



Studying and Teaching in Multilingual Universities

Adelheid Hu

Summer Semester 2019/2020

**The impact of internationalisation on language
practices and policies in universities**

Olena Khomiakova (0190855944)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. The definition of internationalisation.....	4
3. Rationales for internationalisation	5
4. Three central paradoxes on internationalisation	5
5. Internationalisation in relation to language practices and policies in universities.....	7
6. Conclusions.....	8
References.....	9

1. Introduction

Modern universities are characterized by a growing tendency to internationalise their curriculum. However, the process of internationalisation of higher education (HE) has already been a high-relevant issue of HE institutions all over the world since the late 1980s (Mwaniki, 2014). The existence of internationalised programs in HE establishments is not new in an educational area. *Ipsa facto*, people always went to study to foreign countries throughout the period of the history of human existence and civilizations. However, the objectives of internationalisation have changed, in comparison to the past (Welikala, 2011). In the 21st century, the century of globalisation, the universities continue to face myriad challenges due to high competition in the ranking, the attraction of talented and perspective students, and, finally, the financial issues. The obligation to internationalise universities seems to be caused by economic, environmental and geographical factors. In addition to it, a personal factor plays a role in a global process of internationalisation: despite the current COVID-19 crisis and prohibition of flights in some countries, people are still constantly moving and seeking new opportunities abroad, because searches for better life are embedded in the human nature. Education is undoubtedly the first step on the way of improving life conditions by means of a successful career ladder, and internationalisation of education might contribute to this ambitious goal of many students. Various mobility programs, exchange semesters abroad, continuous movements from one place to another – this is nowadays routine reality for thousands of students.

Why is it relevant to investigate internationalisation in the context of language practices and policies in universities? First of all, internationalisation in this context provokes hot debates in the researcher's circle and the consensus in relation to this issue has not been found yet. On the one hand, the usage of the official/national language in education enhances the prestige of the language (Kibbermann, 2017). In addition to it, it might be suggested that the usage of the official/national language in education would show the nation from a different angle and promote patriotism. On the contrary, it appears to be that only a limited number of languages might be used in an academic context (Kibbermann, 2017). To facilitate the process of research in different academic fields, one needs the presence of *lingua franca* between representatives of different cultures. As a consequence, the usage of English in academic settings is an option for many universities.

In this essay the definition of the internationalisation will be given, the difference between globalisation and internationalisation will be explained, rationales for

internationalisation will be provided and the connection between internationalisation and language practices and policies at universities will be established.

2. The definition of internationalisation

Internalisation is a vague term that might be understood differently by different people. For someone, internationalisation might mean international mobility programs such as Erasmus; some people connect this word with curriculum changes; some people associate internationalisation with an obligatory implementation of English into language policy of the university. Internationalisation is an ambiguous concept, as it might be often confused with globalisation (Altbach, 2004). These concepts are interconnected, however, they represent different phenomena. This chapter aims to briefly reveal the essence of these two concepts and show the difference between them.

Knight and de Wit (1995) formulated a definition of internationalisation: “the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service of the institution” (as cited in Rizvi and Lingard, 2007). It means that under the influence of internationalisation, concrete language policies are to be implemented in different sectors of HE institutions: research sector, teaching sector, administration sector.

There are some misunderstandings in relation to the understanding of definition of internationalisation. For instance, Altbach (2004) states that often the concept of internationalisation is considered to have the same meaning as globalization (as cited in Altbach and Knight, 2007). To clarify the difference, Altbach and Knight define internationalisation as power, shaped by economics, politics and society, that makes higher education involved in international processes (as cited in Altbach and Knight, 2007). In this case, internationalization might be seen as a *consequence* of globalisation. In addition, the concept of internationalisation seems to reveal traditional connections between two or more nations or institutions functioning within these nations. Sometimes the term “globalisation” is perceived as a modern extension of the term “internationalisation” because it better represents processes of international exchange (Mwaniki, 2014). However, there are three main explanations of why internationalisation cannot be compared with globalisation (Mwaniki, 2014). The first explanation is that internationalisation supports the system of established nation-states. On the contrary, globalisation presupposes the elimination of borders between nation-states. The second explanation is that internationalisation is guided by cultural and diplomatic dimensions while globalisation stands on principles of global capitalism and consummation culture. The third explanation is that internationalisation supports hierarchy and

hegemony due to the inequality of nation-states, whereas globalisation looks for new methods of organisation of society, it is a constantly changing and developing force.

