

Prof Dr Christiane Bongartz (Universität zu Köln):

### **Multilingualism and research in psycholinguistics: the risks of abstraction**

Researchers in psycholinguistics are variously concerned with the paths and outcomes involving the acquisition of two or more languages. Often, this requires a high degree of abstraction: story-telling competence, as in my own work for example, gets distilled into the management of referential expressions. With that in mind, factors such as background information on language biographies, linguistic experience, education, and cognition are taken on board to offer valid descriptions. Guided by good intentions (e.g. to contribute to improved policies on literacy education) such work involves categorization of various kinds, in-group and in-between-group comparisons and complex statistical analysis. This specialized methodology, however, can be hard to reconcile with real world issues of (linguistic) inequalities.

The illusion of doing ‘good work’ in a broken world, one might say, is hard to maintain at a time where societal debates about identity investment and privilege have increased in scope and sharpened in tone. Who is the judge of what constitutes ‘doing no harm,’ when our descriptive work is constantly being used to categorize: who wants to be a non-balanced bilingual? a speaker of a non-standard variety? a user of an ethnolect or of non-native English? With this talk, I'd like to initiate a discussion about how we might modify our practices with respect to personal accountability across the board and in terms of support for junior researchers in particular. We need effort and time for meta-discussions to improve the impact of our work and our own identities as researchers.