

HYPERSTANDARDISATION IN FLANDERS: EXTREME ENREGISTERMENT AND ITS AFTERMATH

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Abstract

Our intention in this article is to document and analyse an exceptional period in Flemish linguistic history that has not received a lot of attention thusfar, viz., the 1950s through the 1980s. We will argue that these decades mark a period best described as an era of hyperstandardisation, as they involved a large-scale, propagandistic, scientifically supported and highly mediated linguistic standardisation campaign that has thoroughly ideologised language use in all corners of Flemish society. We will propose that the Flemish ‘intermediate variety’ (*tussentaal*) ought probably to be seen as an unmistakable side-effect of this hyperstandardisation process rather than as a transitional stage on the road to full standardisation or the result of a decline in standardisation efforts. In addition to this, we will propose that discourses of declining standardisation efforts are difficult to reconcile with the recruitment of linguistic standardisation in the new global economy.

Keywords: Standardisation; Enregisterment; Flanders; Dutch; *Tussentaal*.

1. Introduction

More and more in Western-Europe there has been notice of vernacular language use in domains, such as the mass media, that one would generally reserve for standard language use under an ideology of standardisation (Androutsopoulos 2010; Auer 2005; Coupland 2007). Various sociolinguists have suggested that this spread of vernacular language use may, at least in a number of cases, have to be attributed to slowly but gradually declining efforts of linguistic standardisation or to a process of “destandardisation” (Grondelaers & van Hout 2011; Grondelaers et al. 2011; van der Horst 2008; Willemys 2007). The underlying idea in such explanations often appears to be that vernacular language use necessarily disproves or is counterposed to an ideology of standardisation. In this article we wish to argue that linguistic standardisation can also be conditional to vernacular language use, and must not probably be seen as an almost bygone phenomenon, with Flemish Belgium (henceforth: Flanders) as a case in point.

Linguistic standardisation in Flanders is traditionally seen as a process that has been delayed and, as a result, is as yet unfinished with regard to spoken language. Having only seriously started up nationwide linguistic standardisation efforts as of the

1930s, consonant with the region's then consolidating autonomy within Belgium, Flanders is usually said to face a historical delay in relation to its northern neighbour the Netherlands, where standardisation has more or less reached its completion. While this delay would at least partially explain the widespread use of non-standard, but not entirely dialectal, language use that has come to be known as *tussentaal* (literally 'in between language') (see, for example, Geeraerts et al. 1999; Grondelaers et al. 2001; Van de Velde 1996b: 269; Willemyns 2003), others have pointed out that comparing Flanders with the Netherlands is problematic because it "assumes a diachronic difference between similar standardisation processes, whereas the standardisation histories of Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch are, in fact, very different" (Grondelaers & van Hout 2011: 200; Jaspers 2001: 142-144). Indeed, as soon as linguistic standardisation is approached as a particular set of social and ideological processes "carried forward under specific socio-cultural conditions and promoted by specific groups and institutions under specific 'market conditions', in specific symbolic economies" (Coupland & Kristiansen 2011: 18), it may be more useful, in the Flemish case, to speak of a "highly distinct, even forced standardisation project" (Jaspers & Brisard 2006: 43).¹

We will substantiate this hypothesis below through discursively analysing an extreme example of an enregisterment process (Agha 2003), viz., linguistic standardisation efforts in Flanders roughly between 1950 and 1980. This is a period that Flemish linguists have up to now only paid sparing attention to, possibly because standardisation efforts in this period strike a tone that many linguists would find uncomfortable, perhaps also damaging to their own profession. To be sure, we will argue that these decades are probably best described as an era of *hyperstandardisation*, involving a fiercely propagandistic, large-scale, extensively broadcast, scientifically supported and enduring ideologisation of language use in all corners of Flemish society, which it is difficult to find similar examples of in other national contexts.² Besides proposing that the presumed linguistic delay of Flanders vis-à-vis the Netherlands be viewed as a rhetorical strategy that legitimates extreme standardisation measures, we will suggest that hyperstandardisation in Flanders is largely conditional rather than orthogonal to the emergence and spread of *tussentaal*. In addition to this we will argue that even if linguistic standardisation in Flanders may appear to be much more subdued than before, it is at present effectively recruited and revitalised to answer some of the problems and opportunities posed by a globalising economy.

To provide a backdrop to the discussion we will first briefly describe the 19th century antecedents of hyperstandardisation, before moving on to the 20th century, with a focus on the 1950s up to the 1980s. We will provide an overview of the various actors involved in linguistic standardisation, analyse the characteristics of their work, and conclude with an estimation of its effects.

¹ Our translation. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes in the remainder of this article are translated from Dutch.

² Cameron (1995: 47) has admittedly used the term 'hyperstandardisation' as well, but in a different sense to our use of it, viz. to refer to "the mania for imposing a rule on any conceivable point of usage, in a way that goes beyond any ordinary understanding of what is needed to ensure efficient communication". Even though the Flemish standardisation efforts may at times also have, in Cameron's sense, gone beyond 'ordinary' standardisation, our use of the term points to the fiercely propagandistic, dramatic, large-scale and high-impact character of this standardisation process.

2. Standardisation in 19th century Flanders

After its foundation in 1830, the young Belgian state could pride itself with one of the most liberal constitutions of its era. It granted, among other things, the right to use the language of one's preference. In actual fact, however, this privilege only facilitated the hegemony of French, the then language of high culture, international politics, revolutionary ideas and scientific enlightenment, and to this there gradually grew resistance in the northern part of Belgium, now called Flanders, where there was a historical presence of a range of Dutch varieties. At first, the resistance to French was largely the work of Flemish middle-class intellectuals (teachers, writers, priests) – upper class intellectuals having already shifted to using French exclusively – who were inspired by the increasingly popular romantic and nationalist ideas. But in the 20th century their efforts culminated into a large-scale, widely popular and explicitly nationalist “Flemish movement” which eventually managed successfully to reverse an impending process of language loss in Flanders, to demand linguistic rights and to consolidate these rights in a series of laws that later formed the basis of a separate political entity in the north of Belgium (Deprez & Vos 1998; Hermans et al. 1992).

Yet, the language for which rights were being demanded was the subject of heated debate among linguists, authors and public intellectuals. Were the Flemings, as the so-called ‘integrationists’ put forward, to fight for a language that was closely in tune with Dutch as it was used in the Netherlands, or were they, as their opponents the ‘particularists’ suggested, to develop a Standard Flemish or perhaps strive for a mixture of these options (with a sizeable proportion of Flemish input in the shared language)? The particularists soon were fighting a losing battle, as in 1844 it was decided that the spelling for Belgian Dutch would (with only a few exceptions) follow the official spelling of Netherlandic Dutch. Given the importance of spelling for the image of a language, this was a formidable blow to the particularists’ hope of building a separate language. It is important to see that this decision was inspired by three arguments that from then on continually motivated a choice for close agreement with Netherlandic Dutch (cf. Deprez 1999a). The first of these arguments was linguistic-political: In contrast with Netherlandic Dutch, a separate Flemish was thought not be large enough to hold its own next to French, given the political and cultural prestige of French in Belgium. A second argument in favour of Netherlandic Dutch was based on romantic ideas of linguistic purification (cf. Bauman & Briggs 2003), in that it held that Flemish was too corrupted by French and therefore unable to give expression to the dignity of the Flemish people that one moreover hoped to liberate from French domination. Netherlandic Dutch was seen to be much more modern, untainted by foreign occupation, a purer remnant of a magnificent past. Closely in line with this, a third argument, both historical and romantic, was that a choice for Netherlandic Dutch would help Flanders to catch up again with its glorious past, which most intellectuals situated in the 16th century, before the southern provinces of the Low Countries were occupied by Spanish troops and found themselves henceforth separated from the North, which itself entered its golden age in the 17th century.

Consequently, Flemings needed to be made familiar with what was basically an imported linguistic standard, and this gave rise to a tradition of linguistic purification and initiated a stream of publications on what kinds of French, German and other influences had to be weeded out from Dutch as it was used in Flanders (cf. Absillis

2009b; Deprez 1999b; Willemyns 1996). Clearly too, from then on, Flanders was ‘delayed’ in relation to the Netherlands. But if this tradition of linguistic purification can hardly be called exceptional in comparison to other linguistic standardisation projects elsewhere in Europe around the same period (cf. Cameron 1995; Deumert & Vandenbussche 2003; Mugglestone 2003; van der Horst 2008), we want to point out below that purification efforts in Flanders from the second half of the 20th century onwards acquire a striking, spectacular character. We will first offer a brief sketch of the most important players on the language purification field before characterizing these players’ efforts.

