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# When the language bonus becomes an onus: a Belgian case study

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## Abstract

Belgian public servants are entitled to a language bonus, ranging from €20 to €110 per month, when they need to use two official languages, mainly Dutch and French, in their jobs. Some of the employees (window clerks) of a state-owned, public service company (company X) receive this bonus, but only those who work in Brussels, because it is an official bilingual area (French/Dutch). To get an insight into the language practices and beliefs of their Flemish colleagues, we analysed the answers of a survey study of 129 participants working in the monolingual area (Dutch). The language bonus is a source of dissatisfaction for clerks working in monolingual regions, such as Antwerp, because they also need to be multilingual to perform their jobs, but do not receive the bonus. The results indicate that there is a discrepancy between the language policy of Belgium (the language laws) on the one hand and the policy of company X and the language beliefs and practices of the clerks on the other. We conclude our article with a discussion about the language bonus and make an assessment about expenditure on it in Belgium, which we estimate at €51 million per year. We argue that the bonus has to be viewed as a language management strategy and thus has to be evaluated regularly to become fully effective.

**Keywords:** language management, language practices, language policy, language bonus, Belgium

## 1. Introduction

The general focus of this research is the official regulation of the so-called language bonus in Belgium and how it affects the employees of the state-owned company X. At the request of the company we have left out its name and any

1. The authors would like to thank the University of Antwerp and especially the Institute of Academic and Professional Communication (IPAC) for their financial support for this research project. They would also like to thank Lieve Vangechuchten for her valuable feedback.

references potentially indicating its business activities. We can say, however, that it is a public service company, which has many international customers and has locations all over the country. The job of the Flemish window clerks of company X consists of selling certain products and providing information to customers, with whom they are in direct contact. They are the focus of our survey study, which we performed in 2014. We wanted to know how they deal with the daily multilingual challenges and how they view the language bonus. The financial benefit creates dissatisfaction among them because they are not entitled to it. Only their colleagues working in Brussels, the official bilingual area, have the right to claim it. The implementation of the language bonus thus leads to undesirable effects and to a discrepancy between the language policy (LP) of the Belgian government and company X.

To understand this language regulation and its implications, one has to understand the political and linguistic situation of Belgium, which we will discuss in the first section. Afterwards, we will explain the theoretical framework of Spolsky (2009), which we used to create our survey. In a next section, we describe the method of our research and give the results. In our conclusion, we discuss whether the implementation of the language bonus is effective and we give concluding remarks.

### *1.1 Belgian language laws*

Let us first discuss the political situation of Belgium and the related language laws.<sup>2</sup> In 1830 Belgium was founded as a francophone country, although a majority of the citizens were Dutch-speaking (Belgium, Ministre de l'Intérieur 1849).<sup>3</sup> This meant that governmental affairs, such as justice, were exclusively conducted in French (De Troyer 1999). The consequences of this practice could be disastrous for the Dutch-speaking citizens because it prohibited them from having access to a Dutch-speaking judicial system, such as in the case of Coucke-Goethals.<sup>4</sup> This caused ample conflict and discussion, which

2. For a comprehensive overview of the political and linguistic situation of Belgium, see Deprez (2000), Wynants (2000), O'Donnell and Toebosch (2008), and Blommaert (2011).

3. The first Belgian census of 1846 states that 57% of the Belgian inhabitants speak Dutch or a related dialect, in comparison to 42.2% of the inhabitants who speak French (Belgium, Ministre de l'Intérieur, 1849).

