

From Africa to Patagonia: Voices of Displacement

Abstract

How does the age of the great European empires continue to shape the experiences of exile and cultural displacement in a postcolonial, globalized world? What can the evolution of language tell us about people's experience of exile and cultural displacement? This project analyzes how language is entangled with cultural identity in a community that traces its roots to South African Boers displaced to Patagonia, Argentina after the second Anglo-Boer War in 1902. The Afrikaans spoken in this community encodes the vestiges of empires and modern nation-building, and reflects the effects of change in the contemporary world. Through an approach that integrates linguistics, historiography, and anthropology, we will study the ways in which this community's language practices reveal both a commitment to preserving an identity distinct from their location in Argentina and an integration that reflects the reality of historical and geographical change. Furthermore, this dynamic between preservation and integration reflects cutting-edge theories about the emergent nature of language with respect to the diverse contexts of human society.

This collaborative project will generate the following outcomes: three public essays; three scholarly articles; one essay on conducting collaborative fieldwork in the humanities; and the *Digital Transatlantic Boer Archive*, which will contain images and audio from our fieldwork experiences, digitized images gathered from Yale University's Beinecke Library, and an interactive map. The team will conduct a collaborative fieldwork visit to Patagonia in Summer 2018 as crucial second stage of the data collection effort.

1. Research team

Faculty team members:

Paulina Alberto, Associate Professor, History, and Romance Languages & Literatures, palberto@umich.edu

Andries Coetzee, Associate Professor, Linguistics, and Associate Director, African Studies Center, coetzee@umich.edu

Lorenzo García-Amaya, Assistant Professor, Romance Languages & Literatures, lgarciaa@umich.edu

Nicholas Henriksen (PI), Assistant Professor, Romance Languages & Literatures (Courtesy appointment: Linguistics), nhenriks@umich.edu

Victoria Langland, Associate Professor, History, and Romance Languages & Literatures, langland@umich.edu

Ryan Szpiech, Associate Professor, Romance Languages & Literatures (Courtesy appointment: Judaic Studies), szpiech@umich.edu

Post-doctoral researcher:

Joshua Shapero, PhD, Anthropology, shaperoj@umich.edu (Sociocultural collaboration manager during Year 1)¹

Graduate team members:

Tara Weinberg, PhD student in History, tarawm@umich.edu (Logistics manager during Years 1 and 2)

Undergraduate team members (we will also recruit 4-6 UROP assistants):

Ian Cook (ikcook@umich.edu) [sociocultural & linguistic analysis]

Ella Deaton (edeaton@umich.edu) [phonetic analysis]

Claire Laing (cmlaing@umich.edu) [phonetic analysis]

Sean Lang (langsean@umich.edu) [phonetic analysis]

Ishan Vashishta (ivashi@umich.edu) [website & archive developer]

¹ Given Joshua Shapero's prominent role in this project during the Proposal Development phase, and the connections he has established with the faculty collaborators and undergraduate team members, he will continue on the project as a post-doctoral researcher for the first year of the grant. His integral role in the inception of the collaboration and working familiarity with the rest of the team will be invaluable assets as we continue our work. We are confident that Joshua's contributions to this project will bolster his profile on the job market in addition to facilitating the strong foundation of this collaboration.

2. Research project

The 2015 documentary, *Boers at the End of the World*, recounts the story of the community of Afrikaans Boers living in South Patagonia. After several generations, a group from the community visits South Africa for the first time. While in Argentina, they identify themselves as “Africans” (or Afrikaners); however, upon arriving to their ancestral South Africa, they are faced with many linguistic and cultural differences from their relatives there. Upon first meeting a South-African cousin, one of the Argentine travelers hesitates before speaking, then asking, “Can you understand me?” This encounter epitomizes our project’s central inquiry: understanding the paradoxical role of language as both a materialization of and an obstacle to cultural identification. In the case of the Afrikaans-Argentine community, language reflects *both* a desire for cultural privilege tracing back to the imperial origins of modern capitalist regimes *and* processes of cultural change and integration that reveal how seemingly stable sociolinguistic identities belie the entangled emergence of language and culture.

