The Dutch-French Language Border in Belgium

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This article is restricted to a description of language border fluctuations in Belgium as far as its Dutch-French portion is concerned. After a brief description of the so-called 'language question' in Belgium the notion of language border is discussed in general. Then comes an overview of the status and function of the language border in Belgium and of the actual language border fluctuations as they have occurred up to the present day. Two problem areas: the 'Voerstreek' and the Brussels suburban region are discussed in more detail. Afterwards language shift and change through erosion in Brussels are analysed as well as the part played in that process by linguistic legislation, language planning and sociolinguistic developments. Finally a typology of language border change is drawn up and the patterns of change are identified in order to explain and account for the almost unique nature of the Belgian portion of the Romance-Germanic language border.

1. Introduction

Belgium (approximately 10 million inhabitants) is a trilingual and federal country, consisting of four different entities constituted on the basis of language: the Dutch-speaking community (called Flanders; 58% of the population), the French speaking one (called Wallonia; 32%), the small German speaking community (0.6%) and the Dutch-French bilingual community of Brussels (9.5%). Since regional governments have legislative power, the frontiers of their jurisdiction, being language borders, are defined in the constitution (Willemyns, 1988).

The Belgian portion of the Romance-Germanic language border is quite remarkable for mainly two main reasons: (1) its status and function have changed considerably since the country came into existence; (2) its present status and function are almost unique as compared to all the other portions under consideration. Because of that it has frequently caught the attention (and imagination) of scientists of various disciplines (although, for a long time, mainly of historians; Lamarcq & Rogge, 1996). It often served as a *pars pro toto* for the Romance-Germanic border as a whole and many researchers have tried to explain its genesis based on its Belgian portion (see Van Durme in this special issue).

A real breakthrough has only been achieved from the moment linguists have entered the debate. Maurits Gysseling in particular is to be mentioned in this respect because of his idea to use the oldest linguistic sources available (including toponyms) and for the skill displayed in doing so. His work is now being continued – with no less skill – by his former student Luc van Durme (there are references on the work of both in Van Durme's article in this issue).

This article is restricted to a description of language border fluctuations in Belgium as far as its Dutch-French portion is concerned. Language contact in Brussels is treated in Treffers-Daller, and the trilingual contact between German,

French and Dutch in Belgium's eastern part in Nelde and Darquennes, both in this issue.

2. The Language Border and the so-called 'Language Question' in Belgium

The 'language struggle' which was going to dominate Belgian political life started shortly after 1830, the year in which Belgium had become an independent constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system dominated by the bourgeois elite, and which secured its position by adopting a poll-tax system (out of 3.5 million people, only 46,000 had the right to vote; Witte & Van Velthoven, 1998). Although the new constitution provided for 'linguistic freedom', it was obvious that this 'freedom' was profitable only to the rich and the powerful, i.e. to the bourgeoisie from Wallonia and Flanders, all of whom were French speakers. For this bourgeoisie, French was a natural choice as the language of the state. The government appointed only French-speaking civil servants and the discrimination of Dutch throughout the 19th century was general and very deliberate, despite the fact that Dutch speakers constituted the majority of the population. There is no room here to elaborate on the genesis of this situation (for more information see Van de Craen & Willemyns, 1988).

A so-called Flemish Movement started up almost immediately and fought a long-lasting battle for cultural and linguistic rights for Dutch speakers. It took until 1889 for the '*gelijkheidswet*' to declare Dutch and French the two official languages of the country . Afterwards things developed faster: two sets of laws in 1932 and 1963 guaranteed what had been the ultimate goal of the Flemish Movement, i.e. the official and complete 'Dutchification' of Flanders. The Walloons having been opposed to widespread bilingualism throughout the country, Belgium gradually turned to the territoriality principle model to accommodate its various linguistic groups. It officialised the language frontier as a domestic administrative border, made it virtually unchangeable and accomplished the linguistic homogeneity of the language groups and regions.

