

The image shows the entrance of a building with a dark red brick facade. The doorway is highly ornate, featuring a central wooden door flanked by two pairs of columns. Above the door is a large, arched relief sculpture depicting three figures. Above the relief is a coat of arms with a red shield and white crosses, supported by two golden lions. The year '1645' is inscribed above the relief. The entire doorway is framed by a decorative archway with blue and gold accents. A small window with a black metal grille is visible to the left of the doorway.

The Netherlands in the World

The Study of Language and Culture in the Netherlands

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Meertens Institute Research Plan Update 2021-2023

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Background and goal

In 2018, the Meertens Institute published *The Netherlands in the World: Research Program Meertens Institute 2018-2023*. In the same year, the institute was evaluated according to the SEP, and was judged 'very good' on the three SEP criteria (*research quality, relevance to society, and viability*, the extent to which the institute is equipped for the future). In 2020, the Meertens Institute was internally grouped into three teams: ethnology, variational linguistics, and oral culture, formalizing to some extent the implicit thematic division of research that has long characterized the institute. Zooming in, there is structure and nuance in this team division:

- ethnology and oral culture are presented as one larger theme, ethnology, in the research program;
- the institute participates in two shared labs within the KNAW Humanities Cluster:
 - NL-Lab, focusing on Dutch culture and identity, with Huygens ING;
 - DHLab, a digital humanities research lab, with Huygens ING and IISH;

At the midterm point between SEP evaluations, the institute opened an internal discussion, and consulted its Scientific Advisory Board (WeCo) on the current state of ideas on the research and the strategy of the institute in the coming years until 2023. It is vital that the institute anticipates the personnel changes of the coming years and thinks of the main lines of research it wishes to consolidate, strengthen, halt, or start. **Research** and **personnel** were the two main components of the updated research plan and strategy the institute discussed internally and with the WeCo. This document focuses on the **Research Plan**. The Strategic Personnel Plan is discussed and developed separately in 2021.

In terms of the **Research Plan**, next to consolidating the long lines of research in the institute and continuing the plans set out in the 2018-2023 plan, the groups in the institute do see new themes to be developed in the next years. As detailed below, in short the two groups propose to update their research plans. We highlight the most salient changes and updates to the 2018-2023 plan:

The **ethnology (and oral culture) research group** is geared towards research both in the Netherlands and in 'the world' as related to the Netherlands. This includes comparative research on phenomena transcending the Netherlands as such – globalized popular culture, pilgrimage, online cultures, processes of heritagization, environmental 'naturecultures' – as well as historically grown connections, in particular those emerging from the colonial and postcolonial relations linking the Netherlands to the Americas, Africa, and Asia. *As a change to the 2018-2023 plan*, the group has identified three umbrella themes to categorize the different ethnological, anthropological and oral culture research: (1) Intensifying quests for tradition and heritage; (2) Shifting relationships between humans and non-humans; (3) Dynamics of religion and culture.

The **variational linguistics group** intends to focus on the question of how to understand variation in Dutch (dialects, regiolects, ethnolects, and sociolects) and languages related to Dutch such as Surinam Dutch, Frisian, and Afrikaans. In the 2018-2023 plan, the group identified three major lines of research to answer this core question: (1) Dutch in contact with other languages; (2) The history of Dutch language contact; (3) Variable and invariable properties of Dutch. *Now*, the group proposes to approach the core question from five disciplinary perspectives: syntax, phonology, (quantitative) sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and computational linguistics. New research in the linguistics group should preferably integrate lines, e.g. using computational modeling methods in sociolinguistics. More explicitly than in the 2018-2023 plan, the group also intends to continue the linguistic work the Meertens Institute is famous for, namely documenting the linguistic variation in the Netherlands and Flanders as well as variation in Dutch or descendants of Dutch. Data collection and description will take place using state-of-the-art digital technologies, and will involve civil scientists.



150th Anniversary of the abolition of slavery (Keti Koti). Portrait of two women in kente fabric in the Oosterpark in Amsterdam, 2013
| Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Ton van Rijn

Meertens Panel

Welkom bij het Meertens Panel! Het Meertens Instituut bestudeert taal en cultuur in Nederland, en Nederlandse taal en cultuur in de wereld. In ons onderzoek staan de verschijpselen centraal die het alledaagse leven in onze samenleving vormgeven. En wie kan ons daarover beter informeren dan de mensen in de samenleving? Daarom hebben we het Meertens Panel opgericht.

Word burgerwetenschapper! Uw antwoorden over alledaagse leefcultuur en uw taalgebruik zijn waardevolle onderzoeksgegevens voor ons.

Voor het Meertens Panel zijn we daarom altijd op zoek naar nieuwe leden, van zestien jaar en ouder, die in het Nederlandse taalgebied wonen. Ook naar het buitenland verhuide sprekers van het Nederlands zijn welkom.

Waarom meedoen?
• U draagt bij aan (internationaal) onderzoek en wetenschappelijke publicaties.

Hoe werkt het?
Nadat u zich hebt aangemeld ontvang u een paar keer per jaar een e-mail met een uitnodiging om mee te doen.

Answers from civil scientists about everyday life culture and language use are valuable research data for the Meertens Institute
| Website Meertens Panel

The Netherlands in the World

The Study of Language and Culture in the Netherlands

Introduction

The Meertens Institute studies and documents language and culture in the Netherlands as well as Dutch language and culture elsewhere in 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, contributes to the social debate by clarifying and adds nuance to the role of language and culture in social processes. The Ethnology Research Group operates with a unique set of methods and instruments to research language and culture, by doing fieldwork, by gathering and analyzing digital materials with computational methods, and by involving citizen scientists.

