Linguistic Purism
in the Germanic Languages

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Taming thistles and weeds amidst the wheat: language gardening in nineteenth-century Flanders.

1. Historical background

In the history of the standardisation of Dutch in Flanders during the nineteenth century, one can observe a number of attempts to keep the language free of foreign influences on the lexical, morphological and syntactic level, and to promote Dutch alternatives for those foreign forms. As will be demonstrated below, these purist activities – albeit intriguing in their own right – can only be fully appreciated when related to the complex sociolinguistic situation in the southern Low Countries from 1600 onwards. Before zooming in on the actors, the strategies and, most of all, the ideological discussions involved in the nineteenth-century purism debates in Flanders, it will therefore prove useful to clarify a number of extra-linguistic elements which shaped the Flemish linguistic landscape at the time.1

With the fall of Antwerp in 1585 to the Spanish occupying forces, the 17 provinces of the Low Countries were split up: the northern provinces became the independent Republic of the Low Countries (largely identical to the present-day Netherlands), whereas the southern Spanish Low Countries (comprising the greater part of present-day Flanders) remained under foreign rule. In the north, a Standard Dutch gradually began to take shape soon after, but in the south this possibility of standardisation was nipped in the bud by the occupiers’ preference for French as the language of prestige and administration. The Austrian (1714-1794) and French (1794-1815) successors of the Spanish rulers also favoured French as their prestige language. When Flanders was eventually reunited with the Netherlands between 1815 and 1830, a sharp linguistic border is said to have separated both territories, to the extent

1 A full account of the standardisation history of Dutch can be found in Willemyns 2003b.
that the northern speakers of Dutch did not recognise the southern Dutch dialects as varieties of their own language, and vice versa. The Bruges-born minister of foreign affairs De Coninck-Van Outryve even went so far as to declare that the tongue spoken in Flanders was useless for any official function:

[H]et Vlaamsch kan, zooals het door hen gekend wordt, noch den eenen, noch den anderen dienstigh zijn tot het stellen van akten van eenig belang [...] Ik ben van oordeel, dat men in de allereerste plaats in deze provinciën de Nederduitsche taal moet doen leeren, omdat men die taal daar niet kent, ten minste zoo niet kent, dat van dezelve door verlichte mannen in eenige belangrijke beraadslingen gebruik kan worden gemaakt.

['Flemish can, as it is known by them [i.e. the members of various social classes in Flanders], be of use to neither one nor the other, to perform acts of a certain importance [...] I hold the opinion that one should first and foremost teach the Dutch language in these provinces, because one does not know that language there, at least not in such a way, that it could be used by enlightened men in any important discussions'; quoted in Willeyns 2003a: 189; all translations are ours].

Due to the absence of clear language norms for Dutch in Flanders, its speakers were prey to feelings of linguistic insecurity and inferiority. At the time of Belgian independence in 1830, Belgium was dominated by French on all government levels, and the mass of the Dutch dialect-speaking population of Flanders saw itself controlled by a small upper-class layer which deliberately used its knowledge of French to exclude the population from political participation and upward social mobility (Vandenbussche 2004). Although there was official freedom of language choice, an influential segment of government officials considered it evident that French was to be the only language of the Belgians, and the later Prime Minister Charles Rogier even stated in 1832 'on détruirra [...] peu à peu l’élément germanique en Belgique' (‘one will destroy little by little the Germanic element in Belgium’; quoted in Peeters 1930: xiv). This conflict of a social, political and economic nature between French and Dutch is a first important element for a sound understanding of the purist strategies that would be developed in Flanders during the nineteenth century.

