

## BAAHE 2019 – ABSTRACTS

### CONFERENCE STREAM 1 - LINGUISTICS

*English as a Medium of Instruction and as an Instructed Medium in Higher Education:  
Policy, Practice, and Challenges*

The English language has been embraced in higher education in Flanders and elsewhere as a vehicle of internationalization, opening up the academy to an international body of students, lecturers, and researchers. Its role has been debated widely in the media and contested in language political arenas as hegemonic, as a threat to the mother tongue and mother tongue education, and as detrimental to the quality of instruction and interaction. There is a need for more research on this important topic, as well as research-informed policy recommendations. We invite papers that address the following questions: what is the relationship between governmental and institutional policy and the practices that can be observed in courses and lecture theatres? Does it offer new perspectives for translation policy and practice? What can we learn from other (trans)national contexts that have undergone similar transformations? What are the views and attitudes of students, lecturers, and stakeholders vis-à-vis the use of English, and what constitutes “adequate English”? What are the effects of English-medium instruction on learning, knowledge construction, and cognitive processes? How do institutions monitor, test, and safeguard levels of language proficiency of both lecturers and students, in relation to the specific requirements of academic language use and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)? Do we understand the context of English-medium instruction in monolingual terms or as part of a multilingual space? What is the relevance of the research literature on English as a lingua franca, “plurilingualism”, “translanguaging”, and “translation” for understanding the dynamics of English-medium instruction contexts? Presenters are encouraged but not required to reflect on the Belgian educational context.

Convenor (language studies): [Stef.Slembrouck@UGent.be](mailto:Stef.Slembrouck@UGent.be)

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*Plenary session: Slobodanka Dimova – Language Requirements in EMI: What is Good Enough?*

Abstract:

Internationalization has become one of the main strategic goals of universities as part of their endeavors to prepare students for careers in the globalized world. English seems to play a central role in the process, as many non-Anglophone universities have been implementing English medium instruction (EMI) courses and programs (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). However, the establishment of EMI has also raised concerns about the quality of teaching and learning, given that most stakeholders in the process are L2 speakers of English (Klaassen & Bos, 2010; Kling & Hjulmand, 2008; Kling & Stæhr, 2011). For that reason, alongside internationalization policies, a number of universities across Europe have also implemented policies with specific English language requirements for admission of students and for EMI lecturers who are L2 speakers of English. These policies often require a B2 or C1 level from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for students and C1 for lecturers (Council of Europe, 2009) although these cutoff levels have not been empirically validated for the EMI context.

The presentation will discuss the validity of these English language requirements for students and lecturers in EMI. Referring to research on admission policies and language requirements at Anglophone and non-Anglophone universities, I will argue that decisions about admission requirements should not solely mirror the practices of peer institutions. Instead, these decisions should draw on careful analysis of the different dimensions of internationalization (historical, economic, cultural, and academic) in the local context. In terms of language requirements for EMI lecturers, I will question the appropriacy of large-scale standardized academic tests and propose use of local tests that represent the linguistic and pragmatic characteristics of the local context. Then, based on research, I will provide validity arguments regarding selection of appropriate CEFR level required for teaching in EMI.

About the author:

Pending.

## *1. Frank van Splunder – English Medium Instruction: Perceptions and Attitudes in Engineering*

### Abstract:

Language is a sensitive issue in Flanders. While Flemish universities embrace English as a vehicle of internationalization, the Flemish Government restricts the use of languages other than Dutch, the official medium of instruction in Flanders. This policy should be understood in the context of the emancipation of the Dutch language in Belgium from the 1830s onwards and the construction of the Flemish nation-state today (van Splunder 2016).

In line with its top-down language policy, the Government set foreign language requirements for lecturers and students and introduced compulsory language testing (e.g. for teaching purposes the C1 level of the CEFR is required, while for students B2 is required). The Government's policy was highly contested and led to an uproar in the media (van Splunder and Verguts 2017). In spite of all commotion, the use of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) remains fairly limited in Flemish Higher Education (van Splunder and Engelen 2018).

The focus of this paper is on the students' attitudes towards EMI and the perception of their and their lecturers' skills in English. The students involved in this ongoing project are Engineering students at the University of Antwerp, all of whom have to write their master's thesis in English. Additional language support is provided by the university's language centre. An online questionnaire organized before the start of the language course showed that most students held overtly positive attitudes towards EMI and that they rated their writing skills in English as 'good' or even 'very good'. However, many students raised concerns about the lecturers' English language skills, especially their pronunciation.

The analysis of the students' written work revealed that the students overrated their English language proficiency. While some students had good writing skills indeed, a small but sizeable group appeared to be particularly weak (that is, well below B2). On the other hand, the students probably underrated their lecturers, all of whom obtained a C1 certificate. While the Government's language policy appears to be a non-issue for most students, there are serious concerns regarding the quality of the students' writing skills in English (Deygers 2017). Therefore, more language support may be needed, especially at the undergraduate level.

### References:

- Deygers, B. (2017) *Assessing High-Stakes Assumptions. A longitudinal mixed-methods approach of university entrance language tests, and the policy that relies on them.* Proefschrift ingediend tot het behalen van de graad van Doctor in de Taalkunde. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- van Splunder, F. (2016) 'Language Ideologies regarding English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education. Insights from Flanders and Finland'. In: E. Barakos and J.W. Unger (eds.) *Discursive Approaches to Language Policy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 205-230.
- van Splunder, F. & Verguts, C. (2017) 'Testing the Test: How Politics Influenced the Reception of an English Test for Lecturers'. In *Proceedings of the ALTE's 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference. Learning and Assessment: Making the Connections*. Bologna, 3-5 May 2017, p. 51-56.

van Splunder, F. & Engelen, C. (2018) 'Ruimte voor creatieve oplossingen. Taal in het Vlaamse hoger onderwijs: beleid en praktijk'. In *Th&ma, Tijdschrift voor hoger onderwijs en management*. Jg. 25, Nr. 3. Taalkwesties in het hoger onderwijs, p. 19-23.

About the author:

Frank van Splunder holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Lancaster University. He has been working at the University of Antwerp since 1996, where he teaches academic writing at Linguapolis, the university's language centre. As a language tester, he works for the Interuniversity Testing Consortium which developed the Interuniversity Test of Academic English (ITACE), a test which is widely used at Flemish higher education institutions. Most of his teaching takes place in an international and intercultural context, and his students are from all over the world. Previously, he taught English for Specific and Academic Purposes and he set up language teaching and testing projects in China, Russia, Congo and Cuba. The focus of his research is the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in a globalizing academic context, on which he has published widely. His most recent book publication is *Language is Politics. Exploring an Ecological Approach to Language* (Routledge, 2020).

