

# Multilingualisms in Education: Conversations among Southern and Northern Scholars

## **Participants:**

- Dion Nkomo, Rhodes University, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Ritu Jain, Nanyang Technological University, SINGAPORE
- Prof Kathleen Heugh, Adelaide University, AUSTRALIA
- Dr Joah Prada, Groningen University, NETHERLANDS

This proposed colloquium features contributors to our forthcoming edited volume, *Multilingualisms in Education: Conversations among Southern and Northern Scholars*, in press with Bloomsbury. Participants will engage in restorative conversations to explore the nature of multilingualisms in education in their unique living, pulsating pluralities of presents, pasts, and futures. Southern perspectives, considered in geopolitical terms, juxtapose the coloniality of habitus in the Global North, steeped in capitalism, universalism, and Eurocentric dominance (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). For those working at the intersection of language and education, Southern perspectives are rooted in the multilingualisms and multilinguality that have for centuries been the norm for Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Australasia, foregrounding linguistic and epistemic ecologies based off people and their land, responsive to socio-political and ecological precarities and vulnerability (Heugh, 2021). A resurgence of Northern interest in multilingualisms, fashioned predominantly through a single language, English, has coincided with two decades of disruptive and divisive sociolinguistic debates, precipitated by clashing axiologies and competing strands of (neo-)colonial, post-colonial and decolonial debates. Taking up these issues, the colloquium papers offer research, practice and scholarship conducted in situated, local classroom and community contexts, drawing insights from ongoing collaborations, respectful partnerships and alliance, and action-oriented fieldwork and activism.

## **Multilingualism, Identity and Being Indian: Decolonial Perspectives from Singapore**

**Dr Ritu Jain, Nanyang Technological University, SINGAPORE**

**Prof Kathleen Heugh, Adelaide University, AUSTRALIA**

This paper offers a decolonial perspective of contemporary multilingualism in Singapore. We offer a brief historical background to the northern influenced colonial and postcolonial language policy that has essentialised ethnolinguistic communities (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil) to suit socio-economic and educational policies optimistically designed for managing diversity. In the face of intensifying 21st century in-migration and mobility,



drawn by Singapore's prominence as the economic powerhouse of Southeast Asia, the artifice of postcolonial public language policy particularly in education, showing signs of fissure, has been adjusted. These adjustments include expanded linguistic options for students with South Asian languages. Through analysis of fresh quantitative and qualitative data, southern perspectives of multilingualisms in Singapore emerge, illustrating the linguistic agency, citizenship and resistance of minority communities from the Indian subcontinent. These are both strategic, expressed in language education choices, and integral to everyday language practices via what Jain (2023) refers to as multilingualiving.

## **Heritage Language Programs as Borderlands within Western Universities: Translanguaging, Transknowledging, and Transpositioning**

**Dr Joah Prada, Groningen University, Netherlands**

Universities in the Global North remain shaped by Western epistemologies that privilege certain forms of knowledge while marginalizing others. This hierarchy, anchored in colonial legacies, continues to inform curricular design, pedagogy, and institutional norms, including in language education. Traditional language programs often reproduce these legacies by treating languages and cultures as fixed, bounded systems and elevating dominant norms as standards. In contrast, heritage language (HL) programs have emerged as critical alternatives, particularly in the United States, responding to the fluid, dynamic realities of multilingual learners. This paper positions HL programs as borderland spaces where multiple linguistic, cultural, and epistemological traditions intersect. Centering translanguaging, transknowledging, and transpositioning, it argues that HL programs foster democratic and liberatory practices that challenge colonial frameworks. Drawing on longitudinal vignettes from two U.S. university programs, the paper illustrates how HL spaces enable epistemological plurality, emergent meaning-making, and transformative possibilities for more equitable futures in education.



# Linguistic Colonialism 2.0 – Machine Learning, Surveillance Technologies and Data Practices, and New Forms of Sociolinguistic Order

## Participants:

- Prof Britta Schneider, Vienna University, AUSTRIA
- Dr Bettina Migge, University College Dublin, IRELAND
- Dr Helen Kelly-Holmes, University of Limerick, IRELAND
- Dr Rafael Lomeu Gomes, University of Copenhagen, DENMARK

The panel inspects the potential of digital machine learning technologies for reconfiguring future sociolinguistic economies and contributing to new colonial relationships. Older language technologies, such as writing and print, were an important element in European colonial language practices. As shown by missionary linguistics research, the transformation of spoken language into written documents – above all, the translation of the Bible – has been crucial for the transmission of the idea of languages as distinct and ethno-nationally ordered entities (Deumert & Storch 2020). National and colonial traditions, entailing the idea that language is tied to territorial and culturally homogenous communities and justifying sociolinguistic and human hierarchies, difference and exploitation, are thus entangled with technologies of writing and printing. Newer technologies based on scraping, automatically analyzing masses of language data and generating text also participate in mapping and controlling human relationships. The panel discusses the potentials they hold for new types of colonialism.

Panel contributions explore data collection practices, data curation, automated surveillance techniques, language materializations in machine learning, linguistic hegemonies in computational cultures, algorithmic management and distribution of content as aspects in new sociolinguistic economies. The panel contributes to a deeper understanding of how machine learning technologies to co-define knowledge and sociolinguistic hierarchies.

## AI as an opportunity to rethink sociolinguistic theory and practice?

**Dr Helen Kelly-Holmes, University of Limerick, IRELAND**

While current concerns in sociolinguistics around AI reflect wider society, they also reflect the historical valorization of spoken language in ‘natural’ settings. Despite this, technology has shaped how sociolinguists study language (e.g. where and how linguists travel to record and extract which and whose ‘language’), as well as many inequalities



and hierarchies hardwired into our key concepts. The current era presents increasingly privatized spaces of human-machine interaction and language production to which sociolinguists have little access and over which they have decreasing control. Drawing on Stroud (2001), Rymes and Leone (2014), Rampton, Cooke and Holmes (2018), Rymes (2020), Bodó et al (2023) and others, as well as examples from the MultiLX study of experiences of using AI among young minority language speakers, this paper explores how ‘digital sociolinguistic citizenship’ could offer a theory and methodology for overcoming new types of hierarchies and inequalities in AI and in our research practices.

Bodó, C., Barabás, B., Botezatu, I., Fazakas, N., Gáspár, J., ... Heltai, J. I. (2023). Participatory sociolinguistics across researchers’ and participants’ language ideologies. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 22(2), 109–127.

Rampton, B., Cooke, M., & Holmes, S. (2018). Sociolinguistic citizenship. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 17(4), 68–83.

Rymes, B. (2020). *How we talk about language? Exploring citizen sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press.

Rymes, B., & Leone, A. (2014). Citizen sociolinguistics: A new media methodology for understanding language and social life. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 29(2), 25–43.

Stroud, C. (2001). African mother-tongue programmes and the politics of language: Linguistic citizenship versus linguistic human rights. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural development*, 22(4), 339–355.

## **AI in academia: Dissent and dissonance**

**Dr Rafael Lomeu Gomes, University of Copenhagen, DENMARK**

**Janus Mortensen, Jens Christian Borup Green Jensen, and Sam Goodchild,  
University of Copenhagen, DENMARK**

The availability of text-generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has had a significant impact on academic practices across the world. Some embrace GenAI; others adopt sceptical stances; but no-one is left untouched by the technology and the discourses surrounding it. Drawing on participant observation and interview data generated through linguistic ethnographic fieldwork at two Danish universities, we examine how discourses of dissent and dissonance are constructed and mobilized by university students and faculty members to counter some of the logics embedded in what has been referred to as ‘techno-futurist registers of AI’ (Del Percio 2025) and ‘digital colonialism’ (Nothias 2025). Preliminary analysis suggests that participants orient to different scales of AI reflexivity when deciding whether and how to use GenAI. The paper sheds light on the emergence of new sociolinguistic tensions in academia, brought about by the advent of AI and discursively reflected, constructed and contested in participants’ accounts and everyday practices.

