The Englishisation of higher education, between naturalisation and resistance

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to shed additional light on the Englishisation process in higher education (HE), by exploring the contentious and divisive nature of language changes and the different ways in which individual academics experience that process and craft ways of resisting institutional attempts to naturalise the use of the English language in teaching and scholarly writing.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on a self-ethnographic insider study in a Portuguese university setting, the data were gathered from multiple sources and over an extended period of time and presented as stories selected as illustrative examples of resistance.

Findings – The Englishisation process goes beyond language issues and tends to be associated with increasing competitive pressures and the implementation of international standards that might challenge the cultural mind-set and long-established practices; by exacerbating old political divisions and tensions, the Englishisation process uncovers a confrontation between different visions of the role and nature of the university that seems to co-exist and compete in the same setting – the community of scholars and the market-led university.

Originality/value – The paper adds to the debate on the implications of the Englishisation process in HE showing that resistance to the growing use of the English language might not be about the language after all. It is the full package that comes with the Englishisation process that really seems to matter.

Keywords Internationalisation, Englishisation, Language policies, English-medium instruction, Academics, Resistance

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The international character of European universities has been part of their identity since the Middle Ages. From the outset, some students have travelled abroad to study, and scholars have worked outside their home countries (Altbach, 2004). Mobility required a common language, and universities adopted one: Latin. "These were the worlds of the wandering scholar and student, now here and now there, fully autonomous from governments in the intellectual arena" (Kerr, 1990, p. 6). Academic mobility in medieval Europe conducted "on a voluntary, laissez-faire basis" (Kim, 2009, p. 398) gave way to contemporary institutional policies of global recruitment of students and staff and the large scale exchange programmes supported by institutional networks and supranational policy frameworks (Kim, 2009). Despite the sophisticated translation devices available, the adoption of a common language of instruction is perhaps inevitable given the number of scholars and students moving abroad in search of prestigious degrees and career opportunities in more rewarding labour markets. In this new world of higher education (HE), English has replaced Latin as *lingua franca* reflecting the "growing hegemony of English as the world's common language" (Healey, 2008, p. 333).

This paper reflects on the current process of Englishisation defined as the spread of English as the foreign language of communication between individuals who share neither a common native language nor a common (national) culture at universities of nation states where English is not the official language (Hultgren, 2014; Koo, 2009). The Englishisation process is one of many changes taking place in higher education (HE) including the

introduction of market mechanisms and managerial practices forcing universities to leave behind the view of education as public good provided by collegial institutions to become a business-like industry providing an internationally traded commodity (Gumport, 2000; Phan, 2013). The adoption of English as the academic *lingua franca* is a substantive development and a major instrument for raising universities' competitiveness in a sector increasingly driven by economic rationales and global competition. Although distinct, these processes are intimately connected.

There is now a wide body of literature on the internationalisation of HE and the motivations and rationale for adopting English-medium instruction (EMI) (e.g. Wilkins and Urbanović, 2014), and the role of English in the global spread of the US scholarly model (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019). However, the tensions raised by the ongoing naturalisation of English and the ambivalence of many academics about the challenge it represents to the *status quo* in their institutions have been somewhat overlooked (e.g. Al-Kahtany *et al.*, 2016; Boussebaa and Brown, 2017; Choi, 2016; Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011; Juusola *et al.*, 2015; Söderlundh, 2012; Tange, 2010, 2012a). Based on a self-ethnographic insider study in a Portuguese university, the paper explores the tensions raised by the Englishisation process and the way academics experience that process and craft ways of resisting the language changes. The paper begins with a literature review on the Englishisation of HE. The following sections outline the methodology and discuss the resistance enacted to the language changes.

Internationalisation and Englishisation of HE

Significant changes in the last decades normally associated with the globalisation process (e.g. mass demand for HE, economic needs for highly educated staff, increased labour mobility) and with political and institutional factors (deregulation and constrained public funding; the rise of managerialism; growing emphasis on accountability, efficiency and performance evaluation) had a profound impact on the structure and culture of HE (e.g. Altbach, 2004; Kalfa *et al.*, 2018). At the institutional level, these changes meant the adoption of business practices and values and the extensive use of *management speak* (e.g. Choi, 2010; Juusola *et al.*, 2015) in universities increasingly viewed as brands rather than institutions (Sidhu, 2009).

With HE regarded as a commodity tradable in the global market (Byun and Kim, 2011), internationalisation became a "managerially led activity with an economic rationale" (Warwick and Moogan, 2013, p. 105) associated with the big business of international student recruitment (Knight, 2012). Besides financial motivations, gaining status and international recognition, benchmarking international high-quality standards set up by accreditation agencies and improving an institution's position in rankings (that ultimately attract more students) became key institutional drivers of internationalisation (e.g. Altbach and Knight, 2007; Knight, 2012; Seeber *et al.*, 2016; Svetlik and Lalić, 2016). Despite the different internationalisation strategies and rationales, they lead to the same outcome, as far as language is concerned – the increasingly dominant use of English as *lingua franca* to the purpose of mutual understanding between speakers of different native languages (Bernini, 2015; Yang, 2001). Even where international recruitment is not the main driver, English-taught degree programs (e.g. Kotake, 2017), parallel language use (Kuteeva and Airey, 2014) and internationalisation at-home initiatives (e.g. Choi and Khamalah, 2017; Robson *et al.*, 2018) were developed to promote the international literacy of native students, improve their intercultural and language competences and allowing them to operate more effectively in the global market.

