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Swanenberg, A.P.C.

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**CONCEPTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF  
MULTILINGUALISM IN EUROPE 2**

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## **CONCEPTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF MULTILINGUALISM IN EUROPE 2**

2011

Tetovë

## **Diglossia, diaglossia and multiethnolect. The case of youth language in the Netherlands**

Jos Swanenberg

### Abstract

*This paper aims at mapping out and analysing language variation and the underlying social dynamics at various points in the spectrum of urbanization from capital city to small agricultural village (province North Brabant). In the Netherlands, local dialects are gradually changing into regional languages, albeit with a recognizable accent and vocabulary. The original stage of diglossia changes to diaglossia. These new language varieties are clearly linked to regional identities, as well as to other markers of regional and local identity, such as sports (and their respective supporters), folklore, and music preferences. Research in the area of variety and diversity in language and culture among adolescents has been conducted frequently over the last ten years in the Western and Northern European language area, but the focus always is on urban subcultures. In North Brabant however rural societies are also very dynamic and have a rich history of immigration (from Indonesia in the 1950s till Poland and Romania in the last decade). Via participant observations and speech recordings of students from various high schools, in their 'natural habitat' (club, school), extralingual data were gathered in order to construct style clusters (sets of regular concurrencies of social features) and define social and geographical background. Spontaneous speech was recorded in order to isolate linguistic features, special to new language varieties (cf. Quist 2008). New language varieties between traditional, local dialects and standard Dutch show a broad spectrum of identity marking features, such as hyperdialectforms, greeting rituals, regional accents, loan words (Limburgish, Surinam, English). The paper focuses on new language varieties in the continuum between dialect and standard language and can be qualified as a mix of geo- and sociolinguistic and ethno- and sociocultural microvariation research.*

In Europe the language situation for dialects and Standard language is a status of diglossia. Diglossia is the use by a language community of two closely related language varieties. In this stage the standard language and local dialects each have their pragmatic domain, so speakers may switch between them. In Northern and Western Europe, local dialects are gradually changing into regional languages, albeit with a recognizable accent and vocabulary (Auer 2005).

In the Dutch province of Limburg we still find diglossia. Limburgians speak standard Dutch and a local dialect. These local dialects together are an official regional language, but there's no Standard Limburgian. In our research area, the Dutch province of North Brabant the stage of diglossia is almost exclusively found in elder generations. The original stage of diglossia changes to diaglossia, which means that in between the two poles of local dialects on the one side and Standard Dutch on the other side, a continuum of varieties evolves. In this continuum we find regional varieties or regiolects. Local and regional dialects in North Brabant are not an official language, because they're supposedly closer to Dutch, although this isn't the case for all Limburgian dialects. This is remarkable since Brabantish dialects are more under pressure than Limburgian dialects.

These new language varieties, regiolects, are clearly linked to regional identities, as well as to other markers of regional and local identity, such as sports (and their respective supporters), folklore, and music preferences.

The emergence of regiolects implies predominantly dialect loss, the fading of dialect features. One might expect that vernacular in Dutch will show less diversity in the future, but the case is not that simple. Regiolects in the Netherlands were first dealt with by Cor Hoppenbrouwers (1990) as a form of youth language.

In urban societies, language varieties associated with various social groups in a migration setting have become a popular topic of research in Northern and Western Europe, in which the emergence of multiethnolects (Clyne 2000) was described. This is a linguistic variety that has developed in multiethnic communities and is used by groups consisting of at least several ethnic minorities. In the Netherlands *straattaal* 'street talk' is a common term for this phenomenon, although *straattaal* is not necessarily used by groups consisting of several minorities, but is simply a variety that picks elements from different ethnolects and vernaculars. Multiethnolect typically is a language variety used by younger people, it's a form of youth language.

Multiethnolect research in Northern and Western Europe typically takes place in an urban setting, e.g. Stockholm, Copenhagen and Antwerp, or in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. In North Brabant however rural societies are also very dynamic and have a rich history of immigration (from Indonesia in the 1950s till Poland and Romania in the last decade). Multicultural, -lingual and -ethnic diversity is not a phenomenon that is restricted to metropolitan areas (see also Juffermans 2010: 24).

Research of cultural and linguistic diversity in North Brabant calls for a descriptive, ethnographic study of language variety and identity among youngsters in a socio-geographical range from urban to rural habitats. It's not the question 'who speaks what language variety to whom in what context with what goal', but rather 'how does a specific group of people speak in specific contexts', how does one manage language (cf. the concept of local languaging (Juffermans 2010)).

