

Sociolinguistic Diversity and Shared Resources: A Critical Look at Linguistic Integration Policies in Belgium

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Abstract

This contribution¹ examines the different actions taken by Belgian authorities intended directly or indirectly to effect the linguistic integration of immigrant populations.²

After describing migratory movements into Belgium, we present first the logic behind the Belgian policies of integration, looking in turn at the Francophone and the Dutch (Flemish) speaking areas of the country, noting the different dynamics in the two regions. Thereafter, we concentrate however on the situation in Wallonia and Brussels, our usual research area. We go on to offer a critique of the measures taken at Communities' government level, and lastly we consider aspects of a transformation in current thinking on integration and immigration in Belgium.

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1. Immigration in Belgium: the state of play

Belgium has for long been an area of net immigration, certainly since the Second World War: first there were the agreements with Italy, in 1946, which began the immigration of male workers for the Belgian mines in exchange for a certain quantity of coal, followed by one with Spain and Portugal in 1956, with Greece in 1957, and finally with Morocco and Turkey in 1964 (Morelli 1992). The idea was to find a solution for the dearth of manpower in certain sectors. Also, a demographic increase³ was expected, since the fertility rate was greater among such immigrant populations (Martiniello & Rea 2001).

While immigration was officially ended in 1974, the steady influx of immigrants did not stop. Factors here included the reuniting of family members, for long authorised by Belgium, the recognition of the right to asylum, work permits conceded in highly specific sectors, the authorisation of residence for study reasons, the selective permeability of frontiers spelled out in the Treaty of Maastricht (1993) and the presence of many international institutions (mostly in Brussels). These exceptions have kept the rate of foreigners present in Belgium at a stable level since 1980 despite the considerable number who have taken Belgian nationality, as a result of reforms in the nationality code of 1984, 1991, 1995 and 2000.

Latest available statistics (1st January 2004 – INS data) show 860,287 people of foreign nationality resident in Belgium, slightly more than 8.2% of the total population. However the situation varies greatly from region to region: 26.3% of the inhabitants of Brussels are of foreign nationality, 4.8% of those resident in Flanders and 9.1% of the residents in the Walloon Region. The proportion of the population of foreign *origin* in Belgium is in any case clearly underrepresented in these figures, since they only indicate the numbers of those of foreign *nationality*. In fact, changes in the availability of naturalisation (Belgian nationality) have considerably modified the figures in this respect, above all in the case of the youngsters.

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² These migrants are not those who come for a short stay only (mainly in Brussels) for professional reasons but rather who come for long-term residence, and whose economic status in Belgium is at start uncertain. It is because of these particular conditions that the question of integration is raised for the Belgian authorities.

³ After Alfred Sauvy who, in 1962, drew attention to the problem of aging.

By way of example, the proportion of young people under 18 of foreign nationality in Brussels fell by 18 % in Brussels between the year 2000 (38%) and the year 2003 (20.2%).⁴

The make up of the population of foreign extraction in terms of nationalities is the result of these various stages or waves of migration over time. Table 1 presents the population statistics for the most representative minority groups (other than those of neighbouring countries – France, Netherlands, Germany) in Belgium's three regions. It can be seen that the Italians, Moroccans, Spanish and Turks are numerous throughout. Only the Portuguese in Brussels, and the British in Flanders need to be added here to the leaders. Other than the Moroccans and the Turks, who to a large extent came before 1974, those from EU countries are numerous above all owing to the influx of civil servants and employees of international institutions (especially of course in the Brussels Region and the surrounding Flemish districts) and as a result of the free circulation of goods and persons instituted by Maastricht in 1993. Recent migrations from outside the Union, which stay minor, come from places in the world that have been shaken by changes of regime and by armed conflict⁵. In short, we would agree with Martiniello and Rea (2001 : 11) on the following observation : « Like many other Western countries, Belgium has become a mosaic of peoples and cultures, a microcosm of the world. Ensuring the harmonious cohabitation of the different ethnic groups that make up Belgian society is a necessity that requires all to do their part.»⁶

2. The linguistic integration policies in Belgium: principles and underlying conceptions

Notwithstanding the long-standing nature of migration in Belgium, awareness that one was faced with a structural phenomenon has come about only recently. Since the beginning of the 80s –only twenty-five years ago, and only thirty-five years after the start of organised immigration–policies of integration have begun to see the light of day, namely with the reforms in the nationality laws already mentioned. On the Francophone side, the first centres intended for the migrant population were created in 1981 and 1982⁷, while the first national centre (subsequently federal centre) for migration and migratory policies came into being in 1989⁸. Note that the word “immigration” tended to disappear over time, to be replaced by that of “interculturality”, an indication of a growing awareness of the new status of those of foreign origin: the authorities are no longer face-to-face with “manpower” but with individuals and citizens; this change implies an idea of equality between cultures, those being less and less associated with ethnic affiliation. More time will be necessary before this equality is translated partially into political rights: foreigners from the European Union will only have the right to vote and partial eligibility in municipal elections from 2000 onwards (as a result of Maastricht); other foreigners will have the former right from 2004 onwards, but they won't have the right to stand as candidates.

