

Language as a Specimen

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Abstracts

Charles-Etienne Coquebert de Montbret (1755-1831), diplomat, civil servant, statistician, geographer and language collector

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The period around the turn from the 18th to the 19th century is characterized, among other things, by a great interest in the diversity of languages. In Russia Peter Pallas published his voluminous comparative wordlists (1787-1789), in Rome the Spanish Jesuit Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro worked on his *Catalogo delle lingue* (1784) and other linguistic studies in which he wanted to describe all the languages of the world and in Germany Johann Christoph Adelung, succeeded by Johann Severin Vater, compiled their *Mithridates* (1806-1817), for which they collected almost 500 different language versions of the Lord Prayer. A few years later, in 1817, Wilhelm von Humboldt published additions and corrections to Adelung & Vater. Subsequently his groundbreaking study on comparative linguistics appeared (1820).

In France, the situation was different. Commissioned by the revolutionary regime the Abbé Grégoire studied the linguistic diversity of France and published his devastating report on the command of the French language by the citizens of the republic in 1794. One of the conclusions of the report was that

the dialects of France should be eradicated. Citizens of France should speak French in order to enjoy their new civil rights.

However, the new language policy was not immediately successful. In 1806 Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who wanted to be informed about the precise demographic situation of his new empire, also wanted to know which languages and dialects were spoken in the 'different portions of the French territory' and by whom. He commissioned a survey to be produced by the newly founded Statistical Office of the Ministry of Interior. Head of this office was Charles Etienne Coquebert de Montbret, a former diplomat, former editor of a magazine about mines and a dilettante geographer. He sent a letter to all the 130 prefects, in which he asked to be informed about the languages and dialects spoken in their department. In addition, he required a translation of a sample text, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in these languages and dialects.

Unfortunately, the results of this survey, that Coquebert and his son Eugène conducted between 1806 and 1812, were only partially published. Moreover, it lasted till 1831 before Eugène was able to release the versions of parable in one hundred 'idioms'. In the archives there are still many versions waiting for publication. Although Coquebert's work is seen as the first specimen of dialect geography, it never achieved the fame in linguistics that for instance Adelung's collection acquired. However, the Parable of the Prodigal Son became and still is the sample text for dialect inventories all over Western Europe.

George Taplin's 1870 comparative vocabulary of Australian languages

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Although the record of Australian languages collected in the pre-academic era of Australian linguistic description (1697-1930) was overwhelmingly made by missionaries, non-missionary description of Australian Aboriginal languages includes works by pastoralists, natural scientists, explorers, and men appointed to the office of Protector of Aborigines, many of whom were trained to observe and record empirical data, and whose work provided necessary contact with Aboriginal people.

Understanding about the structure of Australian languages was slow to disseminate, as was the development of adequate descriptive practices. These factors were largely due to the size of the continent, and the existence of politically autonomous pre-federation (pre-1901) Australian colonies, as well as to the absence of good institutional support, and sustained conduits of communication between Australia and Europe. After the initial surprise discovery that Aboriginal people did not speak a single language, by the mid nineteenth century researchers were concluding that languages documented in different locations across the vast continent belonged to a single family. While this conclusion was in part informed by developing understanding of grammatical structure, comparative vocabularies were commonly compiled to demonstrate linguistic affinity.

I investigate the circumstances in which Congregationalist missionary George Taplin compiled what was at the time the largest comparative vocabulary of Australian languages (1870, reprinted in Grimwade 1975). I look first at the nature of the sources of the twenty sampled languages that were available to Taplin, before discussing the lexical template Taplin employed, which was based on that used by George Turner in a comparative vocabulary of Polynesian languages (1861). Finally, I show that this instance of the movement of linguistic ideas from Polynesia to Australia was not an isolated occurrence.

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“A rose by any other name...”: Renaissance naturalists and dialect classifications in Early Modern Low Countries

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“A rose by any other name...”:

Renaissance naturalists and dialect classifications in Early Modern Low Countries

When during Renaissance humanists and language masters start working on vernacular grammar descriptions and dictionaries, they have to deal with the considerable variation that characterizes most vernaculars at that period. Among others, botany and zoology are two areas in which variation was prominent and embarrassing for lexicographers. Numerous co-existing names for one and the same species, different species going by the same and the lack of commonly accepted classifications are some of the aspects that made the choice of lemmata and their translation particularly hard. In an attempt to overcome such obstacles, Early Modern lexicographers sought help in specialized treatises on plants and animals.

This paper focuses on three major treatises that were frequently used by Early Modern Flemish lexicographers: *Historia animalium* (1551–1558) by Conrad Gesner, *Cruydeboeck* (1554) by Rembert Dodoens and *Plantarum seu Stripium historia* (1576) by Mathias de l’Obel. As will be demonstrated, all three works provide considerable amount of linguistic information structured and presented in a similar way which made it easy for lexicographers to retrieve the necessary information. The paper takes a closer look at the circulation of the three treatises by examining their reception in influential lexicographic works printed in the Early Modern Low Countries such as *Nomenclator* (1567) by Hadrianus Junius, *Etymologicum Theutonicae Linguae* (1599) by Cornelis Kiliaen and *Dictionaire ou Promptuaire François-Flameng* (1596, 1602) by Elcie Edouard Leon Mellema. Special attention will be drawn to the classification and naming of Dutch and French diatopic varieties in the three treatises and the way these classifications contributed to dialect awareness among Early Modern lexicographers. As will be demonstrated, the use of botanical and zoological treatises has a tangible impact on the structure of dictionary entries in so far as it inevitably leads the lexicographers to adopt diatopic labelling.

