

Call for papers: Workshop

Language and Colonialism.

Linguistic perspectives from colonial linguistics and historical sociolinguistics

10.–11.09.2026, Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache, Mannheim

The complex and often critical interrelations between language and colonialism have been a subject of linguistic study at least since Calvet's (1974) seminal work. Compared to the French-, Spanish- and English-speaking environments, however, a more intensive engagement with colonialism within German-speaking linguistics began with a certain time lag. Particularly through the German research group *Koloniallinguistik*, the research field of the same name—which deals with historical power relations and their linguistic manifestations—has, however, become increasingly visible in the German-speaking world over the past 20 years (Dewein et al. 2012). A wide range of topics has been addressed, many of them in the book series *Koloniale und Postkoloniale Linguistik (KPL)/Colonial and Postcolonial Linguistics (CPL)* (de Gruyter), such as linguistic descriptions from the colonial era, colonial language policies, local language practices in schools, missions, administration and plantations, as well as colonial naming practices and discourses from the colonial era and the colonial period. Nevertheless, there are still considerable research gaps, e.g., the further study on colonial language contact, the linguistic-colonial construction of group identity, or the various dimensions of colonially motivated language planning. In particular, documents and sources that shed light on the relationship between colonised speakers and their languages on the one hand, and colonial rulers and the languages of colonial rule on the other, have not yet been researched systematically enough, despite being available in large numbers in various archives.

The aim of the workshop is, on the one hand, to acknowledge the work already accomplished, and on the other hand, to identify existing gaps and explore the need for, and possibilities of, new research foci. German as a means of communication and rule in colonialism will be a focus point. The workshop should also be understood as opening up the field of research to historical sociolinguistics (cf. Auer et al. 2005), which likewise investigates the embedding of language and language change in social structures and offers valuable approaches for colonial linguistics, such as the perspective of a 'language history from below' (Elspeß et al. 2007). A further development of existing links to creole studies and documentation linguistics is also most welcome.

These research fields raise numerous questions concerning, on the one hand, the linguistic analysis of historical documents from the colonial era and, on the other, the linguistic investigation of how we deal today with the linguistic consequences of colonialism. With this in mind, submissions are invited on the following (and other) linguistic aspects of the relationship between language and colonialism:

- What local, regional or international manifestations or effects of language during the colonial era or in relation to colonialism can be identified and examined?

- What role(s) do different colonised and colonising individuals, groups or nations play in the manifestation or effectiveness of language during the colonial era or in relation to colonialism?
- In what form and in what way are language varieties positioned, functionalised or instrumentalised ideologically during the colonial era?
- What implications of source selection and methodological decisions need to be taken into account and reflected upon when working with colonial-era sources and the methods used to analyse them?
- Where, by whom and in what ways do current discursive negotiations regarding colonial-related language take place in the public sphere?
- ...

We invite submissions (max. 350 words plus examples/references) for presentations (20+10 mins) in German or English on the above-mentioned key areas as well as other topics that examine the relationship between language and colonialism from a linguistic perspective.

Deadlines

- Deadline for abstract submissions: 20 June 2026
- Please submit via: <https://easyabs.linguistlist.org/conference/SPRuKO/>
- Notification of acceptance: 4 July 2026
- Workshop: 10–11 September 2026

The workshop will take place on site. There is no participation fee.

Organisers

Doris Stolberg, IDS Mannheim (stolberg@ids-mannheim.de)

Karoline Kühn, Europa-Universität Flensburg (karoline.kuehl@uni-flensburg.de)