

Interdisciplinary colloquium

Constructing the self Linguistic and historical perspectives on identity and authenticity in egodocuments and other writings ‘from below’

*Sat. 25 April 2015
Paleis der Academiën, Brussels*

<https://languageandhistoryfrombelow.wordpress.com>

Historians and linguists alike share an interest in the everyday writings of ‘common people’. Within the field of social history, approaches from below and *Alltagsgeschichte* came to the foreground since the 1980s, while within linguistics, the shift from a ‘bird’s eye’ to a ‘worm’s eye’ perspective has taken place in more recent years within the discipline of historical sociolinguistics. On the heuristic level, both disciplines share an interest in similar types of primary sources, such as egodocuments. On the analytical level, both disciplines can also complement each other in terms of their specific areas of expertise. Historical perspectives may provide linguists with contextual insights into the language users they are studying: who are the common people whose writing they examine, and what do we know about their everyday professional and private life, their schooling, and so on. Linguistic perspectives may in turn inform social historians about the linguistic and communicative repertoire at these writers’ disposal: how did they speak and write, how may this have influenced their daily experiences, and what can we learn about their social background from their language use?

Building on these shared interests, this colloquium intends to bring together experts working on **PERSPECTIVES ‘FROM BELOW’ IN HISTORY AND LINGUISTICS**, stimulating scholars from both disciplines to explore common research agendas and possibilities for multidisciplinary approaches from below. More specifically, the focus will lie on **IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND AUTHENTICITY IN EGODOCUMENTS AND OTHER WRITINGS FROM BELOW**. Possible research questions include:

- How did ordinary people use egodocuments and other writings to shape their social identities and mediate their perceptions of the social world, and to which extent do such writings provide us with an ‘authentic’ window into social and linguistic realities?
- What role does language play in the construction of specific social identities, and how do lower order writers use the various linguistic repertoires at their disposal to construct distinct social identities?
- How can a study of egodocuments and other written texts as socially embedded objects provide us with a richer understanding of social relations in past societies, and where lies the added value of approaches from below?
- To which degree does ideology play a mediating role in linguistic representations of the social world, and what is the impact of (standard) language ideologies on the actual language use in writings from below?

- How are elements from the spoken vernacular represented in the written record, and what is the role of different types of language norms in the mediation between everyday language and its representation in writing?
- What role did literacy and the written word play in the everyday life of ordinary people, and to which extent can we observe alternative cultures of literacy developing among the lesser educated ranks of society?

We welcome contributions on linguistic and historical perspectives on identity and authenticity in egodocuments and other writings ‘from below’, both from linguistic and from historical perspectives.

Contributions will be allotted 30 minutes plus 10 minutes for questions and discussion. Additionally, young researchers are also encouraged to present ongoing work and future perspectives in the form of a shorter presentation of 15 minutes, followed by 10-15 minutes for discussion and feedback.

Proposals for contributions should be submitted in the form of a short abstract (250-500 words) before Friday 20 February 2015, via the colloquium website (<https://languageandhistoryfrombelow.wordpress.com>). Notification of acceptance will be given by Wednesday 5 March 2015.

Master class

Language and history from below

*Friday 24 April 2015
Vrije Universiteit Brussel*

Preceding the colloquium, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel will host two master classes on historical and linguistic perspectives ‘from below’ (Friday 24 April 2015). These interactive seminars will be taught by **Martyn Lyons**, Emeritus Professor of History & European Studies (UNSW Australia) and a leading expert on the writing culture of ordinary people, and **Stephan Elspaß**, University Professor for Germanic Linguistics (Universität Salzburg) and a leading expert on language history from below. The seminars are aimed at graduate and PhD students as well as postdoctoral researchers, but anyone with an interest in language and history from below is more than welcome!

Participation is free, but registration is required. For more information, please visit:
<https://languageandhistoryfrombelow.wordpress.com/masterclass>

Organizing committee

Anne Winter (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Gijsbert Rutten (Universiteit Leiden), Griet Vermeesch (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Jacques Van Keymeulen (Universiteit Gent), Jill Puttaert (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Maarten Van Ginderachter (Universiteit Antwerpen), Rik Vosters (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Wim Vandenbussche (Vrije Universiteit Brussel).