

***Lingue e Politiche* and politics of language**

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1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the academic and teaching interests of Universities around the world have been shifting towards “internationalization”. This is reflected in the various criteria used to measure university merit including the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) and the Shanghai Jiaotong ratings (Kirkpatrick 2011: 3).

Thus, the concept of internationalization has become a core part of Italian university life, politics and reality, all within a very short time, and the speed of the process of internationalization has led to some disorientation and misunderstanding, and has also caught many unawares. Concurrent with internationalization has been a rethinking of teaching and testing practices, and the development of English Medium Instruction (hereafter EMI) whereby subjects, and entire degree courses are taught in English. From the point of view of higher education (hereafter HE) in Italy, the success of Italian universities in a competitive and globalized world seems to lie in internationalization, and the adoption of EMI is seen as the key to that success.

The first and longer part of this paper reviews and reflects on the process of internationalization, and the practices which are involved, with the aim of exploring some of the problematics which have arisen in the movement towards internationalization in higher education institutions (hereafter HEI), many of which remain unresolved due to the speed of this process. Some of the more theoretical questions surrounding Internationalization and EMI are also discussed.

The second part considers the teaching of English Language in the *Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali* of the University of Padova, including the paradoxical situation whereby the process of internationalization seems to imply “englishization”, rather than multilingualism.

2. When did internationalization start?

It should be pointed out that HEIs have always had international interests, but it is in the past 10-15 years that these interests have

moved from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core. In the late 1970s up to the mid-1980s, activities that can be described as internationalization were usually neither named that way nor carried high prestige and were rather isolated and unrelated (Brandenburg – De Wit 2011: 15).

De Wit *et al* continue to point out that it was in the late 1980s that major changes occurred as internationalization took off.

New components were added to its multidimensional body... moving from simple exchanges of students to the big business of recruitment, and from activities impacting on an incredibly small elite group to a mass phenomenon (Brandenburg – De Wit 2011: 15).

This period coincides with the Bologna Agreement and the resulting Declaration signed in 1999 by 29 countries¹ followed by the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. These two agreements have moulded two key aspects of internationalization-collaboration between institutions on the one hand, and competition between them, on the other (De Wit 2011). The Bologna Agreement promotes mobility by insisting that obstacles be overcome so that free movement in Europe is possible. Particular attention is paid to students in terms of promoting access to study and training opportunities in European countries and related services leading to employment and mobility. For teachers, researchers and administrative staff, the Bologna Agreement leads to recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing statutory rights.

Generally, internationalization has been measured by percentages of in-coming and out-going international teaching staff as visiting professors and on exchanges, the number of international students, that is those enrolled independently of any program, the number of exchange students on various programs including Erasmus+, and, finally, the proportion of English-medium courses. It is in the decade following the Bologna Agreement that EMI began to be seen as a channel, or means of expression of internationalization. This movement started in Northern Europe and then Spain, before spreading right through Europe.

2.1. Does internationalization mean “englishization”?

Commenting on the Bologna Agreement, Phillipson (2009: 37) said “what emerges unambiguously is that in the Bologna process, internationalization means English medium higher education”. Coleman too pointed out that “it seems inevitable that English, in some form, will definitely become the language of education” (Coleman 2006: 11), and similarly, Altbach Reisberg and Rumbley (2009: 7) reported “the rise of English as the dominant language of scientific communication is unprecedented since Latin dominated the academy in medieval Europe”.

It should be noted, however, that EMI was not mentioned at all in the Bologna agreement, nor is there any explicit reference to language. EMI evolved from the agreement and its implications - it became an inevitable continuation.

A critical look at this situation should force us to take a step back, to try to understand if, and how, the process of internationalization should lead inevitably to EMI.

There is a nebulous quality to internationalization. Both economical and quality stakes are involved, yet the measurement of internationalization is neither clear nor homogeneous. It is also important to disentangle what is meant by internationalization, and why HEIs are internationalizing higher education. It is this second question which I am concerned with.

