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

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1 Main research objectives

In this dissertation, I examine language variation and change in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dutch. More specifically, my main research objective is to investigate the effects of the national language policy introduced in the early 1800s on actual language usage in the Northern Netherlands[1], roughly corresponding to the area of the present-day Netherlands.

Socio-historically, the decades around 1800 can be considered a fundamental phase of Dutch nationalism and nation building, which also had major implications for linguistic matters. As the concepts of nation and language were closely intertwined during this period, a homogeneous standard variety of Dutch was called for in order to symbolise 'the' Dutch nation. The strong nationalist discourse ultimately resulted in a top-down language policy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the so-called *schrijftaalregeling* 'written language regulation' of 1804/1805, the spelling and grammar of Dutch were officially regulated on behalf of the national government. The standard language rules laid down in the official orthography (Siegenbeek 1804) and the official grammar (Weiland 1805) became the norm for the administrative and educational domains. Moreover, they were implemented in the national language-in-education policy, aiming at the spread of Standard Dutch across the population at large (cf. Chapter 2 for a detailed outline).

As the first political interference with linguistic issues and, moreover, the first official codification of Dutch, the *schrijftaalregeling* clearly marks a turning point in the long history of Dutch standardisation. More generally, these concrete language policy measures also constitute a crucial intervention in the sociolinguistic situation of the Northern Netherlands, discursively introducing a clear-cut distinction between 'Standard Dutch' and 'non-standard' varieties (Section 2).

From a historical-sociolinguistic perspective, the decades around 1800 are thus a highly interesting period. Surprisingly, the intriguing relationship between language policy and language practice in these early years of Dutch nationalism has hardly been studied so far. This research gap in Dutch historical (socio)linguistics is sought to be filled in the research programme *Going Dutch. The Construction of Dutch*

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I will use the term *Northern Netherlands* (for Dutch *Noordelijke Nederlanden*) in order to refer to the area of the Low Countries that roughly corresponds to the present-day Netherlands. In contrast, the area referred to as *Southern Netherlands* (for Dutch *Zuidelijke Nederlanden*) more or less corresponds to the Dutch-speaking part of present-day Belgium.

in Policy, Practice and Discourse (1750–1850)[2], conducted at Leiden University. Addressing three tightly interrelated topics, the research of the *Going Dutch* project is tripartite. First, it will be discussed why and how the rise of the standard language ideology was construed in public and academic discourse on linguistic diversity (e.g. Rutten 2016a, 2016b). Secondly, it will be investigated how this ideology was implemented through language and language-in-education policies (cf. Schoemaker & Rutten 2017; Schoemaker 2018). Thirdly, the effectiveness of these policies will be assessed through an analysis of their influence on actual language use. The latter is, in fact, the central research objective of my PhD sub-project.

The question at the heart of this dissertation is whether and to which extent the national language policy of the early 1800s exerted influence on patterns of language variation and change. In other words, how successful was the Dutch *schrijftaalregeling* in spreading Standard Dutch as 'the' Dutch language across the population? Did the citizens of the Dutch nation adopt the officialised standard norms in their actual language use, as envisaged by the national government?

The effectiveness of the top-down language policy will be assessed through a systematic analysis of authentic language usage data drawn from the newly compiled *Going Dutch Corpus*, a diachronic multi-genre corpus of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dutch (1770–1790, 1820–1840), which comprises more than 420,000 words (cf. Chapter 4).

Building on the research tradition in historical sociolinguistics at Leiden University, most notably the *Letters as Loot* research programme[3] on variation and change in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch (Rutten & van der Wal 2014; cf. also Nobels 2013, Simons 2013), my dissertation, as part of the *Going Dutch* programme, seeks to fill in more *witte vlekken* 'blank areas' in the history of Dutch (van der Wal 2006). My research shifts the focus to variation and change in the intriguing period of political and linguistic nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which has largely remained understudied from a historical-sociolinguistic point of view.

In general terms, it is also the aim of my dissertation to contribute to the international discussion on the success of language planning and policy in historical contexts. Not only for the Dutch case, but for most European languages, hardly anything is known about the impact of concrete policy measures on actual language practice in the past (e.g. Langer 2011, Rutten et al. 2014a, Moliner & Ziegler 2017). Therefore, it is important to gain new insights into how these external (top-down) endeavours to influence language usage affected patterns of variation and change.

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[2] The research programme *Going Dutch. The Construction of Dutch in Policy, Practice and Discourse (1750–1850)* is funded by a Vidi grant of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), awarded to Gijsbert Rutten.

