

Managing languages in academia: Pointers from education economics and language economics

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1. Introduction

The question of the language, or languages, used in academic institutions has, within the span of a few years, turned into a major issue in university governance. A mere twelve years ago, conferences on university governance could address various matters of strategic development while blithely ignoring any language-related dimension (e.g. Weber and Duderstadt, 2004, 2008). This is apparently no longer true, and full-length conferences – such as this one, which is in fact one in a series of

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conferences – are now devoted to topics located at the intersection of “language issues” and “university operations issues”.

Of course, this does not mean that all such conferences identify quite the same issues, or that the organizers of such conferences consider the same points as problematic. In order to illustrate the very contrasted nature of concerns, let me take just two examples from 2009:

- a conference held in March at the University of Geneva focused on the implications for the French language of the fact that the English language is used in a growing number of graduate programs in French-speaking universities, as well for the submission to and evaluation of research projects by research funding bodies in predominantly non-English-speaking countries².
- a conference held last December in Brussels, under the auspices of the ACA (Academic Cooperation Association, which includes 24 institutional members – such as national or regional associations of universities, 20 of them European) also addressed the role of English in the academic life of historically non-English-speaking countries – but its main concern, apparently, was how to help the process along.³

The contrast emerging from these two examples illustrate a fact we all know, namely, that the question of language use in the life of modern universities is not a point of detail. Quite the contrary, it is an issue that carries vast and important consequences. The latter are social, cultural, political, economic, pedagogical and linguistic. Yet my impression is that the lion’s share of all the scientific discourse produced on *language (or languages) in the operations of modern universities* is devoted to pedagogical questions, subsidiarily to linguistic ones. However, given the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of the issues at hand, inputs other than those coming from pedagogy or the language sciences are also needed.

This throws up a whole range of challenges which I shall attempt to discuss in the following sequence. In section 2, I try to reframe the issue, in order to establish the need for an evaluative, public policy approach to the question of the appropriate place of different languages in the operations of modern universities. In Section 3, I present some elements of a public policy approach, drawing on *education economics* on the one hand, and *language economics* on the other hand, stressing in particular concepts designed to assist in the making of well-founded choices. In section 4, I propose a typology of the language-related issues that universities are confronted with, showing that we need to develop a perspective far broader than the partial questions (such as “internationalization” or “competitiveness”) usually invoked in discussions on university governance. Section 5 applies some of the concepts presented in Section 3 to a selection of questions derived from the list presented in Section 4. Section 6 sums up the findings and offers a brief conclusion.

² See www.ciip.ch/dlf.

³ See www.aca-secretariat.be.

2. Reframing the issue

Let me clarify the point just made: of course, there is a massive literature on university governance that does address political or economic aspects. But language tends to be wholly absent from these contributions, as if the linguistic dimensions of university governance required no serious examination. Conversely, whenever language is placed at the centre of attention, pedagogy and applied linguistics take center stage, and the governance problems are typically under-identified. Putting it differently, we can say that in most cases, these perspectives tend to adopt relatively “micro”, sometimes even “nano” angles, which eschew the broader issues of governance. Finally, when attempts are made to investigate the role of language in university governance in a general perspective rather than case-specific context, the focus is usually placed on a specific dimension of governance, such as “internationalization” (e.g. Hughes, 2008).

The offshoot of all this is that there is relatively little in the way of systematic, theory-based analyses of the more macro-level aspects pertaining to the proper role of different languages in tertiary education, in particular the social, political and economic issues at hand. Quite simply, we do not have much research addressing the following essential questions:

- 1) should teaching and research operate in a variety of languages, even if this means *resisting* the trend towards doing more through the medium of language of wider circulation such as English?
- 2) should teaching and research, on the contrary, strive to give such a language a greater role – as exemplified by many currently ongoing initiatives in universities around the world?
- 3) no less importantly, *what reasons* would we have for choosing either course of action?

Merely formulating these three questions makes two things clear:

- firstly, even the most insightful pedagogical considerations about the linguistic aspects of the operation of universities are not relevant to answering *these* questions. Why? Because such considerations, which may tell us *how* to do things, do not tell us *what* to do, and *why*. Questions such as how to improve the quality of English-medium education in a German university only make sense *if* it has been decided, on the basis of a rigorous, logically consistent assessment, that some courses in German universities *should* be taught in English *at all*. And that’s a big “if”. Perhaps it’s a good idea. And then perhaps it’s not. Establishing this point is the first order of business.
- Secondly, it is not enough to *describe* existing linguistic practices in university context. Description is interesting because it can give us fine-grained information about how language—or languages—are used in teaching and research; most importantly, it can help us to make out what is likely, what is possible, and what is impossible. Hence, it serves to identify, out of the range of possible scenarios (or “alternatives”), which are the ones that can

reasonably be entertained. But then a choice must be made, and the best description in the world does not address, let alone answer the question of *what* should be done and *why*.

