Parallel Language Use - a proposal for debate

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Preliminary comments
The taskforce originally planned to formulate a relatively concrete set of linguistic rules on the basis of the general principles in CIP’s value statements. After several drafts and revisions, we decided to maintain for the moment the following somewhat more abstract and theoretical form. This decision is not due to a reluctance to be concrete, but rather that we have judged the empirical foundation to be too weak to assign policy more definitively. We therefore recommend that the policy becomes gradually more concrete as we gain more reliable experience in regard to the best way to translate principles into practice.

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0. Introduction
The following sections describe the principles for CIP’s use of different languages. The description refers to the four points outlined in the Foundation Document on what a language policy at an institution of higher education should cover, namely: teaching, research, dissemination and internal communication (see Appendix).

In addition, reference is made to this foundation for underlying considerations in relation to the drawing up of the language policy practices described below (see Appendix).

1. Dissemination and communication with the public
CIP is part of the University of Copenhagen. The University of Copenhagen is a Danish university and therefore has a substantial obligation to Danish society. This includes actively rendering itself visible to the Danish public as well as answering inquiries from the public. The institution is obliged to disseminate to and address Danish-speakers in a (formally and stylistically) correct Danish. Whereas, with non-Danish-speakers, the institution is obliged to communicate in a common language. The first choice for this common language is English. If this is not feasible, the languages of the Department for English, Germanic and Romance Studies (EnGeRom), CIPs host department at the University of Copenhagen, are encouraged. EnGeRom employs experts in German, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, Rumanian and Portuguese. If it is not possible to reach a common understanding in one of these languages, a translation of the message into another language must be provided. When possible, CIP will respond to inquiries in the language they are written in. It is CIP’s obligation to provide translations if necessary.

For CIP’s responses to inquiries the following applies: In Danish, the rules and forms recommended by Retskrivningsordbogen are applied. In English, British English or American English spelling and grammar is consistently used within the same text.
Texts representing the Centre to an unknown or non pre-defined target audience are edited to native speaker norms – regardless of whether they are in Danish, English or another language. In individual employee’s correspondence with colleagues, the same requirements do not apply, though. There may be good reason to fight for a widening of the constricting standards for linguistic correctness and tolerate forms that are not in accordance with the language use of native speakers; but in instances where the deviations from the norm could damage the Centre’s reputation, CIP must relate to the prestige that the native speaker norms represent and use a language form that cannot cause the recipient to cast doubt on the Centre’s ability to solve linguistic tasks optimally. This means that CIP should be sensitive to the presumed standard consciousness of the recipient.

2. Teaching
The choice of language for teaching is also subject to the general guidelines for language choice in a multilingual context, which are mentioned in article III of the Foundation Document: The choice of language depends on the competencies of the speaker, the competencies of the recipient and on the content of the message.

CIP primarily (currently exclusively) teaches foreign- and second language courses. Although it might seem more appropriate, when weighing the proficiency of the sender and receiver, to choose one language, i.e. Danish in cases when Danes teach Danes, or English when Danes teach foreigners, the aim of the course, that is, teaching a foreign language, takes precedent. In practice, Danish courses are (primarily) taught in Danish and English courses are (primarily) taught in English. However, the Centre’s obligations concerning the principle of parallel language use mean that situations where more than one language is at play at the same time is considered normal, and not an unwanted deviation.

Should CIP offers courses which are not language courses, e.g. courses in foreign language pedagogy, choice of language will be based on three factors – the proficiency of the sender, proficiency of the recipient(s) and course content.

3. Research
CIP has an obvious interest in presenting itself in an international lingua franca, though not necessarily only in English. This means that all staff members with research time are encouraged to publish internationally, presumably in English. This also allows staff with research time to disseminate their research more directly with international colleagues, e.g. at conferences or through international collaboration.

But CIP furthermore has a clear interest in presenting itself as a research centre to a Danish research audience by publishing in national (and Nordic) periodicals. A large part of the research audience that is interested in CIP’s research in parallel language use in a Danish academic context is best reached by publishing in Danish. In particular, there is a limited circle of specialists in this arena (language policy and Danish as a foreign- and second language in a university context). Here it will be expedient to publish in Danish as well. However, CIP must also consider the current research policy in force at KU that prioritizes publications in particular languages.
4. Internal communication

Internally, the institution is required to ensure optimal information exchange. This means that meetings, to as great an extent as possible, are held in a language that everyone understands. If there is more than one language that everyone understands, e.g. Danish and English, individuals may choose the language they prefer to speak. An English-speaker may thus speak English, a Danish-speaker may speak Danish and a Swedish-speaker may speak Swedish, given that everyone understands each other. This mixed language use is not a problem, but is rather, with a little practice, the most effective way of conducting a meeting.

