

LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING: ASPECTS OF PLURILINGUALISM AT AN ITALIAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT • This paper explores the various aspects of plurilingual language policies at the University of Turin. An ethnographic document analysis substantiated with a student survey indicates that plurilingual manifestations serve three main themes: (1) a plurilingual curriculum with much emphasis on foreign language competencies across disciplines, (2) plurilingual policies for internationalisation purposes fostering quality education, mobility, employability and networking, and (3) a plurilingual external communication strategy aiming at promoting the university’s visibility for a worldwide academic audience. The policies adopted by the university, however, need to be more transparent and further consolidated so that the impact on the student community can be more significant and tangible.

KEYWORDS • Language Policy and Planning; Plurilingualism; Internationalisation of Higher Education.

Introduction

Linguistic diversity and plurilingual practices at Higher Education (HE) has gained increasing attention in recent years. Often conflicting with monolingual policies and visions, plurilingual tendencies seem to flip the coin in many educational contexts (Galante et al., 2019), especially, the European one. Being an indicator of and a recognition of social and cultural diversities (Council of Europe, 2007), plurilingual policies aim to maintain and enhance individuals’ abilities to use more than one language in multilingual and multicultural national and international settings. Within the Italian HE context, the national (ministerial) and local (universities) choices are still fluctuating and vary from one university to another, and often, from one school or department to another within the same university (Veronesi, 2009; Orduna-Nocito & Sánchez-García, 2022; Mastellotto & Zanin, 2021). In addition, language policies are fuzzy and misleading, not only at the level of their conceptual design within official documents but also within the common practices of university stakeholders like administrative staff, teachers and students. The manifestation of the blurry plurilingual policies could be reflected in the formal and informal curricula. The reason behind this may be related to the fact that policies are “never materially stable, policies are instead conceptualized as always in a state of production” (Hurdus & Lasagabaster, 2018, p. 229). However, the mere absence of an official document outlining and clearly conceptualising a language policy does not mean one does not exist because, as Spolsky (2004: 8) puts it “language policy exists even where it has not been made explicit or established by authority”.

In this paper, I explore the language policy adopted at the University of Turin (henceforth UniTo) by examining the main official resources whereby the university conceptualises its language policy, how it implements and assesses it and finally I shed some light on the manifestations of plurilingual backgrounds and practices within a sample of students belonging to four departments. Starting from the premise that Italian is the main and official language of education in Italy, this study will try to answer two main research questions:

- How is plurilingualism perceived and implemented in the university's vision and in its official institutional plans and practices?
- What is the reflection of these policies in students' plurilingual and intercultural practices and attitudes?

The first question will be answered qualitatively through a document analysis of the university and its related institutions' official documents and websites. The second question, which represents the outcomes and impact of the university policies, will be addressed quantitatively by focusing on a sample of students and investigating their plurilingual features and how they deploy them in the various multilingual university settings available to them.

1. Language education policy and planning

According to Spolsky (2004), language policy is based on three interrelated but independently describable components: practices, beliefs, and management. Language practices are the observable behaviours and choices, i.e., what forms of languages or language varieties people actually select when they interact. Language beliefs, on the other hand, consists in the attitudes people assign to specific languages or varieties and the values they associate with them, which, in turn, would constrain language selection in different contexts. Language management is “the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims to have authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs” Spolsky (2009: 4). It entails official national (e.g., official language(s) mentioned in the constitution), or sectorial decisions (e.g., medium of instruction in education, language selection in religious sites) that are imposed on, but not necessarily followed by, the whole community. By combining these components, Spolsky confirms Ball's (1994: 10) view about what a policy is; that it is a process whereby “both text and action, words and deeds, [...] what is enacted as well as what is intended” interplay at the levels of text production, implementation and evaluation. However, a language policy is not to be understood as a single official printed and accessible text (Shohamy, 2006). In fact, it is a common practice that “many countries and institutions and social groups do not have formal or written language policies, so that the nature of their language policy must be derived from a study of their language practice or beliefs” (Spolsky, 2004: 8).

Language policies are not created in a vacuum (Kirsch, 2018: 2). The socio-political context in which a language policy is created is central to the overall understanding of the policy itself. Thus, trying to pinpoint language policies at an institutional level should start first by looking at the national higher education level set by ministerial regulations, if any, national laws, and sometimes, any wider regional alignments like the common European vision and recommendations. The Council of Europe, for example, radically shapes language policies adopted within the member states (Byram, 2008) even if the extent to which those states are ready to embrace plurilingual policies is still under-researched. Language policy at HE is expected to be congruent with national and international recommendations, yet, there is always room for variation and adaptation to the local and intrinsic priorities and vision of each institution.

Italy has always been a multilingual society where, apart from the *de facto* official standard Italian language, the population speaks several regional languages and dialects together with a number of foreign languages. The educational system throughout its different levels integrates the teaching of foreign languages to all students regardless of their discipline. Thus, at HE, all students would know at least one foreign language. Italian remains the official language used at HE not only in administrative official communication but also in education (Guerini, 2011; Robustelli, 2018). A few Italian universities have separate official documents for language policy (e.g., the University of Padua¹ with Italian and English versions). Some studies have explored the issue of language policy within or across Italian higher education institutions (Mastellotto & Zanin, 2021; Vittoz, 2015; Santulli, 2015; Guerini, 2011, to mention a few). Most of them almost restrictively focus on the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and, arguably, express critical views towards the adoption of EMI on the basis that the objectives for which it is initially introduced are hard to achieve because neither students nor teachers are fully and adequately prepared for them (e.g., Brogginì & Costa, 2017).

Based on the definition of what language policy means and the fact that emphasis is put on the teaching and learning of foreign languages as well as the intercultural dialogues between individuals of diverse societies these two components will be tracked in a set of official documents and within the practices and attitudes of students.

