

English language use at universities of non-Anglophone European countries: Is there a correlation between Englishization and world rank?

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European universities have, since the late 1990s, undergone dramatic changes centred on internationalization, harmonization, marketization and competition. To traditionally non-English-dominant universities in Europe, such changes often seem to be accompanied by a degree of Englishization, i.e. an increase in the use of English in key areas. However, despite a surge in research into this topic, it is not yet clear to what extent current organizational changes automatically engender Englishization, or whether one can take place without the other. Assuming that average position on seven well-known university ranking lists is an indicator of the extent to which a university has undergone organizational restructuring, this paper examines the correlation between restructuring and Englishization. Using as an example case Denmark's eight universities, it draws on recently compiled statistics derived from a variety of government and national sources to illuminate the extent to which English is used in three areas: teaching, academic publishing and, as a proxy for Englishization, the proportion of international students and faculty. The findings suggest that while there is evidence of a weak correlation, in that the lower rank of a university, the less English is likely to be used in it, there are some notable exceptions in which English is being used more by lower-ranked universities. In these cases, Englishization seems to be better explained by taking into account local and contextual factors than by grand and sweeping narratives. The findings may shed light on longstanding and recently resurfaced scholarly debates on the respective emphasis to be placed on structure and agency, hegemony and rational choice in the process of Englishization, as well as, more practically, on the motivations of universities in Europe for switching to English.

Keywords: universities, Englishization, internationalization.