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# BIDIALECTALISM AND PRIMARY SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT IN A DUTCH DIALECT AREA

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**Abstract.** *Within the tradition of the sociolinguistic difference theory in the Dutch municipality of Gennep a research project was carried out into dialect and education. The Gennep region dialectally and sociolinguistically can be considered representative not only for the Netherlands but also for many other parts in Northwest European countries. The main research questions of the project pertained to:*

*the possible relationship between speaking a dialect as a mother tongue and school achievement in primary education;*

*the possible differences in overall standard language proficiency between dialect and standard language speaking children;*

*the generalisability of the findings of the Kerkrade Project.*

*Although it turned out that language background did not exert a straightforward influence on school achievement, independent of SES and sex, dialect speaking children tend to be disadvantaged if we look at their actual school performance and their choice of secondary education. While no straightforward differences in overall proficiency in the structural aspects of language were found, differences did emerge in communicative aspects of language, especially in the older children. Possible disadvantages of dialect speaking children therefore seem to develop in very subtle ways, with teachers' attitudes towards the dialect, pupils' attitudes towards the school, differences in communicative habits, and differences between the dialect and the standard language all playing their role.*

## 1. Introduction

Seen from abroad the Netherlands might appear to be a homogeneous language area. Contrary to expectations, however, being a small, highly industrialised and urbanised country with hardly any natural boundaries, with a very dense population and highly developed transportation and communication networks, the Netherlands is, and in fact always has been, a multilingual country. This means that, apart from standard Dutch, a great number of indigenous and non-indigenous languages and dialects are spoken by its inhabitants. We will not comment here any further upon non-indigenous language variation, i.e. the languages and dialects spoken by ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands (see for an overview Extra & Vallen, 1988), but confine ourselves to regional varieties in the Dutch language area.

Overviews of dialect variation, including Frisian as an indigenous minority language, are given by van Hout (1984a), Kroon & Sturm (1988) and Hagen & Giesbers (1988). Although neighbouring dialects show only slight linguistic distance and are therefore mutually intelligible, over some distance, because of the accumulation of differences at all levels of the language system, they fairly rapidly become mutually unintelligible. Hence the structural differences between Dutch dialects seem to be better comparable to the geographical diversity found in, for example, France and Italy than to that found in the USA. Although the gradualness of linguistic transitions in the Dutch language area makes a clear-cut classification of the dialects within it rather difficult, several, quite distinct, attempts have been made. Weijnen (1966) for example, on the basis of a study of isoglosses, points out six main dialect groups, whereas Daan & Blok (1969), on the basis of speaker judgements, discern 28 different dialects.

Pooling the findings of various, mainly small scale, sociolinguistic surveys that have been carried out in the Netherlands, it seems reasonable to assume that about 50% of Dutch primary school children and about 60% of the rest of the population have a Dutch dialect, Frisian, or a Frisian dialect as a home language (cf. Vallen & Stijnen, 1987). This does not mean that these dialect speakers have no command of the standard language at all. Quite the reverse: dialect speakers in the Netherlands are in most cases, at least to a certain degree, also speakers of the standard language. To complete the picture it has to be added that standard Dutch in most cases is pronounced with a regional accent.

Against this background, it will come as no surprise that, in the Netherlands, as in other European countries (cf. Hagen, 1988 for an overview), the reception of Labov's *The Logic of Non-standard English* (1969) gave rise to research projects into dialect as a language barrier to education. An important role has been played in the design of this research by Dittmar's influential handbook on sociolinguistics (1973), which offered persuasive plea for the so-called sociolinguistic difference theory (cf. also Edwards, 1979). According to this theory, the standard and dialect varieties are held to be 'different' rather than 'deficient' as is commonly assumed; while the standard may well be superior in social terms, there is nothing inherent in its linguistic structure to justify this status. The most extensive research in this respect was the so-called Kerkrade project, carried out in 16 Kindergarten and elementary school classes in the city of Kerkrade in the southern part of the Dutch province of Limburg (cf. e.g. Stijnen & Vallen, 1981; Vallen *et al.*, 1984 and Stijnen & Vallen, 1989).

