

# Eus Limbörgs, Eus Echte Taol

*An exploration of the interplay between pride, fear, and global digital platforms  
in legitimating the regional language of Limburg (The Netherlands)*



**Master Thesis**  
**Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship**

Student: *Sophie Albert*

Student number: 9876022

Word count: *18.466 words*

Supervisor: *Niek van de Pas*

August 2025



**Utrecht University**

## **Abstract**

This ethnographic study explores how the process of legitimating the regional language of the province of Limburg, the Netherlands, in the context of late capitalism, shapes and is shaped by young people who are actively working on preserving and promoting Limburgian and its dialects. By sharing the perspective of Lotte, a social media influencer who uses Limburgian as her “brand”, and Sander, a linguistic activist working on digitalising the Limburgian language and dialects, I highlight the role of global digital platforms in their everyday lives as young Limburgians who feel a strong sense of pride in connection to their language whilst simultaneously fearing the loss of their language in a globalised world. In this thesis, I argue that the process of legitimating Limburgian has shifted from being a dialogue between the state and its citizens, to a conversation between the state, global actors, and Limburgian citizens.

Key words: Limburgian, Pride, Fear, Legitimation, Global digital platforms, Late capitalism

## Acknowledgments

My two-year journey to becoming an anthropologist opened my eyes to the diversity of cultures around the world and the beauty of learning to understand people from their perspective and context. It also led me to look at my own culture in a new way which allowed me to truly understand the importance of our regional language and its dialects to people's everyday lives. Funnily enough, one of the central themes of this thesis is what initially drove me to do this anthropology at home. Namely, the pride I feel in relation to being from Limburg and speaking the Limburgian language. I am proud to represent our culture and language in this way and I hope it will inspire others to join me in making Limburgian visible and heard.

I would like to thank my friends and family from Limburg for sharing my enthusiasm and passion for our language. You helped me stay motivated at times where I briefly lost focus. Thank you to my new friends in Maastricht for helping me integrate in the city, and a special shout out to De Kiesbar for providing me with a true crash course in *Mestreechs*. A big thank you to my aunt and uncle, Joke and Gerry. Saving snippets from the local paper to keep me in the loop on the current language movement is what truly got the ball rolling for me. Thank you to Zef for letting me attend the information session, organised by Hoes veur 't Limburgs, and for introducing me to fellow young Limburgians who are passionate about the language. Lotte and Sander, I cannot begin to thank you enough for sharing your time and stories with me. Safe to say, you have become close friends of mine in these past months, and I am excited to keep working with you both on our mission to legitimate Limburgian. Thank you to my sister for designing the cover for this thesis, and a massive thank you to Donnée and Dirk, my rocks throughout this sometimes “rocky” process. You were there throughout the highs and lows of this endeavour for which I will be forever grateful.

Last but not least, the process of writing this thesis was not always easy and I would not have been able to do it without my supervisor, Nieke. Thank you for always being understanding and helpful, and for having faith that my initial fuzzy and far-flung ideas will eventually turn out okay on paper.

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dad. Even though you're no longer here to witness my return home, I hope I did you proud by representing the culture and language you loved so much in this way.*

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# Prologue

*Gouvernement aan de Maas, Maastricht*

13 December 2024

Still half asleep, I'm walking down the Limburglaan towards the provincial government building of Limburg. As I'm waiting for a green light, I notice a banner hanging in the trees right in front of me. I recognize the logo and immediately grab my phone to take a picture. PLAT was here. The anonymous political action group has made the local news several times for their efforts to legitimate the Limburgian language. The banner states in big white and red letters: “*t Gouvernement moet PLAT! Besjerm eus Limbörgs!*”. Written in the dialect of Maastricht, it means: “The provincial government needs to become *plat*”. “*Plat*” is the Limburgian word for the regional language and its dialects. They are referring to the fact that, currently, local politics are done in Dutch rather than Limburgian. The second part, “*Besjerm eus Limbörgs*”, means: “Protect our Limburgian language”.

Today marks the first time the provincial government of Limburg will debate in the regional language. As well as being able to speak in their local dialects, the politicians will debate whether they are in favour of or against a five-year plan for the Limburgian language. This plan aims to make sure that the regional language meets all the conditions necessary for the application of Limburgian as a status III language under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). Currently, Limburgian holds status II as a recognised, regional language. If Limburgian is to achieve this higher status, the Dutch state will start to provide more funds for the province to encourage the use of the regional language in areas such as education, local governance, and legal practices.

The plenary hall is busier than usual. The normally rather empty seats for visitors are filled with people eager to attend the first debate in their own language. The politicians' desks all have tiny figurines with the Limburgian flag on them. “A special touch for this special occasion”, the lady next to me informs me. Both the audience members and politicians are provided with headphones should someone need translation. To my left, there are journalists from both local and national news stations covering the event, and right in front of me, I can see social media influencer, Lotte, creating content to share with her followers.

The congress is opened by six citizen speakers who each share their personal views on the importance of the Limburgian language. They all mention topics like the promotion of Limburgian

in education and working environments, as well as highlighting that the different Limburgian dialects are people's mother tongue, part of their culture, and therefore their heritage. The fifth and sixth speakers truly steal the show. The fifth speaker, an elderly man, proudly sings a Limburgian folk song as the opening of his speech. His pride and love for Limburg is tangible as he sings and speaks about the beauty of Limburgian and how he warmly remembers his mother singing to him in Venloos, his local dialect. The sixth speaker, a man in his sixties, has a similar way of connecting with the audience. Jokingly, he uses his time on the stand to promote his side business of selling T-shirts with Limburgian texts on them which is met by a burst of laughter.

Emile Roemer, the King's Commissioner of Limburg, goes on to start the debate. Roemer, who's originally from the Province of Brabant, proudly delivers his opening in Limburgian, as he has just finished following a course in Limburgian. Now, it's time for the parties' faction leaders' to share their views on the five-year plan. All but two of the politicians speak in their local dialects. I notice how, like some of the civilian speakers, a lot of the politicians mention feeling "*gruuts*", "*greuts*", or "*gruuets*" in their speeches. I am unfamiliar with these words and quickly, whilst struggling with the spelling, google them. Meaning "proud" in Limburgian, these speakers are voicing that they are proud of their local dialects and of being part of this important moment for Limburg.

Liberal party VVD speaks about the importance of inclusion and protecting the local language. The labour party PVDA argues that the survival of the Limburgian language is crucial for people to truly see everything the Limburgian culture has to offer. Political party Horizon mentions that minority and regional languages are under threat of dying out in this globalised world marked by migration. And, taking it a step further, local party, Oos Limburg, argues that, to them, the fact that Limburgians are not allowed to speak *their* language in *their* legal courts, and that there are employers who do not allow their employees to speak to their colleagues in Limburgian, could be considered neocolonialism.

It's evident to me that most parties recognise the importance of protecting the Limburgian language and are in favour of the five-year plan. However, some of the parties voice their concerns regarding the Dutch state playing a more active role in promoting and investing in the Limburgian dialects. The parties SP (Socialistische Partij/Social Party), PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid/Freedom Party), and FvD (Forum voor Democratie/Forum for Democracy) express their fear that this plan would "force" people to speak Limburgian. They argue that it would restrict people's freedom of choice. Another argument against the plan is that it would be too costly and would lead to people paying even more taxes than they already are. In the words of the PVV's representative: "We would

be wasting public money on an unrealistic dream". Having a different point of view to the VVD when it comes to inclusion, the SP goes on to warn everyone that we must not create inequity.

With these opposing views, the debate has truly begun. Whether the five-year plan will be accepted remains to be seen, leaving the spectators to patiently wait in anticipation of the final vote at the end of the debate.

# Introduction

*When life gets tough, you want to express yourself in Limburgian. Our language is who we are and what connects us. It's our heritage, but above all, it's a living thing. It's our future, not just our past.*

– Marlou Jenneskens (Provincial debate, December 2024)

To anthropologists, language is intrinsically connected to sociocultural practices and relations (Ahearn 2001; Schieffelin 1990). However, the way in which language is valued in sociocultural settings changes with time (Urla 2019). Attending the first debate in Limburgian sparked my interest in researching how the way in which people in Limburg value the regional language might have changed and what it looks like in the context of the current language movement working towards achieving status III under the ECRML.

In recent years, scholars have been studying the way in which language and its value to society has changed in a globalised world (Duchêne and Heller 2012; Urla 2019). Focussing on the role of late capitalism, with its expansion of free markets and use of global digital platforms, scholars have begun to pay attention to the commodification of minority and regional languages and how they are valued differently (Cameron 2000; Duchêne 2009; Heller 2010; Pujolar 2018; Urciuoli and LaDousa 2013; Urla 2019).

In their work, Duchêne (2012) and Heller (2012) argue that we live in a time where regional languages are experiencing a shift in frameworks of value. This entails the frameworks of “pride” and “profit” (Duchêne and Heller 2012). Where previously minority languages, spoken by a smaller percentage of a population in a specific region or country, were defended on grounds of their connection to people’s cultural identity and a source of pride, they can now be seen as a “valuable” asset to people, as speaking a “unique” language allows them to partake in new niche markets in the global economy (Heller 2011; da Silva and Heller 2009; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Urla 2019). For example, as Monica Heller (2001) shows in her research, in English-dominated Ontario (Canada), community development organisations now talk about creating businesses and jobs in which speaking French is an advantage rather than a disadvantage. This development recognises people’s ability to speak French as a “profitable” aspect next to being of cultural importance to Ontario’s bilingual community members (Duchêne and Heller 2012).

Joining Duchêne (2012) and Heller (2012), this thesis considers this shift from the perspective of Limburg and its regional language. However, I aim to provide more than an ethnographic example of this shift. The goal of this research is to show how the process of

legitimation is missing in the debate on language in late capitalism and how placing this process in the debate can bring a better understanding to people's relation to language in this particular time.

In this thesis, I talk about "legitimizing Limburgian" or the "legitimation of Limburgian" which refers to the process of legitimation. In social science, this process calls attention to the social actors involved in the way a social object, in this case a regional language, is construed as legitimate (Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006). Portraying the stories of two young people from Limburg working on the promotion of Limburgian as a "real" language, I focus on the intertwinement, rather than the dichotomy, of the frameworks of "pride" and "profit" to make my main argument. Namely, I argue that it is not merely the frameworks of value in relation to language that have changed in late capitalism, but also the process of legitimating a language.

In this thesis, I show how these young people in Limburg working with the language have found new ways to promote their language, both off- and online. Furthermore, I illustrate how they both use and acknowledge global companies and their digital platforms as well as the state's ability to recognise and legitimate the Limburgian language and its dialects. Their stories show how the process of legitimating Limburgian has become a collaboration between multiple actors including global digital platforms (i.e. Instagram, TikTok, Google Translate, and Wikipedia) which allows them to find new ways to use their agency and actively partake in legitimating their language.

Based on the theoretical debate and recent developments in Limburg, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

*How does the rise of global digital platforms in the context of late capitalism influence young people in Limburg, the Netherlands, promoting the regional language?*

### *Legitimizing Limburgian as a "Real" Language*

More than describing what is happening in Limburg as a language movement, what we saw during the provincial debate is a discursive change (Duchêne and Heller 2012). Watching Oos Limburg's faction leader take the stand to point out how Limburgians are not allowed to use *their* first language in *their* own legal courts made me realise that this debate was about more than preserving cultural heritage. It's a call for the state to shift its approach in the process of legitimating Limburgian and to use its power to recognise the Limburgian language as an important part of the province's culture and people's wish to use their language in more formal settings, such as legal courts and educational institutions.

