THE EFFECTS OF DUTCH LINGUISTIC INTEGRATION POLICY ON MIGRANTS’ FEELINGS OF BELONGING, AS MEDIATED BY DUTCH SOCIETY

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Abstract: The linguistic integration policy in the Netherlands is following a trend of toughening immigration stances along economic-neo-liberal and cultural dimensions. The paper tries to identify and track its discursive effects on migrants’ subjective feeling of belonging, as it is mediated and further propagated by the Dutch society. In doing so, it follows the framing and problem-setting of the policy focusing on language, the media through critical discourse analysis, and migrants’ insights through semi-structured interviews. Following this triangulation of methods, the paper will show how the immigration discourse gives rise to power issues and what migrants’ coping strategies are.

Keywords: language integration; belonging; misrecognition; frame analysis; critical discourse analysis; migrants; identity; the Netherlands; Dutch.

1. Introduction

The assimilationist requirements and tone of the Dutch integration policy have intensified since the 2000s, and its discourse has attracted the Dutch population consensus by increasingly focusing on cultural difference. Through policy frames several attempts have been made by the government to define “ideal integration” or, subsequently, “the ideally integrated migrant”. It is uncommon however that migrants and their subjective experiences be accounted for in the policy process. Through this research and its critical stance, I will seek to bring migrants’ belonging (subjective experience of integration) onto the concrete map in which the policy and society function, seen through the magnifying glass of language. In order to achieve this, I will investigate the power centres and ideological discourses that create linguistic subjects.

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By dispersing a national image, which recently is contoured around common Dutch values, culture and language, the policy implies a complementary image of migrants through “othering”. I propose to research the way in which these two images and the interaction between the Dutch society and migrants that is informed by them shapes the identities of the latter, which are central in their belonging.

In this complex process, language operates as a gate keeper: by being the object of a linguistic regime which operates through an assimilationist policy, and by being the medium of speech acts, through which people’s identities are constantly negotiated and practiced in social interactions (Piller, 2011). Through its kaleidoscopic dimensions, language can link the micro and macro levels of discussion and become relevant at social, cultural and economic levels in migrants’ lives.

The Dutch linguistic integration policy, in its assimilationist character, has set categorical collective goals for the population it addresses, therefore is incompatible with the notion of a “liberal society which adopts no particular substantive view about the ends of life”, that allows each person to determine for themselves a view of the good life (Dworkin, 1989, in Taylor, 1994: 56-7), which I take as my normative standpoint. When a tension emerges between undistorted self-identification and assigned identity (Honneth, 1992, in Martineau, 2012:164), when one is rendered invisible via authorities, the ensuing misrecognition affects one’s self-esteem, self-respect and consequently, well-being (Fraser, 1995:71).

The paper will try to understand some initial tensions between the image of Dutch society as tolerant, liberal and progressive, on the one hand, and the assimilationist mode of the integration policy and increasing authoritarianism – social convergence around common values (Duyvendak, 2011: 89-92), on the other hand. Furthermore, the neoliberal principles by which the policy operates (Bjornson, 2007; Schinkel and van Houdt, 2010; Demmers & Mehendale, 2010) - market primacy, responsibility and self-sufficiency – may limit migrants’ real opportunities for action. Furthermore, accent stigmatization and an institutional taxonomy that labels migrants as “allochtoon” for generations are initial indicators that recognition and a feeling of belonging are harder to achieve.

The paper will thus examine the over-arching question: what are the effects of the Dutch linguistic integration policy, as understood and further propagated by the Dutch society, on migrants’ feeling of belonging?

The next sections will deal with a literature background on related concepts (the Dutch policy with its linguistic ideology and constructed image of the good, integrated citizen; the Dutch society and how discourse portrays it in relation to migrants; and a conceptualization of belonging in relation to identity formation, symbolic inclusion or exclusion and the potentially ensuing misrecognition. Furthermore, the analysis will result from methodological triangulation: problem setting and frame analysis on the policy, critical discourse analysis for the media as illustrative of social discourse, and semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with migrants and Dutch volunteers who take part in a language teaching/learning couple within the policy framework.
2. Literature review

An extensive literature is available on the Dutch integration policy and how it defines membership in the context of its assimilationist turn. Shifting policy frames in the last four decades demonstrate that multiculturalism was an image without foundation as the policy evolved from defining membership as socio-economic citizenship (1970s and 1980s) to socio-cultural citizenship in the 1990s, to active, common and moral citizenship in the 2000s (Duyvendak & Scholten, 2012: 274; Schinkel & van Houdt, 2010: 701). Common citizenship’s prerogatives recognize members based on common traits and values, the Dutch language standing central (Duyvendak & Scholten, 2012).

