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Emplacing English as *lingua franca* in international higher education: A spatial perspective on linguistic diversity

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Abstract

Within higher education, internationalisation is increasingly important for students and academics alike. In this context, English as the *lingua franca* has gained prominence. The ostensible ubiquity of English rests on a particular rendering of the language as unitary, fixed, and undifferentiated. In this paper, we challenge this notion of English and use a spatial approach to explore the multiplicity of Englishes on display within the higher education context. Increasingly, within higher education outside Anglophone countries, English Medium Instruction (EMI) is seen as a crucial indicator of internationalisation: the term 'international programmes' is often used as a proxy for programmes taught in English. Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore the role of English in internationalisation of higher education, and to show how a spatial approach can illuminate what English means and how it is experienced in its multiple and shifting forms. We examine Danish higher education to explore the multiple usages of English amongst so-called 'native' and 'nonnative' speakers and show the spatial and hierarchical complexity of language. We suggest that a spatial perspective on English in the context of international higher education can help nuance debates about internationalisation and language in important ways – there is not one, but multiple forms of English, displayed at different times and in different places, with differing effects in the creation of spatial hierarchies.

KEYWORDS

Denmark, English, internationalisation, language, lingua franca, space

1 | INTRODUCTION

English has a peculiar geography within conceptions of internationalisation of higher education¹. Whilst many languages remain moored to particular countries, English is, in contrast, 'everywhere'

(Pennycook & Candlin, 2017). It is habitually described as the *lingua franca* (i.e., ELF, the common global language (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019)) and can be argued to have become unmoored and universalised through the internationalisation of higher education.

¹Here, we use the well-known definition of internationalisation as: "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and

delivery of postsecondary education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; p. 3, emphasis in original). In the Nordic context, internationalisation is operationalised as mobility and EMI is the facilitating tool for this.

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One example of such unmooring is seen in the proliferation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) within non-Anglophone higher education institutions (see papers in Hultgren, Gregersen, et al., 2014 for EMI in the Nordic countries, Galloway et al., 2020 for Eastern Asia). Outside Anglophone countries, a discursive slippage can be observed, where internationalisation has become unproblematically equated with teaching in English and celebrated as such (Saarinen, 2012). In other words, internationalisation of higher education seems to equal English.

The ostensible ubiquity of English rests on a particular understanding of the language as unitary, fixed, and undifferentiated, which has been developed since colonial times, and reinforced by the imperialist ambitions of the British Empire (see Pennycook 2017; Phillipson, 2010). Within higher education, this position of English has been perpetuated and reproduced over the past 20, as internationalisation has become politically institutionalised and incentivized (see Airey et al., 2017 for the Nordic context or Galloway et al. for Eastern Asia). Consequently, English has attained a revered and sought-after status that persists to this day. In the academic literature, accounts of international student mobility and 'the desire for English' show this spatial unmooring. An example is Motha and Lin (2014), who have theorised that at the heart of English language learning lies a desire for a particular kind of English; that is, for what the language signals in terms of capital and power, and for the "identities represented by particular accents and varieties of English" (p. 332), implying a very unitary understanding of English as a language. Likewise, in Fong's (2011) work on transnational Chinese students the desire for English is unequivocally expressed but the nature of English remains unquestioned and unproblematised. Within much of the geographical literature on international student mobility, context-dependent engagement with language is also missing. English is often presented as a 'thing' or 'skill' to be possessed (or not) without problematising the nature of this thing. What does English-speaking actually mean? For instance, Beech (2014) discusses international students' imaginaries and decision making concerning study destinations. She explains that students sought "to ensure good English language skills by studying in locations where English is the first language" (p. 102). Likewise, (Waters, 2008) evokes an unproblematised dichotomy between 'non-English-speaking' and 'English-speaking countries', when discussing young people returning to Hong Kong after obtaining an undergraduate degree in Canada. Generally, these depictions retain a surface-level understanding of language and the nature of English remains unexamined.

In this paper, we address this gap by probing the nature of language within the internationalisation of education. We focus on EMI as an increasingly prevalent part of internationalisation within higher education. We argue that research has thus far failed to grasp the spatial complexity of EMI, just as geographers (working with concepts of space) have, to date, had little to say about language use in relation to contemporary internationalisation. We challenge the aspatial and undifferentiated understanding of English within depictions of international student and academic mobility. Through the analysis of our empirical material on Danish higher education, we

show the multiplicity of Englishes and how, through this diversity, the language might be implicated in the creation of new (heterogeneous) spaces of social interaction and social hierarchies. Hence, the aim of the paper is to explore the role of English in internationalisation of higher education, and to show how approaching language use spatially can illuminate what English means and how it is experienced in its multiple and shifting forms. We do so by asking the following research question:

In the context of Danish higher education, how does a spatial approach enable us to understand the multiple usages of English and bring to the fore the hierarchies attached to English use?

