

LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Introduction

Language is and always has been such a minor issue in the Netherlands that there is no mentioning of any national language in the Dutch Constitution. There never has been any serious discussion about the nature of the national language. It was self-evident that Dutch should be the national language. This may explain why language policy is not a very popular topic in the Netherlands. In Belgium where there are three national languages, French, Dutch and German, and where there have been and still are violent language disputes between French speaking and Dutch speaking communities and politicians language policy is one of the most frequently debated political topics.

This paper deals with the Netherlandish language policy. We only present a short overview of the Belgian language laws here, since in a way they can be considered a consequence of the Netherlandish language policy King William I pursued when he ruled over the extended Netherlands of which what is called Belgium now was a part between 1815 and 1830.

The first initiatives: France

Real language policy requires an authority who has the power to develop a policy and implement it. So usually language policy is conducted by a central government; in most cases a national government. In addition, the need for a language policy is only felt when a central government wants to communicate with its citizens directly or when the government wants to show respect for the rights of its citizens.

No wonder that the first ideas about a national language policy came up shortly after the French Revolution of 1789. France was already a centralized country, with a central royal court and government in or nearby Paris long before the First French Republic (1792–1804). However, there was no need for this regal administration to communicate directly with its subjects. It was enough to send orders to the intermediate stages of regional and local nobility, who subsequently commanded their subjects using the local ‘*patois*’. It was only after the French Revolution that the need for a national language and therefore for a language policy was felt. From that moment on subjects became citizens with their rights. Or as Bertrand Barrère, member of the Committee of Public Safety, put it in 1793: ‘The monarchy had good reasons to resemble the Tower of Babel. However, in a democracy it is cheating the citizens to keep them ignorant of the national language and to control the power’ (Hamans 2015: 59). A year later the famous Abbé Grégoire presented his report about the linguistic diversity of France and the need to promote French as a common medium of communication to the National French Convention. His detailed research showed that only a small percentage of the French population knew French. The majority spoke other languages or dialects which were often so far remote from ‘standard French’ that they hardly could communicate with people from other regions or with the authorities. Since the French Revolution propagated the idea of a national citizenship with equal rights for all former subjects the need for a uniform language for all was felt. So, a national language policy was formulated, which consisted of two elements: the radical eradication of all dialects and other languages on French soil and at the same time the imposition of the national language French upon all citizens of the republic. This ideological stance remained the linguistic and educational program for France for the next two centuries (Hamans 2015: 60).

Republic of the Seven United Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the situation was different. Till the French occupation of 1795 there was no powerful central government. From the mid-16th century the Netherlands was a republic, the so-called Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, also known as the Republic of the Seven United Provinces. Actually, this republic was a confederation of seven ‘provinces’, which all had their own administration and own regional ‘*Staten*’, a kind of provincial or regional council in which representatives of the Commons, representing the cities, and the Nobility took the decisions. In these regions, the people spoke their own dialects of Dutch and Frisian. There was not yet a standard language.

Although the seven regions remained sovereign, there existed a highest authority in the Republic the ‘*Staten-Generaal*’, a council formed by representatives of the *Staten* of the seven ‘provinces’. However, the power of this council remained lim-

ited because of the sovereignty of the 'provinces' and was mainly focused on a common foreign policy.

Because of this lack of central authority and national cohesion there was no official interest in language, which does not mean that nobody in the Netherlands showed any interest in the Dutch language. Almost immediately after the decline of Latin as the dominant language and the rise of the vernaculars which took place in the 16th century, there were scholars, savants, mathematicians, lawyers, ministers, schoolmasters, printers and even merchants who called for purification of the vernacular and for language building. Since Latin has been in use as language of administration and science, the Dutch dialects missed the capacity needed for these purposes. In addition, the vernaculars had been neglected according to these dilettantes and therefore should be purified. In 1584 the first Dutch grammar appeared, *Twe-spraeck van de Nederduitsche Letterkunst*, 'Dialogue about the Dutch Grammar', which aimed at a glorification of the Dutch language by purification and language care. The author, Hendrik Laurensz. Spiegel, tried to achieve his goals by formulating grammar rules, cultivating the language, elimination of loanwords and regulation of the orthography. (Van der Wal & van Bree 1992: 183–188). In this way and through the increasing contacts between the different regions gradually a common language grew out of the different dialects. However, only a very small group of people were well versed in this variety. (Van der Wal & Van Bree 1992: 198).

The 17th century showed a similar picture: language enthusiasts who cared about their language proposed that one should follow the example of the great Dutch poets and authors in order to perfect the mother tongue (Van der Wal & van Bree 1992: 221). However, the 17th century also showed a more or less official initiative to standardize the language. This was the Bible translation, the so called '*Statenvertaling*' (1637), 'council translation'.

After the rebellion against the Spanish crown, the Netherlands separated from the Habsburg Spanish kingdom and became a protestant country. Since there was no good Calvinist Dutch translation of the Bible available, the Dutch protestant churches commissioned a translation. For this translation, a committee of translators and another committee of reviewers were formed, that discussed which features from which Dutch dialects should be chosen in order to be understood in the whole Republic. Because the publication of this translation was only possible with permission of the *Staten-Generaal*, which permission is mentioned explicitly in a special introduction, this translation became known as the *Statenvertaling*. (Nauta 1937: 12/3)

Since it was the conscious intention of the translators and reviewers to build a kind of a standard or at least mutually intelligible language, one may describe their intentions and activities as a form of language policy. However, the translation was a private initiative. It was only since the churches needed financial support and permission to publish the result that the authorities got involved in it. However, without formulating any Dutch language policy.

