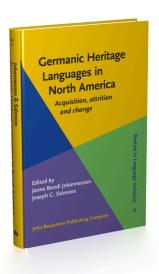# On the Decrease of Language Norms in a Disintegrating Language

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On the decrease of language norms in a disintegrating language

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This paper deals with the issue of norm awareness in decaying American Dutch, the language of the ethnic Dutch in the American Midwest. It is investigated to what extent inflectional 'mistakes' are recognized. This investigation was carried out by means of an acceptability test. These findings are then compared with data from free conversation. Although this paper focuses on the decrease of language norms in the first place, it also contributes to a better understanding of heritage languages in their final stage, i.e., when they are on the verge of extinction.

Keywords: American Dutch, norm awareness, inflectional 'mistakes', reflection versus production, storage/irregularity, spontaneous purism

1. Introduction[1]

In the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century a relatively large number of Dutch speakers migrated to the United States, particularly to the Midwest (Lucas 1955, Van Hinte 1985). The majority of these immigrants were orthodox Calvinists, a fact which has been of crucial importance to the maintenance as well as the development of Dutch in the New World (Van Marle and Smits 1996). For many of these immigrants – and their descendants – Dutch was the language of communication, at least within the family, until the first half of the 20th century. However, as soon as the immigrants settled in the United States they came in contact with socially dominant English as well, especially through school. For many decades, then, there has been a bilingual situation, particularly in the isolated rural areas. At first, Dutch was the mother tongue and the linguistically dominant language, whereas in later years English became more and more prominent. However, particularly during and after the second World War the number of domains in which Dutch was spoken decreased

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[1]. We have profited from the comments of two anonymous reviewers.

rapidly. From that time on, for most Dutch Americans, even in the more isolated rural areas, socially dominant English also became linguistically dominant.

When the interviews that this paper is based on were made (1989), Dutch was no longer in regular use and on the verge of extinction. Even so, in those days there were still quite a few Dutch Americans left who had maintained their ethnic language. Not surprisingly, both in terms of knowledge and proficiency, the differences among these speakers are considerable. Some of them still spoke their ethnic language fluently, whereas others were clear semi-speakers in the sense of Dorian (1981). In the remainder of this paper, we refer to the language spoken by these Americans of Dutch descent as American Dutch (AD).[2]

Clearly, the term 'American Dutch' requires clarification. By American Dutch we understand the standard-like variety of Dutch that was used in the U.S. As noted in Van Marle (2014), in relation to the Second Immigration[3] to the U.S., two types of Dutch should be distinguished: 'standard-like' American Dutch and American Dialectal Dutch.[4] Standard-like American Dutch was particularly prominent in Iowa but it can also be found in Michigan and Wisconsin among educated speakers. In contrast to Iowa, in Michigan and Wisconsin American Dialectal Dutch is dominant.[5] This difference between Iowa on the one hand and Michigan and Wisconsin on the other relates to the fact that the majority of the immigrants in Iowa came from the western parts of the Netherlands, whereas the majority of the immigrants in Michigan and Wisconsin came from the eastern and southern parts of the Netherlands. As discussed in Van Marle (2014), the preference of standard-like American Dutch involves the conscious choice of the Dutch Americans in Iowa – particularly Pella – to imitate the developments in the Netherlands where in the second half of the 19th century a

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2. These interviews form part of a corpus of American Dutch that was collected by the authors of the present paper between 1989 and 2001 (Van Marle 2001b). In this paper we will concentrate on AD as it was recorded in Iowa in the spring and summer of 1989. This 1989 corpus consists of interviews with several second, third, and fourth generation immigrants, and immigrants of mixed (second, third, and fourth) generation. The major part of the 1989 corpus consists of (i) free conversation and (ii) a translation test in which English sentences had to be translated into Dutch. In addition, a number of informants also participated in (iii) a so-called 'acceptability test.' In both the translation test and the acceptability test, focus was on the American Dutch inflectional system (of both noun, adjective and verb). In this paper on norm awareness in AD, we will particularly be concerned with the results of the acceptability test. However, we will also use data from free conversation for comparison.

3. The variety of Dutch related to the First Immigration is often referred to as 'Leeg Duits' (= Low Dutch) or Jersey Dutch. See Van Marle (2001a) for an overview.

4. The third type, 'mixed Yankee Dutch' spoken in the big cities of Michigan, is irrelevant in this connection. See Van Marle (2008, 2010).

