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Miss Belgium, Coca-Cola and Flemish carwashes: Mapping discourses on ‘multilingualism’ by the Dutch- and French-medium written press in Belgium

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Abstract This article explores recent (1995–2018) discourses on ‘multilingualism’ in the Dutch- and French-medium written press in Belgium: how is the notion of ‘multilingualism’ thematised and evaluated and how does this reflect underlying historical, political and socio-economic sensitivities linked to the long-standing Belgian conflict? Based on a corpus of 1710 news articles and using Ruíz’ (1984) language orientations as heuristics for quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study aims to provide objectification and reflexivity over an emotional, versatile and multi-layered language-ideological debate. Similar to (inter)national tendencies indicated in previous studies, our results generally reveal attention for and a positive bias towards (prestigious) multilingualism, mainly linked to discourses of economic utility and plurality. Differences between the Dutch- and French-medium corpus, as well as recurring argumentative patterns in both corpora, however, can be traced back to ideological sensitivities of the Belgian conflict and point to the imperative historicity of Belgian language debates.

Keywords multilingualism, language orientations, language conflict, media discourse, Belgium, Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels

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1 Introduction

“Unacceptable”, “exclusionary” or even “an affront”, the 2008 Miss Belgium pageant didn’t go unnoticed. When several¹ Dutch-medium newspapers questioned the linguistic competences of the laureate after the glamorous crowning ceremony in December 2007, readers’ reactions were not mild: since the French-speaking winner failed to answer questions in Dutch, she could not possibly be an ambassadress of *all* Belgians.² The French-medium newspaper *La Libre Belgique* responded to this commotion with an article entitled *Miss Belgique 2008 n’est pas tweekalig*³ (‘Miss Belgium 2008 is not tweekalig’),

with *tweetalig* ('bilingual') in Dutch as derogatory reference to the supposedly exaggerated Flemish language sensitivities. In a list of personal strengths, such as spontaneity and musicality, *La Libre* further explicitly praised the multilingual repertoire of the newly elected Miss, who in addition to French also had command of Czech and English.

As we will see in this paper, the anecdote captures essential elements of ruling media discourses on the notion of 'multilingualism' in the Belgian Dutch- and French-medium press. In the country's linguistically sensitive context, it is not surprising that language and multilingualism at times cause such heated, emotional and polemical discussions. In the current phase of intense globalisation, after all, different forms of multilingualism become increasingly visible and once again challenge ideals of strict territorial monolingualism by which complex historical tensions between mainly Dutch- and French-speakers are still managed today.

Given this complex, sensitive and emotional context, we therefore consider it meaningful to objectify the ideological thinking and versatility of competing perspectives on multilingualism in Belgian language debates. In order to explore how current valorisations of multilingualism in Belgium interact with perceptions of language typical of the Belgian conflict, this paper aims to map ruling media discourses on the notion of 'multilingualism' in the Dutch- and French-medium written press. This way, we seek to explore the extent to which the representation of multilingualism in Belgian media connect to international trends (see i.a. Horner, 2011; Horner & Weber, 2012; Jaffe, 2011; Kelly-Holmes & Milani, 2011; Robichaud & De Schutter, 2012; Vetter, 2013). In doing so, we additionally try to expand existing research of this type on the Belgian/Flemish context (see e.g. Bollen & Baten, 2010; Calis, 2015; Prophète, 2020) with a larger and broader data corpus.

Based on an analysis of 1710 news articles from the pivotal period 1998–2018, we will (1) present a quantitative and qualitative overview of circulating discursive focal points and language orientations regarding multilingualism, and (2) contextualise how these are interwoven with larger (inter)national historical, political, cultural and socio-economic tendencies. Before addressing these objectives, we sketch the role language and media play in the Belgian conflict and explain the compilation and analysis of our news corpus.

2 Language in the Belgian conflict: The tip of the iceberg

Throughout Belgian history, socio-economic, demographic and political developments polarised its two main language communities (e.g. Deneckere et al., 2012; Wils, 2005; Witte et al., 2016). In the late 19th and 20th centuries, tensions between Dutch- and French-speakers have gradually been canalised by, inter alia, adopting principles of territorial monolingualism, politically defining a 'language border' and, as such, gradually establishing a federal state structure. Belgium nowadays consists of three linguistic Com-

munities (the Dutch-speaking *Vlaamse Gemeenschap* in the North; the French-speaking *Communauté française de Belgique* in the South; the German-speaking *Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft* in the East) and three economic Regions (the assumed monolingual Dutch-speaking *Vlaams Gewest* in the North; the theoretically French-Dutch bilingual *Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest/Région de Bruxelles-Capitale* in the centre; the *Région Wallonne* in the South, which is officially monolingual French except for the German-speaking part). Twenty-seven 'municipalities with facilities' along the language border and in Brussels' periphery constitute a touchy exception to these monolingual structures, since they have to offer municipal services in another official national language to members of constitutionally defined national linguistic minority groups. The rigid nature of these facilities and the polemics this generates in times of growing population diversity and urban expansion of Brussels are emblematic of the constant balancing act between the different language communities.

Being based mainly on ideals of territorial monolingualism, these regulations may suggest that the Belgian conflict is in essence language-centred. Nevertheless, as in similar well-known contexts such as Quebec, Switzerland, Catalonia or the Balkans, language is hardly the only pivotal factor. It has rather become an outward, recognisable and easily polarisable marker of deeper political-ideological, socio-economic and ethnic frontiers (see e.g. Blommaert, 2011; Nelde, 1994). Therefore, language discussions have to be understood not only as discussions about language *an sich*, but also about the ideological role language has in society and about the underlying dynamics between speech communities at various societal levels (Darquennes, 2015).

