

Can speaker evaluation return private attitudes towards stigmatised varieties? Evidence from emergent standardisation in Belgian Dutch

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INTRODUCTION

Few areas in late-modern Europe manifest language dynamics which are so exciting (to linguists) and controversial (to non-linguists) as those witnessed in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern half of Belgium. This chapter reports experimental data collected to investigate the respective position in the standard language space of two varieties: the official ‘best language’, and a rapidly spreading colloquial variety which is referred to as ‘Tussentaal’ (literally, ‘in-between language’), because it is a more or less autonomous variant stratificationally situated in-between the official standard and the dialects.

The uncontested norm for spoken standard usage in Flanders since the 1950’s has been ‘VRT-Dutch’, the variety produced by official broadcasters on the *Vlaamse Radio en Televisie* (‘Flemish Radio and Television’). While this VRT-Dutch is the only prestigious speech in Flanders, its status as a lingua franca continues to be problematic. Observe, to begin with, that VRT-Dutch is not an endogenous Flemish variety: except for its pronunciation, the ‘best’ Flemish Dutch was modelled after spoken *Netherlandic* Dutch. This adoption of the exoglossic Netherlandic standard was promoted in the 19th century to provide for a Flemish prestige variety which did not exist at the time. In the 17th century, Flanders had been cut off from emergent standardisation processes in The Netherlands (as a result of the Eighty Years’ War) and the subsequent Spanish, Austrian and French rulers in Flanders preferred French for supra-regional purposes (more extensive historical accounts of the Flemish adoption of the exoglossic Netherlandic standard can be found in Vandenbussche 2010; Absillis, Jaspers and Van Hoof 2012, and Delarue this volume). When the desire for a Flemish

standard emerged in the 19th century, Flemish language planners opted for the fully-fledged, available Netherlandic Dutch standard instead of creating an endoglossic Flemish variety. It was not until 1898, however, that Dutch was recognised as an official language alongside French in Flanders, and it was only with the advent of radio and TV after World War II, and the ensuing exposure to Netherlandic Dutch, that the Flemish adoption of the Dutch standard gained momentum.

Crucially, the imported Dutch standard was not spontaneously adopted by the Flemish, but *imposed* on the linguistic community (Jaspers 2001, De Caluwe 2009, Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011), in a repressive intellectual climate hostile to variation, and language planning efforts that often coincided with a crusade against endogenous Flemish varieties (Taeldeman 1993: 15). Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012: 97) refer to the exoglossic standardization of Belgian Dutch as a *hyperstandardisation*, ‘a propagandistic, large-scale and highly mediatised linguistic standardisation campaign that has thoroughly ideologised and hierarchised language use in all corners of Flemish society’. One result of the foreignness of the Dutch standard, and the amount of repression with which it was imposed, is the fact that most Flemish speakers are uncomfortable with it. Taeldeman (1993) and Geeraerts (1999; 2001) have referred to Belgian Standard Dutch as a ‘Sunday suit’ in this respect, an indispensable piece of clothing which one takes off as soon as the occasion no longer demands it.

In addition to foreign and uncomfortable, VRT-Dutch is increasingly regarded as a ‘virtual colloquial variety [...], desired by the authorities, but rarely spoken in practice’ (De Caluwe 2009: 19). Many linguists agree that VRT-Dutch represents an unattainable ideal which is realised by only a small minority of the Flemish, in a small number of contexts (see, amongst many others, Goossens 2000: 8; Geeraerts and De Sutter 2003: 57; or Beheydt 2003: 160). The best non-virtual variety of Dutch spoken in actual practice is the speech documented in the Teacher Corpus of the Spoken Dutch Corpus (see Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011: 219, and Delarue’s chapter (this volume)), which consists of interviews with secondary school teachers of Dutch. While most teachers of Dutch proclaim themselves guardians of the standard (Van de Velde and Houtermans 1999), who are loyal to official pronunciation norms (De Schutter 1980), almost all of them have an identifiable regional accent, and a sizeable proportion manifest substandard features in their speech.

In view of the fact that VRT-Dutch is non-endogenous and non-vital, it is unsurprising (according to, for instance, Cajot 2012) that it would eventually be

contested by endoglossic varieties such as Tussentaal, which owes this appellation to the fact that it is stratificationally situated in-between the dialects and the standard. While the rapid expansion of Tussentaal in Flanders has been a highly controversial and strongly mediated phenomenon these past decades, it is interesting to notice that reliable scientific knowledge on this spreading variety is scant (Jaspers 2001; De Caluwe 2009; Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011). The paucity of (empirical) data on the status and structure of Tussentaal reflects the establishment's unease and panic with respect to an endoglossic development which runs counter to the adoption of the exoglossic standard proposed and promoted by the integrationist language planners. According to Jaspers (2001: 131), until recently 'Tussentaal was not analysed but merely incurred disapproval'.

