The future of variation in Dutch verb inflection; typology as a tool for scenario reduction.

Classical variation studies are concerned with describing and explaining language variation within the boundaries of a relatively small-scale time and place frame (cf. Labov 1966). Classical typological studies have very broad sets of languages across time and space (cf. Greenberg 1978) as their research domain. While in the former studies predictions on a more general level are avoided, the latter studies have often a too shallow view of the individual languages to make predictions that are of interest for variation studies.

In this talk I will try to bring the two together. I will sketch some scenarios for changes in Dutch verb inflection for which I will particularly assess the influence of migration, second language learning and language attitudes. These scenarios will be informed by comparable social and cultural changes in language groups like Scandinavian, Arabic, Quechua and Swahili (cf. Kusters 2003).

I will conclude that while there are linguistic limits to possible language change, actual changes depend largely on social and cultural processes. Although at the end of the day we are not able to predict directions of social and cultural change, scenarios of (co)relations between social and cultural tendencies and language changes can be sketched.