## *2. Robert Hartsuiker – Memory Recall When an L2 Is Used in Higher Education*

### *Abstract:*

In many European countries, higher education is increasingly offered in English, which is a second language (L2) for most students and teachers. The desirability of this tendency is (sometimes vigorously) debated in society, but it also raises interesting theoretical questions about the interaction between second language processing and long-term memory. Do people remember material studied in a second language equally well as in the first language? Is the rate of forgetting steeper in L2? Are there disadvantages in L2 language processing? If so, why? In this presentation, I will report a series of studies on cognitive aspects of the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education. We considered memory for texts in L1 (Dutch) and L2 (English). In a typical experiment, participants would read texts about academic topics they have little prior knowledge of. Studying time was constrained. After a retention interval (ranging from a few minutes to a few weeks), a test would be administered that would either tap into recognition or recall, and which could be either in L1 Dutch or L2 English. A very important variable turned out to be test type: Experiments using memory tests predominantly tapping into recognition showed little difference between L1 and L2. But tests requiring explicit recall (including production) did show a clear L2 disadvantage. Further experiments ruled out that this L2 disadvantage is an effect of difficulties with L2 language production, as a similar disadvantage of learning in L2 was also observed when producing in L1. We suggest that students create a somewhat impoverished mental representation of the text when reading in L2 as compared to L1. This leads to poorer recall in tasks that provide little memory cues. This disadvantage is however compensated for in recognition tasks, which provide more memory cues. A study in progress extends this line of research to students who learned a further language at home (e.g., Turkish) and for whom English is in fact a third language.

### *About the author:*

Pending.

### ***3. Kirsten Rosiers, Geert Jacobs & Julia Valeiras-Jurado - Economic English and Economics Taught in English. What Can We Learn from the Views and Attitudes of Students and Lecturers?***

#### Abstract:

Universities in Flanders have seen an increase in the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in recent years. The context of Flanders is particularly interesting for its location, considering the reported European north-south divide in terms of use of English in higher education (Dimova, Hultgren & Jensen, 2015), and also in view of the limited amount of research focusing on this area (Van Splunder, 2016; Dutch, Rosiers & Vogl 2019).

Our research enquires into the use of EMI at one particular university in Flanders and its coexistence with English language courses. Specifically, we focus on the second bachelor year of the degree of Economics, which combines English language courses (Economic English) with content courses offered in English. In line with Lasagabaster (2015) and Dafouz & Smit (2016), we are interested in the attitudes of lecturers and students towards the use of English in the content and language classroom. Our research is ethnographically informed and combines classroom observations with semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

We believe that the insights obtained through ethnographic research can be of great use to improve the quality of education and cover specific needs of both students and lecturers. In particular, the findings can help us close the gap between language and content courses when needed, and avoid overlaps when required. Our final aim is to translate the results of our ethnographic research into recommendations to turn challenges into synergies and opportunities for a fruitful use of English in higher education.

#### References:

- Dafouz, E., and U. Smit (2016). Towards a Dynamic Conceptual Framework for English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings. *Applied Linguistics* 37: 3, 397–415
- Dimova, S., A. Hultgren & C. Jensen (2015). *English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Lasagabaster (2015). Language policy and language choice at European Universities: Is there really a 'choice?', *European Journal of Applied Linguistics* 3:2, 255–276.
- Rosiers, K. 1 & U. Vogl (2019). "Quality first? Engels en Nederlands in het Vlaamse hoger onderwijs. Reflecties vanuit de (meertalige) praktijk". *Internationale neerlandistiek*.
- Van Splunder F. (2016). Language Ideologies Regarding English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education: Insights from Flanders and Finland. In: Barakos E., W. Unger J. (eds) *Discursive Approaches to Language Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

#### About the authors:

Pending.

#### ***4. Sylvie De Cock & Esther Lucaccini - Language and Business Engineering Students' Attitudes to English as a Lingua Franca***

##### Abstract:

English is one of the most frequently used languages in international business communication today. It is overwhelmingly used as a lingua franca (ELF) by users whose mother tongue is not English or between native and non-native speakers of English (Seidelhofer 2001, Jenkins 2007). University students in non-English speaking countries often take classes in English as part of their programmes. This paper focuses on some of these students' perception of ELF.

In a quantitative study Xu and Van de Poel (2011) explored the attitudes of 69 Flemish undergraduate students of English (at the University of Antwerp, Belgium) towards ELF using a questionnaire survey. Their more specific aim was to investigate how university language students "perceive the role of English as a lingua franca through their experiences of engagement with English, both within and outside the academic community" (Xu & Van de Poel 2011: 263). The questions in the survey centred, among others, around the students' own use of English (at university, outside university, and with native speakers), their opinion on the importance of English (e.g. in Flanders, for European citizens...), their opinion about the ownership of English and varieties of English, their feelings about interactions with native/non-native interlocutors and their views on ELF communication.

The study reported on here takes Xu and Van de Poel's investigation as a starting point to examine the attitudes towards English as a lingua franca of French-speaking postgraduate students who are about to finish their studies and enter the world of work. We also set out to explore the possible impact of MA degree scheme on the students' attitudes. A slightly revised version of Xu and Van de Poel's survey was administered to 118 postgraduate students at the Université catholique de Louvain (in Wallonia, Belgium). These Master's students, who all have at least one English module as part of their programme, can be divided into three groups depending on their degree scheme: students of Modern Languages (English is one of their majors and there is considerable emphasis on accuracy), students of Business Engineering (a programme with a very strong emphasis on management) and students of Multilingual Business Communication (a programme which combines specialized spoken and written business communication classes in two modern languages, corporate communication and economics). The quantitative analysis is complemented with a more qualitative investigation based on semi-structured interviews with five students, which provides a deeper insight into some of the students' feelings and opinions about the role of English in Belgium and ELF as a new variety of English.

##### References:

Jenkins, J. (2007) *English as a Lingua Franca: attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Seidelhofer, B. (2001) Closing a conceptual gap: the case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 11(2): 133-158.

Xu, J. and Van de Poel, K. (2011) English as a lingua franca in Flanders. A study of university students' attitudes. *English Text Construction* 4(2): 257-278.

##### About the authors:

Pending.

## *5. Sarah Haas - Why Do(n't) I want to Read These Essays? Developing an Intuitive Framework to Help Students Writers Understand Why Their Texts Might (Dis)engage Readers*

### Abstract:

This presentation outlines the development of a framework used in the writing skills section of a first-year university English Proficiency (ETV) course. The purpose of the framework is to help emerging writers understand how and why the texts they produce might engage—or disengage—potential readers, and to give them the tools they need to produce reasonably engaging text.