The approach of our study is inspired on the work of Pia Quist (2008) and her emphasis on the necessity for sociolinguists to adopt both a variety perspective and a stylistic practice perspective on any kind of language variety.

The variety perspective asks for a formal description of a set of linguistic features. The perspective is needed to systematically describe linguistic variation and change in a speech community, which paves the way for a systematic analysis of social structures and dynamics that we focus on via the stylistic practice perspective.

The variety perspective implies examining language use and variation with the objective of describing new emerging varieties. We may describe features of new varieties in vocabulary, phonology, morphology and syntax. The following two examples of new linguistic features in these youth language varieties, coming from a pilot study in the North Brabantish town of Veghel:

-internal hyper dialect forms, e.g. the word *clubske*, for a 'small group of people'. Regarding the suffix this word form is unmistakably Brabantish, the Dutch counterpart is *clubje*, yet it is not an indigenous dialect form. The true dialect form should be *clubke*. According to grammatical rules the suffix *-ske* only can be applied to words that end in velar consonants, e.g. *oogje-eugske* (eye), *bakje-bekske* (cup), *club* however requires *-ke*. Morphologically *clubske* is a new form, with a remarkable suffix denoting a diminutive, that has the intention to exaggerate a Brabantish identity. Especially during the folk festivities of carnival a term like *clubske* can be heard, in for instance 't cool *clubske*, an act during the carnival festivity 'hofzitting', in Kuussegat, the carnival name of Veghel. A similar example is the word form *appartementske*, heard in a stage play in Eindhoven; *appartementje* is the Dutch form and would also be the dialect form, since nouns ending in *-t* require the suffix *-je*

in both standard language and dialects, but the Brabantish suffix –ske was used here to emphasise the Brabantish roots of the character in the play. Because these are intentional and exaggerated dialect forms we call them hyper dialect (Hoppenbrouwers 1990 mentions comparable examples of hyper dialect, and considers them to originate from deficit dialect acquisition and typical for the genesis of regiolects).

-external hyper dialect forms. An example of a non standard form that didn't originate from Brabant, is the term *piefke*. Informants told me a *piefke* is a cigarette rolled using cannabis. There's no documentation of a Brabant dialect form *piefke*. The informants translated the term with *jonco*, which is neither a Brabantish or Dutch word. *Jonco* is a Surinam word (from the South American creole language Sranan Tongo) for a cigarette rolled using cannabis, and it is a typical form that belongs to multiethnolect. In Dutch it is usually called a *joint* or *stickie*, English loanwords. There's no authentic dialect word in this case, there simply isn't one for this concept. The informants said they learnt the word in the city, Eindhoven in this case. *Piefke* was also found by Belgian linguists in the city of Antwerp (Van Renterghem e.a. 2007), and I found it on internet fora in Limburgian settings. *Pieve* turns out to be an indigenous dialect word in Southern Limburg for smoking. *Piefke* is a normal cigarette rolled using tobacco, in Southern Limburg. Probably *piefke* in Eindhoven is a Limburgian loanword. Why Limburg? Perhaps because Limburg has the most stereotypical dialects in the Netherlands. In that case this would be another hyper dialect form. If these are loan words from stereotypical dialects one might call them external hyper dialect forms as opposed to the internal forms like *clubske*.

These were some examples of features in new varieties, that are part of the language variety perspective.

The latter example can also be used for the sociopragmatic part of our research, the stylistic practice perspective. The use of *piefke*, is restricted to vmbo-students (lower level education). The informants were streetwise 15 year old boys. Not only the use of a hyper dialect form but also the use of the Surinam term is a manner of showing how tough these boys are. They were not immigrant children themselves, but they like to identify with the Surinam youth culture, a hiphop culture.

The other groups of informants, gymnasium students (higher level education, 17 year old, neat girls), said they had heard of the word but they would never use it since it is a vulgar word and they do not smoke cannabis anyway.

The stylistic practice perspective aims at studying language varieties: 'in more holistic terms as part of a broad range of stylistic repertoires in a local community of practice' (Quist 2008: 43). Its goal is to understand linguistic practices and their social meaning and speech is analyzed within a local system of semiotic contrasts in a local community of practice. Style in this context is a cluster of social and cultural, including linguistic, features. These clusters are dynamic (the description is merely a snap shot, where you ought to have a movie to catch the dynamics). Style clusters are feature sets that give an impression of identity, adapted to a specific situation and context. Or even, features may be adapted during a conversation.

