FRENCH FLEMISH LEFT DISLOCATION PATTERNS ON THE SYNTAX-DISCOURSE INTERFACE

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fwo
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Opening new horizons

REEDS
Re-examining dialect syntax

‒ Current research: non-resumptive left dislocation

(1) **dat huis** ik ben ter wereld gekomen.
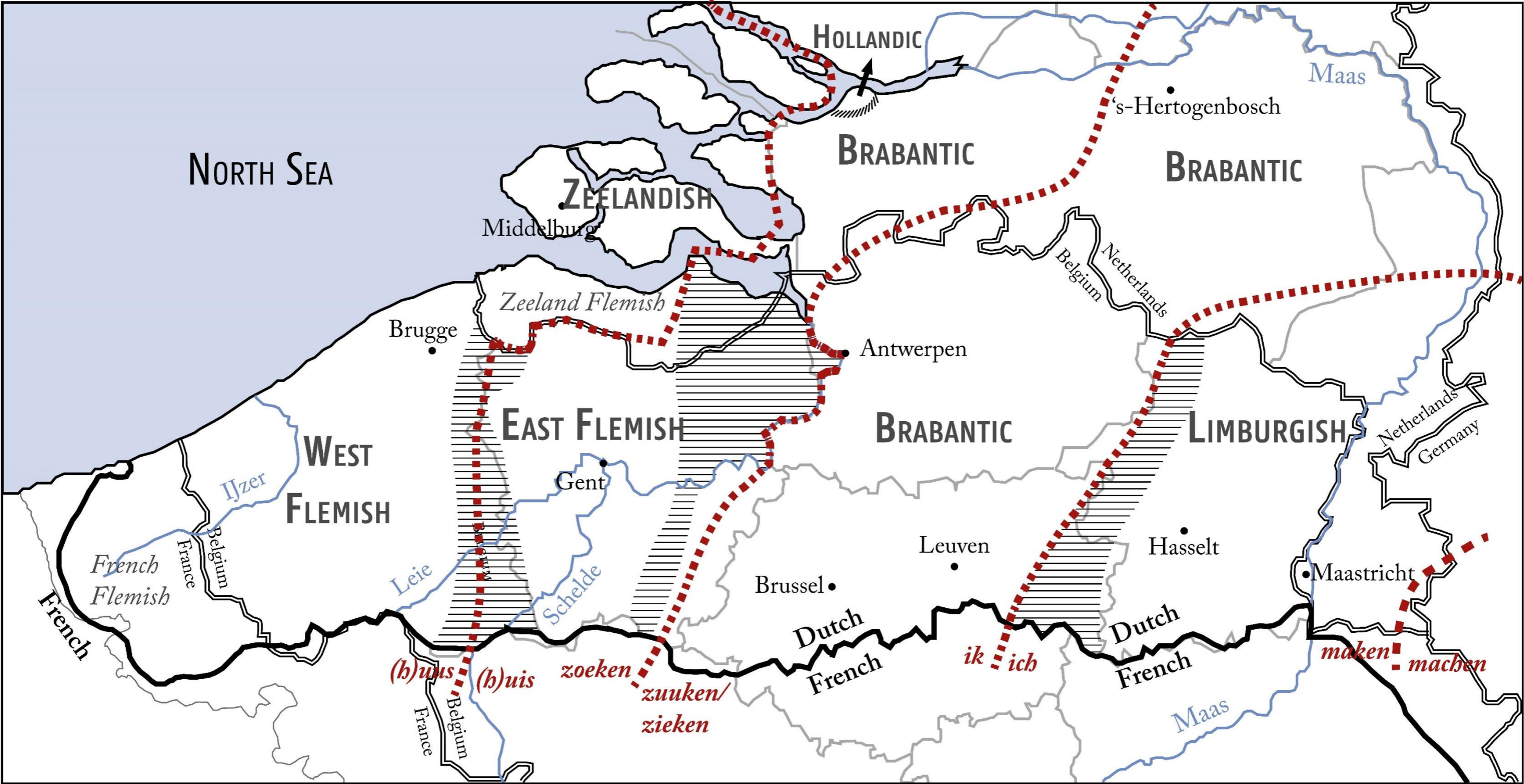   that house I am into world come.
      'I was born in that house'

‒ Work in progress

OVERVIEW

1. French Flemish
2. Data (old and new)
3. Non-resumptive left dislocation
4. Discussion
    1. Spoken language
    2. Role of syntax
    3. Elicitation techniques
5. Conclusion

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FRENCH FLEMISH

FRENCH FLEMISH (BEFORE 1789)

— Belonged to the county of Flanders/Burgundian Netherlands/Habsburg Netherlands until 1678 (annexation by Louis XIV)

