KEYNOTE

Popularization pays: from outreach at festivals via a mobile laboratory to a multimillion euro regional language grant

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I like going to (music) festivals. This was probably not the sentence you were expecting when reading an abstract of an invited speaker for a conference. However, in my presentation I will explain why this sentence in fact is quite important for the work in our lab investigating pronunciation variation. Specifically, I will try to argue why festivals do not only make a good environment for popularizing research, but also make an excellent environment for collecting speech production data in a broad population. In particular, I will highlight a study (Wieling et al., 2020) conducted at the festival Lowlands in 2019 during which we investigated accomodation in speech production, a potential driver of language change (Trudgill, 2008). I will also touch upon an acoustic-only technique we developed to quantify pronunciation differences which performs on par with human judgements (Bartelds et al., 2022; Bartelds & Wieling, 2022).

To facilitate our speech data collection efforts and to simultaneously increase our visibility when collecting data, we were very lucky in that my university has facilitated the acquisition of a one-of-a-kind mobile laboratory containing a sound-dampened room (Rebernik et al., 2025). Since this mobile laboratory, dubbed SPRAAKLAB, has also made collecting research-grade speech production data in noisy environments feasible, we have increased our data collection efforts at various festivals in the Netherlands and abroad. In my presentation, I will discuss the characteristics of this unique research tool.

I will then discuss how SPRAAKLAB has led to a substantial (in principle 30-year) regional language revitalization grant, resulting in the project "MOI: Meertalig Onderwijs In Grunnen en Drenthe" (www.wijzijnmoi.nl) in which we aim to integrate Gronings and Drents in primary schools, and support both teachers and pupils through speech and language technology.

Time permitting, I will also touch upon some novel initiatives to interest a general audience in our work, including our MOOC for Gronings, our board game Streektaalstrijd, and a newly developed Escape Classroom Activity about the "Witte Wieven".