

Call for Papers: Language and Identity in Antiquity

Overview

Date: 19–20 Jul 2024
Location: University of Lausanne, Switzerland
Deadline: 1 March 2024
Invited speakers: Andrea Cuomo (Ghent)
Katherine McDonald (Durham)
Andreas Willi (Oxford)
Organisers: Robin Meyer (Lausanne)
Antoine Viredaz (Lausanne)
Victoria B. Fendel (Oxford)
Website: <https://unil.ch/languageidentity/>

Background

Language and identity have historically been interlinked in deterministic discourses such as ‘one language – one nation’ or ‘multilingualism as a problem’ which no longer reflect our modern understanding of language in society (Bennett and Fisher 2022: 18). Rather, we must view identity as ‘multifaceted, fluid and dynamic, and thus constantly being constructed and (re)negotiated, and as both an individual and social phenomenon’ (Bennett and Fisher 2022: 16). This approach reflects, broadly speaking, a post-structuralist idea of identity: As a semiotic system, language is, on the one hand, a tool to construct identity, and, on the other hand, among a number of emblems of identity choices (Halliday and Webster 2007: 255). However, not all language choices are intentional and not all identity cues are interpreted by one’s environment in the way the individual desires (Block 2022: 187; Foucault 1981).

While production and perception experiments, interviews assessing attitudes, and longitudinal studies are possible for modern spoken languages, these approaches and the type and detail of information they provide are often not available for corpus languages. This conference aims to explore the relationship(s) between language(s) and identity for individuals and groups of people (of any size and shape) in the polities bordering on the Mediterranean Sea and their neighbours. Since correlations between language and identity are prone to changing diachronically and being highly variable synchronically, we have chosen a purposefully wide timeframe of between 2000 BCE and 1000 CE.

Questions

Questions of interest include but are not limited to the following, where ‘language choices’ refer both to choosing between what is usually termed languages as well as between varieties of the same language:

- How and/or why can language choices reflect identity choices?
- What factors impact language choices as reflections of identity?
- What types of identities can language choices reflect?
- To what extent does context influence language and identity choices?
- How are language and identity choices synchronically and/or diachronically connected?
- Are there systems adopted by individuals and/or groups that regulate how language choices reflect identity choices?
- To what extent do language choices not reflect identity choices (e.g. in the sense of Labov’s indicators)?
- What aspects of language are manipulated in order to reflect identity choices? Are there aspects that are immune? Are there aspects that are specifically prone to it?

- What identities are imposed on language users due to their language choices (cf. Block 2022, Duff 2022)? How do language users react?

Call

The conference will take place at the University of Lausanne on 19–20 July 2024. Abstracts of no more than 500 words (excl. references) are invited from researchers at all career stages wishing to contribute to this subject.

We are interested in data-driven rather than theory-heavy proposals but will consider the latter on a case-by-case basis.

Deadline for submissions: 1 March 2024

Notification of outcomes: 15 March 2024

If successful, we ask that contributors prepare a 20-minute presentation (+10 minutes for questions) in English or French. To submit an abstract, please [use the submission form on the website](#).

References

- Ayres-Bennett, Wendy, and Fisher, Linda (eds.). *Multilingualism and Identity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Block, David. Seeking Methodological Rigour in Language and Identity Research: Applying a Version of Positioning Theory to a Research Interview Excerpt. In: Ayres-Bennett, Wendy, and Fisher, Linda (eds.). *Multilingualism and Identity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 181–200.
- Duff, Patricia. Multilingualism(s), Globalization and Identity: Learning ‘Chinese’ as an Additional Language. In: Ayres-Bennett, Wendy, and Fisher, Linda (eds.). *Multilingualism and Identity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 261–279.
- Foucault, Michel. The order of discourse. In: Young, Robert (ed.). *Untying the text: A post-structuralist reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 51–78.
- Halliday, Michael, and Webster, Jonathan. *Language and Society*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.