The classical paradigm in sociolinguistics rests on the assumption that there are more or less fixed links between specific language varieties and specific communities, but that can not account for the dynamics we encounter. We need to look at how people index affiliation to multiple groups by primary socialisation, ethnic group membership, etc. Shifting and multiple group membership have no place in the classical model, and yet, multiple, shifting and ambiguous identities are the hallmark of human social life, especially in contemporary societies (Cornips & Van Rooij 2010). The dynamic linguistic and social diversity, that may be seen as super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) reveals itself through 'truncated repertoires' (see Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005): specific bits of language combined in a repertoire that reflects the fragmented and highly diverse life-trajectories and environments of people.

### *Design*

Teenagers (n=50, age 15-17 yrs.) were studied in their high schools, because this is where one can strike a balance of encountering high diversity while simultaneously being able to have some control.

Selections are made of high schools that are located in rural or urbanising communities. The study is performed in four high schools that are located in more and less rural areas of the Dutch province of Brabant: from urbanising area to small village, stages in the complete spectrum of urbanisation of this province. The schools are Jeroen Bosch college in 's-Hertogenbosch (approx. 103.000 inhabitants), Pius X college in Bladel (10.000), Merlet college, auxiliary branch in Mill (6000) and Udens college in Uden (35.000). Regional high school colleges are the 'market places' where adolescents with different backgrounds meet.

We've recorded video of relatively spontaneous conversations and interactions of 16 groups of two, three or four high school students. Our intention was to record as much as possible real-life spontaneous interaction that occurs in an informal setting (lunch breaks, after school get-togethers, school trips etc.). Socio-cultural data and 'body sign'-data are gathered by individual interviews using a questionnaire and making field notes.

The 16 interviews were transcribed in CLAN (<http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/>). Remarkable utterances then were labeled, as follows:

\*MEL: niet groter als Sint Hubert dat weet ik zeker. [not bigger than the town of Sint Hubert, that I know for sure]

%pho: nie [t-deletion]

%syn: groter als [comparative]

%pho: dà [t-deletion]

%pho: wee'k [contraction: weet ik]

The informant MEL uses marked language features, consisting of the phonological features t-deletion (*niet-nie* 'not', *dat-dà* 'that') and contraction (*weet ik-wee'k* 'I know') and a syntactic feature referring to the comparative (*groter dan-groter als* 'bigger than').

In this way we counted all marked language chunks, labeling them linguistically and categorising them by defining their original registers (dialect, English slang, Dutch slang, ethnolect etc.).

### *Results*

In this paragraph the data are analyzed. We'll focus on four recordings in Bladel and 's-Hertogenbosch. First the quantitative analysis of the four recordings (varying in length from 24 till 42 minutes) is presented. Next a qualitative interpretation of the language variation will come to the fore. Also some of the sociocultural features are listed.

#### *Bladel 1*

Number of utterances informant JOR: 242

Number of utterances informant BRA: 150

Number of utterances informant JOE: 245

Number of words informant JOR: 1894

Number of words informant BRA: 862

Number of words informant JOE: 1387

### Mapping linguistic variety (Relative numbers (x 100))

	P/U	P/W	S/U	S/W	L/U	L/W	M/U	M/W
<b>Jor</b>	34,30	4,38	2,48	0,32	17,77	2,27	3,31	0,42
<b>Bra</b>	32,67	5,68	3,33	0,58	9,33	1,62	0,67	0,12
<b>Joe</b>	26,53	4,69	1,22	0,22	8,57	1,51	1,22	0,21

P/U = number of Phonological codes divided by number of Utterances informant

P/W = number of Phonological codes divided by number of Words informant

S = Syntax, L = Lexicon, M = Morphology.

#### *Bladel 2*

Number of utterances informant LOE: 289

Number of utterances informant LAU: 246

Number of words informant LOE: 2320

Number of words informant LAU: 1497

	P/U	P/W	S/U	S/W	L/U	L/W	M/U	M/W
<b>Lau</b>	23,17	3,81	0,41	0,07	4,88	0,80	2,03	0,33
<b>Loe</b>	18,00	2,24	0,69	0,09	4,50	0,56	0,34	0,04

#### *'s-Hertogenbosch 1*

Number of utterances informant COC : 128

Number of utterances informant ELI: 83

Number of utterances informant NIE: 160

Number of words informant COC: 922

Number of words informant ELI: 790

Number of words informant NIE: 1462

	P/U	P/W	S/U	S/W	L/U	L/W	M/U	M/W
<b>Coc</b>	8,59	1,19	2,34	0,33	4,68	0,65	0,78	0,11
<b>Eli</b>	7,23	0,76	2,41	0,25	15,66	1,65	2,41	0,25
<b>Nie</b>	7,50	0,82	3,12	0,34	20,00	2,19	0,63	0,07

