

# Better catch them young, but how? A multilingual approach to dialects in education in North Brabant

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**Abstract** This paper discusses the state of affairs of dialect education in the southern Dutch province of North Brabant. The dialects spoken here lack formal recognition. Therefore, the province pursues a heritage policy that protects and promotes the dialects as cultural capital. However, a recent questionnaire among teachers and material developers has revealed that local and provincial initiatives for dialect education have not yet been implemented in a sustainable way in primary and secondary education (Doreleijers, 2021). Although teachers indicate willingness to implement dialect in education, there is a lack of knowledge of existing materials and a discrepancy between demand and the quality of supply. The aim of this paper is to look for ways to implement non-recognized dialects in the curriculum. It argues that the current situation in North Brabant can be improved by integrating dialects into the holistic model for multilingualism in education (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018).

**Keywords** dialect education, multilingual education, language awareness, dialects and regional languages, language curriculum, North Brabant

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## Conflicting interests

The author has declared that conflicts of interest did not exist.

## Supporting information

The data from this study are stored for the long term in the digital research data collection of the Meertens Institute (KNAW) in Amsterdam (Doreleijers, 2021, collection id 1142). The data from the questionnaire have been digitalized and are accessible to other researchers.

## 1 Introduction

The present paper discusses the state of affairs of dialect education in the southern Dutch province of North Brabant. For this purpose, it takes as its starting point a questionnaire that was conducted between February and June 2021 among teachers (primary and secondary education as well as teacher training) and material developers to investigate the effectiveness and scope of current practices in dialect education (Doreleijers, 2021).<sup>3</sup> In November 2021, the results of this questionnaire were published on the website of the cultural heritage organization *Erfgoed Brabant* in 's-Hertogenbosch.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this paper is to outline if and how the outcomes can be implemented into a concrete educational framework.

It is beyond dispute that the context of the Brabantish dialects is a challenging one.<sup>5</sup> The dialects of North Brabant have been changing rapidly for the past sixty years. On the one hand, there is functional dialect loss (Hoppenbrouwers, 1990, p. 11; Swanenberg & Van Hout, 2013). Dialects are less and less often passed on from parents to children for emancipatory reasons. At the same time, Dutch is gaining ground as a first language and home language and has become the dominant language in many more domains, mainly due to the influence of the media and education. A recent study (2021) of Statistics Netherlands (CBS ‘Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek’) shows that in less than a quarter of all North Brabantish households a dialect is the home language (Schmeets & Cornips, 2021, 2022). This study made use of self-reporting to investigate which languages in the Netherlands are spoken at home. A diachronic comparison of studies that have used self-reporting, predicts that this number will decline further in the coming decades (Versloot, 2020). The question arises as to what extent attention to dialect in education is justified if research data show that its use in everyday life is actually declining. This practical challenge was the reason for carrying out an inventory questionnaire and for writing the present paper. Should young people still be educated about a possibly dying language? And is there sufficient support among teachers to make an effort?

Another complicating factor for the implementation of dialect in education in North Brabant is the lack of support and recognition for Brabantish dialects. In general, regional languages have gained attention in the Netherlands since the ratification of the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* (Council of Europe, 1992). Low Saxon and Limburgian obtained legal protection under this charter, but the Brabantish dialects were not acknowledged by the Dutch authorities (Swanenberg, 2013; Van Hout & Van de Wijngaard, 2006). This means that there is no support from the charter for the facilitation and promotion of the Brabantish dialects. Therefore, the provincial authorities pursue a heritage policy that encourages the use, documentation and appreciation of the Brabantish dialects as an expression of cultural capital (Swanenberg, 2019). The term ‘heritage’ is not defined in terms of vulnerability and threat per se, but as something associated with the past in a more neutral sense – see for example Aalberse & Muysken (2019, p. 1) for an explanation of the ambiguous interpretation of the word ‘heritage’.

The most recent Brabantish language policy guidelines date from February 2019 and are provided by *Erfgoed Brabant* (Swanenberg, 2019). The guidelines aim at image and prestige planning, i.e., improving the public image of dialect and dismantling prejudices about dialect speakers. These types of planning seem to overlap, but there is a subtle difference, as “image is a non-factual version of the semi-factual identity of a society, while prestige is the result of an attitudinal stance towards the semi-factual status of a language within a language ecology” (Ager, 2005, p. 1). Strengthening the image and prestige of the Brabantish regional language including local dialects is explicitly mentioned as one of the two core objectives within the current language policy (Swanenberg, 2019, p. 7). The other core objective concerns increasing the knowledge of Brabantish and strengthening the underlying expertise network, e.g., via digital infrastructures. To

a lesser extent, current policy aims at status planning, i.e., acknowledging dialects as fully-fledged varieties, but without aiming at official recognition. Furthermore, corpus planning and acquisition planning (e.g., Haarmann, 1990; Johnson & Ricento, 2013) are limited to practices of documentation, for example regarding local dialect dictionaries. Current policy does not aim at standardizing grammar and orthography (corpus planning) or at structurally embedding local dialects in education (acquisition planning). Therefore, the top-down support is often limited to a symbolic effort to revitalize the language at a micro-level (i.e., within the community). However, these limitations on regional language policy are not necessarily harmful as they follow logically from the current stage of dialect loss in the province of North Brabant and fit within the socio-historical context of Dutch education. Nevertheless, paying attention to local dialects in education can also benefit image and prestige planning. This study contributes to finding out what support there is in the educational field for embedding local dialects in education, and thus how acquisition planning can be worked out in more detail in future Brabantish language policy guidelines.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly elaborates on the status quo of dialects in Dutch education. Then, section 3 lists the provincial and local initiatives for dialect education and summarizes the main outcomes of the questionnaire. Section 4 concisely sketches the context of the changing dialects of North Brabant and describes how the traditional dialect is giving way to a new kind of dialect, i.e., hyperdialect (Hoppenbrouwers, 1990; Swanenberg, 2014). Subsequently, section 5 uses the insights from the previous sections to propose a more inclusive approach to dialect education by implementing Brabantish dialect into an existing model for multilingualism in education (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018). This model is already successfully tested in the northern Dutch province of Friesland. Section 6 gives an overview of the recent developments in the Dutch national curriculum and presents opportunities for including dialects that lack official support. Finally, the conclusion in section 7 will briefly anticipate on follow-up research to investigate the utility of the proposed model for education.

