Sociological Implications of English as an International Language in Music Education

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Internationalization and globalization have created a global music education community which is not only linked by similar ideas, but also shares a common language. English functions as a global language and facilitates the international discourse in music education. While it is good to have a common language supporting international dialogue, it also has its clear downsides, e.g., in terms of the dominance of Anglo-American terminology and related music education concepts. In order to overcome this hegemony of Anglo-American music education, it is crucial to develop sensitivity towards the diversity of music education and research traditions and the challenges and opportunities of English as a global language in international music education. By using approaches from sociolinguistics and English for academic purposes, this paper argues for linguistic and cultural diversity in international music education research.

Keywords: internationalization, language, sociology of music education, sociolinguistics

The internationalization of music education has created a global music education community which appears to be perfectly linked by similar visions and by English as a common language. It does not seem to matter if a music teacher or scholar is from Africa or Poland. As long as they are able to speak English, they appear to communicate without problems. While in times of globalization it is certainly necessary to have English as a lingua franca, the use of English raises some issues that can easily be overlooked. First, it is not possible to translate ideas completely adequately into another language. Often, not only vocabulary is missing, but rhetorical practices vary across cultures. Second, terminology in music education also varies internationally, depending on

distinctive music education cultures, concepts and approaches in respective countries. Non-native English speakers often have to adapt their ideas to vocabulary and concepts which are available in English, even though there might be substantial inconsistencies. The German terms Didaktik and Bildung are well-known examples for these problems in international music education. Third, notions of good writing or speaking in international music education do often follow Anglo-American standards, not only regarding grammar, but also regarding the structure of papers or presentations. This puts non-native English speakers who are not familiar with these standards in a difficult position. Fourth, as result of the issues mentioned above, the international politics of publishing and peer review in music education clearly favor scholars from some countries and displace others to the margin, depending on their language abilities and the international audience’s potential interest.

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities of English as common language in international music education. By utilizing research and approaches from globalization studies, sociological and sociolinguistic research as well as English for academic purposes, this article aims to offer new perspectives for the internationalization of music education. For the future of music education, it will be crucial to appreciate the richness and uniqueness of various music education traditions and also scholarly cultures. Research addressing these global issues will be paramount in order to shape the internationalization of music education in a way which facilitates the worldwide improvement of music education.

This study investigates the sociological implications of English as an international language in music education from different perspectives: The first section discusses the general implications of English as a global language. The second part is concerned with English as an academic language in music education, investigating various issues in terminology, translation and cultural differences in academic writing. This leads to reflecting the power of reviewers and editors as gatekeepers. The final section of this paper makes suggestions for dealing with the issue of English as a global language in a culturally sensitive way.

**English as a global language**

For some time, English has been a global language, facilitating communication worldwide. While a global language is certainly a language spoken by many people, also being an official language in many countries and organizations, it is not only the number of native speakers which makes a language to a global language. If this were the case, Chinese would be the global language of choice. Rather, it is the power possessed by a country and the people who speak a language that

determines a global language. Throughout history, there has always been a linkage between language and dominance. Already in antiquity, Latin as “global” language was spoken throughout the respective empire. The influence of military, political and economic power on the use of language is well known and became obvious with regard to English from the end of the 18th century at the latest. John Adam stated in 1780 as part of his proposal for an American language academy:¹

English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries more generally the language of the world than Latin was in the last or French is in the present age.

As we know today, Adam’s linguistic prophecy was right: English dominates various parts of life and business internationally as a global language. It is the language of international relations and organizations (e.g., United Nations, World Bank), is used in media, sciences, academia, travel or air safety. It facilitates communication worldwide, even though the English spoken internationally is neither British nor American English, but an international version, called English as lingua franca (ELF): It is an artificial language which does not belong to a specific country or nation. But native speakers still have, because of their language ability, the chance to dominate discourses.

However, the worldwide hegemony of English as lingua franca has also been criticized. Does English extinguish other languages, thereby creating a monolingual world? There are certainly two different perspectives on this issue. The first one sees English as “an evil and threatening creature,”² the second one understands English as a simple tool, free of expressing the cultural or linguistic identity of the speaker. When English is thought to be evil, researchers use interesting metaphors to characterize its danger as Wilton identifies: English is seen as the “killer language,” “Lingua Frankensteinia,” “Tyrannosaurus Rex,” or “Hydra.”³ These metaphors imply a personification of English as a living organism. This was a common conceptualization of language in the 19th century, but today, it is certainly not appropriate any more. However, Phillipson states:⁴

English may be seen as a kind of a linguistic cuckoo, taking over where other breeds of language have historically nested and acquired territorial rights, and obliging non-native speakers of English to acquire the behavioral habits and linguistic forms of English.

