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The survival of Dutch in seventeenth-century Hamburg: the testimony of a merchant family's letters.

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INHALT

Singen, Tanzen und Schenken. Neujahrslieder in der „Berliner Liederhandschrift mgf 922“ und der „Gruuthuse Handschrift“ <i>Von Anja Becker</i>	7
The survival of Dutch in seventeenth-century Hamburg: the testimony of a merchant family's letters <i>Von Marijke van der Wal</i>	24
Niederländisch-niederdeutscher Sprachkontakt in ostfriesischen und emsländischen Briefen des 19. Jahrhunderts <i>Von Andreas Krogull</i>	46
... <i>de beide spraken, het Nederlandsch en het Platduitsch, maken in den grond maer ééne tael uit</i> Vom sprachlichen Kontinuum zu dessen Auflösung an der Staatsgrenze. Über das komplizierte Verhältnis von Niederländisch und Niederdeutsch in Geschichte und Gegenwart <i>Von Hermann Niebaum</i>	73
Zum POS-Progressiv in den westfälischen Dialekten <i>Von Markus Denkler</i>	113
Grammatikalisierung im Raum? Zu Variation und Wandel des Definitartikels in den niedersächsischen Dialekten Groningens und Drenthes <i>Von Jeffrey Pheiff</i>	130

Buchbesprechungen

Temmo Bosse: Das nord- und ostfriesische Wenkermaterial. Hintergründe, Validität und Erkenntniswert <i>Von Lea Schäfer</i>	156
Luisse Czajkowski: Schreibsprachen im Übergang. Untersuchungen zum Sprachwandel im niederdeutsch-ostmitteldeutschen Übergangsraum im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit <i>Von Anne Breitbarth</i>	158
Markus Denkler und Jens Philipp Lanwer (Hgg.): Dialektologie und Gesprächslinguistik <i>Von Birte Arendt</i>	161

Matthias Hahn, Andrea Kleene, Robert Langhanke und Anja Schaufuß (Hgg.): Dynamik in den deutschen Regionalsprachen. Gebrauch und Wahrnehmung. Beiträge aus dem Forum Sprachvariation <i>Von Toke Hoffmeister</i>	165
Sarah Ihden, Katharina Dreessen und Robert Langhanke (Hgg): Studien zur mittelniederdeutschen und frühneuhochdeutschen Sprache und Literatur <i>Von Simone Schultz-Balluff</i>	171

The survival of Dutch in seventeenth-century Hamburg: the testimony of a merchant family's letters

Von Marijke van der Wal, Leiden

1 Seventeenth-century Hamburg

Seventeenth-century Hamburg can be characterised as a mercantile centre whose population had increased considerably from roughly 40,000 inhabitants in 1600 to 75,000 in the 1660s (Schaser 1995: 139; Whaley 1985: 10). Openness towards foreign merchants had been favourable for Hamburg's rise as a metropolis of international trade (Lindberg 2008; Schaser 1995). The previous influx of migrants, Protestants from the southern Low Countries in the 1580s and Sephardic Jews from Portugal and Spain in the 1590s, also had major demographic consequences. According to estimations, in 1600 approximately a quarter of the Hamburg population consisted of migrants from the southern Low Countries, both Dutch-speaking Flemings and French-speaking Walloons (Uppenkamp 2015: 61–62; Whaley 1985: 10). From a linguistic perspective, seventeenth-century Hamburg must have been a multilingual city, which raises various interesting research questions concerning the daily practice of communication, language contact and possible language shift. Such issues have been topics of research for the urban languages of, for instance, Cologne and Nuremberg within the context of what is known as “*Stadtsprachenforschung*” (Mihm 2016; 2019). This long-term research line benefits from a more recent input of historical sociolinguistics as shown in Pickl/Elspeß (2019).

The present article, which is also embedded in a historical sociolinguistic approach (see Section 2), concentrates on the Flemish migrants who found refuge in Hamburg after the fall of Antwerp in 1585, when non-Catholic inhabitants could choose either to become Catholic or to move to places of free religion.¹ As a consequence, a large number of non-Catholics moved to the northern Low Countries, in particular to the city of Amsterdam and other towns in the provinces of Holland and Zeeland, and to Germany, to commercial centres such as Cologne, Frankfurt and

¹ I use the term Flemish to indicate Dutch-speaking people from the southern Low Countries.



Figure 1: View of Hamburg

Hamburg (cf. Asaert 2010). The migrants in Hamburg belonged to various social ranks, varying from the poor working class to very wealthy merchants. This becomes evident from the *Armen-Casse*, an initiative taken by rich merchants in 1585 to support their fellow countrymen (Asaert 2010: 91–92). The Flemish migrants thus founded their own institutions such as the *Armen-Casse* and had their own societies and religious meetings. Many of them settled in the relatively new southern city quarter, in streets such as Wandrahm and Holländischer Brook (Van Roosbroeck 1968: 245–271). Apart from living in a particular city quarter, endogamy (i.e. marriages of partners with joint Flemish roots) was an evident practice in the Dutch-speaking merchant circles of Hamburg (Poettering 2013: 261–262). The context of endogamy, living together and relying on their own institutions must have guaranteed regular communication in the migrants' native language within their own community.

Research on urban languages distinguishes various types of multilingualism such as the languages of foreign minorities (1), indigenous multilingualism (2), multilingualism related to a profession (for instance the foreign languages of merchants) (3) and cultural multilingualism of the higher ranks (4) (Mihm 2016: 24–38). Insight into these types of multilingualism largely depends on preserved documents and contemporary testimonies for a particular period. When focusing on Dutch-speaking migrants in seventeenth-century Hamburg, we are dealing with the first type of multilingualism, although we may also touch upon profession-related multilingualism (see Section 4). First of all, the question arises of how the Flemish migrants communicated in their new environment. What were their spoken everyday language and their written language like? Furthermore, what were the communicative practices of their offspring, the second and third generations of migrants? The issue of spoken and written communication and the preserved documents available for study will be discussed in Section 2. A rediscovered collection of letters will allow us to gain a view of the written language practice. Section 3 presents the details of this source and the background and biographical details of the letter writers. Sections 4, 5 and 6 focus on

characteristics of the letters as examples of Dutch language in exile.² How and why the letter collection survived will be revealed in Section 7. Section 8 reflects on the conclusions.

