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‘Differing only in dialect’, or How collocations can co-shape concepts*

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Abstract

This article seeks to show that a specific phrase, ‘to differ only in dialect’, was coined before the middle of the sixteenth century in the Zurich region as an effective way to describe the superficial nature of the differences between two speech varieties. Originating in commentaries on the historiographic works of the classical Latin authors Caesar and Tacitus, this originally Neo-Latin phrase became widely used in other types of text from the 1560s onwards (mainly in works devoted to ethnic history, language, and theology), where it served a wide range of divergent purposes and discursive strategies. From the seventeenth century onwards, the collocation ‘to differ only in dialect’ impacted on theoretical reflections on the conceptual pair ‘language’ and ‘dialect’. This case study thus shows that scholars interested in the emergence and development of a concept could benefit greatly from closely examining collocations and their history.

1. Aims

The present paper strives to contribute to the history of ideas—or concepts—in a twofold manner. Its main goal is to trace a key development in the history of the concept of ‘dialect’. Nowadays, the concepts ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ are closely related and often bracketed together, either to determine the status of a particular variety (e.g., “Is X a dialect of Y or is it an independent language?”) or precisely to discuss the problematic status of the twin concepts (e.g., “What is the difference between a language and a dialect?”).¹ In a previous study, Van Hal (2010: 471) observed that Humanist scholars tended to indicate a relationship of close kinship between two languages—and hence between two peoples—by perceiving that the two were similar, ‘differing only in dialect’.

The high frequency with which this expression occurs in early modern books prompted us to take a closer look at the origins, development, circulation, and impact of this phrase. In this paper, we present our findings and provide tentative answers to some key questions: where did this phrase come from? Is it firmly rooted in the classical tradition or is it an early modern innovation? Why was it used so often in the early modern period? In pointing out the significance of collocations and phrases in co-shaping concepts, we also address methodological questions in conceptual history. Above all, we seek to [96] demonstrate that the phrase ‘differing only in dialect’ was at least partly

* Unless stated otherwise, English translations and italicisations, including in the original quotes, are ours. We are very much indebted to Ana Kotarcic and an anonymous reviewer for the substantial and invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ The dichotomy is politically, culturally, and ideologically motivated (see, e.g., Löffler 2003: 3-10 and Chambers & Trudgill 1998: 4-5).

responsible for the shaping of the early modern (and, eventually, modern) concept of ‘dialect’: the phrase affected the meaning of the term *dialect* to such an extent that it contributed to crystallising the concept of ‘dialect’, so as to stand in direct opposition to that of ‘language’.

2. Methodological background

It is our basic assumption that the meaning of the term *dialectus* has not remained stable over time. Whilst we will not engage with theoretical discussions in related fields, such as the history of ideas, intellectual history, the history of concepts, historical semantics, and historical discourse analysis,² we do want to make explicit our practical approach to tracing the history of the concept of ‘dialect’. We agree with Quentin Skinner’s (1969: 39) observation that the persistence of words—in our case *dialect(us)*, in Skinner’s *utopia*—does not necessarily presuppose that the notions expressed by these words have remained consistent over time. In other words, it would be deceptive to treat ‘concepts’ and ‘words’ on the same level. Hence, for the sake of clarity, it is beneficial to make an explicit distinction between ideas (or concepts) on the one hand and words (or terms) on the other (Haßler & Neis 2009: 81; Dutt 2011; see also Stierle 1979). The acceptance of the necessity to distinguish between concepts and words in order to gain an understanding of the history of concepts implies that concepts should be studied within both their textual and extra-linguistic contexts.³ The task of a conceptual historian is therefore very demanding, as (s)he must trace an abstract idea that can adopt various terminological guises. In the past, as Pumfrey *et al.* (2012: 397) have pointed out already, conceptual historians had to rely on a (necessarily restricted) set of pre-identified texts to conduct their research. This method of proceeding entails a certain danger of circularity, since potentially relevant sources remain undetectable without explicit references from within an initially defined corpus.

This paper aims to understand the emergence and spread of a specific *phrase*, viz. ‘to differ in dialect only’, which seems to have crucially affected the early modern and present-day ‘career’ of the concept of ‘dialect’. The idea that collocations can influence the interpretation of a word is certainly not new. In corpus linguistics, for instance, scholars such as John Sinclair (2004: 134-135) have stressed that “[s]ituations [often] [...] arise in texts where the precise meaning of a word or phrase is determined more by the verbal environment than the parameters of a lexical entry” and that “[t]he textual environment will nearly always have some effect on the meaning of a unit”, without, however, “the accepted features of the meaning” being “totally ignored” on the lexical plane. Similarly, in construction grammar (a grammatical model that is generally closely associated with both cognitive and corpus linguistics, see Hilpert 2014 for a recent introduction), it is emphasized not only that lexical units have meanings, but also that syntactic constructions are intertwined with

² See, e.g., Pumfrey *et al.* (2012: 395-397) and Wimmer (2015) for a clear sketch of this tangle of disciplines. Müller & Schmieder (2016) offer a very detailed overview.

³ See Haßler & Neis (2009: 84): “Da sich metasprachliche Begriffe in Texten konstituieren und auch über Texte verbreitet werden, ist ihre rein lexikographische Erfassung nicht ausreichend. Vielmehr muss ihre Konzeptualisierung in Texten gleichfalls betrachtet werden.” See Dutt (2011: 41). It is worth pointing out that scholars specializing in critical discourse analysis and historical semantics tend to attach great importance to the context beyond the sentence level.

a specific semantics which is often pragmatically determined (*i.e.* by concrete usage in a specific context). Goldberg (2006: 5) has defined *construction* as follows:

Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency.

We argue that these linguistic insights and models deserve more attention from conceptual historians. True, scholars in the field of historical semantics have stressed that collocations can be helpful in sketching the history of a concept (see, e.g., Jussen 2011: 60), which made them develop electronic tools that are capable of tracing co-occurrences (see, e.g., Jussen & Rohmann 2015). To the best of our knowledge, however, researchers have not yet explored the extent to which constructions can co-shape concepts. The present contribution therefore seeks to demonstrate, by means of a case study, that paying closer attention to constructions can also be very revealing for the history of a particular concept.

In order to explore the history of the collocation ‘to differ only in dialect’, we seek to make optimal use of all present-day digital tools and possibilities. The emergence of online full-text libraries and repertories, such as Google Books, Internet Archive, and Early English Books Online (EEBO), has opened up new avenues for historians and allows them to investigate relevant texts that did not belong to their initial corpus. Once these archives become more sophisticated and full-fledged longitudinal historical corpora, conceptual history will probably be revolutionized (see the promising results obtained by Pumfrey *et al.* 2012; Jussen & Rohmann 2015). However, it is important to emphasize that the research underlying this paper could not fully benefit from ongoing digital revolutions. First and foremost, the attention directed to the digital searchability of early modern Latin texts has been very limited, despite the fact that Latin “dominated literature production in Europe up to the 17th century” (Springmann *et al.* 2014: 71). This implies that a Google Books query such as “*dialecto tantum*” yields a number of results that are far from complete, especially given that Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology often fails to recognize the typographical ligature <ct> (see Figure 1). [97]

Figure 1: Early modern ligature <ct>, which current OCR-software usually fails to recognize.

Revealingly, the Google Books n-gram tool, which claims to enable researchers to chart the rise and evolution in frequency of phrases from 1500 to 2000 (for an example focusing on French phraseology, see e.g. Marcon 2012), does not even offer a Latin text corpus (see Bamman & Smith 2012 for ongoing initiatives regarding the digital disclosure of Latin). The representativeness of the Google Books text corpus for uncovering the frequency and popularity of word strings and phrases

was recently put into perspective by Pechenick *et al.* (2015) (see also Müller & Schmieder 2016: 788-789).

The lack of both a well-defined and searchable Latin corpus on the one hand and a fixed phraseological expression on the other—we will see that the phrase ‘to differ only in dialect’ can be formulated under diverse terminological guises—precludes a quantitative analysis. The evidence on which this paper mainly relies consists of quotations that emerged not only from searches in major digital corpora, but also from primary source materials with which we were already familiar in the frame of our respective research undertakings. We have attempted to examine the available digital corpora in as creative a way as was possible (for example, by integrating typical OCR mistakes into our search queries). Our main focus is on the sixteenth century in the course of which the phrase came into being (§4). To the best of our knowledge, there are as yet no tools permitting us to generate reliable quantitative data which allow us to substantiate our impression that this phrase attracted increasing popularity from the end of the sixteenth century onward. For this and the other reasons mentioned above, our survey will have to refrain from offering statistical figures. We have tried to overcome this drawback by focusing on the wide range of text types and discursive contexts in which the phrase was operationalized (§5). Investigations such as the one presented in this paper would greatly benefit from better options and functions for searching for collocations in early modern texts (especially non-English ones). Quotations from, and references to, relevant source texts are given in the footnotes.

