**12. The role of English in the internationalisation of Chinese higher education: a case study of English medium instruction in China**

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**Abstract**

This chapter investigates the role of English in a Chinese university’s undertaking of internationalisation in response to the national call to ‘go global’, with the focus on its English medium instruction (EMI) provided to international students. It contextualises the inquiry by discussing language issues pertaining to internationalisation from a perspective informed by a body of research on English as a lingua franca (ELF). The data, retrieved through document analysis, interviews and classroom observation, reveal the complexity of language management in the university. Not only the university provides EMI to attract international students, but also EMI participants, including staff and students, rely on ELF in educational practice. However, the university is committed to following the national endeavour to spread Chinese as a global language and promote it among international students in the form of Chinese medium instruction (CMI). Meanwhile, EMI staff suffer from inadequate language management in relation to content teaching or regard the Chinese language as beneficial for international students. Subsequently, the expectations about CMI as complimentary to EMI are discussed. Towards the end, the needs for and the challenges to EMI invite the re/consideration of the support to the role of English in China’s higher education internationalisation.

# Introduction

Higher education internationalisation is gaining its momentum in China. The *National* *Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development* (2010-2020) (hereafter the *Outline*) posits internationalisation as a key element in Chinese education development planning. It encourages Chinese higher education institutions to 1) increase international communication and cooperation at different levels and in different aspects, 2) introduce and import high-quality educational resources, and 3) carry out student exchange in collaboration with higher education institutions from other countries. Following the *Outline*, Chinese higher education institutions take actions to engage in internationalisation, with the slogan of ‘going global’ upheld.

Internationalisation is well-recognised by scholars as local institutions’ ‘reaction to globalisation’ (e.g. Naidoo 2006, Altbach and Knight 2007, Lumby and Foskett 2016: 95). As Altbach and Knight (2007: 290) note, globalisation is ‘the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century’. This context features ‘*a set of social processes* that appear to transform our present social condition of weakening nationality into one of globality' (Steger 2009: 10, original italics) and poses challenges to the work in political, economic, cultural, intellectual, and various other sectors of society. The internationalisation of higher education is thus applauded as a process of dealing with the trend of globalisation and evokes ‘the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems’ and individuals (Altbach and Knight 2007: 290; Naidoo 2006). In this way, internationalisation as a buzzword in the discourse of higher education today tends to be actualised through various activities such as international student and staff recruitment, student and staff exchange programmes, international programmes and curricula, international research agendas, to name just a few.

As all sorts of internationalisation activities undoubtedly require some mediums of communication, English arises as an incomparable lingua franca for international communication in the world today. In particular, the use of English for instruction is seen as an important index of internationalisation in some contexts, even in the situation where instructors and students share first languages other than English (e.g. Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2013; Choi 2010; Hu 2015; Yang 2002). However, the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as both a cause and an effect of globalisation has attracted burgeoning research interest, which has consequently been transforming our understanding of ‘what is the thing called English’ (Seidlhofer 2011: 1). That is, based on the recognition of the expanding ownership of English, the new understanding of English challenges a traditionally exclusive focus on native English and calls for a response from the education policy and practice with regard to English.

In this context, this chapter sets out to investigate the role of English in educational policy and practice in China’s higher education internationalisation, focusing on a Chinese university’s case. The purposes are to understand issues associated with the role of English in Chinese higher education internationalisation from a perspective informed by the research on ELF and add to the contribution to understanding English in higher education internationalisation in a global context.

**Background**

The university under examination in this chapter is one of the privileged universities under the authorisation of the Ministry of Education in China with the credentials to recruit international students and provide international programmes. It is located in a middle-scale city, which attracts tourists from all over the world due to the Three Gorges hydroelectric project by the Yangtze River in the vicinity. As a first-tier university, it enjoys comparatively good education resources in China and a strong position in the study of hydropower and hydroelectric engineering as well as other relevant subjects. The university attracts international students who are mainly from South Asia and South-East Asia to join various degree programmes. Other international students from other contexts come to study in this university due to student exchange programmes as part of the university's internationalisation project. To support their studies in this university, international students can apply on the basis of competition for fundings provided by the China Scholarship Council in line with the *Outline* which explicitly offers support to students from developing countries. Chinese teaching staff work on the international programmes in the university. International teaching staff consist of members from various linguacultural backgrounds scattered in different disciplines, although most of them worked on foreign language study programmes mainly oriented towards Chinese students.