The research project that will be discussed in this paper is closely related to the Kerkrade project, and was in fact carried out to investigate the generalisability of the Kerkrade results. Kerkrade is situated in what Donaldson (1983: 16) calls that 'one small corner of Limburg' east of the Benrather Line (i.e. the *maken/machen* line), which is generally accepted in linguistic circles as the border between Low and High German (cf. Chambers & Trudgill, 1980: 106). Because of the extraordinary character of this specific dialect area, a parallel research project in a linguistically less divergent region of the country was considered desirable. To carry out this research we chose the municipality of Gennep in the Northern part

of the Dutch province of Limburg. From a dialect geographic point of view the dialect of Gennepe can be characterised as North Limburg, or, to show its affinity with the bordering German dialects, as Netherrhinelandish (cf. Weijnen, 1970). Daan & Blok (1969) postulate a middle position for this dialect area concerning its distance to standard Dutch in comparison with other Dutch dialects. The nature of the North Limburg dialect, its (middle) position in the Dutch language area, compared to both standard Dutch and other Dutch dialects, and its relationship to socio-economic status, means that this situation has much in common with dialect-standard situations in other European countries. A presentation of the aims, backgrounds and results of the Gennepe project therefore seems to be useful for an international audience.

## 2. Aims, Design and Background of the Gennepe Project

The project was carried out in three different schools: one in the town of Gennepe, one in the village of Ottersum and one in the village of Ven-Zelderheide. First of all, we wanted to investigate the possible existence of a relationship between speaking a dialect as a mother tongue and school achievement in primary education (4–12 year olds). Secondly, we intended to test a central hypothesis of the difference theory, namely that, if properly tested, i.e. using bilingual/bidialectal testing procedures and collecting language data in informal situations (cf. Cazden, 1970), dialect speaking children do not show great differences in overall language proficiency from children who speak the standard language. Thirdly, we wanted to investigate the generalisability of the Kerkrade findings. In addition to these research aims, and as a condition for gaining access to the schools, we agreed with the teachers to provide practical suggestions for counteracting any negative effects of dialect use on educational performance (cf. Giesbers *et al.*, 1978).

Before proceeding further, it would be useful to give a brief impression of the sociolinguistic situation in our research area. Following the terminology of Trudgill (1986: 91), Gennepe can clearly be described as a 'divergent dialect community', i.e. an area where there is considerable linguistic distance between the local dialect and the national standard, and where it is quite normal to find situational switching between the standard and the dialect (see e.g. van Hout, 1984b).

At the beginning of our fieldwork for the project we sent out some 424 copies of a questionnaire to be completed by parents and teachers, of which 375 were returned. We decided to limit the number of classes involved in the project (reducing the sample to 276) and to remove children who alternated between dialect and the standard and ultimately worked with a sample of 227 pupils. On the basis of the questionnaire data we are able to give a fairly good account of the sociolinguistic situation in the Gennepe area at that time. About 45% of the pupils ( $n=276$ ) were dialect speakers, whereas about 39% use standard Dutch and about 15% use standard Dutch and dialect alternately. However high these scores for dialect may be, they show a remarkable decrease when compared with

**Table 1.** Parents' language use in four situations (percentages;  $n=375$ ).

	<i>Language background</i> $n=367/371$	<i>With partner child. absent</i> $n=363/357$	<i>With partner child. present</i> $n=367/367$	<i>With children</i> $n=360/354$
Father				
standard	9.3	19.8	29.7	46.4
dialect	71.9	68.8	60.5	35.8
both	18.6	11.5	9.3	17.8
Mother				
standard	15.9	23.8	32.4	50.6
dialect	66.6	64.7	46.8	30.2
both	17.4	11.6	20.5	18.9

figures from the mid-1960s. At this time, 72% of the children in Gennepe and 99% of the children in the nearby village of Ottersum 'spoke a dialect in the street'; and 66.7% of the fathers in Gennepe and 94.1% of the fathers in Ottersum spoke dialect with their children (cf. Weijnen, 1967).

Table 1 shows the influence of this change in patterns of language use in everyday interaction: children are generally talked to in standard Dutch, but they still hear a lot of dialect, as well.

Parents tend to prefer using standard Dutch with their children, because they feel this will help their education. The influence of dialect, however, is still very much in evidence and, according to their parents, about 40% of the children use dialect with their peers. None the less, when we look at the age structure of dialect usage, there is a clear decrease between older and younger children, with four year old pupils using less dialect than twelve year olds (32%,  $n=77$ , and 61%,  $n=82$  respectively). In the 1980s, the use of dialect is declining still further, especially in parent-child interaction (cf. Kroon & Liebrand, 1983; Giesbers, 1984 and Giesbers & Kroon, 1985).

