The Englishisation of higher education in Catalonia: a critical sociolinguistic ethnographic approach to the students’ perspectives

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ABSTRACT
This paper investigates the attitudes towards Englishisation displayed by 30 students enrolled in a Combined Languages degree, including English and another language, in a top-ranked bilingual university in Catalonia, where Spanish and Catalan coexist complexly, and where foreign language medium instruction is relatively new. Through a two-year fieldwork project, I report on how the institution implemented this partial English-medium instruction program for the first time in Spain, following its internationalisation mission. I then focus on the students’ perspectives towards the officialisation of English as the third language of the Catalan university system. Via a Domain and Emotion Coding analysis of 30 essay-writing assignments, I show that students mobilise a series of predominantly favourable discourses on Englishisation which conflictingly interplay with negative attitudes towards it. They envision English as a post-national ‘democratising’ lingua franca and as an asset for employability and educational excellence, but they also construct it as a politicised threat to linguistic diversity. These perspectives contribute to a nuanced understanding of the students’ range of ambivalent stances concerning the established sociolinguistic orders of globalised universities in Barcelona and the neo-liberal linguistic regimes of the European Higher Education Area, which call for policies providing a more balanced ecology of languages.

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Introduction: the Englishisation of the Catalan university system

Catalonia is a bilingual autonomous community of 7,518,903 inhabitants in Spain (Idescat, 2014) where a majority nation-state language, Spanish, coexists with a minority national language, Catalan. In 1999, Catalonia joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and its universities started investing in the internationalisation processes that characterise the socio-economic restructuring of twenty-first-century European tertiary education institutions (Cots, Llurda, Armengol, & Arnó, 2013). This internationalisation mission aimed at (1) competing in the global profit-making educational marketplace; (2) attaining higher educational prestige worldwide and (3) promoting mobility and cross-border collaborative work among academic and administrative staff, and students (Garrett & Gallego Balsà, 2014).
The first internationalisation policies of the European Union (EU) addressed the increased linguistic diversity of those countries that had signed the Bologna Declaration by establishing newer language directives which fostered the inclusion of all languages into the university curriculum (i.e. majority, minority, regional and migrant languages). On the ground, though, these multilingual strategies basically set the basis for the officialisation of English as the lingua franca of most tertiary education institutions (Llurda, Doiz, & Sierra, 2015), and, more generally, as the most widely spoken foreign language throughout Europe (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 11).

In the complex Catalan bilingual context, where the introduction of English as a foreign language at university had a much shorter tradition than in other parts of Europe, the management of linguistic diversity materialised in different language plans based on ‘trilingualism’ (Garrett, Cots, Lasagabaster, & Llurda, 2012, p. 141). This established that all students should be competent in the two co-official Romance languages of the region, and then in a ‘third foreign language’, upon completion of their degree (DOGC, 2003, p. 3329).

The Catalan Government, a key promoter of ‘Europeanization’, instituted that this foreign language shall be ‘preferably English’ (Secretariat for Universities and Research, 2015), and started to fund those universities whose three-language policies ensured both the protection and promotion of Catalan and the use of this foreign language as the third language of instruction (Pons Parera, 2015). These intervention strategies aimed at balancing the introduction of English into the Catalan educational system with the monitoring of the institutional roles attributed to the two local languages (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013, p. 755), in response to the fact that Catalan, not recognised as an official language by the EU, is still emerging from a long trajectory of subordination (Pujolar, 2001), whereas Spanish has a dominant position as the official language of the Spanish nation-state – and as a powerful lingua franca, too (Del Valle, 2006). In this sense, the implementation of trilingualism can be understood as the Catalan administration’s attempt to respond to the global forces which foster the insertion of English as the language of academia into the particular local sociolinguistic configurations of Catalan universities, whose teaching and administrative functions are conducted mostly only in Catalan and/or in Spanish (Vila, Bretxa, & Comajoan, 2014, p. 117).

**Englishisation at the UAB: the new Combined Languages degrees in English**

Today, all Catalan universities have different language plans which spell out the specific ways in which trilingualism shall be implemented (see OPUC, 2015). The Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) provides an illuminating example of how large universities located near global cities like Barcelona started to invest in this three-language directive by officialising English as their lingua franca, as detailed below.

Occupying the 166th position in the world’s top-ranked higher education institutions and the 2nd position in Spain (SIR WR, 2014), the UAB is a university community of approximately 40,000 members, divided as follows: 28,012 undergraduates (with 5.1% international students); 5955 MA and Ph.D. students (with 36.4% foreign students); 3571 academic staff (with 4.54% international researchers) and 2425 administrative staff (Àrea de Comunicació i Promoció, 2015a). Catalan is the language of instruction at a BA level in this university (69.8%), followed at distance by Spanish (17%) and by a ‘third foreign language’ (13.2%) (General Directorate for Language Policy, 2013, p. 26) – basically
English (Estella, 2013, p. 45). This percentage of foreign language medium instruction is notably higher than the average for all Catalan universities (8.6%) – in fact, only the university Pompeu Fabra offers more content teaching via a foreign language (16.85%).

Following the rhetoric of advanced liberal democracies which mobilises institutional discourses fostering ‘unity in diversity’ (Heller, 2006 [1999]), the UAB presents itself as a ‘multicultural community’ (Àrea de Comunicació i Promoció, 2014). However, it systematically conflates the management of linguistic diversity with Englishisation; that is, with the establishment of English as the official foreign language of the university and with the implementation of English-medium instruction (EMI) courses (see, e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 2). This is exemplified in its current Plan for Languages (valid from 2011 to 2015), as shown below.