4. The case of Coucke-Goethals was pivotal for the development of the Belgian language laws. These were the names of two Dutch-speaking citizens who were sentenced to death on suspicion of murder in 1860. The problem was that they did not understand the trial, because it was done in French. Their lawyer and their interpreter did not have sufficient skills in Dutch. After their execution, it became clear that they were innocent. See also de Lentdecker (1987) for a thorough commentary.

resulted in several language laws, such as the Equality law of 1898, the law on the language use in judicial affairs (1935) and the law on the language use in the army (1938). The main language legislation, which is important for our discussion, is the law for language use in administrative affairs of 1966, which is valid for primarily governmental issues and applies to public services of the State throughout the country.<sup>5</sup> This law embodies the concept of territoriality, which means that multilingualism is divided into (primarily) monolingual areas. More specifically, Belgium has four language areas, namely three monolingual areas, i.e. the Dutch, the French, and the German regions, and one bilingual Dutch-French-speaking part (Brussels). The Brussels-Capital Region is the exception as only in this area are Dutch *and* French official languages with a similar status.<sup>6</sup>

The 1966 law applies to public services of the State and reads for the three monolingual areas as follows:<sup>7</sup>

Every local service, which is located in the Dutch, the French or the German language region, uses the language of its region exclusively for its affairs with private citizens, without prejudice to the possibility to communicate with certain private citizens, who are located in another language region, in the language chosen by those private citizens. (Our translation, Law on the Language Use in Administrative Affairs 1966: article 12)

For the region of Brussels, the official bilingual area, the 1966 language law is expressed as follows:

Every local service, which is located in Brussels, communicates in the language which is used by the private citizen, insofar that language is Dutch or French. (Our translation, Law on the Language Use in Administrative Affairs 1966: article 19)

Even public service companies are (sometimes partly) commissioned by the State and these state-owned companies are as such subject to the language laws. Regarding our case study, this means that the clerks at company X in a location in Flanders have the right to use Dutch exclusively to communicate with customers, and any other language is a personal choice of the employee. On the one hand, they may speak French when asked and should the clerk want to. On the other hand, should the customer ask to speak French, the clerk has the right to refuse and to continue in Dutch. The customer cannot demand but only request the clerk to speak another language than Dutch. However, the

5. It does not apply to private situations, such as the language spoken at home.

6. The so-called municipalities with language facilities are another exception to the territoriality concept, where the communication between citizens and the government can be in another language than the regional one, if the citizens ask for it explicitly (Steunpunt Taalwetwijzer 2002).

7. The 1966 law also partly applies to the language use in businesses, for example the language use in official documents (Steunpunt Taalwetwijzer 2002).

situation in Brussels is different. The window clerks in a location in Brussels are obligated to use Dutch or French, depending on the language preference of the customer. The clerk does not have the choice and has to be able to communicate with the customer in those two languages.

This reveals the difference between the areas of Flanders and Brussels. Dutch is the default language choice of Flemish clerks, unless they willingly shift to French (or any other language) if the customer asks for it. In Brussels, the customer has the right to be helped in French or Dutch, depending on preference with which the clerk has to comply. The 1966 law does not explicitly specify what language to choose if the customer is English- or German-speaking. To answer this question, we looked at reports of the Permanent Commission of Linguistic Control, which manages the application of the language laws (Vaste Commissie voor Taaltoezicht 2008 and 2009). This leads us to conclude that the clerk has the right, yet not the obligation, to speak the preferred language of the customer – even if this is English, Spanish or another foreign language – if the situation has an international nature, such as is the case in Antwerp, and provided, of course, that the clerk speaks that language.

### *1.2 Language bonus*

An important aspect of the language laws concerns the language bonus (Law on the Language Bonus 2010). This is paid on top of the clerk's designated monthly salary and can vary between €20 and €110 net.<sup>8</sup> The financial bonus is given to employees in a government department which is either situated within an official bilingual area, such as Brussels, or which services the entire country (i.e. the federal government). Furthermore, employees have to prove linguistic competence in a certain language (Dutch, French or German) with a certificate (through Selor, an accredited language testing service, or with a diploma) and they also need to use this second language in their government job. The following example will illustrate these three conditions further. A Dutch-speaking person from Flanders works for the federal governmental service Ministry of Defence and has to use French and Dutch in his job. He has also done a language test, which proves his proficiency in French. If he meets all these requirements, he can apply for a language bonus. Another Dutch-speaking employee works for a Flemish local governmental service and is exclusively required to use Dutch on the job. He is not entitled to a language bonus although he too is fluent in French.

