

NEDERLANDS / HOLLANDS / VLAAMS – AN UNTRANSLATABLE TITLE

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The multiple names given to the standard language of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Northern part of Belgium has caused considerable confusion and given rise to the widespread misapprehension that only French is spoken in Belgium.

The main difficulty arises from the fact that the terms Dutch and Flemish apply to various historical and geographical data and thus have hindered the breakthrough of the concept Netherlandic as a substantive that defines the standard language of a linguistic area. Moreover, Dutch as an adjective covers two concepts: **Nederlands** and **Hollands**. When Dutch as a substantive defines the language, then it applies to a larger area than the one where the Dutch live. The inhabitants of Northern Belgium do not object to being referred to in the Anglo-Saxon world as Dutch-speaking, but then Dutch must stand for **Nederlands** and not for **Hollands** because that is not the same. Where the language is concerned, **Hollands** only applies to a group of dialects spoken in the North-West of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, whereas **Vlaams** / Flemish applies to a cluster of dialects in the West of Dutch-speaking Belgium. This does not alter the fact that in German speaking areas the standard language is often called **Hollaendisch** instead of **Niederlaendisch**, and in Spain they call it **Holandés**.

In Belgium the language used in the non-French-speaking part of the country has for a very long time been called **Vlaams** (in French **le flamand**). Francophone advocates of a unitary Belgium called it that because they were opposed to the unity of the Dutch-speaking linguistic area. In narrow-minded Catholic circles in the Northern part of Belgium even the term **Nederlands** was considered much too Dutch, this being the language of the Protestants and so a danger to the Roman creed.

But on the other side of the border, people also speak of a Flemish language, albeit on different grounds: when some Dutchmen hear something in the language of a Belgian that does not correspond fully with their own idiom or pronunciation, they are convinced that the Belgian speaks **Vlaams**.

Hardly any linguistic area is completely homogeneous. A conscious and expert listener usually recognizes the origin of the native speaker by details in his pronunciation, his intonation, certain words, a typical expression or a syntactic structure. This applies to English, German, French, and many other languages. There is a distinction between British and

American English, and within Great Britain as well as in the United States and Canada itself, regional differences in English can be observed. German spoken by an academically trained Austrian not only sounds different from the language spoken by a colleague who was born and raised in Hamburg, Berlin or Zurich: it may also contain different words or expressions. A Berliner does not use the term **Zopfen** but **Quark** (in Canada: cottage cheese), at home he eats **Tomaten** and only in Austria **Paradeiser**, on his car and bicycle wheel there is a **Reifen** and not a **Pneu** which is used in Switzerland. Nevertheless the Swiss and Austrians as well as the Germans call their standard language German. There is likewise a difference between European and Brazilian Portuguese, between Swedish in Sweden and in Finland, and there are variations in the French language of France and of Canada.

It is therefore quite normal that even in the Dutch linguistic area with its 18 million inhabitants, of whom about one third live in Belgium, there is variety in unity. Nevertheless, the situation in Belgium needs to be considered within a specific historical and social framework.

It was due to the separation of the Northern and the Southern parts of the Low Countries towards the end of the 16th Century that in the free North a (modern) standard language came into existence, whereas from then onwards only dialects were spoken in the part now belonging to Belgium, the language of the upper classes there being French. Of course, this situation could not be undone straight away in the period between 1814 and 1830, when there was a short political reunion of the two parts. Yet it was during that period that in the South the seed was sown of a striving for linguistic union with the North. Even after 1830, that is within the new state of Belgium, there was the awareness among a great many intellectuals that a complete gallicization of the historic Southern Netherlands could only be halted if that area had a standard language. There was, however, no agreement as to the character of that language. It was thought by many that Flanders (and advisedly I am now applying this term only to the Southern Low Countries, i.e. the Northern part of present-day Belgium) was entitled to a contribution of its own to a standard Dutch language, which according to them was still in the process of development. (Those who want more information on the many disputes about this matter should

read T. Suffeleers' book **Taalverzorging in Vlaanderen**.)

At a time when there was no radio or television and not much traffic across the border (and it may safely be said that this period did not end until after the second world war), the contacts between Flanders and the North were maintained mainly through the written medium. Spoken Dutch, however, differed considerably from the written language, since in the free North, and especially from the 17th Century onwards, it had developed on the basis of the dialects of the provinces of Holland.

The written language in the Netherlands, on the other hand, had a much older tradition with its roots in a period when the County of Flanders and the Duchy of Brabant were dominant in literature and culture. That is why the Flemings were more familiar with the written code than with the standard spoken code, which for them often sounded too exclusively like the Dutch of Holland.

