Summary Dissertation Evy Ceuleers

The influence of mobility, globalization and immigration in a rapidly changing society makes it difficult to predict how relations between language groups will evolve. In Brussels, sociological research shows the increasing discrepancy between the linguistically and culturally heterogeneous nature of the population and the way in which education is organised. In this context, macrocontextual features such as language policy and language legislation have a profound impact on adolescents’ language use and on the way languages are learned. The main aim of this study is to address the relationship between identity and second language learning both at the macro-level of intergroup relations and at the micro-level of language-in-action. It includes both a quantitative and a qualitative component. In the quantitative component, language use, identification processes, linguistic self-confidence and L2 learning motivation of four groups of language learners are compared: monolinguals Dutch, monolinguals French, home bilinguals Dutch-French and school bilinguals French-Dutch. The results indicate that (1) language use in Brussels is highly contextually determined; (2) learners are characterized by variable and multilayered identities that become more or less salient depending on the concrete context; (3) the observed variability in language use and in identification patterns is influenced by the interplay between their home language(s) and school language; (4) more authentic L2 contact leads to more internalized L2 learning motivation. The findings of the qualitative component show that the context-dependent nature of language use of adolescents in Brussels challenges the monolingual spaces created by the educational system. Non-native Dutch-speaking learners who attend a Dutch-speaking school are influenced by the “norm” set by the Dutch-speaking community, and more importantly, by the idea that they are different from the “ordinary Dutch-speakers”. Their description of strategies of inclusion and exclusion suggests that asymmetrical power relations between social groups are reproduced at the school level. A discrepancy exists between non-native Dutch-speaking learners’ beliefs about what good language behaviour is and their actual behaviour. In a Dutch-speaking school context, code-switching and code-mixing are considered as “not good” and “confusing”. At the
same time, plurilingual practices are viewed as signalling solidarity and equality.
When confronted with the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of pupil populations, policy makers often respond in a protectionist way, falling back on the 19th century ideal of one nation-one language. However, as is demonstrated in this dissertation, educational policies based on such principles do not cater for the needs of the pupils of today. Both policy makers and educationalists should be aware of the emergence of variable and multilayered learner identities when dealing with language learners/users in complex, multilingual environments.