3 The Englishization of higher education in Estonia and Latvia

Actors, positionings, and linguistic tensions

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Abstract

In Estonia and Latvia, the focus on the domain of higher education as a site of linguistic tension has emerged more powerfully only in recent years. In this chapter, we show how the two sides of the Englishization of higher education (as an opportunity and as a threat) emerge discursively in two public debates that we analyse. Although the issues that are brought up in the debates take a different shape in the two countries, at a fundamental level, similar concerns are discussed. These include language relationships and linguistic hierarchies in higher education, questions on the quality of higher education, and the role of legal measures applied to manage language matters at universities.

Keywords: Englishization, higher education, language ideological debates, Estonia, Latvia

1 Introduction

In Estonia and Latvia, language-related concerns have historically taken a prominent role in the nation-building processes, particularly since their return to political independence in the early 1990s. As such, language policies in education have played a pivotal role in shaping the discourses around the protection, promotion, and development of the state language (Hogan-Brun et al., 2009). In the domain of higher education specifically, language ideological debates remained relatively mild until the mid-2010s. More recently, however, there are signs indicating that the level of linguistic

Wilkinson, Robert, and René Gabriëls (eds), *The Englishization of Higher Education in Europe*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2021

DOI: 10.5117/9789463727358_CH03

tension may have increased. We posit this may be a result of the consolidated perception of the tension between the ‘nationalizing’ and the ‘globalizing’ trends within higher education at present (Rozenvalde, 2018; Soler & Vihman, 2018), a tension that Englishization, understood as ‘the growing use of English as a medium of instruction’ (Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018, p. 1), exacerbates. This seems particularly the case in countries with recent nation-building projects such as the Baltic states (Bulajeva & Hogan-Brun, 2014).

In the public debates on language in higher education in Estonia and Latvia, the concept of Englishization (*ingliskeelestumine* in Estonian, *anglifikācija* or *angliskošana* in Latvian) is used less than the internationalization of higher education (*kõrghariduse rahvusvahelistumine* in Estonian; *augstākās izglītības internacionalizēšana* in Latvian), or as in the case of Latvian state policies, the economic metaphor of higher education export (*augstākās izglītības eksports*, cf. Kibbermann, 2017). In Estonia and Latvia, the states still focus their policies on dealing with the outcomes of the Soviet linguistic Russification (Brubaker, 2011; Koreinik et al., 2018). Whereas English is ideologically valued as a language of higher education in state and institutional policies as well as at the grassroots level, state policymakers tend to avoid giving special treatment to English in written policy texts, instead preferring to refer overtly to *foreign languages*, *other languages*, or *the official languages of the European Union (EU)* (in Latvian policy texts) when discussing the use of English in academia (Rozenvalde, 2018). The concepts of the internationalization of higher education or its export are overtly more neutral and seemingly diminish the link between the processes of internationalization and Englishization.

In this chapter we investigate how actors from different backgrounds react to and position themselves vis-à-vis the role and status of the national language and English in the higher education systems of each country. Whereas Russian tends to play a rather prominent role in language ideological debates in Estonia and Latvia in particular contexts (e.g., general education), it does not come up in the discussions on Englishization that we analyse here. Specifically, we conduct a discourse analysis of recent debates that have taken place in the two countries between 2018 and 2020. In our analysis, we underscore that although on the surface, the discussions seem to take a different shape, at a more fundamental level, the core issues are rather similar in both countries. These include the language relationships and linguistic hierarchies in the higher education system, the arguments presented in favour of and

against the presence of English at universities, and the role of the law and legal measures in order to address the challenges English puts for the national languages in academia. The questions we seek to answer are: (1) Which actors participate in the debates and what positions emerge in them? (2) What arguments are presented in support to the different positions in the debates?

