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Soft power: teachers' friendly implementation of a severe monolingual policy

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ABSTRACT

Dutch-medium schools in Brussels traditionally cater to a Dutch-speaking minority, but they have recently seen a massive influx of pupils with a limited competence in Dutch. In order to face the resulting pedagogical and ideological challenges, many of these schools have intensified their efforts to remain Dutch enclaves in a predominantly Francophone city. In this article we discuss one Dutch-medium secondary school that positions itself as fairly severe in this regard. We will demonstrate, however, that teachers were generally drawn to a more friendly interpretation of their language policy as they reconciled monolingual expectations with multilingual pupils. Thus, although teachers agreed that a severe linguistic stance was important, they formulated various reasons for not adopting this stance relentlessly. And while pupils in principle could earn a ticket for not speaking Dutch, teachers often merely prefigured the possibility of sanctions, ignored the use of other languages to address other pressing matters, and occasionally recruited pupils' other linguistic skills as a pedagogical device – without, however, reneging on their language political stance. We argue that these ambivalent strategies can be usefully explained as the outcome of negotiating dilemmatically related ideological concerns.

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Introduction

Punishing the wrong choice of language at school is a practice with a long history and diverse motivations. A prominent disciplinary technique was the *signum linguae* ('the linguistic sign'). Used at Catholic convent schools in Europe during the Ancien Régime to make pupils speak Latin rather than their local vernacular, its principle was that pupils were to catch their classmates speaking the vernacular, so they could pass the *signum* – a necklace, wooden block, or big key – to the one committing the offence. Pupils were keen to catch others as the sign holder at the end of the day would risk detention or another penalty. The religious origins of the technique did not limit its use to Catholic schools, since French state schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth century liberally employed what was called *le symbole* to dissuade pupils from speaking regional varieties rather than French (Heller and McElhinny 2017, 94). Pedagogical motivations here went hand in hand with the ideological goal of making all citizens escape their so-called provincial origins and become French state subjects. Similar concerns motivated the *signum* in Belgian schools at that time to discourage pupils from speaking Dutch rather than French, to the dismay of Flemish minority activists who supported its official abolition in state (1885) and Catholic schools (1904), even if school rules and diocesan guidelines hardly mentioned its use (Simons 1998, 2748). That a version of this practice

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could be observed in late 1980s Francophone Canada to repress the use of the dominant language English (Heller and McElhinny 2017, 94) shows that punishing language choice is no prerogative of majority groups and may acquire oppositional qualities.

Making pupils wear a visible stigma would now be criticised as an example of the overly authoritative, often corporal, disciplinary measures that characterised pre-World War II education (cf. also Hymes 1996, 86; García and Li 2014, 56). Today, in the West, adult-child relations are seen as a site for a more friendly, personal, egalitarian ethos, and all Western education systems have to some extent integrated the idea that teaching should not solely subjectify children in the interest of the state but must also foster their autonomy, well-being, and creativity (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017). Though the popularity of this view has, in turn, sparked calls for ‘old school’ teacher-fronted chalk-and-talk classes, even supporters of traditional teaching now accept that a well-balanced education should include pupils’ motivated input in congenial activity. The sign (um) of the present times thus seems to be that education must adapt itself to the learner rather than the other way around (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017, 41). Policymakers’ adoption of this view has led to a gradual redefinition of teaching as the provision of learning experiences, and to a replacement of the idea of the teacher by the notion of the coach who helps pupils discover and develop knowledge they already have (Biesta 2009). Teachers in this view should not see the use of a vernacular as a reason for saddling a child with a wooden block, but as a sign of the child’s everyday knowledge that can serve as a scaffold for discovering and learning what lies just beyond its present zone of competence.

Such a view still implies that learning processes require guidance of what to discover and learn, and it suggests that some need for teacher-led transmission and the accompanying intellectual authority remains an important part of schooling. Indeed, that Western education systems have not sacrificed the idea that learning must follow a pre-defined curriculum and suitably proceeds through a sequence of steps, despite their adoption of a discourse of child-centered discovery learning, illustrates that this opposing perspective on education is equally widely shared. Billig et al. (1988, 50) argue that such contrary values place teachers in a dilemma: ‘how do you get children to invent and discover for themselves precisely what the curriculum pre-ordains must be discovered?’; and they show that this invites ambivalent behaviour in which teachers surreptitiously offer knowledge to pupils that on the surface seems to prompt it (Billig et al. 1988, 52–54). Similar dilemmas arise with regard to discipline: the *signum* evokes a practice we now find too authoritative, but schools have not become less concerned with linguistic and other types of discipline (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Pace and Hemmings 2007; Doherty, Berwick, and McGregor R 2018). Teachers thus have to navigate the paradox of requesting that pupils behave in desirable ways while avoiding a rigid stance that may harm their well-being – hence the dialogues they now have with pupils, which eventually confirm the school rules (or at least make pupils express acceptance); or their indirect, often humorous coaching of pupils to preferred conduct (Macbeth 1991; Margutti and Pirraïnen-Marsh 2011).

