

University of Missouri Visit Report

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Objective of Visit

The goal of my trip to the University of Missouri (Columbia) was to establish new networks, engage with staff and students in formal and informal settings, and to develop future collaborative work. I was generously hosted by the English Department (Tate Hall) and Prof. Andrew Hoberek.

The initial objective of my visit to Mizzou was to propose and develop a (curriculum and research focused) project with Dr. Stephanie Shonekan (Black Studies Department) tentatively titled, “Towards a Transnational Black Studies Project: A focus on Popular Culture, Multilingualism and Race Identity”. At the time, we proposed that the goal of such a project would be to develop a joint research and academic programme of transnational Black Studies that will be co-hosted by the Department of Black Studies at the University of Missouri, Columbia and the Linguistics Department and Centre for Multilingualism and Diversities Research (CMDR) at the University of the Western Cape.

We also put forward that we would investigate how popular cultural practices such as code-switching and multilingualism intersect with racial identities and realities, which include *vulnerabilities and attitudes*. That our aim would be to develop a uniform framework that, on the one hand, sets a research agenda and on the other hand *will result in the design of a pedagogical programme, grounded in transnational black studies, which will* critically approach, dissect, analyze and ultimately institutionalize a range of issues such as popular cultural representations and practices of multilingualism, the semiotic construction of racialized vulnerability, exploring its affordances and modes of challenge. By drawing on our expert knowledge we surmised there would be room for comparative perspectives that would inform our transnational approach. Moreover, we had planned to bring our expertise in black studies, musicology and sociolinguistics, and cognate fields such as popular culture, ethnomusicology, film studies, cultural studies, protest modalities, multilingualism, citizenship and performance genres together.

Unfortunately, not long before I was due to travel to Mizzou, Dr. Shonekan had accepted a new position at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), but secured a new contact and host to receive me at the university: Prof Andrew Hoberek, English Department (Tate Hall). Prof Hoberek have worked from the initial proposal to advance a slightly different

trajectory that would see us draw on our disciplinary strengths and develop a course to implemented in the near future (see below).

Upon my arrival, I had meetings with the Chair of the English Department, Prof Alexandria Socarides, and was introduced to a few colleagues in attendance, in particular, Profs Sherie-Marie Harrison, Michael Marlo and Matthew Gordon. After an introductory meeting with Prof Socarides, I then met with the chair of the Black Studies Department, Prof April Langley, faculty and students from the same department.

My visit to Mizzou has been fruitful. I convened a lecture and a colloquium, very well attended by students and faculty. I had the opportunity to share my research, theory of multilingualism, and also learned from students and faculty research projects in the English and Black Studies departments. At the end of my visit, I have made plans to develop a course as well as research project with English and Linguistic Faculty. I elaborate on this below.

Teaching at Mizzou

In the second week of my visit at Mizzou, I had the pleasure of teaching the linguistics students about my current and ongoing research. Prof Michael Marlo invited me to convene a lecture for his undergraduate students on a linguistics topic relevant for his course on African linguistics. The lecture I taught was entitled “Kaaps: a brief history and present use in South Africa”, describing a variety of Afrikaans formed and developed since colonial South Africa. Subsequently, I convened a Friday afternoon colloquium for Faculty and students entitled “Remixing Multilingualism and the Poetics of Voice”. I introduced the audience to my approach to multilingualism and my research on the sociolinguistics of Hip Hop. This talk was very well attended.

Planned work

Prof Hoberek and I have designed plans for a course on “Global Hip Hop” for implementation in 2019/2020. This course will be on offer to graduate and undergraduate students. And while have worked out some of the practical issues with regards to the administrative challenges from UWC’s side (I elaborate on this below), we do not anticipate and expect time difference across continents would affect the successful implementation of the course.

It is however a significant challenge to recommend a new course or adjust an already established course to successfully implemented the successful course, for several reasons. After consultation with the Head of the Linguistics Department, I was informed, firstly, that a change to a particular course to adjust or align to the new proposed course would not only take time but require “a host of statutory reasons”, and as such implementing the suggested course in 2019 would not be feasible.

Secondly, and most unfortunately, the Linguistics Department staff at UWC have one of the highest FTE:SLE ratios in the Arts Faculty with many colleagues (including myself) overstretched with teaching duties and as such suggesting a new module without removing another is also not feasible (besides a heavy supervision load).

Thirdly, and the only feasible option, at the moment, is for topics in the suggested course to sync to ones in a relevant module currently on offer. Students already registered for the course could video-call to Missouri. I hope we can explore this option more aggressively in the future.

Nevertheless, before my departure from Mizzou, I had a meeting with Prof Matthew Gordon about a future research project. Prof Gordon has expressed interest in my research on Kaaps. We are planning to draft a future project about dialectology and prosody in Kaaps and Missouri English. Thus far we have preliminary ideas on how to proceed, and we hope to have a skype meeting in 2019 to consolidate more some concrete ideas.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Prof Rodd Uphoff for initially inviting me to apply for an UMSAEP grant to visit University of Missouri, Columbia; but also for generously hosting me at Mizzou, introducing me to the President of Mizzou and inviting me to my first American Football match. I would also like to thank the UWC and Missouri administrators for planning my itinerary. I would also like to thank my hosts at Missouri, in particular the chairs of the English and Black Studies departments, and in particular, Profs Andrew Hoberek, Sherie-Marie Harrision, Michael Marlo and Matthew Gordon. Moreover, I thank the undergraduate and graduate students for their engagement during the meegins, lecture and colloquium.