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Policy versus Practice. Language variation and change in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch

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Policy versus Practice

Language variation and change in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch

This dissertation provides new insights into language variation and change in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dutch. More specifically, it investigates whether and to what extent official language policy measures exerted influence on actual language practice.

During the nation-building period around 1800, the Northern Netherlands witnessed the introduction of a national language policy, which aimed at the spread of a homogeneous written standard variety of Dutch, conceptualised as a symbol of 'the' nation. In concrete terms, these top-down endeavours resulted in the first official codification of the Dutch orthography (Siegenbeek 1804) and grammar (Weiland 1805). Despite marking a decisive turning point in the standardisation history of Dutch, the effectiveness of the so-called *schrijftaalregeling* 'written language regulation' has never been investigated empirically.

Taking a historical-sociolinguistic approach, this dissertation aims to fill this research gap by examining the impact of language policy on patterns of variation and change. How successful was the *schrijftaalregeling* in disseminating the officialised norms across the population at large, as envisaged by the national government? Making use of the newly compiled *Going Dutch Corpus*, a diachronic multi-genre corpus comprising more than 420,000 words of authentic usage data (i.e. private letters, diaries and travelogues, newspapers), a wide range of orthographic and morphosyntactic features is analysed.

By presenting a systematic method to measure and assess the effects of policy on practice in the intriguing case of Dutch around 1800, the dissertation contributes to the vivid discussion on language norms and usage in international historical sociolinguistics.

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