

Collecting Data in the Service of the AIS: The Long Journey of Paul Scheuermeier

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Introduction

The *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz* (“Linguistic and Ethnographic Atlas of Italy and Southern Switzerland,” hereafter “AIS”) continues to be regarded as a masterpiece of linguistic geography. The monumental project was founded under the direction of the Swiss Romanists Karl Jaberg (1877-1958) and Jakob Jud (1882-1952)¹ and includes eight volumes published between 1928 and 1940. The data collected was used to produce a total of 1705 language maps² covering the whole of Italy (including the islands of Sardinia, Sicily, and Elba as well as the then newly annexed zones of Dalmatia and Istria and the city of Fiume) and the Italian and Romansh-speaking areas of southern Switzerland. The AIS can thus be considered the first systematic atlas of Italian dialects.³

Jaberg and Jud entrusted the data collection, which took place from 1919 to 1928, to three researchers: Paul Scheuermeier (1888-1973), Gerhard Rohlfs (1892-1986) and Max Leopold Wagner (1880-1962).⁴ Scheuermeier can certainly be considered the principal investigator, since he was active from the beginning of the data collection period and carried out the majority of the surveys (311 of a total of 407 survey points). During more than six years of fieldwork, he maintained continuous contact with Jaberg and Jud through regular correspondence. This correspondence, along with other material

relating to the creation of the AIS, is preserved in the AIS-Archives of the University of Bern.

This essay begins with a description of the AIS correspondence and other sources and materials, enabling very precise conclusions to be drawn about Scheuermeier's life in the field and his working methods. The following section focuses on the methodological aspects underlying the AIS. It examines the extent to which the AIS reflects the theoretical and methodological principles of linguistic geography, which at the time was strongly influenced by Jules Gilliéron, founder of the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (hereafter "ALF"), and the most important general methodological innovations introduced by Jaberg and Jud. This section concludes by examining Scheuermeier's "personal" approach, noting that he was already addressing methodological aspects and reflections that would only be discussed at a much later stage in linguistic geography. General information about Scheuermeier's journey in the service of the AIS is then provided, outlining organizational aspects and the special relationship Scheuermeier cultivated with his informants. Furthermore, this section examines the historical, political, and cultural contexts in which the research took place and how it influenced Scheuermeier's work (e.g., how the rise of fascism in Italy brought challenges to the fieldwork) and, more generally, the setting of the atlas (e.g., the inclusion of Dalmatia and Istria merely due to historical-political events).

The aim of this essay is to discuss Scheuermeier's work in terms of the intellectual, socio-political, and cultural climate of his time, based on his correspondence with Jaberg and the other material preserved in the AIS-Archives. As shown in Kunz (*Tra la polvere*), the letters written by Scheuermeier and Jaberg constitute documentation of great scientific interest: they provide valuable information regarding the methodological approach of the work, which is addressed partly in the introductory volume to the atlas (Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas*). They also shed light on the historical, political, and cultural context in which the research took place.

The AIS and its materials: an overview

In comparison to other linguistic geography projects conducted in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, there is a relatively large amount of material available on the genesis of the AIS, which provides direct insights into the research process. Documents produced during the development of the AIS are now kept in the AIS-Archives of the University of Bern; in addition, various publications by Jaberg, Jud and Scheuermeier aimed to explain their methodological principles and practical approach to fieldwork, or to make the AIS known to a broader public.⁵ The abundance of materials, whether published or not, provide important information on a range of issues related to the methodological approach, and allow us to draw interesting conclusions about the context in which the data was collected.

Research materials in the AIS-Archives

The great wealth of documents preserved in the AIS-Archives is primarily due to Karl Jaberg who, with remarkable care and meticulousness, preserved all the materials and writings created during the development of the project. Apart from materials related directly to the surveys (such as the survey protocols or questionnaires used), other documents include protocols of meetings in which methodological aspects were discussed (e.g., comparisons of the field researchers' phonetic transcriptions) as well as fieldwork locations and instructions (such as the determination of survey locations and travel routes). The heart of the collection, however, is probably the correspondence that Jaberg maintained with the AIS field researchers and other persons involved in the project.⁶ The correspondence is for the most part complete, containing not only the letters Jaberg received but also the documents he wrote himself: he made a carbon copy in each case. After his death in 1958, his library and professional correspondence were handed over to the University of Bern's Institute of Romance Languages and Literatures. While the book collection became part of the Karl Jaberg Library in 1961, the AIS-relevant materials are now kept in the AIS-

Archives located in the Institute of Italian Language and Literature, which has provided an invaluable environment for carrying out research on the atlas.

The archives also preserve documents and materials related to Paul Scheuermeier, providing an excellent insight into his experiences in the field. For example, he kept a diary from the beginning to the end of his mission, in which he mainly recorded organizational details (arrival and departure at the individual survey locations, details of the journey, and accommodations). In addition, the *Vademecum*, which has only recently been discovered, was a kind of “set of rules” to be observed during the surveys. This document provides information on the methodological conception of the fieldwork and consists of 48 principles concerning specific topics. For example, it explains what attributes the ideal informant should possess,⁷ what formulation techniques should be used for questions in order to obtain the most natural and spontaneous answers, and what biographical information and other remarks should be included in the survey protocols. Finally, reference should be made to the typescript *Vom guten Stern über unserm AIS: Erinnerungen von Paul Scheuermeier* (“From the Good Star above our AIS: Memories of Paul Scheuermeier”), written in 1969 by an elderly Scheuermeier, in which he recalled a now distant experience that had begun exactly 50 years earlier.⁸ Dedicated to Emmy Jaberg, Karl Jaberg’s wife, the work is a magnificent travel report in which the vicissitudes and ups and downs of the researcher’s life are vividly reproduced. It is thanks to this document that we get to know about many personal aspects of the data collection that have not been reported elsewhere.

AIS-relevant publications by Jaberg, Jud, and Scheuermeier

It is not only due to the mostly unpublished materials kept in the AIS-Archives that we know so much about the context in which the atlas was created. Even before the publication of the first volume of the atlas, Jaberg and Jud had published various articles dealing with specific aspects of its methodological setting. Of particular note is the

essay "Transkriptionsverfahren, Aussprache- und Gehörsschwankungen" published in 1927, which deals with the transcription system used, referred to by the authors as "impressionistic" (cf. Jaberg and Jud, "Transkriptionsverfahren" 173).⁹ The reflections matured in the articles published during the period of data collection, and culminated in 1928 in the introductory volume of the AIS (Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas*) with an accurate account of the methodological principles underlying the AIS (preparatory work, transcription system, questionnaire, selection of survey points and informants, setting of the recording and collection of ethnographic material). Furthermore, the publication of the survey protocols, including a biography of the informant—although in abbreviated form—constitutes a veritable goldmine of information. The introductory volume is undoubtedly the most valuable and comprehensive tool for those wishing to gain insight into the research process.

