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Heritage-Language Use and Maintenance: the Case of Second-Generation Flemish Canadians in Southwestern Ontario[1], [2]

1. Introduction

For several decades during the last century, in fact from the turn of the century until well into the 1960s, the province of Ontario was the destination of choice for Flemish migrants. Many of the early migrants came from the two Flemish provinces of East and West Flanders, where the agricultural sector was in crisis due to overpopulation and a shortage of arable land. However, after the Second World War, other provinces, such as Antwerp, also joined in. Today, the province of Ontario still holds a large share of the total Belgian-origin population in Canada. Indeed, according to the latest census data collected by Statistics Canada in 2006, at least 60,000 of the roughly 180,000[3] Canadians claiming to be Belgian or to have Belgian ancestry, that is 33%, live in Ontario.

This article focuses on the Canadian-born children of Flemish migrants who settled in southwestern Ontario, either in the decades leading up to or following the Second World War. It attempts to chart the patterns of heritage-language use and maintenance of these Flemish Canadians. This is virgin territory as no such studies have been carried out thus far, at least to our knowledge[4]. Sociolinguistic studies examining the attitudes of the second (and third) generation to (Netherlandic) Dutch language use and maintenance do exist, but their results are not readily transferable to second-generation Flemish Canadians for at least two reasons: firstly, because the Dutch expatriate community possesses a different sociolinguistic profile (as will become clear in section 2), and secondly, because the communities examined evolve in different linguistic environments, for instance Australia (Bennett 1997) or New Zealand (Klatter-Folmer 1997, Hulsen 2000).

The statistical data that will be used to identify the second generation's patterns of heritage-language use and maintenance were obtained by means of a sociolinguistic survey carried out by the author in 2008. The data concern in particular (a) the second generation's use of the heritage language with close family members; (b) the second generation's use of the heritage language outside of the family realm; (c) the second generation's attitudes towards the heritage-language; and (d) the second generation's involvement in activities, such as enrolment in heritage-language classes, travel to Flanders, reading habits, etc., which facilitate heritage-language use and maintenance. The data provide in addition a measure of the second generation's level of Flemish ethnic identity. Personal comments provided by the respondents will furthermore be drawn upon to contextualise the data.

2. Sociolinguistic profile of the first generation of Flemish migrants

Since the home environment forms the platform on which heritage-language maintenance rests, it is necessary to briefly examine the sociolinguistic profile of the first generation and how its propensities may or may not have set the stage for heritage-language use and maintenance by the second generation.

A key question is that of the language spoken by the first generation of Flemish migrants. This is not a simple question, as the terms *Flemish* and *Dutch* when used to refer to the language spoken by the Flemings can apply to various historical and geographical data and concepts (Wilmots 1984). The following two comments provided by first-generation participants in our study shed some light on the issue:

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My first wife, who was Flemish, did not want to use Flemish! [...] Dutch courses were offered in Windsor 12 to 15 years ago. The classes were well attended (...). My [second] wife [L1: French] enjoyed them very much. She understands "plat Vlaams" and speaks a perfect "Nederlands." (respondent 20)

My husband, being Canadian, learned Flemish from me and my parents when we were first married. When we went to Belgium, he was able to converse with my relatives. Having left Belgium in 1951, I find that my Flemish remained in 1951 and did not evolve as language does. But I belonged to a Dutch club and was forced to learn "Nederlands" or "moi flaamse" [sic – mooi Vlaams] so I can converse in Belgium and Holland. (respondent 30)

Both respondents call their language *Flemish* (or *Vlaams*)[5] and oppose it to *Dutch* (or *Nederlands*). *Dutch* is linked to *Holland* and to the membership of *Dutch clubs* (respondent 30) and is taught in *language courses* (respondent 20). Consequently, it is different from *Flemish* in at least two important ways: firstly, it belongs to a geographical area which does not comprise Belgium and secondly, being academic material, it has more prestige. The adjectives *perfect* and *plat* used by respondent 20 to qualify *Nederlands* and *Vlaams* are indicative of a value judgment that ranks *Nederlands* as superior to *Vlaams*. A similar judgment is voiced by respondent 30 who uses the adjective *mooi* to qualify *Vlaams* but only as a way to define what is meant by *Nederlands*.

This usage, which equates *Vlaams* with a low-prestige non-standard dialectal variety spoken in Belgium and which situates the prestigious standard, i.e. *Nederlands*, exclusively in Holland (or more accurately in the Netherlands), is reminiscent of a Flemish linguistic landscape and mindset that are no longer. More than half a century ago an official language policy was launched to promote the use of *Algemeen Nederlands* by the Flemish speech community in Belgium.[6] Today, the language spoken in Flanders is officially called *Nederlands*. A decree to that effect was issued by the *Vlaamse Cultuurraad* in 1973. In addition, in 1980, the *Nederlandse Taalunie* was concluded between Belgium and the Netherlands to facilitate the joint development of the Dutch standard language. One of the *Taalunie's* more specific objectives was the definition of a common official spelling (*Woordenlijst van de Nederlandse Taal* or *Het Groene Boekje*) and grammar (*Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* or *ANS*).

