Language policy in Italian universities

Navigating the language ambiguities of higher education internationalisation

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In recent years, the significant expansion of English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes across higher education institutions outside English-speaking contexts has brought with it an inherent set of language-related tensions and ambiguities. In this article, we explore how a selection of Italian universities have tackled these tensions. Via a content analysis of university policy documents, we investigate the key language-related themes in them, and the orientations to language that these themes entail. The results show that English is seen as necessary for and almost synonymous to internationalisation, as well as a language that can bring benefits to both institutions and individuals. However, a commitment to multilingualism and to the promotion of Italian from a non-protectionist stance is apparent in the documents analysed. This finding, we argue, puts the Italian context apart from other settings that have been previously investigated (e.g. the Nordic countries), and points to an original way in which universities can navigate the language ambiguities that come with the process of higher education internationalisation.

Keywords: English-medium instruction, English, higher education, Italian, language policy

Introduction

Since the Bologna declaration (1999), English-medium Instruction (EMI) has expanded across Europe as a means to promote internationalisation in higher education (HE). In 2007, more than 400 higher education institutions in Europe had established 2400 programs taught entirely in English (Wächter & Maiworm 2008). By 2014, 60% of postgraduate courses in Europe were estimated to be taught through EMI (Macaro 2014, Wächter & Maiworm 2014). Indeed, the linguistic

dimension of the internationalisation of higher education is a highly complex phenomenon, resulting in an increasing number of studies in recent years mapping this area of research in different contexts (e.g., Applegren et al. 2022; Bowles & Murphy 2020; Kuteeva et al. 2020; Wilkinson & Gabriëls 2021). So far, research has focused on mapping the different interests and beliefs that surround EMI, as well as how they are expressed in official documents of language policy. For example, EMI programmes are seen as an opportunity for students to access international environments, expand their horizons and improve their chances in the job market (e.g., Byun et al. 2011; Costa & Coleman 2013; Wächter & Maiworm 2014; Nguyen et al. 2017). Scratching further into the discourses regarding internationalisation, however, research attests the existence of an underlying tension between different ideological positions, which Hultgren et al. (2014) have termed "culturalist" versus "internationalist" positions. On one side, while internationalisation might be seen as desirable, culturalist discourses underscore the perception of universities as key organisations for the protection and promotion of a given national culture, including the local language (see e.g., Cots et al. 2012, for a comparison along these discourses between Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Wales). On the other side, internationalist positions tend to flag universities as global players, in competition (internationally) with other institutions for resources (e.g., students, staff, funding, etc.). As a result, culturalist discourses tend to take an orientation to EMI and English as a problem, whereas internationalist ones will construe English as a resource (for an analysis of the diversity of conceptualisations of English in EMI contexts, see Kuteeva 2020). Finally, EU-level legislation has also suffered, at times, from a lack of coherent focus in connection to language-related matters in (higher) education. On the one hand, the EU has historically shown a strong commitment to the goal of maintaining and fostering linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the continent, particularly in the domain of language teaching and learning (European Commission 2005). On the other hand, when the focus of attention is placed on the domain of higher education, language matters have tended to be left aside, in favour of mobility and competitiveness concerns (European Commission 2013), a tendency already present since the Bologna Declaration (Phillipson 2015).

The evident line of continuity connecting the internationalisation of higher education and the language policy at higher education institutions can be explained thus: while the first is concerned, for various reasons, with fostering mobility and access to foreign knowledge and resources (see Conceição 2020, drawing on Knight 2004), the latter regulates which languages are involved in this process and how. As a result, language policies can be considered constitutive to internationalisation itself (Conceição 2020). In this view, language keeps a cen-

tral position, becoming at once the object of many contentions and the vehicle through which they are expressed (Soler 2019).

Such language tensions in higher education have been well mapped for several countries and contexts, particularly in northern Europe (Hultgren et al. 2014; Kuteeva et al. 2020; Saarinen 2020), where English has made significant societal inroads (Bolton & Meierkord 2013; Hult 2012). Elsewhere, research on the discursive dimension of EMI in higher education is less abundant, particularly in countries with languages with a larger sociodemographic base (but see Blattés 2018 for France, and Earls 2013 for Germany). In southern Europe, with the exception of minority language regions such as Catalonia or the Basque Country (Bretxa et al. 2016; Cots et al. 2012; Doiz et al. 2013), the sociolinguistic impact of EMI has been only scarcely examined so far. Italy is a good example of a context that, despite some peculiarities that make it stand out sociolinguistically, has not received much attention in previous EMI research. What makes Italy especially interesting are its regional disparities and complex reactions to attempts made to adopt English as the medium of instruction in HE (Costa & Coleman 2013). The scarcity of research on Italian EMI might be explained by the fact that the country appears to come somewhat late to the process of implementing EMI programmes in HE, in line with other southern European countries, partly because of the overall suboptimal level of English competence among students and instructors (Broggini & Costa 2017; Costa & Coleman 2013; Grandinetti et al. 2013; Pulcini & Campagna 2015).

