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# Multilingualism in Research and Assessment in HE

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## Line of reasoning: The problem

- 1) Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in today's globalised, linguistically and culturally superdiverse world are *monolingual* topoi – whether instruction and research is carried out in the 'local' language or what is considered today's 'lingua franca'.
- 2) Neoliberal reforms have marketised HE operating within a framework that emphasises competition for status and resources in research and scholarship between:
  - a) institutions for the recruitment of 'international' students, leading scholars and funded research
  - b) students seeking to gain the most sought-after places in universities
  - c) markets for corporate-financed consultancy work
  - d) institutional 'brands' for ranking and prestige.
- 3) The benefits-competition occurs in English-speaking countries, especially in the USA and the UK, and increasingly in non-English speaking countries that have been opting for English Medium Instruction (EMI).

## Line of reasoning: Consequences

- 1) The language of instruction is the language through which scientific knowledge is constructed and reproduced in research and in the diffusion of research outcomes in publications.
- 2) Teaching/learning, researching and publishing in English
  - a) results in the colonisation of scientific knowledge
  - b) often leads to biased assessment of issues and therefore biased outcomes
  - c) excludes scholars, not on the basis of scientific merit, but on the basis of their EAL proficiency
- 3) Teaching, learning and researching in the local language has advantages but it does not develop the proficiency required to work in the international academic arena.

## Line of reasoning: Proposing

Challenging *monolingualism* in the academe by:

- a) moving beyond EMI or LMI towards the direction of pluri-languagising teaching, learning and assessment
- b) providing incentives to sustain European multilingualism in academia, with new ranking indicators that link funding to universities and research organisations to indicators promoting plurilinguaging
- c) supporting the development of language technology tools, digital resources and language-centric AI to support the European languages which are low-resourced and lag far behind English in terms of digital presence – especially with regard to scientific discourse.

## Is English a 'lingua franca' in scientific research and publishing?

- Lingua francas developed from ancient times for commercial, cultural, religious, diplomatic convenience, and for exchanging information between scientists and other scholars who spoke different languages.
- English is not a language used as a means of exchange of information, just for convenience. It is the language of cultural imperialism, related to economic and political aspects of dominance.
- It secures its role through *hegemonic processes* (hegemony understood in a Gramscian sense, suggestive of the formation and organisation of consent), leading to the coloniality of knowledge, the “Englishisation” of scientific thought.

# The consent to English for the sake of internationalisation & Europeanisation

- The hegemony of English occurs through politics of consent, as HEIs adopt policies of *internationalisation*; a condition tightly linked to universities increasingly offering monolingual programmes in English and expecting proficiency in English as an academic language (EAL).
- In 2013, an EC mandate called for the development of more comprehensive *internationalisation strategies* and proceeded to highlight it in the Europe 2020 Growth Strategy with its flagship initiatives, pointing to the importance of ‘smart’, ‘sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’ higher education.
- Internationalisation strategies and relevant policies have been advocated since the Bologna Process, whose overreaching aim has been to create a European Higher Education Area based on international co-operation and academic exchange to facilitate human resource mobilisation, knowledge transference, the sharing of ideas, pedagogies, material resources, research outcomes, and input-based curricula that prioritise knowledge-content (rather than learner output) in modularised curricula that secure ECTS credits and micro-credentials.

## HEIs' consent to internationalisation and homogenisation

- As HEIs become commodified and experience decreased state funding, they regard *internationalisation* as a medium for:
  - attracting high-profile staff and fee-paying students from the international academic terrain
  - developing links with institutions in other countries and hence increase activities across teaching and research
  - securing funding and raising the international ranking of their institutions.
- Internationalisation provides a sound basis for *monolingual* English Medium Instruction (EMI) in an increasing number of programmes in “non-English speaking” universities – programmes implicating the integration of the international dimension to curricula and curricula artifacts.
- In these cases, scientific knowledge is linguistically constructed monolingually in English, which is then reproduced in research and publishing of research outcomes. Alternatively, scientific knowledge is constructed monolingually in the ‘local’ language.
- There is a serious disadvantage for those educated in one language and being obliged to produce and publish in another.

