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THE DAWN
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STANDARDIZATION AND LINGUISTIC NORMS IN THE VERNACULAR LANGUAGES

0. INTRODUCTION

It is from dialect diversity that most Western European vernaculars developed a standard language. Tendencies of language convergence can be observed for as early as the 14th and 15th centuries and this raises the question whether the standardization process started well before 1500. I will argue that the term standardization should be used in a well-defined, restricted sense. In this more restricted sense, the standardization process shows the well-known characteristics of *elaboration of function*, *selection*, *codification* and *acceptance*. In my view, therefore, the Dutch standardization process did not start until the second half of the 16th century, at the time when both favourable attitudes towards the vernacular and improving prospects for its elaboration of function became clearly manifest. I will discuss the problem of selection from the various dialects (that is selection on the macro-level) and give a few illustrative examples of the sorting out of particular variants (that is selection made on the micro-level). As far as codification is concerned, special attention will be paid to the role of the first printed Dutch grammar, the *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche Letterkunst* (Dialogue of Dutch grammar), published in 1584. In addition, we will have a brief look at the acceptance of the Dutch standard language, the final result of the standardization process, which took centuries to be achieved.

1. CONVERGING TENDENCIES AND STANDARDIZATION

In one way or another, all Western European vernaculars had a common starting point: firstly, Latin was the dominant, prestigious language and secondly, it was from the context of dialect diversity that the vernaculars developed a standard language which had to be a worthy equivalent of the highly valued Latin. The development from dialect diversity

to linguistic unity is a long and complex process. Some converging tendencies can be observed for as early as the 14th and 15th centuries. In England, for example, 'colourless regional standards' arose, which 'display a selection of those variants already part of the local dialect but which were current over a much wider area, and exclude those equivalent and co-variant forms having only a limited range.' (Benskin 1992: 83). This colourless regional writing was suitable for correspondence with people outside one's own dialect area.

Similar converging tendencies are to be found in the Dutch language area, which tendencies Willemijns in his description of the Late Middle Dutch period attributes to increasing migration and more intensive political and administrative contacts between the various parts of the Dutch-speaking regions (Willemijns 1997: 170-175). Linguists sometimes call these efforts to avoid regional characteristics 'a standardization tendency', and this raises the question of whether or not the development of a standard language started well before 1500 or 1550. My answer to this question is negative and, consequently, I would rather not use the term *standardization* in the broad and vague sense by which the major differences between the medieval converging tendencies and standardization proper are blurred out.¹ What term should be applied for the medieval converging tendencies is a matter for further discussion: supraregionalization, neutralization or yet another word – as long as *standardization* is avoided for this purpose. I prefer to use the term *standardization* in a well-defined, restricted sense (cf. Haugen 1966, Joseph 1987, Bartsch 1988, Van der Wal 1992; 1995a). In this more restricted sense, the standardization process shows four characteristics: *selection, codification, elaboration of function* and *acceptance*.² In the Low Countries these characteristics did not begin to manifest themselves until the second half of the 16th century.

Before explaining and illustrating these four criteria of what we may call the major linguistic development that affected the vernacular, I would like to stress that the standardization process could not have taken place without a favourable attitude towards the mother tongue and without the presence and support of various other propitious factors such as the invention of printing, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Convincing

1. Note that Willemijns (1997: 149) also admits that we should not speak of a Dutch standard language before the 17th century.

2. Even if the medieval converging tendencies and the standardization process proper are considered as phenomena on a gliding scale which ranges from the onset of supraregionalization to the existence of a full-fledged standard language, at some point a line should be drawn between the two phenomena.

evidence for a favourable attitude is to be found in a wide variety of publications, in which the value of the vernacular is emphasized. In translations, books on logic, on mathematics etc., often the Dutch language is not only praised, but its qualities are explicitly mentioned; qualities such as antiquity, which was an important criterion in the evaluation of languages. The older the language, the better it was supposed to have preserved the qualities of the first, undoubtedly perfect language. Moreover, two structural qualities were repeatedly mentioned, i.e. brevity (Dutch had a great number of monosyllables) and aptness of compounding (In Dutch compounds such as *putwater* 'well-water', *waterput* 'well' etc. are easily created). Another, functional quality was the fitness for scholarly work, especially for teaching the arts and sciences. Comparisons were made with the classical and the contemporary Romance languages in statements which showed both self-esteem and chauvinistic feelings (cf. Hüllen 1995 and Van der Wal 1995c).

