Language Use and Language Contact in Brussels

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Brussels occupies a very special position on the Linguistic Frontier, because the 19 communities that form Brussels-Capital are an autonomous region within the Federal State of Belgium. The article first gives a short overview of the historical development of various aspects of the situation of the Region, as these are essential for an understanding of the institutional and constitutional framework within which Brussels functions currently. The main focus of the article is on knowledge and use of the varieties of French and Dutch in Brussels-Capital, and on the educational system, which received a lot of attention in recent research. Finally, some attention is given to attitudes towards the languages and language varieties and to linguistic aspects of language contact.

Introduction

Brussels occupies a very special, if not unique position on the Linguistic Frontier, because the 19 municipalities which form the Brussels metropolis are an autonomous region in what is now the federal state of Belgium. Because of its special status, in this special issue a separate paper is reserved for the description of the historical background, the educational system, the language varieties used, the attitudes of the speakers towards these language varieties, and linguistic aspects of language contact in Brussels.

Language Knowledge and Language Use: Historical Perspectives

Brussels is situated on the Germanic side of the Linguistic Frontier, in a territory that used to be entirely Dutch-speaking. All observers agree that Brussels is originally a Dutch-speaking city, but the emphasis needs to be on the word 'originally' (Deprez et al., 1981: 94). Until the middle of the 18th century it was still almost homogeneously Dutch-speaking, except for a small French-speaking elite (Van Velthoven, 1987: 21). After Belgium became independent in 1830, Dutch continuously lost ground in Brussels, as a result of a process of language shift towards French, generally known under the term Frenchification. Many factors are responsible for this phenomenon. First of all, it is important to realize that French was the only official language of the country until 1898 (McRae, 1986: 25). In the second place, the international prestige of French also played a role in the process of Frenchification. The prestige of French as an international language contrasted sharply with the lack of prestige attached to the local variety of Dutch spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of Brussels (De Vriendt & Willeyns, 1987: 202). The short period during which the Northern and Southern provinces were united under King William I (1814–1830) was insufficient to strengthen the position of Standard Dutch. This is not only due to the fact that Dutch rule was
preceded by a period of 20 years of French rule (1795–1814) in which Dutch was excluded from official use. The causes of the delay in the development and spread of Standard Dutch in Flanders go back to the political split of the Dutch-speaking territory in the 16th century, when the Northern part of the Low Countries revolted against the Roman-Catholic Habsburg monarchy, but the Southern part remained under Habsburg domination (Van de Craen & Willemsyns, 1988). The South lost many members of its intellectual elite to the North. Although the southern elite contributed to the standardisation of Dutch, the speakers in the South were cut off from this process. As a result, standardisation stagnated in the South and French took on most of the functions Standard Dutch obtained in the North.

After Belgian Independence, the Flemish provinces were once again cut off from the Netherlands. Knowledge of Standard Dutch was far less widespread in Flanders than in the Netherlands at that time. According to Willemsyns (1984; in De Vriendt & Willemsyns, 1987: 224), ‘Standard Dutch is however used considerably more in Brussels and surroundings than in the remaining part of Flanders’.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, the school system contributed to language shift, as until the end of the 19th century, the language of primary education in Brussels was French. In particular with the introduction of compulsory primary education in 1914, the school played a major role in the process of Frenchification in Brussels. It was not until after World War I that a Dutch-speaking school system was gradually built up (De Vriendt, 1984). As is well known, Dutch-speaking university education was not available anywhere in the country until 1930, when the University of Gent became Dutch-speaking, as a result of pressure of the Flemish Movement.

Finally, economic factors contributed to enhancing the prestige of French. In the 19th century, the economic position of Wallonia was much stronger than that of Flanders, due to large-scale capital investment in heavy industry (Van Velthoven, 1987: 17). Flanders, on the contrary, sank into poverty, which made it even easier to associate Dutch with poverty and backwardness. After the World War II, however, heavy industry was confronted with a fundamental crisis throughout Europe, and Wallonia was no exception (Witte & Van Velthoven, 1999: 200). Due to industrial development in Flanders, the economic power relations were reversed, with Flanders overtaking Wallonia for the first time in the 1960s.