In a country as large as Italy, with a wide regional diversity and with a significant amount of higher education institutions (compared to other smaller countries in Europe, for example), it is understandable that past research has zoomed in on specific areas only. Indeed, so far, most of the literature available on the Italian context tends to focus mostly on institutions located in the northern region. The present paper aims to complement existing research on Italian EMI by focusing its analysis on the five central regions of Italy, including the area of the capital. In particular, our goal in this article is firstly to investigate the key language-related themes that can be retrieved from a set of policy documents from universities in these regions, and secondly to find out about the orientations to language that can be connected to these themes. More generally, in discussing the themes and language orientations, we aim to contextualize the Italian context in the evolving scenario of HE in Europe and to see, in this way, to what extent Italian universities follow similar or different patterns in the domain of language policy. In sum, the present study seeks an answer to two main research questions:

RQ1:   What key language-related themes can be detected in a selection of Italian universities' policy documents?

RQ2:   What orientations to language associated to these themes can be delineated?

Internationalisation and language policy in Italian HE

The language-related tensions and ambiguities associated to the internationalisation of higher education described above, derived from the interplay between English and a respective national/local language, have not left untouched the Italian higher education system. On the one hand, the country seems to be aware of the need to increase student and staff mobility and the associated benefits this may entail for universities; measures such as the Legge Gelmini 240/2010, a law meant (among other things) to endorse the introduction of foreign language taught programs in the Italian education system, attest to this awareness (Costa & Coleman 2013). On the other hand, recent language ideological debates seem to indicate that the "acceptance of the [Anglicization] process cannot be taken for granted" (Santulli 2015: 285). The most notorious precedent for this is the 2012 litigation between the Polytechnic of Milan administration and its own academic staff, which resulted in a court case. In order to push the university towards internationalisation goals, the University Senate approved guidelines that sanctioned the exclusive use of English for the teaching of MA and PhD courses. This resulted in extremely polarized reactions, and subsequently in a debate that involved key stakeholders, such as the Accademia della Crusca (the oldest language society in Europe, active over a span of four centuries in the fostering, preservation and promotion of the Italian language). After an unsuccessful petition to the Academic Senate for a revocation of the measure, 100 professors resorted to the Local Administrative Court (the TAR), which invalidated the university's resolution. The Court ruled it unconstitutional to penalize Italian in relation to minority or foreign languages, and to exclude it completely as a language of teaching and learning at advanced higher education levels. In other words, the Court did not rule against the establishment of policies that would foster the internationalisation of the Polytechnic, including increasing the presence of English for teaching and learning purposes, but it deemed it contrary to the law to omit the use of Italian completely.

However, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR in the Italian acronym) and the Polytechnic appealed to the Council of State against the TAR's decision, in fact basing their argument on the aforementioned 240/2010 Gelmini law. The Council of State, hence, expressed doubt about the legitimacy of the law and turned to the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court found that article 2 of the Gelmini law contravened three Constitutional articles (art. 3,

6 and 33) and, as such, was to be regarded as illegitimate. Therefore, after this verdict, in 2018, the Council of State rejected the appeal made by the MIUR and the Polytechnic. These events were widely discussed online, covered by the main Italian newspapers (e.g., Corriere della Sera, Repubblica, Il Giorno, Il Sole 24 ore, La Stampa), as well as explained in detail elsewhere (including on the Accademia della Crusca website).

Overall, these legal developments do put institutions in a difficult position when it comes to offering EMI programmes in Italy. The ruling clearly negates the possibility of entire degree programmes being taught exclusively through English. Guaranteeing an Italian equivalent for every EMI course might seem like an expensive, but nonetheless viable, solution. However, that may not be the case. Two Ministerial Decrees issued on March 16th 2007 regulate the conditions under which degree programmes are implemented in Italian HE and they state that no two identical degree programmes can exist at the same institution: each programme must differ in a significant portion of course credit (40 and 30 credits for BA and MA programmes respectively) from other existing ones. In sum, this means that it is currently technically not possible to implement a programme that is taught exclusively through English. Equally impossible is to offer an identical Italian counterpart at the same institution. The impasse is, therefore, fairly evident. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that EMI will simply cease to exist. Certainly, it may be too early to draw any final conclusion on the effects of these legal proceedings at the time of writing, but institutions may have incentives to seek loopholes and new possibilities in order to keep their EMI courses active in the coming years.

Regarding the principle of the supremacy of Italian in education, one clarification is perhaps in order. Italy, as a nation, has its roots in "a situation of linguistic diversity that is unique within Europe" (Tosi 2004: 263), with the several local dialects representing as a matter of fact parallel Romance varieties of Italian (Pulcini & Campagna 2015). The use of Italian as consecrated by the academic tradition represents therefore a unifying act for a country that reached its formal unification a little over 150 years ago. Significant shifts in language policy are hence perceived to carry relevant weight in this context and require careful consideration.

Based on the above discussion, it seems that several factors contribute to making Italy and its HE system a "distinctive" context (Costa & Coleman 2013). In light of that, it seems justified to find out more about how higher education institutions navigate the apparent tension associated to the introduction of EMI in their curricula and programmes. As noted in the introduction, this is precisely the goal in our paper. In what follows, we explain more about the design of the study

and the data analysed, and we continue with a description of the results and a discussion of them around the research questions delineated above.

