GIJSBERT RUTTEN AND RIK VOSTERS

As Many Norms as There Were Scribes? Language History, Norms and Usage in the Southern Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century

Abstract

Contrary to the fixed language norms in the Northern part of the Dutch language area, the Southern provinces are commonly said to have known as many orthographical and linguistic norms as there were scribes. According to our analysis of a large number of orthographies and grammars, however, there seems to have been a vivid normative tradition, from which a shared body of linguistic norms can be deduced. In comparing these norms with a corpus of early nineteenth-century manuscripts, we argue against the traditional view of orthographical chaos in the South and even suggest a considerable and increasing diffusion of the Northern language norms.

1   Introduction

The present chapter discusses the linguistic situation in the Southern Netherlands[1] in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a historical-sociolinguistic perspective. Whereas a lot of research has been done on

---

[1]   Nowadays, roughly speaking, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. For stylistic reasons, we use 'Flanders' along with 'the South', 'the Southern Netherlands', etc. We are of course aware of the possible anachronism in using 'Flanders' to refer to the Southern Netherlands as a whole, that is, the entire Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

the history of Dutch linguistics in the Northern Netherlands, the South has gained far less attention, and in so far as historical and/or linguistic research has been done, language ideological myths often seem to have been involved. Two such myths are distinguished in this article: *the many-norms myth* (section 3.1) and *the orthographical-chaos myth* (section 3.2). The first refers to the idea that eighteenth and early nineteenth-century grammatical texts from Flanders display a wide variety of norms and do not constitute a coherent normative tradition at all. The latter refers to the idea that actual writing practices in this period are characterized by orthographical chaos. Both myths are reassessed and rejected. First, a vast and coherent Southern normative tradition is identified (section 4.1). Secondly, orthographical practices appear to have been fairly regulated (section 4.2). The latter conclusion is drawn on the basis of a corpus research using judicial and administrative documents from the 1820s. In general, we argue that any interpretation of the historical-linguistic situation should be founded upon empirical studies of that situation. The discussion and *demythologizing* of the two myths is preceded by an introduction to the historical-sociolinguistic context (section 2.1), which briefly addresses the political circumstances, and on which the language ideological background of the myths is based (section 2.2).

On the other hand, Willems (1824) already used the term *Vlaemsch* ('Flemish') in this general sense, and whenever we refer to the areas historically belonging to the Duchy of Flanders, we will indicate this by referring to the actual provinces concerned (East Flanders and West Flanders).

2   History and linguistic history

2.1   *Historical-sociolinguistic context*

Following the final defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1815, the Low Countries were united after more than two centuries of separation. The origin of this split between Southern and Northern Netherlands must be dated over two centuries earlier, with the revolt against Spain at the end of the sixteenth century. The North became the independent Republic of the Seven United Provinces and began its so-called Golden Age. The South remained under Spanish (Habsburg) control, and from 1714 onward under Austrian (still Habsburg) rule. After the French invasion in the 1790s, the South was incorporated into France, while the North eventually became a vassal kingdom under Napoleon's brother Louis Napoleon. After the fall of Napoleon, the European superpowers decided to create an enlarged Dutch buffer state to the north of France. This led to the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (UKN) in 1815, which united the present-day Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourgish territories under the reign of King William I. The UKN only existed for about fifteen years, when the Belgian Revolution ended it, with the birth of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1830. These fifteen years together, however, are traditionally considered to have been crucial for the future of the Dutch language in Flanders:

> Without this brief family reunion, Belgium would probably have become a francophone nation. [...] The pioneers of the Flemish movement, those who fought for the Dutchification of Flanders after 1830, were all educated during the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. (De Vries et al. 1993: 117; our translation)

From the sixteenth century onwards, language standardization took place in the Dutch language area, especially in the Northern Netherlands in and around the province of Holland and its main city Amsterdam. A preliminary written standard was created in the seventeenth century (macro and micro selection, first codification), maintained in the eighteenth century (further micro selection and codification), and transformed into

nineteenth-century written Standard Dutch (codification and elaboration) (Van der Wal 1995, Van der Sijs 2004, Van der Wal & Van Bree 2008). The nineteenth century soon bore two major results of this standardization: an official orthography (Siegenbeek 1804) and an official grammar (Weiland 1805), endorsed by the state and to be used in the administrative and educational domains. Although this received view of the development of (Standard) Dutch is teleological, too general and unjustifiably disregards language variation (Van der Wal 2006), it does provide us with a clear view of the development of written Dutch in the Northern Netherlands, which eventually led to present-day Standard Dutch. In this view, the strong eighteenth-century normative tradition plays a crucial rule, as it is held responsible for guiding the preliminary seventeenth-century written standard of Holland into the nineteenth century (Rutten 2009a).

The reverse of this preoccupation with language standardization in the North is that insight into Southern Dutch of the period is largely still lacking. Linguists have mainly focused on the North, and some even assume that, in a history of Standard Dutch, Southern Dutch has had no role to play after the sixteenth century. Consider Van der Sijs (2004: 53; our translation):

> Because of the political circumstances, the Southern Low Countries did not contribute to the standard language any more after the fall of Antwerp in 1585. For this reason, this book will essentially not deal with Southern Dutch from the seventeenth century onwards.

Parallel writing traditions and emerging standardization in the South have not received much attention. At the same time, it is acknowledged that some normative linguistic works were published in the Southern Netherlands during the eighteenth century, but these are not considered to constitute a normative tradition; on the contrary, they are criticized for their internal differences in language norms (Smeyers 1959, cf. section 3.1). Furthermore, although we know a fair amount about the status of the language at the time, especially with regard to the opposition of Dutch and French (e.g. Smeyers 1959, De Ridder 1979, De Groof 2004), almost no research has been done into the actual form of Dutch in the Southern Netherlands.

