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# English-medium Instruction in the Italian context

Policies, practices, and discourses of internationalization

Beatrice Zuaro

Beatrice Zuaro English-medium Instruction in the Italian context



**Beatrice Zuaro**  
Applied linguist interested in EMI,  
language policy and ideology, and  
academic discourse in general.

ISBN 978-91-7911-730-6

Department of English

# English-medium Instruction in the Italian context

## Policies, practices, and discourses of internationalization

**Beatrice Zuaro**

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 28 January 2022 at 13.00 in hörsal 8, hus D, Universitetsvägen 10 D.

### Abstract

Higher Education (HE) is currently undergoing macro changes that pull in a direction of increased mobility and internationality. As a type of education conducted through a shared lingua franca, English-medium Instruction (EMI) is playing an important role in this process, gathering on itself various kinds of needs, aspirations and challenges. This, in turn, fuels the need for a deep understanding of the phenomenon, as it continues to grow and evolve.

The present thesis conducts a multifaceted investigation of EMI in the Italian context, exploring its conceptualization in relation to, on the one hand, internationalization as a macro-phenomenon and, on the other hand, the local culture and academic traditions. Thus, the thesis seeks to shed some light on the interplay of beliefs, behaviours and policies, to understand how language, culture and international education are positioned in EMI.

The findings indicate that the Italian EMI experience raises important questions for EMI conceptualization in general. In particular, the evidence retrieved suggests that the communication tool plays a role in how knowledge is constructed and conveyed in EMI; a similar influence can also be ascribed to the local culture. This role, however, appears to remain silent, as it is scarcely discussed and represented in the policies. Discussing the significance of such findings, the thesis argues for a more nuanced understanding of EMI and of its aims as an international education.

**Keywords:** *EMI, internationalization, lingua franca, academic culture, higher education, language policy, English, Italy.*

Stockholm 2022

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-199275>

ISBN 978-91-7911-730-6

ISBN 978-91-7911-731-3

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ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

Beatrice Zuaro

KOrrr





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Policies, practices, and discourses of internationalization

Beatrice Zuaro

KORR

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ISBN print 978-91-7911-730-6

ISBN PDF 978-91-7911-731-3

Printed in Sweden by Universitetservice US-AB, Stockholm 2021



To Italia, far, and  
Francesco, farther.



# Abstract

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## List of Studies

- I.** Zuaro, B., Soler, J., & Björkman Nylén, B. Language policy in Italian higher education: Exploring ideas around multilingualism and internationalization in policy documents. (Accepted, pending adequate revisions, in *Language Problems and Language Planning*).
- II.** Murphy, A. C., & Zuaro, B. (2021). Internationalization versus Englishization in Italian Higher Education: reframing the issue. In R. Wilkinson & R. Gabriels (Eds.), *Englishization of Higher Education in Europe* (pp.163 - 188). Amsterdam University Press.
- III.** Zuaro, B. English-medium Instruction through the lens of discipline and culture: lecturers' beliefs and reported practices. (Accepted, pending adequate revisions, in *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies*).
- IV.** Zuaro, B. Content adaptations in English-medium Instruction: comparing L1 and English-medium lectures. (Submitted to *English for Specific Purposes*).
- V.** Degano, C. & Zuaro, B. (2019) Oral examinations in EMI: a focus on pragmatic competence. *Textus*, 32(1), 141-162.

# Contents

Abstract.....	i
List of Studies.....	ii
<b><u>1 Introduction</u></b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Overview .....	3
<b><u>2 Theoretical background</u></b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 Conceptualizing EMI: nomen est omen .....	6
2.2 Institutional communication and academic discourse .....	10
2.3 International HE .....	13
2.4 Language Policy.....	16
<b><u>3 The Italian context</u></b> .....	<b>19</b>
3.1 Linguistic history of the country .....	19
3.2 National language policy .....	24
3.3 Italian education: systems and values .....	27
<b><u>4 Methodology</u></b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b><u>5 Overview of studies</u></b> .....	<b>37</b>
5.1 Study I.....	38
5.2 Study II.....	40
5.3 Study III.....	42
5.4 Study IV .....	44
5.5 Study V .....	47
<b><u>6 Conclusions</u></b> .....	<b>51</b>
6.1 The neutral tool .....	52

6.2 The role of culture .....	53
6.3 Implications for EMI research: a feedback loop .....	55
<b><u>Summary in Swedish / Sammanfattning .....</u></b>	<b>57</b>
1 Forskningsfrågor och mål.....	57
2 Sammanfattningen av studierna.....	59
2.1 Zuaro, B., Soler, J., & Björkman Nylén, B. Language policy in Italian higher education: Exploring ideas around multilingualism and internationalization in policy documents. (Accepted for publication, in väntan på adekvata ändringar, i <i>Language Problems and Language Planning</i> ).....	59
2.2 Murphy, A. C., & Zuaro, B. (2021). Internationalization versus Englishization in Italian Higher Education: reframing the issue. In R. Wilkinson & R. Gabriels (Eds.), <i>Englishization of Higher Education in Europe</i> (pp.163 - 188). Amsterdam University Press.....	60
2.3 Zuaro, B. English-medium Instruction through the lens of discipline and culture: lecturers' beliefs and reported practices. (Accepted for publication, in väntan på adekvata ändringar, i <i>Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies</i> ).....	61
2.4 Zuaro, B. Content adaptations in English-medium Instruction: comparing L1 and English-medium lectures. (Inlämnad till <i>English for Specific Purposes</i> ) .....	62
2.5 Degano, C. & Zuaro, B. (2019) Oral examinations in EMI: a focus on pragmatic competence. <i>Textus</i> , 32(1), 141-162 .....	63
3 Slutsats .....	64
<b><u>Acknowledgements .....</u></b>	<b>65</b>
<b><u>Bibliography .....</u></b>	<b>66</b>

# 1 Introduction

English-medium instruction (EMI) has been attracting increasing attention in the last few decades. The nature of this interest is twofold: EMI has proved to be appealing for universities and students, who look at it as an opportunity to modernize and internationalize the higher education (HE) experience, with potential benefits for career prospects: proof of this is the increase in English-medium programmes offered at universities, particularly in Europe and Asia (Galloway et al., 2020; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). At the same time, EMI has also attracted the interest of researchers, who have approached the phenomenon in many different ways to understand its causes (e.g. Hultgren 2014), its evolution (e.g. Macaro, 2018; Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014; Doiz et al., 2013; Dafouz & Guerrini, 2009) and its outcomes (e.g. Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016; Dafouz et al., 2014; Cho, 2012; Airey & Linder, 2006; Tsuneyoshi, 2005).

Despite much attention being devoted to EMI, there are still many elusive aspects to the phenomenon. The most blatant of these is perhaps the difficulty in identifying a satisfactorily comprehensive definition for it: up to thirteen variants of the “EMI” wording alone can be found in the literature (as discussed in Macaro, 2018), and this is without considering possible overlaps with other labels such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes). To get a certainly rough, but perhaps representative, idea of the extent of this fragmentation one must only go so far as to look at Google Scholar figures: “English-medium Instruction” returns 33.800 results, significantly fewer than the semantically close “English Medium Education”<sup>1</sup>, which returns 2.880.000; even considered together, these results are inferior to the 3.710.000 hits of “English for Academic Purposes” and no match for the 4.030.000 hits of “Content and Language

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<sup>1</sup> Recent research has further discussed the distinction between EMI and EME, arguing that the latter can better capture the broad nature of the phenomenon (see e.g. Dafouz & Smit, 2021).

Integrated Learning”<sup>2</sup>. It is not unreasonable to expect at least some of this research to be tackling similar issues; however, in the general lack of agreement as to how these terms are used, the heterogeneity of them may be making it harder to access and navigate new knowledge, instead of easier. For clarity’s sake, in the present thesis, the label “English-medium Instruction” will be used according to Madhavan and McDonald’s (2014, p. 1) definition: “EMI essentially refers to the teaching of a subject using the medium of the English language, but where there are no explicit language learning aims and where English is not the national language”<sup>3</sup>.

Other than terminological issues, the study of EMI has over time also faced other challenges. The flow of more region-specific studies challenging the idea of ‘one’ possible EMI (e.g. Costa, 2017; Mortensen, 2014; Cots, 2013; Doiz et al., 2011; Airey & Linder, 2006; Lassegard, 2006; Sercu, 2004) ; the increasing awareness that there are ethical implications to the insertion of EMI in education systems (e.g. Dearden, 2014; Bull, 2012; Doiz et al., 2011; Tsuneyoshi, 2005): these elements have all contributed to refining the lenses through which research looks at the phenomenon. With this renewed methodological and conceptual awareness, it is important to fill in the gaps that previous research has left in its intense, but not exceptionally long-running, years of activity.

It is from this necessity, and in this awareness, that the present project finds its dimension. Designed as an investigation of multiple aspects of EMI, this thesis aims to look at the phenomenon at different levels of detail, spanning from the general frame of national regulations to the particular of individual beliefs and behaviours. An overview of the aims of the project is provided in Section 1.1; the finer details pertaining each study carried out are further discussed in Section 5. For the moment, I preliminarily outline the general positioning of the thesis on hand as follows: at its core, the thesis is designed to focus on elements of EMI that, while arguably crucial, have not received extensive discussion in the literature. Such elements include the role played by cultural and disciplinary differences in shaping certain beliefs and behaviours in EMI; the communicative adaptations that are made necessary

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<sup>2</sup> Figures as retrieved on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The “explicit” in this definition being a key addition, as the lack of interest in language learning of different stakeholders engaging in EMI is far from being ascertained (see for example Meneghetti, 2016; Long, 2016; Kym & Kym, 2014).



by such differences; the way in which these operations are framed and implemented in a still under-researched academic environment. Shedding light on these issues could promote a more nuanced understanding of EMI, of its aims, and of the specific support strategies that could improve its implementation.

The project on hand focuses on Italy, a country in which, similarly to other Southern European countries (with the exception of Spain, and Catalonia in particular), EMI research remains generally scarce. This dearth of information has started to be addressed in the literature more recently (e.g. Costa & Murphy, 2018; Bowles, 2017; Brogгинi & Costa, 2017; Costa, 2017; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Costa & Coleman, 2013); nevertheless, more research is needed to cover the many aspects of the phenomenon. Other than the obvious need for further in-depth EMI research, Italy represents an especially fertile ground for a project such as the present one also because of the specific characteristics of its HE system. Among these features, the long academic tradition that has historically favoured humanities (Pastore & Pentassuglia, 2015), and the specific attention devoted to rhetoric and orality in all disciplines. In addition, Italy is characterized by a modest (and well attested, see Brogгинi & Costa, 2017; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Costa & Coleman, 2013; Grandinetti et al., 2013) command of the English language, even among HE stakeholders, which can complicate EMI implementation. Finally, the country also presents a unique linguistic situation, in that “Italy may be the richest country in Western Europe with regard to the number of historical languages spoken within its borders” (Coluzzi, 2012, p. 226), with significant implications for the national linguistic matters. After introducing an overview of the project in Section 1.1, I will return to these specificities to offer a proper background of the context of study in Section 3.

## 1.1 Overview

In line with the goal to provide a well-rounded overview of EMI in Italian higher education, the present project is structured as a compilation thesis, consisting of five studies, each investigating a different aspect with an appropriate methodology. Overall, the aim of this thesis is to investigate under-researched areas of EMI; to look more closely at some of the grey areas of the phenomenon; to probe the ideas that research has started to formulate around EMI, verifying whether they are widespread and indeed applicable to the context here examined. The lack of research from a country as populated

as Italy, which traditionally holds higher education in high regards, is an obvious incentive to a project of this kind. Nonetheless, as mentioned, the choice of this context is not determined exclusively by the need to address the obvious research gap. It also stems from the observation that many of the elements somewhat underrepresented in the research so far available on EMI are prominent in this particular social and educational context. A radically different approach from the Anglo-American model characterizes this country, in terms of pedagogic strategies, pragmatics of the education settings, and even conceptualization of what higher education sets out to achieve. Therefore, there is reason to believe that the study of Italian EMI can offer additional elements to the scholarly conversation around EMI: this could further a deeper and more nuanced understanding of EMI as a phenomenon and unveil findings that could be applicable to other HE contexts (for example, in other southern European countries).

The thesis considers five main research questions as entrance points into Italian EMI, in order to shed light on under-researched aspects of the phenomenon:

- How are questions of internationalization and language use framed in policy documents by Italian universities?
- How is the relationship between internationalization and Englishization portrayed in research about Italian universities?
- What do Italian lecturers report about EMI in terms of their beliefs and practices?
- What strategic adaptations, if any, accompany the switch from Italian-medium to English-medium instruction?
- How is information structure manipulated in the student/examiner interaction in EMI oral examinations?

Overall, the underlying reflection in the present thesis hinges on how language is understood as a communication and pedagogical tool in the investigated academic environment. From this main line of investigation stem considerations around overt and covert aims of EMI, as well as its positioning

in relation to the contemporary phenomenon of internationalization of higher education. Consequently, in this thesis I refrain from maintaining a narrow focus on language, proposing, rather, also a contextualization of its use in terms of societal, pedagogical and cultural significance. Language plays a fundamental role in how knowledge is built and communicated and, as will be discussed in more detail later, this has important implications for EMI. As prerequisites to the exploration of this idea, in the coming sections I will discuss the conceptual framing of EMI as a practice and introduce necessary background information about Italy as the context of study.

## 2 Theoretical background

As mentioned in the Introduction, EMI defies simple categorization. While there are definitions that have achieved relative consensus, and a growing body of research has been investigating it with similar methodologies, EMI can be seen as the place of intersection of a great variety of problematics. In it converge questions of ideology, policy, cognition, privilege. To the best of my knowledge, even the broadest reviews of EMI (e.g. Bowles & Murphy, 2020; Galloway, 2020; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019; Murata, 2019; Macaro, 2018; Doiz et al., 2013) have not aimed for a fully comprehensive account of its implications. A similar limitation is to be expected for the present thesis. Nonetheless, there are fundamental discussions around EMI that have been shaping the very understanding of the phenomenon and that it seems impossible not to mention here. The various studies in the present compilation include specific conceptual and theoretical elements; nonetheless, in this section, I aim to summarize some of the general core features of EMI, starting from what can be observed empirically, and illustrating how this connotes EMI theoretically. In doing so, I clarify the stance taken in the thesis on hand and explain some of the conceptual and methodological decisions made.

### 2.1 Conceptualizing EMI: *nomen est omen*

Now almost 20 years ago, the first large-scale surveys of English-Taught-Programmes (ETPs) in Europe were being compiled (Wächter & Maiworm, 2008; Maiworm & Wächter, 2002). The declared criteria to participate in the count were exclusive teaching through the medium of English, qualification of BA or MA programme, lack of focus on English language or literature learning, and implementation at an institution eligible for the Erasmus Programme. One might be tempted to identify in these fundamental characteristics the hard core of what is generally called EMI; however, one might be wrong in that assumption. Leaving aside contingent aspects of that categorization (e.g. the restriction imposed by Erasmus Programme eligibility), it is clear that the perception of what qualifies as EMI has shifted in significant ways. For example, while the exclusion of countries in which

English is a domestic language (present in Maiworm & Wächter, but interestingly not mentioned together with the other criteria listed above) is still upheld by some (e.g. Iino, 2019), it has been contested or discarded by others (e.g. Jenkins, 2019; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018; Heug et al., 2017; Humphreys, 2017; Mitchell, 2016). Similarly, the choice not to include English language and literature programmes, partly to be connected to the declared lack of language learning aims in EMI, can equally be debated: the study of literature can hardly be equated to language learning, and any ‘collateral’ language improvement derived from it would not be different from what occurs with EMI focused on other subjects. Regarding language learning, while there is evidence in the literature to show that EMI can be the object of EFL learning aspirations (e.g. Galloway, 2020; Murata, 2019; Rose & Galloway, 2019; Galloway et al., 2017; Taguchi, 2014), there is little agreement as to if and how these should be addressed (e.g. Airey, 2012).

Overall, the trace of one of the complex questions that can be raised about EMI is already contained in its name. While the acronym is commonly used as short for *English-medium Instruction*, the nature of that ‘E’ has been debated. Contrary to many stakeholders with language learning aspirations and internalized nativist ideologies (Iino, 2019), many scholars have supported a reconceptualization of EMI where the initial letter is understood not as English, but as English as a *lingua franca* (ELF). Originally proposed by Smit (2010b), this conceptualization frames EMI communication as ELF communication, differentiating it from what occurs among native speakers of English (NESs); additionally, it frames EMI as inherently plurilingual (Jenkins, 2018), and thus different from other practices such as CLIL, that are understood as involving only the local first language and the target language and, thus, as bilingual (Hüttner, 2018). This is taken to make EMI “the domain of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings” (Jenkins, 2018, p. 5; see also Mauranen, 2018). Considering how ELF is defined, the kinship with EMI would appear quite clear: “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p.7, emphasis removed)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> As ELF scholarship continues to develop its theoretical stances over time, this definition has been argued to put excessive emphasis on English (versus multilingual linguistic repertoires) and on the multiple L1s of the participants in the interaction (Ishikawa, 2019). More recent definitions of ELF than Seidlhofer’s speak of “multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 73),

Nonetheless, looking at practical implementations of (what is indeed considered) EMI, things appear less clear-cut. As a first consideration, it might be noted that the same question about the ‘E’ in EMI would present also with the ‘E’ in EFL, as well as any other situation that does not feature exclusive NES-NES interaction; in this respect, there is not much to make EMI ‘*the domain*’ of ELF in academic settings. It might, then, be argued that it is not just the use of ELF that is specific to EMI, but also its understanding and use of language simply as a “communication tool” (e.g. Jenkins, 2018). However, if we are to believe that “knowledge is created in dialogue between people and social contexts, and that learning primarily happens through language” (Nissen, 2019, p. 20; drawing on Halliday & Martin, 1993), the idea of a neutral tool appears unfounded (see also Airey, 2016). The notion that any language and, indeed, that language itself can be considered just a communication tool is discussed critically in the present thesis (see Study II). Finally, regarding the nature of the situation, it should be noted that it is not uncommon, especially in certain contexts, for EMI courses to be attended primarily or exclusively by domestic students (e.g. Doiz et al., 2019; Ishikawa, 2019; Murata & Iino, 2018; Earls, 2013). In these cases, EMI may then not be considered ‘plurilingual’ but bilingual, and English, in fact, not the contact language. Discussing EMI lectures delivered by Japanese professors to Japanese students, Harada and Moriya note: “one may wonder if we must not call them ELF lectures since the common language is Japanese” (2019, p. 139).

Thus, evidence suggests that it would be possible to strip EMI of virtually all of its supposedly defining features: the non-Anglophone setting, the exclusion of literary programmes, the plurilingualism, the neutrality of the communication tool, even, to an extent, the lack of language learning aims. In various combinations, these appear to be sufficient conditions. The question remains as to what the necessary conditions are. On the other hand, the attempt to identify fixed conditions for existence might be ill-advised. Next to scholars working to perfect and expand the definition of EMI, moving from EMI to EME (English-medium Education, see Dafouz & Smit, 2016; 2017) and to

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or “a contact language between speakers or speaker groups when at least one of them uses it as a second language” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 8). In doing so, they theorize English not as a *lingua franca*, but as a multilingua *franca* (EMF). Attempting too deep a dive into ELF theorization would be out of focus for the scope of the present thesis. Nonetheless, one question that might naturally arise is whether these broader definitions may be moving away from describing *English* as a *lingua franca* (ELF), towards a more general and less contextualized idea of *lingua franca* (LF).

EMEMUS (English-medium Education in Multilingual University Settings, see Dafouz & Smit 2016, 2020), there are those who simply advise “against reifying EMI as a stable entity” (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019, p. 6, discussing Baird, 2013)<sup>5</sup>. This is because EMI is in fact constantly shaped by the interculturality of the participants and by the characteristics of the context. The idea of a fixed, one-size-fits-all EMI is generally considered outdated (a position firmly embraced in this thesis). Nonetheless, there are challenges to be faced in reconciling a poststructuralist understanding of EMI with the, in many ways very structured, environment of HE. I will discuss these issues in greater detail in the next sections.

Regarding the inevitable necessity to circumscribe somehow EMI in order to discuss it, the position adopted in the present thesis has already been hinted at in the Introduction. Based on the characteristics of the context of study, and in line with Madhavan and McDonald’s (2014) definition, the criteria here identifying EMI are the teaching through the medium of English in a non-Anglophone context, and the lack of explicit language learning aims. Furthermore, let it be stressed that the use of the label English-medium Instruction is not to divorce such practice from its ELFish characteristics; rather, it is chosen in acknowledgement of its use in the literature as an umbrella term for a variety of practices. Additionally, Jenkins notes that in ELF (and in English as a multilingua franca, see previous footnote) English should not be occupying the spotlight: “the English of ELF had tended to be foregrounded and its multilingualism to be backgrounded, whereas the opposite should have been the case” (2018, p.5). However, in the case of EMI, at least in the situations here examined, English appears indeed to be holding a position of prominence, be this in circulating ideologies, behaviours and even policies. The calls for a thorough reflection on how learning environments might be perpetrating certain language ideologies are numerous (e.g. Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Earls, 2013); in the meantime, the current state of affairs cannot be ignored.

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<sup>5</sup> The question of the reification or hypostatization of ELF (or of ELF research) has also been discussed in the literature (e.g. Baker & Jenkins, 2015; Widdowson, 2014; Mortensen, 2013).

## 2.2 Institutional communication and academic discourse

Despite its many variables, EMI in HE can always be understood as institutional communication. Institutional discourse has been defined as “unnatural non-conversation” (Agar, 1985, p. 47), with the intent to stress its routinized and rigidly codified nature. However, in practice, it is not easy to maintain a clear-cut dichotomy among natural and ordinary communication versus non-natural and institutional communication, first of all because ordinary communication is not easily defined in itself (Wilson, 1989). Originally, institutional communication had been envisioned as “specialized by its situation” (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 6). However, this strict focus on setting has hence been questioned, resulting in a more detailed definition according to which “interaction is institutional insofar as participants’ institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the activities in which they are engaged” (Drew & Heritage, 1992, p. 4). Thus, while the behaviours of professionals represent “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), these behaviours are socially situated, and as such cannot be divorced from their institutional context to be understood. Based on the context of EMI interactions, as well as on the identities of those who partake in them, EMI communication falls under the genre of academic discourse. Analysing it as such, allows for some of the peculiarities of this communication to be brought to the fore.

Heller and Morek (2015), identify three different functions of academic language: communicative, epistemic and socio-symbolic. The communicative function regards the transmission of complex knowledge via specific linguistic structures; Heller and Morek caution against register-based approaches painting an excessively generalised picture of academic language features. Nevertheless, research has unveiled in the past important specificities of ELF academic discourse, highlighting the critical role of communicative strategies (e.g. Björkman, 2011, 2014a), discourse organization (e.g. Harada & Moriya, 2019), accommodation (e.g. Cogo, 2009), simplification (e.g. Hülmbauer, 2007) and repairs (e.g. Harding & McNamara, 2018). Acknowledging the important pedagogical implications of these findings, the present thesis builds on this research with ethnographically informed investigations of classroom and examination discourse (articles IV and V).

The epistemic function of academic language is what allows the completion of complex cognitive operations; in other words, it is “a tool for thinking”



(Heller & Morek, 2015; see also Vygotskij, 1986). The underlying principle to this understanding is that language, cognition and learning are interconnected. This relation represents a particularly key issue in international education, where notions are frequently conveyed in an L2. For example, the notion that L2-medium learning and teaching requires disproportionately more effort is well documented in the literature (e.g. Harada & Moriya, 2019; Marx et al., 2017; Shohamy, 2013; Cummins, 1981). Additionally, if we understand academic language as constitutive to the knowledge created and assimilated (see Halliday, 1993), it follows that knowledge created and assimilated in different academic languages will be different. This has many implications for EMI and represents one of the main points of reflection in the present thesis, that approaches this matter from the angle of both belief (Study II) and practice (Studies III and IV).

Finally, the socio-symbolic function of academic language is rather defined by Heller and Morek (2015) as a “complex of functions”, connected to questions of identity and belonging and social inequality. Metaphorically described as a “ticket” and a “visiting card” (p. 178), the socio-symbolic function is responsible for both the possibility of social-ascent and the projection of personal value, in a view of society and education of clear Bourdieusian resonance. Within educational settings, manifestations include hidden normative assumptions within the curriculum and instructors’ assessment, mechanisms of exclusion, language ideologies. EMI has certainly been the object of much scrutiny from this perspective, raising concerns about access to knowledge and education (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2014), diversity among scholarly publications and learning materials (e.g. Liu, 2017; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Montgomery, 2013), enforcing fake monolingualism (e.g. Iino, 2019; Jenkins, 2018), incorporating elements of nativist ethos (e.g. Jenkins, 2013).

Returning to the broader framework of institutional communication, much overlap can be noticed in relation to the aforementioned socio-symbolic complexities. The well-documented presumption of a close relation between linguistic competence and identity (e.g. Ganuza & Hedman, 2015; Ag & Jørgensen, 2013; Stroud, 2004) has been linked to professionals’ struggles for legitimacy (Mercurio & Scarino, 2005) as well as to monoglossic ideology (Ganuza & Hedman, 2015). In fact, research on institutional discourse proposes a reconsideration of the extent to which language alone can be believed to index level of expertise: “[it is] an overstatement to claim that language is the only modality in which professional practice is manifest. In reality, professional practice is essentially multimodal” (Sarangi & Candlin,

2011, p. 4). Research about EMI lecturers can, to an extent, support this, showing that their level of proficiency may not be the sole parameter to ensure successful lectures (Gu & Canagarajah, 2017)<sup>6</sup>.

Regardless, the institutional perspective can be helpful in clarifying the impact that the English-medium internationalization of HE has been having on the identity of lecturers. It could be argued that expecting lecturers to simply possess the skill to ‘perform’ in English, and without issuing clear policies on the matter, is an example of faulty typification on the HE institutions’ part. According to Berger and Luckmann, “the institution posits that actions of type X will be performed by actors of type X” (1967, p. 72) and, as that given institutional order becomes the reality of things, it comes to define both the institution and those who participate in it, with their specific roles. Therefore, lecturers suddenly being typified as professionals who routinely use English to teach is an example of the institutional order (that did not originally entail such skill within the professional practice of lecturing) being altered. This remains a thorny issue to address, since “on the one hand, the institutional order is real only in so far as it is *realized* in performed roles and [...], on the other hand, roles are representative of an institutional order that defines their character (including their appendages of knowledge) and from which they derive their objective sense” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 96, original emphasis). It can perhaps be concluded that, in the context of the macro-changes occurring in society and education, research can productively focus on understanding the professional practice of EMI lecturers, as well as how their needs can be framed in HE policy.

Having framed EMI as a communicative practice, I will now turn to explaining its positioning in contemporary HE, discussing specifically its relation to internationalization and multilingualism, as well as the implications for HE language policy.

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<sup>6</sup> This would appear to create an interesting paradox where, on the one hand, in a multimodal understanding of the lecturing activity, language skills are but one communicative channel; on the other hand, they are also understood as absolutely central in achieving an “authoritative stance” (Schleppegrell, 2001), fundamental to being recognized as a reliable professional; which would make language skills at once non-crucial and, indeed, crucial to the profession.

## 2.3 International HE

As an institution that holds the exchange of ideas as one of its structural elements, academia can be argued to possess an intrinsic international dimension. Nevertheless, it is particularly in contemporary HE that internationalization has become a symbolic indicator of quality and relevance for institutions. To mark this shift, some have spoken of an “invention of internationalization” (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011, p. 15) as a measurable criterion of merit.

In a recent definition, internationalization is understood as “an ongoing process of change whose objective is to integrate the institution and its key stakeholders (its students and faculty) into the emerging global knowledge economy” (Hawawini, 2016, p. 5). The effort of Hawawini’s definition is to stress the inward and outward movement of internationalization, reinstating an already determined core characteristic of the idea of internationalization: the mutuality of the exchange (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2011). This mutuality is indeed presupposed by the mention of integration, as “integration praxis does not mean adaptation to the dominant culture, but a socialization process for social cohesion that ensures adaptations of common goals” (Koustelini, 2012, p. 182). While this aspect is relatively easily established theoretically, practical implementations do not necessarily follow suit. For example, there is evidence in the literature of a tendency among stakeholders to identify any introduction of English in HE with internationalization (e.g.; Galloway et al., 2020; Cots et al., 2014; Coleman, 2006). Researchers, on the other hand, have stressed that, while English can facilitate the processes of internationalization, “it does not play a central role in all of them, and never in splendid isolation” (Haberland & Mortensen, 2012, p. 2). A necessary distinction follows, opposing internationalization and Englishization (or, in Bull’s 2012 conceptualization, “international English” and “global English”; see also Haberland & Mortensen 2012 for a discussion of this terminology).

If, as noted, internationalization qualifies as “multi-directional, with benefits flowing to and from the ‘periphery’ and not just to and from the ‘centre’” (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p.3), Englishization seems to entail a sort of mono-directional movement, that arguably strives more for assimilation than integration. Granted, the assimilation mindset generally entails indoctrination of a minority into the culture of a majority (Still & Squires, 2015). In this case, however, the possibility for a mechanism of assimilation is created by the position of dominance (and desirability) of English and the Anglo-American

culture<sup>7</sup>. This process is ridden with *méconnaissance* (Bourdieu, 1977), in that the mono-directionality of the movement is naturalized by a projection of intrinsic authority in the source<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, evidence seems to suggest that, at least in academic environments, Englishization is attributed negative connotations that are not extended to internationalization (see Study II in the present thesis).

Ultimately, the question might be one of aims. There is little doubt that increasing the use of English in HE can expedite diversity among the student body (e.g. Tira, 2021) and, in turn, facilitate the climbing of university rankings for institutions (e.g. Kuteeva et al., 2020). In a context of thriving neo-liberalism, that is bound to appear desirable: by embracing a “global knowledge economy construct” (Bull, 2012, p. 65), universities have contributed to a recontextualization of knowledge as a commodity (one directly correlated to job prospects) and of themselves as competing providers of such commodity. It could be argued, however, that this is an oversimplification of the potential of an internationalization based on a more profound principle of integration. Diversity is in itself no guarantee of meaningful integration (Lehman, 2004; see also Fabricius et al., 2017). The potential benefits of diverse learning environments are numerous: higher academic success, broader skillsets, increased civic involvement and decreased prejudice, to name a few (e.g. Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; Bowman, 2011; Engberg & Hurtado, 2011; Page, 2009). However, in order for this potential to find expression, the integration of diverse experiences must be deliberately cultivated (Fabricius et al., 2017; Tienda, 2013). To that end, researchers have called for a pedagogy that brings intercultural learning experiences concretely to the fore (e.g. Mittelmeier et al., 2018; Leask & Carroll, 2011; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> Ascribable to an ample variety of historical and economic factors. Particularly relevant to our time is, for example, the Anglo-American influence on technological progress (and communication technology): “technology is, in fact, laden with norms and values often reflecting the ideological constraints and cultural priorities of the Anglo-American world. Its strong appeal to the developing countries and its ostensibly value-free essence facilitate the penetration of its socioeconomic norms and values, which are not necessarily consonant with those of the local *milieu* and which are likely to be indicative of and subservient to the *modus operandi* of the Anglo-American system” (Alptekin, 1982, p. 57).

