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The observee's
paradox. Theorising
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ego-documents

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Abstract Ego-documents are at the heart of historical sociolinguistics. Early and Late Modern ego-documents constitute a heterogenous group of genres comprising, among others, private letters, diaries and travel journals. In this paper, we first review empirical studies that have shown important linguistic differences between private letters on the one hand, and diaries/journals on the other. The latter often seem surprisingly standard-like or formal. We then discuss a number of theoretical models (e.g. Biber & Conrad 2009; Yañez-Bouza 2015; Koch & Oesterreicher 1985), arguing that these can partially explain the differences, without however offering a full explanation of the surprising formality of diaries/journals. In the final part of the paper, we argue that it is crucial to consider recent work by social historians concerning diaries/journals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Baggerman 2011). Diary-writing was an inherently reflexive practice allowing authors to reflect on their lives, and to create a textually fixed point of reference. Authors of diaries furthermore had a variable and multilayered audience in mind of known and unknown readers. We introduce the *observee's paradox*: while creating private texts for themselves in which they were their own observers and observees, authors of diaries also reckoned with unknown readers in a possibly distant future, which prompted them to shift into a more formal or standard-like register.

Keywords historical sociolinguistics, ego-documents, diaries, private letters, genre, register

1. Introduction: Ego-documents in social history and historical sociolinguistics

Social historians and historical sociolinguists have extensively studied so-called ego-documents over the past decades.¹ The word *ego-document* was introduced into Dutch by historian Jacques Presser (1899–1970) in the 1950s, and from there it made its way into other languages. Presser advocated historical research into diaries, travel journals, memoirs, letters,

¹ We wish to thank the external reviewers for their useful comments on an earlier draft.

autobiographies and so on, and as such initiated the so-called personal turn in the writing of history (Baggerman & Dekker 2018). For Presser, the personal perspective found in ego-documents added significantly to the archival sources traditionally used by historians. The crucial difference with other sources is the presence of a subject, an ego, which led him to invent the word *ego-document* – for want of something better, as he acknowledged (Baggerman & Dekker 2018: 94). There are many reasons for historians to study these ego-documents (Baggerman & Dekker 2004: 9–12): the personal perspective found therein enables research into historical actors instead of events and structures, and into experiences instead causes of change (cf. Ginzburg 1980). It opens up new research topics such as identity, memory, authenticity and self-representation (Mascuch 1997). Finally, it becomes possible to study the social reality of less-privileged groups.

The latter, in particular, has also inspired historical sociolinguists, where it is often assumed that ego-documents are written sources that bring us closest to the spoken language of the past (Elspaß 2012a; van der Wal & Rutten 2013; Brown 2019). Examples of sizeable historical-sociolinguistic collections of ego-documents include the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2017), the German corpus of nineteenth-century emigrant letters compiled by Elspaß (2005), the Dutch Letters as Loot Corpus with letters from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Rutten & van der Wal 2014) and the French Corpus de français familier ancien, comprising sources from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century (Martineau 2013).

The label *ego-document* covers a range of genres. Historians focus strongly on diaries, autobiographies and memoirs, whereas historical sociolinguists are at least as interested in private letters. In volumes such as van der Wal & Rutten (2013) and Brown (2019), both letters and diaries are explored. The overview chapter by Elspaß (2012a) similarly discusses both letters and diaries. Schneider (2002), who does not use the term *ego-document*, puts letters and diaries into the same category within his categorisation of text types according to their proximity to speech.

While *ego-document* is a convenient label for relatively informal first-person writing, it goes without saying that there are linguistic differences between the various genres that fall into this category, particularly

concerning their proximity to speech. It has been observed that diaries are often written in a surprisingly formal or standard-like style, or may not be as 'oral' as expected (Schneider 2002: 78; Elspaß 2012a: 162). This certainly applies to diaries from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the habit of diary-keeping developed into a much wider social phenomenon than it used to be. At the same time, we also know from a number of large-scale corpus studies that private letters tend to be quite informal and/or comprise a large number of vernacular and non-standard forms (e.g. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2017; Elspaß 2005; Rutten & van der Wal 2014). So there seem to be linguistic differences between private letters and diaries, which are however in need of wider empirical and theoretical contextualisation.

In this paper, we explore the linguistic differences between these two major subcategories of ego-documents: diaries, on the one hand, and private letters on the other. Why are they often so different in terms of formality, standardness, and proximity to speech? We begin by delving deeper into the empirically established differences between letters and diaries. As there are also examples of relatively informal historical diaries (Martineau 2013, 2018), we review a number of case studies demonstrating that historical diaries are often quite formal or standard-like when compared to private letters (section 2.1). We then discuss somewhat more extensively eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch, as our Going Dutch Corpus allows for a systematic comparison of diaries and private letters written in a particular time and place (section 2.2). In sections 3, 4 and 5, we discuss a number of theoretical approaches to first-person writing in order to further unpack the problem that we focus on in this paper. These approaches, such as Koch & Oesterreicher (1985) and Biber & Conrad (2009), go a long way towards understanding the empirically found differences between letters and diaries, yet we argue that they are not sufficient for a full understanding of these differences. In the final part of the paper, we argue that we need to incorporate insights developed in social and cultural history in order to explain these differences (section 6). Our analysis is based on a variety of historical language situations with an emphasis on Early and Late Modern Dutch and English.

2. Empirical differences between different types of ego-document

2.1. Examples of case studies

Linguistic differences between private letters and diaries have been established in a number of studies. For instance, Biber (2001) analyses register variation in eighteenth-century English on the basis of the early version of A Representative Corpus of English Historical Registers (1650–1900) or ARCHER. The registers² represented therein are *drama, journals, letters, fiction, newspapers, medicine, science* and *legal*. For our purposes, the comparison of journals and letters is most interesting. Biber (2001) adopts the well-known multidimensional analysis (Biber 1988; Biber & Finegan 1989), according to which the distribution and co-occurrence of particular grammatical items is computed, after which the resulting patterns are interpreted in terms of functional dimensions. For example, grammatical items such as first and second person pronouns often co-occur in a register such as letters, where they are also relatively frequent. This can be explained by the interactiveness of the register, and places the register relatively close to the *involved* pole on a dimension from *involved* to *informational*. The level of involvement is considered to be a measure of the relative ‘orality’ of the register, or its place on a scale from oral to literate (Biber & Finegan 1989: 489; Biber 2001: 207).

Biber (2001: 205–208) compares the aforementioned registers on this dimension and finds that eighteenth-century drama and letters have high scores for involvement. All other registers score negatively on this dimension, so that they are more informational than involved. Personal journals or diaries turn out to be fairly informational, reaching a score similar to science and medical prose. Biber (2001: 2008) considers this to be ‘unexpected’, since ‘[b]ased on our modern-day expectations, we might predict that this register would be rich in features of personal involvement and stance; in actual fact, [...] this register is extremely ‘informational’”.

