Language ideologies in text-based art of Xu Bing: Implications for language policy and planning

Adam Jaworski
School of English, HKU

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Abstract:
Contemporary art has been a site of intense linguistic production for several decades. Visual artists experiment with language in their efforts to develop new ways of displaying language in the transformative processes of creativity and symbolic manipulation that, at times, contravenes or subverts dominant language ideologies. In this way, artists produce new ‘regimes of language’ (or ‘regimes of discourse’, Pennycook, 2002: 92) that regulate or unsettle ‘moral and political visions that shape attitudes and behavior’ (Tollefson, 2011: 370). In this paper, four major, text-based pieces by the artist Xu Bing are examined in terms of their apparent, underlying language ideologies. In the course of the discussion, we see language ideologies not as homogeneous cultural templates but as processes ‘involving struggles among multiple conceptualizations [of language] and demanding the recognition of variation and contestation within a community as well as contradictions within individuals’ (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994: 71). By teasing out these language ideologies, I argue, we can see Xu Bing as an individual ‘language planner’ constructing different sociolinguistic publics and inviting their responses.

About the speaker:
Adam Jaworski is Chair Professor of Sociolinguistics at the School of English, The University of Hong Kong. His research interests include language and globalization, display of languages in space, media discourse, nonverbal communication, and text-based art.