

Negotiating linguistic standardization in Flemish TV fiction around 1980: Laying the grounds for a new linguistic normality

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INTRODUCTION¹

In the successful TV series *De Ronde*, ‘The Tour’, aired on the Flemish public broadcaster VRT in 2011, two men called Dieter and Lasse spend the day together in the publicity convoy that precedes the most important annual cycling race in Flanders, the *Ronde van Vlaanderen*, ‘the Tour of Flanders’. Things go far from smoothly, however. Halfway along the route Lasse has to pull up to allow Dieter to answer an urgent call of nature. Since publicity cars are not allowed to break ranks, Lasse is then, much to his chagrin, ordered by a police officer to leave the convoy altogether. When Lasse vents his frustration upon Dieter’s return, the latter counters Lasse’s reproaches by pointing out, in his routine West Flemish dialect, that ‘for [him] it hasn’t been an easy day either’ (*‘t was veu mie ok hene hemak’lijken dah hé!*).

Lasse’s response², formulated in his routine, less dialectal/ more standard style marked by Brabantic features, is a scathing rejection of that argument. After telling Dieter not to talk nonsense (*och zevent nie jongen*, ‘oh don’t talk rubbish man’), he produces a vehemently caricatural imitation of Dieter’s retort:

[wasməwəʔoindɛhmaʔhã:hwɛndæ:hæʔɜ:]

This imitation formally underlines the message of Lasse’s turn: it portrays Dieter’s retort as incomprehensible nonsense by mockingly reproducing some prototypical West Flemish dialect shibboleths, such as the glottal stop (although Dieter’s original utterance doesn’t contain any), and the fricative [h], which is the typical West Flemish pronunciation of the phoneme /ɣ/. After this outburst, Dieter shuts up – i.e., he

¹ This work was partly supported by the Research Council of Norway through its Centres of Excellence funding scheme, project number 223265.

² See www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyQPE2AbGXs.

accepts the aggressive symbolic degradation of his routine speech style, by respecting a “place for ‘no talking’” (Macbeth 1991).

De Ronde as a whole provides an apt illustration of how linguistic heterogeneity is organized in much of contemporary mainstream audiovisual fiction in Flanders, the officially Dutch-speaking north of Belgium (see, for a more elaborate discussion, Van Hoof 2015). The routine speech style of most characters in present-day fiction, including Lasse, is a hybrid style that Flemish linguists often call *tussentaal* or ‘in-between language’ – a term that refers to its identification as deviant from, although at the same time borrowing from, the socially recognized ‘registers’ (Agha 2007) called ‘dialects’ and ‘Standard Dutch’. The growing popularity of this hybrid style has attracted a lot of attention from linguists interested in trying to define its distinctive or stabilizing features (see e.g. Geeraerts and Van de Velde 2013). The difficulty of this undertaking (cf. Grondelaers and van Hout 2011), and the fact that what linguists call *tussentaal* may in specific interactions count as “speaking dialect” or “speaking Standard Dutch” (Jaspers and Van Hoof 2015), illustrates that *tussentaal* is not “differentiable from the rest of the language without using native metapragmatic judgments of norm and deviance as criteria on identification” (Agha 2015: 307). A focus on the characteristics of *tussentaal* thus fails to reveal that naming features *tussentaal* (or ‘dialect’, ‘standard’) “indexes relationships between social groups” (*ibid.*) or locates the name-giver and the object-discourse in a language-ideological framework where speakers are differentiated from each other in relation to their identification as ‘standard’ or ‘deviant’. In this chapter, then, and following Agha in his discussion of slang varieties, we will be using *tussentaal* as a term for a speech style that combines features of what is customarily recognized as ‘dialect’ and ‘standard language’, but also as a term that has been used to position speakers in relation to each other.

Tussentaal has in Flemish TV fiction become a relatively unmarked speech style (Bucholtz and Hall 2004), the use of which allows fictional personae, like Lasse, to mockingly imitate other personae’s dialectal speech styles without fearing or incurring social penalties for it within the local conditions at hand. To be sure, dialects are presented as marked ways of speaking in most Flemish fiction: they are mostly constructed as deviant speech styles that are readily topicalized in metalinguistic comments, and often serve as an easy butt of mockery or amusement – some of Dieter’s lines in *De Ronde* became popular catch-phrases for a while. Not surprisingly in this light, the use of dialects often becomes iconic of characterological deviance as well (cf. Gal and Irvine 1995): dialects are almost invariably assigned to quirky and comical characters, while ‘normal’, serious personae mostly speak *tussentaal*. Finally, the register that is at the top of the socially recognized linguistic hierarchy in Flanders, Standard Dutch, only has a marginal part to play in most contemporary TV series and films. It is recruited for use in formal and institutional

settings (e.g. court cases), but it is hardly ever used by non-institutional voices or in informal circumstances. In *De Ronde*, the only character who produces Standard Dutch is a priest reading the Sunday Mass, and when he greets the churchgoers after the service, he switches to *tussentaal*.

This division of labour conflicts with widespread, long-standing discourses on linguistic variation in Flemish media and education, which customarily reserve Standard Dutch as the exclusive speech style for public discourse. Consequently, the booming use of *tussentaal* has incurred quite some hostility from journalists, educators, intellectuals as well as from the general public. Secondary school books teach pupils to disapprove of this “bedorven Nederlands, morsig en slecht” (‘rotten Dutch, grubby and bad’; see De Schryver 2012: 145). Eminent linguists and literary authors categorize it as “lui Vlaams” (‘lazy Flemish’; Taeldeman in Notte and Scheirlinck 2007), “hamburgertaal” (‘hamburger language’; Taeldeman 1992: 37), “kromtaal” (‘crooked language’; Hertmans 2012) or “koetervlaams” (‘jabber Flemish’; Barnard 1999). Political party brochures and educational policy briefs describe *tussentaal* as a way of speaking that threatens equal opportunities and efficient communication (see Absillis, Jaspers and Van Hoof 2012; Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013).³ Also the public broadcaster VRT frequently finds itself in the line of fire, given its earlier role as one of the main channels for the large-scale and very intense linguistic standardization campaign that was organized in Flanders between the 1950s and 1980s (Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013). In ‘capitulating’ to *tussentaal*, the VRT is accused of legitimizing this type of language use and adding to its prestige (see e.g. Janssens and Marynissen 2003: 149).

Recently, quite a few linguists have interpreted the increased use of *tussentaal*, in mediated as well as unmediated contexts, as a symptom of the gradual weakening of the standard language ideology, i.e., of a process of destandardization. Such interpretations chime in with broader, pan-European appreciations of changing attitudes towards linguistic normativity across Europe. The currently most widely used definition of destandardization is the one formulated by Coupland and Kristiansen, who take the term to “refer to a possible development whereby the established standard language loses its position as the one and only ‘best language’. [...] Such a development would be equal to a radical weakening, and eventual abandonment, of the ‘standard ideology’ itself” (2011: 28). Previously stigmatized speech styles seem to be increasingly getting access to public space and are penetrating the formerly exclusive habitat of the standard, a process which would in effect amount

³ As such, *tussentaal* has been treated much less benevolently than dialects have been, which along the lines of a typically modernist language ideology (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2003) have been mostly romantically cherished as juicy and folkloric remnants of a linguistic past, and which have been considered to have an authenticity and purity that *tussentaal* is seen to lack (see Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013).

to a form of sociolinguistic democratization (*ibid.*; cf. Coupland 2014: 85; Deumert 2010). For Flanders in particular, van der Horst has called attention to a “widening of the norm”, “increased tolerance”, and a “decreasing fear of variation and ‘foreign elements’” (2010: 23), while Willemys has noticed (for the Netherlands as well as Flanders) “an important attitudinal change [that] is upgrading the prestige of intermediate varieties: people seem to take them more seriously and their use is more commendable” (2013: 245–246). Grondelaers and van Hout (2011) and Grondelaers, van Hout and Speelman (2011) have argued on the basis of experimental attitude research that Flanders is experiencing a ‘standard language vacuum’: since Standard Dutch is all but a virtual variety, exclusively used by Flemish news anchors, and given that no other way of speaking is consistently identified as ‘best’ or ‘most pretty’ by test subjects who were invited to judge the regionally coloured but formal spoken Dutch of teachers, no stand-in appears to be ready to replace the virtual norm (*ibid.*: 217–218).