2 Background

Today, higher education in Estonia and Latvia mainly functions in the official languages of the states, Estonian and Latvian. Both languages, which regained clear dominance in academia only a few decades ago, are quite strongly supported by the states' language policies, including in higher education (Rozenvalde, 2018). Additionally, as a legacy of the countries' Soviet past, Russian is used to an extent in academia, most visibly as a medium of instruction in the numerous private universities in Latvia (Rozenvalde, 2018). However, the official data by the ministries of education show that the use of Russian as medium of instruction has decreased constantly since the 1990s. The data also indicate that English has been used as a medium of instruction in universities both in Estonia and Latvia since the beginning of the 1990s, but it started spreading at a particularly fast pace only at the beginning of the 2010s.

In both countries, every 10th student studies in English (Kreegipuu, 2017, p. 8; Ministry of Education in Latvia, 2019, pp. 71-73). In Estonia, only a few students study in Russian (Selliov, 2018); in Latvia, 6% of the entire student body is enrolled in Russian-medium programmes (Ministry of Education, 2019), the majority of them in private universities as the state has forbidden teaching in Russian in public universities, except for language and culture studies. Both in Estonia and Latvia, the students who are enrolled in Russian-medium studies are mostly local Russian-speakers. In Estonia, language ideological debates in higher education are mostly centred on the hierarchical position and use of Estonian and English, and the use of Russian in academia is usually not debated publicly as it is used only very rarely as a language of instruction in tertiary education. By contrast, Russian occupies a central role in language ideological debates in higher education in Latvia. Although there are almost twice as many students studying in English, and English is used as a language of instruction at all levels of higher education both in public and private universities, creating policies that deal with Russian continues to be

important for the state. Recently, state policymakers have paid a great deal of attention to the issues accompanying the Russian-medium private education in Latvia. In the state language policy discourse, Russian is still construed as the main opponent to the thriving of the Latvian language (Ozolins, 2019).

The Englishization of higher education in Estonia and Latvia is easily noticeable as the states collect data on media of instruction. However, Englishization does not only mean the spread of English-medium instruction in academia, and the concept can also be extended to include the often-noted difference in the language choice for PhD theses. These are written primarily in English in Estonia – more than 90% of PhD theses were written in English in 2017 (Klaas-Lang & Metslang, 2018) – and increasingly in English in Latvia. In 2013, approximately 20% of PhD theses were written in English in Latvian universities (Rozenvalde, 2018) but we estimate that the percentage has increased by now. Additionally, the use of English is also spreading in ways that often do not come under public spotlight: for example, English is used more and more for teaching materials, communicating internationally, and for solving administrative issues (Rozenvalde, 2018).

3 Methodology

When it comes to discourses around the Englishization of higher education, one relatively well-established finding by now is the existence of two opposing stances, what Hultgren et al. (2014, p. 2) have dubbed the ‘internationalist’ and the ‘culturalist’ discourses. On the one hand, those committed to the internationalist stance lay emphasis on the global dimension of higher education and on the importance for universities to be internationally competitive educational institutions. On the other hand, those behind culturalist discourses focus their attention on the national side of universities and on the key role they play as institutions that spearhead the protection, promotion, and development of the national language and culture. These two discourses and the opposition that they entail between English and the national languages are well represented in the Nordic countries (Saarinen, 2020). In that context, the vaguely defined concept of ‘parallel language use’ has enabled social actors from a diversity of backgrounds to lobby in favour of a specific language-political agenda while remaining relatively ambiguous. In Sweden, for example, ‘parallel language use’ might be understood sometimes as ‘more Swedish’, other times as ‘more English’, depending on the scale and the specific language functions one has in mind (Hult & Källkvist, 2015).

As we shall see below, these two discourses, the ‘internationalist’ and the ‘culturalist’, are also present in the language debates in Estonia and Latvia, albeit with different degrees of intensity in their opposition.

