

# LANGUAGE(S) AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

## 2022 SYMPOSIUM INTRODUCTION

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## What is the symposium all about?

- A follow-up of last year's symposium on Multilingualism in Higher Education, this year's event is also concerned with HE in Europe, where, despite the different traditions and conditions of the educational systems, the language of pedagogy and participation remains by and large monolingual, facilitated by explicit and implicit language policies. What is more, scholarship, epistemology and academic publishing follow a monolingual discursive paradigm.

# Monolingualism in HE

- Monolingualism in universities and technological institutions, even when it involves both the official state language and English (which is commonly used in a monolingual fashion) contravenes contemporary multilingual societies and the multilingual turn in education on a global scale. Thus, it raises a series of issues that eminent speakers and discussants from Europe, Australia, Asia and the Americas will problematise as they turn attention during this year's symposium to the relationship between language(s), mono-/multilingualism and the construction of disciplinary knowledge, as well as disciplinary discourses in linguistics that shape ideologies towards language/discourse hybridity or purism and contribute to sustaining or changing one's understanding of how strict the boundaries between languages, language varieties and other semiotic modes are.
- While several contributors will position themselves in favour of using multi-/plurilingual and pluri-/multisemiotic approaches in disciplinary literacy instruction and pedagogy, in communication, research, and scientific production, there will also be argumentation in favour of helping non anglophone scholars forced to produce in a globalised academia that privileges English to develop the necessary literacy to publish internationally and bring their knowledge into global scholarship. Questions will also be raised regarding language and the construction of academic knowledge, English and the colonisation of knowledge.

# The Englishisation of HE

- The Englishisation of academic studies was discussed in our previous symposium but it will continue to be a subject of concern in this event because it is a pressing issue on account of an increasing number of universities and technological institutions aiming at internationalisation so that they can be competitive players in the global market, access prominent international scholars, profit from fee-paying students, receive high world rankings for quality assurance, and so on.
- The issues above are related to the questions that participants will seek answers to – issues having to do with ‘multilingual speakers’ in monolingual academic spaces (this often means speakers of languages other than English in anglophone institutions or EMI programmes, with the effects of mono-/multilingual disciplinary knowledge on whom and for what purposes, and the construction of scientific knowledge multilingually).

# Constraints on communication

- Political
- Cognitive
- Social
- Cultural
- Contextual

## Using our linguistic repertoire in linguistically heterogeneous contexts

- Though we may express ourselves multimodally, how many of our linguistic resources are we likely to use when, for example, we are giving a talk at an academic event such as this one, which requires us to express our position on issues at hand with clarity, disciplinary/genre appropriacy and communicative force?
- How prepared are we to try to understand (rather than dismiss, as we often do what is being said) when our colleagues are trying to use their full linguistic gear in an academic event such as this, which imposes linguistic, discursive, disciplinary and behavioural constraints?

## Preparedness and capability to access our linguistic repertoire

- The use of our entire repertoire to convey ideas, information, feelings, etc. to others intra- and especially cross-linguistically, is not a sine qua non, even in situations that warrant such an undertaking by the speaker/writer.
- Nor is it a sine qua non that interactants will resort to their linguistic repertoire to construe meanings which will help them comprehend hybrid speech and discursive practices.
- It is not at all certain that they will readily 'tolerate' and consent to verbal exchange that involves heterogeneous language sources, especially if one or more of these language resources are rather unfamiliar to the recipient or they do not constitute political capital.

## Being involved in multilingual and hybrid communicative practices

- While in some multilingual environments – where it is necessary to carry out a work-related transaction, to access or provide information, to create a positive atmosphere during interaction or to take part in an educational process – plurilingual and therefore hybrid practices are condoned, translanguaging practices are encouraged and cross-linguistic mediation is merited. However, in other multilingual environments it is not.

## Some of the issues being considered in this symposium

- How realistic and beneficial is it to launch (explicit and implicit) language policies in academic institutions, leading to bilingual/multilingual governance, teaching and learning, research and communication?
- For whom is multilingualism and plurilingualism – as two distinct notions – in academia beneficial and why?
- What sort of policies are required for bi/multilingual practices to take effect in HEIs?
- Which theories of language ought to shape academic identities, communicative and pedagogic practices
  - those of autonomous-structural linguistics
  - those that view language as a social semiotic
  - those which consider language as a process of languaging, blurring the lines between verbal and nonverbal modes of perception and production, between knowledge and practice?

## Questions related to the issues considered

- I. How realistic and beneficial is it to launch (explicit and implicit) language policies in academic institutions, leading to bilingual/multilingual governance, teaching and learning, research and communication?

## Questions related to the issues considered

1. How are universities and higher technological institutions to cope with the complexity of new linguistic realities of global academia, which is recursively reinforcing a dominant rubric of “legitimate” disciplinary knowledge?
2. As scholarship and academia are increasingly “internationalised” and all HEIs are becoming highly diverse educational communities, while monolingual ideologies are maintained through monolingual norms as invariant standards, what is the cost of the increasing Englishisation in non-Anglophone settings – especially for the exclusion/inclusion of particular forms of disciplinary and non-disciplinary knowledge, as well as for the enactment of the imagination?
3. And what about the cost and/or profit of plurilingualism and multilingualism?
4. Given the increasing marketization of universities and higher technological institutions in neoliberal contexts, demanding continuously increased performance (measurable in ultimately economic terms, imposing a new auditable disciplining and quickening pace of learning, thinking and working) where do languages fit in, in our effort to reclaim what Troiani and Dutson (2021) call the “edufactory” as a space of learning/thinking/researching?

## Questions related to the issues considered

5. Finally, a double question that arises when we consider that language and literacy are embedded in academic subjects involving specialized knowledge and we acknowledge that:
  - Content, language, and other multimodal resources are inseparable aspects of the academic subject itself, of its genre, of the teaching and learning in the discipline to which it belongs, of researching and even developing a line of enquiry in this subject area
  - An academic subject constitutes disciplinary discourse with specific ways of reading/writing, speaking/doing and thinking, which differs from daily discursive practices, and requires explicit knowledge of the genre. It requires the development of academic literacy, even in students' home language or languages
  - These specific conventions within disciplinary practices are not the same across languages, cultures, and educational systems.

## The double question

- Aware of all the above
  - how do we cope with the challenges of linguistic and discursive hybridity in scholarship and/or
  - how do we support students when they need to both develop general purpose and academic literacy in languages in which they have not developed great proficiency prior to their HE studies

## Two last points

- When we consider introducing multilingual and plurilingual practices in HE, we ought to keep in mind that
  - content, language, and other multimodal resources are inseparable aspects of the academic subject itself, of its genre, of the teaching and learning in this subject area or discipline of researching and even in developing a line of enquiry in this subject area
  - academic subjects involve disciplinary discourses which warrant specific ways of reading, writing, speaking, doing, and thinking, which differ from daily perspectives on the world
  - conventions within disciplinary practices are not the same across languages, cultures, and educational systems
- Therefore, we might perhaps have in mind that attention to language (metalanguage) is necessary to support students' development of content and expansion of semiotic resources and that a crucial pedagogic task is to acknowledge and build upon students' knowledges and resources, attempting to empower and engage them.

- With the presentations and the discussions in this and last year's symposium, we are embarking in collaboration with our members, partners and other organisations and alliances, on a research-based policy project, based on new concepts of language(s) in academic practices and on an integrated approach of language, of knowledge/science, and of discourse production.
- We invite you to join us.