The empirical material analysed derives from a project on internationalisation of Danish higher education entitled 'Anonymised Project' (AP). Internationalisation of higher education is often portrayed as a neutral process within policy discourses, and as an ideologically impartial intervention that will lead to an unconditional good (Morley et al., 2018). On the contrary, AP explores how internationalisation is embedded in and reinforces global inequalities; it does so by examining its 'geographies', including linguistic geographies (Adriansen et al., 2019). The project uses Denmark as an empirical case to examine how internationalisation policies and instruments (such as EMI) influence perceptions of quality, relevance, and learning in higher education, and how ideas, practices and knowledges travel with internationally mobile students and academics. The Danish case is interesting because it is at the periphery of the hegemonic Anglo-American academy and represents a non-English speaking country, while simultaneously being part of the affluent Global North and, within a European context, is a popular destination for students and academics alike. Thus, higher education within Denmark can illuminate the multiplicities of English.

The paper first situates our argument within current debates on the internationalisation of higher education, with especial emphasis on mobility, language and EMI. Following this, a short methodology section explains the empirical material. Then follows an analytical framework where we outline our spatial perspective. The analysis falls in three parts. The first part shows how EMI is equated to internationalisation for many academics and students. In the second part, we explore the spatial hierarchies of English, which are hidden in the aspatial rendering of English. Finally, in the third part, we analyse the spatial multiplicity of Englishes and its space-making properties such as in- and exclusion within the international classroom.

2 | SETTING THE SCENE: EMI AND THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Within the academic literature on internationalisation, discussions of international student mobility abound, and many stress the importance of the English language in directly precipitating student mobility. The availability of programmes taught in English is seen as important for attracting international students (Airey et al., 2017; Galloway et al., 2020; Kahanec & Králiková, 2011). There are a

number of exceptions to this, including mobility from former French, Spanish, and Portuguese speaking colonies to France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, where alternatives to English are preeminent. However, the unique role of English as a global lingua franca (Fang & Baker, 2018; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019) is evident in higher education internationalisation and student mobility.

As English has spread globally, it has become clear that it is no longer “the sole property” (Fang & Baker, 2018; p. 608) of its ‘native’ speakers. English as lingua franca (ELF; Fang & Baker, 2018; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019) has attempted to make visible the blurred boundaries between nation statist understandings of language and culture. Conceptualisations of ELF have had a definite effect on EMI in both in Anglophone and non-Anglophone settings, as neither teachers nor students necessarily speak English as a ‘native’ language. While EMI does not in general have explicit language learning objectives (Galloway et al., 2020) it is still assumed, somewhat self-evidently, to provide students with English language skills. Interestingly, however, Werther et al. (2014) show that many lecturers who had to teach in English within Danish higher education did not feel they possessed sufficient academic English proficiency (Soren, 2013; Tange, 2010).

Most European higher education institutions have been through approximately two decades of systematised internationalisation aimed at increasing international mobility amongst students and faculty (Morley et al., 2018; van der Wende, 2015). In this process, provision of EMI plays an important role and Nordic countries in particular have featured strongly as providers of EMI (Tange, 2020; Werther et al., 2014). Discussions on *English as a lingua franca in academic settings* or ELFA (for a review, see Baker & Hüttner, 2019) have moved the ELF debates specifically to academic settings, conceptualising English as one element in a range of linguistic resources in higher education.

In Denmark, as in other Nordic countries, the use of English was strongly pushed in university policies in a one-size-fits all manner without much reflection on disciplinary differences and national context (Airey et al., 2017). Denmark also accepts students from other Scandinavian countries to study at programmes taught in Danish without requiring a language test, based on the premise that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are closely related² (UFM, 2021), and reminding us that internationalisation does not take place only in English. In the Scandinavian context, it is worth mentioning that the extensive use of English was predicted to be reaching a ceiling as national authorities grew more concerned about the relationship between English and national languages (Saarinen, 2020; Soler, 2019).

Despite the vast literature on higher education internationalisation, there have been surprisingly few studies critically problematising the role of English in EMI. For instance, Pennycook (2017) has argued that ‘English as *Lingua Franca*’ fails to address “power and inequality

in any adequate way” (p. viii). Until the 2010s, EMI was analysed mainly from a pedagogical or classroom perspective, and social or politically oriented critiques of EMI in higher education have remained scarce (Saarinen, 2017), with the main exception of Robert Phillipson's log work on *linguistic imperialism* (see for instance Phillipson, 2010). In recent years, more critical accounts have emerged on EMI, such as Yeung (2020) and Sung (2020) on language ideologies and EMI in the postcolonial Hong Kong context, or Khan and Block (2021) who take a micro-level critical ethnographic look at EMI in a Catalan context.

