

## DISCUSSING THE MOTHER TONGUES OF A MULTILINGUAL COUNTRY. EARLY MODERN DEBATES ON DUTCH AND FRENCH IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

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Sixteenth-century Europe was marked by a true fascination with language. Up to this period, the study of language had focused mainly on the classical languages, and in particular Latin. In the sixteenth century, however, the attention for language in general increased hugely. In various levels of society, the languages of the world came under scrutiny. People started to study and discuss classical as well as exotic languages and modern, local vernacular languages. They compared languages and studied their individual characteristics and history. A Europe-wide debate developed about the central topic of finding a perfect language or medium for communication. Key questions were: Which language is the best? And how can individual languages be improved? These debates were not just taking place in academic and Latin-speaking environments, but on a much broader scale. Many people were interested in the particular nature of their mother tongue and possible ways to enhance it. It is important to note that at this time, the vernacular languages were not standardized. They existed in a variety of dialects, usually without an overarching prestige variety, and no rules for spelling or grammar had been defined.

This was also the case for Dutch, the main vernacular language of the Low Countries. Around the year 1550, publications started to appear in which this vernacular was discussed. Its positive characteristics were debated, and rules for spelling were proposed. Some language debaters considered one particular dialect the best variety, others suggested that a new form of Dutch should be created out of its different dialects. In 1584, the first grammar of Dutch was published, the *[Twe-Spraack van de Nederduytsche Letterkunst](#)*. In the same period, the Dutch vocabulary was explored through dictionaries. Many encountered the problem that not all words that existed in Latin knew a Dutch equivalent, which made it difficult to write on certain topics in Dutch. It certainly was not a perfect language. There was a vivid discussion on how to solve this problem. Some proposed the use of loanwords from more developed languages, such as Latin and French. Others rejected this strongly and wished to create new, proper Dutch terms.

In the study of these debates, the focus has been on the development of the Dutch language into the standard form of Dutch that exists today. In their search for the roots of the Dutch language in the sixteenth century, researchers have wished to see a strong connection between the language debates and rising feelings of national pride. These feelings led, according to these earlier studies, to defences of the mother tongue and rejections of everything foreign, including loanwords. There has thus been a disproportional attention for the criticism of loanwords, which has been considered modern and moving the language forward. Those who promoted loanwords allegedly represented an old-fashioned point of view, endangering the future of the language.

In this teleological way of studying the language debates, focusing on the development of the Dutch language, large parts of the debates have been neglected. This is caused in part because of a lack of attention for the linguistic context in which the debates took place. The sixteenth-century Low Countries were fundamentally multilingual. While Latin continued to be an important player in the international, scholarly, and religious fields, there were also two vernacular languages. Dutch dialects were spoken by the local population in the north, while a smaller French-speaking area existed in the south. Although French was the native tongue in a smaller geographic region, it also played an important role as an aristocratic, administrative, juridical, and international language in the Dutch-speaking areas. In the larger cities, daily life was multilingual for most people.

In my research project, I argue that these multilingual everyday experiences are key in understanding the debates on language of the sixteenth century. It is not in a monolingual environment closed in on itself and rejecting foreign ideas and influences that people start to actively reflect on their mother tongue. Such reflections rise when people are confronted with problems concerning communication, and with other languages. It is in being open towards the foreign that one becomes aware of what is particular for one's own language. Indeed, looking more closely at the first dictionaries, grammars, and treatises on spelling of Dutch, there is very often a French connection. In virtually all cases, the authors of such texts were multilinguals, and usually, they compare Dutch with other languages. Moreover, people in the Low Countries were studying and discussing other languages than Dutch, for example French. This attention for the French language has remained hidden because of the focus on the development of Dutch. I would like to illustrate these main arguments of my research here by focusing on language debaters who had a particular connection to Zeeland, either because they were born there or because they moved there later in life. At the end of this paper, I will then shift my attention to what was said in these debates about the Zeelandic dialect and the linguistic abilities of the inhabitants of the province.

## THE ZEALANDIC CONTEXT

In the period under scrutiny, the province of Zeeland formed part of the economic and cultural heartland of the Low Countries. During the largest part of the sixteenth century, especially the southern provinces of Brabant and Flanders, and to a lesser degree the northern province of Holland, were flourishing. International trade was thriving, and so were the arts. In the second half of the century, the Dutch Revolt against the Habsburg ruler Philip II caused great unrest in these regions. The powerful metropolis Antwerp was at the head of the Revolt and welcomed many refugees. When the South, including Antwerp, was eventually brought back under the control of Philip II, many people fled towards safer regions, in the northern Low Countries, Germany, or the British Isles. Large groups of refugees passed through Zeeland, and some decided to settle there. While the South was struggling, trade and culture in Holland blossomed,

and would continue to do so throughout the seventeenth century. Zeeland, in between the radiant centres in Flanders, Brabant, and Holland, was an important region for trade itself along the sixteenth century and after. As a general rule, where the economy thrives, so do the arts. It is thus not surprising that the discussions about language were quite strong in Zeeland as well. This is even more so if the linguistic situation in this province is considered.