Data and methodology

The purpose of the present study is to identify and analyse relevant language-related themes in a selection of policy documents issued by HE institutions in central Italy. Data were collected from the 2018 ten best ranking universities in the region according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. In these rankings, universities are evaluated against 13 performance indicators pertaining to the areas of research, interaction with business, international outlook, and the teaching environment, which are considered to cover "the full range of a top university's essential areas of activity". The following universities showed a high profile in this sense and were thus included in this study: Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna; Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa; University of Pisa; University of Florence; University of Siena; Sapienza University of Rome; University of Rome II – Tor Vergata; University of Rome III; University of Urbino Carlo Bo; Marche Polytechnic University. While we acknowledge the problematic nature of university rankings (Buognol & Dulà 2015), this way of proceeding allowed us to narrow down the number of selected universities, and to be able to work with a corpus of documents that would be manageable for a study of this scope.

Data were collected from policy documents published on universities' websites to allow for content analysis. The data collection resulted in a total of twenty-three official documents (two to three per institution), generally including strategic plans, didactic regulations and, in some cases, additional guidelines, regulations or communication plans. The dataset included documents freely accessible on the websites of the institutions in 2018, the year in which the final verdict on the Polytechnic of Milan debate was issued by the TAR, settling, to an extent, the matter, but at a time when the debate was still relatively hot on a national level (Mulas 2018). The documents were only available in Italian and were therefore analysed in their original versions. The data were analysed with a content analytical method, generally considered particularly apt to the investigation of surfacing themes in official documents (Stemler & Bebell 1998). Among possible approaches – namely, conventional, directed, and summative and latent (Hsieh & Shannon 2005) – the summative and latent one was preferred, allowing for a categorization of data based on a selection of key-words (see Björkman 2014; Soler-Carbonell 2015; Soler et al. 2018). The total corpus, of 444,499 words, was scanned for keywords with the aid of a simple "search" function and hence manually analysed. Keywords elected as pivotal to this study were "English", "Italian"

and "foreign language(s)". Where necessary, inflections were taken into account (e.g., italiano, italiana), while concordance hits not pertinent to the scope of the study (e.g., università italiana, "Italian university") or lacking at least a minimum of surrounding text (such as in the case of very non-descriptive titles) were excluded. Identified concordances were quantified and subsequently individually and manually analysed in the context of their surrounding stretches of text to identify themes. This approach proved especially useful in individuating relevant stretches of text automatically and therefore without possible bias on the researcher's part.

Content analysis was our chosen methodology because it would provide us with a relative straightforward access to the relevant parts of the material that would then furnish the core of our study. Guided as we were by the abovementioned keywords, a summative approach to content analysis was deemed as better suited for our purposes. We observed Hsieh and Shannon's (2005: 1285) recommendations in connection to the different steps to follow when applying (summative) content analysis. Most importantly, we did make sure that the material was not only scanned quantitatively, counting the hits per keywords in the documents, but we also read in detail the relevant parts of the texts, reading the keywords carefully in their surrounding context. This can, indeed, be considered "the basic coding process in content analysis" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1285), where the goal is to "organise large quantities of text into much fewer content categories" (ibid.), categories that can be conceptualised as themes in the text that are either explicitly expressed in it or that can be derived from the analysis (ibid.). Next to its benefits, this approach also presents some limitations, as it specifically zooms in on the sections of the texts featuring the keywords. In approaching policy documents, others (e.g. Moring et al. 2013) have opted for broader discourse analytical approaches including, for example, a focus on EU directives. This is a direction that future research on Italian HE policies could indeed pursue; however, for the purposes of the present study, the focus was kept mainly on the national and institutional dimension, in line with the nature of debate that had spread through Italian academia after the Milan litigation.

As a result of the coding process described and of the examination of the relationships between the categories, we were able to identify five main themes emerging from our data (see Results Section below). Such themes were not derived exclusively from a plain reading and analysis of keywords, but, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, themes were also theoretically informed by our conceptual framework, which we outline next.

The study was theoretically contextualized drawing on the notions of "international English", "global English" (Bull 2012) and "soft multilingualism" (Harder 2012), which are key elements for an in-depth understanding of the complex

debate around "internationalisation" and "Englishization". Indeed, the discussion of the use of language in education does not exist in a vacuum, but rather it is loaded with socially constructed meaning. The role of language policies is essentially to regulate usage, but it is the case that "by classifying things, we impose a structure on the social world, and language helps us to construct a model of it" (Romaine 2000: 26). Linguistic choices are, therefore, infused with beliefs and ideologies reflecting what we perceive to be (or what we want others to perceive to be) the "structure of the social world". In the context of language policy, this implies that policy documents are not only descriptions (and prescriptions) of language use, but also written representations of language ideologies. Ruíz (1984) argued that orientations towards language (whether a language is seen as a resource, a right, or a problem) are pivotal to language policy. In this sense, orientations "determine what is thinkable about language in society" (Ruíz 1984: 16). Expanding on that, it would be possible to conclude that, by contextualizing the discussion around the use of language and expressing particular orientations towards different languages, policy documents also determine, or at least frame, what is thinkable about language in the context in which they operate.

