

Call for contributions for issue 122 (Spring 2026)

University language policies in Europe: the challenges and issues of taking account of plurilingual and intercultural perspectives

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Description

For several years now, universities have been strongly encouraged to develop internationalisation strategies, based on a "managerial vision that has governed the appropriation of the initial definition of internationalisation" (Laforest et al. 2014, 4). These strategies have been developed primarily from a quantitative perspective and are more akin to marketing than to high-quality internationalisation based on an intercultural dimension (Knight, 2011).

In Europe, one of the choices made has been to promote, through funded projects, "European Universities", defined by the European Commission as "transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term institutional and strategic cooperation, based on shared values and principles and aiming to achieve sustainable cooperation". They are intended to "convey strong European values and bring about transformation and international attractiveness"¹. These alliances, which bring together institutions working in a variety of languages, raise the question of language policies, as these are often presented as serving international attractiveness (Le Lièvre et al. 2018). Under these conditions, how can we promote language and training policies based on the diversity and variability of linguistic and cultural usage, while at the same time enabling the expected encounters and 'sustainable cooperation'?

Based on this broad question, the proposed thematic issue will focus on three main areas.

1. Anglicisation of higher education: the presence and role(s) of English and the diversity of its uses

One approach to university internationalisation policies, which is relatively prevalent in Europe, is to favour the use of English, with the aim of attracting as many students as possible and enabling universities to achieve adequate positions in international rankings. In this case, where one language prevails over the others, the policy can be described as "language planning by default" (Baggioni, 1997), insofar as it follows the course of a "language market" and the policy is mainly conceived from an economic perspective. In many studies, this approach appears to be simplistic (Grin, 2013), firstly because it obscures the role of languages in the development of thought and knowledge, and secondly because it does not consider the possible advantages of plurilingual practices in research and teaching situations (Berthoud, 2022). F. Grin thus refers to "a truncated vision of 'internationality', since it excludes linguistic diversity" (Grin, 2022: 125). In terms of non-linguistic knowledge, C. Truchot (2018) points out that, in some training courses taught in English,

¹ <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/fr/universites-europeennes-ou-en-est-91855>

the diversity of references used is also atrophied, being reduced to mainly Anglo-American works, and ignoring work done in the scientific fields in question in other linguistic and cultural areas, which can contribute to the standardisation of knowledge (Hagège 2012, 2013) and to forms of "linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 2019). For example, in the field of management, J.-C. Usunier (2010) shows that making comparisons between different management cultures using questionnaires in English, on the assumption that concepts are equivalent in different languages, "[...] tends to blur the cultural differences between linguistic contexts" (*ibid.*: 23). In addition, there is the question of the English language skills of teachers and students and their possible influence on the quality of teaching: nuances in the expression of thought, limited argumentation and complexity, basic interactions, etc. (Hughes, 2007; Truchot, 2018). As simply supporting the development of these skills in English cannot take the place of a linguistic and cultural policy within European higher education institutions, it is essential to consider the possibility of other forms of training that integrate linguistic and cultural diversity at university (Courtaud, 2021).

2. A multilingual and intercultural approach to developing academic knowledge

More positively, in terms of research as well as teaching and learning subjects, the issue of plurilingual perspectives in education needs to be integrated into the debate, including for so-called 'non-language' subjects. J.-C. Beacco states, for example, that "the use of a foreign language at the same time as the mother tongue allows 'multiperspective' approaches to concepts and notions, procedures, methodologies and epistemologies of disciplines, which are fundamental to their understanding [...]" (Beacco, 2016: 196-197)². He goes on to advocate teaching methods that avoid setting up superimposed monolingual situations in favour of genuinely plurilingual situations (*ibid.*). For example, a plurilingual academic approach would aim to get students thinking about the meaning of concepts and the choice of terms. Beyond English as a "lingua academica [...]" based on the illusion that languages are transparent and that modes of communication are universal" (Berthoud and Gajo, 2020), the aim is to imagine "how plurilingualism can open up different perspectives and improve the quality of knowledge by offering a remedy to the 'crush' of different academic and scientific cultures" (*ibid.*). This concern for diversity is not just a fight of principle against forms of linguistic and cultural standardisation; it also helps to promote a densification of knowledge: linguistic and cultural otherness contributes to a "de-familiarisation" that forces us to go deeper and "thicken" the development of knowledge (Gajo, 2003, 2006). Various research studies show that "[t]he plurilingual dimension introduces the question of the plurality of perspectives linked to languages, cultures and research traditions, but also that of the diversification of perspectives on a research object linked to the diversification of linguistic means and ways of verbalising research content and putting scientific concepts into discourse" (Steffen et al. 2015).