Such paradoxes become acute when pupils’ behaviour is seen to threaten the school’s basic mission. This is the case for many Dutch-medium schools in Brussels, which, although traditionally catering to a Dutch-speaking minority, have recently seen a massive influx of French-dominant speakers with limited Dutch proficiency. Consequently, in an ironic twist of fate, teachers at these schools now punish the use of French to make pupils speak Dutch. Rather than letting pupils pass on necklaces or big keys, teachers now give presently more palatable, that is, administrative sanctions, such as a chat with the principal, a notice in a diary, or, as in the school at issue here, giving language tickets. Yet these teachers are at the same time concerned that a punitive approach has the opposite effect if it creates a negative atmosphere around Dutch, and know that other languages can create links between pupils’ present knowledge and the Dutch-language curriculum. In what follows we show that such problems invite ambivalent behaviour, and we argue this is a chronic outcome of negotiating dilemmatically related ideological concerns.

Dutch-medium schools in Brussels

While Brussels is officially bilingual (Dutch-French) since 1963, it does not offer bilingual education – the four, exclusive, EU-funded European schools excepted. This has complex institutional and ideological origins that, for reasons of space, we shall not go into here (but see Sherman Swing 1988; Mettewie and Janssens 2007; Jaspers 2015). Suffice it to say that education in the Brussels Capital Region is not organised by the city authorities but by the Dutch- and French-speaking Community in Belgium who also provide education in the Flemish and Walloon Region, respectively; and that less than a third of Brussels' schools are Dutch-medium. This difference reflects the lesser number of Dutch speakers in the Belgian capital, a city that has gradually frenchified since the eighteenth century, but it overstates the current ratio of Dutch-speaking inhabitants which, although official statistics are not available, is estimated between 5 and 10% (Janssens 2015). Dutch-medium schools in Brussels thus cater to a small minority and to a larger group of pupils in its Dutch-speaking periphery.

These schools, however, saw their pupil numbers drop significantly during the 1970s: parents' rights to decide the curricular language of their children in Brussels was restored in 1971, and many were convinced, in line with the frenchification trend, that French would benefit their children most in the search for social mobility. The Dutch-speaking Community sought to reverse this decline in the 1980s by advertising its schools as a highway to the emerging bilingual service industry in the capital. Thus, posters appeared which claimed that *echt tweetalig, goed drietalig én internationaal worden; in Brussel kan dat in 't Nederlandstalig onderwijs* 'becoming really bilingual, reasonably trilingual, and international, this is possible in Brussels in Dutch-medium education'; some posters even encouraged people in French to *Osez. L'avenir est aux bilingues. 314 écoles néerlandophones à Bruxelles* 'Take the risk. The future is for bilinguals. 314 Dutch-medium schools in Brussels' (see Figure 1). The implicit message of this campaign was: this is not possible in French-medium education, which to this day has a poor record on foreign language learning (Van Mensel 2016). That many parents were sensitive to the promise of linguistic distinction – and to the fact that Dutch-medium education is more richly subsidised and perceived as offering better quality than its French counterpart – can be seen in the veritable boom that Dutch-medium education in Brussels has witnessed since the 1980s, with numbers at nursery and primary schools tripling and doubling, respectively (see Table 1).



Figure 1. 'Take the risk. The future is for bilinguals. 314 Dutch-medium schools in Brussels'.

Table 1. Evolution of pupil numbers in Dutch-medium schools in Brussels (Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie 2019).

Pupil numbers in Dutch- medium schools in Brussels	1979–1980	2017–2018
Nursery schools	4.347	13.183
Primary schools	8.946	18.049
Secondary schools	12.967 (statistics from 1991-1992)	13.891

The linguistic side-effect of this evolution, however, is equally noteworthy. Flemish statistics in Brussels distinguish pupils along four categories for family language: (1) ‘homogeneously Dutch-speaking’; (2) ‘Dutch + other language’; (3) ‘homogeneously French-speaking’; and (4) ‘French + other language *or* other language than Dutch/French’. Although these data may overstate actual use, reflect parental preference and ignore children’s contribution to family language practices, the broad tendencies are striking: whereas forty years ago 70% to 80% of pupils in Brussels Dutch-medium schools were categorised as ‘homogeneously Dutch-speaking’, this number has now fallen to merely 6,9% for nursery schools, 7,7% for primary schools, and 18,7% for secondary schools (see Table 2).

