

# Flemish

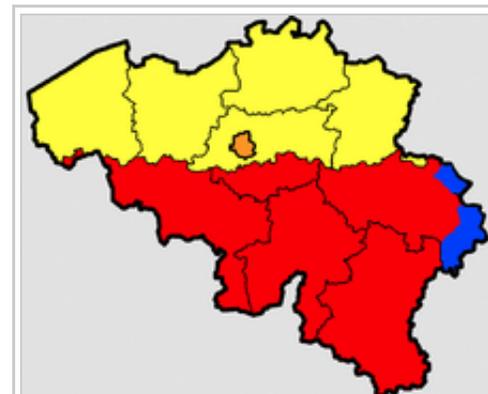
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**Flemish** or **Belgian Dutch** (*Belgisch-Nederlands* [ˈbɛɫjɪs ˈneːdərlɑnts] <sup>ⓘ</sup>), or *Vlaams*) is the Dutch language as spoken in Flanders, the northern part of Belgium,<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> be it standard (as used in schools, government and the media)<sup>[4]</sup> or informal (as used in daily speech, "*tussentaal*" [ˈtʏsə(n),taːt]).<sup>[5]</sup> There are four principal Dutch dialects in Flanders: Brabantian (including Antwerpish), East Flemish, West Flemish, and Limburgish. The latter two are sometimes considered separate languages.<sup>[6]</sup>

Linguistically, 'Flemish' is sometimes used as a term for the language of the former County of Flanders,<sup>[7]</sup> especially West Flemish.<sup>[8]</sup> However, as a result of political emancipation of the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, the combined culture of that region (which consists of West Flanders, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant, Antwerp, Limburg and Brussels) has come to be known as 'Flemish' and so sometimes are the four dialects or the common intermediate language.<sup>[9]</sup> Despite the name, Brabantian and in particular its Antwerp dialect is the dominant contributor to the Belgian *tussentaal*. Using it for the official language in Flanders is misleading: the only official language in Flanders is Dutch.<sup>[10]</sup>

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Language communities of Belgium. In Flanders (yellow), Dutch is the official language and Flemish the common name for it



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## Dutch in Flanders

Dutch is the majority language in Belgium, being spoken natively by three-fifths of the population. Its various dialects contain a number of lexical and a few grammatical features which distinguish them from the standard language.<sup>[11]</sup> As in the Netherlands, the pronunciation of Standard Dutch is affected by the native dialect of the speaker.

All Dutch dialect groups spoken in Belgium are spoken in adjacent areas of the Netherlands as well. At the same time East Flemish forms a continuum with both Brabantic and West Flemish. Standard Dutch is primarily based on the Hollandic dialect (spoken in the Northern Netherlands) and to a lesser extent on Brabantian, which is the most dominant Dutch dialect of the Southern Netherlands and Flanders.

### Phonological differences

*Main article: Dutch phonology*



Map showing the dialects spoken in the Benelux: many people in Flanders speak a

Among Flemish vowels is the diphthong "ou" / "au". (ou) as in *bout* (*bolt*) and (au) as in *fauna* is realized as [ɔu], whereas in northern Dutch it is realized as [ʌu]. Among consonants, the northern Dutch pronunciation of "w" (as in *wang* cheek) is [ʋ], in some southern Dutch dialects it is [β̥] or [w]. Probably the most obvious difference between northern and southern Dutch is in the sounds spelled ⟨ch⟩ and ⟨g⟩. The sound spelled ⟨ch⟩ is a voiceless velar fricative [x] in Northern Dutch and a voiceless palatal fricative [ç] in Southern Dutch.<sup>[12]</sup> In the North the sound spelled ⟨g⟩ is usually realized as voiceless velar fricative [x] or voiceless uvular fricative [χ], whereas in the South the distinction between voiced and unvoiced has been preserved and ⟨g⟩ is pronounced as voiced palatal fricative /j̥/.

## Consonants

1. ⟨w⟩ realised as [β̥]
2. ⟨ch⟩ and ⟨g⟩ pronounced as (voiceless resp. voiced) front-velars, not as palatals, as often claimed.

## Vowels

The difference between short and long vowels tends to be quantitative instead of qualitative, especially in the influential Brabantic pronunciation.

## Diphthongs

Strong tendency towards monophthongisation.

1. ⟨au⟩/⟨ou⟩ realised as [ɔ̥]
2. ⟨ij⟩/⟨ei⟩ realised as [ɛ̥]

dialect and the common Flemish, and understand spoken Dutch; in writing, the dialects are hardly used, while Flemish and Dutch are nearly identical in this regard



Bachten de Kupe (nl) scenic road sign.

### 3. ⟨ui⟩ realised as [œʔ]

## Lexical differences

Flemish includes more French loanwords in its everyday vocabulary than does Netherlands Dutch,<sup>[13]</sup> but there are exceptions: for example, the former Belgian gendarmerie was known as the *Rijkswacht* ("Guard of the Realm") in Belgium while the equivalent body in the Netherlands is the *Koninklijke Marechaussee* ("Royal Military Constabulary").

