

DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

16-18 September 2026, Aarbergerhus Ligerz

University of Bern | Center for the Study of Language and Society
University of Fribourg | Institute of Multilingualism

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS CLINIC Broaching Problems in Sociolinguistic Research

Lecturers: Bonnie McElhinny University of Toronto

Organizers: Emeline Beckmann, Alejandro Santano Suarez, Elijah Liam King & Sophie Pfister, Fribourg and Bern

Abstract

This year's workshop focuses specifically on questions of method and power in sociolinguistic research. It explores the challenges that emerge throughout the research process — from the conceptualization of a project to data collection, interpretation, and analysis — with particular attention to the methodological choices researchers make and the power relations that shape research practices and knowledge production.

Drawing on concrete cases brought by participants and the invited lecturer, the workshop aims to equip participants with analytical tools to critically reflect on, navigate, and address methodological and political issues related to power in research. Through small-group consultations with our highly experienced and critically engaged lecturer, as well as exchanges with peers, participants will further develop an understanding of research “problems” not as obstacles to avoid, but as integral and productive dimensions of the research process. The workshop also highlights “troubleshooting” — understood in a metaphorical sense — as a valuable practice for reflexive and critical knowledge production.

Application

To apply, please provide a brief description of your current research (max. 1 page), a brief description of your interests (one paragraph), a second paragraph which lists a methodological approach / article that inspires you (one paragraph or a list), and 1-3 questions you have about methods. Please also indicate which workshop you want to attend and if you would like an individual consultation. Note that space is limited and will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

For UNIFR participants: Please send the document to Marie-Anne Morand (marie-anne.morand@unifr.ch) by August 9, 2026.

For UNIBE participants: Please send the document to Sophie Pfister (sophie.pfister@unibe.ch) by August 9, 2026.

Practicalities

The workshop will take place at the Aarbergerhus, located in Ligerz close to Biel/Bienne (<https://www.aarbergerhus.ch>). You can reach Ligerz by regional trains via Neuchâtel or Biel/Bienne. Participating students are requested to remain in residence throughout the 2-day workshop, if feasible.

Fees

The workshop is free of charge for PhD students from the universities of Bern and Fribourg and includes accommodation in single rooms and full board.



Prof. Dr. Bonnie McElhinny

Dr. Bonnie McElhinny is Professor of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto, where she is a former Director of Women and Gender Studies and Principal of New College. Her research focuses on language, political economy, migration and diaspora, settler colonialism, anti-colonial research methods, and environmental justice, with particular attention to water. A 2026 recipient of the Faculty of Arts and Science Outstanding Teaching Award, which recognizes her contributions to community-based experiential learning and anti-colonial land-based research and pedagogy, and leadership roles in education, including as a former senior fellow of the University of Toronto Centre for Community Partnerships and on-going work on the faculty advisory board of the CCP. She is the author of three books, including *Language, Capitalism, Colonialism: Toward a Critical History* (with Monica Heller), and over 50 articles and book chapters. Recent publications include *Water Teaching While the World Burns* (2024) and the forthcoming chapter *Eight Ways to Challenge Climate Heating: Climate Discourse and Mobilizing Knowledge for Social Change* (with Tariq Harney and Amanda Harvey-Sanchez, 2026).

Workshop 1: Consent, ethics, and power

This workshop interrogates dominant institutional understandings of research ethics that reduce consent to individualized and procedural forms. Drawing on decolonial and Indigenous approaches, it will examine collective notions of consent, data sovereignty, and the tensions between open-access frameworks and community control over knowledge. More broadly, it asks what researchers owe to the communities, histories, lands, and lives that make research possible.

Workshop 2: Community-engaged research and knowledge circulation

Focusing on relational, reciprocal, and politically accountable forms of research, this session explores both the possibilities and contradictions of “community engagement.” It will address questions of collaboration between universities, grassroots movements, and non-profit organizations, while critically reflecting on accessibility, public writing, and the conditions under which research can — or cannot — produce meaningful social impact.

Workshop 3: Methods and intervention

This workshop explores how sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological research engages with questions of intervention in contexts such as climate change, migration, and institutional archives. It reflects on what it might mean for research to “intervene,” while also interrogating the limits, risks, and partial effects of such claims. Particular attention is given to how different methods (archival, discourse-based, ethnographic, biographical, and cultural analysis) shape what can be heard and made legible, especially in relation to subaltern or marginalized voices. Rather than assuming coherence across these approaches, the session foregrounds their tensions and the uneven conditions under which knowledge production and intervention become possible (or not).

Individual consultations are possible on demand. If interested, please mention it in your application.