We can reasonably assume then that the study of language policy documents can unveil whether, in a given context, certain languages are systematically associated to particular concepts (such as English with internationalisation). Indeed, language policy documents can also help understand whether processes such as "internationalisation" and "Englishization" are perceived to be distinct or the same, at least at an institutional level. Information of this kind is extremely valuable to explore and understand how higher education institutions navigate the language-related tensions associated to internationalisation that we have described above.

We should also remark that our analysis focuses exclusively on institutional-level documents that can up to a certain extent be considered non-binding and particular to the context of each institution. However, we note that such documents still have to take into account national (and supra-national) guidelines and can therefore be considered also an expression of more widely circulating ideas. Furthermore, previous research has already highlighted how "strategy-steering" documents may be considered of particular interest because of their tendency to report less mediated political views (Soler-Carbonell et al. 2017). The documents selected for the present analysis were official, public, documents, but at the same time they were products of each individual university, and as such the documents need to be understood as framing what was perceived to be especially relevant to each institution individually. Hence, they were deemed the most appropriate starting point for an analysis that aimed to identify beliefs and discourses about language in the selected universities.

In essence, this study seeks to investigate one main aspect, namely, which key language-related themes emerge from official policy documents by a selected number of Italian universities, and to then connect these themes with orientations to language that may shape specific discursive frameworks. In the next section, we start by presenting the main themes that we detected in the analysed policy documents and continue next with a discussion of the orientations to language that they connect with.

Results

Great variety in both total word length and number of hits was found in the documents collected for this corpus. This is partly due to the fact that, with the exception of institutions in northern European countries, it has been, until now, fairly uncommon for universities to compile dedicated language policy documents (but see Soler & Gallego-Balsà 2019, for an analysis of language policy documents at Catalan universities). Therefore, in this case, mentions pertaining to language use were found in texts that are quite different in style, purpose and scope, resulting in very different wordcounts. Results of the keyword searches are displayed in Table 1, to offer an overview of the figures.

Table 1. Number of concordance hits in relation to "English", "Italian" and "foreign language(s)" present in the corpus

University	Word count	Hits for English	Hits for Italian	Hits for language(s)
Marche Polytechnic University				
Strategic Plan (2017–2019)	7465	6	0	1
Athenaeum Didactic Regulations (2013)	8324	1	3	3
Document of Integrated Plannig (2018–2020)	63231	69	2	5
Sapienza University of Rome				
Strategic Plan (2016–2021)	8243	4	0	1
Didactic Regulations (2008)	10401	1	1	7
Communication Plan (2018)	7133	15	2	4
Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa				
Triennial Strategic Plan (2016–2018)	9423	4	0	0
Didactic Regulations (2016)	7759	4	6	4

Table 1. *(continued)*

University	Word count	Hits for English	Hits for Italian	Hits for language(s)
Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna				
Integrated Performance Plan (2016–2018)	6272	2	0	1
Educational Activities Regulations (2016)	17128	8	2	10
University of Florence				
Strategic Plan (2016–2018)	10169	4	0	2
Athenaeum Didactic Regulations (2015)	8039	0	1	6
University of Pisa				
Performance Plan (2017)	10564	2	0	0
Athnaeum Didactic Regulations (2016)	13248	0	3	6
Didactic Planning Guidelines (2018)	680	0	0	0
University of Rome II – Tor Vergata				
Triennial plan (2016–2018)	15069	16	7	10
Athenaeum Didactic Regulations (2016)	13983	1	1	5
Statute (2017)	10560	0	0	1
Univesity of Rome III – Roma Tre				
Integrated Plan (2017–2019)	63231	15	14	0
Didactic Regulations (2014)	13761	0	1	3
University of Siena				
Strategic Plan (2016–2018)	108315	233	31	36
Athenaeum Policies and Planning (2017)	6604	2	0	1
Athenaeum General Regulations (2016)	878	0	0	1
University of Urbino Carlo Bo				
Strategic Plan (2018–2020)	14159	2	0	2
Statute and Regulations (2012)	9860	0	0	1
Tot.	444499	389	74	110

As can be seen, all but one of the documents mention, in one way or another, issues pertaining to language. Even in the case of the University of Pisa's 2018 Didactic Guidelines, that presented no relevant concordance hits for any of the keywords, a number of hits were scored in other documents by the same institution. As mentioned, the ample spectrum in the numbers can partly be explained by a practical observation: the structure of documents was not consistent from one institution to the other and some universities had much longer files, where the same layout was repeated for each faculty or department. This is the case for the University of Siena's Strategic Plan, which scored the highest amount of concordances for "English", with an impressive 233 hits over 244 pages. The data are still certainly relevant but need to be put into perspective. To that end, it should also be noted that it was not rare for a number of concepts to be repeated in the texts, resulting in more hits, but not necessarily in a wider variety of themes. Regardless, "English" scored the highest number of concordances by far (389), followed by "foreign language(s)" (110) and lastly "Italian" (74). Following the principles of content and thematic analysis previously outlined, the close analysis of the stretches of texts surrounding these keywords revealed the reoccurrence of the following key themes.

Pertaining to the keyword "English":

Theme 1:   Increasing and improving the presence of English will reflect positively on the institution (23 documents, 197 instances).

