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**Crises et prises de la parole**
**Speach, speak out, crisis**

# Foreword

**Aude-Line Gervais et Thiphaine Le Gauyer**

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# Foreword

**Aude-Line Gervais et Thiphaine Le Gauyer**

## PLAN



## TEXTE

# Introduction

1 When it came to launching the first issue of the journal *Mutations en Méditerranée*, the theme of "speech, speak out, crisis" was an obvious one. Over the last decade or so, the "Arab Spring" and other popular uprisings that have taken place around the Mediterranean have highlighted the desire for political and social transformation of Mediterranean societies through a variety of forms of linguistic expression. The eight contributions in this first issue, by virtue of their subject matter and their disciplinary, spatial and temporal plurality, offer a way of looking at the issue of "speech, speak out, crisis" beyond the prism of social movements. Whether on an individual or collective scale, fictional or real, the motivations of speakers are diverse: finding work in a migratory context, producing a film, resolving a diplomatic crisis, enabling the hearing- and speech-impaired to express themselves, travelling to another continent, commenting on the destruction of the monuments erected by former Ivorian president Gbagbo, preserving the graves of their ancestors or launching a participatory territorial project.

2 This first issue invites a multilingual and multidisciplinary reflection on the multiple correlations between speaking out and moments of crisis. The impossibility of speaking out may be the consequence of a crisis, or, conversely, it may prove to be the most effective way out of a critical situation, whether experienced individually or collectively. As such, the figure of the intermediary invites a twofold reflection: first, on the classic case of the interpreter between different languages and second, from an epistemological approach, on the researcher who faces a series of methodological and theoretical questions in relation to the language they are studying and the language into which they render their analysis. Finally, the multilingualism of the authors and of the subjects of study invites reflections on the spatial dimension of language in the Mediterranean.

# Speech in crisis situations: between silence and liberation

## Impossible speech, consequence of a crisis

3 The contributions refer, more or less explicitly, to a close correlation between the ability to express oneself and a context of crisis. Characterised by a transitional period of instability, a crisis very often seems to disrupt speech itself.

4 In most cases, the effect is to plunge speakers into a state of linguistic disruption and, at least temporarily, of inability to express themselves. Abdelhakk's migratory experience, which took him from Niger to Libya and then on to Malta and France (Schwarzinger), highlights the way in which a lack of language skills affects speech, rendering one unintelligible to foreign listeners. This situation is comparable to that of Evans, the protagonist of Williams' novel *A Voyage to Pagany*, who travels in the 1920s from the United States to Europe, a continent whose languages he is not proficient in. As the author puts it, in reading this novel we witness "how language is thrown into crisis" through Evans' difficulties in communicating (Lemeunier). The crisis he experiences more broadly echoes an "*égarement linguistique*" (*sic*; linguistic disorientation), a crisis of

language experienced by many writers of the period, scarred by the trauma of the First World War. The impact that a collective crisis can have on the spoken word, and more specifically on artistic practice, is also central to Charlotte Schwarzinger's paper. She highlights a certain crisis in cinematic expression. Through a dialogue with three filmmakers, the author shows how the political crisis in Lebanon is disrupting their artistic practice. One of the interviewees, Raed, draws a parallel between the two events, pointing out that "the country's downfall has converged with that of the image" (*sic*). While the cinematic word may be at least momentarily silenced, it can also be a means of expressing a forbidden word. Mélanie Joseph also revisits the ban on sign language for the hearing-impaired during the Milan Congress of 1880, on the grounds that sign language was not a true language. The effect of this political decision was to create a crisis of communication. Alternatively, these same papers mention the language strategies put in place by the actors to overcome these crises. Artistic reconfiguring and linguistic hybridisation are all ways of highlighting and questioning these situations.

## Speaking out to get out of a crisis

5 For those facing a crisis of speech, art can be a means of expression and speech liberation. In her paper, Mélanie Joseph presents the video elicitation technique she uses to create a space for the hearing-impaired to express themselves without intermediaries, so their words are not (mis)interpreted, as is often the case. Brought to centre stage as part of an exhibition, the recorded images are part of a wider movement of speech emancipation of the hearing-impaired and thus constitute a committed act. In Charlotte Schwarzinger's contribution, artistic media, and more specifically cinematography, although weakened by the political crisis in Lebanon, find within themselves the means to emerge from this crisis of speech by reconfiguring artistic practice.

6 If artistic language can provide a way out of a speech crisis, it would also seem that reconfiguring language can help. Abdelhakk's experience of migration, as recounted by May Rostom, invites us to reflect on the way in which language develops while roaming across several countries. During his seven years of migration, the interviewee learnt

Arabic, which he also reconfigured. The originality of this paper lies in the fact that it approaches the issue of migration not through the story of a migrant's journey, but rather through that of the acquisition of language, linguistic roaming contributing to the creation of a unique and singular Arabic language: Abdelhakk's own. This process of language hybridization in the context of a crisis of speech is also found in Evans' initiatory experience (Lemeunier). However, the crisis that the protagonist encounters during his journey seems less the consequence of his own lack of linguistic proficiency than that of the very limitations of language, unsuitable for expressing the emotions he feels with any precision. As his journey progresses, Evans hybridises the spoken word, develops a "synaesthetic language" (*sic*) that the author captures by playing with forms and sounds. By integrating this sensory dimension, the author captures speech in crisis.

