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# JAMES BOSWELL PRACTISING FRENCH AND LEARNING DUTCH IN THE NETHERLANDS<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Start of a *grand tour*

It was at noon on 7 August 1763 that James Boswell (1740–1795) arrived in the Netherlands, where he was to stay for almost a year before continuing his *grand tour* via Germany and Switzerland to France and Italy.<sup>2</sup> Since the late 16th century, the grand tour had been a familiar enterprise for sons of the aristocracy and, increasingly, of the non-noble ruling ranks and important merchants with international networks. These young men from Western and Northern European countries travelled abroad to become familiar with foreign culture and art, to visit antiquities and to learn and practise foreign languages such as French and Italian (cf. Frank-van Westrienen 1983; Towner 1985; Verhoeven 2009).<sup>3</sup>

The young Scot James Boswell, however, started his continental trip with the study of civil (Roman) law at the University of Utrecht. Studying Roman law in the Netherlands was a not uncommon practice for Scots, as Scottish law was mainly based on Roman law, of which the Dutch were “the great masters” at that time (Pottle 1952, 2–3). The choice for Utrecht, and not Leiden, where his father had studied, was determined by James’ mentor Sir David Dalrymple (1726–1792), who himself had studied

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<sup>1</sup> Ingrid Tieken once advised me to bring my research on Boswell’s foreign language acquisition, published in Dutch (van der Wal 1998, 2001), to the attention of an English audience. The present, elaborated and updated article fulfils her wish.

<sup>2</sup> See Blanton (2002, 30–43) for Boswell’s travels after his sojourn in the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the Dutch diaries of Arnout Hellemans Hooft (grand tour 1649–1651; Grabowsky and Verkruijsse 2001) and Coenraad Ruysch (1674–1677; <https://alanmoss.nl/ruysch/>), and the Dutch letters sent to young merchant Michiel Heusch (1664–1665) by his relatives in Hamburg (van der Wal 2019).

in Utrecht. James would have preferred to study in France, but relinquished his preference, as we learn from his letter to Dalrymple, dated 25 June 1763:

As to the particular place, I shall not insist on having my own way. Indeed, what you say of a French Academy has altered my views of it. The only thing that I imagined it preferable for, was that I could acquire the French language better in the country itself, than in Holland. However, you seem to think that I may have that advantage at Utrecht (Tinker 1924, 11–12).

Grand tour travellers often acquired and practised French, the prestige language of the higher ranks of Western Europe, in France or in particular towns in Switzerland such as Geneva, but, according to Dalrymple, the city of Utrecht would also offer that opportunity.

Indeed, French played an important role in the Dutch society of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a society which has been characterised as “truly multilingual” (Frijhoff 2015, 115). French schools and tutors of French were found in most towns and for a long time a pervasive influence of French language and culture has been assumed (on this so-called *frenchification*, see van der Wal and van Bree 2014, 230–231, 254–255; Rutten, Vosters and van der Wal 2015). However, the degree to which the French language functioned in various domains of daily life is still a matter of historical-sociolinguistic research, which is conducted in the Leiden research programme *Pardon My French? Dutch-French Language Contact in The Netherlands, 1500–1900*.<sup>4</sup> In the context of language contact, the experiences of the foreign student James Boswell, described in his correspondence, notes and diary, may give an interesting view of the daily practice of written and spoken communication in various Dutch circles.

## 2. Improving and practising French

James took a few practical measures to learn and improve his French. He was looking for “a good French servant of undoubted character” (letter to Dalrymple; Tinker 1924, 29) and found that servant in the person of François Mazerac (Pottle 1952, 19, footnote 4). A certain Carron, clerk of the English Presbyterian church, who had a French father and an English mother, became his French tutor and taught him three times a week (Pottle 1952, 46). In the evening he read Voltaire for two hours, looked up unfamiliar words in his dictionary and wrote them down along with their meanings (Pottle 1952, 55). He also intended to write an essay of two pages

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<sup>4</sup> This programme, directed by Gijsbert Rutten and funded by NWO, runs from 2018 to 2023.

in French every day, which resulted in an accumulated total of 232 quarto pages during his stay in the Netherlands.

