

# Language Shift Through Erosion: The Case of the French-Flemish 'Westhoek'

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This paper discusses the consequences of 'language shift through erosion' on the basis of an analysis of the development of the situation in French Flanders. This part of northern France used to be part of Dutch-speaking Flanders until 1678, when it was annexed by the French crown. Although the language shift process started almost immediately it only gained momentum after the French Revolution, as a consequence of a deliberate Frenchification policy and legislation on the part of the French authorities. Recent inquiries and research reveal that we are currently witnessing the ultimate stages of language loss, preceding the complete extinction of Dutch as a native language in France. The final part of the paper attempts to sketch the theoretical language-in-contact framework, breaking down the chronological evolution into diglossic, bilingual and (almost) monolingual phases, taking into account the geographic, social and functional variables by which language shift and loss is characterised.

## Introduction

The overwhelming majority of native speakers of Dutch in Europe lives in either Belgium (6 millions) or in The Netherlands (15 millions). Yet, a small group of them is to be found in northern France, and although language shift has reduced its size dramatically during the last two centuries, it is still common practice to locate the utmost western part of the Romance-Germanic language border in the French 'Département du Nord', between the towns of Graveline and Dunkirk. This paper will focus on the linguistic evolution in this zone of contact between French and Dutch and will mainly concentrate on the so-called 'Westhoek' — the part of France in the 'arrondissements' of Dunkirk (Dutch: Duinkerke; French: Dunkerque) and Hazebroek where Dutch is still spoken.

It is generally accepted that the Romance-Germanic language border in the Netherlands in its present configuration was established some time during the 11th–12th centuries (Gysseling, 1976). It appears to have remained relatively stable ever since, and the cases of language shift that did occur were but rarely a consequence of language border shift proper (Willemyns, 1996).

However important the notion of 'language border' may be, it still is a concept which is very hard to define. As is the case with the related notion of 'dialect border', one might even argue that language borders do not really exist, since obviously language territories are rarely separated by a clear-cut line. Usually, there is some kind of transitional zone, and demarcation lines, therefore, tend to be rather fuzzy. Moreover, it is obvious that in zones of transition a social variable, rather than a geographic one, may be decisive for linguistic 'affiliation'. Dialect geographers, who are very familiar with this particular kind of problem usually cope with it by using what Goossens (1968) calls an 'intuitive consensus', which may differ from one region to another. As far as language borders are

concerned we may have no choice but to proceed in the same way. In the case of French Flanders, there is a general consensus among scholars to consider the isogloss often used in dialect geographic studies as 'the' language border between the Romance and the Germanic dialects in the region (see map in Ryckeboer, 1990).

Up to 1963 the same methodological problem used to exist as far as the language border in Belgium was concerned. In that year the language border was defined by law and eventually laid down in the constitution (1970) and thus made virtually unchangeable. In the Belgian case the notion of 'language border' is used in a sociolinguistic sense, meaning that it separates two regions in which either Dutch or French is the official language, disregarding any possible bilingual communication which may actually occur in the transition zone. From 1970 on, the language border coincided with the border separating the two administrative regions of Belgium, viz. Flanders and Wallonia (Willemyns, 1996).

As far as language shift in border regions is concerned, two essentially different types have to be discerned:

- language shift resulting in a change of the location of the border, meaning either that places which used to be part of the transition zone have, in the course of time, definitely moved into the monolingual zone on either side of the border or that formerly 'monolingual' places have acquired an official bilingual status;
- language shift resulting in 'erosion', meaning that the contact situation has decisively been changed in the course of history although the 'language border' (in the traditional sense) has not changed its course. South Tirol (Egger, 1977), Alsace-Lorraine (Hartweg, 1985; Bister-Broosen, 1996; Stroh, 1993), Brussels (De Vriendt & Willemyns, 1987; Witte & Baetens Beardsmore, 1987) and French Flanders (Pée, 1957) are some of the places where this occurred, and in each and every one of them we witness a partial gallicisation of former Germanic territory.

Political change is a well documented initiator of language shift and is responsible for shift occurring along the western section of the French-Dutch language border in what is now known as French Flanders (Dutch: *Frans-Vlaanderen*; French: *la Flandre française*). Part of what is now the north of France used to be an integral part of the County of Flanders, including such major cities as Lille, Douai, Cambrai, Arras, Calais, and Dunkirk. A centuries-long tug-of-war resulted in a frequent shifting back and forth of parts of this territory between France and the Low Countries. From the 13th century on, major parts of it were gradually integrated into the French language territory (Pée, 1957).