After the invention of printing, books could be produced in far larger quantities than before and printers who wanted to sell their products in a large area, paid attention to language usage and rules for orthography. The Renaissance favoured the prestige of the mother tongue: translations of ancient texts into the vernacular had to be made for those who did not know Latin or Greek, and they could be made. The mother tongue was fit for it, at least in principle. For the Reformation, it is beyond doubt that the use of the vernacular was of great importance. These are all well-known facts with which I cannot deal extensively. I prefer to pay attention to the process of standardization itself and its various aspects, while concentrating on the Dutch language area.

2. THREE CRITERIA EXPLAINED AND ILLUSTRATED

2.1. *Elaboration of function*

A favourable evaluation of the mother tongue led to a desire to promote its use and this resulted in pleas for elaboration of function. In the Middle Ages the Dutch vernacular was used in charters and literary texts, but Latin was the language of both church and scholarship. From the second half of the 16th century on, some progress was made: appeals for using Dutch as a scholarly and scientific medium were launched and the mother tongue was used in various new fields. The Amsterdam Chamber of Rhetoric *In Liefd Bloeyende*, whose members wrote the first Dutch

grammar published, the *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche Letterkunst* (1584), argued that Dutch should be the teaching language at the University of Leiden. I should add that the Chamber argued without any success: Latin maintained its dominant position at the university, but when the many-sided engineer and mathematician Simon Stevin (1548-1620) founded a school for engineers, linked with Leiden University, the language of instruction at that school was Dutch. We have to bear in mind that the developing new sciences needed practitioners and that Latin was seen as a barrier. Stevin was convinced that learning sciences in one's mother tongue would be a great gain in time and efforts and he made clear that the choice for Dutch as medium for scientific expression was the best one to be made. Its structural characteristics, brevity and aptness of compounding, made it an extremely useful tool for indicating concepts and things. Stevin himself set a good example: he wrote nearly all his scholarly works in Dutch and not in Latin (cf. Brink 1989 and Van der Wal 1995b).³ Another example of elaboration of function is the *Statengeneraal's* (Parliament's) 1582 decision to use the Dutch language in most of their documents and letters instead of French, the language previously used for diplomacy (cf. Van der Wal 1994).

We may ask whether, according to sixteenth-century contemporaries, the Dutch language was fit for such an elaboration of function. Indeed, the contemporaries had to admit that neglect in the past had caused deficiencies and that language cultivation and the invention and coining of new terminology were needed. In other words: codification activities were required and these went hand in hand with purism.

2.2. Codification

Codification is essential for the existence of a standard language. Before the second half of the sixteenth century, there was no Dutch grammar or detailed Dutch dictionary available: the rules of grammar had yet to be determined and the vocabulary had to be described. Early examples

3. Using Dutch or Latin both had its assets and liabilities for different circles. Those who did not know Latin could benefit from Dutch publications, whereas Latin was the indispensable medium for scholars all over Europe (cf. Pörksen 1983 and Van der Wal 1995a: 79-90; 97-100). In other words, while Latin was an impediment to one group of readers, Dutch was not an appropriate vehicle for the exchange of scholarly knowledge to the other. Small wonder that not only Latin publications were translated into Dutch, but also Dutch ones into Latin.

of codification are treatises on orthography such as the *Nederlandsche Spellinghe* (1550) by the printer Joos Lambrecht. For printers orthographic rules were important: a normalized spelling was assumed to favour a broader distribution of their books.⁴ Other examples of codification are *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* (1584) and the Dutch-Latin dictionaries compiled by Cornelis Kiliaen (1528/9-1607.)

