



# The Netherlands in the World

RESEARCH PROGRAM MEERTENS INSTITUTE 2018 - 2023

Photo cover

G.J. van Rooij

Design and lay out

Ineke Meijer

Print

Koninklijke Van der Most

Edition of the Meertens Institute 2018

Research Program Meertens Institute 2018 - 2023

# The Netherlands in the World

Language and culture in everyday life in the Netherlands



# Content

---

Introduction	5
<b>A. Variationist linguistics</b>	9
Subdivision of the research	11
A1. Dutch in contact with other languages	12
A2. The history of Dutch language contact	17
A3. Variable and invariable properties of Dutch	22
<b>B. Ethnology</b>	26
Subdivision of the research	27
B1. Culture of everyday life	27
B2. Oral culture	33
<b>C. Language-Culture</b>	40
<b>D. Digital humanities</b>	42
D1. Digital humanities at the Meertens Institute	42
D2. The digital humanities lab	45
Appendix I. Collections	47
Appendix II. Valorization of knowledge	49



# The Netherlands in the World

## Language and culture in everyday life in the Netherlands

---

The Meertens Institute studies and documents language and culture in the Netherlands as well as Dutch language and culture throughout the world. We focus on the phenomena that shape everyday life in society. In the current political climate, language and culture are considered to be hallmark contributors to collective identity. The Meertens Institute, which researches the “Dutch case” from a comparative and international perspective, would also like to contribute to the social debate by clarifying and providing nuance to the role of language and culture in social processes. This research plan summarizes the research ambitions of the Meertens Institute for the years 2018-2023.

### Introduction

In recent years, concepts such as *connectedness*, *community*, *identity*, *diversity*, *tradition*, *nation*, and *folk* have found a prominent position in the socio-political debate in the Netherlands as well as abroad. These concepts often appear in discussions about the consequences (be they negative or positive) of processes such as *individualization*, *secularization*, *immigration*, and *globalization*. These debates reflect a search for identity

*The Netherlands and the world.* Stamp by Studio Renate Boere





*Eigen en vreemd* by Caroline de Roy

and belonging. Since people feel that society is changing and feel threatened by that change, a growing need exists in the Netherlands, as well as throughout Europe, to make a distinction between “the self” and “the other”. The rise of nationalist political movements is merely one form of expression of this need in nearly all western countries.

In the current political climate, language and culture are often held up as the ultimate expressions of identity or being different – frequently in conjunction with ideas of what “belongs” within national borders. Language and culture are seen as contributors to “collective” identities. Although this appears to be an international phenomenon, this raises the question of the extent to which these distinctions are made and what unique

characteristics are exhibited in the Netherlands. What role do language and culture play in everyday life?

For decades, research at the Meertens Institute has been focused on the language and culture of everyday life in the Netherlands from an international, comparative, and historical perspective. The developments in Dutch language and culture can be better understood through comparisons with other places in the world – this is what the Meertens Institute intends to contribute to international academia.

Researchers from the Meertens Institute are seen and heard more and more often in the media. In light of the aforementioned social developments, the need for the research provided by the Meertens Institute has recently become more urgent. The nuanced perspective that scientific research offers for social differences can act as a counterbalance to the sometimes intense emotions that arise during the debate. In the years to come, the institute’s research program will also zero in on questions about the current dynamic of interactions with language and culture and how the resulting changes to political identity should be interpreted. The various research fields in the diverse range of disciplines at the institute are unified by a focus on the disparate ways in which people think



of and work on collective identities in society, such as how these are given form in everyday cultural and linguistic practices. With a multidisciplinary approach from several linguistic and ethnological perspectives, the institute would like to highlight how these processes of identification are layered. The ambition of the Meertens Institute is to give research a clearer voice in the social debate and to use the Dutch research data and conclusions to obtain a leading position in the scientific debate.

The ambitions of the Meertens Institute for the upcoming five years are, in sum:

1. We study culture and language in the Netherlands, in a globalizing world;
2. We study how language and culture change, how collective identities are constructed, and how these processes are shaped through embodiment and cognition. Both in the societal and the academic debates on these topics the Meertens Institute aims to play a leading role;
3. The Meertens Institute has a rich tradition of empirical and historical research into processes of change in culture and language. This long-term research is connected to the creation of extensive collections: documenting the gathered materials remains a key task of the institute;
4. We are open to innovations: we employ our existing expertise but are open to new paradigms, methods and techniques. We explore digital innovations and shape some of these innovations ourselves.
5. The institute is uniquely placed to take on long-term commitments and projects, such as digital infrastructure development, and take care of the active afterlife and long-term exploitation of such projects.

The Meertens Institute has a rich tradition of empirical and historical research into processes of change in the fields of language and culture. This long-term research is associated with the creation of an extensive collection: documentation of the collected materials is another key task of the institute. Research within the Meertens Institute is organized into two areas: *variationist linguistics* and *ethnol-*



Queensday  
Amsterdam 2012.  
Photo: Irene Stengs

ogy. The institute also pays special attention to two interconnected multidisciplinary areas of research and methodology: *language culture* and *digital humanities*.

In the research plan that follows, each area is described in greater detail, particularly by listing their thematic sub-projects that will be conducted over the years to come, as well as the researchers involved. Where external funding can be obtained, project teams can be expanded to include PhD students or postdoctoral researchers. Each project will make use of options for external fundraising.

After these four sections we shift attention to important supporting factors for research: the Meertens Institute's collections, and valorization of knowledge. Both of these are inextricably linked to the research at the institute, and we wish to state our intentions with respect to these supporting factors to our research goals in the upcoming five years. In 2018, a new collection plan will be formulated. 2018 also saw the start of a new Digital Humanities Lab within the KNAW Humanities Cluster, the organizational collaborative structure the Meertens Institute has created within the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences together with the Huygens ING and the International Institute for Social History.

15-11 FEBRUARI 2016 **BINNENLAND** ZAMAN VANDAAG 06

## Ophangen van dode varkens is geen onschuldig ritueel

Het dumpen van een dood varken hoort bij de Brabantse volkscultuur en heeft geen link met islamofobie, zo beweerde etnoloog Gerard Rooijackers vorige maand bij omroep Brabant. Niets van waar zeggen antropologen Stengs en Balkenhol. Onreine dieren worden al sinds de Middeleeuwen gebruikt om minderheden te stigmatiseren.

**BEN VAN DEN AARSSEN**

In Heesch werd een varken aan een boom gehangen op de plek waar een asielzoekerscentrum zou moeten komen. In Enschede ging het om veertien varkenskoppen die in een weiland werden neergelegd. Ook hier betrof het een locatie die bestemd was voor vluchtelingen. Onlangs was het raak bij een islamitische slagerij in Mijdrecht. En vorige week hing na het vrijdaggebed in de Ennour moskee in Nijkerk plots een varkensoor aan het hek. Volgens de antropologen Irene Stengs en Markus Balkenhol, beiden verbonden aan het Meertens Instituut, heeft het onsmakelijke ritueel alles te maken met islamofobie en racisme. "De vele recente voorbeelden van het gebruik van varkenskadavers in protesten tegen moskeeen, asielzoekerscentra of zelfs islamitische burens zijn pogingen om een plek symbolisch te verontreinigen."



Opinion Piece in *Zaman* newspaper on ritual and politics by Markus Balkenhol and Irene Stengs

## A. Variationist linguistics

The Dutch language seems to be experiencing a turbulent period, the causes of which include intensive linguistic contact with English, the international lingua franca, but also with the languages of immigrants from inside and outside of Europe. What kinds of effects does globalization have on the Dutch language in all its varieties? For example, what can we expect from the aforementioned language contact? What effects does this have on Standard Dutch and on the dialects, regional languages, sociolects, and ethnolects that are spoken in the Netherlands? To what extent is the current situation unique? What parallels can we find in the past? After all, the language has always been in contact with other languages: along the borders with the French and German language areas or outside of Europe in countries like Suriname, where the language has literally been surrounded by other languages in a distinctly multilingual colonial and postcolonial context.



*Eigen taal, eigen wereld* by Caroline de Roy

These questions are important both from a societal and from a scientific point of view. They also fit well into international developments in linguistics, in which increased attention is being given to the role of linguistic contact in language change and variation – including when it involves contact between speakers of language variants that are typologically very close. Human history is one of continuous migration on both larger and smaller scales as well as across various distances, consequently, speakers of various languages have influenced each other in ever-changing configurations, and the structure of language is deeply determined by all of this.

The central research question of the linguistic group for the coming period will therefore be how Dutch is and has been influenced by language contact, both between Dutch and other languages, and between different varieties of Dutch. An example of the kind of questions that arises in the process would be whether certain components of a language are more resistant than others to this type of contact. At a basic level, it is clear from the literature that items such as content words are more easily acquired than specific pronunciation traits. Over the past few decades, the literature on language and dialect contact has made various attempts to set up hierarchies of various linguistic traits, according to how much they are influenced (vocabulary, function words, sentence structure, etc.), but these hierarchies are far from developed and we still have no convincing, theoretical explanation of why one characteristic is more resistant to change than another. It is clear that such research can only be conducted if there is enough insight in the structure of the language. More generally, such research

is best conducted with a multitude of empirical methods (field work, research with sources, computational modelling) and theoretical approaches (historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, grammatical theory). Linguists at the Meertens Institute have expertise in all of these areas.



