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THE USE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC METHODS IN HISTORICAL SYNTAX

0. Abstract

It is the aim of this paper to show that the application of a methodology deriving from sociolinguistics may deepen our insight into syntactic change and its causes. I will first go into the results of sociolinguistics that have already been proven to be advantageous for historical linguistics (1). Then I will deal with the methodological aspects of sociolinguistics that could be useful for studies of syntactic change (2). Subsequently, I will show on the basis of a number of investigations into syntactic change in Dutch (3,4) that incorporation of these aspects leads to a more thorough and more reliable insight into syntactic change and its causes than we could ever acquire without them (5).

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1. Sociolinguistic contributions to historical linguistics

Historical linguistics have long been aware of the fact that language change is affected largely by sociological factors (e.g. Gauchat 1905, Hermann 1931). The first attempt to incorporate sociolinguistic insights in a theory of language change, however, has been made only recently. Weinreich/Labov/Herzog (1968) indicate in their famous article 'Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change' that historical linguistics could well be complemented by sociolinguistics. They demonstrate that a great part of the heterogeneity in a certain stage of a

language results from ongoing linguistic change: new variants are used more often in some groups than in others. As a consequence sociolinguistic studies can give insight into two aspects that are of interest for historical linguistics: *o n g o i n g l i n g u i s t i c c h a n g e s* and *t h e f a c t o r s t h a t a f f e c t s u c h c h a n g e s*.

However, these are not the only two aspects in which historical linguistics can profit from sociolinguistics. Knowledge of the factors that have affected linguistic change in the present can be used to evaluate the factors that are said to have affected linguistic change in the past. Labov (1972) has formulated this in the so-called uniformitarian principle: "We posit that the forces operating to produce linguistic change today are of the same kind and order of magnitude as those which operated in the past five or ten thousand years" (Labov 1972, 275). This implies that we may only say that a certain factor has played a part in a linguistic change in the past if we can demonstrate that such a factor has also affected a change in more recent times, or to use a variant of the title of Labov's famous lecture about this principle: *w e h a v e t o u s e t h e p r e s e n t t o e x p l a i n t h e p a s t*.

Owing to the contribution of sociolinguistic studies to historical linguistics, sociolinguistics became a legitimate branch of historical linguistics. Strangely enough the methodology of sociolinguistics was seldom incorporated in historical linguistic investigations. It is the aim of my paper to demonstrate that this is a missed opportunity since the adoption of a methodology inspired by sociolinguistics in historical linguistics may help improve our insight into the rise of a change, its spread through the language community and the factors that are involved in both these aspects of change. This holds for change on all linguistic levels: phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic. In view of the topic of this conference, though, I will concentrate on the usefulness of the application of a methodology inspired by sociolinguistics in the study of syntactic change.

2. Sociolinguistic aspects that ought to be incorporated in historical syntax

2.0. Introduction

I will deal with five aspects of sociolinguistic methodology that could be advantageous for historical syntactic studies. They can be divided in two different kinds: those aspects which are absolutely essential in order to achieve a correct picture of a certain syntactic change and its causes (2.1.) and those which are less essential but which may advance our knowledge in those aspects of syntactic change (2.2.).

2.1. Essential aspects

2.1.1. Dialect

In classical sociolinguistic studies due attention is paid to the possibility that a certain linguistic phenomenon may occur in different forms in different dialects. The variable dialect has therefore been eliminated in sociolinguistic studies: only informants who are born and bred in the same dialect area are taken into consideration. In historical syntactic studies, however, the variable dialect has often been neglected. This is the more startling since every historical linguist knows that in the period in which there was not yet a standard language – that is for all languages in Europe before the invention of the art of printing (ca. 1450) – one can only study dialects but not languages, since they did not yet exist. Most historical linguists assume, however, that there were not many syntactic differences between the dialects of a language in earlier periods and that we therefore do not have to reckon with the factor ‘dialect’.¹ It is striking that the extent to which the factor dialect is ignored is inversionally proportioned to the knowledge that one has about dialect differences in the present. There is no historical linguist that will not take care of dialect differences on phonological, morphological or lexical level, but almost all ignore dialect differences on syntactic level. In my opinion this is due to the fact that they know from the dialect atlases about important regional differences in phonology, morphology and lexicon, but that they do not know from those dialect atlases about important dialect differences on the level of syntax. It seems that we have to do here with the mechanism “where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise”: since we do not know of dialect differences on the level of syntax, they do not exist.

