

Michel Francard

The influence of Brussels on the French spoken in Belgium Vocabulary of Flemish and Dutch origin

Translation: Jennifer Corrigan

The role of big cities in the evolution of languages has held the attention of linguists for decades. As places of constant coming and going, mixing and exchanging, urban centres are real hubs for linguistic innovation, with an impact which extends far beyond the city limits.

The influence of major urban centres on the evolution of French in Belgium has not yet been studied in detail as regards the present or the past. This article is in keeping with this theme, with an examination of the French spoken today in Brussels.

Following a short review of the history of the languages spoken in the capital and a clarification of the sometimes misleading label 'Brussels French', this study discusses the Germanic component of the 'Brussels' vocabulary, by distinguishing between the forms and idioms specific to the capital and those which are shared with Wallonia.

Through these examples, we shall attempt to better understand the status of the French spoken in Brussels and the role of the capital in the dynamics of the French used in Belgium.

Michel Francard is a professor at Université catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, Centre de recherche VALIBEL – Institut Langage & Communication), where he teaches French linguistics and sociolinguistics. His current research is centred in particular on the varieties of French in use today and their relationship with the linguistic, social, political and economic environment. He has worked in collaboration on several French dictionaries, such as the *Nouveau Petit Robert* beginning with the 2008 edition. He has just published the *Dictionnaire des belgicisms* with G. Geron, R. Wilmet and A. Wirth (Editions De Boeck, 2010).

Contacts :

Michel Francard,
+32(0)477 572 056, michel.francard@uclouvain.be

Christophe Mincke (Senior Editor),
+32(0)2 211 78 22 / +32(0)473 21 02 65
mincke@fusl.ac.be



Introduction ¹

The role of big cities in the evolution of languages has held the attention of linguists for decades. As places of constant coming and going, mixing and exchanging, urban centres are real hubs for linguistic innovation, with an impact which extends far beyond the city limits.

The influence of major urban centres on the evolution of French in Belgium has not yet been studied in detail as regards the present or the past. There have of course been sociolinguistic studies providing an overview of the evolution of the linguistic practices of the urban population; but very few of them go as far as describing the characteristic features of the linguistic varieties which exist in the country's main French-speaking cities.

This article provides a brief examination of the French spoken today in Brussels. Following a short review of the history of the languages spoken in the capital (1), we shall identify precisely what is included in the sometimes misleading label 'Brussels French' (2). We shall then illustrate the 'Brussels' vocabulary (3) by distinguishing between the forms and idioms specific to the capital (3.1) and those which are shared with Wallonia (3.2). Through these examples, we shall attempt to better understand the status of the French spoken in Brussels and its role in the dynamics of the French used in Belgium.

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1. Brussels, a French-speaking island in a historically Flemish territory²

The French-speaking character of Brussels is the result of a long process which began in the Middle Ages. When Brussels was founded,³ the indigenous population spoke a Low German dialect called *Dietsch*. The city belonged to the principality – and later, duchy – of Brabant, which was bilingual in terms of its administrative use of languages: *Welche* (Walloon) in the 'Romanic country of Brabant' and *Dietsch* in the rest of the territory.

When vernacular languages were introduced in princely chancelleries in the 13th century, Latin was replaced by *Dietsch* in Brussels as the language of administration, unlike Flanders and Wallonia where French was chosen. This situation continued throughout the Burgundian period.

The situation evolved in the 16th century during the Spanish regime due to the growing gallicisation of the court and the elite. As Charles V had made French the language of central administration, with Flemish used only in local administration, an increasing number of administrative acts were written in French. This trend became more pronounced during the Austrian regime and was reinforced considerably during the French period, which imposed in particular the teaching of French in primary education.⁴ After the interlude during which the Belgian provinces joined the United Netherlands, and William I's vain attempt to impose a policy for the use of Dutch, the gallicisation movement resumed more than ever.

At the same time as this evolution in the practices of the elite and in administrative spheres, the use of French slowly gained ground throughout the population. The first mentions of a Romanic presence in Brussels date from the 13th century and tell of the arrival of Walloon workers employed in the field of construction. This situation hardly changed until the 19th century when French emerged more and more as the language of social promotion. The figures gathered from censuses⁵ speak for themselves: French speakers represented approximately 30% of the population of Brussels in 1830, whereas 100 years later they represented 70%.