3. Experiences and prospects for integrating linguistic and cultural diversity into university education

In this direction, it seems necessary to examine, from both a theoretical and experiential point of view, the plurilingual and intercultural practices that already exist in various universities in Europe and to continue to reflect on the concrete possibilities for implementing formative uses that make it possible to encourage plural modes of appropriation, both linguistically and in terms of subject matter. We will be looking, for example, at the intercultural potential of translating practices

² This notion of "multiperspectivity" also appears in the *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*, Beacco et. al., 2016, Council of Europe. In an intercultural approach, it highlights the value of offering history lessons based on a linguistic and cultural multiperspectivity; ultimately, the aim is to achieve recognition and understanding of other peoples and the ability to create a historical culture that is not based on a single point of view (2016: 71).

(Castellotti et al. 2021), the mobilisation of intercomprehension (see for example the development of the UNITA Alliance of European Universities³), alternative and translanguaging practices, taking account of the languages of international students or students in exile, etc. A particular focus will be placed on the diversity of uses of EMI (English Medium-Instruction), as this type of teaching represents a particular challenge for internationalised universities. In particular, EMI raises the question of the variability of forms of English/of Englishes (Widdowson, 1997), as well as the need to take account of students' other languages in this teaching. Several studies have specifically addressed these issues in the field of higher education:

"The use of languages other than English was not only allowed but purposefully required so that students could realise the pedagogical potential of using translanguaging and *comparons nos langues* to learn academic English" (Galante & al., 2019,128).

This type of experiment and others already in existence (in particular Cenoz and Gorter, 2013) largely echo our problem, and it will be interesting to examine the implications, potential and questions that it helps to raise at different levels: these include teacher-researchers working on different ways of diversifying approaches of this kind (Castellotti, Courtaud and Debono 2024), as well as students who have been able to benefit from a variety of approaches such as those described above, or who have studied in different languages and academic traditions. Finally, it remains to be specified (or imagined?) under what conditions approaches that promote linguistic and cultural diversity and plurality in higher education can find a place in the choices (or even priorities?) of university language policy, beyond conventional discourse, and in the implementation of training situations that effectively mobilise plurilingual and intercultural dimensions.

The contributions for this volume will fit into one of the three thematic axes presented above, with particular emphasis on one of the following directions:

1. European university language policy guidelines

Do Europe's higher education institutions have explicit language policy guidelines? If so, what principles underpin these policies and how are they expressed? Through what channels are they relayed, and how are they perceived by different stakeholders?

2. Internationalisation and anglicisation of higher education

Encouraged by European Union policies, universities are increasingly involved in internationalisation processes. How, if at all, do they define this term, and what does it imply in terms of language(s)? What role is given to English, and to which English(es)? What is the concept of diversity?

3. Taking account of linguistic and cultural diversity in university education

How do these policies, which are more or less explicit, play out in practice in training and research? What place is given, if any, to a plurality of languages, and in what ways? How do students and teachers see themselves in relation to these choices, and what prospects can be envisaged for the future?

³ https://univ-unita.eu/Sites/unita/en/Pagina/multilingualism#intercomprehension_courses

In these contributions, we will be able to distinguish or articulate between those aspects that are more programmatic and those that focus on descriptions, analyses and interpretations of more concrete implementations.

We are looking for contributions in the following areas:

- University language policies
- Language teaching in higher education
- Sociolinguistics
- Politics and economics of languages
- Education and training policy in higher education

Format

To participate in the volume, please send an abstract of 300 words, plus references, in English, German, Spanish, French or Italian before 10 January 2025

by email to: elodie.perez@univ-tours.fr

Articles may be written in English, German, Spanish, French or Italian and must not exceed 45,000 characters, including spaces, bibliography and footnotes. They must be accompanied by an abstract in two languages other than that of the article, including European languages other than those mentioned above.

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Marc Debono is a professor at the University of Tours. His research combines language didactics and sociolinguistics, and initially focused on legal language and intercultural issues in French as a foreign language (FLE) training. Although he is continuing to work on these themes in other ways, they are now just part of a more global project involving reflection on the history and disciplinary epistemologies of language didactics and sociolinguistics (see Debono and Noûs, 2024). He works in the Sociolinguistics and Language Didactics department (SODILANG) and the Dynamiques et enjeux de la diversité linguistique et culturelle research unit (UR 4428 DYNADIV).

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