

## ICL 21 8-14 September 2024, Poznań, Poland Workshop Proposal

**Title:** Languages, Work and Social Practices

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**Keywords:** languages, work, social practices, knowledge transmission, sustainable communities

### **Research Question:**

How can languages, language sciences and technologies contribute to the sustainability of work practices and social practices in diverse communities and societies?

### **Description of topic**

There is growing evidence that linguists are seldom called on to contribute to interdisciplinary discourses that address issues related to the sustainability of communities, despite the significance of languages to the realisation of, for example, Sustainable Development Goals (Ezeh and Obiageli 2020, Romaine 2019). Unlike the discipline of economics, linguistics has not yet provided convincing evidence of its relevance to politicians (Vigorous and Mufwene (2020, 2)). At the same time, there is abundant evidence of the interconnectedness between languages, work and social practices, for example linguistic competence and economic success (see Vigorous and Mufwene 2020 and references therein), and the use of local languages in the informal economy in Africa (Djité 2020).

At a time of rapid technological change and increased mobility of workers, either by choice and for political, environmental, or economic reasons, we can turn our attention to the role of languages and language sciences in the sustainability and interconnectedness of work and social practices. As Darkwah and Tsikata have noted, “the evolution of societies has been marked by the changing nature of systems of production and reproduction, manifested in the world of work” (2022: 87). The workshop will explore ways in which work and social practices can be sustained (or threatened) in diverse settings. Communities and societies may include, for example, small agrarian communities, or large multilingual societies. The relationship between work, language and informal or formal economy can also be explored. For example, Djité (2020: 193) describes the relationship between local languages, work (e.g., food crops, transportation, cheap clothing, and services) in the informal economy, and foreign languages, work (e.g., cash crops, extractive industries) and the formal economy in Africa.

This workshop will provide a forum for language scientists to reflect on how, through their research, they could contribute to these discussions. Workshop participants may wish to address this question by showing what has already been done (e.g., in a small community or a large society) or by projecting what could happen in the future (with greater attention to languages and linguistics) in various communities. Examples could include:

- changing work / social practices, including modifications to traditional practices.

- work and social practices that are new to a particular community (e.g., introduced work practices related to changing technologies)
- new work practices resulting from seasonal work or migration.
- language learning in communities, vs formal educational contexts and their impacts on work and social practices.
- cross-species communication in subsistence livelihood practices (e.g., pastoralism, agriculture etc.)
- language-related accompaniments to work/social practices (e.g., games and songs)
- transmission of knowledge and language (e.g., through peer learning, intergenerational transmission of language and work/social practices)
- language, migration, and economy
- language, creative work, and technologies (e.g., music, dance, film, literature)

Sustainable Development Goal 8 aims to promote among others “full and productive employment and decent work for all”. Governments are exhorted to address youth unemployment. As with other global concepts, it is usually assumed that there are universal understandings of such terms. Participants can explore the local understandings of key concepts related to SDG 8 such as decent work or youth (un)employment.

Participants can approach this topic, based on their intimate knowledge of the languages and cultures of diverse communities and societies, and from different linguistic sub-disciplinary perspectives, for example:

- language description and documentation
- conceptual analyses [e.g., of the language of work]
- sociolinguistics
- anthropological linguistics
- language policies
- translation and interpreting

Contributions that reflect collaboration between language scientists and community members will be especially welcome. The workshop will provide a forum for language scientists to propose recommendations that promote the role and potential of linguistics to contribute to national and international discussions about work and social practices.

### References:

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