

The impact of dialect loss on the acceptance of Tussentaal: the special case of West-Flanders in Belgium

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INTRODUCTION

Whoever studies the sociolinguistic literature in Flanders will quickly notice that the Flemish language situation manifests strong dynamics. Processes of dialect levelling and dialect loss have led to a functional elaboration of intermediate variations in between the dialects and the standard (cf. Devos 2006; Willemyns 2005), but these intermediate varieties – which have been referred to as Tussentaal (‘in-between-language’), Verkavelingsvlaams (‘allotment-Flemish’) or Soapvlaams (‘Soap-Flemish’) (cf. Jaspers 2001) – are also penetrating contexts in which Standard Dutch used to be the norm. While increasingly more empirical studies (see e.g. Plevoets 2008) focus on this alleged standardisation of Tussentaal, a number of issues continue to be highly controversial. One of these is the shape of the standardisation, viz. whether one stable, clearly delineated, Brabantian-flavoured Tussentaal is emerging, as suggested in, for instance, Willemyns (2005) and Taeldeman (2008). A second issue is the question whether dialect loss is indeed one of the main determinants of the emergence and standardisation of Tussentaal (as purported in Willemyns 2005) and, more importantly still, whether the peripheral West-Flemish dialect area, which has proven more or less resistant against dialect loss (cf. Willemyns 2008) is also resisting Tussentaal (as suggested in for instance De Caluwe 2009).

In order to gain insight in these issues, it is essential to find out how Flemish language users perceive and evaluate¹ Tussentaal and standard language. At present, however, there are almost no ‘reliable speaker evaluation data [...] to as-

¹ In this chapter, we distinguish between perceptions on the one hand, i.e. the way in which non-linguists (1) process the auditory input, (2) recognise language varieties and (3) draw boundaries between varieties (Preston 1989), and attitudes on the other hand, i.e. the way in which non-linguists evaluate what they hear.

sess the degree of (implicit) communal acceptance of Tussentaal, and to access the SLI [Standard Language Ideology] – if any – which constructs and negotiates its use’ (Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011a: 229). This chapter represents one of the first in-depth attitudinal investigations into Tussentaal. Building on a speaker evaluation experiment in which older and younger West-Flemish listener-judges rate Belgian Standard Dutch, Brabantic-flavoured Tussentaal and West-Flemish-flavoured Tussentaal, two hypotheses are explored. First of all, we investigate whether the strong position of the dialects in West-Flanders, and the alleged concomitant weak position of Tussentaal, translate in negative attitudes towards West-Flemish Tussentaal. Secondly, it is investigated to what extent times are ‘a-changing’: is Tussentaal more easily tolerated in the private conceptualisations of adolescent West-Flemings?

TUSSENTAAL IN FLANDERS

It has recurrently been argued (see for instance Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011b) that the Flemish language repertoire is diaglossic, to the extent that in between the standard language and the dialects, a whole continuum of non-distinct intermediate varieties is found. This collection of intermediate varieties is conveniently dubbed ‘Tussentaal’, although it is obvious that there is not one Tussentaal, but a whole range of varieties determined by speech situation, education, age, sex and regional background (Willemys 2005: 31). Tussentaal cannot be described, hence, in terms of necessary and sufficient features (De Caluwe 2002: 57); it can only be said to be marked by a significant number of deviations from both the standard language and the dialect (De Caluwe 2009). There is general convergence, however, on the idea that the emergence of Tussentaal should be regarded as an endoglossic Flemish standardisation (see Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011a: 222).

