

Unsettling multilingualism: insights from non-polyglossic communities around the globe

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Research in collaboration with communities where many small endogenous languages are spoken has unsettled existing understandings of multilingualism, challenging the notion that stable societal multilingualism relies on polyglossia. These communities, located all around the world, are themselves being unsettled and reshaped by colonisation, globalisation and mobility. Their language ecologies are in flux, calling for approaches that look back to long-standing multilingual practices and forwards to hopes of a future for threatened languages and their multilingual ecologies. The papers in this panel use ethnographic methods to identify the role of multilingual practices in people's everyday lives and the language ideologies that support high levels of linguistic diversity. These are crucial to understanding how long-standing multilingual practices and ideologies persist despite greater mobility, the influence of newly introduced languages and colonisation in all its forms. Anchoring accounts in the contemporary lives of communities helps to avoid exoticising these little researched kinds of multilingualism.

This panel will draw together research from communities around the world where many languages co-exist within long-standing multilingual ecologies – in Siberia, Cameroon, the Amazon, Papua New Guinea, and northern Australia. The panel will cover a range of interrelated topics: the reconstruction of pre-contact patterns of language use, the nature of contemporary small-scale multilingualisms, explorations of how local ideologies shape language practices, how less well-known kinds of multilingualism shape language change and drive linguistic diversity, and the interactions of small-scale multilingualism with colonisation, changing mobilities, urbanisation and globalisation. Together, the contributions seek to unsettle and truly 'globalise' dominant, polyglossia-centric models of multilingualism, and explore the implications of small-scale multilingualism for theories of language change, language contact and identity.

Keywords: multilingualism ; Indigenous ; endangered ; polyglossia ; language change

1. Introduction

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This paper draws together the main themes that have emerged from work on small-scale, non-polyglossic multilingualism around the world and takes stock of recent developments in this important emerging field of research. We consider in particular the challenges work on small-scale multilingualism poses to dominant polyglossia-centric models of multilingualism, the interactions of less well-known forms of multilingualism with language change and language evolution, and how we might strive to decolonise this new field. Finally, we turn our attention to fruitful future directions for work in this area.

Keywords: multilingualism ; Indigenous ; endangered ; polyglossia ; language change

2. Small-scale multilingualism of Papua New Guinea: a Southern New Guinean perspective

Dr. Eri Kashima
University of Helsinki

In this talk I will present a description of the rural language ecology of the Morehead area of southern Papua New Guinea, and situate it alongside hypotheses made about “small-scale multilingualism” in pre-colonial Papua New Guinea. The language situation in pre-colonial New Guinea is thought to have been highly multilingual, in part as a necessity of communication between adjoining communities of low speaker numbers. These views are ostensibly supported by the few descriptions we have of rural Papuan multilingualism from the middle of the twentieth century. Fieldwork based descriptions have, however, become rarer as modernisation erodes these rural language ecologies.

The southern area of Papua New Guinea has managed to retain many aspects of its pre-colonial language ecology due to the relatively recent presence of colonial influence. To this day Morehead is remote from the administrative centre, and only now are some speakers gradually incorporating Tok Pisin into their linguistic repertoires. This makes the Morehead area one of the few places on earth where we can still somewhat study the dynamics of a pre-colonial New Guinea. The data in this talk concerns various aspects of the multilingual language ecology of the Morehead area, and is based on my own fieldwork as well as by colleagues who have worked in the area. Data will include contemporary demographics, qualitative description of multilingual households and speaker repertoires, and emic ideologies and ways of speaking about multilingualism. This talk presents data that are emerging from an under-described part of the world, which goes towards representing New Guinea as another point of comparison to other better-described areas of small-scale and rural multilingualism, such as South America, and Africa.