**Language Censuses**

The process of language shift in Brussels is reflected in the language censuses, but their interpretation remains very difficult for many reasons, one of them being that each time different questions were asked. The first official language census of 1846 shows that the percentage of the population that used French most frequently was much higher in Brussels (37%) than in Gent (5%) or in Antwerp (1.9%). Even if the Brussels figures may be exaggerated, they show that Frenchification was much faster in Brussels than elsewhere in the country. This was in part due to Walloon immigrants, who formed the majority of the immigrants in the first half of the 19th century (De Metsenaere, 1987). Between the language census of 1866 and the last language census in 1947, the number of
Dutch monolinguals dropped sharply, from 46.2% to 9.5%, whereas the number of French monolinguals rose from 19.3% to 37%. In 1947 24.4% of the Brussels population was registered as using Dutch exclusively or primarily, and 70.6% as using French only or mainly (McRae, 1986: 295). All these figures should however be seen as indicating tendencies rather than exact proportions, because the results of all language censuses are heavily contested for methodological reasons. For the last three censuses, an additional problem was that the climate was very hostile to the Flemish, because of Flemish collaboration with the German occupant during the two world wars (see Gubin, 1978 for a detailed criticism of the census data).

For Brussels and its suburbs in particular, the census results had direct political implications. Since the language law of 1932, municipalities in the area surrounding Brussels had to adopt external bilingualism (in contacts with the public) if they counted more than 30% Francophones. As soon as this figure rose to 50%, French also became the internal language of the municipal administration, in addition to Dutch. Clearly, the expansion of Brussels – which continued to annex more and more Flemish municipalities – formed a major threat to the Flemish cause. In 1963, the boundaries of the Brussels agglomeration were officially established and confined to 19 municipalities that formed part of it so far. Six municipalities on the border of the agglomeration, situated in the Dutch-speaking part of the province of Brabant, obtained a special status with so-called facilities for Francophones: Drogenbos, Kraainem, Linkebeek, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Wemmel and Wezembeek-Oppem (Witte, 1993: 12; see also Willemyns in this issue). From the Flemish perspective, the delimitation of Brussels was a very important milestone, which limited the danger of the French ‘oilstain’ (olievlek) spreading over the Flemish country-side. From a Francophone perspective, on the other hand, this delimitation meant the imposition of an artificial ‘collar’ (carcan) on the natural growth of the capital.

It is impossible to give any official figures of the numbers of speakers of each language group after 1947, because language censuses have been abolished, due to the tensions they created. A number of surveys of language knowledge and use were carried out from the 1960s onwards, each of which came up with a different result. In these surveys, estimates of the percentage of speakers of Dutch range from 14% to 27% (see Treffers-Daller, 1994 for a detailed discussion). Janssens (2001) shows how difficult it is to obtain reliable data on knowledge and use of Dutch in Brussels. In a survey of 2500 Brusselsers, Janssens shows that 10% claims to come from families in which only Dutch (or a variety of Dutch) is spoken, but 70% of the same sample claims to have a reasonable knowledge of Dutch. One of the problems with the survey is, of course, that data are based on reported language behaviour, rather than observed language behaviour, and it remains unclear to what extent the data represent actual knowledge and use.

Another problem with many surveys is that they implicitly or explicitly assume speakers are either Dutch-speaking or French-speaking, and exclude the possibility for speakers to be classified as being bilingual. Clearly, figures about the number of bilinguals are very difficult to give, because speakers may have very different opinions about the meaning of the notion ‘bilingual’. An extreme example of the problems involved in assessing the number of bilinguals in Brussels can be found in a survey in _Le Soir_ (1985), which claimed there were only
1.8% ‘absolute bilinguals’ in Brussels. The figure is probably so low because many people hesitated to say that they were absolutely bilingual, despite the fact that they use French and Dutch on a daily basis. In addition, it is probably true to say that both language groups have negative attitudes towards bilingualism. Francophones used to consider bilingualism to be useful for the Flemish, but not for the Walloons (Destrée, 1923), whereas the Flemish feared bilingualism was nothing more than a transition to French monolingualism, which was no doubt the case for many indigenous inhabitants and Flemish immigrants in Brussels. It is not surprising therefore that in reforming the Belgian state individual bilingualism has not become a model goal (Witte & Baetens Beardsmore, 1987: 8). The priority has rather been on creating bilingual structures, based on individual monolingualism. In practical terms, this means that it is now possible for the individual in Brussels to use only French or only Dutch in political and administrative matters, education and cultural activities.