The emergence of Tussentaal has spawned (extreme) irritation on the part of the cultural and educational establishment and, concomitantly, a lot of linguistic attention. The latter is mainly due to the fact that Tussentaal is regarded as a double threat: to the dialects, but also, and increasingly, to the exoglossic Netherlandic Dutch standard that was imported and enforced in Flanders as the official standard (see Vandebussche 2010; Grondelaers and Van Hout 2011b; Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman 2011: for an overview). While early contributions mainly contain emotional comments on the emergence and status of

Tussentaal (e.g. Van Istendael 1989, but also Debrabandere 2005), recent publications tend to focus on more objective descriptions (e.g. Plevoets 2008, Taeldeman 2008). In these data-based descriptions, it has repeatedly been argued that the central dialect area of Brabant is taking the lead in the endoglossic standardisation of Tussentaal (see also and especially Willemyns 2005). Brabantic-flavoured Dutch is not only represented more frequently and tolerated more easily in the national media than other local flavors; Brabant is also believed to play a central role in what is called the ‘stabilisation’ of Tussentaal (Taeldeman 2008; Rys and Taeldeman 2007), because it diffuses linguistic variants over non-Brabantic varieties of Tussentaal (Goossens 2000; Plevoets 2008; Taeldeman 2008).

Crucially, however, the peripheral West-Flemish dialect area² does not seem to be included in this process of diffusion: the transition from a diglossic (dialects vs. standard) to a diaglossic repertoire (dialects–Tussentaal–standard) is believed to be in an early stage (Willemyns 2007; De Caluwe 2009; Ghyselen 2009) in West-Flanders, mainly because the dialects in West-Flanders are fairly resistant to processes of dialect loss and dialect levelling. As a result, the local dialects (often in a levelled form) are still used in informal situations instead of Tussentaal (Willemyns 2008). At the same time, however, processes of dialect loss are reported to be affecting West-Flanders too (Devos and Vandekerckhove 2005), a result of which may be an acceleration of the diffusion of Tussentaal in this peripheral region too. In the same light, Taeldeman (2008) claims that some Brabantic features are spreading into West-Flemish-flavoured Tussentaal (a view which is not, however, corroborated by empirical research in Gabel (2010), who found Brabantic influence on informal West-Flemish speech to be a marginal phenomenon at best).

This chapter investigates the position of Tussentaal in West-Flanders from an attitudinal perspective. Attitudinal data on Tussentaal in Flanders are still relatively sparse (cf. De Caluwe 2009; Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman 2011). Impe and Speelman (2007) report a speaker evaluation experiment in which 301 adolescents from West-Flanders and Limburg evaluated four spontaneously produced stimulus fragments in Belgian Standard Dutch, West-Flemish-flavoured, Brabantic-flavoured, and Limburg-flavoured Tussentaal. While, unsurprisingly, Standard Dutch was found to be the most prestigious variety, the Tussentaal-

² This area roughly corresponds to the province of West-Flanders, the westernmost province in Flanders, but the boundaries do not completely coincide.

samples generally commanded low prestige, but high attractiveness ratings. Somewhat less expected was the finding that the Limburg Tussentaal-fragment received high prestige scores. While Impe and Speelman attributed this unexpected finding to the low frequency of Tussentaal features in the Limburg Tussentaal sample, they could not exclude that comparable evaluations for Limburg-flavoured Tussentaal and Standard Dutch were due to the fact that those two samples were produced by the same speaker.

The position of Standard Dutch as the most prestigious variety is confirmed by Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier (2007), who carried out a speaker evaluation experiment in which Antwerp adolescents rated several video fragments representing actors in specific interactional settings (e.g. a conversation at the chemist's shop), speaking either Antwerp dialect, Brabantic-flavoured Tussentaal and Standard Dutch. Although most of the findings were inconclusive, results show that in Antwerp, Standard Dutch is 'generally considered to be more appropriate than either dialect or tussentaal' (Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier 2007: 252). In line with the solidarity and social attractiveness results of Impe and Speelman (2007), younger respondents were observed to associate dialect and Tussentaal with solidarity, more than the standard language. Older informants, by contrast, were observed to associate standard language with solidarity, rather than Tussentaal. Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier's main conclusion was that in spite of the inconclusiveness of the results, the language situation in Flanders still appears to be diglossic.

