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Early Language Typology
Attitudes towards Languages
in the 16th and 17th Centuries

1. Introduction

The common attitude towards various languages in the 16th and 17th centuries can easily be summarized. Greek, Latin and Hebrew were the three honoured and divine languages. The Romance languages were considered as inferior descendants of Latin, which could not possibly be of the same high rank as the Germanic languages. The important status of the Germanic languages had been put forward strongly by Joannes Goropius Becanus (1518–1572) in his *Origines Antwerpianae* of 1569. This Flemish physician had even tried to demonstrate that *Duyts*, which at the time indicated both Dutch and German (cf. Dibbets 1992), was the oldest language, not Hebrew. Although his idea was far from being generally accepted, Becanus' statements on the superb quality of *Duyts* were influential not only in the Netherlands and Germany, but also in England where his ideas were adopted and applied to the English language (cf. Jones 1953: 215–216).

Admiration for the Germanic languages in general did not imply that all Germanic languages were considered to be equal. The ranking of the various Germanic languages often depended on the nationality of the authors involved who had a tendency to consider their own vernacular as the oldest and best language. — Since the oldest language was assumed to retain most of the original language qualities, the antiquity of a language and its excellence were strongly intertwined. — Many examples of such chauvinistic language attitudes could be given. I will mention only a

few. First of all, two examples from the country that is hosting our conference. The 17th century Swede Andreas Kempe (1622–1689) claimed that God spoke Swedish in Paradise, Adam Danish and the serpent (very revealing!) French.[1] His compatriot and contemporary Olaus Rudbeck (1630–1702), maintained that not only the mysterious Atlantis, but also the origin of all the European peoples and their languages were to be found in Sweden. To restore the balance, I have to add that there were also critical sounds to be heard. In his *Lingua Belgica* of 1612 the Dutch vicar and philologist Mylius (Abraham van der Myle 1558–1637) stressed that due to the corrupting influence of Lappish contacts the Scandinavian languages could not claim the purity which characterized Dutch.[2] The English language was also criticized: both German and Dutch authors disapproved of the amount of foreign vocabulary in the English language. The influential German grammarian Justus Georg Schottel(ius) (1612–1672) even applied the term 'scum' [Latin *spuma linguarum*] to English, a word often used to characterize the inferior Romance languages.[3] Apart from criticizing the English language, Dutch and German authors sometimes did not hesitate to characterise each other's language as being harsh.

Nowadays the opinions described above are considered as curious views on language which — if anything — might be interesting from a social historical point of view. Their importance, however, should not be underestimated. First of all, they played a considerable role within the national contexts of several countries. Latin publications had their impact across the borders and so had some of the books written in the vernacular. Secondly, although, superficially such views seem more related to nationalism than to any kind of language typology, I like to stress that some of the 16th and 17th century opinions on languages comprise elements of linguistic analysis which are worth paying attention to. They may be seen as early, elementary forms of language typology. Elementary, — the analysis does not reach the level of typology on which Nowak (1994) has

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[1] Elert (1978: 221–226) has shown that Kempe's statement should not be considered as a serious proposal of a multilingual Paradise. Kempe is sincere in his view on Swedish, but his statement on Danish and French has to be interpreted as an attempt to ridicule his adversaries among the Swedish clergy.

[2] Mylius wrote his *Lingua Belgica* in order to show that Dutch was a very old, respectable and excellent language and to explain that it was cognate to Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Persian and some other languages.

[3] Cf. the following quotation from Schottel's *Ausführliche Arbeit von der Teutschen HaubtSprache* (1663: 141): "Denn als in einem Topfe/ wie man sagt/ alle Sprache gekocht worden/ were der Schaum davon die Englische Sprache geworden: weil dieselbe ein lauter Geflikk und Gemeng/ wiewol im Grunde Teutsch ist".

focussed recently. There are no attempts to develop any kind of word order typology that somehow resembles for instance Gabriel Girard's tripartite division into *langues analogues (ordre naturel), langues transpositives* (free word order), and *langues mixtes*. What the early opinions on languages do show are on the one hand attempts to come to terms with the diversity and similarity of languages and on the other linguistically motivated ideas of what is a good or a bad language.[4]

Today I intend to concentrate on the latter, i.e. on the linguistic elements in the evaluation of languages. When dealing with the linguistic qualities mentioned in the 16th and 17th century evaluations of languages, I want to focus mainly on the frequently used criterium of *monosyllabicity*. Other criteria such as compounding capacity and aspects of meaning will be discussed briefly.