The increase in the number of French speakers in Brussels in the 20th century was the result of a dual movement: the gallicisation of the indigenous population and the arrival of new inhabitants who spoke French. We know the current figures (and the

² For more specific information regarding the historical aspects, see among others Baetens Beardsmore 1971 (19-56) and Bernard 1997 (239-250).

³ The first establishment in the marshy valley of the Zenne, a tributary of the Scheldt, appears to date back to the 6th century; the first record of the city's name dates from 966.

⁴ Unlike the institution of free and compulsory primary education at the beginning of the 20th century, which modified linguistic practices considerably, the measures taken during the French period had a limited impact, as the majority of families in Brussels did not have the means to send their children to school.

⁵ As we know, with the usual means employed for surveys of linguistic practices, certain responses reflect perceived reality or 'desired' reality rather than experienced reality. The last survey of this type took place in Belgium in 1947 (and the results were only published in 1954), with an end being put to this practice following the pressure from 300 Flemish mayors in particular who questioned the accuracy of the data gathered with respect to actual linguistic practices.

difficulties involved in establishing them due to the lack of a reliable counting instrument): according to estimations, French speakers now represent more than 85% of the population of Brussels (Bernard 1997; Janssens 2001, 2008).⁶ But what French do they speak?

2. 'Brussels French'?

It is just as misleading to speak of Brussels French as it is to speak of Paris French or Montreal French. The linguistic, cultural and economic mix found in major urban centres prevents us from recognising a unique linguistic variety.

Whether it is spoken by a multilingual European civil servant, a Walloon employee who has recently moved up to the capital or a student of north African origin, French in Brussels has many facets which are not specific to the city, apart from the fact that they coexist in the capital of Europe.

However, there is no shortage of publications dealing with 'Brussels regional French' (Baetens Beardsmore, 1971) or 'Brussels French' (Lebouc 1999, 2005). Among the written works to which these denominations apply are plays such as the very well-known *Mariage de Mademoiselle Beulemans* by Fernand Wicheler and Frantz Fonsoon,⁷ or *Bossemans et Coppennolle* by Paul Van Stale and Joris D'Hanswyck.⁸ Let us also mention comic writers such as Jean d'Osta (1909-1993) who created the character Jef Kazak,⁹ or Virgile (pseudonym of Léon Crabbé, 1891-1970), writer for several music halls in Brussels during the periods before and after World War II, prolific writer of songs and sketches which also appeared in *Pourquoi Pas?*, as well as his parodies of famous writers; this theme was also used by Coco Lulu (pseudonym of Victor Lefèvre, 1822-1904), Roger Kervyn de Marcke ten Driessche (1896-1965), etc. If we add the puppet plays of the emblematic Théâtre de Toone written since the 19th century, we end up with a rather heterogeneous inventory from a linguistic point of view, whose common denominator is the presence of Flemish elements (above all lexical and phonetic) integrated into a French morphosyntactic mould.

⁶ This estimation includes the inhabitants of Brussels who use French exclusively (at least in their private lives), representing 57% of the population according to Janssens (2008), as well as those who use it in addition to at least one other language. According to the same author, 95.5% of the inhabitants of Brussels interviewed declare that they speak French well/very well.

⁷ This play, which premiered on 18 March 1910 at the Théâtre de l'Olympia (Brussels), was presented that same year from the month of June onwards in Paris, where it was a resounding success (being performed hundreds of times).

⁸ This play premiered on 25 February 1938 at the Théâtre du Vaudeville (Brussels). The minor role of Madame Chapeau went on to become a character in her own right, often being referred to as an illustration of Brussels 'zwanze'.

⁹ The tribulations of this *façadeklacher*, or 'house painter', entertained readers of the newspapers *Pourquoi Pas?* and *Vlan* for many years.

This mixed code – which calls to mind others in Wallonia¹⁰ as well as in other French-speaking regions¹¹ – leads to writings which differ essentially as regards the proportion of Flemish elements introduced: they may be very numerous, thus making it difficult or impossible for an 'ordinary' French speaker to understand, or, on the contrary, they may exist in small enough doses to give a feeling of local colour.

