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# Contingent policies, complex contexts and ROAD-MAPPING: Ways and plays forward

Taina Saarinen

## Abstract (max 200 words)

This chapter first presents an overview of the complex language policy contexts of the internationalising universities. It starts from the multi-layeredness of university language settings and their political contingency, and moves on to discuss the ROAD-MAPPING frame and the way it has acknowledged these complexities, both theoretically and empirically. After briefly observing the geographical and disciplinary contexts in the volume, the discussion moves on to the chapters' contribution to ROAD-MAPPING and the ways in which the chapter authors discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the frame. The coda closes with a suggestion on how the framework could be used differently. For that, an approach of subversive play with the framework is proposed. In order to understand the messy and multi-layered realities of languages in higher education, we need to give space for the unexpected. Playing with the framework offers a possibility to challenge our assumptions and expectations about language in higher education.

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## Trying to understand the contingent policies

Reading the chapters in this volume opens opportunities to rethink the possibilities offered by the ROAD-MAPPING framework for analysing university language policies. As a frame that attempts to acknowledge the multi-layeredness and complexity of these policies, ROAD-MAPPING also challenges itself in this complex and contingent context. In this coda, I will discuss the possibilities of ROAD-MAPPING to help us challenge our existing assumptions about language policies in higher education.

Language policies of higher education have been a constant and increasing context of research in recent years. This is often attributed to increased international mobility, as numbers of international students has hit 6 million in 2019 from 2 million in 2000. The changes in higher education and its linguistic landscape that also the ROAD-MAPPING framework (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; 2020, see also this volume) tackles are, however, a result of more complex historical changes in higher education policies since the 1970s. Calls for increased transparency of policies for purposes of mobility of people, goods, money and ideas, particularly in the European Economic Area (see St John 2018), but also elsewhere, emerged, and had also implications to language use. While, for instance, the Bologna Process has not required European mobility programmes to be conducted in English, it still seems that the convergence of European policies has also results in a convergence of language use, i.e. use of English as medium of instruction has increased particularly in Europe, but also in Asia (British Council 2021). Consequently, also higher education language policies seem to have converged (Ljosland 2015; Phillipson 2006).

While not all international students conduct their studies in English, it is still for various historical, political, cultural and social reasons the major language of international study. However, regional internationalisation hubs such as Northern Cyprus or Malaysia (Chabre & Stef 2021) may challenge the role of English in internationalisation. These hubs represent hierarchical categories and regionalization goals of higher education, as they often recruit their students from the region (Knight & Morshidi 2011). What may also impact the study of languages in internationalisation is that the phenomenon of internationalisation itself has changed and focussing on intentional student mobility ignores effects of forced migration and other kinds of mobility that are not primarily fuelled by study (see for instance Robertson 2019). While the rise of populist and protectionist migration politics, changes in migration flows due to climate change and military conflicts, and the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions in the 2000s have made us aware of various inequities in internationalisation, it must be remembered that internationalisation has never been an equal and geopolitically innocent activity (Gürüz 2011).

Language is political, in many ways. It reflects political and ideological structures of the societies, but also construes and co-constitutes those structures (Gal 2006). Language ideology, in other words, provides a bridge between language and social theory (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). Language and languages are not ideologically neutral, even if for instance English may sometimes have been presented as such (for a critique, see Pennycook 2017). They are intertwined with the political, economic, social and cultural structures which

they “cloak in linguistic terms” (Baločkaitė 2014, p. 42). ROAD-MAPPING is one example of the need to not only acknowledge the layered and complex nature of language policies, but also to analyze them in a way that would do justice to that complexity.

