Social awareness of Dutch approximant r amongst children

In addition to the older alveolar and uvular consonantal types of r (taps, trills, fricatives), northern standard Dutch knows an approximantal type of r. Perceptually it resembles the approximant r that is found in many American and British English varieties. However, in Dutch its use is limited to syllable coda. Dutch approximant r has been around at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, but it recently started to expand at a fast rate, from the western part of the Netherlands to the more peripheral areas. Quantitative data indicate that children play an important role in this expansion. In this paper we will present the results of two studies which aimed at gaining insight into the social awareness of approximant r amongst children in various regions of the country. In the first study we investigated the attitudes towards approximant r as compared to alveolar and uvular r, using a matched guise approach in which one speaker read the same text with different combinations or r-variants. In the second study we used a questionnaire to probe children’s knowledge and feelings.