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Language and the media in Flanders: new developments in a monolingual framework

Though Flemish electronic media (VRT radio and television) are officially monolingual, developments do occur which counter the official policy of homogeneity. Subtitling functions on television as an instrument to integrate anything foreign or uncommon and to serve the specific needs of VRT's core (Brabant-Antwerp) audience. In commercial messages sundry varieties of Dutch and different languages are used in order to enhance versisimilitude. A number of radio (music) programmes use foreign languages to create a particular atmosphere. Increasingly, the official Flemish electronic media are showing fundamental appropriation of a functional language variation system by language users.

Taal en media in Vlaanderen: nieuwe ontwikkelingen binnen een eentalige raamwerk

Hoewel de Vlaamse electronische media, Vlaamse Radio en Televisie (VRT), officieel ééntalig zijn, kunnen duidelijke ontwikkelingen worden aangewezen die ingaan tegen het discours van homogene eentaligheid. Ondertiteling in televisieprogramma's functioneert als instrument om het vreemde te integreren en in te spelen op de behoeften van het (Brabants-Antwerpse) kernpubliek. Verschillende codes, zowel andere talen als andere variëteiten van het Nederlands, worden functioneel ingezet in reclameboodschappen om de werkelijkheidswaarde te verhogen. In een aantal radio(muziek)programma's wordt vreemde taal aangewend om een sfeer te creëren. In toenemende mate laten de Vlaamse media de grondige toeëigening zien door de taalgebruikers van een systeem van functionele taalvariatie.

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Flanders is officially a monolingual region. Its monolingualism (Dutch) pertains to all domains of public life, including education, government and the media. As to the latter, there are no country-wide networks that use languages other than Dutch. Neither are any nation-wide papers published in any other language.

The present article will focus on covert developments within this monolingual framework. In fact, different codes are present and code-switching takes place. An attempt will be made to determine the extent to which these covert developments reflect an emerging pattern of functional multilingualism.

The presence of language varieties (other than Standard Dutch), both in the media and in other areas of public life, has sparked an intensive debate among linguists in Flanders on the character, motives and tendencies underlying the development of varieties, and particularly of *tussentaal* (interlanguage). As a matter of fact, a clear distinction may be drawn in this regard: some linguists (Geeraerts & De Sutter 2003, Goossens 2000, Hendrickx 1998, Willemyns & Daniels 2003) assume the presence of a stable standard code along with unstable in-between codes. Use of the *tussentaal* would then be a stage nearer the establishment of wide-spread full mastery of the standard code. The alternative view (Jaspers 2001, 2005, De Caluwe 2002) underlines and illustrates the constructive nature of everyday interaction and the functions of language varieties. In this view, people use language varieties as resources and combine them in ways that suit their interactional needs (and the needs imposed by the broader context).

1. Framework: the electronic media in Flanders

In this first section of the paper the official monolinguality of the Flemish electronic media will be outlined as a product of language policies and political developments.

In official terms, the question of language in the Flemish or Belgian media seems to be a non-issue. As a matter of fact, historical developments have turned Flanders into an officially monolingual region, where Dutch is the only official code used.[1] As far as broadcasting media are

1 For a summary of these developments, cf Willemyns & Daniels 2003, Beheydt 2003: 158-9.

concerned, the position of Dutch is undisputed. All radio and TV stations use Dutch. (Private) stations using different languages have very limited coverage and are directed at minority groups (for instance, Arabic stations in Brussels). In the official media, languages other than Dutch are subsumed into the Dutch environment through the use of subtitles or translations into Standard Dutch.

1.1 Dutch as a media language: a history of construction

The position of Standard Dutch in the (public) media of Flanders is the result of a long-term and explicit language policy (cf Schramme's article in this collection). Originally, that policy was intended to be followed in practice merely by the public broadcaster (VRT). However, the commercial stations which were introduced later have implicitly adopted many of the VRT's policies. As a public broadcaster, the VRT has been commissioned by the Flemish parliament to fulfil the public broadcasting mission (*openbare omroepopdracht*).

