



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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

Citation

Nobels, J. M. P. (2013, May 21). *(Extra)Ordinary letters: A view from below on seventeenth-century Dutch*. LOT, Utrecht. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20900>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20900>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20900> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Nobels, Judith Maria Petrus

Title: (Extra)Ordinary letters. A view from below on seventeenth-century Dutch

Issue Date: 2013-05-21

Chapter 7. Schwa-apocope

7.1. Previous studies and present goals

7.1.1. The origin and spread of schwa-apocope

One of the striking differences between Middle Dutch and Early Modern Dutch lies in the endings of words. The unstressed final vowel *e* which is often present in Middle Dutch appears less often in Early Modern Dutch words. This is due to a language change which started in the thirteenth century, also known as schwa-apocope (Marynissen 2004a; 2004b; 2009). This language change affected words of different grammatical categories: not only nouns (*lettere* > *letter* ‘letter’) lost the final schwa, but also some verb forms (the first person singular in the simple present e.g. *ic neme* > *ick neem* ‘I take’, the first person singular in the simple past for some specific verbs e.g. *ic brachte* > *ick bracht* ‘I brought’, and the inflected infinitive e.g. *te doene* > *te doen*), prepositions (*ane* > *aen* ‘on’, ‘with’, ‘to’, ‘of’, etc.), adverbs (*lange* > *lang* ‘long’), adjectives used attributively or predicatively (*simpele* > *simpel* ‘simple’, ‘easy’), articles (*ene* > *een* ‘a(n)’), and numerals (*achte* > *acht* ‘eight’) were stripped of their unstressed final *e* (Marynissen 2004a: 609).

Although schwa-apocope had a very big scope, it did not affect all words ending in the unstressed *e*. In present-day Dutch, old schwa-endings can still be found in some fixed expressions (e.g. *met name* ‘in particular’), in the declension of the adjectives and the ordinal numbers under certain conditions (e.g. *het witte huis* ‘the white house’, *een tweede huis* ‘the second house’), in nominalised adjectives (e.g. *de blinde* ‘the blind person’), in the past tense forms of weak verbs (e.g. *hij kookte* ‘he cooked’), in the nominal suffixes *-de* or *-te* which are used to form abstractions (e.g. *vreugde* ‘joy’, *hitte* ‘heat’), in personal nouns in which the final *e*’s function is to indicate that the noun refers to someone of the female sex (e.g. *agente* ‘policewoman’ vs. *agent* ‘policeman’), and in a few words that can only be classed in a residual category (e.g. *linde* ‘lime tree’, *orde* ‘order’, *vete* ‘feud’, *dille* ‘dill’, *aanname* ‘assumption’) (Marynissen 2004a: 609-610). The question why schwa-apocope spread the way it did, with particular exceptions, has been discussed in several studies (see for instance Van Haeringen 1937a and Boutkan & Kossman 1998).

According to Marynissen (2004a: 616; 2004b: 139), the schwa apocope first occurred in North Holland and Utrecht in the last quarter of the thirteenth century and then quickly spread to east-northern Brabant and Limburg. It then slowly spread to the north and to the south. In present-day Dutch, there is still a north-eastern and a south-western area in which schwa-

apocope is absent, as Weijnen (1991: 108-109) shows in his map 45 and as can be gathered from figure 7.1 below: the check marks represent the places where the first person singular form of the present for the verb *breken* ‘to break’ occurs without a schwa at the ending (*ik breek*). The vertical bars represent the places where this verb form occurs with a final schwa (*ik breke*). These are clearly only to be found in the north-eastern and in the south-western areas of the Dutch speaking region. Of the regions represented in the corpus – Zeeland, South Holland and North Holland – only Zeeland has the form *ik breke*.

Not only geographical factors played a role in the spread of schwa-apocope, but also morphological and phonetic factors were important. It has become evident that the schwa was lost first in words with three or more syllables and was slower to disappear in *e*-endings which indicated a dative or which indicated the feminine in nouns (Van Haeringen 1937a: 325; Marynissen 2004a: 611; 2009: 237). Furthermore it has been suggested that *e*-endings following [d] were less easily dropped (Van Haeringen 1937a: 322-323, Boutkan & Kossman 1998: 169-170). Several factors influencing schwa-apocope have thus been identified already. In what ways can the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus contribute to the discussions?

7.1.2. Social, stylistic and phonetic factors

Firstly, no social factors have been examined yet in relation to schwa-apocope. So while it is clear where schwa-apocope originated geographically and while some morphological and phonetic factors have been identified which influenced the deletion of the final schwa, it is unclear whether the language change moved through different social groupings at the same pace. The seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus offers the possibility to investigate whether social variables did have an impact on this language change and what this impact looked like. In what follows, I will focus on schwa-apocope in first person singular verb forms in relation to the social variables gender, class and age. Since previous studies have shown that region was an important factor and since the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus contains letters linked to three different regions, region will be taken into account as well.

The corpus of letters also offers the opportunity to examine the influence of epistolary conventions: the seventeenth-century letters contain many formulae and much conventional language use. It would be interesting to examine whether schwa-apocope found acceptance less easily in conventional phrases than in more spontaneously composed passages.

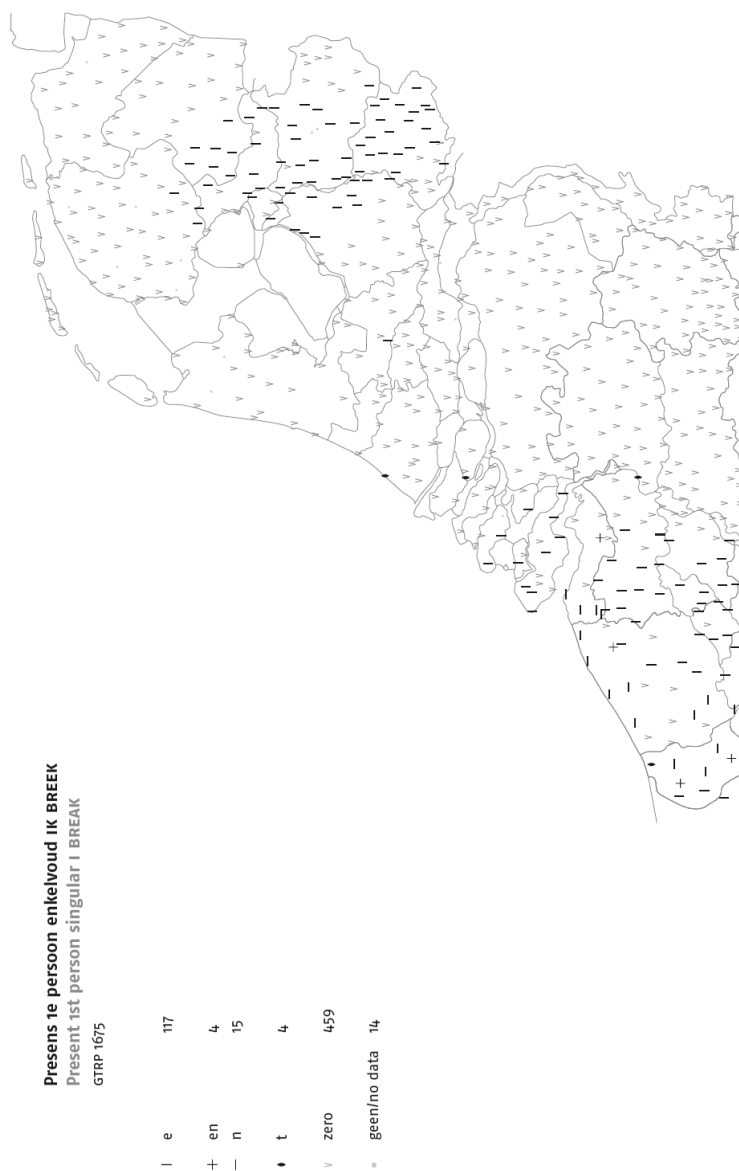


Figure 7.1: the first personal singular verb form for the present tense of the verb *breken* 'to break' in present-day Dutch dialects, from the Morphological Atlas of the Dutch Dialects (MAND II, Goeman et al. 2008).

Finally, I will also examine the possible influence of the phonetic context preceding and following the final schwa. The importance of the phonetic context *preceding* the verbal ending has been suggested by Van Haeringen (1937a: 322-323) and by Boutkan & Kossman (1998), but has not been corroborated with figures yet. Whether the phonetic context *following* the final schwa influences schwa-apocope in the seventeenth-century corpus of letters is also an interesting question: this context was likely very influential in spoken Dutch, but will we see this reflected in the written Dutch of private letters as well?