Many inhabitants of Zeeland were involved in international trade, for which they had to use the *lingua franca* of commerce of this time, which was French. Moreover, Zeeland was located between the bilingual province of Flanders and Holland, the two regions that produced the largest numbers of language debaters. It had strong historical ties with both neighbouring provinces. The Holland and Flemish dialects were engaged in a fierce competition and both had supporters who thought either Flemish or Hollandic was the best form of Dutch. Zeeland was, so to say, caught in the middle. Because of the large influx of migrants from the south, moreover, the inhabitants of Zeeland were confronted with a whole range of Walloon and southern Dutch dialects. I wish to suggest that such linguistic confrontations stimulated reflections on language among the population of Zeeland.

### THE ZEALANDIC NIGHTINGALE

In the province, several people were indeed taking part in the debates on language. Johan de Brune the elder, a Zealandic statesman and lawyer, advocated the use of Dutch in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>i</sup> He was a member of the city council of Middelburg and a poet. In the preface to one of his literary publications, De Brune explains his vision for the Dutch language. He felt that it deserved more attention from the learned speakers of Dutch so that it could become a worthy language:

Since I went through the old and learned languages, and mostly since I have tasted all the European ones, that are customary with us, I have multiple times loathed, that our nation (a people that otherwise is not inferior to any other in the arts and sciences) has been so neglecting and failing to construct our language, to give her decent and mighty beauty.<sup>ii</sup>

Interestingly, De Brune states here that it was through the study of foreign languages, both classical and modern, that he came to realize what was the status and nature of his mother tongue. The debates on the Dutch language in the early modern period did not come into being in monolingual environments that rejected foreign influence, but in open, cosmopolitan milieux where people were interested in comparison. Indeed, De Brune's book consisted for the greatest part of translations of French and Latin poems.

De Brune was, furthermore, particularly interested in proverbs and their translation.<sup>iii</sup> This was a topic that occupied many people in the early modern period. Proverbs were considered

by some as untranslatable and unique for a particular language, and many people collected them as interesting linguistic specimen. De Brune made a collection of Dutch proverbs, hoping to show the richness of the Dutch language.<sup>iv</sup> For this compilation, he studied other vernacular languages as well, and translated mainly French and Spanish sayings into Dutch. Whenever people like De Brune defended the Dutch language, they almost always professed interest in other languages, and mainly French, too.

I would like to briefly make mention of one other interesting remark made by De Brune with regard to language. This Middelburg statesman and supporter of the Dutch language discussed the topic of beauty in one of his works and refers to a popular saying, which he seems to endorse. Here, De Brune describes the perfect woman: ‘a beautiful woman should have a Dutch body, an English face, a Brabantine tongue, and a Hollandic heart’.<sup>v</sup> Apparently, this native of Zeeland, who was very actively reflecting on language, did not consider it problematic for the ideal woman to speak with a Brabantine accent. Perhaps this is suggestive of his opinion on his own native dialect.

Johan de Brune wrote poems for a book titled *Zeeusche Nachtegael* (Zealandic nightingale), printed in 1623. It is the fruit of a collaborative poetic project to which some 20 poets from Zeeland have contributed writings in order to demonstrate the literary qualities of the province. They wanted to show that poets from Zeeland could sing like a nightingale, and thus prove wrong those who thought that the roughness of the nearby sea had caused them all to sound as hoarse as frogs. The initiator of this poetic project was perhaps the poet Jacob Cats, the famous ‘vadertje Cats’, who had been born and raised in Zeeland. Cats’s poems in any case played an important role in the book itself. It is interesting to note that this book unites many of the people who were discussing the form and status of the Dutch language in Zeeland at this time. The *Zeeusche nachtegael* contains translations of French poems, French and Latin texts, and poems in French sonnet style. So, once again, defending the mother tongue did not lead to rejecting the foreign.

A prominent figure in Zeeland, Adriaan Hofferus, who was mayor of Zierikzee for some time, wrote a poem for this collection. In his contribution, Hofferus criticizes the use of loanwords:

I do not know what it is with our Netherlanders,  
Because besides their own tongue, they also speak others,  
It does not suffice them to speak in their own language  
They speak French, and Scottish, Latin, and like the Walloons.  
They know how to mix it like a cook and to finely slice it  
So they can, supposedly, obtain renown.<sup>vi</sup>

Hofferus harshly judges those who use loanwords from French, Latin, and Scottish to embellish their speech. He refers to the frequently used metaphor of the cook, who mixes and matches ingredients like the users of borrowed terms mix and match languages, to obtain a form of

Kitchen-Dutch. According to Hofferus, the use of loanwords is not necessary, as the Dutch language is rich enough in itself. He claims that it was mainly done as a way of showing off one's multilingualism.

