

Announcement

Historical Sociolinguistics - Workshop May 2023

[Historical Sociolinguistics Research Group](#)

[Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication \(ACLCLC\)](#)

[University of Amsterdam](#)

**Methodological Challenges in Historical Sociolinguistics:
'Oral and Written Texts' and 'Elite Bilingualism and Diglossia'
(23 and 24 May 2023, online)**

In case you would like to join us for the presentations and discussions, please contact Dr. Liesbeth Zack <E.W.A.Zack[at]uva.nl>.

We will then update you in due course with a detailed schedule, the abstracts and the Zoom link.

Tue 23 May 2023: 14-18h

(Amsterdam time = CEST - Central European Summer Time)

How is oral speech transformed into written text (or vice versa)? - Methodological challenges

The fields of Oral Tradition and Oral History study, among other topics, the roles of composers and performers, the (often formulaic) oral narrative style, variation and innovation. But oral texts hardly ever come to the awareness of the researcher as such - most frequently they are laid down in writing (and in more recent times recorded),

'transcribed' and often provided with intonation or pause markings, and possibly explanatory comments, introduced by the scholar who creates a written text.

This is not dissimilar to the transcription or notation which was made of oral texts in the past. The process and type of (re)composition or (re)creation in the medium of writing caused changes in discourse and grammatical structure. Thus intonation and stress patterns were lost during what we may imagine as a mostly monologic silent creation. The spoken language, when written down, could be influenced by a 'higher' written variety, resulting in mixed forms. Dialogic and/or performance features would only be reported in quoted speech. What constituted particular forms of traditions, such as stories, myths or communicative events, may have become new genres, such as text collections or books. The writers were often members of a (new) social elite and as such would have had intentions which might differ from those of the oral composers and performers.

In this workshop we will study individual cases of different languages in their (often colonial or postcolonial) contexts and present methodological approaches which may help us to better understand the interface, transition or continuum of oral-to-written forms of expression. This in its turn will help linguists to reconstruct spoken language from written sources.

Presentations

Muhadj Adnan: Exploring Sociolinguistic Variation among Arabic Speakers in Germany: Insights and Challenges

Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz: Re-creating oral discourse as a written tapestry in colonial Peru: Pragmatics and notation (*Verschriftung*) in the Quechua texts from Huarochirí (ca. 1608)

Sune Gregersen: Reconstructing the definite determiner system of Wangerooge Frisian

Hans de Jong: Bottom-up regraphisation? A study on Standard Frisian and Non-Standard Frisian literacy

Liesbeth Zack: Egyptian Arabic in Egyptological excavation diaries from the early 20th century

Wed 24 May: 10-14h

Elite bilingualism and diglossia in colonial and multilingual settings

While the first part of the workshop is devoted to oral language use as reflected in written documents from the past, the second part focuses on the social functions of written documents and literacy practices. Due to limited educational opportunities, literacy was

often practiced among social elites and involved strategies to actively construct and maintain their elite status. Under colonial conditions native authors would also write in order to present and justify their own version of history and/or (re-)create or (re-)confirm their cultural identity. These strategies could include the use of prestigious languages and/or varieties as well as native languages, and sometimes code-switching, thus deliberately applying the linguistic resources available in diglossic or multilingual environments. Standardisation would be an important factor in their work.

The following chronologically and geographically varied cases of multilingual literacy practices will be presented: Coptic and Greek in Late Antique Egypt, Frisian and Dutch in Friesland in the 15th-16th centuries, Ottoman Turkish and French in the 19th century and Afrikaans in the 20th century. The topics to be discussed will include the social positioning of the writers vis-à-vis their intended or actual audiences, the specific linguistic strategies applied and the underlying attitudes and ideologies. Especially for this last issue, the main methodological challenge is to ensure a balance between emic and etic interpretative perspectives.

Presentations

Margreet Dorleijn: French-Ottoman code switching in an Ottoman Novel

Camiel Hamans: The construction of a homogeneous standard Afrikaans

Arjen Versloot: The use of Frisian and Dutch by 15th and 16th c. elites in Friesland

Ewa D. Zakrzewska: Coptic and Greek in Late Antique Egypt