

Danish University lecturers' attitudes towards English as the medium of instruction

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Abstract

The increasing use of English in research and higher education has been the subject of heated debate in Denmark and other European countries over the last years. This paper sets out the various positions in the national debate in Denmark, and then examines the attitudes towards these positions among the teaching staff at the country's largest university. Four topics are extracted from the debate – one which expresses a positive attitude towards English and three independent but interrelated topics which express more negative attitudes. The responses from the university lecturers show that a majority agree with all positions, negative as well as positive. This finding indicates that the attitude may not form a simple one-dimensional dichotomy. The responses are broken down according to lecturer age and the proportion of teaching the lecturer conducts in English. The results show that younger lecturers and lecturers with a higher teaching load in English are more positive towards the increase in English medium instruction.

Keywords: attitudes, survey, English-medium instruction, internationalisation of higher education.

Resumen

Actitudes hacia la lengua inglesa como medio de instrucción por parte de los profesores de universidades danesas

El uso creciente de la lengua inglesa en la investigación y en la educación superior ha sido durante los últimos años objeto de acalorados debates en Dinamarca y otros países europeos. En el presente artículo se establecen las distintas posturas en el debate nacional en Dinamarca, y a continuación se examinan las actitudes hacia estas posturas entre el profesorado perteneciente a la universidad más

grande de este país. Del debate se extraen cuatro temas: uno que expresa una actitud positiva hacia la lengua inglesa y tres temas independientes pero a su vez interrelacionados que aluden a la expresión de actitudes más negativas. Las respuestas obtenidas de los profesores universitarios demuestran que una mayoría está de acuerdo con todas las posturas, ya sean negativas o positivas. Los resultados indican que la actitud no puede configurarse conforme a una simple dicotomía unidimensional. Las respuestas se dividen dependiendo de la edad del profesorado y la proporción de la docencia que dicho profesorado imparte en inglés. Los resultados demuestran que los profesores más jóvenes, así como los profesores con una carga docente en inglés superior, son los que se muestran más favorables a potenciar la lengua inglesa como medio de instrucción.

Palabras clave: actitudes, encuestas, inglés como medio de instrucción, internacionalización de la educación superior.

Introduction

The increasing use of English in research and higher education has been the subject of heated debate in Denmark and in other European countries over the last years. In many countries where English is not the national language, there has been a shift towards English-medium instruction in higher education (Hughes, 2008). This is the result of an ongoing “internationalisation” of higher education (see Wächter (2008) and Wächter & Maiworm (2008) for a discussion of the situation in Europe), where “internationalisation” seems to be synonymous with English-medium instruction (hereafter EMI). The consequences of the language shift involved in such internationalisation have been the subject of considerable research (see Coleman (2006) for an overview).

A number of Scandinavian studies have examined this shift through questionnaire or interview investigations. Many have focused on documenting how much English is used relative to the national language at various institutions (Gunnarsson & Öhman, 1997; Petersen & Shaw, 2002; Brandt & Schwach, 2005; Carroll-Boegh, 2005; Melander, 2005; Bolton & Kuteeva, 2009). Others have focused on the teachers’ English competences, their attitudes towards the change of medium of instruction and their strategies for coping with this change (Lehtonen & Lönnfors, 2001; Jakobsen, 2010; Tange, 2010; Jensen et al., 2011). These studies generally find that teachers judge their English competences to be sufficient, even if they are also able to point to problems with teaching in English, such as

more time needed for preparation and less interactive classes. The situation in Scandinavia thus seems to be similar to that in the Netherlands, where Vinke, Snippe & Jochems (1998) found that a majority of the lecturers at Delft University experienced little overall difference between teaching in English and Dutch, except for an increase in preparation time and some acknowledgement from the lecturers that it is more difficult to express ideas adequately and that teaching in English is more strenuous. None of these survey studies, however, have studied the attitudes of the teaching staff towards the more general issue of internationalisation and “anglification” of higher education. This perspective was included in a survey in Belgium (Sercu, 2004) which found that lecturers, but not students, worry that the role of their native language, Dutch, may be negatively affected by the increasing use of English.

