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# 'Met mijn voeten in de klei' – With My Feet in the Clay: The Impact of a Music Performance in a Local Variety of Low Saxon

**Abstract**

When speakers of a small language switch to a dominant language, the cultural sector sometimes remains a last bastion of use and a token of a minoritised identity. In the north-eastern parts of the Netherlands, some artists perform in the local variety of Low Saxon. Since this variety is considered stigmatised and in clear decline, it is timely to investigate the potential impact of music performances on the audience's language attitudes with the question: How does a music performance in Gronings affect the audience's attitudes towards the language? To what extent can live performances be taken into account for language revitalisation work? This study highlights the potential increased awareness of participants towards a local linguistic identity as well as the complex feelings of attachment towards it. It investigates consequences such as expansion of vocabulary and actions such as a willingness to use or learn Low Saxon after a positive musical experience. The study uses mixed methods of analysis with quantitative data collected through questionnaires and interviews with audience members. The research sheds light on the importance of a cultural community of practice which functions as a safe space for language revitalisation.
**Keywords**: revitalisation; language attitudes; music performance; minoritised languages; Low Saxon

## 1 Introduction

The links between language and culture become particularly complex when linguistic communities shrink and artistic performances take on a symbolic role of a rare expression of survival (Sparling & MacIntyre, 2023) or are part of ethnocultural activism (Huang, 2023; Suleymanova, 2018). For many linguistic minorities, cultural expressions are emblematic of a set of traditions that may be considered a subculture, sometimes classed as folkloric, underground (Fleming, 2004; Joubert, 2011) or at the margins (Cornips & De Rooij, 2015). At the same time, music is a powerful conveyor of emotions which can surpass linguistic proficiency (Hanby, 2022) and thus reveal itself a powerful tool for languages that undergo a process of attrition. The importance of music in language revitalisation work has attracted some attention from music scholars who investigate, for instance, the music genres that have the potential to attract younger speakers (Cru, 2017) and thus be the first point of contact for people who are not acquainted with a lesser-used language (Moriarty, 2011). In addition, linguists who have worked on language revitalisation have considered songs a valid support for the development of teaching material (Vallejo, 2019). More recently, a more holistic approach is noticeable in the debates on the maintenance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Hanby, 2022) which integrate linguistic as well as cultural elements.

Despite the growing interest and a recent special issue on the topic (Echeverria & Sparling, 2024), further multidisciplinary collaborations are needed to reach a fully-fledged theorisation that goes beyond the idea of using music as a way to increase visibility and expand language domains for endangered languages (Grant, 2018). Language and music both represent facets of cultural diversity and face similar challenges for the maintenance of non-mainstream practices. Indeed, musical extinction, similarly to language death, is

a great cause for concern and even a tragedy for humanity (Marett, 2010). In this way, applied ethnomusicology as well as revitalisation research, take on a transformative approach that aims at the decoloniality of linguistic and music practices (Przybylski, 2018) and treats cultural attributes of minoritised communities not as an object of the past and a sign of forgotten or hidden practices but as a practice that reveals and constructs speakers' identity and creates one's own values and place of belonging (Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012).

Having drawn some parallels between linguistic and musical diversity, and considered contemporary trends that go beyond the representation of old traditions, this article contributes to this field by concentrating on the impact of a specific event, a music performance, on the audience's view of an endangered language. Music performances are construed as part of social practice (Agha, 2006) which can go beyond the symbolic function and create a space for the community to gather and embrace a joint practice and in some cases, reconnect with the language and its speakers. In this way, language is not considered in isolation from its socio-cultural environment and the locus of research is the community exchanging cultural as well as linguistic capital (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). The aim of the paper is to evaluate the impact of music performances for the perception of a minoritised language (Low Saxon or more specifically, Gronings) in order to determine the effects of musical performances on audience's attitudes and understand how music can act as a motivator for language learning. The emphasis is put on the way in which a music performance can affect the perception and use of a linguistic variety that has long been stigmatised in the Netherlands.

