

Whose French is it anyway? Language ideologies and re-emerging indexicalities of French in Flanders

Abstract

In this paper I address a number of recent controversial language-related incidents and ideological statements regarding the use of French in the public sphere by Flemish nationalist aldermen in two Flemish towns. By drawing on interviews with different stakeholders (shop-owners, aldermen and passers-by), I address the different perceptions and ideological indexicalities of French shop names and signs in these Flemish contexts. In the data, the indexical field (Eckert 2008) of French in Flanders emerges as both polyvalent and indexically ordered, while the Flemish nationalist interpretations involve rescaled and historically recursive indexical meaning which can only be understood vis-à-vis the historical language ideological debate in Belgium. Language use in the public sphere has thus become a tool to impose monolingual ‘doxic logics’ (Bourdieu 1977) in Flanders, in spite of the fact that commercial and private language use is not regulated by language laws in Belgium.

INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY IN AALST AND KORTRIJK¹

In a research interview conducted in March 2014, a Flemish nationalist alderman in charge of ‘Flemish Affairs’ in the town Aalst in Belgium voiced his opinion on the use of particular languages on shop signs and stated that

- (1) *[a] Thai restaurant that does this in Thai, that is understandable. I think it is a different matter if shops start to adopt this rather structurally in French. Those Happy Holidays, that is international. And French... there is no way around it,*

*language is not neutral. Happy Holidays you see from New York to Japan, but Joyeux Noël means in fact that French-speaking people in Aalst are not willing to adjust.*²

In Belgium, language use on commercial signage publicly displayed by shop-owners to advertise their commerce or, as in this case, spread holiday wishes to prospective clients is not governed by an official language policy. Hence commercial information can be displayed and disseminated in the language of the shop-owners' own choosing. Conversely, signage of an official nature such as street name signs or municipality notices are in Belgium by law constructed in the official language(s). In the quote reproduced above, the alderman somewhat oversteps the bounds of what falls under his authority and jurisdiction, as he criticizes language choices which do not fall under the Belgian policy, by declaring that the use of French on shop signs in Aalst is not neutral and according to him implies incipient Frenchification, which in his opinion should be avoided, or even fought against. In doing so, he bears witness to a particular language ideological stance regarding language use in the public sphere which has become more overt and commonplace throughout Flanders in recent years. Such *language ideologies* are 'ubiquitous set[s] of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity' (Kroskrity 2004:497). As Milani (2008) emphasizes, these ideological beliefs are not just abstract values and ideas held by people, they are also manifested in actual material texts and discourses produced by 'real historical actors' (politicians, journalists, etc.), voicing 'their interests, their alliances, their practices, and where they come from' (Blommaert 1999:7). In the case-study at hand, we will see how two Flemish nationalist aldermen express particular ideologically motivated stances or beliefs against the use of French on shop signs in their Flemish towns, Aalst and Kortrijk. The policy measures and language-related interventions they propose are aimed at strengthening the

Dutch-speaking character of the public sphere and opposing the use of French. These interventions form part of a protracted and historically shaped *language ideological debate*, to use Blommaert's (1999; 2011) term, in Belgium. In recent years, we see how this debate has re-emerged in nationalist policies and public opinion-making throughout Flanders in the shape of renewed heightened sensitivity vis-à-vis language use in public spaces. Such language ideological debates are metadiscursive debates in society in which 'language is central as a topic, a motif, a target, and in which language ideologies are being articulated, formed, amended, enforced' (Blommaert 1999:1). As the discussion will show later on, both the overt and covert policy measures introduced in Aalst and Kortrijk which engage with commercial language use sparked debate and controversy, and elicited outcry in Flemish and Walloon media outlets in 2013.

In this paper, I empirically gauge and examine the different perceptions, attitudes and opinions of relevant stakeholders (shop-owners, clients and aldermen in public office) regarding the use of French in public spaces and on shop signs in these two particular towns in Flanders. Such instances of language use on public signs and their indexical meaning form the focal interest of the burgeoning field of *Linguistic Landscape studies*. In recent years, academic interest in linguistic aspects of signage in public spaces has gained momentum within sociolinguistics with an increase of studies addressing issues related to multilingualism, language policy and (ethno)linguistic conflict from the angle of public language use. As a result, the field of Linguistic Landscape studies is highly diversified and continuously growing. In its broadest definition, a Linguistic Landscape (hereafter LL) encompasses all instances of public language and writing in a particular geographical locale, whether it be commercial, official, mobile, transgressive or private in nature (Shohamy & Gorter 2009). Methodologies adopted to examine LLs have been as diverse in breadth as the geographical locations that have served as foci, and include quantitative, qualitative,

historical, ethnographic and interdisciplinary approaches, or a combination of these in mixed methods studies (see, for example, Shohamy & Gorter [2009]; and Gorter, Marten & Van Mensel [2012]). Similar to other LL studies on perceptions of language use or on language ideologies (Lanza & Woldemariam [2009], Papen [2012]; Maly [2016]), I adopt a qualitative approach and rely on interview data and other complementary data sources in my analysis of Flemish nationalist ideologies vis-à-vis the LL.

The aim of this paper is threefold and its structure is organized as such. The first aim is to shed light on the historical background of this particular Belgian language ideological debate. This is done in the next section. Starting with such historical background is important because language ideologies and debates are always part of larger socio-political processes and historical developments of conflict, nation-building or discrimination (Blommaert 1999); this is most definitely the case for Belgium (Blommaert 2011). Understanding the ideological motivations behind the words of the alderman quoted at the start of this paper therefore requires looking back to the complex history and *longue durée* of language conflict and policy-making in the Belgian context, with particular attention to the capital city, Brussels, and to how this relates to the political climate in Flanders in the 2000s. The second aim of this paper is to empirically document the different indexicalities of French in LLs in Flanders through interviews and to examine the nature of this indexical field. Such qualitative approach shows how the indexical field (Eckert 2008) of French in Flanders emerges as both ‘*polyvalent*’ and ‘*ordered*’ (Silverstein 2003; Blommaert 2007; Rampton 2006), with a number of other indexical and perceived meanings next to the aldermen’s ideological interpretations. We will see how, in essence, Flemish nationalists battling French in face of an alleged threat of Frenchification entails a *rescaled* and indexically *recursive* re-emergence of historical sensitivities to French in Flanders. The third, and final aim of this paper is to consider the central role attributed to the LL by the aldermen and Flemish nationalist party in

their aim to create and maintain a linguistically homogenous Flanders. What makes this Belgian case so peculiar is not just the focus on LLs to impose doxic logics (Bourdieu 1977) of territorial monolingualism, but the fact that the tool they employ to impose this monolingual doxa concerns an area in Belgian language legislation which is not regulated by language laws in Belgium.

