
Pilot project: A Dictionary of the Dutch Dialects

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The lexicon of the traditional dialects in the Dutch language area is disappearing at a rapid pace. Three major regional dialect dictionaries, the Dictionary of the Brabantic dialects (WBD), the Dictionary for the Limburgian Dialects (WLD) and the Dictionary for the Flemish Dialects (WVD) inventory the vocabulary of the southern Dutch dialects. They are thematically arranged following the lexicographic idea's of A. Weijnen, which also are at the basis of still other dictionaries for some eastern dialect groups in the Netherlands. Because of their onomasiological arrangement, however, the dictionaries of Weijnen's school cannot render detailed semantic information. Therefore, professional lexicography has to call in the help of 'amateur' lexicography, i.e. the huge amount of alphabetical regional and local dialect dictionaries, made by non-professional lexicographers.

In this paper a pilot project is presented, which aims at the creation of a lexicographical database for the alphabetical amateur lexicography, including both the old alphabetical tradition of the end of the 19th / beginning of the 20th century and the new tradition, rooted in the so-called dialect renaissance of the 70s and afterwards. It is defended that such a database - if enriched with the dutchifications of the dialect headwords - will prove to be an indispensable tool for lexicological research with regard to the history of the Dutch lexicon.

1. Introduction

In order to carry out scientific research regarding the Dutch lexicon, we need word collections of the following types:

- (a) a comprehensive dictionary of the modern Dutch standard language;
- (b) comprehensive 'period' dictionaries of the historical phases of the Dutch language;
- (c) a comprehensive dictionary of the Dutch dialects.

The (a) and (b) types of dictionaries are documenting the vocabulary of the written language; (c) is about the vocabulary or the oral language tradition¹. This type of vocabulary is not only about words and meanings, but - and by definition - also about word (and meaning) dispersion in space. Throughout this paper we use the term *dialect* in its continental sense, i.e. as a term for a *geographically determined language variety*. We even use it in its narrowest - traditional and nowadays very old-fashioned - sense: the geographically determined language variety typical for Trudgill's 'NORM'-informant, the Non-mobile Old Rural Male, a person who has its urban counterpart in the unskilled blue-collar factory worker.

Geographical differentiation is also an important issue in the historical dictionaries since there was no unified written language for many centuries; it is also - but to a lesser extent - an issue for the standard Dutch language, because some words are restricted to the Dutch standard in the Netherlands or in Flanders - and should be labelled as such in a comprehensive standard Dutch dictionary.

In what follows, we will focus on the collection of the geographically differentiated vocabulary in the traditional dialects of the Dutch language area. In paragraph 2, a few short remarks on the dictionaries for written languages are made. In paragraph 3, we dwell on the dictionaries for oral language traditions, both the geographically oriented *onomasiological* ones (§3.1.) and the local/regional *semasiological* ones (§3.2.). It will be made clear that onomasiological dictionaries cannot render semantics, and that they should be supplemented

¹ We abstract from the fact that dialect texts do exist because they are a relatively marginal phenomenon.

with alphabetically arranged semasiological dictionaries. These dictionaries should be brought together in a database: in paragraph 4 an outline for such a database is presented with the pilot project for the *Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Dialecten* (WND, Dictionary of the Dutch Dialects).

2. Written language dictionaries

Dutch linguistics is lucky to have the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT, Dictionary of the Dutch Language), a gigantic dictionary covering the modern Dutch period (i.e. 1500-1976) in 43 volumes (supplement included), totalling over 49,000 pages (95.000 main entries); it is the most comprehensive and detailed dictionary in the world. At the Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie (INL, Institute for Dutch Lexicology²), where the WNT was made (1869-1998!), also other projects were recently finished: the *Vroeg-middelnederlands Woordenboek* (VMNW, Dictionary of Early Middle Dutch, 1999) and the *Oudnederlands Woordenboek* (ONW, Dictionary of Old Dutch, 2009). They are all available online as part of the 'Geïntegreerde Taalbank' (Integrated Language Database), together with the *Middelnederlands Woordenboek* (MNW, Middle Dutch Dictionary by Verwijs and Verdam) covering the 1200-1500 period.

It is clear that the Dutch lexicon, for both the contemporary and the historical periods, has been well taken care of by the Institute for Dutch Lexicology. The dictionaries the INL has produced are first class, especially those who could benefit from the technological revolution. Moreover, they are made available online and for free. With the completion of the ANW³ all historical periods of the Dutch language will be covered⁴. All the above mentioned dictionaries - the contemporary one included - are based on texts.