2 Spoken and written communication

Apart from literal quotes, for instance in plays or legal examinations, the spoken language of the past remains mostly hidden. This also applies in the case of Hamburg, but some information on the spoken language of the 1660s can be deduced from the testimony of a contemporary German-Danish traveller, Kunrat von Hövelen. He notes that High German (*die ädele hoch-deutsche Heldensprache*) was little used in Hamburg, as *die Kaufbursche (...) Niederdeutsch gebrauchen und Holländisch meist untermischen* (Von Hövelen 1668: 132).³ Von Hövelen's observation led Poettering (2013: 168) to the, in my opinion too hasty, conclusion that Dutch functioned as a lingua franca among the merchants in Hamburg. According to Von Hövelen, however, a mixture of Low German and Dutch was used in mercantile circles and this practice is exactly what could be expected in the Low German area to which Hamburg belongs. In modern terms, receptive bi- or multilingualism, described by Braunnüller (1997) for the Scandinavian area during the Hanseatic league, must also have been a frequent phenomenon in seventeenth-century Hamburg. In face-to-face communication, which is an essential characteristic of receptive multilingualism, Dutch-speaking and Low German-speaking merchants (and others) must have been able to deal with all their business matters in their closely-related languages.⁴ In sum, Dutch must have functioned as spoken language in the domestic domain and in the Flemish community (see Section 1), and it is highly probable that receptive Low German and Dutch bilingualism was a regular communication practice in various other domains among which business and trade. Receptive multilingualism thus overcomes communicative problems of speaking; but what about writing?

Whereas Low German had lost most of its written language function, High German and Dutch functioned as written languages in the seventeenth century.⁵ Did first, second and even third generations of migrants maintain a practice of written Dutch? The Dutch newspapers and books available in Hamburg at the time were a favourable

2 “Exil/expatriate Netherlandic” is a type of Dutch distinguished i. a. by Kremer (2014: 766), who assumes that exile Dutch “did usually not last for very long”.

3 As an explanation for this practice Von Hövelen adds that merchants had travelled in Holland and that many merchants from Brabantian, Hollandish, English (!) etc. origin lived in Hamburg (*um Das Sie in Holland gereiset und auch Brabander, Holländer, Englische und dergl. Vile in Hamburg Säschaft*, quotation in Poettering 2013: 168).

4 For features of receptive multilingualism, such as the close relationship of languages, see Braunnüller (2007: 29–32).

5 It is a general textbook opinion that Low German had already lost its written language function, although rare cases of Low German private letter writing have been found for the late seventeenth century (cf. Elspaß/Stolberg 2014).

circumstance for a passive command of Dutch.⁶ An active command of written Dutch is evidenced by administrative documents such as the *Armen-Casse* papers (Asaert 2010: 91–93).⁷ Moreover, merchants must have maintained their family and business networks with their region of origin by correspondence.⁸ Migrants from higher social ranks may have been able to write High German, but what language choice did their offspring actually make in ego-documents, that is in handwritten diaries, travelogues and letters, the text types that reveal the linguistic diversity of the past and therefore play such an important role in historical sociolinguistics?⁹ If Dutch was chosen, what we would like to know is what characteristics this Dutch in exile showed and to what extent German interferences occurred. These questions may be answered by examining a rediscovered Dutch correspondence, dating from 1664–1665, which allows us to gain a view of a merchant family’s writing practice.

3 A merchant family’s rediscovered correspondence

It was when exploring, with my research team, the Prize Papers that we found a collection of letters, sent from Hamburg to one particular addressee, Michiel Heusch. The Prize Papers are a unique source of documents, which survived due to European warfare and privateering, the longstanding legitimate activity of capturing enemy ships. When a ship was taken, all papers on board were confiscated in order to demonstrate that the seized ship indeed belonged to the enemy and was a legal prize. In England, after the legal procedure, the confiscated papers remained in the High Court of Admiralty’s Archives (HCA), kept in The National Archives (TNA) in London (Kew, UK) today. As a result of the frequent warfare between England and the Netherlands from the second half of the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, approximately 40,000 Dutch letters, both private and commercial, and a wide range of other material, all part of the ships’ cargo, survived (see van der Wal/Rutten/Simons 2012; Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 1–7). As the confiscated letters preserve the written language of thousands of different writers, men and women, from different social classes, age groups and regions, they form an excellent basis for an investigation of everyday written communication in the past and its variation and change (cf. Elspaß 2012; Schneider 2013). The first extensive sociolinguistic analysis of these Dutch letters was conducted in the “Brieven als Buit/Letters as Loot” research programme (2008–2013), funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research and directed by Marijke van der Wal at Leiden University (Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 1–18;

6 I thank Professor Heinz Eickmans (University of Duisburg-Essen) for drawing my attention to the Dutch journals and books which were printed or were available due to importation (see also Eickmans 2020: 122).

7 See also Menke (1992: 289–290) for Dutch as the language of Hamburgian institutions.

8 See Müller (2017) for the maintaining of transnational networks by migrated merchants from Antwerp.

9 See Elspaß (2012) and van der Wal/Rutten (2013) for ego-documents in historical sociolinguistics.

van der Wal/Rutten 2016). This research was concentrated on filling blank spots in the history of Dutch (van der Wal 2006).

For our findings I refer to the Letters as Loot monograph (Rutten/van der Wal 2014), which is available in Open Access and for the letters themselves to the tagged and lemmatised “Brieven als Buit/Letters as Loot” corpus which is available online with elaborate search facilities.¹⁰ Here I only mention that our research convincingly proved the amazing value of the confiscated letters for the history of the Dutch language, but that at the same time the Prize Papers also appeared to comprise fascinating material, such as the letters sent to Michiel Heusch, for a view of language contact in the past. This correspondence comprises 51 letters of approximately 34,000 words in total and covers the period of almost one year, from June 1664 until May 1665, when the addressee travelled from Hamburg to Venice and subsequently to many other Italian towns such as Bologna, Rome, Naples and Genoa. The letters were mainly written by father Michiel Heusch senior, who maintained his practice of writing every week. A few letters were written by other relatives: Michiel’s mother, Elisabeth Heusch-Bosschaert, one of his sisters, Elisabeth, a cousin, Gerhart Heusch and an uncle, Jacob Jansen.¹¹