Language policy research contexts are, then, typically complex phenomena (Johnson 2013; for higher education contexts, see also Studer and Smit 2021 for an introduction of special issue on *English-Medium education in internationalised universities: sketching a way forward*). Their layeredness and fluidity means that structures such as macro-meso-micro that we tend to take for granted are, in fact, problematic not only in language policies, but in a wider sociological understanding of human structures (Byrne and Callaghan 2013) as these linear descriptions tend to lose the multi-sitedness involved (Hult 2010). Policies are not linear, but temporally and spatially fluid and flux, being formulated as they are enacted. While dichotomies such as macro–micro are necessary in making policies understandable, they also (over-)simplify the multi-sited issues they represent (Saarinen 2017; see Hult 2010). In this vein, Chang points out in this volume the interdependence of the dimensions in ROAD-MAPPING and goes on to discuss the potential epistemic problems with linear policies.

The view of policy as linear and dichotomous has been criticized elsewhere in the field of education, as reviewed concisely by Kauko and Wermke in their 2018 essay on political contingency. Here, we come to one of the paradoxes of ROAD-MAPPING. As discussed above, language policies are non-linear, layered and contingent. We, as researchers, on the other hand, try to make sense of language policies by theorizing the ways in which these multi-layered and contingent policies could be understandable, and end up doing that in linear and non-contingent ways. While this helps us understand the phenomenon, it also necessarily flattens it. How can we analyze the contingent, complex policies while using a structured sense-making technology such as a theoretical frame? How do we discuss the layeredness of these contingent policies without “unlayering” them and detaching them from their intertwined being? In this volume, Rose & Sahan ask similar questions in their chapter in this volume on what ROAD–MAPPING does to our understanding of EME policy research. The ROADMAPPING framework (Dafouz & Smit 2016, this volume) is one of these “sense-making” technologies of contingent language policies. I will return to this question in the end of this chapter, to suggest some ways forward.

### Complex geographical and disciplinary contexts

One of my delights in reading the chapters was to observe the various geographical, disciplinary, educational, and linguistic contexts represented by the different studies. This is not meant to glorify diversity as such, nor to say that Inner Circle (Kachru 1997) English contexts would not be important (on the contrary, as Dafouz and Smit in their introduction to this volume show). We need these different contexts for very basic epistemological reasons: to understand the phenomenon of EME (or, in fact, Any-Medium Education) in all its variety. Echoing this, Chang in this volume calls for experimenting with different knowledge theories.

The ROAD-MAPPING frame is not a goal in itself, but a means to understanding the phenomenon. The variety of approaches and contexts, in turn, alleviates epistemological bias in the research on internationalisation that has focused (too much) on the Anglophone sphere (de Wit and Hunter 2015) and been published in English language outlets (Kuzhabekova, Hendel & Chapman 2015).

In the context of EME in higher education, not only are numbers of English Medium programmes rising, but the expansion is also geographical, particularly in Asia. EME is offered to a multitude of learners, and with varying purposes and effects. Simultaneously, English also makes societal differences visible, being a proxy for statuses of speakers (see Hultgren 2020; Saarinen & Ennser-Kananen 2020). Also in higher education contexts, the Englishes at work are not one but many, and our perceptions of the many Englishes have very material consequences to their speakers.

In the context of fluid internationalisation, also the role of English has been critically scrutinized. An increase in critical research of English has emerged in recent years to problematize and question its global and local role (Pennycook 2017), criticizing for instance ELF and World Englishes approaches for perpetuating marginalization of non-native speakers and in general paying too little attention to questions of power, social identity and equity. A recent special issue edited by Anna Kristina Hultgren in *Nordic Journal of English Studies* (see Hultgren 2020) includes analyses of English from critical social justice viewpoint.

As we have witnessed more sociolinguistic research on questions of inequality, we have also seen a turn towards discussing the very political and economic materialities reproduced by these injustices where English is often participating (Pennycook 2018). Participation of English in higher education is never neither coincidental nor innocent. English is ambivalent: it may be seen as a resource but also as consuming resources; it is seen as both empowering (Adejunmobi 2004) and oppressing (Phillipson 2006). The dichotomies surrounding uses of English as a language of globalization may eventually “erase problematizations of the layered societal implications of English in localized contexts” (Saarinen & Ennser-Kananen 2020, 115). All in all, English is ambiguous in many ways and this ambiguity would be important to keep in mind also when ROAD-MAPPING is applied. Adding “the role of Other Languages” in the frame is definitely a good addition to the frame (see the final section of this chapter). However, inequities between speakers of different Englishes (i.e. varieties with different historical and societal trajectories) as well as different speakers of Englishes (i.e. speakers with different relationships to the language as “native”, “non-native”, “learner” etc.) would need more attention. To this question, too, I will return in the final section of this chapter, to suggest some ways forward.

