DE GRUYTER MOUTON
DOI 10.1515/cercles-2012-0022 — CercleS 2012; 2(2): 405–425

Stephan Meyer, Petra Gekeler, Sebastian Manger and Daniela Urank

# Plurilingualism, multilingualism and internationalisation in the European Higher Education Area: Challenges and perspectives at a Swiss University

**Abstract:** The relationships between the internationalisation of higher education and language are still poorly understood. We foreground the perspective of students in order to advance our understanding of these interrelations in the context of the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Accordingly, we propose gathering answers to the questions: *What, from students' perspectives, are their experiences and perceptions of pluri- and multilingualism in the context of the internationalisation of higher education? And how are they dealing with these experiences and perceptions?* Existing studies confirm that local specificities pertaining to languages and education systems impact substantially on the answers to these emerging questions. Thus, an overall picture of the interactions between language and internationalisation that shape the EHEA require the integration of findings from localised investigations that bring to light these particularities. Here we present an overview of findings from a mixed methods study in a medium-sized, historically German-language university in multilingual Switzerland. Our findings confirm that students are making considerable efforts to ensure that their plurilingualism extends beyond English. Notwithstanding attempts by the university to respond to their needs, students however still struggle with the tensions between what they can actually do, what they report they would like to do, and what they perceive is expected of them concerning language competencies during their studies and after. On the basis of these reflections, lecturers at the Language Centre developed a four-language course *Communication training in multilingual settings* that uses French, Italian, English, and German. This course is briefly introduced as an example of a language training intervention which seeks to move beyond the persistent constraints of a compartmentalised approach to pluri- and multilingualism in higher education.

**Keywords:** plurilingualism, multilingualism, student perspectives on languages, diachronic development in student language learning behaviours, multilingual courses

**Stephan Meyer:** Language Centre, University of Basel. E-mail: stephan.meyer@unibas.ch
**Petra Gekeler:** Language Centre, University of Basel. E-mail: petra.gekeler@unibas.ch
**Sebastian Manger:** Language Centre, University of Basel. E-mail: sebastian.manger@unibas.ch
**Daniela Urank:** Language Centre, University of Basel. E-mail: daniela.urank@unibas.ch

# 1 The internationalisation of higher education and concomitant contestations over pluri- and multilingualism

Language and internationalisation in the academic world reciprocally interact in intricate ways. Yet, mounting pressures to internationalise often result in an underestimation of two vital factors: the language-related preconditions that impinge on successful internationalisation, and the consequences that internationalisation has on local language practices. Internationalisation is, for example, often equated or associated with anglicisation, with inadequate examination of what this entails. Furthermore, the diverse attitudes and responses to the promotion of pluri- and multilingualism in higher education, the dilemmas confronting students who seek to enhance their language portfolios, and the possibilities to counter the tenacity of linguistic compartmentalisation are still poorly understood.[1] Assorted studies on the reciprocities between the internationalisation of higher education and language confirm that these interactions may differ greatly depending on variables such as the languages involved and the nature of the education system (Cybulska 2010; Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2011; Erling and Hilgendorf 2006; Gu 2010; Kerklaan, Moreira, Boersma 2008; Phillipson 2009; Schaller-Schwaner 2012; Verhoef and Venter 2008). Accordingly, in order to gain an overview of some of the forces related to language that are shaping the newly emergent European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a whole, we need to develop an integrated tableau comprising analyses of local specificities.

Attempts to gain an improved understanding of the precise nature of these interactions across a range of variables are accompanied by contestations about

**1** For the purposes of this paper we define plurilingualism as the competence of a single individual to communicate in more than two languages and multilingualism as the use of more than two languages in a collective. Since individual competence and interaction in collectives impact on each other, situations may arise where the distinction between pluri- and multilingualism is not always as clear as these definitions suggest.

what higher education should entail (Bergan 2011; Molesworth and Scullion 2011; Sursock and Smidt 2010) and the language practices we should encourage within educational systems (Beacco et al 2010; Cabau-Lampa 2007; Council of Europe 2001a; Du Plessis 2005). Included amongst the latter are concerns associated with language diversity, language dominance and marginalisation, language nationalism, lingua francas, language shift, domain loss, language attrition, and the valorisation of assorted notions of multi- and plurilingualism. Against this background, various measures pertaining to the promotion of multi- and plurilingualism in higher education have been debated and advocated. These include language policies and language strategies; teaching in additional languages; enhancing mobility; the promotion of language portfolios; the harmonisation of language assessment and recognition of achievements through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; and the institutionalisation of language centres that offer general, general academic, and special purpose academic language courses (compare Little, 2011; Schärer 2011; Dalziel 2011).

In this paper, we present findings on students' self-reported views on, and their experiences related to, language use at university as well as aspects of their actual language learning behaviours. Data confirms that students are making considerable investments to ensure that their plurilingual portfolios extend beyond English. Our overall impression is that, notwithstanding often laudable attempts by higher education institutions to guide and/or respond to their needs, students and institutions alike continue to face partly interlocking dilemmas pertaining to pluri- and multilingualism. Students continue to struggle with the tensions between what they can actually do, what they report they would like to do, and what they perceive is expected of them concerning language competencies during their studies and after. After briefly sketching the research questions, population and methods, we present findings and discussions on the following: the relations between individual plurilingualism and institutional mono-/bilingualism; the shift from a historical monolingual equilibrium to a new bilingualism; and the divergences between pluri- and multilingualism at university on the one hand, and in the field of work on the other. We then outline the role of a language centre as one of the institutional measures to address some of the gaps in institutional provision and give an indication of students' responses – in the form of course uptake – to perceived requirements and demands. In particular we introduce some of the guiding principles of the course *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld/Communication training in multilingual settings*, an intervention which was informed by the findings of our study. We propose that this course – which trains plurilingual communication in multilingual constellations and settings involving the use of French, Italian, English and German – might be adapted to local requirements elsewhere in order to train translingualism as a key

communicative competence. In the conclusion we identify questions for future research and public deliberation.

