Assessing Dutch-French language choice in private family correspondence: from intra-writer variation to the bigger picture

Krogull, A.; Puttaert, J.; Rutten, G.J.; Schiegg, M.; Huber, J.

Intra-Writer Variation in Historical Sociolinguistics

Markus Schiegg and
Judith Huber (eds)

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ANDREAS KROGULL, JILL PUTTAERT & GIJSBERT RUTTEN

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ABSTRACT
The present chapter examines Dutch-French language choice in the history of the Northern Low Countries, focusing on the private domain in the nineteenth century. Seeking to assess the phenomenon from a quantitative perspective, while meaningfully integrating the role of intra-writer variation, we present two complementary approaches. On the basis of a substantial dataset of private family correspondence, we first illustrate a quantitative methodology that allows us to systematically study the sociolinguistic dynamics that determine language choice. The variables under investigation include gender constellations and familial relationships. Secondly, we zoom in on intra-writer variation in three selected family archives, taking a more qualitative perspective in order to add valuable nuances to the 'bigger picture'.

1 Introduction[1]

Language choice in European settings of multilingualism has attracted a fair amount of interest in historical sociolinguistics and neighbouring disciplines (e.g. Rjéoutski & Frijhoff 2018). Many of these contact settings can be situated in the broader context of the phenomenon often referred to as 'European francophonie' (Rjéoutski et al. 2014), describing the

1 The research was supported by the Dutch Research Council (NWO), project 'Pardon my French? Dutch-French language contact in the Netherlands, 1500–1900'.

practice of French in language communities outside France as a second or foreign language. In the Northern Low Countries, that is, the area roughly corresponding to the present-day Netherlands, Dutch-French contact goes back to the Middle Ages. Alongside the influx of French loans into Dutch and other contact-induced changes, the enduring contact setting also led to situations of language choice, where Dutch could potentially give way to French in various domains. Initially serving as a lingua franca for international trade and diplomacy, French also acquired a socio-cultural dimension as a 'language of distinction' among the upper ranks of Dutch society. Surprisingly, large-scale empirical studies of language choice, enabling us to test claims about the alleged *verfransing* 'Frenchification' (Frijhoff 1989), are still scarce (Rutten et al. 2015: 146).

When studying the sociolinguistic dynamics that determine language choice, the private domain appears to be of particular interest. Historical research on prominent individuals or specific families reveals that French was widely used in letters, diaries and other ego-documents, most notably in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ruberg 2011; van Strien-Chardonneau 2018). However, we argue that in order to understand '*who* speaks *what* language to *whom* and *when*', recalling Fishman's (1965) famous question, language choice needs to be assessed more systematically. In this chapter, we therefore investigate Dutch-French language choice from a quantitative perspective that can provide insights on the bigger picture, while fully acknowledging language choice as a facet of intra-writer variation.

First, we outline the sociohistorical context of Dutch-French language contact in Section 2. In Section 3, we describe our methodology and the dataset compiled for this study. Section 4 presents some quantitative results, before zooming in on intra-writer variation. Section 5 contains the discussion and conclusion.

2 Sociohistorical background and language contact

2.1 French in the Dutch context

French and Dutch share a long history from the early Middle Ages onwards, which continues into the period central to the present chapter. French was used in the Low Countries in the political and commercial domains: French was politically important, for example, during the Burgundian and Habsburg regimes in the late Middle Ages and the Early-modern period. The two decades from 1795 to 1815 constitute the so-called French period, when the Low Countries formed a vassal state of France. French was also dominant in international diplomacy and trade in Early and Late Modern times (Frijhoff 2015: 116). Numerous social and cultural contacts brought French to the Low Countries. Subsequent waves of so-called Huguenot migration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, comprising religious as well as economic refugees, led to the spread of French in domains such as religion and education: Walloon churches and French schools were established across the Low Countries (Frijhoff 2003; Dodde 2020). In addition, many printers, writers, and booksellers of French descent positioned the Netherlands, that is, the northern parts of the Low Countries, in the heart of the international Republic of Letters (Frijhoff 2003). French furthermore became a language of culture for aristocratic and learned circles, both in the Netherlands and internationally (Rjéoutski et al. 2014; Frijhoff 2015; Offord et al. 2018). While Dutch was the dominant language for many people by the eighteenth century, French books were typically still found in the aforementioned privileged circles (Keblusek 1997; Streng 2008; de Vries 2011). It has been shown that French was even used in private letters and diaries, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ruberg 2011; van Strien-Chardonneau & Kok Escalle 2017; van Strien-Chardonneau 2018).

