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Open letter to the European Research Council: A plea for acknowledging the all-encompassing nature of language and discourse at ERC calls

The aim of this letter is to request a reconsideration of the fields of linguistics and discourse studies in ERC panels that, to our mind, narrowly and wrongly equate linguistics with cognitive sciences.

The role of language in shaping human action and creating more inclusive or increasingly unequal societies has been vastly documented and evidenced. Thus, there is a well-established consensus today on the relevance of linguistic and discourse-based research to reveal the how and why of social processes, as well as to shed light on the consequences that such processes have for the wellbeing of individuals and societal groups. In the EU, for instance, citizens are now experiencing a wide range of social and policy-making transformations. These relate to (i) changing forms of multilingualism and linguistic diversity, (ii) the delocalization of languages and territories, (iii) the consolidation of traditional international languages in competition with new emerging global ones, (iv) sociopolitical struggles that involve ethnolinguistic communities and groups and (v) the proliferation of anti-European and hate discourses and verbal violence in everyday life. Furthermore, globalization and the tertiarization of the economy have placed languages at the core of the economy. Consequently, language in use and discourse in context constitute a salient object of investigation, and they are part of a very dynamic field in which projects, publications, conferences and calls for research proposals abound.

In spite of the relevance and groundbreaking nature of the research carried out in these areas, the evaluation panels at the European Research Council that assess ERC projects do not confer enough visibility to the diversity of linguistic phenomena, nor to these research strands in particular. All research dealing with language is located in the SH4 panel (within Social Sciences and Humanities) entitled *The Human Mind and its Complexity*. This panel singles out disciplines such as cognitive science, psychology, linguistics and the philosophy of mind, therefore leaving aside all aspects concerned with language in society, language and culture, economy, education and politics.

Only very recently, in the 2016 call, a subtopic within SH4 was introduced: SH4_11 *Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis*. However, this does not lead to the required degree of visibility in ERC calls to those aspects of language mentioned above. The fact that this subtopic is located within a panel that deals with issues far from akin, and from a markedly different perspective, makes for a rather biased effect. In addition, the keywords are defined by sub-disciplines (i.e. sociolinguistics, pragmatics or discourse analysis) while other keywords within the same panel are defined by a wider range of possible topics (e.g. attention, perception, action, consciousness; learning, memory; cognition in ageing). We believe these choices of sub-disciplines rely on theoretical and methodological assumptions rather than on problem-oriented questions, which contributes to the invisibility of significant research and therefore has a negative impact on the

results obtained at calls for funding. As a result, linguists and discourse analysts interested in the sociocultural and sociopolitical study of language are forced to present their ERC project proposals in panels in which they do not necessarily fit, and within which panel members do not always have the necessary expertise for an appropriate evaluation. This, of course, makes competition difficult (as shown by the lack of success depicted in the analysis of the results of previous calls we present below).

Considering all arguments and pieces of evidence mentioned above, we request ERC to modify the current distribution of panels, and to include within the current panels a section fully devoted to "Language/Discourse, culture and society" that encompasses the social, cultural, educational, economic and political aspects of language. To fulfil its goals, the new section (as it happens in Philosophy, which is in two panels, SH4 and SH5, Cultures and Cultural Production) would have to comply with two requirements. First, it should include relevant keywords with which to visibilize research topics such as "communication in multilingual and intercultural societies", "language, culture and society", "discourse in contemporary societies". Second, the panel would have to include experts in the social, anthropological, educational, economic and political dimensions of language and discourse, so that project proposals within these fields can be properly assessed.

In an attempt to further back our proposal and to illustrate the need for the new panel we request, we will now highlight some **evidence** of (a) the current thematic profile of the SH4 panel and its cross-relations with other panels; and (b) the strength and academic reputation of the areas concerned with the study of Language, Culture and Society. With regard to the SH4 profile:

1. The core area of the projects funded by the SH4 panel is the study of human cognition through the understanding of human cognitive processes, its development throughout the lifespan (Cognitive development) and its evolution over generations (Evolution of mind and cognitive processes). The most important area is Psychology, with a total of 141 projects, representing around 74% of the total; 27 projects were funded in Linguistics, which represents around 14% of the total; and 23 projects were funded in Philosophy, which represents around 12% of projects funded. Source: <https://erc.europa.eu/publication/science-behind-projects>
2. The most significant cross-domain connections of the SH4 panel "The Human Mind and Its Complexity" is restricted to the LS5 panel "Neurosciences and Neural Disorders". Source: <https://erc.europa.eu/publication/science-behind-projects>
3. In relation to cross-panel connections within the SH domain, the SH4 panel is the least connected with the rest of the panels of the SH domain. The interaction with SH5 is mainly due to projects in Philosophy, as both panels cover this area. This situation contrasts with other humanities panels, and causes isolation as well as difficulties to encompass projects on other areas of the study of language and human communication within it. In fact, SH4 is the only SH panel in which migration research has not been yet funded, although this topic is closely associated with linguistic diversity, multilingualism, and interlinguistic and intercultural communication. Source: <https://erc.europa.eu/publication/science-behind-projects>
4. The description of the structure of SH4 panel (THE HUMAN MIND AND ITS COMPLEXITY: COGNITIVE SCIENCE, PSYCHOLOGY, LINGUISTICS, PHILOSOPHY OF MIND) that follows shows an unbalanced and dissimilar inclusion of the different approaches and issues studied in these fields:
 - SH4_1 Cognitive basis of human development and education, developmental disorders; comparative cognition

