RAF VAN ROOY

LANGUAGE *or* DIALECT?

The History of a Conceptual Pair

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Language or Dialect?

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of individual copies and their unique characteristics, since often only one copy of a book is available in digital format. Additionally, maps and schemes that are printed on pages of larger size are sometimes omitted in online reproductions. Be that as it may, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, and I am grateful that I have been able to make optimal use of these digital resources.

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Conventions

Non-English primary texts, when quoted, are systematically translated into English in the main text. The original passages are given in the footnotes. Translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Other relevant passages are occasionally cited in the footnotes in their original form and without a translation. Ancient and medieval Latin texts are quoted from the editions used by Brepols's Latin databases (*Library of Latin Texts A* and *B* as well as *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*), unless otherwise indicated. I have regularized ancient Latin orthography by reserving <u> for the vowel [u] and <v> for the semivowel [w]. Ancient Greek and Byzantine texts are quoted from the editions used by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (*TLG*) database, unless otherwise indicated. Greek words and short quotations have been transliterated into the Roman alphabet in the main text, with the original Greek quoted between round brackets. For recurring terms, the original Greek is given at the word's first appearance. Longer quotations are cited in the footnotes and provided only in the original Greek alphabet. Titles of Greek and Latin texts cited in footnotes have normally been taken over from the Brepols and *TLG* databases. All English Bible quotes are cited according to the English Standard Version.

I have quoted early modern and modern texts as I have found them in the original sources. I have resolved abbreviations between square brackets. Errors and misprints have been marked with [*sic*]. Original **bold** font or unusual font, for instance Gothic in an otherwise Latin-script text, have been converted to standard Roman script. All italic fonts have been romanized. I have converted the superscript ^{e} to the modern umlaut sign in early modern German quotations. When pagination is lacking, I have used the signature markings to refer to the page intended. The capital letters in titles of early modern works have been normalized in the bibliography at the back. Abbreviations in the publisher's names have not been resolved. Names of Greek, Latin, and early modern authors have been Anglicized whenever this is common in secondary literature. Otherwise, I have opted for one of the most common forms. Life dates are provided in the main text when a source author is first introduced but not in the footnotes. For living persons, I offer the year of birth, if known. I refer to early modern dissertations by mentioning the name of the supervising professor (*praeses*) as well as the presenting student (*respondens*), unless I have good reasons to suppose that one of them should be considered the sole author of the dissertation (on this issue see e.g. Considine 2008b). Furthermore, to distinguish between concepts and terms, I rely on italics to denote that the discussion pertains to a *term*. Finally, I use singular *they* in order to avoid gendered language.

1
Introduction

When during World War II the linguist Max Weinreich (1894–1969) finished one of his New York lectures on the Yiddish language and its social status, one of his auditors, a young teacher from the Bronx, came up to the front of the room for a follow-up discussion. He boldly addressed Weinreich: 'What is the difference between a dialect and a language?'—a question frequently asked of linguists in general. As Weinreich tried to give him a satisfactory solution, the teacher interrupted him and said: 'That I know, but I will give you a better definition: "A language is a dialect with an army and navy".' The identity of the auditor is still up for discussion, but his remark was to have a rich and powerful resonance. Weinreich was so impressed by the witty statement that he decided to mention and discuss it at length in one of his publications, a paper, in Yiddish, entitled 'The YIVO and the problems of our time', which he had prepared for the annual conference of the YIVO, the Yiddish Scientific Institute, in 1945 (Weinreich 1945). The rest, as they say, is history. Today, as soon as the distinction between the concepts language and dialect is raised in debate, someone will take refuge in the quip recorded by Weinreich to relativize it and demonstrate that it is primarily informed by language-*external*, sociopolitical circumstances. The question whether one labels a speech form *language* or *dialect* depends, in other words, on the history of its speech community, its social status, and its participation in power or lack thereof (see Maxwell 2018).

In such debates, the distinction between language and dialect is, almost as a rule, taken for granted. It is, in fact, usually perceived as a kind of ahistorical given, an ever-present and obvious component of our metalinguistic apparatus (cf. Kamusella 2016: 164). The conceptual pairing is, however, not as self-evident as we tend to assume. Like all aspects of human culture, it has a history, which I will sketch in this book. In this history, the early modern era, roughly 1500–1800, was a critical stage. During this period, scholars with various interests and backgrounds began to address, often at great length, questions about linguistic diversity in general and dialectal variation in particular: why are there not only diverse languages, but even differences in every language individually? Is there a litmus test for determining whether a specific form of speech can be considered an actual language or rather a dialect deriving from, and subsumed under, a language? What criteria, causes, and circumstances can be invoked in this debate?

Despite the lively interest which early modern scholars took in these issues, historians of linguistics have thus far made no attempt at exploring the origin and

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evolutions of the language/dialect pair in depth. Usually, it is situated in Greek antiquity because of the origin of the term *dialect* (e.g. Kamusella 2015: 10–14; 2016: 172–5), but I will argue that this view is based on an unfounded assumption. A rare exception is the all-round linguist Mario Alinei (1980: 11–27), who situated the origin of the distinction in the Renaissance in an intriguing paper published four decades ago. Alinei's compatriot Mirko Tavoni (1986: 221), too, has placed 'the birth of the modern concept [of dialect] through contact with the Greek sources' around 1500. In this book, I follow Alinei's and Tavoni's lead as I seek to trace the emergence of the conceptual pair, a complex matter on the crossroads of linguistics, intellectual history, and philology. My main aim is to present the poorly known history of the language/dialect distinction to anyone interested, inside and outside academia: linguists, historians, philologists, and non-specialists with a general interest in history and language.

