Linguistics Colloquium

Rajend Mesthrie

Professor of Linguistics and research chair
School of African & Gender Studies,
Anthropology & Linguistics
University of Cape Town

Race, class and gender in deracialising middle-class South African English: the sociophonetics of schwa today

Tuesday, October 4, 2016
@ 5:30 pm in KCB (565 Commonwealth Ave) room 101

Abstract:
New economic and educational opportunities have given rise to the rapid growth of a black middle-class in South Africa, part of whose making is having its children study at elite schools previously reserved for whites. These “model-C” schools are now important multiracial sites for cross-cultural influences denied to previous generations. The present study tracks the degree to which class and gender relate to acquisition and allegiance to elite varieties of English or more traditional Black South African English. The illustrative variable in this paper is schwa, broken up into seven subsets: initial, final, and medial positions (where there are 5 subtypes in traditional L2 Black South African English, realized as [a e i o u]). Analysis is undertaken via forced alignment of acoustic data and statistics in R. The results give robust evidence of ongoing bifurcation by class and gender.

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