One-day symposium

Religious Language and Discourse

a Sociolinguistic Field of Study

November 23, 2018

P.N. van Eyckhof 4/006 (09:00-13:00)
Eyckhof 2/006 (14:00-17:00)

Universiteit Leiden

LU CL

NWO | Netherlands Organisation
for Scientific Research

Religious Language and Discourse:

a Sociolinguistic Field of Study

Organizers:

Prof. Dr. Jos Schaeken j.schaeken@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Gulnaz Sibgatullina, MA g.sibgatullina@hum.leidenuniv.nl

In our one-day symposium we continue the discussion stared by the works of Omoniyi and Fishman (2006), Darquennes and Vandenbussche (2011), and Yaeger-Dror (2014), among others, who sought to elaborate on the methodology of analysing religion as a sociolinguistic variable. Our aim is to examine approaches that are most suitable to analyse linguistic practices of religious communities that use more than one language for religious rituals and communication. We will look at theoretical and empirical contributions that explore agency in using religious languages, political and symbolic power of particular religious registers, and linguistic strategies in translation of religious terminology.

This symposium is part of the research project that explores the use of religious languages in the interplay of Christian and Islamic communities in Russia. In our project we examine how Russian today transforms from being a language of Orthodox Christians to accommodate discourse of Muslims in the post-Soviet space. And how these transformations influence the 'traditional' Islamic vernaculars in Russia – languages, such as Tatar, Bashkir or Avar.

The project and the symposium are funded by the Grant 360-70-490 from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

References

Darquennes, J. and W. Vandenbussche. 2011. "Language and religion as a sociolinguistic field of study: some introductory notes." *Internationales Jahrbuch für europäische Soziolinguistik* 25: 1-12

Omoniyi, T. and J. A. Fishman. 2006. *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion. Discourse approaches to politics, society, and culture*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.

Yaeger-Dror, M. 2014. "Religion as a Sociolinguistic Variable." *Language and Linguistics Compass* 8 (11): 577-89

Conference program

Friday, 23 November 2018

P.N. van Eyckhof 4. Room 006

9:00 – 9:15	Registration. Tea & coffee
9:15 – 9:30	Greetings by the organizers
9:30 – 10:45	Keynote lecture

Prof. Dr. Rajeshwari Pandharipande (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA).

"Language of Hindu Religious Practice in the Globalizing World: Challenges and Changes"

10:45 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 11:30	**Dr. Hephzibah Israel** (University of Edinburgh, UK)

"Attending to Translation Conflicts: Re-Translations and 'Non'-translations in Religious Discourse"

11:30 – 11:45	Q &A
11:45 – 12:15	**Prof. Dr. Lourens de Vries** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

"Malaysian and Indonesian as Languages of Religion: Processes of Exclusion and Inclusion"

12:15 – 12:30	Q &A
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch

P.N. van Eyckhof 2. Room 006

14:00 – 14:30	**Dr. Sameh Hanna** (University of Leeds, UK)

"Language, Translation and the Construction of Religious Identity: the Case of the Arabic Translations of the Gospels"

14:30 – 14:45	Q &A
14:45 – 15:15	**Prof. Dr. Wolf-Andreas Liebert** (University of Koblenz, Germany)

"Narratives of Awakening: An Investigation into the Linguistics of Religion"

15:15 – 15:30	Q &A

15:30 – 16:00   **Dr. Michiel Leezenberg** (University of Amsterdam)

"Truth and Power in Religious Discourse: Towards a Comparative Genealogy"

16:00 – 16:15   Q &A

16:15 – 16:30   Coffee break

16:30 – 17:15   Discussion. Religion and Language a Sociolinguistic Field of Study. **Prof. Dr. Jos Schaeken, Prof. Dr. Marina Terkourafi, Gulnaz Sibgatullina** (Leiden University Centre for Linguistics)

17:15 – 17:30   Closing remarks

18:00 – 21:00   Dinner

Language of Hindu Religious Practice in the Globalizing World: Challenges and Changes