Theme 2:   There is a need for providing English language support for students and/or staff (8 documents, 20 instances).

Pertaining the keyword "foreign language(s)":

Theme 3:   It is important to promote courses taught through "foreign languages" to increase internationalisation (13 documents, 28 instances).

Theme 4:   It is necessary that all students know at least one other European language other than Italian (8 documents, 12 instances).

Pertaining the keyword "Italian":

Theme 5:   Knowledge of Italian should be promoted to international students (9 documents, 17 instances).

As the most recurring theme, Theme 1 is also the one that finds a wider range of nuances in the different documents. Institutions seem to have a general sense that the progressive integration of English in their curricula and programmes represents a benefit, or at least a goal that needs to be pursued. However, justifications of this goal seem to be often quite generic in the texts. Based on this, it might be possible to suggest that the link between English, internationalisation, and pro-

file of the institution is considered self-evident and, in addition, policies meant to increase the presence of English in universities do not need to be strongly and thoroughly motivated. Expressions of Theme 1 include not only the notion that EMI courses are being/should be increased, but also that universities should be able to provide technical/administrative support in English, that all web communication (including social media platforms) should also be available in English, and that local research should be translated into English. These derivations are all framed in relation to aims for internationalisation. Extract 1, from the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa's Strategic Plan, provides one example for this (all extracts are our translation from the original in Italian; the original versions of the extracts are available in the Appendix at the end of the article):

Extract 1.   The Scuola, as it has been said, needs to expand its international "soul", strengthening its relations networks that lead its students to go study abroad and at the same time foreign students to come to Normale. It is therefore fundamental, for both Italians and foreigners, to consolidate a multicultural environment in which one will not feel like a "foreigner", in which English will be a communication tool, and that will support non-Italian students as they deal with the bureaucracy needed for their stay. (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Strategic Plan)

The second theme emerging from the analysis of "English" as a keyword is the idea that solutions of language support need to be implemented for students and/or staff (Theme 2). This is to ensure a standard level of proficiency of participants engaging in the many different aspects of EMI courses operation. For example:

Extract 2.   In order to guarantee the courses' sustainability, supporting actions for Italian students have been undertaken, in the shape of tutoring enhancement. In particular, students at the Faculty of Engineering have done exercises in order to achieve a level comparable to B1. The University Language Centre has also been strengthened, especially with regards to English language teaching, with the recruitment of a new member of the Technical and Administrative Staff. (Marche Polytechnic University, Integrated Planning)

Theme 3 relates to the keyword "foreign language(s)". Previous research (Pons Parera 2014, Saarinen 2012; Soler et al. 2018; Soler-Carbonell et al. 2017) has observed that in language policy documents the label "foreign languages" is often a cover term to refer to English implicitly. The corpus here analysed is no different: the content analysis around Theme 3 did show clear signs that the use of this label, especially in those documents where the reference is to a singular "foreign language", was meant to be read as "English". In some cases, the association between an openly referenced "foreign language" in the running text and English

was made explicit by the simple juxtaposition of the word "English" in brackets right next to the keyword hit:

Extract 3.   In the medium-long term the aim is to implement at least one MA course in a foreign language (English) for each of the cultural areas of the University. (Marche Polytechnic University, Integrated Planning)

In other cases, the possible connection was less evident, but the actual meaning of "foreign language" remained unambiguous nonetheless:

Extract 4.   The University of Florence endorses the international dimension of research and education programmes, also by stipulating agreements with European and extra-European institutions, promotes participation in excellent research networks, implements international courses, aims to increase the number of foreign students, researchers and teachers, endorses the international mobility of its students, researchers and teaching and technical-administrative staff. Similarly, it works for the implementation of learning and teaching activities and for degree courses in a foreign language. (University of Florence, Strategic Plan)

However, the label "foreign languages" could, in some cases, appear to refer to more languages other than English. This was the case, indeed, in the instances connected to Theme 4, where other European languages were alluded. The documents state that, in order to obtain their degree, students must demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in at least one European language other than Italian. Usually, no further specifications are made. That said, it should be noted that the current Italian university legislation requires students to undertake a test of linguistic adequacy (idoneità linguistica) normally offered in a variety of European languages (usually English, French, German and Spanish). Because of a degree of institutional autonomy, certain institutions may even require knowledge of multiple foreign languages:

Extract 5.   Ordinary students are admitted to the Scuola on the basis of a national public competition. Winners must enrol in the respective degree programmes, undergraduate or postgraduate, at the University of Pisa, and attend the additional courses offered by the Scuola, including the study of two foreign languages. (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Integrated Performance Plan)

Lastly, only one reoccurring theme emerged from the search for the keyword "Italian", the importance of promoting Italian to foreign students (Theme 5):

Extract 6.   The University Language Centre has organized Italian as an L2 learning courses for years, not only for Erasmus students, but also for foreign stu-

dents involved in specific projects. As an accredited certification body, Roma Tre joins forces with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the promotion of the Italian language in the world (e.g., in occasion of the Joint Action for the Italian language organized by the Ministry). (Roma Tre, Integrated Plan)

This represents an apparently successful promotion policy considering the call, by the University of Tor Vergata, for an expansion of "the limits for the sustainable attendance to Italian language courses for foreign students" (Triennial Plan). This need is underscored also by the fact that some universities set Italian learning goals for foreign students. However, it should be noted that these efforts towards Italian language learning are not framed by universities in relation to discourses of language protection, but rather of language promotion, and while the two may at times overlap, they cannot in truth be considered the same. This appears to be in contrast with research on language policy in other HE systems, where the "protection and development" ideas are perhaps more prominent than the "promotion" one (cf. Soler et al. 2018). The next section explores in more detail the underlying orientations to language that the detected themes seem to point at, with an eye on the singularity of the Italian context.

