'A LIMBURGIAN, SO CORRUPT'.

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS INTO THE REPRESENTATION OF THE DUTCH PROVINCE OF LIMBURG, LIMBURGIANS AND LIMBURGISH IN DUTCH NATIONAL MEDIA

SANNE TONNAER

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Concerns about the decline of children being raised in the regional language of the Dutch province of Limburg have recently led Limburgish institutions to present a manifesto arguing that the Limburgish language should not be thought of and presented as an inferior language in e.g. education. By combining the "social connotations" hypothesis and social identity theory, linguistic change can however also partly be explained by how regions, speakers, and language varieties are represented in public discourse. The aim of this article, then, is to investigate the social and linguistic representation of Limburg, Limburgians and Limburgish in Dutch national media. Holding a critical viewpoint, eleven recently published/aired media texts in which evaluations towards Limburg(ians) and Limburgish are expressed are analysed adopting the Discourse Historical Approach. Results show that Limburg and Limburgians are often represented in terms of othering and negative stereotypes, leading to negative attitudes towards the province and prejudice towards its inhabitants. These beliefs and feelings not only decrease the value of the social identity of Limburgians but also get connoted to the specific language features of Limburgish, something which may lead speakers of Limburgish to reduce their use of the language variety.

Key words: Limburgish, language ideologies, critical discourse analysis, media

1. Introduction

With language variation being a natural phenomenon, we often infer information about a person or social group based on the specific language features they use (Garrett, 2010). As Fishman (1971, quoted in Ryan, Giles and Sebastian, 1982, p.2) states: 'language is not merely a carrier of content', but instead 'is content', especially since language and language varieties are strongly associated with group identities (Edwards, 2010). It is therefore not

remarkable that accents are used and changed to either disguise or stress social memberships (Shepard, Giles and Le Poire, 2001; Thornborrow, 2004a).

Giles and Powesland (1975), then, discuss several theories and hypotheses that aim to explain how and why certain dialects have achieved superiority over others. Subsequently, together with Giles, Trudgill (2013) introduced the "social connotations" hypothesis, arguing that (a combination of) phonetic features are often associated with specific geographical areas and/or the social attributes of its speakers, consequently linking the evaluations of those regions and/or qualities to the linguistic variety (see also Giles and Niedzielski, 1998). Such meanings (or indexes) are not static but instead are assimilated in a so-called indexical field that is 'an embodiment of ideology in linguistic form' (Eckert, 2008, p. 464). As such, a linguistic variable can activate a number of categories and meanings depending on the context.

Minimal linguistic sign[s] with a multiplicity of meanings (Thissen and Cornips, 2014, p. 296) in the Netherlands are the so-called soft G and sing-songy accent, indexing among other things 'southerness' and so also more specific categories like Limburgish (Hagen and Giesbers, 1988). Limburgish, an umbrella term for all dialects spoken in the Dutch province of Limburg (Figure 1) (Veldeke, 2018; see also Cornips *et al.*, 2016) finds itself in a diglossic situation in which it has a lower status than the Dutch "standard language" in the formal public domain (Kroon and Vallen, 2004). Although it nevertheless seems like Limburgish still enjoys high prestige within Limburg (Driessen, 2005), a glance in a July 2018 edition of the regional newspaper *De Limburger* shows that regional institutions are concerned about the decline in the number of children raised in Limburgish (Peeters, 2018)[1]. According to them

[1] E.g. Driessen (2012) shows that the number of parents who speak dialect with their children is in decline: from approximately 50% in 1995 to 39% in 2011. However, compare Van de Velde *et al.* (2008) and Belemans (2002).

(Van Hout and Van de Wijngaard, 2018), one of the reasons Limburgish is used less and less is because mainly preschool teachers presuppose that speaking Limburgish badly influences the language development of children[2].

Figure 1 Map of the Netherlands with in the southeast the province of Limburg (Alphaton, 2010)

However, I am just like Grondelaers, Van Hout and Steegs (2010, p. 112) 'convinced that language production changes can only be understood by recourse to how language is perceived' while taking into account the "social connotations" hypothesis, especially since such discourses:

[2] Although e.g. Kroon and Vallen (2004), Van den Nieuwenhof, Van der Slik and Driessen (2004), Driessen (2016), Blom *et al.* (2017) and Francot *et al.* (2017) have proven otherwise or even the opposite for school results. Kraaykamp (2005), however, has shown that dialect speakers in the Netherlands experience a significant social disadvantage, mainly as a result of stereotyping which prevents an objective evaluation of the individual qualities –stressing the importance of the current research.

‘call attention … to the pressures to conform to socially approved identities, … and who determines which identities are approved’

(Lemke, 2008, p.2).

