



Technische
Universität
Braunschweig



English as a Lingua Franca – A Source of Identity for Young Europeans?

English in Europe: Debates and Discourses

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Outline

1. Conceptualising Identity
2. ELF in Europe
3. ELF and European Identity
4. Empirical Study: Questionnaire Survey
5. Summary

1. Conceptualising Identity

- Colloquial:
Identity is who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you.
<http://www.yourdictionary.com/identity>
- Scientific:
Whenever we talk about identity, we need to differentiate between ‘achieved’ or ‘inhabited’ identity – the identity people themselves articulate or claim – and ‘ascribed’ or ‘attributed’ identity – the identity given to someone by someone else. (Blommaerts 2006, 238)
- Language identity:
Relationship between one’s sense of self and different means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect, as well as multimodality (Block 2007, 43)

1. Conceptualising Identity

- Ideology of European nation states rests on the assumption of linguistic, cultural and ethnic homogeneity, ie one nation, one language

However, this equation never quite stood up to reality:

- non-national states, predecessors of the nation states, were multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic
- globalization, migration and mobility (eg ERASMUS), European integration can produce similar outcomes resulting in
 - ▶ multiple identities including language identities involving more than one language
 - ▶ language identities being dynamic, multifaceted and heterogeneous

2. ELF in Europe

- Firth (1996, 240) defines ELF as “a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication”.
 - ▶ excludes native speakers from ELF communication
 - ▶ no specific reference to the status of ELF:
 - Is ELF structurally a somehow ‘reduced’ form of English and functionally a specific use of the English language?

OR

- Should ELF rather be treated as an entity in its own right, perhaps even a variety of English? (eg Jenkins 2007, Seidlhofer 2001)

2. ELF in Europe

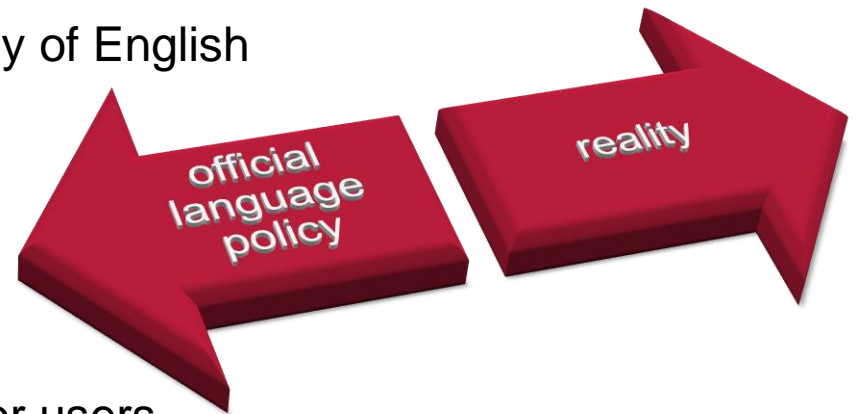


- omnipresence of English (esp. for young Europeans)
 - ▶ 1st foreign language
 - ▶ CLIL
 - ▶ international study programmes
 - ▶ English in scientific communication
 - ▶ English in the media
 - ▶ English in daily life
 - ▶ ...



2. ELF in Europe

- EU language policy: plurilingualism (“M+2”)
 - assumption that a common European identity can be built upon linguistic and cultural diversity (“unity in diversity”)
 - counterweight to linguistic hegemony of English
- Challenges:
 - 23 official languages
 - considerable time and cost efforts for users
 - communicative value and high prestige of the English language



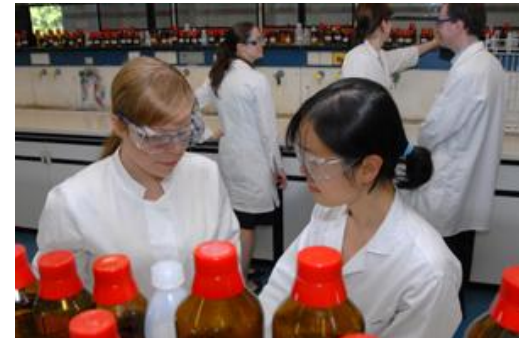
→ English as de facto lingua franca in Europe

3. ELF and European Identity

- Undoubtedly, ELF – irrespective of its status – is widely used in Europe, and especially among young Europeans.
- Assuming that identities are shaped to a large extent through discursive practice it can be hypothesized that **the use of ELF impacts on their speakers' identity, specifically their language identity.**
- Especially so if we follow Seidlhofer's position
“[that] English as a lingua franca is not like other European languages for it has been removed from native speaker ownership, appropriated and adapted for international use on a massive and unprecedented scale.”
(Seidlhofer 2011, 139f.)
- Focus on “young Europeans“: avantgarde of social and sociolinguistic change