The Belgian language struggle has never been an exclusively linguistic problem but has always been intertwined with social and political issues as well. Yet, a considerable change in nature is to be discerned from the early 1960s onward when the language problems were replaced by so-called 'community problems' and the border between Wallonia and Flanders ceased to be a mere linguistic one in order to become a social one as well. This can be accounted for by major domestic economic changes. From the late 1950s onwards a dramatic industrial development was witnessed in Flanders, turning this formally agricultural territory into a highly industrialised region, largely dominating the domestic political, social and economic scene. At the same, time the outdated industrial equipment of Wallonia was slowly breaking down, giving way to a serious economic recession from which it has not yet recovered. In 1996 74.5% of the industrial gross added value was generated in the Flemish region (58% of Belgium's population). Consequently, the cultural and linguistic balance of power shifted towards Flanders (Willemyns, 1992). The present-day social and economic imbalance between Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia is to be considered potentially disruptive for the continuation of Belgium's existence, since it

requires a considerable amount of so-called 'solidarity transfers' from Flanders to Wallonia (for 80%) and from Flanders to Brussels (for 20%). Most of these transfers occur in the field of social security financing (De Boeck, 1999).

Revisions of the constitution in 1970 and 1980 provided for cultural autonomy and a considerable amount of self-determination for the linguistically divided parts of the country. Subsequent constitutional changes in 1988 and 1993 finally turned Belgium into the federal country it is now (Alen & Suetens, 1993).

3. Language Borders

The notion of 'language border' which is essential in this paper and in this volume is not easy to define. As is often the case with, for example, the related notion of 'dialect border', it might even be argued that language borders do not actually exist, since it is obvious that language areas are but seldom separated by a clear-cut line. Usually, there is some kind of transitional zone between them, and a demarcation line, therefore, will always have a somewhat arbitrary character. Moreover, it is obvious that in transition zones a social variable, rather than a geographic one, may be decisive for linguistic 'affiliation'. Dialect-geographers are very familiar with such problems and to cope with them they tend to make use not so much of a theoretical but of a practical solution, which may differ from one region to another. In this paper too, the various kinds of language contact under investigation will be decisive for the particular use which is made of the concept of 'language border'.

Yet, both in a historical and a contemporary sense, it may be necessary to refer to what Goossens (1968) calls an 'intuitive consensus' on language borders. In the case of French-Flanders for example, there is a general consensus among scholars to consider the isogloss used in dialect-geographic studies as *the* language border between the Romance and the Germanic dialects in the region (it is reproduced in, among others, Pée, 1957). The same applied to Belgium up to 1963, the year in which the language border was laid down by law. From then onward the notion of 'language border' is used in a sociolinguistic sense, meaning that it separates two regions in which either Dutch or French is the official language, disregarding any possible bilingual communication which may actually occur in the transition zone: the language border coincides with the border separating two administrative entities.

As regards the changes which are discussed in this paper, two essentially different types have to be discerned (Willemyns, 1996): (1) language shift resulting in a change of the location of the border, meaning that places which used to be part of the transition zone have, in the course of time, definitely moved into the monolingual zone on either side of the border; (2) language shift resulting in 'erosion', meaning that the contact situation has decisively been changed in the course of history although the 'language border' (in the traditional sense) has not changed its course. Since in Belgium the constitutional notion of language border not only refers to the demarcation lines between monolingual territories but also to the demarcation lines between monolingual and officially bilingual zones, 'erosion' is also used to characterise a decisive change of the situation within bilingual zones.

4. Status and Function of the Language Border in Belgium

4.1 General observations

Although the language border has existed for centuries, no solid information prior to the 19th century is available as far as the territory of present-day Belgium is concerned.

In 1846, the recently established Kingdom of Belgium started conducting censuses including a question on language usage which provided statistical information until 1947 (De Metsenaere, 1998). For various reasons the information gathered this way is often inaccurate: the exact wording of the questions was changed from one census to another and, more importantly, two basic requirements for reliable information gathering, namely honest intentions and scientific support, were hardly ever met, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Gubin (1978).

The most important insight yielded by the first census (1846) is that the administrative division of the country into provinces, 'arrondissementen' (counties) and even communes had been carried out without taking into account the language border and had never intended to provide for more or less linguistically homogeneous administrative entities. On the other hand, the information yielded perfectly allowed to draw a language map showing a border line neatly separating the French- (i.e. Walloon dialect) speaking and the Dutch- (i.e. Flemish dialect) speaking communities. For almost a century (and in spite of the deficient methodology) there were (with the exception of Brussels) no significant differences from one census to another (Martens, 1975), a fact demonstrating the remarkable stability of Belgium's linguistic communities.

