Variation in Modern Dutch D-Weakening: A Historical Perspective
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1. INTRODUCTION. In modern Standard Dutch an optional rule exists by which d may be weakened in intervocalic position, followed by either a glide insertion across morpheme boundaries or a word contraction. Thus, goede ‘good’ can become goeie, brede ‘broad’ becomes breeër, and leder ‘leather’ becomes leer. (see example 1). These forms are subject to considerable (regional and social) dialectal, stylistic (esp. casual speaking style), and individual variation. The phenomenon, however, is not a recent one but can be traced back to perhaps as early as the 11th century (van Loon 1986:141). The earliest evidence shows up in old place names (cf. 12th century Nerisca for earlier Netherisca) and in the earliest Middle Dutch (e.g. woensdag < Wodanesdag ‘Wednesday’) and is well-documented by the 14th century. The change appears to have spread from the South to the North of the Low Countries, and Middle Dutch and early Modern Dutch texts already show a significant amount of dialectal and stylistic variation.

Historically, a number of sociolinguistic factors played an important role in this process, while synchronic variation is to a great extent constrained by historical factors. Thus far, the majority of the research devoted to this issue has consisted of either phonological or historical approaches (Cohen 1959; Franck 1910; Goossens 1974; van Loey 1957; van Loon 1986; Schönfeld 1947). Neither approach, however, captures the sociolinguistic reality of modern Dutch d-weakening. In this paper, I will present an analysis of synchronic variation in Dutch d-weakening which takes into account the historical processes which have affected it. Understanding the principles involved in the historical development of the problem may provide insight into the seemingly random patterns of synchronic variation and may explain the choices open to native speakers with respect to the degree of acceptability of these forms.

2. ZONNEVELD’S (1978) ANALYSIS. Most recently, Zonneveld (1975, 1976, 1978, 1981) and Smith (1973, 1975) have considered the phonological constraints of d-weakening. Zonneveld’s (1978) dissertation presents the most detailed phonological analysis thus far. He proposes a two-rule solution to the problem: (1) a weakening process, which occurs across suffixal boundaries (e.g. goede-goeie ‘good’) and (2) a contraction rule which occurs intramorphemically (e.g. broeder-broer ‘brother’). He distinguishes three classes within the d-weakening process.

Class I undergoes weakening and gliding across suffixal boundaries. Between a stressed tense vowel or diphthong and an unstressed morpheme of the shape -e [ə], -en [ən], -er [ər], -ig [əɣ], d is weakened to a palatal or velar glide (Zonneveld 1978:27). Some examples are:

(1) a. attributive -e: brede - breeër ‘wide’
   b. infinitive -en: rijden - rijen ‘to drive’
   c. noun pl. -en: kruiden - kruien ‘spices’
   d. comparative -er: breder - breeër ‘wider’
   e. derived adj. -ig: goedig - goeig ‘good-natured’

In Class II, d is deleted intramorphemically, accompanied by contraction of the following schwa:

(2) leder - leer ‘leather’
    ader - ær ‘vein’
Zonneveld (1978:37) describes this rule informally as "-de is deleted after long vowels and diphthongs in word-final position or before the consonants g, k, m, l, or r." He perceives this process as a contraction rather than a weakening process and therefore argues for two different rules for intervocalic d-weakening.

Class III contains a small number of exceptions to the above two classes. These forms may undergo:

(3) a. both the weakening process of class I and the contraction of Class II, resulting in three possible realizations of a word:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dutch Word</th>
<th>German Word</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bodem</td>
<td>boöm</td>
<td>'bottom'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kade</td>
<td>kaai</td>
<td>'quay'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bladeren</td>
<td>blaren</td>
<td>'leaves'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poeder</td>
<td>poeier</td>
<td>'powder'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D-weakening thus appears to take place in the environment following long vowels (the front vowels [i:] and [e:]), and the back vowels [u:], [o:], and [a:]), and diphthongs and before an unstressed morpheme.

Zonneveld (1978:22) only briefly refers to the sociolinguistic factors which affect this phenomenon by noting that "[t]here is considerable dialectal and even, so it seems, personal variation as regards the acceptability or nonacceptability of these forms." His analysis, however, as any of the historical approaches before him, oversimplifies the complexities of individual and stylistic variation. For instance, in his 1981 article, Zonneveld (1978:28) simply notes that "d-weakening is triggered by casual style of speech," ignoring the considerable variation among native speakers with respect to the acceptability of these forms. Before addressing this issue, I will present an overview of the historical background of d-weakening.