In a related vein, Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman (2011) report a speaker evaluation experiment which investigates attitudes towards regionally accented standard language varieties – i.e. varieties which, in contrast to Tussentaal, are characterised by no more than (some) phonetic flavouring. Their finding is that while the Brabantic and East-Flemish accents varieties are considered prestigious, the peripheral Limburg and West-Flemish accents were downgraded with respect to prestige. This prestige distribution, crucially, is not a national construct; massive demographic bias was found in the perception of the Flemish accents (Grondelaers, Van Hout and Speelman 2011: 219).

Let us at the end of this overview summarise the chapter's goal into three research questions:

1. Since dialects occupy a strong position in West-Flanders, Tussentaal is known to be a marginal phenomenon at best there (Willemys 2007). This paper aims at exploring whether the relatively strong position of the dia-

lects in West-Flanders (De Caluwe 2009) translates in negative attitudes towards Tussentaal.

2. The dialects in West-Flanders are however losing ground too, which can be expected to go hand in hand with an increase in Tussentaal usage among younger generations (Devos and Vandekerckhove 2005). Does this assumed increase in Tussentaal among the younger generation translate in more positive attitudes towards West-Flemish-flavoured Tussentaal? This is not an implausible assumption given that ‘the main forces for change in language attitude patterns appear to be the psychological consequences of the increasing or decreasing vitality of contrasting varieties’ (Auer, Hinskens and Kerswill 2005: 11).
3. Do we, in view of the fact that it is the central Brabant area which appears to be heading the endoglossic standardisation of Tussentaal, find more positive attitudes among the younger respondents towards Brabantic-flavoured Tussentaal?

METHODOLOGY

This investigation builds on an adapted version of the matched-guise technique, a technique which was first applied by Lambert, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960) to test the attitude of Canadians towards French and English. The matched-guise technique aims at revealing language attitudes in an indirect way, so that informants are not consciously aware that their language attitudes are being investigated. As such, it is able – in contrast to more direct techniques – to access attitudes without too explicitly evoking socially desired behaviour.

However, the method has recurrently been taken to task for its artificiality: both the internal validity of the technique, i.e. the degree to which the effect of the stimulus variable can be isolated from the total variance in the perception of a language stimulus, and its external validity, i.e. the degree to which the results of a matched-guise investigation can be generalised to a non-research related context, have been questioned (see e.g. Buccini 1993: 297). Concerning the internal validity, it has been suggested that in changing their language or language variety, speakers also change their voice timbre or highlight different personality features (see e.g. Webb 2010). In addition, the assumption that a speaker can be

perfectly bi- or trilingual (or bi- or tridialectal) has been criticised as a fiction which does not correspond to linguistic reality (Buccini 1993: 297). Concerning the external legitimacy, it is mainly the ecological validity of the research context which has been criticised. According to Fasold (2012) for instance, the fact that informants have to judge individuals purely on the basis of speech is so artificial that it has to be questioned whether the results can be extrapolated to real life situations. Moreover, the official character of the test situation, caused by the research setting (in schools or speech laboratories) and by the use of a 'high' variety by the researcher, would cause the high variety to be favoured (Deprez 1984). Thirdly, incongruities may arise between the subject talked about in the stimulus material, the speaker, and the language used (Agheyisi and Fishman 1970), which can cause negative reactions which are not negative attitudes towards the language itself, but rather towards the incongruity.

Yet, the matched-guise technique is generally regarded as a 'very workable technique' (Deprez 1984: 281) when these limitations are addressed in a responsible design. In order to bypass the issue of credible bi- or tridialectalism, our experiment builds on a partial matched-guise design (Impe and Speelman 2007) with two speakers instead of one recording the Standard Dutch and Tussentaal guises. In addition, experimental stimuli are not identical, though they are topic-controlled and scripted; this was done to make the experiment less monotonous for the informants and to divert attention away from the fact that they heard the same speaker several times.

