Plurilingual Internationalisation *of* and *(with)in* higher education: Principle of economy *vs* principle of intercomprehension

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L'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur est devenue une priorité stratégique pour les universités à travers le monde. Entre la compétition internationale et le service des communautés locales, elles doivent gérer cette tension. Une question clé émerge: parle-t-on de l'internationalisation *de* ou *dans* l'enseignement supérieur? Ces deux notions reflétant des priorités distinctes dans la gestion de la diversité "académique" et "scientifique" interpellent directement la question des langues et des cultures. Si le termes "plurilinguisme" circule de plus en plus dans l'université "mondialisée", il n'est pourtant pas dit qu'il renvoie à des représentations partagées. Dans cette contribution, nous montrerons que, derrière les discours favorisant l'internationalisation, deux perspectives – monolingue et plurilingue – peuvent se trouver en contraste. En fonction de la perspective adoptée, on favorisera le *principe d'économie* ou le *principe d'intercompréhension*. Ces deux mécanismes sont à l'œuvre aussi bien dans le fonctionnement interne de l'institution que dans les liens que celle-ci tisse avec l'extérieur.

L'internazionalizzazione dell'istruzione superiore è diventata una priorità strategica per le università a livello mondiale, che devono tuttavia gestire una tensione fra la competizione internazionale e il servizio alle comunità locali. Sorge una questione chiave: si parla dell'internazionalizzazione *dell'*istruzione superiore o *nell'*istruzione superiore? Questi due concetti, che riflettono priorità distinte nella gestione della diversità "accademica" e "scientifica", sollevano direttamente la questione delle lingue e delle culture. Se la parola "plurilinguismo" circola sempre più nell'università "globalizzata", ciò non significa tuttavia che rinvii a rappresentazioni condivise. In questo contributo, mostreremo che, dietro ai discorsi a favore dell'internazionalizzazione, due prospettive — monolingue e plurilingue — possono trovarsi in contrasto. A seconda della prospettiva adottata, si favorirà il *principio di economia* o il *principio di intercomprensione*. Questi due meccanismi sono all'opera sia nel funzionamento interno dell'istituzione sia nei legami che essa instaura con l'esterno.

Mots-clés:
enseignement supérieur, internationalisation, plurilinguisme, anglais, construction des savoirs, universalité, multiversité, intercompréhension.

Parole chiave:
istruzione superiore, internazionalizzazione, plurilinguismo, inglese, costruzione delle conoscenze, multiversità, intercompensione.

Keywords:
higher education, internationalisation, plurilingualism, English, knowledge construction, universality, multiversity, intercomprehension.

1. Introduction

In the context of higher education (HE), internationalisation has become a strategically significant priority, central to fostering a globally connected academic environment. Universities are increasingly expected to align with international standards while simultaneously addressing local societal, cultural, and linguistic demands, creating a tension that requires careful navigation (Yanaprasart & Lüdi 2018).

This process is often presented as a self-evident goal without a sufficient debate within institutions. Indeed, there is arguably no single form of "internationalisation", but rather multiple "internationalisations", each reflecting different priorities and contexts. Internationalisation in HE (IHE) constitutes a space wherein intensified circulation of knowledge and persons take place. This intensification acts upon the university from the inside (in terms of governance structures, curricular design, and pedagogical practices) and the outside (in its positioning as a global and competitive actor engaged in an academic marketplace). However, the question of *plurilingualism* cannot be separated from internationalisation: While the global circulation of knowledge often relies upon principles of efficiency and transparency – most obvious by their tendency toward linguistic homogenisation (*principle of economy*) – these principles stand in tension with those supporting linguistic diversity and *intercomprehension*, which views languages as different vehicles for knowledge construction and sharing. In the first perspective, language diversity is seen as a source of *complication*, whereas in the second it is considered as a revealer of knowledge *complexity*.

To address these questions, the article is organised into two sections. The first develops a theoretical framework situating IHE within globalisation, commercialisation, and marketisation, distinguishing between the internationalisation *of* HE and *(with)in* HE and outlining different approaches to linguistic and cultural diversity. The discussion then turns to mono- and plurilingualism that remains conceptually ambiguous and context-dependent. Examining these notions through *the principles of economy* (PE) and *intercomprehension* (PI) reveals why English is often prioritised and the implications of choosing monolingual over plurilingual strategies. The subsection further contrasts Englishisation with multilingual Englishes, examining how these models shape governance and language policy.

