



THE LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION WORKING GROUP
VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES

Language as Symbolic Power in Applied Linguistics

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The current crisis in the Trump era in the United States is not only a political emergency but also a linguistic one. Language has become weaponized as never before, truth is scarce, and the symbolic power of language to construct alternative realities is in full display (McIntosh & Mendoza-Denton 2020). Never before have language teachers been so challenged to rethink what it means to learn and use language in an era of reality TV, social media and digital algorithms (Amoore 2020). In the name of communicative competence, foreign language educators have let the communication experts define the pragmatic goals of language learning. But today, drawing on insights from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics within a post-structuralist perspective (e.g., Silverstein & Urban 1996, Blommaert 2005, Kramersch 2020), many are seeking ways to recapture the symbolic, historical and political dimensions of language and the role of language as discourse in the current culture wars. Beyond the certainties of dictionary meanings and grammar rules, educators are keen on redefining the ethics of language use without falling into post-modern relativism. The stakes are high and our profession as educational linguists has never been more important.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2021

12:00 - 01:15 PM (EST)



Claire Kramersch is Emerita Professor of German and Affiliate Professor of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught courses in German and in Applied Linguistics, and where she was the founding director of the Berkeley Language Center. Her areas of interest are applied linguistics, second and foreign language learning and teaching, language and culture, bi- and multilingualism, and language and symbolic power. She has written extensively on language, discourse, and culture in applied linguistics. Her publications have received numerous awards including three Mildenberger Awards from the Modern Language Association, and several honorary doctorates including one from UC Berkeley. In 1998, she received the Goethe Medal from the Goethe Institute in Weimar for her contributions to cross-cultural understanding between the United States and Europe. She is the past president of the American and the International Association of Applied Linguistics and the past editor of the international journal *Applied Linguistics*. She is currently the coeditor of two book series with Routledge and Cambridge University Press, and the editor of the *L2 Journal*.

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