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## THE FRENCH FLEMISH DIALECT IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE SITUATION OF BELGIUM AND FRANCE

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This article addresses the historical language variants of Flanders, spoken both within and outside the region. The linguistic diversity of officially Dutch-speaking Flanders is represented by Limburgish, West Flemish, Brabantian, and East Flemish dialects, with Limburgish and West Flemish being entitled to the status of a distinct language. (Limburgish is recognized as a regional language in the Netherlands.) This paper reviews some sociolinguistic and political features of Flanders, acknowledging the area of West Flemish dialect group use. Special emphasis is placed on the French Flemish dialect, present in the territories of France and Belgium. This dialect is one of the most archaic West Flemish dialects that suffered a profound impact from French and other neighboring languages. The lexical and grammatical features of French Flemish are examined. It is noted that code switching is common for the French Flemish dialect. Some of the French Flemish syntax features related to the antecedent phenomena are explained via the binomiality idea, that states any verbal or substantive part of a sentence be composed of two parts, the first of which can be modified. Some syntax phenomena of French Flemish could be the result of grammatical interference between the West Flemish dialect and the French language. The paper also touches on the French Flemish support actions taken by France and Belgium, and discusses French Flemish seceding from West Flemish dialect group and acquiring a special status, that could be a status of a distinct language.

**Keywords:** Flanders, French Flanders, French Flemish dialect, sociolinguistics, regional language.

Belgium's linguistic diversity draws the attention of many linguists: inconsistent language policy and the mixed language situation of the country are still matters of dispute of a nature varying from advisory-

deliberative to radical-aggressive. Alongside three official languages (French, Dutch, and German) are many regional languages and dialects, some of which are distinct enough to be considered separate languages in Belgium. One such dialect is French Flemish, with its own vocabulary and grammatical features that will be addressed further on.

As we know, there are southern and northern branches of Low Franconian dialects in Flanders. The southern branch comprises Limburgian dialects, while the northern one embraces Brabantian, East Flemish and West Flemish. Limburgian and West Flemish dialects are currently used the most in everyday speech of the Flemish Region citizens and differ the most from Belgian Dutch and Dutch in its common norm [Claeys, 2001]. It is also worth noting that Dutch dialects are used differently in the Netherlands and in Belgium. Netherlands Dutch dialects are used much less often than Standard Dutch, while in Belgium, albeit competing with “tussentaal” (an intermediate variant between Belgian Dutch and the dialects of Flanders), the dialects of remote areas stand out to such an extent that Flemish and Dutch TV programs translate them to “civilized” Dutch (*La Bretagne Linguistique*). Yet currently West Flemish (comprising a group of dialects) is marked as vulnerable as per the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*.

Unlike, for instance, Limburgish in the Netherlands, West Flemish is not recognized as a distinct language in Belgium, despite the fact that it is nearly as different from Dutch in its common norm as Afrikaans. West Flemish dialects are commonly used in western Flanders due to a vigorous movement of local writers who resisted the introduction of Northern Dutch (the basis of Standard Dutch) in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most eminent representatives of this movement was the priest and an influential poet Guido Gezelle. He believed that West Flemish dialect should be the basis of the language of Flanders [Vermeiren, 1988].

The West Flemish dialect group manifests itself quite distinctly as a language variant spoken in Bruges. West Flemish dialects are also common in the Netherlands, in the south of Zeeland province (Zeelandic Flanders), and in France's region Hauts-de-France (Westhoek, Maritime Flanders), as well as in the territories of French Flanders or Southern Flanders (with Lille, Douai, Cassel, Dunkirk, Hazebrouck, Arras, Boulogne-sur-Mer as principal cities), where a special French Flemish dialect evolved. According to the census of 1999, 20,000 citizens are full speakers of the French Flem-

ish dialect, and 50,000 people speak it with varying degrees of proficiency (compare this to the 1830 census figures: there were 170,000 speakers of the dialect) [*Institute nationale de la statistique et des études économiques*]. West Flemish dialects persist and do not yield to Belgium Dutch, “tussentaal,” or Standard Dutch, directly aligning with French and, to a much lesser extent, with Picard. Nearly 80% of the population in regions with West Flemish present speak it as a second language so far.

