Touching the Past

Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics (AHS)

Over the last three decades, historical sociolinguistics has developed into a mature and challenging field of study that focuses on language users and language use in the past. The social motivation of linguistic variation and change continues at the forefront of the historical sociolinguistic enquiry, but current research does not stop there. It extends from social and regional variation in language use to its various communicative contexts, registers and genres, and includes issues in language attitudes, policies and ideologies. One of the main stimuli for the field comes from new digitized resources and large text corpora, which enable the study of a much wider social coverage than before. Historical sociolinguists use variationist and dialectological research tools and techniques, perform pragmatic and social network analyses, and adopt innovative approaches from other disciplines. The series publishes monographs and thematic volumes, in English, on different languages and topics that contribute to our understanding of the relations between the individual, language and society in the past.

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Volume 1

Touching the Past. Studies in the historical sociolinguistics of ego-documents
Edited by Marijke J. van der Wal and Gijsbert Rutten

Touching the Past

Studies in the historical sociolinguistics
of ego-documents

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Table of contents

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Preface & Acknowledgements

The present volume originates from the HiSoN conference *Touching the Past. (Ego-) documents in a linguistic and historical perspective* which took place at the University of Leiden in June 2011 and which was organised in connection with the *Letters as Loot* research programme, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). A selection of the conference papers are now presented in this thematic volume, which focuses on the major themes of ongoing historical sociolinguistic research.

We would like to thank all colleagues involved in the peer review process for their invaluable contributions to the preparation of this volume. The nature of their work implies their anonymity, but we would like to stress that authors and editors alike benefited greatly from the comments made by the reviewers of the individual papers and by the referees for John Benjamins Publishers. We are also most grateful to Martin Durrell (Manchester), Anthony Lodge (St. Andrews) and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (Leiden) for their linguistic advice at various stages of the project. Finally, we thank the authors for their inspiring papers which made our editorial work a pleasant and most rewarding enterprise.

The editors
March 2013

Ego-documents in a historical-sociolinguistic perspective

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1. Ego-documents

Exploring textual sources from past periods, historical linguists often experience a sense of *touching the past*, especially when focusing on ego-documents or first-person writings. From the diversity of text types, both in manuscript and printed form, it is this category of ego-documents or first-person writings that is at the core of the present volume.[1] Ego-documents, which comprise letters and auto-biographical writings such as memoirs, diaries and travelogues, are remarkable for various reasons (cf. Elspaß 2012a: 156). First of all, they are considered to be as close to speech as non-fictional historical texts can possibly be. Secondly, they offer an opportunity of filling in the blanks left by traditional historical linguistics that in many cases had a teleological perspective on language history, mainly focusing on literary texts and formal texts from higher registers (Van der Wal 2006). Thirdly, they provide the basis of a *language history from below* in its own right that studies the language of the middle and lower layers of society (Elspaß 2012a: 161).

The relative proximity of written documents to authentic speech and, more generally, the relationship between speech and writing have been an issue of much debate, and have resulted into different categorizations. Schneider (2002: 70–81) distinguishes the following five text types, based on the relationship between a speech event and its written record: text that is *recorded* (interview transcripts, trial records), *recalled* (ex-slave narratives), *imagined* (letters, diaries), *observed* (commentaries) and *invented* (literary dialect). With regard to letters and diaries, he comments that "[a] writer records potential, conceived utterances by himself which, for lack of the presence of the addressee, need to be written down

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1. The term *ego-document* was coined about 1955 by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser who initiated historical research of this text type (cf. www.egodocument.net). He defined egodocuments as writings in which the I, the writer, is continuously present in the text as the writing and describing subject.

rather than said; but he remains in a near-speech mode" (Schneider 2002:72).[2] Koch and Oesterreicher (1985) differentiate between the language *medium* (i.e. phonic or graphic) and spoken and written *conception*, and determine the position of a text on a conceptual continuum between the poles of communicative *immediacy* (orality, informality, unplannedness) and *distance* (literateness, formality, plannedness). With their interactive purpose, private letters are clearly on the side of the language of immediacy, even more so than diaries and travelogues are (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2003:29; Elspaß 2012a:157–159).[3] It is therefore not surprising that, in their quest for speech-like written texts, historical sociolinguists have in many cases focused on private letters and have compiled letter corpora, such as the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC), the corpus of nineteenth-century German emigrant letters (cf. Elspaß 2012b:47–48), the Dutch *Letters as Loot* corpus (cf. Rutten & Van der Wal, and Nobels & Simons, the present volume), and the French Canadian corpora (cf. Martineau, the present volume). This focus is reflected in the present volume, which contains ten studies of letters, ranging from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries and comprising British and South African English, continental and Canadian French, as well as Dutch and Lithuanian. One of these (France Martineau's paper) also deals with another type of ego-document, the diary, and yet another article, that by Peter Burke, concentrates on autobiography.

