Cross-Linguistic Influences and the Acquisition of English Vocabulary and Registers by Second Language Learners

A Comparison between Dutch and French Speaking Pupils in Belgium

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When I entered university several years ago, I probably did not consider the great task beyond the horizon called thesis which would be the last work I submit before starting a new chapter in the book of my life. Now that this moment has come, I would like to thank those who have supported my projects from the very beginning, my parents.

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Bibliography
1. Introduction

‘The existence of L1 in mind makes it impossible to use L2 in a fully monolingual mode’ (Granger, 1998). This statement reminds me of a conversation I once had, as an Erasmus student in the Netherlands, with my professor Literature, as she remarked on the differences she had noticed in the essay writing of her Dutch and French speaking students respectively. So I crossed the border back into Belgium with this question in mind: ‘To what extent could the mother language possibly help or hinder the acquisition of formality aspects in another language?’ This will be the central topic of my thesis. I decided to focus on the learning of English, considering the context that triggered this analysis, but also because the English language has acquired a substantial position in the life of Europeans, as well as at a global scale. This study takes place in Belgium and addresses the English practice of sixth-grade learners from secondary education in Flanders and Wallonia. My choice is not arbitrary as the former speak Dutch as a mother language but also learn French as a second language, while the latter’s mother language is French and they learn Dutch too. As will be explained more in details in the second part of this work, the informants of this study were tested on their lexical practice of English as they performed two tasks that were adjusted in terms of formality. These are centered on the same topic in order to allow a better comparison.

Before turning to a precise clarification of my analysis, I will sketch the research context of this study, which helped me determine the methodology and the variables that would be of interest in the investigation of the abovementioned issue. In her work about closely related languages, Gooskens (2007:446) specified three main factors: the linguistic distance between the languages concerned, the contact with the language in question and possibly other language experiences, as well as the attitudes towards the specific language. These language-internal and external factors will also articulate the following research context. Although the language practice of learners should not be reduced to a limited series of factors, the elements developed in chapter two will also help me propose possible avenues of explanation for the results observed and perspectives for further research.

2. Research context and background

This chapter has been devised in a zoom-in approach and will draw the outline of this research, starting from more general theories and progressively entering the present study in its specific context. A first section will be devoted to theories of second language learning, especially focusing on vocabulary and how it is organised in a learner’s brain. Those observations will serve as evidence for cross-linguistic influences, which will be further discussed in terms of factors and realizations. As we
will see, the distance between the mother language (L1) and the second language (L2) constitutes one of those factors affecting cross-linguistic influences. Consequently, a second section will be dedicated to historical developments of the English language and how those can be connected to the French and Dutch languages respectively.

After a brief summary of the language-specific features of English, Dutch and French that are relevant in an analysis of second language learning at a lexical level, the focus will be on the particular context in which this study has been carried out. Sociolinguistic, attitudinal and motivational aspects will be dealt with in that very section, as learner-external factors have also proved to play a role in the second-(or foreign) language learning process. In that last section, I will concentrate on the place of the English language in Europe, and in Belgium more specifically. I will also consider how it can affect the attitudes and motivations of learners from the Dutch and French communities in Belgium. As this study materializes in a classroom context, the teaching regulations specific to the Flemish and French communities in terms of language learning will also be briefly reviewed.

2.1. Second language learning and cross-linguistic influences: theoretical aspects

2.1.1. Beyond grammar-oriented researches

Until quite recently, research has mainly focused on grammar, and especially on syntax, in the field of second (or foreign) language learning, while vocabulary remained of minor importance (Carter, 1998:205; Sjöholm, 1995:36). Hence, syntax has served as a basis for developing theories and practical applications in second language learning and teaching (Sjöholm, 1995:36). But today the importance of vocabulary and lexical proficiency in the second (or foreign) language has been fully recognised. Sjöholm (1995:37), among other authors, illustrates this evolution as he mentions Johansson’s and Politzer’s studies about native-speakers’ reactions to learners’ mistakes, or analyses of lexically-driven difficulties that learners face in order to be understood. Kellerman (1987:34) also underlines the importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition, considering the demonstrated assertion that the mother language influences the learning process of the target language at the vocabulary level.

Those observations support the emphasis of this study, which will be on the lexical aspects of cross-linguistic influences between French and English, and Dutch and English respectively. Before turning to the particularities of these languages and the context(s) in which they will be studied, I would like to draw attention to theories and studies coming from various sub-branches of linguistics, such as psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics and language acquisition, which will allow me to sketch the nature and the origin of cross-linguistic ties at the lexical level. It is essential to note here that the focus of this research is not primarily psycho- or neurolinguistic, and therefore the theories mentioned in this
chapter will not be deeply dissected, but will rather be evoked to build a relevant scientific background for my analysis.

2.1.2. L2-lexicon: an ongoing debate

Before discussing cross-linguistic influences as such, I would like to dwell on the intrapersonal genesis of vocabulary processing and development, which is to be found in the speaker’s brain, and more exactly in the mental lexicon: a sort of mental dictionary in which information is stored about meaning, pronunciation or syntactic use. The way the mental lexicon works still remains a burning issue among scholars and the debate intensifies as second and foreign languages become involved in addition to the mother language (Singleton & Little, 1991:62).

When it comes to a multilingual mental lexicon, the discussion concentrates on (1) whether and (2) how the lexicons of the various languages involved are related. The first concern divides ‘separatists’ from ‘integrationists’, as I would call them. In this regard, Cook (2003:7f, cited in Singleton, 2006:130) opted for consensus when he suggested that neither total integration, nor total separation are possible, in that learners can use languages apart from one another even if they are part of the same brain, and therefore not entirely separated. This latter reasoning also justifies Lisniewska’s view that: ‘the existence of L1 in mind makes it impossible to use L2 in a fully monolingual mode.’ (2006:67)

The second issue opposes ‘connectionists’, to whom connections between the lexicons prevail, to ‘localisationists’, who focus on the localisations of the lexicons in the brain (Singleton, 2006:132). Both aspects have been investigated. On the one hand, neuroscience provided evidence that languages are activated in the same area of the brain (Singleton, 2006:130). On the other hand, connections between L1- and L2-lexicons have been demonstrated through various phenomena, such as L1-related creations in L2, the influence of cognates or word-form, and the realization of positive transfer (Singleton, 2006; Singleton & Little, 1991). The influence of the mother language in the learning process of a second language can also justify the differences observed among learners from various linguistic backgrounds (Koda, 1997:37), among other things.

Additionally, researchers zoomed in on characteristics of L1- and L2-lexicons respectively. Although the L2-lexicon approximates its L1 counterpart (Carter, 1998:205), both cannot be totally equated. Indeed, Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen (2008:20) indicate in their book that the L1-lexicon is an ‘immense store of lexical items’ displaying well-defined meanings and usage restrictions, which is ‘well-organised’ and in which words can be easily retrieved. The L2-lexicon on the other hand, would be smaller and sparser in terms of size and structure as those components depend on the language exposure and the language proficiency of the speaker (Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen, 2008:38), which are more limited for language learners. The age of acquisition, or in this case, of learning, also plays a part.
Ultimately, no matter whether lexicons are actually integrated or separated, or whether they should be considered in terms of localisation or type of connection, the point I want to make here is that ties between the mental lexicons in a multilingual brain were established, and many studies demonstrated that the L1 lexicon influences its L2 counterpart. These observations allow me in the next section to dwell on the way in which these connections between the various lexicons actualize in the language practice of the learner at the lexical level. Other phenomena resulting from these connections will also be reported, as well as factors that are relevant to the main subject of this paper.

2.1.3. Cross-linguistic similarities and influences

When confronted to new words in a new language, learners discover perceived or real cross-linguistic similarities between their mother language –or any other language they already know– and the new language. These similarities will influence their second language practice if they assume the previously acquired linguistic knowledge to be relevant for their use of L2 (Ringbom, 2007; Gabrys-Barker, 2006:14; Arabsky, 2006:12; Singleton, 2006:139). The psychological process in which the learner uses other linguistic resources than those of the target language (Sjöholm, 1995:86; Ringbom, 2006:38) is known as cross-linguistic influence: a theory-neutral term that is preferred to ‘transfer’, or to the negatively connoted term interference (Kellerman, 1989:2; Ringbom, 2007:30). Far from being the only factor affecting second language acquisition, the crucial role of cross-linguistic influence in second language practice was demonstrated in many studies. Although the focus of this study will be on lexis, the phenomenon occurs at all linguistic levels; it affects forms and meanings, both in comprehension and production (Arabsky, 2006:15; Kellerman, 1987; Ringbom, 2007). Cross-linguistic similarities and influences can result in two opposite developments. There is positive influence (or: transfer) if the previously acquired knowledge and practices correspond with the target language, resulting in a correct performance and, consequently, in a facilitative effect on the L2 learning process. Negative influence, on the contrary, is established if the old knowledge and practices do not coincide with the newly learned language, and therefore lead to mistakes (Arabski, 2006:12; Ringbom, 2007:31).

The following paragraphs are devoted to some factors, actualizations and variations characteristic of cross-linguistic influences that are relevant to this research.

a) Cognates

Cognates can be considered as one of the materializations of cross-linguistic influence. They are parts of the second-language vocabulary that appear as ‘variants of the L1 vocabulary’ (Singleton, 2006:135) and can be defined as: ‘historically related, formally similar words, whose meaning may be identical, similar, partly different or, occasionally, even wholly different (Ringbom, 2007:73). In the latter case, they are called deceptive cognates or false friends and lead to inaccurate L2 use. In the
second language learning process, it is important that learners become aware of the frequency and stylistic register of the cognates in the second language (Ringbom, 2007:73), as those aspects can vary from the mother language too. An accurate command of cognate words in the second language proves to be useful, more particularly in production (Ringbom, 2007:73).

In his book, Ringbom (2007:77) discusses the conditions that determine whether cognates will have a facilitative or rather inhibiting effect on the learning process. As a first factor, he establishes the ‘degree of formal and semantic similarity’. The facilitative effect of semantic and above all, formal (i.e. phonological, morphological, orthographical and etymological) overlap was also observed by Lowie & Verspoor (2004:81) and Carter (1998:195). Second, the more transparent the cognates are, the more facilitative their effect will be on learning, for example in terms of frequency or context in which they occur in L2 (Ringbom, 2007:73). As far as the context is concerned, Ringbom (2007:75) also argues that false friends used in a similar context in both languages will complicate the learning. As we will see later on in the case of English, the degree of usefulness or hindrance of cognates also depends on the kind of vocabulary aimed at by the learner, whether general or specific (Ringbom, 2007:77).

b) Cross-linguistic influence: some factors

As Ringbom remarks (2007), it is difficult to determine the factors that underlie cross-linguistic influence because they are manifold and intertwined. Importantly, the point of this study will not be to try and establish the factors that will influence the informants in their second language practice, for they are not verifiable. Quite on the contrary, this theoretical background is actually aimed at demonstrating that the informants of my research embody or are confronted to aspects and factors that can justify their L2 practice in the context designed. The learner’s stage of acquisition and (individual) proficiency will be mentioned here below in more details, as well as the psychotypology (i.e. the language distance) of the languages involved. But scholars (Ringbom, 2007:62; Gabrys-Barker, 2006:146; Arabski, 2006:13) established other factors that could contribute to cross-linguistic influence, such as the learning experience, the teaching method or the task designed to measure their L2 proficiency (Gabrys-Barker, 2006:144). As far as the latter is concerned, perceived cross-linguistic similarities at the lexical level prove to be useful in production (Ringbom, 2007:93), but can also lead the learner to overuse transferred terms and in so doing display a limited vocabulary. At an advanced level, the learner relying too much on cross-linguistic similarities could also lack idiomatic refining in language practice (Ringbom, 2007:72). Moreover, the input exposure, the social setting or the educational and social background, and other learner-individual characteristics are relevant considerations in the analysis of cross-linguistic influence. Some of those factors will be discussed later on in more details as they also affect other aspects of second language learning.
Psychantypology, or language distance, refers to the objective (i.e. real) or perceived distance between the mother language and the target language of the learner (Sjöholm, 1995:82; Gabrys-Barker, 2006:144). The higher the degree of proximity between the languages involved, the more occurrences of cross-linguistic influence (Lowie & Verspoor, 2004:77; Ringbom, 2007:77; Singleton, 2006:134; Kellerman, 1987:89). The perceived or assumed language distance can vary among learners (Koda, 1997:38), depending on their age or metacognitive awareness. Indeed, the establishment of psychotypology or cross-linguistic similarities requires a mature and refined knowledge of the mother language (Arabsky, 2006:13). Considering the importance of psychotypology, section 2.2 will be devoted to the evolution of English against the backdrop of its distance towards French and Dutch respectively. The perceived psychotypology will also be briefly alluded to in section 2.3.

