

Negotiating local in-group norms in times of globalization. Adnominal gender variation in two urban youth varieties in the Netherlands

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Abstract: This paper discusses variation in adnominal gender marking in two urban youth varieties in the Netherlands, i.e., Moroccan Dutch in the city of Gouda and leveled local dialect, Brabantish, in the city of Eindhoven. In both settings, linguistic practices are influenced by language contact with Standard Dutch, the dominant language in society, resulting in variation patterns such as omissions and overgeneralizations (i.e., hyperforms). Interestingly, we find overgeneralizations of common gender determiners in Moroccan Dutch, as described in previous research, but also of neuter gender determiners. This hypercorrect usage of the (neuter) prestige variant contrasts with the variation found in the Brabantish variety, as the Eindhoven speakers tend to overuse the local dialect form instead of the standard variant. However, we show that both variation patterns may well be driven by the same underlying mechanism of (re-)indexicalization. Data from speech recordings and online peer conversations as well as focus group discussions reveal that in both cases the gender feature acquires different indexical meanings, depending on the register and stylistic practices speakers are involved in. These indexical meanings are not fixed, but result from a dynamic process of negotiating in-group norms on the local level of peer interactions.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we investigate language variation in two urban settings in the Netherlands, where language contact is omnipresent. In fact, wide-ranging social and economic developments, such as urbanization, immigration, digitalization, and increased mobility, have accelerated contact between speakers of structurally distinct dialects and languages (cf. Britain 2009), not only in the metropolitan areas but also in the margins (Wang et al. 2014). We present data from young speakers in Gouda, a city in the western province of South Holland with a substantial Moroccan community, and Eindhoven, the largest city in the southern province of North Brabant with a conspicuous dialect. Their speech shows interlingual and intralingual variation, as their Dutch is influenced by other languages and lects such as dialects, ethnolects, and sociolects. Moreover, their language practices can lead to new variation, or eventually to entire new varieties (Britain 2009).

Importantly, youth language should not be seen as a separate linguistic category but as a container concept or descriptive label (cf. Cornips et al. 2015). It indicates new and mostly (but not exclusively) urban ways of speaking as markers of identity. These ways of speaking are primarily seen as registers (Agha 2004), or styles (Coupland 2007: 154; Eckert 2008), reflecting young speakers' particular communicative choices. Moreover, youth language in the context of cities with large numbers of immigrants does not necessarily imply ethnic speaker groups speaking ethnic varieties. To an increasing extent, the perception of youth language in urban settings has developed from a perception as indexing 'immigrant' or 'ethnic minority' status to something geographical, a 'place', associated with a city, or one or more districts in a city (Kerswill 2013). For example, Marzo & Ceuleers (2011) explain how *Citétaal*, a specific youth language variety of Dutch in Genk, Belgium, was originally spoken by immigrant Italian coalminers, but has now been 're-linked' to a youth identity associated with the city of Genk itself. What used to be an ethnolect is reallocated: it is now re-indexicalized as something authentically representing a place, i.e., a contemporary urban vernacular (Rampton 2015).¹ Re-indexicalization can also take place at the level of a single feature.

¹ Kossmann (2017a: 294) points out, however, that the label contemporary urban vernacular is hardly helpful in the Dutch context, as Rampton (2015) considers it to be a more or less unstylized variant, whereas stylization is generally assumed to be an important ingredient of Dutch youth varieties.

For example, also in *Cité*, the /s/ palatalization as expressed in the non-standard pronunciation and spelling of *sjtijl* (instead of *stijl* ‘style’) has become an index for a modern, streetwise identity, even by people unfamiliar with its migrant origin (Grondelaers & Marzo 2022).

The current paper presents data from youth varieties of two diverse and urbanized settings in the Netherlands. These settings are quite distinct in terms of center-periphery dynamics and language contact constellations (Cornips & De Rooij 2018). Where Gouda is part of the *Randstad*, the central agglomeration in the West, Eindhoven is the largest city outside the *Randstad* in North Brabant, in the more peripheral South. The contemporary vernacular in urban settings involves “hybrid urban language use” (cf. Madsen 2016), i.e., it is a constantly changing result of Dutch, the dominant language in formal domains of language use, such as in school or at work, in contact with the other languages present. These languages range from local dialects, such as the local city dialect or the dialects of surrounding villages, as well as many other languages, dialects and ethnolects immigrants speak or spoke, and are combined by young urban language users (Jørgensen 2008a).

Investigating sociolinguistic change driven by the omnipresence of the standard language in a multi-sited way has already yielded interesting results for the Danish context (e.g., Maegaard et al. 2019). For example, it is shown that different (rural) traditional dialect areas show different outcomes regarding the use and status of dialect features, pointing to convergence as well as divergence. Although there may be advanced standardization, younger speakers still resort to local features in stylized peer interactions (cf. “the terminal stage of dedialectalization” in Stæhr & Larsen 2019). In addition, Madsen (2016: 210) describes how contemporary urban vernacular can be used regularly when the situated use requires stylized language involving features indexing a particular way of speaking. In the current paper, we show that our Dutch case studies can contribute to a deeper understanding of such phenomena.

Moreover, urban youth varieties are an important part of linguistic practices in online and offline interactional contexts (Blommaert 2021), i.e., in new and social media, for example, in (stylized) performances such as rap music, movies and series, in humoristic vlogs and memes, on Facebook, or in TikTok videos (Cornips et al. 2018; Doreleijers & Swanenberg 2023; Stæhr et al. 2019). The (playful) use of specific linguistic repertoires in such cultural expressions contribute to language creativity and innovation, i.e., “young people use language expressively and creatively in order to create their own social identity” (Kristiansen 1995 in Jørgensen 2008b: 8). Therefore, this paper also deals with examples of online (stylized) peer interactions of the Moroccan Dutch community.²

The aim of this paper is to show how samples of the youth varieties spoken in Gouda and Eindhoven demonstrate (re-)indexicalization, i.e., how specific features of these varieties acquire indexical meaning, in particular in the context of representing a place, ethnicity, social group, or suchlike. We compare both urban settings by focusing on one specific contact phenomenon, i.e., variation in adnominal gender marking. Drawing from data from two different research projects, we aim to answer the following question: What are the differences and parallels in the use and indexicality of the gender feature between the two different urban settings? We show for each setting how the gender marking feature diverges from the standard language, i.e., Dutch, or the traditional dialect, i.e., Brabantish, resulting in hyperforms. In addition, we point out that this variation is associated with the creation and negotiation of in-group norms, as different varieties are identifiable not only through linguistic variants but also through small-scale reflexive actions, such as corrections, mockeries, and other metalinguistic comments (Rampton 2015: 26). In this dynamic context, linguistic variants are assigned their indexical value.

² As for the Brabantish case study, we refer to Doreleijers & Swanenberg 2023 and Doreleijers *fc.* for recent examples of enregistering adnominal gender in online stylized language practices, as the current paper only invokes metalinguistic data from focus group discussions.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we sketch the phenomenon of interest, i.e. adnominal gender marking in (varieties of) Dutch. In Section 3, we move to the setting of Gouda, where data are presented from conversations with a group of youngsters of Moroccan decent and data from online (forum) peer interactions. Then, Section 4 presents data from the setting of Eindhoven, where the local dialect of North Brabant, *Brabantish*, is still spoken to some extent. This section brings together both variation in form (Section 4.1) and metalinguistic reflections (Section 4.2) from young ('new') local speakers. Finally, in Section 5 we synthesize and discuss both studies to answer the research question.

2. Adnominal gender marking in (varieties of) Dutch and its sociolinguistic context

The adnominal gender system of Standard Dutch distinguishes between two genders: common gender, i.e., masculine (M) and feminine (F), and neuter (N) gender.³ Lexical gender is marked by agreement in the adnominal domain, i.e., on articles, adjectives, and demonstrative and possessive pronouns. The studies discussed here only deal with (in)definite articles and demonstrative pronouns (and to a very limited extent also possessive pronouns in 4.2). Dutch has three different articles, the indefinite article *een* ('a') which is used for all types of gender, the definite article *de* ('the') which indicates common gender, and the definite article *het* ('it') which indicates neuter gender. In the class of demonstrative pronouns, Standard Dutch makes a two-way distinction between proximal and distal forms, and each of these categories has two variants, i.e., common (*deze* 'this' and *die* 'that') and neuter (*dit* 'this' and *dat* 'that'). All Standard Dutch articles and demonstratives are presented in Table 1.⁴

Gender	Indefinite article	Definite article	Proximal demonstrative	Distal demonstrative
Common	<i>een (tafel)</i> 'a (table)'	<i>de (tafel)</i> 'the (table)'	<i>deze (tafel)</i> 'this (table)'	<i>die (tafel)</i> 'that (table)'
Neuter	<i>een (boek)</i> 'a (book)'	<i>het (boek)</i> 'the (book)'	<i>dit (boek)</i> 'this (book)'	<i>dat (boek)</i> 'that (book)'

Table 1: Overview of the (in)definite articles and demonstrative pronouns in Dutch.

