

LDLT5 'Language documentation and linguistic diversity'

**Pre-conference session on small-scale multilingualism and linguistic diversity**

Friday, December 2, 9:00-17:30, room T101 21/22 Russell Square

Convenor: Friederike Lüpke

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*“Small-scale societies [...] are economically self-sufficient, and proudly form the center of their own social universe without needing to defer unduly to more powerful outside groups. Their constructive fostering of variegation – which holds social groupings to a small and manageable size, and keeps outsiders at a suitable distance – is not offset by the need to align their language with large numbers of other people in the world.”*  
(Evans 2010: 14)

The social make up of small-scale multilingual situations, attested across the globe and in all likelihood constituting “the primal human condition” (Evans 2010) that has sustained linguistic diversity for most of human history has started to attract attention in the field of contact linguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistic typology and multilingualism research. Small-scale settings are those settings that pre-date colonialization of and Western influx to the Americas, Oceania, Australia, Asia and Africa, and in parts of these areas continue to thrive despite added layers of polyglossic multilingualism, or that were exported in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade and merged with indigenous practices. Detailed knowledge of all aspects of these settings is crucial for advancing all fields concerned with the interaction of languages in speakers’ brains and interactions and in conventionalized practices in their societies. Since these language ecologies are rapidly changing or vanishing, they deserve to be subject of detailed investigations now.

This pre-conference session brings together speakers working on multilingual settings in different geographical areas with the goal of comparing the social exchange patterns that nurture multilingualism, the linguistic ideologies underpinning them, patterns of multilingual language use and their interaction with polyglossic planes of multilingualism in these constellations. The methods and data needed to grasp the complexity of multilingual language use will receive special attention.

Evans, Nicholas. 2010. *Dying words: Endangered languages and what they have to tell us*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

**Programme**

9:00-10:30	<b>Multilingual regional systems in Amazonia: two contexts in focus</b> Kristine Stenzel (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) Bruna Franchetto (Museu Nacional, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
10:30-11:00	<b>Maroon multilingualism in the Guianas: on the formation of social and geographic language spaces</b> Robert Borges

	(Wydział "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw)
11:00-11:30	Coffee break
11:30-12:15	<b>Multilingual traces and poetic traffic: cultivating and practicing poetry in early modern north India</b>  Francesca Orsini (SOAS University of London)
12:15-13:00	<b>Language choice, ideology and identity in Mengguang, a multilingual village in south-western China</b>  Yingying Mu (SOAS University of London)
13:00-14:00	Lunch break
14:00-15:30	<b>The diversity of diverse: zoom on multilingual regional systems on the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa</b>  Friederike Lüpke, Alexander Cobbinah, Abbie Hantgan and Rachel Watson (Crossroads Project, SOAS University of London)
15:30-16:15	<b>Documenting contexts of multilingualism in Africa. Theory, methods, and tools from an evolving area of study</b>  Pierpaolo Di Carlo (KPAAM-CAM Project, University at Buffalo)
16:15-16:45	Coffee break
16:45-17:30	<b>Perspectives on small-scale multilingualism at Waruwi Community, northern Australia</b>  Ruth Singer (University of Melbourne / Australian National University / SOAS University of London)
17:30-19:00	Drinks reception

### Abstracts (in order of appearance in the programme)

#### Multilingual regional systems in Amazonia: two contexts in focus

Kristine Stenzel (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) & Bruna Franchetto (Museu Nacional, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)

From the Gran Chaco of Bolivia-Paraguay-Argentina to the southern Guianas, lowland South America still is home to a number of distinct and highly multilingual areas. Our talks will profile two of the most well-known regional systems: the Upper Xingu in central Brazil and the Upper Rio Negro in the Brazil-Colombia borderlands, highlighting the unique characteristics of each as well as providing a comparative perspective.

