

# **INTERNATIONALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM ANGLICISATION TO MULTILINGUALISM**

**A.K.A.: LANGUAGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION :  
A FEW CONSIDERATIONS TO MOVE BEYOND CLICHÉS**

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# An area in which clichés abound

- ▶ These clichés concern student quality, student motivation, research quality, the very meaning of 'internationalisation' – and language itself
- ▶ What to do?
  - ▶ Review some of these clichés
  - ▶ Try to understand why they're so popular
  - ▶ Try to break free from them

# A necessary clarification

- ▶ In this talk, the question of "English" is often brought up...
- ▶ ... but *obviously* the issue isn't English *per se*
- ▶ The problem is linguistic hegemony, no matter which language benefits from it
- ▶ Similar remarks could be made if Navajo, Norwegian, Italian or Gujarati were in that dominant position

# Cliché No. 1

**"International university education necessarily takes place in an international language"**

This claim mixes up the positive and the normative levels

- it's incorrect at the *positive* level, since it ignores the reality that the world is linguistically diverse, and that if you *really* mean "internationalisation", then a truly international university education should reflect that and be multilingual.
- it's disturbing in *normative* terms, because it implies a consent to linguistic hegemony.

# Cliché No. 2

**"The academic world operates in English anyway"**

A misleading claim on two counts (but with a pernicious effect as a self-fulfilling prophecy when people start believing it).

- A widespread use of English doesn't mean the exclusive use of English: 2012: only 4% of the 15,134 diplomas awarded (at all levels) by German universities are in English (in other words: 96% are wholly or partly in German; some of these use some English, but English-only diplomas make up 4% of the total)
- The academic world does different things in different languages (e.g. internal operations of a research team v. presenting a paper abroad)

# Cliché No. 3

## "Everybody speaks English anyway"

Low-level skills may be quite widespread, but high-level skills are not, and they are not significantly more common among the younger than the older generation.

This is borne out by various data sets, notably *Eurobarometer* and the *Adult Education Survey*:

- English is the L1 of 14% of the (pre-Brexit) EU population
- It's an L2 at a very good or good level for 21% of the EU's residents
- It's the L1 of 7%-8% of the world population
- As a L1 or L2, including modest skills levels, it's spoken by the *at most* 25% of the world population
- In other words: 70% of the world population has little English or no English at all

## Cliché No. 4

"We must teach in English to attract the 'best' students"

This might be plausible at PhD level, where the catchment area can be truly global, but there is not a shred of empirical proof to back up this claim for BA and MA level studies (not to mention that it presupposes that the locals are a bit dim)

- people who really want an English-medium education, *if they really are the best*, are likely to have already registered at Harvard, Yale, or Oxford... and those who register for English-medium degrees in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, etc., might precisely *not* be the best
- this creates pedagogically absurd situations
- those who are truly the "best" are likely to be those who, among other skills, will also have acquired receptive skills in Dutch, German, French, etc.

# Cliché No. 5

**"Offering English-medium education maximizes the intake of foreign students"**

This deserves to be qualified. A rough index of relative over-representation of foreign students in OECD countries (ratio of share of international student intake to share of resident population) indicates that a country's rank as a destination favoured by international students doesn't correlate with the extent of anglicisation of their universities:

- Unsurprisingly, there is strong over-representation of predominantly English-speaking countries (NZ [1st], AUS [2nd], GB [5th], CDN [6th]), largely because students want to learn English
- ... but *among non-anglophone countries*, the strongest overrepresentation is among countries that have resisted all-out anglicisation in higher education (A [3rd], CH [4th], B [7th], F [9th])
- "over-anglicised" countries rank lower (S [8th], NL [11th])
- of course, this index needs to be refined and combined with others, but international students may not be attracted by "English" – perhaps the local language(s) are no less important in attracting them

# Cliché No. 6

**"Scientific research is in English"**

This claim ignores the fact that research encompasses different steps:

- reading of others' research
- interaction within a research team
- presentation of results in international conferences
- publication for an academic readership
- publication for the educated general public

Not all these steps are in English, let alone in English *only*

# Cliché No 7

## "The spread of English is a natural phenomenon

This claims mixes up (incomplete) observations and their interpretation

- qualitative observation of actual language practices in multilingual contexts (incl. academic ones) reveal a high variability of patterns and constant use of code switching
- the macro-dynamics of language aren't "natural": they are the outcome of the interaction of various economic and geopolitical forces, which serve some interests more than others
- these dynamics are something that societies may legitimately aspire to steer through policy, for reasons of both *efficiency* and *fairness*

# Cliché No 8

**"Languages are neutral and having only one for research constitutes a net communication gain"**

This is, of course, a particularly naïve but surprisingly widespread expression of "folk linguistics", which...

