

SEM31. Intersectional hate speech in the digital age: Media, power, and resistance

31A 12 September h. 14:00-16:00, S2 Moro

31B 12 September h. 16:30-19:00, S2 Moro

Convenors

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Abstract

The proliferation of Social Media Sites (SMSs) in recent years has intensified hate speech targeting specific identity markers, including gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, physical aspect and political or religious beliefs (Balirano & Hughes, 2020; Rasulo, 2023). This phenomenon manifests both online and offline, often escalating into hate crimes (European Parliament, 2024).

Rooted in harmful mental models, hate speech serves to dehumanize, stigmatize, and marginalize individuals, thereby reinforcing social divisions and undermining fundamental human rights. Recognizing this threat, global institutions such as the Council of Europe (2022) have implemented monitoring mechanisms and legal frameworks to address its spread.

While hate speech has been widely studied, research on intersectional discrimination, the compounded effects of “interlocking systems of oppression” (ENAR, 2020), remains relatively underexplored (Council of Europe, 2023). This seminar seeks to advance scholarly discussions by investigating the intersectional dimensions of hate speech in media environments, with a particular focus on digital discourse and SMSs (KhosraviNik, 2024). Adopting a critical lens (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2020), we invite contributions that examine how intersectional hate speech shapes power asymmetries, influences identity construction, and triggers resistance strategies.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

- Limitations of current hate speech theories
- Identifying and classifying hate speech
- Intersectional hate speech in digital communication and SMSs
- Intersectional representation in the media (e.g., news, cinema, television, advertising)
- Media policies and regulatory responses to intersectional discrimination
- Resistance and counter-discourse strategies in SMSs
- Forms of intersectional discrimination in institutional and political discourse
- Intersectional hate speech in specialized discourse
- The role of humour (e.g., irony, parody, satire) as a tool for intersectional hate speech
- Building in-group and out-group identity through hate speech
- Multimodal representations of hate speech
- Intersectional hate speech in AI
- Rhetorical tropes (e.g., metaphors, metonymy) and discursive strategies in intersectional discrimination

We welcome papers employing diverse methodologies, including (critical) discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, multimodal (critical) discourse analysis, ethnolinguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, comparative studies, translation studies, media studies, and communication studies.

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SEM31. Papers

31A 12 September h. 14:00-16:00, room S2 Moro

- *(Neuro)divergent voices: From stigma to self-advocacy* (Giuditta Caliendo, Université de Lille)
- *“A transwoman is not a woman”: Rising transphobic rhetoric in politics in the Western world. A critical-discourse analytic perspective* (Maria Ivana Lorenzetti, Università di Verona)
- *#yourbodymychoice: Counter-discourses of resistance on X, Instagram and Reddit* (Laura Sofia Pensabene, Università di Catania)
- *Of currycels and currywhores: A thematic analysis of racialised misogyny in the incelosphere* (Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)

31B 12 September h 16:30-19:00, room S2 Moro

- *Hate is in the AI-r? Prompting disrespectful representations in GenAI image tools. An on-field assessment* (Francesco Meledandri, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro)
- *Pandemic Screens: Exploring cinematic representation of anti-Asian sentiment in the US* (Dalia Mennella, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)
- *The intersectional dimension of hate in the media: A multimodal critical discourse analysis* (Michaela Quadraro, Università della Calabria)
- *News narratives of hate speech in the age of neural machine translation* (Aurora Trapella, Università di Torino / Università di Genova)

SEM31. Abstracts

(Neuro)divergent voices: From stigma to self-advocacy

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Neurodivergence is an umbrella term for the neurological brain characteristics present in individuals who have a diagnosis of autism, Asperger's syndrome, dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD. Previous studies demonstrated that the social acceptance of neurodivergence can be undermined by the stigma perpetuated by the media, often constructing stereotypes through negative and deficit-oriented discourse. Karaminis et al. (2022), draw on the *Autism UK Press Corpus* to show how language choices and framing in newspaper discourse emphasize adversities associated with neurodivergence. These negative mediatic representations predictably make neurodivergent (ND) people increasingly reluctant to get diagnosed and receive proper help, which can have severe repercussions on their quality of life, including chronic stress, social isolation, and mental health deterioration (Turnock et al., 2022). Stigma rooted in negative media portrayals also exacerbates masking, the act of imitating neurotypical (NT) behaviours and concealing autistic traits in order to meet societal expectations. Because of social constraints to conform to NT norms, masking is especially prevalent among non-male subjects, which contributes to gendered diagnostic disparities and delays in receiving support (Karaminis et al., 2022).

