

A SEVEN-LEAGUE STRIDES SIGHTSEEING TRIP THROUGH PAST AND PRESENT OF STANDARD DUTCH

Summary

The standardization of Dutch started in the early 16th century, driven by commercial, cultural and political developments; initially the standardization consisted only of the unification of the (regionally highly variable and still completely uncodified) written language. Standard Dutch is mainly built on Hollandic dialects. Standard Dutch is also partly a construct: for the sake of the first complete Bible translation (financed by the government of the Seven Provinces, where protestantism – in particular calvinism – was the state religion) scholars from different regions were recruited; the language they created had koine properties. The new Bible language also contained many constructions modelled on Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The linguistic resources of emergent Standard Dutch were further developed and expanded for other purposes as well.

After the Spanish occupation of Antwerp and the subsequent Counter-Reformation, the South became partially depopulated and isolated from the cultural developments in the politically autonomous and Protestant North, the first republic in the Early Modern history of Europe. The North experienced a booming development of Standard Dutch, but this did not reach the South. After the defeat of Napoleon and the Vienna Congress (1815), the two parts were reunited under King William I, who pursued a sharp ‘Dutch only’ language policy. This did not go down well with the Catholic and (French-speaking) liberal upper crust in the South. After Belgium had become independent (in 1830), language choice became free, but from a societal point of view Dutch stood no chance due to the political and economic domination of the Walloon / French elite. The Flemish response resulted in the emancipation of Dutch under the leadership of a group of pro-Dutch intellectuals; in this process the integrationist view i.e. affiliation to the Netherlandic standard variety of Dutch eventually predominated. In the 19th century, it was further cultivated and ‘enriched’ with, among other things, syntactic and

morphosyntactic peculiarities that widened the gap with the spoken language (which was still close to the dialects), leading to reactions in the literary world and elsewhere.

Only in the course of the 20th century did Standard Dutch become anchored in the verbal repertoires of the masses. In the South, the adopted Northern variety of Standard Dutch appears to be too much of a *Fremdkörper* and a spoken variety has been developing that is coloured by dialect features and therefore varies regionally. Spoken Netherlandic Standard Dutch also contains variable phonetic and morphosyntactic non-standard features.

In Surinam, Dutch has its roots as a colonial language but it was only widely distributed among the non-colonial part of the population in the last decades of the 19th century. It coexists with a range of creole languages, (especially Asian) migrant languages and indigenous languages, resulting in a great deal of ethnolectal variation. The divergent developments in Standard Dutch in the three parts of the language area have resulted in situations which combine features of pluricentricity with features of pluriareality.

Recent large-scale online surveys have shown that Dutch is firmly anchored and stable in all parts of the language area in all domains of language use. Even in the highly multilingual Surinam it is the largest language – in the Netherlands and Flanders it is so in absolute terms. From the same surveys, attitude data collected in all parts of the language area show that the vast majority of both native speakers and non-native speakers (strongly) believe that it is important that children speak Dutch, so for the time being there is no need to fear for the future of Dutch.

KEYWORDS: Dutch, standardisation, language policy, external language history, norms, pluricentricity, pluriareality, domains of language use.

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