Mining terminology in the Belgian and Netherlandic Limburg coalmines: the role of region, country, dialects and source languages

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*"**Is** das hier ein Sau arbeit! Da hat **de** verfluchte Nachtschicht die zwei **Boe niet gezat**."*
(citation in Bunge 1936)
"At the State mine Emma many dialects were spoken. I gave the answers in the best way possible in my own dialect (Heerlens)." (informant Limburg Dialect Dictionnary)

In the early 20th century, industrial coalmining reshaped the rural landscape of both Limburgs dramatically, with massive immigration, also from other countries, and with immigrants speaking various other dialects and languages. In 1955, there were 19 industrial coalmines in Belgian (7) and Netherlandic Limburg (12); they were extremely important for the national economies. The oldest one was the Domaniale in Kerkrade.

The linguistic landscape became multilingual, with major influxes from French, German and Dutch, mixed with local dialects. While coalmining terminology in Netherlandic Limburg was strongly influenced by German, the terminology in Belgium was originally essentially shaped by French. A coal mine in Belgium was often called a *šarbonaš* (*charbonnage)* but in the Netherlands it was a *koel* (kuil), though other words were *put* and *lok* (German). Even a Russian word was reported: *rabota* (work), and one of Polish origin: *mottek* from Polish *mlottek* (sledgehammer).

Various mixtures of languages were spoken – also in the underground parts of the mines. To avoid dangerous miscommunication, word lists and booklets were used in schooling to standardize mine terminology. An important agent in intensifying language contact was the fact that coalminers and their families lived in tailormade living quarters (called 'cites' in Belgian Limburg and 'kolonies' in Netherlandic Limburg) which represented tightly knit microcosmoses that fostered and promoted a common vocabulary in daily affairs. Engineers and higher qualified managers were living in their own more spacious and prosperous districts where standard languages were preferred for daily communication.

The Limburg Dialect Dictionary published a separate volume on the coalmine terminology in 1989, based on 47 completed questionnaires (with more than 1000 questions), with at least one questionnaire completed for each of the 19 coalmining sites. These questionnaires were supplemented by monographic materials in that volume, to obtain as complete an overview as possible. In 2015-2017, all these materials became available on the internet, at which point the database could be accessed via different entrances, including indirect information about the coalmines involved. This year (2024) the coalmine data became available through

a direct coalmine key. Building on these digital queries, dialect maps can be drawn including all coal mines (see the map below). This novel way of accessing the materials enables us to relate mining terminology in the individual coalmines to their history, region, country, and to the local dialects and languages involved.

The first two research questions to be addressed in this paper relate to the mining terminology used in the coalmines. The first is how *variable* coal mining terminology actually is on account of language contact and mixing (Dutch, French, German) and the confrontation with the local dialects (different dialect areas, the impact of isoglosses): is this variation a property of differences *between* the coalmines, or is the terminology in any case highly variable in all coalmines? The second research question is whether we can cluster coalmines given their terminological inventories. On a high level of granularity: how different are Belgium and the Netherlands? On lower levels of granularity: is the Kerkrade area different from the Heerlen area in the Netherlands? Is Eisden different from the other coalmines in Belgium?. The third research question pertains to whether we can link terminological variation to the different linguistic evolutions in the areas involved, in particular in relation to Genk and Heerlen.

References

Woordenboek van de Limburgse Dialecten (*Limburg Dialect Dictionary*): H. Crompvoets, H. van de Wijngaard, m.m.v. J. Busch, *WLD II, Aflevering 5. Mijnwerker*, Assen/Maastricht 1989.

Bunge, E. (1936). *In het schijnsel van de mijnlamp*. Blitz, Amsterdam.

Limburg Dialect Dictionary, digital database: e-wld.nl. The special coalmine entrance was developed this year by the Humanities Lab of the Faculty of Arts of Radboud University Nijmegen,

The dialect map below shows the different words for coalmine. Only the main entrances are shown on the map. Many coalmines report more words (synonyms). This map shows that the Belgian coalminers used a word related to French *charbonnage, lok* (German) is found quite near to the German border in the Kerkrade region.

Begrip: [steenkoolmijn]

kuil (38)
put (30)
mijn (15)
koolput (14)
charbonnage (8)
lok (5)
pompenlok (3)
zwart lok (1)
kolenmijn (1)

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