2 We are fully aware of the terminological confusion in the use of *register, genre, text type, style*, and related concepts (Moessner 2001). Throughout this article, we adopt the terminology as used in the case studies presented, which come from different research traditions and linguistic backgrounds.

Biber's findings echo Meurman-Solin's (1997: 288) conclusion, based on the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts, that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English diaries and travelogues comprise a relatively high number of descriptive (non-evaluative) adverbs and adjectives, comparable to scientific prose and handbooks, and different from private letters. This does however not imply a greater number of evaluative adverbs and adjectives, which are quite infrequent both in diaries and in private letters (Meurman-Solin 1997: 294–295). Summarising a range of analyses of so-called point of view on the basis of the Helsinki Corpus, Meurman-Solin (1997: 317–318) concludes that diaries and travelogues comprise fewer markers of point of view than private letters. In a similar study, also based on the Helsinki Corpus, Pahta & Nevanlinna (1997: 145–147) show that expository appositions are infrequent in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century private letters and diaries, though slightly more frequent in travelogues.

In Biber (2001), based on the first version of ARCHER, journals and diaries constitute one register. Since version 3.2 (2013), ARCHER has split this category into two separate registers, viz. diaries and journals (Yáñez-Bouza 2015: 456). Yáñez-Bouza (2015) shows that the texts subsumed under the register journals in the early versions of ARCHER are quite heterogenous, and that there are a number of reasons to split this category of 'diurnal prose' into diaries and journals. Diaries would be typically private and talk about domestic affairs, love relationships, friendship, family, domestic and social activities, daily routines, visits and trips (Yáñez-Bouza 2015: 457). Journals on the other hand, would focus on a particular journey or task, and they 'narrate or describe events with an informational purpose' (Yáñez-Bouza 2015: 458). Typical examples include information about voyages to the new world or about a Grand Tour, or they comprise political and economic expositions (Yáñez-Bouza 2015: 459–460). Diaries were usually written for the author only, and not meant to be read by anyone else, whereas journals, with their informational contents about important events such as long journeys or wars, were at the least meant to be read by family members or colleagues, and were often even produced to be published (Yáñez-Bouza 2015: 461–462). These differences in content and readership bear on the language: 'diaries are associated with informal language and, together with private letters, are regarded as the closest representations of the vernacular' (Yáñez-Bouza

2015: 467). If in journals the focus is on the individual experiences of the author, 'the style can be expected to be more involved and informal', but if the focus is on observations, 'the style will tend to be more informational, elaborate and impersonal' (Yáñez-Bouza 2015: 468). The latter could explain the appositional constructions analyzed by Pahta & Nevanlinna (1997).

As historical sociolinguists, we are primarily interested in what Yáñez-Bouza (2015) calls diaries: private texts about the daily life. Such texts are examined, for example, by Martineau (2013, 2018) and Martineau & Tailleur (2014): discussing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French-Canadian diaries, they show the remarkable hybridity of these texts. The diaries comprise many localisable variants and non-standard forms as well as signs of supralocal usage and of established writing conventions. The examples and descriptions of journals provided by Yáñez-Bouza (2015), on the other hand, strongly suggest that this register largely covers fairly informational narratives about events of some historical significance. Journals that recount a journey to another continent or a great war are not the kind of texts that historical sociolinguists usually look for. At the same time, if we look for diaries within a historical-sociolinguistic approach, we often also incorporate travel journals as there are in fact a wealth of texts that talk about journeys. Note, however, that visits and trips are also mentioned by Yáñez-Bouza (2015: 457) as typical topics in diaries. The issue that we seek to elucidate in this paper is that even in such diaries in the Yáñez-Bouza-meaning of the word, we often find a relatively formal or standard-like language. We will argue in section 6 that this is related to the fact that they are in fact not usually written for the author only.

Rutten (2008, 2012) discusses Dutch diaries/journals from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of these are short travel journals of just a few thousand words, some are a bit longer, some are true diaries, not travelogues. Some of the travel journals were written when so-called Orangist parties took control of the northern Low Countries in the late eighteenth century, and supporters of republicanism fled to the southern Low Countries and northern France. The main purpose of these texts is to record, for the authors themselves and/or their families and friends, the extreme experience of exile. The texts display a mixture of personal experiences and feelings as well as information about the new environment in which the authors found themselves. Although

they are perhaps not diaries in the strict sense advocated by Yáñez-Bouza (2015) for English, we would still place them in the category of diaries as they are certainly not similar to the long expositions about international voyages characteristic of what Yáñez-Bouza (2015) considers the journal register. If anything, the texts testify to the fact that the category of diaries is still quite heterogenous in terms of topics.

Linguistically, these diaries turned out to be different from what Rutten (2008) expected. While looking for the relatively informal language found in private letters, Rutten (2008: 43–52) finds that the diaries are replete with present participial constructions. In Dutch, this feature is traditionally associated with seventeenth-century literary and formal style, where it is assumed to have become popular under the influence of Latin and/or French examples (van der Horst 2008: 1150). Rutten (2012: 312–313) compares adversative coordinating conjunctions in various genres from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the formal variants (*doch*, *dan*) predominate in diaries, while the informal variant (*maar*) is preferred in private letters. Rutten (2012: 314) succinctly explains the difference between private letters and diaries with reference to the fact that diaries may be constructed in the interest of positive self-representation, more so than letters. In section 6, we will elaborate on this interpretation.

2.2. Letters and diaries in the Going Dutch Corpus

The results of Rutten (2008, 2012) have led to a specific setup for subsequent studies on historical Dutch. In order to study language variation and change against the background of the first ever language policy in the Netherlands in the early 1800s, Krogull (2018) makes use of a purpose-built corpus of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch. The Going Dutch Corpus (GDC) counts 421,878 words in total, distributed across the variables of genre, time, space and gender. Genre is one of the most defining variables in the corpus design. The GDC comprises ego-documents as well newspapers, allowing for a comparison between handwritten and printed sources. The umbrella category of 'ego-documents' is further divided into private letters and diaries/travelogues. These sub-corpora are evenly spread across the two periods of 1770–1790 and 1820–1840, i.e. before and after the language policy took

effect³. The ego-documents are linked to the middle and (middle-)high ranks of contemporary Dutch society; thus, the letter writers and diarists have similar social backgrounds.