# Understanding English in EMI

English medium instruction (EMI) is one of ‘tangible outcomes of internationalisation’ in higher education worldwide (Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2013: xvii). English as a powerful language is widely learned and therefore allows international students to learn course content via the medium of English in education contexts where usually other L1s than English are means of instruction (Shohamy 2013, this volume). The adoption of EMI, nonetheless, is controversial. It raises a concern with the uncertainty as to how academic content can be successfully taught and learned through the medium of English as a second language (L2). Tange (2010: 137), for instance, points out that the requirement for Danish lecturers to conduct English-medium teaching undermines ‘the quality and quantity of classroom communication’. International students are found to evaluate Danish lecturers with a ‘focus on benchmarking in the university system’ and leave lecturers to ‘fear that an exposure of their linguistic inadequacies will affect their status and opportunities within the faculty’ because ‘there is no “prestige” in admitting to bad English’(Tange 2010: 144). Shohamy (2013) also takes issue with the English-medium assessment. In her view, it is difficult to tell whether low achievement results from language skills or knowledge gaps when the assessment of content learning is conducted in L2 English. In addition, EMI is often seen as an indicator of the hegemony of English that marginalises other different languages (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2010). Saarinen and Nikula (2013), for instance, claim that the heterogeneity of students’ languages and cultures is often invisible in internationalisation, with EMI reifying Anglophone monolingualism. Shohamy (2013) warns that the reliance on English in assessing students’ academic achievement can cause inequality among students who attach different values to English and who have different language backgrounds. What’s more, EMI could have negative effects on the social structure from a critical sociolinguistic perspective (e.g. Hu and Alsagoff 2010). In discussing EMI in China, Hu and Alsagoff (2010) put forward that the extent to which EMI is actualised in educational settings correlates with the range of educational resources across different regions of China. That is, the promotion of EMI in China could intensify the imbalanced distribution of educational resources and even affect the pursuit of social equality.

Three alternative ways of understanding the status and role of English around the globe today offer alternative insights into the said concerns. First, accepting NNESs' agency can contribute to a different understanding. Phillipson (2001) criticises English for serving globalisation rather than the world’s people. For him, the spread of English goes with linguistic imperialism to fuel capitalism and marginalise NNESs’ interests and rights of languages (Phillipson 1992). This perspective positions English as a threat to multilingualism and multiculturalism. In this line, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2010) denounce English as a ‘murderer’ of linguistic diversity along with economic globalisation. Against this position, House (2003) argues that NNESs’ choice for ELF should be respected. She (ibid.: 560-561) challenges the view of English as a threat to multilingualism and argues that the ‘politically correct’ views on multilingualism seem to ‘imply that ELF users do not know what is in their interest’. This view lends support to NNESs’ agency in the process of the spread of English. The diverging positions remind us of Widdowson’s (2003) distinction between the distribution of English and the spread of English. That is, whilst the former has the connotation that NNESs are merely subject to the impacts of the spread of English and acting as the receivers of what the Anglophone centre delivers, the latter implies the role of NNESs’ agency and choice in the process of spread of English. Taking into consideration NNESs’ role in the adoption of EMI thus offers an alternative insight into the issue of English in EMI.

Second, a considerable body of research on ELF phenomenon points to the question of *which English* or *whose English* (emphasised by Seidlhofer 2003, 2011). In this line, Jenkins (2015a) uses the notion of Global Englishes to problematise the exclusive focus on native English and emphasise the diversity of English. It aligns with the argument for the ownership of English by all those who use it and puts native English speakers (NESs) and NNESs on equal footing. As the notion of global Englishes implies, English should not be taken for granted as *the* English (emphasised by Widdowson 2003). That is, ELF integrates with multilingualism and values the role of NNESs in the change and shaping of English (e.g. Mauranen 2012). In the analysis of the dilemma between English as a ‘murderer’ of multilingualism and English as a language choice for the European Union (EU) language policy, Seidlhofer (2003) points out that the assumptions about the hegemonic status of English connect with the ideology that native English represents the rubric of English. By questioning this ideology, she urges to treat ELF as inclusive rather than exclusive of multilingualism in order to address the EU language policy dilemma. Likewise, the consideration of the issue of English in EMI would benefit by asking *which English* or *whose English*.

