

University of Groningen

Het Groninger werkwoordensysteem en 'hoeven'

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(1) All languages change. This is a subject that has intrigued linguists from the very beginning. In the period when the study of language was almost identical with the study of the history of language this was a matter of course, but even today it is an important issue in various fields of linguistic literature.

Especially Labov's work has led to a greater insight into contemporary changes. What only seems to be variation within a language community may be an indication of such an "ongoing change". In dialectology and sociolinguistics the so-called "apparent time method" has become rather common (again due to Labov). Representatives of different generations are asked identical questions, after which the language change may be deduced from the differences between the various categories.

(2) With the help of *ca* 500 Gronings-speaking informants from both the province of Groningen and elsewhere a large amount of material was collected between 1984 and 1987, including information about the various forms of the verb 'hoeven' ('need to'). All this took place by the "indirect method", so by means of postal questionnaires. The informants were subdivided into four age categories and in accordance with three main areas of the province of Groningen, *viz.* North, East/South and West.

(3) Chapter Three gives a synchronic description of the Gronings verb system. Arguments are advanced for distinguishing five different types of verbs, each with its own system. Two of them are in principle identical with the two main groups which are in Standard Dutch and other related languages usually referred to as "regular" (or "weak") and "irregular" for "strong"). Two other types behave in similar ways. These are verbs with a more or less predictable form of vowel alternation in two forms of the singular. There is in addition a fifth category, *viz.* the group of diminutive verbs. These latter, however, play no role in the argument.

(4) A couple of remarks about the special character of the auxiliary 'hoeven' precede the three chapters in which the data (i.e. the present tense, the preterite and the past participle) are discussed in detail and accounted for.

(5) The present tense clearly shows that in the two main areas North and East/South a change is taking place in which *huiven* is developing into *huvven*, via a shift to a verb with vowel alternation. In North Groningen

this development is much more rapid than in East/South Groningen. West tends to do the same but here a distinction has to be made between three sub-areas, to be referred to as the areas where standard *groen* 'green' is respectively *gruin*, *groen* or *gruun*. In the first of these three West-areas one can observe the same change as elsewhere. Just as in the *gruun*-area, where the infinitive is *huvén*. In the intermediate strip of *groen* a transition is taking place from *huvén* to *hoeven*.

(6) A comparable shift may be observed in the preterite forms, but here the situation is more complicated due to the presence of more variants. In North *huf*, common among the oldest age category, is changing into *huifde*, which subsequently becomes *hufde* among younger informants. In East/South there is a comparable but slower process, in which *huf* occurs beside the allomorph *hof*. The areas in West reveal a shift toward "weak" forms, which are predictable from the present tense forms: *hufde*, *hoefde* and *huifde*.

(7) The past participle is, on the one hand, the most stable of the three principal forms, but has, on the other hand, the largest number of variants. The form *hufd* is in North and East/South the preferred variant. In those groups where *huifde* is common the participle *huifd* is also frequent. The preterites *huf* and *hufde* and the past participle *hufd* seem to select each other mutually. The course of events in West is now comparable to that in the rest of Groningen.

(8) In so far as Gronings linguistic literature gives any information concerning the forms of 'hoeven' it is clear that its very irregularity and numerous variants are problematic. The data from the informants reveal how groups of speakers are developing in a step-by-step fashion towards a maximally regular paradigm. The route there leads successively past the four main types of the Gronings verb system and the difference in pace between various areas can be elegantly explained language-internally. Thus the case of 'hoeven' illustrates how a complicated verb with a series of variants in the conjugated forms may nevertheless, during a period of rapid change, retain its strongly systematic "network" character and is by no means subject to chance or random mutations.