The system described in Table 1 is taught in schools and is also prevalent in all domains of formal communication. However, speakers may sometimes (deliberately) deviate from it. For example, in Dutch youth varieties such as *Straattaal* 'street language', a (mixed) multiethnolect (Schoonen & Appel 2005; Kossmann 2017a; Nortier & Dorleijn 2013), and *Moroccan Flavored Dutch/MFD* (Nortier & Dorleijn 2008), speakers are developing their own linguistic and stylistic norms. In these varieties, the overgeneralization of common gender, i.e., the use of *de*, *deze* and *die*, where *het*, *dit* and *dat* are required (e.g., *de/deze/die boek*), is one of the main characteristics of their speech styles (see Cornips 2008 for a detailed discussion). Originally, this is a remnant of bilingual (L2) acquisition, with immigrant speakers overdoing common gender forms in neuter contexts. However, sociolinguistic research has shown that overgeneralization also occurs in the speech of subsequent generations who have acquired Dutch as a first language (Cornips 2008). In youth varieties, the overuse of common gender has been re-indexicalized by group members to flag their

³ Please note that in the pronominal reference system, Standard Dutch still distinguishes between masculine, feminine and neuter gender. However, personal pronouns are outside the scope of this paper, as are relative pronouns and adjectives.

⁴ In this paper, only the singular forms are discussed.

identity. By producing deviations from the standard language (i.e., ‘errors’) speakers can be recognized as in-group, as they accommodate to a speech style that fits the social context of ‘hanging out with friends’ (Nortier & Dorleijn 2008: 132). The same principle applies to other mechanisms of linguistic innovation. For example, it has been shown that omission of (in)definite articles occurs in youth language, with MFD speakers producing bare nouns, e.g., *hij geeft mij Ø boek* ‘he gives me Ø book’ (Doreleijers et al. 2019). Interestingly, both patterns, i.e., overgeneralization and omission, may as well occur simultaneously within the same variety or speaker (group).

This co-occurrence is, for example, found in contemporary data collected in a small exploratory study carried out at the Meertens Institute in between November 2022 and April 2023.⁵ In this study, ten male speakers aged 16-18 and living in Amsterdam, the national capital and largest city in the Netherlands, participated in groups of three in six conversations that were recorded, transcribed and annotated. All participants were part of the same local football club, and they were asked to talk about a range of topics. The study particularly looked at the dynamics of interactions between peers (i.e., the ways in which they accommodate their language use), without focusing on one specific linguistic variable, in order to uncover focal points for large-scale follow-up research. In general, their speech is characterized by heterogeneity, with their language use ranging from standard-like to *straattaal*, e.g., many lexical elements from Surinamese, to local city dialect. However, the data also reveal some interesting examples of gender shift. In the examples displayed below, speaker A1 speaks Dutch and also Brazilian Portuguese at home, speaker B2 also speaks Thai and English at home, and speaker B3 mostly speaks Turkish at home. In the first place, the data show examples of article omission. In (1-3) the target forms are put between brackets.

- (1) *Ik heb net [*<een*] mailtje gestuurd.* (AM-C1, 16)
 ‘I just sent (an) e-mail.’
- (2) *Ik heb daarvoor rijles, gewoon [*<een*] uurtje.* (AM-A1, 18)
 ‘Before, I have driving lessons, just (an/one) hour.’
- (3) *Ik heb [*<een*] interview gehad met de straatcoach.* (AM-B3, 16)
 ‘I had (an) interview with the street coach.’

In these utterances, produced by different speakers, the indefinite article *een* would be required preceding the nouns, following the Standard Dutch determiner system: *een mailtje* ‘an e-mail’ in (1), *een uurtje* ‘an hour’ in (2), and *een interview* ‘an interview’ in (3). However, these omissions do not lead to corrections from the peers, and therefore seem to ‘fit’ within the informal conversational context (cf. Swanenberg 2019). In the next examples, the definite articles, i.e., *de* for common gender (4) and *het* for neuter gender, are omitted (5).

- (4) *Die man gooit ... naar scheidsrechter.* (AM-B3, 16)
 ‘That man throws ... at (the) referee.’
- (5) *Bij examen?* (AM-A2, 16)
 ‘At (the) exam?’

Both omissions follow prepositions, i.e., *naar scheidsrechter* ‘to referee’ and *bij examen* ‘at exam’. Cross-linguistically, such bare nouns following prepositions are quite common, but within restricted

⁵ This specific case study was conducted by Eveline Elferink, MA student at the University of Amsterdam and intern at the Meertens Institute, and she was supervised by Jos Swanenberg.

contexts and often in locative contexts, indicating a geographical, social, or time-related space, such as *zee* ‘sea’, *school* ‘school’ or *vakantie* ‘vacation’ (see Doreleijers et al. 2019: 297). However, the prepositions in (4-5) do not indicate a location, but rather a receiver (4) and an event (5). Both phrases would require a definite article in Standard Dutch. In the Dutch context, data from MFD speakers in Gouda have already shown speakers overgeneralizing such bare nouns (Doreleijers et al. 2019: 318), and this might well be the case in the Amsterdam setting.

As described in Section 2, omissions and overgeneralizations do not seem to be mutually exclusive. The example in (6) shows overgeneralization of common gender in the definite article. *Examen*, a neuter noun, requires the neuter article *het* in Standard Dutch (see Table 1). This type of overgeneralization is also found in the demonstratives in (7) and (8).

- (6) *Wij gaan al de [<het] examen maken.* (AM-B3, 16)
 ‘We will already make the exam.’

Overgeneralization of common gender is also found in demonstratives. *Bord* ‘plate’ (7) is a neuter noun which requires *dat* instead of *die* as a demonstrative, and the same applies to *ei* ‘egg’ in (8). In this utterance, the noun *ei* is used figuratively as a cussword for someone who does something silly. Interestingly, *die ei* does not go unnoticed like the previous examples, as C2 is immediately corrected by one of his peers by offering the correct Standard Dutch alternative: *dat ei* ‘that egg’.

- (7) *Ik eet zo die [<dat] hele bord.* (AM-B3, 16)
 ‘I eat that entire plate, just like that.’
- (8) *Die gast die van zo ’n muurtje afvalt. Die [<dat] ei.* (AM-C2, 16)
 ‘That guy who fell off a little wall. That egg.’

Youth varieties that exhibit these characteristics are perceived to be more socially than geographically oriented, though urban settings, such as Amsterdam, often account for a high degree of language contact in which such varieties emerge and thrive (Nortier & Dorleijn 2013; see Nortier & Svendsen 2015 for multiple studies on this topic).

However, youth varieties can well be influenced by the local language(s) spoken in a given geographical setting. For example, in the southern Dutch province of North Brabant, a parallel gender shift is taking place that aims at a deviation from the standard by magnifying features of the local dialect. Due to processes of dialect leveling and dialect loss, the local dialect of North Brabant, ‘Brabantish’, is changing rapidly (Swanenberg & Van Hout 2013).⁶ This language change can be clearly observed in morphosyntactic features. In contrast to Dutch, the Brabantish dialect traditionally distinguishes between masculine and feminine lexical gender (De Schutter 2013; Hoppenbrouwers 1983, 1990). This difference is marked grammatically in the adnominal domain, as articles, possessives, demonstratives, and adjectives preceding masculine singular nouns are attached the gender suffix *-e*, *-en* or *-n*. The form of the suffix depends on the subsequent adjective or noun, i.e., adjectives and nouns starting with a vowel or *h*, *b*, *d*, *t* usually trigger a so-called binding-*n*. An overview of the different forms, in this case (in)definite articles, is given in Table 2. In this Table, the difference between articles with or without a binding-*n* is also indicated by the labels ‘Brabantish1’ and ‘Brabantish2’. As shown in Table 2, the Brabantish form of the indefinite article preceding singular masculine nouns always deviates from the Dutch form (*ene* or *enen* in contrast to *een*). The Brabantish form of the definite article preceding singular nouns only deviates from the Dutch form if

⁶ In this paper, ‘Brabantish’ is used as an umbrella term to indicate all local dialect varieties that are spoken within the province of North Brabant.

the phonological constraint is met (*den* in contrast to *de*).

Lexical gender	Definite article			Indefinite article		
	Dutch	Brabantish1	Brabantish2	Dutch	Brabantish1	Brabantish2
Masculine	<i>de</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>den</i>	<i>een</i>	<i>ene</i> (<i>unne</i>)	<i>enen</i> (<i>unnen</i>)
Feminine	<i>de</i>	<i>de</i> (<i>d'</i>)	-	<i>een</i>	<i>en</i>	-
Neuter	<i>het</i>	<i>'t</i>	-	<i>een</i>	<i>e(n)</i>	-

Table 2: Overview of definite and indefinite articles in Brabantish (compared to Dutch).