A critical analysis of discourse can thus bring into the limelight ideologies which do not just reflect but also construct (power) relations (Fairclough, 2010) and which, because of their natural occurrence in everyday discourse, are often seen as common-sense and therefore remain unchallenged (Wodak and Meyer, 2015).

With language attitudes and stereotypes being able to influence both (linguistic) behaviour and self-perception (Stangor, 2000; Coupland, 2007; Woolard, 2008), the negative (language) ideology towards Limburg(ians) and Limburgish[3] that is repeatedly expressed in national media may explain why more and more parents decide not to raise their child(ren) in Limburgish.

Since Limburgish is an official regional language, respect must actively be promoted through e.g. the media (Council of Europe, 1992). It is therefore important to be able to hold the media accountable by making them aware of the influence their value judgements indirectly have on the mind and action of the audience (Thomas, 2004a; Couldry, 2008; Van Dijk, 2008b). Hence, the following analysis will adopt a critical stance while focussing on how Limburgish, Limburgians and the province of Limburg are represented in national media.

2. Literature review

A research into representation calls for a close analysis of how language is used to relate emotions, classifications and values to, in this case, a social category (Hall, 2013a). Representations are thus closely related to ideology, with the latter being defined as the cognitive framework that consists of ‘a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values’

[3] The existence of which is shown and proven by e.g. Mathijsen (2011), who gives an amplitude of examples.

that controls the (trans)formation and application of social cognition regarding e.g. attitudes and social representations (Van Dijk, 2008b; Wodak and Meyer, 2015, p. 8)[4].

2.1 (Language) ideology

Within the sociolinguistic arena, there is a specific focus on *language* attitudes and ideologies, terms that are not surprisingly often interchangeably used as both take into account the ideas that people have regarding language (varieties) and the influence of those on identity issues and linguistic change. However, language ideologies go beyond individual psychology as they strongly relate to social positioning (Irvine and Gal, 2000; Bucholtz and Hall, 2006; Kroskrity, 2016). Hence, Garrett (2010, p. 33, my italics) suggests a strong link between the two as language attitudes according to him are taught, rather stable evaluative orientations about 'a speaker and their social group membership, often *influenced by language ideologies'*. The starting point for such language ideologies is often the taken-for-granted idea that a standard variety exists, a concept promoted by dominant and powerful institutions like the media as having the most prestige in society (Edwards, 2010; Garrett, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2012; see also Milroy, 2001). However, the idea that a homogeneous and more legitimate standard variety exists is a myth according to e.g. Lippi-Green (2012), which is why she uses an asterisk when referring to such non-existing standard varieties, a practice I will be adopting here by using *SD when referring to "Standard Dutch".

2.1.1 Stereotypes and social categorisation

With speech features often being associated with (activities of) social groups (Ryan and Giles, 1982; Jones, 2004), they can serve as iconic cues for social categories (Irvine and Gal, 2000). Seen from a constructionist and Discourse-Historical viewpoint, such social

[4] Fairclough (2003, p.9) even *equates* representations with ideologies when the former 'can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation'.

categories are constructed in discourse (Coupland, 2007; Wodak, 2018), with group representation being inextricably linked with the accentuation of intergroup differences (Hogg and Reid, 2006). Stereotypes, the beliefs about the *qualities* that are associated with social categories (Schneider, 2005; Stangor, 2000) essentialise exactly that difference with the "Other" (Hall, 2013c) and thus justify our behaviour towards this Other (Allport, 1986). As such, stereotypes 'maintain sharp boundary definitions' (Dyer, 2002, p. 16).

This is where the "social connotations" hypothesis comes in, with Trudgill (2013) arguing that people connect the qualities (i.e. the stereotypes) of speakers and regions to specific language varieties. It follows that for nonstandard regional languages like Limburgish to proliferate it is important that not only the language itself but also the Limburgians and Limburg have positive connotations, so that speakers feel they want to identify themselves with those and hence want to continue using the language variety (Carranza, 1982) – a statement that is backed by e.g. the Social Identity-, Self- and Social Categorisation Theory (cf. Tajfel and Forgas, 2000; Hogg and Reid, 2006; Hogg and Vaughan, 2014; Trepte and Loy, 2017) and the Communication Accommodation Theory (Shepard, Giles and Le Poire, 2001; Garrett, 2010).[5]

2.2 The Limburgish situation in Limburg

As already established, the characteristic intonation and phonological characteristics of both the Limburgish accent and dialect can provoke reactions that reach further than just the accent itself (cf. Cornips, 2013). Indeed, a dominant north and peripheral south 'opposition play an important role in the linguistic consciousness and self-image of the Dutch' (Hagen

[5] Although one should not forget that speakers of minority languages also often amplify the linguistic differences with the language of the state by continuing using their "own" accent and dialect in an effort to resist the 'forces of modernity and nation-state' (Bucholtz and Hall, 2006, p. 384).

and Giesbers, 1988, p. 32-33) and consequently also the Limburgians (Thissen and Cornips, 2014; Cornips, 2018; see also Stengs, 2018).