With some disciplinary differences (e.g. Kuteeva and Airey, 2014), the widespread adoption of EMI in HE is a worldwide phenomenon from the European shores (e.g. Costa and

Coleman, 2013; Sabaté-Dalmau, 2016; Tange, 2012a) to Latin America (e.g. Gimenez *et al.*, 2018), Africa (e.g. Reilly, 2019), the Middle East (e.g. Al-Kahtany *et al.*, 2016) and the Far East (e.g. Bradford, 2016; Byun *et al.*, 2011; Choi, 2010; Duong and Chua, 2016; Hu and Lei, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2017; Phan, 2013; Poole, 2016), often to the detriment of other languages (Coleman, 2006; Doiz *et al.*, 2013; Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011; Phillipson, 2006).

In Europe, the contrast is apparent between the official language policy statements and the *de facto* role of English as *lingua academica* (Phillipson, 2006). Despite the policy aim to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism (Mar-Molinero and Stevenson, 2006) and the official commitment to linguistic diversity and rhetorical support for the "European ideals of multilingualism and the MT+2 formula (mother tongue and two additional languages for all citizens)" (Coleman, 2006, p. 5) the internationalisation of HE "appears to drive the expansion of English rather than increase the diversity of languages used" (Kaša and Mhamed, 2013, p. 31). The reality is that English has become the language of HE across Europe exposing the failure of multilingual policies (Coleman, 2006; Phillipson, 2006). Even when no clear or explicit language policy is adopted, the underlying assumption is that English will serve as *lingua franca*. Programs euphemistically referred to as foreign language or internationally oriented programmes inevitably mean they are taught in English – an explicit reference is thought unnecessary (Erling and Hilgendorf, 2006; Saarinen, 2012), a process of naturalisation that Soler-Carbonell and Gallego-Balsà (2016) call the *invisibilisation* of English. The emergence of English-only institutions in non-English-speaking countries provides additional evidence of a growing English-monolingual environment in European HE (Martin-Rubió and Cots, 2016).

Policies intended to harmonise HE across Europe and promote intra-European mobility (e.g. Erasmus) were instrumental in the Englishisation process with the inevitable need for a common language of communication that everyone took for granted would be English (Erling and Hilgendorf, 2006; Kaša and Mhamed, 2013). In fact, "only by adopting a common academic language, can the ideal of a free market for higher education be realised" (Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011, p. 19). Moreover, by competing against the same criteria set up by mainly US-dominated rankings and accreditation agencies, institutions face isomorphic pressures leading to an apparent convergence of HE structures and policies (Juusola *et al.*, 2015; Scott, 2006) including the adoption of English as the language of global academe (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019).

Lacking the political support for international mobility provided by European policies, Asian countries witnessed a similar trend in HE (e.g. Bradford, 2016; Byun *et al.*, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2017; Phan, 2013) despite some resistance in places like Japan (Poole, 2016; Yonezawa, 2017). Different countries have been appropriating English in different ways and struggling to balance the complex tensions between what is perceived as the language of advancement and opportunity to communicate with the world and issues of identity, sovereignty and preservation of local languages (Choi, 2010; Phan, 2013). From a critical perspective, internationalisation and Englishisation of HE are political processes playing an active role in transplanting Anglo-American standards and academic paradigms in Asia (Choi, 2010) and disseminating the market logic and progressive (i.e. American) values in the Arab world (Juusola *et al.*, 2015; Neal and Finlay, 2008). In the post-colonial literature, the concept of language spread sheds additional light on the language move taking with it its cultural, social and political models (Sliwa, 2008) and rendering the Anglo-American understanding of the world self-evident (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019). In a contrasting view, Yang (2001) claims that English was *de-ethnicised* becoming a tool for communication that should no longer be regarded as serving the political, economic and cultural purposes of the native English-speaking countries.

In sum, significant changes have been taking place in HE that challenge the traditional collegial culture of institutions committed to long-term educational legacies and democratic

interests and represent a shift towards the rationale typical from the private for-profit sector driven by short-term market demands (Gumport, 2000), ultimately reducing HE to its economic potential (Erkkilä, 2014). In this new global HE landscape, the adoption of English as the language of instruction and scholarship tends to be naturalised, i.e. regarded as self-evident and unproblematic (Saarinen, 2012), but there is evidence that the Englishisation process is being challenged and resisted in multiple settings and from different viewpoints (e.g. Tietze and Dick, 2013).

Englishisation: naturalisation and resistance

University policies for internationalisation often co-exist with a lack of a supportive culture (Svetlik and Lalić, 2016; Yonezawa, 2017) and zooming in, parochialism and practices of de-internationalisation are not unusual (e.g. Barbosa and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Poole, 2016). In the literature, there is growing interest in the study of faculty members' involvement in internationalisation processes (Söderlundh, 2018; Warwick and Moogan, 2013) and the reactions and tensions raised by the use of English as working language (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017; Doiz et al., 2013; Tange 2010).

There is evidence of some detrimental effects of EMI in the classroom, such as reducing interaction and content acquisition, particularly when students and teachers lack adequate English proficiency and intercultural sensitivity and language assistance or support courses are not provided (e.g. Al-Kahtany et al., 2016; Bernini, 2015; Byun et al., 2011; Duong and Chua, 2016; Erling and Hilgendorf, 2006; Hu and Lei, 2014; Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011; Kim et al., 2017; Lourenço and Pinto, 2019; Tuomainen, 2018). Accounts of resistance include the teachers' admission to have been forced to teach through English regardless of their language competence (Costa and Coleman, 2013) and their reluctance to teach in a language in which they do not feel confident (Kerklaan et al., 2008; Tange, 2010), for which they get no recognition for the additional time required for class preparation (Doiz et al., 2013) and that may have adverse effects on their identity (Chen, 2019). Yet, universities willing to be seen as competent followers of internationally accredited best practices are reluctant to acknowledge that EMI might affect teaching quality; and individual scholars are unlikely to publicly admit their weaknesses and voice their language concerns (Tange, 2012a, b). Unlike EMI, the use of English as the doctoral level is already prevalent in some European countries (Kuteeva and Airey, 2014) and increasingly elsewhere (e.g. Rezaei and Seyri, 2019; Strauss, 2012). The naturalisation of English as the language of top quality scholarship seems less contentious (Juusola et al., 2015). Particularly in institutions attempting to emulate the research university model, academics are subject to processes of differentiation enforced through performance appraisal and promotion systems that tend to rely on publications primarily in top journals that invariably are in English raising new tensions between those who aspire to be part of the *anglicised elites* and those who remain *local* in their language and academic work (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019).