Most research on the intersection of language, identity, and colonial domination focuses on marginalized indigenous populations. This project, by contrast, examines the perspective of a community of descendants of exiled white Europeans whose quest for religious and cultural autonomy first led them from Europe to its colonial margins at the southern tip of Africa in the mid-17th century, placing them in an instrumental position for the imperial powers they sought to escape. At the end of the second Anglo-Boer War in 1902, the same quest for independence that motivated their exodus from Europe led approximately 600 Afrikaners, unwilling to live under British colonial rule, to leave South Africa and settle in Patagonia. These Boer migrants’ search for autonomy also fit the Argentine government’s goal of populating the country’s southern region — then recently wrested from its indigenous population — with white Europeans. However, the Boers’ sense of cultural and racial superiority over other Europeans led them to defy this nationalist project. Living in relative isolation, they resisted integration into the Catholic majority, and maintained linguistic structures typical of early twentieth-century Afrikaans. Nevertheless, after several decades in which the community remained practically monolingual, Spanish became the dominant language. Afrikaans is now spoken only by the oldest generation, numbering as few as forty.

By studying this community’s language from both linguistic and anthropological perspectives, our project participates in overlapping debates about language, identity, and colonialism. These questions challenge us to confront implicit ways in which ideologies of racial superiority permeate everyday language on the socio-economic margins of the modern world. Rather than casting the Argentine Afrikaners as either the mouthpieces of a hegemonic colonial discourse or as completely autonomous agents unaffected by historical circumstances, this project seeks to understand how the cultural and linguistic politics of everyday life in Argentina place them in a precarious ethical position with respect to their origins there. To do so, the project integrates humanities and humanistic social sciences methods in an innovative collaborative endeavor, contributing to current debates in these fields: in the humanities, ideologies of race, language, and their relation to nation-building; in linguistics, discussions about the relation between culture and language change.

The focal question during the Proposal Development phase was how to measure the connection between conservative linguistic and ideological characteristics, particularly religious ideology. As we considered the data, we learned that language served as a discursive link to broad sociocultural domains, including not just religion, but also race, ethnicity, and identity. Integrating quantitative linguistic methods with humanistic modes of textual analysis, we found that the topics of race and identity were linked to the community's linguistic features. When community members spoke about race and class, they exhibited a specific constellation of speech patterns (hesitations, slower speech, conservative pronunciations, etc.). During the Project Funding period, we will employ an array of collaborative methods to thoroughly assess the link between linguistic habits and sociocultural views. Conducting a wider range of interviews will enable us to measure the importance of the community's experience of race beyond the views people explicitly accept or reject, expanding to the linguistic habits exhibited when expressing those views.

Our project offers new perspectives within various humanities fields. First, the Afrikaans-Argentine community represents an exceptional bilingual and bicultural context. The socio-historical circumstances that led to this community's existence are rare, and offer insight into the formation of hybrid identity in unimagined ways. The fact that the community remained practically isolated for a half-century after arrival to Patagonia grants us the opportunity to ask questions about language contact that are not possible for displaced communities that assimilate to a new culture and language after one or two generations.

Second, our project focuses on ethnic identity and racial politics in an unparalleled research context. Whereas many projects on race focus on discrimination, our project approaches the problem from the perspective of a population that occupies a liminal position as both an ethnocultural and linguistic minority, and as an ambivalent vehicle for the repopulation of Patagonia with white Europeans. This perspective helps to understand how racial politics spill beyond the projects of domination they support, and how populations marginal to those projects both embody and resist racialized discourses.

Third, our project enriches the study of language within the humanities, where it has long been seen as the essence from which all other forms of inquiry derive or upon which they converge. One of the central questions that we ask is whether culture is merely transmitted and represented by language, or if language itself also actively shapes culture so that the two must evolve in tandem.

Finally, our project bolsters the position of the humanities in two ways. First, it addresses the social and ideological consequences of human displacement, a defining aspect of the human experience. In the twenty-first century, the issues of immigration, ethnicity, and racial identity have remained at the core of many debates. Most universities now include race and ethnicity courses as key requirements of humanities curricula. Our project provides a new perspective on identity by focusing on how the displacement of a white, European population plays out in contemporary racial politics. Second, by establishing collaborations with scholars in Europe, Africa, and South America, our project supports international, collaborative engagement in the humanities.

