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Eliminating social inequality by reinforcing standard language ideology? Language policy for Dutch in Flemish schools

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Flanders, the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, is experiencing growing intra- and interlingual diversity. On the intralingual level, Tussentaal ('in-between-language') has emerged as a cluster of intermediate varieties between the Flemish dialects and Standard Dutch, gradually becoming *the* colloquial language. At the same time, Flanders is encountering increasing numbers of immigrants and their languages. This paper analyses the way Flemish language-in-education policy deals with perceived problems of substandardisation and multilingualism, in order to create equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of their native language or social background. Both the policy and the measures it proposes are strongly influenced by different, yet intertwined ideologies of standardisation and monolingualism. By propagating Standard Dutch as the only acceptable language and by denying all forms of language diversity, Flemish language-in-education policy not only fails to create equal opportunities, but also reinforces ideologies that maintain inequality. Instead, language policy should be open towards language diversity, taking the role of teachers in forming and implementing policies into consideration.

Keywords: language-in-education policy; standard language ideology; monolingualism; social inequality; Dutch in Flanders; Tussentaal

Language policy: ideology, planning and practice

Language policies are present in some form in all domains of society (Ricento, 2006). It is in the domain of education, however, that such policies have the most impact on the members of society, as language-in-education policies play a paramount role in how a society articulates and plans for the future of its members (Liddicoat, 2013). Official documents are the most overt and articulated forms of language policy, but policies also exist in more covert forms, underlying the practices of language use and language learning in education. As such, policies discuss societal beliefs and attitudes about the value of languages or language varieties: which languages or language varieties are considered to have the most value regarding future societal success for pupils, and subsequently have a place in the classroom? This inextricable link between policy and society is used by Djité (1994) to discern between two kinds of processes in language policy: (i) processes at the societal level, where certain problems (e.g. social inequality) are formulated, together with possible solutions and (ii) at the linguistic level, where the linguistic norms which a community will use (or is expected to use) are selected.

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Governments and other authorities undoubtedly have an important role in formulating language policy but policy operates in a much broader context – that of the whole speech community. A speech community can be defined as a group of people ‘sharing a set of norms or regularities for interaction by means of language(s)’ (Silverstein, 1996, p. 285). For Spolsky (2004), there are three components of language policy at work in any speech community. *Language practices* are the actual languages or language varieties that are selected by the speech community to be used in society as a whole and in certain specific contexts. Underlying those practices are the *language beliefs* or *language ideologies* the speech community has about languages and their use in society. The third component is *language planning*, meaning the efforts that are made to modify or influence the language practices of the speech community. Note that, in this definition, ‘language planning’ and ‘language policy’ are not synonymous. Language planning is an activity inherent to language policy, forming the preparatory work which leads to the formulation of language policy and intentional change of language practices in the desired direction (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). However, as Liddicoat (2013, pp. 1–2) points out, language planning work is not limited to that preparatory stage but is also included in the implementation of language policies, in order to organise activities and approaches. As (part of) this paper concerns a discussion of the already existing language-in-education policies in Flanders, we examine ‘language planning’ in this post-policy form, focussing on the implementation actions it comprises.

Spolsky’s model (2004) is one in which language policy is seen as something far broader than a policy document, ‘it is a series of behavioural and attitudinal responses to language, which may be articulated implicitly or explicitly’ (Liddicoat, 2013, p. 3). In that respect, policy documents are only part of a process, ranging from identifying problems and possible solutions over the production and revision of policy texts to the implementation and interpretation of those texts. Yet, policy documents form an extremely useful basis to gain a further insight in the ideological beliefs a speech community holds towards languages and language varieties; they aim to shape the ways those languages are used and understood, they reflect the political ideologies of the state (Shohamy, 2007), serving as indexes of national identity and further, they are both explicit and tangible, which makes them easy to study. Accordingly, we will limit the scope in this paper to an analysis and discussion of the current Flemish language-in-education policy documents.

In the context of Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, the language ideology factor has proven to be very important (Delarue, 2013). Because of a long and hard-fought struggle for Dutch language rights, language had become a powerful nationalist motif in Flanders, although some linguists and anthropologists stress the supporting and mostly symbolic role of language in political-nationalist contexts as an ‘emblematic, romantic element that was shorthand for the more fundamental processes of democratization and enfranchisement’ (Blommaert, 2011, p. 6). Nevertheless, discussions in Flanders involving language policy or language use in public institutions (e.g. public broadcast media and education) often stir up heated discussions, dominating newspapers for days and even weeks after. In the past few years, this ideological sensitivity towards the use of both other languages than Dutch and varieties other than Standard Dutch has received more attention in Flemish sociolinguistic research (see Jaspers, 2005; Van Hoof, 2013).

In Flemish education, there is a large gap between language-in-education policy on the one hand, and actual language practices on the other (De Caluwe, 2012b; Delarue, 2011). Although policy never completely coincides with actual practice as policies are intentionally made to obtain a shift in practice, this desired shift should be both *beneficial* and *realistic* for all parties involved. This paper aims to show how the current policy is neither

beneficial (as it does not succeed in its initial objective, creating equal opportunities for all pupils) nor realistic (as its intensive propaganda for the little-used standard variety is virtually impossible to turn into reality). To do so, we address the following three questions: First, how did the current Flemish language-in-education policy come into practice, and on what theoretical and especially ideological grounds? Second, why and how is the Flemish policy unfit to give an apt response to current, negatively perceived language practices? And third, on what grounds can a new, more suitable and realistic language-in-education policy be elaborated?