The reason why I will focus on verb forms, rather than on nouns, is that verb forms have not been the focus of much investigation yet, while the writings of Verdenius give reason to expect variation in the presence of the schwa-ending in these forms in the seventeenth century (1943: 175) and while first person singular verb forms are ubiquitous in the letters of the corpus. The first person singular verb forms were extracted from the corpus with a simple search on the personal pronoun *ick* and its orthographical variants. The verb forms under examination were limited to forms of the present tense and of the indicative mood, since the first person singular of the past tense shows the variation between final *e* and the null ending in only a few verbs (e.g. *ick bracht* vs. *ick brachte* ‘I brought’) and since the verb form for the conjunctive mood always occurs with the *-e* ending (e.g. *leve de koningin!* ‘Long live the Queen!’). I excluded the verb *zijn* ‘to be’ from the data, given that its declension is irregular. Monosyllabic verbs were excluded as well (*gaan* ‘to go’, *slaan* ‘to hit’, *staan* ‘to stand’, *verstaan* ‘to understand’, *zien* ‘to see’, and *doen* ‘to do’), since the first person singular verb form of the present tense of these verbs only shows variation between a final *n*, a zero-ending, or a *t*-ending. The first person singular verb form of the present tense of these verbs can thus be the stem (e.g. *ick doe*), the stem followed by *n* (e.g. *ick doen*), or the stem followed by *t* (e.g. *ick doet*). The praeterito-praesentia (*kunnen* ‘can’, *moeten* ‘have to/must’, *mogen* ‘may/can’, *zullen* ‘shall/will’) and the verb *willen* ‘to want’ were also excluded.¹⁰⁰ They have been left out on the grounds that they originally occurred without a final schwa in the first person singular of the present tense in Middle Dutch. As a consequence, they show less variation than other verbs in the seventeenth-century corpus. Since some of these verbs occur quite

¹⁰⁰ The verb *weten* also belongs to the class of praeterito-praesentia, but it was not excluded from the data since it shows slightly more variation than the other praeterito-praesentia do: the final schwa occurs in 7 out of the 129 cases (that is in 5.4% of the cases) with the verb *weten*, while with the other praeterito-presentia the schwa never occurs more often than in 3.4% of the separate cases and in 0.8% of the cases in total (in 5 out of 664 occurrences).

frequently (e.g. the first person singular form of *zullen* occurs 326 times), including them could distort the data.

Before I go into the influence of all the different factors mentioned above (region, social variants, epistolary conventions, and phonetic context), I will first list the different kinds of verb endings for the first person singular that were found in the *Letters as Loot* corpus in §7.2. In §7.3 region and the social variables will be examined and formulaic language will be brought to the attention in §7.4. The phonetic context preceding and following the verbal ending will be discussed in §7.5. The final conclusions will be drawn in §7.6.

7.2. Different endings for the first person singular

The most frequent endings for the first person singular verb forms in the seventeenth-century corpus are the *-e* and the zero-ending, which I will represent as *-∅*. In the sub-corpus of private letters (454 letters written by 408 different writers, see table 2.12 in §2.3.4 for the overview of the corpus), the final *-e* occurs 1019 times and *-∅* occurs 1684 times. These endings are presented in table 7.1 together with less frequent endings.

The first ending presented in the table is *-n*. The single occurrence of this spelling for the ending of the first person singular of the present tense originates from Zeeland (*ick verhopn* ‘I hope’). This spelling could represent a syllabic *n*, which occurs occasionally in some Flemish dialects from the southernmost part of Zeeland (*Zeeuws-Vlaanderen*) nowadays (see figure 7.1), although not in Middelburg and Vlissingen, the towns almost all of the Zeeland letters stem from. However, the *-n* could also be a misspelling of the *-en* ending, which will be discussed below.

The *-’* ending is a very interesting one. The symbol at the end of the verb form signals that the final *-e* has been lost. The two letter writers who use this symbol use it only in front of vowels, indicating that the final schwa has been dropped in front of the vowel of the following word. Deletion of the schwa in front of a vowel can occur across a word boundary in present-day casually spoken Dutch (cf. Booij 1995: 65-68, 150-151) and is here shown to have occurred in the seventeenth century as well for the final schwa of the first person singular verb form.

<i>Ending</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>-n</i>	1	0%	<i>ick verhopn</i> ‘I hope’
<i>-’</i>	3	0%	<i>ick bid’ ul</i> ‘I beg you’, <i>ik hoop’ en</i> ‘I hope and’, <i>zend’ ik</i> ‘I send’
<i>-t</i>	70	2%	<i>ick hebt</i> ‘I have’, <i>ick hort</i> ‘I hear’, <i>ick vorlanght</i> ‘I long’
<i>-en</i>	163	6%	<i>ick hebben</i> ‘I have’, <i>ick hoopen</i> ‘I hope’, <i>ick twijfelen</i> ‘I doubt’
<i>-e</i>	1019	35%	<i>ick bevele</i> ‘I recommend’, <i>ick bidde</i> ‘I pray’, <i>ick denke</i> ‘I think’
<i>-∅</i>	1684	57%	<i>ick bedanck</i> ‘I thank’, <i>ick beveel</i> ‘I recommend’, <i>ick bit</i> ‘I pray’
Total	2940		

Table 7.1: Endings for the first person singular verb form in the sub-corpus of private letters

The final *-t* is said to have been a central-Dutch innovation and thus it is not surprising that the data of the SAND (*Syntactische Atlas van de Nederlandse Dialecten* ‘Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch Dialects’) show that it occurs predominantly in the central province of Utrecht (De Vogelaer 2008: 67-68; SAND Barbiers et al. 2005-2008; DynaSAND Barbiers et al. 2006). However, according to different scholars, the area of distribution of this ending is larger than the central area of the Netherlands (De Vogelaer 2008: 67-68). The final *-t* is for instance mentioned to be present in some South Holland dialects and in North Holland (Daan 1965: 13; Van Bree 2004: 90; MAND II, Goeman et al. 2008), but De Vogelaer also finds occurrences in the east of the Netherlands and even in Dutch Limburg in the data of the SAND (2008: 68). In the corpus I find the final *-t* in all the major regions for which I have a large amount of data: Zeeland, South Holland, and North Holland. However, it seems to occur particularly often in South Holland (35 occurrences out of the 64 occurrences that could be attributed to a particular region) and in the city of Amsterdam (17 out of the 64 occurrences that could be attributed to a particular region). The central Dutch innovation thus seems to have spread to the neighbouring regions already in the seventeenth century. Unfortunately, the first person singular verb forms ending in *t* do not occur often enough to examine their distribution across gender and social class in detail.

This brings me to the last unusual ending presented in the table: *-en*. The intriguing thing about this ending is that it occurs most often of all the ‘irregular’ endings, while – unlike *-t* – it cannot be found in the present-day Dutch dialects of South Holland or North Holland. There is no evidence to be found of people who say for instance *ik weten*, with a clear [n] at the

ending in these regions, nor are there any indications in the literature suggesting that people did so in the seventeenth century. This means that the spelling *-en* may very well represent a different pronunciation in seventeenth-century Holland, and the most likely candidate for this pronunciation is the schwa. This is connected to the fact that infinitives and plural verb forms, which are supposed to end in *-en* in spelling, did not always have a clearly audible [n] at their ending when pronounced.¹⁰¹ Writers who knew that these verb forms in spoken language ended in a schwa but were spelt with an *n* at the ending, might have reasoned by analogy for the verb forms of the first person singular: they also normally end in a schwa in the spoken Dutch of Holland too, and writers could have been tempted to write a final *n*, just as for infinitives and plural forms. The *-en* ending in the first person singular in letters from Holland is thus likely an alternative spelling which signals the use of a schwa in spoken language.

However, in the Belgian province of West-Flanders – adjacent to Zeeland – and in the southernmost part of Zeeland (*Zeeuws-Vlaanderen*), where Flemish dialects are spoken, there are examples of final *-n* and of final *-en* in first person singular verb forms in present-day dialects (see figure 7.1). Even though these forms do not seem to occur in present-day Vlissingen and Middelburg, the two towns with which almost all of the Zeeland letters can be associated, I must thus allow for the possibility that the final *-en* in these letters faithfully reflects the spoken language of the seventeenth century. So for Zeeland, the final *-en* may be reflecting the schwa in spoken language, but it may as well be reflecting a schwa followed by an [n]. Whatever the final *-en* in Zeeland truly represents, this ending represents an ending unaffected by schwa-apocope in any case.

Although the ending in *-e* and the one in *-en* are quite likely to be just different spelling forms for the same pronunciation, especially in Holland, I will keep the data for *-e* and *-en* endings separate in the rest of this chapter. I will do this because I cannot be certain that *-e* and *-en* spellings are exchangeable for Zeeland, and maintaining the difference will help to find out whether this spelling was typical of a certain group of writers. Wherever appropriate, however, I will combine the figures for *-e* and *-en*. The other irregular endings *-t* and *-n* will not be dealt with extensively in the following sections; if mentioned, they will be grouped under the header ‘other endings’. The three endings with an apostrophe will be treated as zero endings.

¹⁰¹ This can be seen clearly in the corpus of seventeenth-century letters: infinitives and plural verb forms are regularly spelt without the final *n*, e.g. *waer ouer weij godt niet genoch wete te dancken* ‘for which we cannot thank God enough’.

