

A perceptual typology of standard language situations in the Low Countries

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces and pools speaker evaluation data in support of empirical criteria to measure abstract concepts such as ‘standard language ideology’ and ‘standard language ideal’. The four criteria – speaker prestige, accent status, perceived beauty, and communal consensus – are subsequently invoked to answer (controversial) questions about the current standard language status of Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch. The basic hypothesis to be tested in this respect is the suggestion that Netherlandic Dutch has retained but relaxed its standard, while Belgian Dutch is currently a standardless variety.

Let us first define a standard language in terms of the three criteria Auer (2011: 490) outlines. A standard language is:

1. a COMMON LANGUAGE, which ideally shows no variation in the territory in which it is used. Standardisation aims at uniformity and is typically hostile to variability (Milroy and Milroy 1985);
2. an H VARIETY, which has overt prestige and is used in formal situations;
3. a CODIFIED variety, to the extent that ‘*right* or *wrong* plays an important role in the way in which speakers orient towards it.’

It is a well-known fact (see Deumert and Vandebussche 2003 for an overview) that all European standard languages are currently undergoing extensions which are regarded as a threat to their uniformity (in the country report devoted to Netherlandic Dutch [this volume] we have referred in this respect to the emergence of regional and social accent varieties, but also to the rapid dissemination of the subject use of the object pronoun *hun* ‘them’). This chapter, however, challenges the claim that standardness can be determined in terms of uniformity on the level of language production. Apart from the well-known fact that any spoken language is inherently variable and can never be fully standardised (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 22), there is evidence that even speech which is unquestionably and emblematically standard is still variable: Smakman (2006), for instance, found considerable phonetic divergences between Dutchmen who had been selected by a large panel of informants as the ‘best’ speakers of Dutch. It is unsurprising, therefore, that ‘the amount of variation which is allowed within the confines of the norm is not theoretically specified’ (Willemyns 2003: 113), ‘presumably because there is no way of describing or delineating it.’

We have argued instead (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010a, 2011) that variability in the production of Standard Dutch does not equate to non-standardness when it is accepted in the communal assessment which ultimately determines what is standard or not. Sociolinguists have referred to this communal assessment in terms of the notion ‘standard language ideology’ (SLI). SLI designates a normative ideology imposed and sustained by institutions such as (formal) education and the media, but maintained by (silent) agreement between the lan-

guage users. The term ‘standard language ideology’ (SLI) was coined in Milroy and Milroy (1985: 23) to denote ‘a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent’. On a related note, Silverstein (1979) defines ‘linguistic ideology’ as a ‘set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use’ (Silverstein 1979: 193; repeated in Woolard 1998: 4).

If standard language, therefore, is ‘an idea in the mind rather than a reality’ (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 23), defining and delimiting standard language or standard language change entails investigating SLI and changes within it. The basic question in this respect – how do contemporary SLIs reflect and construct the increasing variability in European standard languages? – is the main objective of the pan-European research network called ‘Standard Language Ideology in Contemporary Europe’ (SLICE), which unites scholars from 14 European communities (including The Netherlands). Ongoing work in the SLICE consortium is currently focusing on two scenarios for standard language change, one whereby increasing variability eventually leads to the abandonment of the standard language ideal (roughly converging with Fairclough’s (1992) *destandardisation*), and one whereby increasing variability does not challenge or threaten the standard language ideal, but ‘stretches’ the standard to include regional and social variation (roughly converging with Mattheier’s (1997) *demoticisation*).

While these two scenarios intuitively grasp some of the contemporary standardisation dynamics at work in Europe, they are difficult to apply to concrete standard language situations because the distinguishing feature – is the standard language ideal lost or preserved? – is for obvious reasons hard to measure. We will therefore concentrate on the standardisation of Dutch in this chapter, a European language whose national varieties – Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch – will be shown to embody both scenarios, and we will try to uncover the basic perceptual parameters along which the Belgian and Netherlandic standard language situations vary and change. In spite of the fact that the sociolinguistic tradition has attributed comparable standardisation processes to Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch, we have argued elsewhere (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011) that while Belgian Dutch seems to be abandoning its imported exoglossic standard, the Netherlandic Dutch standard appears to be ‘stratifying’ to include some regional and social variation. In this chapter we will substantiate these claims with attitudinal data collected in a series of identically designed speaker evaluation experiments carried out in The Netherlands and Belgium. Both the Netherlandic and Belgian experiments build on speech samples extracted from the same corpus, a stratified selection of sociolinguistic interviews with Belgian and Netherlandic secondary school teachers of Dutch, a profession which regards itself as the last ‘guardian of the standard’ (Van de Velde and Houtermans 1999).

In the next sections we first summarise the (early) sociolinguistic history of the Low Countries that lead to the emergence of the national varieties of Dutch. The subsequent sections review the present-day standard language situation in The Netherlands and Belgium respectively.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND¹

In the summer of 1585 the standardisation of Dutch as the national language of the Low Countries came to a dramatic halt in the southern provinces (present-day Flanders), when Spanish troops recaptured Antwerp, while the Northern provinces – the present-day Netherlands – managed to rid themselves of the Spanish at the same time. In The Netherlands the development of a Dutch prestige variety as part of the newly acquired national identity gained momentum in the 17th century, whereas in Flanders the subsequent Spanish, Austrian and

¹ In this section we limit ourselves to a succinct overview adapted from Geeraerts, Grondelaers and Speelman (1999), Geeraerts (2001a), Willemys (2003) and Vandenbussche (2010).

French authorities rejected Dutch as a language for government, culture and education, and promoted French for these high purposes. Around 1800, as a result, Dutch was no more than a concatenation of dialects in Flanders, inappropriate for supra-regional use. The foundation of the Belgian state in 1830 did not alter this situation, because the French-speaking bourgeoisie which dominated the new kingdom was even more hostile to Dutch.

In the course of the 19th century, the so-called 'Flemish Movement' started to fight the discrimination of Dutch and speakers of Dutch in Flanders, insisting on the necessity of a supra-regional prestige variety of Dutch for low *and* for high functions. For the actual implementation of this variety, there was a particularist faction which supported the endoglossic standardisation of Belgian Dutch, and an integrationist faction which supported the adoption of the available Netherlandic standard. The integrationist faction eventually won out, and it has continued to determine the language-political agenda in Flanders up to this day.

It took until 1898 before Dutch was recognised as an official language in Belgium alongside French, and until the period between the World Wars before (some sort of) Standard Dutch had reached the greater part of the Flemish population, and had penetrated to the lower social strata. However, it was only with the advent of radio and television after World War II, and Flemish exposure to Netherlandic Dutch in these media, that the integrationist programme really gained momentum. The Belgian population was actively and consciously encouraged to take over the Netherlandic standard in a number of influential newspapers and TV shows designed to 'clean up' Belgian speech and writing. Remarkably, these efforts succeeded in providing 'almost an entire population in a couple of decades with a more or less new language or, to put it more correctly, with a less known variety of their own language' (Willems 2003: 111).

The Flemish diffusion of a standard variety of Dutch was sustained by a series of language laws whose main outcome was that after 1930, Dutch was the only official language in Flanders. Owing to its growing economic success and the successive reforms of the Belgian state, Flanders has developed into a largely autonomous community which has come 'of age on the cultural, social, and political level' (Vandenbussche 2010: 311). The latter has changed the Flemish underdog attitude into a spirit of self-consciousness directed against the French-speaking Belgians *and* towards The Netherlands. This new-found assertiveness is one of the main reasons for the dramatic changes in the present-day Flemish standard language situation that will be outlined shortly. First, we briefly zoom in on the current situation in The Netherlands (which has been reviewed in detail in the country report), but we also concentrate on a factor which has engendered standard language change in Flanders as well as in The Netherlands.

NETHERLANDIC DUTCH IN LATE MODERNITY

Recall from the country report that spoken Netherlandic Standard Dutch – the uncontested lingua franca of all the Dutch – originated from the speech of the higher social classes in the Randstad (the urban concatenation of Holland and Utrecht's major cities Rotterdam, Den Haag, Amsterdam and Utrecht in the west of The Netherlands). Recall also that the integrity of this Western-flavoured standard is currently 'threatened' by advancing regional and social accent variation. Especially the latter – the lowered pronunciation of some diphthongs associated with pop culture prestige (Smakman 2006: 50) – has been forcefully rejected by linguists such as Stroop (1998), who insists on a spoken standard without systematic variation. The emergence of regional and social group differentiation within the standard motivates Stroop (2010) to announce the upcoming demise of Standard Dutch in a number of influential publications.

