

Report LUS Lunch Club 'Anglification' 10-10-2019

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LUS

Leids Universitair Studentenplatform

Introduction

On October 10th the Leiden University Studentplatform (LUS) meeting on Anglification took place. Aside from the eight representatives of LUS, there were 19 students attending the Lunch Club representing all faculties; both Dutch and international. The LUS-committee selected this topic due to the renewed discussion in The Hague regarding the internationalisation of Dutch higher education. As a traditional 'broad' university, Leiden also faces this dilemma as it retains a diverse assemblage of Dutch bachelor programs, but has also introduced more English, internationally oriented bachelors and bachelor tracks. Furthermore, Leiden also has a dilemma regarding the participation of non-Dutch speaking students in the university forums. By discussing this topic, LUS hopes to give insight in the problems faced by both Dutch and international students regarding this issue, as well as to provide their recommendations.

Introductory talk by prof.dr. Rint Sybesma

The Lunch Club about anglification kicked off with a short talk given by Rint Sybesma (professor in Chinese linguistics). Sybesma is against further anglification and internationalisation of the higher education in the Netherlands and has voiced his opinion and possible solutions in multiple Dutch newspapers. His view was divided in three dimensions, namely that anglification would negatively impact the diversity of education, the society and the Dutch language. Sybesma is primarily concerned that anglification would negatively affect the depth of education.

He supports this claim by stating that by changing the main language in higher education from Dutch to English the discussed topics will also shift from a Dutch perspective to an English and American viewpoint. He also states that by educating the intellectual elite in English Dutch as an academic language, and therefore cultural language will disappear. The flipside is that anglification of higher education can attract foreign talent, resulting in a brain gain.

Sybesma concludes his presentation by providing his solution to for the problems of anglification. He states that all bachelor programs have to be primarily in Dutch. All bachelor programs that are in English need to be terminated. English master programs are still allowed, but students need to have the option to submit their tests in Dutch. At the end of his presentation he presents a couple of questions: 'Do the benefits outweigh the costs?' 'Does anglification make students happy?' 'And to what degree do we attach worth to the Dutch language?'

During the discussion the following topics were discussed:

- *How does the anglicification of education impact you?*
- *How does the anglicification in lectures influence the quality of education?*
- *Where should the line be drawn?*

Question 1 – How does the anglicification of education impact you?

The increased use of the English language in higher education is experienced differently per student. Some see it as an enrichment of their academic career and integral to Leidens participation in exchange programs, whilst others struggle with the language and the effects of anglicification on their study program. International students experience a developed, professional and internationally oriented study environment at Leiden. The English language is therefore deemed by most students as an important part of the university.

However, due to a lack of contact, students feel quite separated in courses that are offered both in Dutch and English. When Dutch and foreign students meet, Dutch students perceive themselves to switch easily to English, so the internationals do not feel excluded. This is perceived by some students as bothersome, as they have to adjust their language of choice to a minority.

The perception and impact therefore differ greatly per study program. In some programs the scientific field is primarily in English, whilst other fields have both an English and Dutch sphere. It is however important that study programs have a clear idea of which language it uses, and where. There are instances where the courses are in Dutch, but the tests are in English, which can be difficult when it comes to terminology. There is also concern that the creation of English tracks within Dutch bachelor programs decreases the quality of the Dutch track.

Not all, but most students see anglicification as a positive development that needs to be handled carefully. However, in study programs where most content is English, but students are primarily Dutch, there is a discrepancy between a developed understanding of academic English and an underdeveloped English speech skill. Also, a lot of Dutch students struggle with applying academic English. University provided English language classes are perceived as difficult to find and often too expensive to the student budget.

Question 2 – How does the anglicification in lectures influence the quality of education?

It is felt that anglicification has an impact on both students and lecturers during lectures. Even though there are lots of native English speakers teaching at Leiden University, there are also Dutch lecturers that have to teach their course in English. This has an impact on the way these lecturers get their message across. A lecturer can be very knowledgeable on his subject but may not be able to give as much details or have a deeper discussion because of speaking in a foreign language. This means that students get less of a detailed lecture. It does not bother students that teachers have an accent when speaking English, as long as this accent does not affect the clarity of the lecture. Also, students that are not

proficient in English experience more of a barrier to actually join in on the lecture, ask questions and partake in discussions.

There is also another way in which the anglification influences the quality of education. There are studies that have an English track which is suitable for international students. Both study programs and tracks have to be of the same quality. Due to the amount of Dutch and international students at the English track it is not possible for the University to give them the same sized workgroups or extensive written exams. Students deem that the size of anglified programs has an impact on the overall quality of education of these studies.

Having English lectures does train your skills in English. This is generally deemed a positive influence on the students, especially since speaking English is of critical value in our globalized world.

The discussion resulted in the following recommendations:

- When deciding if a class has to be in English or not, it should be taken into consideration what the future goal of the study program is. Are the courses aimed at the perspective of international science, or will the learning outcome mostly be applied in a Dutch setting?
- Don't completely separate international and Dutch tracks within a program. By having the two groups share lectures, students increase diversity and society, but still can be comfortable when they'd prefer some things in Dutch. It also helps Dutch students better learn conversational English outside the classroom.
- Lecturers should be given more tools to improve their English. Students experience a difference in lecturers that have been teaching in English for a longer period of time;
- The university could make it easier and cheaper for international students to follow Dutch language courses adapt more easily. Many international students said that they would be interested in taking Dutch classes if they were cheaper, more accessible and offered by the University;
- It was suggested that an independent body should be responsible for checking lectures on the quality of English and overall teaching skills to ensure the quality of education.

Question 3 – *Where do we draw a line?*

Most students present are not completely opposed to the anglification of study programs, as long as there is a good reason for using English that benefits their studies. English for the sake of international students is not a good reason. It is also important that there is a balance between the Dutch and English classes.

International students do not have the means to learn the Dutch language next to their study program. Therefore, integration and more exchange between Dutch and international students is limited. Language courses provided by study associations are popular but are not sufficient to accommodate the need of international students.

The discussion resulted in the following recommendations:

- Provide more help to Dutch students who are afraid of misunderstanding material that is not written in their native language. By having (student) tutors with walk-in hours to help first years with the content and English, students can follow their classes in English but get extra help in Dutch and talk it over with someone in their native language, increasing their understanding of the material. It might furthermore be useful to provide a translated list of the most important used terms.
- There needs to be more help for international students who want to learn Dutch for there is a clear desire under foreign students to learn the language. Their only options now, like the ATC, are very expensive. Study associations should not have to be responsible for providing these classes. The class could teach a bit on Dutch culture, creating more affinity with the country for international students, increasing the chance of them staying in the Netherlands and decreasing brain drain after they have graduated. This way, you combine internationalization with the preserving of the native language of The Netherlands. It would also solve the problem within the right of say bodies of the university, which struggle with international students wanting a say in university policy, which is written in Dutch.
- The option to write a paper in Dutch is provided within all study programs, but students experience the request process at the Exam Committee as very long and have experienced their request being denied. This option should be easier and more well-known, without teachers shaming their students.
- The university should provide more clarity about the validity of a diploma before the start of the program. The International Bachelor of Psychology is offered completely in English but still rewarded with a Dutch psychology diploma, which is a surprise for many international students.