3. Oral language dictionaries: dialect lexicography⁵

Dialect vocabulary has two characteristics that makes it stand apart from standard vocabulary: it is an oral vocabulary, and it is geographically differentiated. If one aims at completeness, each characteristic has its consequence: (a) the data should be collected by questioning respondents; (b) this should be done in systematically 'place by place' in the whole of the Dutch area. To this, one may add that the task is urgent. Because of the changing social circumstances since the 60-ies of the last century, large parts of the traditional vocabulary have disappeared or are disappearing at a rapid pace. This reduction of the lexical component of the dialects is due both to the disappearance of the referents themselves, as is for instance the case for traditional agriculture or crafts, and to the pressure of the standard language. A large part of the dialect lexicon has become a historical vocabulary.

² For more information on the INL, see <http://www.inl.nl>

³ The contemporary vocabulary (i.e. post 1970-), finally, will be accounted for in the current INL-project *Algemeen Nederlands Woordenboek* (ANW)³. The first results of this database-type dictionary are expected in 2009; the project should be completed in 2019.

⁴ With some reservations with regard to the 14th-15th centuries, which are in principle covered by the Middle Dutch Dictionary (MNW). The MNW, although it certainly is a major achievement, has some flaws due to its relatively restricted text basis when compared to both the chronologically preceding (= Early Middle Dutch Dictionary: 13th century) and following dictionary (Dictionary of the Dutch Language: 1500-1976)

⁵ For a recent history of dialect lexicography: see Goossens & Van Keymeulen (2006).

3.1. ‘Onomasiological’ dialect dictionaries: input for a dialect atlas

The geographical dimension of the dialect vocabulary lies clearly at the basis of the approach of Weijnen’s lexicographic school⁶. Weijnen, professor in Dutch, Indogermanic linguistics, Dialectology and Onomastics at the University of Nijmegen, advocated the systematic arrangement in Dutch dialect lexicography. In the 1960ies, he started the *Woordenboek van de Brabantse Dialecten* (WBD, Dictionary of the Brabantic Dialects) and the Dictionary of the Limburg Dialects (WLD, Dictionary of the Limburg Dialects)⁷. The first one was completed in 2005, the last one in 2008. In 1972, prof. W. Pée started the *Woordenboek van de Vlaamse Dialecten* (WVD, Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects), along the lines set out by Weijnen. This dictionary is still being compiled. The three dictionaries combined (and together with the ‘mapable’ WZD⁸) cover the whole of the southern Dutch language area, i.e. French-Flanders (France), Dutch speaking Belgium, and the three southern provinces of the Netherlands (Zeeland, Northern Brabant and Limburg).

All the dictionaries of Weijnen’s school⁹ are arranged in the same way: every fascicle deals with a certain conceptual field (e.g. ‘birds’, ‘the miller’ ...) divided into three parts: I. Agricultural Vocabulary; II. Technical and Crafts Vocabulary; III. General Vocabulary. Every fascicle is onomasiologically arranged and consists of a row of concepts, headed by a standard Dutch ‘title’, followed by a description and the different dialect words which can be used to refer to the concept¹⁰. Every dialect word is followed by (general) indications as to frequency and location (details with regard to phonetics and location are kept in an automated database)¹¹.

The thematical dialect dictionaries of Weijnen’s school, although they are impressive achievements, cannot render detailed semantic description because of their onomasiological arrangement. In the 1960’s an interesting discussion between Weijnen and De Tollenaere (the then editor-in-chief of the WNT) took place with regard to the question whether it was possible to describe ‘meaning’ in an onomasiological dictionary¹². The outcome was that only a semasiological, i.e. alphabetical, arrangement makes it possible to describe ‘meaning’, since in order to be able to do so one needs to start from the lexeme (and not from the concept as is the case in onomasiological dictionaries). Thus, the dictionaries of Weijnen’s school are to be considered as highly-structured geographical inventories of word usages: they are – notwithstanding the names of the publications – atlases, not dictionaries. The opposite is not true); the WZD proves that geography can have its proper place in an alphabetical dictionary, together with detailed information as to meaning.

⁶ See the paper on *Towards the completion of the Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects* for this Euralex conference.

⁷ In the 1990s an editorial board for the two dictionaries was opened at the Catholic University of Louvain.

⁸ The *Woordenboek der Zeeuwse Dialecten* (WZD, Dictionary of the Zeeland Dialects, 1964) by mrs. H.C.A. Ghijsen is the first regional dictionary which rendered detailed geographical information for every single dialect word.