Being able to speak the language of the nation holds a certain advantage (Duchêne and Heller 2012). It allows people to partake in state organised institutions such as schools and legal courts, which in turn allows them to access political and economic power (Duchêne and Heller 2012). In Limburg, people must speak Dutch in these institutions, whereas people in the province of Friesland can choose between their own language, Frisian, and Dutch. In this thesis, I look at how being in the process of moving towards achieving the same status as Frisian influences the everyday lives of people in Limburg who want their language to be recognised as a “real” language that they can use in places like schools and legal courts. However, it is important to note that this view does not reflect the entire population of Limburg, as there are people who consider Limburgian to be a dialect deriving from Dutch rather than Limburgian being a language with different Limburgian dialects.

During my fieldwork, I spent most of my time with people who regard Limburgian as a language. However, even though Limburgian is recognised as a regional language under status II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), some of the people I spoke to regard Limburgian as a dialect, not a language. In her work, anthropologist Lotte Thissen (2013) shows how local oppositions and dialectal differences in Limburg are an important part of the Limburgian culture. For example, Thissen (2013) argues that the opposition Roermond versus Venlo is a common opposition in daily discourse. These cities have distinct dialects which are important factors in shaping people’s sense of belonging to a certain place (Thissen 2013). These local differences are important to consider in the debate on Limburgian as a language as there are people in Limburg who believe the language to be too diverse to be considered *one* language. When I asked one of the participants in Maastricht whether he thought Limburgian was a language, his response was: “Mestreechs wel” (Maastricht’s dialect is), suggesting that Maastricht’s dialect was the true Limburgian language. However, this was said half-jokingly and, to my surprise, he quickly added: “But I think Limburgian should have the same status as Frisian”.

This thesis will provide the perspectives of people in Limburg actively working with the language and who believe the language should be legitimised. However, the discussion on whether the language has too many dialects to be a recognised uniform language influences their perspectives as well. Capturing this inner conflict, Sander, a linguistic activist fighting for the recognition as Limburgian as a language mentioned in one of our chats: “I guess there’s no official spelling in our language... Well, there is one but who is to say whether this is the ‘official’ spelling?”. This quote illustrates how, next to dialectal differences in Limburg, legitimating

Limburgian is a complex process due to these linguistic differences as well as the question who has the authority to legitimate Limburgian as a “real” language.

### *The Field and Participants*

I conducted my research in Limburg, the most southern province of the Netherlands. Limburg borders Germany on its east and is connected to both the Dutch- and French-speaking parts of Belgium through its borders on the south-west side of the province. With the rolling hills of Limburg’s Heuvelland<sup>1</sup> and its unique geographical position, the province is often portrayed as a particularly “un-Dutch” part of the country (Thissen 2013). Known for its Burgundian lifestyle and love for the yearly tradition of carnival (Camps 2017), Limburg is also home to a rich variety of local dialects (Thissen 2013). Currently, it is said that 75% of the Limburgian population speaks a local dialect (Driessen 2009; Thissen 2013).

Next to geographical and linguistic differences, Limburg has a unique historical context compared to the rest of the country (Thissen 2013). Before Limburg, the geographical area as we know it today, was artificially created by the French administrative forces at the end of the 18th century (Knotter 2009; Thissen 2013), the region was marked by a long period of Spanish rule during the Eighty Years’ War, embedding Catholicism in the province (Hagen and Giesbers 1988; Thissen 2013). Even after the merging of the area by the French, Limburg remained a contested territory with political instability shaped by Dutch and German influences from the outside (Thissen 2013). It was not until 1866 that Limburg was integrated into the Netherlands and became “fully Dutch” in 1867 after the independence of the German Confederation (Knotter 2009; Thissen 2013).

Linguistically speaking, this late union of the province can be seen in the variety in dialects and different “dialect families” (Hoes veur ‘t Limburgs n.d.) (see Appendix). As well as identifying with a common Limburgian culture, people in Limburg often express a strong connection and sense of pride in relation to their local dialect and culture (Belemans 2002; Camps 2017; Cornips, de Rooij, and Stengs 2012; Cornips and Knotter 2016; Thissen 2013).

As the base for my fieldwork, I decided to live in Maastricht. The capital of Limburg is home to many state- and language institutions which allowed me to attend different events, as well as the home to most of the participants in this research. The city is located alongside the river Meuse and the border with Belgium (VisitMaastricht n.d.). Its strategic location next to the river and the Roman road “Via Belgica” shaped the history of Maastricht as a garrison town with soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> “Heuvelland” is Dutch for “hill country” and refers to the region in the south of Limburg marked by its hilly landscape.

under Spanish, French, or Dutch rule alternately inhabiting the city (VisitMaastricht n.d.). Originating as a Roman fortress and long history of being a contested territory can be seen in the city's architecture and lives on in people's everyday lives as they continue to live in and amongst Maastricht's historical monuments surrounded by the medieval city wall (VisitMaastricht n.d.).

Another important city as part of my research is Roermond. The old trading town's history is shaped by its position alongside the rivers Meuse and Roer and is located at the centre of the province of Limburg (WeAreRoermond n.d.). Roermond played an important part in this research for different reasons. Firstly, it's where Hoes veur 't Limburgs, a language expertise centre, is located. This centre played a vital role in getting access to the field and participants. Secondly, it is home to one of my key participants, Sander. Lastly, it is where I went to school and spent most of my teenage years. My personal connection to the town helped me to gain quick access to the field and use my personal network of friends and family there to learn more about their relationship to the language and the importance of the local dialect and culture.

As I mentioned, it was through Hoes veur 't Limburgs that I gained access to the field and research population. I will elaborate on this in the methodology section. In light of the current language movement in Limburg, Hoes veur 't Limburgs took the initiative to create a group named Jónk ("young" in Limburgian) to connect young people in Limburg who share a passion for the Limburgian language. With people from all sorts of backgrounds working in different sectors (i.e. education, media, music etc.), the goal of this group is to create a network of people who can share their knowledge and initiatives regarding the Limburgian language.

Becoming part of this group allowed me to meet many different people from Limburg, including two key participants, Lotte and Sander. Lotte, known as Lotteuitlimburg on social media, is a young woman from Bung (Bunde) who started promoting the Limburgian language on online platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Proudly speaking the Limburgian language in her videos has become her "brand" and she has managed to create a large following with this approach. Through becoming a Limfluencer (influencer from Limburg), Lotte has gained access to the network of the current language movement allowing her to work with people in politics, education, and media to connect to a larger audience to promote the Limburgian language.

Sander, a 27-year-old man who shares Lotte's passion for the language, wears many different hats when it comes to being a part of the movement towards protecting and legitimating the Limburgian language. He is a part of political action group PLAT, who are most known for putting stickers on name place signs in towns that do not have the Limburgian names written on

their signs. Sander also works for the non-profit organisation, Limbögse Academie, as a part of the team that is digitalising the Limburgian language.

### *Methodology*

At the start of my research, I was not aware of the language movement in Limburg. I knew I wanted to study and write my thesis on the Limburgian culture and language; however, I was still unsure of the relevance of this broad research topic. As I began to tell friends and family in Limburg about my wish to do my fieldwork in Limburg and write about our language, I noticed the shared excitement and pride. Before I knew it, family members and friends were sending me articles from local newspapers talking about the rise in popularity of our language and the movement working towards achieving status III under the ECRML. This sparked my interest.

One of the articles my uncle sent me mentioned that there would be an information session organised by Hoes veur 't Limburgs on what it would mean for Limburg to achieve status III. After suggesting that this might be an interesting event for me to attend and meet people, I followed my uncle's advice and contacted Hoes veur 't Limburgs to see if I could attend this session. This event proved to be the start of a snowball effect which would grant me access to my eventual field and research population (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault 2016). As it turned out, one of the people working for Hoes veur 't Limburgs, Zef, is an anthropologist. He shared my enthusiasm for an ethnographic study of the Limburgian culture and language and truly opened the doors as this research's gatekeeper (O'Reilly 2012). Through him, I got to attend the first political debate in Limburgian at the provincial government building in Maastricht and join the meetings and WhatsApp group of Jónk, a group of young people from Limburg working with the language.

Once I became part of the network of Jónk, I had to figure out how to integrate in the field and what role I should take on to use the method of participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). After meeting Lotte and Sander through the group Jónk, I started to hang out with them to build rapport (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019) which resulted in us constructing my roles together. Lotte is currently working on creating a YouTube series in which she visits different workplaces where people get to speak Limburgian at work. Sharing Lotte's passion for creating media attention for our language, she asked me to work with her on this series as a production assistant. This allowed me to travel to different places in Limburg, speak to different people, and observe the diversity in dialects.

Sander introduced me to his fellow members of PLAT and allowed me to join their group and observe meetings to learn more about their work and relation to the language.

Lastly, as I had to integrate in my new place of residence, Maastricht, I started working at one of the local bars. De Kiesbar turned out to be another great place for participant observation as it is one of the few places in Maastricht where most of the customers and bar staff still speak Mestreechs or a different Limburgian dialect. Compared to other bars and shops in the city centre where it's common now to be addressed in English or Dutch given the number of international and Dutch students living in Maastricht, De Kiesbar functions as a place for the locals to speak in their own language and listen to their own music in Mestreechs. Working at De Kiesbar also allowed me to speak to people who had different views on the role of the Limburgian language in our culture and were not actively concerned with the political aspects of it.

In addition to participant observation, I used the method of semi-structured interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). After building rapport through participant observation and getting a clearer view of my research topic, I interviewed Lotte and Sander to discuss certain topics in more detail and deepen my understanding of their relationship to the language. One of the interviews with Sander took place at a dialect exhibition in his hometown, Roermond. Doing a semi-structured interview as part of an activity turned out to be a great method to both gain more detailed information as well as truly feel and observe his pride and connection to the local culture and dialect of Roermond.

Given my own background in music as a songwriter and observing the importance of Limburgian music to people at De Kiesbar, I decided to use music as another method for my research. As I noticed how important the difference in local dialects in Limburg is to people, I wanted to create something that would allow people to truly hear this diversity of the language instead of merely reading about it. Therefore, I decided to write songs for the key participants, Lotte and Sander, which would reflect their stories and local dialects. Writing the lyrics and translating them from my own dialect, which is a mix of Bezels, Remunjs, and Mestreechs, to the dialects of Lotte and Sander gave me great insights into the diversity of the language.

After writing the music and lyrics, I made sure to check and adjust the songs with Lotte and Sander so they would be a true representation of their stories. I also used online platforms such as Limbögse Academie's online dictionary to translate some of the words. Given that my dialect is very similar to Sander's dialect as I went to school in Roermond, it was less of a challenge to record his song in Remunjs. However, Lotte's local dialect, Bungs, is very different from my own dialect. To avoid any mispronunciation, I asked Lotte to record the lyrics for me so I could learn how to sing the song, to the best of my abilities, in her dialect.