While there certainly is truth in these analyses (see below), we believe that a conceptualization of the current situation in Flanders as a case of destandardization may be mistaking increasing competition between cultural metadiscourses that valorize different speech styles for the demise of a formerly uncontested discourse that put a premium on Standard Dutch. We will substantiate this belief by focusing on Flemish TV fiction in a relatively ‘unsuspected’ period, *viz.* the late 1970s and early 1980s, which are usually considered to predate the above-mentioned changes. Before we do so, we will first turn to the changes that audiovisual media, as well as public discourse about language in Flanders, have gone through since the early 1980s.

CONTEXT: CHANGING SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONDITIONS IN FLEMISH BELGIUM

Analyses of destandardization rightly, in our view, call attention to changing sociolinguistic conditions that collide with traditional metadiscursive regimes. Developments in audiovisual media are part of these changes: gradually increasing technological possibilities have significantly broadened the bandwidth occupied by state-owned broadcasting corporations that inscribed themselves in a largely civilizational mission, and they have offered ample room for new media to invest in specific genres (notably entertainment), to commercialize the consumption of audiovisual products and to recruit whatever linguistic tools can facilitate these projects. In Flanders, the liberalization of the TV market in the late 1980s has led to a more pronounced presence of nonstandard language use in audiovisual media as a sign of authenticity, informality, unpretentiousness, conviviality and ‘dynamism’

(Grondelaers and Speelman 2013; cf. Kristiansen 2001). Whereas the monopolistic VRT still saw language instruction, in the form of didactic radio and TV shows on ‘proper’ (i.e. standard) language use, as a part of its mission to elevate viewers, its priorities have shifted to informing and entertaining viewers in the current competitive media landscape.

Increased ambivalence towards prescriptivism is another change. In line with the receding popularity of discourses of civilization in a now postcolonial age, and inspired by discourses that put a premium on diversity and democratization, more and more language experts and/or exemplary speakers (authors, politicians, TV presenters, sociolinguists, official authorities) have developed an ambivalent relationship towards standard language use, in Flanders as elsewhere. Whereas linguists used to be among the most prominent activists propagating standardization in Flanders (Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013; Van Hoof 2015), and while they are today still often expected to uphold the norm for ‘correct’ language use (cf. Jaspers 2014: 17), (socio)linguists now openly criticize linguistic purism, while expert voices and public and governmental institutions recruit nonstandard language use in their writing, oratory or public communication (Absillis, Jaspers and Van Hoof 2012; Grondelaers and van Hout 2011). Another reflex of the retreat of civilizational discourses has been an increasing anti-elitism, as a result of which standard language speech is portrayed as undesirably intellectualist and uncool (cf. Cameron 1995; Coupland 2010; Mugglestone 2003). Also in Flanders, in many contexts ‘talking proper’, as Mugglestone puts it, has become ‘talking posh’.

In spite of these evolutions, however, there are a number of facts that suggest that it may be premature to announce the demise of linguistic standardization as a historical metadiscursive regime for the organization and domestication of language (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2003). First of all, there are clear signs that, as nation states face the music of the globalizing economy and the new valuation of bi- and multilingualism, they are reinventing rather than relegating (as a sign of the past) the notion of the standard language through representing it as a technology of the mind (Collins and Blot 2003) or as a commodifiable, technical skill that is prerequisite for equal access to jobs, social cohesion and efficient communication – as a result of which, the presence of other languages on national territory is often presented as a threat to these ideals (Heller and Duchêne 2012; Jaspers 2015).

Secondly, we do not think the sheer increase of nonstandard language use in the public sphere, and on television in particular, can be taken as a straightforward sign of the dwindling impact of standardization, at least if we consider the latter to entail a hierarchization of speech styles and the installation of “a system of stratified speech levels linked to an ideology of speaker rank”, instead of a drive towards uniformity in all possible contexts (Agha 2007: 201; cf. Grondelaers and Kristiansen 2013: 10). Although the above-mentioned evolutions undeniably lead to the

emergence of “a society where singular value systems [*viz.*, those that promote one variety as exemplary] [...] are being displaced by more complex and [...] more closely contextualised value systems” (Coupland 2010: 75), linguistic variability in TV fiction and entertainment is, at least at this stage, still governed by an ordering principle that reserves the more authoritative domains (hard news) for standard language use and relegates vernacular language use to less prestigious entertainment genres, where it is mostly produced by non-institutional voices (Androutsopoulos 2010; Coupland 2014). Neither has the massive increase of televisual entertainment implied the demise or degradation of non-entertainment – ‘infotainment’ precisely appears to draw its distinctive appeal as a type of entertainment from its informative character. Furthermore, even though attitudinal studies bear out that *tussentaal* is attributed positive qualities of dynamism, trendiness and assertiveness (Grondelaers and Speelman 2013), there is no evidence as yet that this stands in the way of the idea of a prestige and high-status style that should be used by ‘exemplary speakers’, such as news anchors, teachers or linguists.

Finally, characterizing the current Flemish sociolinguistic situation as a case of ‘destandardization’ raises the question of how the preceding phase (of ‘standardization’?) ought to be conceptualized. More specifically, hypotheses of destandardization in Flanders seem to have often (tacitly) presupposed that prior to the destandardization stage, “the idea of ‘best language’ in its absolute and totalising singularity” (Coupland and Kristiansen 2011: 29) was unproblematic. But “periods are not all of a piece” (Woolard 2004: 58), so that “we cannot just assume that dominant language ideologies exercise a seamless hegemony” (Jaffe 2009a: 246), or ever did so (cf. Coupland 2014: 86). Indeed, even in the period when standardization propaganda in Flanders was at its peak, *viz.* from the 1950s to the 1980s, certain social spaces allowed for a process of critical negotiation with the standard language ideology. Some of these may have had little or no discursive leverage, but other spaces produced “public sphere representations” (Agha 2007: 202) that reached a wide audience, such as the genre of TV fiction on the Flemish public broadcaster.

In what follows then, we will first demonstrate how, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this genre reproduced the stereotypical sociolinguistic hierarchy in which Standard Dutch was at the top and dialect at the bottom, but also inflected and challenged it. This raises doubts about whether Standard Dutch ever fully commanded the former authority and attractiveness that current accounts of destandardization in Flanders seem to ascribe to it. In addition to this we will challenge the assumption that nonstandard, hybrid linguistic practices such as the use of *tussentaal* are necessarily counter-hegemonic practices, resisting or “exist[ing] outside of the normalizing influences of standardization” (Coupland 2014: 86), by demonstrating how the use of *tussentaal* emerges from our TV fiction data as a linguistic practice that is conditioned by, feeds off and partially reproduces a standard language ideology.