## 2 Research questions, population and methods

Our study follows other investigations in higher education in seeking to understand developments and debates from the bottom-up perspective of students, whose language practices are shaped by the internationalisation of higher education and the various measures aimed at the promotion of multi- and plurilingualism.[2] We consider it crucial to supplement the perspectives of policy makers, university management, and instructors with answers to the questions: *What, from students' perspectives, are their experiences and perceptions of pluri- and multilingualism in the context of the internationalisation of higher education? And how are they dealing with these experiences and perceptions?* Since, as argued above, these processes can only be understood by weaving local exigencies into a larger tableau, our study is firmly anchored in a specific linguistic, educational, and historical context. Accordingly, we sought to gather data on the question: In the context of the internationalisation of higher education, what are the experiences and perceptions of pluri- and multilingualism held by students registered at our institution, namely the Language Centre of the University of Basel, a historically German-language university with a growing international orientation in multilingual Switzerland? And how are these students dealing with pluri- and multilingualism in this context?

To attempt some answers to these questions we draw on a range of quantitative and qualitative, synchronic and diachronic data. We report on selected findings from a seven-page, 33-item quantitative pencil and paper survey (n = 740) completed by Language Centre course participants in the third quarter of 2011. This quantitative survey offers details on the language portfolios, language biographies and the experiences of and attitudes to pluri- and multilingualism of students as a group. Secondly, we draw on statistics from a ten-year-long longitudinal database stretching back to 2003. This data offers details on the diachronic development of courses (e.g. language, level, type i.e. general, general academic, and special academic) and allows inferences about the behaviours of students as a group aiming to enhance their language portfolios. Thirdly, qualitative inter-

**2** For such student-centred studies on higher education and language in higher education, see for example, European Student Information Bureau 2005; National Unions of Students in Europe 2007; Jones 2010; Santa 2011; and the Student Voices section in the LETPP *Unlocking the Gates of Languages* conference held at the London School of Economics in 2010.

views conducted between 2010 and 2012 with 29 students allowed us to explore in greater detail individual experiences, attitudes and behaviours. These interviews focussed on how students are coping with present and envisaged challenges, as well as their views on languages at university and in their prospective careers. With this mixed methods approach to answering the above questions, we add another piece to the emerging image of the powerful trends that contribute to the shaping of the EHEA and the linguistic and social landscapes of Europe in general.

## 3 Linguistic compartmentalisation and reductionism: Plurilingual students in a mono-/bilingual institution

Respondents' reactions signalled a basic divide between their own plurilingualism on the one hand, and the reduction of linguistic diversity in the mono-/bilingualism of the institution on the other. As can be seen in ongoing contestations in international organisations as diverse as the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations, divides like these are a common feature when institutions and collectives respond to the challenges of communication in situations involving interlocutors who use different languages by imposing a select number of working languages. Impossible or difficult to bridge in practice, such divergences nevertheless raise the question: what gets lost – along with the exclusion of some languages – for the mono-/bilingual institution and its activities as well as the plurilingual individuals involved?[3] Concretely, we identified two effects: the first is linguistic and epistemic reduction and compartmentalisation of knowledge; the second is modifications in students' language competencies.

Reduction and compartmentalisation are evident in the restriction of knowledge along language lines. For example, our sample reports knowledge of 42 languages. This includes first, as well as additional languages such as Catalan, Chinese, Czech, English, Estonian, German, French, Hebrew, Igbo, Italian, Korean, Kurdish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish, and Ukrainian. We speculate that in many medium-sized university communities, which in our case in 2011 comprised 12,037 students, this will extend to an even broader range. Accordingly, we sought to establish what role these other languages played in

**3** On the epistemic losses entailed by the reduction of linguistic diversity, and the gains of pluri- and multilingualism in knowledge production, see Berthoud (2008).

students' academic life. To what extent were they perceived as additional resources that students could draw on to source academically relevant information? A significant number, namely 45.7% of respondents, reported that they would like to use their knowledge of other languages in addition to German and English, even though they hardly perceive any opportunity for this. In other words, students registered a divide between what the institution expects or can manage linguistically on the one hand, and what they themselves can or would like to do, on the other. This conclusion corresponds to similar findings elsewhere, namely that one language in the lecture hall tends to preclude others (Wright 2001: 48).

In the interviews, students did not only reiterate scant use of their additional languages (besides English) to source experience or academic content. Contrary to their professed desire recorded in the quantitative survey, the students who were interviewed also widely reported that they actually actively avoided the use of additional languages. Furthermore, such avoidance also occurred when opportunities did arise for them to draw on sources in other languages. Importantly, this behaviour seems to have been strengthened by a reported absence of encouragement from lecturers to explore such options. As the remarks of one interviewee indicate, academic knowledge in additional languages such as French and Italian often seems to be perceived as irrelevant. These languages are at most considered valuable to the extent that they assist in decoding discrete lexical items, probably of related linguistic origin:

> Italienisch und Französisch brauche ich im Studium eigentlich nie. Studienrelevantes Wissen auf Französisch oder Italienisch gibt es eher selten. [. . .] Für das Her- und Ableiten von unbekannten Wörtern sind mir Italienisch und Französisch manchmal hilfreich. [I never really use Italian and French in my studies. Knowledge that is relevant to my studies rather seldom exists in French or Italian. [. . .] To infer and deduce unknown words, Italian and French are sometimes helpful.]
>
> Masters student, Geography and Environmental Sciences

These findings give some indication of the ways in which higher education is shaped by contradictory attitudes and behaviours regarding the use of multiple languages.

