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# Vernacular Multilingualism. The use of French in Medieval Dutch Literature

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**Abstract**
Recently new attention has been paid to the presence and use of French outside of France in multilingual regions, one of them being the Southern Low Countries. Scholarship focusing on this area has emphasized the presence of French within the Dutch literary culture as well as studied the language attitude of Dutch authors towards French. This article adds a third focus to this scholarship, namely that of the use of French found within multilingual texts from the Southern Low Countries. Through an analysis of a selection of bilingual and trilingual texts, it is determined how French is incorporated in these texts, what functionality it serves and to what extent this function reflects or contradicts findings from the other two views on French in medieval Dutch literary culture.

**Keywords** Vernacular multilingualism · Southern Low Countries · Bilingualism · Sociolinguistics · Dutch narrative literature

## Introduction

Since the 1990s, the study of medieval literature has seen an increased interest in multilingualism as a cultural phenomenon, a literary aspect and a sociolinguistic fea-

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ture.[1] Central to many of these studies is the French language, which during the Middle Ages operated as a supralocal language of courtly communication and politics, urban administration and trade, and literature. Through these functions French was able to move across borders and through different cultures. Considering this presence of French outside France was particularly felt in medieval England following the Anglo-Norman conquest, it comes as no surprise that recent scholarship on multilingualism has centered around this region and the relation between French and its other languages (Butterfield, 2010; Kleinhenz & Busby, 2010; Jefferson & Putter, 2013; Morato & Schoenaers, 2018; Gilbert, Gaunt & Burgwinkle, 2020).

Another region in which the influence of the French language was strongly felt was the County of Flanders. This region, too, has become the target of recent studies on multilingualism. In 2012, Serge Lusignan devoted a chapter of his monograph on the Picard dialect in the Middle Ages to its place in Flanders, showing through sociolinguistic enquiries that the French dialect played a prominent role in the urban and courtly life of the County (Lusignan, 2012, pp. 187–233). Three years later, Simon Gaunt published a paper following the conclusion of the AHRC-funded project *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, which similarly devoted attention to French literature from Flanders, alongside examples of literature from medieval England and Italy (Gaunt, 2015). Next to these examples, interest in multilingualism in Flanders has also been promoted by Dutch scholars through special issues of the journal *Queeste* and separate projects such as the ongoing NWO-funded project *The Multilingual Dynamics of the Literary Culture of Medieval Flanders (ca. 1200 – ca. 1500)*, headed by Bart Besamusca (Desplenter & Wackers, 2008; Mareel & Schoenaers, 2015; Armstrong & Strietman, 2017; Van de Haar & Schoenaers, 2021).

Looking more closely at these studies of multilingualism in medieval Flanders – and to a certain extent those dealing with multilingualism in general – one can detect two prominent approaches. The first looks at the presence of French texts and works in Flanders, focusing on book lists and ownership data alongside intertextual references and translation techniques. The second type deals with language attitudes derived from primary sources, in particular those expressed through paratextual evidence in manuscripts and through contemporary prologues, epilogues, and narratorial commentaries. Examples of both approaches will be discussed below.

The aim of this article is to focus on a third, far less studied type of multilingualism, namely that of French elements present in Dutch literary texts. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, various Dutch texts included French linguistic elements, ranging from single words to sentences and passages. Considering the literary tradition as a whole, however, these code-switches are scarce (Gardner-Chloros,

[1] Hafner, 2018, p. 109 discerns between three concepts associated with the coexistence of multiple languages: *Mehrsprachigkeit*, which acts as a hypernym for which no English equivalent exists and denotes all situations in which multiple languages interact with one another; *Multilinguismus* and *Plurilinguismus* function as hyponyms of *Mehrsprachigkeit* and refer to the combined use of languages in multilingual societies or domains (multilingualism) and the multilingual capabilities of individual speakers (plurilingualism). In this article, the term multilingualism is used in a limited sense, referring to the copresence of different languages in literary sources rather than the degree of societal or institutional multilingualism in the domains or regions from which these literary sources originate.

2009; Emerson, 2017). Perhaps it is because of this lack of extensive material that no overarching or comparative study of the actual multilingualism in Dutch literature has been carried out yet. What examples we do possess, however, grant important insights into the multilingual aspects of medieval Dutch works and the sociolinguistic dynamics that inform their reception. This article serves as a starting point for such a study.

By examining the presence of French elements in Dutch narrative texts from the Southern Low Countries, I argue that the general medieval attitude towards French in the Low Countries is largely reflected in the use of multilingualism by medieval authors. As such, my analysis of the function and presentation of these French elements introduces literary evidence to the findings from prior scholarship which predominantly focus on the cultural and sociolinguistic context of multilingualism in the literary tradition.