This view, however, is wrong. Our knowledge of syntactic dialect differences is scarce, because it is very difficult to investigate dialect differences on the level of syntax (van Bree 1981, Gerritsen in prep.), but not because those differences would not exist. On the contrary, very recent studies show that there are highly important syntactic differences between the dialects of a language. In the Dutch language area we find for example important regional differences in the following syntactic constructions: word order (V2 phenomena, OV/VO phenomena, order of auxiliary and main verb), expression of passives, subjectless sentences, expression of negation, preposition vs postposition, the use of cases and

1 It is for example striking that in ‘Dialektologie. Ein Handbuch zur deutschen und allgemeinen Dialektforschung’ attention hardly is paid to dialect differences on the level of syntax. It is true that in ‘Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung’ a distinction is made between High and Low German, but I believe that there are more dialects of German that differ from each other on the level of syntax.

complementizers (Gerritsen in prep.).

What does it imply for historical syntax that there are so many important dialect differences on the level of syntax? Well, it means that it is absolutely essential to take account of the factor dialect in historical syntactic studies. If one does not take account of this factor, one runs the risk to interpret syntactic dialect differences mistakenly as syntactic change. I shall try to elucidate this.

If one wants to trace a syntactic change in for example German, one cannot compare the syntax of let's say a 15th century text with the syntax of Modern German and conclude from the differences that a change has taken place. For, what one is doing in that case is comparing two different entities: a dialect in the Middle Ages and a standard language in the present. One can only conclude that a syntactic change has taken place if the construction under investigation does not occur in the dialect today that one has investigated for the 15th century. If it is difficult to determine in which dialect that 15th century text was written, one must prove that the 15th century construction does not occur in any present German dialect.

If one wants to trace a syntactic change in the past, one has to be sure to compare texts that are written in the same dialect. For, if one compares a 13th century text in dialect A with a 14th century text in dialect B and one finds syntactic differences between those texts, there is a chance that what is involved is not a syntactic change but dialect variation.

2.1.2. Points of time

In classical sociolinguistic studies the 'age of informant' is always controlled. One investigates either one age group or the factor 'age' is introduced as an independent variable. The reason for this is often a difference in the use of certain linguistic elements between different age groups. The historical linguistic counterpart of the factor 'age' is 'point of time'. The importance of this factor is less ignored in historical linguistics than the importance of the factor 'dialect'. Nevertheless, it has often been neglected. True enough, no historical linguist will ever lump mediaeval and contemporary data together. One does, however, often not reckon with linguistic differences within a certain period. The whole period of the Middle Ages, for example, is considered as one linguistic entity.² One speaks about the occurrence of certain constructions in Middle German, Middle English and Middle Dutch, whereas this period

² We find for instance in 'Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung' that the whole period of Middle German is considered as one linguistic entity.

covers at least three centuries, in some views even four. The neglect of the possibility that a linguistic change could take place within three or four hundred years occurs in historical linguistic studies of all linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, lexicology, syntax and semantics. However, I get the impression that we find it in studies on syntactic change in particular. It is only recently that historical linguists have become interested in syntactic change. As a consequence we do not yet know much about changes on the level of syntax. This lack of knowledge has led historical linguists to believe that syntactic change did not occur at all or that – if it occurred – it would proceed very slowly. In my opinion, here we meet again in the mechanism “where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.” Because one does not know much about the speed with which syntactic change proceeds, one presumes that it proceeds slowly. This view, however, is also wrong. We know from recent investigations that syntactic change can proceed as swift as an arrow.³ In the period of Middle Dutch we find for example important changes in the expression of the passives, in negative sentences, in imperative sentences, in the expression of complementizers and in word order (the OV/VO questions and V2 phenomena).

What does this apparent rapidity of syntactic change imply for historical syntactic studies? Well, it means that it is absolutely essential to incorporate the variable ‘point of time’ in studies of syntactic change. If one does not take account of this factor, one runs two risks:

- a. Syntactic changes remain unobserved.
- b. One observes another syntactic change than the one that occurred.

