

Standard language, linguistic variation, and foreign language pedagogy: the case of Dutch as a foreign language in Belgium

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Introduction

- Issue at stake:
 - Place of linguistic variation vs. standard language in foreign language pedagogy
- Issue investigated in various pluricentric languages:
 - Dutch, French, English, German
- This talk specifically deals with:
 - Linguistic situation in the (pluricentric) Dutch-speaking area, i.e. the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium)
 - Standard language vs. variation discussion in L2 Dutch pedagogy

Structure of the talk

- Linguistic situation in the Dutch-speaking area
 - Standard language (ideology) and variation
 - Pluricentric languages
- What constitutes a suitable language variety for non-native speakers (i.e. L2 learners)?
 - Dutch as a foreign language in Belgium (French L1)
 - Official documents (programs), teaching materials, teachers' beliefs and practices
- Conclusions

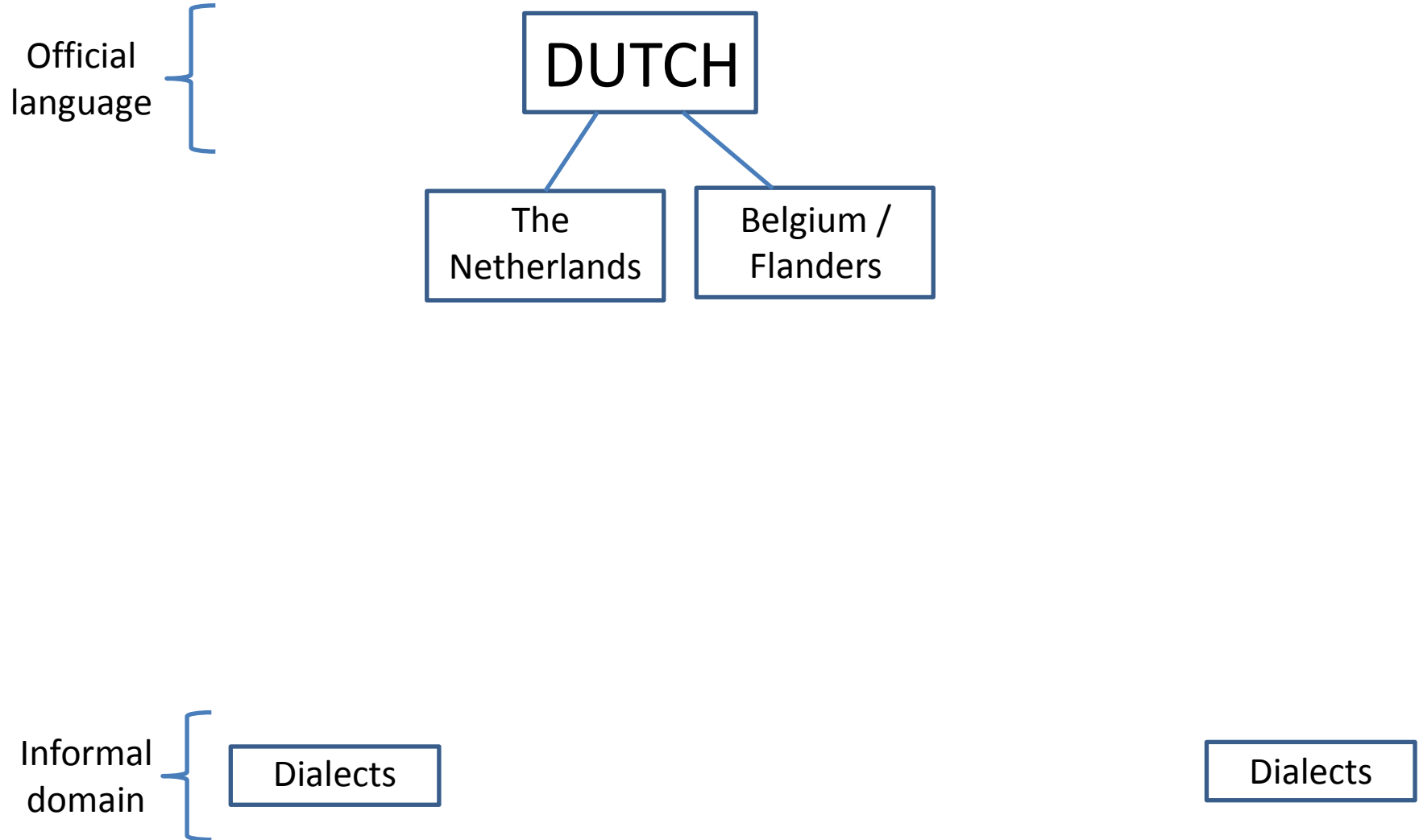
The Dutch-speaking area



Dutch-speaking area

- The linguistic situation in the Dutch-speaking area seems quite clear
- The Dutch-speaking area consists of ...
 - two geographic regions ...
 - The Netherlands
 - North-Western part of Belgium, i.e. Flemish community
 - which have the same official language
 - Dutch
- But when we look at actual language use, a more complex picture emerges (Geeraerts 2001, Geeraerts & De Sutter 2003)

Linguistic situation in the Dutch-speaking area



Netherlandic Dutch vs. Belgian Dutch

- Dutch spoken on both sides of the Belgian-Netherlandic border is not a totally homogeneous language
 - Differences in pronunciation, lexicon, grammar (morphology, syntax)
- Long lasting debate as to the status of both « Dutches »
 - Netherlandic Dutch: **standard language**
 - Normative status / point of reference
 - Prestige, codified, used in a wide range of (official/formal and private/informal) domains
 - Belgian Dutch: deviation / **non-standard variety**
 - Less prestigious, no specific grammars or dictionaries, fewer functional domains
 - Lots of normative works trying to implement the Netherlandic standard language in teaching Dutch (L1/L2) in Belgium

