



# Parallel Language Use at the University of Copenhagen – an evolving commitment

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# Overview

1. Language ideologies ('normative positions')
2. Language policy at the University of Copenhagen
3. The relation between normative positions and practices

# 1. Language ideologies

1. Hegemonic English (the future speaks English – all resistance is both useless and retro)
2. Nationalism (the national language should be prescribed)
3. Soft multilingualism (all languages should be allowed and none prescribed)

# 1. Language ideologies

Soft multilingualism is a label for all those who are against both hegemonic English and nationalism -

- but who have no firm idea about exactly how to make multilingualism functionally operational

Approximately 98% of participants at this conference?

It is also convenient as a rationale for a laissez-faire policy (let everybody do as they like!)



# 1. Language ideologies

'Hegemonic English' is a widespread position in political-administrative circles (including the minister of science from 2001-2009)

Linguistic nationalism was never manifested in a 100% version (everybody knows that English is necessary) - but the national dimension was raised in two ways:

- a. Concern about the future of Danish as an academic language, as anglophone courses spread rapidly
- b. Concern about the university's obligations towards the 20% with little command of English (Preisler 1998)



## 2. Language policy at the University of Copenhagen

The notion of 'parallel language use' was adopted as a compromise position: national and international languages should be maintained in parallel, not viewed as competitors (but cp. Preisler 2009 on 'complementary languages')

The concept was made part of the 2008 *handleplan* (= 'action plan') of the University of Copenhagen, which included the establishment of a center to address language issues (cf. Holmen, this conf, and Jürna, this conf):



## 2. Language policy at the University of Copenhagen

Extract from the plan:

Globaliseringen medfører store muligheder og udfordringer, ikke mindst på det kommunikative område. Der er behov både for at kunne kommunikere og udvide sin kommunikation over landegrænser og for at holde sig eget sprog fagligt funktionsdygtigt. Universiteterne spiller i denne proces en hovedrolle som kultur- og vidensinstitution. Med betegnelsen parallelsproglighed tilsigter vi at håndtere denne dobbelthed. Det er i det lys, KU har oprettet et parallelsprogscenter. *KUs Strategiske handleplan 2008-2012*, pkt 19: Parallelsprogscenter

English (home-made) translation:

Globalization brings great opportunities and challenges, not least in the area of communication. There is a need both to communicate and extend one's communication across borders and to keep one's own language academically functional. Universities play a key role in this process as cultural and educational institutions. The term 'parallel language use' is used to indicate U of C's intention to address this duality. The decision to set up a centre of parallel language use must be understood in light of this aim. ('Strategic action plan 2008-2012' of the University of Copenhagen, point 19)

## 2. Language policy at the University of Copenhagen

'The Center for Internationalization and parallel language use' (=CIP) is hosted by the Dept of English, Germanic and Romance, but funded centrally (Director: Anne Holmen)

CIP provides research, information, course development, teaching and advisory functions in relation to language policies and practices

CIP is set to be maintained in the new action plan, and an enhanced commitment to promoting other languages (including the major European languages) has been put on the table as a potential new element



## 2. Language policy at the University of Copenhagen

First main point: The University of Copenhagen is taking the language issue seriously and is doing something about it – no laissez-faire cop-out!

However, the next challenge is: what are the relations between principles and practices?

'Parallel language use' is in itself a variety of soft multilingualism - it does not specify what parallellism entails in practice



### 3. The relation between principles and practices

The international university shares this dilemma

”Transcultural interaction and linguistic diversity” (cf. the conference theme) means that people from different backgrounds will be around, but does not specify how to devise an institution that brings people together in a way that works for everybody

People like us tend to agree with views such as

We need to avoid academic cultural imperialism and instead look to building more international cultures of teaching and learning where dominant academic cultures make room for new ways of being and knowing (Ryan 2011)



### 3. The relation between principles and practices

In order to address this issue, we need to go from soft to *hard* multilingualism

*Hard* multilingualism is about what is *required* to ensure a space enabling multilingual understanding

The only well-established element of hard multilingualism is the requirement that you must know *English* in order to function at a university

Official 'certification' of teachers for teaching courses with English as the language of instruction was CIP's first major task



### 3. The relation between principles and practices

The most eagerly pursued aspects of parallel language use so far have been those designed to enhance English:

Although all languages are parallel, one language is so far more parallel than others

Conclusion 2 (cf. also Lindström, this conf)

*A principle* of soft multilingualism, including as a special case parallel language policies, may lead to hegemonic English in *practice*

### 3. The relation between principles and practices

If parallel language use is interpreted in terms of *hard* multilingualism, it means that people have to know *both* English and Danish (and other relevant languages)

This is the traditional policy for university teachers – but with no enforcement practices

Rumours are emerging of cases where non-native university teachers' command of Danish is becoming an issue

### 3. The relation between principles and practices

This makes most people uncomfortable: surely 'being international' is about being open to others who may not speak our own language?

The political party 'Det radikale Venstre' has suggested that Denmark ought to make English a second language to the extent of making full participation in Danish social life feasible without learning Danish

On that interpretation, 'being international' once again translates into a policy of hegemonic English: no need to learn any other language



### 3. The relation between principles and practices

A practical snag: is this *realistic* (in the short term)?

Even in organizations where the official policy is 'English-only', mastery of Danish is a condition for full participation, cf. Tange (no date):

Native students "behave badly," e.g. by using Danish in an English-medium class; Danish is the preferred language for small-talk or question-answer sessions, typically occurring during breaks. The usage pattern corresponds to the relation between a hegemonic centre and a subversive periphery

ELF is not a community language, but a linguistic 'meeting place' (cf Mortensen 2010): when the focal context is absent, community norms for language choice take over



### 3. The relation between principles and practices

Lønsmann (2011) found that in a Danish corporation with English as the official company language, more Danish than English was used on an average day

In order to make full participation possible for monolingual Anglophones, Danish would have to be *prohibited*

That would amount to 'hard monolingualism'

A compromise version of 'hard *multilingualism*' would be to stress *receptive* competencies: reading and listening – and let everyone *speak* their language of choice



### 3. The relation between principles and practices

Conclusion 3: The principle of soft multilingualism faces a dilemma

In terms of practices, it can opt for

- (1) laissez-faire (no practical policy);
- (2) monolingualism (effective promotion of ELF only)
- (3) hard multilingualism (effective policies for multilingual participation);

Without a version of *hard* multilingualism, the likely consequence of soft multilingualism in principle is hegemonic English in practice

But policies targeting multilingual participation are on the table (cf. Jürna, this conf)— so watch this space!



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