Session: Cultural Semantics in the North

Abstract:

Words, grammars and discourses are thick with cultural meaning, and this cultural thickness is not well understood by mainstream linguistics. In this theme session, our goal is to explore meaning in language from both cultural and transcultural perspectives. “The North”, in the conception of the theme session, refers to the postcolonial concept of “The Global North” – and plays at the same time, with the more local Scandinavian concept of Norden. This built-in glocal tension allows the participants of this theme session to offer studies and reflections on the culture specificity of meaning-making on both global and local scales.

Our target of analysis is the meaning side of the language-culture complex, and it includes the study of cultural keywords (Wierzbicka 1997, Levisen and Waters 2017), ethnosyntax (Enfield 2002, Gladkova 2014), and culturally-specific discourse (Carbough 2007). Theoretically, our session participants are all working in cultural-cognitive approaches to meaning, such as the NSM approach (Natural Semantic Metalanguage), Cognitive Ethnolinguistics, and more generally in the fields of linguistic ethnography, culturally-oriented cognitive linguistics and applied cognitive linguistics. Offering in-depth case studies on the cultural meaning of specific words, constructions, and discourse patterns, as well as the transcultural challenges and possibilities that arise when “meaning crosses cultural boundaries”, this theme session aims to allow for a general discussion on cultural semantics and the consequences of semantic diversity for both linguistic theorizing, educational linguistics, and society at large.

The theme session on provide nine original case studies on cultural semantics, delivered by a group of scholars from 9 different countries, and 10 different universities. They will bring to our discussion a broad variety of linguistic expertise and cultural knowledge, as well as different takes on how to study cultural semantics.

References:


Levisen, Carsten, and Waters Sophia. Cultural Keywords in Discourse. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.