



Philosophische Fakultät



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*Do languages exist? And, if so, where?*

Monday, 17 October 2022, 2:00 p.m., H80 (Philosophikum) & Zoom

The title of this presentation is not: Does language exist? I leave that question to the philosophers.

As educated people in the Western world we have been taught that different languages are used for speaking and writing. Many are also aware of sign languages. The assumed existence of different languages as separate reified entities is thus often taken for granted. The power of some objectified languages is huge, that of others minimal. Languages as objects are used as symbols of national pride, as reasons to start a war, to unite people around a cause, to exclude people from entering a country or a plane, and so much more. Indeed, the ingrained assumption that languages exist as objects often leads to inequities. Thus, it is worth reflecting on that existence. How do languages “exist”? And where?

This presentation considers examples from a range of perspectives within the field of linguistics showing how the boundaries between what are assumed to be different languages are often far from clear. More fundamentally, some examples can lead one to challenge the notion of the very existence of different bounded languages.