The West Flemish dialectal area does not correspond to the territorial boundaries of the today’s Belgian province West Flanders. This way, the dialects in the east of the province, in the area of the Scheldt river, have distinctive East Flemish features. The language of the coastal areas retained many Ingvaenic features, which is why the dialect shares some similarities with English. Within the coastal West Flemish dialectal area there are northern West Flemish and western West Flemish, which includes French Flanders. Within the continental West Flemish dialect, Ingvaenic features retained to a much lesser extent.

It is important to note that French Flemish is genetically a part of West Flemish dialect group. However, due to its isolated position, it did not undergo some language changes common to West Flemish. As such, French Flemish managed to keep some archaisms. However, essentially French Flemish dialect is a combination of the French language and West Flemish dialects. So this dialect, just like Marollien (that was common in Brussels), abounds with examples of code switching and most fascinating instances of lexical and grammatical interference [Ulianitckaia, 2020].

French Flemish dialect vocabulary is quite archaic on the one hand, and comprises many words and phrases borrowed from languages and dialects in contact on the other.

Due to being “peripheral,” the dialect retained quite a number of stems used during the period of Middle Dutch that are not common to either other dialects or language norm. Here are some examples in the following sequence: French Flemish — Standard Dutch (the examples of words and grammatical structures of French Flemish are hereinafter drawn from the book “Frans-Vlaams. Taal in stad en land” [Ryckeboer, 2004] written by Hugo Ryckeboer, Belgian dialectologist who specialized in French Flemish dialect):

*beiden (beien) — wachten* ‘to wait’  
*bezieën — proberen* ‘to try’

*driesj* — *braakland* ‘wasteland’  
*fieken* — *steken* ‘to sting’  
*groêze* — *weiland* ‘meadow’  
*kasten* — *dopen* ‘to baptize’  
*moede* — *aarde, stof* ‘ground, soil’  
*stallicht* — *stallantaarn* ‘street lamp’  
*viêrstee, viêrsteie* — *haard* ‘hearth’  
*zuuwe* — *zeef* ‘sieve’

There are quite a number of words borrowed from the West and the North Germanic languages. For instance, *e lietje* — *een beetje*, comparable to Friesian *een lutje* or to English *a little*; *wied* — *onkruid* from English *weed*; *wask* — *was* from English *wax* or German *Wachs*; *buuge* — *bui* ‘downpour’ from Danish *byge* etc.

However, the greatest number of loanwords comes from French, and such lexical items are of different spheres of use. Here are some examples sequenced as French Flemish dialect — French norm:

*aprè-tôe* — *après-tout* ‘after all’  
*aranzjeeren* — *arranger* ‘arrange’  
*baskuule* — *bascule* ‘balance’  
*bassing* — *basin* ‘basin’  
*daanzjereus* — *dangereux* ‘dangerous’  
*devooër* — *devoir* ‘duty’  
*dokteur* — *docteur* ‘doctor’  
*en folie èdan* — *faire des folies* ‘do stupid things’  
*freere* — *frère* ‘brother’  
*fring* — *frein* ‘brake’  
*komirsant* — *commerçant* ‘trader’  
*liberòsje* — *liberation* ‘release’  
*marsjang* — *marchand* ‘merchant’  
*paji* — *pays* ‘country’  
*passoozje* — *passage* ‘passage’  
*puniesje* — *punition* ‘punishment’  
*sinteure* — *ceinture* ‘belt’  
*sjampetter* — *garde champêtre* ‘gamekeeper’  
*sjanzjement* — *changement* ‘change’  
*uusiene* — *usine* ‘plant’

Some words and phrases are borrowed with their graphical form unchanged, for example: *chomage* ‘unemployment’, *écremeuse* ‘separator’, *coup de téléphone* ‘phone call’, *feuille d’impot* ‘tax notice’, *conseil municipal* ‘city council’, *certificat d’études* ‘graduate certificate’, *coopérative agricole* ‘agricultural cooperative’, *cygne* ‘swan’, *tortue* ‘turtle’, *écureuil* ‘squirrel’ — however, this lexical item is rivaled by the Flemish compound noun *neutekraaker*.