Prof. Dr. Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

In this presentation, I will discuss the impact of globalization on the language of Hindu religious practice/rituals in the US diaspora. Although I focus on Hinduism, I assume, the discussion will be relevant for the religious practices of other religions as well. Large-scale migrations of peoples, religions/cultures and languages, and the advancement of technology are two major hallmarks of globalization that have significantly influenced the form and function of language of religious practices across the world. These two have challenged and at times, dismantled the cultural/religious conventions of religious language and practices and have given rise to restructuring of cultures (Bourdieu 1991; Block and Cameron 2002; Blonmaert 2010; Copeland 2012 Fairclough 1989; Kachru 2005; Pandharipande 2006, 2010). I will concentrate on these two major aspects of globalization.

The discussion will be divided into two parts. The first part will include discussion on the challenges presented to religious language of Hindu practices/rituals in the Hindu diaspora in the US. I will discuss the rationale behind the challenges, their impact on the form and function of languages, and the process of accommodation and authentication of the change. For example, English, the dominant and powerful language in the US (but the "prohibited language" in the rituals in the native Hindu context of India) is included in the languages (Sanskrit and other Indian languages) used for Hindu practices in the US. This has changed the patterns of language use in religious rituals and the dynamics of the interaction among participants (discourse pattern) in the rituals, and the degree of the "functional load" (Pandharipande 2010) of languages of rituals. The Hindu saints, (who are viewed as the "authority" in Hinduism), authenticate these changes in the US. I will discuss the implications of these changes for the maintenance of the Hindu beliefs in the "purity" and "efficacy" of rituals, "Hindu identity" and the power-hierarchy of languages. I will also discuss the validity of the (at least apparently) conflicting processes of "Englishization" and "Sanskritization" of languages, which simultaneously operate in this ritual context.

The second part will focus on the other major important aspect of globalization-the advancement of technology and its use for religious rituals/practices. "Digital religion" is

rapidly gaining credence worldwide. In the US as elsewhere, Hindu worship of deities is performed online with virtual flowers, incense, oil lamp and sweets, and prayers and is offered to the virtual images of the deities. The pre-recorded instructions in English for performing the worship, are played online. Language of the prayers is variable (Sanskrit and other Indian languages and/or English).

Another Hindu practice of Satsang (literally, connecting with the Divine through conversations with the knowledgeable Guru/saint), takes place online where the devotees and the Guru,a spiritual leader, interact in English and discuss topics such as the nature of the Divine, Karma, rebirth, etc. The Guru and the devotees do not have to be present in person. The use of English, digital space, and digitally "created" images of the deities for the rituals have challenged the Hindu traditional beliefs about "sacred space", "sacred language", "sacrality and purity of the ambiance," which are considered vital in communicating and experiencing religion through traditional offline rituals. Furthermore, the efficacy of the online rituals is questioned (O'Leary:1996:804). I will discuss the issue of authenticity of the digital rituals and argue that the digital rituals can be viewed as authentic. I propose that the change in the images (virtual as opposed to the metal/clay statues), language, the virtual objects for worship (puja- samagri), virtual space, creates a new symbol-symbolized (signifier-signified) relationship where the signifiers have changed. Digital virtual symbols have replaced the traditional material actual symbols. I call this change re-configuring the symbolic universe of religious beliefs. For example, instead of the clay image, the digital image of the deity signifies the Divine in the online worship. I further show that history of Hinduism provides evidence for the change in the signifier-signified relationship between religious symbols and religious meaning.

In the context of the above, I will examine the validity of claims of the scholars who treat the changes in religious practices as "democratization" (Cheong 2013:76) and "secularization" (Dobbelaere 2009) of religion. The discussion will raise an important question, namely, does the change in the medium (language) and mode (digital) of communication change the religious meaning? More empirical studies on different religions and languages of religion are needed to provide a conclusive answer.

References

Block, D. and D. Cameron. 2002. *Globalization and Language Teaching.* London: Routledge.

Blommaert, J. 2010. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Campbell, H.A. 2013. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. London: Routledge.

Cheong, P. H. 2013. "Authority". In *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. London: Routledge. 72-87.

