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ARBEITSVORHABEN

Language Barriers: Speaking across Divides

The project explores the role of language, broadly conceived, in globalising processes of the long twentieth century. Although they are often unacknowledged or even invisible, issues of language speak to central tensions in global history. They are tied to overarching power structures—colonial, national, or economic—and, at the same time, intensely personal in their relation to identity-building and individual expression. Since the late nineteenth century and, increasingly, during the 1920s and beyond, national languages were standardised, vernaculars came under threat, world languages were hotly debated, and experiments with artificial languages emerged in very diverse contexts.

What is more, language and its relation to the “global” are also particularly topical at this present moment. Conceptions of language are changing rapidly in the age of AI, and, for the first time, we can imagine a world without language barriers. Yet, while language barriers may seem finally surmountable, new rifts are emerging. At a time when English has achieved an unprecedented dominance in popular culture, trade, teaching, and publishing, questions of standardisation and linguistic diversity are increasingly being discussed. When it comes to the practice of global history, a passionate debate has erupted in relation to the dominance of English as a vehicle of (uneven) communication.

Research on languages has consequently developed into a thriving but not yet consolidated subfield of global history. This project takes these recent individual explorations as its point of departure. Its goal is to move language history to the centre of global history research and to initiate a larger interdisciplinary conversation about language that speaks to the broad themes of standardisation and diversity, elitism and accessibility, simplification and complexity, and to the tension between the social and the global at large.

Recommended Reading

Huber, Valeska. *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Huber, Valeska, and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds. *Global Publics: Their Power and Their Limits, 1870–1990*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Huber, Valeska. “Openness and Closure: Spheres and Other Metaphors of Boundedness in Global History.” In *Rethinking Global History*, edited by Stefanie Gänger and Jürgen Osterhammel, 139–160. Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Huber, Valeska (Cambridge,2024)

Openness and closure : spheres and other metaphors of boundedness in global history

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1931396868>

Huber, Valeska (Cambridge,2020)

Pandemics and the politics of difference : rewriting the history of internationalism through nineteenth-century cholera

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=193293717X>

Huber, Valeska (London,2020)

Global publics : their power and their limits, 1870-1990

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1725155125>

Studies of the German Historical Institute London

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1725155125>