I will try to elucidate this. Imagine that in the period between 1300 and 1500 construction X changed into construction Y. If one would compare this period as one linguistic unity it would look as if both constructions were equivalent in that period. One would get the incorrect impression that no syntactic change had occurred at all. If one would compare the mediaeval situation with the present-day situation one would wrongly believe that two equivalent constructions were exchanged for one: X+Y to Y. By lumping three centuries together one would moreover not be able to trace which linguistic factors played a part in the change from X

3 In the Dutch language area we found for example that the auxiliary *hebben* (‘to have’) was largely replaced by *zijn* (‘to be’) between 1970 and 1985, so within 15 years (de Rooij 1988). It is evident that this does not imply that syntactic change will proceed as fast in for example the Middle Ages, because the mediaeval circumstances are different from the modern ones. On the one hand, it is plausible that changes took place sooner in that period since there was not yet a standard language and consequently no written norm that could have a restraining effect on linguistic change. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that changes occurred slower since people lived in more isolation than nowadays.

to Y, the so-called transition and embedding problem in the terminology of Weinreich/Labov/Herzog (1968). As a consequence one would not be able to get an answer to the question why the change took place, the so-called actuation problem in the terminology of Weinreich/Labov/Herzog (1968).

The question that arises of course is how the factor 'point of time' has to be incorporated in historical syntactic investigations. It is evident that one gets the best chance to get a good picture of a syntactic change, its transition, embedding and actuation if one takes as many points of time as possible within a certain period. This – together with the other essential factor 'dialect' – complicates the investigation to a considerable extent. It appears from a number of studies that intervals of a century give reasonably satisfying results. One does not seem to get a wrong picture of a syntactic change and one succeeds reasonably well in finding the factors that affected it.

2.2. Not essential but insightful aspects

2.2.1. Social class and style

We know from sociolinguistic studies that a linguistic change does not take place at once in all social classes and styles, but sooner in some than in others. With regard to social class it appears for example that the use of a new element correlates highly with social class and sex. The relationship is roughly as follows. Changes that proceed relatively consciously and that go in the direction of linguistic elements that have a certain prestige occur sooner and more often in the language of women and in the language of the higher social classes. Changes that proceed rather unconsciously and that go in the direction of elements that do not have prestige occur sooner and more often in the language of men and in the language of the lower social classes. Since there have not been great changes in the relationships between the classes and the sexes in the past seven centuries, we can expect that the sex and social class differences that we find nowadays are also present in the past. This implies that if it is possible to study the language of people of different social classes and different sexes in a period in the past (for example by studying letters; see Ebert 1980), it should be possible to get insight into the social embedding of a syntactic change and consequently also in the external factors that played a part in a syntactic change. The investigations of Ebert (1980) in Nürnberg and of Romaine (1982) in Scottish show that such an approach might be very insightful.

It also appears from sociolinguistic studies that a language change occurs sooner in some styles than in others. Language changes that occur relatively consciously and that proceed in the direction of a prestige

language occur more often in formal than in informal styles, whereas changes that occur relatively unconsciously and that go in the direction of variants without prestige occur more often in informal than in formal styles. Knowledge of the stylistic embedding of a new linguistic element shows us something about both the direction of a change and its causes. It is evident that in historical studies style differences cannot be elicited in the same way as in present-day sociolinguistic studies. Nevertheless, the factor 'style' can often be incorporated, since for every text we have some idea how much attention was paid to the use of language when it was written. We can expect for example that diaries are written with less attention for the use of language than statutes. That means that diaries represent a more informal style than statutes. If we can get hold of the stylistic embedding of a change in the past, it may help us to get more insight into its causes.

It is evident that an incorporation of the factors 'social class' and 'style' are not a *sine qua non* for studies of syntactic change. If one does not incorporate these factors, misinterpretations will not be made as quickly as when one does not take into account the factors 'dialect' and 'point of time'. Ignorance of the factors 'social class' and 'style' can, however, hamper our insight into the social and stylistic embedding of a change and consequently also into its causes.

2.2.2. Potential of occurrences

In sociolinguistic investigations one does not only investigate whether a certain informant uses element X, but also how often he or she could have used element X, but did not do it. This is called the potential of occurrences. If one studies for example how often the phenomenon *t*-deletion occurs, one does not only count the examples where it did occur (for example in German: *Herbs*, *Wurs* for *Herbst*, *Wurst*), but also where it did not occur (for example German: *er macht*). The number of times that the phenomenon *t*-deletion occurs is compared with the number of times in which it does not occur. If an informant does not pronounce a [t] in 20 of the 100 words that should have a [t] his level of *t*-deletion is 20 %. This percentage as such is not at all interesting, it is interesting if one compares it with the *t*-deletion level of other informants. From the differences between different groups one can deduce the social embedding of a linguistic phenomenon.