The Constitutional and Institutional Framework

As for its constitutional and institutional status, Brussels occupies a very special position on the Linguistic Frontier, because Brussels-Capital is an autonomous region in the federal state of Belgium. In the course of a 25-year long process of reform of the state, in which finding a solution for ‘the Brussels problem’ was the most difficult issue, Brussels became one of the three autonomous regions of the new Federal State (see also Willemyns and the bibliography to that contribution in this issue). In 1980, the political institutions of the Walloon Region and the Flemish Region were put in place, but it took until 1988 for the Brussels-Capital Region to obtain its own political institutions. The first elections for the Brussels Council took place in 1989.

The Flemish had long opposed the institution of Brussels as a separate region, because they feared that Brussels and Wallonia together could form a front against Flanders (Detant, 1995: 19). In addition, the Flemish felt that the best way to protect the interests of the Flemish population in Brussels was to maintain as close a link as possible between Flanders and Brussels. In the compromise reached during the second constitutional reform, the Francophones had to make a sacrifice too in that they were unable to obtain the breakthrough of the ‘carcan’: the limits of the Brussels-Capital Region remained unaltered. The Flemish, on the other hand, tried to maintain the links with Brussels as clearly as possible by choosing Brussels as its capital (Witte, 1998: 14). The officially bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital is situated between two officially monolingual regions: a monolingual Dutch-speaking Region, Flanders (Vlaanderen) in the North, and a monolingual French-speaking Region, Wallonia (Wallonie) in the South. The Regions are to a large extent autonomous, which means that they have their own regional governments and their own parliaments, known as the Councils.

The division of labour between the different levels of government is a very complex affair in Belgium. In the first place, there is the Federal Government and the Federal Parliament, which remain responsible, among other things, for finances (in order, for example, to guarantee monetary union), the army, important parts of civil, commercial and criminal law, social security, foreign affairs, relationships with other members of the European Union and NATO, an impor-
tant part of health care and major aspects of the country’s internal affairs. The responsibility for other matters is distributed between the three Regions (Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia) and the three Language Communities (the Flemish community, the French community and the German community). The Regions are responsible for matters relating to their respective territories, such as economic policy, employment, regional development, agriculture, housing, transport, energy and so forth. Matters relating to culture and education, however, are the responsibility of the three Communities. The Flemish and the French Communities therefore each exercise their competencies in cultural and educational matters in their respective Regions, as well as in Brussels.

The complexities of the division of labour between the different governmental levels in Belgium become very clear if one realises that there are six different governments (including the Government of the German community), each of which has a share of the administrative and legislative power.

The Council of Brussels-Capital is allowed to vote regional laws, called ordinances, in matters relating to its competencies, and can thus develop a genuine regional legal system, valid only in the Region of Brussels-Capital, within the limits of the boundaries set by Federal Law and European legislation. As conflict between the two language communities in the Council cannot be ruled out, even after federalisation, a so-called alarm bell procedure has been put in place. This means that in case two-thirds of the members of a linguistic group consider a particular proposal to have a negative impact on the interests of that group, the Regional Government can intervene.

The inhabitants of Brussels-Capital elect their deputies for the Council directly by compulsory voting. As the political parties are split along linguistic lines, the composition of the Brussels Council gives an interesting perspective on the relative importance of both language communities in the metropolis. Currently (elections of 1999), 64 (or 82%) of the 75 Council deputies belong to French-speaking parties and 11 (or 17%) to Dutch-speaking parties. It would, however, be a mistake to come to any conclusions regarding knowledge or use of the two languages in the Capital on the basis of voting behaviour. As there are no bilingual parties, bilinguals have to choose either a French-speaking party or a Dutch-speaking party and they may well choose on the basis of issues entirely unrelated to language matters.

