

Call for Papers

International Interdisciplinary Conference



**Topic:** Expressivity, Bodies and Language in the Twenty-First Century

**Venue:** University of Montpellier – Paul Valéry

**Date:** 20-21 November 2025

**Conference organizers:** Sandrine Sorlin (University of Montpellier – Paul-Valéry /IUF - EMMA) and Julie Neveux (Sorbonne University - CeLiSo)

That language can affect bodies is nothing new. In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin theorized “perlocution” as the effects generated by the act of saying something. Perlocutionary acts do imply the presence of the body. But the nature of these bodily effects has never been thoroughly analysed, remaining at an abstract level that made it difficult to think both the corporal impact of language and the corporality of language itself. The language of emotions and emotions in language, in their representational and expressive dimensions, have begun to attract the attention of linguists (Wierzbicka 1999, Fenigsen et al 2000, Majid 2012, Lüdtke 2015, Gutzmann 2019, Alba-Juez and Mackenzie 2019, Trotzke and Villalba 2021, Rett 2021, Cotte 2023) literary scholars and stylisticians who have embarked on the ‘affective’ or ‘emotional’ turn (Keen 2007, Burke 2010, Hogan et al. 2022) and, more recently, pragmaticists (Wharton and Saussure 2023, Alba-Juez & Haugh in press). But the concrete effects of emotions and expressive language on bodies —which can be immediate or long-lasting, have lingered in the shadows of analysis.

Grounded in a post-dualist approach, this conference aims to center the body in order to shed light on how language and bodies interact and “inter-affect” beyond the mere perlocutionary act of language. One of the goals is to investigate the effects of insulting, racist, homophobic, xenophobic or transphobic discourse on its targets’ bodies (as well as those of the locutors). The Black-American novelist, Claudia Rankine, poignantly evokes the body fatigue provoked by implicitly racist remarks, making the “sigh” in *Citizen, An American Lyric* (2014) the mode of expression of an asphyxiated and powerless body in the face of invisible microaggressions. The impact of misgendering on gender non-conforming people, of certain discourses on neurodiverse people also deserves recognition from their own embodied perspective. A cultural politics of bodily affects from a linguistic point of view is overdue to uncover how emotions affect our bodies and language and what emotions make us do and say – a continuation of the work brilliantly engaged by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014).

The body is not, of course, to be severed from the mind. Cognition and emotions have been shown to be inextricably linked (Damasio 2000) and cognitive linguists, in the steps of phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty (1973) have highlighted the embodied grounding of linguistic constructions. For Ruthrof (2000, vi) though, they have not gone far enough in reinstating the body “at the base of linguistic communication”. Human thought is now known to be indissociable from an organism’s embedded activity. According to enactivists indeed, we experience the world with our whole bodies, “enacting” the world in an interactive engagement with it (Noë 2004, Hutto and Myin 2013, Di Paolo et al 2023). The time has come for human sciences to embrace post-dualist approaches (Lüdtke 2015). One may therefore ask how cognitive, enactive but also pragmatic theories can concretely account for the way bodies are affected and exploited by and in language when it comes to responding to environmental causes for instance or, more insidiously, believing in conspiracy theories?

The year 2016 proved to be a turning point precipitating a renewed relationship to truth (see Frankfurt 2005 on bullshit and Neveux 2024 on satirist Stephen Colbert’s coinage of ‘truthiness’ in 2006 as harbingers of the phenomenon). While the lexical formations “post-truth” and “truthiness” account for a new, more subjective and emotionally-grounded relationship to truth, the way it acts and relies on bodies has yet to be fully interrogated. The populist rhetoric and style (Moffit 2016) as exemplified in pro-Brexit discourses, strived to elicit “gut reactions” against (im)migrants. They are construed as invaders intent on stripping residents bare, tapping into the ancestral “us versus them” mindset that Lahire (2023) has shown to be central to human evolution. Is it possible to assess the effects produced by linguistic choices regarding self and other presentation in terms of embodied cognition? Can we measure the bodily impact of Trump’s hyperbolic language on both his followers and anti-Trumpians when he claims that immigrants “are eating pets in Springfield” (during the Harris-Trump

presidential campaign on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024)? Emotions seem to be central to polarizing discursive strategies and yet to have been mostly overlooked in politics (Wolak and Sokhey 2022, Shah 2022).

Body and therapy through language is another field welcomed by this conference as it will focus on the effects of language – in particular metaphorical devices – on bodies and also how pained/hurting bodies affect language in return (Steen 2022, Colston et al 2023, Liu et al. 2024, Lugea 2022, Semino 2023). Positive emotions (joy, gratitude, hope) as studied in psychology (see Fredrikson 2001 among others) also need further linguistic investigation. If psychology has long concentrated on negative emotions (fear, guilt, sadness, etc.), experimental research has demonstrated the benefits of activating positive emotions on health, cognitive abilities and well-being. The sciences of language would perhaps benefit from a cross-disciplinary perspective between language/interactions and positive emotions. This conference will thus seek to assess what this research can bring to pragma-linguistic and discourse analysis, by focusing on the bodily effects of certain speech acts (compliments, flattery, etc.), of polite and generous discourse on the bodies of those who receive them as well as those who produce them: how good can words make us feel? What kind of language triggers empathy, defined as perspectival alignment? Can empathetic language “take care” of bodies as it may have done during the Covid 19-related pandemic that compelled people to remain at a safe bodily distance?

This two-day event will consider all contributions addressing “in the flesh” effects and characteristics of language, highlighting the way bodies can be affected by – or pulled into – linguistic forms, whether negatively, positively, or else, with an eye to assessing in turn the impact of such bodily effects on decision-making and/or state of mind (Bottineau 2008). The sources of analysis need to be language-based (discourse of any genre or interactions of any kind) but the corpora can be found on a wide variety of media (online discourse, forums, interviews, fictional discourse, etc.).

Approaches from specialists of discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, cognitive linguistics, but also enactivism, (social) psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and philosophy in connection with discourse or interactions are all welcome.

**Language of the conference:** English

Selected papers will be considered for publication

**Website:** under construction

**Deadline for submission:** 3 March 2025

**Notification of acceptance:** 15 April 2025

Proposals of around 300 words to be sent to [sandrine.sorlin@univ-montp3.fr](mailto:sandrine.sorlin@univ-montp3.fr) and [julie.neveux@sorbonne-universite.fr](mailto:julie.neveux@sorbonne-universite.fr), along with a short bio.

## **KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

Laura Alba-Juez (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, Spain)

Ezequiel A. Di Paolo (Ikerbasque, the Basque Foundation for Science, Spain)

Christopher Hart (Lancaster University, UK)

## **SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE**

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Arielle Syssau (University de Montpellier - Paul Valéry, France)  
Jordan Zlatev (Lund University, Sweden)

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