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Minoritized Language and Artistic Materiality: The Role of Creative Expression in Valorizing and Legitimizing Marginalized Varieties

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS
(in the order of appearance)

Monday, June 24

Lucija Šimičić, University of Zadar: *Artistic performance and language maintenance among Arbanasi of Zadar (Croatia) and Na-našo/-u speakers (Italy)*

In many minoritized communities various forms of artistic expression function as one of the pivotal if not last resorts of identity expression, and a local language as an indispensable element in such endeavors. However, language vitality can influence the forms of art preferred by a community and the amount they rely on minoritized language resources. The aim of the present study is to explore the format and role of a local minority language in different artistic activities in two endangered language communities: the Arbanasi of Zadar and the Molise Croatian community or Na-našo/-u speakers in Italy. Despite many similarities, they differ in terms of linguistic vitality. While cultural performance represents one of the central spaces for language identity work in both, there are significant differences in the way a local language is used and rendered visible in the two. In both a scarcity of resources calls for the reinvention of the past, leading to hybridity in linguistic and cultural practices, which are sometimes further exploited to enhance the visibility of the community in a broader social context.

Ivana Škevin Rajko, University of Zadar: *The Role of Traditional Cultural Expression, Regattas and Material Culture in Valorizing the Croatian-Čakavian Variety of Betina*

The Betina variety is a local Croatian-Čakavian variety spoken on the island of Murter in central Dalmatia. The influence of Romance languages has left visible traces on the island's vocabulary, just as it has in many other Čakavian varieties of the Eastern Adriatic coast. This influence is mostly present in traditional activities like wooden shipbuilding and sailing in traditional boat gajeta. Lately, because of the alteration and transformation of the culture, Betina variety is losing many of its most salient, mostly Romance, characteristics. This process is leading to a loss of local distinctiveness. The presentation aims to discuss the ways participation in traditional regattas, poems written and performed in dialect, folkloristic expression, reinvention of traditions and finally the material culture displayed in the Museum of wooden shipbuilding contribute to (re)valorization and maintenance of the Croatian-Čakavian variety of Betina.

Katharina Tyran, University of Vienna: *Expressing language and identity through clothing: T-shirts in the Burgenland Croatian Community*

Almost every festival or major event, every folklore group and music band of the Burgenland Croatian community has merchandise products, and most likely it is a T-shirt. Such clothing prominently displays texts and names in local varieties of Burgenland Croatian, a minority language in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia. During my fieldwork in various contexts – and including my experience as an in-group-member of the community – I observed that specifically young people often and consciously wear such shirts. I would like to discuss if we could possibly speak of 'clothscapes' among minority communities and how such clothing practices can be approached from a sociolinguistic perspective, for instance as social indexicality, stance-taking, or practices of enhancing visibility of marginalized languages.

Tuesday, June 25

Miriam Meyerhoff, All Souls College (Oxford): *Practical creativity: Oral history documentation in Vanuatu (SW Pacific)*

Vanuatu (SW Pacific) is home to over 100 Eastern Oceanic languages, many of which are spoken by very small communities. Since 2011, I have been actively working with community members in the village, Hog Harbour (Vüthiev), to document their language, Nkep. Most of the projects have involved a small number of language enthusiasts, but dozens of community members came together in a collaborative creative activity to document oral histories from the 1980s. This paper will discuss how the oral history project took shape, why it was filmed as re-enactments as well as being documented through interviews, how the shared creativity in the community was negotiated, and what the uptake of the final video has been.

Haley De Korne, University of Oslo: *Zapotec will die the day the sun dies: Artistic expression, reclamation, and commodification of Indigenous languages in Mexico*

There is a long history of literary, musical, and visual artistic expression in the Indigenous Isthmus Zapotec community of southern Oaxaca, Mexico. In this paper I will illustrate some of this heritage, and examine the roles that current artists-- including rappers, poets, and designers-- are playing in the reclamation and continued valorization of Isthmus Zapotec language and culture. Examples are drawn from an on-going ethnographic study of language reclamation and activism in Oaxaca, and clearly illustrate the power of artistic expression to influence discourses and ideologies in favor of a minoritized language. Furthermore, I will consider concerns about possible commodification of language and culture that also emerge as Isthmus Zapotec expressions gain recognition in multiple social and economic spheres.

