

“LOWTHIAN” LINGUISTICS REVISITED: CODIFICATION, PRESCRIPTION AND STYLE IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction¹

A considerable number of historical-sociolinguistic case studies have been published since the gradual emergence of the discipline from the 1980s onwards (Auer et al. 2015). The vast majority of studies focus on one particular language or language area. Comparative historical sociolinguistics aims to move beyond analyses of individual languages and language areas (Nevalainen and Rutten 2012; Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016). Can we identify parallel social and sociolinguistic developments across different language areas, and compare developments in language use occurring under the influence of these social and sociolinguistic developments? Examples of such social and sociolinguistic changes include urbanisation, migration, colonisation and war. Language standardisation is another one: the volume edited by Deumert and Vandebussche (2003) compares standardisation histories across a large number of Germanic languages. In a similar vein, the volume edited by Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Percy (2016) explores standardisation and the interrelated phenomenon of prescriptivism across various languages and geographical contexts. In this paper, we offer some more suggestions for comparative historical-sociolinguistic analyses.

Adopting the view that standardisation and prescriptivism are major sociolinguistic events found in many European languages, including Dutch and English, the research topic that we focus on here is the effect of linguistic prescription on language use (section 2). Prescription, as a stricter

¹ The research for this paper was carried out within the project “Going Dutch. The Construction of Dutch in Policy, Practice and Discourse, 1750–1850,” awarded to Gijsbert Rutten (VIDI-grant, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). Andreas Krogull was a PhD student on this project.

or even regulatory alternative to previous codification practices, characterises the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in both England and the Netherlands. Our focus in this paper is on grammar, in particular on the effects of grammatical prescriptions found in the official grammar of Dutch authored by Weiland and published in 1805. This official grammar was part of the so-called *schrijftaalregeling* ‘written language regulation’ (section 3), in which context an official orthography was also published (Siegenbeek 1804). In order to assess the influence of Weiland’s (1805) grammatical prescriptions on language use, we built the multi-genre, diachronic Going Dutch Corpus. The corpus was thus specifically designed to answer the research question of the success of the *schrijftaalregeling*. We report on two case studies here (section 4) involving two grammatical variables, viz. relative pronouns and the genitive case. We also reflect on the relevance of style and different stylistic “levels” conditioning the distribution of grammatical variables. In addition to the shift from codification to prescription, style and stylistic levels also constitute a possible point of comparison for historical sociolinguistics.

2. Codification, prescription, implementation

Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade has written about many different topics. Eighteenth-century English normative grammar and the rise of prescriptivism towards the end of that century are topics that she has devoted an impressive number of publications to. One of the core texts is Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011) about Robert Lowth (1710–1787), the alleged father of English prescriptivism. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011) focuses on the contents of Lowth’s grammar and on the sociohistorical context in which it was written. Lowth’s *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) was part of a broader tradition of normative grammar, which was not prescriptive in the strict sense. In fact, eighteenth-century normative grammars often describe usage as much as they prescribe forms and proscribe other forms, and the grammarians themselves do not always follow their own strictures (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011, 224–253). This tradition of normative grammar gradually became stronger in the eighteenth century, and the number of grammars produced increased significantly, particularly in the second half of the century (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011, 258). An increase in strictures can also be seen, though it has to be noted that Lowth was not among the strictest grammarians (2011, 256). In the 1770s, a new genre emerged parallel to the normative grammars, viz. the usage guide. This is a genre that differs strongly from traditional grammars in form, function and metalanguage (2011, 262), though it often

addresses similar topics such as stranded prepositions, split infinitives and double comparatives. In terms of the Milroviaan standardisation model (Milroy and Milroy 2012), both the increase in strictures and the rise of the usage guide signal the shift from codification to prescription (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011, 257, 259–260).

