Panel organizers: Prof. Dr. Susanne Mühleisen (Universität Bayreuth)  
Dr. Anne Schröder (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

PANEL: Contact varieties translocated: language and identity in Diaspora communities

It is one of the basic tenets of sociolinguistics that language displays a speaker’s identity (Coulmas 2005: 171), and this identification has two dimensions: on the one hand language is taken as an external behaviour which allows the identification of a speaker as a member of a particular group, on the other hand language is taken as the means of identifying oneself as belonging to a particular group, as being a member of a particular group. (Tabouret-Keller 1997: 315) Thus, identification is collective and individual. The question of the identity of a person or a community, however, is complex as identities may be heterogeneous, dynamic and – at times – even consist of overlapping or contradicting identities. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1990: 222) reminds us “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.”

This is all the more true for people living in Diaspora communities, who have frequently retained a memory of or a cultural connection with their homelands, who may harbor doubts about their full acceptance by the host country and who are often committed to their survival as a distinct linguistic community (cf. Safran 2004: 10). Diaspora communities might therefore be seen as ideal exploratory fields where models of identity, language shift and language prestige can be challenged or affirmed.

From the 1990s on, Diaspora communities in Britain, the United States and South Africa have become interesting sites of linguistic investigations (cf. Mesthrie 1992, Rampton 1995, Mühleisen 2002) on productive restructurings of varieties of English, their functions, and their communities of speakers.

We invite contributions on aspects related to varieties of English and identity in Diaspora communities.

Please send your abstract of approximately 200 words no later than December 31, 2008.

Contact: gnel2009@gmail.com or susanne.muehleisen@uni-bayreuth.de.