Language and Identity in a Multilingual, Migrating World

A symposium jointly sponsored by the Pike Center for Integrative Scholarship and the SIL MUSE task force (Multilingualism, Urbanization and Scripture Engagement), to be held in conjunction with SIL’s International Language Assessment Conference (ILAC), 9–16 May 2018, Penang, Malaysia.

Call for Papers

Issues of language and identity can make or break any kind of development project—in large part because they determine the degree of access to new information, ideas and behavior, but also because they influence a community’s willingness and desire to make any kind of change in the first place. Failure to take these concepts into account can result in irrelevant projects, unused products, programs without impact, and lost opportunities.

The relationship between language and identity is complex and varied—and even more so in a highly multilingual, massively migrating world. Boundaries blur, sometimes to the point of invisibility, and hybrid languages and identities result. How can we best understand and describe multilingual individuals and communities and their complex identities? What kinds of language varieties and behaviors characterize multilingual, mobile communities, and what kinds of language-related interventions might best serve them? How does the picture change for those in the minority, especially in settings where a specific identity is associated with marginalized roles in a broader society? Migration results from both voluntary and involuntary forces, whether the movement is to nearby urban centers, cross-border refugee camps, or economic opportunities on the other side of the globe. How do these kinds of forces impact issues of language and identity?

Topics of Interest

Papers are invited which summarize and synthesize relevant research that is already published, propose models for understanding and describing multilingualism and identity, or offer new case studies of particular multilingual situations. Papers may address, but are not limited to, any of the following topics:

- Shifting language, shifting identity
  How does identity shift relate to language shift? When does identity shift follow language shift versus language shift follow identity shift?
• Language and personal identity
  How do the languages a person uses reflect or define their identity? What are positive versus negative effects that attitudes toward language can have on identity?

• Language and group identity
  What is the role of language in forming the identity of an ethnic group? Why do some groups seem to shift languages and identity relatively effortlessly while others experience upheaval and trauma in the process? How can we better explain the management and manipulation of multiple identities?

• Language of the heart
  To what extent can a “language of the heart” be defined? How does it relate to identity? To understanding? How relevant is the concept in various kinds of multilingual settings? How is it related to language(s) of the home or language(s) of learning?

• Language and urbanization
  How are matters of language and identity impacted by the large scale migration to urban centers that are happening, especially in Africa, Asia and the Americas today? How can language varieties and situations in urban settings best be discovered and described, and how are they related to the formation of new identities?

• Language communities in diaspora
  What are the implications for language and identity when users of a language leave the homeland? How are language and identity transmitted to the next generation? How connected do diaspora communities remain, and what kinds of behaviors and needs characterize diaspora communities in different locales and at different stages?

• Language and refugees
  What particular language and identity issues confront refugees, and how do they face particular challenges and opportunities? What kind of language vitality can be expected, and what kind of language interventions would be most appropriate to address felt needs of refugee communities?

• Instrumental, sentimental and other uses of language
  To what extent do differing motivations for language choice impact actual patterns of use, in the short and longer term? What implications are there for effective
language use in different domains, such as education, commerce, government, religion?

● Profiles of multilingualism for individuals and communities
  What are the basic questions to be asked (and answered) in order to provide meaningful descriptions of the configuration of language functions and identities for multilingual individuals and/or communities? What case studies do we have that address these questions?

● Literacy, orality and multilingualism
  How does multilingualism interact with issues of literacy and orality? What makes for sustainable literacy in a local language? Should sustainable literacy/orality be a goal for every language in a community’s repertoire?

Format of the symposium
Our funding allows us to pay the expenses for 10 to 12 authors to present their work at the symposium. This will cover the costs of travel and lodging (including two meals per day) for the duration of ILAC. As a presenter you will be expected to write and submit a full paper in advance of the event so that the Pike Center can use its agile publishing platform to make preliminary proceedings available to all conference participants. The symposium will be conducted as a series of plenary sessions within the larger ILAC conference. The time within the symposium will be more or less equally divided between presentation of the papers and discussion by all the participants. Authors will then be expected to take the resulting peer review and revise their paper for the final proceedings.

Instructions for authors
The deadline for submitting a proposal is 1 December 2017. Submit by emailing a DOCX, PDF, or the URL of a shared Google Doc to steve_quakenbush@sil.org and gary_simons@sil.org.

The submission should be an extended abstract of around 1,000 words (with no maximum limit). An organizing committee will review all of the submissions and select the ones that best fit the theme and that show the most promise for resulting in a well-written paper for the proceedings. Be sure to include a bibliography of the references cited in your extended abstract.

The organizing committee will also provide written feedback that is meant to help in completing the draft for the preliminary proceedings.
Important dates

Deadline for submission: 1 December 2017
Notification of acceptance: 22 December 2017
Deadline for full paper submission: 14 April 2018
Preliminary proceedings available: 1 May 2018
Symposium begins: 9 May 2018
Deadline for revised papers for final proceedings: 30 June 2018

Organizing committee

John Eppele
Maik Gibson
Debbie Hatfield
Paul Lewis
John Ommani
Steve Quakenbush, Co-chair
Gary Simons, Co-chair

For any enquiries, please contact: gary_simons@sil.org