Stimulus materials

Four experimental samples of about 50 seconds were created by two female speakers who had been trained as linguists and had enjoyed extensive instruction in oral standard language proficiency and diction³; both speakers, moreover, are radio broadcasters on the Belgian national radio. Speaker A (aged 30) was born and raised in West-Flanders (Ieper), while speaker B (aged 23) was born and raised in the Brabant dialect area (Borgerhout). Both speakers recorded a standard language sample, as well as a fragment of West-Flemish (speaker A)

³ In addition to the four stimuli designed for the present research, there were two distractor fragments of about 50 seconds in Brabant and West-Flemish Tussentaal produced by two male speakers, as well as five fragments which pertained to another investigation. As it is often assumed that in evaluation experiments the first stimulus fragment is used as a benchmark to evaluate following fragments, the Brabant distractor fragment was used as introductory fragment for all speakers.

and Brabantic Tussentaal (speaker B). A trained linguist with expertise in Standard Dutch language proficiency (from the eastern-most province of Limburg) confirmed that there were no differences in degree of accentedness between the Standard Dutch fragments.

All samples contained (fragments of) popular fairy-tales such as Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel. Fairy-tales were chosen because they represent a form of neutral content which can be produced both in Standard Dutch and Tussentaal without causing disruptions between subject and appropriate language register. While samples were created with a view to sounding natural and authentic, they were all produced on the basis of written transcripts of the fairy-tales which contained the same number of hesitations, 'euh'-sounds, repetitions and non-lexically filled pauses, i.e. pauses taking longer than one second in the middle of the sentence and longer than two seconds between sentences. Speakers were asked to assimilate the texts and to produce them as naturally as possible, avoiding any impression that they were reading aloud. To avoid artificiality, no editing was done afterwards. By relying on fully written-out scripts we attempted to control grammar, lexis, and fluency in the samples to a degree that perceptual differences would be attributable as much as possible to the variety of Dutch evaluated, not to formality or fluency associations.

Listener-judges

165 informants were recruited in the region Ieper-Poperinge in the South-West of West-Flanders; 82 of them were male, 83 female. Two age groups were compared: a group of younger informants (14 to 18 years old, with a mean age of 16) and a group of older informants (40 to 60 years old, with a mean age of 56). The level of education was controlled by including informants with an average or higher education level. For the older informants, this criterion implied that they had finished secondary school, for the younger that they took some form of general pre-university schooling (the so-called 'Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs'). Young informants were recruited in secondary schools, and care was taken not to include students who had already had courses on Tussentaal. The older informants were recruited via local cultural organisations.

Scales

Informants rated the experimental stimuli on 12 seven-point-scales pertaining to the trustworthiness of the speaker ('Do you think that speaker X is someone you can trust?'), her persuasiveness, sense of humour, capacities as an entertainer, physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, reliability, intelligence, popularity, helpfulness, income and professional success.

Respondents were given an experimental set of 11 response sheets, the first 10 of which contained the 12 experimental scales for each of the 11 stimuli, whereas the last contained some demographic variables pertaining to the listener-judge. A post hoc discussion of the survey revealed that whereas some informants had noticed that the experiment was accent- and/or language-related, no-one could correctly identify the exact features or varieties under study, and the term 'Tussentaal' was mentioned by only one informant out of 165. As a result, the experimental goal of our study appears to have been sufficiently hidden to yield private, implicit attitudes towards Tussentaal.

Procedure

Younger informants participated in the experiment in the classroom: in order to conceal the experimental purpose as much as possible, the experiment was carried out during courses unrelated to language (instruction), such as mathematics. The older informants took part in the experiment at the beginning of a meeting of their organisation. All experimental sessions were led by the first author, who told informants that the experimental aim was to test which image the Flemish form themselves of random people they hear on the radio. This introduction was presented informally in West-Flemish-flavoured speech, in order to avoid creating a formal setting which might favour the standard language.