2.   Becanus and Junius on Monosyllables

In the evaluation of languages monosyllables are frequently referred to: the Germanic languages are claimed to consist of a great number of monosyllabic words in which they differ from Latin and the Romance languages. Short remarks on the number of monosyllables in the German language are to be found in Latin publications as early as the beginning of the 16th century (cf. Jellinek 1898: 60; Van den Branden 1967: 282). In his detailed Latin publications of 1569 and 1580 Goropius Becanus went much further in fully stressing the monosyllabic quality of *Duyts* and the lack of such brevity in Greek and Latin. The interest in the subject did not wane. In the middle of the 17th century Franciscus Junius (1591–1677), the scholar who is nowadays seen as the founder of Germanic philology, still paid attention to monosyllables in his *Observationes in Willerami Abbatis Francicam Paraphrasin Cantici Canticorum* of 1655. It is tempting to put both scholars under the same heading as adherents of a so-called monosyllabicity concept. But we must not jump to conclusions. Did Becanus and Junius deal with monosyllabicity in a similar way?

In Becanus' view a perfect language showed clarity, brevity, propriety of sound and aptness of compounding.[5] In the primeval language,

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4   Cf. also Werner Hüllen's paper "Good Language – Bad Language: Some Case-Studies on the Criteria of Linguistic Evaluation in Three Centuries" [in this volume, pp. 315–334].

5   Cf. the following quotation: "Perfectissimam autem eam dicimus quae quam apertissime, & quam breuissime, vna cum sono conuenientissimo, imagines ani-

which must have been perfect, all [basic] words were monosyllables. These monosyllables were so abundant that all ideas could easily be expressed, while no word had more than one meaning. Problems of ambiguity which Becanus had encountered in Hebrew, did not occur in the first language. It therefore surpassed Hebrew in richness of vocabulary, and Latin and Greek in brevity, so that the primeval language was at once the most copious and the briefest of all (cf. Forster 1957: 217).[6] In Becanus' writings monosyllabicity plays a role in an attempt to demonstrate that *Duyts* is the oldest and most perfect language, older and more perfect than Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

The Dutch scholar Franciscus Junius, who was particularly interested in the early stages of the Germanic languages, had another approach. He printed four lists of monosyllables in his *Observationes*: a list of Dutch monosyllables (the longest one), a list of Old English, one of Old Norse and one of Welsh monosyllables. None of them, however, are used by Junius to prove the antiquity or eminence of the languages involved. The lists of monosyllables function in a totally different context, viz. to establish the etymological relationship of each of these four languages to Greek. According to Junius, Dutch, Old English, Old Norse and Welsh display an old habit to truncate originally Greek words; a supposition which Junius supports by the lists of monosyllables.

In passing I note that similarities between Greek and the Germanic languages had been noticed before. The above mentioned Mylius had even asked whether the Dutch spoke a form of Greek or whether the Greek did actually speak a form of Dutch. Words which the two languages had in common indicated, according to Mylius, a Dutch origin rather than a Greek one and this was highly probable, since the Celtic Dutch would have conquered the Greek (and not the Greek the Dutch)! Mylius' linguistic arguments were twofold. For instance, the Greek bisyllabic word *purge* 'tower' had to be younger than the corresponding Dutch monosyllable *burg* 'castle', 'town'. Greek *lalein* had to be younger than Dutch *lellen* which had three meanings (to chatter, to tell and to speak) against Greek having only one meaning. Moreover, *lellen* was a derivation of the Dutch monosyllable *lel* 'uvula'. The background of Mylius' remarks on meaning is not clear. Did Mylius disagree with Becanus' view that a word

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mi, & earum compositionem dat intelligendas [...]" (Goropius Becanus 1580, 'Hermathena', 24).