Situations may arise where no common language is available. Likewise, situations may arise where all present are limited by the fact that one person present does not speak the common language of the others. There is no perfect solution to this problem. The polite everyday practice is that all speak English, but this may not be the most rational practice. This may lead to limited understanding of the meeting’s content by participants who need to understand the content in order to accommodate others on the periphery. Another possible strategy is to conduct the meeting in the language that most present understand and choose an acting chairman who, after each agenda point, ensures that all present understand, e.g. by paraphrasing the content. The practice in each case must depend not only on the language proficiency of the participants, but also on the content of the meeting.

One might also imagine that some items on an agenda are conducted in one language and other items in another language. This would be natural e.g. if guests who are invited to discuss a certain agenda item best (or only) understand one of the languages used. In such cases, it must be ensured that all present understand what was discussed concerning that item before moving on to the next item on the agenda. If it is not apparent that an item is to be discussed in another language than the other items, this should be announced when the agenda is sent out.

Those who do not speak the language in which the meeting is conducted are always in their right to speak the language they prefer. In such cases, the chairman will provide a translation to the others.

Minutes are written in Danish, unless they are to be read by partners outside CIP. In these cases, they are translated.

5. Strengthening of the employees’ language competencies

CIP as an institution and the individual employees have a joint responsibility to ensure that the employees’ language competencies are at a level such that the above mentioned policy can be carried out. For instance, this means that the institution is obliged to support the employees in developing their language skills concurrently with the demands of their assignments; in principle, this goes for their mother tongue as well as their different foreign languages. This obligation is in accordance with The Nordic Language Declaration, which says that states have an obligation to give citizens the right to develop their language, this being a national language, international language or mother tongue. In the language declaration, languages are spoken of as a right that concerns the individual. But CIP takes as a point of departure that a strengthening of language competencies is beneficial to the institution as a whole. An institution of higher education such as KU needs to have competencies in several languages, even though the individual’s knowledge of a certain language may be limited.
At CIP, the employees are given the opportunity to take language courses together or individually. Furthermore, room is made for employees, in order to practice their language, to express themselves in a language that they do not have the same command of as a native speaker. Both Danish speakers’ right to speak English as a foreign language and foreigners’ right to speak Danish as a second language must be ensured. We know from foreigners living here that it is difficult to get an opportunity to speak Danish because Danes all too willingly switch to (an often inadequate) English. At CIP, the employees are ensured the right to participate “on the other side of parallel language use”.

6. Rights of the employee
The presently established language policy is in extension to The Nordic Language Declaration in that it describes the language rights of the individual. These rights apply both in connection to the function of the employees as well as their appointment.

The rights that apply in connection to the function of the employees can strongly be derived from the institution obligations described above. The employees have a right and obligation to teach, conduct research and disseminate in the languages they find appropriate in relation to the institution’s obligations. The employees have a right, and are encouraged, to further education and to receive language training in order for them to comply with these obligations.

The rights that apply for employees by virtue of their appointment are furthermore a specification of the rights that all Nordic citizens have to develop their language competencies (also the common European Framework for Languages).

Language learning is not something that belongs to the young – everyone continues to develop their language(s) throughout their lives, including their mother tongue. Employees have the right to develop and use 1) their mother tongue, 2) the national language, i.e. Danish, 3) international languages, including English. For employees whose mother tongue is Danish this means that they have the right to speak Danish at meetings where all present understand Danish, but also that they have the right to speak and develop another language which all present understand, e.g. English. For employees who do not have Danish as their mother tongue, this means that they have the right to speak their mother tongue given that it is

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1 The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. For instance, partners may switch from one language or dialect to another, exploiting the ability of each to express themselves in one language and to understand the other; or a person may call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, written or even spoken, in a previously ‘unknown’ language, recognising words from a common international store in a new guise. Those with some knowledge, even slight, may use it to help those with none to communicate by mediating between individuals with no common language.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Council of Europe.
understood, but also that they have the right to speak and develop Danish as well as an international language.
Appendix
Foundation Document

I. About language
The ability to use language is fundamental to man as a species. Language, both spoken language and sign language, is the essential form of communication between humans, including the coordination of human interaction as well as in storing knowledge. In a university context, language is fundamental both for the creation of new knowledge, for the distribution of knowledge and for the institution to function. Perceived in this way, language is a tool.

