

Transculturality and multilingualism in formal and informal urban spaces

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transcultural
urban spaces
16/17 October 2015
Berne

WHERE GEO- GRAPHY



MEETS LAN- GUAGE

Interdisciplinary conference studying
the transcultural dynamics of contemporary
urban spaces from the combined perspective
of linguistics and cultural geography

Conveners:
Prof. Dr. Yvette Bürki & Dr. cand Melanie Würth
Institute of Spanish Language and Literatures,
University of Berne

PD Dr. Yvonne Riaño
Institute of Geography,
University of Neuchâtel

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Call for Papers

As centres of attraction for great numbers of migrants, and at the same time as gigantic and sometimes frightening settlement structures, cities and metropolitan areas increasingly shape our contemporary lives. More than half the world's population now lives in cities, and these urban areas are achieving immense and difficult to control dimensions, a phenomenon that can be notably observed in the Latin American context. Great numbers of heterogeneous populations, living now on limited space, are experiencing the multifaceted influences of globalisation processes. This has led to increasingly complex dynamics of identity-making between global and local forces. Segregation and fragmentation, instability, mobility and migration, valorisation and degradation of urban spaces, inequality and changing social identities are contemporary phenomena, which are not only manifested in material structures, but also in the collective memories of urban residents, and in their discourses about the city. Furthermore, cities are also centres of economic, technological, and cultural innovation. New lifestyles and diverse linguistic forms are produced in urban areas, thus shaping the culture and identity of city residents. Urban space is therefore the scene of the socio-cultural processes that shape the 21st century, which are also reflected in the dynamics of language variations.

Understanding the highly networked post-modern city thus requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach as well as interdisciplinary research methods. Combining linguistics and urban geography, two fields sharing several points of common interest, allows such an interdisciplinary exchange, and also posing new exciting research questions. In addition, urban spaces are not only produced by urban design and architectural concepts but also are constructed, appropriated and given symbolic meaning through the social interactions and communicative exchange of their inhabitants. Here is where language plays a central role. Language is the expression of multiple socio-geographic processes in the city, and also a medium for the discursive negotiation of social and cultural urban identities. For example, migration to urban areas leads to multilingualism, language diversity, complex indexical features, and diverse discourses and practices about the city. Studying urban spaces and linguistics from a combined perspective offers thus much potential for future research. This topic has started to receive attention from scholars in recent years and this is manifested by the national and international conferences that have previously taken place in Switzerland. However, we still have far too little discussion on the topic.

This conference aims at promoting and reinforcing interactions and networking between linguists and geographers working in urban areas. The goal is to find relevant overlaps, pose new and exciting research questions, provide a platform for the presentation and discussion of current research projects. The thematic and geographical focus of the conference will be the Hispanic-American metropolis, where in contrast to other urban regions, interdisciplinary work between geographers and linguists has not been sufficiently developed. Proposals on other urban areas are also welcome. In this spirit, we invite empirical papers and/or theoretically driven presentations inspired by, but not limited to, any of the following topics:

- Transculturality and multilingualism
- Migration and language (within urban areas, urbanization, suburbanization)
- Discourses about urban space and spatial practices
- Linguistic and emotional sense of place, urban identity
- Urban indexical fields
- Material and mental boundaries in the city
- Representations of place(s) and language
- Urban linguistic and semiotic landscapes / The city as text
- Social and discursive practices on urban transformations (e.g. gentrification)
- Urban language diversity, variation and social contact phenomena
- Social construction of space and place, verbal and nonverbal styles as place-makers
- Dialects and perception
- Quantitative and qualitative methods to study socio-geographic and linguistic dynamics in urban spaces

The conference is introduced by key speakers from the disciplines of Linguistics, Geography and Anthropology who will present new findings, raise questions for the future, and also serve as possible contact persons for young researchers. The conference is divided into thematic blocks, each of which is chaired by either a key note speaker, one of the conference conveners, or an expert from the University of Bern.

Keynote speakers

- David Britain, Chair of Modern English Linguistics, University of Berne, Switzerland
- Tim Cresswell, Professor of History and International Affairs, Associate Director for Public Humanities, Northeastern University, Boston, USA
- Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, Associate Professor in Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
- Almeida Jacqueline Toribio, Professor of Linguistics, Department of Spanish & Portuguese, University of Texas, USA

Conference conveners

- Prof. Dr. Yvette Bürki, Institute of Spanish Language and Literatures, University of Berne, Switzerland
- PD Dr. Yvonne Riaño, Institute of Geography, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland
- Dr. cand Melanie Würth, Institute of Spanish Language and Literatures, University of Berne, Switzerland

Submitting an abstract

- A 200-250 word abstract (English, Spanish or German) should be submitted to: tcc2015@rom.unibe.ch
- Please indicate your discipline, the state of your research project and five to seven keywords.
- Submission deadline: 30 April 2015
- Notification of results of the abstract review: 1 July 2015