Informants did not rate all the experimental fragments, which were quite long (between 49–53 seconds): all items had the same length as the five single feature clips (not analyzed in this chapter) which were constructed to contain a sufficient number of tokens of the features concerned. As a consequence, all informants rated the two Standard Dutch fragments as well as the distractor fragments, 48 informants evaluated the Brabantic-flavoured Tussentaal and 38 informants evaluated the West-Flemish Tussentaal.

RESULTS

A Principal Component Analysis of our data returned the well-known prestige-solidarity-model (Brown and Gilman 1960) which has recurrently been confirmed in experimental attitude research. Fragment scores for the prestige and solidarity dimensions were calculated by using the regression approach (cf. DiStefano, Zhu and Míndrilla 2009) which yields a range of standard or z-scores in which zero is the average, negative scores reflect negative attitudes and positive scores imply positive attitudes. These z-scores are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Median z-scores for individual fragments on solidarity and prestige

	Standard Dutch speaker A	Standard Dutch speaker B	West-Flemish Tussentaal speaker A	Brabantic Tussentaal speaker B
Solidarity				
Global	0.47	-0.10	0.04	-0.35
Male	0.49	-0.03	0.04	-0.17
Female	0.41	-0.16	0.06	-0.67
Young	0.53	-0.10	-0.22	-0.53
Old	0.40	0.00	0.35	-0.26
Prestige				
Global	0.26	0.26	-0.62	-0.73
Male	0.25	0.17	-0.78	-0.74
Female	0.35	0.49	-0.33	-0.71
Young	0.37	0.42	-0.15	-0.29
Old	-0.11	0.02	-0.92	-1.19

In the statistical analyses, non-parametric tests – Mann-Whitney for two sample comparisons and Kruskal-Wallis for multi-sample comparisons – were used because the data are ordinal and tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and a Shapiro-Wilk) confirm that the null hypothesis of a normal distribution on the prestige and solidarity-variables should be rejected (for the same reason, medians instead of means are reported in Table 1).

A first observation concerning Table 1 is that speaker A's speech is generally rated higher on the solidarity scales than speaker B's: both the Standard Dutch fragment and the Tussentaal fragment of speaker A are rated significantly more

positively for solidarity than the Standard Dutch fragment of speaker B (Mann-Whitney $p < 0.001$) and the Tussentaal fragment of speaker B (Mann-Whitney $p = 0.009$)⁴. This difference can be attributed to subtle voice quality differences (speaker B's voice being somewhat more nasal than speaker A's – see Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010: 111) for a similar effect of nasality on perception), but also to the fact that speaker A is a more 'experienced' standard speaker: whereas speaker A had years of experience as a radio broadcaster at the moment of recording, speaker B was still at the beginning of her radio career.

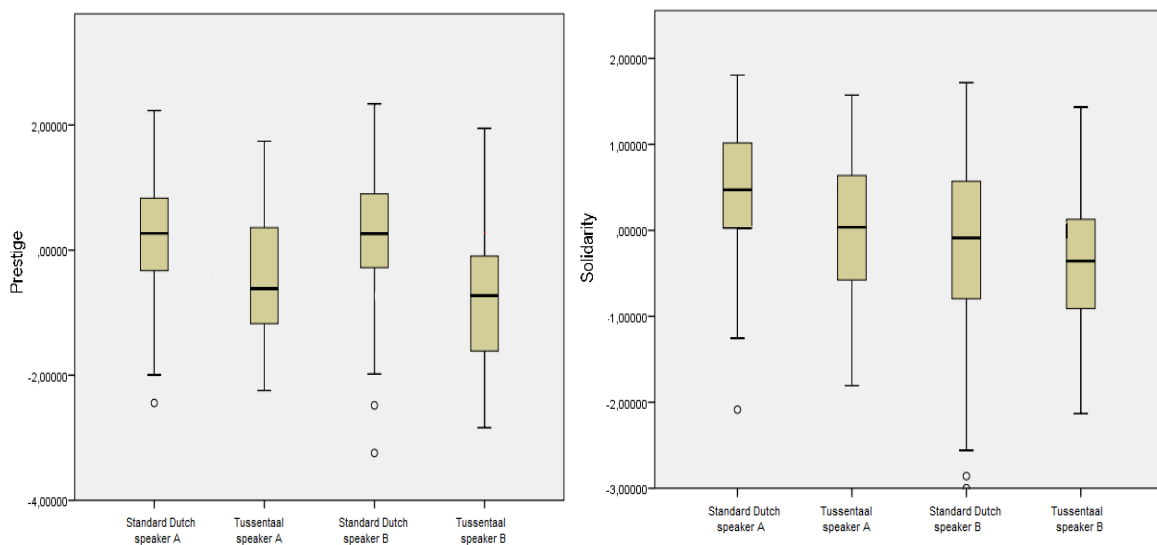
Table 2: Comparison of Standard Dutch and Tussentaal using Mann-Whitney Rank Sum Test

