

JILL PUTTAERT

Linguistic Hybridity in Nineteenth-Century Lower-Class Letters

A Case Study from Bruges

ABSTRACT. This contribution focuses on linguistic hybridity in a small corpus of nineteenth-century pauper letters, written by lower-class scribes from the West-Flemish town of Bruges, in current-day Belgium. We argue that these writings from below do not exclusively display standard language norms, nor are they a direct written manifestation of a local dialect. To describe this so-called linguistic hybridity, we will analyse three features: schwa-apocope, h-procope (and hypercorrect h-insertion), and so-called adnominal accusativism. Through a corpus study of these forms, we will show that dialect variants of these features do occur, but they are remarkably rare. Nonetheless, we do find a considerable amount of instances where older regional (i.e. more widespread) variants are used. This leads us to conclude that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that, when putting pen to paper, formal or supraregional communication was desirable. In their actual writing, however, they neither follow standard language norms nor local dialect forms consistently, drawing on a fairly elaborate linguistic repertoire to produce complex and inherently hybrid varieties. We aim to demonstrate that the written hybridity in these letters should therefore be regarded and evaluated as a form of a language manifestation in its own right, rather than as a watered down version of the predominant standard language.

KEYWORDS: Historical sociolinguistics, Dutch, language history from below, linguistic hybridity, pauper letters, egodocuments

1. Introduction

Various Flemish archives preserve collections of numerous nineteenth-century letters of poor and needy people who begged for financial support from their local government. Most of these ‘pauper letters’ are addressed to the governor of various institutions for charity, others are written to a local mayor, a minister, and some are even sent to the king and queen.¹ This article² focuses on the language in pauper letters from Bruges, in the province of West Flanders³ (see figure 1). As the project in which this case study is embedded has only recently started, the present article provides a first small-scale and exploratory case study on linguistic aspects of 26 pauper letters from Bruges, written by 26 different scribes between 1851 and 1891. The corpus in its entirety comprises 4179 words: the longest letter counts for 329 words and the smallest has only 60 words. The average length is 161 words. The aim of this modest study is to delve into the particular character of these writings from below from a sociolinguistic point of view: as we will show, they cannot be regarded as transliterated dialect,⁴ nor can they be classified as standard language. Following Martineau & Tailleur (2014) we argue that these writings display a type of linguistic hybridity, which may be typical for such writings (see section 3). To demonstrate this, we will focus on three features: schwa-apocope, h-procope (and hypercorrect h-insertion), and so-called adnominal ‘accusativism’. We start with a description of the rise, development and dialectal usage of the features under scrutiny, and move forward to a quantitative analysis of each feature, exploring the possible existence of linguistic hybridity in our corpus of writings from below.

First, we will briefly discuss the historical and linguistic background and the act of writing, which is interwoven with (the quite ambiguous

¹ Much previous work on such pauper letters in Europe has focused on the English context – cf. for instance the work of Sokoll (2001) on Essex pauper letters (1800–1834), and of Fairman (2000) on similar writings in the English record offices. In Belgium, the work of Van Ginderachter (2007) also focuses on pauper letters, which were sent to the king and queen.

² I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive feedback and comments.

³ Work on these letters, as well as on many similar letters from other cities in West Flanders, will be at the heart of the new project ‘Forgotten voices from below. A sociolinguistic analysis of lower class correspondence in the Low Countries’, supported by the Research Foundation Flanders, carried out by the author of the present article at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and supervised by Wim Vandenbussche and Rik Vosters.

⁴ With a transliterated dialect we mean a written variety in which the dialect of the scribe is almost literally put on paper. In this written code only very few dialect features are adjusted to the standard language, since the writer simply does not master the standard language (Willemyns 1983:82).

term) *literacy* (section 2). Next, we will concisely outline the meaning of *linguistic hybridity* (section 3) before proceeding to the corpus study (section 4). The chapter closes with some preliminary conclusions and reflections (section 5).



Figure 1. Map of (present-day) Flanders with West Flanders, East Flanders and Bruges.⁵

2. Historical and Linguistic Context

The nineteenth century was characterised by mass literacy drives all over Europe, providing an easier than ever access to the written word for large sections of society that had been illiterate ever before. Even the lower middle and the lower classes⁶ learnt to write and consequently produced a large number of texts (Elspaß 2007:151). For less (or hardly at all) educated scribes, the task of writing a letter must have required remarkable efforts. Extraordinary social circumstances such as migration (see for instance Elspaß 2005) and war (see for instance Sandersen 2007 and Van Bakel's [1977] corpus of Flemish soldiers correspondence from the Napoleonic era),⁷ often forced them, however, to put pen to paper in spite of their limited literacy skills. The same urge to write surfaced in situations of extreme poverty, when unfortunate people felt the need to write and ask for relief and financial sup-

⁵ This map is based on a map from <http://www.dekrachtvanjestem.be/bij-u-in-de-klas/politiek-woordenboek/gemeente>.

⁶ We certainly are aware of the ambiguous term *social class* as methodological problem. One should take into account that the social and economic structure in nineteenth-century Flanders and the rest of Europe, was subject to continuous change. Furthermore, classes of different countries or even cities are not comparable without a careful analysis of their specific situation (Vandenbussche 2002:29).

⁷ Van Bakel's corpus has recently started to be used for larger-scale linguistic analyses (e.g., Rutten, Vosters & van der Wal 2015).

port. These *begging letters* reveal exceptional information concerning the written word of ordinary people, even if their literacy skills were limited at best.

