

# How popularization and quantification may benefit language variation research(ers)

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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 on language variation. However, in my presentation I will explain why this sentence is in fact 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 accommodation in speech production, a potential driver of language change (Trudgill, 2008).

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 (Wieling et al., 2023; Rebernik et al., submitted). 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. I will illustrate the effectiveness of the mobile laboratory by showing that an acoustically sensitive formant perturbation experiment (conducted at the Noorderzon festival in Groningen in 2022) in which people change their pronunciation in realtime can be successfully conducted in this laboratory (Rebernik et al., submitted).

In addition to visiting festivals to conduct and popularize our research, we also have developed various novel initiatives to interest a general audience in our work. I will illustrate a few of these initiatives, including the development of a Risk-like board game focusing on regional language variation, and a Massive Open Online Course focusing on Gronings. While I will only touch upon these, Raoul Burke and Hedwig Sekeres, respectively, will present these two initiatives in more detail at this conference.

During the final part of my presentation, I will also highlight some of our quantification efforts. Specifically, I will introduce a novel and easy-to-use acoustic-only technique (Bartelds et al., 2022; Bartelds & Wieling, 2022) for quantifying pronunciation variation. Besides being a useful component in a dialect localization experiment at festivals, it allows for a detailed view into dialect variation at various levels of aggregation. I will illustrate the potential of this technique using recently collected data on dialect variation in the Netherlands.