
Language News across the World 2024

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Africa

A new South African education law has caused heated debates in this country. The law, signed by President Cyril Ramaphosa, allows regional officials to override school admissions and requires schools to offer instruction in multiple languages in order to combat racial exclusion. Some politicians and activists argue that it threatens Afrikaans-based education, while others associate this language with the legacy of apartheid. This debate highlights ongoing tensions related to language, education and racial inequalities in the complex history of South Africa (*The Guardian*, 15 September 2024).

Asia

The first volume of a new journal, *Geolinguistic Studies: Language Contact, Conflict, Development and Education*, saw the light in Japan¹. It was published by the American Society of Geolinguistics Publications in Tokyo and was devoted to the memory of Wayne Finke, former editor of *Geolinguistics* (New York), who passed away in 2023. The new journal is the successor of the series of volumes *Multilingual Perspectives in Geolinguistics* (2015), *Geolinguistic Studies in Language Contact, Conflict and Development* (2017–2018), *Recent Research in Geolinguistic Ethnography* (2018–2019), and others, edited by Hikaru Kitabayashi. Another journal that follows this tradition is *Journal of Himalayan Geolinguistics*, the first issue of which was published in Nepal in 2023.

Australia

Researchers from the Australian National University in Canberra analyzed the role of islands in language evolution. They pointed out that islands which comprise less than 1% of the inhabited land are home to one-sixth of the world's languages, and 10% are spoken only on islands. It is argued that islands stimulate language diversification, with fewer phonemes in island endemic languages as isolation increases (*Nature Ecology & Evolution*).

¹ *Geolinguistic Studies: Language Contact, Conflict, Development and Education*, vol. 1 (2024), sites.google.com/view/asgpjapan/home/asgp-e-journal/volume1_2024 (accessed 15 September 2024).

North America

A new study at Massachusetts Institute of Technology explored how different languages coexist in a polyglot's brain. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, a group of researchers observed how the language network in the brain responds to stimuli in languages that a polyglot knows to varying degrees of proficiency. The study revealed that the higher the level of competence in a given language, the greater the polyglot's brain activation in response to this language, except for the native one. This study is a continuation of the previous project undertaken in 2021 (*Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 31, no. 1; vol. 34, no. 3).

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Researchers from the University of Michigan looked into how new words spread across the country. They argue that cultural innovations, including vocabulary, are adopted regionally for two main reasons: identity and network. However, these factors play different roles in urban and in rural areas. The study showed that new words have a tendency to spread in cities when people imitate their friends, while in the countryside people use them to express a common identity. As a result, nationwide diffusion of innovative vocabulary requires the interaction of both factors (*njp Complexity*, 1).

Russia

A round table discussion on Polyglottery conducted as part of the conference on Language, Consciousness and Communication: Methodology and Humanities Practices took place in Moscow on April 6. The round table featured talks on language maintenance in multilinguals (Claudia Pellegrini), polyglottery in comparison with sport (Grigory Kazakov), polyglots' strategies in relation to ancient languages (Dina Nikulicheva), and the acquisition of new grammar constructions by polyglots (Yan Aleshkevich-Suslov). It also highlighted the lack of a unified terminology in the field of multilingualism, the focus on fundamental psychological factors in modern research on polyglottery, and the need to develop experimental methods for further study of this phenomenon.

South America

Ckunsá (Kunza), a language declared extinct decades ago, is experiencing a revival among the Lickantay people in Chile. Ilia Reyes Aymani, one of the last speakers, sings to preserve the language, which was traditionally spoken in the Atacama Desert area. In spite of being considered extinct since the 1950s, Ckunsá is now being reintroduced in schools and community meetings. Since 2017, Chilean schools with a significant indigenous student population are required to teach an indigenous language as part of their curriculum. Ckunsá language activists express determination and optimism about keeping their cultural heritage alive (NPR, 11 May 2024).

Western Europe

The world's second master's thesis on polyglottery was defended at Regensburg University of Applied Sciences in Germany. This was Olga Koeva's work *Language Competence and Access to Coping in New-cultural Environments among Polyglots*. The first MA thesis of this kind seems to have been Laia Herlevi's *Polyglot Identities: Cultural Negotiations, Linguistic Ties and Social Belongings of Avid Language Learners* (University of Helsinki, 2020). Both theses examine the socio-cultural aspects of polyglottery.