

Exploring layers of language contact in emigrant writing

Ever since the pivotal study of Haugen (1969), there has been an abundance of studies on the dynamics between English and Western immigrant languages in North America (see e.g. Boas 2009, Smits and van Marle 2015). Dutch too has received considerable attention as an immigrant language, in North America and elsewhere, albeit confined to Netherland Dutch. Linguistic research on the language use of Flemish immigrants in North America as such, remains uncovered ground to a very large extent. Nevertheless, Belgian Dutch forms an interesting case study: on the one hand because it differs greatly from Netherlandic Dutch, on the other because of its complex pre-migration sociolinguistic history with French. Indeed, Brown and Bousquette (2018) remark, often the pre-migration sociolinguistic context is not taken into account when researching immigrant languages, even though it can help to grasp the contact situation more thoroughly.

To contribute to filling this empirical gap, we will present a case study investigating the language use of a Flemish missionary who moved to Canada in 1886. Specifically, we will study Dutch-French and Dutch-English language contact in his diary over a 25-year time span, charting the overall normalized frequency of both English and French borrowings. Additionally, using logistic regression, we will look at the impact of variables such as year, loan type, level of linguistic integration in Dutch, part of speech, and semantic domain. Preliminary analyses show year to be a major explanatory factor, as we can observe a simultaneous decrease in French borrowings and increase in English borrowings after ten years. Furthermore, we find that the French borrowings are both necessary and luxury transfers, and are linked to religion, while the English material consists almost exclusively of luxury transfers, and covers various semantic domains. We will discuss these results against the broader background of Belgian Dutch as an immigrant language in North America.

References

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