

“Eenen schoonen peacock (in ’t Vlaamsch pauw of paho)”: historical sociolinguistic perspectives on language contact in Flemish-American heritage language newspapers

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While attention for heritage languages is on the rise within the domain of historical sociolinguistics (c.f. Kasstan, Auer & Salmons 2018; Brown 2019), much of the sociolinguistic history of Belgian Dutch in North America still remains to be explored. Nonetheless, the language use of Flemish immigrants in the United States provides an interesting case, as their multilingual and often conflictual pre-migration language ecology may have impacted their post-migration heritage language situation on various levels (c.f. Brown & Bousquette 2018).

Our goal in this presentation is threefold. We aim to contribute to a growing body of research investigating the role of extra-linguistic factors in heritage language use in the past (e.g., Brown 2019). We further wish to open up discussions on multilingualism beyond the contact situation between the majority and minoritized languages in the post-emigration context. Finally, we want to bring in issues of language conflict and language ideologies in combination with an empirical study of emigrants’ multilingual practices.

Specifically, we will focus on borrowing and related contact-induced linguistic practices, but also on language choice and language ideologies, in three Flemish-American newspapers from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (1890-1959). These local publications – *De Volksstem*, the *Gazette van Moline* and the *Gazette van Detroit* – circulated widely within the Flemish-American emigrant communities in the Midwest, and offer us a unique understanding of the local language situation.

We will start off this empirical case study by quantitatively investigating both the amount of borrowing (how many English-origin lexemes are transferred?) and the type of borrowing (which classes of English-origin words are transferred?), analyzed across time and space, bringing diachronic as well as regional differences to the fore. This will then be supplemented with a more qualitative metalinguistic analysis bringing in the language ideological background of the three newspapers.

By focusing on language use in three Flemish-American emigrant community newspapers, our case study reveals how, in spite of the dominant position of English in the US context, emigrants’ post-migration language ecology still continues to be shaped by – and interacts with – the Dutch-French language conflict from back in the Old Country, illustrating the importance of taking the broader socio-cultural context into consideration when studying the use of heritage languages.

Works cited

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- Kasstan, Jonathan R., Anita Auer & Joseph Salmons (2018): Heritage-language speakers: Theoretical and empirical challenges on sociolinguistic attitudes and prestige. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 22(4). 387–394.