



## Textile terminology work - a multilingual approach in the THREAD project Report by Susanne Lervad and Christian Gaubert

---

### Textile terminology work - a multilingual approach in the THREAD project

By Dr. Susanne Lervad and Dr. Christian Gaubert, visiting scholars at the Centre for Textile Research (CTR) , University of Copenhagen.

Summary: The THREAD project - a 3-year project funded by the Innovation Fund Denmark, to create a model for refugee women in Denmark in the areas of Education, Empowerment and Entrepreneurship.

Report of an internship in the autumn of 2017 for three refugee women from Eritrea and Turkey at the University of Copenhagen's Centre for Textile Research, with multilingual sessions on textile words in various languages.

The sessions on textile terminology in Arabic, Danish, English and Tigrinya began in November 2017 a few weeks into the internship of Mlete, Alem and Sarah as a group of CTR.

CTR hosts a blog on [www.traditionaltextilecraft.dk](http://www.traditionaltextilecraft.dk) with a section on multilingual terminology and a table for the ground loom and textile processes in Jordan (the parts of the looms, the materials used, the accessories such as shuttles and pins). We had uncompleted columns in Arabic and had asked the group of interns for help. The first sessions involved discussions of the tools and material, such as wools and silk, and we documented their contribution in their own languages, for instance for sheep and wool (the material and processes around it such as spinning and weaving), but the concepts and terms for the looms and their different parts were too specialized for them, as they were not weavers, but knitting enthusiasts. Thus, we added a practical session on knitting to our textile word sessions. The process of knitting was described in the form of knitting instructions coupled with a description of the product. Other categories were extended from the loom sessions, such as the tools (pins or knitting needles) and the material (wool and silk, spun and twisted).

Wool and silk yarns as material were pleasant and soft to work with, and hours passed where we spoke of our lives, families, home countries and languages, but also textile-related issues: Who taught us to knit? Did our children know the techniques? What are the different approaches used to achieve the same result. At the same time, we added to our multilingual terminology and wrote instructions in Danish, English, Arabic and Tigrinya by using the simple plain knitting.

We began with just three loops and then extended the loops in every round until the shawl was finished. The hand-knitting and hand-writing were easy ways to work and we enjoyed ourselves, as well, getting to know each other's personal stories.

The interesting approach as terminologists in the project is primarily on how to build up the categories. For instance, did it make sense to talk about the material as silk, if you did not know, how silk was produced from the silkworm beforehand. Working with different types of tools/pins was also quite new to the participants. By naming the

characteristics of the concept, such as softness, strength and flexibility of the yarns, we were able to move easily from material to technique. The mix of bright colours and warm fibres in the cold Danish winter, encouraged the creativity of each participant. We continued these positive features in other classes on spinning and dyeing wool and yarn with the students of the faculty/archaeology and museum colleagues at CTR in Eva Andersson Strand's classes at Copenhagen University. From cocoons to silk thread was a pleasant and exciting discovery for the group as well, and the process of dyeing with plants in order to obtain colourful yarns, too, was a good experience. The interns interacted well with the other participants in the class, and involved them in knitting shawls in other materials .

The linguistic barriers were massive, but Eva spoke about the Viking Age and its textiles and we had different looms in the classroom, which facilitated the group's understanding of the textile terms. These visual and tactile approaches helped more than the drawings in the previous blog schemes.

The linguistic Christian Gaubert, who was the project's IT expert, downloaded the software necessary for writing in Tigrinya characters in order to continue the work, and it is now all registered. Afterwards, he facilitated the work on dresses and we also made a small typology of dresses from Eritrea with their description/terminology , These were all rather basic examples, nevertheless, they were highly useful in our attempts to connect with the refugees, and include their dress reality in their present situation in life, something that could be pursued in a more systematic way with new groups in the future.

When it came to the evaluation of the internship period, the reactions/comments of especially Alem and Mlete showed that they were very positive about these sessions; we therefore, continue networking with them and include them in our activities, such as visiting local museums containing textile objects.

They live with their families near the town of Køge where KØS (the museum of art in public spaces) displays the entire gamut of Danish History , represented by the artist Bjørn Nørgård's tapestry cartoons made for Queen Margrethe II of Denmark's Gobelines at Christiansborg. One afternoon, we visited the museum and discussed Danish history with the paintings as the starting point. This provided a marvellous way to learn about the history of Denmark, presented from the Viking Age to today through textiles, ships, dresses and ornamentation, and thereby eventually connecting the story to the refugees' own histories. This is definitely an initiative and an approach we intend to repeat in a new round of the THREAD project, and we now know so much more about embroidery an ddress, and their languages are a bonus for us all in the group.