2.2.1 Historical context

The idea that one dialect has more prestige over others and therefore becomes the standard variety can be explained by looking into 'historical attitudes toward language' (Edwards, 1979; St Clair, 1982, p. 165; Thomas, 2004b). Adding to this the "social connotations" hypothesis (Trudgill, 2013) that, as discussed before, links (evaluations of) regions and speakers' traits to linguistic features, it follows that it is necessary to briefly sketch the history of the province of Limburg, which is a long and tumultuous one (cf. Alberts, 1974, 1983; Ubachs, 2000).

Having been part of the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, Austria and France, it was only in 1815 that the predominantly Catholic province of Limburg (then still constituted of what are now Belgian and Dutch Limburg) joined the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, only to become Belgian again (except for Maastricht) after it joined the Belgian Revolution in 1830.

In 1839, then, Limburg was split in a Belgian and Dutch part (with the latter becoming part of the German League as well), a decision merely based on the fact that King William I needed to be compensated for the loss of territory to the newly formed nation-state of Belgium. This caused a fundamental insecurity (Knotter, 2008, p. 358) among the Limburgians regarding their relationship with the Dutch government. They suddenly had to pay higher taxes whereas they had just lost the Belgian market (Knippenberg, 1999) and the Roman Catholic influences on the predominantly Protestant Dutch political affairs led the Dutch elite to consider Limburg a strange appendix (Alberts, 1983, p. 191). No wonder that more 'us' against 'them' ideas were expressed in e.g. an 1848 edition of the regional newspaper *De Limburger* (quoted in Knippenberg, 1999, p. 48):

'We are Dutch as far as financial debts are concerned; 8 years of experience have taught us, that in all other respects, we are considered as strangers.'

Moreover, Interior Minister Kempenaer publicly argued that there were many in the country who would like to get rid of Limburg and Justice Minister Curtius called Limburg an abominable piece of land (Provincie Limburg, 2018). Not surprisingly, many Limburgians still did not feel part of the Dutch state, causing separatist movements to arise.

Remarkably, exactly those revolutions stimulated the integration of Limburg into The Netherlands after e.g. the desired full annexation with the German League in 1848 failed. The fear for annexation with the Protestant and militant Prussia arose in 1866, leading the Limburgians to assuage their feelings regarding the Dutch state (Op den Camp, 1995). After Limburg lost all connections with Germany in 1867, an integration process followed that stimulated the development of the Limburgish identity, an identity based on the differences with the rest of the Netherlands: differentiation as a form of integration (Knippenberg, 1999; Knotter, 2008; Cornips and Knotter, 2016). Up until now, these differences are still widely noticed and expressed. As Hovens (2010, p. 7) states[6]:

> [T]he landscape, the language, the folklore, the food, you name it, in almost every aspect Limburg deviates from the Dutch norm.

3. Methodology

Mass media has become one of the most important means through which people acquire information about the categorisation and significance of the things around them (cf. Couldry, 2008; Van Dijk, 2008b; Lippi-Green, 2012). How journalists and other media personalities refer to objects, phenomena, actions, actors and places, is thus 'part of the

[6] Also worth reading in this context is Bertram's (2011) book with the rather essentialist title 'Dat zijn nou typisch Limburgers' [Now those are typical Limburgians].

process of representation in discourse' (Thornborrow, 2004b, p. 58; Wareing, 2004) which attracts the interest of critical discourse analysists in the 'representation of Self and Other' (Holliday, 2016, p. 27).

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) engages with and highlights social issues by clarifying how linguistic resources are used to promote power and (language) ideologies and the influence of these on dominated groups (Van Dijk, 2008b; Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2011; Potter and Wetherell, 2015; Wodak and Meyer, 2015). Adopting CDS methods thus seems suitable to find out how the 'power asymmetries in centre-periphery dynamics in the Netherlands' (Cornips, 2018, p. 96) and particularly the (language) ideology concerning Limburg(ians) and Limburgish are embedded within in national media discourse.

Mainly following the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak, 2001; Reisigl and Wodak, 2015, p. 27), *discourse* here is treated as 'a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action' that *include* representations (Fairclough, 2003), with *texts* being the preserved examples of spoken and written (media) *utterances* in interaction (Haberland and Mortensen, 2016).

