Dialect Levelling: A Two-dimensional Process^{*}

Frans Hinskens

Abstract

Processes of dialect levelling reduce the linguistic 'autonomy' of individual dialects by leading to their structural convergence with related varieties. This contribution presents research into processes of dialect levelling in a Limburg dialect of Dutch. After a concise overview of both the goal of this paper and the definitions of some of the key notions (§ 1), the questions and related hypotheses guiding the research are presented (§ 2). A brief sketch of some of the most relevant historical, socio-geographical and dialect-geographical aspects of the research area (§ 3) is followed by an account of the considerations underlying the design of the study and an overview of the main methodological steps (§ 4). Some of the most important findings for each of the hypotheses are then illustrated and discussed. By far most attention is paid to the hypothesis central in the present contribution, the one that says that dialect levelling does not necessarily lead to structural convergence towards the standard language. The findings and conclusions are compared to those of related — older as well as contemporary — studies (§ 5). Finally, a follow-up study is briefly sketched. This follow-up study was designed to deepen some of the insights and to provide an answer to a question that emerged from the main finding relevant to the hypothesis central in the present contribution (§ 6).

1. Introduction

In this paper I will demonstrate that the levelling out of cross-dialectal variation can be structurally independent of the levelling of variation in the dialect-standard language dimension. In doing so, I will also show how one research project, and in particular some of its findings and conclusions, can lead to a new research project.

As to terminology and definitions: dialect levelling is here defined as the reduction of structural variation — of both quantitative, internal variation *and* (either categorical or quantitative) differences between varieties of a language, say, dialects. Dialect levelling thus makes (a) individual dialects more homogeneous, and (b) different dialects more similar and, consequently, diasystems more homogeneous.

Conceptually, the relationship between language variation, dialect levelling

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and language change is as follows. A process of language change that has not come to completion in some respect leaves behind language variation, either internally (as in e.g. lexically diffuse sound change) or between closely language varieties (e.g. dialects or style levels). Variation, on the other hand, can lead to linguistic change; especially quantitative internal variation can be the synchronic reflection of an ongoing process of language change. Now, dialect levelling is the process which reduces language variation. So dialect levelling is a special type of language change.

In so far as dialect levelling affects the differences between related language varieties, it can lead to structural convergence. This can be convergence towards surrounding dialects or towards the standard variety — or both. Convergence can be defined as the becoming structurally more similar of languages or language varieties, whereas divergence can be defined as the becoming structurally more dissimilar of languages or language varieties.

2. Research questions and hypotheses

In this contribution I will briefly sketch a research into processes of dialect levelling. The aim of the research was to provide answers to three questions. Provisional answers to these questions are given in the form of hypotheses which have been tested quantitatively on the basis of fieldwork data.

question:	hypothesis:	implementation:
1. what type of variation does it affect?	dialect levelling is a two-dimensional process	levelling can affect both variation in the dialect-standard language dimension and variation across related dialects

More in particular: the levelling of differences between related dialects can be independent from the levelling of variation in the dialect–standard language dimension. In German dialectology the process of the levelling out of variation across dialects is sometimes referred to as *Ausgleich*; the result of this process can be the formation of what is sometimes called a ‘koiné’. In German dialectology, the process of the levelling out of variation between a dialect and the standard variety which results from the convergence of the dialect towards the standard variety is referred to as *Abbau*.

2. how does dialect levelling proceed?	dialect levelling is gradual in linguistic as well as extra-linguistic respects	levelling is temporally, geographically and internally gradual
3. why does dialect levelling occur at all?	dialect levelling results from and is hence foreshadowed in accommodation	accommodation in the sense of more dialect use in ‘in-group’ than in all ‘out-group’ contact situations

'In-group' contact is here defined as contact between speakers of the same dialect, 'out-group' contact as contact between speakers of different dialects. Consistent use of the features that set one's dialect apart from that of one's interlocutor can impede mutual comprehension, while the interlocutor may evaluate it as psychological divergence (Giles *et al.* 1987).

I will discuss some findings relevant to each of the above three hypotheses, but I will pay by far most attention to the first one.