But that is not the only reason why sociolinguists study the potential of occurrences. They also do so because it can provide an insight into the linguistic factors that condition a linguistic phenomenon. If *t*-deletion occurs for example only after relatively complex consonant clusters, it can be concluded that the phenomenon is caused by articulatory factors.

This can, however, be concluded only if one knows precisely in which words *t*-deletion occurs and in which words it does not. Therefore one needs the potential of occurrences. In sociolinguistic studies the potential of occurrences is applied in order to get insight into both the social and stylistic embedding of a phenomenon and the linguistic factors that affect variation.

Application of the potential of occurrences takes place seldom in historical linguistics. If it is used, it is in studies on phonological change, but seldom in studies on syntactic change. Most often the frequency of a certain construction is stated, but seldom how often it could have occurred. I have four reasons to believe that the study of syntactic change would benefit from the application of the potential of occurrences.

a. In the first place for the very trivial reason that such a survey looks more reliable. Excerpting old texts for linguistic purposes is an exciting, but often difficult and exhausting work. If one checks only whether a certain construction occurs, one runs the risk to observe only those constructions that suit the theory that one wants to prove and to overlook other constructions unconsciously (see Fischer/van der Leek 1981 about Lightfoot 1979).

b. Working with the potential of occurrences is important secondly because it shows how the occurrence of a certain phenomenon has to be evaluated. The observation that a certain phenomenon never occurs, whereas it could have occurred 50 times, is of more importance than the observation that a construction never occurs that could have occurred only two times.

c. Taking account of the potential of occurrences is important in the third place because it enables us to trace which linguistic factors affect the use of a certain new construction, or in other words, which linguistic factors affect a certain syntactic change. In my view it is one of the most important tasks for historical linguistics to give an answer to this question, the so-called actuation question. It is, however, only possible to do so if one can study carefully the linguistic context of both the old and the new constructions.

d. Working with the potential of occurrences is finally important since it makes it possible to trace the social and stylistic embedding of a change if the factors 'style' and 'social class' are incorporated.

It may be that taking account of the potential of occurrences is not a *sine qua non* for the study of syntactic change. But I prefer it highly to incidental observation, since it may give us more insight into the transition, the embedding and the actuation of a syntactic change.

2.3. Consequences for the selection of texts

The incorporation of all the essential and less essential factors mentioned in 2.1. and 2.2. have important consequences for the selection of texts. Literary texts will more often than not give problems since it is difficult to determine when and where they were written. Moreover, if one wants to take into account the factors 'style' and 'social class' one has moreover to know something about the authors of the texts. If one wants to look at the potential of occurrence, one can only look at rather long texts. I realize that this is a difficult task. In my opinion, however, it is better to investigate a small number of syntactic changes on the basis of a reliable design than a large number on the basis of a shaky design.

3. A sociolinguistic approach of syntactic change in Dutch

3.1. Design

3.1.1. Sociolinguistic aspects⁴

I have chosen to restrict my study to the West Flemish dialect of Bruges and to the period between 1277 and 1600. My investigation has been limited to four small periods within this long period: the last quarters of the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th century.

In order to gain insight into the stylistic embedding of the change, I introduced the following styles: Public Trials, Diaries, Chronicles and Statutes. In the list provided here we find an increase of attention to the use of language. By analogy with what we know about changes on the phonological level (Labov 1972), I presume that syntactic change in a period in which there is not yet a written norm is a change below the level of consciousness and such a change will take place slower in styles with much attention for the use of language than in styles with less. For lack of a continuum dialect-standard language in the period under investigation, I expect that style differences in the Middle Ages take place on the continuum modern-archaic language and that the archaic forms remain longer in styles where great attention is paid to language (Statutes, Chronicles), than in those where this occurs less (Public Trials, Diaries).

Table I shows the design of my study. Because of the difficulties of collecting the data, I was not able to study all the different styles for all points in time. Consequently, my study has the design as in Table I.

⁴ More information about the sociolinguistic aspects of the design of the study can be found in Gerritsen (1987 and in press a and b).

| | c.1275-1300 | c.1375-1400 | c.1475-1500 | c.1575-1600 |
|----------|-------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| formal | Statutes | Statutes | Statutes | Statutes |
| ↓ | - | Chronicles | Chronicles | Chronicles |
| | - | - | Diaries | Diaries |
| informal | - | - | Public Trials | Public Trials |

Table I: The design of the study of syntactic change in Bruges prose texts

For all the linguistic aspects that I have investigated I have reckoned with the potential of occurrences. I investigated how often a certain linguistic phenomenon occurred and how often it could have occurred.