Even though the focus is on the early modern era, it is indispensable that I zoom out. In order to fully grasp the history of the conceptual pair in Western linguistic thought, I have to travel back in time to antiquity and the Greek world in particular, with which early modern scholars developed a deep fascination. There, they stumbled across an age-old situation of dialectal diversity that reminded them of their native tongues; this encounter profoundly changed the way they thought about variation within languages. Not only did they adopt the term closely associated with Greek variation, *diálektos* (διάλεκτος), they also adapted the concept that was intertwined with it to their own here-and-now. The rediscovery of Greek diversity served as an eye-opener for humanists, many of whom assumed that Latin, the language of science, education, administration, and religion, was an invariable tongue that did not suffer from regional differences.

I do not only look back to antiquity, as this would result in a very incomplete picture. Understanding the conceptual pairing, its different interpretations, and the suspicions which many present-day scholars harbour about it requires an investigation of modern developments, too. In this period, linguistics emerged as a separate research discipline and was institutionalized. How did this affect the language/dialect distinction? At the same time, the conceptual pair, until then mainly restricted to educated circles, emerged as popular knowledge. In which ways and contexts did this knowledge transfer occur, and why? By answering these questions, it is possible to sketch the history of two intertwined concepts that have been, and still are, frequently used by scholars and laypeople alike in a wide range of different contexts.

My main focus is on the Western tradition of grammatical and linguistic scholarship, with a slight West-Germanic tilt for five principal reasons. Firstly, the conceptual pair seems to have been discussed most intensely by authors with a West-Germanic background. Secondly, available scholarship is also concerned with these authors. Thirdly, English texts are currently most easily accessible in

this digital age. Fourthly, the focus is dictated in part also by the limitations of my linguistic competence. Fifthly, a Germanic tilt also benefits the reader of this book, obviously composed in English. The available source material is extremely varied, especially for the periods before the modern age, when linguistics had not yet emerged as an autonomous branch of study. It ranges from grammars, linguistic handbooks, and treatises over lexica and journal articles to philological and historiographical works of diverging nature. I focus on printed works for the period from the Renaissance onwards, as these generally had a wider circulation than manuscripts and therefore were in a position to achieve a greater impact.

In presenting the results of my analysis, I have tried to strike a balance between the general and the specific. I have, on the one hand, taken a bird's-eye view across twenty-five centuries, tracing the journey of the language/dialect distinction from its prehistory in antiquity to modern language studies. Charting continuities and break-off points has been one of my main concerns. On the other hand, in order to avoid doing injustice to the individuality of scholars and running the risk of losing my grip on the actual sources, I have chosen to draw out telling case studies throughout the book. As such, I have adopted an approach that is more or less in line with David Armitage's 'history in ideas',

> a genre of intellectual history in which episodes of contestation over meaning form the stepping-stones in a transtemporal narrative constructed over a span of time extending over decades, if not centuries. The 'ideas' structuring this history would not be hypostatised entities, making intermittent entries into the mundane world from the idealism's heavenly spheres, but rather focal points of arguments shaped and debated episodically across time with a conscious—or at least a provable—connection with both earlier and later instances of such struggles.
>
> (Armitage 2012: 499)

This *longue durée* approach, which underlines the variability of concepts and their context-bound constitution, has been further developed by Armitage in a co-publication with Jo Guldi (Guldi and Armitage 2015). I have taken great care to put the different episodes of the history of the conceptual pair in their correct setting, an indispensable step in sound studies in intellectual history, as most scholars agree following Quentin Skinner's seminal 1969 paper 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas'. These contextualization efforts are all the more crucial, since language was usually not studied in and of itself before the nineteenth century. I take contexts as a plural noun, as they differ for each author and each source text individually, and I follow Kristin Asdal and Ingunn Moser's suggestion that contexts should not be regarded as invariable givens but rather as selective constructions of the historian's own making (Asdal and Moser 2012: 303).

The main question which I aim to address in this book, then, is the following: how and in which contexts have scholars thus far tried to distinguish a language from a dialect? I have tried to answer this question in a more or less chronological account of twenty-two brief chapters. This choice of presentation will, I hope, make the complex history of the conceptual pair a palpable and well-structured whole for the reader. Further coherence has been created by grouping the chapters into five larger parts, which coincide with the main episodes of the story which I am about to tell.