Similar to speakers of Straattaal or MFD, younger speakers of Brabantish tend to exhibit patterns of omission and overgeneralization, in this case of the masculine gender suffix, resulting in non-traditional dialectal forms (Doreleijers et al. 2020). Some detailed examples will be provided in Section 4.1. What both contexts have in common, is that variation has been explained as resulting from incomplete acquisition or dialect leveling (cf. *interdialect*, Britain 2009), but also, or instead, as cultural identification with speakers using deviations from the standard or the traditional dialect to position themselves by expressing their belonging to a particular community or speaker group (Nortier & Dorleijn 2008; Doreleijers fc.). In the latter case, overgeneralizations and omissions in gender marking can function as conspicuous linguistic markers. They function as shibboleths that are part of a stylistic repertoire and emblematic for a given sociolinguistic context (Coupland 2001; Johnstone 2014). This means that stylistic choices, including variation in the use of determiners, are indexical for particular registers, e.g., young and urban Brabantish (or streetwise Moroccan Dutch), and can become associated with (localized) cultural identities, such as neighborhoods or peer groups in secondary schools (Eckert 1988; Nortier 2018; Dorleijn et al. 2020). Interestingly, this process of enregisterment, i.e., linking linguistic forms with ways of speaking and certain types of speakers (Agha 2003; Silverstein 2003), can only take place when speakers presume ‘a standard’ to deviate from or to aim at (cf. Agha 2015: 316; Madsen 2016: 216). This ‘standard’ is often thought of as the ‘standard language’, i.e., the dominant language in society. However, it can also be the traditional dialect perceived as a uniform variety within the local community. Therefore, the speakers in the studies discussed in the current paper face different kind of norms, ranging from the standard language (Dutch) norms they learn at school to the traditional dialect norms within their local community or the in-group norms that prevail within their peer groups.

Also in terms of speakers’ attitudes, youth varieties seem to elicit evaluations that are not connected to standard language (overt prestige, i.e., status and superiority) or traditional, local dialect (covert prestige, i.e., solidarity). For example, an experiment by Grondelaers and Van Gent (2019) has revealed that Moroccan Flavored Dutch carries dynamic prestige, associated with streetwiseness and popular culture. Something similar has been observed for the Danish context, where features previously “associated with the ‘low prestige’ traditional urban working class variety”, are now re-indexicalized as “modern Copenhagen speech” and “rated high on social dimensions of dynamism” (Madsen 2016: 199). The latter example illustrates that the emergence of dynamic prestige may well be accompanied by processes of re-indexicalization.

Obviously, stylistic repertoires (including the use of adnominal gender markers) and the meanings assigned to them are variable, depending on domains of language use and the registers deemed fit for these various domains (cf. Bell 2006). In recent years, digitalization has increased the opportunities for style-shifts. For example, in offline peer group conversations, registers of language use will be different from the registers for online performances on the one hand, and from online

writing on the other hand. Writing, also when it takes place online, draws on different norms of language behavior and therefore will take different forms and features from the urban youth language repertoires than peer group conversations will do (e.g., Hillewaert 2015). We will briefly discuss this modality-driven linguistic variation in Section 3 and 4.

In the next two sections, the case studies of Gouda and Eindhoven will be discussed. What variation do young speakers show when it comes to adnominal gender marking, and do speakers reflect on it?

3. Gender variation of Moroccan Dutch speakers

3.1. Variation patterns

The data in the present study are taken from a corpus of interviews conducted by one of the authors with Moroccan Dutch (henceforth abbreviated as MD) youth in Gouda from 2014 until 2017 for the purpose of a phonetic and grammatical description (cf. Mourigh 2017, Mourigh *fc.*). Most people of Moroccan heritage in Gouda originate from the region of Nador in northern Morocco, specifically from the Ait Said (or: Bni Said) tribal area (De Mas *ms.*). Therefore, Tarifiyt Berber is the main heritage language, that is, the main language of most parents, while the size of other ethnic communities (Surinamese, Antillean and the Turkish population) is negligible. It is therefore the ideal location to study Moroccan Dutch. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, with occasional Berber or Arabic code-switching. At the time of recording, the participants were in secondary school (*vmbo, speciaal onderwijs*) or in lower vocational training (*mbo*). The interviews reported in the current paper were conducted with boys aged 16-21, i.e., the age at which the ‘adolescent peak is reached’ (cf. Labov 2001), who share a similar educational and socio-economic background.

The Standard Dutch gender system (in Table 1) is used without exception by the white Dutch speakers in the Gouda corpus (Mourigh 2017). However, for the MD speakers, our data show overgeneralization of common gender, which confirms results from previous studies pertaining to youth vernaculars and multiethnolects (Section 2). In Figure 1, the distribution of common and neuter determiners preceding Dutch neuter nouns is displayed for ten MD speakers from Gouda (N = 252). The chart shows absolute numbers. The rightmost bars are the sum of the other columns. The leftmost bars show that the article *het* (neuter) is more frequent than the article *de* (common) preceding neuter nouns, while the second bar shows that the distal demonstrative *die* (common) is much more frequent than *dat* (neuter) preceding neuter nouns. In the case of demonstratives, the overgeneralized form is even more frequent than the standard form. Proximal demonstratives *dit/deze* are infrequent, but show a nearly even distribution.

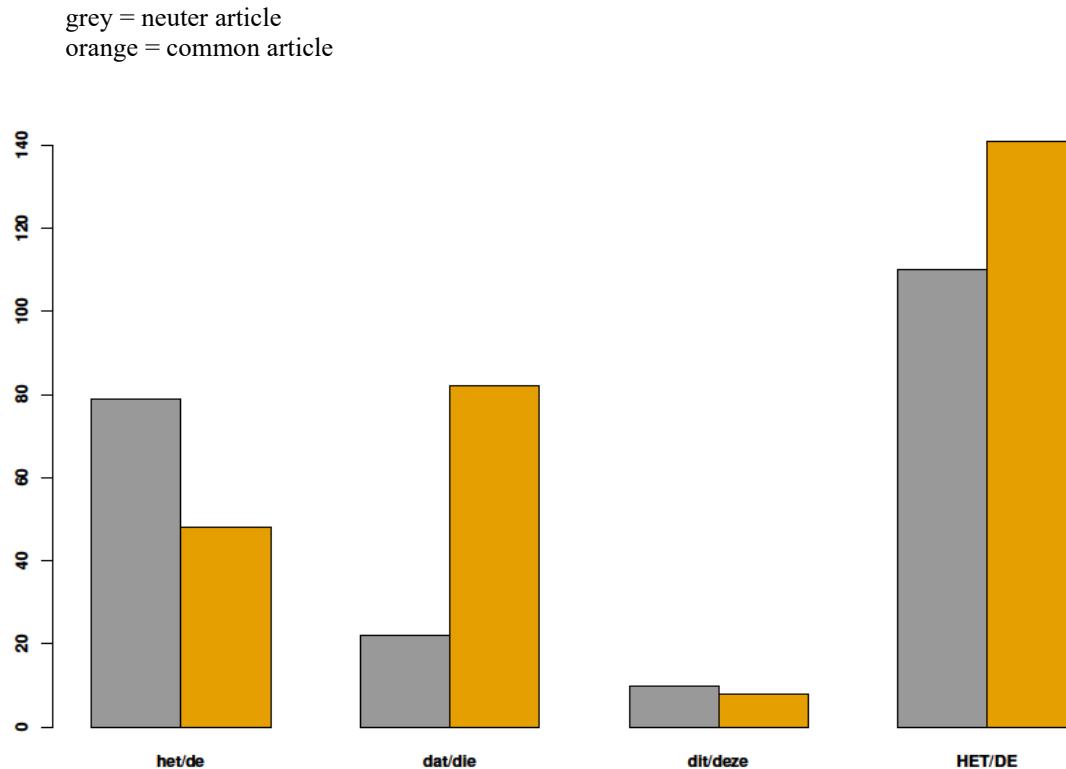


Figure 1: Distribution of common and neuter determiners in the speech of ten MD speakers from the Gouda Corpus.

Below we present some examples (9-13) of common gender articles and demonstratives preceding neuter nouns. The target forms are put between brackets.

- (9) *Bij de [**<het**] centrum, weet je waar, richting uhm.* (MD-C, 16)
 ‘In the center, you know where, in the direction uhm.’
- (10) *Deze [**<dit**] land is niet alleen maar voor Nederlanders.* (MD-K, 16)
 ‘This country is not only for Dutch people.’
- (11) *Zij werken niet precies, je weet toch, niet echt met [**die**] [**<dat**] vlees.* (MD-I, 21)
 ‘They don’t work exactly, you know, not really with [that] meat.’
- (12) *Ik wil daar, de [**<het**] jaar derop, klaar je weet toch uh.* (MD-I, 21)
 ‘I want to, [the] year after that, finished, you know.’
- (13) *Waar ligt, waar ligt de [**<het**] paradijs?!* (MD-L, 16)
 ‘Where is [the] Paradise?!’