The Englishisation process has social, political and cultural implications that go beyond HE. Where language issues remain culturally and politically sensitive (e.g. Kaša and Mhamed, 2013) the Englishisation of HE represents an extension of the global threat to minority languages (Coleman, 2006) eventually leading to hostility and protectionist policies (Cots et al., 2014; Doiz et al., 2013; Hilmarsson-Dunn, 2006). The unmanaged expansion of English perceived as a *killer* language gaining from the extinction of others (Coleman, 2006; Phillipson, 2006) raises the risk of language attrition, cultural diversity losses and political resentment (Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011). Accounts of resistance to English hegemony range from public protest (Choi, 2010) and civil disobedience (Tange, 2012b) to students claiming their "(constitutional) right to be taught in their own mother tongue" (Al-Kahtany et al., 2016, p. 55) or simply skipping classes and showing absent-mindedness (Huang, 2018). The

dangers of leaving language issues to the market (Phillipson, 2006) or letting them be captured by the nationalist debate are apparent, but governments' attempts to regulate EMI have been rare and ineffective (Al-Kahtany *et al.*, 2016; Kuteeva and Airey, 2014) suggesting that language protectionism is powerless to resist the overwhelming pressures of the English language that come with globalisation and the threats of cultural homogenisation (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019; Knight, 2012).

Although HE is a unique context, the study of language policies is also a promising research avenue in the international business literature (e.g. Kroon *et al.*, 2015; Lønsmann, 2017; Neeley and Dumas, 2016) that may provide additional insights to HE studies. Firms originated in non-English speaking countries and multinationals have been implementing language policies that overwhelmingly mean adopting English as corporate *lingua franca* raising tensions and challenging the internal balance of power (Gaibrois and Steyaert, 2017; Lønsmann, 2017; Wilmot, 2017). Briefly, *lingua franca* fluency becomes a salient source of status providing native English speakers an enduring source of opportunities for career advancement. Similar effect was detected among Chinese academics: "native English speakers are automatically in a position of power compared with those who have to learn it as official or foreign language" (Yang, 2001, p. 352). In a contrasting case, Vaara *et al.* (2005) found that the adoption of English was interpreted by the dominated Finns as liberating after an initial attempt to impose Swedish as the official language in a newly merged Swedish-Finnish bank.

In sum, language policies are not experienced neutrally raising tensions and leading to choices that employees may seek to resist (Wilmot, 2017). Academics have been described as quite good at playing the resistance game and subverting managerial intentions (Anderson, 2008; Kalfa *et al.*, 2018). Despite some attempts to explore the academics' responses to the naturalisation of English in HE (e.g. Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019; Choi, 2016; Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011; Tange, 2012b; Tietze and Dick, 2013), the different motivations and ways in which support and resistance are enacted by individual academics remain somewhat overlooked. This study aims to contribute to fill this gap.

The study
The context
UNI (the real name was changed for confidentiality reasons) is a Portuguese public university with about 20000 students enrolled in programmes covering nearly all subject areas. UNI was founded in the 1970s and is usually portrayed in the media as a dynamic place seeking to establish a reputation for high quality standards in education and research. In a 2002 document outlining the institution's international strategy (in English), UNI presents itself "*undoubtedly amongst the most international higher education institutions in Portugal*", regarding internationalisation as a goal ("*one of its priority areas (. . .) an integral part of the institution's strategic plan*"), as well as an instrument to strengthen its position in the HE market ("*internationalisation is a key element to obtain and maintain a high quality level of its education and research and to promote the institution in a growing competitive academic world*"). To implement this strategy, a wide range of measures are suggested besides the expected increase in student and teaching staff mobility and the participation in international networks. The document states that UNI is committed to actions such as to "*mobilise all human resources for an effective, efficient and holistic approach towards the university's internationalisation policy*", "*develop a rewarding system for the faculty members actively involved in internationalisation*", and "*promote quality within its research centres, namely through its internal and external evaluation*". Interestingly, no reference is made in the entire document to the use of the English language.

On most accounts, UNI is not atypical and resembles universities of similar size and status in this part of the world. Portuguese HE is described as a context of "institutional *laissez-faire*

that has been placing English in a prominent place as a strategy to respond to internationalisation demands and to increase institutional visibility" (Pinto and Araújo e Sá, 2019, p. 154), and "a necessary step to compete with other European universities" (Kerklaan *et al.*, 2008, pp. 250–251). References to language issues are rare in HE policy documents, but a recommendation to increase the number of courses in English was included in a 2014 strategic plan from the Ministry of Education and Science (Pinto and Araújo e Sá, 2019). In that academic year, only about 3% of the study programmes (or 139 programmes) were offered in English involving about 0.5% (or 1900 students) of the student population enrolled in Portuguese institutions (Wächter and Maiworm, 2014). Language issues are traditionally left to individual institutions, and at the institutional level, they appear to be pushed further down to the level of individual teachers who "seem to be left on their own to introduce EMI without the necessary institutional support" (Lourenço and Pinto, 2019, p. 264), a context in which language is likely to become a contentious issue. Research on language issues in HE remains very limited, but some recent empirical evidence has been produced showing that students seem "averse to having classes in English, in some cases penalising their teachers in the institutional evaluation process conducted at the end of the year" (Lourenço and Pinto, 2019, p. 262). Looking back at the early years of this century, by the time the Englishisation process was gaining pace helps making sense of the current reactions and the controversies surrounding language issues that seem to remain in some institutions. To first person is used to signal my involvement in the research process.