The second section, based on two research projects, explores academic practices in specific areas. It begins with a discussion of governance and language policy, presenting a brief case study of the University of Geneva that reveals the discrepancy between policy discourse and institutional practice. It then shifts focus to teaching, illustrating how plurilingual practices can foster intercomprehension and serve as a source of epistemic richness – a thickness that broadens world view and expands educational possibilities.

However, in this "multiversity" framework, it must be noted upfront that this article does not intend to present empirical research findings. Instead, its aim is to propose a theoretical framework and provide a critical analysis of the conceptual basis of plurilingual IHE. This, in turn, helps clarify some vague ideas, explore in a structured way the tensions between economy and intercomprehension, and deliver some insights as to institutional strategy and governance. Building on this enhanced conceptual understanding, the discussion and conclusion critically reflect on the contradictions inherent in internationalisation.

2. Internationalisation in the context of HE

2.1. Internationalisation of and (with)in HE

Internationalisation is a complicated, multidimensional, and sometimes disjointed process. Fløllich & Veiga (2005) point out that its trajectory is determined by a combination of national and global forces as well as historical, cultural, and disciplinary traditions, institutional characteristics, policies, funding, and regional dynamics. Interactions of these factors make it impossible to consider internationalisation from a purely policy or economic perspective; the cultural and institutional specificities influencing universities' global engagement must be taken into account as well.

It is therefore essential to distinguish between internationalisation *of* and internationalisation *(with)in* HE. The former refers to the globalisation of the sector, at the level of institutions, systems, and policies, extending operations beyond national boundaries. Examples include establishing overseas campuses or offering joint degrees with foreign partners. This systematic approach involves strategic positioning, policy-making, and global collaboration led by institutional and political actors across areas such as governance, market engagement, and transnational education (Yanaprasart & Melo-Pfeifer 2026). These transformations reflect the adoption of international stan-dards, expanded mobility, and strengthened partnerships – what Verhoeven (2006) calls the globalisation and commercialisation of knowledge.

The second term, internationalisation *in* HE focuses on the way internationalisation manifests within the daily functions of HE institutions. It refers to the specific practices and activities occurring within institutions that foster inter-national perspectives and engagement. These internal processes aim at integrating an international or intercultural dimension within teaching, learning, and research. It typically involves faculty, students, and academic programs directly, particularly in terms of pedagogy, mobility programs, research and collaboration, as well as campus culture. When a university commits to developing a global studies curriculum that integrates international case studies into courses, it is referred to as internationalisation *in* HE.

What are the interdependent dynamics between these two foci when it is undeniable that the education sector is strongly influenced by global trends, prompting institutions to become actively involved in transnational activities?

2.2. Commercialising scientific knowledge

In today's knowledge-based economy, scientific knowledge has become an economic commodity (Truchot 2018) and a market issue (McPartland 2013). The 21st century has witnessed an intensified push to commercialise science (Zamora Bonilla 2020), transforming it into a tradable good with global markets. Its commercialisation in the university market (Charle 2018) has become a key driver of innovation, institutional competitiveness, and global visibility. Universities are repositioned as entrepreneurial actors, engaging in global competition (Airey 2012). With a view to "sell their products to consumers" (Fairclough 1993: 143), institutions struggle to capitalise the prestige of "World Class" (Salomone 2015) and to acquire the status of "World's Best" (Floc'h 2010). This commodification of HE (Usunier 2010) is characterized by the promotion of internationally-oriented training programs so as to attract the best talent among researchers and teachers and the most qualified foreign students (Floc'h 2013). This global engagement often comes at the cost of local relevance and social mission, leading to institutional isomorphism and a narrowing of intellectual diversity (Marginson & Rhoades 2002).