Pronunciation of 'drie liter', three liter.  
Linguistic atlas: *Dialectatlas van Zuid-Drenthe en Noord-Overijssel* by H. Entjes

These types of questions are also among the most socially urgent ones that can be asked about language. Debates about the place and quality of Dutch in (higher) education or the necessity for newcomers to learn Dutch are often quite heated, but lack clear empirical foundation. Also, the question of how regional languages and dialects in the Netherlands should be treated in relation to the standard language in situations such as daycare centres, healthcare institutions, and in the workplace, is also hotly debated. Although the Meertens Institute is primarily a research institute, researchers have always contributed to such debates from their fields of expertise. It is our express intention to continue doing this, with even greater intensity, in the upcoming period.



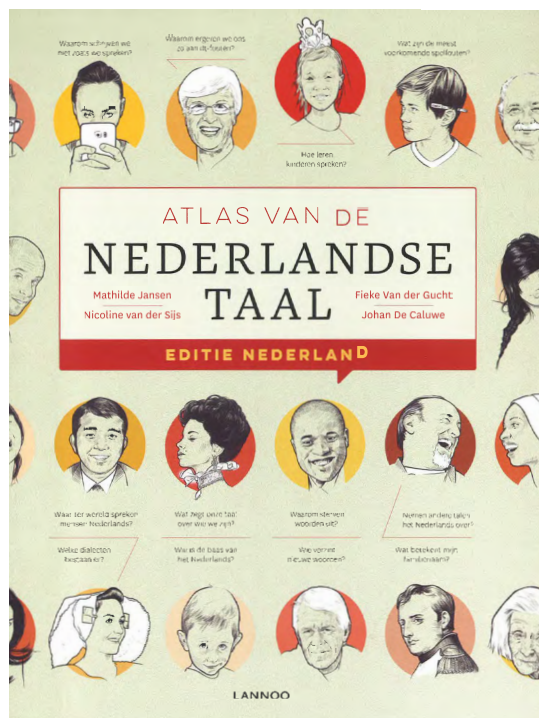
In this respect, joint work with our ethnologist colleagues at the Meertens Institute as well as with others in the KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) Humanities Cluster (such as research into inclusion and exclusion) is a must. We expect that the program will also provide options for research in the context of the NWA's (Dutch National Research Agenda) routes, such as "Smart, liveable cities".

### Subdivision of the research

The institute's linguistic research traditionally focuses on research into contemporary variations in Dutch and historical research into past language change. Previously, the research area was restricted by the political borders of the (European) Netherlands. In keeping with the main research question, linguistic research in the coming period will expand into research on variation and change in Dutch beyond the borders of the Netherlands. To start, attention will be given to Suriname, where the first contacts have already been established.

We will also distinguish between three theoretical perspectives: formal, theoretical, grammatical research; anthropological sociolinguistics, which investigates the extent to which individual language users can decide to use (certain) linguistic formats; and quantitative sociolinguistics. Of course, individual research can and will utilize instruments from more than one of these three areas.

In practice, the research will be concentrated on the Netherlands' position in a globalizing world from three aspects of its grammar: syntax; morphology; phonology. All three theoretical approaches can be applied to all three areas.



*Atlas van de Nederlandse taal.*  
Mathilde Jansen, Nicoline van der Sijs

We have divided the work on our main research question in turn into three parts; to each, a number of coherent projects will be devoted:

- A1. *Dutch in contact with other languages*: these projects investigate from a number of perspectives how language contact affects varieties of Dutch in our present time, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere (the latter mostly in a postcolonial context);
- A2. *The history of Dutch language contact* is comprised of a number of projects that look at various stages in history to see how standardisation has affected Dutch varieties. It also takes into account historical processes of standardisation, which might be seen as a response to contact;
- A3. *Variable and invariable properties of Dutch*: these projects take a grammatical perspective and aim at determining both which properties of Dutch seem relatively stable and which are relatively variable, both synchronically and diachronically.

The division is mostly introduced here for convenience of the reader, since many individual research topics contribute to each of the questions, so that the various subprojects will inform each other.

*Roots of Ethnolect.* Frans Hinskens



## A1. DUTCH IN CONTACT WITH OTHER LANGUAGES

The projects in this section connect to the growing body of international literature on factors in language change. Our focus here is on ‘Dutch’ in a broad sense, so including West-Germanic language varieties spoken in the Netherlands, independent of their formal status (*Gender marking in Dutch dialects, Regional identity construction, Roots of Ethnolects, Sociolinguistic and grammatical influence*), as well as Dutch spoken outside of Europe (*Dutch beyond the Low Countries, Surinamese Dutch*). All of these projects combine a grammatical with a sociolinguistic perspective in order to get a complete picture of the different factors involved, and within each of these a variety of meth-

odologies will also be used. For instance, the sociolinguistic work will be inspired both by qualitative and quantitative methods. Our aim is to get both a lot of data on the present situation of Dutch as well as more general insight into the mechanism of language contact in the modern world.

### A1a. Dutch beyond the Low Countries

Nicoline van der Sijs, Frans Hinskens, Marc van Oostendorp,  
Ton van der Wouden, Gertjan Postma

We take initial steps in mapping out Dutch beyond the Low Countries. For this project, a workshop was requested from the Lorentz Center and subsequently granted and contacts will be established with various researchers who want to collaborate on research into the language use of Dutch communities in Australia and the Mennonites in Mexico, and among Dutch Calvinists in Brazil. The new data may be able to answer interesting research questions such as to what extent contact with various languages has led to differences in Dutch varieties, or if there is evidence of convergence or identical developments. It will also be interesting to investigate whether European standard Dutch continues to exert influence on non-European varieties or if these are based on an older variant or on Dutch dialects.

Does European Dutch still influences varieties of Dutch outside of Europe?

*Dialecten* by  
Caroline de Roy

### A1b. Gender marking in Dutch dialects

Marjo van Koppen, Leonie Cornips, Gertjan Postma

There is a great deal of variation and change in how Dutch and other dialects mark gender. For instance, the Brabant dialects originally have a three-gender system, but the current situation for these dialects demonstrates substantial variation on this point. Language contact in our dynamic and rapidly changing society has led to a convergence of the Brabant dialects into the standard language, resulting in dialect leveling and loss. However, in a pilot study we conducted, we saw that while, in some



contexts, gender markers were used less often, they were used more often in others: speakers are using markers where they were not possible in the original dialect and are even creating new markers. These patterns of variation between and among speakers of the same dialect are a direct indication that a language is in a state of change. Together with Jos Swanenberg (TiU), this variation and change in the Brabantian dialects will be researched in order to gain better insight into the more general processes that lie at the foundation of linguistic variation and change. In this study we will study the language structures as well as the social, stylistic, or cultural influences on the variation and change, and we will connect the dots between them in order to determine the dynamic interaction between language system and language use during the process of change and variation.

### **A1c. Regional identity construction through linguistic practices**

Leonie Cornips

In this project the dual role of “language” will be researched: for people, language is a means to (re)produce culture and community, but language itself also forms the heart of a culture/community. If group identifications change, then communities, culture, and languages change as well, and it is within these

changes that groups are constructed again. The relationship between the individual (groups of people), location, and language will be investigated as something much more complex, fluid, multidimensional, and ambiguous than has previously been done in traditional linguistic research such as dialectology. In this perspective, a “place” such as a street, region, the Netherlands, or Europe is the result of voluntary decisions that various groups of people make regarding how they divide up the world according to their perception of it. In this context, the creation of a place implies that groups of people speak in a certain way and this way of speaking makes them recognizable to others as being from one and the same place. The concepts that are central to this project are agency, be-



Spilstraat in Maastricht: *Crossroads Magazine*  
(via Flickr.com, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



longing, and place-making and linguistic variation represents language forms (lexical, morphological, syntactic), code switching, and language selection.

#### **A1d. Roots of Ethnolects; extended**

Frans Hinskens

Ethnolects, language variants that have origins associated with specific ethnic groups, are rooted in the substrate (the influence of the relevant ethnic group's original language, such as Turkish or a dialect of Arabic), the general processes of acquiring a second language, and the surrounding local dialects. Can the characteristics that are shared by various ethnolects of the same language be traced back to common traits in the substrate languages? Or should these be primarily attributed to universal traits contained in the process of acquiring a second language? What traits from the surrounding dialects are adopted by ethnolects? What role do ethnolects play in the retention and development of the local urban dialects that they typically originate from? Do ethnolect speakers also have a command of other forms of the language, such as the standard language? To what extent does an ethnolect operate as a style? Does an ethnolect also extend beyond the boundaries of its own ethnic group? This project expands upon the data and methods that lie at the foundation of the Roots of Ethnolects project and focuses on some of the many variable phenomena that have yet to be thoroughly researched.