This article starts with an overview of the historic and political events which made this evolution possible, follows with an attempt to sketch the most recent state of affairs, and concludes with some observations on the mechanisms of language shift and loss as they occur in French Flanders.

## Historical Overview

Until the 11th century the border between Germanic and Romance fluctuated and it is, therefore, useless to refer to 'Germanicised' or 'Romanicised' territories

as a 'loss' or 'gain' of either language territory. Only changes having occurred after that time may be considered as such. Even then we have to distinguish, on the one hand, between parts where Dutch disappeared a long time ago, where the language, consequently, is 'dead' (Gysseling, 1976) and, on the other hand, parts where in more recent times Dutch has suffered a loss of function. In the latter parts, French is now used as the language of culture, and as the usual means of social communication, whereas Dutch has only survived in a dialectal form with a very restricted communicative value. In that particular region we have, moreover, to distinguish between communes where even the local Flemish dialect is as good as dead, and others where it has retained some functions within the informal family domain (Ryckeboer, 1977; Ryckeboer & Maeckelberghe, 1987). The particular part of the 'Westhoek' where this occurred is not only gradually becoming smaller, it is also exposed to erosion from within, since only (part of) the older generation still displays an active competence in the local dialect but is no longer able to hand it down to future generations.

Under the reign of the Flemish count Boudewijn II (878–918) the county of Flanders extended from the Zeeland isles to the river Canche in Northern France. The first loss of territory to France occurred in 1180, soon followed by an ongoing, gradual annexation of Flemish territory. Also, as a result of the Treaty of Melun (1226) Flanders lost its political independence and became a fief of France.

Mainly after the defeat and death of Duke Karel de Stoute (Charles the Bold) in 1477, Southern Flanders, as a result of an almost permanent tug-of-war, frequently shifted back and forth between France and the Low Countries. After the abdication of Charles V it became, together with the rest of the Netherlands, part of the Spanish empire of Charles' son, Philip II. From then on the Spaniards gradually lost a considerable part of their possessions in the Low Countries, among them Southern Flanders. As a result of the 'Treaty of Nijmegen' (1678) the French-Flemish territories remained for ever more under French rule (Verbeke, 1973).

It goes without saying that a language border does not change its course every time there is a change of rule. Yet, a slow but continuous shift of that border in a northerly direction has taken place on which I will now elaborate.

### **Language border shift**

The wave of gallicisation that took place in northern France in the 11th–12th century and that led to the very establishment of the language border has been mentioned above. Yet, there was still some shifting back and forth after that: Kales (Calais), which had become part of the Romance language territory was 're-Dutchified' in the 13th century and remained Dutch speaking for quite some time, as is witnessed by the use of Dutch in clerical writing (Gysseling, 1966). We know that also in other parts of what is now the French 'département du Pas-de-Calais', Dutch continued to be used for a long time (Bougard & Gysseling, 1971). It can be safely assumed that in Pas-de-Calais it was the aristocracy, followed by the urban patriciate that took the lead in language shift. In Sint-Omaars (Saint-Omer) it started as early as the 13th century but it was not until the 17th century that French also became the habitual language of the lower

social classes (Pée, 1957). The whole territory west of the river Aa was Frenchified almost completely at the close of the 17th century.

The 'Westhoek' (east of the river Aa) had not been reached by the earlier shift of the language border. When the annexation by France took place it was still monolingually Dutch-speaking (Ryckeboer, 1990: 245), although, of course, it was subject to the same social evolution which accounted for the increasing influence of French in 'Belgian' Flanders (Deneckere, 1954; Willemyns & Van de Craen, 1989). Yet, it was undoubtedly the annexation which was the main instigator of Frenchification, even if its consequences were only felt in reality after the French Revolution (1789), when the use of French was made obligatory in the school system, in local administration and in all official documents (De Jonghe, 1967). The Frenchifying policy of the revolutionary and subsequent Napoleonic governments is well documented for the non-French speaking regions of France, as well as for those annexed or occupied by the French military (Deneckere, 1954). The Jacobin philosophy, that all power had to be concentrated in and to emerge from Paris, could only be effective on a 'one country, one language' basis. Also, it was believed that French was the only language fit to propagate and diffuse the ideals of the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, French had to supplant all national and regional 'idioms', especially (but not exclusively) within the borders of the Republic (De Jonghe, 1967). By 1806 already, the major towns of Dunkirk and Gravelines (Grevelingen) appear to be intensely Frenchified, as can be seen from a linguistic inquiry carried out by Coquebert de Montbret. The same inquiry also reveals that in the 'Westhoek', Dutch was still the habitual language of everyday communication in all but some ten villages (Pée, 1957).