[3] The research programme *Letters as Loot. Towards a non-standard view on the history of Dutch* (2008–2013) was initiated and directed by Marijke van der Wal and funded by her Free Competition grant by the NWO.

2 Sociolinguistic situation: Standard and non-standard Dutch

The historical event that marks the point of departure of this dissertation is the introduction of the Dutch *schrijftaalregeling* in 1804/1805. As briefly mentioned in Section 1, this 'written language regulation' encompasses the publication of the first officialised reference works of Standard Dutch, viz. the national orthography by Matthijs Siegenbeek (*Verhandeling over de Nederduitsche spelling*, 1804) and the national grammar by Petrus Weiland (*Nederduitsche spraakkunst*, 1805). The codification of spelling and grammar was commissioned by the national government, laying down the written standard rules to be used in the administrative and educational domains. In that sense, the official regulations of the *schrijftaalregeling* were concrete language policy measures during the early years of Dutch nationalism.

For the ongoing process of Dutch standardisation, which goes back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. van der Wal 1995), the official codification of spelling and grammar on behalf of the government has to be regarded as a decisive turning point. Although there had been a vivid normative tradition before 1800, with numerous spelling guides and grammar books being published particularly throughout the eighteenth century, these earlier normative works were mainly targeted towards a fairly restricted readership of educated men, such as ministers and poets. However, when a homogeneous variety of Dutch was called for in the later decades of the eighteenth century, conceptualised as a symbol of the Dutch nation, the intended audience was gradually widened (see Rutten 2009a). The shift in normative discourse clearly mirrors the socio-political developments of the nation-building decades around 1800. Rutten (2016c: 213) points out that

> [t]he crucial ideological step includes the aim to spread one form as the language among the population, to eradicate all other forms such as local dialects, to reconceptualise the preferred variety as the only 'real' variety of 'the' Dutch language, and to develop a national educational system to disseminate the one 'neutral' variety.

Against the background of a strong nationalist debate, in which nation and language formed one cohesive ideological framework, metalinguistic discourse thus aimed at the population at large – men and women, from all layers of society and from all regions of the Northern Netherlands. With respect to the nationalist orientation of metalinguistic discourse around 1800, the period under investigation in this dissertation is significantly different from the earlier stages of standardisation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. van der Wal 1995).

In the Northern Netherlands, the standard language ideology emerged in the decades around 1800 and was almost immediately implemented in language and language-in-education policies (Rutten 2016a). The official policy measures of the early nineteenth century have to be considered a crucial intervention in the contemporary sociolinguistic situation. Metalinguistically and ideologically, the Dutch language was split into two rigid categories, viz. standard and non-standard. On the one hand, Standard Dutch, as regulated in the *schrijftaalregeling* and codified in Siegenbeek's orthography (1804) and Weiland's grammar (1805), was discursively

constructed as 'the' Dutch language of 'the' Dutch nation. On the other hand, all other forms and varieties deviating from the national standard, i.e. the traditional dialects and localisable variants, were categorised as and, in fact, degraded to non-standard. While elevating the national standard variety to the only 'real' version of Dutch, the language policy at the same time suppressed the so-called *platte taalen* 'vulgar languages' (van der Ploeg 1800), which were considered to constitute a threat to the (linguistic) unity of the young nation.

The new sociolinguistic situation from the early nineteenth century onwards, involving the categorisation of Dutch into standard and non-standard varieties, could be described as diglossic (Rutten 2016c: 215), referring to the hierarchical situation in which Standard Dutch represents the H-variety, as opposed to any kind of non-standard Dutch representing the L-variety [4]. In the sociolinguistic situation before 1800, there was no officialised split into standard and non-standard Dutch in the Northern Netherlands. Nevertheless, traditional language histories have often given the impression of a similarly rigid form of diglossia, even before the government's interference with linguistic matters. Like for most European languages, the historiography of Dutch usually describes a sociolinguistic situation with a more or less uniform supraregional variety of the written language on the one hand, and the localisable spoken dialects on the other hand (Rutten 2016c: 200). However, it is important to note that traditional language histories are largely based on the printed language of a small upper layer of society, mainly found in literary and formal texts. The written language in these published sources indeed suggests that the standard language gained more and more ground over the centuries. Whereas there is still a fair amount of variation in seventeenth-century printed language, it is commonly assumed that linguistic uniformity must have been consolidated in the eighteenth century (Rutten & van der Wal 2014: 3).