— Final incorporation in France in 1713 (Ryckeboer 2013)

— Flemish: economically, culturally and administratively dominating language

— French: only used occasionally for contacting French-speaking lords

— Gradual shifting of the language border (contact with Picardian) (cf. Gysseling 1976; Willemyns 1994, 1997; Ryckeboer 2013)

FRENCH FLEMISH (AFTER 1789)

– From 1789: French language policy aimed at eradicating minority languages

– By start 20th c.: education in French

– Isolation of other Southern Dutch Dialects and Standard Dutch

– 'Implosion of the language border' (Ryckeboer 2013)
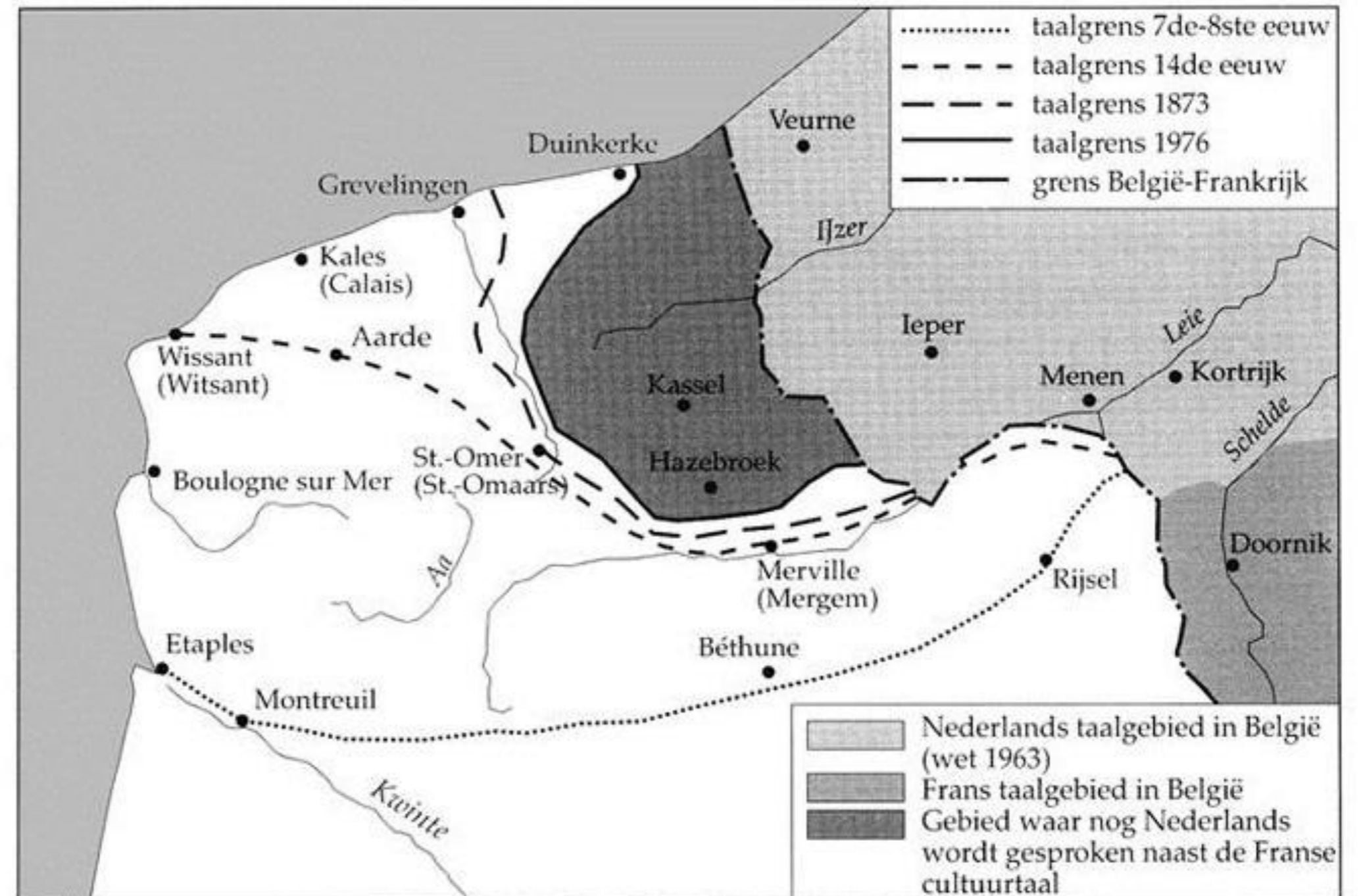
FRENCH FLEMISH (CURRENT SITUATION)