8. This number has to be multiplied with the index coefficient 1.6084 (valid until 30 June 2016) to create the gross amount. The final gross amount then varies between €32.17 and €176.92.

It is not clear if the bonus is meant as a compensation for public service employees in the bilingual region or as a motivation for the same employees to learn Dutch and French and speak these languages (more often). Although we could not find any official documentation about this, we did find two online news articles concerning this issue. The first one states that the former Brussels State Secretary Brigitte Grouwels wants to use the bonus “to increase the active bilingualism of the Brussels public servants”, “to encourage the bilingualism” and “to reward their efforts to learn another language” (De Morgen 2008, our translation). A second source says that “according to the municipal principal officers, the bonus is justified to encourage and stimulate the bilingualism of the public servants” (Bruzz 2005, our translation). Based on these two news articles, we argue that the bonus is probably meant as a compensation *and* as a motivation.

## 2 A theory of language policy

The general framework we used for our study consists of the language policy theory of Spolsky (2009) as explained in his book *Language Management*. He interprets the notion of LP as the language choices made in a specific situation:

The goal of a language theory is to account for the choices made by individual speakers on the basis of rule-governed patterns recognized by the speech-community (or communities) of which they are members. (Spolsky 2009: 1)

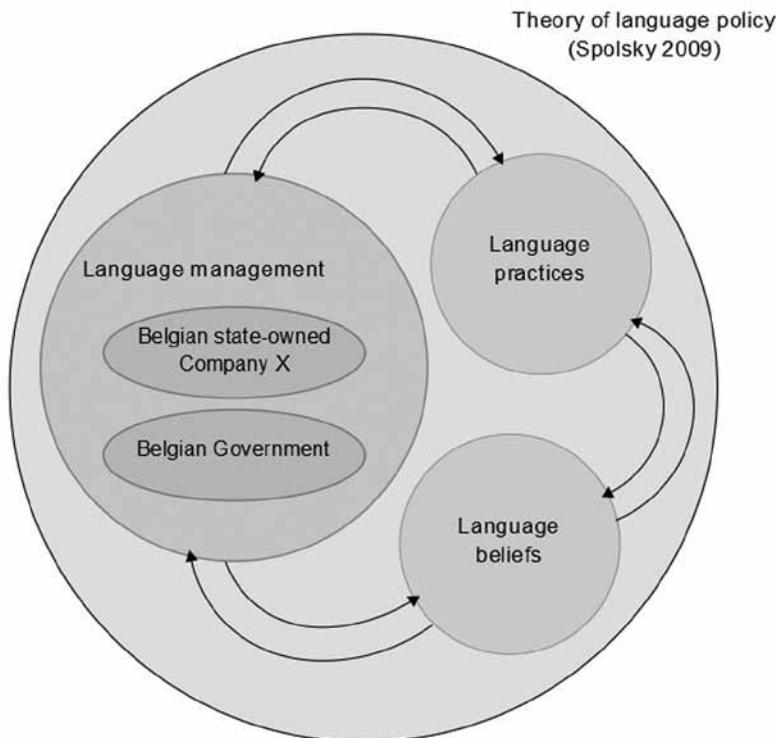
There are other theories and interpretations about language management, policy or planning, but those descriptions are beyond the scope of this article (see for interesting perspectives on the matter Jernudd and Neustupný 1987; Cooper 1989; Shohamy 2006; Grin, Sfreddo and Vaillancourt 2010; Nekvapil and Sherman 2015). We chose his concept and analysis of LP because it consists of a flexible and open model, on which we based the structure of our survey (see our method section). Furthermore, it is easily applicable to the workplace setting, because Spolsky (2009) incorporates the notion of domain proposed by Fishman (1972), who describes how the institutional contexts in a multilingual setting, such as the family or school domain, influence the choice of language. Further, Fishman (1972) establishes a domain as characterized by three components: topic (is it appropriate to talk about a certain topic in a specific domain?), participants (what are the social roles or relationships of the participants?) and location (where does the communication typically take place?). Regarding our case study, there are several locations throughout

Flanders, but the participants' role and the topic are always the same (providing information to customers).