### *Ethics & Positionality*

Who we are and what we do as humans is shaped by our choices (Kapferer and Gold 2018). An integral part of the choices we make is to question what the good or moral way is to act (Kapferer and Gold 2018). As a researcher, my choices not only shape the informative outcome of this study, but they can affect the people I worked with and who trusted me with their personal stories. Therefore, practicing reflexivity (Madden 2017) as well as adhering to certain ethical considerations when conducting ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019) were an important part of both my fieldwork and the writing process. These ethical considerations include informed consent, privacy, harm, reciprocity, and exploitation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019) which are important aspects for me to consider as an aspiring anthropologist.

In building rapport and working with participants, I made sure to provide them with comprehensive and accurate information regarding my research before asking for their participation and consent on the use of data I would collect from spending time with them (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Furthermore, I made sure that all participants were aware of the fact that they can withdraw their informed consent at any time (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019).

The research method of participant observation can provide a deep understanding of people's everyday lives (Madden 2017). However, in relation to the notion of privacy, this method can sometimes complicate the distinction between what is private and public information (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Hanging out with people daily allows you to become familiar to participants. This can make it easy for both the researcher and participants to sometimes forget that conversations are also data which can be collected and published in one's research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Therefore, I always made sure to consider this possibility and the potential consequences of sharing certain private data and always made sure to check with participants if they were okay with me making public what was shared in a private conversation before using their information.

One of those consequences could be that the research causes potential harm, either physically, mentally, or both, to a participant (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Depending on the context of the research, this harm can take many different shapes and is an important consequence to consider and prevent when working with participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). The concern of privacy and anonymity was less of an issue with Lotte as she was happy to be named in this thesis and since most of the things we discussed were already made public on her social media accounts. Nevertheless, I still made sure to share my writing with her throughout the process to make sure that she was okay with the information I planned to share.

In the case of Sander, I had to be very aware of anonymising his data and keeping certain information private as the political action group (PLAT) that he is a part of is an anonymous group. Given that some of their actions are “semi-illegal” as putting stickers on town signs could be considered a form of vandalism, Sander’s anonymity is important to maintain.

Lastly, another concern for anthropologists is whether their research is exploitative (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). To prevent this from happening, it is important to consider reciprocity as a crucial part of ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Personally, I used the method of writing music for participants to reciprocate their generosity of sharing their time and personal stories with me. Throughout my research, I was highly aware of the irony of writing a thesis on language in an academic language which would seem like gibberish to most of my participants. Therefore, I wanted to come up with a way to show them that I listened and understood their perspectives, and to do this in their own language. As people in Limburg have a strong connection to their local dialects, I decided to write the song for Lotte in her local dialect, Bungs, and Sander’s song in his dialect, Remunjs.

As both a researcher and young person from Limburg, I have reflected on how my positionality could influence my understanding and interpretation of the data and its outcomes throughout the research and writing period (Madden 2017). Given the role that “pride” plays in this research, I believe it is important to mention that I consider myself to be a proud Limburgian. I have always felt a strong connection to my culture and language which played a major role in deciding to do this research. However, I am aware that this pride influences my research as it has led me to focus on the people in Limburg who regard Limburgian as a language rather than the people who do not believe Limburgian to be a language.

However, as I pointed out earlier, I am aware that not everyone in Limburg shares the same view on whether Limburgian is a language. At the start of my research, I got very excited speaking to like-minded people who also regarded Limburgian as a language which should have the same status as Dutch, however, having a conversation with a family member who strongly disagreed made me realise that in my excitement I forgot to consider that not everyone in Limburg might share this view. Therefore, I think it is important to point out again that even though the group of people I worked with for this research are part of a larger movement which is fighting for the language to be recognised, and their views reflect the opinions of a lot of Limburgians, this is not a representation of the whole population of Limburg. There are people who do not regard the Limburgian dialects as a language, people who wish to keep the Limburgian language as an

“informal language” and for the state to keep out of it, and there are people who do not speak a Limburgian dialect.

I decided to focus on the group of people who have a passion for the Limburgian language and want Limburgian to be a legitimate language as I believe that it is time for their voices to be heard. However, as this language movement progresses, I do believe it will be important to pay attention to the people in Limburg who do not share this view and to do further research on how language can be a tool for in- and exclusion in a culture.

Due to my positionality, the line between being a researcher and being a part of my group of participants was often blurred (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). There were many occasions where I got so caught up in my new everyday life working with participants, with my key participants becoming close friends of mine, that I often had to remind myself to take field notes and actively observe as well as participate. However, moving from the fieldwork period into the writing part of the research process helped me to take a step back and assess my data as a researcher rather than participant.

### *Outline*

This thesis shows what the process of legitimating Limburgian looks like in the context of late capitalism from the emic perspectives of two key participants. The first perspective is from Lotte, a young Limburgian who uses language as her “brand” on social media platforms. The second perspective tells the story of a young linguistic activist, Sander, who actively fights for the legitimization of Limburgian as a language. The thesis consists of three chapters in which I connect ethnographic data with anthropological theory from the debate on language in late capitalism.

The first chapter contextualises the shift into late capitalism from the perspective of the province of Limburg. It discusses the discursive change regarding the role of language by drawing on data I collected by attending different events from both state- and language institutions, as well as using the historical background of Limburg as a relatively “new” part of the Netherlands and the role that language played in the province integrating into the nation-state. Next to providing a historical context for the role of language in Limburg, I share an ethnographic example of a nursery in Maastricht to highlight the friction between two different discourses regarding language in Limburg. Namely, the discourse shaped by Limburg’s integration as a province of the Netherlands which supports the idea that speaking a Limburgian dialect would negatively impact the children’s Dutch (Maastricht University 2024), and the discourse shaped by the shift into late capitalism which acknowledges the benefits of multilingualism (Duchêne and Heller 2012).

The second chapter dives into the personal story of Lotte and looks at how she legitimates Limburgian as an influencer from Limburg. During my fieldwork, I joined Lotte in her work as a Limfluencer promoting the Limburgian language and its dialects on social media. Using the theoretical framework of the emergence of language as “profit”, I look at how Lotte uses Limburgian as her “brand” on social media to reach a specific audience as well as grows her network in the current language movement in Limburg. However, this chapter also highlights the importance of pride as a driving force for Lotte by showing how she is changing the image of Limburgian from being a source of shame to a source of pride online and in her own day-to-day life.

The third chapter focusses on the connection between “fear” and “pride” and the Limburgian language and its dialects by telling the story of Sander, a member of political action group PLAT. I discuss how both the fear of losing the Limburgian language as well as his pride in relation to his local dialect drove Sander to actively start fighting for the legitimisation of his language. Furthermore, it looks at how Sander uses global digital platforms in his work as a volunteer for non-profit organisation the Limbörge Academie digitalising the Limburgian language and its dialects. His work for PLAT and the Limbörge Academie show how Sander is partaking in the process of legitimating Limburgian both on- and offline. This chapter also looks at the commodification of regional and minority languages in late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) and how this influences the recognition and legitimisation of Limburgian.

# Chapter 1 — Legitimating Limburgian

*Taal móet veural vanoet de luuj zelf kómme. ‘t Oplegge van ‘t Limburgs is precies hetzelfde as wat de Hollanders hebbe gedaon in de kinderopvang. — Ruby Driessen (FvD)*

*Language should come primarily from the people themselves. Imposing Limburgian is exactly the same as what the Dutch did in the nurseries. — Ruby Driessen (FvD)*

During the first provincial government's debate in Limburgian, FvD's (Forum voor Democratie/Forum for Democracy) faction leader voiced his concerns when it comes to the province's plan to work towards gaining status III under the ECRML. He supported his argument by referring to recent incidents at local nurseries in Limburg (Van den Broek 2025).

There is no overarching or clear policy from the Limburgian provincial government or Dutch government when it comes to the use of local dialects in Limburgian nurseries (Van den Broek 2025). However, it recently came to light that some nurseries were reprimanded and threatened with a fine because they were speaking to the children in Limburgian instead of Dutch (Van den Broek 2025). Driessen's comment illustrates the role of the state in legitimating the regional language in nurseries. However, he also mentions the role of people and their agency in using the language, recognising their role and agency in legitimating the language (Ahearn 2001; Urban 1991).

At the start of my research, I attended an information session on the status of the Limburgian language organised by Hoes veur ‘t Limburgs. As a part of this session, language teacher Esther van Loo discussed the topic of nurseries in Limburg and the project Zjuulke which seeks to stimulate bilingualism in nurseries. Furthermore, nurseries were also mentioned during the political debate and were a part of Lotte's series Plat in de Ploog for which we visited a nursery in Maastricht. The importance of language at nurseries and the ongoing normalisation of the use of Dutch instead of Limburgian were reoccurring themes which showed the tension between different discourses in Limburg (Ahearn 2001; Bourdieu 1991).

Namely, the tension between the ongoing discourse of Dutch being considered the standard or “official” language versus the discourse that recognises the added value of legitimating the use of Limburgian. Looking at which actors shape these discourses, I argue that the intertwinement of the historical aspect of Limburg becoming a part of the Netherlands and the role language played in the integration of Limburg, the standardisation of Dutch in educational settings like nurseries, and the

representation of Limburgian on global digital platforms are currently shaping the process of legitimating Limburgian as well as the frictions within this process.

In this chapter, I will look at the power dynamics that surround the legitimation of Limburgian and the tension between the two dominant discourses regarding language in Limburg. Furthermore, I will place these dynamics and discourses within the context of late capitalism to illustrate the role of language in Limburg in late capitalism. First, I will look at the history of Limburg becoming a part of the Netherlands and the role language played in this integration process. Then, I discuss how late capitalism and the use of global digital platforms, influence the discourse on the legitimation of Limburgian, as well as impact the power dynamics in validating the use of the regional language. Lastly, I will use the example of nurseries in Limburg to give a more detailed and ethnographic understanding of the complexities of the process of recognising Limburgian as a “real” language.

### *The Integration of Limburg*

*Ich höb mich ouch altied aangepas aan de taal dao. Woróm mótt ich mich dan ouch in Mesjtreech nog altied aanpasse aan angere die nao mich kómme? ‘t Is toch ouch neet meer es normal det es ich nao Frankriek gaon, det ich Frans sjpraek. Dan is ‘t toch ouch normaal det es luuj nao Mesjtreech kómme, det d'r ouch Mesjtreechs taege ze weurt gekald. Det is toch logisch? — Sander*

*I have always adapted to the language there. Why do I still have to adapt to others who come to me in Maastricht? It is only normal that when I go to France, I speak French. Then it is also normal that when people come to Maastricht, they can expect to be spoken to in Maastrichts. That's logical, right? — Sander*

I grew up in a village located on the border of central- and north Limburg. When I left at the age of eighteen, I did not know any better than that it was normal to speak in my local dialect everywhere apart from school. However, moving back to Limburg after eight years for the purpose of this research, I learned how this was not the case in some parts of Limburg.

With a growing number of international- and Dutch students, speaking the local dialect in Maastricht is no longer the norm, especially in shops and restaurants in the city centre. The above quote from Sander illustrates a growing agitation which I noticed amongst participants and family members from Maastricht as well. My aunt and uncle, who have lived in Maastricht their whole

lives, expressed their fear that their language was lost as they never heard it in the city anymore.