The Upper Xingu regional system is located in the heart of Brazil and the state of Mato Grosso and is composed of ten ethnic groups speaking languages of the Carib, Arawak, and Tupi-Guaraní families, alongside the isolate Trumai. **Bruna Franchetto** discusses the Upper Xingu system, beginning with its prehistorical and historical genesis and then moving on to some of its defining features, including the historical and functional

lack of a lingua franca. Features of *micro*-level multilingualism involving dialect diversity, as compared to *macro*-level multilingualism involving interaction between groups speaking languages with different genetic origins will also be analyzed and illustrated with short videos showing multilingualism in ritual events (ceremonial dialogs and songs) and in everyday interaction. The final part of the talk offers considerations on the Xinguan dialectic between, on the one hand, an ideology of linguistic purism and endogamy, with implications for language use in public and private spheres and impact on matrimonial practices, and, on the other, the notion of *tetsualü* — ‘mixed languages’ and ‘mixed people’ as understood in contemporary perspective.

Moving to northwestern Amazonia, **Kristine Stenzel** discusses the Upper Rio Negro multilingual system, composed of over twenty-five ethnic groups, speakers of East Tukano, Arawak, Nadahup, and Kakuani languages, in addition to Nheengatú (a widespread lingua franca of Tupi-Guarani origin transported to the region in the early eighteenth century). Following a general introduction, the talk outlines traditional features of the system that contribute to establishing and maintaining multilingualism at regional, community, familial, and individual levels. These include longstanding exchange relations involving ritualized trade of material goods, exogamic marriage networks, regional political alliances, and shared cultural practices. At the same time, regional language ideologies bolster a fundamental language-social identity link and impose norms of linguistic etiquette—believed to counteract forces of convergence through strict control of linguistic behavior in keeping with notions of linguistic loyalty and purity. The talk concludes with observations from recent data analysis of multilingual speech that *differs* from the presumed norms and challenging us to explore multilingualism in the realm of everyday interaction.

#### **Maroon multilingualism in the Guianas: on the formation of social and geographic language spaces**

Robert Borges (Wydział “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw)

Surinamese Maroons are typically multilingual and can be found all over Suriname and French Guiana. Commonly, a Maroon would speak one or more Maroon creoles, Sranan, Dutch and/or French, and depending on an individual’s circumstances other regional languages might have place in his/her repertoire, such as Brazilian Portuguese, Sarnami, Guianese Creole, Guyanese Creole, Haitian, or others.

As descendants of runaway plantation slaves who fled their captivity, taking incipient creole varieties with them as they established independent communities in the forests outside the plantation area, the social praxis that fosters multilingualism has been present in Maroon societies since their inception. In the period immediately following their escapes, Maroons maintained “clandestine” contact with plantations, which consisted of overt raids on the plantations as well as covert trade with plantation slaves in order to acquire goods, like metalwares and foodstuffs, as well as new recruits for their group. Given the risks of contact with plantations, such expeditions would often remain away from their villages for many months in an effort to keep villages from being discovered. The pattern continued following peace treaties in the 1760’s between some Maroon groups and the colonial authorities, when many Maroons opted to stay long periods away from the villages in order to participate in the cash economy. These individuals were in contact with speakers of a variety of other languages for the duration of their work stay – in the multilingual plantation setting, in the coastal (peri-)urban areas, and in mining operations.

Circular migrations continue to be a normative pattern of social exchange into the 21st century for a variety of economic, educational, and social reasons, further cultivated by recent historical events, most importantly, the construction of the Afobaka dam and the Binnenlandse Oorlog (civil war), which displaced tens of thousands of Maroons, creating a more permanent urban Maroon population, and dispersed a huge number of Maroons to French Guiana and the Netherlands. Today, despite commonly held linguistic ideologies that would suggest a rather strict triglossic setting (Dutch: official contexts. Sranan: interethnic communication. Group language: in-group communication), language choice appears to be largely governed

by a complex set of social factors that go beyond notions of glossic notions of high language vs low language or a strict language to ethnicity mapping, among them, both geographic and social space, interlocutor goals and “face” maintenance, and the genre of given speech acts.