Scheuermeier's publications are interesting in that they provide first-hand information on the practical implementation of the methodological principles, while also describing the context in which the field research generally took place. In the essay *Observations et expériences personnelles faites au cours de mon enquête pour l'AIS* ("Personal Observations and Experiences Made During My Survey for the AIS"), Scheuermeier returned to many of the theoretical and methodological arguments already extensively discussed in the introductory volume. The essay is distinguished, however, by its more personal character, as the researcher himself illustrated: "everything I am about to say has already been said by my revered masters Jud and Jaberg, in the introductory volume to the atlas [...]. What I can add is only a more personal note"¹⁰ (93). Exemplary in this respect is the section dedicated to the search for an informant, a topic that awakens in Scheuermeier "les plus cuisines de mes souvenirs" ("the most bitter of my memories," 100). Gaining the trust and availability of an informant was a difficult task: Scheuermeier was travelling mostly in rural areas and people were usually very engaged in their farming activities. They were often

reluctant to sacrifice their valuable time for the very time-consuming data collection. Moreover, Scheuermeier moved in the post-war period and the figure of a foreigner, equipped with a camera, often aroused suspicion. Thus, he reports that more than once he was picked up by the police while searching for an informant because he was thought to be a bandit, a spy, or even a murderer (cf. the subsection titled "Collecting data between the wars," below). Personal experiences—just to give another example—are also mentioned in the article "Der Mundartforscher auf der Reise" ("The Dialect Researcher on the Road"), which appeared in two Swiss newspapers in the spring of 1924. All of Scheuermeier's publications, of which we have mentioned only a few examples, are characterized by drawing on the wealth of experience from his many years in the service of the AIS.

The methodological principles of the AIS: between Gilliéronian tradition and innovation

Impact and role of Gilliéron

Linguistic geography, i.e., the cartographic representation and evaluation of linguistic data, represents one of the most important innovations in late nineteenth-century linguistics, which at the time was very strongly oriented toward the natural sciences (consider, for example, historical-comparative linguistics, or the interest in ethnological classification—typical of romanticism—whereby ethnicity is identified with language). The beginning of linguistic geography is usually dated to 1876, the year Georg Wenker started data collection for the *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs*. However, it was the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (hereafter "ALF") edited by the Swiss professor Jules Gilliéron that significantly shaped linguistic geography. As Chambers points out, "Gilliéron and Edmont's atlas (1901-10) stands as an early consummation of dialect geography and became the influential precedent for future projects for almost a century" (348). In contrast to Wenker's atlas, the data collection was no longer based on

correspondence, but set a new standard in linguistic-geographical research with the method of direct fieldworker elicitation; the field researcher—in the case of the ALF, Edmont—travelled directly to the informant's place of residence and conducted the surveys using a standardized questionnaire, which was ordered by subject matter (agriculture, human body, religious life, etc.). The data was subsequently sent to Gilliéron by mail. The informants largely corresponded to the prototype of the so-called *NORMs*: i.e. being non-mobile, older, rural, and male—all characteristics that were associated with the idea of a more genuine and "unadulterated" dialect.

The AIS, but also other subsequent language atlases, shared the basic methodology of Gilliéronian dialect geography (cf. Grassi "Sprachgeographie" 212-13; Chambers 349). Until the emergence of new technical advancements (such as high-quality sound recordings) and the sociolinguistic reorientation of the discipline, Gilliéron strongly shaped linguistic geography for over a century. It is therefore not surprising that he had a remarkable influence on the AIS: Jaberg and Jud—who had both attended Gilliéron's lectures in Paris—emphasized the importance of the master's teaching in the preface to their introductory volume to the atlas:

The idea of giving the French language atlas an Italian-Rhaeto-Romanic continuation was obvious. It was nourished in us by the master of linguistic-geographical research, Jules Gilliéron, to whom we both owe the most significant scientific stimuli in our lives. He, who completed his great work with iron will and by renouncing the comforts of life, was a shining example for us and a constant source of new courage in difficult moments. (Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas* 1)¹¹

Gilliéron serves as an uncontested point of reference in the methodological orientation of the AIS. It is thus not unexpected that occasional references were made to Gilliéron in the correspondence between Jaberg and Scheuermeier. Allusions to the master with whom Jaberg, Jud, and also Scheuermeier were in frequent contact typically

appeared when methodological principles were discussed. When, for example, the decision was made in 1923 to extend the recording area to the whole of Italy, Jaberg and Jud were forced to hire another field researcher in order to proceed quickly with the surveys. They were well aware of the methodological change associated with the involvement of another researcher: in order to keep the survey technique as consistent as possible, they assigned Scheuermeier the task of familiarizing Gerhard Rohlfs with the transcription system used. However, the approach of the newly hired field researcher, who officially became part of the team in 1923, deeply displeased Scheuermeier:

Right in the first hour he started to give me erudite explanations and indulged in phonetic pedantries, which I found to be quibbling. Perhaps he did it because he [...] wanted to show that he was phonetically and terminologically skilled. As is well known, I don't really know all the terminology in this respect and don't feel this gap when it comes to transcribing. The long phonetic discussions in front of the informant were therefore unpleasant to me, because they were harmful, because time-consuming and useless. (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg and Jud, 5 September 1923)¹²

Aspects that seemed to particularly annoy Scheuermeier were the “erudite explanations” and “phonetic pedantries” that Rohlfs sometimes indulged in and that threatened the objectivity of perception, causing the researcher to fall into the trap of autosuggestion. In this regard, Scheuermeier, concluding, brought up Gilliéron: “I almost fear that he is the type of philological researcher that Gilliéron does not consider suitable for the task; he is too biased and not always objective enough.”¹³ It is worth recalling at this point that Edmont, chosen and trained by Gilliéron, was a grocer and before working for the ALF had no knowledge or any experience in phonetic transcription. Scheuermeier—although he held a doctorate in Romance Philology—thus saw himself as being closer to the

ideal of the Gilliéronian researcher and judged Rohlf's to be unsuitable in this respect.¹⁴

The passage quoted above from the preface, however, also clarifies that Gilliéron was much more than a point of reference in methodological questions. Personal contact with the undisputed master of linguistic geography was always a source of inspiration and courage for the authors of the AIS. This was especially true for Scheuermeier who, exposed to the sometimes harsh living conditions in the field, drew new strength from Gilliéron's encouraging messages:

Just before Christmas I received a postcard from Gilliéron that cheered me up as much as a great gift. [...] He warms my heart with his poetic impetus: "You are the source, and we are the streams that flow from it. The only truly fruitful, truly urgent work is the one you are doing at this moment. So I cry out to you: forward, courage and perseverance!" There will be no lack of them. (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 29 December 1920)¹⁵

