

*Call for papers*

## **Identity Construction and English(es) from the Margins**

28–29 May 2026

University of Lorraine (Metz, France)

“[A]mong the many symbolic resources available for the cultural production of identity, language is the most flexible and persuasive” (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 369). From employing certain phonetic features to index alignment with a particular social group, to assembling discourse in a personal narrative that signals allegiance to a given community, via the use of specific words to set oneself apart from others (among an infinite myriad of other examples), language sits at the heart of the performance, (re)production, and contestation of our social identities, both individual and collective.

In the current configuration of the global sociolinguistic climate, English might be considered as having a special role in this cultural production of identity, used as it is in an almost infinite diversity of situations by an almost infinite diversity of speakers across the planet. Whether it be as a first language, an additional language, a component of monolingualism or multilingualism, a national language, an official language, a global lingua franca in a seemingly endless range of domains, English is a language that, for better or for worse, finds itself deeply intertwined in dynamics relating to local, national and global identities around the world today. It is both a language of domination, a tool for imposing the identities of power, and a language of resistance, a medium of expression for marginalised voices.

It is this final point that this interdisciplinary conference aims to explore: the specific role(s) of English(es) in the elaboration, expression and preservation of social identities among individuals or groups situated on what might be termed the “margins” or the “peripheries”. Drawing upon the widely-used spatial metaphor that “refers to the unequal distribution of power in economy, society and polity, stressing the domination/dependency relations between different regions of the world” (Vanolo 2010: 30), the objective of this conference is to centralise the discourses and language practices of marginalised populations. How do marginalised groups and individuals make use of English(es) in establishing, sharing, strengthening and protecting their individual and/or collective identities? In what way do linguistic specificities within

English(es) contribute to the emergence of phenomena of sameness and/or difference in these contexts? How is English used as a linguistic tool when it comes to affirming marginalised identities and/or resisting those of a dominating centre?

We take marginalisation to refer to, on one hand, the multiple processes by which groups and/or individuals are excluded from meaningful participation in social, economic, political and cultural life and, on the other hand, symbolic processes in which certain behaviour or practices come to be labelled as “marginal”, “perceived by others as deviating from what is perceived to be the ‘norm’” (Messiou 2012: 11), thus affecting behaviour towards individuals or groups partaking in such behaviour or practices. In both cases, marginalised individuals and groups find themselves doted with inferior cultural capital compared with those that constitute the “centre”, the practices and behaviours of this latter group coming to form the norms and standards against which anything else will be perceived as deviant, a potential object of marginalisation and/or discrimination. As bell hooks (1984: i) observes, most of those on the margin must align with these central norms/standards as well as engaging in so-called “peripheral” practices that allow for cultural identity production on the margins.

The objective of the *Identity Construction and English(es) from the Margins* conference is to propose a focus on the English language as a means of investigating these “peripheral” practices, the relationships and tension between these practices and “central” norms and standards, and the ways in which social actors navigate between centre and margin, core and periphery, in processes of cultural identity construction. Our approach to this objective is resolutely intersectional. Indeed, much previous research has shown how language is deeply intertwined with processes of marginalisation and identity construction in relation to gender (see Jones 2016, Motschenbacher, H., & Stegu, M. 2013), sexuality (see Angouri & Baxter 2021), race (e.g. Rosa 2019) and/or ethnicity (see Fishman & Garcia 2010), disability (e.g. Galvin 2003, Grue 2015), neurodivergence (e.g. Rebecchi 2025), social class (see Snell 2014), among many other parameters. This conference aims to add to this body of work by exploring the role(s) of English-language discourse(s) and/or specific English language practices in these different processes, whether it be in relation to one of the above parameters, other parameters, or the ways in which different parameters intersect (e.g. Levon & Mendes 2016, Block & Corona 2016).

This intersectional approach is accompanied by an interdisciplinary ambition. While the focus of the conference remains on English language and discourse, thus appealing to (socio)linguists, discourse analysts and those working in related fields, we hope to also bring together researchers specialising in literature, gender/queer studies, cultural studies, Black studies, sociology, anthropology, history, information science, to name but a few fields. As such, we welcome propositions dealing with a wide variety of media and/or types of discourse and language practices. By way of example, these could include audio and/or video recordings, ethnographic studies, extracts from “traditional” media (film, TV, press, etc.) and/or “new” media (social networks, forums, applications, etc.), different forms of political discourse (speeches, pancarts, slogans, pamphlets, etc.), various manifestations of artistic expression (poetry, music, performance art, etc.), literature (either originally written in English or translated), educational material, semiotic analyses of non-textual media (colour, clothing, emojis, etc.) or corporal movement (sign language(s), gesture, drag performances, dance, etc.), etc. These lists of fields of study and of possible objects of study are not to be perceived as exhaustive, but rather as a small sample of the domains and media that we hope to explore during the conference.

Questions which we might hope to explore during the conference (as well as those set out above) could include, but are in no way limited to:

- How do specific recurring patterns relate to expressions of belonging to one or more communities? How might these patterns be identified? “Patterns” may be taken to include linguistic markers, phonetic features, discursive strategies, interactional or pragmatic phenomena, etc.
- How is the expression of identity realised as a political and subversive enunciative choice? What is at stake for the visibility of minorities?
- How do linguistic and/or discursive constructions of identity vary across time and space? What similarities or differences can be observed across different communities, geographical areas, generations, contexts, etc.?
- How does English’s status as a global lingua franca play into identity construction in/from the margins? How does it relate to other languages in these contexts?
- How is English implicated in the creation of labels and binaries? Or in questioning these categorisations and/or reclaiming fluidity?

- What are the roles of language and discourse when it comes to individuals and/or communities navigating between peripheries and centres?
- From a linguistic and/or discursive perspective, how do stereotypical representations of identities compare with their performances by the individuals/groups concerned?
- Can English be considered as having a special role when it comes to identity construction? How? Why?
- What is the role of English(es) in processes of marginalisation and/or in fighting these processes? How does English come to be a language of domination and/or of resistance?

### **Practical Details**

Proposals for papers, limited to 300 words, should be submitted in an anonymous file and include:

- the research context and/or a brief overview of the current state of the art;
- the methodology used;
- the results, if applicable;
- key bibliographical references (not included in the 300 words).

Please add a short bio-bibliographical note in a separate file.

The conference languages are English and French.

### **Schedule**

- Proposals must be submitted on the Sciencesconf platform before 18/12/25.
- Notification of acceptance: 16/02/26.

**For any queries, please contact [camille.ternisien@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:camille.ternisien@univ-lorraine.fr) and/or [adam.wilson@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:adam.wilson@univ-lorraine.fr)**

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