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF FLEMISH TV FICTION (1977–1985)

In focusing on TV fiction we align ourselves with the burgeoning sociolinguistic interest in ‘telecinematic discourse’. Whereas this has long been a neglected area in sociolinguistic research, a recent series of predominantly qualitative studies (see e.g. Androutsopoulos 2012b; Bucholtz and Lopez 2011; Gibson 2011) has demonstrated how telecinematic discourse need not be taken as merely reflecting ‘naturalistic’ patterns of sociolinguistic variation in the ‘real’ world, but can be fruitfully analysed as “a site of social action in its own right” (Androutsopoulos 2012a: 142; cf. Agha 2007: 202), where the deployment of linguistic variability in patterns of characterization and in the development of the narrative may have more to reveal about language ideologies than about actual linguistic usage ‘in real life’. In line with this approach, and using an analytical framework loosely based on Androutsopoulos (2012b), we analysed all of the 13 series that the VRT broadcast in the period 1977–1985,⁴ on three different levels. At the ‘macro-level’, we investigated the genre characteristics of every series and inventoried their linguistic repertoires, i.e. the sum of all speech styles used in them. At the ‘meso-level’, we charted the socio-demographics and the narrative importance of the characters within each series, and investigated the allocation of styles to characters. At the ‘micro-level’, we produced detailed interactional analyses of pivotal scenes, containing instances of style shifting and switching, stylizations, i.e. instances of characters momentarily adopting an ‘inauthentic’ voice markedly contrasting with their ‘own’, routine voice, and other instances of metalinguistic commentary. This three-level approach allowed us to assess to what extent the distribution of different speech styles across different series is tied to their genre (drama or comedy), to investigate how linguistic choices are deployed in characterization, and to lay bare the shared as well as the more local social meanings that are attributed to different speech styles in the series.

⁴ These series were, in alphabetical order, *Daar is een mens verdronken*, ‘There a person drowned’ (1983); *De burgemeester van Veurne*, ‘The mayor of Furnes’ (1984); *De collega’s*, ‘The colleagues’ (1978); *De kolderbrigade*, ‘The baloney brigade’ (1980); *De vulgaire geschiedenis van Charelke Dop*, ‘The vulgar history of Charelke Dop’ (1985); *Geschiedenis mijner jeugd*, ‘History of my youth’ (1983); *Hard Labeur*, ‘Hard labour’ (1984); *Maria Speermalie* (1979); *Met voorbedachten rade*, ‘With premeditation’ (1981); *Paradijvogels*, ‘Birds of paradise’ (1979); *Rubens, schilder en diplomat*, ‘Rubens, painter and diplomat’ (1977); *Slisse & Cesar* (1977) and *Transport* (1983).

REPRODUCTIONS OF THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC HIERARCHY IN TV FICTION

Our analysis revealed that at the macro-level, the corpus displays a ‘genre hierarchy’, in which the standardness of language use in a series is at least in part bound up with its prestige, and whether it is (serious) drama or (more popular) comedy. Thus, Standard Dutch is the base style in historical costume drama. Such high-end dramas were often adaptations of Flemish literary classics, made with large budgets, often in cooperation with Dutch TV channels, aired in prime-time on Sunday evening, and considered by the Flemish broadcaster’s management and board of directors as the most important productions in the total output of TV fiction that the VRT produced (Dhoest 2004). Typical for many of such prestige productions is the absence of any socially conditioned linguistic variation. In the costume drama *Rubens, painter and diplomat* (1977), staging the life of the famous baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens, dukes and duchesses, diplomats, craftsmen, innkeepers, prostitutes and homeless people all speak Standard Dutch. The same holds for *Maria Speermalie* (1979), an adaptation for the screen of Herman Teirlinck’s novel of the same name, in which farmers and craftsmen speak no less standard than the landed gentry on whose estate they work.

Other, lower-budget drama productions adapted literary works focusing on rural life in 19th or early 20th century Flanders, rather than on elite circles. The farmers and craftsmen that are the protagonists in these productions, such as the naturalistic drama *Hard labour* (1984), produce an intermediate speech style which appears intended to be as standard-like as possible, while still evoking the dialect that such historical characters would have spoken in reality, through the sporadic use of dialect lexis and the mild (and inconsistent) use of some nonstandard phonology and morphology that linguists would today consider typical for *tussentaal* (cf. Bleichenbacher 2008: 59 ff.). A similar hybrid style is also used in the few contemporary (i.e. non-historical) series produced in the period 1977–1985. While in the drama *Transport* (1983), the *tussentaal* use of some of the central characters (lorry drivers and their wives) also seems to serve as an evocation of a dialectal speech style, for others it arguably is their target style, i.e. intended as a realistic reflection of the actual hybrid speech style of similar people in ‘real life’. Also the *tussentaal* spoken by some characters in *The colleagues* (1978), a tragicomedy portraying a group of co-workers at their office, was intended not as a diluted form of what in reality would be dialect, but as “een natuurlijke spreektaal”, ‘a natural colloquial lan-

guage', reflecting the speech style of "doodgewone mensen", 'perfectly ordinary people'.⁵

All serious drama, then, featured either Standard Dutch, or more hybrid, intermediate language use. Fully-fledged dialect use, in contrast, was mostly limited to comedy. The partly-comic *The colleagues* featured some dialect speakers, as did the popular contemporary comedy *The baloney brigade* (1980) and the nostalgic, 1950s situated sitcom *Slisse & Cesar* (1977). The more prestigious and serious the fictional production, then, the more standard-like the base style used in it.

At the meso-level also, patterns of characterization in the corpus display a clear sociolinguistic hierarchy, with Standard Dutch typically assigned to high-status characters, and *tussentaal* or dialect mostly to the lower-status characters. In the prestigious drama *The mayor of Furnes* (1984), for example, all main characters, who have an upper-class and upper-middle-class background, speak Standard Dutch. One secondary character, the mayor's mother, who is an elderly fisherwoman living in a rural coastal town, uses a hybrid style infused with some nonstandard features (see Jaspers and Van Hoof 2015). This style seems intended to evoke dialect use without using fully-fledged dialect (cf. Vandekerckhove and Nobels 2010). It indexically links nonstandardness with rurality, old age and low social status, and helps project a social hierarchy in which Mayor Terlinck has made a steep ascent of the social ladder from the lowly position where his mother still finds herself.

In the hierarchy of the administrative department where *The colleagues* is set, the blue-collar staff all speak dialect, the mid-level staff use *tussentaal*, and the assistant managers are routine speakers of Standard Dutch. The only exception is office manager Tienpondt, whose dialect use can at least in part (but see below) be read as a relic of his former lower rank: he started his career at the bottom of the social scale, without a university degree, and managed to work his way up to become head of the office. In this way, it looks as though language use in *The colleagues* is at least in part intended to reflect characters' (former or present) social positions, reproducing the stereotypical associations of dialect with lower class positions and of Standard Dutch with high social status.

Thus, mediated public sphere representations of language variation in late 1970s and early 1980s TV fiction at the macro and meso level by and large attest to the uptake and reproduction of the standard language ideology: they display a clear hierarchical ordering in terms of the genres and the characters that different speech styles were assigned to. The linguistic divisions between serious, cultured drama and light-hearted comedy, between the higher and lower classes, and between modern characters and rural folk are fairly clear-cut. Some series, however, partially reinforce traditional taxonomies that associate linguistic standardness with high

⁵ According to the actors that played these characters (see Van Hoof 2015 for further elaboration).

prestige and culturedness, but also partially break them down. This is, not surprisingly, especially the case in comedy, which we will now illustrate by focusing on the micro-interactional level.

