CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LINGUISTIC VARIATION IN EARLY MODERN WEST GERMANIC *

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ABSTRACT This thematic issue on Early Modern West Germanic homes in on the processes underlying the extensive amount of morphosyntactic variation and change within and between language users in this era. It demonstrates that language structure and language use often interacted with each other, and illustrates that, to fully understand the triggers and extent of this variation and change, we need to combine perspectives and methodological tools from different (sub)disciplines. That is why this issue brings together scholars working on Early Modern West Germanic in different fields and dis-

ciplines –- in particular scholars from early modern literary studies, formal (historical) linguistics, computational linguistics and historical sociolinguistics –- to present a wide array of possible methodologies to investigate historical language variation, and to explore how the different approaches can complement each other to help further our understanding of the complex setting of variation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The early modern period in West Germanic (ca. 1500-1800), in particular in Early Modern Dutch, German and English, marks one of transition in political, scientific, cultural and religious spheres. These transitions led to the use of vernacular languages in all sorts of new domains (e.g. scientific, religious and literary), to language standardization, and to new instances of language contact because of mass migration of people (Deumert & Vandenbussche 2003, Burke 2004). The vibrancy of this situation is reflected in extensive variation within and between language users (Thráinsson 2012, Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2012).

Within this context, the central question of this thematic issue is how different literary and linguistic approaches account for the linguistic variation in Early Modern West Germanic languages, especially with regard to the morphosyntactic properties of these languages. It is impossible to formulate one univocal answer to this comprehensive question, as morphosyntactic variation covers lots of different grammatical properties, and it is known that several intra- and extra-linguistic factors fostered the appearance of variation. This thematic issue will specifically dive into three causes of morphosyntactic variation in West Germanic written texts, that often appear –as the issue aims to argue –in a fruitful and dynamic interaction.

First, language variation is affected by a natural and cultural process of diachronic language development and standardization: upcoming new ways to construct sentences replaced linguistic properties from preceding language phases (cf. the gradual decline of case marking in Dutch and English). Such processes of language change usually took place gradually, and were often influenced by the language users' social context, such as their social class or geographical environment. Second, linguistic phenomena (e.g. negation in Early Modern Dutch) which have multiple syntactic expressions and coexist simultaneously in the same period (e.g. single and bipartite negation in Early Modern Dutch) are often distinct on some formal level, corresponding to different meanings and/or underlying syntactic structures. Third, linguistic variants also coexist fulfilling further different functions in the early modern textual culture: they, for instance, played their own role in the narrative,

or guided the readers in another direction.

The understanding of each of these causes behind morphosyntactic variation in the West Germanic textual culture, asks for a combination of methodologies, concepts and theoretical assumptions. These three processes behind language variation are traditionally studied by scholars working in separate (sub)disciplines. Processes of language change and the relationship between language and social variables (cause 1) are commonly analysed by (historical) sociolinguistics, often in collaboration with computational linguistics, which has developed methodological tools to digitally analyse large diachronic text corpora. The grammatical structures and properties of coexisting linguistic constructions (cause 2) are studied by formal linguistics. The narrative or pragmatic function of language variation (cause 3), finally, is the core interest of (historical) pragmatics, while literary scholars traditionally focus on the larger rhetorical and narrative structure of texts, as well as the way texts helped readers to process information.

However: the three above-listed aspects of language (i.e. change, structure and function of language) cannot be perceived as isolated phenomena, as they are often interrelated during the early modern period. This was the vital insight that we, as a group of scholars with different scholarly backgrounds, gained while working together as part of the interdisciplinary research project *Language Dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age*, funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO Free Competition VC 2015 GW 360-78-020, 2016-2023). We experienced how necessary and fruitful it is to involve and combine perspectives and methodological tools from different (sub)disciplines when we as scholars aim to better understand the morphosyntactic variation in the early modern era.

For reasons of feasibility, the scope of our project was restricted in two ways. First of all, the project particularly focused on language variation in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, which experienced innovations in many domains: economy and trade, arts and sciences, politics and religion. This vibrant atmosphere interacted with a dynamic linguistic situation, as we already knew from current research: language development and variation was spurred by large scale migration, the use of Dutch in new social domains (religion, science, etc.), the rise of new literary genres and active language regulation (van der Sijs & Willemyns 2009, van der Sijs 2004, van der Wal & van Bree 2008).

Secondly, our project specifically chose to chart and explain the grammatical properties of linguistic variation in texts written by one and the same language user, often a literary author, (intra-author variation), and aimed to understand the social- and literary-cultural factors that influenced the

way this individual author used their variation in a strategic and/or creative way. Combining approaches from formal linguistics, historical sociolinguistics, historical pragmatics, computational linguistics and literary studies, the project reveals how the (internal) grammars of authors created a particular range of variation, which was systematically used by authors, based on contextual factors.