2.1 The 19th and early 20th century: Language, emancipation and nation building

In the Belgian context, language questions are burdened by communitarian dynamics of socio-economic and political emancipation. Although the constitution at the time of Belgium's foundation in 1830 provided for language freedom, mainly French was used in official matters as it was the prestige language of the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels elite. This *de facto* linguistic hegemony of French was seen to be an obstacle to the cultural, economic and political emancipation of non-French-speaking (Flemish) social classes. In their *taalstrijd* ('language struggle') against this 'frenchification', the Flemish Movement achieved a series of symbolical victories, amongst which the Equality Act of 1898 that recognised 'Flemish' (*la langue flamande/Vlaamsche taal*) next to French as a legally valid language for the publication of legal texts. In the same sense, the polemical codification and implementation of one emancipatory standard norm in the 19th century, together with an intense mediatised period of puristic 'hyperstandardisation' after World War II, can be understood as a marker of such democratisation, manifestation and nation building processes (e.g. Deprez, 1999; Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012). Linguistic and cultural emancipation of Dutch, as such, meant socio-political emancipation of the Flemish as a group, as a people.

The socio-economic fault line between North and South may also explain the seemingly less tumultuous linguistic history of today's Wallonia. From the 19th to the first half of the 20th century, the region benefited from a flourishing steel, glass and mining industry. Partly because of this socio-economic majority position and the (inter)national prestige of French, subnationalist discourses of oppression, emancipation and linguistic homogeneity have become less dispersed (Hambye, 2009; Lecours, 2001).

Nevertheless, the Walloon Movement also expressed the need to build a proper Walloon identity on the regional level, based on its dialects and regiolects, culture and history. At the turn of the 20th century, however, this intention raised a still unsolved dilemma (Francard, 1998; Kesteloot, 1993; Pirotte, 1997): in order to counteract emerging Flemish language demands on the national level, the Walloon Movement at the same time advocated a generalised knowledge of French in Wallonia and Flanders, promoting this language as a 'neutral' *commun dénominateur linguistique* ('common linguistic denominator') for the whole country. Although this second strategy has had substantial political impact on national language policy (Wils, 2005, p. 188), the Walloon Movement, in the end, was not able to transcend its straddle position due to an incongruent approach and lack of clarity in their demands for the Walloon regiolects (e.g. Gonne, forthcoming; Kesteloot, 1997).

2.2 More recent trends

In the 1960's, economic activity shifted from the obsolete Walloon industries to the Flemish chemical and transport sectors. Today's Flanders, however, still seems to bear traces of the historical 'language struggle' for societal recognition and emancipation in a protective reflex towards linguistic and cultural homogeneity (Blommaert, 2011; Vogl & Hüning, 2010). Multilingual reality at school and foreign language education – as we see for instance in policy discussions about multilingual education programs⁴ or home languages in the playground⁵ – are mainly managed by integrating them into existing and long-standing language ideological structures. Thereby, the focus is on additive language skills and the seemingly unquestionable importance of Standard Dutch for integration and socio-economic promotion (e.g. Blommaert & Van Avermaet, 2008; De Caluwe, 2012; Delarue & De Caluwe, 2015; Jaspers, 2012, 2015; Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2020; Vogl, 2012). With Dutch now carrying prestige in Belgium and Flanders being the socio-economic dominant region, those protective reflexes towards Dutch can be seen as somehow paradoxical at first sight (Hambye, 2009; Hambye & Richards, 2012). Nevertheless, they indicate the strength of several historical sensitivities and the protracted ideological instrumentalisation of language in the Belgian conflict.

In Wallonia, the reversed socio-economic power relations caused high levels of unemployment and impoverishment (see Verbeken, 2014). Growing awareness about the importance of individual multilingualism on the labour market led in 1998 to the rela-

tively early introduction of multilingual ‘immersion’ education with the so-called *décret Onkelinx*. Seven years later, a ‘Marshall Plan’ was launched to revitalise the Walloon economy, again calling upon the Walloons to learn foreign languages such as Dutch or English in order to focus on the Flemish and international labour market. Promoting the language of the North would, in addition, symbolically prove that the so-called ‘Walloon haughtiness’ towards Flanders was no cause for the political crisis at the time (Hambye & Richards, 2012). In other words, also on the French-speaking side, language policy up to today seems to be inextricably linked to Belgium’s long language-ideological debate (Blommaert, 2011).

3 The media as discursive arena

Although the linguistic history of Belgium has been fairly turbulent, language conflicts seem to be generally dealt with at the discursive level (Darquennes, 2015; Rindler Schjerve, 2003). In their role as socio-cultural gatekeepers, the media have considerable importance in (re)producing such discursive language-ideological debates (Bell, 1991; Blommaert, 1999; Fairclough, 1989). Influenced by what is considered newsworthy, they create discursive spaces in terms of news and discussions, in which different arguments and viewpoints can be produced, reproduced and challenged in order to impact on public opinion and official policies (Johnson & Milani, 2010). This makes news and media debates analytical angles par excellence to study circulating discourses, argumentation and ideologies (e.g. Heller, 2009; Horner, 2011).

Moreover, media discourses can mirror and at the same time reinforce a country’s deeper societal tensions. In Belgium, the media landscape is language-divided, making the Dutch- and French-medium systems operate separately, each depending on their own societal context and market dynamics (De Bens & Raeymaeckers, 2010). A national, Belgian, approach to news is thus almost non-existent and information about the other language communities, including in Brussels, is scarce or otherwise often stereotyped (Potvin et al., 2004; Sinardet, 2007).

Nevertheless, news remains a delicate issue for analysis. Baker (2006, p. 73) argues: “newspaper discourses, where they exist, should not be taken out of context or always viewed as mainstream or hegemonic just because they have occurred within a newspaper”. Hence, we sought to establish a diverse and representative corpus based on different text types from various national and regional written media, that may reflect multiple sides of public opinion in different time frames, and in which it would be possible to find recurrent quantitative and qualitative patterns.