	Fragment	n	Median	M-W U	p-value
Solidarity	Standard Dutch (speaker A)	165	0.4705	2186.500	0.004
	West-Flemish Tussentaal (speaker A)	38	0.0355		
	Standard Dutch (speaker B)	165	-0.0986	3066.500	0.029
	Brabantic Tussentaal (speaker B)	47	-0.3524		
Prestige	Standard Dutch (speaker A)	165	0.2620	1909.500	<0.001
	West-Flemish Tussentaal (speaker A)	38	-0.6155		
	<i>Standard Dutch</i> (<i>speaker B</i>)	<i>165</i>	<i>0.2578</i>	2015.500	<0.001
	Brabantic Tussentaal (speaker B)	47	-0.7278		

Concerning the first research question of this chapter, the main finding is that West-Flemish informants have fairly negative attitudes to both varieties of Tussentaal included in the experiment (in accordance with Willemyns 2007: 274–275): Table 2 demonstrates that both speakers are rated significantly more negatively on the solidarity and prestige dimensions when they use Tussentaal than when they use standard varieties.

⁴ Both voices are rated as equally prestigious however ($p > 0.1$).

If we concentrate on the regional origin of Tussentaal stimuli (see also Figures 1 and 2), it can be observed that Brabantic Tussentaal is rated significantly more negatively on the solidarity scale than West-Flemish Tussentaal (Mann-Whitney $p=0.009$), whereas no significant differences can be observed on the prestige dimension. Recall, however, that the same tendency was found for the standard language stimuli of speaker A and B, as a result of which we cannot exclude that the diverging Tussentaal perceptions are also due to voice quality and proficiency differences between speaker A and B (rather than to any actual difference in the evaluation of West-Flemish and Brabantic Tussentaal). In order to factor out such global, irrelevant differences, we replaced our absolute scores with relative ones, by computing the difference between each speaker's Standard Dutch score and Tussentaal score. These relative scores are indicators of the (negative or positive) impact the use of Tussentaal has on the evaluation of a speaker, using the evaluation of the speaker using Standard Dutch as benchmark.