The only fact most observers from all ideological backgrounds agree on is the idea that the rapid spread of Tussentaal represents a case of 'autonomous informal language standardization' (Cajot 1999: 375; Vandekerckhove 2007: 202; Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011: 222). Production evidence for the suggestion that Tussentaal is standardizing comes from the widely reported observation that Tussentaal is encroaching on formal domains in which Standard Dutch used to be *de rigueur* (De Caluwe 2009; Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011), and from the fact that – while the cultural elite in Flanders held on to Standard Dutch much longer than the economic elite –, the youngest generation in *any* professional group is massively defecting to Tussentaal (See especially Plevvoets 2009 for corpus-based evidence). In addition, stabilizing and uniforming tendencies have been reported, to the extent that there is a growing influx in Tussentaal of features from the central Brabant-Antwerp axis (see Vandekerckhove 2006, 2007, and especially Willemyns 2005): although Tussentaal is clearly not a uniform variety (yet), De Caluwe (2009: 8) claims that 'it is Brabant-flavoured Tussentaal which manifests the highest status and widest distribution'.

While its increasing usage and internal uniformity suggest that Tussentaal is indeed standardizing, we have repeatedly argued (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011, 2012; Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman 2011) that production factors do not suffice to determine the standard status of language varieties. (Socio)linguists rarely regard a standard language as a uniform, delineable variety with typical speakers (as they typically do for dialects, see Smakman 2012: 27), but as a 'linguistic ideal' (Van Haeringen 1951: 317), a 'conviction' (Geerts 1987: 165), an 'abstraction' (Niedzielski and Preston 2000: 18), and even as 'a myth' (Lippi-Green 1997: 44). In view of the fact that standard languages owe

their status as ‘best language’ to powerful Standard Language Ideologies – hierarchisations of language varieties based on ‘conceptions’ of purity, modernity and civilisation (Van Hoof and Jaspers 2012: 97) – rather than to any intrinsic homogeneity or superiority (see Milroy 2001: 530), the question whether and to what extent Tussentaal is standard(ising) presupposes an investigation into Standard Language Ideology (change) in Flanders.

Standard Language Ideology (change) has mainly been investigated from two angles in Flanders and other countries. In keeping with the view that language attitudes are ‘socially derived, intellectualised or behavioural ideology’ (Woolard 1998: 16), a number of researchers have accessed native speaker attitudes towards standard language variation in Flanders, building on Lambert et al.’s (1960) speaker evaluation paradigm (whereby listener-judges evaluate unlabelled speech clips on a number of descriptors pertaining to speaker personality). Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier (2007) and Cuvelier (2007) reported speaker evaluation research in which student listener-judges evaluated the functional distribution of spontaneously produced Standard Dutch, dialect, and Tussentaal in video clips representing three different interactional situations (which varied in degree of formality). Standard Dutch received high power and competence ratings, while both Tussentaal and dialect were downgraded on these dimensions. Standard Dutch, by contrast, elicited lower solidarity ratings than the other varieties. Impe and Speelman (2007) reported a speaker evaluation experiment in which adolescent listener-judges of Limburg and West-Flemish descent evaluated spontaneous but topic-controlled samples of non-regional Belgian Standard Dutch speech and Brabant, Limburg, and West-Flemish Tussentaal (the standard fragment and the Limburg Tussentaal fragment were produced by the same speaker). Per fragment, a fluency and Tussentaal-index was computed to investigate the impact of these factors on impression formation. Impe and Speelman’s (2007) findings strongly mirrored what Cuvelier (2007) and Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier (2007) found: Tussentaal-samples commanded low status but high attractiveness ratings. Building on such data, none of the cited speaker evaluation studies regard Tussentaal as a threat to Standard Dutch. Cuvelier (2007: 53) inferred a diglossic situation from his data, to the extent that Standard Dutch, but not Tussentaal is the most appropriate variety for all functions associated with power. In the same vein, Impe and Speelman (2007) conclude that the Belgian Dutch norm for polished usage is still the standard variety.