We want to assert here that concepts of *literacy* and *writing skills* (when applied to barely schooled people from the lower social ranks in nineteenth-century Flanders) are as heterogeneous as for other language communities abroad. “The term encompasses unskilled writers who barely know how to write down their name, as well as more educated and very fluent writers who have received education but still show a few vernacular features in their writings”, Martineau & Tailleux stated in relation to writers from nineteenth-century French Canada (2014:25). We therefore need to conceptualise literacy as a continuum with very elaborate writing skills on one side, and total illiteracy on the other – with a whole array of possible literacies in between these extremes (see also Marijke Van der Wal 2006:8).

To further the complexity of the discussion at hand, it is well known that scribes whose writing skills were too modest to write a letter, asked for help from family and friends who were able to write – so-called *social scribes*. In this context, Nordlund (2013) introduces the concept of *polyphony* in a text: “Instead of only one writer, letter writing could include several actors who composed the text together. These included scribes, narrators, overhearers, those who dictated and those who performed the physical act of writing” (Nordlund 2013:382). As such, the letters that scholars study (in history and historical sociolinguistics, for instance), might thus be a result of a cooperation between several people. In our specific case (i.e. discussing letters from nineteenth-century Bruges) we do assume that all of the people who jointly composed a letter were very likely to be part of the same social class. While the idea of polyphonous voices and social scribes does not make these sources less valuable for linguistic research – quite the contrary: this complexity makes them even more worthwhile to investigate –, we are currently developing a protocol to be able to classify the writings in our corpus and label them as *autograph*, *non-autograph*, *probably autograph* or *probably non-autograph*.⁸

In the (language) historiography of Dutch in Flanders, there is a persistent idea that people from the lower social strata hardly ever wrote, because they were simply not able to. In some extraordinary cases where these people actually did put pen to paper, they are commonly believed to have written

⁸ Marijke Van der Wal, Gijsbert Rutten and Judith Nobels dealt with a similar problem identifying the writings in their corpus and composed a procedure called *the Leiden Identification Procedure* to determine the autograph status of a letter. For a detailed description of the procedure, see: Nobels 2013:53–76.

in their local dialect (cf. Vanhecke et al. 2006:515). Several scholars in history and historical sociolinguistics, however, found that this written language from below is not a transliterated dialect at all (Vandenbussche 2002; Elspaß 2007:152; Lyons 2013:23, among others). In his work, Vandenbussche (2007:282), who studied reports of trade meetings from nineteenth-century Bruges, written by lower-class writers from the apprentice rank of the tailor, wool weaver, carpenter, shoemaker and brush maker trades uses the term *intended standard*⁹ to refer to the written language in the documents under scrutiny: this intended standard is used “to refer to a variety which does not meet the formal requirements of a standard language (e.g. consistent spelling and grammatical correctness) but which is nevertheless intended by the writer to fulfil the functions attributed to a standard variety (e.g. supraregional communication, prestige variety)” (Vandenbussche 2002:34–35).

The term *intended standard* has not been widely adopted in historical sociolinguistics, however, and various scholars may be hesitant to use the term, as it would imply that the written language of almost untrained scribes from the lower social echelons is held up to formal writing norms which many of these writers would not have had access to (see also Nordlund 2013:184). From this perspective, writing correctly was not relevant as a formal linguistic concept to many writers. As such, we should not see these writings as futile attempts to conform to certain formal language norms.

Rutten & Van der Wal (2011:269) suggest the term *intended supralocal variety* instead of *intended standard* to refer to these writings from below. In their study on the degree of orality in Dutch private letters from the seventeenth century, they took note of a *supralocal orthographic leveling* instead (ibidem). Generally, Rutten and Van der Wal found traces of spoken language, but it is certainly clear that people did not write in their local dialect. “They used an *intended supraregional* variety instead and were, to a large extent, perfectly able to do so” (ibidem). This *intended supraregional variety* seems to be an acceptable term which is less stigmatising and therefore might be the answer to the terminological issue.

3. Hybridity

Through the case study presented in this chapter, we aim to show how a significant amount of linguistic hybridity characterises the writings from less- or partly-educated people in our corpus. This *written hybridity* has been described by Martineau & Tailleur (2014) in their discussion of private doc-

⁹ It was Ahrend Mihm who introduced the term *intendiertes Hochdeutsch* in his 1998 study of “Arbeitersprache und gesprochene Sprache im 19. Jahrhundert”. He used this term to characterise the written language of lower-class people in formal situations.

uments written by people from different social classes, specifically focusing on nineteenth-century French in Canada. They argue that there is a certain hybridity “in the sense that [private texts from lower order scribes – JP] reveal an intricate relation to local vernacular and supralocal features alike” (Martineau & Tailleur 2014:224). As we have shown in the previous paragraph, these scribes were certainly aware of the existence of language norms, but because of their minimal schooling and their limited access to these norms, they wrote a hybrid variant that by no means was a local dialect, but could be called an *intended supralocal variety* (Rutten & Van der Wal 2011:269) in which scribes try to avoid local features, and meet a certain supralocal variety, sometimes however with interferences of their local speech. Still following their reasoning, one might say that it concerns varieties that are to be located between the extremes of the classic traditional sociolinguistic continuum from standard to dialect (see also Dossena 2012:26-27), a concept recently rebranded and elaborated by Auer (2005:26) under the label *diaglossia*, “the most wide-spread relationship between dialect and standard”.

Concerning the time and place the writings in this case study stem from, we can postulate that there was a fixed standard variety for written usage, alongside a number of local dialect varieties from in and around the town of Bruges, used almost exclusively in everyday spoken language. Looking at the degree of dialect retention in West Flanders until the twentieth century, it is safe to assume that a West-Flemish dialect was the main variety of the scribes from our corpus. Obviously, the writers might have drawn upon different registers in spoken language too, but this remains a matter of speculation. It is, however, important to underline here that this study focuses on the possible manifestation of hybridity in the written code and we certainly do not want to (or cannot) draw any conclusions concerning the spoken vernacular.

