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**(Extra)Ordinary letters: A view from below on seventeenth-century Dutch  
Nobels, J.M.P.**

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**Author:** Nobels, Judith Maria Petrus

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## Chapter 5. Reflexivity and reciprocity

This chapter combines two case studies of seventeenth-century Dutch which are related in several respects. The first study, presented in §5.1, deals with the rise of *zich* as a reflexive pronoun for the third person singular and plural. In §5.2, the reciprocal pronouns *mekaar* and *elkaar* are examined. Both case studies deal with pronouns, but that is not all they have in common. Both case studies examine how and why a particular pronoun became an element of the developing standard for Dutch in the seventeenth century. Although neither the investigation of *zich* nor that of *elkaar* and *mekaar* yield enough data to put an end to ongoing discussions in the literature once and for all, the new information yielded by both case studies offers clear answers to some important questions.

### 5.1. *Zich*: an intangible history

#### 5.1.1. A change initiated in written or spoken language?

In the light of ongoing discussions in the literature on the history of Dutch, it is desirable to examine the distribution of *zich(zelf)* ('himself' / 'herself' / 'itself' / 'themselves') – the present-day Standard Dutch reflexive pronoun for the third person singular and plural – in the seventeenth-century corpus. The originally High German *zich(zelf)* is believed to have made its first appearance in some south-eastern Dutch texts in the Middle Ages and in some north-eastern Dutch texts from the fourteenth century onwards in the form of *sick* or *sich* (Hermodsson 1952: 263-267; Van Loey 1970: 143; Postma 2004). *Zich* eventually became the standard reflexive pronoun during the seventeenth century (Van Loey 1970: 143). While *zich* rose fast during this period and while it has been present in Standard Dutch for over centuries now, it is not found in the majority of the present-day Dutch dialects (Barbiers & Bennis 2004: 43).

Apart from *zich(zelf)*, the following forms also occurred in seventeenth-century Dutch: a personal pronoun (*haar* 'her' or 'them', *hem* 'him', and *hen/hun* 'them') sometimes followed by *zelf* 'self' (examples 1-3), *eigen* 'own' preceded by a possessive pronoun and sometimes followed by *zelf* (example 4), or the possessive pronoun *zijn* 'his' followed by *zelf* (example 5) (Weijnen 1965: 49).<sup>77</sup> These forms still occur in spontaneous

<sup>77</sup> Whether *zelf* can be included in the reflexive pronoun depends on the type of verb which is used and the context. With reflexive verbs (e.g. *zich vergissen* 'to make a mistake' and *zich voornemen* 'to resolve'), *zelf* usually does not occur in Standard

speech in some Dutch regions (Barbiers & Bennis 2004: 43; SAND *Syntactische Atlas van de Nederlandse Dialecten* ‘Syntactic atlas of the Dutch dialects’ Barbiers et al. 2005-2008; DynaSAND Barbiers et al. 2006). The forms *ul* and *UE* also occurred as reflexive pronouns in the seventeenth-century letters analysed, but it is often hard to tell whether they were seen as second or third person reflexives (see chapter 4 §4.2.1). The reflexive forms *ul* and *UE* were therefore not included in the data. However, it is to be noted that all the other third person reflexive pronouns (*zich(zelf)*, *haar(zelf)*, *hem(zelf)*, *hun(zelf)*, *hen(zelf)*, *zijn eigen (zelf)*, *haar eigen (zelf)*, *hun eigen (zelf)*, *zijnzelf*) that occurred with the subjects *ul* or *UE* were included in the data. Examples 1 to 5 illustrate the possibilities for marking third person reflexivity in seventeenth-century Dutch.<sup>78</sup>

- 1) *de sterre met de steert heeft **hem** hier mede verscheijden nachten vertoont*  
 ‘The comet has shown **him** here as well over several nights.’  
 ‘The comet has shown **itself** here as well over several nights.’
- 2) *Alsoo sij **haer** niet eerlijck quam te dragen*  
 ‘Since she was not behaving **her** in an honest way.’  
 ‘Since she was not behaving in an honest way.’
- 3) *voor waert beter dat alle menschen **haer** met haereijgen dingen bemoeijden*  
 ‘Furthermore, it would be better that all people would occupy **them** with their own business.’  
 ‘Furthermore, it would be better that all people would occupy **themselves** with their own business.’
- 4) *Desen voghel was immers vet ghenoegh om **sijn eyghen selven** te bedruypen.*  
 ‘For this bird was fat enough to baste **his own self**.’  
 ‘For this bird was fat enough to baste **itself**.’