To understand the integration policies implemented on either side of the linguistic boundary, separating the Flemish from French-speakers in Belgium, it is necessary to take on board the conceptions of society, nation, language and culture dominant in each of the two communities and which to a large extent determine the political stances adopted with regard to the immigrant communities.

2. 1 Linguistic integration according to the Flemish Community

The linguistic integration policies applied in Flanders are deeply marked by the central role played by language in the Flemish collective identity. The dominant ideology in Flanders asserts the primary importance of language in belonging to a community and the fact of knowing Dutch (Flemish) as one of the conditions for effective integration⁹ of citizens.

⁴ An overall evaluation of the origin of foreigners in Belgium would need to take into account illegal immigration also. Estimations of this type are accordingly not at all easy. To give just one example, according to several reports without any claim to scientific rigour, the population of foreign origin in the Brussels area represents as much as 40 to 50% of the total population.

⁵ Over the last twenty years, recognition of the status of refugee has been awarded mainly to Rwandans, Turks, people from Zaire, Burundi, Kosovo, and Vietnam (Ouali 2003). Without taking into account numerical strength by ethnic group, the nationalities that have emigrated most recently are many and varied: from countries in Eastern Europe, ex-Yugoslavia, African and Asian countries.

⁶ All quotes from works in French are translated in English

⁷ The *Centre socioculturel des immigrés* in Brussels and the *Centre socioculturel des immigrés* of the province of Namur, renamed *Centres d'Action interculturelle* after around a decade in operation.

⁸ The *Commissariat royal à la politique des immigrés*, which four years later became the *Centre pour l'Égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme*.

⁹ With the tensions that are well-known in the districts of the Brussels suburbs, which are mainly French speaking while located in Flemish territory.

The explanation for this lies in the history of the community and the fact that Flemish had to strive for recognition of their language and their rights within a Belgian state originally ruled by an elite (from Flanders and Wallonia) that was exclusively French-speaking (Beheydt 1994; Francard 1995).

This is why language has a key position in the integration policies in Flanders. In education, there are measures dating from the 90s which stipulate the allocation of extra resources to schools with more than a certain proportion of pupils of foreign origin, viewed as priority in the distribution of educational resources. Since 2002, the Flemish Government has implemented a programme monitoring and overseeing the equality of opportunity in education (*Gelijke Onderwijskansen*) by giving priority treatment to classes with disfavoured children. While these measures do not apply specifically to immigrant communities¹⁰, they nevertheless recognise the priority needs of those pupils for whom Dutch is not the home language¹¹ (Eurydice 2004a : 7).

Moreover, reception classes are organised for the new arrivals, and here too the goal is to ensure integration in Flemish society by means of learning the common language. When the newly arrived immigrants are over school age, and not EU citizens, they are required since 2004 to participate in an "integration process" (*inburgeringstraject*). Once again, the learning of Dutch is at the heart of this programme, according to which language is the first step towards full participation in society on the part of the immigrants.¹²

On the other hand, the conception that language is one of the key elements of identity has led Flemish authorities, at least in their political projects, to foster the vitality of the languages of the immigrant communities. Thus, transitional bicultural and bilingual education, bridging Italian-Dutch language (two schools currently), Spanish-Dutch language (two schools) and Turkish-Dutch language (three schools) was instituted in the years 1986-87 (Byram & Leman 1990) by the *Foyer*, which in 1998 would become a regional centre responsible for coordination of Flemish language policy towards minorities in Brussels. Already at that time, a programme for the teaching of languages and cultures of origin (*Onderwijs in eigen taal en cultuur*) had come into being in 1991.¹³ This value put on multiculturalism might seem paradoxical in the light of the situation described above. In reality it can be easily understood, however, when seen in the context of promotion of linguistic and cultural identity, which will in turn justify the primary importance placed on Dutch.¹⁴ It is for this reason that these projects have not really been fully implemented, and have tended to become less successful as time goes on (Verlot 2002; Delrue & Hillewaere 1999; De Schutter 2001).