2. Plurilingualism and related concepts

In a century marked by globalisation, access to technology and internet, describing individuals as plurilingual and societies as multilingual is the rule while monolingualism is the exception (Crystal, 2010). Even when policy makers opt for monolingual approaches, the outcome is not guaranteed as “monolingual policies turn out to be multilingual in practice” (Spolsky, 2004: 75). Within the European context, the Council of Europe has been advocating for plurilingualism and defending the right of individuals to receive the appropriate educational support in their language to be successful and active citizens. Thus, mastering two foreign languages in addition to a mother tongue is a key objective (European Commission, 2017). Of paramount value is the integration of plurilingual policies at HE because of its tight link with two key objectives, namely, internationalisation and quality of education and research. Foreign languages are empowering tools whereby students can access better opportunities at national and global markets.

A first distinction needs to be made between what plurilingualism means as a linguistic competence and plurilingual educational policies as approaches that adopt the values of plurilingualism and seek to implement them in education. The definition of *plurilingualism* to be adopted in this paper is the official one provided by the Council of Europe which stipulates that it is the ability of individuals to use their repertoires of languages and switch from one code to the other depending on the situation and for different purposes (Council of Europe, 2009). Thus, plurilingualism is a property assigned to individuals not to societies. The latter, when characterised by the presence and coexistence of several languages, languages varieties or dialects, are described as multilingual. *Multilingualism* is therefore used to describe societies and groups of people within particular spatial boundaries. Accordingly, “[p]lurilingualism allows for the interaction and mutual influence of ...languages in a more dynamic way [than multilingualism]” (Canagarajah & Liynage,

¹ https://www.unipd.it/en/sites/en.unipd.it/files/PoliticheLinguistiche_WEB_eng%281%29.pdf

2012, p. 50). In HE contexts, fostering multilingualism “should have its grounds in the deep conviction that diversity is an overarching asset and advantage” (Franceschini, 2009: x).

A direct and inevitable result of plurilingualism at HE and elsewhere is the continuous tendency of individuals to switch from one language to the other in diverse communicative situations. While this tendency is often described as *Code-switching* or *code-mixing*, recent studies have described these practices as translanguaging phenomena. *Translanguaging* is defined as “the flexible use of linguistic resources by bilinguals in order to make sense of their worlds” (García & Leiva, 2014: 200). It is a purposeful blend of diverse semiotic resources (Canagarajah, 2011, 2018) that enable students to use and make sense of congruent meanings in different communicative situations. Translanguaging is sometimes adopted as a pedagogical approach in teaching/learning contexts where students’ plurilingual background is strategically and purposefully used to enhance learning experiences and raise awareness about plurilingual advantages (Li, 2018; García 2009; Creese & Blackledge, 2015).

An important and emerging approach linked to plurilingualism and aiming at fostering its application is that of intercomprehension between related languages (Araújo e Sá & Melo-Pfeifer, 2021). The concept generally involves situations where participants speaking different but related languages understand each other while using their own languages (Pinho & Andrade, 2009) and “refers to strategic acquisition of partial competences within language families (e.g., Romance, Germanic, Slavonic)” (Piccardo, 2013: 607). Piccardo argues that “tertiary language education stresses the possibility of capitalizing on previously acquired languages; awakening to languages points toward the value of an early exposure to a range of languages, beyond the school curriculum; and the intercultural approach is an umbrella term for all practices where culture becomes pivotal in language acquisition.” (ibid). In addition, the Council of Europe maintains that intercomprehension experiences fit better in HE settings where students, presumably, would have developed “receptive skills in several languages” which “could be useful for their studies in a variety of fields” (2016: 52).

Another key notion to be emphasised is the interconnection between plurilingualism and interculturalism. As a matter of fact, some studies strongly indicate that language and culture are two sides of the same coin and that linguistic and cultural awareness, sensitivity and apprehension are inseparable. Thus, in a multilingual context, multicultural and intercultural exchanges necessarily coexist as language and culture are inextricably related (McConachy, 2018; Diaz, 2013; Byram & Parmenter, 2012). Exposure to, communicating and interacting with individuals holding diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds is a typical setting where students can use and improve their plurilingual and intercultural competencies (Chao et al., 2015). This can take place both inside the classroom when teachers and students are encouraged to interact in more than one language, or outside it, when local (LSs) and international (ISs) students, for example, interact in more casual ways. As explained by the Council of Europe, a plurilingual education policy “will refer to all activities, curricular or extra-curricular of whatever nature, which seek to enhance and develop language competence and speakers’ individual linguistic repertoires” (Council of Europe, 2007: 18). These various aspects of language use, foreign language skill development, communication and interaction will be first explored in the set of official documents then through surveying a sample of students.

3. Context and Methodology

In order to capture the multiple aspects of plurilingualism within UniTo, two research methods have been adopted, namely, document analysis and a student survey. While the former provides the official grounds for language policy and planning, the latter gives more insights into

the perceptions and practices of one of the major stakeholders who are directly affected by such policies. The combination and triangulation of results drawn from these two methods shall provide a better understanding not only of how plurilingualism is strategically conceived of but also how it is concretely implemented and performed.

Document analysis represents the qualitative approach used to investigate the topic of plurilingual policies at UniTo. Such an approach could be classified as an ethnographic local study which can be useful to inspire language policy and planning models and inform policy making (Canagarajah, 2006). As Hornberger & Johnson (2007: 511) argue, “ethnographic language policy research offers a means for exploring how varying local interpretations, implementations, negotiations and perhaps resistance can pry open implementational and ideological spaces for multilingual language education”. Key factors are considered while collecting the documents for this study, namely authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Kridel, 2015; Morgan, 2022). These “multiple sources of evidence” are selected based on the types of documents such as mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, strategic plans, and syllabi (O’Leary, 2014). A total of twenty-three official documents (amounting to 1673 pages) and other material from eleven official websites (home pages, course descriptions, project descriptions, project reports etc.) meeting the afore-mentioned factors have been investigated (see Table 1 for the full list). Only data available² in the public domain were selected and retrieved from the university and department websites between January and March 2022.