5. See Van Marle (2005) for Michigan, and Van Marle (2012a) for Wisconsin.

spoken standard language gradually developed.[6] The net result of the developments referred to above is that in Iowa – and among educated speakers in Michigan and Wisconsin as well – a standard-like variety developed which lacked clear dialect features. This was already observed by the first serious scholars of American Dutch – Jo Daan and Henk Heikens (see fn. 9) – who complained about the 'non-dialectal' – and 'standard-like' – character of the variety of Dutch that they encountered in Pella, Iowa.[7] Clearly, this rise of American Dutch in Iowa resulted in the loss of the original dialects and Frisian.[8]

As far as the linguistic aspects of AD are concerned, it may not come as a surprise that this language is different from Standard Dutch (SD), i.e., the language presently spoken in the Netherlands. Present-day AD, being socially as well as linguistically the non-dominant language, exhibits the effects of both language contact (as a result of interference from English) and language attrition (either after acquisition has been completed or due to incomplete, i.e., interrupted, acquisition). Consequently, AD displays all kinds of deviations from SD, whereas, of course, it also consists of forms which are completely in line with SD. In relation to the part of the grammar that we focus on in this paper, i.e., inflection, these deviations are the result of processes such as: (i) the transfer of both inflectional elements and structure from English, (ii) the reduction of distinctions encoded in the Dutch inflectional system, e.g., by way of using uninflected instead of inflected forms, and (iii) the creation of new forms leading to either regularization (i.e., a decrease of irregularity) or deregularization (i.e., an increase of irregularity). Note that these processes may interact and that, consequently, it is often difficult, or even impossible, to determine the strength of each individual force (Van Marle and Smits 1996 and, particularly, Smits 1996).

Furthermore, AD is not a 'newly crystallized' language (Weinreich 1953:69–70) as, for instance, Afrikaans is, the Dutch daughter language spoken in Southern Africa. That is, AD has not developed into a new stable system, but is instead in a process of disintegration. Consequently, at least as far as inflection is concerned, AD displays a striking degree of variation. As an illustration of this, consider the following example which is drawn from the translation test (see fn. 2). As a translation of 'they worked,' we not only came across the regular preterite *ze werkten* (stem *werk* + regular preterite suffix *-te* + plural ending *-n*) which is also the form used in SD, but all sorts of other

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6.   Such a shift to the standard variety has also been reported for other immigrant communities, cf. Smits (1996:18–19) for further discussion.

7.   See Van Marle (2014) for a general discussion of the rise of AD in Iowa. For a detailed and principled discussion of the alleged occurrence of dialect features in American Dutch, see also Van Marle and Smits (2002) and Smits (2002). Note, finally, that we have never claimed that in American Dutch no remnants of the original dialects can be found. The problem is, however, that, on a closer look, most examples of potential dialect features still present in American Dutch are little convincing.

8.   See Van Marle (2012b) for Frisian, as well as Ehresmann and Bousquette (this volume).

forms as well. For instance, *ze hebben gewerkt* (present perfect), *ze werk-en* (present plural?/ infinitive?), *ze werk-t* (present 3rd person singular?/ transferred English preterite *-ed* [t]?), and *ze werk* (verb stem?/ English-based present tense form?). Note, also, that variation does not only occur between speakers, but also within the language of one and the same speaker. One of our informants, for instance, gave the following three translations which he all considered to be correct Dutch renderings of 'they worked': *ze werkt*, *ze hebben gewerkt* and *ze werkten* (which is the form used in SD).

Given this large-scale variation in AD inflection, the following questions arise in relation to 'norm awareness' in AD:

I.   Are the grammatical norms which hold for SD still recognized in AD, and if so, to what extent? Or, put differently, can you make a mistake in AD?
II.   Are there any differences between the results of the acceptability test and free conversation regarding the extent to which speakers of AD cling to the SD norms?
III. Are there any differences between speakers with regard to the extent to which norms are still recognized?
IV.   Is the existence of norms equally strong/weak in all parts of the inflectional system? To put it differently, are there differences between the inflectional system of the noun, the adjective and the verb in relation to the extent to which SD norms are preserved?
V.   Are there indications for the rise of new norms in AD, i.e., norms which are different from SD?

We investigate these questions regarding the existence of norms in AD, as noted, mainly by means of an analysis of data from an acceptability test (fn. 2). In discussing some of these questions, however, these data will be compared with those from free conversation.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, a description will be given of how the data under discussion were collected. In Section 3, the above raised questions regarding the existence of norms in AD will be investigated (except for question 5, discussed in Section 4). In Section 4, finally, we discuss the general conclusions which can be drawn from the results found in Section 3.

