# Destandardization is not destandardization

*Revising standardness criteria in order to revisit standard language typologies in the Low Countries*

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**Abstract**

The growing variability in Europe's standard languages has spawned widely shared accounts of destandardization, as well as premonitions of the death of the very idea of a standard language. In this paper, we propose an alternative to these views by demonstrating that the 'classical' standardness criteria (uniformity, prestige, codification) have become too narrow to define standard varieties in our Late Modern era of democratization and digitalization. Rather than rejecting these criteria as invalid, however, we revise them in function of contemporary standard language dynamics. Building on corpus data and (especially) experimental perception data, we will show (1) that the overt prestige which is typical of standard languages has extended to include other types of superiority (such as media cool or dynamism), (2) that the uniformity believed to manifest itself in the absence of variation can also surface as 'perceptual harmony' (an intuitive agreement on how much socially meaningful variation is admissible in specific contexts), and (3) that codification as the referee of right and wrong in standard languages is being complemented with public media licensing. The three extensions are grounded in a conception of standard languages as vital (not virtual), and multi-indexical (not just neutral or traditionally prestigious) varieties. Applied to the standard language situation in the Low Countries, they reveal that more varieties than VRT-Dutch and Neutral Netherlandic Standard Dutch can claim standard status.

**Keywords:** language standardization, language destandardization, criteria for standardness, language perception, language evaluation, overt prestige, covert prestige, perceptual harmony, multi-indexicality

# 1 Introduction

Anyone who has ever investigated standard language(s) has been confronted with the concern that this object of study is difficult to delineate and define with any amount of precision. While non-experts have folk conceptions about which variety constitutes the 'best', or the 'official', or the 'supra-regional', or the 'neutral' option in the repertoire, it is not easy to propose technical criteria which distinguish adequately between the said variety and the others (Smakman, 2006). A much used and 'relatively narrow' definition according to Auer (2011, p. 490, but see also Hinskens & Taeldeman, 2013, p. 5, and Deumert's, 2010, p. 244 initial definition) builds on three criteria. A standard language is:

1   a COMMON AND UNIFORM LANGUAGE, which ideally shows no variation in the territory in which it is used because all community members prefer the same (standard) variants; standardization is typically hostile to variability (see also Milroy & Milroy, 1985);

2   an H VARIETY, which has overt prestige and is used in formal situations;

3   a CODIFIED variety, to the extent that '*right* or *wrong* plays an important role in the way in which speakers orient towards it'.

It is interesting to notice that this definition relies on production criteria ('common', 'no variation', 'codified'), perception or evaluation criteria ('overt prestige'), and a functional criterion ('formal'). In growing convergence with this definitional heterogeneity, few analysts still hold that standardness can be determined exhaustively in terms of uniformity on the level of language production, because even speech which is unquestionably standard is still variable. Smakman (2006), for instance, found considerable phonetic variation between iconic newsreaders that had been selected by a large panel of informants as the 'best' speakers of Dutch. As a consequence, any spoken standard language is inherently variable and can never be fully standardized (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 22), and 'the amount of variation which is allowed within the confines of the norm is not theoretically specified' (Willemyns, 2003, p. 113), 'presumably because there is no way of describing or delineating it.'

   In addition to the suspicion that full uniformity in standard production is ontologically precluded, it is an empirical fact (see Kristiansen & Coupland, 2011, and Kristiansen & Grondelaers, 2013 for overviews) that European standard languages are currently undergoing changes which are regarded as a threat to their uniformity. Linguists are increasingly attesting systematic and socially meaningful variability – in the form of, for instance,

regional or social accents – in standard speech produced by the 'best speakers' (such as news anchors of official broadcasting institutions) in the most formal contexts (Adank et al., 2007; Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2010). But the fact that varieties which are supposed to be uniform are becoming more variable also excites concern among non-expert, 'ordinary' users:

> […] there is controversy about what the norm should be, and about the fact that nobody abides by that norm, there is resistance against the influx of English loan words, there are complaints about sloppy pronunciation, […] about the fact that text messaging style is on the increase, and that the tolerance against linguistic variation has gone too far. Everywhere in Europe, interestingly, the same issues are being mentioned. (Van der Horst, 2009, p. 14; translation ours – SG, RVH & PVG)

In view of the fact that Europe's standard languages are becoming undeniably less uniform, the pivotal question arises whether standard varieties are destandardizing or, alternatively, whether standardness criteria such as Auer's (2011) are (still) suited to accommodate present-day standard language dynamics. In this paper, we will demonstrate that while Auer's criteria are essentially correct, they have become too narrow to define standard languages in modern (media) times. We will review and revise them accordingly.

The argumentation will be developed as follows. In the next section we briefly describe six supra-regional varieties of Flemish and Netherlandic standard Dutch, and perform a first of round of standardness checks on them in terms of Auer's criteria, introducing vitality as an additional criterion. In §3, §4 and §5, we revise the prestige, the uniformity, and the codification criterions, and introduce multi-indexicality as an additional criterion as we move along. In §6, we revisit the standard status of the six varieties on the basis of a second round of standardness checks in terms of the revised and the newly introduced criteria. In the final section, we zoom in on a number of pivotal conclusions.

## 2      Competing varieties and standardness check 1

In this section, we distinguish between six supra-regional varieties of spoken Flemish and Netherlandic Dutch, which either have uncontested standard status, or are penetrating into the 'standard language space' (by virtue

of their increasing occurrence in formal situations). It will be noticed that not all these varieties are 'emically' available to non-expert users (but see below), and that we limit ourselves to varieties on which both production and perception data are available.

Although VRT-DUTCH – the variety produced on, and promoted by the VRT (Flemish Radio & Television) – has been the uncontested norm for spoken standard usage in Flanders since the 1950s, its lingua franca status has just as long been problematic. VRT-Dutch is an exoglossic variety (modelled after Netherlandic Dutch), and it was not spontaneously adopted, but imposed on the Flemish (Jaspers, 2001, De Caluwe, 2009, Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011) through a process which can best be described in terms of the notion 'hyperstandardization' (Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012, p. 97), 'a propagandistic, large-scale and highly mediatised linguistic standardisation campaign that has thoroughly ideologised and hierarchised language use in all corners of Flemish society.'

In addition, VRT-Dutch is increasingly a non-vital variety (in terms of domains of use, and size of speaker community) many Flemish continue to be uncomfortable with on account of the fact that it sounds so foreign and artificial (Taeldeman, 1993, Geeraerts, 2001).

