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Implementation and acceptance of Dutch as a national language (1750-1850)

Haugen (1966) developed the by now classic two-by-two matrix comprising four crucial elements of a theory of standardization, including 'selection of norm', 'codification of form' and 'elaboration of function'. These three terms primarily refer to language planning 'from above'. The fourth key term relates to the community of actual language users who need to use the standard in order to avoid it from being devoid. Haugen (1966) called this fourth element 'acceptance', which he later changed to 'propagation', then to 'implementation'. In analyses of historical standardization phenomena more attention is usually paid to the first three terms than to implementation/acceptance. In this paper, we focus on implementation and acceptance as crucial elements of a historical-sociolinguistic reappraisal of standardization scenarios.

The case study concerns the Dutch language in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. In this period, Dutch was 'nationalized', that is developed into a symbol of the newly founded Dutch nation-state. It became an object of political control. Significant aspects of the nationalization of language were the establishment of an officialized orthography and grammar in 1804/1805, which were to be used in the national school system. Education was the societal domain in which the national government tried to secure the transmission of the national language norms.

In this paper, we study the implementation and acceptance of official language norms from two perspectives, viz. by focusing on teaching materials developed for the new national school system, and by analyzing a recently compiled corpus of original language data from this period. Specifically, we focus on the orthographic representation of long vowels in open syllables. We argue that implementation and acceptance, though relatively understudied topics, can usefully be operationalized, and turned into empirical questions that historical-sociolinguistic analysis can answer.