The Dutch Language In Australia - Some Comparisons with other Community Languages[1]

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Dutch is one of many languages other than English, the national language, used in Australia. Apart from the 150 indigenous languages still in existence, over one hundred languages from all over the world, which are the result of immigration, are regularly used in Australia. In 1991, 14.8 per cent of the Australian population and as many as 26 per cent of the population of Melbourne used a language other English in the home. This proportion would be higher if the Census included languages used regularly but outside one's own home (e.g. in the parents' home).

'Community languages' is the term given since the mid-1970s to languages brought to Australia by non-English-speaking immigrants. Initiated by lobby groups propagating multiculturalism, the term legitimates the use of such languages in Australia in that they are not described as foreign, and it also recognizes that they may be used beyond the immigrant generation.

The main question I would like to raise in this article is - *Are the Dutch intrinsically different from other ethnolinguistic groups in their linguistic behaviour, are they setting a norm that all the other groups will follow as their period of residence in Australia increases, or are they at the end of a 'normal' continuum, including speakers of all community languages*. I shall present some statistics on the demography of the Dutch language in Australia in comparison with other community languages, and then explore some structural changes in Dutch in Australia, again with a comparative dimension.

Demography of the Dutch language in Australia

Although the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated on the basis of its 1983 language survey conducted on a small representative sample that 110 500 residents of Australia at the time had had Dutch as their first language, the 1976 Census found that only 64 768 used the language regularly and the 1986 Census recorded 62 181 speaking it at home. By the 1991 Census, this number had decreased to 47 115. During the fifteen year period, Dutch had moved from the sixth most widely used language other than English to a position well below the 'top ten' community languages (See Table 1). The Census data is, of course, based on self-reporting and may be subject to under-reporting but in other communities any tendency in this direction seems to have decreased considerably. (Clyne 1991: 44-45)

(Table One about here)

Between 1986 and 1991, there was a decrease of 24.23 per cent in the home use of Dutch. This contrasts with large increases for Filipino (129 per cent) Chinese (84.18 per cent) and Vietnamese (67.31 per cent) and slight increases for Greek (3. per cent) German (1.9 per cent) and Italian (0.7 per cent).Further decreases can be anticipated for Dutch considering that only 2398 of those using Dutch at home were under 15 in 1991 and 12 634 were over the age of 65.

The Dutch have consistently recorded a higher rate of language shift to the use of English only in the home than any of the other larger ethnic groups. In 1991 it was 57 per cent in the first (i.e. Dutch-born) generation, 88.7 per cent in the second generation where both parents are Dutch-born, and 97.5 per cent in the second generation where only one parent was Dutch-born. (See Table 2.)

(Table two about here)

It will be seen that there is a rank ordering of language shift with Dutch at the top of the continuum. It is also evident that, across ethnolinguistic groups, there is a substantial shift to English between the first and second generations. There are numerous factors inter-relating including cultural distance, exogamy (out-marriage), and cultural values. Those language communities with a greater cultural similarity with the dominant group are most likely to show a high language shift and those with a lower cultural similarity exhibit a lower language shift. Therefore it is not surprising to find the Dutch language shift rate at the top. Dutch-Australians also have one of the highest exogamy rates in both the first and second generation (Penny and Khoo, 1996). This increases language shift even further, since there is little reason for Dutch to become the language of the home in mixed marriages. Pauwels (1985) found that only half as many of her Dutch-born informants from exogamous marriages used Dutch as did her Dutch-born informants from endogamous (in-group) marriages. In addition, the amount of Dutch used and the range of situations in which it was employed was much lower. A willingness to pass on the language to children, often on the part of the non-Dutch spouse, was generally not matched by any kind of tangible efforts. Smolicz (e.g. 1981, Smolicz and Secombe, 1989) has argued that Dutch people do not consider language to be a core value in their culture. Pauwels (1980) was able to support this from survey research, which showed that Dutch-Australians characterized the retention of their culture on the basis of social togetherness (*gezelligheid*) and family structures, which are language-neutral for the Dutch (unlike the Italians, for instance, who link them with the use of Italian or an Italian dialect). In a subsequent study of the role of the factor 'dialect' in language maintenance, Pauwels (1986) showed that the use of Limburgs dialect by Limburgers reduced the opportunities for speaking Standard Dutch. Limburgs continued to fulfil very specific in-group functions, e.g. the Carneval.

