Dutch Today

Marc van Oostendorp
Meertens Instituut & Leiden University

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Language is, like, really my thing

Paulien Cornelisse (2009) is one of the biggest bestsellers of this year; written by a non-linguist, it promotes a rather relaxed and joyful view of the Dutch language.
2009
This year also a dictionary for very young children appeared, in English (actually a translation of a Dutch original), published by the most authoritative Dutch publisher of dictionaries.
The State of Dutch at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Legal matters

Dutch and other languages

Extra-Governmental Organizations
The Dutch Empire

Dutch in Europe

The Dutch Language Union

Source: www.taalunieversum.org
The Dutch Language Union

The Dutch Language Union (‘Nederlandse Taalunie’, NTU) was founded in 1980. It is a common governmental body of the Dutch and Flemish governments, which have delegated all their language policies (as well as those concerning Dutch literature) to it; since 2006 also Suriname participates.

Formally the NTU is guided by the ministers of culture; the everyday administration is in the hands of a Secretary General (alternatingly a Dutch and a Flemish official).

“The aim of the Language Union is to support users of Dutch around the world so that the language can continue to be as dynamic and vigorous as it is today.”
Word List of the Dutch Language

Source: Edition 2006
Spelling

- The language issue which typically provokes the most heated debate is orthography.
- The ‘official’ orthography is decided by a state committee; its use is compulsory in schools and for people in public office.
- The word list is adapted every 10 years, which always causes heated debate.
- Changes in the 2005 edition caused a large number of media in the Netherlands (not in Belgium) to rebel, and publish its own alternative spelling list (the ‘White Book’).
The Little White Book

Genootschap Onze Taal

het Witte Boekje Spellinggids van het Nederlands

Source: Edition 2006
The Kingdom of the Netherlands has four languages with some official status: Dutch; Frisian; Papiamento (on the southern Dutch Antilles); English (on the northern Antilles island of Sint Maarten).

Recognized minority languages (European Charter): Frisian, Low Saxon, Limburgian, Yiddish, Roma and Sinti.

Dutch is the *de facto* common language of the Dutch government and the government of the whole Kingdom.

But that isn’t mentioned explicitly in many Laws; Furthermore, Dutch is not mentioned in the Constitution.

The present government has announced a plan to change this.
The Government promotes the simple and accurate use of Dutch as a language of administration, of culture and of everyday use, and in order to do this registers the Dutch languages in the Constitution, without diminishing in this way the legal recognition of (the use of) Frisian.
The Kingdom of Belgium has three official languages: French, Dutch and German. Each is spoken in its own territory. Brussels is the common capital of Belgium, all three languages play an official role there. Belgium has not signed the European Charter for Regional Languages or Languages of Minorities.
The State of Dutch at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century
A continuous source of annoyance for a (possibly small) group of people is the fact that many signs in the National Airport Schiphol are in English.

In 2007, the largest government party CDA asked the government to put pressure on Schiphol to change this.

But the government refused, because of the ‘international character’ of the airport.
Another source of worries is that the formal openings of the academic years (in September) at various universities are conducted in English.

Both rectors and guest politicians speak English, at least in some cases.
English in Education

- At this moment, around 80% of Master Programmes at Dutch Universities are in Dutch (at some technical and agricultural universities, this percentages is at 100%)
- BA programmes typically are in Dutch (with about 20% being taught in English exclusively)
- There are around 100 secondary schools (12-18yr old) who offer a bilingual programme, where many of the classes are in a foreign language. This is almost always English (but also German)
- Some primary schools are now also experimenting with offering part of the courses in English (or German or French)
- Bilingual school programmes are disallowed in Belgium
Does Bilingual Primary Education Harm the Dutch Language?