An emphasis on linguistic hybridity would allow us to investigate to which extent lower-order scribes (in writing) were able to draw on such a continuum of linguistic varieties between the extremes of standard language on the one hand and dialect on the other. Our point of departure would be that the written hybridity described above should be seen (by linguists) as a form of a language manifestation in its own right, regardless of the possible predominant standard language.

4. Case Study

In this section, we aim to examine the hybridity in the pauper letters used for this case study. In order to do so, we focus on schwa-apocope, h-procope and adnominal accusativism. Our choice of these features is related to the

types of indexicality (i.e. the degree of awareness of a certain marked variable) introduced by Labov (1972). Using his terms and building on the study of Rutten & Van der Wal (2014:324–361), we postulate that the apocope of schwa could be called a *marker* for some language users (especially experienced, upper-class scribes) in the period and region we are talking about, while for other, less-experienced and lower-class scribes, this variable would be an *indicator*. H-procope might be a stereotype, since it is definitely stigmatised and several nineteenth-century grammars and language guides (Des Roches [1761], for instance) explicitly stress that <h> should be pronounced properly. The adnominal accusativism could on a certain level definitely be called a *stereotype*, since it was ideologically used by some grammarians to stress the (so-called) linguistic opposition between the North and the South of the Low Countries. For less-educated scribes (like the ones in our corpus) this feature might have been a marker.

It is crucial to underline, however, that this study is a modest first exploration of (a part of) our data; we do not want to make any large-scale extrapolations on the basis thereof. Future research on an extended body of data will be used to confirm or corroborate our findings.

a. Schwa-apocope (first person singular verb form, simple present, indicative mode)

The deletion of the final schwa in Dutch is the result of a phonological change which started in the thirteenth century and characterises one of the main differences between Middle Dutch (ca. 1200–1550) and Early Modern Dutch (ca. 1550–1650) (Marynissen 2004:610–611). Schwa-apocope is the disappearance of the unstressed vowel ə in word endings, affecting several grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, and numerals (idem:609; Nobels 2013:155). There are, however, some contexts in which the final schwa still exists in present-day Dutch, for instance: in fixed expressions, the declension of the adjectives and personal feminine nouns (Marynissen 2004:609–610).

Both language external (geographical, temporal) and language internal (phonological, morphological) factors play a role in the rise, development and spread of this feature. Concerning regional variation, we see that, opposed to standard Dutch where final schwa disappeared in many cases, the schwa is still today preserved in East-Flemish dialects and in some varieties of neighbouring West-Flemish dialects. Since in this case study we look at writings from West Flanders, namely Bruges, we will briefly outline the West-Flemish dialect forms regarding this feature (see also figure 2). Apart from the aforementioned endings on schwa, some West-Flemish language varieties also have verb endings for first person singular simple present on

–en (e.g. *ik werken*, ‘I work’), especially found in Bruges, and –n (e.g. *ik werkn*), which can be located mainly at the coast and the west of West Flanders, but is not found in the dialect of the city of Bruges, where speakers still pronounce the unstressed *e* vowel in –en. The dialects of southeast West Flanders, on the contrary, still have the older form with a schwa ending (e.g. *ik werke* ‘I work’, and *wij werken* ‘we work’) (Devos & Vandekerckhove 2005:32–33; MAND II, Goeman et. al. 2008:50, 56).

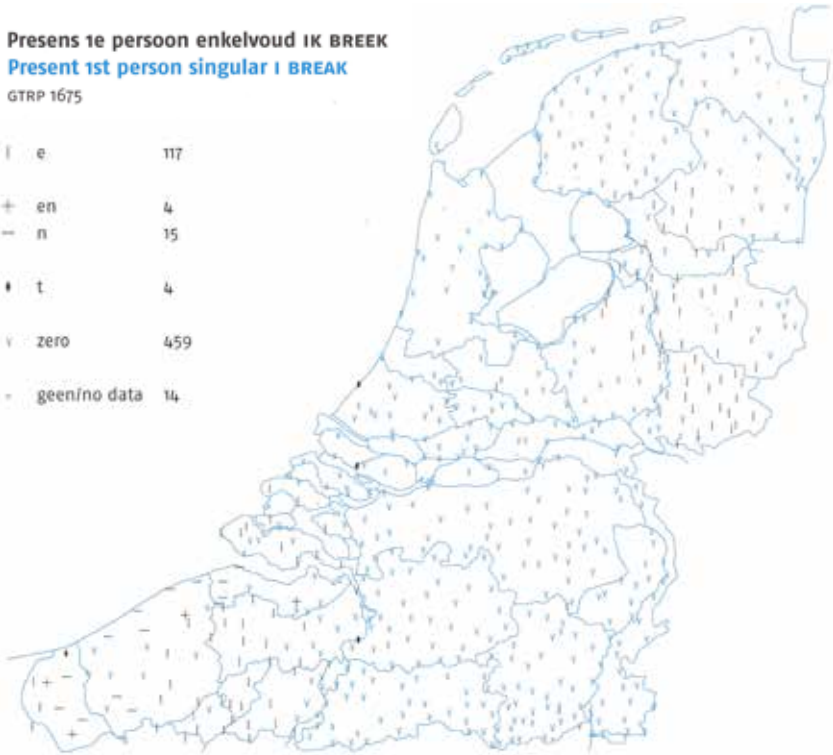


Figure 2. The first personal singular verb form for the present tense of the verb *breken* ‘to break’ in present-day Dutch dialects (MAND II, Goeman et al. 2008).