There seems to be no perceptual support, in other words, for the production data which univocally point in the direction of on-going standardisation. It

should be noticed, however, that all three studies cited in the previous paragraph raise a number of methodological concerns. In Impe and Speelman (2007), the standard and the Limburg Tussentaal-fragment received unintuitively high status scores, an unexpected finding in view of the lack of prestige of Tussentaal. While Impe and Speelman attributed this unexpected finding to the low Tussentaal-index for the Limburg Tussentaal fragment, they could not exclude that comparable evaluations were due to the fact that the samples were produced by the same speaker. And Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier (2007) regarded most of their findings as inconclusive, referring to them as ‘a puzzling pattern of appreciation differences’ (p. 253). The main reason for this, according to the authors, was the fact that ‘Tussentaal proves to be very hard to operationalise as it may cover virtually the entire continuum between dialect and standard language. The question which part of the continuum one selects as a target is a very tricky one’ (Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier 2007: 253).

A second brand of research into Flemish standard language perceptions is represented by the work of Jürgen Jaspers and his colleagues, which Garrett (2005) and Knops and Van Hout (1988: 6–9) would classify under the ‘societal treatment approach’ to language perception. Alternatively referred to as ‘content analysis’, this work infers mostly qualitative attitudinal data from the treatment language varieties and their speakers get within a society. Building on a highly insightful analysis of the propagandistic materials issued by integrationist language planners between 1950 and 1980, Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012) conclude that the language ideology effected by hyperstandardisation has ‘succeeded in creating a collective meta-linguistic consciousness and in thoroughly imbuing the Flemish with the propagated language stratification in which linguistic features are associated with a social hierarchy of speakers and speech situations’ (p. 113, our translation). Crucially, Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012: 113) go on to suggest that this deeply engrained ideology has *not* changed drastically in the meantime, not even on account of the clearly increasing production of Tussentaal: ‘for many Flemings, it is [...] quite normal to manifest a Tussentaal-like practice and, at the same time, to subscribe unequivocally to the necessity of the use, the conservation, and the defence of the standard’ (p. 120, our translation).

In order to substantiate their claim that the standard language ideal is alive and kicking in Flanders, Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012) invoke experimental evidence reported in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman (2011: 217 – cited on their page 119):

[...], the absence of aesthetic appreciation for accented Belgian Standard Dutch could [...] be due to the fact that accented Belgian Standard Dutch is not regarded as standard because non-accented VRT Dutch is the only superior variety in that respect to Belgian listeners, no matter how virtual and non-vital that variety is (or maybe *precisely* because it is so virtual and untainted by practical use): [...] [E]ven in the absence of actual VRT-Dutch, the ghost of this variety impacts the perception of the regional standards.

In this quote, Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012: 119) specifically refer to the design decision in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman (2011) *not* to include VRT-Dutch or Tussentaal in their speaker evaluation experiment into the standard language situation in Flanders. While VRT-Dutch was excluded for the reason cited in the quote, Tussentaal was avoided because it is ‘still so stigmatised that it will immediately and automatically alarm all but the younger generations of Flemings’ (Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman 2011: 206). This design choice was made specifically in view of the failure of previous speaker evaluation designs to uncover any of the prestige which could motivate why Tussentaal is spreading so fast. Rather than just accepting that VRT-Dutch is still the most prestigious variety (as Van Hoof and Jaspers 2012 do), the present paper – as the previous – is an attempt to adapt the speaker evaluation paradigm to the investigation of standard language configurations which involve heavily stigmatised and/or mediatised varieties. Is it at all possible to find any speaker evaluation evidence for their growing prestige?

This paper follows up on the methodology reported in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman (2011) by avoiding the best type of VRT-Dutch as well as fully-fledged Tussentaal as a stimulus. In the experiment reported in the next sections we use informal, regionally accented standard Dutch as spoken by students as a reference point for the perception of speech clips featuring some of the recurrently reported phonological, lexical, and morpho-syntactic features of Tussentaal. Evaluation data were collected to answer two research questions:

1. Can speaker evaluation return prestige values for strongly stigmatised and/or mediatised varieties which are not supposed to have prestige? This question is difficult to answer because the absence of prestige associations either means that speaker evaluation does not return them, or Tussentaal does not have them.

2. In case the answer to the previous question is ‘yes’: which Tussentaal-features command what sort of prestige? Recall that from the perspective of production, Tussentaal is an immediately recognizable variety which is not easy to delineate however (see especially De Caluwe 2009): we know (some of) the production features which characterise Tussentaal, but we are largely ignorant as to which of these have to be present in what proportion for a variety to be called Tussentaal. Little as we may know about the production status of the phonological, lexical, and morpho-syntactic ingredients of Tussentaal, we know nothing whatsoever about their perceptual status.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Experimental speakers and stimulus materials

Experimental speakers were two 3rd year students who majored in Linguistics at the University of Leuven. Speaker 1 was a 20 year old student from the Brabantian town of Diest, which is close to the border with Limburg (as a result, this speaker was often confused with a Limburger, and elicited the negative perceptions typically associated with the Limburg area, see below). Speaker 2 was a 20 year old student from the province of Antwerp, a region associated with high prestige but low solidarity stereotypes (see Deprez and De Schutter 1980).