As the work of Mortensen (2014) illustrates, students at a Danish university perceived the use of English as equivalent to ‘doing’ or ‘being’ an ‘international student’; nevertheless, they also spoke Danish in various (other) contexts (or spaces) as a supplementary and alternative language to English. Consequently, Mortensen (2014) argues that the widespread belief in the exclusive use of English equalling higher education internationalisation constrains the actual potential that international university education holds for multicultural and -lingual development. We explore this point in relation to the spaces that linguistic diversity might produce.

A small number of explicitly spatial perspectives on English exist. For example, Gu et al. (2021) show how Chinese university teachers navigated their EMI instructional settings. Salö (2022) positions language in the terrain of internationalising the academy. Finally, Choi (2021) has illustrated how English has become a marker of class distinction in student mobility – not just in terms of those who speak English and those who do not, but in the types and ways of speaking English and how these are geographically located and socially differentiated (see Ennser-Kananen et al., 2021 on accents and hierarchisation of international student).

Gimenez and Morgan (2017) also demonstrate how English has become a constitutive element of international academics' professional selves and lives, forming a fundamental requirement for successful development and career advancement. English is seen as a form of capital that, like other forms of embodied capital (after Bourdieu, 1996), can be accumulated over time, in situ, and through a degree of effort (it cannot be handed down from one person to another). In this sense, then, linguistic ability is an excellent, illustrative example of what embodied cultural capital represents. However, the nature of English in these discussions and the fact that it represents not a single thing but a multiplicity of social relations that come together to create space – is neglected. Likewise, the use of English within EMI by academics and students, what it means to ‘use English’ and, indeed, to ‘speak English’, and the repercussions of English's diversity are in need of further exploration.

3 | RESEARCH METHODS

‘AP’ is an interdisciplinary research project that focuses on six common instruments of internationalisation in Danish HE: outgoing student mobility, incoming student mobility, international academics, and EMI, internationalisation at home, and international specialisation

²If you are a student from one of the Nordic countries you are normally not required to take a Danish test if you studied Danish, Norwegian or Swedish as part of your entry qualification. It depends on the rules laid down by the institution” (UFM, 2021).

(degree programme having a global or international focus). In this paper, we focus on the first four of these, because Covid-restrictions prohibited us to conduct fieldwork in relation to the latter two. We draw on empirical data collected through ethnographic fieldwork at one (anonymous) higher education institution, and interview material with international students and academics from three (anonymous) higher education institutions. The interviews were conducted in Danish, German or English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Quotations used for this paper were translated into English by the interviewer and peer checked by other team members.

The international academics comprise 16 individuals (postdocs, associate and full professors) who were employed at Danish higher education institutions at the time of conducting the interviews. All of them have been mobile for parts of their academic career, spending time at two or more universities in different countries. In addition, we interviewed five programme directors of EMI programmes. The interviews with the international academics were conducted in English or Danish, and the interviews with the programme directors³ were conducted in Danish despite three of them not being Danes (two German and one Belgian). The group of incoming international students comprises a little more than 100 students from countries within and outside Europe, studying in Denmark for one semester. From this set of data, we draw on campus observations (Madden, 2017) and nine focus group interviews (Crang & Cook, 2007) with up to four students from ten different countries. The interviews with German and Swiss students were conducted in German. The other interviews were conducted in English. The empirical data with Danish outgoing students consist of ethnographic observations and 34 interviews with students either studying abroad for one semester or doing an international internship. These were conducted in Danish. All interviews were qualitative. Those with academics and study leaders were semi-structured using a interview guide (Kvale, 1996). In some of the interviews, language was a theme in the interview-guide, while in others it was an offspring of other conversations about education, internationalisation, and mobility. With incoming and outgoing students, we applied a timeline interview approach (Adriansen, 2012). This is helpful to conduct life history accounts and capture the interviewees' narratives in a visual way across space and in time. In addition, the mapping tool approach (Donnelly et al., 2020) was used with students to tease out geographical dimensions of their mobilities. All interviews were coded and analysed (Madden, 2017) with respect to spatial dimensions in accordance with the analytical framework of the project.

The paper is written by an interdisciplinary team of researchers comprising geographers, anthropologists, and an applied linguist from four different countries with different linguistic backgrounds and insider/outsider positionalities (Adriansen & Madsen, 2009). Our diverse backgrounds give us unique, combined insight into the

spatialities of English within higher education internationalisation. However, producing this paper in English raises exactly the problems we are analysing. We address this in our discussion reflecting on our own position and practices as researchers with varied linguistic backgrounds.

4 | ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK – A SPATIAL APPROACH ON THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN INTERNATIONALISATION

In the following, we outline what we mean by 'space' and a 'spatial perspective', how this resonates with related work on 'geographies', and the way in which this perspective influences our discussion of language practices and internationalisation. In doing so, we propose a spatial approach to understanding the role of language inspired by the ideas of Massey (2015) and her treatise on space as well as Livingstone's (2010) 'geographies of science'. These takes on science and learning present what we call a spatial approach – attentive, as they are, to the importance of spatial difference and geographical embeddedness.

