

**Internationalization or Englishization:  
Medium of Instruction in Today's Universities**

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## **Abstract**

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In this paper, I shall first review the rapidly increasing role(s) English is playing in higher education in both Europe and Asia, and argue that the shift to English is threatening the role and status of other languages, and scholarship in languages other than English. In this sense, internationalization may actually be inimical to cultural diversity and the fostering of civic and intercultural awareness, needs that are essential for higher education in today's world. I shall conclude by arguing that universities, including those in Hong Kong, need to adopt some form of bilingual policy as an integral part of their internationalization platforms in order to protect the local language(s) and scholarship written in the local language(s).

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## 1. Introduction

Universities across the world are desperately seeking to internationalize, and the universities of Hong Kong are all involved to a greater or lesser extent, not least because internationalization is an important criterion on the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) and Shanghai Jiaotong scales. The benefits of internationalization appear obvious, as it encourages academic cooperation and staff and student exchange, and few could argue against these developments. Indeed, the Bologna Process (named after the Bologna Declaration of June 1999) aims to set up a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and, to date, forty six countries have joined.

There have been many recent studies of the internationalization of higher education (cf., for example, the special 2007 edition of the *Journal of Studies in International Education*), but here I want to consider the effects of internationalization upon local languages and local scholarship. I shall suggest that internationalization may have an invidious side in that 'internationalization' often results in 'Englishization', as universities succumb to pressure to use English as the medium of instruction in order to attract international students and staff to their campuses and courses. In the context of Europe and the Bologna process, one scholar has commented that, 'What emerges unambiguously is that in the Bologna process, internationalization means English-medium higher education' (Phillipson 2009: 37).

Related concerns have been expressed in Asia over the adoption of 'Anglo-Saxon paradigms', as universities in many Asian states reshape their education policies in order to internationalize. These changes commonly see these universities adopting a corporate model and, in order to attract fee paying students themselves, introducing a number of English medium programmes. They have also adopted research outcomes as the primary way of distributing resources. As the publications which are currently most recognized by research assessment exercises are those which are listed in the Science and Social Science Citation Indices (SCI, SSCI), this move to 'publish or perish' has led to serious consequences. As Mok points out, 'local research has been ignored' and publications in local languages national publications 'are not counted as internationally important' (Mok 2007: 446).

In this paper, I shall argue that the move towards English medium education and the need to publish in English in 'international' journals may present serious threats to local language(s) and scholarship, and conclude with recommendations designed to help promote local languages and scholarship. In so doing, I shall argue that internationalization must be

multi-directional, with benefits flowing to and from the 'periphery' and not just to and from the 'centre'. Internationalization must also be multicultural and multilingual, with speakers of English seriously engaged in learning about other cultures and learning other languages. As I shall argue below, this means that Hong Kong, far from short-sightedly promoting English medium only universities as at present, should now adopt bilingual policies so that its universities can become centres of Chinese scholarship in which international scholars and students can learn about the rich Chinese cultural, linguistic and scholarly traditions.

The first part of the paper will give a brief account of the European context, but the main focus will be on East and Southeast Asia.

## **2. The European Context**

A study commissioned by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) investigated how many programmes were being taught in English in universities in continental Europe in 2007. By programmes were meant full degree courses which were taught entirely in English (at both bachelor's and master's level). Specialist subject degrees in English or English Literature were excluded. The study (Wachter and Maiworm 2008) found that around 2,400 courses were offered through English, with the great majority of these being taught in Northern Europe, Germany and the Netherlands. For example, 774 programmes were being taught through English in the Netherlands, 415 in Germany, 235 in Finland and 123 in Sweden. The Swedish figure has been contested, with Phillipson (2009) indicating that the Swedish Ministry of Education figures show that, of the 680 MA degrees available in Sweden, 480 are taught in English.

As suggested by this Swedish figure, the majority of English medium programmes are postgraduate. Figures from the Copenhagen Business School support this. They show that 75% of students at the undergraduate level follow degrees in Danish and 25% in English. By contrast, the proportion of postgraduate students taking courses in English rises to 44% (Helmersen 2009: 136).