In terms of method, we develop a discourse analysis of two recent language ideological debates in Estonian and Latvian higher education. We understand language ideological debates as momentary events in which larger scale discourses become instantiated synchronically at a given moment in time via processes of discursive exchange (Blommaert, 1999). As such, these are rich data points when language ideological constructs – that is, beliefs about the value and the function of language(s) in society (Woolard, 1998) – crystallize more explicitly in the public sphere and become more tangible and observable. Our discourse-analytical approach draws inspiration from ‘nexus analysis’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), in particular its ‘Discourses in Place’ component. As such, we focus on ‘the complex aggregate (or nexus) of many discourses which circulate in the social world and serve to construct it symbolically or materially’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 14, as cited in Hult & Pietikäinen, 2014, p. 7). We analysed the material employing thematic analysis in a flexible way (Clarke et al., 2015). That is, while we did have in mind the categories ‘internationalist’ and ‘culturalist’ as two broad discourses, we analysed the data inductively and manually to extract the main themes emerging from the articles, developing in this way an interpretive account of the material.

As far as data is concerned, both for Estonia and Latvia we examine language ideological debates that unfolded themselves in the media, mostly in the form of op-eds in widely circulated newspapers in the two countries. The Estonian debate started in September 2018 and continued until October 2020. In total, we collected 21 newspaper articles, most of them published as op-eds within the period of one year. Many of the articles are concentrated in the December 2018 to February 2019 period; the first few pieces appeared right after the Estonian Culture and Education Congress, held in Tallinn on 23–25 November 2018, in which the rectors of four of Estonia’s public universities debated precisely on the topic of the internationalization of higher education from a linguistic and economic perspective. Then, the number of items falls until late October to early December 2019, when Estonian universities (and particularly the University of Tartu) were preparing themselves to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Estonian-language teaching at the university (1 December 2019). In spring 2020, against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, there was a relatively long period of silence in the

debate, with the final three pieces in our data-set appearing between September and October 2020, by the time that new legislation was being discussed in parliament affecting access to Estonia's higher education by third-country nationals (e.g., students from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, etc.).

In the case of Latvia, the language ideological debate on the Englishization of higher education took place in November and December 2019, when various stakeholders (state and university officials, members of cultural elite, etc.) engaged in a discussion on the need for Englishization. The debate gained momentum at the point when the Ministry of Education revealed that it considered making it obligatory to write and defend PhD theses in English (with some exceptions). Officially, the Ministry was just asking for the opinion of stakeholders as members of its working group had been unable to reach a consensus on the issue. Their initiative, although not final, was met with substantial resistance but it also received support. The debate ended when a parliamentary committee decided that no major changes would be made to the existing regulations on PhD theses.

In order to make sense of the Latvian debate, we collected 20 written items for the analysis that include, firstly, the concept by the Ministry of Education that initiated the debate; secondly, two public letters written as a reaction to the Ministry's initiative, which were signed by hundreds of people and published in several media channels; thirdly, 13 online newspaper articles, most of them published as opinion pieces; and finally, four press releases (by the Ministry of Education, education societies, and a national political party). The pieces that we analyse in the chapter, for both Estonia and Latvia, are available from the authors upon request.

4 Analysis and discussion

4.1 The debate in Estonia

A total of 18 participants engaged in the language ideological debate in Estonia. Seven of them are university professors from different fields within the humanities, social sciences, and engineering (this is the most actively engaged group in the debate). Other participants include five university officials (rectors and other members of their offices), and one member each from the Ministry of Education, the Language Inspectorate, and the Estonian Research Agency. Finally, participants include one politician, one artist, and one educational entrepreneur. Out of the 18 participants in

the debate, seven might be classified as internationalists, while 11 can be counted as culturalists. In line with Hultgren et al.'s (2014) description of which social actors tend to fall in each category, the internationalists in the debate are high-rank university officials (rectors and vice-rectors) as well as representatives of the Ministry of Education, and two professors. On the culturalists' side, we find five professors in total from the humanities, two government officials, one rector, one entrepreneur, one artist, and one politician from a conservative-nationalist party.