3. Purificationist actors in the 20th century

Various actors are involved in purifying language and furthering the spread of *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* (ABN) or ‘General Civilised Dutch’ in 20th century Flanders. We shall discuss successively the purificationist ambitions of grassroots associations, Flemish school youth, film makers, the public broadcasting corporation, and the written media.

The 20th century sees various grassroots associations emerge whose explicit mission is to civilise Flemings’ language use. The most renowned is the *Vereeniging voor Beschaafde Omgangstaal* or *VBO* ‘Association for Civilised Colloquial Speech’, founded in 1947 and based on a similarly named predecessor that had ceased to exist in the wake of the Second World War (Haeseryn 1998). The VBO’s purpose is to “promote, outside of all political and philosophical ambitions, the use of the general colloquial variety in Flanders” (ibid.). Its president and honorary board consist of linguists from every Flemish university, and its activities are supported by a range of prominent figures from the worlds of politics, high culture and education. The VBO publishes its own magazine, *Nu Nog* ‘Still now’, and merges with the Brussels-based *Vereeniging voor Beschaafd Nederlands* ‘Association for Civilised Dutch’ in 1953, after which it continues to carry the name VBO and becomes increasingly popular. The association organises national Civilised Dutch fortnights, Civilised Dutch weeks, linguistic conferences, and, through its local branches, it sets up elocution and writing contests, discussion evenings and linguistic courses. In 1979, the VBO rebaptises itself into *Vereeniging Algemeen Nederlands* ‘Association for General Dutch’ and changes its journal’s name into *Nederlands van Nu* ‘Contemporary Dutch’ (Haeseryn 1998; Willemyns & Haeseryn 1998).

A second, and somewhat surprising group of purification actors are Flemish youth. In 1951 a number of secondary school pupils found the *ABN-kernen* ‘ABN hearts’ – small groups of pupils who engage themselves, under supervision of a promoter, to speak Civilised Dutch and renounce their dialect – which in a fairly short period of time start sprouting from numerous Flemish schools. Explicitly setting out to “reconquer the playground for ABN” (Bouveroux 1965), the ABN hearts manage to appeal to, among others, future leading journalists, various public intellectuals and eightfold Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens, besides professional linguists such as Hendrik Heidbuchel, author of the best selling ABN dictionary that will become a standard reference in Flemish education (Heidbuchel 1962), and Joos Florquin, famous for his linguistic advice on television (see below). The ABN hearts publish a periodical,

Bouw 'Build', they issue out promotional and didactic materials (posters, pins, brochures such as *ABN in Education* and an instruction manual for aspiring ABN promoters: *Put me in your pocket, promoter*) and they initiate the organisation of yearly held ABN weeks, for a while extended to ABN fortnightlies in the 1960s, elocution tournaments, essay writing contests, and debates. From the 1960s the ABN hearts increase their co-operation with the abovementioned VBO (s.n. 1965d) and eventually are subsidised by the Ministry of National Education (De Wever 1998).

A third purification player is the *ABN-centrale* (literally 'ABN power plant'). Sponsored by industry and business, this production house produces documentaries, advertisements and films that it shows at schools and cultural organisations. Its titles include *Jongens zoals wij* 'Boys like us' (1956), *Moeder, wat zijn wij rijk* 'Mother, how rich we are' (1957), *Kinderen in Gods hand* 'Children in God's hand' (1958), *Zwerfers in het land der dromen* 'Vagabonds in the land of dreams' (1959), *Brigands voor outer en heerd* 'Brigands for altar and hearth' (1961 - an adaption of the Peasant's War;³ Van Waeyenberge 1961) and *Zomercapriolen* 'Summer shenanigans' (1962 - see Beniest 1963). The growing popularity of television, however, sees viewer numbers for collective showings plummet and soon forces the ABN power plant to terminate its activities.

But, fourthly, advocates of Civilised Dutch find a loyal and powerful ally in the public broadcasting corporation (henceforth "BRT", for Belgian Radio and Television)⁴: The BRT's directors hold that the elevation of the Flemish people, which has to "go up, to the light", is a crucial part of their work (Bal 1985: 224), and that language education is a vital element in this. For this reason, the BRT engages linguists to see to it that all microphone employees speak an impeccable Standard Dutch. Notoriously, from the 1960s until the end of the 1990s, this is done through sending microphone employees 'blue letters' containing the mistakes they have made while on air and tersely requesting them not to produce such errors again. These educational efforts are not restricted to off-screen activity, however, since for two decades, the BRT provides a forum to Flanders' most famous linguistic purifiers. From 1965 to 1976, the linguist Marc Galle has a daily radio chronicle titled *Voor wie haar soms geweld aandoet* 'For those who tend to violate her' (with 'her' referring to the Dutch language) (Vandenbussche 2010). On television, the regular feature on pronunciation *Het klankbord* 'The sounding board' in the TV show *Teletaalles* 'tele-language lesson' is such a hit that its three presenters, Joos Florquin, Annie Van Avermaet and Fons Fraeters (all linguists working at the University of Louvain), are awarded their own full-fledged programme. *Hier spreekt men Nederlands* 'One speaks Dutch here' is broadcasted three days a week from 1964 until 1972 (Beheydt 1991a, b).

Finally, from the 1950s onwards various newspapers and journals start publishing a language purification section. The newspaper most renowned for its purification work is *De Standaard*, which from 1958 until 1979 publishes *Taaltips* 'Language Tips' by Jan Grauls and later by Maarten van Nierop, who also appears in various other media (Durnez 1998; Van Causenbroeck 1998). Their colleague Marc

³ The Peasant's War refers to the 1798 peasant uprising against French occupation in what is now Belgium. The uprising was by and large suppressed after two months, even if resistance flared up occasionally until 1799, but the events were later romanticised by Flemish and Belgian nationalists.

⁴ From its inception, Belgian public broadcasting has consisted of a Dutch- and a French-speaking channel. The Dutch channel has recently been redubbed into *Flemish Radio and Television* or VRT (*Vlaamse Radio en Televisie*) (cf. Jaspers & Meeuwis 2006).

Galle, next to his linguistic advice on the radio, takes up writing a language column for the newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* (Vandenbussche 2010). Most of the advice produced in newspapers, on the radio and on TV is subsequently edited and published in highly popular pocket books (Simons 1998).

From this overview it is clear that linguistic purification in Flanders between the 1950s and the 1980s is all but inescapable: At school, in the written media, on the radio, and while watching the increasingly popular new medium of television, almost all Flemings find themselves daily exposed to linguistic standardisation propaganda in which Flemish linguists are up to their knees. We will discuss the drift of this propaganda in the following paragraphs.

4. Radical integrationism

All of the abovementioned initiatives and associations share an almost undiluted integrationism and vigorously reproduce the striving for complete linguistic unity with the Netherlands that 19th century linguistic purifiers had initiated. There is widespread agreement that “the linguistic light [comes] from the North” (Pauwels 1954: 1), because Flanders, as a result of its separation from the North, still lacks a so-called “speech making community”, i.e., a cultural and intellectual elite with a sufficiently refined sense for language whose linguistic practices can be taken as normative. Given that this elite has not acquired Dutch yet, still speaks French or a seriously frenchified Flemish, Flemings are of necessity forced to rely on the northern Dutch norm (Heidbuchel 1963a).⁵ This message is also conveyed on television in *Here one speaks Dutch*:

Extract from *Here one speaks Dutch* (Florquin 1965b)

Florquin: There are, among us, indeed some who can speak infallibly, but not entire groups yet, and this is why we do not have a spoken colloquial language that can be held up as an example or a norm. This is one of the most important reasons why we still have everything to learn from the North.

Annie: And who or what decides in the North that it is good or bad?

Florquin: The language use of a comprehensive elite: these are, among others, the people who govern, administer justice and teach, poets, writers, journalists, the economic elite. They form, as in every normal country, a hard to define group that one calls the speech making community.

Annie: I see. And so we are trying to synchronize the Dutch we speak here as well as we can to this living Dutch that is deemed correct.

