

NOT FROM FRENCH OVER FLEMISH AND DUTCH TO ENGLISH?

Brief history of the language struggle in Flemish education

In this edition, we will look at the latest contribution on language and education in ICEC countries. This time the focus will be on Flanders. Teacher Bernard Daelemans has written this four page article in cooperation with 'De Brusselse Post'. Therefore, you will not find an editorial from him this month. The text will also be discussed at the ICEC event. Next month, this series will continue with non-ICEC countries.



Bokrijk: In the 18th century education was mainly religious..

1830: French, the only national language

Less than ten years after Belgian independence was declared (on October 4, 1830) and French became the sole national language 'in the name of freedom', the Flemish movement emerged with its first political demands in the form of petitions from Flemish-minded groups in Ghent, Leuven and Antwerp. They requested a series of the following demands, namely that the provincial councils in Flanders deliberate in Flemish, the national administration use the language of the citizens and of the municipalities, justice be exercised in the language of the majority of the population, and that a Flemish academy be established in addition to the university of Ghent and other state schools placing 'Nederduyts' on an equal footing with French.

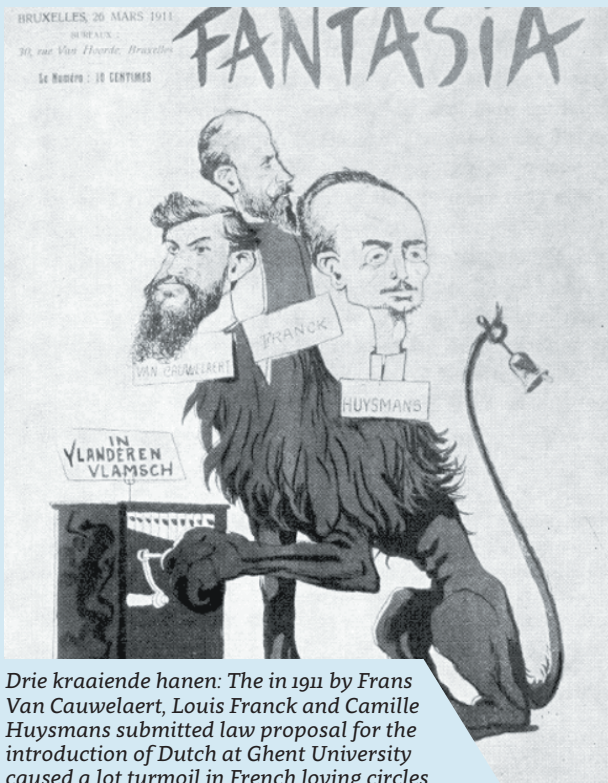
It would be a long struggle before all those things became a reality. It took half a century before the first steps were taken and the complete Dutchification of Flanders took more than a hundred years. In this contribution, we look at how the Dutchification of education has progressed. The language struggle in education was intersected by the school-struggle between confessional and secular movements. That is to say that the Catholics within their educational network and the liberals in public education waged a parallel struggle, although this fault line was sometimes transcended.

It would be a long agony.

Among Austrians, the French and the Dutch

In 1914, Belgium was one of the last countries in Western Europe to introduce compulsory education for children aged 6 to 12. In comparison, compulsory education had existed in all federal states in Germany since 1850. Until the 18th century, primary education in Belgium was mainly an ecclesiastical affair. Parish schools were present in most villages, but in a number of towns (such as in Bruges and of course in Brussels) there were also French boarding schools, as the prestige of French was great among the Flemish middle class.

Already under the Austrian rule and certainly under the French Empire and also during the time of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the government wanted to gain more influence in education and break through the monopoly position of church education and replace it with state monopoly. Naturally, the French government also wanted to spread its language and 'republican values' through public education, but it encountered the reality of monolingual Catholic Flanders and an aversion toward the French occupying forces. As a result, illiteracy increased during that period.



Drie kraaiende hanen: The in 1911 by Frans Van Cauwelaert, Louis Franck and Camille Huysmans submitted law proposal for the introduction of Dutch at Ghent University caused a lot turmoil in French loving circles.

The Dutch government wanted to promote Dutch as a national language. The most important achievement here was the establishment of a 'National Normal School' in Lier, where teachers were trained in Dutch. King William I also established state universities in Ghent, Leuven and Liège, but the official language there was Latin. All in all, primary education was taught mostly in Dutch, except for French lessons which were taught in preparation for (French-speaking) secondary education. King William's policy ensured a qualitative improvement in primary education and a professionalisation of the teaching profession.

The struggle for Dutchization is difficult

The language struggle in the second half of the 19th century thus arose mainly around the Dutchization of secondary and higher education. It was a struggle that was mainly waged between the Flemish movement and the French-minded bourgeoisie of Flanders, the 'franskiljons'.

Since Belgium was initially not a democracy (the right to vote was limited to the 0.5% of the most wealthy), and since the social upper class in Flanders also considered French to be culturally superior, the struggle for the recognition of Dutch as the language of culture, government and education went on. The middle class was also in awe of the French language. It is true that the law stipulated that from 1850 a subject had to be taught in their mother tongue, but that did not happen everywhere.

1883: a cautious start but an ecclesiastical 'nun'

It was not until 1883 that the first education law was passed, which also included language provisions, under the

impulse of a number of pro-Flemish MPs. That law made it mandatory to teach five subjects – including Dutch – in Dutch. More importantly, the law also stipulated the establishment of normal schools to train teachers who could also teach in Dutch.

Dutch is not a cultural language

Cardinal Mercier, 1900

As is always the case with language laws in our country, this law was also followed to an unequal extent - and in some places only reluctantly and sparsely. It was applied more diligently in official education institutions unlike in Catholic schools. Moreover, the law made it possible to teach 'simultaneously' in French and Dutch. The main consequence of the law was that space was created for the Dutch language in secondary education and better grammar and literature anthologies began to circulate as the result of the love and dedication expressed by Flemish-minded literati and teachers.