3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. Historically, d-weakening appears to have spread in the Low Countries from the South, now approximately the southwest of Belgium, to the North. Schönfeld (1947:34) suggests that a possible explanation for the phenomenon might be found in the influence of French of Westflanders. In French, d became syncopated (4a) but remained intact after l (4b):

(4) a. Lat. audi re > Fr. oür 'to hear'

Similarly, West-Flemish maintained a distinction between, on the one hand, forms such as broer (<broeder ‘brother’), rijen (<rijden ‘ride, drive’), zaal (<zadel ‘saddle’) and, on the other hand, those forms which subsequently underwent l-vocalization, such as houden (cf. Ger. halten ‘hold’), oude (cf. Ger. alt ‘old’), and koude (cf. Ger. kalt ‘cold’). Schönfeld hypothesizes that when d-syncope spread from West-Flanders northwards, l-vocalization had already taken place, so that the difference between forms containing the l and the other forms does not exist elsewhere.

Although Schönfeld (1947:67) suggests that the d-deletion process may have started as early as the 11th century, an opinion based on the hypercorrection Odeka for the 10th century place name Hoica, clear examples can be found in the 14th century in the provinces (North- and South-) Holland and Utrecht. Some early examples are:

(5) Mi.D. roeien Mod.D. roeden høymaker gerechtigheien hoedemaker gerechtigheden ‘rods’ ‘hatmaker’ ‘justices’
Franck (1910: 102) reports the following examples from 14th century manuscripts:

(6) \begin{align*}
\text{ghetcroeten} &< \text{ghecroden} \quad ? \\
\text{sint} &< \text{sident} \quad ? \\
\text{vlerc} &< \text{vlederic} \quad \text{‘wing’}
\end{align*}

According to Schönfeld (1947:67), the oldest and most prevalent forms of \textit{d-syncope} are those where \textit{d} is followed by vowel + consonant (preferably \textit{l} or \textit{r}) + syllable; for example:

(7) \begin{align*}
\text{E. Mod.D.} &\quad \text{Mi.D.} \\
\text{vlerc} &< \text{Mi.D. vlederik} \quad \text{‘wing’} \\
\text{Bokele} &< \text{Bodokenlo} \quad \text{(placename)} \\
\text{seware} &< \text{sedeware} \quad \text{‘seaweed’} \\
\text{goelijc} &< \text{goedelic} \quad \text{‘good-natured’}
\end{align*}

Schönfeld (1947: 67) suggests that \textit{d-syncope} must have spread northward and subsequently in eastward direction via the Brabant dialect. \textit{D-syncope} forms appear earlier and with much greater frequency in that particular dialect. He hypothesizes that the change moved north to the province Utrecht, which influenced the northern part of South-Holland, which in turn influenced the North-Holland dialects, specifically that of Amsterdam. To the east the change appears to have reached de Betuw, which is a region in the river valley just east of the province Utrecht. This northward direction of \textit{d-syncope} is supported by historical facts, particularly the fall of Antwerp which occurred in 1585 and caused many southerners to flee to the north, especially Amsterdam. The geographic distribution of \textit{d-deletion} can be seen in placenames, such as the following cited by Schönfeld (1947: 35):

(8) \begin{align*}
\text{Limburg} &\quad \text{N. Brabant} \\
\text{Venray} &< \text{Venrade} \\
\text{from} &< \text{from} \\
\text{Leverooi} &< \text{Leverode} \\
\text{Gijzenrooi} &< \text{Gijzenrode} \\
\text{Wanrooi} &< \text{Wanrode} \\
\text{Betuwe} &< \text{(also: Wayenoyen)} \\
\text{Wadenooien} &< \text{Wadenode} \\
\text{Ravenswaai} &< \text{Ravenswaide}
\end{align*}

Similarly, \textit{d-weakening} appears to be more widespread in the literary works of Southern writers than of Northerners.

3.2 SCHÖNFELD'S ANALYSIS. Schönfeld (1947) provides the following historical analysis of those forms that have undergone \textit{d-syncope} by early modern Dutch.

