

#### **Plenary 4: Prof. Isabelle Buchstaller (Universität Duisburg-Essen)**

##### *Linguistic Malleability across the life-span: A view from the North East of England*

Sociolinguistic theory makes clear and testable predictions about changes in linguistic behaviour across the life-span of the individual speaker. But while Sankoff and Blondeau's (2007) call for action has resulted in a wealth of small-scale panel studies, the dearth of large longitudinal data-sets means that we continue to know very little about the range of linguistic lability past adolescence and about the ways in which changes in adult speakers' linguistic habits are conditioned. This talk explores intra-speaker malleability on the basis of a novel corpus that spans the entire adult life-course. I start by addressing some key theoretical and conceptual issues related to language acquisition and intra-speaker malleability. I then explore changes in adult speakers' linguistic habits during:

- (i) age-grading, i.e. the regular association of vernacular forms with certain portions of the life span, such as adolescence or old age and
- (ii) changes in progress, when incoming forms are propagated by a community in real time).

The analyses focus on the factors that condition linguistic (in)stability in the individual speaker that as well as on the degree of linguistic lability past adolescence. I reflect on the implications of these findings and conclude that the language sciences need to work towards a better understanding of our linguistic abilities across the entire life-course, including the later life stages.