Another claimed characteristic of 'Brussels French' is its working-class character, associated with the Marolles neighbourhood,¹² which explains the denomination 'Marolles French' also found in the literature. Whilst it is true that the Brussels 'working-class' survived until very recently in this neighbourhood, it is however difficult to find people there today who use this mixed code.¹³ Furthermore, the works in 'Brussels French' are usually written by intellectuals, whose ties or sympathies with the working-class milieu of the capital are undeniable, yet whose linguistic knowledge is used in order to write a literary composition, with all of the adjustments and even misrepresentations of linguistic reality which this entails, rather than for the transcription of authentic 'Brussels French'.¹⁴ In other words, Beulemans, Bossemans, Coppenolle, Jek Kazak and Madame Chapeau *perform* in Brussels French, but do not speak 'the' Brussels French.

It is therefore impossible to identify the linguistic practices which could be called 'Brussels French' as an independent variety. And although it is unquestionable that

¹⁰ In Wallonia, a 'French-Walloon' mixed code was used among others by Marcel Remy (1865-1906) from Liege, in his collection of short stories entitled *Les ceux de chez nous* (Liege: Editions Bénard, 1916), as well as by Aimé Quernol (1886-1950), author of *Toussaint de chez Dadite* (Brussels: Office de publicité, 1937), and more recently by Paul Biron, Louis Chalon and Léon Warnant.

¹¹ Here we are referring to the satirical writings found in several French-language newspapers in Africa, works written in Joul by writers from Quebec, works in Chiac from Acadia, New Brunswick, etc.

¹² Initially called the *Marolle* neighbourhood (in the singular form) and located between the Palais de Justice, Rue Haute and Boulevard de Waterloo, this neighbourhood gradually extended southwards to the area bordered by the former city wall and took the name of the *Marolles* (in the plural form).

¹³ To our knowledge, the last study on this linguistic variety was conducted by Régine Wilmet (1991). This indicates that, for most of the people interviewed, 'Brussels French' is considered to be a variety of Flemish with a significant number of French words; this observation had already been made by Baetens Beardsmore (1971: 51), thus raising the question as to the appropriateness of the name 'Brussels French' when referring to the French spoken in Brussels.

¹⁴ The linguistic features (vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, etc.) are certainly representative of the dialect spoken by the working-class inhabitants of Brussels, but there was also a will on behalf of the authors to condense these features and to accentuate the 'local' character of the works; hence the texts 'saturated' with these features in certain parts. For more on this subject, see Baetens Beardsmore 1971: 298ff.

a Flemish-French mixed code existed in Brussels in the working-class neighbourhoods, we do not have a precise description of it.¹⁵

It is interesting that this linguistic artefact is undoubtedly the one which foreigners – above all the French – associate with the way Belgians speak. That is the price paid for the international success of the abovementioned plays, and for an excusable lack of knowledge regarding the linguistic characteristics of a country whose name does not have the same origin as the language spoken on its territory. But it is not unusual to hear the same imprecision on behalf of Belgians themselves, which is less excusable.

In this article, rather than giving substance to the sort of linguistic *zinneke* that is Brussels French, we shall consider that there is (and was) a variety of French which takes a specific shape when it is spoken by native French speakers (and not bilingual Flemish speakers; see note 27) in Brussels, by focusing on the influence of the Germanic adstratum, i.e. Flemish and/or Dutch. This variety is shared quite extensively with other native French speakers, yet it experiences other types of linguistic interference in Wallonia with the regional Romanic languages, mainly Walloon, the Picardy dialect and the Gaume dialect.

¹⁵ This lack leads us to take certain assertions with a grain of salt, whereby 'Brussels French' is composed of loan words from the slang spoken by butchers (*louchebem*) or from the *bar-goensch* spoken by Flemish criminals, with some forms recorded by Teirlinck (1866). However, the significant presence of words of Walloon origin in the Marolles dialect is well documented (including in the literature, see Baetens Beardsmore 1971: 302ff.) and is explained quite easily. To the benefit of the development of Brussels in the 19th century and, in particular, the construction of many public buildings, Walloon workers came to the city and settled in working-class neighbourhoods such as the Marolles.

