

Changing factors in the rise of approximant *r* in Dutch

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The highly variable nature of /r/ in Dutch manifests itself along a number of phonetic parameters: variation in place of articulation ranges from alveolar to uvular, and manner of articulation from trills and fricatives to approximants and vowels (Smakman 2006; Sebregts 2015). This realisational variation is also intimately bound up with socio-geographical factors and patterns of ongoing change (Van de Velde and van Hout 1999; Tops 2009; Sebregts 2015). One important *r*-variant in Netherlandic Dutch is a coda approximant [ɹ], which, as shown by ultrasound studies, can be either retroflex or bunched pre-velar (Scobbie and Sebregts 2010). This variant appears to be on the rise in a typical ‘change from above’ fashion: it is highly prestigious, and speakers are relatively aware of the use of this variant (Van Bezooijen 2005). The restriction to coda position for this variant leads to relatively complex systems of *r*-allophony within speakers, who mostly combine the coda approximant with alveolar taps or uvular trills/fricatives in onsets.

We present linear mixed-effects analyses examining how approximant *r* is seen to be spreading along two separate routes in urban-accented Standard Dutch. Our data consists of 6362 auditorily coded tokens from 242 speakers recorded in six cities in the Netherlands.

The first sense in which approximant *r* is spreading is simply among speakers, both geographically and socially. Our analyses show that the variant is most prevalent in cities in the western Netherlands (Leiden and The Hague especially), and that young female speakers are leading the change there. There is, however, a second, linguistic sense in which the approximant is on the rise. The variant is most frequent when *r* is either word-final or in a coda cluster with a final coronal consonant (e.g. *schaar* /sxɑr/ ‘scissors’ or *kaars* /kars/ ‘candle’). However, in Dutch, final clusters formed by liquids plus a non-coronal consonant are subject to an optional process of schwa-insertion (Booij 1995), which creates an additional syllable and moves /r/ into an onset position (e.g. *kerk* /kɛrk/ /kɛ.rək/ ‘church’). Schwa-insertion and use of the retroflex/bunched approximant only very rarely co-occur: *r* in this context tends to be produced with schwa-insertion and an onset variant of /r/ ([kɛ.rək] or [kɛ.ɾək]), or with a coda approximant but without schwa-insertion ([kɛɹk]). While the latter pronunciation is a minority one in the Netherlands generally, in those cities where [ɹ] is most frequent, The Hague and Leiden, it is actually in a small majority. However, the spreading of [ɹ] into this new syllabic context is not wholly a function of token frequency: while token frequencies of [ɹ] in Utrecht and Rotterdam are similar, the variant has made inroads into the schwa-insertion context in the latter city but not the former. Instead, it is in those cities that show the clearest social (age, sex) effects in use of the retroflex/bunched approximant, where its use in the schwa-insertion context (and concomitant blocking of schwa-insertion) is more frequent. We explore this interaction to ascertain whether social factors are giving way to linguistic-contextual ones in the ongoing change-in-progress.

References

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