Diminutive nouns are grammatically neuter in Dutch, but are preceded by a common gender article by the MD speakers as well, as illustrated in the examples (14) and (15). To be sure we are dealing

with a variable feature, the neuter gender article is attested as well on diminutive nouns (16).

- (14) *Die [<dat] mannetje, de eigenaar van die [<dat] ding.* (MD-I, 21)
‘[That] little guy, the owner of [that] thing.’
- (15) *Die zwager is getrouwd met de [<het] zusje van die man.* (MD-I, 21)
‘That brother-in-law is married with [the] little sister of that man.’
- (16) *Het bruggetje, dat is tussen de stad en Korte Akkeren.* (MD-B, 23)
‘The little bridge, that is between the city and *Korte Akkeren*.’

The example in (17) shows a peculiar use of the demonstrative pronoun which is unknown in Standard Dutch: the city name Gouda is preceded by the demonstrative pronoun *deze* (common). In Standard Dutch it is impossible to use deictics with (unique) place names in this way. It should be noted that the construction is quite rare in the corpus, and it resembles a Berber construction in which a demonstrative pronoun can follow a place name.

- (17) *Ja, veel wel, tenminste deze Gouda volop.* (MD-I, 21)
‘Yes, a lot do, at least in this Gouda a lot.’

Although the bar chart in Figure 1 reveals a quite robust pattern, there are some inter-individual differences in the distribution of common and neuter determiners preceding neuter nouns. Table 3 shows this distribution on a selection of speakers from the Gouda corpus.

Speaker	DE	DEZE	DIE	<i>total DE</i>	HET	DIT	DAT	<i>total HET</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>% DE</i>
MD-I	6	2	23	31	12	2	2	16	47	66%
MD-A	2	-	13	15	2	1	-	3	18	83%
MD-L	2	-	5	7	2	2	2	6	13	54%
MD-K	-	-	11	11	1	-	1	2	13	85%
MD-M	1	-	6	7	-	2	3	5	12	58%
MD-J	6	-	-	6	7	-	2	9	15	40%
MD-M	2	1	5	8	3	-	-	3	11	73%
MD-B	1	-	3	4	26	1	7	34	38	12%
MD-E	2	1	10	14	-	-	-	0	14	100%

Table 3: Inter-individual differences in the production of common and neuter determiners in the Gouda corpus.

Table 3 reveals that most speakers use the demonstrative pronoun *die* most often, in line with the findings in Figure 1. There is considerable variation, between 12% up to 100%. Generally, the higher the percentage of overgeneralizations, the higher the incidence of other aspects of Moroccan Dutch

speech. For instance, MD-I and MD-E's speech is characterized by a high incidence of sibilant palatalization, overlong consonants and sometimes extremely short or absent vowels (cf. Mourigh, fc).

A single gender system seems to be developing, even though, as the data show, this change is still in progress. The use of the neuter article and demonstratives are declining, and common gender seems to be taking over its function. Furthermore, determiners are often omitted (cf. Doreleijers et al. 2019), as in (18).

- (18) *Nu is het gewoon Ø spelletje.* (MD-I, 21)
 'Now it's just a game.'

Like other speakers, speakers of Moroccan Dutch are confronted with a standard language norm which poses challenges in particular circumstances. In the following subsection, we discuss the implications of the tension between the standard norm and speakers deviating from it.

3.2. *Hyperforms in Moroccan Dutch: speech and forum data*

One Moroccan Dutch speaker, MD-B is clearly aware of the different articles Standard Dutch nouns take, reflected by the low percentage of overgeneralization in his speech (see Table 3). In one interview he corrects a younger interlocuter, showing his metalinguistic awareness.

- Interviewer *Ja, je zei: ik ga soms op vakantie naar Marokko. Soms Tunesië hè?*
 'Yes, you said: 'I sometimes go on holiday to Morocco. Sometimes Tunisia, right?''
- MD-T *Ja, om de jaar.*
 'Yes, every other year.'
- MD-B *Het jaar (lachen).*
 'The year' (laughter).

Not only does speaker MD-B correct the interlocuter, during the interview he is very conscious of his language. When we discuss formal subjects pertaining to school and education, he clearly tries his best to keep a formal stance (cf. Kiesling 2009; Mourigh 2017). He does not use the common gender determiner on neuter nouns at all, and more interestingly, he uses the neuter determiner where a common gender determiner is expected in Standard Dutch. This is an example of (qualitative) hypercorrection: the forms "are used in constructions in which they should not occur, being conceived as more prestigious" (Hubers et al. 2020: 553). MD-B uses a neuter determiner preceding a common noun eight times (see 19-22), while he uses a neuter determiner preceding a neuter noun fourteen times.

In the context of overgeneralizing the neuter forms, the Moroccan Dutch speaker shows a form of linguistic insecurity, that is, he is trying to reach the Standard Dutch target but he overshoots it, resulting in 'too much' standard language (cf. Labov 1972). Conspicuously, the examples below show that the neuter determiner is used when there is a triggering context, such as the article 'het' already preceding it or a contamination with a following neuter noun. Example (22) shows variation on the same noun.

- (19) *En die moeten dus het [<de] Engelse taal gaan...* (MD-B, 17)
 'And he must do [the] English language...'
- (20) *In het [<de] Nederlandse taal heb je dat niet, denk ik* (MD-B, 17)
 'In [the] Dutch language there is no such thing, I think.'

- (21) *Van HBO naar het [<de] universiteit.* (MD-B, 17)
 ‘From higher vocational study to [the] university.’
- (22) *In het zuiden van het [<de] hoofdstad of in het noorden van de hoofdstad?* (MD-B, 17)
 ‘In the South of the capital or in the North of the capital?’

In the Gouda corpus, only speaker MD-B shows this type of overgeneralization. To further examine this phenomenon within the interactional context, we decided to examine the use of the neuter determiner in written peer group communication on *forums.marokko.nl*.⁷ On this forum, (mainly) Moroccan Dutch youngsters discuss all kinds of issues. The forum is completely in Dutch and has been active for over two decades. It has 192,205 profiles which is an indication of its popularity in the Moroccan Dutch speaking community (this includes Flanders).⁸ Even though social media seem to have taken over a lot of the functions of the forum, it still is very active with daily posts and almost 1300 people online at one moment.⁹ The forum has different subforums such as *algemeen* ‘general’, *yasmina* dedicated to women and dating, *islam & levensbeschouwing* ‘islam and philosophy of life’, *Marokko dating* ‘Morocco dating’, *Sport, uitgaan & vrije tijd* ‘Sports, entertainment and spare time’, and finally a subforum called *creative writing* (sic).

To investigate overgeneralization of the neuter determiners, we have conducted a random search on frequently occurring common gender nouns (see Table 4) in combination with the neuter article *het* on the forum.

<i>het man</i>	‘the man’
<i>het jongen</i>	‘the boy’
<i>het tijd</i>	‘the time’
<i>het hand</i>	‘the hand’
<i>het dag</i>	‘the day’
<i>het vrouw</i>	‘the woman’
<i>het plaats</i>	‘the place’

Table 4: Frequently occurring common gender nouns with neuter articles on *forums.marokko.nl*.

In addition, we have searched the forum on nouns which we expected to frequently occur with neuter *het* because of their association with formal contexts, i.e., *het school* < *de school* ‘the school’ and *het tas* < *de tas* ‘the bag’, both of which occur in school contexts.

The search yielded many results, especially in longer texts that demand a serious key (cf. Kossmann 2017b). Often, as in the spoken examples, a neuter determiner precedes or follows the noun with a gender mismatch. In examples (23) and (24), *dag* ‘day’ is preceded by article noun with neuter marking, in example (25) it is followed by it. The noun *oordeel* ‘judgement’ takes a neuter determiner in Dutch, pointing to a possible contamination. In all examples, targets are in bold, and

⁷ We would like to thank Maarten Kossmann for pointing out that neuter gender overgeneralization is common on this forum.

⁸ Accessed on 5 April 2023.

⁹ Accessed on 5 April 2023.

preceding ‘correct’ neuter articles are marked by an underscore. Note that in (23), overgeneralization of common gender occurs too, i.e., *deze stukje tekst* ‘this piece of text’ instead of *dit stukje tekst*, as *stukje* is grammatically neuter (a diminutive).