Furthemore, it is quite common for French Flemish to mix Flemish and French phrases, for example: *Biens entendu j’et er die nooit kontent en zien — Je hebt er natuurtijk die nooit tevreden zijn*. ‘That’s right, you are never happy about it’; *Mais van mien, ‘t was een assing op de meur — Maar van mij hing er een uithangbord op de muur*. ‘But I had a sign on the wall’; *‘k En zeeër in me rik, à force van eeïe daagen to stuupen — Ik heb pijn in mijn rug door mij hele dagen te bukken*. ‘My back hurts because I was bending over all day.’ This phenomenon is not an example of code switching, it is rather an interference process that leads to the borrowing of the minor syntax forms. Code switching is however common to French Flemish as well. Investigating examples of code switching, which were extracted from a barrel maker’s speech recorded in 1987, Hugo Ryckeboer noted, that the cooper spoke very fast and must have not seen any difference between Dutch and French [Ryckeboer, 2004].

French Flemish dialect is also exceptionally interesting to look at from grammatical interference point of view. The antecedent phenomena found in the dialect demonstrate an undeniable influence of the French syntax on Dutch at both surface and underlying levels.

This way, French Flemish dialect still has an opposition of relative pronouns *die/dat*, matching the French ones *qui/que*. Principle parts of the sentence placement in the French language takes informative support from interrogative and conjunction elements *who* and *what* into account. Dependent clauses in French Flemish show the same pattern that contradicts with Standard Dutch, for instance: *‘t pèèrd die dòò lopt* ‘the horse that is running’ — *‘t paard dat/wat daar loopt; de man die mien dat ezeid et* ‘the man who told me that’ — *de man die me dat gezegd heft*; *‘t pèèrd dan ‘k ekocht en* ‘the horse that I bought’ — *het paard dat ik gekocht heb; de man dan ‘k egenekommen en* ‘the man whom I met’ — *de man die ik ontmoet heb*. The last two examples show another French Flemish feature (as well as the feature of other dialects)

also, in our view, related to the informative support of the conjunction element. The conjunction seems to be conjugated alongside the main verb of the dependent clause. At the same time the presence or absence of the antecedent in an independent clause is taken into account. This could be explained via the idea of binomiality stating that verbal and substantive parts of sentence comprise two parts (specifier and semi-finitive), the first of which can be modified [Shumkov, 2018]. If the antecedent is present, the subject specifier in a dependent clause (which has to be built on a pronoun) is modified by zero strong pronoun semi-finitive and is split into a new subject (implicit) and a secondary part, which can be fused with conjugative conjunction element *da(t)*, for instance:

*de man dan'k ∅' ezieën en* 'the man (whom) I saw'  
*de man die 'ik' gezien heb* or  
*de man dat ∅' n ezieën et* 'the man (whom) he saw'  
*de man die 'hij' gezien heeft*

In case the antecedent is absent the subject specifier can be modified by non-zero strong pronoun semifinitive and be split into a new subject (explicit) and a secondary part, which can be fused with conjugative conjunction element *da(t)* or *a(ls)*, for instance:

*Die man zegt dan'k/an'k 'ik' num ezieën en* 'This man says that I saw him';

*Die man zegt dat/at 'n 'ie' num ezieën et* 'This man says that he saw him.'

Another remarkable impact of the French syntax on French Flemish narrative sentences is the absence of inversion in subject-predicate structure when it is preceded by a sentence part. This way, a Dutch sentence *Morgen wordt het eindelijk mooi weer* 'The weather will be finally fine tomorrow' transforms into *Morren 't komt ten langen leste schoen were* in French Flemish; and *Om vijf uur is de trein weg* 'The train leaves at five o'clock' — *Alle vuuf voet den triek is weg*. In interrogative sentences, however, the inversion is similar to the one of Standard Dutch, for example *Is 't wòd dan ze op vojòdzje zien?* 'Is it true that they are on a trip?' — *Is het waar dat ze op reis zijn?*

It is also worth noting that noun phrases, unlike in Standard Dutch, are placed in French Flemish outside the frame, for example *Gisteren*

*zijn we met de kinderen naar zee geweest* ‘Yesterday we were at sea with children’ becomes *Gisteren mèn ewist me de joengens an de zeeë*; and *Ik ben nog nooit in Brussel geweest* ‘I have never been to Brussels before’ becomes *‘k En nog noois ewist an Brussel*. The French Flemish perfect of the verb *to be* is made with a form of auxiliary verb *have*, like in French. This, however, was once common for southern Dutch in general.