4. Empirical Study: Questionnaire Survey

- 1061 students from the University of Braunschweig in their 1st and 2nd year from 3 different schools:
 - ▶ *Humanities (English Studies, German Studies)*
 - ▶ *Mechanical Engineering*
 - ▶ *Life Sciences*



4. Empirical Study: Questionnaire Survey

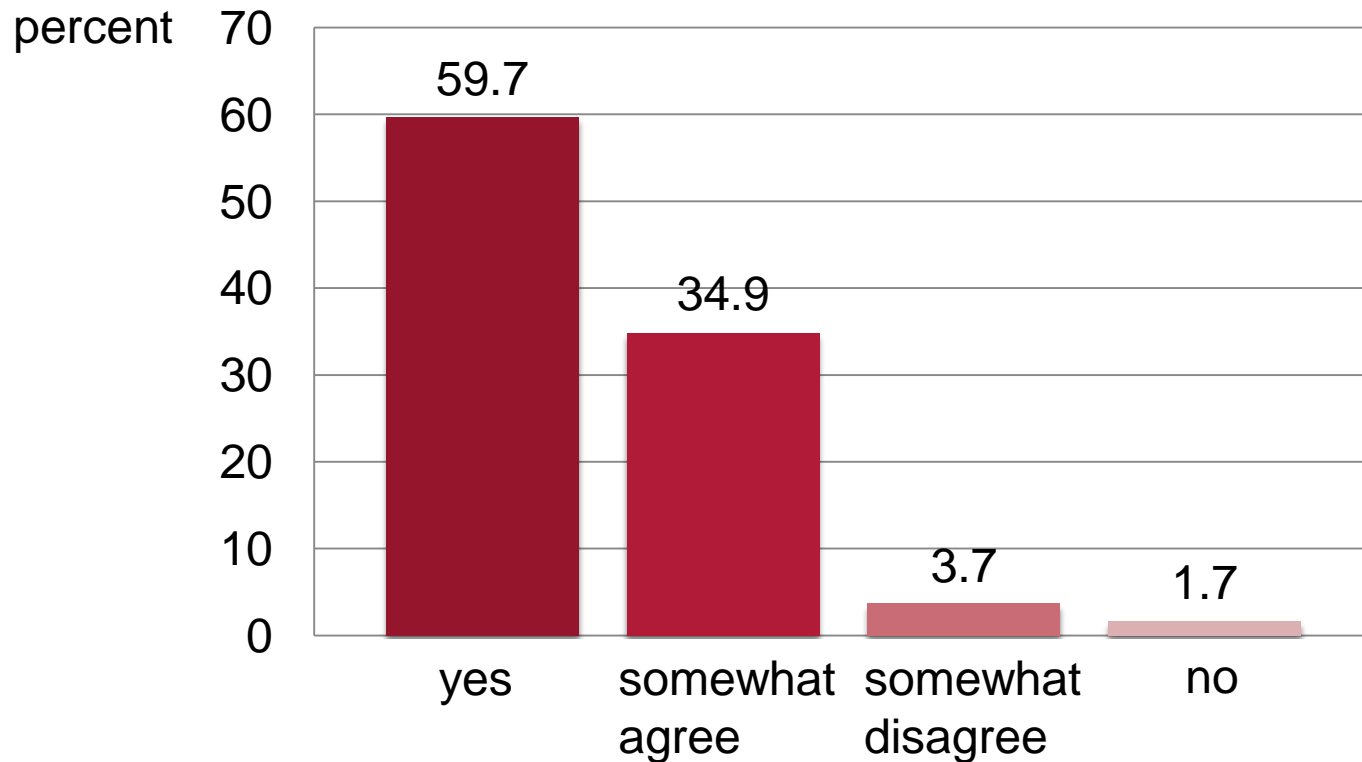
- topics dealt with in the questionnaire:
 - language and academic background
 - Europe and language policy
 - English in Europe
- methodology:
 - 22 single and multiple choice questions and one open question
 - 4-point Likert scale with opt-out option (“Don’t know”)
- development and analysis of questionnaire supported by the *Evasys* questionnaire suite

4. Empirical Study: Guiding Questions

- (1) What significance do participants of the study assign to the use of English as a lingua franca?
- (2) Does something such as a European identity already exist and if so, what are its characteristics?
- (3) What is more suited to contribute to European identity from a language perspective: Fostering the diversity of languages, as proposed by the European Union's language policy, or rather acknowledging and subsequently promoting the idea of ELF as a commonly shared European form of English?