In the debate, the main point of confrontation between the two sides revolves around the language(s) of instruction. This seems to be the core of the problem, the centre around which all other themes that emerge from the debate gravitate. These other themes include: (1) the funding system of Estonia's universities; (2) the role of the law and legislative action; (3) the quality and competitiveness of Estonia's higher education; and (4) the position of international students and lecturers. In addition to these main themes, both culturalists and internationalists agree on two basic points: first, that universities have a key responsibility in developing, promoting, and protecting Estonian-language higher education, and second, that it is important for universities to develop English-taught programmes in order to be internationally competitive institutions. What seems more debatable is: in what order and to what extent Estonian and English should both have a presence in Estonia's universities, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning.

Culturalists' point of departure is that universities have all too uncritically assumed the race towards internationalization at all costs, including at the expense of the Estonian language and culture. As they see it, a combination of factors has led to the current situation of a growing presence of English in Estonian universities, particularly in the form of English-taught programmes. First and foremost, there are financial and demographic reasons. Financially, the 2013 higher education reform stipulated that full-time study places in Estonian-medium programmes were to become tuition-free; by that time, though, the number of Estonian students entering university had been decreasing progressively since 2009–2010. This gave rise to universities seeking ways of compensating for the decline in student numbers and for expanding their funding basis. The development of more English-taught programmes, for which tuition fees could be charged and international students could be attracted, seemed only natural. In the piece that sparked the debate, the author notes that 'it is undeniable that universities need internationalization, but the way it is currently done, at the expense of the Estonian language, leaves a strong impression of

unchained capitalism' (a humanities professor, 24 September 2018) (extracts quoted in this section are our translation from the original in Estonian).

With the above in mind, culturalists argue that this type of funding system for universities should be changed. In their view, taxpayers' money is misused when it goes directly to fund study places in English-taught programmes, most of which are populated with foreign students who, after graduating, will move from Estonia. As one commentator puts it,

More than 80 percent of all foreign students studying in Estonia still receive their higher education in full or in part from Estonian taxpayers' money and without having to learn Estonian. This is not in the interests of Estonian culture, the Estonian state or the Estonian economy. (Education entrepreneur, 28 October 2019)

For culturalists, then, the only way of solving this situation is by means of the law: legislative reforms have to be put in place in order to help find a balance between Estonian and English as languages of instruction in higher education. An argument that emerges repeatedly in the debate from the culturalists' side is that if the primary position of Estonian in higher education is not strongly protected and becomes endangered, this may produce a catalyst effect on other domains, turning Estonian eventually into a simple kitchen language.

The exact proportion of Estonian and English in all programmes is still to be discussed, but some suggest that all English-taught programmes should become bilingual, with an obligatory component within the optional modules of Estonian language and culture. Such an initiative, it is argued, would help international students integrate more smoothly into Estonian society; it would allow them to be able to go on to internships in Estonian companies during their studies, and it would increase their chances of finding a job upon graduation and of seeing a future for themselves in Estonia. This is expressed as follows by one of the contributors to the debate: 'Foreign students should be required to study Estonian language and culture to the extent that they can go on internships and, after graduation, find a job in Estonia and feel part of the local society' (humanities professor, 22 April 2019).

Finally, another group that concerns culturalists from the point of view of their (lack of) language skills in Estonian are international lecturers. With the increase of English-taught programmes and the arrival of more and more foreign students, international lecturers have also become a more visible collective in an increasing number of university departments. There

is agreement among culturalists that those with a permanent contract at the university should be able to participate from the regular university activities in Estonian by the time of their first performance revision (after three years), and that they should be able to also teach in Estonian by their tenure revision (after five years). A humanities professor makes this point clearly: 'With a permanent contract, the foreigner should, in addition to working in the laboratory and auditorium, take part in all activities of university life' (2 December 2019), the implication being that for all activities of university life, Estonian will be required. Taking inspiration in the guidelines of the recent Nordic Council of Ministers report on parallel language use at universities (Gregersen et al., 2018), some suggest that the language requirements for international lecturers should be part of their contract agreement with the university.