Turning to modifications in students' language competence, both improvements and decline were reported. The impact of the virtually exclusive use of German, and more recently to a growing extent English too, is unsurprising. Thus a very high proportion (82.3%) of those who have German as an additional language reported that since university entrance, their skills in German had improved slightly or considerably. Reflecting the mounting significance of English, 68.4% reported that their competence in this language had likewise improved

slightly or considerably. These welcome improvements are, however, counterbalanced by a decline in competence in other Swiss languages. Students who had attended Swiss secondary schools and had therefore received initiation in French and sometimes Italian, reported a deterioration in knowledge of these additional domestic Swiss languages that they had brought along to university. Thus the biggest group, namely 44.6%, reported that their French had deteriorated slightly or considerably, with 32.2% reporting slight or considerable deterioration in their Italian. As the former interviewee continued regarding French and Italian:

> Vor allem mein Aktivwortschatz wurde kleiner, aber auch der Passivwortschatz. Die Verwendung der Zeiten ist mir nicht mehr geläufig. Ich mache viele Fehler beim Sprechen. Zum Schreiben brauche ich ein Lexikon. Englisch ist in meinem Fachbereich eindeutig die wichtigste Sprache. [Especially my active vocabulary became smaller, but also the passive vocabulary. The use of the tenses is no longer familiar to me. I make many errors when speaking. For writing I need a dictionary. In my discipline, English is clearly the most important language].
>
> Masters student, Geographic and Environmental Sciences

Effects like these are clearly a case for concern for these individuals, but also from the perspective of communication, integration and cohesion in the domestic polity, the EHEA, and Europe more generally.

## 4 Internationalisation as anglicisation: Shifts from historical monolingualism to a bilingual disequilibrium

Like many other institutions in the emergent EHEA, the University of Basel seeks to balance access, especially of international students, and the pursuit of excellence. Language often constitutes one of the still little understood regulators in this precarious equation. The internationalisation of higher education and the anglicisation of the worlds of learning and work that have brought into flux earlier language equilibria in many institutions in the EHEA are increasingly evident in multilingual Switzerland, too (Studer, Pelli-Ehrensperger, Kelly 2009). Established assumptions regarding the language of learning – e.g. that the University of Basel is a monolingual German-language institution – are rapidly being eroded, thereby pressing everyone affected to face the question: What kind of bi-/multilingualism should replace historically monolingual assumptions? Underlying this is the question: is, what some perceive as the 'problem of linguistic diversity', best addressed with a lingua franca, more specifically a lingua franca that is

not one of the historical languages of a specific multilingual society, as De Swaan (2001) and House (2001; 2003) propose? Or alternatively, as Grin (2011) advocates: are the challenges of linguistic diversity best addressed with multiple overlapping local multilingualisms, i.e. the promotion of a selection of privileged languages that historically enjoy recognition by the domestic and neighbouring polities? In the Swiss case, this might include German, French, and Italian, alongside English-as-a-basic-skill.

Given the multilayeredness and complexities of the issues at stake, the ambiguity of institutional responses is not surprising. The modulation of language requirements so as to regulate student intake in a competitive global market seems to have produced two opposing developments: greater latitude regarding the local language, namely German; higher requirements and tighter controls regarding the foreign lingua franca, namely English. These changes in policy signal a language shift that may enhance internationalisation by reducing the hurdle constituted by the local language and stepping up the requirements in what is increasingly perceived to be the international language of higher learning. Yet, while there are many valid grounds why educational institutions and prospective students alike may favour lower entry requirements as well as self-regulation over institutional regulation and control, this trend does tend to further muddy the waters regarding the unavoidable question: What is an appropriate level with which to achieve academic success? Such lack of clarity may provide rife ground for artifice and (self-)delusion. Compromises resulting in relatively low stipulated requirements in order to facilitate easy entry may diverge from what staff actually expect. And both stipulated requirements and staff expectations may not match what is in reality required to understand and produce complex academic texts. As one interviewee noted:

> Ich wusste, dass ich [Englisch] brauche, aber ich wusste nicht, dass ich es so stark brauche. [. . .] Es war nicht einfach. [. . .] Wie wichtig das Englische ist, das ist am Anfang an mir vorbeigegangen. Englisch ist mehr oder weniger ein Muss. [I knew that I need English, but I didn't know that I needed it so much. [. . .] It wasn't easy. [. . .] How important English is, that passed me by at the start. English is more or less a must.]
>
> Masters student, Biology

Against the background of growing anglicisation, some respondents expressed concern about the level of English as an academic lingua franca they encounter or are able to produce themselves. Specifically, they were worried about the impact of relatively low language levels on the knowledge generated and communicated. Their responses documented their sensitivity to the interconnections expressed in the Wittgensteinian dictum: 'Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said can be said clearly' (*Tractatus*

4.116). They were keenly aware that studying successfully requires a high level of competence in academic discourse and that there are interconnections between linguistic proficiency and the quality of academic expertise. One respondent emphasised one side of this problem, namely how others judge her in terms of her competence to clearly articulate her knowledge:

> In der Industrie wird mein wissenschaftliches Niveau nach meiner Fähigkeit beurteilt, es sprachlich darzustellen. [In industry my scientific level is judged according to my ability to represent it linguistically].
>
> PhD student, Pharmacy

Another respondent highlighted the other side of the coin, namely how students themselves judge this interconnection in lecturers and publications:

> I find a text interesting when I [. . .] have the feeling that someone can think in an extremely structured way and the structured thought expresses itself in a structured text. And when it is a little [. . .] blurred, I do think that I relatively quickly conclude from this that the idea, too, is not clearly and precisely grasped.
>
> Law graduate currently taking an interdisciplinary Masters in European Studies

While many students reported that they welcome the use of English alongside German, findings discussed in this section also emphasise the fact that the shift towards the new bilingualism has not yet matured into a new linguistic equilibrium.