3.1.2. Linguistic aspects

I studied only one type of sentence, so-called infinitive constructions (1). Those infinitive constructions have the following characteristics: a. they lack tense, b. the comp-position is not always filled, c. they have no subject in surface structure, but a pro-subject in deep structure.

- (1) *dat hy int land van Vlaender ghebracht hadde*
 that he in the country of Flanders brought had
valsche munte om tvolc mede te bedrieghene
 forged coins in order the people with to deceive
 (15th, Chronicle, 58)

I investigated changes and stability in the following constructions:

a. The position of PPs relative to the V

- (2) *omme over the vaerne in Engheland*
 in order to over to cross to England
 (14th, Chronicle, 278)

b. The position of APs relative to the V

- (3) *te wesene breed .ij. elnen*
 to be wide two yards (13th, Statutes, 358)

c. The position of NPs relative to the V

- (4) *te doene huer werc*
 to do her work (15th, Trial, 1033)

d. The position of Adverbs relative to the V

- (5) *hier te scryven*
 here to write (16th, Chronicle, 1)

e. The development of the use of the word *om* (*me*) (cf. 1,2)

f. The disappearance of the gerund-ending (cf. 1 *bedrieghene*, 2 *vaerne*)

3.2. Results⁵

3.2.1. Position of elements relative to the V

Diagram I shows the results of the investigations of the position of PPs, APs, NPs and Adverbs relative to the V in the different points of time.⁶

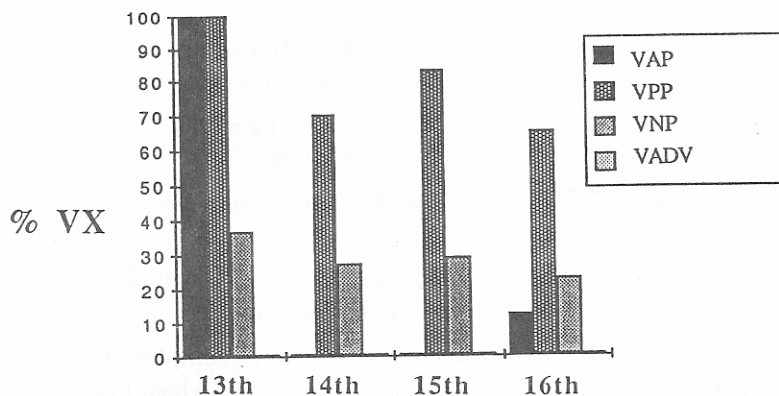


Diagram I: The position of PPs, AP's, NPs and Adverbs relative to the V in the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th centuries

Diagram I shows clearly that there is no change in the position of adverbs relative to the V: adverbs always occur before the V. But there are enormous changes in the occurrence of VPP-, VAP- and VNP-structures. It is not possible here to deal in detail with these changes, their causes and the consequences of these changes for a theory of syntactic change; therefore I refer to Gerritsen (1987 and in press b). I have traced for example which factors affect the occurrence of VNP- and VPP-structures and whether there are changes in the occurrence of these structures in the period under investigation. This happened to be the case indeed. The occurrence of VPP-structures is affected by two factors:

- The length of the PP: PPs after the V are statistically significantly longer than those before the V in the 15th and 16th centuries.
- The function of the PP: The decrease in the use of VPP-structures

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal in detail with the results of my investigations into syntactic change. More details about the changes in the position of elements relative to the V can be found in Gerritsen (1987 and in press a), about the rise of *om (me)* in Gerritsen (1987 and in press b) and about the disappearance of the gerund-ending in Gerritsen (1989). It is clear that I do not have enough data for some phenomena. In Gerritsen (1987) I deal in detail with these problems.

⁶ 13th C.: PP, N=19, AP, N=4, NP, N=46, Adverb, N=12.

14th C.: PP, N=30, AP, N=0, NP, N=45, Adverb, N=9.

15th C.: PP, N=75, AP, N=0, NP, N=88, Adverb, N=40.