4. Procedure

One should keep in mind that "critical" in CDS only implies that the researcher herself has adopted a particular ethical standard (Van Leeuwen, 2006, cited in Wodak and Meyer, 2015) and that the data used are not neutrally gathered, transcribed and interpreted but are linked to the research objective and the theoretical perspective (Bucholtz, 2000; Wodak and Meyer, 2015; Haberland and Mortensen, 2016).

4.1 Data selection

Data selection, then, took place on the basis of whether evaluations of Limburg(ians) and/or Limburgish were expressed by mainly non-Limburgians in the period 2013-2018, but

also by Limburgians themselves to be able to evaluate the influence of the popular ideologies in discourse on their attitudes and to examine how Limburgians 'reproduce Limburg's distinct and peripheral identify' themselves as well (Thissen, 2013, p. 127).

4.1.1 Accent identification and transcription

In case Limburgish was not talked about but instead was used in e.g. sketches, the phonological characteristics of Southern Dutch as described by Hagen and Giesbers (1988, p. 32) were used as markers. Brabantish and Limburgish dialects and accents can be recognised by the use of the so-called soft G, the voiced /ɣ/ and unvoiced /x/ velar fricatives as opposed to the hard-voiced uvular fricative /X/ used in the North of the Netherlands. Moreover, a sing-songy accent, 'the monophthongal realisation of [e.] and [o.]' vowels, 'the maintenance of the difference between [f]/[v] and [s]/[z]' (ibid., p. 32) and the loss of the final [t] (Janssens and Marynissen, 2005) all characterise southern Dutch speech.

4.2 Data transcription

Spoken utterances were transcribed using Hepburn's and Bolden's (2013) transcription conventions while only focussing on those features that were closely related to the research objectives. The typical Limburgish accent was transcribed using a ♪ symbol, as it is uncertain that researchers recognise and describe the same intonational features in similar ways when e.g. using Jefferson's conventions, but also because it benefitted both the readability and, most importantly, the usability of the transcripts (cf. O'Connell and Kowal, 1994, 1999). When soft and/or hard G's appeared in e.g. sketches, they were transcribed following Thissen's (2013) example using bold italic ***g/ch*** for the soft G and capital bold ***G/CH*** for the transcription of the "hard G".

4.3 Data analysis

All texts were analysed by particularly focusing on the first two of five discursive strategies as described by Reisigl and Wodak (2015, p. 33) and were colour coded for the purposes of analysis:

1. Nomination
2. Predication
3. Argumentation
4. Perspectivisation
5. Intensification/Mitigation

while taking into account the immediate, intertextual, situational and sociohistorical contexts that are considered important in DHA.

Data excerpts that turned out to provide vital (contextual) information for the actual analysis and discussion were translated into English and included in the main body of the text. Throughout the writing process, I avoided technical and passive language as this hinders a proper description of what 'speakers/writers are actually doing' and thus the ability to change the language people are using (Billig, 2008a, p. 327, 2008b; cf. Van Dijk, 2008a).

5. Analysis and discussion

After having transcribed and analysed the data, it followed that Limburg(ians) and Limburgish tend to be placed in several overarching categories in national media discourse. These categories, mainly based on (negative) qualities attached to Limburg(ians) and Limburgish, are presented in the following section(s) while incorporating the dimensions of context as presented in section 4.3.

5.1 Limburg: a beautiful area that does or should not belong

'In Dutch, there is a really weird expression that we use when we see something that is exceptionally beautiful, like this. Then we say, it is *'undutch' beautiful*. So it is so beautiful, that it actually *cannot belong to the Netherlands.'*

'Limburg, het vergeten land' (2013)

Presenter Tommy Wieringa is not the first one who uses positive superlatives to describe the Limburgish landscape, but he is also not the only one who communicates the idea that Limburg does, should or cannot belong to the Netherlands. Limburgians themselves often represent Limburg as the 'worm-shaped appendix' of the Netherlands (ibid., Vissers, 2017) with Limburgians being portrayed by non-Limburgians as 'backup Belgians' (Vissers, 2017): a clear reference to the complex history of Limburg as described earlier on.

This history indeed provides an important explanation as to why Limburg is discursively established as a place that does or should not belong to the Netherlands, an idea repeatedly expressed by e.g. historian Maarten van Rossem:

> 'I consider Maastricht to be quite nice, but *the rest of the province*, that *we should never have begun'* ((audience laughs))
>
> (De Slimste Mens, 2013)

A plausible explanation for Van Rossem differentiating between Maastricht and the rest of the Netherlands is that the historian knows that Maastricht is the only part of Limburg that has constantly been the territory of the Netherlands since 1815. He thus may consider Maastricht to have stronger roots with the Netherlands than the rest of the province has. However, he does not provide such (or for that matter, any) justification for his statement and the differentiation he makes – whereas one could reasonably expect a historian in the public eye to at least substantiate an assertion like this.

