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The internalization of universities and the English language

Abstract:

The teaching of non linguistic disciplines in English is a growing practice in European universities. This is popularly known as 'bilingual degrees' but English Medium Instruction (EMI) is the most suitable and precise denomination.

The connection between EMI and the internationalization of universities is evident since English is now the *Lingua Franca* for academic communication. This chapter reflects on the role of English in the internationalization of universities from these two phenomena: EMI and ELF. Conceptual overviews of EMI and ELF in European academic contexts are presented. Secondly, the reasons and forces behind EMI and ELF are discussed. Some of the main challenges and achievements to date are summarized, with special reference to the Spanish context.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction; Bilingual degrees; Internationalization; Tertiary Education

1. *Internationalization*

Internationalization is a ubiquitous word at universities. However, the concept is a disputed one. Internationalizing a university can be understood in the narrow sense of attracting and admitting foreign students or even attracting and employing international faculty staff. Internationalization can mean much more than this. The multifaceted process on internationalization is defined as «the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – and even individuals – to cope with the global academic environment» (Altbach & Knight, 2007: 290-291).

According to Haug (2010), internationalization encompasses aspects that reach beyond mere mobility. The dimensions include

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«the internationalization of studies, of the campuses and of the institutions of higher education themselves in their search for higher quality, more relevance and stronger international competitiveness» (Haug, 2010: 1).

These ideal aims and aspirations have unfortunately undergone significant change. Internationalization based on international co-operation has frequently shifted in a tendency of self-economic interest of maximizing profit and capturing student market by expanding institutional reach in other countries. The result is competition in the international higher education market which has led to the marginalization of teaching-learning, assumed to be the central role of educational institutions (Wadhwa, 2016).

In the European scenario, the Bologna Process involved a profound re-thinking of the goals and organization of Higher Education. One of the aims was to establish a more uniform structure for Bachelor's and Master's degree programs and hence to facilitate the mobility of students and internationalization of universities. This curricular harmonization has led to the removal of numerous bureaucratic obstacles for mobility, and to the design of joint programs (Bologna Declaration, 1999). In addition, this is causing increased international research collaboration.

Haug (2010) identifies three phases in internationalization: mobility, internationalization of studies and, finally, the most complete, complex and demanding, the institutional internationalization. The process of internationalization of European universities is now an unquestionable fact at least for the first two phases. The internationalization process is inextricably related to the need to promote multilingualism. Thus, a decade ago, when the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was still being planned, Tudor anticipated

«The EHEA will become a reality only if students, researchers, academics and administrative staff in Higher Education institutions across Europe are able to communicate effectively with one another, and this depends crucially upon their knowledge of languages» (Tudor, 2004: 1).

Equally, Greere and Räsänen (2008) report on the potential of speaking languages for going international and for successful employability. Measures taken by both higher education institutions and the

European Union to contribute to the competence and competitive edge of graduates are of invaluable relevance to achieve this aim.

In this context, and given the undisputable role of English as *lingua franca* (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006), English has become a key instrument to accomplish the many aspects of the internationalization. This chapter reflects on the increasing use of English as *Lingua Franca* (ELF) and English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The chapter aims to assist non linguists to understand the role of the English language in the internationalization scenario and to focus attention on some practical issues.

2. *English as a* Lingua Franca *in internationalization*

Universities have already shared an international language in the history of Europe. Nastansky (2004), quoted in Coleman (2006), reports that lecturing or publishing in the vernacular rather than in Latin was censured in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Some consider English as the new Latin (Dearden, 2015). This section presents the concept of *Lingua Franca* and provides arguments in favor of English as the *lingua franca* for internationalization. The dangers and discussion about this hegemony are considered as well as some balanced alternatives.

2.1. *The concept of* lingua franca

Kirkpatrick provides a historical recount of the origin of the term:

> «'lingua franca' stems from when Germanic Franks moved into Gaul in the 5th century and adopted the local language, which became known as the language of the Franks, or *lingua franca*. The term then came to mean an unofficial language of wider communication and was first used in the Levant during the medieval period, when the 'Franks' went on crusades» (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 1).