A second, equally important and intriguing language conflict, however, manifested itself within the Dutch language and appealed to feelings of an autonomous Flemish national identity. The growing Flemish Movement2 in favour of the revitalisation and rehabilitation of the Flemish population – a

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2 The history of the Flemish Movement has been meticulously described in the *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging* (NEVB 1998), which contains an elaborate section on language planning issues (Willeyns and Haeseryn 1998).
counter-elite which grew in force despite government policy - realized very soon that a generally accepted Dutch standard language was vital to the successful pursuit of its aims. This Dutch language had to be able to serve as an alternative for all the prestige functions that were consistently attributed to French. Although the various camps in the Flemish Movement shared the conviction that it was necessary to promote a standardised Dutch language, two opposing strategies were proposed to attain this goal. A number of language activists, commonly referred to as ‘integrationists’, opted for the adoption of the northern standard as it had developed in the Netherlands, hoping that the prestige and the linguistic and functional elaboration of that variety would favour its position and integration in Belgian society. Fiercely opposed to this ‘variety import’, however, were the so-called ‘particularists’, defending a newly forged Flemish language that differed mainly from northern Dutch by the presence of lexical and grammatical elements from the great variety of Flemish dialects. As such, the forces of the defenders of Dutch were divided into two camps, which would continue to attack each other in a stream of virulent metalinguistic publications up until the end of the nineteenth century.³

Both integrationists and particularists have employed purist strategies to obtain their goals, as will be discussed below. It should be stressed, however, that purism – mainly driven by the actions of respected and educated individuals – was a modest part of the much larger array of means used to support their respective causes. The integrationist faction in particular benefited from other actions which eventually were far more powerful and influential than its purist activities: for example, the long-pursued acceptance of a common spelling system for north and south on the governmental level was achieved in 1864 and was a major if not the final blow for the particularists. One must further consider the strengthening effect on the integrationist faction of the collaboration between scholars from the north and south in the context of the bi-annual Dutch Congresses for Language and Literature from 1849 onwards, which led, among other things, to the compilation of the Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal ‘Dictionary of the Dutch Language’ (De Groof 2003, Willemyns 1993a). Finally, integrationist and particularist purism are concepts which can be usefully applied when discussing theoretical prescriptivism and views on language policy; it may prove less fruitful, however, to use these labels for the description of actual language use.

³ A comprehensive overview of a selection of these polemic publications can be found in De Groof 2002a.
2. Integrationist purism

The integrationist goals went beyond merely overcoming the Flemish feelings of insecurity with regard to language use. The strategy of continuously referring to the unity of northern and southern Dutch was aimed at importing the prestige of the northern standard variety as a powerful cultural, economic and political instrument in the battle against French. The fact that the disapproval of French interference in Flemish Dutch was constantly to the fore of the integrationist actions may also (at least partially) be attributed to nationalist and identity issues. A leading figure of the early Flemish Movement, Jan-Baptist David, claimed in this respect (1856):

Onze schrywers denken niet in hunne taal, maar in 't Fransch, hetwelke daerom in hunne voordragt [...] barbarismen brengt, tot groote schade der volkstael, ja tot verbastering van het nationael gevoel, van den belgischen geest.

["Our writers do not think in their own language but in French instead, which leads to the introduction of 'barbarisms' in their diction, to the great detriment of the people's language, indeed, to the corruption of national feeling and the Belgian Spirit"; quoted in Willeumyns and Haeseryn 1998: 2935]

These barbarisms were mostly French loans, commonly labelled Gallicisms (although the less frequent Germanisms were also objected to). The battle against these forms was mainly pursued in a series of articles and books in which the despised French loans were listed, followed by elaborate comments on the proper Dutch alternative forms:


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4 Cf. Meert (1941 [1899]: 14): "De gallicismen zijn een kenmerk van het Zuidnederlandsch. Als er een afwijking tusschen Zuid- en Noordnederlandsch is, dan is het hoofdzakelijk door de groote hoeveelheid gallicismen die zich in het Zuidnederlandsch zoodanig hebben vastgezet, dat de Vlaam zonder opzetelijke studie geen vermoeiden krijgt van hun bestaan [...]. Het is toch niet onze wensch ze te behouden en dat geestelijk juk van het Fransch te blijven dragen!" ["Gallicisms are a feature of southern Dutch. If there are differences between southern and northern Dutch, then it is mainly because of the large number of Gallicisms which have taken root in southern Dutch in such a way that the Fleming has no suspicion of their existence without deliberate study [...]. It cannot be our wish to preserve them and to keep on carrying that moral yoke from French!"]
['Laten [to leave]. – <<Laat mij!>> [lit. <<Leave me!>>] MORUANX, *Inl. Nov.*, 88; *laissez-moi*. The verb *laten* is not used in this way as a transitive verb with a direct object, without a specific adjunct. In Dutch one would say: *laat me met rust, laat me met vrede* [lit. leave me with rest, leave me with peace].

Leenen [to lend]. - <<Men leent gaarne zijn eigen gevoelens aan anderen>> [lit. <<One eagerly lends one’s feelings to others>>] , MORUANX, *Inl. Nov.* 66; on *prête volontiers ses propres sentiments à d’autres*. This again is French. Say: *Men schrijft gaarne zijn eigen gevoelens aan anderen toe.* [lit. One attributes eagerly one’s own feeling to others‘; Meert 1941 [1899]: 169-170]

It is impossible to quote all the authors and the works in which their prescriptive advice was presented; Peeters’s list of *Belgicism* contains an extensive compilation of the most frequent ‘important deviations from Standard Dutch in the southern Low Countries’ (Peeters 1930: xxii) which were considered ‘absolutely wrong’ (ibid: xxiii), including Gallicisms.

The titles of these columns and volumes reveal the moralising attitude of the writers: *Uit de pathologie der taal* ‘from the pathology of language’ (Meert 1894a, 1894b), *Taalphantasmen ‘Language phantasms* ‘ (ibid.), *Distels* ‘Thistles’ (Meert 1897) and *Onkruid onder de tarwe ‘Weeds amidst the wheat’* (Meert 1941 [1899]).5 The latter work, together with De Vreese 1899 – both commissioned in a competition by the Royal Flemish Academy of Linguistics and Literature – is considered as the apogee of ‘anti-Galicist’ language planning. Its author, Hyppoliet Meert - one of the most prominent integrationist activists – was crystal clear in his evaluation of French interference in southern Dutch:

Het vreemde kan oneindig veel gevaarlijker zijn, daar waar het een Nederlandsch gewaad aantrekt en ongemerkt daardoor binnensluipt, aan de taal haar kracht, haar eigenaardigheid rooft en ons taalgevoel verstormt, vernietigt. De vreemde invloed kan zich doen gelden in de verschijnselen van de woordleer, in de zinsvoeging en de woordschikking; hij kan hoorderen uitdrukkingen binnensmokkelen, die alleen voornijd Nederlands, doch in den grond vreemd zijn. Dat is werkelijk het geval in Zuid-Nederland. De taal, geschreven door Vlaamsche schrijvers, krioelt van vreemde inmengsels. Vooral staan ze onder Franschen invloed. Het galicisme is verreweg onze ergste vijand.

['Foreign influence can be endlessly more dangerous when it takes on the veil of Dutch and thus intrudes unnoticed, and robs the language of its power and

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5 This horticultural imagery would continue to be used for purist *Sprachpflege* throughout the twentieth century; cf. the title of the daily language advice column in the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* from 1957 onwards, *Taalzuin ‘language garden’*.
peculiarity and blunts, destroys our language feeling. It may be felt in the vocabulary, in the syntax or word order, it can smuggle in hundreds of sayings which are only Dutch in form, but foreign in nature. That truly is the case in the southern Low Countries. The language, written by the Flemish writers, abounds with foreign intermingling. They are especially under French influence. The Gallicism is our biggest enemy by far’; Meert 1897: 76; cf. also Meert 1941 [1899]: 222.