This prior scholarship discussed in the following section, functions as the framework against which my analysis of narrative texts, ranging from chronicles to beast epics and songs, will take place. Absent in this corpus are French texts in which Dutch elements appear – the other side of vernacular Dutch-French multilingual coin. Following the discussion on the presence of French in Dutch narrative texts, this article will end with some remarks on this second type of vernacular multilingualism.

## French in Medieval Flanders

The presence and influence of French in the Dutch literary culture of medieval Flanders directly follow from the political influence of the French crown on the County during the majority of the Middle Ages. The largest part of the County of Flanders belonged to the French kingdom and was ruled over by French-speaking nobles who were often counted among the most powerful vassals of the French monarch and also governed other regions in France. This French-speaking presence at the court remained the case after 1384, when Flanders became part of the domain of the Burgundian branch of the House of Valois. On a more urban level, the role of French as the global language of trade naturally meant its home away from home was Flanders. The region played a key role in commerce across all of Europe, with cities such as Bruges, Ghent and Ypres becoming major trading posts and cultural crossroads that fostered multilingualism on various social levels (Brown & Dumolyn, 2018). Finally, in a religious context, the inhabitants of Flanders answered to four major dioceses, all of which were located in France and under the influence of the French monarchy.[2] Given these institutional connections to France, it is not only understandable why the French language was frequently used in medieval Flanders, but also why this was perhaps less the case for the neighboring regions of Brabant and Holland, neither of which were part of the French kingdom (Croenen, 2003; Schoenaers, 2017).

[2] Ypres acted under the authority of the diocese of Thérouanne, whereasBruges and Ghent were both in the diocese of Tournai, with the final two dioceses overlooking cities of Flanders residing in Cambrai and Liège. (Lusignan, 2012, p. 193).

In Flanders, the influence of French on written sources was first felt in administrative sources, whose language gradually changed during the Middle Ages from solely Latin to a mixture of Latin and French and finally a mixture including Dutch, with certain courts and counts preferring one vernacular over the other (Armstrong, 1965; Prevenier & De Hemptinne, 2005; Boone, 2009). Often, when a linguistically mixed form was used, the degree of multilingualism was limited to single words or phrases that were highly localized and difficult to translate into either Latin, French or Dutch. Whilst these forms are proof of contact between members of different language communities, their multilingual structure shows that these communities were largely separated when it came to their preferred use of language. This is also evident when we consider the narrative literature produced at Flemish courts. Whereas examples such as the Dutch translation of the *Floire et Blanceflor* by the Flemish clerk Diederic van Assenede suggest certain members of the Flemish court were interested in Dutch texts, what material sources we possess clearly show a great interest in French literature above all else (Besamusca, 1991, p. 158; Janssens, 2000).

The Counts and Countesses of Flanders were known patrons for various authors writing in French (Stanger, 1957; Van Hoecke, 1987; Walters, 1994; Collet, 2000). Famously, Chrétien de Troyes wrote his *Conte du Graal* at the behest of Philip I, Count of Flanders (1157–1191). Unfinished, this text was continued by several authors, one of whom, Manessier, wrote his continuation for Joan, Countess of Flanders (1205–1244). Her sister, Margaret II, Countess of Flanders (1244–1278), as well as her son, Guy of Dampierre, Count of Flanders between 1251 and 1305, also supported French poets, such as Baudouin de Condé, Gautier de Belle-Perche and Adenet le Roi. During the fourteenth century French musicians were also often invited to the Flemish court to perform, among them Guillaume de Machaut and his pupil Eustache Deschamps.

The presence of French in Flanders can also be measured through the surviving French manuscripts produced in Flanders known to have been owned by inhabitants of Flanders (Wijsman, 2010). Luxury manuscripts were desirable objects of status and popular French texts were often copied by Flemish scribes or imported from Northern France. One telling case is the beautifully illustrated multi-part codex of the French *Lancelot en prose* acquired by Guy VI of Dampierre, Guy of Dampierre's second son, between 1280 and 1290, of which two parts survive.[3] Alison Stones believes there were many more manuscripts of the French *Lancelot* circulating in thirteenth century Flanders, which aligns with our general understanding of the production and reception of French Arthurian manuscripts in the Southern Low Countries (Stones, 1976; Cf. Meuwese, 2005). In a recent article, Frank Brandsma has argued that were the existing manuscripts to accurately reflect the actual production of manuscripts during the thirteenth and fourteenth century, 60% of all Arthurian romances in the Southern Low Countries would have been French (Brandsma, 2018).

Aside from surviving manuscripts, our scope of medieval ownership of French manuscripts has been broadened through the publication of extant book lists and

[3] These two parts are listed as separate manuscripts: New Haven, Beinecke Library, 229 and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 95.

catalogues (Derolez, 1997–2016).[4] Though it is often difficult to get an exact picture of which texts are referenced in most book lists, since most titles of medieval works are modern inventions, these lists prove that alongside Latin books Flemish nobles and urban elites also owned French and Dutch books. Notable examples are the book list of the Ghentian Michael van der Stoct, composed sometime around his departure from the Sorbonne in Paris (ca. 1394), the library catalogue of Jan Adornes of Bruges (1444–1511) and the book collection of Louis de Gruuthuse (ca. 1427–1492).

