

# HISTORY OF BRUSSELS

## LINGUISTIC USAGES IN BRUSSELS BEFORE 1794

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### THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Capital of Belgium since its creation in 1830, Brussels is progressively becoming the capital of Europe as the second millennium draws to its close and for that reason it is sometimes more familiar to the world at large than is Belgium itself. Indeed, very many foreigners frequently encounter great difficulty in understanding the organisation and functioning of Belgium, a state bisected by the German/Romance language frontier which has existed more or less unchanged since the sixth century. North of this frontier lies the Dutch-speaking region and south of it is the French-speaking area.

The Belgian state contains, in fact, no less than four language zones.

1. 56,1% (5.630.139 inhabitants) of the Belgian population lives in the Dutch-speaking part of the country, which has generally been known as "Flanders" only since the latter years of the 19th century. The only official language of "Flanders" is Dutch, the same language as is spoken in Holland.
2. The French-speaking part (3.221.225 inhabitants) of the country is home to 31,1% of the Belgian population. It is only in the last few decades that this area has been known as "Wallonia". Its sole official language is French, the same language as is spoken in France.
3. In the east of the country lies a small German-speaking area (65.000 inhabitants). This territory was ceded to Belgium by Germany at the end of the First World War (1914 - 1918) and its population speaks the same language as is spoken in Germany.
4. Within the Dutch-speaking zone lies an enclave, the "Brussels Capital Region". The population of the nineteen districts comprising the "Brussels Capital Region" is 997.293 inhabitants (10,1%).

As the Belgian capital Brussels is a region apart with a special, bilingual status, the only such region in all Belgium. Both Dutch and French are official languages in Brussels whereas Flanders and Wallonia are monolingual, respectively Dutch- and French-speaking.

Despite its official bilingual status Brussels appears, at first sight, to be predominantly French-speaking. The reality, however, is somewhat more complex. The fact is that over the last few decades Brussels has grown into a hub of international intercourse where people from all parts of the world are present. Citizens of over 120 different countries currently live and work there, effectively making it a multicultural city. This international character, together with the presence of such important organisations as the European

Commission, NATO etc, has led to the increasing use of the English language.

It requires only a glance at the map of Belgium to see that Brussels lies in the monolingual Dutch-speaking zone and all its historical place names, without exception, are Dutch - Coudenberg (cold mountain), Nieuwland (new land), Orsendael (valley of horses), Ruysbroeck, Warmoesbroeck and Borgendael. Indeed, Brussels was originally solely Dutch-speaking. Since that is no longer the case today it is obvious that over the course of time a process of language-change must have been at work in this city. That directly gives rise to two questions: when did this process occur and what were the factors that determined it? The explanation of the phenomenon lies in the history of the town of Brussels, of the duchy of Brabant and of the Netherlands.

## 2. BRUSSELS, BRABANT AND THE NETHERLANDS

The present day capital of Europe was originally an unassuming village in the marshy valley of the River Zenne. The name "Brussels" derives from the old Dutch words "broec" and "saal", broadly signifying "settlement in the marsh". From around 1000 AD the hamlet began steadily to blossom into a town. Brussels was situated at the crossroads of two major trade routes; the one linking England to Germany and the other joining Northern Europe to the South. Around 1100 a first defensive wall was built around the town. In 1229 Duke Henry I of Brabant (1190-1235) granted the inhabitants of Brussels a charter guaranteeing them a number of rights. Brussels developed into an important centre of the textile industry in the duchy of Brabant.

Brabant was a principality under the suzerainty of the German Empire. It embraced, apart from the present-day "Brussels Capital Region" (established in 1989), not only what is now "Flemish Brabant" and "Walloon Brabant" but also "Antwerp" and even the Dutch province of "North Brabant". The greater part of the duchy was situated within the Dutch-speaking region, in which the four principal towns of Brussels, Leuven (Louvain), 's Hertogenbosch and Antwerp lay. Only the agricultural "Roman Pays de Brabant", containing the abbey town of Nivelles, lay in the French-speaking region.

At first Latin was the language of government in Brabant, as it was throughout Europe, but from about 1290 it was gradually replaced by the vernacular in official documents. In the Dutch-speaking part of the duchy (and thus also Brussels) this was Dutch, of course - or, as it was then called, "Diets", "Duutsch" or "Duytsch". In the French-speaking area French was used.

From the 13th century the development of Brussels began to accelerate and the town steadily expanded. The protection provided by the first fortifications became insufficient and between 1357 and 1379 a second city wall was built. During the 14th century the textile industry enjoyed its greatest period of prosperity. Culturally, too, Brussels occupied an increasingly important position. The town on the Zenne played a pioneering role in the development of the Brabantine gothic style of architecture, while one of its citizens, Jan van Ruusbroek enjoyed great respect throughout Europe for his mystical writings in medieval Dutch. At the same time Brabant was forging its own political culture, too. The powers of the prince were circumscribed by several important concessions, embodied in charters. In Brabant, just as in England, a constitutional system was being constructed. By 1422 Brabant had acquired a form of government that was beginning closely to resemble a parliamentary regime, in which the dukes were to some extent answerable to a kind of people's representation. Furthermore, long before the French Revolution of 1789, the

citizens of Brabant had secured the right to depose their prince should he fail to honour his engagements. This "Privilegium Brabantinum" was to become a beacon for future liberation movements (and also for the drafters of the American constitution).