3. Research area

The research was carried out in Rimbürg, a small village in the south-east of the Dutch province of Limburg, and hence in the extreme south-east of the Dutch language area. Rimbürg, which is a hamlet in the easternmost part of the village of Ubach over Worms, and has slightly less than 1,000 inhabitants. Rimbürg is about 8 kilometers from both Heerlen and Kerkrade and it is located right near the Dutch-German border, not far from the German city of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle).

I will now go into some dialect-geographical detail. Rimbürg is located immediately east of the 'Benrath line', an isogloss bundle which is very important in the history of Dutch and German; as one of the spokes of the 'Rhenish Fan', it is related to the High German Consonant Shift. Some 10 to 15 kilometers west of the Benrath line there is a parallel isogloss bundle. These two bundles cut southern Limburg into three slices; I will label these slices C (the westernmost slice), B (the one in the middle) and A (the easternmost slice). See Map 1.

Rimbürg is located in the A-type dialect area, i.e. in the area where the dialects are spoken that are usually referred to as Ripuarian dialects. The B area is generally known as the transition zone between the Ripuarian and the East-Limburg dialects, and the C area is where the East-Limburg dialects are spoken (Goossens 1965).

For a Dutch speaking outsider travelling from C through B to A (i.e. from west to east), the dialects become less and less comprehensible. The reason for this is the fact that — from the point of view of the Dutch standard language — the number of dialect features increases from west to east, i.e. from C through B to A. Most of the features of the dialects in C also occur in the dialects in B and A; the features in B also occur in the dialects in A — but not the other way around. In other words, from west to east the dialect features accumulate. South-Limburg hence has a terrace shaped dialect landscape.¹

Map 1: *The three dialect areas in the southern part of the Dutch province of Limburg*

In recent history, Southeast Limburg has been some sort of a ‘natural laboratory’ or maybe even a ‘pressure cooker’ of demographic, social and cultural changes. These changes were brought about by the very rapid industrialisation of this area in the first decades of this century with the large-scale development of coalmining. The industrialisation created job opportunities, which led to considerable immigration — of foreigners (especially people from Eastern Europe) and even more so of people from other parts of the country, mainly Limburgers. The migration led, in turn, to urbanization. All coalmines were closed down between 1966 and 1976, but the effects of the industrialisation remain. Nowadays, with respect to the number of inhabitants, the Heerlen-Kerkrade agglomeration ranks among the largest in The Netherlands. Its average density of population is about three times the national average.

4. Methodological aspects

Less than a few centuries ago, in the age when — at least in the Western world — there was nothing corresponding to the modern concept of ‘standard language’, there were only what is nowadays referred to as ‘dialects’. What was language change like in those days? Of course, there has always been language change resulting from internal pressures, such as phonetically motivated sound change, change in response to some sort of structural imbalance because of, e.g. asymmetries in vowel systems, Sapir’s ‘drift’, the tendency to keep paradigms

regular and transparent (e.g. to restore paradigmatic regularity after a sound change had destroyed it), analogy, etc.

Another, though related, source of language change is the modular organization of grammar and phonology. The interaction of general rules, principles or constraints from different modules may cause internal tensions or imbalances which, in turn, may lead to the emergence of new variants; cf. the notion of conflicting constraints in Optimality Theory. Consider the following example. 'Faithfulness' constraints² require the phonetic output form to be maximally identical to the underlying form (a Dutch word such as *recht*, /rɛxt/, 'straight, real', is then realized as [rɛxt]), whereas phonological wellformedness constraints may, e.g., require syllables of a specific structure, which may in certain cases trigger the simplification of consonant clusters (at least of adjacent obstruents in final position), resulting in the output form [rɛx]. If the two types of constraints are not mutually ordered (cf. Anttila 1997), this tension may lead to quantitative variation between the variant which satisfies the relevant faithfulness constraint (while violating the wellformedness constraint) and the variant which satisfies the wellformedness constraint (while violating the faithfulness constraint). Differences between dialects can sometimes be accounted for by the different setting of parameters in otherwise stable rules (cf. Lenerz 1984; Cornips 1994).

