



Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

English-medium instruction in European higher education: review and future research.

Book Section

How to cite:

Dimova, Slobodanka; Hultgren, Anna Kristina and Jensen, Christian (2015). English-medium instruction in European higher education: review and future research. In: Dimova, Slobodanka; Hultgren, Anna Kristina and Jensen, Christian eds. English-Medium Instruction in European Higher Education. Language and Social Life (4). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, pp. 317–324.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2015 Walter de Gruyter GmbH

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/247850>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

English-medium instruction in European higher education: Review and future research

The purpose of this volume has been to give an account of the status of English as a medium of instruction in various political, geographical and ideological contexts: Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western and Central Europe, regions at different stages of EMI implementation. It is our hope that the preceding chapters have given comparative insights into some of the discussions and issues associated with EMI in European higher education. While contributors have investigated a diverse set of empirical, pedagogical and political issues, many issues remain to be addressed in more detail. In these final few pages of the volume, we briefly review some of the main issues that have arisen in the preceding chapters as well as in the broader EMI literature and propose further directions in methodological approaches, areas, and scopes.

We believe the field would benefit from a broader range of research designs and methodological approaches. A favoured methodology both in the chapters of this volume (see Chapters 2–5) as well as in the wider EMI literature from its early days are attitudinal studies based on questionnaires and interviews (e.g. Lehtonen & Lönnfors 2003; Jensen et al. 2009; Tange 2010; Vinke 1995). Such studies unveil a complex range of attitudes – positive as well as negative – towards the policy and practice of EMI. Many point to the challenges of teaching and learning in an additional language and express concerns over a possible decrease in importance of the local language. Others highlight the benefits of EMI such as international collaboration, improved English language proficiency and heightened job prospects for graduates (Wilkinson 2005; Hellekjær 2007; Tange 2008; Airey 2013; Kling 2013; Griffiths 2013; Margić and Vodopija-Krstanović Chapter 2; Gürtler and Kronewald Chapter 4; Arkin and Osam Chapter 8; Kling Chapter 9; Pulcini and Campagna Chapter 3; Santulli Chapter 12). Such attitudinal studies, whether primarily focused on students or teachers (which is more often the case), are important in exploratory research and have helped us gather baseline data about the EMI situation. However, it might be time for the field to move towards more in-depth ethnographic and

observational studies to help us gain insights into the complexity of teaching and learning practices. Thus, where surveys and interviews yield insights into *attitudes* and *ideologies* about EMI, they do not necessarily say anything about how EMI is actually enacted, negotiated and reacted to in the observed *practices* on the ground (for a discussion about the ideologies and practices of Englishization of Nordic academic, see, e.g. Hultgren et al. 2014).

Ethnographic methods might allow for a wider range of data types to be investigated, e.g. teaching and assessment materials, electronic and print materials, and institutional documents with relevance for teaching and learning, e.g. curricula, syllabi, course descriptions, reading lists, minutes from meetings, memos, etc.), all of which contribute to learning and teaching. In other words, ethnographies might be better able to reflect the fact that learning and the teaching in this day and age take place across a wide spectrum of modes and media – not only, perhaps not even first and foremost – through the spoken interaction that takes place between the teacher and the student. One of the few ethnographic studies to date is Smit (2010), where long-term observation of participants in a tertiary level Hotel Management programme provided detailed information about the very collaborative nature of the interactions among students (see also Söderlundh 2014). The study also pointed to the importance of including the local language in considerations of the EMI context.

In a similar manner, observational studies can reveal how teaching the same content in an L1 and L2 differs e.g. a slower, more formal delivery in L2 (Airey Chapter 7; Thøgersen and Airey 2011). Arkin and Osam (see Chapter 8) present findings from case studies and analyses of teacher talk and student comprehension levels, emphasizing the challenges both students and teachers experience in EMI contexts (e.g. reduced amount of information in L2 lectures, low level of classroom interaction, low level of lecture comprehension). Findings in both this and Airey's studies are supported by similar, small case study research which also suggests that learning and teaching in an L2 may be different from that in an L1 (Klaassen 2001; Thøgersen and Airey 2010; Westbrook and Henriksen 2011; Kling and Stæhr 2011). However, documenting that EMI actually leads to a lower learning outcome is inordinately difficult, given the myriad of factors that contribute to successful learning, and no study has been able to firmly document that the learning outcome will be lower in English-medium than in national language instruction. Moreover,