The 'highest' – in stratificational terms – vital variety of Flemish Dutch is TEACHER DUTCH (Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011; Delarue, 2013), as documented by the speech of the Flemish teachers in the Teacher Corpus of the Spoken Dutch Corpus. Since teachers proclaim themselves as guardians of the standard language (Van de Velde & Houtermans, 1999; Delarue, 2013), and all the teachers in the corpus knew in advance that their speech was recorded for inclusion in a database of standard Dutch, it is reasonable to assume that they made an effort to sound as standard as possible. Still, TEACHER DUTCH audibly deviates from the VRT-norm on account of the fact that the absolute majority of teachers have a regional accent which is straightforwardly identifiable to non-expert listeners (Grondelaers et al., 2011, pp. 215-16), and the fact that many teachers also manifest some non-standard phonology in their speech, notably t-deletion in function words. In addition, TEACHER DUTCH clearly does not command the same prestige as neutral VRT-DUTCH (Grondelaers et al., 2011, p. 215). We have argued that a plausible reason for this absence of prestige is the fact non-accented VRT-DUTCH is the only prestigious variety in the mind of naïve listeners (Grondelaers et al., 2011, p. 217).

The most controversial spoken variety of present-day Flemish Dutch is TUSSENTAAL, a highly vital colloquial variety which is stratificationally situated in-between the standard(s) and the dialects in Flanders. In pro-

duction terms, TUSSENTAAL is not a coherent, well-delineable variety (Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2016). Building on a statistical analysis of 80 variables in the Corpus of Spoken Dutch sections which feature spontaneous, unprepared speech, Plevoets (2008, p. 175) argues that it is not possible to distinguish categorically between TUSSENTAAL and TEACHER DUTCH. Neither do (younger) Flemish speakers switch neatly from TUSSENTAAL to Standard Dutch: they often produce code mixes which can be situated almost anywhere on the stratificational scale from more dialectal to more standard (Vandekerckhove & Nobels, 2010). In view of the latter, Jaspers & Van Hoof (2014) justifiably refer to TUSSENTAAL as 'Mixed Dutch': TUSSENTAAL is characterized by phonetic, lexical and morpho-syntactic features, but these features need not always co-occur, and not all variables are always realized with the TUSSENTAAL variant (see Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2016, especially the discussion pertaining to (1)-(6)).

Although there is a lot of individual and regional variation in TUSSENTAAL, uniforming tendencies have been reported in the literature, though there is as yet no consensus on these processes. Observe to begin with that there appears to be a growing influx of features from the central Brabant-Antwerp axis (see Vandekerckhove, 2007 and especially Willemyns, 2005; De Decker's, 2013 analysis of 12 morphosyntactic TUSSENTAAL markers in adolescent chat speech does not fully support the Brabantic expansion hypothesis). In addition, TUSSENTAAL is encroaching on formal domains in which Standard Dutch used to be the evident choice (De Caluwe, 2009; Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011), and the youngest generation of the sociocultural elite is massively 'defecting' to TUSSENTAAL (Plevoets, 2009). Taken together, all these tendencies could be interpreted as indicative of stabilization (Taeldeman, 2008, but see Geeraerts, 2010 for a different view) and even endoglossic bottom-up standardization (see Vandekerckhove, 2007 and Cajot, 2012; Ghyselen, 2015 contains a highly insightful theoretical discussion of linguistic stabilization, pp. 45-50).

In spite of its unstoppable vitality, TUSSENTAAL continues to be explicitly and forcefully rejected (see Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011, p. 224 for an overview), and quantitative and qualitative investigations into attitudes towards, and evaluations of TUSSENTAAL (Cuvelier, 2007; Impe & Speelman, 2007; Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012, p. 113) have not returned any traditional prestige perceptions whatsoever.

In the Netherlands, the closest relative of VRT-DUTCH is NEUTRAL NETHERLANDIC STANDARD DUTCH (NNSD), the regionally neutral variety which Van Haeringen (1924) originally envisaged as the norm for Dutch. Much like VRT-DUTCH, NNSD has remained an ideology rather than a

linguistic reality, since few people have ever spoken it in a pure form (Van Bezooijen, 2001). While there are no explicit figures on proficiency in NNSD, Daan (1969, p. 14, cited in Smakman, 2006, p. 27) believed that prior to WW2, regionally flavoured spoken Standard Dutch was rejected more strongly and by more people than after the war (which suggests a stronger pre-War 'purity' ideology). Kloeke (1951, cited in Willemyns, 2003), however, claims that even immediately after the war, no more than 3 percent of the population mastered accentless Standard Dutch, and there are no reasons to assume that this paucity has changed today.

The Netherlandic equivalent of FLEMISH TEACHER DUTCH is NETHER-LANDIC TEACHER DUTCH. Building on the speech of the Netherlandic teachers in the Teacher Corpus of the Spoken Dutch Corpus, Adank et al. (2007) found that the absolute majority of Netherlandic teachers have an automatically identifiable regional accent (but not, as Flemish Teacher Dutch, non-standard phonology). Evaluation research (Grondelaers et al., 2010) subsequently demonstrated that the high prestige Randstad accent, and the lower prestige Groningen and Limburg accents of Netherlandic Standard Dutch elicit nationally shared social meanings: Randstad continues to be the uncontested prestige accent, but the low-prestige Limburg accent elicited more positive evaluations than before, and in its mild form, the Limburg accent even commands the *same* prestige evaluations as the Randstad accent (Grondelaers et al., 2011, p. 210). In addition to regional accent variation, NETHERLANDIC TEACHER DUTCH also features some widely accepted social flavouring. Stroop (1998) found that some educated middle class females lowered the pronunciation of the first element of the /ei/-diphthong, as a result of which it approximates an [aai]-pronunciation. This variety or variant – Smakman (2006, p. 50) legitimately raises the question whether it should be called the former – is commonly dubbed 'Poldernederlands', and while it was originally claimed to index 'intellectualism, commercialism and pop culture' in the speech of females (Smakman, 2006, p. 50), it has in the meantime spread to both genders (Jacobi, 2008). As early as 2001, Van Bezooijen found that younger females had a more positive attitude towards 'Poldernederlands' than towards non-accented Standard Dutch (p. 269), which suggests subconscious acceptance of the change. Like regional accents, 'Poldernederlands' has in the meantime become an inalienable ingredient of the spoken standard of nearly all the Dutch under 40 (Stroop, 2010). As a consequence, it is safe to conclude that regionally and socially accented NETHERLANDIC TEACHER DUTCH is the practical Netherlandic Dutch standard.

*HUN*-DUTCH, finally, is our label for the variety spoken by a great (and

growing) number of our students in Nijmegen, viz. NSD with an audible regional accent and a number of non-standard grammatical features restricted to Netherlandic Dutch. The most noticeable of the latter (hence our label for this variety) is 'subject-*hun*', as in *Als we zo spelen krijgen **hun** natuurlijk altijd kansen* ('If we play like this, them will always get chances'). Subject-*hun* is extremely controversial, explicitly rejected as low prestige, but nevertheless highly vital in production (Van Hout, 2003, 2006; Van Bergen et al., 2011; Grondelaers & Speelman, 2015). A second, though slightly less frequent non-standard variant in HUN-DUTCH is 'periphrastic *doen*' (henceforward per-*doen*), as in *Doe jij de afwas, dan doe ik de vaatwasser uitruimen* (literally, 'then I do clean out the dishwasher', which is acceptable in English but clearly non-standard in Dutch). In contrast to subject-*hun*, per-*doen* does not excite great controversy, and it is perceived much less negatively: while per-*doen* is viewed as modern and popular, subject-*hun* was found to be no more than 'current', and it was attested much more often with negative likeability, incorrectness-, and low education-perceptions than per-*doen* (Grondelaers & Speelman, 2015).