## 2 The Context of a Minority Language in the Netherlands

The language under scrutiny is a variety of Dutch Low Saxon spoken in the city and the province of Groningen. Referred to as Gronings (or *Grunnegs* in Low Saxon), it is mostly considered a local dialect or a regional language (*streektaal* in Dutch). Other varieties are spread across the Eastern part of the Netherlands, namely in the provinces of Drenthe, Overijssel, Gelderland and some parts of Friesland and Flevoland (Bloemhoff et al., 2013). Low Saxon is most commonly spoken in rural areas with a number of speakers estimated at 1,798,000 in 2013 (Kuiken & van der Linden, 2013). More locally, a study carried out in 2003 revealed that out of the 574,500 inhabitants of the province of Groningen at the time, 34% self-reported a proficiency in Low Saxon, even more so in combination with Dutch which indicates a high level of bilingualism (Schmeets & Cornips, 2022). More recent research acknowledges the lack of precise figures, and estimates that, based on the decline in intergenerational transmission calculated through statistical analysis, only 14% of the younger generation use Dutch and Low Saxon at home in Groningen (Buurke et al., 2024).

At the level of language policy, the Netherlands recognises two official languages (Dutch and Frisian) and two regional languages (Limburgish and Low Saxon) on its European territory (Kuiken & van der Linden, 2013). Low Saxon is recognised by the Charter for Minority and Regional Languages but not to the same extent as Frisian meaning that, like Limburgish, Low Saxon remains a language at the margins in Dutch society (Cornips & De Rooij, 2015). Low Saxon varieties are considered dialects, often assumed to be dialects of Dutch (Buurke et al., 2024), and they do not represent a separate ethnic identity but a regional one. They are not used in any formal domains and are only sporadically present in the education system. However, one domain where the presence of Low Saxon, along Frisian and other non-standard Dutch varieties, has been noticed is the cultural domain, whether in theatre or music productions. While originally focusing on romanticised folklore and feelings of patriotism, 'dialect music' or *streektaalmuziek* (Grijp, 1995) encompasses an impressive array of genres (folk, country, cajun, mainstream pop music, indierock, jazz, funk and rock) and a long list of performers in Low Saxon: Ede Staal, Pé Daalemmer & Rooie Rinus, the Tuutjefloiters, Lianne Abeln, Wia Buze, Imca Marina, Rodney Elzer, Hans ten Have, Bob Heidema, Edwin Jongedijk, Bert Schaap, Henk Scholte, Alex Vissering, Ger Warin, Marlene Bakker, Jan Henk de Groot, Hister, Bökkers, Mooi Wark, VanDeStraat and others. Varied in linguistic and music styles, dialect music is cross-generational since as Grijp (1995, p. 306) puts it: 'The young people go [to the party tent] for the music, the old people for the language, which reminds them of the old days' (*De jongeren komen er [de feesttent] voor de muziek, de ourderen voor de taal, die ze aan vroeger doet denken*). Hence, it seems particularly relevant to investigate further how this music practice can foster a transgenerational interest,

in other words how it can be used for language revitalisation, by exploring further the attitudes of concert goers towards Gronings.

## 3 Theoretical Considerations and Approach of the Study

### 3.1 Language Attitudes, Language Planning and Interventions in Revitalisation Work

Language revitalisation intends to develop measures that help increase the knowledge and use of languages that are considered in danger of extinction. Those are often characterised as small, lesser-used, marginalised often reflect a more localised reality. For language revitalisation to be successful, it requires local grassroots movements and the speakers' interest and support (Sallabank, 2013). A way to evaluate this support is through the concept of language attitudes which covers the speakers' views, feelings, and intended actions towards certain languages or varieties (Garrett, 2010). Language attitudes are usually divided into cognitive, affective and conative components, which relate, for endangered languages, to the level of consciousness of the existence of a language and community, to the attachment to an endangered language and to potential actions that individuals are willing to take to safeguard the language.

As the past few decades of work on language revitalisation have shown, increasing the number of speakers for a language and improving proficiency is no easy task. General language planning activities include corpus planning, acquisition planning and a category of status planning which covers prestige planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). As part of language planning, interventions have been created as deliberate sets of actions designed to improve the knowledge, use, transmission, and vitality of an endangered language, often through educational, community-based, or technological means (Hinton et al., 2018; Hornsby & McLeod, 2022). For instance, immersion programs and intergenerational initiatives such as language nests, are proven techniques that help develop proficiency as well as a boost positive attitude to learning and using the language in later years (O'Hanlon & Paterson, 2019). Interventions are important because they can help develop language skills but they also lead to new behavioural habits (Albarracín et al., 2018). Earlier intervention studies that link exposure to attitudes have been longitudinal in design (O'Hanlon & Paterson, 2019). The current work is different in that it explores the effect of a singular intervention (a music performance) rather than prolonged exposure.

