

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO THE USE OF COLLOQUIAL BELGIAN DUTCH ON FLEMISH TELEVISION: FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR THE GRADUAL ACCEPTANCE OF NON-STANDARD DUTCH

Lynn Prieels and Gert De Sutter

Ghent University

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation, Subtitling, Language variation, Belgian Dutch, Norm-adherence

The present study investigates the vitality of colloquial Belgian Dutch by investigating to what extent it is used in written subtitles by the (self-declared) norm-setting public broadcaster VRT within the Flemish area of the Dutch language community. Next to the official standard language (General Belgian Dutch), various non-standard, colloquial varieties (e.g. colloquial Belgian Dutch, regiolect, dialect) are widely used in Flanders, both in informal and formal situations. Previous research has demonstrated that several of these varieties frequently occur in spoken language on Flemish television (e.g. Van Hoof, 2013). In this context, it is particularly interesting to investigate to what extent this colloquial Belgian Dutch variety penetrates in intralingual subtitles. If this would occur in a significant number of cases, this shift from an exclusively spoken variety to a written medium would be indicative for the further spreading and acceptance of non-standard Dutch in Flanders.

In a first step, we examine (i) to what extent Flemish subtitlers prefer non-accepted Belgian Dutch variants rather than General Standard Dutch variants, (ii) whether they more often use non-standard lexemes than non-standard grammatical items, and (iii) which contextual parameters (*program genre* and *source language*) affect the subtitlers' linguistic choices. To achieve this goal, we gathered sets with lexical and grammatical norm-related linguistic variants and extracted them from the SoNaR-corpus (Schuurman et al. 2010). Using profile-based correspondence analysis (Plevoets 2015), we measured linguistic distances between the parameters and their interactions and visualized them in a three-dimensional plot. The results reveal that certain television genres (e.g. fiction and comedy) encourage the use of colloquial Belgian Dutch in the subtitles. In addition, it was shown that the intralingual subtitles of Flemish speakers contain more non-general Belgian Dutch than the interlingual subtitles of English speakers and the intralingual subtitles of Netherlandic Dutch speakers. A plausible explanation for these results is that subtitlers (consciously or unconsciously) transfer the non-standard, colloquial Belgian Dutch variants in the original footage directly to the subtitles.

In a next step, we compare the original speech in the television program to the corresponding subtitles to examine to what extent the original footage influences the subtitlers' linguistic choices. To find out whether subtitlers just transfer spoken Belgian Dutch colloquialisms to the subtitles or whether they even add colloquialisms to the subtitles (thereby enforcing the Belgian atmosphere), we analyzed the language use in the original speech and the corresponding subtitles of twenty fiction programs. The results reveal that colloquial Belgian Dutch does not merely occur in spoken registers, but that it is also a vital alternative for Standard Dutch in written language.

References:

- Plevoets, K. (2015). Corregp: Functions and Methods for Correspondence Regression. Ghent University
- Schuurman, I., Hoste, V., & Monachesi, P. (2010, May). *Interacting Semantic Layers of Annotation in SoNaR, a Reference Corpus of Contemporary Written Dutch*. In LREC.
- Van Hoof, S. (2013). Feiten en fictie. Taalvariatie in Vlaamse televisiereeksen vroeger en nu. *Nederlandse Taalkunde*, 18(1), 35-64.