The research process

The study unfolds throughout the first decade of this century, by the time I was working at UNI and in a context in which scholars were facing new career challenges and increasing competitive pressures, besides having to deal with the demands of a changing student population. To a large extent, this research was incidental rather than planned in advance and in that sense close to what Karra and Phillips (2008) categorise as *opportunistic ethnography* "carried out by researchers who have found themselves members of an interesting group by chance" (p. 546). Alvesson (2003) calls it an *emergent-spontaneous study* "carried out when something revealing happens" (p. 181). Unlike the traditional planned research in which "the research interest must be decided upon in advance" (Alvesson, 2003, p. 181), and "the researcher has a reasonable clear idea of what to study, plan the work (although in ethnographies never in a detailed sense) and want to have a pile of notes or interview statements to work with and from", in an *emergent-spontaneous study* "the researcher does not find the empirical material, it finds him or her" (p. 181).

As a UK-educated scholar, I was happy to teach in English and often volunteered to do it. I also regarded the benefits of writing the doctoral theses in English as self-evident and fully supported the candidates' requests to do so in department meetings. Throughout the nineties, such requests were unusual and did not attract much attention, let alone controversy, but they became increasingly popular afterwards. It is difficult to locate a point in time when "something revealing" happened, to use Alvesson's (2003, p. 181) words that made me reflect on how we, as academics relate to, and the implications of using a non-native language as working language. Most likely, it was the combination of several work-related situations to produce that effect on me: realising that what was being said in public and mentioned in activity reports regarding the use of EMI did not reflect the actual practice in many cases; the growing number of requests to write doctoral dissertations in English and the impression that the use of the English language was triggering heated debates in department meetings and some overreactions that could not easily be explained by the issues at stake. I started wondering whether what appeared to be isolated negative reactions to the use of English as working language were somehow related to each other and reflecting a more serious

apprehension about the language developments. At the time, I did not categorise such behaviours as resistance, but I could not figure out exactly what they meant and what triggered them. For an inquisitive mind, it was hard to resist exploring these issues and finding out what was going on. Gradually, my active participation in the language debate decreased considerably as I realised I was more interested in trying to make sense of that reality than actually engaging in the debates. As a result, I found myself taking notes of what I saw, heard and felt during those debates and other critical incidents, collecting minutes, reports and memos in which language issues were raised and exploring them further in informal interviews and spontaneous conversations, sharing my thoughts with colleagues in the corridors and over coffee, asking them how they felt about having to teach in English or what made them take a particular stand in the meeting. Despite increasingly keeping a low profile in the public debates, I was aware that most of my colleagues would still categorise me as an "English-enthusiast", so I made an extra effort to keep my questions neutral when interacting privately with them or challenging them with my own interpretations of the language issues. On the other hand, talking with the students informally or outside the classroom offered me the chance to hear their side of the story and observe some creative expediencies being developed to cope with the language challenges that would not surface in more researcher-led conversations or structured interviews.

Gradually, "the empirical material was finding me", to use Alvesson's (2003) words, and I became aware I was evolving into an insider researcher. Like Chavez (2008), having been trained as a traditional scholar with limited knowledge of insider issues, putting myself in the foreground was quite challenging. Having moved to another institution in the meantime, the study was put aside. Yet, keeping on dealing with language-related matters never really allowed me to forget it. The more I explored the literature about the Englishisation process in HE, the more I found that language issues remain overlooked, particularly with regard to the different ways in which individual academics react to the naturalisation of English language in HE and make (or not) the connection between that process and the other changes taking place in HE.

Revisiting the data gathered over an extended period of time while at UNI from my new angle of "insider-outsider", I understood the full extent of my unique circumstances and experienced the (dis-)advantages of distance and the challenges of that dual role (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Tienari, 2019). In line with the view that "the outsider-insider distinction is a false dichotomy" (Chavez, 2008, p. 474), my attempts to balance the two roles and manage de degree of detachment from the field made me aware of the risks involved in this type of research, the critical importance of being reflexive (Greene, 2014; Winkler, 2013) and transparent by scrutinising my role in the process and acknowledging my own position and potential bias (Fleming, 2018; Tracy, 2010),and by exercising "self-awareness of my own emotions" (Chammas, 2020, p. 546). Yet, given the impossibility of eliminating risks in insider research, the researcher's "aim is to become risk-aware rather than risk-averse" (Humphrey, 2012, p. 582).

Revisiting the research notes and collected documents, looking for patterns and themes that somehow caught my attention, wondering whether what I saw and heard from other actors had resonated my own experiences, I kept stepping back from the analysis and reflected on my role as researcher and observing participant in some of those events, engaging in what some authors describe as "conversations with myself" (e.g. Winkler, 2013). Change in university settings has been described as "an activity whose rationality and purposefulness can only be detected *ex post* and in a particular, situational context" (Meister-Scheytt and Scheytt, 2005, p. 90), but trying to make sense of changes in work situations and work-related experiences and interpret them retrospectively raises questions about time and the role of memory. Unlike other traditional methods seeking to provide a snapshot picture of a given reality or to predict what will happen in the future in similar circumstances,

ethnographic research provides explanations of what has happened in the past (Boyle and Parry, 2007) and seem, therefore, particularly appropriate to make sense of processes that took place over an extended period of time. "The significance of memory in the process of ethnography has been acknowledged" (Wall, 2008, p. 45,) and there is a wide body of literature supporting the view that "memories constitute data that should be acknowledged as equally valuable to written notes, recorded material, or otherwise collected information" (Winkler, 2018, p. 238). However, given that memory is fallible, using different sources of data and keeping a rapport with the participants over time is critical to safeguard authenticity and research credibility (Greene, 2014; Tracy, 2010). Above all, "for credibility it is important that insider researchers acknowledge who they are and how they may have influenced the research process" (Fleming, 2018, p. 316). As a then member of UNI, I had prior knowledge and understandings of that community and was a privileged observer of internal politics; my views on the language issue were known to other members.