The outcomes of the contact situation were manifold: a presence of French in various domains, increasing multilingualism among certain social groups and individuals, as well as contact-induced changes in the Dutch language. Both societal and individual multilingualism are connected to

the issue of language choice, which is the topic of the present chapter. Contact-induced changes can be found in the lexicon and the morphology of Dutch, perhaps also in particular morphosyntactic patterns, which is however still in need of further investigation (van der Sijs 2002; Assendelft et al. forthcoming; de Vooys 1970: 135; van den Toorn et al. 1997: 405; van der Horst 2008: 1150).

An additional effect of the contact situation is the rise of a strong metalinguistic discourse against the alleged *verfransing* 'Frenchification'. This discourse has existed from at least the sixteenth century onwards, and has targeted both contact-induced changes such as borrowings as well as language choice, viz. when supposedly Dutch-speakers adopt French for certain purposes (Rutten et al. 2015: 148f.; Frijhoff 1989; Vogl 2015). The anti-French discourse, which peaked in the eighteenth century, did not only target linguistic issues. It also concerned wider cultural models and needs to be seen in the context of emergent Dutch cultural nationalism in the eighteenth century, which created an opposition of French monarchism and aristocratic values with Dutch republicanism and mercantilism (Kloek & Mijnhardt 2001: 76f.).

2.2 French as a socio-cultural phenomenon

As elsewhere in Europe (Rjéoutski et al. 2014; Offord et al. 2018), the use of French in the Northern Low Countries not only fulfilled functional needs, such as international communication, but was also a social and cultural phenomenon (Argent et al. 2014: 15) well into the nineteenth century. Associated with the upper ranks of society as a language of distinction, French became 'a means of raising one's status, because of the prestige of court culture and the behavioural model of the elite derived from it' (Frijhoff 2015: 129). This role of French as a form of cultural capital was often 'as important as strictly utilitarian considerations, if not more so' (van Strien-Chardonneau 2014: 154). While the practice of French thus functioned as 'a sign of recognition between people belonging to the same social group' (van Strien-Chardonneau 2014: 171), that is, the elite encompassing the nobility, aristocracy, patriciate and

emerging bourgeoisie, it was hardly common among the middle and lower strata (cf. Böhm 2014: 206 on French in Prussia).

Focusing on the domain of private life, Kok Escalle and van Strien-Chardonneau (2017: 9f.) emphasize the role of French as 'a language of culture shared between people who are intimate', as found in ego-documents such as diaries and letters, widely preserved in Dutch family archives (cf. Ruberg 2011: 68–75). The function as language of intimacy has also been attested for other European settings of Francophonie. Offord (2014: 385f.), for instance, notes that for the Russian elite French was 'the preferred idiom […] for various kinds of ego-writing – the personal diary, the album, the travel account, autobiographic reminiscences'.

Studies on historical multilingualism in the Dutch context, often in relation to French, have predominantly explored the topic of language choice through case studies on well-known individuals or families (e.g. van Strien-Chardonneau 2018; Joby 2014) or specific cities (e.g. Kessels-van der Heijde 2015). Ruberg (2011), in addition to her qualitative observations on elite correspondence, also presents some quantitative findings on language choice, still based on a fairly small number of five families from the period 1770–1850. Partly due to the limited representativeness of her letter data, Ruberg (2011: 70) concludes that it is 'perhaps far more revealing to approach the question of language choice from a more qualitative perspective'.

In order to complement previous case studies, we argue that a more quantitative way of assessing language choice is needed to understand who, in the language community, wrote in Dutch and/or in French (to whom and when). Intra-writer variation is a crucial aspect of the phenomenon, and we therefore advocate a methodological approach that enables us to learn about the 'bigger picture' while meaningfully integrating the role of the individual writer.

3 Data and method

3.1 Methodology

Our principal aim is to systematically assess Dutch-French language choice in the history of the Northern Low Countries based on solid empirical evidence, thus going beyond the mostly qualitative observations of individuals' language choices. In order to gain a fuller understanding of 'the dynamics which determine language choice in circumstances where knowledge of more than one language makes choice possible' (Offord 2020: 14), we argue that the issue of historical language choice can and should be tackled quantitatively. At the same time, such an approach needs to acknowledge and incorporate the key role of the individual (identifiable) writer. Intra-individual variation with regard to language choice is, in fact, at the very heart of our methodology (cf. Fishman 1965: 76; Head 1995: 592).