Language care also remained a matter of private initiative in the 18th century. Again, ministers, poets, university professors, Latin teachers and scholars, school-teachers, boarding school proprietors, merchants, local authorities, language lovers and amateur linguists discussed aspects of the growing Dutch standard language. They tried to improve the language, to purify it, to regulate it, to standardize it and to formulate standards which the language had to meet and rules which the language users should follow. One of the heavily discussed aspects was the orthography of Dutch, another was the gender of substantives, which had already disappeared completely in the dialects of the central and northern provinces, but which was an important feature of a full-fledged and respectable language, according to most of these people who took interest in their mother tongue. (Van der Wal & Van Bree 1992: 233)

French occupation

In 1795 French troops, together with battalions of Dutch liberals occupied the Republic and installed a new government the ‘*Bataafse Republiek*’ (1795–1801), Batavian Republic, followed by the ‘*Bataafse Gemenebest*’ (1801–1806), Batavian Commonwealth. This is the first central Dutch government, albeit under French supervision. The new government realized that in a country where so little people understood the supraregional ‘common’ language and where there also were no official standards the language user could follow; language should become a matter which deserved attention from the authorities. Therefore, the Minister of Education, Van der Palm, commissioned a system of spelling rules and a grammar. However, there were no well-educated linguists, who could take on this task. That is why Van der Palm approached two dilettantes, the ministers Siegenbeek and Weiland, in 1801. Van der Wal and Van Bree (1992: 287/8) suggest that ministers have a professional interest in language since they have to preach regularly. Be that as it is, Siegenbeek published a Dutch spelling system in 1804 (Rutten 2016: 14), which remained the official Dutch spelling till 1869 (Noordegraaf 2016: 19). Weiland published his grammar in 1805 (Noordegraaf 2016: 18). Although Siegenbeek has become the first professor of Dutch at Leiden University in the meantime he never became a professional linguist. He specialized in eloquence and rhetoric and taught to future ministers and criminal lawyers mainly. That is why he and Weiland looked for a good example, which they found in the works of a well-known German scholar, Johann Christoff Adelung. “Both refer to Adelung repeatedly. Weiland’s grammar, which can be considered as a neat adaptation of Adelung’s *Umständliches Lehrgebäude* (1782), was sanctioned by the government and compellingly prescribed. (...) It is obvious that both Weiland and Siegenbeek also made use of Adelung’s *Deutsche Sprachlehre: Zum Gebrauche der Schulen in den Königl. Preuss. Landen* (1781)”. (Noordegraaf 1990: 716).

Weiland's grammar, '*Nederduitsche Spraakkunst*', is a prescriptive grammar, as most of the grammars of his days. This is the only prescriptive grammar, that ever has been produced on behalf of a Dutch government. It was not until the end of the 20th century, 1984, that a new grammar of Dutch was published, '*Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst*', 'ANS', 'General Dutch Grammar', with the support of the Dutch and Belgian governments and of the Nederlandse Taalunie, 'Dutch Language Union', the Flemish-Dutch umbrella organization for the promotion of Dutch, which was founded in 1980. This grammar is a descriptive grammar.

Whereas grammar hardly became a topic in the political discussions, the Dutch orthography remained a matter of official attention and care after the first and hardly successful introduction of an official orthography in 1804. We will come back to this later.

In 1806 the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was annoyed at the slow way in which the Dutch government carried out the modernization required by him. That is why he dissolved the Batavian Commonwealth, installed a first Dutch kingdom and appointed his younger brother Lodewijk, Louis, king. This king Lodewijk Napoleon, as he was called in the Netherlands, had a firm interest in the language of his new patria and was also influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Therefore, he was open to requests of groups which were disadvantaged. This he showed clearly when a group of progressive Jews approached him.

In 1796 the new government, influenced by the principles of the French Revolution, granted civil rights to all inhabitants of the Batavian Republic for the first time. This implied that also Jews received equal rights, which can be seen as a starting point of the political emancipation of the Dutch Jews. This process of emancipation led to a struggle against the 'Jewish language', Yiddish, the mother tongue of most poor Jews in the Netherlands.

A group of assimilated, liberal and well-educated Jews, organized in a men's club called Felix Liberate, 'Fortunately thanks to the Freedom', promoted the idea that the Dutch Jews should learn and speak Dutch instead of Yiddish in order to emancipate fully. The ideological background of the members of Felix Liberate was that of the French Revolution and the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment (Bloemgarten 1967). It was due to their efforts that a draft produced by members of Felix Liberate became accepted as equal rights law in 1796. A similar approach was followed in 1806, when members of Felix Liberate offered King Louis a memorandum entitled *Recherches sur l'état des Juifs en Hollande et moyens provisoires de le réformer* 'Research on the situation of the Jews in Holland and provisional ways of reforming this'. One of the main points of this report was that the lack of mastery of the Dutch language was a serious handicap for many Jews to integrate in the Dutch society and to make full use of their civil rights. So, the use of Yiddish should be discouraged and the teaching of Yiddish should be replaced by the teaching of Dutch (Boekholt 2006: 116). The boards of different synagogues opposed this proposal,

since their aim was not integration into the Dutch society but keeping their community and thus their Jewish faith pure, which led to a bitter struggle within the Dutch Jewish community. Both sides published pamphlets in which they insulted and denounced each other.

