GUEST LECTURE
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Thinking Language (Classrooms) Differently: An Experiment

When: Thursday, 25th of March 2021, 11.15-12.45h (CET).

Where: Online in the context of the MA-course “Language and Textual Practices - From Colonial Language Textbooks and their Heritage to Today's Understanding of Heterogeneous Knowledge Production” (Daniela Waldburger).

Join us: https://eu.bbcollab.com/guest/f801731351374f93bc7b181db905092b

Abstract

A world divided into languages (Xhosa, English, Swahili... ) is not a neutral, let alone a ‘natural’ fact. Missionary linguists and later colonial states and their divide-and-rule tactics in Africa are illustrative examples of how (African) languages as homogeneous, hermetically sealed units were produced and used for exclusionary purposes in politics and in education (Harries 1988; Errington 2008; Makoni and Pennycook 2007). Until today, languages worldwide work to the advantage of some, but to the disadvantage of many others, be it at immigration ports, on the job market or – as in my example – in classrooms. Based on a long-term linguistic ethnography at a township primary school in Cape Town (Krause forthcoming), I show how such educational disadvantages emerge in the field of tension between (a) the fluid and flexible languaging practices of township residents – including students and teachers – and (b) the static constructs (i.e. languages) of Standard Xhosa and Standard English that dictate what counts as legitimate teaching, learning and assessment practices at the school. With the example of English teaching I then go on to show how teachers and learners are actually rendering this tension between languaging (a) and languages (b) productive via a didactic strategy I call relanguaging – a circular movement of sorting heterogenous linguistic resources into standard language boxes and of dissolving these boxes again by bringing various resources together. Relanguaging has so far remained
invisible for applied linguists as well as for stakeholders in education for reasons to do with the languages-ideology (Sabino 2018) – the idea that the phenomenon language is (and should always be) divided into separate languages. To make relanguaging visible, I had to escape this ideology in my analyses. For that I used a thought experiment (or: a methodical trick) that I will illustrate in my talk. This experiment makes skills and potentials visible in these township classrooms that are normally (i.e. under the influence of the languages-ideology) described as undesirable linguistic and educational dead-ends.