The first set of documents (Table 1) (strategic plans, programming documents, activity reports and departmental plans) are chosen based on the fact that they constitute the building blocks for the policies to be adopted in the short and mid-terms and give an account of the extent to which those policies have been successfully implemented. The choice of the eight departments is meant to cover the four broad disciplinary areas present in the university and the sample represents 30% of the total number of departments. The two humanities departments were purposefully selected as they make part of the setting where the case study is implemented (see section 4.4. about the impact of language policy on the student community), while the other ones (business, natural sciences, and social sciences) were randomly selected. The second set of sources (the university website, the eight department websites, the University Language Centre (CLA) and UNITA websites) were chosen to further understand the direct and indirect language practices within the curriculum (such as the foreign languages taught, and the languages used for instruction throughout the eight departments, CLA centre and UNITA project) as well as the university’s linguistic choices of communication with the national and international communities (e.g., the language options in the websites, availability of translated documents, etc).

² During the data collection period, departmental plans before 2019 were not available and only two departments uploaded their three-year plans for the period 2022-2024. Moreover, the only strategic plans available on UniTo website were the ones included here.

| Name | Date and size | Document type | Description |
|---|--|---|---|
| <i>Strategic plans</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016-2020 (36 pages) • 2021-2026 (65 pages) | Policy document: Planning and implementation strategies | A university's strategic plan gives an overview of the University's overarching mission, its vision, policies, objectives and strategic areas of intervention. The plan builds on the university's current strengths and focuses on the most pressing issues that the university is positioned to address. |
| <i>Programming documents (Programmazione integrate)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016 (91 pages) • 2017 (95 pages) • 2018 (146 pages) • 2019 (156 pages) • 2020 (129 pages) • 2021(60 pages) | | |
| <i>Activity Reports</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016 (109 pages) • 2017 (91 pages) • 2018 (116 pages) • 2019 (113 pages) • 2020 (99 pages) | Results and evaluation document | The activity reports provide detailed accounts of the strategic plan's implementation. |
| <i>Departmental three-year plans (2 departments per discipline)</i> | <p>Humanities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures 2019-2021 (40 pages) +2022-2024(17 pages) • Department of Humanities 2019-2021 (30 pages) +2022-2024 (14 pages) <p>Business:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Economics and Statistics "Cognetti de Martiis" 2019-2021 (46 pages) • Department of Management 2019-2021 (53 pages) <p>Natural sciences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Surgical Sciences 2019-2021 (57 pages) • Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology 2019-2021 (44 pages) <p>Social sciences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Law 2019-2021 (34 pages) • Department of Psychology (32 pages) | Policy document: Planning and implementation strategies | Departmental three-year plans provide an assessment of the results achieved in the previous period and the extent to which they have met the university's objectives set in the strategic plan. The documents also outline the strengths, weaknesses and the new objectives each department aims to reach in the incoming period. |
| <i>Websites</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UniTo website • 8 Department websites • CLA website • UNITA website | Official Media | Websites and related pages/links/documents indicating or referring to language policies, objectives, execution or results. |

Table 1. Documents analysed

These types of documents relate and refer to each other in several different ways. For example, the programming documents (programmazione integrate) usually refer to the strategic plan as a reference point. Likewise, departmental three-year plans also relate to the university's strategic and programming documents with precise reference to the objectives and metrics of evaluation mentioned therein. The university's strategic plan, on the other hand, explicitly operates with reference to the ministerial directions and other national, European and international recommendations and guidelines.

Identifying plurilingual policies required a deep scrutiny of the various documents. The process of analysis follows the steps adopted by many researchers (O’Leary; 2014; Prior, 2008; Bowen, 2009) which require (1) noting occurrences to quantify the use of specific words, phrases and concepts then (2) determining how these occurrences relate to the research questions addressed. First, a search list of key words and phrases (in Italian) was compiled that potentially indicate and point to language policy and the pedagogical implementations that can harness students’, teachers’, and staff’s plurilingual competencies. Those keywords either directly or indirectly reflect choices, decisions, objectives or results made at the level of the university or the departments. Precisely, to track direct reference to language policy, I looked for names of languages, reference to ‘foreign language(s)’, words like ‘language skills/competence’, plurilingual*, multilingual*, intercultural* and communication. To identify indirect reference to language policy, I searched for international/foreign students, visiting/ foreign professors/ teacher/ scholars/ researcher, internationalisation, mobility, joint/ double degree programs. Data coding was done manually, and a deductive approach based on the main themes that emerged in the documents was applied. This helped to sort the findings in three recurrent broad topics: language in the curriculum (teaching and learning) (section 4.1), language for internationalisation (section 4.2) and language for communication (section 4.3).

Following Canagarajah’s (2005) suggestion, document analysis findings are substantiated with some results from a student survey³ to better capture the status of plurilingualism within the university (section 4.4). The main aim of including survey results is to provide a clearer view of the impact of language policies on the student community’s attitudes and practices. The survey gathers data from a sample of students (n=989) enrolled at the four humanities departments at UniTo (Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures, Department of Historical Studies, Department of Philosophy and Education Sciences, Department of Humanities). The items included help understand students’ plurilingual backgrounds as well as the opportunities offered to them to learn and enhance their foreign language and intercultural skills. In other words, the survey results will provide a taste to how the student community is being affected by the language policy enshrined within the official documents outlined above.

Precisely, fourteen questions are included, namely, country of origin, students’ L1, number of known foreign languages, the language they choose to communicate with LSs/ISs, frequency of communication, open-ended questions for LSs about the linguistic and intercultural gains/challenges in communication with ISs, whether ISs took Italian language courses, whether LSs were taught by visiting professors (VPs), languages used in teaching by those VPs, frequency of communication with VPs, whether LSs students included single/multiple EMI courses, reasons why they opted for those courses, impact of EMI courses on their English skills, their perception of the EMI teachers’ English skills. These questions will reflect the proportions of students that take advantage of plurilingual formal and informal educational contexts and their perceptions of how these settings can affect their plurilingual skills. All items also reflect the university’s Internationalisation at Home policies (Beelen and Jones, 2015; Leask, 2016), most of which are explicitly referred to in the set of documents mentioned before (e.g., international students, visiting professors, EMI courses, virtual international courses and extra-curricular activities).

³ The full survey is wider in scope and only questions directly related to the objectives of this study are included.