However, King Louis felt convinced by the argument that the Jewish religious teachers who often came from Poland or Germany and thus did not have much understanding and knowledge of Dutch and therefore used Yiddish as language of education, did not produce young Dutchmen but ‘petits Polonais ou Allemands’, ‘little Poles or Germans’, as the memorandum claimed. That is why he followed the suggestions of Felix Liberate and issued a decree on 10 July 1809 in which he banned the teaching of Yiddish in favor of Dutch and demanded that the teaching material and the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, should be in Dutch (Boekholt 2006: 117, Michman (1995: 174) & Zweers (2003: 34).

However, Louis’ royal decree was not very successful. Because of tensions with his brother, the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, Louis had to resign. As a result, the first Dutch kingdom was abolished and the Netherlands became a part of France. So a separate Dutch legislation ceased to exist. The boards of the synagogues seized the opportunity to stop the translation project of the Hebrew Bible (Beem 1954: 132) and simply continued their old practices of using Yiddish in school and synagogue. It was not till the new Dutch King, Willem I, banned Yiddish from school and synagogue in 1817 that Yiddish started to be replaced by Dutch among the Dutch Jewry (Beem 1998: 12 & Boekholt & De Booy 1987: 141/2).

Kingdom of the ‘extended Netherlands’

After the French were expelled and Napoleon finally defeated the Congress of Vienna decided to install an ‘extended Dutch Kingdom’, which not only covered the old Republic of the Seven United Netherlands but also the Southern Netherlands, which is now Belgium. The official name of this country became ‘The United Kingdom of the Netherlands’. This new country was no longer monolingual Dutch. In the Southern part French was the dominant language, although French was only the language of an elite in Flanders, Brabant and Limburg. The majority in these provinces¹ spoke Dutch dialects. In the south-eastern part, also German was spoken.

Therefore, king Willem I had to introduce a language policy, actually it was his minister of Justice, Cornelis van Manen who did this. For the Southern Netherlands, this new policy meant a big change. These provinces had been an integral part of France for twenty years and the French language policy, which aimed, as we have seen before, at the radical eradication of all dialects and other languages on French

¹ Together these Dutch speaking provinces are often called Flanders.

soil and at the same time the imposition of the national language French upon all citizens of France, had been implemented consistently. Van Maanen just aimed at the opposite. Dutch should become the national language. In those regions where the vernacular was a Dutch dialect Dutch should be implemented as the official language immediately. In regions where French or German, or their dialects, were spoken Dutch should be introduced gradually in order to become the official language in future (Wils: 1977: 81). In 1814 already Willem I announced that he would take measures to regulate language use in court and administration. The use of Dutch in civil records was accepted immediately. However, it took him and van Maanen five years to issue a real language policy. The main principles of this 1819 language policy were that the language of the central government should be Dutch. Local governments should use the language spoken by the majority of their citizens. Where this was Dutch or a Dutch dialect, the language of administration should be Dutch. The same applied to judicature and education. Where the inhabitants spoke French or German, or a dialect of these languages, the language of administration, etcetera remained French or German. For the French and German speaking parts of the Southern Netherlands almost nothing changed, except that civil servants had to learn Dutch to communicate with the central government.

However, in the 'Flemish' part the situation changed dramatically. There the elite used French and so the language of administration, court, media and secondary education was French. Willem's language policy banned French from these regions and thus also from these areas of social life, except when the use of French was necessary, for instance when a civil servant's mastery of Dutch was too limited. Civil servants, lawyers and teachers were forced to speak Dutch. Those who had no or only a limited knowledge of the new national language were allowed still to use French for a transition period of four years, till 1823 (Wils 1977: 81–84 & Kromhout 2008: 29–30; see also Blauwkuip 1920 and De Jonghe 1967). Although this policy was rather successful (Vosters 2010), it was felt as a language coercion, especially by groups of French speaking lawyers, who were active in Brussels and the Flemish speaking part of the Southern Netherlands. Their opposition against the Dutch language policy led to social unrest, especially in Brussels. That is why Willem eased the demands of his language policy. In 1829 first some French speaking lawyers in Brussels got permission to plead in French, even when their clients were Dutch speaking. According to these lawyers French was the language of culture, of education, of logic, of enlightenment and of course of law. So, it was impossible for them to do their job properly in another language than French. This concession of Van Maanen and Willem did not help very much. Some months later Willem took a second step towards his opponents: all French speaking citizens were allowed to make up acts and deeds in French everywhere in the country. So also in those regions where Dutch was the main language. This did not work either. Social unrest and tensions remained. Finally, Willem gave up the language coercion and allowed

the people in Flanders to be defended by a French speaking lawyer in court, to draft their deeds in French or to use French in their communication with the government. French became the official language in Wallonia. So instead of language coercion king Willem I now introduced a principle of language freedom. Apparently, it was too late: 25 August 1830 the Be-Igian Revolution started. Belgium became independent on 4 October 1830 (Wils 1977: 84–86 & Kromhout 2000: 31–33). The Netherlands went on with the territory it still comprises.

Although it was not Willem's language policy which was the main cause of the revolution, the language issue became symbolic. One of the first actions that was taken by the revolutionary committee was the abolition of the language policy. French became the official language of the new Belgian government and of the armed forces. For all the rest, there was language freedom, which implied that the elites in the regional and local governments introduced French as the only means of communication in administration and secondary education in the whole country. Magistrates and lawyers decided that French would become the only language they used in court, in Wallonia and Brussels as well as in Flanders

Dutch in Belgium

Belgium is known as the country of language conflicts. Much has been written about these conflicts and since this contribution concentrates on language policy in the Netherlands only a brief review of the conflicts and the outcome thereof will be presented here. For a more detailed and recent overview see Witte and Van Velthoven (2010).