#### *'s-Hertogenbosch 2*

Number of utterances informant VEL: 201

Number of utterances informant ISA: 96

Number of utterances informant JOD: 108

Numbers of utterances informant RAG: 143

Number of words informant VEL: 1002

Number of words informant ISA: 458

Number of words informant JOD: 593

Number of words informant: RAG: 635

	P/U	P/W	S/U	S/W	L/U	L/W	M/U	M/W
<b>Vel</b>	13,93	2,79	10,95	2,20	17,41	3,49	0,50	0,10
<b>Isa</b>	6,25	1,31	3,13	0,07	5,21	1,09	0,00	0,00
<b>Jod</b>	13,88	2,53	7,41	1,35	12,96	2,36	0,93	0,16
<b>Rag</b>	14,00	3,15	13,29	3,00	5,59	1,26	1,40	0,31



These numbers show that some speakers show more variation than others, or rather, that some recordings contain more variation than others. In the conversation of the three girls in 's-Hertogenbosch 1, scores are rather low in comparison to the other recordings. Especially the three boys in Bladel 1 use a lot of marked utterances.

Morphological marked features are quite rare, syntactic features are not very numerous either. It's predominantly the lexical and phonological features that mark youth language variety. Where Taeldeman (2008) found for the informal language in between Standard Dutch and local dialects in Flanders that morphological features play an important role (e.g. in gender marking *onze auto-onzen auto* 'our car'), our data hardly show any morphological features that deviate from Standard Dutch.

Looking more closely at the data we find that some phonological features are present in the speech of all our informants, namely t-deletion, n-deletion and contraction. The group of Bladel 1 scored high on lexical and phonological features. The phonological features are typically related to the local dialects (quality of the vowel *aa*, e.g. *Paose-Pasen*). The lexical features are either related to dialects or to slang, combining Dutch words and English loanwords:

Dialect: *koekwaus*, term of abuse, *dik* 'often', *daarlangs* for *daarnaast* 'next to him'  
Dutch slang, appreciative: *gast*, *vette vent*, *supergoed* 'guy', 'great guy', 'excellent',  
and pejorative: *flikker toch op*, *kut zoi*, *kutkindje* 'get lost', 'rubbish', and a term of abuse.  
English words: *what the fuck*, *yes*, *easy*, *peanuts*.

To a lesser degree we find some dialectic features in morphology (loss of inflection marker in plural adjectives: *goede-goei*) and syntax (double negation: "*ik zou ook niet meer tegen hem gaan spelen ook niet*", "I would not play against him either not either").

Though these speakers do not use the local dialects in this conversation, there are a lot of dialectic features in their language. They clearly use the regiolect of this area, emerging in phonology (palatalisation *dè* for *dat*), lexicon (*dik* for *vaak*), and to a lesser degree, morphology (*goei* for *goede*) and syntax (double negation).

They also use popular terms from youth slang, especially in the field of social intercourse: impolite terms (swearwords, terms of abuse), adverbs of degree ('very', 'enormous'), appreciative terms ('great', 'beautiful'). The style cluster that can be compiled of these participants is listed below:

gender: male  
location: rural  
origin: Dutch, small town  
religion: r-catholic (not practicing)  
lect: regiolect/Dutch slang  
music: rock  
sports: football  
leisure: pc

For the group of Bladel 2, consisting of two girls, we find a comparable pattern, though it is less extreme. Their language is less rude, but again it is full of dialectic phonological features and lexical features: *kei* 'very', *ons mam* 'my mother, lit. our mother', *daarlangs* 'next to him', *aanlopen* 'leave'. In the morphology the remarkable past participle *gevrage* was found, which is the old strong verb-participle that still survives in dialects, whereas Standard Dutch has *gevraagd*, a past participle for a weak verb.

There seems to be no input at all in the Bladel 1 and 2 conversations from ethnolects, based on Sranan Tongo, Arabic, Turkish etc., nor from other dialects than their own Brabantish dialect.

The group of 's-Hertogenbosch 1 scored quite low. One of the participants however used some typical words (*kei* 'very', *vet* 'great') and also had some syntactic features that stood out (gender marking *die-dat*, *de-het*, case of the pronoun following a comparative: *dan jij-als jou*). These features often are regarded as annoying regional mistakes against Standard Dutch.

