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Setting the standard: norms and usage in Early and Late Modern Dutch (1550-1850)

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Chapter 11 – Conclusion

1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I investigated the relationship between codified norms and language use in Early and Late Modern Dutch (1550-1850). This is the period marked by the most intensive efforts of language standardisation. In traditional language histories, this standardisation process has been portrayed as a linear development, with language norms codified in normative works seamlessly finding their way to language use. Based on empirical research, however, it is suggested that the implementation of codified norms was not always successful (Deumert & Vandenbussche, 2003, p. 7). In fact, recent corpus studies show that codified norms rarely have a lasting and large-scale impact on usage. While some scholarship indicates that prescriptive efforts sometimes have a small influence on usage in (temporarily) accelerating or slowing down changes in specific genres (e.g. Yáñez-Bouza, 2014; Simons & Rutten, 2014; Anderwald, 2016; Krogull, 2018), other researchers cannot find any evidence of prescriptive interference in language use (e.g. Rutten & Vosters, 2010a; 2010b; McLelland, 2014). Since we know little about the linguistic features and contexts which are susceptible to prescriptive influence, this dissertation aims to shed light on the conditions under which prescriptivism is successful.

To ascertain in which circumstances prescriptivism influences usage, Rutten & Vosters (2021) proposed different determinants that possibly influence the success of prescriptive interventions. Based on this proposition, I operationalised (1) the nature of the variable, (2) the complexity of the feature, and (3) the metalinguistic salience of the variable in my research design to assess the impact of these factors in the relationship between codified norms and usage. As the period of Dutch standardisation serves as a case study for examining prescriptive success, I explored five linguistic developments that took place in Dutch between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Each of the investigated case studies is therefore centred around one specific orthographic or grammatical development. In every case study, I systematically compared

language norms, employing a corpus of normative works, to patterns of variation and change in the multi-genre *Historical Corpus of Dutch* (Van de Voorde et al., 2023) to assess the possibility and extent of prescriptive influence on usage.

The conclusion of this research is presented in this chapter, where I tie together the findings from the empirical chapters to address the central research objectives. In section 2, I refer to the main findings and conclusions from the five empirical case studies, in which I summarise whether prescriptive success was attested for the feature under scrutiny, and if so, to what extent prescriptivism influenced language use. Section 3 builds on these findings, and briefly reflects on the scenarios of prescriptive influence that were discussed in Chapter 10. The general conclusion of this dissertation is outlined in section 4, where I assess the relationship between codified norms and usage and reflect on the implications for understanding language standardisation as a process ‘from above’. Finally, in section 5, I provide some concluding remarks, in which I also present an outlook for future research.

2 Conclusions per case study

In order to operationalise the possible determinants of prescriptive success proposed by Rutten & Vosters (2021), I selected different linguistic developments to investigate. I considered features from different domains of the language (spelling vs. grammar), which either consist of a simple opposition of variants or comprise multiple possible forms. Moreover, I made sure that the selected features enjoyed differing degrees of metalinguistic attention (cf. Chapter 4). In this section, I reflect on the possibility and extent of prescriptive influence for each of the investigated features.

Spelling of /a/ in closed syllables

The first feature that was investigated is change from the spelling <ae> to <aa> to represent the long /a/ in closed syllables. This orthographic variable has a basic dichotomy of main variants, in which the variant <ae> is replaced with <aa>, without any difficulties in linguistic embedding. This change in spelling was frequently discussed by grammarians already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it remained a heavily debated issue until the

nineteenth century, making this the feature with the highest metalinguistic salience in this dissertation. While the very first codifiers prescribed the new variant <aa>, the two writing practices grew into spelling shibboleths in the eighteenth century (Vosters, 2011, pp. 238-240). Northern grammarians then generally prescribed the ‘Northern’ variant <aa>, whereas Southern codifiers adhered to the ‘Southern’ form <ae>. These diverging spelling practices were also visible in language use. In Northern usage, the variant <aa> gradually increased until the change was practically completed in the nineteenth century. In Southern usage, conversely, the older spelling <ae> remained dominant for the entire period under scrutiny. In this part of the language area, only the very beginning of a change to <aa> was observed.