The development of the framework was precipitated by one teacher-reader noticing that she was quickly disengaging from the student texts she was marking, even though the student-writers had a good command of English, and good ideas for content. A Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Bryant 2016), was taken, with the reader systematically noting places where she felt she wanted to stop reading the texts, and making margin comments explaining what was causing the disengagement. These reasons for disengagement were categorized, and a preliminary framework was formed.

To further develop the framework, additional readers were enlisted. Both ETV student-readers (reading each others' texts) and staff members from various disciplines (reading student texts) were consulted. All readers were asked to notice and explain in their own words, where and why they felt (dis)engaged in the texts they were reading. Data were written or audio recorded.

Instances of (dis)engagement were categorized, allowing for further development of the framework. Reader (dis)engagement could be divided into Initial Engagement (readers feeling they wanted to *start* reading a text) and Continuing Engagement (readers feeling they wanted to *keep* reading). Initial and Continuing Engagement are further broken down into Lower-Order components, and Higher- Order components of engagement. Lower-order components are those elements of text that can easily be pointed out by a reader as (dis)engaging, and easily implemented or repaired by a writer. Higher-Order components are more difficult for a reader to pinpoint as effective or problematic, and more challenging for a writer to implement or repair.

After six rounds of data collection, and over 1500 readers, the categories in the framework appear to be largely saturated. It was found that students and non- language teachers used similar terms to describe their reasons for (dis)engagement. Thus, in order for the framework to be accessible, the categories utilise the intuitive language used by students and non-language-specialist staff members. This Reader Engagement framework has been found in our local ETV context to be helpful as a tool for teaching writing, teaching peer feedback, giving feedback, and assessing student texts.

### References:

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Charmaz, K., & Bryant, A. (2016). Constructing Grounded Theory Analysis. In *Qualitative Research* (348-362). Ed. by Silverman, D. London: Sage Publications.



*About the author:*

Sarah Haas has been teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages for the past 26 years, in Japan, the UK and Flanders. Her research interests are in the area of writer development. She is particularly interested in how writers can maintain reader engagement; in writer's groups for postgraduate students as a means for developing academic writers; and in how writers' meta-awareness of their own writing process might contribute to their development as writers.

## ***6. José Goris - Training Academic Discourse in English-Taught Programmes***

### *Abstract:*

The teaching of subject matter through English as a foreign language has increasingly been introduced into various types of mainstream education. Secondary school leavers are generally proficient in English at an (upper) intermediate or advanced level at the start of university or higher vocational training. However, research (Hellekjær, 2006) has shown that students who study curricular content in a language that is not their mother tongue require active support in developing so-called academic language proficiency, ideally together with working on the said content. Effective integration of content and language needs a didactical approach in which the teacher orchestrates the talk of the lesson to help students develop subject knowledge. They need to be trained in general as well as subject-specific use of academic language and develop skills necessary to discuss arguments, evaluate conclusions, report information, form an opinion, and talk about their subject with the aim of becoming verbally fluent. However, in most cases content teachers and lecturers in English-taught programmes are not trained to teach a foreign language and naturally focus on the learning goals formulated for their respective subjects, which require conveying complex subject matter to an international classroom. In this process, practising spoken skills is often a neglected area. A monologic, teacher-led approach will not foster effective communicative skills; will bring with it the need for a more interactive pedagogy. In order to develop fluency in academic discourse there is evidence which shows the advantages of input tailored to the students' particular subject (Hyland, 2002; Sloane and Porter, 2010).

My presentation will demonstrate a lexical approach to scaffolding academic discourse based on authentic introductory materials preparing for the syllabuses of, for instance, health care, statistics, political science or law. The approach is of particular interest for teachers and lecturers in English-taught programmes in higher education. In addition, language teachers in upper secondary school classes may also find it useful to attend. In present-day education, English language teachers are needed more than ever to provide language support to both fellow teachers and students alike.

### *References:*

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Hyland, K. (2002). Specificity revisited: how far should we go now? *English for Specific Purposes*, 21(4), 385-395.

Sloane, D. & Porter, E. (2010). Changing international student and business staff perceptions of insessional EAP: Using the CEM model. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 9(3), 198-210.

### *About the author:*

José Goris was born in Bergen op Zoom, the Netherlands. She attended lower secondary education in her home town and continued studying later in life, when she first completed upper secondary education at evening school. After that she trained to be a teacher of English as a Foreign Language and worked in secondary and adult education. After completing the European postgraduate programme 'Educating the Gifted', for which she passed her exam with distinction, she became a specialist in developing enrichment materials for learners of high ability. She obtained a Master's Degree in English Language and Literature at Radboud University Nijmegen in 2001 and taught English Literature to an international classroom in the U.K. In the past decade she conducted research into Content and

Language Integrated Learning in secondary pre-university education in various European countries. The results are reported in her dissertation which was published in 2019. At present she is active in the field of integrating academic content and language in English-taught programmes in higher education. She trains professionals in various disciplines, mainly health care and L2 pedagogy.

## *7. Catherine Verguts & Tom De Moor - The Policy-Imposed C1-Level of English in Flemish Universities: A Blessing for Students, a Challenge for Lecturers*

### Abstract:

Flemish higher education increasingly installs English-taught study programmes. In 2013, the Flemish government decreed that lecturers need official proof of a C1-level when English is not their mother tongue. A controversy about "deplorable levels" of English of academic teaching staff raged in national media, but was mainly based on single-focused accounts or anecdotal evidence. In this debate, various stakeholders seem to gauge both "adequate academic English" and the C1-level differently. Is this C1-level, which the Flemish government interprets as an access provider to academic content taught in English by non-native speakers, an attainable goal for the majority of lecturers?

To reach this goal, most UGent-lecturers participated in an internationally audited test specifically developed for this purpose by a consortium of four Flemish universities: the ITACE for lecturers. This test distinguishes itself from others such as IELTS or TOEFL, which the lecturers are also free to take, through its focus on the background and expertise of the test takers and on the purpose of the policy decree, which can act as an advantage to some and a hurdle to others. In general, the results were far better than the critical press reports seemed to predict. Once the decree and test were correctly contextualized by their targeted audience, a positive washback effect arose: most lecturers now show an increased awareness of the adequacy of their English production and an eagerness to improve their proficiency through test preparation, feedback and specifically developed courses. The test thus seemed to become a tool to assure quality in English-taught study programmes.

### About the authors:

Tom De Moor and Catherine Verguts teach Dutch and English as a second language at the Ghent University Language Centre. They specialise in specific purposes and academic language skills. Catherine is involved in the development of high-stakes tests of Dutch and English in the Interuniversity testing consortium. Tom coordinates business and academic language education and teaches various academic English courses in the Doctoral School programme of UGent.

