Multilingual teaching practices at the University of Geneva

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Language(s) and the construction of knowledge in European HE
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Presenting the study bilingual/plurilingual discourses and practices in the socio-institutional and educational fields at the University of Geneva: The emerging and hidden sides of the iceberg (Pluri-U Project)

Language policy at the University of Geneva: What place for multilingualism?

Teaching programmes and languages of instruction in numbers

Data analysis: interviews with academic advisors

Concluding remarks and next stages of the study
Theoretical framework

• The internationalisation of higher education (Cosnefroy et al. 2020) has led universities to reflect on the challenges and benefits of explicit language policy (Gazzola 2010), particularly in teaching and research (Forster Vosicki 2015; Grin 2018; Gajo, Steffen & Yanaprasart 2021).

• Making these policies explicit is vital in the current context of internationalisation, which changes the game in terms of the target audience, recruitment of collaborators, and curricula offered (Liddicoat 2016: 231).

• In most cases, English is the lever of this internationalisation, not only as of the "unique" language of teaching and research (Hamel 2013) but also as the language of communication and exchange between students, academic and administrative staff, etc.

• Swiss universities responded pragmatically, using the strategy of expanding the range of courses where English coexists with local languages (Studer & Siddiqa 2021).
Pluri-U projet

• **Coordinators:** Prof. Laurent Gajo, Dr. Roberto Paternostro

• **Researchers:** Dr. Ivana Vuksanović, Dr. Patchareerat Yanaprasart

• **Goal:** identifying, describing, and analysing bi-/plurilingual discourses and practices at work in the socio-institutional and educational fields at the University of Geneva.

• **Research questions:**
  • What are the explicit forms of bi-/plurilingual education? Under what programmes are they delivered? In which languages are they provided and under what conditions?
  • Are there other forms of bi-/plurilingual education, and how are they presented?
  • What about bi-/plurilingualism from the point of view of global strategies and language policies? How does it manifest itself in the exchanges between the different actors and bodies within the University (Rectorate, teachers, administrative and technical staff, students)?
  • What is the link between bi-/plurilingualism and the internationalisation process? Where do exchange students come from, and what languages do they speak? Why do they choose the University of Geneva? What are their expectations of learning French?

• **Methodology:**
  • Analysis of official documents: university website, study plans, etc.;
  • Interviews with academic advisors;
  • Questionnaires submitted to the students and teachers.
Multilingualism at the University of Geneva

Language policy at the University of Geneva: 18 measures (2012)

- University of Geneva “takes the position that students need to master French in order to take the courses offered at the university. This mastery of French is also required for instructors hired by the university. Open to the world and conscious of the benefits of multilingualism for enhancing its excellence, the University also encourages the learning and use of other languages employed in the academic and scientific community”. (p. 1)
- “Encouraging, long-term, among the student body, mastery of the languages used in their respective fields”. (p. 1)
- [...] “promoting the confrontation of ideas in multiple languages, depending on the fields concerned, and avoiding the concentration of scientific expertise in countries with dominant languages”. (p. 1)
- “University of Geneva must affirm, with the exception of language study programs, French as the language of instruction for Bachelor’s students, and ensure the possibility of studies in French for at least one Master’s program consecutive to each Bachelor's program”. (p. 3-4)
- “Bilingual programs (offering different languages of instruction within a plan of study) are encouraged. A program is considered “bilingual” if at least a third of its courses are taught in a language other than the one used for the other courses. As an exception, and when justified, elective and even required courses”. (p. 4)
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<th>Bachelors</th>
<th>Masters</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>25 programmes</strong></td>
<td>Two faculties not being included: Humanities (29 branches) and Translation and Interpretation (1 BA in multilingual communication)</td>
<td>Two faculties not being included: Humanities (28 branches) and Translation and Interpretation (3 programmes)</td>
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<td>24 in French (of which 20 demand knowledge of English and 2 require knowledge of German)</td>
<td>28 in French (of which only 4 do not mention any need for knowledge of English)</td>
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<td><strong>1 Bilingual – French and English</strong></td>
<td><strong>13 in French and English or English and French (10-3)</strong></td>
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<td>1 Bilingual – German and French</td>
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Interviews with academic advisors
Bachelor courses taught in English

• Although French is the only official language in Bachelor programmes, some courses are in English.

BEA effective in third year you have already some courses that are in English but it is not officially integrated in the study plan because we had this idea that normally we were not supposed to do it.

