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Will teaching in future European higher education be exclusively in English? You must be kidding.

Bernd Wächter

Director, Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)

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Who is ACA and what does it do?

- A (mainly) **European association of national organisations** promoting innovation through internationalisation
- **Studies on international higher education (HE)** developments in a number of **thematic areas**
 - **English-medium instruction** (English-taught programmes)
 - **International student mobility**
 - **European HE in a global perspective**
- Seminars and conferences (next: *What's new in Brussels?*, 1 February 2019, Brussels, University Foundation)
- *ACA Newsletter – Education Europe*

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Language: emotionally highly charged (1)

- Language issues are **emotionally highly charged**
- Teaching in **English in non-anglophone countries even more**
- Often create even **anxiety**
- Interestingly, **not or little amongst multilingual persons**
- **ideological approach** to language frequent: EMI as an **emanation of Anglo-Saxon dominance**
- Fighting the **ghosts of the past? Anglo-Saxon dominance is waning fast** in a multi-polar world
- A frequent claim: EMI will make **smaller languages disappear as a medium of scientific expression.**

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Language is emotionally highly charged (2)

- **True.** But has this **battle not long been lost?** In **research** (as distinct from teaching) **clearly.** One can of course opt to **publish in Estonian or Letzeburgish** (or can one?). But at a **price: invisibility.**
- **Quality education in EMI: mission impossible?** Frequent claim: the EMI classroom is one where **professors who can't speak English teach students who do not understand this language.** **Pardon my French:** this is bullshit.
- **Interlude:** the Goethean language abilities of German engineering professors.

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Are we ending up with English-only higher education?

- Three ACA studies on EMI in the past 15 years **do not support this expectation / fear.**
- There has been **rapid rise of EMI**, in some countries (Nordic and Baltic countries, NL and CH) much more than in others.
- A rise **from 725 (2002) to 8,089 (2014) programmes** (warning: limited comparability)
- There are **very few English-only HE institutions** in non-anglophone Europe (like the CEU). The College of Europe (Brugge/Natolin) also teaches in English, but in French as well.

Are we ending up with English-only higher education? (2)

- **Share of students** taught in English of all students **nowhere very high**
- In 2014 ACA study on ETPs in Europe the country with the **highest share of programmes was Denmark, at 38%.**
- **But even in DK**, the share of students enrolled in ETPs (Danes included) was **only 12.4%**. No other country reached double-digit numbers.

EMI and internationalisation (1)

- EMI tuition is **just one form of the internationalisation** of HE
- Internationalisation (mainly mobility) has become a **pet concern in European HE** in the past 20 or 30 years
- One **stated reason for internationalisation** was to enable one's own students to be able to **compete on European and global labour markets + to attract foreign students** into the country.
- **Why?**
 - **Very relevant question**
 - **Some countries** have always had **precise answers** to this question
 - Most were simply **driven by a sporty impulse and the quest for reputation**. Surely, a country that attracts more foreign students than its neighbour must have the better HE...

EMI and internationalisation (2)

- **Blurry approach** of the past is now **giving way to clearer answers**. But **not everywhere** in Europe. And there is a **partial roll-back on the EMI front** in some countries (see below).
- Some countries, like the UK, had always had rather clear intentions
 - **Generation of fee income** from foreign students to cross-subsidize the institutions' more 'domestic endeavours'
 - Attracting foreign students for **retaining as graduates for the UK labour market** (academic as well as general segment)
 - To get a taste of this, see UK Vice-Chancellors' recent panicky reaction to the prospect of a '**hard Brexit**', with **ten thousands of top EU scholars leaving the UK.**

EMI and internationalisation (3)

- Germany is following suit. **Not to generate income from fees** (there are none), but because of **serious labour shortages**.
- In yet other countries, **study of foreign nationals viewed as education and science diplomacy**. To open doors for important political and business initiatives. An argument also used to justify outbound mobility (students as 'mini-ambassadors')
- **Countries with rarely-spoken languages saw no other option to attract foreign students than to offer EMI**. If you are an Icelandic HE institution, you offer EMI for **highly pragmatic reasons**. And not for the love of the language of Shakespeare and Donald Trump.

EMI and internationalisation (4)

- All this is **not really about English, anyway**. In 30 or 40 years, **Mandarin might be the new English**.
- One interesting fact: **EMI programmes were not only created for foreign students**. According to our studies, they attract some 40% own nationals. **In Finland (2002 study), the share of Finns was 60%**. Finland's by far largest company, Nokia, used English as its working language.

Is the tide turning? (1)

- Feel threatened by EMI? Then you might welcome **indications that the tide is turning**
- Trend (?) concerns **EMI and internationalisation** in general
- Danish government: decision to **reduce number of places on EMI programmes by 1,200**
- **Why?** It claims the country is **economically losing on EMI**, despite charging tuition fees, because most graduates left **Denmark instead of working on the Danish labour market**.
(But then, the Danes have always been the stingiest Nordics: see HE compensation agreement with 4 other Nordic countries: Sorry Karen).

Is the tide turning? (2)

- But also the Netherlands university association (**VSNU**) has **proposed to put a cap on ETP provision in future**
- The **Netherlands** also saw a **recent court case**, where the plaintiff had argued it was intolerable that Dutch could not study in their own language anymore. The court refused to rule since important information was missing. But it clarified **the issue was clearly a legitimate concern**.
- In Italy, where teaching in English is relatively rare, a reputed technical university had decided to go English-only some years back. Opponents dug up a **law from the Mussolini era** which requires Italian HE institutions to teach in Italian. This put an **erstwhile end to the plan**, it appears.

Conclusio (1)

- Will the backlash remain only a **temporary phenomenon**? Hard to answer today.
- **Your speaker does not expect that, by and large, European and global higher education will go fully English.**
- **More likely is a reduction of ETPs** in countries with ample provision, for example if graduates cannot be retained. And an **increase in countries so far almost EMI-free.**
- **ETPs in English in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland in the field of human medicine and medicine and pharmacy are likely to stay.** By the way: **not a new development.** Hungarian ETPs in medicine were started **in the 1980s in Communist era. For hard dollars.**



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Conclusio (2)

- Will the **populist and nationalist trends** in Europe and beyond play against EMI. So far, the ultra-right has been **remarkably silent on the issue. But that could change.**
- You will have noticed that much: **your speaker does not regard a possible loss of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction as a threat to national identity.** But then, populists and nationalists might plant exactly such ideas into people's heads.



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Thank you for your kind attention

Find the freely downloadable ACA studies on English-medium instruction at this link:

<http://www.aca-secretariat.be/index.php?id=25>

See you at the next ACA seminar

What's new in Brussels?

Fondation Universitaire / Universitaire Stichting

Brussels

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