How do ethnolects develop and how are they absorbed in dialects?

#### **A1e. Sociolinguistic and grammatical influence on language variation**

Leonie Cornips, Hans Broekhuis

In this project, language variation will be researched as a phenomenon that appears in social and cultural interactions, but is still delineated via the (mental) grammar of the speaker. The interaction between the social meaning of the language formats on the one hand and the limitations of the grammar on the other, result in complex, multi-tiered relationships between the individual and the changing groups with which they identify. Through these identifications, the speaker



*Die huis daar* by  
Caroline de Roy

is able to routinely bypass grammatical limitations in specific situational contexts and interactions. This perspective makes it possible to predict which language formats and structures are more retentive or even susceptible to variation and change and to “ungrammatical” or impossible constructions from a dominant perspective. The project will specifically

investigate (i) the grammatical gender in the adnominal and pronominal domains, such as “*de meisje*” or “*het meisje die,*” adjectival inflection “*een grote boek,*” and (ii) pronominal “*er*” in the sense of “*ik heb er drie gezien*” which differs between Dutch varieties and is vulnerable in situations of linguistic contact.

### **A1f. Surinamese Dutch: a broad, in-depth exploration**

Frans Hinskens, Nicoline van der Sijs, Marc van Oostendorp,  
Ton van der Wouden

What are the geographic  
and ethnic variations of  
Surinam Dutch?

Surinamese Dutch has not yet been researched in depth. It varies widely, which is associated with the fact that Surinamese Dutch is a part of a continuum that extends between Sranan Tongo, the primary creole language in Suriname, and European standard Dutch. Within the Surinamese Dutch linguistic community, the variation is connected to the distinction between Paramaribo and the “districts” and to the ethnic (and thereby linguistic) backgrounds of the speakers. In collaboration with speakers and Surinamese linguists, we would like to map out Surinamese Dutch. For these purposes, we are considering large-scale research with inventory elements based on the data collected using crowdsourcing techniques. We also would like to research, to a lesser degree, the ethnic dimension by using conversational data collected during field work via experimental research designs. This will involve representatives of the four main ethnic groups regarding situations with intra- and interethnic contact: to what extent does each group have its own form of Dutch and to what degree do people modify their own language use when interacting with members of different groups (“accommodation”)? It is suspected that the latter mechanism plays a primary role in the development of the standard language in a multicultural society.

## A2. THE HISTORY OF DUTCH LANGUAGE CONTACT

In recent years it has become increasingly clear that Dutch varieties have always been shaped by language contact; the same is presumably true for most languages, at least those that are spoken in relatively open communities. Dutch forms a good case study for research into this topic because the history of the language is well documented. All projects in this section show a combination of approaches, taken from grammatical theory, (historical) sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, digital humanities and philology. Some projects have a (partial) focus on the 17th Century (*Language dynamics, Maritime and continental orientation, Poetic forms in contact, Standardization of Dutch varieties*), a period that is known in the Dutch literature as the ‘Golden Age’ and had a rich, and richly documented, culture of language contact. Other projects take a wider point of view or look primarily at other periods (*The emergence of complex verb constructions, Microvariation in language change, A Middle Frankish deletion process*).

### A2a. The emergence of complex verb constructions in Germanic languages

Nicoline van der Sijs

All Germanic languages have complex verb constructions with two or more auxiliary verbs, such as: *Ik moet kunnen komen / I must be able to come* or *Ik heb/ben kunnen komen / I have been able to come*. The period that these emerged and the conditions under which this occurred vary by language, which created a high degree of variation between the languages. The aim of this study is to determine which causes and mechanisms led to the emergence of complex verb constructions and how to explain these differences. The research will be conducted in collaboration with researchers Evie Coussé and Gerlof Bouma from the University of Goth-



Swedish, Dutch, English, German.  
By Sandra Fouconnier

enburg, and is funded by the Swedish Vetenskapsrådet (Research Council). The study will be conducted based on historical grammars and existing historical corpora for Dutch, Swedish, German, and English; a new corpus will also be created within the project, specifically a multilingual parallel corpus of historical and modern Bible translations, which will make comparative research of the Germanic languages possible.

### **A2b. Language dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age**

Gertjan Postma, Marjo van Koppen, Nicoline van der Sijs

How can we account for the variation in the written language of famous Dutch authors?

Within the language dynamics of the Dutch Golden Age, we observe a type of language variation that has rarely been addressed before: variation within individual language users (*intra-author variation*). The famous author P.C. Hooft, for instance, uses the Middle Dutch way to express negation as well as a modern alternative. How can we account for this variation, seemingly randomly displayed by authors? This project will chart and explain the grammatical properties of intra-author variation, as well as the social and literary-cultural factors that influenced the way individual authors used their variation in a strategic and/or creative way. The central hypothesis of the project is that the (internal) grammars of authors created a particular range of variation, which was systematically used by authors, based on contextual factors.

### **A2c. Maritime and continental orientation**

Gertjan Postma, Frans Hinskens

Increased maritime circulation is not only reflected in material and economic history, but also in linguistic history. This linguistic history has been fossilized in similarities and differences in current language varieties: maritime isoglosses. We will research this using Dutch and German varieties. Older and newer connections exist side by side and can be recognized throughout the unique course of isoglosses: lexical isoglosses and deep, morpho-syntactic isoglosses. This raises many questions: What triggers the transfer from maritime to continental?

What are the social and linguistic consequences? As a working hypothesis, this switch from maritime to continental is perceived on a local scale as “migration”. The model for this switch can potentially be expanded to include modern migration patterns from (North) Africa to Europe.

### A2d. Microvariation in language change

Gertjan Postma, Marjo van Koppen,  
Marc van Oostendorp, Hans Broekhuis

Although languages tend to change according to similar patterns, they do not necessarily change at the same speed. This observation raises one of the most fundamental questions in linguistics: *what triggers language change?* Language change has been shown to result from grammatical properties of the language (Internal Triggers) as well as from the socio-cultural contexts the language is used in (External Triggers). However, the exact way in which grammar and social context interact in language change is far from clear.

This project aims to systematically investigate this interaction to obtain a comprehensive picture of how language change is triggered. It will do so by an innovative, interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from three linguistic disciplines studying language change from different perspectives: formal linguistics (taking a grammatical perspective on language change), sociolinguistics (taking a social-cultural perspective on language change) and computational linguistics (abstractly modeling language change).

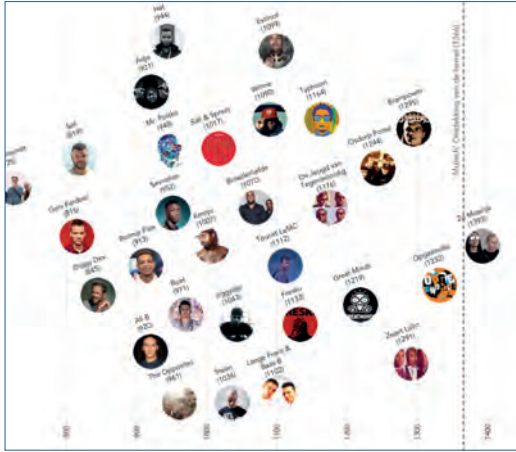
### A2e. A Middle Frankish deletion process and the life cycle of phonological processes

Frans Hinskens

Pronunciation differences often evolve from a grammatical phenomenon into a permanent change in the word itself. This process, known as the life cycle



*Seeman. Maritiem woordenboek.*  
Wigardus à Winschooten



In 2017 research showed that Dutch rappers have a very large vocabulary

of phonological processes occurs slowly and always in the same direction, but not consistently in terms of speed. The differences between stages lead to the differences between dialects and languages. We attempt to clarify the mechanisms that lie at the foundation of this process from three different branches of linguistics, using the deletion process in Middle Frankish dialects as a case study. These dialects form a historically separate group and also exhibit some interesting correlations in linguistic structure, even though they are spoken in present-day Germany, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. More recent developments have led to these dialects becoming a part of very different standard-dialect conditions. When added to the fact that the deletion process in these dialects has been implemented in subtly different ways, it creates the ideal conditions for the comparative phonological reconstruction of this process and in turn, the study of its life cycle.

## A2f. Poetic forms in contacts

Marc van Oostendorp, Mirella de Sisto

How do rappers adapt the forms from one language to another one?

When languages come into contact with one another, this also frequently implies that the cultures who speak these languages have come into contact. This has a twofold effect on poetic traditions. In the “receiving culture,” the language can change, which causes certain poetic forms to be less suitable (e.g. word stress may shift, so that a certain type of meter becomes less effective), but the language users, under the influence of a different culture, may attempt other poetic forms. At the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, this is how intensive contact with the Romance (French/Italian) world resulted in an entirely new poetic form in the Low Countries: the Dutch iambic hexameter (Alexandrine), which, with some degree of variation, has remained the standard meter. This change is sometimes attributed to the simultaneous adoption of numerous Romance loanwords. More recently, rappers have adopt-



ed meters from a different Germanic language (English), while at the same time, their lyrics are interspersed with words borrowed from a wide variety of, largely non-Germanic, languages. The research question is what happens when a language attempts to take on meters from a different language.