LANGUAGE AND POLICY THROUGHOUT BELGIAN HISTORY

Geopolitically, Belgium is divided in different regions according to a constitutional territoriality principle, which since the 1960s demarcates each of these regions by official, fixed language borders: the Flemish Region, known as Flanders, in the North is officially monolingual Dutch-speaking; the Walloon Region, known as Wallonia, in the South is officially monolingual French-speaking and the Brussels Capital Region is officially bilingual in French and Dutch (see figure 1). The German-speaking part of Belgium forms part of the Walloon Region (cf. *infra*). Hence, in each of these different Regions, the respective official regional language is the sole administrative, court and teaching language used for governmental communication with Belgian citizens (Janssens & Chaltin 2014). Belgium is thus ‘a country with three official languages although none of these languages is an official language on state level’, i.e. for the whole state territory (Janssens & Chaltin 2014:43). The two towns of interest in this paper, Aalst and Kortrijk, are located at 30 km distance to Brussels and at 5 km distance to France, respectively (see red dots on figure 1 for approximate locations). I turn to these two research contexts in more detail later.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure title: Regions and linguistic Communities in Belgium, with Aalst and Kortrijk in red

Like most European nation-states, commercial or private language use by individual citizens or companies in the public sphere in Belgium is not controlled by language laws. The specific territorially-defined official policy regulations, on the other hand, fully apply for language use on government-issued signage and official publicly displayed notices in LLs. This has resulted in a highly complex and intricately constructed policy and a seemingly chaotic overall LL on a national scale (see Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael 2012 for an empirical case-study). In the case of Kortrijk and Aalst, two towns in Flanders, this implies that all official communication, including official signs in the LL, are in Dutch only; non-official language use on commercial or private signs is free of choice, with considerable multilingual variation as a result. The current nature of this Belgian language policy as well as of the nation's federal political structure is the historical outcome of a long and complex period of conflict, compromise and uneasy juxtaposition of the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities. Both the ideological sensitivity to French expressed by the aldermen in these two Flemish towns as well as the controversial debate which ensued throughout Belgium in the wake of their statements therefore take some paragraphs to explain.

Territorially-defined language regulations as historical détente

At the time of Belgium's independence in 1830, the sole language used in parliament, court, administration, education and public affairs was French, the language of the ruling class and elites, and of social mobility (Janssens & Chaltin 2014; Van Velthoven 1987). In spite of the demographic preponderance of the Flemish who spoke Flemish dialects³, neither Flemish (nor Dutch) was used in official domains in Belgium (Janssens & Chaltin 2014); in fact, 'there appeared symptoms characteristic of linguistic oppression' (Van Velthoven 1987:16) through the exclusion of Dutch and Flemish/Walloon dialects in the official domains of public life. French was seen as 'the symbol of unity for the new state', and its imposition as the official

language ‘a patriotic necessity’ (Van Velthoven 1987:17). Imposing French as the national language constituted an attempt at unification of the Belgian linguistic market, to use Bourdieu’s (1991) terms. Such nineteenth century one-nation-equals-one-language-and-one-culture models of nation-wide monolingualism reiterated older Romantic ideologies developed by Herder (Bauman & Briggs 2003), and also formed the blueprint for other Modern states such as France, Germany and Italy (Blommaert 2011; Willemys 2002). Prior to Belgian independence, the territory was subjected to similar ‘one language – one country’ credos, albeit with “completely different intentions” (Willemys 2002: 46). From 1794 until 1814 “coercive francisation” (McRae 1986) was pursued by the French government when Belgium was annexed by France. Subsequently, Belgium became part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands from 1814 until 1830 during which period the Dutch King Willem I intended to reverse the previous Frenchification in favour of Dutch by initiating ‘a radical Dutchification of public life in Flanders’ (Vandenbussche 2009: 256). This policy proved unsuccessful and came to a halt in 1830 when the French-speaking elite in Belgium revolted and eventually gained independence. At the time of Belgian independence, this ideology implied the repression of Flemish dialects and the promotion of Frenchification (Van Velthoven 1987), particularly in official and educational domains, while an attitude of more benign neglect was adopted by the French-speaking elites towards language use in less official domains. Moreover, the then lopsided development of the Belgian economy – with prospering heavy industry in Wallonia and a poorer, agrarian structure in Flanders – reinforced the association of Dutch and Flanders with poverty and backwardness (Van Velthoven 1987).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a romanticist Flemish Movement started opposing this lack of official recognition for Dutch and championed the ‘Flemish Cause’ (Van Velthoven 1987). This movement pushed for the standardization of the Flemish

dialects into the Dutch language and fought to attain social recognition and equal status for their language in public affairs, education and overall Belgian society (Vandenbussche 2009). From its inception until the present, Flemish Cause fighters and Flemish nationalism have thus been implicitly connected to language (Blommaert 2011)⁴. Many Flemish nationalists are still ‘extremely sensitive to anything that might be associated with [this] former rule by the French-speakers’ and still continue to perceive this period as ‘oppressive and humiliating’ (Verlot & Delrue 2004:225). Such present-day sensitivity is premised on a nationalist narrative of a continued/continuing linear ‘Flemish Struggle’ and invokes a historical ideological *longue durée*. In this we find some of the historical roots for still lingering sensitivities, animosity and communal division in Belgian society and politics today.

The conflict between the two linguistic communities was only gradually resolved through a territorial pacification model developed during the twentieth century by means of different sets of legislature passed in the 1930s and the 1960s and subsequently through six state reforms (Janssens & Chaltin 2014). As a result, Belgium evolved into the officially and territorially trilingual state it is today; concomitantly, it also gradually transitioned from a unitary state model into a federation of three monolingual Communities (the French-speaking, Dutch-speaking and German-speaking communities) and three territorial Regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region). Within this federal model, power is divided and shared between the Belgian communities (Janssens & Chaltin 2014). The language laws of the 1960s, in particular, officially demarcated each region by installing language borders. Language use in the LL proved paramount here, as the Belgian politicians and language planners behind these laws were ‘among the first to recognize the importance of marking the boundaries of linguistic territories through the regulation of language use on public signs’ (Landry & Bourhis 1997:24). Indeed, the territorial demarcation of the Regions was made visible ‘through the systematic use of unilingual public signs in Flemish and French,

respectively, [which] made the identity of each region [...] most salient as one crossed the linguistic frontier' (Landry & Bourhis 1997:24). Moreover, these language laws 'guaranteed what had been the ultimate goal of the Flemish Movement, i.e. the official and complete Dutchification of Flanders' (Willemys 2002:37), and the aspirational slogan became "In Flanders Flemish!" (Blommaert 2011:247; Préaux 2014).