Monitored by the Language Policy Committee, and delegated by the Governing Council, the UAB Plan for Languages defines Catalan as ‘the autochthonous language of the UAB’, and Spanish, as ‘an official language […] important for the University’s internationalisation strategy’. It then recognises ‘plurilingualism’ as ‘a strategic asset for internationalisation’, and, finally, it equates the third foreign language with English, as illustrated in the following excerpt, reproduced verbatim (see UAB Governing Council, 2011a, pp. 2–4):

> English has become the lingua franca of the international academic community and is essential for attracting and retaining talent, achieving the University’s objectives of internationalisation and excellence. […] This means that it is necessary to formalise the status of English as the lingua franca while differentiating English from the other non-official languages, in accordance with the delivery of classes in English in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. (author’s emphasis)

The four official Combined Languages degrees in English (henceforth CLDsE) were part and parcel of this plan, and epitomise the UAB’s active investment in the progressive implementation of new partial English-medium instruction degrees at the Faculty of Letters. Presented as ‘the most multilingual, new and unique educational offer in the entire Spanish state’ providing students with ‘expert knowledge’ for language-based career options (Àrea de Comunicació i Promoció, 2012), the CLDsE depend on the joint collaboration of the English, French, Catalan, Spanish and Classics Departments. In terms of curriculum, the CLDsE offer partial EMI courses on the language, literature and culture of English, and on the language, literature and culture of any one of the other four languages. That is, almost half of the courses (105 ECTS) are taught in English, and the rest (105 ECTS), in French, Catalan or Spanish (Classics include Latin and Greek), with a choice of a 30-ECTS-credit module in yet a third language (German, French, Italian, Galician or Basque). The twofold aim of these CLDsE, therefore, is to provide linguistics and literature content (e.g. ‘Language Acquisition’ or ‘Victorian Literature’) and to teach these subject matters in a multilingual manner, ensuring, in turn, that students will attain a C2 level of English (of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), upon completion of their degree.

During the academic year in which they were first offered (2009–2010), the CLDsE registered 40 students. In 2014, the number of first- to fourth-year students had risen to 327; about 80% of whom were Catalan young women aged 20–21, in average (for more details, see Tables 1 and 2). This was the highest number of enrolments in the entire Faculty, which is indicative of the success of these Englishisation initiatives. It is precisely the experiences and perceptions of the third promotion of students who decided to participate in the design and implementation of the CLDsE who are the object of this study, as detailed below.
The study: a critical sociolinguistic approach to the Catalan students’ views on Englishisation

The language policy strategies described above allow us to investigate the ways in which traditionally bilingual higher education systems in Southern Europe transformed into truly transnational enterprises, under the umbrella of the EHEA, for two main reasons. On the one hand, the tracking down of these language plans, institutionalised in a top-down fashion, provides privileged access to the logics behind the different roles that English has played, and plays, in non-English-speaking regions like Catalonia (Cots, Llurda, & Garrett, 2014, p. 312). On the other hand, the historicising of these trilingual policy actions may allow for a context-grounded analysis of the attitudes or stances – the empirically observable indexes of the norms that govern individual and collective linguistic behaviours (Sabaté i Dalmau, 2014, p. 176) – with which all university members, from their different situated positions, assess language intervention, conditioning their success or failure (Huguet & Lasagabaster, 2007, p. 246).

In this article, I contribute to these two intertwined lines of research by adding a (micro) informant-oriented, critical sociolinguistic ethnographic perspective (Duchêne, Moyer, & Roberts, 2013) to the multidisciplinary work that has been conducted on the attitudes on English as a lingua franca mobilised by students in different Catalan university settings (see, e.g. Cots et al., 2013; Cots et al., 2014; Garrett & Gallego Balsà, 2014; Garrett et al., 2012; Huguet & Lasagabaster, 2007; de Rosselló i Peralta & Boix-Fuster, 2006). In particular, I explore the CLDsE students’ views on Englishisation at the UAB by addressing the following research questions:

1) What are the attitudes of Catalan university students majoring in a CLDsE towards the roles of English in the Catalan tertiary education system? What beliefs concerning the establishment of English as the university lingua franca do they mobilise, as social actors who chose to devote their academic and work prospects to the mastering of this language, and who experienced, first hand, the implementation of these partial EMI degrees?

2) And what is the rationale behind these views? That is, what can this tell us about the students’ range of situated stances concerning the broader stratifying linguistic hierarchies which govern the market-driven university language policies of Southern Europe in which they are now immersed?

Table 1. Number of new students enrolled in the four Combined Languages degrees in English, per year.

| Registration no. | Degree | Total | New | Total | New | Total | New | Total | New |
|------------------|--------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| 2009             | English-Catalan | 9     | 9    | 26    | 26   | 5     | 5    | Not offered |
| 2010             | English-Spanish | +33   | 48   | +34   | 21   | +17   | 30   | +30   |
| 2011             | English-Classics | 52    | 68   | +34   | 34   | +27   | 54   | +35   |
| 2012             | English-French  | 64    | 87   | +32   | 48   | +32   | 71   | +32   |
| 2013             |         | 75    | 100  | +37   | 47   | +21   | 95   | +34   |
| 2014             |         | 76    | 112  | +35   | 36   | +14   | 103  | +33   |

Source: Àrea de Comunicació i Promoció (2015b).
The data gathered in order to answer these questions come from multiple sources, including:

1. **The researcher’s involvement in the third-year implementation of the CLDsE, in coordination with the UAB Faculty Board**, as the academic coordinator of these majors (2012–2013). This experience provided access to: (1) the information concerning curriculum designs, assessment systems, etc.; (2) the student profiles and (3) the reports gathering their input on the CLDsE (complaints, and so on), provided during regular group discussion sessions with the CLDsE Student Delegation, the official organ of the student body operating in coordination with the Academic Affairs Committee.

2. **The researcher’s observation of 194 CLDsE students in the English classroom** (2011–2013), as one of the two English instructors of their compulsory C1- and C2-level courses ‘Use of English 1’ and ‘Use of English 2’, undertaken, respectively, during their second and third academic years.