Another poet who took part in the *Zeeusche nachtegael* and debated language was Adriaan van de Venne, who was a painter and lived in Middelburg for seventeen years. Van de Venne wrote an [emblem book](#), combining meaningful images with poems. In his work, he wished to use a purified language, because the earlier emblem books by which he had been inspired used, according to him, the Kitchen-Dutch also rejected by Hofferus. In these earlier books, he writes:

the art of rhyming was not swaddled, and not well cherished; but had sucked the breasts of alien and foreign unrhyming words! Nevertheless, some years ago, the praiseworthy Poetry, [...] has come to her Dutch senses: and it seems, that the Hollandic and Zealandic air has made this art of knowing somewhat sweeter, and more open, and more unburdened of strange lisps, and dark vapors.<sup>vii</sup>

Here, the Dutch language is compared to a child that needs to be nurtured by its mother instead of by a foreigner, and should be raised in the land of its parents. Van de Venne is positive about the Dutch language as it was spoken in Zeeland. The air in the province, he argues, caused his own language to be sweeter, clearer and less prone to lispings.

It is interesting that Van de Venne refers to a connection between the Zealandic air and the manner of speaking of its inhabitants, because it is not the only reference that has been made to this connection. Another example can be found in a work by Levinus Lemnius, a physician from Zierikzee, who was active more than half a century earlier than Van de Venne. In a later English translation the following is stated on the speech of Zealanders:

[T]he Inhabitants, by the benefit of the Sun, have no dull and stupid wits, but they are witty, civill, merry, yet many of them by the reason of the Sea that hath its influence upon them, will speak very scurrilous, crabbed, and brinish language [...] [but I do not doubt that] if they have contracted any fault by the Salt vapours of the Sea that are so near to them, that it might be mended with good education.<sup>viii</sup>

So, according to Lemnius, too, the Zealandic air, in this case especially its saltiness, influenced the speech of the local population, but this time not in a good way. It made their speech vulgar and hard to understand. This passage is slightly ambiguous, and it actually seems that Lemnius refers to the content of their speech rather than its linguistic features, but it is remarkable how air and speech are once more connected.

## THE OLDEST GRAMMAR OF DUTCH

Someone who came to Zeeland only later in life has become famous for his role in the debates on the Dutch language. Johannes Radermacher was active as a merchant in the metropolis of Antwerp, but the troubles in the south forced him to leave, spending the last two decades of his life in Middelburg. Radermacher's importance for the language debates lies in a manuscript he wrote before coming to Zeeland. This manuscript contains the oldest grammar of the Dutch language known today. Radermacher felt that the grammatical rules of the Dutch language should be deduced from its everyday use, rather than imposed on it, and studied the language carefully. He also rejected the use of loanwords, comparing borrowed terms with rust that would consume the language wholly:

But if we wait any longer before we eradicate the rust, our language will be eaten completely by the mixture of foreign scumwords that still daily increase in number, so that the language will become unrecognisable, and what has been passed on by our forefathers will be buried.<sup>ix</sup>

Radermacher expressed a fear that some still hold today: namely that the Dutch language will disappear because its speakers incorporate so many elements of foreign languages in their speech. As was most often the case with the language debaters, this fear did not keep Radermacher from expressing an interest in other languages than Dutch as well. It is known which books he possessed because a [catalogue](#) has survived of their auction, which took place in Middelburg after he had died. In his personal library, many texts in other languages can be found, and in particular many dictionaries of various modern and classical languages, and grammatical treatises of various tongues. It is not surprising that for his grammatical treatise, Radermacher compared the Dutch language with other vernaculars. What is surprising, is that he mostly compared the Dutch language with English. Usually, Dutch and French, the two languages of the Low Countries, are compared more often. French does figure in the grammar, but English is more present. This can be explained by the fact that Radermacher spent quite some time in England himself.

## PHILIPS OF MARNIX, LORD OF SAINT-ALDEGONDE

A famous inhabitant of Zeeland who had a major voice in the debates about language in the Low Countries was Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde. He was of noble birth, and was raised in the French language in Brussels. He also learned to speak and write Dutch fluently, as well as a range of other languages. He played an important role in the Dutch Revolt as the right hand man of the leader of the Revolt, William of Orange. He was William's main propaganda author, and wrote many polemic texts in both French and Dutch, so in both vernaculars of the Low Countries. Marnix was appointed mayor of Antwerp during its difficult

times, and he was the one who was forced to give up the city to King Philip II after a long siege, in 1585.

Some years earlier, in 1578, Marnix had bought the ‘ambtsheerlijkheid’ West-Souburg, near Flushing. He had lived there for some time before he became mayor of Antwerp, and after the disastrous ending of the siege of the city, he retired to his home there, where he would stay for several years. Marnix was actively involved in the discussions on the Dutch language in this period and was in fact a language purist. Moreover, he was on the front lines of the reformatory groups in the Low Countries. These combined interests led him to compose a Dutch translation of the Book of Psalms, which was probably almost completely written in West-Souburg. It appeared in several editions from 1580 on. This publication, titled *Het Boeck der Psalmen Davids*, was the result of Marnix’s meticulous translation of the original Hebrew book of Psalms. He set it to the tunes of the so-called Genevan Psalter, a French version of the book of psalms approved by Jean Calvin.