Methodological advances

Even if the AIS is seen as a direct descendant of the Gilliéronian approach, it marked some considerable advances in methodology. One of the most obvious innovations, which can already be deduced from the title of the work (*Sprach- und Sachatlas*), is the inclusion of the historical-ethnographic dimension: the field researchers not only collected linguistic data, but also documented the material culture by means of targeted questions (included in the questionnaire), photographs, and drawings. In the part of the questionnaire dedicated to house construction, the field researcher also had to provide documentation of the shape of the granary, for example, or ask about the material the floor was made of. The ethnographic data was thereby seen as a valuable addition to the linguistic data.¹⁶ The numerous subject areas that were of concern to the ethnographic collection were defined by Jaberg and Jud and included, for

example, threshing and threshing implements, kitchen utensils, traditional costumes, bread making, handicraft, viticulture, domestic life, means of lighting, and apiculture (cf. Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas* 198). The photographic collection of the AIS comprises more than 3,000 photographs, thus providing a detailed insight into the material culture of Italy and southern Switzerland. An explanatory document was prepared for each photograph, containing a description and the dialect terminology of the object or activity in question.

A further innovation can be seen in the use of three different questionnaires: *Qn* (the “normal questionnaire”) was the standard questionnaire that contained about 2,000 questions. It was strongly inspired—in structure and contents—by the one used by Gilliéron. *Qe* (the “extended questionnaire”), comprised about 4,000 questions in order to cover vocabulary and culture on a larger scale. These very time-consuming surveys were carried out in a total of 29 locations. *Qr* (the “reduced questionnaire”), contained about 800 questions, and was mostly used in cities; here questions related to agricultural terminology were omitted, thus reducing in a significant way the extent of the survey.¹⁷

A further advance lies in the increased awareness of linguistic variation that can be observed. This manifests itself, for example, in the fact that the AIS was not limited to rural areas, with the data collected also including cities, albeit to a lesser extent. In some cities, moreover, two surveys were carried out with informants belonging to different social classes (cf. Grassi, “Validità attuale” 51-52).

Scheuermeier’s sociolinguistic awareness

Many of the remarks, notes, and reflections in Scheuermeier’s letters are characterized by a marked sociolinguistic awareness (cf. Berruto 50). However, much to Scheuermeier’s discomfort, his views and insights were not appreciated by his Italian colleagues. It must be added here that his contact with Italian linguists was rather limited: the very time-consuming fieldwork, which took the researcher mostly to rural areas, did not leave much room for

encounters with his Italian colleagues. This does not seem to have bothered Scheuermeier at first, as he wrote in a letter of 11 January 1921 to Jaberg and Jud: "I only see the farmers, not the important philologists."¹⁸ Especially at the beginning of his work for the AIS, Scheuermeier kept his contact with Italian colleagues to a minimum: the fact that he did not seem to feel particularly comfortable in the linguistic scientific communities of Italy at the time also relates to their very historical-comparative research interests, as the following mocking commentary illustrates:

But this became clear to me in today's lecture: in Italy I would never have become a linguist. From 11-12h nothing but *u, ou, eu ai, au* in Old Indic, Gothic, Greek, Old Latin; oh! and au! and *πα παῖ* through rotten millennia. Long live the highly sacred phonology *anno domini Tutankhamun!*
(Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 13 March 1923)¹⁹

This kind of linguistics greatly contrasted with Scheuermeier's practical work in the field, in which theory and linguistic-historical reconstructions did not play a significant role; and as previously mentioned, he was not interested in "phonetic pedantries" (cf. "Impact and role of Gilliéron" above).

Contact with his Italian colleagues was, of course, unavoidable: in the summer of 1924, at Jaberg's request, Scheuermeier visited the Italian linguist Clemente Merlo to discuss the phonetic transcription of his survey in Pisa. The subject of the discussion was a phonetic feature (the so-called *Tuscan gorgia*), which Scheuermeier perceived as oscillating in the survey, and he also noted it as such. However, this was met with great incomprehension by his Italian colleague, who claimed that an oscillation of this feature was not possible. Scheuermeier commented on Merlo's stubborn insistence as follows:

[...] in Pisa -c- falls and that is why it must be eliminated, for the devil's sake. They want clean dialects. As if there were someone who always and with everyone pronounces his dialect the same way in a country where the written language already dominates as it does here. (Letter from

Scheuermeier to Jaberg and Jud, 12 June 1924)²⁰

Based on this observation, Scheuermeier came to the following conclusion, which appears very pioneering from a sociolinguistic point of view:

I see more and more clearly: there are two ways of looking at language: the one that is still generally dominant, academic, which says how it should be, and which has clean phonetics and only one; the other, I would like to say, wild way of looking at language, because it does not adjust the sounds of the answers until they fit (I still do this too often with the repeated questions and insisting). In this way, however, nothing clean comes to the surface, but often a curly salad, determined by a bunch of recognisable or secret psychological factors. We ought to study the salad of life much more; for it is precisely this confusion of “wrong” and “right” that constitutes the language-moving and language-creating moment. (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg and Jud, 12 June 1924)²¹

A characteristic aspect of Scheuermeier’s approach, which also distinguished him strongly from the other two field researchers of the AIS, was the central role attributed to the informant, who did not simply function as a “translator” (cf. the subsection describing Scheuermeier’s relationship with informants, below). In addition to collecting linguistic data, Scheuermeier also noted in the so-called *Randbemerkungen* (“margin notes”) any emotional expressions that might accompany the informants’ answers. Another interesting instrument was the survey protocols, which contained, among other elements, a carefully prepared biography of the informant, an assessment of his linguistic authenticity and accuracy, and a detailed description of the situation in which the survey took place. The protocol from Pisa, for example, reports on the changing linguistic behavior of the informant during the recording and especially on his lack of spontaneity when translating sentences:

Master shoemaker, parents from Sant'Ermete (1 km from Pisa). 59 years old. He has always lived in Pisa and lives in the Sobborgo San Marco, closely connected to the city. While in the first part of the survey he is quite down-to-earth phonetically, he suddenly gives in to written-language tendencies in the second part. Not spontaneous enough in the sentences. (Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas* 102)²²

Jaberg and Jud explicitly recommended the user of the atlas consult the protocols (cf. Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas* 37) and also pay attention to the *Randbemerkungen*; this additional information can be highly relevant when interpreting certain expressions. For instance, one can imagine that terms referring to intimate body parts may differ depending on whether the informant is a woman or a man, or whether the informant is amused or, on the contrary, embarrassed.