Safari & Razmjoo (2016: 40-41) provide a reflection on different definitions of *lingua franca*. The most basic meaning comes from Crystal (1995: 454): «a medium of communication for people who speak different first languages». McArthur (2002) extended this to comprise «a language common to, or shared by many cultures and communities at

any or all social and educational levels, and used as an international tool» (McArthur, 2002: 1). A key component was added by Modiano (2001: 170): «*lingua franca* is a mode of communication which allows people to interact with others without aligning themselves to ideological positioning indicative of specific mother-tongue speech community». This lack of alignment is a crucial feature given the controversy regarding English hegemony which is further explained in section 2.3.

Thus, English at university level acquires the role of *lingua franca* as it functions as the primary vehicle of communication among those in academia who do not happen to share their mother tongue.

2.2. *Why English?*

English proficiency is a key priority in international communication in different areas: technology, science, business and finance, for instance. Access to the latest scientific and technological developments of today's modern world is facilitated with English. In academia, English is the language for international research and publications across disciplines.

However, those not coming from western European cultures do not see an intrinsic reason for this: «The significance and legitimacy that English has gained is due to the fact that it is the tool of globalization, the language of science and technology and nothing else since other languages could have this position too» (Safari & Razmjoo, 2016: 148). The spread of English for the global, political, cultural, and economic exchanges seems so natural that nobody even questions its legitimacy as the *lingua franca* (Chang, 2006), but any other major language could have achieved this status.

2.3. *Risks of the hegemony of English*

In the last two decades, linguists have positioned in two stances (Lasagabaster, 2012). The first group includes those who consider the global spread of English as linguistic and cultural imperialism of English speaking countries. This would be a manner to exert their dominance, power, culture, ideology and language over the periphery countries (Phillipson, 2009). From the linguistic point of view, this hegemony could bring devastating consequences: loss of minority

languages, identities and cultures. For this reason, the English language has received negative nick names: *lingua franca* trap, *lingua Frankesteinia*, tsunami, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, pandemia. The linguistic conflict between English and minority languages may interfere with the multilingual language policy being fostered at different universities worldwide (Phillipson, 2009; Lasagabaster, 2012).

The second group of linguists accepts the hegemony which turns English into a *lingua franca*. This aspect is further expanded in section 2.4.

2.4. *English as* Lingua Franca: *a variety on its own*

Interestingly, ELF is a legitimate variety of language in its own (Graddol, 1999; Jenkins, 2006) which is more and more attracting the attention of linguistic researchers. These linguists are questioning whether the native speaker has to be the standard model or, on the contrary, local varieties have to be considered. This latter stance has caused numerous research activities trying to establish the features of English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) at phonetic, lexical, morphological and pragmatic level in search for those elements which could constitute a Lingua Franca Core (LFC). The aim of these investigations is to guarantee the mutual intelligibility among the different speakers (Jenkins, 2003, 2006). However, designers of teaching materials for English as a Foreign Language are not taking into account the advances in ELF and continue to include British and American varieties. In order to assist research on ELF, the *Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English* (VOICE, 2009) has been compiled with samples from non-native speakers who are effective users of the English language in a variety of professional and communicative contexts. These speakers are not seen anymore as learners but as users. That is to say, VOICE attempts to show how the language used by non-native speakers. By questioning whether the English usage norms would be that of the native speaker or those of the non-native (the majority of speakers) ELF may cause what Graddol (1999) denominates «the decline of the native speaker».

2.5. *The need for a balanced diglossia*

This global acceptance of English, though predicted for years, encounters resistance because of the concomitant phenomenon of language lesser

use or even death. An example of this tension at university is the Nordic debate about the diglossia. The Swedish government warns about the needed balance:

> «English is both essential and welcomed in Nordic universities. Students, lecturers and researchers must be able to understand academic English and use it regularly. However this use of English must not be allowed to result in the Nordic languages disappearing from universities. We should be aiming for parallel use rather than monolingualism» (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2002; original in Swedish, quoted and translated in Airey, 2009: 209).

3. *English Medium Instruction*

3.1. *Concept*

The variety of terms referring to this phenomenon is an indicator of its complexity. Some examples are English used as *Lingua Franca* in Academic settings (ELFA), English as International Language (EIL), English in ICLHE context (Integrating Content and language in Higher Education). The proposal by Dafouz and Smit (2014) deserves special attention. They defend a label which is semantically wider than the previous one, as it does not specify any particular pedagogical approach or research agenda: English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS). By adding multilingualism, the monolingual English centered perspective of the former acronyms is now eliminated.