2.   The data

In the acceptability test, 14 informants were given sentences containing inflectional forms deviating from SD. Since all sentences come from an older corpus of American Dutch, all are actually attested in AD.[9] From a SD point of view, these deviations are

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9.   This corpus was collected by J. Daan and H. Heikens in 1966. It consists of free conversation only. See Smits (1996) for further discussion of both the corpus from 1966 and the one from 1989.

quite dramatic and relate to the pluralization of nouns, the conjugation of verbs (both in the present tense and in the preterite), as well as the declension of adjectives. In order to get an idea of the nature of the deviations presented to the informants, consider the following examples:

(1) Nouns
    a. *mijn twee **broer** die waren naar Racine gegaan*
       'my two brothers had gone to Racine'
       (singular form *broer* instead of SD plural ***broer-s***)
    b. *ze moesten altijd de kinderen Hollandse **vrages** leren*
       'they always had to teach the children Dutch questions'
       (pluralization by means of *-es* instead of SD plural ***vrag-en***)

(2) Verbs present tense
    a. *hij **dragen** altijd witte handschoenen*
       'he always wears white gloves'
       (plural form?/infinitive? instead of SD 3rd person singular ***draag-t***)
    b. *dat **doet** ik vaak*
       'I do that often'
       (3rd person singular instead of SD 1st person singular ***doe***)

(3) Verbs preterite
    a. *toen wij **trouw***
       'when we married'
       (verb stem?/English-based present tense form? instead of SD
       regular preterite plural ***trouw-de-n***)
    b. *ik liep zo hard dat ik **val***
       'I ran so quickly that I fell'
       (present tense form instead of SD irregular preterite singular ***viel***)

(4) Adjectives
    a. *het was maar een **kleine** boertje*
       'he was just a small farmer'
       (declined form of the adjective instead of SD undeclined ***klein***)
    b. *en dan over een ander brug*
       'and then across an other bridge'
       (undeclined form of the adjective instead of SD declined ***ander-e***)

All sentences were presented on tape, i.e., in spoken form. In this way, an average of 25 sentences were presented to each informant. In sum, 345 sentences were judged. The recorded sentences were played to the informants and they had to judge each sentence as either correct or incorrect immediately after presentation. In case the informant judged a sentence as incorrect, it was checked whether this judgment actually concerned the inflectional form in question. If a sentence was judged as incorrect on the basis of considerations other than deviations in inflection – such as considerations

relating to lexical or semantic properties of the sentences in question – it was con-
cluded that the informant considered the inflectional form to be correct.[10]

Finally, as pointed out in Section 1, these data are compared with data from free
conversation. These latter data stem from the 1989 corpus as well (fn. 2). During these
conversations, topics were discussed such as how Dutch was acquired, the domains
in which Dutch was used, and the attitudes towards Dutch ethnicity. Obviously, these
conversations had a much more informal character than the acceptability test (see
3.2.). From the conversations all inflectional forms were extracted, i.e., both forms that
are in line with SD and forms deviating from SD.

3.   Norms in AD

In this section the first four questions that were raised in the introduction will be
elaborated upon. As was pointed out above, question V will be discussed in Section 4.

3.1   Question (I): Are the grammatical norms which hold for SD still recognized in AD?

This question will be tested with the acceptability test. Consider Table 1 on the rejec-
tion of forms deviating from SD in the acceptability test:

Table 1 shows that the percentage of recognized – i.e., rejected – deviant inflec-
tional forms is remarkably low. Out of the 75 nominal plurals which deviate from SD,
only 17 were recognized, i.e., 22.7%. As far as the prototypical, regular verbs with an
infinitive in *-en* are concerned (cf. *zwemm-en* 'to swim'), only 15.3% of the deviating
present tense forms were recognized as such. The non-prototypical, irregular verbs
with an infinitive in *-n* (e.g., *gaa-n* 'to go') do relatively well: 25% were recognized as

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10. The question arises how reliable these answers are. Are 'naive' language users capable of
distiguishing 'incorrect', 'deviant', 'ungrammatical' forms at all, or do they simply accept any
form presented to them? In our view, there is no straightforward answer to this question, in
that this issue highly depends on the types of forms that these naive speakers have to judge.
There seems to be much difference between e.g., the evaluation of subtle word order issues or
'gross inflectional errors.' The latter type of deviations are treated in this paper. The forms in
question are similar to *they walks*, *she see*, *he go'ed* (instead of *they walk*, *she sees* and *he went*) in
English. Since inflection in general exhibits little variation (Section 3.1), one may take the line
that these inflectional errors will generally not go unnoticed. In addition, in Section 4 it will
become clear that most speakers of AD do not simply accept all forms presented to them. In
short, the reliability of acceptability tests no doubt represents a serious issue. However, in rela-
tion to the forms focused on in this paper, the risk of using this type of test seems acceptable.