Clearly, the three questions outlined above are highly complex. But when decisions have to be made, the first challenge is to establish what should be done and for what reasons, before worrying about the “how”. And this is why we need an *evaluative* approach suited to the assessment of alternative, *macro-level* scenarios.

There’s nothing terribly surprising about this idea. What is surprising, rather, is how often – or even systematically – it is overlooked. For a variety of reasons, there seems to be a deep-rooted tendency, even among the authorities entrusted with university governance, to forget or ignore the fundamental questions, and to treat the answers to these questions as forgone conclusions. This may result from inadequate familiarity with the social meanings of language, finding expression in what linguists Franz Andre and Richard Watts have called “folk linguistics”. Another is the obduracy with which, in Jonathan Pool’s (1991) well-chosen word, laypeople and specialists alike cling to “extraordinarily stubborn beliefs” when it comes to language issues. But perhaps the most general explanation is a tendency *not* to adopt a sufficiently broad view, with the associated failure to think “out of the box”. It is in fact ironic that we keep being admonished to think “out of the box” by people who appear quite happy to stay inside the box as soon as language issues arise.

Let us recall that universities are important players whose action, for good or for ill, is not confined to pure teaching and research. Notions such as the broader responsibility of universities, their expected contribution to dealing with all kinds of issues ranging from ensuring economic growth, promoting democracy or advancing social justice are not just very popular in official discourse. They also imply that university governance should take account of the wide range of consequences that the decisions made can have – also, and this is my point precisely, their linguistic consequences. Universities are shaped by, but also contribute to shaping their *linguistic environment*. In short, we can say that:

- E1) the linguistic practices of universities *reflect* broader sociolinguistic conditions;
- E2) through their linguistic practices, universities contribute to the *shaping* of these broader conditions;
- E3) given their strategic position in the fabric of society, universities’ language choices are *per se* elements of *language policy* – whether a university is a publicly-funded or a private one.

Thus, any examination of universities’ language choices (or, more generally, choices that have linguistic implications) should be analyzed and formulated with explicit reference to these three levels. In what follows, however, we leave the first two aside (namely, how universities’ linguistic practices are influenced by, and subsequently influence their environment) and focus on the third (namely, how

deliberate choices regarding these practices can and should be made in policy perspective).

3. Tools and criteria

A/ The notion of counterfactual

When policy choices are made, they should be demonstrably better than the alternatives (Dunn, 1994). If university authorities choose policy *X* over policy *Y*, it must be because they feel confident that *X* promises to deliver better results than *Y* in terms of appropriate criteria.

Of course, assessing this point sounds like a perfectly obvious point. Yet it can be established only through a systematic assessment of the consequences of *X*, and *Y*. Putting it differently, it makes sense to adopt a policy *X* only if the *counterfactuals*, that is, policy *Y* (and possibly additional scenarios like *Z*) have been identified and assessed. In the *ex-ante* context (that is, when a choice between competing scenarios must be made), the only way to do so is to make projections and simulations of likely consequences, even if these projections and simulations can be informed (i) by past experience and (ii) by current experience elsewhere.

That's all quite obvious, of course. But I am prepared to bet that universities' language policy decisions, nine times out of ten, are made *without any effort to assess the counterfactuals*. Let us point out that the *statu quo ante* (that is: "how things are now"), though it is often used informally (or perhaps even unconsciously) as a counterfactual, is not quite satisfactory, because the alternative to policy *X* is not things *as they are now*, but things *as they are likely to evolve if we don't make changes*. The counterfactual is always hypothetical, and the assessment of the relative advantages and drawbacks of *X* over *Y* always requires a thought experiment, formalized through a simulation. Most universities don't bother. Rather, the usual approach to major choices seems to be of the kind: "oh, policy *X* sounds really good, and its consequences will be such-and-such, so let's just go ahead and do it". Even if considerable effort is expended to marshalling evidence regarding the positive effects of policy *X* (along with the associated costs), the resulting discourse is logically worthless unless effort has also been made to assess the effects of at least one reasonable counterfactual.

Let us now turn to the criteria in terms of which alternatives should be assessed.

B/ The overall criteria: efficiency and fairness

There are essentially two broad criteria to be applied, namely, *efficiency* and *fairness*. Discussions of efficiency and fairness are at the heart of a considerable literature in economics (particularly *welfare economics*) and political science (particularly *normative political theory*), and of course in the field of *policy analysis* which connects the preceding two. The relevance of efficiency and fairness, and the meaning of the distinction between them, is a classic in public policy selection, design and evaluation. It is increasingly well-known, as is the fact that it applies to language policy as well (Grin, 2003; Gazzola and Grin, 2007).