2.2   *The image of the eighteenth century in the South*

For our research into the linguistic situation in the South during the UKN (1815–1830), a look into the Southern Dutch linguistic situation of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is indispensable. The image provided by historians in general of especially the eighteenth century has been quite negative for a long period of time (Hanou 2004, De Vries 2004). Illustrative of this is the image of the Southern Netherlands in the middle of the eighteenth century drawn up by Elias (1963: 106; our translation):

> The intellectual life in the entire Southern Netherlands [...] around 1750 offers us a view of the most barren landscape one can imagine. There was simply nothing. There was the most complete silence in the deepest intellectual poverty.

Linguistically, this historical image of the eighteenth century is paralleled by the 'myth of eighteenth-century language decay' (Van der Horst 2004): the idea that Southern Dutch, as opposed to Northern Dutch, did not show standardization but *dialectization*, a regression to locally defined varieties. In this vein, Wils (1958: 527–528; our translation) contrasts Northern uniformity with Southern diversity:

> By the end of the seventeenth century in the North, the colorful diversity in writing slowly yielded to a uniform written language, based on the good usage of the classic authors [...] The language in the South had undergone a different development from the seventeenth century onwards, [and] tended to regress to its purely local character.[2]

The myth of eighteenth-century language decay can be traced back to contemporary comments on the state of the language. Especially during the early years of the UKN, those advocating a closer connection between Southern Dutch and Northern Dutch, for political reasons, had good cause

---

2   Although there is no doubt that Northern practice was not as uniform as claimed here – Siegenbeek's (1804) spelling and Weiland's (1805) grammar were only obligatory in the administration and education – we will have to leave this additional 'myth of Northern uniformity' for another occasion; cf. Vosters et al. (2010).

to uphold the image of eighteenth-century Flanders as an intellectual waste-land (cf. Elias 1963). Consider Jan Frans Willems' (1793–1846) comments on the eighteenth-century linguistic situation (1819: 34–35):

> [F]lemish spelling has not been fixed to the level of a general Flemish standard by anyone up to the present. […] [E]ach schoolteacher in the Southern provinces […] considers himself qualified to teach the children whatever language rules his whim might have dictated him. Anarchy is a serious evil, both in spelling and in politics.[3]

Willems advocated political and linguistic unity with the North. The political context induced commentators such as him to describe the recent past as negatively as possible. A similar reflex can be witnessed in contemporary histories of the Southern Netherlands and Belgium in which the past functions as a long and difficult period of 'slavery', that is, of foreign rule, which only ended during the UKN, and especially from 1830 onwards (Peeters 2003). Van der Horst (2004: 73; our translation) also explains the myth of eighteenth-century language decay by referring to its rhetorical function in nineteenth-century linguistic debates: 'By emphasizing that the South had no tradition of its own, no basis, no language culture, nothing, they strengthened their argument in favor of a closer connection to Northern Dutch'. Building on this myth of eighteenth-century language decay as proposed by Van der Horst (2004), we distinguish two (mis-)conceptions in the traditional literature, two 'sub-myths': first, the *many-norms myth*, as opposed to the vivid normative tradition of the North; and secondly, the *orthographical-chaos myth*, as opposed to the assumed fixed written language in the Northern Netherlands.

---

3   '[D]e Vlaemsche spelling [is], tot heden toe, nog door niemand op vaste gronden van algemeenen Vlaemschen aerd gebracht is. […] [E]lke schoolmeester, in de Zuidelyke Provincien, […] acht zich bevoegd om den kinderen alzulke taelwetten voorteschry-ven, als hem door het hoofd zyn gewaeid. Anarchie is een erg kwaed, zoowel in de spelling, als in de regering'.

3   The language myths

3.1   The many-norms myth

We already mentioned J.F. Willems's strong claims about the state of South-ern Dutch at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century. Concerning the body of normative publications in the South, he further-more explains how he spent many years going through all the books dealing with language and spelling, only to affirm what most already believed to be the case: 'there are no Flemish orthographies or grammars of any lasting authority,'[4] let alone a fully fledged normative tradition. To further prove his point, Willems discusses several grammars and orthographies which had been available since the early eighteenth century,[5] emphasizing inconsisten-cies and divergent opinions on specific orthographical points. Concluding that Flemish grammarians all adhere to different norms, Willems's solution is simple: Flemings should point their gaze northwards, and at least partially adapt to the Northern Dutch orthographical norms (Vosters 2009).

    Many twentieth-century historians echo Willems's claims. Sluys (1912: 53; our translation) speaks about 'the greatest possible confusion' in nor-mative publications, with every author adhering to a different spelling system. Concerning the work of Des Roches (1735/1740–1787), no doubt the most authoritative of the eighteenth-century Southern grammarians, he even concludes '[n]either his grammar nor his orthography were fol-lowed by anyone' (Sluys 1912: 53; our translation). De Vos (1939: 50–52; our translation) follows suit, using phrases such as 'mind-numbing drudg-ery' to describe most of the eighteenth-century normative works. He also lashes out at Des Roches, who supposedly wanted to promote the Antwerp dialect to the level of a literary language.

---

4   'Er bestaen [...] geene vlaemsche Spel- en Spraekkunsten van doorgaende gezag'.
5   For the second half of the 18th century, he discusses P.B. (1757), the second edition
     of Verpoorten (1759), Des Roches [1761], Van Belleghem & Waterschoot [1773],
     Ballieu (²1792), a fifth print of Ter Bruggen (¹1817, ⁵1822), and several other minor
     works and/or reprints. He also mentions Vaelande [=Van Daele] (1805/1806) and
     Behaegel (1817), but does not discuss their work in more detail.

