

## **Linguistic diversity and education.**

### **Dynamic interactions between language education policies and teachers' beliefs. A qualitative study in secondary schools in Flanders (Belgium)**

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to deepen our understanding of the dynamic interaction between language ideologies, education policies and teacher beliefs about monolingualism. This study takes place in Flanders (Belgium) which is characterized by educational policies based on a strong monolingual ideology. The research design combines document analysis, regarding recent language policies in Flemish education, and in-depth interviewing of teachers in secondary education. The main objective of this study is to examine how language policies in education are reflected in teacher beliefs in schools in secondary education. We will look at the interaction between the monolingual policies explicated by the Flemish policy makers and the beliefs of secondary education teachers on home language and language use. Finally, we want to gain more insight in the explanatory schemes teachers use to rationalize their monolingual beliefs. The results of this study indicate that teachers strongly adhere to monolingual policies, and rationalize these monolingual beliefs by mainly referring to time and integration arguments. Even though, some teachers are confronted with the limitations of a monolingual approach to linguistic diversity, an alternative framework seems to be lacking. We also found that these monolingual beliefs strongly impact their inter-subjective relations, particularly teacher-pupil and teacher-parent relations. Implications for policy makers are discussed.

## **Keywords**

Language ideologies, monolingual policies and practices, teacher beliefs, teacher-pupil-interaction, qualitative research design

## **1. Introduction**

The past two decades, education policies in many Western countries have emphasized language use and proficiency in the dominant language as a condition for academic success. The use of and proficiency in the home languages of students with different social and ethnic backgrounds are valued by policy makers as elements of identity building and cultural integrity, but not as didactical capital for academic performance and the acquisition of the dominant language (Cummins 2011, 2013; Van Avermaet 2009; Agirdag 2014; Extra, Spotti, and Van Avermaet 2009). Home languages are now placed explicitly outside the curriculum and attributed no value for academic performance. If at one time educational policies did include projects and programs providing bilingual curricula or curricula in home language and culture, these initiatives have been gradually dismantled and replaced by policy measures such as L2 submersion programs, remedial language courses and testing policies and practices in the dominant language (Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008; Extra and Yagmur 2004; Vaish 2012). These monolingual education policies, as currently implemented in different Western European countries, are based on monolingual ideologies and put into practice by school principals, teachers and school staff through mission statements, curricula and language tests (Shohamy 2006; Gkaintartzi, Kiliari, and Tsokalidou 2014). Thus, in order to be effective, these language policies developed at macro-level need to be internalized by social actors at micro-level and the education system plays an important role in this process (Bourdieu 1991). However, the education system cannot be regarded as a static entity. As most schools have a certain level of autonomy (this is in particular the case in Flanders, where this study is conducted, taken into account the freedom of education as guaranteed by the Belgian constitution), there might be differences at school-level (i.e. meso-level) in how teachers reproduce, contest, negotiate and reconstruct the macro-level language policies.

The main objective of this study is to examine how language policies in education are reflected in teachers' beliefs in schools in secondary education. We will look at the interaction between the monolingual policies explicated by the Flemish policy makers and the beliefs of secondary education teachers on home language and language use. A previous quantitative study, based on a survey of 775 teachers across 48 secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium (Pulinx, Agirdag and Van Avermaet, 2014) looked at the monolingual beliefs of teachers, whether and how teacher beliefs vary across schools, and what the consequences of these beliefs are. The results of that study indicate that teachers in general strongly adhere to monolingual policies. The most significant differences were related to the ethnic composition of the schools. Teachers in schools with a mixed population (schools with 40 to 60 % of ethnic minority students) adhered the most strongly to monolingual beliefs. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that stronger monolingual beliefs of teachers are related to lower levels of teacher trust in the academic engagement of their students (Pulinx, Agirdag and Van Avermaet, 2014).

Building on the findings briefly discussed above, in this study we want to gain more profound insight in teachers' beliefs regarding language, home language and language use in education through qualitative research methods. We argue that the national education policies and school policies regarding language and language use not only impact teachers' beliefs, but also their inter-subjective relations, particularly teacher-student-relations. The beliefs teachers hold on language proficiency and home language often interact with more general beliefs regarding students with a migrant background, e.g. parental involvement, academic and future expectations, and motivation.

This study is a qualitative mixed method study based on document analysis regarding current language policies in Flemish education and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with teachers. These teachers were, at the time of the interviews, working in three schools of

secondary education situated in an urban context in Flanders, Belgium. The population of each of these three schools consists in large part of students with an migrant background.

This paper has four parts. The conceptual framework used to analyze the collected data in relation to the formulated research objectives is outlined in the first part. Secondly, the research methodology and data analyzing techniques are presented. Thirdly, the findings are discussed and summarized. And finally, the paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of the research findings.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework, used to examine the relation between language policies in education and teacher beliefs on language use in education, consists of three elements: 1) languages policies as expressions of language ideologies (Spolsky 2004, Shoham 2006); 2) the notions, developed by Bourdieu, of linguistic capital, symbolic power and doxa (Bourdieu 1979, 1991) to gain insight in the processes of social reproduction in education, and 3) the explanatory schemes of time, integration and control that are used to rationalize strong monolingual beliefs. For each of these three elements the theoretical conceptualization will be outlined and a research question will be formulated. The theoretical frame work will then be used to analyze the qualitative data that were collected via document analysis and in-depth interviewing.

### ***2.1. Language ideologies***

Language ideologies are systems of beliefs and ideas about the role language holds within the cultural, social and political context of a specific society. The construction of these language ideologies does not happen abruptly or accidentally but is always situated in specific social, historic and political contexts. Furthermore, language ideologies are not only socially and

politically situated, but are related to instances of identity construction, power relations and assertion of power in societies (Spolsky 2004; Blackledge and Pavlenko 2002; Kroskrity 2000; Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). As Woolard (1998) stated: “Ideologies of language are rarely about language alone.”

