

Milan

## THEMATIC WORKSHOP

**The cross-linguistic application of grammatical categories and its mechanisms  
from antiquity to modern times**

(Organizer: Raf Van Rooy)

Slot 1	<p>Introduction: The cross-linguistic application of grammatical categories in the history of linguistics and current debates on comparative concepts  <i>Raf Van Rooy (Research Foundation – Flanders [FWO] &amp; KU Leuven)</i>  <a href="mailto:raf.vanrooy@kuleuven.be">raf.vanrooy@kuleuven.be</a></p>
Slot 2	<p>The various grammatical interpretations of the Hebrew definite article: Its treatment and evolution in Hebrew grammars from sixteenth-century Louvain  <i>Maxime Maleux (KU Leuven)</i>  <a href="mailto:maxime.maleux@kuleuven.be">maxime.maleux@kuleuven.be</a></p>
Slot 3	<p>A misunderstood verbal concept and its vicissitudes: The aorist in 16th-century vernacular grammaticography  <i>Raf Van Rooy (Research Foundation – Flanders [FWO] &amp; KU Leuven)</i>  <a href="mailto:raf.vanrooy@kuleuven.be">raf.vanrooy@kuleuven.be</a></p>
Slot 4	<p>Early missionary grammars of Tamil (16th-17th cent.): Descriptions ‘grammatical-category driven’ vs. ‘conceptual comparative-driven’  <i>Cristina Muru (Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Viterbo)</i>  <a href="mailto:cristina.muru@unitus.it">cristina.muru@unitus.it</a></p>
Slot 5	<p>The notion of ‘adjective’ in the history of Otopamean language descriptions  <i>Bernhard Hurch (Universität Graz)</i>  <a href="mailto:bernhard.hurch@uni-graz.at">bernhard.hurch@uni-graz.at</a></p>
Slot 6	<p>The emergence and development of the concept of ‘evidentiality’ in the description of American Indian languages and its exogenous application to European languages  <i>Gerda Haßler (Universität Potsdam)</i>  <a href="mailto:hassler@uni-potsdam.de">hassler@uni-potsdam.de</a></p>

## Abstract ICHoLS (24-28/08/2020)

The various grammatical interpretations of the Hebrew definite article: its treatment and evolution in Hebrew grammars from sixteenth-century Louvain.

While traditional Ancient Greek grammar possessed eight parts of speech, the Jewish Hebrew grammatical tradition (modelled on the earlier developed Arabic grammatical tradition) only possessed three such categories: the noun (שם/*šem*), the verb (פעל/*po'al*), and the 'word' (מילה/*millah*, a vague category containing anything but verb and noun). When Hebrew appeared at the linguistic horizon of the western humanists at the beginning of the sixteenth century (beginning with Reuchlin's *De rudimentis Hebraicis* in 1506), the first Hebraists tried to transfer and translate this grammatical knowledge into Latin and Latinate terminology (unlike missionary grammars, they already had the foundation of the Jewish indigenous grammars to build upon, especially the *Sefer Mikhlol* of David Qimhi). This, however, created a number of difficulties, for Hebrew differs in many aspects from the Indo-European Latin and Greek humanists were acquainted with. One such category was the article. Greek grammar possessed a specific part of speech for this feature, viz. ἄρθρον, which already in Antiquity was translated into Latin as *articulus*. Yet Latin (unlike her daughter languages) lacked the definite article, and therefore had to take recourse to its demonstrative pronouns in order to offer an equivalent. In the Hebrew grammatical tradition, the definite article was regarded as a specific particle, belonging to the category of *millah*. In Hebraist grammars, it is moreover often treated together with other prepositions so as to represent the Hebrew 'cases', which is a clear example of a forced calque of Latin (and Greek). In this paper, I aim to shed light on how sixteenth-century Hebraists based in Louvain dealt with this challenging aspect, since many Hebraists of international fame were educated at the *Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense* ('Louvain College of the Three Tongues', founded in 1517). The grammars written by these scholars were quite influential: Clenardus' *Tabula in grammaticen Hebraeam* (Louvain, 1529), for example, was reprinted with commentaries of Johannes Quinquarboreus at the end of the sixteenth century. In addition, testimonies of the lessons given at the *Trilingue* (specifically annotations and course notes) offer additional information into how the Hebrew grammar, including the article, was taught in this formative period.

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Maxime Maleux, KU Leuven (Department of Linguistics, QLVL)

## **A misunderstood verbal concept and its vicissitudes:**

### **The aorist in 16th-century vernacular grammaticography**

*Raf Van Rooy*

*Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) & KU Leuven*

When Greek grammar became known to western humanists thanks to the teachings of Byzantine scholars in Italy and beyond (Botley 2010), it left an indelible impact on linguistic thought. The very first vernacular grammar ever printed, Antonio de Nebrija's 1492 manual for Castilian, was already greatly influenced by Greek grammaticography. The importance of the category of 'article', covering a phenomenon present in Greek and most Western European vernaculars but absent from Latin, has received ample attention in this context (see e.g. passim in the work of Padley 1985; 1988 and most recently Vallance 2019: 344-410 for Italian). Yet it is lesser-known that humanist grammarians also eagerly transposed another linguistic category from the Greek tradition to their native vernaculars: the verbal concept of 'aorist'.

Linguists today widely agree that this Greek verb form had in the first place a punctual aspectual value, expressing completed events in a continuous process, which can be compared to dots on a line. This correct interpretation, although marginally present in Ancient Greek linguistic thought, was, however, overshadowed in the Renaissance by the more popular idea that the aorist (< ἄοριστος, 'indefinite') marked an event of which the exact situation in the past was left undetermined; did it occur in the recent or distant past, or somewhere in between?