In the scholarly discussion on orality and text types, not only *speech-like* texts such as letters play a role, but also *speech-based* texts such as trial proceedings.[4] The latter (Schneider's *recorded* text type) are likewise supposed to give access to contemporary speech, although they contain *reported* speech, written down by others than the speaker. In this volume, a fine example of such a speech-based source is presented in Laura Wright's article on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century court records from the Island of St Helena. These first-person court testimonies, which represent some of the earliest evidence of both

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2.   Both Schneider (2002:76) and Elspaß (2012b:158) stress that private letters and diaries by semi-literate writers in particular may reflect many features of their speech.

3.   Cf. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (2012:32) who argue that "in our experience of compiling and using the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC), personal correspondence provides the 'next best thing' to authentic spoken language and, even with its obvious limitations, makes it possible to extend the variationist paradigm into the more distant past."

4.   Cf. Culpeper & Kytö (2010:17) who distinguish between speech-like, speech-based and speech-purposed texts (such as plays), each of which categories has own characteristics, advantages and disadvantages for research that attempts to reconstruct actual speech.

colonial English and a creoloid, allow the reader to get a view on a most intriguing speech-based source.

What all the articles have in common is their focus on language variation and change. The various papers deal with different languages and different periods, and take into account the historical context of linguistic phenomena. Some articles focus mainly on social difference and variation in their sociohistorical context, as we will see in Section 2, while others hone in on self-representation, writer-addressee interaction and identity work, as will be discussed in Section 3. In Section 4, we will return to the relationship between written documents and speech. The order in which we will discuss the articles below is the same as that of their presentation in the volume.

2.   Social difference and variation in context

In this section of the volume, focusing on social difference and variation, the papers are presented in chronological order, ranging from Anthony Lodge's article on sixteenth-century French to Carita Klippi's on twentieth-century French letters. The final paper in this section, by France Martineau, examines not only letters, but also another type of ego-document, i.e. diaries, thus marking the transition to the series of articles dealing with self-representation that is the focus of the next section.

The context of Colloquial Parisian French of the mid-sixteenth century features in **Anthony Lodge**'s study "A lady-in-waiting's begging letter to her former employer (Paris, mid-sixteenth century)", dealing with a letter sent to Marie de Guise, Dowager Queen of Scotland by her former lady-in-waiting Mlle de la Tousche (Renée d'Avantigny). This intriguing letter contains remarkable phonetic and morphological variants which are rarely found in the printed texts of the time and which were previously assumed to be characteristic of lower-class Parisian French. The letter raises two major issues, i.e. the relationship between writing skills and the autograph status of letters, and the social evaluation of variants by contemporary observers. Mlle de la Tousche belonged to the minor aristocracy of Touraine and, in her position as lady-in-waiting, would have had an extensive education in the ways of the Court. This need not, however, mean that as a female member of the lesser nobility she possessed advanced writing skills alongside her self-evident reading competence. Material characteristics of this and four other letters sent by Mlle de la Touche make it plausible that the letter under discussion is not an autograph and may have been written by a professional secretary. Although the non-conventional variants in the letter cannot be attributed directly to the sender, they must have been acceptable in a begging-letter to

a distinguished and highly-placed person such as Marie de Guise. By examining the values attached to these variants in contemporary grammar books and literary texts, Lodge concludes that in the middle years of the sixteenth century, these vernacular forms, associated primarily with the semi-rustic speech of Parisians at the lower end of society, were used in the fashionable speech of a different social layer, that of certain sections of the Court.

