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*Familial letters from the War of the Pacific (1879–1881):
Deixis, identity negotiation and communities of practice*

This presentation examines a set of unpublished *ego-documents* (Elsaß 2011) written by Chilean soldiers during the War of the Pacific (1879–1881). The War of the Pacific was a political and economic conflict between Perú, Bolivia and Chile for control over the mining resources of the Antofagasta and Tarapacá regions. The international conflict was of great significance for the consolidation of Chile's nation-state, as it allowed Chile's full integration into the global economy, the consolidation of its national territory, and to overcome political crises (Collier & Sater 2004). Inspired in the third wave approach (Eckert 2018) and in dialogue with the glottopolitical perspective (Narvaja de Arnoux & Del Valle 2010), this study examines how Chilean soldiers negotiate their identities and power positionings within the family and military social fields through deictic practice in letter-writing (Hanks 2005). Building upon Hanks's deictic model, the linguistic analysis will examine personal pronouns, forms of address and naming practices in order to reveal how soldiers take up positions in both social fields (Bourdieu 1991), while articulating intersectional identities as family members and soldiers of the nation. Primarily, this study asks what deictic choices soldiers make as they construct their identities, what intersectional aspects of identity are negotiated, and how soldiers' positionings are entangled in power networks intersecting the social fields under study. Based on the analysis, this presentation will argue for the insightfulness of letter-writing in observing how soldiers configure a binary social order as they construct their identities and negotiate their place in multiple communities of practice (Eckert 2000). Finally, this study reflects on how power works in and between communities of practice where soldiers participate through multiple positionings shaped by linguistic norms.

References

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