¹⁰ «Although immigrants constitute an important target group in the context of the policy on equal educational opportunities, that policy uses indicators of underprivileged education as a criterion. With the exception of 'language spoken at home', these indicators tend to refer to features of underprivileged education rather than ethno-cultural characteristics. » (Eurydice 2004a : 4)

¹¹ Furthermore, supplementary support can be allocated to schools to reinforce certain priority objectives defined by the authorities, and these include « language education » (Eurydice 2004a : 8).

¹² The web page of the "integration process" program expresses the underpinning logic in the following terms « The training programme may be in three parts: Dutch as a second language (NT2), social guidance and career guidance. (...) Most newcomers are anxious to find employment as soon as possible. They regard Dutch-language lessons as a vital tool in this respect. They are also a key to facilitating their communication with their new environment. » (<http://www.inburgering.be/>)

¹³ Implementation of these programmes is subject to certain conditions: «The children involved require written consent to attend such classes. At least two thirds of the parents of the immigrant children concerned have to agree with the initiative and at least 20 pupils from one school location must sign up for such classes for them to go ahead » (Eurydice 2004a : 8).

¹⁴ As Rea & Ben Mohammed (2000 : 8) indicate : « [In Flanders,] (...) the cultural identity of these immigrant communities should be respected and supported by the authorities who should encourage their associational life. At the same time, defence of such cultural identity must not impede their integration in Belgium and cannot be detrimental to the identities of other communities. The essential principle here is harmonious co-existence of cultural communities based on mutual respect. The one essential condition for this co-existence is knowledge of the Dutch language. » For example, in the case of bilingual education programmes, use of the languages of origin is only transitional, indicating that the final aim is first and foremost the acquisition of Dutch.

2. 2 Linguistic integration according to the Francophone Community Wallonia-Brussels¹⁵

With the Francophone Community Government, we find the opposite of the cultural and linguistic integration policy which is dominant in Flanders. The Francophone approach avoids treating pupils with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as a separate group, at the risk of papering over the particular problems faced by children from immigrant and disfavoured backgrounds.¹⁶ Thus certain Francophone schools have, since 1998, been eligible for additional resources in terms of staff within the framework of “positive discrimination (D+) measures” (i.e., affirmative action), as a sequel to the creation of “Educational Priority Areas” (*Zones d’éducation prioritaires*) which existed from 1989 to 1999 with the objective of promoting equal opportunity among pupils. These measures are not aimed specifically at immigrant communities since the criteria for provision of supplementary resources are tied to the socio-economic level of the school population, even though these resources are concretely allocated to institutions with a large number of students of foreign origin and who are in a precarious social situation.¹⁷ In the same way, considerable efforts have been aimed at increasing literacy¹⁸ (Lire et Écrire 2004), while at the same time there are other measures intended to remedy, directly or indirectly, learning difficulties as they arise: special education, alternate education centres (CEFA), distance learning, ongoing education, “homework schools” (*écoles de devoirs*), etc.

This logic favouring a socio-economic approach to inequality in education has not hindered the setting in motion of policies more directly orientated to populations of immigrant origin. On the one hand, these involve the recognition of linguistic diversity. In the French-speaking Community, classes in the mother tongue were held at school in the seventies (in the case of Italian), but outside school hours. So the so-called integration here was little more than the “renting” of classrooms and not a real integration of the others’ language. The organised school policies also came into being in the 80s: under the prompting of the European directive of 1977, which envisaged teaching to immigrant pupils their home languages and cultures, two intercultural education pilot projects saw the light in a number of Brussels secondary schools.¹⁹

An institutionalisation phase followed in the 1990s, with the signing of the *Chartes de partenariat* (Partnership Charters), the first phase being from 1996 to 2000, the second from 2001 to 2005, between the French-speaking Community and the main States of emigration (Morocco, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, but not Spain). The aim stayed the same, that is, the organisation of classes teaching the immigrants’ mother tongues (“languages of origin”) as well as intercultural activities for migrant children, by schools that put in an explicit annual demand.²⁰ Since 2001, some 70 schools on average have joined in with this scheme, which has involved around 5,000 children a year, 90% of whom are of Moroccan or Italian extraction (Blondin & Mattar 2003). The recent changes in initial teacher training are another sign of the increasing awareness of the

¹⁵ These are the official policies, but other initiatives have been carried out over the last 15 years: some in the shape of action-researches intended to change the representations of social and educational actors, some designed to produce material and to propose learning methods for use in education (for a review of this question, cf. Crutzen & Lucchini, forthcoming).