This almost evangelical discourse was ultimately aimed at illustrating ‘de intieme betrekking [...] tusschen het helder denken van een volk en de vastheid, de duidelijkheid, de volmaaktheid van zijn taal’ [‘the intimate relationship between a people’s clear thoughts and the steadfastness, the clarity and the perfection of its language’; Meert 1894a: 3]. It should be noted, moreover, that newspaper journalists were singled out as the major group responsible for the degeneration of Dutch in Flanders:

[O]nze kranten zijn voor ons taalgevoel het verderfelijkst van al! Karrevachten ergerlijke flaters brengen ze dagelijks aan den man. Onafgebroken geven ze de koudigste bewijzen van de onbehopenste onwetendheid op het gebied van taalkennis […] Het vermakelijkste daarbij is, dat deze bladen het dagelijks met elkaar over taalquaesties aan den stok krijgen.

[‘Our newspapers are the most ruinous of all for our language feeling. They daily dispose of carriage-loads of annoying blunders. They incessantly give the most comical proof of the most helpless ignorance on the level of language knowledge […] The most amusing thing is that these newspapers are involved in daily disputes about language questions’; Meert 1941 [1899]: 10].

Excessive purism, however, was not encouraged as a remedy against Gallicisms, as this was counterproductive with respect to the linguistic integration of north and south, which always remained the main language-political goal. Meert clearly stated:

[I]k ben in ‘t geheel niet ingenomen met dat scheppen van woorden, waar ze volstrek overbodig zijn […] die woordsmederij is een bijzonder kenmerk van het Zuidnederlandsch; men bezit gene uitgebreide, vaste taalkennis; telkens en telkens moet men een begrip uitdrukken, waarvoor men het woord niet kent: men gaat aan

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6 Meert (1894a,b,c), for example, only uses newspaper excerpts to illustrate the ubiquitous ‘phantasms from the pathology of language’ in Flemish Dutch. Another language gardener, Désiré Claes, referred to his enemies as “Gazette, Chronique en andere gallische schotelpagger” [‘newspaper, chronicle and other Gallic dishcloths’; quoted in Willemsyns and Haeseryn 1998: 2937].
't smeden, 'tgeen doorgaans synoniem is met kneelen. Dat smeden vindt zijn oorzaak hierin, dat zoo weinig personen in Zuid-Nederland weten wat taal is; bepaald, wat de Nederlandsche taal is; er is iets, waar men zich niet klaar rekenschap van geeft: de Nederlandsche taal bestaat: zij moet niet worden […] Woordsmederij voor begrippen, die in de taal een vasten, algemeen gebruikelijken naam hebben, is niet alleen nutteloos, maar is zelfs zeer gevaarlijk, wanneer ze op zoo groote schaal gedreven wordt zooals dit in Zuid-Nederland het geval is.

['I am not pleased with the creation of words where they are entirely superfluous... This coining of words is a particular characteristic of southern Dutch; one does not have a broad, fixed knowledge of the language; over and again one has to express a meaning for which one does not know the word; one starts coining, which is usually synonymous with bungling. This coining is caused by the fact that very few people in the southern Low Countries are aware what language is; more specifically, what the Dutch language is; there is something which is not clearly understood: the Dutch language exists, it does not have to come into being... Creating words for concepts that have a fixed and commonly used name in a language is not only useless, but even very dangerous when it is practised on a large scale as is the case in the southern Low Countries'; Meert 1894c: 3].3

3. Particularist purism

The particularists, inspired to a certain extent by feelings of Flemish-centred national pride, were opposed to what they called the consistent attempts to purify standard Dutch from Flemish interference. Muyldermans, a late nineteenth-century particularist, summed up their views as follows:

Wij veroorloven ons ook de rechten van het spraakmakende deel der Zuidelijke Nederlanden voor te staan […] Moet er de gouwtaal van het Zuiden uitgesloten, dan dient onze taal geen Nederlandsch maar enkel Noordnederlandsch te worden geheeten […] want nu ook meer dan ooit treckt men in naam der beschaving tegen ons Zuidnederlandsch taaleigen te velde, alsof de Nederlandsche taal niet meer literarisch, niet meer beschafld zoude wezen, wanneer de gekuischte goudstelen van onze gewestspraak er in versmolten waren.