The first two sections of this paper provide an overview of the Flemish linguistic landscape, with a discussion of intralingual developments in Dutch on the one hand ('Language policy: ideology, planning and practice'), and Flanders' ambivalent position towards multilingualism and multilingual education (MLE) on the other ('Diaglossia in Flanders: the emergence of *Tussentaal*'). Subsequently, we show how the current language policy texts in Flanders address the (perceived) problems of multilingualism and standardisation ('An ambivalent position towards multilingualism and MLE'), and we analyse these texts by dissecting two strongly intertwined ideologies which are strongly present in Flemish language-in-education policies, the 'ideology of standardisation' and the 'ideology of monolingualism' ('Language-in-education policy in Flanders'). In the last part ('Ideologies of monolingualism and standardisation'), we sketch the rough outline of a more realistic policy, focussing on three main factors: (i) the acknowledgment of both intra- and interlingual diversity, (ii) the recognition of code-switching (CS) and (iii) the role of teachers in drafting, redacting and implementing language-in-education policies.

Diaglossia in Flanders: the emergence of *Tussentaal*

The Flemish language situation is characterised by a strong dynamic. Following processes of dialect levelling and dialect loss, intermediate varieties emerged in-between the dialects and the standard (Willemyns, 2003, 2005). In his frequently cited typology of dialect/standard constellations across Europe, Auer (2005, p. 22) has described this kind of language repertoire as being 'characterised by intermediate variants between standard and (base) dialect', a *diaglossic* repertoire. These intermediate varieties are often referred to as *Tussentaal* (literally 'interlanguage' or 'in-between-language'), *Verkavelingsvlaams* ('allotment-Flemish') or *Soapvlaams* ('Soap-Flemish'). Although the widespread use of these umbrella terms suggests that *Tussentaal* is one clearly demarcated variety, it should be noted that there is not one *Tussentaal*, but a whole range of unique constellations of dialectal and standard variants determined by speech situation, education type, age, sex, and regional background (Willemyns, 2005). *Tussentaal* cannot be described in terms of necessary and sufficient features (De Caluwe, 2002, p. 57); it can only be said to be marked by a significant number of deviations from both the standard language and the dialect (De Caluwe, 2009).

For the last few decades, *Tussentaal* has been subject to rapid expansion and, according to some, even standardisation (Plevoets, 2008; Willemyns, 2005), which can be attributed to two main factors (for an overview of other possible explanations, see, e.g. Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011):

- (1) The exoglossic standard language, which was imported from the Netherlands in the twentieth century to resist the dominant position of French in Belgium, never really won the hearts of Flemish speakers (Willemyns, 2003), despite several large-scale standardisation attempts from the government, the media, and education (for an overview, see Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012). This resistance to exoglossic Dutch

paved the way for the emergence of a Flemish supraregional variety, namely Tussentaal.

- (2) Processes of dialect levelling and dialect loss in the central regions of Brabant and East-Flanders, led to the functional elaboration of Tussentaal. In an attempt to explain this causality, Willemyns (2007) argues that dialect loss necessitates an informal variety (in between the disappearing dialects and the standard) that indexes regional identity. Because of the smaller distance between this intermediate variety (Tussentaal) and the standard, ‘many people see no inconvenience in using the former in situations where actually the use of the latter would be more appropriate’ (2007, p. 271). As such, Tussentaal seems to replace both the dialects and the standard, pushing the standard to the extreme formality side of the continuum (Willemyns, 2007, p. 271). The correlation between dialect loss and Tussentaal expansion appears to be confirmed by Ghyselen and De Vogelaer (2013) whose attitudinal research in the peripheral region of West-Flanders shows that the spread of Tussentaal progresses much slower if the dialect is still quite vital.

The emergence of Tussentaal caused severe irritation on the part of the cultural and educational establishment and at the same time received a great deal of linguistic attention. Whereas early publications on the subject mainly contain emotional comments on the emergence and status of Tussentaal (see, e.g. Debrabandere, 2005; Van Istendael, 1989), recent publications tend to focus on more objective descriptions (e.g. Plevoets, 2008; Taldeman, 2008). These data-based descriptions show the standard as a ‘virtual colloquial variety (...), desired by the authorities, but rarely spoken in practice’ (De Caluwe, 2009, p. 19, own translation). The zenith of uniformity and standardness continues to be (broadcast) speech by news anchors of the Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroep (VRT), the Flemish public broadcaster. Aspiring newsreaders have to pass rigorous pronunciation tests and adhere to very strict norms (Vandenbussche, 2010). However, it is very doubtful whether this extremely strict norm is also attained (or even aspired to) outside of the news studio.

De Caluwe (2012a, p. 267) discerns two possible options for the adoption of what he calls an ‘informal spoken standard language’ in Flanders, existing between VRT-Dutch and Tussentaal. The first, that it could be derived from the exogenous formal standard language in a top-down scenario; the second, that it could grow from the endogenous language, i.e. from Tussentaal. In such a bottom-up approach, the traditional standard language, oriented towards VRT-Dutch, would be considered a variety that is only spoken in certain formal situations. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the ‘best-suit’ mentality of Flemish speakers, meaning that one only wears one’s best suit for special occasions, but one feels uncomfortable wearing it (Geeraerts, 2001). Grondelaers and Van Hout (2011) compare this to the ‘double norm’ situation in Danish (Kristiansen, 2001), where a conservative standard is reserved for the schools and a modern standard for the media. In much the same way, VRT-Dutch could continue to play its conservative role as an ‘accentless’ and therefore neutral medium for news and culture coverage, while Tussentaal (or a more standardised form of Tussentaal) becomes the more dynamic (media) variety, albeit without any pretence to being the best language.

