

## THE NOTION OF THE DUTCH LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the Dutch (*Nederlands*) is a West Germanic language that is spoken by around 23 million people as a first language – including most of the population of the Netherlands and about sixty percent of Belgium – and by another 5 million as a second language. It is the third most widely spoken Germanic language, after English and German.

**Keywords:** Dutch, Germanic, language, dialect, influence, Flanders.

### INTRODUCTION

Dutch is one of the closest relatives of both German and English and is said to be roughly in between them. Dutch, like English, has not undergone the High German consonant shift, does not use Germanic umlaut as a grammatical marker, has largely abandoned the use of the subjunctive, and has levelled much of its morphology, including most of its case system. Features shared with German include the survival of three grammatical genders – albeit with few grammatical consequences – as well as the use of modal particles, final-obstruent devoicing, and a similar word order. Dutch vocabulary is mostly Germanic and incorporates more Romance loans than German but far fewer than English [5, 87].

In both Belgium and the Netherlands, the native official name for Dutch is *Nederlands*, and its dialects have their own names, e.g. *Hollands* ("Hollandic"), *West-Vlaams* ("West Flemish"), *Brabants* ("Brabantian"). The use of the word *Vlaams* ("Flemish") to describe Standard Dutch for the variations prevalent in Flanders and used there, however, is common in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Dutch dialects are primarily the dialects that are both related with the Dutch language and are spoken in the same language area as the Dutch standard language. Although heavily under the influence of the standard language, some of them remain remarkably diverse and are found in the Netherlands and northern Belgium. The area where they are spoken often correspond with former mediaeval counties and duchies. The Netherlands (but not Belgium) makes a distinction between a dialect and a *streektaal* ("regional language"). These words are actually more political than linguistic, because a regional language unite a large group of very differing varieties. Such is the case with the Gronings dialect, which is considered a variety of the Dutch Low Saxon regional language, but is in fact very distinct from other Low Saxon varieties due to a Frisian substrate. Also, some Dutch dialects are more remote from the Dutch standard language than some varieties of a regional language are [4, 104].

Some of the dialects had until recently extensions across the borders of other standard language areas. In most cases the heavy influence of the standard

language has broken the dialect continuum. Examples are the Gronings dialect spoken in Groningen as well as the closely related varieties in adjacent East Frisia (Germany). South Guelderish (*Zuid-Gelders*) is a dialect spoken in Gelderland (Netherlands) and in closely related varieties in adjacent parts of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). Limburgish (*Limburgs*) is spoken in Limburg (Belgium) as well as in Limburg (Netherlands) and extends across the German border. West Flemish (*Westvlaams*) is spoken in West Flanders, the western part of Zeelandic Flanders and also in French Flanders, where it virtually became extinct to make way for French [3, 66].

The West Flemish group of dialects, spoken in West Flanders and Zeeland, is so distinct that it might be considered as a separate language variant, although the strong significance of language in Belgian politics would prevent the government from classifying them as such. An oddity of the dialect is that, the voiced velar fricative (written as "g" in Dutch) shifts to a voiced glottal fricative (written as "h" in Dutch), while the letter "h" becomes mute (just like in French). As a result, when West Flemings try to talk Standard Dutch, they're often unable to pronounce the g-sound, and pronounce it similar to the h-sound. This leaves f.e. no difference between "held" (hero) and "geld" (money).

Dutch is grammatically similar to German, such as in syntax and verb morphology (for a comparison of verb morphology in English, Dutch and German, see Germanic weak verb and Germanic strong verb). Dutch has grammatical cases, but these are now mostly limited to pronouns and a large number of set phrases. Inflected forms of the articles are also often found in surnames and toponyms[1, 78].

Standard Dutch uses three genders to differentiate between natural gender and three when discerning grammatical gender. But for most non-Belgian speakers, the masculine and feminine genders have merged to form the common gender (de), while the neuter (het) remains distinct as before. This gender system is similar to those of most Continental Scandinavian languages. As in English, but to a lesser degree, the inflectional grammar of the language (e.g., adjective and noun endings) has simplified over time.

In modern Dutch, the genitive articles 'des' and 'der' are commonly used in idioms. Other usage is typically considered archaic, poetic or stylistic. In most circumstances, the preposition 'van' is instead used, followed by the normal definitive article 'de' or 'het' [5, 16]. For the idiomatic use of the articles in the

genitive, see for example:

- masculine singular: "des duivels" (*lit: of the devil*) (common proverbial meaning: Seething with rage);
- feminine singular: *het woordenboek der Friese taal* (*the dictionary of the Frisian language*);
- neuter singular: *de vrouw des huizes* (*the lady of the house*);
- plural: *de voortgang der werken* (*the progress of (public) works*).