3. Expressing close linguistic kinship in antiquity

At the founding of the *Athenaeum Illustre* in 1631, which is generally viewed as the predecessor of the present-day University of Amsterdam, Gerardus Johannes Vossius (1577–1649) was appointed as one of its first professors. He was an authoritative figure in several scholarly fields, including rhetoric, poetics, and church history. In addition, he was the author of a linguistic triad of texts (Rademaker 1999: 201). In 1635, he published (*Aristarchus sive*) *de arte grammatica libri septem*. Ten years later, *De vitiis sermonis et glossematis Latino-barbaris libri quatuor* appeared, in which the author assesses the degree of ‘classicality’ of less frequent Latin and Greek words. A long-promised etymological dictionary was published posthumously by his son in 1662. It is interesting to observe that, throughout his linguistic work, Vossius makes occasional use of the phrase ‘to differ only in dialect’ to indicate the closeness between languages and—‘hence’—peoples. In his 1635 grammar, he remarks that “[the language of the] Belgians differ[s] from the language of Germania *only in terms of dialect*”;⁴ in the preface to his 1645 work *De vitiis sermonis*, the ethnonyms *Getae* and *Gothi* are said to *differ in dialect only*;⁵ in the posthumously published *Etymologicon*, he observes that with respect

⁴ “Belgarum illi, qui a Germaniae lingua *solum differunt dialecto*” (Vossius 1635: 81). See, e.g., also Vossius (1635: 42 & 81).

⁵ Vossius (1645: (**.2)^R): “Imo Scytharum nomine continentur quoque Getae et Gothi; atque appellationes istae, uti et Iutarum et Iutingorum, sola differunt dialecto.” See also Vossius (1645: 3^v & 247): “[...] finitimae gentes, non tam lingua, quam sola dialecto, diversae” and “[...] ut satis liqueat Germaniae gentes in hoc vocabulo sola dialecto variasse.”

to Hebrew the Punic language is *different in dialect only*,⁶ and in one of his letters, he relates the *Gothi* to “neighboring peoples who do not differ as much in language as they do *in dialect only*.”⁷ Given that Vossius was not exceptionally original in his comparative linguistic undertakings (Van Hal 2010: 247), one could expect him to have borrowed this phrase from a classical author—a strategy that would comply with Humanist common practice.

What possible classical sources did Vossius have at his disposal, or in what contexts did classical authors refer to the similarities and dissimilarities between the languages in the world? Although the significance of languages other than Latin and Greek was fairly limited throughout antiquity (cf. Werner 1992), we nevertheless observe that classical authors with a keen ethnographic interest were looking for criteria which could help them determine whether tribes belonged to the same or different ethnic groups. According to the fifth-century BC historian Herodotus, ancient Greeks used four main criteria for determining ethnicity, namely blood, customs, religion, and language.⁸ In his ethnographical books, Herodotus makes ample use of the linguistic criterion. Tribes speaking the same or similar languages belong to identical or related ἔθνεα (“tribes”), while linguistic differences point to a different origin. Munson (2005: 23-24) has rightly drawn attention to the “binary” way in which Herodotus applied this criterion: either languages are identical (enough), or they are considered to be (too) different. In other words, Herodotus felt no need to make a distinction between degrees of linguistic difference. Some other classical authors, [98] however, attempted to introduce what one could call a ‘gradational scale of linguistic closeness’. By the beginning of the Common Era, Strabo, for instance, discusses the slight differences between some varieties of Celtic speech in the following way:

Some divided it [*sc.* Transalpine Gaul] into three parts, mentioning Aquitanians, Belgians, and Celts. The Aquitanians are completely different not only in their tongue, but also as to their bodies, resembling the Iberians rather than the Galatians.⁹ The others are Galatians as to appearance, *yet they do not all speak the same language, but some of them slightly diverge in their tongues*.¹⁰

It is important to note at this point that Strabo provides more details on the linguistic tripartition of Gaul than Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) had done in the famous opening chapter of his *Commentarii de*

⁶ Vossius (1662: 303): “Nam lingua Punica dialecto tantum ab ea differebat.” See also Vossius (1662: 62).

⁷ Vossius in Colomiès (1690: 26): “Eoque iucundius futurum, ubi in parte operis nostri conspicias tot vestigia vocabulorum, quibus usi Gothi et finitimae gentes, non tam lingua quam sola dialecto diversae” (dated August 1, 1645).

⁸ “[...] τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὼν ὁμαίμῳ τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα [...]” (Herodotus 8.144.2). See Morpurgo Davies (1987: 16), Harrison (1998), Pohl (1998). All Ancient Greek and Latin quotes have been taken from the editions figuring in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database (<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>) and the Brepols Latin databases (<http://clt.brepols.net/cds/pages/Search.aspx>).

⁹ According to Strabo, the Galatians were a Celtic people originating from southern Gaul who arrived in (Greater) Phrygia after wandering about for a considerable period. They consisted of three tribes who spoke the same language: the Trocmi, the Tolistobogii, and the Tectosages. See Strabo’s *Geographia* 4.1.13, 12.5.1-2 & 12.8.1.

¹⁰ “οἱ μὲν δὴ τριχῇ διήρουν Ἀκυιτανούς καὶ Βέλγας καλοῦντες καὶ Κέλτας, τοὺς μὲν Ἀκυιτανούς τελέως ἐξηλλαγμένους οὐ τῇ γλώττῃ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν ἐμπερεῖς Ἰβηρσι μάλλον ἢ Γαλάταις, τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς Γαλατικοὺς μὲν τὴν ὄψιν, ὁμογλώττους δ’ οὐ πάντας, ἀλλ’ ἐνίοις μικρὸν παραλλάττοντας ταῖς γλώτταις” (*Geographica* 4.1.1).

bello Gallico, in which he claims that the three parts of Gaul differed in language (“Hi omnes *lingua*, institutis, legibus *inter se differunt*”), without further specifying the nature of this variation. Strabo’s formulation comes close to Vossius’ “sola/solum *dialecto differt*” phrase, although it is interesting to observe that the word *dialect* (Greek: διάλεκτος) is not utilized by the Greek geographer in this passage. Strabo is instead employing the word γλῶττα here. This is not to say that the word διάλεκτος never occurred in ethnological comparisons. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a contemporary of Strabo, for instance, uses the term when denying the common origin of the Pelasgians and the Tyrrhenians by demonstrating that the languages of the two peoples display considerable differences, as is shown in the following excerpt:

I am not convinced that both of them descend from a common stock, and this conclusion is based on several reasons, but mainly on their different languages, which do not preserve any similarity at all. [...] if indeed kinship should be supposed as a cause of linguistic unity, the contrary must be supposed for linguistic diversity. It is, after all, impossible to believe that both consequences derive from the same cause. If it can reasonably occur that people of the same nation, which have settled far from each other, no longer preserve the common character of their language [τὸν αὐτὸν τῆς διαλέκτου χαρακτήρα] through oral contact with their foreign neighbors, it makes no sense that people of the same stock, who live in the same areas, do not even show the slightest similarity in terms of language.¹¹

This passage indicates that in Greek antiquity, the term διάλεκτος had another meaning than *dialect* has today, and that it had not yet been associated with superficial variation (see Van Rooy 2016 for an extensive discussion). The Ancient Greek term διάλεκτος was particularly polysemous (it could designate, among other things, ‘dialogue’, ‘conversation’, ‘way of speaking’, ‘language’, and ‘style’) and was not conceived in terms of a fixed conceptual distinction between ‘language’ and ‘dialect’. Its usage was thus considerably freer and, in its ‘linguistic sense’, the term could refer to (literary) ‘dialects’ such as ‘Ionic’ and ‘Doric’ as well as to Egyptian and Latin, varieties of speech we would nowadays intuitively call ‘languages’.