Fascination with French was not just limited to the owners of Dutch manuscripts but also found among the producers of Dutch texts. Alongside the French texts and manuscripts circulating in medieval Flanders are countless examples of Dutch translations of French works and intertextual references to French literature found in Dutch works. These translations allow for greater insight into the production process itself and the linguistic stance of the translator towards his French source. Often, this insight is gathered through authorial comments in prologues and epilogues. Many of these Dutch prologues have been conveniently edited by Gerard Sonnemans, who also presented an overarching study of the functionality of these prologues (Sonnemans, 1995; Besamusca & Sonnemans, 1999).

The most important study (with regard to multilingualism) to date to analyze these prologues has been a 2010 article by Remco Sleiderink. Collecting prologues and examples of narratorial comments that mention a French (*waelsch*, *fransois* and *romansch*) source, Sleiderink found different examples and tried to determine the stance of Dutch translators towards their French sources. His analysis shows that Dutch authors were eager to use their references to French sources as a means of increasing the authority of their translation. For instance, in the *Wrake van Ragisel*, a translation of the Arthurian romance *Vengeance Raguidel*, the anonymous writer alo points out the popularity of his French source text, hinting at its supposed quality and status:

> Nu willic u van hem die tale.
> Laten bliven ende seggen vort.
> Ene aventure die men hort.
> Gerne lesen in walsche tale. (ll. 25–28).[5]
> [I will not continue the story about them, but will tell you an adventure which people love to have read to them in the French language.]

This Francophile stance seems to have been wide spread, though there is one author in particular who has a less favorable view on French sources and presents a more critical tone in his works. This author is Jacob van Maerlant, without question the most prolific and lauded writer of medieval Dutch (Van Oostrom 1996). Maerlant displays a clear preference for Latin sources, noting how French sources are often full of lies and French authors present fictitious narratives as historical facts. This view has since been commented on by Frank Brandsma, who argues that no ‘franco-

[4] Recent studies using this catalogue for the study of multilingualism in the Low Countries are Oosterman, 2018 and Hoogvliet, 2018.

[5] *Wrake van Ragisel*, fragment Bb. Citation and translation are borrowed from Sleiderink, 2010, p. 137.

phobe' stance can be detected in Maerlant's work, but that Maerlant simply prefers Latin sources over French sources when he had access to both (Brandsma, 2018, pp. 256–261). In the cases where Maerlant had to solely rely on French sources, however, he did so with the same respect and reverence that can be found expressed in prologues of other writers.

Francophobe or not, the case of Maerlant does bring up an important characteristic of the collected references, namely that the authoritative status of a language such as French is not inherently related to the language itself, but rather to the context in which the language is used (as well as possibly the status of the user). In one context, expressing one's reliance on French could function as a mark of excellence, whilst in another it actually devalues the worth of the work as a reliable source. What follows is that the status of French as a literary language was not set in stone but instead dependent on the sociocultural and textual context in which it was used. Additionally, it is also interesting to see whether there is a connection between genre and attitude here, as it does not seem coincidental that didactic and historical authors value Latin, where authors of romance shows admiration for French. Here, we will see whether the use of French elements in Dutch texts reflects the overall positive stance of French as an authoritative language found in most prologues or if they instead present a more critical stance on the use of literary French like Maerlant.

## French as a Source of Truth and Knowledge

Using standard search functions on the online *CD-rom Middelnederlands* database, it is possible to detect French words and verses in otherwise Dutch texts (*CD-rom*, 1997). Searching for common words (such as *qui*, *vie, amour*, *sans*, *comme*), characteristic suffixes (such as those associated with verbal forms) and linguistic markers such as *walsch*, *fransois* and *romansch* leads to a small yet diverse selection of French words and sentences.[6] In some cases, a single French term is used, directly followed by a Dutch translation. For instance in the *Brabantse yeesten* (first half of the fourteenth century): '*Marteel* in walsch, dat weet wale / Es een hamer in dietscher tale' (*Marteel* in French, know this well, is called a hammer in the Dutch language).[7]

These examples generally add a certain degree of historical accuracy or an impression of verisimilitude by adding a *couleur locale* to the text.[8] The effectiveness of this

[6] These examples, as well as many others not listed here, were analyzed in their medieval spellings including different variants (for instance 'ki' as a spelling of *qui*). Note that certain high frequent words like *je*, *il*, *de*, *en* and *tu* were so commonly found in Dutch words or sentences as well that using them as search terms did not grant meaningful results. Whilst this method naturally leaves room for improvement, for the purpose of this article it can be deemed effective. In total, nearly 300 medieval Dutch texts were considered, both verse and prose, with some 'texts' in effect being complete manuscripts such as the *Antwerps Liedboek*, which itself contains over 200 individual songs. Of these texts, looking at those produced prior to 1500, 59 contained Latin in some shape or form, seven French and five a combination of Dutch, French and Latin.

