

# Teaching urban fieldwork at universities helps language documentation and preservation

Niklas Wiskandt<sup>1</sup> • Isabella Greisinger<sup>1</sup>  
Ana Krajinović<sup>2</sup>

Minority Languages in the City  
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<sup>1</sup>Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

<sup>2</sup>Tilburg University

- Linguistic fieldwork – a crucial method of
  - Language documentation (Gippert et al., 2008)
  - Collaboration between researchers and language communities (Krajinović et al., 2022)
- Fieldwork in urban centres relevant for the documentation of languages spoken by diaspora communities (Kaufman & Perlin, 2018)
- Case study
  - Urban fieldwork project with Pontic Greek, Kannada, and Telugu
  - Based on a university course in Düsseldorf, Germany
  - Successful method of documentation and promotion of language communities
  - Integrative approach: Combining teaching, research, and fieldwork

- Class on urban fieldwork
  - Class design
  - Research sessions & results
- Promotion of communities
  - Collaboration
  - Outreach event
- Reflection & Evaluation
- Sustainability
- Challenges
- Outlook

## Preparation in class

- Regular advanced seminar (weekly, 15 \* 90m)
- Ethics: Students wrote their consent forms based on a template, which we then discussed together.
- Methodology:
  - Elicitation materials: Videos, storyboards, questionnaires
  - Practice of elicitation materials in German in class, while recording with Audacity
  - Practice transcription of a recording in Nafsan (Oceanic) in ELAN

## The TMA questionnaire

Tom and Mittens

Totem Field  
Storyboards 

Context indications are given within square brackets. Words within parentheses are not to be translated.

### Part A – sentences

- (1) [Standing in front of a house] The house BE BIG
- (2) [Talking about the house in which the speaker lives (the house is out of sight)] The house BE BIG
- (3) [Talking about a house in which the speaker used to live but which has now been torn down] The house BE BIG
- (4) [Talking about a house which the speaker saw for the first time yesterday and doesn't see now] The house BE BIG
- (5) [Q: What your brother DO right now? (=What activity is he engaged in?) A by someone who can see him] He WRITE letters
- (6) [C=6] He WRITE a letter

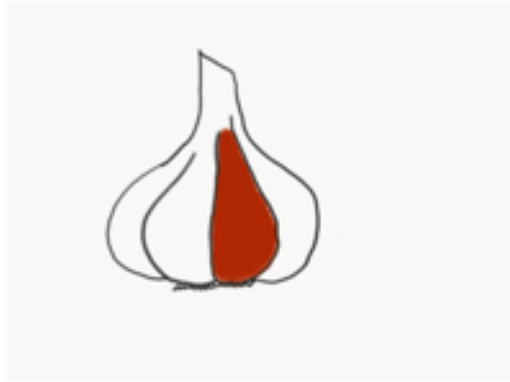


1. This is Tom. And, this is his cat, Mittens.

Dahl (1985) Questionnaire

Modality storyboard from Rolka & Cable (2015)

# The class on urban fieldwork



Stimuli for body-part metaphors from Tjuka (2019): Picture of the body-part metaphor *toes of the garlic*



Cut and break video clips (Bohnenmeyer et al., 2011)

- Based on the experience with different stimuli, each group (~4 students) chose a research question under our supervision, e.g.:
  - Perfect aspect in Pontic Greek
  - Body-part metaphors in Pontic Greek
  - Imperative and directives in Kannada
  - Modality in Telugu
- Students conducted recording sessions outside of the class
- Supervision continued in class

- Students created posters presented in a public outreach event, which included the consultants.

**Körpermetaphern des Pontos-Griechischen**

hhu Jessica Schramm, Allison J. Blanchard-Pooning, Christian Bretsch, Patricia Meier

**Einführung**

Metaphern sind ein zentraler Bestandteil der Sprache und spielen eine wichtige Rolle in der Kommunikation. Sie helfen, komplexe Ideen und Konzepte verständlich zu machen. In der Linguistik werden Metaphern oft als kognitive Strukturen betrachtet, die unsere Wahrnehmung der Welt strukturieren.