Taking the policy evolution to dimensions of home and belonging, Ghorashi & Vieten (2012: 725) criticize the policy approach which imposes standards of identification with the nation through “language acquisition and domestic Leitkultur values”. They add to the policy review by identifying underlying assumptions such as a sedentary bias and a static understanding of home and belonging.

The policy understanding of national membership indeed has become culturalized and politicized (Duyvendak, 2011). The neo-liberal turn has helped facilitate this transformation, as it replaced the national economy with a global one, making Dutch merchantness, a national icon for centuries, symbolically redundant. In this context, culture has become the main battleground for politics and opened new spaces for sameness and othering (Demmers and Mehendale, 2010: 61-3). The linguistic aspect of integration is implemented in a neo-liberal, market-based framework as well (Bjornson, 2007), as the policy focuses on the economic importance of speaking Dutch and forces integration candidates, through the choice of material and by coupling the courses with vocational programmes, thus achieving a de-skilling of migrants and reducing them to a limited understanding of their capacities and aspirations.

The scholarship of linguistic integration in the Netherlands has focused, until recently and in line with neo-liberal principles of responsibilizing individuals, on personal factors and decisions (age, education, use, ethno-linguistic composition of neighbourhood) affecting linguistic acquisition (van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2008; Extra and Yagmur, 2010; van Tubergen, 2010). This approach is criticized by critical language planning authors (Toleffson, 1991 in Ricento, 2006; Blommaert, 2006, in Ricento, 2006). In this line of analysis they acknowledge that power is implicit in all social relations and that language is a means to sustaining the privilege of native speakers (Pennycook, 2002, in Ricento, 2006: 46). It criticizes the neoclassical approach that grounds linguistic achievement on individual decisions and counter-proposes a historical-structural approach which draws attention to constraints on individual decision-making (Tollefson, 1991: 22). Critical language planning aims to unveil ideologies in their connection to power, as the omnipresent undercurrent of language policies. At this level, symbolic domination allows dominant groups of native speakers to maintain control by establishing their view of reality and their cultural practices as the most valued and as the norm (Heller, 1995: 373). Due to these power relations, and acknowledging that the symbolic value of the dominant language determines “who has the power to speak and impose reception”, the assumption that all speakers choose when and to who to speak is challenged (Norton, 2000: 5-8).
The current discourse would have Dutch society as typically tolerant and liberal, although such an image is increasingly being questioned (Delanty, Wodak and Jones, 2008; Schinkel and Friso, 2010; Ghorashi and Vieten, 2012; Schinkel, 2013). Moral, secular, individualistic, egalitarian and enlightened are traits that unproblematically run through the discourse (Schinkel & van Houdt, 2010: 700). There is a remarkably strong consensus on values and goals of integration (Bjornson, 2007: 65) and at the same time a strong demand that migrants share the modern and progressive Dutch values, crystallized in the concept of authoritarianism (Duyvendak, 2011: 89-92). Images of society become observable in the production of images of integration (Schinkel, 2013: 1147). “Hardly a day goes by without Dutch politicians or other spokespersons problematizing immigrant ethnic groups. Dominant discourse on racial-ethnic groups is almost exclusively about “cultural” problems” (Wodak and van Dijk, 2000, in Essed and Trienekens, 2008: 56). As shown by the literature on (linguistic) ideology, the Dutch national identity and its values are constituted as the norm. Social problems are located, by opposition, within individuals deemed cultural or traditional as opposed to the modern Dutch.

To link in with the images of Dutch society members and non-members, Ralph and Staeheli (2011: 523) advance the idea that categorization, which the Dutch social imaginary performs through discourse, has effects on the inclusion and exclusion of people, which in turn influences belonging, understood by the authors as a hurdle to membership imposed by Dutch society. Essed and Trienekens’ findings (2008: 66) show that the condition of being claimed as member by society is crucial for one’s own feeling of belonging.

Apart from the ideological construction, but not independent from it, belonging is constituted in everyday life through practices and experiences, to which the emotional dimension is central (Anthias, 2006, in Ghorashi and Vieten, 2012: 726). Brubaker further signals a discrepancy between the practice of identification and belonging, exclusion and inclusion, and the official, legal membership (2010: 65). These lead to the idea that belonging has a performed quality, that it is an achievement (Essed and Trienekens, 2008: 59) as opposed to the natural, genealogical belonging of “real Dutch” people.

