

CfP – International Conference
La (dé)fragilisation des discours. Acteurs, processus et effets
(The (Un)Weakening of Discourses: Actors, Processes, and Effects)
CY Cergy Paris Université
LT2D EA7518 - Centre Jean Pruvost

Maison de la recherche en sciences humaines et sociales (SHS) Annie Ernaux
Cergy, 22 - 23 May 2025

Call for Participation Committee: Axel Boursier, Manon Pengam, Luciana Radut-Gaghi

The contemporary landscape is marked by multiple tensions: recurring democratic crises at various scales (local to global), a crisis in citizens' relationship with information (infodemic, information avoidance, disinformation, and media blackout), the growing influence of digital social networks, media concentration (as seen in France, for instance), the proliferation of mechanisms legitimizing public actors, and the diversification of diplomacy (informal, scientific, soft power) within the realm of information warfare (Colon, 2023). The report by the *Institut Jaurès* (2022) on information fatigue (Gault & Medioni) highlights the increasing weariness of the French public regarding information consumption, leading many citizens to disengage. While the democratization of speech has amplified the number of legitimate speakers in the public arena, it has not necessarily expanded the audience. Thus, paradoxically, as more voices emerge, discourse itself is simultaneously being undermined.

These fragilities stem both from the conditions under which discourses are produced and from the ways they are received in the public sphere. The concept of "fragile discourse" thus revolves around two key issues: the factors that erode the robustness of discourse (such as veracity, coherence, legitimacy, and the ability to be heard) and the role of agents (both speakers and listeners). A discourse is only fragile when it struggles to find an audience. This fragility particularly affects speakers perceived as illegitimate, who are often silenced, as well as public issues that fail to gain traction in collective debates. This weakening of discourse appears to be a defining characteristic of 21st-century public spaces, where an explosion of speech paradoxically coincides with an erosion of its impact.

At first glance, fragile discourses may be those that lack a strong foundation in the public sphere and risk being marginalized or rendered inaudible. However, fragility is not a static category; rather, discourses constantly undergo processes of fragilization and de-fragilization. The #MeToo movement, for example, illustrates how collective action can amplify voices that were previously unheard, challenging the regulatory power over speech (Foucault, 1971) and enhancing its audibility (Fraser, 2001). However, de-fragilization does not occur without contention and struggle. Competing narratives within #MeToo demonstrate that credibility is often the primary battleground.

In the humanities, social sciences, communication sciences, and language sciences—particularly through discourse analysis—scholars regularly investigate discursive productions that, for various reasons, become vulnerable, precarious, ephemeral, threatened, or unstable. Depending on the epistemological framework, non-hegemonic speakers—those without strong footing in the public sphere—are designated by various terms. They are alternately referred to as "subaltern" (Spivak, 1985), "vulnerable" (Thomas, 2010; Ghiliss et al., 2019), "excluded" (Mots, 1996), "inaudible" (Braconnier & Mayer, 2015), or, paradoxically, "faceless" (Farge et al., 2004) or "voiceless" (Ferron et al., 2022). At a time when rhetoric and public speaking are celebrated through eloquence competitions, some citizens, aware of their marginalization, are reclaiming this stigma. A notable example is the "*Archipel des sans-voix*" which seeks to amplify the voices of those excluded from public discourse.

As Him-Aquilli, Rennes, and Veniard (2024) note in a recent issue of *Langage et Société* on “*Pratiques langagières protestataires: coulisses et marges*”, linguistic dimensions of social movements have been studied since the 1960s, but most research focuses on public expressions such as leaflets, manifestos, petitions, association charters, feminist street collages, and slogans (e.g., those used by the Gilets Jaunes, now archived digitally by the Plein le Dos collective). However, what James C. Scott (1990) calls “hidden transcripts”—the reflective, deliberative, and negotiated processes behind public discourse—remain less accessible, except through ethnographic inquiry during moments of mobilization.

Since 2022, the LT2D “Fragile Discourses” seminar has explored these dynamics, intersecting information and communication sciences with language sciences. We examine discourses that exist, are absent, or remain on the margins of the public arena, including those not intended for public consumption (such as buried family memories), and we analyse their fragilization or de-fragilization.

Our focus includes the diverse phenomena leading to the weakening of discourse. Possible research themes include:

- The forms, causes, and effects of discursive (de)fragility
- Contexts in which discursive fragility emerges or disappears
- Linguistic characterization of fragility using tools such as argumentation, opinion analysis, and discourse genres (testimonies, complaints, etc.)
- Modelling the communicative phases of discursive (de)fragility in the public space
- The roles of actors and groups in strengthening or weakening discourse

Contributions may specifically address one or more of the following areas:

Focus 1: Digital Technology and Fragility

The evolution of speech economies in digital spaces is central to the study of fragile discourse. While social networks have democratized speech, they have also generated a crisis of attention. Who is still listening? The latest *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (2024) highlights the growing instability of discourse, shaped by misinformation, information fatigue, and digital saturation. Discursive fragility in this context is examined through two key dimensions: 1) the ability to attract an audience (visibility) and 2) legitimacy.