While it is hard to get a feel of the total percentage of courses taught in English throughout continental Europe from Wachter's and Maiworm's figures presented above, by contrasting these with the findings of an earlier 2002 study by the same authors, a clear trend towards providing English medium courses can be discerned. In their 2002 study, the authors reported only 700 English medium courses, a number which the authors described as marginal (Maiworm and Wachter 2002). The nearly fourfold increase in the number of

English medium courses has led one commentator to argue that 'it seems inevitable that English, in some form, will definitely become the language of education' (Coleman 2006: 11).

This shift to English medium programmes is one consequence of the Bologna process, referred to above. The Bologna declaration was signed in 1999 with the aim of creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through which academic cooperation and exchange could be facilitated. To date, forty six countries have signed up. It is clear that the use of English as a medium of instruction helps in the exchange of both staff and students and other forms of academic co-operation and it is this that led Phillipson to draw the conclusions presented earlier.

The English medium movement extends beyond Europe. For example, Poland is planning to establish a private medical institute in Israel where students will study for three years before moving to Poland to study for a further three years at the Medical University in Gdansk, finally returning to Israel for an internship. The medium of instruction is not explicitly mentioned, but it can safely be assumed to be English (Altbach and Knight 2007).

In addition to its role as the lingua franca of academic cooperation and exchange, English is the international language for the dissemination of knowledge. English is 'by far the most important language of scientific and scholarly conferences' (Ammon 1996: 26) and, as Ammon (1996) also reports, The European Science Foundation's working language is English and the articles in the Foundation's journal, *Communication*, are *exclusively* in English. In addition, more than 90% of the information contained in databases such as the Science Citation Index (SCI) 'is extracted from journals in English taken mostly from English language journals' (Truchot 2002: 10). This move towards English medium is also seen in Humanities journals. For example, even the *AILA* journal has, since 2003, become an English only publication. I say 'even' here as the journal's acronym actually stands for the *French* title of the journal, *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée* (The International Association of Applied Linguistics). This move towards publications in English only 'has already reduced multilingualism in the field, and may eliminate the status of any other language as an international language of science' (Hamel 2007: 66).

It can also be argued that the move to publication in English severely disadvantages scholars for whom English is a second or additional language. For example, in order to be heard on the international stage and in order to earn recognition within their local academic community, Chinese scholars must publish in English. And while Swales suggested several

years ago that it was time 'to reflect soberly on Anglophone gate-keeping practices' (1997: 380), there is little sign that the editors of the international journals are doing so. Instead, native speaker proof readers are employed to 'tidy up' submissions with the result that 'so many actors have the opportunity to intervene in a non-native speaker text en-route from the author's computer screen to the journal page that few non-native speaker (NNS) traits may survive in the published article', with the result that NNS authors are required to acquire an 'American accent' (Burrough-Boenisch 2003: 238). Ammon has called for a 'new culture of communication' which respects the non-native speaker, but believes this remains 'a rather hopeless postulate' (2000: 114).

This demand to write in English can cause serious division among scholars themselves. For example, in a study of Chinese scholars who were trained in the west and returned to China, a division between them and local scholars was reported (Shi 2003).

In a comment that echoes the concerns expressed above by Mok concerning the whole-scale uncritical adoption of Anglo-Saxon paradigms, Phillipson asks, 'How can one go along with the use of English without exposing oneself to the risk of being anglicized in one's mental structures, without being brainwashed by the linguistic routines?' (2006: 68-69).

### **3. The Asian Context**

There has been a marked increase in the provision of English medium courses in many universities across Asia. One reason is that international education is a very lucrative market<sup>1</sup>. But care must be taken to distinguish between the 'receivers' and the 'senders'. As Altbach and Knight point out, the 'north' controls the process in that students from the 'south' basically buy services from the 'north' (2007: 291). And while Knight (2008) has listed four potential reasons for universities adopting international education, viz, political, economic, academic and cultural, for the providers, the benefits are overwhelmingly financial. Over 90% of the approximately 2 million international students are shared among 5 western nations, namely the USA, the UK, France, Germany and Australia. (Howe 2009: 384). Most of these students come from Asia, and China is the major provider. A glimpse at the figures showing the ratio between local students studying overseas and international students in Australia, the US and UK makes sobering reading. In Australia the ratio is 23:1, in the US, 15:1 and in the UK, 9:1. When one remembers that the great majority of these local students are actually on what Howe calls 'study-abroad-light' programmes, where the local students