Conducting research on private letters, we have to be aware of their hybrid nature in that, on the one hand, they are speech-like and thus reflect vernacular variants, such as those in the French begging-letter, and, on the other, show typical written language characteristics, such as epistolary formulae. In their article "Epistolary formulae and writing experience in Dutch letters from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries", **Gijsbert Rutten and Marijke van der Wal** relate the use of epistolary formulae in Dutch seventeenth- and eighteenth-century private letters to their social context, i.e. to sociolinguistic variation and, ultimately, to different degrees of writing experience. Reviewing research into the history of reading and writing skills in Early Modern Europe, they argue that writing experience varied in the language community across gender, social rank and time and that letter-writing skills were not acquired generally, despite the availability of letter-writing manuals. It is these gender, social rank and time differences that are demonstrated in the letters, on the basis of the distribution of two frequent epistolary formulae in the *Letters as Loot* corpus compiled at Leiden University. Women produced more such formulae than men, more formulae were found in letters from the lower ranks than in those from the upper ranks and, finally, the use of formulaic language decreased over time. The distribution of these formulae thus parallels the distribution of writing experience, which was higher among men than among women and increased both along the social index and over time. Taking into account one of the functions of formulaic language, viz. reducing the effort of writing, the article aims to clarify the interplay between epistolary formulae and writing experience. Instead of lengthy pondering, the letter writer could resort to fixed formulae, providing generally accepted ways of verbalising information and experiences. Considering the differences in writing experience, less-experienced writers are expected to be most in need of such helpful formulae, while more skilled and as such more creative letter-writers are expected to use the fewest formulae. The actual distribution of the formulae examined indeed suggests that formulaic language was particularly convenient to less-experienced writers.

Sociolinguistic differences also come to the fore in the contribution by **Judith Nobels and Tanja Simons** "From *ul* to *UE*: A socio-historical study of Dutch forms of address in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century private letters". In letters from the above-mentioned *Letters as Loot* corpus, as many as five different forms of address can be distinguished: *ul* (from 'your love')*, U.E.* (from 'your Honour')*, u,*

gij, and *jij*, two of which, i.e. *ul* and *U.E.,* are primarily used in letters. The analysis reveals a clear development over time, as the most frequently used seventeenth-century form of address, *ul* (occurring in about half of the cases), appears to be replaced by *U.E.*, a marginal form in seventeenth-century letters, which became very popular in the eighteenth-century letters. Social variation is also present in both periods. In the seventeenth-century data, letter writers from the lower ranks are virtually the only ones who occasionally used the typically spoken Dutch form of address *jij*. At the same time, these lower-rank writers use *ul* more often than higher-rank writers who started to adopt the new form of address *U.E.* In the eighteenth century, the occurrence of *U.E.* has increased dramatically and its distribution is again socially stratified: the higher the social rank of the letter writer, the larger the proportion of *U.E.* Gender differences are also found: seventeenth-century male writers use *UE* more frequently than female writers who in general use ul and *gij*, and *U.E.* relatively little, just as members of the lower ranks. The similarities between women and the lower ranks are ultimately explained by referring to their shared lesser writing experience. In the eighteenth century, the distribution of the different forms of address still shows social class differences, but gender equality, which suggests that women by then had caught up with men as far as their knowledge of epistolary conventions was concerned.

Another socially marked linguistic phenomenon is the use of so-called flat adverbs, adverbs without the suffix *ly*, which **Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade** examines in letters by the English novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817). Considering its proscription in eighteenth-century grammars, it is striking to see that Jane Austen used flat adverbs, not only in her novels, where she employed them to mark the language of some of her lower-status characters as *vulgar*, but also in her own letters where she varied between the suffixless and the suffixed forms. In her article "Flat adverbs and Jane Austen's letters", Tieken-Boon van Ostade finds out, firstly, that most instances of flat adverbs occur in what may well have been Austen's first most informal letter where Austen may have been struggling with finding the right style of writing and may have assumed that flat adverbs were part of such a style. Secondly, Tieken-Boon van Ostade concludes that, albeit small, the number of occurrences over the years suggests a decreasing usage of flat adverbs over time. The latter observation raises the question whether there is any relationship between this decrease and the normative grammars that had been appearing in large numbers since the 1760s. Reviewing Austen's education and schooling, Tieken-Boon van Ostade makes it plausible that her dwindling use of flat adverbs was not influenced by any external factor such as normative grammars. Rather, she stresses her prior assumption that Austen was developing a suitably informal style in which to communicate with her sister, and in which she eventually considered a regular use of flat adverbs to belong to the domain of non-standard usage in her

novels. The case of the flat adverbs thus demonstrates the proximity of private letters to authentic speech and underlines the value of Jane Austen's informal letters as a source of information on the language of the period in which she lived.