Massey (2015) defines space as a dimension of the social. Space is constituted through interactions, is always under construction, and never finished; it forms the sphere of relations between with the coexistence of distinct trajectories, determined by plurality. Space can be conceived: "*as a product of cultural, social, political and economic interactions, imaginings, desires and relations. In this way, space is not merely an objective structure but also a social experience*" (Singh et al., 2007; p. 197). Thus, we can imagine space and multiplicity as co-constitutive. Internationalisation of higher education is a space constructed out of the relations and connections we have with each other across the globe. It is, in a sense, an intersection of multiple spatial relations, presenting us with the existence of 'the other' through (in part) the spatial complexity of language. Local places are produced through this performative nature of space; individuals inhabit places and construct them through (and concurrently produce) social activity (Larsen, 2016). Thinking further with Massey, we can understand Danish higher education institutions as local places acting as meeting points for international and Danish students and academics where space is continuously constructed relationally, rather than pre-existing as a coherent seamless entity. This, in turn, invites us to question its internal construction and negotiation and to explore the geographies of English carried within these relations. Emplacing English in the context of international education means to make space relevant and to bring it alive. Understanding social space as the product of our relations with each other can help to uncover what English means and how it is experienced in its multiple and shifting forms, rather than assuming its uniformity and solidity within the international student and academic experience. Also this approach alerts us to the political implications of flattening and valorising a narrow sense of English, and how this can lead to inequalities, spatial hierarchies, and a devaluing of diversity.

³Most often at Danish higher education institutions, the responsibility for MA-programmes is placed at an educational council and with what we have termed a programme director. The programme director is responsible for the practical organisation of the MA-programme and disposes of the teaching resources.

Hence, viewing English as one language – the *lingua franca* – obfuscates the multiplicity of usages and the hierarchies of English use that are built into these multiplicities. To contest this rendering of English as unitary and fixed we are inspired by 'geographies of science' (Livingstone, 2010; Meusburger et al., 2010), which has questioned the apparent (spatial) ubiquity of scientific knowledge and pointed to the local and geographically emplaced aspects of knowledge and education. In this context, we can use 'geographies of science' to question the notion of English as *lingua franca* of higher education. In a similar fashion, we draw on 'geography of skills' (Raghuram, 2021), which has shown how skills are spoken about as universal, but are in fact spatially situated and contextual.

Summing up, there is much to be gained from a spatial approach when studying internationalisation of higher education. This approach can help us consider various spatial scales of analysis across and within which ideas and individuals move (Larsen, 2016). It can assist us seeing the paradoxical ways that Anglo-American higher education and academics become universalised through language. Following Massey (2015), space represents a 'dynamic, simultaneous multiplicity' (p. 61), and just as space is a relational practice, so are the spatialities of language use also relational. Language is meaning making between people – it is necessarily relational and it creates realities. Using a spatial approach to understand the implications of English in higher education will help us understand its multiplicity.

5 | ANALYSING THE SPACE-MAKING PROPERTIES OF ENGLISH

We now turn to our analysis, which is divided into three parts. In the first part, we address the contention, raised above, that English is often used as a crude proxy for internationalisation – that to 'speak English' is to 'be international' and to 'be academic'. In the second part, we explore the hidden spatial hierarchies of English when English is presented as neutral, merely the *lingua franca* of academia. Finally, in the third part, we analyse how language is able to create spaces and point to the spatial multiplicity of Englishes seen in the international classroom.

5.1 | ENGLISH AS INTERNATIONALISATION AND THE LANGUAGE OF ACADEMIA

In this section, we point to two intertwined points regarding the role of English in academia and internationalisation. First, we show how using English as the language for teaching becomes equated to internationalisation in some contexts. This is partly due to the role of English as *lingua franca* in academia, which is the second point. Taken together, this makes it difficult to discuss or problematise internationalisation: If internationalisation is merely teaching in English and English is the *lingua franca* of academia, what is then the problem?

In the Danish higher education system, the number of English medium programmes increased sharply from the early 2000s when practically all university degree programmes were offered in Danish (Dimova et al., 2021). At its peak in 2018, 48% of Masters' programmes in Danish universities were offered in English (Lønsmann & Mortensen, 2021) and labelled 'international programmes'. In 2013, the European Court of Justice confirmed all EU citizens' rights to Danish student grants, which led the Danish parliament to discuss ways to reduce the number of EU students (Tange & Jæger, 2021). The consequence was a significant reduction of EMI programmes from 2018 within social science and especially arts, while the natural sciences still use English by their MA programmes with around 90% of all programmes offered in English.

As one of the first steps in our project, we interviewed five programme directors of so-called international MA programmes. We asked them, what made their programmes international:

Programme director: It is international because it is in English. And it is actually completely in English – well, in the manner we speak English, but all the [teaching] material is also in English.