Similar developments occurred in Dutch metalinguistic discourse of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rutten 2012). There was an increase in grammar production from the 1750s onwards, particularly in the southern Low Countries (today's Flanders) and to a lesser extent also in the north (today's Netherlands). A certain “pedagogisation” can be discerned in the second half of the eighteenth century: a range of didactic features, such as the use of transparent (non-Latinate) terminology, renders the genre more accessible to a wider audience. The texts also become easier: theoretical diversions are avoided, which places the emphasis more strongly on the language norms. These changes in metalinguistic discourse are connected to ongoing social change. Cultural nationalism developed into a major force in Dutch society, again from the 1750s onwards. This culminated in an official language policy in the 1790s and early 1800s (Rutten 2019). In 1804 and 1805, an official orthography (Siegenbeek 1804) and grammar (Weiland 1805) came out on behalf of the national government, designed to be used in the educational and administrative domains. The publication of these texts generated a stream of new prescriptive works in the first decades of the nineteenth century, aimed at the dissemination of the newly codified and prescribed rules of language – that is, of written Dutch. The language policy marks the shift from codification to prescription in the Dutch metalinguistic tradition. In Haugen's standardisation model, it embodies the implementation stage, which he describes as “the activity of a writer, an institution, or a government in adopting and attempting to spread the language form that has been selected and codified [...] the spread of schooling to entire populations in modern times has made the implementation of norms a major educational issue” (Haugen 1987: 61; cf. Rutten, Krogull and Schoemaker 2020).

3. The *schrijftaalregeling* as a matter of national concern

The officialised spelling and grammar rules, published in 1804 and 1805, constitute the so-called *schrijftaalregeling* ‘written language regulation’. Matthijs Siegenbeek (1774–1854), professor of Dutch at the university of Leiden, was assigned the task to codify the national spelling, and Pieter Weiland (1754–1841), a minister based in Rotterdam, wrote the national grammar. Although new elements can certainly be found, their texts

strongly relied on the normative tradition of the previous century (Noordegraaf 1985). Siegenbeek largely followed the orthographical principles proposed by Adriaan Kluit (1735–1807) in the 1760s and 1770s. Weiland’s grammar is the culmination of the eighteenth-century codifiers of Dutch.

The national government had requested these codifying reference works and supported their publication. Up to the present day, the Netherlands still has an official spelling, developed and published at the request of and on behalf of the government. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the spelling also has official status in Belgium. The 1805 grammar was the first but also the last official grammar of Dutch. Today, the *Nederlandse Taalunie* ‘Dutch Language Union’ (a policy organisation of the Belgian, Dutch and Surinamese governments) supports work on the *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* ‘General Grammar of Dutch’, but unlike the official spelling, the use of this grammar is not compulsory for civil servants in the educational and administrative domains.

The *schrijftaalregeling* thus marks the beginning of a continued national language policy, and can in fact be seen as a textbook example of language planning inspired by the emerging nationalist ideologies in Late Modern Europe (Rutten 2019). The language planning measures were part of the broader phenomenon of educational reform. Feeding on decades of cultural nationalism, the political nationalism and the actual nation-state formation of the period around 1800 appropriated various cultural fields that had previously been limited to private and semi-public initiatives, or that had been organised at a local or regional level. Education is a case in point. Under the old regime, education was primarily organised by church and city authorities, and regulations had a limited geographical scope. As one of the first countries in Europe, the Netherlands installed a Ministry of Education in the 1790s, whose central task was to nationalise the field of education. To this end, educational reform acts were issued in 1801, 1803 and 1806. One of the most important results of these educational reforms was the establishment of a national system of school inspection (Schoemaker and Rutten 2017).

The school inspectors were crucial for the implementation of the school acts. Partly depending on their own interests, they monitored the quality of education, of teaching methods and materials, they commented on the skills of the teachers, they collected data on school attendance, inspected the buildings and the financial records of the school, and so on. Many school inspectors also commented on language education since explicit attention to language was an important innovation in the school acts of the early 1800s. Reading, writing, arithmetic and religious education used

to be the core elements of primary school curricula, but with the school act of 1806, religious education was replaced with knowledge of the language (cf. Rutten 2019, 223). In school inspection reports from the first half of the nineteenth century, numerous examples can be found where inspectors focus on language norms and language use, and as early as 1806 some inspectors were monitoring the extent to which Siegenbeek's spelling was adopted (Rutten 2019, 228).