4.2 The territoriality principle

A dramatic change occurred from 1932 onward, the year in which the language border became a political issue. A century of struggle by the Vlaamse Beweging ['Flemish Movement'] in favour of the promotion of Dutch in a country up to then dominated by French speakers had finally resulted in extensive linguistic legislation bringing about the *de facto* acceptance of the territoriality principle (McRae, 1975), which implied that Flanders was to be governed exclusively in Dutch and Wallonia exclusively in French. To implement this decision, though, a precise legal description of the delimitation of these territories, in other words of the language border, was needed. Although the 1932 laws did not provide such a description, it held a provision that communes with a linguistic minority of at least 30% were to be governed bilingually and that, should a minority become the majority, the linguistic status of the commune was to change accordingly. This seems to be fair enough, were it not that the only means of acquiring the information needed was the census which thus, unfortunately, acquired important political significance.

The first census with these political implications was scheduled for 1940 but was postponed because of World War II and when in 1947 it was finally carried out it resulted in an outburst of political commotion. Contrasting heavily with the stability the returns had shown for more than a century, it appeared that this time not only notorious shifts were registered but that they all went in the same direction: many Dutch-speaking villages appeared to harbour so many French

speakers, that they turned into either bilingual or even French-speaking communes (Martens, 1975). Since fraudulent manoeuvring by (local and/or national) authorities was very apparent, the Flemish reaction was extremely vigorous and the government was finally forced to skip language questions from future census questionnaires altogether and to look for a political solution which might, once and for all, determine the language border between the communities. A law to this effect came into being on 1 September 1963 and since its underlying philosophy was to produce linguistically homogeneous administrative entities, several adjustments had to be made, transferring 25 communes with 87,450 inhabitants from Flanders to Wallonia and 24 communes with 23,250 inhabitants from Wallonia to Flanders (detailed information in Martens, 1975 and Deweerdt, 1998).

4.3 Problem areas

Another provision of the 1963 law was the instalment of communes with so-called 'faciliteiten' [linguistic facilities] (De Schryver, 1998), meaning that if a community harboured a considerable linguistic minority (on 1 September 1963), provisions were to be made enabling this minority to communicate in its own language with communal authorities and to obtain limited possibilities for instruction in its own language. This status was allotted to a restricted number of communes on both sides of the language border. The major provision, though, meant to put minds at rest, was that after 1 September 1963, changes in the linguistic status of communes and provinces became virtually impossible and could only be brought about through a very complicated procedure of changing the constitution. On top of a two-thirds majority required for any constitutional change, those with 'linguistic implications' require a majority within both language factions of the Belgian parliament. Almost everywhere this peace of mind was indeed brought about; two notorious exceptions, the so-called 'Voerstreek' and the Brussels suburban region (the so-called 'Randgemeenten') will now be treated in some more detail.

4.3.1 The Voerstreek

The *Voerstreek* is part of the so-called 'Land van Overmaas', a small territory situated between the major cities of Aachen (Germany), Maastricht (The Netherlands) and Liège (Wallonia, Belgium). During the 'ancien régime' Dutch was the language of instruction and administration in the whole Overmaas territory (Goossens, 1998), but subsequently both a 'Germanifying' and a 'Frenchifying' tendency had become apparent. Also, it has always been almost impossible to distinguish between 'Dutch' and 'German' dialects in the region, on the basis of purely linguistic criteria (Nelde, 1979: 41).

From the end of World War I onward, when the Eupen region, a former Prussian possession, was annexed by Belgium, the 17 'Overmaas' communes were part of three different linguistic regimes (Goossens, 1998). Two of them (called *Altbelgien* and *Neubelgien*) will not be dealt with here, since they are analysed by Nelde and Darquennes in this issue.