We collected a considerable number of private letter data from Dutch family archives across the Netherlands, spanning the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Based on digitized (though untranscribed) manuscript sources, a detailed inventory was compiled for each family, comprising an extensive set of metadata. These family databases include information about the letters (e.g. date and place of writing), biographical data of their writers (e.g. name, gender, date and place of birth), as well as sociolinguistic parameters describing the relationship between senders and addressees, that is, the communicative setting of letter writing in which a language choice is made. We operationalized metadata into variables like gender constellations (male-female, male-male, female-female, female-male) and familial relationships (e.g. parent-child, child-parent, siblings, spouses).

Most importantly, a language choice had to be assigned to each text. Informed by the process of inventorying and manually reading through all letters, we opted for five linguistic categories: (1) 'Dutch', (2) 'Dutch/French', (3) 'French', (4), 'French/Dutch', and (5) '50/50'. Categories (1) and (3) refer to the two most monolingual language choices, either with Dutch or French as the primary language. Note that these categories may not be

entirely monolingual, as they allow for loanwords from or brief switches into the other language. In categories (2) and (4), we can still assign one dominant language to a text, be it Dutch (in the case of 'Dutch/French') or French (in 'French/Dutch'). However, the amount of code-switching is more substantial, to the extent that multi-word switches or entire passages written in the other language become characteristic of these two categories. Finally, a fifty-fifty category was added to account for those cases where Dutch and French are used to roughly the same extent, making it impossible to identify a single primary language.

As regards the representative selection of historical correspondence data, a well-defined set of criteria seemed crucial. The scopes of family archives can range from copious to fragmentary, typically with a few (often male) family members being overrepresented in the preserved correspondence. Therefore, a careful selection needs to be made when establishing a balance in such an unevenly distributed mass of data, both within and across family archives. Taking into consideration those divergent scopes, we allowed for a maximum of forty letters per family, levelling the differences between larger and smaller archives. When possible, we selected texts by at least five different writers of each family. Furthermore, a maximum of four different addressees per sender was defined, as well as a limit of three letters per sender to the same addressee. No letter writer is thus represented by more than twelve texts, preventing the overrepresentation of language choices made by particularly prolific writers.

Importantly, language choice is represented at the level of the unique relationship between one letter writer (or sender) and one specific family member (or addressee), rather than the individual's outgoing family correspondence in its entirety.[2] For the representative selection of (up to) forty letters per family, we draw on all inventoried letters. To illustrate this stage of our methodology, we give three simplified examples. If, for instance, all

2 The difference between these two approaches is also highlighted by Fishman, who argues that the approach considering relationships not only recognizes that 'interacting members of a family […] are *hearers* as well as *speakers* (i.e. that there may be a distinction between multilingual *comprehension* and multilingual *production*)', but also that 'their language behavior may be more than merely a matter of individual preference or facility but also a matter of *role-relations*' (1965: 76).

letters within a sender-addressee unit are written in the same linguistic category, say, 'Dutch', then three letters are selected to represent the language choice within this unit. If, in the case of more than one linguistic category within a sender-addressee unit, the majority of inventoried letters is 'Dutch', with some additional letters written in 'French', the selection of three letters comprises two texts representing the prevalent language choice 'Dutch', and one text representing the other language choice 'French'. A sender-addressee unit with three different language choice options (e.g. 'Dutch', 'French', 'French/Dutch') is represented by one letter for each category,[3] irrespective of their exact proportion.

3.2 Dataset

The case study presented in this article focuses on private family correspondence in the nineteenth century, that is, letters written in the period 1800–99. The texts in this dataset were collected from thirty-six Dutch family archives, covering twelve cities from ten provinces across the language area.[4] Three families were selected for each city. As summarized in Table 14.1, the dataset contains a representative selection of 1,329 private family letters (narrowed down from more than 7,000 inventoried letters in total), written by 371 individual letter writers. With regard to the level of representing language choice, the dataset comprises 563 unique sender-addressee relationships. Whenever possible, we also aimed for a balanced inclusion of genders (for both senders and addressees), familial relationships, and generations.

