Linguistic attitudes in the Dutch-German border area

A comparison of Vreden (D) and Winterswijk (NL)

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1. Introduction and background

2. Attitudes: method and general overview

3. Grondelaers & van Hout (2011): Shared attitudes as a measure for linguistic unity?


5. Conclusions
1. Introduction

- Continental West Germanic dialect continuum
  
  # More or less intact until ca. 1900 (?)
  
  # Today still gradual transitions between language areas, but state border has become a dialect border too

  # Hence, from to
1. Introduction

- Continental West Germanic dialect continuum
- Concrete:
  # Winterswijk (NL) and Vreden (D)

Map: Smits (2011:180)

# Low German: dissolution of dialect continuum through dialect levelling and loss, as investigated by, among others, Kremer (1979), Niebaum (1990), Smits (2011)

# Process of language death? Low German is relatively resilient in border area (Goossens 1997, Smits 2011)

# Unlike structural aspects, attitudes are poorly researched (cf. Kremer 2005:41)
1. Introduction

In short:

• Perceptual perspective on the rise of state border as a dialect border

Against the backdrop of a larger agenda...

• Role of attitudes in sociolinguistic change
  
  # Long theoretical debate (e.g., Auer & Hinskens 1996)

  # Language policy: Low Saxon (NL) and Low German (D) recognized under Council of Europe’s *Charter for regional and minority languages*


  “Most *sociolinguistic studies lack a developmental agenda*, and they are concerned with toddlers and preschoolers rather than with school-age children.”

  (for discussion, see De Vogelaer & Toye, to appear, via [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu))
2. Method and overview

• ‘Speaker evaluation paradigm’

#Developed in 1960s by Wallace Lambert and colleagues, in a (French-) Canadian context

#Controversial? Cf. naive assumption that stimuli can be decontextualised

#Soukup (2013): reconceptualise experiments as “discursive events”, revealing “social meaning”

#Grondelaers & Kristiansen (eds., 2013): results robust enough to warrant cross-linguistic comparison
2. Method and overview

- ‘Speaker evaluation paradigm’

- Vreden: #199 pupils from 5th – 12th class in Gymnasium (Age: 9-18)
  
  #5 fragments: regional colloquial German
  
  High German
  
  Vredener Platt
  
  Wenters plat (= Winterswijk)
  
  Standard Dutch

#of a fairytale as read by 5 males (age 20-25)

#14 questions re. ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ prestige, eligibility as a friend and as a model for own language usage + label the variety used

#Structure of attitudes: Principal Components Analysis (PCA), cf. Zahn & Hopper (1985)
2. Method and overview

- ‘Speaker evaluation paradigm’
- Winterswijk: #183 pupils from 1th – 6th class in VWO (Age: 12-18)
  #4 fragments: regional colloquial German
  Standard Dutch
  Wenters plat (= Winterswijk)
  Vredener Platt
  High German

#same questions, same analyses
2. Method and overview

Spreker 1:

01) Volgens mij is de spreker van dit fragment een **intelligent** persoon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes:</th>
<th>Volledig mee eens</th>
<th>Volledig mee oneens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helpful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(un)intelligible</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>leader</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>speak.like</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>funny</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-presenter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>popular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>well-paid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my.friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>beautiful</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Method and overview

• General overview of results:

1. Huge discrepancy between (reported) active and passive dialect proficiency in both locations

   Vreden (D): 75.4% reports (very) bad active proficiency
                23.1% reports (very) bad passive proficiency

   Winterswijk (NL): 61.7% reports (very) bad active proficiency
                      13.1% reports (very) bad passive proficiency
2. Method and overview

• General overview of results:

2. Substantial differences in how attitudes are structured into dimensions when subjected to Principal Components Analyses

> Vreden:

prestige < solidarity
(cf. Ferguson’s 1959 diglossia model)

> Winterswijk:

prestige < social attractiveness < personal integrity < linguistic attractiveness
(reminiscent of Lambert et al. 1966)

> differences are interesting, but may be partly due to methodological complication
2. Method and overview

• General overview of results:

3. General picture

A. Slightly more positive attitudes towards dialect in Winterswijk, but in Vreden adolescents develop a more favourable attitude towards the dialect

B. High German has a higher status in the Netherlands than Dutch in German
3. Shared attitudes?

- Shared language attitudes as a measure of an area’s linguistic unity (Grondelaers & van Hout 2011 on the Netherlands)

>>> 2 questions:

1. how are varieties under investigation conceived? --> labels
2. how are they evaluated? --> attributes
3. Shared attitudes?

- Shared language attitudes as a measure of an area’s linguistic unity (Grondelaers & van Hout 2011 on the Netherlands)

1. Labels for High German, Low German (Vreden), Low Saxon (Winterswijk) and Standard Dutch fragments

**High German**

- 96.3% Hochdeutsch

**Duits**

- 96.7% Duits
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1. Labels for High German, Low German (Vreden), Low Saxon (Winterswijk) and Standard Dutch fragments

Low German

- 95.9% Plattdeutsch
- 23% ‘mixture’ NL-D
- 38.8% Duits
- 33.3% Duits plat

German

- Plattdeutsch
- Duits
- Duits plat
- Other language
- Other

Plattdeutsch

Duits

Duits plat

Other language

Other
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![Pie charts showing shared attitudes.](image-url)
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1. Labels for High German, Low German (Vreden), Low Saxon (Winterswijk) and Standard Dutch fragments

Standard Dutch (with slight Brabantic accent)

- 88.1% Niederländisch
- 32.8% Flemish/Brabantic/Limburgian
- 49.7% (standaard-) Nederlands
- 16.4% Nederlands “with accent”
3. Shared attitudes?

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2. How are the fragments evaluated?

**NB. low score = attribute applies**
4. More on dialect recognition

- In border areas, dialect competence positively impacts on the proficiency in the neighbouring language (Gooskens & Kürschner 2009)

  # E.g., recognition of the neighbouring dialect by ...

  Neutral/(very) good dialect speakers: 8.7% (4/46) 45.7% (32/70)
  (Very) bad dialect speakers: 0.8% (1/132) 25.7% (29/113)

  # However, years of exposure to the foreign standard language yields a more powerful effect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect proficiency</th>
<th>Years German at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct label ‘Low German’ (Winterswijk)</td>
<td>$r = .151^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  (too low recognition of Low Saxon to carry out similar analysis for Vreden)
5. Conclusions

• State border as a **strong dialect border** also in perceptual terms
  
  Lack of active proficiency suggests that the gap will deepen
  
  Which situation is more favourable for the dialect: an overall more positive evaluation in NL or the development into a solidarity variety in D?
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• **Assymmetry**: Dutch informants have better sociolinguistic skills in German than vice versa

  Cf. more levelling in Low Saxon (Smits 2011), in addition to smaller linguistic distance vis-à-vis the standard variety (Giesbers 2008)?

  Probably rather due to more intensive German teaching in NL (cf. Schüppert & Gooskens 2012 on Swedish/Danish)

  Offers many perspectives for further research, e.g. does alleged ‘dialect friendly’ attitude of border areas (Goossens 1997) relate to contact with the neighbouring language?
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• **More solid empirical basis** needed (e.g., other age groups and social strata; usage data;...)

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