The expansion of uvular /r/ in Flanders

In our contribution we will report on a study of the socio-geographic distribution of /r/ in the Dutch-speaking area of Belgium, based on a large-scale corpus of word list data collected by means of rapid anonymous surveys in 89 localities in Flanders (12 items per speaker, 20 items per locality, stratified for age and sex).

These data give rise to a number of dialectological and sociolinguistic observations. We will present a frequency distribution of the different variants of observed in Flanders, and analyse the data in terms of place of articulation (uvular-alveolar). The apparent time data shed new light on the change in progress from alveolar to uvular /r/ noted in the literature. A central question will be whether the spread of uvular /r/ has to be interpreted in the light of language contact phenomena and/or as an independent internal change.

Therefore we will pay special attention to the border zones with French, the Ghent region, the transition zone between alveolar an uvular /r/ in the Limburg province and a new uvular /r/ region in the North of Flanders close to the border with The Netherlands. Intensity of contact will be measured by means of geographical distance and socio-geographical parameters of contact.