In the next section of this introduction, we introduce different case studies from our project, in order to demonstrate how the project succeeded in combining methodological approaches, and how these combined perspectives helped understand the (combination of) mechanisms behind individual language variation in seventeenth-century Dutch.

In the third and last section, we introduce the current thematic issue as a crucial next step in this line of research: it broadens the geographical perspective (from Early Modern Dutch to other West Germanic languages) as well as the scope of research (from individual language users to variation between groups of language users). This issue demonstrates how multidisciplinary research on West Germanic morphosyntactic variation results in new scholarly ideas and, most of all, invites us to reflect critically on methodological issues. Together, the articles make us aware that our theoretical concepts and research results are always influenced by the methodological choices we make. That is why different approaches sometimes seem to exclude each other at first sight – but in fact need each other to reassess and enrich ideas about historical language variation.

2   Case studies from the project *Language Dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age*

In the following two subsections, we introduce two clusters of subprojects from *Language Dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age*, which depart from different angles: one from a particular instance of morphosyntactic variation (have-doubling vs. simple perfects), for instance in the language of the famous Dutch author D.V. Coornhert (1522-1590), and the other from the broader linguistic variation shown by a particular language user, the seventeenth century naval officer, Michiel de Ruyter (1606-1676), but both relate to several of the three causes of morphosyntactic variation identified in West Germanic written texts.

2.1   Case 1: Have-doubling constructions in D.V. Coornhert's works

The first cluster of subprojects has focused on a particular case of morphosyntactic variation, namely that between have-doubling constructions like *ik heb*

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gelezen gehad (Literally: I have had read) and simple present perfect construc-
tions like *ik heb gelezen* (I have read). The former constructions consist of a
finite or non-finite form of the verb 'have' (e.g. *heb* ('has')), embedding a
past participial form of 'have' (i.e. *gehad* ('had'), which itself in turn embeds
a lexical past participle (e.g. *gelezen* ('read')), whilst simple present perfects
are formally identical to have-doubling constructions, except for the latter's
additional, past participial form of the verb 'have'.[1]

From a linguistic point of view, the study of these constructions in
Early Modern Dutch is beneficial for a number of reasons. First, whilst
have-doubling has been previously reported in studies on historical varieties
of Dutch (e.g. Kern 1912, van der Wal 1988), they are entirely absent from
modern Standard Dutch and most regional varieties, with the exception of
a small number of Dutch dialects (Barbiers, van der Auwera, Bennis, Boek,
De Vogelaer & van der Ham 2008: p. 40, Koeneman, Lekakou & Barbiers
2011). Further, previous studies of have-doubling constructions in historical
varieties of Dutch, leave many questions about their use unanswered. For
instance, van der Wal (1988: p. 393) notes of have-doubling and formally
similar constructions: *Er is een gevarieerd gebruik...waaruit geen bepaalde regel
te destilleren valt* ('There is a varied use...from which no particular rule can
be distilled'). Moreover, have-doubling constructions are of interest from a
broader cross-West Germanic perspective: whilst they are virtually absent
from modern Dutch, they are found – albeit not always with the same mean-
ing – in both modern German (e.g. Rödel 2007, Haß 2016) and English (e.g.
Litvinov & Radčenko 1998: p. 59–81). In particular, whilst have-doubling
seems to be especially frequent in spoken, southern German dialectal vari-
eties (cf. e.g. Salzmann & Schaden 2019), modern German have-doubling is
reported to be highly infrequent in corpus studies of predominately written
texts (Hundt 2011), and is often relegated to the substandard and subject
to negative metalinguistic judgements (e.g. Rödel 2007: p. 217).[2] As such,
the attestation of have-doubling in Early Modern Dutch, and, in some cases,
with an at least on face value higher frequency than in Modern German (e.g.
van de Poppe & Wall In Press), offers the potential opportunity to better
understand these constructions more broadly, through a language variety
which, in contrast, was only on the dawn of standardization and had not felt

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1 We have opted for the term *have-doubling*, based on the form of the construction and to re-
main neutral about its interpretation. In the previous literature, *have-doubling* constructions
have been argued to function both as passive-like construction, which are clearly semantically
distinct from present perfects, and also as so-called *perfect doubling* constructions, whose se-
mantics is much more difficult to distinguish from present perfects (see e.g. Wall 2018a).

2 These latter two facts are no doubt causally related to the low frequency of the constructions
in written registers.

its full effects.