<sup>8</sup> It might be specified that, according to Bourdieu’s characterization, this process neither denies nor implies deliberation, or even complete awareness. See James, 2015.

In the context of EMI, much of the discussion regarding the potential for internationalization has so far focused on language use. It seems that the contact point between EMI and internationalization lies in the role of English as *lingua franca*: by configuring itself as a shared communication tool, English can become an access point to institutions (and the knowledge therein being produced) on a global scale. The possibilities thus created are invaluable for the scholarly and learning community. Nevertheless, as I have discussed above, this is in itself not enough to ensure a meaningful internationalization process. For example, in some contexts, the very idea of EMI ensuring higher accessibility to knowledge and education has been contested (e.g. Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Lueg, 2018; Romaine, 2015; Lueg & Lueg, 2015; Tsuneyoshi, 2005). Similarly, while the use of English has certain evident practical advantages, the monolithic adoption of English often described in policies can present EMI (or better, international education) as a monolingual practice that appears scarcely coherent not only with the desired outcomes of internationalization (e.g. Fabricius et al., 2017; Mortensen, 2014; Doiz et al., 2011; Preece & Martin, 2010), but also with actual practices (e.g. Rose & Galloway, 2019; Earls, 2016; Mazak & Carroll, 2016).

The linguistic paradox of internationalization lies in the fact that, as many institutions reach the highest level of linguistic diversity that they have ever experienced, they are also “steered top-down to focus for academic purposes on just one language, English” (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019, p. 7). On the one hand, some propose a strictly functional view of monolingualism (Gramling, 2016), according to which the prominence of a single language is not an indication of status, but simply of necessity<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, others note that, even if it were possible to identify a monolingual Standard English, this might present itself as the photograph of a moment in time, and one scarcely relevant for the purposes of global contact situations (Ishikawa, 2019). In addition, favouring such language would indeed carry connotations of status, by “[presuming] the primacy of an imagined speech community among affluent monolinguals at a certain point of time [and enshrining] a fixed set of their conventions independently of global milieux” (Ishikawa, 2019, p. 103). Overall, then, promoting a single language as the sole vehicle of internationalization falls in at least two fallacies: firstly, taking for granted a presumption of plural monolingualism (Ishikawa, 2019), according to which the completion of cognitive and communicative operations in a given

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<sup>9</sup> Kuteeva et al. (2020) identify in this an echo of Bakhtin’s idea of “unitary language” (1981).

language occurs in isolation from other linguistic resources available; secondly, assuming that homogenizing language use (and with it, to an extent, practices and values) across the metaphorical board of HE is conducive to the integration processes needed for meaningful internationalization.

On the other hand, the promotion of a romanticized idea of multilingualism in HE also carries some complexities. There is an obvious tension among simultaneous efforts to increase English-medium Instruction, ‘protect’ the national language(s) and encourage multilingualism in universities (see also Kuteeva, 2020). As a result, while phenomena of grassroot multilingualism are well documented (e.g. Holmes, 2020; Kaufhold & Wennerberg, 2020; Wilkinson & Gabriëls, 2020), they struggle to be formalized in official policy (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019). Thus, in a number of situations, academic multilingualism risks to remain “wishful” (Kuteeva, 2020). It seems that, similarly to what noted for internationalization, framing multilingualism as intrinsically valuable somehow frees stakeholders from the obligation of actually elaborating on its role in international HE. This can paradoxically create the environmental conditions for a consolidation of language hierarchies, linguistic capital dispossession (Phillipson, 2018) and epistemic monolingualism (Kuteeva, 2020). Nonetheless, tracing the contributions of various linguistic resources in order to acknowledge them (for example, in language policies) remains a complex task<sup>10</sup>. It seems now established that different languages serve different purposes in different communicative situations in international HE (e.g. Kuteeva et al., 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Ljosland, 2010). The next step might be to move from a position of conceptualizing multilingualism as generically valuable (and even necessary, in some respects) to locating functional space for its potential to be reaped.

## 2.4 Language policy

As the previous sections have variously remarked, the positioning of EMI in HE opens a number of conversations. In addition to what has been already discussed, EMI has shown to have important implications also from a language policy (LP) point of view. In fact, LP can be understood as the expression of three components, which, although independent, ought to be

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<sup>10</sup> Not least because, once again, it implies the possibility of a neat categorization of different language systems. See what mentioned above about plural monolingualism.

considered interwoven: the language practices of a speech community; the values assigned by it to these practices (and its perceptions of the importance of these values); the efforts made by members of the speech community to influence the language practices (Spolsky, 2004). This conceptualization shows clearly the contribution that LP analysis can make in EMI research, in terms not only of the language use prescribed, but also of its underlying ideologies (see Soler et al., 2018; Björkman, 2014b; Soler-Carbonell, 2014). As discussed more in detail in Studies I and II of the present compilation, extant research on higher education LP has evidenced various ambiguities in the positioning of languages (e.g. Cots, 2013; Saarinen, 2012), as well as tensions between policies at the institutional, national and international levels (e.g. Soler-Carbonell et al., 2017; Hult & Källkvist, 2016; Saarinen, 2014).

On the one hand, LP remains strongly connected to ideas of nation and mother tongue, presumably as a result of the fact that a significant part of LP is established nationally (Iino, 2019) and as an inheritance of the early work in this research field, which focused on language planning models (e.g. Taulli, 1968; Haugen, 1966) and typologies of multilingualism and languages (e.g. Stewart, 1968; Kloss, 1966, 1968), rooted in the idea of one nation/one language<sup>11</sup>. Some have interpreted this as a sign of policies lagging behind practices (Jenkins, 2011). On the other hand, given the Spolskian conceptualization, LP could simply be representing the values that communities continue to uphold, regardless of actual practices. In that case, it would not be LP to remain (as it were, intrinsically) connected to those notions, but the individuals in the communities. The situation thus depicted is one of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), whereby individuals find themselves valuing multilingualism, fetishizing English (particularly certain native varieties), aligning to the policies, and also resisting them, all at the same time. This confusion is symptomatic of a clash among diverging perspectives, the more essentialist ones and the deconstructionist ones. To put it simply, embracing a translingual understanding of linguistic practices (Canagarajah, 2013), according to which the linguistic ability is one ‘baggage’ shaped by participation in practices (see Busch, 2017; Pennycook, 2010), implies a deconstruction of language and cultural identity as static entities (e.g. Li, 2018; Garcia & Li, 2014; Pennycook, 2007). In this lies the potential for disagreement with traditional LP approaches, that tend to proceed linearly

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<sup>11</sup> Popularized by the works of von Humboldt, although already widely circulating long before that, as discussed in De Mauro, 1991.

in the analysis, assessment and regulation of linguistic systems (Iino, 2019, drawing on Lo Bianco, 2015).

Philosophically, I approach the linguistic ability holistically, recognizing it as more than the sum of its parts. This, however, does not necessarily erase the possibility of analysing the inner ‘economy’ of such parts, nor, if relevant, of referencing them as specific languages. Kuteeva et al. (2020) write of a “moderately essentialist perspective” (p. 7), necessary to participate in a conversation where the clearly defined terms are, in fact, a representation of the HE mindset. In other words, if the aim is to investigate how language use is construed and regulated in a given community of practices, the investigation can hardly disregard the *forma mentis* of the community<sup>12</sup>. LP itself operates on two levels, the theoretical and the applied (Lo Bianco, 2014), and neither is dispensable where EMI research is concerned. The present thesis aims to reflect this belief by adopting, as much as possible, an emic perspective and investigating policies (Study I), practices (Studies III, IV, and V) and discourses (Studies II and III) not as independent entities, but in continuous interface with each other.

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<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Kuteeva et al. (2020) also note that the very idea of translanguaging presupposes the concept of language.



## 3 The Italian context

Having framed EMI conceptually, in this section I proceed to offer some relevant information about the setting of the present project. While far from being comparable to the newly named “superdiverse” societies (Vertovec, 2007), with a population of almost 60 million, Italy is a densely populated country that, because of intense migratory flows, hosts about 50 different nationalities<sup>13</sup>. This layer of diversity ought to be added to the constitutive inner variety of the country, that presents significant differences (historical, social, linguistic) among its 20 regions. For all this manifest multiplicity, the Italian Republic recognizes one official language of the state: Italian (law n. 482/1999). In the next few paragraphs of this section, I will illustrate the historical and cultural roots of the current state of affairs, clarify the status of officially recognized minority languages in comparison to local ‘dialects’ and generally trace the pivotal aspects of national Language Policy and education.

### 3.1 Linguistic history of the country

Without starting, as one could perhaps fittingly say in this context, from *l’epoca de checc’è nnina*<sup>14</sup>, let us nonetheless walk through a summary of what the situation in Italy was immediately before the unification of 1861. Leading up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, France, Spain and England had established strong capital cities that pulled in a centripetal direction of unification; the industrial revolution had created favourable economic conditions for a customs union in the German-speaking area of Europe (long before Prussia formalized its unification); the Germanic countries had also

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<sup>13</sup> ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) estimate for 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Idiomatic expression typical of the roman dialect from central Italy, used to indicate a not better specified, but certainly very remote, time (orthography varying from *checc’h’e nnina*, to *checc’hennina*, or even *chicchennina*). It would indeed be possible to trace convincingly the causes of the linguistic fragmentation of the country all the way back to Ancient Rome, see De Mauro, 1991, for a more detailed reconstruction.

benefitted, in terms of linguistic unity, from the diffusion of religious texts in German after the Reformation. The situation in Italy was rather different (De Mauro, 1991). Struggling in trying to keep up with the technological progress, short of capitals, more and more divided, at the time of its unification, Italy looked like a “house in which the doors that should have led from one room to the next were more jealously bolted than the main entrance” (Correnti, as reported in De Mauro, 1991, p. 20)<sup>15</sup>. In a picture of such stagnating fragmentation, there can be no illusion of a uniformity of language. Provided that it was not Italian, then, what did the citizens of the newly unified country speak in 1861?

A terminological clarification is in order here. The Italian tradition has long spoken (in both academic and non-academic environments) of local *dialects* to address regional varieties of Italian and regional languages (seemingly) alike. However, this is a misleading nomenclature, given that *regional languages* in Italy have little to do with Italian itself. They are, in fact, parallel romance varieties of Italian, stemming more or less directly from Latin (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). Dialects, on the contrary, are indeed ‘locally altered’ versions of Italian and as such they will be exclusively addressed in this thesis, reserving “regional languages” for the alternative. Given the terminological ‘promiscuity’, it might be apparent how it is not always easy to discern in the literature one sense of ‘dialect’ from the other<sup>16</sup>. Regardless, it has been noted in the literature that what was spoken since after the eclipse of Latin was a puzzle of very different languages, a “selva”<sup>17</sup> (De Mauro, 1991, p. 21) of Dantesque fame. These regional languages (some of which still currently in use) can be grouped at the very least in no less than three macro-areas (Gallo-italic; Tuscan or transitional; southern), with the exceptions of Ladin and Sardinian that ought to be considered separately.

After centuries of autonomy, it was between the XIV and the XVI century that a ‘pan-Italian’ idiom started to emerge, notably through the literary efforts of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio (who wrote in Florentine), bleeding into the writings of higher social classes and consecrated in Humanist literary

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<sup>15</sup> All material available in Italian was accessed in the original and, where necessary, translated by myself. All instances of translation are henceforth indicated in the notes.

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, De Mauro notes: “Only the poor advancement in Italian linguistics can explain how, considering the linguistic picture of the Peninsula regarding the literary language, more than once the existence of dialects has almost been forgotten” (1991, p. 15, my translation).

<sup>17</sup> “dark woods”.

environments through the addition of more properly Latin vocabulary and syntax. Because of its predominantly written use, this pan-Italian (or perhaps proto-Italian) remained remarkably unchanged over the course of centuries, formal and solemn. The most significant changes did not breach the distance with the regional languages, but rather moved closer in the direction of Latin, to the point where, still in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Italian poets were able to compose ambivalent verses that could be read as either Latin or Italian, with no distinction in terms of meaning or pronunciation<sup>18</sup> (De Mauro, 1991). At the same time, however, this process resulted in great lexical and morphological polymorphism, accounting to this day for the great variety of Italian which, contrary to other European languages, often possesses three or more synonyms semantically coincident. Reporting De Mauro's example, this means that in Italian the simple phrase "*devo aver visto tuo padre*"<sup>19</sup> admits at least 12 variants, semantically equivalent and with little to no stylistic difference (1991, p. 30).

How do regional languages fit in this picture? As I mentioned before, the pan-Italian was mostly used in written form (a notable exception being Rome, which followed a significantly different linguistic evolution) and therefore the regional languages, instead of regressing, had a chance to grow solid and vital, obviating, in some cases, to the lack of terminology in those areas that were simply not included in Italian. It is important to remark here that it was exclusively in Rome that Italo-phony was considered a social obligation, and the opinion on regional languages largely derogatory. Elsewhere in Italy, they benefitted from a "full social dignity" (De Mauro, 1991, p. 31).

In 1861, in occasion of the first census of the newly born nation, over 78% of the population was registered as illiterate. De Mauro importantly underlines, however, the lack of distinction among "illiterate" and "semi-illiterate" at the time: when such distinction was established much later, in 1951, the semi-illiterate population constituted about a fourth of all "illiterates". Given the essentially exclusive diffusion of Italian in written form, these statistics give a sense of how many Italians could possibly have come into contact with the language of their nation. Clearly, then, pivotal was the role of education in the diffusion of the national idiom, which gradually brought along a shift in the perception of regional languages and would-be dialects. The school was going

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<sup>18</sup> The Latin pronunciation here referred being V century AD.

<sup>19</sup> "I must have seen your father".

to become a place where there was no room for non-standard languages, as documents already in the 1860s start to attest, by constantly commenting on the linguistic progress. To cite one example from Arezzo: “in schools the Italian language is used, and not a dialect, and the language is spoken by the teachers with very few mistakes, given that all teachers are from Tuscany” (in De Mauro, 1991, p. 41<sup>20</sup>). It would be wrong, however, to imagine a definite switch in the linguistic habits of the Italians. As a matter of fact, if elementary school struggled to contain the rampant illiteracy, it certainly could not manage to imprint a lasting impression of the national language. Various social factors intervened in this process in the following decades, so many, in fact, that a marginally satisfying account would require an extensive discussion (for which, once again, I refer to De Mauro, 1991). Let it be said that, among industrialization, urbanization and other macro-processes at work, emigration also pulled its weight on the linguistic development of the period. Certainly an important part of the history of the country, emigration from Italy reached its peak between 1891 and 1911, involving mostly those younger (10-30 years of age) male citizens that had had the greater access to education and that, ironically, were more familiar with Italian than much of the population in the country<sup>21</sup> (De Mauro, 1991).

As the social conditions of Italy underwent radical changes, it became more difficult to track the spread of Italian. Some of the key factors were bureaucracy, military service, print, and television. However, since already at the end of the XIX century the illiterates started to be able to get in touch with the language (provided that they were willing or felt the necessity to do so) through orality, the census of illiteracy no longer provided a defining parameter (De Mauro, 1991). At the same time, the lack of a clear investigation on the matter is perhaps worthy of reflection in itself. Regarding the evolution of Italian, regional languages and dialects, all in relation to each other, De Mauro talks about a “structural Italianization” that happened in the bigger cities under the direct influence of Italian and in the smaller ones mediated by the “urban dialects” (1991, p. 140). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the creation of Italian dialects interested every corner of the peninsula, becoming the main factor of emancipation from the regional languages and

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<sup>20</sup> My translation.

<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that the long history of emigration that characterized Italy also struck a significant blow to regional languages, by overtime removing from the country large numbers of speakers.

contributing considerably to the evolution of the national linguistic repertoire (Trifone, 2011). It is estimated that up until 1974, 51,3% of Italians were still communicating constantly in a regional language, a percentage that is currently down to 5,4%. However, what has increased is the number of speakers that alternate between the two, raising from an 18% in 1955 to 44,1% in 2014 (De Mauro, 2014). This seems to prove De Mauro's scepticism about the incoming death of dialects and regional languages right. A scepticism that was partly based on the observation that the assimilation of regional languages to Italian had actually facilitated the transfer of words and idiomatic expressions into the standard of the national language: "through their aggressive Italianization, an endogenous source of innovation was created [...], which is a novelty for the Italian language that up until the political unification had enriched its vocabulary and its phraseology mostly by drawing from Latin or exotic sources" (De Mauro, 1991, p. 141). The official position of regional languages and minority languages in Italy at present will be discussed in the next section. For the moment, let it be reinstated that according to 2012 estimates only 53,1% of the population (aged 18-74) speaks mostly Italian in their family environment. The prevalent use of Italian is also shown to decrease as age increases, giving way to an exclusive or prevalent use of dialect in older generations (ISTAT Report, 2012).

Overall, in this section I aimed to provide a brief outline of the linguistic vicissitudes of Italy. It is in this historical experience that the roots of a culturally specific idea of language as a rich and nuanced tool can be found. Additionally, this historical background also accounts for a certain sensitivity to all matters of language. In a 1968 interview on national television<sup>22</sup>, Pier Paolo Pasolini<sup>23</sup> was asked how such a fragmented region as Italy<sup>24</sup> could have developed an 'Italian' language so early, long before the nation even existed. He replied as follows: "It happened in the only possible way, through literature." The rest of his answer can perhaps summarise what is, to this day, the general underlying feeling in the nation: "Even now, we don't speak Italian. You can hear it, my Italian is not yours. Meaning that essentially in

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkqoc8blFvI>

<sup>23</sup> Established Italian intellectual, writer, poet, director, journalist and political figure, prominent from the 1950s all through the 1970s.

<sup>24</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy to report the actual words of the journalist conducting the interview, who addressed Italy as "a country so divided, so full of municipal enmity even" (my translation).

this moment we certainly have an Italian that is unitary from a linguistic point of view: a newspaper in Milan uses more or less the same Italian as a newspaper in Palermo. But when Italians open their mouths and speak, each of them speaks an Italian that is particular, it is regional, municipal, individual.”

## 3.2 National language policy

As the section above aimed to show, the linguistic situation in Italy is historically rather complex. It has to this day been possible to truly quantify the number of languages originally present (and/or still present) on this territory, but if an attempt should be made, the number would not be inferior to 40, in addition to Italian (Coluzzi, 2009a). In this way, Italy presents “a situation of linguistic diversity that is unique within Europe” (Tosi, 2004, p. 263) and that is still manifest today. To provide only a few examples from different areas of the country, Sardinian (which is a sort of umbrella term for a range of varieties rather than one single language) is spoken by 1,600,000 people<sup>25</sup> (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012); three historical languages are spoken in Udine, namely Italian, a Venetian language introduced by means of regional domination, and Friulian (Coluzzi, 2012); in the area of Milan, next to Italian, a variety of Western Lombard is also spoken, the Milanese (Coluzzi, 2012); Neapolitan, “a strong marker of local and regional identity” (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012, p. 227), represents the exclusive mean of intergenerational communication for a third of all families in the area of Naples (De Blasi, 2006) and has an incredibly prolific literary, dramaturgical and musical use (Toso, 2006); Hellenophonic communities in Puglia and Calabria speak two different linguistic varieties of Greek descent, known as Griko (or *Grico*, or *Otrantino*, or *Greco-salentino*) and Grecanico (or *Greco-calabrese*, or *Bovese*) respectively (Baldissera, 2013).

Among the languages here mentioned, only a few (Sardinian, Griko and Friulian) are officially recognized in Italy and therefore possess a status of a minority language. Italian legislation considers these languages in relation to their being used by minorities<sup>26</sup>, as can be seen from the wording on the MIUR

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<sup>25</sup> As Blackwood and Tufi rightfully point out: “Sardinian therefore provides an unusual example of minority language which is used by the majority of the population” (2012, p. 112).

<sup>26</sup> And in specific territories, as will be shown later.

(Ministry of Education, University and Research) website, which speaks of “communities of minority languages”<sup>27</sup>. These minorities are identified as: people living in regions at the borders and that partake in language and culture of the nations on the other side; “other historical communities” spread on the territory of the Republic; people living in particular regions whose autonomy derives from historical conditions of isolation (such as insularity). Based on these conditions, 12 minority languages are currently officially recognized: Arbëreshë/Albanian, Catalan, Germanic languages, Griko, Croatian, French, Franco-Provencal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, Sardinian, Slovene. These languages have a right to be protected by the Italian law, according to what Article 6 of the Italian Constitution (somewhat vaguely) stated already in 1948: “the Republic protects linguistic minorities with special norms”. In addition to this, linguistic minorities are also safeguarded according to the 482/1999 law (which also states that Italian is the official language of the country). This law is itself based on a territorial criterion, which has been argued to “not allow for adequate differentiation of [the] idioms on sociolinguistic grounds, nor for adjustments in the legal provisions” (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012, p. 114). One example for this is the lack of consideration for smaller linguistic minorities within the recognized minority languages (which has somewhat been addressed by regional legislation instead, see Toso, 2006), as well as minorities that have moved from their original territory (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012). Overall, “with the exception of the Fascist period, the Italian state has generally maintained a tolerant position towards minority languages, although this position has effectively been one of neglect” (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012, p. 114). Discourses of protection of regional languages and dialects (regardless of the officiality of their status in the eyes of the law) are still widely circulating, sometimes instrumentalised for political reasons (see e.g. Puzey, 2012).

What appears certain is that, even though official minority languages are also somewhat protected in the education system, traditionally schools have had a punitive attitude towards predominantly dialectophone students (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012; see also what was mentioned in the previous paragraph). Reasons for this can be traced to what has been said about the role education has had, and still has to this day, as a unification motor in Italy. Hence, in general, it should not be surprising that the position of Italian in education is a very solid one. Benefiting from its literary origin and long academic tradition

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.miur.gov.it/lingue-di-minoranza-in-italia>, my translation.

(the foundation of the University of Bologna in 1088, first in the Western world, being a well-known example), even at higher levels of education, Italian is absolutely central. To the point where, in recent times, the insistent operations of introduction of another language, namely English, in a dominant position in HE have resulted in some misgivings. The Milan litigation of 2012 is provided as an example and described in detail in Study I of this thesis. Nonetheless, without repeating the events of that specific debate (for which I refer to the aforementioned article, as well as to Santulli, 2015), it seems appropriate to summarise the legislative pillars that regulate language use in Italian education.

Article 9 of the Italian Constitution states: “The Republic promotes the development of culture and of scientific and technical research. It safeguards natural landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the Nation.” The interpretation of this article includes language in the “historical and artistic heritage” of the Nation and therefore compels the country to safeguard and certainly avoid any penalization of Italian at all levels of education. It is important to stress that this in no way excludes the possibility of teaching in a language other than Italian, which is in fact (up to a certain amount) a mandatory requirement for HE programmes. However, it does void the possibility of providing education *exclusively* in a language other than Italian. The 240/2010 law (also known as the Gelmini law, after the Minister of Education who promoted it) created some ambiguity on the matter. This law supposedly aimed (among other things) at promoting internationalization in education (Costa & Coleman, 2013). It became the basis for the appeal of the MIUR and the Polytechnic of Milan (PoliMI) against a Local Administrative Court’s (TAR) decision that prevented the Polytechnic from offering MA and Doctoral programmes exclusively in English. Because of evident contradictions between the content of the law and the Constitution, the TAR questioned the legitimacy of the law and, following the routine procedure, asked for a verdict on the matter from the Constitutional Court. In 2017, with the ruling 42/2017, the Court found article 2 of the Gelmini law illegitimate and, subsequently, in 2018, the TAR rejected the MIUR and PoliMi’s appeal. These proceedings essentially reinstate the criterion that no entire degree programme can be taught in English (or any other foreign language), since that would result in a penalization of Italian.

Other than the aforementioned 482/1999 law, Article 9 of the Constitution (as well as Article 6 where minority languages are concerned) and the TAR verdict just mentioned, there are two more Decrees that intervene heavily on language policy in Italian education. Two Ministerial Decrees issued on



March 16th 2007 establish that no two identical degree programmes can be implemented at the same HE institution. This may seem not to be especially relevant in terms of language policy, but in light of the legal precedents previously discussed, they contribute to a very peculiar situation that Italian universities now have to face. On the one hand, entire degree programmes cannot be offered in a language that is not Italian. On the other hand, any institution willing to face the expenses of providing the same programme also in Italian (to avoid falling in the previously mentioned fallacy) would find itself in a position of offering the same degree programme twice. This possibility is, however, clearly negated by the 2007 Ministerial Decrees.

As will be clear from the above discussion, any intervention on language policy in this academic context is, at least officially, not uncomplicated. Shedding light on the finer legal aspects is a way to gain access also to the contextual cues that generated that legal framework and, therefore, become more aware of what the particular needs of a society are. I argue that this type of effort is effectively integral to in-depth EMI research, given how context-dependent the phenomenon continuously proves to be.

### 3.3 Italian education: systems and values

Together with some background information about Italy from the linguistic point of view, another prerequisite to the present discussion is knowledge of the education system. This is not only to provide complementary contextual information, but also to trace the roots of some of the complexities that EMI faces specifically in this context. Thus, the following overview aims to present the core features of this specific education system, its structure, and its values.

According to the national legislation, the Italian state has exclusive authority over the “general rules regarding education”<sup>28</sup>. However, part of the jurisdiction (within the frame defined nationally) is competence of the local Regions. Additionally, public education institutions do have various degrees of autonomy regarding didactics, organization, and research. This mesh of juridical competencies withstands two main principles, determined by Art. 33 of the Italian Constitution: the State must offer and manage an education

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<sup>28</sup> My translation, <https://www.miur.gov.it/sistema-educativo-di-istruzione-e-formazione>

system; in the absence of a burden on the State<sup>29</sup>, bodies and private citizens are free to found education institutions. This means that the State does not hold a monopoly of education and ultimately cannot establish the direction undertaken by research or artistic activities. As reported in the opening line of Art.33, “Art and science are free and free is their teaching”<sup>30</sup>. This article also legitimizes the existence of private institutions which, in the case of schools, must conform to public schools.

To be able to offer the full picture of the type of audience that Italian universities are primarily expected to engage with, I will briefly summarize here the main features of previous levels of education. In Italy, a 10-year period of mandatory schooling is established for children normally aged 6-16 (Circular of the Ministry 30/12/2010, n. 101; Ministerial Decree 22/08/2007, n. 139; Law 27/12/2006, n. 296). This covers the five years of *Scuola Primaria* (commonly, *Scuola elementare*), three years of *Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado* (commonly, *Scuola media*) and the first two years of *Scuola Secondaria di Secondo Grado* (commonly, *Scuola superiore*). Importantly, these last two years do not conclude the cycle of secondary education; therefore, while a document that mandatory education has been completed is issued, there is no achievement of an actual diploma. The diploma is attained after the full five years of high school, with a national examination known as *maturità*<sup>31</sup>. Those who choose to leave the school system right after completing mandatory schooling still fall under legal obligation of pursuing a technical/professional education or apprenticeship up until the age of 18. Mandatory schooling in Italy is free for Italian and foreign students.

*Scuola elementare*, can be organized around a 25 or 40 hours-per-week basis. At this level, it is generally the rule for ten disciplines to be taught, including the English language (Art. 5 Legislative Decree n. 59/2004). *Scuola media* is normally based on 30-hour weeks, with one fixed curriculum of ten subjects (Ministerial Decree n. 254/2012), including learning of English and one other

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<sup>29</sup> A controversial component, in that the nature of the “burden” is not specified; in the past, this has raised questions regarding the legitimacy of possible economic aids or tax breaks granted by the State to private institutions.

<sup>30</sup> My translation,

[https://www.senato.it/1025?sezione=121&articolo\\_numero\\_articolo=33#:~:text=L'arte%20e%20la%20scienza,senza%20oneri%20per%20lo%20Stato.](https://www.senato.it/1025?sezione=121&articolo_numero_articolo=33#:~:text=L'arte%20e%20la%20scienza,senza%20oneri%20per%20lo%20Stato.)

<sup>31</sup> A national examination also occurs at the end of the 3 years of *Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado*.

EU language<sup>32</sup>. There are three kinds of Scuola superiore: *licei* (six fixed curricula; marked academic orientation), *istituti tecnici* (eleven fixed curricula; technical/scientific education that generally aims for immediate work placement) and *istituti professionali* (eleven fixed curricula; professional education that aims for immediate work placement). Scuola superiore normally averages around 32 hours per week. Because of such diversification, the picture of language learning at this level of education is more fragmented: next to English, a number of other curricula require learning of another EU language and, in the case of *liceo linguistico* (a curriculum that specializes in foreign languages), English is taught next to two other EU languages. From this summary it might be clear that, by the time they choose to pursue HE, domestic students have engaged in a certain degree of L2 learning, particularly English; nonetheless, such education is liable to vary significantly depending on a variety of factors, including, for example, the type of high school that the students have attended. It is also noteworthy that, given the fixed curricula system, students are not expected to personalize their course of study and, therefore, do not retain any particular ability to choose the level or quantity of L2 learning in which they partake.

Regarding Higher Education (HE), the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) recognizes 67 public universities, 29 private universities, 9 institutions of higher education with special legislation and 11 telematic universities. University is considered the place of “learning and critical elaboration of knowledge” and it operates on the basis of “principles of autonomy and responsibility, [...] for the cultural, civic and economic progress of the Republic”<sup>33</sup> (Art. 1 Law 240/2010). The situation of university language policy is discussed in detail in Study I of the present thesis.

According to the MIUR registry, as of 2019, about 300.000 students were enrolled in Italian Higher Education, 5% of whom held a foreign citizenship<sup>34</sup>. A progressive increase over the years is visible in the number of students who achieve a HE degree; nonetheless the numbers are still below EU average (OECD 2019 report<sup>35</sup>). However, those who enrol in HE (estimates foresee a 37% of Italians enrolling for the first time in HE before 25 years of age, against

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<sup>32</sup> The second language can be Italian, for foreign students.

<sup>33</sup> My translation.

<sup>34</sup> <https://anagrafe.miur.it/php5/home.php>, accessed 16 Feb 2021.

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019\\_CN\\_ITA\\_Italian.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019_CN_ITA_Italian.pdf)

the 45% OECD average) are more likely to continue their education to the MA level compared to EU averages (22% against 14%). Among the certainly very complex reasons behind comparatively lower enrolment in HE is the fact that people who achieve a HE degree and those who do not currently have comparable employment prospects in the country. Furthermore, while HE degree holders achieve higher salaries, the deviation is lower than EU averages (a 39% salary increase, compared to the 59% EU average; OECD 2019 report).

Considering these numbers (and given that, while not especially expensive, HE is not technically free in Italy<sup>36</sup>) it might be concluded that enrolment in HE has a perceived value that goes beyond actual job prospects. In further support of this, let it be noted that degrees in the Humanities remain among the most popular ones, despite resulting into a relatively low rate of employment in related fields (77%, versus STEM degrees that fall approximately within the EU average; OECD 2019 report). Certainly, this attachment to the Humanities may be considered cultural, in light of the rich artistic and literary history of the country. Nonetheless, it is also the legacy of a specific understanding of the education system, its value and its aims. A brief overview of such features follows here.