The body of laws passed in the 1960s also procured several exceptions to this regional monolingualism to reach compromise. This entails that both the Flemish and Walloon region include constitutionally determined municipalities which offer language facilities to local inhabitants speaking another national language, implying they can use their own language for government affairs and administrative services. In these municipalities, official signage is rendered in both the official and facilitated language. One finds these municipalities (1) along the east-to-west language border in Flanders and Wallonia (catering to local French-speaking and Dutch-speaking inhabitants, respectively); (2) in the eastern part of Wallonia (for German-speakers and French-speakers, respectively); and finally, (3) in the Flemish periphery surrounding Brussels with facilities for French-speaking inhabitants. The next section delves deeper into the context of Brussels, as this is key to understanding the creation of the office of 'Aldermen for Flemish Affairs' as well as their fear of Frenchification and related ideological stances vis-à-vis language use in the public sphere.

Brussels and Frenchification as still outstanding sources of conflict today

The institutionalization of linguistic borders which resulted in regional Herderian monolingualism and increasing federalization of the Belgian state has led to societal parity and, to some extent, also to compromise and subdued, relative peace between the Dutch- and French-speaking communities and politics in the present time. However, a long-standing divisive issue and political Gordian knot that still continues to fuel inter-communal animosity

is the capital, Brussels, and its immediate geographical periphery. As we will see, the complex ideological nature of the recent incidents in Kortrijk and Aalst is intrinsically related to the historical and present-day problematics of language in the Brussels region.

In spite of the claims of many Flemish nationalists and even Belgian academics, Brussels has never been a monolingual Flemish or Dutch-speaking city as the capital was exposed to foreign European languages throughout its history of foreign dominion and to French, the language of the courts, bourgeoisie and nobilities throughout Europe from the Middle Ages onwards. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a Frenchification process ensued that affected virtually all layers of Brussels' society and lasted well into the twentieth century. The circumstances of this process were diverse and complex and relate amongst others to demographic and socio-economic changes in the internal structure of Brussels, to the French-dominant school system and to French being the language of Brussels' (and Belgium's) elites, ruling class and essentially a prerequisite for social mobility in the Belgian capital at that time. Consequently, Brussels became for a large part French-speaking, with French its most widely known and used language. This drastic Frenchification process only occurred in Brussels, while in Flanders, Frenchification was limited to the nobility and upper middle classes, failed to penetrate more deeply into the region and was eventually reversed (Van Velthoven 1987; Willemys 2002). As the Belgian capital, Brussels has been officially delineated and determined as bilingual in French and Dutch by law since the 1960s. In practice, however, it is virtually completely French-speaking with comparatively little local relevance or native use of Dutch outside of the official realm. Moreover, in face of increased recent mobility of immigrants, expatriates and tourists, Brussels is becoming increasingly more multilingual with French adopted as the general language of communication amongst Brussels' superdiverse, internationalized population, in addition to English as a prominent international lingua franca (Janssens 2013). As such, Brussels to a large extent constitutes a

French-speaking enclave surrounded by Flemish, officially Dutch-speaking suburbia and countryside.

While the status of Dutch as a de facto minority language in Frenchified Brussels continues to form an outstanding problem in Belgian inter-communal relations and a thorn in the sides of Flemish nationalists, another issue further complicated the role of language in the capital's agglomeration in both the past and present. As with all prominent and vibrant cities, the immediate periphery of Brussels experienced continuous expansion, urbanization and suburbanization throughout the twentieth century, as the Brussels population moved and continues to move away from the urban center to 'greenbelt boroughs' in the quieter and more affordable periphery of the capital agglomeration (Van Velthoven 1987:26). An important factor in this process was the completion of Brussels' Ring highway in the 1970s which turned Flemish and Walloon towns in the vicinity of Brussels effectively into suburbs of Brussels. Given the Flemish nationalist sensitivities and striving for a linguistically homogenous Flanders, the issue that arises here then is that this residential trajectory of the French-proficient Brussels population in practice implies Frenchification of the Flemish municipalities in the periphery of Brussels, as the French-speakers 'felt neither the need nor the inclination to adapt linguistically to their new home environment' (Van Velthoven 1987:43). This residential expansion is referred to by Flemings as the *olievlek* ('oilspill'), an obviously negative metaphor for 'expansive pollution'. Evoking an opposite image, on the French-speaking side the constitutional fixture of the language boundaries of Brussels is referred to with the phrase *carcan*, the 'iron collar' in French, a straight-jacket smothering the capital and its natural growth. Similarly, references to Brussels' peripheral zone by both communities mark turf and are also indexical of divided ideologies and attitudinal stances: the zone is referred to as *Vlaamse Rand* ('Flemish Periphery', stressing the zone's adherence to Flanders) and *Périphérie Bruxelloise* ('Brussels Periphery', stressing the zone as a

geographical expansion of the capital) by certain Flemings and certain Walloons, respectively. Over the last decades, the institutional (and, by implication, linguistic) status of this peripheral zone has been the cause and object of political incidents, conflicts, and even government resignations (Janssens 2012; Blommaert 2011). Language use in this liminal space has proven to be equally controversial, with the LL becoming a battlefield, often in emblematic ways: Flemish citizens' initiatives physically removing and overpainting French on signage were and continue to be commonplace, as well as top-down strategic encroachment by the Flemish government on private and commercial language use, supposed to be not regulated by language laws, yet exercised within the grey zone limits of the law⁵ (see Janssens 2012 for a nuanced overview; also Van Mensel *et al* 2016). As such, one of the 'cornerstones' of the Flemish policy in Brussels' periphery is 'the Dutchification of the streetscene' (Janssens 2012: 40).

The Flemish policy also introduced new responsibilities of 'Flemish Affairs' for a municipal alderman in some of the Flemish municipalities where French-speakers have language facilities. The shared goal of these appointments is to actively protect the Flemish character of their respective municipalities, to limit the further expansion of the Brussels "oil spill", to Dutchify the overall landscape and street scene within the limits of the law and create a monolingual space, and to facilitate the local integration of newcomers who speak languages other than Dutch into mainstream Flemish society through language courses (Janssens 2012). The aldermen for Flemish Affairs in Kortrijk⁶ and Aalst were installed in 2012 and entrusted with similar tasks, but their appointment should be understood in light of the re-emergence of Flemish nationalism in the 2000s throughout Flanders.