## ***8. Kimberley Mouvet & Miriam Taverniers - What Is Language Anyway? A Theoretical Foundation for Effective Communication.***

### Abstract:

When training students at a tertiary level, we expect them to develop into expert users of language (Byrnes et al. 2006). This implies they are able to deal with linguistic problems of both a theoretical and a practical nature (Martin 2016). However, what often appears to be missing in our teaching practices is a model of language that would offer them the tools to do so (Hasan 1999; Martin 2016). Traditionally, proficiency programmes seem primarily concerned with grammatical rules and vocabulary expansion (Macken-Horarik et al. 2015). This focus on decontextualized language downplays the primary goal of language: to communicate with another (Halliday 2014; Hasan 1999). In our English proficiency programme we have adopted a systemic functional model of language to inform the design of our courses (Halliday 2014). As such, we focus on lexicogrammar from an ideational point of view offering a metalanguage to talk about language (i.e. grammatics rather than grammar rules (Halliday 2002)) and we add to this an interpersonal approach to the instances of language use in writing and speaking classes. Students are taught to operationalize these two (ideational and interpersonal) exploiting textual meaning potential. Together, these three components – ideational, interpersonal and textual choices – construe the variables of situation: field, tenor and mode respectively (Martin 2016). Working with these variables, we maintain, gives students a solid theoretical foundation and understanding of the functioning of language, and allows them to effectively communicate a focused purpose in any genre relevant to our culture.

### References:

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- Halliday M.A.K. 2014. *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hasan, Ruqaiya. 1999. The disempowerment game. *Linguistics and Education* 10(1): 25-87.
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- Martin, J.R. 2016. Meaning matters: A short history of systemic functional linguistics. *Word* 62(1): 35-58.

### About the authors:

Pending.

## *9. Eleanor Foster - Reluctant Translanguaging: Pedagogical L2-Content Beliefs and University Classroom Practice*

### Abstract:

The *Université libre de Bruxelles* (ULB) is delivering increasing numbers of courses through the medium of English, both to native French and Dutch speakers as well as to international students. Pedagogical approaches for teaching in English range from English medium lectures to interactive classrooms applying CLIL methodology (Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010). Teachers are free to establish the language regime they feel appropriate for their course, although critically, the university regulations stipulate that students have the right to be assessed in French, the official language of the university, regardless of the language of instruction. This gives rise to a particular set of tensions where teachers feel they ought to be creating an English-only monolingual environment but nonetheless tolerate and indeed at times encourage translanguaging practices. This paper situates itself at the interface between lecturers' pedagogical second language content beliefs (following Shulman, 1986) and their classroom practice. It arises from work conducted by the TEA Project (*Teaching in English for Academics*), the ULB English CLIL support programme and is based on a survey on beliefs and self-reporting on teaching practices conducted with 20 university professors and teaching assistants from a variety of faculties, supplemented by structured observations. It explores the factors influencing the classroom language regime with a particular eye to the role of the language and modality of assessment. Analysis indicates a range of spontaneous translanguaging practices between French and English, sometimes generated and imposed by students themselves, and which tended to the less powerful end of the continua of the development of biliteracy (i.e. around oral and receptive practice in L1) (Hornberger & Link, 2011). Practices were often centred on the needs of students with visibly lower proficiency in English, which also influenced the language regime for assessment which ranged from compulsory English, to optional English/French and even to hybrid oral presentation (but rarely written). Nonetheless, discourses tended towards monolingual functioning being the ideal, with lecturers uneasy about the pedagogical and linguistic validity of linguistic flexibility and rarely planning for it, despite a pragmatic sense that it was necessary to support concept understanding in knowledge mediating processes and for affective purposes, particularly in oral interaction.

This paper indicates the need for CLIL and EMI lecturers to be supported in developing coherent linguistic teaching and assessment regimes for their courses, which enable them to actively conceptualise the role of students' linguistic repertoires in the multilingual space of the CLIL classroom.

### References:

Coyle D., Hood P., & Marsh D (2010). *CLIL: Content and language integrated learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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### About the author:

Pending.

## *10. Alexander De Soete - Translanguaging in South African Tertiary Education*

### Abstract:

Twenty-five years after the birth of a democratic South Africa, it has become clear that the legislative provision for multilingualism in education does not match the facts on the ground (Heugh, 1999; Probyn, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2007; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2013). Effectively incorporating the wide variety of home languages spoken by the students in a way that is beneficial to their educational outcomes, is currently one of the biggest challenges in the country's tertiary education (Slembrouck, Valcke, Verdoolaege, 2013, p. 381). In order to fully exploit the students' linguistic repertoires and properly recognize multilingualism as a resource for epistemological access, Stroud and Kerfoot point to the concept of translanguaging, believing that it could lead to "scaffolding and deepening conceptual understanding in disciplinary subjects" when applied in university classrooms (2013, p. 402). In my PhD research project, I will conduct a multi-perspective analysis of the effects of translanguaging in South African tertiary education through means of a pedagogical intervention at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The impact of translanguaging will be studied from three different points of view. Its effect on student retention and comprehension of class materials will be evaluated through achievement tests, while an interactional analysis aims to shed light on the influence on classroom dynamics. Finally, an attitudinal survey is used to determine the ramifications of this pedagogic tool in terms of student well-being. In this paper, I will present preliminary results after a first period of field work at the UWC. I will focus particularly on a linguistic ethnographic description of the setting for the pedagogical intervention, in order to reach an understanding of the way in which educational and social interaction take shape in this particular environment. Special attention will be paid to context-specific factors which influence classroom interaction, monolingual practices and practices of translanguaging which are already established and/or recognized, etc.

### References:

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- Stroud, C., Kerfoot, C. (2013). Towards rethinking multilingualism and language policy for academic literacies. *Linguistics and Education*, 24, 396-405.

### About the author:

Alexander De Soete is a PhD candidate and junior lecturer at Ghent University and the University of the Western Cape, where he is affiliated with UWC's Center for Multilingualism and Diversity. His research interests are situated in the field of sociolinguistics, and he is particularly interested in multilingualism and epistemological access in tertiary education.

## *11. Thijs Gillioen - My Peer Said It Was Great but My Teacher Failed Me. Comparing Student and Teacher Feedback on Academic Presentations in EFL Higher Education*

### Abstract:

At Ghent University, second-bachelor students in Literature & Linguistics are required to present at least two academic presentations as part of their academic proficiency course. The assessment of these presentations is shared between the teacher and the students themselves, via a combined system of both teacher and peer assessment. While previous studies support the learning value (e.g. Topping, 1998) of peer assessment and its validity in fields such as writing skills (e.g. Topping, 1998; Cho *et al.*, 2006), its effect on oral presentation skills is less studied (De Grez *et al.*, 2012). However, some evidence has been found towards its usefulness, for example in Cheng & Warren's study (2005), which argued that peer assessment can help improve presentation performance. In spite of these findings, however, teachers in the field often note that scores by peers are frequently significantly higher than those by teachers, raising questions about validity (De Grez *et al.*, 2008). Although social factors and peer pressure could influence students' assessment, the trend found in my setting was consistent across peer groups, which raises the question if students could have a different conceptualisation of what constitutes an "adequate" presentation compared to teachers. In this paper presentation, I will discuss a project in which I analysed, and compared, teacher and peer feedback on an academic presentation. Data were collected during the students' end-of-year presentation assignment. Using the same assessment criteria, teachers and peers gave feedback and scores. The peer and teacher feedback for a number of students was compared to find aspects of presentation skills in which the feedback was similar, and areas in which it was not. Implications for teachers and peer feedback will be discussed.