The context of a national ideology of a unified language, largely promoted in the French education system, figures in **Carita Klippi**'s study "Letters from Gaston B.: A prisoner's voice during the Great War", which deals with of a collection of letters written by a prisoner of war to his wife and mother in the years between 1914 and 1918. As a representative of the lower classes, the French coal miner Gaston B. was exposed to the political and social dimension of language planning, and his language reflects its level of success, while it also reveals what grammatical tools and rules have been focused on during his schooling. Gaston attended a state school under the Third Republic, where he learnt to read, write and count, but he never managed to pass his certificate of primary school studies. His fluent handwriting indicates that in school much time and effort were devoted to what Fairman (2012) calls mechanical writing or mechanical schooling. Gaston was also familiar with letter-writing conventions in that he used the correct letter format and employed particular opening and closing formulae, though without dividing his text into paragraphs. Although he must have known the argot of miners very well, hardly any of such lexical features are found in his letters, nor do they contain any instances of soldier's slang. Their absence suggests that for Gaston written text was, in principle, equivalent to standard French. Furthermore, his language use shows that orthography and grammar were the main pillars of primary state education, although at the same time his orthography shows random use of accents, deviations from the orthographical agreement rule and traces of dialectal pronunciation, as well as, at the syntactic level, various oral characteristics such as parataxis and dislocation. Again, the case of Gaston B., a mere lower-class individual with only elementary education, illustrates the hybrid nature of private letters.

It is the hybridity of local oral and supralocal writing characteristics both in letters and diaries that **France Martineau** stresses in her contribution "Written documents: What they tell us about linguistic usage". To illustrate this hybridity, she examines two text types, a diary and a collection of letters. The diary was written in 1765 by the New French (Canadian) merchant Charles-André Barthe. Although this diary is a good testimony of some features of eighteenth-century pronunciation, it comprises few grammatical features associated with popular French. Most of Barthe's morphosyntactic non-standard variants were not judged too harshly by eighteenth-century grammarians. The analysis thus shows that Barthe switched from local oral to supralocal writing practices in his diary. Apart from opportunities for micro-linguistic analyses, ego-documents may also offer a view on the macro-linguistic situation of a community. A good example of such an approach is the correspondence of Joseph Campau (1769–1863) and his family which reveals a bilingual writing practice. Examining the correspondence, Martineau observes that father Joseph Campau always wrote to his children in French, and that both he and his wife received letters only in French as well. His eldest son Joseph Junior did likewise, but his younger brother Daniel wrote in English, and received English letters as well, although occasionally also letters in French. Their sister Adelaïde wrote in French to her mother and to her brother Joseph, but in English to Daniel. In the Campau correspondence, the choice of language thus correlates with different generations, thus indicating an ongoing linguistic change in this respect. Representatives of this change are Joseph Campau's son Daniel and his cousin Louis, both prosperous businessmen in Michigan (in present-day US). Louis was French-dominant, married the daughter of an old French family, and was one of the few who wrote to Daniel in French. Daniel, although raised by two French-speaking parents, married an Anglophone wife, was English-dominant and received mainly English letters. Their correspondence is clearly evidence of the ultimate language shift in the bilingual society of Michigan: from a situation in which French dominated to one of English dominance, with Louis being the representative of the conservative side and Daniel of the changing side.

3.   Representing the self

Apart from their most basic function of communicating information from the sender to the addressee, letters may also function as a powerful means of self-representation, and as such they are similar to another type of ego-document, the autobiography. **Peter Burke**'s article "The rhetoric of autobiography in the seventeenth century" discusses theoretical issues of self-representation and thus serves as an introduction to a set of articles pivoting around the themes of self-representation, writer-addressee interaction and identity work. Considering the different types of ego-documents, Burke proposes to think in terms of concentric circles with what are called autobiographies at the centre. Stressing that autobiographical texts should be used in a critical manner, he points out the importance of rhetoric in seventeenth-century education and chooses an approach of studying the language and rhetoric of autobiographies. In other words, he explores the styles, strategies and tactics of *impression management* or techniques of self-representation in seventeenth-century European autobiographies. Just as there were conventions of letter-writing, there were conventions for writing memoirs and autobiographies, although autobiography was not yet established as a literary genre or a social practice. In the seventeenth century, manuals teaching readers how to write a good letter proliferated in (western) Europe, while books on the *art of travel* explained how to keep a record of new experiences, but there

were no treatises on the *art of self-writing*. All the same, seventeenth-century writers of autobiographical texts made a number of literary choices, such as the choice between prose and verse, between a more formal or public and a more relaxed or private style, or the choice to keep close to an oral style, while others distanced themselves from such a style. In practice, authors could follow one of four popular seventeenth-century models of autobiography which meant making use of prefabricated elements or schemata, just as letter writers could use epistolary formulae. These schemata include *themes* such as descriptions of battles, feasts, the sending and receiving of letters and so on, or *plots* including conversion in a spiritual autobiography or unjust disgrace in secular texts. To illustrate these techniques, Burke discusses John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666), written in the so-called *low style*, and he reveals the combination of oral and written rhetoric in this particular text.