### A2g. Standardization of Dutch varieties (dialects, regiolects)

Nicoline van der Sijs, Leonie Cornips

The standard Dutch language is different from the Dutch dialects in large part because it was created through the efforts of elite language users who selected various language formats, which typically were the results of natural developments anyway. What is interesting is that, at the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st, something similar to what had happened to the standard language during the Renaissance period happened at the regional level: once again, a group of language users attempted to choose a standard format from the existing variations and then promote and codify it. This resulted in a substantial number of sociolinguistic questions which have yet to be systematically investigated: Who determines the standards of the regiolect? What language variants are selected as the standard for spelling, pronunciation, and grammar? What acts as the linguistic center of the regiolect and why? What are the arguments for and against certain variants? To what extent do these arguments correspond with the standard language selections during the Renaissance and to what extent do they differ? To what extent does the standardized regiolect correspond with what people are actually saying or is it only a construction? What is the attitude of the language users toward this standardized regiolect? Do they abide by it and does it lead to changes in the regiolects and/or dialects?



*Hij verstaat je niet*  
by Caroline de Roy

### A3. VARIABLE AND INVARIABLE PROPERTIES OF DUTCH

The subprojects which fall under this general header consider Dutch and varieties of Dutch as it were on their own, in order to establish what their properties are. In line with the history of the Meertens Institute, we concentrate on grammatical (phonological: *The attrition of inflection*, morphological: *The derivational morphology* and syntactic: *Hebben and zijn, Particles*) properties. The infrastructural Taalportaal project, a long-term project in which Meertens Institute is a major partner, spans all three. The goal of each of these subprojects is to determine which properties of Dutch are relatively stable, both in a historical sense, and in the sense of occurring in all or most synchronic varieties, and which seem more variable.

#### A3a. The attrition of inflection

Marc van Oostendorp

It is often assumed that intensive linguistic contact leads to a loss of inflection, which would result from the fact that inflectional morphology is difficult to learn for those acquiring a second language. A system without inflection would therefore be simpler, which is the reason why, in the history of Dutch, the disappearance of elements such as case and grammatical gender always appear to originate in urban areas. However, a problem with this line of thought is that inflection rarely, if ever, disappears suddenly or entirely. It generally occurs via slow, phonological erosion, during which there is a stage where the inflection is barely detectable phonologically, yet still operates at the morphological level. This is paradoxical, because this interim stage appears, in fact, to be *more difficult* to learn for those acquiring a second language. This project will investigate this paradox, assuming that a proper formalization of the concepts such as the “phonological exponentiation” of morphemes could shed more light on the topic and would focus on adjectival and verbal inflection (the expression of grammatical gender and person respectively).



### A3b. The derivational morphology of Dutch

Marc van Oostendorp, Nicoline van der Sijs, Ton van der Wouden

In the past, the Meertens Institute has conducted a great deal of morphological research, but it has always been focused on inflection. In the upcoming research period, we would specifically like to focus on the investigation of derivational morphology in the standard language (in the *Taalportaal*), in the dialects (based on the large data files that the Meertens Institute has compiled over the years as well as on new surveys to be conducted), and in the historical circumstances (based on the Nederlab infrastructure, etc.) What factors determine productivity; how are derivations produced? Are they stored as a whole and retrieved from memory? Are they continuously re-derived from a linguistic rule such as one that combines words with prefixes and suffixes? Or is there evidence of a more complicated combination of storage and calculations?

### A3c. *Hebben (to have) and zijn (to be)*

Hans Broekhuis, Marjo van Koppen, Leonie Cornips

There is a great deal of variation in the use of *hebben* and *zijn* in the various varieties of Dutch as well as their equivalents in various languages. The same applies to the use of the dative case. This is best illustrated by the difference between Dutch and English. While both can be used as an auxiliary verb to indicate tense in Dutch (*Jan heeft gelachen; Jan is gearriveerd*), it is only possible to use *have* in English (*John has laughed/arrived*). This difference in the selection of auxiliary verbs appears to correlate with the use of case: passive constructions with double-object verbs, such as *aanbieden/to offer*, the original accusative case appears as the object in Dutch while the original dative case appears as the object in English (*De boeken werden hem aangeboden* versus *He was offered the books*.) This research intends to map out documented variations between dialects/languages and to explain them based on the hypothesis that the verbs *hebben* and *zijn* are non-variant.

How can we explain that some varieties use *to have* where others would use *to be*?

### A3d. Particles in literary and non-literary corpora

Ton van der Wouden, Folgert Karsdorp



Folgert Karsdorp is being interviewed by the Dutch public broadcast corporation.  
Photo: Simone Wolff

Traditional grammars primarily describe those phenomena that are traditionally described in grammars. For some elements, such as particles and other spoken language phenomena, there is hardly any dedicated space in those types of grammars, and even many theoretical grammars do not always manage to address them. However, they are interesting. Together with Karina van Dalen-Oskam (Huygens ING), we will research whether we can use particles and other function words to answer the question: What is literature? There is anecdotal evidence that translations from English contain fewer modal particles than comparable original Dutch texts. We are going to test that in a corpus of original and translated literature using quantitative methods. We will then examine how this works with translations from German and French and whether various levels of literature correspond with a difference in particle use. We will also

examine whether distributional semantics can be functional in learning more about the meaning of particles.

### A3e. Taalportaal

Hans Broekhuis, Ton van der Wouden, Marc van Oostendorp

The Taalportaal ([taalportaal.org](http://taalportaal.org)) provides freely accessible, authoritative grammatical descriptions of languages like Dutch, Frisian, and Afrikaans for scientific purposes. The Meertens Institute is responsible for the production and maintenance of the Dutch component. In the upcoming research period, several missing components will be added to the field of syntax, including sizable descriptions of coordination and phenomena that are interrelated, such as contractions. A number of topics in the overlapping area of syntax and semantics will also be described, such as negation and negative polarity items (in *Ik denk*

*niet dat er ook maar iemand zal zijn*). Some of the syntax components date back to the end of the previous century and will be updated with the most recent information.



Taalportaal

## B. Ethnology



Digital newspaper featuring the Dutch Singer Andre Hazes at a concert (Amsterdam 2014)

Ethnological research at the Meertens Institute focuses on the Netherlands as a diverse society that is constantly in flux. In an era characterized by mobility, connectedness, and (virtual) networks, people continuously give new meaning to their place and the role in the world, as well as to that what they experience as belonging to themselves or to the “other”. As a consequence, questions regarding culture, identity, authenticity, nationalism, ethnicity, and multicultural society have become all the more relevant.

These processes of identification, inclusion and exclusion, and diversity not only come into play in politics and discourse, but are equally relevant in the culture of everyday life of ordinary people. Views on religion, cultural heritage, migration, the European Union, globalization, high versus low culture, the distinction between urban and rural space, health, the cultural elite versus the general population: these all take shape in everyday interactions. This is why ethnological research primarily focuses on everyday practices, rituals, objects, images, music and stories.

The research is interdisciplinary and qualitative, primarily using ethnographic, historical, and comparative methods. In addition to participant observation and interviews, archives, social media, questionnaires, and surveys are the most important sources of research. With the focus on the everyday life, the ethnology research at the Meertens Institute aims at contributing to the development of a conceptual framework that reflects recent theorizing in the fields of postcolonial studies, emotions, material culture, religion and secularism, heritage studies and oral culture. This conceptual framework makes it possible to contribute to current

debates and developments in society from a critical perspective and in turn, to participate in shaping a resilient society able to reflect upon itself, as envisioned by the European Union who declared 2018 the “European Year of Cultural Heritage”.

The ethnological research is intrinsically international, and so is the Meertens Institute’s orientation. Being the only ethnology institute in the Netherlands and as such a long-term and well-known research hub to the international community, it plays a central coordinating role within the international ethnological society SIEF (Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore / International Society for Ethnology and Folklore).

### **Subdivision of the research**

The ethnological research at the Meertens Instituut is traditionally divided into two, partly overlapping and complementary, focusses: the study of the culture of everyday life and the study of oral culture. These two areas of research are characterized by different theoretical approaches and methodologies.

