Towards the completion of the Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects

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The Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects *is a major regional dialect dictionary for the Flemish dialect area, i.e. the provinces of West and East Flanders (Belgium), Zealand Flanders (the Netherlands) and French Flanders (France). The project began in 1972 at Ghent University (Belgium). It is a thematically arranged dictionary, set up along the lines proposed by A. Weijnen for the* Dictionary of the Brabantic Dialects *(1960-2005) and the* Dictionary of the Limburg Dialects *(1960-2008), its two sister projects. It combines a dictionary with a word atlas. This paper describes the state of affairs of the Flemish Dictionary with regard to data collection, data processing, presentation and publication. (The specialised software program used for the dictionary is presented in a separate paper, in which much attention is paid to the cartographic tools).*

1. Introduction

Lexicological research heavily relies on collections of lexemes; i.e. dictionaries. The Dutch language can boast very good dictionaries both for the present-day standard language and the language of historical periods (ONW, VMNW, MNW, WNT). What has been missing from this body of work is an inventory of the vocabularies of oral language traditions; i.e. the dialects. The opinion that the dialects are quickly disappearing, and hence should be documented as quickly as possible, is by no means a recent one. It was the motivation for the activities of amateur dialect lexicographers as early as the late 19th century. Indeed, language change - often perceived as language deterioration - frequently sparked salvage operations.

By the 1960s, however, language change had taken on a new shape. Instead of the normal, relatively slow, changes that occur in any living language, a sharp divide had come about between an old language situation and a new one. The old situation was characterized by the existence of traditional dialects, reflecting the small-scale local communities in which the majority of an ill-lettered population lived. The new situation was the result of the cultural emancipation of the population on a large scale, brought about by the rise of welfare systems and the level of schooling. In this situation, the dialects came under ever growing pressure because they no longer fitted into the new large-scale society of new technologies, new ways of life and the enlargement of both geographical and social mobility. Vocabulary is the first language component to disappear, due both to word substitution (dialect words being replaced by standard Dutch words) and also to loss of the 'things' which words denote. The former loss was caused by the widespread dispersion of the standard language; the latter was due to the introduction of new technologies and new lifestyles.

2. The three large regional dialect dictionaries for the southern Dutch language area

In view of this situation, it comes as no surprise that it was at the beginning of the 1960s that A.A. Weijnen, a professor at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, started the *Woordenboek van de Brabantse Dialecten* (WBD, *Dictionary of the Brabantic Dialects*), and the *Woordenboek van de Limburgse Dialecten* (WLD, *Dictionary of the Limburg Dialects*). The WBD investigates the dialects of the provinces of Northern Brabant (the Netherlands), Antwerp and Flemish Brabant (Belgium); the WLD covers both Belgian and Dutch Limburg. The idea was to try and present as complete an inventory as possible of the vocabulary of the traditional Brabantic and Limburg dialects. In the 1990s, an additional editorial board for the two dictionaries was created at the Catholic University of Louvain. Work on the third dictionary in the trio, the *Woordenboek van de Vlaamse Dialecten* (WVD, *Dictionary of the*

Flemish Dialects) started at Ghent University in 1972, 12 years after its sister projects[1]. It covers the provinces West- and East-Flanders [2] in Belgium, Zealand-Flanders in the Netherlands and French-Flanders in the Département Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. The minimal goal of the dictionaries is to register each dialect word at least once; the maximal goal is to have enough good data for every locality to allow the drawing of well-documented word maps.

The WBD was finished in 2005; the WLD was completed in 2008. Together with the earlier (but alphabetically arranged, see section 2) *Woordenboek der Zeeuwse Dialecten* (WZD, *Dictionary of the Zealand Dialects*, Ghijsen 1964), the three dictionaries cover the whole southern Dutch dialect area (see Fig. 1). The Flemish dictionary is the only one that is not yet finished.
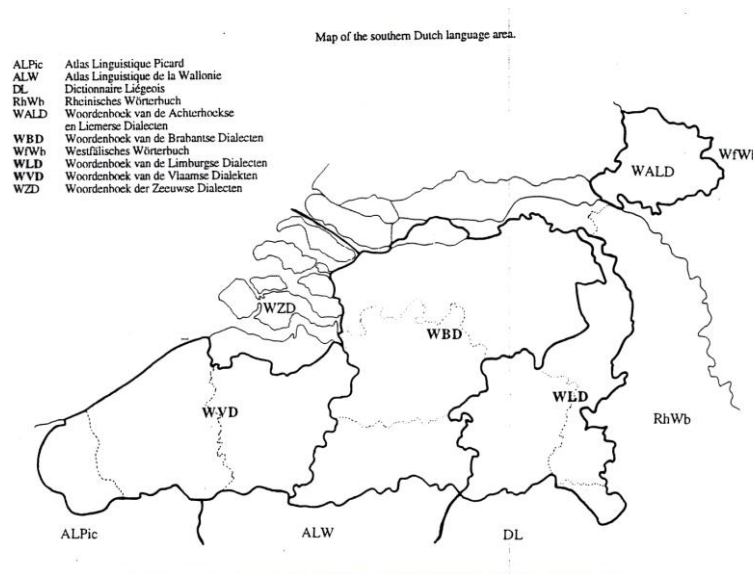