In this talk, I will discuss these historical social developments relating to Surinamese Maroons and Maroon languages in Suriname and French Guiana, existing perspectives on language ideologies and current understandings of multilingual practice in Suriname in general and among Maroons, and possible strategies for studying the complexities of multilingual behavior in this setting and others like it.

### **Multilingual traces and poetic traffic: cultivating and practicing poetry in early modern north India**

Francesca Orsini (SOAS University of London)

Education in early modern north India often meant acquiring several languages, and the way to learn them was to read and memorize literary classics. Language learning and literary cultivation went hand in hand as part of education. But literary tastes were shaped also through exposure to aural recitation—and particularly song-poems in the north Indian vernacular (names simply “Indian”, *hindī*, in Persian sources and “language”, *bhakha*, in non-Persian ones) were popular across a wide range of audiences, from courtly Sultanate and Mughal *milieux* to Sufi hospices, provincial patrons and literati, devotional singing and festivals.

This means that while actual multilingual collections are hard to find give the strict protocols governing the collection and memorialization of Persian literature, *traces* of multilingual enjoyment are many. In textual terms, this means that the evidence for this poetic traffic is to be found largely not through *interlingual translation* but through either (a) the cultivation of parallel poetic tastes, (b) the absorption of tropes, keywords, “nuggets of language” as specific poetic registers within the same language; (c) mixed-language poetry. This takes us away from models of “borrowing” and strong intentionality to a more everyday understanding of what doing poetry and addressing audiences in a multilingual society and polyvocal literary culture entailed.

### **Language choice, ideology and identity in Mengguang, a multilingual village in south-western China**

Yingying Mu (SOAS, University of London)

This talk presents research on language use in the linguistically diverse region of South-Western Yunnan, the People’s Republic of China. It investigates language use in a multilingual village and asks how the various languages in people’s repertoire relate to each other.

The talk also explores how people’s language ideologies affect their language choice and defines the relationship between their language choice and identity. The findings are based primarily on nine-month fieldwork conducted in Mengguang, a village in Mangshi County of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture on the borders of China and Burma/Myanmar’s Kachin State.

### **The diversity of diverse: zoom on multilingual regional systems on the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa**

Friederike Lüpke, Alexander Cobbinah, Abbie Hantgan and Rachel Watson (Crossroads Project, SOAS University of London)

The ongoing Crossroads project investigates multilingualism in the Casamance region of Senegal, which belongs to the geographical sphere of the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa. This refuges zone at the fringe of larger state formations is notable for its high degree of linguistic diversity. Small languages, nominally either village-based or spoken in polities of a group of villages, dominate this fragmented landscape situated on the sunken coastline of the Atlantic, with tidal rivers and creeks crisscrossing its marshlands that harbour tsetse flies and made its inland area until very recently impenetrable to most invaders, including French colonial

administrators. Due to this position at the fringes of larger empires and at the margin of the postcolonial states that succeeded them, not only small groups speaking small languages, but also very diverse multilingual configurations that are very similar to precolonial patterns are attested there. Multilingual settings were and remain nurtured by social needs for alliance and exchange that had changing motivations and ranged from the need to strengthen bonds through marriage networks and child fostering exchanges to integration and othering of strangers for protection against and involuntary participation in the transatlantic slave trade that started when Portuguese vessels started to sail down the major rivers. In addition to the local and regional constellations shaped by the region's topography and history, inhabitants of the area now take part in other planes of language interaction at the national level and within the wider Senegambian region, where three different colonial languages, and various languages of wider communication add more layers of multilingualism.

Until very recently, the descriptive knowledge of languages of this region was very scarce, and research on rural multilingualism there is in its infancy. Our research concentrates on two focal areas. The first area is composed of two villages and a larger polity consisting of 12 villages, with each of these three units having their own patrimonial language. The other area comprises ca. 20 villages that do not form a political unit but are united by having the same patrimonial language. Despite being only thirty odd kilometres apart from each other, these two zones exhibit great differences regarding the multilingual makeup and regional exchange systems in which they participate. In addition, the villages themselves are internally complex, with different wards and households displaying great diversity at the micro level. Zooming down to the personal level even further increases the diversity of multilingual patterns, revealing a complex mix of repertoires that can contain more than twenty named languages.