In terms of a decree accepted by parliament on 16 April 1997, the former BRTN (Belgian Radio and Television — Dutch) changed its name and became the VRT (Flemish Radio and Television). At the same time, the mission of the newly established VRT was defined: VRT is expected to reach as many people as possible by offering a wide diversity of programmes that will attract popular attention and match people's interests. Moreover, it is specified in terms of the mission that VRT is to offer high-quality programmes in respect of content, form and language usage. VRT broadcasts are to contribute to the development of the Flemish identity and of the diversity of Flemish culture, as well as to the promotion of a democratic and tolerant society. Quite remarkable in this regard is the explicit mention of the audience ("as many people as possible"), as well as the (more implicit) task of supporting high-quality language usage. In its present form, the VRT has existed for about eight years.

Research on the origins of Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting (initially called NIR, later BRT, and later BRTN — currently VRT) shows that a very strong policy on language and culture has been operational from the outset. According to Van den Bulck (1999, 2000), between the 1930s and the 1970s the public broadcaster was perceived as a major agent in the construction of national identity and in the edu-

cation of the masses. Many, if not all, of the pioneers saw themselves as building a new society. The establishment of a radio (and later a TV) station was assumed to be yet another tool to be used in the construction of this sophisticated and self-conscious society. Language policies in the early stages of broadcasting history in Flanders were part of a massive project of "modernity".

Van de Velde *et al* (1995), in their study on the development of the pronunciation of voiced fricatives in Flemish and Dutch radio speech, refer to the important role of the official broadcaster. The significance of this role has been recognised over the years as one of the main factors in what is called, in Flanders, the "formation" of Standard Dutch. Moreover, the promotion of Standard Dutch, albeit the southern form thereof, has been considered part of the legacy which was to be cherished by the VRT.

Van de Velde *et al* (1995) illustrate the importance of Standard Dutch in everyday VRT practice: radio and TV speakers are still carefully screened for the quality of their standard language. At one stage, the public broadcaster used to employ a great many graduates in Dutch studies, and there is still a tradition of making use of the services of language consultants. These consultants (typically university professors) were usually external; only recently have internal language consultants been operative. They have developed a uniform policy with regard to standardisation, and have applied a form of corrective practice.

Apart from creating controversy, the "language quality" issue has also led to the establishment of a Language Charter. This charter was written by the official language consultant (*taalraadsman*) of the VRT, Ruud Hendrickx, an academic with a background in language studies. Hendrickx's predecessor was Eugène Berode, who — to a far greater degree — combined language advice and monitoring with a very clear positioning in matters of language policy.

Interestingly, the Language Charter covers a great many areas which are significant to our approach. It takes a clear stand in favour of the use of the standard language (*standaardtaal*), which is defined as the variety that the members of the Flemish cultural community use in their relations with the authorities, and which is used in education, art and literature. The charter provides a very detailed list of the occasions on which Standard Dutch is required. Dialects and interlanguage may only

be used when its use is functional, *i e* in fiction and in broadcasts dealing with regional culture. The use of dialect and *tussentaal* is seen as a potential threat to comprehension.

The use of Standard Dutch is expected of everyone employed by the VRT. In interviews with non-standard speakers, VRT employees are not permitted to adapt their language usage, as that would be seen as tantamount to "condescending" behaviour.

The motivation for using Standard Dutch is related to the assumed expectations of the audience and of the Flemish public in general. As a matter of fact, the Flemish people, including the VRT audience, have traditionally attributed a high normative value to VRT Dutch (and specifically to the variety used in the news broadcasts). According to the charter, the Flemish authorities also expect the VRT to promote Standard Dutch. A major section of the charter contains advice on clear, attractive language use. VRT Dutch is claimed to represent the Belgian norm of Dutch. "Correct" language use is equivalent to the accepted norm for Belgian Dutch, *i e* the educated language used in the Netherlands, with some allowances for Flemish variants, and for a Flemish accent in pronunciation. The Language Charter charts a complicated course in defining what is acceptable and what should be considered "too regional". A procedure is defined for assessing expressions, words, or grammatical constructions. This includes the consultation of (particular) dictionaries and grammar handbooks. Variation in style and register is supported, but the charter explicitly frowns upon the use of local varieties and interlanguage (*tussentaal*) in informal situations, despite the fact that this is common practice in Flanders.

