

## Review

**Brenda Assendelft:**

***Verfransing onder de loep. Nederlands-Frans taalcontact (1500-1900) vanuit historisch-sociolinguïstisch perspectief***

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The ongoing public debate about the Englishization (or anglicization) of higher education and of the business sector in the Netherlands (Wilkinson & Gabriëls 2021) may benefit from insight into the process of francization that took place in the Low Countries between 1500 and 1900 as described in the recent historical sociolinguistic study *Verfransing onder de loep* ('Francization under the looking glass') by Brenda Assendelft (2023). Of course, today's widespread use of English in higher education and in the business sector in the Netherlands, but also in Flanders, is markedly different from the everyday practices on which French exerted its influence in the Low Countries during the Early and Late Modern periods. Still, this large-scale empirical study of the process of francization is not only interesting as a historical-sociolinguistic study of the past, it may well prove an historical incentive to carefully assess current developments in the area of foreign language influence more generally.

Assendelft's study is unique in that it adopts an empirical and corpus-based approach. The author researched a large historical database for her study: the newly built *Language of Leiden* corpus (*LOL* corpus). Her findings are based on a quantitative analysis of the corpus, which considered three levels of linguistic analysis – morphological, lexical and morphosyntactic –, thus aiming to present an empirically validated understanding of the historical evolution of language contact between Dutch and French.

The book begins with a brief description of the study, its design and corpus. The corpus of about 250.000 words is composed of texts that all originated in Leiden and its surrounding region. That geographical area is the control variable of the study. The advantage of choosing a region as a control variable is that 'region' tends to act as a confounding variable in language contact situations; however, that choice also comes with an obvious disadvantage: it impedes generalization to Dutch in general. The study cannot be said to give a fully reliable picture of the influence of French on Dutch usage in the time period investigated. As the author concedes (Assendelft 2023, 59), regarding French influence, Amsterdam differed from Leiden, for instance, and, surely, Flanders would have shown a different francization profile as well. It is therefore somewhat misleading to state that the aim of the study is to determine to what extent the French language influenced Dutch usage at the morphological, lexical and morphosyntactic levels between 1500 and 1900 (Assendelft 2023, 25).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, on the basis of the data only a claim concerning French influence in the area of Leiden appears warranted.

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<sup>1</sup> Assendelft (2023, 25) writes in the original Dutch: "*Het doel van dit onderzoek is het achterhalen van de daadwerkelijke invloed die het Frans op het Nederlandse taalgebruik heeft gehad op morfologisch, lexicaal en morfosyntactisch niveau tussen 1500 en 1900.*"

The *LOL corpus* is furthermore based on two independent variables: period and social domain. For period, the total span of the corpus of four hundred years is divided into eight periods of fifty years in order to make diachronic comparisons possible and to facilitate insight into how francization evolved. For social domain, seven are selected: ‘academia’, ‘charity’, ‘economy’, ‘literature’, ‘private life’, ‘public opinion’, and ‘religion’. Using domains as independent variables in historical sociolinguistic research is a valid approach as domains are “clusters of social situations typically constrained by a common set of behavioral roles” (Fishman 1972, 452), which also determine the choice of specific language varieties in language contact situations. The seven social domains retained by Assendelft constitute moreover a representative social stratification for the city of Leiden and its surrounding area in the chosen time period. Their selection is convincingly substantiated in the chapter on the historical context of Leiden. Unfortunately, however, the criteria restricting text selection for each domain impose additional limitations on the generalizability of the results. The fact that a domain is for the most part represented by one genre (or category of texts) only impedes generalizability to the whole domain. If the domain of ‘literature’, for instance, only contains the genre of theater plays, can the results truly be considered representative for literature in general? It should be said that there were other literary genres available besides theater plays, even in those time periods where Latin was often used by authors. Indeed, though it is argued that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century academically educated authors wrote in Latin and that literature in Dutch in Leiden was scarce, it is not too difficult to find counterexamples. To name only one important author who wrote in Dutch in Leiden in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Daniel Heinsius (1580-1655), professor of Greek in Leiden, comes to mind. Heinsius published two long odes in Dutch, *Bacchus* and *Christus*, as well as a great collection of poetry, *Nederduytsche poemata* (‘Dutch poems’) (Beheydt 2022). Hence, it would certainly have been possible to collect a more variegated corpus of literary texts than just theater plays, and the social domain of ‘literature’ could have been made more generally representative. The same holds true for other domains. The one-sided selection of minutes of meetings of the university board for ‘academia’ or wills with bequests for ‘charity’ undeniably yielded results that are typical for the language of minutes or bequests, but how representative is such a selection for the whole domain? A more variegated selection of genres in the domains would not only have made the to be analyzed language more representative for each domain but would also have made it possible to fill some of the gaps that exist in the present corpus. For instance, if for ‘public opinion’, apart from newspaper articles also pamphlets would have been selected, this could have yielded data, which now remains missing, for three of the eight subperiods.