Re-emergence of nationalist ideologies in Flemish politics in the 2000s

The historical federalization process of the Belgian state coincided with the re-emergence of (regionally defined) nationalist ideologies in politics on both sides of the language border (Blommaert 2011). Over the past two decades, the electoral market share of radically nationalist and xenophobic right-wing parties increased substantially in Flanders (Swyngedouw 1992; Blommaert 2011). Most recently, the long-term cultural and political conflict culminated in an even more profound upsurge of Flemish nationalism as the right-wing conservative Flemish nationalist party N-VA rose to prominence as the largest party in Flanders and Belgium in recent elections. This radical nationalist party's ultimate goal is a politically and economically independent Flanders, bilaterally joined in part with Wallonia in a confederal institutional structure. In the wake of these most recent election outcomes and in particular the politically salient landslide victory of the N-VA, the Flemish nationalist party came into power in several towns in Flemish provinces and introduced 'Aldermen for Flemish Affairs' from 2012 onwards (Maly 2013). The responsibilities of these aldermen in Flanders proper are similar to those of the aldermen already in existence in the vicinity of Brussels and, since their appointment, they have proposed numerous regulations concerning the LL⁷; some of which include(d):

- (i) replacing existing street names with name referring to Flemish culture and history;
- (ii) installing new street name signs with the Flemish Lion icon prominently displayed;
- (iii) removing portraits of the Belgian royalty and national flags from municipal buildings;
- (iv) increasing the prominence of festivities on the 11th of July, the Day of the Flemish Community;
- (v) promoting the adoption of Dutch names of commercial enterprises.

The last one emphasizes the emblematic value attributed to Dutch shop names. Some of these policy lines are about more than linguistic aspects of the public sphere and concern the

semiotic landscape of Flanders, as they introduce Flemish iconic imagery into the streetscape while delimiting the visibility of Belgian symbols. The combination of all these policy measures forms ‘a multilevel plan to construct a national identity’, albeit a Flemish and thus regional one (Maly 2013:13), and are possibly inspired less by fears of Frenchification per se, than by an agenda-setting to emphasize the Flemish identity of the town in question. Again we find ideological traces of Herderian legacy here in the ambition to strengthen and maintain monolingually Dutch-speaking spaces and monoculturally Flemish towns.

Aalst and Kortrijk and the local use of French

Some of the most widely covered and controversial incidents related to Flemish nationalist aldermen and LL-related issues after the N-VA’s election victory were in the provincial towns Kortrijk and Aalst. Particular public statements made by these aldermen were some of the recent ‘highlights’ in this language ideological debate, i.e. one of ‘the most intense and polarized episodes’ (Blommaert 1999:9), which instigated media upheaval, ridicule and controversy. As shown on Figure 1, Kortrijk, a wealthy industrial town is located at 5km distance to France. This proximity to France attracts not only tourists and shoppers from across the border, but also large numbers of transborder immigrant workers from the Lille-Roubaix area in France. Aalst, on the other hand, is located closer to Brussels and has for a long time served as a major Brussels-oriented commuter town due to its straightforward train connection to Brussels. The fact that a fair amount of French-speakers reside in Aalst while commuting by train to their work and social networks in Brussels is colloquially referred to by the term *Spoorwegfenomeen* ‘railroad phenomenon’ by Flemish politicians. Aalst and Kortrijk are thus towns in Flanders who to some extent are confronted with the arrival or passing-through of French-proficient clientele or inhabitants and it is precisely this social reality that instigated the controversial linguistic incidents in both cities.

As discussed elsewhere (Vandenbroucke forthcoming), in the case of Kortrijk the issue revolved around the French name of a new snack bar, *Frituur Grand Place*.⁸ When news broke in a Flemish newspaper that the Flemish nationalist alderman opposed the use of a French name and suggested the adoption of a Dutch name instead of the French *Grand Place*, a media storm ensued with newspapers throughout Belgium reporting on the incident and social media roaring with ridiculing reactions. Part of the controversy had to do with the fact that commercial language use in Belgium is part of the private sphere and thus does not fall under linguistic laws or aldermen's responsibilities.

The appointment of the Aalst alderman for Flemish Affairs caused similar upheaval because of his prior political affiliation with the far-right and racist Flemish political party Vlaams Belang. His policy propositions included some of the ones listed above and were intended to battle the allegedly nascent Frenchification of Aalst as a result of its proximity to Brussels. In both urban contexts, the public sphere serves as a politicized object in the Flemish nationalist striving for territorial monolingualism.

In the next sections, I address the use of French in Flemish LLs more closely by combining insights from interviews with different stakeholders with an empirical examination of French as used in Kortrijk's and Aalst's LLs. The discussion afterwards touches upon this 'indexical field' (Eckert 2008) of French language use in LLs and how the various conflicting indexicalities of French in the current Flemish context must be understood.

PERCEPTIONS OF FRENCH: GLOBAL *ÉLÉGANCE* OR BELGIAN *TACHE D'HUILE*?

The central cornerstones of language ideological debates are the conflicting views, perceptions and opinions on the issue at hand. In order to document this particular debate and gauge perceptions on the use of French in contemporary Flemish LLs, I rely on a diverse set of data⁹ which includes,

- empirical examinations of the phenomenon, i.e. the use of French in Aalst's and Kortrijk's LLs through on-site fieldwork in the commercial heart of each town (central market place and primary commercial street);
- semi-structured interviews with the two aldermen, some of the shop-owners who use French in signage on their façades, and eight random passers-by in these urban spaces. For the latter, the age, sex and place of residence were noted as well;
- secondary data in policy documents, print media coverage and social media outlets.

Lanza & Woldemariam (2009) and Papen (2012) rely on interviews with shop owners and sign-makers so as to ensure accurate descriptions of the intentions and rationales behind language choices in LLs. Examining ideologically charged stances vis-à-vis the use of French in public spaces in Flanders necessitates a similar, qualitative and context-sensitive approach which gauges not only the intentions of shop-owners but also the perceptions of French signs by clientele and aldermen. This is particularly important as signs containing written information are indexical, semiotic objects in the sense that while they convey practical, referential information in writing to certain readers or passers-by, the choice of particular language(s) in which this information is expressed is not made in a vacuum, and therefore not neutral. The use of a particular language can in itself be indexical of meaning through interaction with the context in which it occurs (Scollon & Scollon 2003). Scollon & Scollon (2003) add to this the possibility of 'double indexicality' (Scollon & Scollon 2003:202), with a particular discourse or meaning as intended by the sign-maker and one as perceived by the sign-reader, the passer-by. Particularly in this globalized era, we see that the use of specific languages takes on symbolic connotations, ideological loads, recontextualized meaning or commodified values (see Collins & Slembrouck 2007; Leeman & Modan 2009; Kelly-Holmes 2014). In the next section, I present the interview data which touches upon the different

explanations of French on signs in Aalst and Kortrijk. In order to illustrate the rhetorical manoeuvring by the aldermen in explaining the ideological reasoning behind their policy suggestions, and the multi-faceted rationales put forward by the shop-owners and passers-by, I will quote directly from the interview data in the following paragraphs.

