

*The internationalization of higher education  
in Brazil and its linguistic demands:  
a petition for English (additional languages)  
learning institutionalization<sup>1</sup>*

Marília Mendes Ferreira  
Universidade de São Paulo (USP)

The present essay aims to reflect on the internationalization of Higher Education which is the background of the articles published in this special issue *Academic literacy in English: pedagogical practices in times of internationalization*. This discussion will explore the linguistic (English) demands imposed by the internationalization of Higher Education and advocate for the institutionalization of English/additional languages learning and teaching support by the universities. The thesis defended in this piece is that without proper provision and learning of these languages for academic purposes by the universities, internationalization initiatives will be ineffective.

Often assumed as an immediate consequence of globalization (KNIGHT, 1999), internationalization of this educational sector has increased in number and format: from study abroad programs, and students and faculty mobility to the establishment of international campi and of dual/joint degrees (ALTBACH, 2016). The definition of the term has also changed: from an elementary view as a country's response to globalization (KNIGHT, 1999, p.14) to a more elaborate definition in which this response is laid out and the interculturality is foregrounded (KNIGHT, 2003). For example, Knight (2003) defines internationalization "as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2).

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The reasons for this phenomenon are diverse – socio-cultural, political, economic and academic – with the political and economic aspects being the most influential ones (KNIGHT, 2003). Although the definitions of internationalization have changed, it is often molded by the North Hemisphere perspective, despite the claims it is intercultural/international and global (FINARDI et al., 2019; FINARDI; GUIMARÃES, 2017; CASTRO-GOMEZ, 2007). As a consequence, the level of mutual influence/collaboration in these exchanges (of people, knowledge, resources) are neither balanced nor fair (FINARDI; GUIMARÃES, 2017).

Brazil is an illustrative case of this expansion of internationalization and its change of format. According to the Capes (2017) report on the internationalization process of the Brazilian universities, internationalization is not incipient anymore and is expanding gradually. Passive internationalization – sending the academic community overseas – is the most common form followed by some indication of actions to attract professionals from abroad. The report signals that the institutions acknowledge the need to create their own strategies to promote internationalization. One strategy closely related to the topic of this special issue is the learning of English

In our country, one of the main motivations for internationalization is its association with quality improvement: of graduate programs, following Capes criteria; of institutions, with the international rankings; of individuals, with their resums and the H and google scholar indices. These are examples of how internationalization has been gradually institutionalized – in the normatization sense – by the Brazilian universities.

Institutionalization can be seen as a normatization process carried out by social groups or as a recursive and reciprocal process involving people, who have the ability to act and make sense of the world, and social structures (MACHADO DA SILVA et al, 2005). In the present text, institutionalization means the official response of an institution to a social need. As a consequence, material resources such as financial support and physical space are provided along with the acceptance of values attached to these needs.

For instance, in the American higher education system, the institutionalization of academic literacy happens through some sectors and initiatives. It is mandatory to provide freshman/woman composition courses for all students. It is also quite common the presence and active

role of writing centers. The writing courses and programs along with these centers assist faculty to socialize students into academic literacy in the disciplines and students to learn it. Moreover, the values attached to academic literacy are also transmitted (see FERREIRA; FREITAS, 2020 about how plagiarism is approached by some American universities and its connections with the image these institutions want to convey).

Despite the institutionalization of the internationalization movement of Brazilian universities, the English language support for the academic community has been lagging behind. In the 1980's one of the most prestigious projects to provide English for the academic community was the *Inglês Instrumental* Project from PUC-SP (CELANI et al, 2005). At that moment, reading was the most demanded skill by the academic community as texts in English were part of their undergraduate courses bibliography. Even now, this *instrumental* approach is used in proficiency exams as part of the graduate programs admission process and it is not unusual to have *inglês instrumental* (reading focus) courses offered by university language centers. However, the internationalization of the academic world brought an increasing role for communication in English which moved far beyond the reading skill.

