

Guest Editor's Preface: Germanic Languages and Migration in North America*

The movement of people and their languages on an unprecedented scale has been exerting increasing pressure on the model of the nation state and the ideal of socially and linguistically homogeneous societies. Sociolinguists analyzing recent changes in language policies and citizenship legislation have focused on the global-local interface, as well as issues of territoriality and group membership, thus connecting with cultural geographers and anthropologists who study the relationship between language and senses of place. Although frequently regarded as the domain of linguistics, language policies and practices are inseparable from issues of power and identity. Scholarly investigations have demonstrated the need to view the dynamics of language contact in relation to “external” linguistic dimensions that are central to the field of sociology, including social class, gender, and ethnicity, together with acts of compliance with or resistance to social and linguistic norms.

Taking the socially and spatially situated nature of language as the point of departure, this special issue seeks to advance research on language and migration by zoning in on the interface between language, migration, and place. Spoken and written Germanic language varieties used by people in North America, as well as the diversity of migration experiences and multiple understandings of senses of place as they relate to global flows in the past and present, constitute the focus of these thematically linked papers. In contrast to most European countries, Canada and the United States have historically been portrayed as “immigrant nations,” yet there exists much current debate on the challenges and benefits of migration, and multilingualism is frequently thematized in this context.

The contributions to this special issue explore the ways in which sociohistorical trajectories shape present-day discourses of language and

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migration, and also the ways in which present-day discourses shape representations of past migration experiences. The first paper by Dailey-O’Cain and Liebscher analyzes the ways that immigrants to Canada draw upon or reject the historically situated categories of *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* as a means of positioning their Germanness. In this way, their paper explores the maintenance and shift of forms of social identification and categorization that have traveled with them from Europe to North America. The second paper by Lucht, Frey, and Salmons demonstrates the value of taking a nuanced approach to questions of language maintenance and shift, by comparing and contrasting the use and loss of the German language in three different Wisconsin cities: Milwaukee, Watertown, and Lebanon. Also based on research in Wisconsin, Horner’s paper focuses on the use of Luxembourgish in the town of Belgium, where a locally organized Luxembourg Fest has been held since 1987. Following the grand opening celebration of the transatlantic Luxembourg American Cultural Center in 2011, the Fest is in the process of being transformed, and we observe changes in the way that Luxembourgish is represented and bound up with a localized sense of place. Following the three papers focused on case studies in Canada and the United States, Stevenson’s final paper provides insightful discussion of two key themes that mark the aforementioned studies in different ways: 1) time, place, and space and 2) social processes. The papers in this collection demonstrate the need for researchers to take a fine-grained approach to the study of language and migration and to challenge images of homogeneity among “immigrant groups.”

Insights stemming from work in sociolinguistics, sociology, cultural geography, and other fields are central to the papers in this special issue, as an interdisciplinary approach encourages us to reflect on the parameters that influence the way we conduct research on the topic of language and migration. In this way, the special issue aims to serve as an impetus for researchers in the field of Germanic linguistics to broaden the scope of inquiry so as to include a wider range of methodological approaches and objects of study, such as commodification, tourism, and senses of place.

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