[7] Willems, 1839, Book I, ll. 788–789. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[8] As Emerson, 2017, p. 46 points out, this use is also found in the opposite direction, that is to say Dutch terms that are found in French texts. Often these Dutch terms are either difficult to translate into French, for instance specific concepts like dykes or Dutch placenames. Cf. also Peersman, 2015, p. 109.

function is increased when these French terms are not introduced by a narrator, but by characters themselves. In *Dit es en frenesie*, a Flemish text from the fourteenth century, a student in Paris walks through the city, complaining about his studies and expressing his desires to leave academia behind and simply enjoy life (Parsons & Jongenelen, 2009). When he at one point mentions gambling, he briefly switches to the French language surrounding him: 'Ic wedde *sinc contre sijs*' (l. 30: 'I bet *cinq contre six*'), further adding to the idea that the student has been living in Paris.

Here, we are dealing with a Dutch student speaking French. More often, however, French will be spoken by characters for whom French is their maternal language. Examples of this are found in historical texts first and foremost, such as the *Kroniek van Woeringen* (1288–1294; edition: Willems, 1836), where the Duke of Luxembourg addresses his men to '*Tuwe chi chevalier die Wesemale!*' (ll. 7978–7979: 'Kill that knight of Wesemale!'). Earlier in the same text, a French crowd is also cited in a killing frenzy, this time directed at a corrupt bishop:

> Daer bi riep al in fransoes.
> Van Simpoel her Ghi,
> Doen hi quam den bisscop bi:
> '*Tuwe, tuwe li fans prester* !'.
> Ik ben des fransoys niet wel meester,
> Maer ic wane, alsoe bediet dit walsch:
> 'Doodet den pape, hi es valsch!' (ll. 6044–6050).[9]
> [There they all shouted in French to Guy of Simpoel when he approached the bishop: 'Kill, kill the false priest!'. I do not master the French language well, but I believe that this means in French: 'Kill the priest, he is evil!'.]

In these cases, French is used to promote the historical reality of the narrative, whilst simultaneously creating a social distinction between these diegetic speakers and the Dutch-speaking audience of the texts.

French also functions as a guarantor of truthfulness and authority in the form of proverbs. One example is found in *Die Dietsche doctrinale*, an adaptation of the Latin *De amore et dilectione Dei* (1238) by Albertanus of Brescia, written in Antwerp in 1345:

> Die fransoys seeght dat u er staet.
> *Cius ki a mal vosijn*.
> *A souent mal matijn*.
> Dats wies gebheure sijn quaet.
> Heeft dicke quade dagheraet.[10]

[9] Other examples from the Fifth Part of Lodewijk van Velthem's continuation of Jacob van Maerlant's *Spiegel Historiael* are discussed in Peersman, 2015. An example from a non-historical text is found in 'Venus' vierschaar', one of the longer poems found in the Flemish Gruuthuse song manuscript (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 79 K 10).

[10] The Hague: KB, 76 E 5, ll. 1834–1838. Transcript provided by Willem Kuiper (*CD-rom*, 1997).

[The French that you see here states '*Ces qui a mal voisin a souvent mal matin*'. This means: he who has a bad neighbour often has bad mornings'.]

Often these proverbs are found alongside other expressions of wisdom and knowledge. This is for instance the case in *Van vele edelen parabelen ende wise leeren*, a collection of 225 proverbs transmitted in the Van Hulthem manuscript (Brussels, KBR, 15.589–623, f. 136vb-146ra). Of these 225 proverbs, a majority consists of Dutch translations of *sententiae* by Latin intellectuals and philosophers (which are directly mentioned in the manuscript). Only one contains French:

Die wale sprect elken tuwe.
*Qui bien est ne se remuwe*.
Wetti wat dat in dietsche bediet.
Die wel es verwandel hem niet.[11]
[This French is directed to each of you: '*Qui bien est ne se remue'*. Do you know what it means in Dutch? He who is doing well should not change.]

In this context, the French proverb invokes a sense of wisdom, one which gains prestige through the language in which it is presented. Rather than simply translating the proverb, the original language is used to emphasize and associate with a learned tradition. Such a function, however, is traditionally reserved for Latin, the language of learned discourse throughout the Middle Ages (Lusignan, 1986; Wackers, 1996). Given the predominantly Latin context of the Dutch verses in *Van vele Edelen parabelen ende wise leeren* and the fact that only a single French proverb is included, it seems Latin indeed retained this reputation and that French was only included to serve a similar purpose sporadically. When it is used, however, the French lesson is given equal respect and status as the Latin-inspired Dutch counterparts. Here we thus detect a similarity with the use of French and Latin sources as described in Dutch prologues: Latin is preferred over French, but French itself can be of benefit when its content is useful and truthful.