Karl Swinehart, University of Louisville: *Memes, Modernity, and Making Space for Indigenous Languages Online (and Otherwise)*

Speakers of Aymara, an Indigenous language of the Andes, extend their language into the public sphere through the making and sharing of memes online and through webpages dedicated to Aymara language learning. Humor and play are central to these projects, but so too is a concern with making Aymara claims on the universal, the cosmopolitan, on sophistication and the future. This paper draws on interviews with participants in these online fora and close examinations their memes and webpages to argue that these projects disrupt widespread and dominant semiotic ideologies concerning Indigenous languages and colonial epistemological frames for Indigenous knowledge and technology. Rather than understanding epistemological and materialist approaches to decolonization as counterposed, these projects underscore that we cannot separate discourse from the spaces in which it unfolds. Making space online for Aymara is intimately connected to processes which expand the use of Aymara in urban, educational, and professional contexts.

Cecelia Cutler, City University of New York: *Laayli' kuxa'ano'one: Yucatec Maya goes mainstream*

Recent work points to an 'indigenous turn' as Western scientists embrace indigenous ways of knowing, imagining and seeing the world (Dudgeon & Bray 2023). YouTube and other social media outlets have taken notice and carefully track the monetization of indigenous content creators. This paper investigates the effects of contemporary artistic production in Yucatec Maya and how social media audiences take up its extra-propositional meanings. Building on Cru's (2015, 2018, 2023) pioneering work on Yucatec Maya rappers Pat Boy and the ADN Maya Colectivo, this paper looks at one of their tracks that appeared in a major Hollywood blockbuster film (Black Panther: Wakanda Forever, 2022) and the responses of social media users upon hearing Yucatec Maya in the song and in

the film. It considers the emancipatory possibilities of mainstream and social media for promoting indigenous/endangered/marginalized languages and cultures as well as social media's inherent tendency to depoliticize forms of public activism and reproduce the social order (Roberts, 2014: 93).

Wednesday, June 26

Marina Terkourafi, Leiden University: *"Orthography is like a blanket that never quite covers your phonology"*: Cypriot Greek in the age of ChatGPT*

*with a wink to the Dead Poet's Society
(“Truth is like a blanket that always leaves your feet cold.
You push at it, stretch it, it will never be enough.
You kick at it, beat at it, it will never cover any of us.
From the moment we enter crying to the moment we leave dying,
it'll just cover your face, as you wail and cry and scream.”)

Cypriot Greek (CG) uses a number of phonemes that set it apart from how Greek is spoken in the mainland, especially in the capital Athens. Some of these, such as geminates and aspirated voiceless stops, correspond to the historical orthography that Greek normatively adopts (e.g., θάλασσα, κύτταρο, CG άππαρος) more closely than their current (non-geminated, unaspirated) pronunciation in standard Greek. Others, however, such as the palato-alveolar fricatives and affricates [ʃ], [ʒ] and [tʃ], [dʒ], which occur in many everyday CG words, cannot be represented within standard Greek orthography and a number of conventions have developed over the years to capture these sounds of the dialect in print. In this presentation, I provide a brief overview of the solutions proposed at different times and the surrounding (sometimes heated) debates about them, also in the context of debates and controversies about spelling simplification taking place in Greece. I conclude with a short presentation of a creative writing project that took place in Cyprus in 2021-22, which exemplifies how AI-driven non-human agency can create new language realities from the ground up in the context of a debate which seems to have been otherwise depleted of new ideas.

