

Language at the intersection of internationalization policy and practice in higher education

Oliver ST JOHN

Jonas ÅLANDER

Örebro universitet

701 82 Örebro, Suede

oliver.st-john@oru.se

ORCID: 0000-0002-1730-5463

jonas.alander@oru.se

ORCID: 0000-0003-4981-012X

Cet article examine l'interaction complexe entre les politiques d'internationalisation et leur mise en œuvre dans l'enseignement supérieur en mettant en lumière le rôle souvent négligé de la langue. Il soutient que les politiques d'internationalisation ne constituent pas des cadres neutres, mais qu'elles sont façonnées par des dynamiques de pouvoir et les intérêts des parties prenantes, pouvant entraîner la marginalisation de certains groupes. L'étude identifie les défis et les opportunités rencontrés par les étudiants internationaux et doctorants dans le cadre de ces politiques et souligne la nécessité de placer la langue au cœur des démarches pour favoriser l'inclusivité et des expériences éducatives significatives. En adoptant une perspective dynamique de la politique comme processus évolutif influencé par divers acteurs, l'article remet en question les conceptions linéaires traditionnelles de sa mise en œuvre. Il avance que l'engagement réfléchi envers la langue peut combler le fossé entre les directives politiques et les pratiques locales, enrichissant ainsi le paysage éducatif. En s'appuyant sur des données qualitatives recueillies auprès d'enseignants et d'étudiants, cette recherche contribue à une compréhension approfondie de la manière dont la langue façonne les interactions et les identités dans le contexte de l'internationalisation. En définitive, elle appelle à une réévaluation des dimensions linguistiques des politiques d'internationalisation afin de mieux refléter la complexité des pratiques dans l'enseignement supérieur.

Denna studie undersöker det komplexa samspelet mellan internationaliseringspolicy och dess praktik inom högre utbildning, med särskilt fokus på språkets ofta förbisedda roll. I studien betraktas inte policys som neutrala ramverk, utan som påverkade av maktodynamiker och olika intressenters agendor, vilket kan leda till att vissa grupper marginaliseras. Studien identifierar utmaningar och möjligheter som internationella studenter och doktorander möter inom ramen för internationaliseringspolicys praktik. Vidare betonas vikten av att sätta språket i centrum för att främja inkludering och meningsfulla utbildningsupplevelser. Genom att anta ett dynamiskt perspektiv på policy, som en ständigt föränderlig process formad av olika aktörer, kritiserar studien en mer traditionell och linjär förståelse av policy och dess implementering. Studien framhåller att ett meningsfullt engagemang i språkfrågor kan överbygga gapet mellan policydirektiv och lokal praktik och därigenom stärka utbildningslandskapet. Med stöd i kvalitativa data från lärare och studenter bidrar studien till en djupare förståelse av hur språk formar interaktioner och identiteter i internationaliseringens kontext. Slutligen påtalar studien en omvärdering av språkets roll i internationaliseringspolicy för att bättre spegla komplexiteten som präglar praktiken inom högre utbildning.

Mots-clés:

internationalisation, politique, langue, enseignement supérieur, enseignement et apprentissage.

Nyckelord:

Internationalisering, politik, språk, högre utbildning, undervisning och lärande.

Keywords:

internationalization, policy, language, Higher Education, teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

Internationalization policy in higher education (HE) is far from a neutral or universally beneficial framework. Rather, it is shaped by intersecting power dynamics, stakeholder interests, and institutional ambitions, often prioritizing dominant groups while marginalizing others (Stier 2004; Curaj et al. 2015; Deardorff et al. 2022). The implementation of such policy is further complicated by the nuanced and unpredictable realities practitioners face – contexts that policies frequently fail to anticipate or fully address (Ball et al. 2012).

A critical dimension in this landscape is the role of language, both as a functional tool for communication and as a cultural and ideological force. Language policies are not merely logistical instruments; they shape inclusion, determine access to knowledge, and reflect whose voices are legitimized within academic spaces. By influencing how participants interact, belong, and learn, language should be at the heart of internationalization. However, despite this, language is seldom a prioritized topic in internationalization policies (Crâciun 2022).

This paper explores the complex relationship between policy and practice through the lens of internationalization in HE. It interrogates who benefits from policy, who may be excluded, and how practitioners navigate tensions between broad directives and local realities. In doing so, it emphasizes the need to view policy not as a fixed mandate but as a dynamic space of negotiation, where meaning is made through action, interpretation, cooperation and often resistance.

Given the seemingly minor connection between internationalization policy, its implementation, and language, a question arises about how to bridge this gap in order to enhance meaningful educational experiences in HE teaching and learning. From the perspectives of both teachers and students, and with a focus on language, this study aims to examine the intersection of internationalization policy and practice in HE. This aim is broken down into two research questions: What opportunities and challenges related to internationalization policy and practice do international and PhD students face? And, how can the opportunities and challenges inform the development and implementation of the language dimension in internationalization policy?

2. Policy

Engaging in internationalization and its implications for staff and students through policy necessitates a discussion of the concept of policy. In this study, we understand policy as a dynamic process involving multiple actors and

entities. This stance on policy aligns with Ball's (1993, 2012, 2015) reasoning and meaning of policy.

