

# Wallon : introduction

- \* Among the **oïl languages**, Walloon is probably the most differentiated from French.
- \* It is due to its neighboring situation with Germanic languages.



# History: Middle Ages

- \* its identity is already acquired in the **12<sup>th</sup> century**
  - \* its geographical limits corresponded to the furthest possessions of the Bishop Principality of Liège (founded in 980).
  - \* oïl languages that individualized
- next to it : Picard in the diocese of Cambrai, Champenois (Reims) and Lorrain (Trier).



# 1/2 in Principality of Liège + 1/2 in Low Countries

- \* The Principality of Liège remained independent inside the **Holly Roman Empire** until the 1785 French invasion
- \* Politically, it controlled less than a half of the Walloon-speaking territories.
- \* The other parts were gathered by Dukes of **Burgundy** in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, then passed to the **Spanish**, then to the **Austrian** Empires.

# End 18th & 19th c.

- \* The French regime (1795-1815), established **French** as the sole official language in Walloon-speaking as well as in Flemish-speaking territories.
- \* This linguistic order supported by the newly formed elite educated in Napoleonian colleges continued through the Dutch regime (1816-1830) and independent Belgium (1830 to present).
- \* In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Walloon politicians opposed to Flemish who wanted official use of their own language.
- \* They promoted **French as the sole valuable**

# Arisal of a Walloon identitary feeling

- \* Timid signs of such a feeling appear in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the word “Wallonie” was created, as well as the “Société de Langue et Littérature wallones” (SLLW, 1856).
- \* Walloon identity was emphasised by the Belgian Royal Question (1945-1951), but this arose from **political opposition** between socialist Wallonia and catholic royalist Flanders.
- \* Subsequent State reforms resulted in a largely autonomous status of Wallonia with a **parliament (1998)**, a **president** and most other elements usually attributed to independent States.

## **BUT NOT culture and education...**

...which are governed jointly with Brussels autonomic region (with dominance of the latter, where Walloon remains often unrecognised or not valorised).

# NO independence goal NO role for Walloon language

- \* Unlike in Flanders, there is no political party struggling for the **independence** of Wallonia.
- \* NO official role of the Walloon language inside Wallonia was ever mentioned.

# Nature of Walloon

## Etymology

- \* **Celtic** substratum (3% of the traditional words)
- \* **Latin** stratum (70%)
- \* **Germanic** superstratum (20% of words)
- \* onomatopoeic stock (7%)

## Grammar

- \* French-like with conservative traits
- \* some specificities
- \* few Germanic structures.

**Phonology** is quite different from French

Walloon /tʃ - dʒ/ : **tch**anter, **tch**ivå,  
**tch**én, **djin**, **djino**, **Dj**envire <>

French /ʃ - ʒ/ : **ch**anter, **ch**eval,  
**ch**ien, **g**ent (personne), **g**enou,  
**G**eneviève (to sing, horse, dog,  
people, knee, Genevieve)

Walloon /h=ç=ʃ - h=ʒ/ **pe**x**h**on,  
**te**x**h**e, **â****j**hey, **mâ****j**hon <> French /s

# Dialectology

\* two main, rather uniform dialects:

\*\* Liégeois (East)

\*\* Namurois (Center)

