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Lismont, E.; Rutten, G.J.; Vosters, R.; Beal, J.C.; Lukač, M.; Straaijer, R.

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DUTCH PRESCRIPTIVISM IN A HISTORICAL- SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Measuring the effect of institutionalized prescriptivism

*Eline Lismont, Gijsbert Rutten, and Rik Vosters**

1. Introduction

As is the case for many other European languages, Dutch has a long tradition of metalinguistic commentary, taking the form of, for instance, grammars, orthographies, schoolbooks, or treatises on language. In many of these cases, such works can be seen as part of attempts to standardize the language, with codifiers prescribing specific forms and proscribing others. As we will discuss in this chapter, this even resulted in official norms for grammar and orthography mandated by the Dutch government in the early nineteenth century as an early culmination of corpus planning efforts to regulate and standardize language use.

In this chapter, we discuss such instances of linguistic prescriptivism in the history of Dutch from a historical-sociolinguistic perspective while focusing on the Early and Late Modern period (1550–1850). In Section 2, we discuss the difference between “non-institutionalized” and “institutionalized” prescriptivism. We also argue that prescriptions and proscriptions need to be studied as historical phenomena tied to specific social contexts and language ideologies, where analyses of historical prescriptivism should take into account both their linguistic and social embedding. Section 3 discusses some significant developments in the history of Dutch institutionalized prescriptivism, where we observe how prescriptions became more institutionalized over time, while the social and linguistic embedding of prescriptions also changed. In Section 4, we then discuss the relationship – or lack thereof – between language norms and actual language use, while considering several important factors in the attempt to determine prescriptive success. In this contribution, we focus mostly on the crucial role of chronology and its relation to the social embedding of prescriptivism. This is illustrated in the case study in Section 5, where we discuss changing prescriptions and changing norms of usage

in a historical corpus of Dutch from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. We conclude the chapter by recapitulating the main lines of our argument and the most important findings of our case study along with some recommendations for future research into the history of prescriptivism.

We adopt a wide definition of prescriptivism under which we understand all attempts by metalinguistic commentators to prescribe or proscribe specific forms of language use either explicitly (e.g. by discussing why a particular form should not be used or another is preferred) or implicitly (e.g. by including particular forms in examples or morphological paradigms and excluding others). We do, however, restrict ourselves to prescriptivism targeting people with Dutch as a dominant language, i.e. we do not discuss grammars or language guides for learners of Dutch as a second or foreign language, and we mostly look at comments of language authorities that are laid down in metalinguistic works, although societal processes are also considered.

2. Historical prescriptivism: institutionalization and embedding

Metalinguistic activity is likely to be an inherent aspect of human communication (Cameron, 2012, pp. 1–2), and it often takes the form of corrective practices and attitudes (Moschonas, 2020). Moschonas (2020) distinguishes between two basic types of correctives, viz. correctives proper, which identify what must be used and what should not be used, thus combining prescription, proscription, and permissives, which indicate the circumstances under which certain forms may be used. This approach provides us with sufficiently abstract schemes to cover prescriptive practices from different times and contexts. After all, “verbal hygiene” may be a “general phenomenon”, but “it only exists concretely in specific practices, and these are always socially situated, embedded in history” (Cameron, 2012, p. 2).

Such specific practices can take place in everyday human interaction, for example, when parents correct the language used by their children. In such cases, we may talk about non-institutionalized forms of corrective practices and attitudes, even though they usually involve the reproduction of community norms (cf. Cameron, 2012, p. 2; Curzan, 2014, p. 16). These community norms may be tied to either local or supralocal language ideologies; in the latter case, this can also be the standard language ideology that is simultaneously reproduced in institutional settings such as schools, curricula, and editing policies. The fact that Crystal (2006, p. 197) even compares people’s relationship with the norms of the standard language to the Stockholm syndrome is telling. The institutional embeddedness of the standard language, and the chances of social success associated with this, may prompt parents to instil the standard norms in their children. The difference between non-institutionalized and institutional settings is therefore gradual rather than categorical.

Historical examples of non-institutionalized forms of corrective practices are difficult to uncover, and are typically found in ego-documents, such as personal letters, diaries, and travelogues. A well-known example from the history of Dutch comes from the poet and historian P. C. Hooft (1581–1647). Hooft is considered one of the major authors of the seventeenth century, when the foundation of the Dutch standard was supposedly laid (Rutten, 2016). On 27 October 1646, Hooft sent a letter from Amsterdam to his son Arnout (1630–1680), who was living in Leiden during his studies (van Tricht, 1979, pp. 771–772). He advises his son on his studies and extra-curricular activities such as dancing and fencing. Relevant here is that Hooft also criticizes his son’s language use, formulating a series of correctives proper: the word for “now” is written *nu* instead of *nuij*, the word for “I” is spelt *ik*, not *ick*, the verb “be” is *zijn*, not *sijn*. His son, Hooft claims, should sign his letters *uw onderdaanighste zoon* “your most humble son” instead of *uw onderdaanighsten zoon*, adding the declination of this phrase according

to the nominative, genitive, dative, accusative and ablative cases. The reason for his criticism, Hooft explains, is that he wants his son to learn to write and speak his mother tongue well. After signing the letter, he adds that his son should call himself *Arnout* when writing in Dutch, not *Arnoldus*.

Such non-institutionalized practices, which often take place in spoken interaction, are difficult to identify for historical sociolinguists compared to institutionalized forms of corrective practices and attitudes, which are more easily traceable through language history. However, Havinga and Krogull (2022) show that uncovering language attitudes from historical sources, while difficult, is not impossible. The same text types they mention as valuable sources for research on historical attitudes, namely grammars and schoolbooks, are also often used in research on historical prescriptivism. Typically, the earliest normative publications on Dutch emanate from institutional contexts that trigger metalinguistic practices, such as schools, the printing press, and the literary field, with schoolteachers, printers, and literary authors as the writers of prescriptive works (Dibbets, 1977, p. 24; van der Wal & van Bree, 2008, p. 191). Over time, these metalinguistic practices become institutionalized and part of an increasingly focused normative tradition, maintained by language experts who form a discourse community (Watts, 1999). Nonetheless, such traditions remain sensitive to significant spatio-temporal specificities.