In the Van Hulthem manuscript we also find another text which, alongside Dutch and Latin, includes French sentences (text 94). It is perhaps the most thematically multilingual text found in the medieval Dutch literary tradition, since its protagonists are the most famous polyglots of all: parrots.[12] In *Dits een exempel vrayen betekent bi III papengayen* we are introduced to a man who trained his three parrots to each speak a different language: Central French, Occitan and Latin. While away from home, a clerk visits the man's wife and continues what appears to be an extramarital affair. When the first French parrot sees the clerk and wife kissing, he says: *On fayt tort nostre singoer!* (l. 28: They are abusing our master!). The clerk translates this for the wife, who angrily kills the parrot. When the second Occitan parrot sees this happening, he shrieks out: *Pour dire la veritate, est mort nostre frate!* (l. 43–44: For

[11] Brinkman & Schenkel, 1999, II: 749 (text 148.159).

[12] It is no coincidence that one of the most multilingual medieval texts to our knowledge, John Skelton's *Speke Parrot*, also chooses this bird as its linguistic vessel. On Skelton's *Speke Parrot*, see Griffiths, 2013.

speaking the truth our brother is dead!).[13] Hearing this, the wife once again becomes angry and kills the second, Occitan-speaking parrot. Finally, the third Latin parrot sees both of his brothers die and says: *Audi, vide, tace, si tu vis vivere pace* (l. 57–58: Hear, see and remain silent, if you wish to live in peace). The clerk proclaims that the third parrot spoke wisely and therefore his life could be spared. The poem ends with proclaiming the value of knowing when to remain silent (Wackers, 1994, p. 301). From a multilingual perspective, we may adopt a meta-perspective that reflects the status of French and Latin as learned languages: Whereas the French sentences – truthful as they may be – brought their speakers to an untimely demise, the Latin sentence prevails and grants its speaker safety. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet rightly points out that 'the choice of a language, for medieval authors, is a fundamental political, ethical, and aesthetic statement' (Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2010, p. 345). As such, it is no coincidence that both the French- and Occitan-speaking parrots die whereas the Latin speaking one survives. Here, the content of the Latin *sententia* also comes into play, for what greater authority can be executed by a language than to completely silence (*tace*) another?[14] Indeed, then, we can conclude that the direct lesson of 'know when to speak and when to remain silent' can be supplemented by a second lesson which holds that those who wish to speak wisely speak Latin and not French.

The multilingual cases discussed so far show that French elements were used by Dutch authors to increase the status and truthfulness of their texts. This use parallels the function of poets' and translators' references to French sources in their prologues and narratorial comments. The *exemplum* of the talking parrots does, however, show that given the choice Latin is the safer bet, and thus corresponds with the sentiments shared by Maerlant. It also shows another side to the presence of French in Dutch texts, namely one that critiques the language and satirizes its users (even when these users are birds). This *exemplum*, we will see, is far from unique.

## French as a Means to Social Criticism

One medieval Dutch text famous for its satirical nature is the thirteenth century beast epic *Van den vos Reynaerde* (henceforth: *Reynaert*) (Arendt, 1965; Bouwman, 1991, pp. 403–427). Through anthropomorphic animals portraying a courtly society, it offers harsh criticism of members of all social classes, in particular the nobility and clergy. Laced with intriguing tricks, exceptional word play and a surprising dénouement, the work is a staple in research as well as the classroom. Its popularity during the Middle Ages is also apparent from its five surviving manuscripts, two of them more or less complete, as well as a translation into Latin in the thirteenth century, the *Reynardus Vulpes*, and a continuation, *Reinaerts historie*, written between 1375 and the first half of the fifteenth century (Bouwman & Besamusca, 2009, pp. 34–39; Engels 1996; Wackers 1986; Berteloot, 2008).

[13] The unusual form '*frate*' is likely the result of the author's wish to rhyme this word with '*veritate*' in the line above.

[14] I thank Mark Chinca for suggesting this interpretation during the 2021 Fordham conference *Medieval French Across Borders* (20–21 March 2021).

Less well known is that the *Reynaert* and its continuation are two of the very few examples of trilingual texts found in the medieval Dutch literary tradition. Aside from a variety of Latin sentences – each slightly ungrammatical in their form and parodic in their use – the *Reynaert* also contains French elements. Throughout the story, characters are introduced with French-inspired names, used to highlight the discrepancy between their appearance and their actions. In a recent article, Bart Besamusca argues that this use of French serves comic purposes at the expensive of the French literary (courtly) culture (Besamusca, forthcoming). During the opening passage of the *Reynaert* various animals gather at the court of Nobel the lion to put forward complaints aimed at Reynaert the fox. Of these animals, Cortoys the dog is the only one who voices his complaints in French, claiming that Reynaert stole a sausage from him (ll. 98–106).[15] His use of French seems to be intended as a status-increasing speech act, positioning him above the other animals of the court. In reality, however, this strategy backfires when it is revealed that the sausage Cortoys claims Reynaert stole was in fact first stolen by Cortoys himself (ll. 114–125). Furthermore, complaining about something so minor as the loss of a sausage is also not befitting an aristocratic nobleman. The resulting comic effect juxtaposes Cortoys superficial connection to French courtly etiquettes (embodied in both his name and his use of French) with his base and immoral actions.