## Scholars' consent to researching and publishing in English

- As European recommendations, national and institutional policies for internationalisation entail performance-based research funding systems and call for publication in mainstream journals, emphasising the impact factor, influenced by substantial reliance on mainstream journal-based metrics, scholars are aware of that:
  - they are assessed on the basis of 'which books and journals they publish in', 'what impact factor these journals have' (invariably in English by international publishers, the top percent of them being in the US and the UK)
  - by researching and publishing in English they believe they are more likely to communicate with the international scientific community for networking on transnational projects, to obtain more intellectual feedback and have more opportunities for conference participation and broader international diffusion, more citations, more recognition and prestige among academic peers, as well as better chances for professional promotion.
- There are relatively few incentives for emerging and senior researchers to publish in the local language. These incentives are related to responsibility, ideology and policy concerns such as the decline of local publications, the loss of scientific register and terminology in languages other than English, the increasing marginalisation of local issues.



## Europeanisation as a driver to homogeneity

- The Europeanisation of HE has similar goals, and the European university alliances – a flagship initiative of the European strategy for Education – seem to be collaborating on the basis of EMI, joint research, and diffusion of project planning, implementation and research outcomes, in a *monolingual* manner.
- This is likely to be exacerbated as universities are provided with spurs to develop common long-term structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation on education, research and innovation, and possibly led to joint degrees\* but not provided with approaches favouring non-monolingual paradigms in teaching, learning and assessment, not exposed to plurilingual pedagogies for a plurilingual ethos of communication and scientific knowledge production.

*\*The joint-degree option has just been officially announced (on 24 of March) by the European Commission that adopted a package of ambitious proposals for Europe's HE sector, with the aim of working towards a European degree. The package contains a blueprint for this new and universally recognised qualification, as a result of deeper and wider transnational cooperation.*

# Is English as Europe's academic language the answer?

- There is scarcity of research with classroom, institutional or country data to show whether EMI is valuable or detrimental to content learning and what its other effects are.
- A few studies which have been carried outside of Europe show that:
  - EMI benefits the privileged and discriminates against the disadvantaged in India; a gap that progressively widens (Mohanty 2021)
  - In Hong Kong, where a study investigating international students in an EMI university was carried out, findings pointed to broader issues pertaining to social inclusion/exclusion, linguistic advantage/disadvantage and educational inequality (Sung 2022).
- A few studies carried out in Europe show that in EMI contexts:
  - the merit of professorial staff is often judged by how 'native-like' their English is (Macaro et al. 2018),
  - 'international' and home students experiencing linguistic limitations in comprehension or production of academic content are often excluded from class participation and are finally led to failure (Macaro et al. 2018),
  - students' differential EAL proficiency leads to inequalities of opportunity especially in academic fields of high prestige, such as engineering and medicine (Lueg 2018)
  - students may not be accepted for study in the first place if they have not passed language proficiency tests most of which focus almost entirely on accurate usage of surface features of standard British or American English

## English-only in academia and knowledge production

- Inequality is the pervasive structural characteristic of knowledge production, due to the dominance of English, which is not a 'lingua franca', despite it being promoted as such, given that 75% do *not* speak English at all.
- English-only in academia results in extreme global disparities in terms of the production and circulation of knowledge.
- The Englishisation of academia sets theoretical agendas and methodological standards that play an overly important role in determining legitimate knowledge as well as the means, the mechanisms and rewards of academic knowledge production.
- The production and circulation of scientific discourse is built on this hierarchical system on which academic knowledge production largely depends and it will continue to be reinforced, reproduced and exacerbated globally and locally, within academia, unless it is re-articulated.

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A woman with dark hair is speaking into a microphone. The text "TURN THINGS AROUND" is overlaid in a white, hand-drawn font across the middle of the image. The background is a solid dark purple color.

TURN THINGS AROUND

Can we?

# Multilingualising academia

- Reversing the situation requires incentives, not to denounce the dominant language, but to learn to use it in parallel with the local and other language of importance. This may be possible with new ranking that links funding to universities, research organisations (and researchers' production) to indicators for bi-/multilingualisation in teaching, learning, researching, publishing.
- Changing what has traditionally been a monolingual topos – an environment where only one language at a time is used for under- or post-graduate studies (whether this is the local language, English, or any other language) can involve:
  - Interlingual practices, including translanguaging, cross-linguistic and intralinguistic mediation
  - subject content delivered multimodally and multi-discursively (re)building the discourse and jargon of the discipline, be it in the natural sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities
  - Developing disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) knowledge in more than one language

## Multi-/pluri-linguaging scientific knowledge

- Choosing one or more than one languages for the transmission and production of knowledge in university studies has an important bearing on the type of knowledge emerging scholars acquire and the skills for knowledge management that they develop.
- In producing scientific knowledge not through a single language but through parallel use of languages, and modes of semiosis i.e., as in plurilinguaging, we contend the mental impoverishment resulting from monolingual academic culture and approach to knowledge.