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<sup>1</sup> There is clearly an extremely important historical dimension to the spread of English across Asia. I have dealt with this in detail in Kirkpatrick (2010).

may travel overseas for only a few weeks, compared with the years spent overseas by most international students, the discrepancy is even more marked (Howe 2009: 389). This means that international students on university campuses in the US, the UK and Australia are seen primarily as financial resources. Few universities appear to realize that the presence of these international students represents extraordinarily rich cultural and linguistic resources for the local students. Instead, the rhetoric surrounds the perceived low *English* language proficiency of the international students. The inability of the local students to speak a language other than English or to have any in-depth cross-cultural experience passes without mention. Thus, the many 'Anglo' universities which have campuses in international locations seldom use these to provide linguistic and cultural training for their own students. Rather, their purpose is to offer English medium courses to 'foreign' students in their home countries which can then articulate to courses offered on their main campuses. The motivation for this is primarily economic.

Given this imbalance, it is hardly surprising then to note that some Asian states are striving to become 'education hubs'. The financial benefits of this are twofold. On one hand, they will become receivers of international students (and fees); on the other, these new market-driven universities will also be able to offer fee paying places to local students, thus keeping valuable foreign capital on-shore. Malaysia was one of the earliest Asian countries to see the potential of developing private higher education opportunities for its citizens and to develop the country as a regional education hub (Gill 2004). In this, Malaysia has been successful, as there are now more than one hundred private colleges / university colleges which have some form of partnership programmes with 'Anglo' universities. Malaysia also now has twelve private universities, including those established by national companies such as the Petronas University, set up by the national oil company. Tunku Abdul Rahman University is an English medium university providing private education, primarily to students of Chinese background. But even where the setting up of an education hub looks like a success, competition comes from unexpected sources. While the number of Malaysian students choosing to study medicine in the UK may be decreasing, they are not all staying in Malaysia for their medical studies. Many now travel to Russia (to the Moscow Medical Academy, Volgograd State Medical Academy and Nizhny Novgorod State Medical Academy) to study for medical degrees in English. The total cost of these degrees is about a quarter of what these students would need to pay in the UK or Australia.

China is also moving towards increasing the number of English medium courses taught at university level. This reflects a response to the 'hope' expressed by the then Premier of China, Zhu Rongji, during a visit to Tsinghua University's School of Economics and

Management in 2001, where he said that he hoped all classes will be taught in English as he acknowledged the need for China to be able to exchange ideas with the rest of the world (Gill 2004).

The impetus to teach in English received a further boost with China's joining of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Certain universities have been instructed to use English as a medium of instruction for selected subjects, such as biotechnology, information science, materials science, international trade and law (Mok 2007: 445).

Similar moves can be seen in Japan. Waseda University, a prestigious private university, will offer a total of nine BA and MA degrees through English, starting in the academic year 2010-2011. Subjects include politics, economics, science and engineering. Waseda is just one of the 30 universities chosen to participate in Japan's 'Global 30 Project for Establishing Core Universities for Globalization' (Waseda University 2010).

The notion of internationalization is particularly interesting in the Japanese context. As Howe points out, Japan remains a 'highly ethnocentric and gendered society' and it ranks last in the OECD list of nations concerning the number of women and foreigners in higher education (2009: 386). In Japan, internationalization has often been seen as an opportunity to explain Japanese cultural values to the rest of the world. Apparently, the President of the University of Tokyo realizes this is not inclusive enough. In his words, 'Universities have to internationalize for the sake of diversity... People who are part of the same culture and language can no longer really develop intellectually' (McNeill 2007, cited in Howe 2009: 387). Yet the fact remains that many private universities in Japan rely on international students for the fees they provide. They are not seen or exploited as providers of linguistic and cultural resources for Japanese students.