Internationalization, with reference to HEIs, is a term which in the last ten years has begun to ‘populate’ policy papers, administration documents and academic articles. While the meaning of the term is clear, there is very little discussion of why HEIs should internationalize, and even

¹ The original signatories in 1999 were Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities separately), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. Further countries have since signed, while others have been rejected. Currently there are 46 signatories.

less empirical research. Often the rationale for internationalization is confused with the meaning, thus becoming a logical fallacy, that is: “a rationale for internationalization is often presented as a definition of internationalization” (De Wit 2011: 244).

2.2. Why internationalise?

Most people directly involved in the university environment would agree that internationalization is a “good thing”. What is less clear is why, and on what grounds this assumption can be made.

The reasons usually given for internationalizing Higher Education can loosely be described as academic. Those often cited include improving the preparation of students and thus providing them with greater post-degree opportunities, either for further study or in the workplace. Regarding students, and what the internationalization process can offer, Italian students in particular have much to gain from this reasoning as Italian falls into distinct geographical and linguistic boundaries - that is, Italian is only spoken in Italy². By comparison, L1 French students can use their language in Switzerland, Belgium etc., and German students in Austria. For Italian students, therefore, there is a great incentive to internationalize, however these students do not always receive the linguistic means by which to do it successfully.

A further reason for internationalizing HE is to expand the curriculum by offering EMI courses, but also courses taught by visiting professors, and courses which have a more international flavour.

From the HEI’s administration point of view, it is generally agreed that one of the returns of the process of internationalization is that it inevitably increases visibility and enhances the international profile of the institution, although it is very difficult to measure this.

It is presumed that internationalization strengthens research and knowledge production by permitting a wider exchange of ideas, the capacity to forge strategic partnerships in international research agreements and by allowing more transparent benchmarking of academic and research activities. It is also expected that a strong internationalization policy leads to a diversification of both teaching and administrative staff, and international opportunities, effectively broadening the academic community by allowing for an exchange of ideas and competences.

This widely publicized and rather altruistic view is based on the receiver of internationalization – maybe we should ask what is in it for the agent or sender. Although the internationalization has become an umbrella term for many interesting promises, the factor of language is not mentioned explicitly. It is clear that all these rationales depend on adequate linguistic preparation, without which it is difficult to see how any of them can succeed – and without an explicit language policy, the efficiency of a programme of language preparation is weakened.

Further reasons and motivations for internationalization in Higher Education can be found outside of the single HEI, but within the national context and include political, economic, cultural and social factors (De Wit 2002: 83-102, Hughes 2008).

On a political level, internationalization makes it possible for governments to develop, in terms of funding and planning, and invest resources in a higher education system which can be evaluated within a global framework, rather than a national one. Thus the investment takes on further advantages in the form of international visibility. A truly international university system should also provide a workforce with global awareness and multicultural competences, not for export, but to be exploited on a national level. On the international level, the investment should

² The reference is to a “greater Italy” including the Vatican, Canton Ticino, San Marino, etc.

promote participation in the fast growing global knowledge economy, with benefits to be derived from trade in education services.

Socio-cultural reasons justifying the move towards internationalization of HEI's include the capacity to offer students authentic language experiences, although the problem remains of how to effectively exploit this. One of the much-publicized reasons for a programme of internationalization is to entice international students and teaching staff. However, this needs to be carefully evaluated so as to counter the situation whereby an attractive international environment which is available locally prepares local students to study elsewhere – thus adding to the infamous 'brain-drain'. Clearly there is also a positive spin-off in the job market, though perhaps it is too early to measure this.

In this discussion of the rationales and motivations for adopting a process of internationalization, it can be noted that the term remains abstract and ill-defined. It is not clear what exactly is entailed. Above all, the role of languages in this process is notably absent. It can also be observed how education is beginning to share the terminology and processes of a marketable commodity.

