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Neoliberal governance towards the non-German-speaking world in Austria's internationalization of higher education

Abstract: As in many parts of Europe, Austria has seen increasing internationalization of its public universities since modernization reforms towards autonomy and accompanying steering-at-a-distance practices of state ministries. Here, we explore the sociolinguistic relevance of such neoliberal governance on this trend. In a novel turn, we invert the common lens on English as an incoming language to examine instead the monitoring of internationalization data from the pluricentric context of the German-speaking DACH region, comprising Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. We expound on this as an imagined speech community, vis-à-vis which Austria can be seen through steering at multiscalar level to rearticulate its very identity as a nation state. As part of an innovative use of process tracing methodology, we consulted policy documentation and monitoring data on DACH internationalization in order to probe key stakeholders at a public case study university and at ministerial level on its relevance. An analysis of stance revealed that steering conversations mutually reinforced a move away from the inbound mobility of students and staff from DACH – a dynamic that was disfavoured as inhibitory of progress, a less real form of internationalization, and unambitious, thereby at odds with neoliberal governance towards performance and competitiveness.

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1 Introduction

The largely unchecked growth of English throughout the world has been seen as enjoying a global free ride on the back of capitalism in which it holds high stakes and strong currency (e.g., O'Regan 2021). In the domain of an increasingly neoliberalized higher education (Piller and Cho 2013), such language shift from the societal language(s) of non-anglophone countries is evident, in part, through internationalization strategies and their monitoring by both the state and institutions, as well as supranational forces, promoting the mobility of teaching and research staff in addition to students (Nao et al. 2023). This often presupposes the use of English as a worldwide lingua franca in the sector (Björkman 2013; Jenkins 2013; Murata and Iino 2017). Such focus on English in internationalization, however, obscures from view other potential contenders, including pluricentric ones, resident at home and shared with regions and nation states elsewhere (Darquennes 2021).

In Austria, German is both a societal language and international contender; within Europe, some of its German speakership is to be found in the ideationally packaged same-language region of DACH to which it belongs – an abbreviation derived from the international licence codes for Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH: Confoederatio Helvetica). Given that German from the other countries of DACH may serve as a countervailing force to English of internationalization in Austria, we here invert the anglophone lens to uncover in novel ways the relevance of the pluricentric and hidden language dynamic of German, the societal default. In doing so, we conceive of DACH as an "imagined speech community" as we investigate sameness and distinction as part of a neoliberally driven (re)direction in governance in internationalization monitoring and strategy.

Austrian higher education presents a bilingual domain in which the societal and pluricentric language of German yet presides, while increasingly however making way for English, particularly in the curriculum, namely, through English as a medium of instruction (EMI). By rigorously scrutinizing relevant policy documentation and data, as part of an innovative use of process tracing methodology, we identify a separate collation of data on German-speaking DACH to that of other countries in Europe, including Germany as separate to the category of the EU, notwithstanding its membership. We follow up on this in interview to gain insights from among 20 key stakeholder participants in relevant university and ministerial roles. Our analysis of participant stance uncovers a dynamic of mobility inflow that indirectly favours English through a redirected focus away from DACH in the steering of internationalization strategies of Austrian higher education.

2 Neoliberalism as socio-economic principle and policy mechanism

Neoliberalism has been defined as a socio-economic principle that has come to undergird higher education and beyond in recent decades (Block 2018; Piller and Cho 2013). Linked primarily to the free market as an economic driver of human activity, it is assumed to economically permeate also the "international imperative" of higher education (Altbach 2013) as a form of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), in which English has played a central and often uncontested role to the point of default invisibility (Saarinen and Nikula 2013). As such, it has been taken to propel the growth of English on the higher education scene worldwide in a domain-specific language shift of immense proportions, historically rivalling that of Latin in Europe (Hultgren 2024). It has, in effect, served as a "covert language policy mechanism" (Piller and Cho 2013: 23). Despite its revival of a laissez-faire capitalism (Piller and Cho 2013), neoliberalism has further extended its reach as market logic beyond its economic instrumentality to penetrate more widely public and private life (Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020).

While neoliberalism may be most discernible in the financial benefits of highly marketized tertiary education systems, as characterized by the recruitment of international students as clientele, or less favourably monikered cash cows (Cantwell 2015), it thus has many faces. European countries, and particularly those with relatively low tuition fees, can considerably diverge from such funding models. Nevertheless, gains may be had from attracting student and staff, who can themselves represent indicators upon which public funding is reliant; in this way, they can also serve as pawns in market rivalry among universities seeking competitive advantage through institutional profiling both at home and abroad (Hultgren and Wilkinson 2022).

As a modus operandi, neoliberalism has further permeated their very governance practices by means of legal reforms aimed at "modernizing" the sector that have swept throughout much of Europe (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). Intended to streamline state bureaucracy perceived to have become cost-ineffective (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017), this European modernization agenda at the same time introduced measurements of performance and competition supporting a climate of neoliberalism, in which universities were in principle "freed" to undertake their own business, while steered at a distance by the state (Capano and Pritoni 2020; de Boer and File 2009). This was supported by a widespread move in educational reforms towards the autonomy of higher education institutions (Krüger et al. 2018). In the case of Austria, such legal status of public universities was embedded within the 2002 Universitätsgesetz (Stransky-Can 2019; UG 2002), implementing a framework of

regulation by steering at a distance on the part of state ministries and universities (e.g., Bleiklie 2018; Kickert 1995). Through its practices of governance, neoliberalism has thus ironically cemented the very role of the nation state in managing public revenue and its redistribution (Hobsbawm 2012 [1990]).