The policy-making process typically starts when an issue affecting individuals or groups is recognized as either obstructive or beneficial. This issue is officially recognized and often formalized into a document proposing solutions, which is then distributed for implementation. However, the policy process is not a linear process. It encompasses multiple agents with varying goals and interpretations of the policy's purpose, involving diverse reinterpretations, contextual factors, and varied methods of implementation. When a particular policy is integrated into a practice, it thus raises questions about the practice itself and its constitutional core.

For example, the complexity of the educational setting in this study, where the policy process is explored, encompasses multiple dimensions, requiring policy implementation to comprehend relationships, experiences, identities, values, and organizational prerequisites. These elements cannot be fully captured in a policy document, yet they are all integral to the concept of policy itself. In this study, when teachers' and PhD students' testimonies and statements are related to internationalization, it is viewed as part of the policy process when official documents and informal agreements regarding internationalization are implemented. This is, using Ball's words, *doing policy*. Teachers and students are thus "subject to and objects of policy" (Ball et al. 2012: 3).

Another view of policy relevant to this study with a specific focus on language is a theoretical framework developed by Spolsky (2004, 2007). In this framework, policy and practice are not conceived as interrogating each other separately, but as forming each other reciprocally. Spolsky's view that there is *policy in practices* aligns with Ball's understanding of *doing policy*. Spolsky (2004) proposes three levels of language policy (see also Bonacina-Pugh 2012). First, language policy as actualised in the linguistic behaviour of individuals or groups. This is referred to as language practice, capturing linguistic contexts and the actions of participants' linguistic choices and behaviours. Language practices are crucial for learning language (Spolsky 2007). Secondly, language policy is further expressed in the beliefs or views people hold about proper or expedient linguistic practice. Beliefs are associated with identifications and social belonging, potentially exerting considerable influence over language practices. Thirdly, language policy is planned and managed by those in authority with or without the weight of official documentation (Spolsky 2004). This level is termed management and refers to efforts to exercise power over language practices, structure, contents, and participants' beliefs. At each level language policy can be discerned, although these are also described as dimensions that permeate each other.

These views of policy contrast with perspectives that understand policy as simply an attempt to solve a specific problem by formulating and following a

document's dos and don'ts. This idea is based on the belief that policy is linear and is usually controlled exclusively by formal, top-down processes. Such a view limits the inclusion of broader societal inputs and ideas that may arise outside of these structures, raising questions about inclusivity and the effectiveness of policy outcomes (Ball et al. 2012; Diem et al. 2018).

3. Internationalization policy

The historical development of internationalization of HE illustrates how both internal and external changes within and between nations, societies, and cultural environments have significantly influenced this process (de Wit & Merx 2022). The term internationalization often encompasses different approaches that highlight specific dimensions, most commonly: mobility, internationalization at home (cf. Beelen & Jones 2015), and internationalization of the curriculum (cf. Leask 2015). Today, the focus of internationalization accounts for the complexity of the practice, as a widely used definition (see de Wit et al. 2015: 281) covers several dimensions, including intentions, inclusiveness, HE quality, and societal relations.

Research on HE internationalization policies supports the idea that internationalization is a planned process involving various measures that transform higher education's purpose, function, and delivery with specific goals in mind (Crâciun 2018). This, however, does not mean that the goals of internationalization are the same for all stakeholders. Crâciun (2022) demonstrates that the most central content in HE internationalization policies is mobility, followed by research collaboration, networking, and striving for international quality standards. On the other hand, Crâciun (2022: 99) states that "Internationalization at home and internationalization of curriculum, as well as national and foreign language policies, are mostly absent."

Stier (2004) identifies three main ideological motivations behind the creation and implementation of internationalization policies: idealism, instrumentalism, and educationalism. In short, the idealist rationale is based on the belief that internationalization is good per se. It is believed that through collaboration, HE can contribute to creating a more democratic and equitable world. Instrumentalists view HE as a means to maximise profit, drive economic growth, and promote the desirable ideologies of various stakeholders. The focus lies within the mobility and standardization of university degrees and grading. Finally, educationalists believe that exposure and adaptation to an unfamiliar academic environment enhance the academic experience for both students and faculty.

Åkerlund (2020) illustrates the evolution of Swedish internationalization policies. The development has shifted from "foreign policy and cultural rationales to academic and economic rationales" (p. 116). There are also two trends in Swedish internationalization policy development, where the first view emphasi-

ses competition and the rapid globalization of the economy, arguing that internationalization is essential for industrialized societies to sustain their development. The other view focuses on collaboration, claiming that globalization allows humanity to tackle global challenges, and the internationalization of HE and research helps create opportunities for this.

In non-Anglophone countries, research indicates that the development of internationalization policies has often led to an increase in English Medium Instruction (EMI) (cf. Saarinen 2012). In Anglophone countries, internationalization language policy is rarely addressed, and English is commonly considered the sole language for instruction and communication (Bonacina-Pugh et al. 2022). This aligns with Preece (2011, 2018; see also Preece and Martin 2009) who maintains that anglophone universities are, of course, multilingual, but they tend to overlook, marginalize, or suppress the multilingual abilities of their staff and students.

