Historical Sociolinguistics in a Colonial World, Introduction

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Lecture outline

- **Lecture 1:** Clearing the ground
- **Lecture 2:** Resounding Silences
- **Lecture 3:** Methodological Considerations
- **Lecture 4:** Cultures of Standardization
Clearing the ground

- **History**
  - Meaning
  - Data

- **Sociolinguistics**
  - Eckert’s three waves of sociolinguistics
  - Style, practice and performance

- **Colonial linguistics**
  - The ideological project
  - The rise of Linguistics as a ‘science’
  - Extraterritorial varieties
History
Writing authentik history?

• ‘bloß sagen wie es eigentlich gewesen’ (Leopold von Ranke, 1824)

• JOHNSON: We must consider how very little history there is; I mean real authentick history. That certain Kings reigned, and certain battles were fought, we can depend upon as true; but all the colouring, all the philosophy of history is conjecture. BOSWELL: Then, Sir, you would reduce all history to no better than an almanack, a mere chronological series of remarkable events. (Boswell, Life of Johnson, 1791)
Conjecture

- Historical knowledge is always tentative as the record is incomplete, i.e. we are working with relics. Yet, the conjectures of historians can be measured against the criteria of empirical responsibility, coherence and plausibility (Lass, Historical Linguistics and Language Change, 1997)
A human science in search of meaning

- Akin to **anthropology** and the quest for ‘**thick description**’;
  - ‘Analysis, then, is **sorting out the structures of significance** ... and determining their social ground and import... What the ethnographer is in fact faced with ... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render ... **Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript** – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour’ (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973)
History and anthropology - some common methodological problems

• ‘[H]ow should one define ‘lower class’ in the socio-economic context of the time?’ (Vandenbussche, ‘Lower class language’ in 19th century Flanders, 2007)

• And what happens if we move from Western/North Atlantic contexts to colonial contexts? What was/is the structure of social stratification in Africa?
An African middle class?
No class stratification in Africa?

• ‘It is worthy of remark, also, that it [isiXhosa] is correctly spoken by all classes of the community, which is not the case, perhaps, with any of our European tongues. As a very general, if not invariable rule, a Kafir will never be heard using an ungrammatical expression, but he will always connect his words together, so as to preserve the proper system of alliteration throughout the same proposition. Thus, on the one hand, he would never say, abantuuyyeza, the people is coming; nor, on the other, would he use abantuziyeza, to express, “the people are coming,” but abantubayeza: for though ziyeza means “they are coming”, yet the form of the prefix (zi) shows that abantu cannot be the subject referred to by the verb.’ (Appleyard, Kafir Language, 1850)
Africa has no history?

“Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. **Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely **darkness**, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.” (Hugh Trevor-Roper, lecture given at Sussex, 1963)
An incomplete record

- For colonial contexts the historical record is even more limited than for metropolitan contexts (especially for the colonized);
- The **colonial archive** (in the traditional sense) is highly European centred; the voices of the sub-altern are largely suppressed (or distorted);
- **Example:** Deumert (*Dynamics of Cape Dutch, 2004*) ➞ extremely limited data on non-European speakers of Cape Dutch/Afrikaans.
Beyond ‘homo manuscriptus’

- **Historical sources** are not only written text but also
  - Oral narratives/traditions (oral history interviewing);
  - Practices (routines, habits, clothing etc.);
  - Institutions (family, education, social organization);
  - Discourses which circulate in society (see Foucault).
Sociolinguistics
Sociolinguistics - three waves (Eckert)

- **First wave (the survey era):** quantitative studies of variation which study the relationship between linguistic and social variables (demographic categories such as age, gender, sex, class) in geographically defined communities (variables as indices) – *The Social Stratification in NYC*;

- **Second wave:** ethnographic methods which seek to reconstruct the relationship between linguistic variables and local, participant-designed identity categories (emic categories) – *Martha’s Vineyard study* (also Milroy 1980; variables as indices as well as resources for affiliation);

- Both approaches examine **linguistic features as identity markers** related directly to the groups that most use them. Strong focus on individual variables.
Third wave (Eckert, *Jocks and Burnouts*, 1989)

- Foregrounds **social meaning** and **agency**;
- Explores the contribution of multiple variables in fashioning **styles**;
- Shifts the focus from **speaker categories** to the **construction of personae**.
  - Gender, class, age etc. are no longer seen as independent and predefined categories, but as aspects of an individual’s identity which are **enacted in context**; they might be more salient in some contexts than in others;
  - The social meanings of associated language forms are not fixed, but **emergent** and open to change; they mean different things in different conversational contexts;
  - Social identity is something that is performed, it is brought into being through the act of speaking/behaving (**performativity**).
Reconsidering Style