Some studies have investigated students' English skills and whether these are sufficient to follow courses taught in English (Vinke & Jochems, 1993; Vinke, 1995; Jochems et al., 1996; Hellekjær, 2005; Didriksen, 2009). Sercu (2004) examined the English skills of both lecturers and students and found that the lecturers' reading, writing and listening skills were good, but that they needed to develop their oral skills. The students were found to have sufficient skills for following a lecture but not for writing papers or giving presentations. Finally, a smaller number of studies have examined the consequences of English-medium instruction for teaching and learning through observation or experimental designs. Generally, these have found that the teaching style becomes relatively more monologic and less interactive in English-medium instruction, and that students change their study habits (Vinke, 1995; Klaassen, 2001; Airey & Linder, 2006 & 2007).

The research on teachers' and students' preparedness and handling of the introduction of teaching through English is of course embedded in the larger discussion of the role of English as “a global language” and “a lingua franca for academia”. Within this debate, several scholars have noted how the rhetorical construction of English as “global” and as somehow decontextualised and value-free, is problematic (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 2006; see also Seidlhofer, 2003: 7-75, for a collection of papers that outline the debate). Others have argued that the dominating role of English, which ensures that almost all of the most prestigious journals are written in English and published in Britain or the USA, is marginalizing non-anglophone researchers with the effect of narrowing the combined

knowledge of the world (Canagarajah, 1996; Mendieta, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the attitudes of the teaching staff at a large European university involved in “internationalisation” towards a range of different issues made relevant by the transition, macro as well as micro issues. The paper begins by setting out the most prominent positions in the national debate on English in higher education in Denmark, and then examines university lecturers’ attitudes to these positions in a questionnaire survey. The paper falls into three parts: First the debate positions and their ideological implications are outlined; secondly we turn to the teaching staff at the University of Copenhagen viewed as a whole to see how they react to the positions in the debate; and finally we analyse how the independent variables age and proportion of teaching conducted in English relate to the attitudes of the respondents.

Internationalisation at the University of Copenhagen

The University of Copenhagen (UC) is the largest university in Scandinavia. In 2009 it had some 38,000 students and a teaching and research staff equivalent of 4,500 full-time employees. As is the case with other European universities, the later years have also seen a growing number of courses and programmes at UC offered in English. This is, at least in part, a result of the European Bologna Process which aims to standardise higher education in Europe and thus make an open market of higher education for both European and non-European citizens¹ (Wächter, 2008). At the time of writing, spring 2010, UC offers more than 500 individual courses taught in English (see URL: http://studies.ku.dk/studies/courses_offered_in_English/). About 100 complete Masters’ programmes are taught in English (see URL: http://studies.ku.dk/studies/degree_students/ma/) including the prestige programmes “Copenhagen Master of Excellence”. At present, the university offers no complete BA programmes taught in English. According to a governmental committee (Ministry of Culture, 2008) approximately a quarter of all university programmes in Denmark are taught in English.

The expanding internationalisation of UC is part of the official strategy of the UC, Destination 2012, which states that:

The purpose is to improve the University's chances of attracting greater numbers of outstanding students from abroad. The programmes will also help the University of Copenhagen to challenge and retain the very best students in Denmark. (University of Copenhagen, 2007: 31).

Of the 38,000 students enrolled at the university, some 5,500 or 15% are international students. Many of these are from the other Scandinavian countries. This is relevant because Scandinavians often have a working knowledge of Danish, and would not necessarily require the teaching to be conducted in English. The proportion of international, non-Scandinavian, students who cannot be expected to understand Danish, range from around 5 to 15% across the faculties with a mean of around 8%. All statistics are from the UC website (see URL: <http://tal.ku.dk/>). At present, the university has around 750 international academic staff, or around 8%. "International" is here defined as academic staff on temporary residence and work permit – that is typically employees who have been living in Denmark for less than seven years. Most of these can be thought of as a mobile academic workforce. Many are in the country only for the duration of their PhD or postdoctoral research period, others are on their way to becoming naturalised citizens.²

Several studies have investigated the use of English and Danish in research publications from Denmark. Jarvad (2001) showed that the proportion of English-language publications from the science faculty at UC rose from around 65% in 1990 to around 80% in 1999. In a study of research publications from the Faculty of Science at the University of Aarhus, Madsen (2008) showed that practically all (>95%) of the research publications in 2006 and 2007 were written in English. Danish on the other hand was preferred in research disseminating publications. Here the proportion of English-language publications was between 15 and 30%.