Netherlandic Dutch vs. Belgian Dutch



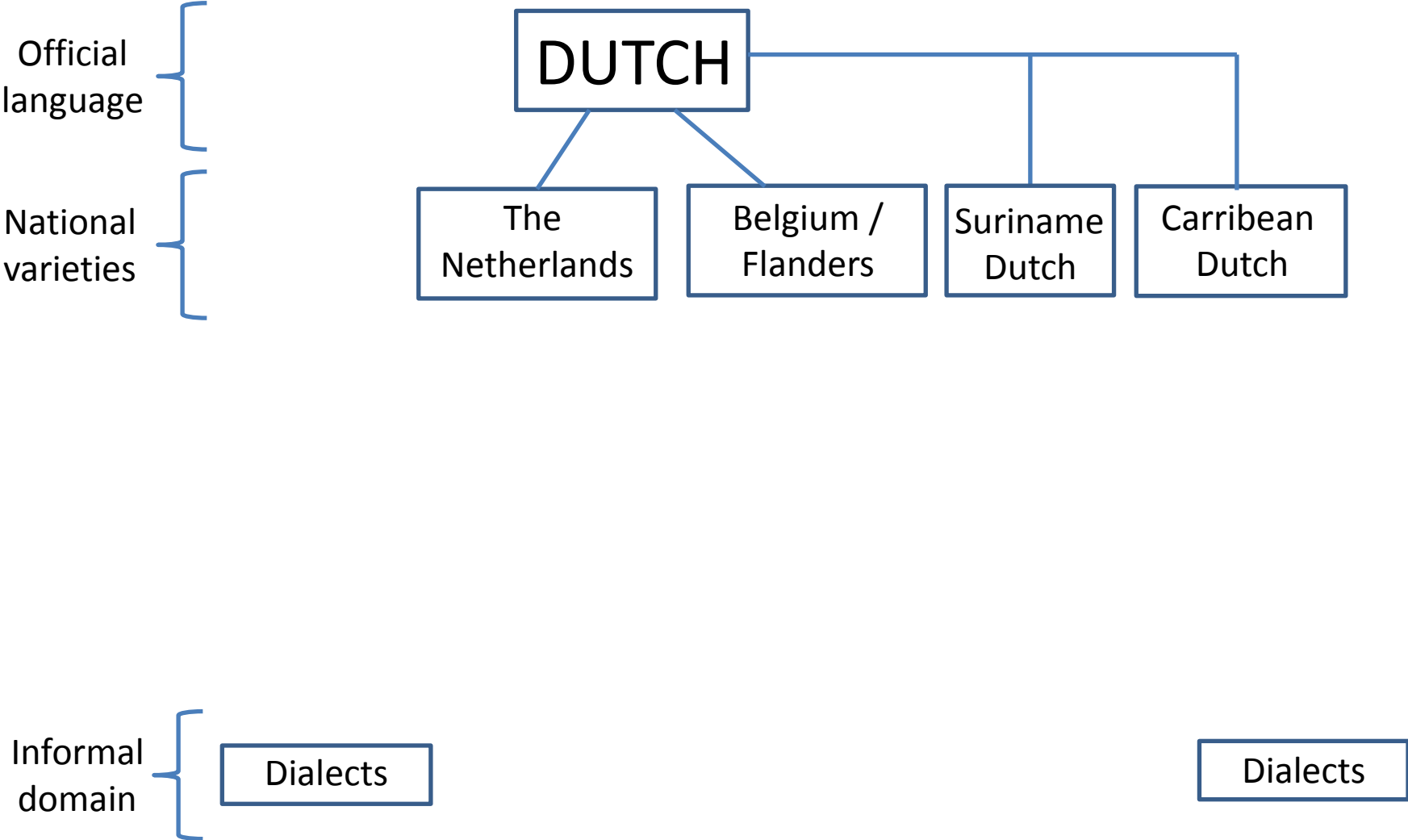
Netherlandic Dutch vs. Belgian Dutch

- Implication for L2 pedagogy:
 - Belgian Dutch seen as unsuitable for L2 teaching
 - Official programs:
 - Focus on the standard language (« Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands »), i.e. Northern Dutch
 - No room for variation, i.e. Belgian Dutch
 - Teacher training:
 - Standard language, attention to Belgian Dutch as a deviation from the norm / standard language
 - Teaching materials:
 - Standard language

Netherlandic Dutch vs. Belgian Dutch

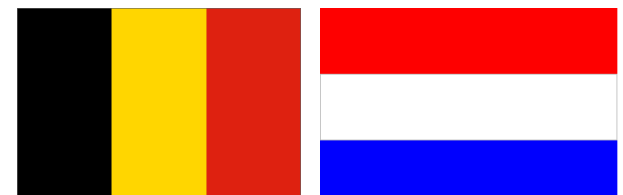
- Slow evolution from 1970-1980's
 - Standard language: ideological construct, myth
- Milroy (2001: 543):
 - « [Standard languages] are not vernaculars, and no one speaks them exactly: the standard ideology decrees that the standard is an idea in the mind – it is a clearly delimited, perfectly uniform and perfectly stable variety – a variety that is never perfectly and consistently realized in spoken use »
- Belgian Dutch began to be seen as a full-fledged variety of Dutch
- Dutch as a **pluricentric** language (Clyne 2004: 296; Kloss 1978)
 - « The term pluricentric was employed, fairly incidentally, by Kloss [...] to denote languages with several interacting centres, each providing a national variety with at least some of its own (codified) norms »