In Grondelaers and Van Hout (2010a and 2011) we have proposed an alternative to Stroop's norm degradation-approach in which neither of the emergent regional and social

varieties represent extensions outside the accepted norm. We have suggested instead that the standard is *stratifying* to become indexical of the speaker's regional origin – hence the emergence of regional flavouring – and of the speaker's social profile – hence the progressive acceptance of the lowered diphthongs. Two factors were proposed for this stratification. Since the 1980s, to begin with, Standard Dutch has no longer been the exclusive property of indigenous Netherlanders: the influx of migrants whose native language is not Dutch (inhabitants of the former colony Suriname, and migrant workers of especially Turkish and Moroccan descent), has changed the linguistic landscape dramatically. A more important factor (Gronde-laers and Van Hout 2010a: 234–236, but see also Milroy and Milroy 1985: 108 ff. and Crystal 1994) is the socio-psychological fact that standardisation-induced uniformity runs counter to a quintessential function of human language, viz. communicating social meaning. Even though linguistic standardisation is incited and imposed from above for political, ideological, or commercial purposes, it is threatened from within by spontaneous socio-psychological motives of the language users themselves: in any society in which people have identities and allegiances to maintain and decode on the basis of (systematic) linguistic cues, variation is likely to persist.

Crucially, the most important linguistic vehicle for communicating regional affiliation is rapidly vanishing: massive dialect loss in The Netherlands has been reported in Willemys (1997, 2003, 2007), Vandekerckhove (2009), Smakman (2006) and Hinskens (2007), although the southern province of Limburg seems to resist the trend somewhat. It is this demise of the regional dialects, we claim, which puts pressure on Standard Dutch to stratify and incorporate meaningful variation (see Willemys 2007: 270–271 for a related view). In this tension between uniformity and variability, a mild regional accent represents the 'best of both worlds' (but see below). A regional accent is tiny, unobtrusive, and it takes years of training to get rid of, even for language professionals whose speech is standard in every other respect. At the same time, a regional accent is immensely meaningful because it indexes 'stable socio-regional groups that are associated with a number of (very) persistent stereotypes' (Gronde-laers and Van Hout 2010a: 235).

The cited evolution in Netherlandic Dutch – standard stratification as a result of dialect loss – is one possible instantiation of the demoticisation scenario introduced in the Introduction, whereby increasing variability does not challenge the idea that there is a best language, but merely increases the number of varieties which satisfy this best language ideal. The term 'demoticisation' was coined in Mattheier (1997), but borrowed in Auer's account of standard change (which runs largely analogous to ours). According to Auer (2011: 500), 'speakers develop intermediate forms, which results in the emergence of new ways of speaking that avoid the negative social prestige now attached to the dialects but nonetheless display regional identity'. In a more advanced situation still, Auer (2011: 501f.) goes on to argue, this development engenders a multi-stylistic standard variety which is 'demoticised', 'extended from a spoken version of the written standard to a variety suitable for spoken, face-to-face interaction, also by less educated speakers' (Auer 2011: 500). In order to steer clear of negative associations, we continue to use the term 'standard stratification' (also implied in Auer 2011: 501) instead of demoticisation.

No matter how plausible the standard stratification scenario sounds, our case against the (much more influential) norm degradation accounts of variability in the standard remains tentative until we can access the ideology/ies which negotiate or construct the variability. If, as Woolard (1998: 16) claims, language attitudes are 'socially derived, intellectualised or behavioural ideology', then an investigation into native speaker attitudes towards variability in the standard may return more reliable answers to questions such as 'how can we determine whether the standard language ideal is maintained or abandoned in Netherlandic Dutch?', 'which varieties in addition to the traditional standard satisfy that standard language ideal (if

such still exists)?', and – ultimately – 'how much variability is accepted in a standard language?'

In order to answer these questions we will report the findings from a series of speaker evaluation experiments based on speech clips from the Netherlandic component of the Teacher Corpus (Van Hout *et al.* 1999), a database of 160 informal sociolinguistic interviews with Belgian and Netherlandic secondary school teachers of Dutch, stratified for gender, age, and region (teachers were told in advance that their speech was being recorded for inclusion in a corpus of standard Dutch). The Teacher Corpus was compiled to document contemporary changes in the 'best' Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch available in actual practice². While the Netherlandic speakers in the corpus are standard speakers in almost every respect, their speech manifests systematic variation to the extent that nearly all of them have a regional accent which can effortlessly be identified by untrained native speakers.

BELGIAN DUTCH IN LATE MODERNITY

Any discussion of the present standard language situation in Dutch-speaking Belgium is bound to be controversial at this moment, for there is no uncontested and vital variety of spoken Belgian Standard Dutch (BSD). The generally upheld model of spoken BSD has always been 'VRT Dutch', the variety spoken by official broadcasters on the Vlaamse Radio en Televisie ('Flemish Radio and Television'). Since its foundation in 1930, VRT has been a major proponent of integrationist ideology by actively promoting an exoglossic variety of Standard Dutch modelled after spoken Netherlandic Dutch (see Van de Velde, Van Hout and Gerritsen 1997 and Vandebussche 2010 for a more extensive account). The result is a highly uniform standard³, which adheres to the strict pronunciation criteria VRT imposes on its broadcasters, but which is also (and increasingly) regarded as a 'virtual colloquial variety (...), desired by the authorities, but rarely spoken in practice' (De Caluwe 2009: 19). Many linguists agree that the VRT standard of Belgian Dutch represents an unattainable ideal which is realised by only a small minority of Dutch-speaking Belgians, 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' BSD attested nowadays in actual practice is the variety documented by the speech of the Belgian speakers in the Teacher Corpus (cf. above), but only a small minority of them approximates the strictest VRT norm. Like their Netherlandic colleagues, the majority of the Belgian teachers have an identifiable regional accent, and a sizeable proportion even manifests features which are generally regarded as non-standard (such as *t*-deletion in function words). Both VRT Dutch and Teacher Dutch – which can in fact be regarded as 'VRT Dutch light' – are currently losing ground to an endoglossic variety of colloquial Belgian Dutch which is neutrally referred to as 'Tussentaal' (literally, 'in-between language') because it is a more or less autonomous variant between the standard and the dialects. Although Tussentaal is immediately recognisable to Belgian speakers, it cannot easily be characterised in terms of necessary and sufficient features. Nevertheless, Goossens (2000: 9–11), De Caluwe (2002: 57–58), Geeraerts and De Sutter (2003: 57–60), and Plevoets, Speelman and Geeraerts (2007: 180–182) provide a list of defining features which pertain to the domains of pronuncia-

² According to Smakman and Van Bezooijen (1997), linguistically untrained listeners regard radio and television newsreaders as more representative standard speakers than teachers of Dutch, but their speech is typically scripted and non-spontaneous. In addition, teachers of Dutch have an acknowledged norm-instantiating function as first-line dispensers of the standard language (Van Hout *et al.* 1999; Van de Velde and Houtermans 1999).

³ Although VRT Dutch was modelled after the most formal Netherlandic Dutch, its pronunciation is audibly different (Geeraerts and De Sutter 2003: 55), especially because long vowels are not diphthongised (as is typically the case in most varieties of spoken Netherlandic Dutch) and the voiced fricatives [g], [v] and [z] remain voiced (whereas they are frequently devoiced in Netherlandic Dutch).

tion and the lexicon, but also and crucially (Goossens 2000) to the morpho-syntax of Dutch. According to Taeldeman (2007), the defining characteristics of Tussentaal are dialectal elements which are not typical for one region and which have a 'low symbolic value' for specific regions (as 'carriers' of the linguistic identity of that region), as a result of which they can index a supra-regional variety.

Building on a statistical analysis of 80 variables in stylistically different sub-corpora of the Corpus of Spoken Dutch, Plevoets *et al.* (2007) argue that 'the Tussentaal characteristics do not occur with systematically equal probability over the various registers', as a result of which 'Tussentaal is not a uniform language variety' (Plevoets 2009: 11 confirms this conclusion). Yet there appears to be a growing influx of features from the central Brabant-Antwerp axis in Tussentaal. Vandekerckhove (2006, 2007) found a marked preference in supra-regional Flemish chat channels for features which are key elements in the Brabantic repertoire. And De Caluwe (2009: 8) suggests that, although Tussentaal is not yet a uniform variety, it is Brabant-flavoured Tussentaal which manifests 'the highest status and widest distribution' (see also Willemys 2005: 30).