The VRT considers the execution of this Language Policy to be part and parcel of the agreement (*beheersovereenkomst*) that governs its activities.

At this moment, virtually all programmes being broadcast from the studio, which would fit the categories that the Language Charter considers to be exemplary in terms of high-quality language, are scripted. Moreover, a great deal of effort is devoted to screening them, and to screening presenters and journalists.

1.2 Media context: some distinctions

Looking at the situation one should be aware of distinctions that exist between two types of programme in public broadcasts: non-fiction programmes and fiction. In fiction programmes (series, films, entertainment) languages and codes are believed to be resources that can be used in an expressive or creative way. In non-fiction programmes (news programmes, interviews, etc) code and language choices are assumed to be part of the broadcaster's own positioning.

In principle, commercial stations operate under a dispensation that differs from the policy of the public broadcaster. For VRT, the public broadcaster, rules exist of governing language use in state-owned media (radio and television). The policies of the public broadcaster are reviewed by the Minister of the Media (and, ultimately, by the Flemish parliament). These rules do not necessarily apply, in principle, to privately-owned media (radio, television or printed media). But, by and large, commercial networks have closely copied VRT policies in terms of code choice (perhaps — temporarily — with the exception of "soap" series).

Commercial messages form a different domain. In general, a considerably wider range of options is available. This does not mean that the situation is completely free of rules. Rather, it means that factors with an influence on language use may be more related to customers, whereas the non-commercial public media are more subject to evaluation by the "general public" and by legislators.[2]

The following paragraphs will consider a number of significant cases from the Flemish public (VRT) media, in which code-switching and code selection take place. The term "code" will be used to cover both different varieties of Dutch and different languages.

2 Depending on the actual context, advertisers may even adapt to the presence of international travellers (for example at the airport), foreign customers (in tourist areas or close to the border), or specific population groups (shops in areas with many people from particular parts of the world).

2. New developments in the Flemish public electronic media

The following cases reveal patterns of multilingualism that will be argued to reflect deep-rooted phenomena and the underlying changes taking place. They represent dynamics which are absent from the official discourse.

On a more general level, we will attempt to connect our findings to a framework for code-switching as a user-defined process with a functionally defined basis.

2.1 The subtitles issue

To a large extent, the VRT television channels make use of subtitling (as opposed to French-speaking RTBf, and British, French and German television, where dubbing is the general rule). The practice of subtitling applies not only to films and serials, but even to news programmes and everyday interview shows.

In October 2004, the new Flemish Minister for the Media, Mr Geert Bourgeois, explicitly stated that he wanted the VRT to use subtitling in more of its programmes. At present, up to 40% of all programmes are subtitled. Responding to a request from the deaf community, Bourgeois insisted that the VRT should have all its TV programmes subtitled by 2010.

The issue of subtitling has an interesting history. Originally, only foreign-language programmes (films, documentaries and other productions) were subtitled. Subsequently, for a while, the VRT provided subtitles for the speech of people who were assumed to be "hard to understand". These included people who had some impairment that prevented them from speaking sufficiently clearly, or people whose voices were hard to hear because of ambient noise. In addition, subtitling was also provided for speakers from non-central areas of the country (West Flanders, East Flanders, Limburg), on the assumption that a great many listeners would be unable to understand them.

This intralingual subtitling or captioning has often been experienced as a marker of difference. Those whose speech was subtitled felt as if they were being regarded as exceptions, and as different from "normal" speakers. For years, the subtitling policy gave rise to anger and

conflict:[3] being subtitled became a stigma which was resented by the native Flemish speakers of, for instance, West Flanders. Then, some time later (and emulating what was happening across the border in the Netherlands), Flemish TV channels started to subtitle Dutch-language programmes produced in the Netherlands (a practice which the Dutch had adopted some time before). Once again, this move evoked a fair amount of anger. At present, the official VRT policy is to subtitle anything that may possibly cause a problem to the listener in respect of intelligibility.