- (23) **llllooooooolll**
 laa illaha illallah 28-10-2007 23:21 #2
*O broeder en zuster hopelijk heb je wat van deze stukje tekst geleerd. De voorspellingen van de profeet zijn ook echt uitgekomen wat ons dichterbij maakt naar het einde van de dagen en **het** Dag Des Oordeels.*
 ‘O brother and sister I hope you have learned something from this piece of text. The prophecies of the prophet have actually come true which brings us closer to the end of days and the Day of Judgment.’
<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=1635845&p=38962402&viewfull=1>
- (24) **princess87** 13-02-2005
*nieuws lezen voor anderen, plaats zal maken in het paradijs op **het** dag des oordeels, en al degenen die dit nieuws niet geloven zullen verbannen worden van het paradijs.*
 ‘reading news to others, will make way in paradise on the day of judgment, and all those who do not believe this news believe will be banished from paradise.’
<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=583699>
- (25) *Wie denkt zij dat zij is , het top punt van al is dat de jurken picco bello uitzagen ze loog tegen mijn zus , al goe kent mijn zus een echte vriendin die ook ziana is ze had ook bruidloft van haar nicht op die dag maar ze wou toch mijn zus helpen 😊👍 alatif en die bruidsjurk gaf ze op **het** dag van het huwelijk*
 ‘Who does she think she is , the pinnacle of all is that the dresses looked picco bello she lied to my sister , well my sister knows a real friend who is also ziana [make-up artist] she also had her cousin’s wedding on that day but she wanted anyway help my sister alatif and that wedding dress she gave on the day of marriage.’
<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=2439548&p=60925697>

Example (26) shows multiple uses of the neuter article *het* in one story. In this case, there is no preceding or following neuter noun which may provide a trigger for *het vrouw* ‘the woman’. Moreover, the distal demonstrative *dat vrouw* ‘that’ woman, is also neuter. Later on in the story, the neuter noun *kwik* ‘mercury’ if followed by the common noun *emmer* ‘bucket’, which is preceded by a neuter article. At the end of the story, the neuter article is used with *emmer* ‘bucket’ again.

- (26) **faatje 01** 21-03-2005
*Ik bekeek het kamertje nauwkeurig en wenste dat ik nu in me eige huisje zat. Het zag er zoo eng uit !! dr was een fornuis met een paar pannen dr op. Wat er in zat kon ik niet zien en weten wou ik ook niet want het rook niet erg lekker. ‘Ga zitten..’ zei **het** vrouw met een felle stem. Ik zg dat khalid het een beetje benauwd kreeg. Ik moest er stiekem wel om lachen. Zo stoer was khalid dus niet. ‘Om wie gaat het..’ zei **het** vrouw.*
 ‘Het gaat om mijn dochter Rachida..’ voordat me moeder haar zin kon afmaken sprak **het** vrouw tot mij.
*het leek wel alsof ze me gedachten kon lezen. Ze pakte een pollepel en k zag dat ze wat uit l van die kokende pannetjes haalde. Het leek wel op kwik. Ze mompelde iets en ze gooide het kwik in **het** emmer water dat onder mij stond. PLATSSSSSSSSSSSS!!!! Ik hoorde een*

*oorverdovende klap en het water spetterde zo erg dat me broek helemaal nat ervan werd. Ik schrok zo erg dat ik begon te gillen. 'niet bang zijn.' zei ze weer en ze herhaalde het drie keer. 'zo je bent klaar je mag weer gaan zitten.' Ik liet me dat niet 2x zeggen en ging als de speer op de bank zitten naast me moeder. zij gaf geen kik. het leek wel alsof ze dit verwachtte. Khalid daartegen was helemaal bleek geworden. **Dat** vrouw pakte wat uit **het** emmer en zette het neer op tafel.*

I looked closely at the room and wished I was now in my own little house. It looked so scary!! There was a stove with a few pans on it. I couldn't see what was in it and I didn't want to know because it didn't smell very good. 'Sit down..' the woman said in a fierce voice. I saw khalid got a little stuffy. I secretly had to laugh about it. So Khalid wasn't that tough. 'Who is it about..' said the woman.

'It's about my daughter Rachida..' Before my mother could finish her sentence, the woman spoke to me.

it was like she could read my mind. She grabbed a ladle and I saw that she took something out of one of those boiling pans. It looked like mercury. She mumbled something and threw the mercury into the bucket of water below me. PLATSSSSSSSSSSSS!!!! I heard a deafening bang and the water splashed so much that my pants got all wet. I was so shocked that I started to scream. 'do not be afraid.' she said again and she repeated it three times. 'so you're done you can sit down again.' I didn't let myself be told that twice and sat on the couch next to my mother like the spear. She didn't make a sound. It seemed like she expected this. Khalid had gone completely pale. That woman took something out of the bucket and put it on the table.

<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=530701&pp=15&page=85>

The following examples do not show any preceding triggers. In example (27), the feminine noun *vrouw* 'woman' is preceded by a masculine noun phrase *de man* ('the man'), and still the neuter article is chosen (*het vrouw* < *de vrouw* 'the woman'). In (27-33), different nouns are assigned a neuter article despite their common gender: *het plaats* 'the place', *het school* 'the school', *het tas* 'the bag'.

(27) **abdelkarim 010** 10-12-2003

*Ik persoonlijk vind de marokkaanse vrouwen de mooiste vrouwen die er zijn. Als je goed om je heen kijkt dan zul je me niet snel tegenspreken. Wat ik wel weet van zowel de man als **het** vrouw dat ze het niet prettig vinden als ze elkaar zien met iemand van andere cultuur zien.*

'I personally think the Moroccan women are the most beautiful women there are. If you take a good look around you, you won't easily contradict me. What I do know from both the man and the woman that they don't like seeing each other with someone from a different culture.'

(28) Weegschaal123 12-07-2009, 16:53

*Het is eigenlijk nooit goed kan **het** vrouw geen kind krijgen is het gezeur...*

'It's never OK, if the woman can't have a child, she's nagging...'

<https://forums.marokko.nl/archive/index.php/t-2639000-mijn-man-wil-nog-geen-kinderen-maar-ik-wil-heel-graag-p-3.html>

(29) JOEJOEJOE 19-03-2009, 12:05

*zet hier **het** plaats waar je bent geboren.....*

'put here the place where you were born.....'

<https://forums.marokko.nl/archive/index.php/t-2501881-waar-ben-je-geboren.html>

(30) 3.301 12-10-2005

*herkennen ze zal samen met die enen knapste jongen van heel **het** school verkeren end of*

story waaaauw wat een pracht van een verhaal net als al die andere verhalen

‘recognizing she will be with that one most handsome boy in the whole school end of story wow what a beauty of a story just like all those other stories’

<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=1745278&p=42178885&viewfull=1>

(31) moslima25

03-08-2012, 20:51

*“oke oke siaar, je hebt je punt gemaakt, ik vertel het gewoon, ik ga misschien verhuizen”, k kreeg een hartaanval, mn beste vriend die **het** school wat leuker maakte, gaat weg?!”*

‘Okay okay siaar, you made your point, I’m just telling you, I might move’, I had a heart attack, my best friend who made school more fun, is leaving?! I got a call, but wouldn’t answer until I saw it was my mom, oh no bullshit.’

<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=2188088&p=54159659>

(32) soufyan007 08-01-2006, 15:06

*aangekomen op **het** school moesten alle leerlingen naar de gymzaal daar kregen we te horen in welke klas we zouden komen en met wie en zo*

‘arrived at the school, all pupils had to go to the gym, there we were told in which class we would come and with whom and so’

<https://forums.marokko.nl/archive/index.php/t-778288-voor-ik-het-wist-was-mijn-meisje-ontmaagd.html>

(33) 🗨️ Geplaatst door **Stopmetjeleven** 🗨️

*Neem dat mee in **het** tas, je klikt gwn er 1x op en dat oorverdovend alarm ga af.*

‘Take that with you in the bag, you just click on it once and that deafening alarm goes off.’

<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=5597287&page=15>

Examples (34) and (35) show an interaction on a forum post. The topic is made by *Mallory* who pretends to open an online coupling agency. Anyone who wants to meet their future spouse can react. Someone says “I want somebody who’s funny”, then another post says “how funny?” to which *Agzenay systém* reacts in example (34). It is unclear if he is referring to an earlier interaction between them with his statement, but the overgeneralization of the neuter pronoun is striking in any case. In (35), *Mallory* makes a metalinguistic commentary about the ‘erroneous’ use of the neuter determiner by repeating the noun phrase *het klas* and by demanding him to stop being ‘funny’. The fact that ‘funny’ is placed in inverted commas indicates its ironic use, i.e., according to *Mallory* the way the neuter article is used in a hypercorrect way by *Agzenay systém* is not really funny but comes across as ‘forced’ or supposedly funny.

(34) Agzenay systém 01-12-2010

*Zo grappig.. dat je **het** klas word uitgestuurd.*

‘So funny.. you get kicked out of class.’

<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=4503024&page=1>

(35) **Mallory** 15-12-2012 13:05 #15

***Het** klas? Alsjeblieft stop met ‘grappig’ zijn. 😊*

‘The class? Please stop being ‘funny’.’

<https://forums.marokko.nl/showthread.php?t=4503024&page=1>

The data in this section have shown that young speakers of Moroccan Dutch in Gouda exhibit

overgeneralization not only of the common determiner (as described in Section 2), but also of the neuter determiner. The latter results in hypercorrect language use, which sometimes leads to mockery by peers. However, not all speakers in the current study show this variation pattern. Interindividual variation might be related to awareness of the standard norm, i.e., speakers deliberately deviating from the in-group norms (such as overgeneralizing common determiners to accommodate to the social context of ‘hanging out with friends’) to achieve a more standard-like speech or writing style. The next section describes the setting of Eindhoven, where speakers actually aim to deviate from the standard by overusing dialect forms.