### **B1. CULTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

The study of the culture of everyday life is central to research projects B1a-B1j, which demonstrate several substantial thematic connections. Processes of inclusion and exclusion form the central theme in the broad research project on *Dutchness*, the research into *Black Dutch in the Atlantic world*, and the research into *Populism, social media and religion*. The focus on heritage is central to the research into material expressions of rural culture (*The new rural*) as well as in projects that focus on (in)tangible heritage and commemorative culture. The central role of images in current society will be brought to the forefront in the research into color blindness, race, and the power of images in the Netherlands (*Visibility and invisibility*), in the many manifestations of religious imagery in popular culture (*HERILIGION*), in the perception of rituals and new religious ex-

pressions (*New and contested forms of religiosity*), and in perceptions of the countryside (*The new rural*). The many new forms of religiosity and fulfillment practices will be the topic of research of the projects into changing viewpoints on medicine and health (*Alternative medicine*), the populist fascination with “Judeo-Christian heritage” (*Populism, social media, and religion*) and the popularity of religious heritage among non-believers (*HERILIGION*).

### **B1a. Dutchness**

Markus Balkenhol, Sophie Elpers, Peter Jan Margry, Irene Stengs

How is “Dutchness” being reinvented?

Dutch cultural heritage is enjoying a boom in popularity. A great deal of attention is being paid to Dutch culture, traditions, architecture, design, heritage, cuisine, religion, standards, and values. The question is why this is suddenly in full swing now, during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Various perspectives will be used to examine which emotional, aesthetic, and political dimensions shape what this project defines as “Dutchness”. How is Dutch culture being commodified? How is Dutchness shaped and expressed through rituals and popular culture? What role do religiousness and processes of secularization play here? What is the relationship of Dutchness to its colonial past, and its postcolonial present? In which language forms is Dutchness expressed?

Commemoration of Slavery Oosterpark (Amsterdam 2013).  
Photo: Boris van Berkum



Is ‘identity politics’ an American import?

### **B1b. Black Movements: black Dutch in the Atlantic world**

Markus Balkenhol

As part of the joint research program of the Humanities Cluster entitled “Impact of Circulation”, Markus Balkenhol researches social movements for the civil rights of black Dutch”. Specifically, he researches the influence of international black movements (the Civil Rights Movement, BlackLivesMatter, Rhodes Must Fall) on organizations of Dutch people of African descent. This project has both an ethnographic and historical component.



### B1c. Visibility and invisibility: color blindness, race, and the power of images in the Netherlands

Markus Balkenhol

Virtual networks and the images that circulate within them are not only part of everyday life, but they also influence to a significant extent the way how people understand themselves in relation to others. In this project, Markus Balkenhol investigates the role of images in constructions of identity in the Netherlands. For example, he focuses on discussions about colonial monuments, such as the former Van Heutsz monument and the continuing controversies surrounding the figure of Black Pete (*Zwarte Piet*).

How does racial identity come about?

### B1d. The new rural. Material expressions of countryside cultures

Sophie Elpers

The “rural”, a topic currently receiving ample attention, concerns (collective) imagined representations of the countryside and concrete, everyday cultural expressions, as well as the interactions between the two. Drastic changes in the countryside have resulted in new perceptions of everyday rural lifestyles and a wide variety of associated images. The research investigates these changes and their effects, exploring how (urban and non-urban) people perceive rural cultures and construct their identities vis-a-vis ‘the rural’. Material culture will be a central focus of attention, taking architecture, construction and “dwelling” as cultural expressions, in which questions of individual, group, local, regional, and national identities are addressed.

Why is rural life increasingly appealing to the imagination?

Moreover, work is also being done on a second, revised version of the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*. The latter will place the research into material culture of the Dutch countryside in an international comparative perspective.



Reconstructed farmhouse, Düsteren Hof in Groesbeek, 1949. Photo: Simone Wolff

## B1e. Intangible heritage and museums

Sophie Elpers

How does everyday culture become intangible heritage?

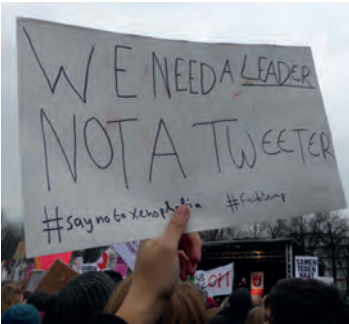
As a result of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was ratified by the Netherlands in 2012, various actors such as government institutions, “heritage professionals”, heritage bearers, and museums, interfere in the preservation of everyday culture. They form an (emotional) network that is determined by meaningful power relationships. In the study, attention will be given to the sphere of influence that this network has to answer questions about heritagization processes. These processes are closely connected to questions surrounding collective identities, where claims are often made to “national solidarity”. The research pays particular attention to the role of museums and heritage bearers as well as their mutual relationships and negotiations in the creation of heritage. A relevant question for this line of research is how the cohesiveness and differences between tangible and intangible heritage are handled.

## B1f. Populism, social media, and religion

Ernst van den Hemel

How do populist movements imagine national identity in religious terms?

The Dutch pvv (Freedom Party) and the German Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) do not easily fit into conceptual categories such as left/right or religious/secular and publish few programmatic texts. How, then, can we better understand these populist movements? In the project “Populism, social media and religion”, researchers attempt to generate better insight into the line of thinking of populist movements by analyzing messages on Twitter and Facebook. More specifically, this project focuses on the role references to Christian and Jewish religions play. How do concepts such as “Judeo-Christian” and “Christian values” play a role in the populist idea of one’s own people? To address these issues, the project has established a collaboration between scholars of religion and



Anti-Trump-demonstration, Malieveld The Hague 2017. Photo: Irene Stengs



new media in the Netherlands and Germany. This project is funded by a KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) Startimpuls grant in relation to the Dutch National Research Agenda. The project is associated with the “Resilient and Meaningful Societies” route in the new research agenda.

### **B1g. HERILIGION: The heritagization of religion and sacralization of heritage in contemporary Europe**

Ernst van den Hemel, Irene Stengs

This European research project, funded by the HERA program, seeks to understand the consequences of the transformation of religious sites, objects and practices into heritage. Particularly, the project focuses on the impact of practices of heritage-formation on religious constituencies, on the role of various management regimes; and on potential paradoxes between religious and secular uses of heritage. What do these transformations of religion and heritage tell us about our time, in Europe and beyond?

The Dutch subproject at the Meertens Instituut, titled ‘The Dutch Passion for the Passion’, takes the Dutch Easter celebrations as an instance of using the religious past in shaping a present-day secular-but-religiously-based Dutch national identity. An important backdrop for this work package is formed by intense debates on religion, national identity and secularity in the Netherlands. The notion that the Dutch nation is built on a ‘Judeo-Christian past’ has become increasingly common. According to many, religious heritage should be treasured as a way to protect embattled Dutch culture. This mobilization of heritage is to be understood against the background of a growing anxiety about the increasing presence of Islam, the arrival of (openly religious) non-western immigrants, and a perceived decline of knowledge on the ‘true meanings’ of Christian Holidays. Empirically, the Dutch project focuses on a wide variety of performances of passion plays in the Netherlands: the successful

Why is religious heritage important for non-believers?

Posing with the cross of The Passion (Leeuwarden 2017).  
Photo: Ernst van den Hemel



televised ‘The Passion’, the more classical annual performance of Bach’s Matthew Passion and the passion plays in Tegelen. The project uses ethnographic fieldwork and discourse analysis, focussing on performers, audience and organizers of passion performances. The researchers collaborate with museum Catharijne Convent in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

### **B1h. New and contested forms of religiosity**

Peter Jan Margry

Why are people increasingly open to idiosyncratic and contested forms of religiosity?

This project incorporates a differentiated field of religious expressions in the past and present. For one part, the research focuses on phenomena such as pilgrimage and appearances and cults around (holy) entities. For another part, the focus is on new, although sometimes implicit, forms of religiosity, spirituality, and ritual practices. The research delves into the identification of new forms and developments, as well as the analysis of their meaning in modern society, such as the instrumentalization of Mary as a “warrior saint” during the (new) Cold War and the struggle between conservative and progressive religious movements.

### **B1i. Alternative medicine**

Peter Jan Margry

Why are people increasingly open to alternative medicine?

The Alternative medicine project entails research into the functions and meanings of contemporary forms of belief and healing as well as alternative, non-standard, and integrative forms of medication and treatment. Based on surveys, field work, and media analyses, the broad expansion and growing popularity of non-medical healing methods in the Netherlands (and even more so, in the Western world) will be investigated. This involves a sociocultural approach to the phenomenon in which the question of efficacy (“does it work?”) is not up for discussion, but rather the research poses the issues of why people are becoming increasingly more open to these methods, the ways in which they are put into practice, and how they relate to the medical world.

## B1j. Commemorative culture and new public rituals

Irene Stengs

In the Netherlands as well as elsewhere in the world, an extensive commemorative culture regarding “public death” has come about over the past few decades. This commemorative culture involves violent death in the public domain as a result of traffic casualties, violence or national disasters (MH17), as well as the (natural) death of Dutch celebrities (André Hazes, Eberhard van der Laan). This research project seeks to understand the persuasive power and popularity of the relatively recent rituals through which people commemorate public death. The project includes a focus on the need to demarcate meaningful locations (“monumentalization”), and the preservation of commemorative materials as a new form of heritage.