Language ideologies are then turned into practice by those in authority through language policies, and more specific through language education policies. Language policies are instruments to achieve certain political goals and to legitimize ideological choices. Shohamy (2006) sees language education policies as powerful mechanisms for creating de facto language practices in educational institutions, given the fact that children and youngsters are (until a certain age) obliged to attend school. This explains why languages policies are developed and maintained, notwithstanding theoretic and empirical evidence stating otherwise.

Language education policies are mostly developed and dictated at regional and national level. They are implemented through official documents such as curricula or mission statements and carried out by school principals, teachers and other school staff (Shohamy 2006). Teachers, as individual professionals and members of a school team, implement these language policies in interaction with the local school context, their own experiences and beliefs (Creese 2010).

The language ideologies that currently dominate the integration and citizenship discourse in most Western European societies consist largely of the following elements: 1) the use of one common language by all members of society is a prerequisite for achieving social cohesion; 2) social cohesion can only be guaranteed by acquiring the standard variety of that national language; 3) language proficiency is a condition for social participation and must therefore be acquired before participating; 4) language proficiency is seen as a marker for knowledge of the culture and social norms and values; and 5) unwillingness or refusal to learn and use the dominant language is regarded as a sign of disloyalty and defective integration

and a threat to social cohesion. These ideologies are propagated and repeated continuously by policy makers, unaffected by academic or empirical repudiation (Silverstein 1996, Piller 2001, Blackledge 2005, Shohamy 2006, Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008, Milani 2008, Horner 2009, Van Avermaet 2009).

These ideological hallmarks are clearly echoed in contexts of education, as will be discussed further in this paper. However, processes of internalization of language ideologies by individual teachers should not be regarded as mechanic or automatic processes. There might be individual differences across teachers as they have a level of agency in which they can negotiate or reject structural processes. Moreover, as most schools have a certain level of school autonomy (this is in particular the case in Flanders where this study is conducted), there might be differences across schools.

Hence, the first research question is formulated as follows: do teachers adhere to the monolingual language policies as currently implemented in the Flemish education system and how are these beliefs expressed in the discourse of the teachers?

## ***2.2. Linguistic capital, symbolic power and doxa in the field of education***

As indicated in the above paragraph, this study looks at the interaction between monolingual ideologies and policies in Flemish education and teacher perceptions regarding the home language(s) and language use of their students. Furthermore, we want to investigate the relation between monolingual mindsets of teachers and a more general deficit perspective on home languages and cultures of students with a migrant background.

Bourdieu (1991) has exposed the mechanisms through which the educational system classifies certain languages as valuable and legitimate within the education and school context. Bourdieu also outlined the unique position education holds regarding social language use and legitimate language competences. He sees the education system as a large-scale production

process delivering producers and consumers of language. Therefore, this system will try to hold on to the social value of the linguistic competences it produces and the linguistic capital these competences represent (Bourdieu 1991).

The classification of languages as valuable and legitimate – and consequently, other languages as invaluable and illegitimate – is a very important mechanism to maintain processes of social reproduction in education. Linguistic capital can be acquired through prolonged exposure in an informal setting, mostly the family, and through deliberate instruction of explicit rules in a more formal setting, being the education system. (Bourdieu 1991). In societies, rapidly transitioning into super divers societies (Vertovec 2007), opportunities to appropriate the legitimate linguistic competencies (as classified by the education system) are unequally distributed among the participants in the field of education, especially in an education system based on a clear monolingual ideology. By marking specific home languages as illegitimate, entire groups of families are no longer considered as settings where legitimate linguistic competences can be acquired. Secondly, in the context of monolingual education ideologies, proficiency in the legitimate language is considered a condition for participation in education. This means that the legitimate linguistic capital has to be obtained before entering the field of education. As a result, the same group of students and parents are excluded from education as a setting where valuable linguistic capital can be obtained. As Bourdieu (1991) stated: “Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are de facto excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence.”.

Not only are the opportunities to acquire linguistic capital unequally distributed, linguistic exchanges are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between individual speakers or their respective groups are actualized (Bourdieu 1991). It goes without saying that speakers with more legitimate capital enter into the field of linguistic

exchange with more symbolic power. For Bourdieu (1979), the opposition between legitimate and illegitimate languages coincided predominantly with the opposition between different social classes: “A language is worth what those who speak it are worth, i.e. the powers and authority in the economic and cultural power relations ... the dominant language is the language of the dominant class”. In most Western societies, becoming more and more diverse as a result of increasing migration and globalization, an additional opposition can be found between native and non-native speakers (notwithstanding the strong correlation between social class and home language often apparent in these societies).

But Bourdieu argued that the domination of one language over one or more other languages and varieties can only persist if dominant and dominated groups alike accept the superiority of the proclaimed dominant language. These shared ideas and beliefs about language become common sense, or in the words of Bourdieu, they become “doxa”, that is, experiences through which “the natural and social world appear as self-evident” (1979). This encompasses what falls within the limits of the thinkable and sayable (“the universe of possible discourse”), a limit which “goes without saying because it comes without saying” (Bourdieu 1979) .

The notion of doxa is very useful for understanding processes of reproduction and transformation (Waquant 2006). When the monolingual doxa are internalized by members of the dominant and the dominated groups, these ideologies and policies are not only reproduced but also reinforced. But these doxa can also be contested, negotiated and reconstructed instead of reproduced by these groups (or individual members) and thus initiating a process of transformation instead of reproduction.