Del Percio, Alfonso. 2025. Technofuturist registers for AI and the future of work. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 29(5): 319–331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12714>.

Nothias, Toussaint. 2025. An intellectual history of digital colonialism. *Journal of Communication* 75(5): 385–397. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaf003>



## Continuations from European colonialism to AI: The material making of language as practice of global domination and control

**Dr Bettina Migge, University College Dublin, IRELAND**

**Prof Britta Schneider, University of Vienna, AUSTRIA**

Although AI language technologies are typically presented as future-oriented technological innovation, machine-learning technologies are also affected by the cultural and historical contexts of their emergence. In fact, close examination of computational language culture reveals striking continuities to concepts of language and their materialization in technology settings in the history of European colonialism. Based on an in-depth analysis of how languages were materially produced in colonialism and are treated in AI technologies, we show the strong colonial continuities in language materialization processes to this day. Our investigation of the materialisation of language investigates a widely read document called “No language left behind” which discusses the processes used by big tech companies for bringing minoritized languages into the digital realm. The paper emphasizes the crucial role that language materialisations play in the construction and maintenance of power and social order in a global realm.



# Mapping “Sacrifice Zones”: The Semiosis Of Coloniality In Waste Discourse

## Participants:

- Prof Crispin Thurlow, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND
- Ms Charmaine Kong, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND
- Ms Laura Wohlgemuth, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND
- Mr Alessandro Pellanda, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND

This colloquium examines the “semiosis of coloniality” (Mignolo 2020) in waste discourse through four interrelated sociolinguistic/discourse-analytic case studies. In this regard, the colloquium is strongly aligned with Deumert & Makoni’s (2023) recent calls for southern theory and a decolonized sociolinguistics. In turn, decoloniality is also closely aligned with Fine & Love-Nichols’ (2021) proposal for a sociolinguistic research agenda on language and climate justice. Linked to each author’s ongoing research in the four-year Articulating Rubbish project at the University of Bern (see Thurlow, 2022), the colloquium addresses a range of different settings and discourse practices: waste governance in Switzerland; waste-related museum exhibitions; migrant waste workers in Hong Kong; and donation narratives in Swiss secondhand shops. Committed to the critical objective of decentering waste (Liboiron & Lepawsky 2022), the presenters collectively demonstrate the discursive production of “sacrifice zones” (Lerner 2012) in which material-spatial hierarchies, racialized labor, and moralized value systems are imagined in fundamentally colonial ways. This colloquium will be following up on an invited interactive workshop held at SS25 in Perth.

## Framing the global south in waste exhibitions

**Prof Crispin Thurlow, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND**

This paper explores how waste museum exhibitions, particularly the Brussels-based Throwaway: The History of a Modern Crisis, frame the Global South in ways that obscure inequalities in global waste economies. Reading the exhibition as a spatial text (cf. Ravelli & McMurtrie, 2016), the analysis pin-points three social-semiotic tactics: relegation, obfuscation, and suppression. Relegation occurs when waste workers from migrant or marginalized communities are, for example, discursively subordinated to objects. Obfuscation is seen in the compositional equivalence constructed between Global North and Global South experiences of waste. Suppression emerges through erasure of the very labor and extractive conditions enabling Western consumption. In mediating public pedagogies about waste, these tactics effectively downplay global asymmetries and disingenuously cast the Global South as peripheral to Western waste crises.



## **Raciolinguistic othering in Hong Kong waste work**

**Ms Charmaine Kong, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND**

This paper focuses on the raciolinguistic dynamics shaping migrant cleaners' labor in Hong Kong, particularly Nepalese workers supported by an NGO. Two discursive tactics are identified: linguistic disciplining and biographical erasure. Training materials instruct cleaners through targeted vocabulary lists, scripting them as "good cleaners" while reinforcing their marginality through enforced acquisition of dominant languages. This linguistic regulation functions as a form of control (Cameron, 2000) within colonial and neoliberal regimes, highlighting inequalities between those entitled to waste and those tasked with cleaning. A related NGO exhibition further extracts and aestheticizes cleaners' labor by displaying curated waste objects accompanied by decontextualized quotes. While intended to valorize cleaners' contributions, the effect is to commodify their experiences into consumable narratives of pity and ethical labor. Together, these tactics expose how waste work is racialized, gendered, and classed, rendering migrant cleaners simultaneously essential and disposable within transnational economies of waste management.

## **Colonial imaginaries in Swiss domestic waste discourse**

**Ms Laura Wohlgemuth, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND**

This paper examines Swiss domestic waste practices—particularly donations to secondhand shops (Brockis)—to highlight how colonial imaginaries persist in everyday discourse. Interview data with Brocki managers show how African recipients are stereotypically cast as passive beneficiaries of Swiss clothing surplus, invoking a White savior logic (Bell, 2013) that erases African agency and reproduces racial hierarchies. Similarly, Romanian recipients are framed as "grateful" consumers of discarded items deemed unfashionable by Swiss standards, reinforcing symbolic hierarchies of taste and value. Such discourses naturalize unequal material flows, whereby Switzerland's surplus is valorized as aid while its structural waste economies remain unexamined. The act of donation, therefore, exceeds charitable intent: it is discursively and materially implicated in reproducing privilege and global inequalities. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that Swiss practices of waste disposal are sustained through moralizing narratives that reinscribe colonial power relations, situating domestic waste as a site where global hierarchies are rearticulated.

## **Switzerland's hygienic enclosures and waste externalities**

**Mr Alessandro Pellanda, University of Bern, SWITZERLAND**

This paper examines how Switzerland's waste governance relies on infrastructures that sustain myths of hygiene, order, and recycling. Practices such as branded garbage bags, recycling stations, and waste-to-energy plants are conceptualized as "hygienic enclosures" that erase the presence of waste while ensuring municipal control (O'Hare, 2022). Yet, these infrastructures extend beyond national borders, creating externalities





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that shift ecological and social burdens elsewhere. Case studies from the Canton of Ticino reveal how landfills and exported waste-to-energy residues exemplify Switzerland's reliance on peripheral spaces, both domestically and abroad, to sustain its model of cleanliness. In doing so, waste's displacement maintains Swiss consumption practices while obscuring the inequalities inherent in transnational waste economies. Ultimately, the discourse of waste erasure enables an illusion of order, but this order is maintained through a contradictory transnational politics of (in)visibility (cf. Kerfoot & Hyltenstam, 2017) reinforcing global hierarchies of value and disposability.

Bell, Katherine M. (2013). Raising Africa?: Celebrity and the rhetoric of the white saviour. *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 10 (1): 1–24.

Cameron, Deborah. (2000). Styling the worker: Gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4(3): 323–347.

Deumert, Ana and Makoni, Sinfree. (2023). *From Southern Theory to Decolonizing Sociolinguistics: Voices, Questions and Alternatives*. Channel View.

Fine, Julia C. and Love-Nichols, Jessica. (2021). Language and climate justice: A research agenda. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 25(3): 453–473.

Kerfoot, Caroline and Hyltenstam, Kenneth. (Eds.). (2017). *Entangled discourses: South-North Orders of Visibility*. Routledge.

Liboiron, Max and Lepawsky, Josh. (2022). *Discard Studies: Wasting, Systems, and Power*. MIT Press.

Mignolo, Walter D. (2020). Colonial semiosis and decolonial reconstitutions. *Echo*, 2: 8–15.

O'Hare, Patrick. (2022). *Rubbish belongs to the poor: Hygienic Enclosure and the Waste Commons*. Pluto Press.

Ravelli, L. J., & McMurtrie, R. J. (2016). *Multimodality in the built environment: Spatial discourse analysis*. Routledge.