Figure 1. The southern Dutch dialect area, covering the southern provinces of the Netherlands, Dutch speaking Belgium and part of the Département Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France.

The three dictionaries describe the vocabulary of the traditional dialects of the first half of the twentieth century, in a joint Dutch-Flemish transnational project. In fact, Weijnen's example engendered still other dictionaries, for the eastern dialects of the Netherlands: the WALD for the Achterhoek and Liemers dialects, the WOD for the Overijssel dialects, the WGD for the Gelderland dialects. In what follows, however, we focus on the Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects. It goes without saying that an undertaking of this nature may be regarded as exemplifying a somewhat outdated linguistic practice. However, we believe that the job simply has to be done for the region.

3. Thematically arranged dialect dictionaries

Weijnen was strongly in favour of the thematic (and not alphabetical) arrangement of the dialect vocabulary. In his opinion, this was the only way to present the way of life of the (rural) dialect speaking community. He took the 'concrete dagelijkse samenhang van de

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[1] Because of this later commencement, it was able to take advantage of the experiences of the two older projects.

[2] These provincial names do not denote the western and eastern part of present-day Flanders (i.e. Dutch-speaking Belgium), but rather the west and east of the Dutch speaking part of the ancient county of Flanders.

dingen' [the concrete everyday connection of things, my translation JvK] (WBD Voorlopige Inleiding 1967: 40) as a point of departure for presenting the vocabulary going with it. As a consequence, the three southern dictionaries are arranged per theme: they are published in a series of fascicles, each of which is devoted to a particular conceptual field (e.g. 'the horse', 'birds', 'school') within one of three general areas. These are: I. Agricultural Vocabulary; II. Technical and Craft Vocabulary; III. General Vocabulary. The last of these is the lexicon that is not restricted to specialist occupations.

3.1. Data collection

The word collection for the three dictionaries comes from two types of source: direct investigation and existing written material (published or unpublished). The directly sourced material is collected by way of written questionnaires – thematically organized of course. At the time of writing, the WVD has sent out 207 questionnaires to a network of volunteering respondents: 62 on agriculture, 53 on crafts and occupations, 92 on general vocabulary. The questionnaires on crafts and occupations are sometimes very extensive. On average, a questionnaire on general vocabulary consists of some 120 onomasiological questions and is filled in by some 100 respondents. In French Flanders, the investigation has to be carried out orally, since the respondents are educated exclusively in French and are not able to read or write Dutch. The WVD editorial board is also lucky to have university students who are willing to devote their master's theses to dialect vocabulary. By now, more that a 100 such theses have been written on a wide number of topics. Since the word material in the theses is collected orally, it is of very high quality.

The collection of the agricultural terminology has been completed. About 15 years ago, the collection of the craft vocabularies ceased for lack of respondents. In 2010, the WVD editorial board decided to call a halt to all data collection. Indeed, even for the 'general vocabulary', it has become very hard to collect traditional dialect words. The criterion that the respondent should be 'socialized' (i.e. have come of age) before 1960 means that a 'good' respondent was born in 1940 or before. The generation of 70+, however, is getting too old for laborious written investigations, especially when low level of education is – next to local orientation – another important criterion.

