

Andreas Krogull and Jill Puttaert

Leiden University

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

In historical sociolinguistics, the phenomenon of ‘European Francophonie’ has attracted quite some interest in recent years (Rjéoutski et al. 2014; Offord et al. 2018). Although strong claims have also been made about the role of French in the history of the Netherlands, hardly any empirical studies have so far been carried out to confirm or refute these claims (Frijhoff 2015; Rutten et al. 2015). In this presentation, we focus on one understudied aspect of Dutch-French contact: language choice in the private domain.

We argue that large-scale empirical evidence is needed to gain profound insight into the sociolinguistic dynamics of historical multilingualism in general, and Dutch-French language choice more specifically. In reference to Fishman’s (1965) famous question, we seek to examine who *wrote* what language (i.e. Dutch and/or French) to whom and when, by incorporating a range of social factors. At the same time, we show that it is essential to represent intra-writer variation on the level of individual language choices made by multilingual writers in order to understand the ‘bigger picture’.

We present our methodological framework to assess language choice in the Early and Late Modern period based on private family correspondence collected in numerous Dutch archives. Zooming in on a selection of multilingual individuals, we also illustrate the intriguing yet methodologically challenging nature of Dutch-French language choice in historical letter data.

References

- Fishman, J.A. 1965. Who speaks what language to whom and when? *La Linguistique* 1: 67–88.
- Frijhoff, W. 2015. Multilingualism and the challenge of frenchification in the early modern Dutch Republic. In C. Peersman, G. Rutten and R. Vosters (eds.), *Past, present and future of a language border. Germanic-Romance encounters in the Low Countries*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 115–140.
- Offord, D., V. Rjéoutski & G. Argent 2018. *The French language in Russia. A social, political, cultural, and literary history*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Rjéoutski, V., G. Argent & D. Offord (eds.) 2014. *European Francophonie: The social, political and cultural history of an international prestige language*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Rutten, G., R. Vosters & M. van der Wal 2015. Frenchification in discourse and practice. Loan morphology in Dutch private letters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In C. Peersman, G. Rutten & R. Vosters (eds.), *Past, present and future of a language border. Germanic-Romance encounters in the Low Countries*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 143–169.