although evidence suggests that students with English as an additional language *perceive* following instruction in English as a problem (Airey 2006, 2009; Hellekjær 2009; van der Walt and Kidd 2013), this ability can improve over time as students adopt different learning strategies (e.g. reading assigned material before class, focusing on lecture rather than taking notes, asking informal questions after class) (Klassen 2001; Airey 2010). As Jenkins reminds us (2014), many stakeholders still view EMI through a deficit lens, considering, for example, code-switching and non-native accents as axiomatically problematic, much like the case in academic writing (see, e.g. Flowerdew 2008; Lillis and Curry 2010; Turner 2011).

The research span of most EMI studies has been quite narrow and embedded in particular national or university environments, so the field could be enhanced by cross-national, contrastive studies. One of the most remarkable facts about EMI is that, though striving towards internationalization, it is almost entirely a purely *national* endeavour, not only in terms of discussions of implementation, policies and attitudes (for example to the risk of domain loss), but certainly in terms of the research that has tried to cast light on these issues. The increased cultural and linguistic diversity stemming from the growing number of international students is often acknowledged, and even highlighted, in the research literature. Yet, EMI research has not, as of yet, addressed this diversity through application of research projects that transcend national and cultural boundaries to examine the extent to which results from one cultural and linguistic setting generalize to other settings. For example, given the potential differences among countries in terms of instructional approaches, student and teacher relationships, as well as teacher and student proficiency levels, it is difficult to determine whether the Airey's recommendations in Chapter 7, based on analyses of the behaviour of students in Sweden, are equally valid for students in Italy or Spain. Research should help us articulate the variation of cultural and educational expectations of students and teachers with different backgrounds, as well as understand the impact of the fluid conceptualizations of English proficiency levels on the success of EMI.

Whilst teaching and learning has thus far probably received the most attention in research on EMI, research into policies is also beginning to take shape (Lasagabaster Chapter 5; Soler-Carbonell Chapter 11; Jenkins 2014; Hultgren 2014). Policy research situates EMI in a wider socio-political context and can help expose hidden ideologies and

social disadvantage of the type Phillipson (Chapter 1) importantly reminds us of. One aspect of policy research is which English language norms are appropriate and relevant in an EMI context (McCambridge and Saarinen Chapter 13). Findings suggest that, at least for now, native Englishes from the traditionally norm-providing inner-circle countries remain normative at international universities (Jenkins 2014; Kuteeva 2014). Amongst teachers and students, the native-speaker norm continues to be preferable to non-native variations, though some preferences for non-native varieties are emerging. However, the relationship between the English norms and students' and teachers' personal and professional identities needs further exploration. At least one study has shown that students' perceptions of their EMI lecturers' overall professional competence are influenced by their perceptions of the lecturers' proficiency in English (Jensen et al. 2013). But the results from this study also suggested that students may be less concerned about correctness according to a native norm than English language professionals (Jensen 2013b), which matches Jenkins' assertion that "ELF speakers [...] prioritise communicative effectiveness over narrow predetermined notions of 'correctness'" (2011: 928). It also supports ideas that identity in the internationalized university cannot be simplistically inferred. Writing about the linguistic and cultural diversity in British universities, Preece and Martin argue that "there is a mismatch between the monolingual ethos and the ideology of English-medium tertiary education and the needs and identities of multilingual students" (2010: 3). ELF speakers are generally believed to have a more utilitarian perspective on English than people who identify as learners of English, which can have an effect not only on attitudes towards English but, as a result, also on the language use of students in an ELF environment such as EMI in the international university. One particular area of interest might be comparing students in the natural sciences with students from the arts or social sciences, based on the observation by Kuteeva & Airey (2014), that natural scientists have more utilitarian attitudes to the use of English as a lingua franca than scholars from other academic disciplines. We might therefore expect natural scientists to be front-runners in a process towards less native-oriented norms of English in EMI.