Under the new policy of the Language Charter (Hendrickx 2003),[4] there is still a consistent tendency to subtitle the speech of speakers from the non-central areas (*i e* from outside the Brabant-Antwerp area) significantly more than that of others. Our research,[5] based on 25 news and magazine broadcasts (*Man bijt hond*), shows that utterances of speakers from the Brabant-Antwerp area were subtitled considerably less often than those of speakers from other parts of the country ($t = 4.03$, $p < .05$).

Vandekerckhove *et al* (2006) analysed a large sample of television programmes from both VRT and commercial VTM, and detected a sharp distinction between non-fiction and fiction (including entertainment) programmes. In non-fiction programming all regional varieties (including *tussentaal*) were subtitled. In fictional programming regional varieties of the western part of the country were subtitled significantly more often than those of the central areas.

Currently there is an additional issue, *i e* whether subtitling should provide a "translation" into Standard Dutch (the standard practice) or whether it should merely render the spoken text and make it easier to decipher. At present, the original regional language variety is used in subtitles only as a strategy to provide local colour. For the first time ever, organisations of hearing-impaired people, who comprise a very

3 Even recently (April 2005), the Minister of the Media had to answer questions relating to this issue in parliament. He claimed that no difference or discrimination was involved.

4 Hendrickx 2003 gives an overview of the intralingual subtitling practice of the VRT. Along with arguments in favour of and against subtitling, Hendrickx explicitly claims that no language policy is involved — which is, of course, incorrect: there is a definite intention to follow a particular course, and there are intended effects.

5 Carried out with the help of students N Vanhove and A Raeymaekers.

important interest group, are now in favour of rendering the story, or the "soap", as truthfully as possible, which means that it should include regional expressions.

In summary, one can conclude that current subtitling practices reflect the officially assumed unequal status of language varieties. Debates in society, however, clearly show that the appreciation of the linguistic landscape is becoming considerably more diverse than is officially claimed.

2.2 "Slices of life" in advertisements

Advertising is an area in which significant developments which have a bearing on the perception of language variation are taking place.

Many advertisements on VRT radio and television currently follow a specific pattern. There is often an introductory scene played by actors (for example, a car with a punctured tyre, two people in front of a house discussing where new scaffolding should come from), followed by the commercial statement proper. In almost every one, the introductory scene is enacted by actors who use a very local variant of Dutch. However, when the core message is conveyed, or when the conditions for purchasing the product are mentioned, only Standard Dutch is used.

This format has been introduced relatively recently. No more than ten years ago, the whole advertisement would have been in Standard Dutch. For many language watchdogs, this new development constitutes evidence of an increasing decline in quality and of growing problems with the standard language. But such a conclusion misses the essence of the phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the presence of the non-standard varieties is very functional and significant, as is the presence of Standard Dutch. Advertisers apparently believe that the audience will regard the introductory scene as realistic, taken from real life (a "slice of life"). In consequence, a certain degree of realism is attributed to the product itself, and its qualities are thereby "confirmed".[6]

However, there is virtually no exception to the rule that the core information is provided in Standard Dutch, which is apparently assumed to confer a sense of quality on that part of the message.

6 Analogously, in some advertisements foreign-language material is put into the introductory scene.

An analysis[7] of a sample of 25 commercial messages conveyed on the various VRT radio stations showed the pattern to be more detailed, with some differentiation as to the type of non-standard variety used. The more popular radio station, *Radio 2*, had no English or other foreign-language material in its commercials at all. Dialect was used significantly more often than in the case of either *Studio Brussel* or *Donna* commercials (p = .0201), which are music stations targeting a younger audience.[8] The introductory scenes in *Studio Brussel* or *Donna* commercials use either Standard Dutch or Colloquial Dutch (*tussentaal*).

All the samples confirmed that the use of codes other than Standard Dutch serves to provide a more realistic (*i e* closer to reality) representation of the outside world. Obviously, the intended effect is to increase recognisability.