## 5 The divergence between pluri- and multilingualism at university and in the field of work

Respondents also pointed to the disjunction between what is expected at university and what they perceive to be expectations in the world of work. To begin with, interviewees underlined the considerable significance of pluri- and multilingualism in the world of work, and this across a range of disciplines. This is commonly acknowledged in business:

> . . . ich denke auch, dass jetzt Mehrsprachigkeit im Beruf immer ein sehr grosser Pluspunkt ist. Also eben, wegen der Globalisierung. Alles ist so vernetzt. [. . .] Zum Teil macht das auch einen Riesenunterschied, ob jetzt der Franzose, der sich vielleicht nicht so mit Englisch anfreunden kann – wenn man diesem auf Französisch entgegnen kann, dann gibt das

> schon eine völlig andere Beziehung. [. . . I also think that now multilingualism is always a very big plus at work. Well, because of globalisation. Everything is so interconnected. [. . .] Partly it also makes an enormous difference if the Frenchman who maybe can't befriend the English language so much – if one can answer him in French, then a totally different relationship can come about.]
>
> Bachelors student, Business and Economics

Yet, as another respondent noted, plurilingualism is a cross-cutting skill which extends well beyond the regularly cited domain of business and indicates its relevance to the broad spectrum of human interaction to which co-ordination and consensus are indispensable:

> In the business world, like in nursing, one must be able to express oneself, exchange ideas, somehow reach a consensus – that in different languages.
>
> Masters student, Nursing Sciences

Another interviewee underlined the necessity as well as the interest that multilingualism holds for both studies and work:

> Für die Arbeit auf Forschungsebene sind sie [Französisch, Deutsch, Englisch und Italienisch] insofern nützlich, dass man nur schwierig ein Thema behandeln kann, ohne die Literatur auf allen diesen Sprachen zu beherrschen. Meistens geht es um Literatur lesen. Dazu sind sie auch für internationale Kolloquien wichtig. [. . .] Eine Arbeit mit nur einer Sprache wäre sogar langweilig. [For work on a research level they [French, German, English and Italian] are useful inasmuch as one can only deal with a topic with great difficulty without mastering the literature in all these languages. Mostly it's about reading the literature. In addition, they're also important for international colloquia. [. . .] A job with only one language would even be boring.]
>
> Masters student, Archaeology

While they stressed the significance of plurilingualism in the work environment, respondents at the same time also report a relative neglect at university of languages that are important for careers and employers, such as French and Spanish. For university, above 90% reported that German and English were particularly or very important, while only 36.6%, 13.5%, and 17% reported the same for French, Spanish and Italian, respectively (See Table 1). Yet, when asked about the importance of these languages at work, French, Spanish and Italian gained immensely. German and English were still considered the most important, each registering a slight increase, while the figure for French at work nearly doubled to 69.6%, that for Spanish more than tripled to 48.8%, and at 46.4% that for Italian at work was nearly three times as high as it was for university (See Table 2). In other words, there is a distinct perception that the languages of education and the languages of employment diverge.

**Table 1:** How important do you consider this language for your studies?

| | German | English | French | Spanish | Italian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very important | 84.4 | 69.9 | 12.9 | 7.1 | 8.7 |
| Mostly important | 8.8 | 23.5 | 23.7 | 6.4 | 8.3 |
| Mostly unimportant | 3.9 | 5.0 | 34.7 | 32.6 | 37.4 |
| Unimportant | 2.9 | 1.7 | 28.8 | 53.9 | 45.7 |

**Table 2:** How important do you consider this language for your (future) field of work?

| | German | English | French | Spanish | Italian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very important | 84.8 | 81.0 | 28.8 | 15.8 | 16.2 |
| Mostly important | 9.9 | 16.2 | 40.8 | 33.0 | 30.2 |
| Mostly unimportant | 3.7 | 2.2 | 22.9 | 31.5 | 37.9 |
| Unimportant | 1.7 | 0.6 | 7.6 | 19.8 | 15.7 |

## 6 Student uptake of the offer by the Language Centre as an institutional measure

While some of the data may suggest that students feel that the University is not responding adequately to their expressed desire to use their additional languages in their studies and that it is preparing them inadequately for envisaged language requirements in their future professional environment, this is only part of the picture. In a sense, both the University and students are taking important and concrete steps to enhance the pluri- and multilingual competencies of the individuals and the institution. By introducing a Language Centre in 2003, the University provided an institutional framework allowing students to develop these competencies systematically, and many students are doing so.[4] Generally speaking, two trends that reflect student attitudes and behaviours can be distinguished: a greater diversification of languages, and greater disciplinary specialisation.

One indicator of the effort that the University and students as a group are investing in the enhancement of their language portfolios, is the increased uptake

**4** Language Centre courses are published in the University Course Catalogue along with all the other courses offered at the University. In the case of subject-specific courses, some Departments encourage students to attend language courses via their websites or through personal recommendations. Faculties stipulate the number of credit points that students can acquire at the Language Centre.

of the institutional offer as evident in the longitudinal data. This is apparent in the diversification of individual language portfolios as mirrored in the diversity of languages. When it officially opened in the first semester of 2003, the Language Centre offered 17 courses in 8 languages. By the first semester of 2012 the number of courses had multiplied more than six times to 114, while the number of languages had more than doubled to 18. Longitudinal statistics (See Figure 1) show trends in the popularity of different languages, reflecting students' responses to experiences and perceived expectations. Steady increases can be observed for all five languages, except for a decline in English in 2010, which might have been due to the increasing popularity of the other four languages at the time. Whereas German initially lagged slightly behind Spanish, French and Italian, it overtook Italian in 2006, French in 2009 and Spanish in 2010. By 2012 the two languages that respondents had identified as most important for studies and work, namely German and English, were the best attended. Spanish, which is perceived more important for work than studies, came next, i.e. it was better attended than French and Italian, which are the second and third biggest Swiss languages respectively.