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### About the author:

Thijs Gillioen is a language instructor at Ghent University (Belgium). He is responsible for teaching writing, research and speaking skills to first and second-year undergraduate students of English. His past work experiences include teaching Dutch language proficiency at HoGent and Arteveldehogeschool, teaching English language proficiency at KULeuven and Odisee, and teacher training at Arteveldehogeschool. His research interests include (peer) feedback, writing skills and presentation skills.



## *12. Annabel Fernandez - Stakeholders' Beliefs about Disciplinary Language Skills in Problem-Based Learning Sessions Through the Medium of English*

### Abstract:

Teaching content through the medium of English (EMI) is rapidly growing in higher education in Europe (Wächter & Maiworm 2014). This growth is not free of tensions and contradictions regarding students' and lecturers' expectations for EMI. This content teaching and learning via the medium of another language creates a new learning environment with shifts in pedagogical focus and evolving roles for teachers. The present study focuses on disciplinary-specific oral classroom discourse in Problem-Based Learning (PBL) sessions conducted through EMI in sharp contrast with traditional teacher-fronted lecturing. Problem Based Learning (PBL) was designed in the 1960s in Canada in medical education as a student-centred (Barrows 1996), self-directed and collaborative learning approach to engage a small group of students in active learning and knowledge construction. As it is through dialogic interaction that students build up and extend their critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills (Aguilar 2016:336), the focus of my approach is on interaction in EMI in Higher Education, which is a poorly researched field (Macaro et al. 2018).

The setting analysed is the Nursing Faculty at the University of Girona (Catalonia, Spain), where undergraduate students take part in highly dialogic PBL sessions that place student-student and student-teacher interaction at the centre (Basturkmen 2016). This study focuses on teachers' and students' beliefs (Borg 2003) around EMI goals, benefits and drawbacks. To pursue this objective, data was collected from semi-structured interviews with PBL stakeholders (students, tutors and Faculty management). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically in order to report on teachers' and students' perceptions. The analysis shows there is a mismatch between teachers' and students' expectations and needs: while students expect to develop disciplinary language skills in English, lecturers do not perceive themselves as teachers of disciplinary English (Airey 2014; Aguilar 2017). Opportunities of developing disciplinary English faced both by students and academic staff are discussed. In the conclusions measures are put forward to inform pedagogical practices in EMI settings in Southern European universities...

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*About the author:*

Annabel Fernandez graduated in Sociology at the Autonomia de Barcelona after spending an academic year at the University of East London on an Erasmus programme. She holds an MA in TEFL (Universidad de Alcalá) and a Masters in Teaching English for Academic Purposes (University of Glasgow). She has taught English as a Foreign Language at various levels for over 20 years in Catalonia, she has also worked as an EAP tutor in a pre-sessional course at the University of Bristol and is a part-time lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Girona. As a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics at the University of Lleida, her research field is English as a Medium of Instruction in Higher Education in Catalonia.

## CONFERENCE STREAM 2 - LITERARY STUDIES

### *Decolonizing English Literature*

The literary studies stream takes up the theme of decolonization, which has attracted renewed attention in the wake of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in Cape Town and Oxford. Contestations over the legacies of European colonialism have begun to coalesce around calls to “decolonize” public spaces, institutions, curricula, and forms of knowledge. Decolonization is understood here as a process of challenging the cultural forces that had helped maintain the colonial system and that remain even after the formal end of colonial rule. English departments have been a frequent target of decolonization protests in recent years, with students at universities such as Cambridge and Yale urging faculty to diversify the English literature curriculum in highly-publicized campaigns. We invite papers that explore issues of decolonization in relation to (the teaching of) literatures in English, whether in terms of processes of canon (de)formation, the development of decolonizing reading practices, questions of diversity and equity addressed in specific literary texts, the contemporary resonance of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's seminal *Decolonising the Mind* and other key theoretical works, or the pedagogical implications of adopting a decolonizing stance in the literature classroom. Presenters are encouraged but not required to reflect on the significance and relevance of the Belgian historical and educational contexts in their papers.

Convenor (literary studies): [Stef.Craps@ugent.be](mailto:Stef.Craps@ugent.be)

*Plenary session: Ankhi Mukherjee - Decolonising Literature: Delayed Decodings*

*Abstract:*

Using an influential term from Conrad studies, my talk examines the emergence of the decolonisation debate at the putative time of the postcolonial in global universities. Drawing on the works of Fanon, Achebe, Morrison, and others, I present a mosaic of experiential and critical observations about being an Indian-born scholar, literary critic, and teacher of English language and literature at the University of Oxford.

*About the author:*

Ankhi Mukherjee is Professor of English and World Literatures at the University of Oxford. She is the author of *Aesthetic Hysteria* (2007) and *What Is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon* (2014), which won the British Academy prize for English Literature. Mukherjee works on Victorian literature and culture, contemporary British and Anglophone literature, postcolonial studies, and intellectual history. She has published widely in peer-reviewed journals such as *PMLA*, *MLQ*, *Contemporary Literature*, and others. She is the editor of *After Lacan* and the co-editor of *A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture*. Mukherjee's current book project is titled *Unseen City: The Psychic Life of Poverty in Mumbai, London, and New York*.

## ***1. Elisabeth Bekers - Decolonising the Study of Literature in English: Work in Progress***

### *Abstract:*

Over the last decade the rallying call for “decolonising the university” has intensified and questions such as “why is my professor still not black” and “why is my curriculum white” have been formulated with increasing insistence, also in Belgium (e.g. “De dekoloniale universiteit”, Kaaithheater, 4 april 2019). In the field of literary studies, postcolonial criticism has done much to introduce writings and perspectives that were previously excluded. This year’s thirtieth anniversary of the publication of the seminal work in postcolonial literary criticism, *The Empire Writes Back* (Routledge 1989) by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is a timely occasion to take stock of these developments. Guided by Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s call for “decolonising the mind” (1986), I examine the study of literature in English in the Low Countries, including my own practices as a scholar and teacher of anglophone (postcolonial) literature with a strong interest in authors of African descent and in knowledge and canon formation. True enough, more than half a century after independence swept across many of Europe’s colonies in Africa and the Empire Windrush’s arrival in London led to what Jamaican poet Louise Bennett pithily termed the colonisation of Britain in reverse (“colonizin/Englan in Reverse”), literature in English has never been more diverse, as is illustrated by the anglophone Noble Prize winners. However, to what extent have literary scholarship and university curricula in literary studies really become decolonized? To what extent do the very existence of scholarly fields such as postcolonial literature and literature of migration also perpetuate the colonial mindsets they challenge? How may our scholarly and teaching practices as well as our university’s curricula help to decolonize (the teaching of) literature in English, and by extension in other European languages? How can we, as anglicists in higher education in a Belgian context, contribute to the decolonization of the study of literature in English?