With such steering-at-a-distance practices of neoliberal governance come incentivizations, including towards internationalization. The effects of nationally cohering internationalization strategies as part of a performance-based audit culture may further have spurred the advent and increasing domination of English (Gazzola 2012; Hultgren and Wilkinson 2022), in part through a similarly increasing number of international staff and students who use the lingua franca as a high-valued currency in and beyond academic life. Such trend has, however, arisen from within a multi-scalarity of decision-making, involving both higher education institutions and system-level strategy of the state, as well as supranational forces of less direct but not negligible influence, such as EU mobility targets (Brooks 2018; Nao et al. 2023). The neoliberally governed drive towards internationalization is one through which a nation state ideationally defines itself also vis-à-vis supranational markets. And such definition involves an interplay and strategic negotiation between both English and its own language(s) – in the case of a pluricentric context, also shared with other nations.

3 Higher education internationalization in Austria

Internationalization is by no means a modern phenomenon of Austria's universities, the more longstanding of which have historically served as illustrious hubs of learning, notably attracting scholars and students from throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1867–1918 (Surman 2018). Such composite further represented more widely the societies in which universities were situated, such as the city of Vienna, itself teeming with a multi-ethnically and multilingually diverse population (Newerkla 2022). Much of the incoming scholarly "talent" of the time thus hailed from parts of the present-day geography of Hungary, Czechia, Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Ukraine, northern Italy, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia (Surman 2018). With the political upheavals of the 20th Century, however, the Austrian higher education landscape changed drastically. In the decades following the Second World War, prior to and during which Austria had been annexed by Germany, its universities had lost much of their perceived eminence (Pechar 2005). As with other countries of Europe, it subsequently underwent its own series of modernization reforms of higher educa-tion. Of greatest relevance to neoliberal governance and steering-at-a-distance practices of public universities was that of the University Act 2002 (UG 2002), granting

them full legal autonomy (Vollrechtsfähigkeit) as independent public entities (Burtscher et al. 2006; Winckler 2018).

While our focus here is primarily on public universities that operate under the provision of the University Act 2002 (UG 2002), it is necessary to note that today's Austrian higher education scene comprises four sectors of higher education institution: public universities, universities of applied sciences, university colleges of teacher education, and private universities. Despite differing in specialization and purposes, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research (BMBWF) has in recent years additionally published strategy and steering documents that aim to present a cohering vision of Austrian higher education amalgamating all four sectors, including a national mobility and internationalization strategy (BMBWF 2020) (although the private sector may in practice be largely free to do as it will).

Indeed, Austria presents an attractive option for international students. Not only does its higher education system count as highly accessible in terms of admission requirements, but it is relatively low cost, with no tuition fees if completed within a given timeframe for EU students (BMBWF n.d.[a]). This is attributable to an epistemology as of yet accommodating the vestiges of prior social democratic government (Winckler 2018). Fellow EU students are nevertheless classed as international along with other non-Austrians in the formulation of strategies and objectives of internationalization of higher education institutions, or indeed of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria (BMBWF) itself; this is by contrast with non-EU students and staff, who are rather classed as "third country" nationals or "Drittstaater" (BMBWF n.d.[a]), a term which is also to be found in the differentiated categorization of numerical data on internationalization.

The predominant use of German at Austrian universities, along with its minimal fees; fewer admissions restrictions (underpinned by a principle of "freier Universitätszugang", literally free university access); geographical proximity; and an education system that is otherwise in many respects not too dissimilar (Johann et al. 2022) has made it an easy and attractive option for German-speaking students from other countries and regions of Europe. Nevertheless, Austria has a somewhat uneasy relationship with its larger German-speaking neighbour, Germany. While such sentiment may hark back to historical influences, not least its annexation during the Third Reich, an influx of students in more recent history from Germany preferring Austria's to their own more restrictive higher education system has presented a bone of contention (Mandl et al. 2021). Particularly marked in certain subject areas, such as medicine, this has notably lead to quota restrictions to preserve spaces for Austrian students argued on the grounds of a foreseeable lack of at-home professionals in the future, which in principle contradicts the EU right to freedom of movement (Ferencz 2015). In fact, in one of the Austrian National Development Plans for Public

Universities, the BMBWF (2017/18: 32) credits Austria for having "successfully introduced the concept of 'asymmetrical mobility' into the Bologna process" to aim for more balanced mobility between member states.

As both German and English coincide at public universities, such environments can be considered a form of globalized bilingualism (Smit and Verena 2024), reflected at some level also societally (Smit and Schwarz 2019). Increasing provision of English in academic master's programmes to accommodate international, as well as home students, has been seen since the turn of the century, to the point of constituting almost a fourth at participating Austrian universities in a 2021 study by the Institute of Advanced Studies Vienna (Mandl et al. 2021: 34). In terms of the international student body in Austria, around one-fifth were classed as international, of which around half came from Germany or South Tyrol, Italy (Mandl et al. 2021). International PhD-holding staff, defined as those without Austrian citizenship, accounted for 36 % in public universities, of which Germans, separately categorized from other internationals, represented 16 % (Mandl et al. 2021: 110).

Notwithstanding that German still predominates as the main language of university business (Dannerer et al. 2021; Smit and Komori-Glatz 2022), the two languages may occupy the same or complementary spaces, or domains. As such they present a site of potential tension in governance, although this may not be openly discussed or indeed perceived as such. Rather than focussing merely on English, however, we believe that insights are to be derived from the German language in the context of its pluricentricity. This has so far been neglected in research, although concerns among German-speaking scholars have at times been voiced about the steady encroachment of English in the scientific community more generally (see, for example, Mittelstraß et al. 2016). We believe this merits consideration also more widely within a conversation on language shift through internationalization of higher education that typically places English centre stage as an incoming language, rather than the less visibly default societal other language(s) pluricentrically shared across nations.