Since its foundation in 1951, Capes has led the organization and evaluation of the post graduation in Brazil. The post graduation aims at the production and the improvement of human resources that can assist Brazil's economic independence (KUENZER; MORAES, 2005; NOBRE; FREITAS, 2017). Internationalization has become more prominent in Capes National Plans for Postgraduation from 2005-2010 plan on (NOBRE; FREITAS, 2017). For this reason, the pressure on faculty to participate in international research networks, to single or co-author international publications have increased. The motto *publish or perish* started being adopted by the academic community to refer to the increasing focus of Capes on the quantification of academic products – specially publications.

The additional complex demands for English use have reached both faculty and students. It is not unusual to find graduate programs which require doctorate students to publish (nationally or internationally) in order to obtain their degrees. Faculty also can use EMI to teach their courses as a sign of strong commitment to the internationalization goals of his/her institution. Also, due to the communicative needs of academia, the community also needs to use

English to present in conferences, to manuscript reviews for journals, and to interact in international research networks. All this requires at least a reasonable level of English proficiency.

However, with Language without Borders program discontinuation in 2019, Brazilian Higher Education stills seems not to have a policy for teaching additional languages for academic purposes, which is highly needed to support internationalization. The problem of Brazilian academic community proficiency in English was revealed by the federal program Science without Borders and Language without Borders and somehow addressed by the latter. Based on the diagnostic application of TOEFL ITP strategic pedagogical actions could be taken to address the needs for English for academic purposes of these local communities. According to the X Language without Borders coordinators meeting report from 2017<sup>2</sup> half (50%) of Brazilian university students, who were enrolled in the program, were in B1 and B2 levels. Also, based on the EF proficiency index 2020 edition Brazil occupies the 53<sup>rd</sup> position out of 100 countries evaluated<sup>3</sup>. This is considered low proficiency band by this report. The situation the country faces now is highly contradictory: the pressure for internationalization (and use of English) increases while the linguistic support for internationalization does not.

Capes 2017 report on internationalization<sup>4</sup> acknowledges the need of graduate students to know an additional language. It clearly states that the universities' plans for internationalization should consider the use of additional languages: "Essas [propostas] deverão contar com infraestrutura para (...) utilização de idiomas estrangeiros (CAPES, 2017, p.7)". The proficiency in English and other languages is assumed to be possessed by the individual and, if not, it is his/her responsibility to obtain this proficiency. However, the linguistic needs for internationalization are far more complex than this assumption as Language without Borders showed.

Academia use of English cannot be taught by private language schools or public schools as their literacy practices for these languages are different. It is highly problematic to assume that if one learnt English in these places (so a good level of proficiency), this English will

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2 This author was not able to find a more recent one.

3 <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/>

4 <https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/a-internacionalizacao-nas-ies-brasileiras-pdf>. Acessado em 20 de maio de 2021.

be enough. It is not. It is the solid base for more learning on how to use disciplinary conventions of academic discourse. In other words, it is universities' duty to provide assistance for the learning of academic use of these languages (FERREIRA; STELLA, 2018). Moreover, English teachers also have challenges with academic discourse which requires continuous and sound teacher education to better prepare these professionals to mediate this learning (FERREIRA; MACDIARMID, 2019).

From the perspective of English language teachers, Language without Borders was a very suitable place for English/additional languages for academic purposes teacher education. The importance of this professional in Higher Education has been increasing worldwide (BARSTURKMEN, 2014, 2019; CAMPION, 2016; WORDEN 2018). These instructors perform relevant actions like literacy brokerage, assistance for EMI classes, internationalization at home, translation, to name some. These instructors' education is either carried out by means of private language training courses or in Languages/Literature majors. As the academic use of the language is not the focus of these contexts the education of these professionals also should take place in the university.