3 The maximum of three selected letters had to be exceeded in only a handful of cases, namely when more than three different language choices (i.e. four or five) could be attested within the same sender-addressee unit.

4 These cities are Amsterdam, Arnhem, Den Bosch, Groningen, Haarlem, Leeuwarden, Leiden, Maastricht, Middelburg, The Hague, Utrecht, and Zwolle (in alphabetical order).

Table 14.1. Dataset of nineteenth-century private family correspondence

N families	N letters	N writers	N sender-addressee units
36	1,329	371	563

4 Results

4.1 Quantitative results

Looking at the overall distribution of language choice in the nineteenth-century dataset (Table 14.2), the prevalence of Dutch immediately stands out. The two categories with Dutch as the primary language (i.e. 'Dutch' and 'Dutch/French') constitute over 75 %, while the two French-dominant categories combined (i.e. 'French' and 'French/Dutch') represent less than 23 %. Thus, the share of French in nineteenth-century family correspondence should not be overestimated, although French is no marginal language either. The fact that Dutch is the dominant language in our dataset should come as no surprise, since the heyday of French in the Northern Low Countries is traditionally located in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Argent et al. 2014: 1; van der Wal & van Bree 2014: 254; Wright 2016: 134).

When we look at language choice across gender (of the letter writer), no major differences can be found. The two Dutch categories combined account for 77.5 % in letters from male writers and for 72.3 % in letters written by women. The share of the two French categories is 20.6 % and 26.4 %, respectively. These results may seem unexpected if we think of assumptions about French being a 'women's language' (cf. van Strien-Chardonneau

Table 14.2. Relative distribution of language choice in the nineteenth-century dataset (N = 1,329)

Dutch		Dutch/French		French		French/Dutch		50/50	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
957	72.0	45	3.4	261	19.6	44	3.3	22	1.7

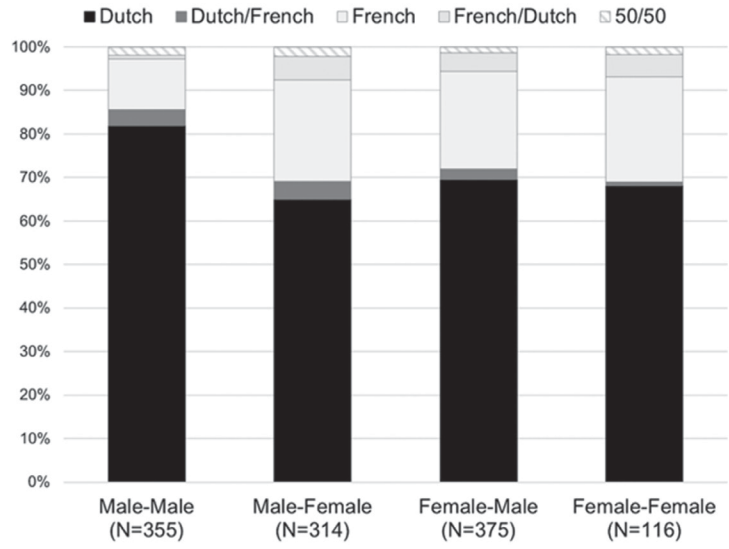

Figure 14.1. Language choice across gender constellations.

2018: 76; Ruberg 2011: 70). However, if we explore gender constellations, taking into consideration the role relations within the letters, a gender effect can indeed be attested (Figure 14.1).

Dutch occurs most frequently in letters written by and addressed to men, where the share of Dutch accounts for no less than 82 %, as opposed to 11.5 % for French. Strikingly, French is used more often in letters written to and by women: men writing to women choose French in 23.2 % of all cases, women writing to men in 22.4 %, and women writing to women in 24.1 %. This suggests that French is more frequently used when a woman is part of the communicative setting. In other words, if a woman is involved (either as sender or addressee), we find a higher proportion of French. Ruberg (2011: 70), in her study on Dutch elite correspondence from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, comes to a similar conclusion, emphasizing the role of women within the sender-addressee relation with regard to the choice of French.

