The Englishization of European education

Concluding remarks

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This conclusion returns to the main questions we put forward in the introduction: how do different stakeholders debate the Englishization that takes place across European education systems? By now, there is a reasonable body of literature on Englishization in Europe (see Macaro et al. 2018), and the rise of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at university level has been particularly well researched. So far, the dominant conceptualisation of Englishization in education has been – perhaps justifiably – one of a hierarchical, top-down process, with educational institutions and/or politicians and policy makers as instigators, and learners as receivers of the process. It has therefore been a useful exercise to consider the views of a wider group of stakeholders, and to ask what positive or negative stances towards the process they might hold.

Macaro et al.'s (2018) meta-study shows that, alongside the interest in Englishization in education, concerns over the phenomenon are also increasing. Empirical studies on the subject tend to report on the perceptions of immediate stakeholders involved in Englishization: primarily students and teachers, and sometimes institutional managers. The future of our national languages, however, is a concern to us all, and an ever-encroaching Englishization into new domains of life means that we all become stakeholders, from parents to end users of academic publications, to the general population. Some such views, hitherto neglected in the literature, are represented in this special issue in the form of *public* discourses on Englishization. Another important principle adopted here (see Introduction) [AQ1] which differs from many studies on the topic, was to allow the possibility that *any* stakeholder group may show a mix of negative and positive stances towards Englishization. Our international perspective also acts as exemplifier of the observation that *who* exactly might be in a top-down position i.e. able to decide on their language policy, depends on the policies and politics of the context. In German schools, for instance, many head teachers may have decision powers to implement EMI

or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); in other countries, education policies are regulated more centrally. In Figure 1 below, we revisit the framework introduced in the Introduction, and add to it the arguments both for and against Englishization in education that we have encountered in our five articles. The following discussion considers how each of our contributions relates to this model.

In addition to exploring different stakeholders' attitudes to Englishization, another question to be asked is if there are national differences in attitudes towards Englishization. It is known that, in terms of EMI in higher education, the Nordic countries have progressed furthest, followed by Germany, then Spain and France – although all countries show upwards trends (Hultgren et al. 2015; Macaro et al. 2018; Wächter and Maiworm 2014). How does this relate to the discourses on Englishization in these countries, as reported in this special issue? On the one hand, we might predict that, as has been observed elsewhere, that those countries whose national language is rarely learned by others tend to be keenest to adopt EMI (Coleman 2006; Vila and Bretxa 2014). Conversely, one might speculate that precisely the high use of English in education heightens stakeholders' concerns, e.g. over domain loss of national languages.
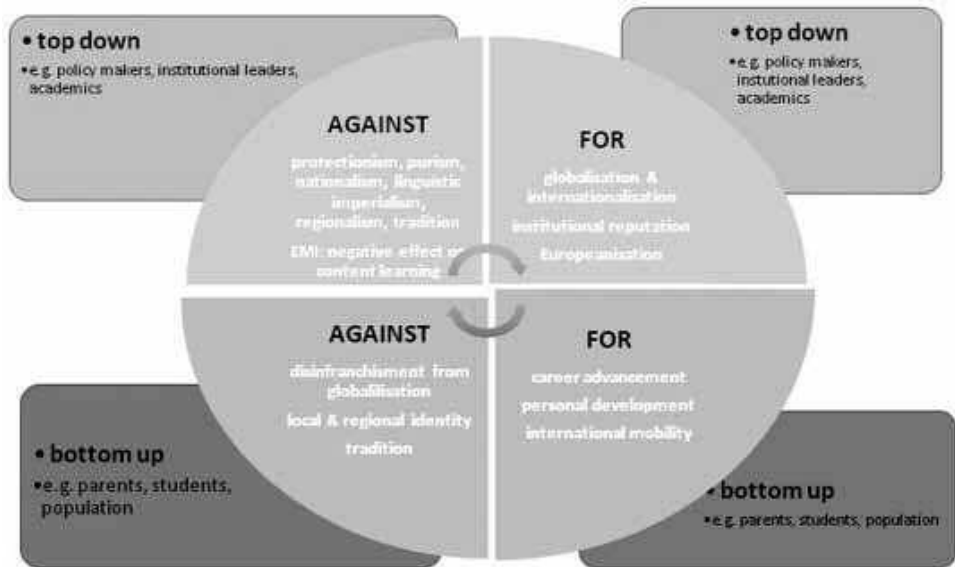

Figure 1.   Englishization in education: dimensions and arguments

Whilst the findings reported in this special issue do not map neatly onto these predictions, they show some trends nonetheless. We can take this as evidence of de Swaan's (2001) observation that second language learning usually has an upward direction in terms of language hierarchies, with learners acquiring languages of higher status than their first language (L1). In this respect, English, as the only 'hypercentral' language (de Swaan 2001) in our context, wins hands down every time. But what of the other languages of concern here? Staying with de Swaan's system of hierarchies, three languages are 'supercentral' (French, German, Spanish), and others are 'central' (Finnish, Icelandic, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Catalan). Might stakeholders representing central languages perceive English as a threat to their national language, or do they, on the contrary, perceive it as an attractive solution to reach audiences that their national language would not have permitted them to reach? We shall briefly discuss each of the five contributions from this angle.

