

Thursday, May 8, 3-4:30 pm (refreshments follow in the lab)
Linguistic Anthro Lab, 340 CRB (Chemistry Research Bldg)

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Cooperation and new models of bilingual education on Corsica

Abstract

This presentation focuses on cooperative pedagogies in a Corsican bilingual school, examining: 1) the processes through which teachers socialize children's participation in cooperative action; 2) the social and communicative norms and values transmitted in cooperative practice and 3) how these models of classroom behavior map onto emerging models of bilingual identity in a context of minority language revitalization. The Freinet School of cooperative pedagogy followed by the teachers in this study emphasizes both individual student agency in the educative process and social rights and obligations connected with collective, democratic life. This articulates with the constraints and goals of Corsican language planning. First of all, it embeds learning the minority language in a social formation that mitigates teacher authority and other forms of hierarchy, thus positioning Corsican in contrast to mainstream experiences of French education. Secondly, with respect to Corsican language practice, good faith effort to learn and to participate in the cooperative structure is given as much value as advanced competence, an important factor in a society in which minority language competence is very uneven. In other words, the cooperative framework values Corsican use without making it a prerequisite for legitimate participation. Finally, cooperative structures of learning link the value and meaning of learning and speaking Corsican with positive experiences of the benefits of collective identity and action. In a context in which the school is the only institution that fully supports children's Corsican language use, this is a potentially crucial way of promoting a process of personal identification with Corsican and corsicanness, and structuring individual motivation to sustain a personal effort learn and maintain the language. These themes are examined in a corpus of recorded "cooperative meetings" with the very youngest children in a school.