Elaborate historical and genealogical research revealed that what we had found was the correspondence of an important merchant family, whose members appeared to be second and third generations of migrants from Antwerp.¹² Father Michiel Heusch (1601–1684) and his wife Elisabeth Heusch-Bosschaert (1609–1679) were second-generation migrants, born and raised in Hamburg; their marriage was a case of endogamy. Their children, Michiel junior and his four sisters, were third-generation migrants. Heusch senior became a wealthy and very influential international merchant with a wide network of business contacts.¹³ He was even elected as the first president of the Commerzdeputation, the Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1665, which was a prominent task to fulfill (Handelskammer Hamburg 2015: 10–15). The Commerzdeputation had to defend merchants’ interests at the English court after the taking of Hamburgian ships by the English during the prelude to and the actual Second Anglo-Dutch War (1664–1667). Heusch senior was also involved in the activities of the *Armen-Casse* as board member and annual administrator (van der Wal 2019: 197–198). As his father’s future successor in the trading business, Michiel junior (1641–1668), made his Grand Tour, travelling in Italy in the years 1664–1665, both for educational purposes as many young men of the aristocracy and upper level

10 See for this corpus <https://brievenalsbuit.ivdnt.org>.

11 All 51 letters and some additional letters from business relations were found in HCA 30–223 (TNA).

12 For more biographical and historical details than could be discussed here, I refer to van der Wal (2019).

13 In 1645, Heusch senior’s overseas trade amounted to over 200,000 Marks, the largest turnover among 481 Hamburg merchants involved in overseas trade (Reißmann 1975: 35; 379–384). He was the merchant with the largest network of European ports (Lisbon, Porto, Sanlúcar, Cádiz, Málaga, San Sebastián, London, Rouen, Marseille, Genoa, Venice, Sicily and Gdańsk/Danzig) in 1647 (Poettering 2013: 219–220).

of society did in Western Europe, and for commercial reasons, namely in order to strengthen the ties of his father's network and to broaden his own trading experience. Michiel may have written a diary, as many Grand Tour travellers did. However, no diary survived, although the letters sent by his relatives did.

After the first stage of transcribing and interpreting the letters, it became clear that these ego-documents deserved a separate study and an edition of all the letters in order to highlight the various interesting topics discussed in the correspondence. A brief impression of these topics will be given in Section 4, while focusing on the theme of foreign language acquisition. For detailed information on the contents of the Heusch correspondence I refer to my book "Koopmanszoon Michiel Heusch op Italiëreis: Brieven van het thuisfront 1664–1665" (van der Wal 2019).

4 Foreign language acquisition and other experiences

The correspondence allows us to reconstruct Michiel's journey and to understand his learning process, which included becoming familiar with his father's business relations, learning foreign languages and solving various protracted business conflicts. The letters also inform us about the practices of international trade, events in Hamburg such as the plague, deaths of relatives and friends, and daily life such as moving house. Apart from these topics, the linguistic aspects also prove to be a fascinating part of the historical context. The letters provide information on foreign language learning abroad and the letters themselves allow us both to establish the level of written Dutch competence and to examine the influence of (Low) German language contact.

For sons of internationally trading merchants and young men belonging to the upper levels of society, language learning abroad was a common practice and the case of Michiel junior is no exception.¹⁴ Father Heusch's letters illustrate profession-related multilingualism: Heusch senior repeatedly stresses the importance of speaking Italian fluently and of acquiring a good writing competence. Progress in speaking Italian was important for communicating with business contacts during Michiel's tour, whereas writing experience was expected to be useful for answering Italian letters on his return home.¹⁵ We may wonder what exactly Michiel's learning methods were. The correspondence reveals that he relied on an Italian teacher, and copying letters appeared to be a highly recommended learning method according to his father's comment *het schrijven sal U wel nut worden, schrijft so wat brieven uut daer leert men best bij* 'the writing [of Italian] will be useful for you; copy a few letters; one learns most from this/ this is the best way of learning' (letter 21, dated 9 November 1664). Italy is not the end of Michiel's journey: he plans to leave for France, and again foreign

14 See Mihm (2019: 41–47) and Beer (2006) for the early mercantile practice of foreign language acquisition abroad. A similar case is that of Johann Schulte who travelled from Hamburg to Lisbon in 1680 in order to learn Portuguese (Poettering 2013: 167), and who also regularly received (German) letters from his father (Merck 1856).

15 The importance of speaking Italian is stressed on 7 December 1664 (letter 25) and repeated on 25 January 1665 (letter 33). Writing experience is stressed on 15 March 1665 (letter 40).

language learning is an important issue. He has to consider which is the most suitable place for learning French: either Geneva or Orleans, both familiar places for Grand Tour travellers. Orleans is close to Paris where, according to his father's information, good French is spoken (letter 35, dated 15 February 1665). What Michiel's ultimate decision was is not clear, as the survived correspondence ends in Genoa without a detailed reference to Michiel's travel route in France.

The following sections concentrate on the linguistic aspects of the letters themselves and the inter-writer variation of the five letter writers: four representatives of the second generation of Flemish migrants (Heusch senior, his wife Elisabeth Heusch-Bosschaert, uncle Jacob Jansen (Heusch senior's brother-in-law) and his cousin Gerard Heusch) and Michiel junior's sister Elisabeth (1638-1708) as third-generation migrant. Various familiar letter phenomena will be examined and compared with the contemporary writing practice as revealed in the "Brieven als Buit/Letters as Loot" (BAB/LAL) research and the seventeenth century part of its corpus. Examples from the Heusch correspondence will be presented with a reference to the page and line number of van der Wal 2019 as follows: Letter 1, 78: 20.¹⁶ Section 5 deals with the characteristics of the four single letter writers, whereas section 6 examines the letters of the main correspondent, Heusch senior.

5 Characteristics of four letter writers

5.1 Two female letter writers

Unfortunately, only two, relatively brief private letters written by female relatives survived: sister Elisabeth's letter *Aen myn beminden broeder Michiel Heusch in Genua* ('To my beloved brother Michiel Heusch in Genoa'), dated 5 April 1665 (217 words), and mother Elisabeth Heusch's letter, *Aen mijn beminden soon Michiel Heusch in Genua* ('To my beloved son Michiel Heusch in Genoa'), dated 26 April 1665 (287 words). Sister Elisabeth knows how to write a letter, using familiar epistolary opening and closing formulae (for epistolary formulae see Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 75–128). After simply mentioning the date and place, she uses the greeting the recipient phrase *naer vriendelycke groetenis* 'after friendly greeting' as opening formula, followed by the self-reference formula *dient desen dat*.¹⁷

- (1) *Lieven broeder, naer vriendelycke groetenis dient desen dat...* (Letter 44, 207: 7–9)
'Dear brother, after friendly greeting this [letter] serves to...'