– No more first language acquisition

– Almost all speakers were born before the beginning of the Second World War

– Indigenous heritage language (bilingualism FF - French)
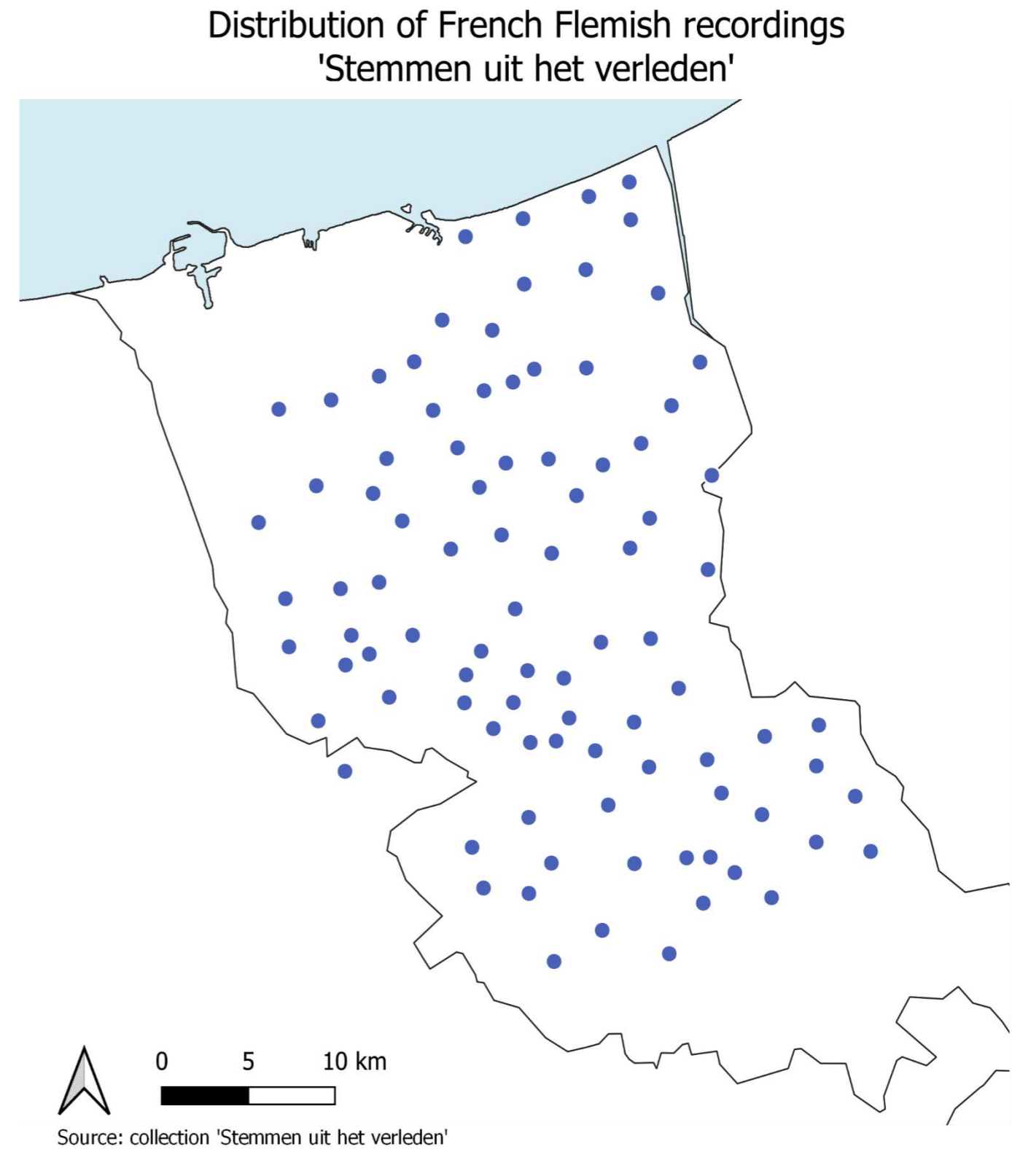
– Endangered

DATA

DATA (OLD)