We constructed eight comparable passages – on the then upcoming Christmas festivities – which were written with a view to be spoken. Two ‘neutral’ passages were produced in colloquial spoken Dutch which reflected the comparatively broad regional accent of the experimental speakers, but contained no specific phonological (beyond the regional accent), lexical or morphological deviations from the standard. In two ‘phonological’ passages three function words (two tokens of the negator *niet* ‘not’ and one of the preposition *met* ‘with’ in the first passage; two tokens of *met* and one of *niet* in the second) were pronounced with a ‘deleted final *t*’, a widely recognised pronunciation characteristic of colloquial Flemish speech and Tussentaal (see amongst many others Cajot 2012: 48). Two ‘lexical’ passages contained three Flemish non-standard lexemes each (the first passage *sacoche* ‘handbag’, *schmink* ‘make-up’, and *nonkel* ‘uncle’, the second *bomma* ‘grandma’, *patatjes* ‘potatoes’, and *sjotten* ‘to play soccer’). And in two ‘morphological’ passages we inserted inflection variables typical of Tussentaal

(Cajot 2012: 48): non-standard diminutive affixes (*spellekes* ‘games’ in the first, *pakskes* ‘presents’ in the second), non-standard pronoun and article forms (possessive *mijne* ‘my’ and the accusative-marked definite article *den* ‘the’ in the first, the demonstrative *dees* ‘this’ in the second), and a non-standard adjective form (*gewoon* instead of *gewone* ‘normal’ in the second). One additional neutral passage and an additional passage containing the morphologically non-standard *pakskes* and *spellekes* and the non-standard lexeme *ambiance* ‘homely atmosphere’ were added to the experiment as distracters. Speakers were asked to produce the passages as spontaneous and fluent as possible, and they were specifically encouraged to avoid any impression of reading aloud. Both speakers produced all ten passages, but the two passages per category which were eventually included in the experiment were never produced by the same speaker.

Measures

Speech stimuli were evaluated on 15 measures which consisted of Likert statements complemented with seven-point scales. We selected measures in function of five recurrently confirmed dimensions of language attitude architecture: personal integrity (this person is – the Dutch equivalent of – *reliable, honest, caring*), solidarity (this person is *popular, entertaining, could be my friend*), traditional status/prestige (this person comes from a *rich* family, likes *classical* music, is *well-bred*), competence (this person gets *good grades, is intelligent, would be a good manager*), and dynamism (this person is *trendy, assertive, cool*). On an additional Likert scale we elicited whether respondents regarded the speech in the sample as beautiful or not.

Respondents

We recruited 135 respondents, demographically stratified with respect to gender (74 male; 61 female) and age. Three age categories were included: adolescents (n = 45; average = 16.12, ranging between 15 and 17), young adults (n = 45; average = 20.18, range 19 to 23) and older adults (n = 45; average = 49.43, range 42 to 55). 92 participants came from the centre of Flanders (62 from Antwerp, 30 from Brabant), and 43 from (more) peripheral regions (28 from Limburg, 14 from East-Flanders, 1 from West-Flanders). Adolescents and young adults respectively were secondary school students and higher education students of various backgrounds. In the older adult group, 11 respondents had not pursued a

higher education beyond their secondary schooling. All respondents were recruited by student assistants as part of the requirements of a course on experimental methodology taught by the second author; student assistants enlisted respondents in their respective Flemish birth provinces.

Procedure

Speech fragments were played from laptops complemented with headphones. Respondents were given an experimental set of 11 pages, the first 10 of which contained the 15 experimental scales for each of the 10 stimuli (8 experimental stimuli and 2 distracters). Speech stimuli and experimental scales were presented in two orders to avoid context effects. The last page contained a number of demographic variables pertaining to the respondents themselves (gender, age, birth province, and education), as well as a debriefing question in the form of an open response item on which respondents were asked to name the goal of the experiment. The analyses reported in the subsequent sections are restricted to the data from respondents who were ignorant about our experimental goal, viz. respondents who had not suggested that the experiment had anything to do with language. This reduction left us with 107 respondents (42 adolescents, 34 young adults, and 31 older adults).