Brussels, together with the rest of the duchy of Brabant, came under the rule of the house of Burgundy in 1430. These French dukes of the House of Valois had made themselves masters of a number of principalities in the Low Countries, such as Flanders, the province of Holland, Zeeland, Friesland, Namur and Hainault. The ducal household and the central institutions of the Burgundian state were French-speaking and Duke Philip the Good (1430-1467) stayed in the "Coudenberg" Palace in Brussels from time to time. The rich tide of artistic achievement continued to rise in the 15th century: Roger van der Weyden (d.1464) was appointed official painter for the town of Brussels, while Jan van Ruysbroeck, "meester vanden steenwerke van den torre van der stad raithuse op de merct" (master mason for the spire of the Brussels Town Hall in the Market square) completed the building of the spire between 1449 and 1454. It was in Brussels, too, that during this Burgundian era the most important 15th century works of Dutch-language literature were written.

With the extinction of the Burgundian dynasty in 1482 the Low Countries (broadly coterminous with the present-day states of Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg) came under the rule of the Habsburgs. During the reign of Emperor Charles V (1515-1555) Brussels became the capital of the wide-reaching Habsburg empire. This embraced, apart from the Low Countries, all of Spain, parts of Germany, Austria and Italy and even a number of overseas territories. From 1531 onwards the ducal household and central administration remained in Brussels.

The arts flourished as never before during this period. Woodcarving and tapestry weaving, in particular, reached new artistic heights. To this day, wall tapestries and carved wooden altar-pieces produced in Brussels at that time still grace countless museums, churches and palaces at home and abroad. Significant advances in science were also seen: Andreas Vesalius (d. 1564), founder of modern anatomy, was a citizen of Brussels. The city also maintained its important role in the literary arts.

16th century Brussels, "Princelijk Hoofdstadt van't Nederland" (Princely Capital of the Low Countries), was the home of many adherents of the Reformation. They were enraged at the religious fanaticism of the Spanish king, Philip II, who wanted to keep the Low Countries Roman Catholic and brought many Calvinists and Lutherans to trial. This aroused deep resentment throughout the territory and Brussels joined the general rebellion against the Spanish domination. The Spaniards were driven out and the Low Countries obtained their independence. Prince William of Orange celebrated his "Blijde Inkomst" (Joyous Entry) in Brussels.

Philip II, however, could not reconcile himself to the loss of the Low Countries and set about winning these "rebellious provinces" back. He succeeded only partially, his field-marshal, Alexander Farnese, reconquering the southern Low Countries for the Spanish crown. The northern Low Countries, however, went their own way from 1585. Protected by their great rivers, they were able to preserve their independence. The "United Provinces" (more or less present-day Holland and officially acknowledged in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648), developed into a protestant, trade-oriented republic. Calvinist refugees from the South made a significant contribution to the prosperity of this state.

However, the southern Low Countries - broadly coterminous with present-day Belgium - continued under Spanish Habsburg domination until 1713, when they passed into the

inheritance of the Austrian branch of that dynasty.

Brussels remained throughout the capital of the Low Countries and was closely involved in all the important events of the province's restless history. The land was frequently ravaged by war - ever since the Middle Ages the French kings had nursed the ambition to annex the Low Countries. Brussels was the foremost victim of the ensuing devastation and it suffered its harshest ordeal in August 1695, when Louis XIV ordered Marshal de Villeroy to bombard the city. In the course of this onslaught, which Napoleon was later to qualify as "as barbaric as it was pointless", countless buildings and works of art were destroyed and many documents were lost from the archives. Despite all the violence and disruption of the wars the artisans of Brussels continued to produce an abundance of work of great quality: tapestries, lace and porcelain in particular. The coach makers of Brussels also established an excellent reputation throughout Europe.

In 1793/94 Brussels and the rest of the southern Low Countries were invaded by the French and in 1795 the whole territory was simply incorporated into the French Republic. From 1793 until 1815 a policy of systematic "gallicisation" was enforced in the southern Low Countries. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 the Allies, particularly England, resolved to establish a buffer against France.

Consequently, the southern and northern Low Countries, which had gone their separate ways since 1585, were united once again under King William I of the Netherlands. The prince threw himself energetically into the task of bringing the South up to the level of prosperity already enjoyed by the North. His approach was not always the most adroit, however, and he met resistance from the catholic bishops, always suspicious of the protestant king. The autochthonous administrators, who had been subjected to gallic influence under the French occupation, also tended to regard William with hostility. Above all, the newly emerged middle class demanded the right of participation in government, hitherto dominated by the aristocracy and wealthy merchant classes.

In 1830 a revolt broke out against the king "of Holland", reviving French hopes of annexing the southern Low Countries. The English (in particular) were firmly opposed to this, however, and in consequence an independent state, which nobody really wanted, was brought into existence - Belgium. Brussels was the capital of the new country.

Belgium was completely dominated by the French-speaking bourgeoisie. Although the majority (about 60%) of the Belgian population spoke Dutch it was French that became the official language. Civil administration, justice, education and even socio-economic business were for a long time conducted in French, even in the Dutch-speaking areas of the country. "Flemish", as the French-speakers invariably called the Dutch language, was treated with racist arrogance. Officials from Wallonia, or even France, were appointed as civil servants, tax collectors, stationmasters and judges even in the furthest reaches of Dutch-speaking Belgium.

Brussels, naturally, attracted far more French-speaking immigrants than any other part of the country since it was there that the apparatus of the central government of the French-only speaking state was installed. Brussels was therefore exposed more harshly than other Belgian towns to process of "gallicisation".

A movement calling itself the "Vlaamse Beweging" (Flemish Movement) engaged in a long, stubborn struggle for the elementary right of a people to be governed in its own language in its own land by its own democratically elected representatives. They forced a number of

changes to the language laws at the end of the 19th century and during the 20th century. From 1930 Dutch gradually gained ground as the official language for the Dutch-speaking part of the country (which, from the end of the 19th century, had begun to be known as "Flanders").

