

Judith Nobels

## (Extra)Ordinary letters

### A view from below on seventeenth-century Dutch

In the National Archives in Kew, London, a treasure is kept which is of great importance for the linguistic history of the Dutch language: a collection of seventeenth-century letters written by men and women from various social backgrounds. Given the fact that much of the linguistic research of seventeenth-century Dutch has been perforce based on printed texts and linguistic data produced by a relatively small number of upper-class – usually male – writers, not much is known with certainty about the everyday Dutch of seventeenth-century lower- and middle-class people. The letters hidden in the National Archives can change this.

In this dissertation, a corpus of 595 seventeenth-century letters written between 1664 and 1672 is examined from a sociolinguistic perspective. Since it is the first time that these letters are investigated on such a large scale, several topics are treated: forms of address, reflexivity and reciprocity, negation, schwa-apocope, diminutives, and the genitive and alternative constructions. The case studies show that there was still a lot of variation in seventeenth-century Dutch and that some linguistic changes had not progressed as far in the everyday Dutch of 'ordinary' people as previous research has suggested. Furthermore, it is shown that gender and social class are important factors of influence on the seventeenth-century language use, especially when they are interpreted in terms of education and writing experience.

This dissertation is of interest to sociohistorical linguists in general, to linguists interested in the language history "from below" and to linguists interested in seventeenth-century Dutch.

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