Having outlined some of the rationales for the internationalization of HEIs, it is now necessary to consider some of the misconceptions that prevail about the connection between internationalization and prestige - many of which are perhaps fruit of the speed with which the process is taking place. Knight, outlining the myths surrounding Internationalization, argues that it is not the case that "more foreign students on campus will produce more internationalized institutional culture and curriculum" (Knight 2011:14). Further, an international reputation cannot be considered as synonymous with quality since it does not follow that an HEI's reputation is directly enhanced by its international status. There is also no causal link between prestige and attractiveness and the number of international agreements an HEI has, nor is an international marketing and branding programme the equivalent of internationalization (Knight 2011).

In European HE, it would appear that there are cases of 'jumping on the band-wagon', or 'doing internationalization' because everyone else is. The weakness of this justification becomes evident in the performance indicators for rankings such as the Shanghai rankings. Gazzola, for example, in analysing the phenomenon of courses being offered entirely in English in Italian universities, argues that introducing these programs does not appear to respond to demands from students, or to demands from the labour market for language skills. Instead, it seems to be related to the use of international student numbers as an indicator of performance (Gazzola 2012).

3. What language does internationalization speak?

Having discussed the implications of internationalization, it is now important to investigate the role of language within the process of internationalization. For a HEI to adopt a clear stance on internationalization and to undertake a political decision, at some point the question of language issues needs to be considered. Effective internationalization cannot disregard the role of languages on various levels.

Research in the field of language economics has started to investigate this area. As noted, discussion of the role of language in internationalization is notable by its absence. As mentioned above, somehow it is presumed that English is the *lingua franca* of HE, but according to Grin (2010) it is not enough to simply adopt English without investigating and evaluating the needs and uses of language in various fields relevant to HE. This means considering and reviewing:

Languages taught as curricular subjects, e.g. which and how languages are taught in the various departments:

Languages of instruction, in particular, EMI

Languages of research activities and publications

Languages of internal HEI administration

Languages of external communication, e.g. with international and local students, websites etc. (Grin 2010).

From the field of language economics we can find further discussion of the rationale “why” HEIs have decided to move towards internationalization. Again it is noted that research into internationalization is extremely scarce, if not entirely absent - that is, HEIs are following a policy of internationalization, yet there is little evidence of research into the process. Gazzola and Grin (2007) argue that it is difficult for a HEI to sustain an approach to “how” to internationalize without assessing “what” to do and “why”, and to assess it rigorously and scientifically.

Regarding language use, including EMI, existing language practices in teaching and research are generally descriptive, but it does not follow logically that an alternative to local language use (e.g. Italian in Italy) is better. From a research point of view, we can only sustain that when proposing or choosing EMI over Italian instruction we should be able to demonstrate that the results will be better in some way. This, according to Grin, means having a clear idea of the counterfactuals. That is, the alternative to policy of EMI is not “how things are now” but “things as they will evolve if we DO NOT change” (Grin 2010: 5).

3.1. Some open questions

There are a number of considerations which need to be accounted for regarding the process of internationalization and consequently, EMI. Many of these are the result of the speed of the process, and the lack of time and space for reflection, or empirical research. The issues are not insurmountable and will inevitably be resolved, but only if further research is undertaken.

Some of these issues are paradoxical, for example, the desire to emulate prestigious HEIs and their international reputation. Interestingly, most of these institutions are, in fact, monolingual (HEIs in UK, USA and Australia) where all courses are taught in English, very often by native speakers.

The need to attract international students implies that in some way these students are better than local ones, academically, and possibly even more desirable socially. Certainly it can be argued that international students bring with them cultural and economic baggage which can be exploited at a local level, however, until now, this is an aspect of the internationalization process which has yet to be fully realised. It is also erroneously expected that international students have a good level of English while local students often have a lower level. This is not always the case as results for the B2 English test administered to students of the English degree course Human Rights and Multi-Level Governance (Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali) show.

