

# **WG10 — Language and Governmentality Workshop Report**

Organised by James Costa and Alfonso Del Percio  
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## **1. Key questions addressed during this workshop**

This workshop was organised to prepare a panel on the same topic, language and governmentality, which Alfonso Del Percio and James Costa are organising at the Hamburg WAC in May 2016. All panel participants were thus invited to contribute a first draft of their texts or material they wished to discuss with other participants. The aim of the workshop and panel is to consider whether (and how) the Foucauldian concept of governmentality is relevant (or not) to the study of language, legitimization and power in particular in the various contexts experienced by New Speakers. The concept of governmentality is a neologism coined by the semiotician Roland Barthes and later taken up by Michel Foucault. It has recently undergone a surge of interest in some studies of language in society as a way to tackle issues of power, there does not seem to be an agreement about what is meant when scholars refer to this notion, or about what this notion helps us to say about the role of language in the distribution of resources in society. One line of thought points to the capacity of governmentality to explain changing legal and political frameworks affecting the government of society through the regimentation of language and talk. Others—focusing on the concept of biopolitics—have drawn on ‘governmentality’ to point to changing modes of power expression and societal control. Yet in other cases governmentality has been used to highlight the ways individuals express control over their own conduct, i.e. appropriate and accommodate ideological formation of language and culture to get or to organise access to specific resources. While these different modes of reading Foucault’s concept of governmentality can overlap and are often interconnected, these different lines of thought can also point to different ontologies and research interests that need to be discussed and made explicit in order to grasp the full potentiality of this concept for an extensive understanding of the challenges encountered by new speakers under current socioeconomic conditions of late capitalism. The workshop thus brought together different scholars that have been working with this concept to map a territory that remains largely uncharted.

## **2. Main conclusions**

In terms of questions answered, the main conclusion reached during this workshop concerns the variety of areas which are affected by different aspects of governmentality, thus bringing together scholars interested in minority language issues on the one hand, and on issues tied with migrations on the other. All participants did also highlight the corporeal effects of processes of governmentality, and all underlined the integrated nature of governmentality, its embodied nature, thus highlighting a form of common understanding of a Foucauldian approach. In her analysis of key texts by Foucault, Luisa Martín Rojo also emphasised the importance of the generation of truth, and, beyond that, belief.

Subjectivity was also a notion brought up by most participants, in terms of the construction of the subject, another notion developed by, among others, Michel Foucault, and one that, as Joan Pujolar put it, is often relegated to the periphery in most forms of sociolinguistics. In that respect, the new speaker approach, it was argued, replaces the subject, its construction, and the embodiment of discipline in the self, at the core of our concerns. In this case, we focused on the production of the so-called neo-liberal subject, although a discussion arose as to whether monetarist policies at the origin of such economic policies constituted a real departure from previous economic regimes.

Subjectivity and belief, Sara Brennan and James Costa argued, are connected through processes of institution, which take the form of symbolic line tracing, as suggested by Emile Benveniste in his discussion of the etymology of the Latin word *Rex*. At the core of our work, therefore, are issues of regulation: who regulates what types of actions, how, with what consequences? How is belief accepted in such a way that it produces (self-)regulation, be it on workers, patients, or newcomers to certain human groupings? And how is language used to achieve this, in particular on so-called new speakers? Conversely, how is the category of new speakers used to generate authority and belief in this respect?

It is anticipated that the participants will meet again in the future, and that an edited volume will be produced once conclusions have been reached.

### **3. Key texts referred to during the workshop.**

Benveniste, E. (1973). *Indo-European Language and Society*. Miami: University of Miami Press.

- Foucault, M. (2003). *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, M. (2004). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. New York: Picador
- Foucault, M. (2010). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.