This historical and necessarily quite brief approach to the problem can be summarized in three points:

1. Dutch in Belgium has been strongly influenced by French. To the so-called Belgicisms belong a number of Gallicisms which are due to the historical dominance of the French language in Belgium and which do not occur in the Netherlands.
2. In the spoken language in Belgium words and expressions occur which in Holland are felt to be old-fashioned or to belong to the written code.
3. In Belgium there was a tendency to react to the French influence. As a result of this reaction to the situation described in point one, a third phenomenon has developed: the so-called purisms. In addition, in the more recent history of our linguistic area, a similar conservative reflex also accounts for the fact that in Belgium the impact of English on Dutch is less than in the Netherlands, where linguists have come to speak of '**Anglo-Nederlands**'. Moreover, in Belgium there is less tendency to use the more modern Gallicisms, i.e. to replace formerly current Dutch words by words recently borrowed in Holland from French.

For my purposes this last phenomenon need not be a separate point. When giving examples, I shall refer to it under point three (purisms).

I should point out that the phenomena illustrated by the examples given below are quite common in Belgium and in Holland respectively. The speaker using those words and expressions is not marked in his own part of the Dutch linguistic area, as most native speakers and

listeners do not regard them as strange or unusual. However, people who are sensitive and critical about language will not use them.

To illustrate the four causes of differences between Northern and Southern Dutch, I shall now give a series of examples. For the sake of convenience I repeat the four points already stated: 1. The French influence in Belgium; 2. written code versus spoken language; 3. purisms in Belgium; 4. the more recent influence of English and French in Holland.

Overlappings between these different points cannot always be avoided.

1. THE FRENCH INFLUENCE

Belgian ladies who wish to have their hair done, still often go to a **coiffeur** to get a **mise en plis**; when they are in Holland they go to a **kapper** to get a **watergolf**. Belgian ladies still address each other with **madame**, although the use of **mevrouw** is increasing. Since the oil crisis central heating has become very expensive; so is **chauffage** in Belgium and **verwarming** in Holland.

A saucepan is called **kookpan** in Holland. Belgian mothers and cooks do not understand how Dutch people can cook soup in a **pan**. They only use a **pan** to boil eggs or fry steak. For cooking soup, potatoes and vegetables they use a **kastrol** in Belgium (from the French **casserole**). Belgian rolls are a lot nicer and crustier than Dutch ones; they are even called **pistolets** and not **broodjes** as in the Netherlands. Just as in the novels of the Swiss writer Max Frisch, a bicycle is called **velo** in Belgium and not **fiets** as in Holland. A cycling contest is still called **koers** (from the French **course**). The Dutch sports jargon has borrowed this word from us, obviously because the tradition of Flemish cycling is at least thirty years older than that of the Dutch. Even Dutch cyclists in the famous Paris-Roubaix contest (Flemish people always say **Parijs-Roubaix**) are **coureurs** riding over the **kasseien**, the Flemish word for the old bumpy cobble-stones. The noisy supporters along the roadside often wear a peaked cap, in Belgium called **klak**, in Holland **pet**. The origin of **klak** is the French **chapeau claqué**.

The influence is not restricted to the use of words borrowed from French or to hybrid words. There is also a considerable number of inaccurate translations from French which have found their place in Belgian Dutch. Because of lack of contact with the standard language in the Netherlands and through insecurity, the Flemish often translated words from French for which there had been already Dutch equivalents for a long time. Through this latent gallicization, interferences like the following came into existence. **Voter une loi** has been translated into **een**

wet stemmen instead of **een wet aannemen** (to pass a law). **I hadn't expected that** is in Dutch **Ik had dat niet verwacht**, in Flanders, however, often **Ik had me daar niet aan verwacht**, from the French **Je ne m'y attendais pas**. Ground-floor is in French **le rez-de-chaussée** and so in Belgian Dutch **het gelijkvloers**. In the Netherlands it is **de benedenverdieping**. The usual word for an elderly gentleman or lady in Holland is **bejaarde**; in Belgium they say **ouderling**, a translation of the French **vieillard**. A **ouderling** does exist in Holland, but he or she is a member of the council of a protestant community. Common is the use of the preposition **van** between a verb and an infinitive, preceded by the particle **te**: **I hope I can come along with you** is in Belgian French **J'espère de pouvoir vous accompagner**, in Belgian Dutch **Ik hoop van te kunnen meegaan**. In normal Dutch the preposition **van** is not used in these cases: **Ik hoop te kunnen meegaan**. Another example: **May I ask you not to smoke** – in standard Dutch **Mag ik u vragen niet te roken** – in French: **Puis-je vous demander de ne pas fumer** – in Belgian Dutch; **Mag ik u vragen van niet te roken**.