RESULTS

Before we could apply factor analysis to reduce dimensionality in the ratings, we had to remedy the perceptual consequences of the global difference between our speakers' regional accents, which were much more outspoken than the variation we manipulated. In order to prevent the accent variation from eclipsing the difference between the phonological, lexical and morphological stimuli, we standardised the ratings for the two speakers separately before feeding them into the factor analysis. More concretely, we split up the ratings by speaker, and within each speaker-specific subset we standardised the ratings for each measure, which means that for each measure we first subtracted the subset-specific mean from the ratings and we then divided by the subset-specific standard deviation. The effect of this procedure is that for both speakers the mean rating for each measure is (forced to) zero and its standard deviation is (forced to) one. This procedure neutralises two global differences between the speakers in the

factor analysis; first, it neutralises the fact that in the non-standardised data the mean ratings for all measures were consistently higher for speaker 1 (with the differences ranging from 0.77 to 1.61); second, it neutralises the fact that in the non-standardised data the standard deviations for all measures were consistently higher for speaker 2 (with the differences ranging from 0.08 to 0.26).

While these neutralisations do not affect the variation we are interested in, it goes without saying that the factor scores in Table 2 below – which pool over the individual speakers – must be interpreted with some caution (although both speakers manifest proportionally comparable scores). A high(er) score, to be more precise, should not be interpreted in any absolute sense, but as reflecting a relatively strong(er) effect of one of the conditions – neutral, phonological, lexical, or morphological – on one of the factors – dynamism, integrity, or prestige – at hand.

Factor analysis returned a three factor solution explaining 53.4% of the variation in the ratings (after *classical-music loving* – which did not load on any factor – and *cool, good manager, well-bred, and friend* – which loaded on more than one factor – had been removed):

Table 1: Loadings of 10 scales on 3 factors

	Dynamism	Integrity	Prestige
Reliable	0.245	0.541	0.144
Rich	0.118	-0.011	0.658
Good grades	0.058	0.287	0.677
Trendy	0.711	0.133	0.115
Entertaining	0.789	0.244	0.026
Caring	0.191	0.691	0.137
Intelligent	0.189	0.364	0.700
Assertive	0.517	0.179	0.331
Honest	0.129	0.688	0.166
Popular	0.769	0.172	0.120

Our inability to find a good factor solution (viz. which retains all the scales and resolves the best part of the variability in the ratings) suggests either that Flemish listener-judges do not fully converge in their perceptions of colloquial Flemish speech, or that we have failed to find the appropriate adjectives to tap into the attitude dimensions. Only in the case of the second factor did the analysis confirm the scales included in function of that dimension, viz. Integrity. On the first factor, two measures included in function of Solidarity – *popular* and *enter-*

taining – correlated with the features *trendy* and *assertive* to form a dimension which could be regarded as either Solidarity or Dynamism. In view of the fact that the Solidarity-trait *could be my friend* loaded both on the first and the second factor – and was subsequently rejected – and the fact that *popular* and *entertaining* can easily be interpreted as attributes of a dynamic personality, while *trendy* and especially *assertive* cannot straightforwardly be interpreted as Solidarity-traits, we have labelled factor 1 as ‘Dynamism’. On factor 3, the Competence and Status-traits conflated in a factor we label as ‘Prestige’.

In order to compare perceptions of the speech samples across these factors, SPSS computed the factor scores diagrammed in Table 2:

Table 2: Factor scores for four conditions on three factors (pooled over two speakers and over two samples per condition); scores which differ significantly from the Neutral reference value are bold-faced

	Dynamism	Integrity	Prestige
Phonological	-0.092	0.073	0.123
Lexical	0.207	0.045	-0.139
Morphological	-0.168	-0.120	-0.161
Neutral	0.019	-0.029	0.235

Data were analyzed with a linear mixed effects regression analysis (using the `lmer` function in the R package `lme4`). All factors were encoded using dummy coding. For all models discussed below the random effects structure that was selected included both a random intercept for each participant and a random slope of speaker for each participant. Fixed effects that were taken into consideration were `FragmentType` (neutral vs. phonological vs. lexical vs. morphological), `RaterRegion`, `RaterAge`, and `RaterGender`, and their two-way interactions. Significance of fixed effects was established by comparing nested models with an identical random effects structure (with estimates in these models chosen to optimise the maximum likelihood criterion). In the final models, significance of individual levels of fixed effects was established with the criterion $|t| > 2$ (with estimates in these models chosen to optimise the restricted maximum likelihood criterion). We will discuss three analyses, one with Dynamism-scores as the re-

sponse variable, one with Integrity-scores as the response variable, and one with Prestige-scores as the response variable.