In spite of these developments, there are currently two conflicting tendencies in the Flemish speech community: an evolution towards standard Netherlandic on the one hand and the promotion of an indigenous Flemish standard variety on the other.

> On the one hand there is an evolution towards standard Netherlandic, promoting the use of the northern Netherlandic norm in the Flemish speech community. This evolution has been supported by official language institutions, and reflects the official language policy in Belgium.
>
> On the other hand there is a divergent evolution, an evolution away from standard Netherlandic, furthering the development of an indigenous, Flemish standard variety. This latter evolution is supported by ethnocentric feelings and values, which arise from the political and cultural separation from the Netherlands.
>
> (Deprez 1984: 7)

As a consequence, the general language spoken in Flanders today has retained much of its local flavour and can be viewed, according to Deprez (1984: 8), as a "regional variety of the Netherlandic standard language." This distinctive character explains why terms such as *Belgian Dutch* or *southern Netherlandic,* and *Netherlandic Dutch* or *northern Netherlandic,* function as key concepts in the literature on the Dutch language, and why sociolinguists, such as Clyne (1992), have gone so far as to suggest that Dutch is a pluricentric language, i.e. a language with two interacting centres, but where one variety, Netherlandic Dutch in this instance, enjoys greater prestige than the other, namely Belgian Dutch. For an overview of the divergent forces at play in the standardization process in Flanders and the resultant diversity in the southern Netherlandic standard, the interested reader can consult for instance Deprez and Geerts (1977), Geerts, Hellemans and Jaspaert (1987), Van de Craen and Willemyns (1988) and Wilmots (1983). In a more recent study, Vandekerckhove (2005) demonstrates that in spite of more than half a century of official language policy promoting *Algemeen Nederlands*, convergence with northern Netherlandic Dutch may well have come to a standstill. Instead, there is mounting opposition, especially among younger speakers[7], to the integration into colloquial Belgian Dutch of northern Dutch variants. Geerts (1992: 80) argues in this regard that the Flemings are striving for "recognisability." They are doing so not only in the traditional areas of pronunciation and the lexicon but also, as Vandekerckhove's (2005) data suggest, in the area of morpho-syntax.

As for the Flemish dialects, under attack since the postwar period from the official language policy promoting *Algemeen Nederlands*, they continue to be relatively strong in the Flemish linguistic landscape but, according to Deprez (1984: 9), "they are giving way in more formal and official domains and among the higher social classes," where Belgian Dutch now prevails.

First-generation Flemish migrants to southwestern Ontario did not take part in all or some of these developments, which took place for the most part in the second half of the 20th century, i.e. during the decades following the Second World War. They are the result of decades of linguistic struggle for Flemish emancipation from French language dominance; a struggle, however, with which the migrants are more than familiar. As a consequence, first-generation Flemish migrants who arrived before the Second World War or shortly thereafter were competent speakers of their local Flemish dialects but had little or no knowledge of *Algemeen Nederlands*. Theirs was still a Flanders where the Flemish dialects had been forced into a subordinate role and where French was for all intents and purposes the standard language. Those who arrived during the 1960s had depending on their level of education a better developed competence in *Algemeen Nederlands* while still feeling most at ease in their local dialects. Theirs was a Flanders where the Flemish dialects were increasingly involved in a diglossic relationship with a standard that, because of its northern origin, was foreign to them.

In accordance with usage current among Flemish Canadians in southwestern Ontario, *Flemish* will be used in the remainder of this article to refer to the respondents' heritage language. The choice of *Flemish* alludes to the dialectal or non-standard nature of the community's heritage language. The language continuum in Flanders can be broken up in several codes: regional dialect, *Umgangssprache* (an intermediate variant between regional dialect and standard language), Belgian Dutch and AN (Van de Craen and Willemyns 1988). Most if not all first-generation Flemish immigrants were non-standard speakers limited to their regional dialects, with *Umgangssprache* for formal interactions.

The prewar situation had instilled in the Flemings strong feelings of linguistic inferiority; of speaking a language that unlike French was 'backwards' and incapable of functioning at the higher levels of public administration, education and culture. On the other hand, feelings of language-centred ethnocentric pride[8] were

also prominent among these prewar speakers of Flemish. This pride was both the cause and the outcome of a linguistic struggle that predated the creation of the Belgian state in 1830 and ultimately led to the language laws of the 1930s, which laid the groundwork for Flemish emancipation and paved the way for the language policies and standardization process of the postwar period. The changed linguistic landscape in the second part of the 20th century led in its turn to feelings of linguistic insecurity; of speaking one's language badly or at least not as well as the higher educated or the Dutch. However, a language-based ethnocentric pride that is somewhat in conflict with northern Dutch (as it used to be with French) was (and still is) present here as well. Indeed, as during the prewar period, "language [remained] the whole nation" for many Flemings; that is "no Flemish, no Flemings" as Deprez (1998: 107) puts it. But because Flemish is actually Dutch and because the Flemings do not identify with the Dutch, many Flemings felt (and still feel) that complete compliance with the northern norm amounted to another form of assimilation. Consequently, and in spite of their insecurities, most Flemings refused (and continue to refuse) to speak like the Dutch. This refusal is often referred to as *schizoglossia* in the literature.