This document constitutes a mid-term update of the research ambitions of the Meertens Institute for the years 2020-2023 and beyond, building on the research plan formulated for the years 2018-2023.

In recent years, notions such as connectedness, community, identity, diversity, tradition, nation, digitalization, nature, environment, and folk, all central objects of study of the Meertens Institute, have become prominent in social-political debates, in the Netherlands as well as abroad. These notions often appear in discussions about the consequences (whether perceived as negative or positive) of processes of individualization, secularization, immigration, and globalization. The COVID-19 crisis has intensified these discussions in surprising and dramatic ways, adding a new dimension to the already existing feeling of shifts and rifts in the tectonic plates of society.

The challenges and misgivings posed by these challenges have led to a growing popular tendency 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 tendency in nearly all western countries.

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

Researchers from the Meertens Institute are seen and heard more and more in the media. In light of the aforementioned social developments, the need for the research provided by the Meertens Institute has become more urgent than ever. The nuanced perspective that social sciences and humanities research offers may act as a counterbalance to the sometimes intense emotions that arise during societal contestations.

Lockdowncultuur: van het eenzame kinderfeestje tot 'Tebbie Nou Op Je Muil?!'

Studie Meertens Instituut Hoe beïnvloedde de coronacrisis tijdens de eerste lockdown de Nederlandse taal en cultuur? In het boek *Viraal Nederland* doen onderzoekers van het Meertens Instituut een eerste poging ons 'nieuwe normaal' inclusief grappen en fakenieuws te analyseren.

Paul Steenhuis • 20 januari 2021 • Leestijd 2 minuten



Het boek *Viraal Nederland* onderzoekt hoe taal en alledaagse cultuur in Nederland door de coronacrisis en eerste lockdown zijn beïnvloed.

Foto Irene Stengs

The Meertens Institute has been studying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on language and culture since the first wave in 2020.

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. With these insights, realizing that the world has been shaken by a global crisis, it would like to contribute to an integral new vision on language and culture in the post-pandemic era, which is characterized by sudden changes in the degree to which linguistic and cultural behavior are enabled and disabled (e.g. singing together).

The ambitions of the Meertens Institute for the foreseeable future are, in sum:

1. **We study culture and language in everyday life, 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. **Our long-term empirical and historical research is connected to the creation of extensive collections: collecting, digitizing, documenting, annotating, and providing access to the gathered materials remains a key task of the institute.**
We aim to return to the institute's traditional reliance on citizen scientists to carry out parts of this substantial task;
4. **We are open to innovations: we employ our existing expertise but are open to new paradigms, methods and techniques.**
We explore digital innovations, such as computational modeling of change and variation, 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 to take care of the active afterlife and long-term exploitation of such projects.**

Research in the Meertens Institute is organized into two **research groups** study language (*Variational linguistics*) and culture (*Ethnology*). Supporting these research topics, several intersections exist between these groups, particularly at the level of (i) computational *modeling methods* and (ii) *data collection*. The first type of work applies computational modeling methods to the domains and data of the two research groups. The second type of work focuses on the *collection* of observations of either of the other groups, through fieldwork, citizen science efforts, the gathering of digital materials, or through computational simulations. Additionally, the Meertens Institute participates in two joint labs of the KNAW Humanities Cluster: NL-Lab and DHLab.

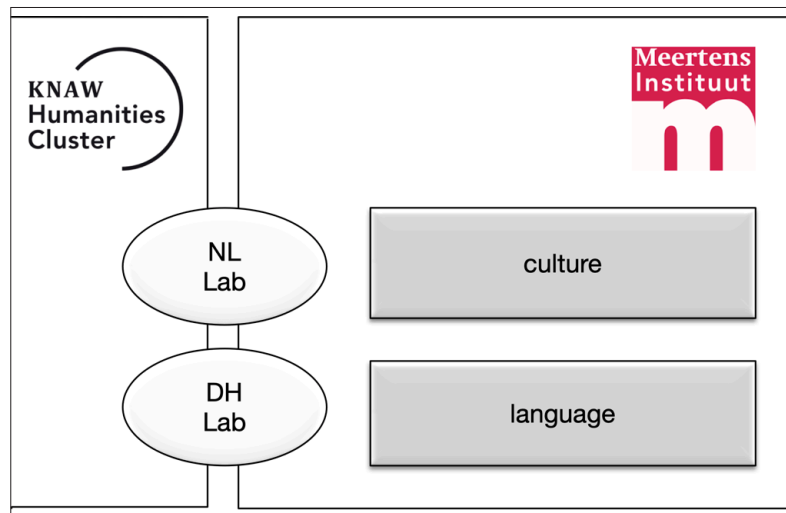


Figure 1. Schematic overview of research in the Meertens Institute: the two core research groups on language (variational linguistics) and culture (ethnology), and the two research labs shared with the KNAW HuC institutes, DHLab and NL-Lab.

Researchers in the institute are typically associated with one of the core research groups, but they may also be member of one of the labs. We explore the updated research plans of the two research groups in more detail. We then describe the two joint labs.

Culture: Ethnology

For its future research and orientation, the Ethnology research group of the Meertens Institute builds on the institute's current research program, 'The Netherlands in the World'. In other words, the group is geared towards research both in the Netherlands and in 'the world' as related to the Netherlands. This includes comparative research on phenomena transcending the Netherlands as such – globalized popular culture, religious and spiritual practices, online cultures, processes of heritagization, environmental changes – as well as historically grown connections, in particular those emerging from the colonial and postcolonial relations linking the Netherlands to the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

In its selection of research angles and conceptual orientation the department positions itself firmly within, and contributes to, international developments in the humanities and social sciences. In addition to the department's disciplinary foundation and interdisciplinary orientation – combining the ethnological perspective with approaches, methods and insights from anthropology, history, religious studies, museum and critical heritage studies, philology, cultural evolution and computational humanities research – the ethnology at the Meertens Institute is engaged in long-term research and documentation. This implies lasting commitments, a feature distinguishing ethnology at the Meertens Institute from the often more project-oriented research carried out at the universities.