A higher level of institutionalized prescriptivism is reached when corrective practices and attitudes become officialized through policy measures such as school regulations and educational laws. This often happens when language develops into a contested object of socio-political debate. In the history of Dutch, such debates intensified in the course of the eighteenth century, when contemporary cultural nationalism increasingly acquired a political touch. This resulted in an official Dutch language policy in the early nineteenth century, leading to the official codification of the spelling and grammar of Dutch (Rutten, 2019).

Whether institutionalized or not, prescriptive practices are always social phenomena tied to variable language ideologies. Some correctives are extremely stable through time. An example from the history of Dutch is the form of the definite article in the genitive masculine singular. The grammatical tradition promoted the form *des* “of the” from the sixteenth century onwards and well into the nineteenth century (Krogull & Rutten, 2020). The approach presupposes case and gender to be relevant grammatical categories in Dutch, which is not self-evident, and which moreover becomes increasingly problematic in the course of the Early and Late Modern period. The linguistic embedding of this particular prescription has weakened since Dutch has been in the process of losing case and gender distinctions, making this prescription extremely conservative.

This means that the discrepancy between this particular prescription and language use also became greater over time, which raises the question of why a form such as *des* was still prescribed in, say, the nineteenth century. The answer must be partly social, and, in general, such historical changes call for the analysis of the social embedding of corrective practices and attitudes. Social aspects that need to be included in the analyses of historical prescriptivism include the intended audience of the prescriptive publication, the register targeted by corrective practices and the underlying language ideologies motivating them. In the case of *des*, it is important to note that older stages of Dutch, and the seventeenth century in particular, became idealized in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse (Rutten, 2016). The sixteenth-century prescription in *des* usage may be grounded in the selection of one of the variants found in the contemporary linguistic repertoire, or in the desire to comply with classical morphology. In the nineteenth century, the prescription was also motivated by the desire to adopt the forms used (or in any case prescribed) by the literary and norm-providing figures of the seventeenth century.

3. Changes in Dutch historical prescriptivism

Dutch institutionalized prescriptivism begins in the sixteenth century with various works on orthography, most of which were published in the Southern Netherlands in the regions of Flanders and Brabant. These works were usually intended for school use, and the authors were often schoolteachers, printers, or both (Dibbets, 1977). The prescriptions in these works differed significantly from one another due to the regional orientation of many of the authors. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the first fully-fledged grammar of Dutch was published titled *Tive-spraak vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* (Dialogue about Dutch grammar, 1584). Although anonymously published, it is widely assumed that the author was the wealthy merchant H. L. Spieghel (1549–1612). Spieghel was the co-founder of the Amsterdam chamber of rhetoric De Eglantier, and the *Tive-spraak* was in fact presented as a collaborative enterprise of this chamber. The chambers of rhetoric were local communities of adult middle and upper-middle class men with a strong pedagogical purpose. They sought to educate their members in the liberal arts, primarily with the aim of promoting educated regional citizenship, but also in order to develop a learned culture in the vernacular (van Dixhoorn, forthcoming). The *Tive-spraak*, for example, was part of a series of publications in the tradition of the *trivium* focusing on the “artes serminocales”, i.e. grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric. The *trivium* period of Dutch metalanguage ended around 1650 (Klifinan, 1983). A number of grammars and orthographies were published in the seventeenth century, some of which, such as Kók (1649), were indeed still part of a series of publications including texts about logic and rhetoric.

The second half of the seventeenth century saw the rise of a new paradigm: the literary texts produced in the first half of the century were increasingly conceptualized as examples of “good usage”. This led to the Vondelianist approach to language, named after the main author, the poet Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) (Rutten & Vosters, 2013). At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, various prescriptive works addressing style, spelling, grammar, and rhetoric were published. The approach looked back on the literary works of the seventeenth century and aimed to create a similar literary culture by identifying young poets as an important target group. The Vondelianist approach aimed to offer grammatical and stylistic advice to those who were to perform the higher linguistic registers in public life, such as politicians, lawyers, ministers, and literary authors (Rutten, 2019, p. 52).

The prescriptive works of the early periods, and until c. 1700, offered many correctives at various language levels, from orthography to style and discourse. The correctives were primarily targeted towards specific social groups within Dutch society, such as the authors’ immediate peers (Rutten & Vosters, 2021). The next major shift takes place during the eighteenth century, when the target audience of metalinguistic texts is gradually extended to include the population as a whole, against the background of the emerging standard language ideology. This change is accompanied by a pedagogical reorientation of normative grammar and takes place both in the Northern and in the Southern Netherlands. For the northern, Vondelianist tradition, this means that the concrete correctives often remained the same throughout the decades, while their socio-political and language-ideological embedding had dramatically changed (Rutten & Vosters, 2021). By the end of the eighteenth century, the nation and the national language had become the natural points of orientation for authors of prescriptive works.

Thus, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, a second level of institutionalized prescriptivism was reached in the Northern Netherlands. An official language policy was established as part of an educational reform. An important aspect of the new regulations, encompassing also

official spelling and grammar regulations published on behalf of the government (Siegenbeek, 1804; Weiland, 1805), was the introduction of a control mechanism, i.e. a system of school inspection, enabling enforcement of language planning measures (Schoemaker & Rutten, 2017). The decades around 1800 mark the beginning of a still existing national language culture. When the Southern and Northern Netherlands were reunited in 1814, in the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat, the official Northern norms also spread to the South (Vosters et al., 2014). The United Kingdom of the Netherlands ceased to exist in 1830, evoking a debate between integrationists and particularists about the extent to which the written language in the South should comply with the Northern normative tradition (Willemyns, 1993).

