Language learning, multilingualism and social inclusion

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Abstract: Migration and other aspects of globalization have made many contemporary societies very linguistically diverse. People with a wide range of linguistic repertoires and resources vie for access to economic and social resources such as employment, further training and sustainable livelihoods. In this panel we want to explore the ways and contexts in which linguistic capital is transformed into economic capital in a range of contexts. We are interested in the ways in which identities and ideologies mediate the relationship between linguistic proficiency and non-language outcomes in specific contexts. We expect the panel to make a contribution to an enhanced understanding of the role of language in social exclusion and inequality in multilingual societies and to explore ways to write language into the social inclusion agenda. Specifically, we will invite contributions that focus on the following:

1. Participant ethnographies of language learners (migrants, overseas students, foreign language learners etc.) that explore the relationship between the participants' language learning and their linguistic repertoires and "real world" outcomes such as employment, further training, settlement success, social recognition or sustainable livelihoods.

2. Explorations of language training programs (e.g., private language schools; language settlement programs; community-based language classes; language teaching in schools) and the ways in which they integrate the "real world" – and which perspective on the "real world" – into their language teaching. This could include presentations with a focus on teaching methods (e.g., content-based instruction) or assessment practices and testing regimes related to non-language outcomes.

3. Site ethnographies of multilingual and multicultural workplaces that explore the ways in which organizations are structured and organized on the basis of language proficiency. Our interest is particularly in workplaces in the knowledge and service economy. Sectors with high language needs due to the diversity of both staff and customers such as apparent in the hospitality and tourism industry are particularly relevant to our enquiry. However, we also welcome explorations of the role of linguistic proficiency in less structured and visible employment such as domestic work, care work or the sex industry.