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Die Einstellungen und die Politik der nationalen Sprachinstitute in
Europa zu Englisch als europäische Lingua franca
European National Language Institutions' Attitudes and Policies towards
English as the European Lingua Franca
Positions et stratégies des institutions linguistiques nationales en
Europe face à la question de l'anglais comme lingua franca européenne

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Alessandra Molino/Sandra Campagna

English-Mediated Instruction in Italian Universities: Conflicting Views¹

1 Introduction²

Quale storta politica è mai questa, di stimare più quel degli altri che il suo?
[Why should a language other than ours be overestimated? A twisted policy indeed!]
(our translation)]

The provocative epigraph is taken from the book: “Che ogni italiano debba scrivere in lingua purgata italiana” [“About the need to use purified Italian in writing”, our translation] written by Antonio Vallisneri, an eighteenth century Italian medical scientist and well-known scholar whose innovative ideas on Galilean experimental science strongly impacted on the future of scientific knowledge. By bravely choosing Italian instead of Latin as the language of scientific writing not only did Vallisneri pave the way to the popularisation of science but also favoured the development of Italian as a language for knowledge dissemination. In the foreword to a newly-published edition of this book, edited by Dario Generali (2013), the editor claims that the past intellectual history of subalternity to Latin challenged by forerunners like Vallisneri, echoes the progressive intellectual history of subalternity to English in our times by Italian scholars who today are ready to adopt English even in University courses. According to Dario Generali this linguistic policy would only favour: “the creation of an Anglophone élite to the detriment of the Italian language and culture, which are the cornerstones of our richest and enviable tradition and intellectual identity” (Generali 2013: 6, our translation)³. Despite the commonalities between the hegemonic role played by Latin in the past and the one played by English today, the two situations are only apparently similar. First, Latin was nobody’s mother tongue and did not embody any specific national culture; as a

¹ This paper is a product of the research project: “English in Italy: Linguistic, Educational And Professional Challenges” co-financed by the Compagnia di S. Paolo, Progetti di Ateneo 2012, University of Turin, and coordinated by V.Pulcini. Both authors have equally contributed to the overall drafting. S. Campagna is responsible for Sections 1 and 2, and A. Molino for Sections 3 and 4. Section 5 is co-authored.

² The authors would like to thank Gabriele Iannàccaro for reading previous drafts of this article, providing thoughtful comments and suggestions, and for constantly supporting the research and writing processes.

³ The original reference is reported here: “Una simile scelta porterebbe alla creazione di un’élite anglofona e alla distruzione della cultura e della lingua italiana, che rappresentano la nostra ricchissima e invidiabile tradizione e la nostra identità intellettuale”.

consequence, there was no overlap between native language and lingua franca, which means that any scholar had the burden of learning an additional language for knowledge construction and dissemination. Second, whilst in the early eighteenth century the transition from Latin to Italian represented a progressive differentiation conducive to a multilingual academic tradition in Europe, today the adoption of English in academic contexts is leading to a progressive flattening on Anglo-American discourses of knowledge. Therefore, if using Italian in Vallisneri's time was a sign of resurgence of linguistic independence, embracing English now, on the contrary, may be seen as a form of reverential submission to an imposed external lingua franca.

In Italy, this condition of dominance is particularly controversial when English is used as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education, especially when its adoption implies a rejection of the national language. A recent event which clearly epitomises this controversy is the paradigmatic case of the *Politecnico di Milano*. In February 2012 the Rector of the *Politecnico di Milano* announced that all post-graduate and doctoral courses would be taught entirely in English as of the academic year 2014-15, thus abandoning Italian as a medium of instruction in second degree courses. This drastic switch to an 'English-only' policy caused sharp reactions inside the academic community and beyond. Many staff members of the *Politecnico di Milano* signed a petition firmly opposing the Rector's decision and subsequently appealed to the Regional Administrative Court (TAR) of Lombardy in order to cancel the Academic Senate resolutions in favour of the English-only formula. The *Accademia della Crusca*, the prestigious Italian institution ever arguing in defence of the Italian language and culture, also took part in the heated debate by posing the following thought-provoking question: "Is it useful and appropriate to adopt English monolingualism in Italian university courses?" Although the outcome of the *Politecnico di Milano* case (the appeal was admitted in March 2013) suggests a policy, at least decided at a local level, aiming at applying a defensive stance against mandates of monolingualism, the issue of English as a medium of instruction is highly controversial even when the plan, as often is the case, does not imply abandoning the national language completely.