Two of the subprojects on have-doubling have examined intra-author variation, focusing on the use of these constructions in the work of the sixteenth-century Dutch writer D. V. Coornhert (1522-1590), whose writing largely focused on important religious and moral issues of the time, such as his opposition to the increasingly influential Reformed Protestantism, but who was also known for his active promotion of the vernacular, and whose language has also been studied elsewhere in the Language Dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age project (see van de Poppe 2018 on Coornhert's variation in genitive constructions). Adopting a formal syntactic approach, Wall (2018a) proposes an analysis of Coornhert's have-doubling (see also Wall 2018b *et seq.* for a revised analysis based on a broader, multi-author corpus). Partially following Koeneman et al. (2011) and Broekhuis (2021), Wall proposes that the varied behaviour of have-doubling constructions is syntactically accounted for if they correspond to two distinct syntactic structures, which both consist of a matrix, auxiliary *have* embedding a verbal participle, and an embedded copular *have* embedding an adjectival participle, but differ in terms of the internal structure of that adjectival participle. In turn, have-doubling constructions are proposed to differ from the formally near-identical simple present perfects in that the latter consist of an auxiliary *have* embedding a verbal participle only, rather than any adjectival participle.

Approaching the same corpus from a different angle, van de Poppe & Wall (In Press) combine methods from literary studies and formal linguistics to examine the semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical properties of Coornhert's use of have-doubling. Semantically, they argue that Coornhert's have-doubling constructions have a temporal/aspectual semantics like the so-called double perfects in various modern non-southern German varieties and Dutch varieties (e.g. Koeneman et al. 2011, Brandner, Salzmann & Schaden 2016), which express approximately the absence of current relevance (cf. Ammann 2007: p. 197). In turn, double perfects in modern varieties with this temporal/aspectual semantics have been associated with related pragmatic functions, such as stressing the "temporal distance" of the proposition (Rödel 2007: p. 136; cf. also van der Wal 1988). Building on these semantics and pragmatics, van de Poppe & Wall propose that have-doubling might be used as an evaluative device/stance marker (e.g. Fleischman 1985) expressing dissociation, thereby paralleling the historical present (i.e. the use of the present tense to report past events), which instead expresses (temporal) closeness.

Through two case studies on Coornhert's argumentative prose on the theology of human sin, van de Poppe & Wall show that have-doubling

constructions are used as an evaluative device/stance marker in two distinct but related rhetorical functions. Firstly, Coornhert uses have-doubling in the rhetorical function of critiquing the views of his opponents. This is shown in Coornhert's polemical debate text 'Van de vreemde sonde' (*On strange sin*, 1584), in which he criticises his opponents' view that mankind had been condemned to sinfulness by Adam's original sin (Berkvens-Stevelinck 1989: p. 22–25). For example, when Coornhert states:

(1)   *Maer dit bewijsdy   even soo weynigh metter   heyliger Schrifturen, als*
        but   this prove.you just as little   with.the Holy   Scripture   as
        ghy bewijst dat hy die   altsamen   oock voor alle sijne Nacomelinghen
        you prove that he those altogether also for   all his   descendants
        *verloren soude **hebben ghehadt***
        lost   would have   had
        'However, you prove this [viewpoint] no more with the Holy Scripture than you prove that he [Adam] also would have lost these [virtues] for all his descendants.'

Coornhert uses a have-doubling construction when stating that his opponents have no evidence from the scriptures that Adam's fall also condemned his descendants to sinfulness. In line with the pragmatic function of perfect doubling, this may be an instance of stressing the 'temporal distance' of Adams's fall. Secondly, Coornhert also uses have-doubling in the rhetorical function of highlighting ideas in his own theology of perfectism, according to which a believer is capable of casting away his/her sinful past and thereby achieving a state of perfection (see e.g. Buys 2011: p. 7; van Veen & Spohnholz 2014: p. 88). One instance in which Coornhert highlights his ideas on perfectism is in his vernacular companion to ethics, the *Zedekunst* (1586), when he states:

(2)   *maar niet zo licht en   vallet een valsch oordeel,   datmen langhe*
        but   not so light NEG falls   a   false judgement that.one long
        *bezeten   ende met ghoeddunckenheyd omhelst   **heeft ghehadt**, te*
        possessed and with self-assurance   embraced has   had   to
        verlaten om een warachtigh oordeel   te anvaten.
        leave for a   true   judgement to accept
        'but it is not so easy to leave a false judgement, which one long possessed and embraced with self-assurance, in order to accept a true judgement.'

Here, a have-doubling construction is used when characterizing the sinful false judgement (*een valsch oordeel*) of a believer's former self. This use is in

line with a have-doubling construction pragmatically stressing the 'temporal distance' of a proposition, because a false judgement must be fully abandoned to achieve a state of perfection. As such, van de Poppe & Wall link the semantics and pragmatics of have-doubling to two different rhetorical functions in Coornhert's argumentative prose.