Third, a developing perspective proposed in Jenkins’s (2015b) work on ‘repositioning’ ELF in relation to multilingualism is helpful. As Jenkins’s (2015b: 51) states, the ‘repositioning’ is ‘evolutionary rather than revolutionary’ from the perspective that integrates ELF and multilingualism as discussed above. Proceeding from the promise that ELF communication evokes ELF users’ multilingual repertoires, which inevitably include their knowledge of English, she proposes to reconsider the relationship between ELF and multilingualism conversely from the mainstream view. For her, ELF is a major part of ELF users’ multilingual repertoire rather than ELF includes multilingual elements. Whereas the mainstream perspective on ELF explains how ELF users make use of multilingual repertoire to enable ELF communication, Jenkins (2015b) further engages with the issue how multilingual nature of ELF is enacted in different multilingual encounters. In this sense, the conceptual discussion of ELF in relation to multilingualism (Jenkins 2015b) acknowledges the operation of English together with other L1s in intercultural communication and has implications for the concern that other L1s are marginalised in the EMI endeavour (e.g. Shohamy 2013).

The alternative understandings of English informed by the ELF research, therefore, urges us to rethink the issues of English in EMI in terms of which/whose English and the relationship between English and other languages relevant to various local contexts. The critical analysis of English would optimistically help to empower non-native English speaking lecturers and students in their intercultural experience. It would help to shift their focus to content learning from worrying about ‘bad English’ that would have negative impacts on ‘their status and opportunities’ (see the discussion of Tange’s study above). It opens the possibility that English can work with other languages to reduce the tension on teaching resources.

**Methodology**

Case study is a qualitative research method, as an umbrella covering a few sub-methods (Gillham 2000). The sub-methods used in the present study include documents, observations, and interviews to allow for triangulation. The documents include university documents available in both the university’s online media and print circulation. Classroom observations are employed to examine how language is used in practice and, further, whether language practice in classroom settings aligns with language expectations revealed in university documents that are presumably associated with the university’s internationalisation. Interviews are adopted to understand possible convergence or divergence between the understanding of English in documents and the interpretation of English in classroom practice, and between what is specified in documents and what is actualised by teachers and students. Importantly, interviews allow for the investigation into teachers’ perceptions of language issues for classroom purposes and those for the university’s overall purpose of internationalisation.

The present study has three data sets retrieved through three different research tools. The first set includes university website, programme brochures, staff performance evaluation documents, university advertisements, university bulletin boards, university recruitment materials, and so on. The interview data are contributed by four Chinese teachers. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 75 minutes, depending on the interviewees’ interest in the interview conversations with the researcher and the information that they would like to share with the researcher. Interview participants were recruited among Chinese teachers on various disciplinary programmes designed to attract international students, such as microbiology, hydropower and economics, operations management, and Chinese culture because I was interested in teachers, students and class contents from other courses than English language ones. Understanding the interaction between Chinese teachers and international students offers insights into Chinese teachers’ work in response to the university’s language practice and language policy, although understanding the interaction between international staff and international students would deserve another study. The third data set records classroom observation. The focus was on one interviewed Chinese teacher’s classroom practice. Nine hours of classroom observation on six sessions altogether were video recorded. The class group included 14 international students who were recruited by the studied university in Bangladesh and therefore shared Bangladesh as their first language. They were in their first year of study in the university. They were asked to give permission to be recorded. They showed interest in the research project and willingness to participate. What follows will present the data analysis in detail~~s~~.

**Document analysis**

Document analysis shows what is overtly specified in the university’s educational policy regarding language choice. In general, the university appears to value both Chinese and English in internationalisation initiatives. The programme booklet, entitled *Prospectus for International Students* and designed for the purpose of recruiting international students, provides information first in Chinese and then in English. The booklet explicitly reads that language used for instruction is ‘Chinese/English’ on most programmes oriented towards international students, for example, civil engineering, hydraulic and hydroelectric engineering, and tourism management. The information on given programmes, for example, often includes an English-medium paragraph like this:

*As qualified, candidates are expected to become internationalised application-oriented professionals with high-quality professional knowledge, which can promote the development of the society, economics, technology, culture and take part in international competition.*

This paragraph spells out the objectives of given programmes. As Chinese is paralleled with English as a medium of instruction, it is inferable that Chinese and English are equally regarded as suitable for the purposes of internationalisation and preparing international students for international communities and international job markets.