• Labov/variationist sociolinguistics: style as a *formality continuum* (from formal/careful to vernacular/casual; measured in terms of ‘attention paid to speech’; cognitive approach);
• Style in a more anthropological sense: a *distinctive* and socially meaningful *way of speaking* (or writing), a ‘voice’;
  ▫ Socially meaningful *clusterings of features*;
  ▫ To talk like a women/man, a professor, a nerd, a resident of Brugge, a resident of Cape Town, a jazz or hip hop aficionado, a farmer, an urbanite, etc.;
  ▫ Typically linked to *other stylistic resources/systems* such as clothing, other forms of adornment, bodily posture, dance, sport preferences, etc.;
  ▫ Also linked to particular settings (i.e. importance of studying *intra-speaker variation* across communicative contexts).
Robert Podesva (2008, Three sources of stylistic meaning)

**Doc**
- Non-threatening: HRT in declaratives
- Expressive (restrained): weak falsetto
- Formal: - d/t deletion
- Competent: + d/t release

**Diva**
- Informal: + d/t deletion
- Prissy: strong stop releases
- Precise: hyper-articulate vowels
- Expressive: frequent falsetto
The postmodern turn, gender

“The ‘performativity’ model sheds an interesting light on the phenomenon of gendered speech. Speech too is a ‘repeated stylization of the body’; the ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ styles of talking identified by researchers might be thought of as the ‘congealed’ results of repeated acts of social actors who are striving to constitute themselves as ‘proper’ men and women. Whereas sociolinguistics traditionally assumes that people talk the way they do because of who they (already) are, the postmodernist approach suggests that people are who they are because (among other things) the way they talk.” (Deborah Cameron, Language and Masculinity, 1997).
Two perspectives on language: dialects and registers

- **Dialect** (sociolect, idiolect, regiolect ...) → variety according to user (relies on preconceived identity categories, e.g., class, region, gender, age, ethnicity)
- **Register/style** → variety according to use/function, an emergent phenomenon (e.g. performing class, region, gender, age, ethnicity; cf. Agha’s work on enregisterment)
Colonial Linguistics
Colonial linguistics

- Tracing the history of the (primarily European) engagement with ‘otherness’ (Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 2008);
  - **Ignoring otherness:** the *Requerimiento* (written in 1513, abolished in 1553) was read aloud in the presence of los indios to inform them that, through that act of reading, they were bound to either submit to the king of Spain and the Christian church, or suffer consequences which the reader went on to describe.
Continued

- ‘We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us’ (cited in Errington, Colonial Linguistics, 2008: 25)
Continued

- “The Requerimiento can be taken as kind of early prototype for linguistic asymmetries in colonial power: the non-intelligibility of speech provided sufficient grounds for subjugating them because it was evidence not of their difference but their deficiency.” (Errington, Colonial Linguistics, 2008: 26)

- A similar example: the Treaty of Waitangi (New Zealand), where the Maori translation included so many English words (neologisms) that it was incomprehensible to the Maori chiefs.
Zones of colonial contact (and conflict)

• ‘Missionary linguistics’
  ▫ Missionaries are the group which has produced the single largest body of knowledge about linguistic diversity around the world; they partially described, partially created new print-literate forms of indigenous languages;
  ▫ Reduced complex situations of language use and variation in the image of European ‘cultures of standardization’ (see Lecture 4).
A Mission School (Windhoek)
From ‘general’ grammar to philology

- Irvine (*Genres of Conquest*, 2001)
  - 18th century/early 19th century: the idea of General (Universal) Grammar, articulated most clearly by French linguists;
  - In the course of the 19th century the German philological tradition became the dominant paradigm;
  - Colonial linguistic observations became an important input for the scholarly project of comparative philology.
William Bleek

- *Comparative Grammar of South African Languages (1862)/ Grimm’s Law in South Africa (1874)*
  - Showed that African languages can be grouped into *language families* (something which was doubted by Max Müller) and that proto-languages can be constructed;
  - However, the academic debates were not only about linguistics, but also about *human origins* and *racial history/inequality* (scientific racism).
Linguistics as a science

African linguistic research

Imperial enterprise

Professionalization of academics
A.

PARSING LESSON.

[The following extract, taken from an article in the first number of the "Isibuto Samavo," and referring to the introduction of the Gospel amongst the Gaika tribe of Kafirs by Dr. Vanderkemp, will conveniently serve for the illustration of the proper mode of parsing Kafir words, in accordance with the preceding Grammar.]