4 Austria and DACH: an imagined speech community of same-language speakers

German in Austria, or Austrian German, belongs to a pluricentric European language landscape (Darquennes 2021; Lenz 2018), in which sub-varieties of German are shared and codified as standards among different countries that likewise claim it as an official language, namely, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Further variations are to be found regionally, i.e., within and beyond

the geographical boundaries of these countries, such as in South Tyrol, Italy. Of these, Germany and Switzerland have slipped into acronymic partnership with Austria in usage of the term DACH, which has been described as a shared "economic and cultural subspace within Europe" (Bauer et al. 2015: 2). This represents a German-speaking triad of strong economies, recognised as a target region also externally in international trade. As such, DACH may be applied as a concept to survey a unified, as well as a differentiated market (e.g., Witzel 2012). Both similarities and differences between its composite countries of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland may hence be explored, including in academic research (e.g., Johann et al. 2022). Nevertheless, it presents an ideationally bounded market space that is statistically reified as one geographical region through the very collation of numerical data for business intelligence (e.g., Davies 2024).

Despite deep-rooted historical, linguistic, and cultural ties between these countries, Wodak et al. (2009) note that Austria has made efforts since 1945 to differentiate its identity from its larger and powerful neighbour, Germany, by which it had been annexed during the Third Reich, while renegotiating and establishing its place in Europe with its accession to the EU in 1995. A distancing from German identity, or Germanness of identity, has also been observed in the case of German-speaking Swiss (Hobsbawm 2012 [1990]), although unlike Austria, Switzerland was never part of the "Greater Germany" of the Nazi era and has maintained a certain independence through its asserted neutrality (Mach and Trampusch 2011). It also differs in its chosen non-membership of the EU, despite extensive bilateral agreements and inclusion in the Schengen area (Czermińska 2023). Nevertheless, for both Austria and Switzerland, Germany is a big and economically powerful neighbour, representing an important export market, comparisons with which are hence drawn, albeit in different ways, in their respective at-home political discourses (Schwarze and Stopfner 2020).

Notwithstanding its unity in ideational configuration, DACH comprises countries governed by nation-states, with their own ideas of what they want their nation to be, both internally and relative to others, and both within DACH and beyond. As Hobsbawm (2012 [1990]) notes, states are now officially nations and no longer confined in recent history to an economy mapping on to the same territorial boundary; at the same time, these nation-states have become inwardly strengthened through neoliberally managed redistribution and expenditure of public revenue. Nevertheless, the concept of nation, often accompanied by that of language, underpins the construction of an imagined or imaginary community as market defined (Hobsbawm 2012 [1990]).

Anderson (2006 [1983]: 6) notably used the term "imagined community" to describe a nation on the grounds that its members "will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the

image of their communion". Here, we refer to DACH as an imagined speech community to imply a similarly abstracted community with whom fellow members do not come into contact in their entirety of population, rooted therefore in an ideational sense of communion through speakership of a shared language, pluri-centrically extending beyond single nations or devolved regions.

This apprehension of communion on the basis of language speakerhood as shared among nations, is consonant with what might be considered earlier and perhaps more sociolinguistically naïve definitions of speech community, somewhat removed in their abstraction from close analytic scrutiny. To these definitions belong Lyons (1970: 326) "all the people who use a given language (or dialect)"; or Hockett (1958: 8) "the whole set of people who communicate with each other, either directly or indirectly, via the common language". Such definitions encapsulate a potential yet unrealized totality of communion of a same-language population that is consonant with Anderson's use of "imagined". Communion can, then, be understood to exist at the ideational level, as conveyed in the following definition by Corder (1973: 53), "A speech community is made up of people who regard themselves as speaking the same language […] defined in terms of its *beliefs*, not its language" (italics in original).

Here, then, we prefix "imagined" from Anderson's concept of a group of people with whom one is in communion in one's head as part of a bounded geography to a "speech community", encompassing a sharedness of language among speakers, the totality of which may be relevant to the business of higher education, even if at an ideational level. It is the role of this imagined speech community of DACH in the internationalization of higher education that we explore in interview with our Austrian university and ministerial participants.

5 Research context and methods

The current study is part of a wider project [ELEMENTAL] (Hultgren et al. 2023) exploring the links between the surge of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in universities of many countries of the European Higher Education Area and steering at a distance of the state as a form of neoliberalist governance (e.g., Bleiklie 2018; Kickert 1995). Starting in the Netherlands, our investigation was initially informed by Kickert's (1995) work from within public administration, in which he observed steering at a distance as a new governance model arising and coined within the Dutch ministry of Education and Sciences in the 1980s. This, we linked to the inception of EMI pro-grammes there, which were among the earliest we were able to identify in Europe (Hultgren and Wilkinson 2022), as further informed in particular by Bleiklie's more recent work within public administration on higher education governance and policy (see Bleiklie [2018] for an overview). In this, he delineated steering-at-a-distance

practices with instruments such as funding formulae and performance indicators, as well as mechanisms of accountability that are themselves embedded in reforms towards university autonomy. While the related concept of "governing at a distance" (Rose and Miller 1992) is well-known within political sociology, we situate our research in the literature within public administration as this better aligns epistemologically and empirically with our adopted methodological approach to investigate causal influences of policy as well as its instruments and mechanisms of enactment on EMI and Englishization in the EHEA higher education sector.