Marshall (2009: 1105) notes that while international students often view themselves as multilingual individuals, they frequently face a somewhat limiting "'remedial ESL' (English as a Second Language) identity". This perspective leads educational institutions to focus primarily on enhancing their English language skills, rather than exploring how their plurilingualism could serve as a valuable resource for teaching and learning. In other words, schools tend to emphasise the need to improve multilingual students' English abilities instead of recognizing and capitalizing on the strengths inherent in their diverse language proficiencies.

4. Language, plurilingualism and learning

According to Linell (2009: 273), there are two ways language scholars have looked at language – as *abstract objects and rules*, and, as *action*. Since the foundation of modern linguistics, conceptions of language have taken on increasingly dynamic and determinative dimensions culminating to date with the fluid and empowering bilingual actions of translanguaging (Garcia & Li Wei 2014). In terms of how theoretical positions account for the determination of linguistic meaning in language use, a significant shift can be distinguished from monological explanations that foreground the language system and dialogism that points to individual speakers (Linell 2009). Regarding the determination of human meaning making, monologism refers to the role of received linguistic rules and general agreements about language. Contrastively, dialogism highlights the individual act of speaking interdependent with others and resourced by as well as reconfiguring the context (Whalen & Zimmermann 1987).

In this study, language is understood dialogically. This conception is characterised by at least the following three qualities, namely meaning potentiality, contextual dependence and action-orientation. Language does not

have a fixed meaning but bears potentiality to mean, to make sense and generate understanding (Linell 2001). Communicative events adhere to a particular setting so that meaning and understanding it are partly contextually construed and in turn contribute unequivocally to the way the context unfolds (Goodwin & Duranti 1992; Brown 1994). Human language is primarily performed, enacted, realised in the doing of language, and therefore must be treated in action-oriented terms (Linell 2009). Languaging (Maturana & Varela 1998) and translanguaging (Li Wei 2018) describe linguistic activity and practices in actual communication and are therefore better aligned with dialogical theory than 'language use' which suggests the pre-existence of linguistic objects which we then use. According to the Council of Europe (2020: 30), *plurilingualism* refers to "the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner" while *multilingualism* describes "the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level". It is this idiolect, this entire personal linguistic repertoire, that translanguaging scholars believe individual speakers deserve to use communicatively as a right of expression and, in education, to secure equal opportunity (Otheguy et al. 2015).

Imitation is an important part of language learning (Lado 1964) but is conditioned by an array of other prerequisites. Language learning has been described as adapting to a new surrounding linguistic environment (Thibault 2017) but adapting to the language activity is not triggered by the mere occurrence of new language phenomena. The appropriation of new language is partly determined by features and conditions indigenous to the learner and partly by the quality of the surrounding language phenomena (Lightbown & Spada 2006). Regarding learner-based conditions, aspects such as previous language experiences, current linguistic repertoire and willingness to take communicative risks impact learning processes. Regarding language-based features, language actions must be challenging as well as have a certain transparency, accessibility. This quality, a blend of familiarity and foreignness in language input entailing *manageable challenge*, must be "comprehensible" for learner appropriation (Krashen 1982). While modified input can be provided by others who are sensitive to the current capacities of their communicative interlocutors, it can also be solicited and gained interactionally. Social interaction is characterised by the negotiation of meaning and works towards achieving mutual understanding by, for instance, asking questions when a lack of clarity occurs, reformulations when a first formulation is not successful, seeking confirmation of one's understanding (Long 1983). These conversational processes can be described in sociocultural terms as micro scaffolding strategies in which a more competent participant seeks to keep the exchange within the other's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978) and collaborates with the other to reach joint communicative goals. The importance of communicative participation and language production for understanding how language works and appropriating

new language has been a hallmark of communicative approaches to language learning (Swain 2000).

5. Data and analysis

This is a small-scale, qualitative study that, by highlighting the experiences and views of teachers and international PhD students, takes a grassroots approach to internationalization policy and practice. The study includes three sets of data: field notes, interviews, and policy documents. This approach characterizes the study as a multi-method investigation, seeking to integrate various data sources to enhance the validity and richness of the findings.

The first set of data comprises a teacher's field notes, providing insights into classroom dynamics, student engagement, and instructional strategies. The notes reflect several years of experience and various roles, including teacher, lecturer, and coordinator. The data encompasses notes from a Blended Intensive Program (BIP) in education on inclusion, as well as exchange program courses addressing general education, special needs education, and diversity. These were EMI courses. Additionally, the data included field notes on general education courses from Swedish teacher education programs. Typical learning activities featured in the notes consist of literature seminars, group work, and workshops.

This data are produced through autoethnography. The method synthesizes the concepts of self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy), establishing a methodological framework that emphasizes personal narrative as a means of understanding phenomena (Adams et al. 2015). Autoethnography enriches the understanding of individual identity and situates personal narratives within larger socio-cultural narratives, thereby fostering a deeper comprehension of the interplay between self and society (Chang 2008; see also Anteliz et al. 2022)

Autoethnography should adhere to the same ethical guidelines as other research, with certain aspects being particularly relevant to this approach. One ethical dilemma for autoethnographers is the heightened risk of exposing close associates. Unlike studies with effective pseudonymization, self-referential narratives can make these individuals more easily identifiable, highlighting the need for careful consideration of confidentiality and potential repercussions (Bylund et al. 2021). The present study refrains from disclosing specific names or additional details regarding the examples described.