This complex sociolinguistic profile was transported by the Flemish migrants to their new homeland. In southwestern Ontario, it resulted in somewhat intricate relationships with the Dutch immigrant community, the dominant Netherlandic presence in that part of Canada from 1948 onwards. Schryer (1998:150), for instance, reports "minor tensions expressed through friendly rivalry and joking," but with the Flemish migrants feeling that they had to defend their way of speaking. An example is the following commentary provided by one of Schryer's (1998) Flemish respondents:

> *[...] as I said, I got along with the Protestants because they were my customers or employees, but I found that the Hollanders would try to poke fun of the way I spoke.* (Schryer 1998: 161)

More importantly, it led in that particular immigrant setting to two contradictory pulls in the area of heritage-language maintenance and transfer.[9] For a detailed discussion, we refer the reader to Collet (2010). A quick overview will be provided here.

On the one hand and in accordance with core value theory, the language-centred nature of Flemish identity tended to act in favour of maintenance of Flemish[10] as the home language. Indeed, in endogamous Flemish unions and to a lesser extent in mixed Flemish-Dutch unions, Flemish often remained the preferred means of communication between spouses (see Collet 2010). Core value theory, as formulated by Smolicz and Secombe (1985), holds that when language is part of the integral core value system of an ethnic group, it is less vulnerable to abandonment as this would threaten the survival of the group.

> In [an immigrant setting], differences appear to exist in the degree of commitment that ethnic groups reveal toward their native languages. [...] For minority groups that are language-centred, the preservation of their linguistic core is indispensable for the transmission of their cultures to the next generation. (Smolicz and Secombe 1985: 12)

On the other hand, the intense feelings of shame and unease, products of the migrants' linguistic inferiority and linguistic insecurity, tended to pull in the opposite direction; that is towards abandonment of Flemish. This occurred not only outside of the home with speakers of both Flemish and Dutch but - in defiance of core value theory - also inside the home with one's Canadian-born or raised children. Indeed, by only reluctantly transferring the heritage language to the younger generation[11], the first generation risked their children's expulsion from the group.

> The term 'core value' refers to those values that are regarded as forming the most fundamental components or heartland of a group's culture. [...] Rejection of core values usually carries with it the threat of exclusion from the group. Indeed, the deviant individual may himself feel unable to continue as an 'authentic' member. (Smolicz and Secombe 1985: 11)

The first generation felt, however, that English proficiency would give their children, among other things, immediate competence in a prestigious standard.[12] As for the use of English with other Netherlandic migrants, this was for the most part a face-saving technique, as English obscured the migrants' former socioeconomic status held in the 'old country' and in so doing created a level playing field in the 'new country'.

To conclude, second-generation Flemish Canadians often grew up in a family environment that simultaneously promoted and curtailed the use of the heritage language. The following sections will attempt to determine the nature of their current relationship with the language and culture of their parents.

3. Second-generation Flemish Canadians

3.1 Survey participants

Twenty-eight (28) second-generation Flemish Canadians (male: 10, female: 18; mean age: 68.5) participated in the study.[13] The youngest participant was born in 1973 and the oldest in 1925. However, one out of every two participants, that is a total of 14, was born in the 1930s and as many as 20 were born either before or during the Second World War. It seems then that the participants were mostly the descendants of prewar migrants, i.e. of migrants who had settled in Canada between the turn of the century and the end of the 1930s. The remaining 8 participants were born in the 1950s (T: 4), 1960s (T: 2) and 1970s (T: 2). The youngest of these are without any doubt children of postwar migrants. The fact that these are a minority among our participants could be an indication that their link to the Flemish immigrant community is weaker and that they may not have taken on the Flemish ethnic identity of their Belgian-born parents. This suspicion finds an echo in a comment by Anne Smith-Clarysse published in the Belgian Club Newsletter of February 2010:

> *The fact is that those of us who feel most attached to our home country are older and our younger folk feel little connection to Belgium, certainly not enough to maintain ties [...]. (Smith-Clarysse 2010: 2)*

An alternative explanation is that interest in one's ethnicity fluctuates over one's lifetime. Elderly persons may become nostalgic for their youth and this may lead to a renewed focus on their ethnic background and to a renewed interest in the 'old country' and in their local 'ethnic community' (Lowensteyn 1981/1982).