Part I, on Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages, is the shortest, and with good reason, as I argue that the conceptual pair language/dialect was largely absent from linguistic thought in these periods. This absence also explains why I have called the first part 'Prehistory'. Chapter 2 starts at the ultimate origin of the term *dialect*, ancient Greece, unveiling how it was never customary in Greek scholarship, both ancient and medieval, to contrast the term *diálektos* to a word referring to language. In order to prove this, the chapter treats both passing references to the Greek dialects and influential definitions of the Greek word. It also frames definition attempts in their philological context. Finally, I briefly discuss the Latin tradition up to about 1500, arguing that an obvious opposition of dialect to language cannot be discovered there either.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed case study of the main exception to this general tendency, the late medieval scholar and polyglot Roger Bacon, who opposed the terms *lingua* and *idioma* in a way that prefigured the later language/dialect distinction. Bacon was able to do so because of his exceptionally broad intellectual and linguistic horizons; he was familiar with English, French, Latin, Greek, and other tongues, as well as the regional variations within some of them. His mastery of Greek in particular was unique in his times. Bacon's linguistic outlook was a central precondition and a triggering circumstance for his *lingua*/*idioma* distinction. He was in good company, since the renowned philosopher Thomas Aquinas presupposed a similar metalinguistic contrast in his exegetical works; yet Thomas was much less explicit about it. Chapter 3 finishes with a brief exposé of biblical exegesis as an overlooked source for ancient and medieval ideas on regional variation.

In Part II, I turn to the major argument of this book, endeavouring to reveal the largescale emergence of the distinction between language and dialect in the first half of the sixteenth century. It begins in the same way as Part I ended, with a case study of a prominent scholar. Chapter 4 uncovers the way in which the Swiss humanist Conrad Gessner, an important language scholar, bibliographer, and zoologist, conceived of the Latin term *dialectus* in opposition to *lingua*. Renaissance intellectuals were confronted with a major explosion of information, also on the languages of the world, and Gessner was one of the first to try and classify human speech in its great diversity. He did so in his *Mithridates* of 1555, the first ever language catalogue, in which the term *dialectus* frequently appeared.

The word served to bring more nuance into the relationships between speech forms and is, unlike in antiquity and the Middle Ages, clearly taken to be a variety of a language. In this regard, Gessner was inspired not only by ancient sources but also by the works of his contemporaries. Indeed, unlike Roger Bacon, the Swiss humanist was not an isolated pioneer, but rather the exponent of an early sixteenth-century trend. The emergence of this trend is traced in Chapter 5 through its main symptoms. Most tellingly, the first decades of the Cinquecento witnessed an increasing contrasting of the Latin terms *dialectus* and *lingua*, after Greek *diálektos* had been definitively borrowed into Neo-Latin. Another symptom was the creation of the concept of common language, which in its terminological guise as *lingua communis* was often opposed to *dialectus*. In addition, *dialectus* definitions were silently updated by means of determiners suggesting the hierarchical subordination of the term vis-à-vis *lingua*. In the 1540s, a new Latin phrase moreover appeared, 'to differ only in dialect(s)', which implied that related dialects differed from each other only superficially, whereas distinct languages exhibited substantial variation. This collocation enjoyed a rich career. *Dialectus* and *lingua* were, however, not contrasted in a very clear fashion from the start, as especially the former term was not yet delimited semantically. Instead, it was part of an intricate conceptual web, including also concepts such as idiom and style.

Chapter 6 tries to frame the emergence of the language/dialect distinction in its intellectual and historical context. The rediscovery of the Ancient Greek dialects constituted, I argue, a major pivoting point, as well as the standardization projects that were gathering steam in the early sixteenth century and the information explosion enhanced by the commercialization of the printing press. Attention to the standardization of the vernaculars was especially urgent in Protestant areas, where a uniform language was needed to convey the Word of God to all classes of society, while in Catholic Europe Latin remained the principal language of religion. In the wake of standardization and categorization attempts, linguistic diversity became countable, as boundaries became more fixed than before. Paradoxically, humanists did not realize that they were introducing a new conceptual pair, assuming, instead, that this had been a Greek achievement. Yet they were, in fact, reading the language/dialect distinction into the ancient source texts. As a result, the new contrast was a product of subconscious appropriation and adaptation.

Part III, 'Consolidation by elaboration', describes how the new conceptual pair became anchored in the metalinguistic apparatus of early modern scholars in the century after 1550 and received various meanings, most of which are still in use today. In Chapter 7, two interpretations with roots in Greek antiquity take centre stage. First, I outline how the spatial conception of dialect established itself after 1550. More circumstantial evidence for the wide dissemination of this geographical interpretation is also briefly treated. Humanists moreover soon recognized the universality of the phenomenon of regional linguistic variation, an intellectual

achievement that has not yet received due acknowledgement. Even though the geographical interpretation of the language/dialect distinction implied that language covered a larger area than dialect, some early modern scholars believed that good language had its seat only in a state's capital. Secondly, I treat the emergence of the early modern idea that dialect was particular to a tribe, implying that language was a kind of ethnically overarching phenomenon. There was, however, an unresolved tension with a competing view, associating language with the nation in the political sense. Although widespread in the early modern period, the spatial and ethnic conceptions of dialect as a variety of a language were never used as diagnostic criteria to determine the language/dialect status of a speech form. Chapter 8 treats two interpretations of the conceptual pair which early modern scholars did consider useful in doing so: the Aristotelian criterion and mutual intelligibility. I argue that in the seventeenth century an interpretation of the language/dialect distinction emerged according to which related dialects showed only accidental differences, whereas distinct languages varied in their substance. This analysis was grounded in two traditional categories of Aristotelian ontology and implied a binary opposition between substantial and accidental variation; numerous humanists realized, however, that linguistic distance comes in degrees. In the remainder of Chapter 8, I contend that the criterion of mutual intelligibility, often bracketed together with the Aristotelian criterion, had its origin in the Renaissance. The eccentric humanist Johannes Goropius Becanus played a key role in its emergence and specified it further as *immediate* mutual intelligibility. This criterion, too, was conceptualized in predominantly binary terms. Contradictorily, numerous scholars complained about the lack of mutual intelligibility among speakers of related dialects, pointing out the wider communicative reach of a language.