It is important to discuss identity here since it is constantly (re)negotiated in social relations (Piller, 2011: 260-1; Norton, 2000:6). It is also shaped by the structural limitations of such systems, since who one is or becomes depends on what one is allowed to do and the structures which regulate such opportunities (Norton, 2000: 8). Language learning, in particular, is a good embodiment of this view, as theorized by Bourdieu: the relationship between identity and symbolic power depends on the symbolic resources one has and the structures which influence their use. The power to speak and to impose reception assigns a value to speech but also to its speaker (Bourdieu, 1977 in Norton, 2000: 9; Toelfson, 1991: 36). The linguistic value of the speaker and the quality of speech are grounds on which in- and out-groups can be formed, affecting (self-) identification.

A body of literature takes into account migrant agency in the power negotiation process, focusing on resistance strategies. Language can become a weapon to mock
sites of power, an example of which is taking pride in one’s mother tongue (Butcher 2008: 380), despite policy prescriptions. Similarly, Pennycook shows how re-localizing, re-contextualizing language practices challenges the legitimacy of the institutions which regulate those practices (2010: 34-39).

3. Data collection

Based on a critical theory stance, the research relies on three methods. For policy frame and problem-setting analysis, 41 policy documents have been identified on the Dutch government’s website (www.Rijksoverheid.nl), under Integration and naturalization, by searching with “language” as a keyword. They range from 2007 until the present day, adding thus to previous research on policy framing. The social discourse on linguistic integration has been analysed in the media available on LexisNexis Academic NL database, around a key event, namely the 2007 state-led campaign “It starts with language”, which is part of the integration policy programme. To ensure continuity of measurements, 6 semi-structured, qualitative interviews have been conducted with participants in a language project which is part of this campaign. The Taalcoach project couples Dutch and migrants with the purpose of teaching/teaching Dutch.

4. Policy Analysis

The title of the campaign this research focuses on, “It starts with language”, and its specific Taalcoach project, deploys a clear imagery about the centrality of language in the integration process of migrants. It is part of the 2007 strategy “Delta Plan Integration”, which accompanies the freshly entered into force Integration Law (adopted 2006, into force 2007). The Delta Plan aims at improving the quality of integration as well as at increasing the number of naturalization applications from 35,000 to 60,000 per year. With 250,000 foreigners under the obligation to naturalize that year, according to the Integration Law which came into force the same year, the Delta Plan came as a response to “deficient results in integration”, as in 2006 only 56% of naturalization candidates reached a basic level of Dutch as a foreign language, (Deltaplan intergration, 2007: 5).

It seems that with the passing of time, the policy is adding more requirement layers, at the same time shedding its “mantel of love” or multicultural understanding, a metaphor common to several policy documents. The departing point is migrants’ responsibility for their integration, which, together with the practical approach (job-market participation and education), corresponds to a neo-liberal mind-set (Schinkel and van Houdt, 2010: 696; Bjornson, 2007). “Integration and participation are inextricably linked together”, reads the programme’s vision statement (Deltaplan integration, 2007: 6-7). The lagging results of the integration test (56% pass rates) are attributed to personal circumstances (lack of flexible childcare for parents, distance between home and school, rigid class timetables), but described as only affecting the ability to socially participate (italics in original, Delta plan integration, 2007: 7). The policy silence and

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1 Language coach, in Dutch
implication about the willingness (emphasis added) to participate starts to contour a portrait of disinterested migrants. The programme further proposes the Taalcoach project as a means of teaching Dutch to foreigners by natives, in an attempt to bring about the much needed practical approach. However, it is assumed that any Dutch person can become a language trainer (taalcoach), and is qualified to teach the Dutch language and culture to foreigners. This creates an image of Dutch society as uniform and unproblematic (Schinkel & van Houdt, 2010: 700; Schinkel, 2013: 1146), an image which will be reinforced throughout many policy documents further.

In 2009 the discussion moves attention towards the problematic actors. Parliamentary debates focus on the growing diversity and segregation in large cities, in a narrative of fear, “invasion”, loss of values and stagnation of development (Answer to Chamber’s question about autochthones in Rotterdam almost forming a minority, 2009). As the number of successful integration tests decreased since 2007, from 85% to 74% in 2009, (Regioplan, 2013), migrants are urged to participate more and take more responsibility for their integration, work and education, which are seen as essential requirements. The new layers added to the policy this time are the characterization of the integration process as asymmetrical (whereby immigrants need to put more effort into reaching towards the Dutch society, compared to the effort the society should make to welcome them in (Integration letter, 2009). Furthermore, the nation becomes symbolically impersonated, and identification with the image of the Netherlands as a “fatherland” becomes a policy requirement (ibidem). Aspects of culture and identification are measured through intervention in migrants’ personal sphere, through mother tongue use within the home. This is a good example of how discourse operates by expansion into adjacent fields, by occupying and colonizing them (Norton, 2000: 14). The policy frames migrant diversity and cultural difference as threats, leading to a loss of trust between population groups. The assumptions here are that the migrant group is the one not initiating contact, since the injured party is the native population (Integration letter, 2009: 2). This assumed rootedness of the Dutch also feeds into the allochtoon- autochtoon differentiation, an almost metaphorical taxonomy with origins in geology (Yanow and van der Haar, 2012, p.11).