The two endings presented at the bottom of table 7.1 are the leading figures in the story of schwa-apocope: *-e* and the zero-ending, *-∅*. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century grammars both endings are represented. Some grammarians only list first person singular verb forms with a final schwa (Moonen 1706: 184), some only list these forms with the zero-ending (Kók 1649: 44, 47), and others point out to their readers that both the *-e* and *-∅* are being used in Dutch (Leupenius 1653: 59, Van Heule 1625: 45; Ten Kate 1723: 551). It is not the case that grammars written before the second half of the seventeenth century prefer the final *-e* and that the grammars of the early eighteenth century prefer *-∅*. This indicates that the change from a final schwa to a zero-ending in first person singular verb forms of the present must still have been in full swing by the end of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, none of these grammar writers explicitly rejects the use of either ending, so it is likely that neither of the endings was strongly marked as improper in the seventeenth century.

As is clear from table 7.1, the zero-ending outnumbers the final schwa. Schwa-apocope is thus clearly spreading through the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. However, whether it is equally present in different regions, in different social spheres, and in different stylistic and phonetic contexts is a question to be answered in the remainder of this chapter.

7.3. Regional and social variation

7.3.1 Zeeland as the odd one out

Based on the map and regional information presented above, which shows that schwa-apocope has not reached the north-eastern and the south-western regions of the Dutch language area even to this day, we can expect there to be a difference between the southern data (data for Zeeland) and the northern data (the data for South and North Holland) as far as the presence of the schwa is concerned. In order to examine this, I looked at all the private letters in the corpus for the regions of Zeeland, South Holland and North Holland (450 letters by 331 writers). The table below shows how often the schwa occurs in the ending of the first person singular forms and how often this ending is missing. The table also includes the ending *-en*, while endings other than *-∅*, *-e*, or *-en* are grouped under the common heading ‘other endings’. As in earlier chapters, the data for North Holland have been presented in total as well as separately for Amsterdam and the rest of the province.

	<i>Zee</i>	<i>SH</i>	<i>NH</i>	<i>NH Ams</i>	<i>NH without Ams</i>
– \emptyset	23%	73%	71%	72%	69%
– <i>e</i>	68%	20%	22%	20%	28%
– <i>en</i>	7%	3%	4%	5%	2%
other endings	1%	4%	3%	4%	1%
N total	631	424	1502	977	525

Table 7.2: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb form in private letters across region

The results confirm my expectations. While in Zeeland the final *e* is present in 68% of all the first person singular verb forms, in South and North Holland the share of the final *e* is no more than 22%. The difference is striking. Clearly, schwa-apocope had not come as far in Zeeland yet as it had in Holland. The data for the endings in *–en* and the other endings are so scarce, that they do not allow for any comparison between the different regions. For schwa-apocope, we see that the data for South Holland agree with the data for North Holland. However, North and South Holland do not always seem to align linguistically, since for the feature of negation expanded upon in chapter 6, the language use in South Holland resembled the language use in Zeeland rather than the language of North Holland.

Since this regional difference between Zeeland on the one hand and Holland on the other is so overwhelming, I will examine the influence of the social factors per region. Given the fact that the data for the presence of the schwa in South Holland seem to be similar to the data for North Holland, I will combine these two regions and refer to this covering region as Holland. I will not make a distinction between Amsterdam on the one hand and the rest of North Holland on the other hand, since the data do not seem to indicate too large a difference.

7.3.2 Zeeland

Social class

In the province of Zeeland, the factor of social class seems to have little influence on the endings for the first person singular as they are written in private letters. Table 7.3 shows the frequency of each possible ending per social class. The sub-corpus of private autographs from Zeeland does not contain any letters written by writers from the lower class. Unfortunately, the corpus also contains no more than 3 occurrences of the first person singular ending in letters written by members of the upper class in Zeeland. Therefore,

only the percentages for the lower-middle and upper-middle class are presented below.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>other endings</i>	N total
LMC	23%	61%	16%	0%	69
UMC	23%	71%	5%	1%	321

Table 7.3: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms private autographs from Zeeland across social class

Looking at the data from the lower-middle class and the upper-middle class, the difference between the classes does not lie in the absence of a schwa-like ending: the zero-ending occurs as often in the lower-middle class as it does in the upper-middle class, namely in 23% of the cases. However, there are differences pertaining to the *e*-ending and the ending in *-en*. The *e*-ending occurs more often in the upper-middle class than in the lower-middle class (71% vs. 61% respectively); while for the final *en* it is the other way around: it occurs more often in the lower-middle class than it does in the upper-middle class (16% vs. 5% respectively). The differences are not staggering and, if the *e*- and *en*-endings are seen as one group of endings unaffected by schwa-apocope, there are no differences at all between the social classes.

Gender

Looking at the data for men and women from Zeeland, it is clear that women use the final *e* less often than men do. In the 88 autographs written by 59 different writers, women use the final *e* in 48% of the cases, while men use it in 71% of the cases. At the same time, women use the zero ending more often than men do (33% vs. 21% respectively). Final *en* is also favoured more by women than by men: women use it in 17% of the cases, while men only write it in 7% of the cases. Even if the final *e* and the final *en* are combined as schwa-like endings, the difference between men and women remains: women use schwa-like endings in 65% of the cases, while men use them in 78% of the cases. I can thus conclude that schwa-apocope seems to have caught on with women earlier than with men in writing in Zeeland. However, I must be very careful in analysing the data for women from Zeeland, since the corpus contains only five autograph letters written by 4 different female writers. On the basis of these data, one cannot conclude for certain that men and women in Zeeland differed in their use of the final schwa and schwa-apocope.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>other endings</i>	N total
Men	21%	71%	7%	1%	407
Women	33%	48%	17%	2%	42

Table 7.4: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms in private autographs from Zeeland across gender

Age

The social variable age only has a very small effect on the presence of the final schwa in Zeeland, as can be gathered from table 7.5 below.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>other endings</i>	N total
<30	20%	67%	12%	1%	245
30-50	25%	72%	2%	0%	201

Table 7.5: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms in private autographs of Zeeland across age groups.

The largest difference between the two age-groups can be found for the presence of final *en*. The younger letter writers use the final *en* more often than the older letter writers: letter writers younger than 30 years of age use it in 12% of the cases, while letter writers of 30 to 50 years of age use it in no more than 2% of the cases. An explanation for this difference is not easily given. Furthermore, the small difference between the distribution of the zero-ending and final *e* across the two age groups is not what one would typically expect to see. Instead of the youngest letter writers, the older letter writers are the people who seem to adopt the language change most quickly. While letter writers younger than 30 use schwa-apocope in 20% of the cases, the letter writers older than 30 use it in a quarter of the cases (25%).

Gender and social class combined

What will the data for gender and social class look like if the interaction between these two social variables is examined? Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of the different endings for the first person singular verb form across gender and social class. The two columns to the left illustrate the frequency of the different endings in letters written by men from the lower-middle class and men from the upper-middle class. To the right, the two columns illustrate this for the one woman from the lower-middle class and for the two women from the upper-middle class.¹⁰²

¹⁰² The data for the fourth female writer could not be included in the analysis of gender and social class due to the fact that it was impossible to assign her to a particular social class.

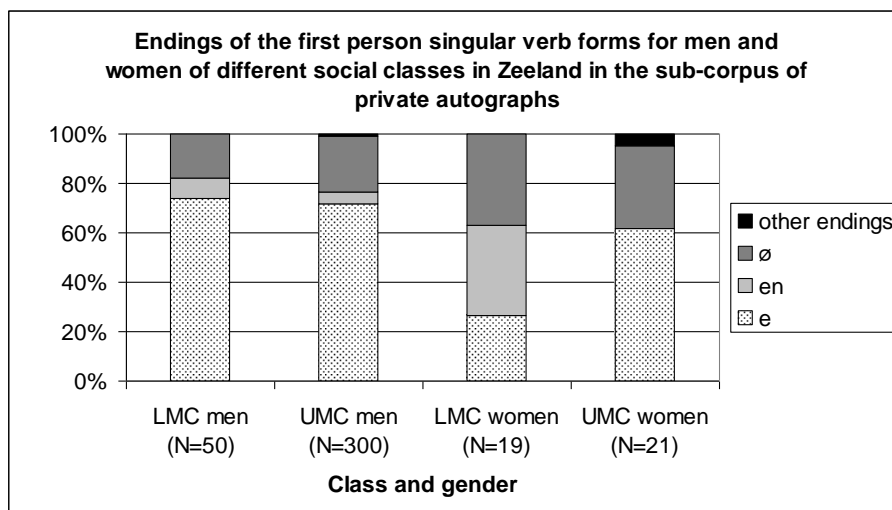


Figure 7.2

The data for male writers show that men from the lower-middle and upper-middle class do not differ much in the suffixes they use for the first person singular verb form of the present. With female writers, however, there does seem to be a difference between the two social classes. The final *-en* is used quite often by the woman of the lower-middle class (in 37% of the cases), while it is never used by the women from the upper-middle class. However, if one keeps in mind that these *-en* endings are closely linked to the *-e* endings in that they are both unaffected by schwa-apocope, the data for the woman of the lower-middle class actually resemble those of the women from the upper-middle class: the data of the lower-middle-class woman show about as much apocope of the schwa (the zero-ending appears in 37% of the cases) as the data for the upper-middle-class women do (the zero-ending appears in 33% of the cases).

