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**Linguistic variation  
and the non-standardisation of the low  
varieties in Early Modern Greek diglossia**

SFB 538

Project H4: „Forms of Written Discourse, in  
Byzantine and Modern Greek Diglossia”

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# :: variation of codes

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- default case for all speech communities
- diglossia: a case of superposed variation of codes

“Superposed variation may involve any number of codes of whatever degree of linguistic relatedness and exhibit whatever degree of functional diversity ... In many societies, however, this variation is **subtle or inconspicuous due to reasons such as close similarity among the codes involved and lack of a neat compartmentalization of functions.**” (Britto 1986: 48)

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# :: diglossia: a striking case of superposed variation

- condition:
  - given a diglossia situation with two poles HIGH and LOW, then there must be total acquisitional and functional superposition of **HIGH** over **LOW**
    - definitively no native speakers of HIGH
    - HIGH is not used in ordinary conversation (discourse) (may nevertheless be used in institutional constellations)

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## :: HIGH & LOW not single varieties

- diasystems, which may contain more than one variety
  - "... a diasystem is a collective denomination, or an abstract level, to refer to all varieties sharing certain common features (e.g. the fact that they are not superposed, the fact that they are used for conversation, etc.) ..." (Britto 1986: 14)
- di- in "diglossia" does not necessarily refer to two diasystems, but to an integer greater than one

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# :: criteria for identifying diasystems in diglossia

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- functional (social) differences
  - formal / informal, prestigious / unprestigious, institutional / non institutional, written/oral etc.
- structural (linguistic) differences
  - phonology, lexicon, syntax, etc.
- acquisition
- “optimal distance”
- use oriented code/variety (determined by use characteristics) and NOT user oriented code / variety (determined by user characteristics)

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# :: Greek diglossia

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- two phases:
  - neutral or Byzantine and Early Modern Greek diglossia (up to the 18th c.)
  - conflictual or Modern Greek diglossia (19th & 20th c.)
- only the conflictual phase (“language question in Greece”) has been studied extensively until now
  - “... a fascinating story which could not be adequately told in any reasonable compass, full of the most remarkable human passions and incredibly illogical behaviour ...” (Householder 1963: 109)

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# :: Byzantine & Early Modern Greek