3. Collaboration

We conceive of collaboration in this project not only as a means of coordinating research activities, but more importantly, as a means of forging methodological innovations. Bringing together a team composed of four disciplines across the humanities, social and cognitive sciences (linguistics, anthropology, social history, and literary/cultural studies), enables us to explore intersecting facets of language, culture, and history. This is of particular value to studies such as ours on the politics of race and language, as these raise questions that are disciplinarily hybrid by nature. Without the use of mixed methods — and the collaborative efforts of a team experienced in them — race becomes a question of *either* cultural practices and beliefs, *or* sociolinguistic difference, for example. Seen through the compound eye of collaborative research, race and ethnicity can be understood as a common point at which disparate lines of critical inquiry converge, thus requiring a multifaceted treatment based on the integration of methods from distinct disciplines. Beyond providing unprecedented perspectives on familiar questions, our collaborative approach also leads to methodological growth within each field represented. For example, during the Proposal Development period, team members specializing in linguistics, literature, culture, and history worked together to adapt quantitative measures to the analyses of the Afrikaans-Argentine community's narratives. Simultaneously, the sociocultural members helped the linguists to develop a method for measuring the effects of anxieties around racial politics on linguistic performance. This kind of reciprocal collaboration exemplifies the investigative teamwork that we will employ and strengthen during the two-year period of the Project Funding grant.

Such a collaborative approach also makes it possible to broaden the scope of public conversations. For example, the team's research during the last nine weeks has resulted in questioning the representation of the community in the 2015 documentary, *The Boers at the End of the World*. This film focuses on the Patagonian Afrikaners to the exclusion of the broader social context of Argentina and of the historical context of imperialism and settler colonialism that conditioned their successive displacements. In contrast, our collaborative approach is centered around the ways in which these contexts continue to shape daily life in the community. This approach makes it imperative to establish a cross-generational research team composed of linguists, anthropologists, cultural historians, and experts in twentieth-century Argentina. The Collaboratory thus affords us the opportunity to test how linguistic and cultural research traditions can both inform and challenge each other. Though linguistics research does take into account the sociocultural identity of speakers, it seldom does so at the same level of sophistication as research in cultural studies. Similarly, cultural scholars do work with language as an integral part of cultural identity, but seldom at the same level of detail as linguists do. A more structured collaboration between linguists and cultural scholars will lead to new insights and methodological innovations in both areas of study.

The research team will collaborate in two principal ways. Professors García-Amaya, Coetzee, Henriksen and our linguistics collaboration manager (a GSRA) will continue to analyze the linguistic properties of the 2014 narrative corpus. These investigations will establish the themes that need deeper exploration during our 2018 fieldwork trip to the community. Professors Alberto, Langland, Szpiech, and the sociocultural collaboration manager (a post-doctoral researcher or GSRA) will analyze the cultural content of the interviews. All team members will

regularly to combine the two streams of analysis with the goal of mapping the linguistic features onto the historical trends in worldview and cultural expression. By working from two different angles toward a common point, the team will provide a deeper analysis of the narratives than could be achieved by any one scholar working in isolation.

Starting in Fall 2017, Professors Coetzee, García-Amaya, and Henriksen will train our students in research methods so that they can reliably tag the speech data for linguistic properties. The team will investigate the data with regard to how the coded phonetic properties portray the hybrid identities of the speakers. This, in turn, will inform possible changes in the ongoing phonetic coding of the data. Since the graduate and undergraduate members will be the primary data coders, their participation in these discussions will be indispensable. The linguistics collaboration manager will provide additional mentoring to the undergraduate members to address any questions related to the analysis.

Simultaneously, Professors Szpiech, Alberto, Langland, and the sociocultural collaboration manager will analyze the transcripts for content that speaks to questions of racial, cultural, and religious identification. The faculty collaborators will mentor the sociocultural collaboration manager to analyze the transcripts and identify excerpts relating to questions of exile, identity, language, race, and ethnicity, as well as to digitize and classify the archival materials accessed from the Beinecke Library. Professor Szpiech will be the lead mentor in this role, given his expertise in archival research and his previous experience at the Beinecke Library. Professor Alberto will join at least two meetings per term (Fall, Winter, and Spring), and Professor Langland will join at least two meetings each Spring term.