The quote shows how the use of English becomes equated to internationalisation. Within Danish academia, there is an ingrained understanding of English as the language of science, the *lingua franca*, especially so within the natural sciences. This rendering makes it difficult to talk about the use of English in everyday settings and some interviewees seemed genuinely puzzled to be asked questions about language. However, the use of language in Danish higher education institutions is filled with paradoxes. While English is seen as the *lingua franca*, the institutions are Danish workplaces in the sense that the majority communication is in Danish also due to the fact that the language of public administration and hence the policies of higher education is Danish. For the purpose of teaching, it is often expected that tenured staff learn Danish within 3–6 year of hiring. Some institutions have language policies, others do not, thereby leaving language use – Danish or English – up to the department or research group. In daily practice, and especially amongst students, other languages than Danish and English are also used whenever needed or more convenient. This means that on the surface, the use of English seems unproblematic; however, as our analysis shows, hierarchies and implicit notions related to languages are at stake.

This seemingly unproblematic use of English is also evident in the next data excerpt, where a programme director of a MA programme within natural science discusses the 'international nature' of their programme and the role of English in it:

Programme director: Well, the fact that we speak English, hopefully it has an effect, not so much that English is spoken, but that everything takes place in English, this means all report writing and our theses must be in English. It hopefully has the effect that our graduates are better prepared, [that they can] act in a

global world where English is the language, at least in science [natural science], that they are well equipped for it. In the way, it makes a difference that it is [taught in] English, because they get skills which they would not get otherwise.

This example shows that while many languages remain moored to particular countries, English, in contrast, is assumed to be the universal language of academia and thus everywhere. Drawing on geographies of science, we can see how the use of English universal characters often ascribed to science (Livingstone, 2010). Another example of viewing learning as unmoored is an imaginary we have witnessed that learning physics is the 'same everywhere' due to the widespread use of the same (American) textbooks in many countries. This implies an idea of knowledge and language as universal in contrast to being produced locally by the students and teachers through the social activity of learning (Larsen, 2016). The assumed universality of English in the two examples above extends to the unique role it has in academia, emphasising English equalling internationalisation. English as a language in academia is perceived to be neutral and aspatial.

At the same time, the example gives us a glimpse of the idea that English as a language is special because it gives access to skills, which the students "would not get otherwise". This focus on English as a skill is also evident in another interview where a programme director explains how native⁴ speakers of English appear more skilled and more knowledgeable, by virtue of their native English:

Programme director: They [English native speakers] can speak really well and speak to appear more skilled. And they are already gaining something from that, right?

Interviewer: Would you say there is a tendency to perceive native speakers as more skilled than the others are, because they are eloquent speakers?

Programme director: Yes, I think so. Because if they [students in general] have a hard time expressing something, then we also assume they probably do not understand it. [...] And it is difficult with the Asians. One can be seriously in doubt whether it is comprehension or [their] linguistic 'take'.

This statement reflects the rendering of English as the *lingua franca* of academia. Here, the need for a *lingua franca* (currently English) in academia can be seen as a legitimate one, as it enables international cooperation among those who share the language, but in such an environment, not having 'the right' English skills means not

being academic. As Raghuram (2021) has shown, skills are not universal or innocent either (see also Allatt & Tett, 2019 for a critique of the 'skills' discourse).

Not all programme directors, however, agreed that the use of English was enough to define a programme as international. When asked what made the programme international, one of them answered that they only had 20 percent Danish students and continued: "I think we are the most international programme at this university due to the students' countries of origin". This idea of international as a multitude of nationalities resonates with an international academic's view of what it means to be international. During the interview we talked about the international attractiveness of universities and the interviewee compared a prestigious "famous university for example like Cambridge or Oxford" with something presumably more generic like "university at, I don't know, Ohio".

Interviewer: Is there a hierarchy of international universities, or how do you see it?

Academic: I will say that I would imagine, like a university, like a famous university for example like Cambridge or Oxford, this kind of universities, to be more international. Because they attract more people from abroad, and then... and you have more language, that is officially English, and that is maybe also why they attract more people. But I wouldn't say like a university at, I don't know, Ohio, to be more international, just because they talk in English.

In this excerpt, it is clear that English does not alone define the international. Despite this, our empirical material shows that the perceptions of internationalisation in higher education rarely relates to de Wit and Hunter's (2015) widely accepted definition (quoted in the first footnote). When internationalisation becomes the use of English in teaching and a matter of gaining English proficiency, or getting access to a particular desired type of English (Motha & Lin, 2014), then an implicit spatial hierarchy follows. This is far from the intention behind the past 20 years of internationalisation efforts and the focus of the following section.

5.2 | Spatial hierarchies of English

One of the consequences of the discourses about English as internationalisation and as the *lingua franca* of academia is that language, in this case English, creates spatial hierarchies. This is done in various ways. We first analyse how different kinds of Englishes are viewed as more valuable and universal than others. Then we show how the use of EMI has led to a monolingual curriculum. Our analysis also shows that English is strongly associated with perceptions of quality, and finally that amongst the international academics there is a hierarchy in terms of who sees themselves as international.