Going beyond Coornhert's individual use of have-doubling, Schraagen, Wall & Brito (2020) take a broader, inter-author approach to these constructions, bringing in methods from computational linguistics. More specifically, they apply different text classifiers to a larger, multi-author data set based on both have-doubling and simple perfect constructions, but in which the additional past participial form of *have*, which formally distinguishes have-doubling from simple perfects has been removed, resulting in a data set of formally identical constructions. When presented with this data, the text classifier's task was to classify examples as either have-doubling constructions, or genuine simple present perfects. In turn, analyses of constructions wrongly classified as either have-doubling or simple perfects, had the possibility to reveal potential contextual factors, which underlie the classification and thus might distinguish have-doubling from simple perfects. For instance, Schraagen et al. show that the misclassification of the example *Aangaande de Papieren van Butkens, die ouwendijk zoude gehadt hebben* ('Regarding the papers of Butkens, that Ouwendijk should have had') –the simple perfect of a lexical use of the verb *have* with a nominal complement –as a have-doubling construction was unlikely to be due to the presence of (a lexical instance of) the past participle had (gehadt), but instead may relate to the example being an irrealis where have-doubling occurs frequently (Kern 1912: p. 290). In so doing, as well as contributing to broader computational objectives (see Schraagen et al. 2020: p. 161), the analysis of the results of text classifiers like those used by Schraagen, Wall and Brito have the potential to contribute to formal linguistic analyses of have-doubling constructions.

Accordingly, the various subprojects on morphosyntactic variation between have-doubling and simple perfect constructions presented above showcase two of the different causes of this variation, namely different underlying syntactic structures (cause 2, cf. Wall 2018a, Schraagen et al. 2020), and the semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical function of have-doubling (cause 3, cf. Wall 2018a, van de Poppe & Wall In Press), and do so from both the perspectives of intra-author variation (cf. Wall 2018a, van de Poppe & Wall In Press) and inter-author variation (cf. Schraagen et al. 2020).

2.2   Case 2: the language of Michiel de Ruyter

Michiel de Ruyter (1607-1676) is reputed to be the most important naval officer of Dutch history. As the supreme commander of the Dutch fleet during several naval wars with England, he became a symbol of the Dutch seventeenth-century oversea trading successes, as well as of the economic and political flourishing of the 'Dutch Golden Age' as such. Despite the growing resistance to a 'Golden Age' cult that suppresses the dark sides of the Dutch seventeenth century, and the fierce debate on De Ruyter's participation in colonial practices and slave trade, De Ruyter is still included in the 'Canon of the Netherlands' as an internationally reputed naval hero. In this national Canon, De Ruyter is meaningfully depicted as being the son of an ordinary beer carrier. The narrative about his low birth and impressive social mobility is often repeated, from the first seventeenth-century biography written by Gerard Brandt (1687) until the epic movie Michiel de Ruyter (2014), and is maybe the main reason why he was able to win the Dutch people's sympathy for so many centuries. De Ruyter shows that low-educated Dutch boy had the possibility to pull himself up by his own bootstraps: from boatswain's apprentice to navigating officer, captain, and, finally, lieutenant-admiral (cf. on his career: Prud'homme van Reine (2015); Lunsford (2005); van Alphen (2014: p. 247). This idea perfectly resonates with the Dutch self-image of an egalitarian country that offers everyone, whatever his birth or class, the possibility to become rich and successful under his own steam.

It was De Ruyter's low birth and lack of education that has also aroused the interest of (historical) linguists. During his life, De Ruyter produced many written documents, among which no less than 36 naval ships' logbooks, kept during his travels (Koelmans 2001: p. 7–8). In contrast to most seventeenth-century written sources that have passed down through the ages, these texts were written by someone who only acquired a bare minimum of literacy education, and who did not have a thorough knowledge of the stylistic and linguistic conventions of formal written language. De Ruyter's texts therefore offer a rare entrance into the way 'ordinary', lower-class people used Dutch during a period in which the language experienced important transitions.

Historical linguist Leendert Koelmans dedicated several studies to De Ruyter's language. On the basis of qualitative analyses and examples from a selection of De Ruyter's journals, Koelmans concluded that writing was not De Ruyter's forte (Koelmans 2007: p. 7). His central argument is that De Ruyter's use of language was quite inconsistent: is it, among other things, characterized by an unstable use of capitals and punctuations, randomly omitted verbs, an inconsistent use of case, and an unsystematic alternation

between single negation and bipartite negation (Koelmans 2001, 2007).

