

Minority Languages & Cognitive Linguistics: towards a two-way relationship

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Studies of minority languages (both signed and spoken) have not only played a significant role in the inception of Cognitive Linguistics (CL) four decades ago, but have continuously provided researchers with unique insights into the study of language ever since (Rice, 2017). The 'preconception-altering' fieldwork experience of linguists, and the cross-linguistic perspective that comes with it, has indeed been one of the most fertile sources of inspiration for contributions to CL frameworks. Many of the most prominent figures in cognitive linguistics have tapped into the diversity of the world's languages to develop models, theories and methods to better understand language as a dependent cognitive faculty in a variety of domains of inquiry. A far from exhaustive list includes: research on spatial semantics and cognition, lexical categorization, polysemy, event representation and semantic typology, the interface of syntax and semantics, and so on. In sum, studies of minority languages have been pivotal to CL. But what can CL do for Minority Language communities? The UNESCO reported in 2010 that 2,700 of the world's 6,700 languages, each carrying generations of worldviews and cultural traditions, are at risk of extinction. This is certainly tragic for modern social sciences scholarship, but more importantly, it threatens the linguistic and cultural heritage of minority language communities around the world. With 2019 declared the International Year of Indigenous Languages, the time is ripe not only to celebrate how this rich cultural heritage has contributed to cognitive linguistics, but also to consider how cognitive linguists can support indigenous and other minority language communities in retaining the use of their languages into the future.

In this theme session, we bring together researchers with experience in the study of minority languages from a CL perspective who can effectively contribute to a discussion of the path to a more balanced two-way collaboration between (indigenous and non-indigenous, deaf and hearing) cognitive linguists and signed and spoken language communities. The theme session as a whole will address the two following questions and aims to make concrete proposals to improve the two-way relationships between CL & ML communities:

- How can the study of minority languages illuminate and enrich the study of language from a cognitive linguistic perspective?
- How can minority languages and communities benefit from the cognitive linguistics enterprise? Especially in cases where the cognitive linguist's expertise is more specific than the broad knowledge required for more 'standard' revitalization and maintenance practices.

References

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