4 Composition and analysis of the corpora

The self-compiled corpus ($n = 1710$) contains both online and printed media articles from the GoPress Academic archive⁶ and is split into a Dutch-medium ($n = 1085$; henceforth NL-press) and a French-medium subcorpus ($n = 625$; henceforth FR-press). In order to obtain generalisable yet manually manageable data, articles were selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- (a) All articles mentioning at least once the keyword ‘multilingualism’ or its derivatives (*meertalig.e* in Dutch and *multilingue.s* in French) were included. We recognise that relevant parts of ruling discourses on multilingualism may also circulate in texts that do not make literal reference to it, but since such texts are difficult to identify unilaterally in a large database, they are beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, the more or less synonymous notions in Dutch and French that might also have served as keywords were considered instances of the generic term ‘multilingualism’ (cf. Cenoz, 2013, p. 7), which is also the most frequently used.⁷
- (b) The selected articles originate from ten election years⁸ between 1995 and 2018. This time span was chosen since it embraces several significant events on multilingualism: the introduction of the European language goal ‘mother tongue plus two’ in 1995, as well as the introduction of multilingual education programs in French-speaking Belgium in 1998 and in Dutch-speaking Belgium since 2014. Within every selected year, we have picked articles from three periods of about two months: eight weeks around the start of school and around the elections, together with a random (reference) month in between the other two periods.
- (c) In terms of the newspapers and magazines selected, we opted for the most read and most influential periodicals in their respective linguistic communities, including their websites and regional editions (see Table 1). As for the article type, there is a balanced distribution across both corpora over news items (74% in the NL-press and 84% in the FR-press), opinion texts (respectively 17% and 13%), interviews (3% and 2.5%) and reader’s letters (3% and 0.5%). As such, we aimed for broad corpora in terms of ideological diversification and possible impact on public opinions.

This led to 1362 hits for the Dutch- and 879 for the French-medium subcorpus, giving a total corpus size of 2241 analysable keyword occurrences.⁹

Using TextSTAT (Hüning, 2015), concordance lists were created embedding the keywords in their broader textual context, hence “highlighting the evaluative polarity, be it good or bad, of the item’s collocational environment” (Mautner, 2016, p. 161; see also Baker, 2006). These word lines, together with close reading of the whole text, served as basis for further manual coding using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial

Table 1 Hits on *multilingu** across the selected magazines and newspapers ($n = 2241$)

NL-press ($n = 1362$)	FR-press ($n = 879$)
News and opinion magazines	
<i>Knack</i> ($n = 55$)	<i>Le Vif/L'Express</i> ($n = 36$)
<i>Humo</i> ($n = 1$)	<i>Moustique</i> ($n = 2$)
Quality newspapers	
<i>De Standaard</i> ($n = 313$)	<i>La Libre Belgique</i> ($n = 227$)
<i>De Morgen</i> ($n = 233$)	<i>Le Soir</i> ($n = 297$)
Business newspapers	
<i>De Tijd</i> ($n = 91$)	<i>L'Echo</i> ($n = 73$)
Popular newspapers	
<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i> ($n = 214$)	<i>La Dernière Heure</i> ($n = 16$)
<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i> ($n = 242$)	<i>Vers L'Avenir</i> ($n = 136$)
<i>Metro NL</i> ($n = 33$)	<i>Metro FR</i> ($n = 2$)
Regional newspapers	
<i>Gazet van Antwerpen</i> ($n = 63$)	<i>SudPresse</i> ¹⁰ ($n = 90$)
<i>Het Belang van Limburg</i> ($n = 67$)	
<i>Krant van West-Vlaanderen</i> ($n = 50$)	

codes that meaningfully interrelated were merged into new, bigger, codes allowing us to identify recurrent quantitative and qualitative patterns concerning the following two aspects:

- (a) By means of both a corpus-based and inductive corpus-driven approach, six broad *thematic conceptualisations* of ‘multilingualism’ were obtained (see 5.1): (1) an educational, (2) a political, (3) an economic, (4) a more general socio-cultural and (5) a tourist theme and, finally, (6) a residual group with hits on various subjects that do not fit into one of the above categories. Within these themes, also specific news topics were marked.
- (b) In order to uncover *ideological frames*, we deductively coded for the classical and widely used¹¹ framework of language orientations as formulated by Richard Ruíz (see 5.2). Ruíz (1984, p. 16) defines his orientations as “a complex of dispositions toward language and its role and toward languages and their role in society”. They

involve a basic threefold division between “language-as-problem”, “language-as-right” and “language-as-resource”. Relevant for the objectification of emotionality and sensitivity in Belgian language discussions, Hult & Hornberger (2016, p. 42) point to their usefulness as etic heuristics “to guide deductive analysis about the values that emerge from messy policy debate and negotiation”. Additionally, since ideological language orientations are rhetorical and, thus, constitutive in language discussions, we also inductively coded and regrouped for why multilingualism is (implicitly) presented as a resource, right or problem in the news articles. As such, we identified eight argumentative patterns across the three orientations in both corpora (see 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

5 Mapping the field

In emotional discussions it is useful to zoom out and map the discursive focal points at play: what are we actually talking about when talking about ‘multilingualism’? From a quantitative and comparative perspective, this section starts by describing the thematic conceptualisations (themes and topics) of the notion ‘multilingualism’, before giving an overview of its ideological valuations (language orientations). We end this section with a description and illustration of the eight recurrent argumentative patterns for evaluating multilingualism that were identified in our qualitative analysis.

5.1 Themes and topics

Table 2 summarises the overall thematic tendencies in our data. For the entire period of time (1995–2018), it captures the thematical variability of ‘multilingualism’ in five separate frames and one residual category. However, since the digitalisation of the press database appeared to be incomplete, establishing solid diachronic patterns was difficult. In 1995, for instance, the search engine only found 15 articles in the Dutch-medium and none in the French-medium database. The years 1999 and 2006, similarly, resulted in no articles for the FR-press. Nevertheless, we can assume that the distribution of themes over the years is relatively stable and that the methodological selection of 10 election years has a minor effect on the observed patterns: checking with Cramér’s V only displays small correlations between theme and year ($< 0,18$ for the NL-press; $< 0,26$ for the FR-press). Temporal impact will therefore only be indicated and explained where it has clear relevance. Neither the choice of period (start of school, elections, random) nor newspaper and text type statistically influence theme frequency.