⁵ This reasoning persists until the present day in the ‘language charter’ of the public broadcasting corporation (Hendrickx 1998). This charter holds that the broadcaster’s choice for standard language is a choice for “the language used by language-sensitive Flemings when they polish their language use consciously”, but this is subsequently qualified by indicating that in practice this means that “the broadcaster will frequently have to decide itself what does and does not belong to the standard language, since in Flanders the standard language is not or hardly supported by a “speech making community”. In our neighbouring countries this community is co-constituted by politicians, managers and academics, but in Flanders their language use can scarcely be held up as exemplary” (Hendrickx 1998: 8).

The plea for linguistic assimilation to the Netherlands is given extra ammunition from the 1950s by the European integration process. Standard language advocates from then on repeatedly argue that conforming to the Netherlandic language and culture is not simply necessary because, as the Louvain based linguist Geerts holds, it “offers us security that we will not be run over again by our well-known neighbour [viz., the French]” (Geerts 1968: 17), it is also the only way to “acquire the right to exist in a unifying Europe” (Geerts 1968: 15).

ABN advocates have no mercy, therefore, for French loans and gallicisms: They are inexorably to be banned from Flemings’ lexicon. Viewers of *Here one speaks Dutch* thus learn that “we do not say *camion* but *vrachtwagen* ‘truck’” (Florquin 1972: 127), and that it is not *pompier* but *sputgast*, *brandweerman* or *brandsputgast* ‘fireman’ (ibid.: 118); *ambras* ‘a fight’, from French *embarras*, is corrected into *heibel*, *relletje*, *herrie*, *ruzie*, *kouwe drukte* or *poeha* (ibid.:129), and words such as *plomb* ‘fuse’ and *lampadaire* ‘desk lamp’ are only to be used if “one intends to brush up one’s French” (ibid.: 95-96). Even modest pleas for the recognition of ‘authentic’ Flemish input are indignantly rejected and set aside as expressions of ‘particularism’ (since for Flemish words such as *beenhouwer* ‘butcher’ or expressions such as *vijgen na pasen* ‘a day after the fair’, ‘proper’ Dutch equivalents are available (respectively, *slager* and *mosterd na de maaltijd*). One *Build* author in 1968 declares that “we all know how they [i.e. the particularists] fared, and whomever seriously thinks of proclaiming his dialect the common language may well take his place at the fair” (Depoortere 1968: 12). A frequent argument, again with deep roots in the 19th century, is that time will tell if Flemish items will ever be part of the linguistic norm: Only when the Flemish speech making community has fully blossomed, will it be able to decide this. Typical is Heidbuchel’s reply to one *Build* reader’s question: “Why condemn everything that is Southern Dutch? Surely the North also has to adopt from us”. The answer is somewhat disdainful:

The North adopt from us? Well sure, that could certainly be the case... if equal partners were involved! You cannot deny that our general colloquial language still takes up such a weak position and is so little purified that we for long do not have a voice in the chapter! *Do you know one country where it is necessary to deliberately and intensively propagate the civilised language as it is in Flanders? Of course not, because in all other linguistic regions the use of the cultural language is so evident that such organised propaganda is unnecessary or would be surprising: is this not proof of our delay?* That is why we have only one option: if we desire to make the one ABN (emphasis in original) our own, then we need to go and learn it where it can be found generally, swiftly and naturally, that is, we need to accept the North as example and norm and avoid as much as possible every word or turn of phrase that is specifically dialectal or Southern Dutch. *Certainly, it can be expected that here and there some words will be admitted to ABN, but nobody can at present predict or determine which ones in particular; this will depend on [their] future linguistic prestige and on the language use of our future, developed, civilised speaking circles* (Heidbuchel 1963b; our emphasis).

As unrelenting as the integrationism of Flemish linguistic purifiers is with regard to Flemish peculiarities, loans and ‘anomalies’, so lenient it appears towards linguistic innovations in the Netherlands, even if these originate in other languages. So we find

that *Here one speaks Dutch* promotes a number of loan words after all, though usually on the condition that they already enjoy a fair measure of popularity in the North. Viewers are advised that *fruitsap* ‘orange juice’ is a good word, just as the French *jus d’orange* ‘orange juice’, which is current in the Netherlands. Similarly, *grapefruit* is suggested as a useful alternative for *pompelmoessap* ‘grapefruit juice’: “It is the same, but *grapefruit* sounds smarter” (Florquin 1972: 62). Florquin adds to this in suggesting that *een kalmeermiddel* ‘a tranquillizer’ can also be called “*tranquillizer* (pronounce: *trenkilaazer*)” (ibid.:13) and for those intending to greet people according to modern fashion he advises to opt for *hoe maakt u het* ‘how do you do’, which, following the English example, needs to be replied to with *hoe maakt u het*.⁶

In other words, evolutions in Netherlandic Dutch tend to be accepted without much ado, with arguments that could equally well apply to Flemish ‘anomalies’. In relation to a Netherlandic change phenomenon that still manages to stir up controversy today, viz., the masculinisation of nouns (as in *de koe, hij geeft melk* ‘the cow, he gives milk’, where most Flemings would prefer *zij* ‘she’ instead of *hij* ‘he’), again Heidbuchel contends in a 1961 *Build* article: “That some Flemings stand up against this ... only testifies to their sheer ignorance of the linguistic evolution in a part – the most important part! – of the Dutch language area” (Heidbuchel 1961). Admitting that it is an “odd phenomenon”, he goes on to emphasise there is “a reasonable and logical explanation” for it (ibid.), brandishing a number of arguments that sound familiar to contemporary ears:

Many assume that grammar prescribes what is *right* and what is *wrong* in matters of language and spelling. This may be true for spelling, but for language it is the other way around: linguistics is a descriptive science, and thus it upholds the following principle: *this* is how it is generally said in civilised circles, so *that* is what is right. In other words: the spoken language determines the grammar ... Well, that masculinisation is a fact in northern civilised language use (ibid.; emphases in original).

Interestingly, these arguments still profoundly determine contemporary linguistic policy making and debate in the Dutch language area.⁷ The only difference is that Heidbuchel and many linguistic purifiers of his age only want to apply them to northern Dutch, while at the end of the 20th century they gradually start to pertain to Flemish linguistic evolutions as well – even if many language professionals at present still have reservations about accepting these evolutions without qualifications and exceptions. This illustrates that the idea of a speech making community whose linguistic habits are registered by a purely descriptive linguistics is a rhetorical strategy rather than the

⁶ *Here one speaks Dutch*, BRT-television, 14 September 1967.

⁷ In the text *What is standard language?* of the *Nederlandse Taalunie* (‘Dutch Language Union’), a binational organisation promoting the linguistic and cultural unification of the Netherlands and Flanders as of 1980, one finds that: “The standard language is not a constructed language, but a living linguistic variety, that comes about of itself through an interplay of societal factors and that is spoken and written by people with a certain social prestige. This group of people are called the speech making community ... The language use of this leading group of speakers is generally accepted by others unintentionally, but also intentionally. In this way that kind of language use acquires the status of standard language. ... The answer to the question [viz. is a particular variant standard or not?] is not based on our own assumption of what we consider standard language or not. We try systematically to give a realistic description of standard language use, or, in other words, of the language use of the speech making community” (see <http://taaladvies.net/taal/advies/tekst/85>).

actual basis of linguistic policy making, since it quickly transpires that at the end of the line, it is the language purifiers who decide who belongs to this speech making community, whether this community is behaving ‘normally’, what kind of language use can be reckoned as standard and whether a particular linguistic evolution needs to be seen as a ‘natural language change’ or as a ‘frequently made mistake’.

So much is also clear from the fact that ABN advocates make exception to one component of the linguistic system, viz., pronunciation. Even the most ardent ABN promoters are agreed that deviating from northern Dutch pronunciation is allowed, if not simply obligatory. This is mainly because northern Dutch pronunciation itself is changing significantly since the early 20th century (see Van de Velde 1996a) and consequently produces changes that Flemish linguists see as “putting the common spoken colloquial on the throne” and as “mistakes against the norms that we continue to honour” (Pauwels 1954). Consequently, individual linguists and the *Here one speaks Dutch* team repeatedly warn against adopting a northern Dutch pronunciation on penalty of sounding unnatural, artificial or pretentious (Blancquaert 1969: 28; Florquin 1965a, b), while setting aside similar reservations on radically adopting northern Dutch vocabulary as unreasonably foolish.

