DoDO – Development of Dutch Orthography 1250–1400

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The general scope of my research is the description of unguided (not-steered) development of writing systems for West Germanic dialects based on the Latin alphabet. It will render this from diatopic and diachronic grapheme research on Middle Dutch local charters. I will, in other words, focus on the period before Early Modern Dutch and the standardisation processes, contrary to other current research which focuses on (the beginnings of) standardisation (Gijsbert, Vosters & Vandenbussche 2014, a.o.), and ask the question: "How do scribes cope in writing with the Latin alphabet in their dialects when there is no prescribed standard?" To answer this, the writings of scribes who operate in local writing systems, i.e. written dialect, need to be considered, and this should be done with manuscripts, e.g. handwritten administrative texts of local importance only, such as local charters.

Preliminary research suggests that in case of vowel grapheme systems, the aptness of singular graphemes is gradable and can be described in terms of the phonological distinctive features they may convey accurately (De Wulf 2019). This stems from the fact that some graphemes are used to convey many more historical phonemes (i.e. West Germanic allophones) than others, and which graphemes these are also varies from dialect to dialect.

There is a clear indication that vowel grapheme systems in the Eastern dialects contain less accurate graphemes, since more of the historical vowel phonemes have in fact evolved into separate phonemes.

My working hypothesis is that an implicational scale of phonological features can be established (per dialect or maybe more generally, dialect region), which means that certain features are to be prioritised in writing systems. This should be investigated for vowel as well as consonant graphemes in administrative texts from the 1250–1400 period.

The method I use consists of mapping grapheme-phoneme relationships as one would do in a dialect atlas. The main outcome of the project in which this research features will therefore be a historical grapheme atlas. These grapheme-phoneme relationships are gathered from excerpts of tokens representing different historical vowels and consonants (*Lautposition,* cf. Elmentaler 2003, Larsen 2001) from each locality.

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References: De Wulf, C. (2019). Bijdrage tot een klankatlas van het veertiende-eeuwse Middelnederlands. Het dialectvocalisme in de spelling van lokale oorkonden. Leuven: Leuven University Press. Elmentaler, M. (2003). Struktur und Wandel vormoderner Schreibsprachen. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. Larsen, N.-E. (2001). Grafematische analyse van een Middelnederlandse tekst. Het grafeemsysteem van de Vroegmiddelnederlandse Statuten van de Gentse Leprozerie uit 1236. Amsterdam: Rozenberg. Rutten, G., R. Vosters & W. Vandenbussche (2014). Norms and Usage in Language History, 1600–1900. A sociolinguistic and comparative perspective. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.