Why choose English in the first place? What are the goals of this specific language policy? There are several layers of complexity behind EMI choices. Following Kaplan (2001), one area of ambiguity regards constructing the rhetoric of English around *extrinsic* values (to meet the pressures of global competition, fulfil the internationalisation agenda, attract foreign students) rather than around *intrinsic* values (to access knowledge especially in disciplines, like science and technology, whose literature is mainly published in English). Both directions are problematic: if on the one hand adopting EMI for extrinsic purposes may result in impoverishing both contents and teaching due to the imposition of English, especially when linguistic practices are not supported by sound governmental policies, on the other hand, conceptualising English as a gateway to international knowledge perpetrates issues

of linguistic (and cultural) dominance (Ammon 2001) by granting undisputed advantages to native speakers to the detriment of non-native speakers and no speakers at all.

By drawing on the *Politecnico di Milano* controversy as a paradigmatic case of ‘English-only’ policy failure, in this paper we aim to provide insight into EMI language planning and policies in Italian higher education. We argue that the absence of a clearly and carefully conceived language policy that takes into account all the essential objectives of Language-in-Education planning, such as the definition and training of the teacher pool (Kaplan/Baldauf 1997), is doomed to fail, and that an imbalance between linguistic and socio-economic objectives in implementing EMI policies in favour of the latter will fall short of the expected goals.

This paper is outlined as follows: in Section 2 we discuss EMI in Italian Universities *vis-à-vis* the European context. In Section 3 we conduct a case study on the implementation of EMI programmes at the *Politecnico di Milano*, analysing official policy statements at macro- (government) and meso- (university) levels, and investigating the micro-level reaction to the English-only policy. In Section 4 we clarify the institutional position of the *Accademia della Crusca* towards EMI policies and the *Politecnico di Milano*’s English-only formula. Discussion and Conclusion will follow in Section 5.

2 The socio-historical context of EMI policies in Italian higher education

The upgrading of English as a lingua franca in Europe is a consolidated phenomenon albeit characterised by controversial positions. First of all, conflict is visible at the level of the European Union where the ongoing process of identifying English with the EU working language is running the risk of damaging especially languages like Italian and German which are exclusively based in EU – unlike other European languages, like Spanish and French, for example, whose international role is strongly established since these languages are thoroughly represented also outside Europe (Ammon 2006: 332). Secondly, the phenomenon of pervasive ‘Englishisation’ is equally permeating higher education in Europe, a sector currently significantly marked by policies/plans favouring a proliferation of English-mediated programmes offered especially at Master and doctoral levels.⁴ According to Ammon (2006), concerns in the EU context specifically regarding the key role played by English as the EU working language to the detriment of languages exclusively based in EU involve several interconnected risks. These can be summarised as follows: by

⁴ Italian tertiary education programmes include vocationally and professionally-oriented programmes, called *Master*.

reducing their international standing owing to the English dominance these languages run the risk of becoming less palatable as objects of foreign language studies, and Italian is a case in point. An additional fear regards the potential loss of the advantage of non-native English speakers in academic communication.