As shown by Kunz ("Wir sollten noch"), an approach related to perceptual dialectology can also be detected in the great attention given to the informant.²³ Scheuermeier's letters show that the speaker's perceptions, information, and judgments about the surrounding dialects could influence the choice of recording points, although in most cases these were predetermined by Jaberg and Jud. The following passage shows that the choice of Vigevano was based on judgments made by speakers:

Now, for once, I did not follow your instruction, but public opinion. In Cozzo [...] I was told that in the area of S. Nazzaro, as in general in the rest of Lomellina, people speak almost the same as they do. Only in Vigevano will I be able to find something special. So I moved there, despite the proximity of the other survey locations [...].
(Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 11 March 1921)²⁴

It would certainly be bold to refer to Scheuermeier as a pioneer of the sociolinguistic reorientation of linguistic geography; rather, the aim in this essay has been to highlight how, through working actively in the field, he began to develop a sensitivity toward certain themes and dealt with issues that would later be discussed within the discipline.

Scheuermeier's journey in the service of the AIS

The length of Scheuermeier's journey collecting data for the AIS is impressive. In the employment contract that Scheuermeier signed before departing to conduct the fieldwork, the planned time for data collection was about two and a half years. In reality, Scheuermeier's journey lasted more than six years. It started on 19 November 1919, taking the researcher first to the Romansh- and Italian-speaking parts of the Grisons (Switzerland). He arrived in Italy about seven months later where he was engaged, almost without interruption, until the end of 1923. From January to April 1924, work was interrupted by a stay in Paris. In 1925, there was another interruption of several months due to Scheuermeier's having obtained a position as a teacher at the Bern municipal high school. From the moment he embarked on that career, it was, of course, no longer possible for him to permanently and continuously be at the project's disposal. He did, however, manage to complete the few remaining surveys for the AIS during holiday periods between 1926 and 1928.²⁵

The researcher's itinerary took him to southern Switzerland, northern and central Italy, but also to Istria and a village in Dalmatia—the latter of which are today part of Croatia. The 311 localities covered by Scheuermeier correspond exactly to the upper part of the linguistic maps of the AIS, separated by a line from the lower part, surveyed by Rohlf's and Wagner (cf. Figure 1). In general, Scheuermeier tried to proceed region by region, although this did not always apply to the same extent: in particular, this was not the case in Piedmont, where Scheuermeier stayed longer than average and in three different periods (in the winter of 1921, in the summer–autumn of 1922, and in 1923), or in Ticino, where he started the fieldwork in 1920 and only completed it during the school holidays in 1926 and 1927.

During his fieldwork journey, correspondence by letter was the most convenient way of keeping in touch with Jaberg and Jud. The letters had a dual function: as we have seen, on the one hand they enabled the researcher to discuss work-related issues with his masters; on the other hand, they also represented a kind of “substitute” for company or even an outlet for the often-solitary researcher. The fact that Scheuermeier usually stayed only a few days in the same place did not make it possible for him to forge

lasting friendships; continuous and regular contact with his masters was therefore extremely important to him.

Between planning and improvisation: organizational challenges

A journey of these dimensions naturally required a very high degree of organization. However, many unforeseen situations arose, such as difficulty finding accommodation in certain villages. The letters provide information about how Scheuermeier organized his daily life in the field and which situations required a certain degree of improvisation. When Scheuermeier arrived in a new area, he first looked for a "base camp" as a place to store his luggage. From this base, he travelled to surrounding

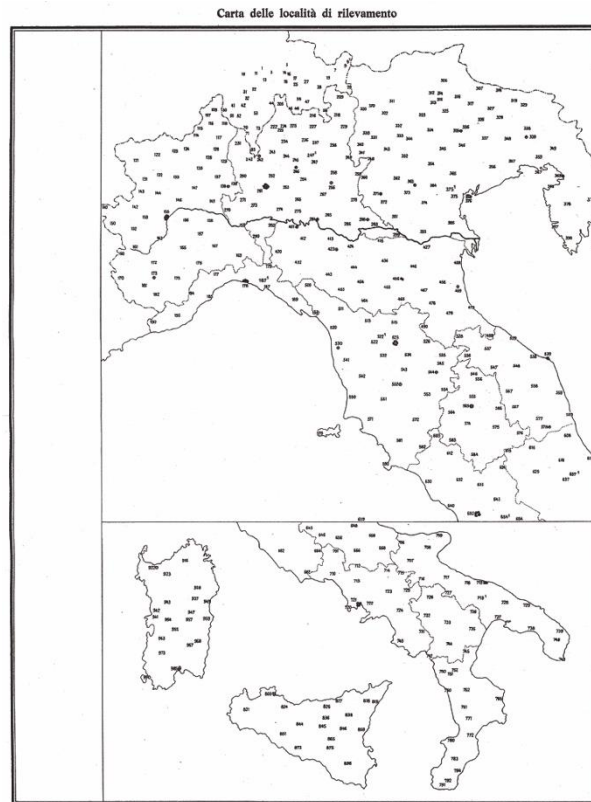


Figure 1: Map of AIS survey locations. The upper part is the territory surveyed by Scheuermeier.

localities, where he tried to find accommodation for the duration of the survey. In smaller localities, which did not have any hotels or inns, he was sometimes hosted by the informant, or else found private accommodation. However, this was not always possible, as the case of Ronchis (province of Udine, Friuli-Venezia Giulia) testifies: “[...] in this hole no house opens to the wanderer, so that he has to walk the 3 km from Latisana every day, today through rain and dirt. But the informant and the dialect are good. The rest, what does it matter!” (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 19 February 1922).²⁶ Overall, finding a room to spend the night was not always an easy task for the researcher. In his letters, he complained very often about the poor conditions in which he had to stay. His greatest torment, however, was caused by the bedbugs, which seemed to haunt him everywhere from Ticino to Abruzzo. In Trento, he spent entire sleepless nights chasing the insects, which tortured him even in a very expensive luxury hotel, and in Capestrano, Abruzzo, the hotel room was so infested with them that Scheuermeier preferred to seek refuge in a nearby stable. No less complicated was the question of travelling. Scheuermeier covered many kilometers by foot, especially to reach the most remote locations. Whenever possible, he travelled by public transport, mainly trains and coaches, the latter still very common at the time. On some occasions he had to resort to more adventurous means of transport: in December 1919, when he was isolated in the Val Monastero in the Grisons, he crossed the Forno Pass on skis, despite the great danger of avalanches. For his journeys to the island of Elba, he travelled on a mule (cf. Figure 2). The survey locations were usually predetermined by Jaberg and Jud, who provided the researchers with a list of locations, although this was not binding, as they stated in the introductory volume to the atlas (Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas* 188): “This list, however, was to serve the collectors only as a general guideline. When they arrived on site, they took more precise information, often already during the train or bus journey or in the centers of the dialect areas in question, and then made the final decision.”²⁷

Very valuable, especially in the search for an informant, were the letters of recommendation issued by the *Minister dell'Istruzione Pubblica*

("Ministry of Public Education"), which Scheuermeier carried with him and which he himself described as his "most precious amulets" (cf. Scheuermeier, "Vim guten Stern" 9). These letters allowed him to seek help from the local authorities: often Scheuermeier found a good informant after inquiring with the mayor or the village priest. These official letters, which outlined the meaning and purpose of his work, also came in useful in cases where his work met with incomprehension or even mistrust among the population (cf. the paragraphs on AIS-relevant publications by Jaberg, Jud, and Scheuermeier, above).