The factor *FragmentType* was the only fixed effect factor with a significant effect on Dynamism-scores. The comparison of a model with no fixed effects to a model with *FragmentType* as a fixed effect yielded a result of $p < 0.001$. No other fixed effect factors had a significant effect on Dynamism, and no significant two way interactions between fixed effect factors were found. In the final model for Dynamism, with *FragmentType* as the only fixed effect, the lexical condition (estimate=0.19; $t=2.96$) yielded a significantly higher average score than the neutral condition (=reference level), and the morphological condition (estimate=-0.19; $t=-2.93$) yielded a significantly lower average score than the neutral condition. The average score for the phonological condition (estimate=-0.11) was lower, but not significantly lower than that of the neutral condition.

The factors *FragmentType* and *RaterGender* were found to have a significant effect on Integrity-scores. The comparison of a model with no fixed effects to a model with *FragmentType* as a fixed effect yielded a result of $p = 0.01$. The comparison of a model with only *FragmentType* as a fixed effect to a model with both *FragmentType* and *RaterGender* as fixed effects yielded a result of $p = 0.04$. No other fixed effect factors had a significant effect on Integrity, and no significant two way interactions between fixed effect factors were found. In the final model for Integrity, with *FragmentType* and *RaterGender* as fixed effects, none of the conditions differed significantly from the neutral reference condition, but both the phonological condition (estimate=0.20; $t=3.06$) and the lexical condition (estimate=0.17; $t=2.64$) were found to yield a significantly higher average score than the morphological condition, and the neutral condition (estimate=0.09; $t=1.42$) yielded a higher, but not significantly higher average score than the phonological condition. With regard to the predictor *RaterGender*, female participants gave higher average Integrity-scores than male participants.

The factor *FragmentType* was the only factor with a significant effect on Prestige. The comparison of a model with no fixed effects to a model with *FragmentType* as a fixed effect yielded a result of $p < 0.001$. No other factors had a significant effect on Prestige, and no significant two way interactions were found. In the final model for Prestige, with *FragmentType* as the only fixed effect, both the morphological condition (estimate=-0.39; $t=-5.91$) and the lexical condition (estimate=-0.37; $t=-5.54$) were found to yield a significantly lower average score than the neutral condition, while the phonological condition (es-

timate=-0.11; $t=-1.65$) yielded a lower, but not a significantly lower average score than the neutral condition.

DISCUSSION

If we discuss our findings in terms of the research questions outlined above, then the answer to the first question – can speaker evaluation return prestige values for stigmatised varieties? – is clearly ‘yes’. The most important conclusion of this investigation is that a design which does not feature the very best variety of Dutch – VRT-Dutch – does not return the global downgrading of the stigmatised Tussentaal variety found in earlier speaker evaluation work. A second design choice which probably sustained the attestation of positive Tussentaal-perceptions was the absence of samples in which phonological, lexical, and morphological features of Tussentaal co-occurred. The fact that we distributed these feature types over different samples is in all likelihood the reason why the majority of our respondents were totally ignorant about the experimental purpose; the ensuing subconsciousness (or at least implicitness) of the perceptions collected is undoubtedly a prerequisite for any stigmatised variety to elicit positive impressions (recall that explicit, public perceptions are typically conservative and sceptical of nonstandard varieties).

A second advantage of our single feature-approach is the possibility to zoom in on the perceptual correlates of different ingredients of Tussentaal. This brings us to our second research question about the *nature* of the prestige perceptions harvested. Unsurprisingly, we did not find any traditional prestige perceptions, though downgrading, again, was not global: while lexically and morphologically nonstandard speech was harshly rejected in terms of traditional prestige, there was no perceptual difference between neutral speech and phonologically marked speech. This finding converges with the (anecdotic) observation that the phonological variable manipulated – final *t*-deletion – is becoming increasingly more acceptable in colloquial standard speech. On radio stations and in programmes geared towards younger listeners, *t*-deletion is penetrating the (in all other respects) standard usage of radio presenters such as Truus Druyts.

An interesting finding in view of ongoing research into the prestige-determinants of overtly stigmatised phenomena – see especially Kristiansen (2009) and Grondelaers (2013) – is the fact that some Tussentaal features elicit impressions of dynamism. Again, morphological Tussentaal features were re-

jected in terms of Dynamism, and phonologically marked speech was considered no less dynamic than neutral speech, but speech with typically Flemish lexis was *upgraded* in terms of dynamism. This indicates that by using typically Flemish lexemes, speakers project a trendy, assertive image. Apart from the fact that this is the first time – to our knowledge – that Tussentaal or Tussentaal features are found to elicit positive impressions, it is the media prestige (of which these qualities are attributes) which seems to co-determine the rapid spread of the overtly depreciated Modern Copenhagen speech in Denmark, and the equally rapid dispersion of the notorious subject-*hun* variable in Netherlandic Standard Dutch.