Finally, the chapters by Ingvarsdóttir and Arnbjörnsdóttir (Chapter 6) and Hellekjær and Hellekjær (Chapter 10) raise issues that relate to pre- and post-tertiary level of education, i.e. how well secondary education prepares students for EMI and the extent to which EMI prepares them for the labour market. Although English language proficiency

has been found to represent one of the major factors affecting EMI success, research on the relationship between high-school English instruction and students' preparedness for EMI has received relatively little attention and could be a future avenue of research. Lack of attention has equally been noted in research investigating to what degree university EMI programs meet the needs of the local and international labour markets although the main goal of EMI is to prepare students for a career in today's globalized world. Thus, future research might usefully widen the lens to focus on the interface between tertiary level education and what comes before and after it, i.e. secondary education and the labour market.

In this volume and in the wider literature, it is clear that most research to date has focused on how teaching and learning takes place in an EMI context. Favoured methodologies have included interviews and questionnaires. We have suggested that the time may now be ripe for extending the scope and methods employed in the field to include also studies into language policies, ethnographic studies and studies which focus on the interface between tertiary-level education and what comes before and after. EMI is a complex field of study which intersects with a many disciplines from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, education, ELT, language policy, to mention just a few, and input is needed from all these disciplines if we are to gain a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of EMI in European universities.

References

- Airey, John. 2006. Physics students' experiences of the disciplinary discourse encountered in lectures in English and Swedish. *Licentiate Thesis. Uppsala, Sweden: Department of Physics, Uppsala University.*
- Airey, John. 2009. *Science, language, and literacy : Case studies of learning in Swedish university physics* (Doctoral dissertation). Uppsala Universitet. <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:173193> (accessed 8 January 2015).
- Airey, John. 2010. The ability of students to explain science concepts in two languages. *Hermes—Journal of Language and Communication Studies* 45. 35–49.
- Airey, John. 2013. "I don't teach language." The linguistic attitudes of physics lecturers in Sweden. *AILA Review*, 25(25), 64–79.

- Doiz, Aintzane, David Lasagabaster & Juan Manuel Sierra. 2014. Language friction and multilingual policies in higher education: the stakeholders' view. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(4), 345–360.
- Flowerdew, John. 2008. Scholarly writers who use English as an additional language. What can Goffman's "stigma" tell us? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7: 77–86.
- Griffiths, E. 2013. *English as a medium of higher education institution in Norway: A critical exploratory study of lecturers' perspectives and practices* (PhD Thesis). University of Exeter.
- Hellekjær, Glenn Ole. 2007. The implementation of undergraduate level English medium programs in Norway: An explorative case study. In Robert Wilkinson & Vera Zegars (eds.), *Researching content and language integration in higher education*, 68–81. Maastricht: Universitaire Pers Maastricht.
- Hellekjær, Glenn Ole. 2009. Academic English reading proficiency at the university level: A Norwegian case study. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 21(2), 2.
- Hultgren, Anna Kristina. 2014. Whose parallellingualism? Overt and covert ideologies in Danish university language policies. *Multilingua*, 33(1/2), 61–87.
- Hultgren, Anna Kristina. 2013. Lexical borrowing from English into Danish in the sciences: An empirical investigation of "domain loss". *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 23(2): 166–182.
- Hultgren, Anna Kristina, Frans Gregersen & Jacob Thøgersen. 2014. *English in Nordic Universities: Ideologies and Practices*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Jenkins, Jennifer. 2014. *English as a lingua franca in the international university: The politics of academic English language policy*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Jennifer. 2011. Accommodating (to) ELF in the international university. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43. 926–936.
- Jensen, Christian, Lars Stenius Stæhr & Jacob Thøgersen. 2009. *Undervisners holdninger til engelsk som undervisningssprog – en spørgeskemaundersøgelse på Københavns Universitet* (survey). <http://cip.ku.dk/forskning/publikationer/> (accessed XXX).
- Jensen, Christian. 2013. Danish university students' evaluative reactions to their lecturers' proficiency in English. Paper presented at the 6th International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF6), Rome, 4–7 September.