Before we perform a first round of standardness checks on these varieties, two remarks have to be made. Observe, first, that our tripartite classification of varieties which will henceforward be referred to as 'virtual', 'practical', and 'emergent' standard on either side of the border is not intended to obscure the sometimes very different synchronic and diachronic essence of the Flemish and Netherlandic sister varieties. The present classification, however, allows us to compare Flemish and Netherlandic varieties in terms of the amount and the *nature* of the variability they contain: there is no variation in the virtual standards (VRT-DUTCH and NEUTRAL NSD), especially regional accent variation in the practical standards (FLEMISH and NETHERLANDIC TEACHER DUTCH), and non-standard morpho-syntax in the emergent standards (TUSSENTAAL and HUN-DUTCH). In this respect, our classification challenges the tripartite taxonomy in Geeraerts et al. (1999) and Geeraerts & Van de Velde (2013) on account of their stratificational equation of TUSSENTAAL with 'Poldernederlands': while the latter is a phonetic 'single variant variety', TUSSENTAAL is non-standard not only in its pronunciation, but also in its lexis, morphology and syntax. In addition, the acceptance of 'Poldernederlands', but not TUSSENTAAL, has by now become uncontroversial.

Second, it will be obvious from the overview that not all six varieties introduced are equally rigidly delineable, let alone that they should have the same popular, empirical, or theoretical relevance. While VRT-DUTCH and TUSSENTAAL have been so diligently studied and (hysterically) media-

tised that they have become household realities to most of the (linguistically trained) Flemish, the term TEACHER DUTCH was introduced only in Grondelaers & Van Hout (2011); although it has been taken up in the meantime in other work such as Delarue (2013), it has almost no theoretical, and certainly no lay relevance yet. The *empirical* delineation of FLEMISH TEACHER DUTCH and TUSSENTAAL is problematic in view of the fact that these varieties are difficult to distinguish categorically (cf. supra, see Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2016, p. 63 for an overview). In both Flanders and The Netherlands, we theoretically differentiate between the virtual standard (VRT-DUTCH and NEUTRAL NSD) and its best real life implementation which, in the case of NETHERLANDIC TEACHER DUTCH, is so close to the ideological ideal (except for the regional accent variation) that one may wonder whether the distinction is more than theoretically relevant (again, it is not one which lay observers would make). *HUN*-DUTCH, by contrast, has no theoretical status yet, but it is increasingly becoming a much-deplored practical reality. Rather, therefore, than a priorly arguing for the independent essence of the six varieties, we will enter them in the discussion as theoretical abstractions to test and revise standard language criteria. In view of the assumed validity of the revised criteria, all varieties entered will turn out – we hope – to have at least some theoretical essence.

Let us next compare the six varieties in terms of Auer's criteria in the first three rows of Table 1. In the fourth row, the six varieties are checked on the vitality-criterion which was implicit in the previous overview, but which will henceforward be treated as a fully-fledged fourth criterion. In earlier accounts such as Stewart (1968), vitality – defined as actual usage of a language by a community of native speakers – was an essential standardness prerequisite, though its present-day relevance is for the most part restricted to the standard status of non-European languages (such as Cantonese in Hong Kong, Groves, 2010), endangered languages (in China, Bradley, 2012, or on the African continent, Lübke, 2015), or regional varieties and dialects (in The Netherlands, Swanenberg, 2013). We use the criterion first and foremost to distinguish between virtual (ideological) varieties and real-life practical standards (see below).

Table 1    Values for six varieties of Flemish and Netherlandic Dutch, compared on Auer's
(2011) standardness criteria

|  | Neutral VRT-Dutch | Flemish Teacher Dutch | Tussentaal | Neutral NSD | Netherlandic Teacher Dutch | Hun-Dutch |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Uniform/common | + | - | - | + | - | - |
| Overtly prestigious | + | - | - | + | + | - |
| Explicitly codified | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| Vital | - | + | + | - | + | + |

Values on the uniformity and prestige criterions were attributed on the basis of the evidence presented in the previous paragraphs. The positive value for VRT-DUTCH on codification reflects the fact that radio and television hosts on the public network – the uncontested model for Flemish pronunciation – are required, and periodically checked to adhere to the most authoritative pronunciation guide of Dutch (Blancquaert, 1934, see Van de Velde, 1996, p. 46; Vandenbussche, 2010, p. 312). The observation that the pronunciation of Belgian Standard Dutch was 'reined in' by explicit codification also transpires from the fact that most 20th century pronunciation dictionaries were explicitly geared towards a Flemish market (Van de Velde, 1996, p. 29). In The Netherlands, by contrast, there has been almost no explicit enforcement of pronunciation norms on national radio (Van de Velde, 1996, p. 49-51), and the idea of a salaried 'language advisor' or rather 'language guardian' – which the VRT has employed since 1971 – would be 'unthinkable' (Verschoor, 1992, cited in Van de Velde, 1996, p. 49); if anything, the lack of explicit pronunciation surveillance and the absence of any pronunciation guides which explicitly target a Netherlandic market (Van de Velde, 1996, p. 29) suggest that the Netherlandic Dutch norm has for the most part been obvious and uncontested (see also Smakman, 2006; Vandenbussche, 2010). In view of the different 'surveillance' of the Flemish and the Netherlandic norm, one could argue that strict codification is more necessary in communities in which the standard is the result of repression and force, as in Flanders. In communities in which norm acceptance is a matter of consensus rather than insistence, there is less need to explicitly safeguard what has been agreed upon voluntarily. Codification, as a consequence, is probably a more relevant attribute of dominance-based language standards.

The classification in Table 1 lays bare a more fundamental concern associated with Auer's standardness criteria, or rather with any attempt to delineate standard varieties in a categorial way. A basic disadvantage of

Auer's criteria is the fact that whereas they are intended to distinguish between 'lects' – language varieties produced in actual reality – they delimit *virtual* varieties in their strictest application. There is wide consensus in the literature that the 'hegemonic, uniform, and codified norms of standard languages' (Deumert, 2010, p. 244) are first and foremost a matter of desire, and of the modernist conviction that there exist varieties which are 'fixed and fixable' entities. In this respect, standard varieties are little more than a reference point for 'good' and 'pure' and 'beautiful' usage, engendered by powerful encompassing ideologies of dominance, superiority, and efficiency (Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012, p. 97; Milroy, 2001, p. 530).

