

## **Rethinking English Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement in Australian Higher Education**

Ingrid Piller and Agnes Bodis

English language proficiency (ELP) is central to the academic achievement of the 1.5 million students enrolled in Australian universities each year. Yet, students are highly linguistically diverse, with a mix of domestic students from English- and non-English-speaking backgrounds and international students from national contexts where English may be the main language, an official language in a multilingual context, or a foreign language with limited communicative functions.

How do universities manage students' linguistic diversity through their admission requirements and set students up for success?

In this seminar, we examine ELP requirements for university admission in Go8 universities to answer this question. Our language ideological analysis found two categorically different constructs of ELP: inherent ELP based on citizenship, linguistic heritage, and prior education, and tested ELP. We show how these two different conceptualizations of ELP map onto two dichotomous student groups. One of these is deemed to naturally speak English while the other is constructed as deficient and subject to perpetual scrutiny.

These language ideological constructs frame ELP as a matter of individual responsibility rather than part of embedded in learning processes. Conversely, they obscure the need for continuous language development of all students and the need for pedagogical innovation in linguistically diverse educational institutions. We close with implications for policy and practice.

[Distinguished Professor Ingrid Piller](#) and [Dr Agnes Bodis](#) both teach in the Department's Applied Linguistics and TESOL program.

### **Further reading**

Bodis, A. (2023). Gatekeeping v. marketing: English language proficiency as a university admission requirement in Australia. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1-15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2174082>

Piller, I. (2023). How do universities decide whose English needs to be tested for admission?

*Language on the Move*. <https://www.languageonthemove.com/how-do-universities-decide-whose-english-needs-to-be-tested-for-admission/>

Piller, I., & Bodis, A. (2022). Marking and unmarking the (non)native speaker through English language proficiency requirements for university admission. *Language in Society*, 1-23.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404522000689>