The traditionally most spoken Dutch dialect in Belgium, Brabantian, has had a large influence on the vocabulary used in Belgium.<sup>[5]</sup> Examples include *beenhouwer* (Brabantian) and *slager* (Hollandic), both meaning butcher (*slager* is however used in Belgium to mean the kind of butcher who sells salami, sausages, etc.: cf. the difference between *beenhouwerij* (butcher's shop) and *slagerij* (delicatessen)); also *schoon* (Brabantian) vs. *mooi* (Hollandic) "beautiful" (however Dutch courses for Belgian French-speakers usually teach *schoon*=beautiful, *mooi*=pretty). Another notable difference is *ge / gij* ("you" in Brabantian and "thou / thee" in the Dutch Bible, originally translated by Belgian Protestants fleeing the Inquisition under Philip II of Spain) vs. *je / jij* ("you" singular in Hollandic), *jullie* ("you" plural in Hollandic). The changes (isoglosses) from northern to southern Dutch dialects are somewhat gradual, both vocabulary-wise and phonetically, and the boundaries within coincide with territorial borders. There is a distinct boundary located in the river area of the Netherlands, a historical border of the Roman empire, south of which "Brabants" is spoken, a Dutch dialect with some of the phonological traits commonly associated with Belgium. A second distinct border area is located around the border with the Belgian territories, where the transition is mostly lexical, but also with an intensification of the phonological diversion from northern Dutch. An exception to the border with the Belgian territories for this border is Zeelandic Flanders ("Zeeuws-Vlaanderen"), a part of the Netherlands where Flemish is spoken.

The differences between Dutch in the Netherlands and Flemish are significant enough for Flemish and Dutch television shows with rather informal speech customarily to become subtitled for the other country in the standard language.<sup>[14]</sup>

In 2009, one of the main publishers of Dutch dictionaries, Prisma, published the first Dutch dictionary to distinguish between the two natiolectic varieties "*Nederlands Nederlands*" (or "*Netherlandish Dutch*") and "*Belgisch Nederlands*" ("*Belgian Dutch*"), treating both variations as equally correct. The selection of the "*Flemish Dutch*" words was based on the *Referentiebestand Belgisch Nederlands* (RBBN): an electronic database built under the supervision of Prof. Dr. W. Martin (Free University in Amsterdam, Netherlands) and Prof. Dr. W. Smedts (Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium).

Professor Willy Martin, one of the Flemish editors, claimed that the latter expressions are "*just as correct*" as the former. This formed a break with the previous lexicologists' custom of indicating Dutch words that are mostly only used in Flanders, while not doing the same for Dutch words mostly only used in the Netherlands, which could give the impression that only usage in the Netherlands defines the standard language.

In the Dutch language, around 3,500 words exist which are considered "Flemish Dutch", and 4,500 words which are considered "Netherlands Dutch".<sup>[15][16]</sup>

In November 2012 the Belgian radio channel Radio 1 wrote a text with many Flemish words and asked several Dutch speaking people to "translate" it into general Dutch. Almost no inhabitant of The Netherlands was able to make a correct translation, whereas almost all Flemings succeeded.<sup>[17][18]</sup>

## Tussentaal

The supra-regional, semi-standardized colloquial form (mesolect) of Dutch spoken in Belgium, which uses the vocabulary and the sound inventory of the Brabantic dialects, is often called **Tussentaal** ("in-between-language", i.e. between dialects and standard Dutch).<sup>[19]</sup> Its evolution is somewhat similar to the emergence of Poldernederlands in the Netherlands, a medium of everyday speech heavily influenced by Hollandic.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Poldernederlands and Tussentaal are sociolects (not dialects or separate standard forms).<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

The *tussentaal* ("in-between-language") is a primarily informal variety of speech which occupies an intermediate

position between regional dialects and the standard language. This *tussentaal* incorporates phonetic, lexical and grammatical elements that are not part of the standard language but are drawn from local dialects. It is a relatively new phenomenon that has been gaining popularity during the past decades. Some linguists note that it seems to be undergoing a process of (limited) standardisation.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Etymology

The adjective *Flemish* (first attested as *flemmysse*, c. 1325;<sup>[21]</sup> cf. *Flæming*, c. 1150),<sup>[22]</sup> meaning "from Flanders", was probably borrowed from Old Frisian.<sup>[23]</sup> The name *Vlaanderen* was probably formed from a stem *flām-*, meaning "flooded area", with a suffix *-ðr-* attached.<sup>[24]</sup> The Old Dutch form is *flāmisk*, which becomes *vlamesc*, *vlaemsch* in Middle Dutch and *Vlaams* in Modern Dutch.<sup>[25]</sup>

## See also

- Belgian French
- French Flemish, the West Flemish dialect as spoken in France
- Zeelandic, a transitional dialect between West Flemish and Hollandic

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