More specifically, VRT-DUTCH and NEUTRAL NSD are common and uniform only by virtue of the fact that they are almost never spontaneously produced in their ultimate 'perfection'. As soon as such linguistic ideals are put into actual every-day usage, their purity is inevitably tainted by variation, and they cease to be common and uniform in the strictest sense of these words. Hence the inverse correlation between Auer's standardness criteria and the new vitality criterion: the 'best' varieties in Dutch (resp. VRT-DUTCH and NEUTRAL NSD) are uniform, prestigious and codified, but non-vital; vital varieties, by contrast, are non-standard according to Auer's criteria. Crucially, the fact that vitality no longer features as a prominent criterion in the literature on the standardization of Western languages may reflect that the focus in this tradition is moving away from standard languages as production realities to standard languages as virtual idealizations. We will come back to this issue below.

A more empirical reason to question the validity of criterion 1 for vital standard varieties is the fact that NETHERLANDIC TEACHER DUTCH – with regional flavouring – is now generally accepted as the practical spoken standard of Netherlandic Dutch (see especially Smakman, 2006, Adank et al., 2007). This acceptance is more than the defeatist acknowledgment of the fact that variability is an inevitable by-product of putting an abstract norm into actual linguistic practice:

> Variation, rather than an impediment to effective communication and in violation of the uniformity maxim of standard languages, is […] the [tool] which allow[s] speakers to express social meaning […] and identities (Deumert, 2010, p. 245).

In connection with the acceptance of regional flavouring in NSD, we have argued in Grondelaers & Van Hout (2010, p. 234) that

standardization-induced uniformity runs counter to one of the primary functions of human language, namely, communicating social meaning. Human speech is a vehicle for social meaning because it contains an abundance of cues for […] characterizing a person in terms of the stereotypes associated with the category/categories he or she allegedly belongs to […]. When an unknown British male speaks with an RP-accent, listeners will be intuitively inclined to categorize that individual as a member of a higher social class, and they will project onto that individual the stereotypes associated with that category (viz. good breeding, private education, high income, probably also right-wing sympathies etc.) in advance of any real knowledge about that person.

So, in any community in which people have allegiances and identities which can be encoded and decoded on the basis of linguistic cues, variation is bound to exist and persist. It is unsurprising in this respect that the only natural habitat for the fully uniform Dutch which is the practical one-on-one representative of the standard ideal, is radio and television news shows in which the anchor is a transmitter of facts who should not have any obvious allegiances for neutrality's and objectivity's sake. The fact that such 'news Dutch' is deemed artificial (cf. supra) derives to a large extent from this neutrality and social meaninglessness.

  If variation-free standard Dutch is in any case an illusion in view of the previous, the outburst of variability in Europe's standard languages is also a sign of the times. While teleological uniformity was an evident design choice in the Modernist era with its collectivist concerns of nation state building, administrative centralization, mass literacy and nation-wide book printing and selling, the present-day era of Late Modernity (Giddens, 1991) is an age of anti-authoritarianism, fragmentation and heterogeneity, with a tendency to 'release [people] from social structures' and '[to] detraditionalise and destabilise life' (Coupland, 2007, p. 29, cited in Deumert, 2010, p. 259). Late Modernity has engendered 'the withering of tradition and the onset of new social forces prising individuals from their old collective modes of existence', as a result of which they 'no longer have any choice but to *actively think and choose* how to live, what to value and what to become' (Atkinson, 2010, p. 2; italics in the original). It goes without saying that self-presentation and identity-profiling are evident attributes of this new responsibility, and (accent) variation an obvious linguistic resource.

  We believe that the evolution of collectivism to individualism which coincided with the transition of Modernity to Late Modernity was sustained by two pivotal media revolutions: the advent and dissemination of

television in the 1960s, which brought about a reorientation of the strict division between the public and the private domain (Kristiansen, 2009), and – more relevant for current standard language dynamics – the growing importance of the internet and internet communication, which pluralized language norms and further amplified the importance of identity. Whereas most people in the pre-internet age wrote nothing unless it was a school assignment which was more often than not evaluated against the backdrop of established linguistic norms, in 2009 38 percent of incoming (American) university students' writing took place *outside* the classroom, most of it on the internet (Thomson, 2009 quoting from the first findings of Andrea Lunsford's *Stanford Study of Writing*). In computer-mediated communication (CMC) like internet chat or Twitter, a substantial amount of publicly oriented language escapes editorial control and its traditional language norms. Androutsopoulos (2011) proposes in this respect that

> digital language practices fragment the locus of normative authority. Written language norms are pluralised to the extent that different styles of writing can be deemed appropriate in different environments and genres and to different user groups. (p. 13)

In addition to being less sensitive to official language norms, CMC has engendered a new need for, and new ways of 'claiming symbolic capital', if only because the non-physicality of most CMC eradicates some of the visual perception cues (like race, gender, or sexual orientation) which are immediately available in face-to-face conversation. In the absence of such cues, all participants' contributions in theory have equal merit, and identity is to a large extent 'typed into being' in CMC (Sundén, 2003), affording senders the opportunity 'to portray themselves in preferential ways, emphasizing desirable characteristics and communicating in a manner that invites preferential reactions' (Walther, 2011, p. 461). The creative assemblage of 'styles' (Eckert, 2008) in which standard ingredients coexist with socially meaningful non-standard features, again, is an obvious linguistic tool for modern self-portrayal.

   It will be obvious from the previous paragraphs that many linguists are increasingly moving away from a negative view on variation as a harmful impoverishment of standard language to a more positive attitude in which variability is regarded as a meaningful enrichment. The impact of this new view on the uniformity exigencies of standard language will be tackled below, but first we add multi-indexicality to the feature list as a character-

istic of the practical (TEACHER DUTCH) and the emergent standards (TUS-SENTAAL and *HUN*-DUTCH).

The proposal that practical and new standards are multi-indexical per-tains to the fact that the social meanings of their non-standard features (regional accents, new grammatical variants) extend well beyond the non-indexicality (neutrality) or mono-indexicality (superiority) of ideal stan-dards. The apparent paradox inherent in the social meaning of ideal stan-dards (non- vs. mono-indexicality) is transparently fleshed out in Davila (2012, p. 181), who asserts in connection with Standard Edited American English (SEAE) that

> the belief that SEAE is unmarked and common more or less explicitly implies a certain identity-less-ness associated with this language variety, a 'bleach[ing] … of markers that reveal … native regional and social dialect[s], especially if these dialects are considered nonstandard by society at large' (Moss & Walters, 1993, p. 444). However, what much of composition scholarship ignores (at least by omission) is that it is *impossible for a dialect to be completely unmarked.* According to Donald Rubin (1995), so-called 'unmarked forms are really just normative forms, that is, representing social and political prestige' (p. 6)' (Italics ours – RVH, PVG, SG).

It goes without saying that as real and new standards are increasingly multi-indexical, the conservative standard is becoming supremacy-index-ical rather than neutral. In (10), (12), (14) and (17) below, chatter B's re-course to posh VRT-DUTCH may reflect his wish to sound neutral, but it is also, and much more plausibly, a mark of his assumed superiority, and his condescending attitude towards chat styles and chat language (cf. infra).