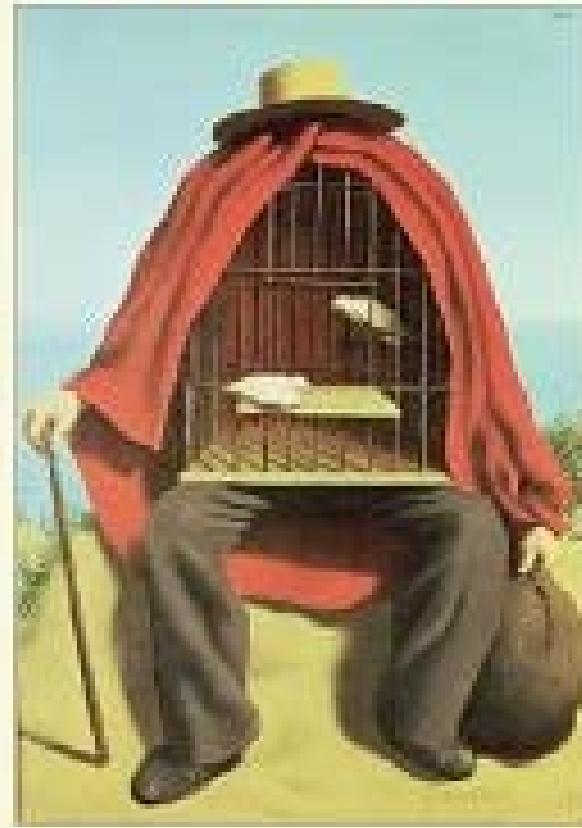
- assumes that language equals communication, and that communication equals mere information transfer
- omits the psychological, sociological, political and economic *non-neutrality* of languages
- assumes a cognitive neutrality which is belied by recent research (and you don't need a crude Sapir-Whorf approach for this)

*Anna  
Wierzbicka,  
(psycho-linguist,  
National Australian  
University,  
Canberra), 2014:*

*rarity of  
semantic  
"primes"*

# ENGLISH

## IMPRISONED IN



*The Barriers of English as a Distant Language*

**ANNA WIERZBICKA**

Pilot studies of the **relationship between multilingualism and creativity**, holding under numerous constraints, including exposure to intercultural experience, reveal the existence of a positive correlation between them

- The correlation stands at about 0.15 – modest, but statistically significant and holding across different psychometric measurements of creativity.
- These effects hold under numerous controls (gender, age, personality variables) and, importantly, "intercultural experience" (e.g. "travel abroad")
- an aggregate model combining individual multilingualism & intercultural experience on one side, and various creativity measurements on the other side, reveals a "general" correlation of about 0.25
- This strongly suggests that monolingualism in research would be dangerous

## Cliché No. 9

**"The generalized used of English by all fosters equity"**

It could... if there were no native speakers. But linguistic hegemony gives rise to major uncompensated transfers in their favour:

- ❖ privileged markets
- ❖ savings in communication effort
- ❖ savings in foreign/second language instruction
- ❖ knock-on effects of the above savings
- ❖ symbolic "legitimation" effects (even the *Financial Times* owns up to this fact)

# Cliché No. 10

"International English isn't really English, it's "ELF" or "globish", and therefore no problem of inequality arises"

This claim reveals a deep, utter confusion:

- *NOWHERE* is there a clear, logical definition of "English as a lingua franca" (actual *language*? way of communicating? "frame of mind"?)
- No clear definition of empirical object (with or without NSs ?)
- Irreducibly anecdotal character of alleged manifestations of ELF

Ultimately, ELF is nothing but a crude syllogism in three terms (T1, T2, T3):

- T1 "ok, English might be imperialistic and exclusionary"
- T2: "ELF  $\neq$  English"
- T2: "*therefore*, English used as a lingua franca isn't imperialistic or exclusionary"
- The concept of "English as a lingua franca" essentially has a whitewashing function

# Why are these clichés so common?

- Three possible explanations:
  - Naïveté (and fascination for a language associated with power)
  - Subservience (and the desire to pay obeisance to power)
  - Market failure (when rationality leads to sub-optimal decisions)
- Only case-by-case studies can tell us which of these explanations is relevant in a particular case (and they may sometimes combine)

# 1. Naïveté

(10 June 2014, Lake Geneva)