[6] Cf. Goropius Becanus (1580, 'Hermathena', 25): "Hac igitur parte, Hebraicam vocum copia, Graecam & Latinam breuitate vincit, in qua alteram perfectissimi sermonis laudem collacamus".

in a perfect language had only one meaning? Or did he opine that a word in an old language had developed more meanings in the course of time, whereas a word in a younger language still had one meaning? It is not at all clear and I will return to this problem later.

My examination of Becanus' and Junius' approaches has shown that for diverging reasons monosyllables played an important role in 16th and 17th century linguistic theories. Besides, we must realize that the monosyllabic criterium prevailed not only in the circle of Latin writing humanists, but was also transferred to publications written in the vernacular.

3.   A New Element Added:
Monosyllabicity as a Discriminating Feature

Monosyllabicity is referred to in the first complete Dutch grammar, the *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche Letterkunst* 'Dialogue of Dutch grammar', published in 1584, four years after Becanus' last book was published posthumously. Two characteristics of *Duyts* are discussed at some length in the *Twe-spraack*: monosyllabic wealth and compounding. The ability of compounding is assumed to be a characteristic which Dutch shares with Greek. Compounding is said to be extremely useful in translating technical terms (for instance, *letterkunst* 'grammar' and *wóórdboek* 'dictionary', corresponding with *grammatica* and *dictionarium*) and in creating new words. According to the authors of the *Twe-spraack*, Hendrick Laurensz. Spiegel and other members of the Chamber of Rhetoric In Liefd' Bloeyende: "If necessary, we may daily compound verbs and nouns in order to indicate something that we otherwise could not have said".[7] In presenting monosyllabicity and compounding as two excellent features, the authors of the *Twe-spraack* heavily drew on Becanus. But they also added a new element to the discussion by presenting monosyllabicity as a discriminating feature for genuine Dutch vocabulary.

Whenever lexical similarities between different languages were discovered in the 16th and 17th centuries, they called for an explanation. Apart from sheer coincidence, similarities were traced back to the common original language before Babel, to natural congruity of word and

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[7] The Dutch quotation: "alzó machmen daghelycks na behoefte wóórden ende namen t'samen voeghen om iet te betekenen dat wy anders niet zegghen konen" (*Twespraack* 1584: 92; ed. Dibbets, 271). I note here that actually *tsaemvoeghing* (h.l. *t'samenvoeghen*) comprises both compounding and derivation. The examples given in the *Twe-spraack* are, however, mostly compounds.

thing, especially in the case of animal sounds, and to trade and intercourse among nations which was said to have led to a certain bilingualism and the adoption of words from one language to another. In the last case it had to be determined which was the donating and which the receiving language. According to Mylius, two general principles could serve as guidelines in this respect: the older language was usually the donor, the younger one the receiver; and where the contact of two peoples was hostile rather than peaceful, it was the victor who imposed, the vanquished who accepted (Mylius 1612: 88–89; 97; Metcalf 1953: 540). Note that Mylius does not advance any linguistic arguments. The *Twe-spraack*, on the contrary, tried to solve the problem of loans linguistically.