3. **Thirty argumentative essays written by students on the topic of English as a lingua franca.** These were provided by one of the two groups of all second-year CLDsE students, as part of an assessment task which accounted for 5% of their final mark in ‘Use of English 1’. This group consisted of 33 students (29 females and 4 males), aged 20 years and 4 months (in average), who were studying the following language combinations: English and French (11 students); English and Catalan (9); English and Spanish (5) and English and Classics (4). The four remaining students were three Erasmus students from Lithuania (all female) who enrolled in the English-Spanish program, and a Catalan male student majoring in Economics who undertook the course as part of his 30-credit Minor in Professional English. The geo-demographic profile of this class was as follows: there was a group of six habitual Catalan-speaking students who had moved from the Balearic Islands (Palma, Sóller, Alaíor, Sa Pobla and Consell) to Catalonia in order to major in a CLDsE; four Spanish-speaking students who had come from other parts of Spain where some Catalan is spoken (Aragó, València and Alacant) and four Catalan-speaking students who were raised in diverse Catalan-speaking regions situated an hour, at least, from Barcelona (e.g. Guissona, Cardedeu, Palafrugell and Girona). The rest of students (apart from the Erasmus) were from medium-sized towns located in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (e.g. Sabadell, Rubí, Molins de Rei and Sant Boi de Llobregat). The selection of this student group responded to the fact that they (1) were fully involved in the piloting of the CLDsE, (2) had gained relevant academic knowledge concerning the history and culture of the English-speaking countries, (3) were attaining a C1-level expertise on the English language.

| **Table 2. CLDsE students’ gender and age, per degree (2014).** |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Gender (2014)   | Mean age (2014) |
| English-Catalan | 79% women       | 20   |
| English-Spanish | 80% women       | 19   |
| English-Classics| 43% women       | 19   |
| English-French  | 82% women       | 19   |
|                 | Source: Àrea de Comunicació i Promoció (2015b). |
and (4) were, therefore, ready to take an informed critical stance on the Englishisation of the Catalan university system.

The individual essay-writing task was assigned, for homework, after having read a newspaper article entitled ‘English language debate renews questions’ (Geller, 2006), and after having completed a series of vocabulary, reading and speaking activities in class aimed at enhancing reflection around the local and global roles of English. In order to detect what particular interests or topics of concern the article had raised among them, I employed a series of discourse elicitation devices broadly connecting language to economy, employment and migration or mobility issues. These consisted of the following list of prompts designed to help develop argumentation in essays: ‘The role of English as a lingua franca’; ‘Current English language debates’; ‘The need for the officiality of languages’; ‘English and job opportunities’; ‘University and employability’ and ‘Language and im/emigration from/to Catalonia’.

The data from the essays were analysed by using an affective method for qualitative research which allows for the detection and exploration of emotions, values and beliefs emerging in written and spoken discourse, here investigated via a combination of Domain and Taxonomy Coding and Emotion Coding, adapted from Saldaña (2013, pp. 157–163, 105–110). Domain Coding is employed in ethnography as a way to interpret the informants’ multi-faceted stances on individual and collective comportments (in this case, sociolinguistic behaviours). I adapted this system as follows: The data were first classified according to a researcher-generated, open-ended list of Domains (presented in small capital letters) that condensed (but did not simply reduce) macro salient themes which were then subdivided into a list of associated topics or Taxonomy (also presented in small capital letters). For example, the Domain ENGLISH triggered the following Taxonomy: LINGUA FRANCA, MAJORITY LANGUAGE, MINORITY LANGUAGE, ASSET, HINDRANCE, INTERFERENCE, PRESTIGE, REQUIREMENT, EMPLOYABILITY, WORLD EXPERIENCE, WORLD KNOWLEDGE, UNITY, DEMOCRACY, THREAT, OFFICIALISATION, NON-OFFICIALISATION, USA and POST-COLONIALISM. Emotion Coding crucially complemented Domain and Taxonomy Coding by providing a selection of words, reproduced literally (in small capital letters enclosed in double quotation marks), that the informants mobilised when they expressed their own views on the aforementioned themes and related topics. This provided a feel of their ‘voices’, here understood as their own social constructions.

The analysis procedure started with an examination of the (1) titles; (2) thesis statements and topic sentences; (3) arguments, counterarguments and refutations and (4) closing statements of each individual essay. Eleven Domains (with their corresponding Taxonomies) were found: HIGHER EDUCATION, INTERNATIONALISATION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, LINGUA FRANCA, MULTILINGUALISM, FOREIGN LANGUAGE, MINORITY LANGUAGE, ENGLISH, CATALAN, NATIVENESS and ECONOMY (see details in Table 3). Domain and Taxonomy codes were then read along with their corresponding qualifying or evaluative Emotion codes, which were taken as venues into the students’ publicly projected stances. Finally, the four essay parts mentioned above were divided according to whether they connoted (a) favourable; (b) unfavourable; (c) favourable and unfavourable or (d) neither favourable nor unfavourable attitudes towards English-related matters. For example, the statement ‘This dominance [of English] is endangering the rest of languages’ (with the Emotion code ‘ENDANGERING’) was understood as
indexing an unfavourable attitude towards this language. Sixteen essay excerpts which were illustrative of these 11 Domains were finally selected, with their corresponding Taxonomy and Emotion codes. These are reproduced verbatim in the following section.