Even balanced accounts such as Smeyers (1959: 112), who should certainly be praised for calling attention to the eighteenth-century codifiers and their grammars and orthographies, clearly states that none of the pre-1815 grammarians ever strove for a uniform spelling, and that they all had different linguistic opinions depending on whichever dialect they spoke. After discussing a significant number of normative texts from the South, Smeyers concludes that most grammarians did nothing to contribute to a way out of 'the maze of orthographical lawlessness', and that the only thing bringing them together was their obsession with purism and fighting off loan words (Smeyers 1959: 127–128; our translation).

In sum, the idea that the South lacked a proper grammatical tradition and that every grammarian constructed his own idiosyncratic spelling system is defended by Willems (1824), and taken over by historians dealing with the issue in the twentieth century.[6]

3.2   *The orthographical-chaos myth*

The second myth under discussion is built around the idea of orthographical chaos in Flanders up until the UKN – not just the lack of a normative tradition, but spelling chaos in actual writing practice. 'Try to read a hundred different [...] books,' the grammarian P.B. claims in 1757, 'and you will find a hundred different spellings' (P.B. 1757: 3; our translation).[7] Half a century later, his much younger colleague Pieter Behaegel (1817: 250; our translation) repeats this lamentation, suggesting that there are 'almost as many ways of spelling, as there are people who worked on improving the spelling'.[8]

---

6   The fact that Sluys (1912), De Vos (1939) and Smeyers (1959) all base themselves on the claims of J.F. Willems can already be demonstrated by the choice of publications under discussion, which De Vos supplements with the anonymous *Inleyding* from Dendermonde (1785), and Smeyers completes with Van Boterdael (²1776, ³1785).

7   '[W]ant leést honderd verscheyde schriften, zelfs boeken, gy zult honderd verscheyde spellingen vinden'.

8   'Men ziet in onze landstreéken bynae zoo veel wyzen van spellen; als er verscheydene persoónen zyn, die zich op het verbeteren der spelling toegelegd hebben'.

Especially during the period of the UKN, this idea of linguistic decay during the preceding Austrian and French rule becomes commonplace, and the image persists well into the twentieth century. De Vos (1939: 45) mentions that decades of foreign control prevented the Dutch language in the South from manifesting itself as a civilized language of culture, which made it shrivel to the level of *patois*. Deneckere (1954: 326) takes this still one step further, denying the existence of supraregional *written* varieties by claiming that even administrative documents were hardly intelligible from one town to another. Also in the 1950s, but repeating these claims more recently,[9] Wils describes how, under the French rule, 'Southern Dutch withered and weakened to such an extent that all contact with Northern Dutch threatened to be lost' (Wils 1956: 529; our translation). Along the same lines as Deneckere (1954), Wils (1956: 530; our translation) is also very clear in reporting that 'Flemish dialects and spellings were still being used in school books, in courts of justice and in notary deeds, and in the administration' during the early years of the UKN. Maybe the best summary of this viewpoint comes from Suffeleers (1979: 19; our translation): 'As opposed to the relative uniformity in the written language of the North, absolute chaos ruled the South'.

4   Revisiting the norm-myth

4.1   *The many-norms myth revisited*

Do the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries indeed display normative chaos in the South? Was there no real normative tradition but, at the most, a relatively small collection of grammatical works characterized by normative variation, as even Smeyers (1959) implied? It should be noted beforehand that spelling differences between authors of grammars and orthographies

---

9   Cf. Wils (2003: 33): 'Voor een hele generatie werd het onmogelijk een Nederlandstalige cultuur te verwerven, zodat de taal verschrompelde en verarmde'.

in itself, as well as an interest in purist activities, do not prove the absence of a vivid normative tradition. On the contrary, both characteristics also apply to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century linguistic situation in the North, which is commonly described as heavily prescriptive (Knol 1977: 70–71). A steady stream of publications containing diverging opinions only proves the existence of a linguistic debate, not its absence.

Moreover, on closer examination there appears to have been a vivid normative tradition in the South, and the norms proposed are not at all based upon local dialect features. After two early works from the first half of the century,[10] it is precisely from 1750 onwards – when Elias (1963) envisioned an intellectual wasteland – that several linguistic publications have come down to us. In the 1750s and 1760s, three Antwerp grammarians laid the foundation of the Southern normative tradition of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Jan Domien Verpoorten (1706–1773), P.B. (?-?) and Jan Des Roches.

In 1752, the schoolteacher Verpoorten published the first edition of his *Woôrden-schat, oft letterkonst*, 'Vocabulary, or grammar'.[11] The greater part of the book consists of lists of loan words, mainly of French or Latin origin, with Dutch equivalents. Verpoorten also briefly discusses some spelling issues. Verpoorten's 'new manner of writing', as he proudly calls it, among other things has to do with getting rid of 'superfluous' consonants in consonant clusters representing only one sound. We summarize:

> [k] which is commonly spelled <ck> in auslaut and which should be spelled <k> e.g. *ik* 'I' instead of *ick*;
> [γ] which is commonly spelled <gh> in anlaut and which should be spelled <g> e.g. *geven* 'give' instead of *gheven*.

These kind of spelling proposals are not in any way related to the dialect of Antwerp. Instead, these are innovations already put forward in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century normative tradition in the North, as well

10   E.C.P. (1713), see Dibbets (2003); Stéven (1714), see Rutten (2009c).
11   The discussion of Verpoorten (1752, 1759) and Bincken (1757) is based upon Rutten (2009b).

as in the scarce early eighteenth-century grammars from the South (E.C.P. 1713, Stéven 1714). Verpoorten is just linking up with and re-implementing common orthographical innovations.