Nouns such as *kap* 'cap', *kussen* 'pillow', *zack* 'bag', *banck* 'bench, bank', *dagge* 'dagger', *kabel* 'cable', *plaats* 'place', *slaaf* 'slave', *haast* 'haste', *fel* 'fierce', *rond* 'round', *sóld* 'pay', *ryck* 'rich', *kóórd* 'cord', *bóórd* 'border', *dubbeld* 'double', *blaau* 'blue', *ghaarde* 'garden', *stóffe* 'stuff', *sluis* 'lock, sluice' and verbs such as *falen* 'fail', *loven* 'praise', *glissen* 'glide', *pissen* 'piss', *graven* 'dig' were considered to be good old original Dutch words, whereas the French equivalents *cappe, couszin, sacq, bancq, dague, chable, place, esclave, haste, felon, rond, soulde, riche, chorde, bord, double, bleu, jardijn, estoffe, escluse* and *faillir, loüer, glisser, pisser, graver* were seen as Dutch loans. Although, according to our current etymological knowledge, the view on these specific instances of borrowing is not justified, it is interesting to follow the line of argument in the *Twe-spraack* (1584: 3–4; ed. Dibbets p. 91–95). First of all the Dutch words mentioned were mostly monosyllables. Secondly, these Dutch words had a broader meaning than their French equivalents. The broader meaning of the Dutch items is illustrated with some examples and all I can say is that a broader meaning seems to be an argument for originality. Thirdly, the Dutch words were not isolated items in the Dutch language, but allowed for compounding and derivation, which compounds and derivations showed no relationship at all with the French language or its manner of composition. The derivations *haasticheid, felheid, besólden* convincingly proved their Dutch origin, since otherwise *hatete, felony, soudoyeren* would have occurred. With the last argument the authors of the *Twe-spraack* showed a clear view on compounding and derivation principles, although they did not yet realize that even suffixes could be borrowed.

The monosyllable criterium was also applied to similarities with Latin. In cases such as *faam – fama* 'fame', *lyn – linea* 'line', *kroon – corona* 'crown', *form – forma* 'form', *wyn – vinum* 'wine', *wal – vallum*

'wall' the authors of the *Twe-spraack* assumed the Dutch monosyllabic nouns to be the original ones against the corresponding Latin words. The famous contemporary Dutch mathematician Simon Stevin (1548–1620) agreed with this incorrect view on what are undisputed Latin loans today. The Romans were supposed to have lenghtened words such as *caes* 'cheese', *beest* 'beast', *put* 'pit', *muer* 'wall', *recht* 'right', *cael* 'bald', *graen* 'grain', *heer* 'lord', etc., for which they say *caseus, bestia, puteus, murus, rectus, calvus, granum, herus* (cf. Stevin 1955–1966,I: 81). The authors of the *Twe-spraack* put the monosyllabic concept into linguistic practice. It was Simon Stevin who made monosyllabicity and composition the core of his ideas on language.[8]

4. Simon Stevin and the Brevity Concept

Simon Stevin, who was a many-sided and inventive scientist and engineer, had interesting and influential ideas on language, language usage and the importance of the vernaculars. He expounded his linguistic ideas in his books on logic, mechanics and mathematics. Stevin was fully convinced of the important role his mother tongue could play. In his opinion, the Dutch language in particular had all the characteristics which were needed to express the thoughts of the native speakers. In his 'Uytspraeck van de Weerdicheyt der Duytsche Tael' (Discourse on the Virtue of the Dutch Language) of 1586 he explicitly states that brevity is needed in a language to expound the tenor of our thought and that this shortness can best be achieved by denoting single, non-complex things by monosyllables.[9] These monosyllables have to allow for composition. The ease of compounding is the second characteristic of the Dutch language. On top of these two structural qualities Stevin mentions two functional virtues, viz., its aptness for scholarly work, especially for teaching the arts and sciences and its ability to express emotions and to convince people. Of all languages, the Dutch language, according to Stevin, fits most excellently with these ideals and in these respects even surpasses Greek, Latin and Hebrew.

It is worth noticing that Stevin not only adopted the monosyllabic characteristic for Dutch, but, unlike his predecessors, also provided new

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[8] Composition is the translation of the Dutch *tsaemvoeghing* which comprises both compounding and derivation. Stevin's examples of composition are, however, mostly compounds. See also footnote 7.