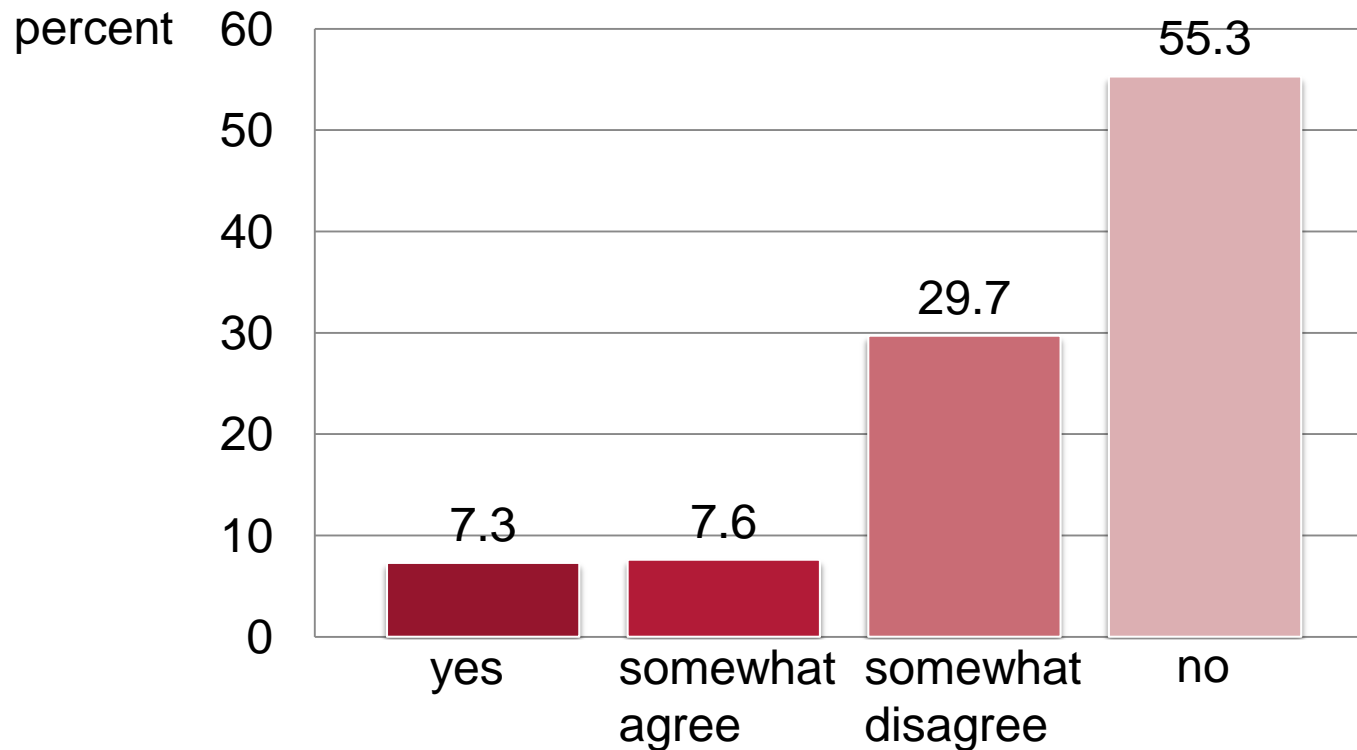
(1) What significance do participants of the study assign to the use of English as a lingua franca?

- The use of English as a European vehicular language significantly facilitates communication among Europeans.



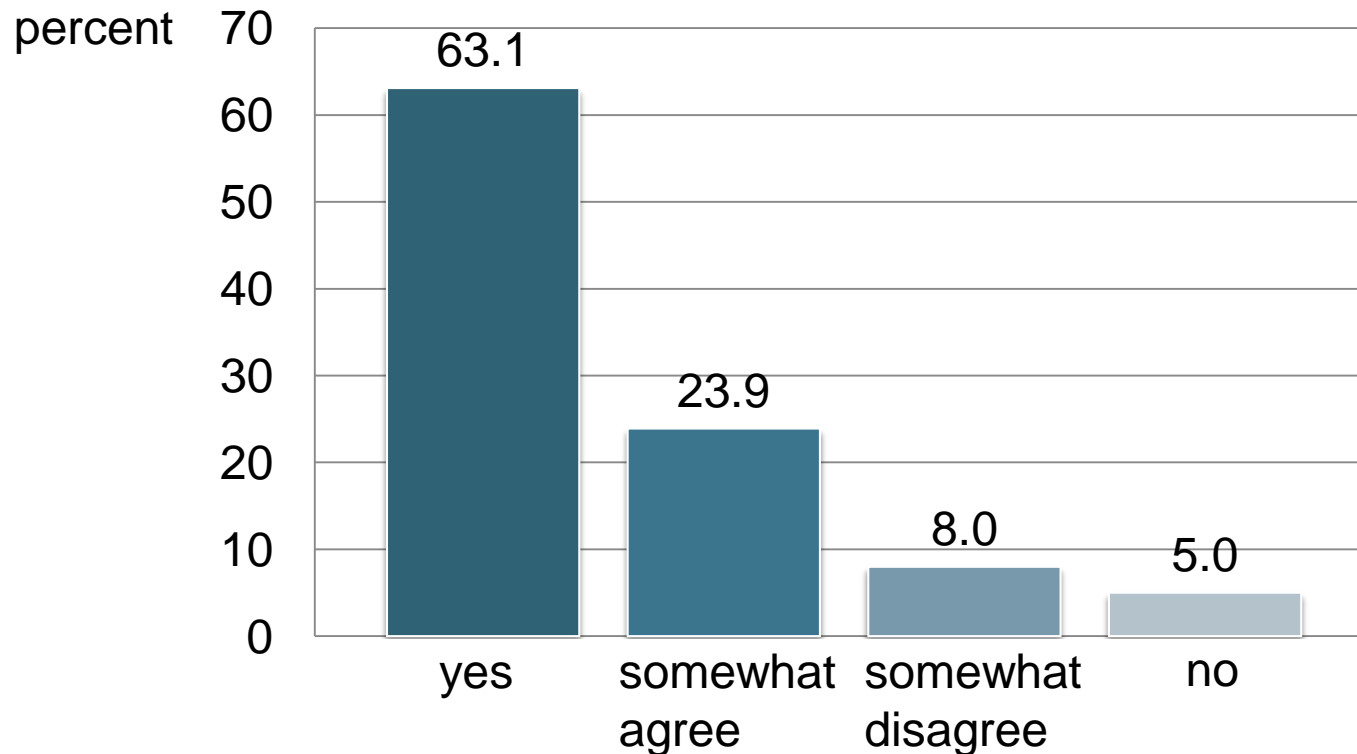
(1) What significance do participants of the study assign to the use of English as a lingua franca?