Verpoorten's few pages on orthography are rather basic and mainly contain examples. Similar orthographical proposals are put forward five years later by P.B. in his *Fondamenten ofte grond-regels der Neder-duytsche spel-konst*, 'Foundations or basic rules of Dutch orthography' (1757). P.B. criticizes schoolteachers who only present examples of correct spellings without explaining the rules, but he does not mention Verpoorten. In 1759, however, Verpoorten publishes the second edition of his *Woôrden-schat*, in which he extensively elaborates on all kinds of grammatical rules, orthographical as well as morphological, without mentioning P.B., and at the same time constantly referring to the Northern normative tradition. An appeal to Northern norms apparently strengthened one's proposals. It seems that P.B. and Verpoorten were competitors, linguistically as well as commercially on the schoolbook market. They take part in an implicit yet lively linguistic discussion that rapidly changed from fairly basic ortho-graphical and lexical (purist) matters into a broader linguistic approach.

This broader approach is further developed by another Antwerp schoolteacher. In 1761, Des Roches published the *Nieuwe Nederduytsche spraek-konst*, 'New Dutch grammar'. Contrary to his predecessors, Des Roches does not limit himself to spelling, loanwords and some morpho-logical issues, but writes a full grammar of Dutch, based on the Northern tradition, texts from the Latin and French grammatical traditions, as well as his Southern colleagues P.B. and Verpoorten, albeit without mentioning them (Rutten 2009d). Des Roches' grammar is the first Southern grammar for decades and counts as one of the most important contributions to the codification of Dutch in the South throughout the eighteenth century.

These three Antwerp grammarians of the 1750s and 1760s were aware of and reacted to each other's works. They proposed similar grammatical rules and presumably taught these rules in their classes. Furthermore, for our research concerning the period of the UKN, it is important to remark that this Southern normative tradition survived into the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as well. Verpoorten published a third edi-tion in 1767. The books by P.B. and Des Roches were printed over and

over again, well into the nineteenth century, and especially of P.B., many (partial) pirate editions appeared. In the last decades of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the normative tradition was not only continued but intensified as well: dozens of works were published in the whole of the Southern Netherlands, which are always concerned with orthography and pronunciation, but often also with other grammatical features.[12] The potential spread of these works was wide, as we know that most primary schools in the later eighteenth century owned a grammar, along with reading matters and a catechism (Put 1990: 202). Besides, nine out of ten elementary schools for boys in the city of Leuven offered orthography as a separate subject according to a 1795 survey (Put 1990: 208).

However, the fact that there was a vivid normative tradition in itself does not imply that it was *coherent* as well. Therefore, we tried to distill language norms from this vast body of normative works. We selected several recurrent features and made an inventory of the prescribed use in the grammars, a selection of which will be shown below. The choice of these features depended on their importance in the nineteenth-century spelling debates, in which the two most important spelling options for every feature were divided into a typically 'Southern' and a typically 'Northern' variant (Bormans 1841; see also Vosters 2009). The features are the following:

(1) dotted or undotted [ei], e.g. *wijn* or *wyn* 'wine';
(2) the second element in the diphthongs [ei] and [œy], either <y> or <i>, e.g. *klein* or *kleyn* 'small', and *bruin* or *bruyn*, 'brown';
(3) vowel lengthening, either by adding an <e> or by doubling the original vowel, e.g. *zwaard* or *zwaerd* 'sword' (with [aː]), *zuur* or *zuer* 'sour' (with [y]);
(4) the form of the definite and indefinite article in the nominative singular masculine form: spelled with or without a final <(e)n>, e.g. *de man* or *den man* 'the man', *een man* or *eenen man* 'a man';
(5) the so-called superfluous letters: <g> or <gh> in anlaut, <k> or <ck> in auslaut, e.g. *ik* or *ick* 'I', and *gheven* or *geven* 'give'.

---

12   E.g. Van Belleghem & Waterschoot [1773], Janssens (1775), Van Boterdael (1785), Ballieu (²1792), Van Aerschot (1807), De Neckere (1815), Henckel (1815), Behaegel (1817), Gyselynck (1819). See also Table 1 and the references.

We examined these features in a selection of normative works from the South. The results can be seen in Table 8. The features are displayed horizontally. Vertically, the names of the authors are given, along with the date of the used edition and its origin. The bottom line gives the official Northern spelling rule of Siegenbeek (1804). When the prescribed use in one of the Southern grammars coincides with this Northern rule, the feature is shown in boldface. Note that <g> and <k> are generally accepted and that every grammarian in North and South rejects <gh> and <ck> – these features cannot be considered to be either typically Northern or Southern.

As can be deduced from the table, most Southern grammars before 1815, including the early eighteenth-century works as well as the Antwerp grammarians of the 1750s and 1760s differ from the Northern 1804 rule on nearly all of the selected features. More importantly, it is clear that there is almost complete general agreement in the South. In other words, there was a vast Southern normative tradition in which spelling choices were to a great extent identical. However, in the period of the UKN both writing traditions collide. The Southern tradition still continues for a while, but the Northern norms are gradually being brought to the fore, sometimes only as alternatives (e.g. Cannaert 1823), often as the only norm.