The situation with regard to medium of instruction at the university level in Hong Kong can only be described as bizarre. Of the eight government-funded universities, only one, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, has an official bilingual policy, and only one, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, has an official trilingual policy. The remaining six are all, officially at least, English medium universities. This itself is worth serious reflection. Seventy five percent of Hong Kong's government-funded universities are English medium. Thus a major Chinese city where over 95% of the seven million plus population is Chinese speaking has only two university level institutions which are officially Chinese medium, but has six which are officially English medium. No other non-English speaking city or state even begins to approach this imbalance between local language provision and English medium university



education. And it is not as if Chinese is some un-regarded minor language of few speakers and with no tradition of scholarship. On the contrary, it is the language which boasts the longest tradition of scholarship and, even counting only those who speak Putonghua, has the largest number of first language speakers.

The universities' adoption of English medium instruction and assessment has serious consequences for the Hong Kong government's language policy and language education policy. Given that most of the universities are English medium, it is hardly surprising that the parental demand for English medium education at the secondary level is so strong. This parental demand has led the government to significantly dilute the mother-tongue policy, recommended by virtually every expert commission invited to report on Hong Kong's language education policy since the 1970s (Kirkpatrick and Chau 2008). The recent so-called 'fine-tuning' of the policy allows schools which previously taught subjects through Chinese, to teach these through English, as long as certain conditions are met. Our research into the effects of this indicate that some six hundred lower secondary maths and science classes which were previously taught through Chinese will be taught through English in the next academic year (Kan, Law, Lai and Kirkpatrick Forthcoming). Apart from wondering where enough maths and science teachers with adequate English language proficiency will come from, this move also unveils the danger of having too much English-medium education at university level. In the past, these students have done well in maths and science. It seems extremely unlikely that they will perform as well when they have to take these classes in English. Yet the university medium of instruction policy is driving them (or at least driving their parents) to push for English medium classes.

The universities' English medium policies also undermine the government's overall language policy of producing trilingual and biliterate citizens. Few could argue with a language policy for Hong Kong that aims to make its citizens trilingual in the local language, Cantonese, the national language, Putonghua, and the international lingua franca, English, and biliterate in Chinese and English. Outside observers, however, could be excused for thinking that the government was not too serious about their trilingual and biliterate policy, given that they allow 75 percent of the universities *which they fund* to adopt English-medium only policies. It is hard to conceive of a university language policy which would be more inimical to the official government policy. And, as I argue below, this also represents a wasted opportunity for Hong Kong to become a truly international education hub which would promote Chinese culture, language and scholarship and genuine multilateral east-west dialogue.

#### 4. The Empire Strikes Back

The setting up of potentially competitive regional education hubs in Asia has not gone unnoticed by the traditional providers of international education in the US and the UK. One example is provided by a report commissioned by the then Prime Minister of Great Britain, Gordon Brown, (UK/US Study Group 2009) entitled *Higher Education and Collaboration in Global Context: Building a Global Civil Society*. Despite the high-sounding nature of the title, the opening sentence of the report's summary describes the real aim of the report which is to 'make the case for a new model for UK/US collaboration, one that will develop multilateral partnerships and bring the longstanding UK/US partnership in higher education to bear in third locations'. It argues that if the UK and the USA are to 'continue to assert their primacy in the realm of higher education (HE) within an increasingly competitive global context, they will best do so collaboratively.'

The report was authored by a group of senior American and British academics and included the Vice-Chancellors of King's College, London, Keele, Surrey, Bristol and Warwick universities and the Presidents of New York, Bryn Mawr and Princeton Universities. It provides some proposals for 'building a global civil society' (UK/US Study Group 2009: 26), which I discuss in some detail here because they indicate how 'Anglicized' the thinking of the authors really is. The authors propose the creation of an Atlantic Trust that 'will invest in global civil society through multilateral international collaborations built on the foundations of the UK/US partnership' (Ibid.). However, as the specific plans to create this make clear, these 'multilateral international collaborations' primarily benefit or are led by the UK/US participants. For example, the proposed Atlantic Scholars scheme aims to create a cohort of global citizens. Yet the great majority of the funding for this scheme would be to attract international talent to spend a total of four years in universities in either Britain or America. Scholars can decide whether to spend three years in the US and one in Britain, or three years in Britain and one in the US. 'Intensive language training in English would be a core component of the programme' (Op.cit., p. 27). The report argues that this would contribute to a 'cohort of global citizens *shaped by the principles on which the UK and US HE systems rest*' (Ibid., my emphasis). This programme is therefore designed primarily to turn talented international students into English speaking promulgators of the Anglo way. The idea that American or British students could gain linguistically and culturally from these international students does not occur to the authors.