AMBIGUATING THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC HIERARCHY IN COMEDY

In *The colleagues* dialect is an index of low social status and blue-collar work, but also of communicative incompetence. Two of the characters that are lowest in rank, classifier Jomme Dockx and coffee lady Madame Arabelle, are routine dialect speakers who time and again struggle with 'difficult' or learned words, complex expressions, abstract language use, and written genres and registers. Madame Arabelle is made fun of when she triumphantly reports to the other colleagues that she has been cured from her recent illness thanks to *aquapunctuur*, 'aquapuncture', a treatment which consisted of inserting needles in her *knoopzenuwen* (literally 'knot nerves', instead of *zenuwknopen*, 'ganglions'). When another colleague uses the expression *Joost mag het weten*, 'heaven only knows', literally 'Justus may know', Dockx asks him with interest who Joost might be. And when Dockx takes an exam in order to get promoted from classifier to clerk, the compulsory essay he writes is a clumsy combination of unnecessarily formal and literary words and expressions, non-existent case forms, contaminations, and registers that are inappropriate in the exam essay genre, such as poetic and judicial language use. Predictably, Dockx's attempt to get promoted ends in fiasco, but not before his co-workers have extensively ridiculed his piece of writing. In such scenes *The colleagues* typifies dialect as a working-class speech style, suitable for use in non-intellectual, hands-on activities, but unfit for the more complex, abstract and intellectual tasks (like writing a letter, or taking an exam) typical of modern, bureaucratic societies. Dialect speakers' limited linguistic competences, then, justify their low position in the social hierarchy at the office.

Manager Paul Tienpondt, however, breaks up the stereotypical association of dialect with low social status and inarticulateness: his no less salient dialect use has never hindered him in becoming head of his own department and acquiring the corresponding material wealth (he owns an apartment at the Belgian coast and one in Salou, Spain). He is witty and *ad rem*, and none of his subordinates question his authority or doubt his intellectual capacities. This high-status dialect-speaking character can afford to speak a markedly less than standard style, and thereby implicitly casts doubt on whether a sound competence in Standard Dutch is the *conditio sine qua non* of social mobility in late 20th century Flanders, as advocates of Standard Dutch have always (and up to this day) maintained.

The slightly subversive character Tienpondt shows that dialects did not entirely “know their place” (Coupland 2014: 90) in *The colleagues*. Moreover, what contributed to the “fracturing of traditional indexical relations” (*ibid.*) was the show’s playful recycling of the linguistic instruction that the VRT broadcast between the 1950s and 80s in various didactic shows on radio and TV. Echoing those purificationist ‘language tips’, standard-speaking second head of department Bonaventuur Verastenhoven constantly corrects his colleagues’ ‘faulty’ use of Flemish or French words and expressions into ‘proper’ Dutch, in response to which his co-workers are offended, ignore him, show their irritation by parroting him, or explicitly voice their indignation about what they consider to be unwanted, bossy and finicky remarks. Greatly contributing to the parodic quality of Verastenhoven’s characterization is the fact that his characterological oddities are piled on thickly. His purificationism extends beyond the linguistic domain, as he suffers from bacillophobia, and his marital status – at forty still unmarried and living with his mother – as well as his high-pitched voice and laugh suggest, in the hetero-normative frame of the series, that he is homosexual. In this way, *The colleagues* parodically turns the erudite, refined speaker of Standard Dutch into a patronizing, meddlesome and jaunty closet gay (also see Nesse, this volume).

In addition, the high positions that standard speakers such as Verastenhoven hold at the office are constantly challenged through metalinguistic commentary: lower in rank, nonstandard-speaking characters often produce parodic voicings of standard speech, which (re)produce indexical links between standard speech and pretentiousness and effeminacy. By stylizing standard speech, the nonstandard-speaking characters demonstrate that they are well able to speak Standard Dutch, if they wanted to. By simultaneously keying these performances as hyperbolic and parodic, however, they also signal that standard speech is (in their view) invested with mainly unfavourable connotations, and that this is the reason why, in their routine speech style, they only switch to it purposefully in a limited number of contexts. The following scene, in which *tussentaal* speaker De Pesser imitates Standard Dutch speaker Verastenhoven, provides a good example.

Extract 1: The king of the hat

From *The colleagues*, episode 2. Abbreviated transcription.

Participants and setting: The colleagues are having a coffee break. It has just been announced that Verastenhoven has been promoted to second head of office, at the expense of De Pesser, who also took the exam but remains junior clerk. De Pesser is outraged. Italics indicate stylized Standard Dutch.⁶

1	De Pesser:	[...] <u>ik blijf</u> erbij da Verasten'oven	[...] <u>I maintain</u> that Verastenhoven
2		politieke voorspraak 'eef't g'ad. <u>mijn</u>	has had political mediation. <u>My</u>
3		examen was beter Verasten'oven.	exam was better, Verastenhoven.
4	Persez:	er: hebben nog andere dingen meege-	Other things have also played a part,
5		speeld Te Pesser. cultuur.	De Pesser. Culture.
6	De Pesser:	cultuur?!	Culture?!
7	Persez:	achtergronden.	Backgrounds.
8	De Pesser:	ah dus ik 'eb <u>gene</u> cultuur.	Oh, so <u>I</u> don't have any culture.
9	Persez:	<u>dat</u> heb ik niet gezegd [Jean.]	<u>That</u> I haven't said, [Jean.]
10	De Pesser:	[°hm°] ik heb evenveel cultuur as de	[°Hm,°] I have as much culture as
11		homo sapiens Verasten'oven [hè]	the homo sapiens Verastenhoven,
12			[right?]
13	Persez:	[evenveel] maar een andere.	[As much] but a different kind.
14	De Pesser:	ja, de cultuur van de	Yes, indeed, the culture of the
15		werkmens ja.	working man.
16	Tienpondt:	(((maakt 'rustig aan'-gebaar naar	(((gestures at Persez as if to say
17		Persez)) °()°	'take it easy')) °()°
18	Persez:	[Paul met alle respect] voor de cultu-	[Paul, with all due respect] for the

⁶ Transcription conventions in the original Dutch version in this and the following fragments are as follows:

[text]	overlapping talk
((text))	'stage directions'
=	latching, no pause between turns
<u>text</u>	stress
,	continuous intonation
.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
!	animated tone
:	elongation of preceding sound
[1.0]	duration in seconds
<text>	speech delivered more quickly
>text<	speech delivered more slowly
°text°	speech spoken more softly
()	inaudible speech
(text)	unclear speech, transcriber's guess