## 2 Dialects in Dutch education

Dialects are often excluded in education by Dutch school policies, as they are frequently perceived as 'dangerous multilingualism' (cf. 'immigrant languages', Kroon & Spotti, 2011). The abolition of education in one's own language and culture (i.e., OALT 'Onderwijs in Allochtone Levende Talen', or previously called OETC 'Onderwijs in Eigen Taal en Cultuur') resulted in the dominant view that the use of other home languages would stand in the way of a good second language acquisition of Dutch (Nortier, 2009, pp. 110–111). The wide representation of this monolingual habitus relates to widespread misconceptions about multilingualism, i.e., that multilingualism causes language deficits and

that speaking a different home language hinders learning a new language. In 2017–2018, an inventory study among 347 language teachers (in training) in secondary education showed that this idea still prevails (Van Beuningen & Polišenská, 2019). The idea that home languages other than Dutch, such as dialects and regional languages, do not belong at school also means that children are less exposed to them. Despite the fact that legislation does not prohibit the use of both recognized and non-recognized regional languages in living use ('in levend gebruik') as a language of instruction in primary education (Primary Education Act, Art. 9 paragraph 13) or where it is appropriate in secondary education (Secondary Education Act, Art. 6A), in practice this is hardly ever the case in North Brabant.

Since the introduction of compulsory education in 1901 ('Leerplicht'), Standard Dutch received an enormous boost. In addition, on 1 August 1968, the Secondary Education Act 'Mammoetwet' or 'Wet op Voortgezet Onderwijs' (WVO) heralded the beginning of school communities, i.e., former individual, local schools started cooperating and/or merging on a supralocal level. School classes were created in which children did not sit together with fellow villagers or neighbors, but with children from dozens of kilometers away. School became a meeting place where local dialects were no longer the preferable language of communication, and as a consequence of language contact the local dialects changed into levelled regional varieties. Standard Dutch, on the other hand, gained ground and became the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools, where dialect was often ignored or even forbidden (Hoppenbrouwers, 1990; Swanenberg, 2010).

In addition, there are negative prejudices attached to speaking a dialect in terms of its detrimental effects on Dutch language proficiency and career opportunities. However, previous research has shown that there is probably no one-to-one relationship between speaking a dialect and school performance, but rather that negative attitudes of teachers negatively influence the assessment of the qualities of dialect speakers (e.g., in chronological order: Hagen & Vallen, 1974, 1976; Stijnen & Vallen, 1981; Giesbers et al., 1988; Van den Nieuwenhof et al., 2004; Kraaykamp, 2005; Offermans, 2005; Driessen, 2006; Rys, 2009; Kroon & Vallen, 2004, 2009; Van Hout et al., 2009). Moreover, recent research shows that dialect use can also have a positive influence on passive vocabulary, literacy and cognitive development in primary education, and that it can contribute to a better guidance of pupils and to a decreased distance between teacher and pupil (see Schils et al., 2020, for examples from the Limburgian context). In general, the predominantly negative discourse on dialect in education is worrying because local dialects are a source of regional pride and identity, and protection is needed to prevent them from becoming extinct (Swanenberg, 2006, 2010). Although there is a strong decrease in the number of younger speakers in North Brabant acquiring a dialect as their first language, they can still learn it later in life through education and revitalization projects. In the contemporary context of globalization, new speaker profiles arise that are referred to as 'new speakers' (O'Rourke et al., 2015). Because new speakers are a good predictor of the future of dialects (Swanenberg, 2014), we'd better catch them young, but how?

### 3 Dialect education in North Brabant: Current practices

Despite the fact that dialect education is not a fixed part of primary and secondary education in North Brabant, neither via the regional language policy nor via the national language curriculum (cf. section 6), provincial and local initiatives have been developed. At present, however, there is no resource available for teachers to gain insight into what is on offer. Therefore, the first task was to map out which educational materials are currently available. Through the questionnaire, it was then possible to gain insight into the teachers' familiarity with these materials and their needs (see footnote 2).

#### 3.1 Provincial products for dialect education

Heritage experts in North Brabant are developing projects and modules to incorporate heritage education in mainly primary, but sometimes also secondary, education. However, language is rarely part of such initiatives. *Erfgoed Brabant* has developed the course *Wat je zegt ben je zelf* ('You are what you say') for children in the first class of secondary school. In this course, pupils discuss their experience with dialects and learn about diversity in language use. The main goal is to make young people aware of the fact that the way they speak is not random, but influenced by many factors. In addition, the *Erfgoed Brabant Academy* wants to raise awareness among teachers and young people that the (Brabantish) identity of young people is partly expressed in the way they talk. They want to convey that diversity in language and culture is a positive phenomenon, and that recognizing diversity promotes tolerance and respect for each other. Moreover, *Erfgoed Brabant* offers a workshop *Professor in de klas* ('Professor in the classroom') for teachers about dialect and identity in primary education. Also, the website of the *Erfgoed Brabant Academy* offers two ideas for lessons about dialect in which pupils interview their grandparents and ask them about old-fashioned dialect words. The heritage professionals involved nevertheless report that these products have only been taken up marginally.

