

# **Intralingual open subtitling in Flanders: audiovisual translation, linguistic variation and audience needs**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article presents an overview of the main findings of an interdisciplinary research project carried out by scholars from a department of translation and interpreting, a department of communication science and a department of linguistics. The project investigated Dutch open subtitling<sup>1</sup> of native speakers of either northern Dutch or a Flemish (regional) variant of Dutch on Flemish television. Its corpus consisted of 793 programmes or 380 hours of broadcasting time.

The project consisted of three substudies. Study 1 aimed to find out what kinds of television programmes and speakers were subtitled. Study 2 aimed at gaining information about the actual source and nature of the intralingual subtitling so recorded. Finally, in Study 3, a viewer survey was carried out in order to investigate the reception of intralingual subtitling in Flanders, in terms of its desirability and enhancement of viewer experience.

## **KEYWORDS**

Audiovisual translation, Flemish television, Dutch, intralingual subtitling, language variation, language change, subtitling policies, interdisciplinarity.

## **1. Introduction: new forms of audiovisual translation, new possibilities for research**

Audiovisual translation (AVT) constitutes a sub-discipline of Translation Studies (TS) that is now in full swing, as witnessed by the numerous very recent publications (e.g., Jiménez Hurtado 2007, Remael & Neves 2007, Díaz-Cintas, Orero & Remael 2007, Serban & Lavaur forthc.) dealing with this extremely volatile translation form. As Remael and Neves (2007: 11) write:

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, AVT has grown exponentially and diversified to such an extent that it has exploded what were once considered to be its constraining technical features, its media-specific characteristics, its Eurocentric borders and its classic, interlingual translational and textual features. Indeed, AVT is mingling with multimedia translation and localisation, and increasingly determining our access to information and entertainment, which themselves are in a sense, the two sides of one and the same coin.

Having started out as a discipline focusing on the traditional forms of interlingual subtitling and dubbing, studies in AVT now embrace such diverse forms of text production as partial dubbing, consecutive and simultaneous interpretation (for television), off-screen narration, voice over, surtitling for opera and theatre, intralingual and interlingual subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), and audio description

for the blind and visually impaired (AD). Many researchers in the field are treating AVT as a form of 'accessibility', i.e., a form of text production that does not merely overcome linguistic and language-specific cultural boundaries, but also sensorial boundaries, boundaries of a quite different kind (see, for instance, Díaz Cintas 2007: 9-23).

Being a translation form with a strong technical component, AVT is very susceptible to influence from technological developments, which – of necessity – have an impact on how AVT is produced, and hence on its form. Another influential factor, one that operates in interaction with technological change, is that of new audiences and their increased empowerment. SDH is now well-established in many western European countries thanks to lobbying by interest groups, while commercial subtitling may be undergoing change due to the impact of online 'fansubbing' by fans of Japanese animated cinema (Pérez-González 2007: 219-234).

In many ways, AVT appears to be acting as a microcosm of current (commercial) text production more generally, mixing spoken, written, visual and aural modes, alternating or combining different carriers, undermining traditional notions such as the linearity of verbal texts and relying on multiple forms of intertextuality (cf. Zabalbeascoa 2005, for instance).

Due to these evolutions increasingly diverse AVT corpora and research topics are calling for appropriate research methods and tools, while a wealth of material for linguistic and interdisciplinary research is being generated. Interdisciplinary projects are no doubt the way forward for TS, but at the same time (audiovisual) translation, in all its guises, has a lot to offer to different sub-disciplines of linguistics, sociology and the broader field of cultural studies.

It is within this framework that the current piece of research should be situated. Its corpus, a collection of Flemish and Dutch TV programmes with open intralingual subtitling, is the product of evolving AVT-forms and the emergence of new audiences mentioned above. The variant of open subtitling under investigation here is intralingual and yet not directed at a deaf and hard of hearing audience. Its intended readers are native speakers of the language that is being subtitled. However, in this particular case, it is not the audience that determines the shape the subtitles take, nor is it at the explicit request of the target audience that the subtitles are produced. They are supplied by public and commercial TV channels in Flanders to meet a perceived need linked to the linguistic context in Flanders and its recent evolution.

The subtitles thus produced are therefore interesting from a translational point of view since they constitute a variant on interlingual open subtitling, but also from a socio-linguistic point of view since they offer a

window on linguistic variation and change in Flanders, or how such variation and change are perceived.

The research project on which this article reports combines these different approaches. More specifically, it presents an overview of the main findings of a research project carried out by scholars from the department of translation and interpreting of University College Antwerp, and the departments of communication science and linguistics of the University of Antwerp, Belgium. The project investigated Dutch subtitling of native speakers of either northern Dutch or a Flemish (regional) variant of Dutch on Flemish television, which is directed at viewers in Flanders, the officially Dutch-speaking region of Belgium where most of Belgium's inhabitants live (around 6.5 million out of a total of 10 million).<sup>2</sup>

There is a general perception in Flanders that Dutch subtitling of Dutch is increasingly common on Flemish television and, as we stated above, there are reasons to assume that the phenomenon is related to relatively recent linguistic developments. Our research therefore looked at linguistic broadcast policies, subtitling practice and its reception within this context. Earlier publications report on the methods used for assembling and organising the corpus in greater detail, or focus on socio-linguistic issues (e.g., Vandekerckhove, De Houwer, Remael & Van der Niepen 2006). The present publication combines TS-concerns with socio-linguistic and policy issues.

Broadly speaking, the project consisted of three substudies. Study 1 aimed to find out what kinds of television programmes and speakers were subtitled. It involved the assembly and classification of a corpus of Dutch-language television programmes with and without subtitles and the drawing up of speaker profiles (see below for an explanation). Study 2 aimed at gaining information about the actual source and nature of the intralingual subtitling so recorded. We carried out interviews with television policy makers and subtitlers, and briefly looked into some linguistic aspects of current intralingual subtitling practice in a few sample programmes from the corpus collected in Study 1. Finally, in Study 3, we carried out a viewer survey in order to investigate the reception of intralingual subtitling in Flanders in terms of its desirability and its enhancement of viewer experience.

## **2. Linguistic variation in Flanders**

The linguistic situation in Belgian Flanders is a very complex one. Dutch is the official language in this northern part of Belgium. The type of Dutch spoken in Flanders used not to be standardised, but in the last five decades the standardisation of the Dutch variety spoken in Flanders has virtually caught up with that of the Netherlands for all formal uses of Belgian Dutch (cf. Goossens 1975, 2000: 4). The difference between standard, formal Dutch as spoken in Belgium and standard, formal Dutch

as spoken in the Netherlands is comparable to the difference between the standard, formal variants spoken in Canadian and the USA respectively (like English, Dutch in both the Netherlands and Belgium shares a single standard written form, with minor regional variations).

Things are different as far as informal uses of spoken Dutch in Flanders are concerned. Informal Flemish-Dutch rather unexpectedly appears to be making an about-turn. Indeed, a growing number of people are adopting a spoken variant that increasingly functions as a kind of 'general Flemish' (De Caluwe 2002). This variant, *tussentaal*, which could be translated as 'intermediate language' (henceforth IL), received this label because, from a structural perspective, it is situated in between the Dutch standard language and the regional dialects of Flanders. Moreover, IL is hard to define since it comprises different variants that are all positioned somewhere on the continuum going from standard language to dialect, and is also locally coloured. Still, its dominant component is the Flemish regiolect of the provinces of Brabant and Antwerp, which make up the Brabant dialect area. In other words, that area is clearly trendsetting. That is why linguists have wondered whether present-day colloquial speech in Dutch-speaking Belgium (Flanders) is marked by a "process of autonomous standardisation ignoring the common discourse on convergence of Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch that has been promoted both in education and in the media for many decades" (De Caluwe 2002: 58). Today, IL is generally used in contexts where in the (recent) past either Standard Dutch or a local dialect would have been the norm, i.e., it has become a public medium. Therefore, the question whether this will ultimately lead to a Flemish alternative for the Netherlandic Dutch norm has been the topic of much debate among Dutch linguists.