**Table 3.** Researcher-generated Domain and Taxonomy codes.

| Domain                  | Taxonomy                                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| HIGHER EDUCATION        | GOVERNMENT                                   |
|                         | UNIVERSITY BUDGET                            |
|                         | UNDERDEVELOPMENT                             |
| INTERNATIONALISATION    | MOBILITY                                     |
|                         | EMPLOYABILITY, WORK ABROAD                   |
| INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION | ASSET, HINDRANCE                             |
|                         | ESTRANGEMENT                                 |
|                         | WORLD EXPERIENCE, WORLD KNOWLEDGE           |
| LINGUA FRANCA           | ASSET, HINDRANCE                             |
|                         | PRESTIGE                                     |
|                         | UNITY, DEMOCRACY                             |
|                         | OFFICIALISATION, NON-OFFICIALISATION         |
| MULTILINGUALISM         | ASSET, HINDRANCE                             |
|                         | EMPLOYABILITY                                |
|                         | UNITY, DEMOCRACY                             |
|                         | FEAR                                         |
| FOREIGN LANGUAGE        | ASSET, HINDRANCE, INTERFERENCE              |
|                         | PRESTIGE, REQUIREMENT                        |
| MINORITY LANGUAGE       | ENDANGERMENT                                 |
|                         | LANGUAGE RIGHTS                              |
|                         | LANGUAGE LOSS                                |
|                         | OFFICIALISATION                              |
| ENGLISH                 | LINGUA FRANCA, MAJORITY LANGUAGE, MINORITY LANGUAGE |
|                         | ASSET, HINDRANCE, INTERFERENCE              |
|                         | PRESTIGE, REQUIREMENT                        |
|                         | EMPLOYABILITY                                |
|                         | WORLD EXPERIENCE, WORLD KNOWLEDGE           |
|                         | UNITY, DEMOCRACY, THREAT                    |
|                         | OFFICIALISATION, NON-OFFICIALISATION         |
|                         | USA, POST-COLONIALISM                        |
| CATALAN                 | LINGUA FRANCA, MAJORITY LANGUAGE, MINORITY LANGUAGE |
|                         | ASSET                                        |
|                         | IDENTITY                                     |
|                         | IN-GROUP, OUT-GROUP                          |
|                         | NON-ENDANGERMENT                             |
|                         | LANGUAGE LOSS                                |
|                         | STANDARDISATION                              |
| NATIVENESS              | NON-NATIVENESS                               |
|                         | IDENTITY                                     |
|                         | PRESCRIPTIVISM                               |
| ECONOMY                 | EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT                     |
|                         | RECESSION, BRAIN DRAIN                       |

Analysis and results: ambivalence in positive attitudes towards English and Englishisation

With revealing essay titles such as ‘One language unites the world’ or ‘Hostile languages’, the students’ essays disclosed a series of attitudes towards the local and the global statuses of English which were predominantly positive but which also revealed, and ambivalently or contradictorily interplayed with, some negative stances towards them. The nuances of these linguistic behaviours are discussed below under the general umbrella of three positive and two negative perspectives on this language.
Positive attitudes

English as a pragmatic economic asset for employability

All students envisioned English as a key ‘asset’ for future employability, and understood their investment in it as a way to ensure some future upward socio-economic mobility. This ENGLISH > ASSET association was the most frequently mobilised among them probably because, at that time, the unemployment rate among Catalan young adults had reached its peak. This ECONOMY > UNEMPLOYMENT, RECESSION and BRAIN DRAIN connection is illustrated in Rosa’s essay (Excerpt 1), entitled ‘Looking for a dream abroad’.

Excerpt 1. Rosa, female, 20, Alacant, BA in English-Spanish.

This generation is having to fend for itself like never before. The current economic situation in Spain [...] is developing an environment of uncertainty. Students, graduates and young people [...] have no expectations about their professions [...] we have to abandon our lands because here there is no future.

These work prospects were projected upon the international scene, for all students agreed that a proficient command of a foreign language (basically English) is a ‘must’ for accessing both the local and the global marketplace. These FOREIGN LANGUAGE > REQUIREMENT and INTERNATIONALISATION > EMPLOYABILITY and WORK ABROAD connections are illustrated by Mariona, in her essay ‘Magic experience of going abroad’ (Excerpt 2); by Aina, in her composition ‘Running away from Spanish reality’ (Excerpt 3) and, finally, by Paula, in her essay ‘English at school’ (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 2. Mariona, female, 20, Balearic Islands, BA in English-Catalan.

You also have to learn a new language and it will make your curriculum better. Furthermore [...] present day employers give a huge importance to having had a job in a foreign country.

Excerpt 3. Aina, female, 20, Balearic Islands, BA in English-Catalan.

Everybody wants to contract someone with experience abroad and the competence to speak more than one language.
Having a good command of English equals more job opportunities and the possibility of working in any country of the world.

In these excerpts, students construct multilingual competence (including an effective command of English) as a utilitarian ‘global commodity’ (Pennycook, 1994, p. 145); that is, as a pragmatic worktool (ASSET) which should enhance their employability and mobility chances to become part of the European workforce. Access to this economic resource was uncritically presented as a socio-professional necessity (REQUIREMENT), rather than as a matter of wish or of personal choice (as seen by the use of ‘HAVE TO LEARN’ by Mariona).

The view that a credentialed proficient level of English provides better work prospects (ENGLISH > EMPLOYABILITY), which is also shared among highschool students and undergraduates in other Catalan universities (Flors, 2013; Garrett & Gallego Balsà, 2014; Lasagabaster et al., 2013; de Rosselló i Peralta & Boix-Fuster, 2003), follows a neo-liberal regime of thought which pushes the institutionalisation of EMI as a (covert) global language policy (Piller & Cho, 2013). This is an economic ideology which is framed within a discourse of ‘linguistic instrumentalism’ (Wee, 2008, p. 32), where languages are seen as consumable ‘added value’ economic resources devoid of socio-cultural or political meanings and of identity connotations.

English as cultural capital for educational prestige

In a similar vein, all students saw the English language as an educational resource embodying the sort of cultural capital which provides academic distinction (ENGLISH > PRESTIGE). This language is associated with ‘high culture’ because its non-elitist widespread teaching in Catalonia has been scant until recently. This view is illustrated by Paula (Excerpt 5), who was very critical about the ‘ineffective’ treatment of foreign languages in the Catalan educational system (ENGLISH > MINORITY LANGUAGE, in Spain).

English is the most spoken language on earth. In the majority of countries all over the world it’s as important as the official language, so children learn it from a very young age in the same measure as their mother tongue. This is not the case of Spain, though. English is considered a secondary language. […] Spain is one of the countries with the lowest English level in Europe, if not the worst. Proof of that are […] the politicians, who speak with bad grammar and worse pronunciation. […] English should be given the same importance as the mother tongue at school, so next generations will be more prepared to this globalized world we live in.
They all presented English as one of the most helpful languages for their daily academic activities, too, particularly for gaining access to up-to-date information (ENGLISH > WORLD KNOWLEDGE). This is illustrated by Judit (Excerpt 6), in her essay ‘English, the universal language’ (note, again, the use of the modality verb of obligation in ‘MUST UNDERSTAND’, which presents proficiency in English as a REQUIREMENT).