The metaphor of English as a cuckoo assigns a language the rights and the intentions of a living being, trying to destroy other “breeds.” But in fact, English as lingua franca is only a language and therefore a tool. It facilitates communication and does not intend to actively extinguish other languages. A good example for this role as global language is Latin as former lingua franca: it was transformed into new languages such as the Romance languages.⁵ However, the fear of English as a killer language is particularly present in higher education, for instance in Germany.

English as a lingua franca in higher education and music education

In Germany, a controversial discussion about English as a lingua franca in higher education has been going on for some time now. Various interest groups and organizations participate in this discourse, particularly those supporting German as an academic language, such as the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers (Deutscher Hochschulverband), the German Rectors’ Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz) or the Taskforce for German as an Academic Language (Arbeitskreis Deutsch als Wissenschaftssprache). Many academics fear that the frequent use of English as an academic language, particularly in the natural sciences, could lead to problems in international scholarly communication, because non-native speakers are often not able to articulate their ideas properly and therefore oversimplify their thoughts. This could foster the hegemony of English native speakers, using their eloquence to dominate the scholarly discourse.

Promoting English as a lingua franca, including master’s programs in the sciences at German universities using English as the language of choice, might also cause problems for the advancement of German as an academic language, particularly in terms of the constant development of new terminology. If English terms are widely used for newly discovered facts, there is no need to create new German terms. While this discussion certainly tends to be one-sided, with a tendency towards doom-mongering, it is nevertheless important to take these issues into account, particularly because this discussion is meanwhile international. Even though it is a merely general discussion, in some aspects particularly focused on the natural sciences, it is interesting to apply some of this critique to other fields of research, such as music education.

Terminology and translation

English as an academic language certainly facilitates communication, but also suggests that there are no differences between the original language and the English translation. But in fact, there are. As sociolinguistic research indicates, the meaning of words changes through translations. In specialized language sectors such as music education terminology, it is even worse. While in empirical, psychological or ethnomusicological research, there is rarely a problem with the use of English because Anglo-American research dominates these fields, there are other areas of research, such as music education, where many terms cannot be translated literally. There are too many different music education systems with technical terms whose meaning can verbally only be approached approximately, using paraphrases with many words. Examples are the German terms Didaktik or Bildung: Didaktik is the art and science of teaching, encompassing both theory and practice. It is at the core of German music education programs and music teaching.

However, it is hard to translate what Didaktik means, because of the different meaning of the word “didactic” in English, mostly describing an authoritarian teaching style. This is completely different from the student-centered or action-oriented models of music teaching and learning that the German Didaktik of music offers, also related to Bildung. Bildung is another term which needs many English words for explanation. Originally, Bildung means formation or cultivation. It has a long history at the core of German education and music education. In music education, it is often used linked to aesthetics in terms of aesthetische Bildung (aesthetic education), fostering the cultivation of an aesthetically educated, self-determined and knowledgeable individual. While even this rudimentary description takes many words, there is an additional problem regarding the translation and this is the history of the English term aesthetic education in Anglo-American music education, in relation to Bennett Reimer’s philosophy of music education and David Elliott’s critique. In Germany, aesthetic education is a relatively neutral and even positive term, describing a student-centered and action-oriented approach of music education. The two examples Didaktik and Bildung indicate that there clearly is a need for research in comparative music education, addressing the linguistic issues affecting the internationalization of music education.

Aside from the problem of translation, another interesting question is how we should deal with national terminology in international music education. Should we, for instance, eliminate German or French terms in favor of the international Anglo-American terminology? This would certainly not be a wise choice. While we value musics of the world in music education classrooms, it seems to be the time to start valuing and acknowledging different terms and traditions in music education and research. The internationalization and globalization of music education should be a process acknowledging diversity. It should not be a development eliminating the variety of terminology, concepts and approaches by implementing English everywhere. Internationalization should be more than Americanization. Therefore, it might be time to argue for a transcultural and international terminology in music education, using terms from various languages. This would certainly underline that we are an international music education community, which acknowledges the diversity of scholarly cultures and differences in academic writing.

