

Séminaire International de Sémiotique à Paris (2025-2026)

Entre automatisme et automatisation des pratiques langagières : pour une nouvelle sémiotique du stéréotype

Séance du 8 avril 2026

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Enregistering the revolution. The metapragmatics of sedimentation and subversion in Indonesian political oratory

When a regime comes to an end, political speechmakers are confronted with new stylistic demands: through what discursive registers can the revolution be made socially recognizable? How can the breaching of the status quo be asserted through innovative ways of speaking? In Indonesia, where I have been conducting fieldwork for two-plus decades, the collapse of Suharto's regime produced a series of stylistic dilemmas for political actors. How could the "revolution" become discursively enregistered and socially recognizable without losing its insurgent effervescence? How bureaucratic Indonesian (the conventional register used to discuss political matters) was to be reformed? Drawing on excerpts from political rallies and meetings, I identify two main tactics to simultaneously forge discursive innovation and enact a semiotic reformulation of the polity. The former, developed in the early years of the Reform Era, aimed at asserting a sense of indigenous locality combined with intertextual references to the anticolonial struggles of the 1940s. The latter, emerged in the post-Reform times and produced through diagrams and workflow charts, pivots on a new ethics of transparent accountability and gestures towards a technocratic turn. In so doing, I reflect on the notion of enregisterment (*mise en registre*). While extremely productive once applied to retrospective analysis of an already consolidated connection between a set of "performable signs" (Agha 2007: 81) and recognizable social types and modes of conduct, its application to the inchoate formation of (allegedly) new ways of speaking emerging from moments of revolutionary rupture proves to be more challenging.

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ChatGPT as a Generative Center of Semiosis

Inasmuch as conversational bots such as ChatGPT are now used more frequently, by more people, and in an increasing number of daily situations, they point to new problem areas and fields of investigation for linguistic and semiotic anthropologists. Some of those problems and fields can effectively be conceptualized based on Michael Silverstein's ideas about "the intersecting dimensions of a semiotic space in which 'culture is to be found'," namely Signification, Circulation, and Emanation. Focusing on each of these dimensions, but giving more space to Emanation, I argue that (1) in the case of ChatGPT, there is an ambiguity within each of those dimensions; and (2) some of these ambiguities are at the core of the fascination generated by ChatGPT and of the fact that this and similar technologies are fast becoming key players in the semiotic space in which culture is to be found today.