

Call for Panel Contributions

20th International Pragmatics Conference (IPC20)

University of Helsinki, 27.06-02.07.2027

Pragmatic Acts of Neo-Imperialism. Reference, Presupposition, Indexicality

Panel Organisers: Rita Vallentin (European University Viadrina), Miriam Lind (European University Viadrina),
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The nexus of language and imperialism has been explored previously from a variety of angles, starting with the rich research on linguistic imperialism (e.g. Phillipson 1992), and further reaching from investigations into discursive constructions of empire (e.g. Thompson 1997) to the critical study of colonial naming practices (e.g. Levkovych 2020) and the impact of colonialism on language research (Deumert/Storch 2020).

While the prime epoch of imperialism is often located in the past, we currently witness a rise in neo-imperialist claims and practices. In terms of geopolitical conflict, Russia's war against Ukraine, Trump's threats to invade Greenland and the US' current attacks on Iran, the increasing Chinese influence and economic expansion in Africa (e.g. Lumumba-Kasongo 2011), and tech giants' fantasies of so-called "freedom cities" come to mind. Yet, neo-imperialism goes much further than that: it concerns AI, technology, platformization, and datafication (Mannion 2020), and stretches beyond the spatial constraints of Earth in fantasies of colonising Mars ('exoimperialism', see Dy/Roberts 2025) and the new-found eagerness for moon missions.

While neo-imperial projects have become a central concern across the social sciences (Mbembe 2021, Mejias/Couldry 2024), pragmatic research has so far put little attention on their linguistic dimensions. Thus, this panel aims to bring together pragmatically oriented research on neo-imperial language use, with a particular focus on referential practices, indexicality and presupposition, and how they might contribute to the discursive naturalization or contestation of neo-imperial claims.

The overarching question guiding the panel is what shared characteristics and differences can be identified across these (and other) pragmatic acts of neo-imperialism. Possible topics include:

- Geopolitical neo-imperialism, e.g. in the Arctic, Eastern Europe, and Africa
- Expedition projects and 'new frontiers' (e.g. in 'exoimperialism')
- AI/techno-neocolonialism
- (Post-)Colonial toponymy
- Linguistic neo-imperialism

- Freedom Cities

- ...

Abstract Submission:

Please submit your abstract (max. 500 words) through the conference website (<https://ipra2027.exordo.com/login>) by October 15th 2026 (23:59 CEST). Please select our panel “Pragmatic Acts of Neo-Imperialism” in step 4 (Topics). We ask contributors to flag possible use of AI in creating the abstracts.

An active IPra membership is required to submit an abstract and for participation in the conference. Please note that each person may be first author of only one conference contribution; anyone may be involved in a second or even a third paper if some else is the first author and will be present at the conference as well.

Further information on the submission process can be found on the official IPC20 Call for Papers (<https://pragmatics.international/page/CfP2027>); general information on the conference is available on the IPra website (<https://pragmatics.international/page/IPC20Helsinki>). Please contact the organisers of the panel (Rita Vallentin: vallentin@europa-uni.de; Miriam Lind: lind@europa-uni.de; Britta Schneider: britta.schneider@univie.ac.at) if you have any questions regarding the panel.

References

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