All the cases discussed so far concern purely *internal* motivations. As far as *externally* motivated linguistic change is concerned, the mixing and borrowing resulting from the prolonged contact between dialects have probably always been very prominent phenomena. According to Ferdinand Wrede (see, e.g. 1919:10-13) and Theodor Frings, two of the main exponents of 20th century German dialectology, *Mischung* and *Ausgleich*, i.e. mixing and levelling, are the key mechanisms that destroy regularity and the alleged exceptionlessness of sound laws in individual dialects. Mixing and dialect levelling probably played leading roles in the shaping of the type of koiné that most of our standard languages basically are. Historically, the Dutch standard language, for instance, is a koiné, a hotch-potch of some Flemish and Brabantic and many Hollandic dialect features.

In short, the study of processes of dialect levelling ought to be located at the crossroads of the study of language variation on the one hand and language contact — i.e. research into the structural consequences of language contact — on the other.

These considerations played an important role in the design of my study of dialect levelling in Rimbarg. The main steps were:

- (i)
 - operationalization of the notion of dialect levelling: dialect levelling may manifest itself as a statistically significant decrease in the use of features which distinguish a dialect from surrounding dialects or from the standard language (or both), from Older through Middle aged to Younger speakers;
 - implementation of the hypotheses (resulting in 'operational hypotheses'). Cf. § 2. above.
- (ii) selection of the dialect features. The main criteria for selection were:
 - systematic variation of the degree of geographical spread of the dialect features. Three types of dialect features were studied: features which only occur in the dialects in A, features which occur in A and B, and features which occur in A, B and C alike;
 - various components of grammar. Some dialect features concern phonology, some morphophonology, others morphology and yet others morphosyntax;
 - structural coherence. The dialect features were chosen such that at least subsets of features are structurally related to each other, such as e.g. sandhi voicing, which is typical of the dialects in all three zones, the derivational suffix '-Iry'', which traditionally marks the A- and B-zone dialects (whereas the C-zone Limburg dialects as well as the standard language have '-lik') and the postlexical γ '-weakening process (typical of the dialects in the A-zone).³ The ratio underlying this criterion was the desire to get an insight in how dialect levelling may affect not only isolated dialect features, but also mutually related subareas of the phonology and grammar of the dialect (cf. Chambers & Trudgill 1980:291);
 - only dialects features with a reasonable average frequency of use were chosen for analysis. Purely syntactic phenomena thus filtered themselves out.
- (iii) drawing a sample of speakers:
 - the sample was stratified for age group. Three age groups were represented by 9 speakers each: 20-30 years of age ('Younger' speakers), 40-50 ('Middle' age group) and 60-75 ('Older' speakers);
 - the sample was homogenized for sex in that only men were included;
 - obviously, the sample was homogenized for linguistic background in that only native speakers of the Rimburg dialect were included who were born and bred in Rimburg;

- the sample was homogenized for socio-economic background. Socio-economic background was operationalized through two variables: educational background and occupational level. Both were measured on six-point scales. The homogenization was reached by including only people whose score on the mean of these two scales is minimally 2 and maximally 4. So in this respect there is variation within the sample, the variation spanning exactly half of the scale — of course the half where we find the modes, means and medians of the distributions.
- (iv) the collection of the speech material: of every speaker in the sample recordings were made of three types of dialect use:
- elicitation through all sorts of formal tests, and
 - spontaneous, conversational dialect use in situations of 'in-group' and 'out-group' contact.
- (v) analyses: from recorded speech material to (quantitative) data.
- The analyses consisted of several steps. The end result consisted of figures representing the relative use of the dialect features that were chosen for analysis; so to an important extent the analyses were quantitative in nature: the end result were indexes ranging between 0 and 100. In the case of most of the dialect features studied, the index values can actually be read as percentages. The index values were broken down for a range of relevant linguistic conditions (or 'factors').

5. Some of the main findings

I will look at the three hypotheses in the reverse order. The *third hypothesis*, which says that dialect levelling results from and is hence foreshadowed in accommodation, was tested by comparing accommodation with dialect levelling. Accommodation was traced by comparing 'in-group' dialect use with dialect use in the 'out-group' contact situations — i.e. on the basis of the two types of relatively spontaneous conversational data. Accommodation was operationalized very restrictively, namely as the type of convergence which consists of the suppression of the usage of features which might make one's dialect less understandable for outsiders.⁴ Overall, I expected less dialect use in out-group contact than in in-group contact. Compare this specific implementation of convergence⁵ to convergence in the social psychological sense; in social psychology (cf. Thakerar *et al.* 1982; Giles *et al.* 1987), convergence is defined as what speakers do to adapt to the speech of others in order to reduce differences.