On a parallel note there are similarities evidenced in the higher education sector where the process of Englishising instruction, mainly motivated by the need to fulfil the *Internationalisation* agenda, is viewed by some more as a *hurdle* rather than an *opportunity* (Gnutzmann/Intemann 2008; Phillipson 2008; 2013; Wolff 1999). One striking trait which characterises the prevalence of English in European Universities is that the Mediterranean countries, broadly speaking, are particularly keen on promoting the *Internationalisation* agenda through English-mediated instruction (as evidenced in the ‘English-only’ policy enacted by the *Politecnico di Milano*). By contrast, the Nordic countries, which have a long tradition of bilingualism and bilingual education, have been exploring more cautious linguistic policies, centred around the concept of *Parallel Language Use (PLU)* largely rooted in Scandinavian reality, aiming at preserving the national language by ensuring that it is not lost to the dominance of English-mediated instruction. As the term suggests, *PLU* implies a co-existence of the local language and English in Scandinavian countries and became an official language policy in 2007 when the Nordic Council of Ministers signed the Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy (Kuteeva 2011: 6). Despite its official status, the application of *PLU* is still under scrutiny for its assumed lack of clear pedagogical aims (Airey/Linder 2008; Bolton/Kuteeva 2012), which indicates a gap between policies and practices not thoroughly resolved. Within the European scenario and quite in line with its consolidated tradition of plurilingualism, *PLU* responds to a multilingual interpretation of *Internationalisation*, a contradictory key concept in higher education developed from the Bologna Process.⁵ The intrinsic ambivalence of the term restates the emphasis on conflict. On the one hand, the Bologna Process mandate suggests that *Internationalisation* should imply the recognition of (and respect for) national linguistic and cultural diversity, albeit rooted in a seemingly homogeneous educational context. On the other hand, as observed in Teichler (2009: 94), *Internationalisation* has been acknowledged to play an increasingly fundamental role as a guiding principle for assessing quality standards in research, teaching and study programmes: an essential recipe for universities to be in line with world-wide rankings not to fall behind global competition. Hence the orientation to intensify EMI programmes across Europe reflecting the logic of identifying *Internationalisation* with English dominance rather than prevalence (as clarified in Ammon 2001). This dual function responds to the contradictory European mandate

⁵ The Bologna Process aimed at harmonising higher education in Europe through the activation of common structural reforms. It was officially ratified in Bologna through a joint declaration signed by the ministers of higher education from 29 European countries in June 1999.

to homogenise education through a common lingua franca whilst maintaining linguistic diversity in accordance to its multilingual tradition.

This ambivalence is particularly evident in Italy where a long history of political and linguistic fragmentation makes the position of this country rather unique. In his study of the language situation in Italy Tosi (2008) argues that Italian is a far less ‘normalised’ language than other Romance varieties, with a long tradition of multilingualism. He claims that multilingualism in Italy: “is rooted in the historical background of a country whose late unification maintained a situation of linguistic diversity that is unique within Europe” (Tosi 2008: 263). Indeed the historical tradition of multilingualism in Italy dates back to the Roman Empire and “spread soon after its decline, because of the different regional ways of speaking Latin, although there was a common written language” (Tosi 2008: 263). It is normally acknowledged that the constant political fragmentation of the country has contributed to the survival of a number of diatopic varieties, traditionally called *dialects* but in fact parallel Romance varieties of Italian, offspring of Latin as well as the *volgare toscano*, which are still in use, despite the official recognition of Tuscan as Italy’s national language in 1861⁶. Two preliminary considerations stem from the Italian complex socio-cultural environment: first, the use of Italian in the academic context symbolises the unifying efforts to shape and maintain a national intellectual identity despite the legacy of linguistic fragmentation which characterises the Italian situation; second, it is difficult to reconcile this complex and conflicting scenario with the acceptance of the pervasiveness of English as indicated by the limited repertoire of critical studies on EMI in Italy. This point has already been raised by Ammon (2001) on the prevalence/dominance of English as a language of science. Ammon rightly claims that: “we need more valid and, of course representative, resentment studies with respect to the prevalence of English” (Ammon 2001: vii).

3 Implementing EMI language policies in public universities in Italy: a case study

3.1 Materials and methods

This section reports the results of a case study on the implementation of English-only programmes in one of the most prestigious public universities in Italy: the *Politecnico di Milano*. The choice to focus on this institution was made for various reasons. First, its leading role within the Italian university scenario makes it possib-

⁶ On the history of Italian from a Language Planning perspective see Dell’Aquila/ Iannàccaro (2004).

le for the *Politecnico di Milano* to set new standards in higher education and have a strong influence over other universities across the country. In addition, the attempt to implement an English-only policy represents a drastic shift away from the traditional, and still dominant, monolingual paradigm of formal education in Italy. Finally, the case of the *Politecnico di Milano* is a particularly controversial example of language policy. Hence, it lends itself to be examined both in terms of the EMI framework as planned language change (Hamid/Nguyen/Baldauf 2013) and also in terms of the role played by EMI as a source of possible ideological clashes among policy makers, actors and other stakeholders, which are closely interrelated with actual language practices and which may hinder the construction of a favourable implementation space (Smit/Dafouz 2012: 6).