In sum, we have argued that a distinct Southern orthographical tradition existed, as can be seen from the implicit debates among grammar writers, and from the coherent normative framework put forward by different grammars and orthographies published especially in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Table 8 Spelling features and the normative framework

ORIGIN	AUTHOR	YEAR	Y/IJ	-Y/-I	V+E/V+V	-N/-∅	GH-/G-	-CK/-K
BEFORE THE UNITED KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS								
Brabant/ Antwerp	Verpoorten	1752	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	P.B.	1757	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Des Roches	1761	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Ballieu	1792	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Van Aerschot	1807	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
East/West- Flanders	E.C.P.	1713	ij	-y	V+V	-n	g-	-k
	Stéven	1714	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Van Belleghem & W	1773	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Janssens	1775	y	-i	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Anon. [Inleyding]	1785	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Van Boterdael	1792	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
	Vaelande	1805	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k
DURING THE UNITED KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS								
ORIGIN	AUTHOR	YEAR	Y/IJ	-Y/-I	V+E/V+V	-N/-∅	GH-/G-	-CK/-K
Brabant/	Anon. [Grond-regels]	1817	y	-y	V+e	-n	g-	-k

Antwerp	Ter Bruggen	1822	y	-y	V+e	-n	**g-**	**-k**
	Zilgens	1824	y	-y	V+e	-n	**g-**	**-k**
	Willems	1824	y	**-i**	V+e	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
East/West-	De Neckere	1815	y	-y	V+e	-n	**g-**	**-k**
Flanders	Henckel	1815	**ij**	**-i**	V+e	-n	**g-**	**-k**
	Gyselynck	1819	y	-y	V+e	-n	**g-**	**-k**
	Cannaert	1823	y/**ij**	-y-**i**	V+e/**V+V**	-n/**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
	Moke	1823	ij	-i	**V+V**	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
	Behaegel	1824	y	-y	**V+V**	-n	**g-**	**-k**
	De Simpel	1827	**ij**	**-i**	**V+V**	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
Limburg	Anon. [Beginselen]	1819	**ij**	**-i**	**V+V**	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
In French	Van der Pijl	1815	**ij**	**-i**	**V+V**	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
	Meijer	1820	**ij**	**-i**	**V+V**	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**
OFFICIAL NORM								
ORIGIN	AUTHOR	YEAR	Y/IJ	-Y/-I	V+E/V+V	-N/-Ø	GH-/G-	-CK/-K
North	Siegenbeek	1804	**ij**	**-i**	**V+V**	**-ø**	**g-**	**-k**

4.2   The orthographical-chaos myth revisited

The final section of this article will assess the 'orthographical-chaos myth'.
Did scribes in different towns write in their own dialects, and how chaotic
were the actual spelling practices? To put the earlier claims to the test, we
used a digitized collection of handwritten documents, which are being
transcribed at the Centre for Linguistics of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel
as part of ongoing research.[13] The corpus contains formal and less formal
texts from the judicial and administrative domain, including a roughly
equal number of:

(1)   police reports, drawn up at the local level by police constables, rangers, or other
      members of the municipal authorities;
(2)   interrogation reports, written down by district-level scribes and signed by the
      juge d'instruction in question;
(3)   indictments, issued by the professional scribes of one of the high courts.

Among these three text types, which already range from the very local
to the supraregional level, all five Southern provinces are represented,
with an equal amount of material per region coming from a main city and
different peripheral towns or villages. A test version of the full corpus was
used, containing a total of 61,912 words (excluding editorial and linguistic
markup). The material allows us to compare writing practices in different
regions, and furthermore has a built-in diachronic dimension, with texts
from approximately 1823 and 1829. Both years have been chosen because
of their sociohistorical importance. In January 1823, language laws came
into practice that made the use of Dutch compulsory in most of the gov-
ernment administration and judicature in the Dutch-speaking Southern
provinces. For the majority of the departments which were operating in
French before the Dutchification policy took place, this means that the
documents under investigation are among the first of their kind to be

---

13   The actual source material was gathered and compiled into a digital image database by
      Isabel Rotthier and the Royal Academy for Dutch Language and Literature (KANTL;
      see Rotthier 2007). For more background on the research project as a whole, see
      Vosters & Vandenbussche (2008) and Vosters & Vandenbussche (2009).

written in Dutch since before the French rule of 1794–1814. The manuscripts give us an interesting overview of the Dutch language in Flanders during the early years of the UKN. This allows us to compare them with 1829, at the end of the Kingdom, and to see if any changes occurred after those years of political union with the North.

The investigation of this corpus material consisted of electronic searches for the orthographical variables discussed earlier: how often do traditional Southern forms such as <y> or <den> occur, in comparison with the <ij> and <de> forms codified by the Siegenbeek norm in the North? It must be emphasized at this point, however, that we refer to orthographical variants as being either Southern or Northern based on the findings of our norms research. 'Southern', then, means that a spelling variant coincides with the prescribed usage in the large majority of the pre-1815 Southern normative publications, while 'Northern' is used to indicate that a variant corresponds to the prescribed use in the officialized orthography of Siegenbeek (1804).[14] Clearly, this approach is reductionist in enforcing a strict dichotomy, and the presented results should only be interpreted as a first and tentative indication of the spread and success of both orthographical traditions, rather than capturing all possible variation, at least as far as the selected features and the employed sources go. We do not mean to suggest that there is any direct causality between linguistic forms being prescribed in normative publications and their use in actual written language.

14   Note that the so-called superfluous letters <gh> and <ck> were also investigated, even though they seem to have disappeared from the Southern normative tradition in the eighteenth century already. The results for these searches are not taken up in the tables below, as they represent values below the 1% mark. These orthographical variants had made their way out of grammars and out of usage by the time of the UKN.