This process is marked by tensions when the strategic positioning does not guarantee or maintain academic and scientific freedom (Phillipson 2016) or institutional autonomy. Actually, these intersecting forces shape institutional strategies, language policies, and academic equity in global HE and research systems. At the core of this tension lies a dynamic interplay between globalisation (Altbach & Knight 2007) and glocalisation (Robertson 2005). At this standpoint, the question of language is raised. According to Gural & Smokotin (2014), a language attains global prominence insofar as it becomes integral to the process of globalisation (cited in Drembinski et al. 2022).

Globalisation undoubtedly has advantages such as worldwide visibility, international rankings, student mobility, market expansion, and competitiveness. However, by the spread of English-medium education and instruction (EME/EMI), the dominance by default of English (Grin 2024) has been criticized for fostering epistemic injustice and marginalising local knowledge (De Sousa Santos 2016). In this context of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 2013) and gatekeeping, the so-called universal language of science (Gordin 2015) is in danger of becoming an innovation-killing language instead of being the language of innovation itself (Salomone 2021). The idea of *glocalisation* offers an alternative that is more decolonial and pluralistic (Canagarajah 2002), thus allowing for a mix of global and local aspects in the engagement process.

2.3. Principle of Economy (PE) versus Principle of Intercomprehension (PI)

Two key principles can be identified in the management of linguistic diversity within academic settings.

From a policy perspective, *the PE* emphasises efficiency and resource optimisation. It asserts that institutions should aim to use as few languages as possible to ensure effective communication across borders. This principle advocates for streamlining languages used in academic settings to focus on those that are most commonly spoken or have the greatest utility for international communication. In practice, *the PE* "naturally" indicates a preference for dominant global languages, such as English, which are often regarded as the *lingua franca* of academia.

Perceiving language primarily as only a means of communication would lead language users to favour *the PE* described by Vicentini (2003) as the "principle of least effort", which consists in achieving the maximum result with the least effort necessary, getting the message across and being effective.

This principle raises two issues. First, striving for simplicity and communicative transparency does not mean achieving it. A single language, often unshared, can create complications. Second, the languages typically chosen are generally those of power offering no neutrality (Phipps 2019). Language is inherently political and deeply intertwined with power structures and epistemological frameworks. With the example of anglicisation, Tollefson & Tsui (2004) and Ammon (2012) point out that this practice reproduces power hierarchies and restricts knowledge circulation to elite, English-speaking spaces. Indeed, this is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but an epistemological one that shapes what counts as knowledge and who gets to produce it. Therefore, the hegemony of a powerful international language in academia can exclude non-native speakers from full participation and recognition (Phillipson 1992), resulting in limited accessibility and narrowed intellectual horizons.

Given that a growing number of students today are plurilingual (Fabricius & Presiler 2015), and due to the increasing number of university stakeholders who have to function and socialise in languages other than their first language (Melo-Pfeifer & Yanaprasart 2019), another approach has been brought to the fore to ensure a diverse academic environment and to move toward inclusive models of knowledge accessibility.

The *PI* promotes the ideals of inclusivity and linguistic diversity and stresses the importance of recognising the value of languages spoken by local communities and academic participants and supporting a learning environment where multiple languages coexist. This approach can enrich academic exchange, as per Iannàccaro:

> In many contexts, people in mobility show insufficient awareness of the benefits of additional language learning. *Lingua francas* (and more generally, languages of wider

> communication) are frequently used instrumentally and interactionally, enabling immediate needs to be met but not allowing for deeper integration within the respective target societies. […] There is a strong need to change public perceptions in order to present plurality of languages as a desirable outcome of mobility, not hindering inclusion but rather supporting it. (Iannàccaro 2018:132-3)

On this basis, plurilingualism is valued in a perspective of inclusive linguistic integration. This approach encourages the development of communication strategies that prioritise comprehension over perfect fluency (Yanaprasart 2018). Favouring a "mutual border-crossing understanding" (Van Klaveren et al. 2013), the efficiency of intercomprehension is based on the notion of fostering mutual intelligibility, reinforced by "common cultural ties" and enhanced by "linguistic creativity" (Braunmüller 2013) between speakers of related languages (Yanaprasart forthcoming).

2.4. Monolingual and plurilingual perspectives: Englishisation or multilingual Englishes

Behind the rhetoric favouring internationalisation two perspectives – *monolingual* and *plurilingual* – can be contrasted. Depending on the perspective adopted, either the *PE* or the *PI* will be favoured.