⁹ The WBD/WLD also served as an example for the WALD, WOD and WGD afterwards.

¹⁰ Weijnen coined the useful term *heteronym* for (dialect) words which mean the same in different (dialectal) language systems.

¹¹ See Kruijssen & Van Keymeulen (1997) for more details.

¹² See Weijnen 1961, 1963, 1967 and De Tollenaere 1960, 1968.

3.2. Semasiological dialect dictionaries: input for a lexical database

3.2.1. The old alphabetical tradition

The dialect dictionary of Hoeufft (1836) for the city of Breda (province of Northern Brabant) was the starting point of dialect lexicography in the Dutch language area. The 19th century indeed witnessed some important works in the Netherlands, such as Molema (1887) for the province of Groningen and Boekenooogen (1897) for the dialect of the Zaan district (North Holland).

In the last half of the 19th century / first half of the 20th century some major regional alphabetical dialect dictionaries were published in Dutch-speaking Belgium¹³. These dictionaries were compiled in the 'Flemish Movement' atmosphere of romanticism and the search for linguistic identity by the Flemings. These regional dictionaries, which sometimes cover whole provinces such as De Bo (1873, province of West-Flanders) or Cornelissen-Vervliet (1899-1903, province of Antwerp), have one important flaw: they do not exactly locate the dialect words. A dialect lexeme in the *West-Vlaams Idioticon* (*West Flemish Idioticon*) of De Bo, for instance, occurs 'somewhere' in West-Flanders; the geographical scope of the words is not indicated.

The above mentioned dictionaries were not produced by an institute, hence we have called them 'amateur' dictionaries. This qualification perhaps does wrong to the high scientific quality of many of them. The *Zuid-Oostvlaandersch Idioticon* (= Southeast Flemish Dictionary) of Teirlinck (1908-1924), for instance, is a marvellous example of completeness and semantic detail. Some amateurs of the 'old school' really deserve admiration for the scientific level of their work.

3.2.2. Dialect renaissance and amateurs

The disappearance - or at least levelling out - of the traditional dialects caused popular, and even political, interest in these language varieties which are now considered 'immaterial heritage'. Due to the general rise of the educational level of the population, speaking a dialect is no longer considered a sign of backwardness. The positive attitude towards these 'endangered' varieties resulted in the production of amateur dialect dictionaries, meant for a local population. The table below visualizes the production of amateur dictionaries since the 19th century¹⁴. The lexicographic effect of the dialect renaissance is clear after the 80s of the last century.

We do not intend to dwell on the many things that may go wrong when amateurs venture to write dictionaries. There is indeed a huge variety, both in quantity (i.e. number of entries) and quality (notably of the semantic descriptions), and in the macro- and microstructural options. It goes without saying that the best dictionaries are made by amateurs with a linguistic schooling, although some authors without any training command admiration for their perseverance in detailed observation and the ensuing lexicographical result.

Nearly all amateur dictionaries are alphabetically arranged, using a home-made dialect spelling for the entries. Few amateurs are aware that this way of presenting the macrostructure of a local dialect dictionary will frustrate the intended user. Such an arrangement indeed presupposes a good knowledge of the dialect, both on the lexical and phonological level, in

¹³ The most important ones being: De Bo (1873), Joos (1900), Tuerlinckx (1886), Teirlinck (1908-1922), Rutten (1890), Cornelissen-Vervliet (1899-1903).

¹⁴ The table is taken from Oosterhof & Van Keymeulen (2009).

order to be able to look up a word. Only a good dialect speaker is able to do so. In many introductions, however, one may read that the dictionary is meant for the future generations of the supposed dialectfree era. One of the major recommendations of the lexicographic manual for amateurs (Van Keymeulen 2003¹⁵) indeed is to add a standard Dutch > dialect register in order to disclose the collection for the non-dialect speakers (which, by the way, include an ever growing portion of the local community the dictionary is meant for). It seems to be the case that the example of the alphabetical dictionaries of the standard language is very strong indeed, and inventing a spelling system for a dialect is a codifying activity with a high symbolic value. Many authors are inclined to appropriate the dialect by creating the spelling for it.