Having looked at how linguistic purifiers strive for “the light from the North” (Pauwels 1954), we will now discuss how they appreciated the darkness of the past that they were hoping to liberate themselves from, namely, the Flemish dialects.

5. Ambivalence towards dialects

One cannot really say that dialects are unanimously disapproved of in the age of hyperstandardisation. Indeed, many language purifiers are professional dialectologists, and they appreciate dialects as a “rich breeding ground” for the standard language (Heidbuchel 1963a, s.n. 1959). Various others in *Build* and *Still now* sound the praises of dialects. The prominent author Herman Teirlinck writes: “[C]ould there ... ever be heard anything sweeter than mother’s word? It is the dialect, the essential mother tongue, which has come to sing in our blood from the cradle, and softly murmurs there, our whole life long” (Teirlinck 1951: 10). The *Here one speaks Dutch* team similarly wishes dialects well:

Dialects are respectable and delightful things: everybody has the right to love their dialect and to speak it without blushing with shame ... I regret and find it annoying that there are people who picture dialects as some form of leprosy: these people often give off the impression that they would like to beat ABN in with a stick (Florquin 1972: 6).

What most ABN advocates are thus striving for is a harmonious co-existence of dialect and standard language, the archetypal romantic ideal (Bauman & Briggs 2003). Dialects are “lively” and exhibit a “robust cordiality” that many purifiers much appreciate (Florquin 1972: 7-8). But in line with modernist assumptions of language use and public discourse, Flemings need to be sharply aware of their functional restrictions. This is what *Here one speaks Dutch* maintains:

Extract from *Here one speaks Dutch* (Florquin 1956c). Mekkie is a speaking dog.

- Florquin: We do not belong to that club of people who are shouting: to death with dialects.
- Annie: We are peace loving!
- Fons: Against every war!
- Mekkie: For delightful quietness.
- Florquin: There is no shame itself in speaking one's dialect as long as we are able to speak – besides these colourful and juicy little languages for local and daily use...
- Fons: Let's say in congeniality and conviviality!
- Florquin: ...as long as we are able to speak the general language, to pronounce the polished Dutch correctly and use it with ease and comfort.

Heidbuchel similarly argues:

Where civilised people convene outside of their intimate spheres, they do not speak a civilised dialect but a *General Civilised Dutch* or ABN that covers all regional varieties and which is the pre-eminent variety to understand one another well and to keep up with civilised manners (Heidbuchel 1964; emphasis in original).

Thus, ABN is the variety par excellence for civilised people to use “outside of their intimate spheres” (also see Geerts 1968: 18; s.n. 1952: 11; Teirlinck 1951: 10-11), and the idea is that Flemings gradually learn to add this variety to their linguistic repertoire which now only contains their dialect. As soon as they have done so, “dialect and *good Dutch* do not have to be at loggerheads with each other” and can “live their lives as good friends with personal rights” (Florquin 1972: 7; our emphasis).⁸ Yet, this functional differentiation becomes much more diffuse as soon as ABN advocates start developing the argument that if Flemings are to master ABN well, they will need to start using it *within the family*:

May daily, homely life still remain regional (*but also this is changing, fortunately!*), the ABN variety has to bring different regions closer to each other and it is thus the obvious means for communication with strangers (Heidbuchel 1964; our emphasis).

The bracketed addition is significant: Whereas above, Heidbuchel still granted personal rights to dialects in the intimate sphere, here he implies they ought ideally to disappear from “daily, homely life”. A similar contradiction characterizes numerous *Build* and *Still now* articles. More than once acknowledging that dialects have the right to exist, at the same time they regularly honour the motto: “If you do not speak ABN *all the time*, you will *never* speak it well” (s.n. 1965b). To learn to speak it well requires that “civilised language [...] becomes as self-evident as the Saturday bath and the weekly cleaning” (s.n. 1959a) and it means using it above all in the family, but also during

⁸ Again this is a perspective on linguistic variation with much contemporary potency, as it is recruited to buttress contradictory rhetorical strategies: some linguists argue that each variety has its own function in order to claim rights for a standard language, sometimes even prescribing the functional distribution of standard and non-standard varieties (cf. Jaspers 2010: 1-2); other linguists, opposing pleas for a stricter prescriptivist language policy, point at the same functional distribution to argue that non-standard language is quite acceptable on specific occasions (see also Jaspers & Brisard 2006: 44).

leisure time, such as in the youth movement, the playground, the cards game club or the pub. The prominent linguist Edgard Blancquaert (Ghent University) points out that ABN efforts must start in small circles, so that civilised language can penetrate “into the smallest villages” (1969: 20). The use of ABN in the family likewise becomes a hot topic for the ABN hearts. One member of a Louvain based ABN heart wins the 1965 Brussels elocution tournament with a lecture titled “Watch out for ABN”. This somewhat provocative title is meant to point at

the danger lurking in the ABN of great events, the ABN of one week per year, the ABN of *sometimes and not always* ... [B]eware of the ABN of the great events, of the ABN that puts a brake on bright language use and a rich vocabulary, and always and everywhere strive for a civilised and fluent use of words, then your language will never sound stiff or artificial (Vastesaegeer 1965; emphasis in original).

The national Union of Large and Young Families (representing over 300.000 families) similarly impels its members to see ABN as a matter of “family education”. Flemings are to set aside their “indolence”, “resistance and inhibition” towards the language many of them wrongly regard as “Hollandic”, just as the “bogus reason” that ABN would be “stiff, stern and strained within the family”, because “if one masters ABN completely, then one is able to have precisely the same agreeable, congenial and intimate interaction with it as with any other dialect that is spoken in Flanders”, the union’s president Frans Van Mechelen holds (1960: 7). Ten years later, then as Belgian Minister of National Culture, he repeats in a broadcast speech that “ABN goes in via the family”.⁹

Flemish parents are primarily held responsible for this education process, since, for now, “ninety-nine percent ... intellectuals included, still brew a dialect stew at home” (Van den Hende 1965), reason why they are often called to order in *Build*. But also Flemish youth are rebuked in the magazine for their laziness and “rotten conservatism” (s.n. 1965b), besides seeing their dialect use associated with undesirable characterological figures. One issue of *Build* sharply states:

Can one imagine anything that is more conservative, dilapidated, more narrow-minded than the little dialect you are so securely rooted in? ... We are limiting ourselves to ABN at school. Now there is some nonsense. Sheer nonsense. This way we will never get there. It is one of the main reasons why ABN does not generally break through. What we are learning thus, is a bloodless poor school language, that we cannot get on with in daily life at home, among each other, precisely because it is so poor, one-sided, simply not endurable (ibid.).

Obviously, we are now a long way off from the love declarations to dialect above. On an abstract level, most ABN advocates appreciate dialects as heritage and grant it right of existence in a number of limited contexts, but in reality they find this hard to reconcile with the promotion of ABN and consequently strain every nerve, even at the expense of dialect. Illustrative is the perspective of the VBO, whose general secretary declares:

Some think we are against dialects. Dialects are not inferior. However, today they are not suitable anymore as communication means. It is of social, economic and cultural concern

⁹ Frans Van Mechelen in *Het Journaal* (‘The News’), BRT-television, 28 February 1970.

that Flemings of all circles learn to speak civilised Dutch and also do this (Dejaeger-Wolff 1965).

For many an ABN advocate the potential demise of dialects would amount to collateral damage: Regrettable, but justifiable in light of the necessary progress, modernisation and unification with the Netherlands.

6. Dialect stigmatisation and drastic measures

The archaisation or folklorisation of dialects (cf. Bauman & Briggs 2003) illustrated above can still be called reasonably well-mannered. Elsewhere in the data we find that dialect and its speakers are seriously given what for. Sloppy, shabby, noisy, lazy, uncivilised or underdeveloped are only some of the adjectives that are used to enregister and typify dialectal speech as undesirable. Dialect use is also called “a part of our clumsy social codex, the arsenal of bragging-like insolence that is named ‘Flemish generosity’” (W.D. 1959: 8). An anonymous author in a 1965 *Build* issue aims at university students who continue using their dialect:

Many are determined to speak civilised, but how much more numerous are those who only interact with others from the same area and with much bravado and boorish, backward hullabaloo babble in an inferior language that so-called intellectuals ought to be ashamed of. ... Why do the better situated allow themselves ... to be lowered, why do they not try instead to ... elevate the less gifted to a higher level of civilisation? (s.n. 1965c)

The *Build* editors suggest it is the psychological disposition of these “less gifted” that makes them persist in their dialect use:

This underdevelopment ... for a large part has to be attributed to the fact that especially the lower classes are [deprived] of any contact with a higher culture that is disengaged from daily worries. The dialect that is still warp and woof there, shuts these people’s horizon off as an impenetrable enclosing wall ([the editors] s.n. 1960).

