Language Diversity and the Problem of English

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In sum</th>
<th>International</th>
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<tr>
<td>597 million yearly turnover</td>
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<td>&gt; 5000 FTE staff</td>
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<td>&gt; 2000 FTE academic staff</td>
<td>&gt; 20% international academic staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Faculties</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30000 students</td>
<td>3750 students</td>
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<td>1100 exchange students</td>
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<td>49 bachelor's programmes</td>
<td>19 bachelor's programmes (39%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>146 master's degrees</td>
<td>101 master’s degrees (70%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1500 PhD students</td>
<td>800 PhD students (53%)</td>
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The Province of Fryslân (NL)

- 650,000 Inhabitants
- Frisian language proficiency (2011):
  - Understand: 85%
  - Speak: 64%
  - Read: 75%
  - Write: 12%
- Official language in the Netherlands
- Protected at level 2 of CRML
- Protected through ratification of Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
- Shift in provincial policies to a multilingualism paradigm
- UCF: academic network organisation

Source: TUBS, Wikipedia Commons
German is the most extravagantly ugly language - it sounds like someone using a sick bag on a 747.

Oh, you think German is an ugly language? Remind me again how you're supposed to pronounce "HOFBRAU."

Our language and dialect is an essential part of who we are. We must resist any attempts to cut us off from that.
Identity, but also a tool

› Language has emotional and social value; is a marker of personal and social identity (cf. Grin & Vaillancourt, 1997; Labov 2001)

› However, a dominant ideology for language learning is that a language should be a tool - cf. instrumentalism of language (Robichaud & de Schutter, 2012)

› The adoption of more current languages may increase the chances of education and employment. The many social dilemmas facing small language communities can only be understood within the encompassing anthropological context (De Swaan, 2004)
Identity, but also a tool

- Ammon (2012a):
  - ‘English has continuously gained ground [...]’. There must, therefore, be forces at work beyond the control of EU language policy. They apparently come from outside the EU: from the global context, in which the EU is tied up in its communication, i.e. the forces of ‘globalization’ to use a catchword

- University language policies are also tied up to the global market and are made to a large extent independent of Europe and national language policies
  - i.e. English
UG Language Policy (1)

› Dual plus: Dutch plus English as Medium of Instruction (EMI), fostering individual multilingualism and enhancing linguistic and cultural diversity and awareness


UG Language Policy (2)

> Reasons for adopting a new language policy:

- Language competences are important for reasons of competitiveness, employability, and mobility
- To become a truly international university linguistic and cultural barriers must be removed and inclusiveness promoted
- To cope with negative national demographic trends after 2020, universities in the Netherlands must strengthen their international position
UG Language Policy (3)

› Reasons for adopting a new language policy:

› Lauridsen: ‘It has become apparent that teaching difficulties are not simply a question of language but are rooted in profound cultural differences. Even in Britain, universities need to address the fact that they can’t just teach in English the way they teach native speakers’
Different to other LPPs?

- Nordic universities: also (partly) English:
  - Nordic languages in academia: no complete domain loss; English facilitates participation in global scientific community (Linn & Oakes, 2007; Haarman & Holman, 2001)
  - National languages are still used throughout the system (in teaching, publishing and even PhD theses)

- UG Language policy: promotes as much teaching in English as possible
  - Hence English becomes more instrumental than the national language
  - In practice universities are not maintaining language diversity but English only
The Local Problem of English

› Ammon (2012b): predominance of English skews scientific development and excludes other approaches to science

› English proficiency used as admissions criteria, but is not a reflection of academic talent

› Admissions are based on IELTS and TOEFL scores (administered by Cambridge English Language Assessment/British Council and Educational Testing Service)
  - Tests created by UK and US native speakers
  - Upholds British and American dominance of EFL market (cf. Grin, 2005:9)
The National Problem of English

- Dutch teens who want to study successfully at Dutch universities must be very proficient in English

- Implication: People believe the best way of ensuring this is to go to an English-spoken high school.

- Possible result: English is no longer only the language of the domain of Dutch academia, but increasingly of the domain of Dutch education as a whole.
The European Problem of English

“L2 speakers who can hold a conversation in English”

Graph made with data from Special Eurobarometer 386 (2012)
Three approaches to tackling the problem

1. Support bilingual or trilingual secondary schooling

2. Support language technology through META-NET

3. Support research and facilities for receptive bilingualism
Tackling the problem - 1

› Educational systems uphold national standard languages
  • The Dutch education system may end up upholding a notion that English is the most important language

› Advice:
  • Support multilingual instead of English-taught, or “international”, (secondary) education
    - This will create notion of instrumentality to more languages
    - Maintain concept of territorialism for education (Nelde et al., 1992; Williams, 2012)
Trilingual Schools in Fryslân

➢ Primary schools: Dutch, Frisian and English as Medium of Instruction
  • 40% Dutch, 40% Frisian and 20% English.
  • Van Ruijven, E.C.M. van en J. Ytsma (2008): Pupils in trilingual schools are better off.

➢ BA Minorities & Multilingualism

➢ MA Multilingualism
Tackling the problem - 2
Tackling the problem - 2

> Instrumentalism = “useful” in technology!

- Follow META-NET’s suggestions (Rehm & Uszkoreit, 2012)
  - Need for “policy making such as regulations supporting the multilingual setup of our society and the effective utilisation of language data for research and technology development”
  - If done appropriately: “Europeans will be able to communicate with one another, with their governments and with web services in their native mother tongue”

=> Will lead to validation of sustained use in education
=> Will facilitate translation of different scientific approaches
Tackling the problem - 3
Tackling the problem - 3

➢ Education and other domains can make more of receptive bilingualism
  • Instead of relying on lingua francas (i.e. English) make use of closely related languages

➢ Research in North Germanic, West Germanic and Finno-Ugric language areas indicate this is truly a viable option (Gooskens, 2007; Ribbert & ten Thije, 2007; Verschik, 2012)

➢ Also holds true for the political domain: e.g. the Nordic council
Conclusion

> These three recommendations complement one another

1. Multilingual education
2. Language technology
3. Receptive multilingualism

Thank you
References