Languages Varieties in Brussels

A description of the language varieties that are being used in Brussels is more complex than in many areas around the linguistic frontier, because of the wide range of varieties that are being spoken, and because of the terminological confusion around these varieties. De Vriendt and Willemsyns (1987) distinguish four different varieties of Dutch, and four different varieties of French. As we have seen above, traditionally, the Brussels population used to speak a local variety of Dutch, sometimes entitled ‘Brussels Dutch’ (De Vriendt & Willemsyns, 1987; Treffers-Daller, 1994) or ‘Brussels Flemish’ (De Vriendt & Goyvaerts, 1989). This dialect belongs to the group of Brabantic dialects spoken in the central part of the Dutch-speaking territory of Belgium. Local inhabitants often refer to it as ‘Brussels’ or ‘Flemish’, a term which linguists reserve for the Flemish dialects that
are spoken in the West of Flanders only. Nowadays very few speakers are monolingual users of Brussels Dutch, as dialect usage is going down everywhere in the country, but particularly in Brussels (see Willemyns, 1979 on reported knowledge of dialects by Flemish students from various Flemish provinces). According to De Vriendt and Goyvaerts (1989) the everyday use of this dialect nearly always implies that the speaker also has an active command of French, which is, among other things, related to the tendency of the Brussels population to visit French rather than Dutch schools: traditionally, therefore, the inhabitants of Brussels tended to choose French rather than Dutch as their code for formal and written purposes.

The use of standard languages is another very complex matter. Two varieties of Standard Dutch are being used in Brussels: Belgian Dutch and Standard Dutch. De Vriendt and Willemyns (1987: 204) define Belgian Dutch as ‘a supra-regional language which is more or less standardised and may, for those who speak it, function as a standard language’. It differs from Standard Dutch, one of the three official languages of the country, in that it is influenced by Brabantic dialects and because it displays many archaisms, dialecticisms, gallicisms, purisms, etc.

As for the French varieties, it is important to see that there is no such thing as an indigenous Brussels French variety, because French is an ‘imported’ language in Brussels (De Vriendt & Willemyns, 1987: 205). Yet, French as spoken by the inhabitants of Brussels may possess sufficient common characteristics to consider it a separate variety (Baetens Beardsmore, 1971). According to De Vriendt and Willemyns (1987: 206) Brussels French is a kind of Belgian French that is isolated from other varieties because of its particular status in Brussels. Standard French is the second official language of the city. It is generally used in the media and in other formal domains.

### Attitudes

In this section I will try to summarise some findings in relation to attitudes towards Brussels, its inhabitants and its languages, as they can be found in the literature, in particular in McRae (1986). Clearly, these attitudes must be seen in the context of the problematic intergroup relations between the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking populations in Belgian society as a whole. Brussels does, however, occupy a special position in Belgium, and there is certainly evidence that the inhabitants of Brussels, ‘Brusselers’, as we will call them, see themselves as distinct from the Flemish and the Walloons.

A first important statement about the Brusselers comes from Jules Destée (1912: 11, my translation) in a famous open letter to the King. In his opinion, there are no Belgians in Belgium: only Walloons and Flemish. He gives the following, extremely negative evaluation of the Brusselers:

They seem to have combined the shortcomings of the two races\(^8\) and to have sacrificed their good qualities. Their means of communication is an awful gibberish, that has been popularised by the Beulemans and the Kaeckebroek families,\(^9\) who unwittingly stress the comical aspects of this language use. They are ignorant and sceptical. Their ideal is a kind of comfortable mediocrity. They don’t believe in anything, and are incapable
of generosity or enthusiasm. (...) These inhabitants of the capital (...) are not a separate people at all; they are a collection of half-breeds.

This negative view of the inhabitants of Brussels also emerges from recent studies into group images and attitudes, a very detailed overview of which can be found in McRae (1986). According to McRae (1986: 92), the sharply pejorative images can be explained on the basis of frustration and perhaps envy on the part of the more disadvantaged periphery in relation to a more favoured centre. On the other hand, it may well be the case that the Flemish and the Walloon groups in the conflict, which saw a complete separation of all public services in Brussels into a French- and a Dutch-speaking network as the only solution, have little sympathy for those who have found a pragmatic solution to the problems, and use both languages in their everyday lives, seemingly without encountering conflict. Just like bilinguals anywhere in the world, Brusselers can be heard switching languages according to interlocutor and topic. For the above Walloon observer, this pragmatic attitude is evidence for the fact that Brusselers ‘do not believe in anything’ and that they are ‘halfbreeds’. Such negative attitudes prevail in much more recent literature, also on the Flemish side, where the fact of alternatively using to languages is seen as a failure to be consistent, and those who demonstrate such behaviour are classified as ‘ambivalent’ (Louckx, 1978).