The goals of the analysis are: 1) to understand how the language policy was expressed in macro-level documents and how it was “translated” to the meso-level; 2) to investigate how meso-level language policies were supposed to be carried through in actual educational practices; 3) to explore why the implementation process was so strongly opposed.

The analytical procedure consisted in a manual inspection of the texts, carried out through repeated close reading aiming at identifying text segments related to language policies. Relevant passages were analysed in detail within the methodological framework outlined in Hamid/Nguyen/Baldauf (2013). These authors underline the importance of considering the following crucial factors in the analysis of EMI policies: they suggest investigating first, the overarching motivation behind language planning; second, the actors that have a role in enacting the policy; third, any specific educational, social and political goals; and finally, the implementation processes through which EMI policies are being (or are supposed to be) carried out.⁷

3.2 Macro-level policy statements: the university reform in Italy

The document taken into account for the analysis of macro-level policy statements is a law promulgated in 2010 (Legge Gelmini 240/2010) on the reorganisation of the Italian university system. The relevant passage for this analysis is the one dealing with *Internationalisation* (Article 2, § 2, letter l), which is reported below.

- 1) rafforzamento dell'internazionalizzazione anche attraverso una maggiore mobilità dei docenti e degli studenti, programmi integrati di studio, iniziative di cooperazione interuniversita-

⁷ In addition to the four criteria mentioned above, Hamid/ Nguyen/ Baldauf (2013) also identify two other aspects that deserve attention in the study of planned language change, namely the historical and ecological context, and educational, social and political outcomes. In this article, the context for EMI policies in Italy was provided in section 2. The outcomes of language planning, on the other hand, cannot be assessed because the policy has failed to be implemented.

ria per attività di studio e di ricerca e l'attivazione, nell'ambito delle risorse umane, finanziarie e strumentali disponibili a legislazione vigente, di insegnamenti, di corsi di studio e di forme di selezione svolti in lingua straniera; (Legge Gelmini 240/2010, Art. 2, § 2).

[I] strengthening of the Internationalisation process also through greater mobility of lecturers and students, integrated study programmes, university cooperation initiatives for study and research activities and the activation of degree programmes and selection procedures in a foreign language, in accordance with the human and financial resources, and the instruments available within the legislation in force.] (Our translation)

The law aims at reinforcing *Internationalisation* policies in Italian universities and mentions some of the strategies to achieve this goal, which include increased student and lecturer mobility, cooperation among universities and the introduction of degree programmes in a foreign language. Two aspects of the phrasing of the law deserve attention. First, the use of the conjunction “anche” (translated as “also”) indicates that what follows is a suggestion of possible means to foster *Internationalisation*, a goal which should not be equated with or reduced to those strategies only. This is an important point to bear in mind, because it represents a crucial passage in the argument against the exclusive use of English in the TAR of Lombardy judgement. This policy has been judged a violation of the principle of proportionality, according to which actions must be in keeping with aims. In other words, the objective of *Internationalisation* has been considered achievable even without the imposition of the English-only formula. Second, there is no explicit mention of English, as the law only refers to the adoption of “a foreign language”. This seems to suggest that in this specific passage, the Italian law complies with the original aspirations of the Bologna Process, which in its initial formulation of 19 June 1999 stressed the respect for multilingualism and the cultures of Europe, talking about a “Europe of knowledge” and the need “to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship”. Therefore, the Italian law does not imply a conflation of English and *Internationalisation*, although the more recent formulations of the Bologna Process prior to the promulgation of the Italian law (i.e. London Communiqué, 18 May 2007, and Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 28-29 April 2009) progressively hinted at English-medium instruction by stressing the need to face “the challenges of globalisation” (London Communiqué, 18 May 2007). Pursuing the goals of globalisation within the *Internationalisation* agenda would imply a progressive blurring and even disappearance of national systems of higher education to encourage “competition and market-steering, trans-national education and [...] commercial knowledge transfer” (Teichler 2009: 95).

The analysis of macro-level policy statements suggests that although globalisation is gradually permeating the original goals of *Internationalisation*, the Italian law is rather general in its formulation and allows universities to opt for EMI programmes, thus responding to the imperative of globalisation, or to pursue the *Inter-*

nationalisation agenda resorting to alternative means, including the adoption of other language policies not centred on English.