- 19 ur van de werkmens maar er is een culture of the working man, but
20 verschil. there is a difference.
- 21 De Pesser: e verschil?! A difference?!
- 22 Persez: ja. Yes.
- 23 Verastenh.: een onderscheid. A distinction.
- 24 De Pesser: een onderscheid! ((gebarend in de A distinction! ((gesturing at
25 richting van Verastenhoven)) zal ik is Verastenhoven)) Now let me
26 demonstreren, dad ik daar even goed demonstrate that I can sit there just
27 kan zitten als de homo sapiens Vera- as well as the homo sapiens
28 sten'oven hèn, med evenveel cultuur Verastenhoven, with just as much
29 hèn! culture, right?
- 30 colleagues: ((zacht geroezemoes)) ((soft buzz))
- 31 ((De Pesser beent naar Verastenhovens bureau en duwt onderweg zijn ((De Pesser heads for Verastenhovens
32 bureau en duwt onderweg zijn kop in de handen van madame Arabelle's desk, on his way shoving his
33 kop in de handen van madame Arabelle's hands)) cup in Arabelle's hands))
34 °Ooh° °Ooh°
- 35 Arabelle: °joei° A:h there we all are again, [my
36 De Pesser: a:h daar zijn we dan weer [allemaal friends! ((laughing)) Hoho!]=
37 vrienden! ((lachend)) hoho!]= [(Come on), De Pesser.]
38 Tien- [(allez). De Pesser.] =I wish you a pleasant day!
39 pondt?:De =ik wens jullie een prettige dag! ((sits down at Verastenhoven's
40 Pesser: ((gaat zitten aan Verastenhovens desk)) Hoho:::!
41 bureau)) hoho:::!
42 er valt hier een berg werk te verzet- There's lots of work to do here!
43 ten! maar:, met een beetje goeie wil, Bu:t, with some good will, right,
44 nie waar, ((maakt beweging met ((gestures)) my friends?
45 handen)) vrienden? ((laughs))
46 ((lacht)) ((takes the phone off the hook,
47 Van Hie: ((neemt telefoon van de haak, ademt breathes on it, wipes it clean with a
48 De Pesser: erop, wrijft hem schoon met een handkerchief)
49 zakdoek)) ((soft chuckle))
50 ((zacht geggrinnik)) ((Persez hands his cup to Arabelle,
51 colleagues: ((Persez geeft zijn kop koffie aan makes 'I give up' gesture, walks up
52 Arabelle, maakt 'ik geef het op'- to Verastenhoven, pats him on the
53 gebaar, loopt naar Verastenhoven, arm. Verastenhoven draws it back.
54 geeft hem een bemoedigend klopje Persez walks away))
55 op de arm, maar die trekt zijn arm
56 weg. Persez loopt weg)) ((in receiver)) Mister Persez! A:::h,
57 ((in hoorn)) menee' Persez! a:::h [Philemon. I'd like to have a conver-
58 De Pesser: [Philemon. ik zou graag es een sation with you about Jean De Pess-

59		<i>onder'oud met u hebben over 'et</i>	<i>er's behaviour. Disgraceful by any</i>
60		<i>gedrag van Jean De Pesser.</i>	<i>standard.]=</i>
61		<i>beneden alle peil.]=</i>	<i>[(soft mutter)]</i>
62		<i>[(zacht gesputter)]</i>	<i>=Plebeian, as you say! ((changes</i>
63	Tienpondt:	<i>=plebejer! zoals u zegt. ((wisselt van</i>	<i>ear))</i>
64	De Pesser:	<i>oor))</i>	<i>Mister party chairman, may I extend</i>
65		<i>meneer de partijvoorzitter, mag ek u</i>	<i>to you my gratitude for the good</i>
66		<i>mijn dank toerichten voor de goede</i>	<i>>offices you've put yourself<</i>
67		<i>>bemoeiing die u zich 'ebt<</i>	<i>out to for my appointment?= ((chuckle))</i>
68		<i>getroost bij mijn benoeming?= ((gegrinnik))</i>	<i>=((changes ear)) The king of the</i>
69		<i>colleagues: ((wisselt van oor)) de koning van de</i>	<i>hat!= (laughs)</i>
70	De Pesser:	<i>hoed!= (lacht)</i>	<i>=Madam, I would like to pop in later</i>
71		<i>Tienpondt: =mevrouw, ik zou straks es even</i>	<i>today in order to purchase</i>
72	De Pesser:	<i>willen binnenwippen voor 'et</i>	<i>a [new hat. With a] little bird on top,</i>
73		<i>aanschaffen van een [nieuwe hoed.</i>	<i>madam! ((chuckles))</i>
74		<i>met een] vogeltje op mevrouw! ((gie- chelt)) ((lager)) <u>ben</u> ek ook mevrouw.</i>	<i>((lower voice)) Well I <u>am</u>, ma'am.</i>
75		<i>(((grinnikt)))</i>	<i>(((sniggers)))</i>
76		<i>(((verontwaardigde geluiden)))</i>	<i>(((indignant sounds)))</i>
77	Van Hie:	<i>[allez Jean!]</i>	<i>[Come on, Jean!]</i>
78	colleagues:	<i>gezien Verasten'oven?</i>	<i>Did you see that, Verastenhoven?</i>
79	Tienpondt:	<i>((legt hoorn neer))</i>	<i>((puts down receiver))</i>
80	De Pesser :		

Even though Persez earlier confirmed off the record that Verastenhoven's promotion was a political appointment, he now suggests, this time in public, that De Pesser's lack of a cultural capital that Verastenhoven does possess (line 13) was decisive (cf. Bourdieu 1996). This is very humiliating for De Pesser: from a purely political matter, which was beyond his power to influence, the missed promotion has now turned into a defeat for which he has himself to blame. De Pesser takes revenge for this severe loss of face with an elaborate theatrical performance, in which he demonstrates that he is well able to master the 'high culture' that standard speaker Verastenhoven epitomizes and which 'working man' De Pesser, according to Persez, should himself pursue, but at the same time also fiercely renounces the tastes and types of behaviour that this culture according to him entails. He does this by imitating Verastenhoven's mannerisms (e.g. his bacillophobia, by cleaning the receiver of the telephone like Verastenhoven does every morning (line 47–49)) and

by stylizing Verastenhoven's routine Standard Dutch (line 36 f.), which contrasts sharply with De Pesser's own routine tussentaal.

De Pesser has his version of Verastenhoven confirm explicitly that his promotion was indeed a political appointment, and has him conspire against De Pesser with an imaginary version of Persez. The finale (line 70 ff.) refers to the new hat Verastenhoven earlier on in the episode intended to buy at the hat shop, 'The king of the hat'. Whereas Verastenhoven was planning to buy a sober hat, De Pesser in his performance turns it into an extravagant piece with a bird on top. The reply 'well I am, ma'am' (line 77) suggests that the imaginary shop lady on the phone, guessing from this frivolous choice, is inquiring about Verastenhoven's sexual inclination. De Pesser thus, in public and in the company of Verastenhoven himself, explicitly voices *and* confirms the rumours about Verastenhoven's homosexuality, an insinuation which results in blatant loss of face for the latter. In Bourdieusian terms, De Pesser ascribes a set of dispositions or a 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1991, 1996) to the 'culture' that Persez refers to – a habitus which he renounces as effeminate and closely entwined with collusion and favouritism, and he portrays speaking Standard Dutch as one of the airs and graces typical of that habitus. He demonstrates how the standard is deployed by its speakers as a mechanism of distinction (*ibid.*), and that it is just one of the symbolic means for sealing off superordinate positions from 'working men' like himself, rather than the ticket to social mobility that advocates of Standard Dutch traditionally claim it to be.

