

Language and the Anthropocene Research Group

WORKSHOP

Japanese  
historical linguistics  
in memory of  
Prof. Dr. Elisabeth De Boer

Forget-  
-not-me

8 - 9 OCTOBER 2025

**Workshop | 8 – 9 October 2025**

**Forget-me-not:  
Japanese historical linguistics in memory of  
Prof. Dr. Elisabeth De Boer**

**Organisers:**

Martine Robbeets and the Language and the Anthropocene Research Group

**Venue:**

Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology, Jena, Germany



**On 22th August 2023, our dear colleague Elisabeth de Boer sadly died at the age of 57, cutting short a promising career in Japanese Historical Linguistics.**

Elisabeth was a respected teacher of Japanese and linguistics at the Universities of Leiden and Bochum. Her research challenged several so-called teisetsu or 'accepted opinions' encountered in the field. Among others, Elisabeth showed that Japanese is better described as a restricted tone language than as a pitch-accent language; that Kyōto-type dialects have been less conservative than dialects to their east and west and that the commonly accepted binary tree structure of Japonic is in need of revision. Moreover, Elisabeth did not shy away from interdisciplinary approaches, integrating linguistic evidence with archaeological and genetic findings to illuminate ancient population movements across the Japanese Islands.

In this workshop, several colleagues will build on Elisabeth's research and teaching in Japanese historical linguistics. Special attention will be paid to the posthumous appearance of her (2024) book on Using Tonal Data to Recover Japanese Language History. We cordially invite colleagues and all who knew her well to take a moment to reflect on Elisabeth as a scientist and a person.

## Publications

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2024) Using Tonal Data to Recover Japanese Language History.

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2024) "The role of migration in the branching and spread of the Japonic language family", Proceedings of the International Conference of Historical Linguistics (ICHL) 24, Australian National University, Canberra.

Boiko, Mel & Griesenhofer, Christopher & Loukareas, Petros & Aoyama, Masato & De Boer, Elisabeth (2024) "Early compound accent in Japanese Tōkyō-type dialects: An unexpected finding." Proceedings of the International Conference of Historical Linguistics (ICHL) 24, Australian National University, Canberra.

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2023) The Ramsey Hypothesis. Handbook of the History of the Japanese Language (HHJL). (Frellesvig, B. and Kinsui, S. J. eds). Handbooks of Japanese Language and Linguistics (HJLL), Mouton de Gruyter: Berlin-New York. 195-222.

De Boer, Elisabeth M. & Loukareas, Petros (2020). The preservation of proto-Japanese tone class 2.5 in the Izumo region explained, *Cahiers de Linguistique Asie Orientale* 49:2 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/19606028-bja10009>

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2020). "The classification of the Japonic languages", in Martine Robbeets & Alexander Savelyev (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Transeurasian languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 40-58 DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198804628.003.0005

De Boer, Elisabeth M., Yang, Melinda A., Kawagoe, Eileen & Barnes, Gina L. (2020) "Japan considered from the hypothesis of farmer/language spread", *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 1-20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/ehs.2020.7>.

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2017). Review of Handbook of the Ryukyuan languages: History, structure and use, *Studies in Language* 41:1, 781-790

De Boer, Elisabeth M (2017). "Universals of tone rules and diachronic change in Japanese", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*; 94, 217-242

De Boer, Elisabeth M (2013). "The split of the Tokyo type tone system into a number of sub-types, and what this can tell us about the tone system of proto-Japanese," *Japanese/Korean Linguistics* vol. 20, CSLI, Stanford, 65-79

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2010). The historical development of Japanese tone. Part I From proto-Japanese to the modern dialects. Part II The introduction and adaptation of the Middle Chinese tones in Japan, *Veröffentlichungen des Ostasien-Instituts der Ruhr-Universität Bochum* 59, Harrassowitz Verlag, 600 pages.

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2008a) "The origin of alternations in initial pitch in the verbal paradigms of the central Japanese (Kyōto type) accent systems," *Evidence and Counter-evidence*, Festschrift F. Kortlandt; Volume II, (SSGL 32 & 33), Rodopi, Amsterdam- New York, 35-50

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2008b) "The Middle Chinese tones through Japanese eyes," *Chinese linguistics in Leipzig (CLÉ 2)*, (Djamouri, Redouane and Sybesma, Rint, eds), EHESS-CRLAO, Paris, 71-86

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (2005) The historical development of Japanese pitch accent; Part I: The accent patterns of the modern dialects, Part II: The introduction and adaptation of the Middle Chinese tones in Japan, Leiden University Dissertation

De Boer, Elisabeth M. (1996) "Present state of the study of Evenki vowel harmony," *Proceedings of the 38th Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC)*, Kawasaki, Japan: August 7-12, 1995 (Stary G. ed.) Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 121-133