

L'ANALISI
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UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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*Critical Issues in English –
Medium Instruction at University*

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Edited by Jennifer Valcke, Amanda C. Murphy, Francesca Costa

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INDICE

Introduction	
EMI – A Tool for the Internationalisation of Higher Education	255
<i>Jennifer Valcke, Amanda C. Murphy, Francesca Costa</i>	
What are we Changing when we Teach in English?	
Views from the Schools of Economics, Mathematics and Physics, Engineering and Linguistics	261
<i>Round table moderated by Prof. Simonetta Polenghi, Professor of History of Education, Head of the Department of Education</i>	
The Introduction of English as an Academic Language in a Faculty of Physics and Mathematics in Italy	269
<i>Francesca Costa</i>	
Teacher Development for Teaching and Learning in English in a French Higher Education Context	289
<i>Joanne Pagèze, David Lasagabaster</i>	
Have we got the Lecturing Lingo?	311
<i>Elizabeth Long</i>	
Metadiscourse in EMI lectures: Reflections on a Small Corpus of Spoken Academic Discourse	325
<i>Susanna Brogginì, Amanda C. Murphy</i>	
Adapting to EMI in Higher Education: Students' Perceived Learning Strategies	341
<i>Robert Wilkinson, René Gabriëls</i>	
Students' Outcomes in English-Medium Instruction: Is there any Difference Related to Discipline?	361
<i>Francesca Costa, Cristina Mariotti</i>	
Beyond the Classroom: the Impact of EMI on a University's Linguistic Landscape	372
<i>Francesca Helm, Fiona Dalziel</i>	

INTRODUCTION

EMI – A TOOL FOR THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

JENNIFER VALCKE, AMANDA C. MURPHY, FRANCESCA COSTA

Over the past two decades, EMI has emerged as a tool for the internationalisation of higher education as a necessary response to the forces of globalisation. As a result of the development of higher education in the same period in Europe and the rest of the world,¹ EMI has become a growing trend. Through a change in the medium of instruction, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe and beyond have initiated paradigm shifts in the delivery and services of higher education in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Indeed, the question of language leads university teachers, as well as university leadership, to consider the linguistic, pedagogical and cultural implications of this new context, as well as to rethink the professional development of university teaching staff.

The papers presented in this volume mostly stem from the themes that emerged during the symposium “English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education” organised by the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation, in collaboration with the Department of Linguistic and Literary Sciences and the Centre of Linguistics at the Università del Sacro Cuore, Milan in May 2016. Invited scholars dealt with topics such as the different approaches to English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in the USA, Europe and Italy in particular, the importance of the continuing professional development of teachers for EMI, the emerging new profile of teacher trainers and the changing role of language experts within university contexts, the differing linguistic demands of academic disciplines, and the communicative ability of non-native English speaking teachers and the challenges their students face.

The first part of the symposium closed with a round table, during which four professors from different disciplines reflected on the question: *What are we changing when we teach in English?* It is with this contribution that the volume opens, because while describing problematic issues that are shared across countries and cultures, each speaker provided a different view of the challenges of EMI in their own context. These differences in describing

¹ F. Maiworm – B. Wächter ed., *English-Taught Programmes in European Higher Education. The State of Play in 2014*, Lemmens, Bonn 2014, p. 38; P. Altbach – L. Reisberg – L. Rumbley, *Trends in Global Higher Education, Tracking and Academic Revolution*, UNESCO, Paris 2009; J. Dearden, *English as a Medium of Instruction – A Growing Global Phenomenon*, British Council, London 2014, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/e484_emi_-_cover_option_3_final_web.pdf (last accessed: December 16, 2017).

the points of view of the lecturer, the student and the institution, can partly be explained by their disciplinary culture, as well as a highly individual viewpoint.