Due to the pressure for internationalization, it is common to find isolated initiatives of well-intended faculty who take on their hands the responsibility to adopt EMI, to teach courses on academic writing in English or on academic presentations. One of the reasons for this fact is the lack of EAP professionals in the universities to do this job. With short-staffed language centers and the discontinuation of Language without Borders the demand for EAP/additional languages outnumbers the offer.

Any internationalization plan should go beyond the acknowledgment of the importance of the English/additional language proficiency and should move to creating material conditions to support its learning and use in the university. An illustrative case is the support for academic writing in anglophone universities by means of writing centers, manual guides, clear instruction for writing assignments, feedback provision and shared responsibility to deal with this need among instructors, students and university administrators. In contrast, Brazil has around 13 of these centers, most of which do not address additional language proficiency<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, professors and graduate

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<sup>5</sup> Survey carried out by the author in the I and II ROCA (Roda de Conversas Acadêmicas) events in 2020 and 2021.

students are frequently on their own to cover the high costs of manuscript submission for international journals.

Critical positions often question the domination of discourses / epistemologies coming from the North (FINARDI et al, 2019; FINARDI; GUIMARÃES, 2017; CASTRO-GOMEZ, 2007). However, without nurturing our academic communities' literacy process (in L1 and in additional languages) and increasing proficiency in English/additional languages, the questioning of the status quo will be even harder for us. The international publication can be one more indicator of internationalization and conformity to North *modus operandi* in Higher Education; yet, it can also convey the voice from the South to a wider international academic community with more chances to be heard. Either way, English/additional language proficiency is highly needed.

Marília  
Mendes  
Ferreira

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This language proficiency could be fostered by institutionalizing the learning and use of English/ additional languages for academic purposes in the universities. Some suggestions are listed below:

- a) The creation and support for writing centers/academic learning centers in which academic literacy will be supported. At the moment the few we have barely satisfy the needs of its academic community.
- b) The application of proficiency entrance exams by graduate programs that encompass not only reading but also writing.
- c) The implementation of Writing across the Curriculum for undergraduate and graduate students. The responsibility of teaching how to write for a particular field is not only writing/ English instructors' but also professors' from the field.
- d) Feedback provision to the assignments that can socialize graduate and undergraduate students into writing in the disciplines. (see ORNELAS, 2019 for a comparison on how disciplines socialized undergraduate students into writing).
- e) The provision of resources for students to learn the language and use it in academic contexts: books, manuals, dictionaries, websites with useful information.
- f) Offer of continuous education for teachers for academic purposes in the language centers / writing centers/academic learning centers.
- g) Steady offer of English/additional language courses as needed by their community (as Language without Borders was discontinued).

- h) Support for professors who want to use EMI.
- i) Requirement for a minimum number of hours/credit in English/ additional languages courses (general and or academic focused) for undergraduate/graduate students.

The institutionalization of these recommendations might not captivate universities administrators due to the high costs involved in human resources payments. Nevertheless, these costs should be seen rather as a reasonable investment to promote sound and fair internationalization. Also, some may have been contemplated by language policies already approved by the institutions affiliated with the Language without Borders program<sup>6</sup>. Needless to say that all these actions need robust English language teaching/learning provided by the Basic Education level (ABREU-E-LIMA et al, 2016).

Without the institutionalization of English/additional languages learning and sound academic purposes teacher education, any initiatives for internationalization will be handicapped. Internationalization does not come without problems as well pointed out by critical applied linguists; yet this process has no turning back. We could use the Higher Education internationalization agenda to 1) assess our own practices (pedagogical, literate, etc) and values attached to these practices and 2) foster proficiency in English/additional languages and academic literacy. This English/additional language knowledge could equip us to carve our own way to develop academic/scientific production that can be effectively heard and, consequently, play a relevant role in the world knowledge production activity, breaking North Hemisphere domination.

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<sup>6</sup> Language without Borders also did a good job as it demanded from the affiliated institutions to design and approve a language policy.

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*Marília  
Mendes  
Ferreira*

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