3.3 Meso-level policy statements: the case of the Politecnico di Milano

Four documents were investigated for the analysis of meso-level EMI policies: the *Politecnico di Milano* three-year Strategic Plan (2012-2014) and three Academic Senate resolutions (15th December 2011, 23rd January 2012 and 21st May 2012). The overall motivation for EMI language policies is stated explicitly in all documents, i.e. the *Internationalisation* of higher education. However, the goal of *Internationalisation* is presented as closely interconnected with the changing socio-economic environment that requires abilities to operate in an increasingly international professional context. Therefore, it can be argued that the *Politecnico di Milano* perfectly embodies the progressive adaptation of the original Bologna Process plan to the priorities of globalisation.

In the 2012-2014 Strategic Plan, two recurrent words co-occur with “internazionale” (international), namely “eccellenza” (excellence) and “qualità” (quality), indicating that the *Politecnico di Milano* views *Internationalisation* as inextricably linked with the aims of increasing research and teaching standards, and consequently the university’s prestige. The unquestionable instrument to attain these objectives is English. However, no specific suggestion is made as to how this policy will be put into practice; only some general indications are offered about the fact that that lecturers and students will be supported during the transition.

The three Academic Senate resolutions provide more details about EMI goals and the implementation process. As for goals, the ability to speak English is seen as a competence that will help future working generations to overcome the financial crisis. The English-only formula is also meant to reduce the phenomenon of brain drain of Italian students. These socio-economic goals reflect those exposed in the 2012 Bologna Process Implementation Report, indicating the willingness of the *Politecnico di Milano* to comply with the most recent policies and practices of European universities. As for linguistic goals, students are expected to reach level C1 of the European framework at the end of the first study cycle, which will require additional support, as the current level is B2. However, no further information is provided as to the type of support needed nor is it stated whether students will be helped in post-graduate English-taught courses. This seems to suggest that the sole language learning objective actually refers to undergraduate programmes and it is aimed at the preparation of students for acceptance in the second study cycle. Finally, some indications are offered as to how the implementation process will be carried out. The main measure is the creation of a coordination staff comprising a project manager and a referent in each department. Some already undertaken initiatives are also mentioned, such as a survey on the proficiency level of lecturers indicating that

more than half of the teaching staff has an elementary or an intermediate level of English. These lecturers will have the possibility of attending intensive language courses and the same will apply to the technical and administrative staff, although no specific language learning objectives are announced. This almost complete lack of concerns for clear language learning goals, neither referred to the students nor to the teaching and administrative staff, suggests that English is mainly valued for its strategic properties, its ability of generating income through transnational research and teaching activities in a context in which universities increasingly compete for foreign students and research grants (Teichler 2009).

The meso-level analysis suggests that EMI policies are a response to the two increasingly overlapping forces of *Internationalisation* and globalisation, a context that is gradually leading to the dominance of English in higher education in Europe. *Internationalisation* is also synonymous with quality of education, and English, with its cultural capital, is viewed as an indispensable instrument to enhance the prestige of the institution. Therefore, English is valued mainly for its *extrinsic* properties, which explains why strategic and socio-economic goals prevail over linguistic ones. These results corroborate the recent findings obtained for other countries in both Europe (Costa/Coleman 2013; Dalton-Puffer 2012; Smit/Dafouz 2012) and Asia (Hamid/Nguyen/Baldauf 2013). The translation from the macro-level to the meso-level was made possible thanks to the general formulation of the law 240/2010 and was clearly encouraged by the progressive conflation of *Internationalisation* and ‘Englishisation’ in recent updates on the implementation of the Bologna Process.

3.4 Micro-level responses: the academic staff’s opposition

A variety of documents were consulted for the investigation of the micro-level response to the English-only formula: two requests for amendment of the three-year Strategic Plan 2012-2014, the appeal of a large number of academics in defence of teaching freedom, the opinion of students as expressed in a letter of their representatives at the Academic Senate, the account of the School of Architecture and Society about their experience with English-taught courses and finally the TAR of Lombardy’s judgement.