Another methodological decision made was to treat diaries and travelogues as one category in the GDC, unlike Yáñez-Bouza's (2015) split of register categories into diaries and journals. While it is important to recognise the heterogeneous nature of these texts, such a split appeared to be too rigid, at least in the Dutch context. Lindeman et al. (1994: 10), who compiled an inventory of Dutch travelogues, point to the vague boundaries between diaries and travelogues, which can easily blend into one another. What is more, the terminology for diary-like texts written while travelling can be confusing, as these are inconsistently labelled in Dutch as *reisdagboek* 'travel diary', *reisjournaal* 'travel journal' or *reisverslag* 'travelogue', with numerous variations such as *dagboek van een reisje* 'diary of a small journey'. Recall again that trips and visits are listed among Yáñez-Bouza's (2015: 457) typical topics in diaries. Krogull's (2018: 57) criterion for the inclusion of a text on the diary/travelogue spectrum was its personal character, though keeping in mind that historically, such texts often provided 'more thorough information about the outside temperature than about the author's inner life' (Baggerman 2011: 465). However, at least to some extent the writer's own experiences and commentary should be present, irrespective of the text's domestic or travel (of whatever scale) setting. With regard to travels, the GDC does include, for instance, accounts of small journeys within the Netherlands or to neighbouring countries, grand tours and even the occasional journey to another continent. Importantly, diurnal but largely impersonal writings such as ship's log books were excluded, as were literary and/or published diaries.

On the basis of diaries/travelogues from the GDC we seek to illustrate that even in what Yáñez-Bouza (2015) would categorise as diaries, relatively formal or standard-like language, typically associated with journals, is found. Examples (1) and (2) are taken from a text written during a walking tour through the Dutch province of Gelderland in 1830, listed by the archives as *Dagboek van een reis* 'Diary of a journey' though originally titled *Voetreisje*

3 Krogull (2018: 37–74) offers an elaborate discussion of the Going Dutch Corpus and the underlying selection criteria.

[door Gelderland] ‘Walking tour [through Gelderland]’⁴. While this confirms the blurry boundaries of such ‘diurnal prose’, it clearly differs from travels or events of historical significance implied by Yáñez-Bouza’s (2015) journal register. In (1), diarist Johan Henrik Beucker Andreae (1811–1865) writes about the (rocky) start of his trip focusing on his personal experiences and feelings, typical of the more involved style of diaries. This is followed by passages with more informational contents about places or sights visited during the journey, as shown in (2), though accounts of the writer’s individual experiences still occur regularly in the text:

(1) *Dit zoude bijna echter mis lukt zijn, want wijl ik net te laat naar bed gegaan was, sliep ik te vast, en t had reeds zes uur geslagen toen ik ontwaakte. binnen vijf minuten was ik echter geheel gereed, en zat reeds op de wegen naast mijnen reisgenoot en vriendin, echter in eene labberlottige toestand, want een ongewassen halfgekleed en nog niets genoten hebbend Jongmensch, in tegenwoordigheid van een lief en aardig deerntje, is waarlijk niet veel bijzonders.*

‘This would have almost gone wrong, though, because while I had gone to bed too late, I slept too soundly, and it was already six o’clock when I woke up. Within five minutes I was completely ready, though, and already on the roads, I sat next to my travelling companion and girlfriend, although in a miserable state, because an unwashed, half-dressed young man, who had not eaten yet, in the presence of a lovely and kind girl, is really not very special.’

(2) *Uit heerlijke oranjeboomen bestond de laan die wij het eerst binnentraden, achter welk allerlei kunstig grotwerk, uit kostbare hoorns en schulpen bestaande, zich bevindt terwijl het geklots van eenen zwaren waterval en het geruisch van onderscheidene fonteinen alles nog verlevendigd.*

‘The lane that we entered first consisted of glorious orange-trees, behind which all sorts of ingenious grotto-work, made of precious

⁴ The original document is kept in the Beucker Andreae family archives (1759, inventory number 150) in the Historical Centre Leeuwarden (*Historisch Centrum Leeuwarden*).

horns and shells, was located, while the splashing of a heavy waterfall and the rustling of various fountains livened it all up even more.'

A second example is the *reisjournaal* 'travel journal' by Maria Johanna Verbrugge (1824–1913), written during a trip to Germany with her family in 1836⁵. Examples (3) and (4) are taken from that text. While unambiguously written in a travel setting, her (private) text talks about daily routines and domestic-like activities typical of diaries (see (3)), alongside, for instance, descriptions of weather (see (4)) and local sightseeing:

(3) *zoodra wy aangekomen waren, ging Papa naar Dr Becker, om te vragen of Willem dien middag met ons eten mogt, hetwelk toegestaan werd. Wy waren allen zeer blyde Willem te zien, jammer maar dat Mama juist op dien aangenamen dag hoofdpyn had, zoodat zy na het eten niet met ons konde gaan wandelen.*

'As soon as we had arrived, Dad went to Dr Becker, to ask whether Willem was allowed to have lunch with us that midday, which was approved. We were all very happy to see Willem. What a shame that Mum had a headache just on that pleasant day, so that she could not join us for a walk after lunch.'

(4) *Na het ontbyt, iets gewerkt hebbende gingen wy met Papa wandelen, doch eene zware stortregen overviel ons, zoodat wy terug keerden. Toen schreef ik eenen brief aan Sally, en daarna gingen wy in het Kurhaus eten. Wy waren genoodzaakt den geheelen middag te huis te blyven, daar het onophoudelyk regende en het zeer koud was.*

'After breakfast, having worked a bit, we went for a walk with Dad, but got caught in a heavy downpour, so that we returned. Then I wrote a letter to Sally, and after that we went for lunch at the Kurhaus. We were forced to stay at home the entire afternoon, because it rained continuously and it was very cold.'

⁵ The original document is kept in the Dutilh family archives (160, inventory number 1093) in the Rotterdam City Archives (*Stadsarchief Rotterdam*).

Even at first glance, the language in this text appears remarkably formal: note, for instance, the relative pronoun *hetwelk* in (3), and the present participle *hebbende* and the adversative coordinator *doch* in (4), especially if we take into consideration that the writer is a twelve-year-old girl⁶.