Spolsky (2009: 4) furthermore distinguishes three aspects of a language policy: “[it] has three interrelated but independently describable components – practice, beliefs, and management”. The language practices refer to the actual language uses of the participant. For example, a person uses a certain dialect of Dutch or, with respect to our case study, a window clerk uses Dutch, French, English and Spanish to communicate with customers. The second component, the language beliefs, has to do with the language ideology of a participant. It refers, in Spolsky's (2009) words, to “the values or statuses assigned to named languages, varieties, and features” (4). For example, a Dutch-speaking clerk living in Antwerp could regard the use of English as meaningful because he projects an international importance onto the English language. Similarly, he could dislike the use of French because he associates it with being elitist (cf. the linguistic history of Belgium and the language conflict between French and Dutch). The third component, and the most relevant one for our discussion later, is language management. For Spolsky (2009: 4) it consists of “the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs”. In our context, it refers to the language laws of the State and the official documents, such as the job vacancies of company X. The latter is the direct language manager of the clerks. The former is the external language manager because the State has written certain language laws, which are applicable to the situation of company X. To give an overview of these components, we have made a graphic representation of Spolsky's theory (Figure 1). The arrows represent the relationship between the components: each element can influence the others.

### 3 Method

This article is based on a part of the findings of our thesis (Rafidison, Van Herck and von Krauss 2014). The original research question concerned the language choice of the window clerks of company X and how the language practices, beliefs, and management interrelate. The respondents worked in the Dutch-speaking region or the bilingual region of Brussels, but for our current article, we focus on the Flemish results and the issue of the language bonus. We used a mixed method approach to examine this issue, consisting of a survey, official documents and personal conversations.



**Figure 1.** A visual representation of the theory of language policy according to Spolsky (2009)

In 2014 we organized the online survey, which was available for about two weeks. We based the structure of the questions in the online survey on the above-mentioned language policy model of Spolsky (2009). The basic structure is the trichotomy of language management, language practices and language beliefs. This division is used in the questions. For example, the topic of language management is formulated in questions about recruitment, training and language bonus. For language practices, we asked, among other things, about the respondents' number of spoken languages and their frequency of use. The answers are reported language use practices, and not observed by us. Finally, the subject of language beliefs is expressed in questions about their preferences for certain languages and their beliefs about management strategies. We used the online program Qualtrics to create the survey.

In addition to the survey, we also consulted several official documents of the company, such as job vacancy documents, which stated the linguistic requirements. Furthermore, we had some personal conversations with our contacts at the company, for instance with the sales manager of the north-east

district. This was needed to understand the LP of company X and to interpret the results.

We received 255 completed surveys, of which eventually 129 were useable for our current article. The reasons for this reduction are the condition that the respondent was working in the Dutch-speaking region (and not in Brussels) and that he answered the question about his work location. For comparison, the total number of window clerks in Flanders in February 2014 was 225, meaning that we had a response rate of 57.3%. This high rate might indicate the importance of the topic of language laws for the respondents. After receiving the data, we performed statistical analysis on the results of the online survey using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 *Language management*

On the basis of several documents about the job requirements for window clerks, we discovered that new employees for Flemish locations are required to have competences in several languages. Feely and Harzing (2003) call this selective recruitment. According to them, it is a cheap and easy strategy to deal with the language challenges. For example, in a job vacancy for a job in Antwerp, the applicant has to be bilingual (French/Dutch) with proper language skills in English and/or German. This procedure is in conflict with the 1966 law, which states that the applicant should only be required to be competent in Dutch. The state-owned company X should theoretically not explicitly demand skills in any other language. But considering the international importance of the location in Antwerp, i.e. a lot of foreign customers, it is logical for the company to hire trilingual employees. Therefore, in comparison with the governmental perspective, the company recognizes the actual multilingual needs of the customers and adjusts its internal LP to them. Here we see a first discrepancy between the language laws of the State and the LP of company X.