#### 3.2 Local products for dialect education

In addition to these provincial initiatives that mainly aim at increasing language awareness, there are some local initiatives that also aim at stimulating dialect use and acquisition, but these are mainly dependent on volunteers who take care of dialect as cultural heritage. A first example is the annual song contest *Kènderkwèèk* (including teaching materials) for primary schools in Tilburg. A second example is the *Jeugdmiddag* ('youth afternoon') of the biennial *Brabants Dialectenfestival*, where pupils of grades 7 and 8 from the primary schools of Lieshout and Mariahout get to know the Brabantish dialect in an interactive way. A third example comes from the dialect society *De Berregse Kamer* in Bergen op Zoom, that developed *'n Leske Berregs*: a dialect lesson for primary school children to raise awareness about dialect being an essential part of the city's cultural

heritage. A fourth example is the primary school teaching package *Um nie te vergeete* about the dialect and historical objects of Schaijk-Reek. Finally, there are products that are not primarily aimed at education but can nevertheless be used in the classroom. A concrete example is the reading board *Nuww Tilburgs Leesplèngske* of *Stichting Tilburgse Taol, LocHal* and *Erfgoed Tilburg*. This is a digital board with eighteen pictures and corresponding words in the dialect of Tilburg. There are also local initiatives that some dialect enthusiasts are still familiar with but that are currently no longer offered or further developed, such as *Prenteproot* (dialect lessons based on pictures drawn by Cees Robben) or the one-year school project (2019) *'t Echte werk* about the local vernacular of Oosterhout.

### 3.3 Questionnaire

The abovementioned examples show that some work is done on material development for dialect education in North Brabant, but that these efforts are not organized in a structural and sustainable way. To further investigate the current state of affairs, an extensive questionnaire about dialect education was distributed via Qualtrics between February and June 2021 (Doreleijers, 2021). The questionnaire aimed at consulting primary and secondary school teachers and other educational professionals (e.g., in higher education such as teacher training), developers of dialect educational materials and other stakeholders, such as people with a supportive function in this field. In total 242 people completed the questionnaire, including 69 from North Brabant (42 teachers and 27 people with a developing and/or supporting function). The questionnaire was compiled by the author of this paper in cooperation with heritage education specialists from *Erfgoed Brabant*. The main goal of the study was to provide an answer to the following question: what are the attitudes, current practices and future desires of teachers and developers with regard to dialect education? The questionnaire contained multiple choice, scaled and open questions on these matters. Participants could also share single or multiple examples of dialect education from their own teaching practice (Doreleijers, 2021, p. 16). The current paper will not go into detail about all the results of the questionnaire, as these can be found in the report (see footnote 2), but will discuss the implications of the main findings, i.e., how to use the data to develop an empirically-driven proposal for the implementation of dialect in education.

The outcomes of the questionnaire as described in the report indicate that 60% of the teachers in North Brabant already pay attention to dialect in their teaching, and a third indicate they want to do so in the future. However, the answers reveal that dialect education is a rare activity that only comes up once a month or even just once or twice a year. In other provinces with recognized regional languages, there are teachers who indicated to pay attention to dialect on a weekly or daily basis (see p. 17 in the report). The limited attention for dialect is reported to be caused by the current curriculum, which offers too little room for dialect education. It appears that this leads to dissatisfaction among teachers. One third of them expressed the view that dialect education should be

a fixed part of the curriculum in primary education, half of them in secondary education and two thirds in teacher training (see p. 8 in the report). Despite the fact that more than half of the teachers reported that they already pay attention to dialect, it turns out that only about 20% of them are familiar with one or a few of the existing dialect teaching materials mentioned in 3.1 and 3.2 (see p. 13 in the report). This implies that teachers are currently more or less self-sufficient, while it would actually help if they could draw on good and didactically sound material within the limited time and space they have. Or to put it differently: current initiatives turn out to be one-directional, i.e., they come from the heritage sector and not from or in cooperation with teachers. For example, the results of the questionnaire show that teachers prefer modules, online availability, audio fragments and concrete exercises and games (see p. 13 in the report).

Another important finding of the questionnaire is that teachers and developers differ in what they label as an important goal of dialect education (see p. 14 in the report). Developers (also) aim at active and passive dialect acquisition, whereas teachers give priority to lessons about meta-level dialect knowledge, attitudes and identity formation. Within the questionnaire, not a single teacher in North Brabant considers active dialect acquisition an important goal of dialect education. In addition, 85% of the participants think that dialect education contributes to a tolerant and positive attitude towards dialects. Thus, they seem to be positive about the added value of dialect education in fostering the attitudes about dialect speakers and dismantling prejudices about speaking a dialect. However, the questionnaire also reveals that the participants do not always recognize and acknowledge dialect as a form of multilingualism, leading to little awareness of the educational possibilities within this framework (see p. 6 in the report). Therefore, section 5 will look at how Brabantish dialects that lack official support from the European Charter, and thus in education, could be embedded in the curriculum as a form of intra-language multilingualism rather than as an educational goal in itself, building on the existing holistic model for multilingualism (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018). Before proceeding to that, the next section takes a more detailed look at the current stage the Brabantish dialects are in, and which aspects of the dialects are suitable for teaching.