The risks of being too close to the data and the need to protect participants are extensively acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Madikizela-Madiya, 2017; Pabian, 2014), and following Winkler (2013) I have "taken as much care as possible to not harm the others in my story" (p. 198). Particular care was taken to preserve anonymity and make sure the identities of the actors involved are not recognised, even at the cost of concealing some relevant information and/or watering down some juicy details. Briefly, I was trying to keep the difficult balance between providing clarity about the findings and preserving the identity of the actors involved (Darmon, 2018). Moreover, ethical concerns raised by self-ethnographic and insider research (Alvesson, 2003; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Chammas, 2020; Karra and Phillips, 2008) seem secured given the time lapse involved and the absence of role conflict since the organisational link has long been terminated. Darmon's (2018) recommendation to "letting time go by before trying to publish" (p. 1747) the research findings in this type of research was also taken as good advice.

Studying one's own setting might be considered not only appropriate but particularly insightful in the HE context. First-hand experiences – having "been there" - offer a deeper level of understanding, pointed out Alvesson (2003), given that "as an insider, the researcher becomes better positioned (. . .) to reveal the true story, as he/she has a natural access to his/her surroundings" (Darmon, 2018, p. 1741) and is in a unique position to provide "important knowledge about what organisations are really like, which traditional approaches may not be able to uncover" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 72), The tensions and controversies that surrounded the language issue at UNI and the different ways in which participants, myself included, experienced the Englishisation process, accommodated those tensions and reacted to the pressures associated to them, is the focus of this study. Some teachers embraced the growing use of the English language full-heartedly, others were less convinced but made an effort to conform. The focus of this study, however, is on those who chose to resist, in one way or another, to the new language order. Ethnographic research "does not easily break down into distinct temporal stages, 'data collection', 'data analysis' and 'writing'; and they are not, nor can they be, conceptually and practically distinct" (Kunda, 2013, p. 17) and is often presented as stories, episodes or vignettes as illustrative examples from the data (e.g. Alvesson and Szkudlarek, 2020; Churchman and King, 2009; Poole, 2016). Other accounts of resistance could have been told, but I found these two particularly suitable to bring to light the tensions and controversies surrounding the language issue and the different ways in which academics experienced and resisted the Englishisation process.

Stories of resistance

Throughout the noughties, language-related matters became increasingly hot topics at UNI triggered by multiple factors mainly associated with the internationalisation process:

growing number of foreign applicants and particularly, exchange students; increasing pressures to adopt international standards in promotions and research assessments, both implying more and better international publication; and emerging aspirations to get international accreditations. Although there was no formal language policy, such developments converged on the gradual adoption of English as working language. To individual academics, these pressures meant having to adapt their teaching materials and methods to the changing student population with very little real guidance on how to proceed and adjusting their research activities taking into account new performance indicators and the need to improve their international publication output. Instructions were issued at the department level about the adoption of EMI whenever non-Portuguese speakers were enrolled in the course. The first story brings to light the strategies developed by some teachers to handle the challenges and demands of EMI implementation. The second story uncovers the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions triggered by formal requests to present the final assignments and doctoral dissertations in English.

A story of silence and appearances

A new term was starting and I realised there were some non-Portuguese students enrolled in my course. On the first session, to the surprise of many students, I spoke in English. When asked about the reasons for their surprise, they replied that "Other teachers do not do it". I was puzzled with their answer taking into account the language instructions. At the end of the session, I asked a group of students, "How come you are not taught in English? That is what is supposed to happen when there are foreign students in the course. . ." They laughed, and one said, "Ok, but some teachers do not do it". It was my turn to get confused and show some surprise. Later that day, I had a look at the programme files and saw the names of the teachers involved in the programme and wondered who the students might be referring to. I was somewhat divided. On the one hand, I thought "it is not my business". On the other, I was curious to find out wat was going on and hear the teachers' side of the story. When I came across them in informal settings, I raised the language issue, asking them about their EMI experience, and how they saw the future of our job having to teach in English. Some admitted having difficulties teaching in English, but no one explicitly said he/she was not doing it, let alone refusing to do it. Yet, some negative attitudes towards the adoption of EMI were not hidden. One replied, "I am not paid to teach in English" and changed subject. Another one said, "My job description does not include having to teach in a foreign language", but adding he was not prepared to take actions that could be interpreted as acts of defiance. When reminded of the language instructions, he put on a serious face and made it very clear: "Don't get me wrong, I follow the instructions very strictly; if there are foreign students in the class, I teach in English". We were doing the same after all, I thought. When asked about how he envisaged the future language developments, he weighed his words carefully and reluctantly agreed that the growing use of English in HE was inevitable. His views were shared by many others; one added with resignation "we will all have to resort to EMI at some point". My impression was that despite a predominant sense of resignation, it was clear that many teachers were unhappy with such developments and some of them were prepared to play an active role slowing that process down for as long as they could. Why resist a development they took for granted was inescapable? I raised that question several times, but never got a clear answer.

