Signs of Plurilingualism
Current Plurilingual Countermoves in Danish Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

During the last decade, universities worldwide have gradually become more internationalized. The article contributes theoretically as well as empirically to the field of internationalization in higher education by discussing two plurilingual language strategies that have recently been implemented in Danish higher education. The authors discuss signs of plurilingualism, how they can be conceptualized and why the promotion of plurilingualism seems to be central to Danish universities’ internationalization efforts. Furthermore, the authors present a preliminary model that tries to capture the plurilingual countermoves and the quantitative data that have been collected in order to investigate students’ language needs and teachers’ language needs, competences and practices. These findings suggest a multifaceted picture of language needs among students and language competences, practices and needs among university staff and problematize the perception of English and the national language(s) as sufficient languages for academia.

KEYWORDS
Competences, Denmark, Language Ecology, Multilingualism, Needs Analysis, Needs, Plurilingualism, Practices, Students’ Perspective, Teachers’ Perspective, Universities’ Language Strategies

SIGNS OF PLURILINGUALISM. CURRENT PLURILINGUAL COUNTERMOVES IN DANISH HIGHER EDUCATION

The article presents and discusses two plurilingual language strategies that have recently been implemented in Danish higher education: the Language Profiles at Roskilde University and More Languages for More Students at the University of Copenhagen. By defining the language strategies as ‘plurilingual’ and not as ‘multilingual’, we emphasize the perspective of the individual, based on the Council of Europe’s distinction between the multilingualism of societies, referring to ‘a geographical area, large or small’ (Council of Europe, 2014), and the plurilingualism of individuals (see Cavalli et al., 2009). As an analogy, we distinguish between ‘spaces’ or ‘sites of multilingualism’ (Preece, 2011; Holmen, 2015) and ‘signs of plurilingualism’. We elaborate on this later in the paper.

Since September 2012, Roskilde University has introduced so-called language profiles in French and German as supplementary courses with the aim of giving all students on two Danish bachelor study programmes, the BA in Humanities and the BA in Social Sciences, the opportunity to reinforce their plurilingual competences related to their studies (Daryai-Hansen & Kraft, 2014; Daryai-Hansen, Barfod & Schwarz, 2015). The language profiles were initiated through a bottom-up policy that was strongly supported by the university management. A Spanish language profile was added in 2014.

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in response to significant student demand (Daryai-Hansen, Barfod & Schwarz, 2015). The students choosing the programme are, in the CEFR terminology, independent or proficient users of the profile languages. The programme aims to develop the students’ capacity to “function as knowledge workers in a globalized, transnational and plurilingual context, both in public and private work settings” (Study regulation, 2017, p. 44f). The learning objectives of the programme are defined as follows:

- To carry out systematic searches for information within the profile language and to critically argue for when and how French, German or Spanish texts can be included, theoretically and empirically
- To engage in reading academic texts in the profile language
- To build up an academic knowledge based on the profile language and related to the bachelor programme of the human and social sciences, by integrating the students’ project work
- To communicate and disseminate academic knowledge either in French, German or Spanish, oral as well as written, and to constantly improve their intercultural communicative competences autonomously

In 2008, the University of Copenhagen adopted a parallel language policy with Danish and English as the two official languages of instruction and research (see Holmen, 2015 and Hultgren, 2014 on ‘parallelilingualism’). In addition, in 2013, the university launched a language strategy called ‘More Languages for More Students’ (Holmen, 2014; University of Copenhagen, 2014). The language strategy was set up by the Rector as a five-year research-supported development project, aimed at improving university students’ language skills in a wide variety of languages. The focus was particularly on developing and implementing different opportunities for tailor-made language support for students outside the language programmes so that their competences in their main area were strengthened by the relevant linguistic skills (speaking, reading, writing or listening).

Most centrally, the strategy’s objectives are:

- To enable students to individually organize and complete their specific courses of study
- To contribute to improving graduates’ opportunities in the national and international job markets
- To contribute to improving the quality of education at the University of Copenhagen
- To contribute to the internationalization of education at the University of Copenhagen as well as improving the University’s relations with the surrounding world (University of Copenhagen, 2014)

Based on the language strategies implemented at the University of Copenhagen and Roskilde University, we will explore the emergence of signs of plurilingualism in Danish higher education. These signs can also be identified at other European universities (see e.g. Meyer, Gekeler, Manager & Urank, 2012 for the Swiss context). The article contributes theoretically as well as empirically to the field of internationalization in higher education by discussing how these signs of plurilingualism can be conceptualized theoretically and how they can be supported empirically by two Danish language strategies and the data that has been collected to support their implementation.

In the following, we discuss the concept of internationalization and problematize that internationalization has been widely equated with English. We put forward the argument that recently in Danish higher education, signs of plurilingualism can be identified that challenge the post-national educational paradigm with Danish and English as parallel languages. We suggest a preliminary model that describes these plurilingual countermoves from a language ecology perspective. We introduce a larger set of data that has been collected at both universities in order to support the language strategies. Based on selected quantitative data, we explore signs of plurilingualism in both university contexts: the students’ perspective is reflected through two surveys conducted at the University of Copenhagen, and the teachers’ perspective is represented through a survey carried out at Roskilde University. We present the results of the surveys separately and focus on implications and the need for further studies in the discussion.
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