Overall, when women and men are compared, women use the schwa-like endings less often than men from the same social rank and they use the zero-ending more often in return. The lower-middle-class woman uses the schwa-like endings in 63% of the cases, while lower-middle-class men use these endings more often (in just over 80% of the cases). For the members of the upper-middle class, the conclusions are the same: women use the schwa-like endings less often than their male peers (in 62% of the cases vs. in 77% of the cases respectively).

This overview has confirmed my previous conclusions about social class and gender related to schwa-apocope in Zeeland: both gender and social class influence the presence of schwa-apocope to some extent. However, the influence of gender seems to be more important than the

influence of social class: influence of social class could only be spotted in the data for women and is limited to the representation of the schwa-like endings. How should these observations be interpreted?

The fact that variation related to social class does not seem to occur in the data for men and that it is limited to variation in the schwa-like endings with women is remarkable. Schwa-apocope is clearly rising in seventeenth-century Dutch, so it could have the potential to become a social class marker. However, I cannot catch it in the data. This may mean that schwa-apocope had not become a variable marking social class yet in Zeeland. On the other hand, it is possible that schwa-apocope *was* linked to social class in Zeeland in the seventeenth century, but that I cannot catch it due to the fact that the data for the lower and the upper class in Zeeland are too scarce.

For the fact that women use the schwa-like endings less often than men, two explanations can be given that are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand it is possible that women's spoken Dutch was influenced by schwa-apocope before men's spoken Dutch and that this is reflected in writing. On the other hand, it is possible that men – as more experienced writers than women (Frijhoff & Spies 1999: 237-238) – were more aware of the fact that the *e*-ending was used quite often in printed texts, which lent it some sort of prestige, and therefore retained the schwa-like endings longer in their written language than women did.

The last observation requiring an explanation is the fact that the presence of the final *en* in the first person singular verb form seems remarkably high in letters written by lower-middle-class women from Zeeland. However, these data are based on the language use of only one woman, Tanneke Cats, so it is impossible to tell whether this was common in the written language use of other women of this same social sphere or not. Regardless of whether this spelling-variant represents an actual pronounced *n* at the ending of the verb forms or whether it is a spelling variant representing a schwa, it probably occurs in her writing due to a lack of knowledge of common spelling practices. If the *-en* spelling mirrors the woman's pronunciation of the first person singular verb forms, this female writer occasionally fails to make the distinction between her spoken Dutch and the written Dutch of the seventeenth century which is starting to be standardised. If the *-en* spelling indicates a spoken schwa, the language use of this woman shows how she confuses the spelling of infinitives and finite verbs.

This is a picture of schwa-apocope in a region in which the final schwa in spoken language was still present. How much and in what ways will this picture differ from the data in the corpus for the region of Holland,

where schwa-apocope was probably a common feature of the spoken language?

7.3.4 Holland

Social class

At first sight, the factor of social class seems to have a limited impact on the distribution of the different possible endings for the first person singular verb forms in Holland. Table 7.6 below, based on the 148 private autographs written by 126 different writers linked to Holland, shows that there is no noteworthy difference in the distribution of these endings between letters written by lower-class members and lower-middle-class members. In the letters of writers belonging to these classes, the zero-ending is present in the majority of the cases (in 71%, and in 73% of the cases respectively) and the final *e* takes up about 22% of the cases. The ‘irregular’ *-en* and other endings occur seldom.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>other endings</i>	N total
LC	71%	21%	7%	1%	89
LMC	73%	23%	2%	2%	244
UMC	63%	27%	6%	4%	309
UC	47%	51%	2%	0%	98

Table 7.6: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms in private autographs from Holland across social class

However, the two remaining upper classes show a different distribution. The upper-middle-class letter writers behave slightly differently from the lower- and the lower-middle-class writers. The share of the zero-ending drops as the writer belongs to a higher class (from 73% with lower-middle-class writers to 63% with upper-middle-class writers), while the share of the *e*-ending rises slightly (from 23% in the lower-middle class, to 27% in the upper-middle class). These trends are continued in the language use of the upper class. Upper-class writers do not use a zero-ending in most of the cases: with a share of 47%, the zero-ending is less popular with upper-class writers than with other letter writers. Conversely, the final *e* is used more often by upper-class writers than by writers belonging to a lower class: the final *e* takes up 51% of all the endings for the first person singular verb form with upper-class members, while the other letter writers use it in no more than 27% of the cases. The change from first person singular verb forms with a final schwa to forms without the schwa seems to have been a change from below in Holland. With regards to the ‘irregular’ final *en* and other endings, there is

no difference to be found for the four social classes: members of all of the different classes in Holland use these endings sparingly.

Gender

While men and women in Zeeland differed in their use of all the possible endings, the differences between men and women from Holland only lie in the share of the zero-ending and the final *-e*. Table 7.7 below shows how the different endings for the first person singular are distributed across men and women in Holland.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>other endings</i>	N total
Men	57%	36%	6%	1%	355
Women	76%	18%	3%	3%	522

Table 7.7: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms in private autographs from Holland across gender

Schwa-apocope seems to have spread more quickly among the women of Holland. They use the zero-ending for the first person singular verb form in 76% of the cases. Schwa-like endings are only used by them in 21% of the cases (*-e* in 18% of the cases and *-en* in 3% of the cases). Although men from Holland prefer the zero-ending over other endings as well, they use it less often than women (in 57% of the cases vs. in 76% of the cases respectively). Conversely, men use twice as many schwa-like endings as women do: they use it in 42% of the cases (36% *-e* endings and 6% *-en* endings) while women who use it in 21% of the cases.

Age

In table 7.8, I show the distribution of the different endings for the first person singular verb forms of the present across the different age groups in Holland, based on the private autographs linked to Holland.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>other endings</i>	N total
<30	76%	18%	5%	1%	382
30-50	67%	26%	4%	3%	393
50+	35%	65%	0%	0%	66

Table 7.8: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms in autograph letters from Holland across the three age groups

The percentages in table 7.8 indicate that the oldest letter writers from Holland do not show as much influence of schwa-apocope in their writings as the younger letter writers from Holland do: schwa-apocope only occurs in 35% of the cases with letter writers older than fifty, while it occurs in 67%

of the cases with letter writers between 30 and 50 and in 76% of the cases with the youngest letter writers. This likely illustrates that schwa-apocope was spreading across Holland during the years before the letters from the corpus were written.

Gender and social class combined

For Zeeland I have shown how an investigation of the interaction between social class and gender can offer a clear picture of the linguistic situation. Since an overview table of the distribution of the different endings for the first person singular verb forms for men and women of different social classes in Holland would become too large and complex, I have split up the results into two figures. Figure 7.3 below shows the distribution of the different endings across social class for men from Holland.

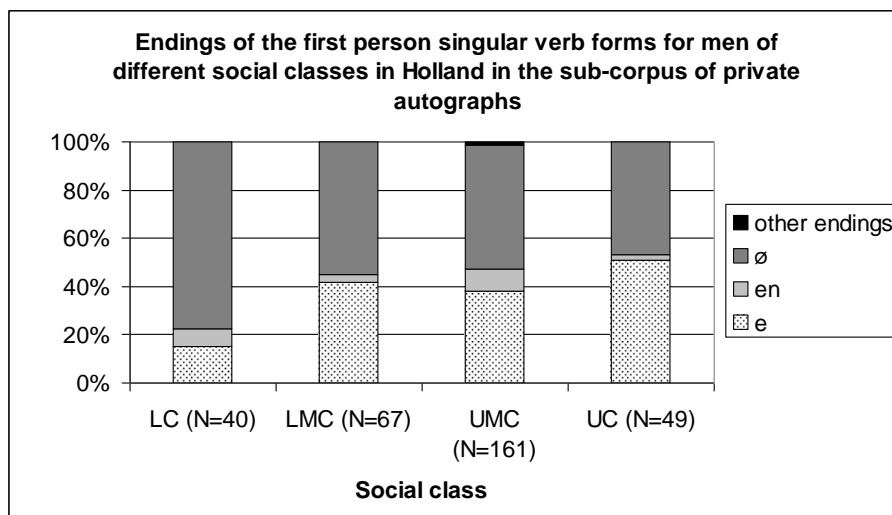


Figure 7.3

The data for men from Holland clearly show influence of social class. However, this influence does not manifest itself in the manner one would expect based on the overview of social class above. While in the overview table (table 7.6) – in which the data for men and women were combined – the upper-class writers behaved very differently from the other writers, now it is the lower class showing results deviating from the other classes. Lower-class men use the zero-ending considerably more often than men belonging to higher classes do: lower-class men use the zero-ending in 78% of the cases, while men from the lower-middle, upper-middle and upper class use it in 55%, 52% and 47% of the cases respectively. In return, men from the lower-middle, the upper-middle and the upper class use the schwa-like

endings more often than lower-class men (in 45%, 47% and 53% of the cases respectively vs. in 23% of the cases).