It follows that Van Rossem is equating 'we' with the whole country except for Limburg, thus creating an opposition between the two by representing the non-Limburgians as 'central' and Limburg as ''other', peripheral or outcast' (Dyer, 2002, p. 14). Actress Lies Visschedijk, born and raised in Limburg, confirms a feeling of Limburgish unbelonging by constructing Amsterdam as a place Limburgians feel they do not belong to:

> *'[A]s Limburgian=uh abroad* … as Limburgians feel when they are in Amsterdam, there they do always feel a certain *embarrassment* about the place they come from, and uh in the past many *jokes* were made about your accent and stuff. It has decreased a bit now, *is decreasing* a little, but still, I feel a little bit ashamed when I hear myself talking like that.'
>
> Visschedijk and Van Koningsbrugge (2013)

Although it could well be that Visschedijk considers *Amsterdam* to not belong to the Netherlands, the intertextual context shows that it is very likely Visschedijk is drawing upon the ideology that Limburg does not belong to the Netherlands. Stienen (2018), for example, paraphrases the often heard idea that 'Limburg is almost abroad' and Visschedijk herself uses the noun 'import'[7] to refer to herself as being born in Limburg but having parents who were born elsewhere in the Netherlands (thus implying that everyone who has no family roots in Limburg is considered as coming from abroad).[8]

Visschedijk also mentions the feeling of shame that goes hand in hand with coming from Limburg. Although the conjunction 'and' implies that there is no causal relationship

[7] With import being defined as 'a product or service that is brought into one country from another' (Turnbull *et al.*, 2015, p. 781)

[8] Although it is clear 'abroad' here is used to create a feeling of unbelonging, we should not forget Limburgians reproduce this idea to promote a distinct regional identity as well, e.g. in 'Lied vur Limburg' [Song for Limburg] by the Limburgian band Rowwen Hèze (Poels, 2007):

'Heer *in 't boeteland, in Limburg* blieve woene' [Stay here *abroad, in Limburg*]

between the embarrassment for having Limburgish origins and a Limburgish accent, Tommy Wieringa suggests differently:

> 'Of old, the Limburgian has the feeling that he is not taken seriously by the Hollanders. Maybe that explains his feelings of repudiation. *His dialect was made ridiculous'*
>
> ('Limburg, het vergeten land', 2013)

Indeed, the only explanation Visschedijk provides regarding her feelings of shame are the jokes which were (and, seeing she corrects herself using the present continuous, to a lesser extent apparently still are) made about the Limburgish accent. When presenter Humberto Tan asks why she feels this way about Limburgish as according to him 'there is nothing wrong with it', she quickly acknowledges his belief. This discrepancy between Visschedijk's feelings and beliefs, then, can be ascribed to the fact that language attitudes consist of (or are at least triggered by) three components: knowledge, emotion and actual behaviour (Edwards, 1982; Garrett, 2010). Here, Visschedijk *knows* that there is nothing wrong with Limburgish, but still *feels* ashamed about both her origins and accent.

5.2 Limburgians: deviating from the (implied) Dutch norm

Visschedijk's feeling can be explained by the "social connotations" hypothesis, linking (negative) attitudes towards Limburg and Limburgians to the Limburgish accent. Indeed, in Dutch national media the same set of negative character traits is often ascribed to the social category "Limburgians" by non-Limburgians, consequently turning these ideas into shared out-group stereotypes (or indexes) that negatively influence the value of the social identity of Limburgians (cf. Thornborrow 2004a; Trepte and Loy, 2017).

5.2.1 Nepotistic and corrupt

Introducing Limburg in the infotainment programme RTL Late Night during the run-up to the 2015 provincial elections, comedian Jan Jaap Van der Wal uses the politics of belonging (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2006; Antonsich, 2010)[9] to discursively create a space that does not belong to the Netherlands, now based on the claim that the region is problematic as sociologically *everything* (mind the hyperbole here) in Limburg slightly deviates from the implied Dutch norm:

> '[L]ook, the most important *problem* with Limburg according to me is that *the rest of the Netherlands* does not understand *Limburg* very well.
>
> Limburg is just a bit of a *peculiar province*. Does not really belong to the Netherlands, it kind of is *the Italy of the Netherlands* actually. *Everything goes slightly different there*: people arrange little things for each other, people do little things for each other, you hardly understand them' ((audience laughs))
>
> (RTL Late Night, 2015)

Even though the deictic '*the rest* of the Netherlands' implies that Limburg belongs to the Netherlands, Van der Wal later explicitly describes Limburg in terms of social unbelonging. Just like Van Rossem, he suggests consensus among non-Limburgians and thus establishes a collective 'we' who apparently share common values which have become requisites of belonging in pluralist societies (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Although Limburgians have been connected to positive character traits thought to be intrinsic to Italians in the past[10], Van der Wal here draws upon negative connotations. Italy, in everyday (media) discourse often associated with organised crime (cf. Beck, 2000), serves as

[9] Thissen (2018, p. 27) calls this the 'politics of (un)belonging' to capture 'both the feelings and the contestations of belonging as well as the exclusionary dimension of unbelonging'.