The growing importance of multi-indexicality which emanates from the increasing significance of 'self' and 'identity' in Late Modern society, not only forces us to revisit and revise the uniformity criterion: *all* of Auer's criteria have to be adapted to a markedly changed or changing linguistic context in order to be valid and useful delineators of standard vs. non-standard language. In the next sections, we subsequently revisit the overt prestige criterion and argue for the existence of *covert prestige* motivations for non-standard variants (§3), we complement the uniformity criterion with a *perceptual harmony* perspective (§4), and we introduce *media licen-sing* as a provisional referee for official acceptance, and hence a 'proxy' for codification (§5).

# 3 From overt conservative to covert modern prestige

In this section and the next, we will demonstrate that the multi-indexical assemblage of standard and non-standard features in vital standard varieties is not unconstrained, and that there are in fact two uniformity regulators which may not save criterion 1, but which engender alternative sorts of uniformity which allow these varieties to be multi-indexical *without* affecting the unity which is indispensable for their functioning within a given community.

   If virtual standard languages are uniform because they represent clusters of prestige variants which are systematically preferred by all users, then vital standard languages *continue* to be uniform if the non-standard variants they contain can be shown to be also prestigious in some sense. In the present section, we will demonstrate that a great number of the non-standard variants cropping up in national varieties of Dutch (and in other European standard languages) are in fact prestigious, albeit in a more modern sense. In traditional sociolinguistic nomenclature, this 'new' prestige would be labelled 'covert', but we prefer to regard the difference between traditional and modern prestige in the less hierarchical terms of relocation from top-down prestige attribution by the socio-cultural and educational establishment to multiple forms of status designation, including (internet) community-based peer evaluation. This relocation involves an extension of traditional status sources – birth, education, professional competence, income, and social success – to include (digital) media credibility and cool as prestige determinants (Kristiansen, 2001, 2009). More particularly, new prestige forms pertain to the dynamism of media personalities such as DJs on media channels geared towards a younger audience, in short, personalities for whom it is more important to project a cool and street-wise, rather than a traditionally prestigious (authoritative, educated, or competent) image. According to Kristiansen et al. (2005, p. 15), the emergence of this modern media prestige was triggered by

> the development of an omnipresent media universe and this universe's remarkable turn from strict formality to ardent preoccupation with 'doing informality': a performance that draws heavily on the 'casual' image of low-status urban speech.

It is much more difficult to access modern prestige evaluations than to extract traditional prestige perceptions. Sociolinguists who are interested in such meanings (cf. for instance Campbell-Kibler, 2007) investigate them

with experimental techniques from social psychology, notably speaker evaluation. In Lambert et al.'s (1960) speaker evaluation paradigm, listener-judges evaluate unlabelled speech clips (representing different variants or varieties) on a number of adjectival descriptors pertaining to speaker personality (to what extent is the speaker of clip X professionally competent, well-educated, socially attractive, dynamic, …?); on these evaluations, factor analysis is performed to identify the principal dimensions of evaluation.

On the basis of this experimental tool, Kristiansen (2001, 2009) found evidence for a prestige and a standard split in Denmark. In consciously extracted evaluations, young Danes confirmed conservative Rigsdansk as the standard for the cultural and educational establishment, but more private evaluations elicited in the speaker evaluation paradigm upgraded Modern Copenhagen Speech – a publicly downgraded modern accent of Danish – on such dynamism traits as 'self-assured', 'fascinating', and 'cool'. According to Kristiansen, the split between traditional prestige (status) and new prestige (dynamism) has engendered a 'competing standards' situation in Denmark, with Rigsdansk as the school standard, and Modern Copenhagen Speech as the media standard. In the same vein, Ó Murchadha's (2013) speaker evaluation data on the standard status of conservative, modern, and local varieties of Irish revealed that Post-Gaeltacht speech, a learner variety, was upgraded on such measures as 'adventurous', 'enthusiastic', 'self-secure', 'interesting' and 'fashionable'. Although Ó Murchadha did not interpret these data as suggesting a possible dynamism-dimension in his perceptions, Grondelaers & Kristiansen (2013) reinterpreted them as revealing dynamism perceptions sustaining the vitality and standardness of Post-Gaeltacht speech.

In the Low Countries, Grondelaers & Speelman (2013) and Grondelaers & Van Hout (2016) have reported speaker evaluation evidence which demonstrated that some TUSSENTAAL features are not traditionally but dynamically prestigious. A phonological TUSSENTAAL feature (the t-less pronunciation of function words *wat* ('what') and *niet* ('not')) did not render speech any less superior or dynamic than colloquial speech without these features. Typically Flemish words were downgraded on superiority, but rendered colloquial speech *more* dynamic. Morpho-syntactic TUSSENTAAL features, finally, were significantly downgraded on both dynamism and superiority.

In a series of (hitherto unreported) studies into prestige motivations for subject-*hun*, Grondelaers & Van Hout conducted two speaker evaluation experiments comparable to the one reported in Grondelaers & Speelman

(2013) and Grondelaers & Van Hout (2016), except for the measures employed. In order to accommodate the concern that there are no appropriate adjectival elicitors to probe the sort of media cool envisaged as a determinant of standard language change – 'resourceful' rather than strong, and 'assertive' and 'mildly challenging' rather than downright aggressive –, we used pictures as elicitors. Five categories of objects were eventually selected (restaurants, concerts, lamps, couches, workplaces) which had a clearly prestigious representative (in the case of the workplace category, an oak-panelled lawyer's office), a clearly dynamic representative (in the case of the workplace category, a colourful internet company office situated in an abandoned factory), and a disapproved representative with low scores on both dimensions (in the case of the workplaces, a garbage collection vehicle).

78 male and 108 female respondents were asked to determine to what extent they associated the speech in 9 short stimulus clips with each of the 15 pictographic measures (on a 7-point scale). Speech stimuli contained spoken NSD, and differed only with respect to the subject pronoun in the critical sentence, either standard *zij* ('they'), a lowered non-standard pronunciation of *zij* – glossable as [zaai] –, and the non-standard pronoun *hun* ('them').

Factor analysis on the ratings yielded a good solution explaining 65.5 percent of the variance in the data, and factor scores subsequently revealed that respondents rejected subject-*hun* on traditional prestige/superiority, but awarded the same amount of, but not more dynamism to subject-*hun* as to subject-*zij*. The fact that *hun* is not the most dynamic option can be plausibly attributed to the fact that the option is still categorically absent in the grammar of a sizeable proportion of speakers of Netherlandic Dutch. In a recently finished, almost exact replication of this experiment – which compared visual and adjectival evaluation elicitors – we *did* find higher dynamism scores for subject-*hun* than for subject-*zij*.

