React locally: How language creation can be a response to global language pressures

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 17 March 2015, 4.00 – 5.30pm
HRC Conference Room, A.D Hope Building #14, ANU

Speaker

Prof Carmel O'Shannessy, University of Michigan

HRC Conference Rm 128, A.D. Hope Building #14, Australian National University

One small Warlpiri community in the Northern Territory has reacted creatively to global pressure from English by incorporating elements of Warlpiri and varieties of English and Kriol systematically in a new way of speaking. The speakers incorporate the source languages into the new code in a pattern rarely seen in the world's languages – by combining noun structure from Warlpiri with verb structure from English and Kriol, and adding structural innovations not found in any of the source languages. The unusual structure is motivated by an interplay of multilingualism, child-directed speech, and peer-group social interactions. This case study shows that a community's response to global pressure can be one of dynamic creativity.

Carmel O'Shannessy is Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Michigan. She completed her PhD in Linguistics at the University of Sydney (Australia) and the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (The Netherlands) in 2007. Within the areas of language contact, endangered languages and language acquisition, her research focuses on the genesis and development of Light Warlpiri, a newly emerged mixed language in north Australia, and documentation of children's bilingualacquisition of Light Warlpiri and Warlpiri. She has been involved with languages in remote Indigenous communities in Australia since 1996, in the areas of bilingual education and her current research.

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