Like Strabo, the Roman historian Tacitus refers to a case of superficial linguistic variation. At the turn of the second century AD, he describes the speech (*sermo*) of the inhabitants of Britannia as “not very different” (*haud multum diversus*) from that of the Gauls.¹² That Tacitus does not utilize the term *dialectus* in this context comes as no surprise, given that it was not part of the classical Latin vocabulary—a fact often overlooked by modern scholars.¹³

¹¹ “κοινοῦ δὲ ἄμφω μετεिल्φέναι γένους οὐ πείθομαι, πολλοῖς τε ἄλλοις καὶ μάλιστα ταῖς φωναῖς αὐτῶν διηλλαγμέναις καὶ οὐδεμίαν ὁμοιότητα σωζούσαις τεκμαιρόμενος. [...] εἰ γὰρ τὸ συγγενὲς τῆς ὁμοφωνίας αἴτιον ὑποληπτέον, θάτερον δὴ πού τῆς διαφωνίας· οὐ γὰρ δὴ κατὰ γε τὸ αὐτὸ ἐγχωρεῖ νομίζειν τὰμφοτέρα. καὶ γὰρ δὴ τὸ μὲν ἕτερον καὶ λόγον τιν’ ἂν εἶχε γεγόμενον, τὸ δὴ τοὺς πρόσω τὰς οἰκήσεις ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων ποιησαμένους ὁμοεθνεῖς μηκέτι διασώζειν τὸν αὐτὸν τῆς διαλέκτου χαρακτήρα διὰ τὰς πρὸς τοὺς πέλας ὁμιλίας τὸ δὲ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς οἰκοῦντας χωρίοις μηδ’ ὅτιοῦν κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογεῖν ἐκ ταυτοῦ φύντας γένους οὐδένα λόγον ἔχει” (*Antiquitates Romanae* 1.29).

¹² See Tacitus, *De vita Iulii Agricolae* 11.3: “eorum sacra deprehendas <ac> superstitionum persuasione<s>; sermo *haud multum diversus*, in deposcendis periculis eadem audacia et, ubi advenere, in detrectandis eadem formido.”

¹³ In the Middle Ages, the cleric and historian Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada (Rodericus Toletanus; ca. 1170–1247) also refers to superficial linguistic variation when claiming that all Germanic-speaking areas “have a single language, although they

If we return to Vossius, it becomes clear that he did not borrow the phrase *sola/solum dialecto differt* from any classical author, given that the Greek word διάλεκτος was not yet used to denote superficial variation and that *dialectus* was not a naturalized Latin word before ca. 1485.¹⁴ On the other hand, we have observed how the ancient authors Strabo and Tacitus, in their discussions of what we call the Celtic languages today, appear to be struggling to express the idea that two speech forms differ only to a limited extent. In other words, there was already an awareness of the fact that the differences between some languages were superficial, but no straightforward conceptual-terminological apparatus had yet been devised to describe such [99] linguistic interrelationships in a precise way. The remainder of this paper will try to demonstrate that the present-day interpretation of *dialect* as ‘a variety of a language exhibiting only superficial variation vis-à-vis related varieties’ (cf., e.g., Löffler 2003: 4) owes much to the increasing popularity of the collocation ‘to differ only in dialect’, which was coined in the course of the sixteenth century against the backdrop of the early modern Humanists’ intensive study of classical historiographers.

4. Expressing close linguistic kinship in the early modern period: the emergence of ‘*dialecto tantum variare*’ in the Zurich region

The sixteenth-century Humanist movement, characterized by its shared fascination with ancient manuscripts and classical literature across the boundaries of the early modern states, led, somewhat paradoxically, to a wave of patriotic feelings (see, e.g., Bostoen 1991: 148). Scholars in Western Europe were delighted to find that authors such as Caesar and especially Tacitus had not only paid considerable attention to the Germans and the Celts, but had also portrayed them in a predominantly positive light (see, e.g., Kelley 1993; the papers collected in Brown 1996; Hirschi 2002: 375-377; Krebs 2005). Hence, the works of Caesar and Tacitus were diligently commented upon, just like the books of Greek historiographers, which were also translated into Latin. The first Latin translation of Strabo’s *Geographica*, for instance, was issued in ca. 1469, almost 50 years before the Greek *editio princeps* (1516). In it, Guarino Veronese’s (1374–1460) Latin rendering of the relevant passage discussed above reads as follows: “Verum eadem non usquequaque lingua omnes: sed plerosque paululum variata” (see Strabo [1469]: *ad locum*). There are a number of reasons why the absence of the word *dialectus* in Guarino’s claim does not come as a surprise. For a start, in the original, Strabo did not make use of the term διάλεκτος. Furthermore, the Greek word had not yet

are distinguished by ‘idioms’.” See *Historia de rebus Hispaniae sive Historia Gothica* 1.3: “Theutonia vero, Dacia, Norveguia, Suecia [...], Flandria et Anglia unicum habent linguam, licet idiomatibus dignoscantur.” As expected, Rodrigo does not employ the term *dialectus*, which had not yet been borrowed into Latin. See Van Rooy (2017: Chapter 2) for the complicated history of the word *dialect(us)* from Greek antiquity until the end of the eighteenth century.

¹⁴ The Bologna-based Humanist Antonio Urceo, known as ‘Codro’, provides the earliest *certain* testimony traced thus far. In one of his *Sermones*, dated 1485/86 but posthumously published only in 1502, Codro (1502: F.v^r) remarks that it is “difficult and hard to learn a foreign language with five dialects” (“difficile et arduum est peregrinam linguam quinque dialectos habentem ediscere”). See Van Rooy (2017: Chapter 2, section 3). It is important to stress that this oldest attestation of the Latin word *dialectus* is remarkably untypical, in that *dialectus* seems to be explicitly contrasted with *lingua*. Elsewhere, however, Codro (1502: F.v^r) equated *dialectus* with *lingua* (“Sunt enim Graecorum *dialecti* seu *linguae* quinque, Aeolica, Ionica, Dorica, Attica et communis”).

been naturalized as a Latin word at Guarino's time of writing. This relates to the fact that Cicero, who was regarded by many early Humanists as the single authoritative model for Latin prose, had not employed the term in his extant works. Consequently, many purist (Ciceronian) Humanists did not Latinize the Greek term either. It was only around the turn of the sixteenth century that the word was admitted and gradually integrated into the Neo-Latin vocabulary, mainly through a twist of fate in textual criticism.¹⁵ At this point, we would like to emphasize that, once the word *dialectus* was introduced into the Latin lexicon in references to and descriptions of the Ancient Greek dialects, it did not immediately denote the idea of 'superficial linguistic variation'. The term was used with a wide range of meanings. Like Greek διάλεκτος, it could refer to the notions of 'manner of speaking', 'idiom', and 'language', to the point of being used interchangeably with terms such as *sermo*, *idioma*, and *lingua*.¹⁶ Nevertheless, we observe how scholars with an interest in the historiographical writings of Tacitus, Caesar, and Strabo gradually started using the word *dialectus* in phrases in which the idea of superficial linguistic variation is clearly presupposed and in which reference to Greek is either made in passing or not at all. The geographical origin of this semantic expansion can be located in present-day Southern Germany and Switzerland, where the Latin term *dialectus* had first moved from the Italian peninsula. In his 1536 commentary on Tacitus' *Germania*, the South German Humanist and reformed pastor Andreas Althamer (ca. 1500–ca. 1539) states the following when discussing German toponyms:

Besides, it is a safe guess that the vernacular word itself, *Bach*, is derived from *pagus*, for some pronounce it *bach*, others *pag*, with the German dialect varying somewhat, just like the Greeks say πηγῇ and παγά, φήμη and φάμα.¹⁷

By making use of the collocation *variare nonnihil* ('to vary somewhat'), Althamer undeniably links the word *dialectus* to superficial variation.¹⁸ Ancient Greek dialectal variation functions here as a bridging context: the words *bach* and *pag* display a limited formal difference, similar to the one perceived in the Ancient Greek words πηγῇ and φήμη which appear as παγά and φάμα in the Doric

¹⁵ Van Rooy (2017: Chapter 2) demonstrates how the adoption of *dialectus* as an approved Latin word owed much to its (nowadays no longer accepted) presence in the *textus receptus* of many incunabula containing Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (at 1.5.29) and its consequent inclusion in the widely used 1502 dictionary of Ambrogio Calepino (Ambrosius Calepinus; ca. 1435/36/40–1510/11). See Calepino (1502: s.v.): "Dialectos Graeci vocant loquendi genera, sicuti docet Quintil[ianus] li[bro] I, quae apud illos quinque sunt, s[cilicet] Ionica, Dorica, Attica, Aeolica et Communis lingua." This dictionary enjoyed a vast number of reprints and adaptations (see, e.g., Considine 2008: 29). From Northern Italy, the term *dialectus* first crossed the Alps into German-speaking areas before reaching the rest of Western Europe.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Alciati (1530: A.2^R): "Nos qui gentilitia dialecto ab eis toto caelo dissidemus [...]." Here, *dialectus* is even used to express a substantial difference. Cf. also, e.g., Pistorius (1582: 1.85): "Tametsi dialectis ea tam varia est, ut nonnulli ex his populis aegre et vix se invicem intelligant."