During the joint meetings of all team members, attention will be focused on the mutual conversation between the linguistic and the sociocultural analyses. We will set aside a portion of each meeting to the two sub-teams explaining their work and progress to each other, with a special dedicated portion of discussion specifically to explore ways in which the streams of analysis can enter into a dialogue with each other. In our interactions during our Proposal Development meetings, we already experienced the value of this kind of interaction, by discovering ways in which portions of the interviews marked by the sociocultural team as interesting also had unexpected linguistic properties. Altogether, these analyses will lead to a crystallization of the specific approaches and themes that we want to explore during the Spring 2018 fieldwork trip to Patagonia, which we see as a crucial second stage of our data collection effort.

4. Research team

Faculty collaborators

Paulina Alberto is a specialist on racial politics of twentieth-century Argentine history. She will provide key insight into contextualizing our community within the appropriate political and social landscape.

Andries Coetzee specializes in phonetics and phonology, with a specific focus on variation in speech production. He is also a native speaker of Afrikaans, and therefore contributes critical language skills to our team.

Lorenzo García-Amaya specializes in language acquisition and theoretical frameworks from which to conceptualize the bilingual aspect of our collaborative endeavor. He brings extensive experience in fluency analysis to the project.

Nicholas Henriksen specializes in Spanish phonetics and phonology. He has extensive experience working on the acoustic analysis of Spanish sounds, and on the role of bilingualism in phonetic variation.

Victoria Langland specializes in twentieth-century Brazilian and Southern Cone history. She will offer critical insight into contextualizing our research within the broad landscape of twentieth-century Latin America.

Joshua Shapero is a linguistic anthropologist who recently received his PhD. He will work as a postdoctoral researcher during the first year, and will contribute experience with mixed methods as well as a background in designing research that crosses the disciplinary territories of humanities and the social sciences.

Ryan Szpiech is a literary scholar whose research focuses on cultural interaction, conflict, and religious beliefs among hybrid and displaced communities in the Hispanic world. He has extensive experience working with multilingual archival and manuscript sources. He will be a key team member for studying the archival sources related to the Argentine Boer community.

Tara Weinberg is a PhD student in History who specializes in twentieth-century South African history. She will work as the logistics manager for our project, given her advanced proficiency in English, Spanish, and Afrikaans.

All faculty collaborators and graduate students (as well as Joshua Shapero) will be co-authors on all publications. The multiple author model will contribute to the expansion of our own horizons, as we will be exposed to the conventions of disciplines with which we otherwise seldom interact. The multi-authorship model also creates a mentoring environment for the student collaborators — an opportunity for them to see how publication works, how it is different from and similar to the kind of research writing that they do as students. When confronted with questions about authorship, including issues like authorship order, we will rely on policies about authorship attribution published by institutions such as the Federal Office of Research Integrity. We do not anticipate major changes to the structure of the faculty collaboration team.

We will work collaboratively with the linguistics and sociocultural collaboration managers to provide mentoring to the undergraduate team members. Now that RLL has a solid track of undergraduate courses in Spanish linguistics, there are many undergraduate students who are eager to work on projects of the type described in this proposal. We would be delighted to supervise the undergraduates in working with this corpus for thesis projects, as many of them are establishing research profiles in preparation for their graduate student applications.

5. Project outcomes

Outcome 1: Public essays

The team will co-author three public essays with the goal of disseminating our findings to a non-academic public.

The first essay, “Listening to history: Language as a window from the past onto the present,” will offer an overview of the Afrikaans dialect spoken by the descendants of Boer immigrants in Argentina. This will be a media-enriched essay with acoustic snippets.

The second essay, “Can you hear racial politics?”, will introduce the team’s collaborative, cross-disciplinary approach to language and society, describing how speakers’ anxieties around controversial topics such as race are quantifiable through analysis of speech patterns.

The third essay, “From Amsterdam to Africa to Argentina: (Dis)placing identity,” will recount the migratory journey of the Boer people from the Netherlands to South Africa to Argentina. While getting to know the Boers as a people and as individuals, the reader will explore burgeoning questions in global politics.

