



**ECSPM**

European Civil Society Platform  
for Multilingualism

# Introduction to the theme of the symposium **MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE**

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# STATING THE PROBLEM I

- We know that today the need for international communication is more urgent than ever before. In response to this urgency, there are several trends for policy and education favouring:
  - 1) forms of multilingualism that can somehow be matched with a certain linguistic equity and justice
  - 2) favouring the use of a global lingua franca, such as English, dissociated from its configuration as a 'native' language, as ELF proponents maintain that it can be
  - 3) promoting and practicing parallel language use and translanguaging (pedagogies)
  - 4) advocating plurilingualism (and plurilingual pedagogies)
- Given that there is no single answer to a complicated problem, which involves such diverse contexts and situations, the problem is how to combine ideas, practices, research findings and come up with workable context specific solutions.

## STATING THE PROBLEM 2

- Despite the ‘candidacy’ of other languages, English is today, and probably in the foreseeable future, the global (and globalising) language.
- British colonial expansion and the 20th c. expansion of the USA as a world super-power cemented the dominance of English in the global market, technology, science (including publishing), and in the creative industry.
- Despite its ‘bad colonial reputation’, the hegemony of English is reproduced through education, the media, the law and other institutions which function as ideological state apparatuses and is used to maintain order in society and reproduce capitalist relations of production.
- English, which is first in the Language Power Ranking Index, is the official language of 10 of the most competitive economies and in the remaining ones there are high shares of English speakers.
- Countries with speakers who have a low English proficiency have fewer members of the global elite, revealing why the spread of English has been examined as a basic variable in the nexus of *globalization*, *internationalisation* and *neoliberalism*.

## STATING THE PROBLEM 3

- Neoliberalism, which venerates 'choice', 'competition' and the 'free market', is implicated in the internationalisation, coupled with the marketisation and/or commercialisation of (higher) education, and in some contexts in its privatisation.
- A basic agent of internationalisation is the adoption of English for teaching and learning, for research, academic publishing, and different forms of professional networking.
- Policy makers assign to English a major role in economic development, modernization, global communication and mobility.
- However, a language like English can be used by social subjects as a medium of power, deploying their accumulated linguistic resources and (to paraphrase Bourdieu 1992) implicitly adapting their words to the demands of the social field or the market that is their audience.
- English is the first 'foreign' language in schools across Europe, and CLIL which is promoted through European recommendations, often means English Medium Instruction (EMI) in secondary schools and particularly in universities. It is within this framework that we have been witnessing the Englishisation of H.E. In non-anglophone countries.

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# THE ENGLISHISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- The Englishisation of H.E. is articulated in the form of policies for *internationalisation* motivated by:
  - economic or symbolic profit (by international student recruitment)
  - the ambition for the marketisation of particular forms of knowledge
  - aspirations for higher scores in university ranking
  - international cooperation
  - recruitment of 'more competent' staff and/or students
- Such policies and the consequent practices have been discussed critically by many scholars:
  - expounding on its numerous socio-cultural and political consequences
  - explaining what internationalisation processes could mean for HEIs
- However, the trend continues to escalate Europe (and in other continents of course).

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# APPROACHES TO ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION (EMI)

- Internalisation (or Englishization) is realised in H.E. through the introduction of EMI, commonly operationalised by any or a combination of the following:
  - Using exclusively English in immersion classes, with teaching being done monolingually
  - Offering only a few specialization courses in English (e.g., medicine, engineering, science)
  - Adopting dual/parallel approaches to teaching/learning (combined use of English and home language)
  - Utilizing translanguaging and cross linguistic mediation to scaffold learning

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## PROBLEMS REPORTED IN EMI PROGRAMMES

- When students are offered support to develop their general proficiency in English or their ESP, it is usually not as part of their academic programme
- Less common is the language support to university staff
- Studies carried out in EMI programmes report:
  - EAP instructors lacking in subject knowledge and professorial staff with inadequate language proficiency to teach academic courses in English
  - No collaboration between instructors providing linguistic and academic support in the language
  - Both students and faculty having insufficient English proficiency, despite some support structures
  - Students and instructors complaining about the shallowness of content taught in English
  - The inaccurate results of monolingual exams such as IELTS, TOEFL and TOEIC (as placement and proficiency tests in EMI programmes) because they are based on 'native' English norms.