– Stemmen uit het verleden ('Voices from the past')
– 783 dialect recordings in 550 locations (+- 700 hours)
– basis of the parsed Spoken Corpus of (Southern-)Dutch Dialects
  (GCND, under construction, Breitbarth et al. 2020) → presentation of
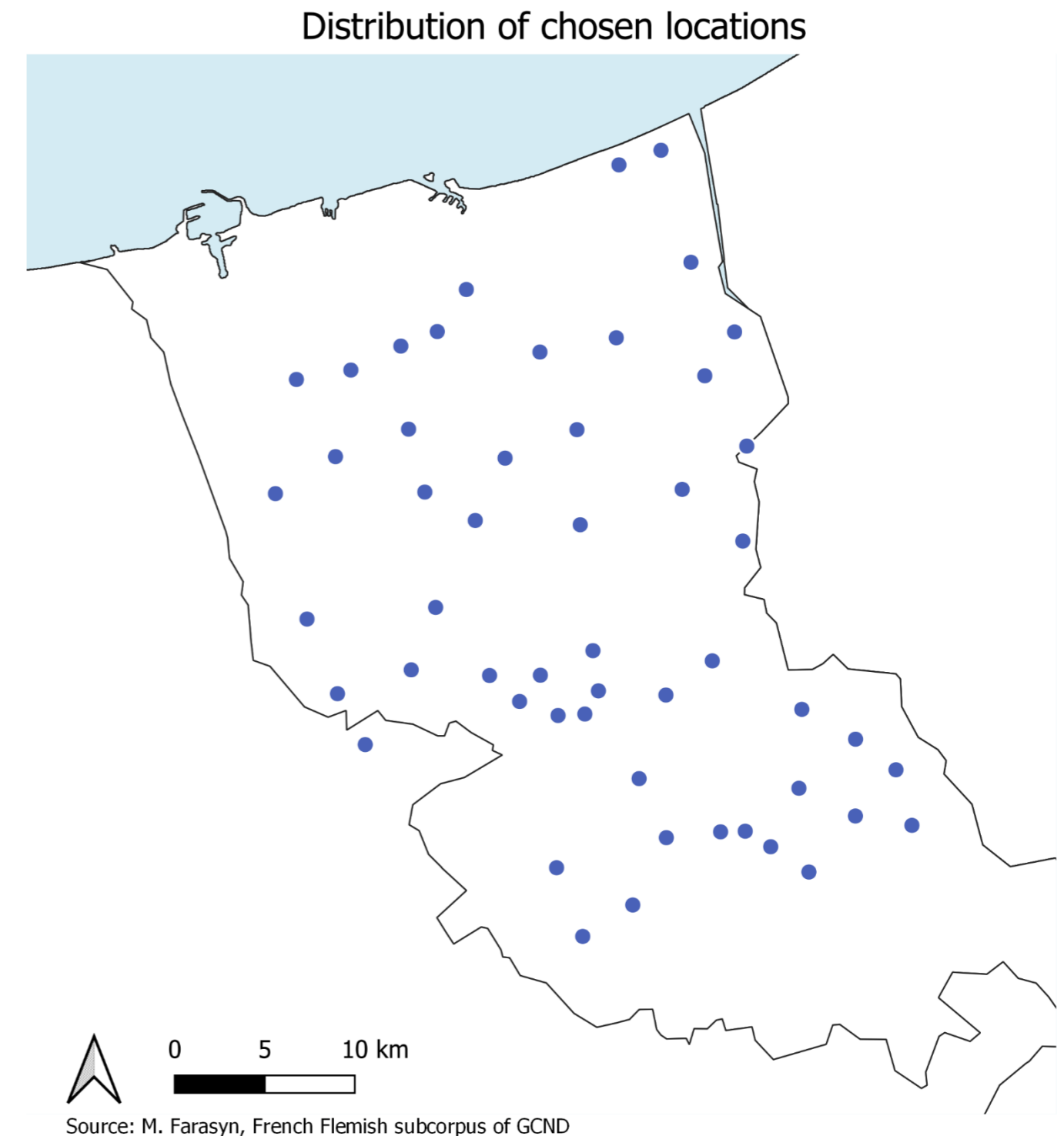 Ghyselen et al. tomorrow
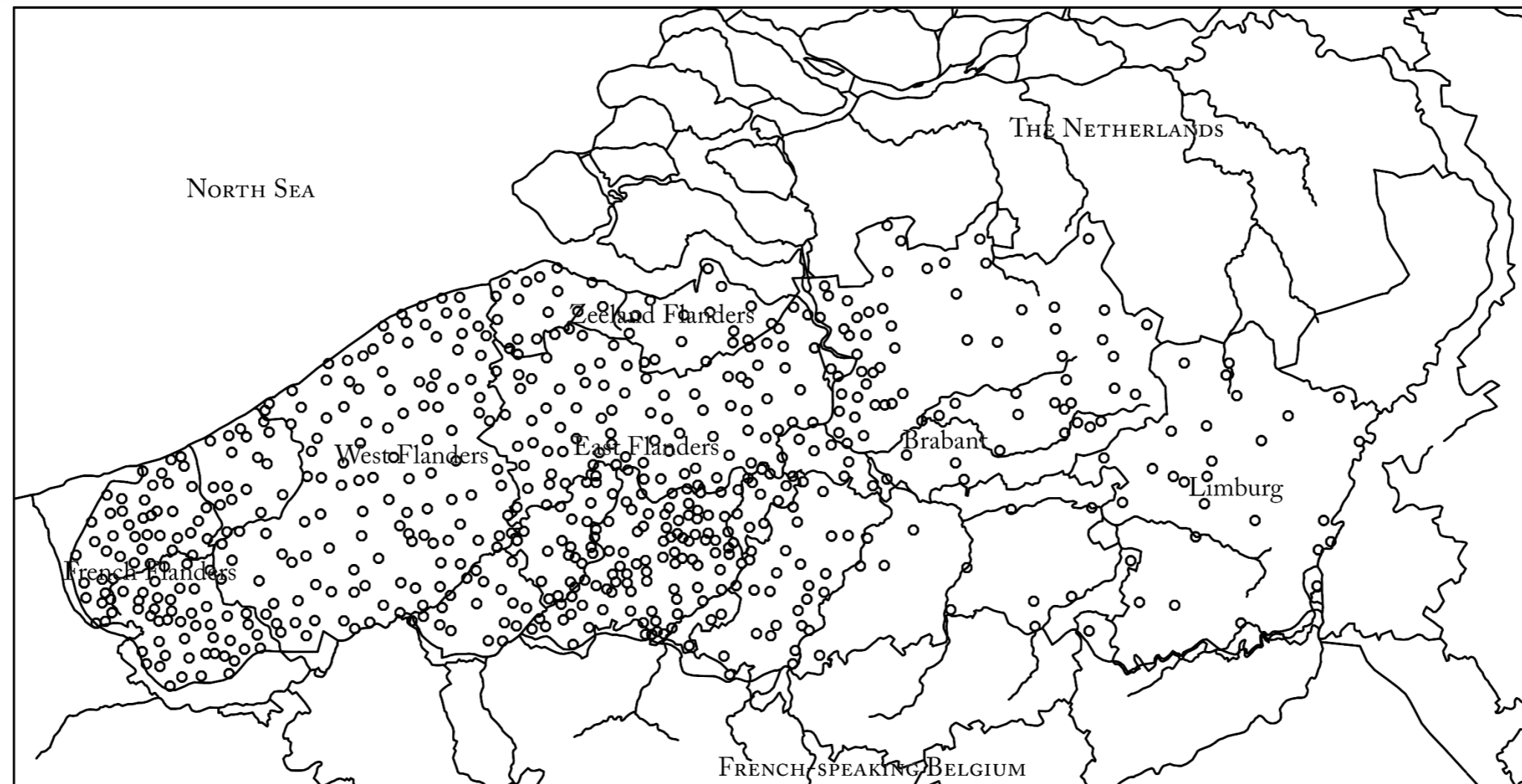
DATA (OLD)