Outcome 2: Scholarly articles

The team will co-author three scholarly articles in journals that represent the kind of intersected research that we explore in this project: *Language in Society*, *The International Journal of Language and Culture*, and *Language and Communication*.

Outcome 3: Essay on fieldwork collaboration

The team will produce a multimodal publication about the collaboration entitled “Digitizing the collaborative fieldwork experience in the humanities,” for submission to *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. The publication will link readers to a short film documenting the team’s collaborative research process (in the Collaboratory space, and also in Patagonia).

Outcome 4: Digital archive

We will develop a digital archive entitled the *Digital Transatlantic Boer Archive*. The archive will be housed within our project website, the prototype for which can be found here: <https://annarborwebdesign.github.io/collab/>. Through one archival trip (to Yale University) and one fieldwork trip (to Patagonia, Argentina), the team will accumulate a corpus of material related to the language, culture, and history of the Argentine Boer community. We will make this information accessible to users, from scholars to community members themselves, through a curated digital archive. The materials will consist of three parts:

- 1) Audio/visual recordings in Afrikaans and Spanish narrating local history, customs, concerns, and visions of the future, selected from the interviews and narratives produced through the team's linguistic and cultural studies. We will receive technological training and support, and equipment for recording and editing from LSA-ISS.
- 2) Documents and images related to the community gathered from the Du Toit Collection at Yale University.
- 2) The digital archive will include an interactive map through a geographical interface. Through this map, users will experience the distances the Boers have travelled from Europe through South Africa to their family farms in Patagonia. Zooming into specific places will provide an intimate experience of the world of the Afrikaans-Argentine community today. The map will be designed with the ArcGIS online StoryMap app. Spatial data coordination and licensing will be accomplished in consultation with Nicole Scholtz and Justin Joque at the Clark Library. LSA IT will provide support for designing a map in the StoryMap platform.

6. Project management

The PI will oversee all collaborative and mentoring activities, and will ensure that hourly pay and travel expenses are within budget. Given the scope of our project and the size of our team, it will be critical to work with all team members to develop a successful workflow. For each term, we anticipate working with two collaboration managers, one logistics manager, and various undergraduate assistants.

Collaboration managers (2 per term)

We anticipate working two collaboration managers (post-doc and/or GSRA's) as the nexus through which all team members will collaborate. This is in line with the mentoring and project management structure that we established in Spring 2017.

Professors Coetzee, García-Amaya, and Henriksen will work with the linguistics collaboration manager to manage the phonetic analysis (vowels, consonants, fluency). This manager will be responsible for organizing files in Google Drive, establishing appropriate file naming conventions, assigning tasks to the advanced undergraduate researchers, and ensuring inter-rater reliability. This manager will also modify the existing data analysis tutorial developed by Dominique Bouavichith in Spring 2017. We will work with advanced undergraduate students (who have substantial training in phonetic analysis), and will also recruit novice undergraduate students through Michigan's UROP program. As we have done in past years, we will recruit 4-6 UROP students.

Professors Alberto, Langeland, and Szpiech will collaborate with the sociocultural collaboration manager to analyze the transcripts for sociocultural content. Professors Szpiech and Alberto will together mentor and train this collaborator (ideally a student from History or Anthropology) to analyze the transcripts and identify excerpts relating to questions of exile, identity, race,

ethnicity, and religion. Professor Langland will join the collaborative meetings during the Spring terms. The sociocultural collaboration manager will also work with one undergraduate student to tag the transcripts and to prepare the technical aspects of the Spring 2018 fieldwork trip.

Logistics manager (1 per term)

We will also employ one graduate student (Tara Weinberg from History) to oversee the following aspects of the project in collaboration with the PI: reserving rooms, setting up Skype or BlueJeans teleconferencing, email communication, establishing travel plans, translating documents, and maintaining contact with our connections abroad. The logistics manager will also work closely with the full team to ensure that all members document their work in a Google Spreadsheet, and that all paid collaborators log the number of hours works and tasks completed for each work session. The logistics manager will translate all digitized Afrikaans texts into Spanish and English, and will translate the text of our archive from English into Afrikaans and Spanish.

The full team will devote a portion of one meeting each semester to assess the project management workflow. In doing so, we will review the file naming conventions, data storage protocols, and communication strategies among all team members. These meetings will be coordinated by the logistics manager, who will work jointly with the PI and the two collaboration managers to ensure that all team members follow up on whatever decisions are made.