Table 1. Rejection of inflectional forms deviating from Standard Dutch in the acceptability test.

	total	rejected	% rejected forms
nouns	75	17	22.7
present tense verbs in *-en*	85	13	15.3
present tense verbs in *-n*	32	8	25
regular preterite verbs	13	1	7.7
irregular preterite verbs	75	21	28
adjectives	65	0	0

deviant from SD.[11] As far as the preterite is concerned, we see the following picture: deviations in the case of verbs with a regular preterite in SD were recognized in only 7.7% of all cases, whereas irregular preterites score relatively high: 28% were recognized as deviating from SD. The behavior of adjectives, finally, is especially remarkable, since the number of recognized deviations is nil. That is, all 65 'incorrectly' declined adjectives presented were accepted. This is tantamount to saying that the SD norm for the declension of adjectives is completely lost in AD.

On the basis of the above it can be concluded that by far the majority of the inflectional forms that deviate from SD are accepted by our informants. This holds for both nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Except for the irregular preterites whose rejection scores rank somewhat higher (28%), the rejection rate of *all* other inflectional forms is 25% or less. In these latter categories *of all deviant inflectional forms 75% or more are not recognized at all.* This is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that inflection is generally considered (one of) the most tightly structured and stable parts of the grammatical system. That is, inflectional rules are considered to be 'compulsory' (in the sense of being dictated by sentence structure). As a consequence, inflectional systems generally display hardly any variation. Actually, in non-disintegrating languages deviant inflectional forms will normally be observed immediately, since they imply a kind of variation which 'healthy' languages are claimed to never exhibit (cf. Carstairs 1987).

3.2 Question (II): Are there any differences between the acceptability test and the free conversations regarding the extent to which the informants in our corpus cling to the SD norms?

This question is taken up by means of comparing the results of the acceptability test with those drawn from free conversation. In this connection we start from the assumption that the informants will reach the SD norm more closely in 'reflection' (i.e., in the

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11. These irregular verbs in *-n* have as their most salient characteristic that their infinitives are monosyllabic (disregarding derived and compound forms, of course), cf. *gaa-n* 'to go,' *staa-n* 'to stand,' *doe-n* 'to do,' *slaa-n* 'to hit,' *zie-n* 'to see.'

acceptability test) than in actual production (i.e., in conversations). In relation to the latter, the following remarks are due: First, in reflection – at least in non-disintegrating languages – speakers are often well aware of the existing norms, although in actual speech they may not always be able to avoid forms running counter to the norms. It may well be that this is *a fortiori* so for speakers of disintegrating languages. These speakers may find considerable difficulties in the process of on-line speech production, whereas their knowledge of the grammatical system may still be largely intact (Sharwood Smith and Van Buren 1991). Second, the more formal the situation is, the more attention will be paid to speech, and the more careful the speech style will be (Labov 1972).[12] As said, in our view there can be no doubt that the acceptability test represents a more formal situation than free conversation which was highly informal.

On the basis of the above, it may be expected that in reflection more attention will be paid to the norms than in actual production. Consequently, *we start from the idea that our informants will be more able to observe deviations from SD in the acceptability test than to avoid deviations in free conversation.* Now, consider Table 2 on the retention of SD inflection for nouns and verbs in free conversation, and note that adjectival declension will come up for discussion later:[13]

Table 2. Retention of Standard Dutch inflectional forms in free conversation.

	total	SD	% SD
nouns	255	242	95
present tense verbs in -*en*	879	704	80
present tense verbs in -*n*	41	25	60.1
regular preterite verbs	72	40	55.5
irregular preterite verbs	333	218	65.5

From Table 2 it follows that in free conversation speakers of AD do much better than expected, particularly much better than in the acceptability test. Different from what we expected, in free conversation the SD norm is reached much more closely than in the acceptability test. This holds for both nouns, present tense verbs and preterite verbs.

It can also be inferred from Table 2 that there are differences between inflectional categories. The SD system of noun pluralization, for instance, is largely preserved in actual production in AD: of a total of 255 plurals, 242 were in line with SD, i.e., 95%.

