Family Names with the Root -meijer in the Dutch-speaking Area

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The geography of family names in the Netherlands.

The Breninkmeijer family comes from Mettlingen in Germany, but in the nineteenth century brothers Clemens and August Breninkmeijer travelled around the Netherlands as itinerant traders, before founding the company C.A. Breninkmeijer in Sneek in 1841. Their family name was not unusual in their new home: in the Dutch-speaking area, there are numerous family names that go back to the appellative meier. With the aid of maps showing the distribution of present-day Dutch and Flemish surnames, in this essay I will look at the orthographic and morphosyntactic variation of Meijer names, and illustrate the lexical variation in -meijer compounds in the east of the Netherlands.

The geography of family names is a linguistic discipline whose key aim is to record variations of family names, both in their geographical distribution and with regard to structures that have evolved over time. The variable maps compiled by myself show contrasting types of family names in the Dutch-speaking area and are based on a complete list of family names from the Belgian and Dutch population registers of 2007. These are the same data used for the websites on which users can map the geographical distribution of individual family names in Belgium and the Netherlands. With the aid of the software for mapping name variants, both a relative and an absolute distribution can be visually represented by means of circle symbols of varying size and colour, following the format used in the Deutscher Familiennameverzeichnis (Atlas of German Surnames). A representation showing relative frequencies, which allow the pronounced regional differences to become visible, was chosen for all the maps in this essay. The lower limit for the data query was five name bearers per municipality.

Geographical variation in the case of family names containing the root -meijer

The geographical variation of family names characterising the Dutch-speaking area is illustrated in the example of names ending in -meijer.
Orthographic variation

While the national border between Belgium and the Netherlands does not, generally speaking, mark a geographical boundary for names, it forms a clear barrier when it comes to the spelling of family names.

Map 1 brings together all the simplexes of the family names containing the lexeme -meier: De Meijer, Meijer, Meijers, Smeijers and Meire.

The Middle Dutch word meyer was borrowed from the Latin maior (the greater, the higher-ranking), whereby the diphthong ai was adopted into Middle Dutch as ei.

In terms of spelling, we can identify four types, which are represented by the following tokens (specific names):

1) Meijer type (in total 51,387 name bearers)
   Tokens: Meijer (38,712), Meijers (4,998), Meijerink (1,535), Meijering (1,534), de Meijer (1,004), Smeijers (1,335), Meijerman (133), Meijerinck (198), Demeijer (124), "de Meijere" (105), Meijerink (88), Smeijer (65), "D. Meijer" (53), Meijer van Putten (47), Meijer zu Schlochteren (42), Meijerse (44), Meijer Drees (40), Meijering (36), Demeijere (16), Meijer Timmerman Thijssen (15), Meijer Swaente (11), Meijer Claesen (8)

2) Meyer type (in total 49,148 name bearers)
   Tokens: De Meyer (5,027), Meyer (3,142), Meyers (1,835), Demeyere (1,435), Demeyer (1,660), Smeijers (1,087), De Meyere (902), de Meyer (925), Meyermans (42), de Meyere (22), Meijerink (23), Meiering (13), de meyer (10), Meier Herr (8), Demeyere Delmeijer (5), Demeyer (5), Meyer Viel (5)

3) Meier type (in total 1,979 name bearers)
   Tokens: Meier (972), Meiere (803), Demmeire (112), Smeier (48), Meiers (103), Meier Mattern (14), Meier Nolte (7)

4) Mijer type (in total 91 name bearers)
   Tokens: Mijer (48), Smitjers (56), Mijers (5)

Map 1 reveals a marked divide between the spelling with ey in Flanders and that with ei in the Netherlands. Although Mathijp Siegbeek, the author of the first officially recognized set of spelling rules for Dutch, recommended distinguishing the spelling of the diphthong ei from the spelling of the diphthong ed (from the West Germanic), the root -meier in family names in the Netherlands is almost always written with ei. The variant with ei in West Flanders concerns the syncopated variant Meir. The rare Mijer type is documented a few times in Twente.

The reason for the pronounced orthographic difference between Flanders and the Netherlands lies with administrative measures implemented in their respective past. In Flanders, the way in which surnames were written was fixed as early as 1795, but never adapted to orthography. As a result, Flemish family names have preserved many regionalisms, as witnessed by the typically Flemish forms De Backer, Cuyper, Celen, Vandenberge and Van den Hauwe. In the Netherlands, family names were only officially laid down in 1811, in other words after the publication of the Siegbeek spelling (1804) and taking this latter as their basis. Most variants in the Netherlands consequently conform to their writing to orthography, for example Bakker, Kuyper, Klaus, Van den Berg and Van den Bos.
Morphosyntactic variation

The morphosyntactic structure of the family names also exhibits structural geographical variations, which are found in all categories of family name.