One of the main findings is: the smaller the geographical spread of a dialect feature, the larger the relative number of linguistic conditions in which one finds accommodation. In other words, the more typical/unique a dialect feature is for a speaker's dialect, the larger the relative number of linguistic conditions in which the use of this dialect feature is suppressed in out-group contact situations

(see Hinskens 1992:431-445 for details). This mirrors the patterns of dialect levelling, which will be briefly discussed below. So it appears that 1. convergence in the social psychological sense can be a pre-condition for structural convergence, and 2. dialect levelling can be a long-term effect of sustained, frequent convergence on the part of the speakers.

Accommodation and dialect levelling should be understood in the light of the continuous struggle between what de Saussure referred to as “la force d’intercourse et l’esprit de clocher” (part III, ch. 4 of the *Cours*), i.e. between the tendencies towards unification on the one hand and those towards particularism and cultural fragmentation on the other.

Hypothesis 2 says that dialect levelling is gradual in linguistic as well as in extra-linguistic respects. Many of the findings I will refer to in this connection are based on the data from the elicited dialect use. As far as dialect levelling goes, the main findings are summarized in Table 1; see Hinskens (1992: Ch. 6) for a detailed account.

This table summarizes the findings for levelling in the sense of the loss of each of the various dialect features on three different levels. The most general level is what I call the overall level; a ‘+’ signifies that the loss of the feature concerned is not confined to any specific linguistic condition(s), but takes place throughout the aggregated data. ‘Loss conditions’ indicates the proportion of linguistic conditions (or ‘factors’) studied under which a dialect feature appears to be undergoing loss. For each dialect feature small sets of linguistic conditions form what is here referred to as linguistic dimensions; e.g. two of the seven conditions which have been distinguished in the analyses of the dialectal γ ’-weakening process concern the question whether [γ ’] is part of a lexeme or a bound morpheme. As will be obvious, these two conditions complement each other; therefore they form what I refer to as a linguistic dimension (or ‘factor group’ in the variationist terminology). The column for ‘Loss dimensions’ indicates the proportion of the linguistic dimensions studied which turn out to have a significant effect on the loss.

Table 1: An overview of the findings regarding apparent time loss of the dialect features in the elicited material (V = verbal morphology)⁶

spread	dialect feature	example	LOSS ?		
			overall	conditions	dimensions
A	<i>Ach-laut</i> allophone	oç ~ ox	+	10/14	0/6
	γ'-weakening	γ' rāvə ~ j rāvə	+	7/7	0/3
	r-lowering	bine ~ bɛnə	–	0/6	0/3
	dorsal fricative deletion	liç(t) ~ li:t	+	6/6	0/3
	[s] in diminutive suffix	me:ʔçfka ~ me:ʔçska	+	3/4	0/2
A,B	R-deletion	e:ʔrt ~ e:tʔ	–	5/13	2/5
	n-deletion	van ~ va	–	1/9	0/3
	derivational suffix -'lɪy'	i:ʔrlɪç ~ i:ʔrlɪç	+	5/6	1/3
	V preterite suffix				
	weak verbs	magdə ~ makət	–		
	V prefixless past participle	γ'əkəʔmə ~ koʔmə	+		
	V subjunctive	wol ~ wøl	+		
	V strong/irregular				
	~ weak conjugation	vrox ~ vro:ʔkət	+		
	t-deletion	lopt ~ ləp	–	0/11	0/5
A,B,C	sandhi voicing	dat in ~ dəd in	–	0/30	0/14
	derivational suffix -'də'	wəʔmtə ~ wəʔmdə	–	1/2	0/1
	absence of inflectional schwa	hoʔə dər ~ hu:əy' dy:ər	+	3/6	0/3
	noun pluralization	mæizə ~ my`s	+	5/25	1/10
	V strong/irregular				
	~ weak conjugation	zetə ~ zat	–		
	V stem 2, 3 sg.pres.				
	indicative	lopt ~ lə`ps	–		
	oblique pronouns	wi ~ wem	–	0/6	0/3
	expletive element	er ~ ət / [zero]	+	2/2	1/1

