

Cross-Language  
Dynamics

OWRI



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

## **Languages, community and area studies: Reflections on concepts and delivery**

**Workshop organised by the AHRC-OWRI consortium 'Cross-language dynamics: Re-shaping community'**

Chancellors Hotel, 4th October 2018

The University of Manchester

### **Programme and Abstracts**

## **Rationale**

The aim of the workshop is to discuss existing practice, and to explore novel and innovative concepts, around the organisation and delivery of higher education teaching and research in languages and its relationship with the study of communities, localities and regions. The event will contribute to debates centring on whether and how Modern Languages should re-position itself with respect to Area Studies, in the context of recent disciplinary realignments which have led to developments such as 'Critical Geopolitics' and the 'New Area Studies'. It aims to bring together colleagues from a variety of disciplines involving the study of particular communities, cultures, regions, and languages. The core of the discussion will revolve around the way to conceptualise, organise, and deliver the study of communities that are defined either partly or primarily through their use of language or particular language repertoires, whether in literary or ritual practice or in everyday routines. We wish to discuss the rationale for existing disciplinary boundaries and identify how cross-disciplinary synergies and in some cases perhaps even the re-consideration of existing boundaries might benefit future programme delivery in both language and 'area'-based disciplines. We also intend to explore links between higher education and non-academic stakeholders that can and do enrich teaching and research and may also have a community and/or policy impact.

The workshop will be organised in three panels, which will each seek to address the following questions, or some of them:

- 1) What are the current rationales behind the grouping of language-related studies in academic disciplines?
- 2) To what extent do these groupings/rationales relate directly or indirectly to either security & diplomacy, teacher supply for curriculum demand, minority group empowerment, the promotion of national identity?
- 3) In what ways are these groupings a legacy (at least in part or to some extent) of colonial studies, post-colonial studies, cold war policy, regional security, civil rights movements?
- 4) Which geopolitical changes may lead us to question the rationale for some present-day groupings, and what is an adequate strategy to manage change in the structure of academic disciplines?
- 5) What exactly are 'areas' in a post-cold war, post-imperial era of intensifying transcultural flows, and of dramatic changes in centre-periphery relations; should they continue to be conceptualised and studied in 'territorial' terms?
- 5) Can Modern Languages, as contributors to area studies, avoid becoming the 'handmaiden' to social science disciplines and instead provide the epistemological core for what is conceptualised as New Area Studies?
- 7) Which non-academic stakeholders might be involved in drafting an agenda for the re-framing of language studies?
- 8) What can we learn in relation to these questions from the experience of clusters such as language-based disciplines, social and political science approaches to clusters like 'Central Asia' or 'the Arab world', heritage-based disciplines like Jewish Studies or Romani Studies, area studies clusters that emerged in the Cold War and their successor clusters known as New Area Studies?

## **PROGRAMME**

*Lunch 12.00 am – 1.00 pm (served in the Carriage Restaurant)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

13:00 – 13:15

(S. Hutchings; Y. Matras)

### **SESSION 1** (Chair: C. Davies)

13:15 – 15:15

CONCEPTS, VISIONS AND BOUNDARIES (Y. Matras; S. Hutchings; C. Forsdick; S. Hodgett)

*Teas, coffees and biscuits 15:15– 15:45*

### **SESSION 2** (Chair: A. Byford)

15:45 – 17:45

HERITAGE STUDIES OR LBAS REDUX? (A. Ehteshami and J. Beaujouan; A. Samely; P. Schell; Yangwen Zheng):

### **CONCLUSIONS** (S. Hutchings, A. Byford, C. Davies and Y. Matras)

17.45 – 18.00

## ABSTRACTS

### **Modern Languages as Area Studies: Towards a New Humanities or Path to Nowhere?**

STEPHEN HUTCHINGS, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

This paper takes as its point of departure the origins of the AHRC OWRI programme in the 5 national Language-Based Area Studies (LBAS) centres. It points to the multiple inconsistencies and contradictions in the relationship between Modern Languages and Area Studies, and within Modern Languages itself, which the history of the LBAS centres highlighted. Rather than using these problems to amplify the 'crisis' overhanging Modern Languages, it re-deploys them as the launch pad for a re-accommodation of our discipline with Area Studies, the social sciences and the humanities more generally. Emphasising the critical role of language in the lives and identities of humans as spatio-temporally embodied beings, it argues that linguistic expertise can be transformed from its peripheral status of mere facilitating skill for social scientists, into the intellectual core of what it terms a 'translocalized' Area Studies. It concludes by tentatively exploring the practical implications of this idea for Modern Languages curricula at UK universities.

### **Translating Cultures: developing a new idea about language**

CHARLES FORSDICK, UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

The presentation focuses on the AHRC Translating Cultures programme, exploring the ways in which research supported under the theme has contributed to a rethinking of the ways languages are organized and categorized as objects of study as well as understood among non-academic stakeholders. By positing the importance of translation and the translational more generally in considerations of language and culture, the theme has challenged traditional divisions between Modern Languages, Language-Based Area Studies, community languages and minoritized languages, encouraging new connections between these subfields and also enabling dialogue with previously marginalized areas such as BSL. Focusing on overarching concepts such as transnationalism, multilingualism and translanguaging, Translating Cultures has sought to disrupt the current grouping of language-related studies into an often-fragmented range of academic disciplines and also the tendency to minimize the visibility of certain languages in the context of formal research and study. By foregrounding criticality, creativity, linguistic sensitivity and a commitment to a new public idea about language, Translating Cultures has sought to contribute to a re-framing of language studies and also to a reconsideration of the relationship of languages to other disciplines in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The presentation draws on a range of projects funded under the theme to illustrate these developments.