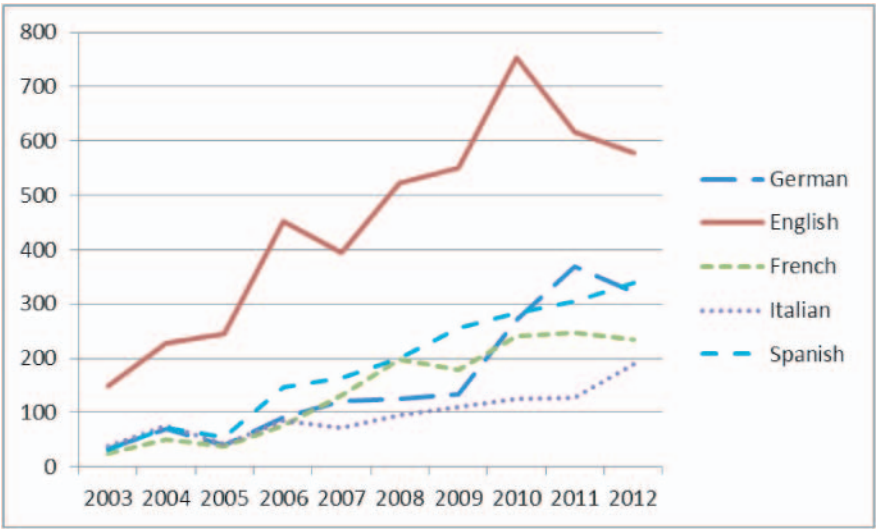


**Fig. 1:** Number of annual registrations in the five most popular languages (2003–2012)

In particular, the growing popularity of courses that train subject-specific academic and professional skills is indicative of students' awareness that they need to improve their skills to cope with the explicit as well as implicit broad linguistic demands of studying and working. While the first semester of 2003 started with 5

subject-specific language courses in English and French in Law, Medicine, and Business, attracting 39 students, by the first semester of 2012 these had grown to 13 courses with a total of 119 registrations. As a selection of the titles shows, *Deutsch für JuristInnen; Deutsch als Fremdsprache: Bewerbung und Vorstellungsgespräch; English for Pharmaceutical Scientists; Preparation for the Cambridge International Legal English Certificate; English for Scientists in Sports; Writing in the Social Sciences and Humanities for PhD Candidates and Post-Docs; Français économique; Français médical; Italiano per medicina; Español de los Negocios y Derecho*, by 2012 the range of courses had extended to include more languages alongside English and French, namely German, Italian and Spanish. In addition, disciplinary specialisation has progressed.

## 7 Intervention: *Communication training in multilingual settings*

Joint reflection with students on their experiences, attitudes and behaviours has again accentuated the tenacity of compartmentalisation amongst languages, or what may be termed serial pluri- and multilingualism. It seems that plurilingualism in individuals is still primarily viewed as a way to cope in different discrete and dispersed monolingual settings in society, each of these separate settings being perceived in isolation from other settings and involving the use of just one language at a time. Even language centres do not seem to be immune to such compartmentalisation. And contrary to its own declared intentions, the CEFR largely seems to be adopted to assess language levels in isolation of each other.

Compartmentalisation or serial pluri- and multilingualism along with the selective use of the CEFR eclipse important additional alternatives. The most striking case might be contextual or concurrent pluri- and multilingualism in which several languages may be used in face-to-face oral interaction in the same setting as described by Wodak, Krzyżanowski and Forchtner (2012). However, even extending pluri- and multilingualism to include face-to-face oral interaction is still too narrow as it fails to consider the extent to which communication involves interconnections amongst temporally and spatially dispersed interactions. Thus an even broader ecological approach (such as that advocated by Kramsch and Whiteside 2008) also takes cognisance of the fact that settings – be they monolingual or multilingual – are interwoven with each other across time and space through agents, actions, objects, and messages. This means that interlocutors may rework inputs in a range of media and languages that come from dispersed times and settings into output in a different or the same range of media and languages. The output may emerge in the same or different settings. And like

the input, the output too may be dispersed across times and space and involve different interlocutors. Taking such an ecological perspective, some organisations, including the EU, the Council of Europe and the European Language Council, have launched an assortment of interventions aimed at dissolving the perceived barriers amongst languages, such as MULTICOM and *Cadre de référence pour les approches plurielles* (CARAP).[5]

The fact that over half of the respondents to our 2011 questionnaire indicated that they wanted to improve their ability to communicate in pluri- and multilingual constellations and contexts indicated a growing awareness amongst them of the specific challenges posed by multilingual ecologies. Students' responses thereby stressed the need to extend and adapt to the broader community in tertiary education, insights from other projects, namely projects conceived for primary and secondary schools or higher education students majoring in languages. Consequently, the Language Centre developed the course *Kommunikationstraining im mehrsprachigen Umfeld*, which uses three national Swiss languages, namely Italian, French and German, as well as English, as an assumed basic skill.

The global course objective is to enhance participants' communicative competence in multilingual constellations and settings. It includes interlanguaging and bridging in face-to-face exchanges, but also extends beyond this to communicative interaction in different media across dispersed interwoven settings and temporalities. Inspired by some of its central insights, the course seeks to restore the pluri- and multilingual spirit of the CEFR, which remarks that:

> Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw (Council of Europe 2001b: 168).

In terms of course and materials design as well as didactics, the emphasis is on transversal communicative competences (compare Berthele 2010). Since they are mostly arranged in project teams, participants regularly find themselves in situations where they learn to pool individual partial competences and skills to collectively meet communicative demands and achieve pragmatic aims.