For the coming decade, we will focus on three umbrella themes prevailing in the Netherlands and the world:

1. Intensifying Quests for Tradition and Heritage
2. Shifting Relationships between People and Nature
3. Dynamics of Religion and Culture



Mural in Amsterdam, 2020 | *Peter Jan Margry*

These themes allow us to connect current affairs with the underlying long-term processes informing them. The themes, as will be outlined below, highlight and strengthen our existing expertise, and allow us to maximize scholarly contributions to making sense of the entanglements of past, present, and future. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has stressed once more the precarious global interdependency of people and societies. The intense awareness and experience of crisis evoked by the virus and the ensuing politics of health, control and nationalistic profiling, have had a frightening impact on the bread-and-butter-issues of everyday life. Ethnographic research on, say toilet paper or baking bread, can provide insights into how crises such as this affect social imaginations and collective practices about who do and who do not belong to the (world, national, local) community, and how Covid-19 amplifies the cracks and bursts in the surface of civilization, radically questioning ideologies of control and what in Dutch is referred to as *maakbaarheid* ("manufacturability") on which the latter is built. Moreover, in a world characterized by a growing distrust towards science and academic knowledge, we see it as one of our central tasks to reach out, in accessible language, to larger, non-academic audiences. Herewith we aim to offer nuance and reflection on the emotions, anxieties and collective imaginations that give shape to much of the processes of identification and polarization of today.

Intensifying Quests for Tradition and Heritage

This theme is at the heart of *Volkskunde*, which emerged in the 19th century and transformed into a scientific discipline in the 20th century. Ethnology at the Meertens has played and continues to play a central role in these transformations throughout the 20th century, but in particular also in the context of a resurging societal interest in a supposed distinct Dutch identity since the 1990s. As (the making of) heritage has become increasingly entangled with social and cultural identities, heritage politics have intensified recently into continuous quests for knowledge, interpretation, defense, claiming and promotion of markers of national, regional and local cultural identities. Simultaneously, traditions take on new meaning, and new traditions demonstrate the need for documentation and interpretation. In studying these developments, we focus in particular on the 'politics of authentication' through which heritage is produced and contested. That is, we understand heritage as a mode of cultural production and as ongoing processes of selection in which actors and factors negotiate what is and what is not considered worthy of preservation and representation. Central to our investigations are therefore the heritage makers and disseminators involved in processes of authentication – of negotiating official heritage regimes and canons. We focus in particular on the emotions involved in these heritage authentication politics. Within this broad theme we distinguish five (overlapping) fields that are central to our research: heritage and religion, colonial heritage, ritual and popular culture, rural-urban identities and oral tradition.

We are interested in the multiple ways religion is transformed into heritage, for instance in the mobilization of and renewed interest and popularization of (elements of) a Christian past - its material culture (buildings, artefacts, art), rituals (pilgrimage, masses, festivals), and narratives (memories, experiences, emotions), placing such transformations in the context of an increasingly plural and diverse society. We also focus on how heritage itself may become sacralised in efforts of preservation.

Here we may think in particular of controversies about traditions linked to the colonial past (the history and dynamics of the Black Pete controversy), as well as discussions about the commemoration of slavery, colonial museum collections, and colonial objects (statues) in the public sphere. The Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated once more how much Dutch cultural identity politics are globally shaped and embedded.

Another topic where Dutchness is prevalent is in the perceived rift between rural and urban identities. In their recent protests against reduction of nitrogen emissions, Dutch livestock farmers resorted to symbols of traditional Dutchness, which apparently is considered to belong to those from the countryside. How to understand the continuous emotive power of this traditional symbolism? Placing the articulations of stereotypical Dutchness in the context of a long tradition of oppositions made between rurality and urbanity – the latter often allocated to a perceived cosmopolitan administrative elite inhabiting the 'Randstad', EU protagonists and (Greta Thunberg inspired) climate protesters – we question such easy dichotomies, focusing instead on the liminality and permeability of the borders between urban and rural spaces, addressing issues as the making of 'rural heritage' and cultural perceptions of water, air, nature and landscape.



Farmers protest on the Malieveld in The Hague against the carbon dioxide measures, 2020 | *Evy van Schelt*