In a more systematic manner, the empirical findings from the GDC, which centre around the research aim to assess policy effectiveness on actual language practices (Krogull 2018), testify to the expected genre differences between private letters and diaries/travelogues. Based on a range of orthographic and morphosyntactic variables, the highest amount of linguistic variation is found in private letters, whereas newspapers display by far the most consistent use of variants, particularly with regard to spelling. Diaries/travelogues constitute an intermediate position across the board: clearly not as uniform/standard-like as newspapers, but more than their handwritten 'relatives', i.e. letters. Diachronically, Krogull (2018: 301–303) observes a genre-specific evolution from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Measuring the conformity with officially prescribed norms, he shows important differences between the two types of ego-document. While the distribution of variants in letters and diaries/travelogues is still fairly similar in the eighteenth-century data, diaries/travelogues in the nineteenth century converge towards the more formal and standard-oriented variants found in newspapers. Krogull et al. (2017) discuss this evolution in the use of relativisers, showing that more formal options (*hetwelk*, *welke*) increase in diaries/travelogues at the expense of more informal *dat*. This leads to a divergence of this type of ego-document from private letters. The results presented in Krogull & Rutten (2021) confirm this tendency in the use of the genitive case, which was the formal alternative to the more common periphrastic construction. Probably as a result of official prescriptions in the early 1800s, historical genitive forms gain ground in diaries/travelogues (in line with newspapers), but remain relatively limited in private letters. These findings emphasise again that

6 The kinship terms *Papa* and *Mama* in (3) may appear familiar and even informal from a modern perspective. However, these terms, originally borrowed into Dutch from French (with stress on the second syllable), were long associated with the more sophisticated style of elite families. See *WNT* s.v. *mama* and *papa*.

diaries were quite different from private letters, also with regard to their sensibility to linguistic prescription (Krogull & Rutten 2021).

3. Ego-documents and language of immediacy

In the previous section, we argued that empirical studies from different languages have shown that there are systematic differences between private letters and diaries. In this section and the next, we review to what extent a number of theoretical approaches can help explain these differences.

In the introduction, we argued that ego-documents enable historians to study the social reality of less-privileged groups. The latter theme is also crucial to the historical-sociolinguistic approach termed language history 'from below' (Elspaß 2005; Elspaß et al. 2007), recalling the so-called history 'from below' (Krantz 1985; Hitchcock 2004). Elspaß (2007) succinctly explains the two meanings of 'from below' that break with traditional language histories: the social meaning indicating a shift to the linguistic experiences of less-privileged groups of language users on the one hand, and on the other the text-linguistic meaning indicating the shift towards previously neglected genres such as ego-documents.

This focus on ego-documents is rooted in the communication theory developed by the Romanists Koch & Oesterreicher (1985), who famously distinguished between the medium of communication and the way in which it is conceptualised. The medium is either spoken (phonic) or written (graphic), but communication can also be conceptualised in terms of leaning towards speech or more akin to writing. The choice between a phonic or a graphic medium is binary. The choice between conceptually oral language or communicative immediacy on the one hand, and conceptually written language or communicative distance on the other is gradual. For example, a conversation between close friends takes place in the phonic medium and is usually also intimate, informal and largely unplanned, i.e. it is conceptually oral, and close to the pole of communicative immediacy (as opposed to an academic lecture, for example). Text messages between these close friends, though realised in the graphic medium, can be equally intimate and informal, and equally close to the pole of communicative immediacy (as opposed to academic papers, for example). The historical-sociolinguistic application of

this model means that ego-documents such as private letters and diaries are also relatively close to the pole of communicative immediacy (Elspaß 2012a). Koch & Oesterreicher (1985: 18), writing about present-day genres, mention both 'Tagebucheintrag' and 'Privatbrief', with the former just a bit closer to the pole of communicative immediacy.

Communicative immediacy or closeness to conceptual orality depends on a number of parameters, summarised by Koch (1999: 400) as follows:

- (i) Physical (spatial, temporal) immediacy
- (ii) Privacy
- (iii) Familiarity of the partners
- (iv) High emotionality
- (v) Context embeddedness
- (vi) Deictic immediacy (*ego-hic-nunc*, immediate situation)
- (vii) Dialogue
- (viii) Communicative cooperation of the partners
- (ix) Free topic development
- (x) Spontaneity.

High values on these parameters imply communicative immediacy, low values signal communicative distance. A number of the parameters are shared by historical letters and diaries: both may be emotional (iv), contextually embedded (v), free in terms of topics (ix) and spontaneous (x). If parameter (i) is interpreted as a characteristic of the communicative situation itself, neither letters nor diaries are immediate as they comprise text that is meant to be read at a later point in time, which is usually caused by spatial distance between the language users in the case of letters. If parameter (i) may also refer to the extent to which the text represents immediate, face-to-face interaction (cf. Koch 1999: 408, 416), then both letters and diaries may have a more positive value. Letters were often considered to be the written continuation of oral conversation (Elspaß 2005: 60–61), and both letters and diaries may comprise representations of actual speech events, i.e. reported speech. For our purposes, the relevant observation is that parameters (i), (iv), (v), (ix) and (x) cannot sufficiently explain any differences between letters and diaries.

Parameters (iii), (vii), (viii) and possibly (vi) are not necessarily shared as all of them are related to the fact that letters are principally dialogical (cf. parameter (vii)), whereas diaries are at least potentially monological. If in the case of parameter (vi), emphasis is laid on addressee orientation, i.e. on second-person pronouns, letters may have a higher value. If parameter (vi) comprises a wider range of deictic elements, diaries can have an equally high value as they often narrate the recent events in a person's life, either at home or elsewhere, in the case of travel journals. Elspaß (2012a: 162–163) writes about the use of letters and diaries in historical sociolinguistics and in fact considers dialogicity the main difference between the two types of ego-document: private letters are 'characterized by dialogue', whereas 'private diaries are strictly monologic in nature' (2012: 162). He continues that diaries 'may be as informal in style and unplanned in their conception as private letters, but they are usually less 'oral'' (Elspaß 2012a: 162). The latter means that due to their supposed monologicity, diaries are principally closer to the language of distance than to the language of immediacy. This might explain the aforementioned linguistic differences observed between private letters and diaries, but in section 6 below, we will argue that diaries are significantly more complex with respect to the issue of dialogicity as an addressee is often implied, though not always mentioned.

Ágel & Hennig (2006a, 2006b) elaborate on the Koch/Oesterreicher model as well as on the issue of dialogicity. They maintain that the crucial difference between language of immediacy and of distance lies in the 'openness' of the interaction between the interlocutors (Ágel & Hennig 2006a: 18). This means that the producer and the recipient of certain language forms can change roles at any time, which is only possible when they are in the same place at the same time (cf. Koch's parameter (i) in the more strict first interpretation above). In the same vein, Koch (1999: 401) emphasises that turn-taking is the main issue with respect to parameter (vii) dialogue. It follows that neither diaries nor private letters constitute the language of immediacy, although they can of course approach it since the difference between immediacy and distance is gradual. Ágel & Hennig (2006a, 2006b) then develop a fine-grained approach to textual analysis, which enables quantification of the level of immediacy of a certain text between the two extremes of immediacy and distance. In this approach, temporal and spatial situatedness and communicative situation

are among the most important elements (cf. Koch's parameters (v) and (vi) above). In fact, in their exemplary analysis of a historical document, Ágel & Hennig (2006b) mainly look at grammatical elements that signal spatial and temporal situatedness, viz. deictic elements. Interestingly, their analysis is based on a seventeenth-century German autobiography, written by a tinsmith, and results in a score of c. 30% *Nähesprachlichkeit* 'closeness to the language of immediacy' (see also Kappel 2006). The analysis thus shows that ego-documents other than private letters can be considerably 'oral'. For the present discussion, it is important that there are no principled differences between letters and diaries within the approach of Ágel & Hennig (2006a, 2006b): one can easily imagine a highly contextually embedded diary, situated in a very specific place and time (e.g. a travel journal), which would reach a relatively high score for *Nähesprachlichkeit*, and a relatively detached or reflective private letter that reaches a significantly lower score.