The second appearance of French is on the lips of Reynaert himself. After all animals have made their claims at Nobel's court, Bruun the bear is tasked with bringing Reynaert in to defend himself. Bruun, however, fails miserably: after being enticed by the prospect of eating delicious honey, Bruun gets trapped in a half-split oak and is mercilessly beaten by nearby villagers. He nearly manages to escape, ending up at the bank of a river with his head and both paws bleeding heavily. Seeing Bruun in this state, Reynaert approaches the bear as follows:

> *Siere* priester, *dieu vo saut*!
> Kendi Reynaert, den rybaut?
> Wildine scauwen,so siettene hier,
> den roden scalc, den fellen ghier.
> Seght mi priester, soete vrient,
> bi den Heere dien ghi dient,
> in wat ordinen wildi hu doen,
> dat ghi draghet roeden capproen?
> So weder sidi abd no pryhore?
> Hi ghinc u arde na den hore.
> die hu dese crune hevet bescoren!
> Ghi hebt huwen top verloren,
> ghi hebt hu anscoen afghedaen. (ll. 937–951)
> [*My lord priest, may God protect you*! Do you know the villain Reynaert? If you want to see him, then you see him here, the red scoundrel, the wicked glutton. Tell me, priest, dear friend, by the Lord that you serve, which order do you intend to join, as you are wearing a red hat? Are you an abbot or prior? Whoever

[15] Citations and translations are from Bouwman & Besamusca, 2009.

gave you this tonsure sheared very close to your ears! You have lost the hair on your crown, you have taken off your gloves.]

Reynaert mockingly interprets Bruun's injured head and paws with the skull cap, tonsure and discarded gloves worn by clergymen and, accordingly, addresses him in the high status French language, thus portraying himself to be more courtly and sophisticated than he actually is. This only increases the contrast with Bruun's actual state – one of severe pain and humiliation – and Besamusca is right to conclude that the French sentence ('May God protect you') is highly cynical in this context (Besamusca, forthcoming). More so, by speaking French Reynaert mockingly mimics the sophisticated manner in which aristocrats wish to present themselves, much like Cortoys. As a result, both in the case of Cortoys the dog and Bruun the bear, French is used to evoke the expectation of a sophisticated courtly language only immediately to shatter this expectation by the reality of the narrative situation.

*Reinaerts historie* duplicates these French elements from the *Reynaert* and adds three French sentences. After Reynaert managed to talk his way out of his execution by sparking the interest of the queen with a made-up treasure, King Nobel holds another court day where various animals make yet further complaints about Reynaert. Hearing what Reynaert has done when he was supposed to be on his way to Rome to repent for his sins makes Nobel reconsider his failings. The cause of these failings, however, according to Nobel is not just Reynaert but also his own wife (ll. 3641–3646). Hearing this accusation, the queen opens her response in French:

Ten lesten sprac die coninghynne:
*Sier, pour dieu, ne croys mye*.
*Toutes choses que on voys dye*.
*Et ne jures pays legierement*. (ll. 3665–3668).[16]
[At last the queen spoke: 'Lord, for God's sake, do not believe everything people tell you and do not judge too hastily'.]

These words by Queen Gente might be considered as justification for her own actions (she believed Reynaert was honest), but in context they emphasize precisely why the court is in the miserable state that it is in: believing Reynaert to be innocent and constantly granting him one last chance led to him deceiving the entire court, and because of Gente's stance in *Reinaerts historie* it is sure to be repeated (Wackers, 1986, p. 175). Additionally, Gente is silent about her own greed and desires, a weakness Reynaert was all too eager to exploit. Through this use of French – and even through her name which, like Cortoys, has a French meaning ('gente' meaning 'of noble birth') – Gente's linguistic presentation attempts to establish a connection with both learned and courtly discourses, both of which turn out to be nothing but a veil to hide her true nature.[17]

[16] Edition: Wackers, 2002.