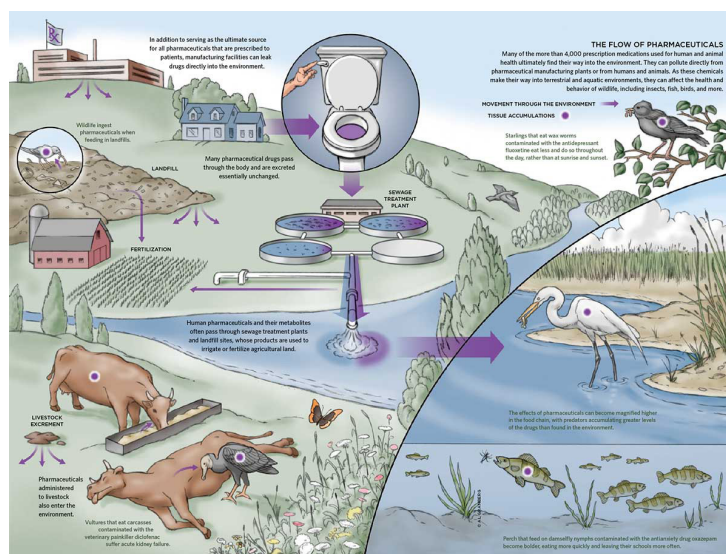
The oral culture line of research interprets folktales and folk songs in the context of ethical developments and heritage production and markers of identity. This research on folk narratives and folk songs is supported by two large and growing databases: the Dutch Folktale Database (www.verhalenbank.nl) and the Dutch Song Database (www.liederenbank.nl). These extensive databases allow researchers to focus on issues of stability and variability. An additional line of research questions, based on digital and computational methodologies, concern the dynamics of oral tradition itself. How do certain traditions and cultural practices persist through time, while others change and disappear? The vast amount of digital text data allows computational analysis and simulations as well (for instance on the impact of texts in a semi-illiterate community). Finally, this expertise allows us to shed light on contemporary issues. What roles do songs and narratives play in debates about freedom and control, nostalgia and modernity, tradition and change, (hidden) truth, fake news and conspiracies.

Shifting Relationships between People and Nature

At the Meertens Institute we want to take up the challenge of further developing current interdisciplinary research on the environment and nature, and food, body and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the embeddedness of humanity in the material environment, and the interdependency of humans and non-human entities. In this umbrella theme we make it our task to contribute to a social science which looks at the contact zones between nature and culture empirically.

Pressing ecological and environmental issues – climate change, water scarcity, (neo)colonial and extractivist economies, toxicity, waste, health, drastic loss of species, and the plurality of human-animal relationships – and their embeddedness in narratives, tensions and emotions, raise in new ways questions how to understand the boundary between the human and the non-human. Moving away from an anthropocentric approach, ethnologists are tackling these issues in a renewed effort to consider the natural and the social world as a complex entangled web of relations. Notions as 'naturecultures' and 'multispecies worlds' help in providing a focus on the complex milieu of everyday life. Research lines at the Meertens Institute that fall within this umbrella are 'food, body and well-being', alternative healing, narrative research, 'rural - urban identities' and 'people, nature and emotion'.

The recently established 'food, body and wellbeing' thematic subgroup is currently focused on the relational study of water in companion with nutrient scarcity, ecological challenges, and global sustainable issues. In Europe, the hotspots for horticulture production are the Netherlands and Spain. Both draw on similar infrastructures (greenhouses), and deal with water as a resource to be managed. Through the analysis of 'ethnographic sitings' we aim to study competing ideas, practices and processes of heritagization of environmental and water management, analysing how those affect socio-cultural configurations.



Toxics drugging the environment | *Al Granberg*

An established research focus at the Meertens Institute directly linked to issues of body and well-being focusses on the growing popularity of alternative medicine and related healing practices. The alignment of the pro-alternative healing and anti-vaccination movements is placed in the context of new orientations towards mainstream medicine in present day's society and changing notions on what well-being may entail. Herewith, this research line connects both with the study of religious healing practices, spirituality and notions of religious heritage, and with contemporary narrative research.



The 'other newspaper' about facts and fables
| Simone Wolff

With regard to the latter, this umbrella theme shows the important task of investigating genres as modern legends, memes, fake news and conspiracy theories. The issues concern doubts about the human factor in climate change, the emergence of 'invisible' viruses like SARS, Ebola and COVID-19, lab-created viruses as bio-weapons, supposed plans to reduce the world population, feared dangers of mass vaccination, chemtrails and the supposedly health-threatening activation of the 5G grid. The research aims to shed light on the production and dissemination of such contemporary legends, the mechanisms that explain their popularity, and the memes and 'anti-legends' they provoke.

The research line 'people, nature and emotion' will focus on the paradoxical and unexpected ways 'nature' increasingly occupies emotional space in everyday life. Anxieties, anger, dread, compassion and empathy arise from and induce societal and political engagements with species protection, animal welfare and nature control, to which ends people resort to cultural forms and ritual repertoire.

Dynamics of Religion and Culture

Religiosity in present-day Europe may be characterized by two main processes. On the one hand, there is a decline in church attendance with a concomitant rise of multiform and sometimes seemingly secular quests for meaning. On the other hand, there is a renewed concern with 'classical' religions. Whether or not inspired by orthodoxy, nationalism or fundamentalism, religion and its relation to identity has increasingly taken on relevance and contestation.

This is also the case for the Netherlands where a great variety of religious bricolage is present,

where new forms of spirituality give rise to new rituals and identifications and where world religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam remain significant in purportedly secular societies in new ways.

'Religion', in short, remains a central marker of cultural identity and individual spiritual practices, while simultaneously, these developments often challenge the frameworks traditionally used to approach religion. The Meertens Institute therefore invests in interdisciplinary approaches to document and interpret new constellations. Identification, documentation and analysis of new practices and beliefs, the renewed significance of religion in present-day society and the mobilization of religious heritage constitute the main issues under this research umbrella.

By ethnographically investigating new religious movements and practices (e.g. healing practices or new public rituals), continuations of and ruptures with belief systems of the past become apparent. With our research on popularized embraces of religious manifestations such as Passion plays, pilgrimages, meditation practices, 'African' religion and Islam-inspired social movements, the Meertens Institute aims to provide understanding how a diverse and nominally secularized Dutch society nonetheless deploys religion in many ways.