Why is commemorative material pertaining to violent death increasingly considered to be heritage?



## B2. ORAL CULTURE

The ethnological focus on oral culture within the Meertens Institute is on folktales and folksongs. In the group *Lied- en Verhaalcultuur* (“Song and story culture”) research is being conducted into the repertoire of songs and folktales in the Netherlands, and particularly into their national and international tradition, transmission, meaning as well as variation across regional and political borders. The research is divided in five projects (B2a-B2e), each highlighting a different dimension of oral culture. Often variation is indicative for changes in morals, culture and society, while the analysis of narratives may give insight into contemporary societal issues like identity, ethnicity, values and beliefs, inclusion and exclusion, fears and prejudices. As all culture, oral culture is inherently mobile, carried by traditional and new media in an increasing speed in all possible intermedial forms, across the globe. The study of oral culture therefore must be placed in an international and interdisciplinary perspective. Simultaneously, in the Netherlands local languages remain central (Dutch and Frisian). The Oral Culture researchers of the Meertens Instituut for one part focus on the relation of language, lyrics and stories in the creation of a ‘distinctive feeling of Dutchness’.

Memorial for the Amsterdam mayor Eberhard van der Laan (2017).  
Photo: Irene Stengs



*'t Groot Hoorns, Enkhuysen  
en Alkmaerder Liede-Boeck,  
Verstert met veel mooye  
Bruylofts-liedekens en  
Gesangen.*

Photo: Marcia Ives

Research into story and song comes together in a shared interest in narrative texts, where the story research places emphasis on narrative aspects and the song research focuses on the poetic and musical aspects. The research is supported by documentation from two similar online databases: the Dutch Song Database and the Dutch Folktale Database, which consist of large collections of songs, stories, and metadata over a long historical period (generally from the Middle Ages to the present). In addition to this support function, the databases are significant as a national heritage archive.<sup>1</sup> In general, the documentation of song and story facilitates the research into the form, function, and meaning of Dutch folktales and songs (and the related instrumental music) through a comparative perspective in both time and place. As always, our specific interest is on oral delivery, but the importance of (the interaction with) written sources is becoming increasingly prominent. In some respect *Lied- en Verhaalcultuur* is positioned between the ethnological and linguistic research at the Meertens Institute and where possible, involves collaboration between the disciplines. Furthermore, it is becoming apparent that the story and song material is useful for research in the Digital Humanities (as previous projects like FACT, Tunes & Tales, and WitchCraft have demonstrated).

## B2a. ISEBEL

Theo Meder

What did people believe about witches in the coastal area of the North and Baltic Seas?

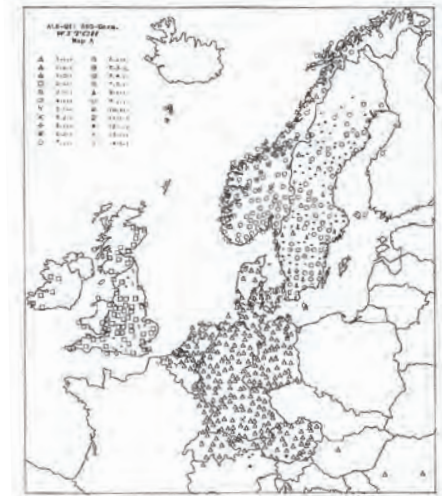
The acronym stands for Intelligent Search Engine for Belief Legends. The project is an NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) Trans-Atlantic Digging into Data project which involves collaboration with Tim Tangherlini of UCLA and Christoph Schmitt and Holger Meyer of the Wossidlo Institute and the University of Rostock. In the project, an international harvester will be built that

---

<sup>1</sup> Which has a connection to the National Science Agenda issue of heritage digitization [#111].

is capable of simultaneously searching multiple databases and mapping out the results in a wide variety of visual ways.<sup>2</sup> This will allow both general northern European cultural phenomena and regional diversity and identity to be observed graphically and interpreted.

This project will start with the Dutch folktale database, the Danish folktale database, and the northeast German folklore database Wos-siDia. Subsequent connections can be made to other databases (Iceland, Sweden, Flanders, Catalonia, Portugal). It is important for the research that the spread of historical folk beliefs in the supernatural is brought into view more clearly: witches, wizards, gnomes, trolls, mermaids, ghosts, sea monsters, and the like. Thanks to ISEBEL it will be possible to map out a large coastal region along the North and Baltic Seas, potentially with highly specific *Wandersagen* or *Migratory Legends*.<sup>3</sup>



Witch. Atlas Linguarum Europae

## B2b. Folktale repertoires and narrative culture

Theo Meder

This long running project deals with a multitude of narrative expressions throughout time: from the performance of medieval tales, the formal structure of fairy tales and testimonies of conversion, the influence of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century newspapers, almanacs and jest books on the (re-)oralization of stories, ethnic storytelling, until the impact of contemporary legends, *memes*, 'fake news' and hoaxes in modern transmission, both oral and on social media.

What makes 'fake news' stick?

---

<sup>2</sup>The ambition to generate and analyze "big data" is connected closely with a question from the National Science Agenda [#112].

<sup>3</sup>The research will also overlap with questions from the National Science Agenda into Dutch identity in a global society and into European cultural values [#031] and [#046].



### B2c. The Dutch Folktale Database & The Dutch Song Database

Theo Meder, Folgert Karsdorp, Peter van Kranenburg,  
Martine de Bruin, Ellen van der Grijn

How do songs and stories  
change over time in oral  
transmission?

The Dutch Folktale Database, which was started in 1994, contains a wealth of folktales (fairy tales, riddles, traditional legends, jokes, contemporary legends) from the Middle Ages until the present day. Each story includes metadata such as the location where it was told, the recorded date, the narrator, and, if possible, the international catalogue number (ATU typology). The Meertens Institute still has the necessary collections in the archives and editions that need to be entered. Some regions are still somewhat poorly highlighted and require additional materials. For the upcoming research, modern and historical materials will be further supplemented. For modern material, we can turn to social media (e.g. urban legends, internet memes, etc.), but there is also a significant need for materials from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to be supplemented using almanacs, jest books, and similar items. The database will be used for research into the form, meaning, variation, and function of folktales and for computational study of things such as narrative patterns, geographical distribution, motive clustering, gender differentiation, and the occurrence of sentiments. Finally, the folktale database will also be used for the digital knowledge valorization project of the SagenJager, which contains hike and bike routes that run from one folktale to the next.



Whatsapp horror

A great deal of work on the Dutch Song Database stems from the current and upcoming research projects. In the coming period, relevant (meta)data will be enriched or added to the canon research (see B2e) and collaboration will be sought out more often with existing initiatives, in order to utilize the data available elsewhere as much as possible. Where a great deal of attention was previously given to historical song material, many of the primary materials from the more recent past will also be released.

## B2d. Changing song traditions

Folger Karsdorp, Peter van Kranenburg, Martine de Bruin,  
Ellen van der Grijn

A fundamental question in the upcoming research period into oral culture is why some cultural artifacts (such as songs and stories) are more successful than others. For example, why has *Little Red Riding Hood* been one of the most popular fairy tales in the western world for more than three hundred years? Why have people in the Netherlands been singing about how *Kortjakje* is sick for generations? Differences in popularity and cultural endurance can also exist at a more abstract level than individual cultural artifacts. For example, why have fairy tales always been extremely popular to tell, while the protest song as a genre is consistently in decline?

A central question of the song research at the Meertens Institute is how (oral) song and musical traditions in the Netherlands change or remain stable. With regard to this, special attention is given to the social and cognitive mechanisms that lie at the foundation when these song and musical traditions arise, become popular (and remain so), and then fall out of favor. For example, what is the influence of differences in social status on cultural transmission and selection and how do certain cognitive preferences impact a song's success? In order to answer questions like these, the study is investing in the development of innovative computational models of cultural shift with which changes in cultural variation can be investigated on a large, magnified scale and in a quantitative manner. The formal and quantitative character of these models makes it possible to describe (historical) changes in song and musical traditions in a detailed, replicable, and testable way. Moreover, these models enable us to create abstractions from specific examples of musical change and draw connections to different, more general processes of cultural change. (For example, how do changes in song traditions relate to fashion trends or shifts in

Why have people in the Netherlands been singing about how *Kortjakje* is sick for generations?



*Feestvreugde, of uitgezochte verzameling van meer dan 100 nieuwe gezelschaps-liederen.*  
Photo: Martine de Bruin

ideological or religious values?) This is all relevant to the research into dynamic identities in the Netherlands.

## **B2e. Canonization & The canon of church song traditions**

Folger Karsdorp, Peter van Kranenburg

Why has Little Red Riding Hood been one of the most popular fairy tales in the western world for more than three hundred years?