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Dutch. With verbs that can be used both in a reflexive and non-reflexive way (e.g. *(zich) wassen* ‘to wash (oneself)’ and *(zich) scheren* ‘to shave (oneself)’), *zelf* can be added to stress the fact that the verb is used in a reflexive way (e-ANS §5.4.3.1).

<sup>78</sup> Examples 1-3 and example 5 stem from the corpus. Example 4 is taken from A. Poirters’ book *Het masker van de wereldt afgetrocken* (Poirters 1646: 109). The first English translations offered for each example are literal translations, while the second ones are more idiomatic.

- 5) *hij adde wel beter gedaen **sijn seluen** daer noch wat af te houden*  
 ‘He would have done better by keeping **his self** away from it [marriage] for now.’  
 ‘He would have done better by keeping **himself** away from it [marriage] for now.’

The ongoing discussion in the literature, summarised in Bennis (2005), is concerned with how and why *zich(zelf)* was adopted into the developing Standard Dutch in the seventeenth century while it was not part of the everyday language use of the elite in the trend-setting province of Holland. A first reason could be, according to Hermodsson (1952: 284-289), Van Loey (1970:143), and Van der Wal & Van Bree (2008: 214-215), that *zich* found its way into Standard Dutch through religious texts from Germany. *Zich* then became preferred by grammarians and literary men as the reflexive pronoun because it was unambiguously reflexive, while the use of personal pronouns could cause confusion, as illustrated in examples 6 and 7 (Van der Wal & Van Bree 2008: 214-215; Van der Sijs 2004: 482):

- 6) *Hij heeft **zich** gewassen.*  
 ‘He<sub>a</sub> has washed **himself**<sub>a</sub>.’  
 7) *Hij heeft **hem** gewassen.*  
 If *hem* has a reflexive meaning, the sentence is interpreted as:  
 ‘He<sub>a</sub> has washed **himself**<sub>a</sub>.’  
 If *hem* does not have a reflexive meaning, the sentence is interpreted as: ‘He<sub>a</sub> has washed **him**<sub>b</sub>.’

A different view on the matter is offered by Boyce-Hendriks (1998: 209-224) who claims on the basis of her sociolinguistic study that *zich* entered Dutch through spoken language: *zich* was introduced through the speech of the large number of immigrants in the Netherlands, particularly in Amsterdam, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These immigrants had originally fled the regions south of the Republic and had moved to Germany, from where they later emigrated to the Republic. According to Boyce-Hendriks (1998: 209-224), spoken language rather than written language was the first bearer of *zich*. It suffices to say that an agreement on the issue is still to be reached, an undertaking in which the corpus of seventeenth-century Dutch letters might be useful.

### 5.1.2. *Zich* in the *Letters as Loot* corpus

Unfortunately, it turns out that the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus will not provide us with the final answers to the questions about *zich*,

since the third person reflexive pronoun is not very frequent in the letters analysed. This is partly due to the text type: the main goals of the seventeenth-century letters analysed are usually to let the addressee know that the sender is alive and well and to ask the addressee for information about his or her state of health and finances. Finite verbs thus most often occur in the first and second person. Third person finite verbs also occur, naturally, when the letters describe the environment and the circle of acquaintances of sender or addressee, but they are less typical. In addition, reflexivity in itself is not highly frequent.

These facts combined explain the low number of third person reflexive pronouns: they occur only 66 times in total in the entire corpus (*zich* 14 times, other reflexives 52 times). Only 32 occurrences were found in the sub-corpus of private autograph letters (see table 2.12 in §2.3.4 for the overview of the corpus) and can thus be assigned to writers of a particular gender, age, region and class (*zich* 5 times, other reflexives 27 times). Given the low number of occurrences of the reflexive pronouns, it is not surprising that there are no absolute conclusions to be drawn about the distribution of *zich*. Some findings, however, are certainly worth to be discussed.