This aspect of credibility and realism is corroborated elsewhere as well. *Klara*, which is the classical radio channel of the VRT, hosts interview programmes with a considerable amount of foreign-language material. *Klara* addresses a section of the audience which is generally well-educated: many listeners have a fair command of English and French, and some are capable of understanding German. All three of these languages feature in secondary curricula, at least in the classical divisions. A typical *Klara* broadcast would be the interview (aired in October 2004) by *Klara*'s famous interviewer, Jean-Pierre Rondas, with Ian Kershaw. Kershaw wrote a book on Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart, a cousin of Winston Churchill, who became notorious for his sympathy for Hitler's Nazi Germany. After a rather long introduction, a conversation sequence was presented in English interrupted by Rondas every now and then in order to summarise in Dutch. The summaries were quite comprehensive and Rondas took care to cover all significant aspects

7 With the help of students Valerie Rousseau and Tom Braem.

8 According to the VRT's own listener profile, most *Radio 2* listeners (60 %) are women between the ages of 25 and 64. This is reflected in the content of the messages, which feature clothing shops, furniture shops, and so on. *Radio Donna*'s listeners are aged mainly between 12 and 54. It broadcasts popular music to people who are employed and who have purchasing power. *Studio Brussel* has a predominantly (64%) male audience within the age group of 12-44. They are mainly students (18%) and employed people with high purchasing power (VAR Radiobrochure 2004).

in some detail. Nevertheless, large portions of the conversation remained exclusively in English (or, on other occasions, in German, French or other languages), without continuous translation.

The use of foreign languages is not limited to the *Klara* station. It is also fairly common on music channels such as *Studio Brussel* in interviews with stars. Many of these are conducted in English (or French), with brief summaries in Dutch.

Obviously, in both cases, the audience is assumed to be Dutch-speaking. Linguistic reality for people in Flanders is believed to be multilingual — or at least to contain several varieties of Dutch. Consequently, the presence of codes other than Standard Dutch is meant to lend credibility.

2.3 The medium as the message

A third significant phenomenon is the wide-scale use of English for other purposes on another all-Dutch radio station, in a quite different corner of the spectrum.

On most evenings of the week, but not over weekends, *Studio Brussel*, which addresses young listeners with a keen interest in modern music genres, broadcasts a programme between 11 pm and midnight, hosted by a DJ called TLP. His main task is to play records. He is clearly a native speaker of Dutch. The programme does not address an English-speaking audience at all, yet the DJ often presents it entirely in English. His language use abounds in short conversational clichés and stock phrases, which are apparently understood by his audience. There are few other types of conversational sequence apart from the occasional brief introduction. He sometimes resorts to Dutch when he is unable to find the right expression in English. Apparently the use of (Jamaican) English is intended as part of the performance.[9]

A corollary of this phenomenon may be found in advertisements. Some contain commercial slogans (for example for products of firms such as Boss, Chanel, and William Lawson's), chunks of foreign-language

9 This correlates with a phenomenon which may be observed in announcements for parties, which abound in and around university campuses. These announcements are in English, without any translation, in spite of the fact that they are directed at Flemish students.

material, and very native pronunciations of brand names (for example shampoo names), all with the obvious intention of creating a particular atmosphere.

Apparently the TLP programme on *Studio Brussel* and similar types of broadcasts (which are few and far between) represent a recent development. They feature the foreign language (English) as part of the message. Listeners are assumed to appreciate the overall atmosphere that comes with the music and the announcements. The fact that occasional lapses into Dutch are not summarised in English is an indication of the character of the operation. It is a matter of producing an inclusive atmosphere, rather than a shift into English. Very probably, a similar situation involving Spanish, French or Lingala might be just as feasible if the atmosphere were linked to the music of the Caribbean, the Mediterranean or the Congo.

The commercial success of these steps may be more problematic than producers tend to believe. Viewers often misunderstand the message, and there is also a fair degree of diversity in their level of appreciation (Gerritsen *et al* 2000).

3. Discussion and interpretation

In this section a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomena outlined above will be attempted; our findings will be linked to large-scale and general processes that are based on societal and individual needs. The relevant processes will also be qualified and put into perspective *vis-à-vis* the proclaimed language policies. We will conclude with an assessment of language policies for the future.

3.1 The Flemish media policy of dealing with uncommon languages and codes

From all of the observations made above, it is evident that only a Flemish audience is targeted, and that much effort is expended in attempting to make that audience feel comfortable. Foreign languages and unfamiliar Dutch accents are included in the broadcasts, but the interests of the core Flemish audience are always borne in mind.