3.2 Survey questions

Second-generation respondents were asked to provide answers to all the questions contained in the questionnaire[14] and to check *this question does not apply to me* whenever necessary. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, of which only section 2 had been designed specifically for Canadian-born participants.

The first section, made up of questions 1 to 45, contained, besides a number of relevant household questions (gender, age, place of birth, level of education, marital status, etc.), questions that attempted to chart the patterns of heritage-language use with (a) same generation members of the Flemish community (e.g. siblings, friends and spouse), (b) with members of the younger generations (i.e. children and grand-children) as well as (c) with 'outsiders', i.e. speakers of another language (e.g. spouse, peers and colleagues). It contained, in addition, a number of questions that attempted to identify the respondents' attitudes towards the heritage language. Questions aiming at measuring the respondents' level of involvement in activities that promote both the heritage language and the heritage culture (e.g. reading Flemish books and magazines, listening to Flemish radio programmes, enrolment in heritage-language classes, membership in a Belgian club, travel to Flanders, etc.) had furthermore also been included.

The second section of the questionnaire, containing questions 46 to 54, aimed at tracing the patterns of intergenerational heritage-language transfer; that is from the older Belgian-born generations (i.e. parents, grandparents, etc.) to their descendants born in southwestern Ontario (i.e. children, grandchildren, etc.). Only Canadian-born participants were asked to complete this section.

The third and last section invited participants to provide additional information in the form of commentaries or personal accounts.

3.3 Heritage-language use and maintenance

The aim of this section is to determine to what extent Flemish, one of two core values of Flemish ethnic identity (the second one is Catholicism), remains important in the lives of second-generation Flemish Canadians. To do so, it examines, firstly, the second generation's language use inside the home with close family members (parents, siblings, spouse and children) and secondly, outside of the home with colleagues, friends and neighbours or with Belgian relatives. It then proceeds to look at the second generation's participation in activities, either individual or group-based, that promote heritage-language use and maintenance. It concludes with an analysis of this generation's attitude towards heritage-language maintenance and with a measure, based on subjective self-evaluations, of its current proficiency in that language.

3.3.1 Language use inside the home

'Home' has a double meaning in this section: it stands for the parental home, i.e. the home in which the second-generation respondents grew up as children, and refers also to the home these respondents later shared as adults with their spouse and/or children. The data will provide two measures that are intrinsically linked: firstly, intergenerational transfer of the heritage language, and secondly, intergenerational language shift inside the home.

3.3.1.1. Language use in the first-generation Flemish Canadian home

- **Language use with parents**

In spite of the Flemish language's core value status, most second-generation respondents grew up in a home that did not promote transfer of the heritage language. Indeed, only 6 of the 28 second-generation respondents (i.e. 21.4%) were raised in a home in which Flemish was the dominant language, that is, the language that parents used most often with their Canadian-born children. Of the remaining respondents, 9 (i.e. 32.1%) indicate growing up in a bilingual home environment where parents alternated between Flemish and English. Nearly one out of two of the respondents (i.e. 13 or 46.4%), however, was raised in a predominantly English home environment.

Of these three groups, only the latter was not exposed to Flemish on a daily basis. The two previous groups (i.e. 15 or 53.5%), on the other hand, evolved in a home environment that attempted heritage-language transfer, albeit somewhat reluctantly.

In which language were you brought up by your parents?	(T: 28)
Flemish	6 - 21.4%
Flemish and English	9 - 32.1%
English	13 - 46.4%

Table 1 G1 parent – G2 child language use

The parental use of Flemish, however, had little effect on the second generation's linguistic habits. Indeed, with their Belgian-born parents, even when these preferred Flemish, all but one, i.e. 95%, spoke English. Only 3 respondents, i.e. 15%, used Flemish, either as their preferred means of communication with their parents (1 or 5%) or alternately with English (2 or 10%).

Which language did you use most often with your parents?	(T: 20)
Flemish	1 - 5%
Flemish and English	2 - 10%
English	17 - 85%
No reply	8

Table 2 G2 child – G1 parent language use

These numbers indicate that the first generation's lukewarm attempts at heritage-language transfer were met with strong resistance from their children. Several second-generation respondents linked this resistance to their socialization in a predominantly English school environment. They felt compelled to explain in section 3 of the questionnaire that heritage-language transfer tended to be more successful as long as they were not of school age. When they entered school, however, and became more aware of the Flemish language's minority status in southwestern Ontario, their opposition to Flemish tended to intensify.

> *My parents came from Belgium in 1949 and shortly later my twin sister and I were born. We spoke and understood only Flemish until age 5 when we entered school. (respondent 68)*
>
> *My parents became Canadian citizens in 1932. The children spoke Flemish in the home. [...] Once in school, we children conversed in English to the extent that it became our prime language. (respondent 87)*

- **Language use with siblings**

The second generation's opposition to the parent-initiated use of Flemish inside the home led in turn to an avoidance of that language with a second group of conversational partners, namely with siblings. Indeed, all respondents, i.e. 100%, indicated that they conversed exclusively in English with their brothers and sisters.

