

9 Creating Awareness of Pluricentricity at University Language Departments

A Case Study of Dutch

Marijke De Belder and Andreas Hiemstra

9.1 Introduction

Dutch is perhaps not the first language one would mention when discussing pluricentric languages, but it functions as a language in several countries and it has three recognized standard varieties which are officially considered to be equal. In this article, we point out that the pluricentric nature of Dutch is a recent phenomenon and, despite the official equality of the varieties, the dominance of Dutch Dutch is still undeniable. This dominance is noticeable when Dutch is taught as a foreign language: Textbooks still focus on Dutch Dutch. As such, it is of importance that future teachers are made aware of the pluricentric status of Dutch (see also De Wilde, 2019). To achieve this goal, we suggest that university departments of Dutch engage in a self-evaluation to test whether they prepare their students to take up this role. In this chapter, we present background information on Dutch as a pluricentric language in [Sections 9.2](#) and [9.3](#), and the dominance of Dutch Dutch in general and its dominance in textbooks for teaching Dutch in [Section 9.4](#). [Section 9.5](#) presents criteria for self-evaluation and [Section 9.6](#) illustrates these criteria on the basis of the Department of Dutch Studies at the University of Oldenburg, Germany, as an example. [Section 9.7](#) concludes our chapter.

9.2 The development of Dutch from a monocentric to a pluricentric language

Dutch coexists in Europe with some of the world's largest languages, which may create the false impression that Dutch is a 'small' language. However, it is a language of medium importance. It has approximately 24 million L1 speakers worldwide, it is number 61 in the worldwide Ethnologue 200 ranking¹ (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2022), counted by the number of native speakers, and it is the 12th most commonly used language on the internet (Taalunie, n.d.).²

It currently functions as a language in several countries, both as an official language and as an unofficial regional minority language. It is an official language in six countries, in Europe and South America. It is of course an official language in the Netherlands where it is spoken by approximately 17 million people.

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However, the Dutch-speaking territory is not limited to north-western Europe. It contains three islands in the Caribbean Sea, viz. Bonaire, Sint Eustatius,³ and Saba. Note that Dutch plays a different role on these Caribbean Islands, e.g., in Bonaire Dutch plays a bigger role than in Sint Eustatius although Dutch has the same status on both islands.

It is thus immediately clear that Dutch should not be characterized as an exclusively European language. In the Netherlands, Dutch shares the status of an official language with Frisian, which is spoken in the province of Friesland and with Papiamentu and English, which are spoken in the Caribbean part of the Netherlands.

Dutch is also an official language in Belgium, alongside French and German. It is the only official language of the Flemish Region and one of the two official languages of Brussels, together with French. In Belgium, it is the first language of some 6.5 million people of a total population of roughly 11.5 million people. It is thus the biggest language of the country counted by number of L1 speakers.

In north-western Europe, Dutch is a heritage language, outside of Europe it was imposed as an official language through colonization by the Netherlands.⁴ In South America, Dutch is the official language of Suriname where it is spoken by some 575,000 people. Even though it is only the first language of around 60% of the population, it is the sole official language of the country. As such, it dominates all domains of society, but it co-exists with eight recognized indigenous languages in this country.

Dutch is further an official language in Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and Aruba, three Caribbean countries formed by archipelagos in the Caribbean Sea, which, together with the Netherlands, form the Kingdom of the Netherlands. To be entirely clear, the Kingdom of the Netherlands should not be confused with the Netherlands. The Netherlands, i.e., its European provinces together with Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba, is just one of the four countries that belong to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. On the island of Curaçao, Dutch is an official language alongside English and Papiamentu, on Sint Maarten, it is an official language together with English, and on Aruba, together with Papiamentu. Even though knowledge of Dutch is common in these countries, it is only the first language of less than 10% of the population. In the three countries together, Dutch is therefore the L1 of less than 25,000 people.

Dutch dialects are further spoken by communities in the most northern part of France and in the northwest of Germany, i.e., in the region between Kleve and Duisburg, and the US and Canada through immigration from the Netherlands. Older people in Indonesia may still know Dutch through the history of colonization. In these regions, however, the language does not or no longer reach the status of an official language.