As far as non-standard varieties of Dutch are concerned there is definitely still a situation of (implied) diglossia. Standard Dutch continues to be seen as the language of authority and expertise. Subtitling

rules, as they are currently applied, have a double basis. On the one hand, the tendency in non-fiction programmes to translate everything into Standard Dutch, excluding regional varieties as much as possible, is still motivated by the perception of the standard language as a component of modernity. There is no essential modification of the traditional policy of using radio and television as instruments for the promotion of the standard language with a view to emancipation and identity-shaping. The reaction of those whose utterances are subtitled confirms the hypothesis that being subtitled is perceived as being excluded from the position of relative power ("normality").

At the same time, however, the increasing pressures to render regional varieties or accents in the subtitles demonstrates the audience's growing awareness of the functional role of code selection. Flanders definitely has a differentiated linguistic landscape;[10] the actual presence of several varieties of Dutch is gradually being recognised, and variety is increasingly being understood to have a meaning for language users. Replacing language varieties with Standard Dutch apparently does not suit the needs of the audience.

The tradition of providing subtitles, of showing films in their original (undubbed) form, of maintaining — in a number of cases — foreign pronunciation of foreign names, and of conducting interviews in the foreign language without voice-over contributes to the construction of a particular pattern of "bringing the foreign element" into the Flemish community. There is, apparently, no wish to exclude foreign or uncommon materials. On the contrary, the proportion of foreign materials on an average evening on Flemish TV may often be as high as 50%.

Apparently, the presence of foreign languages is considered normal; the audience, whose "comfort" is the topmost priority, is believed to be familiar with the presence of other codes. This would even seem to include quite unusual codes such as Japanese (*Oshin*) or Brazilian Portuguese (*Sinja Mosa*).

This openness is not without its limitations, however. Over the last five to ten years, hardly any German has been heard in Flemish entertainment programmes, though there had been a tradition of popular

10 There are indications that Flanders has an "intrinsically code-switched" language situation such as is referred to in Meeuwis & Blommaert (1998).

romantic series (*Schwarzwaldklinik*) and detective stories (such as *Der Alte* and *Derrick*) in German. French series and films have also disappeared. This may be a matter of worldwide Anglo-Saxon commercial dominance, or it may be the result of a popular perception that German and French no longer feature very much in everyday life.

Along with this relatively open position toward foreign codes, broadcasters are apparently very sensitive to the standards and habits of their audience: TV and radio stations refrain from offering anything that would sound provocative or very unfamiliar (no Arabic films; nothing from India or Africa). One could describe this attitude as favouring a form of integration which keeps materials intact but consistently takes cognisance of the needs and preferences of the local majority; and this majority is in favour of Standard Dutch (albeit in its Brabant form) as the preferred variant.

3.2 Changes in the system of symbolic domination

On a more general level, these developments in Flanders represent changes in the existing systems of "symbolic domination", to use Bourdieu's (1977, 1982) term.

Subtitling, as it was originally conceived, was intended as a means of imposing the standard code. The system enabled "translations" of habits and practices depicted on the screen into the dominant framework. This framework was in the hands of a social group which could be characterised as educated and delocalised. Consequently, in the past — and according to the Language Charter, still today — the highly delocalised variant of Dutch was to be favoured. On the production side, the norm was defined and adhered to by representatives of the intellectual elite. More recently, the audience has become the determining factor. This has resulted in "adaptation" to the rules and systems of the most prominent group among the audience (the Brabant middle class).

The debate over subtitles is an illustration of this domination hypothesis. Those who resist being subtitled obviously recognise the implied effect of subtitling: they feel it excludes them from the dominant group.

3.3 Representing a multilingual reality rather than establishing a desired language policy

Expressivity is mentioned in the VRT's Language Charter as one of the few good reasons for using a code other than Standard Dutch in official VRT broadcasts. The use of chunks of dialect, foreign-language materials (such as Italian in a programme showing a view of Venice) and very foreign pronunciations of the names of travel destinations (such as Valencia) all fit a long tradition of using local colour to make things more attractive or expressive. In addition, foreign names are known to add to the specific "flavour" of commercial products. But there is more to it than this.