This chapter cannot go deeper into the methodological aspects, results or expectations on each one of these models, but it becomes necessary to highlight a common feature of most of the forms of bilingual education at tertiary settings. These practices cannot enter the category of prototypical CLIL (Content and Language Integrated learning) programs because they lack the fused pedagogical teaching aims of content and language (Smit & Dafouz, 2012).

As regards the main feature of EMI concerning language learning aims, the following quote makes explicit the distinction with other bilingual education approaches:

«There is an area where CLIL and EMI diverge from each other; this is the attention that each of them pays to language learning. While CLIL is a dual focused process, aiming to overtly develop both language and content knowledge, EMI focuses mainly on subject learning and exploits the language of instruction as a mere neutral tool to perform that goal» (Francomacaro, 2011: 34).

This difference has relevant pedagogical implications. The adoption of English as a vehicular language does not entail language learning objectives, which means that language learning is left to the incidental. This means that the aim of EMI courses is to learn content, and not to learn English, although an improvement in linguistic skills is expected.

3.2. *Forces behind EMI*

Internationalization is then one of the main reasons for using EMI in European universities. As commented, language learning is not the aim and remains of secondary importance. Coleman (2006: 5-6) identifies another five main forces driving EMI at the EHEA:
- student exchanges, with ELF;
- teaching and research materials, without forgetting the dominance of English in research publications and data bases;
- staff mobility (to increase institutional and professional prestige);
- graduate employability (which is usually a criterion of university rankings);
- the market in international students.

These five categories summarize the reasons for which governments, institutions and even individuals are adopting EMI.

3.3. *Achievements*

The first achievement is the exponential growth of EMI courses in the last decade. An increasing number of universities in non-English speaking countries include in their academic offer bilingual graduate and post-graduate programs in which teaching, communication and assessment is through English. This is a strategy in order to be more competitive. Data from 2007 indicate around 3,000 programs through English (Wächter & Mainworm 2008; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2012). This implies a

340% increase in relation to the previous figure at the beginning of the XX century. More specifically, 60% of post-graduate courses in Europe are being taught through EMI (Macaro, 2014). A quite updated list of the academic offer in Spain is available at Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (2013). All these programs have the potential to attract international students from any country, give the use of English as a *lingua franca* for communication, teaching and learning.

A second main achievement affects the content lecturers (that is to say non-language specialists) who deliver these programs. The challenges of this are commented in section 3.4. Lecturers with EMI experience report that it meant a personal challenge and an opportunity to improve personally and professionally as teachers and to advance their research careers (Dearden, 2015; Martín del Pozo, 2014). This implies that in EMI contexts not only students but teachers too can become international.

A vigorous research activity is the third achievement (Pérez Cañado, 2012). An EMI Research Centre has recently been set up to collaborate with institutions worldwide with the purpose of establishing a sustainable evidence base for future policy decisions (Dearden, 2015). The current EMI policy is primarily driven from the British Council and the University of Oxford.

In conclusion, as it had been predicted before the EHEA, «English is the most dominant L2 medium of instruction, with its position forecast to strengthen further» (Marsh & Laitinen, 2005: 2). The growth, extension and speed of the spread is such that some scholars talk about «The Englishilization of Higher Education» (Coleman, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2011) and others predict «The end of modern languages» (Graddol, 2006) seeing English as a threat to plurilingualism.

3.4. *Challenges*

The number of courses being taught through English in European universities continues to grow at a very fast rate. However, a recent study about 55 countries worldwide concludes that

> «[…] policy makers in many countries insist on introducing EMI for reasons of economic growth, prestige and internationalization without considering the teaching resources needed to ensure its proper implementation such as sufficiently trained teachers, materials and assessment» (Dearden, 2015: 24).

Regarding the training and accreditation of their teachers in this area, Halbach & Lázaro (2015) report about how Spanish universities are dealing with this main challenge. This study aimed to follow a previous one (Halbach, Lázaro & Guerra, 2013) which reported Spanish universities to be aware of the relevance of English language proficiency to facilitate students international mobility and graduate employability. In consequence, numerous universities had established initiatives to achieve this aim. Results revealed heterogeneity, confusion and contradictions regarding the required level of English and the accreditation system. The 2015 study (50 Spanish universities were polled) showed considerable improvement due to the coordination of two supra-university institutions: the Mesa Lingüística in CRUE (Conferencia de Rectores de Universidades Españolas) and ACLES (Asociación de Centros de Lenguas en la Enseñanza Superior).

