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Report 2012



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Multilingualism at the University of Manchester

Ella Burke

Zareta Esieva

Catherine Scalon

Shiqi Wan

Huan Zhao

Introduction

The language policy of universities is an issue that is becoming increasingly high profile as can be seen in this recent article regarding the decision of an Italian university, the Politecnico di Milano, to teach the majority of its courses in English from the year 2014 (Coughlan, 2012). With higher education is becoming a global industry, English is increasingly being used as a Lingua Franca even in countries in which it is not an official language. Although the situation at the University of Manchester is different because the language of education is also the dominant national language, Manchester has a high proportion of students who are themselves multilingual. This study attempts to discover the language use of such students through domain analysis and their attitudes to multilingualism within the institution.

Rationale

This study investigates multilingualism at the University of Manchester, focusing on language policy, student attitudes and the domains of language use. It is an interesting area to explore since, despite the large number of multilingual international students speaking a wide variety of languages, the university is strictly monolingual in its operation. While this is justified by the fact that there are so many students from various backgrounds who need to be taught in a language that is spoken by all of them, it seems that little is done by the university to celebrate this multilingual diversity and to assist students. This could be done by providing services in their own language, at least in non-academic settings. From another point of view, the students themselves may wish to communicate exclusively in English in order to improve their competence in the language; moreover, providing services in many languages may not be economically feasible for the university.

Another issue is the one of maintaining linguistic diversity, seeing as the university is a large cultural institution which has the means to promote multilingualism. Peeter Mürsepp (2011) compares English to Latin in European academia during the medieval period. However the situation with English is not directly comparable as this lingua franca is not only present in one continent but across the globe. Mürsepp highlights that although there is a need for a common language, the main purpose of academia cannot just be efficient communication, and proposes the idea of trilingual universities in the future with English, regional and local languages.

According to this model, Manchester University's policy is justified by the fact that English is the main language of the United Kingdom. However other languages being used by students are not being represented. In our survey we researched the opinions and attitudes of the students towards the inclusion of languages other than English within the structure of the university.

Literature

Multilingualism has become increasingly prevalent in European universities in recent years. The continuous implementation of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) serves as a good example. In a survey conducted by Ammon and McConnell (2002) an increasing number of English courses in several European countries was discovered. Schwach (2009) also found that more than 80% of the Norwegian students were enrolled in English-medium Masters programmes. The use of this dominant global lingua franca in different countries indicates that ELF is becoming a 'language for communication' rather than for 'identification' (House 2003), which may be the easiest and most efficient tool to link students together in a multilingual community.

However, while focusing on ELF as a representation of multilingualism, the use of languages other than English in universities is generally ignored. This corresponds to Jenkins' (2010) criticism of ELF, pointing out that English is, most of the time, the only lingua franca in many universities, regardless of their geographical setting. Similarly, Franceschini (2007) defines a multilingual university as "an organisation where linguistic diversity is taken for granted", and goes on to argue that universities should see multilingualism as an asset or an advantage for growth.

This led us to reconsider the aim of our study and to focus more on the languages other than English that are spoken by multilingual students, instead of only observing their use of English as a lingua franca. A comparison with multilingualism in other universities, especially those in countries that have more than one national language, will also be included.

Virkkunen-Fullenwider (2007) mentions the University of Helsinki (whose official languages are Finnish and Swedish), where two operative languages are legally defined and equally used in domains such as university documents and academic events. Another approach suggested by Oltean (2007) is to encourage the use of mother tongue of the country as well as two further foreign languages. This language policy is implemented in Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania. According to Oltean, more than two thirds of the faculties provide a curriculum in both Romanian and Hungarian, with one third of them even providing a third language, German. Furthermore, when interviewing students attending Babeş-Bolyai University, almost all undergraduates regard this '1+2' mode as an advantage, and the majority of them are willing to acquire two foreign languages.

The University of Helsinki and Babeş-Bolyai University's experiences and policies cannot be compared with the University of Manchester (UoM), owing to the dominance of English in England. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the current situation of multilingualism and language policy of UoM is not worth studying. Franceschini (2007) argues that even if the university itself is not located in a historically multilingual area, the 'new immigration' can also lead to the creation of a multilingual community. With more than 7,000 international students from 180 countries, Franceschini's argument is relevant to the University of Manchester and worthy of investigation.

