

**Summary:**  
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*Nederlands is Niet Altijd the Language we Speak Around Here:*  
*An Analysis of Multilingual Language Policies in*  
*Dutch University Councils.*  
Master Thesis Intercultural Communication.  
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This summary has been devised in order to prevent the thesis' sensitive information from being released to the public. The Faculty Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities of Utrecht University has advised that this thesis itself cannot be published in its entirety due to the privacy-sensitive information it contains. In order to still provide insights into important results, this summary, which is based on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), has been created. In this summary, the contextual and theoretical framework, part of the (pseudonymized) results, the conclusion, and the recommendations will be outlined.

### **Introduction**

The anglicisation of Dutch universities has led to criticism and a debate about whether the use of the Dutch language in academia will become lost if the use of English continues. Despite that, universities in the Netherlands strive for a diverse and inclusive environment to attract international students and staff. Therefore, internationals have the right to participate in representative participation bodies such as the University Councils. The University council is an elected body that is made up of students and staff which discusses and promotes the interests of students and staff with the CvB. In this study, the focus was on the multilingual experiences of University Council members of Dutch research universities. The main research question of this study was: **To what extent are multilingual University Councilors at Dutch research universities satisfied with the current language policy and practices within their Council?**

The following sub-questions were created:

1. To what extent do the official language policies correspond with what happens in practice at each University Council?
2. What factors contribute to Councilors' satisfaction with their Council's language policy?
3. To what extent does multilingualism in the University Council affect the Councilors' participation in (preparation for) Council meetings?
4. To what extent is Councilors' participation in (preparation for) meetings affected by the availability of facilities such as translated documents, presence of an interpreter, and the option for language training?

### **Contextual Framework**

This thesis was written within the Multilingualism & Participation project (M&M-project). The M&M project was created upon request from Utrecht University's CvB to facilitate and support the use of Lingua Receptiva (LaRa) in the University Council.

Language policy varies greatly among both universities' administrative bodies and in the education offered. Dutch research universities opt for either a fully Dutch, fully English, or other approach such as Lingua Receptiva (LaRa, in Dutch Luistertaal). Because of the recent increase of bilingual or English-taught programs, internal communication can be complicated. Therefore, many universities argue that it is increasingly difficult to manage their administrative language policy. In this thesis, the administrative language policy was focused on and thus provided an analysis of the language policies concerning University Councils at Dutch research universities. It focused on Councilors' experiences with multilingualism and their perception of the universities' language policies. Therefore, universities could

learn from the best practices and potentially improve the facilitation of communication within multilingual Councils, which contributes to their professionalisation and international profiling. Hence, this study contributed to an inclusive academic environment, something that is actively aimed for by University Council chairmen of the Landelijk Overleg Voor de Universitaire Medezeggenschap (LOVUM).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Through the election and participation of internationals in participation bodies, a variety of languages and cultures come together. If interaction between members of two (or more) cultural groups occurs, it is considered *intercultural*. Furthermore, the cultural differences have to be substantial enough to affect at least one of the communication partners. Hence, since language is an important factor in intercultural interactions because it facilitates mutual understanding and prevents miscommunication, it is important that Councilors in University Councils are sufficiently proficient in the language used in meetings and documents. This can be achieved through multiple communicative modes within the frame of Inclusive Multilingualism and also through Receptive Multilingualism.

The concept of Inclusive Multilingualism (Backus et al. 2013) draws upon the theoretical starting point that foreign-language speakers do not necessarily need to speak a language according to the native-speaker standards, but rather need the communicative competence to prioritise mutual understanding with native or other foreign-language speakers. In the context of this study, four multilingual communicative modes are most applicable: *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)*, *Lingua Receptiva (LaRa)* and *Mediation by Translation or Interpretation (MT)*.