However low the number of occurrences, it is remarkable that *zich* in private autograph letters was only found in letters written by upper-middle-class people (5 times with 5 people), as shown in table 5.1. No reflexive pronouns were found in the letters of lower-class writers.

	<i>Zich</i>	<i>Hem(zelf)</i> <i>Haar(zelf)</i> <i>Hun(zelf)</i>	<i>Zijnzelf</i>
<b>LMC</b>	0	6	0
<b>UMC</b>	5	15	2
<b>UC</b>	0	2	0
<b>Unknown</b>	0	1	1

**Table 5.1: The distribution of the different reflexive pronouns across social class in private autograph letters**

The other reflexives were not only present in upper-middle-class letters (17 times with 14 writers), but were also found in letters written by the lower-middle class (6 times with 4 writers) and the upper class (twice with two writers). This suggests that *zich* was first adopted by the upper-middle class. However, as pointed out above, the scarceness of the data calls for prudence.

Less tentative is the conclusion that can be drawn about the type of reflexive forms used in Dutch seventeenth-century letters. It is undeniable that the personal pronouns are the preferred way of expressing reflexivity in the seventeenth-century letters: they occur 49 times in the letters of 40

different writers in the entire corpus. *Zijn zelf* appears only 3 times in the letters of two writers from Zeeland. The other way to express reflexivity, the combination of a possessive pronoun and *eigen* possibly followed by *zelf* (*zijn eigen (zelf)*, *haar eigen (zelf)*, *hun eigen (zelf)*), is nowhere to be found. Apparently it was customary in the second half of the seventeenth century to use the personal pronouns to express third person reflexivity in writing rather than *zijn/haar/hun eigen*, *zijn zelf* or *zich*. It is possible that *zijn/haar/hun eigen* and *zijn zelf* were already considered to be typical elements of spoken Dutch and thus not used in writing, while *zich* was not established enough yet to appear very frequently.

The behaviour of letter writers who seem to be of German origin or whose mother tongue seems to be German, but who write letters in Dutch is also remarkable. There are four of such letter writers in the entire corpus who use at least one reflexive pronoun in their letters.<sup>79</sup> To these German-speaking letter writers, the reflexive pronoun *zich* must have been very familiar. Two of them indeed use the originally High-German third person reflexive pronoun *zich* in their letters (it occurs 3 times), as shown in table 5.2.

	<i>Zich</i>	<i>Hem(zelf)</i> <i>Haar(zelf)</i> <i>Hun(zelf)</i>
<b>Heinrich Rode</b>	0	2
<b>Everhard Jabach</b>	1	2
<b>Michiel Heusch</b>	0	1
<b>Janneken Aengenendt</b>	2	0

**Table 5.2: The distribution of the different reflexive pronouns across letters that show a clear German influence**

However, these writers also use a different reflexive pronoun in 5 cases. The fact that Dutch reflexive pronouns occur alongside *zich* in these letters merits attention, since it shows how some immigrants with a German background or German-speaking people interacting with Dutch-speaking people actively tried to adapt their language to the existing language norms of the Dutch society.

Take for instance the letters of Heinrich Rode. Not only does his first name indicate a German background, his Dutch letters are filled with Germanisms and spellings that point to German (such as the German conjunction *denn* ‘because’ in example 8, *ei* instead of *ij* in the possessive pronoun *mijn*, the word *bott* for ‘ship’, *mitt* instead of Dutch *met* ‘with’, and

<sup>79</sup> Writers of business letters have thus been included.

the use of a capital for nouns in example 9). Nevertheless, when Heinrich uses the third person reflexive pronoun, he turns to *hem* instead of *zich* (example 10).

- 8) *Jck moet het noetsacklick laeten macken **den** Wij Connen niet off ende anbort Vaaren.*  
‘I have to have it fixed because we can’t leave or board the ship.’
- 9) *mein **bott** is In stucken **mitt** dise **Weders**.*  
‘My ship is in bits and pieces with this weather.’
- 10) *Capt. Weer hefft voel maels **hem** bemuijt om In mein Compania te Wessen*  
‘Captain Weer has often meddled **himself** to be in my company.’  
‘Captain Weer has often done his best to approach me.’

