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# The Englishization of European education

## Foreword

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The global dominance of English (Crystal 2003; de Swaan 2001; Graddol 2006) continues to counter the EU's 2+1 vision of multilingualism that all Europeans should speak two languages in addition to their first. This is no less true for the domain of education, the focus of this special issue. We will refer to the ever-growing use of English as 'Englishization', a term originally used to refer to the adaptation towards English on a number of linguistic levels: 'phonology, grammar, lexis, discourse, registers, styles, and genres' (McArthur 1992: 360). For the purposes of this special issue, we extend its meaning to include the increasing presence, importance and status of English at all levels in the educational domain. The breadth of the term is meant to cover three facets of Englishization in education:

1. the growing use of English as a medium of instruction (Coleman 2006; Hultgren et al. 2015; Wächter and Maiworm 2014);
2. the granting of English a more prominent role as a taught subject in the school curriculum (Eurydice 2012; Eurostat 2016);
3. 1) and 2) in combination, exemplified in pedagogical models such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and immersion programmes, which, while not explicitly being run in English, in practice often are (Coyle et al. 2010; Dalton-Puffer 2011; Dalton-Puffer et al. 2010).

Acronymically speaking, then, we are concerned with Englishization in terms of EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction), EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and CLIL. A fourth, and often less conspicuous form of Englishization in education, is the knock-on effects on staffing, timetabling, material selection and programme design.

The starting point for this special issue, then, is that Englishization happens in many different guises and at all levels of the educational system across Europe. At tertiary level, the rise of English is embedded in processes

of internationalisation, globalisation and European standardisation, with the consequence that English is being used increasingly as a medium of instruction (Coleman 2006; Hultgren 2014; Wächter and Maiworm 2014). Just over 8,000 degree programmes at BA and MA level in EU countries which do not have English as an official language were offered in English in 2014, a 239% increase in the seven years since 2007 (Wächter and Maiworm 2014), making English the language of higher education *par excellence* (Doiz et al. 2012a: 1). However, of particular relevance to this special issue, which includes contributions from across Europe, it is worth noting that there are vast national differences, with Northern and Central Europe being significantly more penetrated by English than Southern and Eastern Europe (Hultgren et al. 2015; Wächter and Maiworm 2014). Notwithstanding this, interactional practices on the ground are often a lot more multilingual than official EMI policies would have us believe, of which ethnographic research from Scandinavia has been a particularly helpful reminder (Ljosland 2014; Mortensen 2014; Söderlundh 2012). The spread of English has led to a reduction in the learning of other foreign languages across Europe (Busse 2017; Lanvers 2014). English is by far the most taught foreign language in schools in Europe, a trend that has significantly increased in recent years (Eurydice 2012; Eurostat 2016). In 2016, the percentage of students learning English at secondary level was 94%, which should be seen against a sharp drop in the learning of other languages, such as French and German. Less than one quarter (23%) of students study French at school level, yet, after English, it is the second most taught language in Europe, followed by German (Eurostat 2016). The age from which English is taught is constantly being lowered, now typically beginning at primary and sometimes even at pre-school level (Eurostat 2016; Eurydice 2012; Enever 2011; Rixon 2013). In many Eastern European countries, Russian, once a compulsory subject, has yielded to English (Eurostat 2016). One reason for the decline in the learning of languages other than English is the cuts in educational spending, forcing curricular de- and re-prioritisations (Kramsch 2014). In a self-perpetuating dynamic, the dominance of English is likely to be continually strengthened, in that the more people speak a language, the more people will want to learn it. This “Catherine wheel” of Englishization has been well described by Earls (2013; see also de Swaan 2001).

Unlike in many Outer Circle countries (Kachru 1992), where English often has a more established presence in the educational system, in the Expanding Circle nations of Europe, Englishization might jar with long-standing traditions of teaching other European languages, e.g. German, French and Spanish. As

education is a domain where standards, traditions, norms and language play a key role (Kramsch 2014), it is hardly surprising that the Englishization of education is perceived by some as a step too far, seen as perturbing the stronghold of the national and other European languages. Although state-funded education is often under-staffed, poorly resourced and subject to constant cuts, it remains a domain of key importance to many. The majority of the population has some stake in it: everyone has at some time in their life been in education; many have children who are. Education is also a professional domain for teachers, lecturers, administrators and other staff. Each of these groups of people – or stakeholders – has its own stake or interest in education, and we would expect their views to differ accordingly. The views by different stakeholders of the Englishization in education are explored and analysed in greater depth in this special issue.