Copeland, N. 2012. *A Handbook of Language and Globalization*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Dobbelaere, K. 2009. "The theoretical background of Secularization theory". In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fairclough, N.1989. *Language and power*. New York: Longman.

Gold, D. 1987. *Lord as Guru: Hindu Saints in the North Indian Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kachru, B. B. 2005. *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

O'Lery, S.D. 1996. "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Space". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64(4):781-808.

Pandharipande, R. V. 2006. "Language of Religion in South Asia". In *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*, ed. by Tope Ominiyi and Joshua A. Fishman (eds), 141–64. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Pandharipande, R. V. 2010. "Authenticating a Tradition in Transition: Language of Hinduism in the US". In *The Sociology of Language of Religion: Change, Conflict, and Accommodation*, ed. by Tope Omoniyi, 58–83. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan

Attending to Translation Conflicts: Re-Translations and 'Non'-translations in Religious Discourse

Dr. Hephzibah Israel
University of Edinburgh, UK

The entangled relationship of language and religion has been studied from the perspective of many disciplines. My talk focuses on what translation studies can bring to the study of the construction of religious communities and their use of languages. A focus on translation, that is, translation history, the range of translation strategies employed as well as the agency of those involved in translation, both translators and readers, is valuable to study the interdependence between linguistic transfers at the level of language use and conceptual shifts at the level of religious discourse. Referring to the way key Christian terminology travelled to colonial India through textual translations, I show how terms developed evaluative connotations both within and beyond the sacred context. I contrast terms that were readily translated and re-translated with those that were adopted without translation into Indian languages to suggest reasons for such apparent inconsistencies in language use. I give examples of the several names for god used in Tamil translations of the Bible and the effects these repeated name changes had on the Tamil communities that had converted to one of the Christian denominations. How did Tamil Christian communities respond to a god with strikingly different names? In contrast, the untranslated term 'Protestant,' mostly used in emerging nineteenth-century print journalism, served to link seemingly disparate conceptions of rationality and secular but 'useful' knowledges with a religious identity increasingly claimed by the Protestant Tamil community. Paying attention to translation and translation projects I argue brings to light shifting attitudes to religious registers and offers new ways to study the relationship between religious discourse and the construction of religious identities.

Malaysian and Indonesian as Languages of Religion: Processes of Exclusion and Inclusion

Prof. Dr. Lourens de Vries
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

My paper deals with the ways in which linguistic practices in the religious domain of Islamic Malay communities in Asia were almost completely absorbed into and transformed by many Malay speaking Christian communities during the colonial era, including Arab-based scripts and key religious terms of Arabic origin (Allah 'God', imam 'priest', Iblis 'devil', Taurat 'law of Moses', and so on) (de Vries 2018). However, the different colonial histories of the decolonized nation-states created fundamentally different conditions for the tradition of using Malay as the religious language of various faiths and as an interreligious language after the emergence of independent nation-states. The social, religious and political role of Malay in modern Malaysia and Indonesia is sharply different (Samuel 2010). This is reflected in the political, religious and legal struggles in Malaysia where the ancient Christian (and partly also Sikh) appropriation of Islamic Malay is highly contested, in contrast to Indonesia where Malay developed into the symbol of the unity state, rather than the language of the Islamic ethnically Malay community in Malaysia (Soesilo 2001). In fact, in modern Malaysia non-Islamic religious communities in urban areas English is dominant in their worship services whereas Malay is used in Islamic faith communities (Coluzzi and Tade 2015). In the Jakarta area, Malay is the inclusive language of mosque and church, school and state. Since Malay was (and is) used mainly in bilingual contexts, the linguistic practices of Malay Christians had a tremendous impact on hundreds of minority vernaculars with many Malay/vernacular bilinguals. In order to understand the interaction of languages in the religious domain as processes of inclusion, exclusion and identity construction, it is necessary to complement quantitative sociolinguistic approaches with qualitative approaches from linguistic anthropology and the history of religion that can articulate and explain the highly diverse and historically situated cultural meanings of religious language.