Finally, the data for *zich* in Zeeland prove to be of particular importance. Considering the distribution of *zich* for the province of Zeeland, my data alone are not particularly revealing: *zich* occurs once out of 9 third person reflexives in total.<sup>80</sup> However, when we compare this result to the data presented in an article on the rise of *zich* in the province of Zeeland in the seventeenth century, the results of this study suddenly become more meaningful. Verhagen (2008) examined a corpus of municipal records of the city of Arnemuiden and decrees of the city of Tholen consisting of about 650,000 words. The corpus shows how *zich* first appeared in these texts at the beginning of the century and gradually took over from the pronouns *hem*, *haar* and *hun* until its use was nearly categorical by 1700. His data show that between 1660 and 1680 the rate of *zich* rose from about 60% to 90% in Tholen and from about 60% to approximately 80% in Arnemuiden. Comparing these figures to my data, the rate of *zich* in the seventeenth-century letters (1 out of 9 occurrences) seems suspiciously low. Of course, these 9 tokens cannot offer absolute certainty that *zich* was used only rarely in late seventeenth-century letters in Zeeland, but nevertheless the figures deserve to be examined. If there is indeed a clear difference between the rate of *zich* in letters like the ones in the corpus and in documents like the ones in Verhagen’s corpus, the fact that *zich* occurs more often in official texts than in private letters – the language of which is considered to be more receptive to influences from spoken Dutch than the language used in official texts –

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<sup>80</sup> All the letters for Zeeland for the entire corpus were taken into account: private and business, autographs and non-autographs or letters of uncertain authorship. There were no third person reflexives found in business letters from Zeeland.



suggests that *zich* entered Zeeland through (official) written texts rather than through spoken Dutch.

### 5.1.3. Conclusions

Due to the low frequency of the reflexive pronouns for the third person in the corpus, it has proved to be impossible to provide a detailed picture of the distribution of *zich* across social class, gender and region in seventeenth-century Dutch private letters. Only the fact that personal pronouns are the preferred way of expressing reflexivity and the fact that other reflexive forms such as *zijn/haar/hun eigen* and *zijn zelf* were not used in the corpus of seventeenth-century letters stand. However, it is also noticeable that *zich* is only found in letters written by members of the upper-middle class; although it is unclear whether this is simply due to the large presence of such letters in general or whether the upper-middle-class writers were actually the first ones to adopt *zich*.

Another interesting point for discussion is the comparison between the use of *zich* in the private letters analysed and the use of *zich* in official texts from Zeeland. The result suggests that *zich* spread through this region as a change from above: that it occurred first in the language use of members of the upper classes and in careful writing before it started to occur in the language use of people from the lower classes and in more spontaneous language use. This seems to contradict Boyce-Hendriks' conclusions about *zich* being introduced into Dutch through the spoken language of lower-class immigrants.

Furthermore, the data provided by the letter writers with a German background are interesting: these letter writers occasionally use the reflexive *zich*, which is closely related to the German reflexive *sich*, but they also seem inclined to adapt their language use to the Dutch norms and to use *hem* and *haar* as reflexives.

However, one should keep in mind that these results are only a small part of the puzzle: without more of such data from different moments in time and from different regions, it is still impossible to provide a detailed picture of this language change and bring an end to the discussion. After all, the nature of a language change can very well differ depending on the region, the period, and the stage this language change was in.

## 5.2. *Elkaar* and *mekaar*: competing forms?

### 5.2.1. The history of the reciprocal pronouns *mekaar* and *elkaar*

Hüning (2006) describes reciprocity in the history of Dutch and focuses on the anaphoric reciprocal pronouns used in present-day Dutch: *mekaar* and

*elkaar*. The article gives rise to some interesting questions to which the seventeenth-century corpus of letters may help find an answer. Before turning to *mekaar* and *elkaar* in the *Letters as Loot* corpus, I will first describe how these reciprocal pronouns are used in Dutch and what is already known about their history.