Close contacts between Southern and Northern scholars of language and literature were intensified from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, when a series of binational conferences were set up (Willemyns, 1993). One outcome was the plan for a national dictionary that would describe the Dutch vocabulary from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and that would simultaneously fulfil an important prescriptive function by offering writers, and literary authors in particular, correct lexical items, viz. the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (Dictionary of the Dutch Language). Loanwords were excluded to the extent possible (Rutten, 2019, pp. 161–162). In 1863, a new spelling system was introduced in the context of the dictionary, which was eventually adopted by the Belgian and Dutch governments in 1864 and 1883, respectively (Bakker, 1977, p. 146).

Since 1804, spelling has remained part of the official language policy. Today, the Nederlandse Taalunie (Dutch Language Union), a policy organization supported by the Belgian, Dutch, and Surinamese governments, regularly evaluates and updates Dutch spelling. The continued social importance of spelling is illustrated by the annual televised spelling test *Groot Dictie der Nederlandse Taal* (Grand Dictation of the Dutch Language), broadcast from 1990 to 2016, which moved to the radio in 2018. The official 1805 grammar, however, was not only the first, but also the last official grammar of Dutch. This leaves a gap in the standard language culture, resulting in numerous publications, organizations, and websites focusing on style and grammar from a prescriptive perspective, particularly in the twentieth and the twenty-first century (van der Meulen, 2020). Among the most authoritative language advice services are the website of the *Nederlandse Taalunie* and the online advice service of the *Genootschap Onze Taal* (Society Our Language) (van der Meulen, 2020, p. 123), a private initiative originally established in the 1930s in order to reduce the number of German loan words.

In the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, standard Dutch competed with French in many higher registers and domains (e.g. as a language of higher education, in legal proceedings, among social elites) in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Vandenbussche et al., 2004). In addition, the Dutch standard was often perceived to be northern, i.e. exogenous. This complex situation led to a period of Flemish hyperstandardization from the 1950s to the 1980s, characterized by a range of prescriptive institutions aiming to diffuse standard Dutch, including societies and youth organizations, a production house sponsored by industry and business that produced documentaries, advertisements and films, the public broadcasting corporation and numerous newspapers and journals (Jaspers & Van Hoof, 2013). For example, the prescriptive television programme *Hier spreekt men Nederlands* (One speaks Dutch here) was broadcast three days a week from 1964 to 1972. The corrective practices in this period also included pronunciation, which had until then not been a contentious issue in Dutch prescriptivism. Finally, they show once more that corrective practices and attitudes had become matters of national concern and were both socially and ideologically far removed from the earlier days of prescriptivism.

4. Prescription and language use

From the perspective of the history of linguistic thought, the study of prescriptivism is worthwhile and interesting in its own right; but if we want to deal with prescriptivism in relation to central notions in historical sociolinguistics, such as standardization, we need to juxtapose prescriptions and actual language use, and focus on the interaction between both. In older histories of the language, the influence of prescribed language norms on usage was often tacitly assumed, and traditional models of standardization such as Haugen (1966; cf. Joseph, et al., 2020) depart from the idea that particular norms are codified in metalinguistic works and subsequently implemented and spread throughout the community of language users. However, this issue requires empirical investigation, and we argue that any sort of direct influence from prescribed language norms on actual usage should *not* be assumed as a starting point.

Several studies have preliminarily investigated the impact of norms on usage, often with a relatively specific focus on one particular grammar or grammarian (e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2011, McLelland, 2014) or on one particular linguistic feature (e.g. Langer, 2001; Auer, 2009). For Dutch, there has been recent work on both Northern and Southern varieties of the language, mostly from a historical sociolinguistic perspective. Vosters (2011), Vosters et al. (2014) and Rutten and Vosters (2016) set out to explore both changes in prescriptive works from the Southern Low Countries, as well as changes in writing practices during the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, where we can note a striking reorientation in writing practices from about 1815 onwards towards the norms prescribed by Northern grammarians. However, rather than attributing this to prescriptive influence, the authors conclude that both language use and language norms “operate against the same sociolinguistic background, and this shared context can shape both norms and usage, independently from each other, but in a similar fashion” (Vosters et al., 2014, p. 96). Krogull (2018), Rutten, et al. (2020) and Krogull and Rutten (2020) investigate the impact of the *schrijfaalregeling* “written language regulation” and the propagation of these official spelling and grammar regulations published by the Northern Dutch Batavian government in the early nineteenth century (Siegenbeek, 1804; Weiland, 1805). In a range of different genres, they find quite a remarkable pattern of convergence in usage towards the officialized norms over the course of just a few years. In this case, normative influence is both possible and very likely, given the strong policy focused on implementation of the new norms as markers of national identity.

Beyond such relatively specific and fine-grained studies, there is a clear need for larger-scale and more general investigations, systematically evaluating the evolution of writing traditions in the light of ongoing metalinguistic interference with writing. Previous studies suggest the importance of several factors in determining normative success (Rutten & Vosters, 2021). First, it seems that orthographical variables are more easily influenced by prescribed language norms than morphological or syntactic variables: Krogull (2018), for instance, clearly demonstrated the impact of the Siegenbeek (1804) spelling norms on language use in different genres, but does note that this is much less clear and much less certain for the three morphosyntactic features also included in his investigation (i.e. neuter relative pronouns, masculine and feminine singular and plural relative pronouns, and genitive case marking). Second, we may assume that the envelope of variation also plays a significant role: linguistic variables with a more complex feature set, displaying for instance three or four different variants for the same variable (such as the 3 Sg <d>, <t> or <dt> forms of *d*-stem verbs, discussed in the following section), can be assumed to be more resistant to conscious, top-down normative manipulation, compared to features which fall into an easy binary opposition (e.g. <aa> versus <ae> spellings for closed-syllable

long /a:/ phonemes, as also discussed in the next section). Third, we believe that very salient features which are often discussed in grammatical treatises and other normative publications are easier targets for prescriptive success than more obscure features, which are often not even mentioned in normative works (Vosters, 2011).