Linguistic situation in the pluricentric Dutch-speaking area



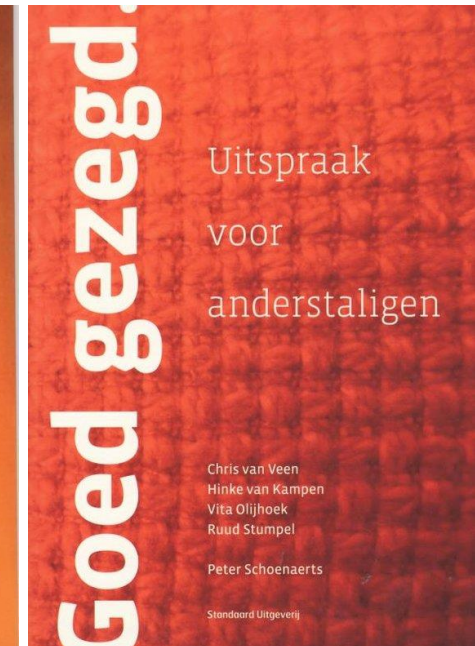
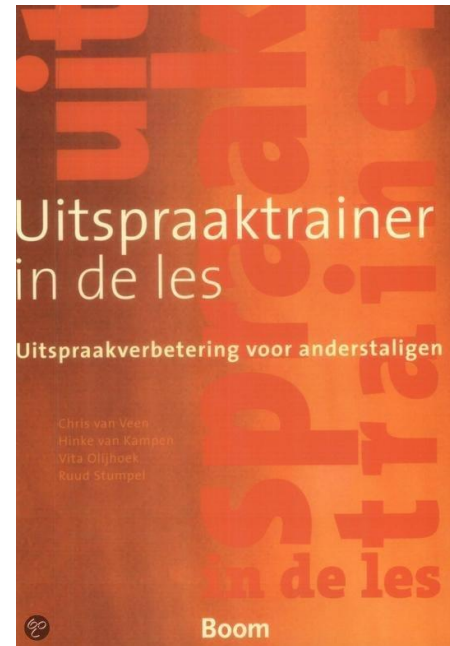
Dutch as a pluricentric language