James had various opportunities to practise his French. Every Wednesday evening he participated in a literary society “where it is not permitted to speak a word of anything but French” (Pottle 1952, 55). He also regularly dined at Robert Brown’s (1728–1777), vicar of the Scottish Presbyterian Congregation, where he had to speak French in the company of the vicar’s Swiss wife and her sister, neither of whom spoke English. Sometimes, out of laziness, he spoke English or “barbarous Latin” with Brown (Pottle 1952, 56). By 31 October 1763, he rather disappointedly remarked: “Yet I cannot observe that I am making rapid progress. In writing, I am slow and clumsy, and in speaking I have great difficulty in expressing myself and often make terrible blunders” (Pottle 1952, 55). The mistakes he mentions include *je suis* (instead of *j’ai*) *bien chaud* and *les magistrats d’Utrecht ont besoin de faire allumer* (instead of *illuminer*) *la ville* (Pottle 1952, 56, footnote 1).

Countess Johanna Gevaerts Nassau Beverweerd (1733–1779) took Boswell under her protection and introduced him into the higher, French-speaking circles (Pottle 1952, 68–69). When he met Belle van Zuylen (1740–1805) and fell in love with her, James was all the more stimulated to improve his French.<sup>5</sup> His mentor Dalrymple appeared to have met the old, noble family Van Zuylen in the past. In his letter dated 11 April 1764, he remembered Belle’s taste for poetry and asked whether her brother Reynold was still alive.<sup>6</sup> Dalrymple’s striking observation that “He [Reynold] used to speak Dutch and French together” and said “*Je ne saurais singer*” (I cannot sing), when asked to sing (Pottle 1952, 236), gives us a glimpse of the French competence of children in high society circles.

On 10 April 1764 James had to confess that he still did not speak French correctly. He repeated a remark made by Belle van Zuylen who had commented that Englishmen never properly respected the tenses or genders, although they had learned them in Latin. Again James resolved to carefully write two pages in French every day and, for each grammatical mistake, he intended to pay a fine of a sou to the poor (Pottle 1952, 208).

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<sup>5</sup> James corresponded with her for many years (Pottle 1952, 54, footnote 1, 55, 285–289; Barfoot and Bostoen 1994, xi).

<sup>6</sup> Reinout Gerard, Belle van Zuylen’s eldest brother, drowned in 1759 at the age of eighteen (Pottle 1952, 236, footnote 2).

### 3. Learning Dutch: The traditional and natural method

Although James managed to communicate well during his stay in the Netherlands from August 1763 to June 1764, both at the university with lectures in Latin and in the higher social circles using French, he became interested in the Dutch language. On 2 January 1764 he wrote a letter in Dutch to young Archibald Stewart, a merchant in Rotterdam (Barfoot and Bostoen 1994, xii–xiii). Ten days later he mentioned in his diary that he “did well at dinner in speaking Dutch” (Pottle 1952, 115) and on the evening of 20 January he was busy writing a Dutch song (Pottle 1952, 117). Clearly, Boswell was trying to speak and write Dutch. From 1 February to 6 March 1764 he even wrote twenty brief Dutch essays or compositions, which comprised observations of daily life, an account of his visit to the Van Zuylen family and his and others’ opinions of the work of the famous linguist Lambert ten Kate (1674–1731).<sup>7</sup> In these essays he characterises Dutch as an old, strong and rich language and appears to be annoyed by the frequent mixture of Dutch with French heard in The Hague (Barfoot and Bostoen 1994, 6). What makes the limited material of only twenty quarto pages most interesting, however, is that we have the opportunity of catching foreign language learning in the act. Barfoot and Bostoen’s 1994 edition of the essays allows us to analyse and evaluate Boswell’s Dutch.<sup>8</sup> I have even been able to determine how he learnt Dutch: whether he followed the traditional method of using manuals, grammars and dictionaries or the natural method of learning from native speakers in everyday life.<sup>9</sup>