This Francophone, Genevan Psalter had already been in use in the Calvinist communities of the Low Countries for some time, but a Dutch translation was, of course, desirable. Completely in line with Reformatory ideas, Marnix wanted to allow the common people to sing the psalms in their native language: ‘By translating into our Dutch language the psalms, hymns, or chants that has recited to us the Holy Ghost, sharing them with all ordinary and common people’.<sup>x</sup> Marnix was not the first to create such a Dutch version of the Genevan psalter; two major authors, [Jan Utenhove](#) and [Petrus Datheen](#), had already preceded him. Utenhove’s psalter had not become a major hit, presumably because of its particular use of the Dutch language. Utenhove had tried to combine the different dialects of the Low Countries to create a language that was understandable for all speakers of the Dutch vernacular. This resulted, however, in a mixture that could not be understood by anyone. The text by Petrus Datheen, published in 1566, had become a huge success. It was a direct translation of the French, Genevan Psalter and stayed very close to its French source. Marnix disagreed with Datheen’s working method, which discarded the Hebrew original, and therefore decided to write a new translation, based on both the French and the Hebrew texts. In his psalter, he showed his linguistic purism. Marnix described his translation strategy in the preface, as follows: ‘That we, wherever possible, have followed the ordinary and common way of speaking, except for that we as much as we could, have avoided all scummed and strange words from other languages’.<sup>xi</sup>

Besides aiming for a pure language, Marnix, like Utenhove, wished to unite the people of the Low Countries under one shared mother tongue, that speakers of all different dialects could understand. He wanted to:

Bring back into use the old Netherlandish vernacular mother tongue in order to make use of clear words, which still in many countries and provinces; being in Holland, Gelderland, Friesland, Overijssel, [...] are known, considered and used as proper Dutch and helpful words [...].<sup>xii</sup>

In earlier studies, it was argued that growing feelings of nationalism were at the basis of this pursuit of a pure and widely shared Dutch vernacular. However, the reference to old, clear Dutch words as opposed to apparently unclear new loanwords suggests another reading of this quote. Marnix's predecessor Jan Utenhove had, in the preface to his bible translation, argued that the existence of loanwords in the Dutch language resulted in doubles, different words meaning the same thing, thus creating possible ambiguities. Utenhove purified his text, he wrote: 'So not, through careless writing, the meaning of the Holy Ghost is obscured, and so that no one is estranged from reading our work'.<sup>xiii</sup> Loanwords made a text ambiguous and unclear, leading to possible misinterpretations of the sacred texts. They could be religiously dangerous. Eventually, such ambiguities could even lead to further confessional disagreements and disintegration of the religious community. Marnix, who was trying to emulate Utenhove's work in many ways, might very well have had similar reasons for purifying his translation and using the mentioned 'clear' words. It was probably not so much a feeling of nationalism that pushed him in this direction, but practical and religious considerations. A clear and pure language and a clear translation that could be shared by all Dutch speaking Calvinists would, of course, support the coherence of the group while preventing misinterpretations of the religious texts.

The link between linguistic impurity and religious misconceptions also comes forth from another work by Marnix, namely his *Byencorf der Heilige Roomsche Kerke (Beehive of the Holy Roman Church)*. It is a satirical description of the structure and dogmas of the Roman Church, printed for the first time in Dutch in 1569. Marnix also wrote an adapted French version. A study of these texts can serve as an illustration of Marnix's linguistic strategy concerning his psalm translation. The *Byencorf* has been written from the point of view of a prominent catholic theologian. His arguments and points of view are exaggerated to the absurd in order to ridicule them. The Dutch and French texts have struck their modern readers because of their extraordinarily rich style of writing. They contain many loanwords and even often apply the notion of code-switching, that is, switching to another language for a number of words. This varied writing style has been attributed to the influence of the French author François Rabelais on Marnix. The Dutch *Byencorf* bristles with loanwords from both French and from Latin. The following fragment is just a minor example:

But may always his sweet Mother be unrestrained and unhampered, and have free permission, to be able to *dispense, ordinate, sententiate, dispose* and *reserve* of all the *decretes, canones*, writings and *ordonnances*, and, *in summa*, to tie the devil to the cushion [...].<sup>xiv</sup>

This quote contains many borrowings from Latin and French, which I have indicated in italic characters. Immediately following the loanwords from prestige languages is the popular saying 'binding the devil onto a pillow', also famously depicted in Pieter Brueghel the Elders painting on Dutch proverbs. So why this sudden mixture of languages and writing styles in a text composed by someone who pronounced himself overtly against linguistic hybridity and

loanwords? Marnix was definitely inspired by Rabelais, but I would like to suggest another reason.