This leaves us with the six communes of theVoerstreek which gained political celebrity and a wretched reputation during recent decades (Murphy, 1988). Subject to both the Frenchification process which also affected the other

communes in the region and to Walloon immigration, they turned out a linguistically mixed region with a French-speaking minority. For that reason the 1963 law transferred them from the Walloon province of Liège to the Flemish province of Limburg. Since, however, they are not geographically linked to the latter province and are/were dependent, for various economic functions, on Liège, some of its inhabitants were not very happy with this transfer. This uneasiness has been exploited by Walloon activists, causing political commotion ever since. Yet, both Flemish determination and recent changes in the constitution which put the 'Voerstreek' firmly under the authority of the autonomous government of Flanders seem to have lessened political tension a good deal. Wynants (1980) explains why, even for autochthonous inhabitants, the established triglossic situation of old – Dutch dialect for informal communication; Standard Dutch in primary schools and in church; French in secondary education and part of the administration – was finally disturbed and eventually changed because of political attitudes. From 1964 to 2000 the political faction advocating a return to the Francophone province of Liège managed to secure an, ever diminishing, majority in the local city council. As a result of the latest communal elections (October 2000) though, the opposite faction came into power. Consequently, a return to Liège is no longer on the political agenda of Voeren's city council and of the majority of its inhabitants. A recent and extensive analysis of the present situation as well as its genesis is to be found in Vandermeeren (1996).

4.3.2 The Brussels suburban region

The 1963 law also affected the status of some suburbs in the Brussels region where the officially bilingual territory is restricted to 19 communes which together constitute Brussels as a political entity. Ongoing Frenchification of Brussels which is discussed below, also affected some of its suburbs. Mostly because of immigration of French speakers but also partly because of upward social mobility behaviour affecting part of the autochthonous population some of these communes lost their former exclusively Dutch-speaking character and pressure was put on consecutive governments to annex them to bilingual Brussels (Sieben, 1993). Yet, surrendering to Francophone demands was politically unfeasible and, afterwards, made constitutionally impossible. Some of these suburbs, though, appeared to harbour not only important French-speaking minorities but in some cases even *de facto* majorities. Six of them, Drogenbos, Kraainem, Linkebeek, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Wemmel and Wezenbeek-Oppem, officially received a 'faciliteiten'-system (De Witte 1975; Witte 1993a) but remained part of Flanders and, consequently, officially Dutch-speaking. This way the risk of Francophone overspill to other than these six communes had been considerably diminished and recent evolution shows a significant decrease of Francophone influence in all of the hinterland communes, as was demonstrated in research by Deschouwer and Mariette (1993). The most recent constitutional change of 1993 also provided for the split of the province of Brabant as from 1 January 1995, cutting the Brussels periphery for good from the capital itself (Detant, 1998). This may very well bring to a conclusion in the near future a process which is to be discerned all along the language border, namely the increasing homogeneity of the language territory through assimilation of minority language islands.

4.4 Pattern of fluctuation

What we have been witnessing in the 'Voerstreek' and the Brussels hinterland is not a fluctuation of the language border, but an erosion within Flemish borders, due to the sociological mechanism of 'upward social mobility and integration' and to Francophone immigration. Actually, the villages mentioned earlier are the only incidence of places really shifting from one community to the other.

4.5 Language contacts across the border

As far as linguistic parallels and mutual influence on both sides of the linguistic border are concerned, some research has been done in the course of time, but the subject has never been extremely popular. The influence of French on the evolution of Dutch is undeniable and a logical consequence of a language in contact situation which has existed for centuries. The opposite phenomenon, although less prominent, has been established as well. An overview of research in both fields is to be found in Willemyns (1997a). There is also a (limited) tradition of research into mutual influence of dialects and dialect phenomena in Flanders and Wallonia, most of it conducted before World War II. In more recent times A. Weijnen is one of the most prominent names in this field (e.g. Weijnen, 1964). A recent overview with a discussion of case studies and possible explanations for similar linguistic developments on both sides of the Flemish-Walloon dialect borders is given in De Schutter (1999).

Both cases mentioned pertain to the field of historical linguistics, that is, the study of mutual influence due to the extremely long duration of language contact and demonstrable in language change that occurred a long time ago. The same goes for so-called 'gallicisms' in Dutch and 'flandricisms' in French, as they are spotted and denounced by purists on both sides of the border. Those too have been existing for ages but it is not known to what extent the phenomenon is still productive.

Apart from the bilingual Brussels region (see Treffers-Daller in this issue) there has not been, to my knowledge, any substantial research on linguistic contact phenomena in the present time.