2. WRITTEN CODE VERSUS SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Some words which are very common in Belgium sound old-fashioned in Holland; they belong to the written code or have a different meaning. In a road accident there may be casualties. In Holland they are referred to as **gewonden**, in Belgium as **gekwetsten**. In a soccer contest Belgian players may get a **kwetsuur**, Dutch ones a **blessure** (from the French **blessure**). Dutch players may feel **gekwetst**, but only by an unfavourable criticism in a newspaper and not by a kick to their Achilles tendons. – The fact that there are pretty girls and women in Flanders is not doubted by the Dutch at all; they only think it a bit funny that Belgian gentlemen are always referring to **schone meisjes**, for **schoon** for them does not mean pretty / beautiful like **schön** in German, but **clean**. Dutchmen speak of **moie vrouwen**.

I had told you however / I had warned you however is in Belgian Dutch **Ik had u nochtans verwittigd** – the root of the **verwittigen** is related to the English **wit**. Dutchmen find **Ik had u nochtans verwittigd** an odd sentence, typically Flemish, for in such a case they say **Ik had je toch gewaarschuwd**. Instead of **nochtans** (however) they say **toch**, instead of **verwittigen** (tell/warn) **waarschuwen**. The English sentence **It's getting time** is in Holland **Het wordt langzaam/langzamerhand tijd**; in Belgium we say **Het wordt stilaan tijd**. The members of

a city council, the alderman, are called **wethouders** (literally law-holders) in the Netherlands, in Belgium they are still called **schepenen** as in the middle ages (from the German **Schoeffengericht**).

Another phenomenon worth noting is the use of the pronoun of the second person **ge/gij** which is still very common in Belgium, whereas in the Netherlands **je/jij** is opposed to the formal **u** (also written **U** with a capital). In the Netherlands **ge/gij** only occurs in the language of the Church, where it has survived owing to the influence of the 17th century translation of the Bible (**Statenbijbel**), and in very formal and solemn language.

3. PURISMS

I have already stated that the Flemings wanted and still want to oppose French. This has had various consequences. To begin with, in their isolation and lack of contact with the Northern Dutch they have coined words which have never penetrated Holland. The most striking example perhaps is the word **duimspijker**, in North American English thumb tack, which in Holland and in all dialects in Belgium is called **punaise**. Maybe under the influence of German **Fernsprecher** some fifty years ago the puristic neologism **spreekdraad** ('speaking wire') was propagated, but this word has not replaced the usual word **telefoon**. Trade unions, environment and peace movements are called **pressiegroepen** (pressure groups) in Holland; in Belgium these groups are referred to as **drukkingsgroepen** (the Dutch verb **drukken** means to press).

It is not so easy to drive French out of one's mind, however, and so among the purisms that are coined we in fact find some hidden gallicizations. For example, in the Netherlands club and society members have a **bewijs van lidmaatschap** (membership card); in Belgium they have a **lidkaart**. This is a hidden gallicization because it is a literal translation of **carte de membre**. In Holland those members pay their **contributie**, the Belgian **lidgeld** is rather purist. A combination of both phenomena (purism and latent French influence) is the fact that a Belgian board of directors are paid **Zitpenningen** or **zitgeld** (lit. sitting pennies / sitting money – in real English an attendance allowance) whereas in the Netherlands they get **presentiegeld** and in French territory **jetons de présence**.

4. THE MORE RECENT INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH

I offer now some examples of the greater influence of English on Northern than on Southern Dutch. – A small radio one can take with him is called a **portable** in Holland, in Belgium **draagbare radio** or in the French way **portatif**. Dutchmen

use the word **taperecorder** as if they had invented the apparatus themselves; Flemish people say **bandopnemer** (**band** tape; **opnemen** record, lit. to pick up). Moreover they think the compromise some other Dutchmen have made in creating the compound **band-recorder** a bit odd, certainly when they pronounce **band** (a) the English way (e), for there is no such word in English **band-recorder**. Just as in Belgium people formerly translated collocations from French, Dutchmen nowadays (perhaps increasingly) do the same with English expressions. **He didn't make it** becomes **Hij heeft het niet gemaakt**. **She is very busy** is translated into **Ze is erg druk**, whereas this always had been **Ze heeft het erg druk**. In addition to this, Flemish people who participate in the normal evolution of language in our time, are more reserved towards French than Dutchmen. What in Holland-Dutch sports is called **een étape in de Tour de France** has been traditionally **een rit in de Ronde van Frankrijk** in Flanders. When during a soccer match a defender touches the ball before it crosses the line, it is a corner. In such a case Dutch players can say **Hij heeft de bal nog getoucheerd** Flemish players will always say **Hij heeft de bal nog geraakt**. This year the Belgians participate in the final round or pool of the football world championship in Spain. They call this final round **de eindronde**. The Dutchmen have not got as far as the final pool. They use this last word, but they spell **finale poule**. As I read the word in this spelling for the first time (p-o-u-l-e), I wondered if it had to do something with a last chicken. But it was just the English word which has received a French spelling. And that is also the way it is spelled in French sports newspapers!