What was Boswell’s method when writing his Dutch essays? According to his letter to Archibald Stewart, dated 2 January 1764, he did not have a dictionary to help him in writing (Barfoot and Bostoen 1994, xiii). We may wonder whether that was still the case when he started writing his essays on 1 February. Remarkably, his eleventh essay, dated 16 February, begins with the following phrase:

Ik sall een maal probeeren een half bladje te schryven **als Ik spreek. Ik zaal geen Wordenboeken nemen**, maar Ik zaal allen die woorden dat in myn

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<sup>7</sup> For Boswell’s reception of Ten Kate’s main work, his *Aenleiding tot de kennis van het verhevene deel der Nederduitsch sprake* (1723), see van der Wal (1998, 183–184).

<sup>8</sup> In the following, *B&B x* refers to the page number of this edition. Apart from a few corrections and alternatives, the English translations of quotes from the Dutch essays originate from the B&B edition.

<sup>9</sup> For methods of language learning and teaching see, for instance, Mc. Lelland (2017) and Noordegraaf and Vonk (1993).

hooft comen introduceeren. Ik moet ook **franschen woorden meleeren**, terwyl ik zyn zoo veel hooren alle dagen in alle Gezelschappen (B&B 24; bold MvdW).

‘For once I shall try to write half a page the way I speak. I will not use a dictionary, but I shall introduce only those words which come into my head. I must also intermingle French words, since I hear so many every day in all kinds of company’

Boswell intends to write spoken language and he plans to intersperse his Dutch with French words, since he hears these often in various circles. Note that in this particular essay we only find the French loans *introduceeren* ‘to introduce’, *meleeren* ‘to mix’, [*het heeft*] *manqueerd* ‘it has failed’ and the Latin loan *probeeren* ‘to try’. He explicitly indicates not using a dictionary, which seems to differ from his earlier practice. Examining Boswell’s peculiar usage in the ten essays prior to this one, I have been able to prove that he indeed used a contemporary English-Dutch/Dutch-English dictionary: W. Sewel, *A Large Dictionary of English and Dutch/ Groot Woordenboek der Engelsche en Nederduytsche Taalen* (1727 or a later edition) (see van der Wal 1998, 184–186). Whether he also used Sewel’s well-known *A Compendious Guide to the Low-Dutch Language/ Korte Wegwyzer der Nederduytsche Taal* (1754, second edition), a Dutch grammar in English with many dialogues, cannot be determined. Boswell appears to be familiar with grammatical characteristics of written 18th-century Dutch, as shown by his correct use of the dative after prepositions, for instance, in *Men zeg dat de hollansche taal is een taal voor den Paarden* ‘People say that Dutch is a language for horses’ (B&B 8) and *in zynen pleytingen invoeren* ‘introduce into their pleas’ (B&B 20). Relying on a dictionary or possibly a grammar, and thus following the traditional method, however, did not exclude learning Dutch in everyday conversation with native speakers, as we may conclude from a number of oral phenomena found in his essays.

#### 4. Oral characteristics: Traces of the natural method of language acquisition

Boswell did not only stay in Utrecht, he also visited towns in the province of Holland (cf. Barfoot and Bostoën 1994, xxvii–xxviii), where he must have heard the everyday spoken language of the region. According to the quote from his eleventh essay above, James intended to write spoken Dutch in his essays, which was indeed what he did. His essays contain quite a few oral characteristics – that is, features which do not occur in 18th-century

grammars or printed publications.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Boswell uses personal pronouns that were mainly limited to 18th-century spoken Dutch: the subject *u* ‘you’ as second person form of address instead of *gij*, and the object forms *myn* ‘me’ and *zyn* ‘him’ instead of *my* and *hem*.<sup>11</sup> Remarkably, Boswell’s *zyn* replaces plural *hen* ‘them’ (see example (3)).