[10] The influential Jesuit monk Van Ginneken (quoted in Cornips and Knotter, 2016, p. 147) referred to the Limburgians as being the Italians of our country. … They are more lighthearted and happier, much more agile, much more dynamic, but also rich in spirit. … They are … just much more sharp-witted and wittier than their Northern language brothers.

a clear metaphor linking Limburgian practices to "Italian" nepotism, something which becomes transparent when he states that Jos van Rey (a Limburgish politician accused of corruption[11]) is 'a kind of *Don Corleone*'[12] with his actions being defined as '*mafia*-like'.

In the direct context Van der Wal provides more clues that explicitly relate Limburg to nepotism and corruption, stating that series like Homeland, House of Cards and Sopranos, which all view 'conspiracy as the very substance of politics' (cf. Jones and Soderlund, 2017, p. 833), are 'unified in Limburg'. He justifies this claim by introducing the widely reported cases of not only Van Rey but also politicians Mark Verheijen (accused of corruption) and Frans Weekers (whose integrity was questioned after it became apparent that he had ties with Van Rey). The problem lies in the fact that he only uses these three examples to make a faulty generalisation, mainly based on Van Rey's assertion that putting a fish in someone's mailbox is something we should not be squeamish about:

> '*[T]hat is Limburg*. … This is what *we* do not understand about that province. It just *all* goes differently there you know.'
>
> (RTL Late Night, 2015)

Basing his argument on only three examples -which clearly have become prototypes now that maximize the difference between the in- and outgroup- (Hogg and Reid, 2006) turns his argument into an *argumentum ad populum* (with negative behaviour ascribed to the outgroup as a whole instead of to specific people) used as a fallacy of hasty generalisation, proving that 'even if they are in part accurate, stereotypes are frequently *overgeneralized*' (Stangor, 2000, p. 7).

[11] At the time of writing, Van Rey has also been *convicted* of corruption.
[12] Here Van der Wal is making an allusion to Don (or Vito) Corleone, head of the Corleone mafia family in The Godfather.

Comedian Youp van ‘t Hek links several Limburgish (former) top politicians and executives to nepotistic activities (most of which had never been proven) as well, concluding his weekly column with the words:

‘*Limlanders* among each other!’

(Van ‘t Hek, 2014)

Van ‘t Hek has invented a whole new demonym to refer to Limburgians, with the suffix ‘land’ stressing the belief that Limburg and Limburgians do(es) not belong but instead form(s) a separate land, a claim here mainly based on mere allegations of corruption.

In the informative talk show Pauw, Van ‘t Hek repeats this attitude without using any animating prosody:

‘State secretary Van der Linden, *a Limburgian, so corrupt,*’

(Van ‘t Hek, 2017)

As nobody questions the (as fact presented) belief, it is clear that the idea of Limburgians being corrupt has become a persistent stereotype showing prejudice (cf. Quasthoff, 1989; Stangor, 2000). The foundation for this can again be found in history, with Dohmen (1996) arguing that since the 1960’s nepotism and corruption could prosper in Limburg, with especially the cases from the 1990s being widely reported in national media[13]. Criminologist Nelen (2016), however, states that corruption is *not* typical for Limburg anymore, turning this stereotype into an unjustified ‘device for categorical … rejection of’ Limburgians (Allport, 1986, p. 191).

[13] Dohmen (1996, p. 219), investigative journalist known for his many investigations into Limburgian corruption cases, concludes his book ‘De Vriendenrepubliek. Limburgse kringen’ [The friends republic. Limburgish circles] by stating that in the 1960s, nepotism and corruption found a breeding ground in South-Limburg that was richer than anywhere else in the Netherlands. The geographical location, history, absolute power of one political party, protectionionism and vast subsidies provided by the government made that corruption in Limburg could find an ideal breeding ground in the 1960s.

5.2.2 (Emotionally) less intelligent and not worthy of much praise

Actor Sjoerd Pleijsier reacts to Van Rossem's statement (Page 11) by quoting comedian Freek de Jonge[14] who, according to Pleijsier, once said:

> 'We need to *give Limburg to Belgium*, and that will benefit the *IQ* of both countries' ((audience laughs))
>
> (De Slimste Mens, 2013, A4-6)

First of all, with "we, the non-Limburgians" hypothetically being able to give away Limburg, the ideology of Limburg being a peripheral part of the Netherlands is once again proven.