By making sense of individual practices of spirituality and their historical and cultural antecedents, the researchers investigate cultural and political mobilizations of religion. The often far-reaching and polarizing debates about national identity has led to considerable political concern for the religious, e.g. 'Judeo-Christian' roots of Dutch society, and the place of other religious traditions therein. In this sense, the present, rife with strife and references to religion, also calls for a reinvestigation of the past. How do political parties and other societal actors mobilize religions? And how does renewed emphasis on majority religious-cultural identity impact minorities in the Netherlands? What are the ways in which, for instance, Dutch Muslims historically and presently are part of or excluded from Dutch religious heritage and identity?

The image shows a screenshot of a Kennislink article. At the top left is the Kennislink logo. On the right are logos for KNAW and FoS. The date '10 december 2020' is displayed above the main title. The title is 'Hoe en waarom Malcolm X nog steeds belangrijk is voor Nederlandse moslims'. Below the title is a portrait of Sakina Loukili, a woman wearing a brown hijab. To the right of the portrait is her name and title: 'Sakina Loukili, Religiewetenschapper, MI'. Below the portrait is a link: 'Bekijk alle Faces of Science'. The main text of the article is in Dutch and discusses the relevance of Malcolm X in 2020. At the bottom, there is a small note: 'In deze blog leg ik uit waarom Malcolm X niet alleen heel belangrijk is om het fenomeen van racisme in Nederland te kunnen gebruiken, maar ook om'.

Religious scholar Sakina Loukili of the Meertens Institute examines the rise of political parties that are committed to the voice of Muslim Dutch people

| NEMO Kennislink, 2020

From the perspective of oral tradition research, this umbrella theme is relevant for its focus on folk 'lore and belief' concerning the afterlife, ghosts, hauntings, mediums, demons and spiritism. These supernatural phenomena are part of traditional legends that continue to live on in our day and age, yet taking on new forms and significance, depending on attributed meaning and impact.

Ambitions and challenges

In addition to academic publications such as journal articles, book chapters, special issues, edited volumes and monographs, we aim to further distribute ethnological knowledge, skills and perspectives in the form of popular monographs, professional articles for societal partners and offering consultancy by participating in thinktanks and boards (museums, heritage institutions, municipalities, civil society). By participating in international academic platforms – conference organizations and workgroups, editorial and advisory boards of scholarly journals – the Ethnology Research Group aims to contribute to the further development of socially relevant research agendas, reaching beyond national borders. Moreover, the Meertens Institute is the seat and secretariat of SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore), a role that positions the institute at the international center of a thriving field through its professional association, the organization of biennial conferences, the coordination of SIEF's specialized working groups, the publication of scientific journals and the induction of young scholars into the international field of ethnology.

Ethnology is currently an academic discipline with high societal relevance, due to its long-term research commitments and cutting-edge research agenda. This position implies both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the societal relevance of our research helps to ensure the department's academic value, nationally and internationally. On the other hand, we need to engage and educate more young academics with the department, with a keen eye for diversity as well. Reaching out by teaching at universities and/or higher education institutions, participating in Summer Schools and Graduate Schools, is central here, a responsibility shared by the entirety of the research group. In addition, ethnology in the Netherlands is represented by two chairs with special appointment (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and one 0,2 fte chair Ethnology at the University of Amsterdam. It is our intention to work on the continuation of our chairs and to expand these in the future. Through a pro-active attitude in attracting funds and collaborations, an expansion and innovation of ethnology in terms of research scopes and themes is part of the ambitions for the middle and long-term future.

The documentation of cultural forms and expressions (songs, tales, images, traditions, etc.) has always been central to the work of the ethnology department, a task implying the creation of the heritage that we research. We are aware of the selective bias that may inform such processes of documentation, in particular in the light of the cultural dynamics taking place in an increasingly plural Dutch society. Aiming for inclusivity by adjusting our collections through a critical and reflective lens will thus be a continuous point of concern for the future.

Language: Variational linguistics

The Variational Linguistics group investigates language variation and change in Dutch and its varieties from the perspective of sociolinguistics, formal linguistics and computational linguistics. The group aims to contribute to the institute's current general research program, 'The Netherlands in the World', by working on the following more concrete research ambitions:

1. We study the Dutch language and its varieties used in everyday life in the Netherlands as well as in other parts of the world (notably in Flanders, Surinam and Brazil).
2. We study how Dutch and its varieties vary and change and how this is related to the cognitive aspects of language, more in particular the grammar, as well as the social structures and processes that underly linguistic variation. Of course we are open to exploring new methodologies and frameworks to investigate language variation and change.
3. We collect, digitize, document, annotate, and provide access to the gathered linguistic materials of present-day Dutch and its varieties as well as historical Dutch and its varieties.
4. We initiate a new program of citizen science where we ask language users to inform us about their language but we also aim to form a network of citizen scientists who will be trained and supervised by the linguists in our team and that will help to actively answer research questions.
5. We explore digital innovations, such as computational modeling of change and variation, and shape some of these innovations together with the computational modelling group, the data collection group, and DHLab.

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 ('heritage languages') from inside and outside of Europe. This turbulence leads to new patterns of variation and change in Dutch and its varieties, including the emergence of various types of contact-induced innovations and the development of new (multi-) ethnolects. These patterns in turn provide a unique insight in what factors contribute to language variation and change. The current situation of Dutch and its varieties leads to questions as (i) What kinds of effects does globalization have on the Dutch language in all its varieties? (ii) What can we expect from the aforementioned language contact? (iii) What effects does this have on Standard Dutch and on the dialects, regional languages, sociolects, and ethnolects that are spoken in the Netherlands? (iv) To what extent is the

current situation unique? (v) 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.