Lite ilizwi lika-Tixo, ukuqala kwalo ukungena ema-Xoseni, langena kwa-Ngqika; lalipetwe ngu-Nyengana,

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Lite; *It did so*; § 392, perf. Ind. of the irr. v. ti, 3rd. pers. 2nd. spec. sing. aff. * in concord with its nominative— ilizwi; *the word*; n. spec. 2, sing. lika-Tixo; *of God*; poss. f. of u-Tixo, n. spec. 1, sing.—in regimen with ilizwi. ukuqala; *beginning*; Inf. of the reg. v. qala. Used as nom. abs., § 442; *as to (its) beginning &c.* kwalo; *its*; poss. pro. 3rd. pers. 2nd. spec. sing. representing ilizwi, and concording with ukuqala. ukungena; *to enter*; Inf. of the reg. v. ngenta. ema-Xoseni; *amongst the Kafirs*; 1st. dat. f. of ama-Xosa, n. spec.

John Appleyard, *Kafir Language*, 1850
APPENDIX.

umfo wapesheya kwolwandle. Wayete yena, esekwelinye ilizwe, weva kusitwa, Kuku isizwe esingama-Xosa. Wa-
za wati kekeloku, wanokunga angashumayela ilizwi lika-
Tixo kwesosizwe. Wasel' ecela indhlela ke kwabantu

umfo; a man: n. spec. 1, sing. in apposition with u-Nyengana.
wapesheya; of beyond: prep. with poss. par. spec. 1, sing. prefix-
ed,—in regimen with umfo.
kwolwandle; (of) the sea: indef. poss. f. of ulwandle, n. spec. 5,
sing. in regimen with the prep. pesheya.
Wayete; He did so: § 392: cont. f. of waye etc, perf. Ind. of the
irr. v. ti, 2nd. aug. f. 3rd. pers. 1st. spec. sing. aff: in concord
with its nominative—
yena; he: pers. pro. 3rd. pers. 1st. spec. sing.
esekwelinye; being still in another: dat. f. of indef. adj. elinye,
1st. class, spec. 2, sing. r. nyc,—in concord with ilizwe; with
pres. part. of the subs. v. 3rd. pers. 2nd. spec. sing. and verb.
sa prefixed, the final vowel of the latter being changed into e,
because of the omission of the verbal root of the former. § 296.
ilizwe; country: n. spec. 2, sing.
weva; he heard: aor. Ind. of the irr. v. va (§ 289), 3rd. pers. 1st.
spec. sing. aff: referring to u-Nyengana.
kusitwa; it being said: pres. part. of liwa, pass. v. of ti, impers. f.
aff.
Kuku; There is (or exists): the verb, ha with the impers. f. of the
pres. Ind. of the subs. v. prefixed, but its verbal root omitted.
isizwe; a nation: n. spec. 4, sing.
esingama-Xosa; which is the Kafir: the noun ama-Xosa used ad-
jectively in concord with isizwe. § 500, 1.
Waza wati; He then became so: aor. Ind. of ti, 3rd. pers. 1st.
spec. sing. af: preceded by the same form of the verb za in its
idiomatic usage, § 566, 1.
kekeloku; expletive.
wanokunga; he was desirous: Inf. of the irr. v. nga, to wish,
(§ 367) conj. f. with the aor. Ind. of the subs. v. prefixed, 3rd.
pers. 1st. spec. sing. verbal r. omitted.
anangashumayela; (that) he might publish: § 529: pres. Pot. of
the reg. v. shumayela, 3rd. pers. 1st. spec. sing. af.
kwesosizwe; to that nation: the noun isizwe with the dat. f. of its
corresponding dem. pro. eso prefixed. §§ 462 and 457.
Wasel' ecela; Immediately he asked: pres. part. of reg. v. celu,
3rd. pers. 1st. spec. sing. aff: preceded by the 1st. aug. f. of the
Analysis

- Text is designed for a **specialist audience**;
- Not aimed at native speakers;
- A scientific *(philological)* translation;
- Shows the **denotational equivalence** between English and isiXhosa;
- Provides an **inventory description** of ‘language-as-structure’;
- See Blommaert *(Artefactual ideologies, 2008)* for a similar example.
The ideological project

- Part of the ideological project of colonial linguistics was to establish resemblances between ‘us’ and ‘them’. That is, to show that their languages – however different on the surface – ultimately conformed to familiar structures and patterns, and that the diversity encountered can be assimilated into a familiar (Latin-grammatical) image of language.
- At the same time, language differences figured significantly ‘in the creation of human hierarchies, such that colonial subjects could be recognized as human, yet deficiently so’ (Errington 2008:5) with the inferior (read ‘different’, ‘non-Indo-European’) structure of their languages a reflection of their inferior mental abilities.
- Ideologies of differentiation (Irvine & Gal, Language Ideologies and Differentiation, 2000)
A South African example