The increasing use of English in research publication and particularly the more recent increase in the use of English in university teaching has led to a heated debate among Danish politicians and academics. This debate is the focus of the next section. We believe it is important to know the history and the different positions in this debate to understand the rhetorical climate in which the attitude study that we have carried out is situated.

The debate on languages in Danish universities

An overview of the debate can begin with Jarvad's (2001) book, in which she writes:

The language of science today is English [...]. Here it is really the case that the domain of science, as far as the natural and technical sciences are concerned, is lost, and the activity in Danish is so small that the Danish language of science is stagnating and dying out. (Jarvad, 2001: 17 – our translation)

In 2003 there was a follow-up to this when the Danish ministry of Culture published its proposal for a language policy for Danish (Ministry of Culture, 2003). The document includes a proposal for “parallel language use”. The committee concludes:

Within the domain of higher education, too, there is a need for *parallel language use*. The objective must be to ensure that there will continue to be elements of Danish-medium teaching in the educational programmes in which English is now gaining ground as the language of instruction. (Ministry of Culture, 2003: 30 – our translation, emphasis in the original)

In 2006 the issue of Danish and English in higher education became a touchstone issue for the nationalist party (*Danske Folkeparti*) which acted as parliamentary support for the Liberal/Conservative coalition government. They proposed a law which would guarantee that Danish remains the predominant language in university teaching. The law was not passed, but the proposal led to the appointment of a new committee to lay out the foundations of a language law (Ministry of Culture, 2008). The debate reached a heated climax in late 2008 and early 2009. In October 2008, the nationalist party again proposed a law that would guarantee the use of Danish at the universities. The law intended to “put universities under an obligation to write teaching materials, employment conditions and public addresses in Danish (and optionally in English)” (our translation). The proposal was supported by a majority of the committee of cultural affairs. In effect, the government was in danger of being outvoted on the issue, and the two strong blocks in Danish politics (Liberals, Conservatives and Nationalists vs. Social democrats, Social-liberals and Socialists) were both divided over the issue. The threat to the government was defused when the Social democrats changed their position after a few days, and the debate cooled down.

The questionnaire we report on here was distributed to respondents in June 2009, just a few months after the debate peaked. The statements which we presented in the questionnaire are extracted from this debate, which is therefore outlined in some detail in the following section. The analysis of the topics in the debate is based in part on our understanding of the public debate over the last few years in general, but we also used a more systematic approach. A sample of newspaper articles and commentaries was extracted from three major national newspapers (*Politiken*, *Berlingske Tidende/Weekendavisen*, and *Kristeligt Dagblad*) from the most heated period of the debate (November 2008 to March 2009). All articles containing the search terms *dansk & sprog & universiteterne* [“Danish” & “language” & “the universities”] were extracted from the web archive Infomedia (URL: <http://infomedia.dk>). The motivation for extracting articles with the key word “Danish” rather than “English” was that the central issue in the debate was the potential threats to Danish. Some articles pointed to these potential threats while others dismissed them or argued that they were far outweighed by the benefits. Irrelevant items and duplicates were removed, which left a corpus of 26 articles, approximately 17,186 words. Our analysis of the corpus confirmed our initial observations that the four positions we have outlined below are the most prominent ones in the debate.

