The interarticulation of class and gender: The center-periphery fractal at work in language practices in Limburg, the Netherlands

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The Dutch southeastern province of Limburg is viewed as markedly distinct, culturally, religiously, and linguistically, from the rest of the country. This idea of Limburgian distinctiveness is shared, and mutually reinforced, by both Limburgians and Dutchmen outside the province. Within the Dutch context, Limburg is one of very few regions where local language is spoken with pride in informal as well as informal settings. Speaking Limburgian works as a strong index of local belonging: by speaking Limburgian instead of Dutch, speakers distance themselves from 'Holland', the administrative, economic, and cultural center of the Dutch nation state. Similar 'lower-level' center-periphery antagonisms can be found within Limburg as well (cf. Eckert 2011).

Taking a 'Third Wave' sociolinguistics perspective (Eckert 2008, 2012) but also building on insights from Bourdieu (1977), the paper shows how speakers, by (de)selecting elements from their linguistic resources, index social types that, in turn, are linked to center or periphery. More specifically, the paper argues that particular linguistic features and body techniques are iconically linked to classed and gendered social types that are mobilized in performing Self and Other, where Self and Other can be linked to center or periphery, depending on social actors’ punctuated (in time and place) experiences of who they are (or wish to be).

The data used in this paper are drawn from public, carnival-related, performances in which the Holland-Limburg opposition, but also local Limburgian oppositions, as well as gender and class antagonisms are articulated. Through the stylized and often parodic language use in these performances, social actors simultaneously critique and reinforce dominant ideologies of language, class, and gender.

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