The following weeks, I nearly forgot about this issue. A particular reply kept coming back to my mind, "if there are foreign students in the class. . ." The end of term was approaching and, as usual, I had a chat with the exchange students asking them the typical questions about their experience, whether they were enjoying the country and what they made of the programme and their stay at UNI. Their views were generally positive but they said they regretted not having the chance to know better the other (local) students, which they attributed to only coming once or twice a week to the campus. "What about the other classes?" I asked. They explained they had been informed by some teachers that class attendance was not required, and handing a written assignment at the end of term would suffice. To me, the puzzle pieces were finally fitting in. The exchange students had successfully completed the courses and yet, EMI was not being used because there were no foreign

students in the classroom! I was amazed with that clever arrangement and looked forward to read the annual report and attend the department meetings to see whether EMI issues were raised. However, no one was prepared to voice their public discomfort with the language instructions and no real discussion of the EMI experience took place in the meetings. In the report, I noticed the inclusion of a subtle terminology innovation – a reference to "EMI and EMI-friendly courses". The later were obviously referring to courses that had not adopted EMI, but were not violating EMI instructions, strictly speaking. Everyone was playing the game after all, pretending EMI was truly adopted, and seemed happy with the implicit arrangement: English-reluctant teachers, for not having to teach in English; local students, for being spared the additional effort to attend classes in a different language; exchange students, for being released from class attendance without compromising the course grades; and the management, for being able to get on showing improvements in international indicators in the reports to accreditation agencies, thanks to the creative "EMI-friendly" formula. Attempts to circumvent EMI instructions eventually became less frequent but the sense that a lot of feet dragging and window dressing was going on lasted for very long. Mistrust on what comes out in reports never really faded away until I left UNI.

This story illustrates different interpretations of what "teaching in English" actually meant ranging, in this case, from the full adoption of EMI to some sort of parallel language use and avoidance strategies. Perhaps aware of their language proficiency weaknesses but reluctant to admit them publicly or feeling powerless to overtly oppose them some teachers were doing their best to mitigate the need to teach in English. While distancing themselves from EMI in private conversations, they were unprepared to voice their disagreement with changes presented as progressive and refrained from taking a confrontational stand. Instead, they crafted ways to circumvent the language instructions through informal arrangements with the students and relying on everyone else's silence. The benefits of cultural interaction and internationalisation were being compromised with such practices, but appearances were being kept, and the management was able to show additional progress in international indicators. Individually enacted resistance may reflect the academics' attachment to independent modes of work (Anderson, 2008) and seems particularly suited to resist changes in individually based practices such as teaching. Accounts of informal arrangements with the students "rather than officially challenge the norm of English only" were also reported in Denmark (Tange, 2012b, p. 14) and Sweden (Söderlundh, 2012), but unlike those cases an effort was made by the teachers involved to avoid the issue and remain unnoticed, thus creating *facades of conformity* (Hewlin, 2003), a typical *weapon of the weak*, in Scott's (1989) words. Feeling powerless to openly oppose it, they favoured keeping a low-profile, thus reducing the risk of having their actions interpreted as acts of defiance. This way, they were acting as *silent resisters*, blending resistance with compliance and taking advantage of what Ybema and Horvers (2017) categorise as *backstage resistance*: displaying acceptance of change while undermining it behind the scenes.

A story of voice and dissent

In the absence of legislation and internal regulations to guide the use of foreign languages in final assignments and doctoral dissertations, decisions had to be made on a case-by-case basis by the college of scholars upon formal request of the candidates. Until the early years of the new millennium, such requests were very seldom presented. To stand a chance, the candidate had to have a strong case. Having a foreign supervisor who could not speak Portuguese (and presumably, could not read the document in that language) was the most likely success factor, but even in those cases, such requests never got unanimous approval. However, opposition was limited to some isolated voices willing "to make a point"; no real discussion was taking place in the meetings and the issues were settled in a matter of minutes. By the mid-noughties, things had changed considerably. A growing number of local PhD students were willing to write their dissertations in English hoping it would boost the visibility of their work and speed up the publication process in international journals. Their supervisors were normally pleased with the idea, regarding it as an opportunity to get

additional credit for their work and, more pragmatically, as a better prospect to co-author international publications. Despite the internationalisation strategy adopted at UNI, the students' requests to write their dissertations in English started to attract more attention in faculty meetings, raising considerable political tensions and bitter debates. Unlike before, such requests were sometimes turned down, and the students' appeals asking for the decisions to be looked at again rarely produced a different outcome.

Attending those meetings, I was impressed with the dynamics of the debate. A typical discussion would start around the language request but in a matter of minutes, the debate would move on to other contentious matters. The language was merely the trigger to a confrontation waiting to happen. The tensions were already there between different views on the changes taking place in the institution, and in HE in general. I always voted in favour of the students' requests, as long as the students and their supervisors were comfortable that the quality and academic content of the theses would not be compromised, though no one seemed very interested in discussing my point. In retrospect, I see my role in those debates gradually switching to the "researcher-mode" taking a more passive stand, and trying to make sense of what was going on. Observing the most active contenders on both sides, I could not resist recording their major lines of argument and examining their performative practices.

On the supporting side, the impression they were trying to convey was one of cosmopolitan and forward-looking academics who regarded themselves as members of the global HE. The underlying theme in their interventions was that adopting the English language was a "natural" development, a necessary step that would enhance the international visibility of the institution in the HE market, allowing UNI to compete internationally and increase foreign enrolment. More assertive members on the supporting side argued that if UNI wished to become "truly international", it should take advantage of the Englishisation process and use it as an opportunity to enforce international standards and involve international academics in doctoral examinations, internal assessments, and promotion decisions. As the debate heated up, it became clear that the language controversy was regarded as a unique opportunity to expose the "old guard" they described as being out of touch with the new world of international HE suggesting between the lines that they should step down from leading positions.