Excerpt 6. Judit, female, 20, Barcelona, BA in English-French.

Most websites are written in English. Anyone who wants to find the best information (1) online must understand English. Likewise, if one wants an article to reach the largest number of people possible, writing in English is a safe bet.

These discourses also reveal that CLDsE students shared a prescriptivist view of language (NATIVENESS > PRESCRIPTIVISM), as they fostered the teaching and learning of ‘pure’ English forms in a native-like manner and, on some occasions, they even censored their own effective command of it. This is exemplified by Marta (Excerpt 7) who, in her essay ‘Shut up better than use the language’, complained about the ‘negative interference’ of Spanish with her foreign language learning process (INTERFERENCE) (note, also, Paula’s general criticism of English communicative practices in Spain, in the Emotion codes ‘BAD GRAMMAR’ and ‘WORSE PRONUNCIATION’, in Excerpt 6):

Excerpt 7. Marta, female, 21, Uruguay, bilingually schooled in Barcelona, BA in English-Spanish.

Learning new languages […] we confused their rules with our mother tongue and we make grammar mistakes.

Further evidence that they targeted a command of English standard norms was provided in a discussion meeting where all students not only agreed with the level expectations required in the three instrumental English courses that they had (which included B2-, C1- and C2-level exams over three years) but also demanded the use of similar tests in the other foreign languages that they were studying (e.g. French). In the first reports that they passed onto the CLDsE academic coordinator (the researcher), for instance, they wrote: ‘During the first year of English, they [instructors] harp on and on about [the B2-level course] ‘Basic English Uses’, as it should be with the rest of all the other courses’ (CLDsE Student Delegation; 26 February 2014).10

One would expect these students to share some negative feelings towards foreign language testing, given that it does not normally work to their advantage. The number of students failing the first- and second-year courses on instrumental English was problematically high, to the point that the Faculty had to offer a third parallel course for repeat students. 21.2% of students in the group under study were repeating the C1-level course and had already
taken the previous B2-level course twice. This means that, in reality, they had to invest four years of effort, time and money to obtain the C1-level certificate. And yet, they kept demanding the institutional credentialing of their English language command.

Thus, the students’ lack of proficiency did not translate into negative stances towards the implementation of Englishisation. In fact, the opposite was true: lack of foreign language command motivated them to work hard in order to obtain the certificates which should provide high standards multilingual curriculums and which should make their individual employability profiles competitive and distinctive.

**English as a ‘democratic’ tool for intercultural communication**

The two intertwined discursive tropes presented so far are also explained by the fact that English seems to index an emotionally ‘neutral’ language in the Catalan university context (Llurda, 2009, p. 125), because it is generally seen as a language which is ‘external’ to the politicised sociolinguistic workings of Catalonia.

Following this stance, all students envisaged English as a ‘democratic’ instrumental tool for establishing successful intercultural communication and for enhancing social cohesion (ENGLISH > DEMOCRACY, UNITY), and about a third of the ‘Use of English 1’ class explicitly argued for what in effect is an ‘economisation of linguistic diversity’ (Duchêne, 2011, p. 102). This consists of a pragmatic hierarchisation (or prioritisation) of a few lingua francas in which, in line with the neo-liberal mindset mentioned above, English is assigned a dominant role to make global communication feasible (LINGUA FRANCA > ASSET, OFFICIALISATION). In Excerpt 8, Marta defended the use of English (which she had previously mentioned) as the official world language, suggesting that MULTILINGUALISM is a HINDRANCE or ‘MAJOR IMPEDIMENT’ for global unity.

Excerpt 8. Marta, female, 21, born in Uruguay, bilingually schooled in Barcelona, BA in English-Spanish.

There are more than 3,000 languages coexisting. As a result, one of the drawbacks of the globalization is the lack of a single official language worldwide. […] The existence of many languages is a major impediment for foreigners who want to move to a new country.

The remaining two-thirds of the class, by contrast, to a lesser or greater extent argued for an understanding of linguistic diversity as encompassing not only English (which they all saw as ‘democratising’) but also, crucially, other regional, minority and majority languages (MULTILINGUALISM > ASSET, DEMOCRACY, UNITY). This is illustrated by Laura (Excerpt 9), who, in her essay ‘Language beyond boundaries’, stated that limiting the choice of foreign languages to English and showing FEAR towards multilingualism is counterproductive for the defence of ‘pro-multiculturality’ neo-liberal values such as ‘democracy’, ‘civism’, ‘respect’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘inclusion of the other’ (see Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2011; Warriner, 2015).
Excerpt 9. Laura, female, 20, València, BA in English-French.

This knowledge in more than just two or three languages makes little by little the boundaries disappear that we put to ourselves and make the world a little bit more united. It seems that some kind of fear to get closer to other cultures exists and people resign to know just their current language and English.

Interestingly, the association of intercultural communication with the use of foreign languages other than solely English was more frequently made by those students who came from the Balearic Islands, who had chosen the 30-ECTS German module which would certify their effective command of English and German. This may respond to the particular work prospects of this sub-group of students, who projected their wished-for professional trajectories back in Majorca, where the tourism industry seems to be crisis-resistant (Exceltur, 2013); and where the biggest group of foreign residents are Germans (Sastre Bestard, 2013, p. 229). This may explain why students from Barcelona (like Paula and Judit) tended to speak about English, whereas students from the Balearic Islands (like Mariona and Aina) tended to mention ‘new’ or FOREIGN LANGUAGES when addressing linguistic diversity.

Negative attitudes

In the previous sub-section, I have shown that the newspaper article mostly triggered positive views concerning English. These, however, complexly interplayed with a series of unfavourable attitudes which were mobilised less frequently, but which were more forcefully defended, at times by the very same students who had previously acknowledged the positive values of Englishisation. These critical perspectives revolved around the negative social consequences derived from the overarching power that English has gained in the global scene, as explained below.