The language border between Germanic and Romance languages, in particular between Dutch and French, now runs through Belgium. However, that was different in earlier times. The language border was more to the south. Due to the political and especially to the cultural influence of France the language border moved to the North. For instance, a French city such as Dunkirk, Dunkerque in French and Duinkerke(n) in Dutch, only became a francophone city in the 18th century (see for the shift of the language border Pée (1957) and Gyseling (1976)).

The influence of French did not stop at the language border. Because of the prestige of French, the upper classes of the neighboring region of Flanders started to speak French, whereas the lower classes still used a Dutch dialect, which is a classic example of diglossia with French as the prestigious variety and the Dutch vernacular as the lower one. Especially in Brussels, the administrative center and the seat of the court, this caused troubles. Brussels is in the middle of a Dutch speaking area, however the main and most prestigious language in the city was and still is French.

The two decades of the French annexation of Belgium, from 1794 till 1813, implied a hegemony of French over Dutch, whereas the following period of the United

Kingdom of the Netherlands just resulted in the opposite. In this way, the seeds of an ongoing conflict were sown.

After the Belgian independence and the official freedom of language choice, except for the government and the army, where French was the only accepted language, French became so dominant that a *Vlaamse Beweging*, ‘Flemish Movement’, came up, led by people who had received their education and training in the Netherlands or had made a career in the period of the United Kingdom. The main figure in this movement was Jan Frans Willems (1793–1846). An important moment in the protests of the Flemish Movement was the ‘*pettitionnement*’, ‘petition’, presented to the government in 1840, in which prominent figures from Flanders, mainly literary people, asked for the recognition of their language in education, administration and court in Flanders. The francophone prime minister Rogier answered that a monolingual, French, Belgium was a political necessity (Van der Sijs & Willemijns 2009: 279). This did not convince the adherents of the Flemish Movement and so they continued their fight for recognition and equal rights. In 1866 a coalition of Flemish political parties won the local elections in Antwerp and decided that Dutch should be the language of administration in this city.

However, on a national level French remained the only language, which resulted in absurd court cases such as the case of Jan Coucke and Pieter Goethals, who were accused of the murder of a widow. The two accused men were Flemish and had only a very restricted knowledge of French. Nevertheless, the whole court trial took place in French. Even their lawyers were French-speaking. Coucke and Goethals were convicted and beheaded. A year later it turned out that the two were innocent. (Van Herreweghe 2010). In 1872 Jozef Schoep, a monolingual worker from St. Jans-Molenbeek, now Brussels, wanted to declare the birth of his son. Since he only knew Dutch, actually only a Flemish dialect, he wanted to fulfill his duty in Dutch, which turned out to be impossible. He even got a fine for it. The court sentenced him to a fine of 50 francs (Fredericq 1906–1909 1: 110–116). This incident sparked much commotion. Tens of thousands took through the streets. Parliament and government realized that something should be done. The first language law, the law Coremans, was accepted in 1793, albeit after long and bitter disputes. This law only regulated the use of language in criminal proceedings in Flanders. So other laws on language in administration and secondary education and in other parts of the country still had to follow, which finally resulted in the *Gelijkheidswet*, ‘Law of Equality’, of 1898. (Fredericq 1906–1909 2: 194–218 and Van der Sijs & Willemijns 2009: 280–282). This law stated that next to French Dutch was an official language of Belgium.

However, this was not the end of the language conflicts, since the law did not make an end to the Frenchification of Flemish social life. As long as the elites in Flanders spoke French and had the right to claim a special position, which usually meant a priority position, for their language, the advance of French could not be

stopped. Officially French and Dutch were on equal footing, socially French was still the dominant language. In addition, the majority of people in Flanders had no or hardly any mastery of French and so were not able to make full use of their civil rights. The Flemish Movement continued. Unfortunately, the conflicts were not restricted to language matters any longer, since the Roman Catholic hierarchy took an anti-Flemish position in the disputes. This was due to a law issued in 1910 that tried to promote Dutch in secondary education in Flanders. Since a fair deal of these schools were Roman Catholic schools and thus fell under the mandate of the church, the Roman Catholic church got involved in the language conflicts. The higher clergy and the episcopate were all French-speaking, being part of the Belgian elite. The leader of the Belgian Roman Catholic church, cardinal Mercier, even said in 1906 that Dutch never could become a language of science and therefore also not a language of higher education.

In this way, the emancipation of Dutch in Flanders became a political issue that divided not only French and Dutch speaking communities but also clericals and anti-clericals, which made the conflicts only deeper. This resulted in a very problematic situation during World War I. A great part of Flanders was occupied by the Germans, who were willing to help their Germanic brothers. Some Flemish activists were less interested in national freedom than in language freedom and therefore cooperated or collaborated, as others would call their behavior, with the Germans.

It was the initiative of the great Flemish socialist Camiel Huysmans (1871–1968) who found a way out. Huysmans (Hunin 1999) was not only the leader of the regional Flemish socialist groups, but being a real internationalist – he used to be the secretary-general of the Second International between 1905 and 1922 – and fluent in French, he also used his position and influence to convince his French speaking colleague-socialists to accept a compromise, the so called *Compromis des Belges* (1929) ‘Compromise of the Belgians’ (Van der Sijs & Willemijns 2009: 282). This compromise introduced a new principle in the Belgian language policy: each language community got the right to organize its own language matters. From this position to the territoriality principle², which became the basis for the later solution of the language conflicts and of the federalization of Belgium is only one, big, step. The territoriality principle, which is opposed to the personality principle, says that the place where citizens live determines which language should be used in official communications. So in Flanders Dutch, in Wallonia French (Willemijns 2013: 20).