IL is also commonly used in Flemish TV programmes, whereas northern Dutch as used in the Netherlands is heard less often by Flemish viewers due to the decrease in the number of television programmes from the Netherlands on Flemish television today and/or due to a change in viewing habits. The presence of subtitling suggests that programme makers are no longer sure which Flemish and Dutch variants are generally understood in Flanders and which are not. Having assembled our corpus, we therefore first analysed which programmes are subtitled and which are not, that is, to what extent intralingual subtitling practice is determined by, first of all, the type of programme (genre) and, secondly, the type of Dutch (which variant) that is being used.

### **3. Study 1: A survey of intralingual subtitling on Flemish television**

#### **3. 1. Corpus**

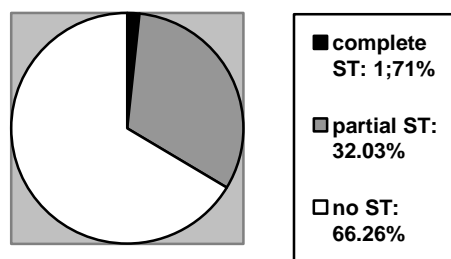
Our corpus consists of Dutch language television programmes broadcast by the public television station VRT (with the channels *Eén* and *Canvas*) and the commercial station VTM in the course of January, February and

March 2005.<sup>3</sup> During that period we recorded all the Dutch-language programming broadcast on one day. We started recording on a Monday, the next week on a Tuesday, the week after on a Wednesday and so forth so that we covered all the days of the week. Our corpus, then, represents a seventh of all the Dutch television programming in the first three months of 2005 on the main Flemish television stations. It is a balanced corpus in terms of broadcasting slots and genres, consisting of 793 programmes or 380 hours of broadcasting time. Discounting the 384 children's programmes (none of which were subtitled), that leaves us with a total of 409 programmes covering four basic genres, as shown in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

	<b>VRT</b>	<b>VTM</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
News	69	33	102 (24.9%)
Documentary	64	27	91 (22.2%)
Fiction	53	48	101 (24.7%)
Entertainment	51	64	115 (28.2%)
Total	237 (58%)	172 (42%)	409

**Table 1: Corpus of Dutch language TV programmes, excluding children's programming**

In terms of subtitling, the above 409 programmes were subdivided into three categories: no subtitling, partial subtitling and complete subtitling (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Degree of intralingual subtitling (ST) in 409 Dutch programmes on Flemish television**

Indeed, about one third of all programmes is subtitled, but this subtitling is often 'partial', meaning that some speakers in the programme are subtitled, whereas others are not. In a first step towards determining who is subtitled and who is not, so-called 'speaker profiles' were drawn up for all programmes with full subtitling and a representative selection of programmes with partial or no subtitling. Our selection of speakers was made on the basis of genre, the presence or absence of subtitling, as well as the linguistic varieties used by the speakers. This operation yielded a total of 1204 speaker profiles, from 66 programmes. The speakers were coded according to the linguistic variant they used, age<sup>5</sup>, sex, role<sup>6</sup> and context<sup>7</sup> (it is this information that constitutes a 'speaker profile').

Since this research was carried out from a Flemish perspective, no subdivisions were made for variants of Dutch as used in the Netherlands. The variants we distinguished were: Northern Dutch (any variant as used in the Netherlands), Belgian standard Dutch, Western regiolect (provinces of West and East Flanders), Brabant regiolect (Antwerp and Flemish Brabant, plus eastern borders of East Flanders), and Limburg regiolect. 'Regiolect' is understood to comprise regionally coloured language, i.e., 'intermediate' language(s) and, occasionally, dialect. The categories 'clarity of articulation' and 'presence or absence of background noise' were also added to each speaker profile because these two factors could potentially explain the presence or absence of subtitling.

### 3.2. Linguistic and extra-linguistic determinants of intralingual subtitling

#### 3.2.1 The crucial role of genre

Our results indicate that genre is a major determining factor in subtitling. There is a highly significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 86.4349$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) between the categories fiction and entertainment on the one hand, and news and documentary on the other, as shown in Table 2.

Genre	Partial & Complete ST	No ST	Total number of programmes
Documentary	73.63 %	26.37 %	91
News	42.16 %	57.84 %	102
Entertainment	16.52 %	83.48 %	115
Fiction	8.91 %	91.09 %	101

Table 2: Subtitling (ST) and genre

Clearly, the genres fiction and entertainment are subtitled much less frequently than the genres news and documentary. Given that subtitling turned out to be so rare in fiction programmes, we decided to investigate these further (see next paragraph). Neither background noise nor bad articulation could account for the differences apparent in Table 2.

#### 3.2.2. Linguistic variation and subtitling in fiction

Most of the 101 fiction programmes in our corpus are not subtitled, but there are 9 exceptions. Of these, 3 are partially subtitled, and 6 entirely. All the 6 fiction programmes with complete subtitling are programmes with Dutch actors who speak a northern Dutch variant.<sup>8</sup>

FICTION	Northern Dutch	Belgian-Dutch varieties	TOTAL
Complete ST	6	0	6
Partial ST	0	3	3
No ST	0	92	92
TOTAL	6	95	101

**Table 3: Linguistic variation and subtitling (ST) in *fiction* programmes**

In the 92 fiction programmes without subtitling only Belgian varieties of Dutch are used.<sup>9</sup> Previous research into linguistic varieties used in Flemish 'soaps'<sup>10</sup> carried out by Geeraerts, Penne & Vanswegenhoven (2000) showed that depending on the social status of the characters, either Belgian standard Dutch or Brabant IL is spoken. Our own speakers' profiles of 5 different fiction programmes<sup>11</sup>, 83 profiles in all, yielded the following table of linguistic variation encountered in Flemish fiction programmes without subtitles:

LANGUAGE VARIETY	Number of speakers
Brabant regiolect	63.86 %
Standard Belgian Dutch	21.69 %
Western regiolect	12.05 %
Northern Dutch	2.41 %
TOTAL	83

**Table 4: Linguistic variation in *fiction* programmes, without subtitling**

The most commonly used linguistic variety in Flemish fiction programmes is the Brabant regiolect, whereas Northern Dutch speakers only make up 2.41 % of the speakers in Flemish fiction programmes, and there are no speakers of the Limburg variety in our selection.

Our first conclusion regarding the subtitling of fiction is therefore that programmes in which the Northern variant is spoken are subtitled, while those in which Flemish regiolects dominate, and especially the Brabant regiolect, are not. Flemish viewers of fiction are apparently not supposed to understand Northern Dutch, but they are presumed to understand the regional variant from Brabant.

### 3.2.3. Linguistic variation and subtitling in *non-fiction*

A comparison of the data for the fiction programmes and those of the non-fiction programmes yields a number of interesting differences. Firstly, a wider variety of linguistic variants is used in the non-fiction programmes. Belgian Standard Dutch is the dominant variant now, but subtitling of Belgian Standard Dutch is rare (see Table 5).

LANGUAGE VARIETY	N	%
Standard Belgian Dutch	310	87.57
Brabant regiolect	24	6.77
Western regiolect	11	3.10
Limburg regiolect	2	0.56
Northern Dutch	7	1.97
TOTAL	354	100

**Table 5: Linguistic variation in Flemish *non-fiction* programmes without subtitling**

Furthermore, the Flemish regiolectal variants are also well represented, as shown in Tables 6 and 6a.