Thurlow, Crispin. (2022). Rubbish? Envisioning a sociolinguistics of waste. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 26(3): 386–403.





# Translanguaging into Decolonial Futures

## Participants

- Dr Nelson Flores, University of Pennsylvania, UNITED STATES
- Dr Corinne Seals, Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington, NEW ZEALAND [ONLINE]
- Dr Xolisa Guzula, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Prof Carolyn McKinney, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Ingrid Beiler, Oslo Metropolitan University, NORWAY

Over the past several years, translanguaging has become a central concept in sociolinguistics. Originating in Welsh bilingual classrooms (Williams, 1994) and later taken up in the United States (García, 2009), the concept has always carried decolonial possibilities through its stance that languages as bounded and numerable objects were a product of European colonialism (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005). More recently, scholars building on these conceptual insights have emphasized how colonial perceptions of language are inseparable from constructions of race, pointing to new decolonial openings (Rosa & Flores, 2017). This includes attention to colonial contexts where race has long structured inequality (García et al., 2021; Oliver & Excell, 2020) as well as to societies where race is often thought to be irrelevant (Beiler, 2020). This symposium seeks to build on these developments by bringing together scholars engaging in research in the United States, New Zealand, South Africa, Nepal and Norway. Our goal is to develop decolonial perspectives on translanguaging that are deeply attuned to local histories while also attentive to how global racial hierarchies shape linguistic practices and perceptions. By creating links across contexts, the panel aims to identify both consonances and dissonances that can open possibilities for new forms of global solidarity.

Beiler, I. (2020). Marked and unmarked translanguaging in accelerated, mainstream, and sheltered English classrooms, *Multilingua*, 40, 107-138.

García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.

García, O., Flores, N., Seltzer, K., Li Wei, Otheguy, R & Rosa, J. (2021). Rejecting abyssal thinking in the language and education of racialized bilinguals: A manifesto. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 10, 1-26.

Makoni, S. & Pennycook, A. (2005). Disinventing and (re)constituting languages. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 2, 137-156.

Oliver, R. & Excell, M. (2020) Identity, translanguaging, linguisticism and racism: the experience of Australian Aboriginal people living in a remote community. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23, 819-832.

Rosa, J., & Flores, N. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, 46(5), 621–647.

Williams, C. (1994). *An Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Methods in the Context of Secondary Education*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Wales.



## **A Raciolinguistic Genealogy of Latinidad**

**Dr Nelson Flores, University of Pennsylvania, UNITED STATES**

Translanguaging in the United States has been shaped by responses to the colonial relationship structuring U.S. Latinx life. Within this framing, Latinidad functions as a political identity mobilized to counter U.S. colonial logics in ways that obscure the settler colonialism and enslavement that created the concept of Latinidad, raising questions related to how translanguaging tied to this identity is theorized. I engage in a raciolinguistic genealogy of Latinidad to examine how conceptions of fluidity central to both Latinidad and translanguaging carry these contradictory legacies. I examine José Vasconcelos's *raza cósmica*, which resisted eugenics while also reinscribing anti-Black and settler colonial logic, and Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of border-crossing, which, building on Vasconcelos, reframed fluidity as resistance while carrying forward these erasures. I then examine how Anzaldúa's work has been taken up in translanguaging research on U.S. Latinx communities, arguing for approaches that move beyond celebratory invocations of fluidity.

## ***Te keteparaha* to dismantle the oppressor's house: Adding translanguaging to practices of linguistic resistance**

**Dr Corinne Seals, Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington, NEW ZEALAND**

**[ONLINE PRESENTATION]**

Within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, language carries deep emotional ties stemming from colonial-inflicted language trauma. This legacy has impacted Māori as *tangata whenua* (people of the land), as well as speakers of more than 160 minority languages who have arrived since, including Ukrainians (who are the focus of this talk). In recent history, there has been major momentum in the language reclamation space with *tangata whenua* leading the way and speakers of minority languages learning from this progress. Drawing on longitudinal ethnographic and interview data with both displaced Ukrainians and with Māori, this talk looks at how translanguaging is gaining traction in Aotearoa as part of *te keteparaha* (the toolkit) to battle the settler-colonizer's ideology of "pure language" separation. In particular, this talk looks at the complex, interwoven discourses that displaced Ukrainians draw on when pointing to Māori translingual practices as inspiration for their own translanguaging - both as a way to disrupt damaging Soviet colonial histories and as a means to negotiate how to belong in Aotearoa.



## **Constructing and disrupting the coloniality of language: radical translanguaging as decolonial pedagogy**

**Dr Xolisa Guzula, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Prof Carolyn McKinney, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Pinky Makoe, University of Johannesburg, SOUTH AFRICA**

Despite South Africa's notorious history of the use of language to construct ethnolinguistic divisions and white supremacy, the powerful role of race is largely absent in research on language in education policy and implementation. Our collective research aims to make visible racializing ideologies of language and their construction of the normal child as a (white) monolingual English speaker, as well as to show how these can be subverted. Inspired and informed by Ngugi wa Thiongo's call for decolonising the mind, Anzaldua's borderlands and the coloniality of language (Veronelli, 2015), we provide an historical overview of colonial language ideologies in post-apartheid language policy and practice contrasting these with more recent interventions designed to disrupt the coloniality of language in learning spaces/materials through translanguaging. We will argue that translanguaging can both reinforce and subvert colonial ideologies of language, and offer a Southern perspective on the conditions for radical translanguaging.

Veronelli, G. (2015). The coloniality of language: Race, expressivity, power, and the darker side of modernity. *agadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies*, 1, 108-134.

## **Translanguaging in a Context of Racial and Colonial Innocence**

**Dr Ingrid M. Rodrick Beiler, Oslo Metropolitan University, NORWAY**

This paper considers translanguaging in a racialized educational setting within a society characterized by racial and colonial innocence (Loftsdóttir, 2024), namely adult basic education (ABE) in Norway. Intervening into European discussions of linguistic integration of adults, García (2017) posits that translanguaging may disrupt the coloniality of power and knowledge. However, such decolonial imperatives are easily rendered irrelevant through Nordic exceptionalism. Focusing on discursive absences in two year-long linguistic ethnographies, I therefore investigate shifts in power along racial and linguistic lines in ABE classrooms committed to multilingual or translanguaging pedagogies. Given taboos surrounding race, the analysis traces racializing discourses centered around cultural compatibility, vocational overdetermination, sociability, and historicity. Although all teachers in the study expanded translanguaging space in some ways, expansion of power along linguistic and racial lines seldom co-occurred. Thus, I argue that recontextualization of translanguaging to color-evasive societies must engage more substantially with covert ways of talking about race.



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García, O. (2017). Problematizing linguistic integration of migrants: The role of translanguaging and language teachers. In J. Beacco, H. Krumm, D. Little & P. Thalgot (eds.), *The linguistic integration of adult migrants: Some lessons from research / L'intégration linguistique des migrants adultes/Les enseignements de la recherche*, (pp. 11-26). DeGruyer Brill.

Loftsdóttir, K. (2024). Coloniality and Europe at the margins. In R. Andreassen, C. Lundström, S. Keskinen, & S. A. Tate, *The Routledge international handbook of new critical race and whiteness studies* (pp. 395-405). Routledge.



# What does Marxism have to do with sociolinguistics?

## Participants:

- Dr Christian W. Chun, University of Massachusetts Boston, UNITED STATES
- Prof Ana Deumert, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Mr Nkululeko Mabandla, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Alex Luke, University of Sydney, AUSTRALIA
- Dr Alberto Bruzos, Princeton University, UNITED STATES

In order to understand the social contexts of language practices, critical researchers in sociolinguistics have drawn upon a wide range of social theories in recent years, such as poststructuralism, posthumanism, and new materialism. However, one critical tradition that has received scant attention in sociolinguistics is Marxism in all its forms and variations. Even some critical scholars have dismissed Marxism as modernist, patronising and irrelevant to the global south and former colonial contexts.

