

Apherdianus, 16th-century Dutch proverbs and the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT)

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Abstract

In the year 1552, Petrus Apherdianus published his *Tyrocinium linguæ Latinæ*, a textbook for students to practice Latin. The Dutch translations of the Latin examples in this book contain a number of proverbs and idiomatic expressions.

This paper sketches the relationship between the Dutch proverbs and other idioms in Apherdianus' schoolbook and the content of several 16th-century proverb collections, and investigates their treatment in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (*Dictionary of the Dutch Language - WNT*). The aim is to gain insight in the position of proverbs in everyday usage in older Dutch.

1. Introduction: what is a proverb?

There is a wealth of literature on the subjects of 'proverbs' and 'idiom', and part of it concerns the definition and the terminology to be used for this linguistic category and its subcategories (see e.g. Maedow et al. 2003:15-16 in ed. Andriessoon 1550; Svensén 2009:188-193). For my limited aim, I will follow the practice of the 16th-century compilers of proverb collections, and include all kinds of idiomatic expressions in the coordinating term *proverb* (cf. Dutch *spreekwoord*), in the same way Erasmus used the term *adagium* for items in his collection. The proverbs in their proper sense are complete sentences with a moral content often presented as a metaphor; they are only a small part of the category. An example from Apherdianus' *Tyrocinium* (1552) (= Aph. in our references):

L. *multæ manus onus leuius reddunt* 'many hands make a burden lighter'
D. *veel handen maken licht werck* (Aph. 10r)

There are far more proverbial expressions than proper proverbs. They can be described as idiomatic collocations with a fixed form, either metaphorical or in another way different from regular language usage. As a rule they consist of a noun phrase, an adverbial phrase, a verbal phrase etc. Examples:

L. *lingua amicus* 'a friend in words'
D. *eenen vrient met den mondt* (Aph. 8r)

L. *ab equis ad asinos* 'from the horse to the donkey'
D. *van den os op den esel* (Aph. 53v)

There is not always a clear dividing line between these subcategories and between proverbs and free usage of metaphors and other figurative collocations.

2. 1 Apherdianus' Tyrocinium and the edition De Tollenaere and Claes (1976)

Petrus Apherdianus' *Tyrocinium linguæ Latinæ* is an interesting work in many respects. Already its modern edition deserves our attention. It can be considered as a milestone in the

historiography of Dutch lexicography. Before going into the details of Apherdianus' schoolbook, I will discuss this edition briefly.

In 1976, volume 4 of series II of the *Monumenta Lexicographica Neerlandica* (reprints of older Dutch dictionaries) came of the press: *Het Tyrocinium (1552) van Petrus Apherdianus*, edited and with an introduction by De Tollenaere and Claes. In the meantime the vocabulary of the *Tyrocinium* was used for the WNT-volumes still to be compiled. The rich and instructive introduction to Apherdianus' schoolbook starts with biographical information (De Tollenaere & Claes 1976:11-20). Petrus Apherdianus or Pieter van Afferden (c. 1510 - c. 1580) was born in Gelderland, a province in the north-eastern part of our country. He was teacher in Harderwijk and Amsterdam. He was a pedagogue in the humanist tradition, and the *Tyrocinium* is only one of his pedagogic works. The introduction of the modern edition is followed by a facsimile edition of Apherdianus' book (p. 91-264; here quoted after the original page numbers 1-87, each page recto and verso), and a word index.

The six editions of the *Tyrocinium* (1552, 1554, 1556, 1560, 1564 and 1568) were published in Antwerp. De Tollenaere & Claes consider the 1552 edition as the first, although other scholars are convinced of the existence of a first edition in Germany in 1545, which got lost.

The *Tyrocinium* is not an isolated work, but has been influenced by a series of preceding publications, dictionaries as well as schoolbooks (De Tollenaere & Claes 1976:43-59); conversely, it influenced later works, among which the most important Dutch-Latin dictionary *Etymologicum Teutonicæ Linguae* (1599) by Cornelis Kiliaan (p. 60-72).

2.2 Dutch vocabulary in the *Tyrocinium*

The *Tyrocinium* is not a textbook for learning Latin, but “een oefenschool voor de schriftelijke en mondelinge taalbeheersing van en de welsprekendheid in het Latijn” (a training school for the oral and written mastery of Latin, and the eloquence in this language). Students who already had elementary knowledge of Latin should become more familiar with the vocabulary of various subjects and situations. The author restricted himself to the language belonging to the youth's daily life, and the 47 thematic chapters include subjects such as cloths, food, school, games (with 5 chapters on specific games!), animal life, trade, politics (De Tollenaere en Claes 1976:21-22).