### 4.2 *Language practices*

The results of the questionnaire show that the Flemish respondents regularly communicate in different languages with the customers. To the question “Which languages did you use for your external communication with customers last week?” ( $n = 129$ ), 128 persons (99.2%) responded with Dutch, 124 persons (96.1%) with French, 123 persons (95.3%) with English, and 68 (52.7%) with German. Another 45 respondents (34.9%) indicated that they also used another

language, primarily Spanish and Italian. The majority of the respondents (95.4%) stated that they used at least three languages in their external communication during the previous week. Next, we asked about the frequency concerning these different languages. 85 respondents (65.9%) indicated that they speak one or more languages other than their mother tongue multiple times a day and 20 persons (15.5%) said that this happens all the time. The Dutch language is spoken most often, which is logical because they work in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, followed by French, English, German, and finally another language, most often Spanish or Italian. These results show that the Flemish clerks in our research have multilingual skills and use them quite often in their daily work. This means that not only clerks in Brussels have to use French and Dutch, but their Flemish colleagues too, perhaps even in a similar way. This shows a second conflict between the language laws of the State and the actual language practices (and needs) of company X. The clerks (and company X too) acknowledge the need for multilingual skills to help the customers. This contrasts sharply with the 1966 law which mentions only Dutch for the public servants in Flanders and does not refer to the need for French, English or any other language. Of course, the law only includes a minimum condition. The use of French and/or Dutch needs to be guaranteed for the end user in public service, but those languages are not the only ones that are allowed, as long as the end user agrees.

#### *4.3 Language beliefs*

One of our focus points in our research is the implementation of the language bonus. This financial compensation was an important discussion item for the respondents, of which at least 41 (31.8%) stated that they wanted an expansion of the bonus. An open question at the end of the questionnaire gave the possibility for the respondents to give remarks about the LP of company X. The overall trend of responses was the comment about the language bonus. They think it is unfair, even discriminatory, that the bonus is only given to clerks working in Brussels, while Flemish employees also constantly (have to) use multiple languages. One person sums it up: "The language bonus should be paid to every window clerk, because [company X] insists that all of us speak several languages. They have to adjust the LP to the everyday reality" (our translation). Based on some answers, we can argue that the respondents might consider the bonus more as a compensation than as a motivation, although the Belgian government might not have intended it this way. These responses thus show a third mismatch between the law and the language beliefs of the employees about the language bonus.

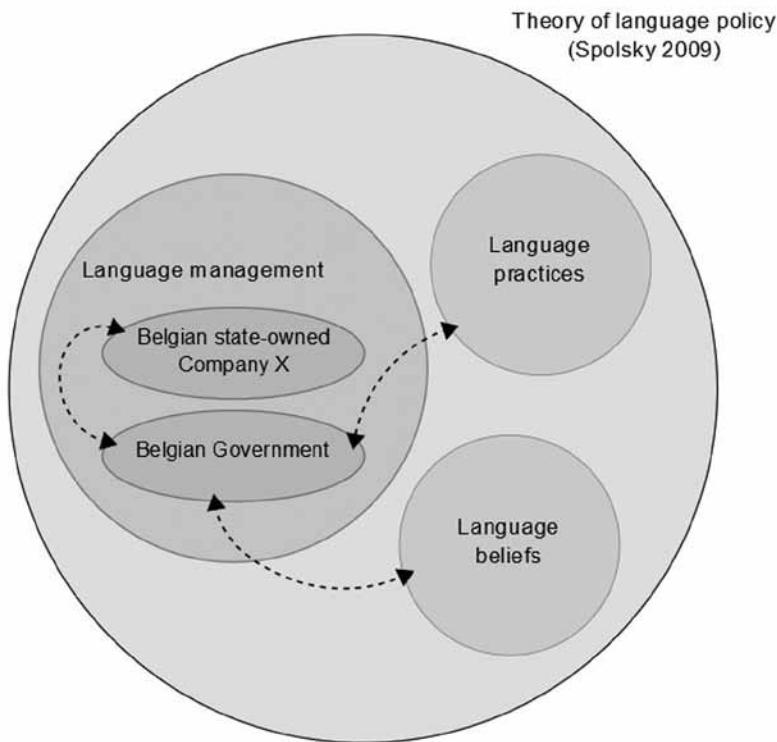
## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Discrepancy of language policies between the State and the company

