

Language and Mobility

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Panel description

Language and mobility are almost inseparable. On the one hand, changes in language use are often initiated by socially and/or geographically mobile speaker groups. On the other hand, the mobility of language users is almost always reflected by and in the mobility of the language itself. On an overarching level, this means that languages are “turning up in unexpected places [...] [and] taking unexpected forms” (Heller 2007: 343), such as in the case of New Englishes, where new varieties develop due to contact between speakers of different languages who need to interact with each other. On a social level, speaking the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ language can enable or prevent upward social mobility (cf. Iversen et al. 2017 for an overview), which might even result in speakers abandoning local or heritage languages in favour of a variety which is perceived as more prestigious. Regarding geographical mobility, English functions as a global lingua franca and might make learning another local foreign language obsolete – especially, when the language is used as a tool for achieving locational freedom and mobility rather than social or cultural belonging (see, e.g., Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2022). Many highly mobile professionals, such as digital nomads or travel bloggers and writers rely almost exclusively on English rather than a local language when abroad (e.g. Luzón 2016).

In tourism contexts and travel writing, experiences are planned, described, and processed through language; (lacking) proficiency in a local language – or rather an insufficient local use of English – might even result in replanning or not travelling. Consequently, while local languages appear to be learnt decreasingly often, local and international speakers’ motivation to acquire English in addition to their first language(s) is strongly increasing (e.g. Meierkord 2020 on English usage in the Maldives). While language might enable contact between different social and cultural groups, it might also be altered by it. Thus, the mobility of diasporic communities is reflected in their way of using language.

Language and mobility share a linguistic, social, and cultural connection. Researching these connections and the varying and ever-changing influence within their interrelation unites scholars in linguistics, literature, and cultural studies. This panel aims at bringing together scholars from different fields to shed light on the multiplicity of relations between language and mobility. We invite contributions related (but not limited) to New Englishes, diasporic communities, language in tourism, language and immobility, grassroots multilingualism, travel writing, colonial writing, narratives of mobility, language and social/professional mobility, and identity construction in touristic spaces.

The panel will include on-site contributions only. Each of the 20-minute presentations will be followed by 10 minutes of discussion. Please submit your abstract of max. 300 words (incl. references) via e-mail to Manuela Vida-Mannl (m.vida-mannl@uni-koeln.de), Theresa Neumaier (theresa.neumaier@tu-dortmund.de), and Sven Leuckert (sven.leuckert@tu-dresden.de) by **January 31, 2024**. We are looking forward to seeing you in Augsburg!

References

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