Codification implies determining external linguistic norms, that is formulating orthographic and grammatical rules in grammars and treatises.⁵ External norms may also apply to the vocabulary: according to the lexicographer Kiliaen and many of his contemporaries, the Dutch vocabulary had to be pure and loans had to be replaced by newly created Dutch words. That is the reason why, in an appendix of his dictionaries, Kiliaen lists loans that should not be used.⁶ Many newly created Dutch substitutes (so-called neologisms) were put forward, for instance in the *Twe-spraack* which aimed at promoting new and pure grammatical terminology. New words were also needed in the various fields in which the Dutch language replaced Latin. The engineer Simon Stevin, previously mentioned, invented and coined Dutch technical terminology instead of using loans.

An interesting question is how the authors of grammars and other prescriptive publications decided what exactly should be stated as a rule or norm. Three possibilities occur: norms could be based on a foreign language model (1), on authorities (2) or on some kind of regularity (3). In some cases, the grammarians follow a foreign model such as in positing a case system. Originally Middle Dutch had four cases, like German nowadays, but by the end of the Middle Ages the Dutch case endings had almost completely eroded. It may therefore surprise us that the following system of even six cases is to be found in the *Twe-spraack* of 1584:

4. Willemijns (1997: 188-190) examined a printed text of 1562 by Anthonis de Roovere and concluded that its printer Jan van Ghelen adapted the text by omitting West Flemish and Brabantian characteristics.

5. Note that native speakers of a language always have internalized particular linguistic norms or rules: they are well aware of which linguistic forms are correct or incorrect in their own language or dialect. They know, for instance, that in Dutch the article should be put before the noun and not after. For the distinctions between norms and the various ways in which they play a role for native speakers I refer to Bartsch (1988).

6. It is worth noticing that in most cases Romance loans were rejected. The Romance languages were considered to be inferior descendants of Latin; they were called bastard languages (*schuimtelen / bastaardtelen*). Loans from other Germanic languages such as German were accepted by most purists.

Noemer	(nominativus)	een man	vir
Barer	(genitivus)	eens mans	viri
Ghever	(dativus)	enen man of manne	viro
Anklagher	(accusativus)	een of eenen man	virum
Roeper	(vocativus)	man	vir
Ofnemer	(ablativus)	van enen of een man	viro

To explain this, we have to bear in mind the goal of codification activities which can be illustrated by a quotation from the *Twe-spraack* itself: '...het Duyts op te helpen, vercierien ende verriyken' ('to build up, to refine and to enrich the Dutch language'). The example of the case system reveals how the idea of refining a language was put into practice. Positing a case system, as the *Twe-spraack* and later other grammarians did, is based on the idea that a good language must have certain characteristics of the ideal language, in this case, Latin. This example should not give us the unjustified impression that the rules in grammars were based only or mainly on Latin. In several respects, the grammars do reflect the actual usage of a certain group, implicitly or explicitly. In taking a stand on questions of language, 17th-century grammarians cite various writers who, in their eyes, were authoritative. These include, among others, Coornhert, Grotius, Aldegonde, the 'Amsterdamse Letter-konstenaers' (= the authors of the *Twe-spraack*), Heinsius, Cats, De Brune, Simon Stevin and Kiliaen; a group representative of the literary and scholarly Netherlands of the time.⁷ The usage of an authoritative group is, however, not always the only decisive factor for the grammarian; other considerations, such as regularity, may be predominant in a particular case. Regularity plays a role when dealing with the pronouns of address: the distinction between singular and plural had to be made in all persons of the personal pronoun. *Du* 'you', the singular pronoun of familiarity, had fallen into disuse in the 16th century, while *gij* 'you' functioned both for the plural and as a polite pronoun for the singular. Regularity leads grammarians either to introducing *gijlieden* as a plural counterpart of singular used *gij* or to maintaining obsolete *du* as the singular pronoun alongside plural *gij*.⁸

7. This contrasts with the advice of their French contemporary, the grammarian Vaugelas, who opines that if there is any doubt it is better to consult women and those who have not been educated rather than those who are familiar with Greek and Latin (cf. Bédard – Maurais eds 1983: 4).

8. The former 'solution' is to be found in Van Heule 1625, the latter in Van Heule 1633. It may be observed that the Latin example plays a role too, as Van Heule also takes the Latin pronominal pair *tu – vos* into consideration.

After this short survey of codification activities, the question arises as to what is the particular Dutch language variety that was selected and promoted.