As already briefly mentioned, the ending on *-e* was an older form that gradually disappeared from the standard language. Whereas in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the grammarian Egidius Candidus Pastor (E.C.P., also known as Gilles De Witte, 1713) still prescribed for instance *ik hoore* ('I hear'), *ik schrijve* ('I write') and *ik hebbe* ('I have'), Des Roches (1761) in the second half of the same century already recommends *ik geloof* ('I believe') and *ik heb* ('I have'). Later grammarians Willems (1824) and Behaegel (1829) also use *-ø* exclusively. It is therefore clear that the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century normative tradition prescribed the endings with schwa-apocope. The ending on *-t*, *-en* or *-n* are very local, dialect forms from West Flanders.¹⁰

In the corpus we compiled for this case study, we found four types of verb endings for the first person singular, simple present indicative mode: the standard *-ø* endings (see example 1), the ending on schwa (see example 2), the ending on *-en* (example 3) which is typical for West-Flemish dialects, and finally endings on *-t* (example 4), also a dialect feature.¹¹

- 1) Ik *heb* het zeer nodig voor min [pacht?] te betaalen
I have it very necessary to my [rent?] to pay

'I am in dire need of it to be able to pay my [rent?]'
(Ambrosius Bonte, 1880).

- 2) Ik *verhope* dat gij mijn verzoek zult vol doen
I hope that you my request will satisfy

'I hope that you will meet my request.'
(Amelia Spetebrood, 1861)

- 3) Ik *bevinden* my in het gesticht
I find myself in the institute

¹⁰ For the case study discussed in this article, we focused on regular verb forms of the first person singular in the simple present. We excluded the verbs *zijn* ('to be'), *zullen* ('shall/'will'), *kunnen* ('can') and *mogen* ('may/can') since they are irregular, the verb *wilten* ('to want') since it originally occurred rarely with a final schwa in the first person singular of the simple present in Middle Dutch (Nobels 2013:158; Van Loey 1970:174), the verbs *doen* ('to do') and *gaan* ('to go'), since they only show variation in endings on *-n* and *-t*. Finally we excluded the verb *moeten* ('to have/must'), since its conjugation in the West-Flemish dialect differs from other regular verbs [for instance: *ik moe(n)*] (Devos & Vandekerckhove 2005:73).

¹¹ In the dialect variant we would expect: *ik (h)en* in the first example, *ik verhopen* in the second, *ik bevinden* in the third and *ik vragen* in the fourth example.

‘I am located in the institute.’
 (Jean Baptiste Caudron, 1863)

4) zoo heer gouverneur ik en *vraegt* niet anders of ten
 so sir governor I [neg.] ask not different if it

 is van UE om eenigen onderstand
 is from you for some support

‘so sir governor I don’t ask anything else than to have some support
 from you’
 (Joannes Franciscus Hinderyks, 1860)

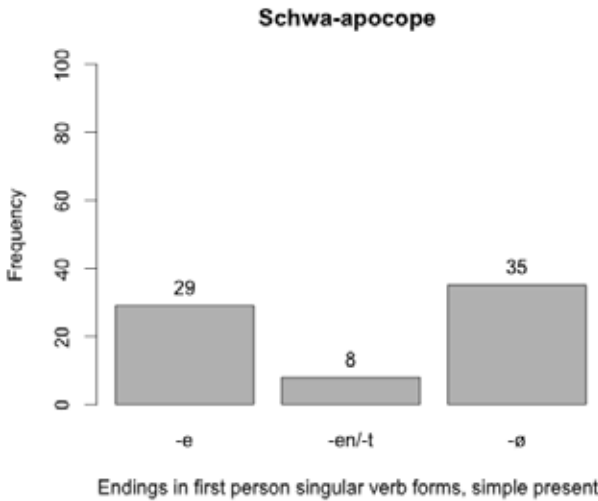


Figure 3. The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb form.

When looking closely at our results for the first person singular verb forms (figure 3), it becomes clear that the endings $-\emptyset$ and $-e$ are the most common in our corpus. While the standard ending on $-\emptyset$ is used in 49 % of the cases, the regional ending on schwa counts for 40 %. It is remarkable that the traditional, local dialect forms ($-en$ and $-t$) are not used very frequently and $-n$ does even not appear at all. This is interesting, since it supports our hypothesis that these lower-order writings cannot simply be regarded as a transliterated dialect. The ending on $-en$ is only used in four cases out of the 72 and $-t$ five times.

Dialect endings on *-t* occur in the conjugation of the verbs *hebben* (e.g. Ik *hebt* ook een kind ‘I also have a child’), *komen* (e.g. *dat ik u eenen gratis komt af te smeeken* ‘that I come to ask you forgiveness’) and *vragen* (e.g. *zoo heer gouverneur ik en vraegt niet anders of ten is van UE om eenigen onderstand* ‘so sir governor I don’t ask anything else than to have some support from you’).

Despite the very low rate of dialectal forms, it must be said, however, that the more regional ending on schwa is very frequent. Since this variant is still today widely used all across West and East Flanders and even parts of the northeast Netherlands, this cannot be seen as a local dialect feature. It occurs alongside the standard *-ø* form. In other words: we do not only find a prominent use of the standard *-ø*, but also notice a frequent use of schwa ending, which is a more regional variant, used in a larger part of the Dutch language community. Forms that can be linked to the West-Flemish dialect are very rare.

b. h-procope

In many southwestern Dutch dialects, /h/ before a vowel is not pronounced at the beginning of a word (e.g. *emel* for *hemel* ‘heaven’) and in some cases in the middle of a word before a morpheme boundary (e.g. *werkuis* for *werk-huis* ‘employment place’). Regarding the dialect of Bruges, De Wolf (s.d.:32) notes that /h/ in the beginning of a word is never heard or “aangebلاzen” (‘aspirated’).