For this spelling feature, language use was probably strongly influenced by prescriptivism. Six potential options of prescriptive influence were identified, and in all cases, prescriptivism possibly influenced language use. I argued that codifiers were at least partly responsible for kickstarting the change to <aa> in Northern usage in the seventeenth century. After the actuation of the change in general usage, grammarians also accelerated the further diffusion of <aa> among Northern language users. This reinforcing effect took place from the eighteenth century onwards, right after the new variant became firmly embedded in the normative discussions, with normative works targeting a broader readership consistently promoting the spelling <aa>. At the same time, prescriptive interventions of Southern codifiers also impacted usage in that codifiers probably held back the change to <aa> in Southern usage. However, the emergence of the variant <aa> in the nineteenth-century South is most likely related to the dominance of Northern norms during the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (Vosters, 2011). In this case, prescriptive influence was thus attested at a large-scale, affecting different genres in both parts of the language area.

Spelling of final /t/ in *d*-stem verbs

The second orthographic feature that was investigated is the representation of the final /t/ in *d*-stem verbs. In the history of Dutch, three different spelling practices were in use for the second- and third-person singular and the second-person plural of the present indicative. These are: <t>, <d>, and the modern-day standard spelling <dt>. With three possible variants, this feature is a multivariate

feature, and it is therefore more complex in nature than the spelling of the long /a/ in closed syllables. In terms of metalinguistic salience, this variable also features less prominently in the normative discussions than the long /a/ in closed syllables. Although explicit prescriptions on the spelling of the verb-final /t/ appear from the seventeenth century onwards, it only becomes a topic of importance in the eighteenth century. This is also the period when most norm givers in the North decide on prescribing the modern-day <dt> after a century of variable prescriptions. Southern grammarians, on the contrary, still prefer the variant <d> at the time. These codifiers only start switching to <dt> prescriptions in the early nineteenth century, when the contact with the North intensified in the context of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (Vosters, 2011). In language use, the spelling <dt> was applied already in the sixteenth century, long before the first prescriptions for the modern-day variant appeared. Prescriptivism could thus not have initiated a change to <dt> in usage. However, while usage remained variable for the entire period under investigation, the spelling <dt> increased strongly in the nineteenth century. An almost complete shift to the modern-day form is even observed in the Northern pamphlets and administrative texts. This increase of <dt> is also observed in Southern usage, although the shift is less convincing here. The variant <d> also held a strong position in this part of the language area, and particularly in handwritten documents.

Out of six options of potential prescriptive interference, prescriptivism proved effective in only three. While grammarians did certainly not initiate a change for this spelling variable, it is likely that they had a reinforcing influence on usage. This impact is observed for two specific developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the social reach of normative works broadened in the context of nation building, and a standard language ideology was spread into the language community, prescriptivism may have strengthened the use of <d> in the South. Together with the strong presence of the spelling <d> in printed genres, Southern grammarians probably caused a temporary rise of the form in handwritten genres in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, a reinforcing effect of prescriptivism is attested after the national language policy appeared in the Northern Netherlands. I argued that the prescriptions in this official language policy probably accelerated the increase of <dt> in nineteenth-century usage.

Comparative marker

The use of the comparative marker was the third feature investigated in this dissertation. For this grammatical variable, I restricted the case study to the context in which *inequal* parts are compared, as is shown in an example like *Hij is groter dan ik* ‘He is taller than I’. From the eighteenth century onwards, codifiers generally prescribed the variant *dan* for these comparative constructions, while the marker *als* was prescribed in constructions in which *equal* parts are compared. While other complementisers may have been in use in local speech – for example, *of* in the Flemish dialects (Barbiers et al., 2005) – only *als* and *dan* appeared in writing. This feature therefore contains little complexity in that only two variants were used in writing. It is also a feature that is infrequently discussed in the normative discourse. Only a small group of grammarians explicitly commented on the feature from the eighteenth century onwards. In fact, these normative discussions emerged when a rapid change to the marker *als* took place in seventeenth-century usage. A few decades after the prescriptions for *dan* were published, language use shifted again to the prescribed marker.