The other papers in this section are presented in chronological order, starting with Nurmi's article on sixteenth-century merchant letters and ending with Tamošiūnaitė's paper on nineteenth- and twentieth-century letters from the lower classes.

In her article "'All the rest ye must lade yourself': Deontic modality in sixteenth-century English merchant letters", **Arja Nurmi** studies the negotiation of power and social distance that is expressed through deontic modality. Recreating the social network of writer and recipient, she explores methods to measure social distance and thus draws on both Labovian stratificational sociolinguistics and social network studies building on the Milroyan model. Each writer-recipient dyad is given an estimate of relative power in terms of social rank and of social distance in terms of a network strength score. These ratings are compared with the use of the deontic modals *must* and *should* in order to discover how power difference and relative social distance influence the strength and directness of modal expressions. The auxiliaries of obligation, *must* and *should*, expressing strong and medium strong deontic meanings, are used as a test case in the correspondence of a group of sixteenth-century English wool merchants, a collection of letters included in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC). As far as relative power is concerned, Nurmi's study reveals some connections between the relative power of writer-recipient dyads and the use of deontic *must*. The strongly deontic modal auxiliary *must* is used less towards people in higher social positions, and more towards social inferiors. In its weaker senses, *must* is more typically used towards superiors and equals than inferiors. The other auxiliary studied, *should*, did not show any patterning according to the power structure of correspondents. Regarding social distance, no support was found in the case of *must* for the hypothesis that social distance would play a role in the directness of expressing obligation. For *should*, the results contradicted the hypothesis, showing higher frequency of

stronger instances of *should* with more distant recipients. The results of this test case led to a critical assessment of the data and methods used, and to suggestions for further research.

Anni Sairio's "Cordials and sharp satyrs: Stance and self-fashioning in eighteenth-century letters" concentrates on stance-taking as intentional self-fashioning in the private correspondence of Lady Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, the Duchess of Portland (1715–1785) and Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson, 1718–1800). The two letter writers, who were close friends in their early twenties at the time of their correspondence, differed in social rank. Elizabeth Montagu, (initially) an unmarried young woman of lower-gentry background, was thus of lower status than the married aristocrat Lady Margaret. The topic of self-fashioning refers to the conscious and artful fashioning of one's identity or to identity performance (cf. Greenblatt 1980), and is considered to be an inherent aspect of ego-documents (Dekker 2002). Sairio explores the linguistic means that were used in examples of stance-taking such as intertextuality, verbal irony, self-reference, and references to the addressee and her perceived mental states. By examining address terms and first- and second-person mental verb phrases, Elizabeth Montagu and Lady Margaret are shown to adhere to eighteenth-century epistolary formalities in their references to the self and the other. Intertextuality and verbal irony, moreover, appear to enable lower-status Elizabeth Montagu to express ambiguous criticism and subversive attitudes. The analysis also clarifies the characteristics of both correspondents: Lady Margaret's letters are rich in direct expressions of familiarity and intimacy, while Elizabeth Montagu relies on more subtle and complex strategies to create feelings of intimacy. Thus Sairio's diverse approach to stance-taking appears to be a fruitful framework for the study of these ego-documents.

Self-reference, together with ego-involvement, is at the core of **Matylda Włodarczyk**'s article "Self-reference and ego involvement in the 1820 Settler petition as a *leaking genre*". Włodarczyk argues that in petition letters the writer's ego discloses itself in many cases, despite the fairly rigid institutionalised demands on the clarity of the message and on the petitioner's detachment. One type of ego disclosure is the use of self-reference, a feature of personal involvement that is illustrated in the English letters of a woman settler, Jane Erith, born in 1790, who was writing to the British colonial authorities in Cape Town between 1820 and 1825. Using the Landert & Jucker model (2011), Włodarczyk is able to position the settler petitions on the context-, content- and form-based scale of public versus private communication. With respect to content, petitions are private, regarding the form dimension they are public, while their context, i.e. the communicative situation of its production, is beyond verification. Furthermore, the form dimension is determined by the social asymmetry of the addressee and the target, which is one of the defining functional features of the genre. The frequencies of self-reference,

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which comprises third-person singular feminine and plural pronouns as well as nominal conventionalised references, appear to be high in Jane Erith's letters, as in the 1820 Settler petitions in general. These high frequencies of ego involvement, which thus appear to be a distinctive and structurally maintained feature of the petition letters, lead Włodarczyk to questioning the division between private correspondence (or ego-documents) and official petition letters, a reason why the petition is characterised as a *leaking genre*.