The shift from Dutch was uniformly high across the six States and two Territories of Australia. However, the general tendency for the shift to be smallest in States with a relatively high population of the relevant ethnic community (Clyne and Kipp, 1995) was confirmed.

Within metropolitan areas, the Dutch are generally more concentrated than comparable groups (German and French speakers) who, however, exhibit a lower language shift but far less concentrated than, for instance, speakers of Maltese, Turkish or Vietnamese.

Policies and Attitudes

At the time of migration

Nieuwenhuysen (1995) has shown that Dutch emigration to Australia was rather compact, with most Dutch speakers arriving in the early to mid-1950s and the population peaking in 1961. During this time, Australia pursued an assimilation policy which had been a feature of the nation since Federation. It was expected that immigrants would abandon their language very soon and use English only. There was very limited use of public announcements in community languages, restrictions on broadcasting time in them, on bilingual education, the range of languages taught and examined in schools, and library holdings in such languages. Any language maintenance efforts were not only initiatives of the individual ethnic communities but also financed by them. In one area Dutch was actually advantaged. It had been taught as a full degree course at the University of Melbourne since 1941, consequently it was a subject in the later and final years of secondary school in Victoria and, because of this, was taught by the Education Department at least on Saturdays.

In the early years of settlement in Australia, the Dutch communities were not highly organized. There were Dutch-language newspapers, limited church services in Dutch, in some places community libraries and some social clubs but, for instance, no Dutch-language broadcasting. The Dutch were ‘model immigrants’ of the time. They did not stand out, they adjusted quickly, at least externally. This was reflected in language and in language use. Not only did the children generally speak English only, as was also the

case in some other communities, but the parents also tended to speak English to their children (Clyne, 1977; Pauwels, 1985), which was unusual in other communities.

The situation today

The 1970s and 1980s saw a dramatic change in Australia's self-image from a British outpost in the Pacific to an independent multicultural nation. Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity began to be seen in a positive light. Bilingualism turned from a problem, first into a right and then into a resource (Eltis, 1991). Newer vintages of immigrants benefited from a telephone interpreter service in 90 languages, public announcements in many languages, and multicultural television with English sub-titles. There are pluralistic language policies at the national and state levels. (Ozolins, 1993; Lo Bianco, 1987; Dawkins, 1991; Victoria, 1993)

The education system is no longer the great promoter of monolingualism. Educational institutions have been working with other institutions in the interests of pluralism. In many States a language other than English is increasingly becoming part of the educational experience of all children throughout primary and secondary school. A range of languages is taught, as many as twenty in some States, but with very rare exceptions, Dutch is not one of them. There has been no public interest or group pressure for the teaching of Dutch. This contrasts with the situation in some other ethnic communities which are exerting pressure on politicians and schools and contributing financial support. Although courses in Dutch are offered at the secondary level on Saturdays in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide, the numbers of students sitting for the subject at Matriculation level stand at 22 nationally. In Victoria they have decreased from 62 to 16 from 1976 to 1994. Dutch is now no longer available at any Australian university. On the other hand, Dutch is well served by multilingual radio and public library holdings, but some of the public libraries are disposing of some of their Dutch books, even ones donated by the Netherlands Government (Personal communication, Benoît Grüter).

There is an active club life but many of the activities are conducted in English. The Reformed Church, set up by Dutch immigrants in 1951, has attempted "de-ethnicization" and conducts almost all services and other functions in English and the Roman Catholic and Hervormd (Uniting Church) Dutch chaplaincies are transitional in that it is anticipated that the families will be or become part of an English-medium parish.

The public and official support for multilingualism in Australia relates to both its identity as a multicultural nation, social justice or 'cultural democracy' (the term was coined by Smolicz 1984) and its national economic needs. From the latter point of view, there has been a greater push for Asian languages, especially Japanese. However, in contrast to

the assimilation rhetoric of a previous era, public figures have been advocating the maintenance of all community languages. In his final Australia Day speech to the nation, the then Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen said:

The thing that distresses me most is how little children and grandchildren of overseas-born Australians retain of the culture and especially the language of their land of origin. The loss of ancestral language is grievous for the individual and the nation. We should be a nation of great linguists.

(*The Age* 26 January 1989)

Former Prime Minister Paul Keating, in launching the policy of 'productive diversity', emphasized that Australia needed to utilize creatively the language resources available in the workforce.