The University of Manchester places importance on international students' mastery of

English by offering a range of English language courses to help improve their academic language skills. Meanwhile, the University Language Centre offers LEAP (Language Experience for All Programme) courses for students who wish to learn a foreign language. The university's website also claims that as 'a diverse and multicultural place', UoM offers a range of facilities suitable for students of all cultures (The University of Manchester website, 2012).

The University of Manchester is undoubtedly a multicultural university, but this does not entail that it is necessarily a multilingual institution. For example, are there any language services or support provided in languages other than English? More importantly (which is not often analysed by most studies), how do students use English and other languages in academic or non-academic domains, and how do they assess their language choice and university's language policies? This study attempts to answer some of these questions.

Language Policy

The University of Manchester does not provide services for students in any language other than English. According to the International Advice Team this is because all students attending the university are expected to have attained at least a competent level of Academic English according to the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) in order to study here (UoM website, 2012). The university believes that students should therefore have enough knowledge of English to be able to communicate effectively in English in all situations. The university has also taken this position, according to the International Advice Team, because it does not have the resources to provide services or information in all the languages spoken by students and would not want to be put in the position of discriminating against some of the languages with a smaller community of speakers by providing services in the more widespread minority languages and ignoring the rest.

This attitude seems to be widespread throughout England. None of the universities researched seemed to advertise any academic or pastoral services in any languages other than English. Aberystwyth University offers a number of modules taught through the medium of Welsh; not only specific to Welsh Language degrees but across the curriculum. The situation in Wales is different to that in England, however, as Welsh is not just a minority language but also an official language so bilingual provision is enshrined in law. It can also be said that in Wales there is significant demand for Welsh language taught courses as there is one main regional language. This is not the case in England, where the majority of minority languages have been introduced to the country through immigration. The main minority language spoken in a given area will vary across the country according to the difference in the concentration of people with a migrant background and where they are originally from.

This assimilationist stance is not, however, employed by all universities in English speaking countries. The University of Victoria in Wellington, New Zealand has adopted a more multilingual approach. As Māori is an official language of New Zealand, the university is obliged to provide a bilingual service but it has gone above and beyond basic provision. As well as offering academic

and pastoral services and support to Māori and Pasifika students through the Te Pūtahi Atawhai department, including services in Māori and languages of the Pacific Islands, the university also caters to the needs of international students by offering its counselling service in a number of Asian languages such as Cantonese, Hokkein, Khek and Mandarin (Victoria University of Wellington website, 2012).

There is one notable exception to the lack of provision in languages other than English at the University of Manchester, which is British Sign Language (BSL). According to the Disability Support Office, BSL interpretation is provided on an 'as needed' basis to D/deaf students and staff. This means that students with BSL as a first language can potentially have access to all of their lectures and tutorials in BSL, either by having an interpreter present or remotely. In this situation, the student is provided with a device on which there is a video link to a BSL interpreter who, although not there in person, has access to the audio feed. D/deaf students with BSL as a first language can also request materials in Plain English. All communication support for D/deaf students is funded through the Disabled Students' Allowance; the maximum support for a full-time undergraduate student per year is £27,405, up to £20,520 of which is available for the provision of a non-medical helper e.g. a BSL interpreter (Directgov website, 2012).

The situation concerning BSL is not directly comparable; however, with other languages as the provision of communication support for those with a hearing impairment is required under the Equality Act 2010. If the university were not to provide access to BSL, it could face charges of discrimination against a 'protected characteristic' as it would have failed to make 'reasonable adjustments' to provide 'equality of opportunity' (www.legislation.gov.uk, 2012).

There are a few examples from other universities which show the inclusion of BSL as part of a bilingual course excluding those which are exclusively studying BSL. The examples found were the BA Theatre Arts, Education and Deaf Studies degree at the University of Reading (University of Reading website, 2012) and the MSc Deafhood Studies course at the Centre for Deaf Studies at the University of Bristol (University of Bristol website, 2012). Both of these courses incorporate an element of Deaf Studies and are therefore more likely to attract students from the Deaf community. As the University of Manchester does not offer any courses including Deaf Studies, it would be unrealistic to expect a completely bilingual course of this type.