Since the general return to *dan* in language use was attested in the nineteenth century, right after multiple prescriptions for the marker were formulated, it is highly likely that prescriptivism interfered and reverted the change to *als* in usage. In fact, the two options of prescriptive interference that I discussed were probably both successful influences of prescriptivism. While codifiers clearly set the norm for the marker *dan* in the eighteenth century, they particularly influenced each other at first. It is therefore more probable that the large-scale influence of prescriptivism is caused by the national language policy in the nineteenth century. These prescriptions had the impact and social reach of affecting varying genres and regions at the same time (cf. Krogull, 2018). The effect of the national language policy also spread to the Southern Netherlands during the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, where it influenced Southern codifiers and overall language use.

Diminutive suffix

With the diminutive suffix, a grammatical feature with more complexity was included in this dissertation. For this variable, I specifically investigated the change from velar to palatal suffixes which emerged in spoken usage before it was attested in writing. I made the distinction between four suffix types, each representing a different stage of the palatalisation process. Although this change in the diminutive suffixes is involved in normative discussions of the sixteenth century, the topic does not soar high in the prescriptions before the nineteenth century. At the level of metalinguistic salience, the feature is therefore more frequently discussed than the comparative marker, but it never becomes as salient as the spelling features that were investigated in this study.

In language norms, the velar suffix type *-kin/ke(n)* gradually lost ground in favour of the palatal suffix *-je(n)*, which generally grew into the favoured suffix of Northern grammarians. As the main variant of the velar suffix type, *-ken* was not rejected for usage, though. While the form was clearly outgoing in usage, Northern grammarians still prescribed or tolerated the suffix, as they considered it a 'dignified' form. Southern grammarians also continued prescribing the velar suffix as the only variant until the second half of the eighteenth century. In both parts of the language area, the prescriptions for *-je(n)* postdate the developments in language use.

Since language norms thus generally reflect patterns in usage, prescriptivism was not successful across the board. Only in two of the five options of possible prescriptive influence, prescriptivism may have influenced usage. In fact, prescriptivism probably exerted an influence on usage only in one specific context. In the nineteenth century, when normative works were strongly institutionalised, and prescriptions were more consistent in prescribing the suffix *-je(n)*, codifiers may have accelerated the change to *-je(n)* in language use. This influence is visible in the Northern and the Southern Netherlands. Due to the stronger adherence to *-ken* in the South, however, the effect is less pronounced in this part of the language area.

Direct and indirect object of the plural personal pronoun

The final feature that is investigated in this dissertation is the syntactic distinction between the object forms of the plural personal pronouns. The prime focus of this case study was on the alternating use of *hen* and *hun*, depending on the case in which the pronoun was applied. Although I argued that this accusative-dative distinction is quite complex at a linguistic level, in the sense that alternative variants (like *ze* and *haar*) were also in use, these forms were not entirely on a par with *hen* and *hun*. While *hen* and *hun* are always used for animate referents, *ze* was particularly employed for referring to inanimate referents. The variant *haar*, conversely, was a minority variant and was primarily prescribed and used for feminine referents. The alternation between the plural personal pronouns therefore mainly concerns the variants *hen* and *hun*. As such, I considered this a feature with an opposition of variants. The distinction between these variants is also binary in language norms, since *hen* was prescribed for the function of the direct object, whereas *hun* was allocated to the function of the indirect object. This case distinction was introduced by a Northern codifier in the early seventeenth century and was picked up and prescribed by later codifiers until it became firmly established in the eighteenth-century normative tradition. Furthermore, this distinction between the personal pronouns was typically included in the case paradigms in grammars, which makes it a prominent and visible topic in normative works. In fact, given its frequent appearance in case paradigms, this feature holds the highest metalinguistic salience among the grammatical features investigated in this dissertation.