Topics in the debate

Proponents of an increased use of English in university teaching, whether they are politicians, academics, political commentators or others, focus their arguments on the internationalisation of university programmes. First, it is pointed out that graduates now need to orient themselves towards an international job market. It is therefore essential that courses become more internationalised so that students familiarise themselves with English as an academic lingua franca. Secondly, they point out how the quality of university teaching is raised when Danish universities can attract the most talented international teachers and students. It should be noted here that the Bologna Process, as pointed out above, almost requires that teaching is conducted in English. Only by adopting a common academic language, can the ideal of a free market for higher education be realised. It is hard to imagine European students learning the language of each of the countries in which they may be taking parts of their education. Finally, in a more local context, some debaters mentioned the economic benefits of attracting

international students. Higher education is already a large industry and is likely to continue to grow. By offering more English-medium courses, Danish universities can attract more international students, in particular non-EU students, and increase their share of the market. These points mirror to a high degree the rationales found by Ammon and McConnell (2002, cited in Coleman 2006: 7). The points are summarised in this quote from the governmental commission mentioned above:

Universities should (...) have the opportunity of offering English-medium programmes and teaching as a prerequisite for qualified recruitment, educations at the highest level and the competitiveness of the graduates. (Ministry of Culture, 2008: 45 – our translation)

Those who are sceptical towards the increased use of English in university teaching have been the most vocal ones in the debate, since they are reacting to a development which is often seen as inevitable. They have typically focussed their arguments around three different, but interrelated, topics.

First, democratic considerations regarding the dissemination of knowledge are pointed out. The Danish universities are publicly funded. The universities therefore have an obligation to Danish society. Researchers are required to disseminate their knowledge in the common language, that is Danish, so that new knowledge is not the exclusive property of those who speak English. The concern here is that if students are taught exclusively in English, they may not be able to communicate in Danish with politicians, journalists, patients and other relevant groups.

Secondly, it is pointed out that the Danish language, and thus an important part of the nation's cultural heritage, may in the long run be threatened by the increasing use of English. If Danish "loses domains," that is if it is no longer used in prestige domains like higher education, it will lose prestige and in time degenerate to a second-rate language only used in the home and not for serious business. This process is self-perpetuating because less use leads to a less developed vocabulary which leads to an increased use of English, etc. These two concerns are pointed out in the following quote:

Danish is not threatened as the dominating language in Denmark, and there is an obvious need for Danes to learn other languages than Danish – and learn them well. But a language which gives out as one approaches an academic field, loses prestige (...) The democratic costs are perhaps even more important. We tend to congratulate ourselves on a long tradition for

the enlightenment of the people and for involving the people on an informed basis. (Lund, 2009: 2 – our translation)

A third and final concern is whether teaching in a language of which neither the teacher nor the student is generally a native speaker may lead to poorer learning. With regards to teachers, the question is whether they are capable of sharing their knowledge with the same precision as they would in their mother tongue, and also whether they are capable of using the same range of pedagogical methods. For example, can they maintain a highly interactive teaching environment, something that is generally accepted as beneficial but also as more linguistically challenging than lecturing? With regard to the students, the concern is partly whether they have the receptive skills to actually follow a lecture in English, but also as to whether they have the productive skills, and the linguistic self confidence, to participate actively in the classes. This is the point raised in the following quote from the same newspaper article by Jørn Lund (who acted as chair of the 2003 and 2008 committees):

... the main reason [why the law regulating the universities must be modified] is the fact that the outcome that students can achieve from classes that are taught in a language which neither they nor their teachers master is poorer than the outcome they would get from teaching conducted in their mother tongue, where they don't spend the energy on the linguistic processing but can memorise the material and relate to it in a critical-analytical manner – and remember it. (Lund, 2009: 2 – our translation)

The different quotations from Jørn Lund express both positive and negative views on the increasing use of English. This indicates that the terms “proponents” and “opponents” in this context should not primarily be seen as different persons involved in the debate, but rather as different positions which the debater may take in the debate.

A final issue that has often been raised in the debate, particularly by academics, is whether the question of language use in university teaching is something to be governed by parliament, or something best left to the universities. As outlined above, different politicians have tried to legislate either for or against the increased use of English. This has led to a reaction from some academics as expressed in the following quote.

