

## **Symposium: The value of languages (to their users and communities)**

**Date Wednesday June 5, 2024**

**Place: Lipsius 1.23**

09.00 : Walk in Tea and coffee

09.30: Welcome and Introduction: **Felix K. Ameka**

10.00: **Anne Pauwels**, SOAS, University of London & The University of Melbourne

### **The 'economic' value of maintaining minority languages**

*The views and attitudes of minority language students in Australia and the United Kingdom*

**Abstract:** The debate around the value of maintaining minority languages has been ongoing for a long time with multiple arguments in favour and against. While the cultural, social and emotional values of minority language maintenance is often acknowledged, accepted and sometimes supported by members of the wider community, this is not so much the case when it concerns the 'economic' value of such maintenance. Although various researchers (e.g., Coulmas 1992: Grin, Sfreddo & Vallancourt 2010, Hogan-Brun 2017) have provided credible analyses and evidence regarding the economic or even financial benefits of multilingualism, these tend to carry less weight in convincing minority language members as well as the wider community of the value of language maintenance. In this presentation I discuss the findings of a large survey combined with a small range of in-depth interviews relating to the values of language maintenance, with specific attention to the 'economic' benefits. The participants are tertiary students of minority language backgrounds in Australia and The United Kingdom. These students, given their education and background, have the potential to become important catalysts in the debate about language maintenance. An insight into their views and attitudes may shed some light on the future of minority language maintenance in these and possibly other countries.

### **References**

Coulmas, F. (1992) *Language and the economy*. Oxford : Blackwell.

Grin, F., Sfreddo, C., & Vallancourt, F. (2010) *The economics of the multilingual workplace*. London: Routledge.

Hogan-Brun, G. (2017). *Linguanomics. What is the market potential of multilingualism?* London: Bloomsbury.

11.00: Break

11.15: **Marian Klamer**, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

### **Language and wellbeing in superdiverse Indonesia**

**Abstract:** With more than 700 spoken languages belonging to 32 language families, 18 known isolates and several different sign languages, Indonesia has an extreme diversity of linguistic wealth. This wealth is not spread equally across the nation. In the western half of the country, some of the biggest languages are spoken, with millions of speakers. In contrast, the eastern half hosts 75% of the country's languages, but most of them have fewer than 10,000 speakers, many less than a thousand.

The linguistic ecology also varies considerably across the nation. While Standard Indonesian is the national language taught in schools, for most speakers it is their second, third or fourth language, and many Indonesians have mainly receptive knowledge of this standard variety. For interethnic communication, regional lingua francas, urban vernaculars or local varieties of Malay are often used.

With its 17,000 islands, the diverse linguistic ecologies in Indonesia compare more to a continent than a single nation; they are complex, variable, and constantly changing. As a result, it is

hard to find answers to general questions such as how speakers value and use their languages, and the relation between language and poverty. Such questions can only be addressed from the local or regional level upwards - 'local' being interpreted as a village or group of villages, and 'regional' as (part of) an island, or an archipelago of neighbouring small islands.

My presentation ventures into the relationship between the (socio-economic) wellbeing of speakers, multilingualism, language vitality and language shift, focussing on a few regions in Indonesia where I have worked. As a general context, I start with sketching the superdiverse linguistic situation in Indonesia. Next, I discuss the naming of languages (logonyms), and what this might imply for how the notion 'language' is being conceived. Then I focus on the role and value of local languages in certain regions: whether and how they are used in education; the role of literacy in local languages; and whether local minority languages matter economically.

12.15: Break

14.00: **Frieda Steurs**, KU Leuven & Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal, Leiden  
**Language is business. On the value of language in our global world.**

Internationalization, caused by modern transport, globalization of the markets and the use of digital aids such as the internet, is having a huge impact on our current society. As a result, the number of migrants is growing. On the one hand, highly skilled workers are employed in the global economy, causing them to move to other countries. Young students are encouraged to add an international component to their studies by making use of scholarships. On the other hand, many employees with low-level education seek their fortunes in other countries, trying to find a better life by emigrating.

In such an internationally-oriented society it is clear that anybody who is more or less proficient in just one language, their own mother tongue, is excluded from a huge amount of information, from understanding other cultures and from a wider world view.

In my presentation I will analyze the additional value of multilingualism and its effects on the economy. I will also discuss the business community's attitude towards multilingualism. My research deals with the situation in Europe. However, the European challenges on multilingualism, the European Language Equality project and the creation of a European Digital Language Space can be used as a model for other parts of the world.

15.00: Break

15.15: **Nancy C. Kula**, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics.  
**Local languages as drivers of socioeconomic growth in Eastern Africa**

**Abstract:** The linguistic landscapes in contemporary communities in East Africa show that local languages are the stalwart of any economic success. There is a disparity between the way that languages are used in communities and how they are represented in language policies. At least in East Africa, SMEs are the backbone fostering growth and also innovation and, in this sense, ensure local languages play a significant role in economic growth. There is evidence that formal institutions like banks and both governmental and private companies are tapping into this reality in trying to attract business. There is an opportunity to change the tide so that the onus is on big conglomerates to engage with communities through their local languages for them to remain sustainable. This paper takes the optimistic view that the power is already with the community and there is a growing trend that their languages are the lever to transform the patterns of operation of the formal sector.

16.15 **General Discussion and Conclusions**

17.15: **Closing**