This tendency to drop /h/ already existed in Old Dutch (ca. 600–1200). The phenomenon is also found in Middle Dutch, namely in texts from Flanders and Brabant (Weijnen 1970:42; Van Loey 1970:97). One of the consequences of h-procope, is hypercorrection (De Wulf 2003:227): the over-generalised use of a feature due to an incorrect analogy with the prestigious form, for instance *haap* instead of *aap* (‘monkey’).

Given the fact that h-dropping is still a very common phenomenon in West Flanders and looking at the map (figure 4), it is safe to assume that /h/ was also dropped in the dialect of Bruges at the time of our corpus.

For the case study discussed in this article, we looked at words with <h> and/or a vowel in anlaut, excluding proper nouns and names, for which no variation was found in a preliminary survey of the data. We chose to exclude contexts with possible h-dropping in the middle of the word before morpheme boundaries, since our corpus has not been annotated with morphological information and morpheme boundaries, making it impossible to extract all relevant instances automatically.

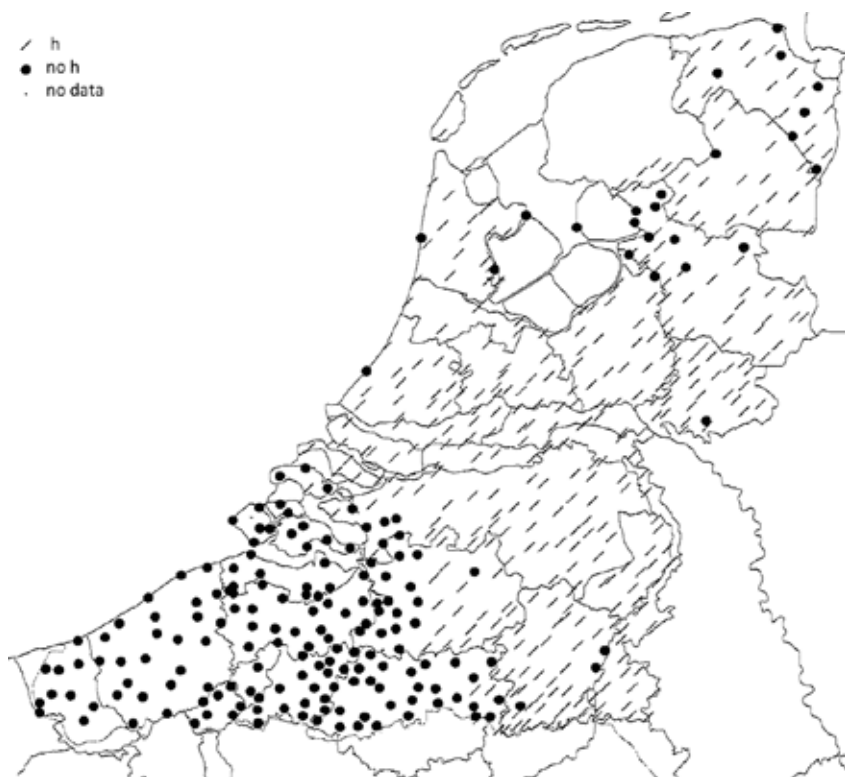


Figure 4. The pronunciation of h at the beginning of the word *huis* 'house' (FAND IV, De Wulf et al. 2005:433).

When looking at the result of our study, it becomes clear that there are almost no instances of h-procope (figure 5). Out of the 305 hits, <h> is dropped in only three cases (the words with h-procope are marked in bold, followed by the present-day standard form between square brackets):

1) en den pastor doet geene **erstelling** [herstelling] aen het gene
and the pastor does no restoration on that what
 ik voorgaendelyk dede
 I previously did

'and the pastor doesn't restore the things I've done previously'
 (Johannes Van De Kerkhove, 1853)

2) en haren vader die is voor den 2 mael *er trouwd* [hertrouwd]
 and her father who is for the second time remarried

'and her father is remarried for the second time'
 (Matilde Bruhaen, 1869)

3) Maer *eilaes* [helaas], naer den tyt van vieren dertig jaeren myne
 But *unfortunately after the time of thirty-four years my*

pligten hebben gekweten gelyk het behoort
duties have fulfilled as it suits

'But unfortunately, after [lit. the time of] thirty-four years of doing my
 duties as it should'
 (Philippe Hubin, 1891)

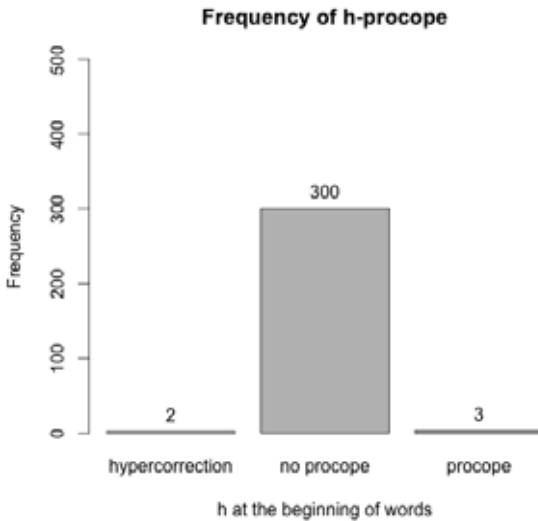


Figure 5. The frequency of h-procope in this corpus.