- Can you imagine communication in Europe to be solely based on the languages of the nation states, ie without resorting to a common European vehicular language (eg English)?



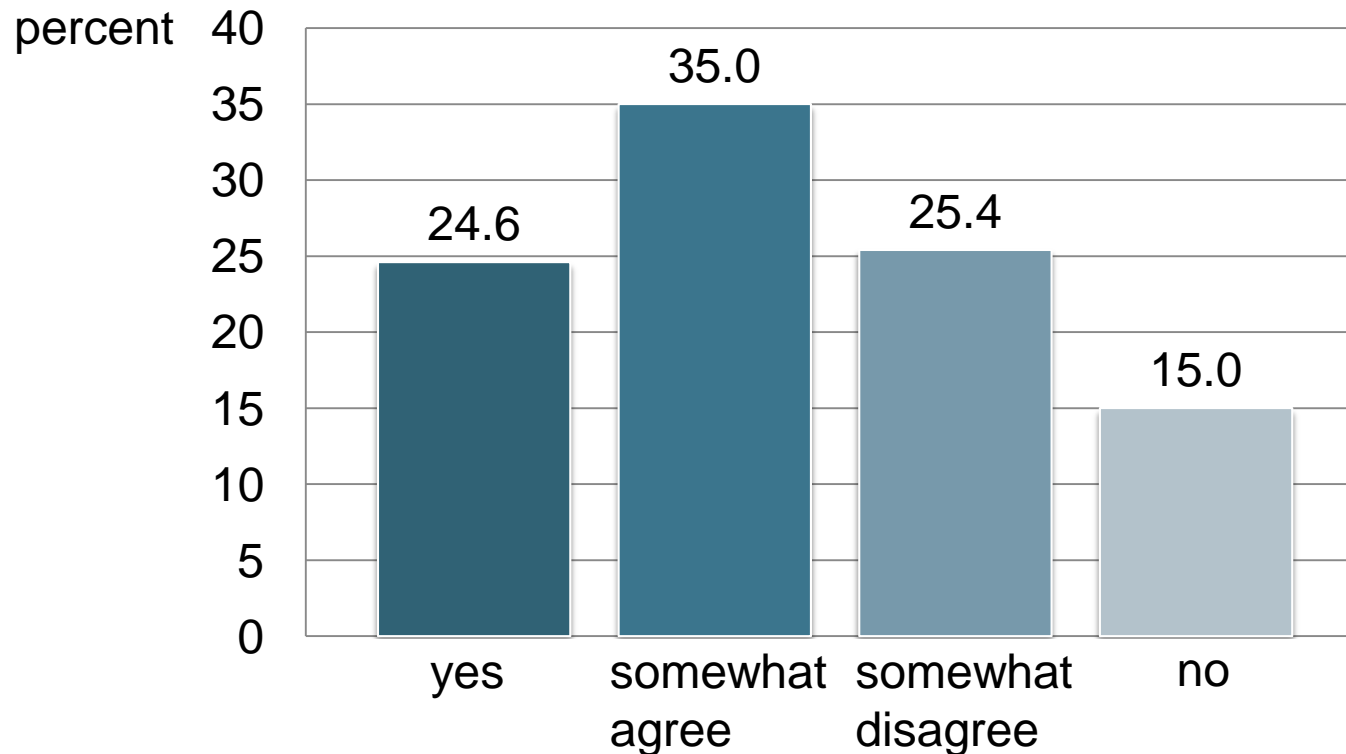
(2) Does something such as a European identity already exist and if so, what are its characteristics?

