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What does "Early Modern" mean? Notes on the Social and Linguistic Outcomes of Modernization in the History of Dutch

While histories of the Germanic languages make free use of terms such as "Early Modern" or "Early New" (as in "Early Modern Dutch" or "Early New High German"), it is clear that linguists have no clear idea of what these terms mean. Waterman's (1965:102) weak justification for choosing the year 1350 as the beginning of the Early New High German period provides an ideal case in point: "The choice of the year 1350 from which to mark the beginning of the New High German period is, from a linguistic point of view, largely arbitrary; 1400 or even 1450 would do just as well." In this paper we argue that the "Modern" or "New" period in the history of a given Germanic language is in no way arbitrary, but rather correlates directly to identifiable changes in the social, economic and demographic structure of the linguistic community. Specifically, we see the processes of *urbanization* and *verticalization* (i.e., the development of supra-local structures, cf. Warren 1963) key sociohistorical processes setting the Early Modern period apart from the preceding Medieval period. A crucial outcome of verticalization is *standardization* in various domains to promote functionality on supra-local levels, e.g., standardization of weights, currency, legal codes, shipbuilding practices, military equipment ... and of the written language.

As we have argued elsewhere, the Early Modern period is characterized by growing urbanization. Urbanization results exclusively from in-migration to cities, which in turn brings people from various areas into close contact for extended periods. An inevitable consequence of this contact of various immigrant groups is conflict and, eventually, integration. The linguistic outcome of this process of integration is *koineization* (cf. Kerswill and Williams (2000), the negotiation of linguistic differences by speakers of various dialects living in the urban crucible. Given the fact that these sociohistorical developments in northern Europe occur first in the Low Countries, we analyze the effects of modernization in the context of Early Modern Holland.

For historical linguists there are two interesting aspects of modernization, standardization and koineization. However, when viewed functionally, the two are quite distinct: standardization promotes uniformity while suppressing change, whereas koineization also promotes a kind of uniformity, but while *accelerating* change. From the Early Modern period onward, linguistic histories focus almost exclusively on the process of standardization and ignore or even explicitly exclude the development of vernaculars, where koineization takes place. Citing the development of specific features in Early Modern Dutch, we argue that linguistic change continues and even accelerates during this period, especially in urban agglomerations. What is more, an interesting tension develops between the dynamic vernaculars and the conservative written standard(s). It is precisely this largely ignored relationship that should become the focus of linguistic histories of the Modern period and which constitutes the focus of this paper.