However, from an alternative perspective on language history, which is commonly referred to as *language history from below* and studies the language in handwritten ego-documents such as letters and diaries (cf. Chapter 3), the sociolinguistic situation in the Early and Late Modern periods can hardly be narrowed down to the implied diglossia of a supraregional written language and the traditional spoken dialects. In fact, recent historical-sociolinguistic research has shown that these ego-documents contain much more localisable features and generally much more variability than contemporary published texts (Rutten 2016c: 200; cf. also Rutten & van der Wal 2014), even in the eighteenth century. Linguistic uniformity in the sense of a supraregional written 'standard' might have been consolidated in printed language, as suggested by traditional language histories, but certainly not in handwritten ego-documents. These sources *from below* represent a

[4] In Ferguson's (1959: 327) seminal paper on diglossia, he distinguished between the superposed variety as the H ('high') variety, and the regional dialects as the L ('low') varieties. According to Auer (2005: 12), the "linguistic repertoire which is not bilingual but contains a structurally related standard variety in addition to the vernacular varieties (dialects) is called diglossic". As one of the main characteristics of diglossia, "the standard represents the H-variety and is used for writing and (if spoken at all) for formal situations, whereas the dialect as the L-variety is not (usually) written" (ibid.).

certain kind of intermediacy between standard and dialect, and can be characterised as hybrid, combining localisable traces of the spoken language with features typical of (more or less) standardised writing (cf. Martineau 2013). In the Dutch case, the hybridity of ego-documents in a supposedly diglossic situation in the Northern Netherlands makes it difficult to apply this dichotomous concept to the sociolinguistic space before 1800 (Rutten 2016c: 197). Therefore, the situation before the official language policy is best described as a diaglossic[5] repertoire, in which "there is no clear-cut separation of standard and dialect" (Auer 2005: 27), ranging from a wide variety of spoken dialects to supralocal writing traditions.

With respect to the diaglossic continuum without a formally standardised variety of Dutch, the top-down language policy of the early nineteenth century with its *schrijftaalregeling* was undoubtedly a major intervention in the sociolinguistic space. For the first time, the conceptual categorisation into standard and non-standard varieties was officialised. Describing the change from a diaglossic to a (metalinguistically constructed) diglossic sociolinguistic situation, Rutten (2016c: 214) argues that

> [h]ierarchization of forms and varieties existed well before 1800, but it is with the construction of the written variety of Dutch used by socio-economically privileged groups as the 'neutral' variety of Dutch that the diaglossic continuum is discursively split into standard and non-standard […] This means that, in the northern Netherlands in the era of nationalism, a diglossic interpretation of sociolinguistic space results from a metalinguistic, ideological operation carried out in and applied to a diaglossic situation.

While the splitting of the continuum into standard and non-standard Dutch was supposed to have far-reaching consequences for the language use of the Dutch population, a historical-sociolinguistic perspective calls for an empirical investigation of whether this was actually the case. Therefore, the central question of this dissertation is to what extent the Dutch government succeeded in disseminating the national standard variety of Dutch across the population at large. Although the standard language norms codified in Siegenbeek (1804) and Weiland (1805) were meant to be used in the administrative and educational domains[6], they were not formally mandatory, certainly not in private writing. Therefore, it remains uncertain how effective the top-down policy measures actually were in spreading the officially constructed Standard Dutch. This research gap in the history of Dutch will be addressed in my dissertation.

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[5] See Rutten (2016d) for a critical discussion of the concepts of *diaglossia* and *diglossia* applied to the histories of Dutch, German and English, in reference to Auer (2005, 2011).

[6] Interestingly, Marynissen (2005, cf. also Marynissen & Nübling 2010) notes that the prescriptions in Siegenbeek's (1804) orthography also served as the point of reference for the official spelling regulation of family names in the Northern Netherlands in 1811.

3 Dissertation outline

In addition to this introductory chapter, the following three chapters provide the historical, theoretical and methodological background of my dissertation. To begin with, **Chapter 2** outlines the socio-historical context of the period under investigation, i.e. the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. Apart from the main socio-political and discursive developments during this fundamental phase of Dutch nation building, this chapter also serves as an introduction to the language and language-in-education policies of the early 1800s, with a particular focus on the *schrijftaalregeling*, i.e. Siegenbeek's (1804) orthography and Weiland's (1805) grammar.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of historical sociolinguistics, in which my research is embedded. This relatively young but thriving field of study will be introduced, highlighting its principles and challenges, its alternative perspective on language histories, as well as its data and corpora. As a central topic of this dissertation, the (under-researched) role of language planning and policy and their implications for actual language use will also be addressed.