In the satirical *Byencorf*, Marnix explicitly ridiculed the poor knowledge most monks and priests possessed of the Latin language. These monks mixed Latin with their mother tongue and other languages in order to present themselves as learned. In reality, Marnix points out, the majority of the clergymen had such a poor command of the foundational languages of Christianity that they did not understand its key texts. They pretended, however, to possess a solid knowledge of these tongues in order to convince the common people of their standpoints:

Remarkably, it can be witnessed, that the Holy Church does all her masses, her hours, prayers and singing, in Latin, mixing it now and then with Greek and Hebrew words: so that not just the common people, but the Papists and Bishops themselves do not understand it.<sup>xv</sup>

According to Marnix, a limited knowledge of languages was an indication of a limited understanding of the sacred texts. Linguistic misunderstanding could lead, and had led throughout the centuries, to religious misconceptions. The Catholic clergy used a form of Latin that demonstrated their incapacity to read the source texts. By mixing and thus corrupting both Latin and the vernacular they made their sermons impossible to understand for the common people. Marnix thus establishes links between linguistic incompetence and religious misconceptions, and between linguistic impurity and religious and moral impurity. A pure language was more than a symbol of nationalism, it was the pathway to religious experience and understanding.

This idea, central to reformed thinking, goes further than simply allowing the people to read religious key texts in their native tongue. First, the native tongue needed standardization and clarity. This would allow a shared religious experience as well as discussions about religious topics among speakers of the same tongue. Linguistic hybridity, according to Marnix and Utenhove, rendered a language ambiguous and obscure, which obstructed interpretation and discussion. The Dutch language thus needed to be purified. But as leader of the new Calvinist community, Marnix not just dealt with the Dutch vernacular and its different dialects, but also with the other languages used by the exiled Calvinist groups.

Within the Netherlandish Calvinist community of which Marnix was one of the local leading figures, a sense of cohesion between French- and Dutch speaking groups was lacking. In order to counteract the ‘pitiful dispersal of the Dutch community of both languages’, Marnix proposed a model of unity and agreement: ‘Not just in the chapters of the pure doctrine, but also in the manners, ceremonies and government of the Church, and furthermore safeguarding the mutual understanding and good relationship’.<sup>xvi</sup> But how can such a sharing of manners and ceremonies be made possible? As already mentioned, Marnix’s psalm translation formed a counterpart of the Genevan Psalter that was used in Francophone Calvinist communities in France, but also in the Francophone congregations in the Low Countries and in exile

communities abroad. Marnix had used both the Hebrew original and the French adaptation while writing his Dutch text, and was thus trying to reach a textual form that would foster the creation of a multilingual community, based on the sharing of one true version of the psalms in more than one language. His translation in clear and standardized Dutch united speakers of different Dutch dialects, while it also united speakers of Dutch and French because they could share the same book of psalms.

In order to overcome problems with communication, Marnix and other authors from this period not only tried to create standardized vernacular languages that could be understood by all their native speakers, they also looked beyond linguistic borders. Before mutual understanding between speakers of two different languages could exist, internal clarity and unity was needed. Marnix not only promoted a pure Dutch language, but also a pure form of French. Linguistic purism did thus not always indicate a sort of nationalist rejection of the foreign, but could, quite on the contrary, actually be a step in the process towards multilingual unity and communication.

#### LINGUISTIC REPUTATIONS

About the Dutch dialect that was spoken in Zeeland at this time, unfortunately very little is known.<sup>xvii</sup> Of course, we have to rely on written source material to gain insight into the way this dialect must have sounded. Unfortunately, strikingly few remarks have been made by contemporaries on the way people from Zeeland spoke in this period, while the neighbouring provinces of Brabant, Flanders, and Holland are much better documented. Reasons for this are unclear, but it is possible that the language of Zeeland has been treated less in discussions on language because it was not considered a contender for becoming the standard language of the Low Countries. Another possible reason could be that the dialect of Zeeland was not considered significantly different from its neighbouring dialects. Indeed, there seems to have existed a dialect continuum stretching along the North Sea Coast.<sup>xviii</sup> The dialect of Zeeland seems to have been somewhat of a mixture of Flemish and Hollandic characteristics, and it is virtually impossible to distinguish particular Zeelandic features. Many overviews of sixteenth-century Dutch do not even mention the dialect of Zeeland, but let the dialect of Flanders stretch out over Zeeland. Of course, it should not be forgotten that even within Zeeland, a variety of different forms of Dutch were used. No overarching Zeelandic unity existed, as every island or peninsula had its own way of speaking.

Nevertheless, contemporaries did consider the language of Zeeland a dialect of its own. A book printer from Ghent, Joos Lambrecht, wrote [a treatise on Dutch orthography](#) in 1550. In it, he enumerated the dialects of which his mother tongue consisted. He mentioned the variants of Flanders, Brabant, Holland, Guelders, Cleves, Friesland, Limburg, and, finally, Zeeland. In his book on spelling, we find some of the scarce clues on what the Dutch of Zeeland must have sounded like. Lambrecht strongly promoted the use of phonetic spelling, which means that

writing reflects pronunciation and that only the letters that are actually pronounced are written. Instead of suggesting that everyone should use one, standard way of spelling, Lambrecht thus wished that everyone would write in their own dialect.. In his treatise, he gives a few examples of how people from Zeeland should write, and thus how they spoke:

Where someone from Zeeland pronounces Jae, there he should in the spelling of this word not follow the Flemish nor the Brabanters, as Ja: unless he pronounces it like that.<sup>xix</sup>