Efficiency refers to the *proper allocation of resources*: given that resources are scarce and have alternative uses (that is, they can be devoted to pursuing policy *X* or policy *Y*), allocating them to *X* is an appropriate course of action only if we have reason to think that allocating them to *Y* (or even to another policy *Z*) would not have delivered a *higher* level of aggregate welfare. Formally, efficiency is a complex notion defined in welfare economics as the *joint* occurrence of (i) efficient production; (ii) efficient consumption and (iii) efficient product mix. In practice, however, efficiency is often approached as “cost-effectiveness” (which can in turn be informally interpreted as “achieving the best outcome with a given use of scarce resources”), *separately* assessed for production and consumption. In an informal way, it is usually good enough to define allocative efficiency as “making the best use of the resources available” or “avoiding the waste of resources”.

Fairness refers to a “just” distribution of resources between social actors as a result of policy *X*, *Y* or *Z* being implemented. “Just” or “fair” is a notion which is, of course, open to discussion, and the analysis of distribution can be broken down in two steps: first, identifying and measuring (without passing judgement) who gains and who loses, and how much, as a result of the implementation of a policy; second, in reference to criteria usually developed in normative political theory, assessing which policies (given their likely outcomes) are more “just” or “fair” than others. The underlying criterion of equity will in practice tend to converge with some *social consensus* in a given time and place, but this is an issue that we shall not discuss further. For the purposes of fairness assessment, social actors may be viewed as individuals or as groups (e.g.: “the poor” v. “the middle class” and “the rich”; “women” v. “men”; “minority” v. “majority”; “the old” v. “the young” – or vice-versa, of course): in specialist jargon, the question here is which group has “standing”, in the sense that the relative share of resources accruing to the group as a result of the implementation of the policy is considered a relevant concern. For example, the impact of a change in the tax schedule would normally be assessed in terms of its impact on the distribution of disposable income between income groups, but probably not between groups of people defined by eye color.

It is often the case that society must accept a trade-off between efficiency and fairness. The classic example is tax policy: more progressive taxation is often viewed as more fair because it allows for redistribution and thus ends up with a less unequal distribution of spending power among members of society; at the same time, heavier taxes on the rich may discourage productive effort and ultimately result in a lower level of production, and thus of aggregate welfare.

The notions of efficiency and fairness, as well as the possible need to trade one against the other, also occurs in language policy, and also with respect to universities’ choices in this area.

Let us now take a closer look at the nature of the “resources” that can be allocated more or less effectively, and distributed more or less fairly.

C/ The relevant resources

Language policy is complex not only because carries material and physical implications, but also because it touches upon non-material, symbolic issues with a considerable political, social and cultural content. The same is true of education policy, not least in the context of university governance. What is policy-relevant is not confined to material or financial effects. The non-tangible effects of a policy are perfectly relevant too, either as such or because non-tangible effects can have pervasive consequences, including perfectly material and tangible ones (Grin, 2003).

This is why, for example, the choice of a language as a medium of instruction matters: the exclusion of a language (say, language L_X) in favor of the use of another (say, language L_Y) lowers the prestige and social recognition of L_X , depriving its native speakers of an asset (the full *usability* of their best language skills), with non-tangible consequences (a feeling of disenfranchisement, for example), but with tangible consequences too (the higher costs incurred, by comparison with native speakers of L_Y , to achieve academic and professional success). These costs must be balanced against whatever advantages are expected, in the aggregate, from adopting language L_Y as sole medium of instruction.

Obviously, taking account of non-tangible dimensions makes policy assessment significantly more complex, and raises tricky problems of identification and measurement. But there is simply *no* proper policy assessment without some effort in this direction, at least in the form of a preliminary identification of the effects at hand.

D/ The internal v. external levels

Let us finally say of a few words of a distinction that has particular import in the sphere of education, including tertiary level institutions. This distinction can be applied to both efficiency and fairness (Grin, 2006; Grin and Gazzola, 2007), but it is best-known in the context of efficiency. What is more, in the latter context, it is often applied not to efficiency proper, but to the narrower question of effectiveness (that is, the *magnitude of effects, or results, or outputs obtained with a given input of resources*), thus giving rise to analyses of *internal effectiveness* and *external effectiveness* (Lemelin, 1998; Levin, 1983; Grin, 2001).