Language ideologies contribute to the continuation of the ‘institutional circle of collective misrecognition’ (Bourdieu 1991), comprising subtle misrecognitions of languages considered as inferior by the dominant group and invisible exertions of symbolic power often

disguised as favorable to multilingual practices and equality of opportunity (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001).

Derived from the above, the second research question of this study reads as follows: Can we discover the central elements of the monolingual ideology, dominating Western European integration and citizenship discourse, in the policy documents and policy statements outlining the Flemish education policies and in the discourse of the actors functioning in this setting (in this study: the teachers)? Furthermore, can processes of classification of languages, symbolic power and misrecognition and reproduction of linguistic capital be exposed in the different policy documents and discourses?

### ***2.3. Time, integration, school success and control as explanatory schemes***

Teacher beliefs regarding home language(s) and language use have already been the subject of extensive research, demonstrating strong adherence of teachers to monolingual ideologies in education (for recent studies see: Pulinx, Van Avermaet and Agirdag 2014; Valdiviezo 2009 and Ramaut et al. 2013). Teachers are not only aware of the monolingual beliefs they adhere to, but they also provide motivation and rationalization for their own mental dispositions (Van den Branden and Verhelst 2009; Mampaey and Zanoni, 2013).

Van den Branden and Verhelst (2009) distinguished three explanatory schemes, used by teachers to rationalize their monolingual beliefs:

- Time argument: students with another home language than the language of instruction in education, are generally coping with language deficiency. These students often use the language of instruction solely within the school setting. Therefore, all the available learning and teaching time in school has to be used for decreasing the language deficiency.
- Integration argument: teachers are convinced that the integration into the host society of students with a migrant background is advanced by exclusively allowing the use of

the majority language in the school setting. Proficiency in the majority language is considered a condition for full participation in the host society as well as academic and professional success.

- Control argument: teachers are afraid to lose control over processes of discipline and order in the classroom, learning processes and student-student-interaction when allowing students to use their home language (teachers are unfamiliar with) in the school and classroom context.

To the three arguments, distinguished by Van den Brande and Verhelst, we would like to add a fourth argument: school success. On the one hand, this argument can be considered a specification of the integration argument (language proficiency to further academic integration), on the other hand this argument is closely linked to the conditionality of language proficiency for academic achievement (as one of the main elements of the monolingual ideology underlying Flemish education policies).

Mampaey and Zanoni (2013), looking into the monocultural practices in the Flemish education system (i.e. mandatory use of the Dutch majority language; banning of religious symbols such as headscarves, and a curriculum focusing on the Flemish and Western majority cultural), differentiated between five core aims or motives for teacher adherence to monolingual and monocultural school policies. These core arguments demonstrated great conformity with the arguments found by Van den Branden en Verhelst (2009):

- Ethnic minority students' educational attainment;
- Majority staff's control over ethnic minority students;
- Ethnic minority students' future socio-cultural and professional integration in Flemish society;
- Positive relations between the school and external stakeholders;

- Positive inter-ethnic group relations among students.

Building on the discussed literature above, a third research question is thus formulated: how do teachers, participating in this study, motivate and rationalize their own monolingual beliefs?

### **3. Methodology**

The study is based on a qualitative research design, combining document analysis and in-depth interviewing. The research is conducted over a period of eighteen months (January 2010 – June 2011)<sup>1</sup>.

As outlined above, we have formulated three research questions based on the conceptual framework. First, do teachers adhere to the monolingual language policies as currently implemented in the Flemish education system and how are these beliefs expressed in the discourse of the teachers? Second, can we find evidence of an underlying monolingual ideology, processes of classification of languages, symbolic power and recognition and reproduction of linguistic capital in policy documents and discourses regarding Flemish education? And third, how do teachers, participating in this study, motivate and rationalize their own monolingual beliefs?

To answer these research question, a mixed-method qualitative research design was used, consisting of discourse analyses and in-depth interviewing.

Firstly, policy documents outlining language policies in education developed and implemented by the Flemish ministers of education in the periods 2004 – 2009 and 2009 – 2014 were analyzed. These documents consist of 1) policy documents, issued at the start of each legislature presenting new policy initiatives; 2) complementary policy papers, issued in

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<sup>1</sup> This study was part of the larger research project “Bet You! Boosting the Educational Trajectories of YOUth in Flanders. A study of the obstacles for and strategies of students with and without an immigration background in secondary education” ([www.oprit14.be](http://www.oprit14.be)) and funded by the Agency for Innovation by Science and Technologie (IWT).

the course of a legislature, outlining more specific policies such as languages policies in education; 3) public speeches of Flemish ministers of education; and 4) accounts of parliamentary debates on education.

Secondly, in-depth, open-ended interviews and focus-group discussions were conducted with teachers working in the second and third year of secondary education in one of the two largest urban regions in Flanders. This city is characterized by a large migrant population with a predominantly Turkish background. The three schools were selected based on two criteria: population and curriculum. Firstly, the population of each of the schools had to comprise a sufficient share of students with an migrant background (more than 50% of the school population), and secondly the three most important tracks in the Flemish education system – the general, technical and vocational tracks – had to be represented in the overall sample of the three schools.

School A, the largest of the three selected schools, counts in total 1200 students and offers exclusively general tracks (languages, science, mathematics). This school is located in the city center and the migrant population of the school consists mainly of students with a Turkish background. In this school 5 teachers participated in the research. School B is located close to the city center offering professional and technical tracks related to the “soft” industry (e.g. commerce, food, care). The majority of the school population, counting in total 730 students, has a migrant background and is characterized by a large diversity. In this school 7 teachers participated in the research. School C is located in the suburban area of the city and provides both professional and technical tracks related to the “soft” and the “hard” (e.g. construction, mechanics and woodwork) industry. Similar to the second school, the population of this school – counting in total 520 students – has a migrant background but with a majority of Turkish origin. In the third school, 10 teachers participated.

