

American Association for Applied Linguistics
AAAL 2024 Symposium – Call for Papers
Symposium title
'Soft' hate speech: Responses to global discourses of retrenchment
Facilitators: Michelle Marzullo and Helen Sauntson

This symposium responds to increased global mobilization by various groups, individuals, and institutions against what are perceived to be progressive moves towards greater equity and social justice. Chapman and Hobbel (2022), for example, detail how various social justice activities have recently been outlawed in some US states – a practice which has resonances around the world. As Badwan observes:

[...] the current global political arena is experiencing a resurgence in old nationalism, sovereignism, populism and far-right movements [...] This has fuelled hate crime, hate speech, cultural anxieties and xenophobia. (Badwan, 2021: 23)

This resurgence that Badwan discusses is often termed 'retrenchment' as it manifests in discourse, and functions to produce new forms of hate speech based on older cultural grievances recast within current environments. In this symposium, we specifically focus on what is commonly referred to as 'soft hate speech' which (unlike 'hard' hate) operates *within* the limits of the law and is generally perceived as 'sayable' in the public sphere. This makes it more difficult to recognize and therefore challenge. Significantly, Borba (2022) observes that anti-progressive soft hate speech repeats formula, contents, slogans and tropes that seem to travel transnationally but are, nonetheless, locally adapted within national borders. In this way, similar discursive strategies are used for expressing hate against diverse social groups. We see similarities, for example, in the language of soft hate speech directed at the LGBTQ+ community as we do against the use of critical race theory in US public schools. Indeed, Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) explain that, taken collectively, all anti-progressive discourses serve as political strategies for harnessing support for far-right populist groups, and as transnational phenomena with deleterious effects that mobilize political power and have real material impacts on marginalized communities.

Papers in the symposium draw broadly on socio-cognitive approaches to critical discourse analysis in their analytic approach (e.g., van Dijk, 2008; 2014; 2017). We consider how frameworks such as Van Dijk's (2006) critical discourse framework for analysing discursive expressions of *prejudice*, and van Dijk's (1992) framework for critically analysing categories of discursive expressions of *denial*, can be particularly helpful for identifying the specific discursive strategies deployed by global groups to distort progressive views and thereby 'retrench' old discourses of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny and so on. Russell (2019) posits that this sort of linguistic analysis is crucial for devising taxonomies of hate speech focusing on how these might ultimately be disrupted.

The aim of this symposium is to identify the specific discursive strategies used to produce soft hate speech then build an effort to challenge and resisting these speech acts through works that understand of how such discourses are established and sustained across transnational contexts.

We contend that socio-cognitive critical discourse analysis can be particularly useful in uncovering the subtle workings of soft hate speech in a range of contexts and in relation to diverse forms of oppression and retrenchment. Papers in the symposium ask the following questions:

- What linguistic and discursive strategies are used to distort progressive views and practices and produce 'soft hate speech' in particular text types and contexts?

- How can socio-cognitive frameworks of critical discourse analysis be used to identify these linguistic and discursive strategies of soft hate speech?
- What are discursive strategies could potentially be used to resist and challenge discourses of soft hate and retrenchment?
- What are models for building communication strategies that promote tactics for talking-back to this retrenchment while promoting alternative visions that support an expansive and inclusive discourse on freedoms and thriving?

We aim to include papers in the symposium that exemplify, discuss, or otherwise highlight one or more analyses of ‘soft hate’ speech drawing on socio-cognitive approaches to discourse analysis. Analyses may focus on (but are not limited to):

- ‘Anti-gender’ hate speech and other forms of transphobia and opposition to gender diversity
- Sexism and sexual prejudice, including against cisgender women in regard to reproductive freedom, members of the LGBT+ community, sex workers, and similar
- Racism and ethnocentrism
- Extreme nationalism, jingoism, and totalitarianism, including rising neo-Nazi movements worldwide and the use of religion in hate movements
- Opposition to critical race theory and other forms of criticality
- Classism, globalism, and neoliberalism

The facilitators invite initial contributions for this AAAL symposium in the form of a 500-word abstract for consideration. Abstracts should include:

- Title of the paper
- Brief description of the important literature related to the topic
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Indication of current project status (e.g., whether data collection has commenced/finished for empirical studies) and timeline for completion
- Brief discussion and significance of the (initial or expected) findings or contributions to the field and symposium aims

Abstract submissions should be submitted to this portal:

<https://forms.gle/MWssyBJzhK8M76HE7>

Informal inquiries and submission questions may be directed to symposium organizers Michelle Marzullo (mwarzullo@ciis.edu) and Helen Sauntson (h.sauntson@yorksj.ac.uk) by the submission deadline of May 1, 2023. If you have any trouble with submitting your abstract via the portal, please email this in a word document to the symposium organizers. Responses to submitted proposals will be sent via email by June 1, 2023. The formal submission to AAAL will be sent on July 1, 2023.

The AAAL 2024 conference is due to take place on 16-19 March 2024 in Houston, Texas.

References

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