Taking a translingual approach, the course trains a selection of competences developed in the CARAP, described by the authors as a logical elaboration of the CEFR (see Candelier, Daryai-Hansen, Schröder-Sura 2012). Since prior experience

5 For MULTICOM, see www.multicom-cdp.eu and Molina (2011); for *Cadre de référence pour les approches plurielles* see carap.ecml.at and Candelier, Daryai-Hansen, Schröder-Sura (2012).

can be assumed, a course like this need not develop all the CARAP competences from scratch. Instead, it might focus on a selection of competences particularly appropriate to members of a higher education community whose primary interest is in functional language in academic and professional settings. In our case we foreground select elements from each of the three CARAP categories of descriptors: knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

The course seeks to enhance participants' *knowledge* of the reciprocal influences amongst culture, identity and communicative interactions, in particular their understanding of the ways in which cultures structure different roles in social interaction. This includes strengthening their awareness of the ways in which different languages perceive and/or organise reality as well as the ways in which culture may influence such perception/organisation. Hence it also strengthens their understanding of translating and mediating amongst languages, accentuating the fact that interlanguaging is not an exchange of labels that can simply be done word for word, but that users need to be attentive to communicative processes within the context of different perceptions and organisations of reality (See the CARAP descriptors: Knowledge 3.4; 3.4.1; 3.4.2; 6.2; 6.2.1; 6.2.2). Concerning *attitudes*, the course seeks to reduce participants' linguistic insecurity when having to negotiate more than one language simultaneously. It seeks to fortify their sense of familiarity linked to similarities and proximities between languages and cultures and to reinforce participants' feeling that they can cope with the diversity and complexities entailed in communicating with plurilingual speakers in multilingual settings (CARAP descriptors: Attitudes 14; 15). Regarding *skills*, the emphasis is on promoting participants' abilities to observe different languages and cultures simultaneously so that they can formulate hypotheses and analyse phenomena in a particular language and culture. In addition, the course seeks to enhance their skills in comparing communicative cultures, in engaging in pragmatic and semantic transfer, and in controlling the validity of transfers. It seeks to develop their interlanguaging skills by training their ability to give an account in one language of information encountered in other languages. Finally, the course is largely designed around the collaborative creation of projects (such as developing and publicising a food policy for hospitals, or drafting an abstract, designing an academic poster and delivering a talk at an international event) to allow participants to train the pooling of skills, such as drawing on the expertise of partners with greater proficiency in certain languages and acting as mediators between languages (CARAP descriptors Skills 1.1.4; 3.9; 5.3.2; 5.3.4; 5.5; 6.4; 7.6.1.2).

Since participants hail from various faculties, the course has a transdisciplinary focus. It addresses cross-cutting themes – such as happiness research, nutrition and health campaigns, humanitarian intervention, vision and technology, and globalised public spheres – that allow participants to draw on

their backgrounds in diverse academic disciplines. Dossiers for each theme contain materials in diverse media that stem from academic and popular sources and alternate French, Italian, English and German inputs. Participants work in regularly rearranged project teams comprising members with different levels of competence in different languages. The course seeks to foster a high degree of learner autonomy: in addition to self-study, participants need to communicate with and meet each other in their project peer groups between in-class sessions as most of the preparation and written output take place outside the classroom, followed by in-class presentation of results. Participants are assigned tasks such as compiling a questionnaire aimed at awareness raising, drafting a policy and promoting the policy via a leaflet, composing a radio appeal, submitting conference abstracts, designing academic posters, and orally presenting projects at international events.

Students' enthusiasm for the experience is expressed in phrases they employed in the course evaluation, such as: 'entusiasmo contagioso', 'Sprachfähigkeiten gleichzeitig pflegen', 'parler avec confiance'. Reflecting on the experience one interviewee explained:

> Es ist einfach irgendwie das Reden und das Switchen und Sich-Finden und Kommunizieren und „welche Sprache jetzt" und vor allem nicht immer den einfachsten Weg nehmen, sondern auch mal denken, okay, ja jetzt versuche ich es mal auf Französisch, meinen Appeal zu schreiben. [. . .] Es ist sehr viel von den Studenten gekommen, man hat richtig gemerkt, die Leute wollen das [. . .] Also ich hatte mir wirklich vorgestellt, dass man ein Dossier bekommt, dann setzt man sich hin und dann löst man das, und dann ist das Englische abgeschlossen, und dann kommt das französische Dossier und so. Aber das Ganze war viel natürlicher und mit Wechsel und irgendwie Zusammenhänge finden und . . . aber trotzdem nicht wie ineinander reinrutschen. [. . .] Offenheit ist schon extrem wichtig und halt auch, es wirklich zu wollen, also auch zu denken, eben: es ist jetzt egal, was die anderen denken und ich spreche jetzt einfach mal und versuche mich auszudrücken. Das ist wohl extrem wichtig – ein gewisses Selbstvertrauen zu haben. Und ja, vielleicht die Fähigkeit, ebenso ein wenig durch die Sprachen durchzusehen und nicht immer nur die Fassade der Wörter sehen, sondern auch sich eben wirklich ein wenig auseinandersetzen zu wollen . . . sich wohlfühlen darin. [It's somehow the talking and the switching and finding oneself and communicating and 'What language next' and, above all, not always taking the easy way but also keeping in mind, okay, now I'll try it in French, to write my appeal. [. . .] Students contributed a lot, one could feel that people really want this [. . . .] Well, I had really imagined that one would get a dossier and then sit down and complete that and then the English is done, and then comes the French dossier. But the whole thing was much more natural and with switches and somehow finding connections . . . but still not like sliding into each other. [. . .] Openness is extremely important and also really wanting it, in other words also thinking, well, it doesn't matter now what the others think and I'll simply just talk and try to express myself. That's extremely important – having a certain confidence. And yes, maybe having the ability to see a little through the languages and not only seeing the façade of the words, but also really a little wanting to get engaged . . . and feeling at ease in it.]
>
> Bachelors student, Business and Economics

As this response indicates, the interviewee was able to reflect on the knowledge, attitudes, and skills the course sought to enhance. The course gave her the opportunity to increase her knowledge of the diversity of semiotic systems and how they organise the world differently; to develop the required attitudes, such as confidence; and to train some of the skills required to transition smoothly from one language to another.