Collecting data from a single source also raises questions about validity. When the source is the researcher, the subjectivity of autoethnography is particularly open to scrutiny. Therefore, researchers should support their arguments with diverse data as good research practice. Combining "internal" data from personal memory with "external" sources, such as interviews, documents, and artifacts,

creates multiple data points. This triangulation enhances the accuracy and validity of autoethnographic writing (Chang 2008).

The second set of data presented in this article consists of semi-structured interviews with international PhD students. A semi-structured interview is a method where the interviewer follows a guide but is free to explore emerging themes. This approach allows for both consistency and depth (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Patton (2002) emphasizes that semi-structured interviews are ideal for exploring people's perceptions while maintaining enough structure to compare responses across participants.

The informants were selected as *information-rich cases* (Patton 2002). In contrast to undergraduate students, the interviewees had considerable international institutional experience. Their extended exposure to the cultural environment of the study context and the institutional language practices in it, meant that their reflections and insights were particularly valuable for the study.

In-depth interviews were conducted with two PhD students (Patton 2002). Each had a different profile and tell their own story. One student was from the Department of Political Science, while the other was studying at the Department of Education. Each participant was informed about the aim of the study and their voluntary involvement in it. Assurance was given that their identities would remain confidential and the planned research use of the interviews was explained. Both consented to participate.

The third set of data encompasses a collection of documents pertaining to internationalization policy. This compilation includes a principal action plan accompanied by two supplementary appendices that provide a rationale for the components outlined in the action plan (ORU 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Collectively, these documents represent the formal articulation and deliberated perspective on the university's approach to internationalization policy.

This research is conducted within the context of Sweden, with a primary focus on practices associated with the university under study. Nevertheless, the experiences of both the included staff and students are envisaged to extend well beyond the confines of this institution, despite the particularity of this study.

5.1 Analysis

The analysis utilized three distinct sets of data: field notes, interviews, and policy documents. The three data sets complement each other, and by integrating these diverse sources of information, we can enhance our understanding and draw more comprehensive conclusions. This multi-faceted approach is crucial for addressing complex questions and making informed decisions based on a well-rounded perspective.

The analytical procedure in this study is qualitative content analysis (Bryman 2018). Content analysis is a systematic technique for compressing extensive

and varying data into manageable and meaningful categories to facilitate interpretation. Within educational research, it serves both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, enabling the examination of, for example, curricular materials, policy documents, learner-generated content, and classroom discourse to uncover explicit and latent patterns (Neuendorf 2017; Krippendorff 2018).

Cohen et al. (2017) underscore the methodological utility of content analysis, emphasizing its adaptability and capacity to address both manifest content – what is directly observable – and latent content, such as embedded ideologies and normative assumptions. This aligns well with the study's aim as an exploration of the relationship between internationalization policy and practice, which entails both rationale and argument as well as personal experience and evaluation.

Accordingly, the data was treated in relation to the study's research questions by qualitative condensation. Having examined the field notes, documents and interview transcripts, specific parts of the data were identified as salient and relevant to the research questions. These parts were then gathered into clusters of related answers, examined critically for analytic consistency and coherence, before receiving a representative thematic heading. These themes address the research questions and structure the presentation of study results.

6. Results

The results of this investigation are presented in three sections. The first two sections correspond to the study's two research questions while the last section highlights some inferences of the reported results for language policy and implementation. In each section, the essential themes are presented and illustrated by empirical description and examples from the study's three data sources. Autoethnographic description is presented as field notes or the teacher's perspective, documents are cited and interview material is paraphrased or given verbatim.

6.1 International student opportunities in HE teaching and learning

Both opportunities and challenges are sources of learning for teachers and students. Sometimes it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between the two since opportunities can be challenging such as travelling to a new country and challenges can be opportunities for gaining strength or learning and development. However, our distinction of these terms in this study is empirically rooted and justified by what we have seen and students have said. Regarding opportunities faced by international and PhD students in HE teaching and learning, the following themes stand out.

6.1.1 Plurilingual interaction and mutual understanding

International students are a linguistically diverse group characterized by overlapping plurilingual skills. While English is used as the lingua franca, the

students have different English proficiency levels. With tasks to be completed and learning to achieve, the stage is set for a purposeful and intricate interweaving of different language forms and varieties as an opportunity to explore and understand the meaning of topics as the following example seeks to illustrate. The context of the first data segment is a BIP. While the course is conducted in English, each student is required to bring authentic materials from their own countries (none of which are in English), analyze them and finally present them orally in English at the end of the course. In this course, the teacher was struck by:

the invaluable interactions among students from diverse backgrounds and how quickly they establish connections, despite their varying levels of English proficiency. For all participants, English is a foreign language, not their mother tongue. As a teacher in this course, I often witnessed students supporting one another by employing a range of languages when their English skills fell short. When I communicated with them in English, they readily translated for each other whenever there were challenges in comprehension. It was crucial for me to remain with the students until we ensured a shared understanding of what was being conveyed.