Taalfouten zijn een lifestyle

Discussies over taalgebruik gaan maar al te vaak over zuivere spelling en grammatica. Dat is onterecht en spijtig. Achter wat ‘taalfouten’ worden genoemd, gaat veel boeiende culturele informatie schuil, schrijft taalwetenschapper **Kristel Doreleijers** op *EW Podium*.

Voor je het weet duiken ze weer op in de media of zit je er onverhoopt zelf middenin: discussies over taal. Dit soort discussies bieden, helaas, zelden ruimte voor verwondering. Waarom het zo mooi is dat taal zoveel mogelijkheden biedt om uitdrukking te geven aan hetzelfde, of hoe interessant het is dat door het horen van *groter als* bij sommige mensen de haren recht overeind gaan staan, terwijl het voor anderen prima klinkt.

De nadruk in taaldiscussies ligt niet op het observeren en verklaren van dit soort variatie, maar bijna altijd op



Kristel Doreleijers (1993) studeerde Nederlandse taal en cultuur en taalwetenschappen aan de Universiteit Utrecht. Op dit moment werkt zij als promovenda taalkunde bij Tilburg University en het Meertens Instituut in Amsterdam. In haar project onderzoekt ze taalvariatie en taalverandering in het Nederlands en de Noord-Brabantse dialecten.

Linguist Kristel Doreleijers in EW Podium, 2021

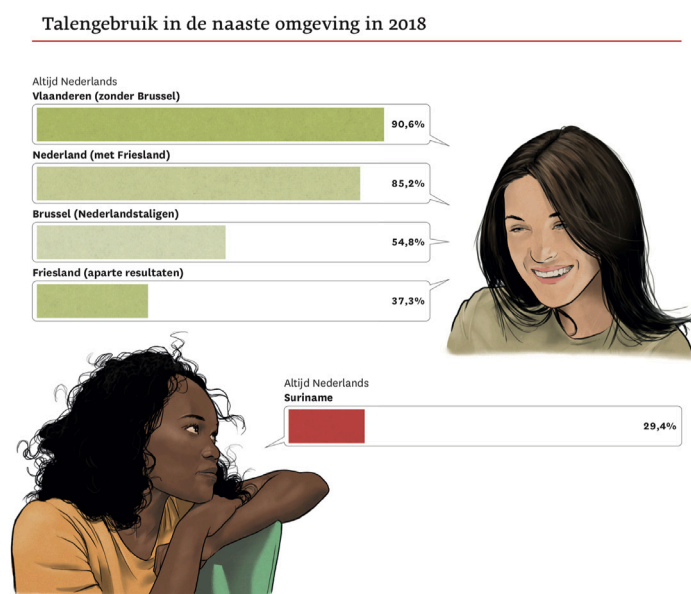
These questions are important both from a societal and from a scientific point of view. They also fit well into international developments in linguistics, in which increased attention is being given to the role of linguistic contact in language change and variation – including when it involves contact between speakers of language varieties 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 arise in the process would be whether certain (sub-) 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 perspectives (historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, grammatical theory). Linguists at the Meertens Institute have expertise in all of these areas.

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, education, and in the workplace, is also hotly debated. Although the Meertens Institute is primarily a research institute, researchers have always contributed to such debates, and provided advice to governmental bodies, 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 Humanities Cluster (such as research into migration, inequality, 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" and "Living past". We also collaborate with the INT (Instituut van de Nederlandse Taal) and the Dutch Language Union (Nederlands Taalunie).



Staat van het Nederlands/State of Dutch, commissioned by the Taalunie and carried out every two years by the Meertens Institute in the Netherlands, Ghent University in Belgium and the Institute for the Education of Teachers and the Anton de Kom University of Suriname

| Atlas of the Dutch Language, Lannoo, 2021

Subdivision of the research

The institute's linguistic research traditionally focuses on research into contemporary variation 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 Surinam. There is already a close collaboration between the institute and linguists in Surinam. 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.

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:

1. **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);
2. **The history of Dutch language** contact is comprised of a number of projects that look at various stages in history to see how language variation and change interact with language contact;
3. **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.

Variational linguistics beyond 2023

For the longer term, the institute remains convinced that it should keep the thematic line of the linguistics group at the Meertens Institute close to the current one: variational linguistics. That term actually describes the core of the linguistic research at Meertens since the founding of the "Dialectenbureau" 90 years ago, from which the Institute originated: variation within Dutch, with particular attention to non-standard varieties.

Although a relatively large amount of research into language variation is presently also being conducted at Dutch universities – and this is different from the situation some 20 years ago –,

the Meertens Institute still clearly has a leading role on the national stage and is a serious player internationally. At the same time, there is still room for improvement especially where the international presence is concerned. This leading role is also related to the fact that Meertens Institute can provide something that has actually become more difficult at the universities: the creation of large collections of (fieldwork) data that document the variation, and this is always linked to long-term research.

In recent years, these activities have slowed down for all kinds of reasons (although, thanks to the work of Van der Sijs and Hinskens, for example, they have always continued). In our view, the new variational linguistics group should again explicitly focus on this line: documentation must always be accompanied by research, research requests must also include an aspect of data collection whenever possible.



Keizersgracht no. 569-571 in Amsterdam, where the Meertens Institute was located until 1998 | *Cor Mooij*

New substantive lines

New lines of research should be taken into account when constructing a new staff for the department. The current members of staff have both broadened their interest over the years, but both have a clear root in formal linguistics (in particular syntax and phonology). This is not a disadvantage: these expertises play an unchanged important role in international research into language variation. However, the expertise base must be supplemented in at least three places: (quantitative) socio-linguistics and historical linguistics as traditionally relevant disciplines, and computational linguistics. Ideally, a multitude of methods would be used in every study. Incidentally, there will inevitably still be gaps under such a design – for instance since it does not necessarily provide for expertise with experimental approaches. Collaboration with institutions outside the institute will therefore always be required.