To be more precise, research has shown that closely-related L1 and L2 enhance positive influence in the second language practice, and have consequently a facilitative effect on the L2 learning process (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2010:187; Manczak-Wohlfield, 2006:50; Ringbom, 2006:36, 2007: 9). Nevertheless, cross-linguistic influence can also lead to various kinds of errors, such as deceptive cognates, calques or semantic extensions (Gabrys-Barker, 2006: 145). Second language acquisition studies have traditionally aimed attention at negative transfer (Ringbom, 2007:30) and its consecutive mistakes, thus focusing on ‘what the learner cannot do’ (Ringbom, 2007:31) and not on the words and structures they already have acquired because the latter is more difficult to experimentally assess (Ringbom, 2007:61). This results in an incomplete picture of the effects of cross-linguistic influence in the second language practice.

Error analysis – the analysis of ‘what the learner cannot do’, as Ringbom puts it– has long been the main methodology applied in the contrastive analysis approach, which was particularly influential in the 1950s and 1960s, with Lado and Weinreich as figureheads. Their principal thesis was that interference from the mother language formed the main difficulty for the learner (Sjöholm, 1995:27; Koda, 1997:36). This is the reason why contrastive analysis proponents established lists comparing the mother language to the target language in order to predict facilitation –in case of similarities between both languages– and difficulties –when many elements differed (Ringbom, 2007:32; Kellerman, 1987:5). Those lists would contribute to the establishment of adapted learning and teaching methods (Ringbom, 2007:32; Kellerman, 1987:90). But those predictions received little empirical support (Sjöholm, 1995:27) and the approach as a whole came under criticism as it focused on language differences rather than similarities, thus failing to consider the greater complexity of cross-linguistic influences and their possible positive effects on learning (Sjöholm, 1995:27-29). Considering this methodological debate, the possible mistakes resulting from cross-linguistic influence in this research will not be categorised as such. I will merely focus on the linguistic influence that can be found in the
second language practice of the learner, but I am not going to establish whether this practice is correct or not.

**L2 level of learners**

Both the level of L2 acquisition and the individual language proficiency of the learner play a role in the way cross-linguistic similarities influence the second language practice. Scholars established that a learner would be more prone to rely on their L1 (or any other language they already know) when they lack knowledge in L2, i.e. if they haven’t learnt the specific L2 element or cannot activate it when necessary; the inadequate use can also come from insufficient or approximate acquisition of the L2 rules (Singleton & Little, 1991; Gabrys-Barker, 2006; Araby, 2006; Kellerman, 1987).

Beside the individual proficiency aspect, the stage of learning has also been discussed by scholars. From the literature on the subject, two main suggestions can be extracted that are relevant in this analysis. On the one hand, it has been argued that transfer especially happens at earlier stages of acquisition. But it has also been suggested that advanced learners are more prone to transfer. At first glance thus, both claims seem to be contradictory, but the kinds of transfer referred to at both stages of acquisition should not be confused.

At early stages of learning, the beginner relies on their mother language as a result of insufficient knowledge of the target language (Gabrys-Baker, 2006; Ringbom, 2007; Lowie & Verspoor, 2004; Sjoholm, 1995). This induces an ‘overemphasis on cross-linguistic similarities’ (Ringbom, 2007), especially at the level of word-form (Gabrys-Barker, 2006; Ringbom, 2007), as a result of their facilitative effects for the beginning learner, assuming that they perceive both L1 and L2 to be typologically close (Ringbom, 2007). But, as the learner at that stage is not yet familiar with deceptive cognates, relying on L1 could also lead the learner to errors in L2 forms or use. Interestingly, connections between L1 and L2 at early stages of learning have been observed both in production and comprehension tasks (Ringbom, 2007).

As the level of proficiency rises, connections between L1 and L2 become looser and more effective (Gabrys-Barker, 2006; Ringbom, 2007). The learner has progressively developed a personal strategy to enhance learning and has become alert to deceptive cognates, differences in register and frequency (Ringbom, 2007). Some scholars go as far as to say that an advanced level is required for the analysis of cross-linguistic influences in the language practice of non-native speakers (Kellerman, 1987; Ringbom, 2007). Only at that stage, they argue, does the learner demonstrate sufficient L2 resources that enable them to make an adequate use of cross-linguistic similarities (Ringbom, 2007). To Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen (2008), an L2 vocabulary size of 5000 words is the threshold level necessary to the production of lower frequency lexical items.
c) Non-native language influence, another form of cross-linguistic influence

As already mentioned, other languages known to the learner can influence the second language practice beside the mother language. This notion is called non-native language influence (Sjöholm, 1995:85) and was evoked by several scholars (Gabrys-Barker, 2006; Sjöholm, 1995; Ringbom, 2006). Ringbom (2006:43) discussed the concept in the case of an unrelated L1 and related L2 to an L3, further detailing that L1-based errors were different from L2-based ones in the practice of a third language. However, we cannot take it for granted that such a phenomenon would not apply in the context of related languages as is the case in this study. Additionally, non-native language influence manifests itself especially at earlier stages of third-language learning and would be a strategy for learners who (consciously or not) avoid relying on their mother language (Ringbom, 2006:43). The concept is all the more important to mention in this study, as research done so far has demonstrated that it occurs predominantly at the lexical level (Sjöholm, 1995:85).

2.1.4. Language awareness, a substantial aspect

For the aforementioned cross-linguistic similarities and influences, and their facilitative aspects to be effective in the learning process, the learner has to be aware of their existence and actualization. ‘Language awareness training’ (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2010:180), ‘conscious intervention’ (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2010:180), ‘informed teaching’ (Ringbom, 2007:105), scholars have used various terms to underline the benefits resulting from making learners aware of cognates, cross-linguistic similarities and opportunities for transfer in the learning process of a second (or foreign) language. In an experiment comparing groups of Polish beginning learners of English, Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2010:178) observed that language awareness proves to be very effective, both at the receptive and productive levels. The learners who had been made familiar with cognate forms performed better than the control group who were unaware of cognates. Kellerman (1987:66) also concluded that students failed to detect similarities between closely-related languages, such as Dutch, German and English, if not clearly trained in recognizing them. In addition, Ringbom recommends the incorporation of frequency and register of cognate words in the languages compared in the awareness-raising process (2007:73).

The awareness-raising approach, scholars advocate (Kellerman, 1987; Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2010; Ringbom, 2007), turns out to be beneficial for learners, making them sensitive to cross-linguistic similarities and closely related languages, and encouraging positive transfer from L1. Along these lines, vocabulary learning becomes much more effective too, making it possible for the learner to ‘learn several hundred words in a very short time’ (Ruben, 1987:16, cited in Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2010:180). This practice would also enable the learner to consider the essence and the limits of cross-linguistic similarities (Ringbom, 2007:105), and in this way, warn them against negative transfer.
2.2. Diachronic evidence and (language-) historical perspective

The aforementioned psycholinguistic aspects are not totally disconnected from the historical perspective of language. The coming sub-sections will be about exploring the historical links that have been established between English and French, and English and Dutch respectively, as it was asserted that those links can play a role in the learning process and second language practice. While Ringbom (2007:8) argues that the genetic tie between languages correlates with perceived similarity, although both aspects should be kept separated, Kellerman (1987:101) has identified a proportional link between the degree of interference and the typological similarity of languages. Moreover, Nation (1998:196) points to the facilitating aspects of morphological, etymological and sound correspondence in memorizing. Those findings support the inclusion of a section dedicated to the historical perspective of the languages dealt with in this paper.

2.2.1. To begin with, a family tree

As illustrated in figure 1, French, Dutch and English are classified among the Indo-European language family. All of them belong to the Western branch, which is the reason why the other branches are not represented on this simplified figure. They also share a common alphabet. While French is part of the Italic branch, just like Spanish, Italian, or Portuguese, with Latin as a common ancestor, both Dutch and English belong to the (West-) Germanic branch (Barber et al., 2009:87) and share morphological, syntactical and some sound features (Barber et al., 2009:60). The English language is also characterized by a Germanic core vocabulary, as evidenced by grammar words, the numbers and words referring to everyday life and situations (Barber et al., 2009: 61). Besides, the English vocabulary includes numerous loanwords, especially from Latin and French, offering ‘a more technically specific alternative’ to their Germanic counterparts (Dik et al., 1981:274). This observation leads to Ringbom’s (2007:75) conclusion that French learners of English have less difficulty with ‘infrequent Romance loanwords in a vocabulary test’ than with more frequent Germanic-based words. His conclusion supports one of the hypotheses of this paper.

1 Based on: http://www.alternatehistory.com
   http://fharriso.sites.truman.edu/latin-language/indo-european-language-family/
   http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/language.html
The mixed vocabulary in English is a result of extralinguistic factors that shaped the history of Britain and, inevitably, that of the English language. Here follows a short overview of those historical issues that help us understand the organization of the Germanic and Latinate vocabulary within the English language and how it could potentially influence the second language practice of the informants of this study. The discussion here below is essentially based on the historical introduction to the English language as presented by Barber et al. (2009), but remarks by other scholars will also refine the reasoning.

2.2.2. A history of conquests and loans

The Roman Conquest and the Latinization of government and administration in a great part of Europe was followed in Britain by the Barbarian invasions and the introduction of Anglo-Saxon dialects, while Latin was relegated to a background position on the island, though remaining the language of literacy (Barber et al., 2009:50; 52). At that time, the British population spoke a variety of dialects with Germanic characteristics, identified as Old English (Barber et al., 2009:107). Towards the end of the Old English period, the Norsemen and the Normans invaded Britain and both Old Norse, which was quite similar to Old English, and Old French marked the English vocabulary (Barber et al., 2009:137). Other loans were borrowed from the language of the next settlers, the Vikings, whose

Figure 1: Simplified and non-exhaustive representation of the Western branch of the Indo-European languages
Scandinavian ‘language’ resembled that of the Anglo-Saxons in terms of grammar and vocabulary (Kellerman, 1987:103). The Scandinavian influence on English especially applied to words of everyday life and terms referring to law and administration (Barber et al., 2009: 143). But those loans of Germanic origin that marked the Old English period were nothing compared to the French influence that was to come.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 stimulated the evolution from Old English to Middle English, although the French language had already started influencing the higher society of Britain before, through close relations between both countries. The invaders spoke (Norman) French and their language soon became the language of government and administration, as William the Conqueror installed a French-speaking ruling class occupying ecclesiastical, educational and other prestige functions (Barber et al., 2009:145). At the English court, the privileged also read literature in French. But while French became a prestige language in Britain, and Latin was used as the ‘language of the Church, of scholarship, and of international communication’ (Barber et al., 2009:150), the majority of the British population still spoke a dialect of English (Barber et al., 2009:146).

13th-century Britain saw a timid, but progressive repossession of English at all levels of the society, as a result of the gradual anglicisation of the ex-Norman upper class and the emergence of national feelings (Barber et al., 2009:150). When in the course of the 14th century, English had become the language of literacy, administration and education in Britain, the French and Latin influence on the language remained much perceptible. While the Norman scribes had affected the spelling conventions that came to characterize Middle English (Barber et al., 2009:161), the main influence was to be found at the level of the vocabulary, as illustrated in Chaucer’s work featuring many French loans (Barber et al., 2009:179). At this period, terms were borrowed from Central French, which had become fashionable. Those French words were generally specialized terms and reflected the way of life of the higher society, while ordinary people mostly opted for their English counterparts. The French loans were connected to various domains, such as law, administration, military terms, hunting, arts, fashion, cuisine, ecclesiastical life, titles and ranks or moral qualities (Barber et al., 2009:156-157). This contrast between English and French terms is still reflected in today’s English, as Barber et al. argue (2009:157): ‘we often have French and Germanic words surviving side by side with similar meanings; in such cases the Germanic word tends to be more popular, and perhaps more emotionally charged, while the French word is often more formal, refined, or official.’

Until the religious conflicts and the Reformation in the 16th century, English and Latin actually co-existed in the British society. The latter being the language of international scholarship, education and scientific publications, the Latin language, literature and culture remained an important intellectual background. When the ordinary citizens of Britain started to ask for books and education in their own language, English gradually became the ‘sole literary medium in England’ (Barber et al., 2009:185).
By this time onwards, the English language progressively entered its Modern stage and Latin came to be the most influential source of loans in the British Renaissance; French reaching the second step of the podium at that time. This influence can be explained by the numerous translations of Latin texts into English, occasionally requiring some creativity on the part of the translators, who then adapted the Latin word to English and were sometimes influenced by French in the process of ‘reshaping’ (Barber et al., 2009:188-189). The borrowed terms were typically learned words that encompassed the scientific, mathematical or legal domains. Others were connected to the liberal arts, classical civilization or a more general lexical field. Only a few terms reflected everyday language (Barber et al., 2009:189). Interestingly, the process of ‘reshaping’ or adapting to the English language did not only apply to loans from that period. In Renaissance Britain, some existing words were adjusted at the level of spelling and/or pronunciation, relying on (possibly a supposed) etymology. This was for example the case for the word dette, a French appropriation, which was remodeled after a newly-discovered Latin etymology into: debt (Barber et al., 2009:190). Other words, borrowed from other languages also entered the English vocabulary at the Renaissance period, to a smaller extent. They generally illustrated the type of connection the British had with those societies: Dutch loans connected with commerce, seafaring, trade or oil-painting; Italian loans referring to warfare, commerce or arts; or Spanish and Portuguese loans about the colonization of the Americas (Barber et al., 2009:191-192).