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Language as a Specimen, and Linguists as Botanists and Ethnologists

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Speaking of language material as a 'specimen' is not just a metaphor. In the 19th century and early 20th century, it was common usage. Just like natural history specimens, language material circulated and was processed and classified; like dried plants and drawings that represented a species, word lists and sample phrases were used to represent a language and its speakers. What is more, natural history specimens and language materials were often collected together and included in separate volumes of prestigious reports, like those of Alcide d'Orbigny, Carl von Martius, the U.S. Exploring Expedition, and the Austrian-Hungarian *Novara* Expedition.

My presentation explores these links between language study, ethnology, and natural history further. My main examples here are Horatio Hale, whose volume on *Ethnography and Philology* (1846) for the U.S.Ex.Ex. reports included reconstructions of Polynesian migrations on the basis of sound shifts and an ethnolinguistic map of the North American west coast; and Friedrich Müller, who defined linguistics as a branch of 'applied ethnography' in his contributions to the *Novara* expedition reports (1867-68), and who later compared the task of the linguist to that of the botanist, who had to pay equal attention to every plant species (*Grundriß der Sprachwissenschaft*, 1876-88).

What these examples show us is how language and language material are part of a global history of knowledge. These specimens have trajectories: Hale's notebooks about Australian languages end up in Western Ontario, and those about Polynesian in Sydney. Along these trajectories, they undergo changes: words are translated, arranged in columns, attached to maps (as toponyms) and herbaria (as plant names), and distilled into abstract linguistic data used in language atlases and comparative grammars. Thus, the trajectories of these specimens give us an insight into the process by which language is turned into an object of study, and how linguistics took shape in interaction with other fields of knowledge.

Languages, science and globalization in the 18th century

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Asia, America and Europe have been intellectually intertwined for centuries. Recent years have seen a number of important studies revealing the interest of European scholars in the 'exotic' languages of Asia and America. Their underlying motives were plentiful. Urs App (2010) has demonstrated that a fascination for religious roots played an important role.

In addition, Concha Roldán (2009) and Pascale Casanova (2004) have argued that some scholars were interested in 'exotic' languages in an attempt to construct a universal language. The German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646– 1716) wrote his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria* as a first step to the perfect language based on combinations of a limited number of basic concepts as well as to reconstruct the migrations of the first peoples (Van Hal 2014). The

present project intends to investigate the emergence, dissemination and consequences of compiling 18th-century multilingual wordlists for comparative purposes ordered by European scholars, and subsequently elaborated by missionaries in the Philippines and the Americas. I will describe this unified and philosophical project, inspired by the general ethnolinguistic project of Leibniz and how these lexical lists contribute substantial information on past stages of the languages described in the list.

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The place of etymology and its principles in Early Modern historical research (the cases of Gaulish, Skythian and Varangian languages)

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This paper will investigate the role played by – and the significance attached to – etymology in the context of Early Modern historical research. Authors interested in national antiquities were at times forced to rely on traces in languages for lack of reliable literary and material sources on the prehistory of so-called “barbarian” people. Hence, the classical and Byzantine testimonies on – and some remnants or proper names of – “dead” languages were seen as a suitable locus of argumentation in numerous attempts to identify or connect the people of contemporary Europe with some of ancient tribes, famous for their nobility and power. This method was all the more attractive, given that Early modern etymology was hardly controlled by any strict linguistic rules.

Our paper will focus on the following questions:

1) Which etymologies were considered to be acceptable and why? Is there a growing awareness for significant principles a valid etymological reasoning should meet?

2) To what extent can we see methodological evolutions from the 16th to 18th century?

3) To what extent were historians familiar with, and dependent on, methodological discussions launched by colleagues having their primary focus on linguistic work?

In answering these questions, we will primarily focus on etymological proposals launched in historical research on the Gaulish (predominantly discussed in the long 16th century by French, Swiss and German scholars) and Scythian legacy, while we will pay special attention to to the 18th-century search for Varangians by German and Russian historians.

The Dutch East India Company as an involuntary patron for language 'sample gathering'

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Although language studies *per se* did not enjoy much financial support from the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Company's overseas activities resulted in a wide range of published and unpublished linguistic materials. Some of them piggybacked on the potentially lucrative studies of medicinal plants and minerals, such as *Hortus Malabaricus*, which included plant names in Arabic, Konkani and Malayam, or *Musaeum Zeylanicum* (1717) by Paul Hermann (1646-1695) with native “Ceylonic” names of plants and plant parts. Georg Eberhard Rumphius (1627-1702) produced works that inspired the nation's passion for curiosities: *D'Amboinsche rariteitkamer* (1705) and *Het Amboinsche kruidboek* (1741). His *Thesaurus imaginum piscium testaceorum* (1711) contained words in 17 languages, including ten from Asia.

While colonial botany and collecting of *naturalia* became a nationwide hobby in The Dutch Republic, the main philological interest strongly focused on non-European scripts. Amateur VOC linguists such as Baldaeus, Ruëll and Hasencamp put emphasis on the writing systems of the Asian languages they were studying, which resulted in first instances of those scripts printed in Europe. In my presentation, I will look closer at that trend that involved acquisition and circulation of antique objects and drawings of ancient architectural inscriptions, as well as epigraphs on foreign coins and seals, etc. My main case study will be the professor of Oriental languages Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) who in his letters to VOC officials implored for help in acquiring samples of foreign scripts from the VOC employees overseas, and actively participated in expertise exchange on undeciphered scripts, which ultimately informed his linguistic work.