This talk seeks to arrive at first generalisations on the nature of diversity emerging from our first exploration of sociolinguistic data, participant observation and records of actual language use. We investigate which wider factors can account for differences in multilingual configurations, and which of these we can only ascribe to personal trajectories and concomitant linguistic biographies. At the same time we use our data and methods for a reflection on which approaches are needed to grasp the complexity of settings like ours and what our findings can contribute to multilingualism research and contact linguistics.

#### **Documenting contexts of multilingualism in Africa. Theory, methods, and tools from an evolving area of study**

Pierpaolo Di Carlo (KPAAM-CAM Project, University at Buffalo)

It was 1982 when, in a paper consecrated to the exploration of individual multilingualism in rural as opposed to urban Kenya, Carol Myers-Scotton discovered that all but 6% of her rural respondents were bilingual in some other language(s), concluding that "the amount of bilingualism in such a homogeneous community may be one of the most revealing findings of this study, for it shows that simply reporting the 'surface structure' of usage at any point in time may mask the actual parameters of linguistic repertoires" (Myers-Scotton 1982:129). This insight has remained virtually isolated until recent projects, led within the theoretical and methodological framework of language documentation, have entered the scene.

This paper aims (i) to offer a clear understanding of what Myers-Scotton meant by using the term "surface structure" and (ii) to provide concrete examples of how recent language documentation projects are trying to go beyond that surface in the study of small-scale multilingualisms in Africa. The first goal will bring me to review contrastively early as opposed to current studies of multilingualism in Africa in both their epistemologies and methods: I will focus on how widely used concepts such as "identity" and "prestige", if not properly understood in all their implications, may risk to keep research floating on "surface structures" akin to that alluded to by Myers-Scotton's.

The second goal will be achieved through the illustration of two case studies coming from the KPAAM-CAM project (Key Pluridisciplinary Advances on African Multilingualism – CAMeroon) which will exemplify situations in which knowledge of both situational and extra-situational contexts, i.e. ethnographic knowledge, is prerequisite for understanding what kinds of meanings may be encoded via languages in interaction according to culture-specific schemes of language valorization which largely escape those that are often assumed to characterize postcolonial Africa.

The paper will end with a list of research questions and tools which I consider essential in projects focusing on small-scale multilingualisms, hoping this will trigger some discussion about how current and future projects can not only effectively document contexts (including ideologies) in a short-time period or relying on limited multidisciplinary resources, but also make them widely accessible to more “traditional” linguists and sociolinguists.

Reference cited: Myers-Scotton, Carol. 1982. Language use in Kenya: an urban-rural comparison of the Luyia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 34: 121–136.

### **Perspectives on small-scale multilingualism at Warruwi Community, northern Australia**

Ruth Singer (University of Melbourne / Australian National University / SOAS University of London)

At Warruwi Community around ten Indigenous languages from five different language families are used among 400 people. It is unclear why there are so many languages still spoken at Warruwi because elsewhere in Australia linguistic diversity has sharply declined. As speakers of small languages, people at Warruwi have always been highly multilingual. Not only individuals but also households and families are multilingual. Traditional marriage patterns have always woven speakers of many languages into the fabric of families, and contemporary marriages continue to do so.

Various methods have been used to gain perspectives on ideologies and practices associated with multilingualism at Warruwi. These include linguistic biography interviews with children and adults; video-making with young people; recordings of naturalistic conversation, digital ethnography and participant observation. Collaboration with elders and young people at Warruwi as well as with musicologists, anthropologists and other linguists working in the area has been key to the methodology. These collaborations and methodologies have enabled multiple perspectives on the elusive, complex and dynamic subject matter of language use at Warruwi.