As we have seen in the previous articles, letters can be used for expressing identities. In her contribution "Ego-documents in Lithuanian: *Orthographic identities* at the turn of the twentieth century", **Aurelija Tamošiūnaitė** introduces the complex triglossic Lithuanian context of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century and addresses the issue of identity expressed by orthography. In that period, the Lithuanian language was restricted to home use among lower social strata. Russian had become the official language of the territory and had replaced Polish in schools, courts and other institutions, while Polish kept its position in the church and was spoken and written by the middle and upper classes. Against this background both a script and a spelling reform took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. The *script reform* of 1864 involved the implementation of Cyrillic for Lithuanian and the two scripts, Latin and Cyrillic, indexed different competing identities and served as religious markers. The Latin alphabet was associated with "Polishness" and Catholicism, while Cyrillic was associated with "Russianness" and Orthodoxy. At the same time, the *spelling reform* introduced new "Lithuanian" spelling conventions, rejecting and replacing "Polish" letters. This indexed a distancing process from Polish identity and culture and was required for developing a modern and distinct Lithuanian identity. Following the approach of language history *from below*, Tamošiūnaitė focuses on two issues, that is on the spread and effects of the spelling reform in writings of "ordinary" people at the turn of the twentieth century, and on the iconic power that different scripts or spellings represent. Her analysis of Lithuanian letters written between 1894 and 1939 shows that at that time at least some lower-class writers employed both Cyrillic and Latin scripts for Lithuanian, and she argues that preference for one or another script might be determined by better literacy skills in one script rather than another. Analysing the distribution of several pre-standard and standard orthographical variables, she furthermore establishes that in her corpus of lower-class private letters, pre-standard spelling variants were used for considerably longer periods of time than in printed texts, whose orthography switched to standard spelling at the beginning of the twentieth century. The longer usage of pre-standard features in lower-class letters indicates that pre-standard ("Polish") graphs did not have as strong a symbolic (ideological) power for the "ordinary" population as they had for the Lithuanian intellectuals of

that time. The persistent usage of these particular variables is shown to be related to the acquisition of writing before or after the development of the standard, and to the strong orthographical influence of prayer books that were used in the tuition of reading and writing.

4.   Speech and writing

A fascinating multilingual society features in **Laura Wright**'s study "The language of slaves on the island of St Helena, South Atlantic, 1682–1724" in which she shows that the early slave community on the Island of St Helena spoke a creoloid, as well as a non-standard form of Southern English. Wright achieves her results by analysing the reported speech of slaves in English court records from the island of St Helena, a victualling station for the English East Indian Company, inhabited by free planters from Britain, British soldiers and slaves. These court records are, as we discussed in Section 1, speech-based texts with their own characteristics. Schneider (2002: 73) considers trial records to come closest to the original speech event, as they represent real recorded speech with no temporal distance between the speech event and its recording *but* with different speaker-writer identities. Slaves were unable to bequeathe us documents expressing directly, in their own language, their life experiences. But Wright suggests that the necessarily indirect first-person court testimonies can be regarded as quasi-ego-documents. The term *quasi* is applied because the slaves did not present any kind of contemplation of their state, nor were they speaking freely of their own volition but responded to questions posed to them by the court interrogator; what is more, their words and grammar may have been changed by the Court Recorder. Nevertheless, the reported speech of slaves in court records constitutes the closest we can get to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century slaves' speech. Moreover, it constitutes some of the earliest data of slaves' speech anywhere and an early example of extra-territorial English. Apart from this reported speech, the only other life-evidence recorded for a subset of St Helena slaves is their names (whether bestowed by their parents, their owners, or themselves). Analysing these names and comparing them with name-usage in eighteenth-century London, Wright also provides some background to the linguistic data and concludes that the names betray contemporary British attitudes to slavery.