The findings of Coquebert's inquiry constitute the starting point for Table 1, illustrating the evolution of the linguistic situation in a sample of French-Flemish villages up to 1940. Although Table 1 provides important information as to the pace of the Frenchification process, it does not explain the reasons for it. Before an explanation is attempted, a discussion follows of some comments made in the inquiries which provided the data shown in Table 1.

The inquiry by De Coussemaker (1857) proves to be an important source of information, in that he presented school teachers, priests and mayors with a list containing 20 very precise questions. It appears that at that particular moment the 'arrondissements' of Dunkirk and Hazebroek comprised 11 villages, in which less than 5% of the population spoke French, and 16 villages where only 5–10 % of the population did so. De Coussemaker adds an interesting observation on the 'geographical' factor: all villages neighbouring the Belgian border, he says, are exclusively Dutch-speaking; all villages being directly in contact with the southern part of the 'Département du Nord' or the 'Département du Pas-de-Calais' are exclusively French-speaking. He also observed that Dutch was hardly ever used in writing or printing any more, since people mastered only the vernacular and were not able to read standard Dutch, that language having no function in the school system whatsoever, the more so since teachers had been forbidden ('a few years ago') to teach or even use the language.

Thirty-four years later an inquiry by Hovelacque (1891) established that all villages situated in the bilingual area in De Coussemaker's time were now predominantly French-speaking. D.Carnel, a priest and the author of a mono-

Table 1

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5 <sup>1</sup>
Belle	A <sup>3</sup>	- <sup>2</sup>	B	B	C
Berten	A	A	B	A	A
Burburg	-	C	D	D	E
Duinkerke	D	D	D	D/E	E
Gijvelde	A	A	A	A	B
Godewaarsvelde	A	B	A	A	A
Grevelingen	E				
Halewijn	A	D	-	B	-
Hazebroek	A	C	B	B	C
Hondschote	A	A	A	A	B
Houtkerke	A	A	A	A	A
Kassel	A	B	B	B	C
Klein Sinten	A	B	B	D	D
Leffrinkhoeke	A	A	A	A	B
Sint-Omaars	-	D	E		
St.-Winnoksbergen	A	A	A	B	C
Wulverdinge	A	B	A	B	B
Zerkel	A	-	B	B	B
Zuidpene	A	B	B	A	B

1. T1: Coquebert de Montbret (1806); T2: Derode (1844); T3: De Coussemaker (1857); T4: Blanchard (1906) + De Wachter (1908); T5: Pée (1938). An in-depth evaluation of these inquiries is to be found in Pée (1957).
2. No information given means that the village is not mentioned in the particular inquiry.
3. A: Almost exclusively Dutch; B: Mainly Dutch; C: Both languages in use in fairly an equal proportion; D: Mainly French; E: Almost exclusively French. As soon as stage E is reached I refrain from giving further information.

graph on the Flemish dialect of Belle (Bailleul) (Carnel, 1891), informs us that in this particular small town 'in spite of the expansion of education and of their mastery of French, the inhabitants of Belle and surroundings almost exclusively use the vernacular among each other'.

Only a few years later Vermast (1897) reports that of the 250.000 inhabitants of both 'arrondissements' 90,000 are living in 73 'exclusively Dutch' villages and 117,000 in bilingual ones. Ten more villages appear to be exclusively French-speaking.

Fredericq (1897) reports that 'the working class, the petty bourgeoisie and the farmers' spoke nothing but Dutch, but also, that this language was banished from the schools. He also mentions that priests were forced by the government to give their catechism instruction in French, on the penalty of losing their state salary.

On the other hand the local 'rederijkerskamer' (theatre group) of the small village of Eke had been organising Dutch play contests in 1861 and 1874.

In 1906 there was yet another inquiry organised by Blanchard and De Wachtere (Pée, 1957: 24–6) in which they pointed out an additional Frenchification factor: in addition to religious instruction and military service (conscription) in French, there was also the influence of compulsory education. Even children from the lower social classes, who formerly got hardly any school instruction at all, now attended school, and there was no other way of doing this but in French. The authors confirm that the competence to read (Belgian) books written in Dutch had completely vanished.