From the more or less neutral early modern conceptions of the language/dialect distinction in Chapters 7 and 8, I move to more subjective interpretations in Chapter 9. From the late sixteenth century onwards, dialect was conceptualized as an anomalous deviation from the analogical language under which it resided. I suggest that this interpretation may have had its roots in Greek ideas on the relationship between the Koine and the other dialects. The analogy/anomaly conception was, however, principally grounded in early modern linguistic realities, since the advancing standardization led to a stronger contrast between the prescribed norm and everything deviating from it. Out of this normative interpretation of the language/dialect distinction, the highly subjective idea that language was superior to dialect developed almost naturally in the course of the seventeenth century. Whereas theorizing on dialect had remained neutral in the sixteenth century because of the close link it had with the esteemed Ancient Greek dialects, the dialect concept was detached from them during the seventeenth century. In addition, local elites gradually turned their back on their native dialects,

embracing the upcoming standard languages. This social evolution likewise enhanced the severe degradation of the dialect concept.

Most interpretations launched by early modern scholars were synchronic; they concerned a snapshot in time only. Yet one take on the language/dialect distinction was diachronic, in that language was considered to generate different dialects. The origin and diffusion of this historical conception is the subject of Chapter 10. I argue that even though it had earlier precursors, it was only due to the influence of Joseph Justus Scaliger's work that this new interpretation became popular. Already in the early seventeenth century, this conception of the language/dialect distinction was moreover framed by Abraham Mylius within a cyclical process of language change. The language-historical interpretation of the conceptual pair, otherwise primarily understood in synchronic terms, soon prompted criticism, voiced most fiercely by the seventeenth-century orientalist Johann Heinrich Hottinger. I also comment briefly on the emergent idea that dialects preserved archaic features, which apparently contradicted the diachronic conception of the language/dialect distinction. Finally, I outline how the conceptual pair came to be used as a handy discursive strategy for historical classifications of language, especially in cases where evidence was lacking.

Chapter 11 gives an overview of how different definitions of the conceptual pair emerged and became rooted in the thought of scholars. It does so, first and foremost, by surveying the seven major interpretations of the language/dialect distinction which originated roughly in the century between 1550 and 1650 and the ways in which they interacted with each other. These conceptions were, I argue, shaped by three main related circumstances: the Greek heritage, scholarly interests, and sociolinguistic realities. I moreover develop the idea that in the period 1550–1650 the conceptual pair underwent consolidation not only by elaboration but also as an emancipation from the Greek heritage. This de-Hellenization resulted in the degradation of dialect as secondary to language on nearly all levels, even though a strictly political interpretation of the distinction was only marginally present in the early modern period.

In Chapter 12, the last chapter of Part III, I present the third case study of the book, the Swedish scholar Georg Stiernhielm. Driven by language-historical interests, Stiernhielm defined the conceptual pair primarily in terms of substantial versus accidental differences. This Aristotelian interpretation he made very explicit, tying it to specific linguistic domains such as the lexicon and pronunciation. He moreover invoked mutual intelligibility in his definitions. As he was concerned in the first place with language history, his usage of the terms *lingua* and *dialectus* was also steeped in the diachronic interpretation. More in the margin, the analogy/anomaly opposition as well as geography likewise shaped his conception of the distinction. The case of Stiernhielm, who probably did not know much Greek, confirms the emancipatory evolution outlined in the previous chapter. It is, finally, no coincidence that his interest in the conceptual pair surfaced around

1650, immediately after he had met at the court of Queen Christina two erudite scholars who had also reflected on the subject along similar lines: Christian Ravis and Claude de Saumaise.

Stiernhielm's extensive attention to the conceptual pair and his linking it to linguistic features reveal a tendency towards systematization and rationalization. Indeed, the Swedish philologist may well be regarded as a transitional figure, heralding a new phase in the history of the language/dialect distinction, treated in part IV. This next period coincides roughly with the years 1650–1800, the age of rationalism and the Enlightenment, when the loose reflections of earlier times were replaced by more structured discussions, and language scholars started to involve more strictly linguistic elements in their treatments of the conceptual pair, even though language-external factors were never far away. I first illustrate this tendency towards systematization and rationalization by means of two short case studies, before moving on to more general reflections. Chapter 13 outlines how the eighteenth-century Dutch orientalist Albert Schultens repeatedly defined the term *dialectus* in a highly systematic fashion. Schultens analysed the conceptual pair principally in Aristotelian terms but tied it also to geographical factors and framed it in a language-historical scheme. He moreover contrasted the analogy of language to the anomaly of dialect. The Dutch orientalist extended the distinction so as to include a third concept, that of degenerate offshoot, which, unlike a dialect, did not preserve the core of the language intact. He also insisted on the linguistic classes in which related dialects allegedly differed from each other. Schultens was a key figure, as he put the conceptualization of dialect on the scholarly agenda, albeit always as a matter of instrumental importance only, and triggered numerous follow-up discussions among his pupils and readers.