The main presupposition here, however, is that non-Limburgians are generally more clever than Limburgians[15], clearly indicating a power relationship partly based on knowledge. Arguments like these ("we should/can give you away, *because you are dumb*") belong to the category of unfair rational arguments which are only permitted when e.g. providing supportive evidence (of which there is none in this case), although even then they will always be expressed in 'terms of war [with] a position to be established and defended'(Lakoff and Johnsen, 2003, p. 63).

When actor Dennis van de Ven then mentions he was born in Limburg and that he had expected Van Rossem 'to be better' but that he will let it go, the latter reacts by ridiculing Van de Ven through applying a fallacy of *argumentum ad hominem* (making 'an irrelevant reference to the opponent's special circumstances … to discredit the opponent's position or reasoning' [Perkins, 1997, p. 30]):

[14] The original source could unfortunately not be retraced.
[15] Limburgian Journalist Willem Vissers (2017) acknowledges that this is an often-heard idea by paraphrasing the aforementioned cliché of Limburgians being 'rather dumb backup Belgian[s]'

'I understand that completely. Yes, if someone's deepest feelings get hurt.

but it also gives you food for thought that your deepest feelings concern

Limburg' ((audience laughs))

(De Slimste Mens, 2013)

Van Rossem implies that whoever feels deeply connected with Limburg is quite shallow and therefore not capable of showing or exhibiting any (emotional) intelligence. Moreover, it again suggests that Limburg is a peripheral area, a feeling apparently shared by the audience and confirmed by Petra Stienen (born and raised in Limburg), who in her column about her ties with Limburg states that:

'When I then answer, no 'I am going to Limburg', I see people raising their eyebrows. *What on earth am I going to do there*?'

(Stienen, 2018)

5.2.3 Problematic with an inferiority complex

In 2016, Maarten van Rossem repeats his negative feelings for the province once again, but this time he provides an argument:

'I do not have anything against Maastricht, but *everything that is located*

between Maastricht and Nimwegen is not really necessary ((audience laughs)) And that is mainly because I *once* asked the way in Sittard, and I- they explained it to me but in a language I do not know ((audience laughs))

… [I] also had a *strong impression* that=that those people did that on

purpose because such *an arrogant dick from the Randstad*, right, they could just *vex him* for a bit.'

(De Slimste Mens, 2016)

The argument here is based on an appeal to emotion and pity while using judgemental language. The nomination and perspectivisation devices he uses show that the construction 'arrogant dick from the Randstad' is one of his own and cannot directly be ascribed to one or more specific Limburgians, turning it into a negative meta-stereotype held by a dominant group member which generally negatively influences intergroup interaction (Vorauer, Main and O'Connell, 1998). Hostility towards the out-group is in such cases anticipated as one naturally wants to uphold the positive social identity of the own in-group (Trepte and Loy, 2017; Hogg and Vaughan, 2014). This may explain Van Rossem's choice to negatively qualify Limburgians as people who actively like 'to cause someone to feel angry, annoyed or upset' (Walter, Woodford and Good, 2008, p. 1616), whereas the Limburgians are now only the passive recipients of Van Rossem's negative predication strategy. The following argumentation strategy of Van Rossem, then, can also be seen in the light of the urge to uphold a positive social identity:

> 'Because that is the *problem* with Limburg, that *it suffers from an immense collective inferiority complex*, right. And I would do the same if my province resembled a clubfoot.'
>
> (De Slimste Mens, 2016)

Not only has Van Rossem generalised his experience in Sittard to the whole province of Limburg, but he now also qualifies Limburg as a problematic region. What Van Rossem is actually implying here, is that *because* all Limburgians have an immense inferiority complex, they all like to vex non-Limburgians: a questionable cause fallacy as vexing people is not *necessarily* the result of having an inferiority complex. He thus gives a distorted view of Limburg based on a belittling rational argument (Lakoff and Johnsen, 2003) which negatively

influences the social identity of Limburgians and thus may well contribute to the 'collective inferiority complex' Limburgians suffer from according to him.

The final remark regarding the 'clubfoot' is part of a *non sequitur* fallacy, as it does in no way relate to the actual human and social being of Limburgians. Moreover, it takes away the accountability of Limburgians, as they can obviously not help the shape of the province they live in.

5.3 Limburgish

We have already looked into the representations of Limburg and Limburgians, so with the "social connotations" hypothesis linking the evaluations of these two to language varieties, there is only one aspect that still needs to be highlighted: the representation of Limburgish.

