

Introduction to *Multilingual Margins*

An imperative for contemporary research on multilingualism ought to be to understand language in a world of mobility, and what Phipps (2013), referring to highly informal, ‘traveling’ forms of multilingualism that are cobbled together along the way, calls ‘unmoored multilingualism’. These forms of multilingualism emerge out of the trajectories of transnational and mobile populations with their attendant diversifications of diversities. They are also found propping up informal markets, and often accompany the violence of marginalisation and the global containment of vulnerable populations. Virtual interconnectivities and porous and fluid diaspora are also sites for transient and marginal practices of unmoored multilingualism. The dynamics of these practices pose theoretical and methodological conundrums for conventional understandings of multilingualism and contact grounded in models of location, harmony and permanence. At the same time, fluid practices of multilingualism raise ethical concerns pertaining to what might comprise a political philosophy of language for vulnerable populations and for fragile contexts of diversity co-existence.

Given this situation, there is a need for a robust reframing of contemporary studies of multilingualism, although opinions differ as to what such a rethinking might involve. One significant aspect of multilingualism is that it arises out of, gives rise to, sustains, mediates and represents encounters across difference. In this sense, it is a fundamental dimension of our engagements with Others and an essential weft in the fabric of

our humanity. This suggests that rather than approach life through language we ought to seek an understanding of language through life. Multilingual Margins seeks therefore to contribute to an understanding of language and multilingualism as intrinsically of and about our humanity through exploration of what marginal and vulnerable populations can contribute to a paradigmatic shift of thinking about language, society, ethics and the mind. This is an ambitious endeavour that requires close interdisciplinary attention to multilingualism in contexts of: power and authority, friction and freedom of mobility, turbulence and the violence of marginalization, and to the variety of semiotic modes of representation and practice in which these dynamics become manifest. Thus, the agenda of the journal is to explore the methodological, theoretical and policy implications of shifting attention to the margins of linguistic contact and to marginal and marginalising encounters. It invites scholars dealing with multilingualism from disciplines such as creative writing, translation, linguistic landscaping, language politics, theologies, indigenous knowledge systems, visual arts and performance studies, philosophy and cognitive science, economics and urban studies to contribute to this endeavour.

REFERENCE

- Phipps, Alison. 2013. Unmoored: Language, pain, porosity and poisonwood. In *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 1(2): 96-118.