Few HEIs appear to exploit the presence of international students who may bring rich cultural and linguistic resources for local students. Not only do international students offer the opportunity of being able to communicate with local students in English as a *lingua franca*, but there is also the possibility of harnessing the L1s that these international students speak.

It is also presumed that international students seek English-taught programmes (ETPs). The assumption is made that as these students are not usually Italian-speakers they will not want to

do courses in Italian³. While this might well be the case, there is little room for the student who wishes to use the opportunity of living in Italy to improve language skills by studying in Italian. The presence of international students in a course may make the course more desirable, and in turn the HEI, however there is little data to show this.

A further area which needs study is the expectation that costs are limited, since it is generally thought that lessons can simply be translated. While this may be true, and existing staff may be willing to take on EMI courses, the increased workload of the teaching staff cannot be ignored. This increase lies less in the face-to-face classroom hours, and more in the extra requirements of preparation. Some HEIs offer incentives in the form of 3:2, that is, three teaching hours in Italian are equivalent to two hours for EMI courses. In some northern European countries, there are financial incentives. However, in these cases teaching staff must also undergo training and certification before teaching courses in English.

The above discussion has outlined the large number of unresolved issues, and unexplored areas regarding the adoption of EMI and the process of internationalization in general. In fact the question of languages of teaching in Higher Education is extremely complex, and at times paradoxical. It is not that the claims are false, the problem is that they have not been tested.

The picture which evolves is that of HEIs apparently launching into the process of internationalization - and as a consequence EMI - without a serious study of what it entails in the long term, and without research into the essential question - how does the HEI (including students and staff) benefit from internationalization (and EMI)?

The trend towards courses being taught exclusively in English is increasing (Wachter – Maiworm 2008: 30-32) with about 90% of international students currently being concentrated in only five countries, and among the European countries it can be seen that France and Germany between them attract a very small percentage, as can be seen in more recent OECD figures and analyses.

These figures (OECD 2013 Education Indicators in Focus – 2013/05) show that the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship increased more than threefold, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.5 million in 2012 (with an annual growth rate of about 6%). In 2012, five destination countries hosted nearly one-half of total mobile students: the United States (hosting 18%), United Kingdom (11%), France (7%), Australia (6%), and Germany (5%). The competition, as expected, comes from the English-speaking countries, USA, UK and Australia. Italy is currently in 10th position with 2%.

4. Language Policy

Essential to managing the process of internationalization, is the existence of a Language Policy document. These documents, common to Scandinavian HEIs for example, should provide clear information, and research results, for all stakeholders. A good language policy discusses the role of language, language choices, as well as language conservation for all parties directly involved in language use: for students (the languages of courses, languages spoken locally, levels required, etc.), for teaching staff (levels of L2 required to teach a course,

³ Currently, it is not possible for international students to attain credits for Italian as a second language. This choice is not foreseen by MUIR. This means that an international student who is required to do two languages, and chooses to study Italian while in Italy, will in fact be studying three languages: English, the second language chosen (French, German, Spanish) and Italian.

certification if necessary), for university language centres (which languages should be offered, levels to be attained, certification), as well outlining the language(s) of university administration and documentation. A language policy also has implications for the wider community, national and international institutions as beneficiaries of a successful policy.

4.1. Further research

To provide further documentation, various analyses are necessary, and should not be onerous. For example an analysis of international student enrolment choices, students views of the efficacy of EMI lectures compared with lessons in Italian (for the Italian L1 students) and the position of university lecturers teaching in English.

Research is currently being carried out at the Centro Linguistico di Ateneo of the University of Padova into students' and lecturers' language needs, students' experiences of being taught in English, and lecturers' experiences of teaching English (Helm – Guarda 2014, Helm – Guarda 2016).