According a 2007 questionnaire, a clear majority of Dutch speakers is not worried about bilingual education, even at the primary school level.
The Dutch Elite and the Frisian Language

“Why does everyone in Holland believe that Frisian is a separate language, while there are more speakers of Turkish in Amsterdam than speakers of Frisian in Leeuwarden? Is that racism? . . . I am not opposed to Frisian, but everybody should understand that this language is a myth. (Columnist Ronald Plasterk on Dutch tv, June 2000)
The Dutch Elite and the Frisian Language II

“My heart warmly beats for the Frisian language, and as a minister I will defend its interests. The fact that I am now doing my best to speak Frisian to you should make that clear.” (Minister Plasterk, May 2007)
Other regional languages

- Next to Frisian, the Dutch State has also recognized Low Saxon and Limburgian as regional languages.
- However, different from Frisian, these languages do not get financial or material support by the measures as indicated by the Charter; recognition is a mere formality.
- This reflects a popular belief that Frisian is the only real regional minority language, the others are ‘dialects’ of Dutch.
Other minority languages

- The two largest groups of relatively recent immigrants are Turks and Moroccans (the latter mostly Berber)
- In the 1980s and 1990 large programmes were set up, in particular in primary education, for teaching pupils at least partly in their own language
- In the 2000s these programmes have been all but abolished, usually referring to widespread (but not well-founded) belief that such education harms rather than promotes the acquisition of Dutch
- In particular, a programme Onderwijs in Allochtone Levende Talen (Education in Non-Indigenous Living Languages) was abolished in 2004
Dutch Sign Language

- Dutch Sign Language (DSL) has been taught since 1980; before that date it was disallowed, again because it was believed that it would harm the acquisition of Dutch.
- In 1997 a state committee, under the presidency of prof. Anne Baker argued for official recognition of DSL, but it never materialized.
- It is sometimes used on tv, and some work has been done on standardisation.
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Extra-Governmental Organizations
Onze Taal

The association *Onze Taal* (Our Language) is probably the largest association of ‘language lovers’ in the world (appr. 35,000 members)

- It publishes a monthly magazine, books, a website, etc.
- Furthermore, it offers ‘language advice’ to its members, by telephone or e-mail; usually on issues of correctness, but also etymology, etc.
- It also organizes a biannual conference with about 1,500 visitors.
Onze Taal II

- The association is a relatively important actor in language policies
- It is invited to ‘correct’ the Queen’s annual State of the Nation address before it is spoken
- It is responsible for the White Book
- It works for the Dutch Language Union as well
- Interestingly, membership is almost exclusively Dutch; there are very few Flemish members
Language Advice

- Do you have language advice for me?
- I sure do. Shut up.
Other Associations

- Next to Onze Taal, there is a number of associations, which are all much smaller and which typically operate on the assumption that Onze Taal is not sufficiently radical.
- Examples are: Stichting Nederlands (Foundation Dutch), Taalverdediging (Language Defense), and Ampzing (name of a 17th century purist) who all are opposed to the use of English.
- The total membership of these probably doesn’t surpass 100 members.
Amsterdam is Crying

Amsterdam huilt

Aj Amsterdam, Welcome in this beautiful town, dear tourist. **

Mensch, das ist ja blöd. Ich dachte Amsterdam sei die Hauptstadt der Niederlande. *

* Das ist physikalisch, ich dachte Amsterdam die Hauptstadt war.
** Aj Amsterdam, Welkom in deze mooie stad, leuke tourist, hoe kom je hier?
It seems that on average, Dutch speakers, in particular those in the Netherlands, are rather optimistic about their own language.

There is a shift to English in various domains, and this is sometimes noticed, but it is typically not seen as a big threat, except by a small minority.
No Way

Hillary must have been looking forward to this sentence in last Tuesday’s speech: ‘No way, no how, no McCain.’ [...] But this ‘no way’ sounded funny, to my ears in any case, because the Dutch who have adapted ‘no way’ already a while ago, aren’t those who we take seriously. Serious Dutch politicians do not say ‘no way’. [...] ‘No way’ in the Netherlands is the exclusive property of young people who get intense inspiration from American tv series. My mind’s eye sees a student, a girl, with a happy ponytail. She would for instance state: ‘I am not going to take that test again, no way!’ [...] But I should add: the girlie students who now say ‘no way’ will dominate Dutch politics within about ten years of course, and by then we will also take ‘no way’ seriously.

Paulien Cornelisse 2009