

## Decolonising, unsettling and rebuilding sociolinguistics

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There has been much talk about decolonising the ways in which we teach sociolinguistic subjects. Lecturers around the world are now changing their curricula to incorporate more examples and scholars from previously colonised places, rather than always only regurgitating 'canonical' studies, which were predominantly conducted in North America and Western Europe or by scholars from the global north. Reading lists for seminars, for example, are now expected to incorporate a substantial amount of Black female scholars to remain trustworthy among multicultural students. While these interventions are necessary and certainly still have a long way to go, the panel seeks to plot the next steps in the decolonisation of sociolinguistics. What southern theories can be used to explain sociolinguistic phenomena that occur in globalisation and mobility? How do the racial identities of researchers both constrain and open up ethical, methodological and theoretical possibilities? What must be considered when scholars in northern and western countries cross national and cultural borders and study disenfranchised and previously colonised people? Has the time come for, say, African and Asian researchers to come to Europe or North America and conduct ethnographic research among local European natives using African and Asian theories? What else can be done to further politicise the academy and balance out the unequal access to knowledge that was established during 500 years of colonialism and imperialism and that continues on and finds emphatic resurgence in the current neoliberal moment of globalisation?

The panel seeks to create a safe, yet not incontestable, space for collegial exchange. It is hoped that the panel will take stock of current best practices and unsettling possibilities of the political project of decolonising sociolinguistics and plot collaborative plans for future steps to rebuild sociolinguistics in more inclusive and realistic ways.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, global south, global north, curriculum, southern theory, ethics.

## 1. Expanding footprints of Sociolinguistics in Asia Pacific

*Prof. Shobha Satyanath*

*Delhi University*

*Two important developments over the past ten years are set to alter the longstanding western selectiveness of sociolinguistics (see Labov, 2015). This includes a new conference series- NWAV Asia-Pacific and a new Journal, Asia Pacific Language Variation (APLV) starting in 2011 and 2015, which together have provided an exclusive space to present and publish research from Asia Pacific. The sheer diversity of Asia Pacific, which is home to 60% of the population of the world, can transform the existing knowledge base on language variation and change and open up possibilities for newer perspectives. The studies from the regions of the Asia-Pacific not only have brought to the fore a wide range of linguistic variables, but have also covered several newer languages belonging to a variety of language families, and societies with varied social structures, thereby diversifying our knowledge of language variation.*

*There are also other parallel developments that are positively contributing to expanding sociolinguistic theory and findings. These include (i) increased interest among some western sociolinguists in documentation of non-western communities (e.g., Vanuatu and Sui community in southwest China), and (ii) a new conference series – Globalizing Sociolinguistics in 2015 initiated by Smakman and Heinrich, and associated publications.*

*The above developments have the potential of expanding and pluralizing sociolinguistics knowledge. This talk surveys the nature of the research produced on communities of Asia Pacific, including India over the past ten years in terms of variables examined, newer social factors explored and specific findings with respect to some of the key discoveries in sociolinguistics.*

### *References*

*Labov, William (2015). The discovery of the unexpected. Asia Pacific Language Variation, 1(1): 7-22.*

**Keywords:** *sociolinguistics, Asia Pacific, language variation*

## 2. Coming out of the cloister: Critical reflexivity in decolonizing multilingual research

*Mr. Imad Ullah Khan  
University of Swat, Pakistan*

This presentation explores the author's critical reflexive stance towards researching multilingually (RM-ly). RM-ly refers to how researchers conceptualize and practice generating, analyzing, and reporting multilingual data mediated by power relations and cultural and linguistic factors. The presentation focuses on data generation in northern Pakistan and the subsequent institutionalized writing up of the research report in New Zealand in a research project exploring intersections between sociocultural factors (specifically, linguistic ideologies and hierarchies) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' (aged 16-18) linguistic identities and their perceptions of multilingual resources. The data were generated in three languages (Pashto, Urdu, and English) and reported in English. The presentation reflects upon the recursive relationship between three stages in the career of the author as a novice researcher: first, the monolingual stage – taking for granted the dominance of English and the subordination of peripheral languages (Pashto and Urdu); secondly, the ambivalent stage – realizing that using more than one language in academic writing is possible but struggling to adopt/develop multilingual methodology; and thirdly, the multilingual stage – the purposeful use of multilingual data to address ethical issues about representation of multilingual data and research participants. Challenges arose in spatial terms with regard to the use of multilingual data generated in a 'periphery country' (i.e., Pakistan) and translated and analyzed in a 'core country' (i.e., New Zealand), with both contexts having specific historical relations to British colonialism and the English language. In relational terms, the author's research production was supervised by academics from 'core countries' (New Zealand and USA). I argue that a researcher's critical reflexive stance can be conducive for making purposeful decisions in RM-ly in spatial and relational terms. Broadly, such a stance can contribute towards novice researchers' ability to use RM-ly to push for decolonizing research approaches that favor dominant languages.