Focus 2: Speakers and Vulnerable Groups

Both speakers and audiences are involved in censorship, intimidation, archiving, or marginalization, which can stifle public discourse. The “*cahiers citoyens et d’expression libre*” from the “*Grand Débat National*” (2019) illustrate this: despite institutional encouragement, citizens submitted proposals that had little political impact (Pengam, 2024). Beyond third-party interventions, psychological, cognitive, linguistic, and argumentative mechanisms that contribute to indescribability are also explored.

Focus 3: Discursive De-fragilization

De-fragilization involves making one's voice visible, emerging from the “chiaroscuro” (Cardon, 2010) to gain credibility. Strategies include leveraging established discourse forms, symbolic mobilization, emotional appeals, reliance on numerical strength or rational argumentation, and institutionalization (e.g., discussions around the proposed French memorial museum on

terrorism in 2025). However, de-fragilization can also involve suppressing competing discourses, highlighting the contested nature of truth in public discourse.

We invite papers that engage with these themes through empirical case studies, corpus analyses, or theoretical reflections.

Submission Guidelines:

Submissions (in English or French) should be 1,500 characters (including spaces) and include three bibliographical references. Send proposals to:

- **axel.boursier@cyu.fr**
- **manon.pengam@cyu.fr**
- **luciana.radut-gaghi@cyu.fr**

Deadline: 9 March 2025

Notification of Acceptance: 31 March 2025

Scientific Committee: Théo Aiolfi, Axel Boursier, Isabelle Boyer, Marine Delaborde, Patrick Haillet, Manon Pengam, Hélène Manuélian, Andreea Mogoș, Luciana Radut-Gaghi, Christophe Rey, Tetiana Suvorova, Béatrice Turpin, Paulo Nuno Vicente.

Organizing Committee: Sotima Berate, Triantafyllos Gkaragkanis.

Bibliography

Bonnafous, S. et Boutet, J., 1996, « Paroles d'«exclus» », *Mots. Les langages du politique*, n°46, https://www.persee.fr/issue/mots_0243-6450_1996_num_46_1

Braconnier, C., et Mayer, N., 2015, *Les inaudibles. Sociologie politique des précaires*, Paris, Presse de Science Po.

Colon D., 2023, *La Guerre de l'information. Les États à la conquête de nos esprits*, Paris, Tallandier.

Cardon, D., 2010, *La démocratie Internet : promesses et limites*, Paris, Seuil.

Farge, A., Laé, J.-F., Cingolani, P., et Magloire, F., 2004, *Sans visages. L'impossible regard sur le pauvre*, Paris, Bayard.

Ferron, B., Née, É., Oger, C., Roffe, J., Marche, G., 2022, *Donner la parole aux « sans-voix » ? Construction sociale et mise en discours d'un problème public*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes.

Foucault, M. 1971, *L'ordre du discours : Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France*, NRF, Gallimard, Paris..

Fraser, N., Traduit de l'anglais par Valenta, M. 2001 . Repenser la sphère publique : une contribution à la critique de la démocratie telle qu'elle existe réellement Extrait de Habermas and the Public Sphere, sous la direction de Craig Calhoun, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1992, p. 109-142. Hermès, La Revue, n° 31(3), 125-156. <https://doi-org.bibdocs.u-cergy.fr/10.4267/2042/14548>.

Gault, G., & Medioni, D. (2022). *Les Français et la fatigue informationnelle*, Fondation Jean Jaurès Editions, Paris.

Ghiss, Y., Paveau, M.-A., et Ruchon, C., 2019, Dynamiques discursives de la vulnérabilité. Introduction, *Signes, Discours et Sociétés: Revue semestrielle en sciences humaines et sociales dédiée à l'analyse des Discours*, n°20. <https://hal.science/hal-02336537>

Him-Aquilli, M., Rennes, J., et Veniard, M., 2024, « Pratiques langagières protestataires : coulisses et marges », *Langage et société*, n°183(3), p. 9-41. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ls.183.0009>

Newman, N., Fletcher, C. Robertson, A., Arguedas, S. & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). Reuters Institute digital news report 2024. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*.

Pengam, M., 2024, « Les cahiers citoyens du grand débat national (2019). D'un geste présidentiel dépolitisant à une (re)politisation citoyenne », *Mots. Les langages du politique*, n°134, p. 119-136.

Scott, J. C. A., Ruchet, O. T., et Chantraine, G., 2009, *La domination et les arts de la résistance. Fragments du discours subalterne*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam.

Spivak, G. C., 2009, *Les subalternes peuvent-elles parler ?* Paris, Éditions Amsterdam.

Thomas, H., 2010, *Les vulnérables. La démocratie contre les pauvres*, Vulaines-sur-Seine, Éditions du Croquant.