The Dutch language offers three ways of creating family names out of appellative professional designations:

1. By juxtaposition: in other words, the professional designation is placed in coordinating fashion directly after the forename, for example Jan Dekker, Piet Meijer.
2. By preceding the professional designation with the definite article de (nominative), for example Jan De Dekker, Piet De Meijer, or the accusative den, for example Jan Den Dekker.
3. By genitivising the professional designation either with the ending -s (strong declension) or -en (weak declension), for example Jan Deckers, Peter Witmers, or with an initial and final genitive morpheme, for example Piet Smeyers.

Map 3, showing the distribution of the morphosyntactic types of the professional designation meier, reveals that the Dutch-speaking area is broadly divided into three:

The Meier type, i.e. the nominative type without an article, dominates the northern half. The De Meier type, with the preceding definite article, is clustered in the southwest. In the southeast of the language region, this professional designation is generally in the genitive: the Meiers type and Smeyers type. Forming a striking subcategory within this genitive type are names with both affixed and suffixed genitive morphemes, such as Smeyers (= of the steward), Smaliders (= of the miller), Spapen (= of the priest/person). The initial s, retained up to today in front of m, p, w, f and g and in front of vowels, is a remainder of the genitive article, as also preserved in the Dutch phrases ‘s avonds (in the evening) and ‘s ochtends (in the morning), used when telling the time. In the nominative area preceding the definite article, the area with both prefixed and suffixed genitive can be demarcated from the area with the suffixed genitive.

Map 4 also shows a fifth morphosyntactic type, namely the derivation with the suffix -ing or -ink: the Meijering type. Formations with -ing are concentrated in the northeast provinces of Groningen, Friesland and Overijssel. The -ing forms increase in number the closer we get to the border with Germany. The suffix -ing expresses belonging to a person (for example in the professional designations Meijering and Dekkerling and in the patronyms Wesseling and Hidding), or to a place of residence (for example Beekink, Bruggink, Bruggering, Dijkstra, Haeurnink, Schurink, Velding and Welink). Such -ing names were already in common use in the Middle Ages as the names of farms. Over the course of time, the name of the manor was transferred to its inhabitant and thus evolved into a family name.

Map 3 documents the phonological variation of the suffix in the types Meiering/Meierink and represents the distribution of the type with the suffix -man(s).

A geographical difference is apparent between the voiced variant Meijering, which is found above all in Groningen and Friesland, and the unvoiced variant Meijeringink, which is located chiefly in Overijssel and East Gelderland. The -ink suffix in the Netherlands was adopted from Westphalia. The formation of farmstead names with -ing/-inge was common both in the east of the Netherlands and in Westphalia. The apocope of -inge to -ing reached Drenthe later than Overijssel and Gelderland. In Westphalia the suffix -inge was replaced even before 1000 by the apocopated unvoiced -ink form. This Westphalian innovation migrated around that date to the
eastern parts of Gelderland and Overijssel.\(^{29}\)

The *Meiermans* type with the *-man* suffix makes its appearance on the western edge of the *-ink* area. The less common variant with the *-gen* variation, i.e. the *Meiermans* type, is found sporadically in the south-eastern genitive area.

In summary, the distribution of the morphosyntactic types of the professional name *Meier* is characterised both by a west-east divide (nomina
tive versus genitive) and by a north-south divide (juxtaposed family names versus family names with article). Moreover, the type suffixed with *-ing/-
-ink* is found in the northeast of the Netherlands, in particular in the area bordering Westphalia and Lower Saxony. We are looking here at historical dividing lines within the Dutch linguistic landscape.

Compounds with *-meijer*: a north-eastern phenomenon

While the root *-meijer* as a simplex in family names is widespread across the whole Dutch language area and indeed represents one of the most fre
quent professional designations of them all (maps 1 and 3), compounds with *-meijer* as family names are an emphatically north-eastern pheno
menon. In the material I have evaluated, there are more than 400 composite family names with the *-meijer* form as their second component. This spell
ing is characteristic of the Netherlands (map 1) and is found in fairly com
mon as well as very common surnames such as Nijmeijer (2,490 bearer), Niemeijer (1,230), Huijmeijer (940), Hagemeijer (450), Burgemeijer (450), Estemeijer (400), Daalmeijer (298) etc. The highest concentrations of *-meijer* compounds are found in the northeast of the Netherlands, in particular in Overijssel and Gelderland, although in many cases migration to the Randstad Holland can also be observed.

The *Nijmeijer/*Niemeijer types

The most frequent form of *meijer* compounds are family names with the adjective *nij* (as *new*) as their first element. The standard Dutch ad
jective *nieuw* appears in the Low Saxon dialects either as *nie* (with a long vowel) or as *nij* (with diphthongised vowel). The *Niemeijer* surname type is found above all in the provinces of Groningen and North Drenthe, but also in South Drenthe and Overijssel to the Nijmeijer type (map 4).

In Germany, the Low German Niemeier type in Lower Saxony (grea
test density in Osnabrück) and in northeast Westphalia (greatest density in Herford) contrasts with the Neumeier type in the south of Germany.\(^{11}\) The German and the Dutch Niemeier vowel types thus only partly lie geo
graphically side by side.