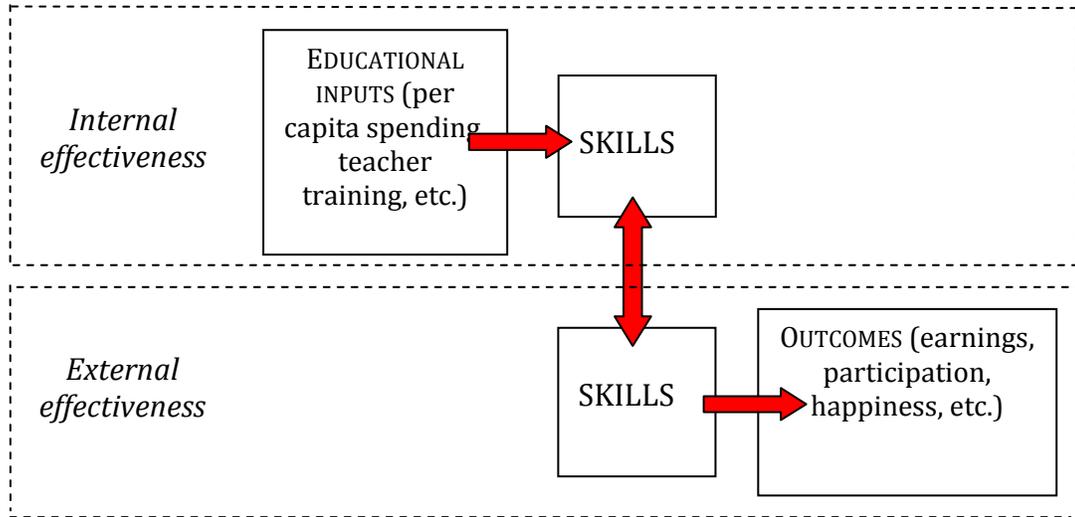
In internal effectiveness evaluation, one looks at what occurs *inside* the educational sphere (in practice, in the educational institution): more specifically, the analyst will try to assess the statistical relationship between, on the one hand, educational inputs like spending per pupil or student, teacher training, ICT availability, etc. and, on the other hand, educational outputs such as student achievement or skills levels (measured, for example, through PISA-type test results).

In external effectiveness evaluation, the attention shifts to what happens outside the educational sphere, and usually *after* education has been completed. What was treated as the *output* in the preceding evaluation is now treated as input. For example, skills levels are treated as an input, which is then put in statistical relation with the usefulness or profitability of this education. A standard measure of output is, of course, wage differentials associated with certain skills (for example, the rates

of return on foreign language competence), but other outputs can be taken into account, such as better health, higher participation in political or community life, or higher overall enjoyment of life.

The relationship between internal and external evaluation can be represented in the following diagram (Figure 1):

FIG. 1: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION



Clearly, and as pointed out earlier in this paper, internal effectiveness evaluation (even if done properly and in full awareness of the principles of policy analysis outlined in this section) does not tell us what should be done. It only tells us *how* things should be done, but this question only arises *after* we it has been decided what should be done – by comparison with what alternative, for what allocative and distributive reasons, while also specifying how the latter have been measured.

This is why discussions of the pedagogical quality of the teaching of, or through, one language or another only has conditional relevance. It is relevant if the *external* issues have been properly dealt with. It is seldom the case, and the issues at hand are typically under-identified, as we shall see in the following section.

4. Identifying the language policy challenges⁴

Let us use the term “linguistic practices” to refer to the use of one or more language by an institution – in our case, by a university. Universities use languages for (essentially) five types of activities:

P1) the languages taught as subjects;

⁴ This section largely draws on an unpublished document (*Canevas en vue de l'élaboration d'une politique linguistique pour l'Université de Genève*) prepared by F. Grin and L. Gajo at the request of the Rectorate of the University of Geneva in 2008.

- P2) the language or languages of instruction, used in the teaching of other, non-linguistic subjects;
- P3) the languages used by academic staff in research, mainly (i) research activities proper, including project drafting and submission, interaction within and between research teams, and (ii) publication of scientific work in specialist journals and books or in formats destined to the general public(including in both cases on-line publication of materials);
- P4) the languages used by the university in its administrative operations;
- P5) the languages used by the university in external communication (e.g for recruitment purposes, public relations locally or abroad, etc.).

What we are deliberately leaving aside here is interaction between students. There are several reasons for this, but the main one is that except in very specific contexts (which often means non-democratic ones), the languages used by students to communicate is not something that universities should or even could regulate; putting it differently, this is not a university governance question.

Combining the three aspects of the linguistic environment (E1, E2 and E3 above) with the five types of linguistic practices (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5), we get a 3×5 matrix represented in Table. 1. However, account should also be taken of the fact that the “language policy issues appearing in the third column can be assigned to three different “levels”, or fall into three main categories, namely:

- general policy orientations [G];
- organizational questions [O];
- pedagogical questions [P].

