

# Lingua Receptiva in Higher Education

*Stefan Sudhoff & Jan D. ten Thije*

*Abstract:* This paper presents an exploration of lingua receptiva as a multilingual mode of communication in academic courses, based on both theoretical foundations and practical experiences from a pilot project at Utrecht University. Lingua receptiva refers to a form of multilingualism where two interactors use different languages yet understand each other through their receptive proficiency in the other's language. Against the backdrop of evolving language policies in Dutch universities and the challenges associated with the widespread adoption of English as a lingua franca, the pilot project aimed to develop alternatives for bachelor's programs in the humanities, with a specific focus on language and culture studies (e.g., Dutch, German, Italian, French, and Spanish). Drawing upon the experiences of multilingual universities across Europe, the success factors, possible applications, and inherent challenges of implementing lingua receptiva as a form of inclusive multilingualism were explored, resulting in a model that can be applied at other universities in the Netherlands and other (European) countries.

*Zusammenfassung:* Dieser Artikel präsentiert die theoretischen Grundlagen für den Einsatz von Lingua receptiva als multilinguale Kommunikationsform in universitären Lehrveranstaltungen sowie praktische Erfahrungen aus einem Pilotprojekt an der Universität Utrecht. Lingua receptiva ist eine Form der mehrsprachigen Kommunikation, bei der zwei Interagierende unterschiedliche Sprachen verwenden, einander jedoch aufgrund ihrer rezeptiven Sprachfähigkeit in der Sprache der anderen Person verstehen. Vor dem Hintergrund der sich wandelnden Sprachpolitik niederländischer Universitäten und der Herausforderungen im Zusammenhang mit der zunehmenden Verwendung von Englisch als Lingua franca hatte das Pilotprojekt zum Ziel, Alternativen für Bachelor-Studiengänge in den Geisteswissenschaften, insbesondere für die Sprach- und Kulturstudiengänge (z. B. Niederländisch, Deutsch, Italienisch, Französisch und Spanisch) zu entwickeln. Unter Berücksichtigung der Erfahrungen mehrsprachiger Universitäten in Europa wurden Erfolgsfaktoren, mögliche Anwendungen und potentielle Probleme der Implementierung von Lingua receptiva als Form der inklusiven Mehrsprachigkeit untersucht. Das entwickelte Modell kann an anderen Universitäten in den Niederlanden und anderen (europäischen) Ländern angewendet werden.

*Keywords:* lingua receptiva, receptive multilingualism, academic education, inclusive multilingualism, language policy  
Lingua receptiva, rezeptive Mehrsprachigkeit, universitäre Lehre, inklusive Mehrsprachigkeit, Sprachpolitik

## 1. Introduction

“Lingua receptiva is a form of multilingual communication in which each speaker uses a different language, but each speaker has sufficient listening skills in the other speaker’s language for them to be able to understand each other. They do not have to be able to speak the other person’s language.”<sup>1</sup> This definition of *lingua receptiva* (in Dutch *luistertaal*) is used on the website of the Department of Languages, Literature and Communication of Utrecht University to inform students about the selection of over 60 courses in which they can participate if they have sufficient receptive skills in the language of instruction. These are all courses which are regularly offered by the department yet make use of a multilingual mode of communication. The result is an increase in the course offerings for (international) students from other degree programs who do not necessarily have sufficient productive skills in the relevant languages. Teachers and most students use the general language of instruction (i.e., Dutch, German, French, Spanish, or Italian), but select students are allowed to use another language (e.g., English or Dutch) in discussions and written assignments.

For example, in a video on the aforementioned website, an international student from an Italian university talks about her participation in an advanced course in German linguistics. She has advanced receptive German skills and is able to understand the theoretical literature and classroom discussions, but she is allowed to use English in order to ask questions and participate in the discussions. However, if she speaks English in class, both the teacher and the other students respond to her in German. She presumes that she, the teacher, and other students can handle this multilingual constellation. In fact, they all appreciate this experience of an international classroom.

In this article, we present the theoretical background of and practical experiences with a pilot project on multilingual education at Utrecht University. This pilot aimed to develop alternatives for bachelor’s programs in the humanities in the Netherlands and other European countries that often have to cope with declining student interest. Instead of switching to a language policy of *English only*, this pilot aimed to use multilingualism as an impetus for knowledge development.

This paper<sup>2</sup> starts by offering background information about Dutch universities’ language policies in the context of internationalization, the problems with relying on English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) in higher education, and the potential of *lingua receptiva* (Section 2). In Section 3, we provide a brief overview of multi-

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1 <https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/lingua-receptiva> (access: May 25, 2023)

2 We thank Madison Steele for her valuable comments on this paper.

lingualism in Europe, summarizing experiences of multilingual universities and European language policies. Following a description of the success factors for using lingua receptiva in Section 4, Section 5 discusses the project at Utrecht University. The final section summarizes our experiences with lingua receptiva in higher education.

## **2. Internationalization of Dutch universities, the consequences of Englishization, and the potential of lingua receptiva**

The European Union introduced the ERASMUS student mobility program in 1987. In addition to this educational bachelor-master innovation, large-scale research programs on multilingualism were set up by the EU and the European Science Foundation (ESF).<sup>3</sup> After the introduction of the Bologna (bachelor-master) reform in 2000, the share of international students at Dutch universities increased from 5% to 12% in 2017 (van der Wende, 2020). According to recent figures from 2021/2022, the share of international first-year students at Dutch universities was nearly 40% (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). For Dutch universities, economic motives played an important role in this development. The funding of universities in the Netherlands largely depends on the number of students enrolled and degrees obtained. Universities benefit financially from international students, especially those from outside the EU, as they pay much higher tuition fees than students from within the EU. That is why – in addition to the importance of the international classroom – Dutch universities have devoted special attention to international recruitment. As a result, the number of international students has increased considerably, and many degree programs have undergone major curricular changes. However, not all Dutch universities have followed the same approach. Some universities have completely switched to teaching in English. At other universities, the language policy differs per study program. Some programs also offer parallel tracks in Dutch and English.

For language studies, another important development is visible (KNAW, 2017, 2018). In recent decades, interest in what is referred to in the Netherlands as *small modern foreign languages* has declined sharply.<sup>4</sup> This concerns the bachelor's programs in Scandinavian languages, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Interest in the bachelor's program Dutch Studies has also declined (KNAW,

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3 See for instance Berthoud & Gajo (2020).

4 The adjective *small* does not refer to the number of (native) speakers here, but to the extent these languages are taught and learned/studied in the Netherlands.

2018). The concept that can be summarized as *one country, one nation, one culture, one language* (Anderson, 1983; Vogl, 2012) and that is seen as typical for the language and culture programs but does not correspond to their broad focus and interdisciplinary nature anymore, appeals to fewer and fewer students. Students are more likely to opt for a bachelor's program in which the study of language(s) and culture(s) is more explicitly combined with (digital) media, gender, diversity or postcolonial, multilingual or pluricultural topics, although most of all these aspects are part of the curricula of modern language and culture programs. However, the image building and branding of these programs does not attract a substantial part of today's youth (KNAW, 2018; ten Thije, 2022).

Another barrier for students is the apparent status of secondary school teaching as the central vocational perspective of language studies. This preconception keeps away prospective students who are interested in language and culture, but who do not necessarily aspire to a career in teaching and are more interested in communication professions in other societal sectors.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore important for the small language programs to reflect upon their educational structures and open up their range of courses to students outside their own programs.

Both internationalization and the changing status of the language and culture programs affect the specific educational constellations at Dutch universities. In order to discuss the practical consequences of these developments and the possibilities for (receptive) multilingual education next to English education, it is necessary to make a distinction between different groups of students that can follow joint education in a course. Since group work and group assignments are recurring learning methods in many programs at universities in the Netherlands, common prior knowledge is a relevant factor for successful academic education. From a curricular perspective, four different categories of students in all degree programs can be distinguished.

The first group consists of local Dutch-speaking students who follow a course as part of their major. They are the first target group for the teacher when designing the course. The second group consists of local Dutch-speaking students who take a course as an elective or as part of a minor within their bachelor's program. Nowadays, in addition to internationalization, study programs increasingly emphasize the interdisciplinarity of their programs and students are encouraged to take courses from other programs. This second group of students forms a substantial part of the participants of a course. By clearly stating entry requirements, programs try to ensure that these elective students have sufficient prior

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5 At the same time, there is a growing shortage of language teachers in secondary education.

knowledge to successfully follow a course. Part of these entry requirements are the language proficiency requirements concerning the language of instruction.

The third category concerns international exchange students who stay at a Dutch university for half a year or more, making use of exchange contracts between universities. Students who follow exchange programs under ERASMUS contracts do not have to pay extra tuition fees. Upon their admission, they receive an exchange contract which specifies which courses they will follow. It is then checked whether they meet the entry requirements of these courses. In addition, it is checked whether the courses are also honored within their degree program at their home university.

The fourth group consists of international students who register for a full degree program at a Dutch university. These are the so-called international degree students. During the selection, it is checked whether their previous education meets the entry requirements of the chosen program. Apart from study results and motivation, language skills in Dutch, English, or another language of instruction of the program can play a decisive role in the selection procedure. These degree students pay higher tuition fees than local students if they come from outside the European Union.

If we look at the consequences of the Englishization of academia as a result of the increase of international students, we see the following developments. On the one hand, English as medium of instruction has increased the accessibility of many courses for international students. For local Dutch-speaking students, on the other hand, the accessibility has diminished because an extra entry requirement has been added: they have to master academic English on a high (C1) level in reception as well as production.

Moreover, we may assume that for many international students, English is not their native language. English is used as a lingua franca in academic education, and it is known from the literature (Backus et al., 2013; Seidlhofer, 2011) that ELF encompasses many different varieties of global English. The mutual intelligibility of these varieties is not guaranteed. The use of ELF can therefore limit the mutual understanding in an international classroom where English is the medium of instruction. Research by Sweeney and Hua (2010) has also shown that the use of ELF can cause problems for native speakers of English who are not accustomed to communicating with non-natives. In the United Kingdom, for instance, there are special courses for native speakers of English to communicate successfully in ELF contexts (Pavone, 2015).

Finally, it appears that the English language skills of lecturers teaching in international classrooms are not always at the desired level. Students often complain about the poor language skills of their teachers. Therefore, many Dutch

universities began offering language training for teachers to get their academic English to a higher level, so that they can also properly assess the participation and assignments of all students in their courses with English as the medium of instruction. However, the new language proficiency requirements for teachers sometimes lead to resistance because teachers do not see why their education should be offered in English in the first place. Therefore, a discrepancy occurs between the general language policy of the universities and faculties on the one hand and the individual attitudes of lecturers on the other hand.

How could the use of *lingua receptiva* (Rehbein et al., 2012) contribute to the solution of the problems outlined before? When we consider the accessibility of courses in the language and culture programs with their high entry requirements regarding the language skills of the participants, the use of *lingua receptiva* could increase the possibility for Dutch speaking elective/minor students and international exchange students to participate in advanced courses that match their interests. This applies in particular to those courses where the level of their productive proficiency in the language of instruction has previously prevented them from participating.

A second advantage of *lingua receptiva* could be to reduce the problem of poorly-spoken English as a *lingua franca* by international (degree and exchange) students and locals. The starting point of *lingua receptiva* is that people use the language they master productively at a high level. For instance, locals can speak Dutch to internationals who have already acquired receptive knowledge of Dutch. Internationals, on the other hand, can use other languages (e.g., French, German, Italian, or Spanish) in which they are proficient and which are understood by the local students. This presupposes that the regulations of *lingua receptiva* must be clearly explained in the entry requirements of courses. *Lingua receptiva* will not solve all the linguistic issues resulting from English as a medium of instruction, but it could increase the multilingual repertoire of students and teachers.

A third aspect of *lingua receptiva* to consider is that this communicative mode presupposes mutual understanding based on high receptive language skills. Ideally, this feature makes it possible for interlocutors to discuss complex topics that are difficult to discuss using ELF. In this way, the use of *lingua receptiva* could demonstrate how multilingualism can facilitate the transfer and reflection of scientific knowledge in an international classroom. Allowing linguistic diversity in the classroom could contribute to an acceptance of cultural diversity and intercultural perspectives. By enhancing the variety of multilingual interaction situations, *lingua receptiva* could also support the development of students' collaboration skills. After all, knowledge exchange and reflection do

not only take place in classroom discussions but also in interactions in small groups or tandem conversations.

Another consideration for using lingua receptiva in the classroom is the effect it has on productive language skills. Although lingua receptiva in this case primarily focuses on receptive skills in the language of instruction of a course, it can also indirectly contribute to the development of productive skills in this language for international (degree and exchange) students and elective students. For Dutch-speaking local students, on the other hand, listening to other languages contributes to the development of their receptive skills in these languages and to their ability to communicate in multilingual situations.

Finally, in the language training of local and international teachers, special attention could be paid to receptive skills in Dutch or other languages that could improve the teachers' possibilities to interact with colleagues and students who speak different languages. Within Dutch higher education, the target language for teacher training is typically English for Dutch-speaking teachers and Dutch for international/non-Dutch-speaking teachers. It could also be valuable for teachers to improve their receptive skills in the languages of large groups of international students, such as German at universities in the border region between the Netherlands and Germany. In this way, the use of lingua receptiva in the international and multilingual classrooms could be promoted (cf. the Dutch – German Neighboring School Project, Jentges et al., 2021).

Keeping the potential benefits of lingua receptiva for various groups of local and international students in mind, the following section turns to the multilingual practices that can be observed at multilingual universities around Europe. These examples prompt further discussion about the possibilities and limitations of the multilingual classroom.

### **3. Multilingualism in Europe**

#### **3.1 Multilingual universities**

There are a few universities in Europe that, because of their locations in multilingual regions, have already gained experience with multilingual education for some time (Berthoud & Gajo, 2020). These universities served as inspiration for the Utrecht pilot (van den Berg et al., 2016). For example, multilingualism plays an important role for the University of Luxembourg, where, in addition to French, German, and English, the recently established national standard Luxembourgish is also used in academics.<sup>6</sup> At the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in

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6 See also Hu (this volume).

northern Italy, German also has an official regional status alongside Italian and is used in higher education. A similar situation exists on the other side of the Swiss-Italian border, in Lugano, where the only Italian-speaking university of Switzerland, the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) is located. For students at USI, Italian as well as German and English play a role in higher education. A final example is the University of the Basque Country, where, in addition to Spanish and English, Basque has also held official status since 1978 (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019). For all of these universities, multilingualism plays a crucial role in education, leading to unexpected opportunities but also pitfalls.

Based on interviews with key figures at the universities in Luxembourg, Bolzano and Lugano, Verbiest (2015) lists a number of important findings regarding the structure and organization of academic multilingual education. For example, the teaching materials are often presented bilingually. If a lecture is given in the regional language, the accompanying slides are in English. Multiple languages are allowed next to each other in the interaction during the classes or in written assignments. If there is a deviation from the official language of instruction in a course, it is up to the teacher to assess whether he or she has sufficient command of the language to assess the assignments. Moreover, teachers indicate that they prefer the use of *lingua receptiva* by a student in case his or her command of English as a *lingua franca* is insufficient. The students are informed in advance which languages may be used in assignments and exams.

It appears that the curriculum development of this multilingual education is still in its early stages. It is important to clearly indicate to students how different courses build on each other and what consequences this has for multilingual participation of students with different linguistic backgrounds. This applies in particular to the combination of language proficiency courses in the relevant languages and courses on linguistics, literature and history, communication and media. Teachers observe that the multilingual approach leads to more reflection from students on linguistic and cultural diversity and ethnocentric attitudes. This is evident, for example, in the multilingual cooperation between senior and junior students. In addition, in case of group assignments, teachers promote cultural and linguistic diversity and avoid creating monolingual groups.

As previously indicated, an important characteristic of these multilingual universities is that they are situated in multilingual regions. Therefore, the students are often already familiar with multilingualism from their everyday communication outside university and appreciate the fact that they can now compare their everyday experiences and reflect on them within an academic framework. This also applies to students who participate in courses that do not directly focus on a language and culture or language skills. They are stimulated to develop a



multilingual and multicultural perspective as part of the academic curriculum. For example, in intercultural constellations, humor and irony often prove to be unexpected but also result in instructive discussions within multilingual education. Verbiest (2015) reports that special training courses for teachers have been developed in the universities addressing how to deal with multilingualism in different types of courses.

### 3.2 Language policies on multilingualism

The development of multilingual practices in three multilingual universities reflect the policy developed by the European Commission in recent decades to give multilingualism a structural place in education. It is important to note that since its establishment in 1958, the European Commission has employed an additive concept of multilingualism for parliamentary communication. This means that all national standard languages within the European Union have an equal status. All voters within the 27 member countries of the EU must be able to participate in European democratic bodies in their own national language, resulting in extensive translation and interpreting facilities for “European communication” (European Commission, 2008, 2012). This additive concept of multilingualism affirms the national aspect of the concept *one country, one nation, one culture, one language* (Anderson, 1983; Vogl, 2012), which is now proving to be inadequate for everyday communication in many countries. To overcome the deficiencies of additive multilingualism, an inclusive concept of multilingualism is also being developed in Europe (Backus et al., 2013). This inclusive concept addresses how different languages are used alongside and in combination with each other in a given situation. Tools such as code-switching, a lingua franca, lingua receptiva, and interpretation and translation can all facilitate multilingual communication.

In this context, it is important to briefly discuss the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This framework is of great importance in international (higher) education. The six levels of the CEFR (from A1 to C2) are used at all universities in Europe to standardize the assessment of language proficiency of students. The CEFR therefore forms the basis of an international university. It is important that the CEFR uses the term *plurilingualism*<sup>7</sup> in its introduction to indicate the interdependence of different languages in everyday multilingual communication. Explicit attention to plurilingualism is also in the description of the different levels of communicative competences. Take for instance the description of plurilingual competence at C2 level: “Can interact in

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7 In the CEFR, plurilingualism is defined as “the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner”. (Council of Europe, 2020: 32)

a multilingual context on abstract and specialized topics by alternating flexibly between languages in their plurilingual repertoire and if necessary explaining the different contributions made.” (Council of Europe, 2020: 128). In this description, dealing with multilingualism is thus seen as a crucial part of linguistic competence. Strictly speaking, however, the description of multilingual competence conflicts with the general set-up of the CEFR, which is based on national languages and on the development of six communicative competences (reading, writing, speaking, listening, interaction, and mediation) per language.<sup>8</sup> Other instruments and frameworks that have been developed with European subsidies, such as FREPA (Candelier et al., 2013) and MAGICC (Räsänen et al., n. d.), are more explicit in stimulating multilingualism.

#### 4. Success factors for using lingua receptiva

Before presenting the pilot on lingua receptiva at Utrecht University, one last argumentation underlying the pilot will be discussed. This concerns the success factors for lingua receptiva in various constellations that have been discerned in the literature. These factors must also be considered in the use of lingua receptiva in educational constellations.

Literature on receptive multilingualism has paid much attention to the influence of the *typological distance* between the languages used for lingua receptiva (Gooskens & van Heuven, 2017). If the chosen languages have a close genetic relationship, a better mutual intelligibility is expected. Relevant examples are the use of lingua receptiva between Dutch and German speakers (i.e., within the West Germanic languages, Hufeisen & Marx, 2014) or French and Spanish speakers (i.e., within the Romance languages, Meissner, 2008). If the chosen languages are not (closely) related, then mutual understanding is not impossible, but it is necessary for the speakers to acquire the other language to a certain extent to be able to understand it (e.g., in the case of lingua receptiva between speakers of French and Dutch).

To conceptualize the influence of similarity/genetic relation and mutual intelligibility, Verschik (2012) makes a distinction between *inherent* and *acquired receptive multilingualism*. In the degree programs to be discussed in Section 5.3, Dutch and English are often used in lingua receptiva communication. On the one hand, these languages are closely related, as they are both West Germanic languages. Therefore, inherent receptive multilingualism should play a role in this language combination. On the other hand, some extent of controlled ac-

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8 The CEFR global scale descriptors are available in 22 national languages in Europe.

quisition of the other language can be assumed in most situations, especially in the case of English. In the EuroCom project (Hufeisen & Marx, 2014), filters are presented that indicate the similarities of linguistic phenomena between two languages that speakers can use to understand closely related languages. Examples of the linguistic structures that facilitate mutual intelligibility include sound correspondences, cognates, and corresponding prefixes and suffixes.

Additional success factors that are investigated in the field of receptive multilingualism are *exposure* and *attitude* (ten Thije, 2019). Exposure concerns the way in which people deal with multilingualism in their daily lives and the fact that they often unconsciously have already become acquainted with lingua receptiva. For example, students in Luxembourg, Northern Italy, or the Basque Country have often experienced lingua receptiva in their multilingual families or local communities. Language attitude is an important factor in communication in general but also in multilingual constellations (Braunmüller, 2013). The status of both languages involved in lingua receptiva communication will influence the willingness to understand each other. Migrant or regional languages often have a lower status than national languages, but also the difference in status between national languages can be an important factor. The status of English as a global language is higher than that of Dutch as a national language. This difference may influence the attitude towards lingua receptiva differently for local and international students in the Netherlands. Native speakers of Dutch, for example, often immediately switch to English when an international does not speak Dutch fluently, even if the international encourages locals to remain speaking in Dutch.

Finally, *common ground* and *conversation theme* shape the preconditions for mutual understanding. In the case of academic discourse, shared prior knowledge creates a positive precondition for using lingua receptiva. Students have already acquired knowledge (e.g., about academic terminology) in a specific scientific domain and are eager to develop new insights by discussing in lingua receptiva. The comparison of the terminology in the two languages involved in lingua receptiva communication can be a motor for knowledge development and awareness (Blees & ten Thije, 2016; Vetter, 2012).

These success factors for lingua receptiva create a theoretical framework for the introduction and discussion of the pilot initiated at Utrecht University.

## 5. Lingua receptiva at Utrecht University

This section provides an overview of the starting points, aims, and results of the project *Luistertaal in het universitair bacheloronderwijs* ('Lingua receptiva in academic teaching at the BA level'), which was carried out between 2014 and

2018 and implemented the use of *lingua receptiva* in bachelor's courses within the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.1 Context and starting points

In spite of Utrecht University's international ambitions, the Dutch language still plays an important role in academic teaching, particularly at the bachelor's level. Dutch is the official language of instruction for 50 bachelor's programs, whereas English is used in 12 programs. The language and culture programs in the modern foreign languages (English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish) are unique in that the majority of the courses are taught in the target language. At the master's level, 109 programs are taught in English, 46 are taught in Dutch, and 13 are multilingual or offer different language specific tracks.<sup>10</sup>

The number of international students at Utrecht University has increased significantly in the last decade.<sup>11</sup> Compared to other Dutch universities, however, the percentage of international students at Utrecht University is relatively low: about 13% in 2021 (Utrecht University, 2021). Independent of their individual foreign language skills, international students mainly participate in courses taught in English. To increase the number of international students, more English-speaking programs and English-speaking tracks within existing programs have been established in the last years. This amounts to an increased use of ELF in academic teaching.

In the *Department of Languages, Literature, and Communication* (LLC), a known issue is the low number of participants in the courses taught in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. On the one hand, the corresponding bachelor's programs (French/German/Italian/Spanish Language and Culture) have comparably few students. On the other hand, the courses only exceptionally attract

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9 The project was funded by Utrecht University as part of the EMP program (*Educatieve middelen pool*), set up to stimulate innovation and quality improvement in academic teaching. It was initially funded for the academic year 2014/15 and has been renewed three times for another academic year. We thank Ineke van den Berg, Fleur Verbiest, Stefanie Klok, Karen Schoutsen, and Hanneke Roodbeen for their assistance and support. We also thank Hugo Quené and Dorien Nieuwenhuijsen for advice and support in their function of Director of Education and Marion Vink in her position of Education Coordinator. Without institutional support, this pilot could not have been executed and implemented.

10 Numbers refer to the academic year 2022/23.

11 Recent numbers can be found at [https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/f\\_c\\_internationale\\_studenten.html](https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/f_c_internationale_studenten.html) (access: May 25, 2023).

students of other programs, although all bachelor's programs include the possibility to choose electives offered by other programs, either as individual courses or as part of a minor (cf. Section 2 above). The reason for this behavior lies at least partly in the high requirements with respect to the language skills of the participants. In particular, the demands on the productive skills – speaking and (academic) writing – often cannot be met by students majoring in other subjects.

For the same reason, international students are often excluded from participation in courses offered by the language and culture programs as well as courses with Dutch as language of instruction. Examples include the bachelor's programs Dutch Language and Culture, Communication and Information Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Language and Culture Studies, Literary Studies, and General Linguistics.

Given the low number of participants in some programs, it is desirable to enhance the accessibility of the LLC courses for students of other programs within or outside the department, as well as for international students. The broad range of courses offered by the language and culture programs is highly relevant for students of, e. g., General Linguistics, Literary Studies, Media and Communication Science, (Art) History, and Philosophy. By making these courses accessible to new target groups, their continuation in the future can be secured and the position of the respective programs can be strengthened. At the same time, the quality of academic education must be guaranteed. The development of the major students' language skills, for instance, must not be negatively affected by the accommodation of other groups of students. Therefore, the use of ELF instead of the target languages of the programs, the use of Dutch in the courses of the modern foreign language and culture programs, or a reduction of the necessary language proficiency level are not desirable options.

Our project attempted to tackle the limited accessibility of the LLC courses by introducing *lingua receptiva* as a regular communication mode in the bachelor's programs. In this way, existing barriers for international and Dutch students to choose electives offered by the language and culture programs could be lowered, while at the same time maintaining the high language proficiency of the students majoring in these programs. As the next section shows, the use of *lingua receptiva* provides an efficient way of dealing with heterogeneous groups of students and makes multilingualism more visible in academic education, thus creating a valuable alternative to ELF. The following subsections outline the general principles for the use of *lingua receptiva* in university courses that have been developed in our project, as well as the practical problems that had to be solved.

## 5.2 General concept of the project

The goal of our project was to create the possibility for students to participate in academic courses despite insufficient competence in the language of instruction with respect to the productive skills (speaking and writing). By combining their receptive skills (listening and reading) in the language of instruction – which are usually much further developed than their productive skills – with the use of another language for their own contributions, students are able to actively take part in courses they would normally be excluded from based on the language proficiency requirements. More specifically, this means that the course instructor and the regular students consistently use the language of instruction of the course, while the *lingua receptiva* students use a different language for their oral presentations, discussions during the course meetings, and written assignments and exams. The language they use is either their native language or another language in which they are highly proficient.

The advantages of this approach are evident: *lingua receptiva* students can be admitted to courses they choose based on their preferences, interests and pre-knowledge with respect to the content of the courses. As they are not required to productively use the (insufficiently mastered) language of instruction for their contributions, their language skills do not hinder their active participation. The use of *lingua receptiva* can reduce or overcome speaking inhibitions and enable students to express multifaceted thoughts more freely. For the regular students who productively use the language of instruction, the use of a (potentially also insufficiently mastered) *lingua franca* is not necessary. In case of the courses with Dutch as language of instruction, the (majority of the) students can use their native language, which has the advantages discussed above. In the case of the language and culture programs in the modern foreign languages, students use the target language of the respective program, ensuring that they reach a high level of proficiency.

The successful use of *lingua receptiva* in academic education has several prerequisites. The following principles were adopted in our project:

1. The proportion of students using *lingua receptiva* in a course must not exceed a certain level to secure the prevailing status of the language of instruction in the course communication. The number of *lingua receptiva* students was tentatively limited to approximately 10% of the participants in a course, which corresponds to two or three *lingua receptiva* students in a regular course with 25 participants. Empirical research is needed to determine the influence of *lingua receptiva* use on the course communication depending on the proportion of *lingua receptiva* students.

2. The courses that offer a lingua receptiva option must be carefully selected. Lingua receptiva cannot be used in courses where the active use of the language of instruction is essential for the course objectives. For this reason, language proficiency courses as well as other courses involving components relying on or developing the participants' productive skills were excluded, such as translation courses or courses on foreign language didactics where students develop course materials in the target language. In the courses that are suitable for lingua receptiva use, the course topic is in principle independent of the language of instruction.<sup>12</sup>
3. Within the courses offering a lingua receptiva option, the language(s) that may be productively used by the lingua receptiva students must be carefully determined based on the language skills of both the course instructor and the regular students. In the Dutch setting, knowledge of English and, to a lesser extent, of German and French, can be presupposed in many cases. English is therefore a natural candidate in courses with Dutch as language of instruction,<sup>13</sup> and German and French are also valid options, especially in courses taught in Dutch or Romance languages, respectively. Dutch can be used by lingua receptiva students in most courses of the modern foreign language and culture programs, i. e., the courses taught in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and in courses with English as language of instruction.<sup>14</sup> More generally, a language qualifies to be used by lingua receptiva students in a given course if the instructor and the regular students have a sufficient receptive command of this language, either because it is their native language or because they have acquired the language to some extent (acquired receptive multilingualism; cf. Section 4). The use of lingua receptiva based on the similarity between genetically closely related languages (inherent receptive multilingualism) is only of secondary importance in our project setting, as

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12 While content and language learning are usually intertwined in the courses of the language and culture programs, there is a gradual shift from more language-oriented courses in the first year to more content oriented courses in the second and third year. For this reason, the advanced courses, which are usually part of specialization modules defined in terms of their content, are more likely to be selected as lingua receptiva courses.

13 Note that the use of English in this setting must not be confused with ELF, as the regular students do not switch to English but keep speaking Dutch during the course meetings.

14 The use of Dutch in courses taught in English only concerns courses of the bachelor's programs Literary Studies and General Linguistics. Courses of the program English Language and Culture have not been included in the project.

the relevant languages are not normally mutually comprehensible without some form of prior foreign language acquisition (with the possible exception of the Romance languages among themselves).

4. It must be ensured that the receptive skills of the *lingua receptiva* students in the language of instruction of the courses they want to attend are sufficient to understand both the course reading materials (academic texts and primary literature) and the oral course communication (lectures by the instructor, presentations by fellow students, and course discussions). As the *lingua receptiva* students are supposed to participate at an equal academic level, it is important that their receptive skills in the language of instruction are comparable to those of the regular participants.<sup>15</sup> This must be guaranteed before the students are admitted to the courses. In our project, we used a combination of self-assessment and examination by the course instructor.
5. The use of *lingua receptiva* in university courses must be officially acknowledged and clearly regulated. The applying conditions must be transparent to both the *lingua receptiva* students and the regular participants in the courses.

### 5.3 Implementation and evaluation

In the first year of the project (2014/15), an inventory of experiences with and the need for multilingual education at the department was made. Data on the students' course choices (especially of advanced courses) within and outside LLC were requested from the student administration. These data show that students mainly choose courses offered by their own program, confirming the assumption that student mobility between programs is very limited. This project and the possibilities of *lingua receptiva* were discussed with various groups of students and teachers during regular information and staff meetings. Most students and teachers showed an open-minded attitude towards the use of *lingua receptiva* in an academic setting but were unsure about the specific circumstances and possibilities.

To gain first experiences with *lingua receptiva* in university courses, two pilots were conducted within the department LLC, one within the program Communication and Information Science (course: Interculturele dialog/Intercultural dialogue; teacher: Jan D. ten Thije; language of instruction: Dutch) and one

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15 A required absolute proficiency level for the use of *lingua receptiva* in academic education cannot be determined, however, as the (required) proficiency of the regular students varies depending on the individual bachelor's programs and the status of the individual courses within the programs, especially in the foreign language and culture programs.



within the program German Language and Culture (course: Sprache, Bedeutung und Kommunikation/Language, meaning, and communication; teacher: Stefan Sudhoff; language of instruction: German). In each of the two courses, one student participated using lingua receptiva. Both were international exchange students, one from the United Kingdom and the other from Iran. The teachers of the courses described their approaches, in particular their methods of supervision and intervention, in the form of a logbook. A class visit to one of the sessions of both pilots was made by an educational expert of the university's Teaching and Learning Center (Centrum voor onderwijs en leren, COLUU) to observe the interaction during the classes. To evaluate the pilots, a questionnaire on the use of lingua receptiva was developed and distributed among the students. In addition, a set of three specific questions about the advantages and disadvantages of the use of lingua receptiva was added to the regular course evaluation carried out at the end of each course. For both pilots, students were positive about the added value of lingua receptiva and did not indicate any problems. Crucially, this is not only the case for the international students who participated using lingua receptiva, but also for the regular students of the courses, who acknowledged the better accessibility of the course for students from outside their own program as well as the benefits of an international classroom.

To gain more insight into the role that lingua receptiva can play in supporting multilingual education, three case studies were conducted at multilingual European universities, resulting in the report of Verbiest (2015) discussed in Section 3.1 above. The language policies and daily practices of multilingual education were investigated through a study of policy documents, course materials, websites, and expert interviews with teachers specializing in multilingualism. Finally, the first concept of a teacher training program for teachers at Utrecht University who want to make use of lingua receptiva in their courses was developed.

In the second project year (2015/16), the two pilots at the bachelor's level were complemented by a third pilot in a cross-language course of the education master's program. This pilot was particularly interesting because a new aspect of using lingua receptiva in teaching emerged. Students working in language-specific subgroups (Dutch, French, German, and Spanish) prepared tasks and gave presentations in their target language in front of the entire multilingual group. Part of the audience could thus participate only through lingua receptiva. The presenting students reported afterwards that this procedure had been very instructive, as they became aware of the differences in language skills in the group and adjusted their presentation accordingly. This was an additional opportunity for the students to prepare themselves within the academic setting for dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity in secondary education. The same was true

for the students in the audience who were able to understand more from the presentation than expected and had also been able to put themselves in the role of their own future students. The students' reflections contribute to the development of their educational competencies. Again, evaluation took place through lesson visits and online course evaluations.

The next project objective involved expanding the number of courses with *lingua receptiva* as an option in the department LLC and the recruitment of participants. For this purpose, a more intensive cooperation with the education coordinators and student advisors proved to be very important. It was agreed that during information sessions organized by the student advisors, students would be systematically made aware of the possibility of participating in courses through *lingua receptiva*. Contacts with the International Office of Utrecht University were strengthened so that their staff could point exchange students to the option of taking *lingua receptiva* courses.

To simplify the admission procedure, a concept was made for the (self-)selection of students to participate in courses using *lingua receptiva*. Short videos were made that allowed students to self-assess their receptive skills in Dutch, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. In cooperation with the university's online education innovation and support team Educate-it, interactive parts of five courses of the department (approximately 10 minutes per course) were recorded.<sup>16</sup> Using the online tool Xerte, these fragments were combined with several multiple-choice questions testing the understanding of the teacher's explanations as well as the students' contributions. Based on the results, an indication is given of whether someone qualifies for participation in a course with the relevant language of instruction.

In close consultation with the department's teachers, a total of 65 courses were selected as *lingua receptiva* courses for the academic year 2016/17. These were mainly advanced courses in the second or third year of the programs Communication and Information Science (6 courses), German Language and Culture (8 courses), French Language and Culture (6 courses), Italian Language and Culture (5 courses), Dutch Language and Culture (5 courses), Spanish Language and Culture (5 courses), General Linguistics (14 courses) and courses of the department not belonging to any specific program (16 courses). The selection criteria have been discussed in Section 5.2 above. In close cooperation with the LLC education director and the education coordinators, a standard description of the procedure for enrollment and participation was formulated in five languages (Dutch, French, German, Italian, and Spanish) and included in the 65 course de-

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16 We thank Hans Schuurman and Michiel Fleerkate for their support and the involved teachers and students for their permission to make recordings in the five courses.

scriptions.<sup>17</sup> A permanent website as part of the LLC student website was created with information about lingua receptiva and the course offerings, both in Dutch (for local students) and in English (for internationals). The tests for self-selection were also published on this website.<sup>18</sup>

To prepare the teachers of the department for using lingua receptiva in their courses, the teacher training was finalized, and 6 LLC teachers were trained in a workshop in spring 2016. In addition, an extensive teacher's guide was developed as an introduction to lingua receptiva and a reference manual.<sup>19</sup>

During this second project year, we observed increasing support for the use of lingua receptiva both within the department and the faculty in general.<sup>20</sup> In March 2016, the project was presented at a workshop of the Dutch Language Union (Nederlandse Taalunie), introducing it to researchers and teachers from other Dutch universities.

In the third year of the project (2016/17), we focused on a further expansion of the number of lingua receptiva courses, the recruitment of more participants, and the evaluation of both the information activities and the lingua receptiva courses themselves. In the 65 courses open for lingua receptiva students in this academic year, a total of 13 students made use of the opportunity, 10 of which were international students. They took part in courses with Dutch (9), German

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17 For instance, the Dutch description reads as follows: "In deze cursus is Luistertaal mogelijk. Deze cursus wordt aangeboden in het Nederlands. De cursus staat ook open voor studenten die deze taal vooral receptief beheersen (als luistertaal). Deze studenten kunnen desgewenst in het Engels of Duits deelnemen, en ook toetsonderdelen in die talen afleggen. Als je van luistertaal gebruik wilt maken, neem dan direct na inschrijving contact op met de docent. Let op: als je van luistertaal gebruik maakt, dan wordt deze cursus opgenomen in de profileringsruimte van je opleiding. De cursus kan dan niet gelden als taalspecifieke cursus binnen het major of minor onderdeel van je opleiding." ('Participation using lingua receptiva is possible in this course. This course is offered in Dutch. The course is also open to students who master this language primarily receptively. These students can participate in English or German, if desired, and also take tests in those languages. If you wish to participate using lingua receptiva, please contact the instructor immediately after registration. Note that if you participate using lingua receptiva, this course will count as an elective within your program. The course cannot count as a language-specific course within the major or minor of your degree program.')

18 <https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/lingua-receptiva> (access: May 25, 2023)

19 All materials (in Dutch) can be obtained from the authors.

20 This has also been helped by the fact that Jan D. ten Thije was appointed Teaching Fellow for Internationalization as of September 1, 2015.

(3), and French (1) as language of instruction. The pilot in the education master's program was repeated as well.

All course evaluations show that the regular students do not perceive the presence of the lingua receptiva student(s) as hindering the achievement of the course goals. In general, they welcome the opportunity to give interested students lacking the necessary productive language skills the chance to participate via the lingua receptiva option. The lingua receptiva students themselves also consider lingua receptiva a valuable addition. However, they sometimes find it difficult to keep up with the course discussions. A reason for this could be that the (self-)assessment procedure was not consistently followed in all cases. Despite the requirement that prospective lingua receptiva students first test their receptive language skills via the self-assessment on the website and then make an appointment with the teacher who carries out an additional check via an introductory interview, part of the students simply signed up for the courses, expecting to hear more about what it means to be a lingua receptiva student during the first meeting.

To gain more insights into the reasons for the relatively low number of participants and the attractiveness of the lingua receptiva option in general, a survey was conducted among undergraduate students of the department LLC (enrolled in one of the seven language and culture programs, Communication and Information Science, Literary Studies, or General Linguistics) as well as among students of the broad bachelor's programs Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) and Language and Culture Studies (LCS). The survey was completed by 335 students, of which 38% (LLC)/29% (LAS/LCS) were familiar with the possibility of taking courses using lingua receptiva. Familiarity with the lingua receptiva option was much higher among second- and third-year students (about 60%) than among first-year students, which is probably an effect of the information provided by study advisors at the end of the first and second study year. After a brief explanation of the principles of lingua receptiva and the possibilities within the courses of the department, 55% (LLC)/60% (LAS/LCS) of the respondents indicated that they found the lingua receptiva offerings interesting, their main reasons being that they could improve their language skills in the target language, enrich their study program and gain experience in an international classroom. Respondents not interested in the lingua receptiva offerings mentioned that they did not have space in their programs for lingua receptiva courses, that they did not see the benefits of option, or that they did not have sufficient receptive language skills in the relevant languages to participate in one of the courses.

Although taking courses through lingua receptiva is an interesting option for a large part of the students, the project had not been successful in creating

sufficient awareness of the possibility among students. This is a surprising result, as we had carried out various promotional activities, such as informing students about lingua receptiva through newsletters and online publications,<sup>21</sup> spreading promotional posters and printed information materials, and informing students personally on multiple occasions. We concluded that for increasing the number of participants, it is important to link the information activities regarding lingua receptiva to the planning of the academic year, to integrate the option in the regular process of course enrollment and to lower the administrative threshold for participation.

A sustainable implementation of lingua receptiva in higher education beyond the duration of the project also requires that all administrative processes are taken over by the educational support staff. In the final year of the project (2017/18), we took the important step to integrate the lingua receptiva option in the university's online course catalogue, resulting in a better findability of the courses for interested students as well as study advisors and administrators. All responsibilities for the continuation were handed over to the education and program coordinators, the educational support team, and the teachers of the individual courses. On the one hand, this decentralization of the project has probably led to a decrease of visibility and awareness. On the other hand, it is clear that the use of lingua receptiva as a mode of multilingual communication has reached a certain normality within the department, not only in courses of the bachelor's and master's programs, but also in the communication between staff members. We consider this an important result of the project.

#### 5.4 Follow-up initiatives

After the official end of the project, a number of follow-up initiatives on lingua receptiva in (higher) education were developed by the project members and other researchers and teachers at Utrecht University. Another EMP project, initiated by Rick de Graaff, identified opportunities and needs for using lingua

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21 On DUB, the independent news site of Utrecht University, articles about lingua receptiva were published in June 2016 (<https://dub.uu.nl/nl/nieuws/experiment-meertaligheid-bachelorcursussen>, access: May 25, 2023) and January 2017 (<https://dub.uu.nl/nl/achtergrond/college-luistertaal-any-questions-dank-je-wel>, access: May 25, 2023). The project was also covered in other media, such as *Transfer*, an independent journal for international cooperation in higher education and research (cf. Eimers, 2016), *Neerlandia*, a Dutch-Flemish magazine for language, culture and society (cf. van den Berg et al., 2016), and the newsletter of the Dutch Language Union (*Nederlandse Taalunie*).

receptiva in international and multilingual student groups of education master's programs. Further research must show how successful use of lingua receptiva in teacher training can contribute to a larger and more diverse and inclusive intake of students, which is of great importance for language and culture studies.

In cooperation with the Dutch Language Union (Nederlandse Taalunie), an inventory of the use of lingua receptiva in different sectors in the Netherlands and Flanders, among which the educational sector, was made by Jan D. ten Thije, Emmy Gulikers, and Karen Schoutsen (ten Thije et al., 2020).

The university-wide project *Multilingualism and Participation* (2019–2022), led by Jan D. ten Thije, explored the possibilities of using lingua receptiva, among other modes of multilingual communication, in representative bodies within the university in order to secure active participation of students and staff members with different linguistic backgrounds (Groothoff et al., 2022). One important result of this project was the development of a receptive Dutch course for internationals as the basis for their participation in meetings using lingua receptiva. Another was the permanent appointment of a coordinator for multilingualism and participation, ensuring the coordinated implementation of the new bilingual language policy that was developed by a commission chaired by Peter Schrijver (Utrecht University, 2022). This policy regulates bilingualism with regard to the language of instruction for degree programs and tracks, as well as the application of (receptive) multilingualism in representative bodies.<sup>22</sup>

In 2023, the NWO-funded research project *Getting to the CoRe: A Communicative Receptive Approach to Language Learning and Mutual Understanding in Multilingual Academic Contexts* (led by Rick de Graaff and Jan D. ten Thije) started, exploring the following main research question: To what extent can a receptive approach in Dutch L2 learning improve the language acquisition process and outcome for the purpose of communicative effectiveness in receptive multilingual settings? The project elaborates this main question in the period 2023–2027 in three subprojects that analyze (1) the effectiveness of receptive multilingualism in multilingual meetings, (2) the cognitive processes underlying speech perception in Dutch L2 and language switching in English when

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22 Information regarding the project *Multilingualism and Participation* can be found on the following website: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/governance-and-organisation/employee-and-student-representation/multilingualism-in-employee-and-student-representation> (access: May 25, 2023). Next to the course *Receptive Dutch as administrative language (B1-C1)*, the project developed a *Toolkit Multilingual Meetings* including seven animated knowledge clips and a *Workshop for Multilingual Meetings*. The quintessence of these training materials is that attempts to improve multilingual communication should address both sides: internationals and locals.

Dutch L2 has been taught and learned receptively, and (3) the characteristics of an effective teaching approach aimed at the development of receptive language proficiency in multilingual meetings in academic settings. The integration of discourse analyses, psycholinguistics, and language teaching analyses is a relevant scientific follow-up of our project that started as a simple innovation project regarding lingua receptiva.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed our pilot project on multilingual education at Utrecht University against the background of European developments of language policies with regard to multilingualism in higher education. The experiences with the pilot within the department LLC are a reflection of the discussed societal developments when it comes to how to deal with the Englishization of higher education. This chapter concludes with a summary of the main advantages and objectives of the introduction of lingua receptiva in academic constellations for individual local and international students:

- Lingua receptiva can act as a first introduction for students to follow education in another language. This creates a stepping stone for students who want to prepare for a study abroad. Taking courses of other programs and in other languages enriches the level of the students' own study program. Students have more options and can profile themselves better. Through courses that facilitate lingua receptiva, students can prepare for a specific master's program. The communicative and intercultural competences acquired through the use of lingua receptiva can be applied in various multilingual and intercultural programs.
- Although improving language skills is not the primary objective of a lingua receptiva course, the regular use of receptive language skills can lead to improved productive skills in the language in question. Further research should document this language development in detail.
- Regular students in a particular course also benefit from the participation of lingua receptiva students. They become acquainted with other perspectives on "their" subjects and gain experiences in an international classroom.

In conclusion, the model of lingua receptiva courses has great potential for further implementation in other universities, cf. also Hu (this volume) and Redder (this volume).

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