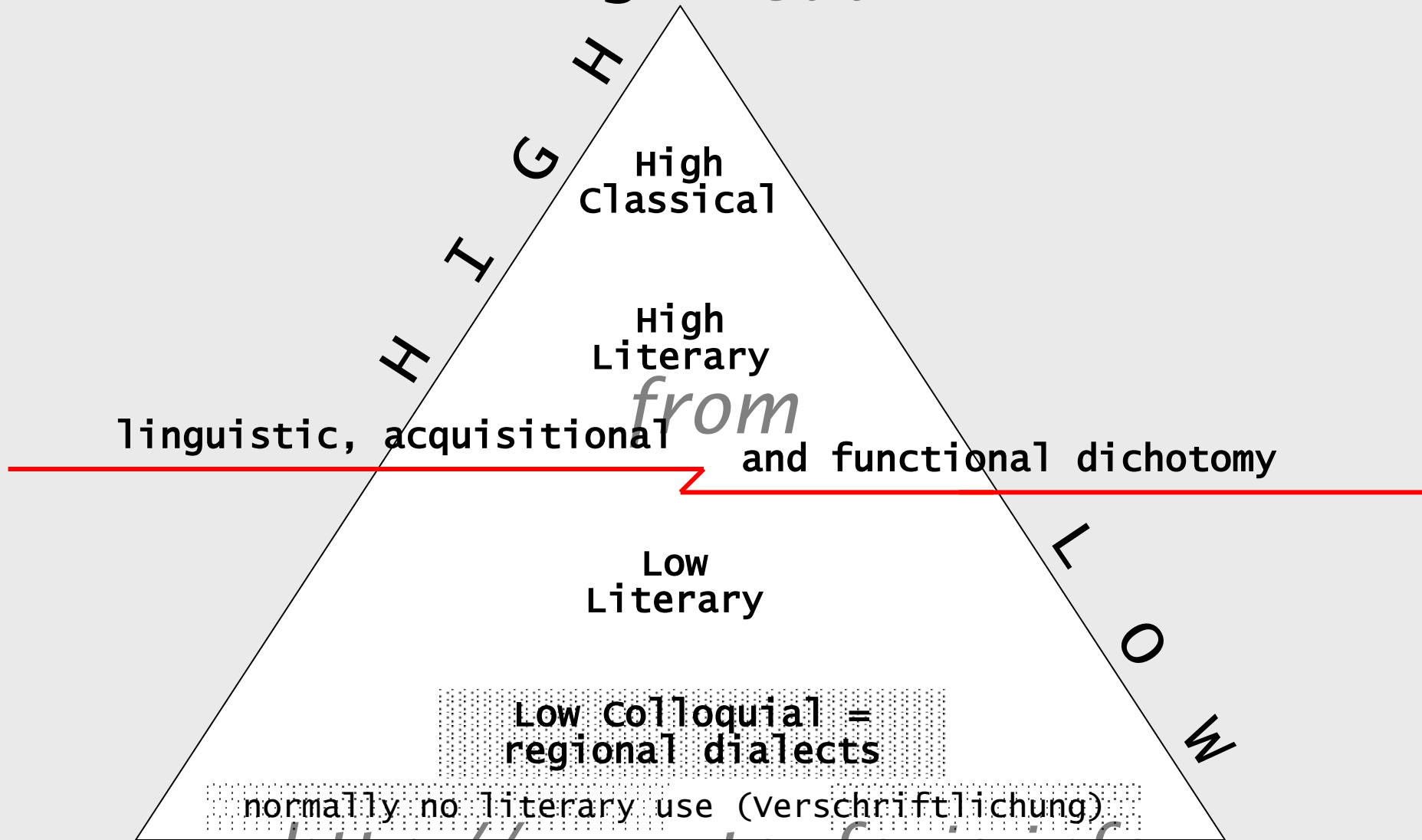
diglossia

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- our project focuses on the late Byzantine and Early Modern Greek Period (1300–1700)
- our corpus consists of prose narrative texts
  - fictitious biographies (novels), chronicles, religious narratives
  - medium: manuscripts and early prints
    - modern editions and transcriptions of manuscripts
- our main purpose: to describe the written registers of narrative texts and figure out the interdependencies between them

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# :: diasystems in Byzantine and Early Modern Greek diglossia



# :: additional factors that must be taken under consideration

- at least before the evolving of printing but also for a considerable time afterwards, the text as it survives today is the product of a manuscript scribe and not of the author himself
  - manuscript scribes are professionals, who have learned their profession through the copying of High texts

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## :: High diasystem: correlation between education and proficiency of the varieties

- High Classical: a fossilized classical language
  - reception and production require a long study of classical texts; active usage only by a few members of the speech community for a limited audience; passive competence by some users of High Literary Greek
- High Literary: linguistically simpler than High Classical
  - reception and production require normal education; active usage by the main body of literates for a large audience of literates

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# :: correlation of Low Literary with education

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- Low Literary: reception requires probably no education; contains either none or very few elements of the dialects
  - active usage of Low Literary Greek requires at least basic writing skills
    - these are acquired *from* on the basis of High Classical or High Literary Greek
      - thus every author /scribe of High Classical or High Literary Greek can produce and understand Low Literary Greek
  - intended audience: all members of the speech community
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# :: Low diasystem: the interrelation between Literary and Colloquial Greek

- the reconstruction of Colloquial Greek is impossible, since no native speakers of it are available today
  - indirect evidence and fragmentary written material suggest that at least in rural areas regional dialects were used
  - Koinezation in urban areas and in contact situations most probable
- only isolated cases of regional dialects used for literary purposes (Cyprus, Crete)

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# :: open questions concerning Low Literary Greek

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- is there a bias of the higher varieties in Low Literary Greek, since only the higher varieties are being used in education and thus writing is being learned only according to the norms of the higher varieties?
  - if yes, what kind of influence do we accept to find?

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## :: open questions

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- does the spoken language (dialect or Koiné) of a given writer of Low Literary Greek come up to the surface of the written text, even if he/she is trying to conceal her?
  - if yes, in which domains do we have to look for them? *from*

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