

Names: Zoe Wang, Hanneke Loerts, Merel Keijzer

E-mail: r.wang@rug.nl

Affiliation: University of Groningen (Netherlands)

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Title: Multilingualism in Crisis Communication: Use of Minority Languages in COVID-19 Awareness Campaigns in the Netherlands

This on-going project investigates the availability, accessibility, and acceptability of multilingual and simple COVID-19 information for individuals in the Netherlands who have a low mastery of written Dutch either due to another mother tongue or low native language literacy skills. With most of the COVID-19 communication being done in Dutch or using English as a lingua franca, minority language speakers, immigrants, and people with lower (or no) literacy, face the challenge of linguistic barriers that make them more vulnerable to the virus and its consequences (OECE, 2020).

This project aims to create a clear image of how the role of multilingualism plays in the Netherlands during COVID-19 pandemic. This project taps into and is rooted within different linguistic traditions that it uniquely combines and integrates within the context of a timely and relevant topic: Crisis sociolinguistics, linguistic diversity, and linguistic landscape. Observational data will be used to provide an overview of the current multilingual information available concerning COVID-19. Furthermore, to have a comprehensive image of the role of multilingualism in the Netherlands during the pandemic, three groups of participants are recruited nationwide: non-Dutch speakers, low-literate L1 Dutch speakers, and a control group consisting of literate L1 Dutch speakers. Questionnaires and interviews are performed to compare the availability and immediacy of public information to people of different linguistic backgrounds.

This project's findings will inform us whether and how the diverse inhabitants in the Netherlands were informed about the pandemic and the usefulness extends far beyond the current pandemic. Investigating the relationship between linguistic diversity and public communication in a broader sense can provide tools for multilingual public communication and ultimately may inform and improve public health in the Netherlands, but also spanning beyond the Dutch context and pertaining to the availability of minority language information in crisis communication more generally.

Reference

OECD, (2020). Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de> on 20th January, 2021.