Integration is now officially presented as an asymmetric process, with migrants owing more effort to integrate than the Dutch society does to receive them, and declared a moral obligation (Integration letter, 2009: 5). By officially taking a step back from considering integration a two-way, reciprocal process, the Dutch policy creates a clear hierarchy of those who are supposed to integrate and those who set the integration standards. Identification with the Netherlands is set as normal, and whenever this is not the case, the SCP declares it a problem classifies it as “disloyalty” (SCP, 2012a: 84). Just as described by Duyvendak (2011: 94), “politicians tell immigrants how to feel, - above all, to feel at home in the Netherlands”.

Discrimination is acknowledged as affecting some migrants, and is measured as individual experience, by the increasing number of registered cases. Further on this issue, the policy is largely silent as to who is discriminating and why. The Dutch society is defended by discrimination accusations by turning the other side of the coin: presumably Dutch people are blamed too easily on this ground, when in fact they may only be defending themselves against the deviant behaviour of migrants (Integration letter, 2009: 8).
In line with the stricter stance, the 2011 vision on integration calls for a more categorical tone of the policy, as “living together won’t happen by itself” (Vision on integration, 2011). Several government agency reports follow in 2012, assessing segregation and the identification of migrants firstly with groups of origin, which are seen as a function of language knowledge and belief internalization (SCP, 2012a, 2012b). “Leaning towards the Dutch society” and “feeling Dutch” are now part of the policy wording (Chamber letter on the Participation Declaration, 2013). The participation frame remains central, and language continues to be the main doorway to successful socio-economic participation, as well as a partial fix to cultural distance.

In 2013 the Agenda Integration summarizes the importance of language in a problematization that brings together both the socio-cultural gap and the job-market participation. It is through language that people can become self-sufficient and participate in society (Integration Agenda, 2013; Chamber letter participation declaration, 2013). Discrimination towards migrants is again acknowledged, but this time specifically as a personal experience. The reason why this should be countered is to achieve a broader economic participation (Integration Agenda, 2013: 1). Discrimination is thus framed as an individual experience, strictly located in the individual, and problematized only inasmuch as it hinders a good economic functioning, ignoring its structural aspects or the human rights perspective. The Dutch society, unlike in the 2009 documents, is left outside this problem.

In line with having made it clear that the integration process is asymmetrical and the burden of integration is to fall upon migrants, the policy is silent about the moral obligations of the Dutch society. An important framing effect of the declaration itself (Draft Participation Declaration, 2013:1) is that the Dutch society, through the policy silences, is portrayed as being uniform and with unproblematic contributions, as an ideal of tolerance, equality, solidarity and participation. Participation in turn is presented as the cornerstone of the policy argumentation and closely related to language competence. However, it is given the shape of “giving”, as opposed to a balanced contribution or exchange. This asymmetrical construction of concepts suggests that coming to the Netherlands creates a feeling of indebtedness and places conditions on the freedom of living and of movement in this EU state. The created obligations are presented as conditions for residence (albeit symbolic, to counter the legal gap posed by the EU legislation). Very importantly, this leads to the creation of a hierarchy of rights and freedoms, with the freedom of migrants to move and reside freely at the bottom, dependent on the freedoms, rights and respect for the values of Dutch citizens.

5. Discourse analysis

By determining and limiting who gets to speak, who is mentioned as a character or participant, who is an authoritative enough source to be mentioned or quoted, and the portraits of speakers and characters, the media sets the bases for a control of public discourse (van Dijk quoted in Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton, 2001: 356).

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The Taalcoach project goals are understood in a multitude of ways in the media: from encouraging the allochtones to speak Dutch, to being an add-on for the integration policy or, on the contrary, cleaning the negative image of the integration policy, really making migrants become part of society and encouraging social participation and self-sufficiency, to informing migrants of their obligations. Aiming for maximum results is a special concern, considering the unsatisfactory results of the language and integration tests. The campaign emerges on the one hand as a playful, informal tool of language teaching (perhaps as a volunteer recruitment strategy), but at the same time, as a coercion instrument which should be compulsory for certain ethnic groups.

