FIGHTING WITH WORDS: NEOLOGY AND ACTIVISM

International conference - Université de Strasbourg (France)

16th and 17th November 2023

Call for papers

Since the socio-cultural upheavals of the late 1960s, activism has gained greater visibility in Western democracies, and is now a key element of citizens' action. Activists make abundant use of neology, as demonstrated in engaged discourse within feminist movements (MeToo), environmentalist (Fridays For Future) or animalist groups (PETA[1]), protest (Orange Revolution, My body my choice) and identity movements (LGBT, Black Lives Matter), or debates in political parties. Functions of neologisms in activist discourse may vary, since they are used for example to denounce specific behaviour or practices (*greenwashing*, *mansplaining*, *wokism*), to draw attention to problematic developments (*ecocide*, *climate emergency*), to enhance visibility of minorities (*gender-fluid*, *queer*) and to call for political change or designate ideological representations (*neo-feminism*).

Making use of this particular kind of neologisms contributes to reinforce both fractures (political, partisan, generational, etc.) and polarization of opinions, characteristic of militant discourse (e.g. *pro-choice* vs *pro-life*). This type includes "banner words", serving to display the ideas one embodies (*black bloc*, *sorority*, *GINK*[2]), and "stigmatizing words", i.e. pejorative designations of adversaries or their objectives and values (*climate change skepticism / climatoskepticism*, *agromafia*, *covidiot*)[3].
While these examples and many others are now widely known to the general public, numerous less well-known neologisms (occasionalisms) have been forged in order to produce a special impact on public opinion, particularly in social networks and the media or on the occasion of demonstrations, such as

– As of this morning the TRUMPAVIRUS has killed 323,510 Americans today alone 745 unnecessary American deaths (Twitter, 23.12.2020)
– Ukraine and the Orcs[4]: Leaders slip into 'Tolkien mindset' (https://www.stuff.co.nz/…/, 6.5.2022)
– Stop Putler[5] (slogan, demonstration against the war in Ukraine; April 2022)

The major objectives of this conference are (1) to study the formation and dissemination of militant neologisms, (2) to explore their role or function in engaged discourse, and (3) to investigate how they reflect societal developments.

MAIN TOPICS OF INTEREST

Proposals for papers may be based on one or more of the following topics:

[1] People For the Ethical Treatment of Animals.
[2] *Green Inclination No Kids*, a designation for people who choose not to have children for ecological reasons.
[3] « Politik und Ideologie », in: Strauß, Gerhard/Haß, Ulrike/Harras, Gisela (dir.), *Brisante Wörter von Agitation bis Zeitgeist. Ein Lexikon zum öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*, Berlin/New York, 1989, p. 27-394.
[4] Derogatory for Russian soldiers.
[5] Blend of *Putin* and *Hitler*.

– Which word-formation processes are primarily used in militant discourses? For example, it might be interesting to examine the productivity of combining forms such as *anti-*, *pro-*, *-cide*, *-ity* and *-cracy* in English.
– What is the impact of English upon activist lexical creation in other languages?
– What is the role of self-designation and hetero-designation in activist discourse? Papers might focus on the importance of connotations in discursive strategies (e.g. *patriarchy*, *white males* in feminist discourses), on the reappropriation of stigmatizing words by the groups concerned (*faggot*, *nigger*, etc.) and on the special use of the expressive dimension (playful and/or provocative) in the case of proper names such as those created to designate a political formation.
– What are the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors which may lead to the rise and diffusion of militant neology? The neologenic potential of certain discourse genres (demonstration slogans, essays, mooks, poetry, satire, pamphlets, etc.) might be investigated here, as well as the role of societal events on the emergence of militant neology, especially when these are relayed or amplified by social networks (see the scandals on the treatment of animals, cases of sexual aggression, scenes of police violence, etc.). As to the diffusion of neologisms, it would also be appropriate to examine the impact of the speaker's social status (political figure, influential intellectual, etc.) upon the fate of these lexical innovations.
– From a comparative perspective: are some activist communities more likely to create new word-formations than other communities, for example among radical groups? More broadly, are there particularities in the formation of militant neologisms from one culture to another?
– From the perspective of intertextuality/interdiscursivity: to what extent are current neological trends influenced by past activist discourse, whether in similar or different domains (e.g. the formation of French *féminitude* by analogy with *négritude*)? More generally, to what extent do militant neologisms give rise to counter-neologisms forged by an antagonistic group?
– Finally, from an epistemological point of view, is seems essential to reflect upon the relevance of militant neologism within discourse analysis, understood as the study of the relationship between language, political power and social identity.

These topics, among others, may be dealt with in contrastive studies of various languages.

TERMS OF SUBMISSION

Abstracts (including title and keywords), at least one page in length (+ bibliography), are to be submitted before 1st February 2023 to **balnat@unistra.fr** and **christophegerard@unistra.fr** and will be evaluated in double blind by members of the scientific committee (currently being constituted). Conference languages are French and English.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Julien Auboussier (Université de Lyon 2, France)
Judit Freixa (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain)
François Gaudin (Université de Rouen, France)
Sybille Große (Universität Heidelberg, Germany)
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Camille Vorger (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland)
Silvia Zollo (Università degli studi di Napoli « Parthenope », Italy)

CALENDAR

- 1st February 2023: deadline for submission of abstracts
- April 2023: notification of decisions to participants

PUBLICATION

Selected papers will be published in a special issue of the international journal *Neologica*.