Chapter 14 presents a short case study from an angle different from that of philology, taking the historian Johann Christoph Gatterer's ideas on linguistic diversity as its object. It not only serves as another telling example of the tendency towards systematization but also, and especially, represents a climax in eighteenth-century attempts at rationalizing the conceptual pair. Proposing an embryonic lexicostatistic method, Gatterer tried to find an objective way to use linguistic data in writing an encompassing history of tribes and nations, in particular their prehistory. Starting from a basic vocabulary set, Gatterer attempted to quantify linguistic distance. In doing so, he divided the kinship continuum into four sections: unrelated languages, related languages, dialects, and closely related dialects. His innovative methodology, prefiguring modern lexicostatistic approaches, had only limited success, however. Gatterer failed to put it into practice, and the historian was criticized, rather ironically, for his ahistorical method by the grammarian Johann Christoph Adelung.

In the last two chapters of Part IV, I adopt a broader perspective again. Chapter 15 outlines the linguistic respects in which related dialects were believed to vary, in opposition to distinct languages, during the early modern era. Initially,

a Byzantine author was the main source of inspiration to describe dialect-level differences, primarily in Greek handbooks. It was only after 1650 that the levels of variation were treated in a more systematic fashion by non-Hellenists, too. The focus of attention was on the ways in which related dialects varied. The differences were, as most scholars agreed, superficial and mainly situated on the level of pronunciation, letters, and the lexicon. There was, however, no linguistic domain in which related dialects were claimed to never demonstrate variation. Overall, the differences required to speak of distinct languages attracted less attention. Yet many scholars agreed that substantial differences were needed, principally in the roots of words. Sometimes, unusual linguistic criteria were put forward, for instance by Johann Georg Wachter and Ferdinando Galiani in the eighteenth century.

Chapter 16 discusses further evidence for the systematization and rationalization of the language/dialect distinction in the period 1650–1800. On the one hand, a kind of dialectological tradition emerged. The study of regional variation became a subfield of philology, albeit never an autonomous one; occasionally, it already was receiving the label of *dialectologia*, introduced in 1650. For the first time, philologists presented dissertations on dialectal diversity that were no longer exclusively focused on the Greek dialects. On the other hand, scholars adopted more rational attitudes towards the conceptual pair. Some chose to supplement the binary contrast with new concepts. Others advocated to distinguish more clearly among different interpretations of the language/dialect distinction. Confusion persisted, however, throughout the early modern period. The first vocal sceptic of the conceptual pair was Friedrich Carl Fulda, who made painfully clear how arbitrary the distinction actually was.

In Part V, I explore the vicissitudes of the conceptual pair in mainstream modern linguistics, with specific attention to their relationship to earlier ideas, both in terms of continuity and breaking points. Chapter 17 surveys the nineteenth-century fate of the language/dialect distinction, during and after the establishment of linguistics as an autonomous field of study. As at this stage the study of language roughly coincided with historical-comparative grammar, it is no surprise that the language-historical interpretation prevailed. In the 1870s, the spatial conception was foregrounded when dialect geography emerged. Other criteria, too, lived on, especially mutual intelligibility and the Aristotelian interpretation. In the first half of the nineteenth century, only few scholars bothered to discuss the conceptual pair at length, with the exception of the forgotten comparative linguist and Hellenist Albert Giese. In the 1860s, suspicion about the validity of the language/dialect contrast grew, perceptible in the work of August Schleicher and the neogrammarians, but not to such an extent that it was extensively questioned. Perhaps linguists were afraid that this debate would mean the premature end of their young discipline. By the end of the nineteenth century, many prominent linguists had realized the arbitrariness of

the language/dialect distinction, and linguists were forcibly confronted with its problematic nature from within, as Chapter 18 argues. This last case study of the book outlines the ideas of the headstrong German linguist Hugo Schuchardt, who dared to face the full consequences of critically reflecting on the conceptual pair. Considering the nature of linguistic diversity, Schuchardt noticed that there were no such strict divisions as Schleicher's family tree model presupposed. Instead, he proposed a wave model, thus prefiguring Johannes Schmidt's image. Language and dialect were merely fictional abstractions from actual linguistic facts and for this reason useless. Schuchardt was not alone in his suspicion. Some of his colleagues likewise acknowledged the abstract nature of the language/dialect distinction, but preferred to keep on using it for practical reasons, whereas others like Jules Gilliéron dismissed its validity and concentrated on linguistic features instead, realizing that dialect boundaries were arbitrary.