16th C.: PP, N=130, AP, N=8, NP, N=170, Adverb, N=73.

takes place chiefly in PPs that are sister of VO, so PPs that have a very close relationship to the V. The occurrence of VNP-structures is affected by three factors:

- a. Length of the NP: NPs in VNP-structures are significantly longer than those in NPV-structures in the 15th and the 16th century. The influence of the length of the NP on its position increases in a statistically significant way between the 13th and the 16th century.
- b. Casemarking of the NP: In the 13th century, NPs with an unambiguous casemarking always occur before the V and never after.
- c. Function of the NP: Sisters of VO occur less often in VNP-structures than sisters of V1 and V2.
- d. Lexical representation of the V: In the 13th century verbs with VNP-structures never have NPV-structures and vice versa.

The stylistic embedding of the change is relatively complex, but very revealing. I will therefore deal with it in the section in which I illustrate the usefulness of the incorporation of the factor 'style' (4.2.1.).

3.2.2. The rise of *om*

Diagram II (s. p. 175) shows the increase of the use of the word *om* in infinitival constructions in functions in which it is optional in Modern Dutch and those in which it is obligatory, divided into infinitival constructions having the function of adverbial of purpose and infinitival constructions having other functions.⁷ The most remarkable change is the addition of *om* to infinitive constructions having the function of adverbial clause of purpose (cf. sentence 1). I have tested the traditional hypothesis that the increase in the use of *om* is connected with the disappearance of the gerund-ending (cf. Lightfoot 1979). This hypothesis was not confirmed, however, since 100% of the 13th century infinitive constructions having the function of adverbial clause of purpose still have a gerund-ending, whereas in the 13th century already 48 % was introduced by *om* (cf. Diagram III in 3.2.3. and Diagram II).

⁷ Obligatory not purpose 13th C., N=0, 14th C., N=0, 15th C., N=4, 16th C., N=8.
 Obligatory purpose 13th C., N=46, 14th C., N=9, 15th C., N=45, 16th C., N=121.
 Optional 13th C., N=28, 14th C., N=46, 15th C., N=66, 16th C., N=116.

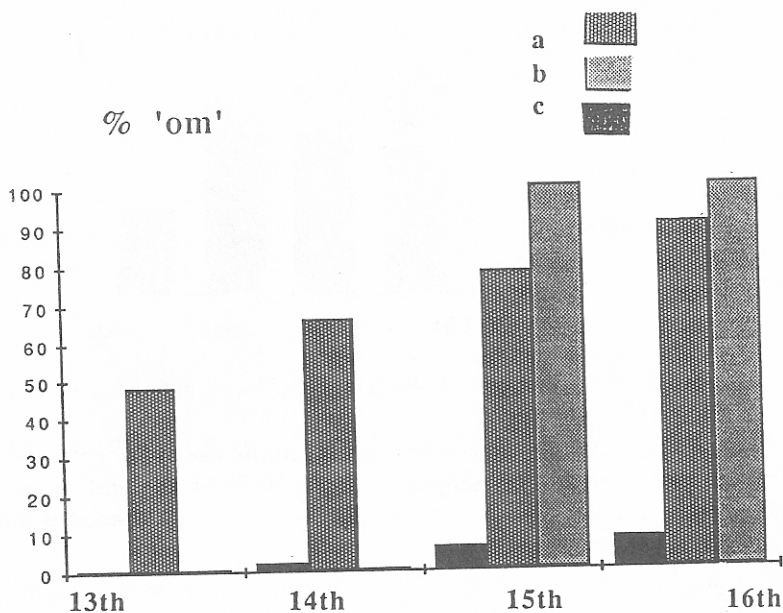


Diagram II: The occurrence of *om* in infinitive constructions having the function of final adverbial (a), other functions in which it is obligatory in Modern Dutch (b) and functions in which it is optional in Modern Dutch (c)

The second traditional explanation that the increase in the use of *om* is due to the fading away of the word *te*, the word that introduces all infinitive constructions, could not be tested due to the scarce knowledge that we have about the history of *te*. With regard to the linguistic factors that affected the rise of *om* I found that in the 13th century *om* was only used in relatively complex infinitive constructions, that is to say, in those with relatively many constituents and in those which had a relatively complex relation with the main clause. The lack of *om* in the 16th century was restricted to very simple infinitive constructions in the function of adverbial clause of purpose. *Om* is apparently added to elucidate complex sentences. Regarding the stylistic embedding of the change, I found that *om* appeared statistically significantly more often in informal than in formal styles.

3.2.3. The disappearance of the gerund-ending

Bare infinitives after prepositions governing the dative case may have a dative ending-*e* in Middle Dutch. I call this the gerund-ending (cf. sentence 1).