4. Gender variation of Brabantish speakers

4.1. Variation patterns

Previous research in North Brabantish context has revealed that language contact not only leads to convergence, i.e., the omission of the masculine gender suffix as displayed in Table 2, but also to divergence (Doreleijers et al. 2021). Variation increases as younger speakers overgeneralize the suffix or invent innovative suffixes. A study by Doreleijers et al. (2020) presents evidence of this increased variation by investigating speech data from fifteen adolescent speakers, aged 14 to 17 (different educational levels). In this study, peer groups of three speakers performed a translation task in which they had to translate 75 sentences from Standard Dutch to their own way of speaking Brabantish (with peers). Strikingly, traditional gender suffixes (such as *enen auto* ‘a car’) were only reported in 4% of all translations. In 70% of the utterances, participants used an adnominal form similar to Dutch, pointing at convergence. However, the remaining utterances show evidence of hyperdialectism, i.e., the suffix is used in linguistic contexts where it does not belong historically (Lenz 2004; Hinskens 2014: 114), such as with feminine nouns (*enen oma* ‘a grandma’), neuter nouns (*ene koekske* ‘a cookie’), or plurals (*den spiegels* ‘the mirrors’). In 5% of the utterances, participants came up with a jointly invented form in which the original suffix is doubled. This stacked suffix is used with singular masculine nouns (e.g., *enenen hond* ‘a dog’) as well as with hyperdialectal forms (e.g., *enene koe* ‘a cow’).

The data of the abovementioned study were collected in June 2017 at a secondary school in Eindhoven, near the city center. Eindhoven is the fifth largest city in the Netherlands, and with about 240,000 inhabitants the largest city of the province of North Brabant. The city of Eindhoven is also called a *Brainport* city because of its booming high-tech industry, such as the High Tech Campus, ASML, and the Eindhoven University of Technology. Due to (labor) migration from other provinces and the influx of expats, the number of citizens has increased significantly in the last century. In addition, the geographical territory of Eindhoven has grown, with former villages becoming urban neighborhoods in *Groot Eindhoven* (Swanenberg & Brok 2008: 25; Wilting et al. 2014: 146). Social mobility and immigration as well as the global image and reach of the companies and the research institutes, lead to language contact situations that may reduce the use of local dialects in favor of macro languages such as Dutch, English, and immigrant languages. Local dialects give way to a so-called *regiolect*, i.e., a leveled dialect variety with a larger geographical reach, cf. *koine* (Britain 2009; Hoppenbrouwers 1990). Moreover, ‘new’ citizens who did not acquire the Brabantish dialect from a young age and carry their own linguistic background mix up with authentic local dialect speakers. This contact situation offers insights into how and why (a specific feature of) the dialect varies and changes.

The variation in forms that was discovered in the study of Doreleijers et al. (2020) raises multiple questions, for example on the situated use and the metalinguistic awareness of the gender feature. Are hyperdialectal forms also found in other contexts? And to what extent are speakers aware of the feature, i.e., are hyperdialectisms produced deliberately or rather unintentionally? To answer these questions, a follow-up study on social media dialect was conducted by Doreleijers (fc.). In this study, a Brabantish Instagram page was analyzed to determine whether the gender suffix is also used

in posts that aim to highlight and magnify the local Brabantish identity. In total, 961 nominal phrases were analyzed. The results reveal that almost a quarter of these phrases contain a hyperdialectal gender suffix. The large amount of hyperdialectisms indicates that the gender suffix is a distinctive feature of Brabantish that is suitable to give the language in the posts a local flavor. This idea is supported by data from a semi-structured interview with the creator (part of the same study), who mentions the suffix as one of the linguistic features that he considers typically Brabantish and therefore appropriate in constructing a recognizable Brabantish identity. In addition, he reports to use hyperdialectisms deliberately to emphasize a deviation from Standard Dutch, even if he hesitates whether the produced form might be ‘wrong’ Brabantish.

Speakers who (deliberately) violate grammatical rules provide an interesting case for sociolinguistic research. In general, hyperdialectisms are thought to result from limited dialect knowledge. As fewer people grow up with a Brabantish dialect as their first language (in favor of Dutch), their acquisition of the traditional grammar is incomplete. These speakers pick up dialect features in their social environment without acquiring the corresponding grammatical constraints. This results in speakers overdoing these features in an attempt to sound local. However, a lack of grammatical knowledge does not necessarily mean that speakers have no sense of a linguistic norm at all. Therefore, Section 4.2 delves deeper into the norms that are associated with the use of the gender suffix by ‘new’ dialect speakers.

4.2. One feature, multiple norms: evidence from focus group discussions

The Brabantish dialects have no standardized norm, unlike Standard Dutch. There is no uniform variety, but rather a set of local variants that can all together be labelled ‘Brabantish’. For example, there are many differences in accent, lexicon and grammar between the western and the eastern part of the province, and there is even variation between neighboring towns and villages. However, the gender feature is considered to be quite stable across the province, as recorded in grammar descriptions from the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Brabantish is not a language you learn from the books (at school, for instance, children are taught in Standard Dutch), but a language that is transmitted across generations, from direct personal experience. The steep decline in the acquisition and use of Brabantish as a first and home language, however, has detrimental effects on the transmission of the dialect (Versloot 2020). This can be inferred, for example, from the following excerpt reported in the abovementioned study of Doreleijers et al. (2020: 95-96). This excerpt is retrieved from the transcriptions of the translation task, with the peers (A4, B4, C4) reflecting on their own use of the gender suffix.

- C4: *Menne* tènè lècht ècht hillemaal nooit, maar *men* oom wel.
 ‘My-M aunt-F never laughs, but my-Ø oncle-M does.’
- B4: Lècht (lacht).
 ‘Laughs’ (laughs).
- A4: Maar *men* oom wel.
 ‘But my-Ø oncle-M does.’
- B4: Ja.
 ‘Yes.’
- B4: ‘Is ut *men* of *menne*?’
 ‘Do you say men-Ø or menne-M?’
- B4: Maar *menne* oom wel of *men* oom wel?
 ‘But my-M uncle-M does or my-Ø uncle-M does?’
- C4: Ligt eraan of je vrouwelijk of mannelijk zit volges mij.
 ‘I think it depends on femininity or masculinity.’

- A4: *Zen oom.*
 ‘His-Ø uncle.’
- C4: *Men oom, menne tante. Ja.*
 ‘My-Ø uncle-M, my-M aunt-F. Yes.’

This example already reveals vague awareness of the grammatical function of the suffix. The speakers know to some extent that there is a grammatical rule for the use of the suffix, and they also know that this rule has something to do with the lexical gender of the noun. However, their interpretation is actually the opposite of what we might expect, as they ascribe the suffix to feminine nouns instead of masculine nouns. Moreover, kinship terms are an exception to the rule, i.e., regardless of their gender, the suffix is never used.

To improve our understanding of the extent to which young speakers still have a sense of a norm, five focus group discussions were conducted between April and July 2022. In total, 25 speakers aged 16-18 participated in the study. All participants had limited knowledge of the traditional dialect, as they (on average) indicated to speak ‘a little Brabantish’. The study took place at a school for secondary education (senior general and pre-university level) in the city center of Eindhoven. Each group of five peers was recruited by the teacher. The focus group discussions were part of a larger mixed-method study, including a questionnaire on language use and attitudes, and a judgment task in which participants had to indicate the acceptability of spoken sentences with traditional and hyperdialectal gender suffixes. Each time, the focus group discussion was the final part of the study. On average, the discussions lasted 23 minutes. The lingua franca of all discussions was Dutch, with interferences from the Brabantish dialect. Based on a topic guide (cf. Matthews & Ross 2010: 246) participants were asked by the researcher about their evaluations of three prompts, i.e., pictures containing a hyperdialectal gender suffix, such as *ene (unne) daome* (‘a- M lady’). The pictures were obtained from the social media corpus described in Section 4.1. In particular, the questions revolved around the features contributing to the ‘Brabantishness’ of the prompts, which could be both linguistic and cultural. In all five group discussions, the gender suffix was mentioned as one of the features contributing to the Brabantishness of the prompts.

An important aspect of the study’s design is that participants were not informed about the phenomenon of interest, i.e., the gender marking suffix, until the very last moment of the discussion. For the current paper, we zoom in on this final part of the discussion. The question that was asked in every group reads (roughly): “do you know when to use *ene (unne)* instead of *een (un)*, or *den* instead of *de*?” Strikingly, this question has led to a different answer in each focus group discussion. Below, these different norms are described and illustrated by excerpts of the transcripts. In each excerpt, A-E indicate different participants, and R indicates the researcher.

Focus group discussion 1

In the first focus group discussion, participants ascribe the use of the gender suffix to the situational context. They would be more likely to use it when they are drunk, in the pub, or with friends, as they adapt the use of the suffix to the setting they are in and the people they are with. In doing so, they call it “the lowest level” of Brabantish, or in other words: it is a kind of ‘basic’ Brabantish, it is just normal to use it. Strikingly, the participants do not talk about a grammatical norm at all.