Language change

What is the Dutch maintained and passed on in Australia actually like? The following observations are based on my research on Dutch-English (and other) bilinguals in Victoria. (Clyne, 1977: 1991, Chapter 4)

I would like to differentiate three types of change in the Dutch of Dutch speakers in Australia:

- those they share with speakers of other community languages,
- those they share with speakers of similar community languages but which they have experienced faster, and
- those that are unique to them.

Like migrants speaking other community languages, many Dutch speakers transfer vocabulary from English, including idioms, into their Dutch, which also undergoes changes in meaning, modelled on English. This is motivated by the need to cope with a new environment, life style, different institutions, and often a new job. Words such as *titree*, *creek*, *country* (as opposed to platteland - flat country), *drover*, *medicare*, *gesponsord* (sponsored) , *gesetteld* (settled), and *relaxen* (to relax) address these needs.

Dutch speakers also tend to adopt Anglo-Australian ways of hedging, such as *well*, *anyway*, and *sort of*, e.g.

Well, je kunt haast zeggen, ieder kind op de school ken ik *sort of*

'Well, you could almost say, every child in the school know I sort of'

(Understatement to denote modesty)

Some words are extended in their meaning on the model of similar sounding English words or ones with some partial overlap in meaning. For instance, *dan* is used as an equivalent of 'then', to cover both Dutch *toen* (past) and *dan* (non-past). *Smal* translates similar-sounding 'small', whose Dutch equivalent is *klein*. *Stil* is employed as the equivalent of 'still', while the Dutch equivalent is *nog*.

Some idioms are translated word-for-word from English and may cause ambiguity or sound amusing in a monolingual Dutch environment. For instance,

Ze *kijkt achter* haar kleine broer

has the intended meaning of: She is looking after her little brother. However, this Dutch sentence would mean `She is *looking behind* her little brother' in Standard Dutch.

Ik ben druk is a morpheme-for-morpheme translation of 'I am busy'. However, the Standard Dutch would be: Ik heb het druk, 'I have it busy'. All these phenomena are to be found in other community languages in Australia as well as in other bilingual situations all over the world (See Clyne, 1991: Chapter 4).

There are also grammatical changes shared with other community languages. For instance, a number of European languages use either 'have' or 'be' as an auxiliary to form the perfect. In Dutch, verbs expressing a change of place or condition take *zijn* (be). Most other verbs take *hebben* (have). Second generation and young first generation speakers of Dutch, like their counterparts using French, German, and Italian, tend to over-generalize the use of the auxiliary 'have', e.g.

We *hebben* naar Nederland geweest. (Standard Dutch *zijn*)

'We have to the Netherlands gone' (Standard Dutch 'are'.)

Switching between languages occurs when there is a change in conversation partner, topic or situation or to distinguish the in-group from the out-group. But it will also take place in the middle of a sentence, between sentences, or within a stretch of discourse when a word is employed from the overlapping area between Dutch and English. This includes words transferred from English, ones that sound similar or the same, names that are part of both languages, or words that are compromise forms between the two languages. They cause speakers to lose their linguistic bearings and switch to the other language. For instance in the following example it is the (English) name of the book that triggers the switch:

Ik heb gelezen: “Snow-white, Stay Here”. *It’s about a winter pet*.

‘I have read….

In the next example

Dit kan *be anywhere*.

the switch appears to be caused by *kan,* which is similar to *can*. While this phenomenon occurs across languages (Clyne ,1991: 193-196), the large amount of correspondence between English and Dutch offers more opportunities for switching than other pairs of languages.

Whereas English has the word-order Subject-Verb-Object, Dutch, like German, word order is as follows:

Subject-Verb-Object in statement sentences, e.g.:

Ze is een beroemde vrouw

‘She is a famous woman’

Verb in second position where a direct or indirect object or adverb starts the sentence, e.g.

Dit boek heeft hij gelezen!

‘This book has he read’

Gisteren moest ik een lezing houden

‘Yesterday had I a lecture to-give’

Subject-Object-Verb in dependent clauses, e.g.

….dat ze geen rechten hadden

‘….that they no rights had’

Like German-English bilinguals, Dutch-English bilinguals in Australia will over-generalize the SVO word order from English that also exists in Dutch where it is not possible in Standard Dutch. This will occur, for instance, where Standard Dutch requires the verb to be in second position:

En achter dat wij doen tekenen of Engels

‘And after that we do drawing or English’

(Dutch word order would be: En daarna *doen wij*…)

In the following example, there are two instances of English syntax influencing the Dutch. English SVO word order is employed instead of both SOV in the dependent clause and verb-second in the main clause.

