

Language Perceptions and Practices in Multilingual Universities

Maria Kuteeva, Kathrin Kaufhold, and Niina Hynninen (Eds.). 2020. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. xxii + 400.

English-medium instruction (EMI) is the use of English as an instructional language in locations where English is not the locally dominant language. EMI is used all over the world, in settings that range from preschool all the way up to graduate-level university education (Macaro et al., 2018). At each level of the educational system, the motivations for using EMI vary, as do the possible detriments of its use. *Language Perceptions and Practices in Multilingual Universities*, edited by Maria Kuteeva, Kathrin Kaufhold, and Niina Hynninen, explores a number of challenges that have arisen in recent years as a result of the adoption of EMI, specifically in European universities. But before delving into the difficulties of EMI that are explored in this book, one might first ask why a university would choose to use English as an instructional language in the first place.

All else being equal, stakeholders in most university systems would prefer that the school attract the most knowledgeable professors, the most capable students, and the greatest amount of funding for research and facilities. In pursuing these goals, university administrators and stakeholders may sometimes attempt to “internationalize” a university, seeking faculty, prospective students, and other resources on a global basis (Knight, 2010; Macaro et al., 2018). In furtherance of this goal of internationalization, many university administrators, or those who direct university policy on such matters, have made the choice to switch some (or even all) classes to EMI. The use of English in the classroom theoretically makes it easier for non-nationals who do not speak the locally dominant language to come to the university to teach and study. This can then lead to other favorable outcomes, such as a greater diversity on campus with respect to national origin, first language, and cultural perspective.

As expressed by the editors in their introduction, the individual chapters in *Language Perceptions and Practices in Multilingual Universities* explore the balance that these aspirationally international universities must strike between English and national languages, which is itself reflective of a larger tension between globalization and nationalism. This tension plays out in many arenas, with university language policy being just one, but it is a tension that has particular resonance today in light of recent geopolitical developments related to migration and national identity. As the editors further note, there are additional dynamics at play in the university context besides just globalization and nationalism, and these cut both in favor of and against the use of English in the classroom. On one side are metrics used in university rankings that promote, intentionally or not, the use of English; these metrics include the number of international students (many of whom may know some English, but not the national language) and faculty publications in international research journals (many of which are published in English, but not in other languages). On the other side, as major recipients of public funds, most universities have an implicit obligation to act in the national interest, which often includes a secondary obligation to promote the national language. Muddying the waters further still, efforts to promote the enrollment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have gained momentum

in European universities, and students from such backgrounds may not be fully proficient in either English or the national language.

Whereas a great deal of research has been undertaken about the acquisition and use of English in universities with EMI, there have been far fewer studies about all of the other languages that compete for recognition. This particular research gap is the focus of this book, albeit for a relatively narrow geographic area – most of the book is devoted to universities in Sweden or Finland, though there are also individual chapters on Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, and the Baltic states, as well as an epilogue that makes broader comparisons with southern Europe. Altogether, in addition to an introduction and epilogue, the book comprises 13 independently-authored chapters that summarize new research studies in this space, most of which involve mixed-methods research design. The chapters are organized into three major sections. The first examines EMI and its consequences at the national and university level, the second focuses on the perspective of students, and the third describes issues related to university faculty and staff. Given the number of chapters in the book, space in this review unfortunately permits only a brief summary of each one; this of course cannot do them justice.

Part I of the book, on national- and university-level issues, contains five studies that ask questions about the connection between language policy and language use and the extent to which policy may dictate actual practice and vice versa. This section contains two studies from Sweden; in one, Kuteeva uses survey data at a university to examine perceptions about the use of English, Swedish, and other languages there; the second, by Källkvist and Hult, is an ethnographic study of the drafting process for a university language policy document. This section also includes two studies set in Finland. In the first, Saarinen examines language policies and the use of English at one university that is officially bilingual in Finnish and Swedish, and at another that is Swedish-only (though both also feature some English-medium classes). The other Finnish study, by Jalkanen and Nikula, analyzes the syllabi of classes on academic English that, in each case, are paired with substantive courses on topics such as sciences or history that are taught with EMI. Finally, this section of the book includes a study by Soler of state-sponsored advertising materials intended to promote universities in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) where classes can be taken in English.

Part II features studies designed to investigate EMI from the perspective of students, and this includes those who are native speakers of the national language(s) of the country in which their university is located, as well as those who are not. A study set in Finland, by Clarke, asks students who are not dominant in Finnish or English about the extent to which they feel that their language needs are supported and whether their proficiencies in other languages are valued. A second study, by Kaufhold and Wennerberg, asks students at a Swedish university who speak languages other than Swedish or English about the opportunities for them to use such languages in their university community. This section also contains a study by Wilkinson and Gabriëls about views of “linguistic justice” among students at a university in the Netherlands, as well as a study by Arnbjörnsdóttir about the disconnect between Icelandic students’ perceptions of their English-language skills and their actual proficiency in the kinds of academic English that are needed for university-level study.