Rhetorical rationalizations by the aldermen

In the policy statements distributed for the local 2012 elections, the Flemish nationalist party articulated strong stances regarding the prerequisite of Dutch proficiency for the integration of newcomers into Flemish mainstream society. These documents also mentioned the need to impose measures to strengthen the Flemish and Dutch-speaking character of their towns. As a consequence of the media attention and controversy when these policy propositions were put into practice, some were retracted as not being a priority and initial strongly-held positions were toned down. The interviews with the two aldermen were conducted in March 2014, long after the highpoint of each controversy and to some extent, we anticipated post-hoc rationalizations and a subdued rhetoric which tried to justify and account for the initial position taken. Indeed, in the interviews the two aldermen voiced similar opinions regarding the use of French in public spaces in their towns, albeit in an overall less polarizing manner. To some extent, the alderman in Kortrijk expressed sympathy and understanding for shop-owners who use French names as marketing strategies, while at the same time arguing that this is an “unfortunate” choice and stressing that Dutch names are (or should be considered) equally attractive:

(2) Or you go with an attractive name which you expect to give a bit of added value to your business.. And then yes the choice of the language is of course affected, unfortunately, and when it concerns fashion merchandise – even if not everyone

likes it – quite some French is used. Which we find unfortunate. But there are a lot of fashion stores that use an equally beautiful Dutch name as well. So yes...

According to him, shop-owners do not adopt Dutch names by default, because of a historical underdog position and still latent lack of pride by Flemings for the Dutch language and culture:

(3) He thought of course he would sell more fries if his name was Grand Place. But that I still doubt of course. But it has a bit to do with the identity of ourselves hey. We think we are not good enough when we present ourselves in Dutch. And that is a bit the attitude of the Fleming. To put it that way.

[...]

No but I... I am, one has to and I repeat it... it has more.. the use of the Dutch language in the street scene has more to do with the pride of a Fleming or not. A Fleming should be much more convinced about his culture and his language. Then this problem would definitely not pose itself.

Both these metadiscursive quotes exemplify an ideological stance that Dutch should be used instead of French in shop signs in Flanders. The need to raise awareness and ‘self-respect’ amongst shop-owners to accomplish this was echoed in the interview with the alderman in Aalst. He acknowledged the importance of LLs in policy-making aimed at creating a dominant Dutch environment and, according to him, shop-owners should be made aware of the message that language use in names and on signage sends to newcomers and should join forces with policy-makers in Dutchifying tht LLs of Flemish towns:

(4) *I also think that commercial enterprises and and the hotel and catering business that they can help make this policy reality.. that you make people think about that, if you then open a business.. why would you not give it a nice Dutch name? But if you don't choose to do this, yes, no problem of course. I think that you a sort.. yes... making people aware that they also.. also they... an image... a name.. the advertisements they use... they also contribute to.. yes how to put this... the character that the city or municipality exhibits. Also on the linguistic plane. But always remember that in the private sphere that language use is free.*

While both aldermen recognize the commercial interest for French names and signage as legitimate, they do speak out against the underuse of Flemish and Dutch for these functions, albeit with a degree of hesitation, because strictly speaking this cannot be enforced and these linguistic choices are free of choice to the individual citizen.

Both aldermen contextualized the use of French in their towns' LLs within the polemic history of Brussels. The alderman in Aalst explicitly likened his professional task and ideological stance to his aldermen-colleagues in the periphery of Brussels. In Aalst, he claimed to be confronted with a similar 'oil spill' threat from Brussels, i.e. what is known as 'the railroad phenomenon' (cf. supra):

(5) *[Part of my job was created] in an attempt to also develop a policy in Aalst as was developed in Vlaams Brabant¹⁰ ... still [developing] because people there are also still looking [for a solution] and this of course in light of the fact that we in [Aalst]... are confronted with an ever increasing group, not necessarily French-speakers... in part yes but mostly yes foreign language speakers who are making up an increasingly larger part of the population. [...] and [Aalst has] also some –*

how should I put it – power of attraction from Vlaams Brabant of course also for the French-speakers who live there

(6) *They are a type... people whose community life is mostly in Brussels, they take the train to Brussels... have... work there... social circle there.. and return to Aalst in the evening, where it is safer, where the education is better and where the houses are cheaper. [...] And if you.. if Brussels overflows hey.. and then people come here.. but these are people who actually are very little involved with the activities in Aalst. And yes, you have in fact a quite large segregation if I'm allowed to use this word*

Similarly, the alderman in Kortrijk invoked strong warfare imagery related to the history of the Brussels' language conflict, and likened his own personal struggle for Dutch in Brussels with his current position as alderman in Kortrijk:

(7) *I cannot be as puristic in Kortrijk as people can be in Aalst. I have lived in Groot-Bijgaarden for 30 years, so at the frontline, where I every day, I worked in Brussels, where I every day had to defend my own language, so as a customer hey. Always having to say 'in Dutch please' in Brussels when one was served and so I have indeed fought this battle and I come now to Kortrijk.*

At the same time, however, he also expressed awareness of the need of French in Kortrijk, due to its geographical proximity to France and due to the physical presence of French tourists and visiting customers:

(8) *You cannot forget that here we are next to the French border and that a quite lot of French people visit and if you have to explain your [menu] card every time to a French-speaker what it says exactly then that is quite labour intensive. In other words that people advertise menu cards in multiple languages one of which for example French or also in English, etc. against that I have absolutely no objection, as long as it is also stated in Dutch, yes.*

Interestingly, while both aldermen also expressed negative attitudes towards the use of English in shop names and their towns' LL, this did not elicit a similarly strong reaction or counteraction as with the use of French:

(9) *Oh I think you see that from Veurne until Maaseik¹¹, those English slogans. Personally I wonder.. is it that much more hip if it is in English? I think... but I also think that you shouldn't also react too forcefully or forced I think... I think that you should positive... yes by presenting Dutch as a fun language [...] Yes OK, [English] is fashionable. I think that now it is English, 50 years ago that was French. [...] I find this to be partially peculiar but also not to the extent to now... start a crusade against it.*

Compared to earlier statements about French in LLs, here the alderman is more tolerant when it comes to English.

Shop-owners' and clients' alternative rationales for using French

In sum, the two aldermen overtly contextualize French signs in the LL of their town as an index of nascent Frenchification, a lack of integration by new-comers, or as a symptom of Flemish inferiority complexes and advocate against French signs as a way to emphasize the

Flemish identity of their towns. The shop-owners, however, listed a more diverse range of rationales in explaining why they adopted French. When asked to explain why he had opted for this particular – French – name, the owner of the *Frituur Grand Place* snack bar in Kortrijk mentioned a purely aesthetic motivation stating that

- (10) *in the end it [the name Grand Place] was our first choice and, and that we, well, thought it sounded nice, it sounded nice and it was our first choice, so we stuck to our first choice... well we didn't really opt for a change.*

The choice of *Grand Place* thus relates to it sounding “nice” and arguably more attractive than the Dutch alternative, which in a Flemish, Dutch-speaking context might strike one as plain or mundane. In a TV interview¹², the snack bar owner added that the name *Frituur Grand Place* sounded more “chic” than the Dutch or English equivalent. Indeed, research has shown that French in advertising is frequently used as a connotational index of more refined taste and elegant luxury (Piller 2003; Kelly-Holmes 2014). Such more *emblematic or symbolic use of French* invokes ‘the complex of symbolic associations of French with extreme sophistication, European chic and exclusiveness’ (Blommaert 2010:29). As a brand marketing scheme, it stands for ‘Frenchness’ (ibid.), and is adopted globally to entice customers in commercial advertising in non-French-speaking countries all over the world. Figure 2 shows two instances of such symbolic French in Stockholm and Hong Kong. Hence, this French name is not a sign of Frenchification in the sense that it implies customers can use French to order French fries in this establishment. While the aldermen do recognize the validity of such a marketing strategy, they still consider it a threat and instance of disloyalty (see quotes 1 and 3).