For Brussels (the capital), however, exceptional dispositions were repeatedly introduced. It was, in effect, surrendered by the Dutch-speaking community (usually called "Flemish"). The capital - and this is a common phenomenon - was branded with a negative image: this, after all, was where the seat of the French-speaking governing authority was established, the place from which countless irksome directives that so afflicted the lives of ordinary citizens (taxes, military service etc) were handed down. In short, a great many Dutch-speakers identified (and still identify) "Brussels" with the Belgian regime.

Around 1900 it became apparent that Belgium's besetting problem amounted to far more than a linguistic "war". "Flemings" and "Walloons" do, indeed, speak totally different languages - in fact, the difference between Dutch and French is greater than that between English and French. Far more important, however, is that "Flemings" and "Walloons" hold wholly divergent views on a host of social questions (such as the government's role in economic affairs, sickness and invalidity insurance, ethical matters, the functioning of the judicial system, the organisation of the police services, punishments for traffic offences, the role of the monarchy, the arms trade, tobacco advertising and so on). What Belgium faces, in other words, is not so much a "language" problem as a full-blown "nationality" problem.

In the face of these not infrequently diametrically opposed outlooks it was necessary (generally with great difficulty) to seek some sort of weak compromise. This, of course, satisfied neither side. More often, though, no solution could be found, in which event the civil servants usually pushed the problem to one side in the hope that it would eventually resolve itself - with the inevitable results. In the last few years in particular, the consequences of the "Belgian sickness" have become steadily more manifest.

As early as 1900 it was obvious to a great many observers that Belgium could survive only if the two peoples who lived in that state were each granted the widest possible degree of autonomy. Only so could potential areas of friction be kept to a minimum. These voices were ignored: the Belgian rulers, anxious to protect their privileges, obstinately opposed any reform. Nevertheless, democratisation of society continued to gather pace. Under the momentum of a growing political awareness, the old Belgian unitary state was forced to concede more and more autonomy to the two peoples living within its confines. This "peaceful revolution" was accomplished through a series of reforms, one following the other at an ever accelerating tempo. In four constitutional amendments (in 1970-71, 1980, 1988-89 and 1993) a great many of the responsibilities of the Belgian (federal) government were devolved to the member states - Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. In many respects Belgium has become a confederation.

## CONTEMPORARY REPORTS ON LINGUISTIC USAGES IN THE SOUTHERN LOW COUNTRIES

It has been seen in the foregoing account that Belgian political life was increasingly dominated by the issue of the language conflict or, more accurately, the nationality conflict. It might, therefore, be expected that historians and philologists would have devoted much of their attention to the linguistic usages in the southern Low Countries before 1794. This, however, is not the case. Indeed, the subject of linguistic usage during the "Ancien

Régime" is still a largely unexplored terrain. Such work as has been published on the subject, moreover, is hardly ever based on systematic examination of records but relies more on contemporary accounts (by writers, rulers, foreign travellers, officials etc.) These witnesses, however, never thoroughly researched the linguistic background; they simply set down their first impressions, which could differ considerably from one person to another. Thus, the British traveller, Shaw, declared in the 18th century that throughout the southern Low Countries the use of Dutch was as good as extinct, while at about the same time Voltaire indignantly exclaimed that Brussels was inhabited only by Flemings!

One contemporary account, whose author understood the subject well, has come down to us from the 18th century, however. In 1788 Jan Baptist Verlooy published his celebrated "Verhandeling op d'onacht der moederlyke tael in de Nederlanden" (Treatise on the neglect of the mother-tongue in the Low Countries). A lawyer from the Kempen region of Brabant, Verlooy became a barrister at the Council of Brabant (a court of law) in Brussels. He was deeply infused with the rationalism of the Enlightenment and was a member of the democratic party.

In his treatise he comprehensively discusses the linguistic usages in the Low Countries and concludes that the Dutch tongue was falling into neglect in both the northern (present-day Holland) and southern areas. He lays the blame for this on the Burgundian dukes (1430-1482) and the French central administration these Valois princes had superimposed on the local administrations of Brabant (from 1430) and elsewhere in the Low Countries; until then, the dukes of Brabant had used Dutch in their relations with their Dutch-speaking subjects. Verlooy contends that the Burgundians, in establishing their court in Brussels, induced countless French courtiers and Walloon servants to settle there. In short, the Burgundians had set in hand the "gallicisation" of the entire Low Countries. Even their successors, the Habsburgs (1482-1794), retained French as the language of administration and never gave the slightest encouragement to the vernacular.

Verlooy pleaded passionately for the rehabilitation of the Dutch language and culture and he was impelled in this first and foremost by his fundamentally democratic attitude. The ordinary citizen could not take full part in the decision making process unless he was governed in his own language. Dutch, he said, was the language of freedom.

As a Brabantine, Verlooy was ever conscious of the series of constitutional rights that had been conceded to the citizens of Brabant since the 13th century. These had been the means by which the arbitrary powers of the rulers had been reined in. The high point of this process had been reached in the 15th century, when the Brabantines had acquired the right to depose any ruler who failed to honour his engagements. Hence, in their resistance to both Philip II's despotism and Joseph II's reforming zeal the citizens of the Low Countries had invoked the "Privilegium Brabantinum".

In making his case Verlooy is sometimes carried away by his own fervour, as is particularly evident in his treatment of Brussels itself. Some of his observations on the capital leave the reader with the firm impression that the city was already largely "gallicised" in the 15th century yet, a few pages later, Verlooy's tune is quite different: here he contends that at the end of the 18th century the entire administrative business of Brussels was still conducted in Dutch.