- Ghent University (Pée and Vanacker)
- 60s and 70s
- Started in French Flanders (due to urgency)
- 110 dialect recordings in 91 locations in French Flanders (+- 75 hours)
- FF speakers usually illiterate in Dutch

Distribution of French Flemish recordings 'Stemmen uit het verleden'

0   5   10 km

Source: collection 'Stemmen uit het verleden'

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DATA (OLD)

– Transcription 52 FF recordings according to guidelines of the GCND
– 28.479 utterances, of which 16.658 relevant (main clauses)
– Number of constituents preceding finite verb, inversion, form and function
– Automatic pre-sorting based on POS tags + manual analysis (not fully parsed yet)

Distribution of chosen locations

0   5   10 km

Source: M. Farasyn, French Flemish subcorpus of GCND

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DATA (NEW)

‒ 2022 - 2023: fieldwork in French Flanders

DATA (NEW)

- New recordings
- Similar setting as in old recordings:
  - Informal setting
  - Intermediate + researcher
  - NOR(M) speakers
  - Spontaneous speech
- Still gathering data

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DATA (OLD + NEW)

- First annotated corpus of French Flemish

- (Intended) incorporation in the GCND

- Time-aligned transcriptions in ELAN (Ghyselen et al. 2020)

- Annotate transcriptions within GCND (POS + parsing (Alpino), Farasyn et al. 2022)

NON-RESUMPTIVE LEFT DISLOCATION IN FRENCH FLEMISH

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NRLD

- Verb placement in French Flemish (old data, Farasyn 2022)

Verb placement	Total	S-V-Inversion
1	23 (0.14%)	23 (100%)
2	13.386 (80.36%)	317 (2.37%)
>2	3249 (19.50)	78 (2.09%)
Total	16.658 (100.00%)	416 (2.62%)

- Average number of XP's before V: 1.19 (> coastal Middle Dutch varieties (Burridge 1993, Coussé 2004)
- Higher incidence of V>2 without S-V-Inversion than in WF (confirming findings Vanacker (1967, 1977), Lybaert et al. (2019) on small FF datasets)

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[NRLD](#)

- LD patterns: a phrase occupies a position in the left periphery of the clause and is resumed by a resumptive element in the main clause
- Relation between the left dislocated phrase and the clause is that of a topic and a comment about that topic
- Topics in LD patterns: 'aboutness requirement' (can be introduced by a non-obligatory 'as for' phrase) (Alexiadou 2006).