**Methoden**

Die Studie wurde in drei Phasen durchgeführt:

1. Identifizierung der Metaphern im Ponto-Griechischen Text.
2. Klassifizierung der Metaphern in verschiedene Kategorien (z.B. Körperteile, Tiere, Pflanzen).
3. Analyse der kulturellen und linguistischen Kontexte der Metaphern.

**Ergebnisse**

Die Analyse ergab, dass Metaphern im Ponto-Griechischen häufig auf Körperteile und Tiere bezogen sind. Diese Metaphern dienen dazu, abstrakte Konzepte wie Emotionen oder soziale Beziehungen konkret und bildhaft darzustellen.

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Body-part metaphors in Pontic Greek

**Imperative und andere Direktive im Kannada**

hhu

**Einführung**

Im Kannada sind Imperative und andere Direktive wichtige Bestandteile der Sprache. Sie werden verwendet, um Befehle, Ratschläge oder Aufforderungen zu geben. Diese Formen der Sprache sind eng mit der Kultur und den sozialen Normen des Kannada-Sprechers verbunden.

**Methoden**

Die Studie wurde in drei Phasen durchgeführt:

1. Identifizierung der Imperative und anderen Direktive im Kannada Text.
2. Klassifizierung der Imperative und anderen Direktive in verschiedene Kategorien (z.B. Befehle, Ratschläge, Aufforderungen).
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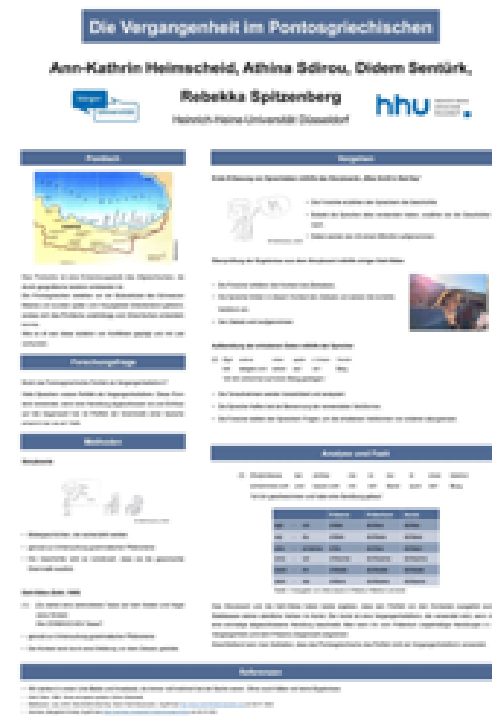
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Imperatives and other directives in Kannada

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Modality in Telugu



Past in Pontic Greek

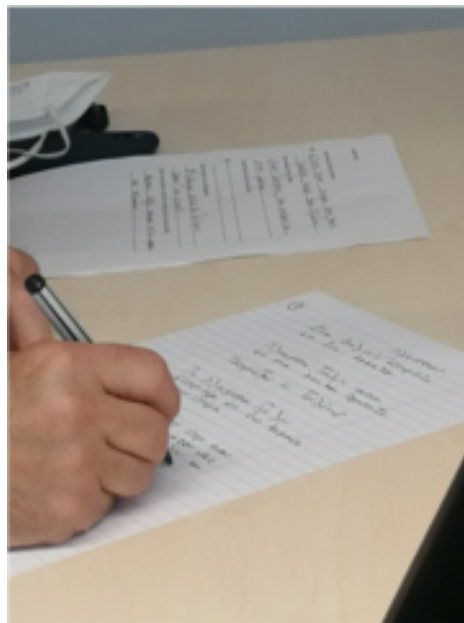
# Recording sessions

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Recording sessions of Pontic Greek

© Isabella Greisinger



- Promoting languages and cultures towards a non-scientific audience
- Bringing together representatives of the civil society, the educational and political sector
- Communicating societal impact of linguistic research
- Deepen the interest in the heritage language within the community across generations
- Cooperation
- Outreach event

