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Inflectional economy and politeness : morphology-internal and morphology-external factors in the loss of second person marking in Dutch

Aalberse, S.P.

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Suzanne Aalberse

Inflectional Economy and Politeness

Morphology-internal and morphology-
external factors in the loss of second
person marking in Dutch

The second person singular pronoun in Middle Dutch was *du*. The pronoun *du* combined with finite verbs ending in the suffix *-s*. Both the pronoun *du* and the suffix *-s* are lost in Modern Dutch. The loss of the pronoun and the suffix is related: there is no variant of Dutch that has a suffix *-s* that does not also have the pronoun *du* or vice versa. The question is how we should understand this combined loss of the pronoun and the suffix.

The central claim in this book is that the decrease in the use of the pronoun *du* (combining with the suffix *-s*) is driven by politeness. The plural and polite pronoun *gi* (combining with the suffix *-t*) came to be used in an increasing number of contexts. Although we can understand the decrease of the pronoun *du* and the suffix *-s* as the result of politeness, the loss of both the pronoun and the suffix is driven by inflectional economy. The suffix that the pronoun *gi* combined with was more economical than the suffix that *du* combined with. This claim is supported by data on synchronic and diachronic variation in Dutch.

This study is of interest to scholars working in the field of historical linguistics, corpus linguistics, pragmatics and inflectional morphology.

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Netherlands
Graduate
School of
Linguistics

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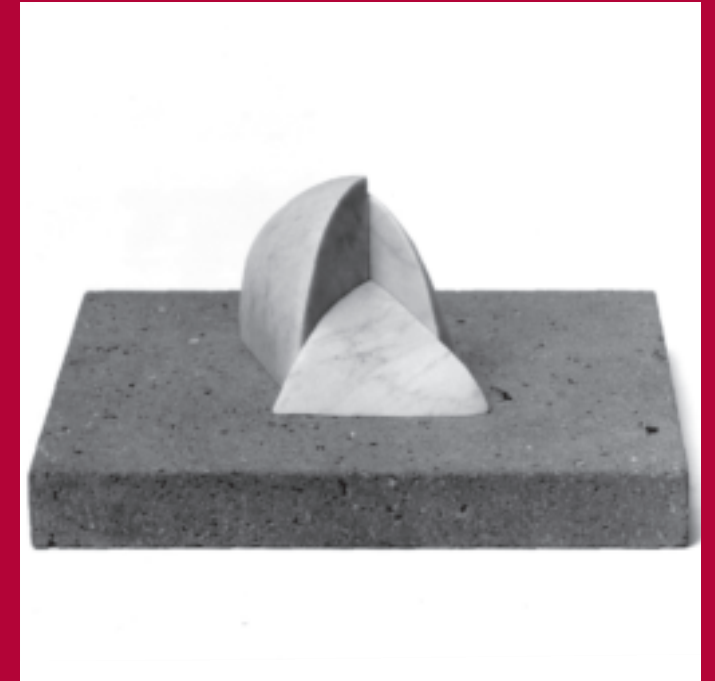
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