Abstract

Samuel Columbus (1642–1671) is generally described as stylistically a highly versatile writer. He began his career as a poet, working in various genres. Towards the end of his life, he wrote En svensk Ordeskötsel (On the Cultivation of Swedish Words) in a style clearly influenced by spoken language – although the book was being revised when its author died, and must be interpreted in the light of that fact. Its aim is one of language cultivation, but it differs from other accounts with similar ambitions. A key theme is undoubtedly the relationship between speech and writing. The author’s own language also lends itself to a study with such a focus. Previous discussion of Columbus’s speech-influenced style has above all centered on the definite article -en, which in his writing shows a clear distinction between masculines and feminines, although it is not one on which he himself comments. For scholars, this has raised interesting questions concerning the relationship between dialect and standard language. In strong feminines, Swedish dialects normally have no n in the -en ending; the exception is an area of western Uppland, which has the same -en ending as Columbus used. This has been explained as a vestige of a cultivated conversational language influenced by written Swedish. Such a variety is described in the eighteenth century, when it is said to be typical of Stockholm, but it may be assumed to have arisen, in somewhat varying guises, wherever a public form of speech, influenced by the written language, encountered a private, everyday one.

Keywords: Swedish, 17th-century language, regional standard, dialect, diglossia, definite article.