All in all, it is safe to conclude that the present-day co-occurrence of standard and non-standard elements in TUSSENTAAL and *HUN*-DUTCH is licensed by a mix of old and new prestige evaluations, which testifies to the continuing importance of prestige as a structural uniformity, or at least coherence builder, but also to an internal change in the concept of prestige which is plausibly related to the fact that superiority is a different notion in face-to-face communication and online interaction. The prestige relocation from authority and expertise institutions to community-based peer evaluation, which supports the vitality of some non-standard variants, is also noticeable in other internet domains. The exponential growth of digi-

tal forums on which individuals can express themselves and their opinions, for instance, has fostered a new type of peer status. Whereas reviews of consumables used to be a matter of expert opinions expressed by trained (or otherwise competent) critics, the ubiquity of 'tools such as blogs, social bookmarking, wikis, social networking sites, and a range of ratings, recommendation, reputation, and credentialing systems' (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013, p. 1626) has turned internet users into experts:

> In spite of their relative lack of official authority, users may possess relevant expertise due to their firsthand knowledge or experience with a topic or situation, and thus may be accurately perceived by others as having a great deal of experiential credibility [...]. Due to this, it is argued that networked tools and applications can 'replace the authoritative heft of traditional institutions with the surging wisdom of crowds (Madden and Fox, 2006).' (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013, p. 1627)

## 4      From production uniformity to perceptual harmony

If anything, the data in the previous section have demonstrated that seemingly heteroglossic repertoires like TUSSENTAAL and *HUN*-DUTCH are much more uniform than one may expect: there continues to be a preference for prestigious forms in these varieties. Whereas the newly prestigious TUSSENTAAL characteristics permit the Flemish to profile themselves as 'dynamically Flemish' and 'anti-Dutch standard', the newly prestigious subject-*hun* invites perceptions of modernity, trendiness, and panache in Netherlandic Dutch users.

At the same time, prestige innovation and relocation do not account for *all* non-standard forms in the Low Countries, especially not in Belgian Dutch. The morpho-syntactic TUSSENTAAL marker *nen* (non-standard 'a') in (9) below represents a flection phenomenon which was found to be non-prestigious in any respect according to the experimental data cited in the previous section. Does the fact that prestige does not condition all non-standardness features entail that one must ultimately conclude that *anything* goes in Standard Dutch?

We do not believe that it does, and we propose to complement the concept of coherence with 'harmony'. In music theory, harmony pertains to consonance, to the intervals which are allowed to co-occur in specific chords, but in actual music practice it pertains to the ideal proportion

between consonance and dissonance. In Renaissance music, harmony was strictly standardized, but from 1600 onwards, a crucial change from pre-scribed to functional harmony emerged in the work of Claudio Monteverdi: the proportion between consonance and dissonance in a composition was no longer regulated by explicit prescription, but determined by the text and the emotions it generated. Even then, not all harmonic liberties were admitted, and composers were supposed to let 'sprezzatura' (a sort of intuitive good taste) guide their harmonic choices.

The parallels between musical and linguistic harmony will be obvious. In (standard) language, harmony pertains to a mostly tacit agreement between interlocutors on how many and which 'dissonant' clusters of standard and non-standard features are intuitively admissible and inter-pretable in a specific interaction embedded in a specific context or register. There are two crucial advantages to the concept of harmony as a coherence diagnostic: as in music, where untrained listeners immediately and pre-theoretically recognize whether a composition is harmonious or not, inter-locutors immediately recognize whether the proportion between conso-nance and dissonance in their interaction is harmonious. In both music and language, dissonance can be extremely meaningful, but not anything goes, and disharmony (disproportionate dissonance) often leads to explicit rejection by the listener(s).

We present two illustrative case studies in support of the working of harmony in language. A first case in point is the informal exchange (1)-(8) quoted in Van Bergen et al. (2011, p. 4, their example 1):

(1) A: 'Misschien zeggen hun van: 'Oh, dit is wel een leuke lengte,' zeg ik: 'Nou, knip dan een beetje in een model, dat ik 't langer kan laten groeien of zo,' weet je, want dat kan nou niet met …'
'Maybe them go like: 'oh, this is a nice length', and then I say: 'Well, style it into a model which allows me to let it grow somewhat longer or so', you know, because that is impossible now with…'

(2) B: ''Misschien zeggen hun,' zei je dat nou echt?'
''Maybe them go like', did you really say that?'

(3) B: 'Misschien zeggen hun …'
'Maybe them go like…'

(4) A: 'Misschien zeggen ze …'
'Maybe they go like…'

(5) B: 'Oh, ik verstond hun.'
'Oh, I thought you said them.'

(6)   A: 'Oh, nou, nee hoor!'
      'Oh no, I surely didn't.'
(7)   B: 'Ik denk al: Huh, dat kan niet!'
      'I was thinking, huh, that cannot be possible!'
(8)   A: 'Oh gut, oh bah, dat kunnen ze natuurlijk gaan opzoeken hier! Oh
      oh oh!'
      'Oh yuk, oh shit, they can retrieve that here! Oh oh oh!'
      (CGN: fn 008088)

The quoted passage comes from the spontaneous dialogue section of the
Spoken Dutch Corpus (Oostdijk, 2002), in which speakers were specifically
recruited to produce their 'best' Dutch for inclusion in a corpus of Belgian
and Netherlandic Standard Dutch. This context conditions speakers to
adhere as much as possible to standard norms, and even in a very informal
conversation on hair style which requires some intimacy between the
interlocutors, inclusion of subject-*hun* represents a noticeable disharmony,
which is immediately detected and sanctioned by addressee B, and which
causes consternation in A (who realizes that the deviation will be retrieva-
ble from the eventual transcript). In order to be harmonious in this con-
text, interlocutors do not accommodate horizontally (towards each-other),
but vertically (towards the prescribed norm). Norm violations – whether
unintentional or consciously expressive – are clearly a risky undertaking.

A second, very different, case was attested on February 25 2003, in an
internet chat conversation recorded to be included in a corpus of chat
language. In view of the fact that the channel operators were unwilling to
hand over the chat logs for linguistic research, and did not give us permis-
sion either to log the chat automatically, the first author (or one of his
Leuven colleagues) had to contribute occasionally to the ongoing conver-
sation in order to bypass the 'idle' prohibition (which automatically re-
moved chatters who did not participate sufficiently regularly in the con-
versation). Being a standard speaker with a mildly provocative attitude
towards the chat customs of the time – the gender imbalance and the
ensuing thematic focuses, and the somewhat artificial insistence on TUS-
SENTAAL –, the first author frequently ended up being verbally abused or
forcefully removed from the channel on account of his (sometimes, but not
always) deliberate harmony violations. A case in point is the exchange
reproduced in (9)-(17), from which we have deleted all conversations
which ran concurrently with the topical interaction; non-standard features
are marked in boldface:

(9) &lt;A&gt; wie heeft er hier zin in **nen** DEFTIGE chat? **Msg me**
Who feels like a decent chat? Msg me
[…]

(10) &lt;B&gt; Definieer deftig voor mij, A
Please define 'decent' for me, A
[…]

(11) &lt;A&gt; **Geene zever**
No bullshit
[…]

(12) &lt;B&gt; als je 'geen' niet correct spelt, dan overweeg ik het niet eens, A
If you can't spell 'no' correctly, I will not even consider it, A
[…]

(13) &lt;C&gt; B je **ziet e mutn**
B, you are a silly person
[…]

(14) &lt;B&gt; wat in hemelsnaam is een 'mutn', C?
What in heaven's name is a 'mutn', C?
[…]

(15) &lt;C&gt; een dwaas mens
A silly person
[…]

(16) &lt;E&gt; zeg B **Ø zijt** ook **nie** lastig **zenne**
Say, B, Ø are not a nuisance, are you?
[…]

(17) &lt;B&gt; en waaraan heb ik dat verdiend?
And to what do I owe this?

