

49th KUASS (Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)

Date and Time: 11 March 2016 (Fri), 15:00 – 17:00

Venue: #318, Inamori Memorial Foundation Building (3rd floor), Kyoto University

Title: Language and Identity Formation in Africa

Speaker: Dr. Matthias Brenzinger

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Abstract: African languages have been predominantly classified *by non-African linguists* and mainly with the aim to represent genetic relationships among languages. The neat tree diagrams which are used to sketch these relationships are reducing and generalizing a far more complex language past. The genetic language trees are challenged by the fact that language communities do not live in isolation. Language contact phenomena, such as lexical borrowing and language merging, are equally important in the shaping of the presently spoken languages.

Most *African linguists and speakers of African languages* generally provide a far more complex picture in their discussions of the historical facts which they consider to be important for the genesis of their modern African languages. They study the speaker's history in sociopolitical environments rather than abstract language structures analyzed from language data which are often detached from actual language use.

The presentation “Language and Identity Formation in Africa” combines both approaches, i.e. it introduces scholarly attempts to language classifications and at the same time discusses local knowledge of speakers on their past. Two perspectives will be applied: (1) The shaping of *language structures* through identity formation, (2) Language as a core asset in *identity formation*. The presentation will focus on two languages and their speakers, SiLozi, spoken in Zambia and Namibia, and Sephuthi spoken In Lesotho and South Africa.