In the monolingual perspective, language is simply packaging (McPartland 2013). A single common language would guarantee perfect intercomprehension, as everyone speaking English would eliminate misunderstandings arising from linguistic and cultural diversity (Lüdi 2016).

In reality, linguistic diversity is inherent in every language, with English serving as a clear example. The different geographical, social, and cultural backgrounds of its speakers have influenced English to the extent that it has never been a stable or uniform entity. On the contrary, its development and vitality originated from this diversity, which is the source of its extraordinary adaptability and acceptance of change. As noted in the Dylan project (2013[1]), the use of English is adapted in diverse ways, reflecting both the international character of its use and a high tolerance for non-standard, non-literary forms, particularly among speakers who use it as an additional language rather than in "native-like" forms.

In this context, what distinguishes Englishisation from the concept of multilingual Englishes? These terms refer to two very different language ideologies and practices. While the first refers to the process by which English – and especially native-speaker norms – becomes dominant, thus often marginalising other languages and language varieties, the second, frequently referred to as Global English, World Englishes or English as a *lingua franca*[2], recognises English as a global language shaped by its use in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. From this view, English belongs to all who use it, not just to native speakers. Its

1 http://www.dylan-project.org for an overview and Berthoud, Lüdi & Grin 2013 for detailed results.
2 For the usage of and ideological backgrounds behind the terms, see Buriro 2023.

legitimacy is not about conformity but derives from its function as a communication tool.

Around this issue, it is even more crucial to distinguish between "additive" and "integrative" visions of English. From an additive perspective, English is added into a plurilingual repertoire with a focus on hierarchy, order, and norm, forcing different languages to be spoken separately with native-speaker norms. In contrast, when English is an integrated part of the plurilingual repertoire, it is mingled with other languages in a pluralistic and inclusive way. And when being used as a *lingua franca,* which is "constituted by very heterogeneous and multilingual varieties" (Markaki et al. 2013: 26), English "is not only realized within, but also through linguistic diversity" (Hülmbauer & Seidlhofer 2013: 338) and functions in a plurilingual mode (Lüdi et al. 2013). Thus, English plays the role of a bridge language, a stepping stone (Forlot 2013), and a gateway to other languages (Schröder 2009). Rooted in the broader concept of plurilingualism, English can be used alongside other languages in flexible, hybrid, and interactive ways. This is illustrated by the DYLAN Project (2013), which examined multilingual communication in academic and professional settings. In such situations, participants from different linguistic backgrounds often draw on multiple languages, and casual discussion may include terms that are difficult to translate directly. With multiple language proficiencies at their disposal, speakers tend to select the lexical item that best expresses their intended meaning, sometimes switching mid-utterance between languages. This form of code-switching allows for more precise expression, a broader lexical repertoire, and smoother communication. Language switching can also reflect a principle of economy, while intercomprehension suggests that such practice may ultimately enhance understanding, engagement, and quality of outcome.

3. Internationalisation and plurilingualism in HE: focus on some governance issues and teaching practices

3.1. Governance and language policy

Regarding language policy, the commodification of HE increasingly aligns with the practice of "one language for science" or "one language fits all communication needs" (Piekkari & Tietze 2011: 267). This ideology has significant implication for language policy and academic language management. As illustrated by the following testimony from a member of the University of Geneva's language policy committee:

> And I don't think there's any particular desire on the part of the rectorate to marginalise French in favour of English. On the other hand, I do think that what exists is a constraint faced by members of the rectorate. And I'm not just talking about the University of Geneva. I'm talking about any non-English-speaking university. The constraint is that the university, whatever it may be, is in competition with other institutions, and that there is a partially justified feeling that in the context of this competition, in order to assert the place, the position of our university, it is necessary to take various measures, various provisions concerning teaching and research, and these provisions concerning teaching and research

> frequently imply that this or that activity of the university will take place in English. Basically, it's this questioning, this general perception that's behind the expansion of course offerings in English. (Our translation from French, Pluri-U, Member of the PL Commission, UNIGE[3]).