Language-ideological ambiguation and contestation also occur in *Slisse & Cesar*, a nostalgic sitcom situated in the 1950s, in which nearly all of the main characters are affluent, middle-class dialect speakers, and – except for the somewhat simple Cesar – highly intelligent, eloquent and verbally agile personae. In several scenes this counter-stereotypical indexicality of dialect is forged in opposition to Standard Dutch, which is, just as in *The colleagues*, mostly associated with unfavourable characteristics. Thus, one episode features the guest performance of Mister Cocufier, the architect who has designed the new house the Slisse family is building and will soon move into. Cocufier is caricatured as a Standard Dutch-speaking, intellectualistic, wordy and airy type with preposterous 'modern' architectural ideas: he advocates a so-called MCR or 'multi-colour room', with every wall painted in a different colour, on the grounds that 'this progress to a high extent breaks the monotony that is the cause of so many failed marriages', and proposes to have a staircase, for which there is not enough space inside the room, exit the house through a window, calling the technique 'intramuros via extramuros'. The Cocufier character contrasts sharply, and humorously, with Sander Slisse, the dialect-speaking protagonist who has an uncomplicated, somewhat more conservative, but also much more worldly take on the architectural matters that the architect has come to discuss. The confrontation between the two culminates into a conflict over a fireplace, which the archi-

tect did not include in his original design, but which Slisse insists on having installed, instead of the system of air conditioning that the architect has planned.

Extract 2: Life is a stage

From *Slisse & Cesar*, episode 3.

Participants and setting: Slisse, his wife Melanie and Mr. Cocufier are discussing the architect's plans in the Slisses' living room. A chimney is called *schouw* in nonstandard Dutch in Flanders (*schoorsteen* in Standard Dutch), referring to the showcase function of the mantelpiece in the home. *Schouw* is related to English 'show' and is also used in Dutch compounds such as *schouwburg* 'theatre' and in the proverbial expression *het leven is een schouwtoneel*, 'life is a stage', coined by renowned Dutch playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). Slisse plays on this double meaning: he suggests he will have no life without a chimney (*schouw*) at home, and retorts to Mr. Cocufier, who puts these down as Slisse's 'own words', that these are actually Vondel's words, since the latter said that *het leven is een schouwtoneel*, 'life is a stage'.

1	Slisse:	'eet te fabriek 'ien schaa? 'eed e schip	Doesn't the factory have a chimney?
2		gien schaa?	Doesn't a ship have a chimney?
3		[en gaa menieër Krotufier,]	[And you Mister Krotufier,]
4	audience:	[((lacht stil))]	[((laughs quietly))]
5	Slisse:	die paaip in uwe mongd 'edde gaa	that pipe in your mouth do you per-
6		misschien oek gien schaa!	haps not have a chimney either!
7	audience:	[((lacht))]	[((laughs))]
8	Melanie:	[((ruwe stem)) o:ch wad 'ee(t) tat er	[((harsh voice)) O:h what does that
9		na me te moaken!]	have to do with it!]
10	Slisse:	=veel! 'ie:ël veel zelfs. neemt 'em	=A lot! A <u>whole</u> lot in fact. Take his
11		vandoag z'n paaip af, en verplicht	pipe from him today and oblige him
12		'em morgen toebakconditioning te	tomorrow to smoke tobacco condi-
13		smoeëren,	tioning,
14		[en de lol is er af!]	[and the fun's over!]
15	audience:	[((lacht))]	[((laughs))]
16	Cocufier:	[ik ben van mening dat] wij van ons	[I am of the opinion that] we are
17		onderwerp wegdrifven!	drifting off topic!
18	Slisse:	=<in tegendieël menieër>, we draai-	=<On the contrary sir>, we're drift-
19		ven d'r <u>re</u> :gelrecht nortoe! in zoeëver-	ing <u>right</u> towards it! To that extent
20		re zelfs da 'k nu me zeker'eid kan	even that I can say with certainty
21		zeggen, zongder schaa, gien 'oësko-	now: without a chimney, no living
22		amer, zongder 'oëskoamer gien gezell-	room, without a living room no con-
23		lig'ad, en zongder gezellig'ad, gie	viviality,

24	leiven!	and without conviviality, no life!
25	Cocufier: dat zijn <u>uw</u> [woorden!]	Those are <u>your</u> [words!]
26	Slisse: [<u>nee</u>] menieër, da zen de woorden van	[<u>No</u>] sir, those are the words of Joost
27	Joeëst van de Vongdel, dieë gezee	van den Vondel, who has said:
28	‘ee, ‘et leven is e schaatonieël!	‘life is a stage!’
29	audience: [((hard gelach, applaus [8.0]))]	[((hard laughs, applause [8.0]))]

Slisse is clearly winning the audience’s favour in this scene: his witty interventions, his word-play (*Krotufier* instead of *Cocufier*, with *krot* denoting ‘slum’ or ‘shack’, line 3) and the slightly absurd comparison of a chimney and the architect’s pipe (lines 5–6) build up to a climax in which he displays erudition and literateness through inserting Vondel’s famous words into his own plea for a chimney (line 28). The audience welcomes this pun with roaring laughter and long applause (line 29). Slisse moreover gets what he wants: with Melanie’s consent it is decided that the architect will redraw the plans, including a chimney with a mantelpiece. In other words, in this scene the dialect-speaker verbally has the upper hand over the Standard Dutch speaker, and his performance aligns dialect with rhetorical brilliance and interactional superiority. At the same time it is not irrelevant to underline that *Slisse & Cesar* was an overtly nostalgic sitcom. Apart from highlighting the absurdity of ‘modern’ architectural plans, the protagonist also deplored, among other things, people’s obsession with progress and technology, to juxtapose it with the ‘speed of human thinking’. This staging of the series, then, did frame dialect use in a way that is consonant with a standard language ideology: it implied a clear-cut *retour au dialecte* that at the same time communicated that, in all its brilliance, this way of speaking too, or choosing to speak it undilutedly or unambiguously, was a symptom of the past.

STANDARD DUTCH AND DIALECT: VARIABLE INDEXICALITIES

The examples above illustrate how the standard language ideology resonates extensively in the series in our corpus. The typification of dialect as a folkloric, pre- or anti-modern, inarticulate working class speech style chimes in perfectly with how dialect speakers were portrayed in the pro-Standard Dutch propaganda that Flemings were confronted with at school, in youth movements, in language columns in newspapers and magazines, and not least in the purificationist language shows the VRT aired on a daily basis until the 1980s (Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013). TV fiction thus testifies to the relatively wide uptake of this intense and at times quite fierce standardization propaganda, but at the same time also provides indications of critical negotiations with it – the framing of dialect in *The colleagues* and *Slisse & Ce-*

sar, for example, ambiguates, inflects and sometimes explicitly contests its traditional associations, and illustrates that “‘stigmatized’ vernaculars [...] have more positive social connotations as well” (Coupland 2009: 285).

Not unimportantly, also the negative connotations that Standard Dutch exudes in some shows can be interpreted as unintended side-effects of the Flemish linguistic standardization campaign. The explicit equation of speaking Standard Dutch with linguistic fanaticism and radical purism (in particular in *The colleagues*, but also in *Slisse & Cesar* – see Van Hoof 2015) suggests that the lack of success that Standard Dutch has always had outside formal and institutional contexts might, at least in part, be the result of overeager standardization efforts that have backfired, and indicates that linguistic standardization, at least in its most hair-splitting form, was less hegemonic or uncontested than it often is held up to be.