Overall 22 teachers have taken part in the study and 25 interviews (22 in-depth interviews and 1 focus group discussion in each school) have been conducted: of these 22 teachers, there were 7 men and 15 women; 5 were teaching in the general track and 17 in the technical and professional tracks; 12 of the participating teachers are Dutch language teachers and 10 are specialist teachers related to the different tracks offered by the schools. The teachers were asked to talk in depth about their ideas and opinions regarding language (both the dominant language as the home language), parental support, home environment and academic motivation as factors for academic success. The majority of the respondents have taken part in at least 2 interviews (1 in-depth interview and 1 focus-group discussion) and each interview lasted approximately one hour. The in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions are conducted by the same interviewer, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions are coded and analyzed by the use of a software program designed for qualitative data analysis (NVIVO 9, QSR International Pty Ltd 2011).

The interviews are all conducted in Dutch. To support or demonstrate research findings and results, quotations and excerpts of the transcriptions are translated in English and included in part four of this article. The possibility of (limited) loss of nuance and specific meaning of typical Dutch expressions has to be taken into account. To guarantee the anonymity of the respondents, no names are used.

## **4. Findings**

### ***4.1. Monolingual education policies in Flanders (Research Question 2)***

The description of the research findings, start with the second research question – evidence of monolingual ideologies, processes of classification of languages, symbolic power and misrecognitions, and reproduction of linguistic capital – is answered. When presenting the findings of the document and discourse analysis regarding education and language policies in

Flanders, at the same time the socio-political context in which this study takes place is depicted.

In the 80's and 90's the Flemish education system showed more openness towards plurilingualism and home languages (other than the majority language) at school. Since then, programs including bilingual curricula or curricula in home language and culture are gradually being dismantled and replaced by policy measures such as L2 submersion programs, remedial language courses and languages testing in the dominant language (Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008; Extra and Yagmur 2004; Agirdag 2010). This shift in education policies can for the most part be explained by two processes taking place in Flanders. Firstly, the increased impact of international comparative research programs (such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS<sup>2</sup>) on education policies and, secondly the process of sub state nation building that is taking place in Flanders over the past decades.

#### *4.1.1. Home language as language deficiency*

The policy shift towards monolingualism is in part related to the increasing influence of international comparative research programs, and especially, the PISA-study. Although the mean level of achievement is very high in Flanders, detailed analyses of the PISA results unveiled the persistence of social inequality within the Flemish education system (De Meyer e.a. 2005, De Meyer 2008; Jacobs 2009). The PISA 2006 survey was comprised of three literacy test, measuring reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. For all three literacy tests, Flanders was part of the group of the then highest scoring countries/regions. But, compared to the results of the PISA 2003 survey, Flanders had dropped two places for reading literacy (dropping from the third to the fifth place) and four places for mathematical literacy

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<sup>2</sup> PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)  
TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (IEA)  
PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (IEA)

(dropping from the first to the fifth place). Further analysis of the PISA-data showed that in none of the other participating countries/regions a greater gap in performance was established between 1) students with high SES and students with low SES; 2) students with a non-immigrant background and immigrant students, and 3) native Dutch speaking students and students who speak (mostly) another language at home (Jacobs 2009).

The data analysis shows that Flemish policy makers made use of the PISA results for implementing more stringent language policies. Quoting the then Flemish minister of education (Vandenbroucke 2007): ‘The Pisa result show that the achievement gap between students speaking the instruction language at home and students with a different home language than the instruction language is the widest in Flanders.’ An explicit monolingual policy framework was formulated, based on three main assumptions: 1) Dutch language proficiency is a condition for participation in education; 2) the use of a home language other than Dutch is detrimental for achieving academic success and leads to insufficient Dutch language proficiency, and 3) insufficient Dutch language proficiency at the start of an education trajectory is a deficit that needs to be elevated in order to achieve academic success.

For the first time, a specific policy document on language policy in education was published by the Flemish minister of Education (Vandenbroucke 2007): “Setting the bar high for languages in every school. Good for the strong, strong for the weak”. Proficiency in Standard Dutch is since then explicitly put forward as the most important condition for academic success. The minister of Education described his three policy priorities as follows: “Language, language and language” (Vandenbroucke 2007), hereby declaring that multilingualism leads imperatively to ‘zerolingualism’ when implemented headlong (Flemish Parliament, 2007). The next Flemish minister of Education (2009-2014) published in 2011 a second language policy document, titled: “Moving linguistic boundaries together” (Smet 2011), mainly continuing the policy guidelines set out by his predecessor.

An analysis of the policy documents shows a striking change in the explanations offered by the Flemish minister of Education for the existing social inequalities between students with different socio-economic and migration backgrounds in education regarding the PISA 2003 and 2006 results. Social inequalities, stereotyping, stigmatizing and discrimination as well as insufficient language proficiency were cited as explanatory factors for the differences in academic performance made clear by PISA 2003. The education policies, outlined at the beginning of the new legislation period 2004-2009, were explicitly focused on promoting equal opportunities.

But when the PISA 2006 results did not show any improvement (on the contrary) regarding social equality in Flemish education and it became clear that Flanders had dropped “several places” in the rankings, the explanations offered by the policy makers changed strikingly. Insufficient language proficiency in the dominant language (the language of instruction at school) was pointed out as one of the most important explanatory factors for differences in student outcomes. Referring to the PISA 2006 results, Christiansen and Stanat (2007) stated that children who do not speak, read or write the language of instruction to the level of their peers, perform less well in school.

Explanations based on socio-economic factors were pushed into the background. Tensions between achieving equal opportunities and educational quality (especially rendering education sufficiently challenging for the highest achievers) are since then increasingly highlighted.