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NRLD

– Customary to use type, form and placement of the resumptive as the main means to distinguish different types of LD (though syntactic, morphological and intonational properties also play a role)

1. **Contrastive left dislocation (CLD) ~ Dutch**
   – Resumptive is a demonstrative
   – Demonstrative usually adjacent to the leftdislocated phrase, which is often assigned contrastive accent (Alexiadou 2006, Den Dikken & Surányi 2017)
2. **Hanging topic left dislocation (HTLD) ~ Dutch**
   – Resumptive can be a pronoun or an epithet
3. **Clitic left dislocation (CILD) ~ French**
   – Resumptive is a clitic pronoun

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NRLD

– In FF, the 'Dutch-like' HTLD (2) as well as CLD patterns (3) are attested.

(2) en pa **hij** was karton
   'and father, he was horse driver'

(3) de Walen **dedie** verstaan dat niet
   'the Walloons, they don't understand that'

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NRLD: TYPE 1

– FF corpus (old data): several examples in which main clause lacks a coreferential element

  → **non-resumptive left dislocation**

– 4 types

  1. Semantic/implicational relation
  2. Apparent PP's
  3. Het/dat is (alternative referent)
  4. Intonation

NRLD: TYPE 1

1. Syntactic relation between aboutness topic and following adverbial clause (with resumptive), but a possibly semantic, implicational relation between "de paarden" < "shoeing (of hooves)" < "the irons" (3)

(3) overtijd **die paarden**, als <u>ze</u> beslagen waren, al de ijzers waren gemaakt met de hand
   'earlier, **the horses**, when <u>they</u> were shoed, the irons were made by hand'

Reminiscent of 'Loose Aboutness Left Dislocation' in French (LALD, 4a, Van Riemsdijk 1997), in which the syntactic relation between topic and comment is replaced by a semantic aboutness relationship between the left dislocate and the main clause, and which cannot be used in Dutch (4b)

(4) a. Oh, tu sais, moi, la bicyclette, je n'aime pas me fatiguer (Van Riemsdijk 1997)
      'Oh, you know, me, the bicycle, I don't like to tire myself'
   b. *Nou nee zeg, de fiets, ik hou der niet van me overmatig in te spannen (Van Riemsdijk 1997)
      'Well no, frankly, the bicycle, I don't like to exert myself excessively'

NRLD: TYPE 2

2. Topic seems not to be connected to the topic by virtue of an implicational relation.

(5). **Ruisscheure** ze zijn raar de Vlamingenj.
'[in] Ruisscheure, they are rare, the Flemish'

- Similar to patterns that are possible in informal spoken French (Barnes 1985).
- Barnes (1985): relation between topic and comment must be discourse-pragmatic, as context is necessary to understand their coherence.
- Topic: PP, in which the preposition seems to be lacking
- FF examples: exclusively locatives vs. French: all kinds of 'apparent' PP's

(6) Oh oeuh, mais tu sais, **l'métro**, avec la Carte Orange, tu vas n'importe où (Barnes 1985)
'oeuh, but you know, [with/on] the metro, with the Carte Orange, you go anywhere'

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NRLD: TYPE 2

– topic seems to be interpreted adverbially and to establish a spatial framework within which the main predication holds (cf. Chafe 1976, Barnes 1985).

(1) **dat huis** ik ben ter wereld gekomen.
that house I am into world come.
'I was born in that house'

– behave in a similar way as circumstantial frame setters in West Flemish, which interact with the syntactic derivation of the main clause. They are located in an extrasentential position and which also lead to superficial V3 patterns (Haegeman & Greco 2018; Greco & Haegeman 2020). Such frame setters are attested in FF as well.

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NRLD: TYPE 3

3. Subject of the main clause is *het/dat is* ('it/that is')

– *het/dat* is not coreferential with the topic, which is often animate (7)

(7) Michel **het is** al beesten beesten
lit. 'Michel, it is all beasts, beasts (= 'As for Michel, he only talks about beasts')

– Construction seems analogous to the French patterns (8) in which the comment begins with *c'est* ('it is', Barnes 1985, Stark 1999).

