

Report LUS Breakfast Club 3: Englishization of education

February 23rd 2018, 09:00-10:00 in the Kamerlingh Onnes Building

Present:

- Hester Bijl (Vice Rector Magnificus)
- Marcel Vooijs
- LUS members: Tobias Sandoval Garcia (FGGA), Naomi Nota (FGW), Iris van der Hoeven (LUMC), Julia Sinnige (FSW), Anne van Zuijlen (FdR), Julius Pilzecker (FdA), Yuri Bonanno (FWN)
- Rint Sybesma: professor of Chinese linguistics

There was a total of approximately 24 student-attendants from all 7 faculties.

Introduction

The Breakfast Club started with a presentation from Rint Sybesma, professor of Chinese Linguistics at Leiden University and writer of the article: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/opinie-schaf-het-nederlands-gewoon-af~a4507956/>.

Rint Sybesma debated that Englishization of education is not in the best interest of:

1. The student.
2. The Dutch society. The social gap between high-educated people and lower-educated people will become bigger because of the Englishization.
3. The Dutch language. Because universities will focus more on English, middle schools and high schools will follow with this course of action. The result will be that the Dutch language will become less and less important and the Dutch language skills of students will be negatively influenced.

Nevertheless, there are some reasons to make the change from Dutch to English education, namely:

1. Research is an international field, where English is the main language.
2. The best foreign students can be attracted to The Netherlands if Englishization takes place.
3. Dutch students who are good at academic English are able to work internationally and employers are more interested in them.
4. The means of the universities in The Netherlands depend on the amount of students that study at universities. Having more students studying at a university means more income for this university. Through English education, more international students can be attracted and therefore this generates more money for the universities that offer education in English.

Rint Sybesma proposes to keep the bachelor programme in Dutch and the master programme possibly in English. Hester Bijl comments that the policy of Leiden University is to keep most of the bachelor in Dutch and the master programme in English, but only if this adds a certain value.

Discussion

1. The result of Englishization can be that Dutch language skills will deteriorate. Therefore, it seems better to keep Dutch as the main language at Leiden University.
2. English should not be mandatory; for example if students want to make an exam in Dutch, because they feel they can express themselves better, this should be made possible.
3. The use of English in the bachelor or master programme is not necessary for all studies at Leiden University, for example clinical psychology, law and political sciences. For some studies, it does seem beneficial to teach in English, for example international studies. This distinction should be made.
4. Communicating in Dutch is easier and more comprehensible (for most people) than communicating in English. Having English as the main language may worsen the communication between students and teachers. Consequently, the efficiency and quality of the study programme may decrease.
5. There might be a gap between Dutch people who are high-educated and Dutch people who are not. This gap may become bigger when English becomes the main language at universities. At the moment, this does not seem like an urgent issue, but perhaps this is because we are in a 'bubble' of high-educated people.
6. For some studies, such as political sciences, the English version seems more important to Leiden University than the Dutch 'original' version. There is less focus on Dutch (local) politics.
If English is used as the main language in a course, it is of utmost importance that the teachers are very skilled in academic English.

Remarks

1. Some students do not see the issue of deterioration of Dutch language skills.
2. Some international students give the remark that they chose for Dutch education, because it is cheaper, compared to other countries. There should be more research after the reasons why international students come to The Netherlands. Moreover, other international students indicate that they came to The Netherlands because of the high standards of the education.
3. International students still perceive a big gap between Dutch and internationals, in terms of bonding between these groups.

Solutions

1. Some of the students agreed with Rint Sybesma; during the bachelor programme the focus should be on Dutch as the main language. During the master programme, this can shift to the English language.
2. There should be more support and guidance for students who struggle with the academic English. The transition from Dutch in the bachelor programme to English in the master programme can be quite sudden and some students struggle with this issue.
3. Teachers should be able to fill out an evaluation form on their own English language skills and how they would like help if they need it. There should be more guidance for teachers who struggle with

the English language as well, it is very important that they are comfortable and skilled in writing and expressing themselves in English.

4. Some students propose that there should always be an option to do exams or papers in Dutch.
5. It is very important to indicate for the different studies if using English is necessary and in the interest of the student.