- (1) *Wat zeg u vrouw?* ‘What are you saying, woman?’ (B&B 10)
- (2) *Hy heeft myn ontvangen* ‘He has received me’ (B&B 12)
- (3) *Ik weet weel dat voor ‘t meerderdeel men zyn “Professeurs” noemen* ‘I am well aware that they are usually called “Professeurs”’ (B&B 6)

These variants also occurred in late-18th-century handwritten egodocuments. The same applies to Boswell’s diminutive *-ie* in *blaadie/bladie* ‘little page’ (B&B 20, 24, 30), *bladyes* ‘little pages’ (B&B 4) and *beytie* ‘little bit’ (B&B 4, 14, 42) (cf. van der Wal 2006, 2007; Simons 2013, 231–257). The diminutive *-ie*, an oral characteristic, is not found in grammars and printed publications, which mention only diminutive *-(t)je* and, to a lesser extent, *-ke* (Moonen 1706, 119; Sewel 1754, 19–20; van der Wal 2007, 88–91). The verb forms *ik bin* ‘I am’ (B&B 4, 10, 30), *zy bin* ‘she is’ (B&B 22), *Wy binnen* ‘we are’ (B&B 18), *u bin* ‘you are’ (B&B 4, 30), *zij binnen* ‘they are’ (B&B 24) were also characteristics of spoken 18th-century Dutch.<sup>12</sup> The regular verb forms in grammars and printed publications are *ik ben*, *gij zijt* or *gij bent*, *hij/zij/het is*, *wij zijn*, *gij* (or *gijlieden*) *zijt*, *zij zijn* are (cf. Moonen 1706, 144; Sewel 1754, 82).

18th-century comparatives show *als-dan* variation such as *groter als* and *groter dan* ‘larger than’ (van der Wal and van Bree 2014, 237–238). The second option is propagated in grammars and other prescriptive publications. Sewel’s dictionary mentions both variants as translations of *than* “Dan, als.” Taking into account Boswell’s English mother tongue, we would expect the choice of *dan*, but in all cases he uses *als*, as in *meer*

<sup>10</sup> Dutch grammars do not explicitly mention the stigmatised forms *mijn* or *zijn*. In Sewel’s English grammar (Sewel 1754, 64), however, “aan *myn* or *my*” is found as a dative variant in the first person pronoun paradigm.

<sup>11</sup> The form of address *ue* occurs only twice in one and the same sentence which is a literal quote of Vicar Brown: *Hier heb ue fier taalen en hier heb ue heelen goeden dissertaties op te spraak int’ algemeen* ‘Here you have solid languages, and here you have an excellent discussion of language in general’ (B&B 16).

<sup>12</sup> In the late 18th-century part of the Leiden *Letters as Loot* corpus (brievenals buit.inl.nl) the dialectal, oral verb forms are only a small minority in the private letters: for instance, *bin* 6% versus *ben* 94%.

*gelukkig als eening Scotsman* ‘happier than any Scotsman’ (B&B 10). We may conclude that, just as in the previous examples, he adopted *als* from spoken everyday conversation.<sup>13</sup> The orthography of words sometimes reveals that Boswell must have had a sharp ear for particular pronunciations. The spelling *Aarmin* ‘poor people’ (B&B 28; instead of written *Armen*) represents the palatal *i*-pronunciation of the schwa, a frequent 17th- and 18th-century phenomenon (see van Bree 1975, 68–69). Such examples as *Ik verwach niet* ‘I do not expect’ (B&B 18; instead of *verwacht*) indicate that he rightly observed *t*-deletion, a spoken language feature of the provinces of Holland and partly Utrecht.

Taking all the oral characteristics into account, we may conclude that in learning Dutch Boswell also followed the natural method of adopting linguistic phenomena, from everyday conversation.