Going back to the very bones of the Italian education system, the Casati Law (1859, technically before the country was even unified) and the Gentile Reform (1923) both shared a key feature: the “dominance of the humanistic model” (Ricuperati, 2001, p. 10<sup>37</sup>); a model which was considered especially important for the education of the élites, and one that has left visible traces in Italian education<sup>38</sup>. Additionally, the historical weight pulled by the Fascist period, with its emphasis on national history and on ancient Rome in particular (Tarquini, 2017), is likely to have further consolidated (although for degenerate aims) this stance. Cappa (2018) identifies in the juxtaposition of

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<sup>36</sup> Fees are comparable to Spain and the Netherlands and have shown to be on a lesser increase in the last 10 years than EU averages. Scholarships, financial aids and fee exemption on the basis of merit or income have also shown a steep increase (OECD 2019 report).

<sup>37</sup> My translation.

<sup>38</sup> Since then, education in the country has continued to evolve, nonetheless this model should not be considered entirely obsolete: the *liceo classico*, a curriculum specialized in the classical humanities, is still widely regarded as the most prestigious education, with an underlying ethos that might be summarized in Gramsci’s words: “One does not study Latin in order to learn Latin; it is studied in order to accustom children to studying” (2011, p. 228).

this Italian ‘cultural train’ to the changes of modern age the reason for another specific trait of the Italian *milieu*: the propensity for doubt. In his words: “A legacy of classical culture, humanism was attempting to adapt such culture to a completely changed context, thus bringing about the burgeoning of a scepticism that was to characterise our tradition profoundly” (p. 512)<sup>39</sup>. The ripple effect of this phenomenon might be hard to summarize; however focusing on the field of pedagogy specifically, the following may be noted: not only is the idea of pedagogy rather broad and diversified in Italian academia, but education scholars have also had a tendency to come from philosophical backgrounds, thus creating a specific line of continuity among the two disciplines and, indeed, with the humanistic tradition, that is to this day unbroken (Cappa, 2018).

It is perhaps in this connection that the specific relevance for Italian education of what Guido (1969) called the “linguisticity of education” may be found. He saw this characteristic as a direct contribution of analytic philosophy, and explained it as follows: “excellence of linguistic education, intended not simply as grammatical or literary competence, but in the broad sense of education of the mind, of thought, of conscience, of the individual’s personality. Education is thus always linguistic education and pedagogy cannot be but semantic pedagogy<sup>40</sup>” (Guido, 1969, pp. 207-208, reported in Barbieri, 2001). Italian education could be argued to have inherited this mindset profoundly, and to maintain it not only in discussions of pedagogical epistemology, but in education practices in general: thence the idea of a plasticity of thought, that can be moulded through language, and of linguistic production as a central tool in learning. This particular mind frame and some of its practical implications are discussed in Study III and, in less detail, in Study IV of the present compilation.

What I retraced so far depicts the Italian one as a sceptical, broadly humanistic, and language-reliant education. There is perhaps one other feature that needs to be discussed, in the context of the scope of the thesis on hand: Italian education strives for democracy. Italy is certainly not isolated in this; however, the way this ideal is pursued in this specific context is noteworthy. Indeed, in the country education is not only considered everyone’s right, but also conceptualized as a public matter, with very specific practical

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<sup>39</sup> A process that was undergone by Europe in general, according to Cappa, but in which Italy had a clear centrality.

<sup>40</sup> My translation.

implications. An example is the fact that university lectures are public, meaning that, with only a few exceptions, anyone has the right to attend them regardless of whether they are enrolled in a course or not (Royal Decree 1592/1933, Art.150). Additionally, while only regularly enrolled students have the right to sit an examination (and achieve the corresponding credits), exams are also considered public, meaning that anyone can witness the examination (Decree of the President of the Republic 487/1994, Art. 6). This stands for university exams, thesis examinations, national selections for public employment and even the aforementioned exams of *maturità*. Overall, this upholds the idea that education is not a matter of students or institutions only, but indeed a matter of all, of the *res publica*. It is also a testament to the idea that these proceedings should be equally fair to all<sup>41</sup>.

As a different example, but manifesting the same underlying principle, Italian education is also characterized by a strong orientation towards inclusion. In fact, “Italy has been internationally credited for being one of the few countries in the world that has pursued the right to inclusive education for all learners with disabilities in mainstream settings since the 1970s” (D’Alessio, 2013, p. 96). This policy has mostly moved from two main positions: that students with disabilities should be integrated in the class and that, therefore, differentiated classes should be abolished (resulting in the Laws 118/1971 and 517/1977). A note of caution is necessary here to specify that the design of inclusive practices can still benefit from more research (a discussion that is beyond the scope of the present thesis and ultimately best reserved to scholars in Disability Studies). Nonetheless, on the matter of the Italian characterization of education, this especially pronounced interest on inclusivity falls in line with a transversal idea of equal access to education as a right for all.

Given what has been shown so far, the potential for cultural conflict that accompanies the introduction of EMI in Italian HE acquires a more layered characterization than could be otherwise thought. The challenge of the overall moderate English proficiency remains critical. To this, however, must be added the complexity of reconciling a profoundly culturally connotated system of practices to a wishfully international education (which, in fact, often carries marked aspects of the Anglo-American tradition). In the rest of this

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<sup>41</sup> Precisely because these examinations are considered administrative acts in the eye of the law. One of the consequences of this is that examinations cannot occur in the complete absence of witnesses (Law 241/1990). This idea is so engrained that the necessity for witnesses is frequently upheld even at schools, for examinations that are not technically considered administrative acts.

dissertation, I move from a position of awareness of these complexities to analyse the phenomenon of EMI implementation from a variety of angles, in order to offer a nuanced understanding of the ideas, aims and needs revolving around it.

## 4 Methodology

In order to investigate beliefs, discourses and behaviours, in the present thesis I adopted a qualitative angle, as a way to “[enter] into the ‘black box’ of how social phenomena [...] are constituted” (Silverman, 2020, p. 5). The underlying understanding to this research design is that to gain access to the meaning of a phenomenon, one must investigate its deeper causes (Fiss, 2009). The project on hand maintains a strong empirical focus, to an extent informed by phenomenological and linguistic-ethnographic methodologies. As an empirical methodology, phenomenology seeks to “disclose and elucidate the phenomena of behaviour as they manifest themselves in their perceived immediacy” (van Kaam, 1966, p. 15); it approaches research as an object-centered investigation, not so focused on the measurement of the experiential phenomenon, as much as on its understanding (Bloor & Wood, 2006; van Kaam, 1966). The idea of an emic perspective is also strongly supported in linguistic-ethnographic methodological approaches, which study “the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures” (Copland et al., 2015, p. 13). In the present project, such contribution is not only to further ground the investigated experiences, but also to foster reflection on the interpretative nature of qualitative investigations of phenomena; interpretation of meaning is, in fact, always influenced by one’s own experiences (Copland & Donaghue, 2021). For example, in the studies included in this project, my deep knowledge of the context allowed me to recognize and operate connections between certain behaviours. At the same time, this had the potential to blind me to their novelty and relevance. Against these risks, the literature suggests, through the various traditions of reflexivity (e.g. Berger, 2015; Bloor & Wood, 2006), critical self-reflection (e.g. Pillow, 2003) and bracketing (e.g. Chan et al., 2013), that the researcher adopts an attitude of active awareness. As one of the ways this can be achieved, I was able to present and discuss my research with peers and more experienced researchers on several occasions as the thesis on hand developed into what it is at present.

Overall, nonetheless, in this project I approached different data with different methods, with a case study approach aimed at shedding some light on how particular outcomes occur in particular contexts. Others have remarked on the



heterogeneity of case study research, both in terms of methodologies and conceptualizations (e.g. Burns, 2000). In the present thesis, the situations investigated are non-random and the datasets are not intended to be representative of entire populations (see, on this, Ridder, 2017). For the analysis of such data, I tentatively subscribe to the recently formulated contextualised explanation method (Welch et al., 2011). This method aims to resolve the tension between positivist epistemology and interpretative approaches, by considering both causal explanations and contextualisation as necessary to understand the nature of things. This view owes a clear intellectual debt to critical realism, which rejects determinism, but also posits that “explanations cannot be reduced solely to human intentionality and agency, because human actors operate within already existing social structures” (Welch et al., 2011, p. 748, drawing on Bhaskar, 1998). Thus, the case study qualifies as an especially valuable approach for a project such as the one on hand, allowing to shed light on the internal workings of a phenomenon, without denying its situatedness.

Looking closely at the context of Italian EMI, research has often favoured the survey as a methodological tool (e.g.; Mair, 2021; Doiz et al., 2019; Macaro et al., 2019; Brogginini & Costa, 2017; Guarda & Helm, 2017b; Costa & Coleman, 2013), which has been used in the past to conduct both quantitative and qualitative investigations. However, for the purposes of the present project, I opted for a more diversified line of action, to address the phenomenon from a variety of angles. Nonetheless, the goal was always to obtain a rich and nuanced understanding of the ideas and behaviours investigated; the diversification of approaches is to be understood as functional to that end. If the idea is to identify beliefs and their possible connections to practices, a logical operation of categorization will be needed: in the context of a large volume of textual data (such as with policy documents, see Study I), the points of access to relevant information may best be located in a systematic and reliable fashion, such as via a content analytical technique (see Stemler, 2000). In the case of information that is not directly observable (e.g. individual interpretations of given situations and phenomena), however, these data would best be generated through direct interviews, that, in asking for pieces of information, also return the meaning that the individual brings to them (Schostak, 2006). When zooming in specifically on particular linguistic phenomena, a qualitative corpus analysis is effective in analysing how language use is connected to specific, ecological, characteristics of the communicative situation (Hasko, 2021). Similarly, a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis can help unveil non-obvious meaning, which could remain otherwise obscure (Stubbs, 1996). I will present the adoption of these

different methods in the various studies more in depth in the next section. Their application is also described in detail in each article/chapter.

The adoption of different methods may be perceived as dispersive; however, given the broadness of the phenomenon investigated, and given the relative lack of information about the context of study, I argue that tackling different issues with appropriate methods was necessary to ground the findings and to spot potential tensions at different levels. There are limitations to the studies here presented, for example in terms of sample size (e.g. in the case of Study V), data access (particularly in relation to the Covid pandemic outbreak, see Study IV) and lack of prior research about certain aspects of EMI, especially in the Italian context. Additionally, in painting a picture of Italian EMI at present, the studies do not lend themselves to any longitudinal claims. Nonetheless, in some cases, the investigations tackled in the present thesis represent the first steps into unexplored EMI territory; thus, however initial, these results are intended to offer a steppingstone into complex discussions, that may in the future require extensive investigation.

## 5 Overview of studies

A brief description of each of the five studies is offered below. The studies are presented in what is considered to be their logical progression, reflecting the full conceptual scope of the thesis. The discussion, thus, starts from what is abstractly reported in the policies and terminates on the direct observation of key communicative situations. This layout does not sustain a chronological order, as different parts of the project developed over different timelines, sometimes overlapping and intertwining, sometimes requiring longer maturation periods. The studies in this compilation naturally reflect that, as the authorial voice develops according to each new finding, and the picture of the context investigated gains more clarity with each progressive study.

Thus, it is the case that Study V references notions of native-speakerism that have been considered under-specific and that may not concord entirely with recent sociolinguistic conceptualizations (see e.g. Lowe, 2020; Davies, 2013). Nevertheless, while these labels can fall short in some regards, they can still be useful for certain purposes, such as investigating the communicative differences reported in the study in question; similarly, their use can also be necessary to frame EMI as a communicative practice, explaining its link to ELF, as done earlier in the present thesis. As another example, Studies I and II both address a similar topic, namely the perceived relationship between English and internationalization, albeit from two different perspectives: one study investigates the points of view expressed by policymakers in a set of higher education policy documents; the other investigates those of the scholarly community in recent research about Italy. Any differences in those results are indicative of the complexity of the role English plays in Italian universities and of the plurality of beliefs and expectations involved. Finally, Studies III and IV can also be seen as complementing each other, as Study IV returns to some of the issues raised by lecturers in the interviews but with a completely different, more ethnographically-informed, approach.

As a result, the thesis does include a plurality of methodological approaches and considers many different, sometimes discordant, perspectives. As I have argued, such an approach is what allowed the thesis to unveil nuanced and qualitatively rich findings, whose interconnectedness would have otherwise

remained inaccessible. The thesis on hand does not seek to control, unify, or move past the contradictions of Italian EMI; it seeks to bring them to the fore, to unravel them, to reflect on their significance. The thesis developed over time accordingly, guided by its own progressive findings, as well as by constant reflection and (formal and informal) scrutiny.

## 5.1 Study I

The first study is a content analysis of a corpus of universities' language policy documents. Language Policy (LP) research about Italy has traditionally mostly been focused on minority languages (e.g. Blackwood and Tufi, 2012; Puzey, 2012; Coluzzi, 2009b; Dal Negro, 2009; Grazioli, 2006<sup>42</sup>; Plank, 2006; and various Mercator dossiers) and national regulations (e.g. Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). This falls in line with the socio-cultural background of Italy, a country with conspicuous regional differences and a history of migration (both incoming and outgoing), where significant efforts of unification have had to be made, notably through education and language regulation (as shown in the previous chapters). However, not much attention has been devoted by research to investigating how these regulations work at a meso level, for example at universities, that do benefit from a modicum of agency on the matter (as per the law 168/89, as well as the Ministerial Decree 509/99). With the advent of more and more 'international programmes' in Italian higher education, language policy at universities has started to come more to the fore as a topic for debate (see Pulcini & Campagna, 2015) and, therefore, the lack of research on the subject must necessarily be addressed. That is precisely the rationale for Study I which, while contextualizing its inquiries in the frame of national legislation and even global tendencies, does aim to shed some light on what is contained in actual policy documents from universities.

Documents were collected from ten universities located in central Italy (an area that hosts the capital of the country, but that remains underrepresented in available research), resulting in a corpus of 444,499 words. All the material included in the study is public, at the time of writing, shared on the websites

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<sup>42</sup> As reported in Coluzzi, 2012.

of the respective institutions. The entirety of the material is exclusively available in Italian<sup>43</sup>.

Previous research on LP documents from universities has highlighted a number of phenomena that tend to present across different contexts, hinting at widespread underlying ideologies: instances of “soft multilingualism” (Harder, 2012), “invisibility of English” (Saarinen, 2012) and the dichotomy “international vs global English” (Bull, 2012) have all been identified as tell-tale signs of ideology at work. However, rather than looking specifically for this kind of discourses, a more prudent approach in terms of bias is favoured in this study. A summative and latent approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), in fact, that allows for the selection of relevant parts of the corpus to emerge, based on a key-word criterion. While not exceptionally large, this corpus is nonetheless quite ample and heterogenous for a manual qualitative analysis, therefore the use of keywords is meant to help make the retrieval of relevant excerpts more reliable and systematic, as well as reduce possible bias. Following Soler et al. (2018)<sup>44</sup>, three key-words were selected (*Italian, English, foreign language/s*, plus inflections) and only then were stretches of text surrounding the instances of key-words manually analysed to identify reoccurring themes.

Another reason for the selection of this methodology is a criterion of comparability. While the present PhD project does not explicitly involve comparative research, the value of future comparative research on education in international contexts is undeniable. Therefore, the replication of a methodology previously used in research conducted in different countries (Soler et al., 2018) is a deliberate act in that direction.

In this article, Soler, Björkman Nylén (co-authors) and myself focused on two research questions:

- Which ideas around language use in HE prevail in Italian universities’ policy documents?
- What orientations to language associated to these themes can be delineated?

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<sup>43</sup> This is not unusual for Italy and represents one of the reasons why familiarity with the country and its language is an asset in the design of this PhD project.

<sup>44</sup> Soler et al. (2018) in turn relies, for this methodology, on Björkman (2014b) and Soler-Carbonell (2014), that first used content analysis for LP research.

Results showed the presence of common themes in the policy documents of the HE institutions in the study. In particular, a clear push to increase the presence of English in various situations was visible in the documents, together with frequent calls for additional language support for students and staff. The documents also manifested ambiguity in the use of *foreign language(s)*, often in a place-holding position for English. Nonetheless, another key theme in these policy documents was the necessity for students to master a European language other than Italian, in this case with no apparent preference for English specifically. Finally, the promotion of Italian language learning for foreign students was also one of the main themes. These discussions positioned Italy mostly in line with what previous research has observed in language policy from other contexts: indeed, phenomena of “soft multilingualism” (Harder, 2012) and “invisibility of English” (Saarinen, 2012) were also present in this dataset. The analysis, however, also brought to the fore original features of the contexts of study. For example, the interest in promoting language learning among students did not only target English but, in fact, a variety of European languages with equal standing for the purposes discussed. Additionally, discourses around the national language were not framed through a lens of protectionism, but rather of promotion, with a clearly distinct attitude. In clarifying these nuances, the study contributes to a more precise understanding of the language policy landscape of HE in this country, supporting a more layered contextualization of practices and attitudes.

## 5.2 Study II

Study II positions itself in the complex debate around the nature of internationalization initiatives in HE. After the role of English as an internationalizing motor has been partially investigated in Study I in its framing in the policies, Study II returns to this discourse tackling it from a different perspective, namely, to investigate how internationalization and Englishization are framed in academic discourse. The complicated relationship between internationalization and increasing use of English in HE has already been object of discussion in Section 2.3. Study II contextualizes this debate into the specifics of the Italian setting, taking into account some of the characterizing aspects of this context. In particular, as a jumping point for the investigation presented, the study contemplates the possibility of an underlying tension between discourses of internationalization and Englishization in Italian HE, made explicit, for example, in events such as the Polytechnic of Milan court case (mentioned also in Study I). In doing so, the

study places emphasis on the lack of clarity as to how terms such as internationalization, Englishization, or its Italian sister term *anglicizzazione*, are used in the literature.

In arguing for a clarification of the terms of this debate, Murphy (co-author) and myself focus on the following research questions:

-How is internationalization in Italian HE conceptualized by academics? Does internationalization coincide

with Englishization/*anglicizzazione*?

-What resonance does Englishization/*anglicizzazione* have in Italian academic research?

These research questions are addressed via the compilation and subsequent analysis of three corpora, which we named INT-EN, INT-ITA and CRUSCA. The first two corpora include articles and book chapters dealing with the internationalization of Italian HE, published in English and Italian respectively, and retrieved on databases of scholarly publications. Such research spanned various disciplinary areas, over the course of the last 20 years. The third corpus included in the analysis is a book published in Italian, illustrating the stances of various Italian scholars in relations to the debate triggered by the Polytechnic court case. While this corpus was not compiled according to the objective criteria followed for the other two, we argued for its relevance in reason of its specific topic. Its addition is, furthermore, meant to partially obviate to the limitedness of INT-ITA which, as determined by the objective criteria, was considerably smaller than its English counterpart.

The data was analysed via a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach (Partington et al., 2013; Partington, 2004a), which differs from other corpus linguistics approaches because of its combined focus, not only on the repeated interrogation of the corpus, but also on the connection of retrieved instances to broader knowledge derived from external sources. Additionally, the analysis relied on the concept of prosody (see Hunston, 2007; Partington, 2004b;), here understood as the negative or positive property of a word, inferable also from its surrounding context. Operationally, the analysis followed two steps, firstly examining how the concepts of internationalization /*internazionalizzazione* and Englishization/*anglicizzazione* were defined in authoritative dictionaries for both languages; subsequently, the occurrence of these keywords in the contexts of the three corpora was examined by software supported corpus interrogations.

The results showed a high degree of conformity among the three corpora. Analysing INT-EN and INT-IT, it was possible to see that discourses around internationalization are not exclusive pertinence of Linguistics or Education research, but rather are included in research about a variety of disciplines. Additionally, in all three corpora internationalization was understood as a process enacted in a variety of different ways, with consistently no indication of either negative or positive prosody. On the other hand, Englishization/anglicizzazione, which was scarcely represented in INT-EN, showed invariably negative semantic prosody and appeared to be connected with notions of problem, threat, injustice. As a result, it was possible to conclude that, in research about Italian Higher Education, internationalization and Englishization are understood as different processes and used in different contexts, in fact hardly appearing to be discussed in relation to one another. This indicates that the negative prosody associated to Englishization in this context cannot be extended to internationalization. This is deemed to hold significant implications for the implementation of internationalization processes in HE, which are explained in the paper. As a limitation to the study, it should be noted, however, that these results reflect the beliefs of but one category of stakeholders, namely researchers; the need to investigate how discourses of internationalization and Englishization of Italian higher education are framed in other domains (such as in newspapers and other media) remains.

### 5.3 Study III

This study is based on perceptions of Italian lecturers involved in English-medium programmes. In a data collection spanning the whole of 2019, lecturers with teaching experience in both English and Italian (their native language) were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews. Such interviews lasted about forty minutes and the participants were invited to choose the language in which they would like the interview to be conducted, which resulted in all of them taking place in Italian. The interviews were semi-structured in order to target specific elements, but also to allow the participants to expand on particular areas of interest (a methodology well established in EMI research, see e.g. Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Guarda & Helm, 2017a; Dafouz et al., 2016; Kuteeva & McGrath, 2014). After a few introductory questions (regarding age, position in the university, years of teaching experience, linguistic repertoire), the remaining questions aimed to cover different areas of the participants' experience as instructors and researchers. The participants



were asked to discuss the role of language in relation to their profession and to their specific discipline, differences in the quantity and purpose of use of their L1 and English, as well as differences in their pedagogic style in L1 and EMI courses. Additionally, the participants were encouraged to discuss any other aspect that they deemed relevant, as well as to elaborate more, at any point, on any point that had been mentioned.

Lecturer perception studies are not uncommon in EMI research (e.g. Borg, 2016; Başibek et al., 2014; Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Cho, 2012; Airey, 2011; Jensen & Thøgersen, 2011; Tan & Lan, 2011; Othman & Saat, 2009; Vinke, 1995), and in recent years some have been carried out in Italy (e.g. Brogginì & Costa, 2017; Giordani, 2016; Costa & Coleman, 2013). However, the literature has often focused on lecturers from science domains, underrepresenting social sciences and, even more so, humanities in its results. Thus, the study here discussed aimed to collect data regarding a wider range of experiences, including lecturers from different disciplines and at different levels of teaching experience. More specifically, the study considered three main factors as potential influences on the lecturers' beliefs and practices: the local academic tradition, characterized by a specific system of values and pedagogical practices, as presented in the article; the disciplinary culture, intended as the distinctive practices of knowledge construction among different disciplines (see Becher, 1989; Clark, 1987); the disciplinary tradition, or the specific approaches and schools of thought prominent, in given academic environments, within the broader contexts of disciplinary cultures.

Italian HE exhibits characteristic features in terms of both academic tradition and disciplinary traditions, thus presenting especially interesting contexts for an investigation pivoted around these aspects. In particular, the specific attention devoted to the humanities and to language as a pedagogical tool in general (as discussed in the article, as well as in Section 3.3) appeared to be underrepresented features in EMI investigations of different academic environments. The article uses the specificities of the Italian environment as a starting point for an analysis of the (often overlooked) role of culture in EMI implementation.

The analysis in this article was guided by three research questions:

- What beliefs and reported practices are identifiable among EMI lecturers in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences?

- How do the local academic and disciplinary traditions manifest themselves in the lecturers' practices and beliefs?
- How do the lecturers' reported experiences problematise contemporary implementations of EMI?

In line with previous research, it was possible to identify some systematic differences among the disciplinary areas, including amount of classroom interaction, and quantity and function of the use of English. Nonetheless, the analysis also unveiled original elements, that did not necessarily comply with stereotypical views of the disciplines. For example, it was the lecturers from humanistic disciplines to report the most positive reactions to the use of English, framing it as an opportunity to access new viewpoints and to facilitate the knowledge exchange. Additionally, the various disciplines appeared to be similarly affected by the language shift, more so than the lecturers themselves seemed to believe. The challenges faced went beyond the linguistic plan, also involving pedagogic strategies and the very positioning of certain disciplines. Thus, while the disciplinary culture seemed to play a role in some of the beliefs and practices of these lecturers, the commonalities in some of their attitudes testified to a general underlying influence of the local academic tradition (reflected also in the specific disciplinary traditions). Such influence was identifiable in beliefs regarding the crucial role of language and of culture in learning and research. The lecturers problematized the lack of attention and support devoted to navigating cultural diversity, both in teaching and other aspects of the profession, remarking on the potential for misunderstandings and injustices. Thus, in the study, I argue for the role played by academic and disciplinary traditions not to be overlooked in international education, and for the implementation of specific support systems in that respect.

## 5.4 Study IV

Study IV focuses on lecturers giving the same lecture in Italian and English in order to study their discursive choices and content delivery. The ultimate goal of this article is to analyse how and to what extent the medium affects the instruction. As shown in the literature, there are several ways to approach an analysis of this kind: extant research has focused, for example, on enunciation speed and pauses, as well as rhetorical style (e.g. Thøgersen & Airey, 2011), signposting (e.g. Ackerley, 2019), and metadiscourse (e.g. Van Hilten, 2019), as well as other communicative strategies (e.g. Björkman, 2011, 2014a), attitudinal markers (e.g. Dafouz et al., 2007), miscommunication and repair

(e.g. Smit, 2010a). Despite this, studies making direct comparisons between L1 and EMI teaching remain extremely scarce (e.g. Sánchez-García, 2018, 2020; Arévalo, 2017; Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Arkin & Osam, 2015; Thøgersen & Airey, 2011; Dafouz Milne & Núñez Perucha, 2010) and, among these, only one has investigated the Italian context (Costa & Mariotti, 2017). Furthermore, with the exception of Thøgersen and Airey (2011), none of the studies mentioned has devoted close attention to the content delivered which, however, appears to be an important parameter. The relationship between language and content is discussed in the article, which adopts a Vygotskian perspective in conceptualizing language as a “primary tool for organizing cognition” (Holland & Valsiner, 1988, p. 251).

The data collection for this study started in 2019 and was planned to carry on for two to three terms, to ensure the participation of all willing lecturers, regardless of their institutions’ teaching schedules. The fieldwork was prematurely interrupted by the outbreak of the Corona Virus pandemic, which made it impossible to continue the ethnographic observations of the classroom teaching<sup>45</sup>. As a result, the dataset for this study comprises five pairs of lectures (in the two languages in which they were delivered, Italian and English), recorded at three public universities in Rome. Five lecturers involved in the teaching of their subject in both L1 and EMI classes took part in the study. The data collection procedures were informed by linguistic ethnography precepts, according to which, when immersing in the communicative situation, the researcher needs to maintain awareness of its ties to the broader social context, which can otherwise be discounted in reason of its familiarity (e.g. Erickson, 1990). Additionally, the design of this study made the comparability of each pair of lectures an explicit focus: the lecturers themselves, according to their role of content specialists, were able to indicate

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<sup>45</sup> After the state of emergency was proclaimed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2020 (Council of Ministers n. 27/2020), Italy entered a national lockdown on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and didactics at all levels came to a complete halt for three months. Since then, various implementations in long-distance or hybrid formats have been attempted. Over a year since the first lockdown, universities were yet to attempt a full return to on-campus teaching, and the Presidents of the single regions were tasked with declaring suspensions of all didactics depending on the local epidemiological picture, following national parameters (Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021). At the time of writing, the state of emergency is yet to be lifted and, while in theory the possibility to implement on-campus teaching is restored (law decree n. 139, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021), only students and staff wearing protective masks and able to exhibit valid proof of vaccination (Covid-19 Green Pass certification) can be allowed into the premises (Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

which lectures matched and should be included in each set. The situations recorded captured the same teacher, delivering the same lecture, at the same institution, in different languages and, indeed, to a different audience. It may be noted that this research design carried an inherent complication, in that the teaching of the L1 and EMI classes did not necessarily take place in the same term<sup>46</sup>.

All data collected was transcribed and a qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify differences and similarities in the two lectures of each set. The analytical procedures are described in detail in Study IV, however let it be explained here that the analysis followed two steps: firstly, the lectures were broken down into units of meaning providing knowledge about different topics (named *macro-units* in the article); these macro-units were compared among the L1 and the EMI version of the lecture, to identify matching content. Subsequently, the way knowledge was organized within matching macro-units was analysed to reveal potential differences. The lecturers verified the soundness of the macro-units system in individual follow-up interviews, in which they also answered questions about some of their discursive choices observed in the analytical phase.

In line with what reported in previous research (e.g. Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Arkin & Osam, 2015; Thøgersen & Airey 2011; Airey, 2010; Airey & Linder, 2006), the EMI lectures appeared to generally take more time and feature slower speech rate and more repetitions in the lecturers' delivery. The distribution of linguistic alternation (see Costa, 2021) in the lectures was also relevant: in the case of disciplines drawing from an Italian disciplinary tradition, most of the linguistic alternation appeared to occur in the EMI lecture, in which terms and names were kept in their original, non-anglophone version. The opposite appeared to happen when the technical terminology had Anglophone origin: in those disciplines most of the linguistic alternation would occur in the Italian-medium lecture. This may reinforce the idea, present in the lecturers' interviews in Study III, of a correlation between language use and disciplinary tradition. Additionally, the analysis revealed that, within matching macro-units, the lecturers appeared to touch upon the

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<sup>46</sup> In this instance, too, knowledge of the local university system, as well as of the language, played an important role. Fieldwork of this type qualifies as especially time-consuming, not only in the actual data collection operations, but also in the correspondence, bureaucracy, and meetings necessary to allow a stranger to step into a university classroom with a camera and an audio recorder.

same core content in both versions, and usually in a similar linear order. Nonetheless, the analysis also showed that essentially every element of how knowledge around such topics was conveyed was prone to alteration in the switch from one language to the other. Such alterations were classified in three categories in the study: differences in length of the explanations provided, in kinds of explanations provided, and in ways in which they are provided. This is possibly the most original finding of the study as, at the time of writing, I am unaware of other EMI research having conducted a similar analysis. The article discusses how such changes operated (either deliberately or instinctively) by the lecturers can be understood as specific types of communicative efforts, oriented in particular towards bridging the many asymmetries present in the EMI classroom. Implications as to how this characterizes the content of EMI lectures vis-à-vis L1 ones are discussed in the article. The discussion additionally draws attention to the need to implement specific provisions for EMI courses in order to recognize and support the additional effort required to overcome the aforementioned asymmetries.

## 5.5 Study V

This article focuses on oral examinations in EMI. Research on examination in EMI tends to be scarce as, even in the case of studies investigating student performance (e.g. Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016; Dafouz et al., 2014; Gerber et al., 2005), not many have based their analysis on actual exams. There are exceptions to this, but even then, research has mostly looked at written exams (e.g. Breeze & Dafouz, 2017) and as a result research on oral examination in EMI is “almost non-existent” (Nissen, 2019, p. 31). This is partly due to the fact that, depending on the academic tradition, oral exams may not be in use; additionally, much of EMI has traditionally been implemented in the context of scientific disciplines, that are more likely to adopt written examinations (Warren Piper et al., 1996). Nevertheless, orality plays a key role in assessment in many education systems, therefore, in recent years, researchers have started to address the lack of research on EMI oral examination (e.g. Nissen, 2018, 2015<sup>47</sup>; Bowles, 2017; Berdini, 2016). Initial results show that students’ difficulties tend to emerge during oral examinations, with consequent negative impact on their performance

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<sup>47</sup> As reported in Nissen, 2019.

(Sagucio, 2016; Chapple, 2015; Dearden, 2014; Al-Bakri, 2013), making the study of this situation a crucial part of EMI investigation.