Dialect also has to suffer for it in the films of the abovementioned ABN power plant. *Vagabonds in the land of dreams* (1959) shows a princess whose beauty grows as she decides only to speak ABN hereafter, and consequently sees her words turn into pearls. The tapping pearls blissful bystanders pick up from the ground intimate that ABN is “a real treasure”.¹⁰ Conversely, the words of a much more shabby looking and dialect speaking princess change into frogs, after which the appalled bystanders boo her away.¹¹ One *Build* critic approvingly remarks of the comical film *Summer shenanigans*: “Dialects are made ridiculous here, because it really shows in the film that they are inadequate to give Flanders but for the most elementary style” (s.n. 1963). On television, Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens informs his viewers that “we humiliate

¹⁰ Extract from *Vagabonds in the land of dreams*, in ‘Soldiers of Dutch’, *Boulevard*, BRTN television, 11 October 1995.

¹¹ Extract from *Vagabonds in the land of dreams*, in *Man over woord* [‘Man about word’], VRT television, 9 December 2011.

ourselves by speaking dialect”.¹² And in one television interview the then popular author Marnix Gijsen intimates: “It is cosy of course to speak dialect isn’t it? ... But you should keep that indoors ... [don’t] use it in contact with other people, that’s rubbish. ... in God’s name, this worshipping of dialects, that’s for yokels”.¹³

This is not to say that dialect speakers are incorrigible. They only need a bit of encouragement, which of course ABN hearts members have to provide. So much one 1959 *Build* issue makes clear when it publishes a short story in which a young ABN militant describes a frightening encounter with a dialect speaker:

I bumped into him at the corner of the street. I found him dirty, and his question in broad dialect scared me. I looked at him and he looked at me. I didn’t say a word and he didn’t speak anymore. (Heelbrem 1959)

The young lad takes for his legs, but once in his room again, finds himself reproached by his shadow and sternly pointed out that he is responsible for “those young Flemish workers who cannot or are not allowed to study” and who lack “distinction and civilised language” (ibid.). The lad takes these words to heart, and the story ends with a report of the subsequent rapprochement, where physical agility and dialect speech are juxtaposed to clumsiness, standard Dutch, and civilisation (owning a tape recorder):

Again we met at the corner of the street [...] We even said something, it must have sounded like “good day”, and I also tried his hoop, with little success... Hula hoop is not my strongest point. Come, I said later, I’ve got a tape recorder in my room. It was not all perfect ABN from the start, but straight away he did not speak perfect dialect anymore. (ibid.)

Alongside these recurrent typifications of speech, there are also ABN advocates who are convinced that more serious measures are called for, such as a “deliberate cultural politics” of which “the dissemination by all means of civilised language use” is the main component (s.n. [the editors] 1960). In their drastic, indeed missionary, efforts ABN advocates thus suggest that the Flemish population get in touch with the Netherlands much more intensively so as to maximize exposure to exemplary Dutch. Marc Galle in his radio chronicle *For those who tend to violate her* urges upon his listeners to let their children “spend their holidays in the Netherlands. There are very many Dutch families who have ensured me that they would love to receive Belgian children during the holidays” (Galle in Verdegem & Depoortere 1968). The *Build* editors, meanwhile, argue that if schools continue to fail grossly in their task to disseminate ABN – “because teachers fear distancing themselves from the village community if they do not speak dialect” (s.n. 1961d) – then something must be done about these teachers’ local and regional recruitment: “If we are to arrive at a *sanatio in radice*, a full cure for the disease, then it is crucial that educational staff be *removed* from their own, all too seductive, dialectal environment” (s.n. 1961a, our emphasis).¹⁴

¹² Gaston Eyskens (s.d.), extract in *Man over woord* [‘Man about word’], VRT television, 9 December 2011. Eyskens was a sixfold Prime Minister between 1949 and 1972.

¹³ Marnix Gijsen (s.d.), extract in *Man over woord* [‘Man about word’], VRT-television, Canvas, 9 december 2011.

¹⁴ Or: “A decent educational policy ought to attempt to prevent appointments of teachers in their own region” (s.n. 1961b).

7. The effects of hyperstandardisation

Having shown how standardisation efforts in Flanders between 1950 and 1980 were striving for a near-complete assimilation to the northern Dutch norm, the question emerges what the effects were of this radical perspective on language variation on the Flemish language situation, or what hyperstandardisation has managed to achieve in terms of *acceptance* and *diffusion* (cf. Coupland & Kristiansen 2011: 24; Deumert & Vandenbussche 2003). After all, even if discourses of linguistic standardisation have enjoyed popularity in most Western European countries, it is clear that the large-scale, state supported, mediated, propagandistic and uncompromising nature of this discourse in Flanders between the 1950s and 1980s is difficult to see as anything but exceptional, and that it can be expected to have left at least some marks on the Flemish linguistic landscape. Thus, Willemys & Haeseryn (1998) argue that the results of the ABN propaganda can be called “amazing”, as “in the course of a couple of decades ... almost an entire population could be made quite familiar with a more or less new language, or, more precisely, with a quite unknown variety of its own language”. Hence, they argue, “from the viewpoint of its own advocates [the campaign may be called] successful” (ibid.). Yet, if we look at the success of the ABN campaign in absolute terms and consider how ABN advocates evaluated their own influence, this interpretation may be somewhat too rosy. With regard to written language use, there are clear signs of convergence between Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch (see Geeraerts et al. 1999). But with regard to spoken language, calling the ABN propaganda successful without further qualifications largely ignores that, as Coupland and Kristiansen point out, “language planning initiatives often fail ... they often have unintended consequences, and ... they are not always well-informed and not always benign in their effects” (2011: 22; English in original). Below we show that Flemish hyperstandardisation is no exception to this. Estimating the success of standardisation also implies deciding on what significance should be accorded to perceptual data and patterns of language use (ibid.: 23), especially when, as in the Flemish case, these two kinds of evidence seem to lead in opposite directions: There is firm evidence that hyperstandardisation has had a very serious impact on Flemings’ metalinguistic awareness of linguistic varieties, while there is equally firm proof that this does not lead to an increasing amount of spoken standard language use. The opposite is true if we take into account the much-debated emergence of *tussentaal* or the ‘in between variety’ in Flanders, a variety that hovers between dialect and standard Dutch. The latter facts have provoked hypotheses of an approaching ‘end of standardisation’ (van der Horst 2008), of ‘destandardisation’ (Grondelaers & van Hout 2011) and of the emergence in Flanders of a ‘standard language vacuum’ (Grondelaers et al. 2011). We will argue however, that in spite of the increasing prominence of vernacular language use in mass media and public life that seems to hint at its demise, the ideology of standardisation still has a lot of purchase.

We shall now first discuss how ABN advocates themselves evaluated their success before pointing out that the ideology of standardisation is firmly anchored in Flemings’ metalinguistic awareness, and that it has produced a number of unintended consequences at the same time as it is now actively recruited to confront the problems and opportunities of linguistic diversity in the globalised new economy.

7.1. ABN advocates' self-evaluation

The data undeniably testify to a broadening basis among the Flemings for the ABN efforts. At the height of their activities, the ABN hearts are active at more than 500 secondary schools, while *Build* at one point is distributed on more than 15 000 copies (Bouveroux 1965). No less than 20 editions appear of Heidbuchel's ABN dictionary, with a total run of 150 000 issues (Simons 1998; van Nierop & Haeseryn 1998). The radio and television language chronicles are immensely popular. Marc Galle remarks on *For those who tend to violate her*:

We would never have dreamed of it becoming such a success, but it became the radio's top broadcast. I receive more than a hundred letters a week, which is more than any other programme. One has measured listening frequencies, and they reach their top right before 7.30 am. ... Some four or five Ministers have asked for my advice [already] (Galle in Verdegem & Depoortere 1968).

On television, *Here one speaks Dutch* is a total hit. In 1965 the programme is awarded a popular magazine's viewers' prize, and a year later its producers receive a TV Oscar. The ABN hearts in their turn are convinced that thanks to their unyielding efforts

the ABN idea is gaining ground. More and more people are convinced of the necessity of a civilised language. Also at home, among young families mostly, ABN appears to be winning hearts and minds. Without being overly optimistic, we dare say the climate has changed (s.n. [the editors] 1961a).