In two different ways, the project *Language Dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age* builds on this former research, aiming to further explain the variation that Michiel de Ruyter's language displays: is this solely the effect of his social and educational circumstances, or is it also caused by other intra- or extra-linguistic factors? As most of De Ruyter's journals were previously only available as handwritten manuscripts in the National Archive in The Hague, one of the project's ambitions is to transmit them into digitally searchable texts. During the past few years, a fair selection of journals have been transcribed diplomatically by a team of student assistants, while Cora van de Poppe –as part of her fellowship with the National Maritime Museum –also conducted some promising experiments with the digital tool *Transkribus* that has been developed to digitize handwritten historical documents. These digitized texts were used to further understand processes of inter- and intra-author language variation: we analysed differences between De Ruyter's language and the language of other writers of naval journals, as well as the language variation performed within De Ruyter's own texts.

To see whether De Ruyter's inconsistent language use was symptomatic of his lower class, van de Poppe & Schraagen (2021) used computational methods to compare De Ruyter's language with the language used in other journals written by higher-class naval officers, who were supposed to write in a less inconsistent and random manner. In particular, van de Poppe & Schraagen selected four journals kept during a famous expedition to Algiers, West Africa and America in 1664-1665, written by people from different classes and social positions: one journal written by Michiel de Ruyter, one by second commander and vice-admiral Johan Corneliszoon Meppel, one by crew member Jeurian Prins, and one anonymous journal. A digital comparative analysis of these four journals[3] indeed confirmed that De Ruyter's language, especially in comparison to Meppel's, displayed characteristics of lower-class language: De Ruyter, for instance, used fewer participles and conjunctions (often found in formal written language), while he more frequently omitted inflected verbs. This is all the more interesting as we realize that De Ruyter, midway through the 1660s, was already undergoing a fair process of social climbing: he already acted as a *vlotvoogd* ('admiral'), and was officially promoted to the position of admiral after his return. So his language seems to reflect a social environment which he in fact was no longer a member of. This suggests that a change of someone's social position does not (immediately) mark his language use. This is an interesting hypothesis, that in fact

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3 The ship journals of Michiel de Ruyter are archived by the Nationaal Archief (National Archive), The Hague, Collection De Ruyter, 1.10.72, inv. nr 02

questions the relationship between an individual's language and social circumstances that is generally assumed in socio-historical research (Sairio & Palander-Collin 2012, van de Poppe In Press). It needs further research, in particular with regard to the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic in which instances of social climbing took place quite frequently (van Alphen, Hoffenaar, Lemmers & van der Spek 2019).

Also in another way, Van de Poppe and Schraagen's analysis questions the relationship between variation and social background: although some types of language variation (i.e. the inconsistent or random use of case) could be perceived as symptomatic for lower class language, other types of language variation, on the contrary, are rather characteristic of different levels of literacy. De Ruyter's ship log is relatively short compared to those by other authors on the same journey, and the other authors show a larger variety in vocabulary (see Figure 1).
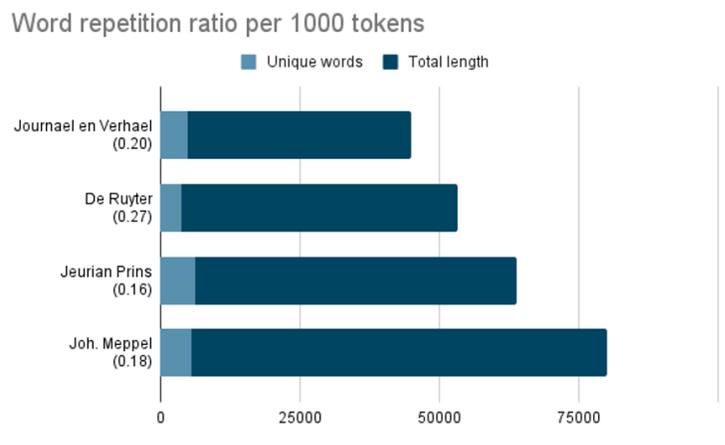
Figure 1   Word repetition ratio in four ship journals on the same journey

A possible explanation for these numbers could be found in De Ruyter's lack of education and competence as a creative language user as compared to the other authors (cf. Johansson 2008 that shows the relation between education and lexical diversity, and Stolarski 2016, Crosbie 2016 for approaches to measure literary quality in historical corpus studies).