Personally, due to this mix of nationalities in Maastricht, I struggled to know when I could approach someone in Limburgian or whether it was better to start a conversation in Dutch. Many of my friends, who do speak the local language, told me they tend to start off in Dutch when they are in a shop or making an appointment somewhere. When I asked them why, they said they never really thought about it. Given that Limburgian is already a recognised regional language, why is it Dutch remains the standard language in certain situations? Why is it Limburgian is not the province's standard language like Frisian is in Friesland or French in France? To understand the relation and tension between Dutch and the regional language in Limburg, I will provide a brief overview of the province's history as a relatively "new" part of the Netherlands.

After a long period of changing borders and different rulers, Limburg officially became a Dutch province in 1867 (Thissen 2013). This started an integration process in which language played a crucial role (Knotter 2009). Even though children in Limburg were taught Dutch in primary schools from the year 1815, speaking the nation-state's language was still a challenge for many Limburgians, especially illiterate people (Orbons and Spronck 2009).

*"Et mieste las hadde de Mastreechteneers van alle klasse mèt et Hollands, neet allein es sjrief- mer ouch es spreektaol"* (Orbons and Spronck 2009, 52)

*"People from Maastricht from all social ranks had the most difficulty with Dutch, not only the written language but also the spoken language"* (Orbons and Spronck 2009, 52).

Limburg became part of the Dutch State in a period marked by the unification of nation-states to establish a new global order ruled by imperialism and colonialism (Shamsul 1999; Wimmer and Feinstein 2010). Part of the project of the modern nation-state was the normalisation of the idea that the nation's citizens were united through speaking one language (Appadurai 2010; Joseph 2012). However, even though linguistically speaking the Limburgian dialects are closely related to Dutch, culturally speaking, the shift to Dutch becoming the formal language of Limburg proved to be a challenge (Orbons and Spronck 2009).

In the south-eastern part of Limburg, people were used to reading German newspapers and it was common for religious people to express ejaculatory prayers in German with the occasional touch of French (Orbons and Spronck 2009). In Maastricht, the historical connection to the French rather than Dutch culture shapes the city to this day (VisitMaastricht n.d.). French restaurants like Le Fernand, Bouchon d'en Face, and Bar Beurre and French street names add to the city's "un-

Dutchness" (Thissen 2013, 127). Working at De Kiesbar where we sell French cheeses and often play French music, I also noticed how it is common in Maastricht to say "*merci*" instead of "*daanke*" for "*thank you*". The city's trading relationship with Wallonia and proximity to the French-speaking city of Liège, as well as having been under French rule from 1794 until 1814, meant that people in Maastricht would sooner choose French over Dutch when they could not speak in the Maastrichtian dialect (Orbans and Spronck 2009).

Despite these challenges in the process of Limburg's integration due to the province's stronger connection to Germany, Belgium, and France (Orbans and Spronck 2009), the example of the nurseries in Limburg at the start of this chapter and the way in which my friends use Dutch instead of Limburgian, show how the political power of the Dutch nation-state has managed to integrate and normalise Dutch as Limburg's standard language over time (Orbans and Spronck 2009).

However, as the quote from Sander at the start of this section illustrates, we are experiencing a discursive shift which shows how some people in Limburg are starting to question why Limburgian is not the standard language of the province. The provincial government's debate on the five-year plan also shows this discursive shift by debating whether Limburgian should achieve a higher status under the ECRML, as well as Lotte's work as a limfluencer who promotes the normalisation of the use of Limburgian online. The next part of this chapter will look further into how global forces and the shift into late capitalism have allowed for this discursive change to take place in Limburg.

### *Limburgian in Late Capitalism*

Scholars engaged in the debate on globalisation (Appadurai 2010; Giddens 1984; Harvey 2006; Henig 2025) argue that we live in a particular moment in the process of globalisation which is shaped by the tensions between regulations of the nation-state and the power of the global economy (Duchêne and Heller 2012). This period of late capitalism is marked by the fusion of the power of states and businesses, with companies taken on new globalised forms (i.e. multinationals, transnationals etc.) with extensive reach through the use of global digital platforms (Appadurai 2010; Jameson 1993).

The dominant discourse of a unified nation-state with a shared language (Appadurai 2010; Joseph 2012) is now being challenged, according to Duchêne (2012) and Heller (2012), by the discourse of the added value of multilingualism in the national and global market. Scholars who consider language to be symbolic capital argue that, in the global economy, speaking a minority or

regional language can be an advantage to people in new, niche markets where their language is considered a unique selling point (Appadurai 1996; Bourdieu 1991; Duchêne and Heller 2012). Following the added value of multilingualism from a capitalist perspective, Duchêne (2012) and Heller (2012) argue that this changed perspective on minority and regional languages has also changed the way in which the use of a minority or regional language is legitimised.

However, as sociolinguist Diana Camps (2017) shows in her work, the process of legitimising Limburgian is not new or solely bound to the period of late capitalism. For decades, people and organisations have been working on the legitimisation of Limburgian through policymaking by local and provincial authorities, advocating for its importance as cultural heritage, and by developing spelling standards, dictionaries, and grammars for the Limburgian dialects (Camps 2017). However, considering the emergence of global digital platforms such as Google Translate, I argue that what *is* new in the process of legitimising Limburgian, are the online spaces in which legitimisation can now take place allowing new actors to get involved in authorising the legitimisation of Limburgian.

Online platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Google Translate, which are not place-bound and work beyond the level of the nation-state (Appadurai 2010), become spaces in which the Limburgian vocabulary, spelling standards, and its importance as cultural heritage (Camps 2017) can be advocated beyond the physical borders of the province and nation-state. Ironically, when I attended the information session organised by Hoes veur 't Limburgs, an older man expressed his fear of the potential harm social media could do to our language's "purity" because of Anglicisation and the lack of regulation on these platforms. As it happened, Lotte was also present at this meeting. Lotte, who uses the Limburgian language as her "selling point" as an influencer, added to the discussion by explaining how these platforms are versatile and allow her to create content in which she teaches people about the orthography<sup>2</sup> of the Limburgian language. She does this by creating videos in which she speaks about the Limburgian culture, or other everyday topics, in the Limburgian language whilst using English or Dutch subtitles to reach a wider audience.

Next to legitimising the use of Limburgian in a new space, global digital platforms allow for new actors to enter the legitimisation discourse (Duchêne and Heller 2012). Like Lotte, Sander also works with online platforms to promote the Limburgian language. As a volunteer for the Limbögse Academie<sup>3</sup>, Sander works on digitalising Limburgian and its dialects. The Limbögse Academie's

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<sup>2</sup> The term orthography refers to the conventional spelling system of a language.

<sup>3</sup> The Limbögse Academie is a non-profit organisation that works on conserving the Limburgian language and specialises in the digitalisation of the Limburgian language and its dialects.

online dictionary translates words from Dutch to different Limburgian dialects (including the dialects of Maastricht, Roermond, Sittard, Valkenburg, and Venlo), and from English to Limburgian.

During one of our interviews, Sander mentioned:

“I guess people see Dutch as more important than their local dialect because that’s the language you speak in school or at work. But I do think that’s changing now. Look at how you can choose Limburgian when using Google Translate. Or SjengGPT, the Maastrichtian version of ChatGPT which states on its website that you can use SjenGPT for your business. I think seeing our language represented by these big companies like Google will make people feel like their local dialect is a real language, just like Dutch.”

This shows how, in late capitalism, alongside the state legitimates language through educational institutions such as schools and nurseries, new actors such as global businesses like Google and global platforms like Instagram and TikTok now play a role in authorising the legitimisation of the Limburgian language (Appadurai 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012).

In the next section, I will use the example of nurseries in Limburg to illustrate how the legitimisation of Limburgian is a complex process due to factors such as Limburg’s history of becoming part of the Netherlands and divisions in the debate on multilingualism (Camps 2017; Duchêne and Heller 2012).

### *Monolingualism vs Bilingualism in Limburgian Nurseries*

As a part of her upcoming YouTube series on speaking Limburgian at work, Lotte and I visited a nursery in Maastricht. This nursery is part of a project named “Limburgs als Tweede Taal (Limburgian as a Second Language)” which promotes the use of Limburgian next to Dutch at nurseries (Hoes veur ‘t Limburgs n.d.). The project is part of a larger research project called “Zjuulke” which studies the use of Limburgian in nurseries in Limburg (Maastricht University 2024). Statistics show that even though 75% of the population of Limburg speaks the Limburgian language, only 56,6% of toddlers use the local language (Cornips et al. 2022). Although research in recent years has shown the benefits of multilingualism in the development of children, the conservative belief that speaking Limburgian would have a negative impact on the “Dutch” language development still lingers among parents and pedagogical professionals (Maastricht University 2024).

There is a tendency to blame parents for the loss of Limburgian amongst children (Maastricht University 2024). However, research shows that it is often not at home but rather at places like nurseries or schools that children start speaking Dutch instead of their local Limburgian dialect (Maastricht University 2024). As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, there are nurseries and overseeing organisations in Limburg, like GGD Zuid-Limburg<sup>4</sup>, who, despite research outcomes, continue to implement Dutch as the only language used at nurseries in Limburg (Van den Broek 2025). Promoting the use of the nation-state's language over a bilingual approach that stimulates the use of both Dutch and Limburgian amongst children, illustrates how the standardisation of Dutch in the province of Limburg as part of its integration is still an ongoing process (Orbons and Spronck 2009).

However, there are also nurseries in Limburg that are actively working on going against the exclusion of Limburgian in the upbringing of children. Lotte and I visited one of these nurseries in Maastricht to see how they implement the Limburgian language.

*When we enter the impressive, historical building hidden in downtown Maastricht, Lotte and I are amazed by the beauty of the nursery's location. It is only two weeks away from the annual celebration of Carnival and the building is brightly decorated in honour of the festivities. As we enter the nursery's classroom, the cheerful artwork made by the children in the colours of carnival ignites the excitement and anticipation I feel each year in the period leading up to Carnival.*

*After being greeted by Marion, the nursery's pedagogical professional, we sit down at a small table on little, wooden children's chairs. Lotte begins to share her story of how she became a Limfluencer and why she wanted to make this series on using the Limburgian language in a work context. Sharing Lotte's love for Limburg, Marion proudly shares with us that she always speaks to the children in her dialect, Mestreechs. "There are a few children who have an immigration background and do not speak Dutch or Limburgian, some Dutch children, and some real Sjenge here. Whether we speak to them in Dutch or Mestreechs depends on the child, but we always manage to interact with all the children through playing together, gestures, and music."*

*We then talk about what a morning at the nursery looks like to get an idea of how we are going to film this episode. Marion mentions how they always sing a song in either Limburgian or Dutch as part of the morning routine. When I ask her if they use traditional children's songs from*

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to an inspection at a nursery in the municipality of Margraten where the pedagogical officials were reprimanded for speaking to the children in Limburgian, GGD Zuid-Limburg (Geneeskundige Gezondheidsdienst Zuid-Limburg/Medical Health Service South-Limburg)'s supervisor responded by saying that Dutch is the official language in all cases (Van den Broek 2025).

*Maastricht, she replies: “There aren’t many traditional Maastrichtian children’s songs as far as I know. We get some music from the project Zjuulke, but most of the songs are in a centre-Limburgian dialect. I feel like using these songs might confuse the children too much as we speak to them in Mestreechs. I think it would be better if the songs were in the real Mestreechter taol (language of Maastricht).”*

This vignette shows how both the festivities and tradition of Carnival highlight the unity of Limburg whilst Marion’s reference to the difference in dialects illustrates how internal linguistic differences can complicate the recognition of Limburgian as *one* language. Even though she is working for a nursery which is part of the promotion of bilingualism at nurseries, she still thought it would be confusing for the children to listen to songs in a different Limburgian dialect. This shows how both the discourse of the added value of multilingualism as well as the traditional idea that speaking multiple languages would negatively affect children’s linguistic skills are also part of the process of legitimating Limburgian.