Yet, at the same time the ABN hearts are continuously aware that the road is still long, and express disappointment about meagre results (Leroy 1960, 1961): "After 15 years, the ABN actions seem to be treading water" (s.n. 1965e). The reasons they point out for this are, among others, "the wall of misunderstanding and indifference" (ibid.), and ABN promoter and later Prime Minister Wilfried Martens also lists possible exclusion as one of the hindrances for those choosing to speak ABN, as he did from the age of fourteen.¹⁵ Throughout their existence, the ABN hearts struggle with engaging co-pupils and their own members for the ABN battle, leading the *Build* editors in 1962 to ask in despair: "Are the builders tired?" (s.n. [the editors] 1962). Later too, there are cries for help when it turns out that hardly any answers arrive at the editors' office to the monthly prize contest (s.n. 1964a). Three years later we find: "But, dear builders, where are your own articles? We are waiting impatiently for personal work from our own readers. But we receive... nothing" (s.n. [the editors] 1967). Quotes such as these suggest the ABN hearts' actions are mainly inspired by a small hard core, outside of which ABN activism find a much more limited amount of support.

¹⁵ "It was a daily battle. You had to have stamina and better brace yourself for exclusion. Certainly in lesser well-to-do families consistently speaking General Dutch was proof of the fact that you had higher aspirations ... [or that you] planned to leave [your] environment. This led to alienation, sometimes even a break with the family. ... "They think highly of themselves", one said about us" (Martens 2006: 31-32).

The language programmes and chronicles in the audiovisual media and the press also turn out to have opponents.¹⁶ In 1972 Nic Bal, the then BRT television director, terminates the *Here one speaks Dutch* broadcasts, arguing that “[the programme’s] purism repelled many and gave them the discouraging impression that everything they said and pronounced was wrong” (Bal 1985: 346). On the radio, Galle’s chronicles continue until 1977, and halfway through the 1980s the last linguistic purification programmes disappear from the national broadcaster. The ABN hearts plough on until July 1982, when they terminate their activities for financial reasons. The VBO rebaptises itself into *Vereniging Algemeen Nederlands* ‘Association of General Dutch’, but sees its popularity slowly fade, reason why in 2003 it merges with the *Algemeen Nederlands Verbond* ‘The General Dutch Union’.

All this seems to suggest that the ABN actions blew out as a candle by the middle of the 1980s. Taking into account the present standard and non-standard use of Flemings they can only seem to boast with meagre results from the perspective of the ABN advocates. We want to suggest, though, that the fall out of these actions in the long run has been much more significant than their immediate success. This is clear, among other things, from how the ideology behind these actions has firmly anchored itself in Flemings’ metalinguistic awareness.

7.2. *Sharpened metalinguistic awareness*

All attitude studies that sociolinguists have carried out in Flanders since the 1970s point out that until today, Flemings have deeply internalised the hierarchisation of varieties that was the hallmark of the ABN campaign. Their attitudes, in other words, reflect the stereotypical ideas of a standardisation ideology (see, among others, Deprez 1981; Geerts et al. 1980; Impe 2006; Meeus 1974; van Bezooijen 2004; Vandekerckhove 2000). Thus, Standard Dutch is continuously associated with status-related characteristics such as ‘civilised’, ‘rich’, ‘valuable’, ‘useful’, ‘intelligent’ and ‘successful’. Informants find its use appropriate in the public domain, in institutional contexts, in conversations ‘with a teacher or professor’, ‘with somebody from another province’, or ‘with a stranger’. Dialect, conversely, is seen as much less valuable in terms of status and mobility, and considered inappropriate in the abovementioned contexts. Informants intimate that “those who speak ABN ... make a better impression than those who speak dialect”, that “speaking dialect with a professor ... amounts to a lack of politeness”, and that a Minister ought not to speak dialect on radio and television (Vandekerckhove 2000). Yet, dialect is considered suitable for interaction with family, neighbours or fellow students, and is seen as congenial and familiar or necessary to be part of friendship groups. Responses such as these point out that the ABN campaign has been successful: Flemings, also those with migration backgrounds (Jaspers 2006), are

¹⁶ See, e.g. the author Gerard Walschap. In his book *The cultural repression* he describes making a list of intellectuals that need to be summarily executed, upon instructions from the Chinese who have conquered Europe. Walschap puts van Nierop, Galle and Florquin on the list, blaming them for nine offences, among which “leading Flemings to believe, on the basis of arbitrary and unscientific linguistic tatter ... that they had nothing more important to do than unlearning good, age-old Southern Dutch words”, “burdening them with the complex that they did not know their language”, and “complicating their easy and natural use of their mother tongue to such extent ... that they were ruled out as language forming element in the Dutch linguistic community” (Walschap 1969: 44-45).

intensely aware of a discursive regime of linguistic hierarchisation and the dos and don'ts this brings along. The campaign has managed to make its discourse be taken up by a much larger group of speakers than the rather small circle of ABN-activists, so that ABN can be called, in Agha's terms, firmly "enregistered in cultural awareness as part of a system of stratified speech levels linked to an ideology of speaker rank" (2003: 243; English in original). There are few signs, too, that this picture has changed drastically in recent years (see below).

Coupland & Kristiansen (2011) justly point out, however, that awareness of linguistic variation and evidence of acceptance is no guarantee for actual diffusion. The latter may even of necessity have to be less widespread than the former in order for a standard language competence to retain any sense of social prestige at all (complete diffusion amounting to a devaluation of the competence as a socially valuable object) (Agha 2003: 264). Next to this, all discursive regimes depend on practices that reproduce them, and even the strictest ones always bring about various sorts of behaviour that negotiates with them, ranging from radical contestation and avoidance, to 'messy' or 'bricolaging' (cf. Erickson 2004) behaviour that is accepting and resisting the regime in question at the same time. We will therefore now look at what evidence there is of changing habits of speech production.

7.3. (Un)intended consequences: Dialect loss, bricolage and the curse of poor Flanders

One way in which the ABN campaign and the discursive regime it helped promote can be said to have had a practical result, is that it has stimulated a process of dialect loss. While much attitude research indicates informants find dialects convivial and would regret their disappearance, it also emerges that informants often find them unsuitable for communication with children (van Bezooijen 2004; Vandekerckhove 2000). In line with this, sociolinguistic research from the 1970s onwards has been showing that declining numbers of Flemings raise their children in dialect and that most parents prefer using an (intended) standard language or a softened-up dialect instead (see, e.g. Meeus 1974). In De Houwer's (2003) study, adults' language use was much more dialectal in mutual conversation than it was when they spoke to children, and the younger the children were, the more standard-like parents' language use became. Results such as these point out that dialects in Flanders are passed on to younger generations in lessening degree, symptomatic for a fundamentally changing dialectal landscape and a heightened process of dialect loss (with varying intensity and speed depending on the region¹⁷), as e.g. Vandekerckhove (2009) has described. Some are reluctant to attribute this to the ABN propaganda. Willemys & Haeseryn (1998), for example, see the "more complicated distribution of dialect and standard language obviously as a quite 'normal' and inevitable stage ... in a transition period of dialect loss, a situation that surely would have come about sooner or later". But even if other factors in this regard, such as increased geographical mobility, cannot be entirely excluded, it is difficult to see them as on a par – that is, as equally successful producers of metadiscursive messages that define the social value of linguistic elements – with the programmatic and intensely disseminated stereotyping of dialect that the ABN actions brought along. We do not

¹⁷ With the province of Western Flanders typically standing out as being least susceptible to dialect loss (cf. Vandekerckhove 2009).

think it unreasonable to suggest that standardisation efforts and their hateful representation of dialects have played an encouraging role in a process of dialect loss. Naturally, while declining dialect use in one sense is a positive result that paves the way for a civilised variety, it also is an unintended consequence of hyperstandardisation in as much as it goes against the harmonious co-existence that at least some ABN advocates hoped would come about (see section 5).