['We grant ourselves permission to defend the rights of the language making part of the southern Low Countries. If the specific regional southern language is to be excluded, the language should not be called Dutch but northern Dutch... because now more than ever is our own southern Dutch language fought against in the name

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3 This point of view was confirmed in Meert (1941 [1899]: 120), where puristerij 'puristery' was called ridiculous.
of civilisation, as if the Dutch language would no longer be literary or civilised if the polished lumps of gold of our region’s language were to be included'; quoted in Willeyns and Haeseryn 1998: 2935]

Despite the publication of particularist language guides (Muyljermans 1893, for example) and inflammatory polemics between particularist and integrationist language advisors (cf. Willeyns and Haeseryn 1998: 2937-8), the real opposition between the actual written language of both factions appears, in retrospect, to have been less significant than their language-political feud. In addition to the fact that they shared the negative attitude towards French loans, certain integrationists actually did accept certain aspects of southern language use, whereas the texts of many particularists were less ‘specifically southern’ than their more radical theoretical claims suggested.

One reason for the early failure of the particularists may have been the fact that the first generation (active around 1840) concentrated all their efforts on a topic which had little to do with real linguistic evolution, namely orthography. In many of the treatises which were written at the time, spelling was not seen as a mere convention but as the very heart and soul of the language. As such, <ae> for long [ʌ:] was considered to be more Flemish that <aa>.

Despite the particularist attempts during the so-called spelling war (Couvreur & Willeyns 1998), to fight against the adoption of the northern Dutch spelling system (which they found both Protestant, heretic and reminiscent of the political union between Flanders and the Netherlands), a near-identical spelling convention was introduced by law in 1844. This first symbolic step towards linguistic integration foreshadowed the defeat of the first generation of particularists (which would, as mentioned above, be consolidated with the acceptance of the De Vries – te Winkel system in 1864). Their successors at the end of the century were similarly engaged in virulent discussions on the use of certain words and expressions, without ever relating their views to the larger context of the social situation in Flanders. This detachment from social reality, in which the majority of the population was illiterate (Ruwe & Wellemans 1978), may have been a second lethal characteristic of the particularist discourse. The dire need for a good school curriculum in Dutch and the idea of

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8 An overview of the variation across the spelling systems at play in nineteenth-century Flanders is given in Vandenbussche (2002: 31). The sociohistorical context of the successive spelling reforms is discussed in Couvreur and Willeyns (1998).

9 The ideological overtones of this orthography issue may be gleaned from the long poem Spellingoorgel ‘Spelling war’ by the Flemish author Prudens Van Duysse: ‘Wat gaat men doen met wijberaden zin? Om ‘t waar geloof en de echte Spelling voor te planten? -Den catechismus drukken in/ De Spelling van de protestanten.” [‘What will one do with wise sense/ To spread the true faith and the true Spelling?/ Print the catechism in/ the Protestants’ spelling’; quoted in Coopman and Schrepé 1899: 92].
the standard language as a crucial means of emancipation, for example, were constantly recurring themes in the integrationist treatises: in their conception, the language struggle was first and foremost a social struggle (Boeva 1994).

4. Abused purism

The term particularists has been used not only for those language planners advocating an internal standardisation based on local, southern language usage or for those advocating a more extensive proportion of southern vocabulary in a standard language with a northerly flavour. It is also commonly applied to the so-called 'second generation' of particularists, who were mainly active in the coastal province of West Flanders during the 1870s. This group is to be distinguished from the first generation for its overt and very specific ideological motivations. As a matter of fact, it appears to have been a movement that had little interest in linguistic emancipation altogether. Its leaders clearly identified themselves as members of the fanatic ultramontane wing of Catholicism, and their involvement in the language issue was nothing but a function of a larger religious goal, a motivation which is rarely observed in the context of purism and language care. The dismissal of northern language elements and the integration of 'purist' dialectal West Flemish forms in a Flemish language-of-its-own were necessary weapons in their religious battle.