	<b>No subtitling</b>	<b>Subtitling</b>
<b>LANGUAGE VARIETY</b>	<b>number of speakers</b>	<b>number of speakers</b>
Belgian Standard Dutch	64.12 %	3.84 %
Brabant IL	16.66 %	35.16 %
Western IL	12.71 %	52.20 %
Limburg IL	4.52 %	7.69 %
Northern D	1.98 %	1.10 %
TOTAL	354	182

**Table 6: Linguistic variation and subtitling in *non-fiction* programmes with partial subtitling**

	<b>No subtitling</b>	<b>Subtitling</b>
<b>LANGUAGE VARIETY</b>	<b>number of speakers</b>	<b>number of speakers</b>
Standard Dutch (Belgian and Northern)	66.10 %	4.94 %
Regiolect	33.90 %	95.06 %
TOTAL	354	182

**Table 6a: Standard Dutch vs. IL and subtitling in *non-fiction* programmes with partial subtitling**

The most striking finding for the non-fiction programmes is that non-fiction speakers of Flemish IL or regiolectal variants are subtitled, though not systematically so (almost 60% of the speakers of regiolectal variants is subtitled, which implies that 40% is not).<sup>12</sup> This means that there is a certain tolerance for regiolectal language use in non-fiction programmes, but much less so than in fiction programmes, where these variants receive no subtitling at all. Furthermore, regiolectal variants that are not from Brabant are subtitled nearly twice as often as Brabant regiolectal speech (see Table 6b), which is symptomatic of present day linguistic relations in Flanders.

	<b>No subtitling</b>	<b>Subtitling</b>
	<b>number of speakers</b>	<b>number of speakers</b>
Brabant IL	49.17 %	36.99 %
non Brabant IL	50.83 %	63.01 %
TOTAL	120	173

**Table 6b: Brabant IL vs. other forms of IL and subtitling in *non-fiction* programmes with partial subtitling**

Finally, Dutch as spoken in the Netherlands is barely represented in the non-fiction corpus (which is significant in itself), and usually receives no subtitling. In fact, in this case the correlation between language variant and subtitling deserves closer scrutiny. We have no more than 9 northern Dutch speaker profiles on a total of 1204 profiles. Of these 9 northern Dutch speakers only 2 are subtitled, and in these two cases the subtitling is motivated by extra-linguistic factors.<sup>13</sup> Even though we have very few speakers of Northern Dutch in our non-fiction corpus, it would seem that - contrary to what happens in fiction - such speakers are not subtitled in non-fiction programmes.

To conclude, the main finding here is that for Flemish speakers in our corpus of non-fiction programmes the Belgian standard variety is seldom subtitled, whereas intermediate language and regiolects are, to different degrees.

### **3.2.4. Main findings of the subtitling survey**

When Dutch language programmes on Flemish television have subtitles, the subtitling tends to be partial. This means that only some speakers are subtitled. There is a link between different genres and the use of subtitling. Fiction programmes are hardly ever subtitled,<sup>14</sup> whereas speakers in non-fiction programmes such as documentaries and news programmes are regularly subtitled. There is also a relation between subtitling and a speaker's language variant, but this relation again depends on a difference in genre.

In fiction, more local, regional varieties are generally not subtitled, whereas they stand more chance of being subtitled in non-fiction programmes. In fiction, Dutch as used in the Netherlands is always subtitled, whereas it hardly ever is in non-fiction programmes.<sup>15</sup> In short, there are obvious inconsistencies in the extent to which local regiolects and Dutch from 'above the border' are subtitled, whereas standard Belgian Dutch is never subtitled, regardless of genre.

## **4. Study 2: Subtitling policies and norms**

The above survey suggests that there is little consistency in intralingual open subtitling policies on television in terms of what kind of speaker is likely to be subtitled. Furthermore, these policies appear to be in a state of flux, which reflects linguistic practice in Flanders more generally. Indeed, the relation between spoken standard Belgian-Dutch, its regional varieties, the so-called 'intermediate languages' and standard Northern Dutch is in a state of marked instability. A few questions that therefore come to mind are: how do broadcasters decide what must be subtitled and how this should be done? Does *intralingual* subtitling follow its own rules or does it implicitly adhere to the same norms as the much more common *interlingual* open subtitling? We offer the results of a small pilot test below, complemented with some of the reactions of policy makers and subtitlers obtained through e-mail interviews.

We conducted two sets of interviews in the course of January 2006, first with Mr. Ruud Hendrickx, VRT language advisor,<sup>16</sup> and with Ms. Tania Vervaeke, VTM's project manager of mastering and subtitling, and subsequently with Mr. Willem Muylaert, who represented the translation department at VRT, and three subtitlers who work for companies that do subtitling for VTM: Ms. Hilde Deholloghne, Mr. Marc De Neve and Ms. Susanne Verberk.<sup>17</sup> Our questions to Mr. Hendrickx and Ms. Vervaeke

concerned subtitling policy: what determines whether a programme or speaker is subtitled, i.e., what are the criteria, who decides about subtitling, has the need for subtitling been tried out on audience test groups, and do separate intralingual subtitling guidelines exist? Our questions to the subtitlers themselves concerned subtitling practice. We enquired about common practice with respect to: reading speed, translation norms in terms of faithfulness to the source text and its linguistic variants, the influence of genre, and how intralingual subtitling compares to interlingual subtitling in these same respects. The replies to these questions were then tested against the intralingual subtitling of two non-fiction reality TV programmes *De Reporters* ('The Reporters', VTM) and *Het leven zoals het is* ('Life as it is', VRT), and two Dutch fiction episodes from the Netherlands, both detective series, broadcast by VRT (*Baantjer*) and VTM (*Grijpstra & De Gier*) respectively. Below we discuss a few striking assertions from the interviews and how they compare to subtitling practice in the two above-mentioned Flemish non-fiction programmes.

#### **4.1. Intralingual Flemish subtitling policy**

At the time that the interviews were conducted, the Flemish public broadcasting station VRT did not have any specific subtitling guidelines for intralingual open subtitling (nor do they have any today), but the VRT language charter (Hendrickx 1998) warns against over-subtitling, which, as it says, can come across as "patronizing". VTM used a single page document dating from October 2005 with very summary guidelines. These merely reflected the intralingual subtitling 'habits' of the day, and were based on a consensus that had grown from practice and discussions on the work floor rather than on research. Indeed, neither VRT nor the commercial Flemish station VTM had ever conducted any serious experiments with test groups.

According to Mr. Hendrickx (VRT) two factors determine intralingual open subtitling policy: audibility and intelligibility (with respect to sound quality, pronunciation and non-standard grammar and vocabulary); the linguistic variant used in the source text is not determining in itself. Likewise, Ms. Vervaeke of VTM named audibility and intelligibility as determining factors, and she added that all non-standard variants are subtitled, including Northern Dutch variants. On the other hand, she specified that VTM opted for 'comprehensive' subtitling, which includes the programme host.

A number of these statements are not confirmed by our findings. Firstly, our corpus indicates that some linguistic variants stand more chance of being subtitled than others (see above). Secondly, the two programmes subjected to closer scrutiny yielded some unexpected data. VTM's programme *De Reporters* contains interviews with a number of people. These interviews are introduced by four 'voices': the presenter (Mr. Jammers), an off-screen narrator, and two journalists (Michel Maessens

and Chris Desire). None of these programme 'hosts' are subtitled, whereas all the interviewees are. In other words, subtitling is not comprehensive and creates a kind of linguistic hierarchy, implying that the language spoken by the interviewees is not standard and might not be intelligible for all viewers. And yet, at least one of the families interviewed, that of Annemie, a girl with incurable kidney failure, speaks a variant of Brabant IL that is very close to Standard Belgian Dutch. What is more, all the family members speak slowly, clearly and in a very structured manner, without any interference from background noise (see Example 1).

**De Reporters**

*'k Heb alletwee mijn nieren nog maar ze werken niet meer.  
Die zijn eve groot, maar da's één littekenweefsel.  
Ja, en da's zienderogen achteruitgegaan op een bepaalde leeftijd.*

'I still have both my kidneys but they are not working anymore. They're the same size, but one and all scar tissue. Yes, and it's gone noticeably downhill from a certain age.'