Also French-medium schools are welcoming an increasing number of pupils with non-French linguistic backgrounds, but this evolution is less pronounced and invites less public concern. Indeed, while pupils’ often unpredictable difficulties with the instruction language invite pedagogical challenges in schools of both linguistic communities, the practical multilingualism of the pupil population, and the resulting spread of French as a lingua franca (as is common in Brussels) leads to ideological anxieties in Dutch-medium schools in particular because it minoritises Dutch speakers in the schools that were designed to address their needs (Jaspers 2014, 2015, 2018; cp. Heller 1995).

In this paper we discuss one secondary Dutch-medium school in Brussels where these challenges are salient. Although this school adopts a severe stance towards the use of Dutch, we found that teachers were constantly ambivalent: they were strict, to varying degrees, about language choice; but on other occasions they adopted a more liberal stance when they ignored, acknowledged and sometimes even encouraged the use of pupils’ family languages in class – without, however, giving up their severe stance. Such a finding is significant, we believe, against the backdrop of research into language policy.

Teachers in language policy research

The opposition between a constraining, top-down imposition of language, and a supportive, bottom-up encouragement of pupils’ pre-existing linguistic skills we sketched above, also appears to structure the main approaches to teachers in research on language-in-education policy. Indeed, there are ample, favourable, accounts of how teachers accept or encourage pupils’ non-curricular linguistic resources, and of how teachers integrate these resources into their pedagogical practice (see, among others, Ramanathan 2005; Hélot 2010; Flores and García 2013; Cooke, Bryers, and Wistanley 2018); these accounts sketch a picture of teachers as challengers of monolingual policies they find neglectful of pupils’ own linguistic resources. Conversely, many other studies describe and contest

Table 2. Evolution of family language in Brussels Dutch-medium schools from in percentages (Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie 2019).

	nursery school		primary school		secondary school	
	1979–1980	2017–2018	1979–1980	2017–2018	1991–1992	2017–2018
homogeneously Dutch-speaking	71,9	6,9	85,9	7,7	76,5	18,7
Dutch + other language	17,8	20,1	10,1	21,7	17,2	25,4
homogeneously French-speaking	5,8	34,1	2,3	32,8	3,7	24,7
French + other language <i>or</i> other language than Dutch/French	4,5	38,9	1,7	37,8	2,6	31,2

teachers as ‘loyal soldiers of the system’ (Shohamy 2006, 78) whose ‘monolingual habitus’ (Gogolin 2002) makes them misrecognise significant parts of pupils’ repertoires or to punish the use of non-curricular varieties (see, among others, Blommaert, Creve, and Willaert 2006; Alim 2010; Martín Rojo 2010; Young 2014; Wiese et al. 2017). Clearly, in both cases, the focus is not simply descriptive but prescriptive. We are dealing with exemplary accounts which advocate a multilingual approach to language teaching, against convictions that a monolingual diet is preferable. Since this diet has been the gold standard for decades and poses serious challenges in multilingual settings, this advocacy is justifiable. The resulting picture however is that of fairly one-dimensional teachers divided in two ideologically opposed camps (for or against multilingualism) with theoretically incompatible views of their activity: teachers in favour of multilingualism are critically autonomous, active agents, whereas those who are against it passively act out an ideology that misleads them; few studies demonstrate that the same teachers can be for *and* against (Heller 1995; Mondada and Gajo 2001; Creese and Blackledge 2011; Pérez-Milans 2013; Martínez, Hikida, and Durán 2015).

Flemish teachers at first sight belong in the camp that is loyal to monolingualism: many studies reveal their negative attitudes towards pupils’ use of family linguistic resources (Agirdag 2010; Agirdag, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte 2013; Pulinx, Van Avermaet, and Agirdag 2017; Strobbe et al. 2017; Van der Wildt, Van Avermaet, and Van Houtte 2017). We argue though that even these teachers have opinions or act in ways that scholars would place in the opposite camp, and that this can be explained by underlining that policies are rarely implemented as they are, and that ideologies are inherently contradictory.

Thus, while various linguists indicate that teachers never passively implement policies but interpret these in line with their own beliefs and knowledge (Canagarajah 2005; Creese 2010; Johnson and Freeman 2010; McCarty 2011; García and Li 2014), sociologists argue that ‘policies do not normally tell you what to do’ (Ball 1997, 270; cf. Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012): their generality, and the particularities of each situation, require that teachers formulate creative responses in context (cf. Hammersley 2005; Biesta 2012). Therefore teachers never act in fully determinable, policy-loyal ways, but rather implement policies in an as-you-go manner. Ball’s suggestion that these responses must be ‘offset against or balanced by other expectations’ (1997, 270) draws attention to their value-based nature: out of the infinite responses that teachers could produce, they are bound to select those that meet the concerns of relevant stakeholders. That this can require a creative juggling of interests is argued by Pachler et al. who claim that teachers ‘respon[d] to multiple different ideological push-and-pull forces’ (2008, 438) as they ‘orientat[e] – often simultaneously – towards different ideological ‘centers’: themselves, their colleagues, their groups of learners, the head teacher, the school as an institution with a tradition, the education system, the curriculum, the government, society-at-large, and so on. Their discourses reveal traces of such multiplicity and layering’ (2008, 440).