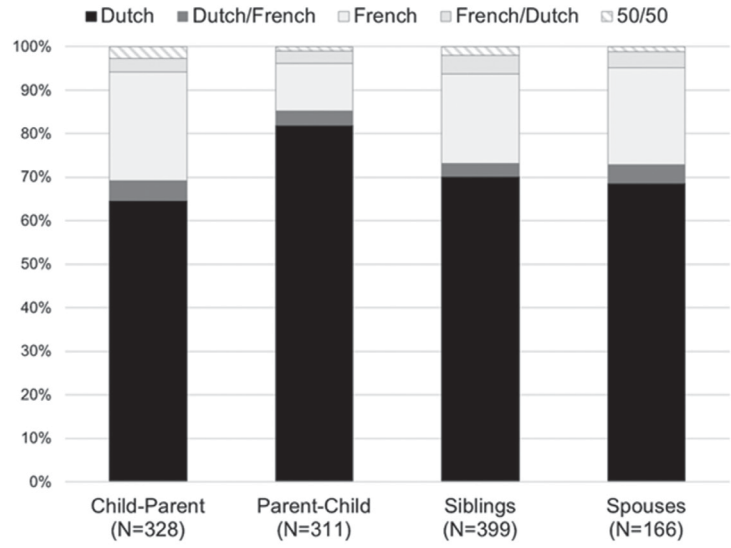

Figure 14.2. Language choice across familial relationships.

Moreover, the analysis of language choice across familial relationships between close family members shows interesting patterns (Figure 14.2). In intergenerational correspondence particularly, Dutch occurs most often in letters from parents to children (82 %, as opposed to 64.6 % from children to parents), while the share of French is remarkably large in letters from children to their parents (25 %, as opposed to 10.9 % from parents to their children). These findings may suggest that the use of French (also) served as an educational exercise (cf. Ruberg 2011: 72), although we must emphasize that we did not account for the factor of age, which means that 'children' may also be adults. However, it is possible that the hierarchical relationship in child-to-parent correspondence triggers the choice of French. The results for siblings and spouses are less pronounced. Overall, though, the variation across familial relationships strongly supports the importance of role relations for (historical) sociolinguistic research on language choice.

4.2 Intra-writer variation

We now zoom in on intra-writer variation in the letters of selected writers from three families: (1) Van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt, an aristocratic family from Arnhem (in the eastern province of Gelderland), (2) Van Styrum, a well-off family from Haarlem (in the province of North Holland, near Amsterdam) that served in administrative roles, and (3) Van Haersolte, an aristocratic family from Zwolle (in the eastern province of Overijssel). These families display very different distribution patterns in terms of language choice. While Van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt and Van Haersolte are predominantly 'Dutch' families, the prevalence of French stands out in the correspondence of the Van Styrum family. This inter-familial variation is by no means exceptional, as we observe major differences with respect to language choice across the thirty-six families under scrutiny.

4.2.1 *Van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt family*[5]

Language choice in the Van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt family correspondence is largely in line with the general distribution discussed in Section 4.1, with a strong prevalence of Dutch (72.5 %), whereas French is used in 20 %. The share of mixed-language letters written in 'Dutch/French' and 'French/Dutch' is 2.5 % and 5 %, respectively. If we look at the individual writers and their language choice, it becomes clear that the choice of French can mainly be associated with one family member: Caroline Rose Clotilde Flament (1802–35), wife of Joannes N. W. A. van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt (1789–1849), a lawyer and notary in Arnhem. Caroline, who was born on the island of Martinique (at the time a French colony), and her mother moved from France to the Netherlands after Caroline's father's death in 1804.[6] When her mother passed away soon after, she moved to her uncle in The Hague, where she stayed until her marriage in 1824.

5 The Van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt family archives are kept at the Gelders Archief (Arnhem), access no. 0466.

6 It is difficult to reconstruct whether Caroline Flament was raised bilingually (i.e. in French and Dutch). Against the background of the strong Dutchification policy

Taking a closer look at the sender-addressee relationships and language choice in Caroline's letters, we see that she mainly uses French in letters to her husband. Occasionally, she switches briefly to Dutch. The letters to her sister-in-law are also written in French. If we look at the letters *addressed* to Caroline, Dutch seems to play a slightly larger role, although French remains the dominant language. Her husband Joannes writes to her in French most of the time, occasionally switching briefly to Dutch. In contrast, he writes mainly in Dutch to his children, although we also find some letters to them in French. It is striking that Caroline and Joannes' son, Carolus Antonius Ludovicus (1825–1907), always uses Dutch when writing to both of his parents together and even when writing only to his mother. The same applies to Caroline's sisters-in-law and father-in-law, who choose Dutch in all their letters to Joannes and Caroline.

