

Where are we (heading)? A sociolinguistic ethnography of pupils' speech in Flanders

Flemish linguists and opinion makers haven't always been welcoming the evolution, but it is clear now that "a standard variety of Belgian Dutch [...] is in any case losing ground to the variety of colloquial Belgian Dutch [...] referred to as *Tussentaal*" (literally *in-between-language*), frequently among younger speakers (Grondelaers & van Hout, 2011). While this contrasts with the Flemish education ministry's renewed demands that all pupils speak Standard Dutch, it is striking that there are virtually no data available of current colloquial Dutch in Flanders in general (De Caluwe, 2009; Grondelaers & van Hout, 2011) and in an educational environment in particular (cf. Van de Craen & Willemyns, 1985; Van de Velde, 2002; but see e.g. Jaspers, 2011).

At the same time, linguists are increasingly at odds over whether *tussentaal* can be seen as one separate variety. There are indications that the situation is much more complex and unpredictable, with speakers often producing eclectic linguistic cocktails that range from 'speaking more dialectal' to using a 'fairly standard' speech style (Vandekerckhove & Nobels, 2010). This suggests that instead of trying to determine the essentially predictable features of *tussentaal* as a variety, sociolinguistic research may advance more through trying to describe the styling principles that guide the variable productions and perceptions of colloquial spoken Dutch (cf. Irvine, 2001).

The current research therefore intends to analyse language use and perceptions of pupils in a secondary school. Using sociolinguistic-ethnographic methods it will investigate what pupils exactly speak, what variation it is characterized by, what motives pupils have for speaking as they do, and how this hangs together with their perception of themselves, each other and their social environment. Doing so will deliver an important corpus of colloquial spoken Dutch and elucidate the (future) position of *tussentaal* in the Flemish linguistic territory.

[Eligible for the award for young scholars.]

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