This chapter illustrates how the legitimation of Limburgian is not a straightforward process. It is both impacted by the history of Limburg as well as its present as a part of a globalised world. Becoming a province of the Netherlands meant that Limburg had to integrate and adapt to speaking the nation-state’s language (Orbons and Spronck 2009). The ongoing standardisation of Dutch in Limburg lives in constant dialogue with the discourse which seeks to legitimate Limburgian as a language of the same status as Dutch.

The shift into late capitalism and the use of global digital platforms in Limburg has allowed this discourse to move beyond the confines of the province and nation-state and into global spaces (Appadurai 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012). Furthermore, new global actors like Google and Instagram have entered the discourse on the legitimation of Limburgian by providing accesses to these spaces.

However, the example of nurseries in Limburg shows that, even though there is a group of people actively working on promoting the use of Limburgian next to Dutch in educational settings,

this does not mean that the process of legitimization is one-sided. It is shaped by different discourses which either support monolingualism with Dutch being the standard language, multilingualism as a valuable thing, or the idea that there are too many different dialects in Limburg for one to call Limburgian a uniform language.

This chapter has given a contextual perspective of the role of language in Limburg from becoming part of the Netherlands to the shift into late capitalism. The next chapter will elaborate more on the value of Limburgian in late capitalism and how this shapes the process of legitimating the regional language (Duchêne and Heller 2012) through the perspective of Lotte as a social media influencer promoting Limburgian online.

## Chapter 2 — Rebranding Limburgian

*As I push open the big, brown doors of De Tribunal, I'm met by the smell of old beer and peanuts. After kindly smiling at a group of old men huddling around the bar, I notice Lotte sitting at a high table in the back of the cafe. Five minutes later, we're perfectly blended in with the rest of the guests enjoying a mid-week drink. As we're catching up, a man in his eighties dressed up in a suit with braces walks past us. "Geer zuut d'r sjoen oet", Lotte says to the man. Not realising she just complimented him on his outfit in Limburgian, the man starts speaking to us in Dutch. No wonder given the amount of Dutch and international students in Maastricht. Lotte, however, proudly keeps speaking to the man in her dialect. Realising we're Limburgian, the man excitedly shifts back to Mestreechs and asks us where we're from. After establishing our places in Limburg, the man wishes us a goojenavend and rejoins his friends by the bar. "What a sweet man! I love how passionate older men can be about our language", Lotte says.*

*She starts telling me about this eighty-five-year old man from her local town, Bung, who spent years creating a dictionary for their local dialect. "I've been trying to work on speaking proper Bungs because I noticed my dialect was becoming more Mestreechs. Before, I always had my granddad to remind me of what we sound like. But since he passed, I sort of let my language slip away a little bit". Touched by her relatable story, I listen as Lotte goes on to tell me about how she found this old man when she was looking for a dictionary in Bungs. "This man spent years working on it, but he never published it because he thought, who would want this? Well, I was sure there would be lots of people eager to buy a Bungs' dictionary. So, I said to him, let me see what I can do". Turns out, Lotte was right. After she put a post on Facebook asking who'd be interested in buying a dictionary, it didn't take long for the requests to come flooding in.*

At the start of my fieldwork, I joined a group named Jónk. This group, created by Hoes veur 't Limburgs, consists of young people from different places in Limburg who share a passion for the Limburgian language and are working on promoting Limburgian in a variety of ways. Through this group, I met Lotte, also known as @lotteuitlimburg. As a limfluencer, a term coined by Lotte's sister meaning influencer from Limburg, Lotte uses social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to promote the Limburgian language and its dialects. Originally from a small town in the south of Limburg called Bunde (Bung), she moved to Maastricht a few years ago.

The above vignette captures both Lotte's passion for the Limburgian language as well as the strong connection to her local dialect. It also highlights how her use of digital platforms has given

her a level of influence both on- and offline. With her reach on social media, Lotte managed to actively help preserve her local dialect, Bungs, by finding and connecting consumers for a niche market (Duchêne and Heller 2012) to the writer of the Bung's dictionary.

In this chapter I will tell Lotte's story to show how her work is connected to the legitimization of Limburgian in the context of late capitalism. Furthermore, it illustrates the role "pride" plays in Lotte's relation to the regional language. First, I look at how Lotte uses the language as her "brand" on social media platforms. I do not wish to reduce Lotte's relationship to Limburgian to solely a clever marketing strategy or symbolic capital in a niche market (Duchêne and Heller 2012) given her strong personal connection to the language and culture. Instead, the goal of this section is to show how the rise of global digital platforms and the added value of Limburgian in a niche market has allowed Lotte to use her agency in new ways to legitimate the use of her language (Appadurai 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Urla 2019). Then, I will focus on how the stereotype of the "stupid Limburgian" with the "soft G" accent (Cornips and Thissen 2014) has influenced Lotte's work as an influencer. Having previously been a source of shame, Lotte has turned the Limburgian language and its dialects into a source of pride with her ambition to change the image of Limburgian. Lastly, I will share the song I wrote with Lotte to retell the story of the vignette at the start of this chapter in Lotte's own dialect, Bungs. The aim of sharing this song is to make the language and dialect Lotte is proud of more visible in this thesis.

### *Limburgian as a "Brand"*

When I met Lotte, we bonded over the fact that we both had left Limburg to end up coming back and reconnecting to our language and culture. Where I ended up moving to the UK to integrate in the English and Scottish culture, Lotte lived in both Switzerland and Italy where she learned different Italian and Swiss German dialects. We both enjoyed learning new languages, however, being away from Limburg also made us realise how much we loved our own regional language. In Switzerland, Lotte was surprised to see how many young people were using their local dialects on social media. It made her question why no one was doing this in Limburg. Having a background in communications and a long-term wish to become a content creator, Lotte took the initiative to fill this gap in the online market by rebranding herself as a limfluencer and started promoting the Limburgian dialects online.

One way in which Lotte uses global trends to enter Limburgian into these online spaces is by following the "bucket list trend" (Jackson 2024). This concept is a way for the new generation to share their ways of living life to its fullest on social media by documenting themselves whilst

ticking things off their bucket lists (Jackson 2024). Lotte started doing this, with her best friend, and created videos in which they visited a football match from Maastricht's local club MVV, attended a gala, and visited a hidden cocktail bar, and many other places, to give an insight in what life in Limburg can look like. By speaking in Limburgian, Lotte connects with the population of Limburg whilst simultaneously reaching a wider audience by editing English or Dutch translations into the videos. In a time where companies and institutions value social media as an important part of their identity and marketing strategy (Ludwig and Van de Poel 2016), not only has Lotte found a way to turn the Limburgian language into a brand and create a following as limfluencer, she has also positioned herself within the language movement by connecting with companies, language institutions, and the provincial government of Limburg.

Before getting to know Lotte, I spotted her at several different events I attended to learn more about the current language movement. Like I mentioned in the previous chapter, Lotte attended the information session organised by Hoes veur 't Limburgs where she seemed to know a lot of people from different organisations and institutions like the Limbögse Academie, Hoes veur 't Limburgs, and researchers from Maastricht University. She was also at the first provincial debate in Limburgian where she was recording the event for her social media, as well as being filmed and interviewed for local news broadcasters. Because of the current language movement in Limburg, Lotte managed to get access to a diverse network of people working with the promotion of the regional language. Next to people in education, research, and marketing, Lotte is also acquainted with local politicians who are working on the province's five-year plan to achieve status III under the ECRML.

As part of her YouTube series "Plat in de Ploog", Lotte and I visited the Gouvernement aan de Maas to speak to a deputy regarding one of the episodes.

*When we enter the government's building, for a moment, we are taken aback by the grandness of the place. As we are waiting for the deputy, Lotte and I study the paintings of the succession of King's Commissioners. Compared to our other meetings, this particularly formal setting is making both Lotte and I nervous. We quickly start filming some behind the scenes footage of Lotte nervously giggling in front of a massive painting of the Netherlands' late queen, Juliana. As nervous as we were going into this meeting, the nerves quickly disappear when the deputy greets us in Limburgian. The meeting is filled with humour and feels rather informal despite the stately setting. As we're finishing up the meeting, the deputy's assistant asks to take some pictures of Lotte and the deputy together so they can share it on their socials. Whilst Lotte and the deputy are posing for the pictures*

*in the Gouvernement's decorated corridor, I take some quick snaps so we can share this moment with her followers.*

Even though it has only been just over a year since Lotte started out as a limfluencer, her work is not only being recognised by her growing number of followers, but it is starting to be recognised by important political figures in Limburg too. As the above vignette illustrates, social media is also used as a tool by politicians to connect to voters and as a marketing strategy (Ludwig and Van de Poel 2016). Given that Lotte has found a way to reach young people in Limburg as a limfluencer, working with Lotte can help politicians in Limburg to connect to a wider audience and achieve a stronger position in politics in the online sphere. Simultaneously, for Lotte to share this experience with her followers, allows her to show how formal state actors recognise her work which could strengthen her position in the process of the legitimisation of Limburgian. Furthermore, the recognition Limburgian as a “real” language can influence another personal goal of Lotte’s, namely, changing the image of Limburgian.

### *From Shame to Pride*

In the previous chapter, I mentioned how it can sometimes be difficult in Maastricht to know which language to approach someone in. When I started spending more time with both Lotte and Sander, they shared with me how they also used to struggle with this. However, for Lotte, the more confident and proud she became as a limfluencer, she began to make a point of always starting off in Limburgian and only switching to Dutch or English if she noticed people did not understand her. “You’d be surprised at how many people actually still speak the language once you start doing this”, Lotte told me. Sander has also recently started approaching people in Limburgian instead of Dutch as he believes this will help to normalise the use of the regional language in Limburg in everyday life. This way of making a small adjustment to using Limburgian in everyday life is an example of Lotte’s ambitions to change the image of Limburgian.

Lotte and I both left Limburg for a while before coming back and reconnecting with our culture. For the both of us, one of the reasons why we decided to leave was the image of Limburgian at the time. More specifically, the image of the way people in Limburg sound rather than the language we speak, and the stereotype that is connected to this.

Linguist Leonie Cornips (2014) and anthropologist Lotte Thissen (2014) illustrate this image through an analysis of the song “Sjtómme Limburger” (Stupid Limburgian) by Limburgian artist Gé Reinders. In the song, Reinders sings about how people from Limburg sound different to

other Dutch people with their “soft G” accent (Cornips and Thissen 2014). The line “Want ich veulde mich weer eine sjtómme Limburger mit miene zachte G (Because I felt again like the stupid Limburgian with my soft G)” shows how the accent does more than indexing people’s southern origin (Cornips and Thissen 2014). It embodies the social meaning of being from Limburg and the stereotypes that come with it, and how people identify with this (Cornips and Thissen 2014). This process of identification and differentiation refers to both the way in which people from Limburg are viewed, as well as the way in which they view themselves (Cornips and Thissen 2014).