Turning to the internationalists, their main point of concern is with the quality of higher education. For them, the only way for Estonian universities to maintain their level of competitiveness is to continue being internationally visible and to offer attractive programmes, which inevitably means engaging with English substantially, both for teaching and research purposes. Internationalists respond to culturalists' concerns about the misuse of taxpayers' money by saying that international students studying in English-taught programmes generate a decent amount of revenue for the state in both direct (the majority of them via tuition fees) and indirect ways (rent, food, leisure activities, etc.). Importantly, those who do end up staying in Estonia return the state's investment on them within one year of working, and the more time they stay, the more tax revenue they generate. As explained by one high-ranking university official: 'A graduate who goes to work in the IT sector will return the sum invested in him or her to the state in taxes within one year' (28 September 2020).

Internationalists emphasize that a great proportion of foreign students end up occupying jobs for which there is a shortage of qualified workers in Estonia and that, as such, these students should be seen as a highly-skilled imported labour force that the country lacks. Even when considering those students who come from abroad to study free of charge, internationalists argue that a highly-trained international student that ends up staying in the country and contributing to the state for the price of a master's degree is a skilled professional obtained cheaply. And even in the case of foreign students who do not stay in Estonia permanently, internationalists value their training because upon their return to their home countries, they become important critical friends of Estonia, a means of soft power that any small nation needs to value positively. Connecting it to the issue of

taxpayers' money, one commentator argues that even if such public funds are used, they are well spent, precisely for the above reason: 'Training foreigners (including for taxpayers' money) is not a waste of money, but a projection of the soft power of a small country like Estonia' (social sciences professor, 12 December 2018).

Beyond purely economic matters, for the internationalists, foreign students and lecturers are important because they enrich the university on many different levels. They help raise the bar of teaching and research because there is greater competition for English-taught places than there is for Estonian-taught ones, which means that students in English-language tracks are generally above the average. Foreign lecturers are also an important asset for universities, emphasize the internationalists. Many of them are in the top ranks of their fields of specialization; students being trained under their guidance can take this as a significant opportunity to learn first-hand from the best in their fields. That is why the learning of the Estonian language by teachers and students from abroad is something that should not be forced on them, according to the internationalists, certainly not by law; it should be encouraged and it should be seen as an important added value, but it should not be made a requirement. Indeed, in the internationalists' arguments, there is a clearer recognition of the idea that if universities expect their foreign members to learn Estonian beyond a mere conversational level and within a certain period of time, then proper conditions need to be put in place by the institution, with the necessary resources that that entails, rather than simply expecting foreign staff to learn the language by themselves. One contributor to the debate puts it as follows: 'it is difficult to just put your hands on your hips and demand extra work from foreign lecturers, as many of our foreign lecturers work 60 hours a week in the general underfunding of higher education' (engineering professor, 26 January 2019).

All in all, summarizing the two positions, culturalists see universities as state-national institutions, whose primary goal and most important function is to serve the state. From their perspective, the Estonian language and culture are at the core of the Estonian state. Without its own language and culture, the Estonian state would either not exist at all or it would be meaningless. Internationalists, on their part, see the internationalization of Estonia's higher education as a way to preserve and reinforce the country's university system. Their position places stronger emphasis on the global nature of today's higher education; they do not see universities as first and foremost national institutions at the service of the state. For them, issues of quality and competitiveness are central,

and to that end, English-medium programmes represent a key structural means through which these two vectors, quality and competitiveness, can be maintained and improved.