In the slipstream of the language policy, many schoolbooks and related reading materials shifted to the new spelling (Schoemaker 2018; Rutten, Krogull and Schoemaker 2020). Older books were respelled in order to comply with the Siegenbeek spelling, and school grammars that had previously prescribed forms different from Siegenbeek's preferences shifted to the new paradigm. With respect to spelling, the 1804 codification was extremely successful. Prescriptive works from the first half of the nineteenth century adopted the new spelling across the board. Moreover, language users also adopted the newly prescribed forms to a considerable extent, even in handwritten ego-documents such as private letters and diaries (Krogull 2018a, 2018b; Rutten, Krogull and Schoemaker 2020). These changes in both prescription and language use are all the more remarkable in view of the complexities introduced by Siegenbeek, whose spelling rules often incorporated etymological differences that had long levelled out in many spoken varieties of Dutch.

4. Grammatical prescriptivism and stylistic levels

4.1 *Assessing the effects of grammatical prescriptions*

Compared to Siegenbeek's influence on spelling in actual language use, the effects of the prescriptions of Weiland (1805) and the prescriptive tradition following him are less clear-cut. Despite the official status of his grammar, Weiland showed quite some awareness of variation and different stylistic levels in language use. This, in fact, is another parallel with Lowth's approach to grammar writing (Rutten 2012). As Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011, 183–184) points out, Lowth occasionally distinguished between different styles of writing, such as “familiar,” “polite” or “solemn and elevated,” which he linked to different linguistic variants. Weiland adopted the Dutch terminology introduced by his eighteenth-century predecessor Lambert ten Kate (1723), referring to three stylistic levels called *gemeenzaam* ‘familiar’, *deftig* ‘polite’ and *hoogdravend* ‘elevated’, although somewhat more implicitly and less systematically than ten Kate. On both sides of the North Sea, therefore, grammarians were introducing the

traditional rhetorical differences in style into grammar, assigning variants to different stylistic levels.

Since grammatical norms became a matter of national concern in the period around 1800, aiming to spread the newly codified standard across the population at large, the question arises to what extent Weiland’s (1805) prescriptions actually influenced language use. Unlike Siegenbeek’s remarkably successful spelling prescriptions, the effects of Weiland’s grammar appear to be more difficult to trace (Krogull 2018b). However, at least with regard to the “Lowthian” stylistic distinction of grammatical variants, some interesting developments can be observed.

We investigated diachronic changes in a substantial multi-genre corpus of historical Dutch. Specifically compiled to measure the effectiveness of the national language policy, the Going Dutch Corpus represents authentic written language use in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch. With the *schrijftaalregeling* of 1804 and 1805 serving as our main point of departure, the corpus is composed of two diachronic cross-sections, viz. one before (1770–1790) and one after (1820–1840) the national prescriptions took effect. It comprises more than 420,000 words of texts from different regions in the Netherlands, and from both men and women (see Krogull 2018b for a comprehensive description of the corpus). Another crucial external variable integrated into the corpus design is that of genre, allowing us to compare the prescriptive effects in two types of ego-document, i.e. private letters and diaries, as well as in newspapers. Private letters constitute the most informal and most “oral” sources in our corpus, whereas newspapers, by definition printed and published, are relatively formal and typically “written” texts, though still locally produced and distributed. Diaries take an intermediate position in our corpus design, as they tend to be less “oral” and closer to supralocal writing traditions than private letters. On the basis of those genre differences, we can also reflect on Weiland’s awareness of stylistic variation and how it affected nineteenth-century language practice. In the following, we focus on two morphosyntactic features in his national grammar, viz. relative pronouns and the genitive case.