16 Fifteen Heusch letters are also available online: the letters of Michiel's sister and mother (letters 44, 48), six of Heusch senior's letters (letters 2, 16, 17, 18, 19, 28) in the BAB/LAL corpus at <https://brievenalsbuit.ivdnt.org> and seven others (letters 6, 8, 22, 23, 31, 43, 47) at <https://brievenalsbuit2.ivdnt.org>, an additional collection of confiscated letters.

17 Punctuation was added and minor orthographic adaptations made in this and all following examples.

Anno 1665 den 5 April in Hamborch
 Liever broeder naer vriendelycke groete
 mis dit dat desen dat poortten dat goet woen Roma
 mi gelonden als 1 pampier met handbotnen
 en 1 bescantige doos dat dencke iche doet dat sal
 syn dat ghy schryff 1 wiczigthige son syn dit
 is werstegelt en staet W. Naem op gelyckert
 en 1 woude doos daer is maer seegel garen om
 en geen merck of naem op gelyckert daer
 syn de 2 schootels in en de kelend te is en stuck
 en gelyckert en watter samen gemact het sal
 roet tot W. Hainys komst te samen bewaren
 soande binde omf lyt hetff by selegen Wader
 gelyckert dat ghy aen hem gelyckert had doet
 byle son hem te wercopen soke Wader niet
 hebben wou of Wader te hem mi nocht gyl
 ten wort wou iche niet. Alst W. Hainys is
 huyndegom niet Litter broeder dochter wou
 leeden Soudachs docht is de huyndegom gelyckert
 wan wouyns syn dochter. En is Conyn
 Michiel wou in de Stadt by was wan dach
 bide in huyndegom by Wader maer iche wou noch
 niet wou by doen wou huyndegom sal endigen
 Wader Moeder Susters doen W. Hainys docht
 ten wan gelyckert doen iche ock en syt Godt be
 woulen.

W. Hainys
 Elisabeth docht

Figure 2: Sister Elisabeth's letter

She confirms the receipt of a package, mentions Hamburgian news and closes her letter with both an intersubjective greeting formula *doen u vriendelyck groeten* and a commendation formula *syt Godt bevolen*:

- (2) *Vader, moeder, susters doen u vriendelyck groeten. Van gelycke doen ick ock en syt Godt bevolen* (Letter 44, 207: 30–32)
 ‘Father, mother, sisters greet you friendly. I do the same too and be commended to God.’

The greeting the recipient formula is a frequent phenomenon of seventeenth-century letters, and women use the formula more frequently than men do (Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 100–101; 137–141). The self-reference formula *dient desen dat...* occa-

sionally appears in the seventeenth-century private letters of the BAB/LAL corpus (Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 103–104). The intersubjective greeting formula, used in the closing of the letter, is one of various options which will be discussed below.

Remarkably, only one feature of German interference occurs in the letter. The Dutch verb *worden* in *afeyssen wort* is used to indicate future tense, which is current in German (the verb *werden*), but not in Dutch:

- (3) *Of vader se hem nu noch afeyssen wort weet ick niet* (Letter 44, 207: 22–23)
 ‘I do not know whether father will still demand them from him.’

Mother Elisabeth’s letter is characterised by extensive epistolary formulae, starting with the familiar seventeenth-century formula *Looft Godt altijd in Hamborch adij 26 april 1665*, ‘praise God always in a particular place (Hamburg) at a particular date (26 April 1665)’ (Letter 48, 222: 5).¹⁸ The following intersubjective health formula, which confirms the writer’s own good health and expresses health wishes for the addressee (Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 114–121), is interwoven with elaborate religious phrases between the two health phrases:

- (4) *met lief vernomen noch wel te pas waert, daer voor Godt zij gelooft ende gedanckt. Die will u voordere met zynen heijlighen enghel begeleiden ende met zynen heijlighen geest regeeren dat ghij niets voorneemt, doet, spreeckt oft gedenckt, maer alleen wat Godts loff ende eere, ende tot uwer siele ende salicheijt het beste is. Wij zij (sic) t’samen met alde vrinden noch wel te pas. De Heere latet beijder sijts continuweeren ter salicheijt, op dat ter rechter tijt malcanderen ingesontheijt moghen sien ende sprecken, om Jesu Christi willen AmenAmen.* (Letter 48, 222: 7–12)

‘I have understood with pleasure that you were in good health, for which God be praised and thanked. He may accompany you further with his holy angel and lead you with his holy spirit so that you do not presume, do, speak or think of but only what is best for the praise and glory of God and for your soul and bliss. We, with all relatives, are still in good health. May the Lord allow this to continue to bliss on both sides, so that we may see and speak one another in health at the proper time, for Christ’s sake Amen, Amen.’

The second health phrase is followed by an intersubjective contact formula, expressing the wish that the writer and addressee will see and speak to each other again (once more referring to health), whereas a Christian-ritual element formulates the condition for contact (see Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 123–125).

The only trace of German interference is the word *phingsten* ‘pentecost’. After having given her son advice and mentioning the preparations for moving house, mother Elisabeth closes her letter with two variants of the intersubjective greeting

18 Just like the greeting the recipient formula, the praise God phrase appears to be a typical seventeenth-century formula (Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 94–97). 260 hits are found in 595 seventeenth-century letters and only one hit in 438 eighteenth-century letters of the BAB/LAL corpus.

formula: the *doen u vrindelijck groeten* variant (option 1), also found in sister Elisabeth's letter, is followed by *zijt van mij hartlijck gegroet* (option 2). The added Christian-ritual formula, commending the addressee into the hands of God, is again combined with the health theme (see Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 121–123; 125–127):

- (5) *U susters doen u vrindelijck groeten, doet mijn groetenis aen monsieur Poleman, ende zijt van mij hartlijck gegroet ende Godt in genaden bevolen tot langer bestendigher gesontheit* (Letter 48, 222: 22–24)
 'Your sisters send you a friendly greeting, give my greetings to Mr. Poleman, and be heartily greeted by me and be commended to God in grace to longer lasting health.'