Caroline Flament certainly is the central figure in this family correspondence when it comes to the choice for French. Before she became a part of the Van Hugenpoth tot Aerdt family through her marriage with Joannes, only Dutch was used in the family correspondence. When she was not part of the communicative setting (either as sender or addressee), mainly Dutch was used. After her death in 1835, the share of French in the family correspondence drops considerably.

4.2.2 *Van Styrum family*[7]

Turning to the Van Styrum family and the overall distribution of language choice in their correspondence, we see a clear preference for French (77.5 %), while Dutch only occurs in 10 %. Mixed-language letters written in 'French/Dutch' and 'Dutch/French' account for 10 % and 2.5 %, respectively. The central figure in this family is Jan van Styrum (1757–1824), who held various administrative positions in the city of Haarlem as well as on a national level. He was appointed as a member of parliament of

in the early nineteenth-century Netherlands (cf. Rutten 2019), it seems unlikely, though, that she grew up in a monolingually French-speaking environment.

7 The Van Styrum family archives are kept at the Noord-Hollands Archief (Haarlem), access no. 141.

the Batavian Republic (*de jure* a sister republic of France but *de facto* its puppet state) and was part of a special commission that was sent to Paris to negotiate with Napoleon about the kingship of Louis Bonaparte, king of Holland. In 1810, Jan van Styrum was transferred to France, where he was prefect of the department of Loire-Inférieure until 1813.

Looking at Jan's correspondence, we notice that French, unsurprisingly, plays a key role. The letters he writes to his wife, Johanna Anna van Vollenhoven (1767–1846), are always written in French and the same applies to the letter addressed to his daughter Anna Henriëtte Maria Wilhelmina (1786–1834). French is also the preferred language in Jan's letters to his sister Maria Jacoba (1763–1848), occasionally choosing Dutch (with some switches to French). When Jan writes to his brother, he sometimes uses French and sometimes Dutch. In one of his letters to his brother, Jan explains why he writes that particular letter as well as the previous letter in Dutch. Discussing his brother's problems with his estate, Jan clarifies that he deliberately writes in Dutch because his brother could then immediately transfer the content of his letters to the notary who is following up the case and defending his brother's interests. The fact that Jan is so explicit about the use of Dutch in his letters implies that Dutch must have been an exception, and that French was the default choice within this brother-brother unit. The implicit presence of the notary seems to be an intervention in the brother-brother/sender-addressee relationship, which may explain the use of the 'non-default' language, that is, Dutch. Jan's siblings also write to him mainly in French. His son, Adolf Jacob (1794–1816), invariably chooses French when writing to both of his parents together and when writing to them separately.

It is striking that almost all Van Styrum members primarily use French in their letter writing, many of them also opting for Dutch in some instances, or switching from French to Dutch within the same letter. It seems that the evident link with France, established by Jan's administrative functions, influences the choice of language within his entire close family.[8]

8 According to the family archives' description, Jan had little sympathy for the French authorities, as suggested in a report from the king's secret agent. This would imply that the prevalent choice of French was independent of any sympathies or antipathies towards the French political hegemony.

4.2.3 *Van Haersolte family*[9]

For the previous two families, we thus established direct or indirect links with France that may explain their choice of French in their private correspondence. However, we must be aware that in other families using French in their letters, such a link with France is far less obvious. A case in point is the Van Haersolte family. The share of Dutch in this family correspondence is 77.5 %, compared to 12.5 % French and 7.5 % 'French/Dutch'. Particularly among members of the second and third generations, interesting patterns with respect to language choice emerge. Geertruid Agnes de Vos van Steenwijk (1813–74), wife of mayor Johan Christiaan van Haersolte (1809–81), invariably writes to her husband in Dutch. However, in the letters to her daughter, Sophia Cornelia (1838–73), she mainly chooses French. Most of Sophia Cornelia's letters to her father are in Dutch, and although rarely writing to him in French, she proudly reports in one of her Dutch letters that she is learning a lot from her French teacher. Sophia opts for mixed-language letters (mostly 'French/Dutch') to her sister Louise Christine Egbertine Françoise (1840–1918).

In contrast to the female members, the men in this family predominantly choose Dutch. Johan Christiaan, for instance, exclusively writes in Dutch to his wife Agnes, both parents and his daughter Louise. His son, Coenraad Willem Antoni (1845–1925), also uses only Dutch when he writes to his sister Louise. It is evident that the women in this family show a preference for French in their correspondence. For these women, no link with France can be determined, neither on a personal nor on a professional level. This suggests that their use of French in the private sphere most likely served a socio-cultural function – as a language of distinction and/or intimacy (see Section 2.2).