In stark contrast to Swedish-only monolingual meetings and coursework in which communication is unintelligible for those who have not yet learned Swedish, the voices of the PhD students also emphasize that plurilingual language use, especially plurilingual interaction, "make communication possible" and mean "that people feel seen and acknowledged". While opportunities are created for attracting a greater number of international students by a wider range of EMI courses across the university, the use of two languages alternating at close quarters makes it possible for both languages to cooperate in meaning making processes within communicative events. In response to what kind of language policy would be more constructive, one PhD student insisted, "a bilingual manner, a bilingual environment is the best for both, all parts". The simultaneous or sequential coordination of two languages is described as "a win-win situation". Examples of such language practices in meetings include presenting the opening agenda in Swedish and English "so that everyone is on the same page" and speaking in Swedish with written communication in English or vice versa. Interpretation of presented content in one language is mentioned as illuminating communication. At a deeper level of linguistic integration, a further example was holding meetings interspersed at strategic intervals by plurilingual group discussions in which group members use their preferred language so that linguistic alternation becomes the communicative medium. Another proposal was *language cafés* for international students offering participants exposure to intelligible new language, the chance to use challenging language in personally relevant ways with promising conditions for succeeding communicatively and gaining self-confidence. These examples illustrate environments which allow participants to operate at full linguistic capacity as language learners, all with varying proficiencies and constraints, rather than as experts or novices.

6.1.2 Cultural content and language integrated learning

In international courses with students from around the globe, sharing experiences related to cultural issues, diversity, national education systems and teaching approaches become central course content and the realm of course activity. English or another lingua franca becomes how such content is treated and how learning tasks or assignments are accomplished. Thus, conditions are created for *cultural* content and language integrated learning in which students gain plentiful opportunity for meaningful language use and incidental learning through engaging in tasks and co-creating new cultural understanding. Regarding BIP courses, the teacher notes:

the importance of the temporal perspective in this context. The intensity of the course is quite high, as participants only meet for five days, which necessitates effective communication. Students are organized into cross-national groups, encouraging them to step outside their comfort zones and engage collaboratively to achieve a common goal [...] the immediate need is to focus on direct engagement and completing shared tasks.

Cross-national groups are work constellations for literature seminars and workshops of other international EMI courses in which students also "explicitly incorporate an intercultural perspective". The rationale for this method of dividing students into mixed-language work groups is that students who share a language wish to cross cultural boundaries for new experiences and learning. They recognize that culturally heterogeneous groups are more likely than homogeneous groups to take them beyond what they already know. The teacher reasons that

this division aims to create more equal opportunities for students' learning, facilitating participation in a wide range of experiences. This, in turn, aligns with one of the fundamental dialogic principles of the course: the more different the experiences students share, the deeper their learning.

6.2 *International student challenges in HE teaching and learning*

The following three challenges stand out as creating significant difficulties for international students.

6.2.1 Language anxiety and exclusion

Internationalization initiatives and goals at universities seek to tackle the lack of preparedness expressed by international students concerning their ability to work in culturally diverse settings. Among the various aspects of this predicament, study data foregrounds students' fear of failing to comprehend others and anxiety about their ability to cope linguistically in their new linguistic landscape. The communicative demands of group work and other classroom activities at the host university, according to one PhD student, create "anxiety for some students who must now communicate with other students with whom they do not share a mother tongue and leave the safety of their language confidence zones". As mentioned earlier, the students show their awareness of this problem by rallying around each other communicatively, supporting one another with

plurilingual illumination, spontaneous translation and interactional sense-making.

The international PhD students not only admit their own language anxiety in the host university but describe a situation in which Swedish speakers in positions of leadership fail to overcome their discomfort with using English and consequently do not proactively model the kind of flexible, communicatively accessible, bilingual behaviour that they expect. Their voices clarify that internationalization policy loses credibility and supportive power when those in power do not validate language proposals by enacting them. The students concede that, for university managers, this was personally challenging since "language is a big part of appearing smart".

6.2.2 Marginalization of International Student Voices

Concerning participant groups involved in internationalization policy implementation, field notes revealed a clear distinction between "the domains of leadership, administration, and policy on one hand and researchers and educators on the other. Students often find themselves caught between these two groups". As stakeholders, international students, both in teacher education and PhD studies, can experience that their voices are marginalized by a lack of communicative proficiency in the majority language, by their temporary or auxiliary status in the host environment and consequently by limited opportunity to participate in organizational channels of policy development. A PhD student summed up her feelings about prevalent hindrances to democratic participation in her host institution and not feeling valued by other colleagues as follows:

Super excluded, not taken seriously, not valued [...]. It pushes you to a limit. It's really hard. It seems no one is interested. I know I have expertise in that [subject], in teacher education, and I felt that it was not valued or important at all. And by using the [Swedish] language, by ignoring the suggestions, you feel unseen and not valuable.

6.2.3 A monolingual language ethos

There is no unified language strategy incorporated in internationalization policy and practice at the university. Instead, the university's "Action plan for internationalization" includes some proposals such as increasing EMI courses at the undergraduate and master levels as well as advertising university posts in English to boost the number of international applicants seeking them. In addition, an investment in bilingualism at the university is advocated by exploring the opportunity of obliging newly appointed international staff to have learned functional Swedish within their first two years of work and by offering university employees courses in English as a way of promoting inclusive environments.