Notably, only one international programme assigns English as the only medium of instruction in the booklet. The programme is entitled Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, attracting international students among whom Indian and Nepalese students have consisted of the majority. The university proudly states in the booklet that ‘more than 250 Indian students and 100 Nepal students’ have received degrees on this programme and subsequently passed their own countries’ qualification examinations. This message gives an impression that the university is willing to highlight its capacity of providing EMI, despite the importance attached to Chinese.

The examination of how language is used in various media of the university offers insights into implicit language policy in terms of the university’s position on language choice. There are both Chinese and English versions of information on the university website. Usages of English are likely to be non-native-like and transparent in delivering messages. For example:

*You are welcome to join into ISA. Please contact with us. (*<http://eng.ctgu.edu.cn/info/1065/1063.htm>*).*

*The history of CTGU can be dated back to 1946, while the bachelor education started from 1978, and the postgraduate and international student education began from 1996. (*<http://eng.ctgu.edu.cn/info/1044/1001.htm>*)*

A webpage (<http://eng.ctgu.edu.cn/info/1065/1063.htm>) introducing the International Students Association allows for some understanding of the use of language. All students who are involved in the Association appear to be non-native English speaking international students. As they are representatives of international students of the university, it is possible to infer that the university’s international student profile is non-native English dominant. It is, therefore, possible that the purpose of communicating with non-native English speaking international students who are targets of the university recruitment and enrolment has impacts on the use of English in terms of what is acceptable and what is not.

In a nutshell, document analysis seems to show the university’s consideration of international students’ multilingual needs, as it accepts different language choices and forms which are available to both staff and students to make international students happy with their experiences in the university.

**Interview analysis**

The interview data highlight the role of English in international programmes provided to international students but suggest little space for Chinese on relevant programmes. Four interviewed teachers shared the view that English was necessary for international programmes oriented towards international students. They reported their use of English on international programmes and their narratives of teaching experience revealed a shared belief that international programmes should give priority to English, while Chinese cannot satisfy the need for international communication. For example,

Extract 1

***T4:*** *I use English in class. The students are required to learn some Chinese, but their Chinese is not enough for them to manage the programme.*

Moving further to make sense of language practice on international programmes, I found that the interviewed teachers have a shared focus on meaning-making while not bothering to analyse forms of English. None of the interviewed teachers had ever thought of native English or NESs unless I mentioned native English intentionally in order to probe their reaction to a reference to native English norms. Unanimously, the interviewed teachers rejected the relevance of reference to native English norms for international programmes. This is particularly revealing in the teachers’ evaluation of student assignments and assessment, with the marking criteria having reportedly nothing to do with a reference to native-like English. For example,

Extract 2

***R:*** *Do you see English as a criterion in marking students’ assignments or their exam papers.*

***T2:*** *I never marked up or marked down because of their English. They are expected to grasp the knowledge, as long as they got the knowledge points written down in their papers, they will get the marking points.*

Despite positive attitudes towards the supporting role of English on international programmes, the interview data do not suggest that teachers applauded this language choice on international programmes, revealing a complex picture of language practice, which highlights a few issues in the implementation of EMI in China.

First, EMI poses challenges to some lecturers that Chinese medium instruction does not. As mirrored in earlier works on EMI in European contexts (e.g. Kuteeva 2014; Tange 2010; Wilkinson 2013), those challenges mainly include time cost, English proficiency, and a sense of humour. T1 contributed her story on this issue. Although she could manage the communication of her disciplinary content in English, teaching on EMI courses involved more investment of time and effort but less fun than Chinese medium instruction. She felt that she underperformed in English as she could have lively stories to help her students to make sense of theories if using Chinese for instruction. She was not happy that her identity as an interesting lecturer became invisible as she could not integrate stories, jokes and real-life experience in her teaching.

