

Dialect perception versus dialect production: how are they related?

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Abstract

Due to the influence of the standard language on the one hand and increased mobility on the other, Dutch local dialects have become less differentiated and fused to larger wholes, (supra)regional koinai or ‘regiolects’ (Hoppenbrouwers 1990, Hinskens 1993, Auer & Hinskens 1996, Hinskens, Auer & Kerswill 2005, Heeringa & Hinskens 2014, 2015). In this paper we study whether this change is perceived by the speakers themselves and, if so, to which extent.

Janson (1983) writes that ‘for an individual in a situation of change, perception seems to lag behind production’. Therefore, we also study how the perception is related to the speaker’s production.

We conducted a perception experiment where speakers of local Dutch dialects listened to recordings of their own dialect, of other local dialects in the same area, and of local dialects from another dialect group. There were 151 participants, 90 male listeners with an average age of 55 years and 61 female listeners with an average age of 44 years, mainly speakers of southern local Dutch dialects. The participants listened to eight recordings of older male speakers and to eight recordings of younger female speakers. They rated the difference of the local dialects the recordings of which they heard in comparison to their own dialect on a five-point Likert scale where 0=‘equal’ and 4=‘very strongly different’. Below, we refer to the ratings as scores.

Using the recorded material we calculated dialectometric distances at the lexical level, the morphological level and the level of the sound components separately for the older male speakers and the younger female speakers.

Using this material, we address the following questions:

1. *Is the difference in dialect production between younger female speakers and older male speakers perceived by the listeners?* We test whether the differences between the scores of local dialects within the listeners’ own dialect area and the scores of local dialects outside the listeners’ own dialect area are on average smaller when they listen to the recordings of the younger female speakers than when they listen to the recordings of the older male speakers.
2. *Are dialect differences less well perceived by younger female listeners than by older male speakers?* We focus on the recordings of the older male speakers and test whether the differences between the scores of local dialects within the listeners’ own dialect area and the scores of local dialects outside the listeners’ own dialect area are smaller for the younger female listeners than for the older male listeners.
3. *Does perception lag behind production?* We focus on the younger female listeners and test whether their scores correlate better with the corresponding dialectometric measurements obtained on the basis of the older male speakers than with the corresponding measurements obtained on the basis of the younger female speakers (See Table 1).

perception		production	correlation
younger female listeners	vs.	production older male speakers	r_{OM}
younger female listeners	vs.	production younger female speakers	r_{YF}

Table1. Perception lags behind production if $r_{OM} > r_{YF}$.

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