- SH4_2 Personality and social cognition; emotion
 - SH4_3 Clinical and health psychology
 - SH4_4 Neuropsychology
 - SH4_5 Attention, perception, action, consciousness
 - SH4_6 Learning, memory; cognition in ageing
 - SH4_7 Reasoning, decision-making; intelligence
 - **SH4_8 Language learning and processing (first and second languages)**
 - **SH4_9 Theoretical linguistics; computational linguistics**
 - **SH4_10 Language typology**
 - **SH4_11 Pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis**
 - SH4_12 Philosophy of mind, philosophy of language
 - SH4_13 Philosophy of science, epistemology, logic
- 5) Similarly, an analysis of current members in the SH4 panel shows that there are no experts approaching language from a sociocultural perspective. The tendency seems to be getting worse in the case of the Advanced grant panel, as the following summary of expertise in such panel displays:
- **2015** (15 panel members): 12 Psychology and Neuroscience + 2 Philology + 1 Philosophy
 - **2014** (15 panel members): 9 Psychology and Neuroscience + 1 Logic + 5 Linguistics (2 *language acquisition*, 1 *computational linguistics*, 1 *theoretical linguistics*, 1 *translation*)
 - **2013** (15 panel members): 11 Psychology and Neuroscience + 2 Philology + 2 Philosophy
 - **2012** (13 panel members): 7 Psychology and Neuroscience + 6 Linguistics (2 *language acquisition*, 1 *computational linguistics*, 2 *theoretical linguistics*, 1 *translation*)

The features of this panel and the lack of alternative spaces may give place to a scarcity of projects, an observation that a preliminary overview of the projects funded by the ERC from 2007 to 2016 seems to confirm:

- 216 projects in which language is addressed to some extent: <https://erc.europa.eu/search/node/language?page=2>
- 61 projects framed within a cognitive, computational and hard linguistics approach: <https://erc.europa.eu/search/node/linguistics?page=1>
- 16 projects framed within a discourse analysis (interdisciplinary) approach: <https://erc.europa.eu/search/node/discourse%20analysis?page=1>
- 4 projects framed within a pragmatic approach: <https://erc.europa.eu/search/node/pragmatics>
- 3 projects framed within a sociolinguistic approach: <https://erc.europa.eu/search/node/sociolinguistics>
- 2 projects referring to linguistics and anthropology (none to linguistic anthropology): <https://erc.europa.eu/search/node/linguistic%20anthropology>

As for the strengths and vitality of the areas of research concerned with Language, Society and Culture, these include:

1. A significant number of international academic associations and organizations in Europe and outside Europe with thousands of members, such as IPrA (<https://www.ipra.org>), DiscourseNet (<http://www.discourseanalysis.net>), AILA (<http://www.aila.info/en/>) and all its national associations for the study of Applied Linguistics (including GAL, BAAL, VERBAL and so forth), EDISO (<http://www.edisoportal.org>), ALED (<http://www.aledportal.com>), CADAAD (<http://www.cadaad.net>).
2. Fifteen COST ACTIONS focusing on language of which at least five explicitly address multilingualism, multilingual speakers and practices, and the analysis of current discourses.

Also, more than ten EU research projects which are currently examining language from a sociocultural approach.

3. A Google search retrieves over 3,650.000 pages on Discourse Analysis or Discourse Studies.
4. A Google Books search retrieves over 313,000 publications in the area of discourse, 187.000 in pragmatics and 500.000 in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.
5. A Google scholar search retrieves the profiles of more than 19,000 scholars working in these fields.
6. Masters degrees and Summer Schools in Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, and Intercultural communication are now in offer all over Europe, thus showing the leading role of scholars in these fields in training young researchers. Some of the cities in which these programs are held regularly include Amsterdam, Lancaster, Aalborg, Exeter, Barcelona, Valencia, Jyväskylä, Uppsala, Lund, Louvain la Neuve or Gent.
7. The field involves a number of well-established high impact, peer-reviewed journals (also listed on ISI). As of 2015, the list includes titles such as:

Journal	Impact Factor	SJR for Language and Linguistics	H Index
<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	3.250	1.749 (Q1)	63
<i>Discourse Studies</i>	0.848	1.292 (Q1)	32
<i>Journal of Sociolinguistics</i>	1.245	1.169 (Q1)	31
<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>	1.118	1.153 (Q1)	57
<i>Language in Society</i>	1.525	1.034 (Q1)	44
<i>Language Policy</i>	1.235	0.910 (Q1)	19
<i>Journal of Linguistic Anthropology</i>	0.912	0.828 (Q1)	20
<i>Discourse & Society</i>	1.137	0.720 (Q1)	47
<i>International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism</i>	1.536	1.144 (Q1)	25
<i>Annual Review of Applied Linguistics</i>	0.739	0.753 (Q1)	23
<i>Text & Talk</i>	0.477	0.644 (Q1)	28
<i>Language & Communication</i>	1.366	0.633 (Q1)	30
<i>International Journal of Bilingualism</i>	1.536	0.612 (Q1)	19
<i>Multilingua</i>	0.556	0.580 (Q1)	18

In view of the arguments and evidence presented above, we ask the relevant ERC committees and bodies to consider our proposal, i.e. to include within the current panels (as in SH5) a section fully devoted to “Language/Discourse, culture and society“ that encompasses the social, cultural, educational, economic and political aspects of language; and to include experts in these fields.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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