The most recent data available so far, also the most complete and reliable, are those provided by the Ghent professor and dialectologist, Willem Pée. In order to collect the data for his 'Dialect Atlas of West and French Flanders' (Pée, 1946), he personally visited almost all relevant French-Flemish villages between 1935 and 1939. Apart from having his informants translate 140 sample sentences into the local dialect, he also asked very specific questions as to the local linguistic situation, including the number of speakers as well as the domains in which the two languages were used. Consequently, he was in a position to provide very specific and reliable data for each village mentioned in the atlas. The main conclusion of his synthesis was:

Should industrialisation not be stopped instantly, then my prediction is that, in a rather near future, Dutch will be pushed backward toward the Belgian border, where it may still survive for quite some time in a few border villages. (Pée, 1957: 57)

And since industrialisation was, on the contrary, intensified still ...

## The Present-day Situation

Pée's investigation was the last reliable source of information for the whole of the territory. The most important characteristic of more recent evolution is not so much the shift of the language border, but the erosion of Dutch within its confines. At present the use made of Dutch has become so restricted that in France the language border, in the real sense of the word, has actually ceased to exist (Ryckeboer, 1990). Although this does not mean that Dutch has completely vanished from the 'Westhoek', we do seem to be witnessing one of the ultimate stages of language death (Dorian, 1982), as is revealed in recent inquiries. Although the following data were gathered in only three particular villages, it is generally assumed that they are typical for all the others where Dutch is still in (limited) use (see Table 2).

Monolingual Dutch speakers are completely extinct, and only a very limited number of senior citizens still have Dutch as their habitual tongue. Hence, it is impossible that the mastery of the language, or even its passive knowledge, may be handed down to the following generations.

Information on the domains and functions of Dutch points in the same direction. An investigation among high school students in Hondschote, a village just south of the Belgian border, reveals:

Table 2

<i>Age</i>	<i>Bilingual skills available</i>	<i>Passive knowledge of Dutch</i>
60+	50%	40%
40–60	8–25%	20%
20–40	3–9%	7%
< 20	0%	–

Source: Ryckeboer (1977)

- that Dutch is occasionally used in 10% of the families and that about a third of the students are occasionally confronted with the language;
- that only 3 out of 118 interviewees claim to be as proficient in Dutch as in French, whereas this is apparently still the case with half of their fathers and a third of their mothers;
- that Dutch is no longer used to communicate with other youngsters nor with parents and siblings;
- that 36% of the students' grandparents speak French among each other, 38% use Dutch and 26% both languages;
- that the village pub is the place where Dutch is (relatively) most frequently used. (Ryckeboer & Maeckelberghe, 1987)

The only figure which at least appears to be positive is the one on attitudes. In contrast to 82% of the parents who don't think it worth while to pass on the knowledge of Dutch to the following generations,<sup>2</sup> of the youngsters concerned, 80% say that this is a shame, since they do consider that Dutch ought to be passed on to future generations. However, this kind of attitude is very common during the final stages of language loss and is consequently to be considered a very bad sign, as is demonstrated by Wölck (1973). As far as France in particular is concerned, Martel (as quoted in Giordan, 1992: 201) observes:

all inquiries in the regions concerned reveal a large consensus regarding the informants' opinions that the minority languages are worth learning; yet, can this symbolic acknowledgement suffice to prevent them from being completely banished from everyday communication?

Positive attitudes cannot possibly bring about any significant changes, indeed, because those who express them no longer possess the necessary competence to hand down the language, not even just to keep it alive. The only positive consequence to be expected is an ever-increasing interest taken in Dutch lessons, which for the past few years have been offered in an increasing number of high schools in the region<sup>3</sup> — which do indeed enjoy some popularity, and in the academic curriculum of the Dutch departments of both Lille universities, which also provide teacher training for those wanting to become teachers of Dutch.<sup>4</sup> Since an ever-increasing number of people in French Flanders, both inside and outside the 'Westhoek', are aware of the fact that Dutch is part of their cultural heritage, it is to be expected that this interest will be more or less permanent. This, together with a considerable amount of place and family names may be, in the not distant future, the only remnants of the Dutch past of French Flanders.<sup>5</sup>

## Typological Description of Language Loss in French Flanders

To account for language shift in French Flanders in a typological way, i.e. based on the type of language/speech community we are dealing with, one has to take into account that overall definitions of the concept do not exist in (socio)linguistic literature. Especially in territories where various languages are not geographically demarcated, the obvious thing is to look for an 'idiosyncratic definition' which will not only characterise the situation at hand but will, moreover, be used to distinguish between that one particular situation and all others lacking these characteristics. Gumperz' (1968) well known definition of the 'speech community' as 'any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage' is very useful in this respect.