In these ongoing dynamics, defenders of the standard place all their hope on Flemish teachers. They are after all ‘the first-line dispensers of standard usage’ (Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2012, p. 48), who are supposed to be ‘loyal to official pronunciation norms’ (De Schutter, 1980). As such, school teachers are ‘the last gatekeepers of the standard’ (Van Istendael, 2008, p. 31) and ‘guardians of the standard language’ (Van de Velde & Houtermans, 1999). These expectations entail a lot of pressure (which is increased even

more by the current language-in-education policy, as we will show later in this paper) and recent research shows that teachers cannot or will not meet these expectations. All teachers use some amount of Tussentaal features when teaching, and as younger teachers tend to use Tussentaal as their default colloquial variety, there is a trend towards even more Tussentaal use in teaching (De Caluwe, 2012b; Delarue, 2011, 2013; Olders, 2007; Walraet, 2004).

An ambivalent position towards multilingualism and MLE

Apart from these standard-versus-vernacular dynamics, which evolve on an intralingual scale, we should also take into account the relationship of Dutch with other languages. Because of the presence of three official languages (Dutch, French and German), Belgium is often considered a multilingual country but at the same time there seems to be a monolingual trend; few citizens are bilingual, let alone trilingual (De Caluwe, 2012a). Yet, there is ample schooling in foreign languages on offer, resulting in the oft-recurring and deserved appraisal of the Flemings for easily acquiring foreign languages. The curricula of primary and secondary education prominently include foreign languages, and each year thousands of students go to study foreign languages at universities and university colleges. This openness towards foreign languages is often linked to the language history of Flanders. For centuries, the Flemish people have found that the sole knowledge of Dutch offers few perspectives in a country like Belgium where other languages (French in particular) are dominant, or in the multilingual community that is Europe. Next to their home language, which was a dialect or regiolect, generations of Flemish people had to study a (foreign, because exogenous) standard language that was used at school, from a very young age. At school, moreover, foreign languages were taught early on, and were stimulated by the government since good knowledge of foreign languages is considered a main asset of Flanders in the competitive international arena.

However, this promotion of foreign languages as school subjects is in stark opposition to the very stringent regulation of the use of foreign languages as media of instruction in Flemish education. This strict focus on Dutch as the sole language of instruction can also be explained by the language history of Flanders. Until well in the twentieth century, French was the language of a socially and economic oppressing elite that dominated Dutch-speaking Flanders (Mettewie & Housen, 2012), and as Flanders had to fight a long, hard battle to consolidate the position of Dutch, politicians are now hesitant to allow for other languages than Dutch to be used in such an important societal domain as education (Bollen & Baten, 2010, p. 413). The closed nature of the Flemish language-in-education policy towards MLE corresponds with the findings of researchers of the DYLAN project, in which the influence of political aspects on the implementation of MLE recommended by Europe was studied (Van de Craen, Ceuleers, Surmont, Mignom, & Allain, 2011). They found that policies tend to be more open-minded towards MLE if the majority language: (i) had early standardisation; (ii) does not suffer from any language threats; (iii) is dominant and (iv) has light legislation. The reluctance of Flanders to introduce forms of MLE or immersion in its curricula corresponds with the position of Dutch on each of these four levels. Dutch in Flanders has had late standardisation, is perceived to be suffering from language threats – one of the main objections to MLE in Flanders is that is un-Flemish and a threat to the position of Dutch (Bollen & Baten, 2010) – has long been dominated by French and has very strict language legislation.

Indeed, all forms of multilingual or immersion education (often called ‘Content and Integrated Language Learning’ or CLIL in a European context) are strictly forbidden by law in Flanders¹ – apart from some on-going pilot projects (Smet, 2011; Van de Craen,

Ceuleers, Mondt, & Allain, 2008) – contrasting sharply with the already well-established forms of immersion education taking place in Wallonia, the southern French-speaking part of Belgium, with lessons in another language (Dutch or English) often starting in kindergarten or the first years of primary school (Mettewie & Housen, 2012). In Flanders, the current and previous Ministers of Education have been members of the socialist party. The previous Minister, who held the post until 2009, developed a very antagonistic discourse with respect to MLE, with ideas inspired by arguments of the Flemish Movement, which strove for Dutch language rights in the ‘frenchified’ Flanders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His policy was characterised by a monolingual view of education and even some anti-European ideas with respect to European legislation (Van de Craen et al., 2011). His successor, current Minister of Education Pascal Smet, is less radical in this respect, but forms of MLE remain strictly prohibited in Flanders: social equality can only be achieved if everyone learns and speaks the same language in the classroom, i.e. Standard Dutch (cf. *infra*).

As such, Flanders keeps hold of a unilingual schooling norm, with non-native speakers being dropped into a mainstream school environment, where they are forced to learn a second language (L2), at the cost of losing their first language (L1). They are subject to submersion, being ‘thrown into the deep end and expected to learn to swim as quickly as possible without the help of floats or special swimming lessons’ (Baker, 2006, p. 216). This form of *subtractive bilingualism* (Lambert, 1977), aiming at a quick and smooth transition from L1 to L2, is considered a weak form of bilingual education by some (Baker, 2006), but in this kind of situation, the language outcome is in fact monolingualism (Bollen & Baten, 2010, p. 413). This monoglossic language ideology can be extremely harmful, especially for immigrant, non-native speakers of Dutch. Blommaert, Creve, and Willaert (2006) convincingly show how immigrant children, who are often proficient and literate in languages other than Dutch, are deemed illiterate because they do not have the ‘adequate’ language skills needed to become valued and integrated members of society:

Entering Belgium as an immigrant meant, consequently, entering this homogeneous space of a monoglot linguistic community, in which every form of upward social trajectory was closely tied to steps in the acquisition of standard Dutch (...) Unless one speaks standard Dutch, or unless one possesses the specific literacy skills associated with Dutch orthography, one is language-less and illiterate, even if one is a proficient multilingual individual, and even if one is a sophisticated literate in a writing system different from that of Dutch. (p. 53).