The attestation of Dynamism-perceptions for Tussentaal, in other words, might well be the perceptual key to (standard) language change in Flanders. On a more conceptual note, these (more) progressive language ideologies also constitute the missing link in an otherwise problematic causality: for linguists (like ourselves) who investigate ideological change as a possible determinant of language change, the invariant conservative standard language ideology which is evidenced in content-analytical work by Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012) and in earlier speaker evaluation work (Impe and Speelman 2007; Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier 2007; Cuvelier 2007) is seemingly at odds with the vitality and diffusion of Tussentaal. It is much more plausible to assume that the rise of Tussentaal is ideologically sustained by more progressive ideologies, viz. by the fact that Tussentaal speakers (know they) are perceived as trendy and assertive by their fellow speakers.

While we could emphasise the methodological superiority of our design (which elicits dynamism perceptions, and which keeps participants ignorant about the experimental goal – design decisions our predecessors did not take), we believe that it is more advantageous to distinguish between two ideological systems which are not, however, completely distinct. We propose that the core of both is the conservative standard language ideology, and that this ideology exists in a public and a private format. Whereas the public ideology is for the most part common knowledge – albeit at different levels of specificity – the private version is more variable because it is entrenched in, and informed by personal value systems which pertain to, among others, matters of *identity* (‘to what extent do I regard myself as Belgian or Flemish, as Dutch-speaking or Flemish-speaking?’), *conformity* (‘what is the distance between what I know I should do and what I want to do?’), and *comfort* (‘what is the distance between what I know I should do and what I am comfortable with?’). The answer to these ques-

tions determines how close private ideologies are to the public version. Speakers who regard themselves as Flemish and Flemish-speaking may be more inclined to find Flemish lexis dynamically attractive (although they *know* it is not considered standard) than speakers who think of themselves as Dutch-speaking Belgians. In the same way, speakers who feel uncomfortable with, or insecure about (their proficiency in) Standard Dutch, may find Flemish lexis and pronunciation the ‘easier’ option.

The fact that private evaluations are co-determined by a number of different value systems which may be personal and idiosyncratic (and which are not, therefore, generally shared) may explain why there is so much variability in our experimental ratings that it is difficult to obtain a satisfactory factor analysis (though, again, our choice of adjectives may also be partly to blame). The absence of shared perceptions is a telltale sign that ideological change in Flanders has not yet resulted in a robust new value system to replace or supplement the conservative ideology. Neither do we wish to claim that the almost total absence of demographic speaker effects in the ratings should reveal ‘national’ perceptions irrespective of the gender or age of our listener-judges (as we have in the case of the much more converging regional accent perceptions in Netherlandic Standard Dutch, see Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs 2010; Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010).

Before we come to our conclusion, three additional observations have to be made in connection with the experimental findings and our interpretation of them. Notice to begin with that our proposal of two non-distinct ideologies is very much in the spirit of Kristiansen’s (2009) distinction between conscious and subconscious ideologies, which respectively determine the preference for overtly and covertly prestigious languages in Denmark. We do not believe, however, that the level of consciousness at which the two value systems are processed is the only determinant. The hyperstandardisation which engendered the conservative ideology in Flanders was so far-reaching and influential that it has left most of the Flemish who were educated before the mid 80-ies with a deeply engrained, automatic dislike of non-standard usage (Van Hoof and Jaspers 2012). While we do not follow our fellow linguists of the previous generation in publicly condemning Tussentaal, our immediate reaction to substandard Dutch – as witnessed in, for instance, our teenage daughters’ text messages – is still one of disbelief and at least irritation. Most Flemings, conversely, will have some degree of conscious access into the private evaluations which override some or all of the parameters of the conservative public ideology.

Second, the fact that neither the qualitative approach in Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012) nor the previous speaker evaluation experiments into Tussentaal uncovered the more progressive ideology reported here is a result of the fact that neither of these analyses is equipped – in its current form – to uncover such ideologies. The experiments in Impe and Speelman (2007) and Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier (2007) did not include any traits to elicit attitudes beyond the traditional status and (social or personal) attractiveness dimensions; the fact that analysis was not restricted to ratings by participants who were ignorant of the research goal makes it more likely that relatively more accessible public attitudes were reported instead of evaluations participants are less able or less willing to access and share.