English as a post-colonial reproducer of linguistic marginalisation

About a third of the ‘Use of English’ students at some point over the two-year fieldwork project displayed very negative attitudes towards English, basically by stressing the socio-economic and political interests behind the attempts at establishing it as the only global lingua franca, following the oft-quoted work of the researchers that they had chosen to read for the essay-writing task (such as Phillipson, 1992). More specifically, they envisioned English as a post-colonial reproducer of ethno-racial difference, linguistic marginalisation and social inequality or exclusion among non-English-speaking populations inhabiting English-speaking countries – in particular, the United States (ENGLISH > THREAT, USA, POST-COLONIALISM). This is exemplified by Oriol (Excerpt 10), who, in his essay ‘English language debate in the USA: A misguided approach’, employed the Emotion codes
‘FUNDAMENTALISTS’ and ‘NARROW-MINDED’ to address North-American English-language-only defenders, whom he had previously called ‘PREJUDICED’ and ‘XENOPHOBIC’.

Excerpt 10. Oriol, male, 20, Girona, BA in English-Catalan.

Claiming that English needs to be oficialized is baffling, to say the least. […] Some experts on the subject have even gone as far as claiming that the expansion of English is a case of ‘linguistic imperialism’. […] By approaching the debate from a fundamentalist, narrow-minded perspective, conservative Americans are missing the whole picture.

Curiously enough, in the discourses that displayed strong criticism around English in the international arena, no negative comments were found on the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) industry, in a European higher education system which has ‘mercantilised’ the teaching of multilingual competence (Fairclough, 2006, p. 73). There was no mention, either, to the market-driven governmental strategies of advanced liberal democracies like Catalonia who have started to foster an understanding of university education as a new form of ‘entrepreneurialism’, and who, consequently, address the student body in client-hood terms (see Deem, 2001, pp. 9–10). It is relevant to highlight, though, that there were some dissenting voices who critically wrote about the sharp increase in tuition fees, which was associated with the ‘Europeanization’ of Catalan universities (HIGHER EDUCATION > UNIVERSITY BUDGET, UNDERDEVELOPMENT).11 This is illustrated by Blanca (Excerpt 11), in her essay ‘Education: something disappearing’.

Excerpt 11. Blanca, female, 20, Barcelona, BA in English-Spanish.

The government should be more interested in education as it seems nowadays and stop reducing the budget of it. Those kinds of things are making this country to seem less developed as it is.

Two of the students who participated in this study were activists in a communist student union. Throughout the course, they invited their classmates to anti-privatisation strikes and posted information on the Student Delegation’s Facebook concerning the demise of the public university system and the negative consequences that the local deployment of the Bologna Plan had brought to the Humanities degrees. However, students left the parallel process of Englishisation unmentioned – as if the implementation of trilingualism was detached from the profit-seeking internationalisation strategies of the EHEA.

English as a challenger for minority languages and linguistic diversity

Five students wrote against the oficialisation of English as the global lingua franca at university and demanded more institutional support to minority languages instead, as a
way to protect linguistic diversity (MINORITY LANGUAGE > ENDANGERMENT). Oriol, for instance, was in favour of officialising ‘subsidiary’ languages, presenting the historical trajectory of Catalan as a case in point (CATALAN > MINORITY LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE LOSS, STANDARDISATION), in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12. Oriol, male, 20, Girona, BA in English-Catalan.

Giving legal status to second languages usually prevents them from being relegated to oral and informal contexts. Catalan […] would be extinct if it hadn’t been standardized.

The students who emphatically mobilised this type of discourses believed that giving English a prominent status quo is incongruous with protecting minority languages, and conceived of ENGLISH as a ‘predator language’ (Cots, 2013, p. 112). This is exemplified by Laura (Excerpt 13), who talked about LANGUAGE LOSS; and by Judit (Excerpt 14), who called English a ‘THREAT’ endangering the ‘PURITY’ of other (unnamed) languages, once again exposing prescriptivist views on linguistic codes.

Excerpt 13. Laura, female, 20, València, BA in English-French.

It looks like you can go wherever you want just knowing English, which means an impoverishment of the cultures and a gradual disappearance of minor languages.

Excerpt 14. Judit, female, 20, Barcelona, BA in English-French.

English […] has influenced other languages and it has become the main language of international communication. […] This dominance is endangering the rest of languages or, at least, their purity. […] English […] is a threat for the rest of them.
The students who saw English as a challenge for minority languages did not explicitly mention CATALAN, and, instead, more ambiguously talked about threats to ‘minor languages’, ‘second languages’ or ‘the rest of languages’ (MINORITY LANGUAGES). Besides, these discourses on the defence of non-nation-state languages were not mobilised by those who had chosen to major in English and Catalan (but by those who studied English and French), as would have been expected, given the fact that many of them overtly stated that they participated in the pro-Catalan independence project. There are two main reasons that may account for this fact: the particular sociolinguistic context of the UAB and the geo-demographic profiles of the social group under study.

Concerning the first aspect, I argue that students perceived that the vitality of Catalan is already optimal, and found it problematic to state that this language is under threat solely because of English. After all, the UAB was the first university to name Catalan the official language and to define it as ‘la llengua pròpia’ or the institution’s ‘own’ language, after Franco’s death (UAB Governing Council, 2011b) – besides, almost 70% of classes are taught in Catalan there (see Introduction).

Further evidence that the use of Catalan was conceived of as being normalised was provided by Ieva, an Erasmus student from Lithuania. In her essay ‘Easter European immigrant’s acceptance in Catalonia’ (Excerpt 15), Ieva expressed surprise (ESTRANGEMENT) about the sociolinguistic behaviours of local ‘Catalan’ students, who, she perceived, tend to communicate in Catalan only, even with Spanish-speaking foreigners with no command of this language, in this particular educational discursive space (CATALAN > IDENTITY, IN-GROUP, OUT-GROUP).

Excerpt 15. Ieva, female, 21, Erasmus from Lithuania, BA in English-Spanish.

Catalans tend to speak Catalan between themselves (and it is natural), but the strange thing is that they might continue speaking in Catalan even if a foreigner could speak Spanish. Thus, an eastern European immigrant could sometimes feel embarrassed and like fish out of water in Catalonia’s society.