Contexts of minoritisation differ across languages, meaning that language planning and intervention measures need to be adapted to the social environment of the communities. Indeed, some endangered languages still benefit from a high degree of prestige and are well supported in some niched contexts. The notion of community of practice, as used in sociolinguistics (Davies, 2005, p. 560), emphasises the importance of membership 'as being created and maintained through social practices (linguistic or otherwise) at a local level, rather than global categories being imposed on individuals'. It combines a mutual engagement with a joint activity and a shared repertoire. Some languages thrive in small communities of practice but can still fail to be characterised as relevant on a wider scale. Thus, communities of practice have revealed themselves useful to unpack the dynamics and interactions of language use, social contexts and group membership which can all have an influence on positive language attitudes in some limited contexts. An aspect that endangered language speakers often have in common is a sense of worthlessness of their language and negative feelings about being speakers. It is a fact of many European minority language speakers that a process of stigmatisation has negatively affected the speakers who have internalised a sense of inadequacy and sometimes even shame. Some communities of practice have not only worked as places where minoritised languages are used safely by speakers but also a 'breathing space' (Fishman, 1991, p. 58) which is a 'demographically concentrated space where […] the respective language can be on its own turf, predominant and unharrassed'. Recently, Belmar and Glass (2019) have applied this concept of a 'breathing space' to virtual exchanges which allow a similar process of positive socialisation that brings a sense of safety. This dimension is important to consider when investigating a minority and endangered variety that can still be encountered in cultural contexts but is otherwise widely and nationally stigmatised.

### 3.2 Musicking 'Live' in a Minority Language

The present research focuses on music performances as spaces that connect speakers (and potential speakers) and could be conceived, from a language planning perspective, as a short and one-time intervention. More than a linguistic practice, a music performance is also an opportunity to showcase minority identities and portray them in a way that feels modern and alive. Ortiz (2021, p. 275) argues: 'Art forms […] require group work and cooperation, they could also strengthen collective identity and help to associate the language with play and socialisation'. In particular, music in a live setting has a strong potential for sparking interest even after a short period of exposure (Sparling & MacIntyre, 2023). Music gatherings also have a de-stigmatising effect which produces an enhanced sense of speakers' empowerment (Cru, 2017) that is attractive to younger speakers (Veblen & Olsson, 2002).

Minority music and language complete each other in a non-conforming and alternative performative act. Kazubowski-Houston and Magnat (2018, p. 384) conclude that 'reclaiming contested intangible cultural heritage [for minority language music] through performance constitutes a radical way of reimagining tradition that supports diversity, inclusivity and solidarity'. Research also shows that, in multilingual environments, songs in native languages provoke more emotional reactions than in second languages (Spanu et al., 2020) as they also highlight the link to local contexts. This 'musicking' creates a flow of emotions that has the potential of deeply affecting the audience creating 'a state of consciousness in which a person feels completely engaged, so deeply absorbed in an activity that one is carried along in harmony with the ongoing activity' (Sparling & MacIntyre, 2023, p. 48).

Joining together minority language and music manifests powerful community-building possibilities during live performances which serve as a way to demonstrate a sense of belonging in 'a more intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place' (Cornips & De Rooij, 2015, p. 84). Live performances establish a link with an audience and although audience creation and audience reach remain a challenge for indigenous languages, for instance, some success is acknowledged (Ortiz, 2021, p. 283) with, among other things, a strong commitment to language and culture, grassroots collaboration and engagement, social inventiveness and creativity. Identification of linguistic features then, rather than being an end in itself, acts as a catalyst for examining their role in the discourse within which it takes place (Clark, 2019). Doing music in or 'musicking' in an endangered language is also a manner to re-construct self-affirming identities in sometimes complex situations of minoritisation which lack state support, as in the Breton case (Dołowy-Rybińska, 2013). In the case of dialects, staging a local linguistic practice also proves to be an act of identity construction that reveals a heightened agency for the performers (Clark, 2019). When considering the links created between the performers and the audience when using a local language, it is clear that placing the often stigmatised language in an open space has the power of reversing the stigma (Dorian, 1987). The type of impact on the audience is particularly emotional because of the lack of status of the language and the way it can be rejected by outsiders. For instance, Magro (2016) shows how hip-hop can be a prestige-forming catalyst for Spanish heritage speakers in New York. This is the type of context that performers of music in minoritised languages face, whether in an activist frame of mind or not. What is less certain is how the audience is impacted and, more precisely, how language attitudes and linguistic proficiency are affected by a short event.