(9) a. Rule I. Syncope:

- with loss of syllable: word-final \textit{d}- assimilated to the stem syllable:

\begin{align*}
\text{reu} &< \quad \text{Mi.Du. reude\,rode} \quad \text{‘male dog’} \\
\text{sloe} &< \quad \text{sloede} \quad \text{‘gutter’}
\end{align*}

- with loss of syllable, where \textit{d}- is followed by a liquid or nasal consonant:

\begin{align*}
\text{Leerdam} &< \quad \text{Mi.Du. Lederdamme} \quad \text{place name} \\
\text{beul} &< \quad \text{bodel} \quad \text{‘executioner’} \\
\text{roer} &< \quad \text{roeder} \quad \text{‘rudder’}
\end{align*}

- without loss of syllable; glide-formation to [y] after [\text{ai}] or [ei] and to [w] after [aw]:

\begin{align*}
\text{kuieren} &< \quad \text{Mi.Du. koderen} \quad \text{‘to stroll’} \\
\text{opruuien} &< \quad \text{opruuden} \quad \text{‘to incite’} \\
\text{vouwen} &< \quad \text{vouden} \quad \text{‘to fold’}
\end{align*}
b. Rule II. Glide-formation from [d] to [y]:

\[ \text{ooievaar} \quad <\text{Mi.Du. odevare} \quad \text{‘stork’} \]
\[ \text{rooien} \quad <\text{roden} \quad \text{‘to dig up’} \]

Schönfeld distinguishes Rule II from the glide formation rule under I, in that the latter is a case of homorganic glide formation, while in Rule II a front glide follows the back vowels [o:] and [a:] and is the result of d-weakening.

Many of the early syncopated forms have become stabilized in modern Dutch, while others are synchronically only acceptable with d or remain open to variation. A variety of phonological, dialectal, semantic, and sociolinguistic factors are responsible for this. A first consideration is dialect mixture. Several of the Middle Dutch dialects did not allow d-weakening, and the varying political and cultural influence of such dialects resulted in variations in the standard language. Particularly also city versus country distribution resulted, with d-weakening seen as a low-status rural variant. Second, the influence of the written language and the competition between socially more and less prestigious varieties, and formal and colloquial registers were responsible for later spelling pronunciations which in turn resulted in restoration or retention of the d in more formal or less common forms. Examples of this in modern Dutch are aanbieden ‘to offer’, gebieden ‘to order’, verluiden ‘to be rumored’, strijden ‘to combat’, etc. Third, there exists a large group of early hypercorrections which occurred in the period from Middle Dutch to early modern Dutch. Te Winkel (1901:94) mentions two environments which were particularly conducive to hypercorrections:

\[(10)\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{geschieden} & \quad <\text{Mi.Du. ghescien} \quad \text{‘to happen’} \\
\text{vlieden} & \quad <\text{vlien} \quad \text{‘to flee’} \\
\text{kastijden} & \quad <\text{castien} \quad \text{‘to punish’} \\
\text{epenthetic d} & \quad \text{between l, n, or r and (ə)r;}
\text{kelder} & \quad \text{‘cellar’} \\
\text{selderij} & \quad \text{‘celery’} \\
\text{Hendrik} & \quad \text{‘Henry’}
\end{align*}\]

3.3 EARLY MODERN DUTCH TO PRESENT. From early Modern Dutch to the present, the forms which had undergone earlier d-weakening either stabilized in d-less form or were subsequently restored, with the result that d-weakening, in many cases, became possible again. Thus, three patterns can be seen.

3.3.1 STABILIZED D-LESS FORMS. A great number of words became stabilized in their d-less forms. All the examples listed under Schönfeld’s analysis in 3.2 above, and many others, have remained that way into the modern period. These forms appear to be the result of a completed sound change. Te Winkel (1901:93) gives the following examples:

\[(11)\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. contraction} & \\
\text{bleu} & \quad <\text{†bleude (OS bloďi)} \quad \text{‘shy’} \\
\text{gedwee} & \quad <\text{MHG getwedic} \quad \text{‘submissive’} \\
\text{veer} & \quad <\text{veder (OLF fethera)} \quad \text{‘feather’} \\
\text{vleermuis} & \quad <\text{OHG feldarmus} \quad \text{‘bat’} \\
\text{b. glide formation} & \\
\text{rooien} & \quad <\text{Mi.Du. roden} \quad \text{‘to dig up’} \\
\text{uitroeiien} & \quad <\text{Mi.Du. roeden} \quad \text{‘eradicate’} \\
\text{ooievaar} & \quad <\text{Mi.Du. odevare} \quad \text{‘stork’}
\end{align*}\]
3.3.2 RESTORED FORMS - NO SYNCHRONIC WEAKENING. A small number of forms which had undergone d-weakening by early modern Dutch were subsequently restored and do not allow synchronic weakening. Two examples cited by Schönfeld are:

vader *vaar* *vader* ‘father’