	FLANDERS					THE NETHERLANDS												
	LI	AN	VB	OV	WV	GR	FR	DR	OV	GD	FL	UT	NH	ZH	ZL	NB	LB	TOT
1835-39																1		1
1850-54																	1	1
1880-84																	1	1
1895-99								1										1
1900-04														1				1
1910-14																	1	1
1915-19																	1	1
1925-29															1		1	2
1935-39			1				1									1		3
1940-44										1								1
1945-49														1				1
1950-54				1														1
1955-59								1								1	1	3
1960-64																		0
1965-69							1		1					1			1	4
1970-74					1					1						1	2	5
1975-79			1	1			1			1	1					1	2	8
1980-84	3		1	1			1			5			1	2		2	3	19
1985-89	3	1	2	4	1					3				2		4	7	27
1990-94	3	1	4	3	2		1		2	5	2		1			8	9	41
1995-99	5	2	5	7	5		2	1	2	4		2	1	2		7	3	48
2000-04	6	2	2	3	6		2		5	3		1	4	2		8	8	52
2005-		1	1	4	1				1	3			1	4		7	11	34
TOT	20	7	17	24	16	0	9	1	13	26	3	3	8	15	1	41	52	256

Explanation of abbreviations: LI = Limburg (Belgium); AN = Antwerp; VB = Flemish Brabant; OV = East Flanders; WV = West Flanders; GR = Groningen; FR = Friesland; DR = Drenthe; OV = Overijssel; GD = Gelderland; FL = Flevoland; UT = Utrecht; NH = North Holland; ZH = South Holland; ZL = Zeeland; NB = North Brabant; LB = Limburg (the Netherlands)

Table 1. Number of local dialect dictionaries by lustrum and province

¹⁵ Cajot (1995) is another manual, mainly aimed at Limburg dialect amateurs. Both manuals try and instruct the amateurs about the essentials of dialect lexicography. They also try and refrain the amateurs to venture themselves into matters one really needs specialised linguistic training for, such as phonetics or historical linguistics (etymology tends to be popular among word collectors!).

4. Towards a *Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Dialecten* (WND, Dictionary of the Dutch Dialects).

Although amateur lexicography obviously has its flaws, there are many lexicographical products of good quality. Even the more humble ones do have scientific value, since they record words from a local oral variety and at least give indications as to their meaning. Since they are alphabetically arranged, they are in principle able to describe meaning. Many of them also include collocations of all types: idiomatic expressions, proverbs ... Many of them contain example sentences in which meaning is illustrated ... In short, they offer very welcome additions to the onomasiological dictionaries of the WVD-type.

In September 2009, a pilot project was started at the Ghent University, funded by the Flemish Ministry of Culture, which envisages the creation of a digital database for alphabetically arranged regional and local dialect dictionaries. The project consists of two phases: (a) creating a digital database on the basis of the dictionary texts; (b) enriching the database in order to be able to perform efficient search operations. Software is developed by the firm Info Service Belgium (Ghent).

Phase (a) boils down to scanning the written texts, and ocr'ing them. Conversion errors are corrected by volunteers. The dictionary text proper is then prepared for input into the database: every entry should be in bold; every article ends with two 'hard returns'. This allows for automatically feeding every dictionary article into a separate record of the database by running a Word macro. The main task in phase (b) is the so-called standardisation of the dialect entry forms. To this end, the headwords, most of the time rendered in home-made dialect spellings, are *dutchified*, i.e. the dialect phonemes are replaced by their Dutch counterparts, and rendered in the Dutch orthography, thus 'framing' the dialect words as if they existed in standard Dutch.

The amateur dictionaries can be divided into three groups with respect to the problem of the dutchification of the headwords.

a) the older regional dialect dictionaries

The dictionaries of what we have called the 'old alphabetical tradition' sometimes cover fairly large areas, hence they were obliged to use dutchified headwords, under which a large amount of phonological differentiation was summarized. In the West-Flemish dialects, standard Dutch *sch-* [sχ-] as in *school* can be represented by [sk]-, []-, [χ]-, [s] ... All this variation is implied and summarized in the dutchified form <sch> in the headword *school* in the West-Vlaams Idioticon of De Bo (1873). The dutchifications, however, are written in an obsolete Dutch orthography. Hence, the headwords should be modernized in spelling (eg. *bosch* > *bos* 'wood'; *keeren* > *keren* 'turn'; *roozewied* > *rozewied* 'cornflower' ...). Since this activity is relatively easy to do, it can be done by volunteers¹⁶.

b) the regional amateur dictionaries

Some amateur dictionaries cover more than one dialect. This is often the case when an author wants to collect the dialect vocabulary of a certain administrative area (a municipality), which contains several localities (villages). The dictionary of Cools (2000) on the dialect of

¹⁶ The modernization of a 19th-century Dutch spelling, however, has its tricky aspects.