New forms of data collection

Each of the disciplines mentioned above includes its own method of data collection, which is constantly subject to change. Basically, the Meertens Institute has always collected data among informants in various ways: through fieldwork where the field worker visited the (dialect) speaker, and via questionnaires filled in by a network of informants throughout the Netherlands who answer questions about their own region. The questionnaires have been replaced by a digital network, the Meertens Panel, which is currently being revised and which we imagine might be one of the core instruments of the new variational linguistics group.

We believe that the Meertens Institute can be at the forefront in the technology of data collection, both on a technical level (recordings of a higher level, audiovisual recordings, both in terms of video and ultrasound, etc.) and at the organizational level. Careful experimentation is being carried out worldwide with the collection of data via mobile telephones, etc. This has the advantage that it can be done on the spot by informants themselves, who can upload their data to a server of the institute. In that sense, data processing can be much less labor-intensive than it has been in the past.

The Meertens Institute can take the lead in establishing a network of (real) civil scientists within the humanities. There is a large reservoir of people with an interest in and knowledge of their own language variety as well as certain aspects of linguistics without the desire or possibility to make a career in linguistics. We can use this reservoir by offering people training in doing fieldwork, and possibly also in doing analyses and even writing grammars.

By systematically involving such a group in our research, the Meertens Institute also has the opportunity to engage in science communication in a unique way: people not only hear about research, but can participate in it themselves.

Geurtaal 1: Geur en ruiken

Allereerst zijn we geïnteresseerd in uw kennis en gebruik van algemene woorden voor 'geur' en 'ruiken'. Hieronder volgt een lijst met woorden. Van elk woord willen we weten of u de betekenis kent en of u het woord zelf gebruikt.

*Kent u de betekenis van dit geurwoord?

	Ja	Nee
Geur	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reuk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aroma	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Luchtje	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Walm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wasem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wadem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Zweem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snof	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

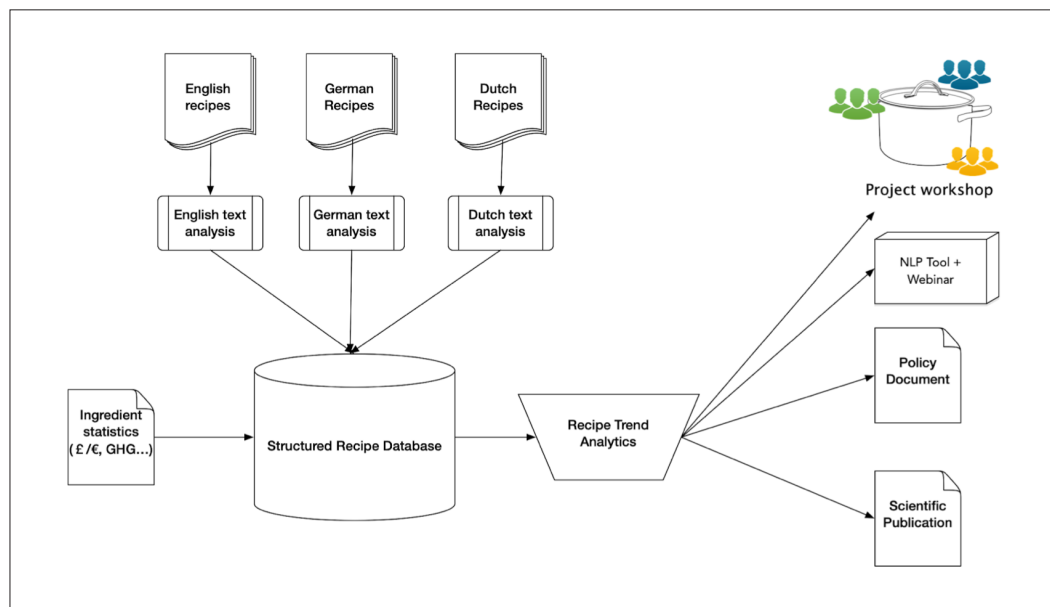
A questionnaire about scent language sent in 2021

DHLab: Computational Humanities and Cultural AI

In the humanities and related social sciences, the use of computational, statistical, and mathematical approaches has increased in recent years. The research can be characterized by (i) relying on quantifiable rather than strictly qualitative evidence; (ii) making explicit and formalizing theory with the help of mathematical and computational models; (iii) making statistical inferences about model parameters; (iv) the use of computational and automatic procedures for processing and analyzing data; and (v) searching for computational analogies through which theories from different disciplines can be unified.

The Meertens Institute aligns itself with this type of research, in which it simultaneously aims to play a programmatic and leading role. It does so by incorporating and combining both the third-paradigm computational methods of *simulation* and the fourth-paradigm methods of *data-driven methods*, creating *culturally-aware artificial intelligence*. Here, the Meertens Institute connects to and participates in the Digital Humanities Lab, DHLab, a shared lab between the three institutes of the KNAW Humanities Cluster, and via DHLab to the Cultural AI Lab, a consortium of partners in the Netherlands working on building culturally aware AI systems.

We expand on these two lines of research in more detail, showcasing the intersections of this work with the Ethnology and Variational Linguistics groups.