Discussion of results

In the introduction of the article, we outlined two research questions that we set out to address, namely: (1) to find out what language-related key themes emerged from a set of policy documents by a selection of Italian universities, and (2) to investigate the orientations to language associated to these themes. We have addressed question one, more descriptive in nature, in the above section, by presenting the five key themes that emerged from the content analysis that we conducted. Question two is, by contrast, argumentative in nature, and we address it in the following discussion of the results presented above. We do this by adapting Ruíz's (1984) framework of orientations in language planning, adapting it to the angle of our study, i.e., orientations to language(s) in Italian higher education policy documents. In what follows, we propose to subsume the five key language-related themes identified above into three broad orientations: (1) English as a desired/desirable language for institutions and individuals; (2) English as a synonym of internationalisation; and (3) multilingualism as a key strategic goal.

Orientation 1: English as a desired/desirable language for institutions and individuals

In recent years, the idea of a "race to internationalisation" in HE has been scrutinized in the research community vis-à-vis the idea of a "race to Englishization". Bull (2012) identifies a conceptual opposition between an "international" and a "global" English. English as a global language is considered by Bull (2012) a result, or possibly a side effect, of the re-conceptualization of knowledge as a commodity in HE. Adopting "global English", universities have subscribed to a "global knowledge economy construct" that has pushed them into "commercializing their research" (Bull 2012: 65). As a result, pressured to keep up with new standards of competitiveness, universities have progressively intensified the presence of English in their curricula to appear more international, often without much question. In Bull's words, "universities seem to show no distance to or criticism of the construction of these notions or of the reality behind them" (2012: 65). However, it is important to remark that the use of English as a communicative tool does not have to be as inherently detrimental to other languages. There is room, in Bull's conception, for an "international" English used as a lingua franca with *ratio*. The risk with internationalisation policies that aim strongly (and perhaps mainly) to increase the competitiveness of institutions is that little thought might go into considering the difference, facilitating the interpretation of "internationalisation" as a close synonym of Englishization (Wilkinson & Gabriëls 2021).

Our study finds traces of the "global English" orientation (certainly reinforced by the ambiguous use of the label "foreign language(s)", to which we return below). This is evident not only in the sheer amount of vague calls for the increase of English, which is presented as a language that is both desired and desirable for institutions and individuals alike (as we have seen in the examples from our data under Theme 1 and Theme 2). Indeed, Theme 2 shows that these documents are consistently concerned with the proficiency of both students and staff. The lack of a wide-spread high level proficiency in English in the country has been discussed by previous studies (Broggini & Costa 2017; Costa & Coleman 2013; Grandinetti et al. 2013; Pulcini & Campagna 2015), and resonates with studies from other Southern European settings more generally (Berns et al. 2007; Dafouz et al. 2014; Soler & Gallego-Balsà 2019). In this case, the focus on providing further English language support in universities presented in Theme 2 falls in line with what previous research had also considered advisable (Costa 2017) and is perhaps an indication of the great efforts that countries speaking primarily Romance languages have to sustain, if they wish to implement EMI at a HE level (Lasagabaster 2021).

Orientation 2: English as a synonym of internationalisation

Previous research has indicated an overlap between "English" and "internationalisation" in university language policy (e.g., Baker & Hüttner 2018). Indeed, as discussed above, it is not rare for institutions to find themselves in contradictory positions when it comes to stating exactly what kind of internationalisation they are offering. Cots (2012) argues that policy makers may be feeding the ambiguity "foreign language"/"English" to avoid formally acknowledging the dominance of English in higher education settings. On the one hand, therefore, there is a sense of English being made invisible in policy documents (Saarinen 2012); on the other hand, the lack of explicitness in the policies as to what standards of multilingualism are desirable inevitably strengthens what is already perceived as the status quo, that is, the preponderance of English (a case of "soft multilingualism", according to Harder 2012). This seems to be the case with many of the instances in our analysis, which we have seen in Extracts 3 and 4 above (under Theme 3), where the use of the label "foreign languages" does not necessarily have to imply "English", but in reality, this is how it is materialised, often more implicitly than explicitly.

In sum, because English is assumed to be the default language for global engagement, it tends to be construed, in the common imagery, as an inevitable language for internationalisation (Van Parijs 2021). That is why, even when universities advertise internationality or multilingualism, through a variety of labels, English may end up being reinforced, not least through a monolingual orientation to English-medium policy operationalisation at the institutional level (Galloway et al. 2020). In this sense, institutions are, perhaps inadvertently, enhancing an idea of a superiority, or at least an inevitability, of English in educational settings and academia that is "reified rather than meaningfully resisted" (Hult & Källkvist 2016: 67). An idea that might entail, in conclusion, a narrow view of internationalisation, and that might run counter to the goals of multiculturalism that many universities set out for themselves when devising internationalisation strategies (Fabricius et al. 2017).