\* transitional dialects

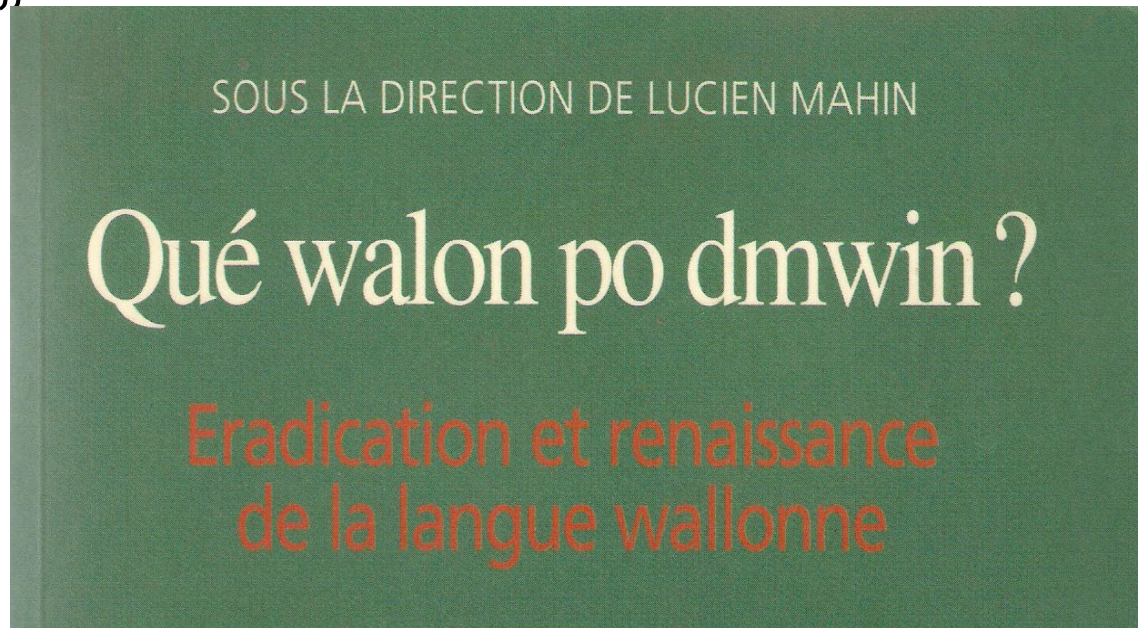
\*\* Western influenced  
by Picard

\*\* Southern influenced  
by Gaumais (Lorrain)



# “Eradication” process

- \* **diglossic** only among educated people in the 19th century.
- \* compulsory school from 1920 banned Walloon and other “patois”
- \* no more inter-generational transmission since the 1960’s



# Means of survival

- \* **belles-lettristic documents** since +/- 1600.
- \*\* tails and humorous poems
- \*\* poetry becamed “universal” in the 1950’s
- \*\* more and more novels since 2000
- \* Walloon-speaking theater (since 1756; 300,000 spectators per year nowadays)
- \* Walloon-speaking music (since the beginning to present with 2 CD ‘malgs per year)

# Language planning

## Status planning

\* **“Décret Valmy Féaux”**

(1990) recognizes Walloon as a “regional endogenous language” but without preseat relatively to other far smaller languages, mainly present in France, Luxemburg or Flanders

\* **No directive for any compulsory application.**



# Corpus planning

- \* 1900: “**Feller sytem**” gives guidelines to writing of each single dialect; users increased slowly but surely all over during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- \* it allows self-learning to native speakers, hence a flourishing of lexical studies (more than 500 publications) as well as quality works of literature.
- \* it is presented by all officials as the definite “**non-negotiable**” orthography of the “patois” / “walloon”.

# Normalisation

- \* idea was released in the early 1990's by personalities and official instances (*Union Culturelle wallonne*).
- \* strong **opposition of academic dialectologists** (1996) blocked the spreading of the process.
- \* work went on thanks to a few members of the NGO "Li Rantoele".
- \* they obtained the ISO 2-letters code for Walloon (**wa**) (2000)

# *Rifondou walon*

- \* this is the name of normalized corpus (1993).
- \* early workers (1992-1995) were inspired by experiences like these of Swiss Romansh, Breton, Occitan or Poitevin-Saintongeais.
- \* majority form was preferred when possible but **this was seldom the case**, because of large dialectal variation.
- \* choice of central forms was **not often** promoted because the richest and oldest region of Liège is out of the geographical centre of the language.

# Diasystems

- \* The use of diasystemic graphs was chosen to keep the main characteristics of Liège dialects as pronunciation options.
- \* These graphs were often found back in old spellings (archigraphemes).
- \* Exemple: diasystem xh:
  - \*\* **xh** : Liège: pèhon <> Namur, South and West:  
pè**ch**on => **pexhon** (fish)
  - \*\* this graph is frequent in place and family names.
  - \*\* a standard pronunciation is not promoted.