In all cases of dialect levelling, the process turns out to be gradual

(a) extra-linguistically:

- in (apparent) time, in that the degree of use of the dialect features decreases step-by-step from the Older to the Middle to the Younger age (this is not expressed in Table 1). The levelling process also occurs gradually
- in space: the smaller the relative geographical distribution of a dialect feature the earlier and/or faster it is levelled out. Among other things⁷ this is evident from the fact that the ratio of dialect features showing overall loss to / dialect features investigated decreases with increasing geographical distribution:

A: 4 / 5

A, B: 4 / 7

A, B, C: 3 / 9

(b) linguistically, i.e. internally, the levelling process is usually gradual too. Two examples will serve to illustrate this:

- γ' -weakening, i.e. the weakening of the voiced palato-velar fricative into the palatal glide, an A-type feature:

A	B / C	<i>standard Dutch gloss</i>	
(1a) $ja:s \sim \gamma'a:s$	$\gamma'a:s$	γas	'gas'
(1b) $jra:s \sim \gamma'ra:s$	$\gamma'ra:s$	γras	'grass'
$jla:s \sim \gamma'la:s$	$\gamma'la:s$	γlas	'glass'

The loss of the weakening rule appears to proceed faster before consonants (and the only consonants we find in the dialect in this type of onset clusters are liquids — cf. (1b)) than before vowels (1a); see Table 2.

Table 2: *Average use of the γ' -weakening rule in two linguistic conditions by the speakers of the three age groups*

	before liquids	before vowels
Older	41.82	52.94
Middle	3.13	15.09
Younger	1.67	2.19

As is evident from the distribution of the means, the speakers of the Middle age group have practically given up the weakening rule before liquids, while still applying it in more than one out of seven cases before vowels. The fact that the weakening rule is levelled out earlier and faster before consonants than before vowels can be explained on the basis of wellformedness constraints on syllable structure, specifically sonority distance.

- r -deletion, i.e. the deletion of postvocalic r preceding a coronal obstruent in monosyllabic words, a lexicalized rule of the A- and B-type dialects. The data in (2) exemplify the traditional situation:

A / B	C / standard Dutch	<i>gloss</i>
(2a) $ko:rt$	$ko:rt$	'cord, string'
$so:rt$	$so:rt$	'sort' N
$ba:t$	$ba:rt$	'beard'
(2b) $k\text{ɔ}t$	$k\text{ɔ}rt$	'short'
$hats$	$h\text{a}rt$	'heart'

As can be seen in Table 1, r -deletion is not subject to loss on an overall level. However, there is a significant apparent time decrease in the use of this deletion rule in five specific linguistic conditions. One of these conditions concerns words which contain a short vowel — in words with a long vowel the rule does not undergo levelling and the effect of the interaction between the linguistic dimension ('factor group') length of the preceding vowel on the one hand and the age group of the speakers on the other is highly significant ($F=3.65$ $df=2,24$ $p=.041$). The explanation of this directionality has to do with syllable weight: a

syllable consisting of a long vowel plus *r* plus an obstruent in the coda, as in the words in (2a), has three moras and is therefore superheavy. In such a constellation, *r*-deletion has a wholesome effect. This is different in words with a short vowel — like the ones in (2b). In such words, *r*-deletion would lead to a change from a heavy to a light syllable.

In the data from the elicited dialect use, there is no overall age effect on word-final *t*-deletion, i.e., there is no statistically significant difference in the proportion of *t*-deletion between the speakers of the three age groups. But in the data from the two types of conversations, there *is*: to tell from the apparent time *increase* in the use, the nature of this effect is that the rule gets applied more and more often — the mean for all speakers in the sample being approximately 80 out of 100. Is this a manifestation of dialect levelling? I think it is, as it makes the dialect sound more like the surrounding dialects, in which *t*-deletion is also a very prominent feature.