The widely documented relationship between speaking a dialect and low socio-economic status and/or education (cf. e.g. Ammon, 1973) is true for the Gennepe region as well and is documented in Tables 2 and 3.

We divided our 'second' sample ( $n=227$ ) into four subgroups: four year olds, eight year olds, ten year olds and twelve year olds (i.e. Kindergarteners and grades one, three and six of primary school respectively). Children were divided on the basis of their father's occupation and the level of education of both father and mother into high/middle and low socio-economic status groups. Within each SES group, a division was made between speakers of the local dialect ( $n=122$ ) and speakers of standard Dutch ( $n=105$ ). This division was based on answers to questions about the children's language use in speaking with siblings and peers, the parents' language use with the children, the parents' language use in the presence of the children (cf. Table 1) and the teacher's opinion of the children's language background. An overview of the final sample is given in Table 4.

**Table 2.** Language use in primary school children related to their fathers' job level (percentages; n=227).

	<i>Unskilled labour</i> n=27	<i>Skilled labour</i> n=74	<i>Lower employees</i> n=28	<i>Farmers</i> n=33	<i>Small business men</i> n=11	<i>Middle employees</i> n=32	<i>Higher employees</i> n=20
Standard	18.5	37.8	53.6	12.1	54.5	87.5	95.0
Dialect	81.5	62.2	46.4	87.9	45.5	12.5	5.0

**Table 3.** Language use in primary school children related to their mothers' level of schooling (percentages; n=227).

	<i>Primary education</i> n=53	<i>Primary education + courses</i> n=21	<i>Lower vocational education</i> n=85	<i>Lower general secondary education</i> n=24	<i>Higher general secondary education</i> n=25	<i>Higher vocational education</i> n=13	<i>Higher education</i> n=2
Standard	22.6	47.6	34.1	79.2	84.0	92.3	100
Dialect	77.4	52.4	65.9	20.8	16.0	7.7	0

**Table 4.** Overview of the subjects participating in the project.

	<i>High/ middle SES</i>	<i>Low SES</i>	<i>Total</i>
Standard speaking	59	46	105
Dialect speaking	9	113	122
Total	68	159	227

For individual testing procedures we tried to select five dialect speakers and five standard speakers per grade for every category. However, because of the low number of dialect speakers with high/middle socio-economic status, we had to limit individual testing to the low SES group.

In addition to language background and socio-economic status, sex and intelligence were used as independent variables. The variable of sex was controlled for by means of the statistical techniques which we used, and intelligence by means of excluding those pupils from the experimental group whom teachers considered to be exceptionally low or exceptionally high achievers.

The design of our project, like the Kerkrade project, was influenced by the sociolinguistic difference hypothesis. This had important implications for the language testing procedures which were used to gather data. It was essential to create situations in which dialect speaking children would produce both dialect and the standard and so we attempted to develop bilingual testing procedures. We needed to steer away from a situation in which language proficiency was measured simply in terms of the standard language, and so decided to test communicative competence, whether in the standard or in the dialect. In order to do this, we needed to draw on testing methods in addition to the commonly used indirect and semi-objective procedures. We therefore introduced testing procedures such as group and individual interviews which allowed us to pay attention to contextual and functional aspects of the test situation.

### **3. Main Findings of the Gennep Project**

#### **3.0. Analysis**

We used 42 different test procedures and sub-procedures in the project, which can be summarised under the following main headings: Oral proficiency (speaking and listening), Writing and related abilities, Reading, Verbal participation in class, School achievement proper, Bilingual testing procedures, Arithmetic and Intelligence (Raven's Progressive Matrices for twelve year olds only). In presenting our results, we will restrict ourselves to the first six areas as far as the dependent variables are concerned; as to the independent variables we confine ourselves to the possible influence of language use. Although we will present our results in a discursive way, it is important to point out that all possible relationships between

dependent and independent variables have been tested using three-factor analysis of variance techniques (SPSS ANOVA). If, for instance, we report the influence of language background on school achievement, this influence has been corrected for sex and socio-economic status and is statistically significant at least at the 0.10 level. We have chosen the 0.10 level to avoid the possibility of making the so-called beta error which sometimes occurs in small samples (cf. Meuffels & Burgers, 1985). For each test or subprocedure of a test the tables in Section 3 give an indication of the (statistically significant) influence of the independent variable 'language background' on the test results in the various age groups (four year old kindergarteners; six year old first graders; eight year old third graders; twelve year old sixth graders) whereby '-' means 'no influence', 'S' means 'standard Dutch speaking pupils perform better', and 'D' means 'dialect speaking pupils perform better'. In Table 10 (Bilingual tests) 'S' and 'D' point to better performance in the standard language and in the dialect respectively by dialect speaking pupils.