Thus when analysing the larger patterns of De Ruyter's language variation, De Ruyter's language shows several characteristics of typical lower-class language use. However: when we dive into De Ruyter's texts more deeply, we see several other types of variation that can not only be explained by his social background. This observation invited the project members to

develop a fresh perspective on De Ruyter's linguistic variation in his journals: to what extent was his variation spurred by underlying syntactic differences between linguistic variants, or by the narrative, rhetorical or stylistic functions of De Ruyter's journals? This research line was further developed in two subprojects, both combining different methodological and theoretical perspectives on language: Van de Poppe analysed the function of De Ruyter's variation in verbs, while Feike Dietz, Marjo van Koppen and Mees van Zanten dived into De Ruyter's, at first sight seemingly random, use of bipartite negation versus single negation. van de Poppe (2020), first of all, sheds light on the narratological process of meaning-making in a selection of De Ruyter's ships' logbooks, by focusing on verb variation, as a linguistic feature that preeminently enhances narrativity and contributes to meaning-making (Stockwell & Whitely 2014: p. 300, Leech & Short 2007: p. 62–63). Van de Poppe's analysis is dedicated to both the alternation between sentences with or without inflected verbs, and the variation between different types of verbs, inspired by the idea, which rooted in narratological research, that the verb's semantics helps to constitute an event (Simon-Shoshan 2013: p. 230). Van de Poppe demonstrates that when De Ruyter notes direction and force of the wind – something he does nearly daily – he usually writes in a abbreviated style that typically lacks verbs, e.g. :

(3)   *item den 21 smorgens   mystych weder   wynt o n o*
        item the 21 the.mornings foggy   weather wind e n e
        'The 21st in the morning foggy weather, wind e-n-e' [21 August 1664]

As verbs are generally lacking in De Ruyter's logbooks, their mere presence –in around thirty percent of the sentences –marks a deviation from his dominant linguistic pattern, and foregrounds particular wind reports for the audience. The main verbs used by De Ruyter to record wind observations are not maritime jargon per se, as we may expect, but more neutral verbs such as *komen* ('to come'), *krijgen* ('to get'), *hebben* ('to have'), and *zijn* ('to be'). Van de Poppe divides them into static verbs, describing states of affairs (*hebben*, *zijn*), and dynamic verbs, depicting events and active processes (*krijgen*, *komen*) (Toolan 2001: p. 32), arguing that this difference allowed De Ruyter to give shape to and highlight his reports on the wind. However, neither of the dynamic verbs *krijgen* and *komen* can be randomly interchanged with the other. Whereas cases of *krijgen* are generally followed by a notion of transition, expressed mostly through the verb *zeilen* ('to sail') – see (4)– the verb *komen* puts additional emphasis on the wind as a main character in the logbook story.

(4)   *wij **cregen** de wijnt oostlijck en   dreven en   seylde tot*
      we got   the wind east   and floated and sailed until
      smyddaech
      the.afternoon
      'we got the wind east and floated and sailed until the afternoon'
      [September 30, 1667]

The verb reports that include *komen* seems to imply a more radical change, see (5). The change in wind direction here allows the Dutch fleet to approach the enemy.

(5)   *doe was gans   stijlle op de myddach **quaem** de wijnt met een*
      then was completely still   in the afternoon came   the wind with a
      buijge   regen o · s · o doe wende de vyse amyrael de wijt naer
      showery rain e · s · e then turns the vice admiral de Wit towards
      de vijant   toe
      the enemy to
      'Then it was completely still. In the afternoon the wind came with showers e-s-e. Then the vice admiral De Wit turned towards the enemy.'
      [October 9, 1652]

So by developing a narratological approach to verb variation, van de Poppe argues that De Ruyter's alternation between verb types as well as sentences lacking or including verbs, could be perceived as a foregrounding strategy, guiding the reader's interpretation of specific events reported in the journals. Following this line of thought, Dietz, van Koppen & van Zanten (Under Review) demonstrate that another type of morposyntactic variation in De Ruyter's journals –variation in negative constructions –was also related to subtle semantic differences that influenced the reader's interpretation of the text. Just like many seventeenth-century language users, De Ruyter expressed negation in the Middle Dutch way (i.e. embracing negation, a combination of the negative clitic *en* and a negative particle *niet*) as well as in the Modern Dutch way (single negation: *niet*) (Jespersen 1917, van der Wouden 2007). Research into negation has previously mainly focused on diachronic changes (Zeijlstra 2004, van Kemenade 2000), on describing its variation at the various language stages (van der Horst 2008), or on the variation between social groups (Nobels 2013, Vosters & Vandenbussche 2012, Nobels & Rutte 2014). But this type of research is inadequate to explain variation in negative constructions within one and the same author, such as Michiel De Ruyter. On the basis of a dataset of all negative sentences from a selection of De Ruyter's

logbooks from the period 1633-1676, Dietz et al. conclude that De Ruyter's variation can not be fully explained by his changing geographical or social circumstances, or by the grammatical characteristics of his constructions (for instance the difference between main versus subordinate clause), but rather depended on the function of negative constructions within the journal's episode and context. De Ruyter generally uses single negation when he expresses a neutral announcement or decision, while choosing bipartite negation when he negates a presupposition, i.e. an assumption or situation that he and/or his audiences expected to happen.

