CALL FOR PANEL CONTRIBUTIONS
"REGIMENTING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY"
2nd International Conference on Sociolinguistics, Budapest, 6-8 September 2018

The category of visibility constitutes a key dimension of the public sphere, up to the extent that the public sphere can be characterized as *constituted in/by struggles over visibility*. At the threshold of visibility, one often encounters power struggles over what aspects of social and cultural practices deserve a public stage, and what aspects should be relegated to the private sphere (or made invisible altogether). For the upcoming 2nd International Conference on Sociolinguistics (http://ics2.elte.hu/), we would like to bring together scholars from various backgrounds and invite them to reflect on these struggles over visibility, which are at the heart of many ongoing attempts to (re-)shape and (re)structure the public sphere in our contemporary societies. We are interested in empirical investigations that look into such struggles over visibility from various angles, and in a variety of online and offline settings. We welcome contributions that document and investigate actual practices of regimenting/reclaiming the public sphere (ethnography, linguistic landscaping), as well as work that examines the macro-discursive structures (discourse analysis) and/or the situated communicative events (conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics) through/in which such regimenting/reclaiming is discursively negotiated.

A first kind of struggle over visibility, with a strong presence in the current sociopolitical climate, can be referred to as "the politics of erasure." This politics comprises various attempts, usually initiated by local municipal authorities, to regiment activities and practices not because they constitute a crime or would endanger members of the public, but because they are perceived as "polluting the public space" and/or "scaring members of the public." Items to be removed from the public sphere, or to be "pushed back" beyond the boundaries of public perception, include cultural practices (e.g., wearing a burkini, a headscarf, etc.) and linguistic practices (e.g., foreign language advertisements and other expressions of multilingualism), as well as certain forms of economic activity (e.g., begging, busking etc.). Often, such attempts to regiment the public sphere are targeting practices and/or activities that have a linguistic, a social and an economic component. Think, for example, of restrictions on "appearance-degrading" businesses, which are often also migrant-owned: night shops, shisha bars, internet shops, video stores, etc.

The politics of erasure is grounded in a vision of "appropriateness" that re-signifies everyday activities as indexing wider socio-political problems, and hence as undesirable (a clear example would be the transformation of the headscarf into an index of religious conflict and non-integration). It brands its own way of "seeing" the public space as the only legitimate one, and hence as the only one that should be allowed to inscribe itself into the materiality of public everyday life. Paradoxically, this process leads to a heightened visibility of the phenomena that are considered illegitimate.

At the other end of the continuum, one finds various attempts to "reclaim" the public sphere, such as the various struggles waged by minority group activists to decenter "oppressive" representations and practices associated with the colonial past. In doing so, these activists negotiate alternative ways of seeing/experiencing the public sphere, decentering the hegemonic gaze that problematizes expressions of diversity and making visible the historical patterns of insubordination on which it is founded. Other activists pursue a more proactive strategy, opening up the public sphere to alternative orders of indexicality through physically "altering" the material organization of the public space, either transiently or permanently. This can be done within existing regulatory frameworks, as exemplified by the various struggles for the recognition of alternative lifestyles and minority communities (e.g., through amendments to the public calendar). On other occasions, however, this may

take the form of transgressive re-territorializations that problematize the very notion of the public realm, ranging from guerilla gardening, over Occupy-style appropriations of squares and plazas, to the tactics and practices of the so-called "black bloc".

Looking at the public sphere through the lens of visibility allows us to explore interconnections between public *space*, as a feature of the material organization of the physical landscapes in which we live our lives, and the public sphere as a *discursive* phenomenon. In addition to an actual space, the public sphere is also a spatial metaphor for a set of discursive practices and shared meanings through which we imagine ourselves to be part of a wider network of mutual accessibility/reflexive accountability. Of particular importance are the various technologically mediated channels that mediate the dissemination of these discursive practices: mass media, social media platforms, etc. The resulting mediatized debates are a major site were struggles over the regimentation public sphere are fought. On other occasions, however, these mediating channels become themselves caught up in struggles over visibility, as attempts to decenter oppressive representations often specifically target media content. Focusing on the category of visibility allows us to explore how these different realms, ranging from physical to digital space, mutually mediate one another, without treating one or the other as somehow more "foundational."

These initial musings aside, we are of course very much interested in what *you* have to say on these struggles over visibility. As indicated, we wish to bring together scholars from diverse backgrounds. If you would like to join the panel, please send an abstract of no more than 300 words to jan_zienkowski@yahoo.com or sigurd.a.dhondt@jyu.fi on January 1, 2018 by the latest.

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