Unlike the majority of Flemish dialects as well as the southern norm, French Flemish composes verb phrases according to the Standard Dutch rules. This way a southern Dutch sentence *Zij heeft nooit haar haar laten af snijden* ‘She never let cut her hair’ becomes *Zoe en et neur òòr noois af lòòten snieden* in French Flemish; *Ik denk niet dat we dat kunnen op eten* ‘I don’t think we can eat this’ becomes *‘k Peizen nie da me dat op kunne ete*. Moreover, instead of typical for Flemish dialects construction *voor te + infinitive* ‘in order to’ French Flemish uses a Standard Dutch construction *om te + infinitive*. This way *‘t Is nog te klòòr om ‘t licht t’oentsteeken* ‘It is too early to put on the light’ becomes *Het is nog te klaar om het licht aan te doen*. Incidentally, the *voor* preposition is often replaced by *om* in French Flemish, for instance: *‘t Is al om mien* ‘All of this is for me’ — *Het is alles voor mij*, widely used in Middle Dutch. Generally speaking, the use of prepositions in French Flemish differs from the Dutch norm. Here are some examples: *peizen op* ‘to think about’ — *denken aan, kieken achter* ‘to care about’ — *zorgen voor, wachten/beien achter* ‘to wait’ — *wachten op*. It is also interesting to note the difference between “*Zoe wunt flu na Duunkerke*” ‘She is living in Dunkirk now’ and *Zij woont nu in Duinkerke*.

A particle common to Middle Dutch — *en* — is still used in French Flemish dialect after verbs *to go*, *to sit*, *to run*, and *to stand* instead of *te* particle, for instance: *Metje zit in de keuken erpels en sjchrooën* ‘Grandmother is sitting in the kitchen and peeling potatoes’ — *Grootmoeder zit in de keuken aardappelen te schillen*. This particle is also used in negative and emphatic structures (as in other dialects), for example: *Ik en gaan nie weg/wei vandaag* ‘I’m not leaving today’ — *Ik ga vandaag niet weg*; *M’ en en mòòr vuuf minuten nie meeë* ‘We have only 5 minutes left’ — *We hebben maar vijf minuten meer*; *Lanke/danke ‘t ik mòòr en wiste!* ‘I wish I knew that!’ — *Als ik het maar wist!*

Belgium’s language situation is aggravated by so-called French-Flemish conflict that arose because of mutual language claims between the citizens of Wallonia and Flanders. Flemings are unhappy with the

francophones' reluctance to learn Dutch, let alone Flemish dialects; their friendly attitude towards migrants, citizens of French-speaking countries; francophone municipalities excessive language facilities; Brussels constantly incorporating Flanders regions; and Wallonia's high unemployment rate. In turn, Walloons criticize francophones' mistreatment and an absolute prohibition of using French in the educational system of Flanders; and they demand to retain language facilities their municipalities have.

As a result of this conflict, the opinions of some sectors of society were radicalized, some right-wing parties were founded, e.g. "Vlaams Belang" (literally "Flemish Interest") campaigning for an independent Flanders, migration restriction, tradition Flemish values preservation, or "The New Flemish Alliance," a Flemish nationalist moderate conservative party that strives for the secession of Flanders from Belgium. (In Belgium's parliamentary election of 2014, this party won the most votes, 20,3 %, and got 33 seats in the Chamber of Representatives out of 150, demonstrating popularity among the electorate.) It should also be taken into consideration that since 1980 Belgium is a federal state with six separate parliaments and governments of the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Community, the French Community, and the German-speaking Community, therefore determining the level of autonomy and independence of each separate region and community. With this level of social and political tension and desire to separate from each other, it is interesting to look at the mixing of languages and find examples of French and Dutch combining, for instance in the same French Flemish. This demonstrates the autonomy of the language, as well as a certain independence from the people's desire to keep themselves away from the influence of a foreign language (especially if we address the neighboring languages).