**Cultural differences in academic writing and speaking**

Rhetorical practices vary across cultures. Anna Mauranen notes that academics who publish in a foreign language face not only problems with grammar and lexis, but also with rhetorical practices. They usually have a different notion of effective
rhetorics and are unaware of the differences in relation to English. Robert Kaplan, the pioneer in contrastive rhetoric, says:

Rhetoric [...] is not universal [...], but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture.

The different rhetorical choices of non-native speakers may seem to English native speakers sometimes to be an inability not only to write and speak correctly, but also to think logically. For people not familiar with a foreign language, it might be easy to confuse the clarity of linguistic expression with the clarity of thinking. But when speaking or writing in a foreign language, we cannot easily change our rhetorical strategies: Native rhetoric is so fundamental to a writer’s internationalized beliefs about writing that it is difficult to change without deliberate effort and awareness of differences.

It is important to realize that every writer is socialized into a specific writing culture and that there might be contrasting notions about rhetorical or textual strategies, depending on the respective language and writing culture. It is difficult to change these strategies when speaking another language. Particularly in scholarly discourse, where linguistic precision is necessary, it can lead to confusions, especially if listeners are not familiar with the problems encountered by scholars using English as an academic language. Being able to speak a second language can help to understand the problems which many international scholars encounter.

As a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA, United States, I had a similar experience. I had to get used to a new music education system, to learn a completely new terminology and to acquaint myself with Anglo-American research. By using English words, I had to adjust my German knowledge about music education to the English terminology and the ways of expressing thoughts the English language offered. However, there were many things for which no direct or one-to-one translation was available, such as Didaktik and Bildung, as mentioned above. Due to the fact that the English language, even if I would have been perfectly able to speak it, did not offer me sufficient terminology to express my German ideas, I often felt like a child, not being able to articulate my ideas appropriately. Luckily, I found out that not only I had these problems, but that they were common for scholars and music educators working abroad and required to use a foreign language and related concepts. Rhetorics vary indeed from culture to culture, and it might be time in music education and research to acknowledge this fact and to raise consciousness of the (so far unchallenged) hegemony of Anglo-American music education terminology.

It is also interesting to investigate how different similar fields of research, such as those in two different countries, can be, if observed from an international

perspective. A good example is philosophy of music education in Germany and in the United States. Research in philosophy of music education in Germany seems to be rather abstract and academic. Referring to the thoughts of famous scholars is important, not so much developing genuinely new ideas. Individual experiences or extensive considerations without reaching certain propositions are not considered to be scholarly important. It is much more the ideal of scientific objectivity that dominates philosophical thinking. The Anglo-American philosophy of music education, on the other hand, emphasizes the freedom of thinking in the realm of music education research. It does not fit the German understanding of philosophy in terms of a systematic analysis using traditional philosophical methods and relying on scholarly authorities. Anglo-American research in philosophy of music education sometimes sounds to German ears rather like free “improvisations” on a given theme, where the author combines various philosophical sources, in order to create a new perspective on a certain topic. Creativity and individual experiences are also important in order to take a look at a certain topic from various points of view. These differences are the result of two distinct research traditions: The British model of discussing, reflecting and relating ideas to the individual experience, and the German model of objective scholarly and scientific reflection, where the individual opinion is considered to be unimportant and where referring to scholarly authorities is much more important than individual considerations. The American university, for instance, is a combination of these two scholarly cultures.

My personal observations on different scholarly traditions are backed up by research in sociolinguistics. Wilfried Thielmann investigated the organization of German and English scholarly papers and identified different rhetorical traditions and scholarly practices. With regard to the different kinds of introductions, he states that German articles are usually written for experts, while the author of English papers does not rely on the readers’ previous knowledge and explains a lot. The German author expects her reader to know a lot and is therefore rather focused on her specific perspective on a topic, how she interprets facts and how this might differ from other authors’ opinions. For a German author, there is no need to explain everything, because the reader is expected to be an expert of some kind. The reader also trusts the author and there is no need for specific rhetorical strategies to convince the reader. In English papers, the author not only describes facts and delivers information, but tries to persuade the reader of his or her own opinion. The author follows a rather linear and logical way of thinking, also uses many modal verbs. She is interested in her reader following and trusting her. The way an introduction and sometimes even the entire paper works is almost like a conversation, not always focused on pure facts, but rather written in an argumentative style, trying to convince the reader. The author does not always use

the shortest way to present knowledge or results, sometimes preferring detours and rhetorical strategies to persuade the reader of the argumentation’s truth. These differences between German and English papers can imply that, as mentioned above, English papers are rather superficial and entertaining, while German papers seem to be too abstract and academic. Thielmann supports his findings by presenting linguistic details: the use of the conjunctions “because” and, the German counterpart, “weil,” which is different in German and in English scholarly papers. The English “because” appears twice as often in English papers than “weil” in German papers. This conjunction facilitates convincing the reader. “Weil” serves the construction of knowledge by referring to former points of the argumentation in order to remind the reader of how the results have been constructed so far, in relation to what kind of knowledge is considered important.23