Neurodivergence is increasingly recognized as an emerging social identity (Sochacka, 2022), deserving the same recognition as other identity categories, such as gender and sexual orientation (Livingston, 2023: 12). By framing neurodivergence as a form of cognitive diversity, this study positions the marginalisation faced by autistic individuals within the broader context of social injustice and hate speech, emphasizing the urgent need for a shift in both societal and media representations of neurodivergent people.

Drawing on Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin, 2004; Hughes, 2018), Critical Discourse Analysis, and corpus linguistics, this paper tracks a shift from deficit-based narratives to empowering, self-defined representations of neurodivergent identity. While traditional media have reinforced stigma through medicalized portrayals, often influenced by gender bias, emerging digital platforms provide space for counter-narratives and self-advocacy. The rhetorical strategies that challenge stereotypes of neurodivergence are observed through an investigation of the use of

lexicogrammatical patterns, identity-first language, and community-driven storytelling in a corpus of social media content in English from various platforms. Special attention is given to digital genre innovations, such as ‘autistic coming-out’ narratives and ‘neurodivergence comedy’, to explore how digital platforms promote neurodivergent self-empowerment and challenge the legacy of exclusion and medicalization.

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“A Transwoman is not a woman”: Rising transphobic rhetoric in politics in the Western world. A critical-discourse analytic perspective

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Despite global advances in inclusive practices towards non-heteronormative identities, discrimination and stigmatising rhetoric against transgender and gender-non-conforming individuals are on the rise in the Western world. In the US, the new Trump administration enacted a series of bills diminishing trans individuals’ rights, including legal gender recognition, while also restricting access to sports or the military. At the same time, in the UK, a recent Supreme Court ruling backed the ‘biological’ definition of a woman, de facto excluding transgender women and denying their gender identification rights. These measures reduce transgender individuals to a binary logic, failing to acknowledge the intersectional character of their identities. Transgender individuals have indeed simultaneously many fluid identities and concurrent membership within different social groups (Burnes & Chen, 2012).

Moreover, transphobic attacks promoting the misrepresentation of gender non-conforming people and ultimately fostering their dehumanisation come from a host of interacting heterogeneous sources, ranging from the far right (Mudde, 2016), centrist Christian fanatics to traditionally left-wing institutions, like some strands of transphobic feminism (Tudor, 2023; Bassi & Lafleur, 2022) and often strategically exploit the online affordances of social media to spread their message (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016). At the same time, trans people are also marginalised within the heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy of orthodox queer theorizing.

Drawing on a critical discourse analysis perspective (Baker, 2014) and on Van Dijk’s sociocognitive framework (Van Dijk, 2013), this paper analyses the framing of transgender individuals in the discourse of UK and US politicians in 2025 in both institutional and social media settings to shed light on different manifestations of misrepresentation, othering and discrimination. Despite differences in the political, cultural and religious backgrounds of these political actors, results highlight four specific narratives characterising current transphobic discourse, including (1) the idea that trans people are ‘paedophiles,’ or generally sick people, (2) that ‘gender identity’ is a false construct, (3) that trans women harm ‘real’ women, and (4) that gender-affirming care and education harms children.

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Hate is in the AI-r? Prompting disrespectful representations in GenAI image tools. An on-field assessment

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In recent times, the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered tools and solutions proved to represent a breakthrough in virtual and real-life practices. Though the idea of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been circulating since the late 1950s (McCarthy et al., 1955) it has only been part of everyone's lives for a few years, since users had the possibility to create language and multimedia contents from scratch. Nowadays the most promising application is probably Generative AI (GenAI), which generates “synthetic data that closely resemble real-world data” (Bandi et al., 2023: 1). Trained upon LLMs (Large Language Models) developed by huge stakeholders (Dao, 2023), GenAI is now closer to the idea of “human reasoning” as it generates plausible contents based on human-induced prompts. There are many issues surrounding this new technology, considering it is within everyone's reach. For instance, ethical issues are paramount to the discussion of AI outputs (Dubber et al., 2020; Boddington, 2023), sparking a debate on the kind of results users can obtain in a matter of seconds. The extreme popularisation of these platforms, along with a lack of authoritative regulation frameworks paved the way to a dramatic rise in hateful and disrespectful comments, some of them being furthered by GenAI tools (Liebowitz, 2025). Though some countermeasures could be implemented (Pendzel et al., 2023), the potential of GenAI in creating ‘new’ forms of hate is huge. Against this background, this presentation aims at assessing how some popular AI tools can create hateful representations starting from users' prompt and ideas. In particular, the attention would focus on AI-powered generative tools that create realistic images from textual prompts, thus carrying out an intersemiotic translation process (Dusi, 2015). In particular, providing different easy-to-use GenAI platforms (including the newly-introduced AI-assistant featured in Twitter/X, Grok) with prompts based on hateful (e.g., racist, sexist, etc.) contents, the analysis would assess the level of faithfulness of such representations, thus evaluating the level of potential filters that could somehow mitigate or inhibit the content users aim at generating.