On a more specific level, the following can be said: about a century ago, a grammar was published of a group of Riparian dialects of German — just across the border (Münch 1904), and well over a century ago, a grammar of the local dialect of Heerlen appeared (Jongeneel 1884). Both grammars are quite detailed and precise. ‘*t*-apocope’ is mentioned in both of them. As far as grammatical aspects go, both grammars point out that the deletion erases the 3rd person sg. present indicative suffix [t], not however the 2nd person pl. suffix [t]. This is different in the present-day Rimbürg dialect; my data show that *t*-deletion also affects the 2nd person pl. suffix [t] — as in (3a) — although significantly less often than the 3rd person sg. morpheme — as in (3b).

(3a)	y: ³ R wir ³ kt	~ y: ³ R wir ³ k	‘you (pl.) work’
	y: ³ R flɔpt	~ y: ³ R flɔp	‘you (pl.) sleep’
(3b)	he: ³ wir ³ kt	~ he: ³ wir ³ k	‘he works’
	ət kɪ ³ nk ʃli:əpt	~ ət kɪ ³ nk ʃli:əp	‘the child sleeps’

So obviously the rule has been generalized and is in the process of loosing some of its grammatical constraints.

In order to test *hypothesis 1*, which claims that dialect levelling is a two-dimensional process, the question needs to be answered whether levelling of cross-dialectal variation is always a function of levelling of variation in the dialect-standard language dimension.

As can be seen in Table 1, dialect levelling in the sense of the *loss* of dialect features occurs in 14 out of 21 cases. In three out of these 14 cases, the loss is only manifest in certain linguistic conditions as yet — hence not on the overall level. In four out of 14 cases, the levelling does not lead to convergence towards the standard language; in three of these four cases, there is even divergence vis-à-vis the standard language going on. I will briefly discuss these four dialect features.

ʏ'-weakening — cf. (1a, b). The weakening rule is given up; the then unweakened voiced fricative [ʏ'] is palato-velar, as in the surrounding Limburg dialects, rather than velar-uvular, [ʁ], as in the standard language. Moreover, the latter is more and more subject to devoicing (cf., e.g. Van de Velde 1996:102-104).

Ich-Laut ~ *Ach-Laut* allophony (the [α back] specification of the preceding vowel spreads to the fricative — as far as the Dutch language area goes, this is a feature of the A-type dialects):

	A	B/C	standard Dutch	gloss
(4a)	kriç	kriç ~ kreç	– ('oorlog')	'war'
	vleç	vleç	vlix	'fly'; 'fly!' (imperative)
	vleɣ'ə ~ vleɔ	vleɣ'ə	vliɣə	'flies'; 'to fly'
(4b)	dax	daç	dax	'day'
	zax	zaç	– ('zei'; 'zeg!')	'said'; 'say!' (imperative)
	zox	zoç	zax	'saw'
	zaɣə	zaɣ'ə	– ('zeggen')	'to say'
	klaɣə	klaɣ'ə	klayə	'to complain'

Traditionally, in syllable-final position (voiceless realization), the A-dialects alternate between an *ach-Laut* allophone which is identical to the standard phoneme /x/, and an *ich-Laut* allophone which is identical to the /ç/ phoneme in the B/C dialects; in intervocalic position (voiced realization), the *ach-laut* in the A-dialects ([ɣ]), is both articulatorily and acoustically almost identical to the standard variant /ɣ/, while the *ich-Laut* ([g]) is again identical to the phoneme occurring in the B/C-dialects.

In the levelling process the *ach-Laute* disappear, hence the B/C-type dialects, which have the palato-velar realization throughout, win — and not the standard variety, which does not have this allophony either; instead it has the velar-uvular realization throughout. In the latter respect, and from an abstract structural point of view, the levelling process could be said to lead to a partial convergence to the standard system however.

The non-palatalization of the epenthetic /s/ in the diminutive suffix (the underlying form of which is -ke in Limburg dialects); /s/ occurs when the stem ends in a velar consonant. This feature sets the Rimborg dialect apart from all immediately surrounding dialects:

	Rimborg dialect	B	standard Dutch	gloss
(5)	dɪpskə	dɪɲfjkə	dingetje	'thing'-DIM
	kʌkskə	kʌkfjkə	koekje	'cookie'
	kre:ʔçskə	kre:ʔçfjkə	kraagje	'collar'-DIM

The Rimbürg dialect is in the process of adopting the morphophonemics of the surrounding B-type dialects. So here, again, the B-type dialects win — and not the standard language.