#### *4.1.2. Language and identity in a super diverse society*

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region of Flanders is continuously working towards more cultural, political and financial autonomy. This processes of sub state nation building and nationalism in Flanders cannot be isolated from the rapid transition of Flanders into a multicultural society

since World War II. The transition into a super diverse society (Vertovec 2007) reinforces the quest for a recognizable identity, comprising a common language, shared norms, and values. The national language is viewed as an intrinsic part of national identity; language is considered an indicator of loyalty, patriotism, belonging, inclusion, and membership (Shohamy 2006).

Policy documents and political discourse of policy makers regarding Flemish education explicitly refer to language as a marker of a common (sub) national identity. The Dutch language has been classified as the legitimate language – leaving little margin for negotiation: “(...) Language policy in education has to focus on high proficiency in Standard Dutch, as the language of instruction, the common language and the language representing a common identity (Smet 2011).” By establishing the legitimate language in the field of education, other languages have been declared illegitimate in the education and school setting: home languages – other varieties than the Standard Dutch variety or languages spoken by migrant students – “are part of the private culture” of the students and their parents and are consequently placed outside the linguistic field of education (Smet 2011). The conditionality of Dutch language proficiency for social participation, education and employment is in turn reinforced by the intertwining of education and integration policies.

Quoting from the same policy document of the former Flemish minister of education (Smet 2011): “A rich proficiency in Standard Dutch is an essential condition for academic success, entrance to the labor market, a condition for social self-reliance and integration, access to youth work, culture, sports, increasing social cohesion, and developing sense of citizenship of every individual.”

The then Flemish minister of Integration expressed this as follows: “Participation and involvement in the Flemish society starts with knowing our language. Without a common

language there is no solid society. Dutch language proficiency is the entry ticket for education and employment.”<sup>3</sup>

In such a context of sub state nation building and increasing diversity, concepts as ‘home language’, ‘language minority’ and ‘foreign language speaker’ (*anderstalige*) have obtained a particular meaning. These terms almost exclusively refer to (second or third generation of) different groups of migrants – especially migrant workers originating from Morocco or Turkey – and more recently people migrating via family reunification, matrimonial migration and refugees. Widespread social prejudices, ascribe to these groups of students low levels of proficiency in the Dutch language, the use of low status home languages such as Turkish or Arabic and low levels of academic achievement (De Rycke and Swyngedouw 1999; Blommaert and Van Avermaet 2008; Nouwen and Vandenbroucke 2011).

These misrecognitions and manifestations of symbolic power – using the notions of Bourdieu – are legitimized and reinforced by official education policies and political discourse. Further clarification of the language policies implemented in education<sup>4</sup> stated that:

The instruction of home languages will be made possible only **outside**<sup>5</sup> of the curriculum. Children will not be offered special classes to maintain or enrich their home language during official school hours, because this will weaken already (linguistically) weak children. On the other hand, linguistically strong students who want to get a head start, can take on an extra language course within the curriculum.

These additional courses will be extended to all the official languages of the European Union and Chinese, Russian and Hindi.

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<sup>3</sup> Speech, Geert Bourgois, Flemish Minister of Integration, 13 October 2009

<sup>4</sup> Personal website Pascal Smet: <http://www.pascalsmet.be/article/samen-taalgrenzen-verleggen-kinderen-in-vlaanderen/>

<sup>5</sup> Bold in source text.

As Bourdieu demonstrated, a classification is made between superior or high status languages (the languages of the European Union such as English, French and German, Chinese, Russian and Hindi) and the inferior or low status home languages (primarily Turkish and Arabic in the Flemish context, languages linked to the different groups of immigrant workers and – more recently – migrants via family reunification and matrimonial migration and refugees). But additionally, a classification is made between the speakers of these languages: the former being the strong, the latter being the weak.

Based on the findings of the document analysis, we can state that the language policies in Flemish education are based on a strong monolingual ideology; and that clear classification of languages in present in the Flemish context, classifying the dominant language as the only legitimate language and banning low status languages from the field of education.

#### ***4.2. Teacher beliefs on (home) language and language use in education (Research Question 1)***

The first research question was formulated as follows: do teachers adhere to the monolingual language ideologies and the language policies as currently implemented in the Flemish education system and how are these beliefs expressed in the discourse of the teachers? Based on the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions, conducted with 22 teachers in three schools of secondary education in an urban region in Flanders, we found that the teachers voiced strong monolingual beliefs and affirmed the main tenets of the monolingual ideology currently dominating the education and integration discourse in Western-Europe (see. 2.1. Language ideologies) and the assumptions underlying the monolingual policy framework in Flemish education (see 4.1. Home language as language proficiency).

Most teachers believe that there is no room for other home languages than Dutch within the school setting. The exclusive legitimacy of the Dutch language in education and school is implemented through school policy measures, such as not allowing students to speak their

home language in classrooms, hallways, the playgrounds and the cafeteria and sanctioning students for doing so. In all three schools, participating in the research project, sanctions were administered to students when caught by teachers for speaking their home language with peers and these sanctions ranged from detention to supplementary language classes or copying text.

Teachers motivate the banning of home languages other than Dutch from the school setting by emphasizing that school is often the only setting in which students can learn and use the Dutch language.

“Those Turkish students, they are more and more in a ghetto again. Because 15 years ago, almost all the parents were able to speak Dutch. Now, parents are coming to parent-teacher-meetings, Turkish parents who were born here and went to school here and they have problems speaking Dutch. They understand it, but they do not speak it. That is what our society is like. They have their own shops, their own associations, their own community life. They do not need the Dutch language anymore.” (Woman, Dutch language teacher, school A)

“At home, they speak the language of their parents and often that is not Dutch. So, it already starts at home and has consequence for school. And we have to learn them to be proficient in Dutch at the end of the school year. It’s not enough, I cannot manage it in three hours a week. School is the most important thing they can hold on to. But they have to continue outside of school and that’s the problem. Once they are past the school gate it (*speaking Dutch*) stops.” (Man, Dutch language teacher, School B).