Diagram III shows per point in time which percentage of all infinitives

in infinitive constructions is marked by the gerund-ending.⁸

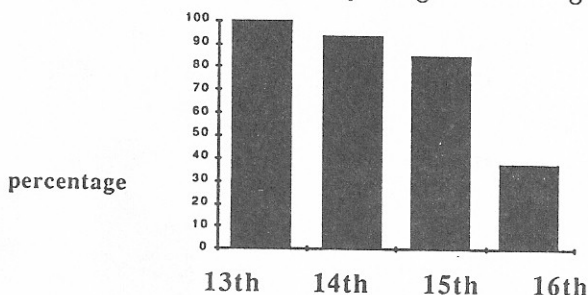


Diagram III: The occurrence of the gerund-ending at different points in time

Diagram III shows an enormous decrease in the use of the gerund-ending in the period under investigation: from 100% at the end of the 13th century to 34% at the end of the 16th century. The change is affected by a number of factors.

a. Syllable structure of the verb: There is hardly deflection in verbs ending on a CVC syllable structure (*doen, staan, gaan*). The deflection takes place mainly in verbs ending on a VCVC syllable structure (*dienen, dekken, begraven*).⁹

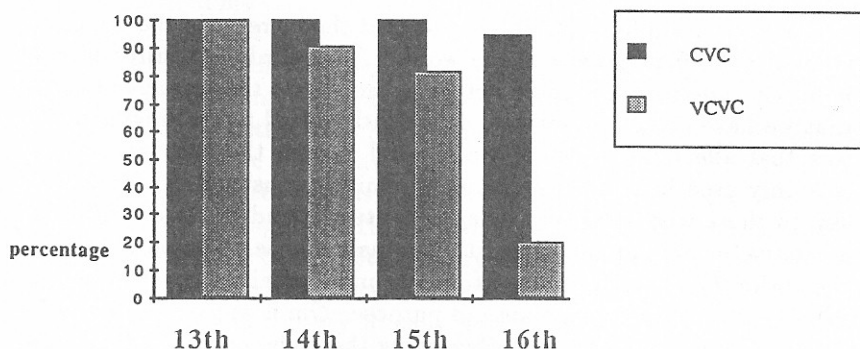


Diagram IV: The occurrence of the gerund-ending in verbs ending on a CVC syllable structure and in verbs ending on a VCVC syllable structure at different points in time

⁸ 13th C., N=84, 14th C., N=73, 15th C., N=151, 16th C., N=295.

⁹ CVC: 13th C., N=26, 14th C., N=18, 15th C., N=21, 16th C., N=64.

VCVC: 13th C., N=58, 14th C., N=54, 15th C., N=130, 16th C., N=231.

b. Frequency of the verb: The deflection starts in the 14th century in verbs used very infrequently.

c. Character of the last consonant of the stem of the verb: From the 15th century on the deflection takes place sooner in verbs with a stem ending on a [+nasal] consonant (*komen*, *spinnen*) than in ones ending on a [-nasal] consonant (*doden*, *zeilen*). In verbs with a stem ending on a [+nasal] consonant, frequency does not play a part any more. Only in verbs with a stem ending on a [-nasal] consonant do we find that deflection has taken place sooner in infrequently used verbs than in frequently used verbs. The gerund-ending occurs in the 16th century only in verbs with a relatively high frequency and ending on a stem with a [-nasal] consonant.

d. Style: The deflection takes place sooner in informal than in formal styles.

The factor b suggests that the disappearance of the gerund-ending is a change that is caused by analogy and the factors a, c and d suggest that it is later on accelerated by articulatory factors.

4. Illustration of the usefulness of the application of a sociolinguistic methodology on the basis of syntactic change in Dutch

4.1. Essential aspects

4.1.1. Dialect

Since I performed my investigation into only one dialect, the West-Flemish dialect of Bruges, it is difficult to determinate whether incorporation of the factor dialect was really essential. I can, however, compare a small part of my study with studies in other dialects. The occurrence of VVP-, VNP-, VAdv-structures with a survey of the same phenomena in 14th century Brabantish (de Meersman 1980) and the disappearance of the gerund-ending in 14th century Hollandish (Hogenhout-Mulder 1987).