Lambrecht also describes how this Zealandic combination of *a* and *e* is pronounced, namely ‘Bae, like sheep bleat’.<sup>xx</sup> This comical description suggests that in these regions, the *a* was pronounced in a slightly more elongated, palatalized way. It is interesting that Lambrecht, who was from Flanders himself, on several occasions stresses the similarities between the dialects of Holland and Zeeland but distances it from Flemish, while this link has been emphasized by modern researchers. Another language debater who wrote on the spelling of Dutch, Pontus de Heuiter, did mention the linguistic link between Zeeland and Flanders. He focused not on the influence of Flemish on the dialect of Zeeland, but the other way around:

Noticing only Flemish to have been corrupted, by the old practice and ruling of the French, the connections with the ugly Zealandic, and the innumerable multiplications of letters and syllables in the beginning, middle and ending of words [...].<sup>xxi</sup>

These two orthographers Lambrecht and De Heuiter were thus both not very praising in their words about this dialect. It seems that the pronunciation of the long *a* was one of the most striking features of the language of Zeeland, as we also find mention of it in another work that took part in the discussions on language in the Low Countries. It is the *Twe-spraak van de Nederduitsche letterkunst*, the first published grammar of the Dutch language. The *Twe-spraak* also dealt with the spelling of Dutch. Contrary to Lambrecht, this book proposed a uniform spelling and pronunciation of Dutch. According to this book, it was no strange thing that people from Zeeland pronounced some words with the long *a* that should not be pronounced as such, because they were written with *ae* instead of double *a*: ‘The Zealanders are not to be blamed if they pronounce Jaet and Maet wrong, since we all spell it wrong’.<sup>xxii</sup>

If we want to learn more about the historical dialect of Zeeland, much research by historical linguists is needed. It would have to be based on extant printed and handwritten material from Zeeland, in the hope to find clues through phonetic ways of spelling. This research would have to be combined with extrapolations from known information on Flemish and Hollandic dialects to complete the picture, but it would remain a rough estimation rather than a solid overview.

Besides remarks on the pronunciation of the Zealandic dialect, a few early modern authors have also commented on the abilities of the inhabitants of Zeeland in other languages. They

sketch a strikingly positive image of the multilingualism of the people in this region. The Italian merchant and historian Lodovico Guicciardini wrote a [description of the Low Countries](#), in which he showed himself positive about the linguistic capacities of Netherlanders in general. He devoted some words specifically to the Zealanders;

The mother tongue of Zealand is Dutch: but since this people travels in all foreign lands, and maintains great trade and sense of community with foreigners within their own country, there is hardly any man or woman who does not speak French or Spanish, and many also speak Italian.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Indeed, the inhabitants of Zealand were strongly engaged in international trade, for which they needed the French language in particular.

Another remark on the multilingualism of people from Zealand comes from someone with strong ties to the province, the humanist Abraham Mylius. He was a preacher in Flushing for several years, and he also contributed to the *Zeeusche Nachtegael*. Mylius wrote a treatise on the Dutch language, *Lingua Belgica*, printed in 1612, in which he discussed his study of the relationships between different languages of the world.<sup>xxiv</sup> He noted similarities in Dutch and Greek and pointed out positive characteristics of the Dutch vernacular, which was, according to him, one of the oldest languages in the world. Mylius argued that one of the best aspects of Dutch was that it was of such a moderate nature that it allowed its speakers to easily learn other languages. If Dutch was your mother tongue, it was much easier, according to Mylius, to learn foreign languages: ‘I would almost say that my Netherlandish compatriot is a linguistic sponge; in the way that a sponge perfectly absorbs all liquids, so does he absorb languages’.<sup>xxv</sup> Mylius goes on to stipulate that he is referring specifically to Dutch-speaking Netherlanders, rather than French-speaking people from the Low Countries. Since Dutch is not their mother tongue, its positive influence has no impact on them. Mylius explicitly mentions the inhabitants of Brabant, Holland, and Zealand, as being able to learn foreign languages.

In my view of the discussions on language in this period, it is typical that it is considered a positive characteristic of Dutch that its speakers could allegedly learn other languages quicker. I see the discussions as expressions of an open mind-set interested in languages and communication rather than focused on monolingualism, nationalism, and the rejection of everything foreign. Although some language debaters indeed strongly supported their mother tongue as the best vernacular and rejected loanwords, the overall trend was characterised by comparison and interest in multiple languages at the same time. Famous Zealanders such as Radermacher, De Brune and particularly Marnix, have illustrated this in their writings. The *Zeeusche nachtegael* group holds a particular place in the debates on language in Zealand in this period and certainly deserves a closer look.