Second, EMI affects disciplinary development to some extent in the university. As also reported in earlier works on EMI in European contexts (e.g. Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2013), a dilemma exists between disciplinary competence and language proficiency. In the current study, language is reported to serve as a precondition for the eligibility to lecture on international programs. According to the interview data, teachers who are not considered to be good in English were not given opportunities to teach on international programmes. There is a reported mismatch between what teachers liked to teach and what the university assigned them to teach. In this sense, both expert language users and non-expert language users were caught in the dilemma. Take T2 for example. For T2, who was a competent user of English, English was surprisingly not an advantage, but a burden, which restricted his pursuit of disciplinary interests. He expressed his view as follows:

Extract 3

***T2:*** *Yes, I can teach in English, but what I can teach in English is not my decision, the program is planned by the program leaders […] then I was chosen to teach on the EMI course […] There’re actually not many teachers who can use English to teach in this university. If all teachers could teach in English, there would have been different criteria for the selection of course teachers. English would not necessarily have been considered as the major criterion. Because many teachers aren’t selected no matter how strong they are in their subjects and how suitable they are for the courses, they are not selected only because they can’t teach in English.*

A counterexample is T4. He was proud that he could teach disciplinary subjects in English. He was more excited talking about English than his disciplinary subjects.

Extract 4

***T4:*** *I have one PhD student from Ethiopia and we talk in English. I teach an international student group on the Economics and Public Management programme. And the Foreign Languages College also invited me to give talks to their students. I have a special way of learning English. I wonder whether my special way of learning English can be promoted and developed into some teaching method. I’m working on it.*

It seems to be surprising that T4, a professor from economics studies background, is interested in developing English learning methods. Given the influence of English across different disciplines, however, T4 seems to have every good reason to take pride in his ‘special way of learning English’ to the extent that he hopes to develop it further to benefit more people. His pursuit in this direction - as he said, ‘I’m working on it’ - reveals his confidence in the need for English learning methods by more people and his pleasure in the achievement brought by his English. That he seems to put the cart before the horse serves as the evidence of the importance attached to English by some content teaching staff members in general. Despite different attitudes towards English in relation to disciplines between T2 and T4, what is common is the role of English in distracting academic staff from their first disciplines due to the university’s need for EMI.

Third, Chinese instructors believe in the necessity of developing international students’ competence in the Chinese language. Despite the emphasis on English, the interview data also surface a belief that international students should learn Chinese for their interest. There are three reasons offered by those who believed in the need for Chinese. First, China is a place where only ’so-so’ English can be learned but is a right place to learn Chinese. Second, the university should project its identity associated with Chinese culture which has strong connections with Chinese but not English. This belief is clearly stated on the standing point of the university, while how international students perceive their language needs is not considered. It is worth noting that the belief in the importance of promoting Chinese culture and Chinese language is also recognised by the university, as there is a module entitled Chinese Culture oriented towards international students. Interestingly, however, international students are keen on the module for their purpose of settling down in the local context other than appreciating Chinese culture. T3 was a teacher of Chinese Culture and gave information on the module:

Extract 5

***T3:*** *Chinese culture is very broad and we can only introduce to the students some superficial culture things, such as festivals, customs, and Chinese characters. But I found that the students are most interested in the information about where they can find nice things to eat, and where they can find interesting things to do. They are interested to know about the city and sometimes I just feel that they just wanted to know some tourist information.*

As T3 points out, the Chinese Culture module offers insufficient knowledge of Chinese culture and only helps international students with language skills that they need for everyday life in China. While international students only seem to be interested in tourist information, it is difficult to expect international students to develop sufficient knowledge of Chinese to cope with academic studies through the support provided by the university. Other interviewed teachers reported having a very limited use of Chinese by international students. For example, in T1’s narrative, students occasionally did code-switch between English and Chinese when they communicated with the teachers. However, the use of Chinese was often related to relatively relaxing content. For example, when T1 talked about fermentation in biochemistry class and drew on examples of fermented food, students switched to Chinese in response commenting on the food as to whether it was 好吃 （tasty） or not. Thus, the feasibility of teachers’ expectation to change to Chinese for disciplinary studies is yet to be investigated.