## 8 Further questions for research and deliberation

In this paper we offered initial insights drawn from a mixed methods study on how students experience, perceive and respond to pluri- and multilingualism in the context of the internationalisation of higher education. Anchored in a medium-sized, historically German-speaking university in multilingual Switzerland, our data contributes to one part of the emergent picture of the relationships between language and the specific shape that higher education is taking in the EHEA. We sketched the interrelations between the students' own plurilingualism and the emergent bilingualism of the institution. Changes in this structural relationship were treated in relation to the shift from a historically monolingual German-language institution to a new bilingualism, as English increasingly gains ground as a medium of instruction. We also described the divergence students reported between the decline in their French and Italian competence and their anticipation of the significance of these national languages as well as Spanish for their lives after tertiary education. We examined one institutional reaction to the broadly acknowledged need for the promotion of pluri- and multilingualism in higher education, namely a university language centre and interpreted student uptake of the courses on offer as an indication of their response to the challenges of multi- and plurilingualism. Drawing on the longitudinal data, we were able to document a greater diversification in the languages students are learning and greater disciplinary specialisation in languages for academic and professional purposes. We concluded with an outline of some of the ideas informing a course that aims to counter the compartmentalisation of languages and seeks to enhance the translingual communicative competence of students from various faculties.

The selected findings and an intervention sketched here contribute to the opening of avenues for further investigation, practice and deliberation. To begin with, further research may explore the factors that contribute to the hierarchisation of languages and knowledge produced in them; the correlating processes that produce disinterest in, disregard for, and disdain of knowledge in certain languages; the ensuing epistemic reductionism; and the actual, albeit limited, use of knowledge that students can access in languages other than those favoured

in the institution. Secondly, it may examine the diverse understandings of pluri- and multilingualism. This might include investigation of the tenacity of the compartmentalisation of different languages and the ways in which this can be attenuated in practice. It might also include an improved understanding of the extent to which the coupling of anglicisation and internationalisation is producing a specific, possibly new hegemonic bilingualism. Thirdly, it would be interesting to improve our understanding of the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of those students who do not seem to be seeking to improve their language profiles. Fourthly, in order to understand the bigger picture, we need to examine the interrelations between the one measure for the promotion of pluri- and multilingualism of which an example was presented here, namely language centres, with other measures mentioned in the introduction, such as language policies and strategies; teaching in additional languages; mobility; language portfolios; and the CEFR. Fifthly, in addition to findings anchored in other localities with their own peculiarities, reflection that builds on the various empirical accounts would also be necessary. Such reflection would also have to extend to some integration of the interconnections amongst these local and transnational trends. And it would have to include explanations for the trends and behaviours sketched here, as well as in-depth explorations of their implications. Finally, on the basis of ongoing research, we will have to engage in inescapable public deliberation on two questions in relation to each other: What kinds of higher education and what kinds of multi- and plurilingualism do we want?

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Robin Samuel from the Department of Sociology at the University of Basel for the validation of the questionnaire; Martina Eichler for conducting some of the interviews and editing the paper; Valérie Blondel, Valerio Fantin, and Daniele Lazzeri for co-developing, conducting, and reflecting on the course *Communication training in multilingual settings*; two reviewers, whose valuable comments assisted us in refining the article; and all respondents who completed the questionnaire and participated in the interviews.

# References

Beacco, Jean-Claude, Michael Byram, Marisa Cavalli, Daniel Coste, Mirjam Egli Cuenat, Francis Goullier & Johanna Panthier. 2010. Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education. Document prepared for the Policy

Forum 'The right of learners to quality and equity in education – The role of linguistic and intercultural competences'. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/ListDocs_Geneva2010.asp (accessed 15 November 2012).

Bergan, Sjur. 2011. *Not by bread alone*. Council of Europe higher education series No. 17. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Berthele, Raphael. 2010. Mehrsprachigkeitskompetenz als dynamisches Repertoire – Vorüberlegungen zu einer integrierten Sprachendidaktik. In F. Bitter Bättig and A. Tanner (eds.), *Mehrsprachigkeitskompetenz als dynamisches Repertoire – Vorüberlegungen zu einer integrierten Sprachendidaktik. Sprachen lernen – durch Sprache lernen,* 225–239. Zürich: Seismo.

Berthoud, Anne-Claude. 2008. Mehrsprachigkeit als Kaleidoskop des Wissens. In: G. Lüdi., K. Seelmann, B. Sitter-Liver (eds.) *Sprachenvielfalt und Kulturfrieden: Sprachminderheit – Einsprachigkeit – Mehrsprachigkeit: Probleme und Chancen sprachlicher Vielfalt,* 189–199. Fribourg: Academic Press.

Cabau-Lampa, Beatrice. 2007. Mother tongue plus two European languages in Sweden: unrealistic educational goal? *Language Policy* 2007(6). 333–358.

Candelier, Michel, Petra Daryai-Hansen & Anna Schröder-Sura. 2012. The framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures – a complement to the CEFR to develop plurilingual and intercultural competences, *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 6(3). 243–257.

Council of Europe. 2001a. *Language policies in higher education*: *Invitation to a debate*. A result of a round table debate of the Council of Europe's Higher Education and Research Committee. http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/lang-policy-higheredu-oth-enl-t02.pdf (accessed 15 November 2012).

Council of Europe. 2001b. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cybulska, Katarzyna. 2010. Developing individual multilingualism in higher education: prospects and dilemmas. *Verbum* 2. 73–83.

Dalziel, Fiona. 2011. A flexible approach to the use of the European Language Portfolio in higher education contexts. *Language Learning in Higher Education* 1(1). 179–194.

De Swaan, Abram. 2001. English in the social sciences. In Ulrich Ammon (ed.) *The dominance of English as a language of science: Effects on other Languages and language communities*, 71–84. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.

Doiz, Aintzane, David Lasagbaster & Juan Manuel Sierra. 2011. Internationalisation, multilingualism and English-medium instruction. *World Englishes*, 30(3). 345–359.