*Mekaar* and *elkaar* are typically used to indicate a symmetrical relationship. A typical context would be a thematic relation with two or more participants in which each participant acts as an agent and as an experiencer or patient at the same time. Take for instance the event of Johan and Thomas who meet each other. Johan meets Thomas and at the same time Thomas meets Johan (Lichtenberk 1994: 3506 and Kemmer 1993: 97 in Hüning 2006: 186). In Dutch, this reciprocity can be expressed as follows:

- 11) *Johan en Thomas ontmoeten elkaar/mekaar.*  
‘Johan and Thomas meet **each other**.’

The pronouns also occur in certain fixed expressions, such as *uit elkaar vallen* ‘to fall apart’. Both pronouns can occur in the same contexts and expressions, but *mekaar* is hardly ever used in present-day written Dutch. *Elkaar* has become the standard form, while *mekaar* can still be found in colloquial speech (Hüning 2006: 185-189). Hüning (2006: 186-189) lists some examples of the use of *elkaar*, taken from the ANS (Haeseryn et al. 1997, e-ANS §5.4.):

- 12) *Johan en Pieter verdedigen elkaar.*  
‘Johan and Pieter defend **each other**.’  
13) *Ze schreven elkaar een brief.*  
‘They wrote **each other** a letter.’  
14) *De auto’s reden achter elkaar.*  
‘The cars were driving **one after the other**.’  
15) *Walter en Maarten aten elkaars boterhammen op.*  
‘Walter and Maarten ate **each other**’s sandwiches.’

Hüning (2006) describes the histories of development of *mekaar* and *elkaar*. *Mekaar* and *elkaar* developed from *malkander* and *elkander* respectively which in turn developed from the Middle Dutch pronouns *manlijc* (‘each one of the people’) and *elc* (‘each’) in combination with the so-called ‘alterity word’ *ander* (‘other’). These constructions of the Middle Dutch pronouns and the ‘alterity word’ became grammaticalised in time as the combinations of *elc* or *manlijc/mallic* with *ander* became re-interpreted as the reciprocal pronouns *elkander* and *malkander* (Hüning 2006: 200-209). It is assumed that the ending *-ander* turned into *-aar* as the vowel in front of *n* became

nasalised. This created an intervocalic position in which the dental was often dropped in the history of Dutch. Therefore *a<sup>n</sup>der* became *aar* (Heeroma 1942: 220 in Hüning 2006: 206).

At the end of his article, Hüning discusses the use of the reciprocal pronouns from the fifteenth until the nineteenth centuries with the seventeenth century as a pivotal period. He concludes that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century authors used *malkander* as the default pronoun of reciprocity and that the switch to the present-day Standard-Dutch pronoun of reciprocity *elkander/elkaar* took place in the seventeenth century (2006: 211). Hüning illustrates this with Vondel's use of the reciprocal pronouns in his plays: until 1641 the famous Dutch poet and playwright Vondel (1587-1679) used *malkander* almost exclusively, while in the period between 1642 and 1648 *elkander* occurs as often as *malkander* in his plays, and starting from 1650 Vondel used *elkander* exclusively. The question remains whether this shift in Vondel's language use occurred because the author adapted to a changing linguistic norm or because he was trying to establish a norm himself (Hüning 2006: 210).

Hüning (2006) also discusses how and why *elkaar* may have become the standard reciprocal pronoun while *mekaar* was once so dominant and still appears to be dominant in almost all present-day dialects of the Dutch-speaking area. Recent dialect maps of the SAND-atlas show that *elkaar* is the reciprocal pronoun in dialects only of the region of Amsterdam (SAND Barbiers et al. 2005-2008, DynaSAND Barbiers et al. 2006). If this was already the case in the sixteenth century, Hüning argues, *elkaar* may have become part of the standard language simply because it was present in the dialect of Amsterdam, which formed the basis of the developing standard language in Dutch. However, the author assumes that *elkaar* in the current dialects of Amsterdam is not a cause, but rather a consequence of the development by which this pronoun became part of the standard language (2006: 213).

These loose ends in the history of the reciprocal pronouns *elkaar* and *mekaar* in Dutch prompt us to examine the corpus of seventeenth-century letters. What does the distribution of *elkaar* and *mekaar* look like and can it help us to answer the remaining questions above?