In addition, from a Flemish perspective, the indigenous inhabitants of Brussels leave the impression of being ‘very Frenchified’ (Louckx, 1978: 58). Their behaviour contrasts sharply with that of the ‘bewuste Vlamingen’, who speak Dutch consciously and deliberately in Brussels under all (or almost all) circumstances (Deprez et al., 1981). There is some evidence, however, that indigenous Brusselers (born and bred in one of the 19 municipalities) do not consider themselves to be either Walloon or Flemish, but a separate category (Louckx, 1978; Treffers-Daller, 1994). Many of the informants in the latter two studies expressed pro-Belgian and anti-federalist views, as well as a marked antipathy towards regional political parties and Flemish and Walloon nationalism. In mainstream Belgian politics, it would be hard to find any defendants of the ideal of a bilingual Brussels in which French and Dutch would live together harmoniously nowadays, but in the 19th century this view was prevalent among the so-called ‘Flamingants de Bruxelles’ (Gubin, 1978). They considered the hybrid character of the city to be a distinct asset. Bringing two languages together in one town was considered to be stimulating and enriching, a privilege unfortunately denied to monolingual nations.

Deprez et al. (1981, 1986) present a fascinating analysis of the language attitudes of secondary school pupils in Dutch-speaking and French-speaking schools in Brussels. The methodology and results of the matched guise studies they carried out cannot be discussed here in any detail, but some important findings should be mentioned. Deprez et al. found striking differences between the attitudes of French-speaking pupils and Dutch-speaking pupils towards a number of stimuli they were presented with: a set of eight different types of speakers in Brussels, ranging from a person who always speaks Dutch or a variety of Dutch, to a person who speaks only French in Brussels. In various subparts of the study the data were collected by researchers who presented themselves in different guises, which again are typical for the Brussels situation:
a researcher from Antwerp who spoke Dutch, a researcher from Brussels who presented himself as a Frenchified Fleming (speaking either French or Dutch), and a researcher who presented himself as a Walloon unable to speak Dutch. As the Dutch-speaking pupils belong to the minority in Brussels, they feel threatened by the presence of a researcher whom they perceive to be a member of the oppressing majority: the researcher who presents himself in their school in a French guise or in the guise of a Frenchified Fleming. The French-speaking pupils, on the other hand, react less negatively to the presence of a researcher who presents himself in Dutch at their school. For these French-speaking pupils, who belong to the majority in Brussels, there is no real threat in the presence of a minority language speaker in their midst.

**Educational Issues**

Much to the surprise of many outside observers, there are no French-Dutch bilingual schools in Belgium. Schools in Brussels (as well as in any other area of the country) use only one language of instruction, except for foreign language classes. This can only be understood from a historical perspective. As space does not allow us to describe the education in Brussels before 1830, the reader is referred to Behling and De Metsenaere (1979) for details about education in Brussels during the French period (1795–1814) and to Behling and De Metsenaere (1982) for the period of unification with the Northern provinces (1814–1830). According to McRae (1986), for half a century after Belgian Independence, most teaching in Brussels was offered in French to generations of Dutch-speaking pupils, most of whom understood little or nothing of what was said in the classroom. In addition, many of the teachers did not understand Dutch (Van Velthoven, 1987: 34). It is not until 1881 that Karel Buls, then mayor of Brussels, replaced the existing structure by a system of transmutation. Children were allocated to French or Dutch classes, according to the language they spoke. It was the school principal and not the parents who decided about the child’s language. In three steps, children were prepared for French as the medium of instruction, as that was still considered the best solution for Brussels. The system failed, for many reasons, among other things, because of the lack of qualified personnel and prejudice on the part of the Dutch-speaking parents. The transmutation classes quickly became very unpopular and finally only the poorest children attended the Dutch classes. Dutch education then became synonymous with poverty and backwardness, and it was only through the medium of French that one could break out of this system. The Dutch classes were emptied in 1914 when the city council introduced the freedom of the head of the family for primary education (Van Velthoven, 1987: 36).