Which language do/did you use most often with your siblings?	(T: 16)
Flemish	0 – 0%
English	16 – 100%
This question does not apply to me (single child)	4
No reply	8

Table 3 Language use with G2 siblings

Because of the tension between the language preferences of the first generation and those of the second generation, especially in those homes that attempted transfer, Belgian-born parents became the second-generation's prime if not sole link to the heritage language. Upon their death, however, that precarious link was often severed and Flemish disappeared from the lives of these second-generation Flemish Canadians. Maintenance required at that point the creation of a new link to the language, outside of the family, if at all possible.

My parents always spoke Flemish and we spoke English back but when they deceased we don't hear the language anymore [and] so have lost some. (respondent 77)

Since the death of our parents [...], we do not hear the language in our daily lives at all. (respondent 87)

I spoke Flemish quite fluently when my parents [...] were alive. I have recently made some new Belgian friends and [have] joined the Belgian club. I also try to read a Flemish newspaper every month. Consequently, my Flemish is getting somewhat better. (respondent 32)

3.3.1.2 Language use in the second-generation Flemish Canadian home

- **Language use with spouse/partner**

All second-generation respondents, i.e. 100%, indicated that they speak English with their spouses (or partners).

Which language do/did you use most often with your spouse/partner?	(T: 25)
Flemish	0 – 0%
English	25 – 100%
No reply	3

Table 4 Language use with spouse

It is clear from this statistic that ethnicity no longer plays a role in the choice of English as home language. Indeed, at least 20% of the second-generation homes are endogamous or near-endogamous (one spouse or partner is Dutch) and thus composed of spouses (or partners) who share the same heritage language or variants of that language.[15] In all of these homes as well, however, English constitutes the preferred means of communication.

What is/was the mother tongue of your spouse/partner?	(T: 25)
Flemish	3 – 12%
Dutch (if from Holland)	2 – 8%
English	17 – 68%
Other	3 – 12%
No reply	3

Table 5 Mother tongue of spouse

The second generation's childhood preference for English (a consequence of their childhood desire to fit in) and their parents' tacit approval are at the basis of the English language's dominance in the second-generation Flemish Canadian home. Indeed, according to our respondents, a majority of Belgian-born parents, i.e. 55.5%, did not attempt to curtail their children's use of the English language inside the home. Only 27.7% tried to oppose its advance but did so inconsistently and a minority, i.e. 16.6%, did so consistently. The first generation's lack of resistance to their children's use of English was likely a consequence of their pragmatism and of their commitment to Canada. It is also a result, however, of their intense feelings of linguistic inferiority and of linguistic insecurity (see Collet 2010), that is, of their conviction that Flemish as an "inferior" tongue may be detrimental to their children's social status and upward social mobility.

- **Language use with children**

The second generation's strong preference for English inside the home, even in marital settings that do not intrinsically rule out the use of Flemish, is incompatible with heritage-language transfer to the third generation. It is not surprising, then, that all second-generation parents, i.e. 100%, admit to speaking predominantly English with their children.

Which language do you use most often with your children?	(T: 24)
Flemish	0 – 0%
English	24 – 100%

Table 6 Language use with children

To conclude, the data discussed in this section indicate that transfer of the heritage language to the second generation was not attempted on a large scale. Indeed, language shift in favour of English had already been completed in at least 46% of the second-generation's parental homes and was well under way in at least 32% of the remaining homes (see table 1). In addition, Belgian-born parents who attempted transfer were under considerable

pressure from their children to shift to English (see table 2). Under those circumstances, transfer of the heritage language could hardly be successful and indeed it was not. As a consequence, the shift away from Flemish is absolute in the homes of the second generation and transfer to the third generation is no longer attempted in these homes.

3.3.2 Language use outside of the home

Heritage-language use outside of the home is very limited, albeit surprisingly somewhat higher than inside the home. Indeed, only two areas, namely *school* and *letter-writing within Canada*, scored a perfect *never*. A somewhat hesitant use of Flemish (ranging from *sometimes* to *seldom*) can be observed in two areas. These are, in reversed order of importance, *letter-writing to Belgium*, and the *Belgian Club*. These areas also scored the lowest in the *never* column, 59% and 54.5% respectively. All other areas have a score of about 73% or higher in this column.