### *About the author:*

Elisabeth Bekers is Lecturer of British and Postcolonial Literature at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Her research focuses on literature from Africa and its diasporas, with a special interest in image and knowledge production, canon formation and intersectionality. Currently she is working on Black British women’s literature (especially neo-slave narratives) and, as part of an international network, on the ways in which Europe has been imagined in literature from across the globe. She is the author of a comparative study of African and African-American literature (1960-2000) on female genital excision (*Rising Anthills*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2010) and co-editor of several volumes and special issues, including *Critical Interrogations of the Interrelation of Creativity and Captivity (Life Writing)*, Taylor and Francis [2018](#), a bilingual book on Brussels and literature entitled *Brussel schrijven/ Écrire Bruxelles* (ASP-VUB Press [2016](#)), *Imaginary Europes: Imaginary Europes (Journal of Postcolonial Writing)*, Taylor and Francis [2015](#); selected as SPIB by Routledge [2016](#) (pb 2019) and a *Matatu* volume on *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe* (Rodopi/Brill [2009](#)). She is editor of the *Black British Women Writers* website ([www.vub.ac.be/TALK/BBWW](http://www.vub.ac.be/TALK/BBWW)) and co-director of the international Platform for Postcolonial Readings for junior scholars.

## ***2. Kathleen Gysels - "To the Gentenaars Who Died in the Congo Free State": On Rhizomatic Linkages between Explorers and Researchers in the Same Family (the Van de Velde and Kesteloot Dynasties, Explorers of the Belgian Congo)***

### **Abstract:**

My paper deals first of all with the forgotten monuments in Ghent for the Belgian Congo. At the back of the Zuidpark in Ghent, hidden behind hedges and trees are 2 monuments. The first one is a statue of Leopold II, entitled "To the city of Ghent, the "Jaarbeurs der Vlaanderen", 10th Anniversary 1955". The other is a horizontal star-shaped stone with names and dates. The inscription reads "Gentenaars died in Congo before 1908 - Au (sic) Gantois morts au Congo avant 1908". It has the names of the two VAN DE VELDE brothers, Liévin (1850-1888) and Joseph (1855-1882), NOT related to the famous architect of the UGhent book tower (BOEKENTOREN) Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957)).

A century after Joseph Van de Velde's untimely passing in the "heart of darkness", the French-speaking Belgian Lilyan KESTELOOT (1935-2018) was the author of seminal essays on French-speaking authors from the French colonies worldwide. The author and co-author of a hundred essays and articles, Kesteloot was born in Brussels into a family where both her father, grandfather and great-grandfathers on mothers' side had strong links with the colonial history. Her thirst for knowledge and radical activism against the French colonizing system, the politics of assimilation and alienation of the "indigenous populations" rapidly made her into an icon of a postcolonial literary history. The origins of her research are to be found partly in her family tree: her maternal great-grandmother had left pictures and letters to her mother and recounted the story of the two brothers who explored "the Kongo" and died there from tropical disease. My "story" is one of the many recent colonial rhizomes coming to the surface: in the same way as Roland Barthes, the famous author of *Mythologies* (among some of the examples, "Le Nègre salue la tricolore") has a grandfather whose accumulated wealth in the "AOF", granting his grandson the means to dedicate himself to literature (like Graham Greene and James Orwell in England, both having inherited fortunes thanks to their relatives dealing with the British Empire).

Through the linkages between the pioneering scholar for French-Caribbean, Haitian and African literature from the Négritude movement onwards to today and the early explorers of what would become the Congo belge, I want to unravel how one generation evolved into the next generations, radically shifting perspectives, ideologies and convictions. The question then arises if Kesteloot's fierce anti-colonialism is in part to be interpreted as a means to pay tribute to the colonized and as a symbolic gesture of "rachat" and "repentance".

### **About the author:**

Gysels Kathleen teaches African and Jewish Diaspora literatures at Antwerp University. As a comparatist, she has confronted French-speaking to English-speaking voices of the African and Jewish Diasporas. She published her Ph.D (*Filles de Solitude: essai sur l'identité antillaise dans les autobiographies fictives de Simone et André Schwarz-Bart* (1996)) and many special issues and articles on Caribbean authors. Some of her books are *Passes et impasses dans le comparatisme postcolonial caribéen: Cinq traverses* (Honoré Champion, 2010), *Marrane et Marronne: la coécriture réversible d'André et Simone Schwarz-Bart* (Brill, 2014), and *'Black-Label' ou les déboires de Léon-Gontran Damas* (Passage(s), 2016). Two monographs on the third man of Négritude are under press, dealing with posthumous poetry, and with the poet's heritage in the politics of Christiane Taubira (Memory Laws, Gay Marriage, Preservation of Amerindian Culture and Communities, Memorials and Museums on Post/Colonial Issues, such as the Transportation Camp in French Guiana).

Her articles on Jewish themes appeared in *European Judaism*, *Prooftext*, *Yod* and *Pardès*. A new research project deals with the invisibility of Jews in Caribbean literature in the four linguistic traditions.

### ***3. Mahlu Mertens & Gry Ulstein - Decolonizing Anthropos: An Econarratological Approach to Teaching English Literature in the Anthropocene***

#### *Abstract:*

In her seminal *The Storyworld Accord* (2015), Erin James marries postcolonial studies with ecocriticism and narratology, suggesting that “engagement with storyworlds stands to foster real-world understanding among readers by opening up channels of communication concerning different environmental experiences across space, time, and culture” (James xv). With James’s “econarratology” as our model, in this paper we ask what it might mean to decolonize the syllabus of English literature in the context of the Anthropocene.

By 2019, “Anthropocene” is more than a buzzword. Though not yet formalized as the name of our current geological age (marked by detrimental human activity measurable on the scale of geo-history), it has taken on a dominant presence in the critical landscape, and particularly within the humanities. One of the main concerns with the concept, however, is its undifferentiated grouping-together of all of humanity, in a way that easily ignores structural differences related to class, race, gender, and colonialism. This prospect becomes particularly precarious when considering questions of power, responsibility, and agency across cultures: who pays the greater price for the effects of global climate change—and for the many strategies currently being suggested or implemented to remedy the situation?