This lack of theoretical interest in Marxism stands in contrast to the broader Marxist revival in the social sciences since the beginning of the century, as well as contemporary social and class struggles that are continuing throughout the world. Indeed, at this point in time, capitalism has unleashed its violent monstrosity yet again, destroying the lives of many people and the planet. Thus, we ask at this particular juncture: What can the Marxist traditions offer sociolinguistics in a pluriversal world? What forms of consonance and dissonance emerge from using Marxism to understand the social context of language use? In this colloquium, an international group of sociolinguists will reflect on their routes into Marxism and explore how Marxist theories can inform future work in sociolinguistics.

## Going against your classed interests in a capitalist society?

**Dr Christian W. Chun, University of Massachusetts Boston, UNITED STATES**

Psychological wages (Du Bois, 1935) of whiteness have been cementing loyalties of white working-class people (not all) to the 1%, elevating them above their classed positionalities. Many Marxist academics have focused only on class, ignoring what Marx himself argued, "labor cannot emancipate itself in a white skin where in a black skin it is branded". But it is not only white people but also people of 'color' who chase whiteness; some Korean immigrants back in the 1990s who were racist against the Black communities in Los Angeles, and the Asian Americans who support Trump even though he precipitated the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic by calling it "the Chinese virus ". So how can Marxists



engage in actual praxis through social and discourse deixis to permanently dismantle whiteness in co-constructing racial and gender unity among the 99% so we can finally abolish capitalism for a real democracy?

## **Towards a sociolinguistics of dispossession**

**Prof Ana Deumert and Mr Nkululeko Mabandla, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

Dispossession and primitive accumulation are core concepts in Marxist thought and are integral to Karl Marx's argument in *Das Kapital/Capital*. In this paper we will explore these two concepts from a sociolinguistic perspective, drawing on the complex dynamics of settler-colonialism in South Africa as a case study. Focusing on the intersection of land and language, we will show that even though these two concepts were introduced to explain the economic changes that are associated with capitalism, they also allow us to understand and theorize sociolinguistic histories in a settler-colony that was built on racial slavery and various forms of forced labour (see also Davis and Smalls 2021). Our argument is based on an understanding of dispossession as linked to various forms of epistemic violence; forms of violence that seek to destroy the inherent pluriversality of the world and re-create new forms of dispossession in the very practice of research.

## **The subsumption of language and semiosis**

**Dr Alex Luke, University of Sydney, AUSTRALIA**

While there have been persistent calls and attempts to bring the sociolinguistics and political economy together, many of these can still treat language use as to some extent epiphenomenal to economic activity. However, Marxist political economy provides a number of abstract categories that can better specify the important role of language and semiosis in value formation and circulation. One such idea is that of the formal and real subsumption of labour, which illustrate how labour is incorporated into and changed by the capitalist valorisation process. This presentation will examine the formal and real subsumption of language and semiosis, and use examples from the use of language by LLMs, and the technologisation of discourse in organisations, to explore how the subsumption of language operates in different conditions and contexts to secure surplus value.

## **Liberty against the linguistic law**

**Dr Alberto Bruzos, Princeton University, UNITED STATES**

Caló is a hybrid language variety associated with Pachucos, a subculture that emerged in the 1930s among young Mexicans in the southwestern United States. It has been proposed that Pachuco Caló is genetically related to caló gitano, the language of Iberian Gypsies (Barker 1969; García 2009). One of the aims of this presentation is to challenge that theory. Drawing on a Marxist perspective that views language as a historically



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situated social practice shaped by ideological interests, I argue that the connection between the two is better explained by the shared social position of their speakers. Through examples from works published in the early 20th century that examine caló and, more broadly, the language of “criminals” and “vagrants,” I will show how the more flexible and free linguistic practices of those deemed economically unproductive were stigmatized and devalued in contrast to the abstract, standardized language required by capitalism and liberal democracy.





# Dialogues and collaborations between sociolinguists and activists: Politics and epistemes of purposeful research

## **Participants:**

- Dr Daniel N. Silva, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, BRAZIL
- Dr Joana Plaza Pinto, Universidade Federal de Goiás, BRAZIL

This colloquium gathers sociolinguists engaged in collaborative and activist research to reflect on the politics of purposeful inquiry. Following Lassiter's (2005) call for explicit collaboration throughout the ethnographic process—from project design to writing—the panel reflects on both the potential and pitfalls of such work, including asymmetries of power, authorship, and recognition. Gandulfo and Unamuno (2020) propose a model of sociolinguistic collaboration grounded in shared decision-making and coauthorship, where writing itself becomes a site of epistemic negotiation and reflexivity. Briones (2020) expands this discussion by defining collaboration as *horizontalidad*—a horizon to be constantly pursued rather than a state achieved—drawing on Mapuche conceptions of *pu xawvn* (“letting the word walk”) to imagine ethnography as co-theorization within accountable relations. Similarly, Borba's (2022) “allied linguistics” calls for researchers to align with communities already engaged in struggles for justice, amplifying grassroots epistemologies without eclipsing the voice and authorship of field collaborators. Bringing these perspectives into dialogue, the colloquium assembles empirical studies on transnational migration, financial crises, collective mourning, and community activism in peripheries. Together, these works explore how collaborative sociolinguistic inquiry can advance semiotic justice—the right to produce, circulate, and be recognized in public discourse—while reimagining the ethical and political purposes of research itself.

## **Biographical Workshops in Feminist Research Methodology**

**Dr Joana Plaza Pinto, Universidade Federal de Goiás, CNPq, BRAZIL**

In this paper, I aim to offer a situated perspective on the methodological discussions built during my last decade of ethnographic research on national and transnational university migration to Brazil. My co-researchers and I have developed feminist linguistic research practices alongside well-known ethnographic practices. I discuss these practices in four sections: first, I outline contradictory aspects of feminist action and research in colonial territories. Next, I present why and how we conducted feminist biographical workshops in our ethnographic research and thereby I discuss the principles that sustain them: horizontality, reflexivity, affectivity, singularity, and political historicity of experience. I then summarize



participants' assessments and engagement as evidence of the impact of workshops on affective conditions of linguistic hospitality, contestation of colonial, racist, and sexist metadiscourses, and political connections among students. I conclude with some horizons and perspectives for our research amidst the struggle for language as part of anticolonial feminism's critical history.

## **Mediating Allyship: Reverse Ethnography and the Politics of Interpreting the Periphery**

**Daniel N. Silva, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, CNPq, BRAZIL**

This paper examines the mediation of sociolinguistic knowledge about peripheries, drawing on long-term collaborative work with favela activists in Brazil. Building on Peircean semiotics, I explore how ideologies mediate our access to social reality. Through the notion of reverse ethnography (Silva 2025), I discuss how activists critique extractivist research models and how such critiques lead us to reposition the researcher as an allied linguist (Borba 2022) working within locally grounded epistemologies. As a scholar situated in the periphery of global academia, I reflect on disputes over the legitimacy of the communicative practices I describe—sometimes dismissed in central academic circles as “indeterminate” or “nonexistent”—and, more problematically, on claims that my interlocutors are “not the real poor,” but rather actors who have gained visibility and influence. Further, critiques of my alignment with grassroots activist ideologies—rather than with the legitimized knowledge of the “center”—reveal how epistemic authority remains unevenly distributed.