To achieve comprehensive and sustainable implementation, the language recommendations in the Action plan are outlined as guidance for "local" internationalization work. As a result of decentralization, language practice is (re)interpreted and determined by different kinds of reasoning and subsequently

varies significantly across university departments. Two polar positions can be identified. One is a Swedish-only position rationalized by the belief that the best way for international students to learn Swedish is to maximize their exposure to Swedish. According to the PhD students, this way of reasoning included no noticeable efforts to modify Swedish communication linguistically to make it easier for the international students to understand. At the other extreme, the second position comprises English-only courses for international students in which the students experience minimal exposure to Swedish. Thus, decentralizing the implementation of internationalization in this context has resulted in separate language solutions which privilege one language at the expense of others.

The PhD students also describe the strategy of organizing Swedish and English-mediated activities in parallel with each other. Examples given of this position include tandem meetings in different languages and the scheduled division of meeting content into relevant English or Swedish parts. While in these activities Swedish and English function equivalently, the environments are still predominantly monolingual in that the languages do not meet or mix but remain apart as distinct compartments.

6.3 Informing the development and implementation of internationalization language policy

Like gloves fit or do not fit human hands, policy somehow needs to fit the hands of those tasked with making it work on the ground. With the aid of Spolsky's (2004; 2007) theoretical framework as an organizational and enlightening tool (see Section 2), this section reports empirically derived inferences of the opportunities and challenges international students experience for language policy development and implementation. What does the data show about how the gap between language-focused internationalization policy and practice might be reduced or bridged in this HE context?

When the three levels of the theoretical framework for viewing language policy and practice are applied to the study's data, they illuminate the complexity and dynamics of the policy-practice relationship. The first step is to dissolve the dichotomy between 'policy' and 'practice' and to understand that policy is formed by practice and that practice understood as resistance or conformity assumes the rudiments of policy. From this perspective, internationalization is a set of practices and language policy is given definition in and through linguistic action (Spolsky 2004).

6.3.1 Engaging with language policies in practice

At the ground level, the framework rests on the claim that language policy is actualized in language practice. At this first level of language practice, we can recognize that international (PhD) students, while they may be disadvantaged by overarching policy, fundamentally do their own language policy through which

they can gain agency to resist prevailing practices and enact alternative linguistic behaviour. One of the PHD students insists that bilingual or plurilingual environments are mutually beneficial for all participants in institutional, research or social university events. The other PhD student thinks that communicative adaptations should be regular practice such as organizing meetings so that English is used for those parts that are relevant to international students, Swedish medium meetings with presentation slides in English and normalizing linguistically hybrid conversations. While this is discourse about practices, these stated convictions amount to a strong predictor of actual language practice. These students' personal policies are about dissolving rigid "either-or" monolingual environments that are linguistically inaccessible for some of those present; their policies are about drawing languages into cooperative relationship alongside each other as the best way of promoting and managing interaction between speakers of different languages for understanding, learning and friendship. Field notes concur:

This inclusive approach recognizes the diverse linguistic landscape within educational settings, fostering an environment that supports equitable access to learning for all students, regardless of their linguistic background. Addressing the language predicaments of international students through policy and incorporating national minority languages into language policy is crucial for promoting cultural diversity, enhancing educational outcomes, and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in the learning process.

This dimension, policy in practice, reveals that policy situations do not deal with a single policy but that several different individual or group related policies are in operation because of different participant practices. These *personal* policies must be understood and capitalized on for a comprehensive language policy that acknowledges and includes international students in HE. They imply the need to engage collaboratively with all stakeholders. When policy is shaped by the interests and ideas of the dominant group of stakeholders, it is inevitably biased and unjust. The PhD students testify to their experiences of feeling marginalized, undervalued, as the victims of policy that transferred into discriminatory practices and unequal opportunities for their rights to participate. Dialogue and deliberation among all stakeholders in policy formation is important because every point of view is necessarily partial and can become enriched by others' vision, knowledge and understanding that are different from one's own (Linell 2009). While, for project coordinators, engaging with all stakeholders can be a time-consuming process and personally challenging, the gain in terms of a balanced blend of thematic content and interests has far-reaching consequences for educational justice and equity. The following field note illustrates the need for such engagement:

In the context of internationalization, policies often exist primarily as formalized documents, emphasizing mobility as a central theme. However, this emphasis on mobility can overshadow other significant educational outcomes that arise from internationalization efforts. For universities engaged in internationalization, the pursuit of broadening student experiences and fostering global competencies may not be the primary motivation but should be regarded as equally valuable. Consequently, a more nuanced understanding of

internationalization policies is essential, recognizing that their impact extends beyond simple mobility to encompass a broader spectrum of learning objectives and institutional goals.

This 'language practice' dimension positions the user as a producer of policy, foregrounding the view that policy can only truly govern when its users have co-authored its formulations. The teacher's field notes include the following conclusions:

In reflecting on my experiences in teaching diversity in relation to policy implementation, I contend that the formulation of policies should be conducted by those who are directly affected by them, taking into account the realities of implementation and the perspectives of the implementers. It is essential to articulate clear justifications for the necessity of such policies and to delineate the anticipated outcomes associated with their enactment.