The meaning and distribution of compounds with *-meijer*

The names *Niemeier* and *Nijmeijer* were given to a new *Meijer*, in other
words the new steward or tenant of a farm. The high prevalence of these var
iants indicates that, just as in Westphalia,\(^{11}\) the increase in two-part sur
names containing *-meijer* in the Netherlands probably went hand in hand with a change in meaning of the Middle Dutch word *meijer*. As the steward of a manor and as title collector, the meijer originally supervised the man
agement of properties on behalf of the landlord and exercised limited jurisdi
ction in the latter’s name. From the late Middle Ages onwards, however, the designation *meijer* was also applied to free peasants as tenants of farms.\(^{11}\)
Although I do not have historical evidence to prove this clearly and unambiguously, the evolution of the meaning of the Middle Dutch meyer – from designating an administrative official to describing a person who ran or leased a farm – can be inferred from the nature of the first component of contemporary Dutch compounds with -meijer.

The meyer as administrative official appears in -meijer compounds such as (Klein) Hofmeijer, Amtmeijer, Burgmeijer and Kerkmeijer (map 9).

The types (Klein) Hofmeijer and Amtmeijer are found above all in Oosterjssel. The meaning of the name Amtmeijer speaks for itself. The compound hofmeijer is equated in the Middle Dutch dictionary with hofmeester, that is to say the representative of the landlord. The name Hofmeester could also be transferred to a farm, however, as evidenced by the family name Klein Hofmeijer. As already mentioned, in the northeast of the Netherlands, just as in Westphalia, people were frequently called after the farm on which they lived. One example is the family name Wissink. If a farm had to be divided up, the two eponymous halves could subsequently be distinguished from one another by the addition of the quantifying adjectives Klein and Groot, as in the case of Klein Wissink and Groot Wissink, for example. Farm names with Klein and Groot as family names – for example Groot Iribink, Groot Keurkamp/Klein Keurkamp, Groot Kremelink, Groot Obbink/Klein Obbink etc. – are found above all in the regions of Twente and Achterhoek bordering Westphalia. The Dutch type with Groot/Klein + farm name ending in -ink continues directly in Westphalia, for example Große-Omebrink/Kleine-Omebrink. Klaz Hanzen Heeroma explains it as a "Westphalan expansion".

The types Burgmeijer and Kerkmeijer designate the managers of the properties belonging to a castle or a church respectively. The name Kerkmeijer is concentrated in Twente, while the Oosterjssel name Burgmeijer has also migrated to North and South Holland.

The inventory I have compiled of names with -meijer compounds also contains many types that hark back to meijer as farmers. A few examples
of -meijer surnames containing, as their first components, terms describing farmland and its properties are: Hagedommeijer ("hedge"), Voeteomeijer ("field"), Duetteomeijer ("valley"), Brinkomeijer ("fence"), Enkomeijer ("reed"). Leopold Schütte's classification of the first components of East Westphalian compounds with -meijer is also applicable to family names in the northeast of the Netherlands, as the following examples show:

1. Orienting first components: Goeaomeijer, Mittelomeijer, Ostomeijer, Mittomeijer, Westomeijer, Hornomeijer, Nederomeijer
2. Quantifying first components: Langomeijer, Grootomeijer, Kleinomeijer, Broomeijer
3. First components describing functions: Borgomeijer, Angtomeijer, Kerkeomeijer, Scholomeijer

According to Jan M. Spelder, many first components of -meijer surnames may be considered ambiguous: he cites numerous competing meanings with personal names. These latter nevertheless make up the less common category as first components in Dutch. As in the Tecklenburger Land, the fifth category is most strongly represented in the east of the Netherlands: the majority of the first components of Dutch -meijer compounds refer to landscape features and point to the origin of the name bearer from a specific farm, whose name was transferred to its inhabitant.

This is also the case with the Breininkomeijer family, which originally came from the Breininkhof farm in Wiche, not far from Mettingen, but which is now dispersed around the world owing to generations of successful trading activity. Map 6 shows the distribution of the family names Breininkomeijer and Breininkomeijer in the Netherlands and Flanders. The highest concentrations are found in the economic centres of the Dutch language area: in the Randstad Holland and around Antwerp and Brussels in Flanders. The documentary evidence of Breininkomeijer in Flanders points to migration, however, since the -meijer spelling does not originate from Flanders. The key to the explanation of the Breininkomeijer family name lies not least in Mettingen, the German home of this family of traders and retailers.

1. My thanks go to Leonard Brouwer at the Central Bureau voor Genealogie, The Hague, and Dr. Gerrit Bloemhof at the University of Amsterdam, for placing the Dutch material at my disposal.
7. Ibid., p. 138ff.
8. Ibid., p. 35.
10. Nota am. 141.
12. See the essay by Christof Spannhoff in this volume, pp. 51-93.
BRENNINKMEYER, LANGEMEYER, TASSEMEIER

Estate and Family Names Ending in -meier in the Tecklenburger Land

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