3.3.3 RESTORED FORMS - SYNCHRONICALLY VARIABLE. In quite a large number of words, the d was restored subsequent to its weakening, which then created a renewed environment for d-weakening. This type of hypercorrection differs from the one described above in that it puts a deleted d back where it previously was rather than inserting it in an analogous environment. Thus a cyclical pattern of d-weakening, restoration, and synchronic variability occurs. Among the forms cited by Schönfeld, the following fall into this pattern:

slede *slee* slede/slee ‘sled, sleigh’

3.4 SEMANTIC CHANGES. The availability of dual forms also facilitated a number of semantic changes. As noted earlier, style and register played historically as significant a role as they do synchronically. A number of forms exist where these stylistic options have become lexicalized, splitting along stylistic lines. For example, the word *moeder* ‘mother’, which cannot be weakened in any way synchronically, shows up in weakened form in a number of colloquial expressions. Following are some examples of this type of split, where the d-less forms denote the lower register:

(14) a. compounds
Standard Dutch but colloquial/dialectal:
moeder *bestemmer* ‘mother’, ‘granny’
moervos parem loer *moervos* ‘female fox’ *parelmoer* ‘mother-of-pearl’
vader *vader* ‘father’
but colloquial/dialectal: bestevaar *praetor* ‘granddad’, ‘chatterbox’
praatvaar
b. adjectives:
Standard Dutch but colloquial:
dode *op z’n dooie gemak* ‘dead’, ‘at one’s leisure’
*op z’n dooie akkertje* ‘all by himself’
*op z’n dooie eentje* ‘all by himself’
c. nouns:
Standard Dutch but denigrating:
eduwe *weeuwtje* ‘widow’, ‘merry little widow’
weeuwtje

Stylistic differences in the other direction, i.e. higher register, appear to account for the preservation of d in the following forms:

(15) *broer* ‘brother’ but: *broederschap* ‘fraternity’
*broedermoord* ‘fratricide’

In a number of cases, it is impossible to detect any such pattern and the d-containing and d-less forms appear to have split haphazardly to accommodate various semantic uses.

(16) *neer* ‘down’ *nederig* ‘humble’
*nederlaag* ‘defeat’
*Nederland* ‘the Netherlands’
however: Neerlandistiek ‘Dutch studies’
neerbuigend ‘condescending’

In some instances, stylistic differences led to semantic differentiation
between the forms containing d and the syncopated forms:

(17) boedel ‘property’ boel ‘a lot’
broeder ‘monk/male nurse broer ‘brother’
vergaderen ‘hold a meeting’ vergaren ‘collect, hoard’
tijdel ‘vain’ ijl ‘thin (air)’
teder ‘tender’ teer ‘delicate’

4. SYNCHRONIC SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS AFFECTING D-WEAKENING. Though
stylistic choice appears to be the primary motivating factor for d-weakening, it does
not present itself as a simple dichotomy between casual and formal styles. Additional (socio)linguistic and functional variables play a role as well.

4.1 STYLE. As Zonneveld (1981:28; 1978: 100) noted, d-weakening occurs
most frequently in casual style. However, considerable individual variation is
present among speakers of Western Standard Dutch with respect to the acceptability
or non-acceptability of the weakened forms. For a limited number of forms the
weakened form has become the preferred or even required variant, while other
forms remain heavily stigmatized. A small number of high-frequency individual
words have begun to be accepted in all styles of speech, even the most formal, with
their d-containing counterparts being regarded as overly formal and stilted in
spoken Dutch. Examples are goeie ‘good’ (especially its compounds goeiemorgen
‘good morning’, goeiemiddag ‘good afternoon’, etc.) ouwe ‘old’, and kouwe
‘cold’. These are becoming increasingly acceptable in informal written styles as
well, suggesting perhaps a renewal of the cycle noted above.