Before even considering the impact of any of these factors, a careful examination of the chronology of observed changes both in language use and in normative prescriptions is crucial in determining prescriptive success (Anderwald, 2016) – as our case study in Section 5 demonstrates. When the chronology points towards changes in usage preceding changes in norms, the case is relatively clear-cut, in such cases prescriptive influence leading to language change is impossible. What is possible, however, is that prescriptions – while not contributing to the “actuation” of new forms – aid in the further “diffusion” of already ongoing changes, either by slowing down the spread of incoming forms using proscriptions, or by using prescriptions to accelerate the spread of incoming variants. If changes in norms precede changes in usage, there is a possibility for these changes in usage to have arisen as a result of the changed prescriptions – at least logically, the chronology allows for this possibility. Nonetheless, in such cases, we must be careful to avoid the “post hoc ergo propter hoc” pitfall (Moschonas, 2020): it is not because a change in usage follows a change in normative orientation, that the usage change is caused by the normative change. This fallacy is in part at least avoidable by carefully considering the social embedding of corrective practices, namely, identifying and considering target audiences of prescriptive works on the one hand, and differences in language use between genres and text types on the other hand. Grammars prescribing norms for formal language use and aimed at elite audiences of literary authors and fellow-grammarians (Rutten, 2009), for instance, may have been important for changes spreading through parts of the speech community in a top-down fashion, but are highly unlikely to have caused changes from below, which first occurred among the lower ranks of society or in less formal text types. Also, in such cases, effects of prescriptions slowing down or accelerating the spread of new variants should be seen as more likely, taking into account a reasonable time lag between the publication of prescriptive comments and the possible or assumed impact on language use (Anderwald, 2014). The same trend may be observed also across genres, with prescriptions then first affecting texts by authors in the target audience and readership of the grammarian, or genres with high amounts of editorial intervention (e.g. newspapers).

5. Case study: the importance of chronology

To illustrate the importance of the chronology of language change in studies investigating the effect of prescriptivism, we discuss the diachronic development of two orthographic variables in both the metalinguistic tradition and in actual language use to uncover the effectiveness of language prescriptions in the history of Dutch.

The first linguistic variable presented is the representation of the long *a* in closed syllables, a feature that enjoyed a tremendous amount of metalinguistic attention from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The long *a*, which is traditionally lengthened by adding an <e> to <a> in Middle Dutch, can be found in forms like *raed* “council” and *naem* “name”. Yet, in the course of the seventeenth century, the <ae> spelling became stigmatized in Hollandic sources and was no longer the preferred spelling. The doubling of the grapheme <a> then arose as the new and preferred way to indicate the lengthening of the vowel. Spelling practices like *raad* and *naam* thus became more prominent, and ultimately made it into the national orthography of Siegenbeek (1804) and the grammar of Weiland (1805) introduced in the early nineteenth

century as the official language policy of all administrative and educational domains in the Northern Netherlands.¹

The second feature we investigate in our case study is the spelling of the final /t/ in the second- and third-person singular verbal endings of *d*-stem verbs, such as *leiden* “to lead”. The phonetic variant <t>, as in *(hij) leit* “(he) leads”, was the most common spelling in the Middle Dutch period. In the second half of the eighteenth century, two other variants gained ground: <d> and <dt>. The former spelling arose out of a principle of uniformity, where all singular *d*-stem verb conjugations had the same ending, as in *(hij) leid*. The alternative spelling *(hij) leidt*, which is based on etymological (abbreviation of the medieval form *(hij) leidet*) and morphological grounds (stem + *t* principle), was equally used and accepted into the official language policy in the Northern Netherlands. Later in the nineteenth century, at the time of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830), both the double grapheme spelling <aa> in closed syllables and the <dt> verbal endings were also introduced as the official spelling variants in the Southern Netherlands as part of the language policy of King Willem I.

In order to establish the chronology of language change for these orthographic variables, we mapped out the diachronic development of both features in a corpus of metalinguistic texts, on the one hand, and a usage corpus, on the other. The corpus of metalinguistic texts comprises 74 authoritative spelling guides and (school) grammars published between 1550 and 1830. We selected works from both the Northern Netherlands (the present-day Kingdom of the Netherlands) and the Southern Netherlands (the Dutch-speaking territories of what is today Belgium), which are written in Dutch by native speakers and intended for a readership of mother tongue language users.²

The patterns in the prescriptions and metalinguistic comments on the two orthographic features are compared to the developments in the usage corpus, namely, a preliminary version of the *Historical Corpus of Dutch*, a multi-genre corpus compiled at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Leiden University with the aim to investigate pluricentricity in the history of Dutch. The corpus therefore comprises documents from Holland and Brabant, two central regions in the Northern Netherlands and the Southern Netherlands respectively, as well as texts from a more peripheral region in each of the language areas, Zeeland in the North and Flanders in the South. The material in the usage corpus includes texts from the middle of each century (sixteenth–nineteenth centuries), and the preliminary version of the corpus covers two text genres: pamphlets and ego-documents. While pamphlets are a rather diverse genre in which commentaries on political and religious topics, public ordinances and other similar texts are included, the documents selected for inclusion in the corpus are all printed and of a rather formal nature. The ego-document component, on the contrary, comprises more personal and handwritten documents, such as personal chronicles, diaries, and travelogues, which are often produced to be read by the author and their relatives only (Elspaß, 2012).