A close reading of the minutes of meetings of the foremost association of second-generation particularists, the 'Sint-Luitgaarde Gilde' (SLG 1875, 1876, 1877, 1879), reveals a discourse which may amuse the reader today, but equally illustrates the overt abuse of language planning and purism for ideological purposes. The need to promote West Flemish linguistic elements was explained as follows by one of the chairmen of the movement:

[...] dragen wij ons oud Dietsch eene zoo vuerige liefde toe, 't is omdat het onze diepingeworteide overtuiging is dat het oude vlaamsche kleed het bekwaamsste is om de zuivere vlaamsche Maagd te bevrijden tegen de verpestende invloed van godesloosheid en zedebederf.

['if we so dearly love our West Flemish language of old, it is because we are deeply convinced that the old Flemish robe is best able to liberate the pure Flemish Maid from the poisoning influence of godlessness and moral corruption'; SLG 1875: 57].

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10 A detailed discussion of the motivations, the discourse and language planning strategies of the second particularist generation is given in Willemyns 1997, which served as the basis for this paragraph.
Any attempt to create a standard language which would enable the West Flemish population to take note of the heathen northern ideas had, therefore, to be rejected by all possible means. Despite the presence of a number of well-informed linguists in this movement, the influence and spread of the ‘half Jewish, half heathen High Dutch’ (as the famous poet Gezelle labelled it) was scapegoated in the most obsessive and hilarious ways, even if this meant taking the argument well beyond the border of reason and scientific facts.

One representative example may illustrate the appalling and nonsensical abuse of pro-West Flemish purist strategies by the second generation particularists. At the 1877 meeting of the Sint-Luitgaarde Gilde, a lecture on the influence of German on Dutch was held, to support the view that Flemish monophthongs had to be promoted in the pronunciation of Dutch, because these were intrinsically better than northern Dutch diphthongs (SLG 1877: 77-86). The motivation for this preference was not linguistic, but purely religious. The diphthongisation of the long vowels in German was claimed to be heathen and devilish because this sound change had been instigated by Luther, the ‘German antichrist’, whose Bible translation had changed the German pronunciation [ví:n] to Saxon [vain]:

En inderdaad, van Luthers tijd voort, ziet men overal de oude, zuivere, volle Swaabsche klanken der Minnesänger en Heldendichter plaatse maken voor de nieuwpokomende sakersche sonanten.

De alemannische lange i, gelijk wij ze, West-Vlamingen nog op onze lippen hebben, ging over in ei, die eene soort van tweeklank is [...]: Mín lib, dîn wâb, thie wîle, sính rîch, dat wierd nu mein leib, dein weib, die welle, sein reich, enz.

De lange ú (de weêrsplette van onze uu) kreeg van 's gelijke eene a of á (é in 't vl.) voor klankgenoot, en wierd alzoo in au of âu (de hollandse u) herschappen: Zoo stond rûmen in rûmen, lûten in lautên, [...] hûs in haus [...] verkled.

De middelhoogduitsche tweeklank ûu wierd vervangen door het nieuwe eu: fiur wierd feuer; [...] niuwe, neue; [...] enz.

['In effect, from Luther's times onwards one sees everywhere how the old, pure, full Swabian sounds of the Minnesänger and Heldendichter are replaced by the new Saxon sounds.

The Alemannic long i, as we West Flemings still have it on our lips, changed into ei, which is some kind of diphthong [...]: Mín lib, dîn wâb, thie wîle, sin rîch, now became mein leib, dein weib, die welle, sein reich, etc.

The long û (cognate of our uu) similarly got an a or â (é in Flemish) as a sound-companion and thus became au or âu (the Hollandic ui). Thus rûmen was dressed up as rûmen, lûten as lautên, [...] hûs as haus.

