

Playing the Verb

A Literary-Linguistic Perspective on Verb Variation in Early Modern Dutch Prose

Verbs are almost indispensable elements of texts. In the long seventeenth century, a period in which the standards of language were still in flux, they appeared in wide variety, resulting in a type of language variation that has rarely been addressed before: intra-author variation. This dissertation is a collection of four papers that deal with several forms of intra-author variation in verbs from a literary-linguistic perspective.

The study argues intra-author variation to be a phenomenon that falls to a large extent in the interface between (socio)linguistics and literary studies. Through the works of four historical individuals, the book opens a window onto the complex political, religious, and cultural context in which authors participated, highlighting the use of verbs as a device to take part in the dynamic society of the long seventeenth century. The study includes the language of authors of a high literary polish and those who had barely any training but for whom texts were an essential means in striving for religious, political and professional impact.

An important result is that despite differences in writing skills, education, social position, and professional occupation, all four individuals played the verb. Verbs provided a strategy to facilitate the interpretation of their texts, both in the content and the structure of these texts. The authors used verbs as a demarcating tool, making a text unit stand out and imbue it with meaning in a certain way.

ISBN 978-94-6093-398-1
DOI <https://dx.medra.org/10.48273/LOT0613>



Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics
Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap



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Cora van de Poppe

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