Maar als wij praten in het Hollands, ze verstaan drommels goed.

‘But if we speak in Dutch, they understand damn well’

Note the similarity to English word order. Standard Dutch would be:

Maar als wij in het Hollands *praten*, *verstaan* ze drommels goed.

The first example is from a member of the second generation, the second from a first generation bilingual. While SVO overgeneralization is prevalent in the first as well as the second generation of Dutch-English bilinguals in Australia, it occurs mainly in second and later generations in German.

The phenomena that are unique to Dutch-English bilinguals are in the field of grammatical change:

Dutch, like many other languages other than English, marks the grammatical gender of nouns. They are either neuter (*het*) or non-neuter (*de*). Some speakers, especially in the second generation, change the gender of some nouns from *het* to *de*, e.g. de *bed* (bed), *café* (pub), *gezin* (family), *paard* (horse), *soort* (sort). This may be because there are already more *de* nouns than *het* nouns in Dutch and because *de* sounds like *the* in English, which, of course, does not have differentiated grammatical genders.

Dutch has a number of ways of forming the plural, the most common of which is *-en* but one of which is *-s*. Some bilinguals overgeneralize the *-s* ending to form plurals of Dutch nouns, e.g. *boeks* (books), *gebouws* (buildings), *stads* (cities), *zondags* (Sundays). German, which also uses the *-s* ending for some plurals, does not experience such a generalization for German nouns (as opposed to ones transferred from English).

Dutch has more verb endings than English (e.g. *-t* in the third person singular, *-en* in the plural). Some second generation Dutch-English bilinguals drop these endings, e.g. *we eet, kan, kijk* (eten, kunnen, kijken).

These changes are partly promoted by English and partly reinforce tendencies that are already inherent in Dutch. They are similar to ones that have occurred in Afrikaans. If Dutch were not lost so quickly in Australia, we could observe more commonalities with Afrikaans in future generations.

Language attrition and reversion

It has been widely observed that as immigrants age, they revert to their first language and culture and lose skills in their second language. There is a certain amount of evidence of this from a longitudinal study among the Dutch in Australia (De Bot and Clyne ,1989; 1994) but not enough to show any clear cut tendencies. It is certainly not the case that attrition (loss) of English language skills and an accompanying reversion to the first language is universal in migrants. The question is - *Why does attrition of second language skills occur in some elderly people and not in others? And why does it occur at all?* The main factor appears to be the level of English attained in middle age. It should be noted that many of the migrants of the 1950s had little or no English on arrival and were given little opportunity to acquire it. It appears likely that there is a 'critical threshold' of second language proficiency below which language attrition in that language is likely to take place. Those who acquired English as children are most unlikely to experience attrition in it. In some cases, English use increases and proficiency actually improves (and/or is perceived to improve) in elderly people. Where attrition of English skills occurs, it is usually linked to a marked decline in the use of English accompanying retirement, with the departure of the children from the family home, and/or disengagement from mainstream society. Sometimes that means

associating more with the ethnic group and sometimes it does not. In some cases this means a reinforcement of first language skills, but that is not necessarily the case since many Dutch migrants use English to each other or code-switch. There is a psychological theory that what was acquired earlier was processed deeper (Storandt 1979), leading to better retrieval in old age.

Part of the widespread belief in second language attrition among the elderly may be due to an impression of vocabulary loss due to the reduced attention of some elderly people. More importantly, the impression could be the result of less disciplined switching between languages. While younger people switch from Dutch into English, they rarely switch from English into Dutch because they are aware that most of their conversation partners in Australia do not understand Dutch. Elderly people are far more likely to switch in both directions and, as we have seen, similarities between the two languages and opportunities for compromise words between them offer much potential for less disciplined switching. An example follows:

Ja in de in de big places *je hebt* Melbourne en de other places *met* de high flats *en zo*. *Dat heb je in Holland ook*. Maar 'n, maar a lot of places nou (now) de same before we go *D'r* is we go to my sister in Apeldoorn en *zi have* de same place nog.

(This was part of discourse which was intended to be English.)

Is there a difference between Dutch and other community languages?