Verlooy goes even further when he says that in his own time (his treatise appeared in 1788) a mere 5% of the population of Brussels was French-speaking. In other words, on the eve of the French occupation of Brussels (1793/1794 - 1814/1815), 95% of its

inhabitants were Dutch speakers. Furthermore, he continues, the "gallicisation" of Brussels was of so little effect that had a different official policy been followed the phenomenon would have vanished on the instant! But that is not what happened, for the Low Countries were occupied by the sansculottes and from 1793/4 France had more than 20 years in which to practise a harsh policy of "gallicisation" of the entire territory. There was resistance, of course, especially in Brussels, but the French occupation was to have far-reaching consequences, nevertheless. An entire generation of intellectuals was educated between 1793 and 1815 and most of them spoke only French; the great majority of the population of Brussels, however, continued to speak its own Dutch dialect.

After the fall of Napoleon in 1815 the southern and northern Low Countries were reunited under King William I. The language usually spoken by this Dutch king - just as by his contemporaries - was French. Nevertheless, the protestant William wanted the official language used for the administration and education of the Southern Netherlands to become, once again, the language of the people - Dutch. This policy gave rise to a great deal of resentment among intellectuals and officials, who had been "gallicised" during the French occupation and who now saw their chances of promotion threatened. The government defended its policy and the "Gazette des Pays Bas", in its issues of 5th and 6th September 1829, pointed out that Dutch had already been the official language in Brussels before the French occupation. But in 1830 the separatists achieved their aims: "Belgium" and "Holland" were divorced from each other.

When, immediately after Belgium's independence, the question arose of what the new state's official language of government and justice was to be, it was fairly soon decided that the only official language would be French. Philologists joined the debate from time to time, reiterating that Dutch had been spoken in Brussels since time immemorial. Jan Frans Willems, "the father of the Flemish Movement", wrote to the minister Sylvain Van de Weyer, pointing out that the people of Brussels had always resisted the imposition of the French language - even in the face of French bayonets.

## THE PHILOLOGISTS' APPROACH

Although the academics of the day contributed intermittently to the discussion there was never any question of systematic research into the linguistic usages in earlier centuries. In any case, the scholars concerned were nearly always philologists and not historians. Their interest was confined almost exclusively to the literary experience of Brussels. They referred mainly to the complaints of 17th and 18th century writers and poets that the (foreign) governments attached too little importance to the language of the people; it was French that gave the tone. This phenomenon, moreover, was by no means restricted to Brussels: the French language was in vogue throughout all Europe at that time. It was precisely for that reason that writers not only from the Low Countries but also from Germany, England, Italy, Hungary, Holland, Poland and Russia used to complain about "francomania" or "gallomania".

Those few philologists who did occasionally interest themselves in the linguistic traditions of Brussels made a different sort of mistake. They attached too much importance to the literary aspects and tended to overlook the fact that writing of poetry or prose is only a secondary purpose of any language. A language is first and foremost a means of everyday communication between people, a medium for composing letters, memoranda and official documents. But the academics were not interested in this, sociologically much more important, use of language and consequently their evaluation of the linguistic climate prior

to 1794 was erroneous: or, more precisely, their treatises gave the impression that Dutch was of little relevance in Brussels during the 17th and 18th centuries - an impression that French-speaking authors were only too glad to promote. From there it was but a small step to suppose that French was the fashion dictated by the capital's civic authorities, its artisans, its chambers of rhetoric, its churches and its abbeys. Indeed, a great many Dutch-speakers were persuaded that Dutch had fallen into disuse within the civil administration in Brussels. They were, of course, quite wrong.

The fact is that in the history of any national literature periods of glory alternate with less spectacular spells so it is perfectly conceivable that in any such history many decades may go by without the appearance of any masterwork in the language concerned. But that certainly does not mean that that language was not in constant use for the day-to-day needs of trade, administration, education and justice.

What clearly emerges from the foregoing discussion is this: a prerequisite to reaching any meaningful conclusions over the linguistic usages of a city like Brussels is a prior study of the public archives. This, after all, is the repository of documents framed by and for the people. Research into linguistic traditions, therefore, is in the first instance examination of archives. This is no small task, of course, and it is not surprising that only a handful of scholars have been tempted to undertake it.

Those analysts who have written about the linguistic circumstances of Brussels have generally done little more than to put together quantities of material selected from easily accessible "documentation". The risks inherent in this, however, are by no means negligible. For instance, the (few) authors who did study linguistic usages in Brussels were aware, naturally, that Dutch was originally the only tongue in use there, but they also knew that during the 19th and 20th centuries the city was largely "gallicised". With this knowledge at the back of their minds they went in search of the origins of the phenomenon. Now in any inquiry conducted, not on the basis of methodical research of the original archives but simply by reliance on easily accessible "documentation", there is a great danger that the conclusions will be flawed. And so, in an unselective rummaging for clues about the linguistic usages in Brussels amongst the miscellany of observations of foreign travellers or complaints of indigenous writers of the time, the researcher is bound to be inclined to select from this profusion of disparate material only that which indicates the spread of the French language in earlier centuries. The residual "clues", which point in a quite different direction, are all too often overlooked. Thus historical facts become completely distorted.

This sort of selective approach can sometimes take on extreme forms. The most flagrant example may be found in L. Van de Bruwaene's "Le français à Bruxelles dans les siècles passés". There is no length to which this Romance apologist will not go to prove that a Walloon community had existed in Brussels since time immemorial. According to him, Walloons were there in the 10th century! To give weight to his proposition Van den Bruwaene plunges headlong into easily accessible "documentation" in search of "clues" pointing to the spread of French - which he finds, naturally - and thus he quotes a whole body of "evidence" which, according to him, indicates the "growing gallicisation of Brussels".

These clues are as follows:

1. From 1531 Brussels was the established residence of the governors representing the Spanish (and later Austrian) Habsburgs in the (southern) Low Countries. Their court and

central administration were also installed in Brussels. Within these circles French (and sometimes also Spanish) was the official language.