### 5.2.2. *Elkander* and *malkander* in the seventeenth-century letters

To examine the distribution of *elkaar* and *mekaar* in the corpus, all variants of these forms in the entire corpus were listed and prepared for analysis.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Occurrences of *de(n) andere(n)* ('the other') were also present in the corpus as another alternative to express reciprocity. *De(n) andere(n)* occurred 5 times in the entire corpus and could not be linked to a specific gender, region or social class. It

However, the surprising results left little room for extensive analyses, since not much variation could be found. Remarkably, not even a single occurrence of the present-day standard reciprocal pronoun *elkaar* was found in the entire corpus, neither in the older form *elkander*, nor in its current form *elkaar*. Instead I found 211 occurrences of *malkander* and 10 occurrences of *malkaar/mekaar* in the letters of 147 different writers.<sup>82</sup> Examples 16 to 19 illustrate the reciprocal pronouns found in the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus:

- 16) *nu verhoope VL sult troost aen **malcanderen** hebben, ende **malcanderen** oock voort helpen*  
 ‘Now, I hope you will find comfort in **each other** and help **each other** as well’
- 17) *liefste ick hoop dat ghij ons me niet verget al ben wij niet bij **mekaer** wij hoef daerom **mekaer** niet vergeten*  
 ‘Dearest, I hope that you will not forget us either. Even though we are not **together**, this does not mean that we should therefore forget about **each other**.’
- 18) *ijck hoopen als dat die heer ons met gesondtghijt weer bij **malcanderen** sal laten komen*  
 ‘I hope that the Lord will let us meet **each other** again in good health.’
- 19) *godt wil ul bewaeren voor on geluck ende ons weder te saemen bij **mal kandere** laete kome*  
 ‘God save you from harm and let us meet **each other** again’

One cannot help noticing that examples 18 and 19 are rather similar. They are indeed both instances of a formula that occurs quite often in the seventeenth-century letters. This formula expresses the wish of the letter writer to be able to meet the addressee alive and well again one day, with the help of God, something which was not self-evident in a time of war, epidemics and overseas adventures. The occurrences of *malkander* and *mekaar* that are found in these formulae should be handled with care, since it is likely that the letter writers did not actively choose the form *malkander* or

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will not be discussed in the remainder of the chapter, since this section focuses on the relation between *elkaar* and *mekaar*.

<sup>82</sup> The 10 instances of *malkaar/mekaar* were mostly found in letters from the sub-corpus of non-autograph letters and letters with an unknown status, so that they could not be linked to a specific individual. Only two instances could be linked to a writer (to a middle-aged upper-middle class woman from Amsterdam and to a young upper-middle class man from Zeeland), but this is not enough to link the newer forms of *malkander* to a specific gender, region, age or social class.

*mekaar* in this environment, but rather used the formula in its entirety and used the reciprocal pronoun as a fixed part of it without much thought. Therefore, the occurrences in formulae could have a distorting effect on the data. However, if all these instances of the reciprocal pronoun found in formulae are left out (129 occurrences by 104 different writers), there are still 92 occurrences of *malkander* or *mekaar* written by 68 different writers – men and women from all different age categories and belonging to the lower-middle, upper-middle and upper classes. These data are still numerous enough to suggest that *malkander/mekaar* was the regular reciprocal pronoun in seventeenth-century letters and that *elkander* or *elkaar* was hardly used by most seventeenth-century Dutch people when writing letters.

That there is no variation to be found in the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus with regard to the use of *malkander* and *elkander* does not mean that the data cannot provide us with valuable information. On the contrary. In this case, at least, the lack of variation gives clear answers to some of the remaining open questions raised by Hüning (2006) discussed above. Firstly, the corpus of seventeenth-century letters analysed here consists of letters written in the periods 1664 to 1666 and 1671 to 1672, which is fourteen to twenty-two years after the poet and playwright Vondel had started to use *elkander* exclusively. If Vondel was indeed following a norm that was developing in the vernacular, then we should at least see some variation in the data, if not find a preference for *elkander* or *elkaar*. However, it seems to be the case that the vast majority of people preferred *malkander* or *mekaar* to *elkander* or *elkaar*. Vondel thus must have been among the first to opt for *elkander* as the only reciprocal pronoun in his written texts. This may well have been a conscious act of standardisation on his behalf, since it is well known that Vondel was very much interested in and concerned with the Dutch language and strove to standardise it (Hüning 2006: 210; see also Van der Sijs 2004: 588 ff; Van der Wal 1995: *passim*).