Diverging from the policy, language is described in the media mostly along social dimensions, as a difficult obstacle to overcome – influencing the practical side of life, the ability to make social contacts and the possibility of falling into social isolation. In this latter sense, contact with the Dutch people is seen as a hard requirement for learning Dutch. In the article descriptions, the language is taught with particular view to pronunciation, with corrections of some Taalcoaches and the use of schoolbook materials creating an impression of primary education for children. This might lead to an important implication for the depiction of learners of Dutch: being treated as little children by their Taalcoaches, helpless in getting their message across, shy in front of strangers, the migrants are exposed to a subjectification effect that constructs them as powerless.

Many articles consider that the current level of the language test requirements is very low, which leads to implications that sustained efforts are not made by migrants to speak the language and maintain their competence level after the integration test as well. This lack of sustained motivation creates extreme feelings of frustration among the interviewees. Pressure on the learners is also reinforced by direct speech acts from the article authors, such as “Stop meowing, learn the language” (De Pers, 14 December 2009), and “Compulsory for everybody, conclude countless reactions who plea for extra motivation: whoever refuses [to integrate] should be kicked out of the country” (De Telegraaf, 27 August 2009: 6).

A peculiar mention to mother tongue in relation to Dutch is made in the media, similar to the presentation of the same topic in one of the policy reports (SCP, 2012b). The article in question (Noordhollands Dagblad, 16 October 2009) presents the campaign as a “conversation lesson in your new mother tongue”. It seems that here the intrinsic adoption of the Dutch language is assumed to change, in addition to the extrinsic priority of languages and values, one’s intrinsic, subjective identifications as well.

Another instrument the media makes use of is the control of establishing categories. The way events are defined, how they are situated in a context, who participates in them, what are the on-going actions (van Dijk, in Schiffrin et al., 2001: 356) determine how the reality is produced in the media representation. A focus on Dutch people’s expectations and migrants’ lacking motivation shows the balance of power between the giver and receiver: Dutch society is portrayed as payer of the language and integration programmes, while the migrants are depicted as lacking sufficient motivation or ambition.
The Dutch expectations are clearly contoured around participation: “from the new Dutch we expect that they commit to participate in our society and that they take the chance we offer them” (ANP, 25 August 2009). A local newspaper which moves further than quoting the minister’s policy letter re-translates its message as “the point is that all foreign newcomers, even if they live in the Netherlands for twenty years (sic!), should really become part of our society” (De Stentor/ Deventer Dagblad, 22 December 2008). This paradoxical formulation shows to a certain extent the impossibility of “real” integration, or at least the impossibility of meeting Dutch society’s expectations. A long dwelling does not make one Dutch, since the status of “newcomers” sticks on indeterminately in migrants’ assigned identity.

Migrants’ expectations are, on the other hand, cut off short, in an article that admits how employers do not wait around for integration candidates to improve their language skills” (De Volkskrant, 28 October 2009: 2). The lack of recognition of the integration diploma on the job market is also a recurring point in the articles (De Volkskrant, 23 October 2009: 2; 28 October 2009: 3).

The integration programme in general is seen as expensive and bureaucratic, and for some integration candidates obliged to follow it, even unnecessary. For other candidates however, the articles show less flexibility: “the first ten years [should offer] no social security” (De Telegraaf, 27 August 2009: 6); “allochtones who need a translator have to pay for it themselves, says PVV MEP Sietse Frisma. The taxpayer shouldn’t worry about it”. (De Gelderlander, 21 March 2009). Reproducing the policy message, the articles depict participation as the cornerstone of integration, along with work and social contact with the native Dutch.

Categories, in turn, define participants. Migrants defined with reference to their language skill or background (“people who have been in the Netherlands for a while but still don’t speak the language sufficiently”, “people who have difficulty with the Dutch language”, “people with a different language”. This kind of attribution of identity in relation to language not only shows the crucial importance of the national language for the state and society and the direction of integration norms (who should do what) but also offers the media the chance to place people in the boxes of helplessness and inability. The aspects of this category gravitate around questioning whether migrants are putting enough effort and motivation into learning Dutch. The insufficient motivation of some migrants to follow language or integration courses is paired with syntax-level devices such as sarcasm (“Stop whining and participate, learn the language.” (De Pers, 14 December 2009: 11).

The portrayal of Taalcoaches has exclusively positive tones, as they believe in volunteering, are social system contributors, comfortable visiting teachers, helpers for getting a job, playful partners in learning the language, support providers, good company against loneliness, and “a beautiful example”. The media applies predicational strategies by defining actors according to their duties and roles (Wodak and Reisigl in Schiffrin et al., 2001: 386), therefore a gap arises between the active Dutch society and the passive migrant learners.