**Keywords:** *multilingualism, codemeshing, ethics, colonialism, reflexivity*

### 3. Decolonizing without demythologizing?

Dr. Adrian Pablé

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If there was a theory able to explain human communication as a universal phenomenon without such a theory being culturally biased, would sociolinguistics be interested in it? Or would it have to be a theory of *linguistic communication*? And therefore would it have to be concerned with explaining 'language'? Or would it rather have to explain 'languages'? However, could such a theory still be universal and unbiased?

While sociolinguists have recently called for a 'decolonial turn' in linguistics, advocating for alternative Southern epistemologies, the question arises whether sociolinguistics is interested in *demythologizing* linguistics along with *decolonizing* it? Is the 'decolonial turn' interested in treating human communication as a lay perspective rather than an empirical object? If yes, this would require a rethinking of the nature of human signs in general. If metaphysics is (arguably) a product of the West, how much of it is a decolonized sociolinguistics willing to give up? Would a sociolinguistics that rejects abstraction altogether be viable? How, then, would it justify its name? If, in turn, communication exists only as a continuum in an individual's life, what exactly is 'linguistic' and 'non-linguistic' about it becomes equally a matter of individual experience. A decolonized sociolinguistics that wants alternative linguistic experiences to take center stage, I argue here, cannot rest content with linguistic relativism as its onto-epistemological stance: rather than treating the abstract linguistic sign as the unifying element, which remains tied to 'a language', it should seek to address what truly unites human communication *semiologically*, i.e. it should inquire further into the nature of signs and the nature of knowledge. Only thus can Western linguistic thought be *demythologized* rather than instrumentalized. Taking Harris' integrational theory of communication as my point of reference, I shall argue that a demythologized linguistics must strive to be both lay-oriented and non-ethnocentric.

**Keywords:** *Harris, integrationism, demythologization*

#### 4. The paradoxical space: Global South academics between subordination and arrogance

*Dr. Viviane Resende*

*UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA*

Due to the continued effects of colonial knowledge-power structures, many Latin American scholars occupy a subaltern space in international academic knowledge production and practice. Our research publications are underrepresented in so-called top-ranking journals, and our participation in international conferences is often peripheral. The subaltern space we occupy, however, is paradoxical when considering our positions in our local contexts. Occupying a university chair, for instance, allows us to wield significant symbolic power endowed by an institution that has long held a monopoly on legitimate production of knowledge. As Latin American scholars, we are therefore in a paradoxical space: a space of subordination in international academic knowledge production and a space of arrogance in the production of local knowledge. We are often white, and often from middle classes or elite backgrounds and we thereby often reproduce - intentionally or not - the logic of race and class of colonial power within our local contexts, while at the same time struggling to find recognition in the international academic community by critiquing the very coloniality from which we benefit at home. In this paper, I intend to discuss this paradoxical space, focusing on the epistemological debate around the coloniality of knowledge, epistemic inequality, and the resulting epistemicides. Ideologically formed, the coloniality of knowledge is never explicitly stated, nor does it clearly delimit its contours; but it nevertheless acts incessantly. I argue that a critical and reflective understanding of this paradoxical space is necessary to find opportunities to subvert colonial knowledge-power systems.

**Keywords:** *coloniality, decoloniality, paradoxical space, Global South, epistemology*

## **5. Discussion**

*Prof. Ana Deumert*

*University of Cape Town*

Professor Ana Deumert will act as a discussant of this panel.

**Keywords:** *Decolonisation*

## 6. Doing (De/Re)colonization: Language, Race, and the Exoticizing of Researchers

*Mx. Mingdan Wu*

*University College London, Institute of Education*

I grew up in Southeast China and had never been to the 'West' until coming to the UK to begin a postgraduate degree. The extensive homeless population in London shocked me at first because of how it differed from my imagination of this part of the world. I decided to conduct my PhD research on homeless people's livelihood strategies in London, documenting the role language and communication plays in their everyday practices as newspaper vendors, tour guides, cleaners, and workers in grassroots projects. I have been considering the idea of racialization since December 2018 when I started my fieldwork, as the first question that most informants asked me was 'where are you from?' One homeless beggar felt compelled to point out upon meeting me, 'it would be a miracle to get money out of Asians' pockets'. And, scholars seem to find it unusual to see a Chinese student not working on a Chinese context.