4. Unito's language policy

4.1. Plurilingualism in the curriculum

Italian language

The key document that outlines Unito's language policy is part of the university language centre's (CLA-UniTo) official documents. The document released in 2018 explicitly sets Italian as the official language in teaching "In conformità a quanto stabilito dalla legge 240, gli insegnamenti sono erogati in lingua italiana per ogni percorso formativo" and in administrative functioning "In Unito la lingua di funzionamento è l'italiano" (CLA-UniTo Language Policy, 2018). CLA-UniTo documents stipulate that mastering the Italian language is a prerequisite for students to be able to appropriately follow their studies at university. In educational and training contexts, CLA-UniTo plays a pivotal role by offering diverse and increasing language courses, especially Italian L2 for foreign students and staff, reaching 31 free courses in 2020-2021. Italian language courses of up to eleven months are also offered to Chinese students wishing to pursue their higher education in Italy thanks to the Marco Polo project (an agreement between Italian and Chinese governments in 2006). This makes much sense knowing that the proportion of ISs who enrol in EMI represents only 37% of the total number of ISs in 2020-2021 (Programming Document, 2020: 41). With no degree courses being taught in other foreign languages, this means that the remaining proportion of ISs, more than 60%, are enrolled in degree courses taught in Italian. This may cause some serious educational problems for foreign students who do not master Italian. The department of Clinical and Biological Sciences, for example, sheds light on the "difficulty in placing non-Italian-speaking foreign students in hospital wards" while the department of Psychology, explicitly points that learning Italian should be a constitutive element of the Erasmus experience in Italy.

Furthermore, Italian is the default language in the university and department websites as well as most of the official documents therein. Elsewhere, the Italian language is rarely referred to or emphasised except when it is to be taught as a foreign language. Yet, the situation may change in the incoming years as the new vision introduced in the strategic plan 2021-2026 gives the Italian language more prominence and includes it within its internationalisation objectives (objective 2.3.3 Potenziare i servizi di accoglienza delle studentesse e degli student internazionali, inclusi i programmi di insegnamento della lingua italiana e di intercomprensione). Thus, Italian L2 and intercomprehension courses can give Italian ampler presence and recognition at the international level.

Foreign languages

Unito has been trying to align its vision to the European and national guidelines about plurilingualism within its educational and research fields. This is conspicuous in the priorities, choices, and metrics the university sets in its policies. Foreign language learning and use constitute the heart of those policies. The strategic plans as well as the programming documents strongly emphasise the need to increase the offer in foreign language teaching and to strengthen students', teachers', and administrators' foreign language skills as they are useful tools for mobility and employability and as an approach to meet comprehensive internationalisation. While foreign language teaching used to be highlighted as a key weakness (strategic plan 2016-2021) marking the university in general, and most of the departments investigated (except the humanities), in more recent years, the university points to steady quantitative and qualitative improvements in foreign language offers. Between 2016 and 2020, activity reports point to a steady increase in the

number of degree courses fully taught in English (12 courses) and the creation of ones in parallel to the Italian courses (6 courses) in the academic year 2020-2021. Very few departmental plans, however, evoke the issue of foreign language learning and consolidation, and prioritise other points in their evaluation of results and selection of future departmental objectives.

Through UniTo website, it is possible to search for all the courses taught in each department based on the language of instruction defined in the course description. Thirteen languages, some of which are rare even at the national level, are available for the students (mainly in the two humanities departments): languages of greatest diffusion (French, English, Spanish, German) and “emerging” languages (Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and Croatian). Although Italian is the main language in teaching, EMI courses have been encouraged and, as a result, their number has been increasing throughout the years and across the various departments (this will be further elaborated in section 4.2). The department of Law is the only one that offers two postgraduate courses taught in other foreign languages, namely, French (Master en gouvernance et management des marchés public en appui au développement durable) and Spanish (Patrimonio Mundial y Proyectos Culturales para el Desarrollo). There are a few other exceptions resulting from grassroots initiatives when teachers decide to use a different language in teaching or when they tolerate more than one language for exams (e.g., one teacher belonging to the Department of Humanities gives students the possibility to take oral and written exams in four languages (Italian, French, English or Piedmontese) while the course itself is about Arabic language and is taught in Italian).

As previously pointed out by (Little, 2020) and (Vittoz, 2015), university language centres play a vital role in implementing and promoting the concept of plurilingualism. Thus, plurilingualism and foreign language learning are also considered key tools for better education quality, for professional and academic purposes and for internationalisation. UniTo has already launched and consolidated a series of actions aimed at promoting multilingualism, including joining the ‘Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)’ and the creation of the Italo-French University/ Université Franco Italienne (UIF / UFI). Apart from the Italian L2 courses offered to foreign students and teachers, CLA-UniTo also provides courses, trainings and certifications in English for professional and academic purposes (for staff and doctoral students), EMI (for teachers), French, German, Spanish, English and Portuguese languages (mainly for the outgoing students), as well as a set of various other languages for students enrolled in joint degree programs with European and non-European countries.

The university is also investing in several projects that can promote plurilingualism. In collaboration with national and international bodies, training programs are organised to improve teacher training for plurilingual teaching like EMI training courses for teachers (in collaboration with the British Council and CLA), the TEMPLATE (Technology-Mediated Plurilingual Activities for Language Teacher Education) project which “aims at strengthening the professional competence of pre- and in-service teachers who want to fully implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe for the use of plurilingual approaches in language education”⁴ and UNITA project which aims at fostering multilingualism and the diversity of languages in Europe. Thanks to UNITA project, clear reference to plurilingualism and intercomprehension, specifically between Romance languages, are introduced in policy and implementation.

⁴ <https://templateplurilingualism.eu/>

Apart from the intercomprehension initiative, there is no reference to how plurilingualism is implemented within the curriculum. We know from published research and from our personal experiences as teachers that translanguaging, code-switching and translation are not uncommon within the classroom. Several studies on EMI, for example, clearly evoke translanguaging practices among students and teachers for diverse purposes like clarifying concepts, illustrating by analogy etc. (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019; Lin, 2019; Mortensen, 2014; Ou et al., 2020; Piccardo, 2019). More recent research trends at tertiary education are advocating for the adoption of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach mainly in settings where students have different L1 or are plurilingual like in contexts with ISs. Such an approach is thought to be more appropriate as it creates plurilingual and pluricultural awareness and enhances students' learning experiences. At UniTo, it is not clear whether teachers and students are encouraged to take advantage of their plurilingual backgrounds in class and, most importantly, didactic strategies involving translanguaging are, for the moment, still absent.

