

'Native Speech'? A 3-part workshop on race, coloniality and language

Organisers: Friedrich Ammermann, Daphné Budasz, Ben Carver, Nicola Hargreaves, Raghavi Viswanath – [The Decolonising Initiative](#)

Dates: Three workshops on Monday 23 May (15:00-19:00), Tuesday 24 May (am), and 7 June (pm).

Location: 23 May: Palazzo Buontalenti (Conference room) & the new Recovery Plan space by the Associazione Culturale Black History Month Florence (BHMF); 24 May: Badia Fiesolana (Sala del Capitolo); 7 June: Villa Salviati (Sala del Consiglio)

Contact: decolonising@eui.eu

Abstract

Thinking and languages are co-constitutive, one shapes the other. However, too often we are not aware of the racial and colonial baggage of the language we use. Thinking about language(s) is particularly important for us as academics, as words are not only the final outcome of the work we invest into our projects, but also shape our work. Attention to language is especially important here at the EUI, a multilingual institution where research is carried out in scholars' native and non-native languages.

This workshop hopes to offer an opportunity to reflect on the colonial, discriminatory dimensions of languages both at the EUI and more broadly in academic writing. The workshop to be held at the EUI in May 2022 with guest speakers **Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau** (Università Iuav di Venezia) and **Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak** (Tischner European University in Krakow), and on 7 June 2022 with **Gary Younge** (University of Manchester). Participation in only one of the sessions is perfectly possible, though we encourage everyone to think of them as one and sign up for the entire programme.

This is a workshop in three parts taking place during three half days (23 May pm, 24 May am, 7 June pm). Participants are not obliged but highly encouraged to register to all sessions. One registration per session is required. This is an 'in person' event with limited seats. If you have registered and are not able to attend, please cancel your registration or write to the organizers to let them know.

The keynote speeches of the workshop are open to online participation via Zoom (see the full programme for details). In case you would like to attend them online, the Zoom link to each keynote speech is provided in the registration e-mail for each workshop day. You can contact the workshop organizers for additional information.

DAY 1: Native speech, translation and language politics

23 May, in Palazzo Buontalenti and at The Recovery Plan space (Piazza San Marco)

Please register: <https://www.eui.eu/events?id=549671>

This workshop considers the problems of racial language used in both academic and non-academic context and how to redress them, especially when doing research that addresses questions of race and particularly with regard to the questions of colonial legacy, migration, conflict, and social in/exclusion.

Dr Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfaù (Università Iuav di Venezia) is a researcher of migration, critical race, and post/decolonial studies, a translator, and an activist.

15:00 Opening of the workshop

15:15–16:30 “Word and Silence: translating *Plantation memories* (2008/2021) by Grada Kilomba” Keynote presentation by Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfaù (Università Iuav Venezia) - Chair: Raghavi Viswanath (LAW) | Discussant: TBD

Grada Kilomba's work focuses on the word/silence dichotomy, revealing how listening is an essential condition for speaking. It is therefore not a dichotomy but a triangulation of actions. In order for a voice to emerge from the silence, however, it is necessary to find words that work on unveiling power relations. Kilomba works on language with the aim of finding words and tools so that this story – the story of the racialisation of blackness – can be heard.

Translating this work into Italian has therefore meant coming to terms with the coloniality inherent in the Italian vocabulary. During the session, I will talk about Kilomba and the choices of translation, showing the specificity of the Italian context but also the continuities that link it to Europe and the global space.

16:30–17:00 Coffee Break

17:00–19:00 “A Fiaschi per Fiaschi” workshop at The Recovery Plan

Prendere fiaschi per fiaschi means confusing one thing for another, a phenomenon frequently rooted in listening with specific expectations in mind, or not really listening at all. Today, our theories and aspirations seek transformation from the eloquence of what could be into a practice that fosters stamina in combatting racial injustice and historically cemented imbalance.

During this discussion, participants will be invited to share their experiences of language politics, acquisition, and exchange. This workshop will be accompanied by a re-purposed Tuscan tradition extending back into the 1300s, l'impagliatura dei fiaschi (covering glass bottles with straw). A tradition employing women's labor as social exchange, the alleviation of the bottles' fragility becomes a metaphor for enacting social care

Facilitators: Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfaù and Justin Randolph Thompson (BHMF)

[end of the day's programme]

DAY 2: How to talk about race? Racial terminology in everyday and academic writing

24 May, in Sala del Capitolo (Badia)

Please register: <https://www.eui.eu/events?id=546136>

In everyday speech and writing, despite good intentions, we might use inappropriate, offensive, or hurtful terminologies without taking note and reflecting on their racial implications. This part of the workshop will address the issue of racial language on two levels. A keynote presentation will discuss how colonial discourses of race persist, change, and fashion the politics of race in Europe; in particular, it will examine the contemporary language of ethnicity and discourse of racism in the context of the war in Ukraine and the experiences of Black and Brown people fleeing the war to Poland and beyond.

We will also provide questions and suggestions for discussion in small groups in order to stimulate a debate and to compare practices and values. The idea is to use everyone's experience and thoughts to address "real life problems" of research writing: which terminology is inclusive and even reparative?

Dr Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak (Tischner European University in Krakow) is a critical linguist, diversity consultant and anti-discrimination trainer who published on race and racism in contemporary public discourse, racist discourse and representations of black ethnic/gender minorities portrayed by media discourse in Poland and CEE.

09.00–09.30 Meet & Greet (Badia terrace)

09:30–10:30 World café: terminology for scholars

Discussion of "real life" terminological problems in research writing with all workshop participants in small-group "world café" format

10.30–11.00 Coffee Break

11:00–12:00 Keynote: "Racism and discourse in the context of the war in Ukraine"

Keynote presentation by Dr Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak

Discussant: Anica Waldendorf (SPS) | Chair: Daphné Budasz (HEC)

12.00–12.15 Break

12.15–13.00 Workshop pt II: Round-up and response

Final Summary of results from World café (note-takers from each discussion table)

Respondents: Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak & other participants - Chair: Friedrich Ammermann (HEC)

Lunch (Badia canteen)

[end of the day's programme]

DAY 3: “Native English” and gate-keeping

7 June, in Sala del Consiglio, Villa Salviati

Please register: <https://www.eui.eu/events?id=549672>

This workshop addresses the advantages of ‘native’ speech in anglophone academia and examines the social dimensions of scholarly language in relation to questions of academic gatekeeping. Key questions we will try to answer together are:

Does anglophone academia impose an artificial communicative deficit on writers whose first language is not English? Does the “native” language threshold obscure the various barriers to scholarly speech and publication among native English speakers? Can we imagine a more equitable way of valuing communication in English that does not reinscribe existing norms and privileges?

Professor Gary Younge (Manchester University) is an author, broadcaster, and researcher who writes and campaigns for civil rights, particularly in relation to race.

14:00 Opening of the workshop

14:15–15:45 Keynote: “The power of nostalgia; the language of amnesia. Understanding Europe’s colonial past and racial present

Keynote presentation by Professor Gary Younge and roundtable discussion
Chair: TBC | Respondent: Shubha Prasad (MWF)

15:45–16:00 Break

16:00–17:15 Roundtable discussion: Chair: Ben Carver | Roundtable: TBC

[end of the day’s programme]