The new habit of keeping foreign-language interviews in the foreign language, and the "slices of life", both in reports and in advertisements, bear testimony to the fact that the audience apparently no longer expects television and radio to create a mimesis of itself.

The division of labour in advertisements is most striking in this regard: Standard Dutch is consistently used to express the "hard core", the professional part of the commercial message; but local varieties are used to make an advertisement more appealing, as well as to give an impression of reliability and realism. Thus the original diglossic situation continues to exist. In the Flemish media, Standard Dutch has obviously not succeeded in becoming an all-purpose language portraying everyday reality. Nevertheless, it remains the language of authority. For the realistic "flavour", however, local varieties have acquired the upper hand, in spite of strong pressure and explicit language planning.

This situation correlates remarkably well with Gal's example of ethnically Hungarian bilingual speakers, who choose to use the prestige code in arguments in order to gain the upper hand and to have the "last word", or "not to be outdone" (Gal 1979: 117).

3.4 Appropriation of varieties

The tendency to keep what is being said in the original language also reflects the changed position of the VRT itself. The public broadcaster and the electronic media in general have lost their status as institutions of power. There are too many stations and the threshold has become low or non-existent. So-called reality programmes (*Big Brother*, *Het leven*

zoals het is) have resulted in a blurring of the distinction between TV programmes and reality. As a consequence, there is a move to represent the external world fully (rather than maintaining a distance). This development parallels the appropriation of the written code.

Written Dutch is rapidly losing its "special" status. As many people use computers and cellphones, they have become acquainted with the use of these tools in order to send written messages and to chat. Appropriation is taking place, in that SMS messages and chat sessions are the locus of a new, widely adopted written code which is quite different from Standard Dutch (including its spelling), but also quite different from regional Dutch (*tussentaal*). People from all kinds of backgrounds use this code without being concerned about correctness. Thus, written language is increasingly being perceived as the property of the language user. It is regarded as an aspect of personal or group identity,[11] but one that is freely chosen rather than imposed.

In a way, DJ TLP's use of English is a case of the appropriation of Jamaican English (as a temporary mode of communication).

This use of English to create a particular atmosphere may very well be one of the most articulated cases of an essentially new development. For the first time in over fifty years of Flemish broadcasting history, language and code selection are being used — by participants, not by the management — as situation and identity markers. In the cases mentioned in this section, code-switching does not serve a communicative purpose as such. It does not improve interaction or adapt to the communicative needs of listeners. Rather, it creates or suggests a particular ambience.

This correlates with the situation described by Sebba & Wootton (1998). In their example, young Jamaican Londoners were found to use both London Jamaican Creole and London English as "we" codes. The code-switching which occurs signals differences in the saliency of the information.[12] In the Flemish case, too, there is a correlation between the code and the nature of the content.

11 The promotion of a "southern norm" (*zuidelijke norm*, *Belgische norm*) is generally seen as an attempt to disconnect Standard Dutch from its obvious association with the Netherlands.

12 Salient information is expressed in London Jamaican English; within sequences of London Jamaican English, London English is used for additional, less important information.

Similar phenomena have been pointed out by Rampton (1995, 1998). In the cases he describes, young people in urban areas use codes of which they have only a very limited command. The effect of this "crossing" is to bring about a sense of community which transcends the obvious ethnic boundaries. Rampton connects this phenomenon to "metaphorical" code-switching, a concept that is intended to accommodate Bakhtin's notion of double-voicing.

Developments in the Flemish media show that "... code alternation no longer functions adequately as a contextualisation cue and instead becomes part of the 'main action' ..." (Rampton 1998: 290). The use of code-switching in terms of precisely this way has also been documented by Jaspers (2005), for second-generation immigrants in Antwerp.