	Always	***Often***	***Sometimes***	***Seldom***	***Never/NA***
Friends			3 (13.6%)	3 (13.6%)	16 (72.7%)
Neighbours				1 (4.5%)	21 (95.4%)
Workplace			1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	18 (81.8%)
School					22 (100%)
Church			1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	20 (90.9%)
Belgian Club			5 (22.7%)	5 (22.7%)	12 (54.5%)
Shops				1 (4.5%)	21 (95.4%)
Letters - *Belgium*		1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (22.7%)	13 (59%)
Letters - *Canada*					22 (100%)
Pets				1 (4.5%)	21 (95.4%)
***Other*: Visiting Belgian relatives Phone calls relatives**	1 (4.5%)		1 (4.5%)		

No reply: 6 (T: 22)

Table 7 Language use outside of the home

These modest numbers highlight the relative importance for heritage-language maintenance of sustained contact with family members in Belgium (particularly when the first generation is deceased) and especially of the institutional support provided locally by ethnic organizations, such as Belgian clubs.

> *In our realm of friends and relatives we never hear or speak Flemish except when we attend the Belgian Club. Since the first generation passed away, we have lost touch with our native tongue. (respondent 50)*

Perhaps not at all accidentally, the second generation is uncharacteristically active in these two areas as their level of membership in Belgian clubs and their frequency of travel to Belgium indicate. The majority of our second-generation respondents, i.e. 74%, claim to be a member of a Belgian club. In addition, 75% have travelled to Belgium. Nearly 15% do so regularly; that is every 3 to 4 years. Most (52%) have visited their parents' native land at least 2 to 3 times. It is doubtful, however, that these two areas can have a lasting positive effect on heritage-language maintenance. Firstly, the level of use of Flemish between members of Belgian clubs is simply too low. Secondly, studies of the effects of immigrant travel to the country of origin have found that the increase in use of the heritage language is usually short-lived. Indeed, such renewed contact with the heritage language generally does not modify the patterns of heritage-language use in the country of residence.

> The chance to use Dutch on a visit to the Netherlands also seemed to be a reasonably strong motivation for language maintenance. [...] Such use of and interest in Dutch may, however, be short-lived and may not mean any great change in attitude or increase in interest in using Dutch in Australia. (Bennett 1997:54)

3.3.3 Participation in heritage-language activities

Heritage-language use can also be accomplished through participation in structured or unstructured language-based activities, such as enrolment in heritage-language classes or perusal of reading material in the heritage language. The second generation's interest in this type of activity is, however, rather low. The reasons for this are manifold. Firstly, it is in keeping with this generation's level of linguistic assimilation. Secondly, there may be a considerable gap between the dialectal Flemish the second generation was exposed to at home and the *Algemeen Nederlands* taught in heritage-language courses and used in printed material. It is not to be excluded, then, that the foreign nature of the standardized variant could act as a deterrent. Thirdly, most second-generation Flemish Canadians who have some fluency in the heritage language have little or no knowledge of its written form. The acquisition of this type of knowledge was not facilitated by the majority, i.e. 94.4%, of the first-generation parents.

> *As parents, friends and relatives spoke in Flemish, we did understand the language but never could read and write the Flemish language. (respondent 87)*

- **Enrolment in heritage-language classes**

Only 3 respondents, i.e. 12.5%, indicated having attempted to improve their knowledge of the heritage language by taking language classes.

Do/did you take Dutch language classes?	(T: 24)
Yes	3 – 12.5%
No	21 – 87.5%
No reply	4

Table 8 Enrolment in Dutch language classes

- **Reading habits**

Most respondents admit to *rarely* (28%) or *never* (60%) reading in the heritage language. Only 3 respondents, i.e. 12%, claim the opposite.

Do you read Flemish/Dutch newspapers, magazines, books, etc.?	(T: 25)
Very often	0 – 0%
Often	3 – 12%
Sometimes	0 – 0%
Rarely	7 – 28%
Never	15 – 60%
No reply	3

Table 9 Reading habits in the heritage language

3.3.4 Attitudes towards heritage-language maintenance

Despite their very low level of heritage-language use, a surprising number of respondents favour maintenance of the heritage language. At least 58% consider maintenance of Flemish either: *very important* (8.3%), *important* (12.5%), or *somewhat important* (37.5%). The remaining respondents, on the other hand, do not support heritage-language maintenance. They feel the issue is *hardly important* (12.5%) or declare it unequivocally *unimportant* (29.1%).

The lack of consensus among the respondents is striking and contrasts with their rather homogeneous behaviour in the area of heritage-language use. The reluctance[16] to declare the issue of heritage-language maintenance as irrelevant could be an indication that there is a lingering understanding of the central position the Flemish language occupies in Flemish ethnic identity. The first generation, then, may have failed in the area of heritage-language transfer but may have succeeded in transferring, to a certain extent, to the second generation the conceptual construct of their ethnic identity structured around the two pillars of language and religion[17]. Of these two pillars, only the latter has been actively maintained by the second generation. Hardly unique to the Flemish community, Catholicism was without any doubt more compatible with the second generation's desire to fit into Canadian society. Institutional support in the form of parishes was furthermore readily available. In addition, when warranted by the number of Flemish parishioners, Flemish priests were sent to serve in southwestern Ontario, for instance in Blenheim (Magee 1987).