Hypercorrect h-insertion occurs only two times, both in a letter from one and the same scribe (vrouwe Blanke Staebles) and is used twice in the same word – she writes *hals tu blieft*, instead of *alstublieft* ('please').

We can thus conclude that h-procope and related hypercorrect h-insertion rarely occur in the corpus. Since h-procope is a common phonological

phenomenon in West-Flemish dialects, and since it is not reflected in the writings of our scribes, we may assume that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that putting pen to paper implied formal communication: they were conscious of the need to avoid this feature from their everyday, spoken vernacular.

c. Adnominal accusativism

In Early Middle Dutch (ca. 1200–1350) there was a morphological distinction between the nominative and the accusative for singular masculine definite articles: in the accusative case, *-n* was added (*den* ‘the’), whereas in the nominative case, the form remained uninflected (*de* ‘the’). Some time between the fourteenth and sixteenth century, this system became subject to change and the originally accusative form *den* started to also appear in positions where a nominative form would be expected (cf. Goossens 2008:64–69). This phenomenon is called *accusativism* and its development was mainly situated in the Southern dialects of Dutch, initially especially in the Brabant area. Accusativism is common in articles (*de/den, een/eenen* ‘a/one’), adjectives (*goede/goeden* ‘good’) and pronouns (*zijn/zijnen* ‘his’).

The absence or presence of accusativism *-n* forms is phonologically conditioned in the local, spoken dialects. De Wolf (s.d.:60–64) postulates that the dialect of Bruges displays specific phonological conditions: the accusative form is used before stop consonants (e.g. *den dwerg* ‘the dwarf’), in some cases with assimilation (e.g. *dem boer* ‘the farmer’) and before a vowel (e.g. *den oven* ‘the oven’, *den hengst* ‘the stallion’ with a silent /h/). In the dialect of Bruges, not only masculine words get *-n*, but also some female words appear with *den/dem/deng* (e.g. *den dochter* ‘the daughter’). Consequently, the pronunciation helps only in some cases to determine the grammatical gender.

In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century normative tradition, the opposition *de/den* became subject of an ideological debate. Gradually, a dichotomy was created and in several normative works and ideological debates, the Southern language users who were assumed to utilise *den* were put in opposition to the Northern language users who were assumed to speak and write *de*. This ideological opposition, however, ignores the fact that there indeed were instances of *de* in the South and *den* in the North and could therefore be called tendentious. Yet, some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Southern grammarians (among whom Henckel 1815:135) did stress that *den* was the only acceptable norm.

All of the Flemish normative works competing for the accusativism prescribed *den* regardless of the phonological context (Vosters et.al. 2012:140), but in spite of their endeavours, *de* became the officially codified norm in Southern Dutch in 1844.

For this case study we exclusively focus on masculine articles *de(n)* ('the') and *een(en)* ('a/'one') and the possessive pronoun *mijn(en)* ('mine') in singular form. The other possessive pronouns *haar* ('her'), for instance in phrases like *haar man is ziek* ('Her husband is ill') and *zijn* ('his') with their variants were not used in the masculine form in our corpus and are therefore excluded.

When looking at the results of our case study (Figure 6), it becomes clear that the ending on *-(e)n* is the most common: it is used in 58 % of the cases, while *-ø* occurs in 37 % of the instances. The ending with *-e* is used only three times (5 %): two times in the lemma *mijn(e)* and once in *een(e)*:

- 1) Ik ben *eene* ongelukkigen
I am a [unhappy one]

'I am an unfortunate person'
(Jean Baptiste Caudro, 1863)

- 2) als dat *mijne* echtgenoot Frans schillewaert nu reeds
ten tijd
as if my husband Frans schillewaert now already
[for] time

van 8 weeken mij koom te verlaeten
of 8 weeks me comes to leave

'that my husband Frans schillewaert has already left me since eight weeks'
(Sophia Dupon, 1865)

- 3) Gy zyt *myne* eenigste hulp en troost
You are my only help and consolation

'You are my only help and consolation'
(Victorine Bulteere, 1865)

Moreover, Bruges-based forms from the spoken vernacular such as *dem* and *deng* do not occur at all. The variation in our corpus is thus smaller than it must have been in the spoken dialect of Bruges. Still, the formal prescribed norm since 1844 was *de*, which in our corpus only accounts for about 37 % of all instances.

However, the results by no means reflect the phonological variation that is typical for the spoken dialect from Bruges (e.g. forms like *dem* and *deng*, caused by assimilation).

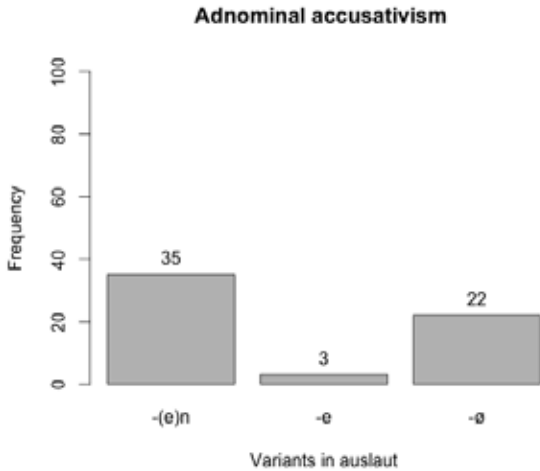


Figure 6. The occurrences of the adnominal accusativism in the corpus of pauper letters from Bruges.

5. Conclusion

The case study presented in this article provides an insight into the possible existence of linguistic hybridity in pauper letters, written by lower-class scribes from nineteenth-century Bruges. In this study, we searched for interferences of the local vernacular, as well as supralocal characteristics. In order to do so, we focused on three features: schwa-apocope, h-procope (and hypercorrect h-insertion), and the so-called adnominal accusativism.