# Southern perspectives and experiences of multilingual education: ideologies, policies and innovating with teachers

## **Participants:**

- Prof Carolyn McKinney, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Xolisa Guzula & Dr Soraya Abdulatief, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA & Dr Simthembile Xeketwana, Stellenbosch University, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Monica Hendricks, Rhodes University, SOUTH AFRICA & Dr Soraya Abdulatief, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA & Dr Simthembile Xeketwana, Stellenbosch University, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Robyn Tyler, University of the Western Cape, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Brian Ramadiro, University of Fort Hare, SOUTH AFRICA

Multilingualism in education and linguistically shaped inequalities are consonant areas of interest to sociolinguists in both the Global South and the Global North but these constitute very different contexts. Multilingualism in the Global South is indigenous and centuries-old. Furthermore, the Southern experience of colonialism and ongoing coloniality have shaped language ideologies which continue to value colonial languages as means to social and economic advancement and fuel resistance to the use of African languages in education. Countering this is a history of research and advocacy for the use of African languages in education, which has leveraged the cracks in the edifice of coloniality. In 2025, in a major policy shift, the National Department of Education introduced bilingual education in primary schools. It is this changing Southern landscape that frames the papers presented in this colloquium.

The five papers present findings from three bilingual intervention projects: a pre-service teacher education programme, an in-service teacher education project, and a primary science project. These provide examples of leveraging the ‘cracks’ and through research evidence, advancing theory and practice.

These papers and others from the Global South can reach points of both consonance and contrast with Northern experiences and the theorising of multilingualism in education.



## **Bilingual Pedagogies in Initial Teacher Education**

**Dr Brian Ramadiro, University of Fort Hare, SOUTH AFRICA**

This paper examines the University of Fort Hare's bilingual Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programme, focusing on the isiXhosa–English stream as a case of bilingual teacher education in a Southern African context. It addresses the global lack of research and practical guidance on preparing teachers for bi- and multilingual classrooms, particularly where a dominant language such as English is paired with a marginalised African language. Drawing on teaching experience between 2018 and 2024, the chapter analyses how lectures, course materials, assessments, and school-based teaching activities accommodated and valorised linguistic diversity among student teachers — most of whom were isiXhosa–English bilinguals, alongside smaller groups of Sesotho-, isiZulu-, and siSwati-English speakers. Using data from learning guides, observations, and assessments, the analysis engages both unitary and multilingual perspectives on bilingualism to interrogate the language ideologies underpinning pedagogical practices and explores how bilingual educators are prepared to use their languages as media of learning and teaching.

## **Crossing the frontier from oral to written translanguaging for epistemic access in a Natural Science classroom**

**Dr Xolisa Guzula, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Dr Soraya Abdulatief, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

Language ideologies in South Africa originating in the colonial and apartheid eras resulted in language in education policies that normalised English as the language of education. While many teachers have subverted these policies by engaging with learners bilingually in oral interactions, writing and materials have remained in English.

This paper demonstrates how the anglonormativity (McKinney 2017) of science teaching materials, and oral and written languaging practices was disrupted by a Sesotho dominant multilingual science teacher in an isiXhosa dominant classroom; and how with mentoring support, and the provision of multilingual dictionary resources, this teacher's bi-multilingual languaging skills were legitimized and mobilised systematically and purposefully to develop learners' understanding and active engagement in knowledge construction. The teacher's and learners' oral translanguaging were extended to written form. As a result, classroom interaction shifted from being teacher-led to being more learner-centred and bilingual, providing greater opportunities for epistemic access and identity affirmation.



## **Balancing Act: Examining Translanguaging and bi/multilingual practices in the English First Additional (EFAL) classroom**

**Dr Monica Hendricks, Rhodes University, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Dr Soraya Abdulatief, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Dr Simthembile Xeketwana, Stellenbosch University, SOUTH AFRICA**

Research (Hendricks and Xeketwana, 2024) highlights how teachers' pedagogical strategies that engage learners' bi/multilingual repertoires emphasize the role of translanguaging and biliteracy in learning. While translanguaging is acknowledged as a productive pedagogic strategy, Probyn (2015) notes that "there is little training that guides teachers towards a coherent systematic approach to using both languages in the classroom" (220). Drawing on data from the L4L project, we build on previous work to explore ways of extending translanguaging and bi/multilingual practices in English First Additional Language (EFAL) classrooms. We consider parameters for creating bilingual and multilingual pedagogies that reflect South Africa's diverse linguistic landscapes. We argue for working within the EFAL curriculum while promoting translanguaging and bi/multilingual practices. Following Tejeda, Espinoza, and Gutierrez (2003), we maintain that decolonising pedagogies must also prepare students for academic success. We focus on bilingualism and writing (codemeshing) and bilingual writers' problem-solving strategies.

## **Reimagining school language policy through a bilingual science intervention**

**Dr Robyn Tyler - University of the Western Cape, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Gilbert Dolo - University of Cape Town, Mxolisi Mbobo - Intshayelelo Primary School, Nosimo Ndzotyana - Intshayelelo Primary School, Suanne Rampou - Western Cape Education Department**

This paper reports on a longitudinal bilingual science intervention project at Intshayelelo Primary School in Cape Town from 2022 to 2025. The intervention involved the use of a bilingual isiXhosa/English science textbook called 'iSayensi Yethu' in Grade 4 with 176 participating children and three science teachers. The five practitioners forming the project implementation team reflect on the bilingual materials, bilingual pedagogy and bilingual assessment which constituted the core of the project, as well as our roles in the surrounding stakeholder engagements. Our aim is to show in detail the mechanisms and levers of language policy shift towards non-dominant languages from the 'side' and 'below' (Kosonen & Benson, 2021). We share clear evidence of the benefits of a bilingual approach to learning at the school. Furthermore, we emphasise that a crucial aspect of policy change is engaging parents, learners, staff members and departmental officials in the change process.



## **‘Free to learn:’ Learners’ voices in the struggle for linguistic social justice in South African classrooms**

**Margie Probyn, University of the Western Cape**

The introduction of bilingual education for primary learners from 2025 has marked a dramatic shift both linguistically and politically. Previously language policies rooted in coloniality required learners to switch from learning through their home language to learning through English in Grade 4. This paper documents the opinions and experiences of learners over three decades, on the challenges of learning through an unfamiliar colonial language, challenges that became normalized along with limited expectations of academic success. This is contrasted with learners’ responses to the introduction of translanguaging pedagogies in a recent exploratory intervention that sought to engage with learners’ home languages as valued resources for learning while also providing access to English. The data presented is based on questionnaires, focus group discussions and classroom observations. It reveals learners as thoughtful and perceptive commentators and agents of change. It also reveals the injustice of decades of lost opportunities to learn.



# Counterspaces in Pluriversal Contexts: Language, Power, and Social Negotiation Large Colloquium

## Participants:

- Dr Jackie Jia Lou, University of London, UNITED KINGDOM
- Dr Dariush Izadi, Western Sydney University, AUSTRALIA
- Dr Anne Ambler Schluter, Sopuruchi Christian Aboh, and John Ganaah, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HONG KONG
- Dr Daniel N. Silva, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, BRAZIL
- Prof Ana Deumert, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA

Foregrounding the clandestine, contested, and generative dimensions of social life, this colloquium proposes counterspace as a critical lens for examining dissonance through marginalised individuals' navigation of and resistance to social hierarchies within public and semi-public spaces. Its roots lie in Foucault's (1978) notion of counter-conduct, which highlights actors' subtle or overt practices resisting and reconfiguring normative regimes. It also draws on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of spaces of representation, which eschews visions of space as static or neutral and underlines, instead, actors' potential to transform it creatively. Subsequent work emphasizes the relational and social dimensions (Cf. Massey, 1994; Keating, 2015), which contribute to an understanding of these transformative practices as forms of spatial agency (Kwok, 2024). Accordingly, space-making activities potentially reposition individuals within existing power structures.

Scollon's (2001) site of engagement brings together dynamic, multimodal interactions among actors, discourses, and material contexts, demonstrating how meanings, norms, and social positions are co-constructed. Complementing this perspective, a sociolinguistics of the spectre (Deumert, 2022) attends to semi-public arenas haunted by suppressed or marginalised voices, revealing temporal and relational layers of social life. This colloquium adopts this framing to envision a niche ethnic market, migrant football match, independent café, documentary film workshop, and diaspora Facebook page as sites where everyday language practices, narratives of origin, and shared cultural repertoires are recontextualised to produce moments of symbolic dissonance with dominant discourses.