Table 2 shows that in the majority of articles, ‘multilingualism’ appears to be understood as a *political* matter. Around one third of the hits in both corpora occur in this context, i.e. 33.19% for the NL-press and 37.88% for the FR-press. The NL-press mainly involves hits about the Belgian and European political system as such: the functioning of

Table 2 Frequency and comparison of themes related to *multilingu** ($n = 2241$)

Theme	NL-press ($n = 1362$)		FR-press ($n = 879$)
Politics*	33.19 %	<	37.88 %
Economics**	11.45 %	<	26.51 %
Education**	27.90 %	>	6.14 %
Socioculture*	16.45 %	>	12.97 %
Other*	6.68 %	<	9.10 %
Tourism*	4.33 %	<	7.39 %

Note. The direction of significance is indicated by < and >

* $p > .05$. ** $p > .01$

Belgian and European parliaments, discussions about multilingual electoral campaigns, and political issues on Brussels or the 'municipalities with facilities'. We notice a heightened focus on multilingualism in 2006 and 2007, when a serious political crisis on community matters arose. In the FR-press too, most of the political hits tend to focus on the Belgian conflict. Remarkably, there is increased attention paid to Flemish statements and decisions in this respect (which we will discuss in more detail in 5.2.2 and 6). Statistically, political issues about multilingualism are discussed more frequently in the FR-press than in NL-press, although the percentage difference is not striking ($\chi^2 = 5,097$; $df = 1$; $p < .05$).

A second block of articles perceives 'multilingualism' in *economic* terms. In both corpora, multilingualism is then linked to employment, international business communication, customer loyalty, international investments and attracting contracts.¹² Interestingly, given the actual socio-economic situation in Belgium, they occur to a significantly greater extent on the francophone side ($\chi^2 = 84,392$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$), as will be further detailed in 5.2.1 and 6.

In the *educational* context, 'multilingualism' is used in articles that report or express opinions on Flemish and Walloon language immersion projects (CLIL) and linguistic diversity management (home language or mother tongue use in monolingual settings). It is logical that we observe a clear peak of this theme in 2014, since the Flemish Minister of Education had just given her consent to the CLIL project in secondary education. Whereas the educational context is the second most frequent in the NL-press (27.90 %), it hardly occurs in the FR-press (6.14 %; $\chi^2 = 161,938$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$).¹³

The *sociocultural* theme clearly covers fewer hits (16.5 % in the NL-press; 12.97 % in the FR-press). In the NL-press we find texts in which 'multilingualism' is represented as part of the sociocultural identity of Flanders, Belgium, Europe, their cities or their respective inhabitants as a group. This mainly occurs relating to Brussels, being a highly multicultural metropolis. The FR-press focusses on similar subtopics, presenting multi-

lingualism as an identity feature of Flemings and Brusselers, with Wallonia itself never being mentioned. This way referring to foreign language skills of ‘the other’, the FR-press thus seems to reproduce a cliché image in Belgium, namely that of the ‘multilingual Fleming’ versus the ‘monolingual Walloon’ (see also Example 4 in 5.2.1).

Finally, *tourism* represents a last separate – rather small – thematical category. In the NL-press only 4.3% of the hits fit in this context, which is significantly less than in the FR corpus (7.39%; $\chi^2 = 9,065$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$).

The remaining hits belong to a residual category *other* and deal with multilingualism in terms of sports, religion, literature, music, quizzes, etc. In this category, articles on national and regional beauty contests stand out, by focusing on the winner’s (lack of or weak) foreign language proficiency. As set out above, this can be seen as an indication of the strong symbolic value attached to language and multilingualism, be it as a marker of personal and intellectual fulfilment or Belgian cross-community identity.

5.2 Orientations towards multilingualism

Table 3 Frequency and comparison of orientations towards multilingualism ($n = 2241$)

Orientation	NL-press ($n = 1362$)		FR-press ($n = 879$)
Multilingualism-as-resource	53.4 %		54.4 %
Multilingualism-as-problem**	10.4 %	>	6.1 %
Multilingualism-as-right**	6.8 %	>	3.5 %
Neutral**	20.6 %	<	25.7 %
Ambiguous	8.9 %		10.4 %

Note. The direction of significance is indicated by < and >
 ** $p > .01$

The ideological representation of multilingualism in our corpora was analysed based on Ruíz’ language orientations. The most prominent domain clearly is multilingualism-as-resource. Table 3 reveals that multilingualism is valued as an asset in more than half of the hits in both corpora. Multilingualism-as-problem and multilingualism in terms of language rights are clearly less common. When they do appear, they occur significantly more often in the NL-press ($\chi^2 = 12,63$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$ and for the FR-press $\chi^2 = 10,73$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$). A fifth to a quarter of the hits are neutral statements that do not link multilingualism to any specific positive nor negative argumentation. Contrary to the main orientations that will be illustrated in the subsections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, these neutral ‘valuations’ will not be further unfolded since they contain no argumentative depth.¹⁴

5.2.1 Multilingualism-as-resource

Let us now consider recurrent and prevalent argumentative patterns on multilingualism in our dataset. To begin with, as Examples 1 and 2 show,¹⁵ multilingualism-as-resource is connected to *labour market opportunities*. This is the case in political, economic, educational and touristic themes in both corpora.

- (1) **Du.:** *Naast Europese talen, met het accent op Engels als taal van het hoger onderwijs en de internationale economie, wordt ook begonnen met Chinees als optietaal [...] Die extra troef bereidt je kind beter voor op hoger onderwijs en een latere professionele loopbaan.*
(NLP1151; *De Standaard* 14/06/2014; News article)
- Eng.:** ‘In addition to European languages, with an emphasis on English as the language of higher education and international economics, Chinese has also been introduced as an optional language [...] This extra asset better prepares your child for higher education and a professional career.’
- (2) **Fr.:** *La lutte contre le non-emploi passe par la promotion du multilinguisme et l’ouverture du pays de Liège vers la Flandre, les Pays-Bas, la Communauté germanophone, l’Allemagne, le Luxembourg ...*
(FRP201; *La Libre Belgique* 12/05/2007; News article)
- Eng.:** ‘The battle against non-employment [sic] requires the promotion of multilingualism and the opening up of the Liège region to Flanders, the Netherlands, the German-speaking Community, Germany, Luxembourg, etc.’

Other recurrent argumentation regarding multilingualism-as-resource has to do with more general *market competitiveness* and can be found in economic and touristic themes in both corpora. As Examples 3 and 4 illustrate, multilingualism (of employees, cities, regions or the country) is then represented as an asset to attract customers, international companies or important contracts. In Example 4 from the FR-press, moreover, we recognise the common image of the multilingual Fleming mentioned above.