(8) Oh moi, **c'est** les yaourts. (Barnes 1985)
lit. 'Me, it is yoghurts' (= 'As for me, I miss yoghurts (instead of you, who misses cheese)')

– Barnes (1985) calls this the "alternative referent function" of the topic, which expresses a contrast between the topic, about which the comment says something, and another topic about which something was said in the immediately preceding context
– Alternative referent in French is almost always a first person pronoun
– FF**: any topic** can be the alternative referent + *het* does **not always** bring in **an alternative referent** (9)

(9) Context: During the war, the speaker wanted to flee, but soldiers blocked the roads:
soldaat, **het was** in de koer en het was er overal.
lit. 'soldier, it was on the court and everywhere'' (= 'There were soldiers everywhere')

NRLD: TYPE 4

4. Intonation necessary to understand the relevance of the comment

   – In (10), the knowledge that the speaker feels sorry for *de mensen* (lit. 'the people', here actually 'the farmers') seems to come from the speaker's emotional state.
   – Associated intonation used to pronounce *de mensen*, conveys a paralinguistic intonational meaning, which is in this case empathy (Ladd 1990, Gussenhoven 2004).

(10) ja en **de mensen**$_i$ die vaarzen$_j$ gaan beginnen staan...
     'yes and the people, those heifers will start to stand up…'

NRLD: NEW DATA

– Still preliminary (no quantitative analysis yet)
– More information about speakers and their language use

Remarkable:
– Fluent speakers who often practice French Flemish:
  – Sparse cases of NRLD
  – When they are used: type 2 ('apparent' PP's)
– Less fluent speakers
  – Often NRLD type 3 ('het is')

(11)   **Daniel** het is beter of ik
       Daniel it is better than I
       'Daniel speaks better [Flemish] than I do'

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

– Work in progress

– Several (research) questions:

1. Why are the patterns common cross-linguistically, but not often described?

2. Involvment of discourse: to what extend is this syntax?

3. Request for advice: how to capture/elicitate NRLD?

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DISCUSSION (1)

1. Why are the patterns common cross-linguistically, but not often described?

— In grammars or syntactic overviews (often based on written sources) NRLD patterns are often neglected (see also Barnes 1985)
— Not a phenomenon unique to FF (or French): similar phenomena in Mandarin Chinese (Chafe 1976), English (Keenan & Schieffelin 1976), Czech (Sturgeon 2008) and Arusa (Andrason & Karani 2017), …
— In common: NRLD is found in spontaneously spoken language
— Literature and terminology dispersed
— Lack of (spoken) dialect corpora

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DISCUSSION (1)

– Previous research on FF syntax: **combination** of four properties which makes it very different from any other Dutch/Germanic dialects (Farasyn 2021)

1. **Archaic elements** due to isolation of the West-Flemish in Belgium/Standard Dutch/Brabantic expansion
2. New **own developments**
3. Influence of **French** (language contact, bilingual (unbalanced heritage speakers))
4. **Nature of the language/data** (spoken language)

DISCUSSION (1)

- New data seem to indicate that again we need to consider multiple factors here and not just that it is spoken language
- More than in other languages, we get a lot of types of NRLD, which may be explained by several (different) extra-linguistic factors.
- Probably again not one explanation, but a combination of several properties of FF at work
  - Spoken language (more discourse-oriented types 1/2/4)
  - French/Flemish bilingualism (1/2)
  - Flemish as a heritage language (3)

DISCUSSION (2)

2. Involvment of discourse: to what extend is this syntax?

– Barnes (1985):
  – difference between planned and unplanned discourse (Ochs 1979).
  – discourse linking to replace syntactic integration
  → discourse involved: context-linking mechanisms that recover referential information from the discourse, mediating between topic and comment?

– Stark (1999):
  – patterns are not due to the unplanned, incoherent nature of spontaneous speech, but important for the organisation of oral discourse
  – different types of examples (and their interpretation) correlate with distinct degrees of integration in the phonological structure,

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DISCUSSION (2)

2. Involvment of discourse: to what extend is this syntax?

– Insights from heritage language syntax
  – Heritage speakers retain the basic, perhaps universal, core structural properties of their language and can reveal important insights related to which linguistic features are vulnerable in a language and which are strong (Benmamoun, Montrul & Polinsky 2013)
  – Syntactic aspects which involve the CP level and the syntax-discourse interface, are often less developed in heritage languages (Laleko 2010)
– Language transfer in contact situations in general often results from the vulnerability of interfaces (Aboh 2006)
  – Way in which different domains of language meet at the interface is often "poorly defined in formal terms" in studies on heritage languages (Lohndal et al. 2019: 11)

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DISCUSSION (3)