Entering the English language, many of those loans, especially from Latin were subjected to the regular English word-formation mechanisms, such as affixation, compounding or conversion (Barber et al., 2009:192).

The scientific and technological developments of the 18th and 19th century led to a further expansion of this vocabulary field, with loanwords from Greek, Latin, French and German, which were unknown to the man in the street, but were used internationally (Barber et al., 2009:229). Also the general vocabulary developed, with borrowings from various languages in various fields.

The expansion and transformation of the vocabulary is, of course, an ongoing process that applies to any language. It is interesting to conclude from this short historical outline that English is genetically a Germanic language, but has a long history of romance borrowings, amongst other influences. The connections observed between French and English on the one hand, and Dutch and English on the other hand, form a valuable starting point in the context of this study and allow us to speculate about their possible effects on French- and Dutch-speaking learners of English. They can also be associated with various theories and observations about second language learning that were mentioned in the previous sections.
2.3. Dutch, French and English: some language-specific conclusions

At this stage, the research context comes to an important turning point. As already mentioned, this chapter is designed in a zoom-in approach. Under 2.1., I have discussed purely theoretical aspects of neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics and language learning that could be relevant to the topic dealt with in this study. Because psychotypology happened to be an important factor in second language learning, section 2.2. has been dedicated to the language-historical developments of the English language and the possible connections with French and Dutch respectively. Before we turn to more language-external aspects of second language learning and discuss the specific environment in which this research takes place, this section will review findings that make the aforementioned theories concrete in the specific context of a lexically-oriented analysis of French- or Dutch-speaking learners of English.

At the formal level on the one hand, scholars have pointed at the effect of spelling and pronunciation of cognate words. In their research on English-speaking learners of French and German, Singleton and Little (1991:75) observed that ‘there are large numbers of English words that, after being subjected to a fairly simple phonological conversion process and little or no orthographic adjustment, will do very good service in French.’ They also concluded to a smaller perceived distance for English learners of French, leading to more L1-related creations in French than in German. Much earlier, in his analysis of cognate recognition by English-speaking learners of French, Limper states that it is possible for an English speaker to read French despite very limited instruction, as many words will be familiar to the reader who relies on their mother language (Limper, 1932:37). However, Limper continues, those formal similarities can also have a negative effect on learning, as the English corresponding term is often a very infrequent word, which might not be spontaneously activated in the lexicon of the native speaker of English (1932:41). Interestingly, this latter observation might not apply to French-speaking learners of English, who would actually tend to transfer words of high frequency from their L1 into the L2, without necessarily noticing that those words are highly infrequent in English. In this sense, the problem would not appear to the learners at the receptive nor productive level, but rather in making themselves understood by native speakers of English. Indeed, as Ringbom (2007:7) argues, similarity is not necessarily symmetrical and we could argue that native speakers of language A may find it easier to learn language B than native speakers of language B learning language A.

As far as meaning is concerned, the word-register should also be taken into account when considering the effect of cognates. Regarding the aforementioned categories of French loans that entered the English vocabulary, we could argue that the French-speaking learners feel more comfortable with more formal, official or specific vocabulary in English. And they actually do, as evidenced by Ringbom (2007:73) who observes that ‘French learners thus tend to overuse commence in spoken English, rather than the more frequent and appropriate start or begin’. This effect of register has been
mentioned by Dik et al. (1981:278) for example, who remark that: ‘[t]he preference for Latinate stems and deviations is much more characteristic of specialised scientific and technological dialects than colloquial English’. In the same vein, Limper (1932:38) observed that philosophical and scientific texts generally contain more French-English cognates than other text types. However, Dik et al. (1981:278) continue, other words of Latin and Greek origin have entered the English lexicon at other stylistic levels. Along with the register, the discourse-form also contributes to lexical differences that are relevant in the context of this research. Indeed, Limper (1932:38) argues that French-English cognates are more characteristic for written language, whereas spoken material rather displays an Anglo-Saxon vocabulary.

Unfortunately, much of the evidence I found in the literature of second language learning and cross-linguistic influence concerns French-English cognates, when specific to the languages analysed here. As far as I have read, I did not manage to gather information which is specific to Dutch-English cognates or other similarities. This might be due to the fact that Dutch and English could possibly not be perceived as close enough at the lexical level to present facilitative learning aspects, but regarding Carter’s observation (1998:45) that ‘Anglo-Saxon based words tend to be more core’ and Limper’s statement that Anglo-Saxon equivalents to French-English cognates are more common (1932: 39), we could also reckon with a possible facilitative effect of those words of Germanic origin for Dutch-speaking learners of English, especially in a less formal register.

2.4. Sociolinguistic and attitudinal aspects in context

Beyond the speaker-internal and language specific aspects that affect the second language learning and practice, the learner is also embedded in a specific environment which influences the exposure to and their attitudes towards the second language, as well as the opportunities for learning. Those components will be dealt with in this section.

The work of Gardner & Lambert (1972) has inspired many researchers in the field of second language acquisition who have shown how much motivation, attitudes and language learning are closely linked to each other. Beside language input and cognitive aspects, motivation, i.e. the reason why a learner wants or needs to acquire a specific foreign language (Klein, 1989:20), plays a decisive role in the level of proficiency attained. Motivation also ‘inherently involves language attitudes’ (Dewaele, 2005:122) towards a specific language, the culture it reflects and its speakers. The learner’s attitude can, in turn, be related to what Spolsky (1989, cited in Sjöholm, 1995:30) calls the ‘social context’ of language learning, which influences the learner’s attitude towards the target language and the speakers’ community, as well as the learning process and situation. Spolsky’s (1989:25, cited in Sjöholm, 1995:31) ‘social context’ involves the learners’ exposure to foreign languages, their attitudes towards those languages and their associated cultures. The term also refers to the community’s
openness to other languages and the role those languages play within or outside a specific community. Moreover, Sjöholm (1995:31) argues that the ‘social context’ determines the possibilities of learning the target language, in a formal (i.e. school) or informal context. Considering the importance of the ‘social context’ in the acquisition process of a second language and the learners’ attitudes towards a specific language, I would like to dedicate this section to those individual components in the context of this research, which takes place in 2013 in two language communities in Belgium. In so doing, I will discuss the role and the presence of English in the above mentioned communities and touch on some attitudinal and motivational aspects that can be relevant in the learning process of the informants.

2.4.1. English as a European and global lingua franca

The choice for an analysis dedicated to the acquisition of English is not arbitrary, considering the growing importance of this language. In today’s society, English is used as an international language for ‘wider communication’ (Sjöholm, 1995:95). This section will demonstrate what Gardner and Lambert (Berns, 2007:10) termed the ‘instrumental’ motivation to learn English in Europe. In her article dedicated to the presence of English worldwide and its various dimensions, Berns (2007:1) cites two factors she considers of crucial importance for the current rise of the English language. On the European scale, the growing number of member countries has contributed to “increasing multilingualism and multiculturalism” (Berns, 2007:1). In this context, the use of a common language has become necessary to ensure a good communication between the member countries and their inhabitants across Europe. Considering Kachru’s model of World Englishes, Europe thus belongs to the expanding circle of the English language (Kachru, 1992:356-357), which encompasses the countries in which English is used as the principal medium for international and cross-cultural communication. Consequently, the last decades saw a clear rise in the motivation and opportunities to learn English in Europe (Berns, 2007:1). As Ringbom observes, the ‘choice of the first non-native language learnt at school is determined by pragmatic and political criteria, not linguistic ones’ (2007:39). Accordingly, a 2006 European study has also shown that 56% of European citizens can understand each other in English. Not only do more Europeans know English, they also know it more thoroughly. Indeed, Berns (2007:2) reports that an increasing number of young people across Europe have acquired a high level of proficiency in English, compared to the previous generations. This development might also be the result of the policies developed by the European authorities that encourage inter-cultural contacts (and in so doing, the spread of English) between the member countries of Europe through various programmes specifically aimed at young people. In this way, the growing interest in English corresponds to what Clément et al (cited in Dewaele, 2005:133) call a ‘xenophilic orientation’. As this study will take place in a school context, it is also worth mentioning that the European authorities have devised what is called the “Common European Framework of
Reference for Languages” which is a descriptive (and not prescriptive) frame detailing the learning, teaching and assessment of foreign languages in Europe. This common framework also aims at facilitating communication and encouraging the language learning in Europe as it provides common levels of proficiency.

Beyond the European level, Berns (2007:1) also cites the globalization of the world’s economy as a weighty factor for the spread of English worldwide. Beside the economic component, I would also suggest that world politics and diplomacy as well as various international organizations, such as the UN, NATO, the IMF, the WHO or internationally recognized NGO’s, also play an important role in the use of English as a global language.

Viewing English primarily as a lingua franca used for cross-cultural communication, Berns posits that English has become ‘culturally neutral’ for non-native speakers (2007:5), the language being used as a means of communication, apart from its cultural components. Although I agree with Berns’ statement when we consider English as a world language, I would also suggest that the cultural component conveyed by the English language also plays an important motivational role in the expansion of the language, especially among young learners. As Dewaele (2005:132) notes, the English language goes together with the British and American popular cultures which are transmitted in many countries through television, the radio and the internet. Movies, songs, sitcoms and other series contribute to establishing English as a ‘trendy and hip’ (Dewaele, 2005:132) language which epitomizes the youth culture. The American culture is also very popular among European learners of English as the United States have long been recognized as the most powerful nation worldwide (Dewaele, 2005:132). As a result, the opportunities to be in contact with the English language in an informal way (i.e. outside a school context) are numerous in Europe. Berns (2007:7) reports that these opportunities, and television viewing in particular, would enable learners to considerably improve their knowledge of English. In her article, she quotes for example Meskill, who said that ‘[w]atching television uniquely enhances proficiency in second language skills because of the greater cognitive investment of the second language learner in the act of viewing’ (1998, cited in Berns, 2007:7). Berns also cites D’Ydevalle and Pavakanun, according to whom ‘watching television is a source of comprehensible input’ (1997, cited in Berns, 2007:7).

Now that the ubiquitous presence and the important roles of the English language at global and European levels have been demonstrated, I would like to concentrate on the presence of English in Belgium. I will also focus on the Belgian ‘social context’, as termed by Spolsky (1989:25, cited in Sjöholm, 1995:31), bearing in mind the above-mentioned decisive role of pragmatic and political factors in the choice of a foreign language (Ringbom, 2007:39) and the previously established link between motivation, attitudes and language learning.

2 See : http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf (visited on 01/12/2013)
2.4.2. The English language in Belgium

Belgium is a federal state consisting of three regions – Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels – and three language communities – the Flemish, the French and the German-speaking ones. The country counts three official languages, namely Dutch, French and German. This taken into account, we could argue that the Belgians have a developed linguistic awareness and come regularly in contact with other language groups. I would however suggest that Belgium cannot be considered a multilingual country in this sense that the language communities are established in distinct areas, with the exception of the bilingual region Brussels-Capital in which both French and Dutch are spoken. Actually, Belgium has a long history of community quarrels and dissensions, especially between the French- and Dutch-speaking communities (van der Sijs & Willemyns, 2009: 274-275), originally based on the superiority of the French-speaking bourgeoisie to the detriment of the Dutch-speakers. The frictions between both communities also originate in the economic developments of both parts. Throughout the 19th century and up to the half of the 20th century, Wallonia has known a thriving economy based on mining and the steel industry, while Flanders remained a very poor region. The tide turned in the 1960s when Flanders managed to develop a modern industry, while Wallonia had to cope with outdated infrastructures. Although those historical developments do not directly influence the learning or the spread of English, they have more profound consequences as to the linguistic awareness in both communities. As Musyck (2011:7) puts it, ‘[t]he historical linguistic sovereignty of the French language and the highly-valued French culture have turned the French Community into a monolingual region’. In the Flemish Community, on the contrary, English is said to have acquired an L2-like status, according to Dewaele (2005:133), which I think is somewhat exaggerated too. The English language has also spread considerably in Brussels, as it is the capital city of Europe and home to European and NATO institutions.