The children's programme Klokhuis alternates informative scenes with sketches related to the episode's subject. In 'Rioolwaterzuivering' (2018), the focus is on sewage treatment. In one sketch we see 'Barbarians' (Figure 2), who both use characteristics from the Southern (though not necessarily Limburgish) accent, and 'Romans' (Figure 3), who use a *heightened* *SD accent. The latter are 'bringing civilisation' to the Barbarians (implying they do not have any yet) who are, according to the Romans, 'unhygienic primitives' and 'uncivilised'.

Figure 2 – Barbarians using a southern accent | Figure 3 – Romans using a heightened *SD accent

What is particularly interesting here, especially since stereotypes are acquired early in life and media is one of the most important 'agents of socialization' (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 101) teaching children the system of representation (Day, 1982; Hall, 2013b), is the way particular accents are used to create a character. Although it is certainly true that the Romans invaded only the South of the Netherlands (which would to a certain extent justify the choice to let the 'barbarians' use the soft G), it is definitely not true that the Romans spoke with a (heightened) *SD accent (cf. Janssens and Marynissen, 2005). The only explanation for the use of heightened *SD as opposed to a southern accent, then, is that one has drawn upon a standard language ideology with the people who are 'significantly different from the majority' being represented in binary oppositions, one of many possibilities according to Hall (2013c, p. 219) is 'civilized/primitive'. As such, the Barbarians and Romans have now become linguistic prototypes confirming and reproducing the aforementioned stereotypes of speakers with a southern (and thus also Limburgian) accent being, among other things, less intelligent[16].

The standard language ideology is also clearly expressed in Superrradio, in which 15-year-old Joëlle gets (upon her own request) a course to get rid of her Limburgish accent. Although both radio presenters and voice coach Frouke Kramer argue that the Limburgish dialect and the soft G are beautiful, Kramer does point out that a presenter who was born in Limburg and also received coaching lessons now speaks 'impeccably', thereby implying that speakers who have a Limburgish (sing-songy) accent do not speak correctly. This idea is reinforced by radio presenter Timur Perlin who invites listeners to join their YouTube channel:

[16] Soares (2017) provides an interesting overview of how the portrayal of accents in Disney films as well 'reproduce and sustain language-based stereotypes of the groups who used *[sic]* these accents'.

> ‘[I]f you are also from Limburg and you want to get rid of your accent uh for example, or just once b*ecause it is handy for a job interview’*
>
> (Superrradio, 2016)

As job interviews are associated with “correct” and educated language, it is clear that Perlin has drawn upon the standard language ideology. The fact that the course ends with Perlin constantly repeating the hard G is -whether or not meant as banter- telling.

6. Conclusion

Although Limburg is generally described as an aesthetically pleasing region, it is throughout texts and history also represented as a problematic one, an idea often based on stereotypes of Limburgians being nepotistic, corrupt, less intelligent and peripheral – qualities that deviate from an often-implied but never defined Dutch norm. With stereotypes maintaining sharp boundaries (Dyer, 2002) it is no wonder that Limburg is discursively constructed as an area that does not belong to the Netherlands – showing that belonging is a ‘naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations’ (Quasthoff, 1989, p. 184).

Such “Othering” of a regional identity is not exceptional (cf. Johnson and Coleman, 2012) and may contribute to a positive social identity for the non-Limburgans (Hogg and Reid, 2006) and sometimes be even more play than truth (Thissen and Cornips, 2016, p. 298). However, the content here shows that through representation in media discourse negative stereotypes (*beliefs*) lead to a negative (standard language) ideology and prejudice towards Limburg(ians) and Limburgish (especially when taking into account the “social connotations” hypothesis), negatively influencing the value of the social identity of Limburgians.

Whereas Cornips and Thissen (2014) argue that dialect has developed from being a sign of stupidity to being a sign of regional connectivity, I would propose that the two are (still) apparent and strongly connected. As such, negative representations in negative media can indeed lead to a decrease of ingroup deprecations (cf. Tajfel, 1982, p. 11) and cause a strong sense of 'Limburgerness' as described by Thissen (2013), but can also (and maybe even at the same time) cause an increased sense of the negative stereotypes and the prejudice this regional identity (given away through the use of specific linguistic features) may evoke in intergroup communication – thus leading people to discontinue using the Limburgish accent and/or dialect.

To conclude, the significance of this research should not be thought of in terms of the "discovery" of stereotypes. The importance lies in the critical stanza taken towards the use of these stereotypes in the media. With the latter possessing an enormous power to spread language ideologies through representation, it becomes an important task of the researcher to hold media institutions accountable for the consequences of their representations of Limburg(ians), Limburg and other linguistic minority groups in media discourse.

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