The stereotype of the “stupid Limburgian” resonated with both Lotte and I when we decided to leave Limburg. Moving away allowed us to have a fresh start in places where no one recognised our accents and could therefore not label us as “stupid”. During one of our interviews, Lotte shared with me how she was embarrassed of her accent when she was studying in Eindhoven. People would often comment on her accent or say that they could not understand people from Limburg.

In an interview with local newspaper De Limburger, Lotte also talked about how she would let these comments get to her and how this became a source of shame (Drohm 2024). Even though the stereotype is connected to the “soft G” accent (Cornips and Thissen 2014), it is easy to link it to the Limburgian language as well. However, Lotte decided to go against this and take the matter into her own hands by turning this initial source of shame into a source of pride. In the interview she mentions: “Speaking a second language, whether it’s Limburgian or a different language, is special and has many benefits. It contributes to language development, more flexible thinking, and a better understanding of different perspectives. I don’t think many young people realize that” (Drohm 2024).

Lotte’s pride was tangible in the time I spent with her during my fieldwork. I found her passion for the legitimization of Limburgian to be infectious as I shared her experiences with shame. It was not before long that I noticed myself starting off in Limburgian, instead of Dutch, at work and in shops which gave me a sense of empowerment. This new image of Limburgian which views the language as a legitimate and equal language to Dutch becomes a source of pride. Furthermore, it emphasizes the important role the regional language plays in our culture and why it should be protected and preserved (Camps 2017; Thissen 2013). By changing the image of Limburgian, Lotte hopes to encourage young people to speak the local language to make sure we do not lose this part of our culture (Dohm 2024).

## Woord veur Woord

### *Couplet*

Ich waor nog jongk toen geer 't mich leerde  
En sindsdien is d'r veul gebäörd  
Ich bin wieët weg goon wonen  
Noe gebruuuk ich ander wäörd

### *Refrain*

Mer woord veur woord sjteit 't hie  
Geer gaof uch tied en leet mich neet allein  
Woord veur woord sjteit 't hie  
Esse wils blief 't zoà bie ein

### *Couplet*

Geer höb zoà väöl jaor gegeve  
Mer uch wirk werd nooit gezeen  
Ich laot de luuj noe bie ein komme  
Zoà weurd uch angs veurgood verdronge

### *Refrain*

### *Instrumentale Brögk*

### *Refrain*

### *Verse*

I was still young when you taught me  
Ever since then, a lot has happened  
I moved far away  
Now I use different words

### *Chorus*

But word by word it's written here  
You gave your time and didn't leave me alone  
Word by word it's written here  
If that's what you want, this is how we keep it  
together

### *Verse*

You gave so many of your years  
But your work was never seen  
I'm letting the people come together now  
To get rid of your fears forever

### *Chorus*

### *Instrumental Bridge*

### *Chorus*

This song reflects the story of Lotte from the vignette at the start of this chapter in her local dialect, Bungs. It talks about how she moved away, how it changed her dialect which her granddad taught her, but how finding this older man from her local town who wrote a dictionary for Bung's made her feel like her local dialect will stay alive after all. Next to being a unique brand and source of pride for Lotte, the fear of losing an important part of her heritage plays a role in Lotte's connection to the language.



This chapter illustrates how, in the context of late capitalism's market orientation and influence of global digital platforms (Appadurai 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012), Lotte has found new ways to represent and legitimate her regional language, Limburgian. Using the Limburgian language and its dialects as her “brand” has given Lotte access to an influential network in the current language movement strengthening her position as a new actor in the legitimization of Limburgian.

Inspired by young people in Switzerland proudly using their local dialects on social media, Lotte uses her work as a limfluencer to change the image of Limburgian and its connection to the stereotype of the “stupid” Limburgian with the “soft G” accent (Cornips and Thissen 2014). Shifting speaking Limburgian from a source of “shame” to a source of “pride” influences both Lotte’s success on social media and empowers her to use the language in her everyday life in Limburg.

Lastly, by sharing the song I wrote with Lotte, I have joined Lotte in making the language and its dialects more visible. Acknowledging Lotte’s pride in connection to her local dialect, writing the song in Bungs allows for Lotte’s story to be told and represented in her own voice.

The next chapter will dive deeper into the connection between “pride” and the Limburgian language by telling the story of Sander. His story shows how, despite a lingering fear that his language might get lost in the future, his “pride” and the possibilities global digital platforms offer to represent his language are the main forces that drive him to take part in the legitimization of Limburgian.

## Chapter 3 — Representing Limburgian On- and Offline

*Stepping off the train at Roermond’s central station, Sander and I are met by the first signs of spring. Walking towards Sjtatieplein on this sunny day fills me with a nostalgic feeling. I remember the excitement my friends and I felt each year when spring arrived. Back then, we would head to Sjtatieplein as soon as school was out, to find the entire square filled with people sitting outside the different bars. We would spend hours people-watching and chatting. But in the past ten years, the city has changed. Most of the bars are now closed and the square is eerily empty. We stop in front of one of the old bars. Sander, a proud Remunjeneer, recently moved out of his beloved city of Roermond to start working at a bar in Maastricht. “It’s sad to see how things have changed here”, Sander says. “I even considered taking over Le Journal”. Even though I know he’s joking, I get the feeling that if he’d been able to, he would have saved the bar at all costs.*

*Sander and I are on our way to a dialect exhibition at Roermond’s Historiehuis, the city’s historical museum. The exhibition displays photos, videos, and information on the past, present, and future of Remunjs, the city’s local dialect. As we enter and take off our coats, I notice Sander’s T-shirt. He sees that I’m staring and laughs. “Enne?”, he says. To which I, like a true Limburgian, respond: “Ouch enne?”. Printed in big, green letters on the back of his shirt it says:*

*“ENNE”. [è•nnuh?] All encompassing. An important understanding in Limburg that’s known by all the locals. The term can be used for almost everything because it represents: Hello, how are you? How is that possible? How are things going? What happened? Is it good or bad news? How did it go? That’s a surprise, tell me more! – The best way to reply is to say “Ouch enne?”*

*After complimenting Sander on his suitable outfit choice for the day, we start walking through the exhibition. Most of the information is written in Dutch. I’m drawn to one specific line in the exhibition’s introduction: “This exhibition shows how Remunjs is everything but ‘weird’, it’s a language full of pride, tradition, and creativity”. Watching Sander finish reading, he turns to me and says: “Greuts! It’s good to see that despite the language dying out, there are people, young people like us, who are proud of the language and see it as part of their identity. It’s the greutsigheid that will live on!”.*

*Greutsigheid* (pride) is something I noticed not just in Sander, but amongst most other participants as well. However, next to a sense of pride, there's a growing fear that the number of people who still speak the regional language in the future is declining and Limburgian thus will need more protecting (Appadurai 2010; Camps 2017; Veldeke Limburg n.d.). The above vignette introduces the themes of change and pride. The way in which Sander's beloved city of Roermond has changed over the years is a reminder of how anything can change at any time, including the use of Limburgian (Duchêne and Heller 2012).

However, next to Sander's fear of the language dying out, there's a strong sense of pride that drives him to promote the language in more ways than one. The shirt Sander wore when we visited the exhibition is an everyday example of how he expresses his pride in relation to Limburgian. Furthermore, despite feeling like the language might be gone in the future, Sander's pride drives him to work on promoting and representing Limburgian in different ways to make sure that its value to the Limburgian culture is acknowledged in the present.

In the previous chapter, I focussed on how the Limburgian language can become a profitable "brand", both symbolically and economically speaking (Bourdieu 1991; Duchêne and Heller 2012), in Lotte's case as a limfluencer. Furthermore, it showed how through her work of promoting and changing the image of Limburgian, Lotte has gained access to an influential network which allows her to become part of the process of legitimating Limburgian (Camps 2017; Duchêne and Heller 2012). However, the chapter also illustrated how, next to the language being a profitable asset in gaining a following and network, "pride" is still an important driving force for Lotte as well as the fear of potentially losing the language and her local dialect.

In this chapter, I tell the story of Sander, a linguistic activist who shares Lotte's fear as well as sense of pride in relation to Limburgian. By sharing Sander's story, I aim to show how "pride" has not become irrelevant in a time where language is increasingly being valued by its economic worth (Duchêne and Heller 2012; Urla 2019). Instead, his story illustrates the positive effects of late capitalism and how "profit" and "pride" are simultaneously influencing the way in which people in Limburg value language. Furthermore, this chapter shows how, like Lotte, the use of global digital platforms plays an important role in Sander's work digitalising the Limburgian dialects, which in turn has led him to become a part of the process of legitimating Limburgian as a language (Camps 2017; Duchêne and Heller 2012).

First, I discuss how “fear” and “pride” shape Sander’s everyday life as a linguistic activist and proud *Remunjeneer*<sup>5</sup>, and how they led him to use his local language as a form of social action as a part of political action group, PLAT (Ahearn 2001). Then, I look at how Sander also works on digitalising the Limburgian language and dialects and how his use of online platforms for the Limbögse Academie has led him to become a part of the process of legitimating Limburgian and its variety in dialects (Camps 2017; Duchêne and Heller 2012). Furthermore, it touches upon how Sander experiences the commodification of Limburgian in late capitalism. Lastly, I will share the song I wrote with Sander in his local dialect, *Remunjjs*. This song reflects Sander’s work, his passion for the language, and his plea that the language is something to be proud of.

### *From Fear and Pride to Social Action*

During my fieldwork, I joined Sander, a 26-year-old linguistic activist and bartender from Roermond, in his quest for true recognition of Limburgian as a standard language in Limburg next to Dutch. Sander and I met in Maastricht at the bar where he has been working for the past two years. We connected over our shared love for the Limburgian language and culture, as well as our connection to the city of Roermond.

Next to his work as a bartender, Sander passionately works on preserving and promoting the Limburgian language and its dialects on- and offline. Together with a friend, he started a political action group called PLAT<sup>6</sup>. They are most known for going to different municipalities in the night to put stickers with the local dialect’s name of towns on their town signs. Some municipalities in Limburg already have both the Dutch and Limburgian names on the signs, however, there are still municipalities that do not have this. For PLAT, this was a logical place to start to create change and raise awareness for the recognition of Limburgian as a language, not a dialect. They argue that calling it a dialect perpetuates the idea that Dutch is a more “important” and “formal” language (Orbons and Spronck 2009). To them, Limburgian is a language which is formed out of the variety of different Limburgian dialects, rather than a local dialect derived from Dutch.

Sander grew up in Roermond (*Remunj*). This city is an embodiment of Limburg’s connection to different countries and cultures (Gemeente Roermond Archief n.d.). Positioned right on the intersection of the river Maas (Meuse) and roads that lead to both Cologne and Antwerp, the

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<sup>5</sup> The Limburgian word for a person from Roermond in the local dialect, *Remunjjs*.

<sup>6</sup> PLAT (Politieke Limburgse Actiegroep Taalbeleid/Political Limburgian Action Group Language Policy) was established by Sander and a friend in response to the current language movement in Limburg working towards status III recognition of the Limburgian language under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

city of Roermond is connected to places on all four of the cardinal points (Gemeente Roermond Archief n.d.). Besides the Maas, there is another important river connected to the city, namely, the Roer (Historiehuis n.d.). This river is of fundamental importance to the city as it owes its name to the Roer (Weareroermond n.d.). Furthermore, it's very important for the city's social life. Next to the river Roer, there's the Roerkade. This busy street right next to the river is filled with bars and restaurants where the locals enjoy the city's night life.