Methodology

The results were obtained via the distribution of questionnaires, which were written and adjusted according to a pilot study carried out at the planning stage. In the original questionnaire, many of the questions concerned participant's use of English whilst at university, which we later changed after receiving feedback from our plan. Participants were chosen at random and the questionnaire was completed both in paper form and by the use of an online survey.

After receiving our initial feedback we decided to adjust the focus of our study, making it more inclusive of languages other than English and not simply asking participants about their use of English. As a result, a number of changes were made to our methodology; including rewriting out questionnaire almost entirely. Some of the original questions were retained, such as one regarding participants' language abilities and another asking about awareness of services in other languages. Other questions were adjusted, such as using a lateral axis approach (Wray et al, 2006) instead of categories when asking about language use in different situations. Finally, some questions were replaced by others that concentrated more on participants' academic and social use of the languages they spoke other than English.

Having altered the questionnaire to concentrate more on students' use of foreign languages, we carried out the research by randomly approaching students in the University library and the Language Centre and asking them to participate. As stated in our plan, the questionnaire was also made available online in order to gain more responses. The online questionnaire was distributed through emails and on Facebook groups related to linguistics. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the online programme used (www.esurveyspro.com), we were not able to create a questionnaire that was identical in every way to the paper one. For example, where a lateral axis with marked points was used for question 2 (see appendix), it was not possible to achieve this in the online version. Therefore, the online version asked the same question but used a multiple choice answer option (see appendix). We are aware that this gave the respondent less freedom regarding their response, but we also found that most of the participants who completed paper questionnaires tended to choose a point to circle, rather than marking an X elsewhere on the axis, so the results were similar. All the other questions were identical in both questionnaires, and provided respondents with a space in which to write a freeform response. Therefore, in our results we will only be comparing the data from the online survey and the paper questionnaires in those questions that are identical, that is, all but question 2.

The majority of questions requested that respondents "please give details", and although many did, there were some questions that elicited a lot of single word answers (e.g. Question 4, see appendix). This could have been avoided by conducting research that was more interview based, rather than the use of questionnaires, but for the purpose of this study and taking into account the time constraints, we decided that it would be unrealistic to attempt an interview with every participant and that this would lead to a much smaller number of results.

In our original plan, we had intended to interpret results from an equal number of males and females. However, in order to make the results anonymous we did not ask participants any personal details and therefore did not have the ability to categorise the results by gender. Although we are aware that this could have an effect on our results, the respondents were contacted on a random basis so it is unlikely that the numbers of male and female participants are radically different. Furthermore, as this study focuses more on the use of languages by multilingual students, it could be argued that the gender of those students is not strictly relevant.

Although our questionnaire allowed us to gather the data we needed in order to find out about the use of languages other than English in the University of Manchester, some further improvements could have been made to our methodology. For example, some of the questions, despite asking for details, yielded many single word answers, which were later difficult to interpret. Further clarification of the questions asked may help to solve this problem, or alternatively the use of a more interview-based approach. The use of an online survey was effective and allowed us to gather larger amounts of data, but in an ideal situation the online version would have to be identical to the paper version in order to properly compare the results of both.