We adopted process tracing as a case study methodology, drawing on the work of Beach and Pederson (2019), to explore the possible link between Englishization at a university and governance reforms towards autonomy that implement steering at a distance in Austria. Such an approach centres on formulating and then testing hypotheses or existing theories on causal processes leading to an investigated outcome. Underpinned by critical realism (Bhaskar 2016), this approach to process tracing is epistemologically probabilistic, accepting that knowledge is a matter of degree and dependent on the quality of evidence. At the same time, it is grounded in a critical-realist ontology which assumes that there are reasons for outcomes, contingent on favourable conditions, that leave traces (or "fingerprints") behind that can be uncovered. While the reasons may not themselves be directly accessible, process tracing calls on us to probe the presence of what traces we might expect to find were our hypothesis true, as well as to question their absence. As Beach and Pederson (2019: 52) put it, "we can infer the existence of ultimately unobservable processes through their empirical fingerprints".

In our case, we expected to find evidence of steering instruments and mechanisms, including "normative pressures" (de Boer and Enders 2018) of monitoring and steering conversations resulting from autonomy reforms (Thomas et al. 2024). We hypothesized that these could impact on English being used in the curriculum and potentially also beyond, even in the case that they did not themselves represent explicit language policies. We then sought to follow up on relevant traces in our investigation to probe whether this might be the case. From the perspective of a sociolinguistics of domain-specific language shift, we sought traces of curricular insertion of English, as well as internationalization through mobility inflows within steering instruments and mechanisms.

In the Austrian context, such steering is demonstrable in a diverse array of forms on the part of both the state ministries and within the institutions themselves, including our case study institution – a large research-intensive public university. The Federal Ministry of Education Science and Research (BMBWF n.d.[b]) publishes an illustrative, and hence non-exhaustive, list of numerous steering instruments of higher education governance, in which internationalization is a staple feature, ranging from university development plans (strategic plans required by law in the

UG 2002 for public universities), its own national development plans (GUEPs for public universities), internationalization visions (also cohering for all four sectors), to dialogues, in which "normative pressure" might nevertheless be exerted (de Boer and Enders 2018).

Searching for both confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence of the potential impact of steering at a distance on Englishization with respect to internationalization led us to probe an apparent anomaly in the BMBWF Unidata database, namely, the separate monitoring of mobility inflows from Germany and Switzerland, despite the former belonging to the EU, which itself represented an aggregate category for other member states (BMBWF n.d.[c]). As this could have presented disconfirmatory evidence in the case of being monitored for desirable inflows from German-speaking countries that would counteract the influence of English as a lingua franca, we followed up on these traces, of which we found similar forms of separate monitoring at our case institution. Hence, we questioned why the other-country composites of DACH – Germany and Switzerland – were handled differently in the collation of data by the BMBWF, as well as in institutional monitoring of internationalization data.

As part of our wider investigation, we identified participants for interview, including elite members in positions of higher education governance, through purposive sampling (Bakkalbasioglu 2020) at multiscalar university and ministerial levels. At the ministerial level, we were able to interview three participants with current, or prior, relevant experience of higher education governance, two of whom held or had held high-ranking positions. In total, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, who provided us with consent to use their interviews in research, including the recording, transcribing, and in all but one case depositing of transcripts in our open repository (Nao 2024). While our process tracing investigation may bear similarities with other methodological approaches such as institutional ethnographies (e.g., Smith 2005), it was very much shaped by probing of traces gleaned from policy and steering documents to probabilistically either confirm or disconfirm any causal links between steering at a distance and EMI or Englishization.

In this paper, we focus in particular on traces and follow-ups relevant to DACH and analyse illustrative excerpts from interviews as stance-taking, namely, "the expression of an attitude, evaluation, or judgement as the speaker's own point of view" (Lampropoulou and Myers 2012). In doing so, we aim to gain better insights into the participant perspective of DACH as an imagined speech community, exploring also its relevance as a market geography of internationalization. We consider how pluricentricity of German speakership in DACH is conceptualized with respect to internationalization of Austrian higher education and what its relevance is, if any, to Englishization. In analyzing the participants' stance-taking in interview, we primarily draw on discourse pragmatics and modality (Maynard 1993). For this reason, we restrict ourselves to simple orthographical representation, corresponding also to the

transcripts in our open access data repository (Nao 2024), with capitals used to signify lexical stress by the participants.

6 Analysis and findings

6.1 DACH and Germany as an inhibitor of internationalization

Our earliest historical observation on internationalization in the Austrian context takes us back to Imperial Austria. This was characterized by an institutionally unaffiliated participant who had previously held roles in high-level governance, as a time of inbound mobility of good brains from among incorporated regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with ongoing implied relevance beyond into the 1930s:

> I would say also for Austria as a WHOLE is that we used to BE um a REGION, think about the Austria Hungarian Empire, where there were a LOT of mobility and uh ESPECIALLY academic mobility, let me say good BRAINS came from, let me say, the Ukraine, Poland, Turkey, near east, and so on. So so there is not only let me see internationalization in the MODERN sense of the world, but there is somehow a LINK to a traditional academic areas, which played an important ROLE up to the 30s when fascist regimes took over, and Nazi regimes took over and somehow cut cut OFF the various links. And also people then MIGRATED to the United States, who HAD the links and so it is not only internationalization, but it is for example the EFFORT of the [university name] to be more ATTRACTIVE, especially in countries like of of Central Europe and of South East Europe, but ALSO of, let me say of ITALY. [E1]

This excerpt illustrates a curtailment of such flourishing intellectual success, as portrayed by the participant, through annexation by the Third Reich into "Greater Germany". Later in the same interview, the participant comments that re-establishing connections with these and other regions nowadays requires the use of English, which has come to replace German as a more popular language of the present day. Thus, both Germany and the German language in this sense present as an inhibitor of Austrian eminence and reach in international higher education.