Keywords: Anthropological Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Language Ideologies, Egalitarian Multilingualism, Papua New Guinea

3. Languages in the social world of indigenous Siberia: evidence from Lower Yenisei

Dr. Olesya Khanina

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This paper focuses on several specific features of language ideologies in the multilingual Lower Yenisei, Siberia. Based on a comprehensive study of the sociolinguistic landscape and its evolution in time over the last century, it points to illuminating parallels between indigenous communities in the Northern Siberia and those elsewhere, in Australia (Merlan 1981, Singer 2018), West Papua (de Vries 2012), Vanuatu (Francois 2012), Amazon (Aikhenvald 2003, Ball 2011), Arizona (Kroskirty 2018), and Africa (Childs et al. 2014). Recurrent patterns attested at the Lower Yenisei, on the one hand, and in (some of) these multilingual speech communities, on the other hand, include (a) shared cultural knowledge and principles of interactions irrespective of particular codes, (b) relational identities and ideologies deemphasizing linguistic contributions to these identities, (c) absence of hierarchical and one-to-one relationships between social units, types of material culture, and languages. Such typological matches are hardly a coincidence, but rather hint to some basic mechanisms of the precolonial sociolinguistic past, strikingly different from what could be expected given the European nationalistic ideologies.

Aikhenvald (2003). Multilingualism and ethnic stereotypes, *Lang. in Society*, 32(1), 1-21.

Ball (2011). Pragmatic multilingualism at the Upper Xingu speech community // Franchetto, (ed.). *Alto Xingu: uma sociedade multilíngue*. Rio de Janeiro, 87-112.

Childs, Good & Mitchell (2014). Beyond the Ancestral Code, *Lang. Document. & Conserv.* 8, 168-191.

de Vries (2012). Speaking of clans, *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang.* 214, 5 – 26.

François (2012). The dynamics of linguistic diversity, *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang.* 214, 85–110.

Kroskirty (2018). On recognizing persistence in the Indigenous language ideologies of multilingualism in two Native American Communities. *Lang. & Comm.* 62, 133–144.

Merlan (1981). Land, language and social identity in Aboriginal Australia. *Mankind Quarterly* 13(2), 133–148.

Singer (2018). A small speech community with many small languages, *Lang. & Comm.* 62, 102–118.

Keywords: Siberia, small-scale multilingualism, language ideologies, language identity, speech community

4. The Lower Kolyma multilingual area

Dr. Maria Pupynina

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Dr. Natalia Aralova

Kazan Federal University (Russia)

In the region of Lower Kolyma (LK), located in North Asia (Northeast of Russia), five unrelated languages are still spoken on a daily basis: Tundra Yukaghir (Yukaghir), Even (Tungusic), Chukchi (Chukotko-Kamchatkan), Yakut (Turkic) and Russian (Indo-European). In the mid-20th century multilingualism became particularly widespread among LK residents. Analyses of historical-sociolinguistic field materials collected in 2018 and historical-ethnographic data have shown that the rise of multilingualism was inadvertently supported by various policies of the Soviet government, especially the 'socialist' economic system (collective farms) and compulsory schooling involving boarding schools. It is usually assumed that the suppression of traditional economies by the Soviet regime was rather destructive for the language and culture of these communities (Forsyth 1992: 283 – 299). However, the same institutions unintentionally created new domains for interethnic communications in the fertile ground of the LK contact zone.

This talk is a sequel to a previous study (Pupynina & Aralova, *forthc.*), which was based on field survey data, including information from a retrospective questionnaire handed out to 84 LK residents. One part of the questionnaire was dedicated to the interviewee's parents and their language repertoires, ethnicity, and level of proficiency. In the present talk we analyze around 200 repertoires of respondents and their parents. Unlike the previous study, the present one takes into account all levels of proficiency, including receptive proficiency. We introduce a 6-level scale of proficiency in each language. This will help to draw a more detailed picture of LK multilingualism involving different ethnicities in the past century.

References:

Forsyth, J. (1992). *A history of the peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pupynina, M. & N. Aralova (*forthc.*) Lower Kolyma multilingualism: Historical setting and sociolinguistic trends. *International Journal of Bilingualism*.

