

## Internationalisation of Higher Education, Multilingualism & Translation

### Internationalisation and HE in turbulent times

Last night I was reading an article in the *University World News* and found interesting a question posed:

If the coming decade is defined by economic, geopolitical and technological disruption, universities are not preparing students for the emerging world. The question is no longer whether higher education must adapt. The question is whether it understands the world it is preparing for.

Our choice to focus on ‘internationalisation’ – a key change agent of HE – at a moment of time when the world order is changing drastically, is not meant to be the springboard for one more discussion on what HEIs stand to gain by internationalising, nor to reiterate the critique of internationalisation as a venture for commercial profit, instrumentalization of research, linguistic and cultural homogenisation and knowledge colonization.

We wanted to examine the role of language, of languages in universities across the world which have internationalized significantly in the last 20 years, transforming from primarily national institutions into global knowledge hubs – a process that evolved from simple student and staff exchanges to a comprehensive approach involving research partnerships, branch campuses, and the so-called "internationalisation at home".

Though forms of internationalisation have historically existed, the recent rapid growth and transformation of internationalisation has been driven by the broader process of globalisation which, however, is currently being challenged, as the world order is moving into a “competitive multipolarity”.

The question we are now asking is how will language issues will figure in this new world order, where several power centers are replacing the one hegemon, and where proxy wars, economic warfare, cyber attacks, geo-economic blocs, and technological rivalry are the components of what has been called a world of “polycrisis”.

It has been more than a decade that numerous language studies scholars have maintained that the support to multilingualism and language learning policies of universities has been an excuse for English-only programmes and the Englishisation of HE around the world.

While the effects of Anglo-homogenised HE across the world have not been fully explored, new pressing questions are on the rise, including the impact of neo-nationalism (tending to replace neo-liberalism, in the US and parts of Europe) on languages and multilingualism; an ethno-nationalism driven by right-wing populism, disenchant-ment with globalism, and concerns over immigration and sovereignty.

Leaders and parties assert national interests over international cooperation. They prioritise cultural identity and national security, concentrate on national sovereignty, border control, and protectionism. It appeals to the masses on account of cultural and economic anxiety, fear of economic loss, and cultural disruption from immigration, resulting to a backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives (DEI) – especially in the US, under Trump’s administration, where diversity itself has been recast as a threat.

The rise of neo-nationalist political agendas in the US and parts of Europe is bound to have several significant effects on the role of language(s) at universities, as such agendas are likely to halt access to student and faculty global mobility, termination of cross-border partnerships and cut short diversity of perspectives, restricting equity-diversity-inclusion (EDI) schemes. Furthermore, it is likely to favour curriculum localisation and the exclusive use of the official/national languages. It is urgent that we, as to consider our own stance in all of this – as ECSPM is a European *civil society*, it is also a *platform* (our political agenda being to promote all languages spoken in Europe), dedicated to protecting and promoting multilingualism in Europe and beyond, making sure that it is treated as an asset and a commitment of the European Union.

Understanding at ECSPM that multilingualism and language policies are not ideologically neutral instruments, just as language is never merely a neutral tool for communication, but a site where power, identity, and social values are contested, produced, and reproduced. To support and advocate our views on multilingualism and language policy, during 2025-2026 we have launched an internship initiative for young multilingualism and language policy researchers at graduate and post-doctoral level.

The initiative constitutes an effort to connect young researchers seeking valuable experience in the areas that ECSPM is active, aiming to offer opportunities for career exploration and practical experience as well as to develop new contextually relevant knowledge and skills, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and field application.

The first person admitted as an intern is a student taking part in an MA degree in “Sociolinguistics: Policy, Management and Education of Multilingualism” at the Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, by the name of Lola Sergeant, who has a background in Law and Languages. During her internship she will carry out a series of short interviews with experts in language policy issues, associated with ECSPM.

### **Back to neo-nationalist movements**

We are already witnessing neo-nationalist governments viewing universities primarily as tools for economic competition and technological sovereignty. But we need to understand that ethnocentrism can also lead to cultural and identity politics on campus by promoting national language policies in teaching and research, encouraging curricula emphasising national history or culture, increasing campus polarisation around issues such as migration, diversity, and identity, with implications for Global Knowledge Production.

At a broader level, neo-nationalism can affect the global knowledge system by fragmenting international research networks; politicising scientific cooperation; shifting the balance between global academic norms and national priorities. In short, neo-nationalism could affect the role of universities — from globally oriented knowledge institutions toward actors expected to serve national identity, sovereignty, and economic competitiveness. This divergence is bound to create tensions between global academic norms (openness, mobility, critical inquiry) and national political priorities.

## **Internationalisation and multilingualism in this time of turmoil**

Despite their reputations as stable institutions, universities are deeply entangled in this new reality that increasingly feels like the age of permanent disruptions and turmoil. And, in times of crises, multilingualism is often underestimated, though it may be a critical in managing chaotic events.

Besides, multilingualism in HE, research and knowledge production is increasingly critical as a countermeasure to the rise of neo-nationalism, which often promotes monolingualism and "academic monoculture" to serve nationalist agendas.

While neo-nationalist movements attempt to restrict academic freedom and favour English-only or a single national language, ECSPM supports plurilingual approaches to education as they foster inclusive knowledge, and resist epistemicide, i.e., the destruction of local knowledge systems, and enhance critical thinking.

Multilingualism allows for the inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives, recognizing and mitigating cultural bias in knowledge production, given that language is not just a medium for knowledge; it is constitutive of knowledge, not just a tool for transmission.

Knowledge produced solely in a single language (be it English or any *one* national language) is limited by that language's context and structural paradigms. Important research findings, methodologies, and insights are lost when research is restricted to monolingual frameworks. Multilingualism ensures that diverse perspectives are not lost... in translation.