Chapter 4 then introduces the corpus and methodology of this dissertation. In particular, the newly compiled *Going Dutch Corpus* of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dutch will be presented in detail, discussing the collection and transcription of data as well as the variational dimensions integrated into the corpus design. The *Going Dutch Corpus* is a diachronic multi-genre corpus of more than 420,000 words, which comprises handwritten ego-documents (private letters, diaries and travelogues) and printed texts (newspapers) from various regions, both from the centre and the periphery of the Northern Netherlands. The ego-documents were written by men and women. The corpus serves as the basis for the empirical analyses of linguistic variables in Chapters 5–12. Furthermore, Chapter 2 also introduces the normative corpus, i.e. an exhaustive selection of normative publications from the eighteenth century until Siegenbeek (1804) and Weiland (1805). Combining quantitative with qualitative methods, these primary sources will be consulted in order to examine and assess the interplay between norms and usage.

Chapters 5–12 contain the corpus-based analyses of eight linguistic variables, comprising five orthographic and three morphosyntactic case studies. Starting with spelling, the selected variables address both consonantal and vocalic issues, all of which were commented on and regulated in the official orthography by Siegenbeek (1804). The first three case studies investigate consonantal variables: (1) the orthographic representation of syllable-final /xt/ in etymologically distinct words (as <cht>, <gt>, <ght>) in **Chapter 5**, (2) final /t/ in particular forms of *d*-stem verbs (as <dt>, <d>, <t>) in **Chapter 6**, and (3) word-medial and word-final /s/ derived from Wgm. **sk* (as <s>, <sch>) in **Chapter 7**. The next two case studies examine vocalic variables: (4) the orthographic representation of etymologically distinct long *e*'s in open syllables (as <e>, <ee>) in **Chapter 8**, and finally (5) Wgm. **ī* (as <ij>, <ÿ>, <y> and alternative forms) in **Chapter 9**.

Moving on to grammatical issues, the following chapters focus on the analysis of three morphosyntactic variables, which were discussed in eighteenth-century metalinguistic discourse and regulated in the official grammar by Weiland (1805). In these case studies, I investigate (1) neuter relative pronouns in **Chapter 10**, (2) masculine and feminine singular and plural relative pronouns in **Chapter 11**, and (3) the synthetic genitive case versus the analytical *van*-construction in **Chapter 12.** All based on data from the *Going Dutch Corpus*, it is the aim of these eight orthographic and morphosyntactic case studies to systematically investigate and assess the possible effects of the Dutch nationalist language policy on actual usage patterns.

While Chapters 5–12 focus on usage in the language community at large, **Chapter 13** adds micro-level insights on the impact of language policy by zooming in on intra- and inter-individual variation and change. Based on the additional *Martini Buys Correspondence Corpus*, specifically compiled for this analysis, the use of five features will be revisited in private letter writing across three generations of family members. While building on the (macro-level) insights gained in Chapters 5–12, this chapter allows a complementary perspective on the effectiveness of the official language regulations by taking into account individual behaviour and the factors of age and lifespan change.

The findings of all previous chapters will be brought together in **Chapter 14**, in which I provide a comprehensive discussion of the results. It is the aim of this concluding chapter to give answers to the central research objectives of this dissertation. First and foremost, it will be assessed whether and to which extent the early nineteenth-century language policy exerted influence on patterns of language variation and change. In other words, were the officialised standard norms of the *schrijftaalregeling* successfully adopted in actual language practice? Bringing together the results of all case studies, I will discuss whether differences in policy success can be identified, both with regard to individual linguistic variables, and with regard to spelling and grammar in general.

Making use of all external variables integrated in the *Going Dutch Corpus*, I will also investigate whether and how we can detect variation between the genres and, on a broader level, between manuscript and print. Geographically, I will examine whether differences can be identified between the various regions of the Northern Netherlands, or between the centre and the periphery. Furthermore, the issue of gender variation will be addressed, examining whether the language policy 'reached' male and female writers to different extents.

To sum up, this dissertation aims to provide a sophisticated assessment of the effectiveness of early nineteenth-century language policy measures in the Northern Netherlands. Given the fact that the influence of language planning and policy on actual language practice is still a largely understudied topic in historical (socio)linguistics, I also seek to suggest a methodological approach to examine and measure the possible impact of language policy systematically and based on a corpus of authentic usage data. In this respect, the Dutch national language policy of the early 1800s offers a highly interesting and concrete case in language history.