Chapter 19 surveys the fate of the language/dialect distinction in structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of it is revealed to have been fairly traditional. In Saussure's wake, mainstream structural linguists usually focused on homogeneous language systems, the *langue*, rather than the *parole*, with scant attention to the conceptual pair. In the 1950s, a dialectological turn occurred. The year 1954 in particular was a breaking point, when three structuralist papers devoted to the concept of dialect appeared. Uriel Weinreich suggested the concept of diasystem to capture variation within one language. André Martinet, in turn, tried to redefine dialect scientifically by excluding sociopolitical factors. Václav Polák, finally, argued that substantial morphosyntactic variation was required to speak of distinct languages. Phonological and lexical differences resulted in dialects only. Structuralist discussions of the language/dialect pair remained uncoordinated, however, and had relatively limited impact on subsequent debates, except for Weinreich's diasystem concept.

The brief Chapter 20 treats the success of the criterion of mutual intelligibility since the 1950s, when American linguists interested in Amerindian tongues started to actively test this feature. Pioneers were Carl Voegelin and Zellig Harris, who suggested four methods of answering language/dialect questions, including mutual intelligibility testing. Even though scholars immediately faced numerous problems, the method enjoyed considerable success and is the primary criterion used by language catalogues such as *Ethnologue* and *Glottolog*. The criterion was criticized by, among others, Frederick Agard, who proposed nine postulates for determining language/dialect status. Others followed Morris Swadesh's lexicostatistic lead and tried to quantify the distance between speech forms. According to one of the most recent representatives in this strand, linguistic distance is bimodally distributed, and the language/dialect distinction is, by consequence, backed by the majority of linguistic evidence. Rather artificially, a strict cut-off point is proposed between the language and dialect poles.

Chapter 21 confronts two opposite perspectives on language and the language/dialect pair with roots in the 1950s and 1960s. On the one hand, it treats generative approaches to linguistic diversity. In general, generative linguists have assumed that dialect-level variation is produced by minor differences in rules, parameters, or constraints and their ordering or ranking, depending on the generative framework which they follow, whereas distinct languages are characterized by major divergences in the same. On the other hand, sociolinguists have focused on linguistic variables rather than systems. As they correlate linguistic phenomena with language-external attributes, their conceptions of the language/dialect distinction tend to be rather hybrid, being shaped by linguistic as well as sociopolitical parameters. This externalist approach has been fiercely criticized by Noam Chomsky, the founding father of generativism. Other linguists have adopted more constructive attitudes, either by supplementing the language/dialect distinction or by supplanting it with an entirely new conception of language.

Chapter 22 develops the idea that even though many linguists today tend to avoid the term *dialect*, it has been a major resource for new terminology, especially through *-lect* derivations. The recent terms *doculect* and *languoid* are particularly interesting as they are derived from (*dia*)*lect* and *language*, respectively, and are part of an alternative conception of language. Terminology linked to the language/dialect distinction is still widely used and has been incorporated into conceptual constellations tailored to specific national contexts. It is moreover striking how noncommittal recent definitions of *dialect* are, as if linguists want to keep a safe distance from this tarnished term. The final section draws the balance of the modern love-hate relationship with the conceptual pair. Five main attitudes can be distinguished, ranging from tacit preservation through explicit redefinition and supplementation to a quest for alternatives and downright dismissal. The unorganized nature of the debate on the subject is remarkable, as is the persistence of centuries-old interpretations.

Even though the book's focus is on scholarly conceptions of the language/dialect pair, first within grammar and philology and later within linguistics, it is indispensable to dwell briefly on popular ideas, too, since they have interfered and interacted with the views of linguists in various intriguing ways. Chapter 23 explores the modern popularization of the conceptual distinction, gathering steam in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the standard language ideologies of nation-states spread to nearly all classes of society, primarily through mass education. This popularization involved a sharp divide between standard language and dialect, which became widely known among the general public. In the process, the conceptual pair was excessively politicized and even politically activated, as demonstrated by some notorious episodes in recent history, including the Oakland Ebonics controversy. The Internet has, moreover, provided laypeople with a forum in which to debate the language/dialect distinction and its applications, which tend to have a strong political colour. It remains to be seen whether

and how linguists and others, both laypeople and academics, have exchanged ideas on the subject. I tentatively suggest that there indeed has been a conceptual cross-fertilization, a phenomenon requiring further investigation.

Chapter 24, finally, surveys by way of conclusion the book's main arguments. These include especially the emergence of the modern language/dialect distinction during the early sixteenth century and the subsequent formulation of its main interpretations. Above all, however, this chapter emphasizes that the conceptual pair unmistakably has a history, for too long neglected, and that it is not a self-evident given which has always been there. Having established the historicity of the language/dialect distinction, I field the question of whether it has a future, to which I try to offer an answer, both tentative and brief, from my perspective as a historian of language studies. On the one hand, I suggest that a reconceptualization of the distinction can be a viable option. On the other hand, the fact that the conceptual pair has become common knowledge in modern times gives linguists, I believe, not only the opportunity but also, and especially, the responsibility to take on a more prominent societal role in language/dialect disputes.