Doubts and criticism of the English-only formula are multifaceted and complex, but can be seen as revolving around three main themes: the implementation process and its outcomes, issues of professional, disciplinary and cultural identity and legislative restrictions. While all the parties involved agree on the need to enhance the process of *Internationalisation* and even welcome an increased use of English, students and academics complain about the lack of specific information on the implementation process and some lecturers claim that Schools have not been sufficiently involved in the decision-making process. The most debated issue, however, is the impact of the English-only formula on education quality. Students and lecturers are

afraid that an inadequate knowledge of English will affect teaching and learning, arguing that language competence does not guarantee appropriate mastery of university teaching and assessment genres. Students, in particular, are concerned that the switch to English might result in a simple ‘translation’ of existing degree programmes, while they hope for a deep reconsideration of the whole educational offer. Other perplexities regard teaching materials, the cognitive load of learning discipline-specific contents in a foreign language, the possible impoverishment of the range of communication styles between students and lecturers, and the implementation timeframe, i.e. three years, which is seen by many of the academic staff as too short to realistically achieve the goal of high-quality teaching, a precondition for high-quality education and competitiveness.

The English-only formula was also strongly opposed by a conspicuous number of academics for identity issues raised at various levels. For instance, the imposition of the exclusive use of English is seen by some lecturers as discriminatory in professional terms, as it may negatively affect their career if the assignment of courses is made on the basis of their knowledge of English, implying that those who do not know this language are obliged to teach at undergraduate level only. However, the most notable clash regards the different epistemologies and ways of disseminating knowledge between the disciplinary sectors of engineering and architecture. The President of the School of Architecture and Society argues that English is not the mother tongue of the field of Architecture and that there are very few classics written originally in Italian that have been translated into English. Those texts are widely used in the degree programmes offered by the School, as they are fundamental for the education of future professionals. If international students are not being given the possibility of reading those texts because learning Italian is no longer a requirement, then one may wonder what added value an education in architecture in Italy would offer. In addition, the forced abandonment of Italian would have a negative impact on the university’s relationships with areas of the world, such as Latin America, where languages such as Italian or Spanish may be more helpful than English. Therefore, the request of the School of Architecture and Society, which was rejected by the Academic Senate, was to reconsider the adoption of a single model, which fits the disciplinary, cultural and professional demands of specific areas but which may be unsuitable for other sectors.

Decisive arguments against the exclusive use of English are those that involve legislative restrictions. A large group of academics signed an appeal in defence of teaching freedom making reference to some Italian laws that are in conflict with the university’s English-only policy. The same laws are mentioned in the TAR judgement. The first is article 33 of the Italian Constitution stating that art and science are free and their teaching is also free (“L’arte e la scienza sono libere e libero ne è l’insegnamento”). Therefore, obliging lecturers to teach in English against their will is an infringement of this constitutional norm. The second is the principle of equality stated in article 3 of the Italian Constitution according to which no discrimination

should be made in terms of various socio-cultural parameters including language. The third is a royal decree of 31 August 1933 (no. 1952) that sanctions that the official language of courses and examinations is Italian in all public universities in Italy. Finally, the English-only formula is also in conflict with the university reform law 240/2010 (art. 2, § 2, letter *l*) which, in the TAR judgement's terms, fosters the integration of cultures, not the imposition of one culture over another, a fact that will restrict and not increase the educational offer.

The investigation of the micro-level reaction to the *Politecnico di Milano*'s English-only policy suggests that crucial aspects of planned language change are the clarity and aptness of concrete measures to implement the policy, the respect of multiple cultural needs and, most importantly, the sense of *policy ownership* (Hamid/Nguyen/Baldauf 2013: 8) by the agents who should put the policy into practice. This result corroborates Ali's (2013: 89) observation that successful language planning depends very much on the agency of content-area lecturers, who have the possibility of affecting change even in contexts in which macro-language policy parameters are too sensitive to be questioned. While the TAR judgement temporarily stopped the rather drastic attempt to 'Englishise' an influential public Italian university, it also raises several questions about the future direction of EMI in Italy. Will EMI policies remain characterised by the "double track" solution, with English-medium and Italian-medium courses running in parallel? Will this situation lead to a form of "natural selection" whereby the best students will attend English-taught programmes and the weakest ones Italian-taught courses, as suggested by the supporters of the English-only formula at the *Politecnico di Milano*? How is it possible to reconcile global and local needs, preserving cultural and disciplinary specificities while cultivating ambitious institutional goals? English-medium instruction is clearly a crucial political and cultural challenge that will determine the future of higher education in Italy in the next ten or twenty years, affecting not only the educational sector, but also the Italian society at large.