- Do you consider yourself a European?



(2) Does something such as a European identity already exist and if so, what are its characteristics?

- In your opinion, is there a European culture?



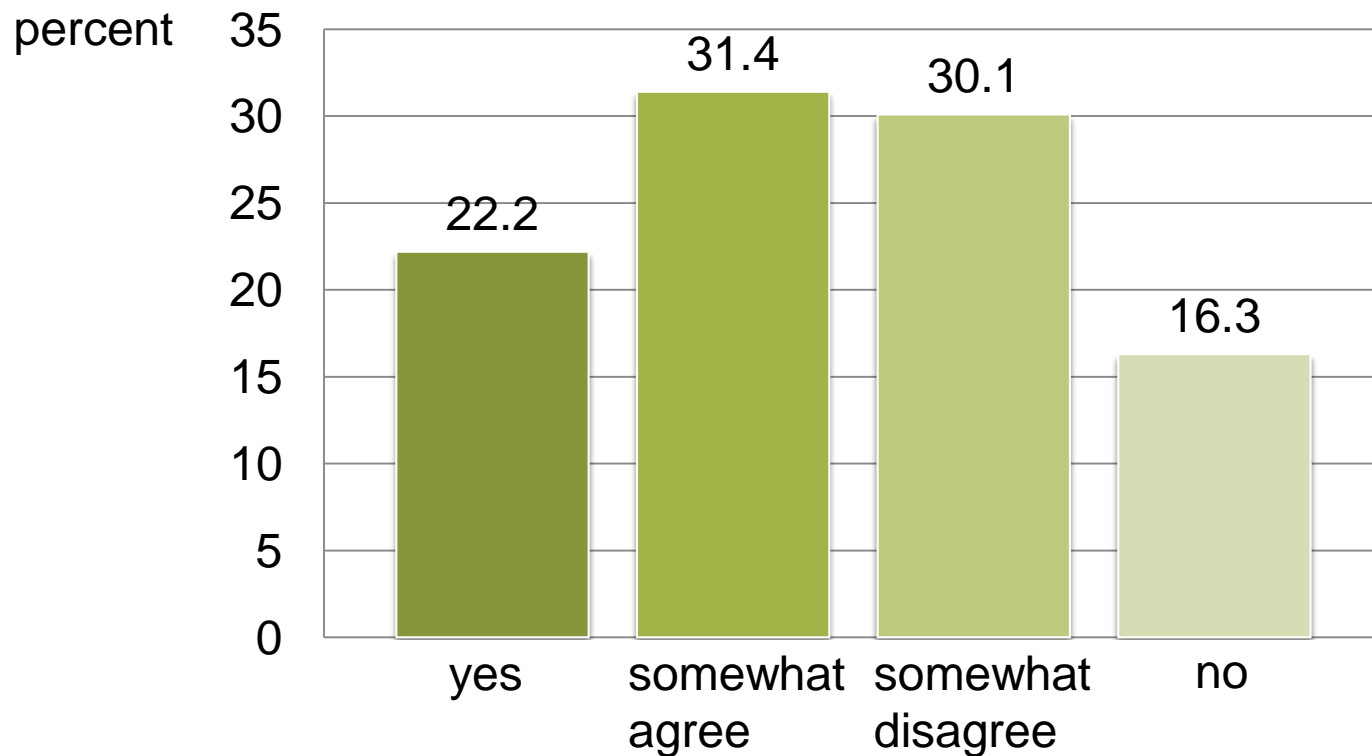
(2) Does something such as a European identity already exist and if so, what are its characteristics?

- Which of the following is “typically European” for you?
 - Multiple choice: 3 answers permitted, ie 300%
 - 1st: the Euro (58%)
 - 2nd: freedom of travel (47%)
 - 3rd: democracy (38%)
 - 4th: language diversity (29%)
 - 5th: human rights (28%)