## Applying ROAD-MAPPING

In the chapters in this volume, ROAD-MAPPING has been applied to a variety of contexts, with the authors analysing both the frame and their take on it openly. This alone is valuable: the benefits of systematically analysing EME with the frame, or describing complex contexts

that have previously been understudied, is important. Of equal importance, however, are the various cracks in the frame that the chapter authors open and scrutinize. Rose and Sahan take a view of layeredness further in their chapter. Hüttner and Baker develop further the comparative aspects of ROAD-MAPPING and end up questioning with good reason the dichotomy of Anglophone – non-Anglophone. Many of the chapters discuss the various sub-categories in the frame, either calling for more nuance and layers to the frame itself (Shao and Carson; Komori-Glatz; Konttinen) or discussing the difficulties in applying the various layers in a rare context of PD course (Graham and Eslami). Pérez-Paredes and Curry bring up the question of how to move on with the new themes and the discrepancies and inconsistencies in the analyses. Chang discusses the knowledge building aspects of ROAD-MAPPING and called for experimenting with knowledge theories. Bradford recommended experimenting with the categories to encompass ROAD-MAPPING with other elements.

While I appreciate the authors adding their suggestions to the frame (or indeed the editors adding “in relation to other languages” to the Role of English section of the frame), I am still thinking that making the framing more detailed does not solve the problem of analysing contingent policies. On the contrary, making the framework messier could be an interesting way of developing it, and to acknowledge and embrace the messy realities the frame attempts to capture. In this volume, there are already some indications towards this. Bradford proposes extending the use of ROAD-MAPPING from agents to agency and encourage future users of ROAD-MAPPING to “remain flexible and open” in encompassing broader elements in their applications of the framework. Equally, I wholeheartedly agree with Chang who suggests experimenting with different (knowledge) theories; I would extend the call to various critical and social justice approaches.

## Playing with ROAD-MAPPING

I started this chapter by first discussing the apparent paradox between our contingent higher education and language policies and the linear ways in which we try to understand that contingency. I then continued to outline the often-neglected ambiguity and socially stratified nature of English. I’m returning to these questions in this final section.

To be credible, we – researchers – are expected to use our theories and methodologies systematically, and to focus on clearly defined questions. This requirement has become performative, and is, in fact, ideological in nature (Rose & McKinley, 2017). The benefit of, but also problem with any methodology is that they enable us to look directly at what we want to look at, while at the same time making us miss what we do not look at.

In recent years, my treatment of language and higher education has been characterized by an attempt to see beyond the frames and to unfocus; to see differently; to challenge the existing ways of thinking and writing about language in higher education (inter)nationalization (Saarinen 2020; Aarnikoivu & Saarinen 2021; Aarnikoivu, Enns-Kananen & Saarinen in progress). This is not merely a theoretical or methodological challenge, but an epistemic and equity one. A politically and historically complex topic requires approaches that help take our

eyes off the focus at times, to enable a bigger picture. Otherwise, we easily just continue to reproduce the taken for granted views of whatever it is we are studying.

Methodologies both help and constrain us. It is difficult to think outside of the box if the box is all we have ever known. ROAD-MAPPING is a box that is trying to be another kind of box; one that allows for various contexts and phenomena to be accounted for in the analysis of higher education language policies. How, then, get to the bottom of the contingency and the messiness that is the essence of language policies? And to take up my second concern: how to acknowledge the critical and material aspects of languages in it? What would be the possibility of using ROAD-MAPPING for a more material analysis and problematization of higher education language policies?