### 3.1. Oral proficiency

In order to test oral proficiency (speaking and listening), we used five semi-objective tests, one objective test and one direct test. An example of a semi-

Table 5. Oral proficiency tests (administered in Dutch).

<i>Test</i>	<i>Age group</i>			
	4	6	8	12
1. Story recall test				
score	-	-	-	-
number of words			-	-
number of errors related to number of words			-	-
error analysis (9 categories)			-	-
2. Sentence imitation test				
errors in sentence construction	-	-	D	D
errors in use of words	-	-	D	-
3. Radio game (describing pictures)			-	-
4. Flavell's communication test (explaining rules of a game)				
5. Listening	-	-		
6. Receptive morphology test	-	-		
7. One-to-one interview				
amount of given information	-	-		D
number of yes/no-questions	-	-		S
number of closed questions	-	-		-
number of open questions	-	-		-
number of words	-	-		-
ratio 1 (giving information)	-	-		-
ratio 2 (initiative and asking questions)	-	-		S
ratio 3 (topic introduction)	S	-		-



objective test is the so-called story recall test. A short story was read to a child who was then asked to retell the story in his or her own words. The child's speech was recorded and analysed later. This recording also served as the basis for an extended error analysis of spoken standard language. Results of the oral proficiency tests are given in Table 5.

One of the (semi-) objective tests, a sentence imitation task, showed a clear advantage for eight and twelve year old dialect speaking children. All the other tests, however, led to the conclusion that there is no correlation between the independent variable language background and oral proficiency. Nor were any statistically significant differences found in the error analysis.

The direct testing procedure was based on an informal one-to-one interview. A research assistant talked with a child about everyday topics and the conversation was taped. We undertook a pragmatic analysis of this conversation based on speech acts such as 'giving information', 'introducing new topics' and asking questions; the number of words was calculated as were the instances of dialect usage, including code-switches. We also computed ratios indicating the relative numbers of some of the child's speech acts to the total of speech acts in the conversation as a whole. Three different ratios were developed:

- ratio 1: based on the proportion of information offered by the child
  - ratio 2: based on the pupil's initiative in giving information and asking questions
  - ratio 3: based on the pupil's share in the introduction of new topics.
- The most important findings from these interviews can be summarised as follows:
- Language background was found to have no influence on the number of words used.
  - Language background had a significant influence on ratio 3 in the four year old children. In the standard Dutch interview, standard speakers introduced many more new topics than their dialect speaking peers. However, this difference was not evident in the older children.
  - There was a difference in ratio 2 for the twelve year old children. Standard speaking children took more initiative, especially in asking questions. Dialect speakers, however, appeared to give more information.
  - Dialect speaking children code-switch more often than standard speaking children. However, the number of switches decreases from 14 to 6 per 1,000 words between the four and twelve year old pupils.

In short, we found no difference in oral proficiency between standard and dialect speakers on (semi-) objective tests. There were some differences, however, in their achievements on the direct test, namely four year old standard speakers dominate in introducing new topics, whereas twelve year old standard speakers dominate in taking the initiative and twelve year old dialect speakers in giving information.

### 3.2. Writing and related abilities

The writing ability of the pupils was tested with four objective tests and two direct procedures. Most of the objective tests were part of standardised primary

school examinations of the National Institute of Educational Measurement (CITO) and the regional Nijmegen School Achievement Test (NSAT) containing items designed to elicit standard language use and orthography. The two direct tests were free composition and letter writing. They were only administered to the eight and twelve year old pupils. For the free composition, children were asked to write something about their leisure activities and for the letter, they were asked to write to the Netherlands Broadcasting Authority (NOS) to say which programmes they liked a lot, which programmes they wanted to keep and which programmes they wanted to be repeated.

