Talking normal or talking formal? Competing language ideologies in Flemish schools

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Recent studies often describe the linguistic landscape of Flanders (the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) as diaglossic (Auer 2005), with in-between the standard and the dialects a range of intermediate varieties, typically known as Tussentaal (‘in-between language’). This highly colloquial variety enjoys rapid expansion, but is also heavily stigmatized by the political and cultural establishment, who remain loyal to the official standard language ideology (SLI) and propagate the use of Standard Dutch. However, the status of the standard in Flanders is problematic, due to its both non-endogenous (the standard was imported from the Netherlands and imposed on the community) and non-vital character (as Standard Dutch in Flanders is ”a virtual colloquial variety [...] rarely spoken in practice” (De Caluwe 2009:19)). These issues do not seem to hold back governmental language policies: language-in-education policies insist on Standard Dutch as the only acceptable norm in schools, adequate to respond to ‘problems’ of language deficiency and multilingualism, and the inequality and discrimination which ensue from them (Delarue & De Caluwe 2014).

This heavily polarized landscape presents Flemish teachers with increasing difficulties: while most of them are much more at ease in Tussentaal, they are expected to adhere to Standard Dutch at all times. In this paper, we analyse the very different ways in which 84 Flemish teachers of primary and secondary schools try to make sense of this gap between policy and practice, and how they evaluate the official SLI. Using interview and questionnaire data, we attempt to map their personal ideological frameworks in a qualitative, conscious way – a methodological choice we will discuss in more detail, as some scholars emphasize that the degree of consciousness with which informants perform tasks needs to be as low as possible in order to access actual (‘deep’) language perceptions (Kristiansen 2010, Grondelaers & Speelman 2013).

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