In English, the nouns used in scholarly papers often seem to be deverbal nouns, derived from verbs and thereby invoking a certain dynamic or development. In the German language, the nouns do not usually have this kind of dynamic, representing instead a stationary state. In summarizing his findings, Thielmann makes one important recommendation: It is not sufficient to translate papers from one language into another, due to the different rhetorical practices and the organization of papers. Rather, papers in another language should be written in a different way, following the practices of a specific writing culture, at least to a certain degree. This certainly involves an “initiation” and introduction in different scholarly cultures. This would ensure that students and scholars not only learn how to translate ideas, but to study cultural differences in academic writing, particularly in music education research. This might diminish the problems international scholars have with peer review and Anglo-American standards of language and rhetorics, but not eliminate them completely. Therefore, it is important to raise these issues in order to change the way peer review works and to alert “gatekeepers” to pay attention to these issues.

The power of gatekeepers

One of the main problems in academia in general and in music education in particular is the fact that the English of native speakers is the standard for good English in scholarly publications.24 Usually, this preference for English has not been thoroughly reflected, but rather is a natural choice. Many scholars and editors working internationally consider Anglo-American standards in scholarly writing to be the most appropriate framework. It is also the easiest way, just having one point of reference in a linguistically diverse world. This fact might be surprising, because scholarly work usually involves critical reflectiveness. But almost nobody questions these Anglo-American standards, even though research about English as

lingua franca clearly emphasizes that rhetorics vary across culture and that a variety of Englishes exists worldwide.25 Having Anglo-American standards in scholarly publications means that editors revise academic texts according to these standards, correcting lexicogrammatical errors and revising unusual textual organization. The author’s rhetorical choices have to fit the Anglo-American understanding of how a good paper is supposed to be structured. Anna Mauranen and her colleagues summarize:26

In absence of clear standards of text organization, it has been easy to make a leap in the thought chain and assume that if English is the language of scientific publication, we should not only observe basic grammatical rules of correctness of Standard English, but follow the Anglo-American lead in matters of stylistic and rhetorical preferences as well.

This statement makes an interesting point. Editors not only use Anglo-American standards for correcting lexicogrammatical errors, which is necessary if readers are to understand what authors say. But reviewers and editors also assume that scholars, when they write in English, have to comply with the Anglo-American style of writing, a specific way of structuring papers and organizing an argumentation. This is almost linguistic imperialism, aiming at eliminating the diversity of scholarly cultures in favor of implementing Anglo-American notions of good writing as international standards. These notions clearly have an impact on the review process in peer-reviewed journals and thereby on professional careers of international scholars. They are used to their papers being rejected or being required to make significant revisions which often destroy the original character of the paper. Regarding the review process, non-native English-speaking music education scholars get used to many, sometimes inappropriate, comments by reviewers who not only correct the language or textual organization of papers, but rather question the general value of research and scholarly publications on the basis of language capacity. Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry present some examples of reviewers’ comments regarding papers from Spanish authors, submitted for a special journal issue:27

These papers do not want reading, they want translation. Poor writing doesn’t encourage the reader to turn the page [...]. The comment is not about the authors’ competence in scientific English. It is about thinking.

This clearly indicates that the reviewer is not able to distinguish between the difficulties a non-native English speaker might have and her general scholarly abilities. Instead of realizing that a few lexicogrammatical difficulties can be fixed easily, these linguistic problems lead to questioning scholarly competencies in general. However, scholars whose native language is not English are used to critique which is often not only focused on language, but rather questions the

general scholarly competence and the ability for logical argumentation. It is critical if the fact that the English of non-native speakers is not perfect leads to the wrong impression that their scholarly work is insufficient. Another example for a review not taking into account the specific situation of non-native English speakers is the following:28

[...] the style needs to be polished. In any instance sentences follow each other without logical connections and the authors often refer to other publications that may not be available to the ordinary unilingual or even bilingual North American readers.