In the hands-on approach of Reeves and Wright in *Linguistic Auditing* (1996), they want to explain how a company can evaluate their LP in regard to communication in a foreign language. The authors differentiate between three perspectives: the policy view of senior management, the implementation view of line management and the record of actual language practices from postholders. We can apply this distinction to our case study. The first perspective resembles the official LP of the State, the second one matches the official LP of company X and the third one is equal to the language practices of the clerks.

Reeves and Wright (1996: 38) consider a unity of these viewpoints as a necessity to create an increase in operational efficiency of the organization, which they call “the process of confirmation – or triangulation”. The senior managers expect their LP to be followed by the line managers, who assume that it is correctly implemented by the employees. But this perfect penetration of LP guidelines is not always a reality. Based on pilot studies, Reeves and Wright (1996: 38) concluded that there are sometimes “mismatches between perceptions of foreign language use held by the different layers of management and postholders”. The LP ideas of managers are sometimes different or even erroneous compared with the actual reality of language needs handled by employees.

In our results, we found a discrepancy between the language laws of the State on the one hand and the LP of company X and the language practices and beliefs of the clerks on the other hand. To visualize this mismatch, we have used the same figure as before, but now with striped arrows representing the conflicting relationships (see Figure 2). Company X thus operates as an intermediary between the two other entities. It incorporates the obligatory language bonus, as stated by the law, and it interprets the 1966 law fairly broadly, because company X encourages the clerks to use multiple languages with customers, although the Flemish clerks are – strictly by law – not obligated to use any language other than Dutch. The fact that the clerks often use multiple languages does not pose a real problem; moreover, the multilingual competences are beneficial for the many international customers. However, the situation is imbalanced, since the implementation of the language bonus favours those who work in the bilingual area Brussels and disadvantages the clerks working in Flemish locations.



**Figure 2.** A visual representation of the language conflicts within our case study, based on the theory of language policy according to Spolsky (2009)

### 5.2 Cost and evaluation

Belgium is not the only country that has seen the legal implementation of a language bonus. Canada for example has the so-called bilingualism bonus, which is organized in a similar fashion to the Belgian situation, but applies to skills in English and French (see also Vaillancourt and Coche 2009). The Canadian bonus is paid annually and amounts to \$800, which leads to a lot of controversies. The initial goal was an incentive for public servants to learn a second language and compete for bilingual jobs (May 2016). However, with an annual cost of \$60 million, the Canadian Commissioner of the Official Languages, Graham Fraser, argues this could better be reinvested in language training as a “more effective promotion of linguistic duality” (May 2016).<sup>9</sup> For the moment, only the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service has

9. The \$60 million per year relates only to the bilingualism bonus of the core public administration. Other federal agencies also offer a similar bonus, but those amounts are not included in the \$60 million figure.

eliminated the bilingualism bonus for certain employees, which saves the agency \$1.4 million a year (May 2016).<sup>10</sup>