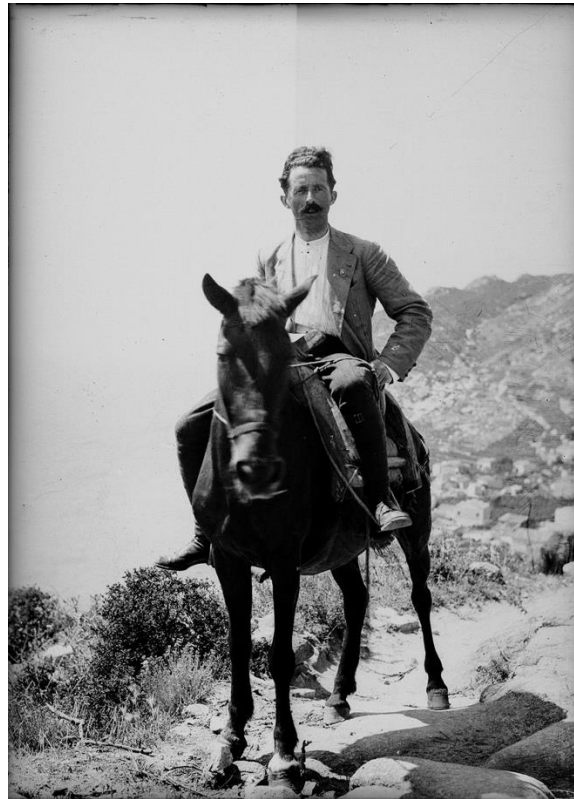


Figure 2: 5 June 1924, Scheuermeier on the island of Elba, between Chiessi and Pomonte (©Archivio AIS).

Scheuermeier's relationship with informants

Several letters testify to the great approachability Scheuermeier found in many of his informants. One example is the informant in Ramesh (Grisons, Switzerland), an unmarried woman who lavished him with culinary delights and who sent him gifts by post after the survey was completed. Scheuermeier, for his part, attached great importance to having a good relationship with his informants. He was aware that their cooperation could not be taken for granted, and whenever possible tried to express his gratitude by sending them photographs or postcards, even though this meant doing additional work:

There are always a number of promises to be kept, since we want to keep our word, even to a poor farmer or lagoon fisherman. What could I photograph without the good will of these good people! And since I am superstitious and believe that our work cannot make good progress if I don't look back at a clean road behind me and at friendly faces, I also have to deal with a somewhat too burdensome correspondence at every stage of my journey, even if it is only greetings by postcard. But count the number of people who have been good to me! (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 10 July 1922)²⁸

Of course, everything did not always run smoothly, and there are cases in which Scheuermeier painted a particularly negative picture of his informants, such as that of Vodnjan (Istria, Croatia), whom he described as “an annoying figaro, peasant barber, who hoes his land five days a week and the other two days he paws people's faces” (Postcard from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 14 May 1922).²⁹ As he explains, this is partly due to the fact that he had to postpone the start of the survey because of him, thus losing precious time.

Scheuermeier's letters, in the passages in which the researcher described the people he interacted with in the context of his surveys,

display a certain emotional involvement—for better or worse—and his accounts are very rarely cold and detached. The informants, for Scheuermeier, were more than just sources to draw on to complete his questionnaires. In many ways, the surveys thus also became real-life experiences that enriched him and undoubtedly fueled his interest and enthusiasm, enabling him to sustain his task so effectively for such a long period of time.

Collecting data between the wars

Scheuermeier's data collection in Italy coincided with a particularly tumultuous historical and political period. On the one hand, the First World War had just ended and its consequences were still clearly perceptible. On the other hand, the rise of fascism was imminent. This specific political-historical context complicated and influenced the researcher's fieldwork. The First World War had left a certain feeling of mistrust in people, especially in areas of combat. A foreigner, equipped with a camera and travelling around villages with the intention of interviewing people to collect linguistic material, could naturally arouse suspicion. Indeed, Scheuermeier was more than once reported to the police because he was thought to be a vagabond or even a German spy. Even if misunderstandings were resolved, such incidents made the search for accommodation or an informant in a particular location more complicated. Another problem concerned the collection of ethnographic data. Especially in the zones of the old war front, it was sometimes impossible to photograph farming tools or other objects because they had been destroyed during the war. For example, this was the case in Tiarno di Sotto (South Tyrol), from where Scheuermeier sent an illustrated postcard in May 1921 testifying to the devastation wrought by the war (cf. Figure 3) and in which the researcher commented as follows: "I have arrived in the area of the war. It still looks like this in one part of the village today. No possibility of ethnographic studies. No photography. In such areas, our work is only possible with educated subjects who can explain and

consciously respond” (Postcard from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 20 May 1921).³⁰

During an excursion to the *Thurwieserspitze*, a mountain in the *Ortler Alps* that was also a site of the recent conflict, Scheuermeier was offered a tremendous view of the destruction caused by the war:

It made a very strange impression to find traces of man's battles everywhere, right up to the highest peaks and in the depths of the glaciers. Beneath our hut there was a whole pile of waste of every conceivable kind, from tin cans to commander's report books; under the widest glaciers there were galleries [...]. On a war rope we climbed straight up the walls of the *Thurwieserspitze* to find barracks, trenches and bomb depots at the top. Unbelievable, if you hadn't seen it yourself. What man can do! And why! (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg, 7 September 1920)³¹