The Middle High German diphthong ûu was replaced by the new eu: fiur became feuer; [...] niuwe, neue; [...] etc.; SLG 1877: 79]
Similarly, the heathen character of a diphthong and the Catholic character of a monophthong could also be observed in the Low Countries, where diphthongisation was introduced by the Protestant Hollanders, more specifically by Marnix van Ste Aldegonde, William of Orange’s secretary and the author of a virulent satire on the Roman Catholic Church:

De Hollanders nu hebben stap voor stap hunne overhijsensche gebeurs gevolgd, en onze oude nederduitsche klanken hebben gevaren juist gelijk de oude hoogduitsche: zij wierden verdreven door het zegevierende Saksersch […] Marnix van Ste Aldegonde schreef uy en ij. Van toen voort, gaat de lange u en de lange zuivere i, in de geleerde taal, verloren: de saksersche û en ei alleen worden fatsoenlijk geheten. ['Step by step, the Hollanders, now, have followed their neighbours on the other Rhine bank, and our old Dutch sounds have undergone the same fate as the Old High German ones: they were swept away by triumphant Saxon [...] Marnix van Ste Aldegonde wrote uy and ij. From then onwards, the long u and the long pure i have been lost in the learned language: only Saxon û and ei are named decent'; SLG 1877: 80-81].

The nonsensical identification of language structures (and even spelling norms) as carriers of ideologies and beliefs, and the subsequent attempts to replace these ‘contaminated’ structures with innocent alternatives were confirmed and elaborately explained by the guild’s most famous member, the acclaimed dialectologist Leonardus de Bo,¹¹ in a lecture on ‘Why there can be no eloquence in literary Dutch’:

[DI]e Waarheid en de Valschheid hebben noodwendigelyk elk hunne taal... Omdat het Protestantisme eene dwallear is en geene waarheid daarom kon de predikatie van het Protestantisme... niet eenvoudig, niet natuurlijk, niet rechtzinnig zijn. Daaruit moest dan volgen - zoo 't met der daad gevolgd is - dat de taal van die predikatie belemmerd en stram wierd, verwrongen, gezocht, gekunsteld, hoogdravend, vol wind en declamatie. [...] En 't is bemerkensweerdig dat zij, die hier in Belgie die taal willen in-brengen, ook al lieden zijn die van de waarheid niet veel maken, zij gevoelen instinctieffelijk dat deze taal hunne taal is, de taal van de kwade trouw en van de verwaande en hooveerdische miswetendheid.

['Truth and Falseness inevitably have their own language. Because Protestantism is a false doctrine and not the Truth, that is why the preaching of Protestantism could not... be simple, natural and open-hearted. The consequence had to be – as indeed it has been – that the language of this preaching became stiff and twisted, far-fetched, artificial, bombastic, full of wind and rhetoric [...] And it is to be noted that those

¹¹ Cf. Willemyns 1993b for a detailed description of this man’s activities as a linguist.
who would like to introduce this language to Belgium, are indeed all people who do not think much of the truth themselves; instinctively they sense that this language is theirs, the language of falseness and arrogant ignorance'; SLG 1876: 20-21]

5. The effect of purism?

The real impact of the aforementioned purist publications on everyday language use in nineteenth-century Flanders is hard to assess, for various reasons:

- the influence of purism cannot be isolated from the overall results of the bundle of language planning measures taken at the time;
- most of the purist actions described above were driven by individuals and did not have any official status;
- explicit metalinguistic comments in everyday written language referring to purist influence are rare;
- there are very few corpus-based analyses of the presence and evolution of Gallicisms and Belgicisms in nineteenth-century Flanders (see below).

In her overview of 200 years of language planning in Belgium, De Groof (2002b) defends the commonly accepted view that the purist discourse never got beyond purely theoretical discussions, and, as such, was not translated into the actual adoption and spread of a codified norm. Its importance should mainly be evaluated on an attitudinal level: ‘Although they [i.e. teachers, linguists and other ‘language lovers’ who were involved in the practice of purification] did not have the means to implement their norm for the masses, their discussion probably increased the awareness of the existence of a norm for certain layers of society’ (De Groof 2002b: 128-129).