- (3) **Du.:** *Brussel is nog maar sinds 2001 het Europese toplabo van Coca-Cola. Voordien waren de onderzoeksafdelingen verspreid over diverse landen. Vanwaar de keuze voor Brussel? “De meertaligheid en de culturele diversiteit in Brussel zijn belangrijk als je 108 landen ondersteunt”.*
(NLP791; *De Tijd* 03/01/2007; News article)
- Eng.:** ‘Brussels has only been Coca-Cola’s European top lab since 2001. Before, its research departments were spread out across several countries. Why Brussels? “The multilingualism and cultural diversity present in Brussels are important when you support 108 countries”’

- (4) **Fr.:** *Le multilinguisme de la population est reconnu au niveau international, ce qui explique la présence de nombreux sièges internationaux en Flandre.*
(FRP500; *SudPresse* 28/09/2018; News article)
- Eng.:** 'The multilingual qualities of the population are internationally recognised, which explains the presence of many international headquarters in Flanders.'

A third argumentative pattern values *interculturality and multiculturalism*. Multilingualism is then discussed in terms of openness, tolerance, broadened views on society, cultural enhancement, better integration and stronger community relations. In both corpora, it can be found in sociocultural and political themes, especially with reference to the future of cosmopolitan Brussels (Example 5) or Europe, and in the educational context as an advantage of multilingual teaching programs (Example 6).

- (5) **Fr.:** *[...] la maîtrise des langues constitue un indispensable outil d'ouverture aux cultures et apporte la distance nécessaire pour jeter un regard neuf sur nos propres valeurs et modes de pensée et d'apprentissage. Apprendre la langue de l'Autre est autant source de respect mutuel que d'épanouissement personnel, car c'est aussi apprendre à voir le monde avec un autre regard.*
(FRP607; *Le Soir* 24/09/2014; Opinion article)
- Eng.:** '[...] language proficiency is an indispensable tool for cultural openness and provides the necessary distance to take a fresh look at our own values and ways of thinking and learning. Learning the Other's language is as much a source of mutual respect as it is a matter of personal development, because it also means learning to see the world through different eyes.'

- (6) **Du.:** *In juni is een eerste lichtung scholieren die in de basisschool meertalig onderwijs genoot 'afgezwaaid'. "Je merkt dat die kinderen een openheid naar de anderen hebben die echt wel indrukwekkend is, zeker voor kinderen van die leeftijd."*
(NLP599; *De Morgen* 08/09/2007; Interview article)
- Eng.:** 'In June, the first generation of pupils who received multilingual education in primary school graduated. "We notice that these children have an openness towards others which is really impressive, especially for children of that age".'

A last argumentative pattern portraying multilingualism as a resource can be found in the educational context, when multilingual teaching programs are related to *a general increase of education quality*, usually by quoting researchers or referencing to scientific studies. Concretely, the advantages of such programs would entail pupils' better cognitive development (Examples 7 & 8) and improve their native and foreign language proficiency (Example 8).

- (7) **Fr.:** [...] *Les élèves de l'enseignement multilingue semblent être plus motivés, plus efficaces. Le développement cognitif des étudiants est plus grand que dans une éducation monolingue. La Wallonie a montré que les tout-petits qui suivent ce type d'enseignement réalisent après un an un meilleur score au test de QI.*
(FRP721; *L'Avenir* 04/09/2018; News article)
- Eng.:** 'Students in multilingual education seem to be more motivated, more efficient. The cognitive development of students is greater than in a monolingual education. Wallonia has shown that toddlers who receive this type of education achieve a higher IQ score after just one year.'
- (8) **Du.:** [*Uit studies*] *bleek dat leerlingen die vakken als rekenen of aardrijkskunde kregen in een taal die niet hun moedertaal was – in tegenstelling tot wat men zou denken – hun moedertaal niet slechter gaan beheersen. Integendeel, de kennis van hun moedertaal gaat erop vooruit én de kennis van de andere taal neemt toe.*
(NLP19; *De Morgen* 01/09/1999; Opinion article)
- Eng.:** '[Studies] showed that pupils who learned subjects such as maths or geography through a language other than their mother tongue did not – contrary to what one might think – become less proficient in their mother tongue. Quite the contrary, both their mother tongue and foreign language proficiency improve.'

5.2.2 Negative orientations towards multilingualism

The reason why we combine the orientation of multilingualism-as-problem and multilingualism-as-right in this section, is that they both appear to relate to the same kind of argumentation. In our data, when multilingualism is specifically dealt with in terms of language rights or language laws, it is simultaneously perceived as a problem, by prohibiting or questioning the rights and status of other languages in order to protect the community language.

Both negative orientations occur to a significantly greater extend in the NL-press. Examples 9 & 10 demonstrate that they mostly involve the potential danger multilingualism poses to *the position and status of Dutch* in Brussels, in 'municipalities with facilities' and in the wider *Vlaamse Rand* ('Flemish Periphery') around Brussels, a geographical area where Dutch encounters French and the highly diverse (linguistic) reality of the capital. We observe such argumentation in political, educational and sociocultural articles on issues including city administration, road signs, student population, foreign language education, traffic information, electoral campaigns or sports clubs.

- (9) **Du.:** *Voeg daar [stadsexpansie] de twee- of meertaligheid bij en je hoeft er niet stom van te staan dat buitenstaanders denken dat ze hier in Brussel zijn. Aanplakborden, opschriften in winkels: allemaal tweetalig. Onlangs stond hier [Vlaamse Rand] een wegwijzertje: 'car wash à la maison', alstublieft ... Ik had er veel zin in om het te gaan overspuiten maar iemand is mij voor geweest.*
(NLP72; *Het Nieuwsblad* 28/05/1999; Reader's letter)
- Eng.:** 'Combine this [urban expansion] with the bi- or multilingualism and you won't be surprised if outsiders think they are in Brussels. Billboards, shop signs: they're all bilingual. Recently, there was a sign here [Flemish Periphery]: 'car wash à la maison' [French], please ... I was really tempted to repaint it but someone got there first.'
- (10) **Du.:** *De meertalige samenstelling van de schoolbevolking, die eigen is aan een multiculturele stad, mag het Nederlandstalige karakter van de scholen niet ondergraven.*
(NLP249; *De Tijd* 15/10/2003; Opinion article)
- Eng.:** 'The multilingual nature of the school population, which is inherent to a multicultural city, should not undermine the Dutch-speaking character of schools.'