The language laws of 1932 laid down the principle of territoriality in language matters. For education this meant the language of instruction in Flanders, Wallonia and the German cantons was to be the language of the region (McRae, 1986: 220). The language laws of 1932 formed an important watershed in the country’s educational history, as they made the formation of a Dutch-speaking middle class in Flanders possible. In Brussels and in bilingual communes along the linguistic frontier, the language of instruction would be ‘the mother tongue of the child or the child’s usual language’ (McRae, 1986: 220). The freedom of the
head of the family was abolished (Witte & Van Velthoven, 1999: 138). The head of the family had to officially declare what the mother tongue of the child was, and there were control mechanisms which aimed to check this declaration. Despite the fact that the head of the family was not free to choose the language of the school for his children, the declaration was open to manipulation by parents or school principals who believed that knowledge of French was a prerequisite to upward mobility. In practice therefore, according to Deprez et al. (1981: 105), the Frenchification of the Brussels population through education continued unabated. The language laws of 1963 abolished the transmutation classes and the number of Dutch schools was increased. In 1970 the ‘liberté du père de famille’ was reintroduced (Witte & Van Velthoven, 1999: 212). In compensation for the reintroduction of the freedom of the head of the family, the Flemish obtained some concessions: a considerable number of Dutch-speaking day-care centres were to be created and in Dutch-speaking primary schools the norms for splitting up classes were lowered significantly (Deprez & Wynants, 1989: 31).

Today the Brussels population is free to choose a French-speaking or a Dutch-speaking school and both networks are well developed, even though there are more French-speaking primary and secondary schools. There are Dutch-speaking and French-speaking primary schools in all 19 municipalities, but six municipalities do not have a Dutch-speaking secondary school (Elsene/Ixelles, St Gilles, St Joost-ten-Node/St Josse-ten-Noode, St Lambrechts-Woluwe/Woluwe-St Lambert, Vorst/Forest and Watermael-Bosvoorde/Watermael-Boitsfort). A comparison of data from the Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie and the Communauté Française de Belgique shows that 36% of the primary schools (including infants and junior departments) in Brussels-Capital are Dutch-speaking and 64% are French-speaking. The proportion of Dutch-speaking schools is slightly lower at the secondary level: 29% and 71% (see Table 1 for more details).

The Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie (VGC) also provides numbers of pupils currently attending Dutch-speaking schools. The figures show that numbers in kindergartens and primary schools increased by 2% and 3% respectively between 1999 and 2000, whereas there was a slight decrease (0.05%) of pupils in Dutch-speaking secondary schools (see Table 2). It is interesting to note that the Dutch-speaking schools lose some pupils every year to French-speaking schools: in 1999–2000 7% of the children in the kindergartens left the Dutch-speaking school for a French-speaking primary school, whereas 6% of the children in the primary school went to a French-speaking secondary school. It may well be the case that these are children from homogeneous French-speaking families (see below). D’Hondt (1999) notes that the number of pupils in Dutch-speaking secondary schools dropped since 1990, the year in which the first counts of pupils in secondary education were made (Gatz, 1996). There is also evidence for a significant exchange with Flanders: on the one hand, 11% of the Dutch-speaking primary school population left Brussels for a secondary school in Flanders. On the other hand, the data of the VGC show that 892 (42%) of the 2103 pupils in the first year of the Dutch-speaking secondary schools come from the Flemish provinces.

A comparison of the figures in Table 2 with those provided by Deprez and Wynants (1989) shows that the Dutch educational system has clearly progressed
since the 1980s. The numbers in Dutch-speaking primary schools had been drop- ping since the end of the 1960s, when 15,150 children were registered, and reached an all-time low in 1983–1984 when 8268 pupils were registered. In the Francophone schools numbers fell too, however. The reasons for these falling numbers are to be sought in the drop of the birth rate and an urban exodus.

Table 1 Dutch-speaking and French-speaking schools in Brussels Capital (all networks)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipalities</th>
<th>Dutch-speaking schools</th>
<th>French-speaking schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary infants + junior schools</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderlecht</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussel/Bruxelles**</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsene/Ixelles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etterbeek</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evere</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganshoren</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jette</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koekelberg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouderghem/Auderghem</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Agatha–Berchem/ Berchem–Ste Agathe</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Gilles</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Jans Molenbeek/ Molenbeek–St Jean</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Joost-ten Node/ St Josse-ten-Noode</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Lambrechts Woluwe/ Woluwe-St Lambert</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Pieters Woluwe/Woluwe St Pierre</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukkel/Uccle</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vorst Forest</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watermaal–Bosvoorde/ Watermael-Boitsfort</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Total</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * There are three main networks: the official subsidised network, the free subsidised network (catholic and neutral) and the network of the Communauté française/Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie. The figures were last updated on last updated 13/02/2001 (primary school) and on 08/03/2000 (secondary school).