Hence, each cell in the third column of the matrix should include the three levels G, O, and P. The resulting table generates a fairly general identification of the range of questions with respect to which language-related decisions must be made; as announced earlier, our focus is going to be on how to handle the third column,

	RESPONSE TO LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT	IMPACTS ON LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT	RESULTING LANGUAGE POLICY ISSUES (EXAMPLES)
<i>Languages taught as subjects</i>	Trends affecting macro-level language dynamics and demand for language skills	Effects of universities' linguistic offerings on relative position of languages	G: what languages to teach and for what reasons? O: what budgetary implications? P: which skills levels in what languages for whom with what methods?
<i>Language(s) of instruction</i>	Trends affecting attitudes and representations of what counts as 'appropriate' languages of instruction; legal framework	Effects of universities' practices on relative language legitimacy/prestige; access to education; responsiveness vs. responsibilities towards different constituencies	G: should languages other than the local one(s) be used for teaching? Why? For which courses? Assuming what level of skills in non-local language[s] by students and instructors? O: what need for associated services for staff (e.g. language center, etc.) ? P: which skills levels in languages other than the local language[s] may be expected

			from students? From instructors?
<i>Language(s) of research activities</i>	Forces that affect the relative prestige/spread of different languages in research, nationally and internationally	Effects of linguistic practices in research on relative language prestige; 'efficiency' of research; 'return' to taxpayer; cognitive impacts	G: should the use of a LWC be encouraged or not? Why? Or multilingualism? For which parts of research activities? O: what need for associated services for staff (e.g. language center, etc.), support for staff's publication activity in non-native language[s]? What need for translation services? P: which type of language-related expertise should be developed.—e.g. for the supervision of doctoral theses?
<i>Language(s) of internal administration</i>	Legislation, if any; actual political weight of legislation relative to other trends	Universities' identity; responsibility towards stakeholders / taxpayers	G: is there any type of situation where non-local language(s) should be used for internal purposes? O: what implications for internal regulations/by-laws? What type of language support services to provide for clerical staff? P: specific pedagogical issues arising in the language training of administrative staff
<i>Language(s) of external communication</i>	Relative importance / legitimacy of languages. Expectations from the public in this respect. Actual import of non-local student recruitment	Effects of universities' linguistic behavior (e.g. in international recruitment practices) on institutional image? On the legitimacy and prestige of different languages?	G: institutional image aimed at; implications for student recruitment (enrollment; student profile; geographical origin) O: setting up of language quality assurance and control; P: specific pedagogical issues arising in the language training of communication team, international affairs officers, etc.

Clearly, the range of issues to be addressed is enormous, and an exclusive focus on a topic such as “internationalization of the student body” (a popular – though somewhat shallow –indicator of university quality) or “competitiveness in international rankings” (typically approached through egregiously skewed indicators) do not, far from it, do justice to the issues at hand.

To my knowledge, there is simply no general treatment available at this time of the language questions identified in Table 1. And when questions are not fully identified, we obviously cannot have proper answers. Available documents suggest that authorities merrily go ahead with all kinds of language-related decisions taken with only the most tenuous grasp of their implications. Obviously, we cannot answer these questions here, and it would simply not be realistic or honest to assert that universities *should* do this or that. We are only just taking stock of the range of questions to be addressed.

But this is enough to show that most of the time, the issues at hand are only partly identified, if at all. Generally, university authorities will take a narrow view, which amounts to making a host of assumptions, often unstated. The result is a very partial approach to language choices in university governance. Let us turn to a few examples in the following section, focusing on the trend to increase the use of English in non-English-speaking countries, whether as a medium of instruction or as a language used in various stages of research activity.

Before doing so, however, let me stress one important point: the question is not the use of English per se. The question, rather, is that of the use of *one* dominant language, which also happens to be the native language of some people (in this case,

the approximately 400 million native speakers of English). The problem would be similar if *the* dominant language were Chinese, French, or Spanish. Let me repeat it once more, loud and clear: the problem is *not* English, which is a language I enjoy using, and which I am using right now. The problem is linguistic hegemony.

5. A look at selected issues

Although we cannot cover all the issues identified in the preceding section, nor give an account of the abundant information available about one aspect or another of this reality, we can reassess – even if briefly – some of the most important aspects. In what follows, I will therefore look at two questions: A – the use of English as a medium of instruction; B – the use of English in research, further broken up in two sub-questions, namely, B1, the practice of research, and B2, the issue of university rankings.

A – The use of English as a medium of instruction

According most commentators, such as Wächter and Maiworm (2008: 30-32), the trend towards more programs through the exclusive medium of English⁵ is on the rise: this can be observed through the percentage of institutions offering such programs (16% to 30% in 2002 in the EU15 minus the UK and Ireland, against 18% to 47% in 2007 in the EU27 minus the UK, Ireland and Malta. Over the same period and for the same sample, the percentage of English-medium curricula has gone up from a 2% to 4% range to a 2% to 7% range. Though this may look modest at first sight, it is in fact considerable, owing the strong increase in the absolute number of programs and tertiary institutions over the same period.

The question is: do universities' apparently frequent decision to increase the share of English as a medium of instruction follow a proper evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of this move, as well as of its distributional implications? On the basis of available evidence, the answer to this question must be a resounding “no”. There is no trace of any single instance of a proper evaluation having been carried out. This does not mean that using more English is necessarily a *bad* choice: this is a distinct question that we shall turn to in a moment. What it means is that university authorities are liable to make important decisions pretty much at random.