¹⁶ Martiniello (1995 : 158) describes the opposition between Flanders and Wallonia in these terms: « Flanders puts the emphasis on specific policies designed to favour integration of immigrant groups. In Wallonie, the approach seems rather to be a general one, destined to combat all kinds of exclusion affecting all disaffected and disadvantaged people, by promoting the concept of citizenship. » See also Rea (1995 : 193-199).

¹⁷ Often, supplementary aid consists in taking on school mediators. These mediators, of foreign origin for the most part, are responsible for the detection and prevention of violence and disaffection through the deployment of home-school liaison strategies.

¹⁸ With regard to the Brussels Region, in 2002 the *Plan bruxellois pour l’alphabétisation* (literacy) was put into action. This involved the recruiting of 90 tutors and an increase in the ways and needs budget with a view to increase capacity to two thousand learner places. In the French community, allocations have also noticeably increased over recent years. Thus the number of learners in the literacy « cells » (groups) of *Lire et Écrire* have increased almost five-fold over a period of twelve years, going from 3,183 learners in 1990 to 14214 in 2002-2003, a year in which a relatively large number of applicants were turned down (1151) simply because of a lack of places or of tutors (Lire et Écrire 2004 : 43).

¹⁹ The first between 1984 and 1987 (Leunda *et al.* 1988), the second between 1988 and 1992 (Anciaux *et al.* 1992). Their aim was to develop an intercultural teaching by the organisation of courses in the languages of origin for migrant populations found in sufficient numbers in the schools, and of joint activities bringing together teachers of different communities interested in selected themes.

²⁰ In the intercultural activities of the second Charter there have been a series of activities under the heading of “*Éveil aux langues*” (language awareness) (Nollet 2003) following the adaptation in Francophone Belgium (Blondin and Mattar 2003) of the French programme *Evlang* (Candelier 2003) and of the Swiss programme *Eole* (Perregaux *et al.* 2003). The material being adapted to French-speaking Belgium is about to come out, as “*Éveil aux langues en chansons*” (French Community 2004).

heterogeneity of the school population.²¹

On the other hand, Belgian authorities have initiated a series of actions aimed at the acquisition of language and cultural norms by means of compensatory education, which in this case will take into account the immigrant population's linguistic background. It will involve, for example, the creation of *classes-passerelles* for newly arrived children, by law in 2001 (Eurydice 2004b). These *classes-passerelles* are intended to take children for a period ranging from several weeks to 6 months or a year, in a referral class where French is learned intensively. The *classes-passerelles*, which have been seen as positive on the whole (Maravelaki & Collès 2004), are currently being expanded.²² Also, where the number of new arrivals does not permit the setting up of a *classe-passerelle*, a course in adaptation to the language of instruction can be organised, providing up to three hours of teaching for 20 pupils (1998 Act).

3. Current policies' limits and problems

In terms of ensuring equality of life conditions for children of immigrant origin compared with those of native extraction, the policies described above turn out to be largely insufficient.

Indeed, according to the results of the international PISA survey²³, those weakest in terms of reading levels include among others (a) children of immigrant extraction born and entirely educated in French-speaking Belgium, whose parents were born abroad (13% of children in the sample), the so-called second generation immigrants,²⁴ and (b) foreign-born children, the first generation immigrants (5% of the sample).²⁵

In comparison with the average scores of children from native backgrounds (at 495 and therefore very close to the international average fixed at 500 points), second generation children obtained 406 points and foreign-born children obtained a mean score of 414 points²⁶ (Lafontaine *et al.* 2003 : 87). The difference between native and immigrant scores is considerable but is minimal between the two generations of immigrants themselves. And, as is underlined in the report by the OECD (2001 : 155), it is this substantial difference between natives and second generation immigrant children which is worrying, given that the latter have received all their schooling in French. At the same time, and this is just as worrying, the scores of the latter children and those born outside Belgium are almost the same, with the foreign born even doing slightly better. This seems to indicate that the fact of being born and educated entirely in Belgium does not improve the educational lot of children of immigrant origin, whose performances in French seem to be more than problematic.²⁷

²¹ Initial courses entitled "*Approche de la diversité culturelle*" (approach to cultural diversity) and "*Éducation à la diversité culturelle*" (education to cultural diversity) were introduced into the primary and lower secondary teacher training programme in 2000 (that is to say, more than 50 years after the agreements to recruit miners in 1946, or at least two generations after the arrival of those first immigrants). Parallel to this, a specific course teaching French as a foreign or second language was set up under the same legislation in 2000. In the Universities, interculturality or the teaching of French as a foreign/second language appeared in the 90s (Collès & Lucchini 2003).