[9] Stevin's 'Uytspraek van de Weerdigheyt der Duytsche Tael' was first published in his *De Beghinselen der Weeghconst* 'The Principles of the Art of Weighing'. Stevin (1955/1966,I) offers a facsimile edition with an English translation.

statistic material to prove it. He claimed that Dutch contained a large number of monosyllables, many more than did Latin and Greek and proved this claim with detailed lists of monosyllabic verbs and nouns. 742 Dutch monosyllabic verbs such as *Ic acht* 'I consider', *blijf* 'stay', *denck* 'think', *eer* 'honour', *eet* 'eat', *gheef* 'give', *hoor* 'hear', *koop* 'buy', *lieg* 'lie', *neem* 'take', *spreeck* 'speak', *tel* 'count', *vrees* 'fear' are listed against 5 Latin verbs and none in Greek (the 45 Greek monosyllabic verbs being contracted from longer words). A second list of monosyllabic words (nouns, adjectives, prepositions, etc.) comprises 1428 Dutch items such as *al* 'all', *ampt* 'office', *bed* 'bed', *bloot* 'naked', *bril* 'glasses', *croon* 'crown', *dach* 'day', *daet* 'deed', *de* 'the', *duyf* 'dove', *ghi* 'you' etc., against 158 Latin instances and 220 Greek ones.

Stevin noticed, just as the authors of the first Dutch grammar had done, that from the numerous monosyllables compounds may be coined very easily. In addition, he pointed out that newly created Dutch compounds were not difficult to understand, since there was a systematic rule implying that the first element is the modifier and the second element the head. With contrastive examples such as *putwater* 'well-water' and *waterput* 'well' and *jachthondt* 'hunting-hound' against *hondjacht* 'hound-hunting' Stevin illustrated this rule (Stevin 1955–1966,I: 84).

According to Stevin, the two structural language characteristics under discussion meet our needs in representing reality very well:

> Since by means of the tongue, lips, teeth, palate and throat we can utter an almost infinite variety of monosyllabic sounds, it is fit that we should assign to every single thing a monosyllabic sound (because less is impossible, and more is useless), [a monosyllabic sound] of such a nature that they are fit for composition, so that we may pleasingly and intelligibly represent by them not only ordinary things, but also the strange things which Nature daily creates.[10]

He argues that single, non-complex things correspond with monosyllables and complex things are represented by compounds. In the background a Platonic idea shows up: the idea that linguistic simplicity and complexity reflect simplicity ('ordinary things') and complexity ('the strange things

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[10] Cf. Stevin (1955/1966,I: 88): "Anghesien wy duer t'behulp van tong, lippen, tanden, verhemelt, keel, bycans oneindelicke verscheyden eensilbighe gheluyden connen uyten, soo ist billich dat wy yder ynckel saeck een eensilbich gheluyt toeeyghenen (want min is onmueghelick, meer is onnut) ende van sulcker aert, dat sy de Tsaemvoughing bequamelick lijden, op dat wy daer duer niet alleen de ghemeene dinghen, maer oock de wonderlicke die de Natuer daghelicx baert, bevallick ende verstaenlick uytbeelden mueghen".

which Nature daily creates') in reality. In other words, there is a relationship between the word and the thing it indicates.

Why did the concept of brevity exercise such an appeal on Stevin? This was not because it was an adaptation of the *brevitas* concept in rhetoric, as has been suggested (cf. Gützlaff 1988).[11] If we want to consider any relationship with another discipline, it is neither rhetoric nor logic, but geometry that has to be taken into consideration. Stevin himself gives a hint in this direction when he compares language to geometry. In geometry everything is built up from the smallest elements to the more complex entities, and it would be absurd to consider the point, the element of magnitude, bigger than magnitude itself. In the same way, Stevin continues, it is improper in grammar that letters, the smallest elements in grammar, should consist of more syllables than the word made of these letters. The superiority of Dutch in this respect is illustrated in spelling the word *Dal*, which is in Greek Delta, Alpha, Lambda and in Hebrew Daleth, Aleph, Lamed. In both cases each element improperly consists of more syllables (namely two) than the monosyllabic word *Dal*. In Dutch *Dal* is spelled with three single sounds or monosyllables, pronounced as De, A, El (cf. Stevin 1955–1966,I: 80). The idea is clear, although Stevin's argument seems peculiar to us nowadays. In evaluating the compounding capacity of Greek and Dutch, Stevin draws an arithmetic parallel:

> just as no sensible person will deem three to be a bigger number than one thousand, but much smaller, likewise Greek composition is not superior to Dutch, but far inferior, for in the former there are occasionally a few words admitting of it, but in the latter it is always possible, and such with special brevity, suitability, and proper denotation of their fundamental meaning.[12]

It is important to note that Stevin, while discussing the characteristics of the Dutch language, also evaluates Latin and Greek. Latin and Greek both contain far fewer monosyllables and the compounding capacity of Greek, which had been noticed in the *Twe-spraack*, is considered inferior

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[11] Economy plays some role as the quotation above shows: "[...] it is fit that we should assign to every single thing a monosyllabic sound (*because less is impossible, and more is useless*)".

[12] Cf. Stevin (1955/1966,I: 83): "want ghelijck gheen menschen die wel by haer sinnen sijn drie grooter ghetal en achten dan Duyst, maer veel cleender; also oock de Griecsche Tsaemvoughing niet boven de Duytsche, maer verre daer onder, want in die sijn hier en daer sommighe woorden diese lijden, maer in dese overal, ende dat met een ander besonder cortheyt, gheschictheyt, ende eyghentlicker beteeckening haers grondts [...]".

to Dutch. Other languages such as French, Italian and Spanish need not be examined, because Greek and Latin, being superior to the others, suffice for the purpose. If Dutch is demonstrated to be more perfect than these two, it follows *a forteriori* that it is much more perfect than any of the former. Stevin has to admit that the French monosyllables are greater in number than the Latin ones, since the French have often shortened the words which they borrowed from Latin (saying for example, for *Facio, Servio, Venio, Rideo, Sentio*: *Je Fay, Sers, Vien, Ri, Sens*), but those French monosyllables are unfit for composition and therefore have less value! (cf. Stevin 1955–1966,I: 82–83).

By drawing geometric and arithmetic parallels, Stevin explains why monosyllabicity is such an excellent feature. One question remains: why could Becanus, the *Twe-spraack* and Stevin use this concept so well in the 16th and beginning of the 17th century? To obtain an answer, we shall have to examine contemporary language data.

5. Shortness and Language Reality: The Relationship between the Ideal Word Structure and the Language Data

Stevin's lists of monosyllables reveal a consistent choice from the available language data. In the Middle Ages most nouns and first person singular verb forms were ending in -*e* (*here* 'lord', *vrouwe* 'lady', *cruce* 'cross', *crone* 'crown'; *ic vraege* 'I ask', *ic hebbe* 'I have', *ic woene* 'I live' etc.). By the process of *e*-deletion, already started in the Middle Ages, variation begins to occur, and variants with and without -*e* are to be found. At Stevin's time this variation and the dialectical differences started being noted. In his grammar of 1625 the grammarian Christiaen van Heule (†1655) asserts that in the province of Holland almost every word was pronounced without a final unstressed *e*, while the southern dialects (Brabantian and Flemish) did not yet show *e*-deletion at all. Without any further explanation Stevin selected the variants of the province of Holland, viz., the variants without -*e*, which correspond with his monosyllabic ideal. Stevin, born and raised in the south of the Low Countries, prefers these above the variants of his native southern dialect. A small group of monosyllables attracted Stevin's special attention: the nouns *vaar* 'father', *moer* 'mother', *broer* 'brother', *zus* 'sister'. According to Stevin, they only occur in the dialect of the province of North-Holland. They correspond with bisyllabic nouns in the other Dutch dialects (*vader*,

moeder, broeder, suster). Historical linguistics teaches us that *vaar, moer, broer, zus* are a regular development from *vader, moeder, broeder, suster*. Stevin, however, took the monosyllabic variants to be the oldest forms which happened to survive in the North-Holland dialect. This dialect is therefore considered to be the best contemporary Dutch. The longer variants have come into being through ignorance of the native speakers (cf. Stevin 1608,I: 24).