This principle was introduced by the language laws of the years 1932–1935 and replaced the personality principle, which says that it is the individual who decides

² See about the territoriality principle as a by-product of linguistic justice Van Parijs (2011, 133–205). Van Parijs argues in favor a national territoriality principle to defend the rights of national languages in their fight with the new European and even global *lingua franca*, English, which promotion he advocates.

which language to use. It is the government that must guarantee that all services are available in all official languages everywhere in the country (Willemys 2013: 20). This principle offered the opportunity to Flemish people who preferred French to use French and to request to be addressed in French. Due to this principle French still kept a dominant social position in Flanders.

For some parts the new principle did not work, for instance for the bilingual city of Brussels and the surrounding municipalities. This of course was a starting point for new conflicts. Another problem was the status of the Roman Catholic University of Leuven. Leuven is a city in the Dutch speaking part of the country, however, the language of education at the university was primarily French. This led to a student revolt in 1968. The final result was a change of the Belgian Constitution (1970). Now Belgium became a federation of three monolingual entities, the French speaking territory, the Dutch speaking part and a German speaking, plus a bilingual city: Brussels. The implementation of the new constitution and the territorial principle turned out to be a very complicated business, which led to consecutive changes of the constitution (1980, 1988 and 1993) (Van der Sijs & Willemys 2009: 284–287). The federalization of Belgium which started as a matter of emancipatory language rights now turned into a striving for autonomy, which falls out of the scope of this contribution.

Interlude: orthography

After the first introduction of an official spelling in 1804, the so called Spelling Siegenbeek, the regulation of the Dutch orthography remained a state matter and in a way thus a matter of language policy. That is the reason why the recent history of the Dutch orthography is discussed briefly here (for a detailed overview see Molewijk 1992 and Booij a.o. 1979: 33–57).

It is easy to understand why governments show interest in the spelling of the official language: the government and its civil servants need rules and norms for their communications and in addition education requires a system with clear rules.

That is why the Spelling Siegenbeek remained the official Dutch orthography till 1869, although some of its rules and choices were highly disputed by a few adversaries of the system or of the person Siegenbeek. In Belgium, the Spelling Siegenbeek became associated with the former Netherlandish government. Therefore, the Belgian government wrote out a competition for a new and non-Netherlandish spelling system. The result was not very positive. Hence Jan Frans Willems, the foreman of the Flemish movement and chair of the committee which was asked to evaluate the newly proposed systems, developed an own spelling system. However, it differed only slightly from Siegenbeek's orthography. This spelling system became known as the Willems-spelling or the Commissiespelling. It was introduced officially in 1844 (Van der Sijs & Willems 2009: 280).

Although the regulation of the orthography was a matter of state, the next initiative came from private scholars, the editors of the planned complete dictionary of the Dutch language, De Vries and Te Winkel. As in many Western-European countries this period was the time of big national dictionary projects. It was thought that it was a matter of national pride to provide the national standard language with a huge inventory of all the lexical material available in this language or in the earlier stages of this language. The dictionary could show how old, venerable and sublime the language was. De Vries and his collaborator Te Winkel undertook this work for Dutch on behalf of a group of joint Flemish and Dutch scholars.

However, since there was a small discrepancy between the official Belgian Commissiespelling and the Dutch Siegenbeek system and since the Dutch opponents of the Siegenbeekspelling still used their own system(s), there was a need for a uniform spelling for the organization of the planned, voluminous dictionary. Therefore, Te Winkel published *De grondbeginselen der Nederlandse spelling* ‘The basic principles for the spelling of Dutch’ in 1863. In this book, which was soon followed by a wordlist comprising a large portion of the current vocabulary of Dutch with all the accepted spellings (1866), he formulated for the first time the fundamentals of the Dutch spelling system. These were, in modern terms, a phonological principle – write the ‘educated’ sounds as you hear them –, a morphological principle – keep the written form of a part of a word constantly the same – and an etymological principle – try to show the history of a word in its written form.

The first principle led to an alphabetical system, in which letters symbolize phonemes. The second principle becomes for instance visible in word forms with final devoicing, such as *paard* ‘horse’ with a final letter *d*, because of the plural *paarden*. The third principle is responsible for the difference between e.g. the symbols *ei* and *ij* which both represent the same diphthong [eɪ], the *ij* representing an original \bar{i} , whereas *ei* may come from different sources, one being *eyi*.

This new system, that did not mean an essential break with the Spelling Siegenbeek, was introduced in Belgium almost immediately, in 1864. In the Netherlands, it took some more time. In 1869 the government stopped the obligation to use the Spelling Siegenbeek, but only in 1883 the new spelling, called ‘De Vries en Te Winkel’, became official.

‘De Vries en Te Winkel’ remained the official spelling for many years, although educators opposed against the system heavily. Especially a group of educational activists under the lead of the linguist Kollewijn suggested to simplify the Dutch spelling. In a famous article published in 1891 Kollewijn suggested to give up most of the etymological differences represented in the spelling and in addition the relics of the case system, which had disappeared from the spoken languages already centuries ago. Kollewijn was a follower of the similar German school of Rudolf Hildebrand, who argued in favor of a modernization of mother tongue education. Spoken language should be given priority over written language. In addition, Kollewijn

found support for his ideas in recent linguistic theories. Just as Te Winkel who referred to the great German linguist of his time, the historically oriented Jacob Grimm, to defend the etymological principle, so it was Hermann Paul, who was quoted by Kollewijn. Paul just wanted to abandon the burden of historical ballast which was included in many spelling systems of his days. For Paul, the practicality and functionality of an orthographic system should be a priority (Booij a.o. 1979: 45–46).