¹ PVV is the right-wing Party for Freedom, currently led by Geert Wilders.
Fundamental political and normative standpoints form the basis of ideology, which is considered here in the sense offered by van Dijk - “social representations shared by members of a group” (in Carvalho, 2000, p. 26). Retrieving these values across the selected articles, one notices the belief in volunteering as a form of social contribution, mostly exemplified by the Dutch Taalcoaches and demanded from the migrants. The obligation of integration through (language) learning is one of the strictest norms expressed. “Integration is learning. Agree 71%, Disagree 29%” - an all-encompassing and thus simplistic poll placed at the end of an article is a powerful discursive strategy (Carvalho, 2000: 23). Through its narrow framing, the poll unites readers around the value of learning for integration, at the same time making a strong point about shared beliefs (De Pers, 14 December 2009: 11). Similar authoritarian statements come to reinforce this: “whoever doesn’t master the Dutch language encounters many problems” (De Limburger, 26 June 2010, p. 2); “You can have it simpler: who lives here must speak and understand Dutch. Everybody agrees about this”; “Anyone who wants to live and work here should know our language and society, no exceptions! Not even for football players” (De Telegraaf, 27 August 2009: 6).

Around another Dutch value, volunteering, which the Taalcoach project taps on, one article declares that “People want to help other people build a new life. That is greatly inspiring” (Nederlandse Dagblad, 3 April, 2010: 3); “According to the Cabinet native citizens and businesses have the “moral obligation” to help these people” (De Limburger, 17 June 2008: 4). The last quote comes in contradiction with later versions of the integration and language policy, when language learning and economic participation are supposed to fall in the sphere of self-sufficiency and responsibility of the migrant. Also, this view does not match the later stance of the policy whereby integration is asymmetrical, with the Dutch society having fewer obligations than the migrants. However, this stance may serve the purpose of recruiting volunteers for the Taalcoach project.

A second media control device proposed by van Dijk (in Schiffrin et al., 2001: 357) is control of the mind –that is, a way to reproduce hegemony and dominance. Recipients accept beliefs, knowledge, opinions from authoritative, trustworthy sources. In the 55 articles analyzed, the opportunity to speak is given to the migrants (be they current or former students of integration) only in 5 articles, although all the topics involve them directly as their subjects. This turns the discourse into a discussion about migrants, but to which the main character is silenced and does not have the power to contribute. In contrast, the most quoted sources are local and central government staff and NGO project leaders in charge of implementing the Taalcoach initiative or recruiting integration candidates. Referential or nomination strategies (Wodak and Reisigl, in Shiffrin et al., 2001: 386) create a clear-cut difference between “the positive self and the negative other”, between the migrants and the Dutch, in the way that these social actors are represented.

6. Interviews
Language is described in a majority of instances within a strong, normative context, equally by refugees and language teachers. When speaking of Dutch as one in a system
of many existing languages in the Netherlands, a hierarchy of languages becomes visible. While all interventions place Dutch at the top, taalcoaches consider the use of mother tongue as acceptable, but not necessarily conducive of a better social integration. By following the policy normativity, Z’s family consciously chooses to either omit their mother tongue from the future socialization and education of their expected child, or to leave this decision ambiguous, at least for the interview moment: “The children…they’re always busy with a new language” (M, refugee, my translation). English, however, has a special status within this hierarchy. While for refugees it is a way to have more social contact (“It gives me more space to make friendships” - I, refugee), taalcoaches express contradictions between socially acceptable, tolerant attitudes towards the global use of English, and normative attitudes about using Dutch exclusively.

For migrants, language-related goals seem to gravitate around social relations, similarly to the media message. A. remembers his experience with the Dutch language and integration course, which only occupied a few hours a week out of many of isolation at home. R’s answer on this question on a more abstract, political level: he wants to learn Dutch in order to stop feeling “lonely, like an outcast, an outsider”, and to “feel like you’re a part of a community, a nation, a country”. For taalcoaches, language is important for slightly different reasons. They believe it is a sine-qua-non condition for communication, which will slowly lead to integration, and an important piece for access into culture. Language impedes their student, as they see it, to become self-sufficient and take responsibility for their social and family duties. On the other hand, as these are implicitly seen as Dutch values which need to be acquired through integration, some taalcoaches prefer not to get involved in related activities as part of the interactive language project.