Noémi Fazakas and Blanka Barabás, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania and Eötvös Loránd University: *Lived experiences of multilingualism around a tabletop game: The Forbidden Csángó Island*

Our presentation focuses on the design process and playing sessions of a tabletop game developed as part of a participatory research project among the Moldavian Csángós, a multilingual minority group living in North-East Romania. Local language experts from the Moldavian village of Lészped (Lespezi in Romanian) and university-based participants collaboratively developed the game as a creative and playful form of expression, responding to the ‘call for more embodied and sensory approaches to research’ (Brown 2022, 204) through role-playing and interaction. The meta-purpose of the game was to familiarise the players with some of the language practices of Lészped, specifically, the local greetings. The participants play an active role in ‘saving the Hungarian language’, while the game is designed in such a way that the island can only be rescued if the players engage in local, i.e. multilingual, language practices. The game sessions also included a discussion of the dilemmas surrounding these language practices. This provided an opportunity to express ideologies and emotions around language endangerment and language revitalisation as saving the “Csángó mode of speaking” (Bodó et al. 2017) is the dominant discourse among Hungarians from Hungary and Transylvania, which is closely connected to resistance identities in multilingual contexts.

Bjørn T. Ramberg and Unn Røyneland, University of Oslo: *Writing language into the world: Artistic achievements and the identity of languages*

On October 5th last year it was announced that the author and playwright Jon Fosse was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for 2023. In his first response to the award, he announced that this was also a

prize to his language – the minoritized language Nynorsk. Fosse is the first Nynorsk author to receive the prize. In our presentation we will discuss some functions that literary art may have in the creation, nurturing, enregisterment, and propagation of minoritized varieties. Our principal case is Fosse’s language, the almost 200-year-old minoritized written standard Nynorsk, but we also consider emerging urban multi-ethnolect, still in the process of enregisterment. We will scrutinize the effects of literary artistic production for the emergence and continued existence of these varieties, as well as the roles that they in turn play in the creation of literary art. In particular, we will explore the sense and importance of literary art’s belonging to a language that Fosse recognizes. We suggest that this recognition pertains to the question of the identity of a language, in a way that takes us beyond characterizations of patterns in particular collectives of individual linguistic repertoires. These are indexicalities and dimensions of symbolic capital that belong to the materiality of a language, that which makes literary art possible and which literary art in turn brings into view – and perhaps into being?

Rafael Lomeu Gomes, UiT The Arctic University of Norway: *Countering standard language ideology through minoritised language practices: Creative expression in music and literature in Norway*

Sociolinguistic research has documented, in the past decades, forms and functions of marginalised language varieties commonly associated with youth with immigrant background living in urban centres across Europe. In the Norwegian context, one of these varieties has been referred to as “kebabnorsk” (“Kebab Norwegian”). In this presentation, I outline the different voices in a debate about “kebabnorsk” that took place in 2020 in Norwegian media and frame it within broader discussions in Norwegian society about racialisation processes whereby language is used as proxy for race-based discrimination. Against this backdrop, I discuss the role of creative expression in the resignification, valorisation, and legitimisation of ways of communicating otherwise stigmatised but strategically employed in artistic expression. I focus, particularly, on examples of songs and books of Norwegian artists as cases that counter standard language ideologies and advance the use of minoritised language practices as a liberating act. Such cases can offer a useful vantage point from which to examine the role of language in processes of social differentiation in contexts shaped by immigration and multilingualism where belonging and integration are under constant negotiation.

Thursday, June 27

Lenore A. Grenoble, University of Chicago: *Word Games and Verbal Art in Kalaallisut: Art as Resilience*

The official colonization of Greenland by Denmark continued for almost two centuries, officially beginning in 1721 and ending in 1953. The end of colonization did not bring independence, but rather Greenland was incorporated into Denmark and became increasingly assimilated. One result was that much of traditional Greenland Inuit (or Kalaallit) culture was lost, but because colonization took place without much settlement, the language was maintained. Extensive language shift began only at the official end of the colonial period which brought with it Danish-language education. Still, Kalaallit resisted linguistic assimilation and have maintained transmission to children to the present day. In this presentation I discuss the role of word play in maintaining Inuit culture, arguing that verbal art came to stand in for appropriated and repressed art of all forms, and that engagement in verbal arts in Greenland is an act of resilience and even defiance against colonizing pressure.