The accusative-dative distinction between *hen* and *hun* was primarily visible in Northern norms. Southern grammarians did not adopt this distinction, and they generally prescribed the pronoun *hen* in both the accusative and dative case. It is only in the nineteenth century that most codifiers from the South also proposed the pronoun distinction based on case. In language use, we see Northern usage aligning with the case distinction already in the seventeenth century. This pattern is even more pronounced in later centuries. Southern usage, on the contrary, does not show this case distinction. In the nineteenth century, when Southern codifiers also prescribe the pronoun distinction, only a few individual writers from Brabant adopt the prescribed use of pronouns.

With the case distinction emerging in Northern usage immediately after Van Heule introduced the alternating pronoun use, an influence of prescriptivism was assumed. Although no large-scale influence of prescriptivism was identified, a smaller impact on usage was likely in four of the six discussed options of prescriptive influence. More specifically, Van Heule was able to initiate this pronoun distinction in language use. This actuating impact was limited to individual writers from the region of Holland at first. While the prescriptive effect probably lingered on, and thereby influenced writers from other regions, the effect did not spread at a generic level. Apart from individual writers, particularly the genre of pamphlets was influenced by prescriptivism.

3 Scenarios of prescriptive influence

For each of the features investigated in this dissertation, I detected a *possible* influence of prescriptivism. The type of influence and the reach of the prescriptive effect, however, differed strongly between the case studies. For some features, like in the case of object forms of the third-person plural pronoun, codifiers probably motivated individual language users in adopting a new pronoun distinction but did not influence the broader language community. In other case studies, such as the spelling of /t/ in *d*-stem verbs, codifiers did not introduce a new variant but probably caused the further spread of a form that was already applied in usage. Since recurring types of prescriptive influence were attested across the five case studies, I identified potential determining factors interfering in the observed effect. These findings were summarised into scenarios of prescriptive influence, which were discussed in Chapter 10.

Eight (sub)scenarios of prescriptive influence were distinguished in the case studies that were part of this dissertation. One of these scenarios, *scenario 5 – no probable influence*, proposes hypotheses for features and contexts in which prescriptivism probably failed to influence use, and two other scenarios, *scenario 4a – forming a discourse community* and *scenario 4b – spreading social meanings*, describe a solely discursive impact of prescriptivism. The five remaining scenarios, however, discuss an influence of prescriptivism that is visible in language use. The different effects summarised in these scenarios indicate that prescriptivism can either initiate a change in usage (*scenario 1 – triggering a change*), intervene in an ongoing change (*scenario 2a – diffusing an innovation*,

scenario 3a – slowing down undesired innovations, and scenario 3b – reviving archaic usage), or even push the change to completion at the tail of the S-curve (*scenario 2b – eradicating remaining variability*).

Nonetheless, the case studies in this dissertation showed that the varying effects of prescriptivism do not simply take place in every context or with every feature. In fact, for each influence of prescriptivism that is observed, both the period and specific socio-historical context, and the characteristics of the feature determine whether prescriptivism succeeds in its goal. The discussed impact of prescriptivism is often also restricted to specific language users, genres, or regions. Moreover, the case studies in this dissertation illustrate that the frequency of each prescriptive effect varies. While grammarians rarely initiate new changes in usage, they succeed more often in influencing an ongoing change in language use.

4 General conclusion

What do the results from the empirical chapters and the scenarios of prescriptive influence reveal about the relationship between language norms and usage in the period of Dutch standardisation? And what does that tell us about prescriptive success in general? In the final part of the conclusion, I reflect on the research objectives that were formulated in the introduction of this dissertation.