2. During the 17th and 18th centuries a number of exiles (noblemen, writers, scholars and political figures) settled in Brussels. Many of these people came from the French-speaking region.
3. A French-language newspaper appeared in Brussels. Its purpose was to defend government policy, particularly abroad.
4. Many of the engravings of Brussels street scenes and street plans published at the time bore French titles and/or place names.
5. A (small) number of Walloon schoolmasters were teaching in Brussels.
6. A number of French-speaking monastic orders were established in Brussels and in some of the churches the sermons were even preached in French.
7. Walloon traders and peddlers used to come to the capital to sell their wares.
8. Numerous writers and rhetoricians from Brussels deplored the neglect of the "Nederduytsch" and the disdain shown for the vernacular.
9. Finally, there were also signs of resistance to "francophilia" and "francomania".

These are the clues traditionally offered - and not only by L. Van den Bruwaene - as evidence that Brussels was already considerably "gallicised" during the Ancien Régime. Van den Bruwaene concludes from this that the majority of the inhabitants of Brussels were already French-speaking in the 17th century.

But, as is well known to everyone at all familiar with linguistic usages in Europe during the Ancien Régime, the "evidence" proclaimed by Van den Bruwaene was to be found in all cities of any size. For instance, French had been the language of the English monarchy, court, aristocracy, administration and justice since 1066. It was not until the end of the 15th century that English began to receive official recognition. But what sane person would dream of disputing that medieval London was English? Countless noblemen and courtiers of the time, living all over Europe (the northern Low Countries, Germany, Austria, England, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Russia and so on), were French-speaking and French language newspapers and travel guides were widely available, French schools were established, sermons were preached in French and French craftsmen and merchants plied their trade. Writers and poets in all these countries complained at the disdainful treatment of their own language and warned their compatriots against "gallomania".

If L. Van den Bruwaene had bothered to spend a few hours perusing any of the Brussels municipal archives dating back to the Ancien Régime he would quickly have realised how absurd his contention was. He could have seen for himself that in all the local institutions, which were the only institutions with which the ordinary people of Brussels had any contact, French was practically never used before 1794.

IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES FOR RESEARCH

The need, then, for methodical research of records is imperative. Unfortunately, only a few scholars have felt impelled to undertake such research. It is true that, as early as 1859, C. Serrure based his study of the linguistic usages of Brussels on material from the city archives but, sadly, his example was not followed.

It was not until 1950-1952 that the historian, A. Cosemans, adopted a similar method but he never set out deliberately and methodically to trace the linguistic traditions from any particular collection of records. In the course of his stock-taking duties, as registrar in the state Records Office, he often made notes on matters of interest. On the strength of these observations Cosemans was forced to the conclusion that Brussels had been a great deal less "gallicised" during the "Ancien Régime" than had hitherto (and unsupported by any research) been assumed. Unfortunately, the results of his work came to the attention of only a small group of specialists.

Around 1977 a fresh impetus was given to the exploration of linguistic usages in Brussels during the "Ancien Régime". The difference with the earlier studies is great. The new research was based on archives: sometimes specific types of documents, sometimes all the archives of a particular institution. Crucially, professional historians now led the inquiry. Unlike A. Cosemans, these experts systematically examined the various official documents with the sole aim of recording the language in which they had been written.

Hervé Hasquin's study (13) based on certificates and deeds issued from the public notary's office in Brussels (1740-1780) was published in 1979, as was that of Paul de Ridder (14) on the city's cartularies (registers containing duplicate copies of original documents) and its accounts (before 1500). Since then the research has been broadened to include other sorts of documents. Whenever the source material permits it, the documents are enumerated.

Hervé Hasquin's study, described above, is an example of such a quantitative approach. According to this French-speaking professor at the University of Brussels (Université Libre de Bruxelles), a little over 10% of the population of Brussels was French-speaking in 1785 (15). That is quite inconsistent with the notion that Brussels had already been "gallicised" under the dukes of Burgundy.

The point of departure in present-day studies of linguistic usages in Brussels is the premise that it was not until the reign of the Habsburg Charles V (1515 -1555) that Brussels became the capital of the Low Countries. From 1531, not only the court but also all the Habsburg central institutions in the Low Countries were established here. French (though Spanish also, to some extent) was the predominant language used for official purposes.

These studies take into account not only the existence of a French-speaking upper class in Brussels but also the influx of many poor folk from the Walloon region seeking shelter in the capital and other simple workers hoping to make a living as craftsmen in the capital or, if unsuccessful, to find subsistence through begging.

But what of the long-term effects of these two sorts of immigration of French-speakers into Brussels? Before the 19th century there were no separate censuses of French- and Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the city. To obtain any idea of the number of French-speakers before 1794, and especially of the impact such people had on the linguistic habits of the host population, it is necessary to resort to indirect evidence.

The most reliable data in this respect is to be found in old documents prepared by inhabitants of Brussels themselves, since these must represent a fairly accurate reflection of the language usage of the citizens. At that time neither the municipal authorities nor any other civic institution in Brussels were able to influence the choice of language by legislation or compulsion. From all these deeds, certificates, contracts, exchanges of letters, accounts, resolutions, regulations, public notices et al, it is possible to make an assessment of the extent to which a "gallicising" influence was exercised on the local population by the presence of the court and of the central civil administration and the influx of the Walloons. Similar documents, relating to the municipal government, the bench of aldermen, the cloth guilds, trades guilds, chambers of rhetoric, the churches, monasteries, hospitals and almshouses, are preserved in various records offices in Brussels.

It is not possible to overstate how essential it is, in the study of this process of "gallicisation", to ensure that the inquiry proceeds from clear and unambiguous concepts. Unfortunately, some confusion has been created around the term "Brussels". Certain Dutch-speakers, in particular, have invested the term with a quite inappropriate significance. To them, "Brussels" means not the city, but the apparatus of central government of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs.