The system of noun pluralization undergoes levelling, but the levelling does not affect the uniquely dialectal non-concatenative, stem-internal morphology, such as *Umlaut* — e.g.

	A / B / C	standard Dutch	gloss
(6)	apəl : ɛpəl	appel : appels	'apple' : 'apples'
	kɔp : kœp	kop : koppen	'head' : 'heads'

or a change of the tone contour from High-Low-High (i.e. 'circumflex') to High-Low ('grave')⁸, e.g.

(7)	ε̣ʀ³m : ε̣̇ʀ³m	arm : armen	'arm' : 'arms'
	ʃtẹ : ʃtẹ̇	steen : stenen	'stone' : 'stones'

These four cases show that dialect levelling does not necessarily lead to convergence towards the standard language. By and large, the concept of standard language is a 19th century invention; the spread of standard languages throughout speech communities and the rise of mass literacy are even younger. So it may well be that cross-dialectal levelling is the older and historically the main or even only type of dialect convergence. As 'late' as 1914 a study by Terracher of the dialects of the region of Angoulême (France) brought to light that "l'agent destructeur de la morphologie des patois n'est pas le français, mais les parlers limitrophes" (Pop 1950:106).

But cross-dialectal convergence is certainly not a thing of the past;⁹ neither is it a uniquely European phenomenon. For instance, in their recent study of /ɔy/, the dialect variant of the standard English diphthong /ai/ in the dialect of English spoken on Ocracoke Island, off the coast of North Carolina, USA, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (1995:710) found that "speakers may add vernacular features from surrounding dialects to their speech", in this case the Southern vernacular variant /a:/.

The Southeast-Limburg dialect landscape has in fact preserved an older instance of cross-dialectal convergence. The dialects in the A-zone have undergone dorsal fricative deletion with compensatory lengthening,¹⁰ which occurs neither in the dialects in the B- and C-zones nor in the standard language. In a subset of lexical items, B-zone dialects do show vowel lengthening but no dorsal fricative deletion — e.g.

	A	B	C / standard Dutch	gloss
(8)	na:t	na:ç(t)	naç(t) / naɪt	'night'
	li:ʔt	le:ç(t)	lɪç(t) / lɪxt	'light'

This seems to be a consequence of partial convergence between adjacent dialects, specifically of the B-dialects towards the A-dialects.¹¹ Convergence is one of the processes that lead to the formation of transition zones.

For specific dialect features, cross-dialectal convergence can lead to either complete or partial similarities between dialects — cf. the types of structurally intermediate varieties which have been labelled ‘mixed’ and ‘fudged’ lects. Mixed lects are lects which, for a given dialect feature, combine variants from two different ‘pure’ lects, to use Chambers & Trudgill’s (1980:132-37) terminology.¹² Fudged lects also combine the variants from two different ‘pure’ lects, but they have an additional third variant which is a compromise between the two ‘pure’ variants. For dorsal fricative deletion and compensatory lengthening, B-dialect variants such as those in (8) constitute a case of ‘fudging’; they have the preservation of the dorsal fricative in common with the C-dialects, while the vowels are long, just as in the A-dialects.

6. Conclusions and discussion

In sum, there is ample evidence in favour of each of the three hypotheses. The answers to the questions underlying the three hypotheses may constitute building blocks for the construction of a fully-fledged theory of dialect levelling.

Hypothesis 1, which says that dialect levelling is a two-dimensional process in that it can affect both variation in the dialect-standard language dimension and variation across related dialects, has a direct bearing on the question regarding the role of standard varieties in the convergence and divergence of dialects. It turns out that in some cases, the levelling of cross-dialectal variation occurs independently from the standard language. In some of those cases, dialect levelling even constitutes crossdialectal *convergence* and dialect-standard language *divergence* at the same time. In most of these cases, the dialect change appears to be *structurally* independent from the standard language — but is it also *sociolinguistically* independent from the standard language? More in particular, the question is whether this type of dynamics would also have occurred in case there had been either *no* standard language or *another* standard language.