²² « For school year 2003/2004, fourteen schools have opened *classes-passerelles* in primary education in the French-speaking region and twelve establishments in the bilingual region of Brussels-Capital. At secondary level four schools have opened *classes-passerelles* in the French-speaking part of the country and twelve in the bilingual region Brussels-Capital. The number of newly arrived immigrants of secondary school age was 588 students for the school year 2002/2003 of whom 272 come from Europe. (Eurydice 2004b : 6).

²³ The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardised assessment that was jointly developed by participating countries and administered to 15-year-olds in schools.

²⁴ Nonetheless referred to as «first generation» in the OECD publication.

²⁵ The PISA survey in French-speaking Belgium, went to 103 schools and covered a total of 2,818 students aged 15-16.

²⁶ These figures can be compared side by side with those relating to those about people of immigrant background among literacy students for the year 2002-2003: three quarters of them are not Belgian nationals (and of these only 15.6% are refugees) and a part of the remaining quarter are foreign born who have been naturalised (Lire et Écrire 2004 : 43). We are unable to say how many of those of immigrant background had had their schooling in Belgium from primary school.

²⁷ We can say that among the other European countries with a similar high rate of immigration, only Germany presents a profile which is comparable with that of Francophone Belgium regarding immigrant children. In other countries like Switzerland, France, Luxembourg second generation children are at an intermediate level between natives and foreign-born children. And in Canada and Australia second generation students perform on comprehension and reading tasks at practically the same level as natives (OECD 2001 : 155). Their school integration is therefore very rapid, unlike what happens in French-speaking Belgium, where learning difficulties, of linguistic nature among others, do not become solved after a generation. It would have been very interesting

The Flemish educational system, while clearly more successful on average, is also one of the most unequal.²⁸ In Flanders, students born in Belgium of foreign-born parents (4%) and students born abroad (3%) obtain scores of 418 and 470 respectively, while the mean score achieved by natives in Flanders is 541 points (De Meyer et al. 2002 : 15).²⁹

Certain factors characterise the sociolinguistic situation of the children of immigrants which could explain their weak performance in reading : the fact of not speaking the language of the school in the home environment seems to reinforce the risk of lowered school performance. In the French-speaking Community in Belgium, "a pupil not habitually speaking French at home runs three times the risk compared to a pupil who habitually speaks French at home, of finding himself / herself among the poorest readers".³⁰ This risk is slightly less pronounced (2.5) but nonetheless present in the Flemish community (Lafontaine et al. 2003 : 82).

It should nonetheless be underlined that children from an immigrant background share their lowered reading performances with all children who are disadvantaged in socio-economic terms.³¹ In this respect, it is in the French-speaking Community where differences are greater.³² Where social background and educational trajectory are similar, the young people of immigrant background do not do worse than the native Belgians of the same age in the French Community: «all other things being equal, the fact of a pupil's being of foreign origin does not constitute an aggravating factor or additional handicap» (Lafontaine et al. 2003 : 80). In this respect it is important to note that the effects of socio-economic background and different mother tongue combine with the factor «establishment», which plays an important role in explaining the poor performances of the young people of immigrant origin, and, more globally, of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds:³³ «In fact, in the majority of OECD countries the effect of the average economic, social and cultural status of students within schools far outweighs the effects of the individual socio-economic background» (OECD 2001 : 199). And precisely, there is, in the French-speaking Community, high concentration effects on the ethnic and socio-economic levels in certain schools, concentration due as much to the massive presence of immigrant populations, in certain cities, (up to 40% in Brussels city) as to the existence in Belgium of a «quasi-market for education» (Verhoeven 2003) : the most attractive schools in terms of their reputation seek to attract a maximum number of pupils, in order to increase their financial buoyancy, but with a preference for those who are closest to the accepted educational levels ; this logic of concurrence creates segregation between the most disadvantaged pupils, concentrated in the least prestigious schools, and the most favoured ones who are those drawn to the schools with the greatest reputation. The effect of this mechanism is doubled or reinforced by the strategies of parents who, in the context of free choice of schools, seek to offer their children learning conditions that come closest to their preferences and their representation of possibilities. The result is that certain schools of the Belgian capital are composed 100% by pupils of foreign origin and from a disadvantaged background.³⁴

to see how the next generation is faring, that is those whose grandparents but not their parents were born abroad. The Survey supplies no information on this.

²⁸ In countries where reading performance is above average, only three countries show above average differences or inequalities : Australia, the Flemish community of Belgium, and the United Kingdom (Lafontaine et al. 2003 : 70).