Conducting sociolinguistic and ethnographic research in the UK while having a typical Asian appearance, I was recognized by some scholars as someone who puts the decolonization of knowledge production into practice. Because of my 'southernized' race, I seem to be able to contribute to the European and North American-centered discourse of decolonization. But instead of rebuilding sociolinguistics, I might have become part of the reproduction of colonial dominance; my 'exoticism' and contribution to decolonization can be considered providing 'ammunition' for the recolonization of knowledge (Cusianqui, 2012). Such framing even implicitly positions my Chinese colleagues who work on Chinese contexts as less innovative. In this paper, I reflect on the politics of decolonization and analyze the complex ways through which a decolonial sociolinguistic practice is entrenched in complex forms of othering and exotization which may both enable and prevent the imagination of new futures for sociolinguistics.

**Keywords:** *decolonization, race, southern theory, academic discourse, recolonization*

## 7. Haunting signs: Communicative overdetermination and the colonality of sociolinguistic empiricism

Dr. Jonathan Rosa  
Stanford University

In *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), Césaire asserted: “My turn to state an equation: colonization = thingification.” This landmark statement challenges us to examine the role of colonialism in stipulating the power relations through which societies and entities within them come to be defined as particular kinds of things. This sweeping take on colonialism’s worldmaking capacities corresponds to what Wynter (2003) frames as the “coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom.” Connecting these insights to scholarship focused on the colonality of language as codified and studied within linguistics and sociolinguistics (Makoni 2011), this paper examines how colonial histories haunt everyday language use in ways that disrupt empirical approaches to the study of communication and interaction. With a specific focus on experiences across the Puerto Rican diaspora, a fraught context with longstanding ties to European colonialism and US imperialism, I show how empirical accounts of Puerto Ricans’ multilingual repertoires stand in tension with the overdetermination of Puerto Rican language use as illegitimate. In my analysis of attributions and self-identifications of Puerto Rican *languagelessness* (Rosa 2019), I draw on Césaire to understand the *thingification* of the Spanish and English languages, as well as Wynter to make sense of how efforts to unsettle ideologies of Puerto Rican linguistic illegitimacy necessitate a reimagining of being, power, truth, and freedom.

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Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3(3):256-337.

**Keywords:** *Colonialism, Language ideologies, Empiricism, Multilingualism*

## 8. Defying common sense – Ethno-tales of economic rationalism in our field

*Prof. Finex Ndhlovu*

*University of New England, Australia*

*Dr. Torun Reite*

*Stockholm University, Sweden*

Decolonization and decolonial interventions critique the universality of the European projects of modernity. We suggest centering this critique on the lived experiences of conditions of coloniality seen from the individual or “from below.” We draw on own biographies and lived experiences: one of us, as a professional economist and early career researcher within sociolinguistics, the other, as a sociolinguist engaged in the decolonization debate, to suggest autobiographical and ethnographically inspired accounts – “ethno-tales” and Bourdieusian reflexivity as fruitful ways of exploring next steps in decolonizing academia. We find inspiration from the post-crash economics movement, rethinking economics, a counterhegemonic social movement which has grown out of undergraduate economists’ discontent with the lack of heterodox curricula within economics. Rethinking economics emerged out of the recognition that there is an economic common sense within society that promotes a belief in the self-regulating workings of the market and that this common sense is not helpful in addressing some of the pressing problems of our time. Such beliefs become part of our social practices, and, often unnoticeably, re-produce conditions of contemporary coloniality. The movement engages at the nexus between the individual, social and political.

The autobiographical “ethno-tale” refers both to autoethnography and to narratives and can be seen as a hybrid notion that aims to reflect the Bourdieusian double objectivity. Rethinking economics grew out of individuals’ lived experiences and draws heavily on autobiographical accounts. Based on this, we suggest that ethno-tales can negotiate a space for questioning and pointing out the extent to which the academe is entrenched in a logic of coloniality and to which extent the economic common sense dominates within our field.