In order to make the same assessment for the Belgian context, we have tried to find an overview of the language bonuses spent by the Belgian government. This endeavour was not entirely successful, because of the administrative difficulties we encountered. As mentioned before, Belgium is divided into several governments and agencies. This fragmentary and decentralized administration makes it problematic to find a final and representative amount of the bonus. Instead, we found several amounts for different governments and agencies, as Table 1 shows. In comparison to the organized overview of Canada (\$60 million per year), Belgium's expenditure on the language bonus can only be estimated. On the basis of the data in Table 1, we assess the *minimum* total amount of language bonuses in Belgium at around €51 million per year.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1.** Overview of expenditure on the language bonus in Belgium

Agency or government	Amount	Year/Month
(a) Brussels, financed by the federal government <sup>a</sup>	€26,939,000.00	2016 (estimated)
(b) Federal government agencies <sup>b</sup>	€1,122,793.00	March 2016
(c) Ministry of Defence <sup>c</sup>	€875,677.96	2015
(d) Federal Police	€10,107,349.34	2015
(e) Belgian Court of Audit <sup>d</sup>	€139,293.82	2015
<b>(f) Total amount</b>	<b>€51,534,837.12</b>	

a Each year €25,000,000 is given to services and institutions in Brussels to fund the language bonus (Royal Decree 2013).

b This amount is paid by Persopoint, a federal organization in charge of the payroll administration of a range of federal government agencies. We received this figure via personal communication with Persopoint.

c We received this figure via personal communication with the Ministry of Defence.

d We received this figure and that for federal policy via personal communication with the Belgian Court of Audit.

Based on the results of our study, we have reason to believe that the employees of company X might consider the language bonus as a compensation while the government might rather think of it both as a compensation and as

10. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service is not part of the core public administration and as such is not subject to the Directive on the Bilingualism Bonus. This is the only separate agency that has eliminated its own bilingual bonus.

11. Calculation: estimation of the total amount of language bonuses in Belgium (f) = (a) + (12 × (b)) + (c) + (d) + (e).

a motivation (see Bruzz 2005; De Morgen 2008). We have nevertheless too few data on this issue to give a complete answer. However, if the bonus is (partly) intended by the State as a motivation and thus as a part of the governmental LP, we could argue that the financial incentive is an explicit language management strategy, implemented to motivate speakers to increase their (use of) bilingual skills.<sup>12</sup> But there are some problems concerning this perspective. As with every kind of state intervention, it would be interesting to know if it is efficient and if the presupposed goals are being reached, for which it is necessary to have specific objectives and ways to evaluate those, for example with indicators. But that is exactly what is missing from the language bonus regulation.

Especially François Grin and Michele Gazzola researched the subject of the evaluation of language policies (see among others, Gazzola 2006, 2014; Gazzola and Grin 2007, 2013; Grin 2008; Grin et al. 2010; Grin and Gazzola 2010, 2013). They primarily focus on the LP of the European Union or of patent organizations, but the general principles and the framework of their research can also be used in this context. They consider the evaluation of an LP as a comparative evaluation of alternative scenarios (Gazzola and Grin 2007), for which they use primarily two criteria: efficiency and fairness. One of the evaluation techniques which are useful in these situations is the cost-effectiveness analysis as it “compares alternative projects on the basis of their costs and effects” (Gazzola and Grin 2007: 97).

If we want to analyse the cost-effectiveness of the language bonus for our case study, we must first identify the core activities or the goal of the language policy (the language bonus), which is the increase in (the use of) bilingual skills, specifically for those working in Brussels. This is the goal which was vaguely mentioned in newspaper articles about the implementation of the language bonus (see Bruzz 2005; De Morgen 2008). The costs can be identified, although not so easily, by gathering the total expenditures of the bonus. Our above-mentioned figures indicate that approximately €51 million per year is spent on the bonus by the government. Gazzola and Grin (2007) state that the ratio between cost and effectiveness can be evaluated if it is compared to at least one other situation in which, for example, the strategy has not been implemented. In our case study, we can easily identify two alternative scenarios: one in which nobody receives a language bonus or one in which everybody who deals with multiple languages in public service receives a bonus. In the former, the costs would decrease (no expenditure on the bonus),