There is general agreement among all observers (of whatever ideological background) that the rapid spread of Tussentaal represents a case of 'autonomous informal language standardisation' (Cajot 1999: 375), although this view is rarely found in print as yet (but see Vandekerckhove 2007: 202 for a notable exception). The paucity of professional confirmation of the standardisation of Tussentaal reflects the cultural establishment's unease and panic (Jaspers 2001: 131) with respect to an endoglossic development which runs counter to the adoption of the exoglossic Netherlandic standard proposed and promoted by integrationist language planners. In the view of most professional linguists, Tussentaal represents a 'norm degradation' and even 'norm falsification' (Taeldeman 1993: 13) which is 'consciously' (*ibid.*) effected by a large proportion of the Flemish 'elite' (*ibid.* – quotation marks in the original), guilty of 'cheap arrivisme and opportunism'. The use of Tussentaal in situations which call for a standard variety is caused by a 'diminished sense of public responsibility' (Geeraerts 1993: 352) of a type of Fleming who is 'amoral in his compromising pragmatism' (Geeraerts 1990: 439–440). In addition, Tussentaal has been labelled unnatural, culturally inferior, non-prestigious, and totally void of cultural prestige products (Goossens 2000). In contrast with these integrationist rejections by the older generations of Flemish university teachers of Dutch, the youngest generation of professional linguists takes a more detached view, insisting on proper analysis of Tussentaal rather than unfounded rejection (see for instance De Caluwe 2009).

In spite of all rejections, Tussentaal is rapidly gaining currency, even by speakers and in situations typically associated with BSD. In an attempt to learn more about the social determinants of Tussentaal usage, Plevoets (2009) computed the linguistic distance between genders, professional categories, degrees of education, and age on the basis of 37 Tussentaal variables attested in the Corpus of Spoken Dutch. Plevoets found that the cultural elite – academics, researchers, media professionals, and artists – in general prefer BSD, whereas the economic elite – managers and other highly educated professionals – are more inclined towards Tussentaal. In addition, there was an effect of education, to the extent that all higher-educated professionals tend towards Standard Dutch, except, crucially, the highest-educated managers, who are *unmistakably inclined towards Tussentaal*. Plevoets also found an age effect: while the cultural elite has held on to BSD much longer than the economic elite, the youngest generation of Dutch-speaking Belgians manifests a general preference for Tussentaal in *all professional groups* (the almost general preference for Tussentaal in the youngest generations of Belgian Dutch speakers is empirically confirmed in De Caluwe 2009 and Van Gijssel, Speelman and Geeraerts 2008: 217–220). And as far as gender is concerned, it is the female speakers – who, according to conventional sociolinguistic wisdom, are the more prestige-sensitive sex – who manifest a significantly higher preference for Tussentaal. These and other data show that Tussentaal is showing an (unstoppable) rise in Belgium.

A number of factors have been suggested for this success. We have already referred to increasing Flemish political independence and economic success, which has changed former feelings of inferiority into attitudes of self-consciousness and superiority. All the cited authors also mention the increasing democratisation of our society as a factor which enhances the success of non-standard varieties (compare Jaspers 2001: 132–133, Goossens 2000: 5, Stroop 1998: 227, Geeraerts 1993: 352; Vandebussche 2008: 190 refers in this respect to the post-1968 era as the period of the definitive crisis of a culture which was bourgeois to its core).

On a more linguistic note, Willemyns (2007: 270–271) proposes the same explanation for the emergence of Tussentaal as for the birth of accent variation in NSD (cf. above): the demise of the dialects in Flanders (which is only somewhat less advanced than in The Netherlands) necessitates an informal colloquial variety which indexes regional identity. This intermediate variety, Willemyns (2007: 270) goes on, is subsequently used in more situations and domains than it was before, taking over functions from the standard variety. While we basically agree with Willemyns that dialect loss in Flanders has spawned an intermediate variety in between the (evaporating) dialects and the standard, the demise of the dialects in itself does not explain why the new intermediate variety is penetrating H-areas and acquiring prestige. Neither can democratisation and globalisation be the only reason for Tussentaal to spread and standardise at this speed.

We propose that, in Flanders, post-1968 feelings of anti-authoritarian resentment were intensified by the ‘foreignness’ of the exoglossic norm imported from The Netherlands, which has never been a familiar or comfortable medium in which Flemish users feel at home. As a result, Belgian speakers consider the standard variety ‘as a foreign variety appropriate for formal interaction but to be dropped as soon as the situation no longer demands it’ (De Caluwe 2002: 61). In the same vein, Geeraerts (1999 and 2001b) and Taeldeman (2007) have referred to the standard as a ‘Sunday suit’, an indispensable piece of clothing which one takes off, however, as soon as the occasion no longer demands it. In addition, the VRT variety of Standard Dutch has been imposed from above without communal consent (Jaspers 2001; De Caluwe 2009), in an intellectual climate hostile to variation, and language planning efforts which all too often coincided with a crusade against endogenous Flemish varieties such as the dialects (Taeldeman 1993: 15). The repression inherent in the integrationist enterprise can be inferred from the moral condemnation of people who prefer Tussentaal, and from the data in Geeraerts and Grondelaers (1997) which demonstrate that 20th century language planning in Flanders has led in particular to a rejection of stigmatised words the purists disapproved of, *not* to an increase of approved terms.

In addition, and crucially, the emergence of a new Flemish self-consciousness and the birth of a Flemish nation state have increased the desire for a Flemish standard, and decreased the need for (and the success of) integrationist language policies and ideologies. The latter process was accelerated by the advent of commercial television in Flanders: ever since commercial alternatives to national television have become available, Netherlandic television – responsible for a major influx of standard vocabulary in the speech of Belgian adolescents (Goossens 2000) – is no longer the preferred alternative to Belgian state television in Flanders.

As one can imagine, it is very difficult to gauge the Flemish standard language situation with any degree of precision at this moment, let alone make reliable predictions. Auer (2011: 499) suggests in his typology of European standard language configurations that the competition between an exoglossic norm and a newly emerging endoglossic standard can temporarily lead to bilingualism until the endoglossic standard is established. This is not the case in Flanders, however. Recall, to begin with, that while VRT Dutch is a prestige variety, it has little spontaneity or vitality: much of what is broadcast on radio and television is fully scripted, and its uniformity is artificially controlled and conserved by the broadcasting authorities. While, secondly, this VRT norm has always been difficult to attain, increasingly few present-day

Flemings make the *effort* to attain it, especially now that people in the public eye – politicians, managers, media people – are openly switching to Tussentaal, even on radio or television.

So where are we heading in Flanders? Probably not in the direction outlined by Ruud Hendrickx, the VRT's official language councillor, who claims that 'with the further spread of the use of Standard Dutch in Flanders, this tussentaal will disappear even more in its current form. It will be replaced by an informal variant of the standard language which relates in a natural and close way to the standard variety that is already accepted in Flanders in the formal register' (1998, cited in Vandebussche 2010: 318). There is no evidence whatsoever that this prediction will come through: '9 years onwards, *Tussentaal* still appears to be on the rise in Flanders and no major shift towards the informal VRT-variant has been reported, so far' (*ibid.*).

It is much more likely instead that some sort of competition between VRT Dutch and Tussentaal will emerge, whereby the former is (at least) affected by the latter (De Caluwe 2009: 21). An obvious source of evidence for this development would be a speaker evaluation experiment in which Flemish listener-judges rate audio-taped samples of VRT Dutch, Teacher Dutch and Tussentaal. For two reasons, however, we propose a more indirect approach. We believe, to begin with, that any speaker evaluation design containing VRT Dutch will reveal little more at present than the deeply engrained dislike of non-standard varieties instilled by the integrationist repression, which has conditioned (brainwashed?) generations of Flemings to love a variety they rarely use themselves⁴. The presence of VRT Dutch in the design would in all probability even drain accented Teacher Dutch of whatever prestige it would be attributed in another design. And while we endorse Kristiansen's (2009a) claim that experimental speaker evaluation techniques can probe more private language attitudes in a design in which the experimental ambition remains undetected, we fear that Tussentaal is still so stigmatised that it will immediately and automatically alarm all but the youngest generations of Flemings.

