

Language policy and practices in the Global North and South: Challenges, opportunities and future directions

Date 01/12/2021

Time: 13:00 – 14:30 CET

Dr. Thomas H. Bak, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Language, health and well-being: A neurologist's perspective

Abstract: Until relatively recently, the main overlap between language sciences and medicine was aphasiology: the study of language disorders caused by brain diseases such as stroke or dementia (including the study of language-specific impairments in multilingual patients). However, while the study of potential language changes in healthy ageing and dementia continues to play an important role, recent developments added several new and exciting strands of investigation. One of them is connected with the observation that multilingualism can be associated with a delayed onset of dementia and a better cognitive outcome after stroke. These findings, interpreted in the context of the current concept of cognitive reserve, led to an intensive study of the effects of lifelong multilingualism as well as language learning on cognitive (particularly executive) functions and wellbeing. Language lessons began to be considered as a potentially beneficial intervention in dementia. Another strand of research is the study of language selection and switching in psychotherapy, where multilingual patients and therapists can use language choice as a tool to regulate emotional distance and social interaction. These types of research bring together perspectives of medicine and neuroscience with those of psycho- and sociolinguistics, paving the way for a refreshingly interdisciplinary approach.



Born and raised in Cracow, Poland, Dr. Thomas H Bak studied medicine and worked as a clinician in psychiatry and neurology in Bern, Berlin, Cambridge and Edinburgh. In the years 2010-2018 he was the president of the World Federation of Neurology Research Group on Aphasia, Dementia and Cognitive Disorders (WFN RG ADCD). His main research interest is the relationship between language, brain and mind, with a recent focus on the impact of language learning and multilingualism on cognitive functions across the lifespan and in brain diseases such as dementia and stroke. He has teaching experience in 7 languages and conducts his research in a wide range of populations across the world, from Scotland, through India, to China and Singapore.

Registration link: <https://universiteitleiden.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5Atf-CrrDIpHtTalMQ7CV6Kbm9DRFJtOmPh>

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