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12. Note, that the latter observation relates to phonological rather than grammatical phenomena.

13. The following discussion of inflection in free conversation is based on the data of only 10 of the 14 speakers who participated in the acceptability test. The fact is, that, at the time this paper was written, the conversations of the 4 most proficient speakers of AD (i.e., those speakers whose language conforms to SD most) had not been analyzed yet. However, since the language of these four speakers is most in line with SD, additional data from conversations of these informants would only make the differences between test and conversations more significant (cf. below).

(It should be noted, though, that in conversations the regular plurals are far more prominent than in the acceptability test.) Furthermore, it appears that in free conversation present tense verbs with an infinitive in -*en* are relatively well preserved too, though less so than nominal plurals: 80% of these verb forms conform to SD patterns. In conversations the non-prototypical -*n* verbs are less well preserved, only 60.1% in line with SD. The SD regular system for the formation of the preterite is even more affected in AD: in production only 55.5% of these forms are in line with SD. The SD irregular preterites are somewhat better preserved than their regular counterparts, 65.5% of these forms are like SD.

In short, in free conversation nouns are best preserved, present tense -*en* verbs somewhat less, whereas irregular preterites, present tense -*n* verbs, and regular preterites (in increasing order) appear to be much more dramatically affected. But, whatever the differences between the inflectional systems of nouns, present tense and preterite verbs, most remarkable is the fact that *in actual production inflection is always significantly much more in line with SD than in reflection.* Put differently, in the conversations many speakers of AD succeed in avoiding inflectional forms that deviate from SD quite well. These speakers, however, experience much difficulty in detecting deviant inflectional forms in the acceptability test (i.e., in the speech of others). Clearly, this runs completely counter to our assumption that the informants would conform to the SD norm more closely in reflection than in production.

Let us now turn to the declension of adjectives in free conversation. In order to appreciate the tendencies within the adjectival system in AD, we will have to discuss SD adjectival declension first. In SD the declension of the attributive adjective depends both on gender and number of the noun it modifies and on the preceding determiner. Most varieties of SD have a two-article system: *het* is associated with neutral nouns, while *de* is associated with originally feminine and masculine nouns. Plural nouns always take *de*. In by far the majority of cases attributively used adjectives take a declined form in -*e*. The fact is, that all singular nouns having *de* as article and all plural nouns take a declined adjective irrespective of accompanying determiners and, in the case of plural nouns, irrespective of the gender of the noun they modify. However, when adjectives refer to singular *het* nouns, things are different. These nouns take a declined adjective when the noun is definite, but an undeclined adjective in case the noun is indefinite. This is tantamount to the following: if the noun is singular, neutral and indefinite the adjective takes the undeclined form, in all other cases the declined form of the adjective is used. Now consider Table 3 on adjectival declension in free conversation:

Table 3. Adjectival declension in free conversation.

	total	% undeclined adjectives	% declined adjectives
singular, neutral, indefinite nouns	40	37.5	62.5
all other nouns	146	12.3	87.7

From Table 3 it can be inferred that in AD conversations adjectival declension is different from SD. Actually, the SD system for declension of attributive adjectives has largely been lost. In general, there is a strong tendency in AD to use the declined adjective, even in the context where SD uses the undeclined form, i.e., in the cases with singular, neutral, indefinite nouns (although in that case this tendency is less strong). In AD the preference for declined adjectives is so strong that the stand may even be taken that in this variety of Dutch a new rule is developing which reads: in attributive position adjectives are always declined.[14]

From the results of the acceptability test (cf. Table 1) it is obvious that the SD norm for the declension of adjectives has been lost. Recall, that the number of recognized deviations from SD in that test was nil. That is, all 65 'incorrectly declined' adjectives were judged acceptable. That is, both cases in which a declined adjective instead of an undeclined adjective was used and cases in which an undeclined instead of a declined adjective was used were accepted. The results in Table 1 also show that in reflection there is no evidence for a new system emerging in spontaneous speech. Whereas in production there is an overall preference for declined adjectives in attributive position, from the acceptability test it follows that this preference does not have the status of overt norm. Both declined and undeclined adjectives are judged equally. In a way, this is consistent with our findings on the behavior of nouns and verbs. In all three cases norms are reached more closely in production than in reflection. Note, however, the crucial difference between nouns and verbs on the one hand, and adjectives on the other. In free conversation SD forms are still largely preserved in the case of nouns and verbs. In the case of adjectives this is not so. Instead, a new rule is developing which seems to oust the original system; this new rule, however, is not supported by the acceptability test.