An intriguing example of cultural change (and stability) is the existence of cultural canons. For example, canons of literature (what are the most “influential” novels), philosophy (who are the “greatest” thinkers?), folktales (what are the most “popular” fairy tales?), or history (what are the most “important” events?) are assumed as a frame of reference for a shared culture. The emergence of canons is typically perceived as a process guided by two interacting factors: (1) acclaim from the cultural elite (publishers, translators, critics) and (2) widespread popularity in a community. However, there are still many questions about how these factors interact.<sup>4</sup>

Using computational models of cultural change, the song research at the Meertens Institute is attempting to gain a more concrete and more exact idea of the dynamics and mechanisms that are at the foundation of canon formation in music and song. Research into (the emergence of) canons is important for a better and more fundamental understanding of issues such as shared standards and values, regional individuality, and national identity, and brings various academic disciplines (such as musicology, ethnology, history, and literature) together. Here, the connecting role is also set aside for computational models of cultural change with which (through necessary abstraction and simplification) the general and fundamental principles of canon formation can be mapped out.

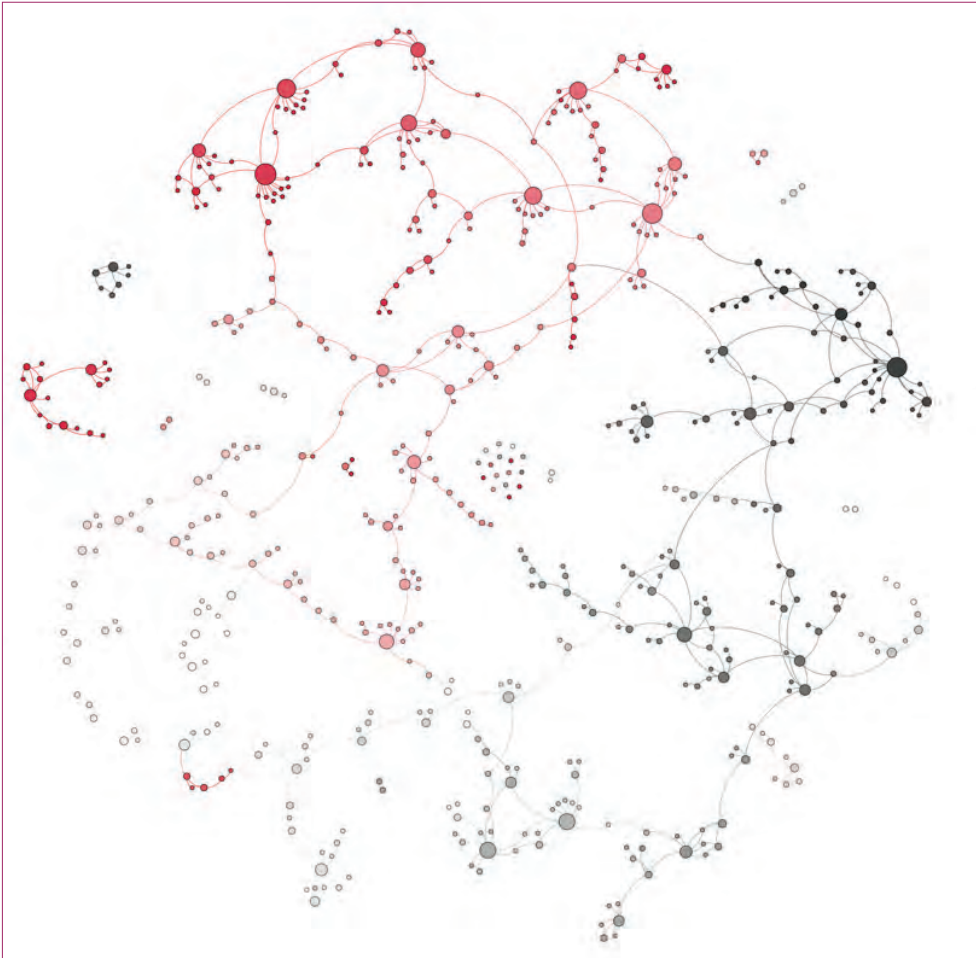
As a specific focus, more ethnographic research will be done into canon formation via qualitative methods, specifically in the field of church song traditions. Through the ages, the Protestant church has split up into various denominations. Each group had its own canon of hymns and a specific way of singing

---

<sup>4</sup>For which there is existing interest in the National Research Agenda [#063].



them, which became defining traits for individual identity. The various traditions still clash in the present day. Research will be conducted into how church song traditions serve as defining traits in the identity of individual groups and how the manner of singing could lead to mutual conflicts.

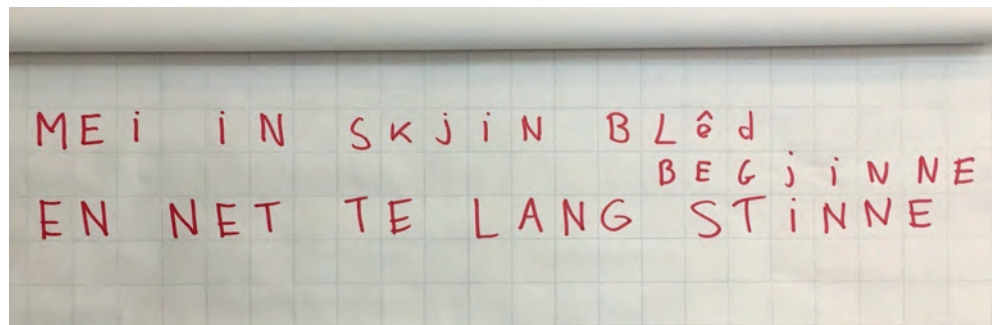


Network visualisation of Red Riding Hood, by Folger Karsdorp

## C. Language-Culture

The Language-Culture project, the interdisciplinary study of “languageculture”, entails an approach in which ideology, and linguistic and cultural forms and practices are studied in relation to each other. The research aims at generating insight into how internalized norms and values, fixed categories, and dominant ideologies interfere with each other, and how they might enhance, or work against, each other in the (unconscious) preferences that people have for certain linguistic and cultural elements. The interdisciplinary perspective allows to question and reevaluate established concepts and research methods in original manners, herewith opening new paths that allow to combine insights from linguistic, sociolinguistic, and anthropological perspectives. Concepts central to the project are: the effects of globalization on the local, ideas on and constructions of ‘the local’, linguistic and cultural identity construction(s), “belonging”, and processes of “place-making”.

The Language-Culture project is intended as a creative, experimental space that invites researchers of the two main disciplines of the institute, linguistics and ethnology, as well as international colleagues to work in joint collaboration.



Frisian saying:  
*Start with a clean sheet  
and do not moan too long.*  
Photo: Simone Wolff

## The use of language and culture in the construction of local identity

Leonie Cornips, Irene Stengs

This subproject investigates a) the use of language (dialect, regiolect, Dutch) and culture (ritual, festivals, gestures) in the construction of local identity in the Netherlands; b) the contexts in which local identity is experienced and conveyed; and c) the actors involved and their audiences. In doing so, we investigate what meanings are given to linguistic and cultural practices. An important theoretical point of departure is that “the place”, “the region”, or “the area” are not understood as clearly delineated geographical spaces with well-defined cultural, linguistic, and historical characteristics, but instead as the temporal, dynamic products of collective actions and social imaginaries. For this reason, the research will not only be focused on the discursive aspects of the expression and formation of local identities, but equally on the praxis in which such identities (in the sense of *performance*) are defined and experienced.



André Rieu in Maastricht.  
Photo: Irene Stengs

## D. Digital humanities



Digital Humanities visualisation of the House of Stark in Game of Thrones

Research in the humanities and allied social sciences can benefit strongly from the current flood of digital data. In collaboration with the KNAW Humanities Cluster, the Meertens Institute is investing in research and development of innovative methods, technologies, and infrastructures with which quantitative, large-scale, data-driven research of the data becomes possible. With this investment, the Meertens Institute aligns itself with research in the *Digital Humanities*, in which it is simultaneously attempting to play a programmatic and leading role. It does so inherently as part of its projects, as already outlined in the previous sections; it also participates, via the KNAW Humanities Cluster, in a newly formed Digital

Humanities Lab that started in the fall of 2017 as an independent group. The DHLab aims to create a laboratory environment to be used by the whole cluster. Together with the Digital Infrastructure group of the KNAW Humanities Cluster, which will be the unification of the technical development groups of the Meertens Institute, the Huygens ING and the IISH from April 2018 onwards, a unique environment for digital humanities research will emerge.

We first characterize the institute's own take on digital humanities, and then briefly summarize the plans for the DHLab of the KNAW Humanities Cluster; more details will be contained in the lab's research plan 2018-2023.

### D1. DIGITAL HUMANITIES AT THE MEERTENS INSTITUTE

With the development and application of digital technologies in linguistic and specifically ethnological research, the Meertens Institute is expanding existing

Digital Humanities practices, e.g. by the aforementioned research into quantitative and computational models of cultural change (e.g. projects **B2d** and **B2e**). Digital humanities research at the Meertens Institute has the following three areas of interest: (i) digitization and standardization of cultural heritage, (ii) development of digital data infrastructures, and (iii) application and development of quantitative and computational methods for data analysis. Each of these points of interest will be briefly described in more detail below.