- Teaching materials: room for Belgian Dutch and variation



Dutch as a pluricentric language

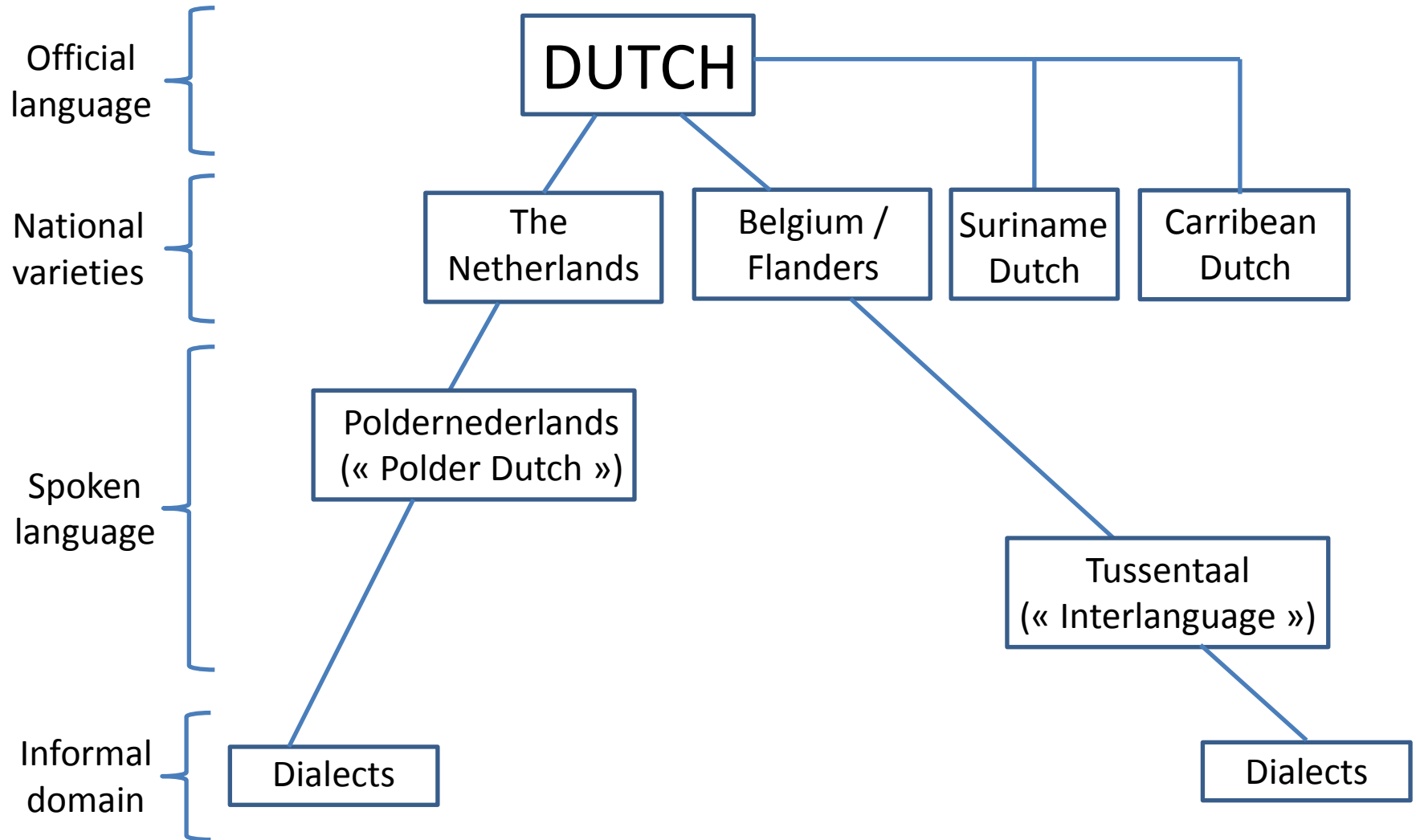
- Netherlandic Dutch and Belgian Dutch version of the same text book



