

**Workshop: Preserving Voices: Strategies for Endangered Languages with a focus on the Semitic languages Arabic, Hebrew, and Neo-Aramaic (Turoyo)**  
**Ursula Schattner-Rieser, Universität Innsbruck; Stefan Schub, Universität Heidelberg**

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Language preservation is indispensable for safeguarding endangered or extinct languages, which are essential for maintaining diversity across various academic disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, pre-history, and psychology. Just as historic preservation allows us to retain insights into the past, language preservation ensures that dying or dead languages remain accessible for future study. Examples of this preservation effort include ancient extinct languages, like those found on Cuneiform tablets from Mesopotamia or monumental inscriptions from Egypt to Mesopotamia, which are often housed in museums. In a similar way, documentary linguists play a part in preserving the current linguistic diversity for future typological research.

In that way preserving languages is not only crucial for understanding ancient and extinct cultures but also vital for safeguarding existing cultural heritage. The workshop aims to delve into both ancient and modern languages. While philologists continue deciphering ancient languages engraved on stone, wood, and various materials, linguists collaborate closely with native speakers to document and transcribe oral traditions, stories, and linguistic nuances. When a language vanishes—such as ancient Egyptian or Sumerian—it takes with it a significant aspect of culture, complicating future generations' ability to comprehend it fully. The workshop seeks to present a range of modern and traditional approaches for deciphering ancient writing systems and safeguarding modern endangered languages. It explores potential solutions offered by both conventional and innovative investigative methods, including those employed by paleographers, epigraphers, documentary and computational linguists on the one hand and by traditions of passing on linguistic knowledge by members of ethnolinguistic communities on the other hand. For example Hebrew and Syriac, while not being the actual spoken languages of the Jewish and Aramean communities, have been preserved by traditional scholarship and learning over centuries in addition to the respective spoken community languages. Moreover, the workshop addresses the contextual challenges scholars face when dealing with ancient codes, alongside the difficulties involved in safeguarding modern languages that have overwhelmingly been transmitted orally thus far, like several Neo-Aramaic varieties. In such cases, the points of interest between linguists and the communities of speakers sometimes diverge. Especially in contexts of migration, minority languages are prone to lose communicative functions and may be viewed by some members of the community as hindering integration and competitiveness in majority-language contexts. Furthermore, there has to be a negotiation about which variety to preserve. The resolutions of intra-communal negotiations may run counter to the linguists' expectation by choosing traditional literary or sacred languages like Syriac or Hebrew in lieu of the language actually spoken within the community. This last point represents a borderline case between the preservation of extinct or rather dormant languages and the preservation of endangered languages. By surveying various methodologies, the workshop aims to provide insights into preserving linguistic heritage while bridging the gap between ancient and modern language studies on the one hand and the respective language communities on the other hand, resulting in a polyphony of voices.

**Ambra Suriano, PhD, Post-Doc researcher**

**Biblical, Medieval, and Modern Hebrew. Language as a Means to Preserve and Shape Identity**

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Language is not only a tool for expressing one's identity but also for constructing a new one. In this sense, the Hebrew language has played a fundamental role in defining Jewish identity. On the one hand, having been preserved over the centuries—sometimes as a spoken language, sometimes as a liturgical language, and sometimes as a lingua franca among Jews from various regions of the world—it has maintained a sense of belonging to the same community of believers among the various Jewish communities in the diaspora. On the other hand, adopting specific linguistic traits from the various communities in the diaspora has contributed to marking identity differences within Judaism itself. In this sense, the revival of a renewed Hebrew language with the State of Israel had marked an identity renewal within Judaism as well, which Ben Gurion understood well when he opposed the use of Ladino or Yiddish, stating that “Hebrew, and with it the knowledge of its greatest written works, Torah and Talmud, are the matrix in which Jewishness is embedded”.

This presentation aims to highlight how the Hebrew language has served as a marker of continuity in the perception of identity and cohesiveness among Jews and, at the same time, over the centuries, shaped minor identities within Judaism itself.

**Maria Rebecca Zarb, Universität Wien**

#### Intra-Tribal Dialectal Preservation and Loss as Social Markers: The case of the *Rashayda* Tribe

The decline of endangered languages stems from multiple factors such as globalisation, which favours widely spoken languages and the preference of locally dominant language (de Dominicis, 2007). Similarly, in the Arab world spoken dialects often suffer from a perceived inferiority compared to Standard Arabic, limiting their recognition as distinct languages (Bassiouny, 2009). Moreover, complex linguistic hierarchies and sociolinguistic variations exist, where some dialects are prestigious in certain regions but not in others (Ibrahim, 1986; Naïm, 2011; Hachimi, 2015). As such, certain communities may conceal or lose their linguistic identity for social acceptance (Iriarte & Laaber, forthcoming). The situation becomes more complex for tribal societies in the Arab world whose sub-branches are spread across regions and encounter communities with different Arabic varieties. These tribes may struggle to preserve their original dialect, a key part of their identity that ties them to their homeland and unites their branches (Young, 1996). However, adopting the locally dominant Arabic variety aids in assimilation, especially as repatriation is often no longer possible.