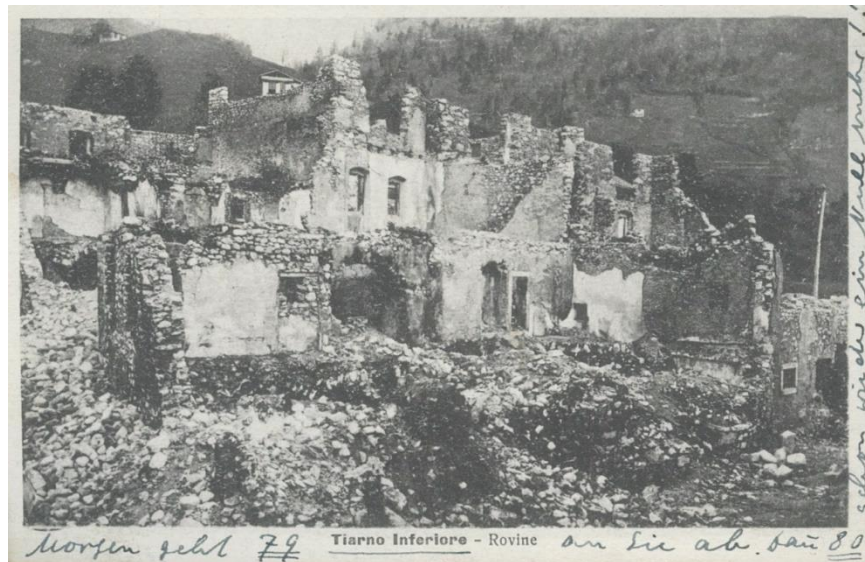


Figure 3: Postcard from Scheuermeier dated 20 May 1921 showing the post-war ruins in Tiarno Inferiore (©Archivio AIS)

But the rise of fascism also influenced Scheuermeier's work in the field. Curiously, in his letters there are no references to some of the

most historically significant events of the time, such as the March on Rome or the kidnapping and murder of the anti-fascist politician Giacomo Matteotti. Although Scheuermeier travelled mainly in rural areas, he could not avoid some of the unpleasant experiences caused by the political climate of the time. Fortunately, these were isolated events, and the researcher's journey was generally peaceful. Only in Carpaneto, in the province of Piacenza, did Scheuermeier find himself in a seriously dangerous situation, when he was mistaken for a journalist and as a result came close to being attacked by a group of fascists. The prompt arrival of the political secretary, who dispersed the troublemakers, prevented the situation from escalating. To prevent similar incidents from happening again, Scheuermeier was provided with various protective documents, but he seriously doubted their usefulness: "As if truncheons and bullets could read!" (Letter from Scheuermeier to Jaberg and Jud, 30 April 1923).³²

The political-historical context also influenced the setting of the atlas. Looking at any of the linguistic maps in the atlas, we can see that Istria and Dalmatia are represented by a total of five points to which are added those of the two newly annexed cities, Trieste and Gorizia, and that of Rijeka. However, the fact that Scheuermeier had travelled to the area in May and June 1922 was by no means a foregone conclusion, given the turbulent historical and political framework of the time, between the two wars. After the First World War, with the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo on 12 November 1920, the cities of Gorizia and Trieste, as well as Istria and parts of Dalmatia, were annexed to Italy, while Fiume acquired the status of a free state. This redefinition of the Italian border had direct repercussions for the planning of the atlas. In December 1920, barely a month after the agreement had been signed in Rapallo, Jaberg mentioned the question of Istria for the first time, specifying, however, that the extent to which it would be taken into consideration and included in the atlas remained unclear (postcard from Jaberg to Scheuermeier, 9 December 1920). Scheuermeier's position in this regard, however, was much clearer:

We cannot think for a moment of leaving out Trieste, Istria and Rijeka. For the whole of Italy, and for the educated in

particular, an “Italian” atlas that does not take into account the Italian locations that have been desired for so long, the only right thing, would be an outrage. What I am saying is not motivated by linguistic or personal considerations, but by diplomatic and commercial concerns.³³

Scheuermeier’s diplomatic concerns naturally referred to Italian irredentism, a political movement that was reaching its peak in those years. The researcher probably felt its importance and weight to a much greater extent than his masters in far-off Switzerland because he had been fully immersed in the Italian reality for several months.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to show to what extent the historical-political, cultural, and intellectual climate influenced the AIS and especially Paul Scheuermeier’s fieldwork and approach.

The essay has revealed the extent to which the various documents and publications that emerged during the development of the AIS allow us to draw interesting conclusions about the context in which the data collection was carried out. A particularly valuable source in this respect is the prolific correspondence between Paul Scheuermeier and Karl Jaberg, which provides a privileged look behind the scenes. From this, we can learn much about how Scheuermeier shaped his work and the long journey it entailed, and how the historical context influenced his approach. For example, the researcher’s work was severely impacted in the zones of the old war front; in particular, the ethnographic collection of material suffered because many buildings and pieces of equipment were destroyed by the war and a functioning agricultural industry was no longer in existence. Moreover, the rise of fascism and the tense political climate led to extremely dangerous situations for the field researcher, hindering his work in the field. The political context, however, influenced not only Scheuermeier’s work but also the planning of the AIS: we have seen that no surveys were originally planned to be conducted in the newly annexed territories in Istria, but that these were included for purely “diplomatic” reasons.

However, the letters also give an idea of the living conditions and the challenges of fieldwork, and also testify to Scheuermeier's great dedication and sacrifice in this monumental project. Scheuermeier can therefore rightly be considered a "hero of fieldwork" (cf. Sanga). The letters are an authentic source of evidence, a freshly written account with an emotional dimension that of course is not perceptible in the scientific publications. But it is precisely these emotional aspects that linked Scheuermeier to the AIS and ultimately led to its successful conclusion.

The letters and publications mentioned are also highly interesting from a methodological point of view. On the one hand, they indicate that the AIS should certainly be seen as a project anchored in the methodological context of the linguistic geography of its time and thus continues the principles of Gilliéron's tradition. On the other hand, the AIS also marked some considerable methodological advances, such as inclusion of the ethnographic dimension but also, more generally, increased awareness of linguistic variation. In this respect, Paul Scheuermeier stands out in particular. His linguistic reflections and insights, which sometimes also led him to unpleasant discussions with his Italian colleagues, testify to his great sociolinguistic awareness. Even if he perhaps cannot exactly be described as a sociolinguist *ante litteram*, he addressed typical sociolinguistic aspects that would only much later—from the 1960s onwards—renew and enrich linguistic geography and linguistics in general.

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Notes

¹ Karl Jaberg was Professor of Romance Philology at the University of Bern between 1907 and 1945. For an overview of his life and work, see Fariba-Reber and Swiggers. Jakob Jud was Professor of Romance Philology at the University of Zurich between 1922 and 1950.

² The maps of the AIS were completely converted into digital form in 2009 by Dr. Graziano Tisato (ISTC-CNR, Padua) with the addition of a

basic search function. They are available online at the following address: <https://navigais-web.pd.istc.cnr.it>.

³ The data collection for the *Atlante Linguistico Italiano* (ALI), under the direction of the Italian linguist Matteo Giulio Bartoli, did not begin until 1925. The work was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and was not completed until 1965. Furthermore, the publication was delayed due to administrative problems and the first volume did not appear until 1995. To date, nine volumes have been published. For a discussion of the failed attempts of cooperation between Jaberg, Jud, and Bartoli, see Kunz (*Tra la polvere* 96-103).