4.2 The debate in Latvia

The actors who participate in the Latvian debate include, firstly, at the state level, the Ministry of Education, the State Language Centre, and the Higher Education Council; secondly, eight administrators of six universities, and ten members of the academic and research staff of the universities; thirdly, four associations of researchers and education workers, and a political party; and fourthly, journalists from various media channels, and writers. Finally, the debate includes all those who signed the letters to protest against the Ministry's initiative (450 + 800 people). The debate revolves around the need for the state's interference in regulating language use for writing and defending PhD theses. Other themes, which are subordinated to the central theme, are: (1) the quality and competitiveness of higher education; (2) linguistic hierarchies in language policies and language practices; and (3) the situation of the Latvian language.

Although going ahead with the Ministry's plan would give English more presence and restrict the use of Latvian in academia, the lines of argumentation presented by actors who either agree or disagree with the plan do not differ much in their stance on English and Latvian but rather in their stance on the state's intervention. In other words, the necessity to use both Latvian and English in higher education is not debated and both parties agree that English is necessary for Latvian higher education and science. During the debate, no opponent to the initiative mentions that PhD theses should not be written in English, and no proponent of the initiative argues that there is no need for Latvian in academia.

Nevertheless, the internationalist and the culturalist discourses are distinguishable. The culturalist discourse is upheld by state officials whose task it is to focus on the state language, professional linguists, cultural and educational workers, their associations, journalists from the public broadcasting of Latvia and Latvian-minded newspapers, a national political party, and administrations of universities that teach humanities, social sciences, pedagogy and/or art. Although these actors agree with the importance of English in academia, they argue that this should not lead the state to change its political course from maintaining Latvian to overtly supporting the spread of English. According to the culturalists, Latvian and English have to co-exist in academia, but it is the state's task to focus on supporting

Latvian. For example, an excerpt from a public protest letter, organized by linguists, addressed to the government and signed by 800 people (excerpts provided in this section are our translation into English from the original in Latvian) says:

We ask the government of the Republic of Latvia to follow the state's Constitution and other pieces of legislation and honour the obligations of the state to strengthen and develop Latvian as the official language, instead of damaging its prestige and wrecking its future prospects. (Public protest letter, 28 November 2019)

Indeed, Latvia's language policy has mainly been 'nationalizing' (Brubaker, 2011) with a strong focus on spreading Latvian since regaining independence. As a result, when compared to the debate in Estonia and language policy discourses analysed by Saarinen (2020) in Finland, it seems rather specific to the debate in Latvia that while the culturalists stress the importance of protecting the official language, they do not engage in the critique of the post-national ideal of globalism (Haberland, 2009) and the spread of English. There is nothing new about the Latvian state adopting globalist ideologies in higher education policies, as these have been present in the policy-planning documents already since the beginning of the 2010s (Kibbermann, 2017). However, the Ministry's willingness to include the ideological view of globalism in legislation attracts the attention of the culturalists as language laws have, until now, explicitly stood for maintaining Latvian. Indeed, it is common in language policy discourses in Latvia to construe the state as the main saviour of the national language (Brubaker, 2011).

Furthermore, the culturalists see the Ministry's initiative as threatening the Latvian language at various levels: the greatest number of arguments focus on the status, functionality, and prestige of the language. For example, the authors of the first public protest letter write: 'giving up on the use of Latvian in any domain can influence the general attitude of the society towards Latvian, the prestige of and need for the language' (public protest letter, 20 November 2019), and a professor of literature puts forth a stronger argument, saying that 'limiting language use in any domain will hinder the development of the entire language and have an effect on all other domains. Its impact will immediately be enormous' (humanities professor, 25 November 2019).

Moreover, the culturalists tend to depict the current Latvian sociolinguistic situation as problematic due to the insufficient Latvian language skills of some minority speakers. For example, a journalist writes in a daily

that ‘almost 30 years after regaining the independence, shop assistants in Daugavpils or Riga might not understand Latvian as they only speak Russian’ (20 November 2019). Similarly, some culturalists (e.g., a high-rank state official and a university administrator, 20 November 2019) express a worry about the state sending a wrong message to the large community of minority speakers, whose interest in acquiring and using Latvian would thus wane. Indeed, the Latvian language has still not ensured a dominant position in some spheres of life, for example, shops and cafes, and this is commonly problematized in state language policy discourse (Rozenvalde & Kļava, 2021).