Table 9 Southern (left) and Northern (right) spelling variants per feature
(distribution per cent) in a digitized corpus of handwritten documents from
the Southern Netherlands[15]

	dotting of [ei]		diphthongs		vowel lengthening	
	y	ij	-y	-i	V+e	V+V
Total	66%	34%	21%	79%	21%	79%
1823	74%	26%	34%	66%	33%	67%
1829	55%	45%	3%	97%	4%	96%

	article N Sg M		Total	
	-n	-ø	Southern	Northern
Total	17%	83%	38%	62%
1823	25%	75%	48%	52%
1829	10%	90%	24%	76%

A first observation while searching through the corpus is that the situa-
tion was far from chaotic. As can be deduced from Table 9, scribes seem to
have been flexible in adopting the Northern norm: overall, 62 per cent of
the total number of tokens was Northern. For three features (diphthongs
with -y, long vowels in -e and masculine *den*), the Flemish variant is quite
rare, being used in less than a quarter of all cases. In the case of the dot-
ting of the [ei], the Southern variant <y> stands stronger, which might
be due to the minimal orthographical difference between <y> and <ij>
in handwriting.

More surprising is that a similar pattern holds true for the situation
in 1823 already. Rather than what might be expected from observations in
the literature (i.e. a disparate but Southern preference), slightly over half

---

15   For the sake of clarity, we only shown the results per cent. The actual number of attes-
tions is high in all cases (a total of 10,295 analyzed tokens, 3,917 of which are Southern
and 6,378 are Northern). The full numbers can be sent upon request. Proper names,
place names, uncertain transcriptions, and stretches of text in a foreign language
were excluded from the present analyses.

of all the attested forms correspond to the Northern Siegenbeek norm (52 per cent). Although the Flemish <y> is still very generally used, the other features occur in a Northern form in over two-thirds of the cases. This is highly remarkable, considering the claims about the spelling chaos and strong dialectal uses in written documents in Flanders, and considering that the investigated documents are among the first of their kind to be written in Dutch for all of the South.

Furthermore, when we analyze the data diachronically, a clear movement away from the Southern variants can be observed. Three quarters of all features in 1829 are Northern, and the Southern spellings for diphthongs with a <y>, for long vowels with an <e>, and for *den* as the masculine form of the article have almost completely disappeared. In general, there is an increase of about 20 to 30 per cent in Northern forms for each of the individual features between 1823 and 1829.

Table 10 Spelling variants per province (distribution per cent)[16]

1823	Total Southern forms	Total Northern forms	1829	Total Southern forms	Total Northern forms
Antwerp	36%	64%	Antwerp	44%	56%
Brabant	71%	29%	Brabant	33%	67%
Limburg	32%	68%	Limburg	21%	79%
East Fl.	68%	32%	East Fl.	30%	70%
West Fl.	62%	38%	West Fl.	33%	67%

The text distribution per province also allows us to look into regional variation, as shown in Table 10. In 1823, we still observe rather strong regional differences, with Brabant, East Flanders and West Flanders showing a clear preference for the Southern forms, and the Northern forms prevailing in

16   The indictment section of the corpus has been excluded from these regional analyses, as these documents all originate from one of two supraregional high court offices (Brussels or Liège). This still leaves the total number of analyzed tokens at 5,499.

Limburg and Antwerp. However, when we look at the situation for 1829, we cannot only discern the general trend towards the Siegenbeek norm as discussed above, but it is also remarkable that the regionally divergent patterns make way for a more uniform preference for the Northern variants. In 1829, the Northern forms are used in the majority of cases everywhere, and the figures lie much closer together in general. Great shifts can be observed in those provinces which were still mainly using Southern spellings in 1823, with a doubled number of Northern forms in Brabant and East Flanders.[17]

To come back to the myth of spelling chaos in the Southern Low Countries, our corpus research allows us to draw several conclusions. The orthographical landscape in general is not at all distinctly Southern, and even when the Dutchification policy had just come into practice in 1823, the Siegenbeek variants were already widely spread. Apart from this far from chaotic spelling situation, we might add that none of the documents we transcribed and examined showed any sign of transliterated dialect (cf. Wils 1956). The number of Northern forms furthermore casts doubts on the claim that administrative documents were hardly intelligible from one town to another (cf. Deneckere 1954). The steady spread of the Northern spelling norms in a mere six years between the measuring points furthermore emphasizes the importance of the political union between North and South for the increasing convergence in writing practices during the nineteenth century.

These results supplement the earlier findings of Vanhecke (2007), who investigated orthographical shifts in town council reports of seven Flemish municipalities between 1795 and 1900. She concluded that 1823 marked the start of a gradual shift from Southern practice to more Northern Siegenbeek variants, and concludes that the different orthographical shifts under changing political circumstances, often without a change of hand, are evidence of the remarkable linguistic competence of the scribes. Additionally, her large-scale investigation of language choice (Dutch/French) in 131 Southern chancery administrations shows that there is a uninterrupted

---

17   We did observe a slight decrease in Northern forms for the province of Antwerp, which calls for further research.

tradition of Dutch usage all throughout the nineteenth century, which in itself already challenges the idea of the language 'withering and weakening' under foreign influence (cf. Wils 1956).