While the lower-class men allowed for schwa-apocope to occur very often in their letters, members of the higher classes, who were probably more aware of writing conventions and who were more experienced writers, were more reluctant to let go of the *-e* endings. These data show that with men from Holland, schwa-apocope was probably very much present in their spoken Dutch, since lower-class writers use it very often. However, men with a certain amount of writing and reading experience seemed to hold on to the older writing convention of the final *-e* to some extent and showed this apocope less often in their writings than men from the lowest social class.

And what about women? Did social class have the same influence on their language use? In what way did women from Holland differ from their male peers regarding the distribution of schwa-apocope in the first person singular verb forms? At first sight, the figure below shows that the upper-class women in Holland behave very differently from women from other classes. While women from the lower, lower-middle and upper-middle class use schwa-like endings in no more than 33% of the cases, upper-class women use these endings in 53% of the cases.

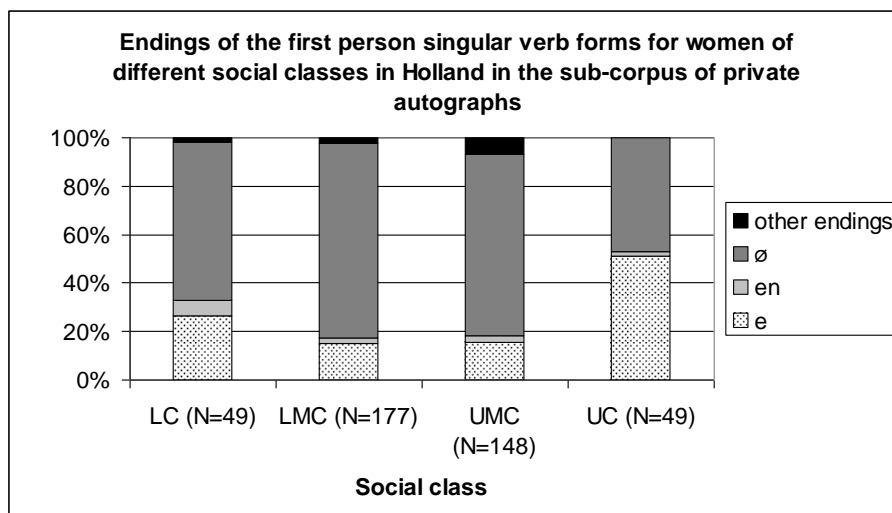


Figure 7.4

However, one must keep in mind the fact that the age groups are not distributed evenly across the social classes for the women in Holland. The only class which includes data from women who are presumably older than 50 is the upper class: it contains letters of three women over 50 and of one

woman younger than 30. As we have seen in previous chapters and in the overview for age above, the data for these 50+ women are very different from the data for the younger peer belonging to the same social group. If I were to leave out the data for the oldest women, it would change the overall overview drastically. While oldest women use the *-e* ending in 64% of the cases, the younger letter writer does this in only 23% of the cases.

It is thus the language use of three older women which influenced the data in such a way that the overview for social class presented above in table 7.6 suggested that the upper-class members behaved radically different from members of the lower classes. With the knowledge we have about the distribution of women of different age groups across the different social classes, we now know that this overall view might be slightly misleading. In order to get a well balanced overview I will present the results without the data of these three divergent writers. Figure 7.5 below shows the distribution of the different endings for the first person singular for women from Holland of different social classes who are all under fifty. This time, the results for the upper class are not radically different from the other social classes.

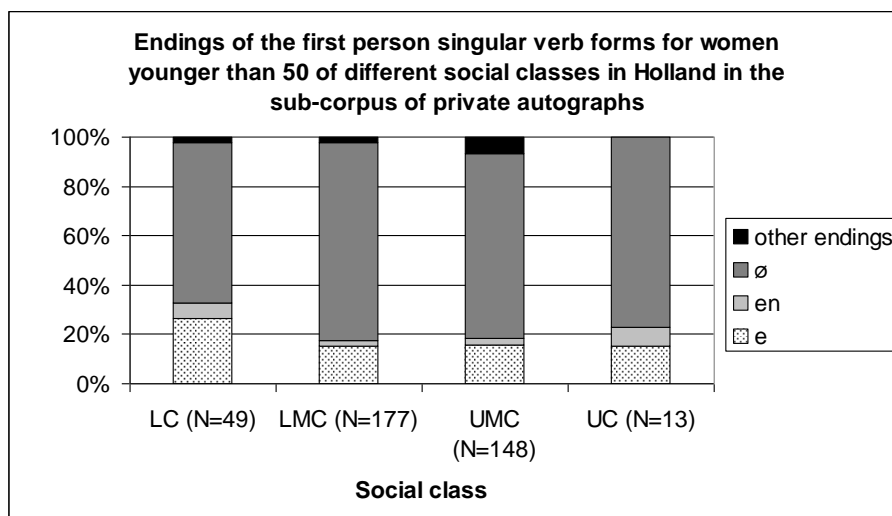


Figure 7.5

Just as the data for men from Holland, the data presented in figure 7.5 show an influence of social class. However, with women from Holland this influence is different. While lower-class men use the final *e* strikingly less often than men belonging to the higher classes, lower-class women seem to use this *-e* ending and the schwa-like *-en* ending more often than women from the higher classes (33% vs. 17%, 19% and 23% respectively). Whether

the difference is big enough to warrant an explanation is debatable and logical explanations for the difference are hard to find.

In any case, the presence of schwa-apocope in the letters of all the women in Holland (76%) is similar to the presence of schwa-apocope in letters written by lower-class men from Holland (78%). Women from Holland in general and lower-class men from Holland can thus be said to use the zero-ending very often (in almost 80% of the cases), while men from the higher classes – who are likely more experienced in reading and writing than women in general and than men from the lower class – use it more sparingly (in about 50% of the cases) and leave more room for the final *-e*. Women in Holland thus seem to stick fairly close to their spoken language and do not seem to resort to older writing conventions in which the schwa was more overtly present.

7.3.5 Zeeland and Holland compared

The distribution of the different possible endings in Zeeland and Holland shows similarities, but also differences. The main difference between Zeeland and Holland is the relationship between social class and the presence of schwa-apocope. Since it is questionable whether social class had any influence on the use of schwa-apocope in the letters of women from Holland, for Holland I will focus on the data for men. While in Zeeland being higher upon the social ladder did not influence the ratio of schwa-like endings and schwa-apocope, in Holland it meant using schwa-like endings more often. In all likelihood, this difference in the written language is linked to the different status of the schwa in the spoken Dutch of Zeeland and in the spoken Dutch of Holland and it can also be linked to the different socio-economical status of the two regions involved.

In Holland schwa-apocope was probably well advanced in the spoken language, as is clear from the low presence of schwa-like endings in letters written by writers pertaining to the lowest social class and by the fact that in present-day dialects the schwa-ending has disappeared in this region. This rendered the older *-e* endings and other schwa-like endings typical of written Dutch. Since members of higher classes were usually more experienced at reading and writing, they were more likely to use typical features of written Dutch when writing their letters. In short, we may be seeing how the more experienced writers of the higher social classes move their written language away from their spoken language in what seems to be an effort to distinguish between the two.

In Zeeland, however, schwa-apocope had not conquered the region to the same extent as it had conquered Holland by the seventeenth century. This is clear because the schwa-like endings are rather present in the letters of letter writers belonging to the lowest class of which I could find letters (in

this case the lower-middle class) and because the schwa can still be found at the end of some words in some present-day dialects of Zeeland as shown in the map in figure 7.1.¹⁰³ The schwa-ending was therefore probably not seen as typical of written or spoken language in Zeeland, which partly explains why it was not favoured by any of the social classes for which there are data in the corpus.

What is similar, however, for the data for Zeeland and Holland is the fact that women use the schwa-like endings less often than men. The fact that women in both regions behave similarly, independent of whether one variant was locally regarded as proper for writing or not, suggests that women were just quicker to pick up on the language change, irrespective of their reading and writing experience. It suggests that schwa-apocope was a part of their spoken Dutch earlier than it was part of the spoken language of their male peers.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that the social variables gender and social class have played a role in the spread of schwa-apocope, albeit that social variables had probably become influential in Holland first and that they were not yet of big importance in Zeeland by the second half of the seventeenth century. The age of letter writers as well has proved to influence the presence of the schwa apocope in the written language use of Holland in the seventeenth century. These findings can now be added to our knowledge about this large-scale language change, but there may be even more to add. In the next section I will examine if and how letter conventions relate to the spread of schwa-apocope.