⁴While concepts like 'native' and 'nonnative' are highly problematic and have been long criticised in sociolinguistics (see for instance Rampton, 1990), we use them here to speak back to our data and to prior literature on the topic.

That English is the *lingua franca* of academia should not suggest that all Englishes is equally valued. On the contrary, often so-called native English speakers are placed in a particular role by positioning them as having particular skills already by virtue of their first language skills, as shown in the quote from the programme director in the previous section. This quote shows a typical feature of native speakerism where speakers with heavy nonnative accents are perceived as less intelligent and less educated (see Wang et al., 2018 on East Asian students in the United States), thereby positioning students from the Anglophone world more highly in the hierarchy. This perception is also prevalent amongst the students themselves. A student from Japan said: "*Biggest problem is language problem. Japanese English is so low*" and explained how she asked her fellow students to check her scripts before presenting anything. This seemed to be a common discourse among international students, both those who place themselves as the 'good ones' and as the 'bad ones. A Swiss student explained: "You have to be very patient, and it actually costs you a lot of nerves. You have to explain things over and over again". These spatial hierarchies, where different kinds of English are viewed as significantly more valuable, correct, authentic, universal and/or legitimate than others, are seen across the empirical material with a pronounced othering related to first languages creating a strong hierarchy with English as first language in the top. The empirical material also showed how native English speakers in different situations tried to tone down their expertise by downplaying their English. Further, our classroom observations showed that also the teachers reproduced these hierarchies in their interactions with students. Elsewhere, we have used these observations and the concept 'the becoming of students' (Simandan, 2002) to capture specificities of what it means to be a 'good student' in an international classroom in Denmark (Spangler & Adriansen, 2021).

It was not only international students in Denmark, who drew spatial hierarchies based on language. Danish students discussing where to go as part of their study abroad semester also hierarchise nonnative speakers into different categories; the implicit geographical hierarchies in this statement make visible the speaker's ideas about Iceland being a place where English is 'better' compared to Spain, France and Germany. One of them said:

Student: Iceland, they know English, while in Spain, for example, they don't like speaking English [...] I know that Iceland is like Denmark, they speak English rather well. That's why I thought it would be easier with an English speaking country or a country like Scandinavia or Denmark that's good at English. France or Germany they know English, but they don't really like [speaking] it. Well Denmark doesn't really like it either, but we are able to.

The quote shows how language is embedded in perceptions of certain parts of the world and certain nationalities as more attractive than others producing hierarchies when talking about internationalisation.

In relation to the hierarchies produced by the categorisation into native and nonnative speakers, the spatial and hierarchical complexity created through accent is a part of how English is performed. As the following excerpt shows, accent can indicate difference and hierarchy and yet, accents are also performed and constructed in a specific local place (Larsen, 2016):

Academic: I think in the States teaching can be a little bit more difficult [...] cause I have an accent [...] so in the States, as instructors, you are very expected to act, like you have a very good accent [...] you do get kind of like mocked behind your back if you don't speak good English.

Interviewer: So is your experience different here in Denmark?

Academic: Yeah, cause here I think Danish people can't tell if I have an [anonymised] accent [...] I think my American accent is a lot thicker than my [anonymised] accent, so they don't, they don't, like... They can't tell. So yeah, language wise I think here I feel like people cut some slack, because Danish people can't tell my [anonymised] accent.

In this account, the academic describes how their accent goes unnoticed in Denmark whereas it is highlighted and even "mocked" in the United States, where a non-US accent is used as proxy for ethnicity, citizenship, or race, and an erasure of accent is considered necessary for academic or labour market success (Ennsner-Kananen et al., 2021). The excerpt also shows how fluidity of accent is related to space and hierarchies (Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013).

When internationalisation is reduced to English and language remains unproblematised, internationalisation reproduce spatial hierarchies that prioritise Anglophone countries. Curriculum is an example. EMI programmes are monolingual in the sense that English is both the only language of instruction and the sole language of the curriculum. In contrast, programmes taught in Danish usually allow a certain percentage of classes to be taught in English and importantly, the curriculum consists of texts written in Danish, English and sometimes Norwegian and Swedish. Of course, this varies from one discipline to another, but the general picture is that EMI programmes are monolingual and Danish programmes are multilingual. In their analysis of four so-called international MA programmes at a Danish university, Tange and Millar (2016) develop a method to map the knowledge geographies existing in curricula. They show the relationship between curricular practices and knowledge geographies that relates not to the language of the publication (they were all in English), but to affiliation of its author. Their findings show how curricular practices of lecturers correspond to the geopolitical patterns of global academic publishing. Thus, Tange and Millar's study confirms the spatial hierarchies existing in curricular practices in Danish higher education.

