

**Crossing linguistic boundaries:  
migration and multilingualism in Early and Late Modern times**

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In Europe, bilingualism or multilingualism was a normal state of affairs in the past, as has been argued repeatedly. Early and Late Modern people were well able to communicate across language borders and effectively showed their multiple belongings to different linguistic communities. Illustrative examples are migrant workers who travelled around Europe and merchants in networks of international trade. For the past centuries, the well-known picture of European communication across borders is to a large extent based on accounts of political contact between nations and on the exchange of ideas within the international literary and scholarly community. Research also focussed on formal language regulations and on book publishing for a multilingual readership. In these contexts, i.e. in the upper layers of society, mostly Latin and French functioned as *linguae francae*. In a different context, that of trade, Low German played a crucial role in the medieval Hanseatic league. Apart from that single Hanseatic case, we are less familiar with the multilingual practice of middle and lower classes, and even less with the everyday communication patterns of migrants from various walks of life in the Early and Late Modern period.

In my paper I would like to show how we gain insight into these as yet unknown linguistic practices of migrants. Exploring my extended *Letters as Loot* corpus, part of which was previously used for an alternative history of Dutch, I will concentrate on two different migration cases. The first case is an example of merchants who had migrated for political and religious reasons. Our linguistic material is a collection of fifty seventeenth-century Dutch letters, mainly written by Michiel Heusch sr., an influential merchant in the German town of Hamburg, and addressed to his son Michiel jr. who was travelling in Italy. In this case, surprising evidence has been found for the long-term survival of Dutch in a foreign setting. Economic migrants figure in our second case for which I selected one hundred eighteenth-century letters, with a few exceptions all linked to the city of Amsterdam. After having solved the identification problem, we may conclude that the letter writers, who found a living aboard ships, originate from Scandinavia and various German regions. Their letters reveal different levels of linguistic competence which leads us to particular hypotheses and lines of fascinating further sociohistorical linguistic research.

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