

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

Research Group Historical Sociolinguistics  
Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication  
University of Amsterdam  
<https://tinyurl.com/HistSocLing>

**PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS**

**Tuesday 23 May (14-18h CEST)**  
**How is oral speech transformed into written text (or vice versa)?**

14:00	Opening
Session 1	Moderator: Arjen Versloot
14:15	Sune Gregersen: <i>Reconstructing the definite determiner system of Wangerooge Frisian</i>
14:50	Hans de Jong: <i>Bottom-up regraphization? A study on Standard Frisian and Non-Standard Frisian literacy</i>
15:20	Break
Session 2	Moderator: Manfred Woidich
15:35	Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz: <i>Re-creating oral discourse as a written tapestry in colonial Peru: Pragmatics and notation (Verschriftung) in the Quechua texts from Huarochirí (ca. 1608)</i>
16:10	Liesbeth Zack: <i>Egyptian Arabic in Egyptological excavation diaries from the early 20th century</i>
16:45	Muhadj Adnan: <i>Exploring sociolinguistic variation among Arabic speakers in Germany: Insights and challenges</i>
17:15	Break
17:25	Discussion session. Moderator: Ewa Zakrzewska

**Wednesday 24 May (10-14h CEST)**  
**Elite bilingualism and diglossia in colonial and multilingual settings**

10:00	Opening
Session 3	Moderator: Sune Gregersen
10:10	Ewa Zakrzewska: <i>Coptic and Greek in Late Antique Egypt</i>
10:45	Arjen Versloot: <i>Standard Dutch and spoken Hollandish vernacular in the Frisian cities in the early modern period</i>
11:15	Break
Session 4	Moderator: Guillermo Olivera
11:30	Margreet Dorleijn: <i>French-Ottoman code switching in an Ottoman novel</i>
12:05	Camiel Hamans: <i>The construction of a homogeneous standard Afrikaans</i>
12:35	Break
13:15	General discussion session. Moderator: Muhadj Adnan

## **How is oral speech transformed into written text (or vice versa)?**

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.

## **Elite bilingualism and diglossia in colonial and multilingual settings**

Whilst 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 practised 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.

## **Abstracts** (in alphabetical order of the presenters)

### **Exploring sociolinguistic variation among Arabic speakers in Germany: Insights and challenges**

**Muhadj Adnan (Universität Bayreuth)**

This presentation explores the challenges encountered when creating a corpus for sociolinguistic research, particularly when dealing with large-scale migration and language contact situations. The study focuses on Iraqi and Syrian speakers living in Germany since 2024/2015, who have been displaced from their home countries into new sociolinguistic environments. The research involves sociolinguistic interviews with Damascus Arabic and Baghdadi Arabic speakers who live in two Bavarian cities, with a focus on the intergenerational differences within the two groups and the degree to which a common koiné can be defined between the Syrian and Iraqi group due to language contact.

The talk will provide an overview of the challenges encountered in various phases of the research, including selecting speakers for the corpus, transcribing recordings, identifying relevant variables for analysis, transferring them into a usable spreadsheet, and processing and interpreting the data. Special attention will be given to the challenges of interpreting language variation among Iraqi speakers living in Germany.

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

**Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (University of Stirling)**

"If the ancestors of the people called Indians had known writing in earlier times, then the lives they lived would not have faded from view until now."

At the beginning of the 17th century an anonymous author-redactor wrote down the so-called Quechua Huarochirí traditions. This author made use of his knowledge of alphabetical writing, probably acquired in the missionary context (in ancient Peru writing was not known). In order to document the traditions of his people from the highlands of Central Peru within the framework of the dominant culture of the Spanish colonial empire, he reformulated and wrote down myths and descriptions of rituals in their own language, Quechua, but following Spanish conventions of composing a book, and adding comments from a Christian point of view. Orally handed-down text was now 'inscribed', directed at an Andean target group (but who could not read!). The objective was the conservation of traditions (stated in the texts' Introduction).

The pragmatics of written discourse changes compared to that of oral discourse because there is no performance, direct oral communication and interaction with the reader. This becomes evident when studying the type of composition, conditioned by, for example, silent creation and linear ordering. Grammatical features will also be influenced, such as evidence-marking, deixis, person-marking, morphologisation etc.

I study through which processes the Huarochirí texts have gone to make them a written tapestry, based on individual myths and descriptions. We are left with the question if the written texts are a re-creation, a transmutation, a new original...

## **French-Ottoman code switching in an Ottoman novel**

**Margreet Dorleijn (University of Amsterdam)**

Whereas in the Ottoman Empire of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French was not as pervasive in Ottoman elite (urban) circles as it was, for example, in Russia's aristocracy at the time, French cultural influence was still immense. Turkish literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is heavily influenced by French literature. Genres like the novel and the short story were introduced through translations of French works (either directly or through translation via one of the numerous minority languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire.) The introduction of new literary genres entailed the reform of the written language. High Ottoman had over the centuries evolved into a sort of relict language – almost nobody, not even the elite, could understand it anymore. In the spur of reforms implemented during the Tanzimat period 1839-1867, writers felt the urge to reform the language as well.