This comment adds another interesting aspect to the discussion. As a scholar who is not from an English-speaking country, there always is the issue of referring to non-English research literature. Often, reviewers criticize exactly what the excerpt above indicates: it is not appropriate to quote research which Anglo-American scholars are not able to read. Even when writing for an international audience, authors should keep in mind Anglo-American readers and their needs. But particularly innovative international research, opening up new perspectives, might rely on non-English literature. This should be common in a global world and the Anglo-American reader should certainly not be the point of reference. Using international and non-English research should not be an issue at all.

It is time to start thinking about the hidden hegemony of Anglo-American music education, particularly in scholarly publications, and the impact it has on research and scholarly careers. Overcoming the hegemony of Anglo-American standards would also mean overcoming the power of gatekeepers such as reviewers, whose power is often based on the fact that they are English native speakers and that Anglo-American concepts and terminology dominate the international discourse in music education. It would also mean overcoming the marginalization of research topics or literature which could be considered to be unimportant from an Anglo-American perspective.29 In view of the diversity of music education systems and scholarly traditions worldwide, it would be important to raise consciousness of the fact that Anglo-American standards of writing in music education often determine what is important and the way research is presented. This is particularly crucial in times of globalization and internationalization in music education.

**Conclusion: valuing diversity in international music education and research**

There are different ways to overcome the hegemony of Anglo-American music education in research, terminology and various issues related to publications. One

way would be to develop a transcultural terminology in music education with terms from various languages. This would support the acknowledgement and celebration of the diversity of music education traditions and scholarly thinking. This terminology would particularly include words which cannot be translated as part of international music education terminology, such as Bildung. Didaktik or maybe the African Ubuntu. Furthermore, it is time to acknowledge that different rhetorical traditions exist and that we should not be required to follow only the English organization of ideas in scholarly writing. While we certainly need orientation in writing and some kind of standards, Anglo-American music education research and its standards cannot be the only points of reference. There is a need for revised standards for publications in international journals, taking into account the diversity of Engishes and rhetorical traditions worldwide. Finally, raising these issues would also concern fostering research about international traditions in music education research and scholarly writing in various countries. While comparative and international music education has long been focused on music education in schools and teacher training, it might be time to investigate research and scholarly writing in various countries. This would also help students and scholars who go to foreign countries, maybe English-speaking ones, to know that their own way of understanding research is not inferior and that they do not have to give up their scholarly or music education identity completely. This also includes professors developing cultural sensitivity towards international students who are used to a different style of music education, research and writing. This would enrich music education internationally and foster the development of a global community of music educators and researchers.

It is important for the future of music education that the richness of various music education traditions and research cultures can be part of music education internationally. Therefore, research is needed addressing these issues in a global world. Lillis and Curry state:

It is important to bring the politics of English to the centre of debates around knowledge construction and to explore how ‘conversations of the discipline’ are refracted through the politics of language and location.

Then, it might be possible to shape the internationalization of music education in a way that takes into account the diversity of music education practices and research worldwide and thereby facilitates significantly the improvement of the global music education community.

About the Author
Alexandra Kertz-Welzel is professor and department chair of music education at Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU) in Munich, Germany. With research interests in comparative music education, philosophy of music education, music education policy, community music, and children’s musical cultures, she has published in leading journals and has regularly presented at national and international conferences in Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, and the United States. Her book, Every child for music: Musikpaedagogik und Musikunterricht in den USA (2006), is the first comprehensive German study describing music education in the United States since the 1960s. Along with David G. Hebert, she is co-editor of the book, Patriotism and nationalism in music education (2012).

Notes


3 Ibid.


6 The author is referring to German and English in particular as reference points, because she is familiar with these languages and related problems. Including additional languages would be a task for further research.

7 For more information, see: http://www.hochschulverband.de/cms1/english. html

8 For more information, see: http://www<hrk.de/home/

9 For more information, see: http://www.adawis.de/


18 Ibid., 4.

19 Alexandra Kertz-Welzel, “’Two souls, alas, reside within my breast:’ reflections on German and American music education regarding the internationalization of music education,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 21, no. 1 (2013), 52–65.


22 Ibid., 72.


act.maydaygroup.org/articles/KertzWelzel_15_3.pdf
23 Ibid., 89–227.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 639.

27 Theresa Lillis & Marie Jane Curry, Academic writing in a global context. The politics and practices of publishing in English (New York: Routledge, 2010), 152.

28 Ibid., 143.

29 Ibid., 135–54.


31 Ibid., 23–4.