3.3   Question (III): Are there any differences between speakers with regard to the extent to which norms are still recognized?

The answer to this question is no doubt affirmative. See Table 4 below. First, out of the 14 informants who participated in the acceptability test, 7 were *not* capable of detecting *any* deviations at all in any of the sentences presented to them. That is, no less than 50% of our informants considered all deviant inflectional forms – be it deviations regarding the inflection of nouns, adjectives, or verbs – to be correct, i.e., SD, forms. Moreover, the remaining 7 speakers – that is, the speakers who did turn down at least part of the forms presented to them – by no means exhibit an equally strong inclination to reject inflectional forms deviating from SD.

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14.   Van Marle (1995) points out that the trend to generalize the declined adjective can also be found in other varieties of overseas Dutch, such as Surinamese Dutch and East Indian Dutch. In addition, as can be inferred from Table 3, in AD a trend in the opposite direction is present as well: on a much more marginal level, undeclined adjectives are generalized at the cost of declined adjectives.

Table 4. Percentage of rejected forms for each informant participating
in the acceptability test.

informant	% rejected forms
1	68%
2	60%
3	54.5%
4	25%
5	24%
6	18.8%
7	16%
8	0%
9	0%
10	0%
11	0%
12	0%
13	0%
14	0%

Table 4 shows that, as far as the 'rejection-inclined' speakers are concerned (i.e., 1–7), there is a rather sharp contrast between speakers 1–3 on the one hand and speakers 4–7 on the other. Whereas the former three speakers detected at least half of the deviating inflectional forms presented to them (between 54.5% and 68%), the latter speakers only detected a quarter or less of the deviations. From these results we conclude that for these 7 rejection-inclined speakers the answer to the above question about the occurrence of individual differences should be affirmative as well. That is, even if informants are inclined to regard some of the inflectional forms presented to them as unacceptable, this inclination is by no means equally strong for all of them.[15]

   Finally, the 7 speakers who refrained from rejecting any sentence at all are not necessarily informants who deviate most dramatically from SD in actual speech production. That is to say, among these 7 there are some who proved to be quite capable of producing SD forms in free conversation. Conversely, most of the speakers who did manage to detect deviations from SD in the acceptability test scored relatively high in the production of SD forms. Note, however, that the latter pattern is not without exceptions. At least one informant who did well in the acceptability test scored relatively low on SD forms in conversations. Consequently, these findings indicate that there is not always question of one-to-one relationships between production and reflection.

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15. These differences do not seem to be related to differences in socio-economic classes. All of our informants were (retired) farmers and shopkeepers.

3.4   Question (IV): Is the existence of norms equally strong/weak in all parts of the inflectional system?

The fourth question will be dealt with by means of a more detailed discussion of the differences in rejection scores between the inflectional systems of nouns, adjectives and verbs. In the light of this issue we will use Table 5 instead of Table 1. As discussed above, 7 out of 14 speakers regarded all test sentences as acceptable, i.e., SD, sentences. Table 5, then, is exclusively based on data from the 7 'rejection-inclined' informants, i.e., the informants who turned down at least some inflectional forms. From this table the differences between the various subsystems in terms of rejection scores become more apparent:

Table 5. Rejection of inflectional forms deviating from Standard Dutch in the acceptability test by the 7 rejection-inclined speakers.

	total	rejected	% rejected forms
nouns	42	17	40.5
present tense verbs in -*en*	47	13	27.7
present tense verbs in -*n*	17	8	47
regular preterite verbs	5	1	20
irregular preterite verbs	35	20	57.1
adjectives	28	0	0

In general, even among the 7 rejection-inclined informants, the rejection score is, in our view, remarkably low. Except for the irregular preterites (with a rejection score of 57.1%), *all* other categories have a rejection score below 50%. Evidently, this means that, with the exception of the irregular preterites, in all categories more than half of the deviant inflectional forms were not recognized whatsoever, not even by the 7 speakers who turned out to be most critical to inflectional deviations from SD.