In the Netherlands, Dutch is a poster child example of a European cultural language. Codification into a standard language and the usage of this codified language in all public areas, such as media, education, politics, business, art, and religion began in the 17th century (Van der Wal, 1992). In the 17th century, the Netherlands acquired, among others, Caribbean islands and Suriname as

colonies where people were enslaved and exploited. Unlike other colonial powers, the Netherlands forbade slaves on the Caribbean islands and Suriname to learn Dutch during this period of slavery, which led to Papiamentu being used as the working language on the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean Sea. These areas would remain colonies until the 1970s, with Dutch as the language of the ruling class. Surinamese Dutch shows phonetic, lexical, and grammatical differences from Dutch Dutch (Ruigendijk, De Belder, & Schippers, 2021, p. 21). In the spirit of colonialism, it was unthinkable that Caribbean and Suriname varieties were accepted as varieties of Standard Dutch. Dutch Dutch was the only standard variety in the region.

Belgium gained independence from the northern Dutch provinces in 1830, with French as the official language. It was the mother tongue of speakers in Wallonia in the south and the sociolect of the wealthy classes in the entire country. Dutch was limited to dialects that were spoken as a home language in the northern part of Belgium. In 1898, Dutch was recognized as an official language in Belgium, but it was not until 1930 that Dutch was used in the public domain. The first Dutch-speaking university (Ghent) was founded in 1817 and established as a Dutch-only university in 1930. Schools, courts, and administrations in Flanders used Dutch (Blom & Lamberts, 2001, Chap. 7). After the Second World War, Flanders worked toward further linguistic emancipation. In order to have a Dutch standard that could withstand the status of French, attempts were made to adopt Dutch from the Netherlands. This convergence between the Netherlands and Flanders became the norm, although it was one-sided: Flanders grew linguistically toward the Netherlands, but the Netherlands did not grow linguistically toward Flanders, neither phonologically, morphologically, lexically, nor syntactically, because linguistic change on their side was not motivated. In Flanders, television programs have been broadcasted in which the Flemish people were taught to speak *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* (literally ‘general civilized Dutch’, i.e., Dutch Dutch). Linguistic elements from the Netherlands have been adopted in the written language and the highest registers of the spoken language. The convergence was thus in part actually successful. A complete convergence, however, was never achieved. There are still recognizable phonetic, lexical, and grammatical differences (De Sutter, 2017).

The linguistic history of the Netherlands, Belgium, Suriname, and the Caribbean shows that Dutch was a purely monocentric language until around 1975. The default language was codified by the Netherlands. The colonies were still dependent on the Netherlands and Flanders intended to adopt the Dutch Dutch standard variety. Anything that did not meet the Dutch Dutch standard was considered a regiolect, dialect, or sociolect.

The situation would change. Starting from 1960 and onward, the economic power of the Flemish region increased, a development which went hand in hand with increasing political power. Belgium was federalized resulting in political emancipation of the Flemish region. The general decline of French as a sociolect of the elite in Europe, the improved status of Dutch as a codified language in Belgium,⁵ a result of the convergence campaign, and the economic and political

emancipation of the Flemish region eventually resulted in higher linguistic confidence for the Belgian speakers of Dutch, paving the way for an acceptance of a Belgian variety of the standard language (Blom & Lamberts, 2001, [Chapter. 7](#)). Eventually, the explicit convergence politics has been replaced by full acceptance of the language's pluricentricity, as will become clear in the next section. The acceptance of national variation and improved postcolonial awareness also resulted in the acceptance of Suriname Dutch as an equal variety of Standard Dutch.

9.3 Dutch is a pluricentric language

In what follows we discuss Clyne's (1992) definition of a pluricentric language and we point out that Dutch matches all criteria suggested. Clyne (1992) defines pluricentricity using five criteria, which we discuss in turn below for Dutch. Firstly, the language must occur in at least two nations and secondly, the language must have official status in at least two nations. In [Section 9.1](#), we have seen that Dutch has official status in six countries located on two different continents.

Thirdly, there is the criterion of acceptance of pluricentricity by the language community. Pluricentricity for Dutch is indeed recognized, even officially so. The language policy for Standard Dutch is managed and developed by the *Taalunie*, a supra-national governmental body which has the Netherlands, Belgium, and Suriname as its members. In 2003, a document was published called *Eenheid in verscheidenheid* ('unity in variation'), which defines Dutch as a pluricentric language. It states that Standard Dutch has equal standard varieties, viz. Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch. In 2003, Suriname Dutch was not included in the document, as Suriname only became a member state of the *Taalunie* in 2004. However, it is clear from the document that the general principle of acceptance of geographical variation within Standard Dutch is supported. The document *Standaardtaal en variatie* (Taalunie, 2015) confirms this view and states explicitly that the standard register of Suriname Dutch is to be considered an equal variety of Standard Dutch alongside the standard registers in the Netherlands and Belgium.

