

## Hit and miss? The concept of ‘intended standard language’ in the history of Dutch

Studies in German and Dutch language history from below occasionally draw on the concept of ‘intendiertes Hochdeutsch’ (Mihm 1998) or ‘geïntendeerde standaardtaal’ (Vandenbussche 1999). This term intends to capture the linguistic variety produced by speakers or writers when aspiring to the most formal standard language variety, but failing to attain it – as is often (but not exclusively) the case in lower-class writing (cf. Vandenbussche 2002). This produces a variety which is inherently variable, but is less confined geographically than the local dialect.

This paper will evaluate the usefulness of the ‘intended standard’ concept with particular reference to the history of Dutch, exploring critiques and possible pitfalls (cf. Elspaß & Maitz 2012), but also demarcating the concept in relation to standardization more broadly. Starting from Haugen’s classic definition of a standard language as a variety with “maximal variation in function” and “minimal variation in form”, we will argue that the term ‘intended standard’ captures varieties fulfilling the functional but not the formal requirements of that definition (Haugen 1966: 249).

To illustrate the use of the concept in the study of Dutch lower-class writing, we will present a case study of phonological and orthographical variation in a corpus of private letters from Flemish soldiers, writing home from the Napoleonic battlefields in the late 18th and early 19th century (Van Bakel 1977). We will investigate the occurrence of features from the local dialects (e.g. final schwa retention: *ik lope* v. *ik loop* ‘I walk’) as well as variation in spelling not linked to the spoken vernacular (e.g. initial /z/ as <s-> or <z->). By focusing on variability within the writing of individual scribes, we will evaluate to which extent these less trained writers had access to standard language norms, or drew on ‘language standards’ (in the sense of Joseph 1987) developed within the community.

Whereas the private letters under investigation contain a large amount of dialectal forms, we will demonstrate that these soldiers did not simply write down their local dialect either: they clearly aimed at a more standardized variety of the language, which included a varying amount of supraregional forms and more limited variation. Although these lower-class writings cannot be evaluated against formal standard language norms to which the language users under discussion had no access, we will argue that the concept of ‘intended standard’ does succeed in capturing the intention of these writers to rise above the level of the local dialect.

### References

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