Corpus-based analysis of reduction processes in -lijk words: their social and linguistic embedding

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In spoken Dutch, words ending in the suffix -lijk often occur in reduced form (Ernestus, 2000). The word mogelijk (‘possible’), for instance, cannot only be pronounced as [moxOlOk] but also as [mox[Ilk], or even as [mok]. From the Corpus of Spoken Dutch, subcorpus Spontaneous Speech, we selected 14 high-frequency words ending in -lijk. We investigated the connectivity of these words: Are these words subject to the same reduction processes and are they affected by the same social (external) and linguistic (internal) factors? Two transcribers have anonymously classified the degree of reduction for a total of 946 tokens of these words, exploring suffix reduction and reduction of the vowel of the word initial syllable. We found clear effects for the social factors involved (In the Netherlands more reduction occurs than in Flanders; men reduce more than women; in Flanders highly educated people reduce less.), but also clear linguistic context effects (More reduction if the predictability of the word on the basis of the preceding word in the sentence is high; less reduction in non-final position in the sentence.). Moreover, the words differed in their regional behaviour, which suggests that in language use these words do not necessarily form one family.