While the scheme will also provide funding for American and British students to study overseas, this would only be for a course of study in the UK or USA, but with a need for

participants to spend 'significant time' in at least one other country 'either one year in an international study capacity, or shorter extracurricular periods of time, through the Atlantic Partners programme' (Ibid.). The Atlantic Partners programme, however, sees the American and British participants providing education to people 'in a developing country' by 'working with an NGO or in other community service' (Op.cit., p. 29). Again, the idea that these American and British students could learn from the locals doesn't seem to have occurred to the authors of the report.

A third part of the Atlantic Trust scheme is called 'The Atlantic Researchers'. This aims to encourage the development of collaborative research networks of international multidisciplinary teams. Yet, 'it is expected that all teams would involve at least one UK and one US institution and at least one from a third country' (Op.cit., p. 28). Even here, therefore, the power remains with the UK/US 'partners'. There is no doubt that the working language of these teams is expected to be English. To quote further from the report, the proposed scheme will ensure that 'our group's universities will plant firmly the ideals of liberty and democracy' (Op.cit., p. 23), and through the medium of English, of course.

The type of programme proposed here is precisely the type that Asian universities should be doing everything they can to oppose. 'We should move beyond the so-called established order dominated by the Anglo-Saxon paradigms and instead develop systems and standards that could preserve national heritage and promote rich cultural traditions' (Mok 2007: 447). Yet, by rapidly moving to embrace English medium education in their universities, Asian universities, far from developing and promoting cultural traditions may, in effect, be encouraging this type of unequal partnership. This is not the internationalization of higher education; this is an attempt, explicitly stated by the authors, to allow the UK-US universities 'to continue to assert their primacy in the realm of higher education' (UK/US Study Group 2009: 21). It is not about creating a 'global civil society'. It is about creating a global society based on Anglo-Saxon values. As Ng (2010) has warned, while internationalization should be about promoting cultural diversity and international understanding, citizenship and cultural awareness are largely missing in internationalization.

## **5. The Language of Scholarship**

As indicated above, the adoption of English as a medium also affects the dissemination of scholarship and the status of 'local' and indigenous knowledge. I have discussed this elsewhere, using traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) as a case study, (Kirkpatrick 2009) and here provide a brief summary of the main points. A key question to be answered is 'What

happens to local knowledge when it is translated and disseminated through English? In other words, 'Does the dissemination of local knowledge through English alter the essence of the local knowledge?' In the case of traditional Chinese medicine, the answer is a simple 'yes'. First, *genuinely* traditional Chinese medicine is characterized by diverse practice (Hsu 1999) and ambiguity. One only has to consider the difficulties in translating the fundamental concept of *qi* to see how true this is. *Qi* has been variously translated into English as:

'that which makes things happen in stuff';  
'stuff in which things happen';  
'energetic configuration';  
'a configuration of energy';  
'(finest matter) influences';  
'emanations';  
'vapours' (Scheid 2002: 48).

As Hsu has pointed out, 'The all pervasive *qi* that permeated macrocosm and microcosm(s) had, in Chinese medical doctrine, innumerable facets. Although unifying, the concept of *qi* lent itself to the expression of great diversity' (1999: 81).