#### 4 The changing dialects of North Brabant

In North Brabant, primary and secondary schools are not required to help children and adolescents achieve certain levels of proficiency in Brabantish dialect. Yet, there are still some speakers, including children and adolescents, who speak the dialect daily or occasionally, fluently or to a (very) limited extent. They pick up the dialect at a later age in their living environment, for example at their grandparents, but also on social media in interaction with friends or by following humorous Brabantish social media profiles such as *RoekOe Brabant* or *Brabantse memes*. Local dialects are also used during

the annual carnival celebrations, which is reflected in the temporary name changes of Brabantish cities and villages, and the language use in local newspapers or on regional broadcasters (e.g., *Omroep Brabant*). Moreover, dialect still plays a role in other cultural expressions, such as popular television or Netflix series and films (e.g., *New Kids* 2007–2011, *Undercover* 2019, *Ferry* 2021) and the language use of comedians such as Steven Brunswijk (e.g., Doreleijers et al., 2020; Swanenberg, 2014, 2017).

The fact that fewer children learn dialect as their first language also has consequences for the structural characteristics of the dialect. Structural dialect loss is reflected in the grammatical characteristics that distinguish the dialect from Dutch (Hoppenbrouwers, 1990, p. 11). This means that typical dialect features are disappearing, or paradoxically, strengthening as a reaction to this process (Auer, 2011; Doreleijers et al., 2021; Hinskens, 2014; Kerswill & Trudgill, 2005). Previous research has shown this, for instance, for the diminutive suffix or the adnominal marking of lexical gender. Unlike in Dutch, diminutives in Brabantish dialects have a suffix *-ke* instead of *-je*, e.g., *clubke* instead of *clubje* ('club', 'community'). In some cases, after a velar sound, this suffix becomes *-ske*, e.g., *bankske* ('couch'). A possible consequence of incomplete dialect acquisition is the loss of the Brabantish diminutive suffix and therefore assimilation to Dutch, i.e., *clubje* and *bankje*, but a consequence may also be overgeneralization, in which case *clubje* becomes *clubske* instead of *clubke* (Swanenberg, 2020b). Because dialect speakers do not know the rules precisely, they choose the form that sounds most dialectal. In the case of gender marking, masculine words in Brabantish have an extra suffix attached to the determiner. This suffix is missing in Dutch, e.g., *enen hond* instead of *een hond*, and *den hond* instead of *de hond* ('a/the dog'). Current speakers of Brabantish either omit the suffix or they exaggerate it (Doreleijers et al., 2020). Thus, it may happen that determiners preceding feminine or neuter words also get a masculine suffix (*enen oma* 'a grandmother', *ene kuukske* 'a cookie'), or that the suffix is even doubled (*enene(n) hond*).

New forms, which are often considered 'wrong' by traditional speakers, i.e., the older generations (Verhoeven, 1994), constitute the basis for what is called the 'new' Brabantish (Swanenberg, 2014) or 'superbrabants' (Hoppenbrouwers, 1990, p. 124). 'New' Brabantish is also called 'hyperdialect' because of the magnification of the features that distinguish it from the standard language (cf. Lenz, 2004). An important characteristic of this hyperdialect is that it seems to have not only a communicative function but also, or especially, an identity-marking function. By using hyperdialect, or just a few dialect features, you can show where you come from, i.e., that you identify with the region and the people who live there (Goeman & Jongenburger, 2009; Mutsaers & Swanenberg, 2012; Vandekerckhove & Britain, 2009; Visser et al., 2015). Certain dialect features, such as the abovementioned diminutive suffix and the masculine gender marker, acquire a shibboleth-like function (Agha, 2007, p. 81; Taeldeman, 2003): they reveal the Brabantish roots or (in case of non-canonical use) they at least show that the speaker wants to pretend to be a 'Brabander', i.e., a person coming from the province of North-Brabant (e.g., Cornips et al., 2018, pp. 154–161).



Dialect education could be a very important asset in dialect preservation. If young people no longer learn dialect at home (i.e., primary socialization), then perhaps the school can play a role in enthusing them for dialect (i.e., secondary socialization) (Van Hout et al., 2009). However, it is unlikely that dialect could ever be given this priority, since the focus in education is on learning Standard Dutch as a target language and working language. Moreover, there are increasing numbers of pupils with an immigration background, calling for a more inclusive approach to language variation in education, ranging from local varieties to global languages (e.g., English) or other (home) languages such as Turkish, Arabic, Polish, Surinamese, or Ukrainian (e.g., Günther-van der Meij et al., 2020). In 2020, about 28% of the Dutch youth between 0–25 years old had a migration background (CBS, 2021). Although their distance from the local dialect might be significant, first and second-generation migrants do sometimes acquire (features of) the local dialect and mix it with the other languages in their repertoire (e.g., Swanenberg, 2011). For the Limburgian context, Cornips (2020) describes some examples of immigrant speakers who are proficient in dialect but feel uncomfortable to use it in their daily practice, because they are considered ‘non-authentic’ by others. In education, teachers and pupils could discuss whether and when linguistic appropriation is felt to be legitimate or not, i.e., ‘in or out of order’ (Swanenberg, 2020a).