Staying competitive may explain why the anglicisation of curricula (Truchot 2018) is the major trend in over 70% of universities worldwide (Maringe 2010). This strategy translates into the intention to universalise science by standardising programs (Chesney 2014), unifying policies and homogenising practices under the label of Englishisation (Haberland 2009). Against this global orientation, teaching in the national language remains the preferred choice in a number of universities (see Fabricius & Presiler 2015). The third model is to propose a managed plurilingual response as an institutional model (Purser 2000; Jernudd 2002; Veronisi & Nickenig 2009), according to which English has equal status with other languages of instruction. With this language policy – institutional practices are evolving – aiming to diversify curricula, specialise disciplinary knowledge with heterogeneous linguistic practices. Recognising that languages other than the local language and English have an important role to play in the academic world, initiatives and projects have been launched to promote equal access to scientific findings in a diversity of languages (e.g., *the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication* 2019), or to create inclusive campuses, promoting the view that students' and staff's linguistic resources are not obstacles, but should be embraced as assets in knowledge creation and participation in academic life (e.g., the University of Westminster's *Multilingual University Project* 2024).

Supporting the development of an overt language policy in HE requires moving beyond a naive conception of the links between plurilingualism and internationalisation. In this perspective, it would be useful to aim for a balance between the *PE* and *PI*.

> [...] that there are still, in my opinion, very naive perceptions on the part of many teachers. It's this very naive conception that science and research are in English, but actually not, science, research and naturally teaching can naturally make use of English. [...] There's a big difference between English and English only. In my opinion, this difference is not always understood. (Our translation from French, Pluri-U, PL Commission member, UNIGE)

According to this view, the "natural" shift from English to English Only in science stems from "very naive perceptions" that the universality of knowledge can be shared through a single, global language, overlooking the crucial difference between *one language* and *one language only*.

3.2. Teaching practices

Observable classroom practices in HE offer revealing insights. Whether instruction occurs in the local language or an international one such as English, teaching typically takes place in a single language at a time. Yet, in some cases, using multiple languages is pedagogically meaningful – as in a law seminar at

[3] Project **Pluri-U** “Bi-/plurilingual discourses and practices from the socio-institutional and educational domains at the University of Geneva” (2020-2022).

the University of Zurich. Although the course is taught in French (L2), the bilingual teacher (T) regularly switches to German (L1 of most students), and provides references in both languages, to foster inclusion and emphasise the role of language in legal reasoning. The aim is to help students interpret Swiss Federal Court rulings written in both French and German.

(1)

11T ((aspiration)) . on- on dit que messieurs b et c sont respectivement associé gérant et associé\ . qu'est-ce que ça veut dire en allemand\
(((breath)) . it- it's been said that Mr. b et c are respectively the managing partner and partner\ . what does that mean in German\)
[…]
14T &associés sont tous au même rang\ . mais ils peuvent avoir des fonctions différentes\ .. et c'est ça qui les distingue\ . y en a un qui est associé gérant/ . et puis l'autre est associé . non gérant/ . ce qui veut dire que/
(&partners all have the same rank\ . but they may have different functions \ .. and that's what distinguishes them \ . there's one who's a managing partner/ . and the other is a . non-managing partner/ . which means that/)
[…]
18T ((aspiration)) also einer führt die geschäfte/ und der andere ist einfach . wahrscheinlich einfach finanziell beteiligt\ . man spricht auch . auf deutsch von einem stillen teilhaber nicht\ . j'sais pas si ça existe en français\ un- ((aspiration)) un associé . silencieux [((rire)) mais donc . lui il s:'occupe en fait pas: de justement de&
(((breath)) so one manages things/ and the other is just . probably just financially involved\ . in german you also don't talk . about a silent partner\ . [French] don't know if that exists in French\ a- ((breath)) a . silent . partner [((laughter)) but then . he isn't really involved: in i mean&)

(Dylan project, UNIL-UNIGE[4])

In this sequence, T introduces a legal problem by contrasting the French terms "associé" and "associé gérant" (11T). By constructing a nonstandard parallelism ("gérant" *vs* "non gérant", 14T) that does not exist in French, he deepens students' conceptual understanding and prepares for a switch to German, which distinguishes between the two notions. The explanation, delivered *with* and *in* German (18T) clarifies the difference between a "managing partner" and "a silent partner". To consolidate the point, T returns to French and coins the term "associé silencieux".

