Chapter 12

Loanwords in Dutch[*]

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1.   The language and its speakers

1.1.   The history of Dutch

Dutch is a West Germanic language, related to English, High German, Low German and Frisian, and, less directly, to the North Germanic languages Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish. Germanic belongs to the Indo-European language family, to which most of the languages belong that are currently spoken in Europe, as well as many languages of southwestern and southern Asia.

The Dutch language originated after the Germanic migrations of the fifth century. The language boundary between Germanic and Romance, which in the northwest runs straight across Belgium, originated in the eighth century – it has witnessed a few modifications in the course of time, but has not been drastically changed since the fourteenth century. Around this boundary we find bilingualism.

In the sixth century the first written texts appear in the Low Countries (i.e. the area of present-day Belgium and the Netherlands). In the Middle Ages various Dutch dialects were spoken here, which can be subdivided into the following groups: Hollands, Zealands, Flemish, Brabants, Limburgs and (Low) Saxon. The Low Saxon dialects were and are spoken in the north-east of the Netherlands – they are closely related to the Low German dialects spoken in the neighboring parts of Germany. There is, therefore, no language boundary – the dialects shaded off into each other gradually. However, there has been, since 1648, a political boundary between the Netherlands and Germany. In the course of the twentieth century, especially since the period between the two World Wars, the state boundary between Germany and the Netherlands has more and more come to be regarded as a culture boundary and a language boundary; the transitional nature of the border dialects has gradually been lost under the ever-increasing influence of the standard languages Dutch and German.

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[*] The subdatabase of the World Loanword Database that accompanies this chapter is available online at http://wold.livingsources.org. It is a separate electronic publication that should be cited as: van der Sijs, Nicoline. 2009. Dutch vocabulary. In Haspelmath, Martin & Tadmor, Uri (eds.) *World Loanword Database*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library, 1513 entries. <http://wold.livingsources.org/vocabulary/12>