

Negation in the letters of Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft

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The vibrant political, religious and cultural atmosphere of the Dutch Golden Age interacted with language. 17th century Dutch was a mixture of fading linguistic properties from the preceding language phase, Middle Dutch, and upcoming new ways to construct words and sentences. These language innovations were partly driven by migration, literary innovations and standardization processes.

Within these language dynamics we observe a type of language variation that has rarely been addressed before: variation within individual language users (intra-author variation). The famous author P.C. Hooft, for instance, uses the Middle Dutch way to express negation as well as a modern alternative. How can we account for this variation, seemingly randomly displayed by authors? This talk will chart and explain the grammatical properties of this particular instance of intra-author variation, as well as the social- and literary-cultural factors that influenced the way individual authors used their variation in a strategic and/or creative way. The central hypothesis is that the (internal) grammars of authors created a particular range of variation, which was systematically used by authors, based on contextual factors.