

THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: LANGUAGE POLICY AND INTERNATIONALISATION IN CATALONIA

Josep Soler and Lúdia Gallego-Balsà
Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019

ROSANA VILLARES

Universidad de Zaragoza
rvillares@unizar.es

137

With internationalisation shaping the main values and strategies of modern higher education, many authors have analysed from different perspectives its rationales, main strategies, and outcomes worldwide (Maringe and Foskett 2010; Knight 2012; de Wit et al. 2015). At its core, language issues, and particularly English, have received much attention as a result of the integration of an international dimension in the teaching, research and management functions of universities. Wisely identified in the title of this book, this situation has positioned language policy (henceforth LP) as a relevant theoretical and methodological tool that examines the relationship between local languages and English as the lingua franca for scientific communication (Spolsky 2009; Ferguson 2012; Jenkins and Mauranen 2019). While most of the leading literature in the European context tends to look at the situation in the northern countries (Haberland and Mortensen 2012; Risager 2012; Ljosland 2014; Soler-Carbonell et al. 2017), the present book focuses on the south-western context, choosing the Catalanian context as a case study. By focusing on a particular university, the authors can analyse in depth the institution's sociolinguistic context from a top-down and bottom-up approach that examines the linguistic tensions experienced by stakeholders.

The book is divided into six chapters, each of them starting with an abstract and keywords and ending with a summary of the chapter's main contents and a reference list. This 'research article' format facilitates the reading process as each

chapter can be read almost independently because they comprise specific sections of the study and are thoroughly contextualised. From the beginning of the book, the authors are aware of the diverse (and sometimes opposing) language expectations that stakeholders have regarding the three working languages at the university, which are Catalan, Spanish and English. Thus, this book analyses the practices and attitudes encountered towards the local, national, and international languages in a bilingual university. The state-of-the-art revision of this study comments on the most relevant issues shaping the nature of language management such as the neoliberal influence and market-driven orientation of higher education, the ecology of languages, or the challenges that English as the medium of instruction (EMI) brings to non-Anglophone institutions. Foreshadowing their own study, the authors stress the importance of the sociocultural dimension and multi-layered nature of LP for understanding the complexity of language relationships and speakers' beliefs, as well as considering it as a necessary tool to manage language use. From the methodological perspective, the authors justify their analytical choices for the study, which are document analysis, linguistic ethnography, and discourse analysis.

138

Chapter 2 includes a detailed literature review of LP studies and internationalisation from a sociolinguistic perspective. Narrowing the field of internationalisation, the authors focus on campus-based activities, commonly referred to as “Internationalisation at home” (20), which include language learning, intercultural competence and the promotion of diversity (Jones 2015). Additionally, the authors discuss the traditional North-South division found in internationalisation and language strategies, which often rely on quantitative indicators such as the number of EMI courses. They rightly argue that this division is too simplistic since it might overlook similarities and differences just because of the geographical location when in reality there is a wide spectrum of sociolinguistic scenarios and language management traditions. In this way, they advocate an ecological perspective that connects internationalisation to multilingualism, diversity, and critical thinking. The chapter ends with an introduction to the Catalan universities' context where LP was originally designed to protect the local language, Catalan, but has recently moved towards the inclusion of foreign languages and linguistic competence in a third language, mainly English, as a consequence of globalisation.

In Chapter 3, a corpus of LP documents from all the Catalan universities is gathered to examine the role of language. The initial frequency analysis shows that the main objective of the institutional policy is the protection of the Catalan language. The quantitative results are later combined with a qualitative content analysis of the documents to underpin their narratives. In this way, the main working languages identified as Catalan, Spanish, and English are associated with

five emergent themes. Firstly, the linguistic competence in Catalan facilitates language management. Secondly, students should be competent in Catalan, Spanish, and a third foreign language, often English. Thirdly, multilingualism appears as a synonym of English and its effect on the university language ecology. Fourthly, the principle of linguistic security is a tool devised to protect the use of Catalan from the speakers of other major languages, namely Spanish. And lastly, Spanish is only mentioned concerning the linguistic right to use it, and on some occasions for collaboration with other Spanish regions and Latin America. These results reveal the main ideologies of policymakers, for whom the protection of the ‘language for (cultural) identification’ is the main objective, followed by the mastery of the ‘language for (international) communication’, to adapt the terminology used by House (2003: 559). Furthermore, these language beliefs are supported by the legal framework, supra-national policies, and access to funding, among other external factors. In sum, this chapter reminds us of the complexity of language management when several languages coexist for the same functions and how each language has certain discourses attached that might be beneficial or threatening for others, for instance, the preference for the most widely used languages over other less spoken languages for communication.