Moreover, as we observe in political and educational articles, multilingualism is seen as a problem for *proficiency in (Standard) Dutch*. Guaranteeing an excellent command of Standard Dutch appears to be one of the arguments for the reluctance to embark on CLIL-type of multilingual education in Flanders. Mainly for non-Dutch-speaking pupils, furthermore, inadequate proficiency in Dutch appears to be associated with 'language delay', slower integration, learning disadvantages and poorer job opportunities (Example 11).

- (11) **Du.:** *Als wordt vastgesteld dat er bij veel kinderen van vreemde origine een taalachterstand in het Nederlands bestaat met studiemoeilijkheden en later problemen op de arbeidsmarkt tot gevolg, dan zegt het gezond verstand toch wel dat er meer moeite gedaan moet worden om die doelgroep te helpen bij het verwerven van een betere kennis van het Nederlands [i.p.v. het voeren van een schooltaalbeleid met aandacht voor meertaligheid]!*
(NLP452; *De Standaard* 08/03/2006; Reader's letter)
- Eng.:** 'When many children of foreign origin indeed have a language delay in Dutch, resulting in study difficulties and at a later stage in labour market problems, then common sense surely suggests that more effort should be made in helping this target group acquire a better knowledge of Dutch [rather than implementing a school language policy with consideration of multilingualism]!'

In the FR-press, multilingualism-as-problem orientations most frequently arise as an almost stereotypical or at least discursively conscious reference to the abovementioned

Flemish sensitivities regarding the position of their community language and the 'frenchification' of the Flemish Periphery. This illustrates the polarising nature of language in Belgium and additionally confirms what Sinardet (2007) describes as an essential part of francophone media discourses on Flanders: an increased focus on Flemish-nationalist and anti-Walloon attitudes, creating a stereotyped image of the other side of the language frontier (in the opposite direction, as Sinardet explains, the same applies of course to the Dutch-medium press). This is mainly observed in the political context, as Examples 12 and 13 demonstrate.

- (12) **Fr.:** *[...] J'ai toujours défendu le multilinguisme. Mais tout cela n'a rien à voir avec la francisation. Le dire, c'est de la démagogie ! Et je suis triste que ça marche.*
(FRP408; *Le Soir* 08/06/2010; Reader's letter)
- Eng.:** ' [...] I have always defended multilingualism. But all this has nothing to do with frenchification. To say so is demagogy! And I'm sad it works.'
- (13) **Fr.:** *Un néerlandophone sur trois est enclin à passer à la langue de son interlocuteur, alors que plus de la moitié des francophones et des bilingues sont prêts à le faire [...] Un Flamand sur deux se dit favorable à une interdiction généralisée du français sur les plaines de jeu.*
(FRP348; *La Dernière Heure* 22/08/2010; News article)
- Eng.:** 'One out of three Dutch speakers is inclined to switch to the language of their interlocutor, while more than half of French speakers and bilinguals are ready to do so [...] One out of two Flemings is in favour of a general ban on French on playgrounds.'

A last kind of argumentation sketching language as a problem has to do with more *practical or financial side effects* related to multilingualism. In education, for instance, attention to multilingualism would require adapted pedagogy, didactics and teaching time so that other competences can continue to be developed (Example 14). In business, the multilingual structures of Belgium may cause competitive disadvantages (Example 15).

- (14) **Du.:** *Zelfs als men in een kleuterklas per dag een halfuur taalonderwijs geeft, overschat men schromelijk de beschikbare didactische tijd [om voldoende andere onderwerpen te kunnen behandelen].*
(NLP103; *Knack* 30/08/2000; Interview article)
- Eng.:** 'Even if you want to devote but half an hour a day to language teaching in kindergarten, one grossly overestimates the available teaching time [to be able to cover a sufficient number of other subjects].'

- (15) **Fr.:** *Un distributeur belge ne peut malheureusement pas s'approvisionner en France car l'étiquetage multilingue est obligatoire sur les produits vendus en Belgique. Un exemple ? Le Coca-Cola ne peut être acheté qu'auprès de Coca-Cola Belgique. Des volumes de fabrication plus réduits, donc un coût de production plus important.* (FRP695; *SudPresse* 13/01/2014; News article)
- Eng.:** 'A Belgian distributor cannot buy its stock in France because multilingual labelling is compulsory on products sold in Belgium. An example? Coca-Cola can only be bought from Coca-Cola Belgium. Smaller production volumes mean higher production costs.'

6 Some 'multilingualisms' are more equal than others

What strikes in the abovementioned quantitative and qualitative patterns, is the fundamental versatility in perceptions, conceptualisations and valuations of 'multilingualism' (see e.g. Blommaert, 1999; Gal, 1998). The notion is ubiquitous, arises in diverse themes and topics, both big and trivial, and is valued or problematised with a variety of mutually contestable arguments. Yet this multiplicity is not random. Quite the contrary, as we will discuss in the present section. Positive or negative valuations of multilingualism once again prove to be socially, linguistically and geographically context-dependent, situationally conditioned and inextricably anchored in deeper (inter)national historical, political and socio-economic tendencies.

Remarkably, in the written press of a country built around strict structures of territorial monolingualism, the notion of multilingualism is nowadays primarily perceived as an asset. Zooming in on those positive visions of multilingualism in both corpora, however, they seem to take shape within largely two argumentative lines (see Robichaud & De Schutter, 2012 for comparable patterns): an economically motivated discourse on the one hand and a more classical rhetoric of diversity and plurality on the other, the former being more prevalent than the latter. As illustrated by the examples above, the economic and market-related approach to multilingualism is generally upward-pointing and conceives of language as human capital or commodity that can ensure greater efficiency and higher esteem on the job market (see Heller, 2003, 2010). In this sense, our data suggests that when multilingualism is referred to as an economic asset, we are dealing with what can be called 'elite' or 'prestigious multilingualism' (Barakos & Selleck, 2019; Jaspers, 2009). This concerns additive, well-commanded, individual forms of multilingualism in terms of internationally acclaimed and strictly demarcated standard languages that have little impact on personal and social life, so that this can continue in the region's official (standard) language(s). In our dataset, i.a. English, Spanish, French and Chinese are explicitly mentioned in that sense.