Study V addresses this research gap by focusing on authentic oral exams in an EMI setting. Contextualising this kind of study in Italy is a choice coherent, once again, with the characteristics of the setting: the Italian education system relies heavily on oral examination, which is present at all levels of education and is strictly characterized in terms of register and pragmatics. Despite this, the lack of research that plagues oral examination in general is to be extended to Italy as well (with only a few exceptions such as Bowles, 2017; Berdini, 2016; Ciliberti, 2007; Anderson, 1999).

The aforementioned scarcity of research had a profound influence on the design of this study. Degano (co-author) and I resorted to using research on discursive choices in conference presentations of the science domain (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005) as a starting point. Such choice initially raised some perplexity among our reviewers, but we defended it by clarifying that we renounced any claim of comparison among our results. Indeed, our only intellectual debt to Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005) is a methodological one, as we chose to analyse our dataset according to similar parameters to the ones that they used. The reason for this was a sufficient number of similarities (in addition to identical mode of communication and topic) between the monologues of conference presentations and the extended turns of speech that characterize oral examination in Italy (based on the conclusions of Bowles, 2017 and Anderson, 1999).

The final design of this study encompasses a corpus analysis methodology, informed by elements of linguistic ethnographic approaches. Firstly, a suitable setting was identified in the final examination of the Immunology English-medium course at the medical school of the Sapienza University, in Rome. Thirty oral exams were recorded, involving two lecturers (who both interrogated each student in separate turns) and nineteen students, representing six different nationalities, including two British native speakers of English. A profound knowledge of the Italian oral examination as an assessment practice was crucial to the interpretation of results; similarly, the presence of the researcher to the communicative situation was necessary to grant a nuanced understanding of the interactions in the event. After the observation and recording of the examinations, the resulting corpus was analysed to retrieve the following syntactic structures: active/passive voice, cleft constructions,

extraposition, and existential there. Typically, these structures serve to modulate emphasis, signal newsworthiness, and contribute to the manipulation of information; as such, they are considered particularly relevant in the analysis of discursive choices (see also Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005).

The frequencies of each structure in NS (native speakers) and NNS (non-native speakers) turns were then compared, based on data extracted through WordSmith Tools 6.0. It should be specified that, given the difference in number of NS and NNS (which is certainly a significant limitation of this study), the analysis did not rely on raw values, but rather on per-thousand-word normalised frequencies. The ultimate goal was to identify potential differences in the manipulation of information structure in NS and NNS speech. In addition to that, the analysis also investigated whether failure to handle information structure adequately (i.e. a lack of rhetorical appropriacy) could impair effective communication.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

- Is there any difference in the way native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English manipulate information structure?
- Can a failure to handle information structure adequately (i.e. a lack of rhetorical appropriacy) impair effective communication?

The main finding of the study was that NS and NNS did manipulate information structure differently, with the majority of the manipulation occurring in NNS talk. Indeed, the manipulation of information structure occurred more frequently in the context of a renegotiation of content following a failure in communication, more common in NNS talk. However, the differences in linguistic choices also seemed to indicate a different understanding of the communicative situation, potentially due to differences in the cultural background. In general, NNS choices signalled a higher register, which may partially reflect lower linguistic competence and a more mimetic use of the language found in textbooks. On the other hand, the choice of a higher register would be a deliberate strategy among domestic students, to showcase expertise in the subject of the examination. These students would have been socialized to understand the examination as a very formal situation, contrary to the NS participants, less likely to be familiar with oral examinations in the first place. In support of this reading, we also noted that the only structure that was more frequent in NS than NNS talk was the

existential there, which appeared to correlate to lower formality (as testified, for example, by the lack of subject-verb agreement).

Overall, the manipulation of information structure as a means to repair failures in communication appears to be specific to EMI oral exams, which seem to entail frequent and extended negotiations of meaning. Certainly, the size of the sample, particularly in relation to the number of NS, represents a limitation of this study. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no study of this kind has previously been conducted in this educational context and the results, however preliminary they may be considered, clearly point at a need for further investigation on the dynamics of oral examination in EMI settings.



## 6 Conclusions

In this outline, I have presented the focus, context and scope of my investigation. Having characterized EMI as a communicative practice and positioned it in the context of contemporary changes in HE, I have argued for the need to investigate more in-depth aspects that had previously been neglected. Thus, I have presented a context in which such aspects feature prominently, constituting fertile ground for the present investigation. By addressing the specificities of Italy, I hope to have created favourable conditions for an understanding of the inner mechanisms of that socio-cultural reality and its relation to contemporary phenomena of internationalization. Finally, having introduced each empirical contribution to the project, I turn to drawing the overall conclusions and tracing the contribution of the present thesis to EMI research.

The five original research questions for the thesis on hand (Section 1.1) were all targeted by a specific study as follows:

- How are questions of internationalization and language use framed in policy documents by Italian universities? (Study I)
- How is the relationship between internationalization and Englishization portrayed in research about Italian universities? (Study II)
- What do Italian lecturers report about EMI in terms of their beliefs and practices? (Study III)
- What strategic adaptations, if any, accompany the switch from Italian-medium to English-medium instruction? (Study IV)
- How is information structure manipulated in the student/examiner interaction in EMI oral examinations? (Study V)

The results of the single studies, which I presented in the previous section, provide the answers to these questions separately. Nonetheless, examined together these results shed some light on a so far largely unexplored EMI context, with relevant original traits. I argue that these findings provide useful insight into some previously undiscussed complexities of EMI, opening up new directions for EMI investigation.

## 6.1 The ‘neutral’ tool

The information discovered by this investigation frames Italy as a country clearly involved in the processes of internationalization that HE is currently undergoing. This is visible in policies (study I), beliefs (study II and III) as well as in actual practices (studies IV and V). In this context, too, English currently represents a key tool to foster internationalization, a tool whose value appears to be recognized, although whose use is not accepted uncritically. The position is not one of bunker attitude (Baker, 1992) or plain distrust: the positive attitudes towards English (and the efforts already in place to facilitate its use) in a country that has an overall moderate command of the language and limited commonality with the Anglo-American culture testify to that. Rather, the lack of an unconditioned embracing of English seems born out of a fault that separates the culturally connotated practices of this academic community from the workings of a so-called ‘global’ HE. Evidence (both reported, see Study III, and directly observed, see Studies IV and V) suggests that it is not possible to superimpose a language (in this case, English) to a system that is arguably ontologically connected to language use without altering the inner workings of that system. In other words, in changing the language of instruction, EMI does not only change the language; it appears to change what is taught, how it is taught (and assessed) and how those who partake in the process are conceptualized in terms of their identity. This is due to the very nature of language itself: language as a means of communication is not developed in a vacuum. It is the result of the communicative needs and vicissitudes of a given community and, because of that, it is indissolubly connotated according to the culture of that community. This understanding of language nullifies the idea that any language can, in and of itself, serve as a neutral tool.

The studies carried out in the context of the present thesis consistently disprove the possibility of an “innocence of language” (as referenced by a

lecturer in Study III). The evidence here gathered suggests that this is true for three reasons. First, because the mere ‘substitution’ of a language to another can change the meaning of what is said (Studies III and IV). Secondly, because the ability to use language in a certain way sets off a projection of identity, and the skill to decode and control such indexed meaning requires community membership (Study V); thus, language is hardly neutral and rather comes with strings attached. Thirdly, because the judgements made about the communities speaking a language can be hypostatized into intrinsic qualities of the language; as a result, languages can be perceived as ideological construals, carrying positive or negative meaning (Studies I and II).

While there is risk in promoting a utopic neutrality of language in EMI, the need for a shared communication tool in international education remains. In this regard, the study of the Italian context reveals tentative initiatives of counterbalancing the significant capital attributed to English: the promotion of multilingualism appears to remain a value of this education system, and one which is translated into actual pedagogical practices (Studies I, III, IV); in research focused on investigating this context, the conceptual distinction between processes of internationalization and Englishization is clear-cut, suggesting a complex view of what the use of language can mean for a community, beyond immediate practical results (Study II); practices typical of the local academic tradition are not forfeited entirely, but rather integrated in the EMI curriculum (albeit with mixed results; see Studies IV and V); lecturers, who can be considered some of the frontline stakeholders in EMI, appear to maintain a questioning attitude which, directed simultaneously at their own individual practices and at the broader system of values of higher education and academia, can foster systemic improvement (Study III). These positions seem legitimate, as they are born out of the need to reconcile the inner complexities of EMI, such as the tension between multilingualism and English as the one lingua franca, and local traditions and international audiences. Nonetheless, as will be discussed later, for these attempts to yield real results, a more structured effort would be necessary, one that is not only consistently intentional, but also supported by appropriate provisions.

## 6.2 The role of culture

As mentioned in the previous section, its connection to culture is what makes language inherently non-neutral. Nonetheless, much like the implications of the non-neutrality of the medium of instruction are in many ways yet to be

unravelling, the role that culture plays in EMI is largely unexplored. For example, while Earls (2016) discussed interculturality as a feature of EMI, identifying no less than three cultural dimensions that EMI participants need to master (i.e. home culture, host culture and English), no real reconsideration of the potential role of this “triple knowing” has followed suit. This thesis makes the case for very a clear need to rethink EMI as a type of education that does not simply ‘translate’ knowledge from a source language into English, but rather develops systems to integrate the local knowledge (including local language, culture and academic traditions) into a curriculum that is internationally accessible.

In this sense, the findings unveiled by the present investigation are fairly unambiguous: failures to even consider the need for cultural mediation in EMI have resulted in additional workload and self-doubt for lecturers (Studies III and IV) and in just as tangible hardships for students in navigating a system that not only is foreign, but also offers very little guidance (Studies III and V). Data analysed in this thesis do not allow an objective evaluation of the aftermath of such shortcomings (e.g. in terms of students’ academic success or lecturers’ professional well-being). What the data show, however, is that lecturers perceive and attribute importance to cultural differences, to the point where, upon scrutiny, consistent adaptation behaviours can be identified. As shown, such adaptations manifest as alterations not only of communicative strategies, but also of content and learning aims of the courses.

Thus, on the basis of the findings of the thesis, at the moment culture appears to play the role of a *stone guest* in EMI. As famously portrayed in Tirso de Molina’s 1630 play, as well as many others<sup>48</sup>, the stone guest is a character whose silent presence, while very much perceived, is not named. Culture sits at the EMI table together with all the other factors influencing the understanding and implementation of the phenomenon (e.g. language, audience, contents). Its influence is felt, but relegated to the background, where it remains hardly discussed. As shown, in the contexts examined in the present project, this appears to result into an undergrowth of individual beliefs and practices, which do not necessarily pull in a coherent direction.

The argument I make in this thesis regarding culture is that its being ‘international’ does not inherently qualify EMI education as less culturally

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<sup>48</sup> The first appearance of the stone guest is penned by de Molina in *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*; the figure has subsequently returned in the literary works of, among others, Molière and Puškin.

connotated, or more standardized, or even accessible. Other than the impossibility of a neutral language in EMI, the results in this thesis also suggest the impossibility of a neutral education. This is hardly a downside, if EMI is to be understood as a tool to facilitate internationalization. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, internationalization intrinsically entails the integration of familiar and foreign: the use of various linguistic resources, the introduction to specific disciplinary traditions, the adoption of practices typical of the local academic tradition seem hardly surprising. Clearly, the need to establish common ground in a multicultural community like the EMI class remains evident; nonetheless, what evidenced in this thesis suggests that the most effective and coherent way to achieve a fruitful mutual understanding is through provisions aimed at explaining the unfamiliar, rather than removing it.

### 6.3 Implications for EMI research: a feedback loop

The spread of EMI as an education practice is often given a conventional origin with the 1999 Bologna Declaration and its explicit mobility aims. Since then, to many stakeholders, EMI has represented an answer to very practical concerns: the ability to achieve an education and a professional identity communicable through English has become, in the collective perception, the gate to a more prosperous future. Part of EMI's momentum can be ascribed to its characterization as a type of education with the potential to provide the means to satisfy these ambitions. Nonetheless, over the span of the last couple of decades, EMI has progressively moved away from a homogenous trajectory of mere increase of English-medium teaching in universities. I have variously reported, in each study of this project, on the growing evidence in the literature of an increasingly locally bound EMI, and of its ever-evolving relationship with internationalization. Each practical implementation of EMI challenges what is understood about the phenomenon, in a feedback loop that holds the potential to rework, redefine, and sharpen the higher education community's objectives with this type of education.

The Italian experience has an original contribution to make to this process. As a context that understands English as international, but not intrinsically so, and the use of various cultural and linguistic resources as inextricably linked to the construction of specialized disciplinary knowledge, the discourses and practices blossoming in Italian academia draw attention to new and difficult questions: how do lecturers' adaptation initiatives reflect on the overall

content delivery? How is the lack of support in navigating local practices affecting the students? To what extent are current EMI implementations successfully fostering internationalization? How can knowledge resulting from specific cultural and linguistic understandings be made internationally accessible? How should these efforts be regulated?

These questions all branch out in different directions, which will hopefully fruitfully be pursued by future research. With regards to the thesis on hand, I summarize its contribution to a more in-depth understanding of EMI as a phenomenon as follows.

EMI cannot be conceptualized as merely concerned with the ‘vehiculation of content’. Meaningful EMI entails expertise in content, language (encompassing not only the lingua franca, but also the languages directly relevant to the subject of study in the learning context), academic literacy (often rooted in the traditions of the local context, rather than in an idealized Anglo-American standard) and cultural mediation. At present, these efforts do not appear to be recognised and supported. A reframing of EMI as a truly international education is thus necessary, not only to draw attention to the need for specific support strategies, but also to clarify the aims of such pedagogical practice, potentially decreasing its assimilation to mechanisms of linguistic and cultural hegemony.

# Summary in Swedish / Sammanfattning

## English-medium Instruction i den italienska kontexten: policyer, praxis och diskurser om internationalisering

### 1 Forskningsfrågor och mål

I enlighet med målet att ge en väl avrundad översikt av EMI i italiensk högre utbildning är detta projekt uppbyggt som en sammanställningsuppsats bestående av fem studier, vilka var och en undersöker olika aspekter av EMI med för ändamålet lämplig metodik. Sammantaget är syftet med denna avhandling att undersöka underforscade områden av EMI; att titta närmare på några av fenomenets gråzoner; att undersöka de idéer som forskningen har börjat formulera kring EMI samt att verifiera om dessa är utbredda och faktiskt tillämpliga på sammanhanget som undersöks här. Bristen på forskning från ett land som är så befolkat som Italien, vilket är ett land där högre utbildning traditionellt sett har högt anseende, är ett uppenbart incitament till ett projekt av det här slaget. Ändå, som nämnts, bestäms valet av detta sammanhang inte uteslutande av behovet av att ta itu med den uppenbara forskningsklyftan. Det härrör också från observationen att många av de element som är något underrepresenterade i den forskning som hittills finns tillgänglig om EMI är framträdande i denna speciella sociala och pedagogiska kontext. Ett radikalt annorlunda tillvägagångssätt från den angloamerikanska modellen kännetecknar detta land, dels vad gäller pedagogiska strategier, dels vad gäller pragmatik i utbildningsmiljöerna och till och med vad gäller konceptualisering av syftet med högre utbildning. Därför finns det anledning att tro att studiet av italienska EMI kan erbjuda ytterligare detaljer till det vetenskapliga samtalet kring EMI: detta skulle kunna främja en djupare och mer nyanserad förståelse av EMI som ett fenomen och avslöja resultat som skulle kunna vara tillämpliga på andra högskolekontexter (till exempel i andra sydeuropeiska länder).

Avhandlingen behandlar fem huvudsakliga forskningsfrågor som ingångspunkter till italienska EMI, för att belysa underforskade aspekter av fenomenet:

- Hur ramas frågor om internationalisering och språkbruk in i policydokument från italienska universitet?
- Hur skildras förhållandet mellan internationalisering och engelskisering i forskning om italienska universitet?
- Vad rapporterar italienska föreläsare om EMI när det gäller deras övertygelser och praxis?
- Vilka strategiska anpassningar, om några, följer med övergången från italiensk-medium till engelsk-medium undervisning?
- Hur manipuleras informationsstrukturen i interaktionen mellan student och examinator vid EMI muntliga examinationer?

Sammantaget handlar den bakomliggande reflektionen i föreliggande avhandling om hur språk förstås som ett kommunikations- och pedagogiskt verktyg i den undersökta akademiska miljön. Från denna huvudlinje av undersökning härrör överväganden kring öppna och dolda syften med EMI, såväl som dess positionering i förhållande till det samtida fenomenet internationalisering av högre utbildning. Följaktligen avstår jag i denna avhandling från att hålla ett snävt fokus på språket, utan föreslår snarare en kontextualisering av dess användning i termer av samhällelig, pedagogisk och kulturell betydelse. Språket spelar en grundläggande roll i hur kunskap byggs upp och kommuniceras och har viktiga implikationer för EMI, vilket kommer att diskuteras mer i detalj senare i avhandlingen. Som en förutsättning för utforskningen av denna idé kommer jag i de kommande avsnitten att börja med att diskutera den konceptuella utformningen av EMI som en praxis och introducera nödvändig bakgrundsinformation om Italien som studiesammanhang.



## 2 Sammanfattningen av studierna

2.1 Zuaro, B., Soler, J., & Björkman Nylén, B. Language policy in Italian higher education: Exploring ideas around multilingualism and internationalization in policy documents. (Accepterad för publikation, i väntan på adekvata ändringar, i *Language Problems and Language Planning*).

Under de senaste åren har den betydande utvidgningen av engelskspråkiga undervisningsprogram (EMI) över högre utbildningsinstitutioner utanför engelsktalande sammanhang fört med sig en inneboende uppsättning språkrelaterade spänningar och oklarheter. I den här artikeln undersöker vi hur ett urval av italienska universitet har tacklat dessa spänningar, och fokuserar särskilt på två forskningsfrågor:

- Vilka idéer kring språkanvändning i högskolan råder i italienska universitets policydokument?
- Vilka inriktningar på språket kopplade till dessa teman kan avgränsas?

Dokument samlades in från tio universitet i centrala Italien (ett område som omfattar landets huvudstad, men som fortfarande är underrepresenterat i tillgänglig forskning), vilket resulterade i en korpus på 444 499 ord. Via en innehållsanalys undersökte vi de centrala språkrelaterade teman i dem, och de inriktningar på språk som dessa teman innebar. Resultaten visar att engelska ses som nödvändigt för och nästan synonymt med internationalisering, samt ett språk som kan ge fördelar för både institutioner och individer. Ett engagemang för flerspråkighet samt en vilja att främja italienska utifrån från en icke-protektionistisk hållning framgår dock av de analyserade dokumenten. Detta fynd, menar vi, skiljer den italienska kontexten från andra miljöer som tidigare har undersökts (t.ex. de nordiska länderna), och pekar på ett originellt sätt på vilket universitet kan navigera i de språkliga oklarheter som följer med processen för internationalisering av högre utbildning.

2.2 Murphy, A. C., & Zuaro, B. (2021). Internationalization versus Englishization in Italian Higher Education: reframing the issue. In R. Wilkinson & R. Gabriels (Eds.), *Englishization of Higher Education in Europe* (pp. 163 - 188). Amsterdam University Press.

Detta kapitel undersöker begreppen internationalisering/internazionalizzazione och Englishization/anglicizzazione som används av akademiker som publicerar forskning om italiensk högre utbildning på engelska och italienska. Vi försöker förstå huruvida internationalisering i huvudsak förstås som engelskisering, och att undersöka termernas resonans i sitt sammanhang. För att göra det tar vi upp följande forskningsfrågor:

-Hur konceptualiseras internationalisering i italienska HE av akademiker? Sammanfaller internationaliseringen med engelskisering/anglicizzazione?

-Vilken resonans har engelskisering/anglicizzazione i italiensk akademisk forskning?

Metodologiskt analyserade vi tre korpusar med ett tillvägagångssätt för korpusassisterade diskursstudier (CADS). De två första korpusarna inkluderar artiklar och bokkapitel som handlar om internationaliseringen av italienska högskolor, publicerade på engelska respektive italienska och hämtade i databaser med vetenskapliga publikationer. Sådan forskning sträckte sig över olika disciplinära områden under de senaste 20 åren. Den tredje korpusen som ingår i analysen är en bok publicerad på italienska, som illustrerar olika italienska forskares ställningstaganden i relation till debatten som utlöstes av yrkeshögskolans domstolsfall. Resultaten indikerar att internationalisering presenteras i ett neutralt ljus, och bör därför inte uteslutande tolkas som engelskisering, vilket alltid används som en negativ term som indikerar en invasiv process från vilken den italienska akademien behöver försvara sig. Detta tyder på att den negativa prosodin som är förknippad med engelskiseringen i detta sammanhang inte kan utvidgas till internationalisering, som vi bedömer få viktiga konsekvenser för HE:s internationaliseringsprocesser.

### 2.3 Zuaro, B. English-medium Instruction through the lens of discipline and culture: lecturers' beliefs and reported practices. (Accepterad för publikation, i väntan på adekvata ändringar, i *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies*).

Även om EMI har noterats skilja sig från sammanhang till sammanhang, fortsätter de praktiska konsekvenserna av kulturella skillnader i EMI-implementationer att förbises. Den här studien syftar till att belysa den roll som disciplinära och kulturella särdrag spelar genom en undersökning av övertygelser och rapporterade praktiker från 13 italienska föreläsare. Analysen i den här artikeln styrdes av tre forskningsfrågor:

- Vilka övertygelser och rapporterade metoder kan identifieras bland EMI-lärare inom humaniora, samhällsvetenskap och naturvetenskap?
- Hur visar sig de lokala akademiska och disciplinära traditionerna i föreläsarnas praktiker och övertygelser?
- Hur problematiserar föreläsarnas rapporterade erfarenheter samtida implementeringar av EMI?

Föreläsarna valdes ut för att representera en mängd olika disciplinära bakgrunder och intervjuades individuellt om sina erfarenheter som lärare och forskare. Resultaten återinför i viss mån inflytandet från disciplinär kultur; men de pekar också på en viktig roll som den lokala kulturen spelar för att forma både övertygelser och praktiker. Sådant inflytande kunde identifieras i föreställningar om språkets och kulturens avgörande roll i lärande och forskning. Föreläsarna problematiserade bristen på uppmärksamhet och stöd som ägnas åt att förhålla sig till kulturell mångfald, både i undervisningen och andra aspekter av yrket, och påpekade risken för missförstånd och orättvisor. Därför argumenterar jag i studien för att den roll som akademiska och disciplinära traditioner spelar inte ska förbises i internationell utbildning, och för implementering av specifika stödsystem i det avseendet.

## 2.4 Zuaro, B. Content adaptations in English-medium Instruction: comparing L1 and English-medium lectures. (Inlämnad till *English for Specific Purposes*).

Medan föreläsarnas undervisningsmetoder fortsätter att vara en samlingspunkt för forskning om engelska som ett medium för instruktion (EMI), är kontrastiva studier mellan EMI och L1-föreläsningar fortfarande extremt få. Den föreliggande studien tar itu med detta forskningsgap genom att analysera fem uppsättningar matchande L1- och engelska-medium föreläsningar som ges inom olika discipliner vid tre italienska universitet. Varje uppsättning föreläsningar ges av samma föreläsare, om samma ämne. Studien undersöker således föreläsningarnas innehåll noggrant för att undersöka vilka förändringar, om några, som följer med den språkliga övergången från L1 till undervisning på engelska.

All data som samlades in transkriberades och en kvalitativ innehållsanalys genomfördes för att identifiera skillnader och likheter i de två föreläsningarna i varje uppsättning. Analysen följde två steg: för det första bröts föreläsningarna upp i meningsenheter som gav kunskap om olika ämnen (benämnda makroenheter i artikeln); dessa makroenheter jämfördes mellan L1- och EMI-versionen av föreläsningen för att identifiera matchande innehåll. Därefter analyserades hur kunskap organiserades inom matchande makroenheter för att avslöja potentiella skillnader. Föreläsarna verifierade validiteten i makroenhetssystemet i individuella uppföljningsintervjuer, där de också svarade på frågor om några av deras diskursiva val som observerats i den analytiska fasen.

Resultaten avslöjar en hög överensstämmelse mellan de kärnämnen som behandlas i föreläsarna; inte desto mindre observeras också betydande skillnader i hur sådan kunskap förmedlas. Sådana skillnader är grupperade i tre kategorier: längd och typ av förklaringar som erbjuds, samt sätt på vilka förklaringarna tillhandahålls. Artikeln diskuterar hur sådana förändringar som utförs (antingen avsiktligt eller instinktivt) av föreläsarna kan förstås som specifika typer av kommunikativa ansträngningar, särskilt inriktade på att överbrygga de många asymmetrier som finns i EMI-klassrummet. Diskussionen uppmärksammar dessutom behovet av att implementera specifika bestämmelser för EMI-kurser för att vidgå men även stödja den ytterligare ansträngning som krävs för att övervinna de ovan nämnda asymmetrierna.

## 2.5 Degano, C. & Zuaro, B. (2019) Oral examinations in EMI: a focus on pragmatic competence. *Textus*, 32(1), 141-162.

Den muntliga examinationen är ett område inom EMI där elevers språksvårigheter ofta kommer i förgrunden, och studier från olika länder har visat att bristande språkkunskaper kan påverka provresultaten negativt. Mycket lite forskning har dock bedrivits om muntlig tentamensinteraktion i EMI-sammanhang. Sådan brist påverkade djupt utformningen av denna studie, som bygger på forskning om diskursiva val i konferenspresentationer av det vetenskapliga området (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005) som en analytisk utgångspunkt. Forskningsfrågorna för denna studie var följande:

- Finns det någon skillnad i hur engelska som modersmål (NS) och icke-modersmål (NNS) manipulerar informationsstrukturen?
- Kan ett misslyckande med att hantera informationsstrukturen på ett adekvat sätt (d.v.s. brist på retorisk lämplighet) försämra effektiv kommunikation?

För att ta itu med dem valde vi ut fem syntaktiska strukturer (dvs aktiv/passiv röst, klyftkonstruktioner, extraposition och existentiell "där") som vanligtvis används för att modulera betoning, signalera nyhetsvärdighet och bidra till manipulation av information. De anses alltså vara särskilt relevanta i analysen av diskursiva val (se även Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005). Frekvenserna för varje struktur i NS (native speakers) och NNS (non-native speakers) svängar jämfördes sedan, baserat på data extraherad genom WordSmith Tools 6.0.

Huvudresultatet av studien är att NS och NNS verkar manipulera informationsstrukturen på olika sätt, där majoriteten av manipulationen sker i NNS-tal. Faktum är att manipulering av informationsstrukturen förekom oftare i samband med en omförhandling av innehåll efter ett misslyckande i kommunikationen, vanligare i NNS-prat. Men skillnaderna i språkliga val tycks också tyda på en annan förståelse av den kommunikativa situationen, potentiellt beroende på skillnader i den kulturella bakgrunden.

### 3 Slutsats

Den italienska erfarenheten har ett originellt bidrag att ge till vår förståelse av EMI som ett fenomen inom högre utbildning. Som ett sammanhang som förstår engelska som internationellt, men inte i sig, och användningen av olika kulturella och språkliga resurser som oupplösligt kopplade till konstruktionen av specialiserad disciplinär kunskap, uppmärksammar de diskurser och praktiker som blomstrar i den italienska akademins nya och svåra frågor: hur speglar föreläsarnas anpassningsinitiativ på den övergripande innehållsleveransen? Hur påverkar bristen på stöd för att navigera lokal praxis eleverna? I vilken utsträckning främjar nuvarande EMI-implementationer framgångsrikt internationalisering? Hur kan kunskap som härrör från specifika kulturella och språkliga förståelser göras internationellt tillgänglig? Hur ska dessa insatser regleras?

Dessa frågor förgrenar sig alla i olika riktningar, som förhoppningsvis kommer att vara fruktbara även för framtida forskning. Bidraget från denna avhandling till denna komplexa diskussion är inriktad på icke-neutraliteten hos (vilket som helst) språk som kommunikationsverktyg samt på betydelsen av den lokala kulturen och traditionerna inom högre utbildning. Fyndet som rapporteras i denna avhandling tyder på att EMI inte kan begreppsmässigt beskrivas som att det bara handlar om att "transportera innehåll". Meningsfull EMI innebär expertis inom innehåll, språk (som omfattar inte bara lingua franca, utan även de språk som är direkt relevanta för studieämnet i inlärningssammanhang), akademisk läskunnighet (ofta rotad i det lokala sammanhangets traditioner, snarare än i en idealiserad angloamerikansk standard) och kulturell förmedling. För närvarande verkar dessa ansträngningar inte erkännas den betydelse de har eller stödjas nämnvärt. En omformning av EMI som en verkligt internationell utbildning är därför nödvändig, inte bara för att uppmärksamma behovet av specifika stödstrategier, utan också för att klargöra målen för sådan pedagogisk praktik, vilket potentiellt minskar dess assimilering med mekanismer för språklig och kulturell hegemoni.

## Acknowledgements

In the four plus years that I devoted to this project, I was fortunate enough to receive the help of many brilliant individuals. Their contributions can hardly be captured in a few words; so, I offer them my gratitude here.

My principal thanks go to my supervisors, Beyza Björkman Nylén and Josep Soler, who, beyond intellectual talent, possess unparalleled kindness and patience. I thank them for always guiding and supporting me, through countless conversations, countless revisions, and countless encouragements. I would like to thank Charlotta Palmstierna Einarsson, not only for rushing to the rescue with a certain *Sammanfattning*, but also for being the most caring mentor, through a strange and difficult time. Thank you to Chiara Degano and Amanda Murphy, who have offered friendship and collaboration, the fruits of which I am delighted to have included in this thesis. Thank you to Taina Saarinen and Janus Mortensen, whose careful study of prior versions of this thesis led to great improvements.

I would like to thank the colleagues at the English Department of Stockholm University, from whom I have learnt in the last few years more than I can hope to say here. To my fellow doctoral students at the Department, thank you for the collegiality, both in person and long-distance. Thank you to my friends and family, who have listened to considerably more EMI talk than anyone not involved in higher education scholarship should ever have to. Thank you to Hugo Bowles, *che ci aveva visto lungo*. Thank you to Daniel Even Giles, who watches the watchmen.

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Zuaro, B., Soler, J., & Björkman Nylén, B. Language policy in Italian higher education: Exploring ideas around multilingualism and internationalization in policy documents. (Accepted, pending adequate revisions, in *Language Problems and Language Planning*).

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## **Language policy in Italian universities: Navigating the language ambiguities of higher education internationalisation**

Zuaro, B., Soler, J., & Björkman Nylén, B.

### **Abstract**

In recent years, the significant expansion of English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes across higher education institutions outside English-speaking contexts has brought with it an inherent set of language-related tensions and ambiguities. In this article, we explore how a selection of Italian universities have tackled these tensions. Via a content analysis of university policy documents, we investigate the key language-related themes in them, and the orientations to language that these themes entail. The results show that English is seen as necessary for and almost synonymous to internationalisation, as well as a language that can bring benefits to both institutions and individuals. However, a commitment to multilingualism and to the promotion of Italian from a non-protectionist stance is apparent in the documents analysed. This finding, we argue, puts the Italian context apart from other settings that have been previously investigated (e.g. the Nordic countries), and points to an original way in which universities can navigate the language ambiguities that come with the process of higher education internationalisation.