During our interviews, many struggled to see the relevance or meaning of discussing the role of English, not to mention its spatiality. Those who found the topic relevant also reported about their frustrations with colleagues, who interpreted resistance toward teaching in English as incompetence. This can be understood when English is seen not only as the language of science but also as an indicator of quality. To strive for the highest international quality is strongly evident in Danish university strategies (Saarinen et al., 2021). When English is seen as internationalisation, language becomes central. An example that has been debated in the Danish press (Fritzboeger et al., 2022) is the withdrawal of support from the Independent Research Fund Denmark to support the publication of the Danish journal 'Kulturstudier' (Cultural Studies). The argument for the withdrawal is that the journal did not contribute to internationalisation of Danish research because it is published in Danish. However, as the journal editors argue, internationalisation is not a one way process, the journal brings in international research by applying it to the case of Danish cultural heritage, and also the peer-review process is international in the sense that it includes reviewers from other Scandinavian countries. This shows how the Independent Research Fund Denmark perpetuates a certain notion of what international means closely linked to the use of language.

Similarly, some of the international academics questioned if they could count as 'international' as we will see, spatial hierarchies are not only linked to language, but also to nationality. When internationalisation becomes EMI or publishing in English, certain parts of the world can be perceived as more international than others. The poignant example is this academic from one of the Baltic countries, who had his master's degree from Denmark:

Academic: I think the fact that I have a Danish education or Danish degree is why I'm here. I don't think anyone would ever employ anyone from [anonymised], to be honest [laughing] You employ from UK or the US, right. When, you know, when it's really something top, you know. [...] I'm not international. But of course I'm international in terms of I'm a foreigner, right. [But] I think I'm more like a foreigner, rather than international.

The academic explains how he views himself in the geographical hierarchy, a hierarchy where academics from the Anglophone countries are seen as international by default and thus positioned in the top. This can be seen as the consequence of equalling internationalisation with English.

5.3 | HOW LANGUAGE CREATES SPACE

In this section, we analyse how language can create space within the international classroom. These spaces are not open to everyone, but instead excluding those not able to speak the 'right' language. In our analysis, we point to the fact that English is rarely the only language

spoken in the international classroom and that language diversity can also be a means of in-and exclusion.

The campus and classrooms where we conducted fieldwork became unique places for social interaction between students and lecturers from various countries. It is in this context that we consider space as relationally constructed and meeting place (Larsen, 2016). If place is the intersection of multiple trajectories, it becomes necessarily a site of negotiation. This then concerns the internal construction of place, posing the question of the geography of those relations of establishment and reproduction (Massey, 2004). With her progressive sense of place, Massey (1993) provides a way and relational means to study place variation for unpacking cultural complexity, difference, and geographically uneven notions produced and shaped by processes operating on a global scale. Another way to address cultural diversity is through the concept of translanguaging. This refers to practices where two or more languages or their varieties are mixed for communicative and meaning making purposes (e.g., García & Li, 2014). Canagarajah (2013) suggests that in higher education contexts, English can be seen 'as a translanguaging practice', pointing to the different varieties and repertoires the students use in their communication. Analysing English as a translanguaging practice "challenges the assumption that sharedness and uniformity of norms are required for communicative success." (Kuteeva, 2020, p. 28.). In this section, we will draw on these thoughts to analyse how the multilingual backgrounds play into the internal construction of place and in- and exclusion in the international classroom.

During a focus group interview with three Spanish students, Marina reflected "*I think one of the challenges is maybe to realise that sometimes we [the Spanish students] are all the time together*". She continued "*I think one of the challenges is try to integrate other people and try to integrate ourselves in other groups*". In the group of international students, the Spanish-speaking students formed the largest group sharing the same language besides English. Throughout fieldwork, we observed them always grouping together. Leaning on each other, holding hands, rubbing each other's backs, hugging, or dropping their heads to the other's shoulder to touch, the students showed close physical affection. They occupied much physical space in the classroom in these constellations, in which they would also speak their shared language together. During classes, they would often keep chatting in Spanish, radiating a sense of disengagement and in ways taking up space of other students trying to focus and follow the course content. Coming from the same country provided the students with a shared common ground and understanding about one another's backgrounds and experiences, and speaking the same language seemed facilitative in creating a place for themselves within the larger group of international students. At the same time, these close groupings strengthened a form of disconnection and separation from their fellow students. Indeed, previous research has illustrated self-segregation by cultural background, mirroring the preference between students to work with those sharing the same background (Moore & Hampton, 2015; Singaram et al., 2011).

At a different higher education institution, we also observed how language creates space in classroom situations. Students were given assignments by the lecturer and worked on them in smaller groups. The students were familiar with the kind of work and with one

another, wandering around and seeking help from each other when questions arose. The lecturer also offered support by moving between the groups and occasionally sharing advice with the entire class. Throughout this process, the language of instruction was English. When at some point, he approached one of the groups, he switched to another language than English. Although the students in the classroom had spoken different languages until then, it was the first time the lecturer used another language. The lecturer and students in the small group discussed and laughed together in their shared language. This affected the dynamics in the classroom, its relational space (Massey, 2015). The rest of the students seemed to turn away, moving from a rather neutral observant to a more distanced, disaffected conduct. The lecturer walked over to the next group and returned to English, which he used for the rest of the time.