3.2. Data processing

Each editor of the Flemish Dictionary works on the dialect words pertaining to a particular theme (e.g. 'flowers') and not a part of the alphabet. His/her job is to classify the words from the different sources according to the concepts included in the relevant fascicle. He/she has to decide on the entry-forms of the dialect words to be included in the onomasiological dictionary article (for an example: see Fig. 3), which involves the Dutchification of the dialect phonology. Every entry-form, indeed, 'summarizes' a number of different dialect pronunciations and is written as if it were Standard Dutch. The first of these operations requires a good knowledge of the extra-linguistic subject matter and folk taxonomies, the second a good knowledge of dialect phonology and historical linguistics. Every dialect word is tagged for geographical location and - if possible - phonologically documented. As far as pronunciation is concerned, the editor very often has to rely on information from untrained volunteers, written in a number of home-made orthographies. Therefore, the so-called *phonetic documentation* of the dictionary is rendered in a broad transcription or very often omitted for lack of sound phonetic data.

Work started on part III ('General Vocabulary') of the Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects in the early 1990s. This was a good occasion to re-examine the methodology of the dictionary,

which resulted in the adoption of a number of proposals by Van Keymeulen (1992)[3]. In the fascicles of part III, a reduction was carried out in the phonetic component: next to Dutchified headwords based on etymological insights, so-called *lexical variants* were introduced which are closer to the dialect forms and account for the 'spelling images' which ordinary dialect speakers may have of their words (for further information see: Rys & Van Keymeulen 2009).[4]

3.3. Presentation of the macrostructure
3.3.1. The *Wetenschappelijk Apparaat* (= Scientific Database)
Every fascicle of the Dictionary of the Flemish dialects consists of a list of concepts, each of which is denoted by a Standard Dutch 'title' (eg. SCHAAP 'sheep', see below). Every dictionary article in the Scientific Database contains: title, source list, the Dutchified headwords (+ in part III any lexical variants), the exact location (indicated by place code numbers) of all the data, divided according to source[5], and phonetic documentation (if any), rendered in a home-made 'phoneographic' notation[6]. The text of the Scientific Database is published in paper for part I and II; since work on part III commenced after the introduction of the computer (for WVD in 1987) the Scientific Database for this part has been automated and is not published in paper form. The data are presented in two blocks: data registered before 1950 and after 1950, thus allowing for chronological comparisons[7].

3.3.2. The publication for the general public
As the example above makes clear, the database, whether on paper or digitized, is not a recognisable dictionary. Therefore, the WVD took the option, right from the start[8], to publish fascicles, parallel with the Scientific Database, meant for the general public (and more especially the hundreds of volunteer collaborators and informants)[9]. In this publication, the semantic and encyclopaedic information is added, while the code number row is replaced by generalized indications as to location, frequency and pronunciation. To this end, the data of every dictionary article have to be mapped. The most interesting maps are published (see Fig. 3); every fascicle also contains illustrations.

4. Towards the completion of the Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects and beyond

4.1. A gigantic book of reference
The aim of the *Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects* (and its two sister dictionaries) is to catalogue the vocabulary of the oldest surviving layer of the traditional dialects and the geographical patterns therein; that is, the dialects as they existed in the first half of the 20th

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[3] See also Kruijsen & Van Keymeulen (1997).

[4] The distinction between headwords and lexical variants was later also adopted by the sister projects WBD and WLD.

[5] It is a drawback that in WBD/WLD the word material is not split up according to source for parts I and II.

[6] The WVD phoneographic notation is highly phonological and uses the letters of the Standard Dutch spelling, supplemented with diacritical symbols.

[7] This chronological division was not adopted in WBD and WLD.

[8] See Devos & Ryckeboer (1977). WBD and WLD publish the fascicles of parts I and II in a database-like format.

[9] The division between a Scientific Database and a publication for the general public derived from it is also adopted by WBD and WLD from part III onwards.

century. Because of massive lexical dialect loss since that time, the dictionary is a 100% unrepeatable scientific undertaking, and hence has to be comprehensive. Since all the data have to be collected - directly or indirectly - from the memory of living persons of the oldest generation, it comes as no surprise that the collecting of words takes a very long time: the WBD project lasted for about 45 years; the WLD for about 48 years. The WVD is today 37 years old and not yet finished. The way the project is financed is a very complicated (and sometimes sad) story. It is subsidized by the FWO (= Research Foundation - Flanders) and Ghent University. It is also funded by the provincial authorities of West Flanders, East Flanders and Zeeland - a fact which bears witness to societal interest in the undertaking. A serious drawback is the fact that every fascicle has to be presented as a separate project, with its own motivation and accompanying time-consuming paperwork and lobbying. The project has financially survived for two reasons. Firstly, the thematic set-up has made it possible to regularly publish a fascicle on a certain subject matter, thus keeping the funding bodies happy. Secondly, the adoption of computerisation in 1987 has accelerated production, so that the demand of (some) bodies that a fascicle be published every year can be met. On matters digital, the editorial board co-operates with the software firm InfoService Belgium[10]