Most entries consist of a Latin word or expression with its Dutch counterpart. See the following fragment of chapter 8, *de Pane* ‘about bread’:

Confringere panem digitis / **dat broot met die vingeren breecken**. [‘to break the bread with the fingers’]

Panem buccellatim comminuere, Concidere panem frustillatim / **dat broodt in cleyn stucken breken oft snijden**. [‘to break or cut the bread into small pieces’]

Panis butyro illitus, butyratus / **ghebotert broot**. [‘buttered bread’]

Crusta / **een korste**. [‘a crust’]

Mica / **een cruyme oft brocke**. [‘a crumb or hunk’] (Aph. 28v)

In some cases the explanation of a word or collocation is in Latin; for instance in the chapter *de Auibus* ‘about the birds’:

Ala / **eenen vlogel**. [‘a wing’] Pluma / **een pluyme** [‘a feather’]

Auis implumis, id est, sine plumis. [‘a bird unfeathered, that is, without feathers’] (Aph. 55r)

The 174 pages of the *Tyrocinium* contain about 56 proverbs, part of them marked with the label “Proverb.” (Proverbium). The Latin proverb is connected to one of the keywords of the chapter. E.g., in Chapter 43, *de Fabricis* ‘on the workshop’, *Clauus* ‘nail’ is one of the keywords; it is followed by a proverb and two collocations:

Clauus / **een naghel** [‘a nail’]. *Clauum clauo pellere, Prouer.* [‘to drive out one nail with another, proverb’] **quaet met quaet verdrijuen.** [‘to drive away one evil with another’]

Euellere clauum / **den naghel wt trecken** [‘to pull out the nail’]

Figere clauum / **eenen nagel slaen** [‘to hit a nail’] (Aph. 75r)

The most important proverbs are listed in chapter 3.1 of the 1976 edition (p. 34-37), while in chapter 4.8 (p. 56-59) Apherdianus’ sources for this category are discussed. Claes argues that the influence of Servilius’ *Adagiorem epitome* (Antwerp, 1544) is most clear; there are eight proverbs, one of them only in Latin, which show a striking similarity, both in Latin and in Dutch. A second source could be Zegers’ *Proverbia teutonica latinitate donata* (Antwerp, 1551). The four examples given by Claes for the latter connection, however, are not very convincing.

2.3 Apherdianus’ selection of Dutch proverbs

When we take a closer look at the Dutch proverbs in the *Tyrocinium* and its place in the entry, we see a great variety both in form and in function. As said before, the Dutch texts are just a help for the students to understand the Latin texts, in order to get a better understanding of them, and gain more conversation and writing skills.

Entries with a single word or a collocation include a literal translation of the Latin elements into Dutch. When the entry consists of a Latin proverb, however, Apherdianus had a choice between several options for the Dutch equivalent. He could a) offer a literal translation in Dutch, which b) sometimes made a Dutch proverb, c) offer a translation of the intention of the proverb in Dutch, or d) include a different Dutch proverb with the same meaning.

Examples of these options are:

a. Latin proverb, literal translation in Dutch (no Dutch proverb):

	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Latin	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Dutch	meaning
66r	Tempora labuntur tacitisque senescimus annis, [‘times are passing and we get old in silence’]	die tijden gaen voorby, ende wy worden stil swijgende outd.	Times go by and we are getting old without being aware.

b. Latin proverb, literal translation in Dutch = Dutch proverb:

	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Latin	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Dutch	meaning
53v	Boni pastoris est tondere pecus, non deglubere, [‘a good shepherd should shear his sheep, he doesn’t flay them’]	een goet herder sal zijn schaepkens scheren / niet villen.	A good prince should take advantage of his citizens by treating them well; he shall not take everything from them and thus lose their sympathy.

c. Latin proverb, translation of the intention in Dutch:

	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Latin	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Dutch	meaning
63r	Animam debet, Prouerb. [‘he owes even his soul’]	hy es meer schuldich dan hy betalen kan [‘he owes more than he can pay’]	He owes more than he can pay.

d. Latin proverb, different Dutch proverb with the same meaning:

	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Latin	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Dutch	meaning
55v	Horatius: Dat veniam coruis vexat censura columbas, [‘the censors are indulgent to the crows, but harasses the doves’]	kleyn diefkens hanctmen, die groote laetmen loopen. [‘little thieves are hung, the big ones are left in peace’]	Ordinary people committing small crimes are punished harder than highplaced persons committing severe crimes.