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*Ik heb alletwee mijn nieren nog,  
maar die werken niet meer.*

269

*Die zijn even groot,  
maar da's één littekenweefsel.*

270

*Da's zienderogen achteruitgegaan  
op een bepaalde leeftijd.*

**Example 1: Almost literal rendering of the speaker's words in the open subtitling**

Neither audibility nor intelligibility can account for the subtitling of such passages. On the other hand, the language the family speaks does sometimes contain more pronounced grammatical features typical of IL, as identified by Goossens (2000), especially in the conjugation of articles as well as pronouns. Like in the sentence below, these are usually corrected (see Example 2).

**De Reporters**

*Annemie*

**Ge moet** ook zelf **uw gewicht** opschrijven en af en toe **uwen bloeddruk** is nemen.

'You also have to write down your weight and take your own blood pressure sometimes.'

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**Je moet** zelf **je gewicht** opschrijven/en af en toe **je bloeddruk** nemen.

'You have to write down your weight and take your own blood pressure sometimes.'

The generally Flemish subject pronoun *ge* ('you') and the typically Belgian use of the possessive pronouns *uw* ('your') and *uwen* (in dialectal form) have been changed to the pronoun *je* which is considered to be more standard.

### Example 2: 'Correction' in the open subtitling of personal pronouns as used by the speaker

While there is no real consistency in what is transferred to the subtitles and what is not, it is safe to say that the subtitles remain much closer to the source text in terms of sentence structure and non-standard lexical items than would ever be the case in interlingual Dutch subtitling. What is impossible to determine or predict, however, is which words will be retained and which will not, or why that is the case. On the whole, the choices made in the subtitling seem arbitrary, and are certainly not dictated by issues of comprehension or intelligibility alone.<sup>18</sup>

This is confirmed by our analysis of the VRT's programme *Het Leven zoals het is*. No reporters appear on screen in this episode. The voice of a narrator who speaks standard (Belgian) Dutch, a variant that is very close to Northern standard Dutch, provides a sound bridge between the scenes. His off-screen voice is not subtitled. However, on one occasion, two of the professionals who report on their experiences as caretakers in the Antwerp zoo (Alex, the caretaker of the seals and Karen, the caretaker of the parrots) speak different variants of IL and they are not subtitled either. Especially Alex's variant borders on the dialectal. His speech is much further removed from the standard variant than that of some other speakers in the programme who do get subtitles (e.g., Bruno, caretaker of the elephants). Remarkably, the following examples from the interview with Alex show that even non-standard grammar is left unsubtitled. The words in square brackets in Example 3 give the standard language form. If intelligibility is the norm, subtitling would have been warranted in this case, but then 'intelligibility' is a very unstable concept, and the linguistic variant Alex uses belongs to the dominant Brabant variety.

#### *Het leven zoals het is*

*Ik weet nu nog ni watdat [wat] die **geten** [gegeten] heeft.*

'I don't know yet what he's eaten.'

*Het **heet** [heeft] gepakt joeng. Hij ziet er gezond uit.*

'It's worked. He looks healthy.'

*Hij ziet er proper uit. **Ziedis** [Zie eens] hoe schoon.*

'He looks clean. Look how nice.'

#### Example 3: IL/dialectal speech without subtitling

An additional problem with the norm of intelligibility is that some speakers' variants become more marked depending on the person they are speaking to. When Western IL speaker Edwin in *De Reporters* (interviewed for his obsession with tattoos) addresses his father, the young man's speech becomes more strongly marked than when he addresses the interviewer. In this particular case, the character is subtitled throughout the programme. However, in an unpublished paper investigating the language of intralingual subtitling in some additional material<sup>19</sup> Serluppens (2007) reports that a speaker in a 2006 episode of

the VRT's *Man bijt hond* (a comparable programme) is only subtitled when his speech becomes strongly dialectal. Achieving consistency appears to be problematic in many different ways.

Since neither Mr. Hendrickx nor Ms. Vervaeke mentioned genre as a determining factor in deciding whether or not to subtitle a programme, we asked them explicitly whether this played a part in the decision-making process at all, since this is what our data indicated. Both confirmed that reality TV and infotainment are subtitled the most. Mr. Hendrickx explained that Flemish fiction programmes on VRT are not subtitled because they have subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing on teletext. However, he went on to say that teletext subtitling was not really efficient as a replacement for open subtitling, since it was barely publicised among hearing viewers, which he regretted. Today, people appear to be tuning in to teletext subtitling more often, although there are no exact figures to confirm this.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the advent and spread of digital television with (theoretically) limitless subtitling facilities may further stimulate broadcasters to switch to closed intralingual subtitling for all. Still, in January 2006 the representatives from both television stations stated in their interviews with us that it was the programme producers who ultimately decided whether a programme ought to be subtitled or not. Apparently, some producers fear that the audience might be getting used to intralingual subtitling, and will tune in to another station if no subtitles are provided. In other words, ratings play a part in the decision-making process, rather than insight into what the audience wants and needs. What is more, the subtitling of the programmes in our corpus would appear to reflect the views of a limited number of people who are trying to gauge – on the basis of accepted opinion – which language variant might require subtitles and which might not. The problem is, public opinion on where Flemish Dutch is and where it should be going is divided, as is that of linguists.

#### **4.2. Intralingual Flemish subtitling practice**

One of the questions we asked the **subtitlers** themselves was: is there a difference between interlingual and intralingual subtitling? The reply was unanimous: the reading speed of intralingual subtitling is higher (no one gave an exact figure), and the rendering of the source text is more literal (i.e. the text is not paraphrased or summarised to the same extent). As we write, the reading speed for interlingual subtitling in Flanders varies from 8 to 13 Characters Per Second (CPS), and that of intralingual subtitling from 12 to 15 CPS, sometimes reaching up to 17 CPS.<sup>21</sup> Our interviewees also agreed that idiomatic standard Dutch was not considered an absolute priority; instead, the subtitles follow the sentence structure, vocabulary and the specific features of the speakers' language as closely as possible.

The few episodes studied so far, including those from the two programmes produced in the Netherlands (see above), indicate that the data confirm this, at least up to a point. The examples given above (see in particular Example 1) show instances of fairly literal renderings, and all the episodes we studied contained numerous examples of subtitles that are rather long in open interlingual subtitling terms (cf. also Example 4). Occasionally, the subtitles even remain quite close to utterances and sentence structures that are not – strictly speaking – standard language, although we are aware that this can be hard to determine in some instances.

***Het Leven zoals het is***

*En dat is een soort van verslaving. Daar geraken ze **ni meer** van af.*  
 'And that is a kind of addiction. They can't get rid of that any more.'

6.

*Dat is een soort verslaving.*

*Daar raken ze **niet meer** van af.*

'That is a kind of addiction

They can't get rid of that any more

***De Reporters*** (VTM)

*Heel veel moe. 't **School** dat gaat, maar heel veel ziek ook.*

'Very often tired. School is ok, but very often sick too.'

287.

Heel veel moe, **de school**, dat gaat,  
 maar heel veel ziek ook.

**Example 4: structurally close rendering of the source text with minor changes**

In this particular example, the original sentence structure, which is not altogether grammatical for written language (ST 287), is respected, but informal or non-standard pronunciation (*ni meer* versus *niet meer*) and grammar (*'t school* versus *de school*) are corrected. All the subtitlers we interviewed claimed that standard language was not that much of an issue in intralingual Flemish subtitling, adding that clarifying non-standard pronunciation, by contrast, was important. However, they differed in their degree of tolerance for "Flemish words not commonly used in the Netherlands" versus "intermediate language" and downright "dialect"; the eternal problem being, of course, the impossibility of coming up with clear-cut divisions.<sup>22</sup> The reason given by all for the acceptability of both the higher reading speeds and the more literal rendering of dialogues in intralingual subtitling is that the Flemish viewers will hear and no doubt understand much of what is said.

