



CSLS GUEST LECTURE

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Decolonizing Sociolinguistics – Project and/or Provocation?

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16.15 - 17.45, online via Zoom, University of Bern

Just when the Coronavirus had arrested our lives in late March 2020, I received an email from a publishing house, asking whether I would be interested in submitting a proposal for a book on decolonizing sociolinguistics. My first reaction was one of conflicted ambiguity: Do we need another book on decolonization? Or is it perhaps time to ‘decolonize decolonization’ (Bonilla 2020, Pictou 2020; also Tuck and Yang 2012)? Alternatively, maybe another book on decolonization is *t’ibi t’ire* (a Yorùbá word that refers to something that is both desirable and undesirable; Adesina 2002)?

At first glance sociolinguistics seems an unlikely candidate for decolonization: it has a long history of being committed to social justice and progressive language activism; of interrogating the workings of power; of recognizing language and semiotic practices in their plurality and multitude; of valuing diversity and challenging hegemonic uniformity. It would be a comparatively easy task to ‘decolonize linguistics’ with its obvious connections to colonial administration, missionary work and bible translation.

I will argue that – a commitment to social justice notwithstanding – sociolinguistics too carries traces of coloniality and ethnocentrism. Moreover, decolonization is not just an act of uncovering, deconstructing and unlearning, it is also an act of building new worlds. It is equally about ‘dismantling the master’s house’ (Audre Lorde) as it is about building new intellectual homes (Sara Ahmed). In my talk I will sketch a possible vision for a ‘decolonized sociolinguistics’ that recognizes (i) the persistence of coloniality as an oppressive force, (ii) recognizes the importance of ante- and anti-colonial practices and ontologies of language, and (iii) reflects on ethics and politics as core dimensions of future sociolinguistic work.

Prof. Dr. Ana Deumert is a professor at the University of Cape Town (SA). Her research program is located within the broad field of African sociolinguistics and has a strong transdisciplinary focus. Her current work explores the use of language in global political movements as well as the contributions decolonial thought can make to sociolinguistic theory.