In addition, there are also other lines of argument presented to argue against the initiative, but these are not as common as the worries expressed about the future of the Latvian language. Firstly, one argument refers to democracy, for example, ‘democracy relies on free choice’ (educational association, 6 December 2019). Secondly, other arguments make use of the notion of discrimination, for example, ‘if the law forbade writing PhD theses in Latvian, any Latvian citizen could take this to the court as it entailed blatant linguistic discrimination’ (humanities professor, 8 December 2019). More commonly, the culturalists refer to the public interest in having access to research results (e.g., a university administrator, 19 November 2019; a national political party, 3 December 2019).

As for the quality of education, the arguments of the culturalists do not stand against the necessity and opportunity to use English for international communication and cooperation but rather argue that writing in English does not make research of higher quality than writing in Latvian. According to them, firstly, the English language skills of PhD students in Latvia are not good enough to ensure the high quality of PhD theses, and secondly, the obligation to write in English would affect the range of local research topics covered in PhD theses (a public protest letter, 20 November 2019).

By contrast, the internationalist discourse is supported by the state officials whose task it is to make higher education internationally competitive, natural and technical scientists, including representatives of administrations from universities that teach natural and technical sciences. The internationalists are accustomed to using English extensively in their daily working lives at universities. These actors construe English as an opportunity to make the local higher education more competitive internationally. For example, a high-ranking university official says: ‘When we have PhD theses in English, we have more opportunities to find good opponents. So, it’s logical that the quality of the theses improves. We have no negative experience with using English’ (19 November 2019).

By no means do the internationalists agree that the spread of English in academia could at some point threaten the linguistic and cultural identity of the local society (e.g., a representative of the Ministry, 25 November 2019; a social scientist, 4 December 2019). Interestingly, the internationalists are far less vocal during the debate, maybe because the idea originates from an authoritative body. However, there is also an exception as one of those who actively participates in the debate and stands clearly against the Ministry's initiative is a professor of chemistry (25 November 2019; 4 December 2019).

Similarly, a great many internationalists agree that Latvian has to be developed but they claim that other means can be used to reach that goal (e.g., a researchers' association, 22 November 2019; a natural scientist, 4 December 2019). According to the Association of Latvian Young Scientists, the Latvian language can be developed at best by well-educated and internationally competitive young scholars, but in order to receive good education and become internationally competitive, they have to write their doctoral theses in English (22 November 2019). The internationalists tend to support their claims that the state's potential pro-English policy on PhD theses does not have any negative impact on Latvian with the current practices of writing PhD theses in English (e.g., a university rector, 20 November 2019). Therefore, from their perspective it does not make a difference whether the use of English is stipulated by law or simply occurs at the grass-roots level.

What is particularly interesting in the debate, is the heterogeneous nature of the Ministry. Its representatives do not adopt a unified stance on the issue. Their publicly expressed viewpoints range from claims, according to which the initiative stems from below and the Ministry has not made up its mind yet (e.g., 26 November 2019), to globalist claims that give full support to writing and defending PhD theses in English in order to make Latvian higher education more competitive internationally (e.g., 25 November 2019). The Ministry is the only stakeholder at the national level that is – at least to some extent – in favour of the state imposing its pro-English language policy on PhD theses. The public discussion came to an end when the Ministry officially rejected the idea of the legal Englishization of PhD theses (10 December 2019).