[17] To take this one step further, comparison with Rukenau the ape is particularly interesting. This female character is newly introduced in *Reinaerts historie* and, as Reynaert's right hand woman, she is largely responsible for his survival when he himself is unable to speak. Like Reynaert and Gente, Rukenau man-

In the two Reynaert texts, French is used not as a tool to increase status or prestige but rather the opposite: to ridicule the desire for status and prestige by contrasting the use of French with the acts and qualities of those who speak it. The same exercise is also present in two other texts from Flanders. Both are found in the Gruuthuse manuscript, a collection of songs, poems and prayers produced around 1400 in Bruges by members of the urban elite (Willaert, 2010; Koldeweij et al., 2013; Willaert et al., 2015). Whilst influence of the French lyrical tradition is felt on a thematic and formal level in almost all of the 147 songs, only three actually contain references to the French language or actual sentences in French (Brinkman & De Loos, 2015, pp. 143–144; Reynaert, 1984; De Loos, 2010). One of these three songs (II.92) merely contains a single French sentence as its refrain with no further commentary on its use of French, whereas the two other songs actively incorporate the French lyrical and courtly tradition into their narrative and use of language. Even more striking is that due to their shared theme, form and reference of geographical locations near Bruges as well as their conjoined position within the manuscript, it has been rightfully assumed that both texts were most likely intended to be read in relation to one another.[18]

In the first song, 'Ic hadde een lief vercoren' (II.16), our protagonist sings about meeting his lover, whom he convinces to join him to the forested outskirts just outside of Daverloo (l. 18), a region right next to Bruges, to consummate their love. Afterwards, the two return to the city where they part (Brinkman & De Loos, I, 2015, pp. 320–323). The description of this beloved is that of a traditional courtly princess or maiden. This is also reflected in the language used by the singer-narrator: he calls her his '*soete minnekin*' (l. 9: sweet darling), says she offers him her '*meine*' (l. 33) and sings with her sweet '*vois*' (l. 44), which the text tells us is in French (ll. 42). In reality, however, she is not a lovely princess but instead a crippled elderly prostitute, with hands dark as coal (ll. 33–34) and lips colored yellow and blue (ll. 51–52). She misses an ear, limps and sounds like a wild boar when she sings and a goose when she walks (ll. 43, 69–70) (Cf. Kügle, 2015, pp. 117–118). As in the *Reynaert* the sophisticated French-inspired appearance and presentation forms a stark contrast with reality.

The second song, 'De capelaen van Hoedelem' (II.17), contains elements similar to 'Ic hadde een lief vercoren', with the addition of actual French. In this song, the chaplain of Oedelem goes out to have sex under the guise of "performing the Mass", accompanied by the sacristan who has to keep watch, until eventually the owner of the house where the chaplain and his lover are arrives and severely beats the chaplain (Brinkman & De Loos, I, 2015, pp. 324–327).[19] Whereas in song II.16 the prostitute was the one said to sing in French, here it is the chaplain who incorporates French-sounding words. He calls his sacristan '*garsoen*' (l. 5) and once at the house of his lover promises to return '*sonder chi*' (l. 22: without delay (Fr. *sans si*)). Fancy words

ages to persuade the other animals of the court and most strikingly she too does this by mixing Dutch with other languages (in her case Latin). On Rukenau's role in *Reinaerts historie*, see Wackers, 1986, pp. 185–190 and Goossens, 1996.

[18] This notion was first suggested by Heeroma, 1966, p. 196. Heeroma's theory that the text were structured in dyads and calendar months is, has been contested by Gerritsen, 1969, pp. 187–215.

[19] On the sexual connotation of "reading Mass", see Herchert, 1996, p. 13. Cf. also Houthuys, 2005, pp. 173–192, where similar expressions such as 'making someone a chaplain' are interpreted in the same vein.

to be sure, but when it comes down to speaking actual French, the chaplain is merely able to produce a muddled refrain that is difficult to fully decipher:

*De bottekalagi, de madamoers sondi, sondi.*
*De bottekalagi, de madamoers, de voustra vi*.

Herman Brinkman and Ike de Loos (II, 2015, pp. 48) managed to offer a modern reinterpretation of these lines, which can be roughly translated as:

About the beauty that alleviates my love ache, it is said.
About the beauty that alleviates my love ache, according to you.

Whilst the translation remains slightly distorted, it is clear that the chaplain is conjuring up words associated with the French courtly love register (for example '*madamoers*' reading as *mal d'amours*, '*botte*' as *beauté* and '*kalagi*' as a form of *qui alegie*). The use of this register, combined with the deed of the chaplain, aims to place him in the amorous and adventurous setting of courtly romance, with the chaplain taking on the role of daring lovers like Tristan or Lancelot. As his broken French, however, already hints at, the chaplain is far from a brave knight and, like his French, his actual "adventure" ends in disaster.