3. The contribution of Brussels to the vocabulary of French-speaking Belgians

3.1. Belgian-French words specifically from Brussels?

We shall discuss only one facet of the French used in Brussels, namely vocabulary, based on information found in the recent *Dictionnaire des belgicisms* (Francard *et al.* 2010),¹⁶ which deals with lexical resources attested in both Wallonia and Brussels.

Vocabulary specific to Brussels and its immediate surroundings¹⁷ is observed in the French used in the capital. As in many other regions of the French-speaking world, some dominant themes appear, with food ranking first, including forms such as *bloempanch* 'black pudding' (cf. Flemish *bloempanch*, Belgian Dutch *bloedpens*, same meaning), *kip kap* 'pork brawn' (cf. Flemish *kip kap* 'minced meat; pork brawn'), *plattekeis* 'soft white cheese' (cf. Flemish *plattekees/plattekeis*, same meaning, literally 'flat cheese'), *smoutebolle* 'doughnut served at fairs' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *smoutebol*, same meaning, literally 'ball cooked in lard'), and *stoemp* 'mashed potato and vegetables' (Flemish/Belgian Dutch *stoemp*, same meaning).

These words are scarcely known in Wallonia, where synonyms are observed which may be considered as regionalisms themselves: the Brussels French term *kip kap* is the semantic equivalent of the Wallonia French¹⁸ term *tête pressée*; *plattekeis*, of *maquée*; and *smoutebolle*, of *croustillon*. Furthermore, most of the forms borrowed from Flemish (or from Belgian Dutch) are not recorded in standard Dutch: the Flemish word *bloempanch* corresponds to the standard Dutch word *bloedworst*; *kip kap*, to the standard Dutch word *hoofdkaas*; *plattekeis*, to the standard Dutch word *kwark* or *wrongel*; *smoutebolle*, to the standard Dutch word *oliebol*; and *stoemp*, to the standard Dutch word *stampot*.

Similar observations may be made on the subject of vocabulary with respect to social relations. Examples include *babelaire* 'unrepentant chatterbox' (cf. Flemish *babbeleir*; standard Dutch *babbelaar*; Wallonia French *berdelleur*); *broubeler* 'to babble, to ramble on' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *broebelen*, same meaning; standard Dutch *brabbelen*; Wallonia French *berdeller*); *froucheler* 'to scheme, to fiddle with' (cf. Flemish *froechelen*; standard Dutch *frutselen*; Wallonia French *chipoter*); *zwanze* '1. joke which is typical of Brussels humour; 2. popular comic among the inhabitants of

¹⁶ The word list of this dictionary was established based on a sociolinguistic study conducted with approximately one hundred people from Brussels and Wallonia. In order to appear in this dictionary, the forms and phrases tested had to be used by at least 30% of the people, from both Brussels and Wallonia, or used by the vast majority (80%) of the people in a given region. One may refer to this dictionary for a more precise description of the forms mentioned in this article, as regards their spelling, pronunciation, meaning, vitality and geographic distribution, etymology, etc.

¹⁷ The 'immediate surroundings' of Brussels in this case refers to the part of Walloon Brabant which is close to the capital and which is influenced by the linguistic uses in Brussels much more than the other Walloon provinces.

¹⁸ The forms referred to as 'Wallonia French' in this paragraph (and elsewhere) are regional idiosyncrasies and therefore compete with their equivalent in standard French in the linguistic practices of French-speaking Walloons.

Brussels' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *zwans* 'silly thing; joke'; standard Dutch *grap*); and *avoir un boentje pour quelqu'un* 'to be in love with someone' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *een boontje voor iemand hebben*; standard Dutch *een voorliefde, een zwak voor iemand hebben*; Wallonia French *être bleu de quelqu'un*).

This double specificity – with respect to Wallonia French and standard Dutch – characterises many other Belgian-French words typical of the French spoken in Brussels, regarding the weather (*douf*, in *il fait douf* 'it is close'; cf. Flemish *het is doef*; standard Dutch *het is zwoel/drukkend*; Wallonia French *il fait malade*), games (*vogelpik* 'game of darts'; cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *vogelpik* 'game of darts'; standard Dutch *darts*; Wallonia French *jeu de flèches*¹⁹), and other 'emblematic' forms such as *caberdouche* 'pub' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *kabberdoe(ke)*; standard Dutch *kroegje*; Wallonia French *estaminet*) and *fritkot* 'chip shop' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *fritkot*; standard Dutch *frietkraam*; Wallonia French *baraque à frites/friture*), etc.