Landert & Jucker (2011) also elaborate on the Koch/Oesterreicher model in the context of present-day changes in private v. public communication in English (cf. Koch's parameter (ii) above). Landert & Jucker (2011: 1426–1427) argue that the original model comprising a scale from immediacy to distance needs to be enriched with two more scales based on previous analyses of private/public distinctions. The first is the scale of accessibility, which refers to the ease of access for other parties. In a historical-sociolinguistic application of this model to nineteenth-century English, Włodarczyk (2013: 207) interpretes accessibility as *not exclusive v. exclusive (author and addressee)*. Both letters and diaries are usually exclusive in this sense, though one might argue that diaries can be even more exclusive, more 'private', particularly when they are not read by anyone other than the author. The second scale is termed the scale of privacy, defined by Landert & Jucker (2011: 1427) by the number of people potentially affected by the contents of the text. Again, both letters and diaries will be highly 'private' in this sense, too, and diaries perhaps even more than letters. Note, however, that we argue in section 6 that private diaries often also imply an addressee or even a readership, and may thus be both more accessible and less private than intuitively assumed.

Koch & Oesterreicher (1985) is widely used in historical sociolinguistics. Theorising the communicative parameters leads to noteworthy changes to the original model in the works of Ágel & Hennig (2006a, 2006b) and Landert

& Jucker (2011), but we do not gain sufficient tools to be able to distinguish between private letters and diaries, and to explain the linguistic differences between them. One might argue that these models are developed in order to determine gradual differences between individual texts, so that, for example, one particular diary may turn out to be quite 'immediate' whereas another diary is relatively 'distant'. The same applies to individual letters. This is correct, and we may add that the models also explain why ego-documents in general are closer to the language of immediacy than certain other genres. The issue that we are concerned with here is that there are general differences between the sub-genres of letters and diaries, and these general differences cannot be sufficiently explained with these models.

4. Ego-documents and register analysis

In section 2, we discussed Biber's (2001) study of eighteenth-century English letters and diaries based on ARCHER, and Yáñez-Bouza (2015), who explained the need to distinguish historically between diaries and journals. These studies are founded on register analysis (Biber & Conrad 2009). Register analysis considers linguistic features as functional elements depending on the social and communicative functions of texts, which in turn correlate with broader situational characteristics. The differences between English diaries and journals outlined by Yáñez-Bouza (2015) are based on such differences in situational characteristics, in particular differences with respect to topic, communicative purpose and setting. Biber & Conrad (2009: 40) and Yáñez-Bouza (2015: 455) give the following list of situational characteristics:

- (i) Participants
- (ii) Relations among participants
- (iii) Channel
- (iv) Production circumstances
- (v) Setting
- (vi) Communicative purposes
- (vii) Topic

This list is reminiscent of Koch's list of communicative parameters (see section 3), though Biber & Conrad place more emphasis on traditional text-linguistic aspects subsumed under (vi) and (vii).

The basic distinction related to channel (iii) is that between speech and writing. Historical diaries and private letters are usually handwritten manuscripts. The production circumstances (iv) relate to a possible time gap between planning and production, as well as to the possibility of editing the text. Both diaries and letters can be carefully planned and revised. As regards setting (v), an important issue is whether time and place are shared by the participants. This is obviously not the case for letters. Diaries are more complex since the author is one of the addressees, which indicates the kind of intimacy that could lead us to expect relatively informal language in diaries (see also above, section 2.1). Another aspect of the setting is the private/public distinction. As mentioned in section 3, Yáñez-Bouza (2015) distinguishes between strictly private diaries and semi-public or even published journals. Based on this, as well as on the Landert/Jucker (2011) model discussed in section 3, diaries could be expected to be more private than letters, and thus to be less formal or standard-like than letters. We contend that even private diaries were often written with a public in mind (see section 6). In sum, situational characteristics (iii), (iv) and (v) do not seem to make a principled distinction between letters and diaries, and where they do, as with respect to privacy, this would lead us to draw conclusions at odds with empirical results as reported on in section 2.

With respect to (vi) and (vii), we refer to our examples (1)–(4) in section 2.2, where we showed how Dutch diaries from the nineteenth century often combine personal/involved and informational passages. A similar combination of private and informational topics can be found in many historical letters. Both the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2017) and the Dutch Letters as Loot Corpus (Rutten & van der Wal 2014) comprise many letters that combine personal experiences and business details. For example, most people who travelled to South America in the Early Modern period went there for work, and their trade contacts in the Netherlands were often family members. So when they wrote to their relatives in the Netherlands, they reported on both personal and business affairs. Furthermore, Biber & Conrad (2009: 45) add that switches

in communicative purpose are common, and that in fact many registers have multiple communicative purposes. This is indeed what we also see in historical ego-documents, which implies that we cannot make a principled difference between letters and diaries in this respect.

Situational characteristics (i) and (ii) concern the dialogicity of language (see also section 6 below). With respect to (ii), Biber & Conrad (2009: 40) distinguish a number of elements, such as shared knowledge, the personal relationship between the participants and their social roles. Here, too, there does not seem to be a fundamental difference between diaries and letters, especially if we consider the authors themselves and their family members to be the participants in the case of many diaries. However, Biber and Conrad (2009: 42) argue that interactiveness is the most important consideration with respect to relations among participants (ii), and in this respect diaries and letters differ. Most registers are situated between conversation (highly interactive) and purely informational registers such as university catalogues. Letters are still relatively interactive, although there is a time gap between the communicative contributions. But there is usually no opportunity to respond to a diary, at least not for any other person than the author. In terms of participants (i), diaries and letters are quite similar. Historical letters may be sent to one person in particular, but often they were meant to be read by family members as well (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000: 447; Elspaß 2005: 63). Thus, both diaries and letters were usually read by a small circle of people close to the author of the text (cf. Elspaß 2012a: 163). Finally, Biber & Conrad (2009: 40, 42) mention on-lookers under situational characteristic (i), i.e. participants who observe the communication but who are not the direct addressees. Both private letters and diaries were sometimes handed down from one generation to another as learning to read and write from old family documents was a normal cultural practice for centuries (Dossena 2010: 16–17; Elspaß 2012a: 163) so that on-lookers need to be reckoned with in both cases. However, we will argue in section 6 below that on-lookers may in fact be more important in the case of diaries, which would partly explain their relative formality or standardness.