However, I do not want to raise the impression that Vondel alone would be responsible for the development of *elkander* into the standard reciprocal pronoun in Dutch. Rather, it seems likely that *elkander* had become the norm in the written language of a circle of upper-class literary men and maybe of upper-class writers in general by the seventeenth century. Since the corpus does not contain letters written by regents, nobility or great literary men (see chapter 2), other sources must be examined to find out who exactly was using *elkander* in the seventeenth-century upper-class circles. Vondel was not the first or only one to prefer *elkander* as is born out by an analysis of the letters of Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687), a well-known Dutch poet and diplomat, and of the correspondence of P.C. Hooft (1581-1647), a Dutch poet, historian and playwright. Huygens preferred *elkander* to *malkander* in his early as well as in his later letters: he used

*elkander/elkaar* 65 times, while *malkander* only appears twice in the epistolary collection examined.<sup>83</sup> In his letters written between 1601 and 1647, Hooft shows this same preference: he uses *elkander* 10 times and *malkander* only once.<sup>84</sup>

As to how and why *elkaar* became the standard reciprocal pronoun in Dutch, it has been suggested that *elkander/elkaar* was part of the dialects in and around Amsterdam, which were at the basis of the standard language (Hüning 2006: 213). However, all of the 23 letter writers from Amsterdam who use a reciprocal pronoun in a non-formulaic context write *malkander* or *mekaar* (a total of 34 occurrences), which contradicts the assumption that *elkander* was the preferred reciprocal pronoun in the seventeenth-century dialect of Amsterdam. Hüning was thus right in assuming that *elkaar* in the present-day dialects of and around Amsterdam is probably a consequence of the fact that *elkaar* found its way into the standard language (2006: 213).

### 5.2.3. Concluding remarks

To conclude, the results from the corpus cannot offer a final answer to the question why and how *elkaar* became part of the standard language and *mekaar* did not. However, the data clearly suggest that *elkaar* was not introduced into the standard language from below, because the first appearances of *elkaar* are not found in the language of immediacy found in private letters written by people of the lower classes. *Elkaar* seems to have entered Dutch through a change from above, because Vondel, Huygens and Hooft are among the very first to prefer the form *elkaar* in their written texts. This suggests that we are dealing here with a form that was introduced into the Dutch by a small group of upper-class literary men or maybe by upper-class members in general.

## 5.3. Conclusions

Both case studies presented in this chapter turned out to be rather atypical compared to other case studies in this dissertation. The case study of

<sup>83</sup> For this query, I used the digital version of the *Briefwisseling van Constantijn Huygens 1608-1687, uitgegeven door J.A. Worp* (Worp 1911-1917), which can be consulted online: <<http://www.historici.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/Huygens>> [08/11/2012]

<sup>84</sup> For this query, I used the digital version of the edition of P.C. Hooft's correspondence (Van Tricht, Kuijper, Zwaan, Musarra & Ekkart 1976-1979) in the DBNL (*Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren* 'The Digital Library for Dutch Language and Literature'): <<http://www.dbnl.org/titels/titel.php?id=hoof001hwva00>> [08/11/2012]

reflexive pronouns only yielded a small amount of data and the case study of the reciprocal pronouns *elkaar* and *mekaar* revealed no variation at all. This hindered settling the issue of why and how *zich* and *elkaar* became elements of the developing Standard Dutch in the seventeenth century. However, although the *Letters as Loot* corpus could not provide the final answers to these discussions, it nevertheless produced some interesting findings. Examining the everyday language in the letters of people from all sorts of social classes and comparing it to the Dutch in official texts (Verhagen 2008) and to the language use of well-known literary men (Hüning 2006) raised some new valuable insights and hypotheses, as described above in §5.1.3 and in §5.2.3. So while the data for *zich* and *elkander/malkander* in the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus seem rather modest when considered in isolation, they are certainly not insignificant in the light of previous research.