7. Documentation and assessment

Data management

We will collect two kinds of data: (i) audio and file recordings of interviews with community members, and (ii) archival documents and images about the community. All data will be digitized, and stored on MBox.

We will create the *Digital Transatlantic Boer Archive*, accessible through our interactive website. This archive will contain curated selections of our data, and will be designed with different user needs in mind. One level of information will be aimed at the public, focusing specifically on the Patagonian Afrikaans community. This part of the archive will be available in Spanish, Afrikaans, and English. A second level of information, aimed at the research audience, will contain information about our results and methodologies.

Our linguistic data will be deposited with the *Language Resource Management Agency* (<https://rma.nwu.ac.za>) at the North-West University in South Africa. This agency, funded by the South-African government, is tasked with creating digital resources for South Africa's official languages, and has the infrastructure to store data in perpetuity. Storage comes at no cost, on the condition that the data will be available to other researchers.

We are in conversation with Professor Brian du Toit (author of the only previous comprehensive study about the Afrikaans-Argentine community) to secure the rights to use images and

documents about the Patagonian community from his personal collection (currently held at Yale University). We will also collect informed consent from community members to use the data that we collect in our archive, and to deposit our data with the *Language Resource Management Agency*.

Evaluation

In addition to using measures such as research publications, we will evaluate our project by tracking the number of visitors to our archive and documenting what parts of the archive are accessed, and from where in the world it is accessed. We will assess the utility of the archive by measuring the number of hits in certain parts of the world where we expect to generate the most interest (the Netherlands, South Africa, Argentina, and the United States). We will work with Stephanie Rosen and Heidi Steiner Burkhardt from the UM Library to assess the website's usability, accessibility, and scalability.

We will also evaluate our collaborative process on an ongoing basis. We will dedicate one of our meetings each term to discuss our collaborative interactions. This will provide opportunities to identify aspects of our process that need further refining, and create a space to work on our essay about collaborative research.

We are consulting with UM faculty whose research focuses on collaboration. We have reached out to Professors James Jackson (Psychology) and John King (School of Information) who were co-authors of a 2015 report for the National Academies on enhancing the effectiveness of team-based research. Both of them responded positively, and in particular Professor King indicated that he would be happy to advise us on our collaborative process. We will set up consultations with him starting in the Fall 2017.

8. Timeline

PI & Team meeting schedule

Nicholas Henriksen will remain as PI for both years of the project. The other members of the team will also remain the same, with the exception that Joshua Shapero will depart after September 1, 2018 (he will be applying for academic jobs during AY 2017-2018). Over the course of the two years, we will hold a two-hour meeting of the full team twice a month during Fall & Winter terms, and three-hour weekly meetings during each Spring term. We will communicate remotely using our email distribution list (aacollaboratory@umich.edu), Google Drive, and Skype or BlueJeans. When certain team members are traveling abroad during Spring 2018 and 2019, they will communicate via video conference during regularly-scheduled meetings to ensure successful completion of incremental outcomes.

Milestones

Our project milestones include the publication of **three collaboratively-authored public essays** (to be submitted in Winter 2018, Spring 2018, and Spring 2019), **three scholarly articles** (to be submitted in Fall 2017, Winter 2018, and Fall 2018), and **one essay on conducting collaborative fieldwork in the humanities** (to be submitted in Fall 2018). We will also develop the *Digital Transatlantic Boer Archive*, including an interactive map, to be launched in Winter 2019 (see prototype: <https://annarborwebdesign.github.io/collab/>). We will plan **four trips**: four team members will travel to the Yale Archives in Winter 2018 (two faculty and two graduate students); three team members will present the findings at two scholarly conferences (one in Winter 2018, one Summer 2018; two faculty and one graduate student); and four team members will conduct a fieldwork trip in Patagonia, Argentina in Spring 2018 (three faculty and one graduate student).

Timeline

The timeline, found via the link below, is organized according to each of the four outcomes (O1, O2, O3, O4) listed in response to Question 5.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1X4MzvSxaunNT3S-kkSvVhXfnt2WdWx14w3ZWs8qWvc4/edit#gid=0>