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Pandemic screens: Exploring cinematic representation of anti-Asian sentiment in the US

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In 1987 Paula Treichler argued that global disease outbreaks produce “epidemics of signification” (Treichler, 1987: 32). COVID-19 is no exception: old and new technologies have shaped an “invisible enemy”, producing a narrative that has reinforced pre-existing racist and xenophobic discourses (Ostherr, 2020). Within this tense situation, the labelling of the virus by several American politicians as “China Virus” has invoked sentiments of fear, hate, othering and discrimination towards a community that has historically suffered stereotyping and exclusion (Ibarra, 2024). During the pandemic period, as a matter of fact, the Trump administration has reignited the “yellow peril” trope demonising China as a global threat to humanity and presenting the US as the only savior of the world (Wu & Nguyen, 2022).

Mainstream media –including films– can, of course, be a conduit for stigma communication. Recent studies confirm a measurable rise in anti-Asian hostility in the US during the pandemic, often linked to media discourse (Cho et al., 2021; Croucher et al., 2020).

In light of this, the present investigation explores how mainstream US films released between 2020-2021, have contributed to the racialisation of the virus and the further marginalisation of the Asian American community in a more or less overt manner. The analysed content is produced by the US film industry, which is responsible, together with other forms of media narration, for the further exacerbation of an already existing stigmatisation due to racial prejudice (Sabharwal et al., 2022). Drawing on Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1996), this study investigates how films of the pandemic period acted as discursive vehicles that, together with other forms of biased representations, contributed –whether intentionally or not– to the intensification of anti-Asian speech, which has a long history of intersection with themes of class and gender. By attending to these intersecting dynamics, this study will highlight how films can contribute to the naturalisation of a multidimensional narrative of exclusion and stigmatisation. This research will, therefore, highlight the intersection between cinematic language and socio-political narratives that position films as subtle, yet strong means of legitimising discriminatory attitudes which, in times of crisis, are further exacerbated by fear.

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#yourbodymychoice: Counter-discourses of resistance on X, Instagram and Reddit

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Social Media Sites (SMSs) brought about a revolution (Balirano & Hughes, 2020) by being spaces where people can express themselves freely, and yet and at the same time, can become targets of inflamed and polarized discussions, generically leading to the use of insulting and offensive language (Mondal et al., 2017).

Hate speech – as this specific type of discourse has been labelled– coincided with the rise of right-wing populism: in Trump’s tweets, for instance, it has been specifically categorized in an intersectional way, as a form of both gendered and racist violence (Saresma et al., 2021). His last campaign trail targeted simultaneously multiple groups, among which women and reproductive rights (Frances-Wright & Ayad, 2024) and acted therefore as a strong catalyst of such violence

online: in one of these instances, Nick Fuentes, enthusiastic Trump supporter, wrote in a tweet on November 5th (day of US election) “Your body, my choice. Forever”, altering the notorious pro-choice motto “My body, my choice”; following his claim, across different platforms, both discourses of support and condemnation could be found.

While the number of studies on hate speech targeting women’s rights is already quite abundant, studies on intersectional counter-discourses on this specific event seem non-existent: in order to fill such gap, this study will be focusing on narratives of resistance on Reddit, X and Instagram; filtering comments and posts that use the #yourbodymychoice to construe counter-discourses and adopting a multimodal critical discourse perspective (Machin & Mayr, 2023), the aim will be that of uncovering how language and other meaning-making semiotic resources contributed to counter hate and fear speech in the two weeks following Fuentes’ tweet, highlighting, when present, what kind of role the interlocking of gender, sexual orientation and race played in the construction of such discourses.

By understanding in which way people, especially women, respond to these threats collectively, creating community in such a threatening political and social ecosphere, we will try to enrich the debate (Council of Europe, 2022) aimed at strengthening discursive resistance towards intersectional hate speech discourses.

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The intersectional dimension of hate in the media: A multimodal critical discourse analysis

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The emergence of digital technologies has introduced new forms of online communication and management of social relationships, which were embraced with optimism as opportunities to cultivate innovative forms of participation, interaction, and democracy (Esposito and KhosraviNik, 2024). However, constant access to mediation technologies has contributed to the promotion of discursive strategies and the reinforcement of exclusion patterns, highlighting multiple systems of discrimination.