Language is also one of the most important means people have for marking personal, social and cultural identity. By linguistic variation, we tell others who we are, whether the variation lies in the difference between different languages, between different dialects or in the choice of words.

Besides being a tool and an identity marker, language is also a code, a system of meaning to be taught, learned and mastered, and which is not necessarily transparent to outsiders.

A language policy should take into account all of these aspects of language: For one, it should be accepted that not all can crack the same linguistic codes. A language must be learned as any other specialised knowledge. Secondly, it must be ensured that communication between the university's employees is as unproblematic as possible. Finally, it must be accepted that choice of language is also a choice of identity, and therefore one should be careful to force language choices upon the individual.

II. On multilingualism
We are all multilingual. This is both understood in the broadest sense, namely that we choose our linguistic expression based on whether we speak to a family member or to the tax collector. For most people in Denmark it is also understood in the narrowest sense, namely that we speak several languages – with a higher or lower degree of expertise.

Few multilinguals are equally competent in several languages. Even children who are brought up with two different mother tongues often have differing competencies in the different languages. They may feel more confident speaking about school subjects in one language and about games in another language. And those researchers who feel more confident speaking about their field in English will typically fall short if they were to sing lullabies in English. Even in our mother tongue, we do not understand everything, but it is typically in the mother tongue that we understand the most. It should not necessarily be seen as a goal to obtain the same competence in a foreign language as in one's mother tongue. Rather, it should be seen as a goal to be able to carry out certain kinds of tasks in two or more expedient languages – this is often referred to as domain specific parallel language use.

Many Danes have some knowledge of up to six or seven different languages, e.g. Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, etc. and many people have a wide or narrow knowledge of more and different languages than these languages, either as a mother tongue or as a foreign language. This does not mean that they without any problems can have a conversation in all of these languages. But a limited knowledge to a language is also a resource, whether it...
is about coping as a tourist, decoding a word in a text one has not seen before or understanding a question from an international student.

People do not have a limited storage capacity for foreign languages. There is no limit to how many languages one can learn to understand, on the contrary, we often use our knowledge from one language to understand expressions in another. If anything, there is rather an added value when focusing one’s linguistic knowledge on several languages. If we have a limited capacity, a bottleneck, it is determinant of how many languages we can actively learn and keep in active readiness at the same time, and thereby also of how fast we can switch productively between languages. This may be due to the fact that our knowledge of different languages highly overlaps. We have probably all experienced getting confused and mixing languages when we learn a new language. This confusion can be a source of irritation, but it can also be seen as an inspiration to think creatively.

III. Choice of language

For the multilingual speaker, the choice of language is dependent on the sender, the target group and the purpose of the communication; the choice of ‘language’ should, as above, be understood both in the broadest and most narrow sense. We form our inquiry in the language that we master (to a higher or lesser degree) and which reflects an identity we would like to take on; in a language the receiver understands and which is not offending, insulting etc. to him or her (unless that is the intention); and in a language that serves the purpose of the inquiry. All elements form part of the choice of language. The linguistic competencies of the receiver can result in the sender formulating the inquiry in a language he or she otherwise would not formulate it in. An inquiry from the same sender to the same receiver can take different forms depending on whether it is an invitation to a party or a contract to be signed.

It is fundamentally the same principles that apply in the choice of language for an institution: the choice of language is dependent on: 1) the institution having competencies in the language and it reflecting an identity the institution wishes to take on, 2) the receiver having competencies in the language and receiving the inquire positively and 3) the inquiry being appropriate for the purpose of the communication. A language policy in the university sector should take at least four different areas into consideration:

1. Language for teaching
2. Language for research
3. Language for external communication
4. Language for internal communication

Often a mixture of languages will be as appropriate as one or the other. This goes for both the individual communication situation (you can have texts in one language and conversation in another) or over a series of communication situations (in the run of a course the instructor or instructors can use different languages).

IV. Language policy declarations

The Danish government has signed The Nordic Language Declaration (Nordic Council of Ministers 2006). In the declaration, the linguistic rights that all Nordic citizens have are mentioned. A language policy for the university sector can in the same manner describe the rights employees have next to the obligations the institution has.
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