The assumptions that low status home languages lead to language and learning deficits at the start of a school career, and that Dutch language proficiency is as a condition for academic success, are strongly supported by the teachers. These assumptions can also be linked to the school success argument for rationalizing monolingual beliefs (see 4.3. Motivating and rationalizing monolingual beliefs).

“I do think that students have to take more Dutch language courses at the start of secondary education. That is not only the basis for the Dutch language course, but it is important for all the subjects. To do well in school, it is very important that they first learn the language. How can they understand a subject like geography, just to give an

example, if they do not speak the language very well and if they do not understand specific words?” (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School C).

“You do know, that a lot of these students are born here and still their Dutch language skills are very weak. Very weak, and they are born here, you know. But they didn’t go to kindergarten. Now it’s different, they have to go to 3rd year of kindergarten. But, still. They enter primary education and they already have a large deficit. Sometimes it cannot be remediated. Especially, when they do not put in the effort.” (Woman, Dutch language teacher, school C).

But occasionally, an individual teacher expresses the possibilities of a more open and inclusive attitude towards students and the use of their home languages in a school context.

“The language proficiency of students with a Turkish background is very poor. I have one student who reads books written in Turkish from time to time. Sometimes she translates (*Dutch*) words in Turkish for the other students. But it does happen that they don’t understand these words even in Turkish. Their language proficiency in general is very poor, that is the main problem. (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School C).

#### ***4.3. Motivating and rationalizing monolingual beliefs (Research Question 3)***

How do teachers, participating in this study, motivate and rationalize their own monolingual beliefs? When analyzing the data collected via the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, we found in particular confirmation for the time, integration and school success argument and not for the control argument (see 2.3. Time, integration, school success and control as explanatory schemes).

##### *5.2.1. Time argument*

As already indicated, teachers believe that students with a migrant background have insufficient language skills in Dutch, being the instruction language in Flemish education. In addition, teachers think that the school context is the only context in which these students learn and use Dutch. Because a good knowledge of Dutch is considered necessary for full participation in the Flemish society and for achieving academic and professional success in later life, all the

available learning and teaching time in school and in the classroom has to be used to improve the Dutch language skills of the students. Teachers refer frequently to the absence of the Dutch language in the home and social environment of the students, emphasizing the (lack of) responsibility taken on by the parents in this regard.

“That is the problem. You can do everything in Turkish. At school, Turkish students socialize with other Turkish students and outside of school they only meet Turkish friends. They go to their own shops. They have no contact with Dutch youth. (...) But they can do everything in Turkish. There are Turkish banks, hospitals, you can even obtain your driving license in Turkish. Shops, everything is in Turkish’. (Woman, specific teacher, School C)

Teachers seem to have a very dichotomous way of looking at the language proficiency in the instruction language of the students and their parents: they either speak Dutch or they don’t.

- I: ‘You said that none of the students in your class is Dutch-speaking. How many of these students are born in Flanders?’
  - R: ‘Probably all of them. No, not all. One or two have migrated recently to Flanders.’
  - I: ‘The students you call non-Dutch-speaking, they have been going to school in Flanders from kindergarten on. But you describe them as non-Dutch-speaking?’
  - R: ‘Yes, indeed. I am sorry, but they are non-Dutch-speaking and they will stay non-Dutch-speaking.’
- (Woman, specific teacher, School C)

### *5.2.2. School success argument*

We added the argument of school success as a specification of the integration argument to the explanatory schemes distinguished by Van den Branden and Verhelst (2009).

The instruction language in Flemish education is Dutch, therefore academic success cannot be achieved without sufficient language proficiency in Dutch. The conditionality of Dutch language proficiency for academic achievement is deeply rooted in the mindsets of teachers. The importance of a good knowledge of Dutch, students and parents alike, for achieving academic success is a belief shared by all the teachers. This argument already

become apparent in discussion research question 1 (4.2. Teacher beliefs on (home) language and language use in education).

‘There are (recent) migrants who are intelligent enough, but they lack the necessary language skills. I have an example of a girl from Moldavia. One day, she was crying. She said: “I have bad results, but I have learned all that already in my country.” She was about 16 and she had to fall back two years. But she said: “I have learned all that, I just can’t reproduce it. I can’t explain it in Dutch.”’. (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School C)

The same argument of Dutch language proficiency as a condition for academic success is used by the teachers when referring to the parents of their students. Parental support is considered a crucial factor for the success or failure of school careers. Teachers ask parents to daily check the school diary and to follow up on homework, report cards and school-parent-communication. Teachers also expect parents to create a positive home environment regarding Dutch language use (learning to speak Dutch themselves, watching Flemish television, offering after school activities in a Dutch language environment, stimulating reading books in Dutch by going to the library, etc.).

‘I do think that if the students are motivated enough to learn the language and if a lot of effort is put into it at home, they can succeed. It’s a different situation, if no effort is made to learn Dutch or if there are not much opportunities to learn Dutch.’ (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School A)

### *5.2.3. Integration argument*

A third argument, used by teachers to rationalize the exclusive legitimacy of Dutch in the school setting – requiring the use of Dutch and banning the use of (low status) home languages – is the integration argument: monolingual school policies contribute to furthering the integration of migrant students into the education system, the labor market and the wider society.