On the opposing ranks, different arguments were put forward. Some stressed the university's specific responsibility to preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of the community and the interest in locally-relevant topics regardless of the economic considerations involved, which implied resisting changes they saw as ignoring the particular context, traditions and identity of that community. In the minutes of one of the meetings, a more outspoken member stated for the record: "there is no good reason for a Portuguese citizen doing a PhD in Portugal under the supervision of a Portuguese professor, to write the thesis in a language other than Portuguese". Another one added "we should do our best to preserve the Portuguese language, the third most spoken language in the Western world". Some side remarks were dismissive of the relevance of the debate suggesting that writing in English was a fashion that would eventually fade away. Another perhaps more interesting line of argument was that the English language was a "Trojan horse", intended to open the door to other unwelcome developments. While accepting that the use of English would enhance the international visibility of the institution and increase foreign enrolment, they were not prepared to take the full package of changes they feared would inevitably come with the English language. On top of such "unwelcome" developments, they were referring to the adoption of international standards in promotions and research assessments besides other managerial measures regarded as hostile to traditional collegial values. When asked about the most likely outcome of the Englishisation process, and despite having the most senior members on their side, they reluctantly admitted they were not convinced they could win the "language war". Yet, they were not prepared to go without a good fight. Voicing their opposition to the use of English was their best shot to express dissent. As one put it, with a mixture of resignation and perseverance: "Englishisation? Yes, it's coming! And you cannot swim against the tide, can you? But that does not mean you should. . .!"

This story illustrates how an angry dispute about the use of the English language in doctoral theses uncovers other contentious issues. The evolving focus of the debate and the emotional

responses of many participants suggest that the decisions on the adoption of the English language were seldom made based on the merits of the issue at stake. Language was seen as part of a broader package of changes that, taken together, were likely to have serious implications on their working lives and career prospects. Unable to unpack those changes and isolate the language issue, their reactions to the use of English reflected their positions on the overall outcome, rather than their views on the language issue, strictly speaking. In other words, the English language was not the real divisive issue. Showing support or opposition to the use of English was instrumental and intended to express their (dis-)agreement with the changes taking place at UNI with regard to sensitive issues such as research assessments and promotion decisions. Taking an obstructionist and sometimes hostile position to the language issue, they were closing ranks and voicing it out loud in order to make their position clear to everyone else. Ultimately, the use of English was uncovering tensions between two different views of the changes taking place in HE, who should call the shots in that changing process and the nature of the relationship between the university and the outside world, that one side referred to as "the community" and the other called "the market".

With high insight and perhaps more interestingly, despite such a fierce and sometimes ugly debate, both sides seemed to share a considerable common ground regarding the two major underlying issues at stake and their prospective outcomes. In fact, both sides admitted that the Englishisation process was an additional step on the road towards a globalised market-driven HE system regulated by international accreditation agencies. They also seemed to agree on many of the likely implications of such developments, including the gradual introduction of common international standards along the lines of the best UK and US universities. Moreover, regardless of whether they liked it or not, it was apparent that contenders on both sides felt powerless to change that course of action. In other words, they agreed on their assessment of the direction the Englishisation process was leading to and on the most likely outcome of that process. What seemed to separate them in the end was their views on the merits of that outcome: How bright or dark the picture looked like in that final destination and how much each one of them was expecting to win or prepared to lose on the way.

Discussion and conclusions

The need for a common language of communication in the increasingly global HE market, and the view that English is the language best placed to play that role are major developments in universities in non-English speaking countries, particularly in institutions attempting to become relevant international players. However, the implementation of language policies and changes in the working language are complex processes that challenge long established routines and power relationships and are, therefore, likely to face some resistance. There is a growing body of literature on the Englishisation of HE, but the different motivations and ways in which resistance to this process is enacted by individual academics remain somewhat overlooked. Using a self-ethnographic methodology, this study aims to shed additional light on these issues by looking at how the adoption of the English language in teaching and scholarly writing in a particular Portuguese university setting was experienced and resisted by some participants.

The literature on change and resistance generally takes a one-sided and judgmental view of changing processes presenting change and their agents as inherently good and resistance to change as dysfunctional and problematic (Ford *et al.*, 2008). While change agents are seen as playing a legitimate and beneficial role, resisters tend to be portrayed as "individuals with constrained psychological or social attributes, or motivated by narrow self-interests that inhibit them from seeing and accepting the reasons for and benefits of the proposed change" (Huy *et al.*, 2014, p. 1653). When changes are presented as positive developments aiming at

goals believed to be in everyone's best interests, resisting them becomes even harder to accept, and even foreseen, by the change agents. Changes intended, or designed to raise academic standards and reflecting the institution's legitimate ambition to become a relevant player in the international HE market are good examples of changes assumed as inherently positive that only "narrow self-interests" could possibly challenge. Taken as self-evident, they do not require further explanation or justification, which may easily lead to complacency in the preparation and handling of the change process. In other words, neglecting the recipients' receptiveness and readiness to accept the inevitable adjustments in internal procedures and work practices required by those changes may ultimately alienate them from the changing process.

