

Multilingual ecologies in a comparative perspective: well-being of speakers, social practices and challenges to linguistic diversity

Description:

It has been widely reported that linguistic diversity is disappearing on a global scale (e.g. Nettle & Romaine 2000; Batibo 2005; Bowerman 2021; Bromham et al. 2022). Language loss in some areas, such as the Americas, has reached 60% over the last 35 years, and some linguists predict the disappearance of 50–90% of the world's languages by the end of this century (Gorenflo et al. 2012, p. 8032). Yet, what we might call 'stable' or 'balanced' multilingual ecologies (Aikhenvald 2002; Jourdan 2007) existed in most parts of the world, including Europe, at least until the mid-20th century, and in some places, they have survived even until most recent times.

This session explores different aspects of complex multilingual ecologies "asking large questions in small places" (Joyner 1999: 1). By bringing together case studies from several continents, we show that recognizing differing linguistic ecologies, with their associated social and cultural dynamics, is crucial to understanding the mechanisms and outcomes of language contact and language maintenance. We are particularly interested in exploring the relationships between speaking Indigenous/minority languages and the wellbeing of their speakers (Olko et al. 2022), the emotional dimension of heritage language use, the impact of language contact as well as deeper connections between linguistic and sociocultural practices. We also ask how the unusual patterns of multilingualism in the regions under study may have given rise to fascinating language scenarios, vast linguistic areas, and numerous shared features, such as those in the Amazon (i.e. "linguistic exogamy" in Aikhenvald 2012: 76, Epps 2018: 156) or Mesoamerica. We also look at historical trajectories of multilingual ecologies (including key factors such as the amount of external pressure, colonial expansion, fusion of speakers' communities, and dispersion and loss of groups), links between linguistic diversity and biodiversity (such as population distribution and density, topography and climate, resources, migration and expansion, shared cultural systems and practices) and the challenges of linguistic diversity (their social, anthropological, and structural aspects). By recognizing both the importance of previous research on the multi-factorial mechanisms underlying language diversity, its loss and/or continuity, and the need for a much better understanding of the dynamic nature of multilingualism in its historical depth and local variation, this session offers a novel comparative perspective that is relevant for understanding the complexity of multilingual ecologies and challenges faced by speakers of Indigenous/minority languages in today's world.

References:

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2002. *Language Contact in Amazonia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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- Batibo, Herman. 2005. *Language Decline and Death in Africa: Causes, Consequences and Challenges*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
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- Bromham, L., Dinnage, R., Skirgård, H. et al. Publisher Correction: Global predictors of language endangerment and the future of linguistic diversity. *Nat Ecol Evol* 6, 231 (2022).
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- Epps, Patience. 2018. "Contrasting linguistic ecologies: Indigenous and colonially mediated language contact in northwest Amazonia." *Language & Communication* 62:156-169.
- Gorenflo, L. J., Romaine, S., Mittermeier, R. A., & Walker-Painemilla, K. (2012). Co-occurrence of linguistic and biological diversity in biodiversity hotspots and high biodiversity wilderness areas. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, May 22, 109(21), 8032-8037
- Jourdan, Christine. 2007. "Linguistic paths to urban self in postcolonial Solomon Islands." In *Consequences of Contact*, edited by Miki Makihara, and Bambi Schieffelin, 30–48. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Joyner, Charles W. 1999. *Shared traditions: Southern history and folk culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Olko, J., Lubiewska, K., Maryniak, J., Haimovich, G., de la Cruz, E., Cuahutle Bautista, B., Dexter-Sobkowiak, E., Iglesias Tepec, H. (2022). The positive relationship between Indigenous language use and community-based well-being in four Nahua ethnic groups in Mexico. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 28(1), 132-143.
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- Nettle, Daniel, and Suzanne Romaine. 2000. *Vanishing voices the extinction of the world's languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Session length: Full day

Presentation format: virtual/hybrid

Presentation length: 30 minutes (20 min for presentation, 10 min for questions).

Estimated number of presenters: up to 12 papers in total

Convenors:

- Prof. Justyna Olko

Professor in the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” at the University of Warsaw and director of its Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity. She specializes in ethnohistory, sociolinguistics, contact linguistics, language endangerment and revitalization as well as decolonizing research practices, with a focus on Nahua language and culture. Olko is involved in the revitalization of Nahuatl and works with researchers and activists revitalizing endangered languages of ethnic minorities in Poland. Co-author of *Loans in Colonial and Modern Nahuatl. A Contextual Dictionary* (2020), co-editor and co-author of *Dialogue with Europe, Dialogue with the Past. Colonial Nahua and Quechua Elites in Their Own Words* (2018) and *Revitalizing Endangered Languages. A Practical Guide* (2021). A recipient of Starting and Consolidator Grants from the European Research Council (*Europe and America in Contact*, 2012-2017; *Multilingual worlds – neglected histories*, 2021-2026). Olko is a member of the Polish National Science Center Council (2018-2022) and 2020 winner of the Falling Walls Science Breakthrough of the Year in social sciences and humanities.

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- **Dr. Katarzyna Wojtylak**

Postdoc at the University of Warsaw. She works on multilingualism, language contact and relationships between the zones in the world with the highest concentrations of both biodiversity and linguistic and cultural diversity. She specializes in the typology of languages of Northwest Amazonia, especially the Witotoan language family.

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Pre-selected: 9 speakers

- Sunyoung Ahn (University of Manitoba)
- Alexandra Aikhenvald, Central Queensland University, Cairns, Australia
- Charles Bond Chang, Boston University
- Szymon Gruda, University of Warsaw
- Justyna Majerska-Sznajder, University of Warsaw & Association “Wilamowianie”
- Joanna Maryniak, University of Warsaw
- Justyna Olko, University of Warsaw
- George Saad, Palacky, University, Olomouc, Czech Republic
- Katarzyna Wojtylak, University of Warsaw

Solicited through an open call: 4 speakers

Special requirements for technical needs:

Connectivity and platform for remote presentations and discussions.

Deliverables:

As an expected outcome of this workshop, we plan to publish a special journal issue or an edited volume.

Preliminary list of speakers:

1. **Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald** (Jawun Centre for Indigenous Health Equity Research, Central Queensland University, a.aikhenvald@cqu.edu.au)
2. **Charles B. Chang** (Boston University) & **Sunyoung Ahn** (University of Manitoba)
3. **Szymon Gruda & Justyna Olko** (Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw)
4. **Justyna Majerska-Sznajder** (Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw; Association “Wilamowianie”; majerska.jm@al.uw.edu.pl)
5. **Joanna Maryniak** (Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw; joanna.maryniak@al.uw.edu.pl)
6. **Justyna Olko** (Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw)
7. **George Saad** (University, Olomouc, Czech Republic)
8. **Katarzyna I. Wojtylak** (University of Warsaw)