The results lead us to conclude that the letters under scrutiny display the type of linguistic hybridity discussed above as far as these three features are concerned. Remarkably, in all the three cases, the standard variant is represented in many instances, while the typical dialect form is rare or almost non-existent. We do of course find variation among the different scribes and within the writing of each scribe, but it is remarkable that almost all of them display variation concerning two of the three features under scrutiny, namely schwa-apocope and the adnominal accusativism. Almost no variation was found concerning h-procope, and the consequent use of only one variant can hardly be found. Nevertheless, the variation used by each scribe, is never unlimited and most of them alternate between (only) two possible variants.

Concerning schwa-apocope, for instance, standard endings on $-ø$ (e.g. *ik heb* 'I have') are used slightly more frequently than the more regional endings (i.e. more widespread) on schwa (e.g. *ik verhope* 'I hope'). West-Flemish dialect endings on $-en$ and $-t$ are found in only very few cases and $-n$, also a very common West-Flemish variant in the modern-day dialects, does not even occur at all.

Even more clear are the results of h-procope in our corpus. While in the dialect of West Flanders (like in many other Flemish dialects) /h/ at the beginning of a word, before a vowel is never pronounced, it is preserved almost categorically in the writings we analysed, with hypercorrect h-insertation being extremely rare. In other words: the scribes of our corpus who must have never used /h/ in word-initial position in their every-day local speech, systematically use <h> according to the prescribed norms when writing. Hence, we may assume that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that when putting pen to paper it was appropriate to avoid some features they used in everyday, informal situations, such as h-procope. The very few instances of hypercorrect h-insertion are also striking, since they show that these scribes not only were aware of the fact that h-dropping was a regional feature, but they also knew where exactly to put the <h> in their writings, i.e. when using a supralocal form.

The use of the adnominal accusativism, finally, also displays linguistic hybridity, since both forms like *de* (standard variant since 1844) and *den* (older form and regional) are present in the letters of our corpus. The latter, however, is more frequently used. Furthermore, Bruges-based forms from the spoken vernacular such as *dem* and *deng* (caused by assimilation) do not occur at all. Thus, there is less variation in our corpus than there must have been in the spoken dialect of Bruges.

Given the relatively low rate of dialect interferences, the many instances of regional and older forms and the frequent use of standard forms, we conclude that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that in writing, formal communication was desirable and features from their everyday, spoken vernacular needed to be avoided. A more supraregional language was thus desirable. This also means, of course, that the scribes of our corpus apparently mastered a code other than their informal local speech. However, the fact that local or regional forms are not absent from their writing either, shows that their language use is inherently hybrid, indicating that these scribes were capable of drawing on multiple linguistic repertoires when writing, notwithstanding their maybe sometimes limited levels of literacy. Linguistic hybridity is thus present in the pauper letters under scrutiny in the sense that both standard forms and more regional, sometimes dialect forms coexist. These results from our preliminary case study show that such 'writings from below' provide an interesting and surprisingly complex source for linguistic analyses. Further research based on a larger set of linguistic features, and on a more extensive set of data, with similar documents from other regions and a larger amount of different scribes, is, however, called for in order to corroborate these findings on a larger scale.

SOURCES AND LITERATURE

Manuscript

De Wolf, Karel. s.d. Het Brugsch, lijk het nog leeft, en vooraleer het nog meer verdwijnt. Unpublished manuscript (original kept by the heirs de Wolf, Bruges).

Literature

- Auer, Peter 2005. Europe's Sociolinguistic Unity, or: A Typology of European Dialect/Standard Constellations. In: Nicole Delbecque, Johan van der Auwera & Dirk Geeraerts (eds.), *Perspectives on Variation: Sociolinguistic, Historical, Comparative*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter. Pp. 7–42.
- Behaegel, Pieter (s.a. ±1829). *Nederduytsche Spraakkunst. Derde boekdeél*. Brugge: De Moor.
- Des Roches, Jan (s.a. 1761). *Nieuwe Nederduytsche Spraek-konst. Derden Druk, oversien en verbeteret doór den Auteur*. Antwerpen: Grangé. [edition by J.M. Van der Horst 2007. Münster: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU/Nodus]
- Devos, Magda & Vandekerckhove, Reinhild 2005. *Taal in stad en land. West-Vlaams*. Tielt: Lannoo.
- De Wulf, Chris 2003. Procope van de h-. In: *Taal & Tongval* 55. Pp. 216–231.
- Dossena, Marina 2012. The Study of Correspondence: Theoretical and Methodological Issues. In: Marina Dossena, Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti (eds.), *Letter Writing in Late Modern Europe*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Pp. 13–29.
- E.C.P. [Gilles De Witte] 1713. *Ontwerp van eene Nederduytsche Spraek-konst*. Meenen: Theodorus vanden Eynden.
- Elsaß, Stephan 2005. *Sprachgeschichte von unten. Untersuchungen zum geschriebenen Alltagsdeutsch im 19. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Elsaß, Stephan 2007. Everyday Language in Emigrant Letters and its Implications on Language Historiography – the German Case. In: *Multilingua* 26 (2–3). Pp. 151–165.
- Fairman, Tony 2000. English Pauper's Letters 1800–34, and the English Language. In: David Barton & Nigel Hall (eds.), *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins. Pp. 63–82.
- FAND IV: De Wulf, Chris et. al. 2005. *Fonologische atlas van de Nederlandse dialecten*. Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde.
- Goossens, Jan 2008. *Dialectgeografische grondslagen van een Nederlandse taalgeschiedenis*. Tongeren: G. Michiels.
- Henckel, Frans L.N. 1815. *Nieuwe Vlaemsche spraek-konst*. Gent: P.F. de Goesin-Verhaege.
- Labov, William 1972. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lyons, Martin 2013. A New History from Below? The Writing Culture of European Peasants, c. 1850 – c.1920. In: Anna Kuismin & M. J. Driscoll (eds.), *White Field, Black Seeds. Nordic Literacy Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. Pp. 14–29.
- MAND II: Goeman, Ton. et. al. 2008. *Morfologische atlas van de Nederlandse dialecten. Deel II*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Marynissen, Ann 2004. De conditionering van de sjwa-apocope bij zijn ontstaan in het Middelnederlands. In: Johan De Caluwe, Georges De Schutter, Magda Devos & Jacques Van Keymeulen (eds.), *Schatbewaarder van de Taal. Johan Taeldeman. Liber Amicorum*. Gent: Academia Press. Pp. 609–620.