In sum, the framework of register analysis offers some clues so as to explain linguistic differences between private letters and diaries, while a principled distinction between the two genres cannot be made.

5. Ego-documents and speech-related genres

Elaborate and widely-used frameworks have been discussed in the previous sections. In this section, we will review a number of other publications that also deal with the extent to which written ego-documents are related to speech. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2000) compares English private letters and diaries, mostly from the eighteenth century, from the perspective of the observer's paradox (Labov 1972). It has been argued that historical data have the advantage that they have not been collected, let alone created at the request of and/or in the presence of linguists-observers (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2017: 27). Nevertheless, Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2000) argues, the language in letters and diaries should not be considered to be unmonitored. Private letters were often read aloud for a wider group of people than just the addressee, and sometimes they even got published (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000: 447). In addition, letters were often crafted in a particular way, sometimes even to suggest spontaneity, since letter writing was also an 'art', i.e. a highly conventionalised social practice (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000: 448). While this may be of particular relevance for the eighteenth century, the observation that historical epistolary writing displayed considerable conventionality in the shape of formulaic language applies to many languages and periods (Elspeß 2012b; Rutten & van der Wal 2014: 75–128).

Diaries, on the other hand, were often written 'for private consumption only', as a result of which we 'might expect their contents as well as their language to be completely free from any of the external constraints discussed [...]: unlike in the case of letters, the author feels unobserved by an addressee when keeping his or her journal. [...] Furthermore, the absence of an addressee sets the author free from the obligation of writing within a well-defined convention, as in the case of the eighteenth-century letter. Ostensibly, then, the observer's paradox would be completely absent here' (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000: 450). Based on this, Grund (2017: 229) even concludes that diaries are better sources than letters for researchers looking for 'vernacular usage', which is however a conclusion that significantly diverges from many historical-sociolinguistic results (see section 2). Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2000: 451–452) warns that diary-writers often imagined or invented an interlocutor ('dear Diary'), which brings in a layer of self-

consciousness similar to the register awareness found in many historical letters (cf. Dossena 2010: 16–17).

Schneider (2002: 72) develops a typology of text categories along 'a continuum of increasing distance between an original speech event and its written record'. With the explicit focus on (primary) historical speech events and their (secondary) representation in writing, Schneider (2002) differs significantly from the theories developed by Biber, Koch, Oesterreicher and others discussed in sections 3 and 4, in which the dichotomy of speech and writing is criticised, and in which instead emphasis is put on the presence of typically 'oral' features in certain kinds of writing, and on typically 'literate' features in some kinds of speech. Closest to an original speech event are the text categories that Schneider (2002) labels 'recorded' (e.g. interviews, transcripts and trial records) and 'recalled' (e.g. ex-slave narratives). These are written representations of a real and unique speech event, with in the case of trial records no or hardly any temporal distance between the speech event and the written record. The third text category comprises letters and diaries, and it is termed 'imagined' as there is no real speech event preceding or underlying the written text (an unfortunate term in view of the factual contents of many historical letters and diaries). For the present purposes it is important that letters and diaries fall into the same category. As mentioned above, Schneider (2002: 78) subsequently comments that diaries are often disappointingly standard-like.

A more useful division of text types is made by Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 17–18), who distinguish three types of speech-related genres in the history of English. Speech-based texts result from actual historical events, in which speech was the dominant mode. The texts are written during or after the events and meant to record the event (cf. Schneider's category 'recorded'). Examples are interviews and witness depositions. Speech-purposed texts are written but meant to be spoken, such as political speeches or sermons. Finally, speech-like texts are neither based on a speech event nor meant to be spoken, but still appear to be relatively close to the spoken language, such as various types of computer mediated communication. Apart from these three genres, Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 18) distinguish writing-based and purposed genres, such as scholarly writing and prose fiction without speech presentation. They also indicate cross-overs such as prose fiction with speech presentation,

which is both a writing-based and purposed genre as well as speech-like. They situate personal correspondence in the same overlap area. They do not mention diaries, journals or travelogues in this regard, but it seems obvious that these would also fit into the writing-based and purposed category. The question whether these are speech-like is the empirical question answered in section 2. If the answer is indeed negative, diaries and the like are strictly writing-based and purposed within this categorisation, which does however not explain why they belong to that category.

Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 63) also develop a list of speech-like characteristics, partially based on the Koch/Oesterreicher model (see section 3). The list largely recalls the inventories of communicative characteristics discussed in sections 3 and 4. Like Koch's list (section 3), it includes linguistic features (see under (i)), which Biber (section 4) did not incorporate as these are the explanandum in his approach, as well as in ours.

| | Speech-like | Non speech-like |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (i) Production/reception (i.a. variability in language, and whether it is for/by one individual) | individual (non-standard, private) | institutional (standard, public) |
| (ii) Function | expressive, phatic | non-expressive, non-phatic |
| (iii) Interactivity | dialogue (rapid exchanges) | monologue (no or slow exchanges) |
| (iv) Sharedness | shared situation | separate situations |
| (v) Restrictions on format (i.a. degree to which topics and turn-taking are free) | freely developed | pre-determined |
| (vi) Transmission | real-time processing | no real-time pressures. |

With respect to (i), we refer to the discussion about private/public distinctions in section 3. Both private letters and diaries can be expressive and phatic (ii) and topic development (v) is free (cf. Koch's parameter (ix) in section 3). Numbers (iii), (iv) and (vi) relate to dialogicity. Both letters and diaries can be planned and edited ((vi), cf. Biber & Conrad's production circumstances, see section 4). Neither letters nor diaries are interactive (iii) and shared in

the sense of Culpeper & Kytö. Interactivity (iii) is most interesting here, as Culpeper & Kytö explicitly group together monologic texts and texts with slow exchanges. This means that both letters and diaries are non speech-like with respect to interactivity.

6. Social-historical perspectives and the observee's paradox

The models and approaches discussed in the previous sections offer a number of useful distinctions in terms of communicative parameters that can help analyse textual characteristics. At the same time, they do not help in making a principled distinction between diaries on the one hand, and private letters on the other. Many of the communicative parameters discussed by Koch (1999), or by Biber & Conrad (2009), for example, apply to historical diaries and letters in the same way and to the same extent. We might say that there appears to be a difference in dialogicity, interactiveness or openness (Ágel & Hennig 2006a), which could explain the informality or non-standardness of letters when compared to diaries. However, there may also be a difference in privacy or even intimacy, which could lead us to think that diaries are more informal and non-standard, or closer to the spoken language.