### 3.3 Project Description, Aims and Research Questions

This paper is the result of a research project funded by the HELLO grant of the faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen which supports collaborations between researchers and local partners working in Groningen. The research was done in collaboration with the Centrum Groninger Taal en Cultuur (CGTC) which organises varied cultural events and has connections with cultural actors in Gronings. The positionality of the researchers is that one researcher had experience as a part-time employee of the CGTC prior to the conduction of the research and neither of the researchers identifies as speakers of Gronings. The interpretations offered in this study reflect our own situated perspective as outsiders researchers in sociolinguistics.

The previous sections have offered an explanation of the theoretical framework interlacing music and language revitalisation with a focus on the concepts of language attitudes, language planning interventions

and a community of practice centred on live music. Focusing more precisely on the Gronings context, the questions guiding this research are: How does a music performance in Gronings affect the audience's attitudes towards the language? More specifically, how does the Gronings music community of practice affect the cognitive, affective and conative sides of attitudes? In what way can a short music intervention improve linguistic proficiency and language attitudes and how can it be used in language revitalisation work? Our hypothesis is that the experience of the concert brings a positive outlook on the language and helps foster feelings of separate local identity that have the potential to lead to a heightened desire to (re)claim the local language.

## 4 Mixed Methodology

This study employs a mixed methods approach, combining analysis of questionnaires and interview data to strengthen validity and depth. The questionnaire data provides a broad overview of patterns and trends across participants and events. It gathers information on different aspects of participants' background (proficiency, exposure and attitudes). The interviews offer deeper insights into individual experiences and perspectives. Together, these methods allow for some generalisation (albeit limited due to the sample size) and deep interpretation of the personal experiences with Gronings.

### 4.1 Events

Amongst the list of cultural events offered by the CGTC, three events were selected for data collection based on suitable dates and venue sizes. The first event was a community party in a recreation centre, which was free of charge and targeted inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Lewenborg. The audience was mixed and the marketing of the event did not mention music in the local language. Multiple bands performed, among which a band that sings cover versions in Gronings of famous pop songs. The second performance took place in a church in the village of Haren which is conglomerated with the city of Groningen. A group of musicians and singers performed Schubert in Gronings. The entrance fee was five euros and dialect music was central in the event marketing. The text had been professionally translated and was displayed on a screen so that the audience could read the text in Gronings while hearing it being performed. The event was sold out and the audience was very eager to participate in the study. The third performance was free of charge and consisted of two local indie bands playing in a record shop, Plato, in the city centre of Groningen on a busy shopping day. The audience was modest in size and varied in that it consisted of fans of the music and coincidental passersby. The three events were therefore different in the purpose, type and size of audience as well as music played. We do not differentiate between concerts as this was not the aim of the present study: all three events represent a music intervention in Gronings for the purpose of this study.

### 4.2 Participants

Participants were selected through convenience sampling meaning that anyone attending the concert could fill in the questionnaire and later on be invited for an interview. It has to be noted that through this method, volunteer bias is quite probable as mainly the people interested in or familiar with Gronings might agree to participate. However, since the methods rely on an intervention, the results bring details about the potential positive effects of the music performance on audience members' language attitudes. For all three events, 84 participants filled out the questionnaire. 61% of these participants were female ($n = 51$), 39% were male ($n = 33$). The participants had a mean age of 58 years ($sd = 12$, $min = 10$, $max = 80$). Of these participants, 53 stated that they identify as *Groningers*, seven indicated ambivalence and 24 participants did not associate personally with the city or province of Groningen. The variety of participants' backgrounds shows a mixed but quite middle-aged audience.