¹⁷ "Ingens praeterea coniectura est ipsum vernaculum vocabulum Bach a pago derivatum, nam alii bach alii pag pronuntiant, variante nonnihil Germanica dialecto, quemadmodum Graeci πηγῇ et παγά dicunt, φήμη et φάμα" (Althamer 1536: 275). Althamer's shorter first version of his commentary (viz. his 1529 *Scholia*) omits this passage.

¹⁸ Cf. also Gessner (1561: *.4^V & *.5^V) for similar phrases linking *dialectus* to superficial linguistic differences.

dialect.¹⁹ It thus seems plausible that Althamer, influenced by his intuitive comparison with a similar situation in Greek, applied the term *dialectus* to denote dialectal variation in German.²⁰

The association of *dialectus* with superficial variation is even clearer in a posthumously published commentary on Caesar's work by the philologist Johannes Rhellicanus (Johann Müller; 1477/78–1542), printed in Zurich seven years later. Born in Rellikon, he taught Hebrew and Greek in nearby Zurich (see Stotz in Bullinger 1987: 186; Van Hal 2011; Germann 2012). [100] Unlike his compatriots, Rhellicanus very much doubted the widely-held view that the languages of ancient Germany and Gaul were identical. As a matter of fact, there was a strong tendency among German-speaking historians to regard the ill-documented language of the ancient Gauls as identical (or almost identical) to German. In so doing, these historians hoped to boast a time-honored past (see Van Hal 2013/14 for a general survey). This is why Rhellicanus claims:

Accordingly, I do not doubt that Polybius, Pliny, Tacitus, and other authors who visited Germany and Gaul would have indicated that both of them had the same language, if *they varied only in dialect*.²¹

This is, to the best of our knowledge, the first instance in which the phrase 'to vary only in dialect' is employed literally. Hence, it appears as though Rhellicanus can be credited with having coined the collocation that would have such a spectacular career throughout the early modern period. It is very plausible that in the passage quoted above Rhellicanus alludes to Heinrich Glarean's (Henricus Glareanus; 1488–1563) 1538 commentary on Caesar's *Commentarii de bello Gallico*. This Glarus-born scholar, who was mainly active in Basel and Freiburg im Breisgau (see Bächtold 2006), wrote the following:

But who does not know that the language of the Treviri is ancient and *not very different from the language of the Germans*? [...] In fact, here we are treating the languages of the Gauls, between which, as Caesar says, there was *some difference*, as is still the case today. Yet nothing

¹⁹ Note that Althamer (1536: 274) believes that *pagus* derives from πᾱγῆ. He might have been motivated by the Doric form πᾱγᾱ́ to posit this etymology.

²⁰ In 1541, *dialectus* might also be associated with superficial variation in a work by Hubert Thomas from Liège, although this is not entirely clear. See Thomas (1541: 8): "Dialectus enim Sicamborum, Tungrorum, Menapiorum, Bethasiorum et Masacorum una est et a superioribus Germanis aliquantum discrepat." The surgeon Mariano Santo (1543: 111^R), mainly active in Rome, uses the phrase *idiomate tantum differre* in a sense different from the one we are presently investigating: "Tamen nos non invenimus distinctionem, apud Persas et Egiptios qua inter eorum nominationem species aliqua distingueretur, sed unum et idem significare apud nos idiomate tantum differens." Santo makes reference to the *meaning* of one word, which is said to "differ in particularity only" across different peoples, and does not identify *relationships between languages*.

²¹ "Proinde mihi dubium non est, quin Polybius, Plinius, Tacitus et alii scriptores, qui Germaniam et Galliam inviserunt, indicassent eandem utrisque linguam fuisse, si *dialecto tantum inter se variassent*" (Rhellicanus 1543: 73). See also Rhellicanus (1543: 73): "Nec est quod nasutus et argutulus aliquis dicat Celticam *dialectum dumtaxat* a Suevica *diversam* fuisse; ad quam discendam perinde longo usu habuerit opus, ut si quis Suevus nunc inferiorum Germanorum proprietatem ac pronuntiationem addiscere vellet."

impedes the designation of it with one and the same common name, *even though it is not entirely the same, but very slightly varied*, which also happens in the Greek language.²²

Interestingly enough, Glarean provides three phraseological alternatives (cf. italics) to express the idea that the Gaulish and German speech forms show only superficial differences. Of these alternatives, one is clearly indebted to Guarino Veronese's Latin translation of Strabo's *Geographica*. Like Althamer, Glarean refers to a similar situation in Greek, though without explicitly employing the word *dialectus*. Glarean was thus an early supporter of the equation of the Gauls with the Germans, and it is likely that Rhellicanus, who advocated the opposite stance, concisely paraphrased Glarean's argument before attacking it.²³

We thus claim that the phrase 'to differ only in dialect' emerged at the crossroads of Greek studies and German-oriented antiquarianism in the intellectual circles of Bavaria, Württemberg, and Switzerland in the course of the first half of the sixteenth century. Scholars, such as Althamer and Rhellicanus, both of whom were significant figures in the revival of Greek studies, are thus likely to have adapted the word *dialectus* to the context of regional historiography, where it could be operationalized as a powerful argumentative strategy (see §5).

Although it is difficult further to trace the ultimate origins of the phrase with certainty, we can offer a hypothetical outline of how this transposition from Greek grammaticography to historiography might have happened. However, before doing so, we need to look at two concise grammars of Greek, composed by Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Jacobus Ceperinus (Jakob Wiesendanger; ca. 1499/1500–1525) and first published in 1518 (Haguenau & Tübingen) and 1522 (Basel) respectively, which are likely to have been sources of inspiration for the coining of the phrase 'to differ only in dialect'. Both grammars were very successful in terms of the numerous reprints they enjoyed. Browsing through these works, the reader encounters several instances in which *dialectus* is collocated with the noun *varietas* and—more importantly—with the verb *variare*. So, for instance, Ceperinus' grammar has a paragraph entitled "How the prepositive and subjunctive article

²² "Quis autem nescit Trevirorum linguam antiquam esse, *nec multo a Germanorum lingua diversam?* [...] Nos enim hic de Gallorum linguis tractamus, inter quas, ut Caesar ait, *differentia aliqua* fuit, ut etiamnum hodie est. Nihil tamen impedit quin communi appellatione eadem ac una nominetur, *quamquam non usquequaque eadem, sed paululum variata*, id quod in Graeca quoque lingua accidit" (Glarean 1538: 19). Conrad Gessner (1555: 21^v) extensively quotes from Glarean's work in his *Mithridates*, including the passage cited and translated here (see Colombat & Peters 2009: 152).

²³ Judging by his own words, however, Rhellicanus regarded himself as the first commentator of Caesar. In his preface, he wrote how he had "only 'heard' of unpublished 'commentationes' produced by Henricus Glareanus [...] some years earlier" (Brown 1976: 107). This is rather bizarre in view of the fact that three editions of Glarean's commentaries existed by the time Rhellicanus was writing—perhaps he wanted to avoid a rivalry with Glarean (see Brown 1976: 107)? It appears that Rhellicanus, who might have started lecturing on Caesar as early as 1529 (Brown 1976: 107), attempted deliberately to overlook Glarean's work, but precisely by paraphrasing Glarean's opinion he gives himself away. In a later commentary, Glarean shows that he had not changed his mind, although his wording echoes Rhellicanus's phrasing: "surely the Gaulish language and that of the Germans *differ in dialect*, not in the primary elements (*themata*), just like Italian, Spanish, and French today descend from the Roman [sc. Latin] language." ("Sane Gallica lingua ac Germanorum dialecto differunt, non thematis, quemadmodum Italica, Hispanica ac Francica hodie e Romana sunt lingua [...]"), Glarean 1560: 51).

vary among dialects.”²⁴ It [101] is very important to stress that such phrases do not yet convey the idea of superficial variation, but simply denote the idea that certain linguistic features of the Ancient Greek language exhibit variation from one dialect to another. This changes in the works of Althamer and Rhellicanus, both of whom were without doubt thoroughly acquainted with these two grammars: there is enough biographical documentation available to prove this point.²⁵ This is why Althamer (“variante nonnihil Germanica dialecto”) and Rhellicanus (“dialecto tantum inter se variassent”), as ‘heavy users’ of these grammars, might have been influenced by the phrase *variare dialectis*. By adding the word ‘only’ (*tantum*), the association with superficial variation was irrefutably born. In sum, it appears that the collocation emerged at the crossroads of Greek studies and the study of ancient historiography, two significant domains in Western European Humanism.