A second reason not to include Tussentaal in a speaker evaluation design with 'higher' varieties is the unfinished state of its standardisation and the absence of the traditional perceptual standardisation indicators in its perceptual profile: what little attitudinal evidence is available (cf. Cuvelier 2007) suggests that Tussentaal elicits solidarity, but not status evaluations. It has repeatedly been observed, in addition, that Tussentaal is a language of 'insurrection' against the standard, most explicitly so in Plevoets (2009:5), who refers in this respect to the 'hypocorrect' inclinations of the new economic elite which embraces Tussentaal:

While hypercorrection refers to an exaggerated polishing of language use which sounds rather artificial, hypocorrection refers to a sloppier and more careless language production (...): While hypercorrection is characteristic for a middle class (...) which expresses its uncertain position between the lower and higher strata in an artificial realization of its language use, hypocorrection is the characteristic of the highest class [which manifests] a careless indifference with respect to the norms in order to profile its acquired position.

According to Van Gijssel *et al.* (2008: 219 ff.), '*tussentaal* has young, even somewhat rebellious, connotations, as opposed to the "conformist" norm of the standard language'. If Tussentaal has any prestige, it will be the covert prestige associated with resisting an imposed standard.

Instead of combining Tussentaal, Teacher Dutch and VRT Dutch in one speaker evaluation experiment, we designed an experiment similar to the one proposed above for the investigation of the Netherlandic standard language situation, albeit with Flemish speakers from the Teacher Corpus and, of course, Flemish listener-judges. The experiment primarily ad-

⁴ This has led to schizophrenic language attitudes whereby Flemings report that they are positively inclined towards Netherlandic vocabulary they never use themselves (see Geeraerts, Grondelaers and Speelman 1999: chapter 2 for an overview). Quantitative evidence for the idea that the integrationist support for VRT Dutch was based on repression rather than encouragement can be found in Geeraerts and Grondelaers (1997).

dressed the hypothesis that Belgian Teacher Dutch is less standard than Netherlandic Teacher Dutch on the criteria to be discussed in the next section.

The gradual abandoning of the exoglossic norm in Flanders and the provisional absence of candidate replacements is in fact suggestive of the process Fairclough (1992) refers to as ‘de-standardisation’:

(...) Fairclough (1992) proposes that the democratisation process can lead to a value levelling that will secure access to public space for a wider range of speech varieties. Such a development would be equal to a radical weakening, and eventual abandonment of the ‘standard ideology’ itself’ (Kristiansen 2009b: 1–2).

Before we turn to our speaker evaluation investigations into Netherlandic and Belgian Teacher Dutch, we first review some perceptual characteristics of prototypical standard configurations that will be used as a standard of comparison for our analysis of Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch.

PERCEPTUAL CRITERIA FOR STANDARDNESS

The basic problem we face in this chapter (and in SLICE work in general) is an empirical one: how to determine in a reliable way whether or not a language has retained its standard language ideal (the ultimate distinction between the destandardisation and the demoticisation scenarios)? Since ‘standard language ideal’ is an abstract notion which cannot in itself be measured, we are bound to investigate standard language ideals on the basis of the perceptual characteristics of the variety which comes closest to instantiating the standard language ideal. We claim in this respect that a language has retained its standard language ideal when there is broad consensus among the standard language community members that one variety is more prestigious, more appropriate for formal interaction, and more beautiful than the others. Let us briefly zoom in each of these criteria.

Speaker prestige is arguably the most important indicator of a language variety’s degree of standardisation, and the one most recurrently invoked and confirmed in speaker evaluation investigations of standardisation (see, among others, Garrett 2005). The idea that standard varieties are more prestigious than non-standard varieties diachronically derives from the fact that it is the economically and culturally dominant area whose dialect is typically promoted to standard status. Synchronically, the prestige inherent in the standard invariably surfaces in the observation that standard speakers are perceived as superior to non-standard speakers in terms of education, competence, and income. Since, however, prestige and standard need not automatically coincide – Arabic is a case in point (cf. Ibrahim 1986) – it is pivotal that we find other perceptual indicators of standardness.

In Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010) we have argued on the basis of experimental data that it is not only the speakers of a specific variety which can be accorded prestige, but also the variety *itself*⁵. Again, evaluations of speaker prestige and **accent status** need not coincide: accents whose speakers are traditionally deemed non-prestigious need not be found unsuitable themselves in terms of their appropriateness for formal interaction – as we will see below in the case of Limburg-accented Dutch. Accordingly, we have urged researchers to include scales in their experiments which pertain to this accent status dimension, and we invariably do so ourselves (although accent status does not always show up as a separate dimension in the eventual factor analysis).

⁵ In a ‘conceptual’ open response experiment (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010b) where we asked people to name the first three adjectives which came to mind upon hearing two accent variety labels, 19.28 % of all the adjectives returned more than once clearly pertained to the varieties investigated rather than to their speakers. Notably, adjectives such as (*un*)*intelligible* or *standard* can only pertain to the status of the varieties themselves.

The perceived **beauty** of language varieties as an indication of their degree of standardness is a criterion which figured prominently in earlier work on the perception of standard vs. non-standard varieties (Giles 1970, Trudgill and Giles 1978). The strongest claim with respect to the central role of the perceived beauty of language varieties is Van Bezooijen's (2002: 13) contention that the aesthetic evaluation of language varieties is 'the most direct and compact means to gain access into language attitudes'. Crucially, standard varieties are invariably found to be more beautiful than non-standard varieties in the literature (see, amongst many others, Giles 1970, Trudgill and Giles 1978, Van Bezooijen 2002, Bishop, Coupland and Garrett 2005 and Coupland and Bishop 2007). We have accordingly elicited aesthetic evaluations in most of our experiments.

Let us, in order to calibrate the Belgian and Netherlandic standard situations, focus on British English first, a variety in which two of the cited criteria – speaker prestige and perceived beauty – divide all accents into standard and non-standard varieties, and in which the category of non-standard accents is globally downgraded on these criteria, manifesting little internal differentiation. In the UK Standard English has recurrently been adjudged to be more prestigious and beautiful than other varieties. Figure 1 diagrams strongly converging prestige and beauty perceptions of English accent varieties collected on the basis of two elicitation techniques in 1970 and 2005. Giles (1970) reports a conceptual experiment in which listener-judges rated 12 accent labels ('RP', 'Birmingham', 'Indian', etc.) on three evaluative dimensions; in a follow-up experiment involving a matched guise speaker evaluation experiment (SEE), the same listener-judges rated unlabelled audio-taped samples of (some of) these accents on the same dimensions. Bishop, Coupland and Garrett (2005) replicated Giles' (1970) conceptual task 35 years later⁶:

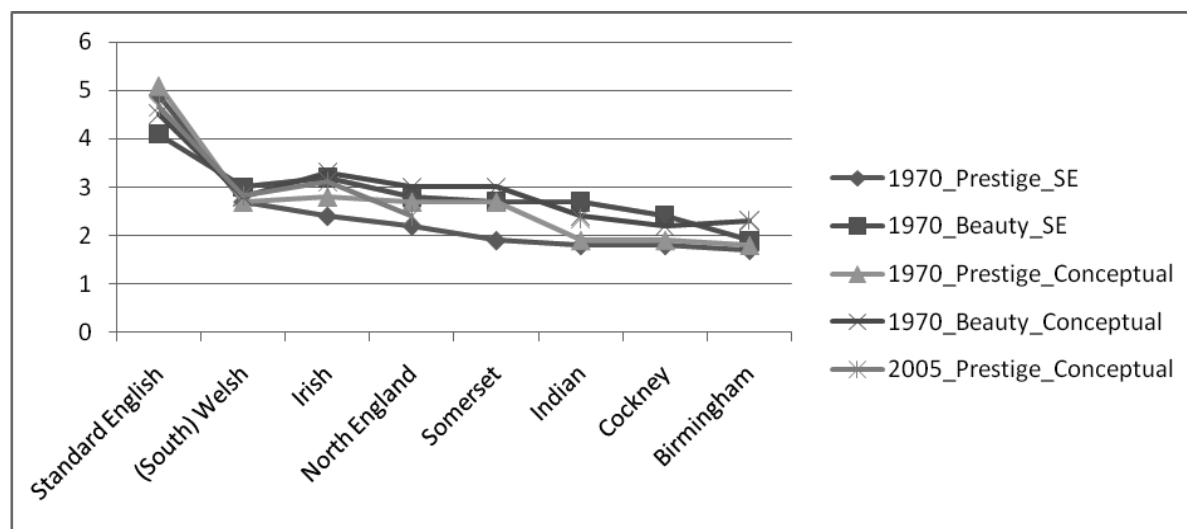


Figure 1. Prestige and beauty perceptions for 8 accent varieties of English, collected in 1970 in a speaker evaluation experiment and in a conceptual task, and in 2005 in a conceptual task.