A spin-drier is mostly called **droger** in Belgium (**droog** dry), in publicity leaflets also **droog-zwierder** (**zwieren** to spin around/to gyrate). This last term could be a translation from German **Trockenschleuder** (**trocken droog** dry, **schleudern zwieren** to spin around). The word **droogzwierder** may have come into usage by translating a German text, the first apparatus of this kind on the Belgium market probably being German. In Holland the machine is called **centrifuge**. This is not French, for in that language it is an **essoreuse** and as far as I know it is not common in English either. When this new utensil came into use Holland apparently preferred a somewhat outlandish sounding name, whereas the Northern part of Belgium chose a normal Dutch word. In our housewives' usage **droger** has superseded **droogzwierder**, which probably could be maintained as a technical term only.

Nevertheless, an absolutist point of view in these matters is not appropriate. Certainly it is

more accurate to say that Holland is rather in the Anglo-Saxon sphere of influence, Belgium more in the Romance sphere. In insurance, total risk and total loss are quite common notions in Holland; in Belgium people say **omnium** and **perte totale**. In our country even English words are pronounced as in France, because we got them from French speaking people in Belgium, who borrowed them from English and pronounced them their own way. Youngsters in Flanders are nowadays less familiar with French than the previous generations. But still they go to a **jazzfestival** – **jazz** pronounced with a French or Dutch **a**, and **festival** with the emphasis on the last syllable; their peers in age across the border attend a **jazz-festival** just like English speaking youngsters. A tennis racket is in Belgium **een racket** (pronounced with a French /a/ and with emphasis on the last syllable). Plastic is **plastiek**. And it is significant that the words **living** and **parking** have become quite common in Belgium just as in France, whereas this is not the case in Holland. In Northern Dutch **living** = **woonkamer**; **parking** = **parkeerplaats**.

The many examples I have mentioned can be considered as illustrative of variety in unity, in the same way as in virtually all languages. Nevertheless, it is probably true that more attention has been and is being paid to this variety than in any other linguistic area. For decades booklets by language purifiers have sold very well in Belgium. And still the norm of Northern Dutch is not realized by the entire population. A lot of Dutch-speaking Belgians are not willing to give up all the characteristics of their own Dutch, although they admit the need for a standard language. The problem is that it does not seem psychologically justifiable to Belgians that gallicisms such as **chauffage** (central heating) lie beyond the norm and are not judged to be standard Dutch whereas a northern Dutch neologism such as **centrifuge** (spin-drier) is claimed to be standard. In Belgium we are supposed to say **verwarming** but not to say **droger**. That a picture that is shown longer than was planned (because of its success) ought to be reannounced as **geprolongeerd**, but not as **verlengd**, does not seem reasonable to many of us. The Dutch speaking people in Belgium are convinced that it is not necessary to follow the Dutch in saying and writing **Het programma wordt gecontinueerd**; they find that it is good enough to say or write **Het programma wordt voortgezet**. When a Belgian tradesman receives a letter from the Netherlands asking: **de emballage te retourneren**, he will certainly do this, but by giving the order **We moeten de verpakking terugzenden**.

Perhaps the notion of norm in these days of small is beautiful and of sociolinguistics has become less relevant. Like the sociolinguist,

we should perhaps only study phenomena and not insist always on norms. If our paper has resulted in creating the impression that the differences between Dutch in the Netherlands and Dutch in Belgium are more significant than you thought at first, it must be pointed out that a certain integration of both parts of the Dutch linguistic area can also be observed. In Belgium, Dutch words are now used which formerly did not belong to its active language, e.g. **leuk** (nice), **meteen** (immediately), **daarnet** (just) and others. On the other hand some Flemish expressions can now be heard in Holland. The future will tell us whether the unifying tendency will persist. It is my conviction that there is only one Dutch language, as there is but one English, one German, one French, but that there will always be variety in unity.

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