Another unmistakable result of hyperstandardisation pertains to written language. On the basis of a corpus consisting of newspapers and magazines from 1950, 1970 and 1990, Geeraerts et al. (1999) conclude that there is increasing lexical convergence between Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch. The results for spoken language are a different story however. There, we find a much more ambiguous and unintended outcome in that the ABN actions appear to have contributed to quite idiosyncratic, typically Flemish, speech practices that, for simplicity's sake, we will call practices of 'linguistic bricolage'. ABN advocates themselves notice from quite early on that while many Flemings are moving up to a 'civilised' Dutch, they still fall short of speaking it as such. Some *Build* editors wonder whether linguistic purifiers should not beware of the fact "that we ... are soon building up a petty language that is no longer dialectal nor French, yet not Dutch either" (Verdegem & Depoortere 1968). This concern is shared by many other ABN advocates, certainly when it turns out that many teachers "speak woodenly ... to the letter, or a pendant between civilised and dialect" (s.n. 1965c). Many purifiers are willing to tolerate such language use as a learner variety or interlanguage (cf. Selinker 1973), but shudder at the thought that this "polished dialect" (Geerts 1968) would become the final stage of standardisation, not to mention be justified as acceptable "general Flemish" or "Southern Dutch": "In fact what is meant is a very curious mixture of dialect, French, gallicisms, fabrications or outmodish items that do not appear in current spoken language anymore" (Depoortere 1968).¹⁸ They are likewise worried that this "mixture" is starting to become the medium of communication for interregional communication (Geerts 1968). The same arguments recur in more recent discussions of *tussentaal*. And just as 30 years later *tussentaal* is denounced as "lazy Flemish" (Johan Taeldeman, a Ghent University based linguist cited in Notte & Scheirlinck 2007: 6), we see that "polished Flemish" is disapproved of in the 1960s as the result of "laziness" and "mental idleness" (Geerts 1968).

Contributing to 'linguistic bricolage' is the fact that, as sociolinguistic studies from the 1970s bear out, many Flemings produce hypercorrections when they *do intend* to speak or write Standard Dutch (see, among others, De Schutter 1973; Lebbe 1997; Taeldeman 1993). A typical example is the use of purisms: For some linguistic elements that appear in dialects as French loan words but that also happen to be seen as 'correct' Standard Dutch, alternatives have emerged that are neither dialectal nor French (such as *stortbad* vs. *douche* 'shower'). These purisms are severely denounced by language purifiers, but when Flemings are asked to choose between 'proper' Dutch terms and purist alternatives, they usually select purisms, just as they tend to prefer obsolete, archaic or solemn forms, assuming these are more correct. This hypercorrect behaviour has formed the basis of the classic diagnosis that Flemings are linguistically insecure

¹⁸ Compare with Peter Debrabandere, linguist and chief editor of *Neerlandia/Nederlands van nu*, the journal issued by the General Dutch Union (cf. section 7.1), who 30 years later describes 'in-between language' in almost identical words: "In-between language is ... a hotchpotch of Belgian-Dutch anomalies, gallicisms, dialectisms, archaisms, purisms, written language..." (Debrabandere 1998).

(De Schutter 1973; Geerts 1974; Taeldeman 1993; Willemyns & Haeseryn 1998), which is usually interpreted as a symptom of a delay in linguistic standardisation. Significant, however, are Lebbe's (1997) overview findings: They show that of the three age categories he distinguished – 18 to 25 year olds, 35 to 50 year olds and 60 plus year olds – the middle generation scored highest on the use of purisms and archaisms. It is this generation that went to school in the decades after the war, and which was exposed most seriously to Flemish standardisation efforts at a crucial period in their lives, a finding that indicates that hypercorrection rather is the *product* of standardisation than a sign of its absence.

The above concerns and analyses make clear that the variety that is now called *tussentaal* is probably much less innovative than is usually assumed in the literature. They also qualify the widely accepted idea that until the 1960s Flanders knew a strict diglossia, with standard language use being restricted to formal, institutional and public events, and dialect as the medium of communication in all other domains (see e.g. Grondelaers & van Hout 2011: 204-207; Vandekerckhove 2009: 75-76). Judging from the worry and anger about the “curious mixture”, it is clear that many Flemings resorted to an intermediate, not necessarily stable or predictable, indeed ‘bricolaged’ way of speaking that hovered in between dialect and standard language (see Craps 2002: 82 for a similar conclusion). It is important, however, to see that this linguistic bricolage can be the outcome of a variety of strategies, aspirations and negotiations that are part and parcel of social behaviour under hegemonic discursive regimes (cf., among others, Erickson 2004), and that this can involve much more than mere insecurity. The above comments and analyses, to our mind, point out that:

- many Flemings intentionally moved away from their dialects (speaking a ‘polished dialect’, ‘speaking to the letter’), in so doing encouraging a process of dialect loss, and sought to align themselves with “the characterological figures depicted in the [metadiscursive] message[s]” that equate ABN with a “set of social personae linked to speech” (Agha 2003: 243; English in original) (ABN as the hallmark of a ‘civilised’, ‘stylish’, ‘modern’ speaker). Yet, many of them had limited knowledge of specific linguistic norms, or were confused about them as a result of their often idiosyncratic and inconsistent nature (French loan words are bad, but French loan words in northern Dutch are okay; northern Dutch leads the way, but beware of its pronunciation), or were anxious of negative sanctioning and stigmatisation and produced ‘safe’ alternatives, such as purisms;
- in this severe, indeed oppressive, sociolinguistic climate, many Flemings appeared to be striving to strike a balance between not being seen to speak dialect anymore, or at least less of it, at the same time as avoiding the social penalties that were attached to accepting dominant language advice without any reservations, in the process developing intermediate ways of speaking that language purifiers resented or only temporarily wanted to accept;
- many Flemings, too, were negotiating a discursive regime that intended to nearly wipe out all references to Flanders (see the rejection of modest pleas for ‘authentic’ Flemish input, section 3), possibly insisting on using at least some Flemish input (be it on a lexical, phonological or morpho-syntactic level), at the same time as they were by and large accepting the regime’s

ideas about the necessity of linguistic standardisation and the uncivilised character of dialect.

All these strategies, considerations and aspirations largely accept the terms and conditions held up by hyperstandardisation but also deviate from them,¹⁹ contributing in this way to a peculiar, unstable linguistic mixture. Given that there is no necessary outcome at the level of the individual speaker, it may indeed best be described as a linguistic practice with “familiar dimensions [viz., standard language and dialect] but unpredictable outcomes” (Slembrouck & Van Herreweghe 2004), or alternatively, as a speech style that is, borrowing a description from the analysis of contemporary urban language use, “connected to all points of the sociolinguistic compass, but identical to none” (Rampton 2011: 289; English in original). The differing results and changing outcomes of this constant negotiation process may explain why it is often so difficult to characterise this linguistic practice precisely, or to point out its “necessary and sufficient features” (cf. Grondelaers & van Hout 2011: 222; English in original; also see De Schryver 2012). But notwithstanding the variety of strategies underlying its use, it is clear that hyperstandardisation must be seen as a precondition, indeed as the necessary context for this sometimes hard to pin down, “curious mixture” that has come to be known as *tussentaal* from the 1990s, rather than it being a transitional stage in a delayed standardisation process or a phenomenon emerging only when standardisation efforts are seen to lose their strength.

Last but not least, a final unintended outcome has to do with the fact that the ABN actions have most successfully helped install a Foucaultian truth regime that can be called the ‘curse of poor Flanders’, which Absillis (2009) has described in much detail. By this we mean the widespread conviction, with deep roots in the 19th century, that Flanders is hopelessly delayed as opposed to other countries. “To emancipate the Flemish people one has ... continuously emphasised its backwardness” (2009a: 536),²⁰ and Absillis argues that this strategy paradoxically undermines any claims to emancipation as it immediately disqualifies Flemings’ capability for making such claims. Blommaert likewise points to a ‘double bind’ that is

activated when cultural activists and language nationalists adopt the hierarchical frame and embark on campaigns for the promotion and the development of their language: by acknowledging the *present* inferiority of their language vis-à-vis another language (usually a ‘model’ language ...) they acknowledge its *eternal* inferiority. The model language will always have attained the desired level of elaboration or sophistication long before the other language, and quality in the inferior language will always be seen as an emulation or a caricature of that of the model language (Blommaert 1999: 432; English and emphasis in original).

Geerts et al. (1980) illustrate this paradox in their analysis of Flemings’ linguistic attitudes. Surprised that more than half of their respondents say dialects are unsuitable on radio and television and prefer Standard Dutch instead, but at the same

¹⁹ Which is not to deny the existence of full acceptance (speaking Standard Dutch) and undiluted resistance (speaking dialect only), but these kinds of behaviour would seem to have been more marginal than the more ambiguous negotiation we see as fundamental to an idiosyncratic, mixed way of speaking.

