

Report prepared by Olga Solovova

September 14, 11-11h30: New Speaker Space | Centro Interdisciplinar de Documentação Linguística e Social

Presentation by Vera Ferreira, CIDLeS coordinator

In this brief presentation, Vera Ferreira described the activities and main projects developed at the Centro Interdisciplinar de Documentação Linguística e Social (Interdisciplinary Centre for Social and Language Documentation): www.cidles.eu.

This independent non-profit research centre aims at improving and deepening research in areas of language documentation and language typology. CIDLeS has three distinct research groups - CIDLeS Media Lab, Language Documentation and Typology, and Language Revitalization – these projects are linked up through fostering interdisciplinary research. Apart from organising conferences and workshops on endangered languages and linguistic research, CIDLeS provides training in language documentation, data processing and management, archiving, coding, and language revitalization.

According to Vera Ferreira, since 2010 CIDLeS has worked mainly in the framework of language documentation (multimedia documentation of communicative events that reflect the language practices of a language community), being focused on the collection of primary language data. Minderico, Fala and Bavarian were some of the languages documented so far. Community-driven documentation is the perspective adopted by the centre, i.e. the documentation is carried out in straight collaboration with the speech communities whereby their members are trained and become involved into the different documentation tasks. Based on the primary data and a bottom-up perspective, CIDLeS develops teaching materials and revitalization programs, gives consultancy on revitalization to several language communities in Europe (Istro-Romanian, Fala, Aromanian, etc.).

Given the increasing importance of digital communication in everyday life, CIDLeS is also focused on language technology projects that create tools which can be used to teach, revitalize, and thus boost the use of minority languages. The training of researchers and the encouragement of local communities not only to document their languages but also to use and develop language technologies for the local languages is the leitmotiv that guides the CIDLeS work.

Later in the day, during panel 13 on “Language diversity in Portugal: Policies and Practices”, the conference participants had an opportunity to look at the work developed by the CIDLeS from the community and stakeholders’ perspective. A representative of the Alcanena Municipality, Vice-President Maria João Gomez related how CIDLeS has contributed to counter the marginalisation of Minderico, which developed in 19th century among traditional blanket weavers and traders and is still spoken in Minde and Alcanena. CIDLeS has brought the almost extinct language into the contemporary world of new digital technologies, and is re-introducing it into the community through language teaching thus shaping up linguistic identity of its population. According to Maria João Gomez, the revitalization of Minde is very important for the Alcanena municipality so that to keep the language alive, spoken and lived despite the globalization trend. It will bring a sense of history and cultural tradition to the community and will make a difference in people’s lives.

September 15, 14h30-15h30: New Speaker Space | Valorising displaced voices Photovoice exhibition

Presentation by Kirandeep Kaur, PhD researcher at Tilburg Law School

The exhibition has taken 6 months to put together, and is a culmination of a two-year-work with refugees to build trust and rapport. The New Speaker Space exhibition is divided in two sections: one is made by a group of undocumented migrants “Wij Zijn Hier” (<http://wijzijnhier.org>) who live in the Netherlands with no access to accommodation, education or healthcare, with contributions from Afghan community centre in Malaysia. This part was curated by Fanny Prigent from Urban Refugees, Malaysia (<http://urban-refugees.org/>) and Asad Ghani in representation of the Dutch group. Another section shows photographs taken and selected to create a visual narrative by refugees who collaborate with the Photovoice charity in the UK (Kate Watson).

One of the exhibition’s aims is to create a visual narrative on the lived experiences of refugees in different countries, focusing on what is normally left unsaid and unseen: the similarities of the situation for refugees in Malaysia and in developed countries like Netherlands and the UK. The work among the refugees was guided by the question: “What did you want to say/show which has not been understood?” Agency, legitimacy and voice are thus represent main themes that sustain the narrative.

Things taken for granted like having to take child to school across the city can pose a threat to the security of a refugee parent, and to the safety of the child. Refugees and displaced people remain extremely vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation. Besides this, they see no real impact despite having participated in several projects: “I constantly tell my story. It has no impact”.

Visitors to the exhibition went around the NSPK Space asking questions and talking to its curators and refugee representatives.

Panel II: Valorising Displaced Voices

Moderator: Kirandeep Kaur

Participants: Kirandeep Kaur (Tilburg University); Elsa Lechner and Gaia Giuliani (Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra); Fanny Prigent (Urban Refugees); Asad Ghani (Photovoice, Netherlands); Kate Watson (Photovoice NGO, London); Alfonso del Percio (University College London); Zani Noruzi (Middlesex University and Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford)

This panel was organized to highlight the ways in which researchers and practitioners can affect social change through recognising and highlighting the voices of displaced actors in their efforts to empower their own communities. The Valorising Voices panel is seen as a space for this dialogue between practitioners and academics.