## Plurilingualism vs. multilingualism

- Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism in that the latter refers a) to societies in which several languages and language varieties are spoken; and b) to individuals who have some degree of knowledge of more than one language but use each language one at a time, keeping languages apart from one another, as if pluralising monolingualism.
- Plurilingualism, on the other hand, refers to social and academic agents using their full linguistic gear to make meaning, to facilitate interaction and break linguistic barriers.
- Plurilingualism captures the dynamic, situated and complex relationship between languages within individuals' linguistic and cultural trajectories and a proactive attitude toward linguistic and cultural plurality, with inventions of meaning.

## Plurilinguaging for pluriknowledging in academia

- In today's technology-enhanced, postmodern, globalised world of mobilities and flows, languages can no longer be conceptualised as autonomous, static or bounded entities, nor viewed as the only important semiotic resource.
- A shift of emphasis from languages themselves to how social and academic agents may produce knowledge with numerous different languages, language varieties, genres, modes of semiosis, language tools and resources is required, as they are constantly exposed to diverse or even contradicting views of the world which highly impact their meaning-making in heterogeneous communicative experiences.
- As it is through *linguaging* that particular forms of knowledge are constructed, when meaning-makers indulge in plurilinguaging they are also engaged in pluriknowledging.
- Plurilinguaging and pluriknowledging are acts of embracing researchers' multi-epistemic identities rather than imposing the socio-political boundaries associated with unilinguaging and uniknowledging which prevent multiple perspectives and epistemic subjugation.



## Challenges to a paradigm shift in academia

- The challenge is to make a paradigm shift in HEIs and respect the volatility which is part of the dynamic nature of disciplinary norms for meaning-making and knowledge-construction practices rather than impose homogenisation of knowledge.
- Homogenisation comes in sharp contrast with the multiplicity of communities of practice within academia and takes no account of locality of disciplinary conventions and the impact of this on social and academic agents' diverse voices, their discourse hybridity and meaning multiplicity.
- Plurilingualism in disciplinary discourses, as socially situated practices, may match the diversity and heterogeneity which are increasingly the norm in HE.

## The role of LT (language technology) in academic plurilinguaging

- The role of LT is crucial in alleviating the acute digital inequality that exists between languages spoken in Europe – even of some of the official/national languages of EU Member States (see the open access publication: by Georg Rehm & Andy Way, 2023, *Cognitive Technologies: European Language Equality. A Strategic Agenda for Digital Language Equality*, Springer). <https://european-language-equality.eu/ele-book/>
- Many Natural Language Processing systems, using machine learning approaches, are unintentionally worsening this imbalance due to their reliance on vast quantities of data derived mostly from English-language sources.
- Urgently needed are natural language datasets, such as text/speech corpora in different languages and different domains of use including general academic register language as well as discipline specific terminology.

## Concluding thoughts

- In the current dramatically changing geopolitical climate, it is crucial that we maintain the dialogue about whether and how internationalisation and Europeanisation of HE can contribute to plurilingualism and pluri-knowledging, through inclusive approaches, for both the mobile and the non-mobile majority of the academic community, with curriculum interventions, formal and informal curricular and dialogic experiences across a range of teaching, learning and research activities.
- Beyond us re-thinking issues related to internationalisation, it is crucial for us to rethink the purpose of our universities and to reconsider their social function, their role in the production of knowledge, in practices of collaborative learning and creative thinking from plurilingual and pluri-discursive perspectives.
- Our thinking should include the design of a university ranking system that expedites multi-/plurilingualism and multi-pluridiscursivity. At the moment, privately produced ranking systems – perhaps inadvertently – use incentives to endorse monolingualism in HE.
- The role of LT to support low-resourced languages is critical for their survival.