The exponential increase of refugees arriving in Europe has added a new linguistic dimension to the social diversity within European societies. The workshop engages with how and where linguistic diversity is observable in the asylum process and how institutions react in situations of non-deniable and more and more complex linguistic diversity.

Asylum seekers are often required to speak and understand the language of the host country or rely on interpreters if they want to interact with public and private institutions. Therefore, the requirement for refugees to learn the language of the host country is omnipresent in the process of applying for asylum. One of the most visible results of this close link is the huge variety of language classes. The diversity of organisational forms and learners makes it necessary to question established ways of teaching language(s) and poses the question of how to adapt language teaching to the heterogeneous group of asylum seekers. Besides that, research needs to take into consideration the violating effects asylum seekers experience by this requirement and its consequences for language learning, well-being and mental health.

At the same time, we can observe that the linguistic diversity of the newcomers forces institutions to rethink their language policies and adjust to the linguistic situation of their clientele. In spite of their official monolingual policies, city administrations and other institutions dealing with asylum seekers develop a more flexible way of communicating with clients. This becomes visible in more diverse linguistic or semiotic landscapes. This does not only include leaflets and (sometimes handwritten) signage in different languages but also an increased use of images, sketches, and icons. The conference will ask how asylum seekers interact with and shape the linguistic landscapes they encounter.

Additionally, there is an increasing need for translation and interpreting services for asylum seekers to cater to the requirements of a mainly monolingual German administration (filling out forms, getting information from social workers, reporting information to officials, etc.). Here the services also vary hugely from unqualified ad-hoc interpretations to qualified state-funded interpreters during the asylum interview. Therefore the role of interpreters and translators in the asylum process will be addressed in the workshop.

All these developments raise the normative question of asylum seekers’ linguistic rights. Therefore, the workshop engages from descriptive as well as normative theoretical perspectives with the links between linguistic diversity and the right to asylum. This also includes questions regarding linguistic diversity and law. The workshop addresses the questions if or how legal asylum procedures neglect territorial linguistic diversity and language shifts over time and discusses recent developments in this field.
Apart from these first examples, the organisers also welcome abstracts covering topics from socio-linguistics, linguistics, anthropology, education, sociology, political science, law and philosophy that engage with the nexus of language and asylum.

The nexus of asylum and language includes a variety of phenomena. They include:

- Language learning for asylum seekers in (linguistically) highly diverse classrooms
- Language biographies and linguistic repertoires of asylum seekers
- Linguistic and semiotic landscapes for and by asylum seekers
- Translation and interpretation for asylum seekers
- Linguistic diversity in monolingual public and political institutions for asylum seekers
- Linguistic diversity, asylum and democracy
- Asylum and linguistic human rights
- Linguistic diversity and asylum law
- Language Analysis for Determination of Origin

The above topics are suggestions; we are open to other topics that fit within the nexus of linguistic diversity and asylum.

Please send abstracts of 300 words to ConferenceLinguistic@mmg.mpg.de

Submission Deadline for abstracts: 1st June 2017. Selected participants are asked to submit a two-page synopsis of their paper. This is required by 15th September 2017. Travel costs for selected participants will be funded by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity.

Important dates:
1 June 2017: Deadline for submission of abstracts
1 July 2017: Notification of acceptance
15 Sept. 2017: Deadline submission synopsis

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the conference organisers.