This faulty view did not, however, keep 16th-century humanist grammarians from applying the 'aorist' concept to their native tongues. How and why did they do so? In my paper, I will argue that even though the 'aorist' concept was fundamentally misunderstood by scholars from the Renaissance, the transposition of this concept from Greek to vernacular grammar could lead to innovative ideas and insightful conclusions about vernacular verbal systems. I will do so through a general overview with two case studies for French and Spanish.

#### *References*

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- Vallance, Laurent. 2019. *Les grammairiens italiens face à leur langue (15<sup>e</sup>–16<sup>e</sup> s.)*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter.

Open thematic workshop, organized by Raf Van Rooy ([raf.vanrooy@kuleuven.be](mailto:raf.vanrooy@kuleuven.be))

*Early missionary grammars of Tamil (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> cent.):  
descriptions ‘grammatical-category driven’ vs. ‘conceptual comparative-driven’*

Cristina Muru

Similarly to what happens among linguists nowadays who “tend to assume that there is a substantial set of universally available crosslinguistic categories from which languages may make a selection and which are used both for description/analysis and for comparison” (Haspelmath 2010: 663), in the *grammaticisation* (Auroux 1994; 1992a, II) of non-European languages, missionaries took the grammatical categories elaborated for Latin as set of universally crosslinguistic categories. One could assume that they fell into the trap of transferring time-tested terminology from traditional Latin grammar to a language with rather different structural properties without really capturing its ‘genius’. Despite this assumption may certainly be true for some grammars, it does not suffice to present the whole picture.

Firstly, one has to keep in mind that missionaries intended to teach, consequently they used terms and constructs that they considered their potential audiences familiar with, putting up with shortcomings of this approach quite consciously. Secondly, for the whole picture to emerge, the theoretical linguistic context of the times needs to be taken into consideration. This, in turn, will show that the above-mentioned attribution of simple transfer of terminology by missionaries does not do justice.

Indeed, when missionaries faced the linguistic diversity of non-European languages they were ‘forced’ do not restrain their descriptions to a matching of grammatical categories between their model of reference and the described language. But rather, they were ‘forced’ to describe the ‘genius’ of the language under observation from a comparative conceptual framework. Looking at the mechanisms of transfers within early missionary grammars (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> cent.) of Tamil, a continuous tension between descriptions led by the transfer of a grammatical category tailored for a language into another one, and descriptions led by conceptual transfers emerges.

Focusing on typologically different elements between the two languages, such as relative clause, or verbal morphology, and underlying the cross-linguistic conceptual transfer, this presentation aims to discuss the tension between descriptions ‘grammatical-category driven’ and ‘conceptual comparative-driven’ highlighting how and why Latin grammatical categories were applied to Tamil.

## References

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## The notion of ‘adjective’ in the history of Otopamean language descriptions

Bernhard Hurch (Universität Graz)

The issue of word classes has a long standing tradition in the European history of language sciences (Sasse 1993). There has been a vivid discussion on the notion of the ‘adjective’ in the past 50 years, especially since the publication of Dixon’s seminal article “Where have all the adjectives gone?” in 1982. The different stances have later been summarized in important publications (such as in Dixon & Aikhenvald 2004, Beck 2002 and 2006). Amongst scholars of Otopamean languages there is a rather clear agreement that little positive evidence for the existence of a proper class of adjectives is to be found in this very language family (for Otomí, for example, see Palancar 2006, for Pame Hurch 2019). Such analyses are not at all rare for Mesoamerican languages.

The presentation will focus on the representation of this discussion in old colonial grammars, dictionaries and texts about the Otopamean subgroup - works which mostly stem from the context of missionary writers. Specifically, it will try to illustrate the indecisiveness and sometimes seemingly doubtful treatment of how to deal with the European concept of ‘adjectives’ in those languages. It will be argued that the critical points brought up in the recent theoretical and descriptive discussion reflect problems that colonial authors had with this very category (like overlaps with certain verb types or with nouns, according to adjective classes). With varying breadth and depth, the colonial sources taken into account concern most of the languages of the subgroup, namely Otomí, Mazahua, Matlazinca and Pame.

## **The emergence and development of the concept of 'evidentiality' in the description of American Indian languages and its exogenous application to European languages**

Gerda Haßler (Potsdam)

The concept of 'evidentiality' is the only example of an exogenous application of a category derived from the description of Amerindian languages to the description of European languages. In this contribution, I will first address the consideration of evidentiality in ancient descriptions of American Indian languages. The missionaries followed the model of Latin grammars, but in some cases, they realized the alterity of these languages. Without perceiving the systematic value of the evidentials, some missionaries grouped them in different classes constituted by elements that had particular meanings and that were different from the European languages. The emergence of the concept of evidentiality in the descriptions of these languages will be analysed. For this analysis I will proceed in an onomasiological way, that is to say, I will not rely on denominations, but on conceptual features that approached evidentiality.

Second, the emergence of the concept of 'evidentiality' as an obligatory element in certain languages will be studied. An important moment in this process was Franz Boas' (1938: 133) formulation: "while for us definiteness, number, and time are obligatory aspects, we find in another language location near the speaker or somewhere else, [and] source of information – whether seen, heard, or inferred – as obligatory aspect". From the description of the evidentials developed a discussion on the problem of what can be considered a "true evidential".

Third, the integration of evidentiality into functional and pragmatic linguistics will be analysed. This is not in contradiction with the use of this category in typological works, rather the existence of a grammaticalised nucleus of evidentiality in some languages allows comparison of linguistic resources that perform this function in other languages. However, the description of elements that indicate the origin of knowledge without being specialised to assume this function raises problems of delimitation.

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