Keywords: Siberian languages, small-scale multilingualism, linguistic repertoire, language proficiency, language shift

5. Multilingualism on the move: small-scale multilingualism and mobility in northern Australia

Dr. Jill Vaughan
University of Melbourne

Against a broader context of critical language loss across Indigenous Australia, in Arnhem Land, northern Australia, dozens of Indigenous languages are still spoken within widening social spheres and new trajectories of mobility. Prior to colonisation, multilingualism was small-scale and non-polyglossic. Reflexes of this system remain robust but are reshaped by broader demographic and socio-political shifts, especially urbanisation and changing patterns of mobility.

This paper considers key features of historical and contemporary multilingualism and mobility centred on Maningrida, a remote regional community in north-central Arnhem Land. This region is characterised by high levels of multilingualism and linguistic diversity, with over a dozen traditional languages from 4 language families spoken alongside newer arrivals like English and Kriol. Circular mobility between sites for cultural, economic and social reasons has long been a part of local life. Contemporary 'hyper-mobility essential to modern living' (Altman & Hinkson 2007) in the region, however, is characterised by 'orbiting diasporas' between 'magnet communities' (Burke 2018). These shifts in mobility have engendered changing interactions with ancestral lands and led to new kinds of language practices.

Drawing on recent data from collaborative ethnographic work, language biography interviews, and language documentation in the Maningrida region and in Darwin (northern Australia's major urban centre), this paper traces key phases in the region's socio-demographic history and concomitant changes in its multilingual ecology. I show that early post-colonial incursions in fact intensified certain formations of small-scale multilingualism, while contemporary shifts have produced differing patterns of multilingualisms (both polyglossic and non-polyglossic) across a broadly triangular mobility network, taking in Maningrida, Darwin, and small outstation communities.

Altman, Jon, & Hinkson, Melinda. (2007). Mobility and Modernity in Arnhem Land: The Social Universe of Kuninjku Trucks. *Journal of Material Culture*, 12(2), 181–203.

Burke, Paul. (2018). An Australian Indigenous diaspora: Warlpiri matriarchs and the refashioning of tradition. *Berghahn*.

Keywords: multilingualism; Indigenous Australia; mobility; polyglossia; language ecology

6. Changing differently? The outcomes of multilingualism in coastal west Arnhem land

Dr. Ruth Singer
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Regions where people speak many small languages may also be home to many language families such as Arnhem land in northern Australia. Typologically unusual kinds of language change are also attested from these areas (Epps 2020; Pakendorf 2019). This talk compares the different outcomes of contact between Kunbarlang and Kunwinjku (Gunwinyguan family) and Mawng (Iwaidjan family). Since the languages are spoken on bordering clan estates, we might expect equal interaction between all three languages. However, while Kunbarlang and Mawng share a number of unusual grammatical constructions and some lexical material, much less is shared between Mawng and Kunwinjku and mainly lexical material. It is argued that long-term, symmetrical relations between Mawng and Kunbarlang clans enabled extensive borrowing. Relations between Mawng and Kunwinjku speaking clans, on the other hand, were less symmetrical as Kunwinjku is part of the larger Bininj Kunwok dialect group which has the effect of reducing bilingualism among Kunwinjku speakers and limiting the impact of contact with any one group. In addition, marriages may have been less common between saltwater (coastal) Kunbarlang and Mawng people and freshwater (inland) Kunwinjku people. The diverse outcomes of contact between Australian Indigenous languages has been noted (Harvey 2011). Shifting alliances between clans lead to differences in patterns of multilingualism and change altering the outcomes of language change.

Epps, Patience. 2020. Amazonian linguistic diversity and its sociocultural correlates. In Mily Crevels & Peter Muysken (eds.), *Language Dispersal, Diversification, and Contact: A Global Perspective*, 275–290. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, Mark. 2011. Lexical change in pre-colonial Australia. *Diachronica* 28(3). 345–381.