Crucially, the data in Figure 1 demonstrate that while Standard English is rated the highest in terms of speaker prestige and beauty (with mean scores between 4.7 and 5.1 on a 6-point scale), all other accents are on or below the neutral point 3 on the vertical scale (mean scores between 1.7 and 3.3). The diagram also shows that there is almost no interpretable internal differentiation among the group of non-standard accents in terms of prestige and beauty. These data suggest, in short, that English does not allow 'dual identity' in the standard: *any*

⁶ We restricted the data points in Figure 1 to accents for which data were available across the different techniques and periods; data were rescaled and reoriented to fit a 6-point scale with a negative left and a positive right pole.

regional affiliation in one's speech automatically leads to downgrading on dimensions which matter for one's perception as a standard speaker. English represents an extreme case because the categorical prestige divide between its standard and non-standard accents has remained stable over the years.

Interestingly, this categorical distinction does not seem to be related to the degree of standardisation of a language: in French, arguably the most standardised of all European languages, the Paris accent unsurprisingly combines the highest scores for the prestige traits included in Paltridge and Giles (1984), but the Provence accent is *not* downgraded for professional appeal and power. It is therefore probably more appropriate to conceive of the prestige values of accent varieties in one language or different languages as occupying different positions on a continuum which has the mono-varietal standard situation of British English as its left pole.

Finally, we will compare the standard language situations in Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch on a fourth criterion **communal consent**, which pertains to the degree of perceptual agreement between the listener-judges rather than to features of the accents themselves. We have repeatedly argued in our work on Netherlandic Standard Dutch (see especially Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011: 211–213) that a language variety is standardised when regionally flavoured standard speech – which indexes a dual identity of national and regional affiliation – invites *national* perceptions on the part of the listener, rather than regional or social in-group preferences and out-group rejections. A language X is standardised in this respect, when speakers of a specific accent X_i of X are willing to evaluate other accents of X as speakers of X rather than as speakers of X_i , and when their supra-regional evaluation adheres to the prestige distribution over accents X_i to X_n agreed on by all the members of the community delimited by X. For speakers of high-prestige accents the communal consent definition of standard language poses no problem, as they can remain loyal to their accents on the national level. For speakers of a low-prestige accent, however, this supra-regional attitude may entail abandoning emotions of accent and in-group loyalty to national stereotypes of their accent and its speakers as low status.

The communal consent definition of standard language is empirically reflected in the absence of demographic (and especially regional) bias in the evaluations, which indicates that ratings are converged on by *all* the members of the Netherlandic Dutch standard language community rather than by specific subgroups. Demographic data are also important in another respect: if it is not the absence of variability in production which makes a language variety standard, but the communal assessment which determines whether or not the variability is included in the variation interval that a language allows, a good view of the listener demographics in one's sample is essential.

In the next sections we will compare the perception of Netherlandic and Belgian Standard Dutch across the four criteria on the basis of speaker evaluation evidence specifically elicited in relation to them. Since most of the Netherlandic evidence has been reported elsewhere, we will restrict ourselves to a short overview, whereas the Belgian analysis – which is reported for the first time here – will be reviewed in more detail.

The perceptual profile of Netherland Standard Dutch in Late Modernity

Methodological specifications

All our own perceptual data come from speaker evaluation experiments which build on 20-second sound clips of unprepared spontaneous speech which (except in Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010c and Latour, Van Hout and Grondelaers submitted) was *not* selected on the basis of accent strength. Sound clips were extracted from the Netherlandic and Belgian components of the Teacher Corpus, and they were rated on a wide range of speaker and speech traits (be-

tween 13 and 18), in relation to a larger number of evaluative dimensions than is usual in speaker evaluation research, which is typically two- or three-dimensional (Status vs. Solidarity or Status vs. Personal Integrity vs. Solidarity; see Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs 2010: 102 ff.). Listener-judges were always selected in the accent zones included in the experiment.

Speaker prestige

Across all experiments, Randstad Dutch was typically rated the most prestigious variety of Netherlandic Dutch in terms of the status of its speakers. In all studies, ratings pertaining to ‘speaking like authoritative persons’, professional competence and accent appropriateness alternatively correlated into separate dimensions (i) for speaker prestige and accent status (Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs 2010; Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010b – see 6.3.), (ii) for speaker prestige and speaker competence (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010a), and (iii) for speaker prestige (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010c; Latour, Van Hout and Grondelaers submitted). On all of these, Randstad Dutch always received the highest scores.

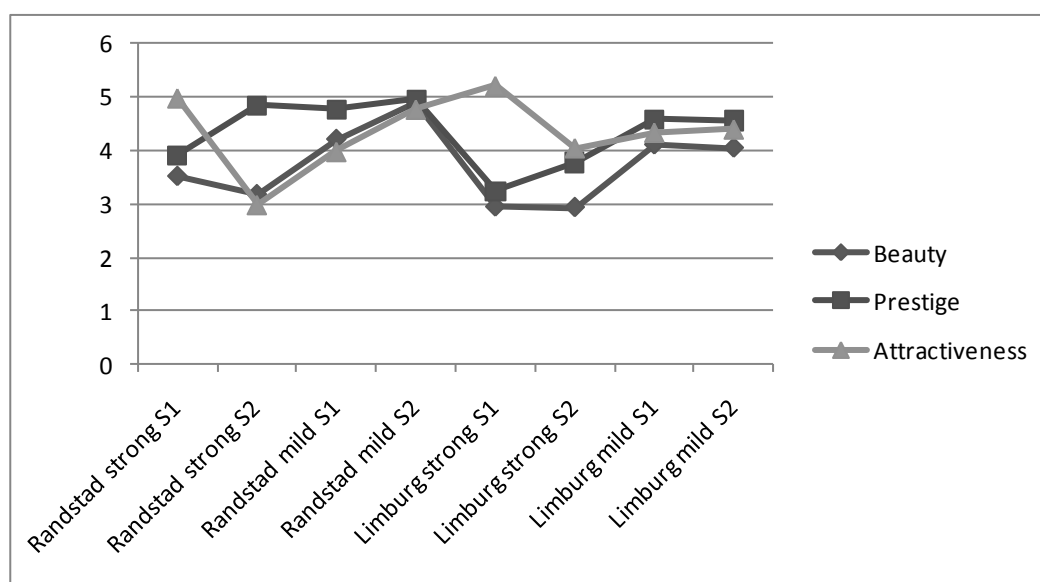


Figure 2. Prestige, attractiveness, and beauty perceptions for mildly and strongly accented varieties of Randstad-accented and Limburg-accented Dutch

Interestingly, though, Netherlandic Dutch is *not* the mono-varietal standard language English is, because there is no global downgrading of non-standard accents. Figure 2 demonstrates data from Grondelaers and Van Hout (2010c) and Latour, Van Hout and Grondelaers: submitted, in which the perception of mild and strong versions of a prestige (Randstad) and a non-prestige accent (Limburg) was investigated. In this experiment, for instance, we found only marginally lower speaker prestige scores for the two mildly accented Limburg speakers than for the mildly accented Randstad speakers (4.58 and 4.56 vs. 4.77 and 4.95); stronger accented Limburgers, by contrast, were much more downgraded than strongly accented Rand speakers (3.24 and 3.78 vs. 3.91 and 4.84). Since milder accented Limburgers were only slightly less identifiable than their stronger accented compatriots, and since they were never confused with high prestige speakers, the perception of a speaker’s prestige is clearly not only dependent on absolute values such as the speaker’s regional descent, but also, and crucially, on dynamic features such as the *strength* of his accent. By reducing his accent, a low prestige speaker can partially overcome the downgrading effect of his descent. In this sense, perception always interacts with production.

Accent status

In the experiments reported in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010) and Grondelaers and Van Hout (2010c), the accent status traits – all eliciting responses to statements such as ‘you have to sound like this speaker when speaking to a news anchor, a diplomat, during a job interview, etc.’ – correlated into a separate accent status dimension on which speech was evaluated in function of its appropriateness for formal interaction. In both experiments, unsurprisingly, Randstad speech was judged the only superior variety in this respect, while all other accents were harshly downgraded, except Limburg speech, which was *not* downgraded in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010)⁷. This finding seems to demonstrate some sort of attitude change with respect to the (previously depreciated) status of Limburg-flavoured Dutch. This attitude change, crucially, is noticeable only in indirect speaker evaluation techniques: the direct conceptual method with which the speaker evaluation data were compared in Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010b returned the ubiquitous, largely negative stereotypes with respect to the status of Limburg Dutch.