In the 21st century, a single version of 'Standard Dutch' thus no longer exists, there are standard varieties of Dutch as spoken in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Suriname. Note that the varieties of Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and Aruba are missing from the policy, as these countries are not members of the *Taalunie* and their language policy thus does not fall within the *Taalunie*'s prerogatives. The absence of these varieties in the definition of Standard Dutch should thus certainly not be interpreted as a principled rejection of these varieties from what is considered to be Standard Dutch.

Fourthly, there must be enough linguistic distance that can serve as a symbol to express identity between the varieties. The *Taalunie* explicitly states this function in *Eenheid in verscheidenheid* as a reason not to impose uniformity for Standard Dutch. Indeed, there are phonetic, phonological, lexical, and syntactic differences between the three recognized standard varieties that do not hinder

mutual understanding, but that do allow a hearer to easily identify the variety of the speaker (Ruigendijk et al., 2021, p. 21).

The final criterion for pluricentricity is codification. Dutch has been fully codified as a standard language in the Netherlands from the 17th century onward. The language is documented in dictionaries,⁶ grammar reference works and spelling lists, and these sources fall under the responsibility of the *Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal* and the *Taalunie*. There is also ample scientific work available on the language. The phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language have been studied in depth. There are no sources that codify Dutch Dutch specifically, language-users in the Netherlands would simply make use of the general sources, in grammars such as *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* (ANS, ‘General Dutch Grammar’) and dictionaries, such as *Van Dale*. In addition, the specific aspects of the Belgian Dutch standard variety are codified by the *Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie* (VRT, ‘Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organization’), the public state-funded broadcasting organization for radio and television in Flanders.⁷ The sources made available by the VRT are to be seen as complementary to the above-mentioned sources. Admittedly, codification for Suriname Dutch is lagging behind. Some dictionaries and studies have been published, but no organization is responsible for the structural codification of the variety (see Ventura, 2016, and references therein). Speakers of Suriname Dutch depend on the general sources mentioned above. In sum, Dutch qualifies for all criteria of pluricentricity and the *Taalunie* recognizes three equal varieties of the standard language.

In a teaching context, the pluricentricity of Dutch cannot be fully compared to the pluricentricity of larger languages such as English, French, and Spanish for two reasons. Firstly, Dutch has a much more limited role as an international language given that it does not function as a lingua franca of non-native speakers. There is no role for a non-native international variety which would be comparable to Mid-Atlantic English. Secondly, its pluricentricity is geographically much more limited. As such, its pluricentric situation is less complex and, therefore, perhaps easier to implement in the classroom.

9.4 The dominance of Dutch Dutch and its dominance in textbooks for teaching Dutch

Despite the official recognition of Belgian Dutch and Suriname Dutch as equal varieties of standard Dutch, Dutch Dutch remains the dominant variety, according to the criteria defined by Muhr (2012), see also De Caluwe (2013). Firstly, Muhr (2012) argues that non-dominant varieties are often labeled as cute, exotic, or archaic. To the best of our knowledge, there is no research on the attitude of speakers of Dutch Dutch toward Belgian Dutch and Surinamese Dutch, beyond one questionnaire on the aesthetic appreciation of Dutch varieties by the *Taalunie* (Taalunie, 2005). According to this study, 10% of the speakers of Dutch Dutch label their own variety as ugly, 22% of them label Belgian Dutch as ugly, and 35% do not appreciate Surinamese Dutch. Speakers of Belgian Dutch,

in contrast, label Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch as ugly to the same degree (12% vs. 10%) but are unappreciative of Surinamese Dutch (31%). Speakers of Surinamese Dutch prefer their own variety and only 2% call Surinamese Dutch ugly. 33% do not appreciate Dutch Dutch and 15% do not appreciate Belgian Dutch. In sum, speakers of Dutch prefer varieties closer to themselves with the exception of speakers of Belgian Dutch who show appreciation for Dutch Dutch as well. We are not sure if any conclusions on the dominance of Dutch Dutch can be drawn from this limited research.

Due to limited research on the attitude of Dutch Dutch speakers toward the other varieties, we can only give our personal impressions that are not substantiated by systematic research. Indeed, we have experienced that Belgian Dutch is often labeled as cute and archaic. Needless to say, there is no scientific support that could substantiate an objectively higher degree of cuteness or an archaic nature. What is perceived as ‘cute’ is a variety of a region that is subconsciously perceived to be economically and politically less dominant. In our experience, Suriname Dutch is often qualified as charming and exotic, qualifications that one may hear for the closely related language Afrikaans as well. Such problematic qualifications indicate nothing but a perception of lower prestige of varieties and languages that originate from European national languages in regions other than Europe.