One of the reformers was Rezaizade Mahmud Ekrem (1847 – 1914), an Ottoman civil servant, writer, literary critic and intellectual. He wrote poems, dramas, and novels, dealt extensively with European literary theories and was one of the most influential, authoritative writers of his time.

Like most writers of that time, Ekrem belonged to the circle of the Sultan's court. He founded the famous magazine *Servet-i Fünûn* (Wealth of the Sciences) and gathered young and established literary people in the editorial board.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a class of 'nouveau riche' ('*alafranga züppe*') emerged, who showed off their 'eliteness' by using French extensively in their speech. Ekrem, himself of old aristocracy, and close to Saray circles, probably looked on these 'züppes' with disdain, as he wrote the satirical novel *Araba Sevdası*, 'A Passion for Cars'. In that novel he pokes fun at the Züppe and especially at his language use, a constant code switching to and from French. In this talk, I will discuss French-Turkish code-switching patterns in this novel in the light of several theories of code switching, bearing in mind the question whether a satirical depiction of code switching can still be analysed with existing descriptive models of code-switching, or whether translanguaging is a better approach.

## **Reconstructing the definite determiner system of Wangerooge Frisian**

**Sune Gregersen (Kiel University)**

Wangerooge Frisian (WF) is a minor Germanic language which was spoken on the Wadden Sea island Wangerooge until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although WF is now extinct, it is possible to study it thanks to extensive documentation surviving from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this presentation, I investigate the definite determiner system as represented in three WF sources: a selection of texts from the Ehrentraut corpus (Ehrentraut 1849, 1854; Versloot 1996), two texts from Firmenich (1854), and the translation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Winkler (1874).

The "full" definite determiner in WF distinguished three grammatical genders and a plural form: masculine singular *dan*, feminine singular *djuu*, neuter singular *dait*, and plural *daa*. This determiner was used both as a definite article and a distal demonstrative, as shown in (1)–(2):

- (1) *nuu kumt der 'n gans aisk krónkheit in **dait** laun*  
 now comes there a very nasty disease in the country  
 'Now a very nasty disease appears in the country'
- (2) *yuu wul 'n laum uut **dait** scha'ipheck hab*  
 she wants a lamb from that sheepfold have  
 'She wants to have a lamb from that sheepfold'

In addition, however, the sources also contain a “reduced” definite determiner which is 't in the neuter singular and *de* elsewhere (with numerous allomorphs, such as *d'*, *der*, *'er*, and *'e*). Two examples are given in (3)–(4):

- (3) *da ropt **de** kaízder sin óobërst*  
 then summons the emperor his colonel  
 'Then the emperor summons his colonel'
- (4) *daa stont deer 'n lítken swerg an 'e wii*  
 then stands there a little dwarf by the road  
 'Then there's a little dwarf standing by the road'

The WF situation is reminiscent of the two-article system found in other Frisian languages and in many varieties of German (cf. e.g. Ebert 1971; Schwarz 2009: 12–23), but the use of the “full” and “reduced” definite articles in WF have not yet been investigated in any detail. In my presentation I will first describe the distribution of the various forms as they appear in the investigated texts. I will then discuss some of the problems one encounters when trying to reconstruct the determiner system of an extinct language, in particular the role played by text type and possible translation effects.

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## **The construction of a homogeneous standard Afrikaans**

**Camiel Hamans (Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań)**

In 1875, a group of young Afrikaans activists met in Paarl, South Africa, and founded the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners 'Society of True Afrikaners', GRA. The anti-British goal of this society was to emancipate the second-class Afrikaans speaking white people of the Cape and the rest of British South Africa by means of promoting the use of Afrikaans as a written language and in public domains. To achieve this goal, the hitherto non-official and also unrecognised language Afrikaans had to be standardised.

Although it was known that there were major dialectal differences in white Afrikaans, this was not taken into account in the standardisation. The varieties of Afrikaans that were native to speakers of colour were not included in the standardisation process at all.

Moreover, the role assigned to Dutch, the 'mother of Afrikaans', in this process should not be underestimated, although it also happened that a variant was chosen, originating from one of the regional variants of Afrikaans, in order to accentuate the difference with Dutch.

In this presentation, I will focus on the attempt to make Afrikaans a homogeneous construct and on the reasons behind this decision.

## **Bottom-up Regraphization? A study on Standard Frisian and Non-Standard Frisian literacy**

**Hans de Jong (University of Groningen)**

The West Frisian language traditionally was an informally-used spoken language, where literacy in Standard Frisian (SF) remained low and its written use limited (Breuker, 1993). Social media, however, created an environment of written informal speech, where SF was unsuitable as (1) only 25% of speakers were literate in it (Klinkenberg et al., 2018), and (2) its purist nature distanced it sociolinguistically from spoken Frisian — a dynamic that has been called diglossia (Breuker, 1993). To overcome this, a non-standard Frisian orthography emerged, now used by 80% of Frisian writers on social media (Jongbloed-Faber, 2014). This variety — Vernacularly-Spelled Frisian, or VSF — transcribes spoken Frisian using Dutch orthographic rules.