FIGURE 2 HERE

Figure title: French in Stockholm and Hong Kong

The use and visibility of French in the LLs of Aalst and Kortrijk was not restricted only to shop names, but was also found on bilingual Dutch-French signs. In order to gauge the intentions of the shop owners behind such linguistic choices, several shop owners were also briefly interviewed in both cities and asked to explain why they included French. In these cases, the particular use of French by these shops had not been as explicit a target for the alderman or an issue covered in the media debate. The owner of the Scaldis store in Kortrijk clarified that the use of French translations on his shop's façade (see figure 3) was purely pragmatic:

- (11) *[French on our façade] is because of the fact that effectively our main activity is the fabrication of commodities. [...] at this moment, I am surely for 70 percent active in French-speaking Belgium. So that is why it [French signs] stays there.*

FIGURE 3

Figure title: Scaldis in Kortrijk

Here French is used to provide important referential information about the commodities to French-speaking customers from Wallonia. Such *referential French* is indexical of the fact that French can be used as a language of business, for transactions and conversations inside the store. However, the explanation of the shop-owner does not imply the use of French to accommodate to an increasing French-speaking population in Kortrijk itself. As such, the intended indexical meaning is scaled nationally, and not locally.

In Aalst, the use of French on bilingual French-Dutch posters displayed by the international chain franchise store ‘Ken’ (see figure 4) was explained in simple terms by the store manager:

(12) *Why that is... actually because KEN is also in France and they in fact make their signs for the two sides, at once. And that is actually more the reason why it is bilingual.*

FIGURE 4 HERE

Figure title: Ken in Aalst

Here the use of French on signs connects to the geographical reach of the international chain store Ken: advertising campaigns and posters are centrally produced and distributed to all branches within Belgium, for Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. Such cost-cutting bilingual display is therefore also not per se indicative of French-speaking inhabitants of Kortrijk. Again, this indexical explanation is scaled internationally, and not locally.

Eight passers-by were also stopped at random in the street during fieldwork by Boterberg (Boterberg 2014) and briefly asked their opinions in a semi-structured manner about the use of French by shops in their towns. The questions asked centered on whether they sometimes hear other languages than Dutch in their city and what they thought about the use of English or French on shop signs. Additionally, they were shown examples such as the ones discussed above and invited to comment on what they represent, according to them, and whether or not this was a good or bad thing in their opinion. These perceptions were gauged so as to in part have access to opinions which are not directly involved in the policy-making or linguistic decision-making, but which instead encompass the bottom-up perspective of the

local Flemish inhabitants in this language ideological debate. Four of the eight people who were interviewed claimed to be neutral and overall inattentive to public language use or the languages spoken in the public space. Their ages ranged from 45 to 66 years old. One 24 year old passer-by in Kortrijk voiced positive attitudes towards the use of English, calling it “hip”, as well as towards the use of French, which he called “chique”. Alternatively, one 66 year old inhabitant of Aalst voiced negative attitudes towards the use of French, English or any other foreign language that is not Dutch in shop signs. The age factor may prove telling here: while the youngest passer-by was one of the most positive, the eldest interviewee – old enough to have experienced first-hand the political debates and linguistic problems in Brussels and Belgium during the second half of the twentieth century – was the most negative:

(13) *When I go to Brussels, I also speak Dutch. I don't want to talk French there because it is a Flemish city. It is the capital of Flanders.*

Similar to the aldermen's statements, this passer-by thus also explicitly connected his disapproval of the use of French in Aalst with Brussels.

(RE-)EMERGING INDEXICALITIES OF FRENCH IN PROVINCIAL FLANDERS

We can now start to sketch the contours of the ‘indexical field’ (Eckert 2008) of French in Flemish LLs. This indexical field encompasses the different contextualized interpretations and meaning-making processes behind how French is perceived by individuals. Based on the gathered interview data, this field emerges as diversified and ‘polyvalent’ (Rampton 2006), with multiple interpretations and rationalizations. On the one hand, contemporary interpretations in the data see French signs as indicative of French-speaking tourists or clientele from France and Wallonia who briefly visit Flanders. Alternatively, the visibility of French can also be indexical of linguistic accommodation to French-proficient newcomers who moved to Flanders from Brussels and who might have a non-Belgian, immigrant

background. The use of French could also be perceived as a historical trace of a bilingual bourgeoisie or French-speaking elite in Flanders who continue to use French amongst themselves. To some extent, this status of French as the language of the elite and of social mobility during the nineteenth and twentieth century in Flanders is still reflected in old inscriptions or plaques which have stood the test of time and are still visible on façades, or in the names of commercial businesses which have been around for decades. Figure 5 shows a historical and contemporary picture of the pharmacy store ‘Crocodile’ (which would be ‘Krokodil’ in Dutch), which opened in the Grote Markt of Kortrijk in 1895.

FIGURE 5 HERE

Figure title: Crocodile in Kortrijk

The picture from the late nineteenth century shows fully bilingual signs (on which French is more predominantly displayed) in addition to the French name, while the 2015 picture shows the French name and monolingual Dutch signs, indicative of the sociolinguistic changes that have taken place in Flanders in the decades in between the two photographs. Finally, French shop names or signs were also construed in the interviews by some as indexical of ethno-cultural associations of France with elegant “chiqueness” or refined taste. This last interpretation is in line with a recent global trend of commodification of French language use in commercial discourse and intercultural advertising (Piller 2003; Kelly-Holmes 2014). Similar to the distinctions made in different indexical meanings of Chinese in Washington DC’s Chinatown by Leeman & Modan (2009), these indexicalities of French are also historically ordered. The first three options I listed here are instances of ‘direct indexicality’ (Ochs 1992), whereby French *referential signs* address and index the physical presence of actual French-speakers. The latter, however, is symbolic language use of a derived, second

order of signification (Silverstein 2003; Eckert 2008; Leeman & Modan 2009), where French is connected to ethnocultural stereotypes of France and French culture. This involves ‘indirect indexicality’ (Ochs 1992) which builds on the first order of direct indexicality but adds a new indexical load (Silverstein 2003; Leeman & Modan 2009). Scollon & Scollon refer to such direct indexicality as ‘geopolitical indexing’, while indirect indexicality implies ‘symbolization based on sociocultural associations’ (Scollon & Scollon 2003:119).

