

From Language to Violence: No Metaphor is Innocent?

Language affects thought. Did you know that the grammar of the Kuuk Thaayorre tribe allows its speakers to instinctively know where the cardinal points are located? This has been Justina's starting point to illustrate the fascinating relationship between language and the mind, before she dove into more specific issues of language-in-use that call for our individual responsibility in resisting the spread of hate speech. In particular, metaphors can hide and highlight various aspects of reality, thus framing it tendentiously. This makes them a powerful vehicle for dominant ideologies to spread almost without us noticing it. Justina proved this point by analysing various instantiations of the dehumanizing IMMIGRANTS ARE A FLOOD/A VIRUS metaphor which has reinforced negative attitudes towards them among the general population. This mind-sharpening event ended with a stimulating and at times touching debate over a glass of wine. In particular, we discussed the possibility of injecting good, healthy metaphors in our daily life to frame reality in more positive terms: what if immigrants were the seeds blown to faraway countries to help them flourish, or countries were thought of as guesthouses offering refuge to wanderers during a stormy night?

Talk by Justina Urbonaitė, 6th September 2018

Report by Davide Castiglione, 14th September 2018