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<sup>i</sup> Marijke J. van der Wal, 'Taalidealen, taalnormen en taalverandering: Johan de Brune in linguïstisch perspectief', in: P.J. Verkruijsse (Ed.), *Johan de Brune de Oude (1588-1658). Een Zeeuws literator en staatsman uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Middelburg: Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 1990, 54-67.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Sedert dat ick de oude en gheleerde talen deur-loopen, en meest alle de Europeesche, die by ons gebruyckelick zijn, ghesmaect hebbe, heb' ick my dickwils verfoeyt, dat onse natie (een volck dat anderzins in konsten en wetenschappen geen andere en wijct) zo naer-latigh en verzuymigh geweest is, om onze tale op te bouwen, en haer behoorlick en meughelick cieraed te gheven'. Johan De Brune the Elder, *Emblemata of Zinne-werck*. Amsterdam: Ian Jacobsz Schipper, 1661, fol. \*3r-v.

<sup>iii</sup> Paula Koning, 'Spreekwoorden als bouwstenen', in: P.J. Verkruijsse (Ed.), *Johan de Brune de Oude (1588-1658). Een Zeeuws literator en staatsman uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Middelburg: Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 1990, 92-106.

<sup>iv</sup> Johan de Brune the Elder, *Nieuwe wyn in oude le'er zacken*, Middelburg: Zacharias Roman, 1636.

<sup>v</sup> 'een schoone vrouw moet hebben een Neerlands lijf, een Enghelands aen-ghezicht, een Brabands tongh, en een Hollands hert'. Johan De Brune the Elder, *Bankket-werk*, Middelburg: Jacques Fierens, 1660, I, 246.

<sup>vi</sup> 'Ick weet niet wat het is met onse Neder-landers./ Want nevens hare taal soo spreken sy noch anders./ Het is haar niet ghenoech te spreken hare taal./ Sy spreken Fransch, end Schots, Latijn, end als de Waal./ Sy weten't als een Kock te mengen, end' te scherven./ Om soo quansuys wat eers by and're te verwerven'. Adriaan Hofferus, *Zeevsche nachtegael*, II, Middelburg: Jan Pietersz. van de Venne, 1623, 28.

<sup>vii</sup> 'heeft de Rijm-kunst noch ongebakert, ende niet recht ghekoestert gheweest; maer hadde de borsten ghesoghen van vreemde ende uytlandsche onrymighe woorden! Doch, sedert eenighe jaren herwaerts, is de lof-weerde Poësie, [...] eerst tot haer Duyts verstant ghekomen; ende het schijnt, dat de Hollantsche ende Zeeusche Lucht deselve Weet-kunst wat soeter, ende opender, en meerder heeft verlicht van de vreemde lisperijen, en duystere dompen'. Adriaan van de Venne, *VVoudt van vvonderlicke sinne-fabulen der dieren*, Rotterdam: Isaac van Waesberghe, 1633, fol. Aiiir-v.

<sup>viii</sup> Levinus Lemnius, *The Secret Miracles of Nature: In four Books*, London: Jo. Streater, 1658, 240.

<sup>ix</sup> 'Maer is't dat wij langer beyden eer wij den roest weren, sij sall so heel opgheten worden van 't mengsele der vremder schuymen, die noch daghelijks meer ende meer darin groeyen, dat men se niet meer kennen en sall ende de fame onser auders sall met der tale begraven worden.' Johannes Radermacher, *Kaars en bril: de oudste Nederlandse grammatica*, Karel Bostoen (ed.), Archief van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 1984, 45.

<sup>x</sup> 'de Psalmen, lofsangen, oft geliederden die ons de gheest des Heeren, in de Hebreische tale heeft voorgedragen, in onse Nederduytsche sprake oversettende, allen slechten ende gemeyne lieden gemeen te maecken'. Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde, *Het boeck der Psalmen. Wt de Hebreische sprake in Nederduytschen dichte*, Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1591, fol. vi r.

<sup>xi</sup> 'Dat wy alomme daer het ons mogelijck is geweest de ghemeyne ende gebruyckelijcke wijze van spreken ghevolget hebben, behaluen dat wy soo vele doenlijck is, alle geschuynde ende vreemde woerden uyt andere talen ontleent, hebben gemijdet'. Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde, *Het boeck der Psalmen. Wt de Hebreische sprake in Nederduytschen dichte*, Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1591, fol. viii r.

<sup>xii</sup> '[...] haer oude duytsche landt ende moeder spraecke wederomme int ghebruyck te brenghen om sick te behelpen met duydelijcke woorden, welcke nochtans in vele Landen ende Provincien: als namelijk in Hollandt, Gelderlandt, Vrieslandt, Ouerijssel [...] voor goede, nederlantsche ende bequame woorden noch heden te daghe bekennt, aenghenomen ende ghebruyckt worden'. Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde, *Het boeck der psalmen Davids*, Antwerp: Gillis van den Rade, 1580, fol A4v.

<sup>xiii</sup> 'Op dat door het onachtzaem schrijuen de meyning des heylighen Gheestes niet verduystert wurde, end dat niemand van dem lezen onzes arbeyds veruréndt wurde'. Jan Utenhove, *Het Nieuwve Testament, dat is, Het nieuwe Verbond onzes Heeren Iesu Christi, Na der Griecscher waerheyt in Nederlandsche sprake grondlick end trauwlick ouerghezett*, Emden: Gillis van der Erven, 1556, fol. II5r.