This restrictive monolingual submersion approach does not seem to be beneficial to all immigrant children in an attempt to reach the required level of Dutch proficiency. Ironically, most Flemish policy-makers still cling to the submersion system, usually emphasising the importance of the Dutch language for narrowing the performance gap between autochthonous and immigrant children (Bollen & Baten, 2010, p. 418). In this context, Brisk (2005, p. 20) rightly stresses that ‘proponents [of transitional programs] should never lose sight that the goal of education is to develop children and not to defend languages’. In an analysis of the media coverage of bilingual education in Flanders, Bollen and Baten (2010) find a fairly positive bias towards bilingual education, but with a strong tendency to promote it for the majority (i.e. native speakers of Dutch) while rejecting it for minorities (i.e. immigrants).

As such, there seems to be a paradoxical situation, in which some cases of learning or using several languages have positive connotations while others have negative connotations. In other words, some uses of more than one language are conceptualised as being

‘multilingual in an acceptable or prestigious way’, others as ‘multilingual in a useless way’ or even ‘multilingual in a detrimental way’ (Vogl, 2012). In this regard, Jaspers (2009) distinguishes two types of multilingualism which relate to this paradoxical situation, and which can partly help to disentangle it. On the one hand, there is *prestige* (or ‘pure’) *multilingualism*; the multilingualism of highly educated speakers who have command of various Western European standard languages, as promoted in the EU and national policies. On the other hand, there is what Jaspers (2009) calls *plebeian* (or ‘impure’) *multilingualism*. It is a label for ...

the use of various languages by the mostly urban, mostly multi-ethnic, very often poorly-educated working class across Europe. It concerns first, second and third generation migrants with linguistic repertoires comprising varieties of national (or minority) languages (among others Moroccan Arabic, Berber, Turkish and Kurdish) of their countries of origin as well as proficiency in (very often regional) varieties spoken in the host country. (Vogl, 2012, p. 6)

Blommaert (2011, p. 11) makes a similar distinction when he refers to ‘multilingualism of the elite’ versus ‘multilingualism of the poor’, respectively, and in a Flemish context, Blommaert and Van Avermaet (2008) are astonished at the selectivity with which the argument of language deficiency is used. Foreign CEOs or members of the European Commission in Brussels need not worry about acquiring Dutch, whereas the poorer migrant is under almost unbearable pressure to integrate as soon as possible. That selectivity only becomes more emphatic because many schools in Flanders, particularly in urban areas, are faced with an increasing number of pupils who have a home language that is different from the language used at school such as Turkish, Arabic, Russian and so on² (De Caluwe, 2012a, pp. 276–277).

Language-in-education policy in Flanders

To answer these ‘problems’ of multilingualism, language deficiency and subsequent inequality, language policy was rekindled as a hot topic in Flemish education in 2007, with a report by the former Education Minister Frank Vandenbroucke. His solution to create equal opportunities for all Flemings essentially comes down to one simple action point: the insistence on Standard Dutch as the only acceptable language variety in schools, inside as well as outside the classroom. Propagating this standard would, according to Vandenbroucke (2007), solve both the problem of multilingualism and the problem of the increasing use of non-standard varieties (e.g. Tussentaal and dialect). In his policy document, the former Minister defines the standard as a variety which is the result of ‘setting the bar high’ (Vandenbroucke, 2007, p. 4), and is characterised by ‘a rich proficiency’ (2007, p. 4) and ‘appropriate language and communication’ (2007, p. 11).³ By contrast, non-standard varieties (e.g. Tussentaal and dialect) are qualified with adjectives as ‘bad, inarticulate and regional’ (2007, p. 4) or ‘sloppy’ (2007, p. 11).⁴ As such, there is no room in schools for...

[...] krom taalgebruik of verkavelingsvlaams of een streektaal die hen in een klein gebied opsluit en hun kansen op mobiliteit en emancipatie ondergraaft. [...] Het Nederlands en zeker het ‘schoolse Nederlands’ beperkt zich voor heel wat leerlingen tot de school en de klas. Daàr moeten we het dus waarmaken. [inarticulate language use (...)] or a vernacular that locks them [the students] up in a small area and buries their chances of mobility and emancipation. Standard Dutch is, for a lot of students, limited to use at school and in the classroom. That’s the place where it has to happen]. (Vandenbroucke, 2008, own translation)

Vandenbroucke's successor, current Minister of Education Pascal Smet, wrote a follow-up document (2011) in which he profiled the distinction between Standard Dutch and non-standard varieties or languages other than Dutch in an even sharper way:

In Vlaanderen groeien nog steeds veel kinderen op voor wie de moedertaal een regionale variant van het Standaardnederlands en dus niet het Standaardnederlands is. (...) Nochtans is een rijke kennis van het Standaardnederlands dé voorwaarde voor wie in Vlaanderen wil leren, wonen, werken, leven. Wie van elders komt, en geen Standaardnederlands leert, blijft in de beslotenheid van het eigen gezin of de eigen gemeenschap leven, en leeft – in Vlaanderen – buiten Vlaanderen. [In Flanders, there are still many children growing up for whom the mother tongue is a regional variant of Standard Dutch and thus not Standard Dutch itself. (...) However, a rich knowledge of Standard Dutch is the prerequisite for who wants to learn, live, work in Flanders. People who do not learn Standard Dutch, remain in the seclusion of their own family or community and live – in Flanders – outside of Flanders]. (Smet, 2011, p. 3, own translation)

This government stance, in which Standard Dutch is regarded as a *conditio sine qua non* for successful participation in society and socio-economic promotion (but see Jaspers, 2012), attempts to kill two birds with one stone; both non-native pupils who speak another language at home and pupils who use Tussentaal or a dialect are urged to learn Standard Dutch. As such, the target audience is broadened to all pupils who do not use the (pro memorie: little used and largely virtual) standard at home, considering them all to be language deficient and in need of a rich variety.