**Keywords:** English-medium instruction, English, higher education, Italian, language policy

### **Abstract (in Italian)**

Negli ultimi anni la significativa diffusione di corsi English-medium instruction (EMI) in contesti non anglofoni è stata accompagnata da tensioni e ambiguità riguardo l'uso della lingua nelle università. Tramite un'analisi dei contenuti dei documenti di politica

istituzionale, questo articolo esplora il modo in cui un gruppo di università italiane ha affrontato tali questioni. L'articolo identifica i temi chiave in ambito di politica linguistica, analizzandone le implicazioni ideologiche. I risultati mostrano la concettualizzazione della lingua inglese come strumento necessario e quasi sinonimo di internazionalizzazione, con percepiti benefici tanto per gli atenei che per i singoli. Allo stesso tempo, ad emergere dai risultati è anche un impegno verso il multilinguismo e la promozione della lingua italiana. Quest'ultimo aspetto distingue l'Italia da altri contesti precedentemente analizzati (e.g. i Paesi nordeuropei), rivelando una modalità alternativa di navigazione delle ambiguità linguistiche insorte col processo di internazionalizzazione dell'istruzione universitaria.

## **Introduction**

Since the Bologna declaration (1999), English-medium Instruction (EMI) has expanded across Europe as a means to promote internationalisation in higher education (HE). In 2007, more than 400 higher education institutions in Europe had established 2400 programs taught entirely in English (Wächter & Maiworm 2008). By 2014, 60% of postgraduate courses in Europe were estimated to be taught through EMI (Macaro 2014, Wächter & Maiworm 2014). So far, research has focused on mapping the different interests and beliefs that surround EMI, as well as how they are expressed in official documents of language policy. For example, EMI programmes are seen as an opportunity for students to access international environments, expand their horizons and improve their chances in the job market (e.g., Byun et al. 2011, Costa & Coleman 2013, Nguyen et al. 2017, Wächter & Maiworm 2014). Scratching further into the discourses regarding internationalisation, however, research attests the existence of an underlying tension between different ideological positions, which Hultgren et al. (2014) have termed



“culturalist” versus “internationalist” positions. On one side, while internationalisation might be seen as desirable, culturalist discourses underscore the perception of universities as key organisations for the protection and promotion of a given national culture, including the local language (see e.g., Cots et al. 2012, for a comparison along these discourses between Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Wales). On the other side, internationalist positions tend to flag universities as global players, in competition (internationally) with other institutions for resources (e.g. students, staff, funding, etc.). As a result, culturalist discourses tend to take an orientation to EMI and English as a problem, whereas internationalist ones will construe English as a resource (for an analysis of the diversity of conceptualisations of English in EMI contexts, see Kuteeva 2020).

The above-described language tensions and ambiguities have been well mapped for several countries and contexts, particularly in northern Europe (Hultgren et al. 2014; Kuteeva et al. 2020), where English has made significant societal inroads (Bolton & Meierkord 2013, Hult 2012). Elsewhere, research on the discursive dimension of EMI in higher education is less abundant, particularly in countries with languages with a larger sociodemographic base (but see Blattés 2018 for France, and Earls 2013 for Germany). In southern Europe, with the exception of minority language regions such as Catalonia or the Basque Country (Bretxa et al. 2016, Cots et al. 2012, Doiz et al. 2013), the language political impact of EMI has been only scarcely examined so far. Italy is a good example of a context that, despite some peculiarities that make it stand out sociolinguistically, has not received much attention in previous EMI research. What makes Italy especially interesting are its regional disparities and complex reactions to attempts made to adopt English as the medium of instruction in HE (Costa & Coleman 2013). The scarcity of research on Italian EMI might be explained by the fact that the country appears to come somewhat late to the process of implementing EMI programmes in HE, in line with other

southern European countries, partly because of the overall sub-optimal level of English competence among students and instructors (Broggini & Costa 2017, Costa & Coleman 2013, Grandinetti et al. 2013, Pulcini & Campagna 2015).

In a country as large as Italy, with a wide regional diversity and with a significant amount of higher education institutions (compared to other smaller countries in Europe, for example), it is understandable that past research has zoomed in on specific areas only. Indeed, so far, most of the literature available on the Italian context tends to focus mostly on institutions located in the northern region. The present paper aims to complement existing research on Italian EMI by focusing its analysis on the five central regions of Italy, including the area of the capital. In particular, our goal in this article is firstly to investigate the key language-related themes that can be retrieved from a set of policy documents from universities in these regions, and secondly to find out about the orientations to language that can be connected to these themes. More generally, in discussing the themes and language orientations, we aim to contextualize the Italian context in the evolving scenario of HE in Europe and to see, in this way, to what extent Italian universities follow similar or different patterns in the domain of language policy. In sum, the present study seeks an answer to two main research questions:

RQ1: What key language-related themes can be detected in a selection of Italian universities' policy documents?

RQ2: What orientations to language associated to these themes can be delineated?

### **Internationalisation and language policy in Italian HE**

The language-related tensions and ambiguities associated to the internationalisation of higher education described above, derived from the interplay between English and a respective national/local language, have not left untouched the Italian higher education

system. On the one hand, the country seems to be aware of the need to increase student and staff mobility and the associated benefits this may entail for universities; measures such as the Legge Gelmini 240/2010, a law meant (among other things) to endorse the introduction of foreign language taught programs in the Italian education system, attest to this awareness (Costa & Coleman 2013). On the other hand, recent language ideological debates seem to indicate that the “acceptance of the [Anglicization] process cannot be taken for granted” (Santulli 2015: 285). The most notorious precedent for this is the 2012 litigation between the Polytechnic of Milan administration and its own academic staff, which resulted in a court case. In order to push the university towards internationalisation goals, the University Senate approved guidelines that sanctioned the exclusive use of English for the teaching of MA and PhD courses. This resulted in extremely polarized reactions, and subsequently in a debate that involved key stakeholders, such as the Accademia della Crusca (the oldest language society in Europe, active over a span of four centuries in the fostering, preservation and promotion of the Italian language). After an unsuccessful petition to the Academic Senate for a revocation of the measure, 100 professors resorted to the Local Administrative Court (the TAR), which invalidated the university’s resolution. The Court ruled it unconstitutional to penalize Italian in relation to minority or foreign languages, and to exclude it completely as a language of teaching and learning at advanced higher education levels. In other words, the Court did not rule against the establishment of policies that would foster the internationalisation of the Polytechnic, including increasing the presence of English for teaching and learning purposes, but it deemed it contrary to the law to omit the use of Italian completely.

However, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR in the Italian acronym) and the Polytechnic appealed to the Council of State against the TAR’s

decision, in fact basing their argument on the aforementioned 240/2010 Gelmini law. The Council of State, hence, expressed doubt about the legitimacy of the law and turned to the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court found that article 2 of the Gelmini law contravened three Constitutional articles (art. 3, 6 and 33) and, as such, was to be regarded as illegitimate. Therefore, after this verdict, in 2018, the Council of State rejected the appeal made by the MIUR and the Polytechnic. These events were widely discussed online, covered by the main Italian newspapers (e.g., Corriere della Sera, Repubblica, Il Giorno, Il Sole 24 ore, La Stampa), as well as explained in detail elsewhere (including on the Accademia della Crusca website).

Overall, these legal developments do put institutions in a difficult position when it comes to offering EMI programmes in Italy. The ruling clearly negates the possibility of entire degree programmes being taught exclusively through English. Guaranteeing an Italian equivalent for every EMI course might seem like an expensive, but nonetheless viable, solution. However, that may not be the case. Two Ministerial Decrees issued on March 16th 2007 regulate the conditions under which degree programmes are implemented in Italian HE and they state that no two identical degree programmes can exist at the same institution: each programme must differ in a significant portion of course credit (40 and 30 credits for BA and MA programmes respectively) from other existing ones. In sum, this means that it is currently technically not possible to implement a programme that is taught exclusively through English. Equally impossible is to offer an identical Italian counterpart at the same institution. The impasse is, therefore, fairly evident. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that EMI will simply cease to exist. Certainly, it may be too early to draw any final conclusion on the effects of these legal proceedings at the time of writing, but institutions may have incentives to seek loopholes and new possibilities in order to keep their EMI courses active in the coming years.

Regarding the principle of the supremacy of Italian in education, one clarification is perhaps in order. Italy, as a nation, has its roots in “a situation of linguistic diversity that is unique within Europe” (Tosi 2004: 263), with the several local dialects representing as a matter of fact parallel Romance varieties of Italian (Pulcini & Campagna 2015). The use of Italian as consecrated by the academic tradition represents therefore a unifying act for a country that reached its formal unification a little over 150 years ago. Significant shifts in language policy are hence perceived to carry relevant weight in this context and require careful consideration.

Based on the above discussion, it seems that several factors contribute to making Italy and its HE system a “distinctive” context (Costa & Coleman 2013). In light of that, it seems justified to find out more about how higher education institutions navigate the apparent tension associated to the introduction of EMI in their curricula and programmes. As noted in the introduction, this is precisely the goal in our paper. In what follows, we explain more about the design of the study and the data analysed, and we continue with a description of the results and a discussion of them around the research questions delineated above.

### **Data and methodology**

The purpose of the present study is to identify and analyse relevant language-related themes in a selection of policy documents issued by HE institutions in central Italy. Data were collected from the 2018 ten best ranking universities in the region according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. In these rankings, universities are evaluated against 13 performance indicators pertaining to the areas of research, interaction with business, international outlook, and the teaching environment, which are considered to cover “the full range of a top university’s essential areas of activity”. The

following universities showed a high profile in this sense and were thus included in this study: Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna; Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa; University of Pisa; University of Florence; University of Siena; Sapienza University of Rome; University of Rome II – Tor Vergata; University of Rome III; University of Urbino Carlo Bo; Marche Polytechnic University. While we acknowledge the problematic nature of university rankings (Buognol & Dulà 2015), this way of proceeding allowed us to narrow down the number of selected universities, and to be able to work with a corpus of documents that would be manageable for a study of this scope.

Data were collected from policy documents published on universities' websites to allow for content analysis. The data collection resulted in a total of twenty-three official documents (two to three per institution), generally including strategic plans, didactic regulations and, in some cases, additional guidelines, regulations or communication plans. Only the most updated versions of the documents were selected, among those available on institutional websites and published as freely accessible. The documents were only available in Italian and were therefore analysed in their original versions. The data were analysed with a content analytical method, generally considered particularly apt to the investigation of surfacing themes in official documents (Stemler & Bebell 1998). Among possible approaches - namely, conventional, directed, and summative and latent (Hsieh & Shannon 2005) – the summative and latent one was preferred, allowing for a categorization of data based on a selection of key-words (Björkman 2014, Soler-Carbonell 2014, Soler et al. 2018). The total corpus, of 444,499 words, was scanned for keywords with the aid of a simple "search" function and hence manually analysed. Keywords elected as pivotal to this study were "English", "Italian" and "foreign language(s)". Where necessary, inflections were taken into account (e.g., italiano, italiana), while concordance hits not pertinent to the scope of the study (e.g., università

italiana, “Italian university”) or lacking at least a minimum of surrounding text (such as in the case of very non-descriptive titles) were excluded. Identified concordances were quantified and subsequently individually and manually analysed in the context of their surrounding stretches of text to identify themes. This approach proved especially useful in individuating relevant stretches of text automatically and therefore without possible bias on the researcher’s part.

Content analysis was our chosen methodology because it would provide us with a relative straightforward access to the relevant parts of the material that would then furnish the core of our study. Guided as we were by the abovementioned keywords, a summative approach to content analysis was deemed as better suited for our purposes. We observed Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005: 1285) recommendations in connection to the different steps to follow when applying (summative) content analysis. Most importantly, we did make sure that the material was not only scanned quantitatively, counting the hits per keywords in the documents, but we also read in detail the relevant parts of the texts, reading the keywords carefully in their surrounding context. This can, indeed, be considered “the basic coding process in content analysis” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1285), where the goal is to “organise large quantities of text into much fewer content categories” (ibid.), categories that can be conceptualised as themes in the text that are either explicitly expressed in it or that can be derived from the analysis (ibid.). Proceeding in this way, as a result of the coding process of the examination of the relationships between the categories, we were able to identify five main themes emerging from our data (see Results Section below). Such themes were not derived exclusively from a plain reading and analysis of keywords, but, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guidelines, themes were also theoretically informed by our conceptual framework, which we outline next.

The study was theoretically contextualized drawing on the notions of “international English”, “global English” (Bull 2012) and “soft multilingualism” (Harder, 2012), which are key elements for an in-depth understanding of the complex debate around “internationalisation” and “Englishization”. Indeed, the discussion of the use of language in education does not exist in a vacuum, but rather it is loaded with socially constructed meaning. The role of language policies is essentially to regulate usage, but it is the case that “by classifying things, we impose a structure on the social world, and language helps us to construct a model of it” (Romaine 2000: 26). Linguistic choices are, therefore, infused with beliefs and ideologies reflecting what we perceive to be (or what we want others to perceive to be) the “structure of the social world”. In the context of language policy, this implies that policy documents are not only descriptions (and prescriptions) of language use, but also written representations of language ideologies. Ruíz (1984) argued that orientations towards language (whether a language is seen as a resource, a right, or a problem) are pivotal to language policy. In this sense, orientations “determine what is thinkable about language in society” (Ruíz 1984: 16). Expanding on that, it would be possible to conclude that, by contextualizing the discussion around the use of language and expressing particular orientations towards different languages, policy documents also determine, or at least frame, what is thinkable about language in the context in which they operate.

We can reasonably assume then that the study of language policy documents can unveil whether, in a given context, certain languages are systematically associated to particular concepts (such as English with internationalisation). Indeed, language policy documents can also help understand whether processes such as “internationalisation” and “Englishization” are perceived to be distinct or the same, at least at an institutional level. Information of this kind is extremely valuable to explore and understand how higher



education institutions navigate the language-related tensions associated to internationalisation that we have described above.

We should also remark that our analysis focuses exclusively on institutional-level documents that can up to a certain extent be considered non-binding and particular to the context of each institution. However, we note that such documents still have to take into account national (and supra-national) guidelines and can therefore be considered also an expression of more widely circulating ideas. Furthermore, previous research has already highlighted how “strategy-steering” documents may be considered of particular interest because of their tendency to report less mediated political views (Soler-Carbonell et al. 2017). The documents selected for the present analysis were official, public, documents, but at the same time they were products of each individual university, and as such the documents need to be understood as framing what was perceived to be especially relevant to each institution individually. Hence, they were deemed the most appropriate starting point for an analysis that aimed to identify beliefs and discourses about language in the selected universities.

In essence, this study seeks to investigate one main aspect, namely, which key language-related themes emerge from official policy documents by a selected number of Italian universities, and to then connect these themes with orientations to language that may shape specific discursive frameworks. In the next section, we start by presenting the main themes that we detected in the analysed policy documents and continue next with a discussion of the orientations to language that they connect with.

## **Results**

Great variety in both total word length and number of hits was found in the documents collected for this corpus. This is partly due to the fact that, with the exception of

institutions in northern European countries, it has been, until now, fairly uncommon for universities to compile dedicated language policy documents (Soler-Carbonell et al. 2017), for an analysis of language policy documents at Catalan universities). Therefore, in this case, mentions pertaining to language use were found in texts that are quite different in style, purpose and scope, resulting in very different wordcounts. Results of the keyword searches are displayed in Table 1, to offer an overview of the figures.

(Insert Table 1 here)

As can be seen, all but one of the documents mention, in one way or another, issues pertaining to language. Even in the case of the University of Pisa's 2018 Didactic Guidelines, that presented no relevant concordance hits for any of the keywords, a number of hits were scored in other documents by the same institution. As mentioned, the ample spectrum in the numbers can partly be explained by a practical observation: the structure of documents was not consistent from one institution to the other and some universities had much longer files, where the same layout was repeated for each faculty or department. This is the case for the University of Siena's Strategic Plan, which scored the highest amount of concordances for "English", with an impressive 233 hits over 244 pages. The data are still certainly relevant but needs to be put into perspective. To that end, it should also be noted that it was not rare for a number of concepts to be repeated in the texts, resulting in more hits, but not necessarily in a wider variety of themes. Regardless, "English" scored the highest number of concordances by far (389), followed by "foreign language(s)" (110) and lastly "Italian" (74). Following the principles of content and thematic analysis previously outlined, the close analysis of the stretches of texts surrounding these keywords revealed the reoccurrence of the following key themes.

Pertaining to the keyword “English”:

Theme 1: Increasing and improving the presence of English will reflect positively on the institution (23 documents, 197 instances).

Theme 2: There is a need for providing English language support for students and/or staff (8 documents, 20 instances).

Pertaining the keyword “foreign language(s)”:

Theme 3: It is important to promote courses taught through “foreign languages” to increase internationalisation (13 documents, 28 instances).

Theme 4: It is necessary that all students know at least one other European language other than Italian (8 documents, 12 instances).

Pertaining the keyword “Italian”:

Theme 5: Knowledge of Italian should be promoted to international students (9 documents, 17 instances).

As the most recurring theme, Theme 1 is also the one that finds a wider range of nuances in the different documents. Institutions seem to have a general sense that the progressive integration of English in their curricula and programmes represents a benefit, or at least a goal that needs to be pursued. However, justifications of this goal seem to be often quite generic in the texts. Based on this, it might be possible to suggest that the link between English, internationalisation, and profile of the institution are considered self-evident and, in addition, policies meant to increase the presence of English in universities do not need to be strongly and thoroughly motivated. Expressions of Theme 1 include not only the

notion that EMI courses are being/should be increased, but also that universities should be able to provide technical/administrative support in English, that all web communication (including social media platforms) should also be available in English, and that local research should be translated into English. These derivations are all framed in relation to aims for internationalisation. The following excerpt from the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa's Strategic Plan can provide one example for this (all excerpts are our translation from the original in Italian):

The Scuola, as it has been said, needs to expand its international "soul", strengthening its relations networks that lead its students to go study abroad and at the same time foreign students to come to Normale. It is therefore fundamental, for both Italians and foreigners, to consolidate a multicultural environment in which one will not feel like a "foreigner", in which English will be a communication tool, and that will support non-Italian students as they deal with the bureaucracy needed for their stay. (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Strategic Plan)

The second theme emerging from the analysis of "English" as a keyword is the idea that solutions of language support need to be implemented for students and/or staff (Theme 2). This is to ensure a standard level of proficiency of participants engaging in the many different aspects of EMI courses operation. For example:

In order to guarantee the courses' sustainability, supporting actions for Italian students have been undertaken, in the shape of tutoring enhancement. In particular, students at the Faculty of Engineering have done exercises in order to achieve a level comparable to B1. The University Language Centre has also been strengthened, especially with regards to English language teaching, with the

recruitment of a new member of the Technical and Administrative Staff. (Marche Polytechnic University, Integrated Planning)

Theme 3 relates to the keyword “foreign language(s)”. Previous research (Pons Parera 2015, Saarinen 2012, Soler-Carbonell et al. 2017) has observed that in language policy documents the label “foreign languages” is often a cover term to refer to English implicitly. The corpus here analysed is no different: the content analysis around Theme 3 did show clear signs that the use of this label, especially in those documents where the reference is to a singular “foreign language”, was meant to be read as “English”. In some cases, the association between an openly referenced “foreign language” in the running text and English was made explicit by the simple juxtaposition of the word “English” in brackets right next to the keyword hit:

In the medium-long term the aim is to implement at least one MA course in a foreign language (English) for each of the cultural areas of the University. (Marche Polytechnic University, Integrated Planning)

In other cases, the possible connection was less evident, but the actual meaning of “foreign language” remained ambiguous nonetheless:

The University of Florence endorses the international dimension of research and education programmes, also by stipulating agreements with European and extra-European institutions, promotes participation in excellent research networks, implements international courses, aims to increase the number of foreign students, researchers and teachers, endorses the international mobility of its students, researchers and teaching and technical-administrative staff. Similarly, it works for

the implementation of learning and teaching activities and for degree courses in a foreign language. (University of Florence, Strategic Plan)

However, the label “foreign languages” could, in some cases, appear to refer to more languages other than English. This was the case, indeed, in the instances connected to Theme 4, where other European languages were alluded. The documents state that, in order to obtain their degree, students must demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in at least one European language other than Italian. Usually, no further specifications are made. That said, it should be noted that the current Italian university legislation requires students to undertake a test of linguistic adequacy (*idoneità linguistica*) normally offered in a variety of European languages (usually English, French, German and Spanish). Because of a degree of institutional autonomy, certain institutions may even require knowledge of multiple foreign languages:

Ordinary students are admitted to the Scuola on the basis of a national public competition. Winners must enrol in the respective degree programmes, undergraduate or postgraduate, at the University of Pisa, and attend the additional courses offered by the Scuola, including the study of two foreign languages. (Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna, Integrated Performance Plan)

Lastly, only one reoccurring theme emerged from the search for the keyword “Italian”, the importance of promoting Italian to foreign students (Theme 5):

The University Language Centre has organized Italian as an L2 learning courses for years, not only for Erasmus students, but also for foreign students involved in specific projects. As an accredited certification body, Roma Tre joins forces with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the promotion of the Italian language in

the world (e.g., in occasion of the Joint Action for the Italian language organized by the Ministry). (Roma Tre, Integrated Plan)

This represents an apparently successful promotion policy considering the call, by the University of Tor Vergata, for an expansion of “the limits for the sustainable attendance to Italian language courses for foreign students” (Triennial Plan). This need is underscored also by the fact that some universities set Italian learning goals for foreign students. However, it should be noted that these efforts towards Italian language learning are not framed by universities in relation to discourses of language protection, but rather of language promotion, and while the two may at times overlap, they cannot in truth be considered the same. This appears to be in contrast with research on language policy in other HE systems, where the “protection and development” ideas are perhaps more prominent than the “promotion” one (cf. Soler-Carbonell 2017). The next section explores in more detail the underlying orientations to language that the detected themes seem to point at, with an eye on the singularity of the Italian context.

### **Discussion of results**

In the introduction of the article, we outlined two research questions that we set out to address, namely: (1) to find out what language-related key themes emerged from a set of policy documents by a selection of Italian universities, and (2) to investigate the orientations to language associated to these themes. We have addressed question one, more descriptive in nature, in the above section, by presenting the five key themes that emerged from the content analysis that we conducted. Question two is, by contrast, argumentative in nature, and we address it in the following discussion of the results presented above. We do this by adapting Ruíz's (1984) framework of orientations in

language planning, adapting it to the angle of our study, i.e. orientations to language(s) in Italian higher education policy documents. In what follows, we propose to subsume the five key language-related themes identified above into three broad orientations: (1) English as a desired/desirable language for institutions and individuals; (2) English as a synonym of internationalisation; and (3) multilingualism as a key strategic goal.

*Orientation 1: English as a desired/desirable language for institutions and individuals*

In recent years, the idea of a “race to internationalisation” in HE has been scrutinized in the research community vis-à-vis the idea of a “race to Englishization”. Bull (2012) identifies a conceptual opposition between an “international” and a “global” English. English as a global language is considered by Bull (2012) a result, or possibly a side effect, of the re-conceptualization of knowledge as a commodity in HE. Seeking to move from their condition of intellectual isolation, universities have attempted to get more in contact with the needs of communities and their economy (Jessop 2008). However, in this way, they have subscribed to a “global knowledge economy construct” that has pushed them into “commercializing their research” (Bull 2012: 65). Pressured to keep up with new standards of competitiveness, universities have progressively intensified the presence of English in their curricula to appear more international, often without much question. In Bull’s words, “universities seem to show no distance to or criticism of the construction of these notions or of the reality behind them” (2012: 65). However, it is important to remark that the use of English as a communicative tool does not have to be as inherently detrimental to other languages. There is room, in Bull’s conception, for an international English used as a lingua franca with ratio. The risk with internationalisation policies that aim strongly (and perhaps mainly) to increase the competitiveness of institutions is that little thought might go into considering the difference.



Our study finds traces of the “global English” orientation (certainly reinforced by the ambiguous use of the label “foreign language(s)”, to which we return below). This is evident not only in the sheer amount of vague calls for the increase of English, which is presented as a language that is both desired and desirable for institutions (Theme 1) and individuals (Theme 2) alike. Indeed, Theme 2 shows that these documents are consistently concerned with the proficiency of both students and staff. The issue of sub-optimal standards of English in Italy is well documented in the literature (Broggini & Costa 2017, Costa & Coleman 2013, Grandinetti et al. 2013, Pulcini & Campagna 2015), and can be considered typical of Southern Europe in general (Berns et al. 2007, Dafouz et al. 2014, Soler & Gallego-Balsà 2019). In this case, the will to provide further English language support in universities presented in Theme 2 falls in line with what previous research had also considered advisable (Costa 2017) and is perhaps an indication of the great efforts that countries speaking primarily Romance languages have to sustain, if they wish to implement EMI at a HE level.

*Orientation 2: English as a synonym of internationalisation*

Previous research has indicated an overlap between “English” and “internationalisation” in university language policy (e.g. Baker & Hüttner 2018). Indeed, as discussed above, it is not rare for institutions to find themselves in awkward positions when it comes to stating exactly what kind of internationalisation they are offering. Cots (2012) argues that policy makers may be feeding the ambiguity “foreign language”/“English” to avoid formally acknowledging the dominance of English in higher education settings. On the one hand, therefore, there is a sense of English being made invisible in policy documents (Saarinen 2012); on the other hand, the lack of explicitness in the policies as to what standards of multilingualism are desirable inevitably strengthens what is already

perceived as the status quo, that is, the preponderance of English (a case of “soft multilingualism”, according to Harder 2012). This seems to be the case with many of the instances in our analysis, which we have captured under Theme 3, where the use of the label “foreign languages” does not necessarily have to imply “English”, but in reality, this is how it is materialised, often more implicitly than explicitly.

In sum, because English is globally marketed as the language of progress and global engagement, it tends to be construed, in the common imagery, as the language that matters. That is why, even when institutions advertise internationality or multilingualism, through a variety of labels, what is actually being advertised is English. And, in this sense, institutions are, perhaps inadvertently, enhancing an idea of a superiority, or at least an inevitability, of English in educational settings and academia that is “reified rather than meaningfully resisted” (Hult & Källkvist 2016: 67). An idea that might entail, in conclusion, a narrow view of internationalisation, and that might run counter to the goals of multiculturalism that many universities set out for themselves when devising internationalisation strategies (Fabricius et al. 2017).

### *Orientation 3: Multilingualism as a key strategic goal*

By contrast to Orientation 2, our analysis reveals an effort towards a more “unbiased” type of multilingualism. As previously mentioned, according to the Italian legislation (Ministerial Decree 270/2004) HE students generally must prove knowledge of “another language of the European Union, besides Italian”. This effort towards a broader and more inclusive kind of multilingualism has its roots already in middle school for Italy, where students are granted mandatory learning of not only English, but also of “another communitarian language” (Spanish, French, German) (Legislative Decree 59/2004). This reveals an attitude towards the pursuit of multilingualism slightly less skewed towards an

all-encompassing English than other contexts, as well as a potentially more transparent use of the label “foreign languages”, which we have identified in Theme 4. Overall, the situation might be read as a tension between national legislation and universities’ policies. However, the application of the national guidelines in universities is, in this case, generally punctual and uncontroversial. This indicates, once again, that the strong promotion of English and EMI might be in the direction of competitiveness both for universities and for students’ prospects on the job market, rather than in the pure interest of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

The positive interest in multilingualism is also mirrored in the orientation towards the Italian language in the analysed documents, marking an important difference with other European contexts. Previous research in northern Europe, for example, has identified discourses of local language protectionism, resulting in ad hoc policies (Kuteeva 2014). In our study, we do not find the same kind of resonances of such protectionist discourses in connection to Italian. Rather, Theme 5 indicates a tendency to frame Italian language learning for foreign students as an act of promotion, instead of an act of defence of the language. This might be because, as it has been shown, the use of Italian in academic settings is overall quite well protected by national legislation. Therefore, while occasional language debates include language protectionism nuances, our data show that universities (at least those included in our study) do not find it important to frame a protectionist discourse of Italian against the threat of English in their policy documents.

In addition, the perception of English as a threat might be smaller in a context like Italy, where the diffusion of English in Italian society and HE might not be seen as strong enough to be considered as a threat by policy makers and the society at large. Indeed, with around 65 million native speakers (Eberhard et al. 2021) Italian is a considerably

bigger language than other present in Europe, which also benefits from a certain degree of mutual intelligibility with other Romance languages. Furthermore, a remark could be made about the proximity of Italian with Latin (which acted as an academic lingua franca for centuries and influenced various academic languages, including English) not only from a linguistic but also cultural and historical point of view. All these elements, paired with an extremely long-standing scholarly tradition that started even before the country was united (e.g., the University of Bologna, considered first in the world), strengthen significantly the position of Italian compared to other languages and may partly explain the current lack of widespread discourses of protectionism in language policy in the country.

## **Conclusions**

In this article, we set out to investigate how a selection of universities from the central regions of Italy navigate the language-related tensions and ambiguities associated to the process of higher education internationalisation. By means of a content analysis of a set of policy documents by these universities, we were able to identify the main language-related themes that run across these documents, a descriptive step that allowed us to then suggest, argumentatively, the different orientations to language that are apparent in the analysed documents. From the analysis and discussion presented above, we can draw the conclusion that the Italian universities in our study both share features with and at the same time differ from other European higher education settings. As for the shared features, we can note: the perception of English as an inevitable language in the race towards internationalisation, and the idea that more English represents a positive development both for institutions and individuals alike. By contrast, what seem original traits of the Italian context of university language policy include: the notion that English

alone might not be enough for a comprehensive internationalisation process, which entails an explicit commitment to multilingualism by universities (at least on paper), via the fostering of the knowledge by students of at least another European language (without any particular push towards English), and the promotion of Italian itself. In connection to Italian, we have noted a lack of explicit protectionist discourses pertaining the use of Italian in higher education in the analysed policy documents. This is not to suggest that such discourses are absent from the Italian HE system (the controversy of the Polytechnic of Milan, which we have described above in some detail, indicates that protectionist discourses are, indeed, present); but its explicit absence from university policy documents sets the Italian context somewhat aside from other European settings that have received more attention so far (e.g. the Nordic countries), and this has to be interpreted against the historical, legal, and cultural background of the country.

In closing, as Italian universities have aligned themselves, in recent years, with other European countries in the introduction of EMI programmes (Costa & Coleman 2013), it seems as though the “internationalist” discourses associated to these developments have been more explicitly incorporated in the language policy fabric of higher education than the “culturalist” ones (Hultgren et al. 2014). Coupled by the explicit stance in favour of multilingualism, this shows that while recognising the inescapability of English for internationalisation purposes, it is also possible for HE institutions to suggest (at least at the level of policy formulation) ways in which English does not have to come at the expense of other languages, and that it is possible to defend this stance through a not necessarily protectionist position. We are, indeed, aware of the limited nature of our study, including only a selection of universities in the central regions of Italy, but we do believe these are original insights that future research from other settings, perhaps from other Italian regions, can take further.

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Table 1. Number of concordance hits in relation to “English”, “Italian” and “foreign language(s)” present in the corpus.