9 The Van Haersolte family archives are kept at the Historisch Centrum Overijssel (Zwolle), access no. 0237.1.

5 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter we have addressed the phenomenon of language choice in the context of Dutch-French contacts in the history of the Northern Low Countries. Focusing on the private domain and on nineteenth-century family correspondence in particular, we sought to assess the sociolinguistic dynamics that determine language choice in a quantitative manner. First, our analyses based on a dataset of more than 1,300 letters from 36 families (see Section 4.1) have shown that Dutch was the prevalent language choice for private letter writing in the nineteenth century (roughly 75 %). While the use of French cannot be considered marginal, our findings do not indicate that this specific social domain was overly 'Frenchified'.

Examining a number of sociolinguistic parameters incorporated into our methodology, gender (of the writer) did not appear to be a crucial variable. Patterns became more pronounced when looking at gender constellations, though. Women, both as senders and addressees, could be associated with higher proportions of French than men-to-men constellations particularly. Furthermore, the variable of familial relationships revealed differences between children-to-parents and parents-to-children, the former having a considerably higher share of French than the latter, which deserves to be discussed more closely in the future. These findings emphasize the importance of role relations or, more concretely, sender-addressee relationships when assessing the topic of language choice.

We then zoomed in on intra-individual variation in the letters from three families from our nineteenth-century dataset (see Section 4.2). The correspondence of the Van Hugenpoth and Van Haersolte families displayed a clear preference for Dutch, although French was also used in several letters. In contrast, French was the favoured language in the Van Styrum family correspondence. For the Van Hugenpoth and the Van Styrum families, we were able to establish links with France that provide possible explanations for the use of French. In the case of Van Hugenpoth, French was mainly linked to one family member of francophone descent. The use of French in the Van Styrum correspondence may be associated with the

professional career of the central figure. However, we must bear in mind that such an evident link with France is not necessarily present in all families that use French in their correspondence. In many cases, French was rather a socio-cultural phenomenon and served as a language of distinction (see Section 2.2), as we could see in the women's correspondence of the Van Haersolte family.

We consider these two perspectives on historical language choice to be best treated as complementary. While previous studies on Dutch-French language choice (in different temporal and spatial settings) have largely focused on more qualitative micro-level accounts of individuals' language choices, their representativeness tends to be fairly limited, as the striking differences across families in Section 4.2 have demonstrated (cf. also Ruberg 2011: 69f.). It goes without saying that some qualitative interpretations about individuals and 'their personal situation and state of mind' (Ruberg 2011: 70), or political factors and identity awareness (van Strien-Chardonneau 2018: 77–81) can hardly be captured by a more macro-oriented framework. In this chapter, we have suggested a different perspective on language choice, showing that inter-writer variation can still be integrated in a meaningful way. With this approach, we aim to assess language choice on a larger scale, but incorporate the key role of intra-writer variation (i.e. on the level of unique sender-addressee relationships) in order to provide a well-balanced and representative dataset.

We try to advocate here for the study of (historical) language choice in the private domain, and recall Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg's approach to the study of language change (2017: 244), namely that the 'various perspectives are not mutually exclusive' and that 'micro-level studies […] benefit from macro-level baseline data'. In other words, it may be risky to *depart* from qualitative observations only in order to make claims about the sociolinguistic dynamics that determine the distribution in a larger community – the 'bigger picture', if you will. However, departing from a substantial empirical dataset (or baseline evidence), which at the same time takes into account intra-writer variation, can help us see individuals' language choices in perspective. What is more, such an approach enables us to go back to the micro level of the individual and zoom in on intra- and inter-writer variation (within a family), adding noteworthy nuances

about the individuals' personal and professional biographies, their mobility across the lifespan, and so forth. Ideally, findings coming from these two approaches can complement each other.

The scope of this chapter only allowed us to share some insights (both quantitative and qualitative) on the intriguing phenomenon of Dutch-French language choice in the history of the Northern Low Countries. Further exploring our extensive dataset of private family correspondence, we will report on the examined variables (i.e. gender, familial relationships) in more detail as well as on the spatial and diachronic dimensions in future publications.

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