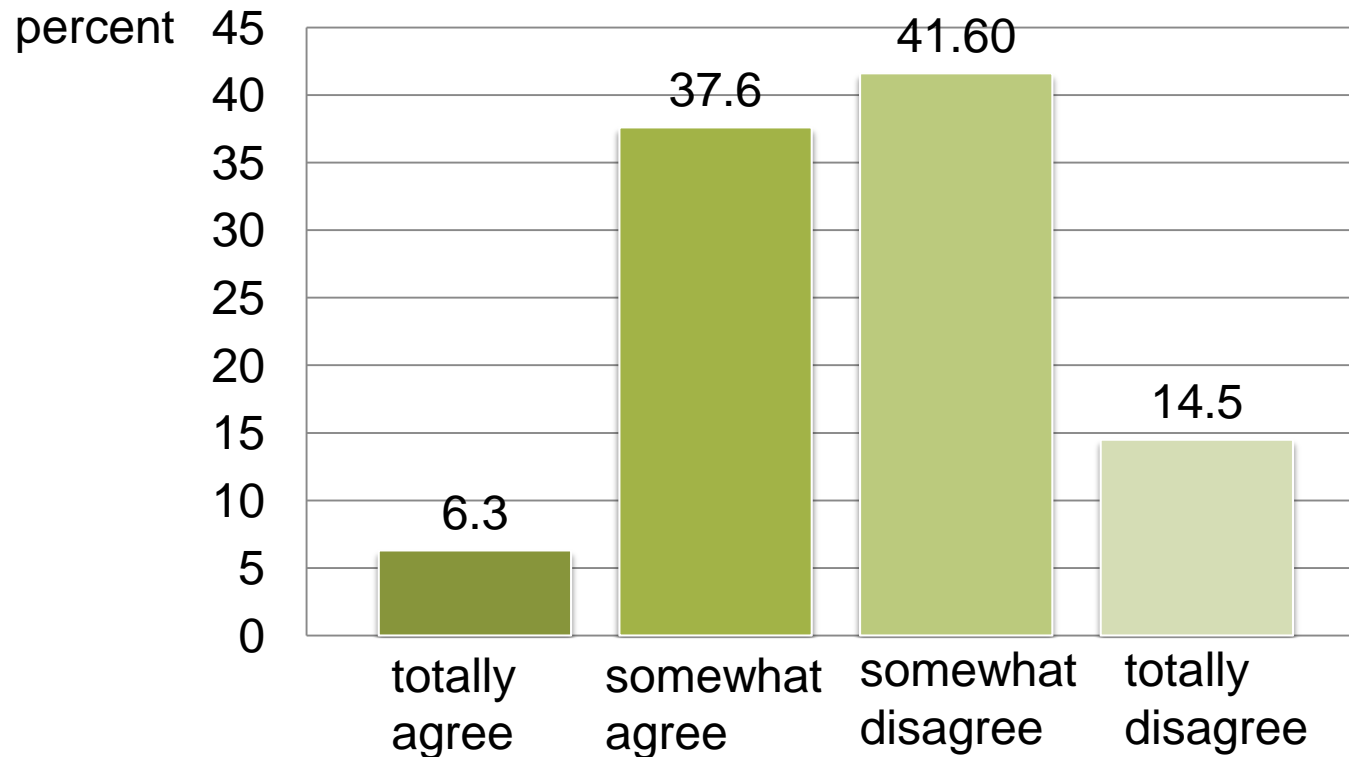
(3) What is more suited to contribute to European identity: Diversity of languages or ELF?

- The EU wants every European to have competency in two languages in addition to their mother tongue. Do you think this is realistic?



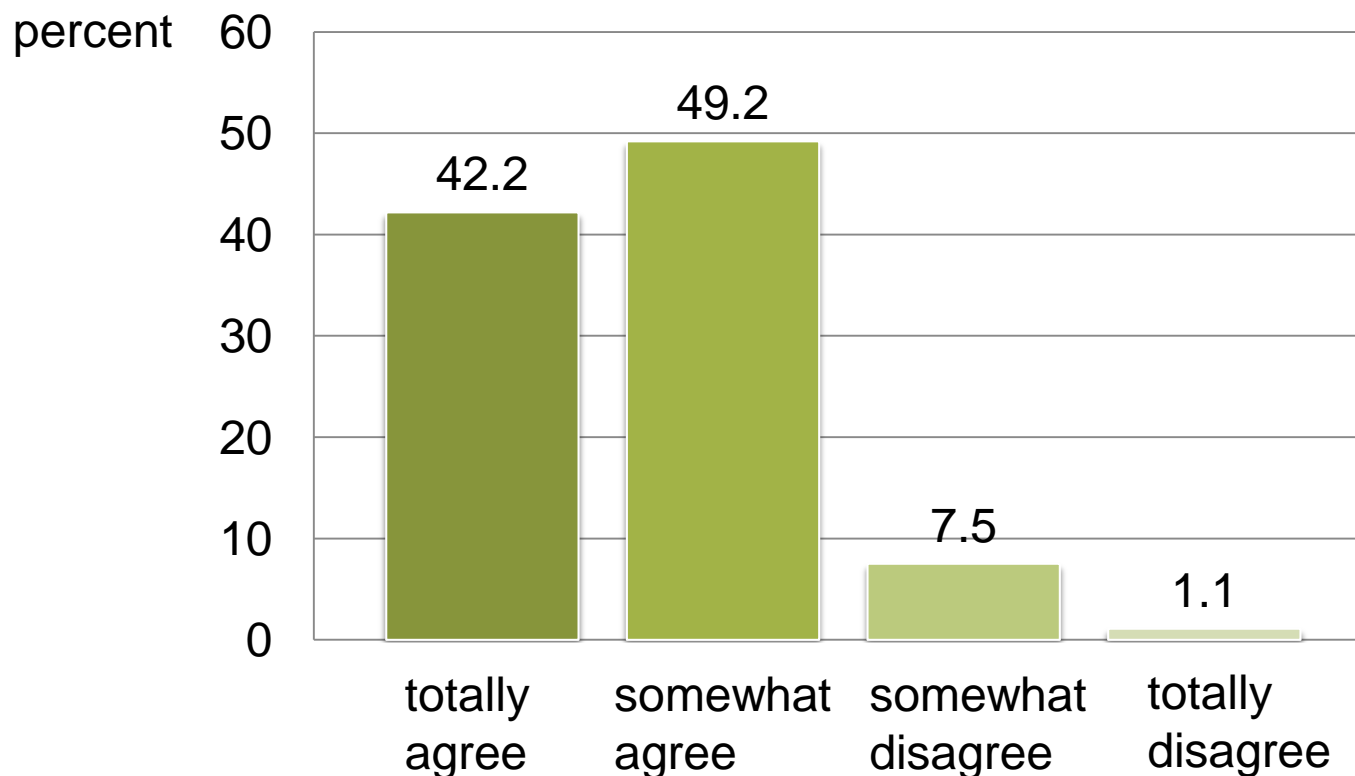
(3) What is more suited to contribute to European identity: Diversity of languages or ELF?