In this exchange too, the importance of harmony is revealed through violation. The chatter named B (the first author of this paper) insists on provocatively correct Standard Dutch in a medium in which a more mixed code is de rigueur (almost all contributions by the chatters except B contain at least one non-standard element). B's usage triggers traditional superiority perceptions which are at odds with the local coolness demands of this type of chat speak. As a remarkable consequence, B is abused aggressively (by C) and good-naturedly (by E) for his violations, which appear to be so intentional and exaggerated that there is little doubt that the perpetrator is well aware of the rules he is breaking. Such aggressive reactions to B's linguistic uncooperativeness are significant in view of the fact that much more inflammatory chat norm violations – such as derogative suggestions about the mental stability and the sexual proclivities of the (almighty)

channel operators – went ignored and unpunished. For some reason, linguistic superiority was clearly *not* the way to claim symbolic capital in earlier internet chat days.

In the context of (9)-(17), harmony is not established through vertical accommodation to a linguistic norm, if only because explicit language norms play no binding role in online communication (cf. above) but are negotiable and violable. In chat channels convening young interlocutors, harmony is served by horizontal linguistic accommodation to one's peers, and the strict avoidance of incompatible identity (superiority, poshness) profiling through linguistic means.

## 5  From codification to media licensing

In the previous sections, we have demonstrated that TUSSENTAAL and *HUN*-DUTCH are more prestigious and more coherent or at least more harmonious than hitherto assumed. That, however, does not make them standard in the strictest 'official' sense of the word. While we believe that the subconscious endorsement of the dynamic prestige of these varieties is a precursor and even a motor of their eventual 'fully-fledged' standardization (Grondelaers & Speelman, 2013, p. 186 ff.), the latter remains a largely conscious process which takes the form of (at least) explicit public consensus, and ideally also some sort of codification.

But how would consensus and codification work in this case? Indexical variability is difficult to inventorize and delimit in the lexicons and grammars which lay down the 'ground rules' of standard languages, and the ultimate consequence of perceptual harmony as a uniformity proxy is that there are no forms which are intrinsically 'bad': even for highly disfavoured sounds or words or constructions, there will be contexts in which said sounds or words or constructions are not (too) dissonant.

We turn to national radio as a key referee in this respect. In the introduction, it was shown how instrumental the official Flemish broadcaster was in the dissemination of Standard Dutch, and there are no signs that its significance in this respect is waning: it is clearly still the VRT who determines what the best Dutch in Flanders is. According to the current VRT language advisor Ruud Hendrickx,

> News Dutch (Hendrickx' label for what we call 'VRT-Dutch' – SG, RVH, & PVG) […] is no more than a consensus among journalists. The VRT has been organizing voice auditions for candidate journalists for many years, and in the audit

> committee we more or less agree on how this News Dutch should sound, although we don't have any objective parameters. […]. For the time being we have to rely on intersubjective objectivity: if the members of the committee believe that someone's pronunciation is standard, then it is standard. (Hendrickx, 2012)

In addition to evaluating candidate journalists' standard pronunciation competence, Hendrickx and his colleagues also monitor and correct tenured journalists' usage on the VRT-stations. In this capacity, the VRT continues to function as the 'supervisor' of Flemish Standard Dutch, and the fact that linguistic innovations appear on the radio amounts to some sort of 'officialisation'.

While Hendrickx explicitly rejects omitting final -t on the VRT-channels under his supervision as 'clearly non-standard' (personal communication, email of 14.01.2015, see also Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2016, p. 68), other broadcast media are becoming increasingly tolerant to this variant which is no longer non-prestigious according to the experimental data cited in Grondelaers & Speelman (2013) and Grondelaers & Van Hout (2016, cf. supra). In the Sunday evening radio show *Heartbeats* – broadcasted on the commercial station Joe FM – radio presenter Truus Druyts, who is in all respects a fluent speaker of the best Flemish Standard Dutch, occasionally omits final -t's in some function words. In addition to the growing prestige of this variant (or its waning stigma), its application in the specific program format of *Heartbeats* – a show which counsels listeners in matters of the heart – is also quite harmonious, because by admitting this dissonant non-standard feature, Druyts signals her willingness to abandon some of the radio speech neutrality or superiority demands in favour of an engaged and more proximal relation therapy style. According to Joe FM, there have been no explicit rejections of Druyts' usage. We believe that the 'radio acceptance' which transpires from the absence of listener reactions represents a practical (and at least a provisional) proxy for the eventual 'officialisation' of t-deletion in the standard (if such will ever obtain).

## 6      Standardness check 2

Table 2 diagrams the values for the six varieties of Dutch on Auer's three criterions (uniform/common, overtly prestigious, explicitly codified), on our reinterpretations/extensions of these criteria (covertly prestigious, per-

ceptually harmonious, media licensed), as well as on the new criteria vital and multi-indexical:

Table 2    Values for six varieties of Flemish and Netherlandic Dutch, compared on Auer's original criteria, Auer's revised criteria, vitality, and multi-indexicality

| | Neutral VRT-Dutch | Flemish Teacher Dutch | Tussentaal | Neutral NSD | Netherlandic Teacher Dutch | Hun-Dutch |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Uniform/common | + | - | - | + | - | - |
| Perceptually harmonious | - | + | + | - | + | + |
| Overtly prestigious | + | - | - | + | + | - |
| Covertly prestigious | - | - | + | - | | + |
| Explicitly codified | + | - | - | - | - | - |
| Media-licensed | + | + | +/- | + | + | - |
| Vital | - | + | + | - | + | + |
| Multi-indexical | - | + | + | - | + | + |

As in Table 1, values were attributed on the basis of the evidence presented in the previous paragraphs. The fact that VRT-DUTCH and NEUTRAL NSD are uniform/common but *not* perceptually harmonious, derives from the absence in these ideal varieties of dissonant clusters of standard and non-standard features. The absence of any check for NETHERLANDIC TEACHER DUTCH on covertly prestigious reflects a lack of knowledge: in neither of the speaker evaluation experiments into the evaluation of regional accent variation (Grondelaers et al., 2010; Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2010) did we include any dynamism measures. The '+/-'-check on media-licensed for TUSSENTAAL signals that some (but not all) TUSSENTAAL-features like final t-deletion are increasingly attested on the radio.