## 5. Interference of English and imperfect learning

Imperfect learning is a common phenomenon in the process of foreign language acquisition, as is interference of the mother tongue. We may wonder what stage of perfection Boswell achieved during his stay in the Netherlands. Analysing his essays, we find various examples of imperfect learning. A morphological example is Boswell’s usage of *sall*: alongside correct instances as *ik sall schryven* ‘I will write’ (B&B 4), incorrect *wy sallen* ‘we will’ instead of *wy sullen* (B&B 6) and *onze raadsheeren sallen* ‘our counselors will’ instead of *sullen* (B&B 20) occur. This imperfect generalisation of the vowel *-a* is, at the same time, a case of interference, since in 18<sup>th</sup>-century English this vowel occurs in the whole present tense paradigm of the verb *shall* (Sewel 1754, 75). Here, imperfect learning and interference are two sides of the same coin.

Contemporaries were aware of the difficulties that Dutch articles and demonstrative pronouns presented for native speakers of English, who were not familiar with gender distinctions and the related morphological features. See the following illustrative quote:

Whereas the English always use the Particles *The, that* and *this* promiscuously before all Nouns (...); it seems an almost unsurmountable difficulty for the English to learn the right use of these Particles, because there have not yet any sufficient rules been given for it (Sewel 1754, 14).

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<sup>13</sup> *As* after comparatives also occurred in Scottish dialects, but Scottish interference is not likely, as Boswell’s English letters exclusively show *than* (personal communication Ingrid Tieken).



Boswell was no exception: feminine or masculine nouns occur with the article *het* and the demonstrative pronoun *dat* instead of *de* and *die*, such as *het engelsche taal* ‘the English language’ (B&B 38) and *dit brief* ‘this letter’ (B&B 28). Sometimes, neuter nouns have an incorrect article *de* instead of *het*, such as *de Boek* ‘the book’ (B&B 14).

From the perspective of the English uninflected adjectives (for example, *good*) we also understand Boswell’s problem of acquiring the Dutch rule of the *goed/goede* distinction. Non-neuter nouns require the inflected form (*de goede vrouw/ een goede vrouw* ‘the good woman/ a good woman’); neuter nouns vary depending on definiteness: *het goede kind/ een goed kind* ‘the good child/ a good child’. In Boswell’s essays we find correct instances such as *Het is een schandelyke Zaak* ‘It is a scandalous matter’ (B&B 6), a mixture of correct and incorrect adjectives as in *een bevallig en heel voltooid vrouw* ‘a charming and very accomplished woman’ (B&B 10) and incorrect instances such as *met een zoo corte uyt spreken* ‘with such a clipped pronunciation’ (B&B 8).<sup>14</sup> The incorrect use of both articles and adjectives is primarily a feature of imperfect learning, often found in the usage of second language learners of Dutch from various linguistic backgrounds. Interference of English would have resulted into a general use of the *de* article and the uninflected adjective. For these morphological phenomena, Boswell remained in a stage of imperfect learning, which we will also notice at the syntactical level of word order.

Boswell’s essays show remarkable word orders. After a preposed phrase or preposed subordinate clause, regular inversion is often lacking in a main clause, as examples (4), (5) and (6) show, although a correct word order as in (7) also occurs. At the same time, Boswell correctly applies the word order rule for a complex verb phrase in the main clause: no verb cluster, as in English, but a final infinitive verb (the so-called “tangconstructie”) such as *sal (...) doen, heb (...) gezenden, heb (...) gedronken*.

*Main clause*

- (4) ... en dat *ik sal* noit doen  
‘and that I shall never do’ (B&B 6)
- (5) Naamiddag te zes heuren *Ik heb* myn knecht naar de eerwardig  
Hogleeraar gezenden  
‘This afternoon at six o’clock I have sent my servant to the worthy  
Professor’ (B&B 16)

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<sup>14</sup> See van der Wal (2001, 127–129) for a more elaborate discussion of Boswell’s articles and adjectives.