While the question of differentiation haunts the Anthropocene discourse, so-called “climate change fiction” has become a cutting-edge topic within literary studies. And while efforts to decolonize the syllabus are becoming increasingly commonplace at universities internationally—with The American Society for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) occupying a leading role, the most widely read fiction writers engaging with Anthropocene issues such as climate change are overwhelmingly white and “Western.”

How can we, as teachers of English literature and scholars of climate change fiction, adopt James’s decolonizing approach to narrative and use it to communicate the representation of Anthropocene issues in an ethical manner? By discussing two novels, Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013) and Aaron Thier’s *Mr. Eternity* (2016), we will explore how we might teach climate change fiction without reiterating the structural inequalities and hierarchical violence of the imperialist canon. In this discussion we distinguish three levels at which decolonization can be put into practice: the level of the corpus (selection of primary texts), the level of the storyworld of individual texts, and the level of the teacher’s framework.

#### *About the author:*

Mahlu Mertens is a literary scholar, teacher, and published poet. Currently she is working on a PhD project at Ghent University that explores how climate change literature that resists the typical form of the post-apocalyptic climate dystopia may provide alternative ways of narrating anthropogenic climate change that are more apt to represent this multi-faceted and far-reaching phenomenon. Her research interests are contemporary fiction and the environmental humanities in general, and climate change fiction and eco-theatre in particular.

Gry Ulstein is a PhD candidate and teacher at Ghent University, where she is also a member of the ERC-funded project “Narrating the Mesh” (NARMESH). NARMESH studies the representation of nonhuman realities and environmental issues such as climate change in contemporary literature and oral storytelling, and explores the ways in which narrative invites readers to think about and engage with ecological issues from different perspectives. Gry is particularly interested in contemporary weird literature as an expression of ecological anxieties.

#### *4. Riaan Oppelt - English Studies and Blended Re-Learning in South Africa*

##### *Abstract:*

Currently, English Studies in South Africa faces stronger calls for decolonisation of its Western canonical content and this paper looks at different theoretical approaches applied at various departments across South Africa in attempts to gauge what some of the responses have been. This study also concentrates on how English Studies evolved in South Africa and how English Studies now adjusts at a time when academics in Humanities are tasked by the state with increasing vocational thrust for students. To assist any new frameworks, we may have to consider the role of Blended Learning in curriculum change and curriculum design. Blended Learning platforms could assist the common challenges that have been faced by English Studies throughout its history in South Africa, such as the improvement of reading and writing skills alongside developing the critical literacy of English. Taken with the questions of decolonisation, there could be room for innovation in English Studies by drawing on its past and assessing its present. This paper also presents a brief overview of some of the recent approaches taken by different English departments in South Africa concerning Blended Learning and/or teaching innovation.

##### *About the author:*

Riaan Oppelt is a lecturer in English at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He was an inaugural Mandela Rhodes Scholar in 2005 and finished his PhD on the anti-Nationalist work of Afrikaans writer Louis Leipoldt in 2012. He was part of the international research group Trajectories of Modernity (TRAMOD) at the University of Barcelona in 2013 and is currently part of the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF). He has written on South African theatre, precarity and film. His research interests are Modernity/Modernism, South African Literature and Cultural Studies and he is currently writing on Post-Truth Politics.



## 5. Laura Michiels – “A Sense of Being the Foreign-”: Unlearning Western Privilege in J. T. Rogers’s *The Overwhelming*

### Abstract:

The destructive consequences of colonialism have always been of interest to American playwright J.T. Rogers. In 2009, London’s Tricycle Theatre asked him to contribute a play to the cycle “The Great Game: Afghanistan”, named after the clash between British and Russian imperial ambitions during the nineteenth century. Rogers dropped out because he developed his short sketch into a full-length play: *Blood and Gifts*, which details events in Afghanistan from 1981 until 1991. Its main characters are a CIA agent, an MI6 operative and an Afghan warlord, supported by the Americans through the Pakistani secret service. While the US are meddling in the region to help the Afghans best their Cold War enemy, a Russian KGB agent points out that this is not the first time the country is used as a pawn by the West. He tells the British MI6 operative that “humiliation is what you *should* feel, comrade Craig. This part of the world, where your imperial lust led you and yours to carve borders over which blood is still being shed, what else but humiliation *could* you feel?” (BG 55). For the purposes of this paper, I would like to look at Rogers’s play *The Overwhelming* (2006). It traces the events leading up to the Rwandan genocide, mainly by means of an American family trying to find their way in the confusing country they have travelled to. The protagonist Jack is an American professor, who has been invited to Rwanda by the Tutsi doctor Joseph Gasana. Jack brings along his family, including his seventeen-year-old son Geoffrey, because he is convinced that a stay in Rwanda will be a similar kind of experience to his own semester abroad in Sweden and teach the boy about empathy. Clearly, Jack himself has several lessons to learn, as characters repeatedly point out that Rwanda is nothing like Sweden. The American visitors lose their foothold, since they are unable to make sense of the intricacies of the political conflict brewing underneath the surface, until they finally find themselves overwhelmed. The play keeps on returning to questions of responsibility: Jack is outraged that the UN is not interested in preventing the upcoming killings, while his wife is told by a French diplomat that it is childish to blame the current turmoil on the legacy of Belgian colonialism. Even though the play’s characters may in the end not be able fully to let go of their sense of privilege, perhaps we as audience can learn from their failure.

### About the author:

Laura Michiels works as a guest lecturer in the Department of Literature at the University of Antwerp, where she teaches courses about nineteenth-century literature in English, literary theory from the perspective of gender and sexuality as well as literary portrayals of New York City. She obtained a PhD from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2015, with a dissertation about metatheatrical aspects to Tennessee Williams’s plays. Her current research focuses on contemporary American political theatre, mainly by Tony Kushner, Naomi Wallace and J.T. Rogers. Her monograph about Tennessee Williams’s metatheatre will be published by McFarland in October 2020.

## *6. Birgir Vanwesenbeeck – “A Sense of Being the Foreign-”: Unlearning Western Privilege in J. T. Rogers’s The Overwhelming*

### Abstract:

Whoever surveys the field of literary studies today cannot help but be struck by the renewed interest in the concept of world literature, and the concomitant obligatory nods to the transnational, the Republic of Letters, and the question of translation. Coming almost two hundred years after Goethe coined the term, this cooptation of world literature by contemporary scholars, many of them trained as Americanists or English literature specialists, is far from unproblematic, as a host of both recent and older critics (e.g. Apter, Mufti, Spivak) has argued. Indeed, what is often lacking from these analyses, as Aamir Mufti has most thoroughly shown, is a willingness to call the Anglophone vantage point itself into question. To “forget English,” as the title of Mufti’s book urges scholars to do highlights the importance of acknowledging the historical-ideological weight that comes with the act of writing and thinking about the world in English. It is to actively work through these linguistic legacies, to recognize the various losses attached to them, and to integrate other languages into the analysis. It is, in short, to be aware of the fact that one “chooses” English even if, or perhaps better put, particularly when that language constitutes one’s only verbal medium of access to the world.