Looking beyond our disciplinary boundaries in historical linguistics, findings from historians' research may offer illuminating insights. A considerable research tradition into ego-documents has come into existence since the days of Jacques Presser. Social and cultural historians, in particular, have explored diaries, memoirs, journals, autobiographies and many other ego-documents produced in European languages from Late Medieval times onwards (e.g. Mascuch 1997; Amelang 1998; Dekker 2002; Baggerman, Dekker & Mascuch 2011). We propose to consult the results of historical research in order to explain the linguistic differences between letters and diaries. This does certainly not imply that any insights emanating from this will be at odds with the models discussed in sections 3, 4 and 5. Quite the contrary, what we aim to offer are ideas that could be used to elaborate these models, and that can also help to adapt them to specific historical situations.

Texts that can be considered to be diaries go back to the Late Middle Ages. The genre evolved from relatively factual Late Medieval genres such as chronicles and account books, in which authors increasingly also noted

personal and family-related issues (Smyth 2010). Well-known examples are Italian family books, emerging in the Late Middle Ages (Chiapelli & George 2014), German *Haus- und Familienbücher*, as well as French *livres de raison* from the Early Modern period onwards (Chiapelli & George 2014: 284–285). The German term *Selbstzeugnisse* is also in use, indicating the increasing interest in personal matters (Ulbrich et al. 2014). It is however particularly from the eighteenth century onwards that diary-keeping becomes a socially much more widespread phenomenon. For example, Dekker (2000) shows that in an inventory of 1,121 Dutch ego-documents from 1500 to 1814, the number of texts surviving from the decade 1800–1810 is as great as the number of texts from the whole sixteenth century. Baggerman (2011: 462) reports that Dutch people born before 1900 have written at least 3,833 diaries and autobiographies, only 361 of which date from before 1800.

Historians explain the sharp rise of the genre from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards with reference to changing perspectives of the self and of time in the period between roughly 1750 and 1850, when both modern self-awareness or individuality and historicism came into being (Burke 2011). In this so-called *Sattelzeit*, following Koselleck (1972) in the introduction to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, new meanings were given to a large number of social, cultural and political terms, including also *people*, *nation*, *democracy* and many more. Baggerman (2011: 467), in an extensive analysis of the rise of life-writing in Dutch, argues like Burke (2011) that the popularity of the genre in the *Sattelzeit* results from the greatly accelerating social, political and technological changes of the time. These changes created a rupture in the historical awareness of historical actors, who no longer felt the present to be the logical result of the past. This is a more specific reformulation of the old idea that a cyclical sense of time gave way to linear historical awareness. If time is linear, non-cyclical, the future is open, and can moreover be steered or made by individuals. In ego-documents, individuals exercised their desire to take control of their lives, including their future. The two crucial concepts of *self* and *time* will be explored in this section in the context of their effects on language.

Burke (2011: 19) warns that the changes of the *Sattelzeit* were not always ‘something entirely new’, but sometimes also a matter of intensity and urgency. Indeed, Sherman (1997) in an analysis of diurnal sources in English

from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries already argued that the temporal linearity of new genres such as newspapers and diaries was linked to the invention of the clock and the subsequent new perception of time. Likewise, Holmes (2011: 172) argues that the rate of change was so great in the 1920s and 1930s that women in Australia felt the need to keep a diary as a way of 'managing the present and, by implication, the future'. The following is therefore of special relevance to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diary-writing, but may also be applicable to other periods in history.

6.1. Dialogicity and audiences

Dialogicity establishes a fundamental difference between genres according to most of the models discussed in previous sections. Working within the Koch/Oesterreicher framework, Elspaß (2012a) stresses the supposed monologicity of diaries when referring to their less 'oral'-like linguistic characteristics. We follow Taavitsainen (2001: 145) and adopt the view that there are hardly any strictly monologic texts since almost all texts are acts of communication with a certain audience in mind. This is of particular relevance to historical diaries, which are the result of an internal dialogue of the author, who creates an external self on paper through the act of diary-keeping (Culley 1985: 10). In addition, historical diaries were often meant to be read by family members and descendants (Baggerman 2011: 466) so that there is a partly real, partly imagined audience. In terms of Ágel & Hennig (2006a), then, *openness* may be a distinguishing feature of letters when compared to diaries, though we need to keep two things in mind. First, diaries are not necessarily less dialogic than letters as they are first-person writings addressed to a partly known audience of family and/or friends. This 'addressing' is not always linguistically coded in forms of address and second person pronouns, but this can be explained by the absence of an anticipated reply. While we know that many historical letters also remained unanswered, especially emigrant letters, a response was usually hoped for.

It may be useful to make a less rigid distinction between dialogic and monologic texts, and to distinguish levels of dialogicity along a continuum from strongly monologic to strongly dialogic instead. Conversation in a shared time and place may constitute the archetypical situation of

a dialogue, whereas legal regulations may be the prototypical case of monologic texts. Private letters and diaries can be found in between, and are in fact not so far apart: they have a small group of family members and/or friends as their primary audience, to which they are explicitly or implicitly addressed; both genres may remain unanswered, though a reply is usually hoped for in the case of letters.

Biber & Conrad's (2009) first situational characteristic of participants (see section 4 above) not only includes addressors and addressees, but also on-lookers: people who are in the vicinity of the communication without taking part in it. In the same vein, Rutten (2012: 314) uses Bell's (1984) distinction between audience design and referee design to explain linguistic differences between letters and diaries. Locating letters and diaries along a continuum of dialogicity, we need to take into account that diaries, more so than letters, may have readers in the future, that is, in a time beyond the time of the author. Again, this may also apply to letters (see above, section 4), but a multilayered audience appears to be particularly significant in the case of diaries. Bloom (1996: 23) argues that diaries are not private texts at all as they always have an audience, 'whether near or remote'. Holmes (2011: 172) comments that diarists assumed 'a prospective audience' as one way of imaging the future within a linear conception of time. Culley (1985: 11–12) likewise assumes that diaries have an audience, 'real or implied, conscious or unconscious', which 'becomes a powerful "thou" to the "I" of the diarist'.

In his study of artisan autobiographies written in Early Modern Europe, Amelang (1998: 63–64) distinguishes different types of audiences associated with the genre. First and foremost, he considers the genre to be 'a form of dialogue', where different layers of audience and possible readers need to be distinguished (Amelang 1998: 70–72). The first layer is that of the family. The second layer comprises 'less familiar readers, not fully identified' (Amelang 1998: 71). Here, we may think of Christian readers in general in the case of conversion diaries. A third layer is God. The fourth layer is the general public. Amelang (1998: 71–72) also notes that some autobiographies were explicitly meant to be read by noone else than the author. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2000: 451) mentions a similar example. Amelang and Tieken-Boon van Ostade probably emphasised this preference as it diverged from

the common practice of writing diaries for a multilayered audience of contemporary and future readers.