- R: Weten jullie wanneer je dat gebruikt die vorm *unne* of *den*?
 ‘Do you know when you use that form *unne* or *den*?’
- A: Ik gebruik het denk ik vaker als ik een beetje dronken ben. Als we dan weet ik veel ‘s avonds met een paar vrienden in het café staan.
 ‘I think I use it more often when I am a little drunk. When we are in the bar at night with a

couple of friends.'

- D: Ik pas het denk ik best wel aan aan de setting waarin ik ben en met welke mensen.
'I think I pretty much adapt it to the setting in which I am and with which people.'
- E: Ik heb het niet echt in de gaten als ik het zou gebruiken. Maar ik heb wel in de gaten dat mijn vrienden het weleens zeggen, maar het is wel Brabants.
'I really don't notice when I use it. But I do notice that my friends say it sometimes, but it is definitely Brabantish.'
- A: Omdat het zo normaal is gaat het eigenlijk gewoon aan je voorbij als iemand het zegt.
'Because it's so normal, you just forget about it when someone says it.'
- E: Ja het is echt het laagste level van Brabants.
'Yes, it is actually the lowest level of Brabantish.'

Focus group discussion 2

In the second focus group discussion the participants also did not know about the grammar rule underlying the use of the gender suffix. They follow the guideline "just do (use) it". This could mean that they assume there is no norm at all. Yet this does not seem to be the case either, as they also refer to contexts where it might not be correct to use the suffix. However, they are not able to further elaborate on what exactly that norm would be.

- R: En heb je daar ook een gevoel bij wanneer je *unne* gebruikt? En wanneer je dat niet kan doen?
'And do you have a feeling about when you can use *unne*? And when you can't use it?'
- C: Hoe bedoelt u?
'What do you mean?'
- R: Ja dus weet je wat de regel daarvoor is, wanneer je *unne* zegt in het Brabants en wanneer je gewoon *un* zegt?
'Yes, so whether you know what the rule is, when you use *unne* in Brabantish and when you use *un*?'
- C: Ik denk da er nie veel regels achter zitten.
'I think there are not many rules behind it.'
- A: Gewoon doen.
'Just do it'.
- C: Je komt er vanzelf wel achter als het niet klopt.
'You will find out if it's not correct.'

Focus group discussion 3

The finding from the second focus group discussion is quite similar to that from the third focus group discussion. Again, there is no explicit awareness of a grammatical norm underlying the use of the gender suffix. Participants indicate that their use of the suffix is automatic or natural.

- R: En hebben jullie een idee wanneer je eigenlijk in 't Brabants bijvoorbeeld *unne* gebruikt of *den*?
'And do you guys have an idea when you actually use *unne* or *den* in Brabantish?'
- B: Ik weet niet of ik 't zo kan uitleggen maar meestal gebeurt 't vanzelf ofzo.
'I don't know if I can explain it this way but usually it happens automatically or something like that.'
- R: Oké, ja, dus je bent daar niet bewust van?
'OK, so you are not aware of it?'
- B: Nee ik ben er nie bewust mee bezig van oh nou moet ik dit zeggen of nou moet ik dat zeggen, 't gebeurt eigenlijk gewoon dan vanzelf.

‘No, I am not consciously thinking about whether I should say this or that, it just happens naturally.’

R: Ja. En geldt da voor jullie allemaal?

‘Yes. And this applies to all of you?’

All: Ja.

‘Yes.’

Focus group discussion 4

We observe a very different sense of the norm in the fourth focus group. Here, participants reflect on the use of the marked possessive pronoun *munne* (‘my-M’). They evaluate this form as exaggerated Brabantish, especially in written dialect. Participant A points to the use of *munne* when addressing or talking about a friend (i.e., in-group, with peers): *munne maot* ‘my buddy’. Besides, the participants associate it with a variant of Brabantish that would be used in stylization practices (Coupland 2007) when speakers want to portray themselves as someone from Brabant, i.e., a social persona (Agha 2003: 243; Doreleijers *fc.*). The participants indicate that in these stylization practices, exaggeration is often accompanied by a non-serious tone of voice.

B: Nee *munne* is gewoon overdreven, maar das bij heel veel dingen als je ’t uitschrijft dan is ’t altijd groter als da je ’t echt in de volksmond zegt.

‘No, *munne* is just exaggerated, but that’s the case with a lot of things, if you write it down it’s always ‘bigger’ [i.e., more exaggerated], than if you say it in vernacular.’

R: Ja oké, eigenlijk overdreven Brabants?

‘Yes OK, it is actually exaggerated Brabantish?’

D: Ik ken maar weinig mensen die echt *munne* in een zin zouden zeggen.

‘I know very few people who would say *munne* in a sentence.’

A: *Munne maot*, weet je wel, da hoor je echt wel af en toe.

‘*Munne maot*’ [‘my-M buddy’], you know, you really do hear that sometimes.’

R: En hebben jullie zelf een gevoel bij wanneer je dat dan wel zou gebruiken, wanneer zou je *unne* zeggen in plaats van *un* en wanneer zou je *den* zeggen in plaats van *de*?

‘And do you have a feeling about when you would use it, when you would use *unne* instead of *un* and when you would use *den* instead of *de*?’

E: *Unne* doe ‘k bijna nooit.

‘I hardly ever use *unne*.’

D: Als mensen vragen “kom je uit Brabant?” en ik wil dat duidelijk maken.

‘When people ask “are you from Brabant?” and I want to make that clear.

A: Ja ook weer in zo’n overdreven Brabantse zin die dan vaak onserieus is.

‘Yes, another of those exaggerated Brabantish phrases that are often not intended to be taken seriously.’

Although the norm within this group seems to be governed by social or stylistic constraints instead of a grammatical constraint, one of the speakers comes up with a comment that assumes a language internal norm. The suffix in the definite article *den* might be used to put information structural emphasis on the subsequent noun, i.e., to convey that you are talking about a specific object, person or entity, in this case a farm.

B: Ik vind *den* trouwens wel iets anders. Bij *den* leg je echt meer de nadruk dan als je *de* neerzet.

‘By the way, I think *den* is something else. By using *den* you really put more emphasis than by using *de*.’

- R: Ja.
'Yes'.
- A: *Den boerderij*.
'*Den boerderij* [‘the-M farm-F].’
- B: Dan heb je het wel over deze, specifiek deze boerderij. [...] *De boerderij* is wa algemeen.
Den maak je ’t wel meer echt *deze* waar hij over gaat.
'Then you are talking about this one, especially this farm. [...] *De boerderij* is somewhat general. By using *den* you are specifying (cf., ‘this one’) what it is about.

Focus group discussion 5

Also in the fifth focus group discussion, there seems to be slight awareness of a language internal norm, although the participants fail to come up with a grammatical rule. One of the participants says he draws upon his grandmother’s speech, who speaks traditional Brabantish dialect. He has noted that she does not always use the gender suffix, only with certain words and usually not multiple times within the same sentence. However, he does not relate this to a grammatical rule about lexical gender. Instead, he creates on-the-spot norm that prescribes alternating between forms with and without a suffix, in order not to overshoot the target.

- E: Ik had het denk ik meer Brabants gevonden als ze *munne* hadden geschreven gewoon als *men m-e-n*.
'I think I would have considered it more Brabantish if they had written *munne* simply as *men m-e-n*.'
- R: Oké, en dat staat er twee keer op hè, *munne buuk*, dus *mijn buik*, en *munne dialect*. Geldt da in beide gevallen of?
'Alright, and that’s on it twice right, *munne buuk*, so *mijn buik* [‘my belly’], and *munne dialect* [‘my dialect’]. Does that apply in both cases or?’
- D: Ja ik denk bij die eerste wel *munne* maar bij die tweede juist *mun*. Twee keer *munne* is een beetje te.
'Yes, I think *munne* in the first one but *mun* in the second one. Two times *munne* is a bit too much.'
- R: Das te?
'That’s too much?’
- D: Denk ik wel.
'I think so.'
- R: Oké. En das gewoon jouw gevoel of heb je daar een reden voor waarom je da zou doen?
'Alright. And that’s just your intuition or do you have a reason why you would do that?’
- D: Nou, mijn oma praat heel Brabants, en ik denk ik vergelijk zeg maar [...] ook een beetje van zou oma da kunnen zeggen [...] en ik denk dat zij minder snel twee keer in een zin *mun* zou zeggen en gewoon zou afwisselen tussen *munne* en *mun*, dus daarom denk ik dat het tweede *mun* beter is.
'Well, my grandmother speaks very Brabantish, and I also compare a bit [...] could grandma say that [...] and I think she would be less likely to say *mun* twice in a sentence and she would just alternate between *munne* and *mun*, so that’s why I think that the second *mun* is the better one.'