4.1 Determinants of prescriptive success

One of the objectives of this dissertation was to put the impact of (1) the nature of the variable, (2) the complexity of the feature, and (3) the metalinguistic salience on the success of prescriptive interventions to the test (Rutten & Vosters, 2021). Considering the results from all investigated case studies, I now assess the impact of these determinants.

I first discuss the influence of the metalinguistic salience of the feature under investigation. The case studies in this dissertation illustrate that several explicit prescriptions were necessary to observe a linguistic impact of prescriptivism. While the metalinguistic salience thus certainly plays a role in the success of

prescriptivism, the feature does not have to be discussed by every single grammarian to see a visible impact of prescriptivism. Once a feature or development is picked up by grammarians, and multiple prescriptions are formulated on the issue, prescriptivism can in principle influence usage. In fact, features with a lower metalinguistic salience, for which fewer explicit prescriptions appeared, like the comparative marker (cf. Chapter 7), also showed signs of potential prescriptive influence on language use. The results from the case studies therefore suggest that not a very high metalinguistic salience, but rather the continuity in the prescriptions is crucial for prescriptivism to have a lasting impact on language use (cf. also Anderwald, 2016).

Second, I turn to the nature of the variable as a possible determinant. The results this dissertation indicate that both spelling and grammatical features were susceptible to prescriptive influence, which suggests that the nature of the variable probably does not interfere in the success of prescriptivism. Nonetheless, the case studies in this dissertation also illustrate a more pronounced effect of prescriptivism for spelling features when compared to grammatical variables. It is possible that this stronger effect for spelling is related to the stance of grammarians towards innovations in language use. For the features investigated in this dissertation, codifiers were often reluctant to accept grammatical changes that they observed in writing. This is not very surprising, since grammatical changes often have a basis in the spoken language, and thus generally arise ‘from below’ (e.g. diminutive suffix). The interference with the spoken language could thus explain why norm givers try to reverse or adapt grammatical developments in usage. When codifiers observe innovations in spelling practice, conversely, these changes are often welcomed and backed by prescriptivism. This progressive stance of grammarians towards spelling innovations also implies that norm givers could easily influence usage. The desired effect of codifiers was to reinforce an orthographic change that was already on its way in usage, after all.

The complexity of the variable is the third, and final determinant that is evaluated. The findings from the empirical chapters clearly indicate that the complexity of the variable is the most decisive factor for hindering or facilitating prescriptive influence. While I operationalised this determinant in terms of features with an opposition of variants versus multivariate features, the case studies in this dissertation indicate that complexity needs to be interpreted at

multiple levels. In addition to the number of possible variants, it appears that both the linguistic embedding of variation in usage, and the incorporation of variants in language norms constitute to the complexity of the variable. A feature can thus consist of a dichotomy of variants and still be a complex variable in usage (e.g. direct and indirect object of the plural personal pronoun). While the complexity of the feature was not defined as broadly in the operationalisation of the determinants of prescriptive success, I considered the different meanings of complexity in the scenarios of prescriptive influence. These scenarios show that any form of complexity – whether in the number of variants, the embedding of variation in usage or in norms – impedes the effectiveness of prescriptivism in usage.

Whereas the impact of these determinants was evaluated for each factor individually, it is important to stress that strictly separating these determinants is not desirable due to their interrelatedness. The case studies in this dissertation, for example, indicate that the metalinguistic salience of a feature is intertwined with the nature of the variable. Compared to grammatical features, spelling issues are generally discussed already in early periods of codification, due to the appearance of mainly spelling guides in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and they remain frequently discussed in normative works in later periods. This inevitably results in a higher metalinguistic salience of spelling features, and thus points to an interaction between the nature of the variable and its metalinguistic salience. Furthermore, when compared to grammar, spelling is a domain of the language with less interference from the spoken variety. Although there certainly are prescriptions imposing a complex conditioning of spelling variants (e.g. the spelling of syllable-final /xt/, cf. Krogull, 2018), spelling features generally have a more superficial embedding of linguistic variation compared to grammatical features, and thus suggest a more limited complexity.