In addition to this emerging regiolectic competition for Randstad Dutch, there is a much more influential sociolectal competitor, viz. Poldernederlands (viz. Standard Dutch with a lowered pronunciation in the first part of a number of diphthongs, see section above on ‘Netherlandic Dutch in late modernity’). In a speaker evaluation experiment similarly designed to ours, Van Bezooijen (2001) compared the perception of accentless, geographically neutral Netherlandic Standard Dutch (NSD), Poldernederlands, Randstad Dutch, and Dutch with an Amsterdam accent (each represented by three female speakers). Although Van Bezooijen (2001: 261) claims that the three non-neutral accents were similar in terms of strength, it is impossible to determine how her Randstad speakers compare to our Randstad Teachers. Nevertheless, it is revealing to notice that Poldernederlands was evaluated by younger listeners as only slightly less standard than regionally neutral NSD, and *more standard* than Randstad Dutch. On the dimension ‘polished’, Poldernederlands was rated as somewhat inferior to NSD, but not significantly different from Randstad Dutch! These data, again, suggest that while Randstad Dutch is deemed the best variety of spoken Netherlandic Dutch, there is clearly room for others.

Beauty

The perceived beauty of the different regio- and sociolects of Netherlandic Standard Dutch confirms the findings on the previous criteria: while Randstad Dutch is invariably deemed the most beautiful sort of Dutch, it has Limburg Dutch and Poldernederlands as (close) competitors. Compare in this respect the mean scores on the beauty scale in Figure 2, which closely follow the prestige scores (the only divergence between beauty and prestige is found in the ratings for the second strongly accented Randstad speaker, whose regional origin was significantly less identifiable than that of the other speakers in the experiment). In Van Bezooijen (2001: Figures 3 and 6, p. 265), the higher accent status of neutral NSD and Poldernederlands is mirrored in the fact that these varieties are also evaluated as more beautiful than Randstad Dutch.

The obvious convergence between, on the one hand, perceived beauty and, on the other, speaker prestige and accent status could indicate that the aesthetic perception of accent varieties of NSD is a function of the status of these varieties and their speakers, but that’s an oversimplification. We have found two types of evidence that beauty perceptions in NSD are trig-

⁷ The fact that Limburg speech was downgraded in terms of accent status in Grondelaers and Van Hout (2010c) is arguably due to the fact that the latter included only adolescent listener-judges; interestingly, we also found (a small number of) age effects in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010) whereby adolescent listeners went against the more global tendency to upgrade Limburg speech.

gered by *all* the dimensions in the architecture of accent attitudes (viz. status *but also* attractiveness and solidarity). Observe to begin with that *mooi* ‘beautiful’ invariably distributes evenly over the dimensions returned by the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the ratings in all the speaker evaluation experiments in which beauty perceptions were elicited:

Table 1. Scores for *beautiful* on the factors obtained in the PCA of ratings elicited in three speaker evaluation experiments

	Speaker Prestige	Speaker Compe- tence	Speaker Attractive- ness	Accent Status	Accent Attractive- ness
Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs 2010	.204		.549	.217	.336
Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010	.304	.484	-.373		
Latour, Van Hout and Grondelaers Submitted	.558		.368		

The data in Table 1 clearly indicate that accent varieties of NSD are evaluated as beautiful on account of their perceived status and attractiveness, and on account of the perceived prestige and attractiveness of their speakers. A linear regression analysis on the beautiful-ratings in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010) confirms that *all* attitudinal dimensions are significant determinants of perceived accent beauty, and that the latter can be reasonably well (average $R^2 = .33$) predicted from them. In view of the fact that Netherlandic accent attitudes are national constructs (see 6.5. below), and that the status components of these attitudes co-determine the beauty perception of accent varieties (in addition to and, judging from the lower rows in Table 1, sometimes to a higher extent than attractiveness, which is an arguably more intuitive beauty-determinant), we have claimed in Grondelaers and Van Hout (2010*d*) and in Latour, Van Hout and Grondelaers (submitted) that the beauty perception of accent varieties of NSD is fuelled to a significant extent by communal (standard language) ideology. We have suggested, in addition, that perceived beauty in the field of accent perception is an ‘overarching evaluative judgment’ which represents the proverbial ‘cement’ between the status and attractiveness ingredients of accent attitudes. If the latter is the case, then attractiveness ratings should be included in attitude-based measurements of the standard status of accent varieties. If standard varieties are evaluated as more beautiful than non-standard accent varieties, and if beauty perceptions are determined by status *and* attractiveness considerations, then the latter – the fact that some speakers and some accents are perceived as more attractive – may also motivate why some accent varieties are valued as more standard than others.

While we do not, at present, have the data to fully back up this suggestion, the attractiveness values we measured for the accent varieties of NSD offer some explanation for the fact that regional and social accent variation is acceptable in lay conceptualisations of NSD. As we have seen, one reason for this acceptance is that some accent varieties – notably NSD with a mild Limburg accent – are not downgraded on the speaker prestige and accent status dimensions. In addition to their different prestige and status values, however, all accents investigated have stereotyped attractiveness values which, in combination with the status values, make for rich social meanings. In any society in which people have allegiances and identities to maintain (and decode) on the basis of linguistic cues, a regional accent is a valuable cue because it identifies ‘stable socio-regional groups that are associated with a number of (very) persistent stereotypes’ (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010a: 235). A Randstad accent was recurrently found to be associated in this respect with positive status categories such as ‘competent,’ ‘professional’, but also with negative integrity/solidarity features such as ‘cold’ and ‘arrogant’. A Limburg accent, by contrast, projects negative stereotypes of lack of sophistica-

tion onto a speaker (especially when the latter's accent gets stronger), but also positive images of kindness and likeability (see Preston 2011 for a detailed account of the processing aspects of this attribution). The northern Groningen accent, finally, is evaluated negatively on all the investigated dimensions. This distribution of social meaning values over the accent varieties has invariably been confirmed in our work.

Communal consensus

One of the more revealing findings in our research is the almost total absence of demographic effects in the evaluations of accent variation in NSD. More precisely, perceptual work into NSD only seems to reveal some age effects. Recall from footnote 7 that in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010), younger participants did not always follow older listeners in their evaluations of Limburg-flavoured Dutch (though there were no systematic effects). And the age grading found in Van Bezooijen (2001) – whereby younger listeners are significantly more sympathetic to Poldernederlands than older listeners – suggests an attitude change which, according to Van Bezooijen, indicates ‘a sombre future for Standard Dutch but a rosy future for Poldernederlands’ (p. 269).

The absence of especially regional bias in the evaluations indicates that accent varieties of Netherlandic Dutch elicit *national* perceptions which are shared by all the Dutch. While there probably is no surer perceptual indicator of standardisation, there is also an important production aspect to this observation. If we conceive of the standard language configuration in The Netherlands as a diaglossic continuum (viz. without discrete intermediate strata, see Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011) between the evaporating base dialects and non-accented, neutral NSD (with the regiolects and the regional standards in-between), then at some point high on this continuum a variety of Dutch is spoken which, in spite of some regional flavouring, has its basic social meaning on the national level. This point has a double significance. From a production perspective it marks the lower threshold of standard Dutch: anything produced above is standard. But it is also at this point that positive sentiments of in-group loyalty within a given regional community give way to national stereotyping with respect to this community (which can be very negative and downgrading). A case in point is the northern accent: speakers of the low prestige accent of Groningen are apparently prepared to accept the global downgrading of their accent in its national perception⁸.

While the previous strongly endorses the use of the communal consensus criterion as an indicator of standardness, some caution is necessary because perception experiments into English and French – both languages whose standardisation is beyond dispute – manifest substantial demographic bias among the listeners – listener age, regionality, gender (Giles 1970; Bishop, Coupland and Garrett 2005), and social class (Giles 1970) for English; listener age, regionality, and gender for French (Paltridge and Giles 1984). While this difference in conformity among French and British listeners on the one hand, and Netherlandic listeners on the other may indicate different conceptualisations of their standards, we cannot exclude the impact of lower-level differences between the speech stimuli employed in the respective experiments. Recall that we exclusively relied on the speech of (experienced) teachers of Dutch in our experiments (average age = 56.9 years, with a range from 41 to 67 years), who were told beforehand that they were being recorded for inclusion in a corpus of Standard Dutch. The communal consensus we found could therefore well be a function of the position of the speech of these teachers on the stratificational continuum, while we cannot exclude the possibility that the lack of consensus in the studies into French and English is a function of a lower

⁸ Though there is some evidence that regional groups which suffer from negative stereotyping on the national level also exhibit a very negative self-image. A case in point is Frenchmen from the Alsace, who significantly downgrade their own accent on the social appeal-dimension (Paltridge and Giles 1984: 78–79), in contrast to Brittany-, Provence- and Paris-born Frenchmen who are loyal to their own accents.

position on the stratificational hierarchy of the experimental speech in these studies. In Giles (1970: 214), one male speaker maintained ‘realistic guises’ of ‘13 different and foreign accents of English’ but there is more than a gambler’s chance that phonetic idiosyncrasies of the accents in these guises were blown up to the detriment of their standard characteristics (criticisms to this effect have repeatedly been levelled against the matched-guise technique – see Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003: 54–61 and Garrett 2005: 1253 for an overview). Neither is it inconceivable that the ‘male primary teacher trainees’ whose speech was included in Paltridge and Giles (1984: 74) were not as standard as our experienced secondary school teachers. Giles is clearly aware of this possibility when he claims that the fact that the recordings used were all by trainee ‘instituteurs’ entails that the degree of accentedness is ‘not the broadest possible’ (1984: 82, footnote 4).