The ease of writing became more important than the museum function of the written word. However, despite a fierce debate it took until 1934 before the Dutch minister Marchant decided to accept most of Kollewijn's proposals. The debate was not over with this decision: a next government withdrew the measures again. It took till 1946 before the Belgium government introduced the spelling reform of Marchant. The Dutch government followed a year later.

The spelling law of 1946–7, which only prescribed a few small changes of 'De Vries en Te Winkel' introduced a joint Belgian-Dutch committee which should produce a wordlist with all the official spelling of all the words of Dutch. This booklet, known as the 'Green Booklet', was published for the first time in 1954. The committee, consisting of linguists, introduced a new principle regarding borrowed words. As they became more accepted their spelling could be adapted to the Dutch system. As long as they were felt to be foreign a foreign spelling was preferred. Since the degree of acceptance differed from social group to social group and from region to region – in Flanders French words were less accepted than in the Netherlands for instance – quite often two or even more spellings were accepted. Usually one was marked as the preferred form.

This new principle caused a lot of debate. Therefore, with the new Dutch-Belgium spelling law of 1994 and the revised wordlist of 1995 the option between preferred and accepted spellings of recently borrowed words was abolished. Other changes were only marginal (Neijt 2006).

What is important is that the Flemish and the Dutch government decided in 1980 to hand over the care for the joint language Dutch to a new supranational organization de Nederlandse Taalunie, 'The Dutch Language Union'³. So, it was the Language Union which installed the committee for the 1994/95 revision and which in-

³ The Dutch Language Union is not a union between Belgium and the Netherlands, but it is an international organization that has taken over duties of a country, the Netherlands and a part or region of another country, Flanders. Legally, this is a hybrid form. Nowadays also Surinam takes part in the activities of the Dutch Language Union. The goals of the Language Union are: to supervise periodical spelling reforms of Dutch and to look after a coordinated introduction of these reforms in Surinam, Flanders and the Netherlands, to develop tools, resources and devices such as reference works, to bring together expertise and experience with respect to the teaching of Dutch, retraining of teachers of Dutch and literary translators, the promotion of Dutch in the world and language policy with respect to Dutch in a European setting.

troduced a new system of spelling revisions each ten year. Consequently, new rules were issued and a new wordlist was published in 2005/6. This led to only small changes in 2005/6 and recently again in 2015. However, the debate remained as lively as if a big change would have been proposed.

With the installation of the Dutch Language Union language policy, especially with regards to Dutch, no longer remained a duty of the national authorities. It became one of the core issues and activities of the Dutch Language Union.

Frisian

When the Netherlands and Belgium split in 1830⁴, the need for a language policy disappeared according to the Dutch government. The country was in fact monolingual, the authorities thought. This turned out to be a mistake. However, it took the Dutch more than a century to accept the fact that there is another language spoken in a part of the country. This is Frisian, a language spoken in the northern province of Fryslân, Friesland. Frisian is nowadays spoken by some 300.000 people (Salverda 2016: 39).

Already before the Belgian Revolution of 1830, a Mennonite minister and self-taught linguist, Joast Hiddes Halbertsma (1789-1869) asked attention for the language and the culture of his region Fryslân. Frisian is a West-Germanic language that is more related to Anglo-Saxon than to Dutch, Halbertsma could show. Halbertsma may be compared with Jacob Grimm, with whom he corresponded extensively just as with the Danish comparative historical linguist Ramus Rask (De Jong, 2009 & Feitsma 2012: 11–15).

In the first half of the 19th century – a period in which nation formation was a central issue in Western Europe – Halbertsma was not the only one who advocated that the roots of one's own culture and language should be examined, cultivated and promoted. In this period in which a fast modernization took place, the kind of romantic scholars to which Grimm, Halberstma and in Flanders Jan Frans Willems belonged aimed at preservation and promotion of what remained of their old culture and language. That they did by collecting and publication of old songs, fairy tales, popular customs, dialects and old documents. In addition, Halbertsma sought to preserve the Frisian vernacular by capturing the remainders of the old culture and language in writing. Together with his brother Eeltsje (1997–1858) he published *De Lapekoer fen Gabe Skroor* 'The Remnant Basket of Gabe Tailor' in 1822, a col-

⁴ The Dutch historiography considers 1839 as the year in which Belgium became independent, whereas in Belgium 1830 is seen as the year of the foundation of the new state. The Dutch government only accepted the independence of Belgium at the Treaty of London (1839), also known as the Treaty of Separation. Under this treaty the great European powers of that time recognized and guaranteed the independence and neutrality of the new kingdom of Belgium.

lection of Frisian poems and stories which would become the basis for the classic Frisian anthology *Rimen en Tetsjes* ‘Rhymes and Stories’ in 1871.

In 1823, Halbertsma’s contribution to the commemorating meeting of the national Frisian poet Gysbert Japicx (1603–1666), which was published later as part of a two-volume study (1824–1827), settled his name (De Jong 2010). In 1834 Halbertsma published an orthography for Frisian and in 1836 a study about ancient and modern Frisian compared with Anglo-Saxon. Just as Grimm Halbertsma initiated a dictionary of his language. He worked on it from 1815 till his death in 1869. He managed to get so far as to F. The author and elocutionist Waling Dykstra was able to finish the dictionary in 1911. Nevertheless, his *Lexicon Frisicum* may be seen as Halbertsma’s *magnum opus* (Dykstra 2011).

