Quantitative perspectives on syntactic variation in Dutch dialects
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Foreword

There are many reasons why I have enjoyed this PhD research so much. Perhaps most importantly, a PhD project presents the unique opportunity to delve into unchartered intellectual territory for four consecutive years. Time to explore new ideas and to integrate them meaningfully in existing knowledge. Having mostly worked on relatively small projects as an independent software developer for a number of years, it has been a true pleasure to finally be able to investigate a problem in depth without being limited by various mundane restrictions—i.e. time and money. The global nature of scientific research constitutes another attractive aspect of performing a PhD research. I have presented this work in the context of conferences, extended visits, seminars, workshops and student courses in Canada, Italy, France, Belgium and throughout the Netherlands. Additionally, I have been able to attend various summer and winter schools, conferences and workshops in Italy, France and throughout the Netherlands. I hope that—in the context of this work—a positive correlation between my research results and travel time may be found.

There are many people who I wish to thank for their support during the last four years. First of all, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the continuous guidance, support and feedback that I have received from my promotors Hans Bennis and John Nerbonne, and my co-promotor Sjef Barbiers. I have always felt truly fortunate to be able to further develop my scientific research skills under the wings of your esteemed expertise. Thanks, Hans, John and Sjef!

I have performed my research in the context of the Determinants of Dialectal Variation (DDV) project. I would like to thank the core DDV members at the University of Groningen—Wilbert Heeringa, Charlotte Gooskens, Renée van Bezooijen and Hermann Niebaum—for their many valuable insights from which this work has benefited significantly. I especially wish to thank Wilbert Heeringa for his enduring and accurate support and feedback in all dialectometrical aspects of my research. I also want to thank Peter Kleiweg for e-sharing his cartographic expertise with me, in relation to his excellent but unpronounceable dialectometrical software package RuG/L04. Thanks, Wilbert, Charlotte, Renée, Hermann and Peter!

During spring 2006, I was fortunate to be able to visit the Linguistics department of the University of Trieste. This period has certainly been one of the highlights of my research. I wish to thank Giuseppe Longobardi for his generous hospitality and support to make my stay as worthwhile and pleasant as possible. I also thank Gabriele Rigon for our many walks and talks in and around downtown Trieste, and his skilled help in battling Italian bureaucracy. Similarly, I wish to thank Cristina Guardiano for warmly welcoming and guid-
ing me through the cities and universities of Modena and Reggio Emilia. I also would like to thank Chiara Gianollo for our professional and personal discussions. Thanks, Pino, Gabriele, Christina and Chiara!

At the Meertens Instituut, I shared room 1.76 with Margreet van der Ham and Alies MacLean. No secret was ever safe in this social centre of the institute! It has been a lot of fun, getting to know you. Furthermore, Margreet regularly helped me out during my struggles to better understand the SAND data. Of course, I would like to thank all other Meertens colleagues as well. You have made me feel at home from day one. I have always especially enjoyed our daily lunchtime discussions. Thanks, Margreet, Alies, Mathilde, Reina, Hilje, Jan-Pieter, and everyone else I should mention here!

For the sake of completeness, I also wish to thank everyone else who somehow contributed to the current work in any way. I obviously haven’t credited you appropriately in these acknowledgements. Truthfully thanks, I’m sloppily sorry!

Oddly enough, this dissertation would most likely not exist today if I hadn’t been unorthodoxly manoeuvred towards this position by Edwin Brinkhuis. Back in spring 2003, Edwin was the software development coordinator at the Meertens Instituut. He arranged an introductory meeting for me with Sjef Barbers. I was an independent software entrepreneur at the time and always interested in challenging projects. Edwin advised me to introduce myself at the Meertens Instituut to assess the possibilities of being contracted temporarily as an external developer for one of their upcoming linguistic projects. However, to my surprise, Sjef started our meeting with the words “So… Marco, what do you already know about this PhD project?”, to which I open-mindedly replied “Not much, apparently”. One hour later I left the Meertens Instituut with a revived desire to further develop my scientific research skills. The scholarly flame has been burning ever since. Thanks, Edwin!

My loving thanks are due to my family for always encouraging, supporting and believing in me. I realise that I owe you much of what I have become. Thank you, dear Mom, Dad, Karin, Kiki and all other relatives of our small but precious family!

Finally, and above all, my most cherished thanks are due to my wife Jet Haasbroek for her passionate and wholehearted love, encouragement, understanding, patience, guidance, support, and everything else. Thank you, Jet! You are the best thing that ever happened to me. I proudly dedicate this work to you, to honour the love we have found during these years.