While this is the only interview in which relevance was drawn to Imperial Austria, Germany was seen also as an inhibitor in the post-war period. Specifically on the trend towards greater English in the higher education curriculum, it was neo-liberally contrasted with the Netherlands, an earlier implementer than Austria of EMI programmes:

> Yeah, but maybe I'll start with your remark that Netherlands, the Dutch are quite early in the development. Yes, that's clear. We have five-, fifteen million Dutch-speaking persons and we have around 100 million German-speaking people, Austria, Germany, Switzerland if I all take together. [M3]

Here, we can see that the difference in population size of language speakers is offered to account for a perceived stage of development, with the Netherlands preceding Austria. German is thereby referenced as a language shared by Austria with its neighbouring countries of Germany and Switzerland, a pluricentric language context invoked through appeal to speakership. On the other hand, Dutch is described by its estimated number of speakers alone in the Netherlands, without any reference to other countries with same-language speakers (e.g., Belgium, which has a comparatively smaller population). Such assumed relevance of population size of same-language speakers, and its distribution within and beyond the political borders of a nation state to English as a medium of instruction, suggests a neoliberal conception of a demographic (e.g., students or staff) with a marketized population count, which is later borne out in the same interview when reference is made to the "international market"; this, despite the Austrian higher education system not being highly marketized through tuition fees or KPIs, as we will discuss later.

The participant continues with reference to Germans in particular, whose nationality encompasses the largest German-speaking population.

> So for, for, for, for long time, we thought internationalization means also being open to German students, to German professors, but it's clear at the end that this is not internationalization. This is Germanification. So in that sense, so therefore it was, it was quite obvious that we have to go the next step. And if we want to open our universities for the world, then we need the lingua franca and the lingua franca is English. [M3]

"Germanification" is here used to convey openness to German students and professors. Such openness towards this demographic is, however, defined by virtue of what it is *not*, i.e., it is *not* internationalization. It therefore represents a form of linguistic negation, excluding German students and professors in the definition of internationalization as a form of inbound mobility, although it is officially recognized as internationalization. While this presents a pattern that prevailed "for a long time" between Austria and Germany in the participant account, "it's clear in the end" and "it was quite obvious" marks, through epistemic modality, a shift in realization away from the inclusion of "Germanified" DACH, and Germany in particular, to embrace English as a lingua franca, a prerequisite of extending the market geography globally as "the next step" of development. This represents an incremental yet junctured development, which the participant later contextualizes with Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995, and its earlier participation in Erasmus exchange. Such initial exclusion of "Germanification", as *not* internationalization, in accounting for a realization about the future, and rupture with the past, is later mitigated in stance-taking by the same participant as but a lesser form of internationalization.

6.2 True/real internationalization as not DACH

In the following excerpt, German-speaking DACH is not entirely excluded from internationalization but falls short of its prototypicalization, while English remains an unstated default. This can be understood from the negational use of modifiers such as "true" (or "truly") and "real" (or "really").

In the words of our first participant:

> [O]ur ambition goes a little bit more than, as I said before, more than Germanification. True internationalization means, be attractive for the world, and not only for the DACH countries. [M3]

Here we see a limitation, or geographical delimitation of DACH, on the basis of being comparatively unambitious, i.e., not *as* ambitious as going beyond the German-speaking world in order to attract people to Austria, impelled by a centripetal force of inbound mobility to its HE sector.

Another ministerial participant suggests that this is part of a wider discourse behind closed doors, which may not, however, be made officially explicit by universities themselves:

> Sometimes it is said that the Germans are coming like the researchers and the students and that then when they are coming from Germany that this is not really internationalization. So this, this, this could be one one point of of of populist statement on this, but I sometimes heard it from universities indirectly. Umm, not not officially, but indirectly. [M2]

While Germans, both academic staff and students, are not therefore excluded from the category of internationalization, they do not entirely fit the mould, either. Mention of populism further suggests an anti-German sentiment towards Germany itself or the influx of its nationals. This is separately explicated as an issue of public debate by [M3], who mimics one such sentiment with "Ohh, why so many Germans are here".

Yet, an additional ministerial participant makes a similar claim with "real", in which Switzerland is added to Germany to complete the geographical compound corresponding to DACH.

> And it's not a REAL internationalization if universities, Austrian universities only yeah, work with German-speaking or with professors from Germany, Switzerland, or [?]. [M1]

While German speakership is *not* "true" or "real" internationalization, i.e., defined as negatory of prototypical modifiers, these are not however used in positive form for English as the "real" language of internationalization. By not being explicitly referenced as such, English may, then, be normatively realer. In other words, the lack of

this attribute may cement its very status as the default language of internationalization via its assumed use as a global lingua franca in pursuit of present-day ambitions.

At the level of the case study university, the definition of what being international actually means is also similarly recounted in interview as the subject of wider discussion with respect to staff nationalities and profiles:

> And WE have also the discussion of international PROFILE within our personnel and THERE we often find that they say, but internationality does not mean that somebody from Germany or Switzerland, speaking German is coming to [case study university]; because this is ALSO international, yeah. [P13]

Although this participant in a governance role accedes that appointing staff from Germany and Switzerland is also a form of internationalization, they convey an opposing account in staff discussions of profiling. In this, there is a definitional negation of internationality as non-DACH which highlights the relevance of "speaking German", over and above the countries themselves, whereby appeal is once again made to the pluricentric speech community.