Both female letter writers show good Dutch writing competence with an appropriate use of a range of epistolary formulae. These formulae are familiar features in seventeenth-century Dutch letters and are also characteristic of a shared epistolary tradition in Western Europe (cf. Nevalainen 2001; Poster/Mitchell 2007). Only a single trace of German interference is found in each letter.

5.2 Two business letters

The letters written by cousin Gerhart Heusch and uncle Jacob Jansen, dated 22 February and 26 April 1665 respectively, are business letters in which they give Michiel specific assignments.¹⁹ The addresses on the letters are very similar (*Monsieur/ Monsieur Michiel Heusch/A Genoa*) and both of them also address Michiel in French: *Monsieur et Cousin* 'Sir and cousin' (Gerhart Heusch) and *Mon Cousijn* 'My nephew' (Jacob Jansen).²⁰ Gerhart Heusch continues with the greeting the recipient formula, using the French loan *salutatie* as equivalent of sister Elisabeth's *groetenis* 'greeting':

- (6) *Naer salutatie, hebben van ul heer vaeder ul goede dispositie seer geerne vernomen* (Letter 37, 184: 7–8)
 'After greeting, we have understood with pleasure your good health from your father.'

The less frequent *Naer salutatie* variant is immediately followed by a remark on the addressee's good health, again including a French loan, *dispositie*.²¹ This remark replaces the familiar intersubjective health formula. Gerhart uses the epistolary form

19 Cousin Gerhart's letters contains 335 words, uncle Jacob Jansen's autograph 242 words and the added clerk's copy of a previous letter 211 words.

20 Addressing Michiel in French may be a convention of business letters. This French usage (see *et* and *Mon*) differs from referring to relatives by the familiar French loans *frer* and *maseur* which occur occasionally in letters by Michiel's parents. See *frer Dierck saligher* 'late brother Dirk' (letter 48, 222: 13), *frer Jochim* (letter 7, 90: 21–22) and *maseur Anna* (letters 30, 161:114; 34, 175:119; 40, 192: 23–24; 50, 232: 71).

21 Only 6 instances of *salutatie*, all in the formula *na* (optional adjective) *salutatie* are present in the 595 seventeenth-century letters of the BAB/LAL corpus. Gerhart's letter con-

of address *ul*, the abbreviation of *uwe liefde/ u liefde* ‘your love, your kindness’, which occurs as possessive form twice in (6), as subject in (7) and oblique in (8):

- (7) *Overmits wij verstaen dat **ul** nu tot Genoa sal comen* (Letter 37, 184: 10–11)
‘As we understand that you will come to Genoa now.’
- (8) *De Almogende wil **ul** voorder goet succes geven* (Letter 37, 184: 8–9)
‘The Almighty may give you further good success.’

Uncle Jacob Jansen also uses *ul/u.l.*, the most frequent epistolary form of address in late-seventeenth-century letters.²² Gerhart Heusch closes his letter with *na cordiale groetenis* ‘after hearty greeting’, an equivalent of *na hartelijke groetenis*, option 3 of the intersubjective greeting formula, discussed in section 5.1., and adds the commendation formula *den Heere bevolen* ‘commended to the Lord’. Uncle Jacob Jansen combines the *doen groeten* variant with the commendation formula as follows:

- (9) *Wij doen u.l. ondertussen groeten en den almogenden bevelen adio* (Letter 49, 227: 61–63)
‘We greet you in the meantime and recommend you to the Almighty, adieu.’

As merchants, both relatives are experienced letter writers and their letters do not show any traces of German interference.²³ They are familiar with the Dutch epistolary formulae and the epistolary form of address *ul/u.l.* The epistolary *ue* ‘your honour’ variant, increasing in the higher ranks of the Upper Middle and Upper Classes in the 1660s/1670s, does not appear to belong to their linguistic repertoire (see Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 227–231). Epistolary forms of address are not found in the letters by the two females who used the pronoun *ghij/ ghy* ‘you’ as subject form of address and *u* as oblique ‘you’ and possessive form ‘your’. As Heusch senior consistently omits the second person pronoun subject forms as in *daer (...) wel gearriveert waert* ‘where **you** had arrived safely’, no further comments on his use of forms of address can be made, apart from the occurrence of a single instance of an explicit addressee *ghij* ‘you’ in *Schrijve hem so **ghij** daer bent dat alles met u in raet sal stellen* ‘I will write him that he has to consult you in everything as soon as you are there’ (letter 29, 157: 32–33) and one instance of *ul* as oblique form in *Tis vrent sr. Druijvesteijn **ul** niet wat assisteert* ‘It is curious that Mr. Druijvesteijn does not help you a bit’ (letter 7, 91: 60–61).²⁴

tains more French loan words, partly general loans, partly trade terminology (van der Wal 2019: 71–73).

22 For the various forms of address, see Rutten/van der Wal (2014: 203–245), and more in particular pages 227–231 for the frequency of *ul* as opposed to *ue*.

23 The clerk’s copy included in uncle Jacobs’ letter shows some interference in the orthography of *uhre* ‘hour’ and *wahren* ‘goods’.

24 See van der Wal (2018) for more details on ellipsis in the Heusch correspondence.

5.3 Preliminary conclusion

The four letter writers all appear to have good Dutch writing competence. They are familiar with both frequent and less frequent Dutch epistolary formulae. We noticed inter-writer variation in the use of variants of the intersubjective greeting formula (*wij/zij doen/laten je groeten* ‘we/they do/let greet you’; *wees gegroet* ‘be greeted’; *na (hartelijke/cordiale) groeten* ‘after (hearty) greeting’) and the commendation formula which also shows lexical variation such as *Godt, den almogenden, den Heere bevolen* ‘commended to God, to the Almighty, to the Lord’. Furthermore, the variants in the opening and closing formulae of the Heusch letters are all familiar phenomena in the seventeenth-century Dutch letters of our BAB/LAL corpus. The two business letters differ from the private letters by addressing Michiel junior in French and by using the epistolary form of address *ul/u.l.* German interference appears to be limited to a single instance in each of the female letters. It is important to stress that in the case of each four letter writers only one single letter was available. The 47 letters written by Heusch senior and including approximately 32,500 words will give us the opportunity to examine more phenomena.