5   Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the differences between language myths prevailing in the historical and historical-linguistic literature, and the actual linguistic situation in Flanders during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Focusing on orthography, we first explored the surprisingly large body of normative publications available for the South in the decades preceding the UKN. There seemed to have been a clear and coherent tradition of Southern writing practices and orthographical prescriptions. The publications analyzed were not based on dialectal uses, and often maintained an awareness of the tradition of good usage in the Northern Netherlands. During the brief union of North and South between 1815 and 1830, grammarians and schoolteachers from Flanders played their own part in the new political scenario. A number of them switched to what had then become the official spelling norm in the North (Siegenbeek 1804), while others continued to propagate Southern writing practices. Building on the importance of the UKN, we then proceeded to investigate actual writing practices in a corpus of handwritten documents from the 1820s. We already witnessed a preference for Northern spellings in the first documents written after the 1823 Dutchification, which led us to believe that the linguistic situation at the start of the UKN could hardly be described as 'absolute chaos'. Moreover, we observed the firm spread of the Northern variants, which revealed how the way people wrote was directly or indirectly influenced by the contemporary socio-historical circumstances. In sum, the period of the UKN has been shown to be an interesting case study at the intersection of both Northern and Southern writing traditions, where the foundations of the later linguistic convergence of Northern and Southern Dutch developed.

References

Ballieu, J. 1792 [1772]. *Néderduytsche spel- en spraek-konst*. Antwerp: J.E. Parys.

Behaegel, Pieter. 1817. *Nederduytsche Spraekkunst. Eerste boekdeel*. Bruges: Wed. De Moor en Zoon.

Bormans, Jean Henri. 1841. *Verslag over de verhandelingen ingekomen bij het staetsbestuur van België ten gevolge der taelkundige prijsvraeg*. Ghent: Annoot-Braeckman.

De Groof, Jetje 2004. *Taalpolitiek en taalplanning in Vlaanderen in de lange negentiende eeuw*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

De Neckere, Philips Jaques. 1815. *Bewerp van Vlaemsche spelling, gevolgd van eenen oogopslag op de nederlandsche dichtkunst*. Ypres: J.B. Smaelen-Moerman.

De Ridder, Paul. 1999. 'The use of languages in Brussels before 1794.' In: Blockmans, Wim, Marc Boone, & Thérèse de Hemptinne (eds), *Secretum Scriptorum. Liber alumnorum Walter Prevenier*. Leuven: Garant, 145–164.

De Vos, Hendrik. 1939. *Moedertaalonderwijs in de Nederlanden. Een historisch-kritisch overzicht van de methoden bij de studie van de moedertaal in het middelbaar onderwijs sedert het begin van de 19e eeuw*. Turnhout: Van Mierlo-Proost.

De Vries, Jan W., Roland Willemyns & Peter Burger. 1993. *Het verhaal van een taal. Negen eeuwen Nederlands*. Amsterdam: Prometheus.

De Vries, Marleen. 2004. 'Efemeriden, seniliteiten, republiekjes der letteren. De geheime fantasieën over literaire genootschappen op een rijtje'. *Spiegel der Letteren* 46, 241–254.

Deneckere, Marcel. 1954. *Histoire de la langue française dans les Flandres (1770–1823)*. Ghent: Romanica Gandensia.

Des Roches, Jan. [1761] (2007). *Nieuwe Nederduytsche Spraek-konst. Derden Druk, oversien en verbetert doór den Autheur*. Antwerp: Grangé. Reprint by J.M. van der Horst & Jozef Smeyers. Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU / Nodus.

Dibbets, Geert. 2003. 'Een nieuw spoor van de Port-Royalgrammatica in Nederland'. In: Dibbets, Geert, *Taal kundig geregeld*. Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU / Nodus, 129–156.

E.C.P. [De Witte, Egidius]. 1713. *Ontwerp van eene Nederduytsche Spraek-konst*. [Meenen]: Theodorus vanden Eynden.

Elias, Hendrik Jozef. 1963. *Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse gedachte. De grondslagen van de nieuwe tijd (1780–1830)*. Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel.

Gyselynck, C.L. 1819. *Nieuwe grond-beginselen der Vlaemsche tael, geschikt na de beste Nederduytsche taelmeesters*. Ghent: J. Begyn.

[Grond-regels]. 1817. *Grond-regels der Nederduytsche spel-konst*. Mechelen: P.J. Hanicq.

Hanou, André. '"De Verlichting brandt." Een kwart eeuw verlichte letteren in Noord en Zuid (1670–1815)'. *Spiegel der Letteren* 46, 215–225.

Henckel, Frans Lodewijk N. 1815. *Nieuwe Vlaemsche spraek-konst*. Ghent: P.F. de Goesin-Verhaege.

[Inleyding]. 1785. *Inleyding tot de grondregels der Vlaemsche spraek- en spelkonste*. Dendermonde: Wed. J. Decaju.

Janssens, Balduinus. 1775. *Verbeterde Vlaemsche spraek- en spel-konste*. Bruges: Joseph De Busscher.

Knol, Jan. 1977. 'De grammatica in de achttiende eeuw'. In: Bakker, Dirk Miente & Geert Dibbets (eds), *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taalkunde*. Den Bosch: Malmberg, 65–112.

[P.B.]. 1757. *Fondamenten ofte Grond-Regels der Neder-Duytsche Spel-Konst*. Antwerp: Hubertus Bincken.

Peeters, Evert. 2003. *Het labyrint van het verleden. Natie, vrijheid en geweld in de Belgische geschiedschrijving (1787–1850)*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers.

Put, Eddy. 1990. *De cleijne schoolen. Het volksonderwijs in het hertogdom Brabant tussen Katholieke Reformatie en Verlichting (eind 16de eeuw – 1795)*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers.

Rotthier, Isabel. 2007. '"In the picture". Een bronnencorpus / beeldbank van juridische teksten uit de periode van het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden'. In: *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Zuid-Nederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis* LX (2006). 131–149.

Rutten, Gijsbert. 2009a. 'Grammar to the people. The Dutch language and the public sphere in the 18th century with special reference to Kornelis van der Palm'. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* 19, 55–86.

