To teach in English or not to teach in English – that is the question

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Why English?

7000+ languages spoken in the world (UNESCO)
Most widely spoken by number of native speakers and as a second language:

- Mandarin Chinese
- English
- Spanish
- Hindi
- Arabic
- Bengali
Languages in Europe

2012 Eurobarometer Survey on Europeans and their Languages

• Half of Europeans speak one additional language
• A quarter speak two additional languages
• One in ten are conversant in at least three languages.
Mother tongue:
• German (16%)
• Italian and English (13% each)
• French (12%)
• Spanish and Polish (8% each)
• Two hundred years ago: French
• One hundred years ago: German
• English undisputed *lingua franca* for science, technology, politics, commerce and popular culture.
• Market shift towards teaching in English, especially at post-graduate level.
• Almost a third of master’s courses now taught in English – in Europe, the number has tripled in last 5 years.
Why teach in English?

For our students:

• Knowing English considered a basic skill in many spheres.
• Improve mobility prospects.
• Improve graduate employment. (Economist Intelligence Unit report)
• Fulfill expectations.
Why teach in English?

For our lecturers and researchers:

- Knowing English considered a basic skill in many spheres.
- Improved possibilities of publishing and presenting academic papers.
- Improved mobility prospects.
Why teach in English?

For our institutions:

• Part of institutional internationalisation strategy.
• More academic papers published in English = improved position in rankings.
• Improve graduate employment = enhanced reputation.
• Attract international students - and the funding they bring with them. (UK: 20% university income)
• Gain visibility and competitiveness in the global education marketplace.
Why not teach in English?

- Local resistance.
- Costs involved.
- Shortage of lecturers proficient in English.
- Student’s level of English insufficient.
Local resistance

- For many, teaching in English is a political issue.
- Seen as a threat to local culture and language.

- Netherlands
- Italy
Why not teach in English?

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Costs involved

• Not only monetary – a great deal of time and effort, and a good plan are required.
• Training for lecturers.
• Compensation/motivation for lecturers.
• Intensive courses for students
• Visiting lecturers (partner universities?)
• Support services for international students and lecturers.
• Training for administrative and support staff.
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Teaching the teachers

• Language courses to improve general level of English.
• Coaching in their specific subject (language for specific purposes)
• Coaching in teaching methodologies and technologies (teaching in English is not simply translating course material into English – it has many didactic implications).
• Quality issues.
• Make qualifications part of selection for new academic staff.
Preparation of the students

- Define linguistic as well as academic entrance conditions for future students.
- Intensive courses in technical and general English at the beginning of studies.
- Courses in academic writing in English.
- Courses in presenting in English.
• So, if you decide to go ahead, if your institution takes the decision to start offering courses taught in English…

you need a language policy.
Language policy: issues involved (1)

• Higher education is a key context where cultural attitudes and practices are formed and carried from one generation to the next.
• We have to break barriers in innovation, interdisciplinary and transnational cooperation.
• But it is also part of our task to modernize the linguistic repertoire and bring national languages up to a par with academic and industrial developments.
• We need to ensure a balance of powers, not a reckless race to convert to English. Mechanisms to support the national language are important.
Denmark (University of Copenhagen):
- 1960 – 1979: 90% PhD theses written in Danish
- 2000 – 2004: 100% in English

Norway:
Project to publish academic book in Norwegian. Difficulty with terminology.

Estonia: National government measures
- Support for publication of textbooks in Estonian
- Requirement for PhD dissertations in other languages to include lengthy summary in Estonian
Language policy: issues involved (2).

• Teaching in English does not (should not) happen in isolation. Universities must also take into account languages in publishing and internal communication, as well as the availability of support services.

• Changing to teaching in English will not happen overnight. It is not a race. It requires careful strategic planning regarding when, where, how, why and which programmes should be taught in English.
Language policy: issues involved (3)

- Funding and sustainability. (Japan, Vietnam)
- Quality – the academic quality of the offer is of paramount importance.
- Curriculum content: clearly stated international dimension in aims, objectives and outcomes of a programme.
Future

• Learn from others’ mistakes
• Technology
• Babel fish
• Martian
• Thank you for your attention
• Agradeço a vossa atenção
• It is wrong to assume that a native English speaker will necessarily have a good command of the language.
• Native English speakers are more likely to use complex words and phrasings or cultural references that require advanced knowledge of the language.
• To get information across, you don’t need to speak like Shakespeare.
• It is rare for university lecturers to be required to sit a language test in order to be allowed to teach in English.
• Teachers should not be ‘let loose’ on students unless their English has been tested.