Being a part of Belgium from 1543, Roermond only became part of the Netherlands in 1839 (Gemeente Roermond Archief n.d.). Like the rest of Limburg, Roermond remained Catholic during the Eighty Years' War (Gemeente Roermond Archief n.d.). The city's religious identity can be seen in Roermond's architecture with monuments like the Munsterkerk and the Sint-Christoffelkathedraal (Gemeente Roermond Archief n.d.; Weareroermond n.d.). Spending time with Sander, he would often proudly tell me all about Roermond, its history, and the dialect, Remunjs.

Even though Sander fights for the legitimation of the Limburgian language with PLAT, he strongly believes that recognising Limburgian as a language should not take away from the acknowledgment of the variety of dialects and the importance of the local dialects to people.

*Ederein wil netuurlik zien eige. Es noe waert gezag van Mesjtreechs is de sjtandaard, of v'r doon un saort mengelmoes van alles biejein, dan geisse veurbie aan waat luuj fien vinje aan 't Limburgs. Det 't ech häör eige is. Mer ich dink det v'r noe waal in ein tied leave waor v'r väöl meer die versjille kinne waardere. – Sander 2025*

*Everyone wants their own. If they decide to make Maastricht's dialect the standard language, or they decide to create some sort of mishmash of all the dialects, then you're ignoring what people love about the Limburgian language. That it's their own. But I think we now live in a time where we can appreciate diversity more. – Sander 2025*

During my fieldwork, Roermond's history museum organised an exhibition named "Het verhaal van onze taal: Remunjs, zo gek nog neet" (The story of our language: Remunjs, not so crazy after all). I visited the exhibition as a part of my work for Lotte's Plat in de Ploog after which I asked Sander if he wanted to go there with me. Excited to see how his local dialect and culture was being represented, Sander accepted the invitation and travelled with me from Maastricht to Roermond to visit the exhibition.

Divided into three sections, the exhibition illustrated the story of Roermond's dialect in the past, present, and future as a lively part of the city's local culture and identity. Being a fan of linguistics, especially when it comes to the Limburgian dialects, Sander thoroughly enjoyed seeing the way in which his language was represented. One of the signs described how dialect union Veldeke<sup>7</sup> was established in the 1920s in response to the fear that the dominance of Dutch (Veldeke Limburg n.d.), industrialisation, urbanisation, and technological progress would create language uniformity in Limburg (Historiehuis 2025). However, following WWI, this fear existed alongside a growing interest in regional identities in which dialects were seen as an authentic expression of people's regional identities (Historiehuis 2025). “Isn't it funny how we're still dealing with the same fear of losing our dialects even a hundred years later?”, Sander asked me after reading the sign.

Like Veldeke, Sander actively tries to preserve the Limburgian dialects with PLAT as he sees them as an important part of our culture and identity. “I get that change is natural, but it does scare me to think that a language can just disappear.” Sander's comment made me wonder whether a language truly disappears or if it just changes. Asking Sander what he thought about this, he said: “I struggle with that discussion. When people start saying “vork” (fork) instead of “versjet”, do we call it language degradation, or is it just language changing with the times? I guess the answer is both.”

The last part of the exhibition was called “Greuts op taal en toekóms”, meaning “Proud of the language and its future”. “Despite the language disappearing, I feel like speaking a dialect remains something that some people are really proud of, including the younger generation”, Sander mentioned. When I asked him if he was one of those people, he told me that it was indeed his pride and love for this part of his culture that led him to act and create PLAT.

“There is a lot of talk about the Limburgian language, but little actually happens” (Drohm 2024), Sander had previously shared in an interview with De Limburger. Being a part of the political action group PLAT allows Sander to actively use the regional language as a form of social action to influence the legitimisation of Limburgian (Ahearn 2001; Camps 2017; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Schieffelin 1990). Not only do they do this by making local dialects visible on town signs, but their “semi-illegal actions”, as Sander calls them, are also attracting publicity. Having already

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<sup>7</sup> Veldeke Limburg is the oldest dialect union of Limburg dating back to its establishment in Maastricht in 1926 (Veldeke Limburg n.d.). To this day, Veldeke functions as an important network organisation that works together with other authorities on the Limburgian language and its dialects (Veldeke Limburg n.d.). With a focus on spelling standardisation, Veldeke stands for: Voor Elk Limburgs Dialect Een Krachtige Eenvormigheid (A Strong Uniformity For Each Limburgian Dialect) (Veldeke Limburg n.d.).

been interviewed by local news broadcasters several times, PLAT recently made the news again when they were reprimanded by the council of Horst aan de Maas for putting stickers on their town signs (L1 Nieuws 2025). However, after meeting with the council to plead their case, Sander and his friend managed to convince Horst aan de Maas to officially add the Limburgian names to their signs (L1 Nieuws 2025).

Working with Sander and PLAT, I saw how they value the language because of its strong connection to their local culture which they are proud of (Duchêne and Heller 2012; Urla 2019). Looking at how they represent different Limburgian dialects on their website, as well as how they make sure to use the local dialect's name for town signs, illustrates how they also value the diversity of the Limburgian dialects as an important part of the Limburgian language. Visiting the exhibition in Roermond with Sander, his strong connection to his local dialect was evident.

When we got to the end of the exhibition, I noticed some old dictionaries scattered across a table. "Do you have a Remunjs dictionary?", I asked Sander. He laughed before saying with a grin on his face: "I have three.". During my research, there were people who felt like there were simply too many dialects in Limburg for Limburgian to become a legitimate language. However, like Sander's earlier quote mentions, he believes that we live in a time where diversity is appreciated more which gives him hope that we will be able to standardise the Limburgian language whilst simultaneously preserve the variety of local dialects.

In the next section, I will look at how this particular time Sander refers to has opened doors for him to partake in the process of legitimating Limburgian (Camps 2017). I will do this by discussing Sander's work as a volunteer digitalising the Limburgian language and dialects whilst placing it in the context of late capitalism where global digital platforms, such as Google Translate, have taken on an influential role in both the economy and society (European Parliamentary Research Service 2021).

### *Placing Limburgian in the Global Order*

Next to his work at PLAT, Sander works as a volunteer for the Limbôrgse Academie. This non-profit organisation was set up in 2007 to connect Limburgian and its dialects to the digital world (Limbôrgse Academie n.d.). Their goal is to create the opportunity for people to use their dialects online as well as to make the language more visible (Limbôrgse Academie n.d.). As a volunteer, Sander works on creating an online dictionary which translates Dutch and English to Limburgian.

This online dictionary also allows users to choose which Limburgian dialect they want to translate to or from. Currently the options are Mestreechs, Remunjs, Zitterds, Valkebergs, and Venloos<sup>8</sup>.

The Limbögse Academie is not the only online platform that recognises the Limburgian language. Sander showed me how the website from Mestreechter Taol has an online dictionary which translates Dutch to the dialect from Maastricht and how you can choose Limburgian as a language on Google Translate and Wikipedia. “Seeing how a big company like Google includes Limburgian is so cool to me. It really makes it feel like a legit language. I think it will definitely help make people feel more confident in saying that their language is a real language”, Sander mentioned one time when we were playing around with Google Translate.

In her work on the legitimisation of Limburgian, Diana Camps (2017) illustrates how claiming the regional language as heritage, developing spelling norms, and acknowledging the dialectal diversity in Limburg creates legitimacy. Furthermore, these aspects of the process of legitimisation create opportunities for social actors to partake in and shape this process (Camps 2017). Sander’s work for PLAT and the Limbögse Academie exemplify this by making the heritage visible through putting the Limburgian names on town signs, and by (re)producing spelling norms in online dictionaries.

However, I argue that what is missing in research on the legitimisation of Limburgian is the role of the representation of Limburgian on global digital platforms as a part of the process of legitimisation, as my research shows how the existence of these global digital platforms has opened the doors for both Sander and Lotte to use their agency to influence the status of Limburgian (Ahearn 2001; Duchêne and Heller 2012). Where Lotte makes sure that Limburgian is represented as a legitimate language on social media, Sander works on the representation of Limburgian and its spelling norms in online dictionaries.

Not only do global online platforms participate in the legitimisation of Limburgian, but the online sphere also allows for the commodification of Limburgian (Duchêne and Heller 2012). In their research on language in late capitalism, Duchêne and Heller (2012) talk about five interconnected processes that characterise the global market. One of those processes is the process of “distinction” (Duchêne and Heller 2012). This process acknowledges the uniqueness of a set of consumers and plays upon this by adding this unique character to products, increasing the economic and symbolic value (Appadurai 1996; Duchêne and Heller 2012). Doing some online research, I

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<sup>8</sup> These are the dialects from Maastricht, Roermond, Sittard, Valkenburg, and Venlo.

found many sites that sell all sorts of products with Limburgian words and sayings on it like the T-shirt Sander wore to the exhibition.

However, this commodification does not just happen online. One of Sander's favourite places to go to in Roermond is a restaurant called Faubourg St. Jaques. Everything at the restaurant is in the local dialect of Roermond, including the menus, toilette signs (saying *mansluuj* (men's toilet) and *vrouwluuj* (women's toilet), and the reservation signs. I once asked Sander what he thought about the commodification of Limburgian and whether he thought it took away from the language's cultural importance. Instead of focussing on the negative effects of capitalism, Sander said: "I don't think the fact that the language has become something with an economic value takes away from the people's pride that is connected to their dialect. As long as it helps to make the language visible, I don't see why we shouldn't use the language as a selling point."

*Couplet*

Zo greuts op dees wäärd  
Die veer sóms neet meer kinne  
Gaer bring ich ze trök  
Laot ós eige taal binne

Ouch deep in de nach  
Laot ich miene sjtum heure  
Veer kinne good kalle  
Mer sóms módt d'r ouch get gebeure

*Refrain*

Gaef 't noe door  
Es 'n echte taal  
't Moog ouch besjtaon  
Jao, ich sjrief 't waal

't Is tied  
Óm d'r veur te gaon  
Ich doon waat ich zègk  
Jao, 't blief besjtaon

*Couplet*

Noe kiek wie ich sjrief  
Ich ómring uch mit wäärd  
De zuus esse hie bös  
Metein wie 't heurt

Al vinjse 't raar  
Det ich hie zo veur gaon  
Nieks geit mich te wied  
Zolang es veer ós versjtaon

*Refrain*

*Verse*

So proud of these words  
We sometimes forget about  
I'd love to bring them back  
To let our own language back in

Even late at night  
I will let my voice be heard  
We are good at talking  
But sometimes we need to take action

*Chorus*

Now pass it on  
As a real language  
It's allowed to exist  
Yes, I'll write it down

It is time  
To go for it  
I do as I say  
Yes, it will survive

*Verse*

Now look at how I write  
I'll surround you with words  
You'll see when you get here  
How it's done right away

Even if you find it weird  
That I'm fighting for this  
I'm not afraid to go the extra mile  
As long as we understand each other

*Chorus*

<p><i>Brök</i></p> <p>En esse bang bös Det 't geit Jao, esse bang bös Weit det ich sjtriej veur groot tot klein</p> <p>'t Blief besjtaon Jao, 't blief besjtaon</p> <p><i>Refrein</i></p> <p>2x</p>	<p><i>Bridge</i></p> <p>And if you're scared That it's going away Yes, if you're scared Know that I'm fighting for young and old</p> <p>It will survive Yes, it will survive</p> <p><i>Chorus</i></p> <p>2x</p>
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This song reflects Sander's pride and work as an activist for PLAT and volunteer for the Limbögse Academie. The lyrics are in his local dialect, Remunjs, and reflect the fear that the language might get lost over time. However, with this song I want to emphasise how Sander is driven not by his fear, but by his pride to actively fight for the survival and legitimation of his language.