6 Heusch senior’s letters

6.1 Structure and characteristics

Heusch senior writes to Michiel about home news such as illnesses and scandals, and mentions the casualties and numbers of deceased due to the plague, a pandemic not only in Hamburg, but also in Amsterdam, where daughter Anna lived with her uncle Gaspar Bosschaert and his wife. Furthermore, Michiel is informed of family matters such as grandmother’s weakness and her passing away, her last will and the inheritance problems among the relatives. Clearly various business matters are also the topic of elaborate discussion, and this reveals Heusch senior’s impressive national and international network.²⁵

The beginning of Heusch senior’s letters, which mostly have a mixed private-business character, always shows the same structure. Starting with the date and place and after having addressed his son with *Eersaeme, lieve soen* (‘Worthy beloved son’) he continues with information on the reception and sending of previous letters, as (10) shows. This practice of referring to earlier communication was useful for the correspondents and it also informs us about missing letters in the preserved correspondence (see Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 101–104 for the variety of referring formulae).²⁶

25 From the letters, I listed 270 names of relatives, acquaintances and, most importantly, business contacts in Hamburg, Italy and other parts of Europe (van der Wal 2019: 236–242).

26 Five of Heusch senior’s letters, four letters by mother Elisabeth, four by sister Elisabeth, three by sister Anna and one by any of Michiel’s sisters appear to be missing.

t/gegroot/gegruut ‘greeted’ which is often modified by *hartelyck/van harten/seer* ‘heartily, from the heart, very’ as in (11).

- (11) *Weest van ons allen seer gegruet en Godt bevolen* (Letter 21, 133: 65)
‘Be very much greeted from all of us and commended to God.’

Alternatives are a combination of the verbs *doen* ‘to do’ and *grueten/ gruten* ‘to greet’ in (12) (5 instances, 11%), often modified by *seer/hartelyck* ‘very/ heartily’, and the noun phrase of the preposition *naer* ‘after’ and the noun *grutenis* ‘greeting’ in (13) (7 instances, 15%).

- (12) *Vorts sijn noch alle wel varende ende doen u tsamen seer grueten ende west den H[ee]r bevolen.* (Letter 28, 152: 33–34)
‘Furthermore, we are all well and we together greet you very much and be commended to the Lord.’
- (13) *en u den allmog[ende] Heere naer grutenis wil bevelen* (Letter 25, 144: 74)
‘and I want to commend you to the almighty Lord after greeting.’

The commendation formula *west den Heer bevolen* ‘be commended to the Lord’ and its variants is present in all 51 letters of the Heusch correspondence. The phrasal and lexical variation such as ‘be recommended to God/ the Lord/ the almighty God/ the protection of the Lord etc.’ is also found in other seventeenth-century letters (see Rutten/van der Wal 2014: 125–127).

6.2 Lexical interference

The 47 letters written by Heusch senior show traces of lexical German interference, although not to a high degree. Apart from variation in pairs such as *gnade(n)/genade(n)* ‘mercy’, *plats/plaets* ‘place’,²⁷ the following thirteen lexical items occur, which show interference from Low or High German: *herbst* ‘autumn’ (2 instances), *osteren* ‘easter’ (2 instances), *pingsten* ‘pentecost’, *arnte* ‘harvest’, *lorberen* ‘laurel berries’, *stockfisch* ‘stockfish’, *vormunder* ‘guardian’, *props* ‘dean’, *verschotten* ‘to pay’, *quitung* ‘receipt’, *poesen* ‘writing quills’, *gefalliert* ‘gone bankrupt’, *erholden* ‘keep alive’ (6 instances).²⁸ The instances of the most frequent item *erholden* all occur in a similar formula *Godt wil haer noch erholden* ‘God may yet keep her alive’. Furthermore, *het geeft*, the calque of *es gibt*, is found (14) and, like his daughter Elisabeth, Heusch senior uses in one instance the verb *worden* to indicate future tense (15):

27 *Gnade(n)* occurs twice in Heusch senior’s letters versus two instances of Dutch *genade(n)*. *Plats* (6 instances) and *platsen* (2 instances) occur versus only two instances of Dutch *plaets*.

28 Apart from High German *herbst*, *propst* and *faillieren*, all lexical items are either Low German (*arnte*, *pingsten*, *pose/poos/poes*, *verschotten*, *erholden*) or identical in Low and High German (*gnade*, *plats*, *osteren*, *lorberen*, *stockfisch*, *vormunder*, *quitung*).

- (14) *het wil eenen bloedigen oorloch **geven*** (Letter 39, 190: 23)²⁹
 ‘a bloody war will happen.’
- (15) *de fesse voeders **worden** morgen aen boort gaen* (Letter 20, 131: 22–23)
 ‘the cargo of bottles will be loaded aboard tomorrow.’

More subtle interferences also occur such as the transfer of a meaning, for instance ‘folly’ (High German *Torheit*, Low German *dorheit*) in *dorheijt*, which means only ‘dryness’ in Dutch (letter 51, 235: 67) and ‘gate’ (German *Tor*) in *een door in en het ander weer uut* ‘one gate in, the other out’ in the case of Dutch *door/deur*, which means only ‘door’ (letter 39, 191: 47–48). Other examples are the adjective *opstutsich* ‘unruly’ (letter 45, 211: 28) and the verbs *inwenden* (*wat inwenden willen over de nottitie* ‘what they want to bring in against a note’; letter 34, 172: 21–22) and *instelden* ‘would give up’ in (16), which are interferences of Low German *upstütsich*, *inwenden* and *instellen* respectively. The meaning ‘just, only’ of Dutch *bloot/bloet* (letter 26, 150: 105) and ‘however’ of Dutch *effen* in (17) indicate interference of Low German *blot* and *even* respectively.

- (16) *De reijs op Venetia wensten dat **instelden*** (Letter 30, 158: 30)
 ‘I would wish that you would give up the trip to Venice.’
- (17) *Moet **effen** de ganse carnavael niet daer blijven* (Letter 31, 163: 53)
 ‘However, you should not stay there the whole carnival period.’

Other interesting cases of interference concern function words, in particular the reflexive pronoun and a relative particle.