### **Debates about English: opportunity and threat**

Englishization has given rise to intense controversy, in academic and public discourses alike. In academia, there are those who, while recognising the opportunities brought by English, criticise the global inequalities exacerbated by its spread (Pennycook 2014; Phillipson 1992; Rapatahana and Bunce 2012; Tupas 2015). Such scholars tend to view the spread of English as inextricably embedded in the hegemony of major English-speaking nations exemplified by British imperialist expansion in the nineteenth century and, more recently, US globalist expansion. Phillipson in particular is known for his work on the thesis of “linguistic imperialism”. In contrast, more pragmatic stances (e.g. Van Parijs 2011) foreground the usefulness of English as an efficient translingual communication tool, and suggest that the unequal divide in efforts and associated costs of language learning could be redressed, e.g. via a tax system. Others, for example those working within the English as a Lingua Franca framework call for a paradigm shift to bring English language teaching norms more in line with the fact that non-native speakers outnumber native speakers (Jenkins and Leung 2013; Mauranen and Ranta 2009; Seidlhofer 2011). Broadly speaking, academics may view Englishization as either positive or negative, though most acknowledge that it can both simultaneously (Brutt-Griffler 2002; Canagarajah and Wurr 2011; Van Parijs 2011; Phillipson 1992, 2006; Pennycook 2014).

In public discourse, debates around Englishization tend to be equally divisive, especially around Englishization in education. Some of the concerns expressed are: marginalisation of other languages; first language domain loss and

attrition; diglossia; and growing disparities between those who speak English and those who speak it less well (as measured against specific yardsticks). Regarding EMIs, there are additional concerns over whether it dilutes content teaching and lowers student participation and learning outcomes. In some countries, there have also been concerns over whether students taught through English will be able to conduct professional roles upon graduation. However, as in academic discourses, the benefits of learning English are also discussed, such as the facilitation of cross-lingual and cross-national communication, collaboration and a global outlook. Furthermore, paradoxically, Englishization may also increase diversity by enabling individual of different linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds to come together. In other words, far from being a threat to multilingualism and linguistic diversity, English as a *Lingua Franca* is their conduit (Jenkins 2015). Individuals and institutions may also see English as giving access to varied entertainment media and increasing socio-economic mobility (Ferguson 2015); however, such benefits depend on socio-economic class, educational level, age and national background (Block 2014; Ferguson 2015)

As has been pointed out, discourses about language, in this case, Englishization, are never neutral (Blommaert 1999), but wound up in ideologies and beliefs about globalisation, the role of the nation state, and the role of the educational system (Blommaert 1999; Duchêne and Heller 2007; Kroskrity 2000). In this day and age, debates appear to arise in the context of a tension between globalisation and nationalism, post or late modernity and modernity, progressiveness and tradition.

### **Focus of this special issue**

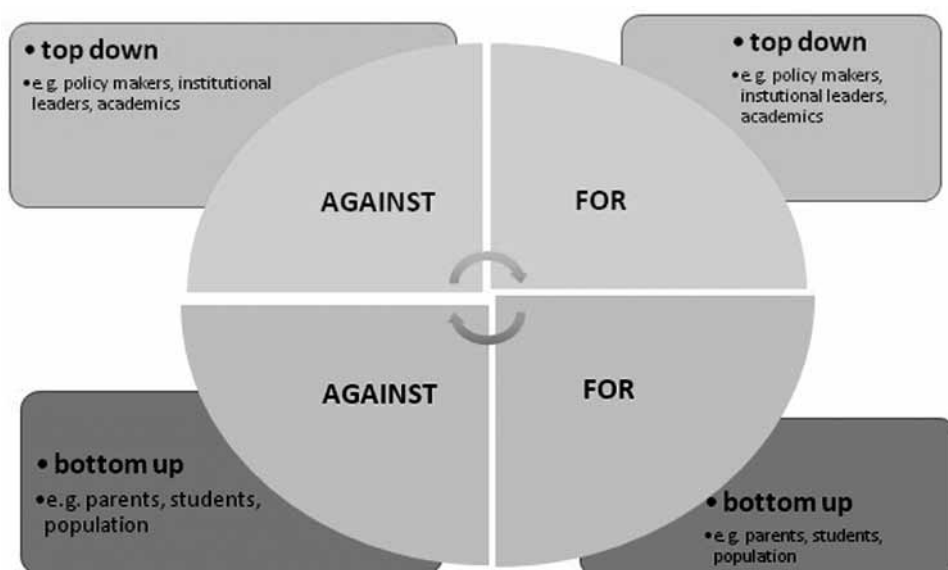
This special issue examines the debates, discourses and attitudes surrounding Englishization of education in some selected EU countries, and offers a comparison of these debates in relation to the specific socio-political context of the country in question. Most of the countries covered here are relatively long-standing EU members: Spain, France and Germany. Of the Nordic countries covered, Denmark has the longest membership of the EU, and Finland and Sweden the shortest. Iceland and Norway are not members of the EU, but of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Since the establishment of the European Union, EU member states are guided by EU policy. Two such policies are particularly relevant to the context of Englishization in education, ironically, pulling in opposite directions. One is the EU's 2+1 vision which

encourages EU nation states to ensure that their citizens are proficient in two other languages in addition to their first language (mother tongue). The other policy is the Bologna Declaration, ratified by a range of EU member states in 1999. Despite not devoting a single word to language, the declaration has had dramatic effects on language in education, and particularly the rise of EMI in higher education. Thus, somewhat ironically, a policy intended to facilitate mobility within a European Higher Education Area incurred little thought to the necessity of sharing a vehicle of communication (Phillipson 2006; Saarinen 2012); for better or worse, that shared vehicle of communication has defaulted to English.