### 4.3 Questionnaires

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: a section to be filled in before the concert, that collected general information about proficiency and general language attitudes, and a section to be filled after the concert with questions evaluating the appreciation of the concert and further actions that could be taken to support the language. By separating the questionnaire into 'before the concert' and 'after the concert' sections, we aimed to treat the concert as an intervention and measure its effects on specific language attitudes. More specifically, the first section contained three main questions with a total of 26 sub-questions. Firstly, we asked for demographics such as age, gender, area of residence, and area of residence during childhood. We also asked about in-group identification, and asked whether they considered Gronings a part of their cultural heritage. Secondly, participants were asked to rate their proficiency in Gronings (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and the frequency and type of exposure to Gronings in their daily lives on a five point Likert scale. This allowed us to have a general profile of the audience members. Thirdly, participants were asked to rate their attitudes towards Gronings on a five point Likert scale with questions such as 'how important is the Gronings culture for you?' 'How important is it to keep the language alive?' (from 1 'not important at all' to 5 'very important'). After the concert, participants were asked to similarly rate their levels of enjoyment of the concert (from 1 'not enjoyed at all' to 5 'enjoyed very much'). Lastly, the questionnaire covered the conative component of language attitudes by asking how participants had been influenced by the concert (changes in motivation to study the language further, changes in willingness to communicate and self-perception of language skills) with questions such as 'how likely are you to keep listening to music in Gronings?' (with 1 'not likely at all' to 5 'very likely').

### 4.4 Interviews

The interview participants were recruited through the final question of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to leave their contact details if they wished to be interviewed. The details of 10 participants were collected and the interview data presented here come from four participants comprising two men and two women with an average age of 45 years old. They all grew up in or close to Groningen and were mostly passive speakers who heard the language in their youth and could speak with different degrees of fluency but recognised that the opportunity to use Gronings is becoming quite rare. The interviews were semi-structured and aimed at unpacking participants' life stories with an emphasis on language attitudes (cognitive, affective and conative sides), linguistic identity, knowledge and interest in cultural productions in Gronings. The data is analysed with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) which means that discourse indicating an expression of power relations between Gronings and Dutch, or the negative implications for the speakers, was interpreted in relation to the macro-level of the social context and the minoritisation of the linguistic community.

## 5 Quantitative Analysis

### 5.1 Presentation of the Results

In order to understand the impact of the concert in comparison with the effect of other variables, the correlations between 8 questionnaire components were calculated: these were *linguistic competence* (composite score of self-rated competence in four linguistic skills), *language exposure* (excluding the concert experience: composite score of three Likert-scale rated questions), *language attitudes* (affective, composite score of two forced-paradigm questions asked before the concert), *concert attitudes* (composite score of five Likert-scale questions), *conative attitudes* (translated as "actionable feelings": composite score of three closed questions after the concert), *self-identification with the in-group/Groningerness* (one question before concert), *perception of Gronings as one's cultural heritage* (idem), *whether the participants learned new vocabulary* and lastly *whether they recognized more vocabulary than they expected* (vocabulary recognition). These questions were the point of focus as they represented how the concert could have an influence

on linguistic proficiency and attitudes. A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted using SPSS, the results of which can be read in Table 1.

Overall, the results suggest a network of mutually reinforcing relationships, where exposure and positive attitudes enhance competence, enjoyment, and cultural/heritage connections. It is not surprising that competence is most strongly predicted by exposure, heritage connection, and in-group feelings but it is worth noting that 44 out of 84 ($= 52.38\%$) participants said they had learned new vocabulary, with two additional participants saying that they had only somewhat learned new vocabulary. Since this measure did not correlate with any other, this means across the board, whether people learned new vocabulary was independent of their current language proficiency, daily exposure, or whether or not they considered themselves Gronings. This finding indicates that even the more proficient speakers can learn new words at a concert.

When it comes to questions of identity ("do you consider yourself a Groninger?") and cultural heritage ("do you consider Gronings to be a part of your cultural heritage?"), a lot more participants gave answers indicating ambivalence (seven and twelve participants, respectively). This might be due to identity and heritage being more layered or complex concepts than enjoyment or language exposure, so participants may have felt it difficult to answer with a strict "yes/no". Overall, 53 participants ($63\%$) considered themselves Groninger, and 46 ($54.7\%$) considered the language to be a part of their cultural heritage. When it comes to the concert enjoyment, those who (i) had a lot of exposure to Gronings, (ii) considered themselves Gronings or (iii) had positive language attitudes rated the concert slightly higher than those who did not (small effect sizes, see Table 1. Overall, the enjoyment of the concerts was quite high, having been rated a 3.8 out of 5 on average. With the aim of the research being the evaluation of the impact of a music performance for revitalisation, the conative part of attitudes was focused on. The results indicate that there seems to be no relationship between concert enjoyment and either new vocabulary that audience members learn or their recognition of Gronings vocabulary.