I

PREHISTORY, 500 BC–1500

2
A dive into the prehistory of the conceptual pair

As the Roman emperor Tiberius (42 BC–AD 37) was very fond of Greek rhetoric, he allowed several Greeks to be part of his entourage and live with him. If we are to believe the historian Suetonius (*c.* AD 70–after AD 128), however, they were subject to his capriciousness as much as anyone else. One of Tiberius's favourite Greeks, going by the name Zeno, for instance, suffered a tragic fate after displeasing the emperor. The Greek had uttered some phrases in an affected fashion, which bothered Tiberius, who asked: 'What is that so very annoying dialect?' Zeno answered that it was Doric, which caused the emperor to promptly banish him to the Greek island of Cinaria, present-day Kinaros in the Dodecanese. Zeno had apparently reminded Tiberius of the miserable period in his life when he lived in retirement on the Doric island of Rhodes, before he was crowned emperor.[1] For this reason, he wanted him gone.

Suetonius inserted this episode into his biography of Tiberius as he wanted to demonstrate the ruthless character of the Roman emperor. Indirectly, it indicates something else, too. It was widely known in the intellectual circles of antiquity, even in the Latin-speaking western sphere of the Roman Empire, that there were different Greek dialects. Indeed, they absorbed nearly all attention turned to the topic of variation within a language before about 1500, since they were the only dialects relevant for literary and philological study. Greek literature was composed not in one uniform language but in a range of different dialects (see e.g. Colvin 2010). Homer's masterpieces were sung in a dialectally mixed *Kunstsprache*. The great orators from ancient Athens drew up their speeches in Attic, the classical form of Greek par excellence. Pastoral poetry was marked by Doric dialect, whereas Sappho chose her native Aeolic speech in her touching lyrical songs. Herodotus, the proclaimed father of historiography, wrote his histories in Ionic.

[1] Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, *Tiberius* 56.1: 'Nihilo lenior in convictores Graeculos, quibus vel maxime adquiescebat, Xenonem quendam exquisitius sermocinantem cum interrogasset, quaenam illa tam molesta dialectos esset, et ille respondisset Doridem, relegavit Cinariam, existimans exprobratum sibi veterem secessum, quod Dorice Rhodii loquantur'.

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2.1 The Greek dialects between anecdotes and definitions

Suetonius's anecdote about Tiberius and Zeno is a fairly banal instance of an ancient author referring to the Greek dialects.[2] As such, it represents a rather low level of awareness of dialectal variation. Several centuries before Suetonius, the Greek historian Herodotus (*c.* 485–424 BC) was more conscious of Greek diversification, as he was in a position to distinguish four different varieties of Ionic Greek in Asia Minor, part of present-day Turkey. He refers to them as *trópous tésseras paragōgéōn*, 'four manners of deviations,', and *kharaktêres glóssēs tésseres*, 'four distinctions of tongue'.[2] Herodotus's wording indicates that he could not yet rely on an established conceptual apparatus and a corresponding metalanguage to talk about dialectal diversity. Instead, he had to resort to words lacking an obvious semantic link with language at that time, such as *kharaktḗr* (χαρακτήρ), 'character(istic); distinctive mark; stamp', *trópos* (τρόπος), 'way; manner', and *paragōgḗ* (παραγωγή), which for Herodotus apparently meant something like 'deviation', 'twisting', or 'seduction'. *Paragōgḗ* did later become a metalinguistic term meaning 'derived form' and 'inflection', whereas the root *kharak-* featured prominently in later Greek definitions of the term *diálektos*.[3]

Some generations later, the Athenian general and notoriously difficult historiographer Thucydides (second half of the fifth century BC) went a little further still by trying to make sense of the different Greek dialects and to characterize their interrelationships. He reported, for instance, on a case of dialect mixture on Sicily (*Historiae* 6.5.1). The inhabitants of the city of Himera spoke, Thucydides claimed, a variety that occupied a middle ground between Chalcidian Ionic and Doric, an assertion for which there is, by the way, no historical evidence (Vassallo 2005: 89). The Athenian historian also mentioned that the Greek spoken by the Aetolians was not understood by other Greeks (*Historiae* 3.94.5), thus apparently proving that not all varieties of Greek were mutually intelligible.

Another type of awareness of dialectal variation came to the fore in its dramatic and literary activation. The brilliant playwright Aristophanes (*c.* 450–*c.* 385 BC), for instance, put specific dialects to comic use at many different occasions, as proved by the masterful analysis of Stephen Colvin (1999). Connected to this was the assumption that a dialect conveyed a specific impression to a listener or reader, which surfaced in other genres, too. For example, the great philosopher Plato (428/7–348/7 BC) apparently experienced the Lacedaemonians, Greeks of Doric descent, as *brakhúlogos* (βραχύλογος), 'short in speech' (*Leges* 641e). A feature frequently attributed to Dorians in general was their alleged 'broadness' in speaking

[2] *Historiae* 1.142: 'τρόπους τέσσερας παραγωγέων' & 'χαρακτῆρες γλώσσης τέσσερες.' Cf. Van Rooy (2016d: 247–8).

[3] For *paragōgḗ* see Liddell & Scott (1996: s.v. παραγωγή); Dickey (2007: 251). For the *kharak*-root see Van Rooy (2016b: 60–1).

(e.g. Theocritus, *Idyllia* 15.87–8). These views are among the earliest explicit formulations of the impression which a dialect conveys or, in modern linguistic terminology, of dialect attitudes and perceptions (cf. Edwards 2009: 82–97).