While the aldermen do express awareness of the different motivations shop-owners might have for adopting French on commercial signage, they still express great sensitivity to French and insist on arguing in favour of Dutch alternatives. It is the history of language and linguistic conflict in Belgium combined with the residential trajectory of French-speakers from the Brussels region into Flanders that permeates their wary stances, irrespective of whether Frenchification actually forms a genuine threat. Within this complex structure of ordered indexical meaning these Flemish nationalist aldermen’s rhetorical interpretations *rescale* the use of French both historically and geographically. *Historically*, the sight of French in Aalst and Kortrijk triggers a re-emerging fear of Frenchification and of anything reminiscent of historical struggles for equality and status-recognition for the Dutch-speaking community and Flemish culture. This latent sensitivity to French oppression reactivates familiar interpretations and brings about *historical recursivity* in indexical meaning by taking a step back in time to grievances of the past. Through their political stances and policy propositions, the aldermen also connect the use of French in Aalst and Kortrijk with the linguistic polemic situation of the periphery of Brussels. This entails *geographical rescaling* in multiple ways. First, it implies an ideological spread from center (the capital) to periphery (the provinces). Interestingly, in the interview the alderman also specified that he himself has moved from the Brussels region (Groot-Bijgaarden) to Kortrijk. In this case, actual human mobility coincides with the mobility of indexical values. Secondly, the aldermen’s

antagonism against the use of French shop names, specifically, also boils down to the rescaling and appropriation of a global commercial phenomenon – the use of French as an ethno-cultural fetishized and commodified resource - into a highly localized Flemish frame of reference and history of linguistic conflict in Belgium. Finally, this geographical rescaling is intensified through the media attention for this language ideological debate: a local policy incident instantly and almost simultaneously becomes national news and is debated by citizens and politicians on a national scale. In each case of rescaled indexicality, French signs are taken out of context and become ‘entextualized’ (Silverstein & Urban 1996) in the ideologically charged interpretations of the Flemish nationalist aldermen. As such, the nature of the indexical field of French in the current political climate in Flemish towns such as Aalst and Kortrijk emerges as both *intrinsically ordered* with direct and derived indirect indexicality, as *geographically rescaled* from Brussels to the Flemish hinterland and with polycentric (Blommaert *et al* 2005) level shifting of shop names from a global to a local scale, and as *historically recursive* through the volatile re-emergence of Flemish sensitivity to the use of French in the present time.

FLEMISH LLS AS IDEOLOGICALLY MALLEABLE TOOLS

At this point, it must be clear that the positions of the Flemish nationalist aldermen quoted in the previous section embody a desire to adhere to a linguistically homogeneous Flanders and to maintain the authentic Dutch-speaking and Flemish character of their towns in Flanders. In light of the long struggle by the Flemish Movement for the recognition of the Dutch language and parity between French and Dutch as official languages in Belgium, the use of French in Flemish LLS is seen in particular as a threat and lack of pride amongst Flemings.

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, the Flemish Movement and Flemish nationalists have always showcased great sensitivity to the use of French on public signage

and in linguistic landscapes in Flanders. An emblematic figure in this respect was language activist and Flemish politician Flor Grammens (1899-1985) who was a well-known and fervent advocate for the language laws in Belgium. In 1937, he started overpainting the use of French on bilingual street and traffic signs in municipalities close to the language borders in Flanders where Dutch was the official language, but French was *de facto* used for governance (Janssens 2012). As Figure 6 illustrates, he would either overpaint the French text to make the bilingual signs compliant with the monolingual Dutch language policy, or he would obliterate the signs completely.

FIGURE 6 HERE

Figure title: Grammens overpainting French text on bilingual signs in Flanders in the 1930s

The use of French in the LL of the periphery of Brussels has been equally controversial with both private citizens and political interest groups, as well as municipal authorities and Aldermen for Flemish Affairs attempting to impose Dutch as the dominant language in the LL (Janssens 2012). Van Mensel *et al* (2016) provide examples of bilingual French-Dutch signs in this region where the French text has been overpainted. These examples from the periphery of Brussels which took place in the past and which continue to take place in the present illustrate the *longue durée* of this protracted language ideological debate of Flemish nationalist striving for territorial monolingualism, as well as its ‘conjunctural’ nature (Blommaert 2011: 244), with occasional controversial upsurges in the likes of the “Frituur Grand Place” incident (Vandenbroucke forthcoming), and other Flemish nationalist policy propositions for the Flemish public sphere mentioned in this paper.

To a large extent, this current re-emergence of Flemish striving for a homogeneously Dutch-speaking territory and LL far outside of the periphery of Brussels perpetuates

nineteenth-century ideological creeds of Romantic one nation-one language ideals. Similar to the Aldermen for Flemish Affairs in Brussels' periphery, the aldermen in Kortrijk and Aalst see the public space and linguistic landscape as a political resource and ideologically malleable tool they can use to convey the predominance of Dutch to inhabitants, old and new, and to encourage newcomers to learn Dutch and to participate and integrate in mainstream Flemish society. A predominant Dutch-speaking LL becomes a means to instill a 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1977), in this case not a social, but a linguistic one. A 'doxa' refers to that which is accepted as self-evident and taken for granted in a society: a reality which 'is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible order amongst others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned' (Bourdieu 1977:166). By creating a monolingual LL policy-makers hope to generate a 'carry-over effect' (Landry & Bourhis 1997:29) from LL practices to spoken language use and private linguistic behavior (see also Cenoz & Gorter 2006). The potential of LLs to impose a Dutch-speaking doxa is also acknowledged and underscored by the aldermen (see quote 4). In light of the latent sensitivity to French, however, not all languages are treated equally: in this homogenous Dutch-speaking doxic LL, the use of Thai or English is deemed as somewhat acceptable by the aldermen (see quotes 1 and 9), while French in the opinions of the aldermen is explicitly singled out as an inappropriate choice in face of what they view as a still legitimate and relevant Flemish Struggle cause, and it should therefore be replaced by Dutch alternatives.