To sum up, the interview analysis clearly reveals a few conflicts. One is between university policy and language practice in terms of language choice. University policy sees the value of Chinese and English on international programmes, but teaching and learning are made possible through English as a medium of instruction. The second is between the top-down allocation of teaching load and bottom-up needs by teachers. This conflict relates to the need on international programmes for language proficiency and content knowledge, both of which are not necessarily at the disposal of the same teachers. The third relates to a concern for Chinese culture. The university and teachers have the wish to promote Chinese culture and language. Students are focused on how to accommodate local culture so as to make most of their learning and life experience in the university. To put differently, university and teachers have needs in ideological terms, but students focus on their practical needs.

**Classroom observation data**

Classroom observation offers opportunities to observe students’ participation in international education in terms of how they use and perceive language choice in the learning process. I recorded six sessions on the module Operational Management taught by T2 in one single semester. Each session lasted 90 minutes. The first time I entered his classroom, I introduced myself to students in T2’s class group and made it clear that I would sit in the corner of the class. I asked whether the students would agree to my recording and they all agreed. The class group included 14 students, although two or three students often missed the class. I had chats with some of the students during session breaks to know that the university recruited them together from Bangladesh. As a group of Bangladesh students on the same programme, they mingled together in class and after class. They expressed their willingness to make friends with Chinese students and Chinese lecturers. This might explain why they showed their cooperation in my classroom observation activity.

The observed group created a multilingual setting of learning. In observed sessions, T2, a Chinese lecturer, taught in English and communicated with Bangladesh students in English. When students were asked to work on group activities, English was used as a major medium of communication and Bengali was rarely used. Occasionally, students make jokes with each other with a few Chinese words inserted in their utterance. For example, ‘很好’ (very good), ‘没问题’ (no problem), ‘是这样’(that is it).

The observation highlighted students’ preference for English in classroom communication. A typical example is students’ insistence on using English when T2 suggested that they could help each other to make sense of difficult concepts by using Bengali to communicate with one another.

Extract 6

(T2 noticed that one student was a bit confused with the idea that he just passed on)

***T2*** *(looking at S1 who is next to the confused student): Could you explain to your friend what is operational cost?*

***S1****: (smiling and hesitating)*

***T2****: You can explain in Bangladesh.*

***S1****: (still hesitating)*

***T2****: Come on, help your friend, you can tell him in Bangladesh*

***S1****(smiling at the confused student): I want to explain it in English*

***T2****: Oh, ok*

Despite the teacher’s suggestion, S1 explicitly indicated his preference for English rather than the first language that he shared with ‘the confused student’. While it is yet to understand S1’ motivation to insist on the use of English, there could be a few reasons. First, S1 might be more comfortable with the use of English in explaining challenging concepts, given the learning process where English is often used for the input of knowledge; second, S1 hopes to have his understanding checked by the teacher by using English to include the teacher in the community; third, S1 tries to use English as often as possible to enhance his English skills. While the observation does not provide opportunities to probe into the reasons in particular and future research can be done to pursue in this direction, the importance attached to English by students in general might offer some understanding on students’ language preference. This reminds me of another classroom example, as presented in what follows.

At the end of the first session on the module, T2 sought student feedback on the course in order to understand what needs to be done to make future sessions more suitable for the students. While generally positive and informal, student feedback was centred on English:

Extract 7

***S1*** *(smiling): You’re a good teacher. Your English is good. Your lecture is interesting.*

***S2****: Err, your lecture is good. I can understand your lecture.*

***S3****: Yes, your English is good. I can understand.*

***S4****: Yeah, it is good, it is good.*

***S5****: Yeah, it is good to study in English.*

It was possible that students had impacts on each other so that the students who spoke later might have followed up with the ideas of those who spoke earlier. It was also possible that the students might have found easier to comment on English than content teaching. The students’ interest in English is visibly connected with their focus on the accessibility of T2’s teaching through English as the medium of instruction. It is particularly in S1’s comment that the priority is given to English when evaluating T2’s teaching. S5’s view that ‘it is good to study in English’ converges with S1’s insistence on using English discussed earlier to confirm an interest in English.

In short, classroom observation offers insights into student participation in EMI and student reaction to language choice. Wilkinson (2013) points out that students on EMI programs often have three concerns including disciplinary competence, teaching competence, and language competence. The classroom observation in the current study highlights a concern for English language competence among the international students. Nonetheless, no evidence is found in classroom observation to suggest that good English is associated with native-like English. This converges with the findings from document analysis and interviews.