The combination of the French language, an amorous courtly context and the subversion of this context gains further importance when we consider the place of these two texts within the Gruuthuse manuscript as a whole. Research on this manuscript has shown that through its unique collection of Dutch songs and its aesthetic excellence the producers of the codex had set out to create a text collection written in Dutch that entered the lyric domain traditionally occupied by French and was able to rival this sophisticated language in terms of both quality and quantity.[20] Considering this, it is not only clear why so few texts contain French elements, but also why those that do ridicule those attempting to use French. It does remain difficult, however, to determine if this distorted French was originally present or the result of a scribe actively altering the French. Interestingly, the stance found in the Gruuthuse manuscript resembles that of Jacob van Maerlant towards his French source texts: criticism is not directed at the language itself in isolation, but instead at those using French for ends better reached by a different language. For Maerlant as a seeker of knowledge this language was Latin, for the Gruuthuse poets this language was Dutch.

Taken together, the Reynaert texts and the Gruuthuse songs illustrate a different stance towards the French language, not as a source of wisdom and truthfulness but rather as a sociolinguistic tool that can be used to satirize courtly behavior and those adopting it unsuccessfully.[21] Additionally, with the Reynaert texts being situated in

[20] The Gruuthuse poets and their craft are widely praised; for example Frits van Oostrom describes the authors of the Gruuthuse songs as possibly 'the best Dutch poet of the entire Middle Ages'. See Van Oostrom, 2013, p. 543.

[21] A comparable situation can also be found in Middle High German literature. In the *Helmbrecht* by Wernher der Gartenaere (ca. 1250?), a peasant's son tries to impress his family with his linguistic skills and courtly etiquette, addressing them in a medley of Dutch, French, Latin and even Czech. The result is that the family has difficulty recognizing him and take him to be a Frenchman, a Saxon, a native of Brabant,

Ghent and the Gruuthuse manuscript in Bruges, we are dealing first and foremost with Flemish texts, as opposed to some of the more learned examples discussed above which are more often situated in Brabant. One question worth further investigating is whether the multilingual dynamics of the literary culture of medieval Flanders are (partly) responsible for this more creative and critical use of literary French in comparison with examples of multilingual texts from Brabant which generally appear to be more of a historical or didactical nature (Cf. Willaert, 2010).

## Conclusion

This article has shown that in general the language attitude towards French that is presented by translators correlates with the use of French in Dutch multilingual texts. French functioned as an authoritative tool in the absence of Latin and as a sociolinguistic tool to create a sense of "otherness" which could be used to satirize or ridicule those that employed French in inappropriate situations.

This conclusion is, however, only one half of the story, for where this article focused exclusively on French elements found in Dutch text, a similar study is needed for Dutch elements appearing in French texts. Also of interest to this study is Dutch spoken by French characters in Dutch texts. In Lodewijk van Velthem's continuation of Maerlant's *Spiegel Historiael*, for example, the Count of Artois, the leader of the French troops during a battle with the Flemish, is presented as speaking French in direct speech, as well as a mixed form of French and Dutch: '*Ariète*, om tebbene platse!' (l. 2298: 'Withdraw in order to make room!').[22] Such mixed forms are also found in French narrative texts produced in northern France (Mantou, 1972; Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2017). In *La Prise de Neuville*, a short parodic text from the thirteenth century, Flemish immigrants are presented as speaking a comically chaotic mixture of Flemish and French (Goyens & Van Hoecke, 1990; Goyens, 2008). Examples like the word '*germain*' being written out erroneously phonetically as '*larmant*' in particular echo the type of mangled French words found in the Gruuthuse songs (Berger, 1981). Written in the same region around the same time, the *Renart le nouvel* also contains codeswitches from French into direct Dutch speech (Roussel, 1961). As in *La Prise de Neuville*, these Dutch words contain French syntactical elements, creating confusing mixed forms which are intended to poke fun at the Flemish characters trying to learn French (Haines, 2010). Interestingly, the use of Dutch in the *Renart le nouvel* greatly resembles the use of French in the Dutch *Reynaert*, and since both text deal with Reynard the fox one can wonder how else these works might relate to one another.[23]

a Bohemian or a Wend. Here, too, the inclusion of a foreign language to appear more socially successful or sophisticated backfires to highlight the inappropriateness of the speaker's pretentions to courtliness. I thank Mark Chinca for introducing me to this interesting example.

[22] Edition: Van der Linden, 1906–1938. Cf. also ll. 2240 and 2305–2306. Citation and translation are from Peersman, 2015, p. 109. This citation is particularly interesting from a sociolinguistic perspective, since in the passage the count is killed by Flemings who express that they are unable to understand the count.

[23] Lusignan, 2012, p. 206 has suggested these mixed forms are aimed in particular at real life Flemish immigrants and students traveling to Northern France to learn French. This then would bring *Renart le*

Other examples like *La Prise de Neuville* and *Renart le nouvel* are likely to be discovered during an extensive search of Dutch elements within French literature. It is therefore my hope that this article not only invites researchers to consider the actual examples of multilingualism within texts, but also to employ a transnational and translingual approach whilst doing so. Medieval French moved across borders and the best way to understand the mechanics and implications of this movement is by adapting a similar approach in our study of it.

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## Declaration

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