Every piece of work was evaluated by three student teachers who did not know the subjects and who did come from outside the Limburg region. The following criteria, presented in the form of several rating scales, were used:

- structure and coherence of text
- communicative adequacy (logical argumentation; comprehensibility)
- general evaluation (style; originality; interest).

In addition the number of words and non-standard features were counted and an error analysis was carried out. Results of the writing ability tests are given in Table 6.

Only one of the standardised tests showed a difference between the two language groups: standard speaking twelve year olds performed better on the CITO test

Table 6. Writing and related abilities.

Test	Age group			
	4	6	8	12
1. Letter				
structure and coherence			-	S
communicative adequacy			-	S
general evaluation			S	-
number of words			-	-
number of errors related to number of words			-	-
error analysis (11 categories)			-	-
2. Written composition				
structure and coherence			-	-
communicative adequacy			-	D
general evaluation			-	-
number of words			-	-
number of errors related to number of words			-	-
error analysis (9 categories)			-	-
error analysis (interferences)			-	S
error analysis (syntactic errors)			-	S
error analysis (code switches)			-	S
3. CITO language use 1				S
4. CITO language use 2				-
5. NSAT orthography				-
6. NSAT style				-

'Language Use 1'. The findings from the free writing tests were more complex. Twelve year old standard speakers performed better on 'structure and coherence' and 'communicative adequacy' in the letter writing task, while standard speaking eight year olds did better on 'general evaluation'. In contrast, the dialect speaking twelve year olds are better on 'communicative adequacy' in writing about their leisure activities. Yet in neither of these testing procedures were there any differences between the two groups in the number of words or in the number of errors.

Of the eleven kinds of error established in the error analysis of each test, three showed the influence of language background. The twelve year old dialect speakers made more interlingual errors in the free composition, as well as more syntactic errors and more errors as a result of unintentional code-switching.

In general we may conclude that while standard Dutch speakers are better than dialect speakers at the letter writing task, language background does not exert much influence on the standardised writing tasks.

### 3.3. Reading

Reading proficiency was measured with five objective tests. Only one test showed the influence of language background, viz. twelve year old standard Dutch speaking children performed better on the Nijmegen School Achievement Test of Reading Comprehension. Results of the reading proficiency tests are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Reading.

Test	Age group			
	4	6	8	12
1. One minute test (technical reading)		—		
2. Reading comprehension		—	—	
3. CITO reading comprehension (small texts)				—
4. CITO reading comprehension (large texts)				—
5. NSAT reading comprehension				S

### 3.4. Verbal participation in the classroom

Verbal participation in the classroom was measured using two procedures: classroom observations were conducted during various lessons and we tape recorded a group discussion (sharing time). Results of the verbal participation tests are given in Table 8.

In analysing the group discussion data we used the same ratios as in the analysis of the one-to-one interview: ratio 1 (giving information), ratio 2 (initiative and asking questions) and ratio 3 (introducing new topics). Language background was not found to have a significant effect on the first two ratios. The topic introduction ratio, however, exerted an influence on the twelve year olds, with standard speakers dominating in the introduction of new topics.

Table 8. Verbal participation in the classroom.

<i>Test</i>	<i>Age group</i>			
	4	6	8	12
1. Sharing time				
ratio 1 (giving information)	-	-	-	-
ratio 2 (initiative and asking questions)	-	-	-	-
ratio 3 (topic introduction)	-	-	-	S
2. Classroom observations				
asking-for-attention ratio		-	-	-
disturbing ratio		-	-	D
daydream ratio		-	-	-

In order to analyse the classroom observation we developed some further measures:

- the rate of attention, e.g. how often individuals asked for a turn
- a disturbance rate, covering behaviour such as annoying peers, whispering, speaking loudly, etc.
- a daydream rate, indicating how often pupils are clearly not paying attention.

The results can be summarised as follows: language background had no significant effect on how often children engaged in either seeking attention or daydreaming. Dialect speaking twelve year olds, however, were found to disturb the educational process more. It seems reasonable to conclude that there are no differences in co-operative behaviour, but that standard and dialect speakers differ in non-cooperative behaviour, the latter being more likely to disturb lessons, perhaps especially as they get older.

### 3.5. School achievement

In addition to the tests of oral, reading and writing proficiency, we felt it was important to look at children's actual school performance. We analysed data such as the teacher's opinion of the pupil's achievement, whether they had ever been kept down a class and the choice of secondary school. School achievement results are given in Table 9.