Secondly, non-dominant varieties are considered to be regional varieties. It has often been noted that speakers of Dutch Dutch do not hesitate to correct the Dutch of a Belgian speaker, even when the Belgian speaker is in a position of authority (see Ooms, 2021, for attested examples).

Thirdly, non-dominant varieties are seen as spoken varieties. Speakers of Dutch are not always aware of the register variation in Belgium and Suriname. The pronoun *gij* (‘you’) as a personal pronoun for the second singular is, for example, often cited as a characteristic of Belgian Dutch.⁸ *Gij* is certainly a form that can mostly be heard in Belgium, but it is by no means a feature of the standard variety of Belgian Dutch as defined by the VRT. It belongs to the sub-standard spoken register. By confusing features of a substandard spoken register as features of Belgian Standard Dutch, one may overestimate the local color of the non-dominant standard variety and one may underestimate its degree of codification.

Fourthly, the dominant nation may believe the rules of the non-dominant variety are less strict. Ooms (2019) cites in this respect the misconception that there is no rule to be detected in the use of pronouns for the second singular in Belgian Dutch. Needless to say, the false impression that the distribution of the pronouns is an irregular mixture stems from a more general lack of knowledge of the registers and the pronominal system of Belgian Dutch. This also immediately illustrates Muhr’s fifth criterion which states that speakers of the dominant variety are less familiar with local varieties.

The sixth criterion states that the dominant nation also dominates the linguistic market and the seventh criterion states that publishers of grammars and dictionaries are situated in the dominant region. These criteria are less clear

for Dutch, at least when it comes to the inclusion of Belgian Dutch. For example, the second edition of the *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* in 1997 was a co-publication between the Martinus Nijhoff Publishers in Groningen, the Netherlands, and Wolters Plantyn in Deurne, Belgium. The most recent revision of the *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* has been a collaboration of six institutions in the Netherlands and Belgium. The lack of inclusion of partners from Suriname, in contrast, is noticeable. We would also like to point out that the dominant publishing houses for literature are situated in the Netherlands, resulting in the fact that many Flemish authors are published by Dutch publishers, and the translation of international literature into Dutch is mainly in the hands of Dutch publishers.

We conclude that despite the official recognition of Belgian Dutch and Suriname Dutch as equal varieties of standard Dutch, Dutch Dutch remains the dominant variety.

We also want to mention that Dutch Dutch is still presented as the sole or dominant variety in textbooks. For instance, for the teaching of Dutch as a foreign language in the German federal state of Lower Saxony, teachers usually choose one of the following three options for more advanced learners: (1) The textbook *Op naar de eindstreep* (Taks & Verbruggen, 2010), (2) the textbook *Welkom terug* (Abitzsch & Sudhoff, 2011), or (3) self-compiled teaching material.

In the case of teachers compiling their own teaching materials, the attention to the diversity of Dutch offered depends on the teachers' choices. We can help teachers adopt a pluricentric view by making them (further) aware of the problem. When a textbook is used, however, the attention to the diversity of Dutch offered is chosen and presented by the authors of the respective book. In the following, we will briefly discuss the two textbooks in turn.

The textbook *Op naar de eindstreep* is written for German speakers and has the ambitious goal of working from the proficiency level A2 toward B2 as specified in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). The perspective of the book is completely monocentric with regard to the parameters defined in Rose, Syrbe, Montakantiwong, and Funada (2020). They suggest five parameters to analyze teaching materials for diversity. These parameters are varieties, speakers, situations of language use, culture, and proficiency.⁹ According to all these criteria, *Op naar de eindstreep* is fully homogenous and monocentric: The only variety represented in spelling, grammar, and vocabulary is Dutch Dutch. All language users represented are native speakers of Dutch Dutch who are fully competent speakers. Different situations of language use are given, but they are again, always situated in a Dutch Dutch context. All texts come from Dutch sources, all examples relate to the Netherlands and are set in the Netherlands. Nowhere is it mentioned that Dutch is also spoken outside of the Netherlands. No text, no exercise, and no example sentence relate to life or culture in Belgium, the Caribbean, or Suriname.

When it comes to culture, Belgium and Suriname are mentioned in a single text (Taks & Verbruggen, 2010, pp. 291–292). In this text, one only reads that

the prejudices prevail that Belgians are stupid and Surinamese people are lazy. Nowhere is it mentioned that they are equal L1 speakers of Dutch. In a text on the following page, we read that Turkish, Moroccan, and Caribbean immigrants are catching up with the native (sic!) Dutch. We also learn that integration is sometimes problematic and that there is a connection with crime (Taks & Verbruggen, 2010, p. 293). Immigrants from the Caribbean are thus presented as foreigners as soon as they live in the Netherlands. It is not mentioned that parts of the Caribbean belong to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, that among other things Dutch is spoken there and that there is an extremely problematic colonial past.

