

## OPEN SEMINAR SERIES

**Tuesday, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2015**  
**13:00 – 14:00**

**SEERC Conference Room**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Strategakis Bldg**

### **“Transnational languages, multilingualism and the challenges for the Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin”**

**By**  
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#### **ABSTRACT**

The question of the role that language plays in a person's national identity is acutely problematized when a person's claim to a particular identity rests on language alone. However, the simple term 'language' obscures the complexity of the claim. For example, a person's national identity may be expressed not only by an accent or dialect that others might recognize or note on the basis of specific regional, class or ethnic clues. Listeners might also make particular assumptions about the status of the language claimed by a speaker as a mother tongue; and further, draw particular inferences about that speaker from his or her claim to be monolingual. In other words, a claim to be a member of a particular speech community on the basis of several claims about language competence and use poses a set of expectations on the part of the analyst. When the values associated with each of these claims do not appear to meet established criteria or indeed expectations, the speaker might be thought to be impersonating a particular linguistic identity, based on a naïve idea of what constitutes a national linguistic profile.

I discuss the difficulty of assessing such claims in the context of an increasingly complex sociolinguistic situation in which concepts like the 'native speaker' or 'mother tongue' are highly unreliable in describing the relationship between speakers and their languages. The task is made particularly challenging in a setting in which language practices and realities are complex. Present day Africa is a striking case of this kind of complexity. I draw upon my own research work on the complex and diverse linguistic repertoires of Zimbabweans of different ages, ethnic communities and socioeconomic and educational backgrounds as evidence. I examine the impact of language contact and transnational mobility, migration from rural to urban areas and multilingualism on the sociolinguistic individual in Africa. In conclusion, I argue that the extraordinarily complex and rapidly changing sociolinguistic situation in many places renders the notions of the native speaker and of the mother tongue highly problematic as evidence of 'whether a speaker is alike enough to other speech community members to permit his or her identification with them' (Patrick, 2010: 76).

Reference:

Patrick, P. 2010. Language variation and LADO. In Zwaan *et. al.* (eds.) *Language and Origin: The role of Language in European Asylum Procedures*. Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers. pp. 73-88.

**The seminar series is open to all members of staff and students of CITY and to any externals that wish to attend.**



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