In both situations, language created in similar ways a paradox. For the ones speaking the same language, it became an instrument of connection, while for the rest it formed a boundary or line of separation. While English may be the first language and means of communication in the international classroom it is most often not the only language. Concerning the internal construction of place it is by thinking of flows, networks, and multiplicities that we come to unravel and see how the international classroom is internally spatial and linguistically multiple, produced through relations spreading out way beyond it. While in an international group of students (and academics alike), different language spaces might occur rather naturally, language can also become a serious barrier for accessing certain spaces, preventing one's inclusion into specific groups.

As we have also seen in the previous sections, the socio-spatial linguistic processes through which the international classroom is constructed and shaped operate in uneven ways and individual students are positioned relatively as a consequence. Massey (1993) points out the intimate connections present between productions of space and productions of power, which shape and generate these hierarchical and variable positions of social groups and individuals. We come to see that places are made through power relations that shape and define boundaries. These boundaries are both spatial and social, defining usually in highly uneven ways who belongs to a place, 'fits in' or is excluded (Massey, 1993). Our empirical material show how language in the international classroom also became such a boundary or line of distinction, it became a proxy to fit in and belong, regulating in- and exclusion.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we were writing this paper, we were constantly reminded of our own usage of English as *lingua franca*, both within our multilingual team as well as English as the language of international publishing. We recognise that by using English (as the only common language we had) in this way, we not only made our work possible, but also reproduced the hegemonic position of English in our particular academic corner of the world. For us, this paper has also been an

exercise in questioning the ostensible monolingualism of academic research, and making visible the multiple ways in which the languages of our interviewees and ourselves intertwined during the data collection, analysis and writing. There is ample evidence of language being an issue at various points of research processes, even if the publication practices may give the impression that language has no role in it (Resch & Enzenhofer, 2018). While we have written this paper in English and recognise its importance as a major academic *lingua franca*, we simultaneously recognise the many multilingual and translanguaging practices in the processes of academic research that challenge the position of English. In this multilingual, qualitative research process, we have strived to: "ensuring inclusive social research, making diversity between and within societies visible, and increasing cultural competence of the involved researchers" (Resch & Enzenhofer, 2018; p. 133). In that way, acknowledging the multilingual nature of contexts that seem monolingual on the surface has made us aware of the diverse spaces of internationalisation and helped us understand that even when we (think we) talk about English, there is often a multitude of other languages involved.

In the paper, we have unpacked the meanings of English within the internationalisation of education through a spatial perspective and delivered a multi-disciplinary analysis of an understudied aspect of higher education internationalisation. Specifically, we explored the diverse ways in which English is experienced by academics and students within the 'international' university and how this, in turn, creates a multiplicity of higher education spaces. Linguistic diversity is not just about speaking multiple languages, of course, but about speaking the ostensibly same language in different ways, in different places, and with different social consequences. Students and academics are differentially positioned when it comes to English. Drawing on Massey's (2015) ideas around relational space, we discuss how a spatial perspective on English in the context of international higher education can nuance debates about internationalisation and language in important ways. There is not one, but multiple forms of English, displayed at different times and in different places, with differing effects in the creation of spatial hierarchies.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan professor of English and comparative literature and an important voice in the language debate in postcolonial studies, has pointed to the importance of language in 'colonising the mind' (Ngũgĩ, 1992). Inspired by his thinking, one could argue that the one-eyed acceptance of English as internationalisation and lack of discussion about the role of language can be seen as 'self-imposed colonialism'. Doiz et al. (2013) have also pointed to English being imposed through its position as *lingua franca* "that squeezes out the possibility of having courses delivered in both the local and other foreign languages" (p. 1416). While it may be stretching the argument too far to talk about self-imposed colonialism in the context of Danish higher education, we would argue that internationalisation has brought with it spatial hierarchisation. This is because internationalisation through English has become unmoored and universalised. As Livingstone (2010) argues, we thereby pretend that knowledge production and teaching are not situated practices. Instead, we need to address exactly this in higher education. Hence,

we would like to argue that our findings calls for a 'geography of pedagogies' that can relate pedagogy, skills, and language in relation to international education.

Our arguments contribute directly to extant debates within the wider literature on internationalisation of higher education, which have to date been relatively silent on the role that different forms of English play in understandings of the differentiated nature of mobilities. This paper considers where 'the international' lies in relation to language (specifically English). It attempts to counter prevalent discourses that see English as undifferentiated, exposing the multiplicity of Englishes in different spaces. This is, in part, a political project. It is about exposing power where it lies – uncovering the ongoing dominance of particular (Anglophone, Western, 'unaccented') forms of English.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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