Listening to the voices of the international students and incorporating their views into policy formulation is certainly one way of including end-users in the production of policy. The secret of governing by policy is to involve those directly affected by policy in devising and authoring the constraints and capacities the policy requires, in other words, what user responsibilities and rights are needed. Such action is a key implementation strategy as fieldnotes record:

To enhance the likelihood of successfully implementing a policy, I believe all participants need to cultivate a shared comprehension of the policy's objectives and significance, ensuring that it is clearly linked to practical application.

6.3.2 Policy credibility and intercultural learning

The second of the framework's dimensions foregrounds ideological positions and beliefs in relation to language policy and practice, that is, what people believe is the right thing to do (Spolsky 2004). At this level, data shows that there can be misalignment between what participants advocate and do, discrepancy between a person's public and private policy practice, thus undermining their credibility and making it ambiguous. While participants may be convinced that a policy is good, they may at the same time be able to justify their own personal exemption from it. Such action is not simply "not practiced language policy" but entails other language practices which may devalue the very precepts a person claims to support such as bolstering a monolingual rather than a plurilingual policy. There is the need for language policy that recognizes both the anxiety of international students and university personnel about using a language they are not yet proficient with and the need they have to learn language under psychologically safe conditions. Language policy must counter the excluding consequence of unintelligible language in contexts such as course activities and departmental meetings that international students have the right to participate in. This can mean advocating the importance of modified input (Long 1983), using participants' first language in second language communication (Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain 2009) and interaction (Gass 1997) that turns informal and formal communication into rich language learning opportunities.

Regarding beliefs, data shows that internationalization needs to be approached interculturally. An interface between internationalization and intercultural learning is important because policy can be steered by an ethnocentric mindset and pervasive norms that people follow unconsciously. A critical awareness of our culturally embedded values and how these shape our judgements of what is good or bad is a necessary condition for fair policy comprehension and treatment. Intercultural learning is also a vital dimension of internationalization because it teaches a diversified, manifold, view of culture that can lead to more respectful and accurate perceptions of individuals, home or abroad (cf. Beelen & Jones 2015). While broad stereotypical categories of people in the world may be seen as a first tentative orientation towards conceiving their differences, a diversity perspective shows such images up as dangerously prejudiced and inadequate bases on which to evaluate others. The tendency to stereotype has relevance for how international students and the majority culture students perceive each other and identify themselves. An important intercultural principle is to respect every individual's right to self-identification and the importance of not labelling others before they have had the chance to do so themselves. In the context of a general teacher educational module with students that predominantly identify as Swedish, particularly when considering formal national affinity, field notes capture the following on identity:

However, it is imperative to acknowledge the complexity of identity. Increasingly, individuals may experience multiple layers of identification and belonging that extend beyond traditional notions of nationality. This recognition calls for an understanding of diverse cultural, ethnic, and social identities that shape the educational landscape and influence the experiences of these future educators.

6.3.3 Framing freedom

In the light of the framework, it becomes clear that the third level of 'top' language management and the formal meanings of official policy documents do not have a strong connection with ground-level practices. The framework makes these two dimensions distinctive. Internationalization policy as a managerial practice is likely to differ from the policy of other university individuals and groups. Field notes work revealed that the different groups involved in producing internationalization policy had considerable variation in their understanding and perspectives on internationalization – its definition, purpose and rationale. A distinction was observed between the domains of leadership, administration and policy coordination on one hand, and researchers and educators on the other. Field notes specify:

These two sides are, of course, generalizations, but they focus on different aspects of internationalization. The leadership and policy side primarily concerns itself with mobility, university rankings, statistics, institutional prestige, and economic factors. In contrast, the educator side emphasizes learning and fostering individuals' opportunities for democratic participation. As a project leader, I had to strive to blend these perspectives on internationalization. It became evident that both sides are mutually dependent, yet there is often a lack of understanding and awareness of each other's viewpoints.

At the same time, *policy must govern*. When managerial policy does not converse with everyday university practices and is subsequently vague or noncommittal, it becomes vulnerable. As described by the PhD students, the varying language practices of university departments, stemming from different conceptions and interpretations of internationalization policy, indicate an absence of coherent directives and policy producer-user incongruency regarding language use. Under such conditions, decentralizing the implementation of internationalization policy makes pieces of policy highly susceptible to the ideologies and reasoning of lower-level leaders and managers. Policy is likely to be fitted into prevailing institutional culture and structures without significant change to the status quo rather than adapting institutional practices to meet the challenges of a proactive plurilingual strategy. This produces an assortment of divergent, if not radically different, patterns of language deployment, across university institutions putting at risk equal educational opportunity for students. Regarding appropriating policy, the choices of university actors such as departmental heads and teachers must be enabled and constrained by a policy framework that provides clear mandates about language practice that can be identified with. When, for example, the difficulties of language anxiety and insufficient language learning opportunity for employees is not comprehended by leaders or managers, it is unrealistic to assume that 'top-level' policy will be adopted by lower-level personnel or international students. Policy will not govern if it does not address the barriers to implementation.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Within the internationalization contexts of this study, language practices vary significantly across the university departments. According to the PhD students, language practices are distributed in a pattern of either-or, Swedish or English-mediated environments at the expense of bilingual language deployment. These patterns are monolingual responses to the problem of how to manage communication in a group where the presence of international students among speakers of the majority language forms a multilingual environment. With language in focus, these scenarios imply promoting internationalization as a "one-language for all" communicative project rather than as taking advantage of plurilingual language action, boundary crossing and the many environments in which there are multiple latent language learning opportunities.