4.2. Plurilingualism for internationalisation purposes

The cornerstones of internationalisation policies in the university rest upon a number of measures that require plurilingual competencies. It is important to understand internationalisation as a multidimensional instrument whereby virtual and or physical contact, communication interaction and collaboration with foreign participants speaking diverse languages and representing different cultural backgrounds combine and complement each other to guarantee a high-quality educational system. In addition to the value given to foreign language learning discussed in the previous section, UniTo and its various institutions highlight five main areas of internationalisation:

- Enhancing the inward and outward flows of students and teachers at BA, MA and PhD levels.
- Increasing the number of 'international' courses: EMI+ joint/double degree programs.
- International projects and cooperation (e.g., UNITA).
- Fostering publication with foreign researchers.
- Strengthening ties with European and international bodies and institutions.

While all five policies necessarily create plurilingual and pluricultural contexts, the last two dimensions are not directly related to the student community. They are more about teachers, researchers and administration staff. As the second research question focuses on the impact of language policies on students' attitudes and practices, the last two points are less relevant, therefore, they will not be further discussed here. Mobility and exchange programs involve visiting professors, scholars, researchers, administrators, international and exchange students and together, these components have the merit of creating the concrete opportunities for local students and teachers to make use of and enhance their plurilingual and multicultural skills. Whether this happens locally with the inward movements, or abroad with the outward flows, the benefits are quite guaranteed (this point will be further discussed with the case study in section 4.4). While mobility abroad fosters emersion in the foreign culture and language, at the local level, the presence of foreign visitors creates rich contexts for foreign language use and intercultural exchanges for the local, especially non-mobile, students and teachers. Even when international students and teachers prefer to use, learn or improve their Italian language and culture while they interact with the local community, they indirectly participate in the spread of Italian worldwide and consequently promote the language and the culture outside the national borders.

The second strategy could be thought of as the manifestation of "internationalising the curriculum" (Leask, 2015). The university's strive to increase the number of international programs is intrinsically linked to the previous objective, that is, attracting more international students and

teachers. At this level, the English language remains the central tool for internationalisation with an ongoing emphasis, throughout the various data investigated, allocated to EMI degree courses and the need to increase their numbers. Departmental plans as well as UniTo's activity reports (both of which outline and assess the results previously reached) point to the proportional link between EMI offers and the number of international students and visiting professors within the different departments. Joint and double degree programs, on the other hand, are the results of bilateral cooperation and agreements between the departments/schools and foreign universities. They give UniTo students as well as foreign ones, the chance to attend courses and take credits from the partner universities and end up with a degree recognised by the two institutions, i.e., the local and foreign ones. These programs are often taught in diverse languages, like, French, Spanish, English but may take place in wider cultural contexts (for example, a double degree program between the Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology and the Russian National Research Medical University where the courses are taught in English, but local students would spend their mobility period in Russia).

While implicitly acknowledging the value of English for internationalisation purposes (illustrated through the ever-increasing number of EMI throughout the departments), there is a growing awareness about the hegemony of English over other foreign languages. Indicators of this awareness could be spotted, for example, at the level of mentioning the language itself. Reference to English has decreased considerably in the strategic plans (from 4 times in 2016-2020 to zero in 2021-2026) and in the programming documents (not once in the latest 2020 document). In the Department of Languages' three-year plans, English was mentioned eleven times in 2019-2021 but only once in 2022-2024 and the only degree course fully taught in English in the department is simply referred to as "un CdS erogato in lingua straniera". Plurilingualism, multilingualism and pluriculturalism, on the other hand, are gaining more space in the narratives of the university and the department of languages. In order to alleviate the over dependence on English as a lingua franca, intercomprehension has been included as a plurilingual strategy since the creation of UNITA, according to which, "le nuove alleanze universitarie europee non possono più limitarsi a ricorrere all'uso dell'inglese come lingua franca e mezzo di comunicazione dei saperi disciplinari" (Corino, Costa & Garbarino, 2022: 35). Intercomprehension is now adopted within the university's strategic plan (2021-2026) as an approach that can promote UniTo's international presence via its language, i.e., Italian. A number of teachers have been mobilised and trained to teach intercomprehension courses for local students and to prepare them for mobility in the partner universities. Several virtual and in-class intercomprehension courses have also been organised which proved to be innovative, fruitful, and very promising for future intercultural communication contexts during which successful comprehension is guaranteed even if each participant would be using their own language (ibid: 38).

International projects and cooperation expand the scope of plurilingual practices thanks to the involvement of various stakeholders as they use a plethora of linguistic competences. Taking advantage of the virtual exchange possibilities brought by the technological advances, several international projects are complementing the university's internationalisation policies in response to the growing need of Internationalisation at Home and its broad aims of equipping local non-mobile students with an international experience. A prominent example that is reshaping UniTo's plurilingual vision is UNITA project (Universitas Montium). UNITA is an alliance between six European universities in five countries: Italy, France, Portugal, Spain and Romania. A central mission of the consortium is "to actively use Romance languages in addition to English, thus enhancing linguistic diversity and promoting inclusion"⁵. One of the methods deployed to reach

⁵ <http://www.univ-unita.eu/>

this objective is the intercomprehension programs that were discussed previously. In addition, UNITA provides several flexible forms of mobility including short five-to-thirty-day physical mobility, virtual exchange programs, winter and summer schools as well as internship opportunities in the respective countries. The rich catalogue for virtual mobility programs offered by the partner universities provides a set of 253 courses for the academic year 2021-2022 targeting a total number of 658 potential students. As the project itself is still in its early years of execution (kick off date was 6th, November 2020), the number of participating students is still low compared to the offer, but it is increasing. The number of virtual courses offered in the different universities is also growing and becoming more diversified as more and more departments and teachers are integrating the project.