These findings, in our view, complicate hypotheses of destandardization. While most hypotheses of destandardization in Flanders locate the advent of this process at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, and suggest it coincides with the gradually loosening hold of a civilizational metadiscursive regime, our analysis points out that the social meanings of dialect and Standard Dutch constituted complex indexical fields (Eckert 2008) already in a period when standardization efforts were still vigorous. If Flemish TV fiction in the late 1970s and early 1980s goes beyond simple associations of dialect with social stigma and Standard Dutch with prestige and high status, hypotheses of destandardization run into difficulty if they portray such ambiguity, lack of respect for the standard language, or the attribution of prestige to nonstandard speech styles as symptoms of a distinctly new linguistic era (cf. Garrett, Selleck and Coupland 2011). Put differently, rather than having gone through an evolution from a “pro-standard consensus” to a “mixed ideological field” (Coupland and Kristiansen 2011: 32), the Flemish language-ideological field seems to have been mixed already when standardization was still in full sway – illustrating Woolard’s point that “[w]hen periodized worldviews or discourses are taken not as broad-stroke caricatures but as sequential monoliths of thought, with abrupt clean ruptures between them, we miss the important fact of conflict between competing conceptualizations – of language [...] – in any given era” (2004: 58).

In addition, our findings complicate analyses that interpret the growing use and legitimacy of *tussentaal* as a straightforward symptom of the gradual crumbling of the formerly hegemonic standard language ideology (see e.g. Willemyns 2013; van der Horst 2010). In contrast to this view, we suggest that the positive valorization of linguistic hybridity can be conditioned by a standard language ideology and go hand in hand with the (partial) reproduction of that ideology. In our data at least, the use of *tussentaal* does not imply the adoption of an anti-standard, counter-hegemonic stance, but rather, the strategic, often ambiguous and varying (dis)affiliation with

those characteristics conventionally attributed to dialect and Standard Dutch under the influence of an ideology of standardization. This would imply that *tussentaal* is in fact predicated on linguistic standardization, rather than signalling its negation or demise. We explore this hypothesis in the next section.

LAYING THE GROUNDS FOR A NEW LINGUISTIC NORMALITY

A few shows in our corpus, notably *Transport* and *The colleagues*, recruit *tussentaal* as the base style for ordinary people in contemporary settings. The ‘linguistic normality’ of *tussentaal* is most clearly illustrated in *The colleagues*, where its metadiscursive typification contrasts with that of both dialect and Standard Dutch, in several ways.

Compared to dialect or standard speech, the use of *tussentaal* in *The colleagues* hardly ever compromises its speakers. In contrast to dialect speakers, routine speakers of *tussentaal* are rarely challenged to prove their competences in Standard Dutch or in formal or written registers. If they are, they are able to do so quite aptly, and they never have any trouble understanding or using any abstract, learned or otherwise difficult words. Despite its nonstandardness, then, *tussentaal* in this show is generally an index of articulate, verbally competent personae. Moreover, whereas stylizations and imitations of dialect and standard speakers abound, and the *tussentaal* speakers are often precisely the ones who deliver them, their own speech style seems to be a far less obvious target for theatrical performances or metalinguistic commentary, as it is never the object of such (critical or ridiculing) imitations or stylizations. Thus, *The colleagues* implicitly seems to portray *tussentaal* as a ‘normal’ or non-humorous speech style against which other styles stand out as salient, conspicuous and therefore often funny linguistic choices (cf. Billig 2005).

In addition, different types of correction practice are framed differently in the show, depending on the kinds of linguistic ‘errors’ they target. Contaminations, ungrammatical sentences and mangled expressions like those that Dockx and Madame Arabelle frequently produce are invariably ridiculed, and corrections or mockery of such errors, which are often voiced by *tussentaal* speakers, rarely meet with protest from the other colleagues. More often, they respond to them with smiles, grins or laughter that validate and approve the intervention. Such corrections are, in that way, framed as legitimate, and the errors themselves as ludicrous. In contrast, nonstandard words and expressions, often typical ‘flandricisms’ which are frequently used by *tussentaal* speakers as well as by dialect speakers, are only corrected or criticized by Standard Dutch speakers, and most of these corrections meet with irritation and indignation from the other colleagues. Such purificationist interventions are, in other words, framed as over-zealous and illegitimate, and a ‘moderate’

degree of nonstandardness as normal and acceptable. To illustrate this, the following scene shows *tussentaal* speaker Van Hie legitimately poking fun at an error-stricken upward style shift by dialect speaker Dockx.

Extract 3: Get to work

From *The colleagues*, episode 34. Simplified transcription.

Participants and setting: It is morning. Dockx, Van Kersbeke, De Pesser and Van Hie have just arrived at the office. The men are reading their newspapers. Dockx folds his up. ABN stands for *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands*, ‘General Civilized Dutch’, i.e., Standard Dutch. Adelbert is Dockx’s son. Italics indicate (a speech style intended as) Standard Dutch.

- | | | | |
|----|-------------|--|--|
| 1 | Dockx: | j:a! ik zal is <i>aan den ar::beid</i> | Y:es! Now how about I get <i>to work</i> , |
| 2 | | schieten se. | hey! |
| 3 | V.Kersbeke: | Jomme. dad ABN laat ta maar hè | Jomme, leave that ABN, will you, |
| 4 | | seg ik ken u zo nie. | that’s not how I know you. |
| 5 | Dockx: | jamaar ik moet van m’nen Adel- | But my Adelbert tells me to |
| 6 | | bert <i>ta</i> spreken! | speak <i>that!</i> |
| 7 | Van Hie: | ((grinnikend)) hij moet van zijnen | ((grinning)) His Adelbert tells him |
| 8 | | Adelbert ((nadrukkelijk)) <i>dat</i> | to <i>speak that.</i> |
| 9 | | <i>spreken.</i> | |
| 10 | Dockx: | ja en gij moet taar niet <i>met</i> | Yes, and you should <i>not</i> laugh <i>at</i> |
| 11 | | lachen. | that! |
| 12 | Van Hie: | ((nee schuddend)) ik lach daar | ((shaking his head)) I do <i>not</i> laugh |
| 13 | | niet <i>met.</i> | <i>at</i> that. |

Dockx, whose precocious son Adelbert is a staunch defender of Standard Dutch (ABN), tries to demonstrate to his colleagues that he is well able to speak the standard himself as well. In doing so, however, he cuts a poor figure: he uses the wrong word order (*ik moet van m’nen Adelbert dat spreken* instead of *ik moet dat spreken van m’nen Adelbert*, ‘my Adelbert tells me to speak it’ (lines 5–6)), a syntactic error which is immediately mockingly imitated by Van Hie in lines 7–9. Trying to get back at Van Hie, Dockx only makes it worse: in an attempt to carefully pronounce all his final /t/’s (which ought to be pronounced in Standard Dutch, but are often deleted in nonstandard Dutch), he makes another mistake, by using the preposition *met*, ‘with’, instead of the adverbial equivalent *mee*, ‘with’, that is required in this syntactic context (lines 10–11). This again results in a mocking echo from Van Hie (lines 12–13).

Van Hie’s routine speech style is not Standard Dutch either: if he were talking *in propria persona* he would most probably say *hij moet ta spreken van zijnen Ad-*

elbert (cf. lines 7–9) and *ik lach daar nie mee* (cf. lines 12–13), and thus produce a form of *tussentaal* that shares the /t/-deletion in *ta* and *nie*, the progressive assimilation in *ta* and the inflected possessive pronoun *zijnen* with Dockx's dialect (in contrast to Standard Dutch 'dat', 'niet' and 'zijn'). Despite the nonstandardness of his own routine speech, though, he here demonstrates that he is nevertheless more than knowledgeable about the standard, through a mocking imitation of Dockx's mistakes relative to the grammatical rules of that variety. He can legitimately perform this correction practice (without being put down as finicky by any of the other colleagues) and firmly positions himself as verbally competent: he signals that, in contrast to the dialect speaker, he is well able to produce Standard Dutch if needed, even though he does not do so routinely.