²⁹ The good scores of foreign-born students, observed to a lesser extent in French-speaking Belgium, can be explained by the fact that this group is composed of immigrants from neighbouring countries in the European Union, notably those from Holland in the case of the Flemish community (De Meyer et al. 2002 : 15).

³⁰ In this respect, Lafontaine and his colleagues underline the following fact : «While more than three quarters of pupils stating that they speak French at home achieve a score of or greater than level 2 [on a scale of 1 to 5], we see that nearly 60 % of pupils who claim that they usually speak another language at home fail to reach level 2.» (Lafontaine et al. 2003 : 88)

³¹ Thus, scores from the 25 % least privileged families in socio-economic terms in French-speaking Belgium average out at 412 (Lafontaine et al. 2003 : 87).

³² « In Belgium, there are clear north south differences: while the gross difference [between the most and least favoured socially] in the Flemish community is 94 points, in the French-speaking community, this figure has the record value of 124 points. » (Lafontaine et al. 2003 : 85)

³³ Belgium is one of three countries with the greatest effects of segregation on learning level (OECD 2001 : 199).

³⁴ We would stress that the segregation is not just at school. The district of Saint-Gilles, in the Brussels area, where 40.6% of the population have foreign nationality (INS 2003), has an unemployment rate of 40% among the active population aged under 25 (ORBEM 2003). Other districts in Brussels are in the same situation. Without wanting to see strict correspondences between educational level and unemployment among the immigrant population, which suffers from (often veiled) discrimination, we think that the low school achievement remains an important risk factor which may impede access to resources for those from an immigrant background, as well as the transfer of a professional and human fulfilment for the society as a whole.

It would seem, then, that the main problem of integration policies consists in the inability of the system to foster the heterogeneity of the school population, and to ensure that the social, linguistic and above all educational backgrounds of immigrant children does not determine their progress and the chances of success at school. The picture that emerges then is that of school segregation and the social marginalisation of immigrant communities, a degree of marginalisation that the actions designed to recognise intercultural differences, referred to above, seem unable to reduce. One might well ask oneself about the relevance of measures now applied to favour this recognition. We note that:

- The home language and culture teaching classes are addressed exclusively to children from immigrant backgrounds, even where there would be nothing, as such, to stop children from French-speaking families from taking the same classes. The schools that have decided to join the Partnership Charter are very much in the minority – namely because of organisational constraints (Campolini *et al.* 2001)– and it is clear that only the national languages (French, Dutch, German), as well as English and Spanish, to a lesser extent (Fabry & Lucchini 2003), are considered apt for Belgian pupils taken as a whole, since these are the only languages with the right to a place on the curricula of all pupils (Blondin & Mattar 2003) –despite the statements underlining the richness of plurilingualism and multiculturalism of present-day Belgium.

- The Charters were signed with the ambassadors of the States of origin, who decided which language or language variety should be taught (thus we find that the language to be taught to children from a Moroccan family background is literary Arabic). There is no place for a country's regional or minority language. That means that the languages taught are not always the languages the pupils are familiar with, and the place accorded to them in the heart of the school will not necessarily contribute to valuing the linguistic and cultural identity of the child.

- Finally, as applied at the present time, linguistic and cultural recognition seems to be based on knowledge of the other and on a status accorded to him or her, but without the other being present in the decisions that are involved.

In summary, the recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity does not occur within a framework allowing immigrant populations to gain equality of status and right to make their voice heard. This intended intercultural recognition could in fact increase the symbolic violence perceived by these populations and could lead to the opposite result to that desired: "In this way, all teaching of cultures constructed on a naming of cultural facts runs the risk of being no more than a show of power, no more than a possessing of the Other. [...] In this sense, cultural recognition will not necessarily improve either the points of contact, or the pedagogical relationship, but could on the contrary serve as a screen and a filter. (Pretceille 2003 : 12)

4. Towards an equality of linguistic resources

Although relatively different in their conception, the policies described above seem to be unable overall to give people from an immigrant background the means to become completely autonomous, independent citizens, and to allow them to develop their lives in favourable social and economic conditions. The different logics which coexist in Belgium when it comes to define educational policy in favour of children from immigrant backgrounds, are proving to be inadequate. They do so because of the inadequacy of the plans they put in place, in the absence of a clear political strategy which will make it possible to solve the shortcomings of the current measures. Among these, as we see it, there are four main problems that ought to be avoided.