The professor of Management pointed out three major changes: the change in target audience for the university triggered by offering courses in English, and the entrance into a different market and a different type of competition; the change in the contents of the course, both in terms of the subjects taught – for example, English is no longer treated as an evaluated discipline, which frees up credits for other subjects – and in terms of the way each subject is adapted to a different audience; the change in faculty – English Taught Programmes (ETPs) attract a younger and more international staff, who adopt a more inter-active teaching methodology. The professors of Maths and Physics were concerned about mastering all the linguistic aspects that are not subject-related, but which communicate ideas and concepts linked to real life; interestingly, they were uneasy about the model or variety of English they were (mis)representing. They also looked with foreboding to a future era when students might choose universities on the basis of the quality of the English offered, rather than on other more academic merits.

The professor of Engineering, who declared that his variety of the language was ‘international English’, pointed to the difficulties of juggling a class where the competencies of the students from all around the world differ vastly, and crucially, to the different styles of reasoning they are accustomed to. While Southern Europe tends to adopt a deductive, top-down approach from principles to rules to problems, students from countries like Vietnam or South America or even English-speaking countries are impatient when they hear the principles, and do not feel they are learning unless they start from practical problems. He also noted the different expectations as regards the length of the degree course – Italian engineering degrees are more open-ended than in other countries, whereas when foreign students enrol, they need to know the year in which they will graduate. This threatens to lead to a lowering of standards to enable students to pass exams and graduate faster.

Finally, the Professor of General and German linguistics expressed his view on the deeper questions of using a foreign language, and the need for a speaker to feel comfortable in a language in order to communicate effectively. On the one hand, if an audience sees an uncomfortable speaker, they will typically not be drawn into the speaker’s discourse, which obviously has consequences for effective learning and teaching. On the other, a speaker needs to be able to express not only content but also emotion to create an interpersonal relationship with the audience. Communication, also in the classroom, is first and foremost communication with another person – interpersonal communication – and this must not be lost if effective communication is to come about.

The fact that language plays such a predominant role in the international classroom prompts the question: How should HEIs respond to an academic culture that is increasingly globalised, and the needs of students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds? Many HEIs have responded to globalisation by adopting internationalisation strategies, such as promoting ETPs in order to attract international students. Today, the sociolinguistic

reality of using English as a *lingua franca*² calls for a re-appraisal of language competence, stepping away from native speaker norms and embracing different varieties of English as they are used around the world. In this respect, the anxiety expressed by some EMI teachers regarding the variety of English they speak might be appeased if they conceptualised a fully competent speaker of English as an *international* language as a speaker with a wide vocabulary, accurate grammar, easily understood accent, and who may or may not originally be a native speaker³.

The volume opens with an edited transcription of the Round Table to provide a sense of how the local context is both unique and universal. The logic thereafter moves from the standpoint of an institution, weighing up the pros and cons of introducing EMI, to the standpoints of lecturers and of students. The volume closes by reflecting on the linguistic landscape that begins to change as EMI is adopted on a campus.

Starting from the institutional point of view, Costa discusses the trend in Italy of introducing ETPs to encourage the growth of Maths and Physics Faculties, and reports on the interview with a Dean of a Faculty planning to adopt ETPs, and a questionnaire delivered to its future possible clients. While the Dean expresses concern about the possible simplification of contents, it emerges that the students hope to gain proficiency in English through attending ETPs, but would ideally sit exams in Italian. The data points to a slightly more open attitude among students of Physics rather than Mathematics in this regard.

Broadening the discourse beyond Italy, Lasagabaster and Pagèze discuss the various positions European HEIs have adopted with regards to ETPs. These vary considerably, ranging from parallel language contexts in Northern Europe,^{4 5} where recent language policies have reinforced the importance of the national language(s) in the academic domain, to a maximalist approach to EMI, where English is seen as a vehicle for globalisation and as inevitable. Research on EMI in Italy and southern European contexts has reinforced the idea that English must co-exist with local language identities, local higher education practices, and local attitudes to multilingualism. While Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), with its focus on learning and multilingualism, has been enforced by the Italian Ministry of Education⁶, EMI remains associated with imperialism⁷ and disputed to

² Penny Ur defines English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a language taught/learned in order to interact with the native speakers of the language, while she defines English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a language used for communication between speakers who share no other common language (P. Ur, *English as a Lingua Franca and Some Implications for English Teachers*, 2009, https://www.tesol-france.org/uploaded_files/files/Coll09-Ur_Plenary_Handouts.pdf) (last accessed: January 18, 2018).