To establish the patterns of variation and change in the metalinguistic discourse, we uncovered the prescriptions and other normative comments concerning the two above-mentioned orthographic variables in the corpus of metalinguistic texts. We hereby distinguished between explicit prescriptions, where an actual comment on the feature is formulated, and implicit prescriptions, which are instances where the orthographic feature is used in examples and paradigms in the metalinguistic work without explicitly commenting on the feature itself. Both types of prescriptions are coded in terms of the prescribed variant, and they are processed together in the case study. This means that we prioritized the explicit prescriptions in our analysis (Example 1 and 2), but if an explicit comment is lacking, we coded the implicit prescription of the grammarian in the analysis (Example 3 and 4).

Explicit prescription:

- (1) Wat nu aangaat de Lettergreepen, waarinmen de A volko-men moet hooren, alſchoon'er Médeklinkers naa vólgen, het gebruik heeft wel meest gewild, dat men dan de A verdubbele en AA ſchryve, als in *Gaan, Slaan, Haat, Maagd*, enz.

As for the syllables, in which the A must fully be heard, and which are followed by consonants, usage has most wanted that the A should be doubled, so that one writes AA, as in *Gaan, Slaan, Haat, Maagd*, etc.

Van Belle 1755, 3

- (2) Dóch om weder tót de T te keeren, zy behoort ook gebruykt te worden in de tweede en derde perſoon der Werkwoorden, als *Gy, hy, zy wordt, bidt, houdt, bindt, vindt, biedt*, enz.

To turn back to T, it should also be used in the second and third person of the verbs, as in *Gy, hy, zy wordt, bidt, houdt, bindt, vindt, biedt*, etc.

Séwel, 1708, p. 27

Implicit prescription:

- (3) De *h* [...] moet uytgesproken worden met het ophaelen des adems uyt de borst: en diend beſonderlyk om het onderscheyd te maeken tusschen veéle woorden, die zonder deéze de zelve uytſpraak zouden hebben. Zal hier van eenige voorbeél-den laeten volgen. [...] *haes*, wilde beest; *aes*, voedsel

The *h* [...] must be pronounced with the breath drawn from the chest and serves in particular to distinguish many words which would have the same pronunciation without it. I will give some examples of this. [...] **haes**, wild animal; **aes**, food

Ballieu, 1792, p. 5

- (4) “Een werk-woord is een spraek-deel, dat het zijn, doen of lijden beteekent, als: ik ben, gij bemint, hij word gegeesseld

A verb is a part of speech that expresses the being, the doing or the suffering, as: ik ben, gij bemint, **hij word** gegeesseld

Henckel, 1815, p. 22

As Figure 26.1 shows, the prescriptions concerning the spelling of the long *a* in closed syllables develop differently in the Northern Netherlands and the Southern Netherlands. The first prescriptions favoring <aa> appear already in the sixteenth century in both language areas. The seventeenth century, conversely, is more diverse with a high degree of variability in the Northern Netherlands. Some codifiers prescribe <aa> whereas other grammarians prefer the older variant <ae>. There are no metalinguistic comments in the seventeenth-century South, but in the eighteenth century, we notice that mixed prescriptions pave the way for a uniform Southern tradition of <ae> prescriptions in the second half of the eighteenth century. At the same time, almost all Northern codifiers find consolidation in the <aa> spelling, indicating

distinctive metalinguistic traditions in both language areas: <aa> as the preferred variant in the North, whereas <ae> was favored in the South. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, and mainly during the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, most Southern grammarians turn to mixed prescriptions again or even adjust to the Northern tradition and start codifying the more innovative <aa> spelling.

When compared to language use, a different and more gradual pattern is observed (Figure 26.2).³ All of the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century is characterized by <ae> spellings in both language areas. Although the first traces of language change appear around 1650 (<aa> = 18.3%), the actual transition from <ae> to <aa> occurs in the eighteenth century only in the Northern Netherlands (88.8%). Meanwhile, Southern language