Although Halbertsma is rightly seen as the father of the Frisian movement, the interest for Frisian and the Frisian culture remained still a matter of single individuals. One has to wait till the establishment of *It Selskip foar Fryske Taal- en Schriftekennise* ‘The association for the knowledge of Frisian language and writing’ in 1844 that the promotion of Frisian became a matter of broader interest (Vries 1971: 151). This group of romantic, anti-clerical liberals aimed at public education by means of the publication of Frisian literature and theatre pieces. However, the group was hardly combative and rather introverted. That changed in 1915 when the *Jongfryske Mienskip* ‘Young Frisian Fellowship’ was established. However, the spelling system that was introduced in 1879 by the *Selskip* remained the official spelling for 70 years.

The leading figure behind the *Mienskip* was the activist Douwe Kalma (1896–1953). He and his fellows aimed at a place for Frisian in education, recognition of Frisian in the administration and in court (Karsten 1937/8: 167). In one respect, they were successful. In 1937 the Dutch Primary Education Act was modified in such a way that schools were allowed to pay some attention to regional languages and dialects, in so far as they were spoken alongside Dutch. Although the law offered the possibility to all regional languages and dialects spoken on the Dutch territory only Frisian schools seized the opportunity wholeheartedly. Within a year 100 Frisian schools, out of 600, offered classes in Frisian, within two years this number doubled (De Vries 2005: 92–106). The Secondary Education Act was modified similarly in 1948 (Ytsma a.o 2007: 40).

Unfortunately, equal rights for Frisian was not yet a fact with this legal change. Before that could happen, first there were some riots to take place. The main took place on Friday 16 November 1951, *Kneppelfreed* ‘Club Friday’. Some weeks before the Frisian veterinary Sjirk Frânses van der Burg was to appear in court because of a simple road traffic offense. Van der Burg wanted to explain the offense and to defend himself in Frisian, which was not accepted by the judge. One of the journalists who reported of this court hearing was the editor in chief of the *Heerenveense Koerier*, Fedde Schurer (1898–1968), well known as a Frisian poet and activist and

at the same time pacifist social-democratic politician. Following the court ruling Schurer wrote a provocative editorial, which was considered to be insulting the judiciary. The result was that Schurer himself was to appear in court on Friday 16 November 1951. Schurer used the trial to argue the position of Frisian in court. However, he was sentenced to two weeks suspended imprisonment. Schurer was accompanied by hundreds and hundreds of supporters and Frisian activists, most of which had to wait outside the courtyard.

At the end of the afternoon it came to a confrontation between the public and the police, which used their clubs to dispel the crowd (Boomsma 1998 & Hoekstra and Riemersma 2012). The day after all Dutch newspapers, not only the Frisian ones, wrote about these riots. The Dutch government awoke with a start. In 1952 a Royal decree was issued to amend the University Statute, so that Frisian could be chosen as a main subject for academic studies. In addition, the Dutch government installed a commission which advised to give Frisian a special legal status. As a result, a *Regeling van het onderwijs in de Friese Taal en het gebruik van die taal of van een streektaal of voertaal bij het lager onderwijs*, ‘Regulation of education in the Frisian language and the use of that language or a dialect or a regional language in primary education’ was published by the Dutch government in 1954 (De Vries 2005: 101). In 1955 a new amendment to the Primary Education made it possible to use Frisian as medium of instruction in the first forms of the primary school. Frisian was also explicitly mentioned as an optional subject in primary education. In 1956 Frisian was accepted as language in court in Fryslân (Ytsma a.o 2007: 40).

As an effect of the wave of democratization in the Dutch society and the Dutch educational system (De Vries 2005: 103) a new special committee, *Friese-Taalpolitiek*, ‘Frisian Language Policy’, also known as the *Van Ommen Committee*, was installed in 1969 to advise about the status of Frisian. The main conclusion of the 1970 report of the committee was that Fryslân should be recognised as a bilingual province. Frisian should be recognized as the second national language of the Netherlands. However, the use of Frisian in certain domains is bound to Fryslân, which is the so-called territoriality principle that we have seen already while discussing the Belgian case. The committee stated clearly that ‘the central government should focus on safeguarding the identity of the Frisian language and culture, in collaboration with the provincial and municipal authorities’ (Ytsma a.o. 2007: 6). This led to a new amendment to the Primary Education Law in 1974 whereby Frisian became a subject in all primary schools in Fryslân and Frisian got accepted as medium of instruction in all grades of primary education.

The next step forward was the *Bestjoersôfspraak Fryske Taal en Kultuer* ‘Bestuursafpraak Friese Taal en Cultuur’, ‘Covenant on Frisian Language and Culture’, which was drawn up in 1989, renewed in 1993 and newly drafted in 2001, after the Netherlands signed and ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992 and 1996 respectively. The Charter requires some special

measures for the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages. So, the Covenant had to be rewritten with respect to these requirements. The Covenant states ‘the desirability of making it possible for citizens, local authorities, organizations and institutions to express themselves in Frisian’. According to the Covenant it is the joint ‘responsibility of the provincial and central government to preserve and reinforce the Frisian language and culture’. Both authorities have to provide financial resources in order to create suitable conditions for this purpose’ (Ytsma a.o. 2007: 6/7).

Finally, in 2011, the Dutch government drafted the *Wet gebruik Friese taal* ‘Law on the use of the Frisian Language’, which was officially introduced in 2014. This law states that Fryslân is a bilingual region in which Frisian can be used in all domains next to Dutch (Wet 2014).