So, if active dialect acquisition is not a learning objective, yet another possibility remains: dialect as a means of reflection (cf. Van Hout et al., 2009). The current phase of changing dialects offers opportunities to teach pupils more about language variation and language change and the grammatical and social causes involved, with a main focus on language attitudes and raising linguistic awareness, i.e., ‘talensensibiliseren’ (De Graaf et al., 2019; Delarue & Zwart, 2022; Jonckheere, 2011). Language reflection as such can contribute to language awareness, generally regarded as one of the most important ingredients for more challenging, creative and future-oriented language learning in Dutch education (Van den Broek & Dielemans, 2017; see also Curriculum.nu, 2019, building block NL2.1 ‘Language awareness and language learning skills’; SLO, 5 October 2021). How exactly this could take shape is discussed in the next sections.

## 5 A multilingual approach to dialects in education

Due to societal processes of globalization, migration, increased mobility, urbanization and digitalization, the Netherlands is increasingly a multilingual country, not only in metropolitan areas (‘de Randstad’) but also in the margins (Wang et al., 2014). In 2018, the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) called for a more sensible and efficient use of the languages in society (KNAW, 2018). Policy (makers) should look beyond English and make better use of existing language knowledge and resources in society, including the field of education. Growing linguistic diversity has increased the interest in and research into multilingual education (MLE) in the Netherlands, but also elsewhere in

Europe. Previous research has led to different pedagogical approaches to multilingualism in education, i.e., involving multiple languages in education, for example through the active inclusion of pupils' home (family) languages as a resource in instruction (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018, p. 25). At the same time, many approaches aim at fostering productive and receptive skills in two or more languages (Baker, 2011). The main challenge deriving from the North Brabantish setting, however, is that schools are not required to help pupils achieve certain levels of proficiency in (local) dialect. From a perspective of teacher professionalization and sustainable implementation it is therefore not yet sufficiently clear how dialects without an official status can play a role in education. Although models for bilingual or trilingual education for regional minority languages have been developed and implemented in Basque, Catalan and Welsh contexts, those models are still aiming at language (re)vitalization and everyday use (Gorter & Cenoz, 2012). The current study should therefore build on other models that focus on making use of multiple languages and varieties as functional resources for learning instead of raising competences in the languages of schooling (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018, p. 26).

A key feature of such models is the concept of language awareness (Carter, 2003; Hélot et al., 2018; Svalberg, 2007), or in other words 'the awakening to languages' (AtL), referring to all educational activities that concern languages that the school does not intend to teach (Candelier, 2017). Activities that foster language awareness break with the segmentation and isolation of language learning methods at school, thus challenging the monoglossic ideology of pupils learning distinct languages in which they must be separately proficient (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018, pp. 26–27). This means that a singular approach to language learning gives way to a plurilinguistic approach to support so-called plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Candelier & Andrade, 2004, p. 17; Candelier, 2010). These interrelated competences are cited in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR):

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe, 2001, paragraph 8.1, p. 168)

In the late 20th century, the idea of plurilingualism also took shape in the concept of 'translanguaging', referring to "the action undertaken by plurilingual persons, where more than one language may be involved" (Council of Europe, 2020, paragraph 2.3, p. 31). In this action all different communication systems (languages or language varieties) are integrated in one shared system (Canagarajah, 2011; Duarte, 2019; García & Wei, 2014).

The translingual approach acknowledges the full linguistic repertoires of speakers and their agency to shape their language to specific purposes (Horner et al., 2011).

This approach is in line with the idea that the linguistic landscape in North Brabant is currently shifting from a diglossia to a diaglossia with speakers drawing on linguistic repertoires that encompass multiple languages and varieties. Dialect leveling and loss have caused local dialects to give way to regional dialects (or 'koinés') that cover a larger regional area (Britain, 2009; Hoppenbrouwers, 1990, pp. 79–90). Until the 1970s, language use was linked to certain domains, with local dialects being used in spoken, informal domains and the standard language in written, formal domains. In this situation, which is also referred to as 'diglossia', the dialect was acquired as the first language, while the standard language was learned through education. Today, language use varies not only between but also within domains. This has implications for the language system, which is no longer autonomous and acquired as such, but consists of a set of intermediate systems: a continuum of language varieties with the local dialect and the standard language as extremes. This linguistic situation with intermediate forms between standard and dialect is also referred to as 'diaglossia' (Auer, 2005, 2011). Within the continuum, Dutch, local and regional dialects, and other languages (e.g., English, immigrant languages, youth languages) come together to form a hybrid language form (Cornips et al., 2018). This dynamic context paves the way for pedagogical approaches that allow for the use of these multifaceted repertoires in a fluid manner. Therefore, education must be made appropriate to enable pupils to make use of all their linguistic knowledge, even if this knowledge is not bilingually balanced.

To build a model that does justice to the linguistic context of North Brabant, it is not necessary to start from scratch. Recently, the Dutch research project *3M Meer kansen Met Meertaligheid* ('More opportunities with More Languages') provided a solid foundation by designing a holistic model for multilingual primary education in the province of Friesland (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018). The interventions that are tested for the Frisian context also offer good starting points for the Brabantish context, and can be filled in in such a way that they can also be used for secondary education and teacher training as the results of the questionnaire indicated that teachers are willing to pay attention to local dialect(s) in all levels of education. This finding is also in line with earlier research by the Dutch Language Union (Taalunie, 2020), in which a survey among 210 teachers in the Netherlands and Flanders showed that 75% think that one should make use of the different varieties of Dutch that pupils speak (such as dialect or a regional language) when learning Standard Dutch.