- Martineau, France & Sandrine Tailleur 2014. From Local to Supra-Local: Hybridity in French Written Documents from the Nineteenth Century. In: Gijsbert Rutten, Rik Vosters & Wim Vandenbussche (eds.), *Norms and Usage in Language History, 1600–1900. A Sociolinguistic and Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Pp. 223–248.
- Mihm, Ahrend 1998. Arbeitersprache und gesprochene Sprache im 19. Jahrhundert. In: Dieter Cherubim, Klaus J. Mattheier, Siegfried Grosse (eds.), *Sprache und bürgerliche Nation: Beiträge zur deutschen und europäischen Sprachgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter. Pp. 282–316.
- Nobels, Judith 2013. *(Extra)Ordinary Letters. A View from Below on Seventeenth Century Dutch*. Utrecht: Landelijke Onderzoeksschool Taalwetenschap.
- Nordlund, Taru 2013. Letter-Writing as a Communicative Practice – Polyphony in Finnish Emigrant Letters in the 19th Century. In: *Poznan Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* 49(3). Pp. 381–398.
- Rutten, Gijsbert & Van der Wal, Marijke 2011. Local Dialects, Supralocal Writing Systems. The Degree of Orality of Dutch Private Letters from the Seventeenth Century. In: *Written Language & Literacy* 14 (2). Pp. 251–274.
- Rutten, Gijsbert & Van der Wal, Marijke 2014. *Letters as Loot. A Sociolinguistic Approach to Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Rutten, Gijsbert, Vosters, Rik & Van der Wal, Marijke 2015. Frenchification in Discourse and Practice. Loan Morphology in Private Letters of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. In: Catharina Peersman, Gijsbert Rutten, & Rik Vosters (eds.), *Past, Present and Future of a Language Border. Germanic-Romance Encounters in the Low Countries*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter Mouton. Pp. 143–169.
- Sandersen, Vibeke 2007. Writing Ability and the Written Language of Danish Private Soldiers in the Three Years' War (1848–50). In: *Multilingua* 26 (2–3). Pp. 247–278.
- Sokoll, Thomas 2001. *Essex Pauper Letters 1731–1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Bakel, Jan 1977. *Vlaamse soldatenbrieven uit de Napoleontische tijd*. Brugge: Orion & Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt.
- Vandenbussche, Wim 2002. The Standardization of Dutch Orthography in Lower, Middle and Upper Class Documents in 19th century Flanders. In: Andrew R. Linn & Nicola McLelland (eds.), *Standardization. Studies from the Germanic Languages*. Amsterdam & New York: John Benjamins. Pp. 27–42.
- Vandenbussche, Wim 2007. Lower Class Language in 19th Century Flanders. In: *Multilingua* 26 (2–3). Pp. 279–290.
- Van der Wal, Marijke 2006. *Onvoltooid verleden tijd. Witte vlekken in de taalgeschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Academie van Wetenschappen.
- Van Ginderachter, Maarten 2007. If your Majesty Would Only Send me a Little Money to Help Buy an Elephant: Letters to the Belgian Royal Family (1880–1940). In: Martin Lyons (ed.), *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives*. Bern: Peter Lang. Pp. 69–83
- Vanhecke, Eline, Vandenbussche, Wim, Willemyns, Roland & de Groof, Jetje 2006. Het verhaal van de negentiende-eeuwse Zuidelijke taal: tien jaar en drie sociolinguïstische conferenties verder. In: Tom Koole, Jacomine Nortier, Bert Tahitu (eds.) *Artikelen van de Vijfde sociolinguïstische conferentie*. Delft: Eburon. Pp. 514–525.
- Van Loey, Adolphe 1970. *Schönfelds historische grammatica van het Nederlands*. Zutphen: NV. W.J. Thieme & Cie.
- Vosters, Rik, Rutten, Gijsbert, Van der Wal, Marijke & Vandenbussche, Wim 2012. Spelling

and Identity in the Southern Netherlands (1750–1830). In: Alexandra Jaffe, Mark Sebba, Jannis Androutsopoulos & Sally Johnson (eds.), *Orthography as Social Action. Scripts, Spelling, Identity and Power, Language and Social Processes* 3. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Pp. 135–60.

Weijnen, Antonius Angelus 1970. *Het schema van de klankwetten*. Assen: Van Gorcum.

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

Willemyns, Roland 1983. Taalvarianten en normbewustzijn. In: *Verslag van het achtste colloquium van docenten in de neerlandistiek aan buitenlandse universiteiten*. Internationale Vereniging voor Neerlandistiek, Den Haag & Hasselt. Pp. 79–96.