Current sociolinguistic theory emphasizes language as doing, as procedural and dynamic. This is evident in the now commonly used term languaging, which constitutes an attempt to rethink the ontological basis of the discipline. Yet, at the same time as we are beginning to formulate a new vocabulary for thinking and speaking about language, it appears difficult to move away from approaching linguistic practice in terms of structures, patterns and even rules. The idea that language is – in some sense at least – a structured (and thus predictable) system remains pervasive in sociolinguistic theory.

Drawing on Roman Jakobson’s work on poetic language and locating it within Jakobson’s own poetic practice and the artistic context of its time (the Futurist movement), this presentation takes as its starting point the fundamental visuality of written language, and the Futurists’ poetic program of ‘liberating’ words and letters. I will show that these poetic principles have found their way into the everyday creativity of interactive digital writing (texting). These texts show language as an open semiotic practice, where the existence of a norm or convention is always temporary and carries with it the potential for its destruction. In the presentation, I argue that all communication, all speaking/writing, is fundamentally unpredictable and necessarily ambiguous (Jakobson 1960). It is this ‘inalienable’ ambiguity of language which speakers/writers exploit in creativity, and which allows them to resist ‘evaporation into an anonymous citationality’ (Butler 2011).

The (multilingual) data, on which the research is based, comes from a long-term project on digital communication in South Africa and smaller data sets collected in Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire.

References:


Keywords: new media, creativity, performance.