Our own analysis of what is 'corrected' and what is not reveals that the subtitles in the programmes *De Reporters* and *Het Leven zoals het is* usually do more than clarify non-standard pronunciation. This is confirmed by Serluppens' paper on 6 episodes with intralingual subtitles from the programme *Man bijt Hond* (2007). Notwithstanding the anomaly in the episode from the VRT's *Het Leven zoals het is* (Example 4), Serluppens

too found that hardly any non-standard lexical forms survive and that all non-standard grammar is cleaned up. Sentences that are transferred literally are sentences in which there is relatively little to correct. Only occasionally is a 'colourful' expression retained to render some of the flavour of the programme in the subtitles. In our episode from *De Reporters* this amounts to a total of two non-standard, dialect words, whereas in *Het Leven zoals het is*, four obviously non-standard expressions make it into the subtitles (see Example 5a).

<i>De Reporters</i>	<i>Het leven zoals het is</i>
<i>Content</i> ('pleased') <i>Zeveraar</i> ('bullshitter')	<i>Amai</i> ('Wow!') <i>dat zijn geen vodden</i> ('no kidding') <i>heet en gereed</i> ('all ready for it') <i>precies (net)</i> ('seemingly')

**Example 5a: presence of non-standard lexicon in the subtitles of two episodes**

On the other hand, some commonly used, 'understandable' non-standard or standard but more informal (Belgian) Dutch expressions are actually replaced, as is shown in Example 5b.

<i>De Reporters</i>	<i>Het leven zoals het is</i>
<i>Antibioticashot = antibioticaspuit</i> ('shot of antibiotics') <i>Gazet = krant</i> 'newspaper' <i>hij leest luidop = hij leest hardop</i> ('he reads aloud')	<i>Er van af geraken = raken</i> (obsolete) ('to get rid of') <i>Iedere = elke</i> ('each') <i>Bruin zien = bruin zijn</i> ('to have a tan') <i>Vanonder = onderaan</i> ('at the bottom')

**Example 5b: presence/absence of non-standard or informal lexicon in the subtitles of two episodes**

Overall, both our findings and those of Serluppens (2007) indicate that the decision to retain some lexical variants and occasionally some items of sentence grammar is quite random. Sometimes perfectly standard but informal words as commonly used in Flanders such as 'luidop' and 'gazet' are hypercorrected into a word that is more commonly used in the Netherlands. Sometimes this hypercorrection goes as far as to result in the change of a common Dutch word used in both Flanders the Netherlands such as 'ieder' (every, each) and 'vanonder' (underneath) into a synonym ('elk' and 'onderaan', respectively). Generally, however, it is the Belgian standard Dutch more formal variety that dominates open intralingual subtitling, which is therefore much like open interlingual subtitling in its tendency to correct speakers, be it with a slightly higher degree of tolerance for non-standard, regiolectal words (a difference that is difficult to quantify). For the public television channel (the VRT), this is in line with the guidelines laid down by Hendrickx (1998), the station's language advisor. It would therefore certainly be stretching the data to suggest that the stated trend towards the use of a kind of standardised

regiolect (Brabant-Antwerp) in informal speech is also infiltrating written language through subtitling.

## 5. Study 3: What the viewers want and need

### 5.1. Method

In 2006 we carried out a large-scale survey into the needs and wishes of Flemish viewers with regard to intralingual subtitling on television. 454 adult viewers watched a number of carefully selected clips with and without subtitles from the project corpus, and were asked to express their opinions on the desirability or undesirability of subtitling and on the extent to which they understood the fragment. The poll was organised in four major Flemish cities. These were the province capitals located in four different regiolect areas: Antwerp (for the Brabant regiolect), Ghent (for the Western regiolect of East Flanders), Bruges (for the Western regiolect of West Flanders), and Hasselt (for the Limburg regiolect). The respondents were from the cities themselves or the surrounding areas. In all four regions the test groups consisted of a balanced sample of men and women from three age groups. The youngest respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, the oldest group was between 60 and 70, and the middle group between 35 and 55 (all in 2006). The educational level of the respondents varied from low to average and a small minority of people had a university education.

	<b>BRUGES</b> (n=120)		<b>GHENT</b> (n=120)		<b>ANTWERP</b> (n=108)		<b>HASSELT</b> (n=106)		<i>TOTAL</i>
	men	women	men	women	men	Women	men	women	
young	25	15	24	16	20	20	27	13	<i>160</i>
middle	12	29	17	22	10	25	8	18	<i>141</i>
senior	18	21	18	23	17	16	20	20	<i>153</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>51</i>	<b><i>454</i></b>

**Table 7: The respondents**

All the respondents were asked to watch 7 clips from the corpus (see also Table 8). These consisted of two excerpts with speakers of the Brabant-Antwerp regiolect, one with subtitling and one without, two excerpts with speakers of the western regiolect (representing both West and East Flanders), with and without subtitling, and two excerpts with speakers of the Belgian standard variant, again one with and one without subtitles. To conclude, the informants were presented with one clip from the popular Dutch police series *Baantjer*, in other words, with speakers of a rather informal Northern standard variant from The Netherlands. *Baantjer* is always subtitled on Flemish television, but we used an excerpt without subtitles.

1	Brabant-Antwerp regiolect with subtitling
2	Brabant-Antwerp regiolect without subtitling
3	Western regiolect with subtitling
4	Western regiolect without subtitling
5	Belgian standard Dutch without subtitling
6	Belgian standard Dutch with subtitling
7	Northern informal standard Dutch without subtitling

**Table 8: The selection of clips presented to the respondents<sup>23</sup>**

In none of the clips was intelligibility hampered by background noise, poor articulation or other extra linguistic factors. The questions with each of the clips asked about the intelligibility of the excerpt as well as the viewers' attitudes towards the subtitling. Intelligibility was tested on the basis of a five point Likert scale going from 'excellent intelligibility' to 'not at all intelligible'. In other words, we tested reported comprehension: the informants were asked to indicate which variants they believed they had or had not understood. Carrying out tests in order to check whether this 'reported' comprehension corresponded with what the informants had in fact understood was beyond the scope of the present research. With regard to their appreciation of the subtitles, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they found the subtitles 'necessary', 'useful', 'superfluous' or 'disturbing' (they were allowed to tick off several options). In the case of excerpts without subtitles, the respondents were asked whether they thought subtitling would have been desirable, with a choice between three options: 'yes', 'no', 'I don't care'.

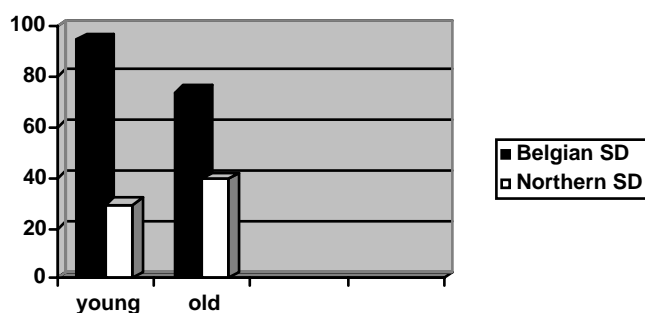
## **5.2. What the viewers understand**

The first and most general conclusion was that subtitling, irrespective of the linguistic variant it translates, promotes comprehension. All subtitled excerpts were understood significantly better, in statistical terms, than those without subtitles. This is true for all regions and all subgroups, but this finding hardly comes as a surprise. Anyone who watches films on DVD knows that conjuring up the subtitles facilitates viewing, and research into the use of subtitling for language learning is expanding quickly within the branch of Translation Studies focusing on audiovisual translation (Gambier 2007).

Our overall intelligibility testing further indicates that the senior group scores are significantly lower than those of the two other age groups, and this holds true for excerpts with and without subtitling. The comprehension scores for the northern standard Dutch film clip constitute the one striking exception to this rule: in this case the older respondents' scores are not significantly lower than those of the others. Their 39% score for 'excellent intelligibility' is the same as the 39% obtained by the

middle group but higher than that of the group of young respondents, where only 29% ticked off 'excellent intelligibility' for the Northern Dutch standard variant (the difference between 39% and 29% is not, however, statistically significant).