5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have attempted to answer the following questions: which actors participate in the language ideological debates within the higher education systems of Estonia and Latvia, what positions emerge from

those debates, and what arguments are associated with each position. To summarize our analysis and discussion presented above, the actors that contribute to the debates analysed here include mainly those who conduct their daily working lives at universities, that is, in both cases they mostly represent university administrations, who are in charge of institutional policies and the appropriation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001) of state-authored policies at universities, and academic and research staff, who appropriate the top-down policies at the grass-roots level. For a century already, it has been customary for the states of Estonia and Latvia to regulate language matters at the state level (Hogan-Brun et al., 2009), so state authorities also participate in these debates – in the case of Estonia, the state officials add their additional points of view to the debate; in the case of Latvia, the Ministry's actions spark off the entire debate, and the representatives of other state institutions express their standpoints. Moreover, the actors do not only include those who are closely related to creating and appropriating language policies at universities but extend beyond academia and include the general public, which takes a rather keen interest in language matters in society. The interest of the general public in language is nothing extraordinary in these cases as language holds a prominent position in group identity both in Estonia and Latvia (Ehala, 2017).

The standpoints of culturalists and internationalists outlined in the analysis above show that both parties in Estonia and Latvia agree, firstly, that the official language of the country has to be protected, and secondly, that English has to be used in local academia. In both cases, the debate is about the extent to which one or another language should be used, and what position the states and universities should adopt and defend. Whereas the culturalists see language use and policies at universities as affecting language use and ideologies also beyond universities, the internationalists tend to argue that the policies aiming at more qualitative and competitive higher education have nothing to do with maintaining the official languages because this objective can be reached by other means. Consequently, at a more fundamental level, the debates both in Estonia and Latvia revolve around the question of whether language use and policies at universities affect language use and ideologies also in other spheres of life, and whether universities should primarily act to serve the state. So, as in all language ideological debates more generally (Blommaert, 1999), the debates in the context of higher education are also not about language alone (Saarinen, 2020).

However, for all the similarities that can be traced between Estonia and Latvia, with similar core issues that seem to be behind the debates, it is also possible to notice revealing differences between the two cases.

In the Estonian case, the opposition between the internationalist and the culturalist discourses is strong and clear, and the central point of controversy between them is whether English in higher education does or does not represent a threat for the Estonian language and the Estonian nation. For the internationalists, it does not; for the culturalists, it does. By contrast, in the Latvian case, while this kind of opposition is there in the debate, it is not as fronted as in the Estonian case. Instead, the controversial point in Latvia is whether the state can or cannot take an explicit stance in favour of English in higher education, and in so doing, step away from its historical aim of developing policies for the promotion of the official language. In some sense, then, the higher education language ideological debates in Estonia have moved closer to the debates held in the neighbouring Nordic countries, where the opposition between English and the national languages is more clear-cut and more intense as well.

Inevitably, then, the two cases are context-dependent, and they evolve within their own national and political dynamics. In that regard, we would argue that the sensitization towards English in the Estonian context stems from developments within and outside universities. On the one hand, the significant growth in the number of English-taught programmes has brought with it an increase in the number of international students and staff, making English more readily observable and hearable at university campuses. On the other hand, Estonia has witnessed in recent years a rise of right-wing populism that has re-centred the country politically closer to new-nationalist postulates. As such, what we see in the higher education language ideological debates in Estonia is not entirely different from what Saarinen (2020) describes for Finland, where traditional nationalist discourses are recycled and reused in contexts from where they had historically been absent, thus regaining a renewed impetus. By contrast, the idea of English being an opportunity and a necessity in higher education still enjoys wide currency in Latvia, although the more concerned voices insist on clearly defined hierarchies for Latvian and English, with the former being on top. It will be important, then, to keep monitoring the developments in the two countries and to see whether Estonia continues to move towards the Finnish direction, and whether Latvia follows in the footsteps of its neighbours to the north, or if it takes a somewhat different path, solving the inherent contradictions of the Englishization of higher education in an original way.

Funding

This work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund and the programme Mobilitas Pluss (grant number MOBJD646).

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