#### *English as a Lingua Franca*

*ELF* is used among interlocutors that neither share a culture nor a language and therefore use English as a foreign language to communicate. Additionally, it is not necessary to adhere to native-speaker norms since the goal is mutual understanding. Using *ELF* could be an effective mode of communication in the University Council sphere, as it allows Councilors to discuss matters more rationally. However, some limitations to *ELF* exist as different Councilors most likely speak different varieties of English, which could cause reduced intelligibility. Hence, it is vital that speakers and hearers accommodate when using *ELF*.

#### *Lingua Receptiva / Receptive Multilingualism*

With *LaRa*, interlocutors generate mutual understanding by using the receptive skills they have in their conversation partner's language. When using *Receptive Multilingualism* as a communicative mode, interlocutors can understand each other while speaking different languages because of their passive knowledge of each other's languages. This derives from the idea that some languages are closely related and thus speakers possess enough skills to communicate with each other despite using different languages. This approach has the benefit of not having to depend on native-speaker skills and feeling more confident when speaking your own language. The difference between *LaRa* and *Receptive Multilingualism* is that in the latter, both speakers use their mother tongue and have receptive skills in the language of the other. In *LaRa* you do not necessarily have to speak your own mother language, but you may also use a second or third language such as English. Although *LaRa* presents some challenges, such as the amount of receptive knowledge participants actually need to have, the application of it in bigger groups, and the need for checking in to see if messages are understood, *LaRa* is considered an effective mode of communication in specific multilingual settings. It promotes the feeling of belonging in participation bodies since members are willing to put effort into understanding each other. However, it is important to note the role of the chairman is vital when using *LaRa*, since the chairman is responsible for actions such as checking understanding and supporting the use of different languages.

#### *Mediation by Translation and Interpretation*

If receptive knowledge of another language is not developed sufficiently to fully participate during meetings, communication could be accommodated via an interpreter or translator. Interpreters can mediate between languages and cultures of participants. They can adopt various approaches, such as *simultaneous interpretation*, in which translation is performed while a person is speaking, and *consecutive interpretation*, when speech is translated after someone has already finished speaking.

### *Language policy*

Decisions made regarding the implementation of a communicative mode are related to *language policy*. A *language policy* refers to beliefs about the language(s) that are supposed to be used, for which purpose, in what situation, and by whom. This study followed the idea that these beliefs about language policies derive from a framework of Language Planning (Ref.). There are three different aspects of Language Planning: *status and prestige planning*, *corpus planning*, and *acquisition planning*. *Status and prestige planning* refers to the legal position of a language compared to another language (variety); as such, Dutch universities are required to adopt Dutch unless another language is more effective. *Corpus planning* refers to the prescriptive rules that are established about the use and modernisation of a certain language. Usually, this concerns the written and oral rules of a language connected to the current social developments. *Corpus planning* activities usually derive from beliefs about how the form of a language is appropriate to serve the anticipated functions. However, when talking about a multilingual instead of a monolingual policy in a University Council, this mainly concerns the efficiency, the accessibility, the awareness, and the acceptance of multilingualism.

*Acquisition planning* (AP) concentrates on language users, access, and the distribution of literacy. The primary goal is to increase the number of people using the language (variety). In University Councils, this could for example include language training for multilingual meetings.

### *Multilingual Participation Facilities*

Participation is determined by a multitude of factors, but productivity and satisfaction have shown to be of great influence. There are several ways to facilitate participation. *Document translations* are applicable in case institutions believe changing the spoken language policy from Dutch to English or LaRa is a step too far. They could choose to offer policy documents fully in English or bilingually, or to offer Dutch documents with an English translation or summary. Providing policy versions in two languages seems like the most inclusive and considerate option, but translating documents takes more time than creating only one version in a language everyone can read, especially when documents include jargon and industry-specific terms. Furthermore, for multilingualism to be successful, a list with *institutional keywords* based on frequently used words could be provided. Lastly, universities could help by facilitating both Dutch and English language courses for Councilors to improve their proficiency, also called *language training*.