I'm tired of the determination of know-it-all politicians to control the university sector and order us to act in a certain way. Therefore I say as the 18th century revolutionary Americans in the fight against the English tyrants:

“Don’t tread on me!” I and my colleagues can determine when we need to introduce English in our teaching and when we have to nurture the Danish cultural heritage. The intervention and micromanagement of politicians is slaughtering our universities. (McGuire, 2009: 9 – our translation)

Research questions

The overall purpose of this study is to gauge the attitudes of university lecturers towards the arguments which have been presented for and against the increasing use of English in higher education, in particular the increasing number of English-medium programmes and individual courses. The issue of university autonomy presented above was also included in the questionnaire, but since it is only indirectly concerned with positive or negative attitudes towards the use of English, the statements regarding this issue have not been included in the analysis below. The remaining topics were divided into four separate themes, as outlined in the Method section below.

The study includes several background variables which we believed could act as predictors of the lecturers’ attitudes. In this paper we present analyses of two of these variables, for which the preliminary analyses revealed particularly interesting results. The variables are described in the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1. Younger lecturers have a more positive attitude towards the increasing use of English.
- Hypothesis 2. Lecturers with a higher teaching load in English are more positive towards the increasing use of English.

Hypothesis 1 is based on the general development in the use and status of English in Denmark over the past 50 years. Most notably the school system has had an ever-increasing focus on formal English teaching with English classes starting earlier and earlier. This reality presumably leads to higher competence and different attitudes among younger generations. Simultaneously, English has gained impact “from below” (Preisler, 1999), that is informally through youth culture, which may further enforce the differences in competence and attitudes across generations. Previous studies on Danes’ attitudes towards English in Denmark have indeed shown a tendency for younger people to be more positive towards English (Preisler, 1999; Jarvad, 2001; Kristiansen, 2006). Hypothesis 2 is based partly on

previous research which has shown a correlation between a high contact with English and positive attitudes towards English in the Danish population in general (Preisler, 1999; Kristiansen, 2006), partly on informal personal communication with the lecturers who teach in English at the University of Copenhagen today, and also on the fact that the faculties that have the highest proportion of EMI are also the faculties that have been the most vocal proponents of the benefits of EMI. This, however, need not necessarily reflect the opinions of the individual teacher.

Method

In order to gauge the attitudes of the teachers at the University of Copenhagen towards the issues outlined above, we constructed a questionnaire, which was distributed as an online survey to all teaching staff at the University of Copenhagen. In the survey, teaching staff were asked to take a position on 17 statements that stem from the themes outlined above:

- Theme 1: Increased use of English in higher education impedes knowledge dissemination to the public.
- Theme 2: Teaching through English results in reduced learning for the students.
- Theme 3: Increased use of English in higher education threatens Danish as an academic language.
- Theme 4: An increased amount of English-medium teaching leads to higher academic standards and improved competitive capacities internationally.

Themes 1 to 3 suggest a negative attitude towards the increased use of English in higher education, while Theme 4 suggests a positive attitude towards this. Participants were also requested to evaluate their own English skills and answer a series of questions related to the various potential problems that could arise from teaching through the medium of English. Finally, we collected a number of background variables: job title, place of employment (faculty), age, gender, native language and teaching load in English. All 17 attitude statements were extracted from the ensuing debate and had been modified only enough that they could be understood out of the original context. The questionnaire was piloted by a group of representative university teachers, using a combination of think-aloud comments and

interviews. A few statements were revised as a result of the piloting process. Because of university policy the e-mail with a link to the online survey, and an accompanying cover letter, was sent out by the university's IT department. We were informed that the survey was distributed to a total of approximately 4,300 people. We received 1,131 completed questionnaires (either fully or partially), where the necessary information for the present study was included, which gives a response rate of just over 25%. Respondents could choose between a Danish and an English version of the questionnaire. In the Results section below, responses to the two versions have been combined. The presentation sequence of the attitude statements was randomised for each respondent by the survey management system (SurveyXact, available at URL: <http://www.surveymxact.dk/>).

In this paper we report results of the main trends and address two of the background variables, namely age and proportion of teaching conducted in English.

Results

Main results for the four themes

Because of the random order in which the statements were presented and because respondents could leave the questionnaire after each section the precise number of respondents varies slightly across the 17 statements, from 1,108 to 1,131. The distributions of responses to the 17 statements in the four themes are presented in Tables 1-4. Note that the statement formulations are from the English version of the questionnaire. For the Danish versions, please see Jensen, Stæhr and Thøgersen (2009: 9-14).