In sum, according to the authors of this book, the Dutch language does not seem to exist outside the Netherlands. Taks and Verbruggen (2010) is a good handbook with many didactic advantages. However, it can hardly be overlooked that it offers students in Lower Saxony only a static and monocentric perspective within the boundaries of a dominant nation-state. A teacher using this book, therefore, depends on their own knowledge to communicate the pluricentricity of Dutch to their students.

The textbook *Welkom terug!* is written for German speakers and has level B1 within the CEFR. The book focuses on Dutch outside of the Netherlands. One chapter is devoted to Dutch in Flanders which introduces the Belgian variety, culture, and speakers in different situations (Rose et al., 2020). Cultural characteristics of Flanders are presented and some linguistic specificities of Belgian Dutch are discussed. An exercise in this chapter aims at raising the awareness of pluricentricity: “German is spoken in different countries. Did you notice any differences there too? Discuss with your fellow students” (Abitzsch & Sudhoff, 2011, p. 19, exercise 6; our translation). In addition, some exercises refer to Belgian cities and life in Belgium. One also finds references to Belgium in other cultural references. For example, on page 25 one finds the cartoon character Cordelia, where it is explicitly mentioned that the author is the Flemish author Ilah. Students who have used this book will have learnt that Dutch is spoken in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Suriname is mentioned in one thematic text (Abitzsch & Sudhoff, 2011, p. 43) which introduces the Surinamese variety and it hints at its culture (Rose et al., 2020). In a fictitious email, a student is planning a stay abroad and she asks herself whether there is an exchange program with the University of Paramaribo in Suriname. On the following page, we also learn a little more about Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo, and it is explicitly stated that Dutch is an official language in Suriname.

It becomes clear that *Welkom terug!* pays attention to pluricentricity. Belgium and Belgian Dutch are adequately covered according to the parameters presented by Rose et al. (2020). The pupils learn that Dutch is also spoken in Suriname and that this region outside of Europe is presented as a region that has something to offer, as such, it fulfils two of five parameters of Rose et al. (2020), albeit to a minimal degree. What is missing from the book is a somewhat more in-depth elaboration of Surinamese cultural studies and the linguistic peculiarities of

Surinamese Dutch. The fact that the three varieties are equivalent varieties of the standard language is not mentioned. The Caribbean varieties are also not mentioned. *Welkom terug!* offers a contemporary, more fluid worldview, which could, however, still be deepened. It is desirable for future teachers of Dutch to recognize that *Welkom terug!* approaches this aspect of the language much more successfully than its competitor *Op naar de eindstreep*.

9.5 Creating awareness of pluricentricity at university language departments

In this section, we present a matrix that serves as a practical and simple guide to evaluate and/or implement the awareness of the pluricentric nature of a language at a university language department. The matrix consists of six parts: 1. Teaching staff, 2. guest speakers/authors, 3. exchange programs, 4. obligatory courses, 5. optional courses, and 6. literature lists/library collection.

- 1 Teaching staff: The teaching staff of a university language department could represent many (or possibly even all) standard varieties of a pluricentric language in order to create awareness of pluricentricity. This applies not only to the teaching staff in courses that focus on practical language skills but to the entire curriculum and teaching staff. However, this could prove difficult to implement with regard to smaller standard varieties of a pluricentric language: If the field is small and there are no applicants from these language areas, it will be impossible to select teaching staff on the basis of their linguistic variety. In order to attract applicants of small standard varieties, job advertisements could, for example, explicitly address speakers of underrepresented varieties.
- 2 Guest speakers/authors: Guest speakers and authors could represent many or all standard varieties of a pluricentric language, too. This is not only about representing all standard varieties linguistically, but also about the visibility of the scientific and artistic fields of the regions where they are used. We recognize again that in practice these goals may be harder to accomplish when varieties are spoken in smaller regions with fewer speakers. Nevertheless, attention could be paid to including scholars and authors from underrepresented varieties.
- 3 Exchange programs: Exchange programs could enable students to experience several standard varieties of a pluricentric language and thus develop an awareness of pluricentricity. Here again, it is not just a matter of representing these standard varieties linguistically, but, in this case, also of making it possible to experience the culture, the customs, and traditions, for example, of the regions where the language is spoken. As such, students learn not only to accept pluricentricity, but they also learn that a language should not merely be associated with a dominant nation. Again, this goal could be difficult to implement if language areas of smaller standard varieties of a pluricentric language do not have suitable institutions such as universities,