Notable is also the marked difference between reported comprehension of the Belgian Dutch variant versus the Northern Dutch variant (both without subtitling). The Belgian standard Dutch is obviously much more accessible for Flemish viewers than the Northern variant, even though these variants constitute the same language. No more than 36% of the respondents claim to understand the Northern Dutch variant without any problems, whereas 87% of them understand the southern, Belgian variant of Dutch. This difference is highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 242.4095$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Figure 2 shows the percentage scores for 'excellent intelligibility' of the Northern and Belgian Dutch variants for the oldest and the youngest age groups. The figure demonstrates graphically the big difference with respect to the two linguistic variants, but also the difference in the reactions of young and old.



**Figure 2: 'Excellent intelligibility' for the youngest and the oldest group of respondents for Belgian and Northern standard Dutch (SD)**

We are here faced with the curious finding that although the older generation presents with significantly lower intelligibility scores for 6 out of 7 excerpts (i.e., for the regiolects and the Belgian standard variant), the same group performs much better than the younger group for the Northern Dutch variant. What might explain the fact that the older generation understands informal northern Dutch more easily than the other groups? One tentative explanation is that the older respondents are more familiar with the northern variant because of more extensive exposure to it, especially through television, a number of decades ago. Since the advent of commercial television channels in Flanders in the early 1990's the viewing habits of the Flemish public have, indeed, changed drastically. In the 1960s and '70s many Flemish viewers used to watch Dutch television, but that is no longer the case today (cf. Goossens 2000; the 100 currently most popular Dutch language television programs today

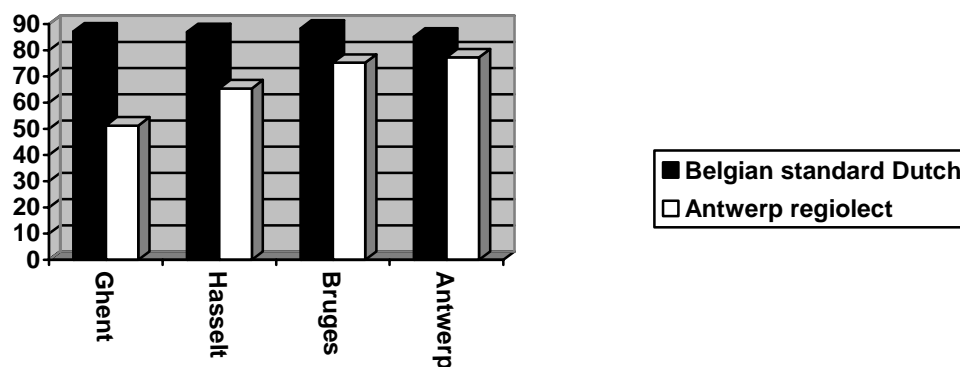
are all broadcast on Flemish television stations, see <http://www.cim.be/tele/nl/index.html>). Another factor may be a change in attitudes. It is possible that the younger generation increasingly perceives northern Dutch as a different language, more so than the older generations. This in turn may have an impact on younger respondents' evaluation of how much of the northern Dutch variant they actually understand. In any case, the intelligibility scores for northern Dutch are relatively low for all generations. No more than 29 (young) to 39% (old) of the informants state that they are perfectly capable of understanding northern Dutch, whereas the scores for non-comprehension range from 36% (old) to 43% (young). These scores certainly support the current intralingual subtitling policies for fiction: northern Dutch is always subtitled and this obviously meets viewer demand.

Another linguistic variant that deserves special attention given its prominence on Flemish television is the Brabant-Antwerp regiolect. This regiolect is spoken in everyday informal conversation by Dutch speakers residing in the centre and the north of Belgium. They make up the largest population base (with the city of Antwerp as its main town, cf. the map in the appendix). In two of our excerpts, one with and one without subtitles, the speakers used the Brabant-Antwerp variant. As in the other clips with regiolectal speech, the variant used was not the local dialect, but a Flemish Dutch variant showing clear interference from Brabant-Antwerp dialect related characteristics on the level of phonology and morphology. For the excerpt without subtitles (which contained an interview with a caretaker from the Antwerp zoo) we obtained remarkable results: the respondents who resided in the regions of Antwerp, Hasselt and Bruges showed very similar scores for intelligibility, even though Hasselt and Bruges are well outside the area in which Brabant-Antwerp regiolect is commonly used. On average, 73% of the people in these three groups of respondents indicated that they understood the fragment perfectly well. There were no statistically significant differences between the results for 'perfectly intelligible', 'not at all intelligible' or the intermediate categories. However, the respondents from Ghent showed significantly lower scores than viewers from Antwerp and the other regions. Here the percentage for good comprehension is just 51 %. At first sight, the scores from Ghent seem to meet expectations. It is only natural that people from East Flanders who were presented with an exogenous variant should have lower scores for intelligibility than people from Antwerp who were confronted with an endogenous variant. It remains to be explained, though, why viewers from Bruges in West Flanders and Hasselt in Limburg apparently understand an exogenous variant as well as viewers from Antwerp for whom this variant is indigenous.

This rather surprising finding of similar response patterns for viewers from Antwerp, Bruges and Hasselt is somewhat mitigated if we compare the scores for comprehension of the Brabant-Antwerp regiolect with the scores for Belgian standard Dutch. Comprehension of (Belgian) standard

Dutch by viewers from Bruges and Hasselt (as well as Ghent) is significantly higher than their comprehension of the Antwerp regiolect, while for viewers from Antwerp there is no difference between the scores for comprehension of standard Dutch and Antwerp regiolect. Thus, whereas Antwerp viewers' levels of understanding of the Antwerp and Belgian standard variants are comparable, Flemish viewers from the other regions understand the standard language better than they do the Antwerp variant.

Figure 3 is based on the percentages for 'excellent intelligibility' for the Belgian standard Dutch excerpt and the Antwerp excerpt, both without subtitles. It visualises the differences in intelligibility for these variants for viewers in the four different regions. The only difference that is not statistically significant is that for the Antwerp group ( $\chi^2 = 2.0582$ , n.s.). The difference in comprehension for West Flanders (Bruges) is significantly smaller than the difference for East Flanders (Ghent) and Limburg (Hasselt), but it is significant all the same ( $\chi^2 = 6.8657$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ).



**Figure 3: Percentage of viewers in the four regions who claimed perfect comprehension of Belgian standard Dutch and Antwerp regiolect**

The intelligibility scores for the Brabant Antwerp regiolect, then, do not yield straightforward conclusions. The majority of our respondents ticked off 'excellent intelligibility', but for Ghent the percentage amounts to a mere 51%. For Hasselt, Bruges and Antwerp the percentages are 65%, 75% and 77% respectively. The majority of our Flemish respondents appear to be sufficiently familiar with the Brabant Antwerp regiolect for there to be virtually no problems with comprehension. Still, there is a relatively large minority for whom this regional variant does pose problems. Depending on the region, one fourth to one third of the informants (and almost half of the group from East Flanders) signals moderate to serious problems of intelligibility. If one compares these results with the intelligibility scores for the Belgian standard Dutch variant, it is obvious that understanding the Brabant Antwerp variant may be more problematic for Flemish viewers than many producers of fictional programmes appear to think (cf. Table 6).

For the respondents from the regions of Bruges and Ghent we also checked where they positioned their own western regiolect with regard to both the Brabant-Antwerp variant and the Belgian standard Dutch variant. We could not do the test for Hasselt because our corpus contains no fiction programmes with speakers of the Limburg regiolect (significant in itself, perhaps). The intelligibility scores are clear. Both Bruges and Ghent yield intelligibility scores that are significantly higher for the western regiolect than for the Antwerp regiolect (Bruges:  $\chi^2 = 9.9472$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ; Ghent:  $\chi^2 = 22.7423$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), but this is not the case when comprehension of their own western regiolect is compared with that of the Belgian standard Dutch variant (Bruges:  $\chi^2 = 0.3479$ ,  $p \leq 1$ ; Ghent:  $\chi^2 = 1.8492$ ,  $p \leq 0.20$ ). These results demonstrate that people in West and East Flanders understand both their own and the standard variant better than the Brabant Antwerp variant.

