

Rubbish? Envisioning a Sociolinguistics of Waste

Crispin Thurlow

University of Bern, Switzerland

This talk will be fundamentally concerned with both kinds of disturbance invoked in the conference’s “unsettling language” thematic. First, I want to journey beyond the usual comfort zones of sociolinguistics by considering some of the important places we seldom seem to go. In this regard, I think specifically about places like scrap yards and waste dumps (cf Thurlow, 2020). Over and above its obvious ecological relevance (see Stibbe, 2015), this move is also politically significant in turning our attention to neglected, precarious worlds of social interaction. Second, by focusing on the embodied, multisensory materialities of waste – those things (or people) we discount as “dirty” – I am also prompted to think at the limits of language. In this vein, my talk engages our field’s recent experiments with post-humanist (Pennycook, 2017) and non-representational approaches to language (Thurlow, 2016). I want therefore to consider the capacity of linguistically-oriented analyses to make sense of rubbish and other things which often fall beyond – or sit beside – words in significant ways. This does not, however, mean ditching language. On the contrary. Words may not be fully sufficient, but they are undoubtedly central to how people make sense of waste. All of which has powerful social, political, and ecological ramifications.

References

- Pennycook, A. (2017). *Posthumanist Applied Linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. London: Routledge.
- Thurlow, C. (2020). Expanding our sociolinguistic horizons? Geographical thinking and the articulatory potential of commodity chain analysis. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 24(3), 350–368.
- Thurlow, C. (2016). Queering critical discourse studies or/and performing post-class ideologies. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 13(5), 485–514.