A second argumentative line within the language-as-resource orientation in our corpora fosters linguistic diversity, language equality and cultural plurality. This is the case in

articles that celebrate Brussels' and Europe's multiculturalism and diversity, in which both individual and societal multilingualism are represented as enhancing openness, broader worldviews, tolerance and mutual understanding between different (inter)national communities and minorities. Note, however, that Blommaert and Verschueren (1991) pointed to possible sloganism in these kinds of arguments, remarking that Europe ironically is the least linguistically diversified of all continents. Moreover, arguments on the promotion and valuation of linguistic diversity in our corpora are often based on the essentialisation of language with culture, cultural identity, worldview and equality. When such arguments are indeed slogansque or superficially developed, overestimating the culturally broadening abilities of language *an sich* (one could refer to Example 5 above), they may have an opposite effect: in overdoing the premises of linguistic relativity, they actually accentuate the otherness of a cultural 'other' and, as a consequence, possibly reinforce perceptions of cultural difference (see also McWorther, 2014). A rhetoric of multilingualism as vehicle for cultural openness, furthermore, is also found in articles on rather prestigious projects of additive individual multilingualism. A recurrent argument (see Example 6) in favour of the CLIL programme in Dutch-medium education, for instance, is that it provides cultural enrichment and therefore better personal development.

As such, our data seem to support tendencies described by Ricento (2005) and Kubota (2011), namely that the orientation of multilingualism-as-resource shows an evolution from ideals of cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity towards a greater focus on economic utility and the role of prestigious standard languages. The argumentative trends within the multilingualism-as-resource orientation in both corpora, furthermore, resonate broader international tendencies and are anchored in specific national developments on the economic level. Regarding larger EU language policy, for instance, studies indicate that the proclaimed linguistic diversity of Europe is in fact often framed by neoliberal arguments emphasising primarily the importance of individual proficiency in national standard languages in a Knowledge Based Economy (e.g. Horner, 2011; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2010; Sayers & Lea Láncoş, 2017; Vetter, 2013). In the FR-press, multilingualism is frequently associated with such economic (and touristic) topics and arguments, this way echoing the much-needed economic revitalisation of Wallonia.

The forms of multilingualism presented as problematic, then, seem to be mainly of societal kind (cf. Cenoz, 2013, pp. 5–6). In our corpus, this concerns the presence of more than one language in institutions and geographical areas where existing monolingual structures and language laws may be compromised: administration and schools in Flanders or Brussels and the linguistic landscape in 'municipalities with facilities' or the wider Flemish periphery around Brussels. In this historically linguistically sensitive context around the language border, the press mainly appears to pick up symbolic issues linked to the Belgian conflict between speakers of Dutch and French, such as multilingual road signs, election campaigns or language use in sports clubs. In addition, where positive arguments mainly referred to prestigious and additive multilingualism, negative argu-

ments are also found in contexts of subtractive and plebeian multilingualism. This is the everyday language repertoire of multi-ethnic and poorly educated urban working class families, which are expected to learn the official community language and replace their mother tongues that are seen as less useful for emancipation and integration (Jaspers, 2009).

The fact that such arguments are more common in the NL-press shows how rooted they are in historically grown language-ideological sensitivities and discourses of minorisation and endangerment (see Duchêne & Heller, 2009 for an analysis of the prominence of such discourses in language discussions in general). Although the current socio-economic situation in Flanders is completely different, ideas grown throughout the 19th and 20th centuries regarding the societal status and emancipatory power of Dutch are prominent in our data up to today. In other words, and as Bollen & Baten (2010) also conclude for the media coverage of bilingual education projects in Flanders, the NL-press is predominantly positive towards multilingualism and applauds its prestigious individual forms as an asset, but where- and whenever the hard-fought position of Dutch in society (hence the nation state) is ‘at risk’, the orientations seem to invert. This tendency is reminiscent of what Heller et al. (2015) describe as the ideological tension between “language as skill” and “language as marker of belonging”, i.e. of nationhood and nationality: the fact that the promotion of (individual) multilingualism is accompanied by concerns for implications on the position and knowledge of the national/community language.

To summarise, our analyses mainly reveal three frames of multilingualism: that of prestigious individual multilingualism, that of societal multilingualism linked to the Belgian conflict and that of plebeian multilingualism linked to migration, integration and multiculturalism. Other forms of the multilingual reality, interestingly, remain largely out of the picture: hits on German, the third official national language (that is less controversial in the general Belgian conflict), hardly appear in our corpora. The notion of ‘multilingualism’ is also very scarcely linked to, from a Belgian point of view, ‘less canonical’ European standard or migrant languages (as compared to i.a. Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Turkish, ...). The same applies to dialects, regiolects, Flemish *tussentaal* (lit. ‘in-between-language’, see e.g. De Caluwe et al., 2013) and other forms on the spectrum between dialects and standard language; all these forms, as such, constituting instances of so-called ‘hidden multilingualism’ (see Vogl, 2012; Tamburelli & Tosco, 2021). Hence, drawing on Blommaert et al. (2005), it is meaningful to interpret the notion of ‘multilingualism’ in our corpus not as something fixed, as something an individual or a society is said to have or lack, but rather as something an environment, with all its layered complexities, enables and disables. What Belgian Dutch- and French-language media discourses, rooted in their societal contexts, mainly enable is an understanding and valuation of ‘multilingualism’ as the economically useful and countable sum of demarcated prestigious standard languages, and not as someone’s repertoire of varieties, styles, registers and genres, as ‘linguistic competence’ in general.

7 Concluding reflections: Revisiting the Belgian 'language struggle'?

Back to 2008, back to Miss Belgium. The 'language fuss' and conflicting reactions in the media after the election gala have shown to be exemplary for the ways the Belgian Dutch- and French-medium written press project their linguistic historiography on current multilingual practices: age-old Belgian linguistic frictions still seem to leave fresh traces.

At first sight, however, the quantitative and qualitative similarities between the Dutch- and French-medium press outnumber the differences. In similar themes and topics in both corpora, elite multilingualism – involving individual proficiency in high-status standard languages – is generally embraced and promoted as economic or cultural asset in a neoliberal and diverse world. The broad and consensual positive perception of multilingualism seems to go against strict monolingual thinking, which might then, one could argue, transcend or leave aside the historical focus on the 'own' community language in Belgian linguistic quarrels between Flemish and francophones.