6.3 DACH as one market

Although, as we have seen, separate reference is made to its composite countries, DACH is at the same time referred to as one market, defined on the basis of common language speakership.

> PARTLY internationality is considered to be NOT speaking German as your first language, and NOT being from a different country, so it is already interesting that actually the LANGUAGE is kind of what matters. And then what's also peculiar is that BECAUSE Germany is such a huge market, and so in some sense it's just, I mean, the DACH market is just ONE market. [P14]

What is termed internationality – a locally used variant of internationalization that is be found, for example, in the development plans of Austrian universities and BMBWF (2020) internationalization strategy – is linguistically defined in terms of what it is not, i.e., in a negatory way, at least "partly". Viewed as one DACH market on the basis of population size, the same participant comments that the Austrians are by such definition even overrepresented in Austrian universities.

In contributions from participants in higher education governance and ministerial roles in more targeted response to the monitoring of appointments from Germany separately to the rest of the EU in the BMBWF Unidata database, we see that there is likewise a separation of the DACH region when considering the monitoring of internationalization strategy at the case study university.

> And also when WE consider or when we make our international strategy, we also consider the DACH region which is Austria, Germany and Switzerland as a SEPARATE category. We also see, OK, we know there's a lot of INFLUX from these countries but when we look at the data, we also see, OK, this is an OWN category standing ALONE. Yeah, because we don't have to DO much to attract people from here, do you see. We want to we have to do a LOT to get the high calibre people from, from from, from UK or from US. Yeah. So this is also something we consider when WE do our strategy or when we RETHINK our strategies. [P9]

The separate handling of DACH is accounted for on the pragmatic basis that there is not much need to attract people from this region, who will come anyway – an assumption that is informed by preestablished patterns of mobility which show an influx from this geographical area. While elsewhere in the interview, the same participant also addresses mobility within a wider global context of internationalization (as do other participants), it is noteworthy that in discussion of DACH itself, a contrast is drawn with two anglophone countries, namely, the UK and the US, which are further equated with a high level of calibre. A rethought strategy is implicitly anchored in the historic pluricentricity of these anglophone countries, while extending to the wider world via English as a lingua franca as part of a reconfigured market geography away from DACH.

While English is not here explicitly referenced, these countries may nevertheless be symbolic of the language, in so far as they are taken to represent its "inner circle" (Kachru 1985; Kachru et al. 2006). This is further expanded to the outer circle of India by our first ministerial participant.

> No, it's as I said before and therefore we differentiate in all our statistics students from German countries and to and the REAL internationalization, and the REAL internationalization is coming from other countries, from UK, from US, from India so. [M3]

Despite a wider global vision on the part of both of these participants, in contrastive discussion of DACH, the realest internationalization would appear to be ideationally reserved for countries inhabited by a population holding the idealized or mythological status of native speakers (Davies 2003; Leung et al. 1997; Nao 2011). Such idealization supports also the symbolic value and currency of those languages, on which Austria can further draw in its own internationalization ambitions in global competition. This accommodates in the latter case also second-language speakers of the outer circle.

While the aggregation of the three countries of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland in the above account differs from the segregation of Germany and Switzerland in the monitoring of the BMBWF, it similarly allows for an overview of mobility in which there is a separation of the German-speaking countries that constitute DACH from the rest of the world.

6.4 The neoliberal monitoring of DACH internationalization

At the level of the case study institution, rethinking their internationalization strategy may involve directing their efforts towards newer and expanded markets, without necessarily monitoring the non-effort of DACH with a view to redressing it; at the ministerial level, on the other hand, concerns of internationalization involve the very monitoring of such efforts as a coordinating strategy, subsuming within its strategic remit in recent years also the entire higher education sector.

Having been asked to explain the separate monitoring of Germany and Switzerland, a senior civil servant with the BMBWF closely involved in steering negotiations with universities underscores the need for university governance to understand fields of what he defines as recruitment, such as German-speaking DACH.

> And of course, in the field[?] of university governance or in the analyses for the fundaments of university governance, we we NEED to know where the fields of recruitments are. […] And of course, the reason behind are language. They speak German, they can easier work in Austria, there are the networks inside the disciplines. So maybe the connections in in the so-called D-A-C-H region, "DACH Region", are much more closer. So there are national mechanisms.

> And of course, it's more difficult to overview INTERNATIONAL markets in order to to search and to identify INTERNATIONAL researchers, tend to use only the German-speaking area. And that's one of our critic- most critical points in the discussions in the steering of universities. That we say you HAVE to call at professors and scientists from other regions as well. You, much more intensive than you do it for the time being. [M1]

The ease of appointments of academic staff, cohering around the common use of language in what is defined as a "German-speaking area" is identified as the reason for the monitoring of market flow. Such effortlessness of DACH appointments is further evident in the agency with which it is represented as their own action: "They speak German, they can easier work in Austria". No action is therefore required to establish inward bound mobility flows. There is already a force impelled by "national mechanisms" of networks and disciplinary ties in place, a dynamic movement of seeming stasis in the DACH status quo, which pulls this market demographic centripetally towards Austria. In other words, the employment of faculty staff in Austria from other DACH countries is a steady flow through entrenched terrain.