Statement	Strongly agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Students who will be employed in the Danish labour market should be taught in Danish	16.6	28.4	29.6	23.0	2.4
The use of English in teaching and research means that the general population has less access to research results	12.5	23.6	28.6	31.2	4.2
Researchers have an obligation to disseminate their research findings to Danish society in Danish	46.7	31.1	10.7	10.0	1.5
It is a societal problem if all specialised areas cannot be explained in Danish	30.7	29.0	19.8	16.9	3.6

Table 1. Theme 1: Increased use of English in higher education impedes knowledge dissemination to the public (distribution of responses in per cent).

Statement	Strongly agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Far from all university teachers have the necessary skills for teaching in English	40.5	32.6	12.7	6.7	7.4
Academic standards fall when the medium of instruction is English	19.1	28.2	19.2	29.8	3.5
Students learn best when they are taught in their mother tongue	36.8	31.4	17.5	9.9	4.8
Teaching in English could lead to a wider gap between students' levels of ability	15.9	31.7	22.5	15.6	14.3
If the course material is in English, teaching in English creates a better link between the teaching and the course material	19.6	24.4	25.8	26.6	3.5

Table 2. Theme 2: Teaching through English results in reduced learning for the students (distribution of responses in per cent).

Statement	Strongly agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
It is important to continue developing Danish technical terminology	40.2	31.1	16.5	8.9	3.3
The University should offer courses in Danish at both the bachelor's and master's levels	30.1	30.0	19.8	16.3	3.8
Danish technical language will disappear if a lot of teaching is conducted in English	21.6	42.8	21.4	10.8	3.4
Within my field, the English technical language is more developed than the Danish	41.5	23.1	15.5	17.1	2.8

Table 3. Theme 3: Increased use of English in higher education threatens Danish as an academic language (distribution of responses in per cent).

Statement	Strongly agree	Partly agree	Partly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The number of courses taught in English in my department should be increased in order to attract more international students	28.1	31.3	20.8	11.8	8.0
The number of courses taught in English in my department should be increased in order to attract more international researchers	28.1	29.1	23.6	11.4	7.9
By teaching students in English, the University ensures that they are well-prepared for the future	29.2	36.6	21.7	9.5	3.0
Teaching more programmes in English will raise academic standards at the University	19.6	26.5	29.7	17.4	6.8
If we are to compete at an international level, we have to offer more courses in English	37.6	32.9	17.5	7.5	4.5

Table 4. Theme 4: An increased amount of English-medium teaching leads to higher academic standards and improved competitive capacities internationally (distribution of responses in per cent).

The results can be summarised briefly as follows:

Theme 1: Regarding the questions concerning knowledge dissemination to the public, there is broad agreement that Danish researchers must disseminate their findings in Danish, and slightly less agreement that it is a societal problem if Danish does not develop as an academic language. Respondents are divided as to whether students who are likely to be employed in the Danish labour market should be taught through Danish and if the use of English in the classroom will inhibit knowledge dissemination to the general public.

Theme 2: Respondents agree to a great extent that not all lecturers are prepared to teach through the medium of English and that students learn best when they are taught through their mother tongue. However, the respondents are essentially divided on the question concerning the extent to which the academic level falls when teaching is conducted through a foreign language or if this results in a greater difference in overall academic level. This last question also has a very high proportion of “don’t know” answers indicating that either the phrasing or the topic is in some way problematic.

Theme 3: Two out of three respondents agree with the statements that within their field the English technical language is more developed than the Danish and that Danish technical language will disappear if a lot of teaching is conducted in English. This could be seen as a sign of emerging “domain loss” for Danish as a scientific language. On the other hand, there is overwhelming agreement that it is important to continue developing Danish technical terminology. Perhaps this explains why a large majority agree that the university should offer Danish-medium course both at the BA and MA level.

Theme 4: The respondents tend to agree that it is necessary and desirable to increase the number of courses offered in English in order to attract more international students and researchers. And there is even higher agreement that the university needs to offer more courses in English if it is to compete internationally. However, the respondents are split regarding whether courses offered in English lead to higher academic levels. This means that there must be reasons other than academic level for offering more courses in English, for example that “the university ensures that [students] are well-prepared for the future”. Perhaps this preparation could be an improvement of the students’ English skills.