In contemporary usage, the genitive case still occurs a little more often with plurals than with singulars, as the plural article is 'der' for all genders and no special noun inflection must be taken account of. 'Der' is commonly used in order to avoid reduplication of 'van', e.g. *het merendeel der gedichten van de auteur*

instead of *het merendeel van de gedichten van de auteur* ("the bulk of the author's poems"). There are also genitive forms for the pronoun *die/dat* ("that [one], those [ones]"), namely *diens* for masculine and neuter singulars and *dier* for feminine singular and all plurals. Although usually avoided in common speech, these forms can be used instead of possessive pronouns to avoid confusion, these

forms often occur in writing. Compare:

- *Hij vertelde over zijn zoon en zijn vrouw.* – He told about his son and his (own) wife.
- *Hij vertelde over zijn zoon en diens vrouw.* – He told about his son and the latter's wife.

Analogically, the relative and interrogative pronoun *wie* ("who") has the genitive forms *wiens* and *wier* (corresponding to English "whose", but less frequent in use).

Dutch also has a range of fixed expressions that make use of the genitive articles, which can be abbreviated using apostrophes. Common examples include "'s ochtends" (with 's as abbreviation of des; *in the morning*) and "desnoods" (*lit: of the need*, translated: *if necessary*) [4, 87].

The Dutch written grammar has simplified over the past 100 years: cases are now mainly used for the pronouns, such as *ik* (I), *mij, me* (me), *mijn* (my), *wie* (who), *wiens* (whose: masculine or neuter singular), *wier* (whose: feminine singular; masculine, feminine or neuter plural). Nouns and adjectives are not case inflected (except for the genitive of proper nouns (names): -s, -'s or -'). In the spoken language cases and case inflections had already gradually disappeared from a much earlier date on (probably the 15th century) as in many continental West Germanic dialects.

Inflection of adjectives is more complicated. The adjective receives no ending with indefinite neuter nouns in singular (as with *een /ən/ 'a/an'*), and -e in all other cases. (This was also the case in Middle English, as in "a goode man".) Note that *fiets* belongs to the masculine/feminine category, and that *water* and *huis* are neuter.

Dutch shares much of its word order with German. Dutch exhibits subject-object-verb word order, but in main clauses the conjugated verb is moved into the second position in what is known as verb second or V2 word order. This makes Dutch word order almost identical to that of German, but often different from English, which has subject-verb-object word order and has since lost the V2 word order that existed in Old English [3, 100].

An example sentence used in some Dutch language courses and textbooks is "*Ik kan mijn pen niet vinden omdat het veel te donker is*", which translates into English word for word as "*I can my pen not find because it far too dark is*", but in standard English word order would be written "*I cannot find my pen because it is far too dark*". If the sentence is split into a main and subclause and the verbs highlighted, the logic behind the word order can be seen [2, 164].

Main clause: "*Ik kan mijn pen niet vinden*"

Verbs are placed in the final position, but the conjugated verb, in this case "kan" (can), is made the second element of the clause.

Subclause: "*omdat het veel te donker is*"

The verb or verbs always go in the final position.

In an interrogative main clause the usual word order is: conjugated verb followed by subject; other verbs in final position:

"*Kun jij je pen niet vinden?*" (literally "*Can you your pen not find?*") "*Can't you find your pen?*"

In the Dutch equivalent of a wh-question the word order is: interrogative pronoun (or expression) + conjugated verb + subject; other verbs in final position:

"*Waarom kun jij je pen niet vinden?*" ("*Why can you your pen not find?*") "*Why can't you find your pen?*"

In a tag question the word order is the same as in a declarative clause:

"*Jij kunt je pen niet vinden?*" ("*You can your pen not find?*") "*You can't find your pen?*"

## CONCLUSION

Summing up of all what has just been said we can conclude that among the Indo-European languages, Dutch is grouped within the Germanic languages, meaning it shares a common ancestor with languages such as English, German, and the

Scandinavian languages. All Germanic languages are subject to the Grimm's law and Verner's law sound shifts, which originated in the Proto-Germanic language and define the basic features differentiating them from other Indo-European languages. This is assumed to have taken place in approximately the mid-first millennium BCE in the pre-Roman Northern European Iron Age.

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