²⁰ For a recent example, see Geeraerts who has explained ‘in between language use’ in various publications as a clear symptom of the Flemish “mental-historical retardation” (cf. Geeraerts 2003).

indicate they do not wish to speak like the Dutch themselves, Geerts et al. conclude – probably correctly – that their respondents mean “there is or ought to be a place for a ‘third way’ in between dialect and Standard Dutch, a Flemish standard language” (1980: 245). But this idea is immediately disqualified as impossible and illusory:

An impossible case, unless one would be content with a completely artificial standard language... Which is evidently not a very attractive alternative. It is thoroughly difficult, moreover, because that ‘third way’ simply does not exist, while one is having an increased need for it (Geerts et al. 1980: 246).

The authors subsequently conclude that this attitude is “symptomatic for the schizoglossia that the Flemish community has to reckon with” (*ibid.*). Hence, the option for assimilation to northern Dutch is presented as an inevitable law, as a result of which Flemish reservations are nothing but absurd, an expression of linguistic schizophrenia rather than of independent emancipation, as this is simply ‘impossible’.

8. Linguistic standardisation in the globalized new economy

Having discussed hyperstandardisation and its effects, we have left hanging the issue of how much appeal linguistic standardisation still has in contemporary society, and whether it is appropriate to talk of an impending ‘destandardisation’ or ‘standard language vacuum’. To be sure, even if hyperstandardisation has had manifold effects, it is clear that by the 1980s its appeal clearly started to wear off. This may not be coincidental, given that this era heralded a wider-scale disapproval of explicit civilisation discourses in the wake of the end of colonialism. And one can assume that the advent, in the same period, of a neoliberal politics that put a premium on individual material success rather than on collective emancipation, and the arrival of a globalised new economy with an increasing outward-looking focus rather than an inward one, further contributed to the fading of the ABN actions’ star. Any discussion of the contemporary appeal of (hyper)standardisation must probably be seen against the backdrop of these larger societal changes that increasingly confronted nations (and the sub-nations contesting them) with new, now global and transnational challenges and opportunities.

The emergence of a new globalised economy and the flourishing of various supranational organizations have led various commentators to presume that the world has become essentially ‘post-national’, or, so to say, has entered a stage of ‘denationalisation’. Yet, doing so overlooks the fact that nation-states remain active and powerful players on this new international scene and engage themselves with the opportunities it provides. Nation-states have sometimes resisted the effects of the new economy (through, for example, protecting their internal markets or, in the case of France, through consistently coining French alternatives for innovations that usually only go by their English name). But they have also taken the global economy as an opportunity to advertise themselves (see, for example, the ‘Flanders Technology’ fairs of the 1980s with which Flanders positioned itself on the international market), and to open up their markets and mass media for (inter)national investment (the emergence of a commercial Flemish television channel in 1989 can be seen as a case in point). Contemporary transnational dynamics have neither prevented the successful

mobilisation of histories of nationalism to realise agendas that are primarily predicated on controlling economic resources and opportunities and restricting access to these for others (the recent electoral success of the nationalist party *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* ‘New Flemish Alliance’ in Flanders is exemplary).

Similar qualifications apply to suggestions of a supposedly post-standardised world on a linguistic level (cf. van der Horst 2008). Even though the older discourse of civilisation has certainly faded away, linguistic standardisation has found new ways of manifesting itself, disclaiming forms of authority that are now deemed unacceptable, and aligning itself with more persuasive discourses that express common-sense values such as communication, equal opportunities, democratisation, diversity and the acquisition of marketable skills (see Heller & Duchêne 2007 for a similar account with relation to discourses of language endangerment). Also in Flanders, standardisation is now effectively recruited to resist various linguistic phenomena produced by transnational conditions that are seen to threaten school success, equal opportunities, or diversity. Thus, Standard Dutch is called upon to resist the dominating, diversity-reducing influence of English in public life as well as the ‘problematic’ diversity that urban, migration-based multilingualism is seen to pose for the survival of Dutch as a lingua franca. The use of vernacular language on television (sometimes called ‘soap-Flemish’ or ‘hamburger language’, among other terms that allude to new socio-economic conditions) and in digital communication (texting, chatting, twittering etc.) is likewise frequently resented as either setting a bad example for the young or as a threat to the linguistic skills young people need to succeed at school and later in life. Not to mention that successive Flemish Education Ministers have in the last five years issued linguistic policy decrees that hammer at the use of Standard Dutch while equating the use of other languages and non-standard Dutch with being ‘deprived of opportunities’. The history of Flemish language purification is, in addition, not infrequently called upon to argue that Flemings cannot now jump ship and betray past efforts in favour of the ‘sloppy’ language use popular entertainment is seen to bring forth.

On the other hand, discourses of standardisation are frequently recruited in light of realising various new socio-economic goals. Thus, not only should Flemings strive to speak a Standard Dutch that will provide immigrants and foreign business(wo)men with a clear learning target and facilitate easy communication and integration, so too should Flemings carefully trim their language to acquire marketable communication skills and the upscale jobs related to them, to facilitate participation in democratic decision making and ensuring easy nationwide communication, and to prevent incomprehensibility that may deter foreign investors or reduce the market size. Moreover, purifying language will avoid putting a spoke in the wheel of maintaining a transnational linguistic zone that comprises Flanders and the Netherlands (a project which at the same time echoes the older discourses of linguistic integration that hoped to set right linguistically what took a wrong turn politically), which is also seen as a prerequisite for safeguarding Dutch against the dominance of other languages on a European level (see, for a discussion of recent examples: Absillis 2012; De Caluwe 2002; De Schryver 2012; Jaspers 2001, Jaspers 2009; Jaspers & Brisard 2006; Van Hoof 2013).

All this, in our view, complicates hypotheses that posit a straightforward process of ‘destandardisation’ or a “standard language vacuum” (Grondelaers et al. 2011) in Flanders, and in various other European contexts. This is not to deny that non-standard

language use is much more visible in public life than it was before, nor that the new economy has opened up successful markets for such language use that may subsequently be recirculated in public discourse as exemplary speech that others may wish to align themselves with (cf. the discussion of the ‘dynamic’ speaker by Kristiansen 2001). But the point is that the ideology of standardisation and these ‘new’ conditions do not cancel each other out, but rather condition each other, and need to be approached as communicating vessels in the same ideological-symbolic and economic system in which linguistic differences are linked to exemplary social identities and their opposites.

9. Conclusion

The 1950s through the 1980s mark an exceptional period in Flemish linguistic history which is perhaps best described as a period of *hyperstandardisation*, since it involves a highly explicit, propagandistic, widely mediated and compelling linguistic standardisation project that has ideologised and hierarchised language use in all corners of Flemish society. We have demonstrated that these efforts were radically tuned to a complete assimilation with Netherlandic Dutch, that dialects were sometimes treated with kind paternalism, but equally often vigorously condemned, and that drastic measures were suggested to achieve a widespread use of Standard Dutch in Flanders.

Even if this campaign has only managed to achieve its ideal to a limited extent, it has fundamentally recalibrated the Flemish linguistic landscape and produced a number of side-effects that still characterize language use in Flanders and popular discourse about it. Hyperstandardisation has deeply planted a standardisation ideology in Flemings’ metalinguistic awareness and it has encouraged a process of dialect loss. In addition to this it has helped emerge idiosyncratic, ‘bricolaged’ ways of speaking that are not dialectal nor standard, and that lie at the basis of what is now commonly called ‘in between language’, next to installing a representation of Flanders as hopelessly delayed in relation to its northern neighbour. Our data show that the suggestion of a neat diglossia, with standard language use limited to formal, institutional and public events and dialect as the medium of communication in all other domains, is hard to sustain in the 1960s already.

Finally, we have argued that even if hyperstandardisation undeniably loses its momentum when the 1980s arrive, it is difficult to consider linguistic standardisation a relic of yesteryear given the ways in which it is actively recruited and revitalised to confront the problems and opportunities of linguistic diversity in the new, globalized economy. Naturally, this argument does not provide a final answer to ‘where we are heading’ (Grondelaers & van Hout 2011: 233), but we believe that answering this question may benefit considerably from a thorough insight into what came before and how this history resonates and renews itself today.

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