In such communities linguistic behaviour is based on a clear-cut and rather limited set of rules and social conventions and, consequently, we are in a position to interpret the linguistic behaviour of individuals in terms of their social position and their psycholinguistic intentions. This is very useful especially when dealing with language shift, since the 'linguistic'/'speech' community is a unit in which the members signal social status through the means of, among other things, linguistic communication. 'Wherever the relationship between language choice and rules of social appropriateness can be formalised' Gumperz says, 'they allow us to group relevant linguistic forms into distinct dialects, styles and occupational or other special parlances'; he thus clearly discards the idea that speech communities are supposed to be homogeneous and he explicitly accepts systematic variation within a community: 'Regardless of the social differences among them, the speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to a *shared set of social norms*'.

In communities where various languages are in common use the *shared set of social norms* (e.g. *upward social mobility*) causes and governs language shift. The fact that Gumperz explicitly emphasises that belonging to the same 'speech community' does not necessarily imply that all members display the same competence is extremely important. The extent of the speech community as well as the extent of communicative parallelism depend on the amount of internal interaction. The more interaction between members of a community, the more communicative strategies they will share and this not only accounts for language shift, but also for the speed with which it occasionally proceeds and for the difference in pace which may sometimes be noticed between classes of individuals and territories. According to Hymes (1972): 'A speech community is defined then ... as a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech'.

In this particular sense French Flanders is a distinct speech community, characterised through a specifically (yet changing) organised use of both a Flemish dialect and the French standard language. This particular combination allows us to set apart this community from either

- (a) any other territory where the French standard is used; or
- (b) any other territory where a Flemish dialect is used.



In case (b) the border cannot be anything else but the French/Belgian state border and, consequently, in case (a) the border must be the 'language border'. The latter, however, is much less clear cut than the former, since we have to take into account the transition zone between the monolingual and the bilingual (e.g. diglossic) territory. Every shift of the language border, therefore, must be an expansion of the (French) monolingual territory in a north-easterly direction. Language change by erosion then, means that in the French-Flemish territory an increasing number of the population adopts the same pattern as the one displayed to the southwest of the 'language border'.

Since linguistic situations and patterns change in the course of time, it is obvious that the data characterising the situation just mentioned may change as well. In the 18th and the 19th century a similar diglossic pattern used to exist in (Belgian) Flanders, allowing a certain typological identity to be assumed between the linguistic situations in both French and Belgian Flanders at that time. Consequently, the state border was less a line of linguistic demarcation than it is nowadays. As of today the state border is not only a political frontier but also a boundary dividing two territories with markedly different linguistic behaviour, since in (Belgian) Flanders, French does not play any role in the communication process any more.

The methodological procedure just accounted for allows not only for a clear characterisation of the French-Flemish speech community, it also explains why such a community may comprise typologically different 'types' (smaller communities within one bigger community, so to speak). Based on the diglossic behaviour in the 'private' and 'public' domains, four different types may be distinguished:

In the 17th century a Dutch standard language in the present-day sense obviously did not exist. However, we may assume that even then there used to exist some stylistic differentiation between a more and a less formal variety. The former is here referred to as 'Dutch', the latter as 'Flemish'.

These four types do exist or used to exist in French Flanders, either as the characterisation of the linguistic behaviour of individuals or of more or less homogeneous territories. Type 1 is characterised by a diglossic, Types 2 and 3 by a bilingual and Type 4 by a monolingual situation. Adding a chronological and a geographical dimension, on the basis of the information given earlier, allows for the drawing of a chart of 'typological' shift, i.e. of the geographic and chronological spread of language shift (Frenchification). Three zones are to be distinguished :

**Table 3**

	<i>Private</i>	<i>Public</i>
Type 1	Flemish	Dutch
Type 2	Flemish	French
Type 3	Flemish + French	French
Type 4	French	French

- *Zone A*: the part west of the present 'language border', i.e. west of the river Aa;
- *Zone B*: the urban environments in the 'Westhoek';
- *Zone C*: the rural environments in the 'Westhoek'.

The situation at four different moments in time is rendered as follows:

- *Phase a*: prior to the annexation of the 'Westhoek' (= prior to 1678);
- *Phase b*: shortly after the annexation of the 'Westhoek' (= after 1678);
- *Phase c*: the 19th century;
- *Phase d*: the 20th century.