The case studies in this dissertation show that the combination of these determinants can also impact the success of prescriptivism. This is illustrated by the case study on the spelling of the long /a/ in closed syllables. This feature possesses multiple favourable characteristics that make the feature exceptionally receptive to prescriptive influence. The spelling variable not only consists of a simple opposition of variants and a limited complexity at a linguistic level, but it is also explicitly discussed by grammarians already in the sixteenth century, and it remained highly salient at a metalinguistic level for the entire

period under investigation. The feature was also subject to strong social evaluation from the eighteenth century onwards, with a socio-political stigma being ascribed to the form (Vosters, 2011). While stigmatisation of variants is certainly a form of salience (cf. Labov, 2001, pp. 196-197), the concept was not operationalised as such in this study. However, this kind of salience may also contribute to prescriptive success, as the social evaluation creates awareness of spelling variation among language users (cf. Rutten & Vosters, 2021). As the spelling of the long /a/ in closed syllables was more affected by prescriptivism than the other features investigated in this dissertation, this case study suggests that the interplay of multiple determinants explains why specific features are exceptionally susceptible to prescriptive influence.

4.2 The socio-historical context

In addition to the determinants, also the socio-historical and socio-political context of language standardisation impacts the success of prescriptivism and the reach of the effect. Especially the ideological change that took place in the eighteenth century, with the standard language ideology spreading into society (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 19), influences the linguistic success of prescriptivism and the reach of the effect on usage. While the case studies in this dissertation show that a visible impact of prescriptivism is possible before the eighteenth century, a large-scale influence – with prescriptivism influencing different regions and genres – is observed only after many explicit prescriptions are formulated by a discourse community of grammarians (cf. Watts, 1999; 2008), and a strongly institutionalised form of prescriptivism emerged (Curzan, 2014, p. 32).

Large-scale influences of prescriptivism are thus observed in periods of emerging nation building, when the awareness of a standard language increased (Rutten, 2019). Since many normative works with a broader social reach appeared in this period, it is most likely that schoolbooks for a broader audience and official language regulations facilitated the large-scale success of prescriptivism. It is probably the most institutionalised and official forms of normative works, like the national language policy and the many schoolbooks that derived from this policy (cf. Schoemaker, 2018), that made language users reflect on – and consequently adapt – their language practice in the direction of

the prescriptions. These findings confirm the claim that standardisation ‘from above’ is an eighteenth-century phenomenon (Rutten & Vosters, 2021, p. 65), of which the effects in usage are primarily visible in the nineteenth century. Although the role of education in the diffusion of codified norms is undeniable (Haugen, 1987, p. 61), the results in the empirical chapters also illustrate that not all prescriptions were seamlessly implemented by their intended audience (e.g. direct and indirect object of the plural personal pronoun).

4.3 The importance of genre

Whenever a visible influence of prescriptivism was attested, whether in the language use of individual writers or on a broader scale, printed genres or formal handwritten texts were the prime sources affected. This indicates that texts which were subject to formal editorial practices, as is the case with printed texts, or documents that were written in a neat version – and thus subject to adaptations by the writer – were the first, and sometimes the only genres that were directly influenced by prescriptivism (cf. also Anderwald, 2016, 2019). Although less formal texts, which did not undergo editorial interventions, are less prone to prescriptive influence, these texts are not immune to normativity either. In these texts, the effect of prescriptivism is only less pronounced and occurs somewhat later than in the edited genres. This delayed effect may indicate that prescriptivism is not the sole actor in effectuating a prescribed change. As printed genres adopted the prescribed forms, the visibility of these variants increased within the language community. Contact with texts that use the prescribed form can therefore also accelerate the adoption of the variant in the wider language community.