# Own experience

- \* born in 1953, growing in a Walloon-speaking family (this situation was no longer usual in that period and changed abruptly a couple of years later).
- \* unproblematic diglossic state during my youth.
- \* graduated in 1977, going to work in Morocco.
- \* awareness that my mother tongue was not French, the colonial language of that country (which was clear for our Flemish fellow countrymen).
- \* deep questioning of why Walloon people had abandoned their identity language.

# From passivity to activity

- \* since 1980, I began **studying Walloon**, then became a **writer** (poet and novelist) and a self-made researcher in that language.
- \* but other activists did not use Walloon in science, politics...; **only in literature and theatre**.
- \* neither for oral communication between them.
- \* no linguistic studies of Walloon in Walloon (all are in French).

# Meeting with language planners

- \* in 1993, I met a group of young “*waloneus*” who had started the normalisation process. I was very excited with that evolution, and I imagined it would be adopted rapidly by all the militants, as the genuine solution to dialectical variety.
- \* in that group, we communicated in Walloon, and my creations of neologisms were welcomed, being in line with their goals for the language.
- \* I helped them to create the **association “Li Rantoele”** (the web) and was a main contributor to the eponymous magazine (1996).

# Li Rantoele (gazete)

Li RANTOËLE

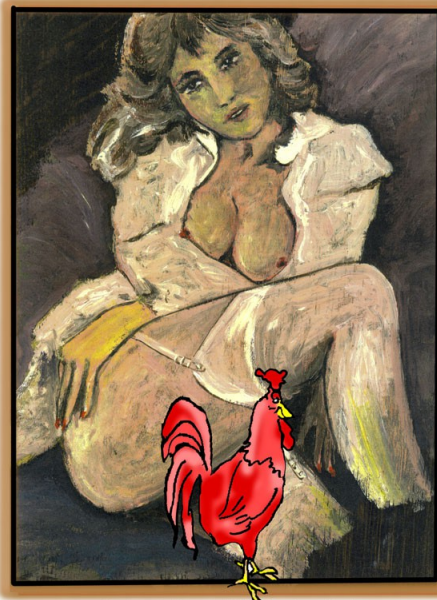


ERI-SAJHON 2010 \* L°55

## Li RANTOËLE



Gazete di prôze nèn racontrece ki rexhe tos les troes moes.  
publyeye pal "RANTOËLE" - soce nèn recwârante (a.s.b.l.)  
avou l'aspalaedje del Kiminîté Walonreye-Brussele



Mwaisse scrijheu : L. Mahin - Dessins : Djozé

Eplaidou responsable : Pire Otjacques

19, rûe d' la Hasse, 6840 Li Tchesteu - Bureau de dépôt : 6840-Neufchâteau

Pris : 3 uros à l'imero ; abouneint po én an : 12 uros (20 po l'etrindjî)

à conte 068-220405-07 - (IBAN BE74 0682 3043 0507)

Do 12 à 19 di may, c' est l' fiesse  
às lingaedjes walons !



## Li Rantoele

BONTINS 2018 - L°85

Gazete di prôze nèn racontrece ki rexhe tos les troes moes eplaideye pal  
« RANTOËLE », soce nèn recwârante (a.s.b.l.) mimbe del Soce  
po les mancîs Lingaedjes et Tuzances d' Urope (ALCEM), avou  
l'aspalaedje del Federâcion Walonreye-Brussele



Mwaisse scrijheu : Lucyin Mahin. Eplaidou responsable : Pire Otjacques - rûe d' la Hete, 19, 6940 Li Tchesteu - Bureau de dépôt 6940-Neufchâteau.  
Pris : 3 uros à l'imero ; abouneint po én an : 12 uros (20 po l'etrindjî) à conte IBAN BE74 0682 2043 0507, BIC GKCCBEBB.