3. Request for advice: how to capture/elicitate NRLD?

— NRLD can in all probability only be found in spoken conversation → discourse needs to be present
— Not very frequent and hard to gather during interviews:
  — Introduce topics briefly: 'Can you tell me something about the war/the first television/traveling…?'
  — Only works (sometimes) for very fluent speakers

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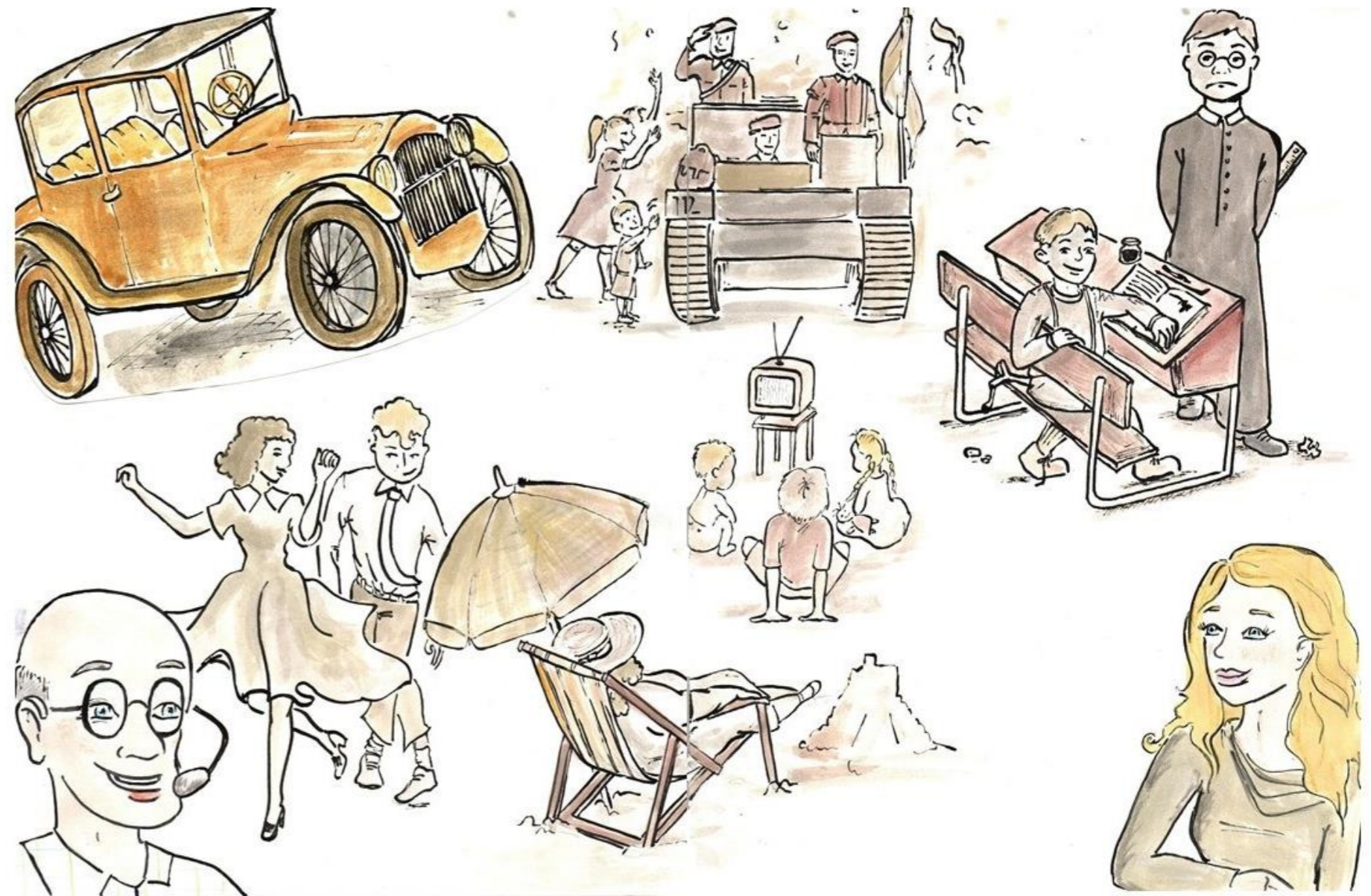
DISCUSSION (3)

3. Request for advice: how to elicitate NRLD?

– Value judgements hard
  – Lot of context needed
  – Speakers need to be able to reflect on their language
  – Speakers cannot read/write FF (audio fragments)

CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

‒ There is a lot we can learn about syntax using spoken (dialect) corpora

‒ Case study: NRLD in French Flemish

   ‒ Old data: 4 different types

   ‒ New data: sparse (for now)

‒ NRLD cross-linguistically

‒ Role of syntax

‒ Reflections on elicitation techniques

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THANK YOU!

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