5. The further career of the phrase and its argumentative potential

Using a modern expression, one could say that the phrase *dialecto tantum variare* ‘went viral’ from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards. Whilst to a modern reader it might seem surprising that some loose remarks in a commentary may have had such an impact, it is important to remember that in the early modern period commentaries were of pivotal importance in both classroom education and the circulation of knowledge (see Enenkel & Nellen 2013). This paragraph will examine in what contexts and for what aims the phrase was so abundantly employed throughout the early modern period.

We notice that ‘to differ in dialect only’ remains current in contexts very similar to those in which it originated, namely as a paraphrase of ancient passages discussing the close linguistic kinship between tongues that are now classified as Celtic. The Leiden professor Marcus Zuerius van Boxhorn (1612–1653), for instance, rephrases Tacitus’ “sermo haud multum diversus” (see *supra*) as a

²⁴ “Ut articulus praepositivus et subiunctivus *dialectis variant*” (A.v^R). *Articulus praepositivus* refers to the article, whereas *articulus subiunctivus* denotes the relative pronoun. For other examples, see Melanchthon (1518): “Si lubet huc *pro varietate dialecton* [transcription of διαλέκτων] collige literarum passionēs, quibus mutatis saepe et prosodiae mutantur. ἀχλλέος communiter ἀχλλήος Ionice μόνος μούνος” (b.iv^{R-V}), “*variatio κατὰ διαλέκτους*” (g.iv^V), “Praeteritum plusquamperfectum εἶδειν et diphthongi temperamento ἦδειν. Vides ergo primae syllabae variationem, posterior syllaba *dialectis variat*. Nam pro ἐτετύφειν regulari praeterito plusquamperfecto dicunt Iones ἐτετύφεα. Sic ergo pro εἶδειν vel ἦδειν est ἦδεα” (p.iii^R). See also Ceporinus (1522): “*Variatio dialectorum*” (A.v^R, A.v^V & C.v^R), “Alias in ις pro ιος flexa, *variant dialectis*, et contrahuntur hoc modo. ὁ ὄφις τοῦ ὄφιος, Ionice ὄφεος, Attice ὄφεως” (A.viii^V). Cf. also the Greek grammar by the Spanish Humanist Francisco de Vergara (1537: 210): “De Dorica et Aeolica hoc ipsum propemodum traditur, loco videlicet ac tempore *nonnihil variasse*.” In the second half of the sixteenth century, similar phrases also start to appear in vernacular grammars; see Johannes Claius’ German grammar on *pluralia tantum*: “Sed et haec et superiora *variant ratione dialectorum*” (1578: 76).

²⁵ Althamer was still a student when Melanchthon’s grammar was first published in 1518. What is more, from 1525 onwards, he studied theology at Wittenberg (Ulery 1986: 148), where Melanchthon was professor of Greek. He likewise sent his commentary on Tacitus’ *Germania* to Melanchthon, who advised him to revise it further (Krebs 2011: Ch. 4). Rhellicanus, in turn, personally knew Ceporinus, who, before his untimely death in December 1525, was professor of Greek and Hebrew in Zurich for a few months (Botley 2010: 50; see also a 1525 letter from Rhellicanus to Zwingli on Ceporinus’ death in Zwingli 1830: 449–450). Both grammars were praised by the Swiss Protestant theologian Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), who admired his teacher Rhellicanus (see Stotz in Bullinger 1987: 186–187). Rhellicanus might thus have used both grammars in his courses. Bullinger was the successor of Ulrich Zwingli (Stotz in Bullinger 1987: 187), who, in turn, had also praised Ceporinus’ grammar and specifically his discussion of the Greek dialects (Botley 2010: 50).

difference “*dialecto tantum*”.²⁶ The English antiquarian and Hellenist William Camden (1551–1623), in turn, uses the phrase “*dialecto tantum discrepasse*” when paraphrasing Strabo’s view of the Celtic languages (see Camden 1587: 15). In the next sentence, he rephrases Caesar’s statement: the *lingua Gallica* and the *lingua Britannica* “were the same, except, perhaps, for a variety of dialect” (“*eandem [...] fuisse (nisi forte dialecti varietate) [...]*”).

We argue that the phrase ‘to differ only in dialect’ owed its popularity first and foremost to its enticing argumentative potential in a wide range of early modern debates, particularly in historiographic-ethnographic and theological fields. First of all, we observe how scholars readily used the phrase as a historiographic strategy in order to connect two peoples. Very often, nationalist-like motives were at stake (cf. Hirschi 2012: 119–179), as many early historiographers were eager to construct a glorious past for their fellow-countrymen. We have already seen how intensively the phrase was used (and even originated) in debates over the ancient Gaulish heritage, during which scarce and contradictory historical evidence was often usurped to serve the author’s own ideas and discursive aims. Whereas Camden (see *supra*) wanted to prove the common origin of the Gauls and the Britons, the Dutch scholar Johannes Isacius Pontanus (1571–1639) makes use of the phrase so as to defend the Celtic-Germanic unity, like the majority of Germanic-speaking authors on the continent.²⁷ Some authors went so far as to claim that a given set of ethnonyms, e.g. *Scythae*, *Gothi*, *Suedi*, “only differ in dialect”—which is of course, in function of one’s own argumentative strategy, an all too easy move to equate a number of peoples on the basis of just a few names.²⁸

[102] Needless to say, not all authors who regarded the close link between two speech forms as an indication of a close relationship between the users of these speech forms had such ambitions. The French jurist and historian Jean Bodin (Johannes Bodinus; 1529/30–1596) related the following in his widely-known manual on historiographic methodology:

Yes indeed, Procopius and Albertus Crantius narrate that the Slavs invaded Pannonia from Scandinavia in Justinian’s times. Later on, that people filled the whole of Europe with the fame

²⁶ Boxhorn (1654: 70–71): “Si enim tribus in regionibus hodie supersint veterum Britannorum eorumque sermonis reliquiae, Cambria nempe aut Wallia, Cornubia et Armorica Galliae, quae Britannorum colonia etiamnum Britannia appellatur et Gallorum sermo ille vetustissimus a Britannico *haud multum*, id est, *dialecto tantum*, testante Tacito, fuerit *diversus*, sequitur, ex earum gentium lingua, qualis vetusta, de qua hic agitur, Gallorum fuerit, facile posse intelligi.” See also Pontanus (1606: *.4^R), who mentions that there are commentators of Caesar who contradict Strabo’s view that the languages of the Belgians and Celts only differed superficially (in dialect). Cf. also the following note of Isaac Casaubon (1587: 68) on the relevant passage in Strabo’s work: “ἀλλ’ ἐνίοις μικρὸν παραλλάττοντας ταῖς γλώσσαις) Etiam hodie de Gallis vere dixeris quod olim de Graecis Strabo, eos nimirum σχεδὸν κατὰ πόλεις ἄλλους ἄλλως διαλέγεσθαι. Nam in Gallia certe nostra, tot fere linguae sunt, aut certe tot eiusdem linguae dialecti, ac diversi pronuntiandi modi, quot sunt Galliae, non dicam provinciae, sed urbes.” See also Schrieckius (1615: 54), who approves of Casaubon’s remark, while using the phrase “*dialecto tantum*”.

²⁷ See Van Hal (2013/14: resp. 219–220; 236–237; 238–241). See Pontanus (1606: 165): “Nam cum Caesar Gallorum alios Aquitanos alios Gallos, alios Belgas faciat omnesque non modo institutis verum etiam lingua discrepantes, adicit Strabo discrepantiam eam de *dialecto tantummodo* capiendam.” Cf. furthermore Besoldus (1619: 87).