Pakendorf, Brigitte. 2019. Direct copying of inflectional paradigms: Evidence from Lamunkhin Even. *Language*. *Linguistic Society of America* 95(3). E364–e380.

Keywords: language change ; multilingualism ; Indigenous Australian languages ; language contact ; linguistic diversity

7. Toward an interactional approach to multilingualism: insights from the Vaupés

Dr. Kristine Stenzel
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

Dr. Nicholas Williams
University of Postdam

Small-scale multilingualism has been described as intrinsically different from more well-known polyglossic forms of multilingualism in contemporary urban/globalized societies. In this talk, we take a closer look at one of the better-known cases of small-scale multilingualism: the Vaupés region of northwest Amazonia. In this highly multilingual society, individuals are commonly proficient in multiple indigenous and colonial (now national) languages. Longstanding norms of exogamous marriages, political equilibrium among groups, and language ideology have traditionally supported this individual polylingualism and societal multilingualism. Local ideologies promote one's father's language as the primary marker of social identity and ostensibly mandate loyalty to this patriline. Indeed, some ethnographic accounts argue that such patriline-based essentialist ideologies are key in shaping some observed linguistic practices, including avoidance of lexical borrowing and restrained displays of multilingual prowess. Nevertheless, little is known about the actual use of multiple languages in everyday interaction, a gap our work seeks to address. We draw on a large corpus of video recordings of informal, everyday interaction collected from 2017-2019, focusing on cases of code-switching and accommodation, long presumed to be either unattested or highly dispreferred. We present evidence for a wider range of multilingual practices in the Vaupés than previously claimed, demonstrating the everyday accomplishment of multilingualism in social interaction. Our analysis and findings call into question the bifurcation of multilingualism into 'small-scale' and 'modern'(?)/'non-small-scale' (?) types. Instead, we argue for the development of a typology of multilingualisms based on empirical analysis of actual multilingual practices in everyday life. Ultimately, the question of how different so-called small-scale or indigenous multilingualisms are from the better-studied polyglossic models is an empirical one, dependent on documentation of everyday interaction in a wide range of multilingual settings and comparative interactional analysis.

Keywords: multilingualism, language ideology, north-west Amazonia, interactional analysis, language documentation

8. Negotiating identities in contexts of small-scale multilingualism: focus on relational identity

Dr. Pierpaolo Di Carlo
University at Buffalo SUNY

Findings from recent works focused on hitherto under-researched contexts of small-scale multilingualism appear to problematize some key (and tacit) assumptions underpinning existing scholarly paradigms on both multilingualism and “language and identity”. One such tacit assumption concerns the relative importance that community-wide abstract cultural values as opposed to individual-based concrete interpersonal relations have in the construction of language ideologies influencing multilingual behaviors.

Roughly speaking, we normally see abstract factors—such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation, and social status—used in studies of multilingualism to understand the kinds of identities a speaker may construct. What is seldom recalled is that these factors are categorical features allowing the construction of one main type of identity, i.e. categorical identity, which is identity through membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical, and therefore abstract, features. Even influent frameworks used in the study of “language and identity” have privileged looking at categorical identities and downplayed the other major type of identity documented, i.e. relational identity, which is identity through position within a given relational web, be it based on kinship or on other particular social institutions.

In this paper, I will illustrate how the emphasis on categorical identities is a reality of the western mindset (and of western societies) and should not be taken as a universally valid interpretive device. I will also provide examples clarifying that (i) the interplay between relational and categorical identities is key for understanding small-scale multilingualisms and that (ii) a more fine-grained knowledge of relation-based phenomena might be a prerequisite for a globalized sociolinguistics.

Keywords: sociolinguistic language documentation, ethnography, rural African multilingualism

9. Discussion

Dr. Jenny L. Davis

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

The discussant will provide commentary on the papers presented in the panel, drawing on their expertise in Linguistic Anthropology and Indigenous Studies. This will include suggestions for how understandings from linguistic anthropology could further inform research on non-polyglossic multilingualism and ideas for decolonising this fairly new and growing field of research.

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