Table 9. School achievement (Chi-square analysis used).

<i>Test</i>	<i>Age group</i>			
	4	6	8	12
1. Teachers' opinion	S	S	S	S
2. Repeating a class			-	-
3. Preliminary choice of secondary school				S
4. Definite choice of secondary school				S
5. Secondary school level after four years				S

No statistically significant differences were found between the numbers of standard and dialect speakers who had to stay back for a year. However, we found that dialect speakers were over-represented in the poor achievers and standard speakers in the good achievers. There were also considerable differences in the preliminary choice of secondary school: 55% of standard speakers chose pre-university or higher general secondary education compared with only 27% of dialect speakers; 47% of dialect speakers and only 32% of standard speakers chose vocational education.

These differences increase rather than diminish over time. A small follow-up questionnaire was also administered some years later to the children who had been eight and twelve years old in 1979 (Kroon & Liebrand, 1983). Dialect speaking children go on to less prestigious forms of secondary education, they have to stay down a class more often than their standard speaking peers and they are also transferred more often from higher to lower status schools. Standard speakers also did better on four out of eleven comparisons of (self-reported) achievement in various subject areas. This was especially marked in foreign language learning and Dutch where dialect speaking children feel themselves to have more difficulties than standard speakers. In contrast, however, dialect speakers would appear to experience fewer difficulties in science than standard speakers. No differences at all were found in the creative arts (cf. also Weltens & Sonderen, 1989).

### 3.6. Bilingual tests

Standard speakers were tested throughout in standard Dutch. Dialect speaking children were tested in some cases in both the standard and the dialect. Results of the bilingual tests are given in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Bilingual tests (dialect speakers only).

<i>Test</i>	<i>Age group</i>			
	4	6	8	12
1. Story recall test	-	-	D	-
2. Sentence imitation test				
errors in sentence construction	-	-	S	-
errors in use of words	-	-	S	-
3. Listening	D	-		
4. One-to-one interview				
giving information	-	-		S
yes/no questions	-	D		D
closed questions	-	-		D
open questions	-	-		-
number of words	-	-		-
ratio 1 (giving information)	S	-		S
ratio 2 (initiative and asking questions)	-	D		D
ratio 3 (topic introduction)	-	-		-

We found that eight year old children did better on the story recall test when they used the dialect, but worse when they used dialect for the imitation task. Four year olds did better in dialect on the test of listening comprehension.

The results for the one-to-one interview are also contradictory. The four year old children gave more information in the standard language. The six year olds did better in dialect when asking yes/no-questions and in giving information. The twelve year olds did better in dialect when asking questions, but better in the standard when giving information.

#### 4. Conclusions and Discussion

We have to conclude that language background does not exert a straightforward influence, independent of SES and sex. There are various possible explanations. Our findings may, of course, reflect the inadequacies of our research design: our sample size may have been too small to establish statistically significant differences. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of the differences which we found in the language tests showed an advantage for standard speaking children. This might well point to an overall disadvantage for dialect speakers. Yet, when you look at our findings in greater detail, this conclusion would seem to be too simplistic.

In our opinion, it is important to emphasise that we found hardly any differences between the language use of the two groups of subjects with respect to the structural aspects of language. Note, for instance, that even in free writing activities dialect and standard speaking children did not differ in either the number of spelling mistakes, an area which is the most important source of writing errors (in our research more than 60% for eight year olds and 47% for twelve year olds). It would therefore seem that dialect speakers do not find themselves at a disadvantage as far as the technical or transcriptional aspect of writing is concerned.

However, it would seem that when they have to use the standard for communication — especially in highly specialised tasks such as letter writing or group discussion — they do not seem to perform as well as their standard speaking peers. This conclusion is supported by the fact that most of the differences appear in the twelve year olds, a group that is commonly assumed to write and/or speak almost like adults.

This brings us to our second research question, namely is there still a difference between dialect and standard speakers in their overall language proficiency when the assessment measures are not based solely on performance on tests administered in the standard language? It has become clear in the course of our research that standard and dialect speaking children do not show big differences in their overall language proficiency. This is borne out in particular, by the fact that we did not find any important differences in oral proficiency. At the same time, error analysis showed only a small proportion of dialect based errors (interferences and unintentional code-switches). The figures vary from 17% for eight year olds to 25% for twelve year olds (cf. McLaughlin, 1978 who considers 30% to be a low proportion).