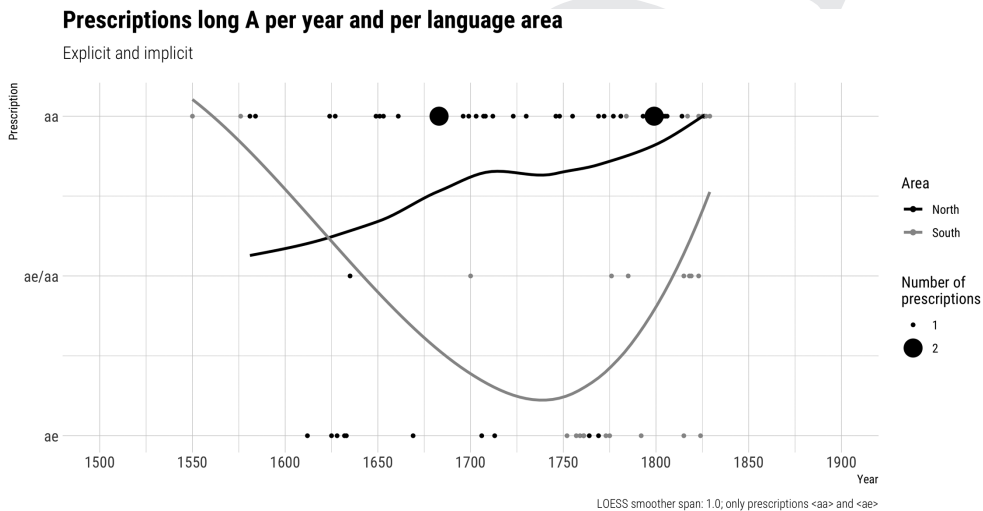


Figure 26.1 Prescriptions long a in closed syllables.⁴

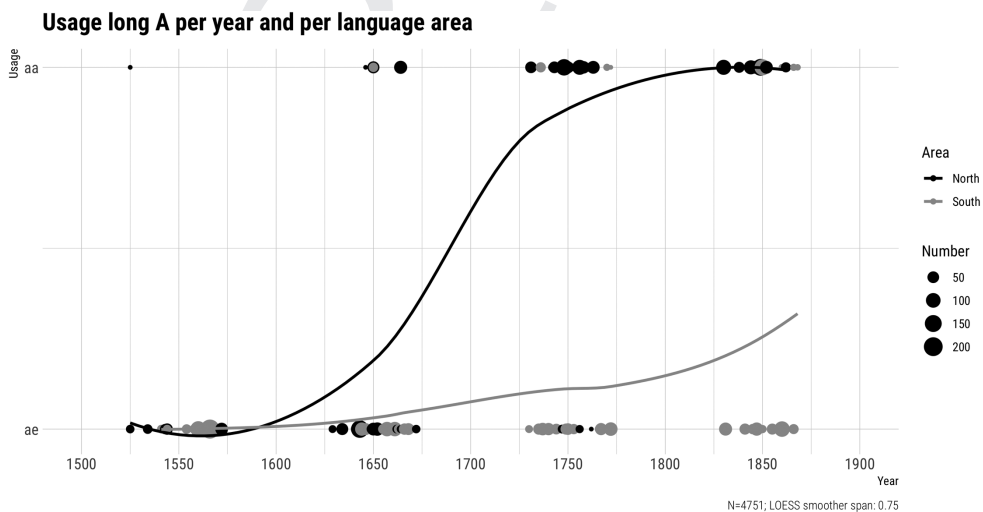


Figure 26.2 Usage long a in closed syllables.

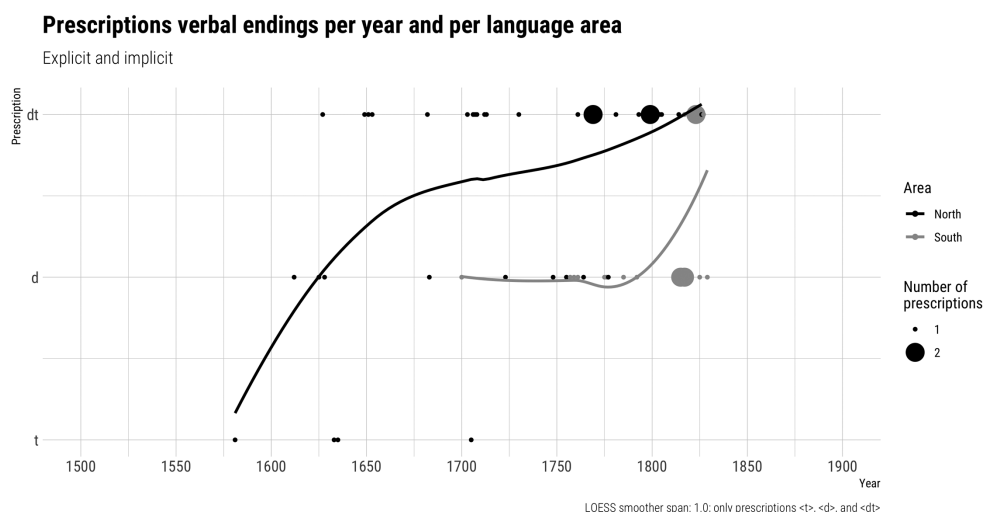


Figure 26.3 Prescriptions verbal endings of *d*-stem verbs.

users largely adhere to <ae>, although the beginning of a change to <aa> is also noticeable here (11.4%). The change towards <aa> further developed in the nineteenth-century Southern Netherlands (25.7%), whereas the transition to the incoming variant was already complete in the Northern Netherlands.

In terms of chronology, the change to <aa> in the normative tradition precedes the developments in actual language use, since the first prescriptions favoring <aa> already show up in the sixteenth century when <ae> spelling practices were still common. As mentioned in the previous section, a chronology where a change in metalinguistic works is followed by a change in usage possibly indicates a transition in language use that is initiated from prescriptive influence. Two facts, however, contradict the possible effect of prescriptivism on language use.

First, we have to consider the disparate prescriptions in the seventeenth century, which are opposed to the rather consistent writing practices in actual language use. As these capricious patterns in the metalinguistic discourse continue in the eighteenth century, at the time that usage shows a gradual change towards <aa> (cf. traditional S-curve in the Northern Netherlands), the comparison of both patterns in norms and usage suggests that prescriptions were not steady enough to affect language use. Moreover, when considering the time gap between the first <aa> prescriptions in the sixteenth century and the convincing change in language use, which only occurs in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the possibility of prescriptive influence becomes even more unlikely. Although an imposed change in the normative tradition needs some decades to establish in language use, a time gap of two or three centuries between prescriptive pronouncements and change in usage is unlikely.

The prescriptions on the spelling of the second- and third-person singular of *d*-stem verbs initially vary, as Figure 26.3 illustrates. In the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the three variants appear next to each other, and they are prescribed equally often. The first language norms in the Southern Netherlands show up only in the beginning of the eighteenth century and introduce a highly uniform tradition of <d> prescriptions which lasts until the early nineteenth century. Although there is some variation in the eighteenth-century Northern prescriptions, a preference for <dt> emerges, which also culminates in uniformity towards the