Du Plessis, Theo. 2006. From monolingual to bilingual higher education: the repositioning of historically Afrikaans-medium universities in South Africa. *Language Policy* 5(1). 87–113.

Erling, Elizabeth & Suzanne K. Hilgendorf. 2006. Language policies in the context of German higher education. *Language Policy* 5(3). 267–293.

European Student Information Bureau. 2005. *The black book of the Bologna process*. Available at www.aic.lv/bolona/Bologna/contrib/ESIB/0505_ESIB_blackbook.pdf (accessed 15 November 2012).

European Student Information Bureau. 2007. *Bologna with student eyes*. Bologna Process Committee 2005–2007 (Anne Mikkola, Bruno Carapinha, Colin Tück, Daithí, Mac Síthigh, Nina Gustafsson Åberg, Sanja Brus, eds.). Available at http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Bolognastudenteyes2007.pdf (accessed 15 November 2012).

Grin, François. 2011. Interview, in European Commission (ed.) *Lingua Franca: Chimera or Reality?* 1. 59–70.

Gu, Mingyue. 2011. Language choice and identity construction in peer interactions: insights from a multilingual university in Hong Kong. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 32(1). 17– 31.

House, Juliane. 2001. A stateless language that Europe must embrace. *Guardian Weekly* Thursday 19 April http://www.guardian.co.uk (accessed 13 March 2013).

House, Juliane. 2003. English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism? *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(4). 556–578.

Jones, Elspeth. 2010. *Internationalisation and the Student Voice: Higher Education Perspectives*. Abingdon and New York: Taylor & Francis.

Kerklaan, Vincent, Gillian Moreira & Kees Boersma. 2008. The role of language in the internationalisation of higher education: an example from Portugal. *European Journal of Education* 43(2). 241–255

Kramsch, Claire & Anne Whiteside. 2008. Language ecology in multilingual settings. Towards a theory of symbolic competence *Applied Linguistics* 29(4). 645–671.

LETPP. 2010. Student Voice. Essays invited as part of the LETPP Conference: Unlocking the Gates of Languages, London 15–16 April. Available at http://www.letpp.eu/conference/student-voice (accessed 15 November 2012).

Little, David. 2011. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, the European Language Portfolio, and language learning in higher education. *Language Learning in Higher Education* 1(1). 1–21.

Molesworth, Mike, Richard Scullion & Elizabeth Nixon (eds.). 2011. *The marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Molina, Clara. 2011. Curricular insights into translingualism as a communicative competence. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 2(6). 1244–1251.

Phillipson, Robert. 2009. English in higher education, panacea or pandemic? In Peter Harder (ed.), *English in Denmark: Language policy, internationalization and university teaching*. 29–57. v. 9 of Peter Harder (ed.) *Angles of the English-speaking world.* Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press and the University of Copenhagen.

Santa, Robert. 2011. Student centred learning and Bologna process. *Journal of the European Higher Education Area* 01. Available at http://www.ehea-journal.eu (accessed 10 November 2012).

Schaller-Schwaner, Iris. 2012. The eye of the beholder: Is English as a Lingua Franca in academic settings a monolingual or multilingual practice? *Language Learning in Higher Education* 1(2). 423–446.

Schärer, Rolf. 2011. Revisiting the principles and functions of the European Language Portfolio with a focus on tertiary education. *Language Learning in Higher Education* 1(1). 143–161.

Studer Patrick, Annabarbara Pelli-Ehrensperger & Paul Kelly. 2009. Mehrsprachigkeit an universitären Bildungsinstitutionen: Arbeitssprache Englisch im Hochschulfachunterricht. Institut für Sprache in Beruf und Bildung Working Papers, Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften. (ed.). Available at http://www.zhaw.ch/fileadmin/php_includes/popup/hop-detail.php?hop_id=1222889142 (accessed 13 March 2013).

Sursock, Andrée & Hanne Smidt. 2010. *Trends 2010: A decade of change in European Higher Education*. Brussels: European University Association. Available at http://www.eua.be/publications/ (accessed 15 November 2012).

Universität Basel. 2008. Reglement betreffend den Nachweis von Englischkenntnissen auf Niveau B2 oder C1 des Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens. Available at

http://www.unibas.ch/doc/doc_download.cfm?uuid=2B566BE63005C8DEA3CDBFA23569613F&vobj_id=4591 (accessed 15 November 2012).
Universität Basel. 2011. Studierenden-Ordnung. Available at http://www.unibas.ch/doc/doc_download.cfm?uuid=256D1B86DC4F79DD98EEE2621BA62CFC&&IRACER_AUTOLINK&& (accessed 15 November 2012).
Verhoef, Marlene & Theo Venter. 2008. Functional multilingualism at the North-West University as part of the institution's transformation agenda. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 26(3). 379–392.
Wodak, Ruth, Michał Krzyżanowski & Bernhard Forchtner. 2012. The interplay of language ideologies and contextual cues in multilingual interactions: Language choice and code-switching in European Union institutions. *Language in Society* 41(2). 157–186.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1922. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.
Wright, Sue. 2001. Language and power: background to the debate on linguistic rights. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 3(1). 44–54.

## Bionotes

*Petra Gekeler* is the Director of the Language Centre of the University of Basel. She seeks to develop course programme concepts for plurilingual teaching and learning in higher education that are informed by students' perspectives and by assessments of developments in students' actual language learning behaviours over time.

*Sebastian Manger* is responsible for all aspects of information technology and statistics at the Language Centre of the University of Basel.

*Stephan Meyer* co-ordinates the English programme at the Language Centre of the University of Basel. His present interest concerns the interrelations between personal plurilingualism and social multilingualism.

*Daniela Urank* is a co-researcher and lecturer in the multilingual project team at the Language Centre of the University of Basel and lecturer of English at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences. Her current research interests include teaching methodology for multilingual academic settings and pluralistic approaches to languages.