Such accounts imply that rather than being purely for, or against policies, teachers are likely to be pragmatic problem-solvers who ‘navigate the paradoxes and difficulties caused by [...] uneasy ideological marriages’ (Pachler et al. 2008, 440). However, they do not explain why teachers wish to marry multiple concerns instead of abiding by one ideological ‘center’. This may have less to do with generous servitude to multiple centers, each with their unique stakeholder values, than with the fact that the stakeholders in these centers have opinions about education to which teachers feel accountable, and that these stakeholders broadly have the same, widespread, but contradictory views. This is the line taken by Billig et al. (1988, 44ff.) who claim, first, that educational ideologies are usually versions of broader societal ones which juxtapose, among others, the values of freedom and equality to the values of legitimate constraint and defensible authority, respectively; that, secondly, educational ideologies typically do not stand alone but are mirror-images of each other, ‘positions extracted from a single dialogue’ with contrary positions (Billig et al. 1988, 45); and thirdly, that these opposing positions tend not to be mutually exclusive, but shared, that is, part of a single culture in which all parties agree, up to a certain point, that it is important to base learning on what children already know, but also to transmit a pre-defined curriculum; or, in our case, that linguistic diversity is a valuable asset, but that pupils must also acquire the curricular language. Rather than

reconciling multiple ideologies, therefore, Billig et al. argue that teachers navigate contrary positions within the same, largely liberal, ideology that simultaneously values equality and authority, bottom-up learning and top-down teaching, and, accordingly, linguistic diversity and uniformity (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2003). This does not imply that contrary positions should be equally responded to – actors can and will put different emphases, but they will all be sensitive, and accountable, to both positions. Teachers may not differ categorically then, in their approach to language policy, but gradually. The relevance of contrary values nevertheless creates dilemmas, and oscillating behaviour. Let us look more closely now at how such dilemmas work out at a school with a severe stance on language.

Data and fieldwork

The data for this paper were ethnographically collected and form part of a broader project ('Between the devil and the deep blue sea', PI: Jürgen Jaspers) which investigates how teachers in Brussels schools implement monolingual policies in multilingual classrooms. Fieldwork was carried out in one 2nd year class ('2MOD') at the Saint-Martin's College (SMC – a pseudonym) by Kirsten Rosiers between February and May 2017. It involved participant observation, classroom audio-recordings (up to 24 h), interviews with teachers (up to 7 h), focus group interviews with pupils (3 h), and collecting policy documents. The class was part of 'general track' that prepares pupils for higher education and was composed of 20 pupils between 13 and 15. Six of these pupils reported speaking only Dutch at home, the rest stated using French, Arabic, Aramaic, Spanish, Persian, Somali, Turkish, and English. Kirsten observed seven teachers of this class and interviewed the school's language policy officer and the principal. We will now first discuss the school's language policy before exploring teachers' actions and reflections.

The school policy: entextualised ambivalence

The official linguistic regulations at SMC at first sight leave little room for ambivalence:

Our school is a Dutch-medium school. Your choice for Dutch-medium education implies that you will encourage your children to learn Dutch, also outside of school.

[...] When you register your child at our college you declare you understand the linguistic agreement we present to you. [...] Because you have decided to come to a Dutch-medium school you always have to speak Dutch with pupils, members of staff and management [...]. Pupils who repeatedly fail to speak Dutch will be given a linguistic assignment they need to present to management. After several linguistic assignments the school will impose penalties. (School rules, 7, 24)

Interestingly, however, other paragraphs in the same school rules booklet exemplify the opposite view:

We want to prepare pupils for a harmonious co-existence in a multilingual and multicultural society. In an effort to grow towards each other via communication, we are tolerant and respectful towards each person's individuality. (School rules, 3)

Obviously, the pursuit of harmonious co-existence, tolerance, and a 'growing towards each other via communication' is hardly compatible with suggestions that pupils must be penalised for not speaking Dutch. Yet we believe this inconsistency is a first, entextualised, example of how the school navigates the simultaneous valorisation in the wider society of mono- and multilingualism. This is not to say that the school finds these values equally important. The balance clearly is in favour of imposing a Dutch-only policy: even if the paragraph on tolerance precedes the sections which insist on Dutch, the school rules booklet contains more of the latter sections, plus a summarising 'linguistic agreement', which intimate the school's inclination. Does this mean that the school's pursuit of tolerance is superficial then, a convenient disclaimer that anticipates criticism of its monolingual stance (cf.