5. Brussels

5.1 General observations

Language shift in Brussels, spectacular though it may have been, is also a shift not affecting the language border as such. Here too, the pattern of fluctuation shows an erosion within the Dutch linguistic territory eventually rendering a city which used to be part of Flanders (*à part entière*) into a bilingual city with Francophone dominance. From a judicial point of view, though, a shift did nevertheless occur, since Brussels changed its status from (*de facto*) monolingual Dutch into (*de jure*) bilingual. Yet, there is not and there cannot be an answer to the apparently simple question of how many speakers are to be attributed to the Dutch or French speaking groups respectively (Baetens Beardsmore, 2000). The portrait of Brussels is one of immense complexity (Mackey, 1981) involving not only linguistic background and competence but also attitudes, social status, job

conditions, circumstances of discourse, feelings towards the interlocutor, etc.; in a word all of the sociolinguistic variables which are known to determine linguistic interaction in multilingual settings (Willemyns, 1997 and Treffers-Daller in this issue).

5.2 Language shift

Until the 19th century Brussels shared its linguistic fate with other Flemish cities: an important part of the social elite was bilingual and used French for most of the traditional culture language functions. The competence of the majority of the population was restricted to a Dutch dialect; other varieties of Dutch were only at the disposal of the few (De Vriendt & Willemyns, 1987). This situation existed in most Flemish cities and there was neither a typological nor a quantitative difference between the situation in Brussels and in other cities such as Antwerp, Ghent or Bruges. Consequently, since Frenchification was stopped and eventually reversed in Flanders but not in Brussels, an explanation can only be found in factors specific to the Brussels situation.

5.2.1 Historical development

Ever since the start of the Burgundian period in the 15th century (De Vries *et al.*, 1995: 50 ff.), Brussels has been a capital and consequently the number of courtiers, noblemen and influential government officials and civil servants has always been larger than elsewhere. It is precisely in these groups of people that the influence (and usage) of French has always been the most important (Witte, 1988, 1993).

Frenchification after the annexation by France was more intensive here than elsewhere in Flanders, not the least because of the presence of an influential group of French immigrants (Deneckere, 1954). After 1830, Brussels emerged as a symbol of Belgium and here the 'one country, one language' principle appeared to be more appropriate still than elsewhere. The strongly centralising Belgian policy, moreover, resulted in a disproportional high concentration of the country's financial and industrial power in the Francophone 'milieu' of the capital. Since power and wealth essentially derived from Walloon industry it is hardly surprising that the elite particularly favoured this region and its language.

At rather short notice Brussels became a pole of attraction to numerous immigrants from both the Dutch and the French-speaking parts of the country. In Brussels as well as in its suburbs there was an explosion of the population. Between 1830 and 1840 the population quadrupled (De Metsenaere & Witte, 1990: 3). Flemish immigrants mostly consisted of lower-class and poor people, whereas Walloon immigrants mostly consisted of upper-working-class and middle-class people (De Metsenaere, 1988). The latter immediately fortified the Francophone population. As to the former: 'the pressure from the top social stratum to adopt its French language filtered down through the middle-classes and from them into the "labour aristocracy" of skilled workers, but generally stopping short at the lowest categories of service personnel and day labourers, made up to a large extent in the 19th century of Flemish immigrants to the capital' (Baetens Beardsmore, 1990: 2). Consequently, until far in the 20th century being Flemish (and speaking Dutch) used to be associated with being poor or even being socially and culturally retarded.

An additional handicap for both immigrant and autochthonous Dutch-speaking 'Brusselers' (the English language seems to have no appropriate term to designate the 'inhabitant of Brussels'; 'Brusseler' will be used to fill this gap) was that their habitual language was a dialect, i.e. a variety with a very limited social prestige. Consequently, the majority of the lower middle and working classes tried to acquire mastery in the only language which appeared to make upward social mobility at all possible. Hence, the attractiveness of the French educational system was immense in a period of rapid development of mass education.

The unprofessional and fraudulent censuses in Brussels (Gubin, 1978) showed an enormous increase of the 'statistical' amount of allegedly French-speaking inhabitants, and the judicial consequences of censuses were very real.