In this paper we are specially interested in those entries in which Dutch proverbs are used as translation that are different from the Latin ones (category d, used in 18 out of 56 cases). Because their form is independent of the Latin proverb, they might reveal which Dutch idioms were familiar to the students who formed the target group of the *Tyrocinium*.

Some examples are presented in Table 1.

	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Latin proverb with literal translation	<i>Tyrocinium</i> Dutch proverb with literal translation	meaning
1. 5v	Perfricare frontem. ‘to rub one’s face’	die onschamel schoen aentrecken. ‘to put on the shameless shoes’	To put aside one’s shame; to act or to behave shamelessly.
2. 7r-v	Oscitante vno deinde oscitat & alter. Prouerb. ‘when one yawns, another yawns too’	eenen geck maeckt veel gecken. ‘one fool makes many fools’	People tend to follow the bad behaviour of others
3. 54v	Lupus pilum mutat non mores. ‘the wolf may change his hair, but not his habits’	hy ghrijst eer hy wijst ‘he is getting grey before he is becoming wise’	He is still a fool, although he is old now; one cannot change his character
4. 74r	Penelopes telam texere, id est, inanem operam sumere, & rursum destruere quod effeceris. ‘weaving Penelopes fabric, i.e. doing useless work, and destroy what has been done’	monincken werck doen. ‘to do muncks work’	To do useless work; to make a vain attempt.

Table 1. Dutch proverbs as an explanation of the Latin one

In all these cases we see the sense of the Latin proverb expressed by a Dutch one. In most cases the relationship with the subject of the chapter is lost; see for instance 74r, *Penelopes telam texere*, part of Chapter 42, *de Lanificio* ‘on the wool industry’, where the Dutch proverb is taken from monastic life.

3. *Apherdianus* in 16th-century proverb collections and in the *WNT*

We call these proverbs in the second column “Dutch” because they are different from the Latin ones of which they are the counterparts. Why did *Apherdianus* choose these Dutch

proverbs? Did he expect that the students knew these idioms so well that they could clarify the meaning of the Latin proverb better than a literal translation of the Latin text?

To find out whether Apherdianus' proverbs were generally known in 16th-century Dutch, we first checked some contemporary proverb collections (these works are all listed in Claes & Bakema 1995).

The first publication of Dutch proverbs was titled *Proverbia Communia* (1480; ed. Jente 1947) containing some 800 Dutch proverbs with Latin translations. After the publication of Erasmus' *Adagia* in 1500 (first edition), which already referred to a number of Dutch proverbs (see Suringar 1873), many proverb collections in the vernacular followed. Sartorius was the author of successive editions (1539, 1544, 1561) of compilations of Erasmus' book; they included the Latin proverbs with Dutch translations. Later publications became more independent of the Latin collections. A very interesting collection is Andriessoon's *Duytsche Adagia* (1550). It is the only 16th-century collection to give explanations (in Dutch) of the Dutch proverbs. Furthermore, it is published in an interesting modern edition by Mark Meadow et al. in 2003. Many more (some 1900) proverbs are recorded by Gheurtz in his *Adagia* (1552; ed. Prędota & Mooijaart 2009). It contains 900 'new' proverbs, i.e. proverbs not found in previous collections.

We looked up the Latin proverbs (in their Dutch form) as well as the Dutch proverbs in these and other older proverb collections. A first illustration of the findings is the Latin proverb in the second example in Table 2.

L. *Oscitante vno deinde oscitat & alter*. 'when one person yawns, the other yawns too'.
Andriessoon 1550 & De Brune 1636:
Gaept deen, so gaept dandere 'when one person yawns, the other yawns too'
(Andriessoon interpretation: people follow other people in their behaviour, be it good or bad.)

Conclusion: this (Latin) proverb is mentioned in two works and proves not to be common in Dutch, but is probably known in non-fixed form, e.g. *gapen is aanstekelijk* 'yawning is contagious' (only in the literal sense).