I suggest that local supporters of minority languages, in fact, made explicit attempts to present Catalan as a fully-fledged European language (CATALAN > MAJORITY LANGUAGE) by detaching themselves from older discourses which directly tied this language to an essentialised Catalan identity (see Pujolar & González, 2013). Their way to support Catalan was to present it in neo-liberal terms as an economically and socially ‘strong’ language having the same weight (and therefore, deserving the same rights) as any other ‘medium-sized world language’ (Vila, 2015, p. 1). They did so in discourse by quoting facts provided as authoritative evidence for their claims, and by using the argumentum ad verecundiam that powerful international institutions have proved the potential of this language. This is illustrated by Alba (Excerpt 16), who, in her essay ‘Catalan is not endangered’, explained that Catalan is a post-national language of global reach which is worth investing in (CATALAN > LINGUA FRANCA, ASSET).
It [Catalan] will not disappear because it is a powerful language and many people speak it. […] Catalan is one of the most spoken languages in the world. […] The 9th language with more speakers in Europe, according to the UNESCO.

None of the students mentioned Spanish in their essays, which may reveal the difficulties that they had when addressing the complex bilingual reality of their immediate sociolinguistic context. This shows that, to a certain extent, the assignment of particular status quos to the two local languages is still a sensitive issue that they apparently tried to skirt in public. It may be the case, too, that they were also using a rhetorical strategy of ‘political correctness’ which does not allow for the criticism of any language, including majority languages like Spanish, out of respect for the world’s linguistic ecology (see Muehlmann, 2007).

The avoidance of emotional displays concerning Catalan and Spanish may be linked to the particular sociolinguistic configuration of the group under analysis, who were university students in a relatively comfortable socio-economic position fully invested in the implementation of EMI, in the era of globalisation. As outlined in Section 2, this student cohort, except for the Erasmus students, came from four distinct regions: the Balearic Islands; Spanish communities where Catalan is official or has traditionally played a role; predominantly Catalan-speaking towns and metropolitan cities near Barcelona. However, their individual mobility trajectories all converged in that globalised city, as the vast majority reported having left their hometowns to share a flat with other students and to cultivate an independent urban lifestyle. This occurred during a crucial turning point in their lives, university entrance in early adulthood, when individuals show a tendency to shape and change their sociolinguistic comportments so as to better adapt to their new communities of socialisation (Pujolar & Puigdevall, 2015). For this reason, I argue that these students’ linguistic trajectories and experiences had become increasingly similar. They all networked in an academic setting where Catalan predominates in the classrooms. They all socialised in Barcelona, where (1) Spanish (and, therefore, Catalan/Spanish bilingualism) is used extensively among this age cohort (Torrijos, 2013); (2) the choice of Catalan and/or Spanish is no longer indexical of strongly politicised static ‘either–or’ local ethnolinguistic identities but of more fluid ‘both–and’ post-national subjects (Woolard & Frekko, 2013, p. 134) and (3) English has colonised the urban arena as a distinct landmark of cosmopolitanism and modernity (Codó, 2014).

Concluding remarks

Under the complex dynamics of economic neo-liberalism, higher education institutions in Europe have undergone a series of radical transformations which have turned them into market-driven transnational ventures, following the wider socio-economic restructuration processes that internationalisation entails. One of such transformations has been the
Englishisation of traditionally non-English-speaking universities. The causes and consequences of the adoption of university language policies and practices which foster the establishment of English as the institutional lingua franca of higher education centres have now been investigated worldwide and count on a robust body of research from many different applied linguistics areas. And yet, there is agreement that more case studies are needed on what that the implementation and management of Englishisation involves, on the ground, from the perspective of all institutional agents (policy-makers, professors, staff, students, etc.), particularly in bilingual or minority language contexts, in the comparatively less researched universities of Southern Europe (Huldren, Jensen, & Dimova, 2015, p. 2).

Catalonia is one of these late capitalist societies of the south who have relatively recently started to invest in the ‘Europeanization’ mission of the tertiary education system. Its governmental authorities have crucially incentivised, and are now fully engaged in, the institutionalisation of the teaching and learning of a dominant ‘foreign language’ (English) in their universities as part of this mission, with the aim of gaining projection and competitiveness (i.e. socio-economic weight) not only within the EHEA but also, strategically, within the global educational marketplace.

The Englishisation en masse of public universities in Catalonia epitomises how these newer globalised language policies and strategies have created tensions and have posed a challenge for officially bilingual societies, basically because they have re-opened the debate concerning what roles the local majority and minority languages may now play in ‘trilingual’ tertiary education systems of advanced liberal democracies in Europe, committed to protecting their local languages in this powerful sites of knowledge.

The context-grounded historicisation of the Englishisation process in Catalonia also provides an illustrative picture of the ways in which, in the era of late capitalism, southern European universities have embraced a modernist ‘unity in diversity’ rhetoric which fosters an ‘abstract’ (i.e. non-fully materialised) ‘respect for linguistic diversity’, and have ultimately opted for a complex language policy strategy which consists of: (1) the securitisation of the minority language as the institutional language at university (in this case, Catalan); (2) the public acknowledgement of the majority language and of its key role for internationalisation upon having become one of the dominant lingua francas of global reach (Spanish) and, finally, (3) the relatively sudden compulsory inclusion of a third foreign language into the curriculum (English), up to a credentialed B2-level of competence, from the academic year 2015–2016 (DOGC, 2014, p. 162).

Overall, this demonstrates that, by choosing to institutionalise English, in a top-down manner, as the de facto foreign lingua franca of the academic community among teachers, students and administrative staff, higher education bilingual institutions like those found in Catalonia join their northern counterparts in that they also participate in, and reinforce, the privileged status quo that the EHEA has already conferred to this language, thereby excluding other policies which could more realistically address the increased linguistic diversity that universities manage on the ground, in today’s multilingual and multicultural Europe.

The international Catalan universities which have pioneered these transformations and have gained a pre- eminent position in the global tertiary education marketplace, notably still largely under-researched, provide crucial knowledge on the nuances and
particularities of the implementation of new educational policies and language directives geared towards the fulfilment of Englishisation in higher education institutions of the south. A case in point is the UAB, now fully invested in a particular type of Englishisation practice that was actually launched, for the first time in Spain, in 2009. This consists of the offer of a series of new Combined Languages Degrees in English which provide an innovative type of partial English-medium instruction that certifies a proficient competence in English and in at least two more languages, upon completion of the degree.