** The figures for Brussels refer to Brussels 1000, Haren/Haeren, Neder-over-Heembeek and Laken/Laeken.

In the 1980s the Dutch-speaking school population formed little more than 10% of the total Brussels school population, with the remaining 90% of pupils attending Francophone schools.

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that bilingual education does not officially exist in Brussels, Dutch schools are not only attended by children from homogeneous Dutch-speaking families (i.e. families in which both parents are Dutch-speaking, cf. De Bleyser et al., 2001; Deprez et al., 1981; Deprez & Wynants, 1989; Gielen & Louckx, 1984). Table 3 gives an overview of the development in Dutch-speaking primary schools, and shows that the percentage of children from homogeneous Dutch-speaking backgrounds in primary schools decreased steadily between the early 1980s and the academic year 1999–2000 (data from the Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie).

Table 3 Language background of pupils in Dutch-speaking primary schools in Brussels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Homogenous Dutch-speaking</th>
<th>Homogeneous French-speaking</th>
<th>Homogeneous other language (neither Dutch nor French)</th>
<th>Mixed (Dutch and another language)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80–81</td>
<td>7225</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>99–00</td>
<td>2852</td>
<td>3173</td>
<td>2305</td>
<td>3109</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
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</table>


This phenomenon, for which De Bleyser et al. (2001) coined the term ‘wild immersion’ is generally attributed to the following factors: the growing importance of bilingualism in Brussels, the fact that there are fewer immigrant children in Dutch-speaking school and the quality of the education. It is not known how many homogeneous Dutch-speaking families send their children to Francophone schools nowadays. According to a Market Segmentation Enquiry carried out on behalf of the NCC in 1979 (Deprez & Wynants, 1989), more children from homogeneous Dutch-speaking families attend Francophone schools than Dutch-speaking schools (7000 versus 5600). According to this enquiry, the majority of children of mixed backgrounds (Dutch/French) attend Francophone schools: 3200 children in Dutch-speaking schools and 20,000 children in Francophone schools. More recent information regarding the language background of the children in Francophone schools is however necessary to help clarify whether education continues to play a role in the Frenchification process in Brussels.
Language Contact

Language mixing of all kinds (borrowing, code-switching and interference) have a very bad press in Brussels, but this is the case in many bilingual communities, according to Poplack (1980) who calls it a stigmatised sociolinguistic marker. In a situation of conflict between language communities, it is not surprising that this negative attitude towards language mixing is pronounced very clearly by various observers, who see it as evidence of the speakers being ‘semi-bilingual’ or unable to speak any language properly. Destréée (1912: 11) qualifies this mixture as an awful gibberish, and Van Velthoven (1987: 36) sees it as cultural impoverishment. Wilmars (1971: 80, my translation), a Flemish observer, gives the following characterisation of language use among Brusselers:

When a common Flemish speaker begins to speak French in Brussels, he quickly discovers that he will never be able to speak like a gentleman. And as he is unwilling to ‘murder’ the beautiful French language, he tries to overcome his language problems by simply chattering away, mixing French and Flemish. The result is the awful language usage that is ridiculed in Pourquoi Pas.

Treffer-Daller (1992) shows that code-switching is no longer current practice among the younger generations of indigenous inhabitants of Brussels. Among those informants who have been to Dutch-speaking schools, code-switching and borrowing was found significantly less than among those who went to French-speaking schools. In addition to the factors mentioned above, the polarisation between the two language communities in Brussels may be responsible for the fact that code-switching is not currently common practice. As Myers-Scotton (1993: 128) puts it: code-switching as an unmarked choice is not predicted to occur in ‘communities where the main candidates for such switching are also symbols of present intergroup competition or conflict’. Finally, strong purist traditions on the French and the Dutch sides may well have played a role here.

