Teachers’ Dutch in Flanders: Strategies in dealing with monolingual language-in-education policies

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**Abstract**

Flanders is experiencing growing intra- and interlinguistic diversity, with both the emergence of Tussentaal (‘in-between-language’) as a cluster of intermediate varieties between the Flemish dialects and Standard Dutch, and an increasing number of immigrants and their respective languages in Flanders.

Flemish language-in-education policy (LiEP) deals with these (perceived) problems of standardisation and multilingualism by imposing a strict monolingual policy, propagating Standard Dutch (SD) as the only acceptable language variety. In most Flemish classrooms, however, a lot of non-standard features are used, both by teachers and pupils, causing tension between policy and practice. Using sociolinguistic interviews with 82 primary and secondary school teachers, my research analyses the way in which teachers cope with this tension: how do teachers respond to LiEP? How much importance do they adhere to Standard Dutch, and which strategies do they use to bridge the chasm between policy and practice?

**Methodology**

- **82 primary (6th class) & secondary school (3rd/6th grade, general secondary education) teachers**
- Classroom observations and sociolinguistic interviews
- Types of data collected
  1. Ethnographic fieldnotes
  2. Participant observation data (one lesson per teacher, audio recording, guise: focus on language use of pupils)
  3. Sociolinguistic interview data (after observation, semi-structured, transcription in PRAAT, coding and analysis in NVivo)
  4. Questionnaire (after interview, continuum scale ST---DIA, rating of aspired language use in different situations)
- **Sociolinguistic interviews: 4 main topics**
  1. Assessment of pupils language use
  2. Importance of Standard Dutch during teacher training / education
  3. Knowledge of / vision on language-in-education policy
  4. Own language background and language-related expectations towards him/herself and other teachers

**Model: a policy/practice gap**

**Policy [macro]**

*Only Standard Dutch!*

Dealing with (perceived) problems of standardisation and multilingualism by imposing a strict monolingual policy (= hyperstandardisation)

Standard Dutch is propagated as the only acceptable language variety in educational settings (Delarue & De Caluwe 2015)

Schools as *norm reproduction sites*: teachers as “guardians of the standard language” (Van de Velde & Houtermans 1999) and “the last gate-keepers of the standard” (Van Istendael 2008: 31)

**Practice [micro]**

Classroom language variation

Standard Dutch is seen as extremely important

“Standard Dutch is the most beautiful language”

“Pupils should use Standard Dutch when talking to teachers”

“Teachers should use Standard Dutch, as they set an example for pupils”

BUT

As a lot of non-standard features are used in the typical Flemish classroom, teachers develop strategies to put this importance of Standard Dutch into perspective in order to bridge the policy/practice gap

“Standard Dutch reduces fluency and spontaneity”

“As long as I don’t speak dialect, it’s ok”

“Proper teaching outweighs proper language use”

“I’m not properly trained to be able to speak Standard Dutch”

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