



Coherence in spoken Belgian and Surinamese Dutch

An exploratory study

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A hot topic within sociolinguistics today is the degree to which language variation is *coherent*, i.e. marked by language phenomena covarying systematically in the context of language-external and language-internal parameters (Beaman and Guy 2022, Guy and Hinskens 2016, Geeraerts 2010). The topic is not new; it is in fact a modern version of the issue of *orderly heterogeneity* (Weinreich et al. 1968)—now however revisited from a multivariate perspective. Coherence is of topical interest today, as societal developments such as informalisation, democratisation, and reflexivity (Giddens 1991) are said to endanger the systematicity of language variation (cf. Kristiansen and Coupland 2011). In this talk, I will present a project which addresses the question whether some lects are more coherent than others by comparing covariance patterns in Surinamese and Belgian Dutch. The project departs from the distinction made by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) between *focused* and *diffuse* communities and empirically tests the idea that in highly dynamic sociolinguistic situations, such as multi-ethnic communities with creole language development, norms are less homogeneous and delineated than in focused communities, which European speech communities are generally believed to be. In my talk, I will first reflect on the topic of coherence and the way in which it is operationalized in present-day research, after which I will introduce a new, self-compiled corpus of stylistically stratified Surinamese and Belgian Dutch, and the data analysis techniques used to explore this corpus. I will discuss some preliminary results concerning grammatical variation in Surinamese and Belgian Dutch and will conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and methodological challenges to be met.

References

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