⁴ Scheuermeier was originally intended to be the only field researcher. After Jaberg and Jud's decision in 1923 to extend the survey area to the whole of Italy, two further researchers were recruited. Jaberg and Jud found an expert for southern Italy in Gerhard Rohlfs, who carried out a total of 80 dialect recordings in southern Italy between 1922 and 1928; for Sardinia, they were able to gain the cooperation of Max Leopold Wagner, who carried out 20 recordings on the island between 1925 and 1927. Regarding the extension of the survey area and the involvement of the two new field researchers—whose familiarization with the survey method practiced by Scheuermeier did not proceed without problems—see Kunz (*Tra la polvere* 69-88).

⁵ For an overview and discussion of the numerous publications that have a more or promotional character or are aimed at a wider audience, see Kunz (*Tra la polvere* 11-13).

⁶ The correspondence between Karl Jaberg and Paul Scheuermeier during the period of field research for the AIS (1919-1925) includes 636 documents and has been published completely in Italian translation (cf. Kunz *Tra la polvere*). Jaberg also maintained correspondence with the other two field researchers: the correspondence with Gerhard Rohlfs comprises about 230 documents, and that with Max Leopold Wagner totals 209 documents. This latter correspondence has also been published, both in the original German version and in Italian translation

(cf. Masala "Lieber Freund"; "Caro amico"). It should be mentioned here that the AIS-relevant letters make up only a small part of the very prolific scientific correspondence of Jaberg, who was in very active contact with important researchers of his time (e.g. Jules Gilliéron and Ferdinand Brunot). Jaberg's entire scientific legacy is preserved in the AIS-Archives and offers highly interesting insights into the work of this important Romanist.

⁷ According to the *Vademecum*, informants should preferably be between 30 and 60 years old, born in the village where the survey takes place, ideally never having left it. As far as age is concerned, it can be concluded from the survey protocols that this rule was followed in 59% of the cases. In 36% of the surveys, however, informants were chosen who were older than 60 years old. The "selection scheme" in this respect is thus very close to the prototype of the *NORMs*, followed by Gilliéron (as described above). A certain deviation from this model can be seen in the inclusion of women, who served as informants in 36 of a total of 407 recordings. For a detailed review, see Kunz ("Materiali inediti"). The *Vademecum* is available online at the following address: https://www.italiano.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/fak_historisch/dsl/italiano/content/e75031/e75032/e648011/e649049/VademecumExploratorALIL_ita.pdf.

⁸ The document is available online at the following address: https://www.italiano.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/fak_historisch/dsl/italiano/content/e75031/e75032/e648011/e648066/VomgutenSternAIS-Archiv_UniBern_ita.pdf. For an Italian translation of the document, see Kezich, 329-46.

⁹ Jaberg and Jud distinguished between a "schematizing" and "impressionistic" method of transcription. The first tries to place each sound within fixed and pre-established categories, with the advantage of being able to order and compare materials more easily; the main disadvantage is the risk of losing nuances, not restoring reality, but "forcing" and interpreting the linguistic data until it fits into a specific typology. The "impressionistic" system, on the other hand, first used by

Edmont and later adopted for the transcription of the AIS data, seeks to capture as much nuance as possible, aiming for a deliberately subjective reproduction of the auditory perception.

¹⁰ “Tout ce que je vais dire a déjà été dit par mes vénérés maîtres Jud et Jaberg, dans le volume d’introduction à l’atlas [...] Ce que je puis y ajouter n’est qu’une note plus personnelle.”

¹¹ “Der Gedanke, dem französischen Sprachatlas eine italienisch-rätoromanische Fortsetzung zu geben, lag nahe. Er wurde in uns durch den Meister der sprachgeographischen Forschung genährt, Jules Gilliéron, dem wir beide die entscheidendsten wissenschaftlichen Anregungen in unserm Leben verdanken. Er, der mit eiserner Willenskraft und unter Verzicht auf die Bequemlichkeiten des Lebens sein grosses Werk vollendet hat, war uns ein leuchtendes Vorbild und in schweren Stunden eine stete Quelle neuen Mutes. Mutes.”

¹² “Gleich in der ersten Stunde kam er mir mit gelehrten Aufklärungen und phonetischen Haarspaltereien, die ich als Spitzfindigkeiten empfand. Vielleicht tat er es, weil er [...] zeigen wollte, dass er phonetisch-terminologisch gebildet sei. Ich kenne bekanntlich alle diesbezüglichen Fremdwörter nicht recht und empfinde diese Lücke nicht, wenn es gilt zu transkribieren. Das lange phonetische Diskutieren vor dem Sujet war mir daher unsympathisch, weil schädlich zeitraubend und unnütz.”

¹³ “Ich fürchte fast, er ist etwas jener philologische Explorator, den Gilliéron nicht will; nicht immer genügend unvoreingenommen u. Objektiv.”

¹⁴ However, the Gilliéronian ideal of the linguistically and phonetically untrained field worker was not followed by the disciples of Gilliéron. As Bottiglioni points out: “Now it is a fact that the field workers of all linguistic atlases since the ALF have almost all been linguists: Oscar Bloch, Griera, Gauchat, Tappolet, Scheuermeier, Rohlf, Wagner, Pop, Kurath and his assistants, etc. etc. This is because we now realize that the autosuggestion and the prejudice feared by Gilliéron cannot influence the man who, linguist or not, is devoted with all his mind to the difficult task

of selecting an informant, establishing rapport, and transcribing so smoothly and so quickly as not to interrupt the contact which has been forming and binds the questioner to the questioned. The field worker, even if he is a specialist in linguistics, is so absorbed with this exhausting work that he could not, though he would, think of rules, phonetic laws, linguistic schemes" (383).

¹⁵ "Von Gilliéron habe ich kurz vor Weihnachten eine Karte bekommen, die mich wie ein grosses Geschenk freute. [...] Er macht mir warm mit seinem poetischem Schwung: 'Vous êtes la source, et nous sommes les ruisselets qui en découlent. La seule besogne, vraiment féconde, vraiment urgente, est celle que vous faites en ce moment. Aussi, je vous crie: en avant, courage et persévérance!' An dem wird's nicht fehlen."

¹⁶ The attention paid to material culture was entirely in the spirit of the relatively new research direction called *Worker und Sachen* ("Words and Things"). This philological movement of the early 20th century, initiated by Rudolf Meringer and Hugo Schuchardt, is concerned with the study of the reciprocal relationship between words and the objects and facts they denote.