7.4. Letter conventions: conservatives or forerunners?

One would expect that formulaic language is an environment in which archaic variants can be well preserved and examples of this preserving action are not scarce: e.g. the Dutch idioms *zegge en schrijve*, literally meaning ‘I say and I write’, *verzoeke* ‘I request/I ask’, and *met name* ‘in particular’. Therefore I expect to find the schwa-like endings more often in formulae and conventional phrases than in non-conventional passages of letters. In order to test this hypothesis I looked at two different types of epistolary conventions. Firstly I took into account the typical epistolary formulae: standard things to say in a letter that have been moulded into the same pattern. Typical epistolary formulae always occur with more or less the same words in more

¹⁰³ Other examples of words with a final schwa in Zeeland can be found in Van Driel’s book on the dialects of Zeeland (Van Driel 2004: 74-75): *baade* ‘bed’, *deure* ‘door’, *oore* ‘ear’, *eane* ‘one’, *tweae* ‘two’, *drieje* ‘three’.

or less the same order and form, conveying the same message.¹⁰⁴ Some examples from the Dutch seventeenth-century letters in the corpus would be:

- 1) *Ick laet ul weten dat ick noch kloeck en gesondt ben en verhope van ul het selfde te hooren*
‘I let you know that I am still sturdy and healthy and I hope to hear the same from you.’
- 2) *ijck wens mijn alderlijste man dussent goeden nacht*
‘I wish my sweetest husband a thousand times good night’
- 3) *Ick laet ul weten als dat*
‘I let you know that...’

Secondly I took into account an epistolary convention regularly encountered in the seventeenth-century corpus: the ellipsis of the personal pronoun for the first person singular *ick*, which is also a common feature of present-day letters and e-mails and which is also illustrated in the idioms presented above, *zegge en schrijve* ‘I say and I write’ and *verzoeke* ‘I request/I ask’. In the letters, ellipsis of the subject can occur with singular as well as with plural first persons, but it is hardly found with second or third persons.

7.4.1 Formulae

In order to check whether the *-e* and *-en* endings are more abundant in formulaic language than in non-formulaic language, I examined a few frequently occurring verbs in the sub-corpus of private letters from Zeeland and Holland. Three verbs which occur often in formulae were compared to a verb which has nothing to do with formulae at all (*hebben* ‘have/to have’ occurring 760 times for the first person singular in the private letters from Zeeland and Holland). The verbs typical of formulae which were compared to *hebben* are (*ver*)*hopen* (occurring 379 times), *wensen* ‘to wish’ (occurring 158 times), and *laten* ‘to let’ (occurring 455 times). The results are presented in table 7.9.

¹⁰⁴ For a further discussion of the use of formulae in the letters of the *Letters as Loot* corpus, see Rutten & Van der Wal 2012, Rutten & Van der Wal forthcoming, and Van der Wal & Rutten forthcoming.

		–∅	–e	–en	other endings	N total
‘Formulaic’ verbs	<i>(ver)hopen</i>	52%	45%	3%	0%	379
	<i>wensen</i>	53%	39%	7%	2%	158
	<i>laten</i>	92%	7%	1%	0%	455
‘Non-formulaic’ verb	<i>hebben</i>	45%	43%	7%	6%	760

Table 7.9: Endings of the first person singular verb forms of typical ‘formulaic’ verbs and the neutral verb *hebben* in private letters from Zeeland and Holland

The data for *(ver)hopen* and *wensen* do not seem to differ greatly from the data of the ‘non-formulaic’ verb *hebben*, and where they do, they do not illustrate a preservative effect, but rather a promoting one. While schwa-apocope is present in 45% of the verb forms for *hebben*, it is slightly more frequent with *(ver)hopen* and *wensen* (it occurs in 52% and 53% of the cases respectively). Schwa-like endings occur slightly more often with *hebben* (50%) than with *(ver)hopen* (48%) and *wensen* (46%).

So far, formulae do not seem to have a strong conservative effect on the presence of schwa-like endings. Moreover, the data for *laten* suggest completely the opposite effect: the zero-ending is present in the overwhelming majority of occurrences. The first person singular verb form occurs with a schwa-like ending in only 8% of the cases. This may be due to the sheer frequency of the formula *ick laet ul weten dat* or to the fact that this verb form is found almost always in front of a vowel (in 93% of the cases) which in spoken language could induce the apocope of the schwa at the end of a word (Booij 1995: 166, 171). However, Van Helten (1887: 251) mentions that *laten* is among the first verbs to appear without a final schwa in the first person singular form already in the fifteenth century, so the reason for the low presence of the final schwa might not be dependent on the context following *laten* in the letters per se. Yet another cause of the high frequency of the zero-ending in the verb *laten* could be the final t of the verb stem: this will be discussed below in §7.5.1 on phonetic context.

If the [t] in front of the verbal ending could influence the presence or absence of the schwa, I must allow for the possibility that other stem endings can also influence the occurrence of schwa-apocope and that the small differences between the verbs in table 7.9 have nothing to do with the influence of formulaic language. Therefore, I resorted to a second method of investigating the influence of formulae: I examined the first person singular verb forms of the verb *(ver)hopen* ‘to hope’ in different contexts. This verb can be part of several different formulae: e.g. *dat ick noch kloeck en gesont*

ben soo ick verhoope dat het met ul meede soo is ‘that I am still sturdy and healthy and I hope the same goes for you’, or *ick hoop dat godt de heer ons weeder bi malcander sal laten comen* ‘I hope that God our Lord will let us come together again’. I classified each occurrence of *(ver)hopen* as part of a formula or as part of a non-formulaic context and then examined whether schwa-apocope occurred more often with the verb forms which did not belong to a formula. The table below shows the results.

<i>(ver)hopen</i>	–∅	–e	–en	other endings	N total
Formulaic	49%	45%	5%	1%	173
Non-formulaic	54%	45%	1%	0%	206

Table 7.10: The distribution of the different endings for the first person singular verb form of *(ver)hopen* for formulaic and non-formulaic contexts in private letters from Zeeland and Holland

Table 7.10 shows no large differences between the distribution of the different endings of the verb forms of *(ver)hopen* across formulaic and in non-formulaic sentences. Schwa-apocope occurs in 54% of the non-formulaic usages while it occurs in 49% of the formulaic usages. In return the schwa-like endings occur in 46% of the cases in non-formulaic sentences while they occur in 50% of the formulaic sentences. These differences do suggest that the schwa was preserved longer in formulaic contexts, but they are so small that they do not warrant the conclusion that there was a strong preserving influence of formulae on the presence of the final schwa.

7.4.2 Ellipsis

If the typical formulae do not seem to influence the presence of schwa-apocope much, does this also count for the ellipsis of *ick* in letters? A remark from Ten Kate (1723: 551) suggests that the answer to this question is ‘no’:

dog oulinks had men E agter 't zakelijke Worteldeel, even als nu nog bij den Subjunct: als, IK REDDE, IK LEVE, enz.: Deze laetste stijl is nog in wezen bij den Koopman, wanneer die, om korthed-wille, 't Pronomen IK in 't schrijven agterlaet, zettende ZENDE AEN U (mitto tibi), enz.:

‘[...] though in earlier days the E was behind the root of the verb, as it is still with the conjunctive form: such as, IK REDDE, IK LEVE, etc. This last style is still present with the merchant, when he, for brevity’s sake, leaves out the pronoun IK in writing, putting down ZENDE AEN U (*mitto tibi*), etc.’

To investigate whether the ellipsis did indeed help preserve the schwa in first person singular verb forms, the forms of the highly frequent verb *hebben* ‘to have’ were examined again. Some examples of the first person singular verb form for the present of *hebben* with ellipsis of the personal pronoun are given below:

- 4) *ue aengename vanden 7 April uijt Engelant hebbe seer wel bekomen*
‘[I] have received your pleasant letter which was sent on the 7th of April from England in good order.’
- 5) *heb gescheept Aan den baes in Jan meier 2263 lb suiijker*
‘[I] have shipped 2263 pounds of sugar to the boss with Jan Meier.’
- 6) *hebbe mijt hendrijck vor borch en brif gesturt mijt gudt dar bij*
‘[I] have sent a letter with some things with Hendrijck Vor borch.’

This time, all the verb forms of *hebben* ending in *-e*, *-en*, or the zero-ending with ellipsis of the first person singular pronoun as the subject were traced in all the private letters from Zeeland and Holland in the seventeenth-century corpus and compared to the data for the verb forms of *hebben* which were accompanied by *ick* or its spelling variants. The table below shows the results. The percentages for *hebben* with *ick* in table 7.11 (47% $-\emptyset$, 46% *-e* and 7% *-en*) differ slightly from the percentages for *hebben* with *ick* presented in table 7.9 (45% $-\emptyset$, 43% *-e*, and 7% *-en*), since verb forms with other endings than the zero-ending, *-e* or *-en* were not taken into account in table 7.11 for practical reasons.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ The verb forms of *hebben* with other endings and without the ellipsis of *ick* turned up automatically in the general search for first person singular verb forms. This search was executed by looking up all instances of *ick* in the corpus of private letters and then identifying the different verbs and the different endings used, as was explained in § 7.1.2. The first person singular verb forms of *hebben* with ellipsis of *ick* could only be traced by making a list of the different verb forms of *hebben* and manually checking this list for sentences with ellipsis. Since these first person singular verb forms of *hebben* with an unusual ending are rather scarce and not the main point of interest in this investigation (while *heb*, *hebbe* and *hebben* are) and

	–∅	–e	–en	N total
<i>hebben with ick</i>	47%	46%	7%	718
<i>hebben without ick</i>	26%	71%	3%	164

Table 7.11: The distribution of the different endings for the first person singular verb form of the verb *hebben* 'to have' with or without the subject *ick* in the private letters from Zeeland and Holland

The difference between the verb forms of the first person singular showing ellipsis of the personal pronoun *ick* is and those not showing ellipsis of *ick* is unmistakable. The schwa-like endings *–e* and *–en* occur more often in the elliptic environment: when *ick* is absent, schwa-like endings occur in 74% of the cases, but when the subject is present, these endings occur in 53% of the cases. The ellipsis thus seems to hold back schwa-apocope to some extent.