4.3. Plurilingual policies in external communication

Effective communication with the external world is a way to guarantee international visibility and to self-market the educational and research products available at UniTo. The university has been adapting its languages of communication to meet the European and global spheres while committing itself to the plurilingual vision outlined in its language policy. Starting from 2021, UniTo website is offered in five foreign languages, whereas it used to offer only English (as a lingua franca) and Chinese (related to the Marco Polo agreement). French, Spanish, and Portuguese versions are now available as a way for the university to align its practices with the new plurilingual vision partly inspired by UNITA network. The foreign language versions of the website do not exactly match the content of the official Italian version. However, they provide valuable information for international browsers aiming to learn more about the university, its educational and research offers as well as the opportunities and steps to follow for prospect international students wishing to enrol in one of the degree courses. All department websites, however, are only given in Italian and English with huge differences between the data included in each language. The English version mainly targets the international community while the Italian official version addresses the local one (compare, for example, the home page in each language). This confirms Santulli's (2015: 280) conclusion that "[i]nformation at a more general level is available on the schools' websites, and the presence of translations or adaptations in English depends, as we have seen, on the choice of the single school". An ongoing effort done within the departments has made it possible that almost all the course descriptions in the eight departments are now given in Italian and English, even the ones where the content is a foreign language like German or Polish. In very few cases, only Italian is available or only English is used (mainly for some EMI courses).

The availability of multilingual versions or translations of key documents can also be considered an indicator of universities' willingness to promote itself for the external world. Yet very few UniTo documents are translated. Compared to some other Italian universities which give an English translation or summary of their strategic plans (e.g., University of Bologna, Sapienza University, University of Milan, Bocconi University), UniTo' strategic plan is only available in Italian. This could restrict the university's internationalisation objectives and limit its visibility worldwide. While there is an increasing consciousness about the value of spreading fundamental strategies to the wider international community, failing to promote the university's essence worldwide may negatively impinge the very objectives it originally sets for its mission.

The growing need to adequately address the international community is also reflected in the university's measure of publishing calls targeting international students, researchers and teachers not only in Italian but also in English. Although there is no reference to using English in calls in the new strategic plan (2021-2026) and the latest programming document (2021), it is expected that this practice will persist in the future. The English language is also emphasised in some departments as an indicator of quality research when scientific and academic publication is

disseminated to the international research community in English. For example, the Management department prides itself that research published in English by its affiliated researchers has reached 70% of the total number of publications and that PhD candidates, post doc researchers and teachers are always encouraged to present their studies in international conferences and workshops using English only. Despite this, some departments are lamenting the inefficient international communication system of the university, classifying it as one of the threats jeopardising their efforts of recruiting more international students “La presenza di un numero chiuso costituisce un limite per un’efficace promozione del CDS fuori dal territorio nazionale, in quanto non adeguatamente supportata da un sistema di comunicazione in inglese che raggiunga gli studenti potenziali fuori dal territorio italiano (si confronti con siti di Atenei e la loro comunicazione di deadline per l’accesso ai corsi di laurea)” (Management Department’s 3-year plan 2019-2021).

4.4. Plurilingualism and Internationalisation: impact on the student community

This section focuses on UniTo’s language policies for internationalisation and their impact on students’ foreign language and intercultural skills. The document analysis has shown that fostering students’ plurilingual and pluricultural skills outside mobility programs, can be guaranteed via recruiting more international students and visiting teachers, both of which are closely sensitive to the provision of EMI courses. These three components offer rich contexts of exposure to foreign languages and or cultures. The survey questions will try to explore students’ plurilingual repertoires, whether and how they make use of them when they are exposed to the opportunities brought to them thanks to the university’s policies.

Local and International Students’ plurilingual backgrounds

The student community in the four departments is multilingual per excellence, with twenty-six languages, including Italian, being spoken as L1 by local and international students (Table 2). Some of these languages are non-European languages (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Persian and Vietnamese). For the overall majority of LS (84.33%, n=786), Italian is the mother tongue (including bilingual ones). The remaining 15.77% (n=146) mentioned fifteen other languages as L1 namely: Albanian, Arabic, Bangla, Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian with the top five frequent languages being: English, Spanish, Romanian, Arabic and German. This percentage is slightly below the national level for the same age category which is 16.9% (ISTAT, 2017). Local students who declared that their L1 is not Italian reflect the increasing multilingual aspect of the Italian society brought by immigration in particular. ISS’ L1, on the other hand, amounts to twenty-one languages with Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Persian and Russian being the most frequent ones. Twenty-five foreign countries were reported to be the country of origin in diverse world regions like West Europe (Belgium, France), East Europe (Czech Republic, Serbia), East and West Asia (China, Iran, Turkey), Latin America (Colombia, Brazil), MENA region (Egypt, Morocco) and Africa (South Africa) and this diversity reflects the cultural diversity of those ISs.

| | LSs' Foreign Languages | | ISs' Foreign Languages | | Total | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | N= | Percent | N= | Percent | N= | Percent |
| 1 language | 16 | 1.7% | 0 | 0% | 16 | 1.6% |
| 2 languages | 173 | 18.6% | 5 | 9% | 178 | 18% |
| 3 languages | 400 | 42.9% | 26 | 46% | 426 | 43.1% |
| 4 languages | 260 | 27.9% | 20 | 35% | 280 | 28.3% |
| More than 4 languages | 83 | 8.9% | 6 | 10% | 89 | 9% |
| Total | 932 | 100% | 57 | 100% | 932 | 100 |

Table 2. Students' known foreign languages

ISs fall in two broad categories: degree seeking students who had a prior degree from a foreign country and who are enrolled at BA or MA levels and exchange (mainly Erasmus Incoming) students who attend specific courses and stay for short or medium periods. 61.4% of ISs confirmed to have attended Italian language courses either in one of UniTo's structures (15.8% of total IS respondents) or elsewhere (45.6% of respondents). 38.6% said they never took Italian language courses. What these answers indicate is the willingness and perhaps the need of those ISs to learn Italian during their stay in the country, but at the same time, the percentage of those who took the language course at UniTo remains rather limited. As for foreign language landscapes, all students speak at least one foreign language and the majority (80.4%) speak three or more (Table 2) with English, Spanish, French and German being the most frequent foreign languages amongst local and international students.