It is difficult to determine how well these criteria work in the absence of independent validation, but it is obvious that they capture some of the central parameters of current standard language dynamics. Most important of all, they distinguish between virtual and vital varieties. Virtual varieties are the unflawed product of ideological desire and design, and in this capacity they are uniform and prestigious, and they can be rigidly codified. This perfection automatically entails that virtual standards are also non-vital (compare Milroy & Milroy's (1985) postulation that the only fully standardized languages are dead languages): as soon as they are put into actual spoken practice, they inevitably become *imperfect*. It is the confusion of virtual and vital varieties, of the desire for 'makeable perfection' and its inevitably imperfect implementation, which engenders the

bulk of the pan-European standard language complaints this paper started out with. In this sense, destandardization is not destandardization: the fact that there has never been a perfect standard reality in the first place, reduces the significance of any alleged norm degradation.

The covert prestige and multi-indexicality features delineate a second sense in which destandardization is not destandardization. The variability in Europe's best languages may reflect an inability to acquire the perfect variety, or a (growing) reluctance to play by the rules of such standards, but the up side of this alleged 'disintegration' is the linguistic potential to flag identities *beyond* the neutrality and superiority meanings of perfect standards. In an era which celebrates individualized, constructed, and self-monitored identity (Giddens, 1991), indexical variability is an evident tool for identity construction.

But that does not imply that anything goes. The increasing tension between 'fitting in' (uniformity) and 'standing out' (identity) automatically cancels out uniformity in the strictest sense of the word, but (new) prestige and perceptual harmony are evident coherence checks on stylistic assemblage: many of the non-standard forms in TUSSENTAAL and *HUN*-DUTCH continue to be prestigious, albeit 'only' dynamically, and there is tacit consensus between interlocutors on how much socially meaningful variability is admissible in a specific interaction. Harmony is a coherence enhancer because it locally overrides the low prestige of prescriptively wrong, but socially meaningful variants, and renders them 'fitting' in an unfolding interaction. Disharmony is a coherence diagnostic which automatically detects variants which do not belong in a specific linguistic context.

(Media) licensing, finally, is the criterion which renders the practical standards – Flemish and Netherlandic TEACHER DUTCH – more standard than the emergent varieties, because it signals an explicit communal acceptance which approximates official codification. What is currently admissible on radio and television coincides with the distinction between TEACHER DUTCH and *HUN*-DUTCH/*TUSSENTAAL*, to the extent that regional accent variation and, in Flanders, t-deletion are allowed, whereas morphosyntactic deviations are not. However, the audibly increasing tolerance for additional TUSSENTAAL-features on *Studio Brussel* – the VRT-network geared towards a young and 'grungy' audience – confirms that the distinction between Flemish TEACHER DUTCH and TUSSENTAAL is difficult to make, or that the public acceptance of TUSSENTAAL is growing.

In addition to capturing some of the dimensions of synchronic standard language dynamics in the Low Countries, the feature clusters in Table 2 also have diachronic import, if only because *any* synchronic comparison

between Flemish and Netherlandic Standard Dutch automatically conjures up the developmental difference between these varieties (viz. the fact that the standardization of the former was much more complicated than that of the latter). This diachronic difference is reflected in a much smaller distance between the virtual and the practical standard in The Netherlands than in Flanders. In The Netherlands, TEACHER DUTCH represents the best of all worlds in terms of standardness: it approximates the virtual ideal by being a consensus-based, overt prestige variety, but it also is a modern and multi-indexically vital standard. Flemish TEACHER DUTCH, by contrast, is not prestigious in any sense of the word (Grondelaers et al., 2011, p. 215-218), and it continues to be regarded as an inferior variety in the shadow of VRT-DUTCH, which remains ideologically powerful although it has never been a vital production reality. In connection with this apparent paradox, Deumert (2010, p. 259) uses Beck's (2002) evocative 'zombie' metaphor to refer to varieties which are 'essentially dead, but continue to structure our actions and experiences because we […] treat them as if they were real'.

## 7    Conclusion

In this paper we have investigated whether standard languages in the Low Countries (and other European countries) are destandardizing, as is commonly held, or whether it could be the case that the 'classical' standardness criteria (uniformity, prestige, and codification, as specified in for instance Auer, 2011) have become too narrow to fit present-day standard language dynamics. Although the latter was found to be the case, we have argued that Auer's criteria are essentially valid, but we have revised them to be applicable to the radically changed role of standard languages as multi-indexical tools in highly diversified societies (which are no longer stratified along predictable lines of social classes) with a bewildering variety of (digital) media, registers, and functions. Standard languages now serve more kinds of interaction than only the most public and formal ones, and they are used by more speakers than those with a higher social class or educational background. It goes without saying that prestige, coherence, and codification are noticeably different phenomena in this new social and linguistic reality.

While the application of the original prestige, uniformity, and codification criterion to the language repertoires in Flanders and The Netherlands would have resulted in a verdict of massive destandardization (viz. a rejection of all the vital varieties, except Netherlandic TEACHER DUTCH, as non-

standard), application of the extended criteria shows that Flemish TEA-CHER DUTCH with some TUSSENTAAL features would qualify as standard on them (especially in view of the latter variety's media licensing which signals collective acceptance). The fact that *HUN*-DUTCH is still too stigmatized for public broadcast use indicates that its acceptance has not advanced as far as that of TUSSENTAAL (features).

In view of the evidence collected here we can plausibly anticipate that the vital Netherlandic standard will progressively incorporate some of the grammatical non-standard features from *HUN*-DUTCH. In the experiment in which we attested covert (dynamic) prestige for subject-*hun*, we also found evidence that the [zaai]-variant of the standard [zij]-pronunciation of the personal pronoun has shifted its social meaning from covert dynamic to *overt traditional* prestige. If such dynamism-to-superiority extensions are structural rather than incidental – a hypothesis for which we have insufficient evidence at present –, then there is reason to believe that subject-*hun* will once be an accepted ingredient of the best Netherlandic Standard Dutch, which will become even more socially meaningful on account of it. While this extension converges with earlier proposals (Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011; Grondelaers et al., 2011) that Netherlandic Standard Dutch is stratifying to accommodate variability indexical of regional or social macro-categories, the availability of subject-*hun* would enable speakers to profile more personal styles in Standard Dutch.

In the case of Flemish Dutch, it is much more hazardous to predict the linguistic future. Above and in earlier work (Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011; Grondelaers et al., 2011), we have referred to the Flemish competition between a non-vital but ideologically powerful variety (VRT-DUTCH) and a vital but non-prestigious variety (TEACHER DUTCH) as a 'standard vacuum'. While it is obvious that some sort of heteroglossic code will assume the role of lingua franca – plausibly TEACHER DUTCH with TUSSENTAAL features –, it is equally obvious that the eventual recognition of that variety as the fully-fledged standard necessitates the demise, or rather the violent killing, of the 'zombie' standard. There is no sign that either will happen in the near future.

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