3. Rationales for internationalisation

Knight and de Wit (1995) provided the list of rationales for internationalisation: economic, political, cultural and educational (as cited in Rizvi and Lingard, 2007). In the case of economics, a stimulus for developing internationalisation is a financial aspect (Altbach and Knight, 2007). It is not a surprise that some universities try to improve their financial situation by means of attraction the flow of foreign students who are willing to pay for studies. In fact, students spend massive amounts of money during studies abroad: Davis (2003) estimated that international students made the U.S 12 billions richer (as cited in Altbach and Knight, 2007). A lot of universities take advantage of foreign students by setting high fees for studying programs (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Apart from the for-profit sector, non-profit universities are also taking part in internationalisation, but they can provide different reasons for the necessity of internationalisation. These non-profit universities are guided by the desire to enhance understanding between cultures (Altbach and Knight, 2007). International mobility programs, such as Erasmus Mundus, contribute to better cooperation between representatives in different cultures, because students take part in different international projects during their studying semesters and, as a consequence, they develop intercultural communicative competence.

4. Three central paradoxes on internationalisation

First of all, it is necessary to mention that internationalisation is overtly present at both the institutional and the national level (Knight, 2004). Both levels are interrelated and exert influence on each other. By means of language practices and policies, the national level affects the international sector of higher education. Different countries form a range of methods of internationalization: scholarship programs, exchange projects, implementation policies. Each country follows its own internationalisation program.

In some countries, internationalization is often perceived as a benefit in the context of tertiary education. Student's mobilities, international exchanges, a new experience in a foreign country, professional opportunities – internationalization promotes all the above-mentioned, in fact. Despite visible advantages of internationalization, there are also hidden drawbacks that are also called “three central paradoxes”. One of the paradoxes, formulated by Mortensen (2010), is that when a student's group becomes more diverse, the number of languages in this group decreases. Every student brings their own language background to the international

group, and it is getting more complicated to find a common language, suitable for everyone. One of the solutions, proposed by Mortensen (2010), is to choose English as lingua franca in the group. As a consequence, internationalisation might lead to the implementation of English into language policy of the university and dominance of the English language over the local language. Fabricius et al. (2017) state that internationalization does not necessarily lead to linguistic pluralism at the universities. Moreover, it seems that in the context of Danish study, internationalization might even lead to worse teaching quality. Some of the students, coming to a foreign country, expect subjects to be given in the local language despite the fact that English is often associated with the concept of international education. However, often subjects are taught in English, which minimizes the opportunity to practice the local language during the classes. Is linguistic uniformity due to usage of English useful for foreign students? In some cases, yes, for example, when an exchange student does not speak the local language. Personally, I am an Erasmus Mundus graduate, and, from my own experience, I would suggest that the curriculum in English in Poland and France was appreciated by me, because I did not speak academic Polish and French. However, a lot of foreign students still preferred to speak Polish and French instead of English, because usage of the local language leads to faster adaptation in a foreign environment, helps to find local friends, job opportunities, etc.

The second paradox connects internationalisation and intercultural understanding. One could assume that internationalisation leads to a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects of other cultures. But is it true in reality? From my own experience as a foreign student, I did not have a chance to be fully integrated into Polish culture because I did not speak fluent Polish. I was surrounded by Polish students everywhere: in the cafeteria, on the lectures, on the streets, but my lack of knowledge of the Polish language restricted my opportunities to deepen into Polish culture. Indeed, I participated in an international program aimed at increasing students' mobility across the EU countries, but I did not feel quite comfortable in that circumstances, because the language policy of the program needed improvements. For instance, if I would have obtained obligatory courses in Polish language before the start of the program, the process of integration in Poland would have been different. Internationalisation does not automatically mean receiving the ability of intercultural understanding abroad, and, first of all, in my case, it is connected to the fact that the languages of my curriculum in a *Polish* university were *English* and *German*. In fact, I visited only lectures that were taught in English and German, and every class during my day I had different students, so I was not able to remain in contact with local students, as we did not have time and opportunity for it. This is a bright example supporting the second paradox connecting internationalisation and intercultural understanding.

Undoubtedly internationalisation is often associated with usage of English. English is seen as a prestigious language and language of opportunities; students all over the world are eager to possess English skills. In fact, English takes the first place in the rating of taught languages, as Maiworm and Wächter (2014: 26) state (as cited in Kibbermann, 2017). However, Malinowski et al. (2019) state that internationalisation has nothing to do with the usage of only one language in the research activity. Internationalisation leads to the ubiquity of English and the obligation to use English in university practices and policies. The third paradox states that internationalisation by means of English increases quality of education and competitiveness. A case study, conducted by Giannoutsou (2019), showed that usage of languages other than English in an academic context prevents the development of the academic career. On the contrary, English-language professional discourse leads to a higher evaluation of academic work. It means that academic papers written in English automatically will be estimated as more proficient and international. This case study supports the third paradox. However, on the other hand, Hultgren (2014) argues that there is no direct connection between the use of English at the university walls and the position of the university in the ranking (as cited in Kibbermann, 2017). In the case of the third paradox, it might be noticed that there are various opinions on the topic of efficiency of English as the language that contributes to better education quality.