**Table 1.** Outcome of bivariate correlation analysis in SPSS. Only statistically significant results are included. Effect sizes are in Spearman's rho, followed by the p-value.

| | Exposure | Language attitudes | Enjoyment of concert | Actionable feelings | In-group | Heritage | Vocabulary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Competence | .688 | .434 | – | – | .503 | .624 | -.281 |
| | <.001 | <.001 | | | <.001 | <.001 | .013 |
| Exposure | – | .398 | .263 | .283 | .325 | .465 | – |
| | | <.001 | .016 | .009 | .004 | <.001 | |
| Language attitudes | – | – | .235 | .294 | .421 | .522 | – |
| | | | .031 | .007 | <.001 | <.001 | |
| Enjoyment of concert | – | – | – | .310 | .241 | – | – |
| | | | | .004 | .035 | | |
| Actionable feelings | – | – | – | – | .226 | .242 | – |
| | | | | | .048 | .028 | |
| In-group | – | – | – | – | – | .564 | – |
| | | | | | | <.001 | |

Additionally, enjoyment of the concert does have a significant, positive effect on the actionable feelings of the audience towards Gronings (see figure 1). Those who enjoyed the concert were more likely to report an increase in confidence to use the language themselves. They were also more likely to want to learn more about the language through courses or music, and to be motivated to attend more concerts in Gronings. Not-

ably, conative attitudes were also affected positively by positive in-group identification, exposure (minus concert), and seeing Gronings as a part of cultural heritage. However, none of these had as strong an effect on conative attitudes as the enjoyment of the concert.

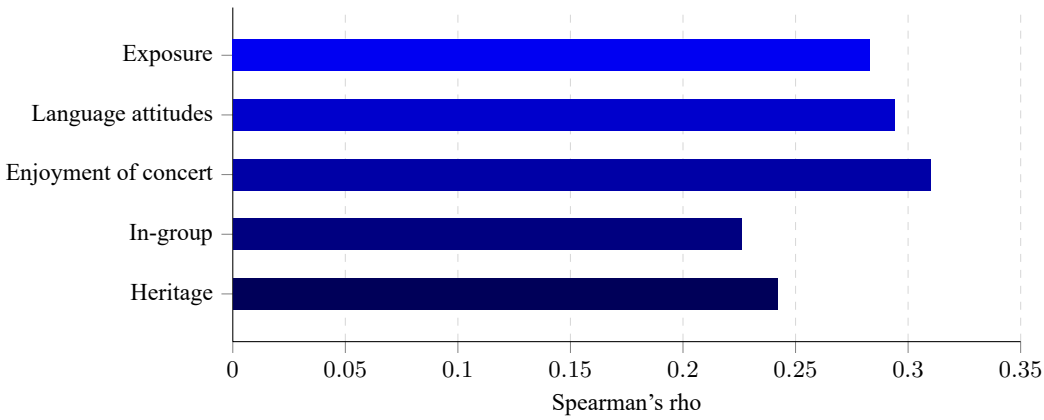



**Figure 1.** Correlations with Actionable Feelings.

### 5.2 Discussion

The different parameters included in this research have included important information about the participants background and perceptions of this variety of Low Saxon. The Gronings music performances investigated in this research appear to have a potential for revitalisation on two levels: firstly, most of the audience has increased linguistic proficiency by learning new words, meaning that there is a language-educational effect of concerts even after a short-term intervention. This is a promising finding as it indicates that even proficient speakers reaped the benefits of exposure to music in Gronings. Secondly, a positive concert experience can positively affect language attitudes and especially the desire to be somewhat proactive in and about the language. This means that the participants show more motivation and self-efficacy to interact with the language, outweighing all other factors such as pre-concert language attitudes, identification with the language and speaker community, and self-reported language competence. These results indicate that not only prolonged exposure, but also singular events or interventions can increase language proficiency and actionable feelings which have the potential to lead to an increased use of the language.

## 6 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis sheds light on the main discursive themes, analysed through Critical Discourse Analysis, that emerge from the data collected through interviews. It seeks to reveal further the different levels of cognitive, affective and conative parts of attitudes as well as the expression of linguistic identity in relation to a live performance in Gronings. To follow up on the information extracted in the questionnaires, the questions delved deeper into the appreciation of the concert and the emotions felt before, during and after the concert and how those can help counteract the stigma attached to this minoritised variety.