## **Results**

To discover the administrative language policy of the respective universities, a range of documents were studied. Most universities have a clear Language of Instruction policy but are less clear on their administrative language policy. Some universities have a Dutch spoken language policy during meetings. Furthermore, in some universities, the language policy differs per decentered Council, which means that they might use Dutch, English or another multilingual option. Additionally, some Councils opted for an English-only approach. Finally, some universities allow for a multilingual setting in their meetings and documents.

**Table:** Council board members and Language Policy per Dutch university, 2019-2020 (Levert 2021, 13)

University	UC # Board Members	UC Meeting language policy	UC Document language policy
<b>Utrecht University</b>	12 staff 12 students	The spoken language is Dutch, Lingua Receptiva is used	Written bilingually or provided with English summaries
<b>University of Twente</b>	9 staff 9 students	English, unless only Dutch speakers are present	English only
<b>Maastricht University</b>	9 staff 9 students	Free to express in English or Dutch	English only
<b>University of Amsterdam</b>	15 staff (COR) 14 students (SR)	The SR speaks English, in the plenary meetings it is Dutch. Lingua Receptiva is used	Mostly English or provided with English Google translations.
<b>Tilburg University</b>	9 staff 9 students	Unknown or not available	Unknown or not available
<b>Leiden University</b>	8 staff 8 students	Dutch, unless there is a good reason to switch to English	Available in Dutch and English, from 2020 provided with translations
<b>Erasmus University Rotterdam</b>	12 staff 12 students	English, unless only Dutch speakers are present	All documents are available in Dutch and English
<b>University of Groningen</b>	12 staff 12 students	Dutch, as long as all members have sufficient passive knowledge	English only
<b>Radboud University Nijmegen</b>	20 staff (OR) 14 students (SR)	Dutch only	Available in Dutch and English, minutes provided with manual translations
<b>Wageningen University</b>	16 staff (OR) 12 students (SR)	The SR speaks English, in the plenary meetings it is Dutch or English	Available in Dutch and English or translations. Minutes in English.
<b>Delft University</b>	23 staff (OR) 10 students (SR)	Dutch, unless non-Dutch speaker is present	Available in Dutch and English, most preparation documents are in Dutch
<b>Eindhoven University</b>	9 staff 9 students	English, unless only Dutch speakers are present	English only
<b>Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam</b>	21 staff (OR) 11 students (SR)	Free to express in English or Dutch, Lingua Receptiva is used	Can be bilingual, but mostly Dutch

OR = Ondernemingsraad (Works Council), SR = Studentenraad (Student Council)

### *Satisfaction*

Generally, the participants of this study were moderately satisfied to satisfied with participation, how other Councilors deal with language diversity and the language policy. Nevertheless, Dutch speaking participants were more satisfied with the language policy than non-Dutch speaking participants. Even so, dissatisfied Dutch and non-Dutch speaking respondents argued that non-inclusivity was the main factor of their discontent as it resulted in lower-quality discussions, no-shows and being less prepared for meetings. Overall, participants from universities with a clear language policy were more satisfied than those from universities lacking a clear policy, especially when the official language was English. Additionally, satisfaction was strongly linked to the way co-Councilors deal with language diversity, with satisfied participants stating that Councilors are patient, willing to help others, and are prepared to switch to another language if it helps another Councilor. Dissatisfied participants indicated that some people are careless about the language barrier and not everyone is willing to help another person.

### *Participation*

For both Dutch natives and non-Dutch participants, receptive listening and reading skills in Dutch and English were higher than skills like writing and speaking. However, this did not significantly impact their participation. Nevertheless, a strong positive correlation was found between participants' satisfaction with the language policy compared to their participation.

### *Participant suggestions*

According to the participants, most dissatisfaction comes from unclarity about the policy. Whether it is Dutch-only, Dutch unless a non-Dutch speaker is present, English only, English unless everyone present has sufficient knowledge of Dutch, bilingual, or LaRa, each possibility facilitates inclusion for one group but leads to exclusion for another group. Despite that, a frequently made suggestion by both Dutch and non-Dutch Councilors was to implement English-only as the official language policy. However, not all respondents favour an English-only policy as it might lead to lower-quality discussions. Implementing a Dutch-only policy was mentioned frequently as well, if it includes good facilities for non-Dutch participants. Many participants seem to be open to implementing a Dutch unless or English unless policy to be the most inclusive to everyone.