Such effortlessness, on the other hand, requires effort on the part of the ministry to monitor this market flow; not only that, but to intervene on such basis, namely, through steering conversations aimed at aligning university strategy with a cohering Austrian framework, underpinned by ideologies of state. We can see here that ease of inbound DACH mobility is contrasted with the difficulty of surveying international markets and researchers. That this is what the universities should, in fact, be doing is

underscored by deontic modality of "you have to". This representation of exemplar steering communication is relayed in interview as direct speech between the ministerial participant and the abstract entity of universities, conveying an obligation or requirement to be adhered to on their part.

Moreover, this represents "one of the most critical points" among steering priorities, requiring greater intensity than presently undertaken. As a generic injunction, this is irrespective of actual activity by any given institution, which may significantly vary. In effect, it is possible for all universities to intensify their efforts to recruit and engage in research with academic staff in regions other than German-speaking DACH. However much they are doing so already, they can do even more so. Further, they can do it at a faster pace:

> We bring it into the discussions, we challenge the universities the rectorates and say what are you doing what are your developments and so on, but of course there IS a good development but maybe a too slow one (laughing). [M1]

In the case of highly international universities that hold their own ambitions to further internationalize, however, such ministerial priorities may closely align with their respective goals and visions, while leaving them with enough leeway to formulate their own plans.

> They say you HAVE to increase internationalization, you HAVE to increase mobility, yeah, but NOT with which universities, with which partners or with which which kind of types of universities. So in this sense, yeah, it is quite in LINE with our OWN university strategy because we WANT to be an international universities, we WANT to increase our OWN international activities, we WANT to be MORE international more MORE networking with we want to be more VISIBLE on the international scale, especially in the in the SCIENTIFIC international scientific community. So this is in LINE with the GOALS and this is nothing that would disagree with it with that. [P9]

While this excerpt mirrors the deontic modality of our ministerial participant [M1] in its relaying of direct speech, the actual effects of ministerial steering conversations on internationally oriented universities may be attenuated where the goals align. This could consequently differ in the case of Austrian universities that would otherwise be "satisfied with their regional situation", as [M3] asserts. At a very minimum, such conversations form part of a mutually reinforcing dialogue, in which internationalization becomes reified as a market geography, also on the basis of what it does and does not prototypically include, such as DACH.

That non-DACH internationalization is a key concern of academic appointments is evident in the closing remark in interview by [M1], when asked whether there was anything he would like to add:

The MOST problematic aspect is the recruitment of scientists and professors, to get THEM from English speaking areas and not only from Germany or Switzerland. So I it's the most important and then and CRITICAL question. [M1]

7 Discussion: neoliberal governance away from DACH as an imagined speech community

Our analysis supports a conceptualization of an imagined speech community of pluricentric German language speakership relevant to neoliberalist governance through separate monitoring of the other countries of DACH, namely, Germany and Switzerland. Such imagining and reimagining advances a redirection in internationalization strategies in Austrian higher education. The monitoring of Germany separately from the EU category in the BMBWF database, despite it being part of the EU, presents data of relevance to steering at a distance, whether this reinforces coalignment in ambitions between institution and the BMBWF, or whether the latter further exercises "normative pressure" (de Boer and Enders 2018) in such direction. This internationalization away from DACH represents somewhat of an unseen and uninvestigated dynamic of potential language shift towards English in the higher education sector, in so far as it pluricentrically converges with the invisible default of the societal language.

We have explored such trend in relation to three key themes in our data analysis: DACH and Germany as a perceived inhibitor of internationalization; prototypicality of internationalization as non-German-speaking; and the separate monitoring of the German-speaking region by both the ministry and case study institution, a public university, as a market geography of little or non-effort, falling short of ambition towards the outward world from this ideationally defined boundary of same-language speakers.

Within DACH, Germany features more prominently than Switzerland in our participants' interviews, as Austria's larger, more populous, and economically more powerful neighbour. Austria has, and has had, a somewhat complex relationship with Germany, from having been annexed as part of "Greater Germany" during the Third Reich to its sustained economic interdependence as an important export market in recent decades. The former history of Nazism was referenced in our first interview excerpt by the participant [E1] as a point of interception in the previously advancing eminence of the Austrian higher education system, linked to its imperial past. Nevertheless, Austria's comparisons with Germany in at-home political rhetoric suggest ongoing socio-economic aspirations towards its model of success as well as competitive differentiation (Schwarze and Stopfner 2020). With its own imperial

past (Surman 2018), Austria may thus draw on socio-cultural and linguistic similarities with Germany in its own aspirations as a nation-state, while also diverging from them in outwards thrust towards the non-German-speaking world as part of a (re)shaping of its national identity. In terms of internationalization of higher education, this implies also a reconfigured market, which may be ambiguous towards Germany itself. As one of our participants puts it, "The Germans are NEITHER properly international NOR are they local" [P14].

The relevance and indeed relative magnitude of Germany could be understood in our data from the outset with the account by a former high-ranking ministerial participant [M3], in which they contrasted Austria with the Netherlands on the basis of an estimated population of shared German language speakership. It is to this shared speakership of DACH, and in particular with Germany, that Austria's later development of Englishization of higher education was attributed, implicating inbound mobility of a German-speaking demographic through internationalization, which had previously been held as sufficient. With respect to the Netherlands, this observation accords with the findings of our research on the Netherlands as part of the wider ELEMENTAL project, given that our case study university there was compelled as early as the 1980s to cross national borders to non-Dutch-speaking areas in its recruitment drives for students to meet KPIs as government-imposed targets of neoliberal governance practices, given an insufficient number of students (Hultgren and Wilkinson 2022).

