

## **“Mind your language, that would be so nice” Intensification strategies in parliamentary debates of the 1963 Belgian Language Act**

Ilias Vierendeels & Laurence Mettewie

*Université de Namur*

Polarization is characteristic for the relations between speakers of French and Dutch in Belgium. Scheltiens (2017) and Potvin et al. (2004) show how this is sustained in political and media discourse by stereotypical enemy images and neo-racist mechanisms of overgeneralization, diabolization and catastrophism. In this paper we focus on Belgian language-in-education policy deliberation, a highly symbolic and emotional issue in the country’s linguistic-sensitive context. We investigate the presence and contestation of excessive language in parliamentary debates of the 1963 Language Act for Education, a milestone in Belgian language policy making. Between 27th June and 11th July, more than 25 hours of verbal jousting preceded the final law approval. The official transcripts of the 5 relevant debates in the Chamber of Representatives are subjected to a critical-pragmatic analysis following the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak 2016) in order to answer these research questions: in which contexts are intensification strategies used, by whom are they deployed or resisted, and how are they linguistically realized? Results will provide insight into what can be seen as a play between – on the one hand – mild voices trying to calm tempers by (explicitly) utilizing politeness and – on the other hand – an abundant excessive and provoking debating style characterized by i.a. hyperbolic word choice, intensified adverbs, generalizing pronouns, exclamations, sarcasm and repetition by questions. Next to being informed by the specificities of the parliamentary genre, the language used in these discussions, as such, also resonates and at the same time reinforces long-standing language-ideological sensitivities and broader socio-political agitations of the 1950’s and 60’s.

Potvin, M., Morelli, A. & Mettewie, L. (2004). Du racisme dans les rapports entre groupes nationaux au Canada et en Belgique? In: G. Bourgeault & M-H. Chastenay (eds.). *Ethnic relations and education in divided societies. Comparing Belgium and Canada*. Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies, 25-60. Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2016). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In: Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*. London: Sage, 23-61. Scheltiens, V. (2017) *Met dank aan de overkant. Een politieke geschiedenis van België*. Polis: Kalmthout.