- The use of English as a vehicular language contributes to a European identity.



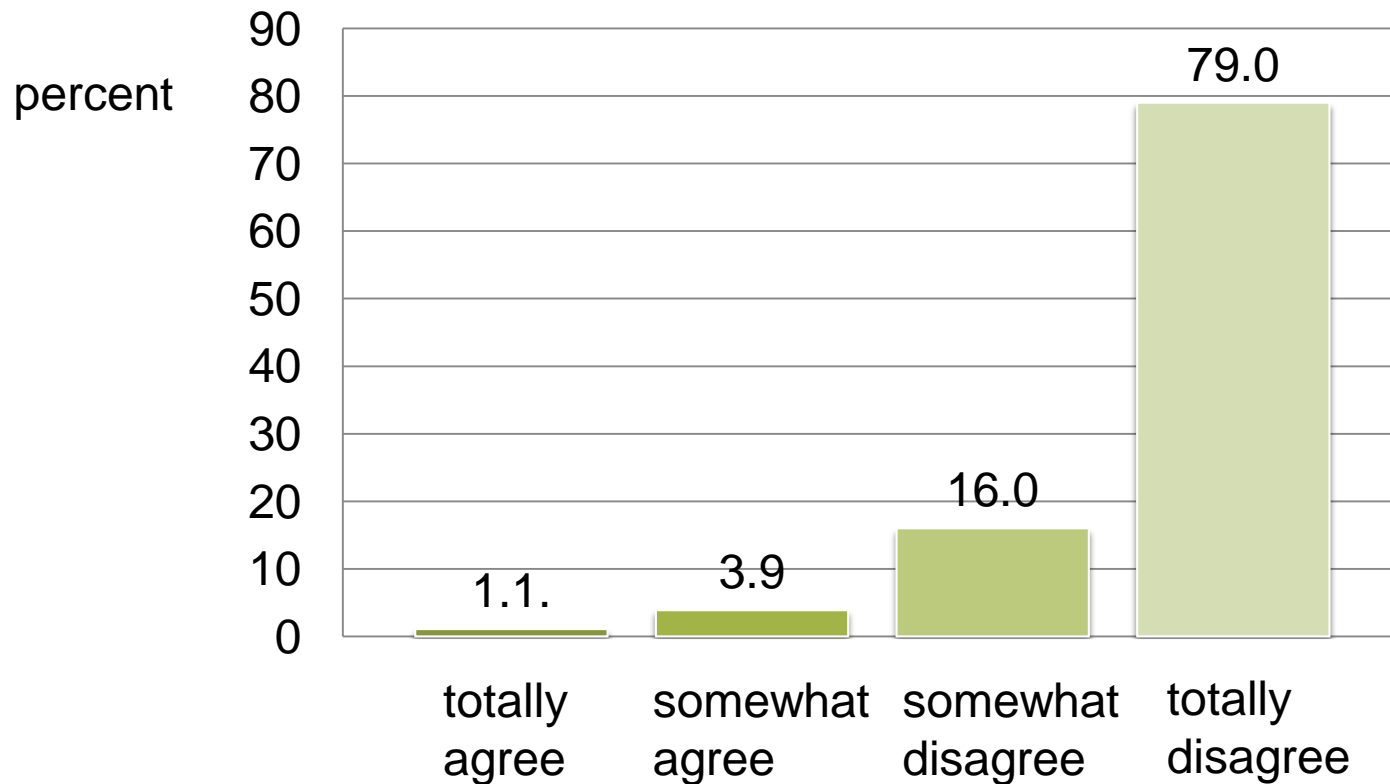
(3) What is more suited to contribute to European identity: Diversity of languages or ELF?