Some figures[11]

At this point (i.e. the period 1979 - 2010), the *Dictionary of the Flemish Dialects* has published:

- An introduction to the dictionary, with an overview of the phonological patterns in the Flemish dialects (WVD Inleiding 1979)

- 11 fascicles of part I. Agriculture, containing:

> 2,032   dictionary articles
> 996   published word maps
> 2,006   dictionary pages
> ±70,000 different words

- 7 fascicles of part II. Technical and Crafts vocabulary, containing:

> 3,098   dictionary articles
> 653   published word maps
> 1,640   dictionary pages
> ±30,000 different words

- 6 fascicles of part III 'General Vocabulary', containing:

> 2,031   dictionary articles
> 873   published word maps
> 1,900   dictionary pages
> ±70,000 different words

The total number of word tokens is estimated at several millions.

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[10] See also: Valck & Van Keymeulen (1988) and Ryckeboer e.a. (1995).

[11] For a complete overview, see http://www.wvd.ugent.be/.

It is estimated a further 28 person-years will be needed in order to complete the dictionary, specifically 4 years for 2 fascicles of part I. (on 'Harvest' and 'Generalities') and 24 years for the remaining fascicles of part III ('Clothing', 'Dwelling', 'Societal behaviour', 'Religion', 'Leisure', 'The material and abstract world').

The staff consists in 2010 of two supervisors (Magda Devos and Jacques Van Keymeulen) and five editors (one full-time, 4 part-time: Tineke De Pauw, Veronique De Tier, Matthias Lefebvre, Liesbet Triest and Roxane Vandenberghe).

4.2. An annotated Atlas of the southern Dutch dialects

Because of the onomasiological perspective of the WVD, word maps can be produced easily. Indeed, the dictionary can be considered in the first place as a highly structured collection of words fit for mapping[12]. Thanks to the identical - onomasiological - set-up of the two sister dictionaries (and the fact that most data are kept in a digitized database), the data from all three can be combined to produce geographical overviews of the southern Dutch dialects[13]. Thus, thousands of word maps can be produced and studied - that is when the WVD has been completed and the three databases put together. (For an example see Fig. 4, map 'madeliefje' = 'daisy' below.) The PLAND-database (created by Har Brok and Joep Kruijsen) on the website of the Meertens Instituut is a very nice example of what is technically possible (see also Van Keymeulen 2000)[14].

5. Conclusion

The dialect dictionaries provide data for the future study of the lexical history of the Dutch language in general; they are complementary to existing dictionaries of both the historical and present-day periods of Dutch, which are based on written text corpora. Hence, the *Dictionary of the Flemish dialects* has a general documentary value for times to come. It will be a tool for any future linguist who wants to study the history of the Dutch language, with particular relevance to the fields of historical semantics, lexical semantics, etymology, lexicology and toponymy. The regional dictionaries are being incorporated into the 'Geïntegreerde Taalbank' (Integrated Language Database) by linking them to the historical dictionaries (ONW, VMNW, MNW, WNT) which are already out there (see the paper 'Historical and regional dictionaries digitally united' by Schoonheim and De Tier in this volume). It is also clear that collecting dialect words is only a first step. The collection should be interpreted in a digitized and annotated Word Atlas of the Dutch Dialects.

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[12] See the paper *Pilot project: A Dictionary of the Dutch Dialects* by the same authors (this volume).

[13] The Dictionary of the Zealand Dialects provides detailed locations for its words, so that these can be added to the data of the three thematically arranged dictionaries.

[14] For an experiment of a word map combined with an etymological article: see the website *Digitale Taalatlas van de zuidelijk-Nederlandse Dialecten* (Digital Language Atlas of the southern Dutch Dialects; http://users.ugent.be/~jvkeymeu/cyberlemmata/).