companies, and organizations to provide a meaningful stay. This goal could equally be difficult to implement if a language is spoken by a lot of communities in the world, resulting in the existence of too many pluricentric varieties to host in one single department. In addition, the geographical location also plays an important role: Financing a stay in a distant country is more challenging than in a neighboring country and stays outside of Continental Europe¹⁰ fall outside the scope of the ERASMUS+ exchange program of the European Union. In order to enable stays in several pluricentric language areas, university language departments could establish cooperation in diverse language areas. Stays in language areas of small standard varieties could also be particularly advertised and, if possible, financed.

- 4 Obligatory courses: Obligatory courses focusing on practical language skills, but also content courses in linguistics, literature, and subject-specific didactics could include awareness of the standard varieties of a pluricentric language as part of the curriculum. The pluricentricity and cultural diversity of language could and should be a central and recurring theme in the program.

Firstly, practical language skills courses could teach different standard varieties of a pluricentric language, especially with regard to receptive language skills, as has been argued for by Reimann (2017) for the Romance languages. With regard to productive language skills, it seems reasonable to aim for only one standard variety: Either the most dominant standard variety could be chosen or one could opt for the closest standard variety in term of geography since students might have the most personal and professional contact with this standard variety (see also Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011, for English). Above that, course books written by authors and published by publishers from different regions of a pluricentric language could be included in language skills courses. However, this could once again be difficult to implement if only authors and publishers of certain language areas put course books on the market. Furthermore, the dominance of a single standard reference variety could influence testing and assessing practical language skills.

Secondly, linguistics courses could not only introduce the general concept of pluricentricity but cover the historical development and linguistic characteristics of the standard varieties of a pluricentric language across all domains of language use. Above that, examples of possible regional variants could be introduced when discussing general linguistic phenomena. Such courses could also lay the basis for a more intensive study of individual standard varieties of pluricentric languages in optional courses.

Thirdly, literature courses could teach methods that enable the reflection and discussion of literatures of different standard varieties of a pluricentric language. Furthermore, the historical development of the literatures of the language areas of a pluricentric language could be brought into focus and literary texts could be used as case studies representing authors from different language areas of a pluricentric language. Furthermore, the literary

canon could be critically questioned with regard to the pluricentricity of a language. This could provide the basis for a more intensive study of individual literatures or literary works of individual standard varieties of a pluricentric language in optional courses that build on this.

Finally, subject-specific didactics courses could qualify student teachers to reflect on their knowledge about the pluricentricity of a language which they have acquired in the course of their studies, and to integrate it into their own future teaching practice and teaching material (see, e.g., Hehner, this volume). In this way, teachers can compensate for deficits in textbooks when needed but also act as multipliers who create an awareness for the pluricentricity of a language (see Callies & Hehner, this volume).

- 5 Optional courses: Optional linguistics and literature courses should also include a selection of varieties of a pluricentric language in order to further increase awareness of that pluricentricity. Here, the in-depth treatment of pluricentricity is of particular importance. Linguistics courses, for example, could zoom in on individual standard varieties of a pluricentric language, their historical development and their regional and social features across individual domains of language use. In addition, topics such as the language policy of individual standard varieties could also be included in discussions. Literature courses could also zoom in on specific standard varieties of pluricentric languages in terms of their authors, readers, and institutions such as publishers.
- 6 Literature lists/library collection: Literature lists and the library collection could represent the many standard varieties and regions of a pluricentric language and, thus, create additional awareness of pluricentricity. This equally applies to literary works, reference works, and scholarly works. We recognize that the dominant variety will unavoidably dominate the published works, but a collection that makes non-dominant regions and varieties visible may be a feasible goal.

9.6 Creating awareness of the pluricentricity of Dutch

In this section, we apply the matrix for evaluating and/or implementing awareness of pluricentricity to describe the approach to pluricentricity at the department of Dutch Studies at the University of Oldenburg, Germany. After applying the matrix, we summarize our findings and formulate future goals to create a higher awareness of the pluricentricity of Dutch.