Charter

A new chapter in the language policy of the Netherlands started with the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which was ratified by the Netherlands in 1996 and which entered into force in 1998 (Hamans 2006 & Hamans 2015). The Charter is an international treaty of the Council of Europe, the leading human rights organisation in Europe⁵. The aim of the Charter is to protect and promote the regional and minority languages of the countries which are signatories of the treaty. The Charter does not define what a regional or minority language is. It is up to the participating parties to present the regional and minority languages of their country which they want to be recognized according to the Charter. The Charter offers two levels of recognition, mere recognition or recognition plus support and promotion. Again, it is a matter of the national authorities to propose the level of recognition for the languages they present. Dialects of the national languages cannot be recognized as regional languages according to the Charter. The same applies to the languages of recent immigrants.

Belgium never signed and ratified the Charter because of constitutional problems. Yvo Peeters, a member of the committee of the Council of Europe which drafted the Charter in the 1980’s and early 1990’s, clearly expressed why Belgium does not want to accept the Charter: ‘Belgium has reached a balanced situation with the federal constitution of 1993 after a century and a half of linguistic discrimination of the Dutch-speaking majority by the French-speaking minority. So, the only genuine minority in Belgium is the 1% German speakers. As long as the French speakers want that residual social upper strata, francophones and francophone immigrants in

⁵ About the Charter in general, linguistic rights of minorities and other important legal documents concerning language rights in Europe see Gorter and Cenoz (2012).

Flanders should be subject to the Charter, Flanders cannot agree to ratification, because it would be regressive and restore the linguistic, social discrimination of the 19th century' (Hamans 2015: 69). So, it is the primacy of the territoriality principle above a personal right to choose the language one wants to use in public, which made it impossible for Belgium to join the Charter. Since the territoriality principle is part of the Constitution, one can hardly expect Belgium soon to change its position. In addition, where the Netherlands accepted the Charter and Belgium did and does not, this may lead to problems at the level of the Dutch Language Union, the international organization in which Flanders and the Netherlands cooperate since 1980 with respect to language matters.

The Netherlands almost immediately suggested recognition of five languages: Frisian, Low Saxon, Limburger, Yiddish and Roma. The latter two being transnational languages. Frisian received recognition at the highest level, that of active support and promotion, whereas Low Saxon and Limburger were only recognised. Low Saxon is spoken in the north-eastern and eastern part of the country and is more or less similar to *Plattddeutsch* or *Platdüütsch*, the language spoken in the neighboring parts of Germany and which is recognized by the German government in terms of the Charter. Limburger is the language of the Dutch province of Limburg, the south-east of the Netherlands, and is also spoken in the Belgian province of Limburg. The language resembles the language spoken in the adjacent regions of Germany.

Since Limburger received recognition from the Dutch government, Belgian dialectologists approached the Flemish authorities with the question whether it would be possible to recognize the language of the Belgian province Limburg. (Belemans 2009) The Flemish regional government send the request to the Dutch Language Union, something which had not be done so far by the Dutch government, since the recognition was not about Dutch or Dutch dialects⁶.

The answer of the Dutch Language Union, drafted by the Flemish sociolinguist Koen Jaspaert, was clear and was not open to misunderstanding. Limburger and Low Saxon also are dialects of Dutch, because all traditional scholarly literature considers these languages to be a dialect of Dutch. However, the second argument counts more: the moment speakers who are so far considered to be speakers of Dutch will be called speakers of another language, the number of speakers of Dutch will decrease, which will likely jeopardize the position of Dutch in Flanders (Hamans 2015: 67/68).

Actually, Jaspaert claims that speakers of a recognized regional language no longer can be counted as native speakers of the national language, Dutch in this case. His view implies that people are unidimensional, a claim which is remarkable in these days of diversity.

⁶ See for the role of the Dutch Language Union regarding language policy in the period 1996–2005 also Van Oostendorp (2008).

However, the counterargument that everybody and especially speakers of minority languages have a multiple identity, so consider themselves to be Limburger and Dutch, for instance, at the same time, did not convince either the Flemish authorities or the Dutch Language Union. Jaspaert even suggested to withdraw the recognition of Low Saxon and Limburger, but the Dutch government did not follow this suggestion. However, although it was clear to everybody that intern-Belgian language political problems interfered with the discussion about the rights of Dutch minorities and that opinion of the Dutch Language Union was assessed by these internal Belgian problems, the Dutch government accepted the primacy of the Dutch Language Union in matters regarding language and language policy, even in the case the language was not Dutch (Hamans 2015: 69/70).

With this position, the Netherlands gave up in fact their interest in language policy. Effectively, it is now up to a joint Flemish-Surinam-Dutch committee to decide upon language policy not for Dutch but also for the Netherlands. Where Belgium still suffers from the effects of a long and bitter fight for the language rights of the Flemish majority, it may be expected that the emphasis in the language policy of the Low Countries will be on the Flemish problems more than on those of the Netherlands.

Conclusion

The Dutch are known for their lack of interest in their own language. This study showed that the Dutch authorities react similarly. They only came to think about the language at the moment external forces made it necessary. As soon as the external pressure decreased the Dutch authorities lost their interest in the national language. Interest in other languages spoken on the territory of the Netherlands has also been minimal. Only under external pressure the Dutch authorities showed any interest. In the case of Frisian this worked out quite well, since Frisian activists in collaboration with the Frisian regional authorities did not give up. In all other cases the Dutch interest disappeared as soon as possible. Language and language policy appear not be a priority in the Netherlands.

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