Multilingualism has long been a core educational and policy commitment in the de facto and de jure multilingual European Union and European University Alliances funded through the EC have been explicitly tasked with embodying this foundational value. However, as Angouri and Delmas (2025) who investigated how the integration of multilingualism has materialised at the University Alliances level, how multilingualism is framed and implemented in practice, inform us the dominant focus across the university alliances remains on language learning – especially English and other 'big' languages.

Our own experiences with European universities confirms that multilingualism is limited to offering the student body opportunities to study a variety of languages rather than to introduce what Hufeisen (2025) names 'functional multilingualism' or integrate multilingual practices in their pedagogy, research and writing/publishing.

Concerned about multilingualism and the development of plurilingual and pluricultural ethos in the production of knowledge in education in general, and at university in particular, the ECSPM has circulated a Declaration which stresses the need for change in Higher Education, so that multilingualism in teaching and learning, in research and publishing, in governance and communication is legitimated through explicit institutional language policies.

Translated in 28 languages (appearing [here](#)), the ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in HE has been uploaded as an [on-line](#) petition. The petition is addressed to: (a) the Education Department of the Council of Europe, (b) the Higher Education Unit of European Commission, (c) the European University Association (EUA), and (d) the Higher Education Institutions across Europe. The petition is [here](#).

In HE education, in academia in general, conducting and communicating research in multiple languages is necessary for the scientific community to create an impactful research landscape. Opportunities for multilingual research enhance discoverability and reach, while leveraging multilingual resources.

This is why the ECSPM has adopted the Helsinki Multilingualism Initiative and the UNESCO Open Science Recommendation, promoting multilingualism in research as part of the broader goal of Open Science.

The initiatives aim to increase equity and autonomy in research by encouraging scientists to communicate in languages other than in English Digital repository systems.

Raising awareness, across all fields and academic disciplines, about the importance of “multilingualism in the practice of science, in scientific publications and in academic communications” is one of the main objectives of the *Working Group on Multilingualism and language biases in research assessment*, of which ECSPM is a member.

An equally important objective of the workgroup is to provide institutions with guidelines, toolbox and an implementation proposal for recognizing, and rewarding, for providing incentives for research carried out and communicated in different languages, and for addressing language *biases* in metrics, expert-assessment and rankings.

The Multilingualism WG is one of 13 working groups approved by CoARA (the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment – <https://www.coara.org/>) which is a collective of organisations committed to reforming the methods and processes by which research, researchers, and research organisations are evaluated.

Current research assessment methods rely heavily on publication-based metrics such as citation counts, and often fail to recognise the wide array of contributions made by researchers. Over 700 research organisations, funders, assessment authorities, professional societies, and their associations have agreed on a common direction and guiding principles to implement reform in the assessment of research, researchers, and research organisations, outlined in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment which provides an outline for reform and implementation. The ECSPM has signed this agreement.

### **Internationalisation and translation in the age of AI**

International and global dimensions of HE are deeply intertwined with translation – the most obvious connection being the translation of course materials, research resources, and documents of an internationalized curriculum which, logically, must be adapted to reflect diverse student experiences and perspectives. Such tasks require translation of educational practices and assessment methods – with translation helping to bridge the gap between different educational systems and cultures, enabling students and faculty to understand and adapt to diverse learning environments. These and many other tasks involve the challenges of adapting knowledge, ideas, and perspectives across cultures and contexts, of transferring and sharing knowledge and research findings across borders, necessitating the translation of scientific constructs and research methodologies.

In fact, the share knowledge and research findings across borders, which necessitates translation of scientific concepts and research methodologies is one of the basic aims of internationalisation.

But translation, in its broader sense, goes beyond language itself and encompasses the transfer and adaptation of knowledge, ideas, and perspectives across cultures and contexts. It involves translating concepts and ideas from one cultural context to another, which requires sensitivity to cultural nuances and values. But as we are considering scientific translation, to what degree do we resort to the so-called 'functional translation' or to cultural adaptation – the process of adjusting or modifying content, language, or cultural references in a translation to make it more relevant and accessible to the target audience? What about concepts lexicalised in one language have no equivalent in the other (eg. plurilingualism or the Habermasian concept of "Öffentlichkeit" which has been translated into English as Public Sphere and Publicity<sup>1</sup>), or concepts languaged differently (eg. the term policy or Habermas's concept of "Lebenswelt" translated into English as Lifeworld<sup>2</sup>). Does the translator enforce this lexicalised reality imposing what some have called "the hidden violence of translation"? Or do translators decide to totally adjust to the target audience and "erase the markers of a culture" or do they make decisions leading to the "decolonisation of translation"? To what extent is this possible in academic/scientific translation? What are the challenges of adapting epistemic knowledge across contexts, of transferring and sharing knowledge and research findings, of translating scientific constructs and research methodologies across borders.

One would think that translation may be less challenging with automated systems of translation and especially those leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. But it is without question that there are serious risks if we rely excessive on such tools, without proper refinement and review of translations. Automatic translation tools often fail to capture the complexity of scientific language, creating a language bubble that hinders understanding across linguistic boundaries. This symposium will attempt to answer some of these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> A concept by Jürgen Habermas (who died on 14 March) **Öffentlichkeit** commonly translated as "public sphere," this particular concept is not really coterminous in English, as it carries a stronger normative, social, and communicative charge than the English spatial or institutional understanding of a "sphere". *It refers to the realm of social life in which public opinion is formed through rational discourse.*

<sup>2</sup> The term **Lebenswelt** commonly translated as "lifeworld" it refers to the "shared background stock of cultural knowledge that is 'always already' familiar to agents". It is not just the "world we live in" but the taken-for-granted, unproblematic foundation of communicative interaction.