12. For other kinds of language management strategies used in companies, such as the use of a lingua franca, see Feely and Harzing (2003) and Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011).

while in the latter, the costs would increase. The question is whether such an increase or decrease would be related to a more or less effective realization of the goals. As the government has not gathered information about the increase or decrease of language skills in French and Dutch and their use in public services in Belgium and particularly in Brussels over the last years, it is not possible to analyse a cost-effectiveness ratio. However, the results of a study of Mettewie and Van Mensel (2009) in Brussels indicate that it is difficult to find employees with the French/Dutch combination. Even though this study focused on the business setting in Brussels, it suggests, despite the existence of the language bonus, similar difficulties for the bilingual recruitment of the public sector. To sum up, the fact that the Belgian government does not have explicit goals concerning this language bonus, nor data on the skills of bilingual speakers (French/Dutch) and their language use, makes it impossible to evaluate the language bonus.

If we look at Canada, we see that they discuss their language laws, because some consider them as a hindrance for the welfare of the country. They challenge the ideal of the efficient language bonus and they discuss whether to eliminate the bonus, as the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has done, or to reinvest it in language training, as proposed by Graham Fraser (May 2016). The example of Canada shows that the cost-efficiency of those language laws is under discussion and will possibly be altered in the future.

Based on our research, we conclude that the exclusivity of the language bonus for the Brussels employees is debatable because it does not relate to actual language practices. We can identify two alternatives; first, a scenario in which every employee of company X, including those working in Flanders, who deals with multilingual situations on a daily basis receives a financial benefit. Questions related to this situation that arise, are: What would this alternative scenario cost? Are there other possibilities to compensate or motivate those employees to use their multilingual skills? Second, we can identify a scenario in which the bonus is abolished. Are the large costs of the language bonus justified in times of scarcity and budget deficits? Is it justified to invest in this strategy without stating specific goals nor knowing if it actually increases the (use of) bilingual skills of the employees? Is the language bonus for French and Dutch even relevant today, because there are a lot more languages to account for in our daily lives (see Janssens 2008; Mettewie and Van Mensel 2009). To answer these and other questions, more research is necessary. We have to know exactly how much is spent on the bonus, what objectives it pursues and whether these objectives are met. Only empirical research of these questions will allow cost-effective decisions to be made about Belgian language policy.

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## Résumé

Les employés du gouvernement belge ont droit à une prime linguistique allant de €20 à €110 par mois lorsqu'ils doivent utiliser deux langues officielles, principalement le néerlandais et le français, sur le poste de travail. Certains employés (guichetiers) d'une entreprise de service civil appartenant à l'état (entreprise X) reçoivent cette prime, mais seulement ceux qui travaillent à Bruxelles, parce qu'il s'agit d'une région officiellement bilingue (français/néerlandais). Afin d'obtenir un aperçu des pratiques et convictions sur le plan linguistique de leurs collègues flamands, nous avons analysé les réponses de 129 participants travaillant dans la région unilingue (néerlandophone) à une enquête spécifique. Il s'avère que la prime linguistique est une source d'insatisfaction pour les employés qui travaillent dans les régions unilingues telles qu'Anvers, parce qu'ils doivent aussi être multilingues pour accomplir leur travail, mais ne reçoivent pas la prime. Les résultats indiquent qu'il existe un écart entre la politique linguistique de la Belgique (les lois linguistiques) d'une part et la politique d'entreprise X et les convictions et pratiques linguistiques des employés de l'autre part. Nous concluons notre article par une discussion à propos de la prime linguistique et nous faisons une évaluation quant aux dépenses annuelles liées à celle-ci en Belgique; que nous estimons à €51 millions par an. Nous soutenons que la prime doit être considérée comme une stratégie de gestion linguistique et donc être évaluée régulièrement pour devenir pleinement efficace.

**Mots clés:** Gestion linguistique, pratiques linguistiques, politique linguistique, prime linguistique, Belgique.