The kind of parental with the schooling of their children (as described above, see 5.2.2. School success argument), requires – as to the teachers – not only a good knowledge of the language of instruction in school but also an academic mindset as conceptualized in Flemish society. Parents with a migrant background do not always (sufficiently) meet the expectations set by school and teachers. Teachers attribute these unfulfilled expectations for the most part to cultural differences between parents and school, hereby opposing the culture of the students and their parents to the Flemish culture and the value attributed to education in Flemish society.

‘But it requires a change in mentality. When I look at my own situation. My child doesn’t come home from school without showing her school diary. She’s only 6 years old, but she does it spontaneously. Even if school doesn’t demand it, she does it automatically. When I came home from school, even when I was already in the last year of secondary education, I showed my school diary every day to my parents. (...) That’s a change in mentality. Yes, of course. My parents supported me like that, and now we do it in the same way.’ (Woman, specific teacher, School B)

‘Before, the school was vibrant and students would come to school for after school activities. Now, that’s not the case anymore. I do not think it’s part of their culture, recognizing the value of school and education. And they (*the parents*) do not expect much of their children, they know not much about it and they are not interested. Signing school diaries, returning letters that need to be filled out or signed, checking homework, it is all so very difficult.’ (Women, specific teacher, School C)

Learning and speaking Dutch is often considered by the teachers as a sign of – willingness – to integrate in Flemish society. This strongly corresponds with the dominant policy discourse on integration and the monolingual ideologies underlying these discourses. Consequently, some teachers have great difficulty to understand why parents and students with a migrant background continue to cling to their own language.

‘There’s a negative evolution taking place, compared to 10 or 15 years ago. Before, they (*the parents*) came to parent-teacher-meetings. They used to be much more interested. My husband is a pharmacist, he says: “Before, when mothers came to the pharmacy with their children, they spoke Dutch. They spoke Dutch with their children in the pharmacy. In recent years, they don’t do that anymore, they all speak Turkish again.” ‘So, it’s not only in school we notice this evolution. Furthermore, he says that

there are mothers in their thirties or forties who are dressed in a very Western way. They give the impression to be fully integrated. But they speak to their children in Turkish.’ (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School A)

‘I just cannot understand it. They are all born here. But when they have a family and children of their own (*they speak again their own language*). Those (*children*) start kindergarten already with a language deficit, they don’t speak Dutch. And they (*the parents*) have been to school here from kindergarten on. But with their children they speak their own language. Well aware of the fact that they will be entering kindergarten with a deficit.’ (Woman, specific teacher, School C)

These quotations clearly demonstrate the dichotomous approach teachers adopt regarding the language proficiency of students and parents. The concept of linguistic proficiency as a set of repertoires and registers – varieties of the Dutch languages combined with varieties of other languages, used depending on the context, interlocutor and topic discusses – seems to be absent. In the above quotation, it can be presumed that the Turkish woman in her role as costumer speaks (a variety of) Dutch with the pharmacist, but changes to (a variety of) Turkish when speaking to her child as a mother. She is not recognized as a person with multilingual competences, only as a non-Dutch- speaking person.

Some teachers do demonstrate a more profound insight in the complex processes of integration and identity building. They don’t consider the fact of preserving the home language as a sign of non-willingness to integrate and they are capable of mirroring the experience of their students to their own experiences.

‘If they speak Turkish – or any other language – at home, that seems 100% normal to me. But these parents should also emphasize the following: “I can (*speak Dutch*) or I cannot. But you have to do better than me in life, so you better start learning it.” I do think parents have to lead the way. That they don’t do it at home, that’s normal. When I visit my parents in (*a specific region in Flanders*), I also speak the local dialect. That’s normal’ (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School A)

‘I have two girls in my class and they speak Serbian to each other. I do understand, it’s much easier to have a conversation in Serbian. Otherwise, they have to listen do poor Dutch all the time. (...) If you want to talk to your friends, it’s much easier (*to speak your own language*). I do understand that it’s very difficult for those youngsters. And

you can repeat it as often as you like (*that they have to speak Dutch*).’ (Man, Dutch language teacher, School B).

### 5.2.3. Monolingualism ‘by deficit’

Next to the time and integration argument, teachers seem to rationalize their monolingual beliefs in the absence of an alternative framework to deal with the increasing linguistic diversity in school and classrooms. Teachers voice – implicitly and explicitly – their doubts about the effectiveness of the education and language policies that are currently implemented at regional, school and classroom level. The language proficiency of migrant students appears to be decreasing instead of increasing despite all the support measures (e.g. remedial teaching, pull out classes, languages testing) put into place. Nevertheless, the existing class and teaching practices are maintained. Education policies at Flemish level continue to confirm and reinforce a monolingual approach of linguistic diversity in education, while the necessary pedagogical and didactical competences to develop alternative perspectives and practices are lacking at school and teacher level.

‘All the things we do at school. I find this really frustrating, we really do a lot about language. But I do ask myself if all this is effective. I don’t see it. Their (*the students*) languages proficiency is decreasing instead of increasing. The more we do about language, the worse it seems to get.’ (Woman, specific teacher, School C)

‘I mean it, individually they are all adorable, but sometimes it’s about group dynamics. They are caught up in a negative spiral and in the end they make fun of themselves. They say: “I have broken Dutch.” They know that’s not correct but they keep on saying it. I don’t think it’s evolving in a positive manner. I really have a bad feeling about it.’ (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School C)

Teachers do experience that the current pedagogical and didactical frameworks, based on monolingual ideologies and policies, are no longer adapted to the linguistic diversity of the school and classroom population they are working with every day.