In the case reported, it is significant that a strategic document outlining the institution's international strategy detailing the measures that ought to be taken to make it work, setting targets and mobilising resources, made no reference to the use of the English language. Taking for granted that English was the "natural" language in HE, the implicit assumption was that the Englishisation process was unproblematic and, therefore, no need was felt to reflect upon the implications of such changes on the change recipients. The difficulties some of the recipients were likely to face to actually adopt EMI in their teaching activities and the additional workload involved were being ignored. Moreover, by naturalising the English language, i.e. by taking the use of the English language for granted and not as an issue open to discussion, the management was missing the potential contributions and suggestions some teachers might have to a successful implementation of EMI, besides failing to anticipate withdrawal behaviours and expediencies to circumvent the language instructions, as illustrated by the disengaged and "English-reluctant" teachers in the first story. The fact that their actions were tacitly supported by students possibly lacking either the confidence or the linguistic competencies required to study in English further stresses the need for a careful preparation of language changes, before attempting to implement them. Universities have possibly disregarded the full extent of the cultural changes involved in internationalisation processes, even where language is not the main issue. Turner (2006), for instance, examined the challenges UK universities faced with the internationalisation of the student population and their need to adjust teaching and learning practices to students unaccustomed to the native culture. In Continental Europe, universities have traditionally been mainly oriented towards their native populations, and learning how to deal with a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic community is often a painful and politically sensitive process (Barbosa and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007). Having to switch the working language adds a new layer to the complexity of the cultural change. Recent evidence on the Portuguese context shows that students remain "averse to having classes in English" and "think they might be penalised when teaching takes place in English" (Lourenço and Pinto, 2019, p. 262). Their teachers, on the other hand, also fear to be penalised in the students' assessment of their courses, further stressing the scale of the language challenges. Whether those fears remain regardless of the EMI experience, deserves further examination.

This study shows that although regarded as a natural and inevitable development to becoming "truly" international at the rhetorical level, the Englishisation process can be rather unsettling when it comes to the actual adoption of English as working language. Languages are sensitive issues, and the impact language changes might have on everyone directly affected by them should not be underestimated. The potential to become a contentious and divisive issue and even promote organisational mistrust and cynicism is apparent in the two stories examined in this paper. Particular care should be given to problematic practices such as the definition of internationalisation strategies by hierarchy and design. Language policies defined top-down with little effort made to win the hearts and minds of the teachers eventually affected by the language changes should be avoided. Poorly implemented language policies can encourage resistance to the intended goals, ultimately undermining the effectiveness and expected benefits of those policies.

In the two stories, both supporters and resisters seemed to converge on the expectation that the changes were beyond their control and the growing adoption of the English language the most likely outcome of the current developments in HE. Despite that "inevitability" sensed by most participants, the language was not regarded as a closed issue. The two stories suggest that the naturalisation of English as the working language in academia is best described as an ongoing process, rather than a *fait accompli*. In other words, some tensions remain between the view of the Englishisation process as one in which the final outcome is taken for granted and inevitable and, therefore, regarded as "natural"; and one in which the outcome is still open, stimulating the participants to influence or even resist, more passively or actively, that course of action. As illustrated by the second story, resisting the Englishisation process may well be more than a mere attempt to postpone the "inevitable". No matter how self-evident the final outcome might be, resistance to an inevitable (and seen as adverse) outcome is not necessarily a futile exercise. It can also be a golden opportunity to voice disagreement with a certain course of events, show concern and call attention to issues that ought to be addressed. In that story, the language issue was taken by the resisting side as a symbolic and powerful instrument to signal they were not throwing in the towel and they were not (yet) prepared to surrender their autonomy to the normalising forces of international HE. The seniority of some of the resisters allowed them to take that stand at a time when the "managerial artillery of subordination mechanisms" currently available to HE administrators (Alvesson and Szkudlarek, 2020, p. 1) were still incipient.

Looking from a different angle, the language can also be a powerful instrument to promote internal changes that would otherwise struggle to go through. Some members of the supporting side in the second story were precisely trying to do so: raising the language issue as a key step to the adoption of new international standards in assessment and promotion decisions. It has long been established in the literature that the Englishisation of HE goes beyond language issues and is normally associated with increasing competitive pressures and changes to internal practices, including the implementation of high-quality international standards defined by leading universities and accreditation agencies. Interestingly, although the Englishisation process is normally associated and legitimised on the grounds of contributing to the adoption of international high-quality standards, the quality implications of teaching and writing in a language other than the mother language have been somewhat overlooked. Universities willing to be seen as competent followers of internationally accredited best practices are reluctant to acknowledge that EMI might affect teaching quality. As illustrated in the second story, the discussion about the students' requests to write their dissertations in English showed more concern with issues of institutional visibility than to the impact on the academic content of the theses. The provision of translation services is a fast-growing business, popular among students willing to write their dissertations in English but aware of their language limitations can be problematic in some cases. Here again, the implications of such outsourcing practices in doctoral education need further examination.

In sum, this study shows that changes taking place in HE challenge the cultural mindset and long-established practices in universities, eventually upsetting the organisational *status quo*. Despite the contributions already available on the impact of the Englishisation process, the use of language as a political weapon in internal politics deserves further examination. In the UNI context, the language debate exacerbated old political divisions and unleashed deeper, yet dormant, tensions uncovering a confrontation between two cultures and visions of the role and nature of the university that seemed to co-exist and compete in the same setting – the university as community of scholars and the market-led university. Moreover, whereas the contents of the dispute – the use of English language to raise the international visibility and accreditation prospects of the institution and attract foreign students -, reflect managerial concerns typical from a market-led university, the procedures in place – the teachers' autonomy to run their courses and faculty meetings in which everyone has a seat and a say –

remain attached to the collegial values of old academia. This study illustrates how the language issue may exacerbate those tensions, unveiling different attitudes towards the changes taking place in HE and the polarisation of academic identities (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017; Boussebaa and Tienari, 2019; Ylijoki and Ursin 2013).

The study has several limitations that are mainly related to the methodology adopted. These limitations were extensively discussed and acknowledged in the "The Study" section of the paper as well as the procedures adopted to mitigate them. The paper contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which individual academics experience institutional attempts to naturalise the use of the English language in teaching and scholarly writing and develop strategies to resist them, taking advantage of the language debate to support their views on the future of HE and to advance their own agendas. Although limited to a particular Portuguese university setting, the research procedure helped to make sense of the tensions and controversies raised by language changes, bringing to light reactions, evasions and confrontations that would not be easily uncovered with more traditional methodologies. Yet, the ambivalence towards the Englishisation process and the subtleties of resistance to that process deserve further examination.

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