The arguments marshaled in favor of English-medium education, in the main, fall in three broad categories: (i) this is necessary to attract “the best” foreign students (Gazzola, forthcoming); (ii) others do it, so we must do it too; (iii) a typical “folk linguistics” perception that “English is the language of science”. I shall examine the first argument in relation to the issue of the choice of a medium of instruction, and

⁵ Wächter and Maiworm talk of “PTEs”, that is, “programmes taught entirely in English”, which of course excludes programmes in English language or literature. They also report an increase in the percentage of students attending PTEs, from 0.2%-0.5% in 2002 to 0.6%-1.8% in 2007; the latter range increases to 0.7%-2.1% if all 27 member countries of the EU, plus Turkey, minus the UK, Ireland, Malta and Luxembourg are included in the estimation.

the second in relation to the issue of language in research. A brief discussion of the third argument is deferred to the concluding section.

As regards the first argument in relation with the choice of languages of instruction, it seems to rest on a host of unstated and debatable assumptions⁶:

[1] firstly, it would seem to imply that students, if they are foreigners, are usually better than local ones (or that local ones are on average a bit dim by comparison with all those bright foreigners). But bright as they are, these foreigners cannot be expected to learn a local language, or be subjected to the indignity of having to learn German or French! To my knowledge, this claim that “the others are better” has never been assessed, even informally. In fact, it sounds very much like putting the cart before the horses. Proper university governance probably ought to address matters of quality and recruitment the other way around. The priority should be in setting up the best possible programs. Then, IF the local catchment area is too small to generate enough bright students, AND IF it can simultaneously be shown that getting more attractive prospects than the local dimwits is possible only by offering this particular program through the medium of English, THEN there would be an argument for doing so. However, all this has never been established – particularly in the case of large countries where the recruitment basin is significant (after all, there are about 60m residents in France and 83m in Germany; is it really impossible to recruit enough good students with such population numbers?).

[2] A second implicit assumption is that foreign students with a native language such as Spanish, Russian, Swedish or Farsi will flock to courses taught at French, German or Italian universities if these courses are taught through the medium of English. For very specific, high-level programs, this may be the case. For example, one particular Master Program in corporate communication offered by the University of Italian Switzerland⁷ would appear to fall into this category. However, non-native speakers of English in search of an education in English will first and foremost try to enroll at universities in English-speaking countries, particularly the US and Britain, with English-speaking Canada and Australia coming next (Hughes, 2008): To the extent that the best students have a better chance to achieve this goal, the ones who will settle for English-medium programs in France or Germany are likely, precisely, *not* to be the best⁸. By contrast, French or German universities stand their best chance at attracting the best students precisely by teaching through French and German respectively, and thus attracting the bright students who have studied French and German as foreign languages up to the level where they can follow university-level courses in those languages at native speed (which doesn't mean that they haven't learned English too). A related question, of course, is

⁶ Many such assumptions are exposed and criticised in Usunier (2009).

⁷ See <http://www.mcc.usi.ch/corporate-communication-09.pdf>; this program is considered by some as one of only three such programs worldwide, the other two being taught in Denmark and in the US respectively.

⁸ A related question, of course, is whether foreign students' English is really good, and whether teaching in English is the appropriate response to their presence. Usunier (2009) claims the opposite, noting that most foreign students' level of English is weak.

whether foreign students' English is really good, and whether teaching in English is the appropriate response to their presence. Usunier (2009) claims the opposite, noting that most foreign students' level of English is weak. I wouldn't go as far as to argue that teaching through the medium of English is, for a French- or German-speaking institution, a recipe for attracting second-tier students. But so far, it has not been proved that it will attract "the best".

[3] A third assumption, which is sometimes made but in a vague, warbled way, is that the international character of the student body enhances the quality, if not of teaching, then at least of learning. In its crudest form, this assumption is reflected in the notion that one indicator of university quality is the percentage of foreigners in the student body. Let us not dwell on the fact that flattering statistics revealing the presence of a large cohort of foreign students (i) ignores the possibility that foreigners come from countries with the same native language (as in the case of French citizens coming to my home university, Geneva, or Argentinians studying at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid); (ii) glosses over the possibility that students may be attracted to a university because it's inexpensive (certainly the case in Switzerland, where tuition for non-residents is in the region of EUR 1,000 per year – a far cry from the tens of thousands one has to fork up to study at some universities in the US)⁹. However, let us for a while ponder the notion that a genuinely more diverse student body has positive effects on the quality of students' learning experience. However, this argument rests on the notion that diversity stimulates creativity or enhances problem-solving abilities.