²⁸ See, e.g., “Addo et illud, *Scytharum, Gothorum, Getarum et Suetarum, Suedorumve*, ut gentem hodie appellant, eadem esse vocabula, ac diversa, pro diversis saeculis, pronuntiandi emunciative [*sic*, probably “enunciative” was meant] *dialecto tantum differre*” (Boxhorn 1652: 224; original italics). For ethnonyms, cf. also Reineccius (1574: 37) and Vossius (1645: (**.2)^R; quoted *sub* §3).

of its name and language. For so it is that I hear that Poles, Bohemians, Russians, Lithuanians, Muscovites, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Croatians, Dalmatians, and Vandals use the same language of the Slavs, which is used in Scandinavia, and differ only in dialect.²⁹

Here, Bodin employs a linguistic argument to prove the original unity of the Slavic peoples, all of whom, in his view, came from Scandinavia.³⁰ Indeed, we see that the phrase also proved to be useful to authors who endeavored to cast some light on ethnic prehistory by comparing languages. The insight, most likely first formulated by Bodin, that languages could help write prehistory was time and again emphasized in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz' letters and writings (see also Van Hal 2014). Hence, it does not come as a surprise that Leibniz makes analytical use of the phrase in his Latin work *Succinct account of meditations on the origins of peoples, primarily inferred from linguistic evidence*.³¹

The argumentative potential of the phrase was also acknowledged by some theologians, who intended to find a solution to a vexing issue. Based on Noah's pedigree, as outlined in Genesis 10, a consensus arose in the Middle Ages that 72 languages had emerged following the Flood. Early cataloguers of the world's languages, however, found that the real number was larger by far. By pointing out that many of these languages only differed in terms of dialect, some scholars found a clever loophole.³² It is, however, important to add that many theologians had already pointed out that the initial number of 72 languages, resulting from the *confusio Babylonica*, had increased over time through migrations and mixtures of peoples.³³ For other Bible-related issues too the collocation 'to differ only in dialect' proved a welcome tool. For instance, the Cambridge-based churchman William Whitaker (1548–1595) asserts that only books written in Hebrew could be authentic parts of the Old Testament. An exception, according to Whitaker (1585: 25), are the Aramaic passages in the Book of Daniel: "As for *Daniel*, albeit some parte of him be written in the Chaldey tongue, yet was it

²⁹ "Quin etiam Procopius et Albertus Crantius tradunt Sclavos ex [...] Scandia Iustiniani temporibus in Pannoniam irrupisse; postea gens illa sui nominis ac linguae fama Europam universam implevit; sic enim audio Polonos, Bohemos, Russios, Lithuanos, Moschovitas, Bossinios, Bulgaros, Servios, Croatios, Dalmatas, Vandalos eadem Sclavorum uti lingua, quae in Scandia usurpatur, ac sola dialecto differre [...]" (Bodin 1566: 439).

³⁰ Elsewhere Bodin (1566: 408) applies the collocation to the relationship between Chaldean and Hebrew. See also Caspar Peucer in Carion & Peucer (1562: 88^v-89^r): "Inter hos populos praecipui fuerunt Hunni, Sarmatae cumque his Heneti et ὁμόγλωττοι gentes Germanorum. Non enim lingua, sed idiomate tantum ac dialecto discerno Gottos, Francos, Burgundos, Longobardos, Alanos, Suevos, Anglos, sicut reipsa linguis non discreparunt." See also Carion & Melanchthon (1560: 124^r) for the association of *dialectus* with superficial variation in the context of the Slavic languages.

³¹ See Leibniz (1710: 4): "Nec Amharica ab Aethiopica vulgari nisi dialecto distat". See also Leibniz (1991: 226-227) and Ten Kate (1723: 1.21): "Want, gelijkheid van talen (die niet meer dan in dialect verschillen) geeft gelijkheid van af komst te kennen [...]."

³² "En tibi apud Hispanos cuncti praeter Vascones Romana utuntur lingua, quamvis dialectis, id est, loquendi proprietatibus inter se paulominus, quam Graeci sint differentes. Hac denique ratione forsitan ad septuaginta linguarum genera universa loquendi idiomata revocari possunt" (Honcala 1555: 77^v; see also Merula 1605: 207 defending a similar stance). Conversely, other scholars employed the same phrase to emphasize that the (initial) languages resulting from the Babylonian confusion were not just different in dialect (see, e.g., Mornay 1583: 575 and Skinner 1671: B.1^{r-v}), whereas Monboddo (1774: 578) argued that the primeval language was a language that "could not have been invented by man, but was revealed from heaven, it is evident, that this revealed language is the only primitive one, and that all the other languages of the world are *only dialects* of it, more or less pure."

³³ See, e.g., already Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.21.142.2-3, for which, see Van Rooy (2013: 39).

understood of the Church, being then in captiuitie vnder the Babylonians: and that tongue is but a diuerse *dialect* from the Hebrew, and differeth littel from it". Finally, the potential of the phrase is crystal clear when the Anglo-Welsh novelist and grammarian James Howell (ca. 1594–1666) claims that "of those two and twenty tongues, which Mithridates [sc. VI, king of Pontus] is recorded to have understood, above two parts of three, I beleeeve, were but dialects" (Howell 1642: 150). In other words, the phrase 'to differ only in dialect' also proves to be a handy means when it comes to relativizing someone's proficiency in foreign languages.³⁴

It goes without saying that the collocation 'to differ in dialect only' also appeared in works primarily devoted to language, such as in the widely known *Mithridates* (1555), in which the Swiss botanist and scholar Conrad Gessner (1516–1565) offers a survey of the world's languages—limited, of course, to those that were known to him.³⁵ In some cases, the phrase is employed to make spectacular claims. To the numerous statements of Germanic-speaking scholars claiming the Gaulish heritage (see fn. 26) we can add the assertions by, for instance, Méric Casaubon (1650: 139) and Franciscus Junius (1665: *.3^v), who argue that Greek differs from Saxon and Gothic only in terms of dialect. Nonetheless, most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars appear to have employed the phrase to indicate affinities between the speech forms belonging to the language [103] families that are nowadays known as Germanic,³⁶ Insular Celtic,³⁷ Slavic,³⁸ and—especially—Semitic.³⁹ The phrase is, to our surprise, only rarely applied to the Romance languages and the Ancient Greek dialects themselves.⁴⁰ Occasionally, the collocation is also used to map distant

³⁴ Howell was likely inspired by Merula (1605: 209), who makes use of a similar argument, albeit without employing the phrase.

³⁵ See, e.g., "Livonum vel Livorum et Lituorum et Curorum lingua, eadem est quae vetus Prussica; dialectis tantum variant" (Gessner 1555: 60^r). For another example of such a purely descriptive use of the phrase, see Johannes Mączyński's (ca. 1520–ca. 1587) dedicatory letter accompanying his 1564 *Lexicon Latinopolonicum*: "Quae nationes omnes unum et idem genus sermonis Slavonici agnoscunt, et dialectis tantum inter se variant" (Mączyński 1564:)(1^v).

³⁶ See, e.g., Pontanus (1631: 792): "Reliquum est demonstrare Danicam, Suedicam et Norvagicam linguas inter se tantummodo dialecto differre [...]." See also Camden (1605: 14), Richardson (1627: 41), De Laet (1643: 144), Urquhart (1653: 5), Fuller (1655: 81), Hickes (1689: b.3^r), Brönwall & Näsman (1733: 11, 17, 18), and Richey (1755: xxvi).

³⁷ See, e.g., Carew (1602: 55^r): "And as the Cornish names hold an affinity with the Welsh, so is their language deduced from the same source, and differeth onely in the dialect." See also Gatterer (1770: 7), clearly echoing Leibniz's idea that languages can help write history: "Daß die heutigen Einwohner von Wales, Cornwal und Bretagne mit Rechte zu Einem Völkerstamme gerechnet werden, beweist die genaue Verwandtschaft ihrer Sprachen, die sich nur als Mundarten unterscheiden."

³⁸ For an example regarding the Slavic context, see mainly Bodin (1566: 439), quoted above, and Rastell, who states that in the Slavic tongue, "the difference consiste in dialecte and proprietie only" (Rastell 1566: 75^r [sic pro 65^r]). Rastell's statement was doubtlessly motivated by Bodin's account as well as by Gessner's *Mithridates*—see Van Rooy & Considine (2016: 648–649).

³⁹ See, e.g., Leigh (1656: 58): "The Syriack and Chaldee are as it were but dialects of the Hebrew (differing not much more then Northern and Western speech from plain English) and though they be nearly allied to the Hebrew, yet they are nearer one to the other, insomuch that some reckon them both one." See also Mylius (1612: 19), Mayer (1629: 16–17), Grotius (1644: 20), Leusden (1656: 201), Hammond (1659: 746), Gale (1670: 132), Stiernhielm (1671: c.3^v), Hale (1677: 162), Pococke (1677: 6), Bagnati (1732: 88), Schultens (1737: 3), Hof (1772: 13–14) for other instances.

