

Greetings from Braboneger - Linguistic variation in digital communication

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In the past few decades, three phenomena have significantly changed the linguistic and cultural situation in our research area Noord-Brabant (the Netherlands): 1. the demise of local dialects and their metamorphosis into 'regiolects'; 2. the influx of migrants from abroad and their linguistic and cultural repertoires into peripheral areas; 3. the increasing use of dialect in written domains, especially in social media. The focus of this paper will be on the last phenomenon.

The increased use of social media, particularly Internet forums, text messaging and social networking sites, has given dialects new modes of expression (Warschauer et al. 2002). In the past, of course, writing was almost exclusively the domain of the standard language, but the modern means of communication have triggered freer use of linguistic repertoires, also drawing upon dialects, in writing. Language use on social media and in other online environments has been the subject of investigation in various domains of linguistics and communication studies, but its role in dialect revitalization needs more attention (Vandekerckhove 2009).

Steven Brunswijk, a standup comedian from Tilburg (in Brabant, the Netherlands) uses dialect in his performances, and also does this on Twitter and Facebook. Brunswijk is of Surinamese descent. His artist name is Braboneger, the "negroe from Brabant". He tweets e.g. "heeeeeeeey luitjes, witte gullie wie er op 20 en 21 december in de nieuwe vorst in tilburg è uitdeelt?? jazeker ikke ja!!" (hi guys, do you know who will give you a stomach ache in Tilburg's theatre? Yes, I will, for sure). This text contains remarkable and recognizable dialect features and voices the image the artist is aiming to portray. This paper will analyze and discuss the way Braboneger uses dialect in his online communication and how his online identity is thus constructed.