

Experiments, commercials, and social media data.

A multi-purpose toolbox to study (complex) standard language dynamics

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This paper reviews new tools to tackle three problems which complicate the study of attitudes and ideologies as predictors of (standard) language change:

1. The bulk of experimental evaluation research extracts attitudes with the speaker evaluation (or matched-guise) technique, which has recurrently been criticized as ecologically and empirically dubious. Are there **more valid** indirect attitude measures?
2. Our insistence on (and success with) experimental replication, suggests that regional varieties of Dutch are associated with specific (positive or negative) social meanings, but are these **really invariant** across contexts?
3. There is almost no direct evidence that positive evaluation leads to **increased production or diffusion**. Or is there?

We report two new methods to tackle these issues. In order to probe ecologically and empirically more valid elicitation methods (issue 1), and to verify whether regional accents are evaluated invariantly negatively (issue 2), we conducted a marketing experiment with two yoghurt commercials that were visually designed to converge with the image of two stigmatized regional accents from The Netherlands, viz. the Groningen accent from the north (rural and robust) and the Limburg accent from the south (rural but cosy and festive).

In response to issue 3, we tracked the diffusion of the highly stigmatized subject use of the object pronoun *hun* “them” in a corpus of tweets. While the non-posh, urban prestige that has been linked with diffusing varieties and features (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013) is clearly a hearer category – to the extent that whether a speaker is considered cool depends on the listener –, speakers can try to *enact* a modern prestige personality. If we can prove that speakers who stylise themselves as streetwise and cool, also manifest a higher preference for subject-*hun* in the enactment of that style, then the diffusion of this non-standard feature is undeniably (co-)determined by its social meaning.