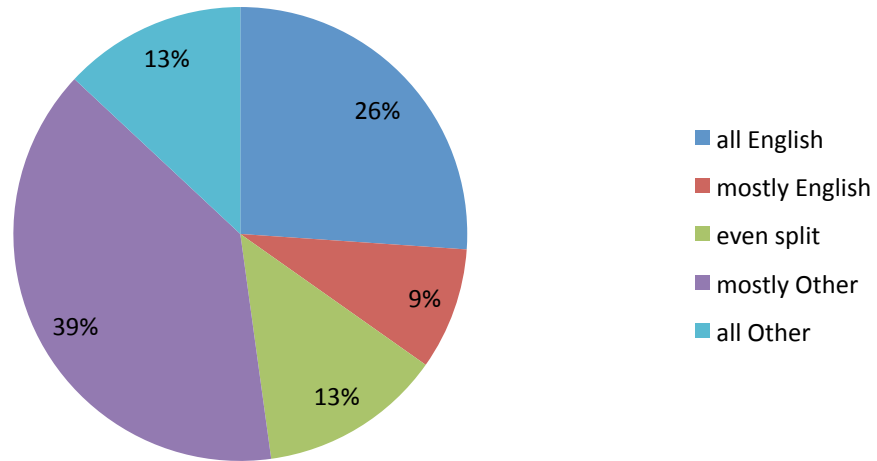
It is not possible to provide accurate figures for the number of multilingual students at the university because international students from English speaking countries may be monolingual and home students may be multilingual.

Results

Question 2

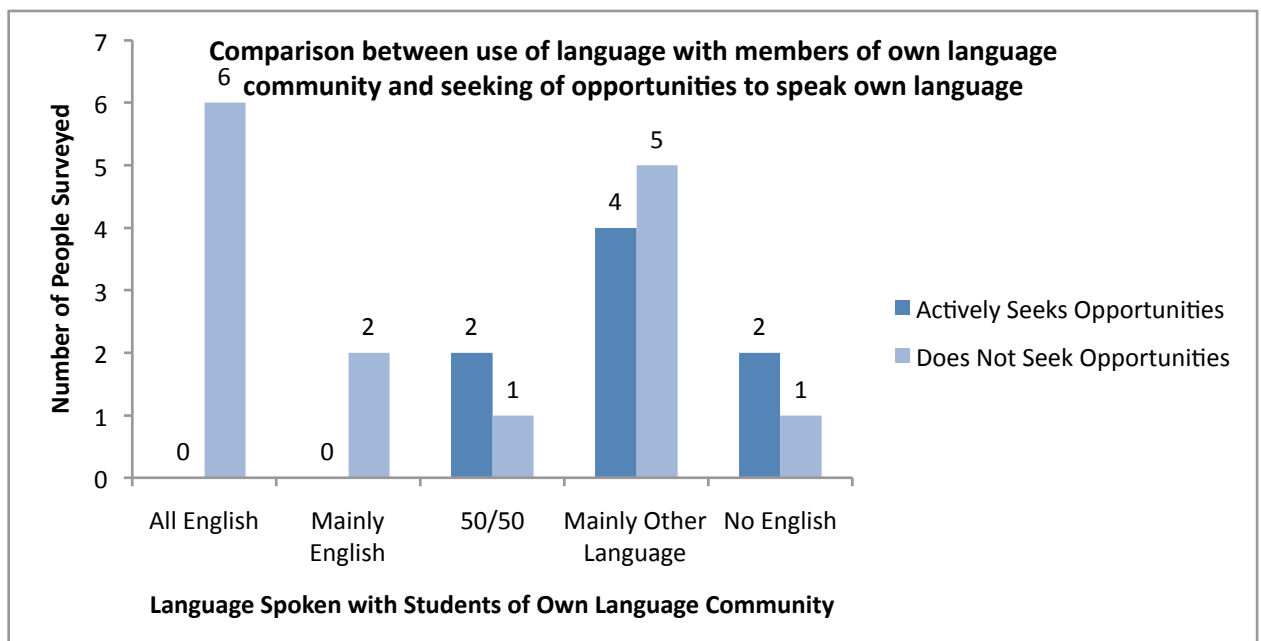
From our survey, it seems that the predominant language used in academic settings by multilingual students is English. We had expected this at a university in which English is the only language in use by the establishment of the university, is the native language of the majority of the student population and can be used as a lingua franca for those students whose first language is not English. Only 22% of respondents reported ever using another language with their lecturers and all of these said that they still mainly used English. Even fewer reported using another language with English speaking students (19%) but the use of languages other than English increases when the multilingual students are interacting with international students, with only 52% reporting that they use only English and 18% reporting that they use another language at least 50% of the time. As can be seen unexpectedly high number of respondents (35%) reported that they used English at least most of the time with members of their own language community.