All of these forms – most of which are borrowed from Flemish – are characteristic of Brussels and its immediate surroundings, yet they are part of the French spoken in Belgium to the extent that, although they are not used in Wallonia – except in humorous contexts – they are often understood there. In other words, these forms are 'available' and, due to external circumstances, may be the object of a diffusion which deregionalises them, i.e. which ensures their vitality well beyond their area of origin.

Recent cases of deregionalisation of forms from Brussels are illustrated by words such as *snul* 'moron, idiot' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *snul*; standard Dutch *sul*), well known today throughout French-speaking Belgium thanks to television programmes made by a group of cheery lads²⁰ who use this word as their name; *stut* 'problem' (cf. Flemish/Belgian Dutch *stoot* 'noteworthy fact' – used ironically), made popular in Wallonia by the humorist Marc Herman, with his famous line 'Y a un stuuût!', and more recently, *zinneke* 'mongrel' (cf. Flemish *zinneke* 'mongrel'; standard Dutch *straathond*), which has grown in popularity thanks to the Zinneke Parade.²¹

3.2. Belgian-French words from Brussels used in Wallonia?

The small size of the country and the attractiveness of the capital, both in the economic²² and cultural domains (performances, media, etc.), leads one to think that linguistic uses spread from the capital city to the other regions of the country. The city's role as an innovative centre in terms of language has not yet been de-

¹⁹ In Wallonia, the phrase *au vogelpik* 'at random' is also used (cf. *choisir au vogelpik, répondre au vogelpik*, etc.), but it competes with its regional synonym (more common) *à pouf*.

²⁰ Under this name (as an allusion to the group of French humorists called *les Nuls*), Frédéric Jannin, Nicolas Fransolet, Kristiaan Debusscher, Stefan Liberski and Serge Honorez began making a series of television programmes for Canal + Belgium since its creation in 1989, and then for RTBf.

²¹ The Zinneke Parade is a colourful biennial event created in Brussels in 2000, which highlights the multicultural and cosmopolitan nature of the capital of Europe.

²² Close to 400,000 people come to Brussels every day for their professional activities, two thirds of whom come from Flanders and one third from Wallonia. See De Witte and Macharis 2010: 2.



scribed. Compared with the role played by Paris in the development of French in France (Lodge 2004), it is inevitably more limited in time and in its impact, essentially for historical reasons (see above).

If we examine the loan words from Flemish or Dutch in Wallonia, we notice that a not inconsiderable number of these forms are attested in French as well as in the regional Romanic dialects. Words such as *amigo* 'police premises' (cf. Flemish *amigo*), *blinquer* 'polish' (cf. Dutch *blinken*), *brof* 'stuff; junk; rubbish' (cf. Flemish *brof*), *cloppe* 'fear' (cf. Flemish *klop* 'beat of the heart'), *clopper* 'to be in agreement' (cf. Flemish *kloppen* 'to agree'), *crollé* 'curl' (cf. Flemish *krol*), and *dracher* 'to pour with rain' (cf. Flemish *draschen*) appear in the lists of Belgian-French words to proscribe²³ as well as in certain Walloon dialectal glossaries. Even if Brussels has played a role in their diffusion (as a bilingual city), the presence of these Flemish and/or Dutch words in Wallonia is explained more generally by the contacts on either side of the linguistic border.

It would also be rash to attribute to Brussels the presence of grammatical structures or phrases in Wallonia which are evidently translated literally from a Germanic adstratum, such as *trop court* (to say that a certain quantity is missing: for example in *deux jours trop court*, *quelques centimètres trop court*; cf. Dutch *te kort*), *bière au fût* 'draught beer' (cf. Dutch *bier van het vat*, literally 'beer from the barrel'; German *Bier vom Faß*), *qu'est-ce que c'est pour* (a person, a thing)? 'what sort of (person, thing) is that?' (cf. Dutch *wat is dat voor...?*; German *was ist das für...?*), *jouer sur la rue* 'play in the street' (cf. Dutch *op straat spelen*), *sous toit* 'sheltered from bad weather following the installation of the roof (in reference to a building)' (cf. Dutch *onder dak*; German *unter Dach*), etc. Once again, it would be more appropriate to speak of linguistic interference with Flanders in general rather than loan words from the French spoken in Brussels.