5.2.2 Linguistic legislation

An additional reason why the development in Brussels was different from Antwerp or Ghent was the fact that either most of the linguistic legislation did not apply to Brussels or had to be paid for by concessions intensifying the Frenchification of the capital. This situation changed as soon as the major struggle in Flanders was over and the Flemish Movement could start paying attention to the capital as well (Witte & Van Velthoven, 1998).

The turning point appears to have been when Flemings agreed to give up the advantages of their numerical majority in the country at large in favour of parity in administration for Brussels. This implied that Dutch-speaking 'Brusselers', even after having become a minority group, were nevertheless allotted half of the high ranking civil servants in the administration of Brussels' 19 communes (Willemyns, 1997).

Several measures taken on the level of the national government guarantee Dutch speakers in Brussels a position on all kinds of levels, which they never could have extorted by virtue of their sole numerical strength. A very eloquent example is to be found in the school system. Although the number of pupils in the Dutch school system had very much deteriorated in the 1950s and 1960s, a combination of measures accounts for a constant increase of the population of Dutch schools from the late 1970s onward (Baetens Beardsmore, 1990), as opposed to the decrease of the school population in the country at large and in French schools in Brussels in particular.

Other measures, then, have entailed consequences which were completely unpredictable. The reinstalment of the so-called 'freedom of the head of the family', meaning that Dutch-speaking families could choose French education for their children and vice versa, was very much feared by supporters of the Dutch cause in Brussels who expected language shift to be increased by it. Completely unexpectedly, it appears to be the 'heads' of French-speaking families who, to an ever increasing extent, use their 'freedom' to choose Dutch education for their children. Consequently, pupils in the Dutch schools increasingly originate from linguistically mixed or homogeneously French-speaking households (D'hondt, 1999).

Also, as Baetens Beardsmore (1990: 5) points out, Flanders' increasing economic resources made it possible to put up structures in Brussels which enabled 'the individual to function as a monolingual. Schools, hospitals, welfare

services, cultural instances, recreational facilities have all been set up to service either community in its own language. Hence the institutional pressures to Frenchification have been eliminated and … the minority speaker (was enabled) to maintain his ethnolinguistic identity'. It enabled him also to profit maximally from the gain in prestige the language had acquired in the country at large.

An internal factor which has to be stressed is the shift in linguistic behaviour and attitudes away from dialects in the direction of the standard language. Among supporters of the Dutch cause there has always been a general awareness that meeting the French challenge was only possible by increasing the importance and usage of Standard Dutch, the only variety (if any) able to equal the social prestige of French. This awareness was particularly strong among inhabitants of the bilingual Brussels region. Inquiries have demonstrated that here indeed, the shift from Dutch dialects to Standard Dutch started earlier and has been more massive than elsewhere in Flanders (De Vriendt & Willemyns, 1987: 224–225). This factor is to be added to those mentioned before and is to be considered one of the most important contributions from the Dutch-speaking 'Brusselers' themselves to the dramatic change of the Brussels linguistic scene.

Finally, the rapidly expanding population of foreign origin accounts for the fact that for probably one-third of the capital's citizens none of Belgium's languages is their mother tongue. Yet, for the overwhelming majority of those, French is their first 'Belgian' language.

6. Typology of language border change

The analysis of these various and differing instances of language shift will help to explain my initial assumption concerning the 'language border' concept. History proves that demarcation lines between dialects of different languages can remain remarkably stable over centuries, but also that changes in the political and/or social constellation may account for dramatic alterations leading to language shift and eventually language loss. The point that I would like to emphasise though, is that only (conscious or semi-conscious) language planning initiatives may entail durable, irreversible change. Planned political interference of various kinds (and linguistic legislation is only one of them) accounts for a process of socially determined shift, resulting in language erosion on one side of the language border and eventually in complete loss. Since language planning initiatives may be of a contradictory nature – either to encourage the 'offensive' language or to support the 'defensive' one – political and sociological factors will decisively determine the eventual outcome. The fact that language planning methods in France and in Belgium are so completely different in nature will help to clarify that matter.