This paper will examine the *Rashayda* (*Rašāyda*) tribe, originally identified as a northwestern Arabian community, and its various branches in Kuwait, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia. It will investigate how these branches have either preserved or modified their distinct linguistic variety, focusing primarily on the motivations behind the proactive and systematic conservation of their speech variety as seen in Sudan, in contrast to other branches where the dialect is increasingly being subsumed by more prestigious varieties. Furthermore, the presentation will address the methodologies and challenges associated with fieldwork in such unique contexts and will explore the *Rashayda* members' perspectives on dialect loss and preservation. Ultimately, this presentation aims to elucidate how different processes affecting the same speech variety can lead to varying outcomes and impact identity, and to understand how the deliberate neglect (or preservation) of a dialect is, to some extent, consciously governed by the speakers themselves.

**Ursula Schattner-Rieser, Universität Innsbruck**

#### Aramäische Dialektgeografie und Variantenselektion: 3000 Jahre Sprachgeschichte im Überblick

Das Aramäische blickt auf eine 3000-jährige Geschichte als lebendige Sprache zurück und ist eine bemerkenswerte Ausnahme unter den semitischen Sprachen. Bereits in den altaramäischen Texten des 10./9. bis 8. Jh. v.u.Z. zeigt sich eine Vielfalt sprachlicher Merkmale, die sich dennoch zu einer erkennbaren aramäischen Variante vereinen. Unter der Herrschaft der Achämeniden im 6. Jh. v.u.Z. erlebte das Aramäische eine sprachliche Vereinheitlichung in Orthographie, Phonologie und Morphologie, was seine weite Verbreitung förderte. In der hellenistischen Zeit führte die erneute Dialektbildung zur Aufspaltung in west- und ostaramäische Varianten.

Trotz aller regionalen Unterschiede besteht eine linguistische Einheit, die eine „Aramäische Gemeinsamkeit“ ermöglicht – eine Einheit, die sich bis in die heute gesprochenen neuaramäischen Dialekte erstreckt. Dies wirft die Frage auf: Welche linguistischen Merkmale definieren das Aramäische in seiner Einheit und Vielfalt? Mein Paper untersucht diese Frage unter dem Leitgedanken: Was ist Aramäisch?

**Werner Arnold, Universität Heidelberg**

#### Probleme und Irrtümer bei der Erforschung moderner aramäischer und arabischer Dialekte

Das Aufnehmen, Transkribieren und Beschreiben der modernen arabischen und aramäischen Dialekte stellen den Feldforscher vor große Herausforderungen. Das beginnt mit der Auswahl geeigneter Sprecher, ein Problem, das umso größer ist, je mehr eine Sprache vom Aussterben bedroht ist und nur noch wenige Sprecher hat. Aus mehreren Gründen spielt es eine große Rolle, dass auch Frauen, sowie jüngere und ältere Sprecher aufgenommen werden. Das kann besonders in muslimischen Gesellschaften ein Problem sein. Welche Irrtümer auftreten können, wird mit Beispielen, insbesondere bei den Personalpronomen und den Pausalformen vorgestellt.

Johny Messo, President of the World Council of the Arameans

### Preserving Aramaic Through Family Language Policy: Challenges, Missed Opportunities, and Strategies for Aramean Parents

This paper explores the critical role of family language policy in preserving Turabdin Aramaic, focusing on the decisions Aramean parents make regarding language use at home. Drawing on decades of personal experiences visiting numerous Aramean households in Europe, America, Canada, and Australia, it discusses challenges and missed opportunities in maintaining and developing this ancient language. The consequences of prioritizing dominant languages over Aramaic, as well as the missed opportunities for cultural transmission when children are not being taught Aramaic from a young age, will be reviewed. Strategies for Aramean parents to balance the use of Aramaic and the dominant language in their households will be recommended, while noting the important role linguists and Aramaic institutions can play, showcasing the long-term benefits of bilingualism, multilingualism, and cultural preservation. This presentation underscores that a thoughtful family language policy can help Aramean parents, the cornerstone of the Aramean people and identity, to become more aware of their responsibilities and opportunities to preserve their 3,000-year-old language.