This suggests an underlying syntactic and semantic difference between constructions of single and bipartite negation, as has also been hypothesized before with regard to West-Flemish and several other languages (Breitbarth & Haegeman 2015, Schwenter 2006). As the analysis of De Ruyter's journals revealed, such expectations are sometimes explicitly addressed in the text, but this is not always the case: they should often be read between the lines. In the next sentence, for example, the implicit presupposition concerns an unwritten code of conduct between friendly nations on sea namely that a request from a stricken allied vessel for a anchor and anchor cable should usually be fulfilled:

(6) *hy versocht om een anker* **en** *kabel maer wy en conden hem* **nyet**
he asked for an anchor and chain but we NEG could him not
helpen
help
'he asked for an anchor and chain but we could not help him.' (20-11-1675)

Such implicit expectations and meanings can only be unravelled with knowledge of, as well as sensitivity for, the textual and cultural context in which early modern negative sentences functioned. It is therefore vital that specialists with different backgrounds (formal linguists, literary scholars, sociolinguistics) work together to interpret the nuanced meaning of historical language.

In sum, the several recent subprojects on De Ruyter's language variation –conducted by scholars related to the Utrecht research project *Language Dynamics in the Dutch Golden Age*, organized in different subteams and inspired by a wide range of methodological and theoretical perspectives –together demonstrate that De Ruyter's morphosyntactic variation patterns are the result of a complex interaction of social circumstances (above introduced as cause 1, cf. van de Poppe & Schraagen (2021), different underlying syntactic structures (cause 2, cf. Dietz et al. Under Review), and the narratological

and rhetorical function of language variants (cause 3, cf. van de Poppe 2020, Dietz et al. Under Review). Although particularly focusing on Early Modern Dutch and on one specific individual language user, this cluster of subprojects clearly suggests that the study of historical language variation needs a combined perspective and profits from the scholarly exchange between specialists working in different subfields of linguistics and textual studies.

3 The next step: Combining methodologies to investigate West Germanic language variation

The current thematic issue on West Germanic language variation marks an important next step in the interdisciplinary research line illustrated above. Whereas the Utrecht project focuses on Dutch, this issue brings together case studies from different West Germanic languages ((Low) German, English, Dutch). And while our project focuses on the patterns of variation of individual language users, as the case studies on Coornhert and De Ruyter have clearly shown, this issue aims to understand variation between (groups of) language users, from a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective. As such, the central questions of this issue are: How can we account for patterns of historical language variation from a synchronic and diachronic perspective? And –assuming that language change, structure and function should not be perceived as isolated phenomena but interacted with each other during the early modern period –which types of methodological approaches help to better understand these synchronic and diachronic patterns of language variation?

That is why this issue brings together scholars working on Early Modern West Germanic in different fields and disciplines –in particular scholars from early modern literary studies, formal (historical) linguistics, computational linguistics and historical sociolinguistics –to offer a wide range of the possible methodologies to investigate historical language variation and to investigate how the different approaches can complement each other in understanding the complex setting of variation.

3.1 Empirical extension: languages, authors and genres

Although the methodological approaches developed in this issue are quite diverse, and –obviously –no single article is able to analyse the structure and the use of language in a fully balanced and exhaustive way, a common factor emerges in all articles and case studies: language variation is a phenomenon guided by grammatical developments and restrictions, as well as by com-

municative and socio-cultural factors. In one way or another, all articles take into account how this interplay of grammatical and socio-cultural factors influenced the abundance of variation, and how a combined perspective can contribute to a broader linguistic and cultural-historical understanding of the way in which language is used and evolves in a community.

What all these articles share, is their use of the 'comparison' as a pivotal methodological tool. In several cases, the scholars contributing to this issue choose to compare linguistic features diachronically Breitbarth (This Volume), Fonteyn, Manjavacas & Budts (This Volume). Dietz, van de Poppe & Vaartjes (This Volume), on the contrary, organise their comparison in a synchronic way, whereas Demske (This Volume) and Oudesluijs, Gordon & Auer (This Volume) combine a diachronic and synchronic approach. Oudesluijs et al. also compare the way linguistic constructions developed in different geographical locations in England (York, Bristol, Coventry), as well as in different text types (civic texts versus ego-documents). Demske and Dietz et al., in turn, make comparisons between individual texts rooting in the same genre (newspapers and historical reports respectively).

The articles clearly show the value of such comparative methodologies: differences and similarities help us see to what extent certain linguistic features or practices are related to specific periods, places, genres, texts or languages. At the same time, the articles reflect the problem of comparative research on historical data: as data are scarce, it is often nearly impossible to compile data sets from different periods or genres that are truly comparable.