A profound influence of the French language on French Flemish is quite common for other regions of Flanders as well [Ulianitckaia, Shumkov, 2020]. This way the influence of French is noticeable in the dialects of Antwerp, Gent, Bruges, etc. While some features of French can be found in the majority of the Flanders dialects, others can be traced only in French Flemish. These distinctive characteristics however are not a valid reason for lawmakers to recognize French Flemish dialect as a regional language. Such a status could secure the spheres of its use, and potentially increase the number of speakers.



At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century French Flemish was not that common in Armentières, west of Lille, but over the last decades some efforts have been made to support the dialect. During the 1980s and 1990s through the work of “Tegaere Toegaen” (Samen Vooruit) association French Flemish was taught in some colleges as the third foreign language through the subject called “Regional Flemish Language and Culture.” The association strove for the teaching of a true French Flemish language rather than some “foreign” Standard Dutch. In 2004 an Akademie voor Nuuze Vlaemsche Tael (ANVT) was founded. It aims to preserve, spread, and improve the image of the French Flemish dialect around the entire French Flanders. It also seeks help from the French Government regarding the teaching of French Flemish in primary and secondary schools of French Flanders.

A new source of support of French Flemish is the Office public du flamand-occidental, approved to be created on 27 March 2018 by the Regional Council of Hauts-de-France committee. This center is the fifth in France following the Basque, the Breton, the Occitan, and the Catalan Language Centers.

The aforementioned support of the French Flemish dialect from both France and Belgium undoubtedly inspires hope for the preservation and development of such a unique language variant. It is possible that the future orientation of Europe to lawmaking regarding minority languages and cultures will lead to French Flemish seceding from West Flemish dialect group and acquiring a special status, that could be a status of a distinct language.

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### **ФРАНКО-ФЛАМАНДСКИЙ ДИАЛЕКТ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ СИТУАЦИИ В БЕЛЬГИИ И ФРАНЦИИ**

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Статья обращается к историческим языковым вариантам Фландрии, распространенным как внутри региона, так и за его пределами. Языковое разнообразие официально нидерландоязычной Фландрии представлено лимбургским, западно-фламандским, брабантским и восточно-фламандским диалектами, причем лимбургский и западно-фламандский диалекты могли бы претендовать на статус отдельных языков (в Нидерландах лимбургский признан региональным языком). В работе раскрываются некоторые социолингвистические и политические особенности Фландрии, отдельно описывается область распространения западно-фламандской диалектальной группы. Особое внимание в статье получает франко-фламандский диалект, бытующий на территориях Франции и Бельгии. Этот диалект представляет собой один из самых архаичных западно-фламандских диалектов, испытавших сильное воздействие со стороны французского и других соседствующих языков. Рассматриваются лексические и грамматические особенности франко-фламандского диалекта, отмечается, что в нем довольно часто встречается переключение кодов. Некоторые синтаксические особенности франко-фламандского диалекта, связанные с антецедентными явлениями, получают свое объяснение в рамках идеи двухчастности, устанавливающей, что любой глагольный или субстантивный член предложения состоит из двух частей, и что первая часть может быть подвергнута модифицированию. Высказывается предположение, что ряд синтаксических явлений в франко-фламандском мог явиться результатом грамматической интерференции западно-фламандского диалекта с французским языком. В работе также приводятся сведения о мерах поддержки франко-фламандского диалекта со стороны Франции и Бельгии, обсуждается возможность выделения этого диалекта из западно-фламандской диалектальной группы в целях придания ему особого статуса, вплоть до статуса регионального языка.

**Ключевые слова:** Фландрия, Французская Фландрия, франко-фламандский диалект, социолингвистика, региональный язык.

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