

Du Iz Tak?

The Impossibility of Linguistic Erasure

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Theoretical Points

The “ontological turn” as a facing away *from* an anthropocentric orientation with its emphasis on human language *toward* a neo-materialist, post-humanist ontology is gaining influence in the social sciences (Barad, Haraway, Puar, Latour, Deleuze & Guatarri). The implications of this turn are significant for both language/literacy scholars and qualitative methodologists. The turn away from language in post-humanist and new materialist thought relies on a representational conception of language. A thorough critique of representation does not necessarily require abandoning language as an intrinsic aspect of human experience or dislocating human heterogeneity through a critique of a human/non-human binary. An alternative articulation of social justice methodological theory can be reconstructed from problematizing correspondence theories of language and truth while introducing a pragmatic perspective for conceptualizing meaning. This requires us to put forward a holistic rational expressionist contextualized theory of language and truth (Brandom, Habermas). Conceptualizing language in this way facilitates a more nuanced theory of being.

Empirical Examples/Points

We bring the theoretical discussion to fruition by analyzing two distinct photos from two different international research projects – one in rural China examining the life histories of Chinese youth who came of age during the radical social changes surrounding the cultural revolution and the other in Uganda examining the local orientations toward peace in a poverty stricken, post-war context. These two photos will be analyzed through a post-humanist, new materialist perspective and then re-interpreted through a critical pragmatism that seeks retain communicative commitments as human endeavor.

The paper concludes with a provocative invitation to rethink the representational hegemony in linguistic theory and the legacy of the linguistic turn.