IVU et on said/ . and that’s the general rule of the University of Geneva/ . that all the bachelor are supposed to be in French/ . it’s the case here for the bachelor=

CAS =yes

IVU but is there a course in English after all/

MOD then very very very little and it depends on us not in bachelor one/ . first year of bachelor euh our students follow the courses that are given to the students in medicine/ . medical medicine human medical dentistry . and CERTAINLY some of his teachers master very badly the French [...] and sometimes they prefer to teach in English

BA in Biology

BA in Biomedical science
English in Master programmes with French and English as languages of instruction (1)

• English gradually became the dominant language of instruction. Non-French speakers can follow the entire MA programme in English, French courses being optional.

et petit à petit, très lentement j’ai essayé d’inciter tous nos enseignants à donner un titre et le descriptif de leurs cours en anglais pour essayer de faire passer nos masters en anglais\ […]

[...] maintenant un cours de master nous souhaitons qu’il soit donné en anglais/ mais pas nécessairement. on peut pas OBLIGER un enseignant de donner en anglais

MA in Chemistry and Biochemistry

[...] je pense que quand le master a été créé/ .. je pense qu’il a été effectivement pensé xxx j’étais pas là donc je peux pas vous dire à 100% mais je pense que c’est ça . il a été créé en: … disons peut-être qu’ils l’ont pensé bilingue à la base puisque c’était interfacultaire et qu’ils savaient qu’il y aurait des cours en français donnés par la Faculté de psycho/ .. euh du coup ils ont fait la distinction je pense justement bien français anglais . mais l’évolution a fait que: on ait quand même vraiment vraiment basculé sur le côté anglais

MA in Neuroscience
English in Master programmes with French and English as languages of instruction (2)

- English is the minority language of instruction, even though the number of courses in English is increasing.
Official bilingual programmes

• Only two official bilingual programmes: French-German Master in Law and French-English Bachelor in Economy and Management.

• What is the nature of their bilingualism?

• Bilingual Master in Law: two faculties and two study plans, no language policy.

• Bilingual Bachelor in Economy and Management: a well-defined language policy, parallel courses in French and English in the 1st year; however, in the 2nd and 3rd year, the number of subjects taught in English increases.

IVU est-ce que le bachelor a TOUJOURS été promu comme un programme bilingue
KEG oui [...] 
IVU oui .. et pourquoi
CEV bah pour justement essayer de proposer quelque chose à l’accord avec le marché/ . l’anglais est très utile dans le monde de travail après/ . et pour effectivement proposer . avoir une carte à jouer auprès des étudiants qu’on veut attirer . pour se DISTINGUER d’autres programmes en Suisse/ . par exemple . et pour OUTILLER nos étudiants avec l’anglais qui leur sera très utile après\
Non-official bilingual programmes

- In reality, some programmes are bilingual, although they are not promoted as such.
Internationalisation process and languages of instruction

- English goes hand in hand with the internationalisation process in education.

C’est un programme international on accueille BEAUCOUP d’étudiants anglophones donc franchement .. tant qu’on peut on part toujours sur l’anglais’. très honnêtement’

IVU: et pourquoi pas juste de continuer d’avoir une continuité et: essayer avec une promotion bilingue au niveau master . pourquoi ce basculement vers l’anglais uniquement . au niveau [master

CEV: [parce que la population concernée est très différente . au bachelor on a BEAUCOUP de gens locaux/ .. genevois ou français/ . après on a aussi des étrangers mais en moindre proportion . au master on vise un public international/ .. on a vraiment une proportion internationale que maintenant je ne sais pas de tête je devrais savoir . mais du coup ça permet pas de: si on propose des cours en français on PERD toute une série d’étudiants qui ne: . pour qui le français n’est pas accessible

MA in Neuroscience

IVU: comment pouvais-je faire venir des gens qui sont pas francophones pour étudier un master en français . ça c’était littéralement mort/ . donc il fallait absolument qu’on passe à l’anglais’

MA in Economy and Management

MA in Chemistry and Biochemistry
In some BA programmes, where the official language of instruction is French, labelling a curriculum as bilingual paves the way for the introduction of English.
Discussion

• Although French is the only official language in Bachelor programmes, some courses are in English, mainly because of non-French speaking teachers.

• In MA programmes, especially in the Sciences, English is gradually becoming the dominant language of instruction due to internationalisation (= English as lingua franca).

• In some other disciplines, MA programmes officially taught in French allow courses in English because many teachers are English speakers (= seek for excellence in recruitment).

• Official bilingual BA programmes are not always presented or promoted as such, and bilingualism is often an implicit means of introducing English. So what is the place of French then?

• The “bilingual programme” label seems valuable and attractive, but there is a lack of actual language policies behind it.
Concluding remarks and the future of the project

• This exploratory study needs to be extended, e.g., by comparing the language policy of the University of Geneva with other Swiss universities.

• There is a need for a more explicit language policy regarding multilingualism.

• It is necessary to create guidelines for the development of multilingual programmes.

• Training programmes for teachers and scholars who work on developing multilingual education and research practices would be beneficial.
References