As the free planters' testimonies were also recorded, Wright has a point of departure for comparison and she succeeds in disentangling the complicated mixture of languages in the slaves' speech, revealing that some of the slaves (if not all) used a creoloid. Although there is overlap between non-standard forms used by both the free planters and the slaves, there are also creoloid features in

the slaves' testimonies that were used by the slaves only. Perusal of the testimonies leads to the conclusion that all the slaves were represented as proficient to some degree in English, even if they professed "me no savvy speake English". It seems likely that the St Helena Creoloid English represented in the court records acted as an inter-slave code, rather than as a means of planter-slave communication. By an elaborate analysis of a number of linguistic features Wright clearly demonstrates the value of these *quasi-ego-documents* which allow us to gain access to the multifaceted linguistic past.

More than any of the other sources explored in the previous papers, Wright's discussion of the reported speech of slaves brings into focus the relationship of speech and writing, particularly, the supposed closeness of written ego-documents to the long gone speech events of past periods (see Section 1 above). Whereas the court records Wright examines are speech-based, yet written by someone other than the speakers, the ego-documents discussed in the previous papers have a different what we may call disadvantage or problematical aspect. We assume that they are closer to speech than any other text type, while recognizing that they are, indeed, *text* types, that is written means of communication, meant to be read by the recipient. Hence, the language will not just be close to speech in many instances, but also "close to writing" in many other instances. This ties in with what Martineau in her contribution refers to as the *hybridity* of ego-documents, and with the concept of an *intended standard*, referring to writers' recognition of and convergence to supraregional writing practices (see e.g. Mihm 1998; Vandenbussche 2002; Nordlund 2007; Rutten & Van der Wal 2011). While all contributors to the present volume depart from the assumption that ego-documents are as close to speech as possible, all of them also question this assumption in one way or another.

The most fundamental problem posed by ego-documents is probably the question of authorship. The farther we go back in time, the lower the literacy rates were, and the more probable it becomes that ego-documents such as letters were not written by the senders themselves. In the case of the Leiden *Letters as Loot* corpus, for instance, this called for research into the autograph status of letters, as referred to in the papers by Rutten & Van der Wal, and Nobels & Simons. It is still unclear what non-autograph letters contribute to our knowledge of the language of past periods. The fact that they do not immediately inform us about the language of the sender, as autographs do, need not imply that they do not inform us about it at all. The question of how to study the language of non-autographs, and who to attribute its language to, is addressed in the paper by Lodge. He begins his study by noting the existence of a certain letter to Marie de Guise, a document well-known among historical linguists of French for the large number of vernacular, perhaps lower-class Parisian elements. Having established that the letter was written by

someone other than the sender, however, these presumably vernacular traits are put into a completely different perspective, when Lodge suggests that they may even have been consciously employed in an effort at accomodation to the recipient's speech. While this is no less interesting from a sociolinguistic perspective, it reduces the value of the letter "as evidence for the speech of the uneducated Parisian masses", as Lodge rightly concludes. In other words, by inserting specific vernacular elements into the letter, the text is rendered both less oral and more oral at the same time.

With this interpretation of the letter to Marie de Guise, Lodge clearly touches upon the themes of self-representation, identity work and sender-recipient interaction discussed in Section 3 above. In their papers on English sources, both Nurmi and Włodarczyk describe the subtle linguistic ways in which letter writers aim to influence recipients, by employing modality or self-reference. It is difficult not to interpret such subtle strategies as characteristic of fairly competent writers, even if this implies that the supposed closeness to speech is thereby reduced. The papers by Burke and Sairio mainly involve texts produced by highly experienced writers, and clearly testify to the fact that ego-documents as "naïve witnesses" of past speech events may shade into a literary and/or playful text type characterizing extremely competent language users. This is where their proximity to speech is placed under severe pressure.

Related to the foregoing is the theme discussed in several papers in terms of schooling, education and/or writing experience. A general way of stating the problem is that educated writers are expected to have fewer typically oral elements in their written language, which requires research into educational systems and schooling opportunities, reading and writing skills necessary in everday life, and the values attached to different variants by language professionals as well as in the language community at large. These topics are discussed in the papers by Klippi, Lodge, Nobels & Simons, Rutten & Van der Wal, Tamošiūnaitė and Tieken-Boon van Ostade. Seeing that ego-documents may contain typically oral elements, but also linguistic features characteristic of the written language, in short, that they are *hybrid* on the axis of spoken and written language, their language may be investigated from both angles. The presence of oral or non-standard elements is at the core of the papers by Klippi, Lodge, Martineau and Tieken-Boon van Ostade, who investigate the degree to which phonology/orthography and morphosyntax reveal aspects of the spoken language. Nobels & Simons, and Rutten & Van der Wal, on the other hand, focus on aspects of the written language, viz. forms of address and epistolary formulae. What all authors aim at is to disentangle the reflections of speech and the written code.