6.1 The French type

France is an officially monolingual country where French is the only official language. Ever since the French Revolution constant and determined pressure has been put on the 'allophone' regions to accommodate, both officially and privately, to the official policy. This had led to a massive shift of which French Flanders and Alsace are only a few examples (Bister-Broosen, 1998; Ryckeboer, 1997). As a consequence of the monolingual assumptions of the central govern-

ment language borders were neither protected nor was their mere existence accepted in any legal or official way and so there has been no official protection or even function for minority languages in France; their usage has, on the contrary, constantly been fought and banned. Consequently they have deteriorated everywhere, in French Flanders almost to the point of complete extinction, emptying the still existing 'language border' of almost all practical relevance nowadays. Yet, even in this very restricted sense the language boundary has shifted considerably in a northern direction over the last two centuries. A quantitatively and qualitatively very restricted form of bilingualism and/or diglossia, and what Dorian (1982) calls 'semi-speakers' is all that has survived the aggressive language planning activities (namely linguistic legislation and social pressure) devised by the French government and establishment.

6.2 The Belgian type

The evolution in Belgium has been completely different, mainly because of a very different historical evolution:

- Prior to 1794 (annexation of the Belgian territories by France) there has never been a consistent linguistic policy (mainly because there has never been a central government!) .
- Both the French (up to 1814; Deneckere, 1954) and the King of the 'United Netherlands' (from then till 1830; De Jonghe, 1967) legislated on linguistic matters in the 'one country – one language'-sense, albeit it with completely different intentions.
- The 'founding fathers' of independent Belgium meant to appease linguistic unrest by constitutionally declaring 'the use of the languages optional'. In a nation dominated by an industrialised and powerful Walloon part and a mainly French-speaking Flemish nobility and bourgeoisie, this meant the perpetuation of the dominance of French over the majority, i.e. the Dutch speaking, yet politically powerless Flemings.

During all this time the internal language border between Dutch and French continued to exist practically unchanged and unchallenged since it was simply an informal line on dialectologists' maps having no official or political implications whatsoever. The struggle of the so-called Flemish Movement for cultural and linguistic rights for Dutch speakers gradually changed the picture. Bitterly fought, yet only gradually implemented linguistic legislation resulted, in the 1930s, in the *de facto* acceptance of the territoriality principle legally acknowledging the existence of language communities. The next step, consequently, had to be the official delimitation of these communities; in other words the official determination of the language border. Subsequent constitutional reforms finally transformed Belgium into a federal state with regional governments having extensive legislative power within their territories confined by language borders. These borders were laid down in the constitution and made virtually unchangeable. Consequently, each Belgian town or village has been allotted a specific linguistic status and the official language of each individual is not a matter of personal choice but of the territory she or he lives in.

6.3 Patterns of change

The changes that have occurred can be classified into different types or patterns:

(1) 'Monolingualisation' of formerly bilingual or bicultural villages as is the case of some of the language border communities.
(2) 'Bilingualisation' of formerly mostly monolingual villages, i.e. 'Frenchification', for example, in the border villages of Brussels, some of which have indeed been annexed to the Brussels bilingual community in the course of time.
(3) A specific evolution in Brussels itself, mainly of the type mentioned in (2).

Political evolution in recent decades has stabilised the language border and made drastic changes virtually impossible in the future. It appears that:

- changes have become 'definitive' over time mainly by securing the linguistic homogeneity of administrative entities;
- ongoing shift has been frozen by firmly embedding shifting villages into a monolingual community. Investigations have shown that Frenchification not only seems to have stopped but is being slowly reversed (Deschouwer & Mariette, 1993).

As a result we are now in the presence of a firmly monolingualised Belgium, divided into autonomous communities based on linguistic homogeneity and determined to reduce the political consequences of language contact at their borders to a strict minimum. In so doing the language border has become the most important internal boundary to which all pre-existing administrative delimitations were subordinated. The only interesting place left (from a socio-linguistic point of view) is Brussels. The principal of territoriality does not apply here; there is no official demarcation line between speakers of both languages and no way of officially controlling language contact or potential shift either.

In Belgium at large the language border is no longer a mere linguistic notion but a legal, administrative and political reality. This evolution has completely changed the nature of the coexistence of the country's various linguistic communities – firmly embedded in their own monolingual structures – and has also demonstrated how decisive the implications of language planning activities can be.

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