The role of contact between texts and writers as a reinforcing factor for prescriptive influence is also evidenced by the shift towards Northern norms and writing practices in the South during the early nineteenth century. In every case study examined in this dissertation, Southern norms and usage shifted to align with the variants prescribed and used in the Northern Netherlands. While the specific socio-political context of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands contributed to the dominance of Northern norms, the increased contact between Northern and Southern language users also played an important role in the

success of Northern prescriptivism in the Southern Netherlands (cf. Vosters et al., 2014).

4.4 The relationship between norms and usage

While the case studies in this dissertation illustrated that prescriptivism *possibly* influenced language use during the period of most intensive standardisation in Dutch, they also showed that the relationship between norms and usage depends on specific determinants and socio-historical contexts. Prescriptivism appears to be primarily successful in influencing changes that are ongoing in usage. To define the relationship between norms and usage, we therefore need to move away from the idea that norm givers generally trigger changes in usage. Norm givers mostly reflect on what they observe in language use. They respond to patterns in usage, and under favourable conditions, these codified norms influence language use, which, in turn, also diffuses the prescribed form further in the language community. Prescriptivism is thus not a static phenomenon that operates in isolation from language use (Curzan, 2014, p. 13). It is a force that is both shaped and reinforced by language users.

4.5 Standardisation ‘from above’

This dissertation also adds nuance to traditional theories of language standardisation, which see the implementation of codified norms by the broader community as an evident outcome of the standardisation process (cf. Haugen, 1987). Although I detected several instances of possible norm implementation by language users, the case studies also suggest that the general acceptance of codified norms is far from self-evident. As the scenarios of prescriptive influence illustrate, a large-scale implementation of prescriptions occurs only for specific features and under the right circumstances. Moreover, the successful implementation of norms does not imply that new changes are initiated. Codified norms rather reinforce practices that are already ongoing in language use. As such, the selection of the norm by language users often precedes the codification and further implementation thereof.

Perhaps the results in this dissertation then suggest that we need to speak – in the terms of Joseph (1987) – of a process towards a language standard rather than a standard language? While that may be part of the story for Dutch, this study indicates that an engineered form of standardisation is then also imposed on top of the more circumstantially achieved layer of language convergence (cf. Joseph, 1987). The discursive impact of standardisation, with codifiers spreading the ideology of a standard language into society, is probably the most apparent effect of this process (Milroy & Milroy, 2012). However, this dissertation has demonstrated that prescriptivism also wields the power to influence language change when conditions are favourable.

5 Concluding remarks

The findings in this dissertation substantiate the paradigm shift that emerged in recent studies investigating prescriptive influence. While prescriptive influence was long considered the one-sided impact of codified norms on usage, recent scholarship acknowledged that prescriptivism does not work in a vacuum but interacts with language use (cf. Hinrichs et al., 2015; Kostadinova, 2020; Van der Meulen, 2023). With this dissertation, I aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics between codified norms and usage. With the standardisation period of Dutch as a case study, it was abundantly clear that a one-dimensional approach falls short of capturing the impact of prescriptivism on language use. Different types of prescriptive influence need to be distinguished to formulate an accurate answer on the effectiveness of prescriptivism, and the relationship between codified norms and language use.

Although this study is carried out on a modest-sized usage corpus, and similar analyses in larger corpora incorporating an even wider range of genres – both sources representing language use ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ – are necessary to understand the broader and more diffuse mechanisms of the relationship between codified norms and language use, this study demonstrates the relevance of approaching prescriptive influence from a multifaceted and typological perspective. To clarify the complexities in the relationship between codified norms and language use, this research calls for a comparative analysis across European languages to identify commonalities and differences in prescriptive influence.

Fruitful avenues for further research are also linked to theories of language standardisation and language change. It would be relevant to explore whether different effects of prescriptivism are connected to Haugen's (1966, 1972, 1987) stages of the standardisation process, and to investigate how changes 'from above' diffuse through social network structures (cf. Milroy & Milroy, 1985). Integrating theoretical models of standardisation and language change with fine-grained corpus analyses allows for re-evaluating established ideas about the relationship between codified norms and language use, after all.