In the Conclusion we discuss the relationship between the four themes and whether they all belong to a single dimension of attitude. However, since our

analyses revealed identical patterns for all four themes with regard to the two background variables which are considered in the following sections, we have collapsed the themes into one attitude scale for ease of exposition.

Variation across age groups

We expected that the attitudes towards the increasing use of English could vary across age groups, because of the development in the use and status of English in society in general over the last 50 years (Hypothesis 1). Figure 1 presents the results across five age groups. The responses have been re-coded so that all reflect attitudes on the same scale with “very negative towards EMI” at one end and “very positive towards EMI” at the other. We refer to Jensen, Stæhr and Thøgersen (2009) for details about the individual themes.

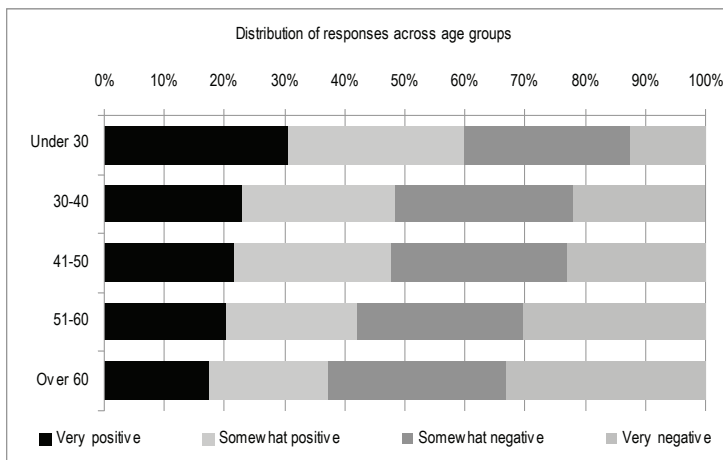


Figure 1. Responses to statements on attitudes towards English medium instruction; distribution across age groups. All four themes have been combined.

Figure 1 shows a very clear pattern: the younger the respondents, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards the increasing use of EMI. If this trend reflects differences in the respondents' backgrounds (for example how comfortable they are using English) and views on the role of English in general (in Denmark and as an international language), then we can expect the attitude towards English to become increasingly more positive at the university, as the more sceptical, older lecturers are gradually

replaced by younger, more English-positive, lecturers. It is of course possible that lecturers become more sceptical with time, in which case the current pattern will remain more stable.

Variation across teaching load in English

We expected that respondents who conduct relatively more of their teaching in English would be more positive towards English-medium instruction (Hypothesis 2). The respondents were divided into five groups based on the amount of teaching they do in English. The result is shown in Figure 2.

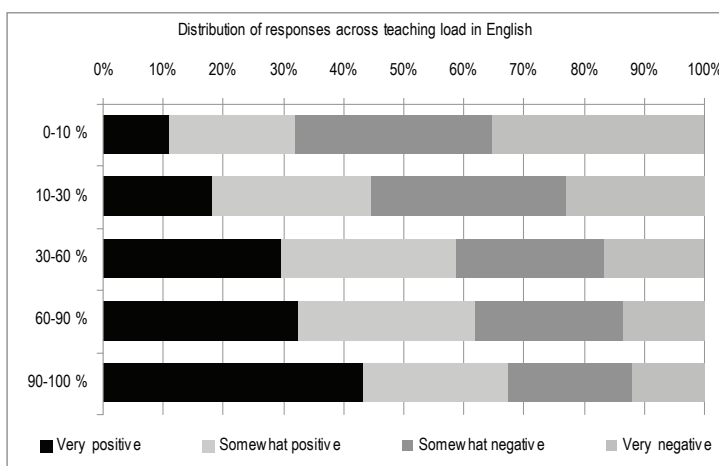


Figure 2. Responses to statements on attitudes towards English medium instruction; distribution across teaching load in English. All four themes have been combined.