Recent census statistics indicate a slowing down of language shift in the first and second generations. However, in most groups, the process is completed in two generations and there are indications that even in the remarkably retentive Greek community by the third generation, Greek will not continue to be maintained much in the home. This suggests that the Dutch have simply gone through the process of language shift faster than the other groups and also did not choose to take advantages of the early fruits of the change to multiculturalism. The rapid shift to English among Dutch immigrants in English-speaking countries contrasts with the survival of Dutch in Brazil and colonial Indonesia, the tenacity of Afrikaans, and the strong position of Dutch in competition with French in contemporary Belgium. It is really amazing that a national group that attaches so much value, and not only instrumental motivation to languages should devalue its own language so much following immigration to English-speaking countries. On the basis of the factors proposed in Section 1, I would suggest that this can be explained by a combination of perceived and actual cultural similarity with the dominant Anglo group and relative cultural dissimilarity with most of the other immigrant groups who had maintained their languages better, together with a pragmatic assessment of the value of assimilation.

There are many features of Dutch in Australia that are typical of changes in all community languages. There are some changes that Dutch shares with other languages in Australia but which have taken place faster in Dutch. However, some phenomena are unique to Dutch due to some of the structural properties of the language which are not quite so conspicuous in the European heartland.

The Dutch-Australian community needs to reassess the social transformations in Australia brought about by the acknowledgement of dual cultural identity, the communications revolution, cheaper and faster travel, and European integration. Australia has the potential to become a link nation because of its multilingualism and multiculturalism. The Netherlands, already well established as a cultural intermediary in Western Europe, may offer openings to Europe for Australians of Dutch background. Bennett (1990) has found that many second generation Dutch-Australians are expressing renewed loyalty to the Dutch language at least in attitudes, something that could form a basis for some reversal of language shift. (Fishman, 1991) Ammerlaan (1996) has shown that Dutch 'attrition' was mainly just a decrease in automatized recall of the language and that strategies based on cues such as similarity with English or other Dutch words or a recollection of a situation can be developed to reactivate one's competence in the language. In this way the language could be reactivated instead of having to be fully reacquired. But that applies only to those who once had some knowledge of the language. For many, reversing language shift would have to mean starting from scratch.

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Table 1 The fifteen most widely used community languages: Home use, 1991.

	NSW	*VIC*	*Q'LD*	*SA*	*WA*	*TAS*	*NT*	*ACT*	*AUST*
Aboriginal Languages	655	184	6 043	3 088	8 158	26	26 141	32	44 327
Arabic (incl.Lebanese)	117 826	34 802	2 890	3 194	2 740	322	120	963	162 857
Chinese	118 780	75 672	21 309	9 594	23 035	1 270	2 007	4 534	256 201
Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, Croatian, 'Yugoslav'	51 078	46 732	7 656	8 563	11 222	583	178	4 727	130 739
Dutch	**11 376**	**13 835**	**8 145**	**4 772**	**6 319**	**1 637**	**248**	**783**	**47 115**
Filipino	31 337	14 000	6 538	2 330	2 574	377	1 208	746	59 110
French	17 018	13 841	5 885	2 008	4 789	486	404	1 070	45 501
German	34 290	32 441	16 846	14 872	9 149	2 125	918	2 695	113 336
Greek	98 522	132 489	11 360	29 904	6 291	1 452	2 567	3 142	285 700
Italian	113 818	179 324	26 947	48 810	42 995	1 788	960	4 162	418 804
Macedonian	25 926	31 018	563	889	5 517	27	6	483	64 429
Maltese	20 915	27 804	1 839	1 619	518	34	15	255	52 999
Polish	19 729	22 633	5 005	9 077	7 540	1 240	97	1 611	66 932

Spanish	48 277	23 575	7 253	3 134	4 864	456	350	2 570	90 479
Turkish	16 542	23 583	547	461	669	45	27	86	41 960

Table 2 Language shift to English only

	1st Generation	2nd Generation (Endogamous)	2nd Generation (Exogamous)	2nd Generation (Aggregate)
China	5.9	21.6	58.9	45.5
Hong Kong	8.4	9.6	52.5	40.0
Germany	42.5	72.9	92.0	88.7
Greece	4.4	9.6	53.8	21.8
Italy	11.2	32.2	77.0	49.8
Malta	31.0	63.5	93.2	78.5
Netherlands	57.0	88.7	97.5	95.0
Poland	17.2	56.6	85.9	74.4

[1.] I am indebted to the editors for helpful comments.