



Writing Around the World - Contact and Conflict

Prof. Brendan WEEKES

The University of Hong Kong

Date: February 09, 2021 (Tuesday)

Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)

***Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM**

Registration Deadline:

12:00nn of 07 February 2021 (Sunday) – Hong Kong Time

The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 08 February 2021



Prior registration is required

Abstract

The UN General Assembly declared 2019 as the Year of Endangered Languages resulting in the proclamation of the newly endorsed Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032). According to UNESCO, at least 2500+ spoken languages are vulnerable or extinct. Ten (Chinese, English, Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, Japanese and French) are "linguistic hegemons" - each having at least 100 million speakers and accounting for over 51 percent of the global population. Half of these are written with an alphabet (including Cyrillic) and half are not. For the non-alphabetic group, native speakers read and write in a logographic (e.g. Chinese) or a syllabic writing system (e.g. Devanagari) or both (e.g. Japanese). In the other nearly 6000 languages that are spoken by less than one million people, Latin, Arabic and Chinese writing systems dominate. Multi-literacy is a feature of education in Asia (Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore). In the 21st century, access to social media and policies on better literacy will deliver more multi-literate speakers. Growth in multi-literacy brings new and old questions to the foreground. Multi-literacy is ancient (e.g. the Rosetta Stone) due to multilingual spoken language contact. In the coming century, 'digital citizenship' will be a grand challenge as access to global networks becomes necessary for new opportunities and potentially produces barriers for others. Although documentation of multi-literate speakers is not news in linguistics (philology and sociolinguistics) it is not prominent in global education policy as yet, with programmes to increase literacy reserved for the "hegascripts" e.g. English. Neglecting global diversity in writing systems in developing and developed countries risks inequalities if speakers of a minority language are required to become literate in a non-native language e.g. indigenous peoples.

Speaker

Professor Weekes is Foundation Chair in Communication Science at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and Director of the Laboratory for Communication Science also at HKU. Professor Weekes is an internationally recognized expert in the field of language and cognitive processing in speakers who have communication disorders as well as the application of cognitive neuroscience methods to the diagnosis and treatment of language impairment. He is on the editorial boards of *Aphasiology*, *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *Languages*, *Language Science*, and *Psicologia* reflecting his interests in communication disorders and experimental psychology in different languages. He has also served on expert panels for the Australian Research Council, British Academy, BBSRC, the Economic and Social Research Council, MultiLing at the University of Oslo, Research Grants Council Hong Kong, Royal Society, UK Medical Research Council and the National Science Foundation, USA. He is a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne and currently a Visitor in Experimental Psychology at the University of Cambridge and was Ambassador for UNESCO (2019).

All are Welcome

Enquiries

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