**Discussion**

A messy picture is unfolded with regard to the language management in the university’s internationalisation process through the examination of English in three aspects including university policy concerning EMI, teacher perspective on EMI and student reaction to EMI. The university’s education policy regards Chinese as equally useful as English in its internationalisation initiatives. Both Chinese and English are explicitly assigned as mediums of instruction on international programmes. The status planning of Chinese is reflected in the courses provided to international students of Chinese Culture and of Chinese Language Learning, which serve the purpose of assimilating them into Chinese culture. Nonetheless, the actual language practice in classrooms does not fully support the university’s language status planning but emphasises the role of ELF in contrast with the marginal use of Chinese in international classroom communication. The focus on the pragmatic value of language is evident in that different languages are generally accepted as useful linguistic resources and the use of English suits the purpose of accommodating to international students. While acting as the negotiators between university policy and student needs, teachers appear to be contradictory and inconsistent. On the one hand, they engaged with the EMI process; on the other hand, they perceived difficulties and challenges in the hope to switch to CMI (Chinese-medium instruction).

The debates on EMI in non-native-English contexts inevitably involve the issue of culture and national identity (e.g. Ha 2013). A major concern is that the internationalisation of higher education with English at its heart is subject to ‘the hegemony of Western theoretical knowledge and the dominant role of English’ and inevitably leads to non-native English countries’ ‘academic dependency and Western superiority’ (Ha 2013: 164; Choi 2010). Although no evidence is found to support a concern with English as a threat to Chinese culture and identity, the Chinese university and teaching staff promote Chinese culture with the hope that CMI can be adopted among international students when they are ready, holding a strong belief that Chinese can help international students to cope with the competitiveness in international job markets. That is, while the role of ELF is acknowledged, there emerges a desire to promote the status of Chinese in international communication and in international communities. The desire converges with ‘the fast-growing scholarly interests in Chinese as a global language’ - as indicated on the website of the journal *Global Chinese* (<https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/glochi>) and China’s endeavours to promote Chinese worldwide. An influential Chinese project known as the Confucius Institute makes a statement on its website (<http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciousinstitutes/node_7537.htm>) that the Confucius Institute strives to ‘promote the development of multiculturalism around the world and contribute to the construction of a world in harmony’. As an educational institution within China’s educational system, the university echoes the national dedication to contribute to the multilingualism in the global arena and its confidence in the role of Chinese in this pursuit.

Notably, the belief in the role of Chinese in global multilingualism accommodates with the acknowledgment of multilingual reality within China and the call for the need of experts in different modern languages for the development of Chinese economy. As explicitly indicated on the website of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, ‘there are more than 130 languages and more than 30 written languages in our country’ (<http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/s5990/201506/t20150610_189893.html>). Some key universities specialising in developing multilingual experts provide various programmes of different modern languages, for instance, Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, to name just a few. Different language programmes provided in different private educational institutions also attract students from different walks of life. In addition, articles calling for the training and education of multilingual experts are published in the media (e.g. <http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-06/08/nw.D110000renmrb_20170608_2-17.htm>). Thus, the promotion of Chinese among international students seems to converge with the forces resisting the predominance of English around the world.

Education practice in the university in the current research seems to signal a departure from traditional attachment to native English norms. As far as many ELF scholars are concerned, the sociolinguistic fact of ELF use revealed through an ELF perspective is often neglected in many places, with monolingual native English bias still influential (e.g. Leung 2013). As Jenkins (2009: 11) argues, ‘the “fascination” with RP continues to this day’. Seidlhofer (2011: 42) points out that ‘what we are faced with is the claim that a national standard language should be valid not only within a particular country but globally’. The ‘national standard language’ in Seidlhofer’s words points to Standard English, which results from language regulations in native-English-speaking communities. While the discussion of the controversy of Standard English in native-English-speaking contexts is beyond the scope of this chapter, the attempt to use Standard English to regulate ELF users’ sociolinguistic behaviour is epidemic in many places and thus subject to criticism from scholars adopting an ELF perspective. Adopting an ELF perspective, I find it difficult to discern from the data an attachment to native English norms in the university’s educational policy and practice. Rather, focus on meaning-making is clearly visible in the data. Teachers are confident in students’ English and their evaluation criteria have nothing to do with native-likeness. In classroom observation, no evidence points to a concern for native-likeness and the communication among classroom participants was smooth. This case study thus suggests an irrelevance of NESs’ authority for the approach to English in the internationalisation of the given university. While not explicit, a disconnection of English from native English norms seems to be hidden in educational policy and practice. That is, English is described in terms of its practical function and its pragmatic value for those who are involved in EMI practice in the current research.

