Recent demographic and technological developments have made it hard to predict the relations between specific speakers, linguistic resources and socio-cultural affiliations, and we find several competing linguistic and cultural orientations to norm centres at work in everyday communication. Individuals are surrounded by variation, they develop strategies to deal with this as well as with unpredictability, and everyday linguistic practices characterised by different types of hybridity – often performed by young speakers – are rarely appreciated by mainstream institutions. The language of children and youth not only reflects current and new conditions, but it also creates and points toward future developments and changes. Thereby it provides a perspective on language as a social phenomenon in contemporary Europe, given the current communicative and social conditions.

In this paper presentation we will introduce the aims, theoretical background, scope and methods of the panel and of the empirical projects which the panel presentations build on. Drawing on the overall findings of our projects so far, we will discuss the concept of languaging (Jørgensen 2008), and the differences, similarities and developments of languaging over time. The languaging approach places the emphasis on language as a social and goal-oriented phenomenon involving form, situated activity and ideology, i.e. the total linguistic fact (Silverstein 1985). We illustrate how a longitudinal collaborative research can contribute to comprehensive accounts of these dimensions, by discussing similarities and differences in how linguistic resource are used and linked to local cultural models among the school-starters and school-leavers in different age cohorts.

Keywords: Cultural orientations, Children and youth, Languaging.