Those differences in terms of linguistic openness or contact are also reflected in the media landscape of both communities, and more precisely in television policies. Wynants (2002:13, cited in Musyck, 2011:7) describes the French-speaking media as monolingual, with dubbed films or interviews, as opposed to the multilingual Flemish media, where contents in other languages are consistently subtitled. The multilingualism displayed by the Flemish media would play an important and favorable role in the language acquisition as it makes potential learners used to specific sounds, words and grammatical structures (Musyck, 2011:7). The subtitled tv-programmes would also contribute to enabling many Flemish children to produce and understand a substantial amount of English before they learn it at school (Berns, 2007:8). Other researchers (e.g. Königs, 1999:255, cited in Berns, 2007:8) have also come to the conclusion that an early contact with a foreign language through subtitled media content would make it possible for learners to learn English more rapidly and efficiently than their peers.
2.4.3. Belgian learners and their attitudes towards the English language

As mentioned above, the social context is also characterized by the attitudes of learners towards a specific foreign language and the culture associated with it. MacIntyre and Gardner’s work (1994, cited in Dewaele, 2005:118) on learner’s attitudes has unveiled the crucial role they play beside personality and motivation in the second language learning process. Moreover, Dewaele (2005:120) argues that attitudes strongly depend on the socio-cultural and political environment of the learners, and therefore ‘vary from language to language, from region to region and from period to period’ (Dewaele, 2005:119).

In the previous sections I have briefly alluded to socio-cultural, political and economic developments in Belgium. While learning French or Dutch can still be affected by those developments in both communities, there is no such effect as to the learning of English (Dewaele, 2005:119). In his study, Dewaele (2005) analysed the attitudes of Flemish high-school students towards French and English. He concluded that the attitudes towards English are much more positive than towards French. Moreover, a good proficiency in English is considered a crucial factor to get a good job by the learners. English is also more popular than French because it is associated with the above-mentioned youth culture spread by the media and the American political dominance and popular culture. The Flemish pupils of the study also generally had a good self-perceived competence in English and were generally not afraid to talk in English, regarding this foreign language as less difficult than French. This boosted their attitudes towards the English language. Although I couldn’t find any replicate research focusing on the French-speaking community, I would suggest that a great deal of Dewaele’s findings could be extended to both communities, considering the role of English internationally and the sociolinguistic situation in Belgium. Dewaele’s findings are also tendencies I witnessed, although not at all scientifically, as a teenager and learner of English in Wallonia.

So far, I have mainly focused on the informal learning opportunities of English at a global, European and national scale. As far as Belgium is concerned, various researches lead me to the conclusion that Flemish learners have more regular contacts with the English language in an informal way than the French speakers of Belgium as a result of the multilingual media policies in the Flemish Community. Now, I would like to turn to the analysis of the formal learning of English in French- and Dutch-speaking Belgium and the regulations, programmes and policies associated to it. The result of this review might partly serve as an explanation for potential findings of my research. But before focusing on the case of Belgium, I would like to address in the next section several findings and comments by researchers in the field of foreign language teaching that are worth mentioning in this study.
Despite the presence of English in the informants’ everyday environment, language teaching is an important component of this study, which centers on what Krashen (1985:1, cited in Sjöholm, 1995:23) termed ‘second language learning’ and deals with the conscious process of foreign language learning, as opposed to ‘second language acquisition’, being subconscious and rather comparable with the first language acquisition process. Although theoretical aspects have already been dealt with in section 2.1., I would like to dedicate this very section to language learning more specifically and review several recommendations made by investigators in this field, especially dealing with vocabulary learning and registers as they are the core issues of the analysis.

In section 2.1., I commented on the excessive interest in grammar-oriented research as compared to vocabulary-focused investigations. In the same vein, when considering the general contents of language classes, the over-emphasis on grammar in a classroom context at the expense of vocabulary has been much criticized. Contrary to those practices, researchers insist on the important role of vocabulary learning in the actual use of a foreign language (e.g. Zimmerman, 1997:17). Sjöholm (1995:89) also claims that an in-depth mastery of vocabulary enables the language learner to enter the socio-cultural reality that goes together with a specific language and makes it possible for a non-native speaker to sound ‘native-like’ thanks to an ‘idiomatic’ use of the language. And Sjöholm (1995:40) further identifies deficient vocabulary as the main problem for advanced L2 learners. Other objections have been addressed to the disproportionate amount of written material, such as ‘textbooks, exercise-books, readers, school grammars’ (Sjöholm, 1995:90), requiring skills that go beyond mere interpersonal communication (Sjöholm, 1995:91). Regarding the fact that writing is rather formal whereas spoken language is rather informal (Swan, 2009:293), we could argue that pupils are thus encouraged to use and master the formal register in a classroom setting. More than that, some specialists argue that informal situations generate less rigidity as to language mistakes and would allow, we could conclude, a rather sloppy language use. Other instructors, however, advocate for more attention to the informal register as it goes together with more authenticity and might be the register pupils need to a greater extent (Musyck, 2011:70).

Not only does Sjöholm (1995:91) describe the input offered in a classroom context as ‘bookish’, he also considers it ‘distorted’ (1995:89) because it often serves to epitomize specific theoretical aspects and typically displays ‘simplified, basic, high-utility and high-frequency words’ (Sjöholm, 1995:89). As far as the vocabulary size is concerned, Nation and Newton (1997:239; Arnaud & Savignon, 1997:201) advocate that the first 2000 high-frequency words should be taught at the beginning of the instruction as they are necessary for basic communication. They argue that the next word categories to be learnt depend on the learner’s uses and aims, and therefore distinguish ‘academic vocabulary’ from the more field-specific ‘low-frequency vocabulary’ (Nation & Newton, 1997:239). Relying on similar
characteristics, Arnaud & Savignon (1997:167) argue that ‘the acquisition of words beyond the first 2000’ actually starts at the university level. They also support direct teaching of high-frequency words –i.e. through vocabulary activities (Nation & Newton, 1997:240) – and indirect approach of the low-frequency vocabulary, through other kinds of activities (Nation & Newton, 1997:241).

In the next section, we will see whether those prescriptions are taken into account in the Belgian teaching system. Pertaining to the chronological arrangement of instruction, Manczak-Wholfield likewise maintain that ‘easier matters [should be introduced] before more complicated ones’ (2006:50). In that, they include loanwords that also exist in the mother language, owing to their facilitative effects on learners (2006:51). So, as it has already been discussed in earlier sections, depending on the mother language of the learner, it is possible to easily go beyond the 2000 high-frequency words, to a certain extent, thanks to cross-linguistic awareness and loanwords. There also remains the question whether official educational curricula encourage language teachers to make their pupils aware of those cross-linguistic similarities.

2.4.5. Teaching English in Belgium

In his article, Dewaele (2005:120) argues that attitudes and motivation in the learning process can be linked to educational factors such as the ‘teacher’s personality, ideology and pedagogical approach’. He also alludes to previous studies, which support that the knowledge of other languages plays a role in the learning process of a foreign language. As this research takes place primarily in a school context, I would like to take some of those variables into account and introduce briefly the particularities of the Belgian education system. After a brief introduction of the general structure of education in Belgium, I will focus in more details on the teaching of English and the place dedicated to vocabulary and register, as those are the central topics of this dissertation and are of possible relevance in the results of my analysis. As the reader will see, discussing the position of English as a foreign language in the educational system of Belgium implies a comparison between the communities of Belgium. Therefore I would like to insist on the fact that my point here is far from comparing and determining a good and a bad system. I will rather try to shed light on factors that could possibly play a role in the findings of my analysis on the use of vocabulary and register by learners of English in both communities.

As mentioned earlier, Belgium is a federal state consisting of three regions and three communities. Whereas the regions are bound to territory issues, the communities are language-based and in charge of issues relating to the people. With the exception of several (federal) prerogatives that are anchored in the Belgian Constitution, such as the age limits of compulsory education among other things (Musyck, 2011:9), decision-making about educational issues belongs thus to the French, Flemish and German Communities respectively. Geyer (2009:11, cited in Musyck, 2011:7) sums the situation up as
follows: “there exists not one Belgian educational system but in fact three separate systems with distinct characteristics”. In what follows, I will concentrate on the school systems of the Flemish and French Communities, as my research focuses on Dutch- and French-speaking learners of English. In so doing, I will mainly rely on Musyck’s master’s thesis (2011), which provides a comparison between the Programme de langues modernes langues I, II et III -2e et 3e degrés de transition enacted by the Francophone Fédération de l’Enseignement Secondaire Catholique, and the Flemish Leerplan Engels derde graad ASO studierichtingen met component moderne talen established by Vlaams Verbond van het Katholiek Secundair Onderwijs. The curriculum of the French Community is wider in range than the Flemish Community’s one. Indeed, the former is applicable to three modern languages taught from the third grade, whereas the latter is specific to the teaching of English in distinct orientations of the fifth and sixth grades. But both curricula reflect the parallel educational structure between the Flemish and French communities and allow the comparison between English learners from the same grade and form of education. Despite its limitations in the practical part, Musyck’s (2011) theoretical comparison of curricula specifying ‘concrete educational practices’ (Musyck, 2011:22) designed for Francophone and Flemish language teachers is worth mentioning in this research paper as both her analysis and mine concentrate on French- and Dutch-speaking learners of English in the sixth grade of general secondary Catholic education in Belgium. It should also be taken into account that curricula are only prescriptive documents that may not be strictly followed by teachers in practice. The informants of this research might therefore not have been taught English the same way as prescribed in what follows.

First of all, both education systems differ in the place and number of teaching hours they allow to English as a foreign language. In the French-speaking community, English can be taught as first, second or third foreign language (Musyck, 2011:19). Education regulations of that community also impose the organization of modern language courses from the 5th grade of the elementary level onwards, leaving the choice between English, Dutch and German to the school boards (Musyck, 2011:19). This means that some pupils in the French-speaking community start learning English at about the age of eleven, depending on their (or their school’s) linguistic choice. The pupils who learn English as a second foreign language usually start doing so in the third or fourth year of the secondary level. They might however opt for another language instead, as English is not compulsory. They can also learn English as a third foreign language. In the Flemish Community on the other hand, English necessarily comes as a second foreign because French is the compulsory first modern language to be taught both at the elementary level and in secondary education (Musyck, 2011:19). This means that pupils in the Flemish Community start learning English at the secondary school, from about the second grade. The compulsory status of French as a first foreign language in the Flemish Community has however become a growing issue. Moreover, both educational systems differ in the number of teaching hours allocated to English every week. The French Community system imposes at least four
teaching periods allotted to the first foreign language, to which four teaching hours are generally added for the second foreign language from the third year onwards (Musyck, 2011:19). In the Flemish Community, the first foreign language –French– is taught at a rate of three to four teaching hours per week\(^3\). English is generally proposed from about the second year at a rate of two teaching hours per week, although there is no regulation about the number of teaching hours in the Flemish Community. From the third year onwards, schools generally offer two to three teaching hours of English per week (Musyck, 2011:19).

The analysis of the contents reveals that both educational programmes share a common objective, i.e. ‘the development of the communicative language competence in the four basic skills’ (Musyck, 2011:24). Both programmes also aim at offering as much authentic material as possible. As far as the teaching method is concerned, the French Community decreed the ‘Competency Based Approach’, while the language teachers in the Flemish Community are free to adopt their own method. However, Musyck (2011:26) argues that many of them also opt for such a communicative approach. This means that the teachers from both communities insist rather on the ‘successful communication of the intended message’ (Musyck, 2011:25) than on its phrasing.

Despite those similarities, both programmes display meaningful differences in the training and assessment of the four skills. As a first example, the contrasting stance on the ‘Competency Based Approach’ in both communities is eloquent in the assessment of vocabulary, binding the teachers from the French Community to assess the lexical competence within a communicative activity only, whereas the Flemish teachers are free to choose their assessing method (Musyck, 2011: 52). With regard to the level of formality, both curricula aim at encouraging the learners to recognize and use various registers, although the French curriculum simultaneously recommends the use of standard non-specialized language in the training of the four skills (Musyck, 2011: 31, 33,35). The Flemish curriculum, on the other hand, widens the range of language varieties encountered by learners, promoting literary texts as reading material (Musyck, 2011:28) or else listening material that may deviate from Standard English (Musyck, 2011:33). As this paper is primarily concerned with the lexical competence of learners, it is moreover interesting to point out that, unlike the French Community, the Flemish curriculum encourages learners to develop a method to guess the meaning of words and attempts to make them aware of word-formation rules (Musyck, 2011: 44). The Flemish learners of English must also know the most frequent 3000 words (Musyck, 2011:44). In the French Community, the lexical competence must be tightly linked to a thematic list of topics (Musyck, 2011:44).