6.3 Reflexive pronoun and relative particle

Reflexive verbs were not found in the single letters written by the four other relatives, but instances of this lower frequency phenomenon do occur in Heusch senior’s letters. In Dutch, the personal pronoun originally functioned as a reflexive third person singular and plural, but in the seventeenth century the reflexive pronoun *zich* became an increasing alternative. For example, ‘to dress (oneself)’ could be indicated by either the old option *hem/haer kleeden* or the newer option *zich/sich kleeden*. Stressing the importance of a separate reflexive pronoun, the Dutch grammarian Petrus Leupenius preferred the Low German *sik* variant to High German and Dutch *sich/sig/zich* in his grammar “Aanmerkingen op de Nederduitsche taale” (Remarks on the Dutch language) of 1653, but *sik/sick* did not gain ground in Dutch (van der Wal/van Bree 2014: 214–215).

What is striking in the Heusch correspondence is that we find fourteen instances of the Low German reflexive *sick* such as in (18) as opposed to eleven of the

²⁹ Other instances are: *So wilt daer slechte negotie **geven*** ‘Then there will be bad trade there’ (letter 30, 158: 43); *hope goede negotie sal **geven*** ‘I hope that there will be good trade’ (letter 28, 153: 26).

old option such as in (19), and not a single instance of Dutch or High German *sich/sig*.

- (18) *Hope sal sick als een knecht behoort comportereren* (Letter 1, 78: 20)
 ‘I hope that [he] will behave himself as a servant should.’
- (19) *My sal lief sijn den barbier gesel hem wel draegt* (Letter 1, 78: 17)
 ‘I shall be pleased that the surgeon’s/ barber’s apprentice will behave himself well.’

In this case, the Low German variant was clearly adopted by Heusch senior. Looking more closely at the fourteen *sick* instances, we notice a few cases of additional interference apart from the *sick* form itself. The reciprocal usage of *sick/sich* is found in *en willen sick roepen met den degen* ‘and they will challenge one another to a duel’ (letter 39, 191: 44–45) and the German phrase *das hat nichts auf sich* is reflected in *dat sal so veel niet op sick hebben* ‘that will not mean much’ (letter 26, 147: 14–15). Interference of the German reflexive verb *sick/sich bedanken* versus Dutch *bedanken* occurs in *Cattarina sal met eersten een briefken schrijven en sick bedancken* ‘Cattarina will write a letter soon to thank you’ (letter 23, 139: 54–55).³⁰ A similar interference of the syntactical pattern is found in the reflexive use of the personal pronoun *hun* in *Ende sss. Moens antworde heeden en bedancke hun vor hun presentatie* ‘And Messrs. Moens reply now and they thank for their gift’ (letter 10, 101: 30–31).

Our last interference phenomenon concerns a remarkable relativisation strategy, consisting of the invariable relative particle *so* instead of the familiar Dutch relativisers *die, dat, wie, wat, welk* or *hetgeen*.

- (20) *S^r. Johan Behn, so met u naer Leibsich reijdsde, is bruijdegam vor sijn derde reijs met de tweede dochter van Daniel Le Conte* (Letter 43, 204: 17–18)
 ‘Mr. Johan Behn, who travelled with you to Leipzig, is groom for the third time to Daniel Le Conte’s second daughter.’

The letters by the other correspondents comprise relative clauses, but without the particle *so*, which occurs in no fewer than 41 instances in Heusch senior’s letters. The relative *so* particle is not a feature of Dutch, but it does occur as a supraregional relativisation strategy in German, only in a particular period, mainly from the second half of the fifteenth until the eighteenth century, and alongside the familiar system of relative pronouns (High German *der, die, das* and *welch-*; Ebert 1986: 163, and Low German *dê, dê, dat* and *welk*; Ihden 2020: 59–61; 64). The *so* particle is assumed to function either as subject or direct object and mainly in particular relative clauses, that is in restrictive embedded relative clauses in which *so* follows immediately after the antecedent (Ebert 1993: 447). For a detailed analysis of the *so* instances, taking into account not only the various types of relative clauses, but also the animacy or non-animacy of the antecedent, I refer to van der Wal (2018). Here I only mention the outcome that Heusch senior adopted the relative *so* particle, both as subject and as object, in all four types of relative clauses. In example (20), *so* functions

30 I thank professor Ann Marynissen (University of Cologne) for drawing my attention to this case of additional interference.

as subject in the appositive embedded type, the type in which *so* immediately follows the antecedent. Example (21) illustrates the function of *so* as subject in the appositive final type, in which one or more elements (*verloeft was*) separate the antecedent (*de jongfrou Rodenbergs*) and *so*. In (22) the object *so* immediately follows the antecedent *alle courtegie* in the restrictive embedded type. An example of the restrictive final type is (23), in which the element *op* separates *so* and the antecedent *een van de hoijkens*.

- (21) *Men seijde vor desen dat dat [hij] met de jongfrou Rodenbergs verloeft was, so verleden jaer stirf bijden borgemester* (Letter 2, 81: 28–30)
 ‘One said that he was previously engaged to maiden Rodenberg, who died last year at the mayor’s.’
- (22) *Sal hun alles wel schrijven ende met eens bedancken vor alle courtegie so genoeten hebt* (Letter 34 175: 116)
 ‘I will write all to them and at the same time thank them for all the courtesy that you have received.’
- (23) *Henrick Poorten hadde verleden weeck een van de hoijkens op, so hem gesonden hebt* (Letter 27, 152: 61–62)
 ‘Last week Henrick Poorten was wearing one of the little hats that you sent him.’

In Heusch senior’s letters, *so* thus functions as an alternative for the familiar Dutch relative strategies in four types of relative clauses and both as subject and as object. Heusch clearly adopted a German supraregional feature in written Dutch and his usage does not appear to be determined by the need to avoid repetition in conjunctive relative clauses, as only a single instance of such a clause occurs:

- (24) *Detlof sijn soen, so naest den Baars woont in grootmoeders woningen, die ons het houdt pleech te setten, is mede overleden* (Letter 14, 118: 14–15)
 ‘Detlof’s son, who lives next to the Baars in grandmother’s houses, who used to stack wood for us, also died.’