# Hard times for *rifondou walon*

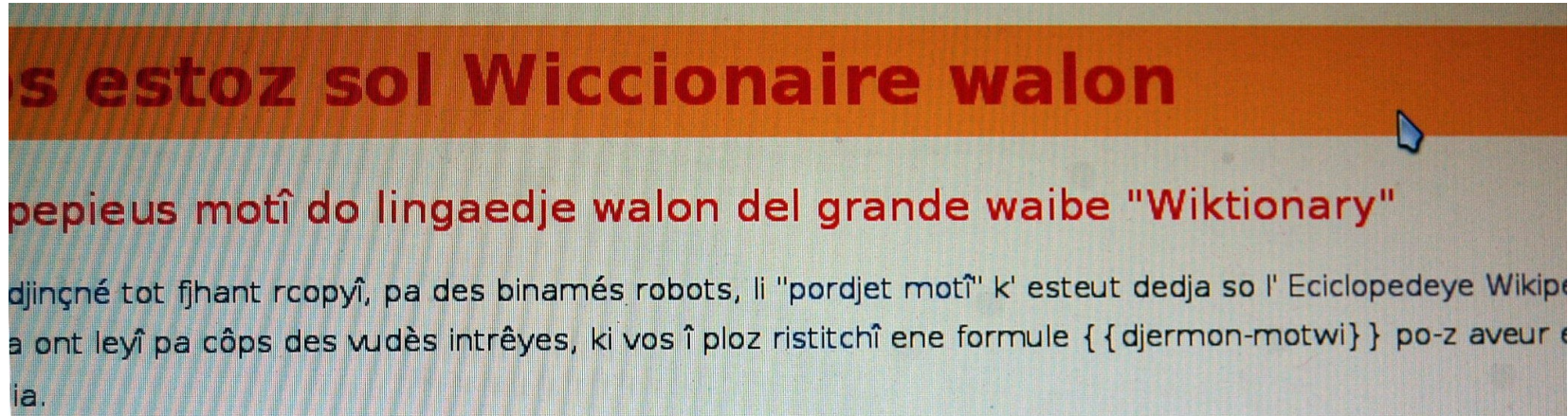
- \* abrupt opposition from a large part of traditional *waloneus*, - and, amazingly, nearly all the Romanic scholars (especially since 1996)
- \* but we pursued our goal: to make Walloon a language adapted to all aspects of modern life.
- \* our opponents never suggested an alternative project for the future of the language (except “revalorisation of the different *patois*”)
- \* not even giving us any opportunity to discuss the different points of view publicly.

# Work went on

Thanks to our skills in languages and computer science, we could achieve realisations like:

- \* L' Aberteke (on-line magazine (1997 to present))
- \* **Esplicant motî** (explaining dictionary) (2000-2004)
- \* Walloon Wikipedia (2004 t.p.)
- \* Walloon Wiktionary (2009 t.p.)
- \* completion of **DTW** (on line lexical data base, 1992 to present).
- \* *Tévé walon-câzante*, a video channel on Youtube, with subtitles in *rifondou walon* (2008

# Aberteke / Wikipedia / Wiktionary / DTW



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Rezultats



# Changing the tide?

Among writers and linguists, there were **positively neutral personalities** and even frank supporters, who adopted some main points from the program of the “*rifondeus*” (normalized Walloon users) such as:

- \* Walloon speaking between activists
- \* transmission to children
- \* creation of neologisms
- \* subject for belles-lettres no longer bound to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Walloon-speaking villages.
- \* production of non-fictional prose in some magazine used to published only literature.

# More mitigated results

The **greater resistance** was noted in the use of normalised spelling, especially:

- \* the diasystemic graphs not present in the Feller system (xh, jh, sch, ae, oe, oi...)
- \* the accent-reduced spelling (*d'zan.n'ner* => dzandner; *dëslô<sup>n</sup>.yi* => disloyî; *rèpublique* => republike)

After nearly 20 years following definite fixation of normalized orthography, only a couple of writers use it currently (but in the mean time, new writers using Feller system are also scarce).

# The future

- \* life prognosis of Walloon is poor (the same for 6000 other languages worldwide).
- \* but Walloon has some uncommon advantages:

# Advantages of Walloon

- \* there is a political entity, **Wallonia**, which bears its name and which encompasses its natural area, comprising about 3 million people.
- \* its lexicon and grammar specificities have been recorded with great precision, including detailed etymology and dialectical variations, **plus a recent trend of creation of neologisms**.
- \* there remain a fair number of people devoting their time and energy for the language to survive
- \* the existing normalisation process can allow learners to acquire the language with reduced difficulties.

So: act and wait and see...



Merci di m'aveur schoûté