On the other hand, Austria had an abundance of students from DACH, and Germany in particular. Not only that, but it had an over-abundance from Germany in certain subjects, leading to the aforementioned quotas (Ferencz 2015). While this would, on the one hand, serve to account for the fact that Austria need not have gone elsewhere in terms of any desire or demand for incoming students, and would thus provide one possible reason for the later delay of inception and development of English language academic programmes by contrast with the Netherlands; at the same time, it does not account for any such motivation to turn away from the DACH demographic, either.

Population may, then, rather be taken to hold symbolic significance as part of a neoliberal ethos of operation, in which a German-language demographic is seen to inhibit outward-looking expansion elsewhere. Such symbolic value holds all the more so, given that the system of Austrian higher education is less marketized and with a low direct currency of internationalization through tuition fees, while it had little need to seek out students across its borders in the same way as the Netherlands at the time. Population size is, rather, interlinked with what we have defined as an imagined speech community – it represents an estimated aggregate of a population of same-language speakers, with whom one does not come into contact. This imagined totality of speakership of a language is consonant with earlier and more naïve

sociolinguistic definitions of speech community (e.g., Hockett 1958; Lyons 1970), as well as Anderson's (2006 [1983]) and Hobsbawm's (2012 [1990]) use of "imagined", which further marries with Corder's (1973) ideational definition of a same-language speech community as founded on belief. It is this potential totality of speakership based on population size that may serve as a politico-geographically bounded ideational market, even if it does not translate more directly to financial gain as in heavily marketized systems of higher education, whether through tuition fees or KPIs. Where it does not do so, it points to a higher level of imagining.

Our study has shown that in Austrian higher education, that of pluricentric German-speaking DACH, which is effectively thought to drive itself, may now be one to leave be, or indeed leave behind. Renewed efforts are to be directed instead towards the seemingly unbounded potential of English as a lingua franca, hence requiring intervention of system-level strategy in such direction where it does not coincide with the aims of the higher education institution itself. Such movement is signalled in our data initially by a shift of stance-taking by [M3] from a breach with the past, marked by total linguistic exclusion of German speakers from the definition of internationalization, to one in which it represents but a lesser form that falls short of prototypicality. It further finds resonance in other participants' accounts through the negational use of modifiers of prototypicality, e.g., not real/true. This concern applies also to the appointment of international staff who do not stem from DACH, which is voiced at ministerial level as a priority of its steering conversations with universities, although at the time of research, such differentiation was not explicitly formulated in its actual published steering instruments, such as GUEPs for public universities.

A limitation of our study is that we cannot say within any certainty that the steering through conversations on internationalization as non- or beyond-DACH is a contributing factor in any directly measurable terms of Englishization in the higher education curriculum and elsewhere, although they might be expected to exert normative pressure in such direction (de Boer and Enders 2018). Certainly, our interview data with participants in governance at both university and at ministerial level, show concurrence between accounts, through deontic modality of relayed direct speech of what public universities "have to do", which point in such direction. Such mirrored alignment between institution and ministerial accounts is further apparent in non-DACH observations elsewhere in our interview data. At the very least, then, such dialogues can be assumed to mutually reinforce each other at some level, and in so doing to further reify DACH as an imagined speech community from which to turn away in neoliberal pursuit of greener pastures elsewhere in the non-German world.

8 Conclusions

As a less marketized higher education system that is nevertheless neoliberally governed through steering-at-a-distance practices, Austria has provided us with an insightful context in which to explore language shift towards greater Englishization through the monitoring of internationalization and inbound mobility of staff and students. In a novel and revealing sociolinguistic twist, we have done so by inverting the common lens from English itself as an encroaching language onto the societal default of German, which is also an official language in other countries, including its more populous neighbour Germany, as well as Switzerland. Together with Austria, these countries constitute the acronymically defined DACH region. In this way, we have moved away from a simplistic anglophone-centric focus on English which would disregard other pluricentric dynamics, paradoxically perhaps thereby reinforcing its very status. This is a move we would argue as necessary to give a more nuanced and integrated sociolinguistic view of Englishization within the higher education landscape, and one which we would encourage others to take up in pluricentric contexts of research.

Further, it is the innovative transdisciplinary use of a process tracing methodological approach informed by literature from within public administration that allowed us to uncover a separate monitoring of Germany and Switzerland as internationalization data of relevance to steering conversations between the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) and higher education institutions. This presented an anomaly for Germany, in particular, as a member state of the EU, and one which was mirrored in the monitoring of data and its collation at our case study university – a large research-intensive public university. Pragmatically rooted in the instruments of steering and monitoring, this investigatory approach to neoliberal governance led us to interrogate the normative use of a category in a way that revealed a more subtle and hidden policy narrative, namely, one that was not contained within the instruments themselves but part of recounted steering conversations in interviews.

Our analysis of participant stance in which we probed this anomaly supported a conceptualization of DACH as what we have expounded as an "imagined speech community", seen as a limited, outmoded, and less real inbound demographic; this, by contrast with a bigger, faster-growing, and more visible form of internationalization, requiring a desired effort consonant with a competitive neoliberal ethos of performance and its assessment. Such differencing of German-speaking countries in the collation of internationalization data, and in particular the larger and more dominant neighbour Germany with which Austria has a complex and ambivalent relationship, is mutually reinforced through the practices of neoliberal governance

by ministry and institution. While potentially inhibiting German language reinforcement through inbound mobility, the implicated shift towards the wider non-German speaking world through English at the same time allows Austria to assert and rearticulate its identity as a nation-state.

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