Another restriction on the generalizability of the study results is that no attention is paid to disguised or concealed forms of francization in the corpus, such as so-called gallicisms (De Vreese 1899; Muller 1921; Peeters 1930), i.e., literal translations of idiomatic French words and structures that replace original Dutch words and structures. Thus, for instance, in the Flemish variant of Dutch, we find many literal translations of French prepositions that replace native Dutch prepositions. Speakers of Flemish Dutch say and write *zich verwachten aan*, which is the literal translation or *calque* of *'s attendre à* ('to expect') instead of *verwachten* ('to expect') without preposition, or *aan een lage prijs*, *calque* of *à un prix bas* ('for a low price') instead of *tegen een lage prijs* ('for a low price'), etc. Hundreds of comparable gallicisms can be attested in Dutch; however, this major form of French influence is not accounted for in the present study.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the *LOL corpus*, which constitutes the basis for the case studies, has been created with the utmost care, following very strict transcription conventions, and contextualizing each text in clear headers. Also, the author provides clear definitions, which help the reader understand her at times idiosyncratic use of specific terminology (e.g., domain, genre) and their methodological application. In that respect, the *LOL corpus* is exemplary and can also easily and profitably be used in follow-up studies. In *Verfransing onder de loep* ('Francization under the looking glass'), it is first used to study French-origin loan suffixes. Chapter 5, for instance, focuses on loan suffixes across time and social domain, whereas Chapter 6 considers loan suffixes in specialized terms and in words belonging to the general lexicon and investigates the productive integration of loan suffixes into Dutch morphology. Secondly, the corpus is used to study French loanwords in the Dutch lexicon. Chapter 7 focuses on the number of French loanwords per period and social domain, whereas Chapter 8 analyzes the parts of speech the loanwords belong to and seeks to determine their first attestation in the Dutch language. Chapter 9 examines the individual frequency of the lexical loanwords in the corpus, the proportion of specialized terms versus general words, and the lexical integration of the loanwords. Finally, the corpus is used to study, to some degree, the extent of French morphosyntactic influence on Dutch.

The evidence-based investigation of French influence over a long period of time in a well-defined geographical area has certainly yielded interesting results. The descriptive approach shows a stable diachronic increase in the use of loan suffixes from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, that increase is highly influenced by only a small number of loan suffixes and is more marked in the administrative domains ('academy', 'charity', 'economy' and 'religion') and in specialized terms. The suffixes become part of the Dutch morphological system over time. As to the lexical loans, French words – just like

French suffixes – show an increase until the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and demonstrate a comparable distribution over period and social domain as the loan suffixes. Further inspection of the use of French loanwords reveals that the majority of loanwords taken from French are nouns, with adjectives and adverbs amounting to a much smaller share. As most new loanwords were attested for the first time in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this century should be considered as the period in which French had the most influence on Dutch. Interesting also is the finding that loanwords immediately upon borrowing are integrated into Dutch morphology, taking Dutch morphological endings where required. The final analysis chapter examines French morphosyntactic influence on Dutch by focusing on only one pattern: the relative pronouns *dewelke* ('which') and *hetwelk* ('which'). This is a very restricted focus that can hardly be considered as representative for the morphosyntactic influence of French.

All in all, the descriptive analysis of this meticulously built diachronic *Language of Leiden* corpus reveals a reliable, data-based evolution of French influence on Dutch from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in different domains and in a well-defined region. However, it is regrettable that the author has only used descriptive statistics to present her quantitative data and has refrained from applying inferential statistical analyses, with the excuse that "*beschrijvende statistiek heeft als voordeel ten opzichte van geavanceerde statistische methodes dat het minder tijdrovend is en dat er dus meer tijd is om verschillende variabelen te analyseren*" ('descriptive statistics has the advantage that it is less time consuming and hence, leaves more time for the analysis of a larger number of different variables') (Assendelft 2023, 96). This justification is not particularly convincing in the present context. Not only is there a wide selection of statistical packages available today that make inferential statistical analyses no longer time consuming, but inferential analyses would also have rendered the results more reliable and valid. Simple tests, like *Chi square* for instance, would have revealed quite clearly whether the differences noted in Table 6.1 (Assendelft 2023, 131) between low frequency words and high frequency loanwords in the general lexicon and in specialized terminology were significant, to give but one example. In addition, it would have been possible to calculate the regression line for the Type Token Ratio of French loanwords (TTR number of different loanwords (types)/total number of loanwords (tokens)) over the different subperiods revealing significant divergences by *Chi square* in specific subperiods. More refined inferential analyses might also have proved relevant. By means of a two-way Analysis of Variance with Domain and Period as independent variables, it would have been possible to verify whether Domain has a statistically significant influence and whether there is a significant trend over time (longitudinal effect), and with a post-hoc Tukey's HSD it would even have been possible to determine

between which Domains and which Periods differences were significant. In that respect, not performing inferential analyses is a missed opportunity.

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## About the reviewer

Ludo Beheydt is professor emeritus at the *Université catholique de Louvain* (or *UC Louvain*, a Catholic university in French-speaking Belgium). He studied Germanic philology specializing in Dutch linguistics, obtained his PhD – doctorate in Philosophy and Letters – from the *KU Leuven* (or *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*, situated in Dutch-speaking Belgium), and became a full professor at the *UC Louvain*. He has taught courses in Dutch linguistics, foreign language teaching and cultural studies, with a focus on the culture of the Netherlands, and has published widely in those areas. His major publication is a comprehensive study of the language, art, and culture of the Low Countries, *Eén en toch apart. Kunst en cultuur van de Nederlanden* ('One and yet separate. Art and culture of the Low Countries') published in 2002 by the Leuven-based publishing house *Davidfonds* and *Waanders Uitgevers* based in Zwolle (The Netherlands). He has held visiting academic positions at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* ('Amsterdam University') and *Universiteit Leiden* ('Leiden University'). He was awarded the order of *Honorary European Senator* for his contribution to European culture and, in 2014,

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