The Dutch counterpart of this proverb, on the other hand, is more frequently mentioned:

D. *eenen geck maect veel gecken*. 'one fool makes many fools',
Proverbia Communia 1480 & Gheurtz 1552: *een dwaes maect veel dwasen*.
It is also included in other proverb collections, with variation:
Servilius 1545: *een geck maecter tien* 'one fool makes ten of them'
Zegers 1551: similar to Servilius
Warnersen 1550: similar to Apherdianus

Conclusion: the Dutch proverb is more common than the Latin version ("when one person yawns...")

The third example in Table 2 shows a different result.

L. *Lupus pilum mutat non mores* 'the wolf may change his hair, but not his habits'
Variants in Dutch:
Servilius 1545: *De wolf verandert zijn haer maer niet zijnen aert* 'the wolf may change his hair, but not his character'.

proverb collections 16th-/19th c.: Een oude wolf betert zich niet ‘an old wolf will not change for the better’

Attestations are found from the 19th century onward, and it is still common in Modern Dutch (with *vos* ‘fox’ in stead of *wolf* ‘wolf’):

Een vos verliest wel zijn haren maar niet zijn streken ‘a fox looses his hair, but not his tricks’.

Conclusion: this proverb is well-known in variant forms. The Dutch counterpart:

D. hy ghrijst eer hy wijst ‘he is turning grey before he is becoming wise’.

on the other hand, has no other attestations at all. The conclusion might be that this time Apherdianus preferred a less known, maybe local idiom to the well-known Latin version (“the wolf may loose his hair ...”)

We have seen now what proverb collections can tell us about the proverbs and their popularity. In addition we consulted the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT), the great historical dictionary of Dutch. From the beginning, the WNT has been very generous in including proverbs and proverbial expressions. It took advantage of Harrebomée’s *Spreekwoordenboek* (1856-1870), which itself included the proverbs from 200 earlier collections, enlarged with many contemporary examples.

The WNT includes idioms as elements of word entries, with or without explanation, with at least the oldest attestation(s) from dictionaries or proverb collections and with citations from literary and other texts (“in free use”). As Kruyskamp states in his introduction to Stoett (1981:11) (itself by far the most reliable proverb collection of Dutch): it is the WNT that still makes a very valuable contribution to the explanation of the Dutch proverbial heritage. The dictionary is especially useful in that it offers the meaning of words as elements of idioms. Even when the explanation of the proverb as such is lacking, the meaning of the separate words, often obsolete or with an obscure form, may help reveal the intention (Mooijaart 2009).

An important part is the addition of citations from literary texts as illustrations of spontaneous use of proverbs. They are taken from comedies, novels, essays but also from non fiction texts.

We checked each pair of proverbs in the WNT in the same way as we did in the proverb collections. In this way we could get an impression of how common each of the proverbs was. See Table 2 for the results for the 18 pairs of proverbs; it makes it clear that only half of the Dutch proverbs were included in the WNT, and also that most of the Latin proverbs were not found in any source.

	Latin proverbs (literally translated into Dutch)	Dutch proverbs
common (= found in proverb collections + WNT + literary texts)	3	9
less common (= only found in proverb collections)	2	7
unknown (= not found in any other source)	13	2

Table 2 Popularity of 18 pairs of proverbs

4. Conclusion

Most of the 18 original Dutch proverbs which Apherdianus preferred to the translation of the Latin ones are indeed more common. We see that in five cases the Latin version seems to be well-known or more or less known in its Dutch form, while, nevertheless, Apherdianus obviously preferred a different Dutch proverb. But in most cases, it is easy to be understood why he selected an original Dutch proverb. Obviously, a fair amount of proverbs in the vernacular was available, totally independent from their Latin counterpart with the same meaning.

These results, however, are not quite straightforward. I will only mention three problems which frustrates the researcher. First, the variation: when do we actually speak of “the same proverb”? Is it only seldom that a proverb keeps the same form; variation is the rule. Think of the example with *wolf* versus *fox*. Second, proverb collections copied from each other on a large scale – so what does “frequency” mean when we investigate proverb collections? And with respect to the WNT: elaborateness of sense description and coverage of literary texts depends partly on the lexicographer’s view and on the year of publication (the fascicles and volumes were published between and 1864-2001!). Many more literary texts should be available to execute a quick search with reliable results on the use of proverbs in free contexts.

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