5. Internationalization and the *Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali*

Within the Department, internationalization tends to be synonymous with “englishization”, not by choice, but the evolution of language teaching practice, and the process of internationalization as adopted by the University of Padova. This is evidenced by the fact that English language courses are obligatory, while other languages are not⁴. While students can choose the options of studying so-called “second” languages – French, German and Spanish – these choices remain implicitly “second” choices, with all the resulting negative connotations which reinforce the idea that capacity in English is inherently more valuable and prestigious, and that other language choices are of a lesser substance.

We see here how the Bologna Agreement and its move to multilingualism, appears to have fallen short. At the University of Padova, the languages are not on an equal footing, and nor should they be, some people may argue. English is seen as the language of academia and has thus acquired a prestige which is out of the reach of other languages, as noted above.

However, capacity in the other languages should be rewarded in keeping with a fair interpretation of internationalization, that is, the promotion of abilities in all languages and the promotion of multilingualism. It is interesting to note too, that most university department websites are in Italian only (as of June 2015), even though they offer courses taught exclusively in English.

The language of the university and department administration is also Italian, for obvious reasons. However international students often find themselves in difficulty dealing with administrative problems, given the absence of staff who speak other languages at a level which is useful, and necessary, to problem-solving. The paradox is that the very students that the University of Padova is aiming to attract, on the one hand, are not offered the direct and indirect language facilities to help them, on the other.

While the University and the Department are committed to internationalization and have invested in the process, on the local level there is little evidence of the changing world in the form of services and day-to-day survival for international students and staff. Further investment

⁴ It may be obligatory to study a second language, but the student can choose which.

is needed so that international students are able to negotiate daily life. Investment in multiculturalism and multilingualism in university services is to the benefit of all, not just international students, and having attracted international students, the university also has the obligation to look after them once they are here.

5.1. Levels of English

In the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali, students of all undergraduate (Laurea Triennale) courses must reach a B1 level in English in all 4 skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking). To attest their level, they must either produce an internationally valid certificate (Cambridge exam syndicate PET, IELTS, etc.) or pass the *Test di Abilità Linguistica* (TAL) organised by the CLA. They must complete this procedure before attending the *Lingua Inglese* course in their second year.

Regarding the level, it is interesting to note that following the school reform of 2010, the Italian Ministry of Education (Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca, MIUR) proposes that school students on completion of their final year of high school will have reached a B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for two modern languages, in all competences. Further, they will have acquired a third language at the level of B1 of the CEFR in all skills. (MUIR 2010: 31). For other types of school (Liceo Classico, Liceo Scientifico, etc) the required level of English appears to be B2, although the documentation is vague.

In reality, however, testing of English carried out at the Centro Linguistico di Ateneo demonstrates that very few students have in fact reached these levels on enrolment at the university. For this reason, the required levels for undergraduate courses at the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali (and most other departments) have been established as the B1 level according to the CEFR.

5.2. The Test di Abilità Linguistica (TAL)

The TAL test is in three parts. The first, the TALB1-AL (*ascolto e lettura*), is a computerized test and regards reading and listening – the so-called receptive skills. It is generally considered the easiest of the three parts. The results for students enrolled in the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali courses measured over 17 sessions (6 per year coinciding with the regular exam sessions) show that an average of 69.4% of students passed the tests over the 17 sessions. It was not possible to track how many times each candidate took the test, so the pass rate includes students who did the test unsuccessfully numerous times. This presumes that the pass rate for first attempts is, in fact, much lower, which is in stark contrast with the levels that the school system purports to reach.

The average pass rate per single session is 61%, with a range of 31%-83%, depending on the time of the test. For example, tests at the beginning of the academic year have a high pass-rate as school-leavers who do the test on admission tend to pass immediately. By contrast, the lowest pass rates are found in the July and September sessions.

Students who pass the TALB1-AL (*ascolto e lettura*) are then able to enrol in the TALB1-S (*scritto*), a written test which comprises two exercises and takes place in the computer laboratory. The aim of this test is to prepare students for having to write academic English, and the tasks require writing an email, and a short report from given prompts.

