

## **Pedagogical Anthropology of Language and Speech**

### **Annual Conference of the Subdivision for Pedagogical Anthropology (DGfE/GERA)**

**TU Dortmund University**

**Institute of General Educational Sciences and Vocational Pedagogy**

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Throughout the history of anthropology, language has played a central role in understanding human beings. For Wilhelm von Humboldt, it is only through language that humans become human beings; Ernst Cassirer, in turn, speaks of humans as ‘animal symbolicum,’ and Charles Taylor describes human beings as the ‘language animal’. Language and speech are subject to the typical anthropological tension between the human ability to speak, which is assumed to be universal, on the one hand, and the diversity of concrete languages on the other. In addition, language is important for anthropology as a research discipline in that anthropological knowledge is usually expressed in language. This leads to an insight into the twofold historicity and culturality in anthropology: human beings cannot be understood ‘by themselves,’ but only through the ‘world views’ (Humboldt) of historically and culturally contextualized languages. The importance of language is also highlighted in educational science, be it by focusing on the significance of language abilities for academic achievement or by considering foreign language learning as a paradigm for transformative educational processes. However, there is little educational research that deals with language as language in an anthropological sense, although language theory approaches (including John Austin, John Searle, Judith Butler) provide an important background against which the pedagogical-anthropological concepts of performativity and mimesis have been developed.

Pedagogical anthropology combines anthropological and educational science perspectives and asks, on the one hand, how human beings can be understood in terms of education and socialization and, on the other, what implications arise for education and socialization from specific conceptions of the human being. In particular, culturality, corporeality, historicity, sociality, subjectivity and liminality are examined as interwoven dimensions of the human being, which opens up a broad horizon of questions with regard to language and speech:

Language and speech (re-)produce symbolic realities and thus represent a central aspect of *culturality*. From a pedagogical point of view, issues such as the representation of culture through language, dealing with linguistic and cultural foreignness or the creation of new cultural ideas, e.g. through translation, come into focus. Language and speech in peer-cultural contexts are also of interest. From a pedagogical perspective, one could ask about the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic symbols. What pedagogical anthropological implications arise from today’s possibilities for the technical production of language - for example, in times of increasing digitalization of human life and so-called artificial intelligence?

In educational science, language is usually conceptualized in relation to cognitive abilities. From a pedagogical-anthropological perspective, the question arises as to what extent language

can also be seen in relation to human *corporeality*. The relationship between language and corporeality can be linked, for example, to individual and collective practices of performative processes, but also to the question of the embodied nature of language and the different possibilities and limits of the embodied use of language over the life span.

With regard to the *historicity* of language and speech, it is of interest, for example, as to how historical pedagogical images of the human being are linked to the possibilities and limits of linguistic expression and how the creation of new words has opened up new perspectives on the human being. Particularly in times of crisis, the question also arises of a (pedagogical) way of speaking that can open up paths to future.

Following on from sociolinguistic research, language and speech play an important role in the constitution of *sociality*. The focus here is on language patterns and language use in social groups as well as the pedagogical and socializing introduction to these patterns. From the perspective of a theory of performativity, the social effects of language and speech must be examined, e.g., with regard to the creation and reproduction of inequality, power relations and symbolic violence (also in postcolonial terms) as well as community and equality. The question of how language can hurt can also be used to outline symbolic vulnerability in more detail. Other questions might include whose speech is recognized and how language and speech relate to generational or gender orders.

Following Humboldt, language can be understood as the central medium between a person and the world and thus as an element constituting *subjectivity*. From a pedagogical-anthropological perspective, it is important to ask, on the one hand, what role language and speaking play in educational, socialization and training processes for the development of identity and autonomy and, on the other, to what extent new relationships to the world and the self can be explored and practiced in a playful way through a creative approach to language or also how language is used as a means of order in pedagogical contexts. Another focus can be on the role of language in the constitution of knowledge.

The *liminality* of language and speech is apparent in the fact that all people can potentially communicate with each other through language, but the particular languages draw relatively clear boundaries between social groups. Pedagogically, this problem is addressed through the teaching of foreign languages. However, this raises questions about the possibilities and limitations of foreign language learning. In particular, the extensive global use of English must be critically discussed. On the one hand, global English extends the boundaries of understanding, while on the other, there is a danger that this linguistic concentration will narrow and thus limit ways of thinking in the ‘global society’.

The conference welcomes a wide range of pedagogical-anthropological questions, both in terms of content and methodology. The approaches mentioned should therefore be understood as suggestions. In line with the pluralism of methods in pedagogical anthropology, contributions from different perspectives (philosophical, phenomenological, ethnographic, historical, etc.) are therefore also welcome.

We plan to have 20-minute presentations each followed by a 20-minute discussion. Please send your proposal with an explicit relevance to pedagogical anthropology and with a maximum of 2,500 characters (incl. spaces, excl. references) by e-mail before 15 April 2024 to: [ruprecht.mattig@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:ruprecht.mattig@tu-dortmund.de).