### 6.1 The Stigma as a Reason for the Language Decline

When asked about general attitudes and how Gronings is viewed, a difference is clearly marked along two axes: the generational dimension and the in-group/out-group perspective. Indeed, negative perceptions have affected the use of Gronings in previous generations and the stigma attached to it is still present for younger generations who do not feel like speaking or learning the language, as exemplified in (1) and (2).

(1) *Dat is toch in onze generatie best wel veel gebeurd. Dat je daardoor het dialect niet meer bent gaan gebruiken, dat, kinderen werden daarop aangekeken; dat was ja, dat was niet al te slim, niet al te snugger.*
'But it happened a lot in our generation, that you stopped using the dialect as a result, that, children were looked at; that was yes, that was not too smart, not too clever.'

(2) *Ik vind sowieso de Groningse taal leuk hoor. Ik vind: het wordt steeds minder gepraat, weet je wel, zoals mijn kinderen ook hoor, die verstaan het wel, maar ze vinden het een stomme taal om te praten.*
'I like the Gronings language anyway you know. I think, it is spoken less and less. My children hear it too, they understand it, but they think it is a stupid language to speak.'

The stigma refers to perceived lower levels of intelligence for speakers of Gronings and is a trait that has been recorded as part of the problem for the survival of this variety (Brouwer et al., 2024). This leads to the language itself being described as 'stupid' and to feelings of inferiority and avoidance for the young generation who want to be accepted more easily by the dominant society. It is also noteworthy that receptive skills are still present in the sense that the children in (2) understand Gronings even if they do not actively use it.

However, live performances and a public (and pleasurable) display of a use of Gronings can break stereotypes, as shown in (3) which was said by one of the band members:

(3) *Er zijn een soort stereotype beelden over de Groninger, weet je, het Groninger boertje, en ik heb juist ook door al die optredens,* […] *hoe rijk die cultuur is en hoeveel verschillende mensen er zijn die Gronings praten.*
There are stereotypical images about the Groninger, you know, the Groninger peasant, and I've seen precisely through all those gigs […], I've seen how rich that culture is and how different people who speak Gronings are.

In this quote, we can identify more precisely the origin of the negative connotations which can be linked to the disparaging view of the countryside ('the Groninger peasant'). In opposition, (3) emphasises the importance of culture for Gronings which, thanks to various performances, has led to an alteration of the cognitive representation of the language itself which becomes richer through the experience of a rich culture.

### 6.2 Emotional Attachments and Scales of Identity

Although the stigma attached to Gronings still exists, the speakers' attachment is discursively present as it helps to connect the community and show a local identity and sense of belonging as shown in (4) and (5).

(4) *Want Groningers onderling, denk ik dat die best wel een hele sterke band hebben. En als dan in Gronings denk ik wel dat je hebt geen kapsones, want daar houden we niet van. Dus praat alles in je moerstaal, want dat snappen we, en dat is één van ons.*
Because Groningers among themselves, I think those have quite a strong bond. And if then in Gronings, you don't have arrogance, because we don't like that. So if you say everything in your mother tongue, because we understand that, and then you're one of us.

(5) *Ik vind: je woont in Groningen, dus ik vind je moet ook een beetje voor je provincie opkomen.* […] *je hebt vaak vooral in zo'n dorp, daar praat iedereen Gronings en als je dan Nederlands praat, dan ben je vaak gelijk al een buitenbeentje ja, dan kom je van een andere planeet eigenlijk zeggen ze.*
I think: you live in Groningen, so I think you should also stand up for your province a bit. […] Often, especially in a village, everyone there speaks Gronings and if you speak Dutch, you are often an outsider, yes, you come from another planet, they say.

The two previous citations show that speaking Gronings creates a special connection between people, in opposition to outsiders who feel so removed that they are from another 'planet' in (5). The existence of the strong bond through a linguistic practice is particularly important for revitalisation work as a separate sense of identity ('you're one of us') is essential for the maintenance of the language in intergroup relations and

for efforts towards revitalisation. It is also an aspect that is maybe less obvious when studies focus on the lack of social prestige of the language but reveals itself essential when looking at the positive effects of a musical event which creates a joint community of practice between performers and audience members.