Let us also mention that the absence of pertinent sources sometimes prevents us from determining which language is the lender and which is the borrower. What should be concluded from the presence in both Brussels and Wallonia of forms such as *brosser* 'skip a class' (cf. Belgian Dutch *brossen*, same meaning; standard Dutch *spijbelen*), *extension téléphonique* 'telephone extension number' (cf. Belgian Dutch *extensie* same meaning; standard Dutch *toestel*), *frigobox* 'cooler' (cf. Belgian Dutch *frigobox*, same meaning; standard Dutch *koelbox*), etc.? Or phrases such as *assiette profonde* 'soup dish' (cf. standard Dutch *diep bord* 'deep dish'), *clé sur porte* 'turnkey (in reference to a building)' (cf. Belgian Dutch *een sleutel-op-de-deur woning*; standard Dutch *onmiddellijk te betrekken woning*), *faire de son nez* 'to give oneself airs' (cf. Flemish *van zijn neus maken*; standard Dutch *opsnijden*, *pochen*), *plaine de jeux* 'playground' (cf. standard Dutch *speelplein* 'playground'), etc.?

In certain cases, the comparison with other French-speaking areas provides an indirect response. Although *attendre famille* 'to be pregnant' is close to the Belgian Dutch *familie verwachten* (standard Dutch *zwanger zijn*), the presence of this phrase – or of similar variants – in Quebec, Acadia, Louisiana and in several African coun-

²³ Although certain Belgian-French words are considered to be 'respectable' (in particular the archaisms, see Doppagne 1979), the Flemish words are condemned most severely. A similar situation was observed in French-speaking Switzerland with respect to loan words from German-speaking Switzerland (Prikhodkine 2009).

tries is a point in favour of a loan word from French used in Belgian Dutch. Likewise for the structure *cent et un*, *cent et deux*, with a coordinating conjunction as in Belgian Dutch (*honderd en een*, *honderd en twee*), which is not used in standard French (*cent un*, *cent deux*) or in standard Dutch (*honderd een*, *honderd twee*), but is well attested in French as it was spoken in the past. Another example is the verb *driller* 'submit someone to repeated exercises', which is used with the same meaning in Dutch but is heard in particular in Quebec, thus suggesting a loan word from English²⁴ rather than from Dutch.

However, the absence of evidence in other French-speaking regions or of a corresponding English term leads us to consider the hypothesis of a loan word from Flemish or Dutch.²⁵ This is probably the case with the phrase *conducteur fantôme* 'person who drives in the wrong direction on a motorway', which is translated literally from the standard Dutch *spookrijder*, analogous to the German *Geisterfahrer* 'ghost driver'. Once again, it is unlikely that Brussels would play a role in the diffusion of this type of form in Wallonia.

In the current state of our documentation, we must therefore accept the fact that, although there are matching characteristics in Flemish or Dutch for a significant number of features of Belgian French, it is sometimes difficult to determine the language source with certainty due to a lack of documentation.

²⁴ Loan words from English explain why identical forms appear on either side of the linguistic border, such as *mop* (also in Flemish; standard Dutch *zwabber*), *plinth* (also in Belgian Dutch; standard Dutch *kast*), *roofing* (also in Belgian Dutch; standard Dutch *dakleer*), etc. Football vocabulary also contains forms borrowed from English in the French and Dutch spoken in Belgium (*back*, *goal*, *half*, *keeper*, etc.).