This sequence illustrates that the use of a second language can give rise not only to *complications* but also to opportunities for deeper engagement with the *complexity* of scientific knowledge. By slowing communication, bilingualism fosters intercomprehension and stimulates creativity (Berthoud & Gajo 2020). Beyond this example, it is useful to reconsider the functions of language. The most common is the *function of communication*, which views language in its transactional dimension: communication is deemed successful when language

4 See Gajo et al. 2013.

appears transparent and offers immediate access to content. From this perspective, plurilingualism may seem to hinder the *PE*. Yet two other functions merit attention (Gajo et al. 2021):

- Function of *representation* (mediation): language is not merely a vehicle for communication but a means of shaping knowledge (formulation of knowledge as an issue); plurilingualism thus serves as a resource for engaging with and problematise the complexity of knowledge;
- Function of *contextualisation*: language is understood in relation to its social or cultural contexts, which carry specific values; in this sense, while scientific discourse aspires to objectivity, it can never be entirely neutral; plurilingual practices help reveal the cultural grounding of knowledge.

Both functions relate to the principle of intercomprehension, revealing the layered nature of discourse (thickness) and challenging its opacity. Plurilingualism thus emerges as a tool for decoding complexity and problematising knowledge.

We now turn to a second sequence, also taken from the Dylan project but from an economics course, where language comparison is used to deepen a concept – *globalisation* – which is also directly relevant to this article's focus.

(2)

we have to . make a clear difference between . GLOBALISATION which is a(n) . english: . word/ .. and mainly relates to . economic globalisation/ .. and what is called ((French pronunciation)) < MONDIALISATION >(in french/ . or . in dutch/ ((voice lowered)) you find a . a word which looks like ((French pronunciation)) < MONDIALISATION > / […] it relates communication/ . ((voice lowered)) being easier/ . people travelling&SO MORE the sociological changing/ . <in a world where people can travel>/ . to foreign countries/ . express themselves in foreign languages/ and so on and so on\

(Dylan, UNIL-UNIGE)

The professor teaches part of his course in English (L2) at a French-speaking Swiss university, using his plurilingual resources to problematise complex notions such as globalisation. The contrast between French ("mondialisation) and English ("globalisation") is illuminating, going beyond mere translation to enhance understanding. Here the functions of representation and contextualisation are central, again linking to the principle of intercomprehension.

This discussion of globalisation returns us to a key issue of the article: The relationship between internationalisation and plurilingualism. The process of globalisation has made HE a sector worldwide competing and where universities sometimes are seeking internationalisation as a strategic move. In contrast, "mondialisation" see the cultural and humanistic dimensions of global interconnectedness as its main point. Unlike a purely economic and

technological perspective, it emphasises the nature, multidimensionality, and interdependence of global-local interactions, providing a conceptual lens to better understand the plurilingual and intercultural dimensions of internationalisation.

In HE, internationalisation operates within both logics, creating a dual role. Their coexistence generates dynamic tensions in institutional practices, challenging universities to balance global competitiveness with inclusive, ethical, and transformative forms of internationalisation.

4. Discussion

Under globalisation, HE faces the challenge of evolving from the traditional university to the "multiversity" (Krücken et al. 2007), reflecting diverse missions, disciplines, and cultural contexts. Central to this is whether internationalisation should pursue uniformity, implying standardisation, or universality, embracing difference beyond national boundaries (Julien 2004). Institutional approaches require strategy, commitment, and resources, highlighting the tension between efficiency and ethical responsibility. The *PE* prioritises resource allocation for maximum impact, while the *PI* fosters dialogue and collaboration, using linguistic and cultural differences to create a more equitable space where power relations are acknowledged.

If knowledge is understood as multiple and context-dependent (Berthoud 2017), the multiversity and the notion of "multiversality" open up space for decolonial approaches that accommodate divergent epistemologies. Although challenging to implement, this model fosters equitable collaboration, intercultural dialogue (Lüdi et al. 2016), and cutting-edge research, thereby supporting a truly global and pluralistic knowledge society.