# Collaboration with O Xeniteas

## O Xeniteas and the Pontic Greek diaspora

- One of numerous Pontic Greek associations in Germany
- Düsseldorf hosts one of the largest Pontic Greek diaspora communities
- Youngest generation of the diaspora speaks Modern Standard Greek or German or both, but never Pontic Greek as L1
- Use of Pontic Greek in music events, theater, and amongst/with elderly people
- Number of native speakers of Pontic Greek is unknown



## The collaboration

- Contacting the head of O Xeniteas (Ilias Mavridis)
- Searching for native Pontic speakers amongst the members of O Xeniteas
- Getting in touch with diaspora members using the list of possible participants
- Assigning students to the participants (3 groups of students, 5 consultants)
- Preparing the cultural program of the public outreach event
- Collaboration still continues after the project

# Public outreach event

## Program

- Opening messages by Ana, Isabella & Niklas
- Short description of the investigated languages by students
- Presentations of the results of the students' work
- Experience reports by students & participants
- Speech by the head of O Xeniteas
- Speech by the consul general of Greece in Düsseldorf
- (Recorded) speech by the mayor of Düsseldorf
- Pontic music



© Isabella Greisinger

Pontic music at the final  
event

## Students' evaluation of the class

- High workload
- Exceptional opportunity for hands-on learning
- Strengthens self-esteem regarding the discipline of linguistics

## Reflection and evaluation by the project team

- Local level regarded as beneficial
- Collaboration between university and civil society very productive
  - Communities contribute language knowledge
  - University contributes methodological expertise and infrastructure
- Positive outcomes for both sides
  - University gains research opportunities, data, a new learning environment, and awareness for relevance of linguistic research
  - Communities gain linguistic knowledge and resources, as well as publicity for their valuable language and culture

- Students as next-generation researchers
  - Early training in methods of language documentation
  - Inspiration for future interest in language documentation & minority languages
  - Preparation for independent scientific work
- Students as part of the civil society
  - Ambassadors for awareness about the situation of minority languages
  - Impact on action in non-academic work environments & volunteering
- Adaptable plans & materials
  - Class design & teaching materials
  - Blueprints for outreach activities and events
- Collaborations

- Access to speakers
- Finding intersections between students' and consultants' weekly routine
- Divergence between recorded data and previous descriptions
- Interference effects in the data
  - with German
  - with (standard) variety of target language

- Replicability of the project intended
  - Replication at/around HHU
  - Replication in other locations
- Necessary conditions for replicability
  - Multilingual environment
  - University with a (General) Linguistics department
  - Geographic/transportational proximity
- Favourable conditions for replicability
  - Community associations
  - Curricular flexibility for integration of the class
  - Staff with fieldwork experience
  - Funding

- Opportunities created by the project
  - Collaborations
  - Materials
  - New questions
- Continuation of the project
  - Second edition in the current semester
  - Perpetuation as a part of the B.A. Linguistics curriculum at HHU
  - Conference presentation by student participants envisaged
- Spin-off proposal for a research project on Pontic Greek (e.g. DFG, FWF, UNESCO)
  - 'Pontic Greek in German speaking countries: Endangered heritage languages and the diaspora'
  - Research on the language and sociolinguistic situation of the Pontic diaspora

- We took an integrative approach to urban fieldwork by combining teaching, research, and fieldwork.
- Perspectives and resources of researchers, students and communities complement each other and create benefits for all sides.
- Involving students fosters new perspectives and sustainability.
- Introducing more stakeholders also brings along more complications.
- Despite difficulties, the approach is a valuable instrument for advancing language documentation and preservation in urban environments.
- Perpetuation and spin-offs of the project forthcoming!

# Acknowledgements



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  - our strong, committed and open-minded students in the B.A. and M.A. programs of Linguistics at HHU.
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# Thank you for your attention!

- Informed written consent was obtained from all participants of the project, i.e. students and consultants.
- All rights for graphics, logos and photographs have been respected.



Pontic musical instruments

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