SCHAAP (title of the dictionary article = 'sheep')

WVD 47 (1989), 1; WVD 161 (2006), 1; D 66 (1991), 64; Taquet, Van de Velde, Van Hulle, D 2 (1932), 1; ZND A1 (1923), 7; ZND A2 (1923), 313 en 22; ZND 6 (1924), 25; ZND 20 (1936), 22c; ZND 38 (1942), 40; ZND 39 (1942), 44; GV Meertens (1935), 3-3a-3b; Oostvlaamse Zanten 33 (1958), 62. (= source list, with the abbreviations of questionnaires, dates, number of question, student names for master's theses, short titles of articles, references ...)

lemmen *lem&n* : WVD 161 : O 058, O 062; ZND 38 : I 260a, O 061; GV Meertens : O 061. **schaap** *schaap* : WVD 47: I 112; *schôêp* : WVD 47: O 117, O 122, O 202, O 206; GV Meertens : O 126; *schòòp* : WVD 47: I 106, I 125a, I 138, (…) O 116, O 257; D 66 : I 163, I 190, I 223, I 259, N 083; Taquet : I 238, I 246, O 015, O 016, O 017, O 019, O 021, O 025, O 033, O 037; Van de Velde : I 141, I 147, I 150, I 168c, I 170, I 170b, I 173, I 174, I 175a, I 177, I 179, I 207, I 210, I 212, I 217; D 2 : I 122, I 123, I 125, I 127, I 128, I 129, I 134, I 136, I 137, I 138, I 139, I 140, I 140a, I 141, I 141b, I 142, I 143, I 143a, I 144, I 144a, I 162, I 166, I 167, I 167a, I 168; ZND A2 : H 005, H 036, (…) O 114; ZND 6 : H 036, I 125, I 145, I 167, I 204, I 241, N 043, O 032, O 061, O 084, O 133, O 180, O 182, O 205; GV Meertens : I 146, I 154, I 169, I 175, I 178, I 181, I 190, I 200, I 208, I 209, I 213, I 218, I 237, I 241, I 255, I 258, I 261a, I 264, I 266, I 272, I 273, N 038, O 004, O 009, O 025, O 036, O 047, O 052, O 059, O 063, O 082, O 181; *sjaap* : WVD 47: b 015, H 081, H 081a, N 013, N 054, N 102, N 104, N 161; WVD 161 : N 057, N 059; ZND A2 : H 049, H 100; *sjchaap* : WVD 47: H 022, H 083, N 014, (...) N 065; WVD 161 : H 016, H 026, H 046, H 050, H 051, H 084, H 089, N 014, N 015, N 018; D 66 : H 016; ZND A2 : H 046, H 049, H 104, N 025; ZND 6 : H 007, H 016, H 093, N 071; GV Meertens : H 016, H 088, H 101, H 108, N 021, N 031; *sjchòòp* : WVD 47: H 004, H 009, N 016, N 017, N 034, N 037, N 068, N 072, N 077, N 115, N 131, N 163; WVD 161 : H 025, N 016, N 033, N 067, N 070, N 072; ZND A2 : H 002, N 077; ZND 6 : H 026, H 067; GV Meertens : H 063, N 067, N 068, N 076, N 123, N 126; *skòòp* : WVD 47: H 069, H 119, N 041, N 042, N 044, O 080, O 135, O 223, O 230; WVD 161 : H 013, H 121, N 041, N 087, N 090, N 141, N 145, O 056, O 146, O 233; D 66 : N 089, N 141, O 181; Van Hulle : H 014, H 032, H 041, H 065, H 066, H 068, H 069, H 072, H 118, H 119, I 124, I 153, I 223; ZND A2 : N 045, N 132, N 141; ZND 6 : N 081, N 141; GV Meertens : H 036, H 069, H 116, H 119, H 120, H 123, N 042, N 045, O 080, O 142, O 179, O 230; *skop* : GV Meertens : N 145; *zfd* : WVD 161 : O 220, O 230; D 66 : H 017, H 040, H 051, H 066, H 069, H 089, H 119, H 121, I 104, I 105, I 106, I 107, I 108, I 112, I 116, I 116c, I 128, I 138, I 140, I 141, I 141a, I 147, I 155, I 158, I 160, I 161, I 167, I 171, I 183, I 190, I 193, I 208, I 212, I 223a, I 233, I 241, I 262, N 015, N 020, N 024, N 067, N 077, N 082, N 132, O 082; D 2 : I 122, I 123, I 138, I 142; ZND A2 : H 050, H 114, H 119, I 158, I 208, N 021, N 072, N 090, N 139, N 145, O 052, O 077; ZND 6 : I 154a, (...) O 271; GV Meertens : H 009, I 252, N 041, N 087, N 141, O 127, O 199, O 200
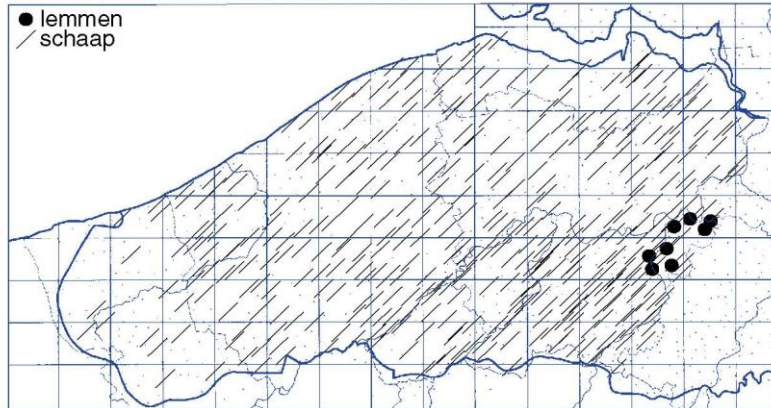
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words in bold = Dutchified headwords
words in italics = phonetic notations in a home-made phoneographic spelling; zfd = without phonetic documentation