And while the research in Van Hoof and Jaspers (2012) is immensely valuable in that it provides the qualitative flesh on the quantitative bones of our speaker evaluation research, the content analysis method is as good as the content on which it builds. In this specific case, the sources analyzed represent ‘standard language propaganda’ (Van Hoof and Jaspers 2012: 101) issued by ‘the central standard language actors’ (p. 99) between 1950 and 1980, viz. a period prior to the noticeable rise of Tussentaal. The conclusion that the resulting ideology has lost nothing of its vigour nowadays is not supported by discourse analysis of more recent meta-linguistic sources, but by anecdotic evidence only. It is highly probable, though, that a comparably detailed discourse analysis of recent materials – including, ironically, the delightfully controversial volume Absillis, Jaspers and Van Hoof (2012) – would uncover considerably less conservative ideologies.

Third, and most importantly perhaps, we do not wish to claim more in this chapter than that we have uncovered a plausible prestige motivation for the rapid spread of Tussentaal. While we believe that subconscious endorsement of a language variety is a precursor and a motor of its eventual standardisation, the latter largely remains a conscious process which takes the form of (at least) a shared consensus. It needs no elucidation that Tussentaal has not reached that stage yet, though it is entirely plausible – in view of the covert prestige boost and the (concomitant?) vitality of Tussentaal – that some sort of more public standardisation will follow the (preliminaries to the) private standardisation attested here.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have reported a speaker evaluation experiment into the perception of different linguistic features of Tussentaal, the colloquial variety of spoken Belgian Dutch which is widely claimed to be standardizing. In order to counter the claims that this standardisation is not sustained by prestige perceptions, and that VRT-Dutch is still the only ‘best language’ in Flanders, we designed an experiment in which 107 male and female Flemish respondents in three age groups (all participants included in the statistical analysis were ignorant about our experimental goal) rated eight recorded samples of spoken Belgian Dutch – two neutral, two with nonstandard phonology, two with nonstandard lexis, and two with nonstandard morphology – on traits included in function of five dimensions, viz. status, competence, dynamism, personal integrity, and solidarity. Factor analysis eventually reduced these dimensions to dynamism, integrity, and prestige, and a linear mixed model analysis subsequently revealed that whereas nonstandard morphology is harshly downgraded on prestige and dynamism, nonstandard phonology is not downgraded on prestige or dynamism, and that – crucially – nonstandard lexis is *upgraded* on dynamism (whereas it is downgraded on prestige).

The main conclusions we draw from these data are that speaker evaluation can offer access into private perceptions and evaluations of stigmatised language varieties, and that contrary to the dominant public standard language ideology (which categorically rejects Tussentaal), private perceptions reveal dynamic prestige attributions which may co-sustain the alleged standardisation of Tussentaal production. We have proposed, in addition, that public and private standard language ideologies in Flanders are not distinct systems: the core of both is the conservative standard language ideology which was forcefully impressed on the Flemish between 1950 and 1990. In its public shape, this ideology manifests itself in a strict hierarchisation of language varieties, which has been invariant since the beginning of top-down language planning and prescription in Flanders. In more private variants, the ideology is evidently (and probably also increasingly) affected by personal value systems which may override and/or reverse aspects of the public ideology.

The study reported here is inevitably subject to a number of limitations which will be corrected in follow-up work. It should be repeated, first and foremost, that we deliberately excluded VRT-Dutch and fully-fledged Tussentaal from the current design. The best variety represented in the neutral samples of this exper-

iment was regionally flavoured colloquial Belgian Dutch without audible Tussentaal features as spoken by students of linguistics. An undesirable consequence of the perceptual divergence indexed by the different regional accents of the speakers is that we had to standardise the ratings in order to be able to focus on our experimental manipulations. In the follow-up experiment we are currently preparing, we strictly control for accent differences, and we will include VRT-Dutch in one condition to find out to what extent private evaluations of Tussentaal are affected by the best Belgian speech. In a second experiment we will investigate the perceptual consequences of a confrontation of the current neutral, phonological, lexical and morphological guises with a condition in which *all* these Tussentaal features coincide.

An additional problem, finally, which has to be remedied in follow-up work, is the scarcity of adjective traits which appropriately tap into underlying attitude and ideology dimensions (recall that this paucity was cited as another possible reason for the outspoken variability in the ratings). In ongoing experimental work on the perception of the no less stigmatised subject-*hun* change in Netherlandic Dutch (as in *Als we zo spelen krijgen hun natuurlijk altijd kansen* ‘If we play like this they will always get chances’), we attested very clear dynamic perceptions on the basis of picture instead of adjective traits. In order to reduce avoidable variability in the ratings, we will continue further speaker evaluation research into Tussentaal on the basis of the picture scales.

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