‘I thought it (*grammar lesson*) would go much quicker. (...) We had a test today, I think they understand it now. That makes me feel good. Ok, that’s where we are now. And all the other learning objectives we have to meet, that just won’t work. What’s the

point in rushing through all these lessons and to note in their class diaries that we have seen it all, if they don't understand it. Who are we helping then, I wonder.' (Woman, Dutch language teacher, school C)

'We have a lot of migrant students, Dutch is not their mother tongue. But we teach them Dutch as mother tongue, for them it's the second or third language they have to learn and additionally they have to learn French and English. So we notice that these students mostly fail the language subjects Dutch, French and English.' (Man, Dutch language teacher, School B)

'That's a very big problem for me. I teach Dutch, and I am supposed to teach Dutch to native speakers. The textbooks and the learning objectives are developed for students who speak Dutch as a mother tongue. In the first grade of secondary education, there are no native speakers. So work with that! You just can't meet the objectives. It's impossible. I do not mean the students are impossible. But with those students, you just can't meet the objectives.' (Woman, Dutch language teacher, School C)

Some teachers try to respond to the changing needs of their students by adapting classroom practices, but these efforts remain minimal and do not break out of the confinement of the monolingual framework.

'I do try to take into account that a lot of my students are non-Dutch-speaking. For Flemish students that (*French*) is a third language, but for some Turkish students it's already the fourth or the fifth language. I do think you have to be aware of this, it's really necessary.' (Woman, specific teacher, School C)

'And listening exercises, that makes them (*students*) really panic because they have to listen and write at the same time. We have an agreement. I do not sanction spelling or grammar mistakes when correcting listening exercises. Why not? Because I am evaluating listening competences. And then I want to know if they understood the (*spoken*) text. I also adapt the questions, for example by using multiple choice or only filling in a word.' (Woman, specific teacher, School B)

## **5. Conclusion and discussion**

In the above section, we have provided answers to the three research questions outlined in part two based on data collected by means of qualitative research methods. Firstly, we wanted to examine if teachers adhere to the monolingual language policies as currently implemented in the Flemish education system and how these beliefs are expressed in the discourse of the

teachers. Secondly, we wanted to look for evidence of an underlying monolingual ideology, processes of classification of languages, symbolic power and recognition, and reproduction of linguistic capital in policy documents and discourses regarding Flemish education. And thirdly, we wanted to gain insight in the explanatory schemes teachers use to motivate and rationalize their own monolingual beliefs.

Our findings indicate that the language policies in Flemish education are based on a strong monolingual ideology; and that a clear classification of languages is present in the Flemish education context, classifying the dominant language as the only legitimate language and banning low status languages from the field of education. In addition, we can state that teacher beliefs regarding the use of (home) language in education coincide to a large extent with the monolingual policies implemented in Flemish education. Teachers use time, school success and integration arguments to motivate and rationalize these monolingual beliefs. Teachers voice – implicitly and explicitly – their doubts about the effectiveness of the education and language policies that are currently implemented at regional, school and classroom level. The language proficiency of migrant students appears to be decreasing instead of increasing despite all the support measures (e.g. remedial teaching, pull out classes, languages testing) put into place. Nevertheless, the existing class and teaching practices are maintained in the absence of an alternative framework to approach the increasing linguistic diversity in schools and classrooms.

These findings have important implications for policymakers. Current education policies in Flanders, aimed at improving the achievement rate of non-Dutch speaking students, is based on the assumption that Dutch language proficiency is a condition for academic success. However, the intended objective – increasing the Dutch language proficiency by imposing the exclusive use of Dutch and the banning of other home languages in the school context – appears to be jeopardized by the interaction between teachers' language beliefs,

teachers' trust in students and teachers' expectations about academic achievement. Pulinx, Van Avermaet and Agirdag (2014) found an association between the monolingual beliefs of teachers and the level of trust they have in their students: the stronger the monolingual beliefs are, the less trust teachers have in their students. From the literature on teacher-pupil-interaction (Rosenthal and Jacobsen 1968, Crowl and MacGinitie 1974, Godley et al. 2006, Agirdag, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte 2013, Ramaut e.a., 2013) we know that trust in students is related to the expectations teachers hold regarding the academic achievement of students, and these expectations are in turn determining for the actual academic outcomes of students.

In the quotations of teachers illustrating the arguments used for rationalizing their monolingual beliefs (in particular related to the integration argument), stereotypes and beliefs teachers hold on the ethnic and cultural background of the students and their parents become apparent. These stereotypes and beliefs start out by referring to the home language and the language use of the students and their parents, but is then transferred to other – ascribed – characteristics of the speakers of these languages. In the literature, such processes of stigmatization, based on the language of a person or a group of persons, are labeled as 'linguicism' (Skutnabb-Kangas and Philipson, 1989): "Ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language." Based on the above mentioned literature, we can assume that these processes of stigmatization and stereotyping on the side of the teachers are also determining for the level of trust they have in their students.

The monolingual beliefs of teachers are shaped by an ongoing dynamic and reciprocal interaction process between education policies and specific school contexts. Therefore, teachers can be key actors in bringing about more open and inclusive language policies in

education. A transition from a monolingual toward a multilingual approach regarding home languages in education will be most successful when initiated by teachers at school and classroom level. The opposite shift – changing regional and national language policies first – seems more difficult to initiate taking into account the strong adherence to policies in the socio-political reality of Flanders. Earlier research programs have shown that practice-orientated and experimental approaches can lead to changes in the beliefs of teachers regarding the (linguistic) competences and academic involvement of their students (Ramaut e.a. 2013; Valdiviezo 2009).

By supporting grass root initiatives (small scale projects merging bottom up, based on school and class room experiences), conducting action research and experimental research programs and professionalization of teacher training, change in school policies and teachers' beliefs can be brought about. Subsequently, education and language policies at regional and national level can be influenced by the altered beliefs and experience at school and teacher level. In other words, monolingual school policies can be contested and reconstructed at school and classroom level.

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