⁴⁰ Romance variation is often described in terms of corruption. For rare examples of the phrase's usage with reference to Romance, see, e.g., Poza (1587: 67^{r-v}): "Porro lingua Gallica de qua et de Flandrica conflata est Anglica, matricem habet linguam Romanam, quemadmodum et Italica Pedemontana, Hispanica et quas istae pepererunt alias multas, dialectis tantum dissidentes [...]." See also Glarean (1560: 51), Pontanus (1606: 85), Howell (1642: 21–22), Urquhart (1653: 5),

languages, spoken in the New World or Asia.⁴¹ Despite the wide diffusion of the collocation, there are also primary sources in which the phrase is strikingly absent. In the essays accompanying the collection of the Lord's Prayer translations edited by John Chamberlayne (1666–1723) and David Wilkins (1685–1745), plenty of attention is directed to dialects (Chamberlayne 1715: *passim*), although the phrase under investigation is hardly operationalized (Wotton 1715: 59 has the only occurrence of the collocation we were able to trace in this collection).

What exactly do early modern scholars understand by such 'differences merely in terms of dialect'? A number of them make it explicit that these differences pertain particularly to the phonic level, especially vowels, which throughout the early modern era were generally considered to be far less stable in pronunciation than consonants.⁴² Other authors suggest that dialectal diversity resides merely in the manner of pronunciation and writing.⁴³ An interesting criterion put forward at times is that of 'mutual intelligibility'. Although considered by several authors to be a litmus test for distinguishing dialects from languages,⁴⁴ there are some authors who highlight that mutual intelligibility is not a crucial condition for stipulating that two speech varieties 'differ only in dialect'.⁴⁵

Some of the above examples have already shown that the phrase was not only used in Latin discourse, but that it was also seamlessly adapted to vernacular discourse, especially in English.⁴⁶ A marginal note—containing a reference to Gessner's *Mithridates*—suggests that John Rastell's (1532–1577) very early use of the phrase was directly borrowed from Latin:

here be about three skore seuerall countries, that use the tounge named Illyrica, but though the kind of the tounge be one, and the *difference consiste in dialecte and proprietie only*: yet

Chambers (1728: LH, 230 in entry "HEBREW"). For even rarer applications to the Ancient Greek context, see, e.g., Saumaise (1643: 356), who states with regard to the Thessalian and Macedonian dialects: "Lingua porro utriusque populi minime dispar, nec nisi dialecto differebat." Saumaise was inspired by Strabo, *Geographica* 7.7.8: "ὅτι καὶ κουρῶ καὶ διαλέκτω καὶ χαλμῦδι, καὶ ἄλλοις τοιούτοις χρῶνται παραπλησίως." See also Fuller (1655: 81), Sammes (1676: 76), Schwartz & Helm (1702: A.2^v), and Bagnati (1732: 88). For vernacular Greek, there seems to be at least one passage in which a similar phrase is used—see Meggen (1580: 78–79), in which dialectal variation between Cypriot and Cretan Greek is briefly mentioned.

⁴¹ See, e.g., De Laet (1643: 27): "Porro Novae Hispaniae incolae infinita paene idiomatum varietate inter se discrepant, quae non tantum dialectis variant, sed plane diversae sunt linguae; nam et Otomies, et Mechuacani, (quos Hispani hodie vocant Tarascos) et plurimi alii suas proprias linguas habuerunt." See Purchas (1613: 581) for the languages spoken in Angola and Congo. The phrase is occasionally also applied to the Persian context (see Hyde 1700: 333).

⁴² See, e.g., Raphelengius (1584 [1983: 123]), within the context of the interrelationship of Persian and Germanic: "Kast', apud eosdem, est Arca, cista. 'Band', ponitur pro prohiberi, coacerari, quasi vinculo constringi. Invenio etiam 'Dare' pro ostio (pro 'deure') nam non magni facio vocales, cum harum sit tantum formare varios [*sic*] dialectos." Consonants can also be said to 'vary in dialect only'—see Ten Kate (1723: 1.69), where it is said of the "letters" V, F, B, and P, and Saumaise (1643: 368), who claims that the two words *Wasser* and *Water* "do not differ except in dialect".

⁴³ See Schilter (1728: 342): "sed non diversa esse [viz. vocabula], nisi sola pronuntiandi et scribendi dialecto."

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Goropius (1580: 3–4), Walton (1657: 3), and Lhuys (1707: 1).

⁴⁵ "Non Saxones et Scoti, Belgae et Angli se mutuo intelligent, etsi dumtaxat dialecto differunt" (Mylius 1612: 85).

⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, the English word *dialect(e)* first occurs in the works of English exiles working on the European continent (see Van Rooy & Considine 2016 for the early history of the English word).

they vnderstand not one the other, as in example: Hungarians, Moscouites, Polonians, Sclauons, Bohemians, et cet.⁴⁷

In other vernaculars, it appears to have taken somewhat longer for the phrase to arrive.⁴⁸ Revealingly, Philippe de Mornay (1549–1623) introduced the phrase in a self-made Latin translation of an apologetic piece he had composed in French (published in 1581), in which the collocation did not appear (compare Mornay 1583: 575 with Mornay 1581: 650).

Sinclair’s (1991: 111) observation that many phrases allow internal lexical and syntactic variation also holds for the collocation ‘to differ in dialect only’. Its principal appearances in Latin can be visualized as follows: [104]

<i>dialecto</i> <i>dialectis</i>	<i>sola</i> <i>tantum</i> <i>dumtaxat</i> <i>tantummodo</i>	<i>variare</i> <i>differre</i> <i>discrepare</i> <i>dissidere</i> <i>distare</i> <i>diversi, -ae, -a esse</i>
<i>non nisi</i> <i>vix nisi</i>	<i>dialecto</i>	

Table 1: The Latin guises of the phrase ‘to differ only in dialect’
(the most frequent ones offered in bold)

Apart from using the phrase *dialecto tantum variare*, Rhellicanus, who was—as we have seen—the probable coiner of the collocation, also speaks of Celtic as a *dialectus dumtaxat a Suevica diversa*. Other sixteenth-century variations include *dialectis tantum inter se variare* (Mączyński 1564), *sola dialecto differre* (Bodin 1566), and *dialecto tantum differre* (Mornay 1583).⁴⁹ The last two seem to have become the most frequent forms in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Important to observe here is that, in contrast to the phrase’s other components, the Latin word *dialectus* (most frequently in the ablative case) has almost no alternative terminological guises. There is the example of Caspar Peucer (1525–1602), who, in a work conceived of as a furthering of Johannes Carion’s (1499–1537) *Chronicon*, “distinguishes” a number of Germanic peoples “not in language, but only in idiom and dialect” (Peucer in Carion & Peucer 1562: 88^v; see note 30 for the original passage). The logician Alexander Richardson († 1621 or earlier; 1657: 15) similarly collocates ‘dialect’ and ‘idiom’. Other exceptions, in which *dialect(us)* is replaced by other terms such as *proprietie* and *idioma*, are rare.⁵⁰ In vernacular discourse, too, the word *dialect* (and its equivalents, especially *Mundart*) is a constant element. Our concluding section seeks to demonstrate that, in view of the above, it is very likely that

⁴⁷ Rastell (1566: 64^v–65^r). See also Rastell (1566: 68^r): “[...] we see by experience at these dayes, that every Englishman understandeth not ye Scot, nor ye lower countries that speak Duch, understand the hygh Almanes (which yet *differ but in dialect*) [...]”

⁴⁸ The first example of German we were able to trace is from Schottel (1663: 154): “Zustimmige/so an sich teutsch und durch die Ausrede und Mundartweis nur unterschieden seyn/ bestehen entweder im [...]”

⁴⁹ The phrase Althamer used (*dialectus* in combination with *variare nonnihil*) enjoyed some success as well. Several authors use (variants of) it: see, e.g., Goropius (1569: 426) and Kiliaan (1599: *.3^r).

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Mornay (1587: 123), Richardson (1657: 5), and Caramuel y Lobkowitz (1670: 751).

the phrase had a considerable impact on early modern and, eventually, present-day conceptualizations of ‘dialect’.