## 2. Subservience

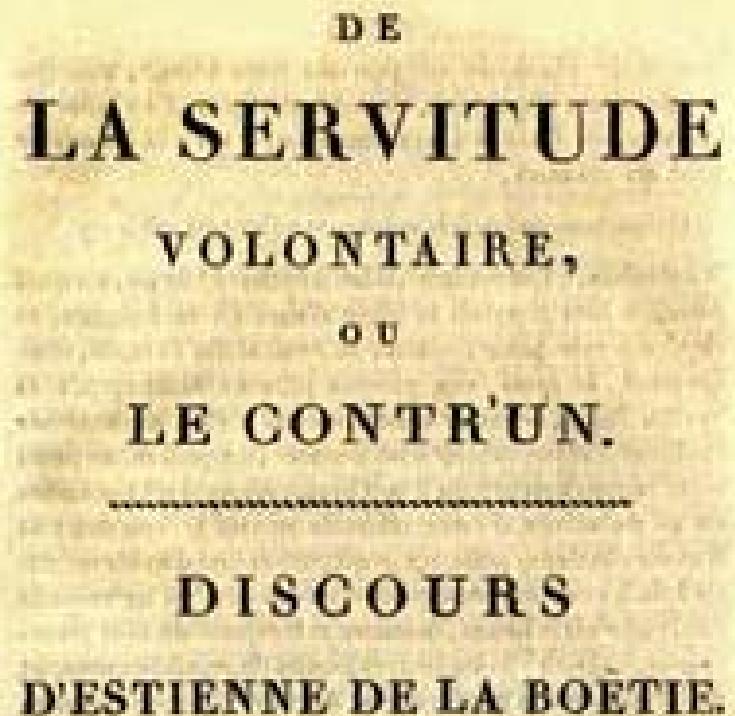
### ***Discours de la servitude volontaire***

Étienne de La Boétie, 1548/1549  
(then aged 18)

Translated into various languages, e.g.:

*Discurso de la servidumbre voluntaria*

*Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*  
([http://www.constitution.org/la\\_boetie/serv\\_vol.htm](http://www.constitution.org/la_boetie/serv_vol.htm))



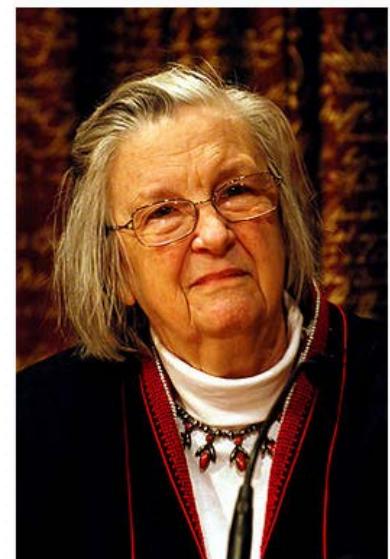
# 3. Market failure

- Non-coincidence of optimal solutions:
  - at the MICRO level, what is in the interest of individual actors is **multilingualism** [sometimes called "plurilingualism" when referring to individuals' language skills]
  - at the MACRO level, what is in the interest of society as a whole is: **[societal] multilingualism**
    - resource allocation: creativity, innovation, resilience, intrinsic value, political and cultural aspects
    - resource distribution: "linguistic justice"
  - at the MESO level, what is in the *perceived* interest (if viewed in a short-time perspective) of institutions, firms, universities often is **uniformisation** (leading to choices that reinforce self-fulfilling prophecies)
- The problem at hand bears strong resemblance with that of the evaluation of natural resources (e.g. fisheries)

# The political challenge

So, what should be done? I submit that we should:

1. constantly repeat facts and staying alert to expressions of naïveté and subservience
2. keep a watchful eye on university presidents, ministers of education, etc.
3. better understand the role and value of diversity as a common good (referring to the "commons", studied in particular by Elinor Ostrom, 2009 Economics Nobel Prize winner)
4. think in terms of a global governance of linguistic diversity, just as we try to put in place forms of global governance for climate or for the environment



# The organizational challenge

Explore pragmatic solutions:

- Bear in mind the various types of communication (teaching, research, admin; internal v. external; etc.) occurring at a university
- In order to ease foreign students' arrival, offer English-medium instruction for foreign students in *initial* years, but *not* for subsequent years (the space made for English may then increase again for PhD courses, giving the presence of English a "U-shaped profile" in the 3-5-8 Bologna system)
- Differentiate between receptive and productive skills (courses and readings in the local language, student essays in English allowed)
- In order to offer a *genuinely* international and intercultural education, *exclude* English-only degrees

**Keep multilingualism as a compass!**

Merci – Danke – Grazie – Grazia