Do you consider it important to maintain Flemish?	(T: 24)
Very important	2 – 8.3%
Important	3 – 12.5%
Somewhat important	9 – 37.5%
Hardly important	3 – 12.5%
Unimportant	7 – 29.1%
No reply	4

Table 10 Attitude towards heritage-language maintenance

3.3.5 Current proficiency in the heritage language

In light of the data discussed in the previous sections, it is not surprising that the vast majority of our second-generation respondents, nearly 68%, ranked their current proficiency in the Flemish language as either: *somewhat poor* (42.8%), *poor* (10.7%) or *very poor* (14.2%). As many as 6 respondents, i.e. 21.4%, admitted having no knowledge at all of the language of their parents. Only 3 respondents, i.e. 10.7%, rated their knowledge as *good*.

These numbers do not differentiate between productive and receptive knowledge. However, many respondents have indicated that their ability to understand Flemish is greater than their ability to express themselves clearly and grammatically. The unbalanced nature of these two abilities is a consequence of the second generation's lack of active use of the language. This trend started in childhood, when the second generation opposed cooperation in parent-initiated use of Flemish, and continued throughout adulthood, when English remained their dominant means of communication.

My parents [...] and relatives conversed in Flemish. The children understood Flemish and could speak it in a basic fashion using a syntax of English grammar. (respondent 50)

I understand everything that is spoken but have more difficulty responding in Flemish. I never learned how to read Flemish. (respondent 68)

How would you rate your current knowledge of Flemish?	(T: 28)
Excellent	0 – 0%
Very good	0 – 0%
Good	3 – 10.7%
Somewhat poor	12 – 42.8%
Poor	3 – 10.7%
Very poor	4 – 14.2%
Inexistent	6 – 21.4%

Table 11 Knowledge of heritage language

It is clear, then, that Flemish in southwestern Ontario has all but disappeared with the first generation, as too little of the language was transferred to the second generation. Many older members of the second generation have come to regret this and now express nostalgia for the language and the culture of their parents.

I would have liked to speak Flemish more fluently and be able to read and write Flemish. (respondent 2)

Now, as a senior citizen, I look back and wish that I had [had] the opportunity to be more involved with my Flemish heritage [...] at a younger age. (respondent 16)

Wilson and Wyndels (1976), in their historical account of Flemish immigration to the province of Manitoba, identify a similar pattern: a yearning among the assimilated second generation to get reacquainted with the language and culture of their parents. They concluded more than 40 years ago that:

> [...] there is a serious split within the Belgian community. It is not the historic ethnic and linguistic dichotomy between Fleming and Walloon, but rather a split of generations. It is perfectly natural that the younger [i.e. second] generation yearns for a knowledge and understanding of its cultural traditions. The tragedy lies in the decline of the Flemish language, for language is the key to cultural appreciation. Without knowledge of the Flemish language, the younger Belgians are effectively cut off from their cultural inheritance. The blame for this must surely be shared by both old and young: the old for failing to pass on their language, and the young for failing to show greater initiative in seeking to learn it. (Wilson and Wyndels 1976: 96)

4. Conclusion

Language, the crucial pillar of Flemish ethnic identity, has been all but lost in southwestern Ontario. Catholicism, the second pillar of Flemish ethnic identity, has been maintained but is ill-placed to affirm the ethnicity's uniqueness as it is shared with so many other ethnic groups. There is, however, a lingering Flemish identity among second-generation Flemish Canadians. Firstly, there seems to be an awareness of the conceptual construct of Flemish ethnic identity, and specifically of the centrality of language in that construct, as indicated by the second generation's attitude towards heritage-language maintenance. Secondly, the level of involvement in Belgian clubs (specifically among the older descendants of prewar migrants) and the amount of travel to Belgium are indicative of an affective link to the first generation's country of origin. Both have a positive effect on the maintenance and rediscovery of ethnic identity, as argued by Lowensteyn (1981). This effect, however, is unlikely to result in an increased use of the heritage language and may, in addition, not extend into the third generation that has no exposure to the language.

NOTES

1. The author is greatly indebted to the Office of Research Services (ORS) of the University of Windsor, whose financial support made this study possible.

2. An earlier version of this paper was read at the 2010 annual meeting of CAANS at Concordia University in Montreal (Quebec). It is a follow-up to another paper presented at the 2009 annual meeting of CAANS at Carleton University in Ottawa (Ontario) that dealt with the patterns of language shift and transfer of first-generation Flemish migrants in southwestern Ontario.

3. The province of Quebec, the destination of choice for emigrants from the French-speaking provinces of Wallonia, also has a considerable share of the total Belgian-origin population: roughly 25% or 45,000 Belgian Canadians. Of the other provinces, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, are third, each home to about 20,000 to 22,000 Belgian Canadians, i.e. roughly 11% to 12%. At least 10,000 Belgian Canadians, i.e. 5.5%, live in the province of Saskatchewan. The remainder lives scattered over the Maritime Provinces and the Territories. (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 97-562-XCB2006006)

4. For an overview of the literature, the interested reader could consult Collet, T. (2010): "First Language Use, Maintenance and Transfer. The Case of the Flemish Community of Southwestern Ontario.", *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XXXI(i), pp. 5-28.