This paper will argue that such linguistic awareness constitutes a key-feature of a literary corpus that, oddly enough, has thus far been excluded from discussions of world literature both past and present, namely that of African American writing. More specifically, I will argue that what is pertinent to some of the most significant African American writing, from W.E.B. Du Bois to Colson Whitehead, is the attempt to bear witness to what one might call the “many dozens gone,” i.e. the African languages lost in the trauma of the Middle Passage and of American slavery. How does one testify to linguistic losses that can no longer be recovered in the present? What does it mean to confront or work through such losses? And, perhaps most pressingly, what does it mean to do so in English? If the relative insufficiency of the English language to capture the colonial subject’s experience has long constituted a hallmark of postcolonial studies, this linguistic reflex is yet to receive its due within African American studies. Whereas black studies have traditionally emphasized the linguistic variety within English—i.e. what Henry Louis Gates Jr., in *The Signifying Monkey*, famously hails as the contemporary “thriving” of the black English vernacular—then the African American writers studied in my paper—Dubois, Baldwin, Whitehead—uncover a rather more somber tradition, one where the emphasis lies on loss, not richness, and on the attempt to approach the English language from without.

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*About the author:*

Pending.

**7. Inge Brinkman – *Gikuyu and English: Colonial and Post-colonial Debates on Language, Education and (De)colonisation through the Works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Gakaara wa Wanjaũ (Kenya)***

Abstract:

In his famous essay *Decolonising the mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o singles out one Kenyan author in particular whose work formed a source of inspiration for him, namely Gakaara wa Wanjaũ. Gakaara had been publishing in Gikuyu since the 1940s and reached a massive audience in Kenya with his popular market literature. Conform his own ideas on language and politics, Ngũgĩ asserts that Gakaara 'was jailed by the British for the ten years between 1952 and 1962 because of his writing in Gikuyu' and that 'he never broke his faith in the possibilities of Kenya's national languages' (24).

While Ngũgĩ's stance in the postcolonial language debate, precisely through publications in English, has attracted international attention, Gakaara's notions of language and politics have been left unstudied. How did the debate on language, education and (post)colonialism develop in Kenya itself? In what ways did the concerns, parameters and axes of debate differ from or converge with the international ones?

The paper seeks to address these questions through the prism of the conversation between these two Kenyan intellectuals: one internationally known with a radical, leftist point-of-view, the other a self-made man largely engaged with Kenyan concerns. This conversational approach will help us to steer away from a generalised, monolithic image of 'decolonisation', and view decolonisation in terms of a contextual and historical process that dynamically relates local and global concerns at once.

The paper will draw not only the publications of Ngũgĩ and Gakaara, but also on the unpublished Gakaara papers, assembled by Derek Peterson.

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Pugliese, Cristiana, 'The Organic Vernacular Intellectual in Kenya: Gakaara wa Wanjau',

*About the author:*

Pending.

## *8. Zhuyun Song – Chinese Semi-Colonial History and Decolonization in Chinese European Literature of the Late Twentieth Century*

### Abstract:

From the First Opium War (1840) to the foundation of the People's Republic of China (1949), modern China experienced a period of political turmoil in which Western powers colonized major port cities along the Chinese east coast and undermined the authority of the central government. This semi-colonization not only affected China's national politics and economics, but also greatly enhanced the West's cultural influence in the Far East. Especially since the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the deep-rooted Chinese tradition of Confucianism has been consistently challenged by Western ideals of democracy and science, forcing China to negotiate the conflicting demands of tradition and modernity, localization and globalization, nationalism and westernization. These sociocultural changes were observed and experienced also by Chinese intellectuals who were born in China and had migrated to Europe, most notably by late twentieth-century Chinese-European literary authors.

This paper focuses on Gao Xingjian (1940- ), François Cheng (1929- ) and Hong Ying (1962- ) and demonstrates how they, in *Soul Mountain* (2000), *The River Below* (2000) and *Daughter of the River* (1997) respectively, address the great influence of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Opening-Up Policy (1978). In both East and West, the former has been seen as damaging China's ancient cultural tradition, whilst the latter is thought to be responsible for the increasing westernization of Chinese culture. However, I argue that the three authors' writing questions the West's Orientalist cliché of China as a backward country marked by strong political and cultural suppression and, instead, builds on deeply-rooted Chinese perspectives of the world and nature. By integrating Daoist theories centred on Dao ('the way'), Zi-ran ('naturalness') and Wu-wei ('non- action') into the self-narrated life journeys of their protagonists, the Chinese-European authors under review show the diversity, dynamics and universality of Chinese cultural values and thus transcend the stereotypical East/West dichotomy. Decolonization in their writing, therefore, is not so much a question of eliminating Western colonial influence. I will demonstrate that it is rather a positive portrayal of Chinese people's natural pursuit of freedom and harmony, whereby the colonial legacy is purified and absorbed into the long river of Chinese cultural development.

### About the author:

Zhuyun Song is a PhD candidate in Linguistics and Literary Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and a member of the VUB Centre for Literary and Intermedial Crossings (CLIC). In 2017, she obtained a Master's Degree in Philosophy from Tongji University (Shanghai, China) with a thesis about Edward W. Said. As a junior researcher in the Cultural Industries Institute in the School of Humanity (Tongji U), she worked on cultural and literature programs and published several papers about Chinese diaspora writing. Currently, she is working towards a PhD on Chinese-European literature under the supervision of Prof. dr. Elisabeth Bekers (VUB). She is currently coordinator of the Study Group for Literature and Culture (WOLEC) for and by junior researchers of CLIC and a board member of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association of Brussels (CSAB), which closely works with Chinese Embassy in Belgium and Mission of the PRC to the European Union.

## PANEL DISCUSSION – English in Higher Education

The conference will come to a close with a panel discussion on the role of English in higher education.

Participants:

- Prof. Dr. Freek van de Velde (Language variation and change, KU Leuven);
- Prof. Dr. Eline Zenner (Language borrowing and the social functions of languages, KU Leuven);
- Mr. Frederik De Decker (Head of internationalisation, Ghent University);
- Dr. Evy Woumans (Bilingualism and cognition, Ghent University & UCLouvain).

Panel coordinator:

- Prof. Dr. Bernard De Clerck (BAAHE President).