### **5.3. What the viewers want**

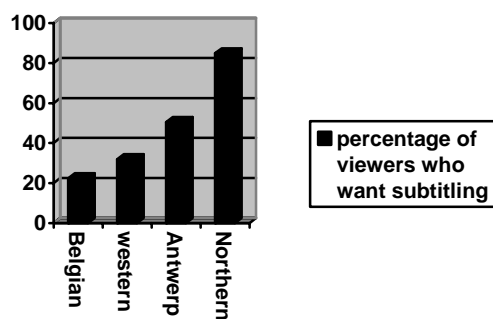
Flemish overt attitudes regarding the desirability of intralingual subtitling are anything but clear-cut, and our data therefore cannot really provide TV producers and policy makers with straightforward answers. Still, the results are interesting enough in themselves.

In response to the excerpts with subtitling, 59% of the respondents reacted positively: 10% indicated that the subtitles were 'necessary' and 49% found them 'helpful'. Conversely, 41% of the respondents reacted negatively to the subtitles: 31 % thought they were superfluous and 10% found them disturbing.

For the excerpts without subtitling, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought subtitles might have been desirable. Here, too, the reaction was very divided: 47% of all respondents stated that subtitles would have been desirable, whereas 38% did not want any, and 15% did not care one way or the other. The regional differences in the responses are minimal and never statistically significant: The positive reactions 'win' everywhere, but the margin is extremely small (e.g., in Ghent the results are: 51% in favour, 36% against and 13% indifferent). This lack of unanimity is not only found for all regional groups, it is present in all age groups as well. The need for subtitling is clearly linked to the variety of Dutch that is presented to the respondents, but for most fragments the opinions are divided once again. There is only one remarkable exception to the latter finding, i.e., the clip with northern Dutch without subtitles. With regard to this one clip there is a striking unanimity in response: no less than 85% (381/449 reactions) of the respondents want subtitling for the informal northern Dutch variant. The demand for subtitling is significantly higher for northern Dutch than for

the Belgian standard variant (100/446 reactions or 22%;  $\chi^2 = 350.8302$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ , see Figure 4).

At first sight the clip with Belgian standard Dutch also elicits unanimous responses, since most people (61%) do not want any subtitling. However, when we consider the scores for the people who were indifferent to subtitling, these reveal an essential difference in the viewers' evaluations: Only 6% of the respondents claim to be indifferent when it comes to the presence or absence of subtitles for northern Dutch (the lowest "indifferent" score overall), whereas 16% are indifferent regarding the presence or absence of subtitling with the standard Belgian standard variant. In other words, only when it comes to northern Dutch do the Flemish ranks close: a large majority want subtitling and hardly anyone remains indifferent to the issue.



**Figure 4: desirability of subtitling for four different varieties of Dutch**

In the case of the regiolects, the demand for subtitling is higher than for the Belgian standard variant, but considerably lower than for the Dutch variant from the Netherlands (see Figure 4). Another remarkable finding is that the demand for subtitling is higher for the Antwerp regiolect than for the western regiolect. Half of the Flemish respondents (50%) want subtitling for the Antwerp regiolect, whereas a mere 32 % signal that subtitling would be desirable for the western variant. Still, these conclusions should be corroborated by further research, since the present data are based on questionnaires with one excerpt without subtitles per regiolect only. Without going into further detail, we also wish to point out that all regional groups report a lower need for subtitling for their own variant than for the exogenous one.

A comparison of the scores for 'intelligibility' and 'desirability' shows that they are quite consistent. The variants that appear to cause the most serious comprehension problems are also those for which the respondents indicate that subtitling would have been desirable. The groups that stand out because of higher percentages of comprehension problems (the older respondents, and respondents from Ghent) also want more subtitling.

## 6. Concluding remarks

In recent years, both Dutch and Flemish academic journals have published extensively on the convergence or divergence between northern and southern Dutch, and the expansion of interlanguage in Flanders. Research has shown that formal Dutch in Flanders has evolved towards northern Dutch, especially on the lexical level (cf. Grondelaers, Van Aken, Speelman & Geeraerts. 2001). With respect to informal Dutch, by contrast, the opposite trend has been recorded: Flanders has been focusing increasingly on its 'own' linguistic centre of late, more specifically on the dialectal region of Brabant, which comprises the regions of Flemish Brabant and Antwerp for Flanders (Goossens 2000, Jaspers 2001).

The Brabant regiolect (or Brabant IL) appears to be gaining visibility and acceptability to such an extent that De Caluwe (2002: 58) feels he can claim that "the development and spread of *tussentaal* (IL) in Flanders amounts to a process of autonomous Flemish standardisation that appears to ignore the discourse of conversion between North and South that has been maintained for so long in education and through the media" (our translation).

Our research into the practice and evaluation of intralingual subtitling on Flemish television provides a new angle on this evolution and on the dynamics of Dutch in Flanders. Our findings reflect the instability of the present situation as well as the difficulties involved for those involved in the subtitling process.

The corpus of Dutch language TV programmes broadcast by the Flemish television channels VRT and VTM shows that subtitling policy *in fiction* appears to mirror the changing linguistic relations in Flanders. Programme makers and producers seem to believe that Flemish viewers have become alienated from northern Dutch and therefore need subtitling of programmes in which informal northern Dutch is spoken. This supposition is irrefutably supported by our reception results: all viewer groups indicate that they have great difficulty understanding the informal northern Dutch variant and state that subtitling is required in this particular case. Another remarkable finding is that the older generation shows intelligibility scores comparable to those of the youngest group for northern Dutch only, whereas they consistently report more comprehension problems with the southern varieties than our younger respondents. This could mean that Flemish familiarity with northern Dutch is indeed diminishing.

Another linguistic variant that deserves separate mention is the ubiquitous Brabant Antwerp regiolect. The choice for regiolectal rather than standard language in fiction programmes is no doubt strongly determined by genre-related requirements, since realistic series or soaps will try to reflect current linguistic practice (Geeraerts et al. 2000). This does not explain,

however, the dominance of the Brabant Antwerp dialect/IL in such programmes, nor why this variant is not subtitled. These findings can only be explained as symptoms of the above-mentioned process of "autonomous Flemish informal standardisation" (see above, De Caluwe 2002). But to what extent is such an evolution indeed taking place? Do all Flemings understand informal language with a Brabant colouring? Our data offer some insight into the overall passive knowledge of this variant, but our findings can be interpreted in two different ways. A large majority of Flemish viewers understand Brabant Antwerp regiolect (or 'intermediate language', IL) perfectly, but on the other hand, and depending on their region of origin, one fourth of the respondents (or up to half the respondents for East Flanders) states that they experience difficulties in understanding the excerpt in which the Antwerp IL is spoken. This group's passive knowledge of the variant is obviously still limited and insufficient for a good comprehension of the material viewed. What is more, only the respondents from the 'central region' itself, i.e., the Antwerp group, report equally good comprehension of the Belgian standard Dutch variant and Antwerp IL. For the groups from West Flanders, East Flanders and Limburg this is not the case. On the contrary, they report significantly fewer comprehension problems for the Belgian standard variant.

Today subtitling practice in *non-fiction* is much closer to official Flemish language policy and its (continued) promotion of the standard Dutch variant (with a strong northern slant) than that in *fiction*. Regiolectal variants are subtitled (be it not systematically), whereas northern Dutch usually is not. For Flemish viewers outside the Brabant Antwerp area current subtitling practice in *non-fiction* therefore probably meets their linguistic needs better than subtitling policy in *fiction*. Nonetheless it is striking that in non-fiction programmes the Brabant Antwerp varieties are subtitled less frequently than the western regiolects. This could point to certain presuppositions among programme makers and producers, who might thereby indirectly confirm or even strengthen the (perceived) dominance of Brabant IL in Flanders. And yet, the demand for subtitling among our respondents was higher for the clip with Antwerp regiolect without subtitles than for the one with the western regiolect. A question that deserves further consideration in this respect concerns the impact of the position taken up by regiolectal language use on the continuum between dialect and standard language. Are 'intermediate' variants more likely to be subtitled when they are closer to the dialect end of the continuum, or the other way round?