**Keywords:** *Reflexivity, Decolonization, Counterhegemonic, Social movements, Economics*

## 9. Tracing precolonial archives: Evidence from Southern Africa and the Indian subcontinent

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*University of Cape Town*

Drawing on our linguistic archaeologies in southern Africa and in the Indian subcontinent, we trace precolonial archives which assemble language ideologies that partly predate colonial conquest. The precolonial archives both contest and reinforce dominant 'northern' conceptions of language which stem largely from colonial domination and which continue to permeate popular and academic imaginations of language. Precolonial archives are diverse and not confined to 'western' notions of an archive. They include oral histories and folk ideas about language, passed down by word-of-mouth in stories, embodied practices and other cultural resources. Importantly, European colonial domination systematically distorted such precolonial ideas of language in order to render the newly subjugated peoples as linguistically inferior or even languageless; a crucial premise for Christian missionary efforts and colonial education and governance. Precolonial archives have been further damaged by the dividing up of peoples, races, religions and territories, the creation of postcolonial nations and the current neoliberal globality. Our archaeology in this paper is thus unlikely to unearth any fully-formed or intact archives. We base our discussion on two examples. First, we explore the transcultural continuities and ruptures between *tabla bol* (drum speak), an ancient Asian form of mnemonic vocal percussion, and contemporary hip hop beatboxing in urban India. Secondly, we discuss 'reconstructed' ideologies associated with an indigenous language and cultural revival movement in South Africa. While precursory and unfinished, our engagements with precolonial archives ultimately aims to diversify the ways in which we all understand language. Bringing colonially-distorted language ideologies into mainstream sociolinguistic research of today is, we suggest, now a necessary move for our critique of coloniality to respond to new challenges posed by the current resurgence of ethno-nationalism in South Africa and in India; a politics that engages in a search for southern theory and precoloniality that somewhat resembles our own decolonial agendas.

**Keywords:** *Archive, language ideologies, precolonial, vocal percussion, hip hop, indigenous language revival*

## 10. Shards of the South: Thinking decoloniality and southern sociolinguistics

*Prof. Kathleen Heugh*  
*University of South Australia*

*Prof. Christopher Stroud*  
*University of the Western Cape*

It is tempting to turn towards southern theories when thinking about decoloniality. However, as Macias (ftc) points out, there may be an inherent risk of appropriating and re-voicing both decolonial and southern thought and voices. In this process, decoloniality may be reconstructed upon the *shards* of southern thought. Treading lightly, however, towards southern thinking and ways of knowing encourages us to contemplate the questions we could be asking ourselves of language relevant to southern conversations.

Southern linguistics invites conversations in which understanding is co-produced and co-revealed. Understanding seeps slowly through the forgetting of cacophonies of the metropole, the bruising of our sentient beings and the recognition of irrelevance. Ideas don't necessarily come from our individual selves. Rather they come from an anchorage of cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies – from intimate associations and affiliations with particular places and the ecologies that these places support – living and non-living, including human beings, ancestors and those who are yet to be.

Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana (e.g. 2005, and in Holas, ftc) posits, as a fundamental basis for conversation, intimacy-love which he sees as the condition for the emergence of language(ing) and the co-constitution of the human being as *homo-sapiens-amans*. Taking this as our point of departure, we ask what considerations this avenue of thinking can contribute towards refiguring or reconstituting a southern and decolonial sociolinguistics.

**Keywords:** *Southern theory, understanding, intimacy, love*

## 11. Unsettling colonial discourses of Anangu practices of literacy

*Mx. Janet Armitage  
University of South Australia*

Anangu (Pitjantjatjara speaking people) are the holders of continuity on their own land, in an area across two states and a territory of central Australia, where Anangu literacy practices are visible and important in community life. These include a wealth of communicative traditions that encode meaning and transmit knowledge through a variety of forms and media. The strengths of these practices are in their plurality of languages, modes of representation and transmission of knowledges, yet they are not recognised as forms of literacy. Anangu literacy practices create a space that is worthy of exploration and challenge already contested definitions of both 'literacy' and 'text' (Street, 2003; Kral, 2012).

The metaphor of 'the abyssal line' (Santos, 2018), with its explanations of the ways Northern epistemologies classify limited types of knowledge, creating hierarchies, categories, schemas and frames of understandings, supports this redefinition of literacy. Demarcations and counterpoints are created by Anangu epistemologies and ways of doing and being where the abyssal space between is not just a divide; the term evokes a sense of uncoverable distance, irremediable damages and irreconcilable differences. Southern theory provides support of analysis of the deliberate constructions and maintenance of Northern 'abyssal' thinking in models of literacy. Anangu artists respond to abyssal thinking by 'flipping' relationships so that managers become apprentices, community members become guides, teachers become unskilled workers, and participants become research leaders.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (2018) *The End of the Cognitive Empire: the coming of age of the epistemologies of the South*. Durham: Duke Uni Press.

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**Keywords:** *Anangu, literacy, Southern theory, decolonial*