

## **The role of English as a lingua franca in social integration: The case of the international students of a university in Taiwan**

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Globalization and the ease of mobility across nations in the last decade or so have brought some fundamental changes to the structural organization and operation of universities worldwide. To enhance global competitiveness, East Asian universities, in particular, have seen a growth in the intake of international students. A majority of the previous studies on students studying abroad were undertaken in the context of English-speaking countries such as the UK and USA; research investigating students coming from afar to study in countries which are predominantly Chinese-speaking appears to be lacking. Even scantier is the work related to how this group of students navigates through the social way-of-life at the university. This article explores the social integration of the international students of a bilingual university located in northern Taiwan. More specifically, the role English as a lingua franca plays in the integration will be examined based on the narrative accounts of 14 informants. The findings suggest that some institutional and individual obstacles need to be overcome before English can become more widely accepted as the common medium of communication.

**Keywords:** English as a lingua franca; social integration; international students; Taiwan

### **Introduction**

The Taiwanese have their own lifestyle and their own activities and the foreign students do not seem to know what happens in the school. Most of those who come to join the activities are Taiwanese as they know Chinese. For foreign students, they have their own activities, maybe they go travel a lot.

(Malaysian informant)

If foreigners sit down first, nobody sits beside you. I always go sit between them. They won't ask you to join them, unless you ask.

(Gambian informant)

For the last decade or so, the annual publications of world league tables or university rankings such as the *Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings* and *Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings* have been given considerable attention. Despite scepticism about their accuracy and universities' seemingly artificial manipulation of the reported data as opposed to real changes (Eccles, 2002), the rankings published continue to be seen as an important indicator of universities'

performance. Parents and prospective students may use them to make informed decisions about future university studies. Individual universities certainly recognize the face value of rankings and implement various measures in response. Among the variables used for the calculation of rankings, *internationalization* is one that has been underscored. Universities worldwide, particularly East Asian ones (Mok, 2007), have taken this on-board and, as a result, have been making changes to the ideologies of university management, governance and institutional policies.

While the authors recognize that internationalization is multifaceted in nature, covering dimensions such as medium of instruction, mobility of students, teaching and learning environment, this paper will place the focus on the single aspect of social integration as perceived by a group of international students who were at the time pursuing a full degree or were on an exchange programme in a university in a foreign country. Problems faced by international students during their social integration as reflected in the informants' comments at the beginning of this section are only the tip of the iceberg and certainly not confined to the university within which this research was contextualized. We believe that understanding the role played by the language used for communication or as a lingua franca is crucial to tackling the problems identified because language is fundamental to social interaction.

### **Context of study**

The current study was conducted within the context of Yuan Ze University (YZU hereafter) located in northern Taiwan. YZU is a private university and has been recognized as one of the top research-oriented universities in the country. In 2005, YZU was one of the 12 universities which received a substantial amount of funding in their bid for the national 'Top University Project'. One of the highlights of their proposal was the emphasis on internationalizing the campus which had previously been dominated by Chinese-speaking students. Such an initiative is also articulated and underlined in the University's vision statement which states that "Yuan Ze University is going to become a bilingual and application-led research university with international reputation", and that it "possesses an innovative, diverse and harmonious learning atmosphere, and provides high-quality and internationalized education" (YZU, 2014a [our translation from the original Chinese]). The University website shows that more than 30% of courses are delivered in English and some degree programmes, such as the English BBA programme, have English as the sole medium of instruction. A bilingual (Chinese and English) policy and a generous scholarship package are in place to attract international students. In the 2013/14 academic year, there were 208 international students (excluding those from Hong Kong, Macau and the Mainland China) coming from 28 countries, accounting for about 3.5% of the total student population. YZU has also established exchange programmes with their partner institutions worldwide. About 37 non-Chinese speaking exchange students from 11 countries were on campus in the fall semester of 2013/14. While a small number of foreign students at the university have a mastery of basic Mandarin Chinese, English is predominantly the lingua franca they use to socialize with other foreign and local students in class and out of class. Such a linguistic choice may seem natural and taken-for-granted but whether this is the reality merits investigation. The purpose of the study reported here was therefore to solicit the views of the foreign students about integration into the social life of YZU and about the extent to which it was facilitated and/or impeded by language use. The research focus will be contextualized in relation to previous research on English as a lingua franca, international students and social integration.

### **From lingua franca to English as a lingua franca**

A lingua franca, according to Samarin (cited in Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 211), refers to “any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues”. The term has been in existence for centuries and was originally in use for business and diplomatic activities throughout the eastern Mediterranean. There exist many different lingua francas in the world and English as a lingua franca (ELF hereafter) is among the most researched and discussed in the literature.

ELF is often conceptualized as a kind of ‘contact language’ used in situations where interlocutors do not share a common native tongue or a common culture, and English is chosen as the medium of communication (Firth, 1996; Jenkins, 2014). The emergence of such a concept ties in closely with both the “consequence and driving force of globalization” (Seidlhofer & Mauranen, 2012, p. 1) which has led to a drastic increase in the number of non-native users of English. ELF distinguishes itself from a similar term World Englishes (WEs) in that ELF is more *ad hoc* and localised in its formation and use whereas WEs are the varieties of English that are more recognized and established because of their “historical and functional characteristics” (Sharma, 2008, p. 122), and in Kachru’s (1998) terms, span three concentric circles (see also Jenkins, 2009; Kachru, 2009).

Much of the ELF research focuses on description at various linguistic levels, namely, phonology (including segmental and suprasegmental), lexicogrammar, syntax and discourse pragmatics. While ELF may seem to deviate from the so-called English as a native language, ELF researchers do not normally take a deficit view nor do they assume “all the English used by ELF speakers... is by definition acceptable, or that all the processes and features found in ELF communication are different from those of native English” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 25). Following this line of argument, the notion of mutual intelligibility is crucial to the understanding of ELF interactions.

ELF research has been carried out in various domains and in a wide range of settings such as: business (see, for example, Louihala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005), higher education (see, for example, Mauranen, Hynninen, & Ranta, 2010; Smit, 2010), cross-cultural communication (Kirkpatrick, 2010) and teacher-training (Snow, Kamhi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006), to name a few. However, the issue of the role of ELF in socializing seems to be under-explored, or as Jenkins (2014) suggests, it “tends to be forgotten” (p. 29). Such research is nevertheless worthwhile in the current higher education context where opportunities for students to study abroad are on the rise, and global citizenship (Lewin, 2009; Pigozzi, 2006) is advocated by universities around the world with a view to raising young adults’ awareness of cultural diversity and sociopolitical situations beyond where they live.

### **International students**

Not surprisingly, the definition of who count as ‘international students’ proper varies between countries and institutions. At YZU, international students are defined as those “whose nationality is not from the Republic of China and also without overseas Chinese student status as described in Article 2, of the Nationality Act” (YZU, 2014b). Those from Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China are excluded from the category of international students. The reasons behind the categorization are beyond the scope of this paper but it is worth noting that the majority of people from these excluded areas share the same grammatical system despite variations in the vernacular and orthographic (simplified vs traditional) forms.

Studies on international students are mostly concerned with how well they adjust to the new environment, i.e. acculturation. They have been undertaken mainly from the psychological, social and linguistic perspectives. Such studies deal with issues related to these sojourners' psychological and mental well-beings (see, for example, Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008), social adaptation and adjustments (see, for example, Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002), and adaptation to new discursive practices (see, for example, Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). These studies are very crucial to informing institutional policies and the implementation of relevant support or intervention mechanism.

Much of the research on international students was conducted in English-speaking countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The presence of a growing number of East Asian international students in the classrooms of these countries have made great impacts on the teaching and learning atmosphere, teacher-student interactions, pedagogical approaches adopted, as well as materials and task development. For example, Brown (2007) brought to the readers' attention the challenges faced when supervising the dissertation writing of international postgraduate students in the UK. A rather low linguistic competence, prevalence of personal difficulties, lack of critical thinking, and excessive teacher-dependence are among the factors that hinder successful supervision. While the academic staff at times felt frustrated, a "sensitive treatment" (Brown, 2007, p. 242) was required for these students. This could be due to the consideration of the substantial economic benefits brought about by this group of students.

More relevant to the present study would be Jenkins' (2014) recent conversation study on international students' perceptions of the effects of English language policies and practices. The findings suggested that there was still much room for improvement in the way international students were treated in terms of having a more realistic expectation in their use of English during lingua franca communication.

Despite the vast number of studies available in the literature, the current study can contribute further to the understanding of international students' experiences by situating the research in a bilingual university, with the caveat that Mandarin Chinese is the lingua franca (Li, 2006) for the host nation. Also, rather than focusing on the level of linguistic descriptions, this study will adopt a sociolinguistic viewpoint through the analysis of informants' perceptions as reflected in their interviews.

### **Social integration: The analytical framework**

The theory of social integration goes back more than half a century. Blau (1960), for example, understood such a concept in terms of bonds of social attraction, i.e. "how attracted a person is to the group and how attractive each person is to the rest of the group" (p. 546). The influences of social integration together with academic integration on students' connection with the institution have also been widely studied, on the basis of which students' levels of attribution and persistence are gauged (Bers & Smith, 1991).

The analytical framework for this paper is adapted from that proposed by Rienties, Grohnert, Kommers, Niemantsverdriet, and Nijhuis (2011) who analysed social integration broadly from two perspectives: *formal integration* facilitated by the institution and *informal integration* facilitated by the peer social network. Under formal integration they identified two contributing factors, namely, the perception of faculty and education system. Social support by family and friends, social life and national/ethnic identity contribute to informal integration. While their framework is

comprehensive, we need to adapt it to fit our purpose of understanding the role of ELF in social integration. Therefore, with respect to formal integration, enforcement of the bilingual policy and language support for international and home students will be investigated. As for informal integration, the informants' perception of the extent to which English is used as a social ELF, and their experience in communicating with home students will be examined.

### Methodology

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews (more than 260 minutes in total) with informants recruited at YZU. The interview questions are listed in Appendix 1. In total, 14 international students participated in this study, with an equal distribution of undergraduates and postgraduates. These informants came from 12 countries, namely: Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, Korea, Vietnam, Honduras, Japan, Brunei Darussalam, Iraq and Gambia (see Tables 1 and 2 for fuller demographic information). It is noteworthy that many of these interviewees were bi- or multi-lingual. For example, the Honduran informant had Spanish as her mother tongue and could also speak English, French, Portuguese, and some Chinese. The choice of language use is also subject to the setting within which interactions take place. The Indian interviewee, for instance, spoke English while at university, Hindi with her Indian friends, and Marwari (an Indian dialect) with her family.

While the Korean, Japanese and Bruneian informants were at YZU on a one-semester exchange programme, the others were reading for full degree programmes lasting for three to four years. There is a representation of a range of disciplines, covering both humanities (Applied Linguistics, Art and Design, Business, and English Language Teaching) and hard/applied sciences (Computer Science, Communication Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Information Engineering). Although not a major concern in this study, disciplinary differences may provide a useful starting point for data analysis. In one of the interviews, the informant complained of limited opportunities to interact with other classmates as most of the assignments in his course were completed individually whereas a friend studying for a business degree had more opportunities to participate in group projects.

Table 1. Demographic details of the postgraduate informants of this study

Informant	Nationality	Languages spoken*	Degree pursued	Reasons for choosing YZU	Length of interview
PS01	Indonesian	Bahasa Indonesian & Acehese	MA in Applied Linguistics	Self-proclaimed "scholarship hunter"; considered it an adventure to study abroad	29'10"
PS02	Indian	Hindi, Marwari & Sanskrit	MA in Applied Linguistics	Recommended by a friend; provision of a scholarship	22'10"
PS03	Gambian	Mandinka & Wollof	MA in Applied Linguistics	Among the very few offering Applied Linguistics; bilateral cooperation between the two nations	17'27"
PS04	Malaysian	Malay, Cantonese, Mandarin & Hakka	MA in Applied Linguistics	Scholarship provider; connection with his former college	13'29"

PS05	Thai	Thai & Chinese	MA in Applied Linguistics	Was on exchange at YZU before; wanted to be able to use Chinese and English	17'15"
PS06	Iraqi	Arabic & limited Chinese	PhD in Communication Engineering	Scholarship provider	21'35"
PS07	Nepali	Nepal, Hindi, some Thai, Chinese, French	MEng in Communication Engineering	Scholarship provider; was on exchange at YZU before; famous professors available to supervise him	13'33"

\*other than English

Table 2: Demographic Details of the Undergraduate Informants of this Study

Informant	Nationality	Languages spoken*	Degree pursued	Reasons for choosing YZU	Length of interview
US08-Ex **	Korean	Korean	Some courses in Electrical Engineering	Has a good Engineering department; wanted to learn Chinese and English	21'13"
US09	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	BA in International Business	Good learning conditions	15'08"
US10	Honduran	Spanish, French, Portuguese & limited Chinese	BEng in Information Communication	Scholarship provider; bilingual policy	13'16"
US11-Ex **	Japanese	Japanese & Chinese	Some courses in Chinese and English	Connection with the home institution	16'54"
US12	Iraqi	Persian & some Chinese & Spanish	BSc in Computer Science	Preference for a private university believing there is a smaller teacher-student ratio; good reputation	26'17"
US13-Ex **	Bruneian	Malay & some Arabic	Some courses in Art and Design	Connection with the home institution	14'25"
US14	Gambian	Jola & Chinese	BA in English-BBA	Was going to study at another university but the international office made a mistake; heard good things about YZU from a friend so decided to stay	18'49"

\*other than English, \*\*Exchange student

Triangulation in this study is provided internally by basing the themes discussed on the views of at least two informants. This eliminates over-emphasis on what may otherwise be idiosyncratic views. Soliciting views from local students would not have

heightened credibility because our focus is solely on the perceptions of the foreign students. However, a parallel study with local students would make an interesting further study.

The length of interviews conducted with informants varies considerably (between approximately 13 and 30 minutes). Length was influenced by factors including: the interviewee's English language proficiency, level of commitment to social activities, level of understanding of the social way-of-life at YZU, and the length of time studying at YZU. However, length of interviews does not always correlate with depth of detail as it may also relate to the need for rephrasing and clarification. All the interviews were transcribed and themes identified from re-reading the transcripts. When analysing the data, the authors brought in both the etic and emic perspectives as we are affiliated with different universities, one in Taiwan and the other in Hong Kong.

### **Findings and discussion**

In this section, the 14 informants' interview data will be thematised to explore their level of success in integrating into the "social way-of-life" (Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012, p. 686) at YZU and to gauge the role ELF played in the integration.

### ***Informal integration***

#### *Prevalence of English use*

The informants were asked whether they perceived English was widely used at YZU. In general, sadly, the informants did not think so. One of them (US12) even expressed a very high degree of disappointment as reflected below (I=Interviewer):

- I: do you consider English is commonly used at YZU?  
 US12: no no no  
 I: are you happy about the situation?  
 US12: no no no no no  
 I: why not?  
 US12: as we are foreigners we say that once you are reaching the Bachelor degree there's going to be fun time. It's not 90% fun time no but there's going to be fun time. That does not mean you are going to drink or something. It means that you are going to find you are going to meet a lot of student so through this connection you will be happy you will be meeting new students you will be happy knowing others' situation ... all these lead to something which is connection... connection through language is very important. Everybody knows that when a foreigner goes to a country, for example Taiwan, when foreigners come to Taiwan, their language is English... as long as he's not a local student or local people the important important thing is language. The connection is language. Through this connection you can make all the process happen. But this connection goes to the language is lost in this university...

While the interviewer's question points to a rather general situation of use of English at YZU, informant US12 quickly focused his responses onto socialization. He vented his frustration about the language environment presented, directly through a repetition of the negative response 'no'. The excerpt from his extremely long monologue, which was nearly five minutes in its entirety, reveals that language is a fundamental problem that pushed him away from integrating into the life of the local students. US12 establishes a strong linkage between 'connection' and 'language', intensified with the repetitive use of the adjective "important", and took for granted that

English was *the* social lingua franca, yet what he faced was quite the contrary to his initial expectations.

Some informants expressed their desire for an English-speaking environment as it would be a rich learning resource in its own right:

PS06: For English, no. English is not my mother language not native. When I went to Malaysia English is more popular so there is a chance to improve my English... here to do that it's hard. It's not popular English speaking.

US13-Ex: For English, no. English is not my mother language not native. When I went to Malaysia English is more popular so there is a chance to improve my English... here to do that it's hard. It's not popular English speaking.

For some of the international students such as PS06 and US13-Ex whose native language is not English, being able to use it in daily conversation is a learning opportunity for them. Yet such opportunities appear to be very limited in the physical context in which they are situated.

Some informants considered English was widely used at YZU. However, they may have over-generalized the situation from their localized experiences:

PS03: It is commonly used because there are a lot of foreign students here. The means for communication for those students is English and many of them can only communicate with Taiwanese students in English.

PS05: I think so. In dorm there are a lot of international students so I have to use English.

While the two informants seemingly expressed a positive view about the prevalent use of English, it was in fact false-positive in the sense that what they perceived appears to be an isolated view of the big picture. In both cases their positive opinions were qualified with the same defining condition, which is the use of English is only common among international students.

### *Interacting with home students*

As a follow-up on the responses given to the previous question on the prevalence of English use, a number of informants made specific comments with regard to the obstacles posed when they tried to interact with the home students in English which in turn hindered the development of English as a social lingua franca:

US10: I feel that they are really shy about speaking English because they are very judgmental about how good their English is. They are scared to pronounce a word wrong and we won't understand it.

US12: But there are some most of these students are not trying not because they are shy. They think maybe they will say something wrong maybe they are afraid of grammar mistakes or something so maybe we would be laughing. But no we are not laughing.

US14: if I speak English they will say 'wo de ying wen bu hao' (My English is not good). So most people they won't even talk to you if you are a foreigner. If they speak good English, they feel embarrassed that their English is not good. I understand that you are not English. Even if your English is not good, who cares? Because everybody knows that you speak good Chinese. For me I say Chinese I don't care whether my Chinese grammar is good or not. I say Chinese



because they know that I am not Chinese. I think they need to have the concept that even if your grammar is not good, much more important in communication is to understand. Don't feel embarrassed if your English is poor.

One common obstacle that was identified by these three undergraduate informants was that the home students were overly concerned about accuracy when using English to the extent that they would rather not interact at all. The informants' views also suggest that the Taiwanese students would make (false) assumptions about the negative consequences of making mistakes, not so much causing misunderstanding as losing face. Their apprehension about communicating in a language other than their mother tongue may partly be attributed to what MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) referred to as "language anxiety", a concept often applied to foreign language learning, denoting "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening and learning" (p. 284). Although our focus here is not on learning *per se*, it is important to note the international students' perceptions that Taiwanese students were self-critical of their abilities to accurately use English, anxious about potential failures and envisaged being negatively judged by international students. This coincides with some of the key constructs of language anxiety.

One instance that exemplifies home students' anxiety is their seeming obsession with recognizing a 'native' accent:

- US14: Sometimes they say to me, 'you speak English?' I pronounce something and they pronounce it their way. I said No. That's how I pronounce it. No I say that's my own accent. It says something about me. Though I speak English but I learnt to improve English not the accent. I don't learn the other people's accent. That is their accent. This is my own. If they study English they have to study accents. No matter what accent they speak African, American, British, if they speak English they should understand. They should not concentrate only on accent. Learning a language and learning an accent are different
- PS07: I don't think their English is bad. Maybe it's hesitant they are shy or something. Sometimes they may be like we come from a different country and we have a different accent. They don't like my accent ... Admin staff don't understand English or they are used to American accent. I think if something is important it becomes a big issue.
- US12: I believe that even when we were born foreigner native or native speakers we were born not with English language it's our parents taught us at the beginning. Apply to local students their parents speak Chinese to them we speak it we learn from their mouth so it's the same I mean by this we have the priority that we speak English no but we hear them speaking we learn that means that has nothing to do with age as long as you hear and you learn it has nothing to do with age. I hope you are aware of this you talk to foreigners with your accent strong. And the important thing is to be able able to talk. And don't be shy

The issue of accent has been discussed widely in the ELF literature; it is often scrutinized when intelligibility problems arise in ELF interactions (Seidlhofer, 2004). However, the problem raised by the Gambian (US14) and Nepali (PS07) informants seems to be more about self-preference than intelligibility. The recognition of a limited range of 'native' or standard accents of English and the low tolerance among Taiwanese students for the other varieties may have created some psychological discomfort among the international students who speak English with traces of their L1 accent. On the other

hand, Taiwanese students' reluctance to interact with foreign students may also have been due to their self-consciousness of having a non-native accent of English.

The general recognition of American English as the norm by Taiwanese college students and teachers (Liou, 2010; Wang & Ho, 2013) may explain why informant US12, who has a strong American accent as a result of spending a considerable amount of time in the US, did not mention receiving any criticisms of his accent from the home students. Also, the open-mindedness to other varieties of English can be seen from the international students' emphasis on the need for "willingness to communicate" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 564) among the home students and the belief that an accent constitutes the identity of oneself.

### ***Formal integration***

After exploring social integration at the personal level, this section intends to delve into the 'hardware', i.e. institutional policies, which may facilitate or impede ELF interactions.

### ***Enforcement of bilingual policies***

The informants were asked if they had participated in the activities organized by students and/or the university. A few of the informants related their responses to the language used in the publicity materials:

- PS02: But how to get the information about that is the problem. Sometimes there is an activity going to be held but the information is in Chinese. We don't even try to get the information. Just ignore it
- PS03: You can don't know characters that's the big problem for us because those characters I have never learnt before I cannot read. That's why the problems with the posters they are mostly in Chinese so I don't read them.
- PS06: Every time when we go to attend the meeting before each trip they explain everything in English to us. But the difficulty is the activity here the main poster and advertisement they are in Chinese. It's hard to understand.

One important way of drawing international students' attention to the social activities held by students or individual units is through publicity materials put up around the campus (see Figure 1). However, as revealed in the interviews, most of these materials were written in Chinese only, which would, no doubt, deprive those who did not understand Chinese of involvement in those activities. This problem was noted particularly by the postgraduate informants for two main reasons: firstly, the social circle of the postgraduates is much smaller compared with that of the undergraduates, so information flow is much slower; secondly, greater emphasis on independent study means that the postgraduate students may spend more time away from the campus so their access to information becomes limited. These students may become reluctant to find out, or may even 'ignore', as highlighted above by the Indian informant PS02, the details of the activities, simply because of the lack of bilingual explanations on the promotional materials.



Figure 1. Monolingual publicity materials

#### *Language Support for International Students and Home Students*

Previous studies on the language needs of international students were very much concerned with adaptation to the academic discourse practices (see for example Andrade, 2006). The conducive role played in non-academic settings by the provision of language and communication courses has also been recognized (Zhai, 2004). At YZU, it is gratifying to learn that a mandatory Mandarin Chinese course was offered to all international students. The Gambian undergraduate informant in particular was appreciative of the benefits the course had brought to him:

US14: I knew it's a Chinese-speaking environment so I took it very seriously. I can do things on my own. No need to ask for help. I never regretted taking it.

It looks as if taking the language course actually lowered the informant's motivation to integrate as he could get by without asking for help from the local students, yet he did show strong determination to integrate with his Taiwanese counterparts with the use of Mandarin Chinese as exemplified in his interview as cited in various sections of this paper. While he admitted quite frankly that "*Taiwanese people are hard to integrate*", a number of other informants such as the Vietnamese student (US09) and the Japanese exchange student (US11-Ex) expressed no problem with social integration, mainly because they could communicate in Chinese which they had learnt before entering YZU.

Perhaps YZU could strengthen its English support services by making it compulsory for home students to attend social English workshops or intercultural communication courses. It is indeed pleasing to see that English corners are formally organized by the International Language and Culture Centre and informally by individual departments with some success:

PS06: At first, it was hard. Some of them they don't have their listening capability. It was really hard. In my department, we have something like English corner. We

just speak. Free speaking. Life, food. Because some of them are like shy. This kind of smaller group can help each other

## **Conclusion**

Putting all the findings into our analytical framework, it can be concluded that English has yet to be developed as a lingua franca in the social integration of international students at YZU. It can also be seen that while the international students tried very hard to integrate into the social life of the locals, Taiwanese students did not seem to have met them halfway, at least not insofar as the context of this study was concerned.

At the personal level, that is in informal social integration, the home students' reluctance to interact, overly judgmental attitude to their own English and narrow vision of English varieties may have put up a wall separating them from the international students. This undoubtedly creates a vicious circle: local students avoid interacting with international students and so international students have no choice but to hang out with other international students.

At the institutional level, that is in formal social integration, further work needs to be done to strengthen language support services and bilingual policies especially in terms of dissemination of information. This requires not only the efforts of the university but also the students as many of these activities are very much student-driven.

Internationalization has become a top priority of the institutional policies of many universities worldwide. It is understandable that it takes time for it to be realized and that it is subject to a range of internal factors (e.g. classroom language training for teachers) and external ones (e.g. national language policies). YZU and many other universities in Taiwan which emphasize global competitiveness and international rankings have made good progresses with promoting academic integration through advocating English as an academic lingua franca (see, for example, Mauranen, et al., 2010). More attention should now be paid to social integration and the role of English in making this process successful is crucial.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Questions**

### ***Personal level***

1. Can you tell me where you are from originally?
2. What are the native language(s) of your home country?
3. What languages do you speak?
4. What is the typical medium of instruction of the universities in your home country?
5. Is this the first time you have studied abroad? If no, where else have you studied?
6. Why did you choose to come to YZU to study?
7. Why didn't you choose to stay in your home country to study?
8. To what extent English as the medium of instruction and participation is a key consideration in choosing an overseas university?

### ***Programme level***

1. What is your major?
2. To what extent English is used in your study?
3. To what extent English is used in programme-related academic/non-academic activities?
4. Have you ever come across language-related difficulties when participating in the programme-related academic/non-academic activities?
5. Have you been deprived of course selections because of the medium of instruction of a specific course?
6. Have you had any difficulties using English academically?
7. Are you aware of any language support services/provisions provided by the University?

### ***Institutional level***

1. Overall, in your view, is English the common language used widely within the University?
2. Is English the common language used in student activities? Have you had any difficulties participating in the academic/non-academic activities organized by the university because of the language barrier?
3. Has the language environment of the university met your expectations?