The first of these consists in putting forward a model of integration that, while making language the heart of collective identity, promotes an assimilation model in which the identity of the person of foreign origin risks not being recognised. In societies which are increasingly heterogeneous, it is essential (let us remember) to base citizenship on a community of rights, obligations and resources (economic, cultural, linguistic and others) and not on a predefined identity conceived in an essentialist fashion.

However an egalitarian ideal promoting the opening to otherness and non-discrimination should not lead to the denial of social and cultural heterogeneity or of the need to take into account the specific conditions of certain groups. While achieving equality of socio-economic conditions for students of immigrant origin is undeniably a fundamental objective, this will not be enough to

improve their own specific situation in the Belgian educational system: that of being some of the main victims of a system which permits a marked degree of segregation, with concentrations of pupils facing school failure in classes where it will be ever more difficult to change their trajectory. Moreover, there is a need to take stock of the specific needs of students who are in a way at distance from the norms of the dominant society. The issue raised by this distance with regard to socially legitimate practices is that of knowing to

what extent the situation of children from immigrant backgrounds is peculiar to them. What has to be avoided is a "politically correct" train of thought that encourages educators to refuse to see the specific difficulties faced by these students, in the name of "non-discrimination".³⁵ In this respect, it is striking to note the gulf between, on the one hand, the scientific studies which place emphasis on the particular sociolinguistic situation of children from immigrant backgrounds, on the value of intercultural pedagogy, etc., and, on the other hand, policies which tend to postulate the homogeneity of the students. The argument that remedial teaching for marginalised populations in itself may ghettoise the children carries little weight when one knows that the current situation is not able to create equality of competence among learners, and that this segregation already exists in Belgium in the shape of the so-called "quasi-market for education" (see above). Without prejudging specific circumstances and without placing all the responsibility on ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences, it would seem to be necessary to implement certain measures that take into account, among other things, the multilingual environment of certain children, especially in elementary education where the differences between learners start to be entrenched³⁶ (Lire et Écrire 2004). After Crahay (2000), we would thus insist on the urgent need to put corrective schooling in place which dismissed illusions linked to equality of opportunity, and plainly recognised the inequality of needs.

The third problem is that of seeing in any and every form of remediation in favour of immigrant children a denial of the intrinsic value of their own practices or a rejection of the children's cultural and linguistic diversity in favour of the dominant norms of the host society. Thus some see research on school failure of children of immigrant extraction as identifying deficits in competence where in fact there is only non standard or socially "deviant" behaviour patterns. The praiseworthy intention of not imposing a single, wall-to-wall vision of social success should not, however, let us forget that the mastery of certain norms, including the linguistic norm, is one of the primary objectives of education. There is no doubt that it is fundamentally important not to fall into the trap of hypothesising that such pupils have an intractable handicap, and to value their cultural resources rather than stigmatising and emphasising what they lack. Nonetheless, it would be irresponsible not to seek to remedy, for example, the lack of access these children have to legitimate linguistic resources, within an approach that values differences and incorporates the

³⁵ As Crutzen & Lucchini (forthcoming) have it: « The much contested status of the cultural question in schools in the French Community rests on an universalist and egalitarian principles, according to which evoking differences means going back to "making differences", and on the empirical observation of perverse effects brought about by culturalist experiences, which risk creating erroneous, reductionist or stigmatising misrepresentations .» The «intellectual mistrust» regarding these questions, mixed with the ethical concern not to stigmatise populations often characterised in reductionist or simplistic terms, often leads to a blindness which has to be questioned. Indeed, how can one combat something when we do not know how it was produced, and what it produced ? Is it really by doing research that we reinforce stigmatisation by delimiting, by constructing, and therefore by creating an immigrant "with problems"? Does not this stigmatisation lie in the scholastic and professional segregation that the researcher is called in to understand, as an agent of change, among others, towards greater equality of opportunity?

³⁶ On the basis of the statistics for the French Community for 2003-2003, the *Lire et Écrire* association (2004) makes the following observation: «Already in the primary schools the inequalities become entrenched. In the sixth year of primary school, one pupil in five is at least a year behind. These pupils continue going from year to year, still behind or more so, with or without CEB [primary school certificate]. In the first year of secondary school, 30% of pupils are behind. In the 3rd year, the figure is 44%. A figure which is quite different according to types of education. Indeed, in our system, the accumulation of such failure leads to re-routing towards technical or professional studies [technical school or similar]. Thus the percentage of pupils more than a year behind or more is 22.5% in general secondary school, and 48.6% in transitional technical studies; it rises to 64.5% in qualification technical studies and reaches 75% among pupils in professional education.» (Lire et Écrire 2004 :34). We would observe that already in primary school the proportion of children needing remedial teaching goes up from one year to the next by 10%. Entry into compulsory education is therefore impeded for one child in 10. Furthermore we would state that the majority of students in literacy classes have been through compulsory education. According to one survey (Lire et Écrire 1998), it emerges that 91% of these students have been through primary education (of whom 30% were steered toward special education). Some 57% of adults interviewed stated that they were at failure before the age of 13, 32% before the age of 8. The conclusion points to school failure as a major cause of illiteracy (Lire et Écrire 2004 : 33).