### *Facilities*

Although opinions on the spoken language differ, most participants agree on their suggestion for the written language policy. The most suggested facility was for Councils to offer bilingual documents, where every document is available in English and Dutch or at least provided with translated summaries. Rather than English translated follow-ups, the bilingual documents should be available simultaneously. Furthermore, investing in professional translation was cited. Additionally, the Council could contribute to helping Dutch and non-Dutch Councilors by making it clear to every potential Councilor what the language policy is before elections, so they know what to expect. Finally, they emphasise the importance of being patient with and kind toward each other, helping each other out, and making everyone feel welcome and comfortable.

### **Conclusion**

Firstly, this study concludes that access to most universities' documents and information on administrative policies was limited. Furthermore, what happens in practice does not entirely align with what the documents state. Documents are sometimes incomplete and unspecific about interpreter availability, document translations, or translated summaries. The differences in policy and practice make that no matter which language is chosen, its status and prestige cannot increase as its value or status depends on the number of people that use it. If Dutch universities would take this as a starting point, it could guide them into a more aligned policy and practice, offering inclusion to all members and thereby increasing the status and prestige of that language (variety). It should be noted that participation bodies are dynamic and

best practices could change after every new election. Language policies that current Councilors are satisfied with now, new Councilors could be completely dissatisfied with next year.

Furthermore, participants' satisfaction differs per university. Generally, participants of English (unless..) speaking Councils were most satisfied with the language policy, although not all groups were equal. Universities aim to create an inclusive environment, but by including internationals and implementing an English language policy, others can feel excluded. The number of internationals in each Council is still small (or non-existent), and many Councils do not facilitate their needs enough. Moreover, the results indicated that co-Councilors' attitudes towards language diversity contribute to participants' satisfaction with the language policy.

Generally, Councilors participate frequently by submitting memorandums or discussion topics, and they are rather satisfied with their participation as well. The results indicated that their satisfaction with the language policy contributes to this. Furthermore, the results indicated no statistical relations between Councilors' (satisfaction with) participation and the availability of multilingual facilities. However, some participants mentioned that they experienced frustration due to English translations becoming available later than the Dutch texts, or the incompetence or non-presence of an interpreter. Moreover, the results demonstrated that not all participants are confident about their English language skills. This suggests that both Dutch and English language training could help improve participants' receptive language knowledge. However, learning a language does not happen overnight, which is why the availability of an interpreter or translator is essential. In conclusion, overall, Councilors think it is important to be inclusive and they are willing to adjust to a language policy that incorporates all members of the Council, despite their multilingual skills.

## **Recommendations**

### *Status and prestige planning*

Despite the results, this study does not recommend the use of a specific language as future Councilors may feel differently about the language policy than current Councilors. Rather, it is recommended for universities to be clear about the policy that they choose before the elections, or to be clear about the possibilities in case internationals are elected. Transparency and clarity contribute to the satisfaction and therefore status of the language policy.

### *Corpus planning*

When contemplating implementing a multilingual language policy within the Council, universities should ensure that inclusion does not apply to internationals only. Inclusivity for one could lead to exclusivity for another, which emphasises the importance of facilitating both groups and making them feel equal. Multiple strategies could contribute to this, like introducing a list with frequently used institutional keywords in Dutch and English. Additionally, it is recommended to provide translations for documents that are discussed in the Council, and for them to be made available simultaneously to the original rather than a translated follow-up. Lastly, the availability of (professional) interpreters or translators during official meetings could be considered.

### *Acquisition planning*

Finally, it is recommended that universities consider providing both Dutch and non-Dutch Councilors with (receptive) language training and multilingual meeting training. Not only could this contribute to Councilors' confidence in their language skills, but it also allows for universities to explore the possibilities of implementing LaRa as a language policy.

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