However, we must keep in mind that the ellipsis is a writing convention that may have been used by a typical group of writers, rather than by every writer. And indeed, if we compare the distribution of the first person singular verb forms of *hebben* showing no ellipsis of the subject to the distribution of this verb form showing ellipsis of *ick*, it becomes clear that ellipsis is used more often by men than by women and more often by members of the upper classes than by members of the lower classes. Of the occurrences of the first person singular form of *hebben* in the presence of *ick*, 60% is found in letters written by men and 67% is found in letters written by members of the upper classes. But for the occurrences of the first person singular form of *hebben* showing ellipsis of the personal pronoun *ick* almost all of the examples are found in letters written by men (93%) and a large majority stems from letters written by members of the upper classes (88%). This particular distribution of ellipsis could distort the results, since I have shown above that men in general use schwa-apocope less often than women and that the upper social classes in Holland also use it less often than the lower social classes. The differences shown in table 7.11 could thus be caused by the fact that ellipsis occurred more often in letters written by men and by upper-class people, rather than by the presence or absence of *ick*.

The only way to find out whether ellipsis itself was responsible for a higher percentage of the use of the final schwa is to check whether the difference between the verb forms of *hebben* showing ellipsis of *ick* and the forms not showing ellipsis of *ick* still manifests itself if I keep the other variables of influence (region, gender, and social class) stable. Only the

since finding the instances of these verb forms of *hebben* with the ellipsis of *ick* would require a manual search of a list of all occurrences of *hebt* and *heeft* (and their different spelling variants) in the corpus of private letters of Zeeland and Holland, I excluded these special forms of *hebben* with ellipsis of *ick* in table 11.

groups of male upper-middle-class writers from Zeeland and of male upper-middle-class writers from Holland provide us with enough occurrences of the first person singular verb form of *hebben* with ellipsis of *ick* to be compared to their counterparts without ellipsis. Table 7.12 shows the percentage of schwa-like endings for the verb forms of *hebben* with and without ellipsis for these two groups of writers.

	<i>ellipsis of ick</i>		<i>with ick</i>	
	schwa-like endings %	N total	schwa-like endings %	N total
Upper-middle-class men from Zeeland	75%	56	92%	98
Upper-middle-class men from Holland	69%	42	65%	68

Table 7.12: The frequency of the schwa-like endings in first person singular verb forms of *hebben* with and without ellipsis of the subject *ick* in private letters written by upper-middle-class men from Zeeland and from Holland

If the difference in presence of schwa-apocope between the verb forms of *hebben* with ellipsis and without ellipsis is caused by the presence or absence of ellipsis itself, we should be able to see more schwa-like endings in verb forms with ellipsis for both groups of writers in table 7.12. However, the percentage of schwa-like endings for verb forms with ellipsis for the upper-middle-class men from Zeeland is lower than this percentage for verb forms without the ellipsis (75% vs. 92% respectively). And for the upper-middle-class men from Holland the presence or absence of the ellipsis does not seem to make much difference for the presence of the schwa-like endings; the frequency of schwa-like endings for the verb forms with and without ellipsis of *ick* is similar (69% and 65% respectively).

However, before concluding that ellipsis does not have any influence on the presence of the final schwa in first person singular verb forms in the seventeenth-century letters, the small sub-corpus of business letters should be examined too, for Lambert Ten Kate (1723: 551) explicitly referred to the relationship between ellipsis and the blocking of schwa-apocope in letters written by *merchants*. It is possible that Ten Kate did not refer to all letters that were written by merchants, but that he was referring to letters that merchants had written in their capacity as merchants: business letters.

If the business letters written by upper-middle-class men are drawn into the investigation and the relationship between the presence of the

schwa-like endings and the ellipsis of *ick* in this sub-corpus is examined, it becomes evident that Ten Kate's remark should not be discarded too quickly. In the business letters of upper-middle-class men from Zeeland and Holland, the final schwa is always present when the first person singular pronoun *ick* has been left out, while it is not always present when *ick* is written. Table 7.13 shows the results:

<i>Business letters</i>	<i>with ellipsis of ick</i>		<i>without ellipsis of ick</i>	
	schwa-like endings %	N total	schwa-like endings %	N total
Upper-middle-class men from Zeeland	100%	11	67%	9
Upper-middle-class men from Holland	100%	12	94%	16

Table 7.13: The frequency of the schwa-like endings in first person singular verb forms of hebben with and without ellipsis of the subject *ick* in business letters written by upper-middle-class men from Zeeland and from Holland

Although this comparison suggests that the ellipsis of *ick* with first person singular verb forms of the present did indeed block schwa-apocope in business letters, this result cannot be considered as sufficient evidence, since the number of occurrences on which this comparison is based is fairly low. The conclusion of this investigation must thus be that the seventeenth-century data do not demonstrate conclusively that the ellipsis of the subject *ick* with first person singular verb forms had any influence on the presence or absence of the final schwa, although there is reason to believe that in seventeenth-century business letters the ellipsis of *ick* in combination with the preservation of a final schwa was or was becoming some sort of an epistolary convention.

7.4.3 Conclusions

The results presented above nuance the idea that conventional parts of letters typically preserve archaic features. Schwa-apocope seems to have encountered little resistance in entering typical formulae for seventeenth-century letters such as *ick verhoope dat het met ul meede soo is* 'I hope that you are in the same state', *ick hoop dat godt de heer ons weeder bi malcander sal laten comen* 'I hope that God our Lord will let us come

together again', *ijck wens mijn alderlijste man dussent goeden nacht* 'I bid my dearest husband thousand good nights' and *ick laet ul weten dat* 'I let you know that'. On top of this, the epistolary convention of the ellipsis of the first person singular subject *ick* cannot be proved to bear any relation to the presence or absence of schwa-apocope in the first person singular verb form used in private letters, although the data in business letters seem to suggest otherwise. Apparently, the preservative strength of the seventeenth-century epistolary conventions examined here did not assert itself very strongly with regards to the presence or absence of the final schwa.

7.5. The phonetic context

In spoken Dutch, the phonetic context in which the first person singular verb ending was situated, could have been a very important factor in the spread of schwa-apocope. Since the language in the seventeenth-century private letters is expected to lean relatively close to spoken language, the influence of the phonetic context on the presence of schwa-apocope could also be detectable in the corpus.

What is more, possible influence of the phonetic context may also provide us with new information on the status of the *-en* endings. So far, I have treated most of these endings as a reflection of the schwa in spoken language. However, as it often happens in casual spoken present-day Dutch, the final *n* might also be functioning as a filler for the hiatus between the end vowel of the verb form (in this case schwa) and a vowel at the beginning of the word following the verb form (Booij 1995: 166, 171): an intrusive *-n*. If this is the case, it may be reflected in the results for the phonetic context following the final schwa.

However, before investigating the influence of the phonetic context *following* the final schwa in §7.5.2, I will discuss the phonetic context *preceding* the final schwa in §7.5.1. Some evidence leads us to believe that this phonetic context is important as well and the data will be needed to correctly interpret the results for the phonetic context *following* the final schwa. Van Haeringen (1937a: 322 ; 1937b: 104-105) signalled that words with a [d] in front of the final schwa were less likely to lose this ending than other words and as Van Helten (1887: 251) noticed that *laten* is a verb that showed schwa-apocope very early on, it is worthwhile investigating whether a [t] in front of the final schwa promotes schwa-apocope (cf. §7.4.1 about the verb *laten*). I will thus examine whether first person singular verb forms with different stems also differ in their receptivity to schwa-apocope in §7.5.1. Finally, in §7.5.3, the influence of the phonetic context preceding the

ending of the verb form and the phonetic context following it will be compared.

7.5.1. The phonetic context preceding the final schwa

The examples Van Haeringen (1937a: 322 ; 1937b: 104-105) gives of words which end in *-de* and which seem to preserve their final schwa without becoming archaic or part of a high register are all nouns (cf. *vrede* ‘peace’, *bode* ‘messenger’, *schade* ‘damage’). If the fact that these nouns preserve their schwa-ending more easily than other nouns is truly a consequence of the phonetic context, we should be able to trace the same influence of the *d* in the verb forms in the corpus. Table 7.14 below shows the distribution of the endings for first person singular verb forms from private letters from Zeeland or Holland across verbs with different stem endings.

<i>Stem ending</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	N total
m	30%	53%	17%	30
d	36%	56%	8%	116
l	37%	56%	7%	41
ng	45%	44%	11%	62
b (only <i>hebben</i>)	47%	46%	7%	718
p	52%	45%	3%	380
s	54%	39%	7%	158
k	55%	40%	5%	75
r	57%	43%	0%	61
n	57%	34%	9%	44
v	57%	33%	10%	63
w	60%	35%	5%	20
g	78%	15%	6%	65
z	79%	21%	0%	14
t	92%	7%	1%	645
Total	61%	34%	5%	2492

Table 7.14: The endings of verb forms of the first person singular across verbs with different stem endings in private letters from Zeeland and Holland.