It appears that there are no important differences between the dialect of Bruges and the Brabantish dialect in the position of adverbs relative to the V: all occur before the V. There are, however, important differences between West-Flemish and Brabantish with regard to the position of NPs relative to the V and PPs relative to the V. The percentage of NP after the V is more or less the same in both dialects: around 25 to 30%. The conditions that play a part in the occurrence of NPs after the V, however, are different. In the Brabantish dialect, the occurrence of VNP-structures is affected by the complexity of the NP, its meaning (NPs after the V refer to an amount, a quantity or are a name), and the number of verbs in the sentence. In the dialect of Bruges, however, none of these factors play a part in the occurrence of the NP after the

V. Regarding the occurrence of VPP-structures, the Brabantish dialect differs highly from the dialect of Bruges: PPs occur in Brabantish 40% less often after the V than in Flemish.

With regard to the occurrence of the gerund-ending Hogenhout-Mulder found that it occurred in the Hollandish dialect of Leyden in only 5% of all the cases, whereas it occurred in the dialect of Bruges in 91% of all the cases. This is a highly significant difference (86%).

The examples above show that the incorporation of the factor 'dialect' is essential in order to get a *bona fide* insight into the syntax of a certain point in time.

4.1.2. Points of time

It will be clear from the diagrams I-IV that the incorporation of the factor 'point of time' is absolutely essential for the study of syntactic change. If I had considered the whole period of the Middle Ages as one linguistic unit, I would not have had any idea of the syntactic changes that had taken place. On the contrary, I would have thought that Middle Dutch syntax had been very chaotic. If I had not incorporated the factor 'point of time', I would not have got an insight into the factors that affect a certain syntactic change either. For example the influence of the length of the NP and the PP on its occurrence after the V would not have been noted, just like the role of frequency in the disappearance of the gerund-ending. As a result I would not have got an insight into the possible causes of the change.

4.2. Not essential but insightful aspects

4.2.1. Social class and style

Owing to the fact that there are so few sources for the period of Middle Dutch, I was not able to incorporate social factors in my design. I succeeded, though, to incorporate style differences for the 15th and the 16th century (cf. Table I). The style differences in the rise of *om* and in the disappearance of the gerund-ending indicated that we had to do here with a change from below the level of consciousness. The change occurred sooner in informal than in formal styles. The stylistic differentiation supported the findings of the linguistic aspects that determined the change.

With regard to the stylistic differences in the use of PPs and NPs after the V the differentiation is more complex. The 15th century data indicate that the change from VNP to NPV and from VPP to PPV is an unconscious change. The new structures occur more often in informal than in formal styles. In the 16th century, though, we find that the new structures, NPV and PPV, occur significantly more often in the

most formal style, Statutes, and in the most informal style, Public Trials, than in the other two styles. This shows that the change creeps into the language from two different points: unconsciously in informal styles and consciously in the most formal style. Since we find this unexpected stylistic differentiation after the invention of the art of printing, I think that it might be due to the increasing use of the written word. Owing to this, people became aware of the variability in the position of NPs and PPs to the V. This was experienced as undesirable and a choice was made for a standard variant – the most frequent one: NPV.

Introduction of the factor 'style' has led to a deeper insight into the stylistic embedding of the changes and therefore also into its causes. Most changes seem to be affected by internal linguistic factors only, but in the 16th century we find that an external factor also plays a part. The growth of a norm affects the rise of NPV- and PPV-structures.

4.2.2. Potential of occurrences

If I had not applied the potential of occurrences, I would not have been able to trace the changes. Theoretically speaking, it would have been possible to say that *om*, the 'gerund-ending', the VAP-, the VPP- and the VNP-order occurred frequently in the whole period under investigation. Furthermore, it would not have been possible to trace the factors that affected the changes, such as the influence of casemarking on the position of the NP relative to the V, the lexically diffuse way in which the change from VNP to NPV proceeded and the influence of the complexity of the infinitival construction on the occurrence of *om*. Without application of the potential of occurrences the stylistic embedding of the changes would have been unclear. As a consequence I would have had a less clear insight into the causes of the changes.

5. Concluding remarks

Investigations in which the essential and less essential factors here mentioned for studies of syntactic change are not incorporated are certainly not worthless. I hope to have shown, though, that the incorporation of aspects of sociolinguistic methodology such as dialect, period, style, social class and potential of occurrences leads to a better insight into syntactic change than we can obtain without the application of this methodology. I realize, however, that it is often difficult to reckon with all those factors, not in the least since it brings along a lot of work. Nevertheless, it seems better to me to study a few changes with the help of reliable methods, than many on the basis of questionable methods.

Both for the description and the explanation of a syntactic change it seems worth the effort to apply a methodology inspired by sociolinguistics.

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