Orientation 3: Multilingualism as a key strategic goal

By contrast to Orientation 2, our analysis reveals an effort towards a more "unbiased" type of multilingualism. As previously mentioned, according to the Italian legislation (Ministerial Decree 270/2004) HE students generally must prove knowledge of "another language of the European Union, besides Italian". This effort towards a broader and more inclusive kind of multilingualism has its roots already in middle school for Italy, where students are granted mandatory learning

of not only English, but also of "another communitarian language" (Spanish, French, German) (Legislative Decree 59/2004). This reveals an attitude towards the pursuit of multilingualism slightly less skewed towards an all-encompassing English than other contexts, as well as a potentially more transparent use of the label "foreign languages", which we have seen in Extract 5 illustrating Theme 4. Overall, the situation might be read as a tension between national legislation and universities' policies. However, the application of the national guidelines in universities is, in this case, generally punctual and uncontroversial. This indicates, once again, that the strong promotion of English and EMI might be in the direction of competitiveness both for universities and for students' prospects on the job market, rather than in the pure interest of multilingualism and multiculturality.

The positive interest in multilingualism is also mirrored in the orientation towards the Italian language in the analysed documents, marking an important difference with other European contexts. Previous research in northern Europe, for example, has identified discourses of local language protectionism, resulting in ad hoc policies (Kuteeva 2014). In our study, we do not find the same kind of resonances of such protectionist discourses in connection to Italian. Rather, as seen in Extract 6, exemplifying Theme 5, a tendency to frame Italian language learning for foreign students as an act of promotion, instead of an act of defence of the language. This might be because, as we have explained, the use of Italian in academic settings is overall quite well protected by national legislation. Therefore, while occasional language debates include language protectionism nuances, our data show that universities (at least those included in our study) do not find it important to frame a protectionist discourse of Italian against the threat of English in their policy documents.

In addition, the perception of English as a threat might be smaller in a context like Italy, where the diffusion of English in Italian society and HE might not be seen as strong enough to be considered as a threat by policy makers and the society at large. Indeed, with around 65 million native speakers (Eberhard et al. 2021) Italian is a considerably bigger language than other national languages in Europe, which also benefits from a certain degree of mutual intelligibility with other Romance languages. All these elements, paired with a deeply rooted scholarly tradition in the country, may help strengthen significantly the position of Italian compared to other languages and may partly explain the current lack of widespread discourses of protectionism in university language policies in the country.

Conclusions

In this article, we set out to investigate how a selection of universities from the central regions of Italy navigate the language-related tensions and ambiguities associated to the process of higher education internationalisation. By means of a content analysis of a set of policy documents by these universities, we were able to identify the main language-related themes that run across these documents, a descriptive step that allowed us to then suggest, argumentatively, the different orientations to language that are apparent in the analysed documents. From the analysis and discussion presented above, we can draw the conclusion that the Italian universities in our study both share features with and at the same time differ from other European higher education settings. As for the shared features, we can note: the perception of English as an inevitable language in the race towards internationalisation, and the idea that more English represents a positive development both for institutions and individuals alike. By contrast, what seem original traits of the Italian context of university language policy include: the notion that English alone might not be enough for a comprehensive internationalisation process, which entails an explicit commitment to multilingualism by universities (at least on paper), via the fostering of the knowledge by students of at least another European language (without any particular push towards English), and the promotion of Italian itself. In connection to Italian, we have noted a lack of explicit protectionist discourses pertaining the use of Italian in higher education in the analysed policy documents. This is not to suggest that such discourses are absent from the Italian HE system (the controversy of the Polytechnic of Milan, which we have described above in some detail, indicates that protectionist discourses are, indeed, present); but its explicit absence from university policy documents sets the Italian context somewhat aside from other European settings that have received more attention so far (e.g. the Nordic countries), and this has to be interpreted against the historical, legal, and cultural background of the country. Future studies on this topic could also look, contrastively, at different documents produced by the same university in different languages (if available), particularly in English and Italian, to explore if/how different orientations to language(s) emerge in such documents.

In closing, as Italian universities have aligned themselves, in recent years, with other European countries in the introduction of EMI programmes (Costa & Coleman 2013), it seems as though the "internationalist" discourses associated to these developments have been more explicitly incorporated in the language policy fabric of higher education than the "culturalist" ones (Hultgren et al. 2014). Coupled by the explicit stance in favour of multilingualism, this shows that while recognising the inescapability of English for internationalisation purposes, it is also possible for HE institutions to suggest (at least at the level of policy for-

mulation) ways in which English does not have to come at the expense of other languages, and that it is possible to defend this stance through a not necessarily protectionist position. We are, indeed, aware of the limited nature of our study, including only a selection of universities in the central regions of Italy, but we do believe these are original insights that future research from other settings, perhaps from other Italian regions, can take further.