Van Dijk 1987; Billig 1996, 268ff.)? Only if we disregard how much this value influenced teachers' issuing of, and reflection on, language tickets, to which we now turn.

Language tickets: from severe technique to virtual penalty

In principle teachers at SMC can give a language ticket to pupils who fail to speak Dutch – they receive a booklet with blank tickets at the start of the year. Yet like the *signum* more than a century ago this option was not openly mentioned in the school rules – Kirsten only found out about it while interviewing pupils – while the practice had been contested by Francophone parents, in echo of the Flemish activists some hundred years before. More precisely, when SMC's primary school informed parents through a letter in February 2012 that, following the secondary school's example, pupils would receive a ticket if they failed to speak Dutch and that obtaining three of these would earn them an after-school 'language study', one father angrily complained to the press that 'the measure is linguistically mean and only targets the Francophone pupils', and that 'the school's decision is dangerous for pupils' development' – a complaint that was picked up by other, also Dutch-medium news outlets.¹ In defence, the primary school principal argued that the measure was intended to help pupils improve their Dutch, that it worked well in secondary school, that it had been approved by a more than 80% Francophone parent board, and she later reported that she had not given a single ticket yet but that threatening to had been enough – which, she said, her pupils confirmed ('if you're not strict, then we don't do it'). The different parties in this anecdote thus revisit similar positions to the ones in earlier debates about the *signum*, with some arguing that a ticket is an effective, necessary, even if virtual, incentive, while others claiming that its authoritative character will harm well-being and learning.

A similar virtual take on giving tickets seemed to become adopted in SMC's secondary school too, at least in recent years, after complaints by the inspection and growing concern among teachers that strictly policing language choice would have adverse effects. Indeed, teachers did not give a single language ticket during the fieldwork. Whether this 'worked' as well as the primary school principal suggested depends on which criteria are adopted, since even if 2MOD's technology teacher said 'do you see, nobody speaks French here', pupils did speak French, also during his class – albeit mostly during informal asides or group work. In response to this the teachers of 2MOD asked pupils explicitly to speak Dutch ('hey there guys, no French', 'Dutch if possible, and also when it's not', 'use more Dutch words'); they corrected or asked pupils to reformulate their French replies in Dutch; or they ironised the use of French, as when the maths teacher overheard Mr OKLM (a self-chosen pupil pseudonym) use the word *mère* 'mother' to another pupil, and said *pas op hé gij daar! 'k zal ne keer met uw mère praten dan* 'hey you watch out! I'll have a chat with your *mère* then', to the amusement of the rest of the class – the teacher in this way kept a pupil's behaviour in check, and turned the use of French against him, without explicitly challenging his language selection. On other occasions teachers ignored French, treating it as an aside to the main business at hand, or actively sidetracked it by concentrating on Dutch instead of French replies after an initiation, as in this example (see the teacher's focus on Luis's rather than Ellis's reply in line 7):

Example 1. English class at SMC, 5/05/2017. Participants: Audrey (teacher, 28), Luis (14), Ellis (14). Dutch underlined, French in italics.

		Original recording	English translation
1	Audrey:	we're going to watch a	we're going to watch a weather
2		weather forecast	forecast
3	?:	<u>wa?</u>	wha?
4	Audrey:	so a weather forecast, what is	so a weather forecast, what is a
5		a weather forecast?	weather forecast?
6	Ellis:	<i>ah météo!</i>	ah weather forecast!
7	Luis:	<u>een weerbericht</u>	a weather forecast
8	Audrey:	<u>een weerbericht</u> , and you	a weather forecast, and you have
9		have to do exercise A and B,	to do exercise A and B, but first
10		but first we're going to	we're going to watch ...
		watch ...	

This focus on Dutch is in line with the school policy, but teachers refrained from penalising pupils during the fieldwork, and seemed uncomfortable about the idea of language tickets. Thus, when they were asked in interviews just how many tickets would earn pupils an assignment or detention, teachers seemed uncertain about the rules, answering ‘actually, I don’t know’ (school principal), ‘I don’t know exactly’ (English and History teacher), ‘I thought three’ (Dutch teacher 1), ‘after so many tickets they get a language study, after so many, nine I think they get detention’ (Dutch teacher 2), ‘after a certain number of language tickets, God knows how many I don’t keep track, one receives an extra task’ (language policy officer). Only the French teacher explained decidedly that in principle, three language tickets equal an assignment, and that three assignments mean after-school detention.