Stevin's linguistic ideas exercised a strong influence on Dutch authors, grammarians and the wider circle of literate people in the seventeenth century. His influence even crossed the borders of the Low Countries. The most striking example is the famous German grammarian Schottel, who adopted Stevin's ideas wholesale in his magnum opus *Ausführliche Arbeit von der Teutschen Haubtsprache* of 1663 (cf. Kiedron 1985). Schottel elaborated on Stevin's ideas in a very interesting way: he related the monosyllabicity concept to his own newly developed ideas about word structure. Schottel assumed that the structure of a German word consisted of three elements: the root (*Stammwort*), the inflectional ending and the derivational ending. Each of these three elements may be monosyllabic. In this way, more German words could be aligned with the monosyllabic ideal than would be the case if Stevin's original monosyllabic concept was adopted. Nevertheless, Schottel was confronted with similar problems as Stevin had been: *Vater* 'father', *Mutter* 'mother', *Adler* 'eagle', *Himmel* 'heaven' obviously were not monosyllabic roots. Schottel could not refer to dialect variants to solve this problem. He therefore assumed that the ancient Germans pronounced these words as monosyllables *Vaer, Moer, Arndt, Himl*. Nouns like *Hirte* and *Ehre* remain problematic, as they cannot be seen as monosyllables. Moreover, the *-e* in such words cannot be explained as a derivational ending nor can it possibly be an inflectional ending since the nominative is involved. At this point remained a gap between the ideal word structure and the language data.

6.   Further Considerations and Conclusions

It is time to sum things up and draw conclusions. In the 16th and 17th centuries monosyllabicity was an important criterium in the evaluation of languages. The monosyllabic concept, used in the humanist Latin tradition (Becanus, Junius and others), was transferred to vernacular writings in which it was further elaborated. The *Twe-spraeck* put monosyllabicity

into practice in discriminating genuine Dutch vocabulary. Simon Stevin provided linguistic data to support the monosyllabic claim. Finally, Schottel embedded Stevin's ideas in his analysis of word structure. All these authors and publications share the positive evaluation of monosyllables. Monosyllabicity is considered as an excellent quality of the Dutch or German (or Germanic) language and as a language ideal, used in the evaluation of other languages. On the one hand, this language ideal had a relationship with language reality, i.e. with the great number of monosyllables caused by erosion of unstressed final syllables in the Germanic languages. On the other hand it also led to incorrect views of borrowing in the past or language change.

Having dealt with monosyllabicity, I note that there is still room for research on other aspects. I will briefly touch upon some interesting questions on the level of meaning. First of all, from the few available passages it cannot be deduced whether the "one word — one meaning" relationship is a common language ideal or not. Secondly, it is not yet clear to me how extension of meaning was evaluated. Was one word with more than one meaning considered as a good or a bad quality or only as a sign of age (against younger languages in which a word had one single meaning)? Meaning is not a subject extensively dealt with in the grammars of the time. In order to get an idea of the different opinions on aspects of meaning, we must take other publications into account. One illustrative example is the short treatise of the Dutch Euclid translator Jacob Willemsz. Verroten (1599–?), who lived and taught part of his life in Hamburg. He knew Stevin's ideas on language, discussed the good and bad qualities of the Dutch language in some detail and paid attention to ambiguity and synonyms (cf. Van der Wal 1993). In Verroten's opinion man had at some stage overcome the original language ambiguity and reached a high level of development in which one thing corresponds with one word with only one meaning. At this linguistic stage a large amount of words was required. Unfortunately, this high level of achievement was not maintained: a period of deterioration followed in which loss of words occurred and ambiguity arose. It is important to note that the ideal one to one relationship of word and meaning did not allow the occurrence of synonyms. In Verroten's view therefore synonyms did not exist: native speakers simply had forgotten particular meaning distinctions between words! Learning the forgotten distinctions and solving ambiguity were considered concrete tasks for language lovers who wanted to improve the vernacular.

Improving the vernacular was not just Verroten's motivation. It was an aim of grammarians, scholars and writers and a motivation of the various efforts of elementary typology which I have discussed. It is within this context that we can understand the 16th and 17th century views on language that seemed so evident to contemporaries and are so strange to us.

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