Rutten, Gijsbert. 2009b. 'Lezen en schrijven volgens Verpoorten en Bincken. Onderwijsvernieuwingen in Antwerp in de achttiende eeuw'. *E-Meesterwerk* 2. <http://www.peeterheynsgenootschap.nl/e-meesterwerk.html> accessed 18 August 2011.

Rutten, Gijsbert. 2009c. 'Over Andries Stéven, wie het Voorschrift-boek schreef.' In: Boogaart, Ronny, Josien Lalleman, Marijke Mooijaart & Marijke van der Wal (eds), *Woorden wisselen. Voor Ariane van Santen bij haar afscheid van de Leidse universiteit*. Leiden: Stichting Neerlandistiek Leiden, 301–312.

Rutten, Gijsbert. 2009d. 'De bronnen van Des Roches. Jan Des Roches' *Nieuwe Nederduytsche spraek-konst* (1761) en de taalgeschiedenis van de achttiende eeuw'. *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 125 (4), 362–384.

Siegenbeek, Matthijs. 1804. *Verhandeling over de Nederduitsche spelling, ter bevordering van eenparigheid in dezelve*. Amsterdam: Allart.

Sluys, A.L.I. 1912. *Geschiedenis van het onderwijs in de drie graden in België tijdens de Fransche overheersching en onder de regeering van Willem I*. Ghent: Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde / Siffer.

Smeyers, Jozef. 1959. *Vlaams taal- en volksbewustzijn in het Zuidnederlands geestesleven van de 18de eeuw*. Ghent: Secretarie der Academie.

Stéven, Andries. 1714 [1784]. *Nieuwen Néderlandschen Voorschrift-boek*. Ypres: Moerman.

Suffeleers, Tony. 1979. *Taalverzorging in Vlaanderen. Een opiniegeschiedenis*. Bruges: Orion / Gottmer.

Ter Bruggen, Joannes Abraham. 1822 [1817]. *Nederduytsche spraek-konst ten gebruyke der schoólen*. Antwerp: J.S. Schoesetters.

Vaelande van Ieper [Van Daele, François Donatien]. 1805/1806. *Tyd-Verdryf. Ondersoek op de Néder-duytsche spraek-konst*. [Ypres]: [De Varver].

Van Aerschot, M. 1807. *Nieuwe Nederduytsche spraek- en spel-konst*. Turnhout: J.H. Le Tellier.

Van Belleghem, P.J. & Daniël Waterschoot. [1773]. *Deure oft Ingang tot de Nederduytsche Taele*. Bruges: Van Praet.

Van Boterdael, L. 1785 [1776]. *Gemaklyke wyze om óp korten tyd grooten voortgang te doen in de Nederduytsche spel-konst*. Bruges: Joseph Bogaert.

Van der Horst, Joop. 2004. 'Schreef J.B.C. Verlooy echt zo gebrekkig? Het 19de / 20ste-eeuwse beeld van de 18de eeuw getoetst'. *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 114 (1), 71–82.

Van der Sijs, Nicoline. 2004. *Taal als mensenwerk. Het ontstaan van het ABN*. The Hague: Sdu.

Van der Wal, Marijke. 1995. *De moedertaal centraal. Standaardisatie-aspecten in de Nederlanden omstreeks 1650*. The Hague: Sdu.

Van der Wal, Marijke. 2006. *Onvoltooid verleden tijd. Witte vlekken in de taalgeschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen.

Van der Wal, Marijke & Cor van Bree. 2008. *Geschiedenis van het Nederlands*. 5th edn. Houten: Spectrum.

Vanhecke, Eline. 2007. *Stedelijke kanselarijtaal in Vlaanderen in de negentiende eeuw*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

Verpoorten, Jan Domien. 1752. *Woorden-schat oft letter-konst*. Antwerp: A.J. du Caju.

Verpoorten, Jan Domien. 1759. *Woorden-schat oft letter-konst*. 2nd edn. Antwerp: Berbie.

Vosters, Rik. 2009. 'Integrationisten en particularisten? Taalstrijd in Vlaanderen tijdens het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1815–1830)'. *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Zuid-Nederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis* LXII (2008), 41–58.

Vosters, Rik, Gijsbert Rusten, V Marijke van der Wal. 2010. 'Mythes op de pijubank. Naar een herwaardering van de taalsituatie in de Nederlanden in de achttiende en negtutiende eeuw'. *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterliunde*, 120, 93–112.

Vosters, Rik, & Wim Vandenbussche. 2008. 'Wijzer worden over Willem. Taalgebruik in Vlaanderen ten tijde van het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1814–1830)'. *Internationale Neerlandistiek* 46 (3), 2–22.

Vosters, Rik, & Wim Vandenbussche. 2009. 'Nieuw onderzoek naar taalbeleid en taalvariatie in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden ten tijde van Willem I'. In: Backus, Ad, Merel Keijzer, Ineke Vedder & Bert Weltens (eds), *Artikelen van de Zesde Anéla-conferentie*. Delft: Eburon, 389–395.

Weiland, Petrus. 1805. *Nederduitsche Spraakkunst*. Amsterdam: Allart.

Willems, Jan Frans. 1824. *Over de Hollandsche en Vlaemsche schryfwyzen van het Nederduitsch*. Antwerpen: Wed. Schoesetters.

Wils, Lode. 1956. 'Vlaams en Hollands in het Verenigd Koninkrijk'. In: *Dietsche Warande en Belfort*, 527–536.

Wils, Lode. 2003 [2001]. *Waarom Vlaanderen Nederlands spreekt*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.