6.4 Conclusion

Heusch senior’s elaborate letters show a good command of Dutch. He appears to be familiar with epistolary formulae and their variants and varies, for instance, between three variants of the greeting the recipient formula. In his letters, German interference includes 13 lexical items, a calque, the use of the verb *worden* to indicate future tense, whereas a few more subtle cases of meaning transfer also occur. Heusch senior also adopted the Low German reflexive *sik* and the German supraregional relativisation strategy of the *so* particle.

Finishing our analysis of the Heusch correspondence, I would like to address the mystery of the preserved letters in Section 7 before drawing general conclusions in Section 8.

7 The mystery of a package of letters

The Heusch correspondence survived due to warfare, as discussed in Section 3, when ships were taken by English privateers or warships. However, we may wonder how and why the 51 letters Michiel junior received when travelling in Italy ended up on a ship. The individual letters had reached Michiel by overland transport from Hamburg to Venice, from where they were distributed to other Italian destinations. By the end of his Italian journey, while staying in Genoa, Michiel was busy with loading a ship bound for Hamburg. That was the moment, I assumed, that he sent the bulk of his received letters home. Letter 26, dated 14 December 1664, refers to an earlier case in which ten of his father's letters were returned unbundled, in an open parcel, addressed to the Hamburgian merchant Henrick Poorten. Returning letters, which included important business information, thus appeared to be a regular practice necessary for archiving, as Heusch senior had not copied the letters he sent to his son. In the case of problems, evidence from the archive could be crucial, as becomes clear when Heusch senior discusses various long-running and complex business conflicts with which Michiel has to deal. Knowing the reason for returning the letters, we understand that only two letters from his mother and sister, sent in April 1665, survived. Although of no commercial interest, they may have got mixed up with the last letters Michiel received in May and June before leaving for France. If Michiel returned the letters before leaving Genoa, this would have happened after 14 June 1665, the reception date noted on the last preserved letter. However, I had not been able to trace a ship sailing from Genoa that was taken as a prize in the second half of 1665. The solution came from researchers working on the capture of French ships. According to the interrogations which took place after the taking of a ship, trading goods shipped by Michiel Heusch were present on the French ship *St. Michael*, sailing from Marseille via Malaga to Hamburg, and captured on 23 August 1665.³¹ This would mean that Michiel had followed his father's advice to accept the invitation of David Martens, an old and loyal business relation in Marseille (letter 50, 231: 51–57). During his stay in Marseille he must have arranged the loading of commercial goods including the bulk of his received correspondence. Whether he continued his Grand Tour to either Geneva or Orleans and when he arrived home, we do not know. What we do know is that, unfortunately, Michiel did not benefit long from his experiences abroad, as he was buried on 5 November 1668, at the age of 27, in St. Catherine church, the Hamburgian church where his parents were later interred, Elisabeth Heusch-Bosschaert on 17 January 1679 and Michiel Heusch senior on 6 March 1684 (van der Wal 2019: 63–66).

31 I thank Dr Amanda Bevans (TNA) and Andrew R. Little (TNA, freelance) for providing me with this information, when I presented my online lunch talk “International trade, an instructive journey and linguistic practices revealed in the Heusch correspondence (1664–1665)” in the Oldenburg Prize Papers series of lunch talks on 15 February 2021.

8 Reflecting on Dutch in a (Low) German environment

We have become familiar with the linguistic practices of second- and third-generation migrants, Michiel Heusch senior, and his family. For their spoken language, the members of the Heusch family most probably practised receptive Dutch – Low German bilingualism. At the same time they preserved a tradition of written Dutch up until the third generation, that of Michiel junior and his sisters. The analysis of the letters written by five individuals resulted in conclusions about the letter writers' command of Dutch and the degree of German interference. The letter writers were familiar with the contemporary Dutch variants in epistolary formulae. The various formulae of their letters do not deviate from the Dutch epistolary formulae found in contemporary private letters of non-migrants from the BAB/LAL corpus. The correspondents also show inter-writer variation in their forms of address: *ghij/gy* 'you' by the female writers and *ul/u.l.* by the male single letter writers, which are both familiar variants. In sum, both variation in the formulae and the inter-individual variation illustrate a still good command of varied written supraregional Dutch.³² At the same time, their letters show different rates of influence from the (Low) German environment, ranging from none (the two business letters) or only a single (the two female letters) interference to a few, yet remarkable, German interferences in lexical items, transfer of meaning, reflexive *sik* and the relative *so* particle in the case of the main letter writer Heusch senior.

Kremer (2014: 766) assumed that exile Dutch “did usually not last for very long”, a somewhat vague indication of time. The Heusch correspondence shows that the offspring of migrants from Antwerp still wrote Dutch letters eight decades later. The maintenance of a native language in a foreign environment clearly depends on a variety of factors.³³ In the case of the Dutch-speaking community in Hamburg, there were a number of favourable conditions: the size of the Flemish migrant community, their living in particular city quarters, the practice of endogamy, the presence of their own institutions such as churches and an institution for poor relief, and their contacts with relatives and business relations in the region of origin and the northern Low Countries. In mercantile circles, Dutch had remained the written language locally in Hamburg and at a distance when communicating with relatives and particular trading partners.³⁴ We are aware of the limitations of the Heusch correspondence, which includes the written language of only five individuals belonging to the upper ranks of an influential merchant family. Nonetheless, their letters are genuine reflections of the contemporary writing practices of former migrants and give us a glimpse of the survival of Dutch in the language contact setting of seventeenth-century Hamburg.

32 *Grueten*, the main variant used by Heusch senior versus *groeten* 'to greet', is the only Brabantian feature in the Heusch correspondence (see Marynissen 2020: 156–157).

33 These factors, such as the number of speakers and institutional support, have been identified in language contact research (see i. a. Thomason 2001: 22).

34 Some of the commercial letters by other correspondents (see footnote 11) show that Dutch was also used in correspondence with trading partners.

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Sources of the images

Figure 1: Stiftung Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv, S/571 Atlas Klefeker, Bd. 6 Karte 100; courtesy of custodian Kathrin Enzel.

Figures 2 and 3: Digital photos taken by the Brieven als Buit/Letters as Loot research team, archival box HCA 30-223, The National Archives (Kew, London, UK).

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- Brieven als Buit-2/Letters as Loot-2, an additional collection of letters, compiled by Marijke van der Wal, Leiden University. First release 2021. <https://brievenalsbuit2.ivdnt.org>