

Assemblage theory and language mobility: How come some languages can't keep still, while others barely move at all?

In an earlier seminar, I questioned the use of spatial metaphors to represent language and languages as self-contained, coherently organised systems. This seminar will develop an alternative view of the spatiality of language based on Manuel DeLanda's Assemblage Theory. The basic idea is that language is a non-physical object that only exists in the world in the form of language-bearing assemblages (thought, speech, writing, print, digital text, etc.), in which language is attached to physical objects of various kinds. This idea will be applied, first, to the historical formation of languages and their standardisation, and, second, to the sociolinguistic concepts of language spread and language contact. I argue that the contrast between the mobilities of world, regional and national languages and the immobilities of minority languages and dialects are an ongoing outcome of inequities in the circulation of language-bearing assemblages.

Bio

Phil Benson is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Director of the Multilingualism Research Centre, which is located in the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Human Sciences and Faculty of Arts. His current research is in the areas of English and community languages in multilingual cities. He is also researching language learning environments and informal language learning beyond the classroom. He is co-editor of *Multilingual Sydney* (Routledge, 2019), author of *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning* (Pearson, 2011) and has co-edited several collections of papers on autonomy and out-of-class learning. His latest book is entitled *Language learning environments: Spatial perspectives on second language acquisition*. Phil is expert in the use of a range of qualitative research methods. He is especially interested in narrative inquiry as an approach to research on language learning beyond the classroom and is co-author of *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research* (Routledge, 2013), the first applied linguistics research manual on narrative inquiry methods.