The rhetorician and lexicographer Julius Pollux (second half of the second century AD) elaborated in more general terms on the variability of language by pointing out that differences in tongue existed from city to city (*Onomasticon* 2.110). Before him, the geographer Strabo (*c.* 62 BC–*c.* AD 24) had made a similar suggestion (*Geographica* 8.1.2). Ancient Greek authors undertook no real attempts at explaining variation in their native language, even though Diogenes Laertius (mid-third century AD), author of a work on the lives and thought of various philosophers, suggested colonization as a force behind linguistic change (*Vitae philosophorum* 1.51).

In the past few paragraphs, I have covered the spectrum from vague awareness of dialectal variation to a preliminary search for the causes of the phenomenon. With Diogenes Laertius, I can even go one step further and reach a still higher degree of abstraction. For in his work we find one of the earliest definitions of the key term *diálektos*, which he quoted from a now lost work by Diogenes of Babylon (*c.* 240–150 BC). This Stoic philosopher must have explained the word as follows:

> Dialect is speech stamped tribally and in Greek fashion, or speech of a certain region, that is, having a certain quality according to a dialect, as *thálatta* [*θάλαττα*, 'sea'] in the Attic and *hēmérē* [*ἡμέρη*, 'day'] in the Ionic.[4]

Diálektos was conceived by Diogenes as a technical term to designate features of the Greek language that bore the mark of a certain tribe or region. The philosopher expressed this by means of the *kharak*-root, as Herodotus had done several centuries earlier. The verb *kharássō* (*χαράσσω*) meant, among other things, 'to carve; to engrave; to stamp', specifically with reference to coins. By using this verb, Diogenes probably wanted to emphasize the distinctive character of a *diálektos*, and how a tribe and its members could leave their own mark on features of the Greek language. He provided specific examples, too. *Thálatta*, as opposed to *thálassa* with double sigma, was a Greek word bearing the stamp of the Attic tribe and the region of Attica, whereas *hēmérē*, as opposed to *hēmérā* (*ἡμέρα*), was typical of the Ionic dialect.

Even though Diogenes of Babylon linked *diálektos* with regional variation, he did not presuppose a clear-cut distinction between dialect and language. Instead, the term was understood as *léxis* (*λέξις*), which Diogenes explained very generally

[4] Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.56: '*Διάλεκτος δέ ἐστι λέξις κεχαραγμένη ἐθνικῶς τε καὶ Ἑλληνικῶς, ἤ λέξις ποταπή, τουτέστι ποιὰ κατὰ διάλεκτον, οἷον κατὰ μὲν τὴν Ἀτθίδα θάλαττα, κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἰάδα ἡμέρη*' (translation adapted from Van Rooy 2016d: 250).

as 'speech that is expressible by means of letters', *phōnè eggrámmatos* (*φωνὴ ἐγγράμματος*) in Greek (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.56). Accounts such as Diogenes's, which testify to a larger degree of abstraction than shown by previous observations, will constitute the central thread running through this chapter, as they are indispensable for an adequate understanding of numerous aspects of later theorizing on the language/dialect distinction.

2.2 *Diálektos*, a variety of interpretations

Was Diogenes of Babylon alone in trying to define *diálektos*? Or was he part of a tradition? The scant evidence available suggests that the latter is true. Indeed, numerous Greek scholars tried to define *diálektos* as a workable metalinguistic term, albeit in different meanings (Van Rooy 2016b, 2016d). Aristotle's (384–322 BC) early interpretation of *diálektos* as 'articulation of the voice by means of the tongue' is miles away from later definitions focused on the literary varieties of Greek.[5] Yet even in works devoted to the Ancient Greek dialects, there was considerable disagreement.

The term *diálektos* had an important generic meaning referring to language, 'manner of speaking; means of communication', deriving from the Greek middle verb *dialégomai* (*διαλέγομαι*), 'to converse with'. With this generic meaning, the widespread definition *idíōma glṓssēs* or *glṓttēs* (*ἰδίωμα γλώσσης/γλώττης*), found in several philological and grammatical works on Greek, shows affinity. In my view, the definition must have signified 'particularity of tongue' rather than 'particular form of a language' (*pace* Consani 2000: 612–13). The difference between the two interpretations lies in the presence or absence of conceptual *subsumption*. I will make use of the terms *subsumption* and *to subsume* in this book to refer to a key development in the history of the conceptual pair language/dialect: the emergence of the idea that there is a level of linguistic entities, dialects, which fall under the hierarchically higher category of languages. In other words, at a certain point in history, the concept of dialect was *subsumed under* that of language, an issue which I will address at length in Part II.

According to my interpretation, then, the widespread Greek definition *idíōma glṓssēs* meant 'particularity of tongue', in which case *diálektos* was not subsumed under a superordinate language concept. Instead, it was viewed as a language particularity in a very general sense, as an ensemble of language features that did not have a wide application, but were restricted to a certain context of usage. Doric, for instance, was a *diálektos* because it had long alphas where one would normally expect etas, because it was particular in contracting the vowel sequence

[5] *Historia animalium* 535a: '*διάλεκτος δ' ἡ τῆς φωνῆς ἐστι τῇ γλώττῃ διάρθρωσις*'.