

Dick Smakman

Standard Dutch in the Netherlands

A Sociolinguistic and Phonetic Description

Standard Dutch in the Netherlands has been subject to lively scholarly debate since its rise in the 15th and 16th Century. Lay beliefs have received relatively little attention in this ongoing discussion. This dissertation presents the first extensive description of these beliefs. It focuses on pronunciation, the most critical criterion to determine the degree of standardness of language.

The results show that Standard Dutch is, first and foremost, perceived as correct, non-regional, and as a modern-day lingua franca. A side-effect of the special position of Standard Dutch is its unnaturalness. The type of Dutch as it was spoken in the 1950s seems to constitute a sentimental norm, which is no longer active as a living model. The language norm adapts to changes in society.

Pronunciation descriptions from the 19th and 20th Century focus on a set of phonemes that are subject to realisational variation and to controversy. We found that (g) has settled down as a uvular voiceless fricative, regardless of phonetic/phonological position. Coda (r), on the other hand, has unpredictable realisations. It is suggested that force of articulation is more important than actual place and manner of articulation for this (r). Furthermore, the diphthongs of the conservative type of Standard Dutch described in this dissertation seem relatively untouched by the first-element lowering tendencies that recent literature mentions.

These and other findings may guide foreign learners of Dutch in their language-learning choices. Furthermore, this research has added to the debate on language norms and attitudes, particularly in connection with language standardisation.

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