All in all, then, speaking *tussentaal*, i.e., using a hybrid speech style which is nonstandard and 'mildly' regional, but *not* strongly local and markedly dialectal, is portrayed in *The colleagues* as normal, legitimate and perfectly compatible with articulateness and verbal agility. Speakers of *tussentaal* are able to style themselves as non-elitist and still professionally competent. A strongly locally coloured, i.e. 'fully-fledged', dialectal style, in contrast, is indexical of communicative incompetence, whereas Standard Dutch is constructed as socially overbearing. A different typification of these speech styles would of course have been perfectly possible (see Van Hoof 2015 for examples of the non-ironic use of Standard Dutch as a base style in fiction). And since it is difficult to investigate what *tussentaal* in *The colleagues* sounded like to late 1970s and early 1980s ears, it is not unimaginable that our representation of *tussentaal* as a 'normal' and unmarked speech style may ultimately have more to do with current conceptions of such language use, and with sociolinguists' sympathy for vernacular rather than standard speech styles, if not with finding historical legitimacy for a speech style the authors of this chapter use themselves on a daily basis.

But to drive this argument home, one would have to disregard the fact that *The colleagues* frequently alluded to linguistic standardization and its conventional typification of styles in the first place; one would equally have to ignore the impact of a more general evolution that Giddens (1991) has called the emergence of a 'post-traditional' society, where social roles are less defined than before and have to be actively negotiated. In this light, our findings suggest that producing a hybrid mix that combines features of both Standard Dutch and dialect creates a convenient 'indeterminacy' (Jaffe 2009a, b) that allows speakers to capitalize on the positive connotations of dialect and Standard Dutch at the same time as it helps them to avoid the negative connotations of both speech styles. As Jaffe (2009b:18) argues, identity work can be motivated towards claiming singular, fixed, well-recognized social categories for the advantages this confers upon the speaker (such as authority, or authenticity). But speakers may also

exploit indeterminacy in language use as a way of resisting processes of regularization, reglementation and categorization, using their agency to suspend definition when being clearly defined creates dissonance, personal or interactional conflict, discomfort or disadvantage. Because multiple social and linguistic positions, identities and stances are relevant or useful for social actors, they can have an interest in exploiting the fundamental indeterminacy or multivalency of language use to maintain flexibility of self-presentation in potentially unpredictable or volatile social fields of reception and interpretation. (Jaffe 2009a: 242)

Considering the various jokes and types of ridicule that linguistic practices evoked in a series such as *The colleagues*, it is not far-fetched to suggest it is an “unpredictable or volatile social fiel[d] of reception and interpretation” for the different speech styles that are produced there. And in this light, it makes sense for those characters who seek “flexibility of self-presentation” to produce a mixed, “indeterminate” type of Dutch that “suspend[s] definition” or mitigates the extent to which speakers can be held accountable for identities or stances taken up or ascribed to them (Jaffe 2009b: 18). Those characters who use *tussentaal* indeed align themselves flexibly with characters along the office hierarchy, depending on their roles and relationship in each new participation framework. Extract 3 provided an illustration of how *tussentaal* speakers dis-align from dialect speakers, while Extract 1 showed, conversely, one of the numerous instances where *tussentaal* speakers disaffiliate, and sometimes quite strongly so, from the standard speakers, through producing parodic voicings of standard speech. Such variable strategies of alignment are also displayed in other ways. De Pesser’s self-presentation as a ‘working man’ (see Extract 1), for instance, is corroborated by his voting for the socialist party and his being a union representative. At the same time he is eager to make promotion, and he frantically attempts to conceal his modest living conditions from his colleagues, by lying about the fact that he rents (and does not own) his house, by pretending the house has a garden, and by bragging about travels to the Canary Islands (while his yearly holiday is a week much closer to home, in the Ardennes). Thus, he strategically aligns himself, depending on the context, with working or middle class attributes, positions and aspirations.

CONCLUSION

The occurrence of *tussentaal* in *The colleagues* was not new; there were already reports of its existence in the pro-standard discourses of the 1960s and 1970s, where it was often presented as a regretful hotchpotch that remained far below standard

language expectations (see Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013).⁷ But the producers of *The colleagues* and the actors who used this speech style on this show did not seem to regard it (anymore) as a ‘failed Standard Dutch’, nor as a ‘mild’ evocation of dialect (compare the section ‘Reproductions of the sociolinguistic hierarchy in TV fiction’ above), but to valorize it as a normal, non-conspicuous if not respectable speech style, associating it with (what were regarded as) socially more acceptable personae. This valorization on the one hand stood (and still stands) in competition with the predominant explicit evaluations of this speech style in hegemonic metadiscourses which put a premium on Standard Dutch. But on the other hand it also feeds off these discourses, as *tussentaal* speakers in *The colleagues* could also be seen to engage in correction practices and reproduce the hegemonic linguistic hierarchy to assert their superiority *vis-à-vis* dialect speakers.

There is of course a difference between arguing that individual speakers in TV fiction are strategically exploiting the indeterminacy that hybrid speech styles can offer, and suggesting that a whole community has consequently accepted this hybrid speech style to avoid undesirable identity attributions. But TV fiction and the different competing cultural metadiscourses it helped circulate can be argued to have at least had an impact on the “social life of [the] cultural value” (cf. Agha 2007: 190) of different speech styles in Flemish society, and for the most popular of these series, this impact may sometimes have been considerable. *The colleagues* for three seasons brought into circulation metadiscursive depictions of Standard Dutch, dialect and *tussentaal* in which the discourse of the Flemish standardization campaigns clearly resonated, but was also critically reworked, before a viewing audience equalling nearly one-third of the Flemish population. Regardless of how the members of this audience responded to them in their own subsequent (meta)discourse, seeking to align their self-images (partly or wholly) with the characters depicted in *The colleagues*, or not (cf. Agha 2007), the show in any case “create[d] a memorable cast of fictional characters, whose popularity made the link between accent and social character more widely known” (*ibid.*: 214).

It does not seem implausible either to suggest that, beside TV fiction, other contexts also offered room for similar negotiations with the hegemonic standard language ideology and for alternative metacultural typifications. Also in TV entertainment and certain unmediated contexts, the success of *tussentaal* may have been, and probably still is, in large part due to the need for a multivalent speech style that

⁷ This representation also has its fictional counterparts in our corpus: imperfect renditions of Standard Dutch, exhibiting interference from dialect, are produced by Jomme Dockx in *The colleagues* (as we saw in Extract 3 above), but also by Melanie Slisse in *Slisse & Cesar* when she tries to accommodate and express her deference to architect Cocufier, and by an agitated and slightly panicking Sander Slisse, when he addresses the doctor who will help his daughter deliver her baby.

indexes “multiple social and linguistic positions, identities and stances” (Jaffe 2009a: 242) as potentially available and relevant in a post-traditional society. Such flexible positioning only seems to be encouraged by (and indeed, may be taken ‘more seriously’ (cf. Willemyns above) as a result of) the increasing tension between the processes of democratization, informalization and commodification since the late 1980s and 1990s on the one hand, and on the other hand the legacy of linguistic standardization and the various attempts to revalorize it as an economic necessity and civic duty.

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