Language, cognition and ideology in Namibia: Arguing for a cognitive sociolinguistics approach

Speaker: Prof. Dr. Martin Pütz
University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany

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Abstract:
Research exploring the language policy and planning situation in the state of Namibia is now well documented and has formed the focus of several studies in sociolinguistic research (e.g. Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2001; Frydman 2011; Töttemeyer 2010). The aim of this paper is to introduce into the discussion an approach from cognitive sociolinguistics which aims at a cognitive view of social inequality, ideology and attitudes. In this regard, the globalisation of English in the context of marginalised African languages will be discussed from the perspective of the rationalistic and the romantic model in language policy and planning. It is argued that an extension of cognitive linguistics to sociolinguistics, and, we may add to the sociology of language, is an inevitable part of the cognitive linguistics paradigm. As a dynamic usage-based model, cognitive linguistics is certainly predestined to have an impact on the various facets of culture, ideology and society as such.

The organization of the talk is as follows. The first part of the paper will give a brief sociolinguistic profile of the multilingual situation of Namibia with a focus on the historical development of language policy issues since independence in 1990 until the present day. The second part discusses the main concepts pertaining to the relatively new study of cognitive sociolinguistics (see recently Pütz et al. 2014) and its impact on the globalisation of English as well as the fate of minority languages in Africa (see, for example, the 36th International LAUD Symposium on “Endangered Languages”, Landau, March 2014). In particular, I will discuss the language policy situation in Namibia in the light of two dominant competing models or ideologies: (i) the rationalist model, which focuses on the role of language as an instrument for wider communication (i.e. English) and the (ii) romantic model where post-colonial English is generally perceived as a threat to the ecolinguistic situation in multi-ethnic and multilingual societies.

Bio
Martin Pütz has been Full Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Koblenz-Landau, Landau Campus (Germany) since 1998. From 2004 - 2007 he was External Examiner and Visiting Professor at the University of Hong Kong. Since March 2014 he has been Head of the English Department at the University of Koblenz-Landau (Germany). His current research interests include sociolinguistics, multilingualism, applied cognitive linguistics, language contact in Africa. He has published around 60 articles and 22 books. He is a Member of the Board of Consulting Editors of the journal Cognitive Linguistics.

Department of English Language Education

All are welcome