<u>University</u>	<u>Word Count</u>	<u>Hits for English</u>	<u>Hits for Italian</u>	<u>Hits for Language(s)</u>
<b>Marche Polytechnic University</b>				
Strategic Plan (2017-2019)	7465	6	0	1
Athenaeum Didactic Regulations (2013)	8324	1	3	3
Document of Integrated Plannig (2018-2020)	63231	69	2	5
<b>Sapienza University of Rome</b>				
Strategic Plan (2016-2021)	8243	4	0	1
Didactic Regulations (2008)	10401	1	1	7
Communication Plan (2018)	7133	15	2	4
<b>Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa</b>				
Triennial Strategic Plan (2016-2018)	9423	4	0	0
Didactic Regulations (2016)	7759	4	6	4
<b>Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna</b>				
Integrated Performance Plan (2016-2018)	6272	2	0	1
Educational Activities Regulations (2016)	17128	8	2	10
<b>University of Florence</b>				
Strategic Plan (2016-2018)	10169	4	0	2
Athenaeum Didactic Regulations (2015)	8039	0	1	6
<b>University of Pisa</b>				
Performance Plan (2017)	10564	2	0	0
Athnaeum Didactic Regulations (2016)	13248	0	3	6
Didactic Planning Guidelines (2018)	680	0	0	0

**University of Rome II –  
Tor Vergata**

Triennial plan (2016-2018)	15069	16	7	10
Athenaeum Didactic Regulations (2016)	13983	1	1	5
Statute (2017)	10560	0	0	1

**University of Rome III –  
Roma Tre**

Integrated Plan (2017-2019)	63231	15	14	0
Didactic Regulations (2014)	13761	0	1	3

**University of Siena**

Strategic Plan (2016-2018)	108315	233	31	36
Athenaeum Policies and Planning (2017)	6604	2	0	1
Athenaeum General Regulations (2016)	878	0	0	1

**University of Urbino  
Carlo Bo**

Strategic Plan (2018-2020)	14159	2	0	2
Statute and Regulations (2012)	9860	0	0	1

<b><u>Tot.</u></b>	<b>444499</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>110</b>
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KORREKTUR

Murphy, A. C., & Zuaro, B. (2021). Internationalization versus Englishization in Italian Higher Education: reframing the issue. In R. Wilkinson & R. Gabriels (Eds.), *Englishization of Higher Education in Europe* (pp. 163 - 188). Amsterdam University Press.

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## 8 Internationalization vs Englishization in Italian higher education

Reframing the issue<sup>1</sup>

*Amanda C. Murphy and Beatrice Zuaro*

### Abstract

This chapter investigates the concepts of internationalization/*internazionalizzazione* and Englishization/*anglicizzazione* as used by academics publishing research about Italian higher education in English and Italian. We seek to understand whether internationalization is understood principally as Englishization, and to investigate the resonance of the terms in context. Methodologically, three corpora are analysed within a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach. The findings indicate that internationalization is presented in a neutral light, is not construed exclusively as Englishization, which is used invariably as a negative term indicating an invasive process from which Italian academia needs to defend itself. The research suggests reconsidering the role of English as a way of making Italian academic culture more accessible to international audiences, rather than a threat to its identity.

**Keywords:** internationalization, Englishization, CADS methodology, higher education, Italy

<sup>1</sup> This paper was devised and written as an entirely joint project. For the sake of the publication norms in the Italian academic system, Sections 1-3 were written by Beatrice Zuaro, 4-6 by Amanda Murphy, and 7 together.

## 1 Introduction

The internationalization of Higher Education (HE) in Italy has been a sensitive topic for members of the public tuned into education, due to a clamorous court case won in 2018 by 100 professors from the Politecnico di Milano, one of the most prestigious and respected Italian higher education institutions. The academics took the University to court to challenge a decision taken by the Academic Senate to impose English as the medium of instruction in all MA and PhD courses. This enforced Englishization (*anglicizzazione* or the more rarely used *inglesizzazione* in Italian) had enraged some Faculty members, and mainstream newspapers gave space to both voices: the Rector of the University at the time defended the University's position, affirming that 'a graduate who can work in English has five times the opportunities of one who can't' (Cavadini, 2014),<sup>2</sup> while the authoritative national reference point for the Italian language, Accademia della Crusca, defended the importance of upholding Italian as the national language of education and culture (Maraschio & De Martino, 2013).

It is no novelty to assert, with Haberland and Mortensen (2012, p. 1), that 'there is more to university internationalization than mere Anglicization', and yet it is undeniable that teaching through English is the fastest way of attracting international students to a country (Tira, 2021). Italy has taken this route decisively: by 2015, 100% of private and 82% of public Italian HE institutions offered degree programmes in English (Broggini & Costa, 2017, p. 253), and this unstoppable trend may be one of the reasons why the Politecnico case, well documented and discussed in academic research (Molino & Campagna, 2014, Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Santulli, 2015; among others), continues to be cited by dissenters.

The present paper does not intend to go over this well-rehearsed ground, but rather discusses the issue of internationalization by examining how it has been conceptualized, measured and discussed by the Italian academy. We intend to answer the following questions: How is internationalization in Italian HE conceptualized by academics? Does internationalization coincide with Englishization/*anglicizzazione*? What resonance does 'Englishization/*anglicizzazione*' have in Italian academic research? To answer these questions, the paper draws on academic research on internationalization regarding Italian HE, and investigates the contexts in which Englishization or its sister term, *anglicizzazione*, are used.

2 'Un laureato che può lavorare in inglese riceve cinque volte le offerte di lavoro.'

## 2 The Italian Context

In order to properly contextualize the present study, a brief account of the Italian linguistic context, as well as of its policies, seems necessary. In fact, Italy has a complex history which represents the inevitable backdrop to discourses around culture, education, and language. On the one hand, the country is characterized by a long tradition of local academia (the University of Bologna being the first founded in the Western world) and Italian is one of the bigger languages in Europe (Ethnologue, 2019), with significant international relevance in certain domains; on the other hand, the country's long history of divisions has resulted in a unique situation of inner linguistic diversity (Tosi, 2004) which has informed national policies and contributed to a certain sensitivity around the topic of language. While it is estimated that no less than 40 languages were traditionally spoken within Italian territory (Coluzzi, 2009), only Italian currently holds the status of official language of the nation, together with 12 minority languages (Law n. 482/1999).

In the context of the aforementioned inner fragmentation, education is deemed to have played a central role in the unification of the country (De Mauro, 1991). It may thus be unsurprising that Italian is the main language in use at all levels of education. This position of prominence relies, among other factors, on the general interpretation of Art. 9 of the Italian Constitution, which safeguards the 'historical and artistic heritage' of the country, including the national language. Nonetheless, in recent years, as internationalization has been establishing itself as an indicator of quality and prestige in global higher education, the debate around language use has been rekindled. As mentioned in the introduction, the strategy of Italian institutions to increase internationalization seems to have largely revolved around the implementation of English-medium degree programmes. Nonetheless, initial available data painted the picture of a country that was 'slow to internationalize its universities' (Costa & Coleman, 2013, p. 7; see also Wächter & Maiworm, 2008, 2014). This trend appears to be confirmed by recent research that found the English-medium instruction (EMI) offer to be on a slow increase (Costa & Mariotti, 2020). A possible reason for this is the overall moderate proficiency of the English language in Italy: indeed, Italy is one of the few countries in Europe where the competences of the local student population in EMI courses appear to be lower than that of foreign students (Clark, 2018; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014).

Despite the challenges, there are signs that EMI courses appeal to different stakeholders, for different reasons, including improvement of the institutional profile, better prospects on the job market for students and even aspirations of language improvement (Ackerley et al., 2017; Clark, 2018; Costa, 2017; Costa & Coleman, 2013; Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Guarda & Helm, 2017). However, the clash of needs, motivations, and expectations has in some instances caused much discussion around higher education policies.

Returning to the example of the Milan litigation mentioned in the introduction, it is important to note that the resistance encountered was not towards the idea of any teaching occurring in a foreign language (in this case, English). In fact, as established by the Ministerial Decree 270/2004, the learning of a foreign language is a qualifying educational objective across disciplines in Italian universities. Rather, opposition was made to the *exclusive* use of a foreign language as the medium of instruction. The verdict to the court case reaffirmed this: the resolution of the Polytechnic was seen as explicitly contradicting Art. 9 of the Constitution and therefore invalidated (see also Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Santulli, 2015). Additionally, it should be noted that, given the rather modest command of the language in this country, implementing courses exclusively via English is seen as having the potential to curtail access to education. This scenario can be especially striking vis-à-vis a cultural environment that has traditionally advocated for accessible education, even at higher education level, via free attendance of lectures at public universities (Royal Decree 1592/1933).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, it would be an oversimplification to read these events as a manifestation of resistance to English in HE *tout court*. As mentioned, there is evidence in the literature to show favorable approaches in Italian academy to the use of English as the lingua franca. The 'bunker attitude' (Baker, 1992) that often finds particular expression in the media may be but one nuance of a multilayered discussion. To fully appreciate the views of different stakeholders in the internationalization debate, we argue for the need to clarify the terms of this discussion. The contribution of the present article to that end is an investigation of how the ideas of 'internationalization' and 'Englishization' are conceptualized and used in academic research about Italian HE.

3 According to the mentioned Decree, lectures are to be considered public, thus anyone is free to attend them, regardless of whether they are enrolled in a programme or not.

### 3 Review of Literature

Before moving to the details of the present study, we present an overview of how ‘internationalization’ and ‘Englishization’ are understood and discussed in the literature.

Since the so-called ‘invention’ of internationalization as an element of prestige for higher education institutes (HEIs) (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011, p. 15), stakeholders in various capacities have contributed to the codification of the internationalization paradigm. Nonetheless, conceptually the idea of internationalization remains somewhat broad, one oft-cited example being the ‘working’ definition by De Wit et al. (2015, p. 29), whereby internationalization means:

Integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

By contrast, more recently Hawawini (2016) stressed the need for a definition which, while remaining applicable to a variety of contexts, places emphasis on the beneficial outcomes of the process, clarifying their twofold nature. In fact, if, on the one hand, institutions benefit from becoming a part of the global knowledge construction process, on the other hand, it is the institutions themselves that contribute to this body of knowledge and to its increase. Thus, Hawawini came to the following formulation (2016, p. 5):

Internationalization is an ongoing process of change whose objective is to integrate the institution and its key stakeholders (its students and faculty) into the emerging global knowledge economy.

If defining internationalization theoretically can prove challenging, the difficulty is heightened when one attempts to pin it down into categories that can be measured. The use of language, for example, can be a difficult indicator: while a shared lingua franca seems an effective way of enacting internationalization, its uniform use can raise issues of ‘globalization’ (Bull, 2012) and ‘linguistic hegemony’ (Ives, 2006). Given its strengthened position as the de facto lingua franca of academia (Cots et al., 2012), in the last few decades English has thus found itself at the centre of the debate.

At least in some circles, the equation of ‘doing things in English’ and internationalization has appeared to be consolidated (e.g., Coleman, 2006;

Cots et al., 2014; Galloway et al., 2020). The use of English as the default language for international courses is a comfortable practice for institutions, in that it merely consolidates what is already perceived to be the status quo (on the 'self-perpetuating' dynamic of the dominance of English, see Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018a; see also the 'Catherine wheel' described by Earls, 2013). This 'ever-growing use of English' (Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018a, p. 1) is often addressed in the literature as 'Englishization', with a shift from the original meaning of the term, traditionally used to indicate linguistic adaptation towards English (Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018a, drawing on McArthur, 1992).

In previous research, the phenomenon of Englishization has been paired up with various types of complications. Many have raised pedagogical concerns (e.g., Aizawa & McKinley, 2020; Kaur, 2020; Klaassen, 2001; Wang, 2020). Airey and Linder (2007), in particular, showed that not only there are differences in the way students experience lectures in different languages, but also that they appear to be unaware of such differences, which has important pedagogical implications. It has also been reported that, considering the differences in practices and disciplinary literacy goals among disciplines, the idea of a possible uniform use of language is simplistic and fallacious (e.g., Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). Ethical implications for access to learning and research have also been reported (e.g., Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018a; Lueg, 2018), especially for contexts where English has made fewer profound inroads in society (e.g., Kuwamura, 2018; Romaine, 2015; Tsuneyoshi, 2005). Additionally, there are indications in the research to show that students from higher classes are more likely to be socialized into reaping the benefits of an English-medium education, perpetrating mechanisms of elitism and social inequality (Lueg & Lueg, 2015). In previous research Englishization has also been linked to preoccupations of domain loss, diglossia, and general impact on the international dimension of other languages (e.g., Cots et al., 2012; Cots et al., 2014; Earls, 2013; Phillipson, 2006).

As a result of these considerations, it could be argued that, far from simply describing the presence of English in academic environments (cf. Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018b), the term Englishization carries negative, albeit not yet precisely codified, connotations.

In this chapter we posit that although much research dealing with internationalization inevitably examines it in connection to Englishization, the two phenomena are associated with different discourses, one of which is more dominant. We look specifically at the context of Italian HE to show that, while much research on the country is indeed conducted under the umbrella of English-medium instruction (e.g., Brogginì & Costa, 2017; Costa, 2017; Costa & Coleman, 2013; Costa & Murphy, 2018; Doiz et al., 2020; Guarda

& Helm, 2017; Murphy & Costa, 2018; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015), above all by linguists, there is also a significant amount of research which, conducted within various disciplines, testifies to the multiple manifestations and interpretations of internationalization in the system. We present the details of our dataset and analysis in the next section.

#### 4 Methodology

In order to answer the question of how internationalization is understood and researched by Italian academics, and whether it is construed as Englishization, we have adopted a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach, enucleated by Partington (2004a) and clearly laid out in Partington et al. (2013). The use of corpora – large quantities of computerized text – for analysing language, language functions, and ideas was pioneered in Europe by John Sinclair (see, for example, *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation*, 1991). One of the major insights emerging from his work was, as Thompson and Hunston (2006, pp. 11-12) concisely point out, that meanings are not located in single words, but in ‘units of meaning’ (Sinclair, 1996); consequently, discourse can thus be described and investigated as a series of semi-fixed phrases. Meaning is created also by the regular phraseologies and collocations that frequently occur with certain words. Another important concept which is relevant to the present study is that of semantic prosody: this has been interpreted either as the property of a word (Partington, 2004b), typically indicating a ‘positive or negative attitudinal meaning’, which is also gradable (Hunston, 2007, p. 250), or as a property discernible through the surrounding discourse.

Corpus linguistics is typically quantitative: if a pattern of words recurs across different texts, then it is significant, both in terms of observing what is said, and in terms of predicting what could be said. It can also be described as an inductive methodology, in that from a series of repeated instances in text, it infers a general law or principle (Partington et al., 2013, p. 8); accumulating evidence of a phenomenon is also a way into deeper knowledge of that phenomenon. What the CADS approach adds to ‘pure’ corpus linguistics is the combination of observations deriving from a corpus with knowledge from other sources. Methodologically, this can add a qualitative, even sociological slant, which examines the extra-textual contexts and the society in which they are embedded. It also explains the adoption of reference works such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias for assistance in interpreting the findings in a corpus of texts and understanding how

the meanings of words can change. ‘The aim of the CADS approach is the uncovering [...] of what we might call *non-obvious meaning*, that is, meaning which might not be readily available to naked-eye perusal’ (Partington et al., 2013, p. 11).

To this end, a number of corpora were compiled to provide appropriate data for the research questions. Since the research specifically regards academics in higher education, it was decided to examine the text typologies which represent them most, that is, research articles and book chapters. These constitute the prime research outputs for most academics in the 21st century: they reflect systematic research and considered thought more than other text types, such as newspaper articles, for example. While an issue as topical as internationalization may also create waves in the print and online press, newsworthiness is a prime concern for the press, rather than depth of thought. The academic article is a genre in which evidence-based discourse has been distilled, discussions and conclusions are pondered rather than sensational, and where there is a guaranteed audience of a similar type to the writer. Research articles and book chapters have also normally gone through a peer review quality assurance process.

Two corpora were built following objective criteria. The first was compiled by means of the English search words ‘internationalis/zation’, ‘higher education’ and ‘Italy/ian’ using the databases ProQuest, Elsevier Science Direct, Eric, and Google Scholar. Articles in journals and book chapters published in English and reported in these databases were sought over a span of 20 years (1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020) in the disciplinary areas of applied sciences, business, ecology, economics, education, engineering, environmental sciences, international relations, language and literatures, law, political science, psychology, social sciences, social welfare, and social work. The search words had to appear more than once and not be present only in the bibliography of the articles found. This search produced 69 academic articles<sup>4</sup> from a cross-section of the above disciplines, which adopt a variety of research methodologies and data types, including annual reports, university strategic plans, and national evaluation reports, for example. A second search was made for articles in English the word ‘Englishis/zation’, using the same databases and in the same 20-year span; but of the four articles found through this search, two were not about higher education, and the other two were already in the internationalization corpus.

4 Articles and book chapters published in this timespan but not registered in the databases were obviously not included, but the two corpora are representative of academic publications that have international visibility and are available online, some through library subscriptions.



The total amount of text in English, minus the bibliographies and tables which were removed for the corpus research, is 329,401 running words. The corpus INT-EN thus represents scientific research on the topic of internationalization (and Englishization) written in English.

The same criteria were adopted to build a corpus of academic research about internationalization written in Italian called INT-IT. Accordingly, the search words *internazionalizzazione* and *anglicizzazione* referring to Italian higher education were sought through Italian databases and journals. This produced a small amount of data, namely seven articles, amounting to just over 31,000 words.<sup>5</sup>

Since the two corpora were constructed according to the same criteria (i.e., through key words in academic journals and books), despite their difference in size, they can be compared with due attention to normalization of numbers. Incidentally, the amount of data available in Italian gives an indication of little attention to the issue of Englishization in published Italian research, despite it attracting a certain amount of attention in the national media; alternatively, it could be an indication that research on the topic is published in English.

Given the small amount of data in Italian, it was decided to build a third corpus containing the articles in a book which is known to be precisely about the topic of internationalization and Englishization, because it contains the academic contributions made in a high-profile debate launched by the national Academy for the Italian language, Accademia della Crusca, after the Politecnico court case. The Academy took a public stance opposing the unilateral use of English in the MA and PhD courses at the Politecnico, and the book illustrates the various positions assumed by academics around the country. The title chosen for the book was clearly provocative: *Fuori l'italiano dall'Università?* (Exclude Italian from the University?). The size of the corpus is approximately 13,000 words, and it was called the CRUSCA corpus. The difference between this corpus and the INT-IT corpus is that the latter was compiled according to objective criteria, so that it is comparable to the INT-EN corpus. The CRUSCA corpus concentrates specifically on the debate linked to the Politecnico case.

The research followed two steps: the consultation of authoritative dictionaries in both languages for definitions of the words *internationalization*,<sup>6</sup> *Englishization*, and *anglicizzazione*, and the

5 Many articles were found about the internationalization of companies, but not about higher education.

6 The search for words ending in -zation used \* to gain occurrences also with -sation.

examination of the words (and derivations from the same stems), in the three corpora. The free software Antconc 3.5.9 (Anthony, 2020) was used to examine the words in context, their collocates, and repeated clusters of words in which they occur.

Section 5 presents the definitions of the words, while subsections 5.1-5.3 present the findings from the three corpora, with initial comments on the textual examples. The findings are discussed in greater detail in section 6, while conclusions are drawn in section 7.

## 5 Definitions and Findings

In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), an acknowledged authoritative source for the English language, the first thing to note is that ‘internationalization’ is a general process, not associated necessarily with education, and is defined: ‘The action or process of making something international in character, composition, or scope.’ ‘Englishization’, on the other hand, does not exist as a lemma in the dictionary; the closest word is ‘anglicization’, of which ‘*anglicizzazione*’ is a cognate, whose definition (updated in 2008) is:

- i. The action or process of making something or someone English (or British) in character; an instance of this. Also: the acquisition of English (or British) character or characteristics.
- ii. An English form or version (of a word or name); an adaptation into English. Typically describing a word formed from the pronunciation or spelling of a foreign term rather than by translation of its meaning.

We note in passing that the dictionary equates ‘Englishness’ with ‘Britishness’, a contestable feature which seems dated in the present era where regional and national identity is of increasing importance. More relevantly, the division of meaning into two areas, one relevant to ‘character, characteristics’, the other to ‘words or names’ is notable. The definition is neutral and indicates no attitude towards this process.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of comparison, more recently compiled and corpus-based dictionaries, such as the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (CALD), and the *COBUILD* dictionary, were also consulted, but they too lack the word ‘Englishization’; the verb ‘anglicize’ is defined in CALD as ‘to make or become English in sound, appearance or character’. The added specification of ‘sound’ is similar to the second meaning listed in the *OED*.

As regards Italian dictionaries, one of renowned authority is the Trecani, and the definition of the Italian equivalent *anglicizzare* is as follows:

Rendere inglese, adattare agli usi, ai costumi, alla cultura inglesi: *a. un popolo, una nazione*; con riferimento alla lingua, accogliere parole o costrutti della lingua inglese (to make English, adapt to English customs, uses, culture: to Englishize a people, a nation; with reference to language, to incorporate words or constructions from English).

The definition is shared by the verb *inglesizzare*. We note there is no hint of Britain or British culture.

### 5.1 Findings from the INT\_EN corpus: Internationalization in Italian Higher Education

The compilation of the INT\_EN corpus revealed first of all that the discourse about internationalization in Italy is distributed across a wide variety of disciplinary areas (see Table 8.1). These range from the more classic fields, like education (also higher education, bilingual education) and language and linguistics, with education occupying half the corpus, to the disciplines within the social sciences, such as politics, sociology, policies and language policy, economics, management, planning, entrepreneurship, informatics, statistics, and technology transfer. There is one exception, which is an article from engineering.

**Table 8.1** Disciplinary areas in the INT corpus

Education (Higher, Bilingual)	31
Economics, Management, Planning, Entrepreneurship	18
Politics and Policies (Language), Sociology	11
Informatics, Statistics and Technology Transfer	6
Language and Linguistics	2
Engineering	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>

The frequency with which the concept is named, also counting the various forms of the verb ‘internationali\*e (\*s, \*ed, \*ing), is 1.4 per 1,000 words. The strongest lexical collocates<sup>8</sup> of *internationali\*ation* in this corpus are

8 Collocates were calculated via AntConc (Anthony, 2020) using the T-score function, which also takes into account frequency of occurrence.

*university, education, and academic*, which are distributed fairly evenly across the corpus. These collocates merely situate internationalization, in the academy, without adding anything significant about the understanding of the concept. Other collocates, however, indicate examples of a less conventional and more specific interpretation. These are *spin-offs, co-authorship, and entrepreneurship*. Examples 1-3 illustrate these collocates in context.

- 1) Our approach differs from existing literature since it explores the co-authorship network to measure internationalization across institutions. In fact, we build a network based on co-authorships and we use it to measure internationalization of Italian Universities.
- 2) the degree of internationalization of academic spinoffs can be a consequence of the presence of a highly international team due to the international propensity of the parent university.
- 3) Future studies can address the role of entrepreneurial teams in the internationalization of ventures originating from universities and research institutes.

In these and other occurrences of the collocates, there is no indication of positive or negative semantic prosody. They point to the study of the enactment of internationalization through unconventional measures. There are many other collocates of the term *internationalization*, but none with very high scores that indicate a prominent theme that dominates the discourse. Apart from *co-authorships, academic spinoffs, and entrepreneurship*, other ways of interpreting and measuring internationalization that are found in the co-text of 'internationalization' emerge as:

- a the percentage of international staff compared to total staff;
- b cooperation with departments from other countries for joint programmes and double degrees;
- c establishment of branches of universities in other countries;
- d partnerships with international institutions and multinational firms;
- e virtual educational programmes delivered in other countries;
- f the influence of Rectors with international mobility on the development of networks and collaborations;
- g Italian student representation in international political forums and policy-making bodies.

By contrast, the word *Englishization* appears only twice in the whole corpus, in journals from the areas of education and language policy, where it is

used to mean ‘teaching only through English’. Examples 4 and 5 illustrate these two occurrences:

4) it seems impossible to separate the Bologna Process from internationalisation, and internationalisation from the **Englishisation** of Higher Education: to that extent, the Bologna Process has indeed undermined the EU’s goal of multilingualism.

5) The latest studies in the field of English as a corporate language demonstrate that adopting a global language policy is not easy. It is a radical choice. The benefits of ‘**Englishisation**’ (as Hiroshi Mikitani calls it, the CEO of Rakuten, Japan’s largest online marketplace, who decided in 2010 that English would be the company’s official language for business) are significant, but only a few companies have systematically implemented an English-language policy with sustained results.

And here arises a question: Is the university a company? Is its mission the same as that of an international or multinational corporation?

Obviously not.

The INT-EN corpus, which reflects research on internationalization in Italian Higher Education published internationally, shows no dominant interpretation of the concept, and no particular trend of positive or negative semantic prosody, as well as very limited reference to Englishization. It shows an understanding of the variegated ways in which internationalization can be enacted and an overall neutral stance.

## 5.2 Findings from the Italian corpus on Internationalization in Italian Higher Education (INT-IT)

The Italian corpus contains 7 articles written for an Italian audience, taken from four disciplinary areas, as illustrated in Table 8.2.

**Table 8.2** Disciplinary areas included in the IT corpus

Language and Linguistics	3
Social Psychology	1
Public Law	1
Education	2
Total	7

The word 'internazionalizzazione' occurs 2.7 times per 1,000 words and is distributed throughout all the articles in the corpus. The noun has three lexical collocates: i) 'casa' (home), which occurs in the expression 'internazionalizzazione a casa' (internationalisation at home); ii) 'discorsi' (discourse about) in the expression 'discorsi sull'internazionalizzazione', which is used exclusively in one article contesting the common association of internationalization with mobility and arguing for 'internationalization at home', and iii) 'atenei' (universities), used exclusively in one article that reflects on the consequences of the legal case at the Politecnico di Milan, particularly on courses in foreign languages. Similarly to the results of the investigation into INT-EN, the first collocates do not indicate an attitude towards the phenomenon of internationalization, but specify its context (universities), or the type of internationalization envisaged (i.e., at home).

The one article where 'atenei/universities' is a collocate of internationalization concludes with the following recommendations: 'ben venga l'internazionalizzazione dei nostri Atenei' ('the internationalization of our universities is more than welcome') as long as the following three conditions are met: resistance to intellectual subservience to the English-speaking world, resistance to cultural subjection to the same world, and the search for alternative ways of internationalizing. This example shows that although the collocate itself is not negative the surrounding text reveals a defensive attitude summed up as 'resistance', indicating that the process can only be considered positive if it does not imply subservience to the English language or culture of the English-speaking world.

The word *anglicizzazione* occurs 0.2 times per 1,000 words and is distributed over 3 articles (42% of the corpus), rather unevenly. It is invariably used in negative contexts: in example 6, we see *anglicizzazione* glossed as 'killer language', whereas in the article where it occurs most (6 times), the word is used exclusively in the sense of 'incorporating words or constructions from English' which is seen as a negative process. These are illustrated in examples 6 and 7:

6) Il fenomeno dell'English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) nel suo complesso ha portato molti a parlare di **anglicizzazione delle università, o addirittura di «killer language»** (Coleman, 2006) e «pandemic English» (Phillipson, 2009). (The phenomenon of EMI as a whole has led many to speak about the **Englishization of universities, or even of a 'killer language'** or 'pandemic English'.)

7) **Per fermare, o almeno frenare, una tale anglicizzazione della lingua italiana, e similmente delle altre lingue, e per renderle la sua purezza, non servirebbero forse delle contromisure come quelle dei francesi? (To stop, or at least slow down, such an anglicization of the Italian language, and in the same way of other languages, and to restore her purity, would we not need some kind of countermeasures like those adopted by the French?)**

Comment: Anglicization is seen as a pernicious process that needs to be stopped or slowed down.

In the INT-IT corpus, internationalization is discussed mostly in terms of internationalization at home, which in fact does not need to take place in English, but which can mean internationalizing the curriculum, for example (Leask, 2015). *Anglicizzazione* is mentioned solely in connection with the negative effect on other languages, which leads to monolingualism and subservience to Anglophone culture.

### 5.3 Findings from the CRUSCA corpus

The articles in the CRUSCA corpus comprise all the contributions to the debate on the use of English as a vehicle of instruction at university, promoted by the Accademia della Crusca in 2012. This corpus is expected to produced negative examples about Englishization, given the heated debate it represents.

The search for ‘internazionalizz\*’ produced various forms of the verb ‘internazionalizzare’ as well as the noun, and ‘anglicizzazione’, and more various related words, including *anglicismo* (anglicism), *anglicizzat\** (anglicized), *anglicizzante* (Englishizing – adj), *anglitaliano* (Italish), than in the INT-IT corpus.

*Internazionalizzazione* or related words occur 5.5 times per 1,000 words, much more than *anglicizzazione* which occurs 1.8 times per 1,000 words. The top lexical collocates of internazionalizz\* are: *università* (university) and *sistema* (system), which as in the other two corpora both indicate the context of use, while not revealing anything about how it is conceptualized or positive or negative semantic prosody: *internazionalizzazione delle università* (internationalization of universities), *internazionalizzazione del sistema universitario italiano* (internationalization of the Italian university system). *Anglicizzazione* proved to be more fertile ground in terms of discerning positive or negative semantic prosody, and Table 8.3 illustrates the numbers

of occurrences of the word and its derivatives, and the classification into positive or negative contexts of use.

**Table 8.3 Occurrences of words beginning with *angl*\* and their positive or negative contexts in the Crusca corpus**

	TOTAL OCCURRENCES	POSITIVE or NEUTRAL CONTEXT	NEGATIVE CONTEXT
<b>Anglicizzazione</b>	8	2	6
<b>Englishization</b>			
<b>anglismi/o</b>	4	1	3
<b>anglicismi/o</b>	3		3
<b>Anglicisms</b>			
<b>anglicizzata/i:</b>	3	1	2
<b>Anglicized</b>			
<b>anglico / anglicus</b>	3		3
<b>English</b>			
<b>anglicizzante/i</b>	2	1	1
<b>Sounding English</b>			
<b>Anglitaliano</b> A language mixture of English and Italian-English	1		1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>19</b>

Six examples of the co-texts surrounding the words are reported, translated, and briefly commented on here. In examples 8-13, *anglicizzazione* has a negative semantic prosody, judging from the surrounding co-text. In example 13, the process is seen from two points of view and appears to be neutral.

8) Che francese e spagnolo appartengano a questa categoria, non c'è alcun dubbio. Basta pensare alla tenacia con cui hanno frenato l'anglicizzazione della terminologia del computer. (*There's no doubt that French and Spanish belong to this category of 'languages of culture'. It's enough to think of the tenacity with which they put a brake on the anglicization of computer terminology.*)

Comment: the use of 'tenacity' and the verb 'brake' (frenare) would indicate that the anglicization process is something negative that has doggedly been stopped.

9) Diversa, naturalmente, è la situazione nelle aree umanistica e giuridica, dove è inaccettabile oltre che un po' ridicolo il principio che le



pubblicazioni in inglese (p. es. nel settore dell'italianistica!) valgono più di quelle in italiano; ma dove non vedo alcuna minaccia di anglicizzazione dell'insegnamento. (*The situation in courses in the areas of Humanities and Law is quite different, where it is unacceptable as well as rather ridiculous that publications in English (e.g. in the sector of Italian studies) should be worth more than those in Italian; but I see no threat of anglicization of teaching*)

Comment: the fact that anglicization is seen as a threat confers a negative aura to the process.