This uncertainty concurred with the identification of ‘free zones’ where it was impractical to give tickets ‘because if you apply [the policy there] you can’t do anything else; walk through the corridor and you only hear French; walk in the playground and it’s French, then one ticket book won’t be enough’ (Dutch teacher 2). The principal argued:

Example 2

I think the unwritten rules of the language tickets are that- like the playground, we’re not even talking about it, in the sense of, there’s not enough supervision there, we can’t control it, we know that [...] so I think, the playground, that’s in my view a free zone as far as that’s concerned. (Principal, 40+, interview 18/09/2017)²

Yet also within the more supervised areas a strict application of the policy was fairly virtual, it appeared, for teachers said that giving tickets happened only ‘highly exceptionally [...] mostly because I don’t have them with me’ (Dutch teacher 2), ‘mostly with pupils who are actually not really prepared to speak Dutch’ (Dutch teacher 1) or ‘when someone really time and again, after a hundred thousand remarks, still keeps talking French to a classmate, erm, then a language ticket might possibly emerge’ (Principal). The French teacher added ‘I don’t constantly pull out my ticket book [...] we’re sometimes criticised that we don’t react often enough’, while the English and History teacher – who said she gave ‘mostly a dozen [tickets], in the corridor’ each year, and recently to two girls she had noticed speaking French twice within 10 min – explains there is a difference between giving a ticket and writing it:

Example 3

Yes but the thing about these language tickets is actually, you very well say like ‘I’m giving you a language ticket’, but then that gets forgotten and nothing is done with it, but they never actually get it into their hands, so they never actually know physically ‘I’ve got a language ticket’, so for example these two girls, I still have to write that language ticket so I know I still have to do that but I always forget, but I’m going to, but eventually, you might as well write a language ticket and not say anything, but that’s of course not the whole idea. (English and History teacher, 28, interview 28/09/2017)

If we consider the reasons that may have led teachers to adopt this virtual severity, the same arguments emerge that the disgruntled Francophone father and previous opponents of severe approaches put forward. To be sure, the principal reported that ‘at a certain moment it was said, this is a bit too punishing’, and also the next examples suggest that teachers at SMC found it ‘mean’ to give tickets because of the unconscious nature of switching to French:

Example 4

Yes yes, you know, you can draw their attention to it, but then, but sometimes it’s also unconscious that they’re doing it, isn’t it, you know, and then I feel yeah, you know, do I have to punish them for that? (Maths teacher, 30+, interview 12/09/2017)

Example 5

I think that’s an automatism that’s sometimes difficult, I have that with my- my sister too, I’ve always spoken Dutch with her, so if I’m with my French family it’s difficult to speak Dutch with her [...] that’s so unnatural [...] I think that that’s difficult, I find it difficult myself, and then I think like, yes it’s so natural and if they’re

really not doing it out of laziness or out of-, on purpose, I think you need to a bit, take account of that. (French teacher, 50+, interview 28/09/2017)

Punishing as a technique itself was also questioned:

Example 6

Punishing, you know, how does that help, punishing? You know, if it is not working in class, yes, writing ten times or writing lines for ten pages, does that help, I don't think so. (Dutch teacher 2, 50+, interview 18/09/2017)

Example 7

Pff, if they sometimes say something briefly to each other in French, yeah, pff, I don't know, you know, I think [1.0] we're not the police either, are we, we should draw their attention to it, but yeah anyway you can't react all the time. (Dutch teacher 1, 30+, interview 22/02/2018)

Example 8

You are not just going to solve it with that ticket because you don't actually solve things with that, I think [...] Maybe it says on paper that you need to do it this way, that's possible, but I think the principal also thinks like you're still a person who can somewhat assess, you know, to what extent you really need to give [that language ticket], you know. (Maths teacher, 30+, interview 12/09/2017)

In place of punishing, teachers said they opted for a more congenial approach – 'my style is still a bit, a joke here and there, you know, trying to make them see it themselves' (French teacher); 'I'm of the principle that I don't give language tickets, but I do draw pupils' attention to it, 'hey you know', because I want to do that in a sort of friendly way, creating a good understanding' (Maths teacher); 'I talk to them about it, I don't sanction them for that' (Technology teacher); 'I think, you shouldn't punish per se, I say it, if it's on purpose [...] but all the rest, I think that's drawing attention to it' (Natural Sciences teacher). The principal argued a punitive stance is hardly compatible with achieving learning goals and a good dynamics in class:

Example 9

Teachers are always concerned about the progress of their class, erm, at the end of the class you have to get there, and if you have to make a remark if you're in a class full of pupils who are constantly speaking French, if every time you have to make a remark you can imagine that, yes, the dynamics of my class are gone and the progress of my class, totally gone, teachers can think like actually, you know, pfff, I've given up trying. (Principal, 40+, interview 18/09/2017)