Considering the material gathered for my research, it is also important to mention here the particularities of writing tasks in both communities (see Musyck, 2011: 27-31). Both curricula

\(^3\) See : [http://www.onderwijskiezer.be](http://www.onderwijskiezer.be) (visited on 01/12/2013)
underline the authentic character of writing tasks and insist on the coherence and comprehensiveness of the learner’s message. The learner should also be able to produce formal as well as informal texts in both communities, but according to Musyck’s finding, Flemish learners are generally not required to write the same kind of texts as French-speaking learners. While the former are more often confronted with informative, narrative, polemical texts or reports, the latter are rather asked to write letters or e-mails to acquaintances (Musyck, 2011:35). As opposed to previous conclusions in terms of cognate vocabulary, we could thus argue that Flemish learners could feel more at ease with formal writing, whereas French-speaking learners are more accustomed to rather informal writing.

In a last comment about educational issues, I would like to relate the prescriptions detailed in section 2.4.4. to the Belgian regulations mentioned in this part. As we have seen, both educational programmes insist on authentic material. This wipes out Sjöholm’s criticism about ‘distorted vocabulary’ mentioned under 2.4.4., provided that authentic material forms a sufficient proportion of the total teaching material used. However, as far as the French-speaking learners are concerned, we could wonder whether the standard non-specialised vocabulary mentioned here above would not contribute to create a distorted perception of the English vocabulary distribution, as condemned by Sjöholm. Scholars’ denunciation of disproportionate written material in the teaching method seems to have been overlooked in the Belgian programmes as they do not further specify the proportions expected. This, we could argue, can also result in distorted input, especially if we take for granted that written material generally displays rather formal language, whereas spoken English generally demonstrates a lower level of formality (Swan, 2009:293). And, turning to formality, the programmes discussed encourage the learners’ familiarity with various registers although it seems that the Flemish pupils are more confronted to rather formal production tasks, quite unlike their French-speaking peers. Pertaining to the vocabulary size, the Flemish programmes prescribe the mastery of the most frequent 3000 words, whereas the programme from the French community doesn’t allude to a specific quantity. Neither programme touches on a learning approach that would be specific to high- and low-frequency words respectively, contrary to the scholars’ advice mentioned earlier. There is also no reference to awareness-raising approach of cross-linguistic influences in the prescribed teaching method of both communities.

3. Research questions and hypotheses

Together with the observations made in the previous chapters as to the lexical organisation in a multilingual brain, the factors and actualizations of cross-linguistic influences, the languages involved in this research paper and the specific context and environment in which they will be analysed, the comments on educational issues mentioned here above allow us to sketch the main hypotheses and research questions of this study.
Is there a significant L1 effect in the English language practice of the informants, leading to lexical variations between both groups?

As a first question, we could wonder whether L1 influences will be observable in the English practice of the learners in both groups. On the one hand, the connections between the lexicons in a multilingual brain have been demonstrated in previous chapters. On the other hand, the informants do present some of the aforementioned characteristics that would reinforce cross-linguistic similarities: they have, among other things, a mature command of their mother languages, which are both—to a certain extent—related to English. As intermediate learners of English, they could also have to face L2 deficits and therefore consciously rely on their mother language to cope with them.

The realization of the cross-linguistic influences could lead to a significant contrast in the English use of both groups of learners at the lexical level. Indeed, provided that learners from both groups rely on linguistic resources from their mother language, we could expect to observe more Germanic-based words in the English use of Dutch speakers and a rather romance or Latinate lexical influence in the production of French speakers. However, we cannot exclude the possibility of non-native language influence. In that we should also envisage the possibility of a Latinate lexical influence in the production of Dutch speakers, or a Germanic influence in the L2 use of the French-speaking group, as both groups have also learnt French and Dutch respectively as a second language at school.

Does the L1 influence lexically affect the English language practice of the learner at the level of register?

Under 2.2., it has been demonstrated that the romance borrowings in English are rather to be found in formal, official or specialised domains, whereas the Germanic terms belong to the less formal core vocabulary of the English language. Moreover, it has been argued earlier on that French-English cognates are more typical of written language, whereas spoken English would contain more Anglo-Saxon words, with a Germanic origin. Therefore, we could predict an effect of register on both groups and wonder whether the informants will be able to use the facilitative aspects of cross-linguistic similarities to produce register-specific variations. Again, we could also reckon on non-native language influence.

Sociolinguistic components also need to be considered in the case of a potential effect on register. We have seen that the Flemish linguistic landscape is more diverse and that Flemish people generally have more contact with—spoken and, arguably, less formal—English thanks to the media policies in that part of Belgium. As far as teaching is concerned, regulations seem to be designed to make learners aware of register variations among other things in both groups. However, as Musyck (2011) concluded, it seems that Dutch-speaking learners are more often asked to write rather formal texts. This could actually modify the result expected on grounds of cross-linguistic similarities and sociolinguistic context.
To what extent do the results of the analysis support the choices made in the establishment of teaching methods and prescriptions in Belgium?

The validation of the two hypotheses mentioned here above could lead to an interesting discussion on the second-language teaching methods established in the education programmes of both language groups. Indeed, as already remarked by scholars, taking the facilitative aspects of cross-linguistic similarities into account would allow a significant and rapid progress in the lexical domains and items concerned. Saving time on the facilitative aspects, the learners—and, inevitably, the teachers—could rather concentrate on those lexical areas that are more difficult to acquire depending on the language influences observed. On the other hand, an awareness-raising approach to deceptive cognates would enable the learner to quickly reach a more advanced level.

4. Method

Now that the main research questions have been outlined on the basis of the academic background described in chapter two, I would like to dedicate this part of the dissertation to the method that has been established for this study. I will first discuss the sample in more details and specify some essential language, educational, geographical or gender characteristics of the informants. I will further explain the administration procedure of the assignments and describe the tasks that were submitted to the informants. In so doing, I will also justify the choices I have made. A last section will be devoted to how the data were processed and analysed before turning to the results and main findings of the analysis in the next chapter.

4.1. Participants

4.1.1. Sample description

In his book, Ringbom points to a very useful approach to the study of cross-linguistic similarities as he suggests to ‘compare groups of learners of similar cultural and educational background but with different L1s, learning the same foreign language.’ (2007:33). His advice inspired me in the selection of my sample. The informants of this study are sixth-grade students from two secondary schools from the Catholic network in the Flemish and French-speaking parts of Belgium respectively. According to Ringbom’s suggestion, Belgium forms an ideal setting to carry out such an investigation as both groups of informants do not only share a western cultural background, they also have a national frame in common (see 2.4.2.). In terms of geographical position, I opted for two towns (Tournai and Waregem) that are situated at a comparable distance (about 20 km) from the ‘border’ between the Flemish and the French-speaking parts of the country. Because Tournai is bigger than Waregem in terms of inhabitants, the study in the French-speaking part was actually carried out in Kain, a village
bordering Tournai that attracts many students from other adjacent villages where there is no secondary school.

The choice of two secondary schools from the same educational network is not innocent either. Despite the differences in the education programmes of both communities (cf. 2.4.5.), I aimed at selecting samples that would be as comparable as possible apart from the language factor. Both groups of students are thus registered in language-oriented options of the general education and learn English as a second foreign language beside French and Dutch respectively. In this way they can be assumed to have a similar (foreign) linguistic background as far as explicit teaching is concerned although, as we have seen, the number of teaching hours attributed per week differs. In this study the informants of the Dutch-speaking group reported to have 4 teaching hours of French and 3 teaching hours of English per week in their sixth school year, while the French-speaking informants have 4 teaching hours of Dutch and English per week respectively. There are also differences within and between both groups as to the number of years the informants have been in contact with their second and third languages. Generally speaking, most informants reported to have had English classes for 4 to 5 years and about 8 years French or Dutch respectively. As proficiency does not necessarily coincide with the amount of time devoted to learning, those elements will not further be taken into account in the analysis of their English practice.

Furthermore, the informants of this study were not selected by virtue of their age, but according to their level of education. All of them are sixth-grade students. This is an intentional selection as it is the last grade of compulsory education in Belgium and forms therefore a threshold in the educational developments of the students. Because the informants have not yet opted for a professional career or specialization at this stage, we can also take for granted that the sample selected is representative for a rather extended population. This would not have been the case with admittedly more advanced—university students who take English courses that are more specific to their studies. In sum, the sixth grade forms the stage of learning where we can expect to find the highest possible (non-specialized) level of explicitly instructed English in compulsory education. This is an important factor if we consider Kellerman’s (1987:101) and Ringbom’s (2007:6) claims that an advanced level is necessary to investigate cross-linguistic influences (see 2.1.3.). Another reason for this choice has to do with the abovementioned observation that the maturity level of the mother language and the skills associated to it also play a role in the cross-linguistic influences. Indeed, in the course of their educational progression, the students have been trained on various skills to develop their mother language proficiency. The same holds for the foreign languages taught at school, though to a lesser extent.

Quantitatively speaking, the sample consists of 72 students of whom 41 (i.e. 57%) in the Dutch-speaking group and 31 (i.e. 43%) in the French-speaking group. This uneven distribution in the language groups has to do with the number of students per class in each school as two classes were
evaluated in each educational institution. However, each language group counts a number of informants that is sufficient to expect telling results in the analysis. As far as the gender distribution is concerned, the sample is very asymmetrical, with a male majority in the Dutch-speaking group –i.e. 68% of the Dutch-speaking students– and a female majority among the French speakers –i.e. 81% of them– against only 6 male students. For this reason, comparing both samples from a gender perspective will not allow to draw any significant conclusions. With regard to nationality, 70 of the 72 informants are Belgian; the two non-Belgian students are equally distributed in both groups. Concerning the factor ‘language spoken at home’, 69 of the 72 students tested speak the language of their community with their family, among whom all the informants of the French-speaking group. The three other informants speak both French and Dutch at home.

4.1.2. The informants’ self-perceived foreign language proficiency

In addition to the tasks that will be discussed in the next sections, a questionnaire (cf. appendices 4 and 5) was handed out to the informants about their knowledge of foreign languages, including English and the language of the other community –i.e. French or Dutch. They were asked about the languages they learn (at school or elsewhere), for how long they have been learning them and what is their self-perceived level of proficiency. Additionally, I asked them to explain briefly whether and in what ways they had contacts with foreign languages outside the school context. The main results of this questionnaire are illustrated in graphs 1 and 2 here below and will be detailed in the next paragraphs of this section as we have seen that non-native language influence can also play a role in the language practice of learners. Because both language groups are quite unbalanced, some of the results will also be expressed in in-group percentages in the text, in order to draw a comparable picture of them.
The first series of bars on both graphs illustrate the informants’ self-perceived level of proficiency in English. Among the students who indicated it in both groups (70 of the 72), only 3 consider they have a beginner level. The majority of the informants (67% of the total number) pointed to an intermediate
level, especially in the French-speaking group, with 87% of the learners of this language group against 53% of the Dutch-speaking learners. Interestingly, 7% of the informants spontaneously added a category between the intermediate and the advanced levels. This new category is not represented as such on the graph, but is included in the advanced level. Those informants, who selected the upper-intermediate category as I would call it, are rather symmetrically distributed in both language groups. As far as the results of the advanced category are concerned, it is striking to see that no French speaker selected that level of proficiency whereas 15 Dutch speakers (12 boys and 3 girls) did so. The latter represent 38% of their group and 21% of the total number of informants. Let us not forget that I am discussing the results of the informants’ self-perceived proficiency here. This means that the results in the advanced group, just as in the other ones, could reflect a real discrepancy as to the learners’ proficiency in both groups, but could also illustrate a ‘cultural’ difference in terms of self-assessment.

Apart from English, all the informants of this study also learn the language of the other community: all the French speakers learn Dutch and all the Dutch speakers learn French. Here again, but to a lesser extent, more Dutch speakers (10%) reported to have reached an advanced level than their French-speaking peers (4%) if we consider the total number of informants. However, the in-group percentages can be paralleled if we consider as a modest indication of an advanced level the two French-speaking students who rated themselves ‘upper intermediate’. This taken into account, the advanced category would concern 18% of the Dutch speakers and 17% of the French speakers. Anyway, as a first conclusion we can say that more French-speakers feel more at ease in Dutch than in English. This is also illustrated by the beginner category which is inferior to its Dutch-speaking equivalent for French and also to the French speakers’ counterpart for English. Just as for the assessment of their proficiency in English, the majority of learners in both groups pointed to an intermediate level (78% of the Dutch speakers and 80% of the French speakers).