Languages and communication between local and international students

Communication between local and international students is somehow asymmetric. While 64.1 % of LSs would use English to interact with ISs, interestingly, ISs' preferred language of communication with the local ones is not English but Italian, with 75.4% of them opting for Italian only. Only 17.5% of ISs said they prefer English, the remaining ones (7.1%) said they would use both, English and Italian. 26.1% of LSs said they would use both English and Italian (though it is not clear in what manner) and 5.4% said they would use only Italian. A minority (n=42) opted for other languages like Spanish, German, and French. Obviously, English is the preferred language of communication, and it is in constant interaction with Italian and the other languages in a multilingual setting. Wanting to learn more about how LSs can benefit from the multilingual interactional contexts with ISs, they were asked to provide some real examples of these interactions based on their own experiences. Some of the answers given highlight the rich linguistic and cultural exchanges that take place between the students, the linguistic and cultural awareness they develop, as well as the translanguaging and code-switching practices they resort to.

- I faced the linguistic gap we, Italians, have while speaking in English.
- I became more aware about life in Spain, Ireland and Turkey thanks to International students. For example, I now know about political thoughts among young people in Turkey; I learned so many new words that Spanish adolescents use.
- In my *lettorato* class I have two students who come from China and I have learned some interesting things about their way of living, means of transport and language too.
- I discovered some French expressions and habits: e.g. "du coup" to say "perciò", "carrément" to say "proprio/assolutamente" and the fact that French people kiss in the opposite direction to the Italians when greeting each other.
- I learned about the student life in Japan and also expanded my knowledge con colloquial

informal Japanese, which is very different from the registers taught during the university lessons.

- I do remember we talked about life in Poland and in Italy using: Italian, Polish and English.
- Pronunciation is a very important skill that can be improved only by speaking with a mother tongue like an international student.
- I started a conversation group in Portuguese for Italian students to improve their skills in this language and to show them some aspects of Brazilian culture, there we talk about food, music, grammar, literature, differences between academic systems, and family.

Frequency of communication between the two groups, however, remains rather limited. More than half of the students who confirmed having had at least one IS in their class said they never or rarely spoke to ISs and only 17.23% said they frequently or very frequently did so, even if more than 70% of all local respondents believed that ISs can improve their foreign language and intercultural skills.

Languages and communication between local students and Visiting Professors

Out of the 932 LS, 23.93% (n=223) confirmed to have attended classes taught by visiting professors. When asked about the languages used for teaching by these professors, students' answers reported a list of 8 foreign languages (Figure 1) with English ranking first (59%), Spanish, German and French ranking second, third and fourth respectively. Some minor presence was reported for languages like Arabic, Portuguese, Japanese and Catalan.

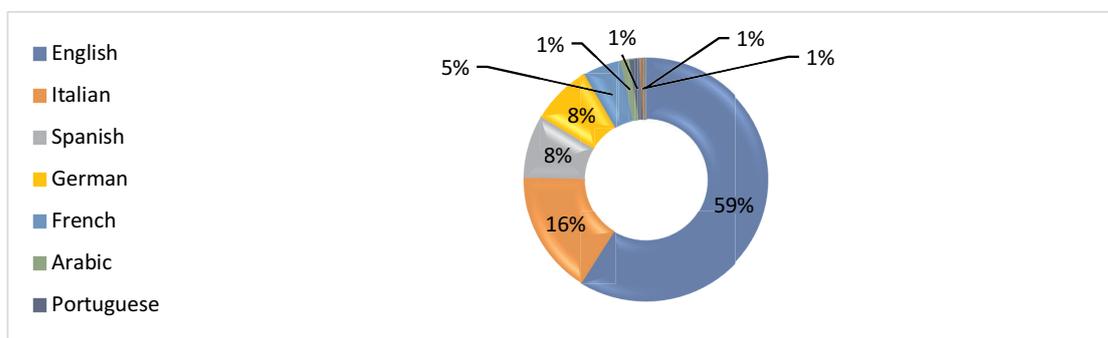


Figure 1. Visiting Professors' teaching languages

Less than half of the students (n=108) who attend courses by visiting professors had the chance to communicate with these professors at least once using not only Italian but also the list of foreign languages listed above. Frequent communication, however, was restricted to less than 8% of respondents. These acts of communication took place in spoken and written forms during the course and outside it (e.g., side chats with the teacher before or after course time, office hours, email exchanges etc.). The remaining 115 students said they never communicated with those professors.

English language skills in EMI

Less than 30% of the local students (n=267) said they included EMI in their study plans. Only 10.1% of them took the courses despite the availability of a similar one in Italian. More than

half (51.7%) said they included the course because its content was interesting and was only offered in English while the remaining 38.2% said the course was compulsory in their study plan. When the same content is available in two languages and students opt for the one in English, this suggests that what drove their choice was the language itself, and perhaps a desire to consolidate their existing level. However, the proportion of students deciding for an EMI course because of the language remains very limited, a finding similar to that of Clark (2017) who found that only 26% of his surveyed students explicitly mentioned English as the reason of their choice. Even if the objective of EMI is not teaching the language (Costa & Coleman, 2013), those courses still represent contexts of exposure where learning would be incidental. Results, in line with several previous ones in the Italian context (e.g., Ackerley, 2017; Clark, 2017), show that local students believe that the courses mainly improved their skills in such areas as vocabulary, listening and reading (Figure 2).