At this time, the evidence on this matter is mixed, but if such an effect does exist, one may wonder whether this worthy purpose is really best served by the use of *one* language of wider communication; qualitative work currently being carried out in the context of the DYLAN project, funded by the European Commission in Framework Program No. 6, suggests that it is precisely the use of several languages that gives rise to positive effects (see research papers on the DYLAN website on www.dylan-project.org).¹⁰

[4] A fourth assumption is that all the material and symbolic costs of this increase in the role of English are negligible or irrelevant. Yet these costs may be considerable: they include:

- time and money devoted to language learning by instructors;
- time and money devoted to language learning by students (who have no choice but to follow tuition in English);
- time and energy spent compensating for "glitches" in written or oral communication resulting from inadequate knowledge of English by

⁹ Incidentally, the popularity of universities in the US, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand may well be due not only to the quality of the education they provide, but simply to the fact that they teach through the medium of English – in fact, owing to their practices in teaching and research, they turn out to be among the least multilingual academic institutions in the world.

¹⁰ A related issue is that of the economic value of multilingualism. Recent research by Grin, Sfreddo and Vaillancourt (in press) indicates that multilingual skills contribute 10% of Switzerland's GDP.

participants in communication (including presumably “Anglophone” foreign students);

- the mental impoverishment resulting from a monolingual academic culture and approach to knowledge. Let us recall that even if knowledge is not strictly language-bound, it is not wholly language-free either. Writing about the teaching of finance, Chesney (2009) notes that the increasingly dominant use of English in his discipline translates into a homogenization of contents, with the same books being used, the same formal models applied, etc.; according to Chesney, this induces identical behavior by decision-makers in the world of banking and finance, and may thus have worsened the financial crisis. Usunier (2009) goes further and claims that English monolingualism in the higher education systems of non-English-speaking countries amounts to deliberate *deculturation*.
- further symbolic costs linked to the downgrading of the language whose use in academic teaching declines. This question would deserve to be examined in depth, something which of course exceeds the scope of this paper.

In any event, these costs are hardly ever mentioned, and I am not aware of *any* example of an attempt to assess their magnitude, in order for them to be balanced against the alleged benefits. To my knowledge, no such evaluation is ever carried out, and the identification of the issues at hand is never even done properly. Then, even if these effects were identified and assessed, the next question is the distributive one: how are these effects distributed among social actors? Who gains, who loses? And even if *everyone* were to gain (a rather unusual case), who gains a lot, and who gains only a little? Needless to say, these distributive questions are never addressed.

In short, the factual and analytical basis for weighty language decisions in university governance is amazingly thin.¹¹

2/ Language in research

Linguistic practices play a no less central role in research than in teaching. Research, in turn, implies many different activities, but in terms of language use, it can be organized according to the following typology, proposed by the French physicist Lévy-Leblond (1996):

¹¹ The Catalan education ministry has recently announced a new scheme amounting to a caricature of this trend. Extra funding will be allocated to universities who teach more courses through the medium of English and Catalan. While the case for using a minority language as medium of instruction (also in higher education) is well established in minority language research (Fishman, 1991), the case for using more English is, as we have just seen, rather flimsy. This new incentive scheme in favor of more English does not even attempt to link incentives to whatever positive consequences more English-medium teaching *might* have: it rewards the use of English per se; see “Subobjective B.3.5 in the circular entitled *Finançament variable per objectius de les universitats públiques catalanes, 2008-2010*, dated 28 July 2009.

<i>Communication:</i>	INFORMAL	INSTITUTIONAL	PUBLIC
WRITTEN	Laboratory log books, correspondence (incl. e-mail exchanges), etc.	Scholarly papers and books	Publications for wider, non-specialist public
ORAL	Oral interaction, e.g. in team meetings	Colloquia, seminars, scholarly conferences	Presentations to the media, talks aimed at the wider public

Source: adapted from Lévy-Leblond (1996: 235).

According to Lévy-Leblond, an essential part of communication in research takes place in the researchers' first language or mother tongue – which may very well not be English at all. In his view, the need for a language of wider communication only arises for institutional communication, where a case can be made that the use of one language delivers various advantages. Let us, however, examine this point at closer range.

The convergence towards the use of one given language for institutional communication should be submitted to the same type of scrutiny as before: what are the advantages of carrying out research through the medium of one common language? What are the effects on creativity, problem-solving, innovation? There again, evidence is lacking: qualitative results from the already-mentioned DYLAN project suggest that in research as in teaching, it is advantageous *not* to be confined to one language only (even if it is a language of wider communication); and a survey of psychologists' research on individual bilingualism indicates that they lean towards a positive evaluation of the effect of multilingualism on creativity (Europublic, 2009)¹². And what are the long-term impacts on a society when the language — or languages — associated with its history and cultural development are no longer used for top-tier scientific research? The usual response is to summarily dismiss such concerns¹³, yet at the very least, they deserve to be examined, since the negative effects may be substantial and could largely offset whatever gains may be achieved by the use of one language such as English.