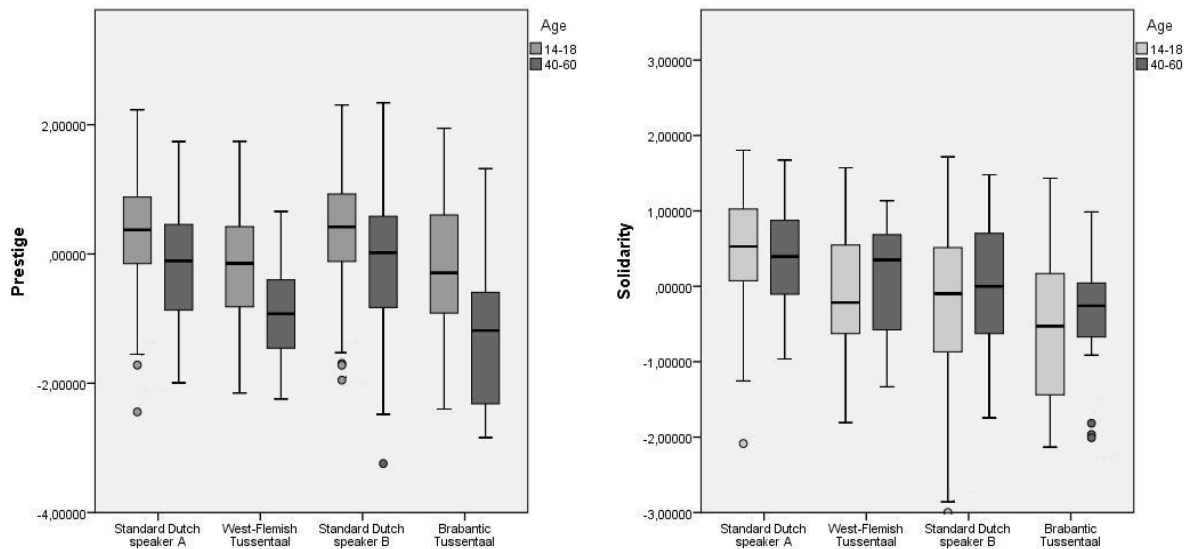
Figures 1 and 2: Boxplots of evaluation of Standard Dutch and Tussentaal for prestige and solidarity

Crucially, there are no significant differences between the relative scores for West-Flemish and Brabantic Tussentaal (Mann-Whitney $p=0.818$ for solidarity and $p=0.923$ for prestige), which indicates that the regional provenance of the Tussentaal does not seem to have any influence on the evaluation of Tussentaal: both West-Flemish and Brabantic Tussentaal are downgraded similarly vis-à-vis Standard Dutch.

These negative attitudes towards Tussentaal converge with the idea that in West-Flanders the rapid progress of Tussentaal is delayed by the relatively strong position the dialects still hold there (De Caluwe 2009). The fact that West-Flemish-flavoured Tussentaal is perceived neither as a sign of solidarity, nor of prestige, indicates that dialects and Standard Dutch are still considered to be the only appropriate means of respectively informal and formal communication. Neither does there seem to be any greater tolerance towards Brabantic Tussentaal, which is prominently used in the national media and is known to strongly impact the language use in the surrounding dialect areas (Taeldeman 2008). Previous attitudinal research by Impe and Speelman (2007) in the whole of Flanders had shown that Brabantic supraregional language is generally evaluated as ‘socially attractive’, but our informants do not seem to share this view, evaluating Brabantic Tussentaal as neither prestigious nor socially attractive. A possible explanation for this result is the persistent West-Flemish stereotype about the Brabantic (and especially the Antwerp) as braggarts who consider themselves superior to the West-Flemish⁵.

A second research question was whether younger respondents have more positive attitudes towards West-Flemish-flavoured Tussentaal than older respondents. This was expected given the fact that the dialects in West-Flanders are slowly losing ground, making way for an increase in Tussentaal usage. At first sight (cf. Figures 3 and 4), this hypothesis seems to be confirmed by our data: a Kruskal-Wallis test shows that the younger informant group rates West-Flemish-flavoured Tussentaal significantly higher on prestige than the older informant group ($p=0.024$). On the solidarity dimension, no significant differences could be found ($p=0.397$).

⁵ Support for this hypothesis is the fact that during the experiments, when the Brabantic fragments were played, five respondents mockingly remarked that it was certainly *een Antwerpse dikkenekke* (‘an Antwerp braggart’) speaking. This is a considerable amount, given that the questionnaire ought to be completed in silence.