## **Necessary travel: New Area Studies and Canada in Comparative Perspective**

SUSAN HODGETT, UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

This contribution will briefly explore some recent ideas on developments in Area Studies (AS), a prominent type of expertise, along a range of dimensions. It references a forthcoming international collection brought together by Hodgett and James (2018), who argue that New Area Studies (NAS) has departed from Traditional Area Studies (TAS) – commonplace till the millennium. The editors of this volume, and its contributors, are scholars in area-based work across continents. Together they have participated and observed as area oriented research has struggled to overcome protracted and intense criticism since the Cold War. The volume marks the resurgence of area-based research in its new guise as NAS – the crux – understanding increasing complexity around a shrinking globe. The contribution from NAS is to support multidisciplinary and comparative approaches with increasing contextualisation of the local. Through reimagining NAS, rethinking older models, and disciplinary boundaries, we look closely at complexity and how knowledge is increasingly produced and transmitted.

ANOUSH EHTESHAMI AND JULINE BEAUJOUAN, DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Since the 1990-1991 Kuwait Crisis, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been characterized by two main dynamics: The de-regionalisation of the Arab world, and the erosion of state power. The absence of leadership at the regional and national levels accelerated the rise of several non-state actors, whose credentials are mainly asserted by a religious discourse. In early-2011, this two-fold disintegration was epitomized by the Arab Spring. The wave of popular revolts shook the national and regional order(s), creating a vacuum of power in several countries, as well as the cradle for the establishment of the Islamic State (IS)'s Caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Despite the fact that IS has been struggling on the military frontline since 2015, it has been a fierce opponent on the ideological battlefield. The group has developed a highly effective use of language and discourse as a tool to portray, carry and circulate its ideology in societies of the MENA region and beyond, thereby waging an intensive and extensive communications campaign aimed at both friendly and hostile audiences. This presentation offers a short glance at how language is at the core of IS' revisionist socio-political programme for a new regional – and in time – global order. Looking at IS through this prism also speaks to the changing core, but continuing importance, of Area Studies as a multidisciplinary endeavour to make better sense of global regions such as MENA.

## **“Jewish” languages**

ALEX SAMELY, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

A large number of languages were spoken, or written, by Jews. Some of these languages, or some historic stages of certain of these languages, are taught at University only because of their ongoing importance to or use by Jews in the contemporary world. The languages seen as carrying most obviously markers that tie them to “Jewish” history, religion and culture, are most often: Biblical (literary) Hebrew, ancient literary Aramaic, modern Hebrew (Ivrit), Judeo-Arabic, Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish. The way these are taught or not taught in national University systems reflects (a) their status as “supplementary” to more widely used national or supra-national languages (Arabic, German, Spanish), (b) their importance for understanding Jewish culture or the role of Israel in the modern Middle East, or (c) their importance for a majority religion’s approach to the Hebrew “Old Testament” (Christianity). Almost all of these languages were once shared by Jews with a majority of non-Jews, or were the lingua franca of a certain period and age. But in most cases, it is the fact that Jews have continued to speak them to study Jewish documents written in them which lends them sufficient importance in academic contexts to be taught. In the case of more recent “Jewish” languages, such as English, creating such niches is unnecessary and the niche becomes instead expressed in course unit themes such as “The American-Jewish novel”, etc. The presence of aspects of Jewish “culture” within the study of wider regional, national or supra-national contexts of culture has been transformed in recent decades by the emergence of new inter-disciplinary paradigms, in which the study of “Jews” as socially constructed (as “self” or as “other”) becomes important.

PATIENCE SCHELL

In this talk, I will provide an overview of the concept of ‘Latin America’, which reminds us of the history and interests behind the construction of this region conceptually, as well as discuss the emergence of ‘Latin American Studies’ in the UK, in its 1960s Cold War context. Understanding this context helps me frame the limitations hidden and problems within the idea of Latin American Studies, which I will discuss, but also the ways in which the field, in practice, expands beyond these limitations. I will also discuss ‘Latin American Studies’ and its relationship to the disciplines of Modern Languages, which provide a home for many UK-based Latin Americanists, but can also contribute to the invisibility of ‘Latin American Studies’ as its own discipline. In the context of migratory flows between Latin America and the US and, more recently, the UK, I will finally look at developments and opportunities in these new geographies of Latin American Studies which demonstrate the healthy elasticity of the field.

## **Sinology or Chinese History?**

YANGWEN ZHENG, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The study of China has come a long way from the Age of Exploration when it began in the hands of Catholic missionaries. Sinology, the study of Chinese language, literature, culture and history, was well established by the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Protestant missionaries and even diplomats joined the ranks of Sinologists. It grew into a fully-fledged academic discipline by the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Cold War drove many governments to fund Chinese Studies; many universities established either Oriental Faculty or East Asian Studies where all kinds of China scholars were trained. This led to the professionalisation of the field but also challenges which continue to plague us today. This talk focuses on the various challenges facing Chinese Studies and discusses new trends that are emerging.