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The sociolinguistic situation of Weert

The town of Weert is for a number of reasons an interesting case for a sociolinguistic study. It belongs to the medium-sized towns and together with Maastricht its dialect belong to the Center Limburgian dialect area, with Maastricht in the south and Weert in the north. The number of inhabitants was 49,105 in 2016 ("Gemeente in Cijfers -Weert -Work," 2017). After the end of World War II, the industry and trade grew intensively, causing the town to remain a regional urban centre. On the other hand, Weert has a lot of new commuters working in Brabant (Eindhoven). The variety originally spoken in the town centre (*Stadsweerts*) differs from the variety spoken in the surrounding town parts and parishes, the so-called *Buitenijen* variety.

We interviewed 31 dialect speaking respondents, from different parts of the town, with different ages. We first present an overview of the sociolinguistic situation dealing with dialect use and dialect appreciation. Next, we deal with the existence of the two varieties that systematically differ in the realization of the long close-mid vowels, [e:], [o:] and [ø:] (*ee*, *oo* and *eu* in standard Dutch) in the nucleus of a large number of words. In the variety of the town centre (*Stadsweerts*), speakers say [iə], [uə] and [yə], as in *ziəvə* 'seven', *duəv* 'through', 'by' and *dyəv* 'door' (centralizing diphthongs). Speakers of the *Buitenijen* variety respectively pronounce [e:], [o:] and [ø:], (comparable to standard Dutch), pronouncing the three words as /ze.və/, /do.ɐ/ and /dø.ɐ/. The older generation of dialect speakers in our study turns out to adhere strongly to the variety that is assumed to be spoken in the town area where they live. The younger dialect speaking respondents in the *Buitenijen* area tend to produce the *Stadsweerts* variety for a rather large number of dialect words, especially in the words containing the [o./ue] vowel sound pair, so taking the variants that are more distinct from Standard Dutch and strengthening the symbolic value of the *Stadsweerts* variety.

The outcomes are used to evaluate the stratification and vitality of the dialect of Weert, also in comparison to other town dialects in Dutch Limburg and the Limburg regional language.