Blattes's contribution in this issue demonstrates how the tension between, on the one hand, a proud history of linguistic purism and protectionism of a supercentral language, and, on the other, pressures to modernise and internationalise the education system, are played out by policy makers themselves. In this case, the processes of debating new language policies led politicians to adopt (slightly) more anti-Englishization policy. The apparent traditionalist 'win', however, needs to be interpreted with caution: Blattes herself reminds us that French language policies are not always enforced in the way they are formulated. The French contribution illustrates well how politicians 'do politics' with language policy, what happens de facto might be different, and decided at institutional level. **[AQ2]**

The German contribution, **[AQ2]** reporting on another supercentral language in tension with English, demonstrates a tug-of-war between top-down concerns against and bottom-up voices for Englishization, i.e. diagonally across our model. Here, public media frame parents, students, and the general public as 'stampeding' for English, and cautious policy makers as those safeguarding linguistic diversity, and European national languages. Concerns for their own language, e.g. domain loss, are less prominent than in the French contribution. **[AQ2]** It is interesting to note that in both the French and German case, top-down answers are to teach the national language alongside English, and thus create 'ambassadors' for their language and culture (Blattes 2018 **[AQ3]**). Some policy makers may take solace in this argument, but as Coleman observed already in 2006, the Erasmus principle of students learning the language of their host nations is facing increasing erosion.

The Catalan contribution [AQ2] offers an interesting dual perspective on a central (Catalan) language and a supercental (Spanish) language against the backdrop of English. Here, institutions seem to take the hypercentrality of English for granted, but also deliberately counter-balance it with a revalidation of their central language: Catalan is framed as *the* language permitting visiting students access to authentic immersion into life and culture of the host university. The Finnish context [AQ2] is of similar linguistic complexity, and equally offers insights into institutional views. In comparing two different universities, one which has a trilingual (English, Finnish and Swedish) policy, and another which has a bilingual (English, Finnish) policy, the paper describes that at least where the trilingual university is concerned, English is often used in practice, suggesting that the top-down stance pro national language(s) may not always be replicated in practice. The Nordic contribution, [AQ2] similarly, contrasts a top-down concern with domain loss with the bottom-up and more lax attitudes held by Nordic scientists, exposing some mismatch between the two.

This special issue has pointed to the need to complement our understanding of Englishization in education by offering more bottom-up perspectives on the question. The German contribution has given insights into what might happen in situations where top-down policy and bottom-up demands diverge: parents sue educational institutions, pay for private English lessons, or find private English medium nurseries. Our contributors have also reminded us that we must broaden our understanding of 'stakeholders', to include all those involved in the education process, and potential end users or beneficiaries of the education process – in other words, the whole population. For both reasons, more studies are needed on how such population groups view Englishization.

The tensions described here between stakeholders and different national contexts are manifold. Tensions were observed within the discourses of those who determine language policy (top-down), often seeking to validate national and regional languages while nonetheless justifying strong EMI policies. The French contribution serves as illustration that the (perceived) need for protective stances towards a national or regional language bears no necessary correlation to its status as superlanguage. In Germany, protecting the status of *other* second/foreign languages seems to be a greater concern than protecting their national language – a phenomenon most likely linked to the nation's strong European identity, and commitment to the European Union's '1+2' goal of language education. Furthermore, the Spanish and Nordic contributions demonstrate how English might be utilised in the context of tense relations between national languages, and conflicting demands. In other words, we

found little evidence that positive and negative stances towards Englishization correlate in any linear fashion with the status of national languages (in de Swaan's sense), with actual levels of Englishization, or with particular groups of stakeholders.

It is interesting to observe that, of all possible tensions within our model, the one we did not observe was bottom-up voices *against* Englishization in education. After all, it is conceivable that people might develop anti-English sentiments alongside anti-globalisation ones, either for political reasons, or because they feel disenfranchised from this global process. Some might view English dominance as linguistic imperialism, following Phillipson's arguments. The fact that this small volume did not detect such stances does by no means indicate that they do not exist, and future studies might well seek to explore this. Similarly, another type of stance that did not come out strongly was top-down voices *for* Englishization. This may be because many stakeholders view the process of Englishization as 'happening anyway', whether or not it is being explicitly advocated. The results of this special issue suggest that Englishization tends to happen as a result of policies which have nothing to do with language, such as internationalisation policies, research evaluation systems and pressures to publish in high-ranking journals. While such policies do not necessarily explicitly advocate English, they often covertly promote it (Hultgren 2014). As long as such policies are in place, debates about Englishization in education are likely to continue.

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