³ J. Jenkins, *English as a Lingua Franca in the International University. The Politics of Academic English Language Policy*, Routledge, New York/London 2014.

⁴ S. Dimova – A.K. Hultgren – C. Jensen, *English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education*, Mouton, Berlin 2014.

⁵ A.K. Hultgren – F. Gregersen – J. Thøgersen ed., *English in Nordic Universities: Ideologies and practices*. Benjamins, Amsterdam 2014.

⁶ Legge Moratti, 53/2003; D.L. 17.10.2010 n. 226.

⁷ R. Phillipson, “English as threat or an opportunity in European higher education” in *English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education: English in Europe*, S. Dimova – J.K. Hultgren – C. Jensen ed., Volume 3, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin 2015.

some extent, as exemplified by the much-publicised court case involving Milan Polytechnic, where professors rebelled against the imposition of EMI^{8,9} and the present ruling imposes parallel language use. Nevertheless, EMI has proliferated throughout HEIs in Italy, with the vast majority of universities offering ETPs (75% of universities in the North, 88% in the Centre and 100% of universities in the South), although the latest survey of ETPs¹⁰ shows a stabilising of the increase of courses, after the boom in the first decade of this millennium.

Continuing professional development is a rather contentious issue that cannot be avoided if EMI is to be successfully implemented, since it is now clear that there is a need to modify teaching and implement new pedagogies for international classrooms. According to Long's contribution to this volume, training university teaching staff is not only a linguistic affair, since teaching staff who have a C1 or more on the CEFR scale still experience difficulties in their oral proficiency and find certain aspects of teaching particularly challenging. There is a strong need for the continuing professional development of teaching staff to be systematic and holistic, based on research, and a robust institutional language policy. However, the majority of university teachers are not keen to receive pedagogical training in teaching through a foreign language¹¹. This is why close collaboration should be fostered between content and language teachers¹², so that the latter can advise the former on how to benefit from using the language more effectively – in particular in suggesting specific training on certain features of pronunciation and communicative ability. With regards to pronunciation, very few studies¹³ pay attention to the impact of pronunciation during lectures. The efficacy of teachers does not lie in their capacity to provide native-like explanations, but rather in the negotiation and construction

⁸ M-L. Maggioni – A. Murphy, *La lingua o le lingue inglesi oggi: strumento di egemonia culturale o ponte?*, in *Geopolitica delle lingue*, S. Cigada – G. Del Zanna – A. Dell'Asta ed., Maggioli, Milano (in press).

⁹ *Fuori l'Italiano dall'Università? Inglese, internazionalizzazione, politica linguistica*, N. Maraschio – D. De Martino ed., Accademia della Crusca, Laterza, Roma 2013.

¹⁰ S. Brogginì – F. Costa, *A survey of English-medium instruction in Italian higher education. An updated perspective from 2012-2015*, "Journal of Immersion and Content-based Language Education", 5, 2017, 2, pp. 240-266.

¹¹ F. Costa – J. Coleman, *Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education in Italy: Ongoing Research*, "International CLIL Research Journal", 1, 2010, 3, pp. 19-29.

¹² J. Valcke – K. Bartik – I. Tudor, *Practising CLIL in Higher Education: Challenges and Perspectives*, in D. Marsh – O. Meyer ed., *Quality Interfaces: Examining Evidence & Exploring Solutions in CLIL*, Eichstätt University, Eichstätt 2011, pp. 140-154; M. Gustafsson – A. Eriksson – C. Riäsänen et alia, *Collaborating for Content and Language Integrated Learning: The Situated Character of Faculty Collaboration and Student Learning*, "Across the Disciplines", 8, 2011, 3, <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/clil/gustafssonetal.cfm> (last accessed: December 12, 2017).