Another view distinguishes between language that is sufficient for communication, and language that is perfect - the kind that helps one to emulate the Dutch, each offering a different degree of access to Dutch society. This taalcoach strongly encourages his students to strive for this “perfection”: “but after 10 years you’re still…the foreigner, you know, everybody understands, he’s a nice guy, but…[I mean], he makes a lot of mistakes”. A different taalcoach refers to language as something that needs to be internalized, following in the policy discourse footsteps, and presents it as a condition to social integration: “but also you have to learn your new language […] otherwise you have a problem”.

On the issue of using one’s mother tongue some respondents explained that they avoid speaking it, implying that speaking Dutch instead connects them more to the public sphere. Speaking anything but Dutch outside the home is also implied as forbidden: “that’s why we don’t speak too much, never outside…speaking only our language, that’s a little [laughing] […] impolite.”(A., refugee, my translation).

Getting to the core of the matter, I traced the concept of belonging from my theoretical framework by interpreting respondents’ responses to direct questions about its meaning, but also related answers around notions of home, future plans, description of their new life and sense of self, difficulties encountered, the real opportunities for action that immigrants actually have. In doing so, misrecognition emerged as an important issue, confirming that this piece of the theoretical puzzle for this paper was accurately identified.

Belonging was described in one instance as a continuous journey, as a form of social acceptance and “assimilation”. The respondent also warned about its perceived
dangers: “Just be mindful of everything that’s going on around you. Don’t feed into anything too much, cause you’ll become a part of that […] once you become a part of that, and you no longer feel accepted. Or like you belong there….”. This is one of the coping strategies against the assimilationist tone that integration has taken on in the Netherlands.

Other testimonies contour belonging as feeling heard and recognized. In fact, responses laid heavily on accounting for misrecognition and discrimination. The integration diploma ultimately does not play a role in employment, nor do previous foreign qualifications, as they are not recognized, although this topic is mentioned as a problem in some policy documents. Furthermore, indirect discrimination practices take their toll (“First question! Do you have a driver’s licence? Yeah, a little weird, right?” (M, refugee, speaking about employment agencies, my translation). This is a conspicuous question, charged with issues of race-nationality and class. M. further explains his conviction that a Dutch person with the same work experience would get the job instead of him: “I have this experience and this and that […] 100% the Dutch man will get the job first” [at this point in the conversation Z., his wife, starts practicing her Dutch reading aloud again, as a passive interruption or attempt at covering the topic] “M:…that’s why I [don’t] understand… D: Why do you think that happens? M: what is it? what – is - it? [that they have and I don’t]” (original emphasis). This illustrates a vicious circle created and sustained by the integration requirements. The example given shows a deep misrecognition of the migrant and the impossibility that he make a contribution to society according to his own capacities and strengths: (on working in his domain - “[…]and then I [would] pay taxes, […] and maybe I help someone, maybe… my arms are healthy, I can work hard, and maybe I can help someone”. M, my translation. Another charged moment in the conversation with this family was when they brought up the issue of N. Center, a work re-integration facility for petty offenders/respondent’s description; the municipality website does not specify who the centre employs). M. is forced to “volunteer” here by sorting pieces of glass trash in order to receive social assistance. He expresses frustration, and feels like he needs to clarify he does not belong there: “I don’t make trouble, I am not a bad person. […] Why do I go to N. Center and can’t [do meaningful] work?” M’s way of coping is patience: a “step by step” approach combined with compliance and optimism are balancing the injustice that he has been experiencing.

For refugees as well, work is central for belonging, similar to what the policy has envisaged, and a primary locus of misrecognition. Being accepted and acknowledged for who one is, for one’s strengths and capacities can be achieved through recognized work. In this context, refugees reduce their feeling of home to being happy with the family, being in a safe place, where one can manifest their full identity. However, I. defines home as something immaterial, an emotional space: “thuis [home, in Dutch] is only material, you know, material is nothing. […] you can make material anywhere’; “Yea….so for me, I think home it’s…there, where- somebody is waiting for me’.

The content and direction of change in migrants’ identity might also indicate their feelings of belonging. Feeling less worried, more at ease about the future of one’s family, and even being able to have the family together in a safe place, may help facilitate this feeling, irrespective of the language or integration requirements. Integration requirements may also be experienced as having opportunities for self-
development (literacy). On the other hand, “sounding different” in Dutch may make one feel vulnerable within one’s circle of friends.

This part of the research also examines the correspondence between the image of Dutchness/otherness and respondent’s self-descriptions, as well as their description of their counterparts in the couple. Taalcoaches define themselves in terms of their profession, family composition, family choices and decisions for migration within the Netherlands, age and hobbies. They all see themselves as helpful people, and their students confirm this in unanimity as they express gratitude for their work.