Most importantly, when language is treated as a transparent channel for the transmission of knowledge – a means to an end – this perspective overlooks what might be called the *thickness of language,* with its layered, value-laden, and formative nature. From this perspective, language is positioned as a site of inquiry, a source of insight and reflection. The economic and academic implications of monolingualism *versus* plurilingualism must therefore be subjected to critical scrutiny. Monolingual systems based on a dominant language tend to be regarded as more efficient, cohesive, and cost-effective, as they reduce the *complications* of linguistic diversity by limiting the need for translation and simplifying collaboration. By contrast, plurilingual ecosystems nurture interdisciplinarity and integrate diverse intellectual traditions (Berthoud 2013). This approach transforms the *complexity* of diverse ways of thinking into a resource, enabling learners to navigate multiple languages and perspectives, while fostering critical reflection, cognitive flexibility, and innovative knowledge production.

Engaging plurilingually means working with and through the opacity of language, acknowledging that understanding and being understood are often delayed, negotiated, and co-constructed. Rather than a linear or immediate process, meaning-making unfolds through interaction and adjustment between interlocutors. This process is not deficient or flawed but rather deepens meta-cognitive awareness and cultivates diverse ways of framing knowledge across languages. Working with the *thickness of language* in a plurilingual way thus means accepting language as constitutive of thought, rather than secondary to it. This opens the way to more pluralistic, reflexive, and contextually grounded approaches to knowledge.

Language policies impose their values and preferences on the languages that are learned, transmitted and used within institutions and by them, thereby shaping access to knowledge (Templin et al. 2022). Institutional language policies determine what disciplinary knowledge is transmitted within or beyond university settings (Berthoud & Gajo 2016). The main argument here is that language policy should not treat English and other languages as rivals, nor should it privilege “English ONLY” as the sole language of knowledge in contemporary university systems. Instead, English should be understood as “ONE” among several linguistic bridges that sustain epistemic and cultural exchange across local and global languages. It is therefore necessary to develop governance-based solutions in the form of balanced plurilingual strategies that would combine international outreach with sustained institutional support for local languages (Grin 2024).

Ultimately, the internationalisation *of* and (with)*in* HE is intended as a reflective and inclusive process that aligns context-sensitive learning with responsible knowledge production on a global scale. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that the internationalisation *of* HE has a profound impact on that *(with)in* HE. Drawing on the concepts of “thick standardisation” (Usunier 2010) and “thick description” (Geertz 1973), a notion of "thick internationalisation" may offer a way to reconcile these dimensions of internationalisation with principles of language use, with the aim of fostering genuinely plurilingual sciences (Yanaprasart 2020). The key question is how a *thick internationalisation* approach can foster forms of *internationalisation* that reflect linguistic diversity while maintaining academic rigor and promoting a coherent multilingual global strategy.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper examines plurilingual internationalisation and offers a framework bringing together a range of perspectives on language governance in HE. Reconciling the tensions between global competitiveness and local inclusivity, plurilingual approaches recognise that individuals do not typically navigate through a single *lingua franca* but instead engage with multiple languages. From

an economic perspective, plurilingual internationalisation aligns with institution's strategic use of dominant languages, usually English, to enhance international visibility and collaboration, while not neglecting other linguistic repertoires. At the same time, intercomprehension resonates with the plurilingual emphasis on hybrid communication and flexible multilingual practices that promote epistemic diversity, as well as linguistic and cultural inclusion.

An overt language policy remains a crucial factor in the democratisation of knowledge. Well-designed policies support diverse cultures, preserve intergenerational knowledge, and make visible forms of knowledge that are both local and global. By contrast, poorly designed policies tend to reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies by privileging dominant languages and marginalising others. The future of higher education will largely depend on whether institutions adopt monolingual or plurilingual approaches, rather than simply favouring English over other languages. In this sense, universities are facing a key decision: should they prioritise global visibility and efficiency, almost like brands, or should they act as responsible international players, supporting fair, context-aware and intellectually dynamic environments? Ultimately, the direction they take will shape whether internationalisation leads to uniformity or instead becomes a means of building more inclusive, sustainable and locally grounded forms of knowledge.

Note

This text is a product of original human research, maintaining rigorous academic standards.

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