Unfortunately, we find that the pass rate for this part of the test goes down to 30.4% as calculated over a two year period (12 sessions). The average pass rate per session is 33.8%. Similar to the reading and listening test, we were not able to track students but informal measures indicate that students take an average of two attempts before passing, and it is not unusual to find students who attempt the test up to six times. These results show that the level of preparation in written English of undergraduate students is very low, and the school system does not prepare students to a B1 level of writing. Again, the pass rate tends to be high at the beginning of the academic year (up to 58%) and falls to a very low 7% in September.

Undergraduate students' oral skills are tested using the TALB1-O (*orale*) in which students perform much better than in the other tests. The pass rate over 12 sessions is 78.3%, with an average per session of 80.25%, which ranges from 43% to 100% depending on the session.

Since students often require several attempts to pass each part of the test, many are unable to complete the test within the first year of their course, and thus they are unable to do the English course in their second year.

In the post-graduate degree courses (the Laurea Magistrale), a B2 level is required in all four skills, in a format similar to the above for B1. However, after a year of attempting to apply these levels, it has become clear that students are unable to reach a B2 level, and are unable to pass the test, or to produce a B2 certificate. The difficulties are such that the programme is being reviewed. Students of the EMI course Human Rights and Multilevel Governance are required to pass all parts of the TALB2, or to hold an internationally valid certificate. Students of the other post-graduate courses are required to do the B2 receptive test (listening and reading). However, alternatives will be offered in place of the writing and oral tests.

From the above it seems that two serious concerns are becoming evident. First, despite the programmes outlined by the MIUR (2010), students generally do not have the requisites in English language that the schools are attesting. The second problem is that this has a great impact on internationalization and EMI in particular, in that many students do not have the capacity to follow EMI courses. If the EMI entry requirements were to establish B2 as a minimum level to be reached *before* enrolment in an EMI course (as is the case in northern Europe) very few Italian L1 students of the University of Padova would be eligible. Similarly, students wishing to enrol in postgraduate courses should be reaching a B2 level by the end of the undergraduate course in order to be eligible for enrolment. However, many only reach B1, and with great difficulty.

This situation cannot be easily or quickly improved. Clearly there needs to be a massive increment in language teaching if internationalization, and EMI, is to become a real option and an effective and successful one.

Regarding alternative certification, we have found an increase in the number of certificates being presented by students. In the 2013/14 academic year, only 21 certificates were presented, while in the current year 2014/15, 47 certificates had been presented until November 2014.

6. Conclusions

This paper had a twofold scope: a discussion of the process of Internationalization at University level, while the second part looking at the situation of English at the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche, Giuridiche e Studi Internazionali was aimed at looking at how prepared the department is, considering this shift towards internationalization, and EMI.

Discussion of internationalization is complex, not least because there is much flexibility in defining the term. Nevertheless, it is clear that internationalization in Higher Education in Italy is having a massive impact. There is little doubt that the increased internationalization in Higher Education is resulting in more EMI courses. As of June 2015, there were 187 ETPs being offered in 40 different Italian Universities (Universitaly). This number is destined to increase (Costa – Coleman 2012). As in most countries, EMI is seen in Italy to be a consequence of internationalization. Despite this, the issue of language as a factor in internationalization has not been investigated in depth (Saarinen – Nikula 2013, Phillipson 2006). On the other hand, internationalization has taken on an economic profile, and an Institution's choice to offer courses taught in English seems to be based more on economic forces, than academic ones. (Shohamy 2013: 198). As Phillipson (2015: 25) notes that “the higher education area is in effect a market”.

Thus, for internationalization to be effective and successful, the teaching of languages – not only English – is of prime importance. Part of the investment in internationalization must be directed towards language teaching, otherwise the process will remain out of the reach of many local students. Only by investing in, and insisting on, high levels of language expertise, can the process of internationalization succeed.

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