Spanish universities are making an effort to foster foreign language competences. However, Halbach and Lazaro warn that formation (having received some training) must not be confused with qualification (having achieved a competence level).

Additional challenges identified in this study are the centralization of linguistic policy competence in only one person or body and the unification of information about internationalization and linguistic policies of Spanish universities in institutional web pages.

The authors recommend the development of a clear linguistic policy under the supervision of a university body specifically appointed for that purpose. The designation of an institutional budget for linguistic accreditation is also desirable.

Another challenge in the same line of internationalization policies is the level of English of university administration staff, mainly of those in positions related to international relations (Halbach & Lázaro, 2015).

In addition, more research is clearly needed, for example to develop descriptors of quality assurance, or for the development of international accreditation tools and procedures. Finally, it is imperative to bring to attention that teaching subjects through English is much more than simply translating class content into a second language (Cots, 2012; Dafouz *et al.*, 2007, Martín del Pozo, 2014). The introduction of EMI requires a significant shift in methodology apart from linguistic upskilling.

In response to these challenges, Universidad Complutense de Madrid presents a cutting edge initiative in Spain. The UCM developed a Plan for Curricular Internationalization which is centralized at the Vice-rectorate

for International Affairs and Cooperation and is led by the Vice-rector and the Advisor to the Vice-Rector for International Affair, a special new created position for the purpose of internationalization. In addition, as an integral strategy of the UCM other Vice-rectorates are directly involved in its effective implementation.

Also in Spain, the Commission for internationalization in CRUE is to present the conclusions of a report by mid 2017. This document will include a group of recommendations which will serve as guidelines to implement more or less homogeneous linguistic policy in Spanish universities.

4. *Summary and conclusions*

The borderless EHEA where nationalities with various languages and cultures co-exist requires a shared linguistic code or an international language. This has caused the rapidly growing global phenomenon of English medium instruction (EMI). Therefore, teaching subjects though the medium of English is widely considered to be an essential tool in the internationalization policies of universities. We find the classic situation of a snake biting its tail: «While the global status of English impels its adoption in HE, the adoption of English in HE further advances its global influence» (Coleman, 2006: 4).

In Europe, Internationalization means Englishization (Kirkpatrick, 2011, Marsh & Laitanen, 2005; Phillipson, 2009). In consequence, and first conclusion, the adoption of English as a *Lingua Franca* seems a must for any university to take an active role in the global, academic and scientific market.

Secondly, if internationalization is not any more a privilege and all universities should have an international perspective, there is a need for planned policies with aims affecting each part within university structure. Situations differ widely across European countries (national language use, levels of language teaching, managerial and decision-making traditions for instance).

A third conclusion derives from these differences. One specific model of language policy is unlikely to be equally appropriate in all

contexts. In consequence, a high-quality policy should depart from the analysis of the linguistic, cultural and academic challenges of each context, which leads directly into the fourth conclusion: the need for research projects and quality assurance of EMI practices.

There are 26 levers (Marsh, Pavón & Frigols, 2013) which provide indicators and recommendations for quality English degrees. Space restrictions of the present paper impede a detailed consideration of these levers but they are a recommended checklist for those readers interested in a state of the art regarding quality assurance. Besides, a second relevant source of updated studies about EMI programs is the scientific production of the INTE-R-LICA research project. The linguistic, cultural and academic challenges and impact of bilingual degrees are being empirically analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective which comprehends linguistic, content, pedagogical and sociological factors.

Finally, if internationalizing the higher education system is a high priority and languages play a key role, language learning is not an option. The choice refers to 'what' language. Michavila relieves the concern of those less supportive of the hegemony of English:

> «La universidad europea es multilingüe. La norteamericana no lo es, pero la europea lo es y lo será. El multilingüismo debe ser considerado como un valor añadido, una riqueza adicional que poseemos, y debemos valorar los europeos» (Michavila, 2012: 21).

For those who are fond of the English language or at least do not find it objectionable, this consideration of these less thought about advantages may draw their attention:

> «It is an undeniable fact that English has become the current lingua franca which means that university students and faculty are `required´ to have a good command of English, but if this is achieved, this requirement comes along with multiple benefits. English has become the language of academia and the educational revenues cannot be overlooked» (Doiz *et al.*, 2012: 214).

Thus, the educational revenues of ELF and EMI are one of the 'reasons for Erasmus'.

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