5. Internationalisation in relation to language practices and policies in universities

Different countries operate the internationalisation process differently due to their domestic situation. Internationalisation might be treated in two opposite ways in different countries. On the one hand, internationalisation tends to promote students' mobility, improve the language and cultural skills of students, enhance their future chances on the labour market. On the other hand, in some countries, internationalisation might be perceived as a challenge for an academic institution. For instance, the Development Plan of the Estonian Language states that it is necessary to save the position of the Estonian language as the main language of research and teaching (Kibbermann, 2017). In this case, internationalization might be seen as a threat to the flourishing of the national language of the country due to the implementation of English in the language policy of HE institutions. Estonia is not the only country that tries to support the national language in the education sector. For instance, Latvia developed a plan of internationalisation of tertiary education that allows preserving the national language of the country (Kibbermann, 2017). The National Development Plan of Latvia stresses the

importance of preserving the Latvian language as the primary language of instruction in the Latvian HE institutions.

How is it possible to implement the English into the language policy of the country along with preserving the national language? One of the alternative language policies that are intended to diminish the threat of the English language to the prestige of the national language is *parallelingualism*, or *parallel language policy*, mentioned by Linn (2010), Harder (2009), Saarinen and Taalas (as cited in Fabricius et al., 2017). This language policy presupposes the usage of two languages on an equal level in a particular area. However, this policy contains flaws, as languages are not supposed to be competitors. Languages are used as a means of successful communication, and this language policy restricts the students from using languages other than English and the local language. In fact, this is impossible in an international surrounding, as every foreign student brings their own language and created multilingual surrounding at the university.

6. Conclusions

A successful internationalisation process should take into account different linguistic profiles, cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. Internationalisation aims at bringing students from different cultures together, creating opportunities for future professional development and increasing of awareness of cultural differences. Currently, the process of internationalisation is very contradictory, as internationalisation has both advantages and disadvantages, and every country deals with internationalisation due to the domestic situation. Internationalisation is mostly discussed in the context of the issue of the language of instruction. The concept of internationalisation is often associated with English-medium instruction that has both negative and positive sides. Internationalisation is not a new concept, but the reality of the 21st century and globalisation made a great influence on it. Internationalisation is connected with a wide range of challenges such as the absence of an explicit policy that could both integrate English and local languages. Positioning English as the main language of curriculum eliminates the concept of linguistic pluralism and multilingualism. The perception of internationalisation as an opportunity to implement the English language into the curriculum and remove local language from the language policy of HE institution destroys the effective cooperation between representatives of different cultures. Last and not least, modern policy makers have to think of internationalisation processes as an opportunity to create a perfect environment for international students who are eager to become “world citizens”.

References

1. Altbach, P., & Knight, J. (2007). The Internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and Realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), 290-305.
2. Egron-Polak, E., F. Marmolejo. (2017). Higher Education Internationalization: Adjusting to New Landscapes. *The Globalisation of Internationalization: Emerging Voices and Perspectives*, edited by H. De Wit, J. Gacel-Avila, E. Jones, and N. Jooste, 7–17. London and New York: Routledge.
3. Fabricius, A., Mortensen, H., & Haberland, J. (2017). The lure of internationalization: Paradoxical discourses of transnational student mobility, linguistic diversity and cross-cultural exchange. *Higher Education*, 73(4), 577-595.
4. Giannoutsou, M. (2019). Multilingualism and ELF at the university workplace: investigating language practices and ideologies in the production of academic discourse.
5. Kibbermann, K., (2017). Responses to the internationalisation of higher education in language policies of Estonia and Latvia. *Eesti Ja Soome-ugri Keeleteaduse Ajakiri*, 8(1), 97-113.
6. Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8(1), 5-31.
7. Mwaniki, M. (2014). University language policies in an era of internationalisation: An analysis of language of publishing shift at a South African university. 28(1), 197-220.
8. Rizvi, F., Lingard, B. (2006). Globalization and the changing nature of the OECD's educational work, *Education Globalization and Social Change*, 1: 247-260
9. Welikala, T. (2011). *Rethinking international higher education curriculum: Mapping the research landscape*. Nottingham, UK: Universitas 21.