- (6) Als van daag is Het eerst van Februari, *ik begin* ...  
 ‘As today is the 1st February, I am beginning’ (B&B 4)
- (7) Laatst Maandag *heb ik* Thee gedronken ...  
 ‘Last Monday I have drunk tea’ (B&B 12)

*Subordinate clause*

- (8) ... ik verhoop dat hy *sall* niet Kwaardaardig worden  
 ‘I hope that he will not be put out’ (B&B 4)
- (9) ... zoo dat ik *moet* een reght kennis van dit Zaak hebben  
 ‘so that I will have proper knowledge of this matter’ (B&B 28)
- (10) ... dat zy niet in goed luym *was*  
 ‘that she was not in a good mood’ (B&B 12)

The Dutch SOV word order in subordinate clauses differs from the English SVO word order. Sometimes Boswell uses the correct verb final word order as in (10), but examples (8) and (9) still show a stage of imperfect learning.<sup>15</sup> Instead of a final verb cluster, Boswell splits the complex verb phrase into a verb second and a final verb, which is the word order rule he acquired for the main clause. At the word order level I conclude that Boswell had not sufficiently mastered the rules of inversion and subordinate clause word order, which he mostly applied incorrectly, but that he was well aware of the word order rule for complex verb phrases, which he even generalised in subordinate clauses.<sup>16</sup> Yet another verbal phenomenon, the past participle, will reveal his generalising efforts.

Boswell often uses the perfect tense and therefore Dutch past participles. These participles differ from the English through the occurrence of the prefix *ge-*: this difference leads Boswell to use examples that lack a prefix as in *Het is derdtig Jaaren zeedert myn vaader te Leyde heeft studeerd* ‘It is thirty years since my father has studied in Leiden’ (B&B 22) and *Ik heb veel gaaten daarin vonden* ‘I have found many holes in them’ (B&B 24). English and Dutch share the distinction between strong and weak verbs, but Boswell does not always place the Dutch verb in the right

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<sup>15</sup> Boswell also applies the Dutch subordinate word order in a main clause as in *Juvrow zyn doghter seer vermaaklyke was* ‘His daughter was very pleasant’ (B&B 12). We cannot consider this mistake as an earlier stage of language acquisition compared to (10), as both examples occur in the same essay.

<sup>16</sup> To avoid any misunderstanding, I mention that both present-day inversion and verb final subordinate word order are features of 18th-century Dutch.

category. Illustrative examples are the strong verbs *schrijven* ‘to write’ and *spreken* ‘to speak’ with incorrect weak past participles:

- (11) Mynheer Johnson (..) **heeft** myn een brief uyt Londen **geschryft**  
 ‘Mr. Johnson has written me a letter from London’ (B&B 28) –  
 correct *geschreven*
- (12) hy **heeft gespraakt**  
 ‘he has spoken’ (B&B 40) – correct *gesproken*

Moreover, many weak verbs occur with an incorrect strong past participle form (ending in *-en*), including the following selection:

- (13) Hy **heeft** myn **belooven** een vol verhaal daarof  
 ‘He has promised me a full account of them’ (B&B 28) – correct  
*beloofd*
- (14) zy **hebben** (...) **bewaaren**  
 ‘they have kept’ (B&B 20) – correct *bewaard*
- (15) Waar **heb** u allen uw daagen **geleeven**...  
 ‘Where have you lived all your life’ (B&B 30) – correct *geleefd*
- (16) ...dat in het hollansche taal **oversetten is**  
 ‘which has been translated into Dutch’ (B&B 28) – correct *overgeset*
- (17) ...en hy **heeft** in frankryk, Spanye en Italie **geryzen**  
 ‘and he has travelled in France, Spain and Italy’ (B&B 34) – correct  
*gereisd*

From the perspective of the verb system, we might expect the regular weak forms to proliferate at the cost of the irregular strong forms, but Boswell generalises the strong past participle *-en* suffix and even adds this suffix to the past participles *gecoft* ‘bought’ and *geweest* ‘been’, which results in the double forms *gecoften* (B&B 24) and *geweesten* (B&B 40).