10) è molto significativo che anche la Germania, la quale ha affrontato questi problemi prima di noi [...] ed è quindi più avanti nel processo di anglicizzazione, stia ripensando le sue scelte. (*it is extremely significant that even Germany, who faced these problems before we did [...] and who is therefore further on than us in the process of anglicization, is rethinking the choices that were made.*)

Comment: a country that is more anglicized than Italy is reconsidering the choices it made – this implies that the choices were not good and that therefore anglicization is not a good thing; the mention of 'problems' also confers a problematic aura on the process of anglicization.

11) Ironicamente i nostri avi hanno resistito l'anglicizzazione per 150 anni, difendendo l'italiano come acroletto [...] no ai primi decenni del Novecento, ma oggi dobbiamo ammettere che per noi il cambiamento è stato un vantaggio. (*Ironically, our ancestors resisted anglicization for 150 years, defending Italian as acrolect... but today we must admit that the change brought us advantages.*)

Comment: the use of 'resist' implies that anglicization was not considered a good process, and Italian needed to be defended from it. The coordinated clause introduced by 'but' resets the balance, implying that this point of view is no longer shared, thus neutralizing the negativity.

12) Non si può ignorare che l'applicazione totalitaria dell'anglicizzazione dei corsi anzidetti creerà una netta preselezione sociale e ambientale dei fruitori. (*It cannot be ignored that the totalitarian application of the anglicization of the prementioned courses will bring about a precise social and environmental pre-selection of the students.*)

Comment: the adoption of the adjective ‘totalitarian’ could be a neutral choice, if the adjective is being used just to mean ‘total’, but its connotations are inevitably negative; moreover the consequences of the anglicization process – that students are preselected on the basis of economic and social grounds – creates negative backlash to the anglicization process and the sentence as a whole.

13) Perché è apparso immediatamente chiaro il rischio da evitare: quello che su un tema tanto delicato e in un momento significativo di svolta (che parte dall’università ma non si limita certo a essa) si determinasse una contrapposizione netta, quasi manichea, tra fautori e oppositori dell’**anglicizzazione**, tra chi cioè vede nella scelta dell’inglese come lingua veicolare dell’insegnamento il modo migliore, più semplice ed economico per i nostri atenei di aprirsi al mondo e chi invece difende ad oltranza la lingua italiana, appellandosi alla forza e all’autorevolezza della tradizione nazionale. Inglese contro italiano, insomma, in una visione semplificante e fuorviante. (*It became immediately clear that a risk needed to be avoided: that of creating – on a rather delicate issue, which had emerged at a significant turning point (which starts in university but would go beyond it), a distinct, almost Manichean contraposition between the advocates and opponents of **anglicization**, between those who see the choice of English as a vehicular teaching language as the best, simplest and most economical way for our universities to open up to the world and those who defend Italian all-out, invoking the strength and authority of national tradition. English against Italian, in other words, in a simplistic and misleading way.*)

Comment: anglicization is construed as a process that can be seen as a fast, simple, and economic way of opening universities up to the world, or as bad thing because it attacks national tradition. A neutral use of the word.

## 6 Discussion

The findings in the corpus of articles in English (INT-EN) scarcely mention or discuss the concept of Englishization with regards to internationalization, with the word occurring only twice in publications from the areas of language and linguistics in a corpus of 69 articles. Both instances of the search word Englishization occur in negative contexts, implying that the process undermines plurilingual competences and that universities

should not apply monolingual policies that may characterize companies. On the other hand, the discussions of internationalization in this corpus are embedded in a wide range of disciplinary areas, and their attention is focused on various enactments of internationalization, such as co-authored publications, international, academic spin-offs, entrepreneurship, the presence of international staff, virtual education, and so on. Neither Englishization nor simply English appear as lexical collocates of the noun internationalization, nor do the classic indicators of international mobility and the presence of international students in a university. This is the corpus where debate does not appear to be polarized, where discussion of the topics is broad ranging, and touches on innovative measures of internationalization, such as academic spin-offs and entrepreneurship. The research in this corpus, reported in English, is directed at an international audience, which may influence the more nuanced and multi-layered attitude towards the phenomenon and the lack of a clear polarization around the Englishization process.

In the small Italian corpus on internationalization, INT-IT, the research is produced by scholars from various disciplines, and internationalization is mentioned generally in the form of internationalization at home, with one article encouraging resistance to cultural subservience to the English-speaking world. 'Anglicizzazione' is mentioned in fewer than half the articles in the corpus, and is seen as a process requiring resistance, since incorporating English words into the Italian language attacks its purity, and the adoption of English generally encourages an exclusive, monolingual, and monocultural outlook; a few examples show a balanced attitude towards the process, recognizing that there are good reasons for publishing in English internationally. The third corpus, composed entirely of contributions provoked by the Polytechnic court case, understandably shows the highest frequency of both 'internazionalizzazione' and 'anglicizzazione'; while the first term is used without any noticeable positive or negative connotations, the second demonstrates a predominantly negative semantic prosody, describing the process as a threat needing to be braked or resisted, and a path taken and subsequently regretted by some countries. There is, however, admission of the fact that Englishization is a simple and fast way of opening universities up to the world. Both the INT-IT and CRUSCA corpora are directed at predominantly Italian audiences; the former was compiled through objective criteria and could in theory be for an international (Italian-speaking) audience, but the prosody of *anglicizzazione* is predominantly negative, as in the CRUSCA corpus, which fulfils expectations of negativity, given the circumstances it represents.

Overall, the negative connotations of Englishization in these corpora are largely consistent with what has been reported in previous research, which frames it as a de facto monolingual and hegemonic process (e.g., Cots et al., 2012; Cots et al., 2014; Earls, 2013; Ives, 2006; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018a, b; Phillipson, 2006). The Italian understanding of internationalization as a wide-ranging phenomenon is also in line with the general paradigm: the focus on its enactments and on the various stakeholders here identified is also a feature of current definitions of internationalization (see De Wit et al., 2015; Hawawini, 2016). Whether, by rejecting Englishization's monolingual model, internationalization inherently comes to signify plurilingualism is not clearly established by the present analysis (and, indeed, see Kuteeva, 2020, for a discussion of 'wishful multilingualism'). Nonetheless, the differences in how Englishization and internationalization are construed in these corpora appear prominently and represent the main finding of the present study.

## 7 Conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate how 'internationalization' and 'Englishization' are conceptualized in research about Italian HE. To that end, academic publications both in Italian and English were analysed with a focus on the use of this terminology, its context, and its nuances. In this section, we provide answers to our original research questions to draw the conclusions of the study.

The investigations conducted here show that, across disciplines, the term 'internationalization' has no prevailing attitudinal undertones and, while its use appears firmly nestled in the context of education, its interpretation remains broad and connected to several indicators. On the contrary, 'Englishization' was shown to be associated with consistently negative semantic prosody, in fact never occurring in a positive light in any of the corpora. In line with what previous research brought to light (see section 3), when Englishization/anglicization/*anglicizzazione* does appear in these corpora, it carries connotations of threat, problem, or injustice. This shows that internationalization and Englishization do not coincide in either meaning or use. Furthermore, their distribution was clearly different in the corpora, indicating that, most frequently, internationalization is not discussed in direct association with Englishization.

Overall, we conclude that, in light of its connotations, Englishization is not perceived as a desirable phenomenon in this context. This perception appears to have two nuances (in line with what originally noted for dictionary entries in both languages) investing both language and culture. Nonetheless, we remark that this stance is no indication of attitudes around internationalization itself,

given the ascertained distinction between the two phenomena. It should be noted, however, that much like the simple introduction of English in education systems is not a reliable indicator of internationalization, similarly not all use of English should be connected to processes of Englishization and its negative connotations. Internationalization achieved through the medium of English can represent a bridge to other cultures and a way of making Italian academic culture more accessible to international audiences, rather than a threat to its identity (Maggioni & Murphy, 2018). In the future, further research could productively focus on identifying ways in which this accessibility could be enhanced. Fortunately, as our results seem to indicate, internationalization is clearly understood by academics to be much more than Englishization, which is a trend that will hopefully become prevalent.

### *Acknowledgement*

This chapter gained enormously from the peer-review process. The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for engaging deeply and constructively with the first version of the chapter.

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KORREKT

Zuaro, B. English-medium Instruction through the lens of discipline and culture: lecturers' beliefs and reported practices. (Accepted, pending adequate revisions, in *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies*).

KOPI

# **English-medium Instruction through the lens of discipline and culture: lecturers' beliefs and reported practices**

Zuaro B.

## Abstract

In the last few decades, English-medium Instruction (EMI) has been the focus of a rapidly increasing body of research. While such research has tended to cover certain aspects of the phenomenon extensively, others still remain under-researched. For example, in focusing primarily on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines, EMI investigations have devoted limited attention to the potential relevance of disciplinary differences. Similarly, while EMI has been noted to differ from context to context, the practical implications of cultural differences in EMI implementations continue to be overlooked. The present study aims to shed some light on the role played by disciplinary and cultural specificities via an investigation of beliefs and reported practices of 13 Italian lecturers. The lecturers were selected to represent a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and individually interviewed about their experiences as teachers and scholars. The results reinstate to an extent the influence of disciplinary culture; however, they also point to an important role played by the local culture in shaping both beliefs and practices. Additionally, the results also reveal a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and challenges of EMI among these participants, stressing the need for more attention to cultural mediation in international higher education.

## 1 Introduction

The diffusion English-medium Instruction (EMI) in universities all over the world has marked a change in the composition of many learning environments, contributing to the need for a reevaluation of tertiary education students' and staff's needs. Characterized by a speedy increase, EMI implementation has been observed to "outpace empirical research" (Galloway, 2020, p.1), a situation that an increasing body of research has been seeking to remedy. In the last few years, efforts have been made to take stock of the

overall progress made (e.g.; Bowles & Murphy, 2020; Kuteeva, 2018; Macaro, 2018), and research has expanded its horizon to include the language policies that accompany EMI implementations (e.g. Soler, Björkman, & Kuteeva, 2018), the professional identity of EMI lecturers (e.g. Ploettner, 2019) and the specifics of EMI teacher training and development (e.g. Sánchez-Pérez, 2020). In this article, I turn my attention to some lesser investigated aspects of EMI, namely the role of academic and disciplinary traditions in shaping lecturers' practices and beliefs about EMI.

Lecturers continue to be at the forefront in EMI research and are considered by some the “key participants or stakeholders in the EMI process” (Macaro, 2018, p. 71). Previous research has focused extensively on lecturers' perceptions around EMI (e.g. Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Brogini & Costa, 2017), often in an attempt to finalize a ‘pro/against’ categorization of attitudes that has so far largely remained unattainable (Macaro, 2018). Nonetheless, there are still aspects that have not been investigated in-depth. For example, with only a few exceptions (e.g. Belyaeva & Kuznetsova, 2018; Kuteeva & McGrath, 2014; Roothoof, 2019), EMI research has shown a tendency to focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) disciplines, often excluding other subjects entirely. Rather than out of deliberate exclusion, this likely stemmed from the idea that it is indeed in the science and technology domains that the “current dominance of English as an international language of academic publication” (Ferguson, 2007, p. 10) reaches its apex. Nonetheless, other studies (e.g. Kuteeva & McGrath, 2014) seem to indicate a shift in this situation, or perhaps a need for a more detailed investigation that factors-in disciplinary specificities within the macro-areas of Humanities and Social Sciences.

One aspect that remains particularly under-investigated in EMI research is the part played by the local culture, despite its clear relevance in education (e.g. Hyland, 1994). In the context of higher education (HE), the “complex of shared understandings” that constitute a culture (Stenhouse, 1967, p.17) is often broadly addressed as ‘academic culture’ (e.g. Okamoto, 2016; Peterson & Spencer, 1991). Nonetheless, the view of one monolithic academic culture is inaccurate: global academia does share universally acknowledged values, such as academic freedom and autonomy (Sporn, 1996); however, it is also influenced by the cultural background of the specific environments, which is local and particular. This distinction is sometimes made in the literature via the use of ‘academic

tradition' (e.g. Creswell, 1998; Hamilton, 2001) to stress the situatedness of certain practices and beliefs.

Similarly, if the local culture is understood to be constitutive of the different academic traditions, then we can conclude that its influence extends to the micro level of disciplinary culture. Disciplinary culture theory finds its pivot in the idea that different disciplines exhibit distinctive practices and approaches to knowledge construction (see Becher, 1989; Clark, 1987). However, while the study of a certain discipline will feature consistent epistemological characteristics across different academic traditions, it may also feature ideological and methodological specificities that connote its connection to the local culture and academia. This is reflected, in the literature across disciplines, by mentions of 'approaches', 'traditions' or 'schools' (e.g. Faucci, 2005; Frese & Zapf, 1994; Gangneux et al., 2002). In the present paper, when referring to specific schools of thought within the broader set of a disciplinary culture, the term 'disciplinary tradition' will be adopted, to minimize terminological heterogeneity.

Given the nature of EMI, at once multicultural but also contextually bound, consideration of cultural elements must be kept at the forefront, with regards to both academic and disciplinary tradition. Previous research has discussed differences in disciplinary cultures: it was evidenced that soft disciplines (see Becher, 1989) appear to focus on "creativity of thinking and oral and written expression" (Neumann, 2001, p.138, drawing from Hativa, 1997) in comparison to the more mnemonic and methodology-oriented hard disciplines (Smart & Ethington; 1995); similarly, humanities are reported as more "language-sensitive" (Kuteeva & McGrath, 2014, p. 371), contrary to more numerically-based disciplines (e.g. Dearden & Macaro, 2016); humanities are also observed to make larger use of oral assessment (Warren Piper, Nulty & O'grady, 1996) and soft disciplines to be more prone to changes in teaching style in international environments (Sawir, 2011). However, differences pertaining to disciplinary traditions have not been investigated in equal detail and, thus, also their impact on multicultural education has been neglected.

The necessity to focus more on disciplinary differences (Airey, Lauridsen, Räsänen, Salö, & Schwach, 2017) and the potential influence of disciplinary culture on lecturers' beliefs has certainly been identified in EMI research (Roothoof, 2019). In combination with the

calls for further research about soft disciplines (Becher, 1989), a clear research gap is delineated. The present paper aims to address this gap by combining the following two aspects: the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented disciplines (e.g. Law and Art) and the focus to the potential role played, beyond the different disciplinary cultures, by the specific disciplinary traditions in lecturers' beliefs and practices. The study is set in Italy, a context that is not only one of the less explored EMI environments in Europe, but also where education research in general "seem[s] to remain largely invisible – at least in quantitative terms – on a European or international landscape" (Knaupp, Schaufler, Hofbauer & Keiner, 2014, p. 86). Previous education research has identified some of the distinctive features of the Italian academic milieu in its "tradition of literary, theoretical and philosophical thinking and debating" (Knaupp et al., 2014, p. 89), as well as in the high relevance placed on orality, particularly evident in examination settings (e.g. Anderson, 1999; Bowles, 2017; Degano & Zuaro, 2019). These specificities and their characteristic prominence in Italian HE make Italy a productive environment for the aims of the present study.

With the above in mind, the present article aims to answer three main research questions:

- What beliefs and reported practices are identifiable among EMI lecturers in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences?
- How do the local academic and disciplinary traditions manifest themselves in the lecturers' practices and beliefs?
- How do the lecturers' reported experiences problematise contemporary implementations of EMI?

### 1.1 Italian academia and EMI

The tradition of Italian academia dates back to the University of Bologna, first in the Western world. This long-standing tradition has consolidated over time, developing its own set of values and practices, directly intertwined with the local culture. However,



while “on Italian university much has been said and quite frequently continues to be said<sup>1</sup>” (Paleari, 2015, p. IX), as mentioned, research on Italian pedagogy often remains confined to the national borders, partly because of publication practices (Knaupp et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, despite its many complexities, the Italian education system is considered one of the most influential institutions of the country, constituting an “acquis of very different norms, [...] rituals, experiences and ambitions, with direct and indirect effects on the daily lives of the citizens<sup>2</sup>” (Cellerino, 2012, p.15). Despite its culture having deep roots, Italy has only relatively recently reached its formal unification, and is left with a history marked by internal divisions. As a result, education represents one of the strongest centripetal forces of the Italian society.

Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Italian education presents unique features that hold a very secure position. Italian academia subscribes to the general values of academic culture, however, it is also characterized by a distinctive academic tradition that, across disciplines, holds philosophical thinking (Knaupp et al., 2014), orality (Anderson, 1999; Bowles, 2017; Degano & Zuaro, 2019) and language in general<sup>3</sup> in particularly high regard. In addition, within certain disciplinary cultures, Italian academia has consolidated specific disciplinary traditions, that can differ significantly from Anglo-American scholarship, for example in terms of “positioning within the [...]discipline, philosophical foundations and conceptual categories” (Maran & Leoni, 2019, p. 7).

The advent of multicultural education practices such as EMI has arguably made the need for taking into account cultural differences even more evident. Italy is a good example of how the introduction of exogenous pedagogical practices, without sufficient reflection on the implications, can provoke strain: the Milan litigation of 2012, during which the academic staff petitioned in court against the Milan Polytechnic’s decision of offering English-medium only education at MA and PhD level, is a frequently discussed example<sup>4</sup> (e.g. Murphy & Zuaro, 2021; Pulcini & Campagna, 2015). The multilayered complexity of cultural interplay in EMI has been described by Earls (2016) as requiring a “triple

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<sup>1</sup> My translation.

<sup>2</sup> My translation.

<sup>3</sup> Possibly because mastery of the language is considered evidence of great culture. For a critical perspective on this, see Beszterda, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The dispute ended with the legal authorities invalidating the Polytechnic’s decision in 2018.

knowing”, to encompass home culture, host culture and English. To what extent universities are prepared to support students and staff in this challenge remains to be explored.

With regards to local EMI, English-medium courses at Italian universities have been on a slow increase in the last decade (Costa & Mariotti, 2020). The legal framework in the country officially complicates the position of these courses, as the implementation of entire degree programmes in a foreign language was, in past legal proceedings, ruled incompatible with the Italian Constitution. Additionally, English proficiency can be considered uncommon in this country, which scores in the bottom ten in Europe in the English Proficiency Index (2019). Thus, in EMI, Italian students can be considered to have the same needs as other non-Anglophone foreign students (Costa & Mariotti, 2020), although often with lower starting proficiency (Clark, 2017). Furthermore, as mentioned, Italian HE is characterized by academic and disciplinary traditions sometimes distant from the Anglo-American model, which adds further complexity in the adaptation of courses from Italian to English.

Nevertheless, in the last few decades, internationalization has become an explicit goal in HE, as well as an indicator of prestige for institutions (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). Italian HE has made clear efforts to increase its participation in this global process, often via the implementation of EMI courses (e.g. Clark, 2018; Guarda & Helm, 2017). Despite the aforementioned complications, perception studies have identified some positive responses to EMI implementations (e.g. Costa, 2018; Costa & Mariotti, 2017).

For the reasons elaborated, Italian HE seems an especially fertile ground for EMI research, particularly to gain deeper insight into the relationship between EMI and local academic environments. The present study breaches this subject by investigating the reported practices and beliefs of university lecturers, contextualizing them with their disciplinary background, as well as with the country’s academic and disciplinary tradition.

## 2 Materials and Methods

In order to investigate in detail beliefs and practices of a community of professionals, the present study adopted a qualitative methodology, known for its emphasis on saturation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were initially individuated via purposeful sampling, aiming for individuals with teaching experience in both L1 and EMI courses (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011); the sample reached its final composition after subsequent rounds of variation and chain sampling, that granted its balance regarding experiences represented (Dörnyei, 2007). This procedure resulted into 13 participants, from the Humanities (HU), Social Sciences (SS) and Natural Sciences (NS), employed at three major Italian universities. A certain lack of uniformity in the literature regarding the categorization of disciplines is to be acknowledged (see Becher, 1989; Kuteeva & Airey, 2014; Neumann, 2001; Sawir, 2011; Roothoof, 2019). The study at hand divides them in NS, SS and HU, reflecting the positioning of each discipline at their respective institution.

In reporting the participants' data (TABLE 1), priority is given to their subject, teaching experience and linguistic repertoire, which are considered of primary interest for this analysis. However, similarly to Kuteeva and McGrath (2014), in order to avoid any infringement of privacy, gender, age, and position at the various institutions are removed. This does not deny the potential relevance of that information in contextualizing the data; thus, a more general account is provided here: participants included 8 women and 5 men, from their late 20s to their late 50s, at different stages of the academic career, all but one in tenured positions.

TABLE 1. Participants' information. Languages are given in order of self-reported proficiency; many Italian high schools require up to five years of Latin and Ancient Greek study, here placed in parentheses for those who mentioned them.

Lecturer Alias	Discipline	Years of Experience	Languages
NS_Biotech	Biotechnologies	30	IT, ENG, FR
NS_Pharmageno	Pharmacogenomics	30	IT, ENG, FR
NS_Viro	Virology	18+	IT, ENG, FR, DE (LAT, ANC_GR)
NS_Gastro	Gastroenterology	7	IT, ENG
NS_Stat	Applied Statistics	10	IT, ENG
SS_Inteco	International Economics	25	IT, FR, DE, PT
SS_Finance	Finance	24	IT, ENG
SS_Intmana	International management	23	IT, ENG, FR
SS_Law	Law	20	IT, ENG (LAT)
HU_Cons	Conservation	22	IT, ENG
HU_Archist	Architecture History	11+	IT, ENG, DE, FR
HU_Arthist	Art History	7	IT, ENG, FR
HU_Archeo	Antique Archaeology	2	IT, ENG, FR, AR, GR (LAT, ANC_GR)

All participants signed an informed consent document, accepting to participate in audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. The interviews included questions regarding different aspects of the profession, while also leaving room for participants to guide the conversation to other areas that they reputed of interest. The aim of this methodology, well-established in qualitative EMI research (e.g. Guarda & Helm, 2017; Kuteeva & McGrath, 2014), is to provide deep insights into the ideas, reasoning and practices of the interviewees. In light of the complexities highlighted in relation to L2 interviews (Welch & Piekkari, 2006; Zhang & Guttormsen, 2016), the participants were allowed to choose whether the interview be conducted in their L1 (Italian) or in English. While many initially stated to have no preference, eventually all interviewees opted for Italian. All excerpts from the dataset presented in English are my translation<sup>5</sup>. All interviews, averaging at around 40 minutes in length, were transcribed and manually analysed. Data was coded via close reading and with the support of data analysis software NVivo. The

<sup>5</sup>The analysis was conducted on the Italian version of the interviews; however, the original excerpts are here omitted due to space constraints.

coding of the dataset was guided by the research questions, resulting in the analytical tree presented in the next section.

### 3 Results

This section offers an overview of the analysis' findings, following the logical progression represented in the analytical tree (FIGURE 1).

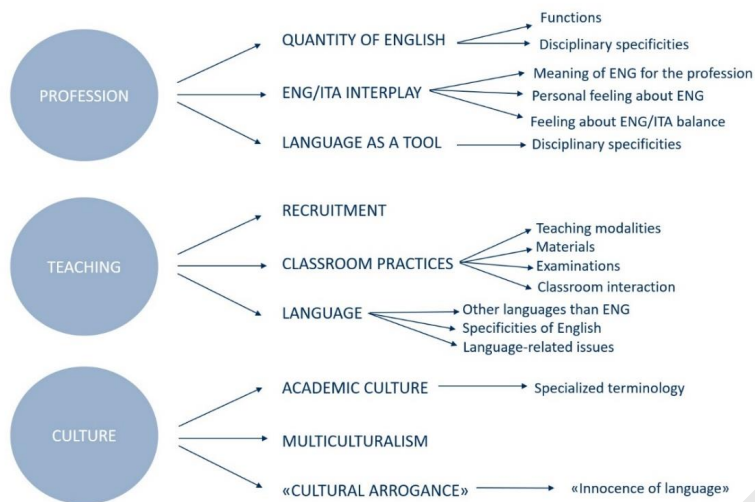


FIGURE 1. Analytical tree

Information was grouped under three main categories that emerged from the thematic analysis: profession, teaching and culture. These main categories are intended as descriptors for the following: presence and significance of English for the profession of university lecturer as a whole; experience of involvement and teaching in EMI degree programmes; and relevance of culturally specific elements both in teaching and research. Similarly, all subcategories also emerged directly from the data, their nuance factored-in in the analysis. Henceforth, text presented in quotation marks is to be considered as directly quoted from the dataset.

### 3.1 Profession

Asked to quantify their professional activity conducted in English, the lecturers reported great variety, with percentages of use spanning from 10 to 90. However, no clear relation was evidenced between quantity of English and discipline. Similarly, also the functions that, according to the participants, involved use of English (i.e. conferences and collaborations; publications; research<sup>6</sup>) did not reveal behavioural differences in relation to disciplinary background, with one exception: publication practices. All three disciplinary areas reported different habits here, with NS lecturers using only or mostly English, SS lecturers using mostly English or an equal amount of English and Italian, and HU lecturers using mostly Italian. These answers reinstate the idea that the use of English is linked to specific functions, which are closely related to the international dimension of the academic profession.

The lecturers framed the very presence of English in their profession as an opportunity, a necessity, or a challenge, with similar distribution. The SS group positioned firmly in the challenge category, while HU lecturers showed a slight propensity for considering it an opportunity. In terms of their personal feeling, the HU lecturers mostly reported excitement, while NS lecturers generally framed it as not being a problem for them. SS lecturers spread evenly between these two attitudes, while also reporting that using English cost them effort. Importantly, if the lack of either excitement or distress among NS lecturers appears to be in line with what EMI research has evidenced in the past (i.e. that in NS the use of English is simply considered part of the job), HU lecturers' excitement is not as well documented. As discussed in the introduction, those disciplines have long been considered the hub of EMI antagonism. However, these HU lecturers showed an overall very positive attitude towards the use of English, often more so than their colleagues. This painted a peculiar picture: many of the lecturers subscribed to a stereotypical view of disciplinary areas (according to which HU and certain SS would

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<sup>6</sup> Other than teaching, which was a necessary requirement for these participants.

have little interest or possibility to use English); however, not only did HU and SS lecturers report being interested in using English, they also specifically connected this attitude to their discipline and academic environment.

- (1) And then our discipline, conservation, is very auto referential. We believe to be the best in the world. However, being able to talk... And even if that were the case, that we are the best in the world - which might be true -, having contacts with others is even more important, to share what we know. Especially when we're good at something for once.

#### **HU\_Cons**

Most of the participants described the L1/English balance at university as efficient. Half of them ascribed to it a potential for enrichment, but it was also pointed out that, while it would be incorrect to consider the situation balanced, at the moment it seems functional. That is because, while research and publishing can often happen in English, there is still a significant portion of teaching in Italian. Some lecturers did stress that it is important for Italian to maintain a position of relevance in Italian academia.

- (2) Well I wouldn't call it... it's not a question of balance. But I think the Faculty of Economics did the right thing. [...] I think it would be wrong to do like the Polytechnic [of Milan] and try to use only English [...] In Italy, in my opinion, one should also be able to speak Italian at university [...] I also think it's fair to leave students the option to [take courses] in English or Italian, and I think that an Italian professor should be able to speak English, yes, but also speak Italian and write in Italian. The problem is that we only write in English these days. So, if, I don't know, a young researcher writes in English but can't write in Italian, that is not great, in my opinion.

#### **SS\_Finance**

The overwhelming majority of the lecturers also reported giving language a high degree of importance in their discipline (over half of them describing it as “fundamental”). They stressed the pedagogical potential of a “methodology of language”, meaning a specific and deliberate use of language as a way to captivate the student, set the appropriate register and even ascertain comprehension.

- (3) Based on how they use language I understand if they understood. So, to me language is... a test. If they can translate in intelligible language formulas and graphs, this makes me think

that they... have a clear grasp of the concept. So, formulas and graphs are tools, tools to facilitate the learning process. However, it is then language that expresses it more clearly.

#### **SS\_Inteco**

Again, the lecturers motivated their stance on the basis of specificities of their own field, while, in fact, the analysis showed this perception being shared across all disciplinary areas.

### 3.2 Teaching

The lecturers reported getting involved in EMI programmes as a result of their reputation, connections or previous experiences abroad; some of them volunteered. On the other hand, one account also offered a picture of the pressure for faculty that EMI implementation can sometimes entail:

- (4) I was asked to create this course from nothing. The university really cared about our faculty also getting a course in the humanities entirely in English and so... I wasn't recruited, I was thrown, let us say, into the fray [...]. However, I have to say it was... more than a recruitment it was a Godfather style situation: they made me an offer I couldn't refuse. This kind of situation. And to that I... answered. Because in the end it's not like I had options. And no one bothered thinking, for example, to evaluate my knowledge of English. So. [...] I have to say, my debut into didactics in English was, I repeat, simply due to... I don't want to say an imposition, because one can always say no, but as a matter of fact, it was an external imposition.

#### **HU\_Archist**

When asked about their teaching, many of the lecturers (predominantly SS/NS) reported a higher degree of interaction compared to their Italian classes. They also often reported having to change their pedagogic and assessment strategies in the shift from L1 to English. Nevertheless, there were elements that remained consistent: most lecturers still preferred an off-the-cuff delivery and kept the oral component in their examinations.

A dislike for slides was frequently mentioned: they were considered limiting and perceived to impoverish and speed up excessively content vehiculation. Furthermore, there was a concern that slides may be too distracting for students, and that they may be used as a replacement for the course literature. This dislike for slides was manifested across disciplinary areas.



- (5) When you make slides, the students are tempted to study on them, so they don't consider the book. However, the book offers a wider-range vision on a topic, allows for several examples, it's got higher composition quality, and reading that instead of a couple of lines helps achieving a better understanding of the concept. This is the first reason. The second reason is that slides... when you use slides you go faster, you run. And this is not a good thing, because when things are taught with much too speed, they are not assimilated. Whereas, with chalk and blackboard, while I write I'm thinking of what I'm writing. [...] Even the students, when they write they are not passive. They are not passive auditors to something [...] I know that many of my colleagues use [slides], however I don't consider them an appropriate tool, neither in Italian nor in English. In English it can help. Especially the teacher. However, in my opinion, it is counterproductive for the students.

**NS\_Stat**

Regarding course literature, most lecturers were able to assign a volume (or articles); however, lecturers from HU and NS reported specifically having to adapt or pick special material. Examples were extra support material created by the lecturer, books in Italian being translated into English, and efforts to involve the students in the selection of the course materials.

- (6) No, because we don't have [a book]. So, I... they have to do an exercise on a topic and I picked a theme that has two important books in English. So... obviously it's incomplete. [...] If they pick Italian topics, all the archival documentation and the publications are in Italian, so they can't read them. So, this year I picked [...] very archaeological themes that have a bit of bibliography in English. But otherwise, there's not a lot. And there's nothing in the archive, there are no documents. It's important they learn to search in the archives. So, let's say that this course is a bit different for them, compared to the Italian version, because obviously some things are not accessible to them because of the linguistic barrier.

**HU\_Cons**

This last quote can perhaps exemplify an important element that appeared in several statements: taking a course in English is not the same as taking it in Italian with regard to both content and methodologies. This belief will be discussed more in the next section.