After a round of participant introductions, the panel moderator started off by tracing the context of its development. The idea of refugee voice was first explored in Galway, then expanded in a Migration and Asylum Roundtable in Hamburg, continued this conversation through the Research Impact in Action: Refugees, New Speakers and Global Law in Tilburg. All of this led up to the wrapping up in the thematic panel in Coimbra.

The refugee voice has been explored from two perspectives:

- 1) Who listens to the refugee voice? Have they given any value to it? What does it mean?

2) Who do refugees speak to? Are refugees able/enabled to communicate? What roles do/can researchers play?

Two main strands are connected to these perspectives:

- a) the role of the researcher in making the refugee narratives heard and seen;
- b) voices of individual refugees are not heard so refugees are/should be engaged in NGOs

Three Skype calls had been planned to organize discussion into three themes: refugee voices (Zanji Noruzi), refugees in civil society (Khalid Jone) and refugees in academia (Shafie Sharif, Somali community centre in Malaysia).

1) **Refugee activism:** are refugees heard in the NGOs and INGOs that represent them?

Khalid Jone is a spokesman for Wij Zijn Hier [We Are Here] from Amsterdam, has been refused asylum. He has lived undocumented in the Netherlands over 16 years. The group is led by undocumented migrants who organize themselves to support their communities through gathering food donations, finding shelter and protesting about their living conditions. Khalid answered the participants' questions, stating that photographic projects are organized by Wij Zijn Hier to create visibility for the refugees and undocumented migrants. These, among other projects promoted by refugee activists, aim to let other people see/learn of the refugees's realities and lived experiences, open up a dialogue with the population, policymakers and researchers. Fanny Priget from the Urban Refugees provided examples of the type of agency refugee organisations have on different levels: e.g., on local level, ID refugee card is recognized by the local police thanks to the efforts of local activists in Malaysia; on global level – creation of a global federation of refugee organisations aiming to share their voices in the increasingly expanding public space through the media and conferences.

Topics and issues discussed:

- Refugees as non-homogeneous group, people with varied interests and subjected to different power inequalities.
- Easier to capture/measure impact at the personal/individual level. Group and long term – more difficult.
- Who are we empowering? Active and visible refugees are already empowered. What happens to those who cannot/won't speak up?
- Refugees as cultural mediators, dealing with the complexity of their situation in relocation countries. Refugee leaders overwhelmed with requests from NGOs and academia
- Suspicions of corruption among humanitarian organisations vs. their legitimacy to represent refugee voices
- Researcher's responsibility and the (lack of) transformational impact on the life trajectories of the researched refugees. Being overresearched and tired of being exposed, just wanting to get on with their lives.

2) Refugee scholars' voice:

Zanji Noruzi: PhD candidate at Middlesex University, human rights lawyer back in Tunisia, part of refugee community, granted asylum in 2015. He spoke on the struggle for recognition of the material and symbolic values produced by refugees in general and refugee scholars in particular. Refugees are often seen as cultural outsiders and a strain on public funds. Yet refugee scholars have the potential of contributing to the knowledge production and research about/on/with refugees, as they have experienced the same things themselves.

Topics and issues discussed:

- Refugee scholars and symbolic violence of ignoring/disregarding their practical knowledge and experiences
- The need to be aware of the hypervisibility of certain narratives, discursive threads and particular groups. Who would speak for raped women refugees, for example?
- Legal frameworks shape categories and terms of representation, reproduce hierarchies we want to challenge, and distribute available resources unevenly (some categories give access to specific economic resources)

3) Refugee voices in academia:

Shafie Sharif: Somalian refugee, who has lived in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for 5 years. Has completed a PhD programme in Business Administration at the International Islamic University of Malaysia. One of his main aims is to improve the quality of education in the home countries upon return.

Topics and issues discussed:

- Refugees should be given chance to collaborate in academic research in order to amplify the impact and potential for change
- Listening as an attitude, as a research practice and as a quality (psychological skill): creating knowledge collaboratively in a relational practice, a biographical workshop as an embodied space where memories, emotions and histories converge, a way of reinventing oneself
- Empathy as a source of new knowledge and transformation: from hostility to hospitality
- Can listening provide potential for change? What assumptions are we ready to shed and destroy? What hierarchies are at play in the particular moment of research? Being fully aware of the hierarchies, incorporating them into the analysis. Co-building and providing solutions
- The transformation in both refugees (and research participants) and researchers through the very process of research: e.g. follow the speaker along, explore her repertoire/narrative all the way from the first account/interview to the final conference

4) The aftermath and impact of the research or civil action:

Katja van Nimwegen: journalist from Amsterdam, project on undocumented minors

Topics and issues discussed:

- The need to distinguish between a content-oriented and target-oriented research
- What happens once the project/action is over? Helping find strategic discourses to rely upon in the activists' struggle for empowerment and resources
- Power issues in reporting somebody's voice vs. research problematizing the view that "refugees are better ethnographers". Sociolinguistics was founded as an activist's space. We cannot reproduce the mistakes our discipline has dealt with already. All research should be situated.