The language planning initiatives that are proposed to achieve this goal aim at different levels, corresponding with the three 'environments'. The most recent policy document distinguishes between family, school and work, and leisure (Smet, 2011, p. 5). On the family level, the 'language deprivation' of a lot of parents is emphasised. They should be encouraged to acquire and use Standard Dutch actively at home by watching Flemish television programmes and reading Dutch books to their children. The policy acknowledges in passing that a rich native language can be more beneficial for children than poorly spoken Dutch (Smet, 2011, p. 6), but then continues to actively propagate Standard Dutch:

Anderstalige ouders gebruiken beter een rijke thuistaal dan een arm Nederlands. Dit neemt uiteraard niet weg dat ze zich positief engageren t.o.v. de onderwijstaal, het Standaardnederlands. Voor de kennis van het Standaardnederlands is het noodzakelijk dat professionele begeleiders jonge kinderen tijdens hun voor taalontwikkeling meest gevoelige leeftijd op een correcte wijze begeleiden en stimuleren. Naast het hanteren van een rijk Standaardnederlands moeten begeleiders een positieve aandacht voor de taal hebben die het kind thuis spreekt. [Parents who are not native [in Dutch] are better off using a rich native language than poor Dutch. However, they still engage positively with respect to the instruction language in education, Standard Dutch. To become proficient in Standard Dutch, it is imperative that professional counselors supervise young children in a correct and stimulating manner during their most sensitive stages in language development. Besides speaking a rich Standard Dutch, counselors should have a positive attitude towards the home language of the child]. (Smet, 2011, p. 6, own translation)

On the school level, the government plans to impose new final attainment levels for both primary and secondary education, in which language proficiency in Dutch should be a main factor and schools are required to elaborate their own language-in-education policy. Former Education Minister Vandenbroucke calls for an intensive system of testing and evaluating the proficiency of pupils, as well as the efficiency of those school language policies, to create 'a policy which is based on facts, not on perception' (2007, p. 23, own translation).

An important factor, which is stressed in all policy documents, is the reform of the teacher-training programme in order to train teachers in linguistic competencies. However, as the government explicitly passes the task of defining the actual methods, curricula and skills to obtain these goals to educationalists and teacher educators, there are still no actual changes in the final attainment levels (Delarue, 2011), the ways in which schools should work on language policy (De Caluwe, 2012b) or the reform of the teacher-training programme (Van Hoyweghen, 2010). In other words, because of limp language planning, the gap between policy and practice remains and even expands.

Ideologies of monolingualism and standardisation

From the discussion in the previous paragraphs, a few different but strongly intertwined ideologies can be inferred, which have shaped language policy in Flanders over the last decade. To begin with, the Flemish language-in-education policy clearly reflects a still vital Herderian ‘one nation, one language’ aspiration (Bauman & Briggs, 2003), which is also present in other (Western) European nation states. This *ideology of monolingualism* might seem strange considering the multilingual character of Belgium, but it is important to note that Belgium, much like Switzerland, actually consists of several monolingual regions (except for Brussels) which entails that most citizens can function monolingually (Willems, 2009). In these monolingual territories, ‘[i]t is only natural, then, that [...] very little tolerance is shown to minorities that deviate from the monolingual norm. Social, cultural and linguistic diversity, consequently, are seen as problematic and deviant’ (Blommaert, 2011). A society with internal differences is viewed as dangerous and centrifugal, whereas the ‘best’ society is deemed to be one without any intergroup differences. Next to this clearly present ‘dogma of homogeneity’ (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998), the statements of both Ministers of Education show clear features of Silverstein’s monoglot ideology (1996); an ideology where monolingualism is considered a fact, and speaking one language is a means to achieve in-group membership, to become part of the ‘linguistic community’ or, in this case, Flemish society (Delarue, 2013). The governmental policy constructs a pure, monolingual society, denying the fact that practically all speakers reside in a ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1987) of different languages and varieties. By equalling this much-desired situation to actual language practices, Flemish language-in-education policies seem to confuse language ideology with actual language practice. Moreover, all other aspects of the socio-economic background of society are deleted from the context frame; that is in Flemish policy, all problems are reduced to *language* issues.