Figure 2 also shows a very clear pattern: respondents whose teaching is conducted exclusively or almost exclusively in English are far more likely to have a positive attitude towards the increased use of English. Respondents with a lower teaching load in English are less likely to be English-positive. Although the trend appears to be gradual across the five groups, we see the biggest difference in the respondents whose teaching load in English is 30% or less. In other words, lecturers who teach very few or no courses in English are particularly sceptical towards the current increase in EMI. There are several possible explanations for this. First, it may be that actually acquiring experience with teaching in English makes lecturers less sceptical or negative about the change into English. If that is the case, we can expect the overall

scepticism to drop dramatically as more and more courses are taught in English. Second, it is possible that causality runs in the other direction, and that lecturers who do more of their teaching in English have chosen to do so, for example by establishing English-medium programmes and volunteering to teach them, because they believe in the importance of internationalisation. Third, there may be no direct causality between attitude and teaching load in English. Lecturers with a high teaching load in English and a positive attitude towards English EMI may more frequently be part of a “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998), for instance a department or an educational programme, in which English-medium courses are seen as an obvious necessity. That is, it may be that the correlation between teaching load in English and positive attitudes towards English is not so much a matter of personal experience and preferences as it is about the different academic cultures in which the respondents are emerged.

Conclusion

The results of a survey at a large, internationalised Scandinavian university show that there is general concern among university teachers about the consequences of the increasing use of English as the medium of instruction (EMI). More than two thirds of the teachers agreed with statements that highlight the potential negative consequences of EMI, less dissemination of knowledge to the general public, poorer learning for students, and “domain loss” for the national language, Danish (Themes 1 to 3). However, a similar majority of the teachers also agreed with statements expressing a positive attitude towards the “internationalisation” of the university, where internationalisation primarily means more teaching in English (Theme 4). In other words, the teachers at the University of Copenhagen, or at least some of them, show agreement with both positions when it comes to internationalisation of the educational programmes.

This is in contrast with the presuppositions of the public debate. The debate about the increasing use of English as the medium of instruction at Danish universities seems to place people at opposite ends of a single scale of being either positive or negative towards EMI: either you are opposed to the increasing influence of English on the educational system and, as a result, on Danish as a scientific language, or you are for internationalisation, the reasoning goes. Although the two positions are not logically connected, they often appear to be linked in the debate. However, our results suggest that we

cannot treat all four themes as representing a simple dichotomy, or belonging to the same underlying, unidimensional attitude scale. A better description may be to view the themes as a set of related but different attitude scales. It is possible to be “sceptical” towards English when it comes to certain aspects of the debate, for example a concern about Danish as a scientific language or students’ learning in EMI, and still be “positive” towards English when it comes to internationalisation. The university teachers’ responses are an indication that the issue is a complex one, or it may be that the university teachers simply want to have their proverbial cake and eat it too. The exact relationship between the themes is left for future study.

Our results also showed that younger teachers and teachers who conduct a large part of their teaching in English are more positive towards the benefits of internationalisation and less concerned about the possible drawbacks in terms of reduced learning for students or a detrimental effect on the Danish language and society. These results mirror previous studies of Danes’ attitudes towards English (Preisler, 1999; Jarvad, 2001; Kristiansen, 2006), which have also shown a correlation between a high level of contact with English and positive attitudes, and between young age and a positive attitude towards English. One reason which has been proposed for the more positive attitudes towards English among younger Danes is that the increasing use of English is still seen as something relatively new, potentially threatening to the generations who grew up in a different environment with exposure to other languages, but as something familiar, something to approach with an air of excitement and sense of possibilities to the generations who have grown up with a higher exposure to English. This would lead us to expect a general change in attitude towards EMI in the years to come. The change will come from two sides: more English-positive generations will replace more sceptical generations, and the general increase in the number of courses conducted in English will make teachers more comfortable using English, which again will lead to a more positive attitude. However, this is still very much a working hypothesis which will have to be tested in follow-up studies. At present we are left with a picture of widespread concern mixed with a general acknowledgement that internationalisation is necessary for the future development and competitiveness of the national universities.

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NOTES

¹ See the Bologna Process' official website at URL: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

² Statistics from the UC's office for International Staff Mobility (personal correspondence).