In the group of 's-Hertogenbosch 2 we find an interesting combination of dialect and ethnolect features. This group is ethnically mixed, with a participant born and raised in 's-Hertogenbosch but descending from Turkish parents, a participant from Sri Lanka, a third participant with a Limburgian mother and a father from Uruguay and a fourth participant from local descent. The first participant is male, the others are female. The style cluster compiled from features for this first participant is:

gender: male  
location: urban  
origin: Turkish  
religion: muslim  
lect: regio-/multietnolect  
music: R&B, hiphop  
sports: kickboxing  
leisure: running

In this recording all four participate in a conversation that mixes various ethnolect and dialect features. The boy Vel. is the instigator. They engage in a play, calling a friend of the boy anonymously and teasing and insulting him. Vel. uses a lot of swear words and terms of abuse. He also has some local dialect forms (*zeetie* 'said he', *ocherm* 'oh (how) poor'), that are stigmatised. These are not tertiary dialect features, slipping in by accident, but primary features, willingly applied (primary features are local, salient, often stigmatized, and vulnerable; secondary features are regional, less salient but well known; and tertiary features are close to the standard language and relatively subconscious, cf. Taeldeman 2008). Further more Vel. uses features that seem to originate from ethnolect (stressing the vowel schwa in *jonguh*, *maatuh* 'boy', 'friends' even in *gabuh* 'friend', deleting an -r: *gabber*). Lexical items however do not originate from his own Turkish repertoire, but from Arabic, a language of the 'stereotypical immigrants' from Morocco (Cornips & Van Rooij in prep.), e.g. *wallah* 'for sure', *ewa* 'hey, what's up', *dreri* 'friend'. In this way Vel. mixes different ethnolectic features, typical for multietnolect, and dialect features, showing an example of language crossing (Rampton 1995) in a super-diversity setting (Vertovec 2007). We find parallels in the work of Jaspers (2005) on playful linguistic sabotage. With this study, which he carried out at a secondary school in Antwerp (Belgium), Jaspers shows that, contrasting general stereotypes about these boys' supposed incompetence in Dutch, Moroccan boys deliberately and skilfully style several Dutch varieties to wrong-foot adults and people in authority. A crucial element of this practice is 'doing ridiculous' with linguistic varieties (e.g. exaggerated forms of the Antwerp dialect, Standard Dutch and learned Dutch), including the faking of enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn, simulating ignorance and creating other kinds of ambiguity and inauthenticity all for the sake of causing delay, confusion and unauthorised pleasure, especially in the context of boring activities (Jaspers 2005).

There seems to be a lot of adaptive behavior, language accommodation, going on towards the more extreme speakers, most clearly shown by the girls towards Vel., and in Bladel by Joe. towards Jor.

### *Conclusion*

The case of youth language in North Brabant, The Netherlands, does not reveal a simple stage in the process of diglossia transgressing to diaglossia. The traditional status of diglossia, with Standard Dutch and local dialects each having their pragmatic domain, no longer fits our recorded data. Our speakers are speakers of informal Dutch, full of regional, deficit, English, or, in the case of a group of city youngsters, multiethnolect features. English, multiethnolect, and dialect features however are embedded in Dutch structures; we hardly find any 'full' dialect, English or ethnolect utterances. The repertoires vary amongst groups and individuals, being adapted to contexts and circumstances. This process implies that our participants have mixed, or rather, multiple identities. Language accommodation plays a strong role in the group conversations. Though ethnicity and nationality contribute to these communities of practice, there is no one-to-one correspondence between ethnic background and stylistic features such as the use of multiethnolect. It simply comes up when needed, playfully and willingly applied in conversation. English, dialect features (including primary features) as well as multiethnolect features are clearly part of the repertoire, but none of the lects is used as a sociolect, ex- or including potential group members. They are used as truncated repertoires for special purposes in joking, insulting, boasting, fooling around and doing ridiculous.

Obviously, a systematic description of youth language in the Netherlands is not possible. Heterogeneity and flexibility form the norm. It is therefore important to emphasise that these new language varieties need to be viewed upon in the geographical, social and cultural space in which they are used and will further develop. We choose as our research field not the adolescents in urban society, but aim for a broader terrain, including the youngsters from more and less rural areas, which implies the province North Brabant in its full spectrum of urbanisation and multi-ethnicity, from small agricultural towns via the urbanising areas to the cities.

Language variation in this approach is integrated in cultural diversity and, as such, part of a holistic perspective on stylistic variation. In this way we hope to gain insights in the development and dynamics of identities of teenagers in North Brabant, and of course in the role that language plays.

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