### 6.3 Music as a Community of Practice: A Safe Space for Stigmatised Dialect Speakers

The questions about the knowledge of the cultural domain, and music in particular, clearly showcased the extent of the Gronings music traditions as all participants could easily name artists performing in Gronings and express their preferences about which genres or singers. They all reiterated that they enjoyed the concert (whatever one it may have been) and especially because of a nice atmosphere. This effect of the concert was scrutinized in the discourse of one participant that insisted at various points of the interview on the idea of 'letting go' or loosening up (los laten) as seen in (6).

(6) (13'30): *Zo leuk, dat contact ook gelijk met het publiek, weet je. Je zag het ook, mensen kwamen allemaal los.* (G: 15'45): *Maar toen, met die muziek, ja, ik kwam zelf ook helemaal los, ook zo van oh, wat is dit geweldig! Helemaal och!* (G: 24'07): *Bij jezelf zijn en liedjes vertalen zoals zij, en dat herken je, daar heb je wat mee. Ja, dat geeft gezelligheid en dat geeft een lossigheid.*
(13'30) So nice, that contact right away with the audience too, you know. You saw it too, people were all loosening up. (15'45) But then, with that music, yes, I got all loose myself, also like oh, how great this is! Totally! (G: 24'07) Being with yourself and translating songs like those, and you recognise that, you have something to do with that. Yes, that gives sociability and that gives looseness (= freedom).

The feeling of 'letting go' or 'looseness' comes across very strongly in the participant's impression of the event. It can be understood as the effect of the concert on her ability to let go of social constraints and negative judgements in order to be her own self in connection with her community. This is close to the idea of a safe space, or a breathing space, for a minoritised language speakers who do not need to conform to other standards or languages, and therefore feel more true to themselves, and in synergy with speakers like them. This same participant goes one step further in explaining how she feels when asked to comment on the impact of culture more generally, as illustrated by (7).

(7) (Interviewer): *Hoe voelt u zich over cultureel erfgoed, dus boeken en muziek, toneel in het Gronings?*
(32'25): *Hoe ik mij voel?* […] *Met de voeten in de klei, ja.*
(Interviewer): How do you feel about cultural heritage, i.e. books and music, drama in Gronings?
(32'25) : How I feel? […] With my feet on the ground [clay], yes.

The clay (*de klei*) has an important significance in the North East of the Netherlands as the region extracted this material for the brick industry which made the region rich for a time but also led to a lot of inhabitants selling their houses and eventually feeling exploited and let down. This regional expression refers clearly to feeling grounded in the 'clay' or 'muddy ground' which is typical of rural areas around Groningen. Reading books, listening to music or watching plays in the local language has a grounding effect. In other words, culture, and here music performance, has a de-stigmatising effect through its strong connection to territory and identity.

## 7 Conclusion

This small-scale study set out to investigate the impact of music performances, taken as potential intervention-type of events, on the language attitudes of audience members and to evaluate how important music performances can be for revitalisation work. The use of mixed methods of analysis has highlighted various effects on participants: firstly, there is an educational effect in the sense that the audience members' vocabulary is expanded regardless of their language proficiency. Secondly, there is an effect on actionable feelings, or the conative side of attitudes, with a desire to learn and practice Gronings which is highly correlated with

a positive concert experience. Thirdly, the combined methodological approach sheds light on the complexity of language attitudes. The interview data unveils how negative connotations remain, in particular for the younger generation, but how they can change through exposure to music and culture. The strong sense of separate identity is felt during the live performance which has a clear community-building capacity. Finally, the desire for action and expression of the local identity is also enhanced by the feelings of being liberated from outside judgements and of feeling grounded when listening to a music performance with other members of the community.

This study is the first study, to our knowledge, on how language exposure during a single cultural event can affect language attitudes. It is clearly limited due to the small size of the sample and the restricted choice of venue and styles of music. It is also possible that the desire to increase the knowledge and practice of Gronings is only an after-concert effect that has no long-term repercussion on language use. Further research could widen the scope to include more participants and it could test the lasting effect of the desire to act by, for example, conducting follow-up interviews. Overall what this study has achieved, despite its limits, is to show the potential of a single intervention in influencing speakers in their knowledge of the language, their desire to take action and in their sense of belonging. The music performance represents not just a pleasant musical moment, but also the opportunity to expand proficiency, experience a shared community of practice that reveals itself a breathing space for stigmatised speakers who can be themselves ‘looser’ and ‘freer’. The study contributes to a better understanding for the field of language revitalisation of the importance of small steps and short interventions that count towards an enhanced feeling of community sharing that can help speakers not just in their acquisition of the language but in feeling good using it.

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