Øystein Alexander Vangsnes, UiT The Arctic University of Norway: *Romsa, Bådåddjo and the Sámiification of (Northern) Norway*

In 2011 a motion to include the Northern Norwegian city Tromsø/Romsa in the Sámi Language Administrative Area caused fierce debates and brought to the fore strong anti-Sámi sentiments. In the same year a single bilingual Norwegian/Sámi sign by the main road into another Northern Norwegian city, Bodø/Bådåddjo, was vandalized several times. A decade later, the main football stadium in Tromsø

has been renamed with a Sámi name (Romssa Arena) and the regional electricity company has run a commercial entirely in Sámi. In Bodø, the opening ceremony of the city's year as cultural capital of Europe was in large parts based on Sámi music and artistic expressions. It is difficult to see how the current embracing of Sámi language and culture in the two cities could have happened only a decade ago. How can we understand this swift positive change? This will be the pivotal question I seek to address in my presentation.

Pia Lane, University of Oslo: *Always coming home – cultural endurance as a process of becoming*

Indigenous and minoritised peoples once seemed destined to disappear (Clifford 2013), often as a consequence of colonisation and oppressive policies (Lane 2023). Norway implemented policies targeting its Northern minorities, the Kven and Sámi peoples, which contributed to loss of language and culture. Now young Kven people engage in the reclamation of Kven language and culture, exploring what it means to be Kven through literature, visual arts, handicrafts and theatre. Many insist on the right to self-ascribe to more than one ethnic identity and claim both Kven and Sámi ethnicity. This complex process may evoke a range of emotions from pride to vulnerability, particularly in the face of purist discourses. To shed light on this, I will analyse Instagram posts and a monologue on identity positioning by the Kven theatre. This shows how artistic expressions may confront “the scars of colonisation” (King and Hermes 2014) and also contribute to healing.

Friday, June 28

Kristian Novak, University of Zagreb: *“If we have to founder, let's go down to the sound of fanfare” – on choosing a low-prestige dialect as the language of a novel*

From a linguistic autobiographical and autoethnographic perspective, this presentation delves into the author's literary work, particularly the utilization of Kajkavian dialect, a low-prestige idiom, in his novels spanning the period 2013 to 2023. The presentation will examine the pivotal educational and developmental factors that influenced the creative decisions to employ multiple varieties in the crafting of these prose texts. Additionally, it will explore the intended and perceived functions of these varieties within the prose narratives, as well as the reception of linguistic heterogeneity in the novels and their theatrical adaptations across Croatia and the former Yugoslav republics.

Zvezdana Vrzić, New York University: *Rocking it the Istrian way: Dialect performance and the social meanings of dialect in the lyrics of Istrian singer-songwriters*

This presentation explores the role played by the low-prestige Čakavian (Croatian) dialect, spoken in the multilingual region of Istria in Croatia, in the creative performance of the well-known Istrian singer-songwriters – Franci Blašković and Elis Lovrić. These musicians can be associated with the popular music phenomenon *Ča-val* ‘Ča-wave’ (*ča* ‘what’ indexes the Istrian regional dialect) now more than thirty years old. The novelty of the musicians associated with this phenomenon is that they combine globally popular, modern forms of music (rock, pop, jazz and so on), typically associated with urbanity, with lyrics in the low-prestige dialect, linked to rurality and/or local culture and traditions. While they use the regional dialect, these artists seem to direct their artistic production at an audience that surpasses the regional borders. They produce very different music and use the dialect to construct very different artistic personas. They embody the regional Istrian identity, that has gained much strength in Istria since the 1990s, but express and construct it differently. The presentation will delve into the various social meanings conveyed by the two artists in the dialect.