3.5 The wider perspective

Recent theory on code selection and code-shifting (Auer 1998) shows that major changes have occurred during the last decades. While attention was originally focused on the issue of the choice of a different language or a different code, recent approaches (from the 1980s on) have tended to focus on the psycholinguistic effects of multilingualism, the question of language acquisition by bilinguals and in bilingual situations, and so on (Swann 2000, Milroy & Muysken 1995). From the viewpoint of interaction and social contacts, code-switching has recently been researched in terms of its assumed impact on, or relation to, language competence, its relation to identity and identity construction, and even ethnicity or group identification.[13] The common element in these approaches is the view that the focus should be on code-switching as a process that is communicatively meaningful. This approach obviously generates a strong need to consider specific interaction situations and to concentrate on their characteristics. As a matter of fact, the selection of a particular code can be affected by various contexts, both very remote (historical, geopolitical) and very localised (type of interaction, background music, educational character). The influence is reflexive: the choice of a particular type of code evidently leads to changes in the perception of the situational context as well.

13 A discussion of the essential differences in approaching code-switching can be found in Alvarez-Caccamo 1998.

The Flemish situation is very congruent with this. Under the (thick) cover of the imposed monolingualism of the official electronic media, new developments are taking place which reflect the emergence of a multidimensional pattern of language use. In this pattern, a major role is played by individual language users, who use languages (to a lesser extent), or (more commonly) language varieties, as tools to construct their personal world-view.

Essentially, the change is also one of perspective. Taking the Dutch linguistic landscape as a departure point, one could distinguish, within code alternation, between code-shifting and code-mixing. Code shifts sometimes tend to occur when a particular code for example, Standard Dutch is taken as a starting point by one of the participants. As soon as the conversation evolves, there is room for the establishment of new footings, new psychological contexts (for example the discovery of a common background, or a subject switch) which open the way to changes and adaptations, and sometimes to the use of localised varieties. In everyday Flemish interaction, occasional borrowings also occur at the level of individual words and terms, possibly involving wider contexts (for example, expressions taken from English-language films occur in young people's conversations). Quite common, too, are discourse markers which are being put into a broader, homogeneous language context ("Jesus", or "shit, man").

However, rather than approaching code changes from a bird's-eye view (with the choices and changes being interpreted as societal phenomena), our attention here has been focused on codes from the point of view of the (individual) language user.

As was mentioned before, in Flanders it is often rather difficult to tell whether observed linguistic differences in Dutch are perceived as different codes by the language users themselves. Diversity, however obvious it may seem to the external observer, is not always experienced as such by language users (cf the "monolectal hypothesis", discussed in Meeuwis & Blommaert 1998).

4. Conclusion

The overall conclusion is that we are currently witnessing a fundamental change in the Flemish electronic media.

Future language policies will need to be reorientated and restructured in order to accommodate the new functional distribution. Planning in terms of the promotion of one particular variety as an element of national identity or as a component of "education of the masses" is no longer an option. On the contrary, for language planners, the critical assessment of changing patterns of dominance (now imposed by a section of the audience) is becoming increasingly urgent.

The new developments in Flanders' language situation obviously fit in the local distribution of power and the Flemish historical context. However, they are also illustrative of some more general phenomena with implications beyond this empirical domain.

One important issue is the tension between officially proclaimed guidelines for media behaviour, on the one hand, and the pressure of interactional needs, on the other. Clearly those involved in media interaction are very well aware of both the local and the remote factors that serve to interpret language variation. This awareness definitely also applies to other countries, including South Africa. Despite official guidelines, language users are likely to make their own decisions, so as to utilise the functional power of the varieties which they have at their command. Official policies tend to underestimate both the complexity and the impact of this factor.

On the other hand, language legislators have no real option but to imply external large-scale factors in their policies. This may come down to the development of specific steps to empower languages or language varieties to function in contexts of high symbolic meaning. Promoting language varieties or languages in the media without the necessary societal background is likely to be futile, while attempts to exclude varieties with high symbolic power from the media are likely to be equaly pointless.

A second significant finding is the impact of language and language variety appropriation. Electronic media, along with the internet and new modes of communication (sms, chat, and so forth) have brought about a new language ideology: language users increasingly refuse to cede authority over languages or language varieties to the authorities or (state) institutions. In the long run this is bound to lead to profound changes in the media and education, where traditional status varieties may rapidly lose ground in favour of the new varieties which target groups have appropriated and consider to be more adequate.

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