Even when a strong verb is correctly labeled, the right past participle form does not always occur, as in (18) and (19):

- (18) hy heeft t’huys **geblyven**  
 ‘he has remained at home’ (B&B 40) – correct *gebleven*
- (19) Het is (...) **geschryven**  
 ‘It is written’ (B&B 16) – correct *geschreven*

The examples (13)–(19) clearly show that Boswell generalises the Dutch strong verb classes 5, 6 and 7, the verb classes with the same vowel in the infinitive and past participle such as *meten* – *gemeten*, *lachen* – *gelachen*, *laten* – *gelaten* ‘to measure, to laugh, to let’ (van der Wal and van Bree 2014, 147–148).<sup>17</sup> In this way, he appears to simply create his own system of strong verbs.

## 6. Conclusion

Boswell’s ego-documents (notes, diary, letters and essays) are useful material to reveal his linguistic experiences in the Netherlands, where he had the opportunity to practise and improve his French. He received comments on his spoken French and Vicar Brown corrected his French essays. Brown also intended to correct the Dutch essays James wrote during a brief period (see B&B 4, 26), but careful correction appears to be lacking in the surviving versions of the essays.<sup>18</sup> What they show is Boswell’s learning of Dutch caught in the act: imperfect learning, interference of English and also correct language acquisition. Close scrutiny of the essays reveals that Boswell acquired Dutch by following both the traditional method (using Sewel’s dictionary) and the natural method (adopting phenomena from spoken everyday conversation).

Boswell’s intention was *te minsten een beytie te leeren zoo dat ik can met de Hollanders conversatie hebben* ‘to learn at least a little, so that I can talk with Dutch people’ (B&B 4). The grammarian Sewel, who mentioned the difficulty of the different preterites *hoopte*, *kofte*, *liep* in the case of the verbs *hoopen*, *koopen*, *loopen* ‘to hope, to buy, to walk’, gave the following advice: “And therefore the easiest way will be to learn those variations by a frequent and attentive reading, and dayly speaking if one has occasion to converse among the Dutch” (Sewel 1754, 91). We do not know

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<sup>17</sup> It does not mean that no correct past participles are to be found in Boswell’s essays, but the incorrect forms dominate. Correct forms are, for instance: *ik heb gebrogt* ‘I have brought’ (B&B 10); *heeft gedronken* ‘has drunk’ (B&B 40); *geleefd hadden* ‘had lived’ (B&B 8); *...u heeft...gesproken* ‘you have spoken’ (B&B 30); *Ik heb waargenome* ‘I have observed’ (B&B 20); *Hy heb ...geweest* (B&B 12) ‘he has been’. Boswell’s mistakes deviate from the mistakes made by 20th-century second language learners of Dutch (see Van der Wal 2001, 131–135).

<sup>18</sup> Barfoot and Bostoen (1994, xiv–xv) assume that either Boswell’s notebook with later Dutch essays was lost, as was his Dutch journal, or that he had lost interest in the Dutch exercise and continued writing his French essays and letters “presumably because of its greater usefulness in the social world in which he moved and his anticipation of further travels on the Continent.”

how frequently Boswell read Dutch, but in daily life he must have talked regularly with Dutch people. He himself refers to the circumstances of a foreigner abroad in one of his essays: *Moet hy niet in die Schuyten ryzen? Moet hy niet in hollanschen huizen en Winkelen worden? En zeekerlyk hy moet in die straaften wandelen* ‘Must he [the foreigner] not travel in the draw-ships? Must he not find himself in houses and shops? And surely he must walk in the streets’ (B&B 32). In his diary he recorded that he spoke plenty of Dutch when he was looking for pleasure in the red light district of Amsterdam, “but could find no girl that elicited my inclinations” (Pottle 1952, 254–255).

In a letter dated 23 March 1764, Boswell evaluates his efforts: “I have advanced very well in French (..) I have picked up a little Dutch” (Pottle 1952, 190). Indeed, our analysis shows that he acquired *een beytie hollansche* ‘a little bit of Dutch’ (B&B 14), probably enough to chat with Dutch people during the rest of his stay in the Netherlands.

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