As opposed to the portrait of the Dutch teachers offered by language students, the Dutch people’s description of particular migrants, their language students, on the other hand, is anything but unproblematic. Their portraits cut across all spheres of life and identity markers: their intelligence, degree of motivation, language skills, social skills and literacy levels are assessed bluntly. Duties are also contoured as part of what one ought to be, in terms of hard work, language learning and gender roles.

Migrants’ view of Dutch society is important as it represents a dimension of belonging, reflected in feelings about a society or nation (Liu, 2013). Tolerance of homosexuality and sexual education for children as a way to prevent child molestation were praised. Other accounts about Dutch people are not so positive, though. One respondent emphasizes the pervasive role of history and describes the Dutch jokingly as “pirates”, hinting at their colonial past of repression. Another respondent questions the fact that such a wealthy country has so many undereducated people, and recalls inequality and a lack of solidarity in everyday life. Employment discrimination is also mentioned. These statements contest the policy image about the Dutch and signal barriers in real opportunities for action (such as further study or dependable and meaningful social ties).

Looking back at the tensions in the conceptual puzzle, the sedentary bias seems to undermine any migration project, according to a taalcoach: the migration project is seen as abnormal, cultural differences making it impossible to ever be happy: “yea, but yea, but here it’s very difficult, so here in the Netherlands you cannot bring your family like…that. No, I don’t think… and then there’s the problem, are they happy when they’re here? Because of this cultural difference? Are they really happy? I don’t know.” (A., taalcoach). Further empirical impediments in achieving integration are an almost non-existing job market for people who don’t speak Dutch, employment discrimination, and the ultimate uselessness of the integration diploma in obtaining employment. Prior qualifications obtained abroad are not recognized and the subsequent lack of support for adults in starting education all over again makes it impossible to move on. Also, in migrants’ words, rather than being solely a matter of motivation, hard work or intellectual capacity, (linguistic) integration is more a matter of luck, help and self-mindedness. Another coping strategy is illustrated by I., who thinks overcoming shyness and being assertive (which also happen to emerge as basic Dutch values from the interviews) is a good way to feel more at home.

7. Conclusion

The policy elements gain new dimensions as they are transmitted further to migrants, via media and social discourse. While the three analytic levels attributed to language in
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the policy (economic, through work participation and education; social, not causing segregation, making contacts; and cultural, identification and loyalty; replacing one's mother tongue with Dutch; overcoming the cultural gap by speaking the Dutch language) remain present throughout their discursive dispersion, their ranking will vary. The media acts as a promotion tool for the policy, therefore it emphasises the social participation dimension of language, while not neglecting its economic importance. Taalcoaches, however, choose to talk about the social and cultural dimensions of language – its role in creating social ties as a way of acquiring local knowledge.

The mother tongue is repressed by the policy. The delay that speaking it can bring to one's integration is incorporated in the media as a short, but sharp hint about the necessity of internalizing Dutch as your “new mother tongue”. Taalcoaches are ambivalent on this topic – the mother tongue is tolerated for expressing sensitive feelings. This however doesn't diminish the importance of speaking Dutch. Migrants express spontaneous consent to this view on the mother tongue, an agreement with the imposed direction of social life (Tollefson, 1991: 10).

The suggested hierarchies contoured by the policy are being transmitted in further discourse. The media polarizes the language couple into admirable teachers and passive migrants, thereby enhancing the entitlement of Dutch society. Taalcoaches internalize this message in turn and their privilege reflects in how they portray and criticize their students. The policy and media silencing of migrants is further internalized by migrants themselves, as they recognize the unproblematic nature of their teachers. However, criticism is present when it comes to their view of society, which signals an uneasiness about “being there”.

The constructed categories populate both policy and media hierarchies, as images of “givers” and “takers” reinforced; The way that taalcoaches and refugees speak about each other and the extent to which they allow themselves to dive into and assess each other's personal features reflects the asymmetry of power and entitlement. Identities are formed in this interaction in a polarized manner.

Belonging has never been a goal of the policy. However, the personal dimensions it reaches into leads me equate the policy’s understanding of belonging (as emotional attachment) to loyalty, which can be reached through cultural identification. Cultural affiliation seems to be actually a low priority of migrants, who feel at home with a restricted circle of the family, an environment that appreciates them for their own qualities, a climate of holistic acceptance. This shows a lack of synchronicity between discourse and migrants' goals.

The lack of recognition discussed with migrants (either in participation according to one's qualities and aspirations, or as being heard and listened to) emerges as a major impediment to belonging.
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