Conclusion

All the data collected in the previous paragraphs suggest that growing variability in Netherlandic Dutch does not challenge the idea that there is a best language, but merely increases the number of varieties which satisfy that best language ideal. We claim, in fact, that the Netherlandic Dutch standard language ideal is instantiated in ‘a standard language space’ which is vertically and horizontally stratified. This space is roofed by non-accented, fully uniform NSD, a variety which is ‘more of an ideal than a reality, since few people speak it in a pure form’ (Van Bezooijen 2001: 260). Building on our speaker evaluation data on regional accent variation and Van Bezooijen’s (2001) perception findings, we know that Randstad-flavoured Dutch and – for younger speakers – Poldernederlands are the best ‘real-life’ varieties of NSD, both deemed more prestigious, functionally appropriate and beautiful than the other varieties. At the bottom of the standard language space, NSD is stratified into regional standards, albeit that these are vertically differentiated as well: recall that spoken NSD is equated in actual practice with Randstad Dutch, and that Limburg-accented Dutch is awarded a higher accent status than the other non-central accent varieties. Crucially, none of the varieties discussed occupies a fixed position in the stratificational ‘matrix’ of the standard space, except maybe for non-accented NSD at the top. For the accented varieties, the position in the space is dynamically and probabilistically determined by features such as accent strength: a lower prestige variety such as the Limburg accent significantly gains in status when it becomes milder.

THE PERCEPTUAL PROFILE OF BELGIAN STANDARD DUTCH IN LATE MODERNITY

Design

In order to gauge the Belgian standard language situation, the experiment reported in Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010) was replicated with Belgian speech samples and Belgian respondents. Speech clips were extracted from eight speakers representative of four accent regions: the central zone (the Brabant-Antwerp axis, the nation’s socio-economic hub), two peripheral zones (West-Flanders and Limburg, rural areas in which the base dialects are still frequently spoken), as well as a transitional zone (East-Flanders). Except for the latter, these zones feature well-identifiable regional accents.

19 scales were adapted from the experiments described in the preceding section. We included accent status scales, ‘old’ speaker prestige scales (pertaining to speaker competence and speaking like authoritative persons), ‘new’ speaker prestige indicators (pertaining to rhetorical competence and media ability), speaker integrity scales, speaker solidarity scales and, finally, accent euphony scales (pertaining to intrinsic sound qualities of the accents compared). Two specific scales were adapted to the Belgian situation. For the ‘speaking like au-

thoritative persons' scales we included – in addition to the news anchor function previously used – two well-known Belgian speakers who are models of pleasantly civilised speech (media icon Marc Uytterhoeven and politician Karel de Gucht).

As listener-judges, 100 native speakers of Belgian Dutch were recruited in universities and university colleges in the four accent regions included in the experiment. Principal Component Analysis revealed that the 19 scales correlated into the four factor solution illustrated in Table 2 (from which scales loading on more than one dimension have been removed):

Table 2. Factor loadings for 14 scales on 4 components after varimax rotation

	Component			
	Competence 'old status'	Dynamism 'new status'	Solidarity	Integrity
beautiful	,316	,373	,604	-,154
arrogant	-,185	,229	-,094	,798
civilised	,805	,050	,237	-,132
could win a debate	,209	,774	,121	,074
highly educated	,787	,196	,124	-,023
honest	,086	,000	,739	-,108
norm during job interview	,253	,765	-,019	,018
monotonous	,266	-,488	,002	,536
news anchor	,620	,389	-,035	,049
social	,071	,086	,843	-,092
norm when speaking to news anchor	,378	,696	,034	,065
norm when speaking to prime minister	,762	,286	,145	,055
unfriendly	,022	-,001	-,206	,760
warm	,186	,021	,760	-,098

The four dimensions returned by the PCA can be labelled Speaker Competence 'old status', Speaker Dynamism 'new status', Speaker Solidarity, and Speaker Integrity. To compare the individual perceptions of the eight speech samples on each of the four dimensions, per sample and per dimension an estimate was computed that averages over the scores on the scales that received the highest loadings for a dimension (see Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs 2010: 113, footnote 4 for a justification of this method):

Table 3. Proportion of correct regional identifications, mean beauty scores, and PCA factor scores for 8 samples of Belgian Standard Dutch speech

	% correct identifications	Beau- tiful	Factor Scores			
			Compe- tence	Dyna- mism	Soli- darity	Inte- grity
Antwerp	75,00	3,27	3,601	3,610	3,533	2,940
Brabant	46,67	3,15	3,373	3,210	3,549	2,570
East-Flanders1	44,09	3,16	3,268	3,360	3,613	2,285
East-Flanders2	29,67	3,11	3,334	3,283	3,483	2,370
West-Flanders1	26,09	3,23	3,263	3,413	3,673	2,345
West-Flanders2	68,89	2,92	2,697	2,940	3,813	2,155
Limburg1	79,35	2,60	2,714	2,660	3,617	2,785
Limburg2	84,95	2,60	2,619	2,440	3,643	2,300

Table 3 contains, for each of the speech samples, the percentage of correct regional identifications (which reflects to what extent an accent is correctly located in the region in which it is

spoken), the mean beauty scores on a scale from 1 to 6, as well as factor scores for the four dimensions identified in Table 2. While the regional identification of the samples was, on the whole, unproblematic⁹, speaker ‘West-Flanders 1’ was incorrectly identified as an East-Fleming more often than as a West-Fleming (27,17 % > 26,09). The fact that his evaluations visibly concur with the evaluations for the ‘genuine’ East-Flemish speakers, plausibly derives from this misappropriation.

Speaker prestige & accent status

We found no general downgrading of accented speech in the Belgian data, but that is probably due to the absence of a clearly superior variety with respect to which non-prestigious speech *can* be downgraded: on the old status dimension, an (unintuitive) binary distinction was found between the prestigious central accent (Brabantic) and the transitional (East-Flemish) accent on the one hand, and the non-prestigious peripheral Limburg and West-Flemish zones on the other. Whereas, in addition, only ‘old’ status indicators emerged from the perceptual analyses of Netherlandic Dutch accent variation (education, civilisation, speaking like the prime minister, etc.), Belgian Dutch accents also elicited ratings which correlated into the ‘new’ status dimension of *dynamism*, on which scales pertaining to rhetorical skills and media ability loaded. Kristiansen (2009a) gauges the current rise in prestige of ‘Lower’ Copenhagen speech in terms of this ‘Dynamism’ component, which in his views indexes standards for the media rather than for the schools (Kristiansen 2001). Again, it is the Brabantic and East-Flemish accents which are deemed somewhat more dynamic than the peripheral accents. Observe, finally, that we did not find a separate accent status dimension in the architecture of Belgian accent attitudes: there appear to be no inter-subjective perceptions of the central Brabantic accent, or any other accent, as more ‘appropriate’ for formal interaction (recall that in Netherlandic Dutch, the status of the Randstad accent is repeatedly confirmed in this respect).

Beauty

The crude distinction between the peripheral and the central/transitional zone obtained on the prestige dimension is sustained by the beauty ratings, albeit that the distinction ‘beautiful vs. ugly’ is better rephrased here as ‘not beautiful vs. very ugly’: while the scores for the central and transitional accents hover around the neutral point, there is evident downgrading for the peripheral accents. Clearly, no accent of Belgian Teacher Dutch is evaluated as truly beautiful.