In sum, diaries and letters may not be so different with respect to dialogicity. Recall that Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 63) would place them in the same category of non speech-like due to slow or even absent interactiveness. In terms of audiences, diaries are more differentiated in that they may be targeted towards family and friends, like letters, but usually also towards more abstract or anonymous types of audience in the future. We will elaborate on this in the next section.

6.2. Reflexivity and permanence

In an early overview chapter, Dekker (2000) singles out introspection and recollection as two major motives for historical individuals to write about their own lives. There is an inherent reflexivity to diaries: the reason such texts exist lies in the reflexive attitude of the authors who reflect upon themselves (Burke 2011: 21). Culley (1985: 10) discusses the 'double consciousness' of the authors: self-consciously they write about themselves, creating a second self on paper. In the previous section, we connected this with dialogicity: diaries are dialogical texts, if only because they are the result of an inner dialogue. But it also means that these seemingly intimate texts objectify the author's self (Culley 1985: 11–12). Even private diaries, written for the author only, construct an external self on paper, for which the author engages in what is often called identity work. Diaries, in this sense, display a public persona, even if the public consists of no one other than the author.

The inherent reflexivity of diaries may certainly lead authors to reflect upon themselves in manifold ways, but strong general patterns can be recognised in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diaries, which are related to the changing perspectives of time and self. An important characteristic of diaries is the structuralisation of time, not only in the form, but also with respect to the contents (Sinor 2002; Baggerman 2011). Assigning temporal structure to daily activities increases the opportunity to reflect on the extent to which the time was spent well, or perhaps wasted: when the future is open and can be manipulated by individuals, it is all the more important to spend time well, and to exert temporal discipline (Baggerman

2011: 474–477). Reflecting on time is thus connected to self-improvement, which Forthergill (1974: 66) considers to be a major rationale for diary-writing in the eighteenth century.

If diary-keeping was indeed motivated by the need for future self-improvement (see also Baggerman 2011: 479–483), then the texts functioned as points of reference, as forms of textual recollection. In a more general sense, too, keeping a diary advances the ability to remember, not only for the writers themselves, but also for other audiences, contemporary as well as in the future (Holmes 2011: 172; Culley 1985: 8). In the late eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, in particular, ‘the pleasure of recollection’ became a strong motive according to Fothergill (1974: 72) in his study of English diaries. Having the opportunity to return to memories, to past experiences, to read and reread about events in the past implies textual permanence. In other words, diaries were often meant to be preserved.

6.3. The observee's paradox

Historical diaries cut across the private/public distinction (cf. Dekker 1995: 277). They are private texts that are often also targeted towards a multilayered larger audience. Diaries also cut cross the monologic/dialogic distinction, that is, these seemingly monologic texts are relatively close to the pole of dialogicity, if we assume a continuum from strict monological texts to dialogic face-to-face conversations. For both individual authors and other audience types, they may serve as points of reference in the future, and as instruments of recollection. This implies permanence.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2000: 45), in her analysis of the applicability of the observer's paradox to historical documents, suggests that, unlike in the case of letters, the writer of a diary or journal feels unobserved, so that the observer's paradox would be ‘completely absent’. Authors of diaries and journals work alone, and are only observed by themselves. Given the inherent reflexivity of the genre, they are the sole observers of themselves as observees. However, since their texts are not only monologic, but also dialogic, and created to be preserved and to be read by a multilayered audience, the authors are simultaneously, potentially, the observees of a large number of people after them, including anonymous readers in a

distant future. This situation, where a single individual writes a private text that simultaneously functions as a recollection for future generations, signals what we would like to call the *observee's paradox*, i.e. the paradox that the authors of diaries and journals are their own observees, in the intimacy of their private lives, and at the same time the observee of a large and partly anonymous audience of readers.

It is this particular, paradoxical situation that makes many authors of diaries and journals adopt a relatively standard-like, detached or formal style. We shy away from the exact label, as this may depend on the specific historical-sociolinguistic situation, but it is clear that the language is often less close to the spoken language, less 'oral', less vernacular, and more in line with contemporary writing as found, for example, in published texts. The combination of a multilayered audience and permanence leads writers to use the language they associate with other texts produced for larger audiences and meant to be kept, or to adopt at least particular variants they associate with this language. In principle, there is a register choice to be made, and writers could also choose to adopt a range of 'oral' features, as they often do in their private letters. We know however from many studies that implicit and explicit hierarchies of language forms and varieties came into existence in the Early and Late Modern period, including the standard v. non-standard dichotomy (e.g. Rutten 2019 for Dutch). Such hierarchies foster the use of highly valued forms in the case of texts that are meant to be preserved.

7. Conclusions

We have started out from the idea that there are general differences in language between different types of historical ego-document: in various languages, diaries are usually more formal or standard-like than private letters. Passing by specific genres such as literary diaries and ships' log books, these general differences can be found in letters and diaries written by middle and (middle-)high ranked individuals from a variety of language areas. We have strongly relied on research on western European ego-documents (mainly Dutch and English) from the Early and Late Modern period. It will be interesting to see whether our generalisation will hold when other languages and historical periods are taken into account. While we

have taken examples from different languages, we have focused primarily on theoretical aspects, and cross-linguistic analyses of specific historical situations still need to be carried out.

Stipulating general differences in language between private letters and diaries does not imply that each and every private letter is closer to speech than each and every diary; there are quite formal or standard-like, 'distant' private letters, as there are very informal diaries. The general observation that diaries are usually more formal or standard-like than private letters is however corroborated by various empirical studies, so that wider theoretical contextualisation of the general differences is in place. We have discussed a number of theories developed in historical linguistics, text linguistics and pragmatics that can help interpret such differences, but we have also argued that these theories do not allow a principled difference between letters and diaries, and need to be complemented by research results from cultural and social historians who have also studied ego-documents extensively. We argue that the perspective developed in section 6 is helpful to account for the observed differences between letters and diaries at a more general level. These differences are largely based on the paradoxical nature of historical diaries. While writing in private for an immediate audience of one, authors of diaries often had a more variable and multilayered audience in mind of both known (e.g. close friends, family members) and unknown readers (e.g. future generations). Furthermore, diary-writing was an inherently reflexive practice allowing authors to reflect on their lives, and to create a textually fixed point of reference, to which they themselves could return later on but also future generations of as yet unknown readers. Authors of diaries thus created private texts for themselves in which they were their own observers and observees. At the same time, they reckoned with unknown readers in a possibly distant future, which prompted them to shift into a more formal or standard-like register. 

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