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Multilingual language use and ideology of One Language at a Time: Insights into language issues in higher education

Today, discussions on language matters in higher education tend to be intense in political and academic circles, and raise many questions among the general public. In this paper I intend to contribute to the debate by elaborating on the results of my PhD thesis. These suggest that several languages are used in the university setting, often simultaneously, however, both students as well as language policy makers have a tendency to depict languages as separate and bordered entities: one sociolinguistic function can be filled by one language at a time (this has been discussed by Li Wei (2011) as the ideology of One Language at a Time). More specifically, the paper aims to cast light on whether and why language ideologies differ from language practices, and seeks to answer the question whether the success of top-down language policy depends on taking actual language practices into account. The data for the paper are collected from the macro-level policy documents authored by the Estonian state, the mezzo-level documents produced by the University of Tartu (UT), and through semi-structured interviews with students of the UT.