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the ethnographic data collected from observations, field notes, and interviews with three groups of stakeholders in a small-sized Catalan university. The two main discourses identified in the data present opposite reactions. While the “discourse on ‘Catalan as an obstacle’” (77) is challenged with persuasive strategies, the discourse on the revitalisation of Catalan is encouraged and simultaneously aligns with the stance of the institutional documents analysed in the previous chapter. The interview data, on the other hand, provide first-hand evidence of the bottom-up stakeholders’ language practices and beliefs that reveal the presence of tensions between individual rights and institutional responsibilities. Firstly, international students tend to show concerns about their lack of linguistic competence in Catalan and the general opposition to switching to Spanish (or English) by the institution and lecturers. Although ultimately international students accept the situation, they question the institutional monolingual policy since the university is located in a bilingual region. In the case of lecturers, they see themselves as mediators between the university’s and the international students’ demands. They also criticise the rigid nature of the linguistic security principle and consider that its original purpose, the protection of Catalan, should be reviewed since nowadays the use of the other two working languages is promoted to reach wider audiences. Lastly, language instructors legitimise Catalan as the university’s default language, aligning with the institutional stance. Hence, this chapter explores the effects of LP on the stakeholders, who juxtapose their language beliefs with actual practices, pointing at the tensions encountered in this particular sociolinguistic context.

140 In Chapter 5, the authors identify three main orientations to language in the institutional documents (Ruíz 1984), which shape the discourses attached to the working languages: “language-as-right” (101) as the right to use the national languages, “language-as-resource” (101) that values international languages and multilingualism, and “language-as-problem” (101) referring to a multilingual setting with a predominantly monolingual policy. This book exhaustively reflects on the role of Catalan in the internationalised university, challenging some of the negative assumptions attached to it. However, there are few references to the second main objective of LP, which is the linguistic requirement for a foreign language. Since it is acknowledged that obtaining the necessary linguistic competence may hinder students’ graduation, perhaps the authors could have explored the effects of this measure and compared how other bilingual or monolingual Spanish universities tackle this issue since it is a national mandatory requirement. Regarding the ethnographic data, there is a unanimous call for an update of the language management mechanisms to better suit the stakeholders’ needs. For instance, the language instructors’ protectionist stance originates from the fear that the accommodation to the linguistic demands of non-Catalan speakers would threaten the sustainability of the local language. The in-between position of lecturers creates a situation where language choice tends to respond to conflict-avoidance with students. In the case of the international students, their negative stance is challenged by means of linguistic devices, which frame the use of Catalan as part of a full immersion experience. Hence, the current situation requires an update of the LP mechanisms that would grant flexibility and foster positive attitudes towards multilingualism. In doing so, the identification of the institution’s weaknesses and strengths would be crucial for language management, especially when several languages compete for similar functions.

The final chapter of the book answers the main research questions of the study and provides alternative options for a flexible LP approach at the university. In response to the first question, there are three contradictory stances regarding Catalan that confirm the principle of linguistic security, and therefore LP should be updated to meet current needs. Concerning the second question, the three main objectives of LP are the use of Catalan as the default language of communication at the universities, the right to use Spanish as an alternative to Catalan for national and international communication, and becoming a competent speaker in a third language, often English, as a consequence of internationalisation. “Receptive multilingualism” (105) also appears as the final goal of LP because it facilitates switching between languages without harming the right of others to use the language of their preference. Regarding the last question, the fate of Catalan is divided between a supportive policy of minority languages and a pragmatic client-oriented policy of widely spoken languages. This dichotomy is found to a certain

extent in the ‘glocalisation’ challenge that many universities face: in other words, how to become internationally attractive without losing their local identity. Thus, the conceptualisation of language is a crucial element because it shapes the contents and strategies of policy documents. Using the language-as-resource orientation, the authors mention a series of strategies such as parallel language use and “translanguaging practices” (127) that generally rely on the users’ linguistic competence. The authors’ conclusion aligns with the latter option, which calls for a flexible combination of languages according to the speakers’ needs and skills. In this way, translanguaging practices are considered an alternative to the rigid indications of the institutional documents, especially when a minority language is involved, because it changes the decision-making power from top-down to bottom-up agents. The book finishes with the fundamental idea that languages should be an asset that benefits both international and local stakeholders, a tool that promotes exchange and unity.