This reductionist focus on monolingualism brings about a striving towards uniformity and standardisation. It is not enough for pupils to acquire Dutch; they have to become proficient in the standard variety of Dutch. According to the policy documents, speaking Standard Dutch is the only guarantee of equal opportunities, a proper job and an improved ranking on the social scale, as the quotes in the previous section have shown compellingly. The following quote from the most recent policy document sums up the advantages of becoming proficient in Dutch:

Een rijke kennis van het Standaardnederlands is een essentiële voorwaarde voor een succesvolle schoolloopbaan, doorstroming naar de arbeidsmarkt, voorwaarde voor maatschappelijke zelfredzaamheid en integratie, toegang tot jeugdwerk, cultuur, sport, verhoging van de sociale cohesie, persoonlijke ontwikkeling, het aanwakkeren en ontplooiën van de burgerzin van elk individu. [A rich knowledge of Standard Dutch is a prerequisite for a successful school career, a smooth transition into the labour market; it is a prerequisite for social empowerment and integration, access to youth work, culture, sports, an increase of social cohesion, personal

development, and fuelling and expanding the citizenship of each individual]. (Smet, 2011, p. 4, own translation)

This reasoning contains some (ideo)logical errors. As discussed earlier, every form of intralingual diversity is denied. Non-standard varieties of Dutch (such as Tussentaal and dialect) are deleted from the ideological scheme in the policy document, providing a classic example of what Irvine and Gal (2000) have called *erasure*. To illustrate, in the most recent language-in-education document (Smet, 2011), which comprises about 40 pages, the term ‘Standard Dutch’ is used 77 times, whereas ‘Tussentaal’ (or a synonym) does not occur once. The line of reasoning seems to be that if only Standard Dutch is propagated extensively, Tussentaal will disappear of its own accord. The ideological background of this policy document, striving towards monolingualism, can be summarised by referring to the *standard language ideology* (SLI) concept, coined by Milroy and Milroy (1985). Lippi-Green (1997, p. 64) defines it as ‘a bias toward an abstract, idealised homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and which has as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class’. Imposing and maintaining that bias is considered one of the tasks of the dominant institutions in society, particularly education. Strangely enough, the vigour of this SLI seems to be opposed to the recent societal changes of the last decades, typical of what Giddens (1991) has called ‘Late Modernity’, such as informalisation, democratisation (Fairclough, 1992), globalisation, immigration and feelings of anti-authority. Strong SLIs also seem to go against the processes of destandardisation and demoticisation (Coupland & Kristiansen, 2011) that are widely researched and acknowledged in many countries and regions (e.g. Grondelaers & Van Hout, 2011; Grondelaers, Van Hout, & Speelman, 2011; van der Horst, 2008). In other words, while language diversity – interlingual as well as intralingual – has become an essential part of contemporary society, Flemish policy condemns this diversity, denying the essence of how language becomes a social and cultural instrument in daily life.

Apart from selecting Standard Dutch as the only variety worthy to be used and taught in Flemish schools, this standard is also narrowed down to a specific, invariable, codified set of rules. In what Blommaert (2008) calls an *artefactual ideology of language*, ‘in which particular textual practices can reduce language to an artefact that can be manipulated like most other objects’ (Blommaert, 2008, p. 292), a ‘true’ language is fully form-based, codified in dictionaries and grammars, and has nothing to do with actual speech. This ‘objectification’ of (standard) language becomes clear in popular expressions about language proficiency. For example, language can be possessed like an object (*‘My Dutch’*); it can be changed and manipulated (*‘I need to polish my pronunciation of Dutch a bit’*) and different qualities can be distinguished in it (*‘He really speaks Standard Dutch poorly’*). Supporters of the current language-in-education policy often argue that education contexts simply need such specific, specialised forms of language – written language, certain forms of narrative, a specific lexicon, registers and jargons – which contrast sharply with the real-life language competencies of most children (Feys & Gybels, 2009; Vandenbroucke, 2008; Van Istendael, 2008), and that the standard is the only apt variety to do this in.

Indeed, these contextualised language competencies (Cummins, 2006) are the ones that are assessed in the international PISA studies⁵ of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which evaluate and compare education systems. When the Ministers of Education state that their language-in-education policy is based on thorough scientific research, only these PISA studies are cited explicitly as underpinning

research for their policy measures (Vandenbroucke, 2007, p. 7). However, the PISA results only indicate that Belgian schools have difficulty overcoming differences in social background, showing in the results one of the largest gaps between the best performing pupils and the weakest ones of all participating countries (OECD, 2010, p. 9). That a very restrictive language policy is the only decisive factor in closing this gap, is not suggested by these or any other studies on the subject. Moreover, using the results of tests of very specific and specialised language competencies as arguments for an education policy that claims to call for equal opportunities for all pupils to participate in everyday society is both illogical and irrational. It is undeniable that education qualifications determine people's social trajectories but that does not imply that schools are replicas of society. Indeed, they are nothing more or less than a very specific and important niche. Considering this niche to be the entire world, leaving out all other forms of real context, is one of the main flaws of the current policy documents (Blommaert & Van Avermaet, 2008).

This lack of context accounts for the final fallacy we wish to address here. The main claim that the policy measures create 'equal opportunities' and thus 'higher success rates in society' for all is strongly influenced by a class-determined ideology of literacy (cf. Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Succeeding in society is equalled to getting a white-collar job, functioning in an ICT-controlled, globalised office environment and disregarding the fact that these jobs are, whether the polity likes it or not, fundamentally elitist. By setting the bar that high – which is actually the title of the former language-in-education policy document (Vandenbroucke, 2007) – technical and vocational fields of study, leading to the so-called blue-collar jobs, are severely downgraded. As such, the aspiration of inclusion can easily turn into exclusion; people who do not measure up to such elitist expectations, are easily deemed to be losers. This partly explains why Flemish parents are so inclined towards sending their children to general secondary education instead of technical or vocational forms of education, even if those children are formally dissuaded to do so. If they fail in general education, they can always choose a 'lower' education type. In Flanders, this train of thought is often called the 'cascade system' (Boone & Van Houtte, 2013), showing the consequences of this 'caricature of the egalitarian point of view' (Hirtt, Nicaise, & De Zutter, 2007).