Beveren-Waas (East Flanders) is a nice example. The dictionary tries to account for 7 former villages (Doel, Haasdonk, Kallo, Kieldrecht, Melsele, Verrebroek, Vrasene) which were joined with the town of Beveren in the 70s of the last century. Thus, the dictionary is a small regional dictionary. This forced the author to dutchify the headwords. The word *lopen* 'to run', e.g., is pronounced in three different ways ([ly^opm],[lu^opm] and [li^opm]) in the different villages. In order not to frustrate some or other dialect speaking community, the dutchified headword *lopen* is used, thus avoiding an unwanted choice between the dialects. The phonological variation is rendered in the microstructure of the dictionary.

Since the (small-scale) regional dictionaries of the dialect renaissance are usually written by authors without any linguistic training, the dutchifications cannot always be trusted. The evaluation of the headwords has to be done by linguistically skilled persons, preferably with a good knowlegde of the dialect concerned.

c) the local amateur dictionaries

Most dictionaries of the dialect renaissance period are local and written by linguistically unskilled authors. The interpretation of the headwords and the dutchification of them is not an easy job to do. One has to be able to evaluate the sometimes fantasized dialect spellings, and reconstruct a dutchification on the basis of etymology and the correspondence rules between standard Dutch and the dialect. The best job will be done by a linguistically trained person with - ideally - a good knowledge of the dialect concerned or at least the dialect group a particular dialect belongs to. A few examples of dutchifications are:

- brèikkraaid* (dialect) > *braakkruïd* (dutchification) 'turnips' (Pletinckx 2003: 184);
- mottejêr* (dialect) > *mottenaarde* (dutchification) 'kind of potting compost' (Pletinckx 2003:435);
- sponnebêrre* (dialect) > *spondebed* 'kind of bed' (dutchification) (Pletinckx 2003: 576);
- juutepêird* (dialect) > *jutepaard* (dutchification) 'rocking horse' (Clinckemaillie 1996: 77);
- ollengsch's* (dialect) > *allengskens* (dutchification) 'gradually' (Clinckemaillie 1996: 114);
- oovrans* (dialect) > *overhands* (dutchification) 'alternately' (Clinckemaillie 1996: 115).

Next to the dutchification of the headwords, many other additions are possible. In the pilot project, we will try and investigate the possibilities of the following field structure of the record: at the moment the records contain fields for translations in standard Dutch, thematic markers and location. (example taken from Pletinckx 2003:435):

mottejêr zn. v.; (vero.) wilgenaarde, aarde uit vermolmde boomstronken, gegeerd door tuinders. [motten + aarde]. o. motjêr. z. jêr.¹⁷

Figure 1. Original dictionary article

mottejêr zn. v.; (vero.) wilgenaarde, aarde uit vermolmde boomstronken, gegeerd door tuinders. [motten + aarde]. o. motjêr. z. jêr.
mottejêr (= <i>original headword</i>)
mottenaarde (= <i>dutchification of the head word</i>)
potaarde (= <i>translation into standard Dutch</i>)
landbouw / woning (= <i>thematic markers [agriculture / home]</i>)
Asse (= <i>location</i>)

Figure 2. Field structure in WND-database with additions

¹⁷ Translation in English: **mottejêr** zn. v.; (arch.) willow earth, earth taken from mouldered tree-stumps, much in demand by gardeners. [motten + aarde]. also **motjêr**. see **jêr**.

The system for the thematic markers will be based on the classification used by the WVD, within the three parts: I. Agriculture, II. Technical and crafts vocabulary, III. General vocabulary.

I. Agricultural voc.	II. Technical and craft voc.	III. General vocabulary
generalities	cooper	generalities
farmland	carpenter	body
housing	bricklayer	clothing
cattle breeding	shepherd	inner self
arable farming	house
....		family life
		food
		school
		religion
		plants
		animals
	

The dutchification of the original spelling of the dialect word is undoubtedly the most essential addition to the database. In this way, the word collections will be opened up for the non-dialect speakers and for scientific research. The dutchification of dialect words is not always easy; in some cases (eg. French loan words adapted to dialect phonology) we will have to resort to double or even triple headwords, with different levels of etymological abstraction. As a rule of thumb, the orthography of the headwords (and the variants of them) in the WNT will be taken as a guide, since the WND eventually will be linked with WNT in the Integrated Language Database. Next to dutchification, the translation into standard Dutch for the lexically 'contrastive' part of the dialect vocabulary is very important. The addition of thematic markers, makes it possible to re-arrange the words thematically. This operation, although it will certainly lead to interesting results, is not so essential as dutchification and translation. Therefore it will be carried out as a final step.

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