The material analysed so far does not allow us to draw any final conclusions, but the issues involved are quite complex. What is more, they are not only tied in with current trends in language change and how it is perceived, but also with technical issues, audience preferences and commercial issues – if we consider the matter from the point of view of AVT.

As we pointed out above, some programme makers opt for subtitling as a 'safe' way out, even if subtitling practice (in both how and what is subtitled) reflects a degree of bias and uncertainty, and is co-determined by the difficulty of delineating what is dialect, what is IL and what will be understood. In one episode (from the programme *Het leven zoals het is*), a speaker was subtitled across the board, even when his speech was close to the standard variety, whereas in another episode (from *Man Bijt Hond*) another speaker received subtitles only when his speech bordered on the dialectal. Offering subtitles for all televised material for whoever wants them, an option favoured by both the teletext and the open subtitling departments at VRT, may indeed be the best option. At this time, teletext can provide such a service, but digital television is on the rise. Using the possibilities of digital TV also circumvents another issue: 888 subtitling on teletext is still directed at its main target group, the deaf and hard of hearing audience, and is being offered to others 'on the side'. However, in contrast with open subtitling, SDH teletext subtitling in Flanders has opted quite radically in favour of the inclusion of IL/dialectal lexicon into its subtitles (as its stylesheet confirms) at the explicit request of its viewers (Dewulf & Saerens 2006). Indeed, for them subtitling is the only way of keeping in touch with language variation and change. As we write, the intralingual subtitling policy at the VRT is to provide open subtitles only when there is no teletext subtitling available. Teletext subtitling and the translation service collaborate, use the same server and software, and exchange files. This leads to the unusual situation that stylesheets and language varieties are mixed to an even greater degree and with different degrees of tolerance than they were at the time that our corpus with exclusively open subtitles was recorded.

We have come full circle. AVT is a form of translation that evolves quickly because of its ties with technological change and because it always involves the translation or transfer of hybrid (semi written, semi spoken) language variants. This is why the study of AVT has a wealth of material to offer to (socio)linguistic approaches to language, whereas insight into linguistic variation and change, rooted in historically determined socio-political contexts, can offer explanations for specific instances of AVT practice, as our study into open intralingual subtitling practice in Flanders has shown.

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<sup>1</sup> Open subtitles are not encoded into the video signals and are instead burned on the images or broadcast with them. "They are an integral part of the audiovisual programme since they cannot be removed and are always visible on the screen, like subtitles on a cinema film." (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 249)

<sup>2</sup> The map of the Netherlands and Belgium in the appendix gives a good idea of the linguistic layout of the two countries.

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank Mr. Frank Van Coppenolle and Mr. Kurt Kerkhofs of the New Media Service of the University of Antwerp for their help in obtaining the corpus.

<sup>4</sup> The divisions into genre are based on Creeber & Miller (2003).

<sup>5</sup> The following categories were distinguished: old, elderly, middle-aged, young, child.

<sup>6</sup> That is, role in the programme at hand, for example: journalist, interviewer, clerk, patient, housewife etc.

<sup>7</sup> That is, where was the scene enacted or where did the interview take place: at school, at a zoo, in an office, in the street etc.

<sup>8</sup> In the three programmes with partial subtitling, the ST is motivated by background noise in one case (one of 8 instalments of *Kaat & Co*). For the other two (2 instalments of *Het Geslacht De Pauw*), we are dealing with a programme that can best be defined as fictional reality TV. Its characters use a lot of regionally coloured language, and it would seem that subtitling policy in this case follows what happens in the case of non-fiction. For details, see Vandekerckhove et al. (2006).

<sup>9</sup> Only very occasionally do characters from the Netherlands appear, and their contributions to the programme remain minimal.

<sup>10</sup> These were the popular programmes *Thuis* (VRT) and *Familie* (VTM).

<sup>11</sup> These were *De kotmadam* (VTM), *De wet volgens Milo* (VTM), *Kaat & Co* (VRT), *Kinderen van Dewindt* (VRT) and *Urbain* (VRT).

<sup>12</sup> The only non-fiction programme with complete subtitling is an instalment of *Typisch Belgisch*, a reality TV show ('documentary' genre) with 20 speakers of Brabant intermediate language and two Standard Belgian Dutch speakers.

<sup>13</sup> In one case (from a newscast in which two other Northern Dutch speakers are not subtitled), the speaker's articulation is very unclear; in the other one, the speaker is actually singing a Dutch song.

<sup>14</sup> They do get teletext subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing on the public channel. However, at the time the recordings were made (2005), SDH was hardly publicised on TV and directed almost exclusively at its specific target audience. This appears to be changing as we write (2008). All viewers are now encouraged to use teletext subtitling and the service is publicised more widely. We actually believe that the research results of this study, discussed at a press conference at University College Antwerp on 6 June 2007 may have contributed to this evolution.

<sup>15</sup> Our corpus of non-fiction programmes contains two speakers of Northern Dutch with subtitles. In one case the person is singing, and in the other comprehension is hampered by background noise.

<sup>16</sup> Hendrickx regularly publishes on linguistic variety in change in the Netherlands and Belgium (see, for instance, Hendrickx 2000 and 2003)

<sup>17</sup> We received replies from these three companies: Option Facilities, Miles Linguistics and The Subtitling Company; we would like to take this opportunity to thank all our interviewees for their time and interest

<sup>18</sup> The tolerance for non-standard vocabulary appears to be slightly higher than that for non-standard grammar. However, some words are replaced in the subtitles of this particular episode of *De Reporters* even though they are IL, not dialect, and should not cause comprehension problems. Examples are: the substitution of *zot* by *gek* ('mad'), 'chance' by *geluk* ('luck') and *stylo* by *balpen* ('biro').

<sup>19</sup> Serluppens analysed the intralingual subtitling of 6 non-fiction episodes of the public channel VRT (*Man bijt hond / Man bites Dog*, of October 3, 16, 17 and 18, 2006 and March, 15 and 16 2007).

<sup>20</sup> This appeared from a meeting with a mixed SDH and hearing public, a test group, assembled by VRT teletext on 14 November 2007.

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<sup>21</sup> Personal communication by Susanne Verberk, independent subtitler, e-mail dd.20 February 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Only Hilde Dehollogne of *Option Facilities* claimed they would even retain dialectal grammar and vocabulary (especially if a word is clarified by the visually conveyed information), but added that such words are italicised. The idea behind this is that it "would be wrong to correct or clean up" people's speech, and that the "couleur locale" of reality programmes must be retained. Marc De Neve of *Miles* was more careful, claiming that spoken language as well as dialectal forms are "suggested" in the subtitles (unless the customer insists on them being included); as for IL: "If we were to italicise IL in Flemish [meaning: Dutch] subtitles, entire subtitles would be in italics." Susanne Verberk, then of *The Subtitling Company*, confirmed that intralingual subtitles render what people say, not what they should have said in Standard Dutch. *The Subtitling Company* too would occasionally use italics for words that lean more towards the dialect than what she calls "General Flemish", but grammar is always corrected. Mr. Muylaerts of the VRT confirmed the tendency to remain as close to the source text as possible, but only words that are common in Flanders as opposed to the Netherlands are acceptable for the public channel. 'Dialect words' are replaced by standard language synonyms. The VRT never uses italics to signal dialectal forms. However, only the VRT's Mr. Muylaerts was also tolerant of generally accepted 'Flemish' words in **interlingual subtitling**, stating that the Flemish viewer should not be confronted with typically Dutch words (the example given is *hardstikke*).

<sup>23</sup> The clips were presented in random order, not in the order presented in this table.