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## ISSUES RAISED IN CONNECTION WITH EMI

- EMI can be additive, but is often subtractive, as it becomes responsible for domain loss, especially in particular disciplines.
- Though there is fear of “loss of cultural identity” particularly in the Arab world, it is doubtful that one can lose one’s identity by adopting English speaking practices; however, the traces of intellectual colonisation are often strong.
- Teaching through or using ELF in educational and other social contexts is not a ‘remedy’ to various problems but a reality. That is, NNS of English use the language (not dissociated from its cultural context as that is not in fact possible) in a *hybridised* manner.
- The tolerance of hybridised language use, the especially in academic contexts, in class, exams, in academic papers, etc. is underexplored.

## H.E. IN EUROPE TODAY

- All that HEIs in each Member State and across Europe have in common is their shared mission to provide post-secondary education.
- Other than that, they vary enormously as regards their institutional visions, size and structure, their economic set-up (especially if they are private, fee-paying or state institutions), in their socio-political status, their disciplinary anchoring, in the quality of education they offer. which was one of the motivating factors behind the Bologna process which intended to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications.
- The new EU initiative regarding the development of a European Education Area (EEA) – different in many ways from the Bologna process that many of us criticised – aspires not for homogeneity but for conjoint pursuit of quality of education and training, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, and the professional development of teachers and trainers.

## NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR H.E. IN EUROPE

- Concrete actions of the EEA are the European Universities Initiative, the European approach for micro-credentials, the issuing of a European Student Card and European passport, the possibility of a European degree and a European statute for European University Alliances and other university coalitions (such as our CURUM)
- All these actions and initiatives certainly promise a new future for European H.E.
- In parallel to the “internationalisation” process which is still snowballing, the *Europeanisation* of HE is being born in the EU, and we fully support it, as is obvious with this symposium which brings together experts to discuss features a panel with representatives from different European University Alliances.
- As a matter of fact, though the use of English is unavoidable in the Europeanisation process of HE, which is of course far from homogeneous despite use of an overriding term, the topic of this panel is multilingualism and how the different European Universities Alliances are addressing this issue.

## MULTILINGUALISM IN EUROPEAN H.E.

- Europeanisation is likely to help the EMI trend continue, and institutions need to work collaboratively for research-based policy recommendations that will help HEIs to operationalise it as effectively as possible, **but:**
  - NOT at the cost of the home languages
  - NOT at the cost of students learning other languages, which are at the heart of European thought as it developed through the centuries
  - NOT at the cost of social justice and equity, of the social rights of users (with limited resources in English)
  - NOT at the cost of people communicating with restricted power of expression
  - NOT at the expense of science of academic and disciplined discourse.
- How are these sometimes conflicting goals to be achieved?

## ADDRESSING ISSUES INVOLVED: Examples

- Recognise that in this case the reference is to English in academic settings by people for whom English is neither a mother tongue nor a language which they experience in their daily exchanges.
- Understand that language is a form of capital and that access to 'legitimate' language – in this case the language of an academic discipline – is not equal to linguistic competence.
- Access to the discourses and discursive practices of different disciplines is differentially accessible, as it is related to social, cultural and linguistic experiences. Relevant background may offer access to the discursive practices more easily by some and that should be born in mind by those using or teaching in that language
- Appreciate or discover what it means to articulate 'multilingual' disciplinary discourse.

## ADDRESSING ISSUES INVOLVED: More examples

- Determine what type of academic proficiency is required and other languages for different purposes and in different settings
- Provide support structures to help students' academic discursive practices which may be articulated in hybridized forms (on the word and sentence level, on the level of text, genre and discourse)
- Professional development seminars for instructors dealing with subject and language courses in HEIs – addressing their monolingual mindsets and their tendency to devalue the heterogeneity of language practices
- Helping students become aware of their dominant/non-dominant language constellations, their repertoires and their literacy practices.

## PLURILINGUAL

- What seems to be missing in practically all academic settings and different types of programmes are plurilingual pedagogies and plurilingual communication practices.
- Traditional pedagogies and conventional curricula still dominate all levels of education in most European countries, and while resource-based views of communication may be starting to find ground in primary and secondary education, HE is all about developing the ability to articulate discourse of disciplinary conventions. But, who sets the conventions? Can these be altered? Who decides?
- To this end, the linguistic habitus of the student will have substantial impact on his/her capacity to make sense of the discursive practices of the course and hence their subsequent capacity to gain access to legitimate disciplinary knowledge along with the power and status associated with that knowledge.

## In conclusion

- The symposium addresses all these issues and the ECSPM-CURUM hopes to embark, in collaboration with other organisations and alliances, on a research-based policy project, based on a new concept of language in academic practices and an integrated approach of language and knowledge/science, and discourse production.



Best wishes to all speakers, discussants and participants in this symposium. I hope we learn from each other and enjoy the time we spend together these two days!