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Bringing into focus multilingual realities: Faculty perceptions of academic languages on campus

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Abstract

The widespread use of English in academia has been reported to have detrimental effects on other academic languages and to pose considerable language problems to those scholars that use English as an Additional Language. This paper, however, seeks to bring into focus the functionality of English along with that of other academic languages for campus-wide internationalization. Using data from semi-structured interviews with university faculty, the paper examines the plurilingual practices of a localized disciplinary community in a non-Anglophone academic setting. The data show that while several causal and intervening conditions promote English in the domain of research communication, context-specific factors support the use of Spanish in the domain of education. Regarding the spoken mode, faculty accounts of language-related phenomena (language mixing, translanguaging and parallel language use) reveal complex multilingual interactions. Furthermore, their accounts of informal academic interactions and of features of English as a Lingua Franca confirm that they communicate effectively in English with other academics even if their English does not fully conform to the English Native Language norms. Given that macro-level (institutional) language policies have a dramatic impact on language practices, we advocate effective language planning and management to preserve and enhance plurilingualism on campus.

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Keywords: English for academic purposes; Language attitudes; English linguistic imperialism; English as a Lingua Franca; Language awareness; Plurilingualism; Language policy

1. Introduction

Internationalization has become an increasingly important institutional, national and supra-national concern on the contemporary higher education agenda (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004, 2008). As such, Knight (2008:21) remarks that institutional internationalization needs to be carefully articulated and implemented through the integration of “an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”. In pursuing such integration, language policies developed in universities with internationalization aspirations are progressively promoting the use of English so as to increase their prestige, enhance the visibility of their research excellence and attract students from abroad by offering them a global education experience, increasingly, through English-medium instruction (EMI hereafter).

English has been defined as a ‘hypercentral’ language (de Swaan, 2001:27) in the context of neoliberal globalization. It is the language associated with modernization, opportunity and economic competitiveness and thus has a significant impact on both social and educational life (Blommaert, 2010; Ferguson, 2006; Graddol, 1997). Nonetheless, the ideology

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of English as a prestige language and as the international language of science contrasts with compelling arguments on the negative consequences of 'English linguistic imperialism' in academia (Canagarajah, 2002; Hamel, 2006b; Phillipson, 1992). For instance, there is evidence that the global spread of English has led to the attrition of other academic languages such as French and German in the domain of scientific publications (Englander and Uzuner-Smith, 2013). Another example of the negative impact of the spread of English can be found in the context of Nordic universities, where language policies had to be developed to protect the national languages from the advancement of English through paralellingual instruction (i.e. instruction offered both in English and in the national language) (Bolton and Kuteeva, 2012; Hultgren et al., 2014; Ljosland, 2007). Still, in many universities today the prevailing ideological discourse of English has permeated institutional, university-level policies and has boosted the popularity of EMI.

Language practices and language beliefs, both of them interrelated components of Spolsky's (2004:4) language policy framework, further attest to the dominance of English in non-Anglophone academic communities. These communities have been conceptualized as 'non-core' or 'semiperiphery' communities, in opposition to 'core' (Anglophone) communities (Bennett, 2014; Englander and Uzuner-Smith, 2013; Lillis and Curry, 2013; Uzuner, 2008). Numerous studies based on large-scale surveys and interviews with non-Anglophone academics across disciplinary fields report a dramatic shift to English-only research publishing practices as a result of the implementation of national research policies that give greater merit to English-medium publications. The shift to English has been described in Europe (Ammon, 2006; Bennett, 2014; Burgess et al., 2014; Ferguson et al., 2011; Lillis and Curry, 2010, 2013; Muresan and Nicolae, 2015), Latin America (Corcoran, 2015; Englander and Uzuner-Smith, 2013) and in other expanding circle countries (Flowerdew and Li, 2009; Uzuner, 2008), which reaffirms the status of English as a hypercentral language and as a global language phenomenon.

Yet, faculty motivations and attitudes towards the use of English in academic settings render a more nuanced perspective of the increasing dominance of English. Although non-native English speaking academics, as users of English as an Additional Language (EAL hereafter), feel linguistically-disadvantaged, they also acknowledge that English offers various opportunities and rewards. For them, writing in English is an opportunity to cooperate with researchers overseas and achieve international visibility (Buckingham, 2014; Ferguson et al., 2011; Lillis and Curry, 2010). Publishing in international indexed journals supports staff's career advancement and guarantees success in research excellence evaluation frameworks (Bardi and Muresan, 2014; Burgess et al., 2014; Flowerdew and Li, 2009). Ingvarsdóttir and Ambjörnsdóttir (2013:123) also refer to English as having "a high profile as a utility language" in Icelandic universities that seek to increase their international research publication outreach. Publication outreach in first-tier English-medium journals is in fact an indicator to measure a university's degree of internationalization (Beerkens et al., 2010).

The literature has also extensively reported that EAL academics manage to overcome English language-related problems through, e.g., reading similar texts and picking up the recurring phraseology, using strategies such as "textual borrowing", resorting to online tools and seeking the support of translation/revising/editing services (Bardi and Muresan, 2014; Ferguson et al., 2011; Hanauer and Englander, 2011). Additionally, there is great concern towards finding ways to redress EAL academics' recurring complaints as regards the use of English Native Language (ENL hereafter) norms as the 'default' norms to assess the quality of the language in English-medium journals (Pérez-Llantada, 2012; Ingvarsdóttir and Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013; Lillis and Curry, 2010).

Regarding the spoken mode, convincing arguments from the theoretical strand of English as a Lingua Franca' (ELF hereafter) have placed a shift in emphasis on the use of ENL norms in academic interactions that involve a majority of non-native English speakers. Essentially, ELF research argues that even if the English used in these interactions does not fully conform to the native-English speaking norms on a phonological, grammatical, discursal and pragmatic level (Jenkins, 2009; Mauranen, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2011), it enables effective communication. Arguably, the use of English by the non-native English speakers is claimed to be "legitimate use of English" (Seidlhofer, 2011:24).

If we turn to the domain of education, the spread of English has been reported to raise conflicting views, as English is regarded both as an opportunity and a threat in the context of higher education internationalization. While English is perceived as a threat to the national/local language, the increasing number of English-taught courses in universities in Europe, as well as in China, Colombia, Iceland, Mexico, Sudan, Thailand or Turkey (Cheng, 2016; Hamel et al., 2016; Hultgren et al., 2014; Ljosland, 2007; Phothongsunan, 2016; Uzuner, 2008) attest to the fact that EMI is gaining ground at a very fast pace. All in all, there seems to be little dispute that EMI implementation enhances both the prestige of the institution as a provider of global education and the students' foreign language competence (Cheng, 2016; Hamel et al., 2016; Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011).

Notwithstanding the distinct differences across higher education systems in terms of procedures and funding (de Wit et al., 2015), it seems evident that English is a hypercentral language at the forefront of the internationalization aspirations of many universities.

1.1. Rationale and aim of the study

Phillipson (2010) explains that attitudes towards the advancement of English can be influenced by context-specific factors and, hence, universities in which English-medium instruction is not widespread are suitable *loci* to investigate the

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