Finally, Part III of the book examines issues related to EMI and language policy that affect university faculty and staff (including graduate students). A study in Sweden by Holmes posits the difficulties that faculty and graduate students would face trying to advance their careers without fluency in English. In a study set in Finland and Sweden, Järnlström, Piekkari, Pilke, and Turpeinen focus on the difficulty of publishing or otherwise disseminating research

other than through English-language channels; a related issue explored in this study is the perceived difficulty or even impossibility of expressing certain technical concepts in many researchers' respective native languages, thus suggesting that domain loss may be occurring in some languages due to the use of English in academia. A study in Finland, by Hynninen and Kuteeva, examines the congruence, or lack thereof, between the language needs and language proficiencies of university staff members. Finally, a study at a university in Denmark, by Dimova, explores the differences between the measures of English proficiency that are typically used to evaluate prospective faculty members, such as native-like grammatical accuracy, and the types of language abilities that are more predictive of actual effectiveness, such as pragmatic skills and the ability to negotiate meaning with students.

The book concludes with an epilogue by Lasagabaster and Doiz that enriches many of the studies' central themes with the perspective of researchers who focus on southern Europe. Southern and northern Europe have both commonalities and differences in their implementation of EMI and the underlying conditions that prompt its use, and the book as a whole is rendered more generalizable with this insight. Of particular interest is the fact that, as in northern Europe, universities in southern Europe that use EMI tend to emphasize only the national (or dominant regional) language and English, with other languages being promoted and used much less than they could be. The epilogue also gives the book a fitting conclusion, with a call to action and a recognition that universities should be at the forefront of normative language policy.

The studies in this volume are timely and well-written, and they present a host of issues that show how even the most well-intentioned language policies must make difficult compromises among values that sometimes conflict. Fundamentally, the desire to make a university more multicultural and more multilingual runs up against the unfortunate "paradox of internationalisation" (Haberland & Preisler, 2015) – as the number of languages used by students and teachers at a university increases, the chances that everyone will just use English also increases. Another conflict of ideals arises when the parallel (or equal) use of the national language and English is promoted at a university. While this can protect the use of the national language in academic and social domains, it has the effect of excluding international students who were willing to attend the university largely on the premise that they would be able to do so using only English.

Other contradictions and difficulties are brought forward as well in this volume. Several chapters give attention to the fact that there are many other languages competing for space besides just English and the relevant national languages. But, despite universities paying lip-service to the idea of language diversity as a resource rather than as a problem (Ruiz, 1984), in practice, other languages spoken by students, faculty and staff typically have almost no role to play in the university community. Another dilemma is the fact that, for all of its drawbacks, there are no clear alternatives to the use of English and, in some senses, European universities have always cycled through various *linguae francae* in one domain or another; past examples include French, German, Latin, and, in the Baltic states, Russian.

An unfortunate limitation of this book is that its treatment of the phenomenon of EMI at universities is limited to nations, *viz.*, Nordic states, the Baltic states, and the Netherlands, that are in many respects atypical. To be sure, there are important differences among these countries across many metrics, but on the whole the nations of northern Europe are smaller and more prosperous than much of the rest of the world, and their citizens have, on average, greater English proficiency than in many other regions. These characteristics are not necessarily determinative of a university's experience with EMI, but they might allow a university to

mitigate a number of problems that would otherwise be expected to arise with EMI implementation, most notably those related to capacity and funding.

Given the complexity of the book's subject matter, a limitation of this kind is in some respects inevitable – a book that purported to summarize EMI at universities on a global scale would no doubt suffer from the opposite problem of superficial treatment. The narrow geographic scope is an issue that the editors and some of the authors acknowledge, and efforts are made throughout the volume to draw lessons from the experience of European universities that can be applied elsewhere. As noted above, the epilogue serves this volume well by helping the reader generalize its conclusions to other contexts, and what this book may lack in geographic breadth, it makes up for in substantive depth. If anything, the excellence of this volume simply underlines the need for other scholars with differing geographic expertise to publish their own studies on this very pertinent subject matter. As a final point, and one that is also related to the depth of treatment, this book appears to be primarily targeted at specialists in the field. As a result, certain background information about the language policies that underlie EMI adoption (such as that described in the beginning of this review), is largely assumed on the part of the reader.

To briefly conclude, this book provides an important and welcome contribution to the study of a phenomenon that, despite its disadvantages, is likely to further expand in the coming years. No university is monolithic, each university occupies a unique place within its local educational ecosystem, and social, political, legal, and regulatory conditions vary by country. But whatever the characteristics of a particular university, those who direct university language policies would be well advised to consult this volume when considering the adoption or modification of the use of EMI at their institution.

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