- 1 Teaching staff: Both Dutch and Belgian teachers are working at our department and we consider this highly desirable. However, despite a high degree of general diversity amongst the staff, resulting from an undeniable openness toward diversity in hiring, the majority of the teaching staff speaks Dutch Dutch. Belgium does produce its fair share of scholars in Dutch linguistics and, as such, one could argue they are underrepresented at the department. We refrain from speculating why Belgian candidates do not often find their

- way to Oldenburg, but we would like to mention one factor, which is something as obvious as geographical distance: The Dutch border is considerably closer to Oldenburg than the Belgian one. Surinamese Dutch is not represented at our department at all. We believe it is generally challenging to attract candidates from a smaller group of speakers from a different continent.
- 2 Guest speakers/authors: Both Dutch and Belgian guest speakers and authors have visited our department. Again, only two of the three standard varieties of Dutch are represented. With respect to these varieties, the *Taalunie*, which funds the visits, recommends a ratio of two Dutch authors to one Belgian author, due to their different dominances and sizes. However, in the years 2004 to 2018, the actual ratio was two Dutch authors to 0.375 Belgian authors. Moreover, Surinamese authors are not mentioned with regard to the specifications of the *Taalunie*. Until today, no Surinamese speaker or author has visited our department although Suriname has a literary tradition in Dutch with authors such as Clark Accord, Albert Helman, Cynthia McLeod, Ismene Krishnadath, and several others (Diepeveen & Hüning, 2016). In 2021, the Surinamese Dutch author Astrid H. Roemer received the literary prize *Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren*. As a solution, Belgian and especially Surinamese guest speakers and authors could be invited more often. Above that, scholars and artists could be meaningfully connected to the teaching content by addressing their linguistic and cultural backgrounds in teaching.
 - 3 Exchange programs: There is a range of exchange programs available for the students of our department. There are three partner universities in the Netherlands (the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, and the University of Groningen) and two partner universities in Belgium (the University of Ghent and the Catholic University of Leuven). Considering the size of the Netherlands and Flanders, this seems to be more than an appropriate ratio. There is no partnership with Anton de Kom University in Suriname since it does not offer suitable study and exchange programs for our students. It is further possible to complete an internship in any region where a standard variety of Dutch is spoken, i.e., the Netherlands, Belgium, and Suriname. Nevertheless, students focus mainly on the Netherlands which is also reflected in the number of outgoing students in the years 2008 to 2020: Out of 63 outgoing students, 54 students (85.7%) went to a Dutch university and only nine (14.3%) to a Belgian university, although more places were available in Belgium. In the same years, all four students going abroad as language assistants went to the Netherlands. This can be attributed to the geographical proximity to the Netherlands. The same trend could be observed with regard to the summer school by the *Taalunie* in Ghent, Belgium, to which we are allowed to send five students every year. Only through intensive advertising from 2017 onward has it been possible to actually send five students every year since 2017. In the future, not only the summer school in Ghent could be intensively promoted, but also study stays in Belgium as well as the possibility of doing an internship in Belgium or Suriname.

With regard to an internship in Suriname, it could be considered whether there are possibilities on the part of our department to support students with specific information and contacts, as well as the necessary funds if necessary. This could not only help to increase the representation of Belgian Dutch and Surinamese Dutch but help to represent all three standard varieties of Dutch.

- 4 Obligatory courses: We offer various obligatory courses in the Dutch programs at our department. In our practical language skills courses, the dominant standard variety is Dutch Dutch which is due to the fact that our language skills teaching staff has a Dutch background. Regarding students' productive language skills, the goal is to achieve active knowledge in one standard variety of Dutch. The selection of Dutch Dutch is not only based on the teaching staff's language background but also on the location of Oldenburg: Dutch Dutch is the standard variety our students will have the most contact with, both personally and professionally. Regarding receptive language skills, all standard varieties of Dutch are considered, but Dutch Dutch remains the dominant standard variety followed by Belgian Dutch to a much lesser extent. Above that, the textbook we use is written in Dutch Dutch. To the best of our knowledge, there is no textbook in another standard variety of Dutch available for an L1-German target group. Thus, due to the dominance of Dutch Dutch, only one standard variety of Dutch is represented in our obligatory practical language skills courses.

In our linguistics courses, the pluricentricity of Dutch is a central topic. The module on the introduction to Dutch linguistics pays attention to the general concept of pluricentricity as well as the institution of the *Taalunie* and its aims. Above that, examples of variation across all domains of language use are discussed, e.g., phonological differences between Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch. Suriname Dutch is covered but to a lesser extent. The module on the history and variation of Dutch deals with the development and standardization as well as the characteristics of all the three standard varieties of Dutch, examples of which are used within this course. However, overall the main focus lies on Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch, too, which is due to the textbook which has the same focus. Again, the students learn about the standard varieties they will have the most contact with. In total, Belgian Dutch and Surinamese Dutch are indeed included in our obligatory linguistic courses, however, Dutch Dutch is the most dominant.