2.3. Selection on macro-level and micro-level

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Low Countries encompassed an area with various dialects. Apart from the French speaking provinces (Hainaut, Namur, Liege) and Frisian speaking Friesland, the main Dutch speaking areas in the 16th century were Flanders, Brabant, Holland and the eastern part of the Low Countries (Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel, Gelre). In other words, we have to do with southern dialects (Flemish and Brabantian), the Hollandish dialect and eastern dialects. A few examples of the dialect differences are given below:

- (1) U lyefden sullen weten,
 dat wij **altsaemen ghesunt synnen**/ dat wij altesaemen ghesont sijn
 'you must know that we are all in good health'
 de **vrenden** / de vrienden 'the friends, the relatives'
olders/ ouders 'parents'
 Geert **to** Water/ Geert te Water
- (2) hij **most**/ hij moest 'he had to'
miest/ meest 'most'
meulen/ molen 'mill'; **veugel**/ vogel 'bird'
speulen/ spelen 'to play'
graft/ gracht 'canal'
stien/ steen 'stone'

The examples under (1) show the bold printed eastern variants alongside the other dialect variants: *altsaemen* 'altogether'; *ghesunt* 'healthy'; *synnen* 'we are'; *vrenden*; *olders*; *to*. In the examples under (2) the bold printed words are the current Hollandish dialect variants (*most*, *miest*, *meulen*, *veugel*, *speulen*, *graft*, *stien*) against the variants of the southern dialects.⁹

Selection on the macro-level occurs in different ways: the developing standard language can be based on one dialect that has supremacy over the others (which has been the case in France and England) or on various dialects which all contribute their elements. In the Low Countries, an

9. The written southern language of the 16th and 17th centuries mainly show the variants *moest*, *meest*, *molen*, *vogel*, *spelen*, *gracht*, *steen*. Some of the Hollandish variants under (2) occurred in medieval southern dialects as well and even survived in various spoken 20th-century dialects.

early effort to present a more general language was made in Utenhove's 1556 translation of the New Testament. The West Fleming Jan Utenhove (1520-1565) aimed at a mixed language that would be comprehensible in the whole area from Flanders to the East Sea coast.¹⁰ That language differed so much from the current usage in written and printed texts that readers in the western regions did not accept it. Twenty five years later, in his *Nederduitsche Orthographie*, Pontus de Heuiter once more pleaded for a general Dutch that would consist of the best from all the dialects including the eastern ones (De Heuiter 1581: 77) – all in vain. At the beginning of the 17th century, the eastern dialects had no prestige; they were considered to be a mishmash of Dutch and German elements, unfit – we may conclude – for any contribution to the standard language. This attitude is clearly demonstrated by the statement that the representatives of the province of Drente made at the Synod of Dordrecht. When they were asked to appoint revisors for the new Dutch Bible translation (the Statenvertaling), they preferred to be delivered from this task because there were very few among them who had enough knowledge of the Dutch language!

External factors such as the economic and political power of a region determine the supremacy of its dialect. Holland flourished, became powerful and wealthy during the second half of the 16th century. The South, on the other hand, gradually lost its prosperity, after 1585 when Antwerp finally succumbed to Spanish government. Due to these well-known historical factors, the Dutch standard language developed in the northern part of the Low Countries, in Holland in particular, but southern (Brabantian and Flemish) elements became important constituents as well. To explain the latter, we have to realize that the attitude towards the southern dialects was favourable: the southern dialects, the Brabantian dialect in particular, had a certain prestige and moreover, the influential written and printed language had exhibited southern characteristics for centuries.

Selection on macro-level implies selection on micro-level, that is the selection of variants. In order to prevent any misinterpretation, I want to stress that the selection on micro-level takes place through the language usage of speakers and writers who avoid particular variants. As Stein (1994: 1) put it: 'The most obviously visible process is a sorting out of variants into goodies/nobilitated and baddies/demoted/dialectical variants leading to a difference in prestige between standard and dialect-

10. Utenhove's translation was intended for the parish of Emden whose members were refugees from all over the Low Countries (cf. Niebaum 1997).

tal forms (...). On the uniformitarian principle, and judging from language change in present-day conditions, this must have been very much a function of the rise of prestige norms.' An illustrative example is the case of the *mijn/ mij* variants in 17th century Dutch. Originally both *mij* 'me' and *mijn* 'me' were object forms of the personal pronoun *ik* 'I'. As *mijn* 'me', the Hollandish dialect variant, gradually was avoided in language use, in educated written language in particular, it was not accepted into the standard language; *mij* 'me' became the norm (cf. Van der Wal 1992: 123-4).