3.2   Methodological extension: quantitative and qualitative approaches

Although all articles use a comparative approach, they at the same time use quite distinctive methodologies to analyse linguistic features. This partly relates to the fact that they make comparisons on quite different 'levels': comparisons between time periods ask for a much more generic approach than comparisons between individual texts. As Fonteyn et al. (This Volume) clearly show in their article, computational approaches are particularly useful to detect patterns of language variation and change in a data-driven way. In particular, computational distributional semantic models (DSMs) – which are currently predominantly used to quantify lexical and conceptual change – can be employed to understand morphosyntactic variation and change. Fonteyn et al. represent these DSMs not only as instruments to alleviate time-consuming manual labour, but also as *a means of tackling questions that would be difficult to address by means of introspective annotation alone*. Their own case study serves as an example here: their model enables them to quan-

tify the extent of functional-semantic equivalence between modal verbs and auxiliary *do* over time.

As Fonteyn et al. argue, such data-driven computational approaches also have their restrictions: '*it is important to be aware of which sort of information can and cannot be extracted from (raw) corpus data*'. Although the models occasionally induce higher-level variables such as genre, it would be too far-reaching to say that they can encode them. Similarly, DSMs do not straightforwardly encode extra-linguistic information about the social, geographical or cultural context in which morphosyntactic constructions occur.

The approach conducted by Oudesluijs et al. can therefore be perceived as a fruitful complement to the one of Fonteyn et al.. While both studies describe the development of periphrastic *do* in English, their findings are quite different as an effect of their methodological choices. The case study in Fonteyn et al. shows that the similarity between *do* and modal verbs decreased during the seventeenth century, and that affirmative declarative *do* gradually disappeared. Oudesluijs et al. apply a qualitative and philological approach to analyse periphrastic *do* in relation to region and text type. While Oudesluijs et al. conclude that there was 'no clear rise-fall pattern', as found in previous studies, the case study in Fonteyn et al. suggests a 'gradual disappearance of affirmative declarative *do*'. This difference clearly demonstrates that methodological choices directly impact the outcomes of a research project, and that is it fruitful and even necessary to compare different approaches and findings before drawing firm conclusions about the temporal development of a particular linguistic construction.

As a suggestion for further research, Oudesluijs et al. propose to conduct '*a more detailed and comparative analysis of language-internal factors*' that seem to be related to the use of periphrastic *do*, such as the use of different pronouns or lexical verbs. Several articles in the issue answer this call for more detailed analytical approaches (although not with regard to the English *do*), by focusing on the close textual and/or linguistic context of specific linguistic features. In their turn, these articles display considerable distinctions with regard to their methodology. To mention two extremes here: Breitbarth (This Volume) investigates the grammar internal properties of the afinite construction in Middle Low German and Early New High German, from a predominantly formal linguistic approach, but also including statistical modelling of certain extralinguistic factors; in contrast, Dietz et al. (This Volume) are inspired by insights from linguistic, narratological and literary research in their analysis of the linguistic representation of speech as an instrument for reporters to structure historical events. However different their approaches and findings may be, on a more general level both articles demonstrate the in-

fluence of individual texts and writers on linguistic variation. The majority of Breitbarth's occurrences of the afinite construction in the first half of the sixteenth century, for instance, are found in only three texts, while no less than eleven texts from that same period do not show any occurrence. Further, Breitbarth's statistical modelling does not provide evidence for a link between the afinite construction and particular genres, suggesting this might not be a useful factor in explaining variation in the attestation of this construction in the variety in question. Dietz et al., in turn, reveal that a small number of individual texts – three seventeenth-century reports on the same murder – contain vital differences in the representation and formal make-up of speech, in line with their distinctive position in the underlying political conflict. This conclusion also suggests that 'genre' is not always a useful category to explain language variation: there can be meaningful differences between the texts or groups of texts within a particular genre.

Demske (This Volume) draws a comparable conclusion when studying the linguistic complexity of early newspapers. She reveals the degrees of complexity of adverbial clauses across newspapers, suggesting that the syntactic complexity of newspapers highly depended on news topics and production circumstances. For instance: news reports from Venice or Hamburg include low numbers of preposed adverbial clauses *because they mainly report facts without further contextualization*. News reports from Antwerp and Cologne, by contrast, need contextualization (e.g. on shipping, peace negotiations) and thus contain more preposed clauses.

All together, the articles in this issue offer a wide range of methodologies to analyse morphosyntactic variation in Early Modern West Germanic languages, and demonstrate that these methodological approaches result in different hypotheses about language variation and change. As the methodological approaches are connected to in some ways fundamentally different underlying theoretical assumptions and findings (cf. the *do*-case: change or continuity?), they seem very distanced from each other. But by bringing them together in one thematic issue, we are also able to see how they share the ambition to compare linguistic variety on different levels (such as region, genre, text), and how these levels can complement each other to understand the complex setting of variation.

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Cross-disciplinary approaches to linguistic variation in Early Modern West Germanic

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