Nevertheless, looking deeper, multilingualism appears to be appropriate particularly if it can strengthen the socio-economic position of the own speech community, internationally but also in the national power relationship, without threatening the position of and proficiency in the (standard variant of the) community language. The major focus on additive forms of individual multilingualism and the negative valuation of societal and plebeian multilingualism attest to this, as do the many symbolic topics taken up by the Dutch- and French-medium press. In such articles, 'multilingualism' regularly refers to the Dutch-French opposition. In the NL-press, this is accompanied by explicit protective reflexes towards the 'hard-fought' monolingual structures of Flanders, which is then on the French-speaking side recuperated in a discursively conscious, but at times also derogatory, way of being (stereo)typically Flemish.

As such, our data underline that language debates are always about more than only language and that contemporary discussions on multilingualism, in an intensely globalising context, cannot be separated from historical sensitivities characterising the complex Belgian 'language' conflict. The notion of 'multilingualism' in our corpora is versatile, ubiquitous and multilayered, a mirror of deeper societal tendencies. It emerges in a wide range of major and more or less anecdotal topics, in which we observe a dynamic of different arguments that propagate diverse context-dependent valuations and ideological perspectives, but that, in turn, are anchored in (inter)national socio-economic and politico-historical developments transcending language. On the one hand, this deep societal stratification explains the recurrent emotionality of Belgian language discussions. On the other hand, highlighting and contextualising this – at school through research and in the media – may at the same time provide more nuance and reflexivity in public debate, something, eventually, Miss Belgium 2008 might have hoped for.

Notes

- 1 E.g. 'Alizée Poulicek uit Hoei is Miss België 2008 maar kan amper Nederlands'. *Het Belang van Limburg*, 16-12-2007; 'Moet Miss België perfect tweetalig zijn?'. *De Standaard*, 17-12-2007. The issue was further monitored in, e.g., 'Miss België spreekt Nederlands'. *Het Nieuwsblad*, 01-02-2008; 'Waalse Miss België-kandidates spreken amper Nederlands'. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 27-11-2008.
- 2 An idea, for instance, also expressed more recently in expectations for French-speaking politicians about their proficiency level in Dutch (e.g. 'Un député N-VA reproche à Sophie Wilmès sa mauvaise utilisation du flamand'. *Sudinfo.be*, 24-09-2020; 'Een gevecht met het Nederlands'. *De Standaard*, 20-11-2020). This might suggest that the requirements for the language proficiency level also depend on the specific language in question: knowledge of Dutch (for foreigners or, in this case, Belgian French-speakers) only seems to count if it is flawless and accentless (see for example 'Waarom we zo streng zijn voor buitenlandse accenten: Vlamingen stellen hogere taaleisen aan buitenlanders dan aan zichzelf'. *Knack*, 30-9-2020). Nevertheless, this remains a sensitive issue that, following Simon & Lybaert (2021), merits more systematic research attention.
- 3 'Miss Belgique 2008 n'est pas tweetalig'. *La Libre Belgique*, 17-12-2007.
- 4 See the policy papers of Crevits, 2014; Smet, 2011; Vandenbroucke, 2007; Weyts, 2019.
- 5 See the policy brief of the Gemeenschapsonderwijs (2017) and reactions of policy makers in the press ('Thuis taal in de klas: Crevits blijft er achter staan, maar heeft ook kritiek'. *Knack*, 29-11-2017; 'De Wever over moedertaal op school: dacht dat het een vervroegde aprilgrap was, het is een absurd idee'. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 27-11-2017).
- 6 GoPress offers a daily updated database of i.a. articles and press releases from Belgian (Dutch and French-medium) and several international newspapers and magazines (<https://academic.gopress.be>). Only very recently the name was changed into Belga.press.
- 7 Between 1 January 1995 and 31 December 2018, the GoPress Academic database contains 5297 occurrences of *meertalig** and 3492 of *multilingu** ('multilingualism'); 1584 of *drietalig** and 2892 of *trilingu** ('trilingualism'); and 384 of *veeltalig** and 404 of *plurilingu** ('plurilingualism'). The node *tweetalig**/*bilingu** ('bilingualism') is more frequent, but could, in public discourse and certainly in Dutch, refer more to the sole Dutch-French dimension, whereas in this article we are concerned with 'multilingualism' also other than instances, situations and repertoires containing only Dutch-French.
- 8 In Belgium, there are municipal and provincial elections every six years. Regional and federal elections are held every five years (unless earlier elections need to be organised).
- 9 For additional composition details of the corpora, see Vierendeels (2019).
- 10 A newspaper group comprising 5 regional dailies: *La Capitale*, *La Meuse*, *La Nouvelle Gazette*, *La Province* and *Nord Éclair*.
- 11 See, for instance, Hult & Hornberger (2016, p. 31) for an overview of relevant references.
- 12 See e.g. Degraeve & Hilgsmann (2021) for a study on the need of multilingualism, and knowl-

- edge of Dutch, on the labour market in French-speaking Belgium. See also Mettewie & Van Mensel (2009) for the role of multilingualism in business in Brussels.
- 13 The low frequency of educational hits in the FR-corpus could possibly be explained by the absence of articles in the years 1995 and 1999, when crucial decisions were made on the subject of immersion education. A second possible explanation may be found in the collocational environment of *multilinguisme* in French. After all, (synonymous) nodes as *plurilinguisme* and *bilinguisme* may have a stronger relationship with educational terms (e.g. *enseignement plurilingue* or *enseignement bilingue*). Nevertheless, the formula '*enseignement multilingue*' also appears repeatedly in our dataset. For methodological reasons (see section 4), 'bilingualism' and synonymous nodes of 'multilingualism' are beyond the scope of this study.
- 14 Instances of *multilingu** that were coded as being 'neutral statements' (i.e. displaying no positive or negative evaluative orientation towards multilingualism) were for example: 'Brussel is een meertalige stad. [Brussels is a multilingual city.] (NLP773)'. They contain, as such, no further argumentative depth.
- 15 All translations are ours.

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