4.2 Two grammatical case studies

Unlike in eighteenth-century grammars, relativisation became a more prominent topic in Weiland (1805; cf. van der Wal 2002). He was the first Dutch codifier to provide a more or less complete inventory of the different forms of relative pronouns as well as the conditions under which these forms should be used (see also Weiland 1799). For each of the available forms, we

give an example taken from the Going Dutch Corpus, illustrating both the neuter (1–5) and the masculine/feminine paradigms (6–9).

- (1) *een steigertje **dat** Papa en ik reeds gezien hadden*
'a small jetty that Dad and I had already seen'
- (2) *Ons rytuig **wat** wy om 8 Uur besteld hadden*
'our coach that we had ordered at eight o'clock'
- (3) *het gure en regenachtig weder **het geen** reeds den geheelen dag had geduurd*
'the biting and rainy weather which had already lasted the whole day'
- (4) *het geheim **welk** 'er gaande was*
'the secret that was happening there'
- (5) *het voornaamste **hetwelk** er bij mijne ziekte is voorgevallen*
'the main thing which happened during my illness'
- (6) *een sterke Donderbui, **die** met eenen harden wind en sterken regen begon*
'a heavy thunderstorm, which started with a strong wind and heavy rain'
- (7) *de Heer Jan van Cleef **wie** lekker bier brouwt*
'Mister Jan van Cleef who brews delicious beer'
- (8) *een elendige kok, **welke** nog geen eens aardappelen kan kookten*
'a miserable cook, who cannot even cook potatoes'
- (9) *een zware hoofdpyn **dewelke** wel haast met braken ge verzeld ging*
'a bad headache which was almost accompanied by vomiting'

As for prescriptions, Weiland noted for instance that only *w*-forms (*wie* 'who', *wat* 'what') could function as free relatives. He was even more prescriptive in the case of relative pronouns referring to noun phrases, rejecting the use of *wat* altogether. Interestingly, Weiland was also aware of the existence of stylistic differences between relativisers. In terminological reference to ten Kate (1723), he distinguished between forms of the "polite" style (i.e. *deftig*) and forms of the "familiar" style (i.e. *gemeenzaam*): "*Welke*, or *dewelke*, as the most proper relative pronoun, is mostly used in the polite style, the shorter *die* [...] in the familiar style" (Weiland 1805, 244, our translation). Weiland thus assigned *welke* 'which' and *dewelke* 'the which' to a higher stylistic level than *die*. While he did not explicitly refer to the neuter counterparts of these relative pronouns (i.e. *welk*, *hetwelk*, *dat*), he added one example sentence to illustrate the use of *dat* (*het huis, dat* 'the

house that’). This implies a similar stylistic distinction as for the masculine/feminine pronouns, i.e. “familiar” *dat* as opposed to “polite” *welk*, *hetwelk*.

Is this differentiation also reflected in nineteenth-century language use? Our corpus results indeed suggest a strong genre effect on the distribution of relativisers in both neuter and masculine/feminine paradigms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the stylistically higher variants *hetwelk* and *welke* appeared to be particularly frequent in newspapers, but considerably less so in private letters. Here, the shorter *d*-forms *dat* and *die*, both stylistically lower options according to Weiland, prevailed. The special intermediate position of diaries becomes evident when we consider genre-specific changes in the distribution of relativisers (Krogull, Rutten and van der Wal 2017). In eighteenth-century diaries, the distribution of variants (especially *hetwelk* and *welke*) was fairly similar to that in private letters, i.e. the other type of ego-document. In the nineteenth century, however, the “polite” options *hetwelk* and *welke* gained considerable ground, at the expense of “familiar” *dat* and *die*. Diachronically, and at least in the choice of relativisers, diaries seem to have converged towards a more “written” and formal style also found in newspapers. Either indirectly or directly, we may ascribe these developments to Weiland’s prescriptive influence.

The second feature we are looking at is the genitive case. The Dutch case system, including the genitive, had been in decline for centuries and was gradually replaced by periphrastic constructions. By the eighteenth century, synthetic genitive forms were largely restricted to higher registers of the written language, while the alternative construction with the preposition *van* ‘of’ had gained in importance. These two options are illustrated in examples (10–11), which are also taken from the Going Dutch Corpus.