The story of the translation and dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) can't be considered here<sup>2</sup> but, in effect, what is now known as TCM could be more correctly be called modern Chinese medicine, as the traditional variety had to be modernized (which actually meant it had to be tested against western scientific paradigms) before it could become accepted. However, it is important to point out that the major impetus for the modernization of TCM came not from Anglo journals and editors, but from Mao himself, who demanded that things had to be 'new, scientific, unified' (Taylor 2001: 357). Indeed, it is one of life's ironies that people find it easier today to consult genuine practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine in London, Melbourne or New York than they do in Beijing or Hong Kong.

The major point to be made here is that translation may radically alter the knowledge translated. Access to Chinese scholarship is best obtained through Chinese.

Insisting on the use of English may also be influencing student's attitudes to knowledge written in languages other than English. I have noticed in my own field a tendency for Chinese-literate students to avoid or neglect referring to sources and scholarship written in

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<sup>2</sup> See Alter 2005; Scheid 2002 and Hsu 1999.

Chinese. For example, Mainland Chinese students writing PhD theses in Anglo universities seldom reference Chinese language sources. I cite below excerpts from my comments on three such theses which I have recently examined. The three theses all dealt with aspects of Chinese culture and language.

‘The Literature review covers much of the relevant literature in English. I was extremely surprised to note, however, given the candidate’s cultural and linguistic background, that no Chinese language sources were cited.’

‘... I was disappointed with the relative lack of reference to Chinese scholarship and language sources. I hope the candidate will, in future, make more use of the hugely rich field of Chinese scholarship in rhetoric.’

‘It is noticeable that very few, if any, primary sources (or translations of them) are cited, nor are there any Chinese language sources here ...’

This is suggestive, and it would be interesting to investigate this further to identify the extent to which Chinese students writing theses in English are consulting or neglecting scholarship written in Chinese. I suspect, however, that there is more neglect than consultation, representing another serious effect of adopting English as the medium of scholarship.

I now turn to the conclusion in which I make recommendations for the internationalization of higher education and the use of English, with a particular focus on Hong Kong.

## **6. Conclusion**

There can be little doubt that the recent increase in the internationalization of higher education has resulted in a proportional increase in English medium education. This is, in part, a consequence of the adoption of a corporate or market model for universities, most of which are now competing for student fees. In order to attract ‘international’ students, universities feel they have to offer more and more courses through English. This, in turn, means they need more and more staff who can teach through English. The significance of this should not be underestimated, as the move towards internationalization is privileging English and scholarship disseminated through English at the expense of other languages and scholarship disseminated in languages other than English. There is a real threat that the

internationalization of higher education is, in effect, providing opportunities for English-medium education and Anglo-Saxon paradigms to maintain and increase their control over higher education. In order to counter this, Asian universities need to establish bilingual/ multilingual language policies. How precisely to implement bilingual education will be dependent upon the situation pertaining in each university. Preisler has suggested that the notion of 'complementary' languages needs to be introduced by which 'the two languages will be functionally distributed within the individual programme according to the nature of its components, i.e. the national or international scope of their academic content and orientation of the students' (2009: 26). Examples of such bilingual language policies are those currently implemented in the five Nordic countries. These are based on the 2006 'Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy'<sup>3</sup> and their aim is to ensure the continued importance of national languages in higher education.

Asian universities also need to work together to establish and promote internationally recognized journals with bilingual publication policies. Academics in Asian universities need local and regional publication outlets that are recognized as equal to the current Science Citation Index (SCI) and Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) journals. It is surely not beyond the wit of Asian universities to take the lead in creating a new 'centre' of publication excellence, which will allow, if not demand, bilingual publications.

Hong Kong is strategically extremely well-placed to be leading this revolution. It has a critical mass of universities and academics concentrated in a relatively small space, but with excellent resources. It probably has the largest number of Chinese-English biliterate academics anywhere. But in order to take advantage of this position, the universities will need to establish bilingual education policies and abandon their current English-medium only policies. Hong Kong also has the talent and resources to take the lead in establishing bilingual journals and in promoting and disseminating Chinese scholarship. Therefore, rather than seek to become a hub of international education following the current 'Anglo' paradigm, Hong Kong has the opportunity to lead the way in creating a new type of international higher education in which local languages and scholarship are promoted and where international higher education is truly multilateral.

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the webpage of the Nordic co-operation: [www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org)

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