

Stabilization of Flemish *tussentaal*: The style-shifting behavior in West-Flanders as a test case

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In several European language areas, processes of dialect leveling and dialect loss have led to an increasing use of varieties intermediate between dialects and a standard language (Auer 2005). In Flanders, these intermediate varieties - mostly referred to as *tussentaal* - are also penetrating contexts in which Standard Dutch used to be the norm (Grondelaers en Van Hout 2011). While increasingly more empirical studies focus on this functional elaboration of *tussentaal*, a number of issues continue to be highly controversial. One of these is the so-called 'stabilization' of *tussentaal*, viz. whether one stable, clearly delineated *tussentaal* is emerging, as for instance suggested by Taeldeman (2008). Testing this claim, a study by De Decker and Vandekerckhove (2012) reveals that a number of non-standard variants are embedded so firmly in Flemish *tussentaal* that they even make it into the chat language of Flemish teenagers. However, the authors emphasize that further research is necessary as the studied features can only be labeled 'stable' "if the use of [these] features appears to be firmly embedded in the colloquial speech of the youngest generation in the peripheral regions as well" (2012:145). That is what the present paper aims to investigate: by studying the style-shifting behavior of two generations of women in the peripheral region of West-Flanders, it is investigated to what degree *tussentaal* is indeed stabilizing. An analysis of ten phonological and morpho-syntactic variables in five speech settings yields convincing evidence: several widespread non-standard features seem to be so firmly embedded in the Flemish linguistic landscape that they are used frequently by our West-Flemish informants in supraregional settings, even though they do not know these variants in their local dialects. For certain features evidence of a steering influence from the Brabantic area could be found, although in general it are mainly the features which are widespread in the whole of Flanders that show evidence of stabilization. These results seem to point towards an informal standardization in Flanders; perceptual data are however necessary to substantiate this claim.