However, all this was too little for the Flemish-minded and they continued to put pressure on the ecclesiastical hierarchy to pursue the Dutchification of education, but the opposition was great. It was Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier himself who in 1900 made clear in his 'instructions' for the Catholic education network that Dutch could not be regarded as a genuine language of culture. Only an 'international' language like French was suitable for scientific practice.

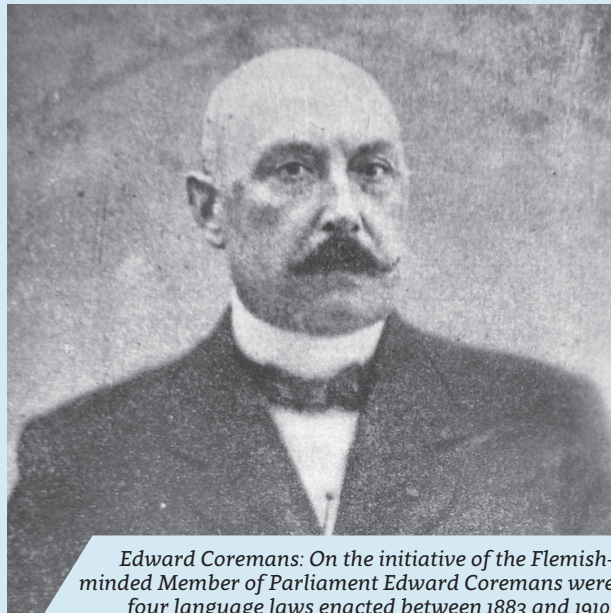


P. Van Humbeeck: Education Minister Pierre Van Humbeeck (1878-1884) recognized as the first Belgian minister that he had to carry out the law of 1850 fairly.

An improvement in sight from 1910

A new law from 1910 abolished the system of simultaneous teaching in French and Dutch. Obtaining a secondary diploma with a number of subjects taught in Dutch became a requirement to gain access to university. Moreover, this law was applied with more diligence than the law of 1883.

In the meantime, a radicalization took place in the Flemish Movement which increasingly advocated for a complete Dutchification of secondary and higher education. During the First World War, due to the trauma of the front soldiers, the Flemish Movement had grown from an elitist movement into a mass movement. The introduction of universal single suffrage after the First World War also ensured that the voice of the broad Flemish masses became important. Without any new legislative changes, the minimum teaching package in Dutch in secondary school was expanded to include 1/3 and later even 2/3 of the subjects.



Edward Coremans: On the initiative of the Flemish-minded Member of Parliament Edward Coremans were four language laws enacted between 1883 and 1910.



Mercier: Cardinal Mercier advocated cultural racism.

1932: finally full secondary education taught in Dutch

At last, a new law in 1932 ensured that secondary education could be taught completely in Dutch, although French-speaking departments continued to exist. These "language islands" would disappear in time. There were also Flemish "language islands" in Wallonia. The law stipulated that the regional language should be the language of instruction. But in the officially bilingual area of Brussels, it was the mother tongue that was in principle the language of instruction. Yet in the capital there was a great deal of resistance from the organizing authorities against the establishment of Flemish classes and many Flemish people in Brussels also preferred to have their children study in French. The Frenchification of Brussels reached its peak in the interwar period and the great majority continued to send their children to French-speaking schools or departments.

A lot of foreigners follow Dutch-language education in Brussels.

From fear to success in Brussels

In the 1970's there were concerns that Dutch-language education in Brussels would disappear, especially when the law was amended to introduce 'freedom of the head of the family'. This meant that apart from the actual mother tongue, the head of the family could decide in which language his children would be educated. It was feared that this would be the final blow, but the opposite turned out to be true. Gradually, more and more French speakers began to send their children to Flemish schools.



Leuven: At the end of the 1960s, the students in Leuven split their university.

Despite the internationalisation of Brussels, Dutch-language education appears to be appealing and nowadays around 25% of children of compulsory school age participate in this type of schooling. The economic rise of Flanders has of course played a major role in this.

What about higher education?

As far as higher education is concerned, the battle was analogous. The State University of Ghent, the Liberal University of Brussels and the Catholic University of Leuven remained French-speaking throughout the 19th century, except that the law eventually stipulated that some courses at the law faculty had to be taught in Dutch, since magistrates and lawyers would eventually also encounter common people who did not speak French in their practice.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the demand for the Dutchization of Ghent University took center stage. Little by little, some subjects were tinkered with again. This also happened in Leuven and Brussels. Ultimately, it was the German occupier who Flemishized Ghent University (briefly from 1917 to 1918), but King Albert promised that after the war higher education would be conducted in Dutch. This complete Dutchification only happened in 1932.

However, the KU Leuven (KUL) remained bilingual and at the ULB the Flemish were stepmotherly treated. It was not

until the 1960's that both the KUL and the ULB split. After separating from the KUL, the French-speaking branch (UCL) then moved to Louvain-La-Neuve in Walloon Brabant in 1970 and in the same year the VUB in Brussels also acquired its own legal personality and was able to expand its campus in Etterbeek.

After the struggle for Dutch, now against English?

In recent decades, however, the pressure to give more place to English in higher education has increased dramatically. This has been the case especially in the Netherlands; several universities there have been completely anglicised, and at most universities more than half of the programs are taught in English. This is quite an exceptional condition which cannot be found anywhere else in Europe.

In Flanders, there continues to be a legal brake on organising courses in English. At the bachelor's level this is limited to 18.33% of the courses and at the master's level a maximum of half of the courses may be taught in a language other than Dutch.



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