

English language and the career progression of academics in Anglophone universities

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This study aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate about linguistic privilege in academia. The article pushes this debate forward by considering the role of English in the career development of academics in Anglophone universities. More concretely, our study empirically explores the career trajectories of multilingual scholars in Ireland who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Adopting a Bourdieusian lens, the article conceptualises academia as a locus of competitive struggle over authority, recognition, and prestige, in which scholars avail themselves of different kinds of capital, including linguistic capital, and deploy strategies to flourish. Through a qualitative approach, the article examines data from university documents and procedures, from interviews with EAL scholars in different disciplines and at different stages of their career, and from interviews with academics holding senior management positions in three universities in Dublin. We analyse the language-related challenges that EAL scholars encounter and the affordances with which Anglophone universities provide them, as well as the ways in which language impacts on their career progression. The empirical data reveals a complex and nuanced interplay between language and other academic factors. Our findings suggest the need to go beyond simple hierarchies of academic privilege or disadvantage based on a scholar's first or additional language alone.

Keywords: Internationalisation of higher education; career development; Anglophone universities; English as an additional language; native-speakerism; English as a global academic language

Introduction

Guided by their own personal curiosity, academics pursue the generation and transmission of knowledge and the advancement of their own field, often based on noble values (e.g., equality, collegiality, and social justice) and in line with an institutional mission to improve lives and transform societies. But to flourish in purportedly meritocratic universities, scholars have to navigate through a highly competitive environment. Put differently, for academics to succeed, they have to engage in a race to the top and face stiff competition from peers.

Our aim in this article is to explore the ways in which speaking English as an additional language (EAL) shapes the career progression of multilingual scholars in Anglophone universities, focusing on the context of Ireland in particular (which will be discussed below). We start from the premise that there might be two contradictory tendencies impacting EAL scholars' career progress in Irish academia. First, under some circumstances, EAL speakerhood may hinder academics' prospects of advancement in their career, given the internationally mobile nature of such scholars and the prejudiced views towards non-native accents (Russo et al., 2017; Seeber et al., 2023). Secondly, we posit that working at Anglophone universities may open up career progression opportunities for EAL academics, as a result of enhanced opportunities to capital on material and symbolic resources (Hohti & Truman, 2019). From these starting points, we ask the following three research questions:

- (1) What are the language-related challenges that EAL scholars face in Irish universities?
- (2) In the context of Anglocentric academia, is English an enabler for the academic capital of EAL scholars in Ireland?
- (3) In what ways does language impact on the career progression prospects of academics working in Ireland?

The present article revolves around the so far relatively untapped area of the role of language in academic career progress. Briefly put, the article is about speaking English as an additional language in academia, and the challenges and successes that speakers of various linguistic profiles face within three Irish universities: Dublin City University (DCU), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), and University College Dublin (UCD). For some time now, discussions about native-speaker advantage versus EAL disadvantage in academia have concentrated in the area of writing for academic publishing in English. The debate is complex and far more nuanced than we can

explore here, but in essence, one camp of authors argues that writing in English as an L1 for academic publishing comes with important advantages that EAL authors do not enjoy when it comes to composing academic texts (Flowerdew, 2019). In contrast, other authors do not consider L1 status to play such a central role in academic writing. After all, writing for scientific publishing is a skill that everyone needs to learn and practise, so some consider linguistic injustice in academic publishing in English to be more of a myth than a reality (Hyland, 2016). This second camp of authors sees other factors (level of expertise, networks, access to resources, etc.) to be more important than L1 status. However, what both sides seem to share is a view of language (at least its academic register) as a semi-autonomous entity that everyone in academia, regardless of L1 background, must learn (see Soler, 2021, for a critique of the limitations of this framing of the debate). To us, this view of language is problematic, and so we wish to delve deeper into situated contexts of analysis to see in what ways language is or is not an enabler or an obstacle not just in academic publishing, but more generally for academic career progression in an Anglophone context such as Ireland.

Previous research has investigated the important role of language ideologies in giving shape to an image of the ideal speaker in professional domains. In Anglocentric contexts such as the field of English language teaching, native-speakerism has been denounced for many years now (Holliday, 2006; Phillipson, 1992), but this ideological construct continues to be a central feature of the field. Native-speakerism in ELT forges and reinforces a hierarchy of types of speakers (and teachers of the language), leading to feelings of imposter syndrome and of second-order speakerhood amongst highly trained and educated professionals in the field (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2022; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016). In academia more generally, non-native-speaker accents may have important practical and symbolic consequences in workplace settings and for scholarly career prospects. Prejudiced views of such accents may lead speakers to feelings of exclusion and withdrawal from assuming responsibilities (Russo et al., 2017). Penalisation of non-native-speaker accents may be particularly significant during high-stakes communication events, such as job interviews (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2013). In short, the language ideological component of social interaction in academic workplaces seems to play a central role in shaping career opportunities for scholars.