This paper intends to analyse the representation of hate in media environments. In particular, we will seek to understand how hate is constructed, communicated, and socially perceived. The emphasis will be on digital discourse and the dehumanising consequences of discrimination and social divisions. For example, the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025) will be analysed to examine the representation of social media violence and cyberbullying. Depicting a 13-year-old boy arrested after the murder of a schoolmate, the show has received significant recognition for its groundbreaking single-shot filming technique, which enhances the intensity of the representation and the emotional involvement of the audience.

In a multimodal perspective, the analysis will investigate the multiple semiotic choices in language and visual communication that construct hate and achieve specific communicative aims. This model emphasises language as a system of options from which authors select resources and create meanings. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen’s ‘grammar’ of visual design (2021) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin and Mayr 2023), this paper will examine the multimodal representation of hate and the mental models, thus creating emotional involvement and instilling a sense of threat. How we perceive the participants in the show is also influenced by how their actions are depicted, with reference to Halliday’s work on transitivity, rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (2004).

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Of currycels and currywhores: A thematic analysis of racialised misogyny in the incelosphere

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This study explores the intersectional dynamics of misogyny and racialised self-hatred within online incel communities, focusing specifically on the discourse surrounding South Asian incels – commonly referred to as ‘currycels’ – and their perceived exclusion from the sexual marketplace. Through Thematic Analysis, the research examines how whiteness is constructed as the apex of desirability, leading South Asian men to internalise racial inferiority while simultaneously reproducing the white supremacist logics that marginalise them. This paradox reflects a complex interplay of racial and gendered hierarchies, where masculinity is validated only through proximity to whiteness, and ethnicised masculinities are pathologised. The analysis foregrounds how these communities produce a stratified model of sexual capital in which South Asian men are relegated to the lowest rungs, while South Asian women (‘currywhores’) are doubly marginalised – as both sexually undesirable and as traitors for pursuing relationships with white men. The vilification of South Asian women thus operates at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual politics, revealing how patriarchal control is racialised and policed. Furthermore, the study reveals how fantasies of violence – particularly rape and punitive discipline – function as regulatory tools to enforce these intersectional norms and punish perceived transgressions. Ultimately, this research situates the incelosphere as a digital site where structural inequalities of race, gender, and sexuality are reproduced, reinforcing a reactionary politics that thrives on exclusion, self-loathing, and ideological violence. By tracing how intersecting systems of oppression operate within this subculture, the study offers a critical lens on how digital hate speech both reflects and reinforces broader socio-political hierarchies in the contemporary Anglosphere.

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News narratives of hate speech in the age of neural machine translation

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Defining and identifying hate speech can be challenging, due to its conceptual ambiguity and the difficulty in delineating the boundary with free speech (Zottola, 2020). Hence, hate speech is regarded as a controversial topic, subject to analysis from various perspectives. This paper investigates how hate speech is represented in news discourse considering current socio-political shifts, especially within the context of Trump’s administration and the ensuing controversy over “woke culture”, with efforts to restrict policies and practices associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion in federal government communications (Yourish et al., 2025). These recent developments have further blurred the boundaries between freedom of expression and hate speech, raising questions about values, behaviours, and tolerance thresholds in

public communication particularly as they relate to structural inequalities shaped by diverse intersecting dimensions of identity such as gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

The first aim of this study is to examine how hate speech is constructed and conveyed in news media, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to highlight underlying ideas and values in language choices (Machin & Mayr, 2023). To this end, a small, specialised corpus of English-language newspaper articles on hate speech will be compiled and analysed, comparing pre- and post-Trump periods to investigate how political discourse in the news construct, obscure, or legitimise intersectional hate speech, considering how overlapping forms of discrimination operate within news discourse to reinforce power hierarchies and marginalisation.

The second objective explores the role of Neural Machine Translation (NMT) in mediating and potentially reshaping these representations. Given the increasing reliance on automated translation tools in journalistic contexts, often with minimal post-editing, this study investigates whether NMT introduces ideological shifts, omissions, or biases when translating politically sensitive content. As NMT increasingly serves as an assimilation tool (Koehn, 2020) in news consumption, the risk of unintentional ideological bias grows, with possible shifts in meaning going unnoticed. Moreover, NMT use in editorial settings, where post-editing is often performed by editors without formal translation training (Trope & Marchan, 2017), also represents a challenge.

Drawing on examples such as Song (2020), which illustrates subtle ideological shifts in translated political discourse, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how intersectional hate speech is framed and potentially transformed in the age of machine translation and global news circulation.

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