This set of monolingual practices is the outcome of a decentralization strategy in which overarching policy becomes subject to local (re)interpretations impacted by disciplinary ideologies and institutional goals. As dialogism teaches us, the meanings of texts or utterances are highly context sensitive and context forming. The fragmentation of policy into institutional practices that contrast significantly and even contradict each other in this university setting suggests

the need to rethink and specify the meaning potentiality of internationalization language policy, to be semi-structured, so there is room for creative practices without losing ethos. Decentralization can be justified by arguments such as local commitment to policy and sustainability, but the policy formulations need to be sufficiently explicit and rigorous for decentralization to work in concert with central policy tenets and principles. The lack of a coherent and robust language policy integrated into internationalization in this HE context is an urgent developmental need.

A treatment of internationalization language policy that gives primacy to practice rather than to the "transmission of cognitive products" may be described as a dialogical theory of language policy (Linell 2009 p.274). The implication is that policy implementation is not conduct governed by one stake-holder but a creative process that can give agency to policy users and a greater definition to policy. It means that practice as response to policy, whether resistance, reservation or compliance, moves policy forward and produces novel variations of policy which, if harnessed, can inform ideological and managerial levels. New perspectives and fresh insights, animated in and through practice, can transform policy frameworks so that, in turn, they address the challenges of implementing policy and inspire more beneficial and just practice. An action-oriented understanding of language policy sheds light on the importance of co-producing policy interdependently with other stakeholders and those directly affected by it. A commitment to capturing the experiences and proposals of the international students is one way of not only folding end-user voices and views into policy frameworks but also forming *inner* frameworks of constraints and resolve in the participant practitioners themselves.

A final reflection about language use concerns language learning. Study findings clarify that current institutional language practices do not serve international students' need and desire to learn the majority language, understand what is going on and belong to the surrounding community. The idea that "you can learn Swedish just by hearing it" without modifying or adapting input for those who are learning it, is pedagogically uninformed. At the same time, moving in environments that do not afford opportunities to hear, process or produce an additional target language is unlikely to promote language development. Rather than tolerate monolingual environments, the PhD students advocate taking advantage of the many everyday and meetings-based language learning opportunities that plurilingual interaction offers. It is at the interactional level, where, for example, Swedish cooperates with English, that students can gain language calibrated to their proficiency levels and the chance to perform target language authentically and meaningfully. This is where participants can operate out of their full linguistic repertoires, attempt to express themselves within their zones of proximal language development and benefit from the naturally occurring scaffolding support of interpersonal interaction. For these reasons, international students should be encouraged to get involved as quickly as

possible in co-creating bi-or plurilingual university environments. Such environments will clarify that all those involved in everyday exchanges or departmental meetings are not in expert-novice relationships but stand side-by-side as language learners in their own right with varying degrees of proficiency and needs. It will also clarify that both international students and university personnel who speak the majority language are so much more than simply speakers and learners of different languages.

The study clarifies that among those engaged in developing and operationalizing internationalization policy, there was a variation of understanding of internationalization but that these different perspectives were mutually dependent. These findings align with research studies suggesting that, despite efforts to standardize understanding of internationalization in HE, this field of education and scholarship comprehends different conceptions, goals and ideological dimensions attached to the venture (Stier 2018; de Witt et al. 2015). In the study, mobility endorsed by leaders is contrasted with learning and participation emphasized by educators. Yet these two interests stand in complementary relationship. Mobility is a means of transporting students into unchartered, cultural territory in which extraordinary kinds of participation and learning can occur. An exploration of environments made possible by mobility is enhanced by challenges to make sense of virgin settings characterized by new, and different experiences, communicative behaviour, cultural habits and values. Crossing such boundaries has the potential to stimulate unprecedented learning experiences.

To regard this situation as a valuable learning experience for exclusively international students and staff is to see only half the picture. It is to sideline "the principal advantages of outsidersness" (Bakhtin 1986: 141) as key learning dynamic for *all participants*. National actors are indispensable to the interaction that creates culturally diverse encounters. The tensions and resolutions springing from such culturally challenging and interesting engagements impact both sides so that the learning is *mutual*. A more nuanced understanding of internationalization policy is to recognize, for example, that the learning afforded by mobility is conditioned by individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds in which those from the home setting and those for whom it is foreign ground make equally significant cultural contributions. Internationalization in practice implies that teachers are also *learners* and "host" personnel are significant sources of learning for their international counterparts. Language is the main means of communication that makes this reciprocal transformative learning possible.

Acknowledgement

In this article, AI was utilised to suggest alternative phrasing and conduct preliminary spelling verification.

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