A school’s language policy: how policy and teachers’ perceptions on language are co-constructed

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The monolingual habitus and language ideologies in schools provoke a widespread Dutch-only policy in Flemish education (Sierens & Van Avermaet 2013). This paper aims at finding out how beliefs on language use at school are formed in teachers’ minds, addressing the research question ‘Which personal and contextual variables shape Flemish teachers’ beliefs regarding multilingualism?’.

This research question is answered using a mixed method study. The data analyzed in the quantitative section come from a survey in 67 Flemish primary schools conducted in 2012. In four of these schools, an in-depth qualitative study was carried out.

In our report of this study’s results, we first focus on the analysis of the four schools’ regulations, websites, mission statement and language policy (LP) documents. These constitute the institutionalized framework that can influence teachers’ perceptions of multilingualism. Then we compare this analysis with the quantitative data produced by the teachers in these schools, looking into the variables at school level that could explain differences in teachers’ tolerance towards multilingualism. To do so, both compositional and cultural school factors are included in stepwise multilevel modeling. Next we return to a qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups, exploring how teachers coproduce their perceptions of multilingualism with colleagues, how teachers are influenced by the school’s official LP and how a team constructs a joint policy on language use in their school.

This paper aims at deepening our insight in teachers’ beliefs regarding multilingualism by combining a quantitative and qualitative point of view in order to address questions that have so far only been addressed in qualitative research. In addition, it makes a contribution to the research base on educational LP by focusing on LP making processes in schools.

Keywords: education, language policy, multilingualism.