- English, as it is spoken by non-native speakers in Europe, differs from British and American English (eg with respect to pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary).



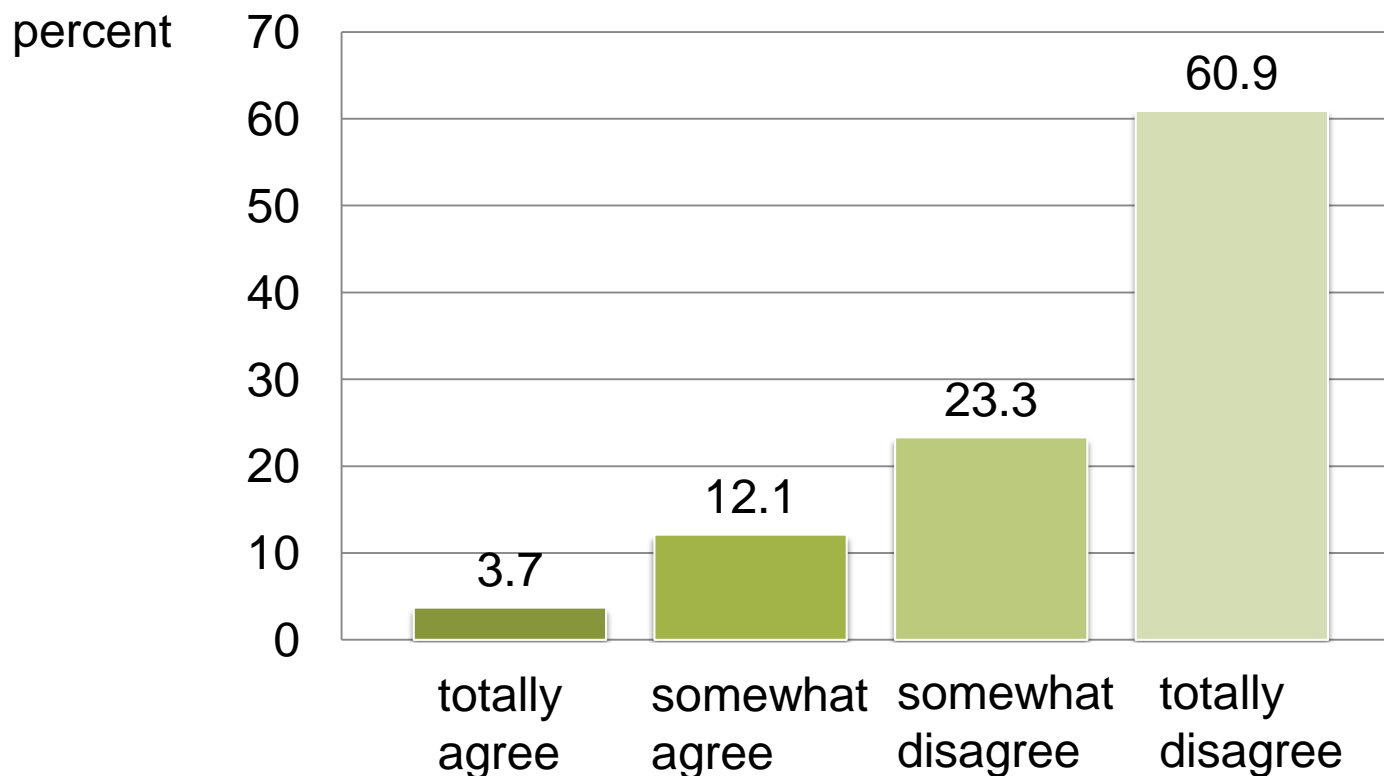
(3) What is more suited to contribute to European identity: Diversity of languages or ELF?

- In Europe there should be a distinct form of English (eg Euro-English) which differs from British or American English in terms of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.



(3) What is more suited to contribute to European identity: Diversity of languages or ELF?

- Such form of Euro-English, differing from British and American English, can contribute to creating a distinct European identity.



5. Summary

- (1) Students seem to embrace ELF as a useful mode of communication, but not as a variety in its own right.
- (2) They see themselves as Europeans. However, their European identity seems to be largely influenced by ideas and symbols rather than language-based notions such as language diversity.
- (3) They are split on the issue of plurilingualism as envisaged by the EU and strongly acknowledge the high communicative value of English. They are fully aware that non-native speakers' English differs from British and American English.
However, the vast majority are strictly against introducing their own form of English and reject the idea of Euro-English contributing to a European identity.

“Euro-English would be as artificial as Esperanto and, in my opinion, would not be able to establish itself, let alone create a European identity.”