¹³ S. Thompson, *Text-Structuring Metadiscourse, Intonation and the Signalling of Organisation in Academic Lectures*, "Journal of English for Academic Purposes", 2, 2003, 1, pp. 5-20; K. Saito – K. van Poeteren, *Pronunciation-Specific Adjustment Strategies for Intelligibility in L2 Teacher Talk: Results and Implications of a Questionnaire Study*, "Language Awareness", 21, 2012, 4, pp. 369-385.

of knowledge by means of various initiatives and activities, and this is where training them to use the language efficiently acquires full importance¹⁴.

As Long demonstrates, a new profile for EMI teacher trainers is beginning to emerge, where such individuals would provide training in terms of higher education pedagogy, the mechanisms behind language acquisition, the development of communicative competence, knowledge of academic language, the cultural dimensions of the international classroom and the language of the university classroom.

The spoken production of EMI lecturers remains an area requiring research. The contribution by Brogginì and Murphy presents an initial study of an aspect of EMI spoken discourse that deserves attention, namely, metadiscourse. In their paper they analyse a corpus of four EMI lessons to observe how the lecturers structure their discourse, with particular focus on connectives, framing markers, code glosses and self-mentions. The study details how the range of metadiscursive types used to organise the lectures is rather narrow, and that self-mentions occur frequently as a strategy to render the lecture less formal. It suggests that EMI lecturers could benefit from some training in the area of metadiscourse markers to enhance the clarity of their discourse, and enliven and vary their oral production.

In the contribution by Wilkinson & Gabriëls, the perspective of the student is explored, particularly regarding the perception of an effect of EMI on learning strategies. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, the authors uncover questions such as linguistic asymmetries in an EMI setting between native and non-native speakers and differing levels of language competence between students, which need to be overcome if they are to focus on content learning. All the students interviewed report differences in their learning strategies in an EMI lesson, although students with higher language abilities naturally focus on content more easily.

Straddling both the student and the institutional perspective, Costa & Mariotti contribute to the debate on the reduction of content in EMI, demonstrating that there is evidence of some detriment in learning outcomes when comparing parallel groups studying either through English or Italian. Interestingly, this is not the case in all disciplines or at all levels of education; previous research^{15 16} has shown no detriment reported for Economics and International Relations as a subject area. Costa & Mariotti here contrast scientific disciplines with humanistic ones, and find detriment in the learning of Geometry and Physiopathology. While the debate continues, and further research is clearly necessary, it

¹⁴ J. Valcke – V. Pavón, *A Comparative Study on the Use of Pronunciation Strategies for Highlighting Information*, in R. Wilkinson – M-L. Walsh ed., *Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education. From Theory to Practice*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 2015.

¹⁵ E. Dafouz – M. Camacho – E. Urquía, 'Surely they can't do as well': *A comparison of business students' academic performance in English-medium and Spanish-as-first-language medium programmes*. "Language and Education", 28, 2014, 3, pp. 223-236.

¹⁶ N. Hernandez-Nanclaresa – A. Jimenez-Munoz, *English as a medium of instruction: Evidence for language and content targets in bilingual education in economics*, "International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism", 2015, pp. 1-14, DOI:10.1080/13670050.2015.1125847 (last accessed September 28, 2017).

is evident that HEIs must make informed choices as to the selection of appropriate courses for EMI, taking into consideration the importance of language in the discipline.

In the final paper of this volume, Helm & Dalziel offer a novel analysis of the linguistic landscape of an Italian university. The linguistic landscape (the language visible in public spaces) is also considered to be a place of identity construction and representation; a university adopting EMI may thus become an 'arena of contestation', where the linguistic landscape offers evidence of competing languages, and partially documents the language policy being adopted. Linguistic landscaping is a new methodological approach to observing the EMI context, a way to observe "the changing face of Italian universities in their quest for ever increasing internationalisation".

The volume draws on original research which points to the critical challenges HEIs are facing as they embark upon EMI, and we trust that the contributions will highlight the challenges and opportunities that the predominant role English plays in the furthering of internationalisation within universities. We also hope that this volume will contribute to further research and lines of investigation for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning in higher education contexts.

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