Figures 3 and 4: Effect of age on evaluation of Standard Dutch and Tussentaal for prestige and solidarity

A closer look at the graphs, however, reveals that there is *general* tendency among younger informants to award higher prestige ratings than the older informants, not just to West-Flemish Tussentaal but also to the Standard Dutch stimuli and the Brabantic Tussentaal fragment. In order to level out this different rating behaviour, we again use relative scores comparing Tussentaal scores to Standard Dutch scores, rather than absolute scores. The same relative technique is used as in the analysis of the regional Tussentaal differences, as focusing on the difference between each speaker's Standard Dutch score and Tussentaal score does not only allow factoring out the difference between speaker A and speaker B, but also neutralizing rating behaviour differences between young and old informants: if younger informants generally give higher scores on the prestige dimension than older informants, they will do so for both the Standard Dutch fragments as for the Tussentaal fragments. Hence, by focusing on the relative differences between the Standard Dutch fragment and the Tussentaal fragments and by studying the way in which age impacts these relative scores, we are able to study the age differences in the evaluation of Tussentaal, rather than the age differences in rating speakers in general on prestige dimensions.

With regard to prestige, the relative scores reveal that the use of West-Flemish Tussentaal impacts the attitudes in a similar way for both age groups (Kruskal-Wallis Test on relative scores, $p=0.254$). On the solidarity dimension, the relative scores do not reveal any statistically significant preference for West-Flemish Tussentaal (Kruskal-Wallis Test on relative scores, $p=0.838$).

A third question which has to be addressed here is whether more positive attitudes towards Brabantic -flavoured Tussentaal can be found among the younger informants. This hypothesis was formulated in view of the idea that it is the central Brabant area which is heading the endoglossic standardisation of Tussentaal. Figures 3 and 4 indicate that younger informants rate Brabantic Tussentaal higher on prestige scales than the older informant group (Kruskal-Wallis $p=0.005$), whereas older and younger informants rate it similarly on the solidarity dimension (Kruskal-Wallis $p=0.516$). However, when we factor out the observation that our younger informants deem all samples more prestigious than older informants, by concentrating on the relative scores, we again find no significant differences between our age groups (Kruskal-Wallis $p=0.167$ for solidarity and $p=0.733$ for prestige).

In brief, no clear age effects can be observed. This is a remarkable result, which contradicts previous perception and production research in other regions which show that it is especially younger people who favour Tussentaal (Vandekerckhove and Cuvelier 2007; Plevoets 2008). Our results show that no change in the appreciation of Tussentaal is imminent in West-Flanders, and confirms the exceptional status of the latter in the Flemish linguistic landscape.

CONCLUSION

Is there attitudinal evidence for the idea that the rapid progress of Tussentaal in Flanders is delayed in West-Flanders by the relatively strong position the dialects still hold there? We found zero tolerance (no prestige, no solidarity) for Tussentaal in West-Flanders, and while there are few data available to calibrate this finding, the fact that Tussentaal does not even elicit the evaluations of sympathy and solidarity it enjoys elsewhere in Flanders is strongly indicative of a conservatively diglossic distribution of dialects for informal, and Standard Dutch for formal language use. Since, in addition, we found no straightforward age effects, there is no evidence for changing evaluations among the younger generation: adolescent West-Flemings do not seem to jump the bandwagon of rapidly spreading Tussentaal.

In combination with the production data in De Caluwe (2009: 23), which demonstrate that some of the most typical Tussentaal variables are used almost four times less frequently by young West-Flemish adults than by other Flemish speakers, the perception data presented in this paper clearly confirm the impact

of dialect loss on the rise and dissemination of Tussentaal. The rapid spread of Tussentaal seems to correlate organically with the loss of language varieties in which speakers can express regional identity. The survival of these varieties, conversely, conditions the growth of Tussentaal. In order to acquire better insight in the dynamics of the Dialect–Tussentaal interaction, the present investigation will have to be replicated in other Flemish dialect areas. In any case, it is only through the systematic collection and confrontation of production and perception data that we can eventually hope to gain insight into the dynamics of ongoing standard language change in Flanders.

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