This relative tolerance for language choice coincided with signs that teachers did not simply ignore other languages, but showed some, albeit minimal, openness towards them. This was partially motivated by the view that it would be good for pupils to make connections between the languages in their repertoire, as the English and History teacher explained: 'a lot of English words have a French equivalent or something that resembles it, and if they draw links between them, I think that's actually quite positive, because they are making connections between different languages and then I don't have any problem at all with that'. This teacher sometimes also accepted non-equivalent French lexemes, as when Musafeh translated uninvitedly the English word neighbourhood into 'quartier':

Example 10. English class at SMC, 27/04/2017. Participants: Audrey (teacher, 28), Lasse (14), Musafeh (14). French in italics

1	Lasse:	erm, I am serving erm some of the best teas in our erm neighbourhood
2	Audr:	neighbourhood, good
3	Musaf:	<i>quartier</i>
4	Audr:	yes

The Maths teacher partially mirrored pupils' multilingualism by interspersing her Dutch with French, for example when she asked a pupil to speed up his distribution of handouts (French is underlined): *zo snel als je kan, da's zo à l'aise* 'as quickly as you can, this is so at ease'; or when

she gave a pupil permission in French to make an exercise on the blackboard: *vas-y* ‘go for it’. Some teachers, when asked about it, were open to the idea of content and language integrated learning or multilingual group work.

This pedagogical and interpersonal openness to other languages found a more ideological articulation in the principal’s reflections. Indicating that she ‘really really resents [it] that, also here, erm, multilingualism is often seen as erm, I’m going to use big words now, a crime’, she admits to understanding that this is ‘a sort of fear for the French invasion’, but argues that this fear should be transcended:

Example 11

I understand that, but I think that that’s an old reflex, I think that people should get over that erm, especially also, because also French is having a difficult time today erm, it’s now more and more about multilingualism in Brussels, the monolinguals are just the minority, also the monolingual Francophones. (Interview 18/09/2017)

And yet, in the same interview some 45 min later this principal answers ‘yes, constantly’, to the question ‘do you ever draw pupils’ attention to the importance of speaking Dutch?’ and expressed concern that French would take over at school. To explain this paradox we suggest, before concluding, that despite their problematisation of a punitive monolingualism and their ostensible openness to multilingualism, teachers at SMC justified their Dutch-only policy as reasonable in the light of the same values that made them problematise its severe application.

Justifying the policy

All teachers in our case study found it reasonable to condone some non-Dutch usage, but they found it equally sensible to maintain the Dutch-only policy, language tickets included. Several argued they were glad to have clear rules and a big stick they could wield in case ‘asking nicely’ (French teacher), ‘having to say it every time again’ (Maths teacher) or giving ‘a hundred thousand remarks’ (Principal) did not work. Even if they were aware that wielding such a stick could have negative effects and admitted, like the principal, that ‘there effectively is a problem with the thing of the language tickets’, it seemed to be the next best thing, for they ‘hadn’t yet found the solution’.

The main reason why this solution was hard to find, in the view of the teachers at SMC, appeared to be that relaxing their policy eventually boiled down to self-erasure as a Dutch-medium school and Dutch minority in Brussels. Several teachers commented that lest they intervene, the school would quickly become a Francophone institution, or at least one with French as the *lingua franca*, as elsewhere in Brussels. This was seen as pedagogically undesirable: it would reduce pupils’ opportunities for practicing their Dutch, and contravene the very reason why their parents had sent them to SMC in the first place, *viz.*, to become Dutch-French bilingual, in contrast to pupils going to Francophone schools.

A more fundamental objection, however, seemed to be that such an evolution would jar with the very values that inspired teachers to refrain from severe punishment, such as a need to ensure well-being, respect for difference, and a ‘harmonious co-existence’. Some teachers argued that relaxing the policy would be giving in to a lack of respect, if not an attitude problem, on the part of the pupils: ‘look this is a Dutch-medium school, you choose to go to it, your parents decide on it, so I think, you know, they should make an effort’ (Dutch teacher 2). The French teacher warned that a more lenient stance ‘should not, yeah, push anyone into a corner, and that’s the danger, if you say ‘go ahead’’, implying that ‘go ahead’ would invite more French and less Dutch. For the principal a moderate policy would entail diminished well-being for teachers *and* pupils, which she illustrates by drawing on her experience as a Dutch speaker in Brussels:

Example 12. Interview with principal (40+), 22/09/2017.

