**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** The aim of this study has been to analyse the use of English as lingua franca at an internationalised university in a non-English speaking country, the challenges caused by the need to use English for academic and social purposes as well as the use of other languages by a multicultural student community.

**Methodology:** The methodology was based on qualitative research and involved open-ended interviews with students of 14 nationalities as well as staff members, both local (Polish) and from English-speaking countries.

**Findings:** The main findings indicate: a degree of mismatch between the self-perception of English language competence and the actual ability to use it; the key function of language for social bonding; frequent recourse to first language comfort zones rather than the use of the *lingua franca*.

**Value Added:** The research focuses on English language issues in a non-English speaking country, an understudied area in higher education. It draws attention to the use of Russian as a secondary lingua franca among students for whom it is their other language of fluent communication.

**Recommendations:** University level educators should be more aware of the specificity of the problems in the use of English by international students, including such as underestimated listening comprehension issues, tensions connected with the use of polite forms and the mismatch between communication skills in English and the academic needs. The impact of language identity on international students social networking should be taken into account as well.