Zeki Bilgic, Universität Heidelberg

### Aramäisch des Tur Abdin (Ṭuroyo) auf dem Weg zur Verschriftlichung

Der erste bekannte systematische Ansatz zur Verschriftlichung des Aramäischen des Tur Abdin findet in Schweden in den achtziger Jahren des letzten Jahrhunderts statt. Im Rahmen des herkunftssprachlichen Unterrichts in Schweden lässt die schwedische Schulbehörde die Sprache verschriftlichen. Aufgrund der Wahl der lateinischen Schrift wird das Projekt von der Sprechergemeinschaft abgelehnt. In den Neunzigern wird die Sprache zum ersten Mal in syrisch-aramäischer Schrift verschriftlicht, einige wenige Texte werden in Zeitschriften herausgegeben. Ab dem Millennium intensiviert sich dies und es entstehen vier ausgearbeitete Orthographien, von denen eine die NISIBIN-Orthographie ist. Diese wird im Workshop vorgestellt. Die NISIBIN-Orthographie verwendet nicht nur die syrisch-aramäische Schrift, sie greift auch auf die etymologische Schreibweise derselben Sprachvarietät zurück, welche das Erlernen und Anwenden erleichtert.

Maurice Ledwinka, Stefan Schub, Universität Heidelberg

### Lehrmittel des Aramäischen des Ṭur `abdin (Ṭuroyo): Probleme und Perspektiven,

Obwohl das Aramäische des Tur Abdin als eine der bestdokumentiertesten Varietäten des Neuaramäischen gelten kann, sind wissenschaftliche Lehrmaterialien rar gesät.

Die bisher am weitesten rezipierten Werke sind Otto Jastrows *Lehrbuch der Ṭuroyo-Sprache* (1992) in lateinischer Schrift und das von Shabo Talay herausgegebene biskriptomale (Syrisch und Latein) *Šlomo Surayt* (2017). Beiden Lehrbüchern gemein sind Lücken in der Sprachbeschreibung, die für die kommunikative Kompetenz nicht unwichtig sind, sowie eine teils veraltete oder zu sehr in semitistischer Tradition verhaftete und damit für Lerner aus anderen Disziplinen nicht unmittelbar zugängliche Terminologie.

Während ersteres eher eine Lerngrammatik des Dialekts von Midīn als ein kommunikatives Lehrbuch darstellt und sich daher vor allem für Strukturkurse eignet, erweckt letzteres trotz seines kommunikativeren Ansatzes den Anschein, vor allem für *heritage speakers* und nicht für Fremdsprachlerner konzipiert zu sein. Weitere Probleme sind, dass dem Lehrbuch eine nicht immer ganz transparent standardisierte Varietät zugrunde liegt und nicht genügend auf die für eine erfolgreiche Kommunikation wichtige dialektale Variation eingegangen wird.

Wir möchten anhand von ausgewählten Problemen und einer Beispiellektion aufzeigen, wie kommunikative Lehrmaterialien des Aramäischen des Ṭur `abdin aussehen könnten, damit auch ein größerer Lernerkreis die Möglichkeit bekommt, kommunikative Kompetenzen zu erwerben und somit auch ein Beitrag zum Spracherhalt geleistet werden kann.

Tania Notarius, University of Free State, South Africa

### Impersonal experiential constructions in ancient Northwest Semitic languages in a diachronic perspective

This paper aims at scrutinizing the impersonal usage of experiential constructions in ancient Northwest Semitic (NWS) languages. The methodological distinction is made between affective and evaluative types of the impersonal experiential usage. The affective type communicates the physical and emotive condition of the Experiencer (Hebrew *ham/qar lô* "he feels hot/cold"). The evaluative type communicates an

attitude towards particular proposition (Hebrew *ʔim ʿal PN tōb* “if PN would like ...”). These types are distributed differently in the ancient NWS languages. The Old Canaanite of El-Amarna demonstrates both usages of the impersonal experiential construction, while Akkadian has only the evaluative usage. Ugaritic avoids the impersonal usage, except for some diagnostic cases in the language of prose. Biblical Hebrew consistently demonstrates both types. Official Aramaic exemplifies the evaluative type only, while the affective type emerges at the Middle and Late Aramaic stages. It is hypothesized in this paper, that the impersonal experiential construction, and its affective type in particular, is an *areal Canaanite feature*. The affective experiential usage appears in Ugaritic, and then thousand years later in Aramaic, as a result of the contact with Canaanite languages.