Vanhecke’s (1998, 2002) study of the language use in town council reports in the Flemish town of Willebroek between 1818 and 1900 supports this view. Her data show a dramatic rise in the number of Gallicisms and Belgicisms in the chancery records after 1830 but the frequency of these constructions remains the same throughout the rest of the century, a fact which may be related to the lack of official Dutch translations for French administrative terminology up until 1900.\(^{12}\)

One may, however, want to question the validity of the language gardeners’ claims for all domains of the written language in nineteenth-century Flanders.

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\(^{12}\) Ongoing research at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel is focussing on the influence and use of Gallicisms in the Antwerp and Bruges town council records.
A sharp contrast with the findings regarding the heavily Frenchified official discourse is provided by Haest (1982), who conducted an analysis of a number of ‘Gallicist’ structures in newspapers from the town of Antwerp between 1700 and 1900. She found 1191 Gallicisms on a total of (approximately) 1700 pages (i.e. no more than 0.7 per page), which puts into perspective the language gardeners’ obsessive preoccupation with the alleged ubiquitous presence of Gallicisms in journalists’ language. As far as the distribution of these structures in the corpus is concerned, however, the major increase also occurred after Belgian independence: 2% of all ‘Gallicisms’ found appeared in the newspapers from 1700, 6.8% in 1750, 12.2% in 1800, versus 44.6% in 1850 and 34.1% in 1900.

Contrary to other language purifiers, the second-generation particularists did not succeed in influencing the general attitudinal climate towards Standard Dutch. Their principles were hardly ever put into practice, not even in their own texts, which – apart from a few archaic forms - display a language use that is remarkably close to that of the integrationists. One member of the particularist group, however, did consistently try to introduce Flemish purisms into official decrees of the Bruges town council; one of his rare victories had the amusing consequence that, for many years, bicycles were referred to as ‘wheel horses’ in all official town documents.¹³

6. Concluding remarks

This necessarily brief portrayal of the complex linguistic discussions which dominated nineteenth-century Flanders has illustrated the presence of purism in the first two stages of the standardisation process (the selection and the codification phases; cf. Einar Haugen’s model) in both main currents with regard to the shaping of a Dutch standard language for Flanders. Integrationists believed that the Dutch used in Belgium was an impotent regional variety, full of local idioms and interference from French. The only means of obtaining a worthy standard language that would be able to replace French was the adoption of the northern standard, with the consequent battle against Gallicisms and the promotion of Hollandic forms. Particularists believed that the Flemish Dutch dialects contained many elements that were worth preserving, and favoured the acceptance of these regionalisms as an integral part of the Dutch language. It is clear, in retrospect, that the integrationist

¹³ An overview of this man’s language-political activities – his name was Eugène van Steenkiste – is given in Vandenbussche 1995; a case study of his attempts at a particularist written language is presented in Willemyns 1996.
movement won the battle at an early stage and that the particularist movement hardly stood a chance from the very onset. The debate on purism and language cultivation was driven by underlying motivations of identity, social promotion, political aspirations and – as a footnote - even religious fundamentalism. The first three motivations continued to determine the debate about the form of Standard Dutch in Flanders during the twentieth century up until the 1980s, a debate which was continuously fed by a stream of purist publications, by language advice on radio and on television, and by newspaper columns of the ‘don’t say... but say....’ type (Willemys 2003b). As the centre of gravity of the Belgian economy shifted to Flanders and the reform of the Belgian state led to the establishment of a largely autonomous Flemish region and community, Flanders (and the Dutch language in Flanders) came of age on the cultural, social and political level, compared to both the Netherlands and the French-speaking part of Belgium (Witte, Craeybeckx and Meynen 2000). In this new social context, the purism described above has gradually become a footnote in the recent history of Dutch.

7. References

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