

Language matters at the internationalised university: from practice to policy

Synopsis

In the rush to internationalise, universities have often overlooked crucial language matters. Indeed, language is the medium through which Higher Education is accessed, understood and assessed, and therefore it should demand the attention of all involved in the internationalised university context. Informed by extensive research into the student experience, this book explores where language intersects with student identity and expectations; how it impacts interactions between staff and students inside and outside university classrooms; why language matters for academic work, groupwork and assessment; and finally, how current language practices within the internationalised university context may run counter to claims made by internationalisation policies, particularly in relation to internationalisation at home. This book is relevant to university leaders, staff and educators aiming to translate internationalisation policies into practice for a successful student experience. It also provides important insights into why language matters when interacting, teaching and socialising in multilingual internationalised university contexts.

Arguments for necessity

Universities worldwide have been embracing internationalisation strategies to compete in global rankings, to attract more international students and researchers, and often to increase their income. With internationalisation comes an increase in linguistic diversity of staff and students within the university spaces and, as research has shown, this can bring challenges for interaction, intercultural learning, group work, academic success, and overall international relations. With some universities' financial standing now dependent on securing student fees, and particularly international students who often pay higher rates for tuition, student satisfaction has perhaps never been more important. With growing competition between universities to win students, universities must ensure the promises they make in promotion materials regarding internationalisation materialise. Many claim their students will emerge from university as interculturally competent, global citizen graduates, but if they have not had intercultural interactions or have struggled to communicate across linguistic boundaries, this kind of development will not occur, a reality many studies have already commented on. It is imperative, therefore, that university leaders and educators begin to pay more attention to the student experience and the factors influencing it, language being one of them.

In addition, many "Anglophone" universities are undergoing a process of decolonisation and acknowledging the multilingual turn is part of this, namely a movement in Applied Linguistics that promotes multilingual mindsets, teaching methods and policies. Continuing a monolingual mindset, and particularly privileging "native speaker Englishes" or English-only approaches, would be in direct conflict

with efforts to decolonise. Universities therefore must pay more attention to the positioning of English or Englishes in relation to other languages at the internationalised, multilingual university.

Author biography

Dr Hélène Stakounis is a first-generation, northern scholar of Applied Linguistics. Former Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics and TESOL at Durham University, EAP Co-ordinator at Lancaster University and Associate Lecturer at Salford University, she has over a decade of experience in Higher Education and is Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She has developed and taught modules, both online and in-person, in a range of Applied Linguistics and TESOL subjects, for example, Sociolinguistics, Intercultural Communication and Education, and Technology-enhanced Language Education. She has also taught English, French and German in several countries as well as having launched and managed her own British Council accredited language school, Language Café, welcoming students from around the world to Manchester, England. Currently, she is attempting to launch Language Café online whilst working on her SRHE series Routledge book, entitled “Language Matters at the Internationalised University: from practice to policy”. She is also studying for MSc in Smart EdTech, Co-creativity and Technology-enhanced Learning at Université Côte d’Azur.