This chapter highlights the role of fear, as well as the importance of pride as a driving force in legitimating Limburgian and its variety of dialects.

Sander's take on the commodification and economic value of language in late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) shows how Limburgian's connection to both "pride" and "profit" are intertwined (Duchêne and Heller 2012). Where his pride drove him to take action, the added economic value in the commodification of the Limburgian language helps Sander in his quest to legitimate his language by making it more visible.

Furthermore, Sander's story illustrates the advantage of the use of global digital platforms in late capitalism as they have provided new ways for him to use his agency and partake in the

legitimation of the Limburgian language through representing the Limburgian language in online dictionaries for people to use.

However, Sander's work for PLAT is a reminder that the process of legitimating Limburgian does not just take place online in the context of late capitalism but continues to also take place offline. By placing stickers with the Limburgian names on town signs in Limburg and getting the council of Horst aan de Maas to change their town signs, PLAT uses offline authorities, such as local councils, to legitimate the Limburgian language outside the online sphere.

# Conclusion

I began this research with the aim to answer the following research question:

*How does the rise of global digital platforms in the context of late capitalism influence young people in Limburg, the Netherlands, promoting the regional language?*

Having spent three months with young people in Limburg working with and promoting the regional language, it became clear to me that the legitimisation of their language was an important part of their work in promoting Limburgian and its dialects. By bringing the perspectives of Lotte and Sander and their roles in the legitimisation of Limburgian to the debate on language in late capitalism, I have shown how this particular time and the presence of global digital platforms provide new ways for Lotte and Sander to legitimate Limburgian, as well as allowing them to look at new “authorities” such as global platforms like Google Translate to recognise Limburgian as a legitimate language. Furthermore, looking at the how Lotte and Sander navigate the legitimisation of Limburgian has revealed that while the fear of losing their language and dialects plays a role in their everyday lives, the pride they feel in connection to their culture and language remains an important driving force in their work promoting Limburgian. It also shows the “positive” effects of capitalism by highlighting how the commodification of Limburgian helps to make the language more visible.

The first chapter has provided a contextual overview of the role of language in Limburg’s history and present. Moreover, it illustrates how the integration of Limburg in becoming a province of the Netherlands (Orbans and Spronck 2009), as well as the shift into late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) have influenced the current friction between two different discourses in relation to language in Limburg. Namely, the friction between the discourse which stems from Limburg’s integration and recognises Dutch as the only authorised language and the discourse shaped by late capitalism which acknowledges the benefits of multilingualism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) and makes room for the legitimisation of Limburgian as the province’s standard language next to Dutch.

By using the example of nurseries in Limburg, I have shown how this friction plays out in everyday contexts in Limburg. Furthermore, this ethnographic example illustrates how, even though a nursery like the one in Maastricht is part of the project Zjuulke which legitimates Limburgian, they are still influenced by the counter discourse which emphasises the importance of monolingualism.

Chapter two has illustrated what the legitimisation of Limburgian looks like from the perspective of Lotte. As a limfluencer using the regional language as her “brand” on social media, Lotte uses global digital platforms in the context of late capitalism (Appadurai 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012) to gain access to an influential network in the current language movement in Limburg whilst working on changing the image of Limburgian.

Recognising Limburgian’s value as a “profitable” source which can provide access to a niche market in late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012), in Lotte’s case online representation of Limburg, has provided the opportunity for Lotte to change the stereotype of the “stupid” Limburgian with the “soft G” accent (Cornips and Thissen 2014) from a source of shame to the Limburgian language being a source of pride which she promotes online.

Writing a song together with Lotte helped me to make her local dialect, which she loves so much, visible in this thesis. Furthermore, the process of creating this song showed me how, despite the “profitable” aspects of the language to Lotte as a “brand”, “pride” is a strong driving force in the work that she does.

Sander’s chapter has shown how his fear of losing the language in the future, as well as his “pride” in relation the language as an important part of his culture have shaped his role in the legitimisation of Limburgian. His work as both a linguistic activist and a volunteer digitalising the Limburgian language and its dialects illustrates how the legitimisation of Limburgian happens both off- and online in the context of late capitalism. Placing stickers on town signs in the middle of the night lets Sander partake in this process in a tangible way offline, whereas his work digitalising the language in online dictionaries for the Limbôrgse Academie allows him to partake in the legitimisation in the global online sphere.

To Sander, the commodification of language in late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) does not take away from the “pride” that is connected to the Limburgian language. Furthermore, Sander’s perspective shows how capitalist processes that create a niche market for the Limburgian language (Duchêne and Heller 2012) like selling T-shirts with Limburgian words on them or a restaurant using the language for its marketing, help to make the language more visible which in turn helps to recognise and legitimate Limburgian as a language.

Like Lotte, Sander’s pride is strongly connected to his local dialect, Remunjs. Sharing the song I wrote with Sander represents his pride and work for the Limburgian language in this thesis in his own language and voice.

These three chapters all discuss three important themes in relation to the legitimisation of Limburgian. Namely, the fear of losing the regional language and its dialects in the future, pride as a

driving force in wanting to legitimate the language, and the importance of global digital platforms as a part of the legitimization of Limburgian. In the context of late capitalism, I argue that the Limburgian language is valued as both a source of “pride” and “profit”. Moreover, the added value of the regional language as a “brand” in a time that values multilingualism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) provides new ways for the language to be legitimated by Limburgian citizens like Lotte and Sander, as well as new global authorities like Google social media platforms, and state actors such as the provincial government.

This thesis shows how, instead of a shift in the way we value language in late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012), we are seeing a shift in the process of legitimating minority or regional languages like Limburgian. Where it was previously a dialogue between the state and its citizens, in the context of late capitalism, the process of legitimating Limburgian has become a discourse shaped by the state, its citizens, and global actors (i.e. Google Translate, Wikipedia, Instagram, TikTok, etc.).

To answer the research question, the rise of global digital platforms in late capitalism allows young people in Limburg, like Lotte and Sander, to find ways to legitimate the Limburgian language by using these platforms to promote and digitalise the Limburgian language. Their stories illustrate how the process of legitimating Limburgian has changed in the context of capitalism and, next to providing new ways to use their agency, the process has become a conversation between the state, Limburgian citizens, and global actors, instead of a dialogue between the state and its citizens. However, their perspectives also show how the process of legitimization has not completely changed in the context of late capitalism. Both Lotte and Sander still use old methods like standardising the language and claiming it as cultural heritage (Camps 2017) to legitimate the language next to their work in the global online sphere.

Given that my research has focussed on people in Limburg who are in favour of the legitimization of Limburgian, it would be interesting for further research to consider the perspectives of people who do not speak a Limburgian dialect, or who believe that the differences in the Limburgian dialects is too dominant for Limburgian to be called a language in relation to this process. As my own research comes to an end, I think it is important to consider the diversity in local dialects in Limburg. Even though my thesis has touched upon the importance of people’s dialects by looking at Lotte’s connection to Bungs and Sander’s to Remunj, there is room for further research to focus on these differences as they are an important part of the Limburgian culture. Furthermore, they can provide a different perspective on the legitimization of Limburgian by

looking at how this process influences the everyday lives of people who do not consider Limburgian to be a language or who do not speak a Limburgian dialect.

# Epilogue

*Gouvernement aan de Maas, Maastricht*

13 December 2024

*Veur!* All but ten faction leaders proudly deliver their vote in favour of the five-year plan in their local dialect. After the three hour long debate, the proposal has been accepted unanimously. The room erupts in boisterous applause. I can see Lotte excitedly recording this momentous moment for the Limburgian language and its dialects.

Having watched some of the political parties raise the concern that Limburgian working towards status III under the ECRML might exclude people or force people to use the regional language, I wasn't sure how the vote was going to play out. However, people's pride and love for the language proved to be the decisive factor in the outcome of this debate.

As I leave the provincial government's building, I walk past PLAT's banner. Turns out climbing the trees in the early hours of the morning was not done in vain. Limburgian will be protected after all.

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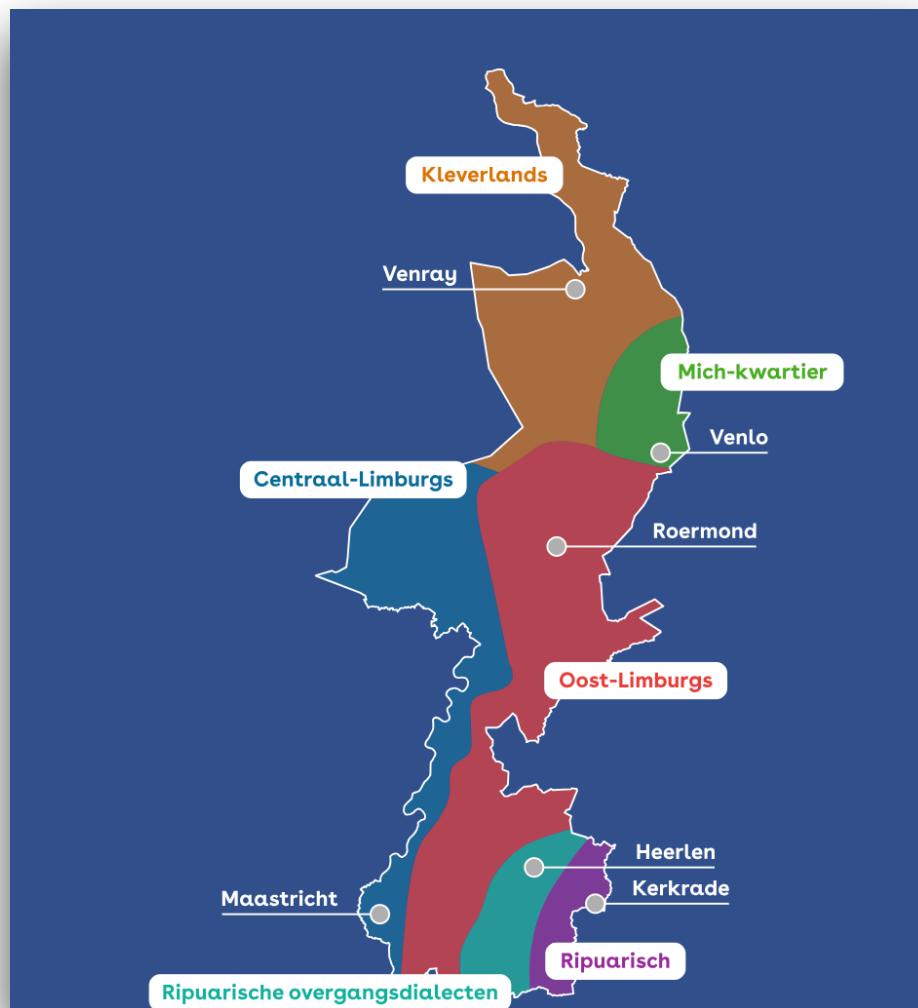
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# Appendix



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