The approach to English in EMI in the Chinese university is thus different from the approach to English in English language education in China. As Wen (2012) points out, English teaching continues to be oriented towards native English in China. The “E” in ELT is often institutionalised to target at native English norms, with Chinese universities playing an important role in reinforcing the importance of native English (Wang 2015). The “E” in EMI, however, supports the learning of subjects and decentralises the notion of English as the language exclusively owned by native English speakers. This echoes studies (e.g. Murata and Iino 2017, Smit 2017) on EMI in other contexts which share a tendency of ELF practice in EMI, adding evidence to the expanding ownership of English among global users of English and challenging what Widdowson (2003:37) describes as the ‘custody’ of English by elite native English speakers. In addition, Wang and Wen’s (2017) study on Chinese university students on EMI programmes which prepare those students for overseas learning experiences reveals that those students tend to be open-minded towards various forms of English that enable effective communication and regard native English norms as disparaging in their beliefs of what makes good English. Put together, studies on EMI in China point to the decentralisation of native English and an acceptance of various forms of English that accommodate to learning and teaching experiences.

To recap, the role of ELF emerges in the university’s internationalisation in three fundamental ways. First, English is recognised as a communicative instrument in internationalisation initiative. Second, English is acknowledged to be compatible with Chinese and other languages to contribute to multilingualism. Third, a focus on meaning-making surfaces and adds to the argument that NESs' norms are irrelevant for NNESs who use English for their own purposes. Some challenges arise to the role of English from teachers’ perspectives. In particular, teachers’ professional identities are undermined in a few ways. First, teaching becomes less enjoyable for teachers when they cannot express what they can use Chinese to express; second, research interests were not fully respected and teaching load is decided according to their English proficiency; third, teachers are evaluated in terms of their English rather than their disciplinary expertise.

The university seeks to promote Chinese as a global language, which might resolve the teachers’ dilemma associated with the role of ELF. It is uncertain, however, whether international students can manage their studies through Chinese as a medium of instruction on international programmes provided by the university. The spread of English has enabled the acquisition of English - although in different versions due to ELF users’ influences on the change of English (Mauranen 2012)- on a global scale and give rise to the role of English in international communication. Nonetheless, the emerging desire to promote Chinese as a global language urges our deliberation of the future of English in relation to other global languages in response to the call for multilingualism worldwide.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the role of English in a Chinese university’s internationalisation initiative by looking into institutional documents, teachers’ narratives and international students’ classroom experience. The university adopts an inclusive manner to accept different languages and different Englishes in the internationalisation of higher education, which has EMI at the core. The EMI initiative not only accommodates to international students’ needs to develop their disciplinary knowledge but also parallels with the promotion of the Chinese language associated with Chinese culture and Chinese identity. The interaction between university policy, teacher participation and international student involvement reveals the challenges underpinning the implementation of the EMI project. Those challenges include EMI teachers’ competence in English, international students’ competence in Chinese, and the balance between English and disciplinary capacity. These challenges request the thinking of staff support to carry out EMI and the rethinking of expectation for international students to develop Chinese competence to cope with CMI.

**Appendix: Transcription conventions[[1]](#footnote-2)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| , | Continuing pitch contour |
| […] | Material omitted |
| UTTERANCE | Emphatic utterance (i.e. with raised pitch or volume) |
| [utterance] | Author’s clarification or elaboration |
| @ | Laughter |
| Utterance- | Utterance being interrupted |
| -utterance | Interruption |
| R | Researcher |
| T1, T2, … | Teacher 1, Teacher 2, … |
| S1, S2, … | Student 1, Student 2, … |

**Acknowledgement**

Thanks to the Liverpool University Press for their permission of my re-using the data (in extracts 1, 3, 6, 7) that I used in Wang, Y. 2017. Language policy in Chinese higher education: a focus on international students in China. *European Journal of Language Policy*. 9(1): 45-66.

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1. I adopt the convention that is used in Wang (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)