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Tussen Hulst en Sint-Niklaas: de rijksgrens als taalgrens?

Summary

This article illustrates that the Dutch-Belgian border functions to some extent as a language frontier. It focuses on the dialects of a couple of Dutch villages in the east of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and of the adjacent Belgian villages. Historically speaking, the dialects spoken in these villages are all the same. There is, however, clear evidence that the national border has led to a divergence between the dialects on both sides of the border. The inhabitants of the Dutch villages are linguistically oriented towards the northern, Dutch standard language. The dialect of the Belgian villages on the other hand, has clearly been influenced by French (which functioned for a long time as the standard language in Belgium) and by the Belgian substandard variety of Dutch. The divergence between Dutch and Belgian dialects should not be exaggerated, however. The northern variety of Dutch ('Dutch Dutch') has a clear influence on the Belgian variety of Dutch, and hence also on the Dutch dialects spoken in Belgium. As a result, it could be claimed that, to some extent at least, the Belgian dialects are converging towards those spoken in the Dutch villages.