**Table 4**

		<i>Zone A</i>	<i>Zone B</i>	<i>Zone C</i>
Type 1	a	- <sup>1</sup>	+	+
	b	-	-	+
	c	-	-	-
	d	-	-	-
Type 2	a	-	-	-
	b	-	+	-
	c	-	-	+
	d	-	-	-
Type 3	a	+	-	-
	b	+	-	-
	c	-	+	-
	d	-	-	+
Type 4	a	-	-	-
	b	-	-	-
	c	+	-	-
	d	+	+	-/+ <sup>2</sup>

1 '+' means that the diglossic, bilingual or monolingual characteristics of the relevant type mentioned above is/was still in existence, '-' means that it is not.

2 As far as Phase d is concerned Zone C has to be subdivided. In most cases we are in the presence of type 4, yet in some villages (near the Belgian border, Ryckeboer, 1977) a type 3-ish situation may still be discerned.

## Summary

The Frenchification of the territory outside the 'Westhoek' is the consequence — in some cases belated — of a 'rearrangement' of the Romance and Germanic language territory in a European zone of contact, of which French Flanders was only a part. It is a process that lasted for centuries, in which both language-families made gains and losses, and has finally generated a rather clear and stable, linear language border. Frenchification has been initiated by political events which have disconnected parts of Flanders from the 'motherland'. Consequently,

contact has been lost in a number of domains, of which language is probably the most spectacular one. Through annexation by France, the language variety in use in these parts had become 'roofless' (in the sense of Kloss, 1976) causing functional as well as structural loss<sup>6</sup> (Willemyns, 1995) and, hence, its communicative value was decisively reduced.

Theoretically, a language can survive for a long time even under the circumstances just mentioned. Subsequent extralinguistic factors, though, may be the prelude to almost complete extinction. Conscious discrimination through linguistic legislation is one of them. Another is growing industrialisation and a considerable internal migration (in both directions) which annihilates the linguistic homogeneity of the region and, consequently, the useability of the minority language. 'Social integration' took care of the rest: mastery and usage of the majority language appear to be so indispensable for upward social mobility (and social life in general) that they easily overcome solidarity factors such as cultural and linguistic loyalty.

The combination of all these factors hardly ever allows for more than a short transitional period of bilingualism and/or diglossia. The minority language, structurally and functionally impoverished and no longer supported by innovating 'injections' from a genetically related standard language, stands no chance against the domestic majority language and, thus, gradually vanishes.

There is very little to be expected from 'external support' (Wood, 1980) offered by Belgium and The Netherlands. Support measures as recently proposed by Nelde *et al.* (1991) on behalf of the German-speaking minority in Hungary are very unlikely to succeed, even less so if the language loss process has reached the final stage we witness in the 'Westhoek'. The only lasting consequence of the cultural heritage in these parts may lie in the field of foreign language acquisition and mastery: since Dutch is now again available as a subject in French schools, and since also a considerable number of private Dutch classes have emerged during recent decades, it may be assumed that French Flanders will produce more students of Dutch than other regions of France, where it is not part of the cultural heritage. In the foreseeable future this may be the only remnant of the Dutch past of that particular part of France.

## Notes

1. Grégoire, during the debate in the National Convention: 'l'unité de l'idiome est une partie intégrante de la révolution' (language unity is an inextricable part of the revolution) (Guillaume, 1891-97, III, 348ff).
2. This is the mechanism, labelled 'language suicide' by Denison: '... when multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low-prestige language variety ... they may be said to "commit suicide"' (Denison 1977: 21).
3. There are only two primary schools (in Bailleul and Wervicq-Sud) where Dutch lessons are part of the official lesson plan (KFV-mededelingen 22 (1994) 2: 11).
4. Apart from the curriculum in the state high schools there are currently 38 courses with 25 teachers in 15 villages, organised by the 'Komitee voor Frans-Vlaanderen', a private organisation dedicated to the advancement of the Dutch language and culture in French Flanders (KFV-mededelingen 22 (1994) 1: 8).
5. 'Radio Uylenspiegel' is a private radio station trying to strengthen this sense of cultural heritage. For some 100 hours a week it broadcasts regional news and cultural

programs in both Dutch and French, as well as Dutch courses for speakers of French (KFFVmededelingen 22 (1994) 3: 26).

6. The purely linguistic importance of this relict dialect is not discussed here. It is analysed in, among others, Vanacker (1967) and Ryckeboer (1990).

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