I by no means claim to engage in post-qualitative methodologies; in fact, I'm one of those people who struggles to think differently, while at the same time reproducing the same old ways of thinking (see Aarnikoivu, Ennser-Kananen and Saarinen in progress). However, I find St. Pierre's (2021) call for denormalizing the categories that "*organize qualitative methodology*" tempting. St. Pierre (2021, 165) calls for throwing "into a radical doubt" our need to methodologize, in order to loosen the methodologies' "increasing control of our thought", eventually to "think thought and being differently, to think difference itself." This is appealing.

Luckily, there are approaches that can help us reorientate and think differently. These often come from traditions that challenge existing societal norms and the epistemologies that reproduce the existing inequities, examples are *unlearning* (Azoulay 2019) and *queering* (Ghaziani and Brim 2019). I am delighted about the approach of the volume, as the editors were putting themselves out there and asking the chapter authors to provide critical comments on ROAD-MAPPING. Most of the chapter authors responded to my first concern of studying contingent policies with a relatively tight frame such as ROAD-MAPPING. Some took on the task as employing different theoretical or methodological approaches to ROAD-MAPPING, while others sought to apply it as fully as possible. It seems that the most fruitful engagements included tinkering and playing with the frame itself. By playing, I mean the kind of subversive playfulness that resists not only academic performatives (Nørgård and Moseley 2021) but also our assumptions of what is "real" or "good" research (Rose & McKinley 2017).

In the case of ROAD-MAPPING, "playing" could include shifting about the main notions of the frame. What if one of the main notions of the frame was about other languages in relation to English and not the other way around? What if we didn't talk about academic disciplines, but academic institutions and organisations? What if the frame was not about internationalisation, but the local? A thought experiment like this could help us look "outside the box", or at least change the shape of the box. We know that sometimes in order to understand what the role of language in a situation is, we have to look behind the language. Lund asks in his 2014 article: what happens when case studies are taken for granted? What is, in fact, the real case? In analysing a complex setting, the risk of making self-evident and unproblematic the six elements of ROAD-MAPPING, as well as the centre of "discourses", is real. There is a myriad of literature on the ways in which internationalisation and globalisation are understood as self-evident (see for instance Morley et al. 2018; see also Hüttner and

Baker discussing the categories of ROAD-MAPPING in this volume) and how we should, in fact, challenge these self-evident conceptualisations. Playing with ROAD-MAPPING, more could be done.

Currently, at the centre of ROAD-MAPPING there is *discourses*. We know that discourses are also very material: they are embedded in the structures of our societies and in the structures of higher education policies, and they continuously participate in the reproduction of those structures. What if the frame did not revolve around discourses, but the materialities (instead of, or in addition to, *discourses*) of higher education and language use in it? Would adding a look at materialities of languages in higher education contexts change the usability of the ROAD-MAPPING frame? (Ennser-Kananen & Saarinen forthcoming.)

An example of adding a more material foundation to ROAD-MAPPING could be found from the role of Englishes in it. English is not homogeneous; we know that but talking about English as the language of internationalization may make us think there is only one English. I know the editors and chapter authors of this book do not think that, and my point is not to even make that claim. My point is that when focusing on “English” or EMEMUS it is easy to focus on language and to sometimes overlook the societal or material aspects behind that language. However, the different Englishes act in a dynamic relationship with the material world (Ennser-Kananen & Saarinen forthcoming): the socioeconomic materialities that knowing a particular kind of *English* (and being a particular kind of speaker of the language) entail, or the material entanglements of *English* with the spaces and times where it is used. Decentering *English* from our thinking and centering the speaker or the space could be a material starting point also for ROAD-MAPPING.

For me, one of the major values of the ROAD-MAPPING would be not only to use it to try to analyze and understand different contexts, but to play with it and, in doing that, to play with our own assumptions and expectations about language in higher education. In order to understand the messy and multi-layered realities of languages in higher education, giving space for the unexpected is a real possibility.

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