The first students who decided to participate in the gradual deployment of such Englishisation initiatives as social agents crucially gearing the degree of success of such educational innovations provide a privileged lens on how the university students of the global era reveal their situated perspectives and attitudes towards the establishment of English as the foreign language of university education. As found in other bilingual contexts, the students of this Catalan university mobilised discourses which generally displayed positive views concerning the use and officialisation of English in higher education institutions. These, however, complexly interplayed with a smaller set of unfavourable stances that were circulated more forcefully, frequently in an ambivalent, contradictory and even conflictual manner.

Thus, rather than either enthusiastically embracing or rejecting internationalisation, bilingual university students accepted the idea that their life trajectories would probably include the study or the work abroad experience (in fact, the majority of them decided to spend their third or fourth academic year in places such as Dresden, Vienna, Aarhus, Frankfurt, Los Angeles or Santa Barbara). In this sense, they uncritically saw the Europeanization of the Catalan university system via Englishisation as a professional requirement for their work prospects, rather than as a wished-for, personal choice. They all envisioned English as a certified (payable and consumable) academic and professional passport to navigate the currently troubled European marketplace. In fact, they justified their efforts to obtain a credentialed high-standards multilingual curriculum by explicitly mentioning that one of the reasons why they chose to invest in partial English-medium instruction degrees was to command English in a native-like manner, in order to make their employability profiles distinct. This view of languages as economic resources that are attainable via ‘competitiveness’ and ‘meritocracy’ is in line with the neo-liberal mindset – shared by many other European and international students, too – which legitimates the dominant sociolinguistic orders and politico-economic interests that govern the multilingual policies of higher education institutions, not only in Europe but also worldwide.

However, these prospective language experts did not simply accept all that the Englishisation process entails. They shared a high degree of reflexivity and sensitivity with regard to their own, and to the others’, linguistic trajectories and language repertoires. They presented themselves as socially-engaged cosmopolitan people who were ready to denounce linguistic marginalisation in English- and non-English-speaking countries. Their commitment and genuine willingness to respect linguistic diversity both locally and globally at times led them to display very negative attitudes towards the status quos of English in the international arena, and to defend a conception of multilingualism (and of ‘multiculturalism’) as necessarily inclusive of more languages other than solely this one.

This ‘open-mindedness’ public linguistic behaviour may also explain why they all systematically avoided direct (re)-presentations of the self (and of the other) in ‘fixed’ ethno-linguistic terms, and defended their commitment to their minority language (Catalan) by highlighting the socio-economic utilitarian potential of this language, without overtly
mentioning its rivalling relationship with the nation-state language (Spanish). English, by contrast, was generally understood as the ‘neutral’ code devoid of local identity connotations with which to publicly engage with the present-day modern lifestyles and the fluid post-national global identities that characterise the new generations of young social players born into the twenty-first century.

Overall, the students’ nuanced range of situated stances with regard to English and to Englishisation provides evidence that southern European foreign language learners tend to legitimise the stratifying linguistic regimes and sociolinguistic hierarchies which reproduce the micro and macro power structures that today assign superior roles to English, but with some well-informed dissenting voices which definitely call for a critical global change in favour of realistic language directives providing a more balanced ecology of languages, beyond ‘English-plus-local-languages’ institutional strategies.

Notes
1. Catalan is considered a minority language in the sense that it is a linguistic code which has been historically, socio-economically and politically ‘minorized’ (see Bastardas, 1996), as explained at the end of the Introductory section.
2. At the time of writing, there was a general increase of EMI courses from 5.5% to 13.2% at the UAB (General Directorate for Language Policy, 2013, p. 26). Apart from the Combined Languages Degrees in English, the Business Management and Administration, Economics and Primary Education official majors also offered the EMI option, and 25% of all MA programs were offered in English, too (Àrea de Comunicació i Promoció, 2015a).
3. This gender imbalance in language-related degrees has been attested in many Catalan universities (see, e.g. Llurda et al., 2015).
4. In 2014, the English Studies degree had registered 324 first- to fourth-year students; French Studies, 46; Spanish Studies, 151; Classics, 75; and Catalan, 68. This was considered a success, given the fact that most language Departments at the UAB had been experiencing a decrease in the number of enrolments, for philology-related studies were becoming non-popular, in Catalonia.
5. No confidential information of the institution under analysis has been displayed. The informants’ data were gathered with both oral and written informed consent. All names used are pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity, strictly following the guidelines for academic research established by the UAB Ethics Committee.
6. These tasks were part of the syllabus established for all C1-level instrumental English courses by the Faculty of Letters at the UAB. Here is an illustrative small sample of the exercises done in class prior to the take-home essay-writing activity:

- Reading comprehension activities: ‘Summarise the text in one sentence’; ‘What motivations for having an official language organ are mentioned for France, Canada, Israel and Iceland?’
- Vocabulary exercises: ‘What is the function of a lullaby (paragraph a)?’ ‘What would be a synonym in the expression “… has often stirred very strong feelings” (paragraph g)?’
- Speaking activities in groups: ‘Language is never about language. Discuss’.

7. Cases in which this classification was difficult to conduct were addressed by means of ethnographic fieldwork, for example, by observing the students’ linguistic behaviours and contributions in classroom debates or by asking them further about Englishisation in tutorial sessions, over the two-year fieldwork project.
8. The unemployment rate among people aged 16–29 was 32.2% in 2014 (Observatori Català de la Joventut, 2015, p. 11).
9. Phrases removed for space constraints are indicated with […].
10. Author’s translation. Original quote: ‘En primer año de inglés [los profesores] nos machacan con Usos básicos como tendría que ser con todas las demás asignaturas’.
11. The overall price of a degree within the disciplines of Humanities increased by 172.25% between 2007 and 2014, in Catalonia (OSU, 2013, p. 13).

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