In our research, we study (1) Frisian speakers' literacy in VSF, SF and Standard Dutch (SD) and (2) analyse where these trends come from. In an online counterbalanced self-paced reading paradigm, participants read identical texts in these varieties. The reading speeds of 85 participants were then related to demographic data from a post-experiment questionnaire, such as age, education, Frisian dialect, dominance of Frisian orthographic variety and language ideology.

The results showed that SF dominance positively correlates with reading speeds of SF. VSF dominance negatively correlates with reading speeds in all varieties. The decrease of VSF reading speeds was more limited for speakers of Wood Frisian dialects — who read VSF faster than SF. Social variables seem to explain VSF-users' general decrease in reading speeds. Overall, my data suggests that the two Frisian orthographic systems function mutually independently for Wood Frisian speakers, likely due to the distance of this variety to SF.

Through analyzing this novel Frisian orthographic variety, we show how social media may lead to a bottom-up regraphization in Frisian, according to already existing sociolinguistic divides. We suggest that this possible digraphia is relevant to the study and protection of the Frisian language.

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## **Standard Dutch and spoken Hollandish vernacular in the Frisian cities in the early modern period**

### **Arjen Versloot (University of Amsterdam)**

The citizens of the major Frisian cities (largely) gave up speaking Frisian as their private language, as witnessed by contemporaneous sources, commenting on the language in those cities. This was not an abrupt contrast with the preceding period, because Dutch must have been in wide use, both spoken and written, in the cities already before that time.

The new situation was at least trilingual, if we leave aside the use of Latin in learned circles or French in multinational relations, with spoken Frisian (as a second language), Dutch/Hollandish vernacular (as the primary spoken language) and the emerging Dutch standard language (mostly written). Both the form of these varieties as well as the social values assigned to them changed over time.

In this talk I will give examples of the various aspects.

(This presentation will lean on a publication in preparation, with Reitze Jonkman as the first author.)

## **Egyptian Arabic in Egyptological excavation diaries from the early 20th century**

### **Liesbeth Zack (University of Amsterdam)**

In the first half of the 20th century, archaeological expeditions were run in Egypt by the Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts under the directorship of George A. Reisner (1867–1942). In 2006, more than seventy Arabic excavation diaries were rediscovered, dating from 1913 until 1947. These were written by the Egyptian foremen of the expedition who belonged to the Diraz-family from the Upper-Egyptian village of Al-Qal'a (near the town of Qift, in the Qena governorate). The foremen were trained archaeologists who were responsible for the practical side of running the expeditions, such as recruiting labourers and



paying them, doing delicate excavations, photographing the finds and keeping the excavation diaries.

The diaries are not only fascinating from an Egyptological perspective, but also from the point of view of Arabic linguistics. The texts are written in a mixture of Standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect, and contain features reminiscent of Middle Arabic. In this presentation, fragments from the first two books, dating from 1913 until 1915, will be discussed. The excavations covered in these diaries were run at Giza (near Cairo) and Deir el-Bersha (in Upper Egypt). Although the same *rāyīs* (foreman), Sayyid Aḥmad Sayyid Dīrāz (1890-1926), was responsible for these excavations, the diaries are written in several hands. It remains unclear which parts of the text were written by the *rāyīs* himself, and which ones by others (perhaps scribes). This presentation will discuss these aspects of authorship and the use of colloquial Arabic in the diaries.

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## **Coptic and Greek in Late Antique Egypt**

**Ewa D. Zakrzewska (University of Amsterdam)**

This presentation develops the argument presented in a series of earlier articles (most notably Zakrzewska 2017) in which I problematise the traditional interpretation of Coptic as the last stage of Ancient Egyptian, a vernacular variety heavily influenced by Greek. In my view Coptic, as it has come down to us (that is in the form of written sources from the mid-third century AD), is a set of high-status varieties, more or less constructed and originally put to use, next to Greek, by members of diverse newly-formed ascetic communities in order to create their distinctive group identity. After some of these groups, especially the monastic milieus, gained considerable prestige, the specific varieties of Coptic they used were adopted by those inhabitants of Egypt who wanted to align themselves with such prestigious milieus by evoking the specific symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991) with which those varieties were endowed.

Methodologically, my contribution is based on the so-called third wave of variationist sociolinguistics which stresses the individuals' agency in creating the desired lifestyle, among others by opting for particular linguistic behaviour. As P. Eckert puts it in her programmatic article (Eckert 2012: 87), "variation does not simply reflect, but also constructs, social meaning and hence is a force in social change". This involves also the strategies applied in written discourse (Coulmas 2013).

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