- IR: would you abolish those language tickets?
 P: [pauses] in an ideal world I would, yes, absolutely, because it impacts on well- or uhm you know on well-being, but I'm not sure what alternative I'd propose because I also wouldn't like, would absolutely not think it an ideal situation if everyone spoke French
 IR: uh huh
 P: You know that's when my own background as a Dutch-speaking mum of Dutch-speaking children – I've once changed the school of my son in primary school because he, after two years we realised 'he doesn't connect, he doesn't make any friends because at school everyone in the playground everyone speaks French'

She herself had had similar experiences outside of school, after living for twenty years in Brussels: 'I can't say that I always find it easy. I can easily go to the market to do my shopping in French, but for a lot of other things it often gets up my nerves, at the pharmacist's that you, have to look up things in advance before you can explain something, in the hospital, at the emergency department, I've once gotten awfully angry'. And so, despite identifying 'old reflexes' among colleagues who fear multilingualism, she 'still think[s] that Dutch-medium education should be the school or the place for Dutch-speaking children in Brussels'.

Severity and linguistic uniformity are, in other words, justified here by their previously opposing values as a sign of striving for well-being and linguistic diversity.

Concluding discussion

Rather than belonging to two opposed camps, the teachers at SMC seem more like ideological liaison officers, shuttling between camps as they defend a severe policy as well as doubt it; ostensibly give language tickets to pupils but 'forget' to follow it through; problematise multilingualism but also valorise it. The image that emerges here is of a struggling teacher, who 'hasn't yet found the solution' as she tries to reconcile the irreconcilable, and whose actions can neither be explained as the product of autonomous resistance nor as the symptom of blind obedience to ideology – unless one ignores the contradictory, flexible character of the struggling (Creese and Blackledge 2011). The image of teachers in much research on language-in-education policy is not inaccurate therefore, but incomplete in its description while it tends to reduce the analyst's options to celebration (of the critical teacher) or contestation (of the loyal ideology soldier).

Our argument has been that this shuttling behaviour is driven by long-standing ideological dilemmas, with deep roots in liberal modernity, that juxtapose authority with equality, top-down teaching with bottom-up learning, uniformity with diversity (cf. Billig et al. 1988). It is unlikely therefore that we have sketched a transitory stage, with teachers at SMC gradually moving from a monolingual to a more multilingually anchored policy. Drastic changes in policies excepted, the ambivalent behaviour we found may be a chronic feature of many other schools where monolingual goals need to be reconciled with multilingual pupils.

The chronic nature of these dilemmas does not imply that teachers' struggle is unchanging. Without the massive influx of pupils with limited Dutch proficiency there would have been no need for teachers to tighten their policy stance; this stance is likely to abate should these pupils become attracted by the promises of Dutch immersion increasingly offered in Francophone schools. The criticism teachers received for their linguistic severity (from the inspection, in the press) likewise forced teachers to consider the negative effects, to soften their approach and to justify it in more agreeable terms. Such efforts may contribute to changing the terms of the debate: if overt authority and monolingual regimes become taboo, actors can start justifying these as roads to ensuring well-being and linguistic diversity, inviting new dilemmas between different interpretations of these values (see example 12).

It would be difficult to argue that teachers at SMC are unopposedly regimenting their pupils to accept Dutch as legitimate language, even if they pull the institutional strings. Their struggle is indexical of, and indebted to, a larger attempt to promote the cultural presence of Dutch in the Belgian

capital by the economic benefits of Dutch–French bilingualism. While the success of this promotion carries the promise of increasing the number of Dutch speakers (and of having a viable number of pupils), managing its effects – the significant influx of French-dominant speakers and the associated French lingua franca use among pupils – hinges upon teachers’ capacity to avoid deterring Dutch minority speakers as well as pupils who are interested in Dutch for other reasons than its cultural significance. Being too soft on language risks discouraging the first group, being too severe, the second. SMC’s soft power policy thus accommodates complex institutional and ideological paradoxes.

One could argue in this light that SMC teachers reasonably impose Dutch to improve pupils’ proficiency, to teach them it is necessary and respectful to make discursive space for the minority language they seek to acquire, and to ensure that pupils who do not speak French so well, like the principal’s son, can still make friends. It is also defensible to claim that these teachers fail to explore the utility of other languages for raising Dutch proficiency levels, that the convenient smoke screen they raise around language tickets is doubtful, and to argue this may teach pupils implicitly that eventually, teachers do not really place great importance on Dutch. So, the struggle that results from reconciling opposing concerns does not preclude criticism nor advocacy. In the present institutional and ideological constellation that teachers at SMC work in, however, neither criticism nor advocacy risks being highly persuasive to the extent it overlooks the contradictory values they have to balance.

Notes

1. The original article appeared in a Francophone daily on 14 February 2012. The exact location of articles is withheld here so as not to disclose the school’s identity.
2. Our translation from Dutch here and in the following examples, unless otherwise indicated.

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