The table shows a large amount of variation: while verb forms with a stem ending in *-m* occur without a schwa in 30% of the cases, verb forms at the other end of the list (with a stem ending in *-t*) occur without a schwa in as much as 92% of the cases.

As is clear from the table, the intervocalic *d* does seem to preserve the final schwa quite well. With the schwa present in 64% of the cases, verbs with a stem ending in *-d* are almost at the top of the list. What Van

Haeringen (1937a: 322; 1937b: 104-105) signalled for the nouns with an intervocalic *d*, thus also seems to hold for verb forms of the first person singular with an intervocalic *d* at the end.

While the words with *d* in front of an original final schwa are very preserving of the final schwa, the opposite counts for words with *t* in front of the original schwa ending. Verbs with a stem ending in *-t* can be found at the bottom of the list. These verbs occur with a final schwa in less than 10% of the cases. For the verb *laten* I have already shown above that the schwa is seldom present in the first person singular verb form. Rather than a consequence of the formulaic nature of the verb, this is indeed a consequence of the *t* in front of the verb ending, since other verbs with a stem ending in *t* behave similarly. This is shown in table 7.15.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	N total
<i>laten</i>	92%	7%	1%	455
Other verbs with the stem ending in <i>t</i>	92%	8%	1%	190

Table 7.15: The endings of the first person singular of *laten* and of other verbs with a stem ending in *t* in private letters from Zeeland and Holland.

It has been shown in tables 7.14 and 7.15 that the phonetic context preceding a final schwa has influence on the presence or absence of schwa-apocope. Is this also true for the phonetic context *following* the final schwa?

7.5.2. The phonetic context following the final schwa

Since in spoken Dutch, a vowel following a weakly stressed schwa can cause the schwa to be dropped (Booij 1995: 65-68, 150-151) and since the private letters sometimes exhibit oral elements, it is possible that we find influence of the phonetic context following the ending of the first person singular verb form on the presence of the final schwa in the letters. Two particular writers mentioned in §7.2 do indeed show explicitly how the weakly stressed schwa is dropped in front of a vowel by replacing the final *-e*'s of their first person singular verb forms by an apostrophe (e.g. *ick bid' ul* 'I beg you' or *ik hoop' en* 'I hope and'). Does the final schwa drop in front of vowels in the letters of other writers as well? Table 7.16 below shows the relation between the phonetic context following the verb form and the ending of the first person singular verb form for all the private letters from Zeeland and Holland from the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus (450 letters by 331 different writers).

	–∅	–e	– en	N total
preceding a vowel	66%	30%	4%	1365
preceding a consonant	55%	39%	6%	1103

Table 7.16: The distribution of the different endings of first person singular verb forms preceding a vowel or a consonant in the private letters from Holland and Zeeland.

It is immediately clear from the table that there does seem to be influence from the phonetic context on schwa-apocope in the letters of the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus, although the differences do not seem to be very overwhelming. The zero-ending is used more frequently preceding a vowel than preceding a consonant (occurring in 66% of the cases vs. in 55% of the cases respectively) and the final –e is used less often preceding a vowel than preceding a consonant (30% vs. 39%).

However, a large part of the difference seems to be caused by the formulaic verb *laten*. This verb is one of the three verbs whose first person singular form occurs more than 250 times in the sub-corpus of private letters (*hebben* occurs 760 times, *hopen* occurs 301 times, and *laten* occurs 455 times), which makes it quite influential. Now *laten* has a very interesting distribution: it occurs in front of a vowel in 93% of the cases. At the same time, it occurs almost always without the schwa, which is a consequence of the *t* in which the stem ends, as shown above in tables 7.14 and 7.15. Since this verb's frequent occurrence in front of vowels happens to be combined with a tendency to lose the schwa-like endings, the large presence of *laten* could distort the data, suggesting a relationship between a vowel following the verb and schwa-apocope where there might not be one. And indeed, if the verb *laten* is left out of the data, the difference between the two phonetic contexts disappears completely, as can be seen in table 7.17 below.

	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-e</i>	<i>-en</i>	<i>N total</i>
preceding a vowel	54%	40%	5%	941
preceding a consonant	54%	40%	6%	1072

Table 7.17: The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb forms preceding a vowel or a consonant without data for the verb *laten* 'let' in private letters from Holland & Zeeland.

In order to ensure that the results are trustworthy, I examined the effect of the type of phonetic context following a first person singular verb form of the present tense again, but this time only for verb forms occurring in the middle of a sentence and not at the end of a sentence or at a specific point in a sentence where a pause could occur. This ensures that only the phonetic contexts are examined which could have influenced the pronunciation of the verb form for certain. However, the results still showed no difference. The percentages of the different possible endings in the middle of a phrase are the same for verb forms preceding a vowel and verb forms preceding a consonant. The final schwa occurs in about 41% of the cases, the zero-ending in about 54% of the cases, and the *-en* ending in 4% of the cases.¹⁰⁶

I can only conclude that unlike the phonetic context *preceding* the ending of the first person singular verb forms, the phonetic context *following* the endings does not seem to influence the presence or absence of the schwa in seventeenth-century Dutch letters. Furthermore, the occurrence of the final *-en* does not seem to be influenced by the nature of the phonetic context following the first person singular verb form: it occurs in 5% of the cases preceding a vowel and it occurs in 6% of the cases preceding a consonant. This suggests that the final *n* in spelling is not used as a reflection of an epenthesis between two vowels, which strengthens the idea that the *-en* endings actually represent a schwa-like sound.

¹⁰⁶ The distribution of the endings is slightly different for the verb forms at the end of a sentence or in front of a pause. The final *-e* occurs in 32% of the cases, the zero-ending in 54% of the cases and the *en*-ending in 14% of the cases. The *-en* ending thus occurs more often in verb forms at the end of a sentence than in verb forms in the middle of a sentence. A possible explanation could be that if the first person singular verb form occurs at the end of the sentence, it is likely that it is far removed from the subject *ick*. This may cause the letter writer to make mistakes more easily and confuse the first person singular verb form with the infinitive, a verb-form more likely to be found at the end of a sentence which is spelt with final *en*.

7.5.3. Conclusions about the phonetic context

In seventeenth-century Dutch letters, the phonetic context does not always seem to influence the presence of schwa-apocope. From the data it has become clear that the phonetic context *preceding* the verbal ending has a clear influence on the presence of schwa-apocope: if a *t* precedes the ending, the schwa is more likely to be dropped than in other verbs; if a *d* precedes the ending, the schwa is more likely to be retained. On the other hand, the data clearly show that the phonetic context *following* the ending of the verb form does not influence the presence of the final schwa in the letters analysed, while I have every reason to believe that the phonetic context following the verb form would have affected the presence of schwa-apocope in *spoken* Dutch.

7.6. Conclusions

The conclusion of this investigation of schwa-apocope is clear: several of the different factors examined were influencing its progress in the seventeenth century. As was expected, there was a strong regional effect, which can still be seen in modern Dutch dialects: the schwa apocope did not affect the spoken Dutch in Zeeland in the same way as it influenced the spoken language in South and North Holland and this can be seen in the written Dutch of the seventeenth century. While the final schwa was found in about 25% of the cases in letters linked to Holland, it occurred abundantly in letters linked to the more southern province, Zeeland. Secondly, the social variables gender, social class, and age were influential as well. The effect of gender was similar for Zeeland and Holland: women were quicker in embracing schwa-apocope. However, with regards to social class, the data for Zeeland and Holland differed from each other. In Zeeland, social class could not be shown to influence the presence of schwa-apocope, while in Holland, social class did influence the endings of the first person singular verb forms of the present tense in letters written by men. The higher the social class to which a male writer in Holland belonged, the larger the share of final schwas was.

Not all variables examined had as much influence as the regional and social variables, however. Formulaic language, for instance, could not be shown to have much effect on the presence of the final schwa in the verb forms of the first person singular of the present in the letters of the corpus, even though some formulae have preserved the final schwa until this day (e.g. *met name* ‘in particular’). The phonetic context *following* the final schwa also did not influence the occurrence of schwa-apocope in written

language, despite the fact that it probably did in spoken Dutch. However, the phonetic context *preceding* the final schwa did influence the presence or absence of schwa-apocope. Some phonetic contexts stimulated schwa-apocope ([t]); others seemed to block it ([d]).

The way in which all of these variables relate to schwa-apocope reminds us strongly of the intricate relationship between the language use in letters and spoken Dutch. On the one hand, there was no complete separation between what was said and what was written; otherwise schwa-apocope would not have stood a chance in the written Dutch and certainly not in the epistolary formulae. On the other hand, I cannot trace any influence of the phonetic context following the ending and men from the middle and upper social classes in Holland seemed to distance their written language from what was probably spoken. Therefore, the language in the private letters should not be considered as just spoken Dutch written down either.