Therefore, the current paper takes the holistic model for Multilingualism in Education (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018) as a starting point for a proposal for future dialect education in North Brabant. This model focusses on five different approaches towards multilingual education, as illustrated in Figure 1. These approaches are placed along a continuum that oscillates between the acknowledgement of different languages and their actual use in instruction (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018, p. 29). We have

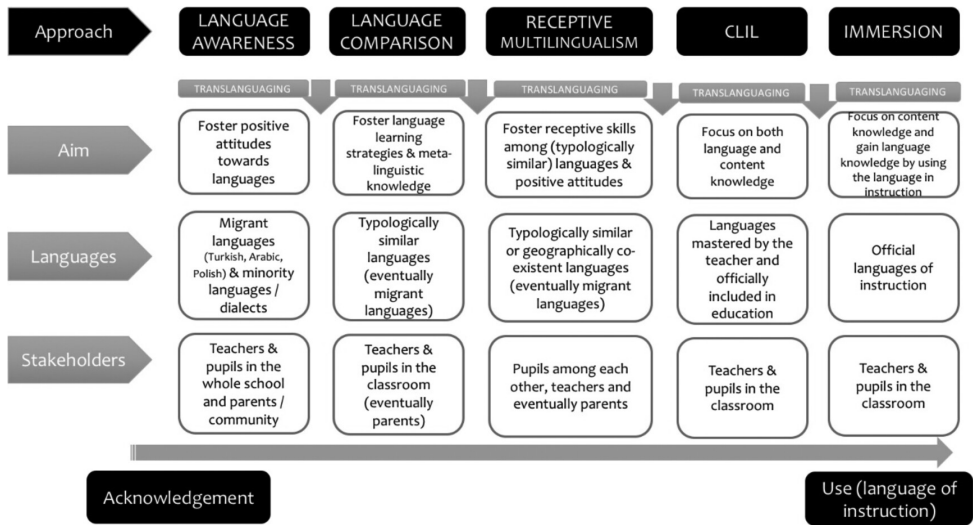


Figure 1 Holistic model for multilingualism in education

already noted that knowledge of the dialects of North Brabant is clearly declining. As a result of dialect levelling, many teachers indicate that they are familiar with a variety between Dutch and a (local) Brabantish dialect. This also applies to pupils who still pick up the dialect at a later age but no longer speak it as their mother tongue. There are also teachers who are not familiar with dialects at all and therefore do not necessarily share their languages with their pupils. This status quo has implications for selecting the approaches within the model that are appropriate in this particular educational setting. The rightmost approaches, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and immersion – both focusing on the actual use of dialect in the classroom as a language of instruction – are the least useful, as these involve the active use of the minority language (i.e., providing language knowledge), while the outcomes of the questionnaire reveal that there is no support at all for helping pupils learn Brabantish dialect through education (i.e., to achieve certain levels of proficiency). The outcomes show that teachers do not consider active and passive dialect acquisition as important learning objectives, obviously because the use of dialect in everyday communication is decreasing. The fact that Brabantish does not have a uniform standard variety probably also plays a part in this. Therefore, the immersion and CLIL approaches are not considered further in the present study.

However, the other three approaches that are aimed at acknowledgement and promoting positive attitudes towards multilingualism could be applied in a relevant way to the Brabantish dialects. The first approach is built around the previously mentioned concept of language awareness, which focuses on “the ability to reflect upon and reveal some degree of awareness of individual’s dispositions and motivations regarding languages”

(Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018, p. 26), i.e., to enhance pupils' consciousness of and sensitivity to (different forms and functions of) language. In particular, activities that aim at establishing associations between the local Brabantish dialects and other languages (e.g., Dutch) or varieties that are present in class or in the broader societal context, could be very relevant to promote positive attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity inside and outside the province. On a more conceptual level, and based on the idea of comparison as a successful learning process across disciplines (e.g., Rittle-Johnson & Star, 2011; Ziegler & Stern, 2014), the language comparison approach can help pupils to stimulate deeper processing of linguistic features from the language system by highlighting similarities and differences, for example between linguistic features of Brabantish and Dutch such as the differences in diminutive suffixes and adnominal gender markers (as discussed in section 4). In addition, the approach of receptive multilingualism, i.e., instances of asymmetric communication between typologically similar languages (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018, p. 29), may be particularly beneficial. The mutual intelligibility (in general) of (Standard) Dutch and the Brabantish dialects almost inherently allows for 'practices of intercomprehension' in which speakers attempt to understand utterances in the language without being able to actively or fluently speak that language (Ten Thijs & Zeevaert, 2007). However, this approach is not only relevant to enhance pupils' receptive skills, but also to make pupils sensitive (on the spot) to the presence of other languages, teach them to appreciate these languages, and put them at ease by letting them speak their own (home) language from time to time.

How each of these three approaches could be concretely implemented through various educational topics is indicated in the model in Figure 2 below. As Duarte and Günther-van der Meij (2018, p. 29) mention, these approaches can be combined by teachers in tailor-made educational activities. Recent research in the Frisian minority context has already shown that teachers generally have positive attitudes towards the value of language awareness, but that external factors such as lack of time and curriculum pressure can make implementation difficult (Makarova et al., 2021). This obstacle was also indicated by the teachers who participated in the questionnaire that provides the basis for the current paper (Doreleijers, 2021, p. 9). Therefore, the next section will look for opportunities to include dialect education in the curriculum.

