Bilingualism: Language and Cognition

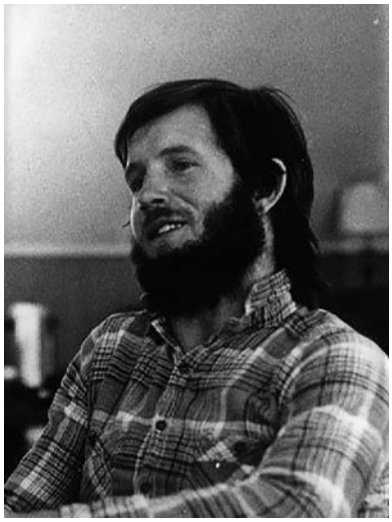
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Obituary: Pieter Muysken

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(Pieter Muysken 1981 in Lake Arrowhead, California)

It is with great sadness that we learned about the death of Pieter Muysken (1950–2021). Pieter was one of the four founding editors of *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* in 1998, and he continuously contributed to the journal over the past 20 years in multiple ways. He acted as the journal's handling editor and co-edited a Special Issue in 2017 (on cross-linguistic priming in bilinguals). He also contributed to the journal as an author of a number of influential research papers and insightful commentaries, including a keynote article on bilingual language contact phenomena in 2013. The journal also greatly benefited from Pieter's active and reliable role as a reviewer and advisor to the editorial team. There can be no doubt that Pieter's work for the journal had a substantial impact on *BLC*'s current standing in the field.

Beyond his specific contributions to bilingualism research, Pieter was first and foremost a GENERAL LINGUIST, with a solid theoretical grounding in generative grammar and a wide range of interests and expertise in several subdomains of linguistics. He also made contributions to language typology and to the study of many under-researched languages. Pieter was one of the leading figures in pioneering theoretically-based (specifically, generative) studies of pidgin and creole languages. He also contributed to theoretical morphology with studies of South American Indigenous languages and other minority languages that enlightened our understanding of the nature of stems, affixes, and affix order. Here, I'd like to highlight three aspects of Pieter's legacy that are particularly worth remembering. Firstly, while theoretically grounded, Pieter was never dogmatic and always open to alternative ideas. In a commentary published in the first issue of *BLC* in 1998, he wrote: 'In my view, this field should be explored in a non-partisan way', a typical Pieter sentence. He was opposed to any kind of bunker mentality and always went for open and fair discussion of controversies. Secondly, Pieter never swam with the mainstream, neither in his conceptual approach to linguistic issues, nor in the choice of languages that he studied. Instead, he taught us that much is to be learnt from exploring the fringes of the language system and from looking at uncommonly studied languages. Thirdly, Pieter's work demonstrated that important progress can be made by establishing links between what at first sight might appear to be diverse fields of linguistic research. A case in point is his 2013 BLC keynote article, which offers a new framework for understanding language contact, bringing together methods and insights from previously unrelated domains of linguistic research (Creole languages, code-switching, language development, linguistic borrowing, and areal convergence).

Pieter won several prestigious grants and awards for his work, the most important one probably being the Spinoza Prize in 1998, the highest scientific award in the Netherlands. Despite the international renown and recognition he gained in the course of his career, Pieter remained the most generous, kind, and modest person one could imagine. Arrogance of any kind was alien to him. I can also assert, based on personal experience, that Pieter was enormously inspiring and supportive, particularly towards young researchers. I first met Pieter in 1981 at a workshop in Lake Arrowhead, California, after completing my PhD

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and struggling to make sense of some complex set of data from child and adult language learners of German. Pieter suggested to approach the problem from a purely linguistic angle ('Let's write grammars for these data as if these were languages'), and he spent hours and hours with me doing just that. As a result, we not only produced a number of joint papers, but we also felt that we had achieved a better understanding of the nature of the linguistic systems that child vs. adult learners are able to create.

Pieter was a giant in linguistics and a giant in kindness and generosity. His death is a great loss to our field, to our journal and to me personally.

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