From the linguist's point of view, during the development of a standard language, choices are made and have to be made: some variant linguistic forms are accepted, others rejected. What choices were made, which dialect variants were preferred? In order to obtain an answer to that question, we can either examine a large corpus of written 16th- and 17th-century language material or turn to the contemporary grammars, which both reflected and guided the selection process. Choosing for the latter, we will switch from a general to a more specific view and examine what the first printed Dutch grammar actually offers at the onset of the standardization process.

3. THE TWE-SPRAACK

Although one third of the *Twe-spraack* is devoted to orthography, I want to restrict myself to the observation that its orthography rules were based on the principles of 'eenparigheid' (uniformity, regularity) and 'gelijkvormigheid' (similarity). The former implied that all long vowels were spelled with a double sign (*aa, uu, oo, ee* and not *ae, ue*) and the latter that the third person present tense was spelled *krabt* (and not *krapt*) because of the infinitive *krabben* 'to scratch'. Instead of going into orthographic discussions I will rather focus on those linguistic variants that the authors of the *Twe-spraack* denounced.

As far as pronunciation is concerned, the *Twe-spraack* states that every region, even almost every town, has its particular mispronunciations of which the most serious ones are enumerated: the *Twe-spraack* rejects the extreme diphthongization of the *ei* (that is the pronunciation of *eiley* as *ai* in *zeyde* 'said', *leyde* 'led', *schreyde* 'wept'), the velar pronunciation of *nt* in *hangd, mongd, hongd* instead of *hand* 'hand', *mond* 'mouth'; *hond* 'dog' and the unrounding of the vowel *u* in *breg, pet* (instead of *brug* 'bridge', *put* 'pit') which is a coastal characteristic (*Twe-spraack*

1584: 61; ed. Dibbets 1985: 209).¹¹ When in the grammar the question is asked as to which regional pronunciation has to be taught, no conclusion is drawn, no choice is made (cf. *Twe-spraak* 1584: 62; Dibbets 1985: 211). What misuse is, proves to be clear; however, what the best usage is, has yet to be established.

It is at the level of morphology and syntax that the most serious misuse is assumed to occur and where, therefore, rules are needed. Apart from an inappropriate combination of the article and the noun as in *dat man* 'that man', *die wyf* 'that woman', *die kind* 'that child', (an invariable foreigner mistake), misuse in gender, number and case are explicitly mentioned. In order to remedy this situation, the *Twe-spraak* presents its paradigms of six cases and once more enumerates instances of improper use of syntax (*Twe-spraak* 1584: 84; Dibbets 1985: 255). Some of the examples given show subjects which have the incorrect accusative feature: *enen zót laat zyn tóorn zien* 'a fool shows his anger' instead of *een zót...*; *waar den ós werckt* 'where the ox labours' instead of *de os*. Also, improper gender occurs: *op den ghebaanden pad* 'on the beaten path' instead of *het ghebaande pad*. Other examples show old versus more modern usage: the *Twe-spraak* condemns the new usage of *wie* (instead of current *die*) in *wie zyn acker boud zal broods ghenoegh hebben* 'he who cultivates his field will have enough bread', but prefers both the reflexive *zich* above original *hem* (*een wyze zoon laat hem tuchtighen/zich tuchtighen* 'to punish himself') and the article *het* above original *dat* (*dat ghódlóós wezen – het ghódlóós wezen* 'the godless / wicked creature'). The *Twe-spraak* also discusses the frequent use of *ghy mint* 'you love' which has almost replaced *du minnest* 'you love', but it presents the variants *ick min / minne* 'I love' without any comment (*Twe-spraak* 1584: 85; Dibbets 1985: 257). Neither does it comment on the preterite variants *zong / zang* 'sang', *bond / band* 'bound' etc. (*Twe-spraak* 1584: 87, 89; Dibbets 1985: 261, 265). *Men begheert* 'one desires', on the other hand, is considered as correct against the incorrect *men begheren* 'one desires' (*Twe-spraak* 1584: 95; Dibbets 1985: 277).