Naturally, this sort of semantic abbreviation makes any meaningful research impossible since there is a fundamental difference between the institutions of Brussels, on the one hand, and those of the Habsburgs, on the other. Meanwhile, the (southern) Low Countries' central government archives are of little relevance to the study of the linguistic usages in Brussels. Indeed, it may confidently be stated that the best way to reach a wrong conclusion is to base the research on the Burgundian or Habsburg official documents. The people of Brussels were virtually excluded from the court, the councils and the state administration. The (southern) Low Countries were governed by the Burgundians or the Spanish or Austrian Habsburgs but certainly not by people from Brussels. Quite the contrary, in fact: Brussels, just as the rest of the (southern) Low Countries, lay under the dominion of foreign potentates who exercised their rule through governors and plenipotentiaries. In fact, the "government" established in Brussels during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries had relatively little power, most important decisions being taken in the Escorial in Madrid or the Hofburg in Vienna. So those given to the sort of semantic abbreviation illustrated above should be consistent and say that the Low Countries were governed by Madrid (1559-1713), by Vienna (1713-1794) and later, by Paris (1793-1815).

One final consideration demonstrating how unsound it is to equate "Brussels" with "the central government" is the following: during the "Ancien Régime" just 5% of the inhabitants of Brussels were employed in the various departments of the central government. Any reference to the state apparatus as "Brussels", therefore, creates an intractable problem. What term is to be used to describe the remaining 95% of the capital's population?

To summarise, therefore: any study of the process of changes of language used in Brussels must proceed from an accurate and unambiguous definition of terms. Be it clearly established, then, that the term "Brussels" is intended by the author herein to denote its only correct meaning, namely the city in Brabant, its population and its civic institutions.

As a rule, the average inhabitant of Brussels came into contact only with city officials or fellow-members of his trade, church or place of worship or chamber of rhetoric. The governor or plenipotentiary, the Council of State, the Secret Council and the Finance Council were, of course, all established in the city but any direct contact with state institutions was quite exceptional for the ordinary citizen. Such communication as there

may have been between the state government and the citizen would normally be channelled via the Brabant regional or Brussels municipal authorities.

The archives of the various Brussels institutions give us, then, a good idea of the language usages of the capital. Although countless municipal documents were destroyed in the 1695 bombardment of the city, a very great number of pre-1695 records survived. For instance, most documents of the churches, abbeys and convents, hospitals and almshouses escaped practically undamaged from the attack and, furthermore, even many of the official records kept by the municipal authorities survived the disaster. Thus, twenty 14th and 15th century cartularies from Brussels have been preserved to this day. No city in the entire Low Countries possesses such an impressive collection. Clerks copied out, by hand, a wide miscellany of documents: anything that might in any way be of interest or importance to the municipality was duplicated. As a result, countless records, the originals of which were destroyed by the French in 1695, have nevertheless been preserved.

The Brussels municipal archives are particularly well endowed with records from the period after the bombardment (1695-1794). A wealth of documents from the last century of the "Ancien Régime" has been preserved, material in abundance for the study of the linguistic usages of Brussels. Indeed, such was the sheer quantity of this material that it was impossible to deal with it all in a single study and consequently the research was broken down into two phases. During the first phase (1977-1981) all (!) the documents originating in Brussels before 1500 were examined. Those from 1500-1794 are being dealt with in the second phase, which began in 1984. Archives are being sifted through, collection after collection, and it has even proved necessary, at times, to restrict the research to particular types of documents.

An approach such as this imposes a far greater workload on the researcher than would be the case were he to limit himself to the traditional "documentation". On the other hand, he has a far more solid basis from which to draw conclusions about the linguistic practices in Brussels before 1794, since he is working with a comprehensive and relatively complete assemblage of documents. The risk, moreover, of his drawing subjective conclusions is far less than it would be were he to rely merely on the "documentation" referred to above. After all, it is quite plain to a researcher studying an entire archive of documents of a particular type that each document is written in one or other language: it is fairly easy for him, then, to establish how many of these documents are in Dutch and how many in French. The conclusions, in other words, lie open before him and speak for themselves.

## RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH OF THE ARCHIVES

### A. LINGUISTIC USAGES BEFORE 1500

All documents from Brussels from the period before 1500 were systematically examined with respect to the language used. These were:

- a) Twenty cartularies from 14th and 15th century Brussels,
- b) Nine city accounts registers
- c) Over 1,600 files containing documents from the aldermanic registries, trades guilds, cloth guilds, churches, abbeys and convents, almshouses and hospitals.

Practically all these 1,600 files concern either a register with several dozen folios or else a box containing dozens of original charters or packets of several loose documents. Thus, the archives of the collegiate church of Saint Michael and Saint Gudula alone harbour more than 5,000 original charters dating from before 1500 - more than enough material from which to form a well-founded judgment of the linguistic customs of Brussels before 1500.

All this systematic research led to the following conclusions. In Brussels, just as everywhere else in western Europe, early official documents were drawn up in Latin. From the late 13th century a gradual switch to the use of the vernacular began. This, in the case of Brussels, was Dutch or, as it then was called, "Dietsch", "Duutsch" or "Duytsch". It was used at first in connection with matters affecting the population at large (regulations, by-laws, statutes etc.) and also for the public accounts. For more "private" business, such as property transactions (e.g. sale of land, rents and tithes) the authorities continued, for the time being, to use Latin. In fact, this practice continued until the start of the 16th century, when Dutch finally replaced Latin.

The archives of Brussels contain virtually no record, earlier than 1500, written in French; virtually everything was drawn up in Latin or medieval Dutch. Close examination of the few deeds that were drafted in French leads to a surprising discovery: they arise, almost without exception, from proceedings heard, not in Brussels, but outside the city. They concern, for example, French-speaking princes such as the Count of Hainault, the Prince-Bishop of Liège and the Duke of Burgundy or else civic dignitaries or religious establishments in the French-speaking region. It is not surprising, then, that such proceedings should have been conducted in French. It might also be mentioned that lying in the archives of Brabant are a number of documents drawn up in German (concerning relations with the archbishops of Cologne).