6. Conclusions: the phrase’s impact on the conceptual pair ‘dialect’ and ‘language’

This paper has demonstrated that our present-day concept of ‘dialect’ is clearly not a straightforward loan from Ancient Greek grammatical learning, in which the notion of ‘superficial variation’ was still absent. We have endeavored to show that the emergence of the conceptual pair in which ‘dialect’ was both opposed to and subsumed under ‘language’ can be traced to the sixteenth century, and that the phrase ‘to differ only in dialect’, coined by South German and Swiss scholars with a firm background in Greek grammar, has contributed considerably to the crystallization of the twin concepts. One could, however, argue that the collocation ‘to differ only in dialect’ makes sense if and only if the concept of ‘dialect’ in its specified sense, viz. in opposition to language, was already present. Nonetheless, Raf Van Rooy’s (2017: Chapters 1-3) extensive terminographical and conceptual research has revealed that

- the use of the term *dialectus* was initially restricted to texts focusing on the Ancient Greek context. In the Ancient Greek and Byzantine tradition, the association with superficial variation was absent, and the contrast between ‘dialect’ and ‘language’ was not made (cf. Van Rooy 2016).
- attestations of the word *dialect* in the Western vernacular languages before 1550 are extremely limited in number;
- the semantic scope of the earliest attestations of the term *dialectus* in Neo-Latin texts is very wide, covering, most importantly, ‘dialect’, ‘language’, ‘manner of speaking’, ‘style’, and ‘dialectal feature’;
- there were various alternative terms and circumscriptions to refer to variation within one language (such as *diversitas loquendi*, *varietas linguae*, *idioma*, *modus loquendi*, and especially *proprietas linguae*);
- the textual attestations in which *lingua* and *dialectus* were explicitly opposed before 1550 are rare (important exceptions are Erasmus 1519: 202 and Vives 1533: P.vii^B).

These findings lead to the conclusion that, from a chronological point of view, the rise of the phrase under investigation went hand in hand with the crystallization of the conceptual pair ‘language’ and ‘dialect’. Hence, it seems plausible that the wide diffusion of the phrase ‘to differ only in dialect’ could have affected early modern interpretations of the ‘dialect’ concept. We have suggested that the debates over the nature of the Gauls’ language among early modern historiographers were, in this respect, of decisive significance. It was in these discussions that the phrase most likely emerged, and that the word *dialectus* and even the phrase *dialectis variare* were transposed from the domain of Greek grammaticography to the domain of German historiography. By adding a word designating ‘only’ (most commonly *solus* or *tantum*), the early modern commentators forged a close association between the term *dialectus* and the idea of superficial linguistic variation. Through the presence of

this crucial element ‘only’, the construction of the phrase itself implies that ‘dialect’ was subsumed under a concept situated at a higher level: that of ‘language’. In other words, the addition of ‘only’ seems to have diminished the [105] grade of vagueness that was until then inherent in the learned term *dialectus*. This is why the phrase, especially in view of its wide diffusion, may have substantially contributed to the widespread sixteenth-century emergence of the conceptual pair ‘dialect’ and ‘language’. Needless to say, it would be an exaggeration to assert that our present-day concept of dialect is entirely indebted to this sixteenth-century event. Van Rooy (2017: Chapter 3) detects three other symptoms of the emergence of the conceptual pair during the first half of the sixteenth century: (1) the development of the concept of ‘common language’, presupposing the existence of non-common varieties, (2) the explicit contrasting of *lingua* to *dialectus*, and (3) the further determination of *lingua* in definitions of *dialectus*, in conjunction with the appearance of phrases such as ‘x is a dialect of language Y’. It is difficult to assess the interrelationship between these four indicators, all of which seem to have emerged in the same time span.

Although the concept of ‘language’ remained implicit in most sixteenth-century attestations of the phrase,⁵¹ some seventeenth-century testimonies testify to a more explicit opposition between dialect (*dialectus*) and language (*lingua*). In 1643, Johannes de Laet (1581–1649) stated, for instance, that the tongues of the New World “do not only differ in terms of dialect, but are entirely different languages”.⁵² It is therefore safe to say that the phrase greatly contributed to the disambiguation of *lingua* and *dialectus*, which, in the first few decades of the sixteenth century, were still interchangeably used. The wide dissemination of this popular and multifunctional phrase in a wide range of text types (see §5) thus catalyzed and considerably accelerated the increasing opposition between ‘dialects’ as varieties only differing superficially (in their accidents) on the one hand and ‘languages’ as speech forms differing substantially and hierarchically roofing several ‘dialects’ on the other.

Although it is fair to say that the original interchangeability did not at all vanish entirely, one can observe that, in the end, the term *dialect(us)* almost came to monopolize the concept of a ‘speech variety subordinate to a language with slightly deviating properties of its own’. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, scholars started offering contrastive definitions of ‘language’ and ‘dialect’, some of which clearly echo the phrase under investigation, e.g. “languages vary among each other, so to speak, in substance, but dialects only in their accidents”.⁵³ The following eighteenth-

⁵¹ See Buchanan (1582: 19^v & 20^v), where *sermo* and *dialectus* are explicitly opposed. Here, the element ‘only’ is absent, but the association of *dialectus* with superficial variation is unmistakably presupposed—see the addition of the adjective *totus* to *sermo*.

⁵² See fn. 4#. See also the following early and revealing statement by Merula (1605: 419): “Quod in lingua discrimen illud fuerit, an in dialectis solum, an in tota lingua, ut ea alia fuerit Aquitanis, alia Celtis, alia Belgis, nemo adhuc, quod ego quidem sciam, diffinire aperuit”. For other explicit oppositions, see, e.g., Cluverius (1616: 54), Walton (1657: 4), and Sherman (1664: 980).

⁵³ Kirchmaier & Jäger (1686: 17): “Linguae inter se substantia (ut ita loquar) differunt, sed dialecti tantum accidentibus.” This definition relies on the one given by the Swedish poet and scholar Georg Stiernhielm (1598–1672) in his *Preface on the origin of languages*, prefixed to his 1671 edition of the Gothic Bible: “Languages mutually differ in substance, in their foundation as it were, but dialects differ in accident. Languages are distinguished by matter, dialects by form.” [“Linguae inter se substantia, ceu subiecto; dialecti vero accidenti differunt. Linguae materia, dialecti forma distinguuntur”]

century definition of *dialectus* by the Dutch orientalist Albert Schultens (1686–1750) is revealing in several respects:

- I. A *dialect* is a *variation of one language*, which is only *external* and *accidental*, and which does not touch its *internal substance*, let alone that it *taints* and corrupts it.
- II. If the *root* and *marrow* are tainted, they no longer have to be called *dialects*, but *degenerate offshoots*, which have flown away to an entirely other nature.⁵⁴

Schultens was doubtlessly inspired by the phrase *dialecto tantum differre*, which he also employs elsewhere,⁵⁵ when defining *dialectus* in his defense of his method of conducting Hebrew philology. This clearly emerges from his wordings: note especially the terms *variatio* and *tantum* in combination with the adjectives *externus* and *accidentalis*, unmistakably linking ‘dialect’ to superficial (‘accidental’) linguistic variation. Schultens also transparently subsumes ‘dialect’ under ‘language’ by stipulating that a *dialectus* is a “variation of one language” (“*unius linguae variatio*”). Elsewhere he also characterizes a speech variety X as a dialect of language Y.⁵⁶ To Schultens’ mind, the conceptual pair needs to be conceived primarily from a diachronic perspective: ‘dialects’ historically derive from one common ‘language’, and can, in turn, develop into new ‘languages’.

We hope that this case study has convincingly demonstrated that more meticulous attention devoted to collocations could open up new and fruitful avenues in conceptual history. Indeed, collocations are clearly not merely post-factum embodiments of long-established meanings. On the contrary, they often reveal the implicit and intuitive presuppositions of scholars which only later influence interpretations and theories of the concepts in question. [106]

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(Stiernhielm 1671: c.4^R). See, e.g., also Ravis (1646: 42) and Blount (1656: s.v. “dialect”) for definitions in which this idea is also foregrounded. See Van Rooy (2017: Chapter 4, section 2.1) for a more extensive discussion.

⁵⁴ Schultens (1738: 109; original italics):

- I. *Dialectus est unius linguae variatio tantum externa et accidentalis, quae internam eius substantiam non attingit; nedum ut eam vitiet atque corrumpat.*
- II. *Si radix et medulla vitietur, non amplius dialecti appellari debent, sed degeneres propagines, quae in aliam plane indolem defluerunt.*” See Van Rooy (2017: Chapter 5, section 1) for Schultens’ views.

⁵⁵ See Schultens (1737: 3; original italics): “Iam vero *Chaldaica* ista et *Hebraica*, sive *Chananaea*, *dialecto* tantum differunt atque *linguae primaevae* duas constituunt *ramos* maiores, prout *Syriaca* et *Arabica lingua* duos alios ramos efficiunt, hinc in *Septentrionem*, illinc in *Austrem* diffusos.”

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Schultens (ca. 1748–50: §CXVII [see the edition in Eskhult forthc.]): “Hinc certissimum nullam dialectum alicuius veteris linguae, quae mater sit plurimarum, sibi sufficere ad veterem indolem intime introspicendam, praesertim in analogia grammatices et syntaxeos et originum ordinisque significationum.”

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