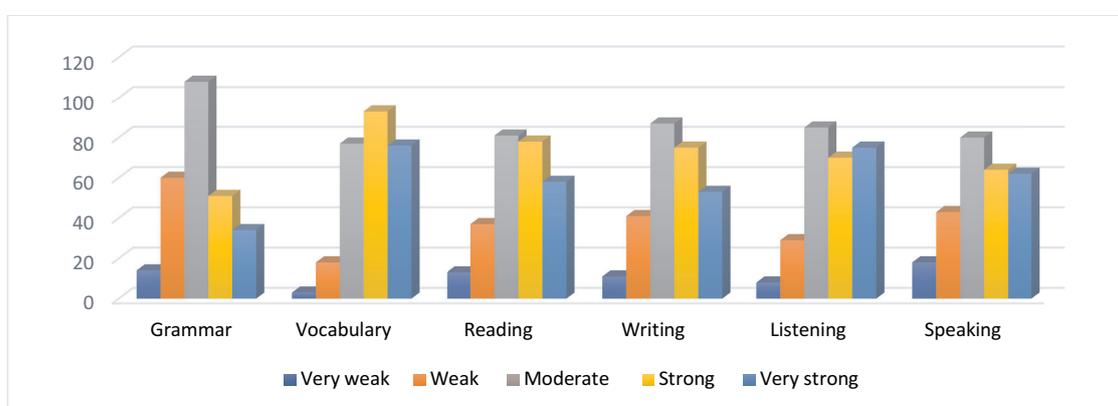


Figure 2. Students' perception of EMI's impact on their English level

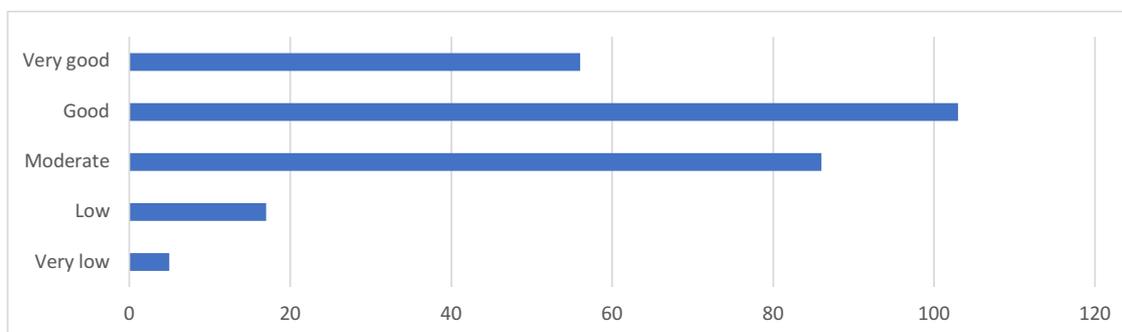


Figure 3. Student's perception on EMI teachers' English level

Students' opinions on their lecturers' English language level were also positive (Figure 3) even if they may not necessarily reflect the real level of the teachers. However, these opinions can echo a general sentiment of appreciation or dissatisfaction, which, in turn, can affect the processes of course comprehension. EMI teachers' proficiency in using English within the Italian higher education system has been criticised of being not very adequate and of affecting teaching and learning quality (Clark, 2017; Bagni, 2021; Molino et al., forthcoming). The present results are in line with those by Belhiah & Elhami (2015) and Clark (2017: 13) who found that "overall, responses show that students are reasonably satisfied with the level of their lecturers' English".

EMI teachers' lacunas related to the medium of instruction is sometimes thought to "lead to lowering the standards of teaching and literally dumbing down the academic content" (Bagni, 2021: 134). However, further research is needed to inspect if EMI teachers' insufficient English proficiency might impede learners' English language improvement. The purpose of including a similar question in the present study should be taken as a complementary piece of the puzzle that serves to further understand how EMI courses may affect language learning rather than content learning.

Conclusion

This paper has reached two main objectives. The first is to bring into focus the issue of language policy and planning within universities. The second is to draw the attention to the limits of these policy implementation, mainly on the student community. Analysis has shown that plurilingual policies make a complex composite whose bits and pieces are scattered around several types of official documents and implemented through various forms of actions. The concept of plurilingualism, although advocated for by the European Commission long time ago, has integrated UniTo's language policy documents rather recently. Major changes and innovations started to shape UniTo's vision the day it adopted a networking orientation, specifically thanks to its collaborative project with the four European universities previously mentioned. This, in turn, reflects a mature awareness regarding the values of languages and cultures, the local and foreign ones, manifested in the prominence given to intercomprehension courses for the incoming years. English remains the pivotal axis for many of UniTo's internationalisation policies and measures, including the increasing number of EMI and English being the only foreign version available in all departmental websites. Despite the university's efforts to come up with clear indicators to measure the success of implementation of its policies, these indicators can only provide general quantitative data about the number of EMI courses, the proportion of students who take foreign languages courses, the number of ISs and that of visiting teachers and researchers. Qualitatively, little is known about how plurilingual communication is actually taking place in all the aforementioned contexts.

The survey results, on the other hand, suggest that the university's plurilingual vision does not completely match students' perceptions and practices. While the student population itself is fully plurilingual with more than half speaking at least three languages, the real contexts, that is the ones resulting from the university's policies, remain rather limited as they affect only a small proportion of the cohort. Results have shown that communication between local students and foreign ones and between local students and visiting professors is so restricted that it covers a minority (probably also due to the limited proportion of ISs present in the four departments). In addition, EMI courses remain the privilege of those who feel confident enough with their English proficiency to take them, or those who project themselves in the future educational and employability benefits that EMI can facilitate. The multilingual settings created by ISs, VPs and EMI at UniTo remain rather low, but the potential and the diversity of foreign languages they represent need to be further exploited by creating more contact occasions and by pushing the two sides, that is the locals and the foreign visitors, to be more interactive. This necessitates a serious and efficient measures to raise students' awareness about how fostering one's plurilingual and intercultural skills necessitates constant interaction with individuals representing those languages and cultures. Students should also be sensitised that, for several reasons, experiencing these interactional opportunities in their natural contexts, i.e., abroad, is guaranteed only for a minority, so it is preferable to seize the occasion at home when it is available and get prepared for a real abroad experience afterwards.

The methodology adopted here has some limitations. Although the data analysed largely cover most of the university's policies and decisions, some additional references could give further precision to the analysis and conclusions given in the paper (like including all the departmental websites and plans rather than a sample of them and surveying students belonging to more disciplines and departments). In addition, it was not possible to study the evolution of the language policy through a long period of time because of the non-availability of some reference documents on the official sites (mainly the strategic plans before 2016 and departmental plans 2020-2024, except those of the two humanities departments included).

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