Figure 2. Example of a *Scientific Database*, taken from WVD I,12

— 1.1.1.2.2.2.

SCHAAP: OUD EN NIEUW MATERIAAL

● lemmen
╱ schaap

— 2.2.2. Het schaap

— 2.2.2.0. Algemeen

SCHAAP

Een herkauwend woldragend zoogdier, dat door de mens gedomesticeerd is om wol, melk en vlees te leveren. Zie afb. 45 e.v.

WVD 47 (1989), 1 ; WVD 161 (2006), 1 ; D 66 (1991), 64 ; Taquet, Van de Velde, Van Hulle; D 2 (1932), 1; GV Meertens (1935), 3-3a-3b; W (1886), 1; ZND A1 (1923), 7; ZND A2 (1923), 22 en 313; ZND 6 (1924), 25; ZND 20 (1936), 22c; ZND 38 (1942), 40; ZND 39 (1942), 44; Dialect WZV (s.d.), 130; Oostvlaamsche Zanten 33 (1958), 62.

lemmen : Wieze, Moorsel *lemən*.

GV : s p o r. str. v. Dendermonde en Denderstr. noord *lemən, lèèmən*. ZND : s p o r. str. v. Dendermonde, ook Aalst *lemən*.

schaap : a l g. FV *sjaap*, WV *sjchaap, sjchòòp, schòòp, skòòp*, ZV *schòòp, schaap* en OV *schòòp, sch̄ōēp, skòòp*.

D : a l g. ZV *schòòp*. GV : a l g. WV *sjchaap, sjchòòp, skòòp* en OV *schòòp, sch̄ōēp, zfd*. W : a l g. FV *sjaap*, WV *sjchaap, sjchòòp, schòòp, skòòp*, ZV *schòòp* en OV *schòòp, sch̄ōēp, sk̄ōēp*. ZND : a l g. WV *sjchaap, sjchòòp, schòòp, skòòp* en OV *schòòp, sch̄ōēp, zfd*, ook Steenvoorde *sjaap*. Wdb : DS sjhaap; J, LVC; T schoap; WZD : schaop i.v. schaep : alg. Dialect WZV : schaop. Oostvlaamsche Zanten : schoup, Nieuwkerken-Waas.

VLEINAAM VOOR EEN SCHAAP

Een woord om een schaap, meestal een jong en/of vrouwelijk dier, vleiend aan te spreken.

WVD 49 (1989), 56 en 57; Van de Velde; GV Meertens (1935), 3d; VCA (1949), 2j.

bèè(tje) : Hillare *bèè(kən)*, Waasmunster *bèèkən*.

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SCHAAP = title 'sheep'

description: a ruminating wool-bearing mammal, domesticated by humans for wool, milk and meat.

words in bold = Dutchified headwords
words in italics = phonetic notations in a home-made phoneographic spelling; zfd = without phonetic documentation
alg., freq., spor., zeldz., = frequency indications, meaning 'general', 'frequent', 'sporadic', 'seldom', respectively
FV, WV, OV,... = general indications as to location, meaning: French Flanders, West Flanders, East Flanders, ... respectively.