From Table 5 it also follows that in relation to the acceptability of inflectional deviations the diverse subsystems behave differently. Deviant adjectival forms were never rejected, whereas deviant nominal plurals score relatively high (40.5%). The verb system does not exhibit a uniform pattern: irregular -*n* verbs (present tense forms) and irregular preterites score relatively high (47% and 57.1% respectively), whereas regular present tense and regular preterite forms score remarkably low (27.7% and 20% respectively). Note, though, that these findings are not too surprising in the light of our earlier work on overseas Dutch. Van Marle and Smits (1989, 1993, 1995) and Smits (1993) reached similar conclusions on the basis of an analysis of inflectional forms in conversations in the 1966 corpus and in the translation test in the 1989 corpus, respectively.[16]

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16. As noted in Section 3.2, there are also differences between the inflectional subsystems in free conversations. Although these differences parallel the differences in the acceptability test to a large extent, the parallelism is far from complete. Consider, for instance, the relationship

The relatively high rejection score of nominal plurals should, in our view, be attributed to the fact that in AD the system of noun pluralization is still largely intact (also: Smits 1996). As can be drawn from both the translation test and free conversation (cf. also Table 2), the SD rules for nominal plurals are relatively well preserved and, consequently, our informants are still quite capable to reject forms deviating from these rules in the acceptability test.

For verbs, things are different. Generally, the verb system is less well preserved than the nominal system. That is, the speakers of American Dutch are less capable of applying the rules of verb conjugation and rejecting verb forms deviating from the rules in the acceptability test. As a result, in the case of verbs it is particularly the verb forms which do not involve application of the actual rule system (i.e., non-prototypical, irregular -*n* verbs and irregular preterites) that have a relatively high score in the acceptability test. Put differently, deviations within the irregular classes are more often noticed than deviations within their regular counterparts. The fact is, of course, that irregular verb forms cannot be predicted by general rule, but that these forms have to be learned by rote. In sum, as far as verbs (both present and preterite) are concerned 'storage' is of more relevance than systematicity. Systematicity, then, does not always lead to a generally high percentage of rejection. Instead, in the case of verbs, and different from nouns, the most prominent factor which appears to bring about rejection is storage, the psycholinguistic counterpart of the linguistic notion of irregularity. This outcome is in complete harmony with Smits (1993).

No doubt, the behavior of adjectives is most remarkable. As we have seen, this is the only inflectional subsystem which – as far as free conversation is concerned – seems to have developed into a new, more or less stable, system. The tendency to generalize the inflected form in attributive position is so strong that it is tempting to assume that a new rule is coming into existence: 'attributively used adjectives are declined in -*e*.' In sharp contrast to this finding, however, are the results from the acceptability test. Not one of our informants rejected any of the attributively used *undeclined* adjectives presented to them.[17]

4.   General discussion

Clearly, the crucial issue is that the outcome of the acceptability test contradicts our assumption according to which the SD norm should be obeyed more readily in reflection than in production. As has become clear, in AD the reverse is the case. In

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between -*en* verbs and -*n* verbs in the present tense: in the acceptability test the -*n* verbs score highest whereas in free conversations it is the -*en* verbs which score highest.

17. The extent to which factors such as absence of meaning distinctions, the – presumably – limited role of storage, and the 'subconscious' character of adjectival declension in general play a part, awaits further study.

production inflectional forms conform more to SD norms than in reflection. In our view, this is mainly due to the fact that free conversation, so to say, gives a distorted picture of the knowledge that the present-day speakers of AD actually have of the overall grammatical system of Dutch. In Smits (2001) a similar conclusion was reached. That paper compared inflection in conversations and translations. This comparison made clear that in this case, too, inflection was more affected in translations than in conversations. That is, there is a clear parallel between the results of the translation test and the acceptability test, as opposed to the results from free conversation. Speakers of AD score considerably better in informal free conversation than in the tests. Like the acceptability test discussed above, then, the translation test reveals that speakers of AD only have a weak control of the inflectional system. AD as it figures in free conversation can best be regarded as a 'strongly reduced' variety of Dutch for which it holds that:

a. In free conversation speakers of AD are free to use rules which they still have a relatively strong control of.
b. Consequently, in free conversation speakers of AD can avoid all rules which are less well mastered, meaning that they can avoid all kinds of difficulties. In addition, many rules have been 'generalized' considerably.
c. In free conversation it is not only the rule system which is reduced but also the lexicon. As a consequence, small classes of non-prototypical forms (such as the irregular -*n* verbs) have become highly marginal. The direct result of this is, that many speakers of AD are only able to apply the most frequent – and 'generalized' – rules to the prototypical cases.
d. Finally, it may well be that many of the forms used in free conversation are drawn straight from memory, meaning that in these cases there is no question of the application of rules at all (also Smits 2001). That is, for many of the present-day speakers of AD it may well be the case that 'disintegrating' AD is to a large extent based on memory, much more so than in the case of 'healthy' languages.