- Jensen, Christian, Louise Denver, Inger M. Mees & Charlotte Werther. 2013. Students' attitudes to lecturers' English in English-medium higher education in Denmark. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 12(1), 87–112.
- Klaassen, Renate G. 2001. *The international university curriculum: challenges in English-medium engineering education* (Doctoral dissertation). Technische Universiteit Delft, Delft, NL. <http://repository.tudelft.nl/view/ir/uuid%3Adea78484-b8c2-40d0-9677-6a508878e3d9> (accessed 8 January 2015).
- Kling, Joyce & Lars Stenius Stæhr. 2011. Assessment and assistance: Developing university lecturers' language skills through certification feedback. In Rita Cancino, Lotte Dam & Kirsten Jæger (eds.), *Policies, principles, practices: New directions in foreign language education in the era of educational globalization* (Vol. 2011), 213–245. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Kling Soren, Joyce. 2013. *Teacher identity in English-medium instruction: Teacher Cognitions from a Danish tertiary education context* (PhD Thesis). University of Copenhagen. http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/86/38/16/PDF/Ph.d._2013_Kling_Soren.pdf (accessed 8 January 2015).
- Kuteeva, Maria. 2014. The parallel language use of Swedish and English: The question of “nativeness” in university policies and practices. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(4), 332–344.
- Kuteeva, Maria & John Airey. 2014. Disciplinary differences in the use of English in higher education: Reflections on recent language policy developments. *Higher Education* 67(5). 533–549.
- Lillis, Theresa & Mary Jane Curry. 2010. *Academic Writing in a Global Context: The Politics and Practices of Publishing in English*. London: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group
- Lehtonen, Tuula, Pearl Lönnfors, Charles van Leuwen & Robert Wilkinson. 2003. Teaching through English: A university case study. In *Multilingual approaches in university education: Challenges and practices* (pp. 103–118). Maastricht: Uitgeverij Valkhof Pers.
- Preece, Siân & Peter Martin. 2010. Guest editorial: Imagining higher education as a multilingual space. *Language and Education* 24(1): 3–8.

- Smit, Ute, 2010. *English as a Lingua Franca in Higher Education: A Longitudinal Study of Classroom Discourse*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Söderlundh, Hedda. 2014. Zooming in on language practices in Swedish higher education. A discussion of five studies and their normative versus dynamic approach towards policy and practice". In Anna Kristina Hultgren, Frans Gregersen & Jacob Thøgersen (eds.), *English in Nordic Universities: Ideologies and practices*, 111–126. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Tange, Hanne. 2008. International Education as Intercultural Learning. In Meeri Hellstén & Anna Reid (eds.), *Researching International Pedagogies*, 99–114. Springer Netherlands.
- Tange, Hanne. 2010. Caught in the Tower of Babel: University lecturers' experiences with internationalisation. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 10(2), 137–149.
- Thøgersen, Jacob & John Airey. 2011. Lecturing undergraduate science in Danish and in English: A comparison of speaking rate and rhetorical style. *English for Specific Purposes*, 30(3), 13.
- Turner, Joan. 2011. *Language in the Academy: Cultural reflexivity and intercultural dynamics*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Vinke, Adriana A. 1995. *English as the medium of instruction in Dutch engineering education* Doctoral Thesis, Department of Communication and Education, Delft University of Technology. Delft, The Netherlands: Department of Communication and Education, Delft University of Technology.
- Walt, Christa Van der & Martin Kidd. (2013). Acknowledging academic biliteracy in higher education assessment strategies: A tale of two trials. *English-Medium Instruction at Universities. Global Challenges. Bristol: Multilingual Matters*, 27–43.
- Westbrook, Pete & Birgit Henriksen. 2011. "Bridging the linguistic and affective gaps" – the impact of a short, tailor-made language course on a Danish university lecturer's ability to lecture with confidence in English. In Rita Cancino, Lotte Dam & Kirsten Jæger (eds.), *Policies, principles, practices: New directions in foreign language education in the era of educational globalization* (Vol. 2011), 188–212. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Wilkinson, Robert. (2005). The impact of language on teaching content: Views from the content teacher. Presented at the Bi and Multilingual Universities—Challenges and

Future Prospects Conference.

<http://www.palmenia.helsinki.fi/congress/bilingual2005/presentations/wilkinson.pdf>

(accessed 8 January 2015).