Whenever a plot of land in Walloon Brabant or in Hainault was purchased by an abbey situated in Brussels or Brabant the deed of sale would, quite naturally, be drawn up in French by the local (French-speaking) authorities. The same is just as true for purchases by abbeys not situated in Brussels. Thus, in the archives of certain abbeys in Dutch-speaking areas, such as Affligem or 't Park (Louvain), whole sections of Walloon deeds, relating to property situated in the French-speaking region but owned by these establishments, may be found. On the other hand, the archives of the abbeys of Nivelles, Villers-la-Ville and La Ramée (Jauchelette), in Walloon Brabant, contain various deeds in Diets (medieval Dutch) relating to property situated in the Dutch-speaking region but belonging to these abbeys (25).

There is not the slightest doubt that Dutch was the official language in Brussels - and elsewhere in Brabant. Only in Walloon Brabant was French used, quite naturally. Conditions in the medieval duchy of Brabant were fundamentally different from those in the county of Flanders (which was only a fragment of the present-day "Flanders"). Flanders was largely dependent on the French crown and its civil administration had used the French language since time immemorial. Indeed, study of the archives of Bruges, Ghent and Ypres reveals that the proportion of French-language documents before 1500 varied between 30% and 60%.

Such French influences were quite unknown in Brabant, whose medieval dukes paid allegiance to the German Emperor. In the towns of Brabant such as Brussels, Antwerp, Leuven, Lier, Tienen, Zoutleeuw, 's Hertogenbosch and Breda the only official language was Dutch. Among the thousands of pre-1500 documents in the various archives of

Brussels, just three were drafted in French by the municipal authorities: one respecting the county of Hainault, one concerning the chancellor of Burgundy and one relating to the duke of Burgundy.

The archive of the collegiate church of Saint Michael and Saint Gudula (29) contains 5,027 original pre-1500 manuscripts. A mere 49 of these are in French. Furthermore, these 49 documents arise from proceedings as follows:

41 involving authorities or institutions in Walloon Brabant or Hainault,

7 involving the dukes of Burgundy,

1 involving the collegiate church of Saint Michael and Saint Gudula (1455). Even this document relates to the French count of Etampes.

The conclusion is inescapable: despite the fact that from 1430 onwards Brussels (and, indeed, the entire duchy of Brabant, as well as the counties of Holland and Flanders, *inter alia*) were under the rule of the dukes of Burgundy, and notwithstanding the establishment of numerous Burgundian institutions in Brussels, Dutch continued throughout the 15th century as the official language of Brussels. In fact, traces may be found of a certain linguistic chauvinism: in 1488 the Burgundian chronicler Jean Molinet wrote that, during the wars of the Austrian emperor Maximilian, the people of Brussels had unceasingly hated the Walloons and the French - because of their language!

## B. LINGUISTIC USAGES BETWEEN 1500 AND 1794

Naturally, vastly more documents have been preserved from the period from 1500 to 1794 than from the previous period and that has necessitated a step by step approach to the research. Complete collections of documents are examined for the language in which they were written. Sometimes this involves whole archives; sometimes specific sequences of documents are studied. This project, therefore, will stretch over several years.

The following archives, collections and sequences have already been examined. In some cases the number of documents contained in the archive is given:

1. the archive of the collegiate church of Saint Michael and Saint Gudula (12,052 documents),
2. archives of the trades guilds of Brussels (1,100 documents),
3. archives of hospitals and almshouses (4,377 documents)
4. city cartularies containing 16th, 17th and 18th century documents (23 documents),
5. "publicatieboecken" - records of ordinances proclaimed from the steps of the Town Hall between 1635 and the end of 1793 (26 documents),
6. "correctieboeken", containing similar ordinances (13 documents)
7. various sorts of municipal accounts and other accountancy documents (1,112 documents),

8. registers and "resolutieboeken" (minutes books) of the city council (38 documents),
9. registers and "resolutieboeken" of the treasury (56 documents),
10. "wijckboeken" (district books), in which were recorded, by district and by street, all transactions relating to land, houses etc.

The proportion of French-language documents in the various archives of Brussels fluctuates around 5%. In other words, until the end of the "Ancien Régime" in 1794 some 90% to 95% of the official documents relating to Brussels were in Dutch.

That is not all: closer examination of the few documents that were written in French reveals that they practically never concerned the local population of Brussels. Time after time, they were initiated by, or related to, particular milieus, such as :

- a) the Habsburg royal household or the government institutions of the southern Low Countries,
- b) a few noble families,
- c) a number of Walloons (craftsmen, clerics, officials etc) who had immigrated to Brussels,
- d) institutions or people from the French-speaking region.

What is clear is that Dutch remained the normal language of the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Brussels until 1794. Even the civic administration seems to have been sympathetic to the use of "Neder-Duytsch". Whenever French-speakers, from not only within Brussels but also outside, addressed written requests to the councillors the latter would invariably send their reply in Dutch. It was only in dealings with the court, the aristocracy and central government institutions that this (unwritten) rule was sometimes relaxed.

It has already been observed that certain types of document lend themselves to a quantitative approach. The "publicatieboecken" of Brussels are merely one example. These files contain the texts of 4,036 ordinances which were proclaimed from the steps of the Town Hall between 1635 and the December 1793. If any documents may be deemed to be of a "public" nature, it is these. They were intended for the whole population of Brussels, the general public. 95% of these publications are in Dutch and just 4.7% in French. Moreover, of the 4.7%, not one order referred specifically and solely to Brussels. Their scope was far wider: indeed, they were sent to the administrators of other towns in the Low Countries, inter alia Antwerp, Louvain, Ghent and Courtrai, since they concerned the whole of the southern Low Countries. Some even applied to the entire Habsburg empire. Fairly typical of these orders are that over the riots in Hungary or that concerning the free ports of Trieste and Fiume (Rijeka).

