

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

LITERARY, LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL
CONSTRUCTIONS OF HOSTILITY



CALL FOR PAPERS

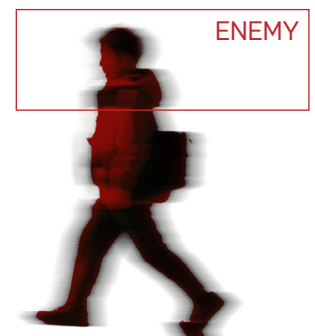
40TH CYCLE OF THE SELLT PHD PROGRAMME

In his essay *Inventing the Enemy* (2011), Umberto Eco provocatively argued that one of the misfortunes of a nation is not to have an enemy. Whether real or 'invented', to put it in Eco's words, enmity plays a crucial role in the construction of individual and collective identities, providing a necessary mirror through which individuals and communities define themselves and establish their own values and beliefs. Societies have exhibited what Achille Mbembe (2016) has defined as an ontological need for an enemy, turning hostility into the constitutive condition of the contemporary subject, as attested across literature, theatre, media, language and translation. In the face of ongoing debates marked by the proliferation of misinformation via digital media, forced migration and the resurgence of nationalisms, Mbembe (2016, 23) describes our contemporary society as a "society of enmity", arguing that the enemy must

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be continually invented in order to safeguard the integrity of the self, recalling Eco's provocation that "when there is no enemy, we have to invent one" (2011 [2012], 2).

This Graduate Forum addresses the rhetorical and narrative construction of the enemy and the recurrent strategies that fix, simplify and dehumanise the Other. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the stylisation of characters contributes to identity-based processes of exclusion, frequently perpetuated through the use of hate speech from the perspective of us vs. them reasoning or the discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups. Critical Discourse Analysis, in this sense, examines how enmity is produced in politics and media through the use of recurring schemes, tactics and mappings (e.g. the enemy as disease, beast or flood which import a logic of elimination or containment) into the way real-world conflicts are reasoned about and acted upon. In the realm of audiovisual media, the fabrication of the antagonistic Other inevitably intersects with its linguistic manifestation. Translation, far from being a neutral act, is a deeply ideological practice embedded in the socio-political narratives that construct reality. Translators play an active role in this cultural mediation, at times producing what Bogucki (2024, 35) describes as a more or less pronounced manipulation of characters' identity in the target text. Taken together, these approaches suggest that enmity in language is rarely a neutral description: it is actively built through translation choices, metaphorical framing and discursive strategies that can either escalate or de-escalate perceived hostility.



With this conference, we also intend to move beyond explicit representations of military conflict to explore how hostility is constructed, negotiated and legitimised across literature. While war literature offers perhaps the most immediate literary context for representing enmity, the literary construction of hostility takes different forms across genres and

traditions. Hostility may emerge from within the self, as in the case of lyric poetry and psychological fiction. It may be embodied by external figures of threat, as in invasion scare, spy, horror, thriller and detective fiction, where different forms of antagonism often function as projections of collective anxieties. In other traditions, hostility may be invented, such as in Gothic literature and science fiction, or mythologised, such as in epic poetry and prose. In postcolonial and diasporic writing, hostility may also be militarised through narratives of conquest, experienced as trauma, internalised and subsequently contested through acts of resistance. At the same time, forms of hostility may also emerge from within literature itself through literary rivalries and acts of resistance to established figures or traditions. In all these cases, literature occupies a privileged position in the construction of hostility as literary texts do not merely represent pre-existing enemies, but they participate in the processes through which hostility is articulated and sustained.

The Graduate Forum of the 40th cycle of the PhD programme in Studies in English Literatures, Language and Translation invites contributions from the fields of literary studies, cultural studies, theatre studies, linguistics and translation studies to explore the various ways in which hostility is fabricated, legitimised or contested. Topics of interests include, though are not limited to:

- The (re)configuration of hostility across different literary genres, including veteran, sci-fi, gothic fiction, invasion scare, thriller, horror, detective fiction, fantasy etc;
- The subversion of Western practices of stigmatisation and hostility in colonial and postcolonial literatures;
- Diasporic literatures of exclusion and belonging;
- Representations and adaptations of hostility across gender issues in different media;
- Literary rivalries and productive hostility between writers;

- ◎ Race and the enemy as a constitutive figure of national identity;
- ◎ Utopian and dystopian imaginaries of conflict, coexistence and reconciliation;
- ◎ Cultural memory, collective trauma and the affect of enmity;
- ◎ Ecocritical perspectives on hostility: environments, human, non-human and more-than-human enemies;
- ◎ Religious, ideological and political constructions of hostility across literary and cultural traditions;
- ◎ Theatrical and performative constructions of hostility;
- ◎ The discursive and visual fabrication of enmity within multimodal media, including graphic narratives, cinema, television, (video) games and social media;
- ◎ Historical perspectives on translating the enemy, exploring how the language of enmity evolves across different cultural and political contexts;
- ◎ The role of AVT in reinforcing or mitigating stereotypes of gender, race and class and the use of specific accents, dialects and sociolects to mark villainy in audiovisual products;
- ◎ Critical discourse analysis, attending to the ways in which text and talk reproduce ideological positions and power asymmetries across political, media and institutional contexts;
- ◎ Conceptual metaphor theory, tracing how enemy figures are systematically structured through metaphorical mappings and what ideological work these perform;
- ◎ Pragmatics opening questions about implicit enemy construction through presupposition, implicature and strategic ambiguity;
- ◎ Internet linguistics, attending to the discursive forms specific to digital environments (e.g. memes, hashtags, dog whistles etc.) as instruments of enemy fabrication at scale;
- ◎ Native-speakerism and the ideological construction of linguistic authority and exclusion;

- English Language Teaching as a site for constructing or contesting linguistic hostility and otherness.

REFERENCES

- Bogucki, Łukasz. 2024. "Constructing the Other: Linguistically Manifested Otherness in Audiovisual Translation". In *The Palgrave Handbook of Multilingualism and Language Varieties on Screen*, edited by I. Ranzato and P. Zabalbeascoa. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Eco, Umberto. 2011 [2012]. *Inventing the Enemy. Essays on Everything*. Trans. by Richard Dixon. Vintage Books.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2016. "The Society of Enmity". *Radical Philosophy* 200 (1): 23-35.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- Massimiliano Demata** (University of Catania)
- Neelam Srivastava** (Newcastle University)

STEERING AND ORGANISING COMMITTEE

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WHERE, WHEN AND HOW

The Graduate Forum will take place in person and will be held at the Edificio Marco Polo, Circonvallazione Tiburtina, 4, 00185 Rome. The language of the conference will be English. Conference registration will be free of charge.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicants must send their proposal as an attachment to the following email: graduateforumsellt40.seai@uniroma1.it by 15th January 2027.

The file must include:

- Name(s), surname(s), affiliation(s) and the biobibliographical profile of the author(s) (up to 150-200 words);
- Title of the paper;
- Abstract (up to 250-300 words, excluding references).

Accepted authors will be notified by 10th February 2027 and will have 20 minutes each for their talk.

IMPORTANT DATES

- 📅 **15th January 2027**: proposal submission deadline.
- 📅 **10th February 2027**: author notification.

EMAIL ADDRESS

If you have any questions, please write to us:
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