• ‘[T]hey [the Khoisan languages] are uncouth and unharmonious, rendering any attempt at their systematization a matter of almost insuperable difficulty ... [these languages] are inferior to all others in the mode of their enunciation, employing, as they doubtless do, the very lowest grade of articulate sounds ... The alliteral class [Bantu – characterized by concordial agreement as a major structural feature] forms the second and principal division of South African languages. Its various dialects are of a much higher order than those of the Click class, being highly systematic and harmonious in their construction, and well worthy of receiving a literature.’ (Appleyard, Kafir Grammar, 1850)
• ‘How vast is the difference separating the language of the Copts [Egyptian] from the humble level of the Hottentot ... [European languages constitute a family] superior not only to its own sisters, but to all other instruments of the human intellect which are found throughout the world, and I pride myself that its most pre-eminent daughter is our own Germanic.’ (Bleek 1851, cited in Bank 2006: 19).

- **Iconization** – linguistic features become iconic images of the assumed ‘essence’ of social groups
  - Click consonante – primitive (because they are not evidenced in any of the European languages, and spoken by hunter-gatherer groups)
  - Khoisan – primitive (and the more clicks a language has, the more primitive its speakers)
Images of science: language maps

Gaston van Bulck (1948)
Gustaaf Huestaert (1950)
Centre and periphery

- **Gaston Van Bulck** (1948, *Recherches Linguistique au Congo Belge*)
  - Based on literature, not fieldwork;
  - Presents numerous, tiny linguistic enclaves in the colony;
  - 7 distinct Mongo languages;
  - Supports efforts of the colonial power to impose colonial unity on a disunited region (including the use of languages of wider communication, LWCs, e.g., Lingala/Swahili/French);
  - Underlying view of language: ‘battle metaphor’, survival of the fittest.
• **Gustaaaf Hulstaert** (1950, *Carte Linguistique du Congo Belge*)
  - Based on over 20 years of fieldwork;
  - His map shows much less fragmentation, more homogeneity;
  - 1 Mongo language;
  - Thus, local languages could be used for communication (LWCs were not necessary);
  - Biography matters: Hulstaert was Flemish-speaking, with a strong sense of ethno-linguistic identity, and compared the francisation of the Congo with the situation in Belgium.

• Structures/conflicts/ideologies of the centre affected the vision of the periphery (**Van de Velde, Two Language Maps, 1999**).
Another area of interest: extraterritorial/transplanted varieties

- English, Portuguese, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, also Hindi, Chinese languages ...
- ‘In the fullness of time, this transplantation led to the development of a number of new national and local varieties of these languages, such that they were all clearly different from varieties in the metropolitan homeland.’ (P. Trudgill, Colonial dialect contact in the history of European languages: On the irrelevance of identity to new-dialect formation, 2008)
Language/dialect contact

- Dialect/language contact as an important mechanism of linguistic change;
- Contact makes the ‘feature pool’ significantly more heterogeneous
  - ‘As this heterogeneity varies from one geographical setting to another, contact can cause the same language to evolve differentially ... [c]ontact with other languages increases the likelihood of specification’ (Mufwene, *Colonialization, population contacts and the emergence of new language varieties*, 2008)
The mechanism

• Were they ‘created’ by speakers (to express a new sense of identity)?
• Or did they emerge by accident (via quasi automatic/psychological processes of face-to-face accommodation, with identity being only a secondary process, parasitic on the newly emerged variety; cf. Trudgill, *Colonial Dialect Contact*, 2008)?
• Accommodation as ‘automatic’: ‘talk like others talk’ as a basic maxim of human language behaviour (linked to an evolutionary motivated human pre-disposition for communal sameness & interactional synchrony; Trudgill, *Colonial Dialect Contact*, 2008)
Factors which guide feature selection

- **Frequency** (demographic factors, very important)
- **Typology** (related to frequency, but draws on notions of linguistic typologies/language families)
- **Salience** (how do we define it?)
- **Markedness** (rather problematic; important counter-example from southern Africa, clicks in isiXhosa)
Continued

- **Simplicity** (highly problematic, contact languages are not always ‘simpler’ version of their lexifier, they often include complex superstrate features; e.g. pronoun system in TokPisin, negation in Afrikaans)
- **Semantic transparency**
- **Regularity**
- Plus (vs. Trudgill): **social reasons** (yes, **identities**)!!
Geographical Focus: Southern Africa