## CONCLUSION

There is not the slightest doubt that from 1531 Brussels was the home of the French-speaking court and the predominantly French-speaking central administration of the Habsburgs. It is also well established that the city took in a number of poor folk, economic refugees, from the Walloon region.

Although the systematic study of the archives of Brussels relating to the period from 1500 to 1794 is still not complete, broad conclusions are already emerging. What is quite clear is that there is nothing to show that the presence of a privileged gentry had any profound "gallicising" influence on the ordinary people of Brussels. Had any such evidence existed, countless traces of it would have been discovered in the archives - but none have been found. Until the French occupation of 1794 Dutch remained the official language of the city's institutions. It was the only language with which the typical inhabitant ever came into contact.

But that was not all. Even those central administration officials who had to deal with files concerning Brussels needed to have at least a passive knowledge of Dutch. No less a personality than the plenipotentiary envoy Cobenzl regarded ignorance of Dutch as "une espèce de défaut" (a sort of shortcoming) - and French-speaking officials were consequently obliged to learn Dutch. In 1752 Charles Alexander of Lorraine, governor-general of the Austrian Netherlands, mentioned in a letter to his sister-in-law, the Empress Maria-Theresa, that a certain Cazier, a French-speaking official and member of the Finance Council (one of the central institutions of the Habsburgs), knew no Dutch at all originally. However, he studied the language so assiduously that within a short while he was even able to audit the accounts of the city of Brussels: "cependant, il s'est tellement appliqué à la langue flamande qu'il a été en état d'entendre les derniers comptes de la ville de Bruxelles qui sont couchés dans cette langue" (but he applied himself so well to learning Flemish that he was able to audit the most minute accounts of Brussels drawn up in that language). Nowhere is the huge difference in attitude between the Brussels officialdom on the one hand and the Habsburgs on the other hand more clearly illustrated than in that letter.

Thus, in Brussels, as in numerous other European cities, there resided a predominantly French-speaking court and corresponding central administration. The direct "gallicising" influence exercised by the nobility, the courtiers and the high officials was, however, a great deal less than has been imagined until now. The French-speaking upper class represented only a tiny portion of the population of Brussels. They lived withdrawn, for the main part, in the upper town, the Coudenberg and Zavel (Sablons) districts and had little contact with the average (or even wealthy) local inhabitants. In any case, they had no interest in integration with the host population, particularly since French language and culture were greatly in vogue throughout Europe.

Although contact between the host population and the non Dutch-speaking newcomers undoubtedly did exist this certainly did not lead to a generalised bilingualism. Quite the contrary! Requests in French sent to the civic authorities were almost invariably replied to in Dutch. Some tradesmen did, of course, make the effort to learn a few words of French to increase their chances of doing business with the foreign élite, but they certainly did not strive for thorough mastery of the language.

But the influx of French-speakers to Brussels was not limited to courtiers, aristocrats and high officials; large numbers of ordinary folk from the Walloon region were also tempted to seek their fortune in the capital. Not only did the latter enjoy little social prestige, but they also found themselves in an overwhelmingly Dutch-speaking environment. Consequently, they had to adapt to the local ways and language - Dutch. Examples abound in the city archives of people with typically Walloon names who yet used Dutch in all their contracts, agreements, correspondence and accounts. The language-changing process, therefore, did not always operate only to the advantage of French. The arrival of Walloons of modest

background did, however, lead to the assimilation of numerous Walloon words into the Brussels dialect, though even words of Spanish and Italian origin also found their way into the vernacular.

From about 1780 a very small number of isolated cases began to appear in Brussels (and in other Netherlands cities, for that matter) of extremely wealthy, locally born and bred members of the monied class switching over to the French language. It is certainly no coincidence, then, that Jan Baptist Verlooy chose this precise time (1788) to write his "Verhandeling op d'onacht van de moederlyke tael in de Nederlanden" (Treatise on the neglect of the mother tongue of the Netherlands). During the revolution of Brabant in 1790 a great many pamphlets appeared in French. This did not escape the notice of the Austrian emperor, Joseph II, who commented " Les habitants de Bruxelles et des Pays Bas sont des imitateurs de leurs voisins. Le fond est hollandais et le vernis français" (The inhabitants of Brussels and the Low Countries merely imitate their neighbours. Their core is Hollandish, their varnish French).

There arose, among many in Flanders, a great aversion for the capital. "Brussels", it was asserted, had forced "gallicisation" on "Flanders". As has already been clearly demonstrated, however, this was not true; control of the capital's municipal institutions continued to be exercised by Dutch-speakers until the French occupation. Indeed, on the eve of the attack by the sansculottes, 90% to 95% of the city's population spoke Dutch.

It was not until the modern era that the fundamental "gallicisation" of Brussels was carried out. During the French occupation (1793-1815) a policy of "gallicisation" was put systematically into effect, by force.

The reign of King William I of the United Netherlands (1815-1830) was not long enough for him to restore the official language of government and justice to that of the ordinary citizen.

After 1830 the Belgian regime introduced the so-called "freedom of language". The result was that large sections of the population of Brussels were made French-speaking, a trend which was reinforced after the First World War, with the introduction of compulsory education.

This "gallicisation" under social pressure was carried out not only in Brussels; the whole of Dutch-speaking Belgium - known later as "Flanders" - was affected in the same manner.

The conclusion, then, may be clearly and simply stated as:

Belgium (1830 - ) made Brussels French-speaking.

By Dr. Paul De Ridder