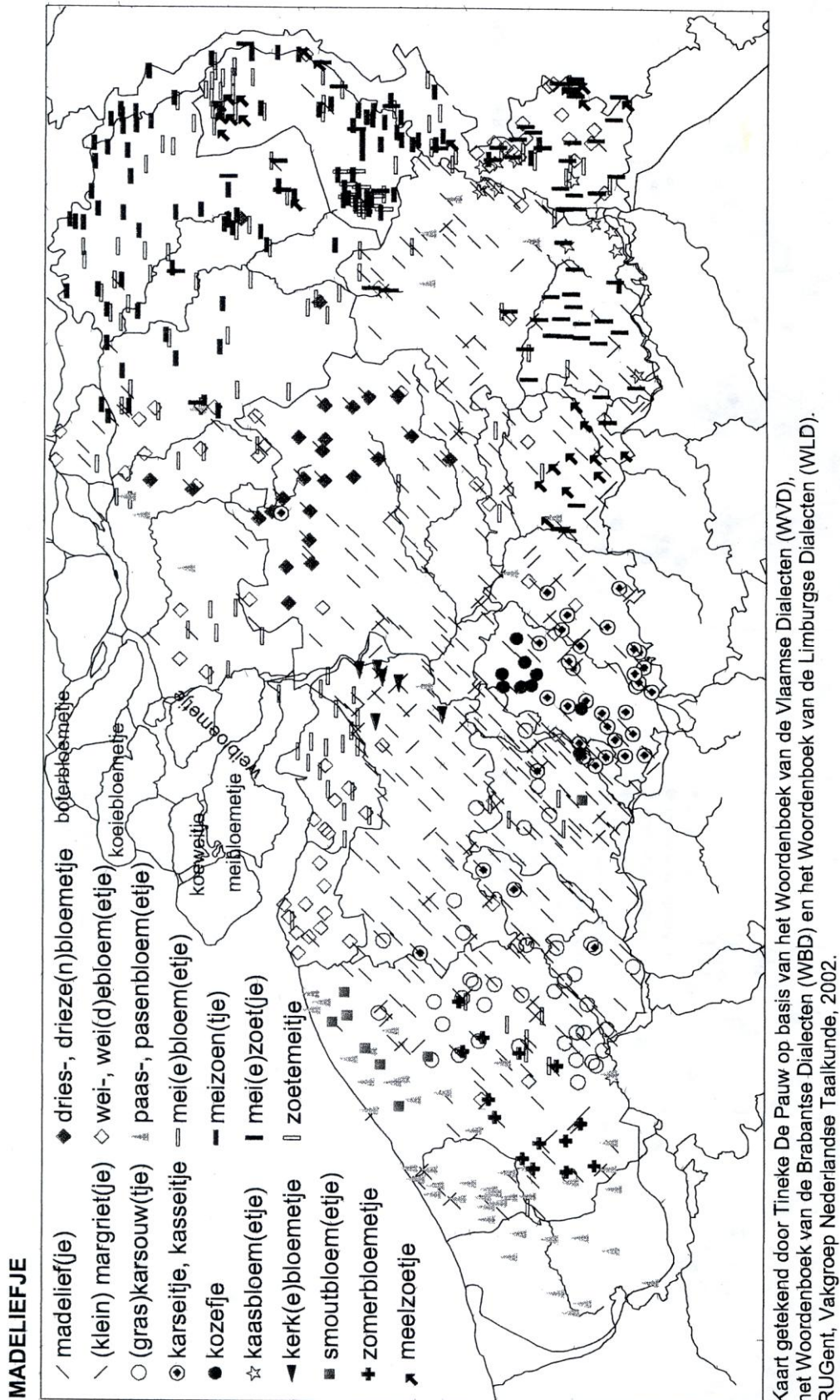Figure 3. A page of the WVD (WVD I,12:165)

Figure 4. Word map of the heteronymy of 'daisy' for the southern Dutch dialects, based on the WVD, WBD, WLD and WZD dictionaries[15].

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[15] The map is drawn by Tineke De Pauw (2002) with MapInfo (see the presentation of the WVD software).

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VMNW = Pijnenburg, W.J.J. et al. (1999). *Vroegmiddelnederlands Woordenboek*. Leiden: Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie. (Dictionary of Early Middle Dutch, also available online: http://vmnw.inl.nl).

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