## **The spatial re-enregisterment of an urban dialect in Shanghai**

**Dr Jackie Jia Lou, University of London, UNITED KINGDOM**

This paper examines the resurgence of Shanghainese, an endangered variety of the Chinese Wu language family, in the urban linguistic landscape of Shanghai. Shanghainese rose to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century when the city became a Treaty Port after the Opium War and has since become a symbol of Shanghainese identity and culture. However, this prominent dialect has been in sharp decline since the mid-1990s, leading many to speculate its imminent demise. While Shanghainese is only written in literary contexts, its presence has become more visible in the linguistic landscape of the city in recent years, especially in spaces of consumption. Drawing on ethnographic observations and interviews in an independent café, this paper analyses the resemiotisation of this urban vernacular in the designs of shop signs and interior spaces and discusses how such recontextualisation serves as a kind of spatial re-enregisterment, infusing the dialect with new cosmopolitan affect.

## **Material acts of belonging: Language, agency, and everyday counterspaces**

**Dr Dariush Izadi, Western Sydney University**

**[ONLINE PRESENTATION]**

This paper examines how everyday commercial sites such as migrant corner shops and local markets function as counterspaces where linguistic and material practices intersect to negotiate belonging and resistance. Drawing on linguistic ethnography in Sydney, it explores how multilingual signage, embodied routines, and object-mediated exchanges reconfigure social hierarchies and produce moments of symbolic dissonance with dominant discourses. These spaces, while seemingly mundane, become arenas where marginalised actors transform the conditions of visibility and participation through creative semiotic and material practices. By engaging with Foucault's notion of counter-conduct and Scollon's site of engagement, the study traces how spatial and discursive practices collaboratively generate micro-level acts of agency and innovation. The analysis contributes to theorising counterspace in sociolinguistics, demonstrating how material artefacts, linguistic repertoires, and embodied actions co-produce sites of negotiation that reveal the relational and generative dimensions of power in everyday life.



## **“We go give una wotowoto [merciless thrashing]”: Trash talk and multimodal stance-taking in the counterspace of a Hong Kong-based diaspora football rivalry**

**Dr Anne Ambler Schluter, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HONG KONG**

**Sopuruchi Christian Aboh, and John Ganaah, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

Informal, migrant-led sports competitions serve as counterspaces where participants build social networks and resilience in the face of structural exclusion (Aquino et al., forthcoming). Through collective navigation of barriers and intercultural interactions, teammates develop “belonging-in-interaction” (Simpson & Bradley, 2024). Combining frameworks of social resilience (Hall & Lamont, 2013), social anchoring (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017), and place-based social capital (Blokland, 2017), this paper examines observation and interview data from football matches between Hong Kong’s Nigerian and Ghanaian diaspora football teams. Here, bodies and emotions come together with national symbols, drums, cheers, and trash talk to create a space in which dominant Hong Kong-centric structures dictate little influence over site-specific semiotics. Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Bezemer, 2023) of the integrated communicative functions of bodies, language, and materiality yields findings that draw a sharp contrast between participants’ agentive, defiant on-field stances vs. their docile, off-field everyday conduct as migrants who possess little power.

## **From deixis to counterspace: Reimagining place and security in a Rio de Janeiro favela**

**Dr Daniel N. Silva, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, BRAZIL**

Sociolinguistic research on deixis has shown how the here-and-now of enunciation can project beyond its immediate context, anchoring broader embodied, political, and affective formations. This paper extends the notion of the deictic field (Hanks 2005) to explore counterspace—a concept this symposium adopts to examine how marginalized actors reconfigure the coordinates of belonging and insurgence. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Faveladoc, a grassroots filmmaking workshop in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, I analyze how participants collectively responded to a nearby shootout during class. Through listening practices, distributed embodiment, and humorous metapragmatics, they re-scaled the deictic field of insecurity into one of mutual care. What emerged was what one participant called a pedagogy of chaos: a counterspace where the experience of violence became a ground for creativity and resilience. The analysis situates this deictic remapping within wider struggles against (in)securitization and racialized spatial governance in the Global South.



# Ontologies of language

## Participants

- Mr Justin Brown, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Mrs Tlalane Lekhanya-Tshikare, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
- Mx Pule kaJanolintji, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA

This panel looks at the notion of language ontologies with regard to some sociolinguistic research currently being undertaken in South Africa. Ontology is the study of what exists and is part of metaphysics – the branch of philosophy that examines reality. The concept of ontology has been brought to bear on language in recent years (Hauck 2023, Demuro & Gurney 2021 & 2025). An important aspect of this work has been the insistence that ontology of language is not just another approach to thinking about language. Speaking about language ontologies, Demuro and Gurney (2012: 2) say the following,

*[We] move away from labelling these as ‘perspectives’ on Language, which would assume, from the onset, that there is an independent, extant, and definable entity called Language about which competing perspectives have been mobilised.*

In this panel we explore some of the implications of language ontologies using data from our ongoing research. We explore how ontologies can be grasped in terms of language itself – its existence and materiality – as well as in terms of the various realities that semiotic systems can reveal.

## If languages do not exist, why do we feel so strongly about them?

### Mr Justin Brown, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA

Scholars such as Pennycook and Makoni (2007) have argued that languages have no independent ontological existence. To argue that languages have no ontological existence also does not preclude the possibility that a named language can be deeply connected to identity. How can something that doesn't exist make us feel such strong emotions? Languages, like all systems of meaning-making are always material and embodied, and one way of grappling with the ontological status of languages is to examine aspects of the materiality of language, such as sounds and the effects of these on speakers. In this paper, I focus on the significance language activists working with Khoekhoegowab attach to certain sounds in Khoekhoegowab. I argue that the emphasis on the experience of sounds is evidence of a heightened awareness of language materiality and that this in turn can help shed new light on the notion of language ontologies. Shankar and Cavanaugh (2017: 3) argue that “language materiality offers a different ontology”, one which can place notions such as affect, sound and sentiment at the centre of our linguistic scholarship.



## Towards a Sociolinguistics of Ho Bothofatsa

**Mrs Tlalane Lehanya-Tshikare, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

Drawing on Botho/Ubuntu philosophy as “the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology” (Ramose, 1999:49) and an undeniable invitation for cosmic resonance, I propose Ho Bothofatsa as a framework for sociolinguistic analysis that reflects pan-epistemic and trans-signification approaches to ways-of-being, knowing, believing and meaning-making. In this sense, Bothofatso is a – necessarily imperfect – remembering of our ancients’ ways of being and their wisdom before violent interruption by colonialism-capitalism. To make my point, I turn to the spirit (moya) which is conceived as the transcendental essence of life that is not restricted to human beings. It is a concept that allows us to disrupt – from an Indigenous perspective – the anthropocentrism that, all too, frequently still shapes work in sociolinguistics. Grounded in a long-term ethnography (and auto-ethnography) of Basotho ways-of-being, I suggest that working from within different ontologies of being and signification allows us to reimagine the work we do as sociolinguists.

## A Morphosemantic Argument for *Isintu* as a Practice of Discursive Ontology

**Mx Pule kaJanolintji, University of Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA**

[ONLINE PRESENTATION]

If “isintu” can be defined as a “Manner of Doing” coherent in an ontology endogenous to Southern Africa (Moyo 2021), what is the history of this concept embedded in the term? I offer here an account of the historical semantics of \*-ntu which would explain a cross-linguistic peculiarity about it – that it has the broadest semantics of any root, deferring to that of the “noun class” prefixal system. For example, we note the luVenda reflex series: *muthu* (cl. 1) [PERSON], *tshithu* (cl. 6) [THING], *fhathu* (cl. 16) [PLACE]. Van De Velde (2019:244) has also pointed out “a semantic hierarchy of agreement patterns for entities and locations respectively” among such series, and we could see this constituting an implicit ontological order.