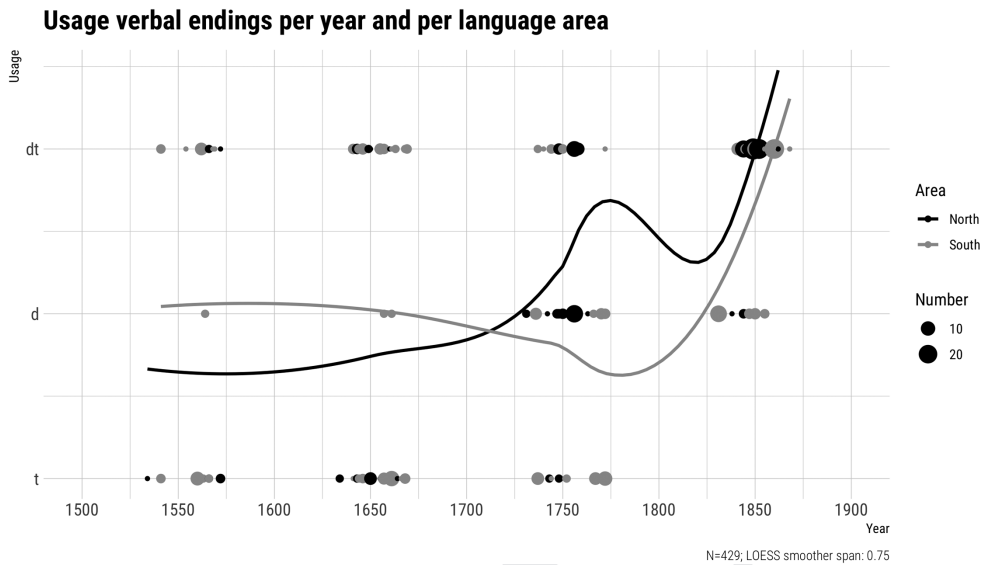


Figure 26.4 Usage verbal endings of d-stem verbs.

end of the century. Similar to the long *a*, albeit less pronounced, the eighteenth century presents a distinct metalinguistic tradition in the Northern and the Southern Netherlands, with <d> clearly being the Southern variant, whereas <dt> is the favorable form in the North. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, and especially towards the end of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 1820s, most Southern codifiers start adhering to the Northern norm by prescribing <dt>.

As far as language use is concerned, most of the standardization history of this variable is characterized by variation (Figure 26.4). In the North of the language area, on the one hand, the variability between <t> and <dt> observed in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century even increases in the eighteenth century, when also <d> shows up in language use. This variability largely disappears in the nineteenth century, as 92 percent of the Northern language users makes the change to <dt> spellings. In the Southern Netherlands, on the other hand, the variation between three variants persists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. It is only in the nineteenth century that <t> disappears from Southern usage, and that 65.4 percent of the language users opts for <dt> verb endings instead. Unlike in the North, a considerable number of Southern scribes still uses the <d> variant (34.6 percent), which means that the real breakthrough to <dt> in the Southern Netherlands did not occur before 1850 and more probably in the late nineteenth century.

Since the sixteenth and seventeenth century are characterized by a large amount of variation in both language norms and usage, the possibility of a prescriptive effect is ruled out at the time. Even so, when looking at the chronology, we notice that the Northern prescriptions favoring <d> in the seventeenth century precede the occurrence of the variant in actual language use in the eighteenth century. As we have seen before, this is a scenario that allows for prescriptive influence. But even though the trend shows up in the metalinguistic discourse first, and is later on followed in usage, norms may not directly influence usage, and, here, this is even highly unlikely. The seventeenth-century prescriptions, after all, are all implicit in nature, which means that actual prescriptions with explicit comments do not exist for this variable at

the time. In addition, these normative works have a relatively limited scope in terms of target audiences, while we observe the incoming <d> spellings both in the ego-documents and in the pamphlets in our corpus. Hence, it is very unlikely that metalanguage has affected language use. The <d> spelling therefore most probably arose as an innovation in Northern language use between 1670 and 1730.

On the contrary, when considering the chronology of language change, we also observe the uniformity in the early-nineteenth century Northern prescriptions, which is followed by an increasing use of <dt> forms in Northern usage around 1850. As the <dt> variant was already in use back then, a direct impact of prescriptivism with codifiers initiating a change, is ruled out. Nonetheless, other than introducing a change in language use, the tradition of uniform prescriptions has probably played a role in this increase of <dt> in language use, more specifically by accelerating the change towards the prescribed variant. The most effective and widespread prescriptions at the time were probably produced by Siegenbeek, who published the official spelling in the Northern Netherlands in 1804. In his national orthography, the codifier thus prescribed a form that was already common in language use, but he succeeded in disseminating and actually establishing the <dt> variant in Northern usage (Krogull, 2018).

Also Southern language practices represent the same augmenting use of <dt> around 1850. As the first prescriptions favoring <dt> show up in the Southern Netherlands during the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the rise of <dt> in usage is situated one or two decades later in this part of the language area. Although this particular chronology again allows for a restricted impact of language norms on usage, similar to the influence of Siegenbeek in the Northern Netherlands, the change to <dt> in Southern language use is probably unrelated to prescriptive influence. Both language norms and usage changed to <dt> more or less simultaneously, exactly at the time when the United Kingdom of the Netherlands was established and shortly thereafter. The changed sociohistorical and language-political context, with the Northern norm entering the Southern language area, thus likely caused the shift in both language norms and usage in the Southern Netherlands (cf. Vosters et al., 2014).

For both orthographic variables it becomes apparent that the tradition of metalinguistic works and actual language use in the Southern Netherlands adjusted to the Northern norm in the nineteenth century. That these features developed in the direction of the codified variants in the Northern Netherlands is not surprising, though. As Siegenbeek (1804) prescribed the <aa> and <dt> variants in the official Northern language policy, these forms were also introduced in the Southern Netherlands at the time of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, and it is particularly during this period, when the Northern and Southern Netherlands were reunited, that Southern grammarians started adopting the Northern language norms. Around the same time and shortly after the period of reunification, also Southern language use shifts to the Northern <aa> and <dt> variants. This implies that Northern forms generally became more widespread in the Southern Netherlands from 1815 onwards, and accordingly both Southern codifiers and actual language use turned to Siegenbeek's prescribed variants (Vosters et al., 2014).