Language Use with Members of Own Language Community



Question 5

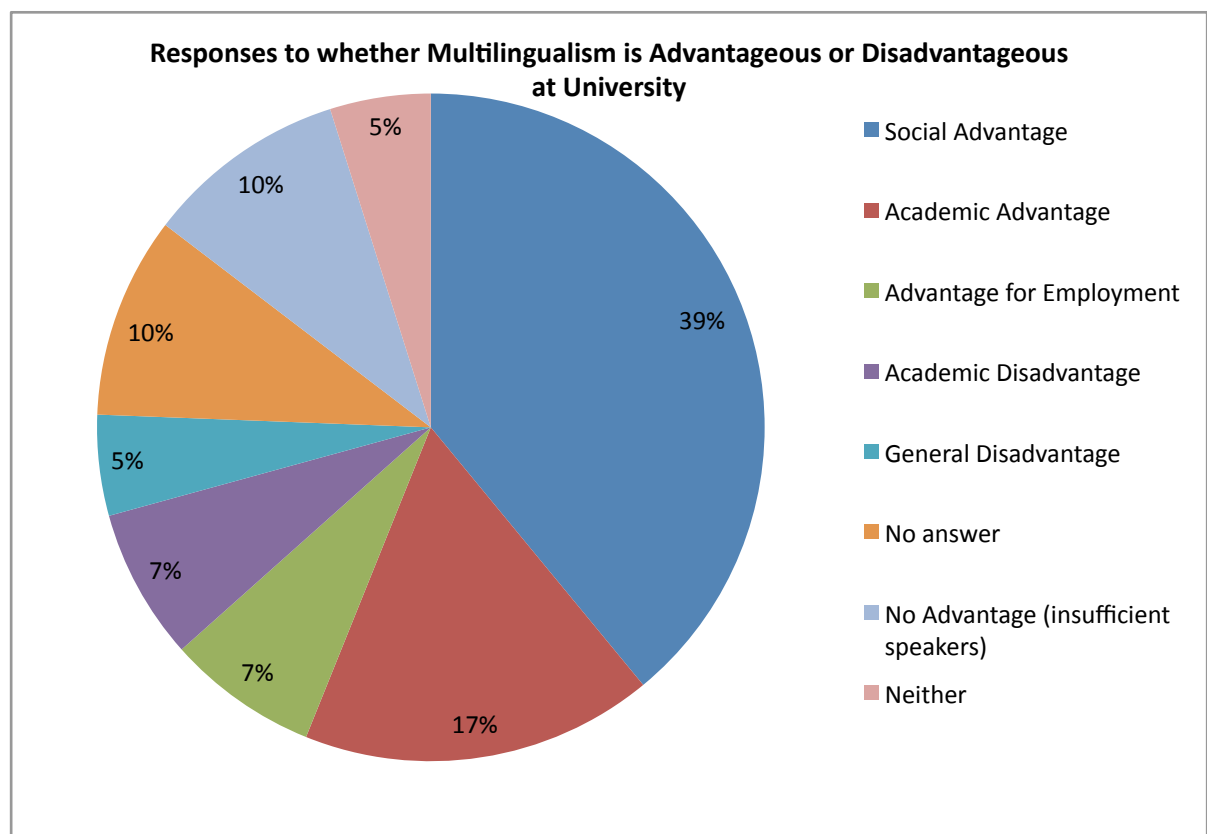
All of those who said that they used at least mostly English, also reported that they did not actively seek opportunities to speak their own language, in contrast to those who spoke English less than half of the time of whom 53% actively sought such opportunities. Those who sought opportunities to speak their own language often specified these as country or language specific student societies e.g. the Francophone Society, the Nordic Society and ManCym (UoM Welsh Society). Of the few respondents who chose to elaborate on the reasons why they did not seek opportunities or events in which they could speak their own language, the most common reason given was that they wanted to practise English. This may explain the high percentage of respondents speaking English with members of their own language community.