²⁵ The most simple cases are those of the words whose phonological form and spelling identify them clearly as loan words: e.g. *kern* 'restricted ministerial committee' (cf. Belgian Dutch *kern[kabinet]*), which is also used for the meetings of the main members of the Walloon regional government; or a phrase such as *en stoemeling* 'on the sly, on the quiet', which is not confined to Brussels and its surroundings, and which is an adapted loan word from the Flemish/Belgian Dutch *stoemelings* 'without saying anything; in a hidden manner' (standard Dutch *zwijgend*, *heimelijk*). The opposite process prevails for forms borrowed by the Flemish from Belgian French, such as *cache-poussière* 'blouse' (standard Dutch *stofjas*), *clignoteur* 'turn signal indicator' (standard Dutch *knipperlicht*), and *navetteur* 'someone who commutes regularly to work' (Belgian Dutch *pendelaar*; standard Dutch *forens* or, with reference to students, *spoorstudent*). But the distribution in both Wallonia and Flanders of the forms mentioned in this footnote is not clearly attributable to the influence of Brussels in particular.

4. Conclusion

For our illustration of the French spoken in Brussels, we chose to limit our approach to vocabulary and its Germanic component. We did not discuss the languages of immigration²⁶ as a major source of (recent) linguistic variation, or the uses of French which correspond to the reference standards.

The emphasis on the Germanic adstratum does away with the fact that most of the French spoken in Brussels also exists in Wallonia: hundreds of forms of Romanic origin from the fields of administration, politics and education are used throughout French-speaking Belgium; university slang, construction vocabulary, the world of entertainment, commercial terms and many more are commonly used by the inhabitants of Brussels and Wallonia.

The Germanic component of the vocabulary which is scarcely used beyond the city and its immediate surroundings is objectively limited with respect to that which exists both in Brussels and Wallonia. It is unlikely that Brussels had an influence on the diffusion of the latter – whose origins sometimes date back several centuries – in Wallonia. Instead, the many interferences have been the result of contacts on either side of the linguistic border, with their scope often extending to the regional Romanic languages of Wallonia.

Does this mean that Brussels does not play a role as a centre of linguistic innovation in French-speaking Belgium? It would be premature to affirm this before determining more clearly the paths taken by the words which travel from one region to another, based on detailed documentation.²⁷ The hundreds of thousands of Walloons who are in regular contact with inhabitants of Brussels probably adopt forms or turns of phrase which were unfamiliar to them. The presence of federal institutions in the capital has an impact on the linguistic practices of the departments and administrations under their remit. It is thus likely that a series of administrative terms (which J. Pohl refers to as *statalisms*) spread outwards from the capital, to each linguistic region. But is this situation – characteristic of a centralised and unitarian state – not simply a thing of the past, since the process of the federalisation of Belgium devolved part of the federal responsibilities to the Regions and Communities?

²⁶ These languages of immigration were the object of recent investigations, in particular within the framework of a concerted research action (ARC) entitled 'Régulation de l'hétérogénéité linguistique en contexte multiculturel' promoted at Université Catholique de Louvain by Michel Francard (spokesperson), Ludovic Beheydt, Luc Colles, Philippe Hambye, Silvia Lucchini, Anne Catherine Simon and Marie Verhoeven. The first results of this research were published in doctoral theses by Stéphanie Audrit, Karolien Declercq, Salima El Karouni and Jean-Louis Siroux.

²⁷ In-depth studies of a transdisciplinary nature may lead to unexpected discoveries. Thus, to demonstrate the linguistic influence of Brussels, Jacques Pohl (1979: 19) puts forward the example of bakery vocabulary, which is found in the region the furthest away from the capital, i.e. Gaume (in the south of the province of Luxembourg), and which the author associates with the origin of the wheat used in Gaume (Brussels region).

In-depth studies involving both written documentary resources and speakers themselves shall provide us with welcome input, as our knowledge in these areas is greatly lacking with respect to Brussels.²⁸

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²⁸ The only large-scale study of French in Brussels was the one conducted by Baetens Beardsmore (1971). Due to its date of publication, this work is now somewhat outdated from a methodological point of view (in particular in its lexical component), and suffers from a more fundamental lack (mentioned by Massion 1987: 52): this study does not differentiate clearly enough between the French spoken by the unilingual inhabitants of Brussels and that spoken by the bilingual inhabitants of Brussels (Dutch-French). The situation is somewhat different in Wallonia, where a long tradition of the study of regional Romanic dialects has attached importance to the relationship with regional French as well as to linguistic interference with the Germanic dialects.

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