4 Attitudes of the *Accademia della Crusca* towards EMI policies and the *Politecnico di Milano*'s English-only formula

The most prestigious national language institution in Italy is the *Accademia della Crusca*, whose research activities have long been devoted to the lexicographic endeavour of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*. Since the early twentieth century, however, the institution has widened its interests becoming one of the most

important scientific research centres for the study and promotion of Italian.⁸ The decision of the *Politecnico di Milano* to opt for the exclusive and mandatory use of English, a policy that was extensively mediated and supported by the Minister of Instruction, University and Research (MIUR), raised immediate reactions among journalists, writers, intellectuals and eminent linguists members of the *Accademia della Crusca*. The importance of the topic and the particularly complex questions raised by EMI policies led the institution to organise a round table on 27 April 2012, inviting the MIUR Undersecretary, the Rector of the *Politecnico di Milano* and scholars from different fields (linguists, mathematicians, scientists and jurists). The contributions presented during the event and numerous other opinions that had appeared in newspapers and blogs were collected and published in a 300-page volume edited by the President of the *Accademia della Crusca* Nicoletta Maraschio and by Domenico De Martino (2013).

The position of the *Accademia della Crusca* is clearly stated in the Preface of the volume, where President Maraschio warns against the risks of reducing the debate to a Manichean contraposition between the supporters of the Englishisation process and the defenders of the authoritativeness of the national language. In addition, even within the institution, different individual opinions are present. Therefore, rather than taking a firm position in favour or against the English-only policy, the *Accademia della Crusca* preferred to stimulate discussions that could reach a wider audience, providing critical tools to conceptualise and assess EMI language policies and the various ways of internationalising the Italian University (Maraschio 2013: 8).

The vast majority of the participants in the debate believe that the exclusive and mandatory use of English in higher education in Italy is neither useful nor effective. The perplexities towards the English-only formula, which in part correspond to those of the academic staff and students at the *Politecnico di Milano*, are analysed taking into account the wide-ranging and long-term consequences for the Italian language and society of this extreme language policy, which is seen as having cultural, social, pedagogic, cognitive and political implications. Possible long-term consequences are the impoverishment of scientific Italian and the connected risk of *domain loss*, a fear that characterises the EMI policy debate in other countries, especially in Northern Europe (see, among others, Jensen et al. 2013 for Denmark). Associated with the erosion of language functions is the relationship between research and popularisation, which is rapidly evolving thanks to new forms of web-mediated communication: a language no longer able to communicate scientific knowledge using its own resources will affect the comprehension of important scientific concepts among the general public (Manni 2013: 30). This preoccupation

⁸ The website of the *Accademia della Crusca* offers detailed information about the organization, its history, its purposes and initiatives: <http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it/it/laccademia> (last access on 27 October 2013).

leads to reflections on the social role of universities, which have not only responsibilities towards students but also towards the whole society (Coletti 2013: 20), as several scientific professions (e.g. medical doctors, veterinaries, engineers) are characterised by tight interactions with local communities (Marazzini 2013: 33).

The pedagogical and cognitive worries mainly refer to the depreciation of the *high-definition* language of teaching due to the adoption of *low-definition* English (Sabatini 2013: 135; Segre 2013: 137). The use of *basic* English is seen as affecting the ability of fully understanding disciplinary contents (e.g. in mathematics, as observed by Favilli 2013) and developing critical awareness of the topics studied (Sabatini 2013); therefore, the simplification inherent in a not-fully-mastered or *basic* English language by either teachers or students, or both, may result in what has been termed *content loss* (Jensen et al. 2013: 88), i.e. an impairment of the learning process. Finally, some voices expressed concerns for the political implications of EMI policies, arguing that the support of English-medium courses by the government seems to go hand in hand with the progressive devaluation of the teaching of other foreign languages and even Italian, which has been undermined by the reduction in the hours devoted to the study of the humanities starting from the lower secondary school level (Gregory 2013: 206).