There are two possible explanations for this low beauty perception of accents of Belgian Dutch. Could it be the case that beauty perceptions are *not* ideologically determined in Belgian Dutch, as they are in Netherlandic Dutch? Could it be possible that beauty is in the eye of the beholder in Belgium rather than in the grip of ideology? The two sources of evidence we invoked to support the idea that beauty perceptions are communally and ideologically (rather than individually) determined in Netherlandic Dutch, demonstrate interesting differences between the Netherlandic and Belgian perceptions. Observe to begin with that the loadings for the *beautiful* scale do not distribute evenly over the dimensions returned by the PCA in Table 2, and that it is in particular the Solidarity dimension on which *beautiful* gets the highest loading; this indicates that it is in the first place a speaker’s social attributes which

⁹ The lower identification proportions for the East-Flemish speakers can be attributed to the fact that the East-Flemish accent was included in the experiment as a transitional zone. The Antwerp and Brabant proportions are based on correct identification on the level of *province*: when correct identification is defined in terms of the central zone – Brabant *or* Antwerp –, the percentage of correct identifications of the Brabant accent rises to 91,3 %, and the percentage of correct identification of the Antwerp accent to 78,91 %.

determine whether an accent is deemed beautiful¹⁰. Recall that in The Netherlands, by contrast, *beautiful* was invariably distributed evenly over all the dimensions returned by the PCA of all the experiments conducted, whatever these dimensions were. In addition, it was especially the status-related dimensions which were the prime movers of beauty judgments. Whether these discrepancies indicate that beauty perceptions are not embedded in lay conceptualisations of BSD, as a result of which perceived beauty is not a good standardness indicator for this variety, is bound to remain unclear at present.

Note, however, that the absence of aesthetic appreciation for accented BSD could also be due to the fact that accented BSD 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). If this is the case, our decision not to include VRT Dutch in the experiment has backfired: even in the absence of actual VRT Dutch, the ghost of this variety impacts the perception of its regional standards.

Communal assessment

The most important difference between Belgian and Netherlandic accent perceptions, however, is that whereas the latter are national constructs, we found massive demographic differences between the Belgian listener-judges. The most outspoken bias is respondent regionality, viz. the fact that the regional origin of the respondents significantly impacts their evaluation of the samples; cells with grey shading in Table 3 contain values which average over evaluations which differ significantly between the respondent regions (while non-shaded cells pertain to ratings for which there is no regional bias). The fact that no less than 14 out of the 32 factor scores in Table 3 manifest regional bias indicates that the most formal variety of spoken Belgian Dutch available in actual practice does *not* incite national perceptions: it rather triggers regional rating attitudes in the listeners, who evaluate the samples as Limburgians, Brabantians, Antwerpians, and East- and West-Flemings (instead of Dutch-speaking Belgians), manifesting all the concomitant ingroup and outgroup biases.

Conclusion

While the perceptual picture of Belgian Dutch is far from complete as yet, the available speaker evaluation data raise pertinent questions as to how standard Teacher Dutch is. If the criteria proposed in this chapter – speaker prestige, accent status, beauty, and communal consensus – represent valid perceptual criteria for standardness, then it is obvious that Teacher Dutch represents the standard variety of Netherlandic Dutch, but *not* of Belgian Dutch.

The best way to describe the current standard language situation in Flanders is to refer to it as a ‘standard language vacuum’. The best variety of Belgian Dutch, VRT Dutch, is an imported norm which – in spite of its uniformity – has never been a comfortable language medium for Belgian speakers, and which increasingly few people try to attain. There are at present no valid replacements for this virtual norm. The highest stratum of spoken Belgian Dutch – Teacher Dutch – manifests a high degree of variability without there being a ‘best’ variety: there is no accent in the Teacher database which characterises the most prestigious, and the most beautiful Belgian Dutch (for the latter is the VRT-norm which – in spite of continuing perceptual prestige – is rapidly losing ground on the level of production). Tussentaal, finally, may one day become the new standard of Belgian Dutch, but its standardisation is as yet un-

¹⁰ A regression analysis on the *beautiful* scores in which the four dimensions returned in Table 2 were included as predictors confirms this effect: while all the dimensions are significant predictors of the *beautiful* scores ($p = .000$), it is the Solidarity dimension which has the highest impact (Status $\beta = .273$; Dynamism $\beta = .186$; Solidarity $\beta = .390$; Integrity $\beta = -.076$).

finished, and it is not sustained by constructive ‘best language’ perceptions (of excitement, enthusiasm, progress, etc.).

There is, in other words, no vital standard variety of Belgian Dutch either from the production or from the perception point of view. In our implementation of the notion ‘standard language ideal’, the Belgian standard situation clearly represents a case of Fairclough’s (1992) destandardisation.

CONCLUSION AND CONSEQUENCES

In this chapter we have (for the first time, to our knowledge) compared the Netherlandic and Belgian standard language situations exclusively in terms of speaker evaluation evidence in order to detect the perceptual parameters along which the national varieties of Dutch vary and change. We collected experimental speaker evaluation evidence in relation to four criteria which revealed clear-cut differences between Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch.

Building on **speaker prestige** evaluations, we found that the standard language ideal of English is instantiated in one prestige variety which eclipses all other varieties in terms of status (viz. RP or the Queen’s English). Netherlandic Dutch, by contrast, has more prestige varieties, viz. Randstad Dutch and Poldernederlands, but other regional accents of NSD can rise to almost comparable prestige as they become milder. Belgian Dutch, finally, appears to be a ‘decapitated’ standard. Prestige evaluations split up the field in (broadly defined) central accents, which are to some extent prestigious, and peripheral accents, which clearly are not. If we discount VRT Dutch, there is no ‘best’ variety of Belgian Dutch as there is in The Netherlands.

Low speaker prestige in itself, however, does not suffice to regard a variety as non-standard. Speakers of the Limburg accent of NSD are not typically evaluated as prestigious (unless their accent is mild), but changing attitudes towards Limburg-flavoured Dutch transpire from **accent status** scores which are significantly higher than for the other accents except Randstad Dutch. The fact that it is the accent status dimension which embodies the new status of Limburg speech, and not the speaker prestige dimension, need not surprise us. While the speech of the Limburg teachers does not *resemble* the speech of Prince Willem-Alexander or a radio newsreader (cf. the scales which underlie the speaker status dimension), it has become much more acceptable in official situations requiring formal speech. The fact that there were three ministers with an audible Limburg accent in the previous administration bears some testimony to this fact.

In view of their alleged subjectivity, **beauty perceptions** do not normally play a role in scientific descriptions of language variation and change. We hope to have convinced the reader, however, that the perceived beauty of accent varieties is not individually, but communally and ideologically determined, as a result of which beauty perceptions offer us privileged insight into underlying standard language ideologies and ideals (as Van Bezooijen 2002: 13 claimed). While perceived beauty in our experiments predominantly concurs with status ratings – which is in itself intuitive confirmation of the fact that they are ideologically motivated – we have shown that they are also determined by the attractiveness component of language attitudes, which should therefore be included in investigations of this kind. Again, we find significant differences between Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch as far as speaker attractiveness is concerned: while the attractiveness values of the Netherlandic accents combine with the status values to create rich and stable social meanings (which probably explain why regional accent variation is tolerated in NSD), there is even less differentiation between the Belgian accents in terms of attractiveness than there is in terms of status. If there’s any social meaning inherent in regional accent variation in BSD, it is certainly not as rich as it is NSD.

It will be obvious that the speaker prestige, accent status, and beauty criteria manifest strong correlations in the data we have presented here (although there is no reason to assume

they always will). It is nevertheless expedient to rely on a fourth criterion of standardness which is not a feature of the accents evaluated but of the *evaluators*. We have used the degree of **consensus** between the respondents in our experiments as an indicator of the degree of communal assessment in the negotiation and construction of the regional and social variability in Standard Dutch. While demographic bias in the evaluations was almost completely absent in the Netherlandic data – which indicates that Netherlandic Teacher Dutch elicits national perceptions – nearly half of the Belgian ratings manifested significant differences in term of listener regionality, which indicates that Belgian Teacher Dutch elicits regional perceptions.

In view of the massive demographic bias that was found in highly standardised languages such as English and French, it is prudent to consider communal consensus as a typical criterion for standardisation, not as a necessary condition. For the standard stratification configuration illustrated by Netherlandic Dutch, however, we believe that communal consensus is a more stringent condition. Communal consent on a pattern of variation decreases the effect of any norm deviation engendered by that variation: if the larger community knows *why* a regional subgroup deviates from the norm – because there are no dialects left to profile regional identity – and *how* a subgroup deviates from the norm – by regionally flavoured speech which is in every other respect standard – then variation becomes not only meaningful but also predictable.

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