Moreover, the students were asked whether and how fluently they could speak other Romance or Germanic languages. Interestingly, half the sample, including all the informants of the French-speaking group does not learn any other Germanic language. Among the Dutch speakers, most students who do learn another Germanic language (i.e. German) consider they have a beginner (37%) or intermediate (46%) level. As we can see on graph 2, only two students rated themselves ‘advanced’ in this group. As regards the Romance languages, 53% of the total number of informants learns another Romance language; all of them report a beginner level. Of course, some informants learn both an extra Germanic and an extra Romance language. Therefore, the distribution of the extra-languages learnt within and between both groups reveals interesting results. As illustrated on the pie chart here below, 29% of the total number of informants does not learn any extra-language beside English and Dutch or French. This applies to 12% of the Flemish learners and 53% of the French speakers. Seventeen per cent of the total number of informants learns a Germanic language (i.e. German) but no
extra-Romance language. They represent 29% of the Dutch speakers. The remaining informants of this group (59%) thus learn both a Romance and a Germanic language beside English and French. They represent 34% of the total number of learners. The last category pertains to informants who learn extra-Romance languages but no Germanic language. This concerns 47% of the French speakers, who represent 20% of the total number of learners.

Next to a self-assessment of the languages they learn, the students were also asked to indicate whether they have regular contacts with foreign languages outside the school environment. Eighty-six per cent of the informants answered affirmatively, of whom 83% of the Dutch speakers and 90% of the French speakers. Again, it is important to distinguish the self-perceived contact with other language from the real situation, which was not measured here. Indeed we might suppose that the Dutch learners underestimated their extra-curricular contacts with foreign languages considering the multilingual media landscape in Flanders mentioned in 2.4.2. All in all, there was no discernible effect of self-perceived extra-curricular contacts with foreign languages on the results of the informants’ self-assessed proficiency in English.

4.2. Administration procedure of the tasks

The data gathering took place in March 2013, just before the Easter break in both groups. They are thus quite representative of the level of the informants at the end of their secondary education. In the French-speaking group, the data gathering took place during the regular English classes in the presence of the English teacher, whereas the Dutch students completed the task during a class-free hour. Their English teacher did not attend the session. The documents consisted of two productive tasks, which will be discussed in more details in the next section, and the aforementioned questionnaire about the informants’ perceived proficiency and contacts with foreign languages. The documents were administered in class groups, by hand and face down. I handed out, conducted and gathered the surveys in the four classes visited. In the end, the informants were thanked for their cooperation with an Easter egg.

All the instructions were given in English in both language groups. I also made sure I told the four classes exactly the same. Before starting, I briefly introduced the context of the study and tried to enhance the informants’ participation. I told them that I needed their cooperation for my master’s thesis in the field of English linguistics, but the ultimate purpose and criteria of my analysis were not further detailed in order to ensure a spontaneous language practice. To avoid any stress factor, I also insisted on the fact that this exercise was not a test and would remain anonymous. Because the informants were considered to be unaccustomed to word-association tasks, this first exercise was explained to them in much detail, as will be discussed in the next section. After this brief introduction, the informants were allowed to turn their sheets of paper and start working.
4.3. Description of the tasks administered to the informants

The assignment handed out to the informants can be found in the appendices (1 to 5) of this paper, together with the aforementioned survey that accompanied them. The document consisted of two tasks: a word-association task and a letter writing exercise. Both focused on the productive proficiency of the informants. This is not an arbitrary choice. Indeed, as Juffs suggests (1996:179): ‘Spontaneous production can be assumed to be a reflection of unconscious knowledge of language, that is, it is one potential window through which one may indirectly observe competence.’ Moreover, real-life communication situations require a well-developed productive lexical knowledge (Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen, 2008: 24). Unlike comprehension activities, production is also considered to be a more active and more difficult process (Carter, 1998:191; Ringbom, 2007:24), and the learner’s productive vocabulary is known to be less extended (Carter, 1998:213). Writing competence is also assumed to be the last of the four language skills acquired (Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen, 2008:6). Moreover, Ringbom (2007:24) argues that the use of formal cross-linguistic similarities in production would rather result from explicit teaching whereas those similarities at the comprehension level would serve the learner even before formal instruction has started. In this way, we could expect the possible cross-linguistic influences to be a conscious choice of the student in such a task, and not merely guesswork as it could have happened in a comprehension task. However, the cross-linguistic similarities in those productive tasks could also be the result of assumed similarity on the part of the learner (Ringbom, 2006:40). But, as previously mentioned, the focus of this study is not on the definite factors that lie behind cross-linguistic similarities; the question is rather whether traces of the L1 can be detected in the second language practice.

In addition to the language form, both tasks are centered on the same topic so that the language practice can be compared in both exercises. This topic was not selected at random as I wanted to make sure that the respondents of both groups would be able to access it and react on it whatever their level of proficiency. I also opted for a theme that would possibly involve the learners’ personal experience as it has been demonstrated that it enhances the informants’ engagement in the task (Musyck, 2011:76). Those are the reasons why I selected holidays as a frame and source of inspiration in both tasks. Moreover, this very broad lexical field makes it possible for the informant to focus on particular aspects of it, depending on what they prefer of find less difficult to say, and thus avoiding any writer’s block, considering that the students were not prepared to the assignments as they would have been in the case of an examination for example. Another advantage of holidays as a frame topic is that it allowed me to vary on it at the level of formality in the letter writing exercise, while still involved in the same lexical field. This also makes the results of the tasks and their variants worthy of comparison. Each task was designed to test a different level of formality in the lexical practice of the informants, but it is essential to make clear that this specific level of formality was not explicitly mentioned in the
instructions of each task. Rather, the decision as to the degree of formality was left to the informants and their general knowledge of conventions.

4.3.1. Word-association task

Word-association tasks have been widely used by scholars in earlier studies to investigate the organization of the mental lexicon and provide qualitative and quantitative information about it (Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen, 2008:32; Ringbom, 2008:20). This is especially interesting in the case of foreign language learners. In productive word-association tasks, the informant is supposed to ‘provide the first word that springs to mind in response to a stimulus word’ (Albrechtsen, Haastrup & Henriksen, 2008:32). This has to happen as quickly as possible in order to reveal the spontaneous access of the person to their mental lexicon. I chose holidays as stimulus word for this task because it is linked to the overall topic of the survey and it is supposed to be known to the informants of both groups, however Germanic in essence (as opposed to its American counterpart vacation, for instance).

This task was designed to prepare the informants for the following writing exercise and to help them activate the necessary nodes in their mental lexicon. Accordingly, it was presented as a kind of lexical warm-up to the informants. They were told that they would find a word in the center of the page and asked to link as many words as they could to that specific term. I also emphasized on the spontaneous aspect of the exercise and invited them to write down any word that would spring to their mind. Besides, I gave them an oral example with the word kitchen which made me think of knife, plate, spaghetti, mother and also bathroom, living room and so on. The time limit of the exercise was set to 3 minutes.

4.3.2. Letter writing task

The productive word-association task was followed by a letter writing exercise centered on the same frame topic, i.e. holidays. This task echoes the concept of communicative competence, of which the development is essential in the process of language learning and language acquisition. Berns (2007:9) defines the term as ‘a person’s ability to communicate appropriately and successfully with respect to whom they are interacting, the purpose of interaction, and the topic of the interaction.’ Communicative competence thus also involves a good command of the various degrees of formality, which are the central focus of the second task submitted to the informants. The reasoning for this second task was also based on Carter’s claim (1998:107) that ‘lexical choices can vary relative to text-types or genre of writing’. Within the overall holidays frame, two letter writing tasks were designed and adapted in such a way as to encourage the learner to adopt a rather formal or informal language style. On the one hand, part of the informants was asked to write a postcard to a friend. The others were invited to write a
letter of complaint to a tour operator after a bad holiday. Both versions of the exercise can be found in appendices 2 and 3 in the end of this paper.

The students were not informed about the two versions of this second task as it would have given them a hint as to the ultimate purpose of the analysis. But in the handing out of the documents I made sure that both versions were equally distributed among the informants of both language groups. Accordingly, 21 Dutch speakers and 15 French speakers produced the informal version of the task, whereas 20 Dutch speakers and 16 French speakers wrote a letter of complaint. The informants were not allowed to use any external resources such as dictionaries. They were also given some indication about the expected length of their text (between 5 and 10 lines), which was not aimed at restraining the more creative minds, but rather intended to encourage the other ones so that I could compare material of similar length. The students were not given any time limit for this task, but most of them completed the exercise within about 25 minutes.

4.4. Data analysis

The language practice of the informants was coded according to the language root –i.e. the origin of the word– and the level of formality. The language root of the words used was determined on the basis of the free online version of the Oxford Dictionaries, which is to be found on the following website: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com. This dictionary was selected because the origin of the words is detailed in each entry beside the usual description of the pronunciation, part(s) of speech, derivations and modern meanings and uses of the words. Once the origin of the words detailed in the dictionary had been set, I established three root categories: Romance, Germanic or other origin. The Romance category consists of words with a French or Latin root, for example. Words deriving from Old English or a West Germanic language were coded under the category Germanic root. There were also entries in which the word was of unknown, undetermined or mixed origin. Those were coded ‘other’. Let me insist on the fact that we are here talking about the historically determined origin of the English words and not about cognate relation. But in numbers of words that were analysed, the genetic links are still inferable on the basis of the word form, to a certain extent.

In addition to the language root, the level of formality has been determined for each word analysed. For that purpose I relied on the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary which mentions the level of formality whenever it goes beyond the neutral or unmarked language use. On this basis, the words were coded as neutral –i.e. in the case there was no specific mention of another level of formality in the dictionary–, formal or informal. The items that were identified as ‘rather formal’ or ‘rather informal’ in the dictionary were classified as formal or informal respectively.
For each informant, the words used in the word-association task and the letter writing task were quantified and coded separately. As already mentioned before, the English grammatical words have essentially Germanic characteristics. They form a finite word class including pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions and conjunctions (Carter, 1998:8), and principally structure the other elements of a sentence that carry the information. In this sense, they are also called empty words. This is the reason why I decided to disregard this word-class, in order to prevent any (Germanic-oriented) bias in the results. I also decided to ignore the proper names as they are fixed and do not illustrate the spontaneous lexical use –or choice– of the informants. So this analysis concentrates on lexical words, or full words, which are an open class including nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs (Carter, 1998:8), and carry the information of the message. As this word class is not limited in number and changes across the time, it is worth analysing in a lexically-oriented study. Moreover, we have seen that many lexical words from other languages have entered the English language over time. It is also important to note here that the compound words were systematically coded as separate words. For instance, the word sunglasses was coded follows:

\[
\text{SUN: Germanic root} \quad + \quad \text{GLASSES: Germanic root}
\]

neutral level of formality \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \ quatre
5.1. Word-association task

5.1.1. General observations

A total number of 1262 words were coded in terms of word origin and level of formality in the word-association task. Sixty per cent of them were produced by the Dutch-speaking informants and 40% by the French speakers. This is not surprising considering the unbalanced distribution of informants in each language group. Because the language variable is central to this analysis, the following results will be discussed in terms of percentages per language group, representing the total number of speakers in each group, or the sum of items produced by them respectively, in order to enable comparison.

This strategy is illustrated in graph 3 which represents the distribution expressed in percentages of the word categories that were observed in the lexical choices of the French- and Dutch-speaking informants respectively. At first glance, the lexical use seems to be quite similar in both language groups as the bars are of comparable length in almost every word category, except the last one on the abscissa. As far as the level of formality is concerned, we see that the neutral level is much more represented than the other ones, especially in the Romance and Germanic categories. If we sum the various word origins together in order to extract the distribution of formality in both groups, we can conclude to an overwhelming 97% of neutral words, against 3% of informal and about 0.2% of formal terms. Apart from the latter category which only appears in the lexical choices of the Dutch-speaking group, the level of formality is equally distributed in both language groups. The vast majority of neutral terms observed here is not surprising as the word-association task did not hint at the expected level of formality in the instruction.

If we consider the total distribution in terms of word origin in both groups, we can see that about 58% of the terms used by the informants have a Germanic root, whereas 32% are Romance-based terms and about 10% have another origin. A similar distribution shows through the in-group percentages although a slightly greater difference is to be found between the groups’ lexical practices in the category ‘other’. Strikingly, both groups display a great majority of Germanic-based terms, i.e. more than the half of the total number of items analysed in each group. This observation could be attributed to the fact that English is essentially a Germanic language, with the Romance vocabulary only as part of a long history of borrowings as alluded to in section 2.2.2. In this sense, the informants would have used more Germanic words because the English language counts proportionally more Germanic-based terms. A second factor could be the topic that was chosen for the task. We could argue that holidays spontaneously activated a rather core vocabulary in the minds of the informants, which is essentially Germanic as we have seen. In spite of this Germanic preponderance, words of Romance origin are well-represented and also deserve a more extensive analysis.
It is also interesting to note in these first observations that the category Germanic-formal is not represented in the word-association task. Therefore, this category will not be mentioned any further in this section. Its Romance counterpart is also underrepresented and only to be found in the Dutch-speaking group.