Informed with such ontological structure, I find in Hyman (2018:226) a note from Williamson wherein she offers support for Stewart’s earlier opinion that the form of the class 9 prefix was archaically a nasalised vowel, which logically results in a number of potential reflexes ( $\text{ŋ} \sim \text{ĩn} \sim \text{n} \sim \emptyset$ ), and I hypothesise that the root \*-ntu presents as a fossilised class 9/10 prefix, with a Potential verbal root \*-tá “name”.

Taking this as the semantic area, I build on the “prototype theory” of noun class semantics from the experimental study of Kari-Anne Selvik (2001), encountered after I independently devised a similar experiment regarding speaker intuitions about class prefixes. I depart from her findings to contend that so-called “noun classes” are in fact an



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aggregate grammatical apparatus of paradigmatic connotation, functioning as a set of phenomenological lenses restricting the denotation. The root \*-ntu, with its potential primordial substructure, and its deferral to the prefixal semantics, pattern the entire ontology as discursive – a relational Becoming rather than stative Being, representing an implicit philosophy latent in intellectual cultures the grammar represents.



# Researching ‘Otherwise’: Developing Approaches for a Sociolinguistics of Potentiality

## Panelists:

- Dr Jackie Lou, Birkbeck, University of London, UNITED KINGDOM
- Ms Jade Engel & Prof Amiena Peck, University of the Western Cape, SOUTH AFRICA
- Dr Natalia Volvach, University of Gothenburg, SWEDEN
- Dr Sean P. Smith, Tilburg University, NETHERLANDS

Recent scholarship develops a sociolinguistics of potentiality, where spaces of ‘otherwise’, or alternative social worlds, contrast the dominant narratives of linear and universal modernity (Kerfoot & Stroud, 2024). Alternative ways of seeing and knowing have been formulated within Sociolinguistics of the South, including the concept of Linguistic Citizenship, but also by following feminist scholarship that foregrounds ethics of care as well as sensory ways of knowing and doing research. While these frameworks address established power structures and ethical accountability in research, approaches that include ways of researching ‘otherwise’ have also been critiqued. In this colloquium, we take these frictions as an invitation to discuss the methods of researching ‘otherwise’. For this, we consider the role of emotion, creativity, multisensory embodiment, and attunement in our respective research sites across the global South and North. While these directions might be described as ‘out of line’ (Ahmed, 2006, p. 136) in sociolinguistics, we maintain that beyond addressing the field’s ongoing concern with language and power, developing ‘practices of otherwise’ emphasizes the place and ethical obligations of the researcher in knowledge-making (Volvach & Kerfoot, *etc.*). Noticing, sensing, and attuning into the creative happenings ultimately means ‘nurturing’ (Moriarty, 2025) the potential worlds and challenging normative structures and ways of knowing.

## Visualising Voids: Creativity as ‘Space of Otherwise’

**Dr Jackie Lou, Birkbeck, University of London, UNITED KINGDOM**

This paper explores creativity as a ‘space of otherwise’ (Kerfoot & Stroud 2024) by reflecting on a personal, creative project exploring memory and loss in the aftermath of Covid-19. Approaching the infamous PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing booth as an iconic fixture of Covid-19 in China, I experimented with their redaction from and reinsertion into the semiotic landscapes of Shanghai as visual metaphors for collective memory and its erasure in a pop-up installation. Drawing on nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon 2004) as the conceptual framework, I examine my own trajectories, experiences, and identities which had shaped this non-academic project. During this detour, I found not only a space for healing and resilience but also an alternative approach to understanding voids and absences in the semiotic landscape (Deumert 2022; Volvach 2024).



## **Vulnerable motherhood: investigating agency and voids of refugee mothers in South Africa**

**Ms Jade Engel & Prof Amiena Peck, University of the Western Cape, SOUTH AFRICA**

Childbirth is one of the greatest and most precarious experiences women undergo due to invasive procedures, marked body exposure and incredible pain. For refugee mothers, the experience of birthing their child arrives with spatial, discursive and emotive challenges with their bodies becoming sites of surveillance, contestation and rejection. To explore their experiences in South African hospitals and clinics, we draw on Linguistic Citizenship to investigate agency and voice as well as voids and absences when interacting with South African nurses. This paper investigates the refugee mother's bodies as they are discursively constructed and constrained in healthcare facilities. Additionally, we operationalize absences and voids to elucidate the lack of Linguistic Citizenship amongst refugee mothers at their most vulnerable. Ethics around researcher's access and positionality during walking methodologies and the relegation of interviews in favour of 'in-between' conversations and personal drawings are discussed as emergent methodologies in a pluriversal frame.

## **Knowledges in the shadows: Sensing the In/visible through an ethnography of ghosts**

**Dr Natalia Volvach, University of Gothenburg, SWEDEN**

As sociolinguists, we seldom consider the entire sensorium as a way towards knowing. We often rely on vision or hearing as modes of meaning-making. In this talk, building on my fieldwork in Qırım-Crimea after its occupation by Russia, I turn to the sensing body and argue that, especially in contexts touched by violence, attention to the senses often unveils in/visible traces that dispossession inflicts. I discuss how an approach of a ghost ethnography allows one to study phenomena in the landscape that haunt. Rather than treating them as 'data' isolated from the viewer, I see them as entangled with the researcher who senses and becomes affected. By taking a relational perspective, I illuminate how the body as a sensing agent can facilitate different ways of knowing in contexts where violence and its aftermaths enact absences, thus shedding light on knowledges that otherwise remain in the shadows.

## **Towards a sociolinguistics of attention: from semiotic ideology to attunement in spaces of otherwise**

**Dr Sean P. Smith, Tilburg University, NETHERLANDS**

The concept of an 'otherwise' underscores that space can be experienced multiply, yet modernity enshrines belief in a singular, universal space. This paper analyzes how discourse constructs 'modern' space and considers sociolinguistic approaches to





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destabilizing modernity's universality. Through an analysis of interviews together with digital data from Instagram and Google Maps at a tourism site in the Sultanate of Oman, space is shown to be interpreted through a semiotic ideology, or a discourse of what signs mean and how they were created (Keane, 2018). Yet ideology further shapes what signs in space are identified, as attention brings one interpretation of space into focus while rendering others invisible (Ahmed, 2006). A sociolinguistics of attention is proposed as a framework for challenging 'modern' space, grounded in attunement to signs that modernity does not recognize as legible: e.g., counter-hegemonic histories, or more-than-human lifeways and processes. In revealing such 'spaces of otherwise', this case further outlines a scope for ethically incorporating 'data' involving participants who may conceive space differently.

Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press.

Deumert, A. (2022). The sound of absent-presence: Towards formulating a sociolinguistics of the spectre. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 45(2), 135-153.

Kerfoot, C. & Stroud, C. (2024). Towards a sociolinguistics of potentiality: Linguistic citizenship, quasi-events, and contingent becomings in spaces of otherwise. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 287, 1-22.

Moriarty, M. (2025). 'Volume as Vulnerability: Semiotic Landscapes of Collapse and Transformation'. *Linguistic Landscape* 16. University of Duisburg-Essen.

Volvach, N. (2024). Shouting absences: Disentangling the ghosts of Ukraine in occupied Crimea. *Language in Society*, 53(3), 523-548.

Volvach, N. & Kerfoot, C. (forthcoming). *A sociolinguistics of the spectre: Language, space and memory*. Bloomsbury.