¹⁷ While a survey with *Qn* took an average of 18 hours, a survey with *Qe* required about 40 hours; time needed for a survey with *Qr* was significantly lower, corresponding to ca. 4.3 hours (cf. Jaberg and Jud, *Der Sprachatlas* 195).

¹⁸ "Ich sehe nur die Bauern, nicht die grossen Philologen."

¹⁹ "Das aber wurde mir im heutigen Kolleg klar: in Italien wäre ich nie Linguist geworden. Von 11-12h nichts als *u, ou, eu ai, au* im Altindischen, Gotischen, Griechischen, Altlatein; *oh! und au!* u. *πα πα παϊ* durch morsche Jahrtausende. Es lebe die hochheilige Lautlehre *anno domini Tuntachamen!*"

²⁰ "[...] in Pisa fällt -c- und darum muss es raus, ums Teufels Gewalt. Man will saubere Dialekte. Wie wenn es einen gäbe, der immer und mit allen seinen Dialekt gleich ausspricht in einem Land, wo die Schriftsprache bereits schon herrscht wie hier."

²¹ “Ich sehe immer deutlicher: es gibt zweierlei Sprachbetrachtungen: die eine noch allgemein herrschende, akademische, welche sagt, wie es sein muss, und die eine saubere Phonetik hat und nur eine; die andere, ich möchte sagen, wilde Sprachbetrachtung, weil sie ohne vorgefasste Meinung die Laute der Antworten nicht zurecht stutzt, bis sie passen (ich mache das mit dem wiederholten Fragen u. mit Insistieren auch noch zu häufig). So kommt aber nichts Sauberes, sondern oft ein krauser Salat zum Vorschein, dessen Mischung von einem Haufen erkennbarer oder geheimer psychischer Faktoren bestimmt wird. Wir sollten noch viel mehr den Salat des Lebens studieren können; denn gerade dieses Durcheinander von ‘Falsch’ u. ‘Recht’ ist das sprachbewegende und sprachschöpferische Moment.”

²² “Schuhmachermeister, Eltern aus Sant’Ermete (1 km vor Pisa). 59 jährig. Er hat immer in Pisa gelebt und wohnt im Sobborgo San Marco; mit der Stadt eng verwachsen. Während er im ersten Teil der Aufnahme lautlich durchaus bodenständig ist, gibt er plötzlich im zweiten Teil schriftsprachlichen Tendenzen nach. In den Sätzen Zu wenig spontan.”

²³ Perceptual dialectology is a recent discipline that has established itself as a subset of folk linguistics (cf. Preston *Perceptual Dialectology* and *Handbook*). In contrast to classical dialectology, which focuses on the formal linguistic differences between dialects, it is concerned with how non-linguists see and assess these differences. A traditional field of study is the folk perceptions of dialect boundaries, or the social characteristics that individuals attribute to the different dialects.

²⁴ “Nun habe ich einmal nicht Ihnen, sondern der öffentlichen Meinung gefolgt. In Cozzo [...] hat man mir gesagt, dass man in der Gegend von S. Nazzaro, wie überhaupt in der übrigen Lomellina fast gleich spreche wie sie. Nur in Vigevano werde ich noch etwas Spezielles finden können. So bin ich dorthin gezogen, trotz der Nähe der übrigen Aufnahmen [...]”

²⁵ Between 1930 and 1935, Scheuermeier undertook five more trips to Italy and the Grisons, this time devoted exclusively to the collection of

ethnographic material that would later be included in the two volumes of the *Bauernwerk* (cf. Scheuermeier *Bauernwerk*), a project related to the AIS. During these journeys, which also took him to the south of Italy, Scheuermeier was accompanied by the Bernese artist Paul Boesch, who was commissioned to fix, with pen and paper, a number of objects and scenes from rural life.

²⁶ "[...] wenn im Nest keine Kiste dem Vagabunden sich öffnet, so dass ich täglich die 3 km von Latisana zu Fuss machen muss, heute durch Regen u. Kot. Aber Sujet u. Mundart gut. Was macht da alles andere!"

²⁷ "Diese Liste galt aber für die Exploratoren bloss als allgemeine Wegweisung. Sie selbst informierten sich genauer an Ort und Stelle, oft schon auf der Hinreise, im Eisenbahn- oder Postwagen oder in den Zentren der in Frage stehenden Dialektgebiete und trafen dann ihre definitive Wahl."

²⁸ "Damit sind immer eine Reihe von Versprechungen einzulösen, da wir doch einmal das gegebene Wort halten wollen auch nur einem armen Bauern oder Lagunenfischer gegenüber. Was könnte ich photographieren ohne das frdl. Entgegenkommen dieser guten Leute! Und da ich abergläubisch bin u. meine, unser Werk könne keinen guten Weg machen, wenn ich nicht auf eine saubere Strasse hinter mir u. auf frdl. Gesichter zurückblicke, habe ich auch bei jedem Absatz meiner Reise allemal eine etwas allzubelastende Korrespondenz zu erledigen, wenns auch nur Kartengrüsse sind. Aber zählen Sie die Menge von Menschen, die gegen mich schon gut waren!"

²⁹ "ein lästiger Figaro, Bauernbarbier, der 5 Tage sein Feld und 2 das menschliche Antlitz zerhackt."

³⁰ "Ich bin im Gebiet des Krieges angekommen. So wie hier sieht es in einem Teil des Dorfes heute noch aus. Keine Spur von Sachstudien. Keine Photographie. In solchen Gegenden nur mit gebildetem Sujet, das erklären und bewusst antworten kann, unsere Arbeit möglich."

³¹ "Einen ganz merkwürdigen Eindruck machte es, überall bis auf die höchsten Gipfel u. in die Tiefen der Gletscher Überreste des

Kampfes der Menschen zu finden. Unter unserer Hütte breitete sich eine ganze Schutthalde aller erdenklicher Abfälle, von der Konservenbüchse bis zum Kommandorapportbuch aus; unter den breitesten Gletschern führten Galerien [...] An einem Kriegsseil kletterten wir die Wände der Thurwieserspitze gerade hinauf, um zu oberst Baraken, Schützengräben, Lager von Bomben zu finden. Unglaublich, wenn man es nicht selber gesehen hätte. Was der Mensch alles kann! Und warum!”

³² “Wie wenn Knüttel und blaue Bohnen lessen könnten!”

³³ “Trieste, Istrien u. Fiume wegzulassen, daran dürfen wir nicht einen einzigen Moment denken. Ganz Italien u. das Gebildete oben an wäre beleidigt durch einen „italienischen“ Atlas ohne die ersehnten italienischen Orte, die heute allein seelig machen. Ich rede nicht aus linguistischen oder persönlichen Überlegungen, sondern aus rein diplomatisch kaufmännischen Bedenken.”

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