# Conveying, reporting or interpreting speech: the plural figure of the intermediary

## Speech intermediaries in crisis situations

7 The role of the intermediary of the spoken word is sometimes not fully appreciated. This is the case of interpreters, a little-known profession, despite being one of the oldest. There are few historical sources on the subject. Using fragments of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Ophélie Lecuyer shows us the crucial importance of the interpreter in the plight of the Ten Thousand who found themselves in disarray at the heart of the Persian Empire four hundred years BC. Interpreters are intermediary figures: their role is not so much to take the floor to express their own opinions, but to convey the word of one speaker to another through the act of translation.

8 Less perilous, but just as important, is the role of the project manager, as Martina Tuscano reveals in relation to a territorial food project in the south of France, meant to be set up through a democratic and participatory process, involving the residents concerned.

Though all the citizens share the same language, French, the fact remains that they can still misunderstand each other and not get along, leading to disputes and controversies that can jeopardise the project itself. Here, the project manager, mediating between the school coordinating the project and the citizens co-constructing it, creates a space for discussion – the meeting – facilitates exchanges, conveys the spoken word by putting it in writing. However, this transcription of the spoken word can fall short and lead to a crisis in communication between the participants, but also between the intermediary herself – the project manager – and the secondary school behind the project, which has certain expectations. The way out of this crisis may be, as in the case study, to change the intermediary and therefore the way in which the word is conveyed and reported.

## The researcher, another intermediary figure

9 Over and above the plethora of diverse subjects covered in this issue, the authors give us food for thought about the role of the intermediary as played by the researchers themselves. The chosen survey methodologies imply a certain way of collecting the views of respondents, which can be oral (film, audio- or video-recorded interviews, participant observation) or written (letter, written press, report, novel, ...). Researchers have a wide range of techniques and methods at their disposal for analysing and reconstructing the spoken word. The choice depends on the research subject and the material collected.

10 This epistemological issue is all the more fascinating in this issue in that almost all the contributions are multilingual, written in English or French by people of various Mediterranean nationalities who are themselves multilingual: French, English, Arabic, ancient Greek and French sign language. The question of the language of the spoken or written word arises at every stage of the research, particularly when interviews are being transcribed. The authors of this issue almost always supersede the written format, some actually use images, whether cinematographic (Schwarzinger) or through video elicitation (Joseph), which avoids having to transcribe the spoken word and instead reproduces it in its most raw, unadulterated form, in exhibi-

tions open not only to academics but also to the general public. Thus, the researcher-intermediary is an interpreter throughout his or her investigation. He or she interprets the materials, but also the literature that feeds into his or her thinking, whether read in the original language, translated by others and then reproduced as part of an academic publication.

## Speech and space: a geolinguistic approach

11 Another common but unexpected feature of the papers in this issue is their very strong spatial dimension, even though geography as a discipline is not represented as such in the issue.

12 At the very least, it appears that a speaker's ability to express him or herself is intimately linked to the territory in which he or she is. This is particularly true of the articles that deal with mobility, such as with Abdelhakk's (Rostom) migratory journey and Evans' (Lemeunier) voyage, which took them through several countries on Africa and Europe respectively: Niger, Libya and Malta for one, Italy and Austria for the other, and France for both. A parallel can be drawn here with Ophélie Lecuyer's paper, which discusses the movement of Greek soldiers through Persia, on the fringes of the Asian continent, as part of the antique expedition of the Ten Thousand. The multilingual context, coupled to spatial diversity, made the interpreter necessary to overcome a diplomatic crisis. In other contributions, space is the very subject of speech or speech crises. Margot Garcin's article highlights the capacity of a particular type of place, namely a cemetery, to give rise to unique forms of speech. The contributions by Charlotte Schwarzinger and Nadège Dessia Sea show how urban space, because of the political events that take place within it, either encourages speech or hinders its expression. Martina Tuscano's piece looks at one type of scheme, "territorial food projects", designed to be part of a given territory to encourage the development of agriculture there.

13 Some of the contributions take an eminently geographical approach, in which space and speech are intertwined, inviting us to reflect on a geography of language, a field as of yet little explored. Two articles in particular need to be mentioned. To give the hearing-impaired back

their full voice, Mélanie Joseph creates a space in which they can fully express themselves, far from the everyday exclusion of their language. Samantha Lemeunier's analysis of Williams's novel highlights the effects of territory on language and offers us a real cartography of speech in crisis.

# Conclusion

14 This first issue, devoted to "speaking out and speech in crisis", takes readers on a journey through time and space. The contributions in this issue reveal that the issue of crisis is just as central as that of speech. They highlight the impact a crisis can have on speaking out, and conversely, how speaking out can lead to a crisis or its resolution. Language is far from being a fixed object that we passively internalise; it is alive, evolving and rearranging itself over the course of a speaker's journey, whether fictional or real. Speech is thus a message that we appropriate, repeat, report or record. The study of the interpreter's role in a diplomatic crisis illustrates how the spoken word can be a lifesaver. The figure of the intermediary is also present in research. The oral or written word that the researcher selects, analyses and reproduces is invaluable, and this work must be carried out in full respect of the speakers. Finally, this first issue shows that research on speech reveals avenues for thought and spaces for speech and discussion that are transnational, multilingual and multidisciplinary. The geographical aspects of speech and language cut across all contributions, offering further avenues for reflection that complement the initial call. The richness of the subjects and materials presented here thus leads to broader perspectives on the power of speech, whether critical, in crisis or soothing.

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