Overall, by comparing the chronology of language change in a corpus of metalinguistic texts, on the one hand, and a multi-genre usage corpus, on the other, we were able to unravel the question whether changes in historical language use are caused by prescriptivism. A direct impact of norms on usage in the actuation of language change is, after all, only possible (although not necessary) if changes in metalanguage convincingly precede trends in usage. Otherwise, when trends show up in usage first, grammars simply reflect these changes, and prescriptions can only affect already ongoing change. In this case study, we observed that prescriptivism thus had little effect on language use. As codifiers did not manage to initiate a change in usage, a direct influence of norms on usage in the transmission of language change is

lacking for the two variables under scrutiny. However, by comparing patterns of variation and change in both language norms and actual usage, we did uncover instances where grammarians may have succeeded in accelerating the ongoing transmission of incoming forms in language use. The nineteenth-century codifiers, and more specifically the official Siegenbeek spelling, had a limited influence on language use, by successfully affecting a change that was already in progress.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed prescriptivism in Dutch language history from a historical-sociolinguistic perspective, focusing mostly on the Early and Late Modern periods. After discussing and illustrating two core concepts in historical prescriptivism – that is, the notion of institutionalization on the one hand and the issue of social and linguistic embedding of prescriptions on the other – we gave an overview of how prescriptivism in Dutch changed over time in this regard. We discussed how normative practices started to become increasingly more institutionalized over time, with a strong pedagogical turn in grammar writing taking place during the eighteenth century, and a full institutionalization in the early nineteenth century, when a formal corpus planning policy with official spelling and grammar norms was adopted nation-wide. Meanwhile, we also observed how prescriptivism gradually became socially embedded, with a target audience moving away from literary circles and specific, elite social groups, to include the entire nation as part of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century nation building enterprise.

In the second part of this chapter, we warned against simplistic assumptions about prescriptive influence on actual language use. Discussing possibly relevant factors such as the nature of the variable (i.e. orthography versus morphosyntactic features), the envelope of variation (binary oppositions versus more complex sets of variants), and metalinguistic salience (how frequently particular variable appear on the radar of grammarians and other codifiers), we mostly focused on the role of chronology. Here, we argued that the default assumption should not be that norms impacted language use, and we discussed a careful examination of the chronology of innovations appearing in prescriptions and in actual language use as a prerequisite before any assumptions about prescriptive success can be made. In fact, even in cases where normative injunctions clearly and reasonably – taking into account a possible time lag for prescriptions to spread – predate changes in usage, we pleaded for more attention to the social embedding of prescriptions (e.g. in terms of genres and target audience) to avoid the “post hoc ergo propter hoc” fallacy.

Finally, we considered prescriptions and language use across the centuries for two orthographical variables in Dutch: the representation of the long *a* in closed syllables and the spelling the final /t/ in second- and third-person singular verbal endings of *d*-stem verbs. For the long *a* spellings, we saw a pattern where the chronology of change allowed for possible prescriptive influence: prescriptions to favor <aa> over <ae> already appeared in the sixteenth century, while <aa> only started to appear to any significant degree in usage from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. However, considering the overall pattern of change in prescriptions versus language use especially highlights how different both developments were across the centuries. Prescriptions go back and forth displaying a capricious pattern with a strong and clear North–South divide, while actual usage shows a much more gradual pattern of change towards the incoming <aa> forms, with the development in the Southern Netherlands lagging behind that of the Northern provinces. Based on this overall observation, in addition to the large time lag between the first <aa> prescriptions and its first occurrence in usage, we showed

that prescriptive influence – although possible – is not very likely for this variable. For the second variable, the *d*-stem spellings, we see equally distinct patterns when comparing the developments in norms with those in usage. The earliest <t> spellings are used well into the eighteenth century, long after the normative consensus shifted away from <t>, while the modern incoming <dt> variant was already in use for centuries before codifiers notice and select it as the preferred variant. Only for the <d> spellings, prescriptions reasonably predate usage, but the implicit nature of the prescriptions and their limited social embedding again make prescriptive influence highly unlikely.

With the case study of Dutch orthographical norms and usage, we have demonstrated how mapping out the chronology of change allows us to move beyond easy assumptions of normative influence, and even beyond simple dichotomies of norms influencing language use or vice versa. Systematically determining the chronology of language change is thus of great importance in studies quantitatively investigating the effect of prescriptivism in historical settings. In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that the success of prescriptions is not necessarily limited to initiating new changes, but prescriptive influence can likewise take place by reinforcing or slowing down ongoing changes that already have some roots in language use, as was the case for the official Siegenbeek prescriptions in the early nineteenth century. Although this case study is still limited in its scope, we argue that future studies of norms and usage should attempt to investigate systematically the relationship between the two while taking into account the chronology of change as well as other factors.

Notes

- ★ We wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) for the ongoing research project entitled “Setting the standard: Norms and usage in Early and Late Modern Dutch (1550–1850)”, in which the case study discussed in this chapter is to be situated.
- 1 Other variants, such as <a> and <ai>, did exist as well but from the Early Modern period onwards, but they are so rare that they hardly play any role in either the metalinguistic discourse or actual language use. We therefore focus on the two main variants of the variable.
- 2 Because of the scanty number of metalinguistic works in the sixteenth-century Southern Netherlands, we included one spelling guide that is written in Latin: A. Sexagius, *Orthographia Linguae Belgicae* (1576).
- 3 Note that we generated a simple random sample of 5,000 out of 17,720 hits of long A in the two subcorpora of the *Historical Corpus of Dutch*. From this random sample, 4,751 results were drawn for the corpus analysis.
- 4 We projected the main variants in terms of prescriptions and usage onto distinct points on a numeric scale (1–2 and 1–2–3) on the y axis, which allowed us to add locally estimated scatterplot smoothing to visualize larger-scale trends in our data (cf. the two-colored lines on each plot).

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