This one-dimensional distribution of the word categories analysed according to the language group does not hint at any form of influence on the lexical practice of second language learners of English. Indeed, graph 3 depicts a rather well-balanced distribution of the various categories across both language groups. In the next sections, other variables will be introduced, which could have played a part in the informants’ lexical choice as they completed this first task.

5.1.2. Lexical practice and perceived proficiency in English

In this section, I am going to analyse the impact of the variable ‘perceived proficiency in English’ on the distribution of the word categories in both language groups. In a first phase, I am focussing on the number of items used by the learners in each proficiency category in order to determine whether this factor can be said to influence the informants’ lexical practice. When we work out the average number of items produced by the learners of each language at each proficiency level, we see that this average number grows parallel with the proficiency level. This is illustrated in table 1 here below.
The results found in table 1 suggest that the self-perception of proficiency corresponds with a real proficiency level if we take for granted that a learner is able to produce more words in a foreign language as their language knowledge increases. From table 1, we can also conclude that the Dutch speakers produced on average more items than French speakers at the beginner and intermediate level. The results of the third level support my choice for including the two modest French students who rated themselves upper-intermediate in the category advanced. The fact that they used 2 more items than their Dutch-speaking peers will not be stressed here due to the great numerical discrepancy between the informants of both language groups, with 2 French speakers and 18 Dutch speakers. The lack of representativeness also concerns the category beginners in both language groups, as this proficiency level counts remarkably less informants than the others. However, the rather striking difference between the intermediate and advanced levels in the comparison of the total number of individually produced items can be assumed to be representative.

Graphs 4 and 5 illustrate the distribution expressed in percentages of word categories according to the level of proficiency in English in each language group. The percentage has been established on the basis of the number of items produced within each proficiency category in order to allow comparison from a proficiency perspective in both language groups. The two most represented word categories reveal a rather similar lexical practice within the proficiency levels of each language group. We see that the beginners of both language groups use Romance- and Germanic-based words in comparable proportions and only in the neutral level of formality. Strikingly, a U-shape can be observed in the category Romance neutral in both language groups. This could hint at some form of (conscious or unconscious) avoidance of this specific word category at the intermediate level. This U-shape is specifically remarkable in the French-speaking group, where we see that the lexical choices of advanced learners equates those of the beginners in the Romance-neutral category, as if fully recognising the possibilities within this word category after the decrease in use at the intermediate level. Graph 5 also shows that this decrease in Romance-based word use at the intermediate level benefits to the category Germanic-neutral, much like in the Dutch-speaking group, but to a slightly greater extent.
As far as the other word categories are concerned, graphs 4 and 5 show that the informants of both groups use the categories ‘other origin’ in a proportional way across proficiency levels, although the Dutch speakers tend to use more neutral and less informal terms within those categories than the French-speaking informants. We also see that advanced Dutch speakers use –to a small extent– informal words of Germanic and Romance origin, contrary to their French-speaking counterparts. This observation does not hold for the intermediate level. It is also striking to observe that no French speaker has used any Romance-formal word, as opposed to the Dutch speakers. Importantly, the limited representativeness of the word categories discussed in this paragraph should not be ignored. However, their very presence in the lexical choices of the learners shows that the two main categories represented here are not the only ones.
5.1.3. Lexical practice and perceived level of L2 proficiency

Another variable that deserves the attention is the perceived level of the second-language proficiency. Although the term L2 has been used to designate all the foreign languages –i.e. second, third, fourth, etc. – of a learner in the previous chapter, L2 in this part of the work refers to the language of the other community (French and Dutch respectively) because the informants started to learn it before they were explicitly introduced to the English language. This section is dedicated to the possible effect of the perceived proficiency of Dutch learners in French and of French learners in Dutch on their lexical choices in the word-association task. Before analysing the distribution of word categories in each proficiency level of each language group, I will zoom in on the average number of items produced by the informants individually at each proficiency level. This is illustrated in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived proficiency-level in L2</th>
<th>French speakers</th>
<th>Dutch speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-intermediate/Advanced</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Average number of items produced individually in the word-association task in each L2 proficiency category*

A first striking observation about table 2 is the opposite evolution in both language groups. Just as in section 5.1.2, we see that the French speakers produced more items as they feel more at ease in Dutch. The beginner level in both groups is less representative as it only includes one and two informants respectively, but table 2 indicates an L2-proficiency effect on the number of items produced by the French speakers, as opposed to the Dutch-speaking group. Indeed, the difference between the intermediate and advanced level is remarkable in the French-speaking group, but only negligible in the Dutch speaking group.
The percentage of items used in each word categories according to the perceived L2 proficiency in both language groups can be observed in graphs 6 and 7. Again, the categories Romance-neutral and Germanic-neutral are the most represented, but the graphs reveal interesting results. From the L2-proficiency perspective, we can see very clearly on both graphs that the informants who rated themselves as beginners in the language of the other community rely remarkably more on words that are related to their own language family. Graph 6 shows that Dutch speaking beginners of French use remarkably less Romance-based words than their Germanic counterparts, which is actually a general tendency in the results observed to this point. Interestingly these informants also use less Romance-based words than the other proficiency levels in both language groups. As far as the French beginners of Dutch are concerned, the reliance on words that are genetically related to their L1 in their lexical production in English is even more striking as the representation of the Romance-neutral category has remained inferior to its Germanic counterpart in the variables that were previously analysed. This tendency is literally reversed by the beginners from the French-speaking group.
As far as the intermediate informants are concerned, both graphs reveal similar lexical practices in the two language groups analysed, even when including the less represented categories, such as Romance-informal and Germanic-informal words. This contrasts with the results observable in the advanced groups, in which, contrary to the beginning level, but illustrating a similar strategy, a foreign language influence can be assumed. Indeed, when comparing both graphs, we can see that the Dutch-speaking informants who feel more at ease in French use more Romance-based words than the other proficiency levels within their language group, but also more than their French-speaking peers in the advanced level. Regarding the latter, we can observe that they also use more Germanic-based words than the Dutch speakers. Parenthetically, both graphs also show that the category ‘other-neutral’ is proportionally represented in both language groups as regards the intermediate and advanced levels. Contrary to the French-speaking group, this word category is also used by Dutch-speaking beginners of French, in a non-negligible percentage.

Those are the main results revealed by the analysis of the word-association task. They will be briefly summarized at the end of chapter 5, in a transversal examination of the results provided by the three tasks proposed. But before turning to the analysis of the next task, I would like to briefly point out that the variable ‘extra-curricular contact’ has also be tested on the lexical practice of the informants of both groups in the same way as the previously discussed aspects. But this variable has not revealed any meaningful result and will therefore not be further detailed here.

5.2. Letter writing task

Next to the word-association task, the informants were asked to write a letter on the same topic, i.e. holidays. In order to measure the possible cross-linguistic influence according to the level of formality of a specific production task, both language groups were divided along this line. Twenty-one Dutch speakers and 15 French speakers were asked to write a letter to a friend, while the remaining students in both groups (20 and 16 respectively) wrote a letter of complaint. Both tasks will be discussed and compared according to the language groups in this section. Just as in the analysis of the word-association task, the influence of the perceived proficiency in English and in the language of the other community –i.e. French or Dutch– will be tested on the informants’ lexical choices in those tasks. In total, 2250 items were coded for this second task, but as the number of informants in the language groups and levels of proficiency are unbalanced, the results will be expressed in percentages in order to make comparison possible.
5.2.1. Distribution of the word categories and letter type

I will first propose a comparison of the number of items that were produced by the learners of each language group according to whether they wrote a formal –i.e. a letter of complaint– or informal letter –i.e. a postcard to a friend. To this end, I will refer to graphs 8 and 9, that represent the total number expressed in percentages of items used by the Dutch (graph 8) and French speakers (graph 9) respectively. If we consider the observations made in 2.2., we could possibly expect a Germanic tendency in the lexical practice of the postcard, which is less formal and requires a more core vocabulary, and more Romance-based words in the letter of complaint. Attention will also be drawn to the level of formality of the words used by the informants in both tasks as well.

Both graphs demonstrate a similar tendency of as far as the main categories are concerned. We see that in both language groups, the informants used more Romance-neutral terms in the letter of complaint than in the postcard and more Germanic-neutral words in the postcard than in the letter of complaint. This supports our expectations and could indicate that the learners, to a certain extent, are aware of the fact that the word origin can also have a role in the degree of formality. The lexical choices of the
Dutch learners in the letter of complaint, more specifically, are very telling. The level of formality is not very visible as the majority of the words used are neutral. But if we consider the categories that are less represented, we can see that the results do not consistently support the expectations. The Dutch speakers use more informal words of both Romance and Germanic origin in the letter of complaint than in the postcard. The Romance-informal category is also more represented in the letters of complaint of the French speakers than in their postcards. The category Other, on the contrary, supports the expectations in both language groups. But these smaller categories need to be further investigated as they are not representative enough in this study.

5.2.2. Letter type and perceived level of proficiency in English

In the analysis of the word-association task, we have seen that the perceived level of proficiency influenced the distribution of the word categories in both language groups. This variable will also be discussed here, in order to determine whether it also plays a role in the distribution of the word categories in the formal and informal productions respectively. The results will be discussed on the basis of graphs 10, 11, 12 and 13, which each illustrate the percentage of the word categories according to the perceived proficiency level of English in a specific language group, for a specific task.

First of all, the beginner level is not represented in the postcard task. For this reason, an overview of the average number of items used individually at each proficiency level as found in the discussion of the results in the word-association task, is not appropriate here. We can see on graph 10 here below that the lexical choices of both proficiency levels in the Dutch-speaking group are very similar, in all the categories concerned, except Germanic-informal words, which are only used by intermediate learners. We can also observe that no formal word has been used in this language group, which is in agreement with the expected level of formality of the postcard. In the French-speaking group (graph 11), the language practice of the intermediate learners is quite similar to that of the Dutch learners, but contrasts strongly with that of the advanced French-speaking learner. Although this category is not representative as it only includes one student, it is striking to see that this student used considerably more Germanic-neutral words and remarkably less Romance-neutral terms. Among the smaller categories, this student also used more informal words of Germanic and other origin than the other learners, which again supports the expectations predicted for this task.
Unlike the postcard task, the results of the letter of complaint include the three proficiency levels that were coded on the basis of the questionnaire submitted to the informants. A first analysis of the average number of item per informant at each level reveals that the learners of both groups produced more items as their perceived proficiency of English grows. Interestingly, graph 12 shows that the Dutch-speaking learners who rated themselves beginners use the most Romance-neutral terms across all levels and language groups. They also produced remarkably less Germanic-neutral terms, but compensate with their formal counterpart. This is in agreement with the expectations anticipated for this task, but quite surprising at a self-perceived beginning level, where we could have expected a greater reliance on L1 –i.e. Dutch. The intermediate and advanced learners of this group use Germanic-neutral and Romance-neutral terms in similar proportions, which would again support the expectations for this task because the proportions previously encountered in this analysis generally manifested a larger number of words of Germanic origin.
Surprisingly, the results of the French-speaking group seem to have been literally reversed compared to their Dutch-speaking peers as far as the categories Romance-neutral and Germanic-neutral are concerned. We can see on graph 13 that all the French-speaking learners use remarkably more Germanic-neutral terms than their Romance counterparts, which goes against the expectations made for this task as well as those connected to the language group. Indeed, we could have anticipated that the French-speaking learners would have relied on their L1 to a greater extent in the production of a formal text. However, the tendency observed seems to shift towards a more balanced distribution among those word categories as the level of proficiency grows. Unlike the postcard task, the category Romance-informal is here represented, especially in the productions of French-speaking advanced learners. The category Other-neutral is also represented in both language groups.

Quite logically, after this focus on the learners’ perceived proficiency in English, I am going to try and determine in the next section whether the perceived proficiency of the informants in their L2 –i.e. French or Dutch– influences their lexical choices in this study. As we have seen in the analysis of the word-association task, the incorporation of this variable unveiled very interesting results.
5.2.3. Letter type and perceived proficiency in L2

Just as in the previous section, the analysis of the proficiency level in the postcard task does not include the learners who rated themselves beginners. Graph 14 shows that the advanced learners from the Dutch-speaking group produced less Romance-neutral words than their intermediate peers, but more words of Germanic origin. Therefore, any possible L2-effect should be rather assumed at the intermediate level than in the advanced group, who used the word categories just as expected for this informal letter writing task. Additionally, we see that the smaller categories represented also support these expectations. For this task both level groups produced neutral or informal words; the latter more specifically generated by advanced learners. The same tendencies, but in other proportions can be observed in the French-speaking group, as illustrated on graph 15. In this language group, these results can actually be linked to a possible L2-effect, as we see that the advanced learners used more Germanic-based terms than their intermediate counterparts. This hypothesis cannot be verified however, and the differences between both proficiency levels are relatively narrow. The informal word categories are also present in this language group, with the exception of the category Romance-informal, unlike their Dutch-speaking peers.