children's linguistic and cultural references. Thus, promoting intercultural teaching methods will be ineffective if not accompanied by actions aimed at equalising competences: it would, in other words, try to give pupils a positive image of themselves when they have not the resources needed to effectively build success within the society at large (Rea 1995 : 203-205).

Having said that, we should avoid the fourth stumbling block which sets up a priori a degree of incompatibility between sharing common norms and valuing cultural particularities. Offering Belgian citizens equal opportunity for social success, whether their family background is native or not, involves giving them the material and symbolic resources that they need to be able to respond to the normative requirements of society, while conserving a positive self-image. Indeed, recognition of the richness that immigrant languages and cultures represent for Belgian culture is an important step towards giving immigrant populations the opportunity to freely choose their life project, outside the alienating pressure

of a society in which only one form of identity is deemed legitimate. This recognition goes substantially beyond simple affirmation of formal equality based on a principle of non-discrimination (v. Honneth 1995; Taylor 1992). It involves for example, the affirmation of the interest of all pupils, regardless of ethnic background, in participating in the multilingual and multicultural background, without prejudging the needs of the different communities in this respect: true, authentic recognition does however imply not imposing on the Other the vision one has of him or her. For that reason it would be useful for the immigrant communities themselves to express their views and preferences in terms of management of plurilingualism.

For all the interest that there is in favouring the presence of the immigrants' languages in the school, this type of education will only bear fruit if preceded by or backed up by a programme of reinforcement of at least one language. Indeed, studies of young children from Italian immigrant families suggest that these children suffer above all from the absence of a language of reference for their literacy acquisition (Lucchini & Flamini 2005; Lucchini 2005). Given the linguistic complexity of the communities in question, we believe that this language can only be the socially dominant language of the host society. Recognition of the social realities which make mastery of the dominant language the open sesame essential for effective participation in the wider society, should necessarily be accompanied by the recognition of a variety of usages and the equality of their intrinsic value.

In conclusion, it seems to us that what is needed, namely in the French Community, is a policy of voluntary learning of the dominant languages and at the same time an authentic recognition of the complementary value of all language learning. Yet, some of the measures already adopted tend in this direction, and the recent reform projects implemented by the Francophone Ministry of Education have, it seems, been alerted by the alarming findings of fundamental and applied research carried out in schools. However, achieving the objectives will mean in many cases the application of more ambitious measures than those applied until now. The modifications effected in teacher training, for instance, often turn out to be vague, and many measures only affect a minimum number of schools and educational centres. As we see it, real change will need more radical reform. However, these will only be acceptable on two conditions: on the one hand, education will need to be seen as the main means of striving against inequality, and on the other hand, measures designed to combat inequality will have to be underpinned by a common wish to live together. In other words, these changes depend even today, on bold affirmation of the equal value of cultures and communities, on opposition to xenophobia and discrimination in its various forms, going way beyond a flimsy principle of non-discrimination.

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Table 1. The most represented nationalities from States other than those bordering on Belgium, by region

	Total number of foreigners	Nationalities most represented, number of ressortissants and percentages in relation to the total number of foreigners in each region	
Belgium – 10396421 habitants	860287	Italy	183021 (21.3%)
		Morocco	81763 (9.5%)
		Spain	43802 (5.1%)
		Turkey	41336 (4.8%)
Brussels – 999899 habitants	263451	Morocco	41987 (15.9%)
		Italy	27953 (10.6%)
		Spain	20428 (7.8%)
		Portugal	15958 (6%)
		Turkey	11595 (4.4%)
Flemish region – 6016024 habitants	288375	Morocco	26799 (9.3%)
		Italy	23159 (8.1%)
		Turkey	19711 (6.8%)
		United Kingdom	12198 (4.2%)
		Spain	10064 (3.5%)
Wallon region – 3380498 habitants	308461	Italy	131909 (42.8%)
		Spain	13310 (4.3%)
		Morocco	12977 (4.2%)
		Turkey	10030 (3.2%)