## 6 Opportunities for dialect education in curriculum development

In the current Dutch core objectives ('kerndoelen') for primary and secondary education (OCW, 2006, 2010), only core objectives for Frisian have been included in addition to Dutch. No formal core objectives have been formulated for the other regional languages or dialects. Therefore, there is little guidance for teachers to include dialect in education according to formal guidelines that are aligned with the final test ('Cito eindtoets') in primary education and the continuous learning line ('doorlopende leerlijn') towards the

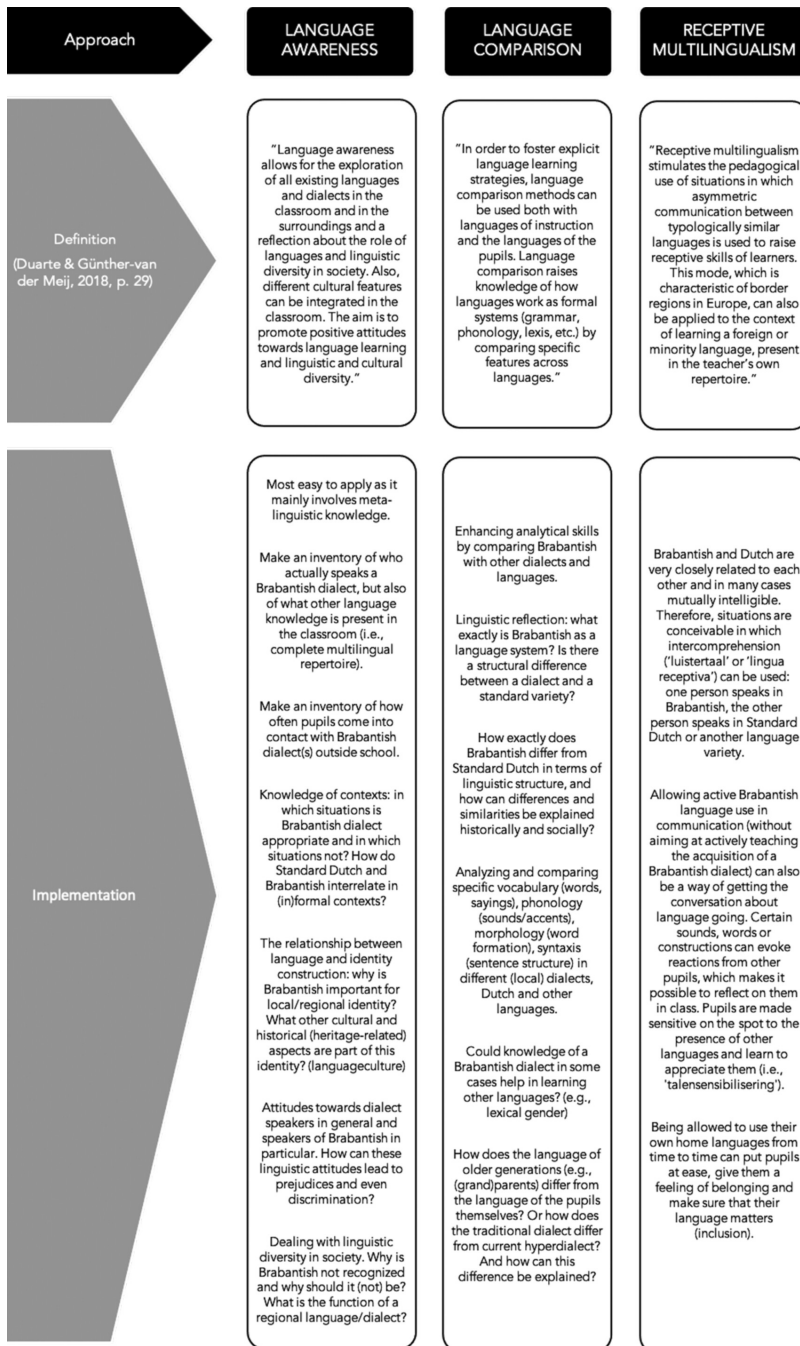


Figure 2 Three approaches to acknowledge Brabantish dialects in education within the holistic model for multilingualism in education

final exam ('Cito eindexamen') in secondary education. However, the language reference framework ('Referentiekader taal'; OCW, 2009) that focuses on basic knowledge and basic skills within the continuous learning line from primary school to higher education (from level 1F up to and including 4F), does offer a (very) limited number of starting points for dialect education. For level 1F (end of primary education), 'dialect', 'standard language' and 'multilingual' are (among others) described as necessary concepts to be able to speak about language and linguistic phenomena. In addition, for oral language proficiency at level 2F ((pre-)vocational education), it is required that the pupil can use different languages in formal and informal situations, i.e., is able to choose the appropriate register with the corresponding language variation, possibly ranging from dialect to youth language.

### 6.1 Dialect education as part of multilingualism and cultural awareness

In 2018–2019, teachers and school leaders, supported by other experts, have produced proposals in nine development teams for the revision of the Dutch curriculum for primary and secondary education. One of these development teams focused on the learning area of Dutch language. This large-scale endeavor to renew education is also known as *Curriculum.nu*. The aim of this initiative was to formulate so-called major tasks ('Grote Opdrachten') and building blocks ('bouwstenen') for curriculum renewal. Starting in 2022, these will be transformed into new core objectives ('kerndoelen') for primary education and lower secondary education, and attainment targets ('eindtermen') for upper secondary education. This task will be carried out by SLO ('Stichting Leerplanontwikkeling'), the Dutch curriculum development foundation, in collaboration with teachers from different school levels (vmbo and havo-vwo) and experts from universities (of Applied Sciences).

In these proposal documents, regional languages and dialects are explicitly mentioned as part of the third major task ('Grote Opdracht') Multilingualism and Cultural Awareness (*Curriculum.nu*, 2019, NL3.1). Regional languages and dialects are considered relevant within the (historically) great linguistic and cultural diversity in the Netherlands and important as carriers of culture and identity. Hence, attention to linguistic diversity in education should contribute to the (inter)cultural awareness and self-confidence of pupils. In addition, sensitivity to multiple languages and an open attitude towards linguistic and cultural diversity are mentioned as important pillars of increased language awareness. The fact that dialects and regional languages (as well as youth language for example) are mentioned in the text as fully-fledged components of multilingual repertoires, paves the way for a more inclusive multilingual approach as proposed in section 5. However, the texts are currently still drafts, which makes their precise elaboration uncertain for the time being.