Graph 14: Distribution of the word categories produced by the Dutch-speaking informants in the postcard task and L2 proficiency expressed in percentages

Graph 15: Distribution of the word categories produced by the French-speaking informants in the postcard task and L2 proficiency expressed in percentages
As far as the letter of complaint is concerned, a first analysis according to the L2-proficiency variable shows that the average number of items produced individually grows together with the learners’ perceived level of proficiency in L2. Both graphs here below reveal a contrasting language practice between the informants of both language groups. As regards the beginner and intermediate categories of the Dutch-speaking group (graph 16), we could assume a certain Romance influence in the lexical choices of these informants, considering that they use the categories Romance-neutral and Germanic-neutral in similar proportions, which goes against the general observations already made in this analysis –i.e. about 30% of Romance-neutral terms and around 50% of Germanic-neutral items. The intermediate learners produced even more Romance-neutral terms than their Germanic counterparts. Whereas we would actually have expected a Romance influence in the lexical practice of learners who feel more at ease in French, graph 16 shows that the advanced Dutch speakers do not follow the tendency of the other proficiency levels. Additionally, just as previously observed, the neutral categories form the majority of the produced items, but we can see that the informal categories are also represented on graph 16. Some Romance-formal words were also produced in the Dutch-speaking group.

**Graph 16:** Distribution of the word categories in the letters of complaint produced by the Dutch-speaking informants and L2 proficiency expressed in percentages

**Graph 17:** Distribution of the word categories produced in the letters of complaint by the French-speaking informants and L2 proficiency expressed in percentages
Quite in the same manner as in the Dutch-speaking group, the L2 influence—if any—in the lexical practice of the French speakers is rather to be found at the beginner than the advanced level, which is unexpected. We see on graph 17 that the three level categories of the French-speaking group tend to use more words of Germanic origin than their Romance equivalents at the neutral formality level. The formal level is not represented in the results of this group either. We see however that the advanced learners use more Romance terms than the other levels of proficiency, which could refer to a possible awareness of the fact that Romance-based words can have a more formal value than terms of Germanic origin.

5.3. Three tasks and three formality levels: a summary

The three tasks that were proposed to the informants actually integrate the three levels of formality discussed in this paper. As there was no indication of formality in the word-association task, we could indeed consider it the neutral counterpart of the formal and informal letter writing tasks. This is the reason why I am proposing a transversal summary of the results found in the word-association task, the postcard and the letter of complaint, in order to draw conclusions as to the influence of the apparent degree of formality on cross-linguistic influences in the tasks proposed. Importantly, the students were not explicitly asked to write a formal or rather informal text. The decision as to the degree of formality of each task was left to the informants and their general knowledge of conventions. The discussion in this section will be based on the various graphs that illustrated the results detailed in 5.1. and 5.2.

A first general look at the lexical choices of the informants of each language group in the various tasks reveals that the word-association task is essentially neutral, while the formal and informal word categories reach a maximum of 1% in each language group. The distribution of the word origin is comparable between the French and Dutch speakers, with about one third of Romance-neutral terms and over a half of Germanic-neutral words. The category Other-neutral remains stable, with more or less 10% of items in each language group, across the variables that have been discussed and will be summarized here. In the results of the postcard, we see that both groups tend to use more terms of Germanic origin than their Romance counterparts, in a distribution that resembles that of the neutral task. As far as the level of formality is concerned, we see that both language groups use more informal categories in this rather informal writing task. This could possibly hint at a conscious and aware lexical choice. The letter of complaint also displays lexical choices that are consistent with the formality level of the task, especially in the Dutch-speaking group. The tendency to use more words of Romance origin is also observable in the results of the French speakers, but to a lesser extent. So we could assume that the informants associate Romance-based words with higher degrees of formality. This choice does not always lead to a more formal style, however, as we can see on both graphs (8 and
9) that the learners of both groups produced more Romance-informal words in the letter of complaint than in the postcard.

Second, in measuring the perceived proficiency in English, I wanted to determine whether the possible association between the word origin and the level of formality would be verified as the learners feel more at ease in English. Surprisingly, the word-association task as analysed according to this variable reveals that the neutral distribution in terms of word origin, as previously observed on graph 3, is rather to be found at the intermediate level in both language groups (graphs 4 and 5), which results in a U-shape figure in the Romance-neutral category. As opposed to their intermediate counterparts, the beginners and advanced learners tended to produce more Romance terms than expected. As far as the formality level of the items is concerned, the Dutch lexical practice is clearly neutral, whereas the French speakers tended to use slightly more informal words. Unfortunately, the informal task analysed according to both proficiency variables does not include any beginner learner, which is a stumbling block to the representativeness of the results. The formality of the words produced in the informal task is in agreement with the expectations as no formal category is represented while all the informal ones are illustrated, with the exception of Romance-informal words produced by French speakers. We could also hypothesize that there is an assumed association at play between words of Germanic origin and rather informal registers on the part of advanced French speakers, who produced remarkably more Germanic-neutral and less Romance-neutral terms than their Dutch-speaking peers. In the letter of complaint, we can observe an effect of word origin that agrees with the expectations of the task in the Dutch-speaking group, who tended to use more Romance-neutral terms as compared with the Germanic-based category, but also in comparison with the French-speaking group. Nevertheless, French-speaking advanced learners tended to produce a more balanced distribution of word origin than the informants of all other proficiency levels in this language group. Contrary to the Dutch learners, the formal level is not represented in the productions of French speakers as far as the letter of complaint is concerned.

The analysis of the lexical production of the informants according to their perceived L2 proficiency reveals a clear effect of this variable in the word-association task. Indeed, graph 7 shows that the degree of ease in Dutch influences the items proportions in terms of word origin in the French-speaking group. The beginners used more Romance-based words, while the intermediate and advanced levels show a more neutral distribution in word origin in this language group. The advanced Dutch speakers also used more words of Romance origin than the other proficiency levels of their language group. As opposed to the word-association task, the results of the postcard seem to indicate that the learners of both groups associate a less formal text type with a Germanic vocabulary, more specifically at the advanced level. This does not indicate any L2 effect. Additionally, the formal categories are not represented here, which would support my suggestion. In the letter of complaint, the L2-effect, if any, is rather observable at early proficiency stages, which is surprising. In the Dutch group, the beginners
and intermediate learners used more Romance-neutral terms than their advanced counterparts. This possible effect of L2 is also observed in the beginner category of the French-speaking group, who used more Germanic-based words. The expectations of the text type seem to prevail over this L2-effect at the advanced level, in which the Romance-neutral category is more represented.

6. Conclusion

Starting from the fact that the various languages known to individuals are connected in the brain, but that the L2-lexicon has been found to be smaller and sparser in structure, this study has focused on possible cross-linguistic influences in the lexical practice of Dutch and French speaking learners of English as observed at the end of secondary education in Belgium. In the first part of this work, I have determined on the basis of previous studies that the informants of my research present and are confronted to different factors that could possibly enhance cross-linguistic influences on their lexical practice of English. Considering the links established between the languages involved in my research, I decided to focus more particularly on the levels of formality in the analysis of the variables.

In answer to the research questions proposed in chapter 3, the observations detailed here above allow us to conclude that an effect of the mother language can be assumed to cause lexical variations in the language practice of learners of different mother languages. We also noted a possible non-native influence as far as this first research question is concerned. Additionally, some of the results provided by the analysis of the neutral, informal and formal production tasks proposed to the informants of this study suggested a native and non-native cross-linguistic influence on the use of register, which can sometimes lead to inappropriate practice according to the formality conventions and expectations in a specific task. This is the reason why I would argue for a greater attention to cross-linguistic similarities and awareness-raising strategies in terms of formality registers in the foreign language teaching approach, even if the results of my analysis do not provide consistent lexical practices according to the variables tested. This might be due to a lack of representativeness resulting from the limited and rather unbalanced sample.

I am aware of the fact that the observations made in the previous chapter are very difficult to justify and cannot only be attributed to possible cross-linguistic influences. Indeed, we have seen that many factors are at play in the process of second language learning and production. As a result, the point of this analysis was not to consider those cross-linguistic influences as the only explanation. Rather, in the interpretation of the results, I have attempted at demonstrating that the mother or foreign language factor can in some cases be spotted in the lexical practice of the learner, especially when we take the proficiency level of those languages into account. On the other hand, the informants’ lexical practice in English has also revealed at some points that they seem to associate words of a specific origin with a text of specific formality.
Other limitations pertain to several aspects of the method. First of all, the limited and rather unbalanced sample in terms of gender or perceived proficiency in English or in the L2 does not allow me to draw conclusions at a national level, although the observations made here revealed several interesting tendencies. This is the reason why I would suggest larger-scale replications of this investigation, including a statistical analysis of the results. With regard to the methodology, the analysis of the word origin in the lexical production of the informants should be complemented with a cognate analysis, which would involve formal and semantic cross-linguistic relations as they can be detected today. Indeed, the word origin is not always easy to recognise in the modern English term although this genetic link could be retrieved in the majority of the words that were coded. To this end, I would refer to Gooskens’ (2007) methodology in her analysis of lexical distances between languages, as she attributed a score between 0 and 1 depending on whether the words were cognates or not. Part of my methodology also consisted in attributing a level of formality to each item coded. I chose the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as a basis to determine this component but, considering the vast majority of neutral words, I would suggest to broaden this scale in future studies, and possibly solicit the collaboration of a native speaker of English in order to determine in-between levels of formality, such as elevated, rather informal, and so on.

Despite its limitations, this investigation of the possible influence of other languages known to the learners on their English practice, and especially at the level of formality registers, could be considered a starting point. I would advocate for further research in this field because any teaching approach that would prove to be beneficial and facilitative in the learning process and acquisition of specific aspects of a foreign language are worth exploring in a society that has become increasingly multicultural, and inevitably, multilingual.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Word-association task administered to the informants

APPENDIX 2: Informal writing task administered to 36 informants

APPENDIX 3: Formal writing task administered to the other 36 informants

APPENDIX 4: Questionnaire administered to the informants of the Dutch-speaking group

APPENDIX 5: Questionnaire administered to the informants of the French-speaking group
Master Thesis Survey in the field of English Linguistics

Note: the survey is anonymous

1) **Word-Association Task.** What are the words that first come to your mind when you think about holidays? In this exercise, you get about 3 minutes to write down as many related words as you can.

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2) **Writing Task.** You are on holiday and you send a postcard to your best friend. Tell him or her about your stay (where you are, what you are doing, etc.) and how you feel about it. (length: 5 to 10 lines)

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2) **Writing Task.** You have just come back from a terrible holiday abroad and you decide to write the tour operator a letter of complaint detailing the problems you faced during your stay. You also express your deep disappointment. (length: between 5 and 10 lines)
3) Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. You are (circle the correct answer): a girl  a boy

2. You are from (color the correct circle):
   ○ Belgium  ○ another country:.....................
   If so, at what age did you arrive in Belgium? ..........

3. What language(s) do you speak at home? .................................

4. This year, you have ...... classes of French  per week at school
   ...... classes of English

5. What about your knowledge of foreign languages?
   i. What foreign languages do you speak (learnt at school or elsewhere)?
   ii. For how long have you been learning them?
   iii. What is your level of proficiency (beginner-intermediate-advanced)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i. Language</th>
<th>ii. For how long?</th>
<th>iii. Level of proficiency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>French</td>
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6. Apart from school, are you sometimes in contact with foreign languages? In what context? How often? Explain briefly.

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7. Do you want to add something?

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Thank you very much for your cooperation! ☺
3) Please answer the following questions about yourself.

8. You are (circle the correct answer):  a girl     a boy

9. You are from (color the correct circle):
   ○ Belgium     ○ another country: ......................
     If so, at what age did you arrive in Belgium? .........

10. What language(s) do you speak at home? ..............................

11. This year, you have ...... classes of Dutch     per week at school
     ...... classes of English

12. What about your knowledge of foreign languages?
   i. What foreign languages do you speak (learnt at school or elsewhere)?
   ii. For how long have you been learning them?
   iii. What is your level of proficiency (beginner-intermediate-advanced)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i. Language</th>
<th>ii. For how long?</th>
<th>iii. Level of proficiency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>Dutch</td>
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13. Apart from school, are you sometimes in contact with foreign languages? In what context? How often? Explain briefly.

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14. Do you want to add something?

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Thank you very much for your cooperation! ☺
Bibliography