Research into the sustainability of recipes

Computational Humanities: Simulation models

One branch of methodological and computational innovation pursued at the Meertens Institute is the use and development of generative, theory-based computational simulation models, to model, for example, cultural variation and change. There are several major theoretical and practical benefits of these 'theorizing machines'. A first is that they call for detailed and replicable definitions of, for example, processes of cultural transmission, and as such, force us to make our theoretical assumptions explicit. At the same time, the use of simulation models allows researchers to formulate and test hypotheses under extremely controlled conditions. This enables us to manipulate and isolate single variables, which is often problematic both in experimental and especially in historical research. Finally, the use of simulation models, such as agent-based models, allow us to bridge the gap between micro-mechanisms (i.e., those operating on the level of the individual) and macro-mechanisms (i.e., population-level processes) of cultural transmission, to enhance and advance our understanding of how the combined interactions between individuals might yield the patterns of variation or change that we observe at the population level (which is not at all obvious).

Fine-grained individual-level data of cultural variation and change are often hard to obtain, yet many (historical) data collections (such as the Dutch Folktale Database and the Dutch Song Database) do represent aggregate, population-level outcomes of individual-level processes. As such, a central and enticing question in the computation group of the Meertens Institute is how such macro-level outcomes can be used to explain observed periods of cultural change and variation, and, crucially, how these outcomes can be linked to individual learning psychologies and transmission strategies. Here too, simulation models play a key role. By developing methods that align the population-level outcomes of simulation models to observed, empirical data, we aim to infer the individual-level properties generating these outcomes. This idea, 'simulation-based inference', helps to gain new insights into diverse phenomena of cultural variation and change, such as how to distinguish processes of cultural drift from cultural selection (e.g. in language change), how cultural stability can arise and persist (e.g., in story and song traditions), and how population size and social connectivity impact cultural innovation and complexity.



DHLab and Culturally-aware AI

DHLab, the Humanities Cluster's Digital Humanities Lab, was established in 2017 as the first inter-institutional research group connecting digital humanities research across the three KNAW HuC institutes. The lab is focused on advancing humanities research through digital methods for which they bring together expertise from humanities, computational linguistics, social science and semantic web.

Culturally-aware AI, Cultural AI for short, is the study, design and development of socio-technological AI systems that are implicitly or explicitly aware of the subtle and subjective complexity of human culture. It is as much about using AI for understanding human culture as it is about using knowledge and expertise from the humanities to analyse and improve AI technology. It studies how to deal with input and output data in the context of the intended (or other) application areas, how to deal with cultural bias in data and technology and how to build AI technology that is optimised for cultural and ethical values. Together with DHLab, the Meertens Institute co-founded and participates in the national Cultural AI Lab, jointly with the Centre for Mathematics and Informatics (CWI), TNO, Rijksmuseum, National Library, Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam.

Due to successful funding applications, the Meertens Institute and DHLab started new lines of Cultural AI research in 2020 and 2021, on building tools for moderators of online discussion fora and on detecting polyvocality in descriptions of cultural objects in heritage collections. Both projects are close collaborations with domain experts and humanities researchers. The project on helping human moderators of online discussion fora deal with escalating debates is closely aligned with research from the Ethnology group and NL-Lab (see below) on populism, social media and religion.

NL-Lab

NL-Lab, which started in 2019, studies Dutch culture and identity in present, past, and future. NL-Lab is an experimental lab, seeking answers to the questions how, when, and by whom Dutch culture and identity are shaped, felt, and transmitted. Where and why is national identity put in play? What futures are crafted when people appeal to national identity? What are the forms that have shaped the Netherlands; what forms are considered key to national identity? How does the Netherlands feel, smell, taste? What happens when we take animals in the equation of identity debates?

The lab does not pretend to be able to determine what 'Dutch identity' is. It does not standardize; it tests. NL-Lab aims to bring new perspectives to both the academic and social debates around national identity. For this, NL-Lab combines traditional with novel methodologies: archival research, reconstruction research, discourse analysis and ethnography with digital methods (social media analysis, text mining, semantic web), and performative methods, such as reconstructions of historical spaces, smells and tastes. NL-Lab also aims to be a social laboratory, bringing together people from different strands of research and professions, to learn and jointly study Dutch culture and identity, and to school junior researchers in a multidisciplinary environment.

In the context of the KNAW Humanities cluster NL-Lab aims to combine expertise across the institutes, forming research groups with affiliated members, research fellows and the core staff of the lab. This approach has already proven successful: not only are new collaborations formed, resulting in publications and media attention (e.g. on how during the Covid crisis the Netherlands developed into a statistical community of feeling), NL-Lab, in collaboration with DH-Lab, MI immaterial heritage and 'food, body and well-being' experts just received news that it has been granted a Horizon 2020 project: Odeuropa (2,8m), for which the KNAW Humanities Cluster will be the PI. The project on smell and taste, olfactory heritage, and sensory mining will address issues of identity through the unexpected question of smell, while further establishing the HuC as a centre of expertise in cultural heritage and computational methods.

The NL-Lab research programme closely connects to various research lines of the Meertens Institute. Taking a transnational and postcolonial approach, NL-Lab studies 'the Netherlands in the world' with a keen eye for cultural, lingual and religious diversity within the nation. The lab's interest for cultural heritage and processes of canonization, as well as for emotional communities, affective economies, and embodied knowledge connects strongly to the research themes of the ethnology department. Researching interspecies communication both connects to the sociolinguistics expertise of MI and its goal to extend data driven research.

In the spring of 2021 NL-Lab had its official launch around a project on "Charting the Netherlands" - how politics and science have collaborated in measuring and establishing the Netherlands as identity category. The project also involves a critical positioning of NL-Lab regarding the long-term research programmes of the Meertens Institute.



NL
LAB

NEDERLANDSE
CULTUUR EN IDENTITEIT
IN HEDEN EN VERLEDEN



Fragrant pomander | *Rijksmuseum*