On the other hand, many forms remain highly stigmatized, even in the most
casual styles; forms such as zouwen instead of zouden ‘should, houwen instead of
ouden ‘hold’ tend to be labelled as nonstandard by most people, while many
forms are ruled as unacceptable in most situations (e.g. *broien for broden
‘breads, *ouwerdom for ouderdom ‘old age’). Yet another small set is labeled as
belonging to children’s style or ‘childish’ (especially bloeden-bloeiien ‘to bleed’ and
verkleden-verkleeven ‘to dress up’). Thus, there appear to be a continuum of
options stylistically, ranging from acceptable/preferred to acceptable in casual style
to stigmatized and/or unacceptable.

4.2 SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS. While d-weakening in general tends to be socially
stigmatized to some extent and stratified along socioeconomic lines (with the
exceptions noted above), it also appears to have a significant amount of covert
prestige among (upper) middle class, college-educated speakers of Standard Dutch.
Particularly among males from western college towns (e.g. Leiden Utrecht, Delft),
the extent of acceptability seems to be much greater than among other groups.
Conversely, lower middle class hypercorrection is common as well. The examples
in (17) show d-insertion in environments which appear to have undergone d-
deletion.

(18) *breiden for breien ‘to knit’
*blaude for blauwe ‘blue’
*kauden for kauwen ‘to chew’
*beeldhouden forbeeldhouwen ‘to sculpt’
4.3 REGISTER. An important variable in d-weakening is register, particularly since Dutch has a wide gap between its spoken and written language (spreektaal versus schrijftaal). A large percentage of Zonneveld’s class II words has become differentiated in spoken and written form, where the d-containing variants (for example, leder, slede, lade) occur only in formal written contexts (e.g. advertisements) and are generally unacceptable or highly marked in spoken form (spelling pronunciations), while their d-less counterparts are used in all styles of speaking and informal written contexts.

Less frequently used words which are felt to belong to higher registers also tend to resist d-weakening. Thus, synchronically, the following forms are generally considered unacceptable:

(19) *versmaaien - versmarden ‘to slight’
*geschieën - geschieden ‘to happen’
*vermijten - vermijden ‘to avoid’
*beduijen - beduiden ‘to indicate’

4.4 DIALECT. Dialectal variation, which played historically a major role in the distribution of d-weakening, remains an important factor. The West-Flemish dialects of Blegium and the Brabant dialect of the Netherlands seem to be the most tolerant toward d-less variants.

4.5 FUNCTIONAL FACTORS. Avoidance of homonyms appears to be of only minor significance in blocking the application of the weakening rule. While a number of examples can be found (e.g. waden ‘to wade’ cannot be weakened to waaïen ‘to blow’; goden ‘gods’ cannot become gooiien ‘to throw’), an equal number of counterexamples is readily available (rijden ‘to drive’ becomes rijken, also ‘rows’; luider ‘louder’ can become luier, also ‘diaper’).

4.6 WORD CLASSES. Among the Class I forms, nouns (plural ending -en) appear to allow d-weakening less freely than adjectives or verbs. Of the examples presented by Zonneveld (1981:28), none of the nouns were acceptable among the ten native speakers I consulted (e.g. broden -*brooien ‘breads’, hoeden-*hoeien ‘hats’, kruiden-*kruien ‘herbs’, treden-treeën ‘steps’).

5.0 CONCLUSION. Even though modern Dutch d-weakening is generally perceived to be an innovation resulting in stylistic variation, the process itself originated quite early on in the history of the Dutch language. After seven or eight centuries of repeating patterns of change (dialect mixture, stylistic differentiation, hypercorrection, spelling pronunciation, etc.), a stable sociolinguistic variable (Labov, 1994; 1972) has developed which synchronically operates under two phonological conditions (weakening and contraction). However, while phonological analyses, such as Zonneveld’s (1978), may indicate the phonological constraints of d-weakening, they cannot account for the seemingly random and highly idiosyncratic patterns employed by speakers of modern Standard Dutch. A sociolinguistic approach may provide some insights, yet without a historical perspective a great many puzzling exceptions remain. Historical patterns of d-weakening intersect with synchronic ones and produce a complex array of partially completed changes which may block further variation or trigger subsequent hypercorrections. The historical development of the d-weakening process, then, should not be seen as an example of a change in progress, but rather as the creation of a highly complex, widespread, and purely sociolinguistic marker.
REFERENCES


