In the Low Countries there is a long tradition of language planning discussion concerning the convergence of the two polycentric varieties of the language, the northern one from The Netherlands and the southern one from Belgium. For a long time this discussion remained on a rather theoretical level. The sixtyies, though, witnessed the beginning of an uninterrupted series of empirical research on linguistic conversion and diversion. At the same time, in Belgium, we witnessed the start of a very popular stream of language planning initiatives which were to be understood as the conscious effort of (a portion of) the linguistic community to change the linguistic habits of that community both internally and externally in the direction of the variety of Dutch used in the Netherlands.

During the whole 20th century the official establishment in Flanders has always favored the largest possible convergence between the Southern and the Northern language varieties. As a result, this integrational tradition achieved a measure of convergence which is considerably larger than it is in most other polycentric language territories in Europe, both as far as linguistic reality and as far as attitudes is concerned. The bulk of the empirical research on this phenomenon and on the underlying linguistic situation concentrated on the lexicon (vocabulary) and the book under review here has its place in that lexicologic tradition.

The aim of this study is to determine the mutual relationship and evolution of the Dutch vocabulary in Belgium and The Netherlands and is mainly based on an investigation of two lexical fields, viz. clothing and football (soccer) terminology, as they evolved from 1950 through 1990. The data have been gathered in various ways, one being a corpus of written terminology taken from Belgian and Dutch news magazines and some miscellaneous sources (e.g. signs in shop windows), the other one being an attitudinal investigation in two northern (Leiden and Maastricht) and two southern (Leuven and Kortrijk) urban environments. The latter inquiry has been carried out in order to determine whether a possible normative orientation of Belgian Dutch on Dutch from the Netherlands is more explicit from attitudinal data than from real linguistic behavior (p. 1). The working hypothesis is that there may be considerable discrepancies between attitudes and real language usage. Finally, the authors also wanted to analyze the internal structure of Dutch in Belgium by comparing standard language usage with regional linguistic usage (ib.).

The book is divided into 9 chapters. After an Introduction, Chapter 2 (p. 12-29) gives an overview of past sociolinguistic research on Belgian Dutch, more specifically stressing the investigation of particularist and integrationalist tendencies, resulting in divergent or convergent language usage and/or attitudes respectively. Chapter 3 (p. 30-35) explains how the corpus of data was collected and interpreted.

The purpose of chapter 4 (p.36-64) is to clarify methodological concepts. Both the investigation premises and the methodological assumptions are formulated clearly and convincingly. There is a major problem, though, with the mathematical formulae used to formalize the investigation turn outs. The problem is not so much that the method is unusual (which it is) but mainly that it is hard to evaluate. As opposed to more familiar statistical procedures, the average linguist (for whom, according to the introduction, the book is written) cannot be supposed to really understand what this is all about and the linguist writing this review certainly doesn’t. Since the average linguist is not in a position to check the complicated mathematical procedures, he has no way to find out whether the authors’ conclusions are reflecting the real situation or even whether they are plausible. Consequently, he can only take their word for it and that is not the way most of us want to see data treated and handled. This is all the more serious since this book claims it originality from precisely this new methodological approach, which is supposed to generate a more objective, formalized presentation of the amount of convergence and divergence between Northern and Southern Dutch.
The analysis of the results is spread over four chapters. In Chapter 5 »Het externe diachrone perspectief« (the external diachronic perspective, p. 65-85) the change of the mutual relationship between the varieties of Dutch at large is investigated. Chapter 6 »Het interne diachrone perspectief« (p. 86-112) deals with the internal diachronic perspective, i.e. the analysis of language internal (=systematic) factors susceptible of interfering with the linguistic evolution in Belgium and The Netherlands. Chapter 7 »Het synchrone perspectief« (p. 113-132) analyzes the synchronic perspective, whereas chapter 8 »Het attitudinele perspectief« (p. 113-145) details the outcome of the attitudinal investigation. All these chapters have an identical framework: they start with working hypotheses which are subsequently discussed on the basis of the data available and are followed by conclusions, some new hypotheses, and desiderata for further research.

Finally, chapter 9 »Conclusies en consequenties« (p. 146-156) gives an overview of »conclusions and consequences«. It opens listing the reasons why this study is different from and more reliable than similar ones conducted in the past. The main reasons mentioned are that this particular investigation is not based on elicited but on real data and, secondly, the innovating method of quantifying data, meant to solve the traditional problems inherent to this kind of research.

Yet it is precisely this quantifying method which, in my opinion, renders the book’s conclusions hard if not almost impossible to evaluate.

This notwithstanding I want to end this review with a brief summary of the main conclusions:
1. Between 1950 and 1990 the lexical convergence between Belgium and the Netherlands is obvious and has substantially and continuously increased;
2. This convergence is mainly due to a one way development: it is Southern Dutch (in Belgium) which increasingly adapts to the (lexicologic) norm of Northern Dutch (in The Netherlands);
3. The convergence proceeds in both, theoretically conceivable, ways: by taking over »typically Northern« terminology as well as by gradually dropping »typically Southern« expressions, the latter mechanism being more popular than the former;
4. Convergence is not only apparent from a diachronic perspective (i.e. it has constantly been increasing from 1950 onward) but also on a synchronic level: even the most recent data allow for the conclusion that converging with the northern norm is a much stronger tendency than stressing southern peculiarities.

The plausibility of these conclusions suggests that the sophisticated mathematical procedure might be operational after all but, by the same token, that it is actually superfluous!

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Tove Skutnabb-Kangas has been writing on minority language and education policy and practice, and the rights attendant upon it, for some thirty years now. She is, accordingly, a central figure in the field. One may not always agree with her – indeed many do not – but her influence and her arguments have unmistakably influenced, and to some extent, shaped much of the historical and contemporary debates on these issues. Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights? (hereafter, Linguistic Genocide) is in many ways a culmination and collation of her work to date, and demonstrates clearly why her contribution has been, and continues to be so influential.

The book is formidable, not least because it traverses such a wide range of interdisciplinary arguments and concerns. It includes discussion of the links between biodiversity and language diversity, and the complex sociological and sociolinguistic arguments surrounding the interconnections between