CHAPTER 1

Dutch in Early Modern England: An Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the prologue I sketched out some themes that provide the framework for this book. One of these is the distinction between the knowledge and the use of Dutch. In this chapter detailed consideration will be given to the question of who knew Dutch in early modern England. In the subsequent chapters a comprehensive analysis will be provided of the social domains in which those who knew Dutch used the language. We can divide those who knew the language into three groups.

First, we have those who settled in England and their descendants, who formed separate Dutch (Nederduytsche) or Flemish communities in some twenty towns and cities in England. During the early years of these communities in particular Dutch was the mother tongue of their members. They typically established separate churches where they could practise their Reformed faith; they often married others from within their community or other Dutch communities; worked apart from local English workers, often restricted to working in certain trades; and had their own elders and deacons and in some cases also politicke mannen. Collectively, these leaders were responsible for keeping order within the communities, looking after the poor and orphans and dealing with the local authorities on behalf of the communities.

Secondly, there were many Dutch people who visited England on a temporary basis. Fishermen, seafarers, and merchants from the Low Countries frequently sailed into various ports on the East and South coast of England during this period. To these we can add Dutch people who went to England on diplomatic missions such as the poet and statesman, Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), and his son, Lodewijck. Their correspondence was typically in Dutch, although they also used other languages in their diplomatic activity.

A third group of people who knew Dutch were Englishmen and women who learnt the language for various reasons. This group includes English merchants who learnt Dutch in order to trade with the Low Countries; English men and women married to Dutch spouses, who had sometimes lived on the Continent for a while; and individuals such as the scientist Robert Hooke, who learnt the language in order to be able to read texts concerning scientific developments written in Dutch.
Some individuals do not easily fit into just one group. A prime example of this is King William III. He was born in The Hague to a Dutch father and an English mother, Mary Henrietta Stuart, the eldest daughter of King Charles I. William visited England in 1670–1671 and again in 1677 to marry Mary Stuart, before leading the invasion of 1688 which resulted in the Glorious Revolution. During his reign, from 1689–1702, he spent much time outside Britain defending the interests of the United Provinces of which he remained the stadholder. As well as Dutch he also spoke French and English. Special consideration will be given to the extent and manner of his use of Dutch in Britain.

However, before providing a more detailed account of who belonged to each of these three groups, we need to discuss two other matters that will help to complete the framework for this book. The first of these is terminology and the second is the range of sources that will be used in this study. Let us now consider each of these in turn.

1.2 Terminology

In the prologue I discussed the use of the term ‘Dutch’ to describe the object of this study, even suggesting that the term ‘Dutches’ might provide us with a more accurate picture of the heterogeneity of the varieties of the language under discussion. Here, we need to say a little more about this.

In the early modern period there were a number of Germanic dialects spoken in an area stretching, roughly, from Arras (Atrecht) to Groningen and beyond. In the Southern Netherlands dialects such as Vlaams (Flemish) and Brabants (Brabantic) can be identified, whilst northern dialects included Hollands and Zeeuws (Zeelandic). These dialects can be further divided. For example, reference is made to West-Vlaams as a sub-dialect, or variety, of Flemish; to Antwerps as a sub-dialect of Brabants, and to Haags Delflands and Zaans as sub-dialects of Hollands (Willemyns 2013: 87; Joby 2014f). Whilst some commentators used the general term Nederduytsch, lit. ‘Low German’, to describe these dialects and sub-dialects, others simply used the shortened form, Duytsch (Johannes Radermacher refers to onse Duitsche tale (‘our Dutch language’) in his 1568 grammar mentioned in the prologue (Bostoen 1985: 42)).

We also need to account for the varieties of Dutch outlined in the prologue such as the language of Jan Utenhove’s New Testament, heavily inflected with Germanisms such as aver (‘but’), and the language of King William III, which

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1 He contrasts this with the language of the Hoochduitschen, i.e., (High) German (Bostoen 1985: 43).