Overall, the most urgent problems of the current Flemish language-in-education policy can be summarised in three main points:

- (1) An abstraction of what language actually is, denying the diverse, rich but complex multilingual society in which schools are located.
- (2) The propagation of Standard Dutch as the only variety that is deemed acceptable inside as well as outside of school, and at the same time the objectification of that variety to a contentless set of rules, estranged from actual speech.
- (3) The complete absence of any form of context. Language planning is the ultimate recipe for equal opportunities, regardless of what the actual needs in society are. As such, schools reside outside of the society they should be embedded in.

Towards a more realistic language-in-education policy

In their ideological discussion of language-in-education policy in Flanders, Blommaert and Van Avermaet (2008) call for a learning environment that teaches language not only linguistically, but also sociolinguistically, 'explaining how and why certain language variants function, why they are useful, how they are preferably used (and how not to be used!),

which possibilities and limitations certain language forms offer' (Blommaert & Van Avermaet, 2008, p. 106, own translation). The current deletion of genuine interactions in non-standard varieties or languages other than Dutch in official policy (De Caluwe, 2012a) needs to be replaced by a more realistic language policy, in which 'realistic' bears a double meaning: (i) a policy that starts from how pupils and teachers actually speak in schools today and (ii) a policy that takes into account the basic sociolinguistic insight that intralingual (as well as interlingual) diversity is an essential part of how language functions in society (Blommaert & Van Avermaet, 2008).

Tussentaal is a variety that is used spontaneously by most Flemings in informal situations. It is the mother tongue of most youngsters in Flanders and Tussentaal has gradually become *the* colloquial language (De Caluwe, 2002, 2009). Instead of ignoring or explicitly denouncing Tussentaal, *language-in-education policy should take into account this intralingual diversity* and consider the place Tussentaal can have in classroom and school contexts.

Language policy also mostly focuses on programmatic issues and the linguistic, academic and societal achievements of students but the role of the teacher is often relatively absent – the same can actually be said about research on language policies (deJong, Arias, & Sánchez, 2010). To *enhance the role of teachers in forming and implementing language policies*, thus increasing the chances of the measures that are proposed by these policies, the relation between teachers and policies must be studied more in detail. Heineke and Cameron (2013) discuss the very different ways in which teachers appropriate language policy. As they observe, language policy only provides a framework for teachers to figure the world, teachers can proactively use their own perspectives and identities to deal with the expectations and routines of this figured world. Following sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), knowledge is constructed by participating in social and cultural activities that are simultaneously affected by individual, interpersonal, and institutional planes (Rogoff, 2003). By interviewing teachers of different age groups, Heineke and Cameron (2013) were able to show that these three planes occur sequentially, and teachers 'move' from one plane to another as they become more experienced. New and inexperienced teachers are on the institutional plane, enacting policy as prescribed (*maintenance*). On the interpersonal plane, teachers with some experience acknowledge the policy statements (*recognition*) but they are moulded into a form that fits the teachers' classroom practice. The most experienced teachers navigate the policy, adopt some measures and alter others, according to their everyday practice (*negotiation*). This development of teachers as agents of language policy shows that teachers are indeed at the centre of policy formation and implementation, and 'rather than relying on increasingly restrictive language policies [...], policy should be prioritised to develop effective and multifaceted ways to prepare and support teachers who are well-equipped to negotiate the policy demands and complexities of today's classrooms' (Heineke & Cameron, 2013, p. 17).

A third and last important key concept in elaborating an improved, more beneficial and more realistic language-in-education policy is *the non-denouncing recognition of processes of code-switching*. A policy can easily demand the use of the standard in every classroom situation, but then it ignores the continuous changes in classroom situations, as well as the numerous roles teachers take on every day and the sometimes very different social and linguistic backgrounds of pupils. Pupils can have non-standard varieties of Dutch (such as Tussentaal or dialect) or languages other than Dutch (such as Moroccan, Berber or Arabic) as their home language, and it is normal to see the home language shine through in classroom speech in all kinds of more informal situations. The same is the case for teachers, as they do not only give instructions. Sometimes they give spontaneous examples from their own lives, tell stories or anecdotes, try to initiate a class discussion, they

