

Pieter Muysken (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

Language contact research: Three challenges and opportunities

Language contact research now has a history of over 60 years, starting with the seminal publications by Weinreich and Haugen in the 1950s, and its trajectory has been extremely successful in academic terms. It has diversified into a large number of subfields, ranging from neuro-imaging research of the multilingual brain to political discourse analysis in minority-dominant language competitions, via creole studies, code-switching, and linguistic area studies. It's very success also poses at least three challenges, however. The first challenge is unification. There is no need, of course, for all language contact specialists to talk to each other all the time, but extreme fragmentation makes people lose sight of common research questions and results that go beyond a sub-discipline. The second challenge is that of external boundaries. Since the notion of a language has become more and more multiplex and variable, it is hard to see, sometimes, where language contact studies begin and 'non-contact' developmental linguistic studies end. The third challenge comes from the fact that, as the language sciences are discovering both the complexities of and the regularities underlying multilingual practices, in many social and political constellations all over the world monolingual models of language behaviour are taken as the norm, with old nationalisms blending with new mono-ethnic conceptions of the human space.