And then, assuming it has been shown to be good thing (let me emphasize: *assuming* this has been *shown*), the alternatives still need to be assessed not only in allocative (that is: “on balance, is the use of English in research a sound allocation of scarce resources?”), but also in distributive terms (that is: “who gains, who loses, and how much?”). The extra costs incurred by non-native speakers (language learning time, effort devoted to writing in a foreign language, translation costs, etc.)

Obviously, decisions to use more English are *never* subjected to this type of scrutiny. The general principle seems to be: “others do it, so we *must* do it too”. At one level, this is perfectly understandable: no-one wants to be shut out from the larger debate.

¹² One implication, of course, is that curricular provided in one language only (say, German), would benefit from including another language, which may very well be English. But then care must be taken to ensure that this broadening of a curriculum's linguistic scope amounts to additive, not “displacing” or subtractive bilingualism.

¹³ For example in the weekly magazine *The Economist*, “English is coming”, 12 February 2009.

But it amounts to ignoring the possibilities of *coordination* — which is, as we know, indispensable for all kinds of policies, starting with environmental policies: after all, university authorities, or the political authorities that fund them (e.g. on the European continent) or at least define the legal context in which they operate (everywhere) could very well implement another solution resting on different linguistic practices, where the cross-fertilization of intellectual work resorts not to one strategy only (that is, the use of English, mistakenly described as a *lingua franca*), but on the joint use of several communication strategies. Given the heavy costs of an English-only strategy, it is very likely that alternatives yield, on balance, a higher return. Hence, the argument according to which “we must do it because others do it” is strikingly shallow.

This shallowness — and the negative effects it induces — is nowhere more in evidence than in the role of performance indicators for some systems used for the ranking of universities (or the relative performance of states), like the “Shanghai ranking” (Gazzola, forthcoming). In addition to the many biases to which they are exposed (or which they may even encourage), bibliometric indicators are problematic because of their exclusive or near-exclusive reliance on publications in English-medium journals compiled by the “ISI Web of Knowledge” in indexes such as, the *Social Sciences Citation Index*. This creates an incentive to publish in English irrespective of the objective usefulness of doing so: researchers are compelled to publish in English because researchers are compelled to publish in English — not because publishing in English has been shown to encourage better-quality research. The very construction of the indexes artificially reduces (as shown by Van Leeuwen *et al.*, 2001, with the *Science Citation Index*) the visibility of research produced in non-English speaking countries.

The problem, of course, is that there is simply no automatic positive connection between the language in which a paper is published and the quality of the ideas it contains; the reliance on truncated, monolingual, and ultimately misleading indicators of research quality not only misses its professed objective: it also abets the spread of one language in research — and at this point, it is simply impossible to claim that this evolution is, on balance, a positive one.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that language-related decisions in academia have potentially massive consequences and deserve to be evaluated with proper analytical instruments, such as those provided by the discipline of policy analysis. After presenting some essential analytical concepts, I have proposed a preliminary identification of the range of language-related choices that universities have to make, showing that these choices go far beyond standard issues such as internationalization, research excellence, etc. Focusing on the role of English in traditionally non-English-speaking academic environments, we have then taken a closer look at two types of choices, namely, the role of English as a language of

instruction and the use of publications in English as indicator of research performance.

The general picture emerging from this examination is that university authorities, although they could be expected to lead by example and make carefully justified choices, routinely make major decisions without any kind of proper examination of their consequences, on the basis of strikingly flawed information or frivolous beliefs.

This latter word, beliefs, probably explains a lot, and is exemplified by clichés such as “English is the language of science” and similar pronouncements of the same tripe. The “extraordinarily stubborn beliefs” mentioned by Pool (quoted in the introduction of this paper) seem to operate completely unchecked in the higher spheres of academia — by contrast, business seems to be edging towards much more nuanced views, and to acknowledge the necessity for a partnership of languages. And again, let me repeat: the problem is not English *per se*, but linguistic hegemony, no matter which language is placed in a dominant position.

Why is it so? This remains a puzzling matter. Pending more detailed analysis, we might be tempted to call on Étienne de La Boétie, who back in the 16th century wrote the *Traité de la servitude volontaire* – the Treaty on willing submission, or voluntary serfdom. Perhaps we are confronted with the regrettable, though not uncommon inclination to bow before images of power, in the naïve hope of getting of few crumbs of this power in return for a show of submissiveness. After all, submission is often the easiest course of action.

At the same time, being an economist, I believe that people act rationally under a set of constraints, one of them being the information available – more precisely, “understood information”, that is, not just raw facts, but duly explained and contextualized analyses. If the need for proper evaluations of the alternatives at hand is explained, we can hope that even academic bodies can overcome their notoriously stubborn beliefs and move towards a genuinely multilingual ethos.

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