For the Rimborg case one can only speculate as to the first scenario (no standard language). However, there are possibilities to study the second one, i.e. a different standard language. This different standard language would be German. As a matter of fact, at present a research project is being prepared at the Department of General Linguistics and Dialectology of the University of Nijmegen in which in the neighbouring German dialect of Übach-Palenberg (just across the Dutch-German border) the vitality of a number of dialect features will be studied which this dialect has in common with the Rimborg one. Traditionally the Übach-Palenberg dialect is very similar to the Rimborg one. This

new research project will not only make it possible to give a better answer to the question regarding the structural and sociolinguistic role of the standard language in processes of dialect levelling. The outcomes will also be relevant to two other issues. One concerns the relative weight of internal factors. The other one is the question regarding the effect of state borders on the supposed erosion of old dialect continua.¹³

Address of the Author

Frans Hinskens
Department of General Linguistics and Dialectology
University of Nijmegen
Erasmusplein 1
NL-6525 HT Nijmegen (The Netherlands)
e-mail: F.Hinskens@let.kun.nl

Notes

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- 1 *Staffellandschaft*, in the German terminology — see Bach (1934:61); (1950:144-145); Hard (1972). Cf. also Weijnen (1977:18-19).
- 2 Cf. McCarthy & Prince (1995).
- 3 See Hinskens (1992), sections 5.3.2, 5.3.8, 5.3.15, 6.3.2, 6.3.8 and 6.3.15 for details regarding the relationship between these dialect features, and section 6.4.4 for a short overview of several other cases of structural relationship between dialect features and their consequences for the actual process of levelling of these features.
- 4 Cf. the operationalization of the notion of accommodation in § 2 above. A case of the opposite suppression of the usage of features which make one's dialect less understandable for outsiders, i.e. of linguistic divergence, has been reported in Labov's 1963 study of the centralization of the diphthongs in the English dialect spoken on the island of Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Massachusetts, USA.
- 5 Linguistic, rather than merely psychological convergence, to be specific. The latter concerns a speaker's intention and conviction regarding his or her interactional behavior in general.
- 6 I consistently take as a starting point the varieties to the west that do not have the features concerned. Likewise in the examples: whereas the C- and B-zone dialects have, e.g. [oç], the A-zone dialects have [ox], etc., whereas the C-type dialects have [vɔn], the B- and A-zone dialects have [vɔ], etc., whereas the standard language has [lopt], dialects in the C-, B- and A-zone dialects have [lap], etc. The glosses of the examples are, respectively, 'eye', 'to dig', 'inside', 'light', 'stomach-DIM', 'earth', 'of', 'honest', 'made-PRET', 'come-PAST PART.', 'would like to-1./3.SG.', 'asked', 'walks', 'that in', 'warmth', 'high door', 'mice', 'put-PRET 1./3.SG.', 'walk-2.SG.', 'whom', 'there'.
- 7 See Hinskens (1992), § 6.4.2 for additional approaches.
- 8 The Rimburch dialect, like most dialects spoken in Limburg and the neighbouring Rhineland, is a pitch accent system. Pitch accent systems are a special type of tone language in which the type of tone contour (i.e. intonational contour) with which a syllable is realized under certain conditions, can be lexically or morphologically contrastive. See Hinskens 1992, § 2.3.5 for a more elaborate account and some illustrative examples.

- 9 See Auer & Hinskens (1996:13-15) for some of the most recent references.
- 10 These telescoped processes are no longer productive; as a matter of fact they have been lexicalized — cf. Hinskens (1996).
- 11 This analysis is corroborated by the fact that, in the course the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, the center of prestige shifted from Cologne (some 75 km to the east), which for many centuries had been an important center especially in economical and cultural respects, to the north-western part of the Netherlands (roughly the triangle Amsterdam – The Hague – Utrecht). This shift followed the change in the geo-political position of most of the present province of Limburg, which was incorporated into the kingdom of the Netherlands no earlier than 1839. See Hinskens (1992:§3.2.1) for a brief sketch. Traditionally, dorsal fricative deletion with compensatory lengthening occurs in the Cologne dialect (Münch 1904:37, 92, 95-96, 158) and in most local dialects of German east of Cologne, including the neighbouring dialects of Aachen and Herzogenrath.
- 12 Recall the sketch of the considerations regarding *Mischung* and *Ausgleich* in older German dialectology presented in § 4 above.
- 13 See Hinskens (1997:75-78) for a more extensive sketch of the aims and methods of this new project.

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