# Dehumanization and genocide in Palestine: Do we need a more human(e) sociolinguistics?

## **Participants:**

- Dr Lara Krause-Alzaidi, Leipzig University, GERMANY
- Prof Kristina Hultgren, The Open University, UNITED KINGDOM  
& Jaspal Naveel Singh The Open University, UNITED KINGDOM
- Dr Julia Molinari, The Open University, UNITED KINGDOM

This colloquium takes its cue from El-Kurd's (2025) discussion of Palestinian dehumanization within the historical trajectory of Zionist settler colonialism. The contributions mobilize sociolinguistic concepts and theories to explore how such dehumanization occurs in the context of the genocide in Gaza, and also how it is resisted, grieved and counteracted. Papers include empirical approaches to making dehumanization visible with concepts like iconization, and to analyzing institutional silencing of Palestine activism. Others explore grief and resistance to genocide in African poetry on Palestine. The panel also conjures counterforces to dehumanization from within sociolinguistics, reflecting on what makes academic writing human(e) during a genocide. It challenges academic writing practices by insisting that they be decolonized (Said 2004, Fúnes-Flores 2024, Tbakhi 2023). This would require academics to instigate a writing Intifida by shaking off, for example, enduring monolingual and impersonal writing practices (Hultgren and Molinari 2022; Canagarajah 2022) that continue to convergence to anglophone positivist linguistic norms. Mindful of the very productive posthumanist turn (Pennycook 2018) and animal turn (Cornips 2025) in recent sociolinguistic research, in this colloquium we ask: If sociolinguistics wants to become response-able (Haraway 2016) towards genocide, do we need to recenter the human and the humane to counter dehumanization?

## **“I kill two khamas”: Material-discursive iconization and the justification of genocide**

**Dr Lara Krause-Alzaidi, Leipzig University, Germany**

**Taylor O. Gray, Penn State, UNITED STATES**

We analyze phonological, semantic, and ideological dynamics around the word Hamas that we observe after October 7th 2023. Exploring these processes through an assemblage of video, written, and image data from online blogs, social media and YouTube, we show how, through a process of iconization facilitated by a phonological slippage between the Arabic and Hebrew pronunciation of Hamas, the Arabic semantic content of Hamas is reworked and wrongly attributed the Hebrew meaning ‘violence’. This



process participates in the material-discursive production of Palestinians as inherently violent, which helps justify Israel's genocide in Gaza. Combining sociolinguistics, biblical studies, and new materialism, we argue that said iconization a) works in part by enrolling the Hebrew Bible as what we call an iconization device that gives weight to the misdefinition of Hamas as "violence," and b) is not merely ideological or representational but material-discursive, and therefore directly implicated in the genocide.

## **Universities' silencing of Palestine activism**

**Prof Kristina Hultgren, The Open University, UNITED KINGDOM  
& Jaspal Naveel Singh The Open University, UNITED KINGDOM**

To justify profiting off the dehumanization of Palestinians, institutions in the global north deploy several sociolinguistic silencing strategies (Jaworski 1993, Pervez 2025) that suppress their members' expressions of solidarity and calls for decolonization. Drawing on ethnographic and questionnaire data collected during the last two years of the genocide in Gaza, we show three interrelated sociolinguistic strategies deployed by British universities to silence students and employees who speak up against their institutions' complicity in the genocide and Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

1. *Weaponization*: inverting EDI policies to suppress minoritized voices,
2. *Interception*: shutting down communication channels,
3. *(In-)securitization*: intimidation, surveillance, physical force.

Our critical analysis of these silencing strategies also demonstrates how scholars/activists over time developed human(e) counter-strategies that recentre the human experience, affect, and sense of shared humanity on this planet.

## **What makes academic writing human(e): a sociolinguistic, political, and decolonial call to action**

**Dr Julia Molinari, The Open University, UNITED KINGDOM**

English academic writing – its texts, practices, purposes, and writers - has evolved to value positivist ideals (Judd, 2003). These are exemplified by terms commonly used to describe it, such as 'formal', 'objective', 'neutral', 'balanced', 'transparent', and 'linear'. Cumulatively, these ideals combine to create an imaginary of academic discourse that is 'detached' and authorless, making it non-human and arguably inhumane. Known as the 'view from nowhere', detached discourse is exemplified by the over-determination of passive syntax; the avoidance of emotive and creative language; and increasing standardisation, compounded by Large Language Models (LLMs) trained on archives that perpetuate the myth that because of its alleged neutrality, English academic discourse affords an unmediated view of the world (Bouchard, 2024). My talk interrogates the role and responsibility of academic writing in times of human crisis (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Ziadah, 2025). Specifically, I show that 'impartiality' undermines academia's mission to further knowledge, truth, and human flourishing.



# A Sociolinguistics of the Spectre: Language, Space and Memory

## **Participants:**

- Dr Natalia Volvach, Stockholm University, SWEDEN
- Dr Lara-Stephanie Krause-Alzaidi, University of Leipzig, GERMANY
- Dr Andreas Nuottaniemi, Stockholm University, SWEDEN

This colloquium addresses the challenges of studying the violence with which resurgent wars and enduring colonial practices confront us. It is inspired by Derrida's ([1994]2006) notion of absent-presences, understood as spectres that haunt, articulate the voices that history has tried to repress, and provoke dissonance in existing narrative orders and paradigms. We seek to provoke a conversation on the potential of the spectral as a "future forming orientation" (Gergen 2014) for sociolinguistics. In attending to the absent presences that violence produces, we consider the capacities, risks, and limitations of the spectre in opening the way to new questions, practices, and ethico-political deliberations.

To do justice to the multi-dimensional nature of the spectral, this colloquium draws inspiration from human geography, memory studies and anthropology. Studies from Spain, Zanzibar, the UK and Sweden illuminate the fragile presences of the past in shadows, traces of sound or script, fleeting encounters, and buried histories. Together, they problematize what counts as "data", question the role of the researcher, and advance methodologies that foreground embodied, affective, and more-than-human ways of knowing. While forging spectral directions in sociolinguistics, this colloquium also invites us to find a voice from which to speak and act against erasure.

## **Ghosts at the crossroads: Linking the Southern with the Spectral turn in sociolinguistics through an interdisciplinary conversation**

**Dr Lara-Stephanie Krause-Alzaidi, University of Leipzig, Germany**

This conversation – a decolonial, collective format allowing for openness to alternative onto-epistemologies – is an exchange between the Southern turn and the Spectral turn in sociolinguistics. The former pushes for a counter-hegemonic sociolinguistics centring Southern onto-epistemologies, helping to "interrupt our compliance, connivance and complicity with the apparent universality or neutrality of our theories of language." (Menezes de Souza 2022: xvii). The Spectral turn unsettles present-focused sociolinguistics, engaging absent presences. For us, ghosts link these turns: In Indigenous, Southern ontologies real ghosts are often part of everyday life. But, in the Spectral turn, sociolinguists use ghosts



as metaphors, or remain agnostic regarding their existence. We articulate these different senses of ghosts through questions like: Does the Spectral fit with the Southern turn in sociolinguistics? What challenges do real and metaphorical ghosts bring to sociolinguistics? Might Southern ghosts push us to question metaphorization and move towards analytical repertoires for a Southern, Spectral sociolinguistics?

## **The Ghost in the Green Machine: On the Fetishisation of Labour and Language in the Green Transition**

**Dr Andreas Nuottaniemi, Stockholm University, SWEDEN**

This presentation addresses the ghostly logic of capitalist abstraction in the green transition, focusing on language and space in the battery manufacturer Northvolt's workplace-residence regime in Skellefteå, Sweden. Ethnographic data from barrack villages and language classrooms show how workers' bodies are disciplined and silenced, even as corporate discourse celebrates creativity and purpose. Applying Marx's concept of fetishism, the study demonstrates how linguistic practices are commodified, reducing language learning to gamified fragments while ignoring its role in social reproduction. The barracks function as semiotic landscapes of placelessness, indexing temporariness and control. By tracing these spectral dynamics, the paper argues for a sociolinguistics that re-centres embodied labour and communicative practices in debates on sustainability and justice.