We began the introduction to the present volume by pointing out that historical sociolinguists share an interest in ego-documents because of their

relative proximity to the spoken language of the past, in an effort to complement traditional linguistic histories. Reviewing the papers in this volume, however, we conclude that this does not mean that historical sociolinguists are only looking for traces of the past speech event so as to resemble modern sociolinguistics as much as possible. Ego-documents pose their own problems, and the contributions collected here show that one of the main problems and objects of investigation in historical sociolinguistics is the *hybridity* of the sources, as Martineau points out. This means that scholars are as much interested in acquired written language as they are in remnants of the spoken language.

5.   Concluding

In the decades that have passed since the publication of Suzanne Romaine's *Socio-historical linguistics: Its status and methodology* (1982) and James Milroy's *Linguistic variation and change: On the historical sociolinguistics of English* (1992), historical sociolinguistics has developed into a strong and challenging discipline.[5] Historical sociolinguistics has broadened its scope to many languages and to a considerable time depth,[6] which was reflected by the variety of papers presented at the conference *Touching the Past. Ego-documents in a linguistic and historical perspective*, held at Leiden University in June 2011 in conjunction with the Historical Sociolinguistics Network (HiSoN).[7] The present volume with elaborated versions of a selection of those papers bears witness to recent developments in the field. With a strong focus on first-person writings or ego-documents, the

contributions deal with different languages, multilingual contexts and different periods: French in Paris and in New France, English in England, South Africa and the South Atlantic, Dutch and Lithuanian; ranging from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Within the shared framework of historical sociolinguistics, the authors explore various methods, as we have seen in Sections 2, 3 and 4, and the articles deal with phenomena at all linguistic levels, from phonology and orthography through morphosyntax to discourse phenomena. Apart from sociolinguistic analyses of such internal features, the wider sociolinguistic situation is at the core of the contributions by Martineau, Tamošiūnaitė and Wright, who focus on complex multilingual societies. In the end, all papers offer new linguistic data that cast light on the linguistic variation and change of the past, and insights into the fruitfulness and feasibility of different methods. Almost all articles have also benefited from the technical progress made in the field of corpus linguistics, where searching techniques are improving. Historical corpora have become available for a variety of languages and more corpora are being compiled.[8]

Examining ego-documents and compiling corpora, we have to realize that our research material often survived by chance and due to specific historical events. For instance, Nurmi's collection of sixteenth-century English letters was preserved because of a bankruptcy process and the Dutch seventeenth- and eighteenth-century letters from the *Letters as Loot* corpus were confiscated during times of war. The (re)discovery of such collections of ego-documents (or Wright's quasi-ego-documents) is of immensely great value for historical linguists. These documents allow us to gain access to an otherwise mainly hidden linguistic past and to the contemporary language use of people from various ranks. The sociolinguistic studies of the present volume, which are based on analyses of such documents, may thus give readers the appealing experience of touching the linguistic past in its intriguing variation and change.

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5. This is clearly illustrated by publications such as *Historical sociolinguistics: Language change in Tudor and Stuart England* (2003; Terttu Nevalainen & Helena Raumolin-Brunberg), *Germanic language histories 'from below' (1700–2000)* (2007; eds. Stephan Elspaß, Nils Langer, Joachim Scharloth & Wim Vandenbussche), *Language and history, linguistics and historiography. Interdisciplinary approaches* (2012; eds. Nils Langer, Steffan Davies & Wim Vandenbussche) and the recently published *Handbook of historical sociolinguistics* (2012; eds. Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy & Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre).

6. Of the two terms for indicating the discipline, *socio-historical linguistics* and *historical sociolinguistics,* the latter has consolidated and is now most widely used.

7. Co-organisers of this conference were Jos Schaeken (Slavic department) and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (English department) who both are involved in research of ego-documents. Schaeken examines the intriguing birch bark letters from medieval Novgorod (cf. Schaeken 2012); Tieken-Boon van Ostade has been studying eighteenth-century English letters for many years, most recently in her research project *The codifiers and the English language* (cf. Tieken 2011). For HiSoN see: http://www.philhist.uni-augsburg.de/hison/

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8. Cf. Elspaß (2012a: 162) for references to various corpora of ego-documents. In addition we mention Martin Durrell's German multi-genre corpus GerManC (Manchester) and Rita Marquilhas' Portuguese CARDS letter corpus (Lisbon) which were both presented in the form of papers at the *Touching the Past* conference.

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