In our obligatory literature courses, the pluricentricity of Dutch is not a central topic but more an implicit one. Text selection is based on other criteria than pluricentricity. The module on the history and variation of Dutch literature focuses on Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch which is also due to the focus of the textbook: It is written for an L1-German target group dealing with the literatures of the neighboring countries of the Netherlands and Belgium. The module also focuses on the canon which includes solely Dutch and Belgian literature. One could question the canon but one of our goals is to prepare students to meet the requirements of the state ministry

and to teach the canon. One may also hope that the canon will become more inclusive in the future. In fact, professors and lectures could take an active role in this respect, given the freedom of research and teaching at German universities. In total, Belgian Dutch is included in our obligatory literature courses, however, Dutch Dutch is by far the most dominant. Surinamese Dutch is lacking and we see Eurocentric tendencies.

In our subject-specific didactics courses, the pluricentricity of Dutch and the reflection of knowledge about pluricentricity as well as the production of teaching material are not topics, yet. This, too, concerns us, since we believe that students can serve as valuable multipliers who create awareness for the pluricentricity of Dutch outside our department.

All in all, we observe a strong dominance of Dutch Dutch with a slight general inclusion of Belgian Dutch and a very slight inclusion of Surinamese Dutch in our linguistics courses. With regards to our language skills courses and especially with regards to our literature and didactics courses there is a high potential to further represent the diversity and pluricentricity of Dutch: Belgian Dutch and Surinamese Dutch could be included into these courses more often. Thereby, not only the representation of Belgian Dutch and Surinamese Dutch could increase but also the awareness of the pluricentricity of Dutch. Until then, we see a dominance of Dutch Dutch with a slight inclusion of Belgian Dutch.

- 5 Optional courses: We offer different optional courses at our department which deal with the pluricentricity of Dutch. In linguistics, we offer courses on Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch. The latter deal with in-depth discussions of regional and social variation in Belgian Dutch, its history and characteristics as well as topics such as language policy. We do not offer optional courses that address Surinamese Dutch. In literature, we offer courses based on research projects carried out by members of the faculty as well as their personal expertise and interests which, however, mainly focus on Dutch literature and to a lesser extent on Belgian literature. Surinamese literature is not represented here.
- 6 Literature lists/library collection: The literature list offered by our department as well as the library collection of the University of Oldenburg are estimated to include Dutch Dutch and Belgian Dutch authors in a ratio that matches the size of the two standard varieties of Dutch, which is two Dutch books for every Belgian book (see the *Taalunie* ratio as presented in the section on guest speakers above). However, Surinamese literature is estimated to be underrepresented. Surinamese literature should be included systematically in order to present all standard varieties of Dutch and create awareness for its pluricentricity.

9.7 Conclusion

The pluricentricity of Dutch is a recent phenomenon and it should not come as a surprise that Dutch Dutch is still the dominant variety. This dominance is reflected in various aspects that learners of Dutch encounter: Textbooks,

the literary canon, etc. At the same time, the *Taalunie* shows a clear openness toward variation and officially states that the three standard varieties should be seen as equal. We, therefore, think that students of Dutch should be made aware of the pluricentric status of Dutch as they could serve as multipliers of this view as future teachers. We argue that it is beneficial for departments to self-evaluate whether their curriculum may achieve this goal. At our own department, we see a general openness to represent the pluricentricity of Dutch, and Belgian Dutch is made visible at the department, even though we still see opportunities. The inclusion of Suriname Dutch is lagging behind. Our students are certainly aware of its existence but are not generally introduced to the variety, the culture or the literature of Suriname.

Notes

1. Available at <https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/ethnologue200>.
2. Janssens and Marynissen (2011) write that Dutch is number 37 in the worldwide ranking.
3. The island is also known as Statia.
4. Colonization by Belgium (mainly in Congo and Ruanda-Urundi) resulted in the introduction of French rather than Dutch in the colonized regions.
5. Available at <https://vrttaal.net/>.
6. The *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal (WNT)*, with its 400 000 entries, is even the largest dictionary in the world.
7. Available at <https://vrttaal.net/>.
8. See <https://www.nkvk.be/post/spreek-je-vlaamse-woorden> for an example. The pronoun *gij* plays a role in the perceived ‘archaic’ nature of Belgian Dutch.
9. Rose et al.’s (2020) parameter of proficiency is more relevant to English than to Dutch as English has the role of a lingua franca in the world. Learners of English will therefore have more contact with non-native, less-proficient speakers of English.
10. Truus De Wilde points out that the University of Aruba is in the Erasmus Network.

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