While acknowledging that no one-serves-all recipe can be found due to the diverse ideological orientations of different stakeholders and the multifaceted nature of the functions of higher education and universities, most of the intellectuals involved in the discussion agree that the “double track” solution, for single courses or entire degree programmes, is to be preferred to a monolingual educational offer, besides in a foreign language. According to Maraschio, the true challenge of Italian and European universities is to diversify, arguing that the English-only formula is a “serious regression from ideas and values that seemed established, those of multiculturalism and multilingualism, and reflects a static view of the university and the professional world, one which is flattened on the present and not, as has been claimed, geared towards the future.” (Maraschio 2013: 16, our translation)⁹.

5 Conclusion

This paper presented a qualitative analysis of EMI policies in the Italian university context through the case study of the *Politecnico di Milano*'s English-only formula. Language policies were scrutinised analysing documents at macro-, meso- and micro- levels. The results reveal that the meso-level policy is a response to the in-

⁹ The original Italian passage is: “[...] un grave arretramento rispetto a ideali e valori che sembravano acquisiti, quelli del multiculturalismo e del multilinguismo, e riflette una concezione dell’università e del mondo del lavoro statica e appiattita sul presente e non, come si sostiene, proiettata verso il futuro.”

creasingly dominant ideology of globalisation in the name, however, of the *Internationalisation* process. As a consequence, the attention is almost exclusively paid to the *extrinsic* properties of English (Kaplan 2001), thus disregarding both language learning objectives and the possible loss of disciplinary content resulting from the use of a *low-definition* language of teaching. These outcomes are in line with the quantitative findings obtained by Costa/Coleman (2013), who carried out a survey based on a national questionnaire sent to all Italian universities highlighting the prevalence of *extrinsic* rather than *intrinsic* values underpinning the EMI choice. Therefore, it is not surprising that the survey reports an almost total lack of teacher training programmes offered by universities opting for English-taught programmes, a big issue indeed especially if we consider that 90% of lecturers are Italian native speakers who are often either reluctant to choose this mode of teaching or may be 'forced' to do so by the university (Costa/Coleman 2013: 14). This problem is related to the claim made in this paper that micro-level actors play a decisive role in constructing EMI policies and that successful implementation also depends on the aptitude of the model chosen to deal with the agents' cultural and disciplinary demands and their (often insufficient) language competence.

The simplistic and unsatisfactory approach to the language competence issue, which in the meso-level documents analysed is essentially reduced to the need to set an adequate entry level (i.e. C1) for the second study cycle, is particularly alarming if set against the data reported by Campagna/Pulcini (2014), who note that compared to the European trend, the Italian situation reveals a specific local problem concerning inadequate levels of communicative competence in English irrespectively of the high number of tuition hours delivered to students before they access university. In this respect, as the two scholars suggest, it is possible to hypothesise the existence of *two Europes* (largely represented by Nordic European countries and the Mediterranean area), partially contradicting the claims of the homogenisation agenda introduced with the Bologna Process. This hypothesis seems corroborated by the recent more cautious attitudes in Scandinavian countries (e.g. PLU project) and in Germany where the role of the national language is being reassessed, exactly when Mediterranean countries are pushing for a greater use of English.

This paper also considered the position of the *Accademia della Crusca*. Rather than strongly opposing the monolingual English option, the institution stimulated a debate involving a large number of different voices in a constructive attempt to provide language policy makers and the public opinion with critical tools to be employed in the future. The analysis of the different opinions in the debate together with the results of the documentary research presented in this paper suggest that language policy makers at all levels need to avoid the temptation of adopting quick and oversimplified solutions if the implementation process is to be successful. In addition, it would be appropriate to implement *ad hoc* linguistic/educational pedagogies, starting at least from secondary school level, aiming at improving English

proficiency through content teaching. This would frame a *real* ICLHE (Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education) context, not merely a *cosmetic* travesty of *Internationalisation* mandates as often EMI is perceived. Finally, there is the urgent need to consider the ideological implications of language choices in higher education, including those connected with what essentially remains a monolingual mindset, despite Europe's declared multicultural ideals. As Weber/Horner (2013) argue, even self-professed multilingual universities are often deeply entangled with the ideology of monolingualism as the norm. Therefore, in order to implement effective, sustainable and fair EMI language policies, and possibly before doing so, a reassessment of traditional higher education models would be necessary.

6 References

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