

Speak normal or be damned?
Attitudes of youngsters towards four different accents in Dutch

Abstract

In this study the attitudes of university students (WO-high level of education) and vocational education students (MBO-low level of education) towards four different accents in Dutch are being investigated. A verbal guise test is used to rate the four accents according to the dimensions 'status' and 'solidarity'. The accents concerned include, besides the standard accent, both non-standard and nonnative accents. In particular, the accents are Randstad-Dutch (the standard accent), British-Dutch, Frisian-Dutch and Polish-Dutch. Accents hardly ever are perceived as being neutral. Although, in fact everyone speaks with an accent for an accent is the way in which people pronounce words and sentence. From the side of the listener, accents evoke all kinds of opinions and ideas about the speaker. Especially, non-standard accents including nonnative accents, are associated with negative characteristic features. In a broader perspective, a fair amount of research has been performed on the attitudes towards accents, both on non-standard and nonnative accents. However, these studies primarily focused on accents in English (American-English as well as British-English). Besides, almost all the participants were college/university students, i.e. highly educated people. Whether and how level of education is a factor regarding the attitudes towards accents has not been subject of research yet. While previous studies showed that highly educated people tend to be more open-minded regarding migrants and other cultures than lower educated people, the expectation is that level of education also plays a role in the attitudes towards accents among participants. The research that does have been performed on accents in Dutch, detected that in general, the Randstad-Dutch accent is considered to have high status, but scores low on solidarity. A British accent is considered to both high status and high on solidarity. Frisian-Dutch (and more in general, regional accents) on the other hand, is rated as low status but scores high on solidarity, whereas Polish-Dutch (as an in-migrant accent) is expected to score both low on status and solidarity. Though, the latter accent does not have been subject of research in the Dutch situation before. A brief preliminary analysis of the data collected up until now for this study, slightly indicates that the Randstad accent indeed is rated high on status. Secondly, it hints that the Polish accent indeed is rated low on solidarity. Further data analysis will reveal how all the accents are rated on the features of both status and solidarity and whether there is a significant difference in the rating between university students and vocational education students.

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