Outside Anglophone contexts, for example in Sweden, studies have found that language is a key asset with significant impact on the academic trajectories of academics within the local hierarchy. Salö et al. (2022) report interview data with internationally mobile scholars in Sweden who seem to be acutely aware of the power dynamics that surround language; although a big part of Swedish academia is significantly anglicised, knowing Swedish makes a difference when it comes to being promoted to positions of power and responsibility within departments or research teams. From yet a different context, Seeber et al. (2023) contribute large-scale quantitative data to show that internationally mobile scholars at Flemish universities in Belgium have significantly fewer chances of becoming a professor compared to non-mobile national scholars. They attribute this difference to a lack of rules to prevent “inbreeding” and few opportunities to teach in English at Flemish universities. That said, each university system has its own specific country characteristics, and international mobility might be valued differently because of that (Bojica et al., 2022). In addition, in Ireland and in Anglophone contexts more generally, an extra layer of significance comes from another parameter for our study: “Anglocentrism”.

We use “Anglocentrism” here to refer to not only the linguistic but also (and importantly) the epistemic and ontological biases that currently underpin many areas of academic life (Heller et al., 2021; Hohti & Truman, 2019; Levisen, 2019). Through the favouring of certain methodological and conceptual approaches to objects of study, Anglophone research seems to exert a pulling force, resulting into a gravitational node. As a consequence, other potential ways of analysing objects of study may become obscured or silenced, resulting into a potential source of epistemic and linguistic injustice (Catala, 2022) or what Kuteeva terms “epistemic monoglossia” (2022, p. 136). Much of the current effort toward decolonising academic publishing (e.g., Canagarajah, 2022) seems driven by a concern over these injustices. However, the flip side of this coin is that by occupying positions closer to the Anglo centre of their respective fields, scholars may benefit and capitalise from being in such a position. We investigate whether a qualitative sample of scholars in Ireland do indeed capitalise on this.

Language in career advancement: conceptual approach

The academic realm is a structured network of individuals and groups (e.g., scholars, senior management teams, funding bodies, research councils, publishers, etc.) with differing, and often conflicting, specific interests and investment strategies. We follow Bourdieu (1988) in understanding academia as a locus of competitive struggle over authority, recognition, and prestige. The academic field is a site where agents take positions that, in conjunction with their experiences, practices, and interactions with other agents, shape their actions. The structural hierarchies, relations of force, and power dynamics existing in the field influence social phenomena, including agents' actions, in academia. Here we must note that our focus on particular attributes of the academic field, such as competitiveness, does not take account of all academic practice, which of course includes activities that provide personal development, self-esteem, and moral satisfaction (Bathmaker, 2015).

To thrive in academia, scholars deploy strategies that are inseparably scientific and social (Bourdieu, 1988). Academic capital is defined as a “set of properties which are the product of acts of knowledge and recognition performed by agents engaged in the scientific field” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 55). Scholars build on two kinds of academic capital for career advancement. First, they rely on a capital of strictly scientific authority based on scholarship achievements, such as producing high impact research outputs, lecturing, supervising PhD students, securing grants, being part of editorial boards, and getting involved in public engagement activities. Second, scholars also utilise a capital of power over the academic field, in which they invest and accumulate capital by means that are not purely scientific. This second kind of academic capital is exercised through administrative, bureaucratic, and managerial channels, for example, occupying leadership positions in governing bodies of disciplines or in the management of universities. To operationalise Bourdieu's concept, we use these activities and achievements, placing particular emphasis on those of the first kind, as indicators of academic capital in their interaction with language.

Individuals possess different forms of capital, namely, valued resources that are interrelated. Academic capital is, therefore, not detached from the various types of social and cultural capital and their symbolic value that specifically relate to scholarship. From Bourdieu's viewpoint, some capitals are valued more highly than others, depending on contextual factors. Moreover, one form of capital can compensate for a lack or deficit in another form of capital. For example, and applied to our specific case study, Bourdieu's conceptual equipment allows us to explore how and under which circumstances EAL scholars with a solid academic capital may mitigate potential language-related challenges that they face in Anglophone universities. Likewise, it enables us to capture the potential adverse repercussions of the linguistic capital of early career EAL scholars in their career progression, when their academic capital is still consolidating (see Salö et al., 2022).

Academic capital is relational and, therefore, mediated by linguistic resources. Far from being a neutral entity with merely communicative purposes, linguistic capital cannot be understood without considering the social conditions and power dynamics in the academic realm. Linguistic capital, thus, refers to legitimate competence as established by the context and dominant group (Bourdieu, 1991). Language practices are the product of an encounter between two additional Bourdieusian concepts: linguistic habitus and the linguistic market. The linguistic field or market is the structure resulting from the relationship between speakers (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 68) and their competences. Competence here includes the language skills of speakers or writers (e.g., linguistic assets) and their whole social and cultural competence, which depends on multiple factors such as sex, age, and economic and social status. Such multiplicity of competence explains why struggles in the linguistic market are not purely linguistically motivated and do not always have an obvious linguistic component. In the linguistic market there are power relations, some of which (e.g., those based on academic authority) transcend the communicative situation and are, therefore, irreducible to the relation in one particular linguistic interaction (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 83). Thus, the linguistic market is a terrain where different forms of domination can take place. Since language practices are always situated in a market, or a conjunction of markets, they are determined by the norms of the market(s) and by dominant societal values or ideologies.