The findings from the focus group discussions not only provide compelling evidence of different norms within different speaker groups, but also of a shifting norm in general. The gender suffix gains social function and meaning at the expenses of grammatical function and meaning. To create an overview of this norm shift, we can situate all different norms on a continuum (see Figure

2) with the extremes being the traditional grammatical norm on the left end and the new social or stylistic norm on the right end. In between are the norms that tend to be more grammatically or socially oriented, or have a ‘neutral’ meaning, i.e., when the speakers have no explicit sense of a norm underlying the use and distribution of the gender suffix.

Language internal (grammatical) norm			No explicit sense of a norm		Language external (social or stylistic) norm	
Marking lexical gender	Specifying/ emphasizing the noun	Alternating between different forms	It happens automatically/ naturally	No rules (just do (use) it)	Adapting the use of the suffix to the setting, i.e., interactional context	Exaggerating the dialect to portray a persona (stylization)

Figure 2: Continuum of different norms for the use of the gender suffix in Brabantish.

The continuum shows that the original grammatical function of the suffix (i.e., marking lexical gender) can change into another function, such as emphasizing the noun (i.e., as an information structural cue) or alternating between different forms. Of course, alternation is quite vague. However, it does reveal that there is awareness of a grammatical constraint on the distribution of the suffix, which is at odds with the stylistic norm at the right end (i.e., exaggerating and overshooting the target). The right-end of the continuum illustrates that the suffix can also be detached from the original grammatical function to index social or stylistic meaning. Note that none of the participants in the focus group discussions have mentioned the traditional grammatical function of the gender suffix, although the speakers brought in different experiences and dialect knowledge.¹⁰ Their ignorance is reinforced by the fact that none of the participants have recognized the use of the suffix in the prompts as hyperdialectal. This supports the idea that hyperdialectisms (see Section 4.1) are the result of a limited understanding of the traditional dialect. However, the suffix still functions in a social manner by adding a Brabantish flavor to the language. This claim is strengthened by the finding that the suffix is found particularly suitable for portraying a Brabantish persona.

5. Discussion

Comparing the data from Section 3 (Gouda setting – Moroccan Dutch) and Section 4 (Eindhoven setting – Brabantish) reveals differences, but also interesting parallels not previously discussed. One major difference, besides the differences in geographical area and the languages involved, relates to the target variety which determines the specific outcomes in terms of gender variation. A speaker who gears the Moroccan Dutch (developing) gender system towards a more standard type is different from a Brabantish speaker who, for different reasons, imitates the dialectal gender system by changing its rules in the process. The former aims at the standard variety by overgeneralizing the prestige variant,

¹⁰ One could argue that this is an effect of the research setting, i.e., that speakers are unable to consciously reflect on the linguistic phenomenon. However, in this study we also collected data from older participants who did show grammatical awareness of the gender marking rule.

while the latter aims at the non-standard variety by overgeneralizing the local dialect variant. However, different linguistic outcomes appear to be resulting from comparable stylistic practices.

The first interesting parallel between the two cases is the variability in the selection of linguistic variants as well as co-occurring variants. In the Brabantish speech style, speakers both omit the gender suffix and overgeneralize it (in different ways). In the MD speech style, especially in peer interactions, speakers also favor overgeneralization of common gender determiners for stylistic reasons (cf. Nortier & Dorleijn 2008). In the light of this shift towards common gender, one might ask why neuter gender is used in the speech and writing of Moroccan Dutch youth. Although overgeneralization of neuter gender is restricted in the Gouda corpus (it is only attested in the speech of one speaker, which can also indicate an idiolect), in written MD on the forum, there are many cases. Online written communication inherently evokes a more formal style that is enhanced when used in semi-literary prose, for example in the stories on *forums.marokko.nl*. This type of overgeneralization may well be more abundant in the *creative writing* subforum, as the writer attempts to reach the standard language register. In spoken interaction, the neuter (hypercorrect) option also emerges when the register changes, for example in interaction with a higher educated and older interlocutor (the interviewer) who triggers the use of standard-like forms. However, the issue remains why so many speakers in the Gouda corpus, in which each interview was compiled in similar circumstances by the same interviewer, do not show more cases of neuter gender overgeneralization while the expected overgeneralization of common gender is abundant. This can only be accounted for if context is not the central driving force of stylistic variation. Rather, individual speakers act as stylistic agents who are “tailoring linguistic styles in ongoing and lifelong projects of self-construction and differentiation” (Eckert 2012: 98). This can also be observed in the Brabantish context, for instance when speakers indicate that their use of the gender feature depends on the interactional setting they are in or the people they are with, or on the way they want to portray themselves.

This brings us to the second parallel, as both speaker groups share that they are trying to project social personae (Agha 2003), for example formal, literate and educated in the MD case, and informal, funny and local in the Brabantish case. In constructing these personae, both speaker groups use different linguistic strategies. For example, the Brabantish case shows clear examples of *hyperdialectism*, an overgeneralization of the masculine gender suffix typical of the traditional dialect, whereas the Moroccan Dutch case shows overuse of the standard system. An appropriate term for the latter could be *hyperstandardism*, a deviant form that aims at the standard language.¹¹ In both processes, specific linguistic features become enregistered to represent a social persona (cf. *enregistered voice*, Agha 2005: 39). However, one feature can be linked to different registers and personae (Johnstone 2011: 675). For instance, overgeneralization of the gender feature could be an index for place (e.g., Gouda) or ethnicity (e.g., MD speakers), or both. In addition, speakers may also want to portray a persona associated with a social group, for example a non-standard speaking, streetwise youngster, or a standard speaking, literate and educated one. This stylistic agency is also reflected in some of the speakers in the Eindhoven context. Clearly, none of the speakers are aware of the traditional grammatical function of the gender feature, as they all fail to link the suffix to lexical gender. Instead, they create and negotiate on the spot the norms associated with the use of the suffix. Interestingly, these norms differ between the five speaker groups, with some groups invoking language internal norms and others referring to more social or stylistic norms. The latter relate the use of the suffix not to a grammatical rule but to an informal stylistic context of hanging out with friends, or even to portraying an exaggerated local persona. In this change from a grammatical to a social function, the suffix acquires indexical social meaning, or, in other words, the suffix is re-indexicalized as representing a jovial interactional tone of voice (in the pub, having drinks, with

¹¹ This term should not be mistaken for *hyperstandardization*, a macro-level term referring to large-scale and propagandistic standardization campaigns (cf. Jaspers and Van Hoof 2013).

friends), or as representing a local place (*Brabant*) or persona (*De Brabander*). These indexicals are not fixed but dynamic and changeable, as they “acquire a certain recognizable value when deployed with a specific time-space configuration”, i.e., they are part of the chronotopic identity of the speaker (Blommaert & De Fina 2017: 3).

The inter- and intra-individual differences, in the Brabantish as well as the MD context, as well as the register and modality-driven differences in speech style (formal vs. informal, serious vs. funny, spoken vs. written, online vs. offline, et cetera), support the idea that the meaning of the linguistic variable, in this case the gender feature, is underspecified. It gains more specific (social) meaning(s), ranging from jovial and funny to formal and literate, in the context of the stylistic practice (Eckert 2012). The current paper has used two datasets of urban youth varieties, one in the central *Randstad* and one in the more peripheral south of the Netherlands, as a starting point to show that in addition to production data, metalinguistic reflections can be key in uncovering these meanings. Contexts of peer interactions in the online-offline nexus not only show patterns of variation, but can also provide a glimpse into the underlying awareness of the speakers, either through responses (corrections or mockery) to each other’s language use in (semi-)spontaneous speech settings, or through explicitly requested statements in focus group discussions.

However, the differences in the types of data compared in this paper need to be taken into account. The two case studies did not result from the same research project, but were conducted and analyzed separately before synthesis. This explains the discrepancy in methodology, i.e., language use in interviews and digital communication were investigated in the Moroccan case study (Section 3) and focus group discussions in the Brabantish case study (Section 4). Ideally, in a multi-sited approach, the same data types should be collected to provide an accurate and thorough description of parallels and differences (cf. Maegaard et al. 2019), as explicit norms and signs of implicit (enacted) norms may take place on different levels of linguistic awareness. Therefore, the current paper is mainly exploratory; it serves as a prelude to a more detailed and methodologically balanced comparison of the youth varieties in question, drawing on multiple registers (ranging from standard to ethnic or local dialect features) in different contact constellations.

In any case, the data presented in this paper show that, even in times of globalization, in-group norms are negotiated on a very local level. In diverse urban settings, intertwined with settings of digitally mediated communication, young speakers with different linguistic backgrounds are actively involved in stylistic practices of meaning-making. In the Dutch context, dialect variation and ethnic variation in youth varieties have not previously been linked, as they are thought to result from different speaker characteristics, different source languages and possibly different social dynamics. However, a comparison of these data suggests that although different contact situations may appear very distinct on the surface, i.e., in their various linguistic outcomes (forms), the underlying driving mechanisms may be quite similar and worth further exploration.

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