Question 3

The majority of our responses (56%) affirmed that being multilingual was an advantage at university whereas 12% reported that it was a disadvantage. Of those who felt it was neither advantageous or disadvantageous (22%), a significant proportion (10% of the total responses) said that this was because there were not enough speakers of their language in the university community for it to be of use. We have included those who said that being multilingual would be advantageous when they were looking for employment (7%) in this 22% as they reported that they did not feel that it was a particular advantage whilst at university but were looking, instead, to the future.

Those respondents who reported that they felt being multilingual was an academic advantage cited the reason that they had access to a wider range of resources as there is much academic material written in languages other than English. In contrast, some felt they were at a disadvantage. They were usually non-native speakers of English who felt that English native speakers have an advantage in exams as dictionaries are not permitted and non-native speakers of English can often be penalised for spelling and grammar mistakes.



There was a common theme running through the answers of those respondents who felt that being multilingual put them at an advantage socially which was that it allowed them to talk to and make friends with a range of people from a variety of different countries and cultures. Although a few made it explicit that this was through the medium of their own language, many did not and some also stated that this was made possible by their ability to speak English and use it as a lingua franca. Another social advantage stated was that a sense of belonging was engendered when speaking their own language with members of their own language community.

Some general disadvantages mentioned were that in working in and focusing so much on learning English caused them to neglect their other languages, decreasing their proficiency in them and a 'sense of confusion and disorientation' when returning from holidays at home.

Question 6

Due to the lack of multilingual services that the University of Manchester provides, our group designed the question 'Would you welcome having classes or academic work set in languages other than English (e.g. exam papers, Blackboard etc)?' The responses to this question were divided. Some respondents (35%) supported the idea because if the exam papers and Blackboard were provided in other languages, it would be easier for students whose second language is English to understand. In contrast, the majority of respondents (65%) opposed it, arguing that different terminology can lead to confusion and that English is a universal tool which should be used in the academic field. A common response was that if they had wanted to study in their own language, they would have stayed in their own country. From the responses to this question, we may conclude that as the University of Manchester is based in England, where English is by far the most widespread language, it is not necessary to alter the university's multilingualism policy in this respect in order to cater to students whose mother tongue is not English.

Question 7

This point is also supported by the responses to the next question, 'Is it important for you to be able to speak your language in academic situations while at university?' Although the respondents were again split on the issue, those respondents who believed it was not important to speak their own language in academic situations (78%), far outnumbered those who thought it was important (22%). The strongest point which emerged from among the former group was that many had chosen to study abroad in the UK in order to improve their English language skills. Therefore they felt it was worthwhile for them to communicate with students in English in academic situations. Those who felt it was important often cited the reason that they appreciated being able to discuss their work more freely with members of their own language community. One respondent reported that they would appreciate a member of staff with whom they could converse in their own language as they felt they were often misunderstood when speaking English. Another, whose first language was English, also felt that they would 'engage more in university' if there was the opportunity to speak their second language. This suggests that, although seemingly in the minority, some sections of the student body would be receptive to the provision of services in languages other than English.

Question 8

The final question on our questionnaire was 'Do you consider the University of Manchester to be a multilingual university?' From the results we received, it seems that the respondents had different ideas as to what a multilingual university is. The majority of the participants (58%) answer yes, with many justifying their response by the fact that as the university has a multilingual student body; it therefore constitutes a multilingual university. Those who felt that it is not multilingual (42%) often made the distinction between a multicultural and multilingual institution. Some also responded that they felt that the university was a multilingual community rather than a multilingual institution and one respondent commented that this was 'led by the students not by the staff'.

Conclusion

From the results that we have got from the questionnaire, we may conclude that multilingual students of the University of Manchester are generally satisfied with the monolingual situation in academic domains. As they have some knowledge of English and have the motivation to learn and practise it, they can adjust fairly well to using English as a universal tool in the academic field. Some of the respondents would welcome acknowledgement that English may not be their first language in exams, for example, where they felt that they are put at a disadvantage compared to English native speakers. Even those who see their multilingualism as an academic advantage may find it harder to utilise their skills than they think. A Norwegian friend of one of our group members has been actively discouraged from using sources in Norwegian academic journals in a dissertation as the lecturer cannot understand the language and cannot, therefore, verify whether the conclusions she has drawn from them are accurate.

