



**Call for Contributions:
Interdisciplinary Workshop on Language and Trauma
Planned for 9th and 10th of March, 2023**

Aims and goals

There is little question as to whether language and (lack of) expression are crucial in dealing with trauma – however, it is only recently that researchers in applied linguistics began to address language and trauma explicitly. A first attempt to bring researchers in applied linguistics together was undertaken by Brigitta Busch and Tim McNamara in their special issue *Language and Trauma of Applied Linguistics* (2020). They focused on research employing the tools of linguistic analysis to address the question of language in the experience of, recounting of and possible recovery from psychological trauma, in personal, literary and institutional contexts.

While the term trauma ('wound' in its Greek origin) was originally largely confined to medicine and psychotherapy, it has recently found its way into everyday language, where it is often used, semantically overstretched, for any form of painful or frustrating experience. In specialized literature trauma is conceived more narrowly, albeit not quite uniformly. Fischer and Riedesser (1998: 84, our translation) define trauma „[...] as a vital experience of discrepancy between threatening situation factors and individual coping possibilities“ and they stress that this “causes an ongoing disruption of one’s understanding of the self and the world.“

The disruption as a shared characteristic caused by trauma cannot initially be integrated into the self. This presents a difference to pain and sorrow that are understandable as they are linked to ‘more expectable’ negative experiences. On another note, experiencing trauma brings about enduring changes, as Van der Kolk (2014: 21) stresses:

We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present. Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think.

The effects of traumatic experiences are thus relevant for the persons involved and they also become relevant for future generations who might socially inherit some of the imprints left by traumatic experiences (Rauwald 2020, Keilson 2005). Transmission can happen through languages but also silence can be a relevant, often threatening part of a speaker’s repertoire after trauma.

Our workshop aims at continuing an ongoing discussion around trauma as a multi-disciplinary field by exploring the role of language in the discursive construction of trauma as an object of knowledge, its involvement in the actual experience and the reenactment of trauma, and its potential and limitations in the narration of trauma. Relevant research is not limited to language studies per se and we are eager to learn about interdisciplinary research in the field. Trauma, like other intense experiences and feelings such as pain, grief, and rage, touches at the limits of the sayable. In situations of trauma, linguistic interaction might be perceived as so ‘extreme’ or ‘exceptional’ that these kinds of interactions might appear marginal to an understanding of how language in ‘normal’ interaction functions. We welcome contributions that present theoretical considerations, give insights into empirical research in different areas related to language and trauma or present applications of the connections of language and trauma.

Engaging with language at the limit of the sayable (Jaworski 1997, Holzer et al. 2011, Milani 2014) can benefit applied linguistics precisely because it challenges some taken-for-granted boundaries. Dalenberg speaks of the inadequacy of language in trauma treatment (Dalenberg 2000) and traumatic experiences influence how speakers are able to interact with the world around them.

Such moments are marked by overwhelming emotional states of extreme fear and helplessness, often intermingled with other affects (such as grief or shame) and moral injury (such as feelings of failure or guilt). As traumatic experiences and memories remain deeply inscribed in the body (Fuchs 2012), emotions linked to them remain equally present and leave their imprints in the way one can speak or not speak about traumatic moments. Being aware of the many faces of traumatic experience, we invite work on different historic and contemporary contexts, and covering a broad geographical area. We are especially interested in challenging normativities and thus wish to foreground research that takes decolonial or intersectional approaches to trauma – either in theory or methodology.

Contributions to the workshop can include

- research on supposedly ordinary, ‘normalized’ every day practice and how it relates to the nonsayable, the exceptional, the marginal and the disturbing
- research on the significance of messiness, of omissions, silences, and ambiguities with regard to lived experience of language and multilingual repertoires
- research on specific social, political and historical conditions that lead to and frame traumatic experience; questions of (public) recognition, remembrance and commemoration
- methodologies and approaches applicable to trauma studies from an interdisciplinary, language - related perspective

Organisation and Venue

We are organizing the two-day workshop at the University Duisburg-Essen (Germany). There will be no participation fee, but participants are expected to cover travel and accommodation. We can offer a small number of travel grants upon request.

Participation, Conveners and Contacts

Please send your abstracts of approx. 300 words to all three addresses **until 30.9.2022**:

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