The conversational data, then, do not give an accurate picture of the extent to which speakers of AD still manage to apply the overall grammatical system of Dutch. Instead, in the conversations we are faced with a restricted variety of Dutch which involves only a limited number of (generalized) rules, a restricted lexicon, and which heavily depends on memory. Conversely, in the acceptability test as well as in the translation test the speakers of AD were confronted with Dutch in its 'full range' and were forced to apply their, impoverished, knowledge of the system to a wide variety of forms, most of which do not form part of present-day AD any more. In short, both the translation test and the acceptability test give a similar and more accurate picture of the actual knowledge of the overall grammatical system of Dutch that the present-day speakers of AD still have. As became clear in the above, this knowledge is seriously affected. As a matter of fact, for most speakers of AD it holds that their overall knowledge of Dutch is much more affected than the conversations suggest, since their native variety of Dutch (i.e., American Dutch) is nothing but a highly reduced version of their original ethnic language.

To be clear, our conclusion that AD represents a 'reduced variety' of Dutch is not meant to imply any negative judgment, neither with respect to this language nor with respect to its speakers. Our above remarks are meant to be nothing but an objective characterization of present-day AD vis-à-vis SD. As to our appreciation of the competence and skills of the present-day speakers of AD, rather the reverse is the case, In our view it is quite remarkable how proficient many present-day speakers of AD still are, how much they still know about their ethnic language, and how efficient 'reduced' AD in informal in-group communication still is. However 'reduced,' to many present-day speakers AD is still valuable and functional, while the language skills of many present-day speakers – not infrequently third or even fourth generation Americans – are no doubt impressive.

The results of the acceptability test presented above may bring to light another specific characteristic of the present-day speakers of AD as well. This regards the attitude which these Dutch descendants have towards the language of 'the old country.' The fact is, that speakers of AD have a high esteem of both the Netherlands and the Dutch language. They are proud to be of Dutch descent and of the fact that they have preserved the language and are still able to speak it. As an effect, they are extremely pleased to be confronted with it, even to the extent that they simply do not consider the possibility of rejecting a Dutch sentence. Put differently, many speakers of AD are quite willing to accept all 'Dutch-like' sentences presented to them. Most likely, a precondition to this permissive attitude towards language norms is their impoverished knowledge of the overall grammatical system.

The potential role of the positive attitude towards Dutch also comes up for discussion in relation to the fifth, and final, question raised in the introduction:

4.1   Question (V): Are there indications for the rise of a new norm in AD, i.e., a norm which is different from SD?

It is naturally not simply the case that AD is lacking any norms whatsoever. As became clear above, half of our informants have preserved at least part of the SD norms holding for the inflection of nouns and verbs. In morphology no new overt norms have come into existence, even not in the case of the adjective. However, on the lexical level things appear to be different. In general, our informants appeared to be very keen on the occurrence of English elements in AD, meaning that the use of English vocabulary in AD sentences was strongly criticized, even by speakers who were not 'rejection-inclined' at all.[18] That is, on the lexical level a new norm appears to have come

18. Some speakers even exhibit a sort of 'anti-English' attitude when they speak Dutch. One of our informants, for instance, avoided the normal, i.e., English, pronunciation of the place name *Orange City*. Apparently unable to come up with a Dutch rendering of this place name, he preferred the French pronunciation instead. In other cases, present-day speakers of AD still use the old, and strongly 'Dutchified,' pronunciation of English place names when they are speaking Dutch.

into existence. Crucially, this lexical norm is much easier to handle than the more complicated grammatical norms bearing upon the abstract inflectional system. Also interesting about this new norm is, that it indicates that puristic trends may develop spontaneously and need not be the result of the efforts of generations of schoolmasters.

To conclude, our above findings can only fully be appreciated in light of the following two facts. First, present-day AD is a highly reduced language variety which is only a faint reflection of the original ethnic language that the Dutch settlers brought to the New World. Second, the majority of the present-day speakers of AD have an extremely positive attitude towards 'the old country' and the language that is spoken there. The joint effect of these two forces leads to, first, the uncritical acceptance of far too many 'unconventional,' though Dutch or Dutch-like, forms. As noted above, this acceptance presupposes a lack of knowledge of the overall grammatical system from the part of the speakers and, second, a remarkably strong tendency to criticize non-Dutch, i.e., English, lexical elements in American Dutch.

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