Treffer-Daller (1999) shows that borrowing, the incorporation of features of one language into the other, on the other hand, is a frequent phenomenon in the local varieties spoken in Brussels. Brussels Dutch mainly borrows lexical items from French, whereas structural borrowing from French is limited. For Brussels French, the opposite is true. Lexical borrowing from Brussels Dutch is less important in Brussels French, but structural influences from Brussels Dutch can be found more frequently. The overall picture thus reveals basic asymmetries between the influences in both directions. These asymmetries can be predicted and explained with the help of Thomason and Kaufman’s framework for contact-induced change. It is well known that many speakers of Brussels Dutch have experienced language shift in the direction of the prestige language French. As a matter of fact, there are few monolingual speakers of Brussels Dutch (De Vriendt & Willemyns, 1987: 217). As a result of the process of language shift, French as spoken in Brussels is typically marked by substrate (and adstrate) influence of the Germanic varieties. This influence becomes apparent in phonology and syntax rather than in the lexicon, as predicted by Thomason and Kaufman.
The fact that Brussels Dutch borrowed extensively from French is also in line with Bloomfield’s observation that ‘borrowing goes predominantly from the upper language to the lower’ (Bloomfield, 1933: 461). Structural borrowing in Brussels Dutch is limited to relatively minor phenomena. Phonological, morphological and syntactic influence is mainly visible in the words borrowed from French. French phonemes only appear in French borrowings, but not in native words, and derivational suffixes from French are not attached to Germanic roots. On the level of syntax, it has been shown that the specific position reserved for French adverbs is mainly accessible for French borrowings, and hardly for native adverbs. Only in the extension of the use of van (of) has the influence of French become apparent in Dutch structures. This is however a very peripheral phenomenon. The basic syntax of Brussels Dutch has remained unaffected by French.

Phonological influence from the Germanic varieties in French, on the contrary, is not confined to lexical borrowings from Brussels Dutch. Brussels French is undoubtedly marked by Dutch phonological rules. On the level of syntax we have seen that constituents can be placed in the position before the subject. This occurs in sentences which do not contain any lexical item from Dutch. Thus, whereas structural influence in Brussels Dutch is clearly linked to lexical borrowing, structural interference in Brussels French is not connected to lexical borrowing at all. This confirms Thomason and Kaufman’s (1988: 114–115) prediction that ‘while borrowed morphosyntactic structures are more often expressed by actual borrowed morphemes, morphosyntactic interference through shift more often makes use of reinterpreted and/or restructured target language morphemes’.

More details about language contact in Brussels and about the similarities and differences between the Brussels situation and the contact patterns at other points along the linguistic frontier can be found in Treffers-Daller (1994, 1999).

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Notes

1. During the last constitutional reform, in 1992, the province of Brabant, in which Brussels is situated, was split in two: the province of Flemish Brabant in the North and the province of Walloon Brabant in the South. Though situated in the province of Flemish Brabant, Brussels is administratively unrelated to province, except for matters of public order, for which the province remains responsible (Witte, 1998:30).

2. De Vriendt (1984) however mentions the existence of Dutch-speaking classes in Catholic schools and points to the fact that in towns on the periphery of Brussels, such as Molenbeek (now one of the nineteen municipalities of Brussels Capital), Dutch-speaking schools were common.

3. In the census figures of 1866, the figure for speakers of French drops again to 20%. This may be an indication that the figure of 30% given for 1846 was exaggerated (Treffers-Daller, 1994:15)

4. More details can be obtained from the webpages of the Federal Belgian Government (http://belgium.fgov.be/) and the webpages of the three regions, in particular the Region of Brussels-Capital (http://www.brussel.irisnet.be/).
5. The Walloon Region also contains the German-speaking cantons, all of which are situated in the Province of Liège.

6. To make it possible for each Community to develop policies specifically for Bruxelles three particular institutions have been created: the Commission Communautaire Française (COCOF), the Commission Communautaire Flamande (or Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie VGC) and the Commission Communautaire Commune (CCC). The COCF consists of the French-speaking members of the Brussels Council and the VGC consist of its Dutch-speaking members. The CCC consists of both.

7. The French Community and the French Region each have different governments and different parliaments. On the Flemish side, on the other hand, one Government and one Council represent both the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region.

8. Destreé even goes as far as calling the Flemish and the Walloons two different races: the Germanic and the Romance ‘race’, though Witte and van Velthoven (1999: 41) comment that the broad French term ‘race’ is largely synonymous with ‘nation’.

9. Fonson and Wicheler’s (1910) famous play Le mariage de Mlle Beulemans and Léopold Courouble’s series of novels about a family called ‘the Kaeckebroek owe their popularity to their exaggeration of the peculiarities of Brussels French and their Flemish calques.

10. McRae (1986: 221) points out that the laws only applied to schools subsidised by the state. Private unsubsidised schools could still exist outside the law.

References