Linguistic habitus is a subset of dispositions that speakers acquire in the course of learning and socialising in particular contexts (family, school, community, etc.) through a process of inculcation. Dispositions are ingrained, structured, generative, and durable, and reflect the social conditions within which they were transmitted and internalised. Simply put, speakers are predisposed to act in certain ways because, among other reasons, their linguistic habitus governs linguistic practices.

While the level of correspondence between habitus and market in this relation can theoretically vary to a certain degree, the expectation is that they are compatible and congruent with one another. For instance, in a situation in which the social background of one speaker (e.g., working class) does not correspond with the language practices and discourse conventions in a given setting (formal situations or elite institutions), the speaker is normally expected to struggle. Bourdieu's account of linguistic issues is useful because he views language as a social phenomenon, rather than a self-contained and socially detached entity that speakers deploy in communicative exchanges. His approach is also useful because it does not subordinate agency to structure and reconciles the agency-structure dichotomy.

That said, we find that his particular emphasis on the nature of linguistic habitus as predictable and determined by, for instance, unconscious manifestations of social inheritances, contributes to viewing social reproduction through language in a too narrow deterministic lens (Jenkins, 2014). This is probably due to the stratified linguistic context in France, on which Bourdieu drew his sociological account of language issues. In this study, we depart from such a conceptualisation of linguistic habitus because, in our opinion, it leaves little space for progression prospects for EAL academics in Anglophone universities. For example, we believe EAL academics have agentive capacity to overcome some potential language-based difficulties and to strategically build up both linguistic and academic capital, but only provided that they can avail themselves of adequate resources and institutional support. Rather than linguistic habitus, we use language competence, namely the range of available linguistic resources that speakers mobilise to carry out an activity. In line with scholars within the sociolinguistics of mobility (Blommaert, 2010), we conceptualise language practices as adaptive and context-sensitive, resulting from dynamic and complex interactions between speakers in multiple situations and formats (genres, styles, registers) in the academic field.

Despite adopting an agency-oriented approach to language use and development, it must be noted that we understand agency also as socially constituted. We therefore do not subscribe to the idea that agents are not constrained by structures of inequality. By this we mean, more concretely, dominant language ideologies (e.g., *unequal Englishes*; Tupas, 2015) and other forms of exclusion located in socially stratified academia (Soler, 2021) such as epistemological and institutional racism (see Kubota, 2020). Language plays an important role in gatekeeping processes to prevent people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds accessing key social and institutional positions (Gumperz, 1992). Let us take as an example the notion of markedness, namely the expectedness and appropriateness of language practices based on specific situational factors and circumstances (see Myers-Scotton, 1993; Piller & Bodis, 2022). Bearing in mind that most academics in Irish universities are of Irish origin, it is probably correct to assume that the language practices of Irish academics (exclusively understood as L1 speakers of English) are generally perceived by listening and reading subjects as unmarked. For instance, prestige Irish English, also known as Hiberno-English, accent(s) can be expected to be positioned as inherently legitimate (the *right* accent), as opposed to the marked language practices of EAL scholars (*foreign* accents). As research on language ideologies of perception points out, "linguistic mononormativity" (Blommaert & Horner, 2017) in Anglophone universities and an English-dominant academic world may lead to perceptions of a speaking and writing deficiency or a lack of the legitimate competence and, consequently, impact negatively on the credibility of EAL academics.

We pay close attention to potential difficulties and disadvantages that research has identified for EAL scholars (see previous section). However, and drawing on Bourdieu's idea of the interplay of various forms of capital, we do so by conceptualising language practices as interacting with other non-linguistic aspects of academic life such as prestige, authority, and recognition, along with factors of potential inequality such as gender and race (see Martín Rojo, 2021).

Methodology

Our methodological approach involves utilising the combination of two data collection methods for triangulation purposes: university documents and procedures, and interview data. While our analysis primarily focuses on the interview data, we also consider relevant material from university reports, procedures, and practices, as it offers crucial background information and contextual factors against which interview data can be assessed. Regarding the second method¹, we draw on data from interviews with two categories of respondents with different institutional roles: EAL scholars and academics working within the governance and management

structures of universities. Our aim with the convergence of multiple methods and sources of empirical evidence is to add breadth and depth to our analysis and increase the reliability of the findings.

For the former category of respondents, we employed a systematic approach to identify potential participants. We conducted a comprehensive search of university websites, initially focusing on non-Irish or non-Anglophone names in department and faculty staff lists. Subsequently, we undertook a thorough review of the academic bibliographies of these scholars in their institutional profiles. We strived to obtain a sample that represents the current staff diversity within Irish universities. We sought to include individuals at various levels of seniority, but given our aim of exploring the role of language in career advancement, we focused on those in junior positions. We made this choice based on the assumption that language plays a more crucial role in the promotion from assistant professor² to associate professor than in other positions with more accumulated academic capital. To ensure that we captured the relevant aspects of career progression, we excluded positions that were focused solely on one of the three domains of teaching, research, and service; examples of excluded positions are postdoctoral researchers, research assistants, part-time lecturers, and administrative officers. To confirm eligibility, potential participants were contacted via email and asked to verify that English was not their L1. In contrast, for the latter category of respondents, language was not a selection criterion. We asked EAL participants to propose potential senior management participants and the selection was made based on their suggestions.

For the group of EAL academics, we reached out to a total of 34 potential participants and received responses from 14 individuals. This equates to a response rate of 41 percent. The 14 EAL participants (see Table 1) were roughly evenly distributed across the three universities and included four male and 10 female scholars. Our participants comprised ten assistant professors, two associate professors, and two professors. We recruited a diverse range of participants from various academic disciplines within the social sciences as well as computer science and physics. Of the scholars who agreed to participate, six are originally from Europe, four from Asia, two from the Middle East, and two from Latin America. For the group of senior management academics, we contacted three potential participants and received responses from two. The two participants are from Ireland.

Table 1. Profile of EAL scholars

Participant	Academic Rank	Discipline	Years in academia post-PhD	PhD in English
1	Professor	Physical Science	+20	No
2	Associate Professor	Political Science	10-15	No
3	Assistant Professor	Political Science	0-5	Yes
4	Assistant Professor	Communication and Media	0-5	Yes
5	Associate Professor	Language and Linguistics	10-15	Yes
6	Assistant Professor	Business	0-5	Yes
7	Professor	Language and Linguistics	+20	Yes
8	Assistant Professor	Political Science	10-15	Yes
9	Assistant Professor	Communication and Media	10-15	No

10	Assistant Professor	Law	5-10	Yes
11	Assistant Professor	Law	0-5	Yes
12	Assistant Professor	Psychology	15-20	No
13	Assistant Professor	History	10-15	Yes
14	Assistant Professor	Computer Science	5-10	Yes

We conducted 16 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, guided by a set of predetermined questions designed to open up topics and allow respondents to share their perceptions and experiences, as well as to steer the conversation in different directions. The questions were clustered as follows: background information, perceptions about English in academia, expectations and scholarly achievements, opportunities, resources and institutional support, and potential cases of language disadvantage. An adapted version of this protocol was used to interview the senior management members. Interviews were conducted in English by Author 1 and had an average duration of 45 minutes. They were digitally recorded and transcribed.

For the analysis, we used a software package for qualitative research (NVivo). We relied on latent content analysis, an analytical framework that utilises concepts and theoretical lenses to identify patterns in content with the aim of interpreting the meaning of participants' experiences (Johnson et al., 2020). This framework recognises that meaning is not always apparent on the surface of the content and requires uncovering context cues, connections, and interpretations. In latent content analysis, researchers typically use theory and existing research to identify concepts that can be used for deductive coding.

To begin our analysis, we first identified and selected units of meaning from the data. Our initial coding was primarily driven by concepts and notions used in the literature, but we also used inductive searches to find patterns in the data, which led to the incorporation of additional codes in subsequent, more detailed readings and cross-checks of the data sets. After establishing a set of a priori and emergent codes, we examined their relationships, including those with the indicators used to operationalise the concept of academic capital, to form categories that represent a higher level of abstraction in the data. Finally, to address our research questions and reach conclusions, we organised these categories into themes, which capture the fundamental underlying meaning in the content (see Table 2). When interpreting the data, we took into account the contextual circumstances of the academic settings in which the data were produced, as well as the conditions surrounding the interviews.

Table 2. Codes, categories, and themes used in the analysis, and their interrelationship

Themes	Categories	Codes
Language-related challenges	Language barriers	Pronunciation and accents
		Formal and academic writing
		Participation
	Language-based micro-aggressions	Stereotypes
		Language bias
English as enabler	Anglocentric academia	Competence in English
		Access to resources
		Ireland and the Anglosphere

Language and capital in the academic market	Interaction of forms of capital	Linguistic capital
		Academic capital
		Other forms of capital

Findings

In what follows, we begin the presentation of the findings by providing essential contextual factors and background from the Irish case. We then present and discuss our findings. This second part is organised thematically according to the themes and categories of the analysis. In the presentation, we integrate document-derived evidence and the perspectives of both senior management academics and EAL scholars. However, considering the study's aim and research questions, we give priority to the voice of the latter group when presenting the findings.

The context

The language regime in Ireland is comprised of two languages: Irish is the national and first official language; English is also officially recognised but is relegated to the second official language. However, English is the country's de facto language in most domains of public life, including higher education. Third-level institutions comply with the Official Languages Act 2003 to provide services in Irish, but operate predominantly through English.

In the past two decades, Irish universities have experienced significant changes due to academic mobility and the internationalisation of higher education. However, accurately determining the level of diversity among university staff, including their linguistic profile, is a difficult task due to limited available data based on surveys with rather low response rates. The most reliable indicator for the purposes of this study is nationality, as reported by the Higher Education Authority (Kempny & Michael, 2021). According to their data, 71 percent of staff identify themselves as Irish, while 9 percent hold dual Irish and another nationality. Non-Irish staff make up 18 percent of the total, with 6 percent coming from outside the EU and the United Kingdom. Although a breakdown of international staff across ranks and pay grades is not provided, the report notes that there is an ethnic pay gap in most higher pay categories.

Two universities in the study, TCD (2023) and UCD (2023), provide data on their websites, revealing that 41 percent and 36 percent of their staff, respectively, are international. DCU (personal communication) does not collect nationality data, but instead uses ethnicity, with 23 percent of staff self-identifying as not being White Irish. These sets of data suggest that approximately one third of university staff may come from backgrounds other than Ireland, though it is important to note that this estimate includes staff from other English-speaking countries, and should be interpreted with caution.

Language-related challenges

Language barriers

In the context of recruitment, proficiency in English is a prerequisite for applicants seeking faculty positions at Irish universities. This requirement is typically communicated through job advertisements, either implicitly, saying that candidates should have excellent communication skills, or explicitly, by specifying a near-native level in English. Notably, unlike for students, universities do not usually mandate certified proof of English language proficiency from faculty applicants. Instead, the fulfilment of this requirement is left to the discretion of interview panels. One of the senior management academics explains the expectation from the university management level and shares their perception that language barriers are not an important issue.

EXTRACT 1 (Participant 15)³

I # don't think that language-related issues really come to the fore # when staff are being considered for # progress or, say, for promotion [...] That's the perception at the kind of # management level. I think that there's an # understanding or an expectation that if you get hired to work here, that you have all the skills

that you need, whether or not that's true, right? [...] I think that people are hired for their knowledge expertise, for their # research expertise. The fact that they may not have English as a first language or second language or whatever doesn't seem to really play a part in my experience.

Focusing on the input of our EAL participants, pronunciation, writing, and participation are among the language-related difficulties that EAL academics face, particularly in the early stages of their career. First, academics without previous exposure to Irish English report problems in fully understanding Irish accents, and equally they have experiences of both Irish students and colleagues not understanding them due to their foreign accent. A second issue that emerges from the interviews relates to academic writing for publication. Interestingly, however, its impact varies widely among participants. While for some academic writing in English does not pose a problem, others note a need for proofreading services for their manuscripts. However, only one academic unit within one of the three universities offers some support for proofreading for staff, which means that most scholars who need proofreading can only pay for this service from external research funding or their own pocket. Third, some participants identify participation in meetings and other formal activities as an aspect of their daily life influenced by language, in conjunction with non-linguistic factors such as having little experience of the topic under discussion. These EAL scholars report that in the first years after taking up their faculty position, their involvement in sharing ideas and thoughts in meetings was limited, as they needed more time to put into words their ideas and were afraid of both making grammar errors in public and potential reactions from peers.

We identified two crucial factors to determine the self-reported level of impact of language on EAL academics' performance. The first is whether the latter stages of their tertiary education were conducted in English or not, with a distinction emerging between those who completed their doctoral studies or have postdoctoral experience in English and those who did so in other languages. While using English in academic life hardly poses a challenge for the former group of academics, scholars from the latter group find it to be notably challenging in the initial few years of their career. Immersion in an English-speaking environment, or the lack thereof, is the second (and interrelated) factor. For participants who had not previously lived in an English-speaking context, language-related difficulties appear to significantly decrease after the first five years of doing so; after this, participants no longer considered language as an issue. Universities may wish to consider providing specific support to EAL scholars with limited previous exposure to English.

Language-related issues may also hinder the performance of EAL scholars with a high level of proficiency in English, extensive experience in English-speaking contexts, and even seniority. Extract 2 is from a junior scholar with a self-reported excellent level of English. It includes an example of language anxiety or feeling of exhaustion associated with the use of an additional language (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

EXTRACT 2 (Participant 10)

I do realise that when I am under severe stress, when I'm under constant stress # and am # there are periods when I'm able to cope with it and periods where it's a bit overwhelming, and in that case, language suffers. So <...>[?] I find it more difficult to formulate ## sentences and to express what I want to say, be it in writing or ## in, you know, as a spoken communication, as a verbal communication.

According to this participant and others, including the two senior management academics, language-related anxiety is a condition that goes unnoticed for universities.

Perhaps inevitably, perceptions of language barriers also involve contrasts between native and non-native speakers. In the next fragment, a senior EAL academic refers to the critical role of pragmatics in situations of decision-making.

EXTRACT 3 (Participant 5)

Because I'm not a native speaker of English, I may not say the things they [Irish colleagues] would say, the way they like, so that might cause some issues [...] [%] Irish [people] have this particular way of convincing others or carrying out meetings and influencing others and so on <...>[?] You [EAL people] can never learn that. You can never learn the way [...] they can beautifully conduct themselves at meetings. And they might not say much, but they may say a lot. But they are very influential when they open their mouth. And # it's not just because of the English, obviously, but # the way they put their opinions forward is something. And that's something we can never acquire.

In addition to linguistic factors, it is worth noting the involvement of non-linguistic factors in such situations. Later in the interview, this scholar used the terms “Irish way of doing things” and “distinct way to negotiate their way through the system” to describe factors that are not related to language.

The agentic capacity of EAL scholars may overcome, to different degrees, some of the language-related challenges. This is the expectation noted by the senior management academics and most EAL scholars themselves and probably the reason for the absence of specific training or resources offered by universities. We move on now to analyse the more structure-oriented language challenges.

Language-based micro-aggressions

Most EAL scholars have gone through sporadic episodes of language bias in academic contexts. We understand language bias as implicit or explicit prejudice resulting from the association of language and related social categories (e.g., nationality) with negative attributes. Most of the experiences shared by our academics fit into the notion of “micro-aggression”, namely brief and often subtle exchanges that either consciously or unconsciously disparage others based on their perceived group membership (Sue, 2010). One such example of the intertwining of language and stereotypes is included in Extract 4. The fragment shows the exchange between the interviewer and a senior EAL scholar in one of the STEM fields, a domain in which language appears to have little effect on EAL academics (Pronskikh, 2018).

EXTRACT 4 (Participant 1)

PARTICIPANT: I don't think it's just the language, I think it's more the nationality. Obviously # you know, in X [university], back in those years, there would be a handful of ## colleagues who were foreign nationals. Ireland was not a country where there were too many immigrants. You know so, I think, yeah, so obviously your accent reflects on this, but I think it's not just the language, it's the # yeah, the nationality and the cultural sort of picture of the person as not being Irish.

AUTHOR 1: And that was like a kind of issue for you? Or perhaps that you weren't treated as the Irish colleagues? Did you feel that?

PARTICIPANT: I think, occasionally # oh yes it's happened. I'm going to answer this honestly. I think that I've had a few arguments with people ## and # when they get really annoyed, it's always their last argument, they make you feel you're a foreigner, you know, that you're not Irish, you know, that you are a X [nationality] bastard, whatever, that kind of stuff. So, this has happened to me.

Other EAL scholars report additional cases relating to language, ethnicity, and race, which demonstrate that micro-aggressions by dominant groups still occur. On a positive note, as this and other participants with long career experience recognise, Ireland's universities have made considerable progress towards inclusion and diversity. This is corroborated by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) plans of the three universities. However, it is noteworthy that the plans make limited reference to language. Specifically, UCD is the only institution that includes an action to promote linguistic and cultural diversity in its plan, while TCD solely acknowledges the Irish language and Irish Sign Language. Language is absent from DCU's EDI plan.

In one part of the interviews, we asked EAL and senior management academics if they felt EAL scholars enjoyed equal opportunities in comparison with Irish colleagues. All participants responded positively. Furthermore, we asked the EAL scholars if they had ever felt discriminated against for linguistic reasons. In the first instance, most of them needed some time to elaborate a response, with many, particularly those from disciplines outside the humanities and social sciences, admitting that they had not previously thought about language being a potential factor of discrimination. In general, the EAL scholars consider they have the same opportunities, but also think that language-related challenges may be discriminatory. Such a reflection is summarised in Extract 5.

EXTRACT 5 (Participant 2)

I think it is discrimination. It's ## not discrimination in terms of you have no access to promotion or you have no ## it's not like discrimination against access to positions in that sense. But it is discrimination in the sense of # being stigmatised as, you know, someone who has no access to in-group dynamics or # has no access to an in-group, however you want to define it. Someone who is # perceived and depicted as being outside, part of an out-group and, in that sense, discriminated. I think that's definitely a concept I would

use. Then, of course, you have different types of discrimination. Some of them are very serious. This one is closer to some sort of casual racism than actual institutional racism, which I experienced.

In this and other EAL scholars' opinion, language-related bias is less to do with overt, structural discriminatory procedures and more to do with casual attitudes and ingrained practices. In the particular case of career promotion, a process in which universities assess scholars regardless of whether they are EAL or not, our two groups of academics tend to consider that language does not play a determining role in progression. Promotion is a complex, multifactorial process in which, according to some EAL scholars, language can at most lead to a slight delay in moving up the academic ladder.

English as enabler

We have so far discussed some of the language-related barriers that EAL scholars face and how those barriers may impact on their career prospects. Now, we zoom our focus out from the local level to the more global context of academia to explore the potential affordances that the linguistic and academic capital resulting from working within the Anglosphere provide to our EAL scholars.

EAL participants unanimously find that being part of the Anglophone academia has proved beneficial, albeit with nuances regarding its particular impact on their career progress. Through the next two excerpts, we can observe subtle differences in opinion.

EXTRACT 6 (Participant 5)

PARTICIPANT: I think I have an advantage: here's such and such [X], who is associate professor in an English-speaking country. That would put me in a certain position, not power, but yes, straight away, I'm someone to be respected. Whether I actually am that good or not, it's a different story. But people will put respect to that position ## and English-speaking yeah, I suppose.

AUTHOR 1: Would you say that compensates perhaps the [language-related] problems or difficulties that you find here?

PARTICIPANT: No, no. Because I don't think that matters day to day, whether X [participant's country] people think I am great or not doesn't really impact on the work I have to do here [at the Irish university].

While it is true that there is a level of privilege which an EAL scholar is accorded for working in an Anglophone institution, for this participant this added benefit does not pay off at the local level. As they go on to explain in the conversation, this is because career success is mainly played out at their home institution in Ireland, where EAL scholars have to compete against Irish scholars, understood as L1 speakers of English who do not face the language-related challenges of their EAL peers.

Opinions about the interaction of linguistic and academic capital among our EAL scholars differ slightly. This can be seen in Extract 7, where this time the emphasis is on the affordances offered by Anglophone academia. More specifically, the participant explains how English opened up opportunities for them to capitalise on the relevant kinds of resources in academia that were not available in their European country. The resulting expansion of their academic capital in the form of experience in international committees, publications in English and grants ultimately contributed to their promotion.

EXTRACT 7 (Participant 2)

[If I had been in my country] I don't think I would've been able to ## sit in councils of international professional associations, in # boards of really important journals in my field. Of course, I don't think I would've been able to do that if I were in X [participant's country] because there is no incentive to publish in English for instance, which means that your work is not really known. So # I think, professionally speaking, I think that moving here was the best decision I've ever made. I've had access to opportunities here because of English that I would have never, ever had access to in [...] other places. There's also more money here for research like funding, you know, even X [participant's university] has all these different funding schemes.

Scholars in Ireland have very little incentive to publish their work in languages other than English (see Curry & Lillis, 2022). Publishing only in English medium outlets, both EAL and senior management academics say, is

one of the implications of joining an Anglophone institution. Linked to this is the Anglocentrism of the global academic market, in which Irish universities and faculty staff, including EAL scholars, are part of the powerful centripetal forces in the linguistic and epistemic centralisation and homogenisation of scholarly work. Yet, our EAL participants do not believe that the Anglosphere is a homogeneous entity and for them the position of Ireland within Anglocentric academia is unclear, with many EAL scholars describing Irish universities as semi-peripheral. Extract 8 illustrates this point.

EXTRACT 8 (Participant 7)

I'm not 100% sure. Sometimes # okay, I would say I think Ireland is too peripheral for that. But when people want international participation, they do want people from English-speaking countries. There seems to be that ideology, right? So, if you are from the US or UK, possibly also Australia, then [...] it looks good, but I don't think Ireland really fits the bill very much.

In sum, the EAL participants consider the linguistic capital of English as an enabler in the global academic market although the impact of this global dimension in terms of career progression in the local market is variable.

Language and capital in the academic market

In the preceding sections, we have examined various instances of linguistic capital in interaction with other forms of academic capital. We now direct our focus towards one specific case that provides rich insights into the circumstances and conditions in the academic market. Here academic capital, in the form of scholarly merit, social capital and personal qualities, seem to counterbalance the self-perceived limited linguistic capital of one EAL scholar.

The academic in question began their journey of learning English through formal education in their home country, but it was not until several years after completing their PhD that they achieved a level of proficiency suitable for working in the language. The scholar joined an Irish university a number of years ago. Their current reading and writing skills are good, but they admit they do not have as much confidence about their spoken skills. The academic further explains that their perception of themselves and their place in academia has always been characterised by a lack of confidence when it comes to the English language. However, this has not hindered their career advancement and they are now seeking a promotion. Being an academic working in Anglophone academia despite coming from a family with limited financial resources makes them particularly proud.

Extract 9 captures a fragment of the interview where we asked the participant whether they felt their voice was being heard.

EXTRACT 9 (Participant 9)

The inclination of a foreign speaker for which English is not the first language would be to do less. But, as said, it's a challenge, so I do it. So I probably do it even more [%] because I like it. So, I'm anxious, but I don't want to # avoid it. But this is related to confidence. For example, at the department level, everyone knows me # and I am inclined to think that everyone knows that even if my pronunciation sometimes is broken I'm a super good scholar. I mean, I publish a lot in the top international journals, so I think I'm a particularly good scholar. And the point is, I know they know because we are part of the same sector. It's evident where I'm publishing, they know where I'm publishing, they know I win [xxx] grants. They know I'm good because we speak on a daily basis. So, I don't have any issues. I'm probably more active than the average lecturer. I'm X [an administrative role], so I speak very frequently [...] I think I'm perceived as a very enjoyable person, sociable person and I'm # sorry to insist, but I think I'm perceived as quite successful, professional in my field.

This excerpt highlights the significance of intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and personal traits in relation to career advancement. Furthermore, it presents a case that illustrates how academic capital may be prioritised over linguistic capital under specific conditions and contextual factors. In particular, because the academic performance of this EAL scholar aligns with the university's expectations for their position (measured by a good publication record, securing funding, and holding roles of responsibility), their "broken" pronunciation may not represent a hindrance for career success. This perception resonates with the views of senior management

academics (see Extract 1) that forms of academic capital such as research skills and expertise play a more important role than linguistic capital in the career advancement of scholars. Following a relational understanding of scholarly life (Bourdieu, 1988), we can say that the amount or level of linguistic capital that one individual academic needs in order to obtain validation from peers and universities may depend on the status of the overall set of academic capital of that particular scholar.

Concluding remarks

This study offers an initial exploration of the intricate subject of EAL in the context of academic progression in Anglophone universities. The EAL academics included in this study are a heterogeneous group with very different backgrounds, educational experiences, professional trajectories, academic capital, and personal characteristics. Such diversity has obvious implications for the possibility of determining in a succinct, overarching manner the ways in which language may affect their career progression. The disparity in terms of career impact that results from this heterogeneity compels us to take a cautionary tone in our assertions and constitutes in itself a primary finding of this study (and we return to this point below).

Moving on to address the three research questions that guided our study, we have seen that EAL scholars in Irish universities encounter a range of language-related challenges. While proficiency in English is a requirement for successful applicants for faculty positions, many of our participants have faced difficulties with academic writing, participation, and anxiety, particularly in the early stages of their careers. Additionally, most have experienced language-based micro-aggressions in academic settings. It should be noted, however, that not all EAL scholars necessarily experience these challenges.

Regarding the particular effects on career development, our findings indicate that language does not appear to be a decisive factor in the promotion prospects of our participants. This is also the case when taking into account the potential affordances that working at Irish universities may offer to EAL scholars in the context of Anglocentric academia. However, individuals who lack formal education in English or who have not previously been immersed in English-speaking environments may experience a delay in career progression during the initial years of their tenure. Irish universities provide limited or no support for activities that may turn out to be challenging from an EAL perspective (e.g., proofreading for manuscripts). This is because faculty staff are expected to be proficient in English and, probably, also due to the general conviction that language is simply about communication, that is, a tool free from power dynamics (Bourdieu, 1991).

Any measures from universities to assist EAL scholars should focus on the needs of academics with little previous exposure to English because our data suggests they are the ones who struggle most with language barriers in academia. The perceptions and experiences shared by our EAL participants demonstrate that language matters to career progress and well-being in academic life. We would also suggest, therefore, the incorporation of language into existing EDI actions aimed at students and academic and management staff to raise awareness about the linguistic diversity of universities. There seems to be no structural language-based discrimination in the institutional infrastructures under examination but, in our opinion, there is room for effective improvement to tackle conscious and unconscious language bias. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the majority of our interviewees (10 out of 14) are female participants. Given the well-known intersection between language and gender in social interaction (Levon, 2015), it would be worth exploring the gender-specific dimensions of career progression and their interplay with language-related matters, something that can be addressed by future studies specifically designed with these goals in mind.

In sum, as a general conclusion, our study offers an empirical contribution to ongoing debates about whether speaking English as a first or as an additional language constitutes in and of itself a form of advantage or disadvantage in academia (see Flowerdew, 2019; Hyland, 2016). We certainly do not dispute the existence of native-speakerism in academic settings, but the findings presented here suggest a more complex picture than a simple classification of speakers into an imagined hierarchical ranking based on their first or additional languages alone. Where there are instances of privilege or disadvantage, these are most likely the result of a combination of factors in locally situated contexts. With Bourdieu (2000), we close by emphasising the need to look at the interaction of different forms of capital (academic, as well as linguistic, economic, and symbolic). This should help us develop intersectional frameworks to pin down the instances where different axes of inequality in academia (gender, race, class, ability, etc.) might be lived through and recreated in language (Kubota, 2020; Martín Rojo, 2021), with important consequences for speakers at an individual level.

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² Assistant Professor is a tenured position in the Irish system.

³ Transcription conventions: #, short pause; ##, long pause; [xxx], uninterpretable speech; [%], laughter; <...>[?], unclear speech; [...], ellipsis of text; [TEXT], the authors' clarification of the interviewee's words; X, where words or phrases have been omitted to anonymise the data.