As an institute in an English speaking country in a field which is becoming ever more English dominated, the University of Manchester cannot be expected to accommodate to a diversely multilingual student body academically but this does not mean that it cannot improve in other areas. Pastorally, the university provides no support in languages other than English. Citing the English language ability of the students as a reason for not providing such services overlooks the fact that only competence in academic English is required in order to study at the university. This does not necessarily mean that the students will have the English language skills to cope with personal or general problems, such as those to do with accommodation.

By refusing to engage with multilingual students in any language other than English, the university is controlling the ways in which multilingual students can interact with it as an institution. According to Van Dijk (1993), this can be seen an example of the university asserting 'dominance' over the students in the linguistic minority which then creates a 'social inequality'. This inequality is created by the fact that the university is limiting the students to using one language, which may not be the one in which they are most comfortable communicating, which therefore is limiting the 'discourse access' which the multilingual students have. This gives the students less power in the relationship between them and the university. In order to redress the balance somewhat, the university should consider providing support services in at least some of

the more widespread minority languages spoken by its student body.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire—Multilingualism in UoM

1. Which languages do you speak at a fluent or native level?

2. Please mark a cross on the axis to indicate your language use in the following situations:

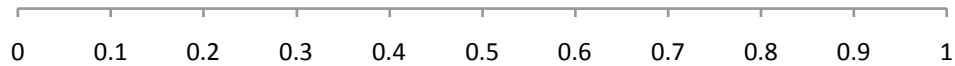
(0= No English 1= All English)

Academic

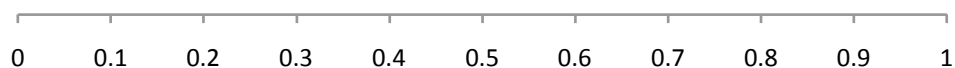
a. With lecturers



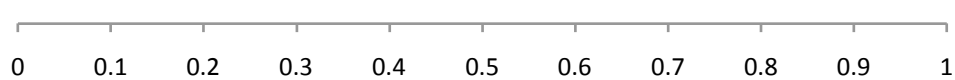
b. With English speaking students



c. With international students

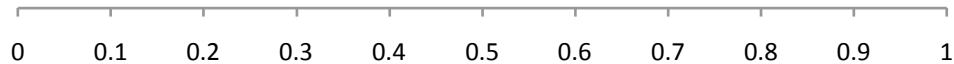


d. With students from your own language community

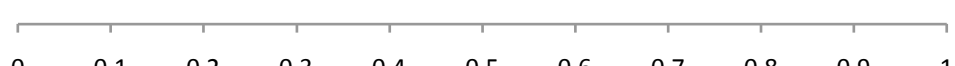


Non-academic

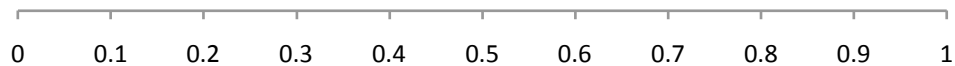
a. Media (books, papers, films etc.)



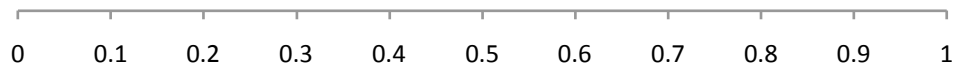
b. Social networks (Facebook, Twitter etc.)



c. With friends



d. In clubs or societies



3. Do you feel that knowing more than one language gives you any advantage or disadvantage whilst at university? Please give details.

4. Are you aware of any university service offered in languages other than English?

5. Do you actively seek places/events where you can communicate only in your language? (e.g. societies, clubs) Please give details.

6. Would you welcome having classes or academic work set in languages other than English (eg. exam papers, Blackboard etc)? Please give details.

7. Is it important for you to be able to speak your language in academic situations while at university? Please give details.

8. Do you consider UoM to be a multilingual university? Please give details.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix 2

Online Questionnaire

<http://www.esurveyspro.com/Survey.aspx?id=538bbb4e-c6a9-47c2-a35e-9921478904ff>