become angry or tell a joke and so on. In less formal situations, it is obvious that teachers easily revert to their ‘default’ language, which often is Tussentaal (De Caluwe, 2012b). Acknowledging and thus legitimating CS furnishes teachers with a solid language foundation to build upon. The standard variety is expected in typical instruction situations but there is room for vernacular varieties in other situations. Ferguson (2003) provides policy-makers and language planners with three categories of CS that often recur in actual classroom practice and could thus be legitimised in language policy: (i) CS for curriculum access, to help pupils understand the subject matter of their lessons; (ii) CS for classroom management discourse, to motivate, discipline and praise pupils, and to signal changes and (iii) CS for interpersonal relations to humanise the affective climate of the classroom. Teacher education programmes should take measures to raise the awareness of classroom CS in their curricula. Future teachers should become aware of the existence of language alternations in communities and classrooms, reassuring them that this is very common and in fact normal behaviour. They should also be informed of the beneficial functions of CS:⁶ it can help pupils understand lesson content, manage their behaviour and help to maintain a good classroom climate.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper should not be read as a plea for ‘language relativity’ (Vandenbroucke, 2007), in which the norm of Standard Dutch is abandoned completely and teachers as well as pupils can speak any variety or language they like. However, if policy-makers and other stakeholders want to elaborate an effective, beneficial and realistic language-in-education policy, they should be aware of the existing ideologies they (unknowingly) base their policy upon and refrain from a restrictive monolingual policy. Non-standard varieties of Dutch are denounced in policy documents, solely focussing on the importance of Standard Dutch. At the same time, the native languages of non-Dutch-speaking school children are considered to be millstones around their necks, blocking their chances of a successful career in later life, as well as any form of upward social mobility. Although the current Flemish Minister of Education, Pascal Smet, tends to be slightly more appreciative of the richness of home languages other than Dutch, he ultimately stresses (and sometimes even more sharply than his predecessor) the need to use Standard Dutch in *every* classroom context, whether we are talking about a classroom in a small rural village without any immigrant children, or a multicultural classroom in the centre of Antwerp, in which more than 20 nationalities are represented and all pupils have different backgrounds and learning needs. The reasons for this hostility towards language variation and diversity have become apparent from the previous sections. Due to the long and hard-fought struggle for Dutch language rights in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most politicians are still strongly opposed to forms of MLE or immersion education, which are considered to be un-Flemish and a threat to the position of Dutch. This anti-MLE discourse is ‘indicative of Flanders’s suspicion when it comes to language matters’ (Bollen & Baten, 2010, p. 429). Simultaneously, Standard Dutch is promoted as a means of creating an environment of social equality, answering a rising popular demand for homogeneity but denying ‘pedagogical pragmatism and a European rhetoric of pluralism’ (Bollen & Baten, 2010, p. 430). Ministers and policy-makers urgently need to lose their blinkers and embrace the multilingual reality, with all its complexity and different norms and values. Non-native (immigrant) children in particular, who are now deprived of individual counselling and are not encouraged to use the language skills and creativity they already possess as a scaffold to eventually become more proficient in Dutch, need to feel as if they are being listened to. Their individual ‘track records’ should be taken into

account and teachers should be trained and strongly encouraged to take the literacy skills of their pupils into account when helping them to achieve better proficiency in Dutch. The same goes for native children who speak a non-standard variety of Dutch at home; even if they are used to speaking Tussentaal or dialect and (initially) do the same in a school context, they should not be denounced for doing so.

In spite of the favourable results of studies on MLE and a fairly positive (yet ambiguous) slant in the Flemish media coverage of MLE (Bollen & Baten, 2010), the situation is not likely to change drastically in the near future. In their plea for MLE in Flanders, Metwewie and Housen (2012) stress the importance of flexibility (social, educational, financial but especially political) when trying to implement MLE, and urge policy-makers to maximally build their language-in-education policy onto local (linguistic) resources, in order to meet both global and specific needs. Only then pupils can be guided as individually as possible, taking into account their background, and only then a climate of openness can be created, reducing stereotypes and tensions, developing positive attitudes, and promoting pluricultural awareness and identity. To actually create equal opportunities, we expect this kind of openness and critical awareness to yield much better results than the imposition of outdated language systems.

Notes

1. This very stringent regulation regarding the use of languages other than Dutch in education is only one expression of the apparently “deep-rooted fear of endangering the position of Dutch” (Bollen & Baten, 2010, p. 430). Another example is found in the government’s social housing policy: although the right to decent housing is enshrined in the federal constitution, in 2005 the Flemish government made the allocation of social housing in an extremely competitive market conditional upon the completion of a Dutch language course. Moreover, the Flemish municipality of Zemst (near Brussels) has decided that it will sell municipal land only to individuals who speak Dutch or who are willing, similarly, to learn the language (Ceuppens, 2006, p. 167).
2. According to data provided by the former Flemish Minister of Education, Frank Vandenbroucke, for the period 2002–2008, on average 12.6% of the pupils in primary and secondary education in Flanders do not have Dutch as their first language (<http://www.vlaamsparlement.be/Proteus5/showSchriftelijkeVraag.action?id=542888>).
3. The original quotes were: *Slechts door elke jongere tot correcte en rijke vaardigheid in de standaardtaal te begeleiden, garandeert het onderwijs dat maatschappelijke talenten niet afhankelijk zijn van herkomst, maar van de mate waarin iemands talenten tot ontwikkeling zijn gebracht. De lat hoog leggen, vergt discipline.* [Only by guiding every youngster to a correct and rich proficiency in the standard language, can education guarantee that talents in society are not dependent on origin, but on the extent to which one’s talents have been developed. Setting the bar high requires discipline, own translation] and *Kunnen communiceren in Standaardnederlands is een noodzakelijke voorwaarde voor goed onderwijs. Bij het streven naar verzorgde taal en communicatie gaat het onderwijs vaak in tegen maatschappelijke tendensen.* [Being able to communicate in Standard Dutch is a prerequisite for good education. In striving for appropriate language and communication, education often goes against social trends, own translation].
4. *Scholen die aandacht schenken aan taalzorg, zijn vaak eilanden in een context waar slordige tussentaal getolereerd wordt.* [Schools that pay attention to correct language use, are often islands in a context where sloppy Tussentaal is tolerated, own translation].
5. PISA (in full: *Programme for International Student Assessment*) is an international study that was launched by the OECD in 1997. It aims to evaluate education systems worldwide every three years by assessing 15-year-olds’ competencies in the three key subjects: Reading, Mathematics and Science. To date, over 70 countries and economies have participated in PISA. More information is available on the PISA website: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>
6. CS is mainly discussed from the teacher perspective here; of course policy measures should also focus on a non-denouncing view on CS for *pupils*: in some cases, they should be allowed to use

their home language (albeit a non-standard variety of Dutch or a language other than Dutch) if it helps them to communicate in a more efficient way, in order to become more proficient in Dutch (the concept of *scaffolding*, cf. Wood, Burner, & Ross, 1976).

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