Overall, this book presents a detailed account of the sociolinguistic context of the Catalan universities based on a combination of the multiple data sources, the representation of stakeholders’ voices, and the triangulation of methods. It offers comprehensive insights into the processes involved in language management, and how policy documents may alter the agents’ linguistic practices and perceptions. Since the Catalan universities have a tradition of bilingual education, however, the book could have included a series of feasible recommendations for the introduction of several working languages at the university. In this way, such a proposal would be useful for other institutions facing similar challenges, either monolingual or bilingual, which could look at this case study for guidance. Similarly, it would be interesting to compare the findings of this book with other scenarios sharing similar sociolinguistic features. For instance, some South American universities may provide useful contrastive material, particularly those dealing with widely spoken languages like Spanish or Portuguese, revitalisation policies of indigenous languages, and the introduction of English, all of which present a similar language ecology.

Some further aspects that could be considered for future work would be widening the object of analysis, in other words, analysing the effects of LP in other university domains such as languages in research communication to establish whether language choice and language hierarchies are different depending on the activities carried out. In the case of education, it would be interesting to include other stakeholders’ voices (e.g. local students or administrative staff) or move on from the interview data to investigate how classroom interactions occur between students and lecturers, providing an opportunity to track monolingual or translanguaging practices. Lastly, I think that identifying the key areas of LP, such

as the resources and services provided by the institution for linguistic support, would have offered valuable information for the readers. Despite the policy analysis, there are scarce references to the available resources that lecturers and students can access to meet the linguistic requirements in other foreign languages, or to how the use of the discursive strategies deployed to reduce negative attitudes towards Catalan could be applied to the promotion of multilingualism and language learning.

Notwithstanding these minor points, the clarity of the writing and coherent organisation makes this a useful book for a heterogeneous readership. For the general audience, the book includes essential theoretical and methodological concepts about internationalisation, LP and ethnographic methods indispensable for familiarisation with the topic at hand. For a specialised audience, the detailed account of the analysis and up-to-date data makes it an excellent study for replicability. In this way, readers can reflect on the situation at their own university and take action investigating the presence of overt and covert LP mechanisms, the short- and long-term effects of those strategies, or the efficacy of the available resources to deal with multilingualism in an internationalised university. In sum, this book contributes to the field of LP with a fresh perspective, valuable for anyone interested in the relationship between internationalisation and language in higher education.

142

Works Cited

- DE WIT, Hans, Fiona HUNTER, Laura HOWARD and Eva EGRON-POLAK. 2015. *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Brussels: European Union.
- FERGUSON, Gibson. 2012. "English in Language Policy and Management". In Spolsky, Bernard (ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.: 475-498.
- HABERLAND, Hartmut and Janus MORTENSEN. 2012. "Language Variety, Language Hierarchy and Language Choice in the International University". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 216: 1-6.
- HOUSE, Juliane. 2003. "English as a Lingua Franca: A Threat to Multilingualism?" *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7 (4): 556-578.
- JENKINS, Jennifer and Anna MAURANEN. (eds.) 2019. *Linguistic Diversity on the EMI Campus: Insider Accounts of the Use of English and Other Languages in Universities within Asia, Australasia, and Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- JONES, Elspeth. 2015. "Culture Change and Exchanging Culture: The Role of Languages in Internationalisation". In Orme, Mark (ed.) *Supporting Internationalisation through Languages and Culture in the Twenty-First-Century University*. Bern: Peter Lang: 11-22.
- KNIGHT, Jane. 2012. "Concepts, Rationales, and Interpretive Frameworks in the Internationalization of Higher Education". In Deardorff, Darla K., Hans de Wit, John D. Heyl and Tony Adams (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE: 27-42.
- LJOSLAND, Ragnhild. 2014. "Language Planning Confronted by Everyday Communication in the International University: The Norwegian

Reviews

Case". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 35 (4): 392-405.

MARINCE, Felix and Nick FOSKETT. (eds.) 2010. *Globalization and Internationalization in Higher Education: Theoretical, Strategic and Management Perspectives*. Continuum: London.

RISAGER, Karen. 2012. "Language Hierarchies at the International University". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 216: 111-130.

Ruiz, Richard. 1984. "Orientations in Language Planning". *NABE Journal* 8 (2): 15-34.

SOLER-CARBONELL, Josep, Taina SAARINEN and Kerttu KIBBERMANN. 2017. "Multilayered Perspectives on Language Policy in Higher Education: Finland, Estonia, and Latvia in Comparison". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 38 (4): 301-314.

SPOLSKY, Bernard. 2009. *Language Management*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.