- (10) *het gegons der muggen*
‘the buzzing of the mosquitos’
- (11) *de deur van de kelder*
‘the door of the cellar’

Weiland clearly preferred the old genitive, which he laid down and officialised in his 1805 grammar. This striking return to the synthetic form as the only option went against the grain of the developments in metalinguistic discourse. In the course of the eighteenth century, grammar writing witnessed an increasing acceptability of the analytic *van*-construction (Rutten 2016). Weiland himself did not comment on stylistic differences between synthetic and analytic options. However, eighteenth-

century grammarians, and ten Kate (1723) in particular, explicitly assigned the synthetic genitive to a higher stylistic level (“elevated”) that the option with *van* (“polite,” “familiar”). From this normative tradition and Weiland’s ultimate choice we can thus deduce that he believed it was the highest stylistic level, rather than the familiar style of everyday language, that should set the norm for the Dutch national standard (Rutten 2012, 55).

The same question remains whether Weiland’s prescription (in favour of the synthetic genitive) affected usage patterns in the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, an effect as strong as in the case of spelling cannot be observed. Also, it should be emphasised that the analytic alternative was already the most frequent option by the end of the eighteenth century, and continued to be so after the *schrijfaalregeling*. Yet, our corpus results show a noticeable increase of synthetic forms in the first half of the nineteenth century across all genres, even in the most “oral” genre of private letters. Of all genres, the rise of the genitive case is most distinct in diaries, which is in line with their (stylistic) convergence towards more formal writing attested for relativisers. Although Weiland might have failed to “revive” the genitive on the whole, these developments in language use suggest his influence at least to a certain degree. Importantly, we have argued elsewhere that internal factors probably played a role too (Krogull and Rutten 2020).

To sum up, the effects of Weiland’s (1805) grammar prove to be fairly subtle and difficult to pinpoint. However, our two case studies show that they can still be traced in our corpus, especially when we utilise its genre dimension to assess different stylistic levels in grammatical prescriptivism.

5. Concluding remarks

Sociolinguistic change is often not confined to nation-states or language areas. Events that seem important in the history of one language may be paralleled by similar events in other language areas, where they occupy an equally important position in the history of the language. The developments in eighteenth-century English normative grammar, with Lowth (1762) as a key text, and the subsequent rise of a prescriptive tradition are clearly contemporaneous with the changes in eighteenth-century Dutch normative grammar that eventually led to the national language policy and its implementation in the early nineteenth century. In the English tradition, *politeness* and *polite society* are often-used sociohistorical concepts that help explain changes in metalinguistic discourse and practices (e.g. Beal 2004; Hickey 2010). In the Netherlands, the rise of cultural nationalism and

actual nation-state formation played a crucial role (Rutten 2019). In a comparative analysis, the question should be answered whether politeness/polite society has explanatory power in the Dutch situation, and whether nationalism/nation-building can explain the changes in Britain. In more general terms, the time has certainly come for a comparative historical sociolinguistics (Deumert and Vandenbussche 2003; Nevalainen and Rutten 2012; Rutten, Vosters and Vandenbussche 2014; Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016) now that so many in-depth case studies of many European languages have been carried out. An excellent example is the work by Tieken-Boon van Ostade (e.g. 2008, 2011), which has greatly enhanced our knowledge of norms, prescriptions and language use in eighteenth-century England.

For the Dutch case presented here, it is clear that Siegenbeek’s (1804) orthographical prescriptions were successful. The same goes for Weiland (1805), but to a lesser extent. Style appears to be an intersecting factor, and this again ties in with the approach to language also advocated by English normative grammarians such as Lowth (1762). Furthermore, the notions of style and stylistic levels also seem to bear on genre, in that different types of ego-document behaved differently with respect to stylistically higher variants preferred by Weiland (1805). Differences between private letters and diaries in the light of variation and ongoing change would also constitute an interesting line of research in a comparative historical-sociolinguistic framework.

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