

Pragmatics of the Margins

The theme for IPrA 16, *Pragmatics of the Margins*, aims to reflect the position of Hong Kong. HK is a place in which post-coloniality, marginalization and entanglement are salient and omnipresent tropes in public discourse. In Hong Kong, democratization is a much discussed theme and a source of pressure and disagreement, with questions of who historically has been marginalized, and, after the handover to China, who is newly marginalized and who continues to be? How might those at the margins speak back to ‘the middle’ and be heard? How might they effect change? These same questions, recurrent in the Hong Kong media, are also often applied to the democratization of intellectual spaces, including pragmatics in its various manifestations. There has long been a sense that academia should be ‘decentred’ from its Eurocentric theoretical biases. Yet equally enduring has been a sense that, in spite of intention, theoretical decentring does not ultimately take place. Rather, the metropole continues to conceptualise theory based on local data that is not *imagined* as local, whereas the global periphery continues to provide mainly raw data. In addition to such geopolitical margins, epistemological hegemonies within societies also show stubborn resistance to decentring, with gendered, linguistic, political, religious, sexual, socio-cultural, and socio-economic margins also requiring closer examination.

The aim of this conference theme is to place all pragmatics scholarship in the margins and ask how Pragmatics can gain from engagement with ‘dirty theory’ (Connell 2007), or theorization on the ground on which the researcher’s boots are planted. Most importantly how can this conference contribute to democratization of the research imagination in pragmatics? What would a ‘dirty pragmatics’ look like? That is, what can be achieved when all pragmatics research is framed as taking place in the ‘dirty’ margins, linked not by universalizing theories but via messy entanglements; epistemologically interdependent and mutually constitutive. Local data (regardless of its geopolitical origins) is viewed *as* local data and no theoretical leaps are made in order to universalize its insights. Rather, theorizing is done locally and there is ‘cross-fertilization’ of ideas via entangled relations of social, cultural, economic and epistemological interdependency (Cooper and Stoler 1997; see also Nuttall 2009). More specifically:

- • How does pragmatics interact with ‘the margins’ in multiple conceptualizations?
- • What are the pragmatics of various phenomena in postcolonial conditions?
- • How can pragmatics from the metropole avoid epistemological hegemony?
- • How can scholars ‘talk back’ to theory locally regardless of their geopolitical location?
- • What are the entanglements that allow these localized insights to transcend dichotomies such as core/periphery or north/south?
- • What are the implications for pragmatics of dirty theory as opposed to universalizing theory?

The conference aims to provide a platform for researchers and research students from around the world to discuss these themes of margin and entanglement via numerous sub-topics that are relevant to the theme. All are invited to submit proposals for individual papers, colloquia, workshops, roundtables and poster displays that address any topic relevant to the theme, including the following examples: This list is in random order and **not exhaustive**.

- • Meaning and Social Context

- • Workplace
- • Diversity
- • Globalization
- • Multilingualism
- • Digital Technology
- • Identity
- • Social Change
- • Peace and Conflict
- • Politics
- • Metaphor
- • Embodiment
- • Multimodality

References

Connell R. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Cooper F. and A. L. Stoler (eds). 1997. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Nuttall S. 2009. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.