

Global Ethnolinguistic Conflict: An Internet Encyclopedia Project

New York Ballroom West

8:45 – 10:15 AM

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Whether arising through conquest and colonization, immigration, enslavement, or the creation of political states that ignore “natural” ethnic territories, linguistic minorities exist in nearly every nation and territory. Where there are linguistic minorities, one typically finds language conflicts and obstacles to minorities to use their languages freely and without prejudice. In the 21st century, ethnolinguistic factors play an increasingly important role in conflict systems, and must be considered alongside the religious, ideological, economic, environmental, and resource bases of conflicts. This is especially true of “protracted social conflicts.” Ethnic and linguistic nationalism is today resurgent in the face of globalism and centuries’ old ethnolinguistic rivalries. In seeking to provide a fundamental understanding of the issues surrounding ethnolinguistic conflict we apply a “Typology of Language Conflicts”:

- i. **Indigenous minority conflict.** A conflict involving indigenous people and a group that has settled in and appropriated their territory.
- ii. **Geo-political minority conflict.** A linguistic conflict arising due to changed borders.
- iii. **Minorities of migration conflict.** A conflict arising when a group moves into a territory dominated by a linguistically distinct population.
- iv. **Intra-linguistic (dialectal) minority conflict.** Conflicts involving dialect minorities. These are sometimes difficult to identify, since it is sometimes hard to determine whether two groups speak different languages or different varieties of the same language.
- v. **Competition for linguistic dominance conflict.** A case in which two groups each hold sway in some region of a country, and the linguistic conflict is part of a struggle for dominance.

The publication of *Language Conflict and Language Rights: Ethnolinguistic Perspectives on Human Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) has opened the door to the construction of an *Encyclopedia of Global Ethnolinguistic Conflict*, a curated digital source of information about ethnolinguistic conflicts and language rights violations around the world, information not readily available elsewhere. Starting with the few dozen cases presented in the book, this project will be a growing source of information on such conflicts worldwide. Conflict cases will be geo-located, with information about the state/territory of the conflict, the ethnolinguistic parties to it, its history and linguistic background, and relevant language rights issues. Database filters will allow users to compare and contrast conflicts, sorted by conflict type (e.g. indigenous minorities), language family (e.g. Bantu and/or Indo-European languages), or location (e.g. Canada or Burma). The *Encyclopedia* will eventually include several hundred cases, providing useful information to linguists, political scientists, historians, and legal scholars, as well as the general public. Our development plan involves the creation of a prototype by the end of Fall 2018, beta test this resource with USC classes in Spring 2019, and roll out a publicly accessible version of the Encyclopedia at the UC – Davis Summer Linguistic Institute in June-July 2019.

This workshop will (i) situate global ethnolinguistic conflict in the larger context of conflict systems and global conflict analysis, (ii) provide a synopsis of the relevance of linguistics to ethnolinguistic conflict analysis, and (iii) present the conceptualization of the digital encyclopedia, the organization of its database, and the front-end user interface.

Abstracts

Harvey Starr (University of South Carolina)

The nature of contemporary global conflict: language conflict analysis in its larger context

Studies of global social conflict typically draw from sociology, psychology, political science/international relations, and geography, and so ethnolinguistic approaches to such study reach beyond linguistics to the social sciences generally. Post-World

War II international conflict studies were predominantly focused on war between sovereign states. In the 1970s, more scholars stressed reciprocal relationships between domestic and foreign politics. Post-Cold War conflict studies increasingly focus on internationalized domestic conflicts, protracted social conflicts, terrorism, and failed states. Central to this paper's argument, these all typically involve important *sub-national actors* – local ethnic groups, terrorist groups, and pan-national identity groups (e.g. pan-Arabism), which draw upon racial, religious, tribal, or ethnolinguistic identities, singly or in combination. These components of identity are key to understanding social conflict globally and, we argue, language is often ignored or underappreciated in this regard. However, it can be key to understanding inter-group conflict and should be foregrounded.

Stanley Dubinsky (University of South Carolina)

Global conflict through a linguistic lens

“What can linguistic description contribute to an understanding of language conflict and language rights?” Understanding resource-based conflict requires geography, geology, and environmental science. Class and economic conflicts are filtered through economic theory, and political-ideological conflicts require political analysis. Likewise, language conflicts beg linguistic description. The linguistic circumstances of territorially contiguous populations (e.g. Spanish-speaking residents of New Mexico) are distinct from those of migrant minorities (e.g. relatively recent Spanish-speaking migrants to South Carolina). Linguistic description of linguistic (dis)similarity can explain pragmatic issues arising from these conflicts. E.g., Slovakia's language laws served to negatively impact speakers of Hungarian, much more so than speakers of more closely related Czech. Finally, linguistic understanding of varieties is critical for analyzing socio-political aspects language conflict. E.g., Japanese miscategorization of Ryūkyūan as a “dialect” of Japanese played a role in the imposition of Standard Japanese in the Ryūkyū Islands and the suppression of the inhabitants' native language.

Michael A. Gavin (University of South Carolina)

Corpus-based quantitative models for language conflict

A corpus-based model for language conflict study can facilitate (i) description of groups' differential understanding of key concepts, (ii) analysis of discourse participants' perspectives revealed through language use, and (iii) identification of social-media hotspots of ethnolinguistic conflict. Complexities in the topic create methodological problems. These conflicts are multifaceted, not often territorially contiguous, and have many categories of participants. There are many possible document sources and no one corpus type reflects all aspects of the conflict. Further, ethnolinguistic conflicts require multilingual corpora. Identifying meaningful differences in competing groups' conceptualization of conflict entails understanding causes of statistically significant patterns, such as: (i) inequality of access to writing and publication, (ii) grammatical, lexical, and morphological variation, and (iii) variations in concepts and their construal. After outlining design principles, we apply quantitative measures of corpus data into language conflict research and show how such data deepen insights into majority and minority group relations.