It is interesting to note that the variants under discussion are not the main well-known regional variants such as *meulen / molen* 'mill'; *stien / steen* 'stone'; *speulen / spelen* 'to play'; *hout / holt* 'wood', *goud / gold*

11. The pronunciation of the *ey* as *ai* was also rejected on page 35 of the *Twe-spraak* (Dibbets 1985: 157). Three other mispronunciations are mentioned on page 61 (Dibbets 1985: 209): the *aa* pronounced as *ae* and the *ae* as *aa* (*paard, kaas, waer, daer, jae*), the *e* (in *scherp, perck, vercken, sterck, hert*) pronounced as *a* and the word forms *kyeren* (= *kinderen*), *naat, wet, wierom*. Cf. also Dibbets (ed. 1985: 383; 402).

'gold'; diminutive *-ken / -jen* etc. For the main selection on micro-level we have to wait till the sorting out of variants in the 17th century. It is the grammars by Van Heule and Leupenius that discuss, for instance, the Hollandish diminutive *-je(n)* versus the southern *-ken* and mention other dialect variants.¹²

4. ACCEPTANCE

In 1625, the grammarian Christiaan van Heule characterized the Dutch language situation as follows: 'The Dutch have (in general) in their writings and books an almost uniform language which is seen not only in the books shared in common such as bibles, histories, but also in many writings of the courts or cities' (Van Heule 1625: 91).¹³ Van Heule is rather optimistic: there was still considerable variation in the written language, which only decreased in the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. And what about the spoken language which we have left out of consideration? The developing standard language is, in the very first place, a written standard. The development of the written standard is well on its way in the middle of the seventeenth century, when also *acceptance*, the fourth characteristic of standardization, can be observed: the written standard is gradually being accepted among larger

12. In his grammar of 1625, the grammarian Christiaan van Heule prefers the Brabantian diminutive *-ke(n)* (*manneken, wijfken, dierken*) above the Hollandish diminutive form *-je* (*mannetje, wijfje, diertje*) (Van Heule 1625: 91). The use of diminutive *-ken* decreased in the long run and gave way to Hollandish *-je(n)* in the standard language. Almost thirty years later Petrus Leupenius still mentioned the diminutive *-ken* in his grammar of 1653, but he had to admit that *-je(n)* was far more usual; Hollandish *-je* had become the rule (Leupenius 1653: 23). Diminutive *-ken* has survived for a long time in the new 17th-century Bible translation, the so-called *Statenbijbel*. In another case both chronological and regional aspects are at stake. In Middle Dutch most nouns and first person singular verb forms ended in *-e* (cf. *vrouwe* 'lady', *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. Occasionally, this variation and the dialectal differences are noted. Van Heule asserts that in Holland almost every word is enunciated without a final *e* while the southern dialects (Brabantian and Flemish) did not show *e*-deletion at that time (Van Heule 1625: 91). The Hollandish variants with deletion were accepted in the standard language, whereas in the high level biblical usage of the *Statenbijbel* the original forms such as *Heere* were maintained.

13. Cf. the Dutch text: 'De Nederlanders hebben (in het gemeyn) in haere schriften ende boucken/ by nae eenderley Tale/ gelijck men noch in de gemeyne bouken ziet/ als Bybels/ Historien/ ook in veel schriften van Hoven ofte Steden/ maer om dat het eygen gebuyck/ onder yder volck/ zomtijts veel verscheelt/ zo zullen wy van die verscheydenhey yet aenroeren.'

groups and in larger regions. The rules in the grammars and the example set by authoritative works such as the *Statenvertaling* (the Dutch Authorized Translation of the Bible) and the writings of prestigious authors, resulted in the distribution of (external) language norms and the dissemination of the written standard language. We have to wait many centuries more to see the spoken standard language gaining ground. That development certainly is far beyond the scope of a conference focussing on the dawn of the written vernacular in Western Europe.

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