5. None of our first and second-generation respondents used the term *Belgian* (or *Belgisch*) to refer to their heritage language. This usage, however, has been attested by other authors, such as De Ridder (2008: 245-246), for southwestern Ontario: “Meestal spreken broers en zussen al Engels onder elkaar terwijl ze met hun ouders nog hun Vlaamse dialect (*Belgs, Belgian*) praten.” Wilson and Wyndels (1976: 53), furthermore, have attested the usage in Manitoba: “Here [in Manitoba], Belgian means a Fleming and speaking Belgian means speaking Flemish.”

6. “[...] legislation in the 1930s made sure that Dutchification [...] continued on institutional levels. This stage was finally completed by about 1960. From a linguistic viewpoint a [...] standardization process started only then.” (Van de Craen and Willemyns 1988: 49)

7. The October 2009 edition of *Taalpeil*, published by the *Nederlandse Taalunie*, reports: “Vlaamse scholieren spreken lang niet allemaal Algemeen Nederlands. [...] Volgens Ruben Lefever is de taal die hij en zijn klasgenoten spreken geen dialect. “Nee, echt dialect, dat spreken mijn ouders nog wel met elkaar. Maar tegen mij schakelen ze over naar een tussentaal. Het is geen dialect, maar ook geen Algemeen Nederlands.” Volgens Ruben zijn er sentimentele redenen om hun tussentaal te verkiezen boven het AN. “Ge kunt echt niet verwachten dat we met ‘je’ en ‘jij’ praten. Dat krijgen we niet uit onze mond. ‘Ge’ en ‘gij’ klinkt gewoon gezelliger. Iemand die met ‘je’ en ‘jij’ spreekt, die creëert afstand. Geef mij maar onze spreektaal: AN met een hoek af.”

8. According to Vos (1998: 92), the language question in Flanders has led to language becoming the “main symbol” of Flemish identity. This means that for most Flemings the existence of the Flemish people depends on the survival of the language.

9. The conflicting tendencies identified here are based on information provided by first-generation participants in our study. These were overwhelmingly postwar migrants. As a consequence, the described heritage-language tendencies apply specifically to this group of Flemish migrants, i.e. to those migrants who arrived in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. They should, however, also capture the propensities of the prewar first-generation migrants, as the data pertaining to heritage-language transfer provided by their descendants seem to indicate (see section 3.3).

10. First-generation participants in our study expressed themselves overwhelmingly in favour of heritage-language maintenance. At least 68% ranked maintenance as *very important* to *important*. Another 29% considered maintenance *somewhat important*. There was only one dissenting voice (2%). See also Collet (2010).

11. Only 23% of the first-generation parents who participated in our study spoke Flemish to their children on a daily basis. See also Collet (2010).

12. Geerts, Nootens and Van den Broeck (1978) observed a parallel sociolingual reflex in parent-child interactions in post-war Flanders, where out of an apparent desire for social promotion the use of Belgian Dutch or AN is favoured over that of the regional dialects. Indeed, Geerts, Nootens and Van den Broeck (1978: 37) argue that “since the Fleming experiences the [...] linguistic situation in Flanders as a ‘transitional period’ [...], he apparently may not consider the dialect as ‘pedagogically’ appropriate since it could hurt the child’s chances to climb the social ladder.”

13. In total, 200 questionnaires were mailed to potential participants. 80 of the questionnaires were completed and returned to the author (i.e. a response rate of 40%). Of the 80 questionnaires, 44 had been filled out by first-generation migrants, 28 by second-generation, 4 by third-generation and 4 by fourth-generation Flemish Canadians. The breakdown possibly reflects the diminishing rate of Flemish ethnic identity and the raising level of assimilation into mainstream Canadian society from the first to the fourth generation.

14. The questionnaire was modelled after Hulsen (2000). See also Collet (2010).

15. Endogamy has dropped significantly from the first to the second generation. Nearly 60% of all the first-generation marriages were endogamous (56%) or near-endogamous (4%). With respect to the Flemish community's (inter)marriage pattern, Carbonez-Dejaeger (1997:48) contends the following: "de eerste generatie trouwde meestal binnen de eigen gemeenschap. In de volgende generatie werd er getrouwd in een bredere groep maar binnen de katholieke bevolking."

16. The reluctance could also be symptomatic of the familiar problem of the low level of correlation between language attitude measures, particularly of affective attitude, and overt behaviour (see e.g. Agheyisi and Fishman 1970).

17. The second pillar of Flemish ethnic identity is clearly identified in Flemish nationalist slogans such as AVV/VVK (Alles voor Vlaanderen en Vlaanderen voor Kristus).

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