

Vereinigung für Angewandte  
Linguistik in der Schweiz

Association Suisse de  
Linguistique Appliquée

Associazione Svizzera di  
Linguistica Applicata

Associazion Svizra da  
Linguistica Applitgada



## VALS-ASLA Conference 2008

### *Changing societies: methodological challenges for applied linguistics*

Università della Svizzera italiana,  
Facoltà di Scienze della comunicazione  
**Lugano, 7-9 February 2008**

At a time when societal changes such as the globalisation of spaces, the circulation of goods, the mobility of individuals and the spread of new technologies increasingly affect many spheres of social life (economic, political, educational), questions concerning the impact of such changes on linguistic practices present a fundamental challenge to the field of applied linguistics.

The ever increasing mobility of people and the circulation of goods in a globalised marketplace trigger new language needs and practices. Consequently, due to migration and trade as well as to computer-mediated communication, new forms of language and culture contacts have emerged. Today, the field of applied linguistics is confronted with these phenomena, which constitute methodological challenges for our discipline and raise fundamental questions about our research practices.

Firstly, there is the issue of the adequacy of our research methods with respect to phenomena of social change and, beyond method, our conceptions of linguistic practices: how can linguistics capture these changes and how do we deal with the technologisation of linguistic practices?

Secondly, these phenomena also force us face new conditions and opportunities of our research, the limitations of our work, but also its impact. Our methodological reflection allows us to think about the compatibility of our understanding of language and of communication with the object of our research, as well as to study the epistemological convergences and divergences between researchers and social actors undergoing these changes.

Thirdly, the phenomena observed raise the issue of different social, cultural and economic contexts in which linguistic practices develop. Dealing with the issue must involve an interdisciplinary dialogue in order to understand the social, economic, technological and juridical dynamics multiple research methods are thus called for.

For the above reasons the VALS/ASLA symposium aims at investigating ongoing changes, focusing specifically on methodological challenges. The general architecture of the colloquium proposes five avenues of inquiry whose purpose is, on one hand, to specify essential questions we wish to tackle, and, on the other hand, to leave sufficient scope for various domains of research (schools, enterprises, universities, state institutions and NGOs, public and private spaces ...)

*Transnationalism and learning / teaching of second and foreign languages:*

- How can we capture the trajectories of learners of second/foreign languages?
- To what extent do our empirical methods take into account changes in educational settings?
- How can we describe the role of language learning in the construction of identity?

*Fluxes of migration and linguistic mobility*

- Where and how can we capture language contact, and in which institutions (hospitals, state institutions, local communities, families ...?)
- How can we problematize linguistic and political issues associated with migration, and with what consequences?

*Methodological approaches to new technologies and new media (computer-mediated, chat, Internet, e-mail) in connection with new language industries (translation agencies, automatic language processing...)*

- What methodological and technical challenges are we faced with when studying new technologies and their impact on linguistic practices?
- How and why do new technologies, industries and media condition our research?

*Linguistic work in occupational contexts*

- How can language-related work be captured in our globalised economy?
- What are emerging forms of language related jobs in professional and media communication, and what methodological challenges do they present?
- How to study decision-making processes in the domain of work (deliberation, negotiation, co-operation, consulting, decision-making on site or by distance)?

*Concerns of researchers and needs of businesses and institutions: which methods of knowledge transfer?*

- How does knowledge transfer influence our research methods?
- What are the methodological and epistemological opportunities and limits of knowledge transfer

**Plenary speakers**

Monica Heller (University of Toronto, Canada)  
Scott Jacobs (University of Arizona, United States)  
Thérèse Jeanneret (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)  
Ulrike Hanna Meinhof (University of Southampton, United Kingdom)  
Bruno Moretti (University of Berne, Switzerland)

**Paper presentations and panels**

The languages of the conference are French, German, Italian and English.  
All information related to the submission of proposals for panel sessions and papers as well as to practical points (registration costs, accommodation, travel) are available on a dedicated Internet site: [www.vals-asla.ch](http://www.vals-asla.ch). For any additional information, please contact [alexandre.duchene@unibas.ch](mailto:alexandre.duchene@unibas.ch).

**Deadline for the submission of abstracts: 15 October 2007**

**Organizing committee**

Alexandre Duchêne (Universität Basel)  
Aleksandra Gnach (Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur)  
Andrea Rocci (Università della Svizzera italiana)  
Daniel Stotz (Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich)