

The role of language in career development and inclusion in Norwegian academia

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Abstract

This study reports responses from international staff in a Norwegian university to questions about language choices in the workplace and their impact. It explores what types of tasks are conducted in Norwegian and English, respectively, and the effect participants perceived language ability to have on their career opportunities and sense of inclusion in the workplace. We collected data from 313 international academic staff using an online survey; 114 were permanent and 199 were temporary staff. Findings indicate a division of labour where some tasks like teaching and research were commonly conducted in English while organizational tasks and higher-level staff meetings were mostly conducted in Norwegian. Almost all participants reported seeing Norwegian as vital for career progression and leadership opportunities. Many staff reported feeling limited in their opportunities for career development, participation in decision-making in the workplace, and a feeling that language practices exclude employees with limited Norwegian proficiency. We discuss our findings in light of ideals of parallel language policies with the goal of highlighting the complexity of the situation and the danger of de facto monolingual practices excluding a significant portion of staff from important university functions.

Introduction

English currently functions as the *lingua franca* of academia, both in terms of international academic activities such as publications, conferences, and collaborative projects, and, increasingly, also intranationally in countries where

English is not the majority language, largely due to international mobility (Mauranen, 2010). Across the world, universities employ international researchers and teachers, who typically arrive with little or no knowledge of the local language but with competence in English, which thus becomes a *de facto* working language also in their new local academic communities (Haberland, 2014; Smit, 2017). In turn, this poses a potential challenge for the status of local and national languages as academic languages.

In Norway, a tension exists between the international nature of academia and the need to maintain Norwegian as a language relevant to all domains of society. On the one hand, the research communities strive for diversity in staff and for excellence, hiring the best qualified candidates regardless of nationality. On the other hand, universities have a responsibility for maintaining and developing Norwegian as an academic language and are required by law to use Norwegian as the main language in both teaching and university business. In essence, this tension reflects universities' identities as, at once, both essentially international and essentially national (Salö, 2022, p. 120).

It is clear that there is an urgent need for language practices that balance the international nature of academia with the responsibilities of universities to safeguard local languages and educate future generations in those languages (Apelgren et al., 2021; Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021). In conversations to this end, however, the voices of international staff are often underrepresented, especially as higher levels of policy-making tend to operate in Norwegian (Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021, p. 592), and systematic research is scarce in the Norwegian context. Hence, we conducted the present study to highlight the perspectives of this group in the discussion.

The Norwegian context

Norwegians are reported to be among the most proficient second-language speakers of English in the world (EF EPI, 2023), which may impact both language practices and their perception. On the one hand, many staff and students will be comfortable speaking English to international staff and may even be impatient in using Norwegian with less proficient speakers, limiting the opportunities of international staff for practicing their Norwegian. On the other hand, there may be an expectation that all Norwegians are comfortable in English and that any preference for Norwegian is purely political or ideological. However, it should be noted that Norwegians' fluency and comfort in English may depend

on their background, such as age, use of English in private life (e.g., Busby, 2021), and usage in the workplace, and also on the specific topic of conversation; Greek and Jonsmoen (2021) cite a Norwegian participant in their study feeling that social interaction in English is forced. Even for those comfortable with such interaction, informal oral fluency in English does not necessarily translate into comfortable usage in all domains, for example academic reading (Busby & Dahl, 2021). Indeed, according to Greek and Jonsmoen's (2021) Norwegian informants, information is lost and Norwegian colleagues may be less eager to speak when meetings are conducted in English.

The current situation with English as the *lingua franca* in academia alongside local languages is often described as a *parallel language* situation. The Nordic Council of Ministers (2018) define parallel language as follows: "two or more languages are used for the same purpose in a particular context within a particular sector of society" (p. 14). In the same policy document, it is also specified that, in the Nordic context, parallel language designates a collective need for explicit and conscious language policies which ensure that one particular language (e.g., English) does not become the only language used for any one academic activity. Thus, parallel language also entails local language maintenance.

Norway has a tradition of explicit policies for language maintenance, as evidenced for example in the mandate of the Language Council of Norway to strengthen the Norwegian language (Language Council, n. d.). Consequently, concerns about the ubiquitousness of English in terms of "linguistic imperialism" and developments toward domain loss or diglossia may contribute to the tension between the two languages and influence perceptions of parallel language use (e.g., Kuteeva, 2014) in the Norwegian context (Ljosland, 2007).

Norwegian universities are obligated by law not only to use but also to develop Norwegian (Universities and Colleges Act, 2024). The law states that the language of teaching, meaning the spoken language in class, should be Norwegian (or the Indigenous Sami languages), although exceptions can be made for academic reasons. These reasons are specified in the preparatory work for the act (Proposition to Parliament 126 L, 2022 - 2023) as relating to the content, for example foreign-language study programs, or to the target audience, if a course is mainly aimed at international students. Temporary exceptions can also be made if there are no qualified teachers who can teach in Norwegian. However, it is

specified that a clear majority of teaching over time should be in Norwegian unless there are academic reasons to the contrary.

Norwegian universities have their own language policies, generally establishing Norwegian as the main language of business and the institution's responsibility to Norwegian academic language, but also highlighting the importance of English for internationalization¹. Many Norwegian organizations, including some universities, sum up their parallel language policy as "Use Norwegian when you can, and English when you must", a slogan first introduced in the White Paper 35 (2007 - 2008) on Norwegian language policy more generally. This can be understood as an encouragement to communicate in Norwegian when all parties present know the language, and reserve English for contexts where non-Norwegian speakers are present.

In reality, enforcing parallel language policies is a challenge, as it presupposes that everyone involved has the necessary competence in both Norwegian and English. As pointed out by Kuteeva (2014, p. 333) for the very similar Swedish context, this may not be the case if a majority of staff and/or students are in fact from abroad; in such cases English is the only realistic language for use. Kuteeva (2014) furthermore argues that ideas of parallel language use seem to presuppose native(like) language competence in the local language and near-nativeness in English.

Participation, inclusion and career development

Career development in Norwegian academia may depend exactly on the dual language competence described above, where both English and Norwegian can be used comfortably. In most fields, being able to publish in English, attend international conferences, and participate in international research projects is a prerequisite for a successful academic career (Salö, 2022). Indeed, a sentiment sometimes expressed concerning the internationalization of Norwegian academia is that English, not Norwegian, holds academic prestige, and that not knowing Norwegian may in fact be desirable in order to avoid certain responsibilities (Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021, p. 601). Previous research has found that expectations regarding Norwegian proficiency are unclear, and that international staff are sometimes told upon arrival that it is not necessary, given that research is an international activity (Gujord et al., 2022a, 2022b).

¹ See <https://www.uhr.no/ressurser/sprakpolitikk/> for a list of language policies at Norwegian HEIs

On the other hand, local languages may also constitute valuable linguistic capital in academia, since leadership and administrative level tasks may not take place in English (Gujord et al., 2022a; Jürna, 2014; Salö et al., 2022); lack of proficiency in the local language may thus constitute a “glass ceiling” for career development (Salö et al., 2022, p. 121). Holmes (2020) describes that to an international academic in Sweden, only “certain doors” were open, and that he was not allowed to participate in committees for which he volunteered because he did not speak Swedish. Thus, fluency in both English and the local language may constitute membership in dominant in-groups (Lønsmann, 2014) who are able to participate fully both socially and professionally in the workplace.

Greek and Jonsmoen (2021) found that international staff may avoid meetings if they know they will be conducted in Norwegian, and Flikke et al. (2020) found that documents written only in Norwegian were not interpreted as directed at everyone by international staff, both of which naturally impact these employees’ ability to keep updated on important information and to partake in decision-making processes. Thus, lack of Norwegian proficiency may in fact lead to two-way frustration in that non-Norwegian speakers are, on the one hand, perceived to be unable to participate in everyday decision-making and planning, resulting in those responsibilities falling to those who do speak the language, while international staff themselves may feel excluded from such decision-making and, consequently, from democracy in the workplace (Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021).

While parallel language practices are a challenge in the formal responsibilities that constitute academic work, they are no less challenging in informal and social settings in the workplace. A number of studies indicate that international staff in universities may feel isolated due to language barriers (Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021); while both Norwegian and international staff may feel comfortable using English or Norwegian, respectively, for work-related tasks, they may find strictly social interaction in a language they do not fully master more challenging (Greek & Jonsmoen, 2021). A lack of social interaction may also be a further challenge to international staff’s understanding of power structures and decision-making processes at their institution (Gujord et al., 2022a; Maximova-Mentzoni et al., 2016). These limitations may become increasingly apparent to international staff after their first years in Norway, with an increasing awareness of the importance of Norwegian for tasks and responsibilities that are not narrowly research related.

The issue of language choices and proficiency may especially impact international staff in temporary positions. For those hired in a PhD candidate or postdoctoral research position, the need for Norwegian may not be evident, given that English may be sufficient for research-related tasks, and a requirement to learn Norwegian may not have been part of their contract. Their leaders and supervisors may thus not have encouraged spending time on this, and temporary employees may feel additional pressure to focus on research output as the main component in building their CV for their further career. Finally, as these positions tend to be short-term, this group may not plan to stay in the country long-term and may not know if they would be able to, which may further reduce their desire to embark on the task of learning a new language (Gujord et al., 2022a). This may impact not only their own career should they choose to stay in Norway, but also what language practices are possible in any given environment, given that many university departments regularly employ international staff in temporary positions.

Current study

This study aimed to investigate language practices and experiences among international employees at a Norwegian university. While previous studies have mainly looked at the use of Norwegian and English in teaching and supervision, we also investigated other workplace situations and the importance of language for inclusion and career development.

Research questions (RQs):

1. What practices do respondents report regarding language use in different contexts in the workplace?
2. How do respondents report that language practices influence their participation in the workplace, particularly in decision-making processes?
3. To what extent do respondents perceive that knowing Norwegian is important for career development in Norway?
4. What perceptions do respondents express regarding inclusion in the workplace relating to language practices?

RQ1 surveys the contexts in which Norwegian versus English is used across the university. RQ2 and RQ3 investigate the impact of language practices on participants' working lives, both whether they are willing and able to participate,

and the impact on career development. Finally, RQ4 is data-driven: We did not specifically ask whether participants saw language practices as having an impact on inclusion in the workplace, but the issue rather emerged from responses to open-ended questions, which frequently mentioned this potentially problematic point. This study is part of a larger project investigating experiences of international staff in Norwegian academia, although only data relevant to the abovementioned research questions are presented here.

Method

We collected data from international employees at a Norwegian university using an online survey distributed via the university's intranet. The study was only advertised once (with no reminders sent), to all members of staff at the university, with no specific measures to further target international staff. The questionnaire consisted of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions where participants could write comments. The questionnaire was adaptive so that the appearance of certain questions depended on answers to previous questions.

The study was registered with the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT). The analyses and visualisations were completed in Excel and R (R Core Team, 2024), with responses to Likert-type items visualised using the package *likert* (Bryer & Speerschnieder, 2016).

Participants

A total of 363 international staff (defined as someone who did not grow up in Norway) participated in the survey. Although the exact number of international employees at the given university is difficult to estimate, this is likely to represent around 10-15% of all international employees. This study presents data from 313 of these respondents, namely employees in academic (research and/or teaching) positions who did not report having a Scandinavian native language. Of these, 114 reported holding a permanent and 199 a temporary position. Every faculty in the university was represented in the responses. Table 1 shows the number and gender of respondents in permanent and temporary positions.

Table 1. Respondents in permanent and temporary academic positions, by gender

	Permanent	Temporary	Total
Female	43	103	146
Male	62	90	152
Other/prefer not to say	9	6	15
Total	114	199	313

The respondents were between 23 and 70 years old and had lived in Norway for different amounts of time. Table 2 shows the average age and average number of years in Norway for permanent and temporary employees. The latter is calculated from 277 participants, because participants who responded “less than a year” ($n = 27$, 2 permanent, 25 temporary) or “more than 20 years” (9 permanent) were omitted from the calculation of the average time spent in Norway.

Table 2. Average age and number of years in Norway for permanent and temporary employees

	Mean age	Mean years in Norway
Permanent	44.5	8.2
Temporary	32.1	3.6
Total	36.6	5.36

The respondents reported a total of 54 different first languages (L1s). English was a reported L1 for 27%, while 27% reported another Germanic language (German or Dutch), 28% another European language, and 14% a non-European language as L1. The remaining 4% did not report their L1.

The majority reported having attended Norwegian language training. Only 9 permanent staff (8%) and 62 temporary staff (31%) reported that they had not taken any Norwegian language training yet. Among these, 2 permanent staff and 39 temporary staff had lived in Norway for a year or less and may not have had time to do so.

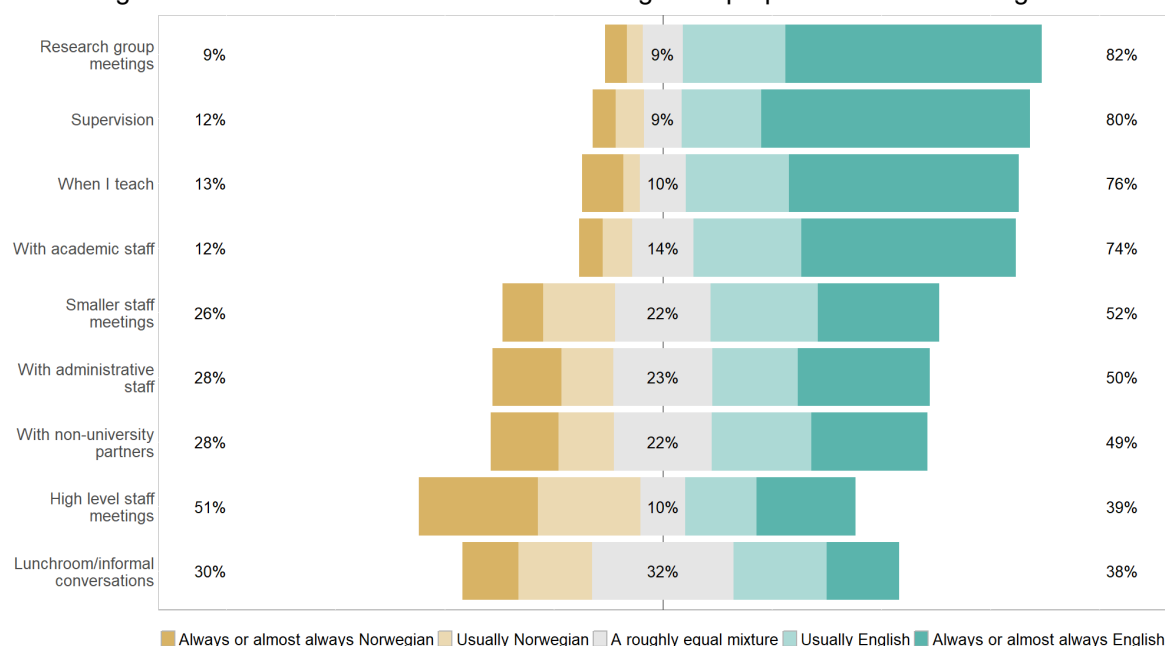
Findings

Here, we report on data from the multiple-choice questions combined with illustrative open-ended comments.

Reported language practices

For an overview of the perceived balance of Norwegian and English in the workplace, respondents were asked which language was used in different contexts (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Diverging stacked bar chart showing the percentage of reported use of Norwegian versus English for different tasks in the workplace. The total percentage of participants reporting tasks taking place predominantly in either language is shown on the left and right. Work tasks with longer bars on the right show a higher proportion of English used and tasks with longer bars to the left show a higher proportion of Norwegian.



As shown in Figure 1, some activities, including research group meetings, teaching, and supervision, were reported to take place more frequently in English than Norwegian. Higher level staff meetings were reported to happen more often in Norwegian. Respondents reported interactions with other academic staff to be more often in English, whereas they used Norwegian more often with administrative staff. Lunchroom and informal conversations were more evenly divided between the languages. A small number reported that some activities occurred in languages other than Norwegian or English.

Open-ended comments from respondents typically reflect the situation indicated by the quantitative data, namely that language choice tends to depend on task type. However, comments also indicate that language choice may depend on who is present, and some describe the experience of having meetings conducted in

English due to their presence. Some also mention that language practices vary widely between individual workplaces, e.g. *“I’ve worked in [several] departments [...] and each had their own habits in terms of languages.”*

Participation and decision-making

To explore the impact of language practices on involvement in decision-making in the workplace, we asked about participation in meetings and leadership positions, as well as whether respondents felt they knew enough Norwegian to do their job well (Table 3).

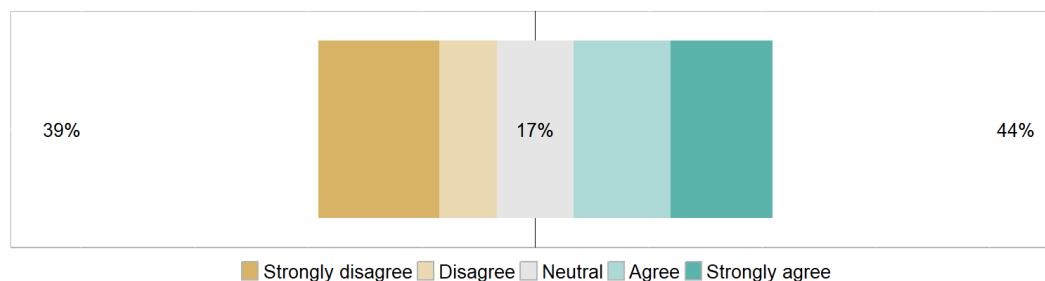
Table 3. Responses from permanent and temporary staff to the question “Do you feel that you know enough Norwegian to be able to do your job well?”

	Permanent	Temporary
Yes, definitely	18%	10%
Yes, generally	36%	26%
Not really	27%	21%
Not at all	8%	10%
I don’t feel that I need to use Norwegian in my job	11%	34%

The majority of respondents (74%) reported feeling that Norwegian was necessary for their work, but only 57% of these reported feeling that they knew enough to do their jobs well. Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of temporary staff (likely to be in research-based positions) than permanent staff reported that they did not feel that they needed Norwegian in their job.

Higher-level staff meetings were reported to almost always take place in Norwegian by half the respondents (see Figure 1, above), and participants were asked for their agreement with the statement ‘I avoid meetings if I know they will be in Norwegian’ (Figure 2). Almost half (44%) said they avoided meetings if they knew they would be in Norwegian; 39% disagreed with this statement, and 17% were neutral.

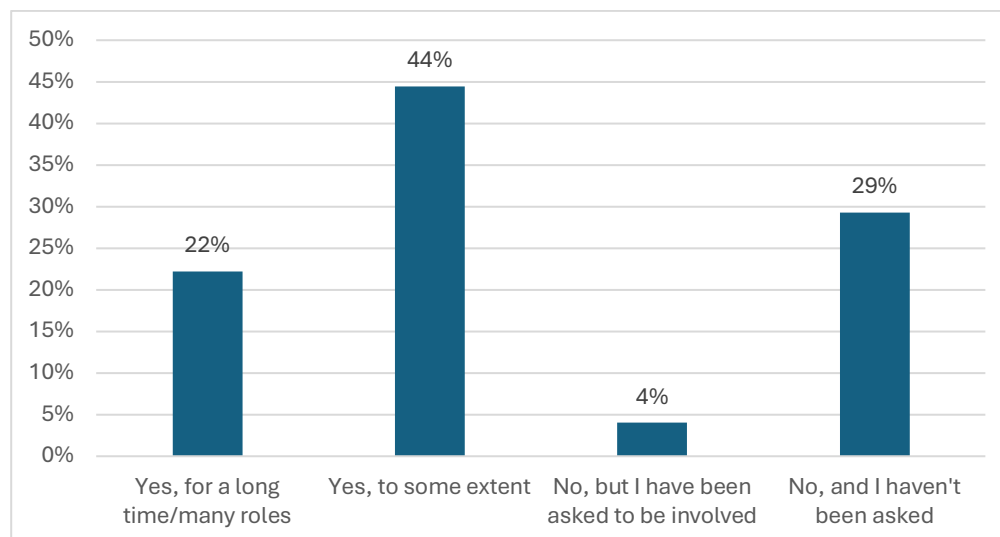
Figure 2. Diverging stacked bar chart showing participants' responses to the statement "I avoid meetings if I know they will be in Norwegian". Total percentages of participants agreeing or disagreeing are shown on the right and left, respectively.



Related to this question, one respondent described a “chicken-and-egg situation” where higher-level meetings are conducted in Norwegian, excluding non-Norwegian speakers, and consequently creating the impression that there is no need for these meetings to be in English since non-Norwegian speakers are less likely to attend. Another respondent highlighted the challenge for representative department leadership bodies, which “*require a certain level of fluency in Norwegian. [...]. The main problem I encountered is a lack of interest from Norwegians in participating in these roles, and the temporary employees, most of whom are foreigners, are not really allowed to partake.*”

We isolated those 100 respondents who reported having permanent positions and having lived in Norway for at least three years, as they might be most likely to have considered taking on leadership responsibilities. The majority (66%) of this group reported having held leadership roles. Among the remaining 33%, the majority had not been asked (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Responses from permanent staff living 3 or more years in Norway to the question “Are you or have you been involved in formal administrative or leadership roles in your workplace (e.g. section coordinator, study program board member or leader, member of study program evaluation committees, etc.)?”



A majority of these respondents, including those who had taken on leadership roles, reported that language was a factor when deciding whether or not to take on such roles. For 37%, it reportedly played a large role in their decision, for 27% it played a lesser role, and the remaining 36% said that it did not play a role. Out of the four participants who reported having declined to take on such roles, three reported that language was a factor in this decision.

It is clear from these results that language practices do influence employees' participation in the workplace, but that it is not the case that international staff necessarily avoid leadership roles.

Career development

To investigate the impact of language on career development, respondents were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of the importance of Norwegian for career progression. An overwhelming majority of 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that knowing Norwegian is important for obtaining leadership roles at Norwegian universities and 85% considered knowing Norwegian to be important for career progression. A majority of 80% of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that not knowing Norwegian would be a hinderance to career development at Norwegian universities.

However, only 59% agreed that leadership roles in Norwegian universities require fluency in Norwegian. Figures 4 and 5 break these overall percentages down into separate groups.

Figure 4. Diverging stacked bar chart showing participants' responses to statements about career progression in Norway sorted by temporary and permanent staff. Total percentages of participants agreeing or disagreeing are shown on the right and left, respectively.

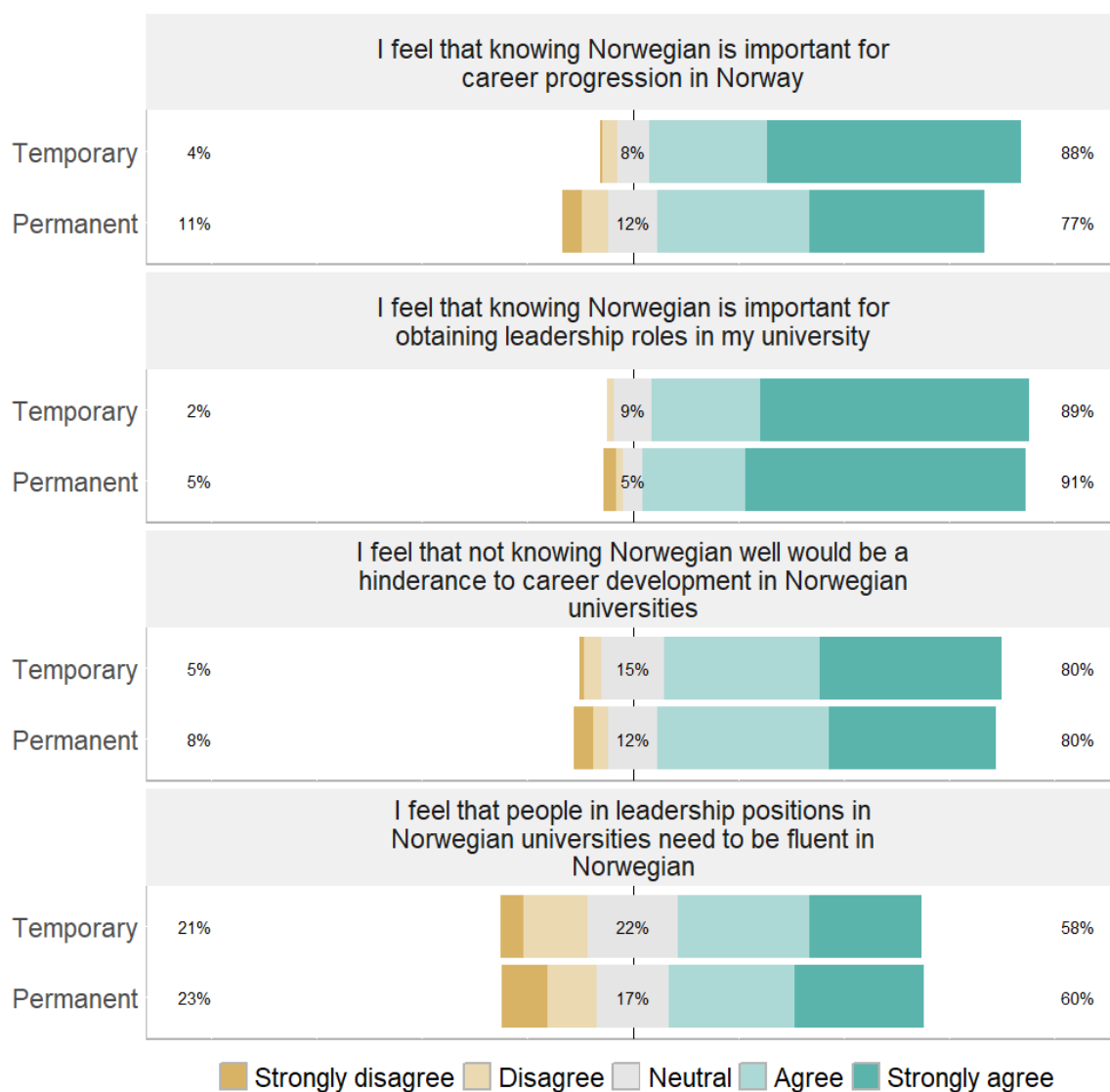
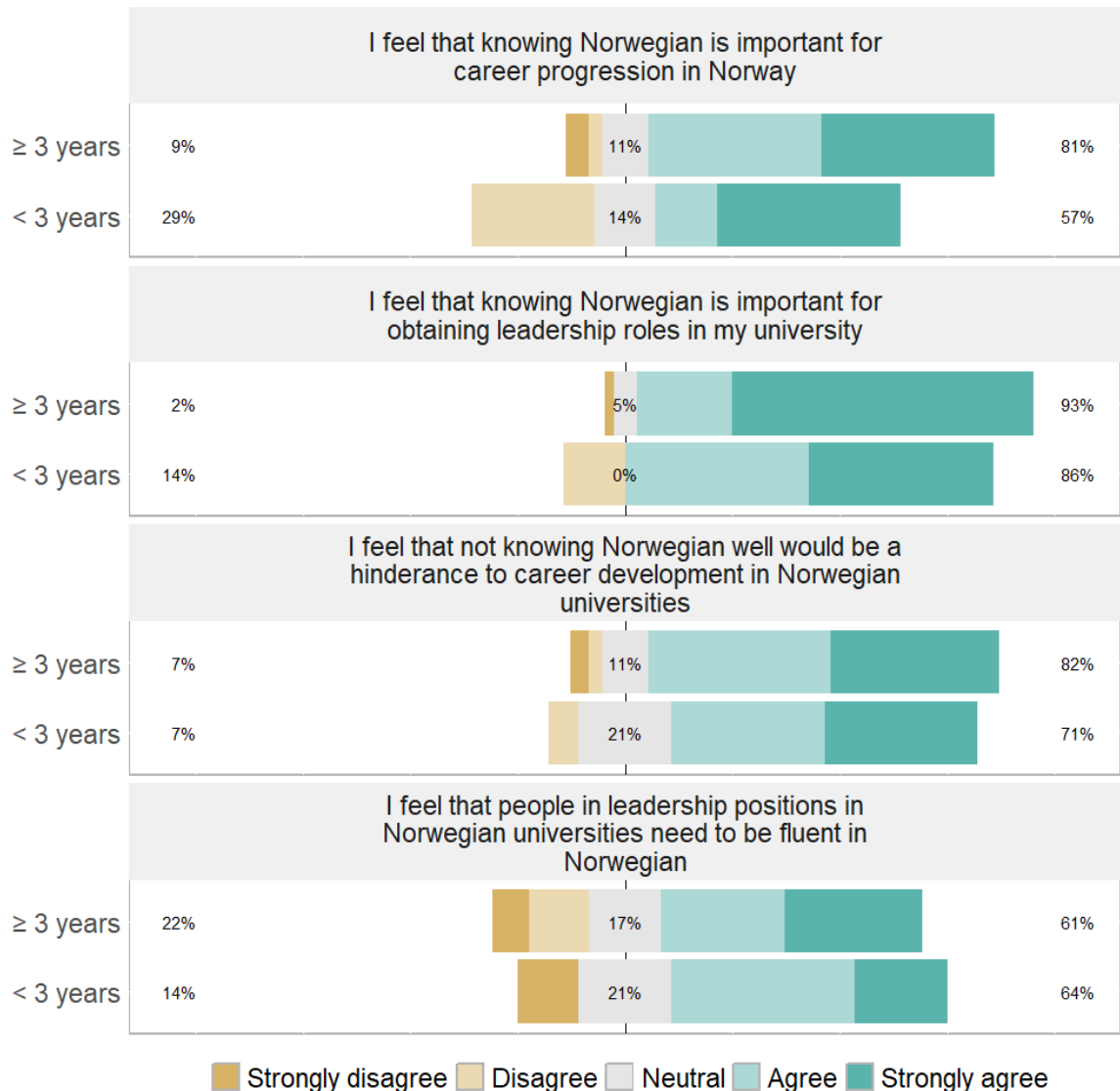


Figure 5. Diverging stacked bar chart showing participants' responses to statements about career progression in Norway sorted by reported length of residence in Norway (3 years or more vs less than 3 years). Total percentages of participants agreeing or disagreeing is shown on the right and left, respectively.



Comments from respondents also reflect the perception that knowing Norwegian is important for leadership roles. Some commented that they were not able to participate in meetings and committees because of lack of Norwegian proficiency, particularly as a high level of proficiency is needed. Even though English is widely used for research, some participants expressed that not knowing Norwegian may affect career progression also in research, because some research groups use Norwegian, and because the ease with which one learns languages is not the same for everybody, and that this could create an imbalance in career prospects.

Some express an opinion that English should be the working language since it is an academic lingua franca: *“research is mostly done in [E]nglish, so it is easier to ‘work in [E]nglish’, independent on the country of employment”*.

Inclusion in the workplace

The questionnaire did not include specific questions about feelings of inclusion in the workplace related to language practices. However, many respondents used open-ended questions to comment on such aspects. The comments cannot be taken as representative of the group as a whole, but their ubiquitousness in the material nevertheless illustrates sentiments seemingly shared by many of our respondents. We therefore sum up and illustrate the views emerging from the data.

Several respondents commented that the university’s language practices of using Norwegian exclusively for certain tasks can be perceived as discriminatory and exclusionary. Terms used to describe how these practices can make international staff feel are “second-rank citizens of the academic community”, “incompetent”, and “excluded”. In fact, versions of the word ‘exclude/exclusion’ occur 41 times in open-ended comments in reference to language practices, for example: *“Most administrative meetings in my department are held in Norwegian, which makes me feel excluded”*.

A recurring comment is that language practices are not considerate of recently arrived staff who do not yet know Norwegian:

Norwegian will be used at more essential meetings at a higher level. [H]owever, this is very exclusionary towards new academic staff including professors who have just started their positions.

Moreover, the division of labour between languages, where Norwegian is used for higher-level meetings, means that newcomers have access to some parts of their work obligations while being deprived of access to other, equally important, parts. Respondents fear missing important information:

The communication of administrative and organizational issues, particularly at the department or faculty level is nearly always in Norwegian. Only issues directly involving employees or regulations are generally communicated in English, but issues more about the development and changes of the organization are generally not. This makes many

temporary employees feel excluded and that their input or awareness about these things is not valued.

When I started working here, most “important things” were in English and it felt fairly inclusive. Recently, more and more “important things” are in Norwegian and it’s much more difficult. One time [...] the announcement about food allergies was in Norwegian, and I was very worried about mistakenly eating something I’m allergic to.

A number of comments focus on how language practices exclude the voices of international staff: *“The use of Norwegian seems aimed at excluding the opinions of temporary, foreign staff”*. It is perceived as problematic *“to promote a competitive international environment and trying to force everyone to speak Norwegian. The best professionals do not get a say, they are excluded”*. One comment suggests that lack of Norwegian may be used in selection processes to intentionally exclude international staff: *“The lack of Norwegian might not be a technical requirement for positions or promotions, but it is still used as a method to exclude foreigners.”*

Comments reveal a perception of lacking awareness among leadership and colleagues that participants experience that language learning takes time, which may be particularly problematic for temporary staff on shorter contracts. Respondents express a tension between spending time on language learning and building a research career.

If I had a permanent position I would put a lot more effort into learning Norwegian. It takes a lot of time and energy and, when in a temporary position, this time is best used on building your CV.

Discussion

Our first research question asked about language use in different contexts in the workplace. Results suggest a certain division of labour between English and Norwegian, in line with findings from previous research (e.g., Gujord et al., 2022a). Specifically, the data show that English is prevalent for tasks related to everyday academic practice, such as teaching and supervision, research group meetings and when communicating with other academic staff. Interestingly, use of English and Norwegian appears relatively evenly distributed for lunchroom and informal conversations, where participants also report frequent mixing of English and Norwegian. Use of Norwegian is frequently reported for tasks that are administrative or organizational in nature, such as talking to administrative staff or for higher-level staff meetings, reflecting findings from previous research (e.g., Flikke et al., 2020; Gujord et al., 2022a).

While the responses indicate that English is predominantly used in teaching and supervision, it should be noted that this does not necessarily reflect general practices at the university; as one respondent points out: *“a factor here is that I only choose to teach in the courses that are taught in English. The same can be said about Master students I supervise.”*

Often, the choice of language may depend on who is present rather than the type of activity itself; particularly at lower-level meetings, English is used when non-Norwegian speakers are present. This fluid language choice seems less common for higher-level meetings, and in meetings of an administrative character. Respondents' comments indicate differences in systematicity in language practices between departments: One respondent mentioned rules that presentation slides should be in English if meetings are conducted in Norwegian, but that the rule is not always followed. Another mentioned that the language of meetings tends to shift to Norwegian, even when a non-Norwegian speaker is present.

While many comments pointed to problems when activities take place in Norwegian, others indicated the opposite: One respondent reported feeling that their leadership seems to try to create an “English-speaking bubble” for the benefit of the non-Norwegian speakers, with the consequence that they do not get the chance to learn Norwegian. Overall, these comments indicate that aside from informal interactions, there is a relatively clear division of labour between the languages, characterised by monolingual practices where the language depends on context (see e.g., Karlsson & Karlsson, 2020).

Our second research question asked how language practices influence participation in the workplace, particularly in decision-making processes, and responses indicate that language practices do indeed influence participation. Almost half of all respondents reported avoiding meetings that they know will be conducted in Norwegian, echoing findings by Greek and Jonsmoen (2021). One respondent noted how this creates a vicious circle; with no international staff present, any need to conduct the meetings in English goes unnoticed. Given the above-mentioned division of labour between Norwegian and English, this means international staff might typically be underrepresented in those types of meetings where decisions are made. This indicates that a high level of Norwegian is

necessary in order to fully contribute in the workplace, at least for tasks beyond the core academic ones.

Despite this, 62% of participants in permanent positions who had lived in Norway for three years or more had taken on leadership roles, meaning that this group is indeed involved in decision-making fora, while also reporting that language plays a role when deciding whether to take on leadership roles. Furthermore, we do not know *which* types of roles they are referring to, and whether certain positions are less likely to be available based on how comfortable they feel in Norwegian; thus, it is not clear from our data whether a linguistic “glass-ceiling” (Salö et al., 2022) exists. It is, however, worth noting that most of those respondents who had not taken on leadership roles had also not been asked to do so; we do not know whether language skills played a role in whether they were asked, parallel to the Swedish case described by Holmes (2020).

It also appears that many respondents in the study were very aware of the potential limitations created by a mismatch between the language requirements of the job and their own Norwegian proficiency. Only 57% of those who said their work required knowledge of Norwegian reported feeling that they had the language proficiency to do their job well, even though the majority reported having completed Norwegian language courses. Some expressed surprise, or even anger, that they found themselves unable to fully participate in the academic environment of the university. One comment revealed surprise that they were *“not included in meetings because [they] don’t speak Norwegian”*. Some comments reflected the opinion that English is *“the language of the international academic community”* or that the *“work environment is international”* and questioned why Norwegian was required, which perhaps reflects a lack of communication about the reasoning behind language choices. Such comments could also be related to the Governments’ proposal at the time of data collection about new, more ambitious, requirements for Norwegian learning for both permanent and temporary academic staff, which may have left international staff feeling particularly targeted.

Importantly, comments from respondents echo Salö et al.’s (2022), pointing out that not only English but also local languages constitute linguistic capital in academia. Our data show that Norwegian is used for important functions, and respondents generally perceive Norwegian as important for career development.

One respondent says about their lack of Norwegian: *“So I worry about this in the long-term as it will restrict what's possible for me to do.”*

This perception seems to increase among those who have spent more years in Norway, perhaps indicating an increased understanding of those processes beyond research and teaching that in fact do not take place in Norwegian. Interestingly, however, temporary staff are even more in agreement about the importance of Norwegian than are permanent employees, possibly because the former's careers are in fact more uncertain. One says that *“I believe Norwegian is very important to master in workplaces. I would've loved that my supervisor would push me or support me more to learn. Instead it was sometimes regarded as wasting research time by attending classes and leaving the university early which sometimes made me uncomfortable.”*

This quote, however, also shows that situation is complex. Some respondents in fact refer to expectations of Norwegian competence as an obstacle to research-related career development, for example that they *“rather feel [knowledge of Norwegian] to be an active hindrance. Career progression is almost exclusively based on research, where knowledge of Norwegian is irrelevant.”*

Overall, we can conclude that our international respondents do see Norwegian as important for their careers in Norway, but that a tension exists between the university's simultaneously national and international character (Salö, 2022), essentially requiring dual language competence (Kuteeva, 2014): English for an international research career, and Norwegian for participation in decision-making at their institution.

Our fourth research question concerns feelings of inclusion – a topic which emerged from responses to open-ended questions. If we adopt Jeong and Lindemann's (2024, p. 367) definition of inclusion as “involvement in work groups, participation in the decision-making process, and access to information and resources”, we do indeed find that the use of Norwegian leads to, likely unintentional, exclusion of non-Norwegian speakers. Many respondents described the use of Norwegian as exclusory, and some even perceived this exclusion as intentional on the part of their Norwegian-speaking colleagues or leaders:

When things are conducted in Norwegian it sends a very clear and strong message that until we are able to operate in Norwegian, we are not an equal part of the department.

One might expect that this is a problem for newly arrived or temporary staff, but feelings of inadequacy linger despite the effort to learn Norwegian, evident both from respondents indicating they do not feel capable of doing their job well and in comments, as this example shows:

Despite having a very strong research profile, I am constantly made to feel inadequate because my Norwegian hasn't improved quickly enough.

Second, our material confirms previous findings of a division of labour between languages in lower and higher-level meetings (Flikke et al., 2020; Gujord et al., 2022a), where Norwegian is used for the latter. It is clear in our data that the feeling of exclusion particularly pertains to organizational parts of work-life, that is, from processes and “bodies [that] are loci of influence and power” (Karlsson & Karlsson, 2020, p. 81). For some, the question is mainly access to information; however, it is also a question of whose voices are heard in these bodies, and, not least, of the ability to fully participate in the development of the workplace (Flikke et al., 2020; Jeong & Lindemann, 2024; Maximova-Mentzoni et al., 2016). The latter, illustrated in the comment below, constitutes a democratic problem for academia.

In general I would love to be involved in shaping my department but I feel that the forums for doing so require a high level of grammatically perfect Norwegian which I will never achieve.

Some respondents highlight policies at department level to counterbalance the effect of meetings being in Norwegian, such as presentations or real-time captions in English, albeit with varying success.

My department has implemented a software that adds closed captions in English when having staff meetings, which are always in Norwegian. Although I appreciate the intention of being more inclusive, the captions are very hard to follow and sometimes imprecise. I just rather not attend the meetings.

While it is impossible from our data to say whether such measures are systematic across the institution, the number of comments about meetings and information being in Norwegian only indicates that this has not been the case.

A relevant point to note is that 73% of our respondents are themselves non-native speakers of English, and comments point out views to the effect that using English “*puts people on a more even ground when everyone has to make an effort and use a common language*”.

Overall, these comments point to the fact that language practices at this university may be experienced as exclusory, particularly with regards to higher-level meetings and information. Moreover, there may be varying awareness about this fact across departments at the institution, and thus unsystematic approaches to mitigating measures.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of language practices on career development and feelings of inclusion in the workplace among international staff at a Norwegian university.

Our data show that an overwhelming majority of international employees attend Norwegian courses and that they see Norwegian proficiency as important for career development. English remains the primary language for research responsibilities and communication with academic staff. In lower-level meetings there is a fluid approach to language choice depending on who is present. Norwegian is more often used for communication with administrative staff. For higher-level meetings and information, 50% of respondents report Norwegian is used almost always. Respondents consider Norwegian important for leadership roles, and language plays a role when international staff consider taking on such roles. Still, our data show that a majority of international staff do take on leadership roles when they are asked to.

However, our data also highlight how the tension between the university's simultaneously national and international character (Salö, 2022) is instantiated in language practices. The language practices and policies of Norwegian universities and in similar national contexts are often referred to as “parallel language” usage. Our data indicate that there is a certain parallel *monolingual* practice (Jeong & Lindemann, 2024), where a division of labour between the languages leads to many international employees feeling excluded from important information and decision-making processes in the workplace. In a situation where Norwegian higher education institutions must negotiate their international and national character while promoting Norwegian as an academic language, awareness at all institutional levels about language practices and how they can be exclusory, as well as systematic approaches to mitigating measures are necessary.

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