References

Coluzzi, P. and R. Tade. 2015. 'The languages of places of worship in the Kuala Lumpur area. A study on the "religious" linguistic landscape of Malaysia." *Linguistic Landscape* 1(3): 243-267.

Samuel, J. 2010. "Les voies de l'aménagement linguistique dan le monde malayophone." *Télescope* 16(3), 135-155.

Soesilo, D. 2001. 'Translating the Names of God: Recent Experience from Indonesia and Malaysia". *The Bible Translator* 52: 414-423.

de Vries, L. 2018. "Iang Evangelivm Ul-kadus menjurat kapada Marcum: the first Malay Gospel of Mark (1629-1630) and the Agama Kumpeni". *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 174, 47-79.

Language, Translation and the Construction of Religious Identity: The Case of the Arabic Translations of the Gospels

Dr. Sameh Hanna
University of Leeds, UK

Since the 9th century, at least, Arabic-speaking Christians have strived to accommodate their scriptures into the Arabic language. The key challenge they faced has always been the conditional relationship between Arabic and another sacred text i.e. the Quran. For Arabic-speaking Christians, this challenge only meant negotiating the linguistic coding of Christian sacredness in a way that both signals the distinctiveness of their beliefs and allows at the same time for a shared 'linguistic space' that facilitates communicating these beliefs to fellow Arabic-speaking Muslims. Finding the register that achieves this balance has been problematic: some translators chose to prioritise the distinctiveness of Christian beliefs at the expense of communicativeness, while others sought to develop a common linguistic code that facilitates interfaith communication, even if this led at times to compromising distinctiveness. Negotiating the linguistic code to accommodate a new sacred text also meant the (re)construction of religious identities and communities. Arab Christians' complex relationship with the Arabic language has been symptomatic of their multi-faceted struggle to forge a Christian Arab identity. This dilemma is further complicated by two key socio-cultural factors: first, the existence of different Arab Christian denominations which sought to signal their difference; second, the fact that a growing number of Arab Muslims either developed an interest in Christianity or actually converted meant that there has been a need for translations that would both communicate the faith and allow them to maintain their cultural Islamic roots.

Using Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production, this paper looks at specific translations, both old and recent, to explore this interface between religion, translation and the (re)construction of religious identities in the Arab-Islamic-Christian context.

Narratives of Awakening: An investigation into the Linguistics of Religion

Prof. Dr. Wolf-Andreas Liebert
University of Koblenz, Germany

The paper focuses on verbal and other multimodal ways of presenting awakening experiences in non-traditional scenes and cultures, also referred to as informal religiousness. In spite of the still valid premise that traditional religions are losing their appeal in late modern societies, experiences of transcendence have not completely disappeared, but have manifested themselves in non-traditional and even non-religious contexts. Research in the sociology of religion has identified late modern religiousness to be fluid, self-empowering, informal and individualising, while the field of linguistics has yet to start researching late modern religiousness. From a linguistic perspective, informal religiousness seems to be particularly suitable for analysis because its formats of presentation are highly individualized and heterogeneous. A fundamental question to be raised is whether there are basic patterns when presenting experiences of transcendence and, if so, how they can be described. Key concepts of a linguistics of religion will be presented through case studies of awakening narratives such as the writings of Eckhart Tolle, experience reports presented in self-published works, forums, blogs and other digital formats.

Truth and Power in Religious Discourse: Towards a Comparative Genealogy

Dr. Michiel Leezenberg
University of Amsterdam

The publication of Foucault's *Les aveux de la chair*, the fourth and final volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*, fills in a number of questions that had remained open in the wake of the volumes that had been published earlier. In this contribution, I will discuss some of the new questions it raises, and some of the answers it provides, concerning the relation between religion, spirituality, truth, and (different forms of) power. These questions are particularly pressing in the light of the study of religious traditions other than (Catholic and Protestant) Christianity. For example, confession does not play as central a role in other religious traditions; but obviously, that need not imply that considerations of truth and power are absent from them. In this contribution, I will discuss these matters with a focus on embodied spiritual practices and truth in Islam and, time permitting, Buddhism.