Dutch as a pluricentric language

- Official programs:
 - Notions of « general language » and « intelligibility »
 - Distinction between production / perception
 - Productive side = language variety of the community with which the learner will have the most contacts
 - Receptive side = other language varieties in the Dutch-speaking area
- Teachers:
 - Many teachers have conservative attitudes
 - Only focus on the standard language
 - Lack of self-confidence? Influence of their own experience as L2 learners (= teach as taught)? Scarcity of resources?
 - Little attention paid to variation, or only receptively

Linguistic situation in the pluricentric Dutch-speaking area: the whole picture



Variation within national varieties

- Both in Netherlandic Dutch and in Belgian Dutch, you have « in-between » varieties
 - Poldernederlands: special way of pronouncing specific sounds (e.g. *maar*, *mee*, *tijd*) in the Netherlands
 - Interlanguage (« tussentaal »): informal variety of Belgian Dutch which lies « in-between » the standard language and the dialects + specific grammatical, lexical, and phonological features (Absilis, Jasper & Van Hoof 2012)
- Other forms of variation: sms / chat language, youth language, a.s.o.

Variation within national varieties

- Poldernederlands appears in some text books (e.g. pronunciation courses) >< Interlanguage (« tussentaal »)
 - Not well-documented yet, not yet used in written communication (only an oral medium)
 - Little teaching resources, e.g. Dutch++ (<https://dutchplusplus.ned.univie.ac.at>)
- Teachers are reluctant to exposing L2 learners to those varieties, especially Interlanguage
 - Used in a limited number of functional domains
 - Because of its use for in-group interaction, one may even wonder if native speakers would find interlanguage a suitable variety for non-native speakers
 - If teachers do expose L2 learners to Poldernederlands and/or Interlanguage, then only in receptive tasks (+ contrastive approach with advanced learners and/or in higher education)

Conclusion

- Overview of the linguistic situation in the Dutch-speaking area and its implications for L2 pedagogy
- Differences between language varieties in terms of
 - Status and use within the Dutch language community
 - Their prevalence in official documents and text books
 - Focus on prestige varieties, even if there is also a growing interest in varieties besides the standard language
 - Scarcity of resources paying attention to variation and non-standard varieties of Dutch
 - Their presence in the classroom
 - Reluctance of teachers to teach other varieties than the standard language
 - Distinction between production and perception

Thanks for your attention!

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