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Appendix

Extract 1. La Scuola, come già detto, deve accrescere la sua "anima" internazionale, potenziando le reti di relazione che portano i propri allievi a studiare all'estero e nel contempo quelli stranieri a venire in Normale. È dunque fondamentale, sia per italiani che stranieri, consolidare un ambiente multiculturale dove non ci si senta "stranieri", dove l'inglese sia strumento di comunicazione e che supporti gli studenti non italiani nel disbrigo delle pratiche burocratiche utili al soggiorno. (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Strategic Plan)

Extract 2. Per garantire la sostenibilità dei Corsi, sono state svolte azioni di supporto per gli studenti italiani, in termini di potenziamento delle azioni di tutoraggio. Sono state, in particolare, svolte esercitazioni per tutti gli studenti della Facoltà di Ingegneria per raggiungere un livello equiparabile al B1. È stato inoltre potenziato il Centro Linguistico di Ateneo, con particolare riferimento all'insegnamento della lingua inglese, assumendo una unità di Personale Tecnico e Amministrativo. (Marche Polytechnic University, Integrated Planning)

Extract 3. Nel medio-lungo termine si intende istituire almeno un corso di Laurea Magistrale in lingua straniera (inglese) per ognuna delle aree culturali dell'Ateneo. (Marche Polytechnic University, Integrated Planning)

Extract 4. L'Ateneo di Firenze favorisce la dimensione internazionale dei programmi di ricerca e formazione, anche mediante la stipula di accordi con istituzioni europee ed extraeuropee, promuove la partecipazione a reti di ricerca di eccellenza, istituisce corsi di studio internazionali, punta a incrementare il numero di studenti, ricercatori e docenti stranieri, incentiva la mobilità internazionale dei propri studenti, dei ricercatori e del personale docente e tecnico-amministrativo. È altresì impegnato nella realizzazione di attività di studio e di insegnamento e in corsi di laurea in lingua straniera. (University of Florence, Strategic Plan)

Extract 5.   Gli allievi ordinari vengono ammessi alla Scuola sulla base di un concorso pub-
blico nazionale. I vincitori sono tenuti ad iscriversi ai rispettivi corsi di laurea, di
primo livello o magistrale, dell'Università di Pisa, e a frequentare i corsi integrativi
della Scuola, compreso lo studio di due lingue straniere. (Scuola Superiore
Sant'Anna, Integrated Performance Plan)

Extract 6.   Il Centro linguistico di Ateneo (CLA) organizza da anni corsi di italiano L2 oltre
che per gli studenti Erasmus, per studenti stranieri afferenti a progetti specifici.
Come ente certificatore, Roma Tre partecipa al tavolo del Ministero degli esteri per
la diffusione della lingua italiana nel mondo (ad es. in occasione degli Stati Gene-
rali della Lingua italiana organizzati dal Ministero). (Roma Tre, Integrated Plan)

Sommario

Negli ultimi anni la significativa diffusione di corsi English-medium instruction (EMI) in con-
testi non anglofoni è stata accompagnata da tensioni e ambiguità riguardo l'uso della lingua
nelle università. Tramite un'analisi dei contenuti dei documenti di politica istituzionale, questo
articolo esplora il modo in cui un gruppo di università italiane ha affrontato tali questioni.
L'articolo identifica i temi chiave in ambito di politica linguistica, analizzandone le implicazioni
ideologiche. I risultati mostrano la concettualizzazione della lingua inglese come strumento
necessario e quasi sinonimo di internazionalizzazione, con percepiti benefici tanto per gli ate-
nei che per i singoli. Allo stesso tempo, ad emergere dai risultati è anche un impegno verso
il multilinguismo e la promozione della lingua italiana. Quest'ultimo aspetto distingue l'Italia
da altri contesti precedentemente analizzati (e.g. i Paesi nordeuropei), rivelando una modalità
alternativa di navigazione delle ambiguità linguistiche insorte col processo di internazionaliz-
zazione dell'istruzione universitaria.

Resumo

Lastatempe, la signifa disvastiĝo de programoj de perangla instruado (EMI) tra institucioj de
supera edukado ekster anglalingvaj kuntekstoj kunportis propran aron da lingvorilataj streĉite-
coj kaj ambiguoj. Ĉi-artikole, ni esploras kiel selektitaj italaj universitatoj frontis tiujn streĉite-
cojn. Pere de enhavanalizo de universitataj politikodokumentoj, ni esploras la tieajn ŝlosilajn
lingvorilatajn temojn kaj la prilingvajn orientiĝojn kiujn tiuj temoj kuntrenas. La rezultoj mon-
tras, ke la angla estas konsiderata kiel necesa por, kaj preskaŭ sinonima kun, internaciigo, kaj
krome kiel lingvon kiu povas alporti avantaĝojn same al institucioj kiel al individuoj. Tamen,
devontigo al multlingvismo kaj al antaŭenigo de la itala el neprotektisma starpunkto estas evi-
denta en la analizitaj dokumentoj. Tiu eltrovo, laŭ nia argumento, apartigas la italan kuntekston
disde aliaj jam esploritaj medioj (ekzemple la nordiaj landoj) kaj montras al originala vojo per
kiu universitatoj povas navigi la lingvajn ambiguojn kiuj akompanas la internaciigan procedon
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