Language Assemblages

What are languages? An assemblage approach to language gives us ways of thinking about language as dynamic, constructed, open-ended, and in and of the world. This book unsettles regular accounts of knowledge about language in several ways, presenting an innovative and provocative framework for a new understanding of language from within applied linguistics. The idea of assemblages allows for a flexibility about what languages are, not just in terms of having fuzzy linguistic boundaries but in terms of what constitutes language more generally. Languages are assembled from different elements, both linguistic elements as traditionally understood, as well as items less commonly included. Language from this point of view is embedded in diverse social and physical environments, distributed across the material world and part of our embodied existence. This book looks at what language is and what languages are with a view to understanding applied linguistics itself as a practical assemblage.

KEY TOPICS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Series Editors

Claire Kramsch (University of California, Berkeley) and Zhu Hua (UCL Institute of Education, London)

Books in this series provide critical accounts of the most important topics in applied linguistics, conceptualized as an interdisciplinary field of research and practice dealing with practical problems of language and communication. Some topics have been the subject of applied linguistics for many years and will be re-examined in the light of new developments in the field; others are issues of growing importance that have not so far been given a sustained treatment. The topics of the series are nuanced and specialized, providing an opportunity for further reading around a particular concept. The concept examined may be theoretical or practice oriented. Written by leading experts, the books in the series can be used on courses and in seminars, or as succinct guides to a particular topic for individual students and researchers.
Language Assemblages

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Books always emerge from multiple collaborations, die Frucht allgemeiner gemeinsamer Arbeit, the fruit of general collective labour, sometimes, as Marx suggests, with Zeitgenossen, contemporaries, sometimes with the work of previous generations (früherer Geschlechter). Several major thinkers with whom I had long and lasting friendships and critical discussions have alas recently moved to become members of those previous generations no longer with us. As I write, we are mourning the death of Tim McNamara, a great intellectual who was always ready to engage in long and thoughtful discussions about language, poetry, art, deconstruction, life. We recently saw the departure of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, such a fierce advocate for language rights. Bernard Spolsky, who did so much for language policy, will be sorely missed. And it is still hard to accept that as we constantly refer to Jan Blommaert’s remarkable body of work, he is sadly no longer with us.

1 ‘Every scientific work, every development, every invention is the fruit of general common work. This is partly a collaboration of contemporaries, partly an exploitation of the labours of previous generations.’
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