**Digitization of cultural heritage** has been one of the key tasks of the Meertens Institute for a long time, and has been translated into large-scale digital data collections such as the Dutch Song Database ([www.liederenbank.nl](http://www.liederenbank.nl)), the Dutch Folktale Database ([www.verhalenbank.nl](http://www.verhalenbank.nl)), and various extensive linguistic databases (such as the dialect dictionaries). In the upcoming research period, these collections will also be actively developed, improved, and supplemented, which will reinforce their (international) position as a unique data source for Dutch language and culture, as well as create new options for large-scale, data-driven research into language and culture in the Netherlands. In addition to these existing databases, the internet and social media (Twitter, Facebook) are playing an increasingly prominent role in the collection and analysis of linguistic and cultural research material – whether it involves historical text, contemporary language use, code switching between standard language and regiolects, modern legends and fake news, or cultural, political, and religious developments.

With the development of **digital data infrastructures**, the Meertens Institute increases the options for the dissemination and use of these unique data collections, both within a scientific context and beyond. Existing infrastructures will continue to be maintained and where possible, better defined, with new data facilities being developed as well. In this way, the Dutch Folktale Database and the Technical Development department of the KNAW Humanities Cluster will lead the way in the international collaboration project ISEBEL (Intelligent Search Engine for Belief Legends), in which various story databases will be integrated and harmonized in order to make large-scale, comparative research into narrative culture in northern Europe possible. The Meertens Institute also



Linguistic Atlases.  
Left: W. Pee, *Dialectatlas van West- en Frans-Vlaanderen, II*  
Right: E. Blancquaert en J.P. Meertens, *Dialectatlas van de zeeuwse eilanden, I-II*

plays a leading role in CLARIAH (Common Lab Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities), which is a collaboration between CLARIN and DARIAH. In the coming period, researchers can benefit from the infrastructure and tools that have been developed for historical and modern texts in Nederlab: a web environment for researchers and students who are working with historical developments in Dutch language, literature, and culture. In Nederlab, researchers can search for billions of words in newspaper articles, books, and many other types of documents. These selections are automatically enhanced linguistically and can be searched through and analyzed with advanced technology.

The digitized data collections and associated infrastructures offer unique opportunities for **large-scale, data-driven research** into language and culture in the Netherlands. By using the many digital tools offered by the collections and infrastructures (such as geotagging engines, language recognition software, classification software, visualization software, and dedicated search engines), large-scale research can be performed into areas such as narrative structure, musical patterns, stylistic traits in music and storytelling, and variation and variability in the geographical spread of language and culture phenomena. In addition to the use of state-of-the-art digital technologies, the Meertens Institute also invests in the development of computational and quantitative methods that go above and beyond being state of the art.

An example is the aforementioned project regarding the canonization of popular culture (**B2e**), in which computational models of cultural change are developed in order to gain a more concrete and more exact idea of the dynamics and mechanisms that are at the foundation of canon formation in music and song. The development of innovative digital technologies is necessary, because humanities research presents unique issues that cannot simply be answered using existing methods and techniques from other academic disciplines. This is why the Meertens Institute endorses the autonomy of Digital Humanities as a research area in which specialized technologies are investigated for innovation, systematizing, and scaling up of humanities research.



## D2. THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES LAB

The newly-formed Digital Humanities Lab (DHLab) is an independent research group within the KNAW Humanities Cluster, aimed at offering a laboratory environment for all digital humanities research in the cluster, including the aforementioned work at the Meertens Institute. In its first months of existence, lab members have interviewed staff members of all three KNAW Humanities Cluster institutes in order to arrive at a starting point inventory. Joint topics that came up were the general topic of ‘change’, and more specific topics such as communities, networks and gender; the Dutch seventeenth century; historical language variation; and geospatial research.



Digital Humanities Lab

The mission of DHLab is to advance the humanities through digital methods, both at the KNAW Humanities Cluster and outside. The lab’s research will focus on adapting existing tools and developing new tools for humanities research on textual sources. For the near future, the lab has identified three themes in the lab’s research: Events and entities, Connections, and Change.

### Events and entities

Persons and organisations, and what they did or what happened to them and where, are core research objects in the humanities. To investigate these, we need to be able to detect their mentions from text. The DHLab research in this theme will investigate how we can extract semantically rich elements from text along with their relationships and create rich and accessible data structures.

Statistical natural language processing methods, informed by information about the domain and textual source can be used to extract semantic elements from text. By making entities and events and their relationships explicit, we can start investigating connections between individuals and groups as well as changes over time.

## Connections

The Connections theme logically connects to the Events and entities theme: it starts with detected relationships and linkages within and across datasets and it is driven by the quest to understand processes, change, content and contexts of entities within and across communities.

The lab will focus on technologies that help to study connections that can be identified in structured and unstructured (textual) data. These methods can be linked to network analysis methods, both as method to identify relationships among entities as well as relational meaning extraction.

## Change

Many fields of humanities, including those studied at the Meertens Institute, deal with processes of change. The DHLab aims to implement and develop methods for detecting, tracing, and contextualising change in a variety of datasets relevant to humanities researchers. The theme Change is intrinsically related to the other two themes of the DHLab. By combining domain expertise from Humanities Cluster researchers with computational methods, we aim to advance how we conceptualise, model, and study change as part of cultural expression.

## Appendix I. Collections

The Meertens Institute began acquiring collections in the 1930s. Data collection continues to be an important part of the research at the institute. The ways in which the data is collected have been expanded and changed: from paper questionnaires to digital ones and collecting material from the internet and via crowdsourcing in addition to field work. Due to these different ways of collecting research data, the institute possesses a diverse range of paper collections, digital databases, audio databases, and a specialized collection of books for which the institute has its own library.

As a rule, collections are compiled as a result of a research question and therefore, often form a thematically cohesive whole. During the creation of a collection, we generally do not aim for completeness, but databases are continuously expanded with worthwhile, logical additions.

Some collections were not created through research at the institute, but rather provided by other parties. Such collections are included at the institute because they fit in with its research mission. In the years to come, the institute will continue to be open to these types of collections.

Most of the physical paper and audio collections at the institute were moved to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam after the KNAW Humanities Cluster was started. As stated in the policy plans for the KNAW Humanities Cluster in 2012 (*Contourennota*) and 2014 (Advanced Humanities Center), the intention is to cre-

Literature on songculture.  
Spinhuis Amsterdam.  
Photo: Marcia Ives



ate joint collection management within the cluster. Nothing changed in terms of function or intention for the research with the exception that a physical distance was created between the institute and the physical collections. In 2018, a separate collections plan will be formulated by the *KNAW* Humanities Cluster.

## Appendix II. Valorization of knowledge

Based on its academic mission, the institute feels that it has a social responsibility to share its knowledge and expertise and be prepared to clarify or provide nuanced answers to questions from society in which language and culture play a role.

The institute is frequently consulted by social partners: media journalists, professional authors, organizations, and the general public about the reasons behind the issues that appear in the news. On the other hand, the proactive contributions of the institute's researchers to the public debate on a wide variety of issues, such as alternative medicine, urban legends, the role of regional languages in contrast to standard language, the Netherlands' postcolonial past and its relationship to the Sinterklaas celebration, and the role of religion and spirituality in the "secularized" Netherlands all garner much attention.

The Meertens Institute maintains ties with its fellow institutes and organizations that focus on preserving heritage. In addition to being social partners of the Meertens Institute, these organizations are also the subject of its research in relation to the ethnological problem of how heritage emerges and which organizations play a decisive role in this process.

The way in which the Meertens Institute utilizes its knowledge in society can be categorized into the following social areas. In the years to come, each of these channels will continue to be used and, where possible, strengthened.

*The general public.* The millions of times that databases such as the song database, first names database, and folktale database have been accessed show that making linguistic and cultural collections available can generate significant public interest. We expect that by further opening up our collections to the

public, e.g. the audio recordings (which can be equipped with searchable rough transcripts using automatic speech recognition), there will be a further expansion of these public offerings.

*The (creative) industry.* The institute stimulates and organizes contacts with the industries and keeps itself open to it. Collaborations can come from unexpected places. The Dutch book industry, represented by the CPNB (Collective promotion for the Dutch book) had a literary writing robot developed by the Meertens Institute and the University of Antwerp based on the computational modeling work developed in the *Lied- en Verhaalcultuur* group.

*The heritage sphere.* The institute maintains close ties to heritage organizations such as KIEN and FARO and works together with museums, libraries, and archives on joint goals: exhibitions, releases, and links to collections. The Meertens Instituut plays a central role within the international ethnological society SIEF (Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore / International Society for Ethnology and Folklore).

*The policy world and politics.* The institute conducts research to support policy formation. The research can be conducted under assignment from government organizations such as the provinces and policy support organizations such as the *Nederlandse Taalunie* (Dutch Language Union).