Recent years have seen an increase in research on the Englishization in Higher Education (HE) (De Houwer and Wilton 2011; Dimova et al. 2015; Doiz et al. 2012b; Fortanet-Gómez 2013; Haberland et al. 2013; Hultgren et al. 2014; Linn et al. 2015). Such research underlines how reactions to Englishization depend both on the specifics of national context and on various stakeholders' interest in the phenomenon. Thus, attitudes, discourses and debates are likely to be affected by factors such as the linguistic ecology of the context (e.g. mono- or bilingual), perceived merits of internationalisation at institutional and personal level, and English skills of both staff and students, just to mention a few.

In this special issue, we are concerned both with top-down and bottom-up discourses of Englishization. Each contribution, reporting on the following national or regional contexts: Germany, France, Spain, Finland and the Nordic countries, approaches the question of Englishization from a predominantly top-down or bottom-up perspective. We understand top-down discourses as originating from stakeholders who – in theory – are endowed with decision-making powers to influence the extent to which English is used and taught. This group includes decision and policy makers within or outside of the institution, such as parliamentarians (as in the French contribution, Blattès 2018), or managers of educational institutions (as in the Spanish and German contributions: Elliott et al. 2018; Lanvers 2018). Bottom-up discourses, in contrast, are conceptualised as circulating among those endowed with less or no institutional power to influence the extent of English used, but who may nevertheless have strong attitudes to it. We see the bottom-up discourses of such stakeholders explored in the German and Nordic contributions (Hultgren 2018; Lanvers 2018; Saarinen and Rontu 2018). We envisage that both bottom up and top-down stakeholders may hold negative or positive views on Englishization, as illustrated in Figure 1. We shall return to this graph in the concluding chapter to summarise arguments brought forward for and against

Englishization, and to evaluate how the tensions between stakeholders are played out in the different countries represented in this Issue.



**Figure 1.** Dimensions of Englishization in education

The German contribution (Lanvers 2018) concerns itself with bottom-up discourses of Englishization, as expressed in print media. Our French contribution (Blattès 2018), in contrast, is a classic example of top-down discourses, in that it explores the parliamentary debates that surrounded the legalisation of EMI. The Spanish contribution considers the discourse enacted through institutional websites, which might also be classified as a case of top-down discourses, at least if these are seen as originating from the institution themselves. The Nordic contribution (Hultgren 2018) examines the attitudes of scientists and approaches discourses of Englishization from a bottom-up perspective. The Finnish contribution (Saarinen and Rontu 2018), finally, explores both top-down and bottom-up discourses within the same article, being concerned both the official policy as encoded in institutional documents as well as how that policy is interpreted and construed in interviews with staff and students.

Whilst the dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up discourses may have some empirical validity (e.g., Hultgren and Thøgersen 2014; Björkman 2014; Fabricius et al. 2016), it serves mainly heuristic purposes in that reality is often far more complex and fluid. Recent work undertaken within more

ethnographically sensitive studies of language policy and planning has made abundantly clear that it is far from straightforward to establish where one policy begins and another ends. Several actors and structures are involved in creating, interpreting, resisting and embracing policies, and often policies are circulated and recycled across levels and domains (Saarinen and Taalas 2017; Hult and Källkvist 2016; Hornberger and Johnson 2007). Consequently, as we shall see in the concluding article, where this model is revisited, individual contributions are difficult to place in any categorical way within the model. The actors in charge of devising the institutional websites in the Spanish contribution (Elliott et al. 2018), for instance, can be seen as responding to and replicating discourses at the global, national and regional level, each of which is permeated by tensions between the use of Catalan to maintain a distinct identity and English as a way to attract international students. Each other contribution in this special issue should be read with such intertextuality in mind and the knowledge that it is not clear-cut to determine which discourses are top down and which are bottom up; they are all both at the same time.

Just as a strong delineation between top-down and bottom-up discourses and policies may not be empirically tenable, there is the additional complication that a lot of policy making in relation to Englishization is not explicitly language related at all. Whilst universities may well make strategic decisions to implement English as a Medium of Instruction, very often EMI happens as a result of other decisions which have nothing or very little to do with language. We have already mentioned the implementation of the European HE Area. Other examples include the ambitions of HE institutions to advance up university ranking lists, recruit the best possible students and staff from overseas, and putting measures in place to increase the internationalisation of their operations (Hultgren 2014; Saarinen and Nikula 2012).

Using a variety of discourse analytic techniques and data in the form of policy documents, questionnaires, interviews and media sources (print and electronic), contributors to this special issue explore the discourses of Englishization as reproduced by various stakeholders in different European nation states. Questions that we seek to explore are: to what extent are Phillipson's (2006) and others' largely negative views of Englishization present in the discourses of these different stakeholders, and to what extent will the attitudes be more favourable? How do views differ across different stakeholders and nation states? What underlying ideologies, if any, will the discourses reveal? And do people "speak out", as Dendrini and Theodoropoulou propose, "if a policy does not serve a country's interest"? (2009: 814). The contributions in this special issue aim to find out.



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