<sup>xiv</sup> '[...] maer late altijd sijn lieve Moeder vrijen oorlof hebben, om van alle *decreten, canones, schriften ende ordonnantien*, te moghen *dispenseren, ordonneren, sententieren, disposerende reserveren*, ende *in summa*, den duyvel op een kussen binden'. Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde, *Den Byencorff der H. Roomsche Kercke*, vol. 1, Albert Lacroix (Ed.), Brussels: Van Meenen, 1858, 90.

<sup>xv</sup> 'Ende nochtans men siet merckelijck, dat de heyliche Kercke hare missen, hare ghetijden, ghebeden ende ghesanck, alle in Latijn doet, vermenghende somwijlen Griecsche ende Hebreusche woordekens daer onder: soo dat het niet alleenlijck het ghemeyn volck, maer oock de Papen selve ende de Bisschoppen niet en verstaen.' Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde, *Den Byencorff der H. Roomsche Kercke*, vol. 1, Albert Lacroix (Ed.), Brussels: Van Meenen, 1858, 36.

<sup>xvi</sup> 'Het is genoech openbaer ende kennelick hoe grootelicx het inde kerke Godes van noode sy, eene goede, vaste en onbewegelicke ouereencominge onder elcander te houden, niet alleen inde hoofstukken der reyner leere, maer oock inde wysen, ceremoniën ende regeringhe der kercken, ende daerenbouen een onderlinghe ghemeynschap

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ende goet verstant te houden [...] Soo men yet sulcx in dese jammerlicke verstroynghe der nederlandssche ghemeynten der beyde spraken, konde te wegen brenghen, om aldaer, int ghemeyn met gelycker hant, ende eendrachtighe herten te beraetslagen ende te besluyten ouer vele sware hoochtwichtighe daghelycks vooruallende saecken, ende in sonderheyte, om eene algemeyne lieflicke ende christelicke ouereenkominge aller nederlandssche ghemeynten op te richten'. Aloïs Gerlo and Rudolf de Smet (eds.), *Marnixi epistulae: de briefwisseling van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde*, I, Brussels: Brussels University Press, 1990, 173.

<sup>xvii</sup> Lo van Driel, *Zeeuws. De dialecten van Zeeuws-Vlaanderen tot Goeree-Overflakkee*, The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 18-19.

<sup>xviii</sup> M.C. van der Toorn, W.J.J. Pijnenburg, J.A. van Leuvensteijn & J.M. van der Horst (Eds.), *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taal*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997, 181-182.

<sup>xix</sup> 'Zo waar de Zealander pronuncieerd Jae, daar en behoord hy in tspellen van den zeluen woorden den Vlámijnghe noch den Brábanter niet te volghen, aldus Ja: of hy moeste oac zoa spréken.' Joos Lambrecht, *Néderlandsche spellinghe, uutghesteld by vraghe ende andwoorde*, Ghent: Joos Lambrecht, 1550, fol. A2v.

<sup>xx</sup> 'Bae, ghelijc de schapen bleaten'. Joos Lambrecht, *Néderlandsche spellinghe, uutghesteld by vraghe ende andwoorde*, Ghent: Joos Lambrecht, 1550, fol. C8r.

<sup>xxi</sup> '[M]erckende t'Flaems allene te zeer gevalst wezen, door d'oude hanterijnghe en bestier der Fransoizen, t'gemeenschap van t'lelic Zeus en ontellicke vermerdeerijnghe der letteren en sijllaben, int begin, middel, en einde der woorden'. Pontus de Heuiter, *Nederduitse orthographie*, Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1581, 93.

<sup>xxii</sup> 'alzó dat de Zeewen niet te beschuldighen zyn als zy Jaet maet qualyck uyt spreken. dewyl wyt al t'samen qualyck schryven'. *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst*, Leiden: Christophe Plantin, 1584, 26. See also Geert Dibbets, *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst (1584)*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985, 397-403, 504-505.

<sup>xxiii</sup> 'De moeders tale van Zeelandt is Nederlandtsch: maer want dit volk over al buytens landts reyst, ende binnens landts seer grooten handel ende ghemeynschap met de vreemdelinghen heeft, soo en isser schier noch man noch vrouwe, zy en spreken Fransoys, Spaensch, ende veel oock Jtaliaensch'. Lodovico Guicciardini, *Beschryvinghe van alle de Neder-landen, anderssins ghenoeemt Neder-Dvytslandt*, Cornelis Kiliaan (tr.), Amsterdam: Willem Jansz [Bleau], 1612, 282.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Toon Van Hal, 'Moedertalen en taalmoeders': *het vroegmoderne taalvergelijkende onderzoek in de Lage Landen*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 2010, 209-247, 464.

<sup>xxv</sup> 'Dixerim fere Belgam meum spongiam linguarum, ut ista perfecte humores omnes, sic ille linguas recipit'. Abraham Mylius, *Lingua belgica*, Leiden: Joris Abrahamsz Marsce & Uldrick Cornelisz. Honthorst, 1612, 69-70.