## 6.2 Perspectives approach: Systematic, individual, socio-cultural and historical

As a by-product of the new curriculum development, there has been a lot of discussion about what the school subject Dutch in secondary education should look like, not only by educational professionals but also by academic researchers. Since 2016, a group of academics (language and culture researchers) has been arguing for conscious literacy ('bewuste geletterdheid') as a core criterion for Dutch lessons in secondary education, i.e., the focus should be on the development of conscious language skills and literary competence. These academics are united in the so-called Dutch *Meesterschapsteam* ('mastery team'). They strive for the use of recently acquired scientific insights in the school subject Dutch and for didactics to be more firmly embedded in academic education and research. They have elaborated their vision in a document published in March 2021, called *Bewuste geletterdheid in perspectief: kennis, vaardigheden en inzichten* ('Conscious literacy in perspective: knowledge, skills and insights'). The aim of this document is to provide curriculum developers with starting points for the development of the school subject Dutch. One of the most important beliefs in the document is that the school subject should not only consist of productive skills (writing and speaking) and receptive skills (reading and listening), but also of content (knowledge components), and that both aspects should be closely intertwined. In other words: when pupils work on their language skills, this can be related to content knowledge, for example a speaking assignment about the history of Dutch dialects, a reading assignment about prejudices concerning regional accents, or a writing assignment about the connection the pupil has (or does not have) with the (local) dialect.

An important pillar of the vision document is that pupils (at every level of education) learn to look at the domain of Dutch language, literature and communication from four different perspectives: 1) a systematic perspective, 2) an individual perspective, 3) a socio-cultural perspective, and 4) a historical perspective. When pupils reflect on a linguistic topic, they may ask themselves the questions *what, who, where* and *when*, as the answers provide a more nuanced picture, a better understanding and more conscious language skills (cf. Janssen et al., 2019, pp. 65–88).

Relating to dialect, the teacher or the pupil could therefore ask the following global questions, which can be further specified according to the local context or the particular learning objective. What is the form (phonological, morphological, syntactic) of the dialect, i.e., how is it structured? What is the most common meaning of specific dialect forms? Who speaks dialect and when, and how do individual speakers deal with language variation? How do dialects relate to the emergence of a standard language? And how do current dialects differ from dialects of previous generations? Through such questions, pupils study the grammar and usage of dialect, without having to master it actively or passively themselves. Although the term dialect is mentioned only once in the vision paper, the proposed perspective approach offers concrete starting points for an integrated approach with the model for multilingual education within a new cur-



riculum. This integrated approach then starts with the inclusion of dialect as a form of intra-language multilingualism, can be concretized using the approaches of language awareness, language comparison and receptive multilingualism, and these approaches can in turn be given a concrete overarching didactic interpretation via the perspective approach that covers the full scope. That is to say: the dialect system exists primarily within the individual speaker, that individual speaker is part of communities at different levels (from local to regional to national to inter/transnational) and those communities, in turn, are part of the changing societal history. Particularly in the current stage of dialect variation and change, combining all these perspectives can result in a meaningful and relevant educational activity.

## 7 Conclusion

The aims of the current paper were to present a state of affairs of dialect in education in the province of North Brabant and to discuss the implications of the outcomes of an inventory questionnaire on this matter that was carried out in 2021 among teachers and material developers. Despite the fact that Brabantish is not an official language and its use in everyday life is declining, the outcomes reveal that there is support for paying attention to dialects in the curricula of primary and secondary education as well as teacher training. However, the current curricula offer too little support for dialect education, and the available material is neither known by most of the teachers nor meets their needs for lessons that are focused on dialect knowledge on a meta-level, or on attitudes and identity regarding (regional) language variation. Therefore, this paper proposes to integrate dialect education into a model of multilingual education that does not aim at active acquisition but at language awareness, language comparison and receptive multilingualism. This proposal fits within the draft plans for a new language curriculum in the Netherlands in which multilingualism and cultural awareness are key learning concepts.

The next step will be to put the proposed model into practice by designing and conducting an intervention in collaboration with heritage education specialists of *Erfgoed Brabant*, e.g., by bundling teacher initiatives (as collected through the questionnaire) and linking these initiatives to the theoretical-didactical insights of the current paper. In addition, follow-up research should investigate whether there is enough support in primary and secondary schools for incorporating teaching activities on language awareness, language comparison and receptive multilingualism (cf. Günther-van der Meij et al., 2020). Ideally, the recommendations could then also be incorporated into North Brabant's next language policy (with the former policy dating from February 2019).

Although this paper focuses on the specific context of North Brabant, the insights provided in this paper may also be beneficial for teaching other dialects that lack official

support in education. As such the paper could be read as a practical guide for stakeholders who face similar challenges.

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### Noten

- 1 The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Tilburg University, REDC 2020.205.
- 2 The report can be accessed digitally via the website of Erfgoed Brabant <https://www.erfgoedbrabant.nl/nieuws/2021/publieksrapport-dialect-in-het-onderwijs/>.
- 3 In the remainder of this article, 'Brabantish' or 'the Brabantish dialects' are both used as umbrella terms to indicate all local dialect varieties that are spoken within the province of North Brabant.

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