Moreover these interferences form only 1%, a very small proportion, of the overall number of words.

Our study of bilingual testing procedures did not, in general, lead to an advantage for the dialect speaking children. On the contrary, there were some occasions when the children performed better in the standard language. Thus, in our opinion, dialect usage in the classroom is not a *conditio sine qua non* in acquiring second language proficiency, but it could be helpful in creating an open, tolerant and stimulating teaching environment which can, in turn, help in language learning. It would seem to be important, however, to think carefully about the ways in which dialect can be introduced into the classroom, since it seems probable that our results on the bilingual tests were due in the main to the subjects' uneasiness about using dialect in formal situations, and particularly in test situations.

Finally, if we do not confine ourselves to statistically significant findings, it is possible to make some observations about the general trends and directions in our results. On all our tests, we find highly inconsistent difference patterns, with dialect speakers doing well on some measures and standard speakers doing well on others. The most likely conclusion is that there is a situation of balanced bilingualism in the Gennep region at least as far as the primary school population is concerned.

All these findings are highly pertinent to a consideration of the Kerkrade findings, and our third research question. Even though the Kerkrade project revealed a large proportion of school problems related to the speaking of dialect as a mother tongue, it would seem that dialect speaking is not an educational disadvantage *per se*. Probably, dialect related disadvantages are also dependent on the degree of divergence from the national and school language, the sociolinguistic situation and the sociocultural orientation of the speakers. In other words: when people see their future in relation to the state, they will think and act in a super-regional way for instrumental purposes, at least (cf. van der Plank, 1985: 133-135). In this respect, van den Toorn (1972: 275-276) points to a process of growing identification with the state in the Netherlands since World War II, in which the standard language has an important unifying function. The state of the Netherlands had become a reality for most of its citizens and the recognition of the standard language is a reflection of these developments. This affects, among other things, accepting the standard language in many everyday domains. This acceptance seems to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, since speaking the standard leads to success, not least for school children.

We agreed with the teachers in the schools where the project was based that we would provide them with practical suggestions based on our findings. In doing so, we have emphasised the following issues.

First we have pointed to the important findings of the near absence of disadvantages for dialect-speaking children in the technical and transcriptional aspects of writing in spite of the fact that dialect speakers tend to underperform in school on conventional tests of achievement. We therefore felt it would be inappropriate to recommend language teaching approaches like contrastive analysis (cf. also Barbour, 1987, who reaches a comparable conclusion on the basis of a critical

discussion of the West German didactic series *Dialekt-Hochsprache Kontrastiv*, presenting contrastive analyses of standard German and the nonstandard dialect of regions of the Federal Republic of Germany). We discussed instead possible alternative approaches to language teaching which would encourage all children to use language in a wide range of situations (cf. van den Hoogen & Kuijper, 1989). We also tried to give information on the possible influence of teachers' attitudes towards school achievement.

As pointed out before, we consider the Gennep region dialectally and sociolinguistically representative not only for the Netherlands, but also for many other parts in Northwest European countries. If the same is true for our general results, then our research yields important consequences for considering the disadvantages of dialect speaking children. Dialect speaking children are disadvantaged when compared with their standard speaking peers if we look at their actual school performance and their choice of secondary education. Nevertheless we could not find a straightforward difference between the two groups as far as overall proficiency in the structural aspects of language use is concerned. Some differences were found in communicative aspects of language especially in the older children. To us this means that the possible disadvantages of dialect speaking children develop in very subtle ways, with teachers' attitudes towards the dialect, pupils' attitudes towards the school, differences in communicative habits, and, of course, linguistic differences between the dialect and the standard language all playing their role. Needless to say that in this respect the educational problems of dialect speaking children show very much resemblance to those of children of ethnic minorities who have learned Dutch as a second language.

What is missing until now, however, is a thorough understanding of exactly those subtle processes that make dialect speaking children underperform in education. Therefore, we would like to end with the suggestion that future research on the dialect-standard controversy in education should concentrate on the interactional aspects of the problem rather than the purely linguistic ones. This would seem to be particularly important since, on the one hand, linguistic differences are diminishing and, on the other hand, these differences are becoming more and more correlated with differences in socio-economic status.

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