Similar 'symbolic battles to conquer the LL' (Janssens 2012:43) take place in other European nation-states as well. Barni & Vedovelli (2012), for example, describe how in certain Italian towns, the LL became a political battleground through the local adoption of legislation banning Chinese language use from shop signs in an effort to ensure an Italian-dominated LL. Both the Toubon Law in France and the Bill 101 in Québec similarly require commercial signage in LLs to use French alongside any other language used in order to

protect and ensure a French-dominant LL (Blackwood & Tufi 2012). What makes this Belgian case of Flemish aldermen unique and different from the Québécois, French or Italian context, however, is the fact that the Flemish aldermen try to enforce a doxic monolingual LL in an area over which they have no legal say, in a matter which does not lie within their power as municipal aldermen, as long as commercial and private language use remains not regulated by language laws throughout Belgium. As they cannot impose overt, official policies, they have to resort to covert measures, such as by introducing certain semiotic adjustments to the public sphere, or by making the suggestion of adopting a Dutch name when registration documents are filed for a new business, or by organizing annual competitions for the most attractive Dutch name of a commercial establishment, to name a few examples. In light of all this, it comes as no surprise that the LL-related incidents in Aalst and Kortrijk instigated (social) media attention and controversy over the past couple of years, but remained largely ‘inconsequential debates’ (Blommaert 1999:29), as the aldermen’s suggestions were not all put into practice and were eventually de-prioritized by the local municipal government. However, given the long history of linguistic polemics in Belgium, the protracted nature of this particular Belgian language ideological debate and the symbolic and emblematic value attributed to the LL in nationalist ideologies, one can still expect many more of these LL-related maneuvers and policy propositions to occur in the future in Belgian towns where Flemish nationalistss are in power. As the old adage goes, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

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7. Figures

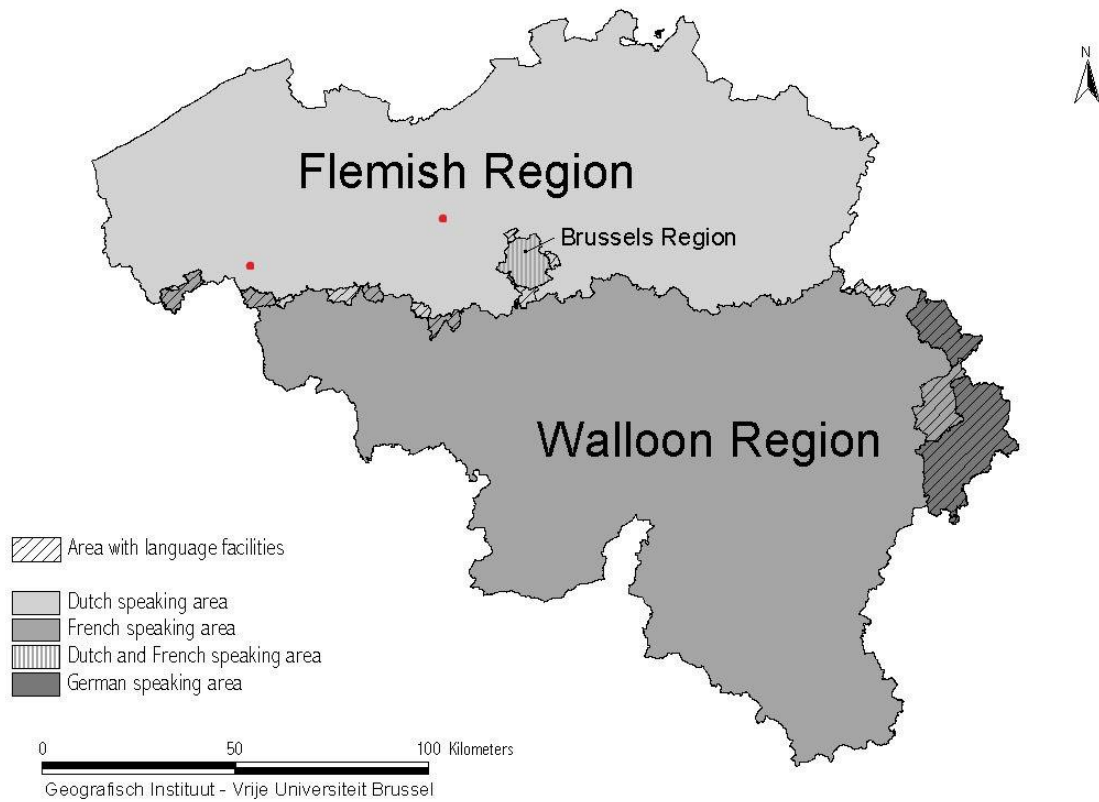


Figure 1

Figure title: Regions and linguistic Communities in Belgium, with Aalst and Kortrijk in red



Figure 2

Figure title: French in Stockholm and Hong Kong



Figure 3

Figure title: Scaldis in Kortrijk



FIGURE 4

Figure title: Ken in Aalst



FIGURE 5

Figure title: Crocodile in Kortrijk



FIGURE 6 HERE

Figure title: Grammens overpainting French text on bilingual signs in Flanders in the 1930s

8. Endnotes

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² See Boterberg (2014: 162-170) for full interviews in Dutch. My English translations are provided here.

³ ‘Dutch’ to refer to the standardized official language of Belgium, whereas ‘Flemish’ denotes the various regional dialects of Dutch spoken throughout Flanders.

⁴ However, it is important to realize that language in the Belgian context only functions as the emblematic surface level of much deeper historical struggles over socio-economic and political power amongst the different linguistic communities and elites (Blommaert 2011; Willemys 2002).

⁵ As mentioned by Janssens (2012: 44), Flemish provincial authorities ordered to academic studies by professors of law into the “legal possibilities of ‘dutchification’” in Brussels’ periphery.

⁶ Technically, the alderman in Kortrijk is not officially charged with ‘Flemish Affairs’. He is the aldermen for Tourism and Economic affairs, amongst others, but as the linguistic incidents referenced in this paper indicate his policy line also touches upon strengthening the Dutch-speaking nature of his town and issues related to language use in the LL.

⁷ See the 2012 election programs of the Flemish nationalist party in the towns Aalst, Kortrijk and Wijnegem. The program for Aalst is discussed in Maly (2013).

⁸ While the snack bar owner, the aldermen and the general public in Belgium read this commercial name singularly as monolingual French, the name is in effect an example of bilingual “simultaneity” (Woolard 1998), as it could also be in English. As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, reading the sign as monolingually French implies a bending of a potentially plurilingual sign.

⁹ I am grateful to Silke Boterberg for conducting the interviews and part of the fieldwork and for allowing me to use her data for the argument developed in this paper. See Boterberg (2014: 162-170) for full interviews in Dutch. My English translations are provided here.

¹⁰ Vlaams Brabant is the province in which the Brussels Capital Region is located, hence it refers here to the Flemish Periphery of Brussels.

¹¹ Veurne is a town close to the Belgian-French border in the province of West-Vlaanderen, while Maaseik is a town close to the Belgian-Dutch border and Belgian-German border in the province of Limburg. The space in between Veurne and Maaseik thus covers the entire Flemish Region.

¹² See <http://www.focus-wtv.be/video/frituur-verandert-van-naam-op-vraag-van-schepen?page=8>