On the use of language in class, while the lecturers were firm in reporting that all teaching was done in English, they also mentioned some use of other languages for expressions/quotes, names/toponyms/technicisms, or for brief interactions, e.g. when

someone forgot a word. These multilingual tendencies were more common for HU disciplines. The great majority of lecturers also evidenced some of the linguistic challenges that are well documented in EMI literature, such as communication not being as efficient, difficulties in the intelligibility of certain accents and challenges in the language switch.

Finally, the participants mentioned that some features of their language use in the EMI class were due to specificities of English. The inherently “dry” nature of English was perceived to reduce the possibilities for parenthetical elements and tangents, which was presented as desirable. However, it was also stressed that this same dryness of the language results into less nuances, which can lead to loss of meaning. The lecturers also stated that the inferior command of the L2 compels a simpler expression of ideas which, once again, can contribute to a situation of loss of meaning. This feeling was shared across disciplinary areas.

- (7) As we know, English is more... concise, yes. On the one hand, for scientific subjects, this can help, from a certain perspective. From a certain perspective, some things are a bit simplified compared to the nuances of Italian.

**NS\_Pharmageno**

### 3.3 Culture

The idea of culture represented the common backdrop to several of the lecturers’ reflections regarding values and practices. Analysing the lecturers’ answers, it was possible to identify three main thematic categories: academic culture, “cultural arrogance” and multiculturalism.

Half of the participants noted that their discipline finds its paradigm in a primarily non-Anglophone academic tradition, which is difficult to reconcile with EMI on multiple levels (e.g. methodologies, technical language and *forma mentis*). In some cases, this mismatch can extend to the entire idea behind a course, starting from its very name:

(8) -Keep in mind that with the word *Restauro*, which we use, we have to use its translation: *Restoration*. But that has a different meaning. Slightly different, but different, a difference that is important to us. So, we don't really have a word for what we mean, and we use Conservation instead. Which, however, isn't *Restauro*. Therefore, in the beginning this creates a block. You can't teach *Restauro* in English, because you don't have the words. Eventually, being in class, we can explain this difference and the students get a chance to understand.

-And then they use the English term, even once the difference has been explained?

-Yes, there is an official name, which I don't even remember. Conservation... which is not exactly what *Restauro* means, it's a bit different, but... we have to work on it, because we don't have words that can be easily translated.

#### **HU\_Cons**

In this case, it is evident that the problem, while certainly finding a linguistic expression, transcends language, connecting with the disciplinary tradition. This calls into question the idea that every language is equally suited for the teaching of every discipline, at least for its most technical aspects. And, once again, this does not appear to be due to an intrinsic quality of the language, but rather to the history of the discipline, which found its primary expression and development in a different cultural context. While this aspect was more evident in HU, it appeared to be experienced across disciplines. In some cases, this gave rise to the conclusion that there are pedagogical reasons for including certain languages in the learning of specific disciplines:

(9) The technical language in Italian has its own linguistic form, which is the result of centuries of study that in our case, in my case, dates back to Vasari, the 500' (or even earlier), got through the 700', transformed and arrived to our time. [...] And historical artistic studies about Italian art have an intrinsic international dimension. So even non-Italian scholars almost all know Italian, because they have to draw information from our bibliography in Italian and from the sources and ancient documents.

#### **HU\_Artist**

It is worth noting that, for some of these lecturers, changing language inevitably changed the *forma mentis*. Regardless, the participants confirmed that the great majority of the technical terminology in their EMI courses was taught in English, sometimes, as shown, even at the cost of accuracy.

On the role played by culture, the lecturers also discussed a condition of “cultural arrogance” in the profession favouring the Anglo-American culture. This manifested in the need for language certifications (which are considered mostly profitable for the institutions that issue them, but an unnecessary burden for professionals with proven experience in studying/teaching in English); the lack of consideration in institutional contexts (and particularly by English native speakers) for the additional effort required to international scholars to convey their ideas in a foreign language; the double-standard in research publication that can deem studies conducted in non-Anglophone countries, or with approaches non-conforming to the Anglo-American tradition, “peripheric”. It is relevant to point out that this feeling was much more present among SS/NS participants, possibly because of the more advanced Englishization of their academic environments.

Additionally, most lecturers, across disciplines, showed not to believe in what was defined as the “innocence of language”. In their view, language could not be considered simply any tool; instead, it must be deliberately refined and “perfect” (in line with what the lecturers’ comments on the crucial role of language in their profession); in addition, this also meant that linguistic choices have high relevance and carry meaning that goes beyond the literal. Interestingly, this did not prevent some of the participants from still framing English as a “neutral” language, and as such divested of that loaded meaning that they attributed to other languages.

Half the lecturers spontaneously placed the great value of EMI in its multicultural nature. They also pointed out, however, unaddressed complexities related to multiculturalism. Some of these complexities related to practical and organizational aspects (e.g. students facing language barriers when looking for internships and collaborations with local agents; difficulties with practices of the local academic tradition); others were more conceptual and broadly pedagogical in nature (e.g. previous education impacting the ability of students to approach the content of the course; different value-systems interfacing; the fact that a lecture designed for a culturally homogenous audience will not work for an heterogenous one). The lecturers, across disciplines, frequently reported that these challenges were not dependant on language, but rather on cultural elements.

When faced with lost-in-translation situations, the lecturers reported changing their behavior, attempting to bridge the cultural gaps. However, none of them mentioned receiving any guideline or assistance regarding this matter, that appears to be going unnoticed in current EMI implementations.

(10) This obviously creates a distance, because I get less of a feeling from them. I understand them less, I'm less empathetic, I recognize that. But that is because I don't have the means to understand what they are thinking, how they are feeling. [...] I repeat, because the Italian students have a certain body language, they're not shy about this. While the others, because they are a bit more inscrutable – at least for me, I repeat, it is my limitation – I find it harder to adjust. To reset. Where are you? Because sometimes I ask them explicitly and they don't reply. Even asking directly, they don't reply. So it's... I found it harder as a teacher to come across, to make certain concepts that they need to understand understood.

**SS\_Intmana**

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusions

The present study investigated a set of Italian lecturers' beliefs and reported practices in relation to culture and tradition. The analysis unveiled some systematic differences among disciplinary areas. For example, SS/NS classes reportedly tended to be more interactive in English than in Italian. Additionally, the professional use of English (particularly for publication purposes) was very common among NS and not very common among HU. This finding concords with the reports from previous research (e.g. Ferguson, 2007). Crucially, however, this behaviour did not appear to be linked to hostility towards English (cf. Kuteeva & McGrath, 2014). While the NS group reported considering English as a necessary tool for the profession, expressing neither positive nor negative attitudes about it, it was the lecturers from HU that showed excitement for the possibilities that English offered. Aside from these differences, the lecturers reported remarkable similarities in both beliefs and practices, suggesting the influence of other relevant elements than disciplinary background. Importantly, the lecturers did not show an awareness of such similarities, subscribing to stereotypical views of the disciplines instead. Similarly, the typical challenges of working through the medium of a L2 were reported by various lecturers, regardless of disciplinary background.

The notion that changing the language of instruction entails other methodological changes has been previously discussed (e.g. Belyaeva & Kuznetsova, 2018; Guarda & Helm, 2017; Roothoof, 2019). Nonetheless, contrary to what has been found in other studies (e.g. Sawir, 2011), in the present dataset the various disciplines appeared to be similarly affected. This, again, suggests that focusing on disciplinary culture without considering the specific academic tradition risks returning an incomplete picture. Despite the changes that the EMI class necessarily entails, some of the pivotal beliefs of the Italian tradition were not especially affected; namely, the desire for elaborated language, the propension for oral examinations, the understanding of verbal production as a means to conquer ideas still appeared to be at the centre of these lecturers' practice. This is true even for those SS/NS disciplines that, in other contexts, have not been seen as placing particular value upon these practices (see Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Hativa, 1997; Smart & Ethington, 1995).

These lecturers questioned some of the practices of the 'global' academia, focusing specifically on cultural aspects, rather than purely linguistic ones (such as language endangerment or domain loss). The idea of "cultural arrogance" was generally connected to the disadvantageous position of scholars who are not native speakers of English and whose research does not deal with Anglo-American contexts or methodologies; even when language challenges were discussed, the problem did not appear to be the level of proficiency itself, as much as the lack of consideration for the extra effort required of non-native speakers of English in academic environments.

However, the lecturers' dissatisfaction did not target the international dimension of academia indiscriminately: the multicultural nature of EMI, for example, was explicitly reported as the most valuable aspect of this phenomenon. In the context of education, the lecturers did not frame their challenges in terms of "cultural arrogance", but rather in terms of lost-in-translation situations. From a specifically linguistic perspective, what seemed contested here was the lack of integration between the newly introduced communication tool (namely English) and the other relevant linguistic resources. This was, once again, generally not presented in a perspective of language protectionism, nor with an attitude of wishful multilingualism (Kuteeva, 2020). The lecturers reportedly made a modest use of other linguistic resources than English, and only seemed to consider

it a problem when English did not appear to be efficient for the communication. This was often the case with those disciplines (mostly HU) that, having developed in a tradition other than the Anglo-American one, reportedly lacked the appropriate means of expression in English. In addition to terminology, another limitation born out of the exclusive use of English was found in access to sources: while the lecturers were usually able to find or make alternatives, in some cases (in no correlation with disciplinary area) drastic changes to the design of the course had to be operated. Thus, the impossibility of accessing certain resources did not only shape the information that the students received, but also the competences that they acquired and, ultimately, the aims of the course. More research could focus on such differences, in the future, to establish up to what point EMI courses and their L1 equivalent are indeed comparable, particularly within specific disciplines.

Nevertheless, the occurrence of lost-in-translation situations was not only strictly dependent on language. Cultural differences also played an important role. What emerges from the lecturers' reported experiences is a conspicuous lack of assistance in developing Earls' (2016) triple knowing, for lecturers and students alike. Lecturers routinely experienced the impact of cultural differences in their teaching and attempted bridging the gap, reporting little success. These lecturers appear thus to be shouldering at once the load of the necessary cultural mediation, as well as the (self-imposed) blame for those situations that could not easily be solved.

In conclusion, the present analysis focused on the role of culture and disciplinary background in lecturers' beliefs and practices. Confirming, to an extent, the relevance of disciplinary cultures, the study also signals that academic and disciplinary traditions may in some cases overrule what is generally understood about a disciplinary culture. Therefore, the study argues for the need for academic and disciplinary traditions to be included in the conversation around EMI. Additionally, the study identifies a clear need for attention and support to the process of cultural mediation that a multicultural type of education such as EMI requires.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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IV

KORREKTUR

Zuaro, B. Content adaptations in English-medium Instruction: comparing L1 and English-medium lectures. (Submitted to *English for Specific Purposes*).

KOPI

# Content adaptations in English-medium Instruction: comparing L1 and English-medium lectures

Zuaro, B.

## Abstract

While lecturers' teaching practices continue to be a focal point of English-medium Instruction (EMI) research, contrastive studies between EMI and L1 lectures remain extremely scarce. The present study addresses this research gap by analysing five sets of matching L1 and English-medium lectures given in different disciplines at three Italian universities. Each set of lectures is given by the same lecturer, about the same topic. Thus, the study, closely examines the lectures' content in order to investigate which changes, if any, accompany the linguistic shift from L1 to English-medium teaching. The analysis reveals a high correspondence of the core topics addressed in the lectures; nonetheless, significant differences in the way such knowledge is conveyed are also observed. Such differences are grouped into three categories: length and type of explanations offered, as well as ways in which the explanations are provided.

## 1 Introduction

The continued momentum enjoyed in recent years by English-medium Instruction (EMI) in global Higher Education (HE) has brought to the fore the need for a detailed understanding of the phenomenon. In particular, previous research has pointed out the need to diversify EMI depending on the context (e.g. Airey et al., 2017; Costa, 2017; Helm, 2020) and the collaborative role played by language proficiency and communicative ability towards a successful EMI pedagogy (e.g. Björkman, 2010; Denver et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2019). The classroom, hence, represents a coveted site of investigation, presenting itself as the setting where the interplay of context, discourse and practice becomes especially evident. The lecture, in particular, continues to be one of the main ways of delivering education at university level (e.g. Björkman, 2010; Siegel, 2020), fulfilling important pedagogical functions, such as transmission of lecturers' evaluation of the content (Lee, 2009) and mediated introduction to specialized terminology. This makes lectures an important object of study, and especially so in the EMI class, where, to conceptual complexity, must be added the linguistic complexity of learning through an L2 (Dafouz Milne & Sánchez García, 2013). Thus, many are the calls in the literature for close analyses of L2-medium lectures (e.g. Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Dafouz Milne & Sánchez García, 2013; Hu & Li, 2017) aimed at complementing with direct observation available perception-based findings.

Extant empirical research on EMI lectures has tended to focus on communication strategies (e.g. Björkman, 2010; Costa, 2012; Costa & Mariotti, 2021), often devoting particular attention to metadiscourse (e.g. Brogginini & Murphy, 2017; Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020; Molino, 2018) and questions (e.g. Chang, 2012; Dafouz Milne & Sánchez García, 2013; Hu & Li, 2017; Johnson & Picciuolo, 2020). However, contrastive studies comparing L1 and EMI lectures are still extremely scarce (Arévalo, 2017; Arkin and Osam, 2015; Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Sánchez-García, 2018, 2020; Dafouz Milne & Núñez Perucha, 2010; Thøgersen and Airey, 2011) and can vary in terms of analytical angle and criteria for data selection. Furthermore, the predominant focus on communicative

practices has resulted in the role played by content being somewhat overlooked. Nevertheless, the relationship between language and content has been argued to possess an inextricable quality (see Airey, 2016; Hüttner, 2019), making it potentially difficult to investigate one without factoring in the other. In this paper, I address this aforementioned research gap, introducing an additional element of rigour to the contrastive analysis of L1 and EMI lectures, namely a close examination of the content.

The main aim of the present study is, therefore, to identify and analyse differences and similarities that accompany the shift from L1 to EMI lecture, in the delivery of the same content, by the same lecturer. The present study employs data collected in Italy, a context where, at the time of writing, only one other contrastive study has been conducted (Costa & Mariotti, 2017). Until very recently, Italy has been characterized by a dearth of EMI research, nonetheless some complex discussions around the phenomenon have been taking place in this context (e.g. Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Santulli, 2015; Costa, 2017; Bowles, 2017; see also Murphy & Zuaro, 2021). The present paper builds on previous research to shed further light on the crucial, but overall still under-researched, topic of EMI lectures.

## 2 Review of Literature

EMI is generally understood to feature English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) interactions, in which participants resort to a non-native language, namely English, as a shared communication tool. ELF literature has identified a propensity for self-regulatory behaviours in this type of communication (e.g. Mauranen, 2003; 2006), aimed at increasing the chances of positive communication outcomes. However, this does not always translate in the adoption of strategic communicative choices in EMI. In a study on Swedish HE, Björkman (2010) showed that lecturers made modest use of pragmatic strategies, a finding echoed across different contexts: lecture observations in Malaysia (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020) and Italy (Broggini & Murphy, 2017), for example, found a tendency among lecturers to rely on a narrow variety of metadiscursive strategies, possibly caused by the demands of teaching in a L2. In addition, previous research on EMI lectures also identified lower speech rate (Airey, 2010) and decreased interaction (Airey & Linder, 2006); similarly, Hu and Li (2017) reported showed that even when interaction does occur in the EMI class, it is characterized by cognitively lower-order questions and responses. This body of research clearly indicates a need to include specific provisions in EMI, to counter-balance the challenges of the L2 medium of instruction.

One way to understand which adaptations may be necessary in the EMI class is to look at the behavioural differences that arise naturally in comparison to the L1 class. To that end, a number of studies have been conducted for comparative purposes. Arkin and Osam (2015) asked a lecturer to include some Turkish-medium lectures into his EMI course, finding that, in the face of his considerable communicative effort, the EMI lectures took longer on average, causing the lecturer to cut on the content delivered, on examples, and questions. Costa and Mariotti (2017) analysed one EMI and one Italian-medium lecture given by the same lecturer: in this case, the lecturer reported no significant differences in the content covered. Nonetheless, the language shift seemed to cause a change in rhetorical style, the speech in the EMI lecture appearing slower, more redundant, and more prone to signposting. In a study also based on naturally occurring data, Dafouz Milne & Núñez Perucha (2010) reported contrasting findings, identifying more explicitness in transition signalling in the Spanish-medium lectures, as well as more metadiscursive variety and specificity. Similarly, contrastive research on question use seems to suggest that the language switch does play a role in the use of questions: frequency, type and purpose of questions all varied in various constellations in the



shift between EMI and L1 classes (Arévalo, 2017; Sánchez-García, 2018, 2020), pointing at a significant role played by context. Certainly, another potential influencing factor behind certain discursive choices could lie in the nature of the content; however, this aspect has received only modest attention in the literature. An analysis based on closely matching content was offered in Thøgersen and Airey (2011), revealing that the EMI delivery took significantly more time and featured more repetitions; nevertheless, in this case, only a number of segments from lectures delivered by a single lecturer were analysed.

Other than the role played by content in shaping discursive choices, another aspect that could benefit from further investigation in EMI research is the influence of the social context in the learning process. While there have been remarks in the literature about the relevance of local cultural elements in EMI (e.g. Hu and Li, 2017; Zuaro, under review; Degano & Zuaro, 2019; Bowles, 2017; Huang, 2011), how exactly these affect lecturers' teaching remains to be investigated. The notion that different cultures can exhibit specific learning styles, which can be influenced by changes in the surrounding environments, is well-established (Hyland, 1994). Similarly, students and faculty are only partially responsible for the characterization of the context of learning, as this is also influenced by the broader institutional and social setting (Tiberius & Billson, 1991). Education research has variously analysed the influence of the social context on learning at different levels of education: pre-existing boundaries and national culture (e.g. Cho & Lee, 2008), identity and community perceptions (e.g. Bliuc et al., 2011), and instructional behaviour (e.g. Perlman, 2013) have all shown to be determining factors. Such research, however, has so far not been extended to the EMI class, which by its own nature is likely to feature specific complexities in this regard. This analysis addresses this research gap by devoting attention to the role played by the social context in EMI teaching, to identify potential adaptations made by lecturers.

### 3 Theory and Method

The present paper approaches the data from a Vygotskian viewpoint (1987), which identifies a social component to the process of knowledge production and learning. In this perspective, social and psychological processes are not only both contributory to cognitive development, but also mutually influential. The human brain possesses the ability to understand and create knowledge; however, it is via social experiences that one learns to engage this capability. The interface between mind and environment is operated by mediating devices (Holland & Valsiner, 1988), that match external tools to internal symbols. In this way, humans are able to manipulate not only their environment, but also their cognition: “thanks to their production of, and facility with, tools and symbols, humans can not only modify the environment physically, but they can also modify its stimulus value for their own mental states” (Holland & Valsiner, 1988, p. 248). Thus, part of the human intellectual ability is external to the mind itself and, in fact, constructed in a fashion that is necessarily social (Del Rio & Álvarez, 2007).

A key role is played, in this sociocultural cognitive perspective, by language, as the “prototypical mediating device” and “primary tool for organizing cognition” (Holland & Valsiner, 1988, p. 251). Language does not only provide the occasion for social connection; because of its role as a mediating device, it translates reality into something that the mind can understand. This function holds a crucial role in formal education, an environment created to foster cognitive modelling, whereby the learner internalizes the tools and symbols of the mentor to achieve higher mental functions (Vygotskij, 1987).

In this process, the sense of the language becomes less and less generic and amorphous, narrowing itself down to the associations made in that given socio-cultural context (Vygotskij, 1986).

Sociocultural cognitive theory has relevant implications for EMI, a type of education that, in this view, features two critical specificities: the dissemination of knowledge through a different language than the local one; the communication with an audience of usually not entirely domestic students. Based on what discussed above, if the meaning of language is intimately cultural, its switch in a context of learning cannot simply be assumed to be inconsequential. Overall, the social context in which EMI learning occurs is different from the one in which L1 learning occurs; the knowledge therein generated will thus also be, to some extent, different itself.

In the present article, such difference is investigated in the form of potential variations in lecturers' discourse in five sets of lectures at three Italian universities. Each set comprises two versions of the same lecture taught by the same lecturer: one L1 (Italian, for all of the participants) and one EMI. All lectures were taught at MA programmes and cover different disciplinary areas, in line with the well-documented need for EMI research to broaden its scope beyond STEM disciplines (see Zuaro, under review). Participants included four women and one man, all in tenured positions, with multiple years of teaching experience.

**Table 1.** Participants' information.

Set reference	Discipline	Years of Teaching	Languages
#1	Applied Statistics	10	IT, ENG
#2	Gastroenterology	7	IT, ENG
#3	International Economics	25	IT, FR, DE, PT
#4	History of Architecture	11+	IT, ENG, DE, FR
#5	Art History	7	IT, ENG, FR

In selecting the participants, I adopted purposeful (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) and variation sampling (Dörnyei, 2007), aiming for individuals involved in L1 and EMI teaching, although with different areas of expertise. Prior authorization by the Faculty/Department and informed consent by the lecturers, all lectures were video and audio recorded, maintaining a fixed focus on the lecturers, as to protect the students' identity. To reap the benefits of a more ethnographic approach to the richness of the data (see Chaudron, 2000; Watson-Gegeo, 1997), in addition to filming the lectures I joined them and made notes on the environment and my preliminary observations, to return to this material during the analysis stage (as recommended also in Graneheim et al., 2017). In the lecture hall, I attempted to minimize the intrusion by using small recording devices, as well as blending in with the students. In that regard, it should be noted that attendance varied greatly among different sets of lectures, ranging approximately from a dozen to over a hundred students<sup>1</sup>.

I selected the relevant lectures on the basis of the lecturers' indication, by virtue of their role as content specialists. Recorded material was subsequently transcribed and manually analysed via a qualitative content analysis (Altheide, 1996; Kohlbacher, 2006), which supports a quantification of certain aspects of the data, while still maintaining a qualitative focus (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The analysis proceeded in a two-step fashion, firstly identifying macro-units of meaning in each lecture and later comparing the units among the two lectures in each set. Thus, after a preliminary assessment of matching units involving some quantification of specific features (such as length, delivery rate,

instances of questions), the comparison moved inside the matching units, for an even closer, “narrow and thick” (Broggini & Murphy, 2017, p. 330), analysis of observed phenomena. Macro-units identified in the first step are informed by the notion of information unit (IU), firstly formulated by Halliday (1961), and introduced in EMI research by Siegel et al. (2020). Anderson defines the IU as “the smallest unit of knowledge that can stand as a separate assertion” (2014, p. 104). In the present paper, such small IUs are grouped together to identify macro-units, understood as conveying knowledge about the same topic. In this way, the identification of macro-units does not rely on previously identified patterns, such as Young’s (1994) *macro-phases*, characterized by their communicative function and envisioned as interspersed in the discourse. Rather, it is data-driven, relying on the way meaning is naturally grouped in coherent macro-units by lecturers. The shift from one macro-unit to the next is marked by typical shift markers and the introduction of a new keyword, generally within the structure of a topic-sentence (e.g. #3emi “There’s a very simple way to have a sense, to have a measure, of technological progress. And this procedure is linked to the name of Robert Solow. And, effectively, this procedure is called *the Solow residual*.”; #3ita “Un modo per quantificare nei dati il progresso tecnologico è quello che si chiama *il residuo di Solow*, dal nome appunto di Solow”). The accuracy of the categorization was ensured via a follow-up with the lecturers, who evaluated it based on their technical expertise of the subject matter. To further ground the analysis, the lecturers were also asked about some of their linguistic and discursive choices in the sample lectures; in order to minimize recall interference. This procedure did not include video stimulated recall, but only access to transcripts (cf. Martinez et al. 2021). All lecture recordings, totalling 15 and a half hours, were transcribed. For the purposes of initial quantifications, only the lecturing time starting from the first matching macro-unit to the last was considered, to increase the reliability of the comparison, thus based on actual matching content. Having thus laid the grounding principles of the methodology adopted in the study on hand, I turn to describing its application in detail in the next section.

### 3.1 Procedure

The procedure of dividing each lecture into macro-units was carried out consistently among the various sets following the criteria described in the previous section. Having located all macro-units in common among the Italian and EMI lecture, a high degree of consistency became apparent in the content progression of the lectures for all sets but one. The lectures in set #1 (Applied Statistics) touched upon some similar topics, however from very different methodological perspectives, in one case focusing on manual analysis, and in the other, on software-supported procedures. This difference made it effectively impossible to find a match in the respective macro-units in the two lectures. Thus, for this segment of the data, it must be concluded that the nature of the content delivered was tailored to the specific audience and aims of each degree programme to the point of no longer being comparable. As a result of this finding, I excluded the Applied Statistics set from further investigation.

For the remaining four sets, I conducted preliminary quantifications on the matching units, measuring the total length, as well as the average speech rate of the lecturer and the number of questions by the students. These data hold no statistical relevance and are presented in this paper purely as contextual clues to the lecturers’ delivery. The speech rate was obtained via manual calculation of words uttered per minute (wpm): the final rate averaged the wpm values registered at two different points, approximately after the first 20 minutes and at the last 20 minutes mark of the delivery. Regarding the question count, a question has previously been defined as “a speech act that is either an inquiry [...], an interrogative expression, that is, an utterance that would be followed by a question mark in



communicative choices. The lecturers' content organization generally proceeded in a linear fashion, one macro-unit giving way to the next in the same order in both versions of the lectures. As a first finding, in all sets but one, the EMI delivery showed to require more time than the Italian one; while there appeared to be no correlation with number of questions received, it should be noted, as a potential influencing factor, that the lecturers' speech rate was consistently lower in the EMI lectures (Tab.2).

**Table 2.** Preliminary quantifications for each lecture.

Set reference	Length	Delivery rate (wpm)	Questions	Instances of alternation
#2ita	70"	116	4	44
#2emi	78"	88,5	13	2
#3ita	80"	121	24	47
#3emi	92"	103	12	6
#4ita	51"	93	0	2
#4emi	80"	87,5	0	83
#5ita	88"	140	1	9
#5emi	70"	72	0	46

Other than different delivery rate, three additional orders of differences were revealed by the analysis: length of the explanations, kinds of explanations offered for concepts, and ways of providing explanations. In fact, on the one hand, matching macro-units showed a high degree of correspondence of the topics addressed by the lecturers; this reinforced the aforementioned sense of linearity in these lectures and was possibly a result of the lecturers' own planning for the lectures. On the other hand, however, the microscopic analysis revealed some differences as to how knowledge around such topics was conveyed, which I introduce in the following sections.

#### *4.1 Length of the explanations*

The lecturers in this dataset adopted an off-the-cuff lecturing style, allowing them some flexibility in their discourse organization. As a result, the space devoted to explanations of specific concepts varied, presumably according to the lecturer's reading of the room and assessment of the students' needs. In some cases, this translated into a higher amount of time devoted explaining concepts to the EMI class, vis-à-vis more succinct, or completely omitted, explanations to the Italian class. Example (1) shows one such case, where the mathematical conversion between the international standard and the Italian standard of one unit of measure is explained in detail in the EMI lecture, while being completely absent in the Italian version.

(1) #2emi

The HOMA index is given by the ratio between glycemia per insulin, on this coefficient, 22.5, when glycemia is expressed in millimole/litre, so it's expressed according to the international standard. Anyway, for example, in Italy, glycemia usually is expressed in milligram/litre so we have to convert milligram/litre on millimole/litre. So we have to divide the glycemia value expressed in millimole/litre for 18. So if we multiply 18 for 22.5, we obtain 405. So 18 is the number for the conversion from millimole/litre to milligram/litre. So if we had the glycemia expressed in milligram/litre, we have to divide for 405. So is glycemia per insulin on 405.

Something similar can occur with brief, contextualizing, remarks that are interpolated in the explanation, adding pieces of information omitted in the Italian version.

(2) #4

Questa è una soluzione che ha una fonte antica, extra romana diciamo: viene dall'anfiteatro di Pola, dove troviamo proprio in antico, il doppio piedistallo

There are some specific roman... architectures that present the double pedestal: for example, one is in the... can still be seen in Pola, in Croatia, what is now Croatia, it is the anfiteatro, amphitheatre of Pola, where there was double pedestals. It's something sort of a weird... that's not, as far as I know, visible in Rome.

While in the Italian version students are provided with cues to locate the source of the architectural solution discussed (it is ancient, “antica”, and not straightforwardly roman, “extra romana diciamo”), in the EMI version the foreignness of the building is made explicit via the addition of its actual geographical location (“can still be seen in Pola, in Croatia, what is now Croatia”).

In the same macro-unit, another example (3) can be found of the lecturer taking care to further explain, in the EMI lecture, a concept that is mentioned in passing in the Italian version.

(3) #4

Un livello inferiore scandito da paraste binate, con, su alti basamenti, reggenti un ordine dorico che riprende, che regge appunto una, una trabeazione con il fregio liscio come avviene per esempio nel Colosseo, dove il dorico, il fregio del dorico non è scandito dai triglifi, ma è un fregio liscio.

And what is interesting is to consider the classical language applied to this façade you see the façade is entirely articulated by vertical elements, doubled, so vertical. Flat columns, what we call the lesene eh? Pilasters, with a sort of doric order on the ground floor - Vitruvius in his treaty, De Architectura, says that the doric order is the simplest and so could be used for... to represent simple functions.

While the notion of a simple style is present in the Italian version (“il fregio del dorico non è scandito dai triglifi, ma è un fregio liscio”), in the EMI version additional information to its use and a historical source are also mentioned (“Vitruvius in his treaty, De Architectura, says that the doric order is the simplest and so could be used for... to represent simple functions”). It is also noteworthy that in the Italian version, part of the information is communicated through a simple reference to architectural elements indicated in the technical terminology (“Un livello inferiore scandito da paraste binate”), while the nature of the architectural elements is unpacked more by the lecturer in the EMI version (“you see the façade is entirely articulated by vertical elements, doubled, so vertical. Flat columns, what we call the lesene eh? Pilasters, with a sort of doric order on the ground floor”). These instances may appear subtle; however, their frequent occurrence throughout the dataset appears significant.

Finally, another case of more space being devoted to explanations in the EMI version is represented by situations in which information is not just added, but also repeated and rephrased more. Example (4) shows one such instance:

(4) #3

<p>Qui, abbiamo detto noi, oggi guarderemo al progresso tecnologico. Innanzitutto, il progresso tecnologico è inteso in senso ampio quindi che comprende sia nuove scoperte sia nuovi... nuove tecniche, nuovi metodi di produzione, sia nuovi prodotti... prodotti che prima non esistevano, una maggiore varietà degli stessi prodotti, una maggiore quantità degli stessi prodotti, diversa qualità. Quindi il progresso tecnologico lo vediamo declinato in tante in tante forme.</p>	<p>So today, we are going to try to understand the role of technological progress for growth. Just to start with, what is technological progress? We have a broad definition of what is technological progress, not the development of new products or the development of new ideas, but also new techniques to improve the means of production. So, we... also new management strategies that a new organization, better organization, of the work inside the firm. So, we can call many... many things can be called technical progress.</p> <p>And essentially the effective of technical progress on production has also many dimensions. So, the first dimension is the product dimension. So, with the same input, when there's technological progress, we can get higher output. So, the first dimension of technological progress is that we get more output from power from our inputs. So more products. Also, the quality of this product changes because of technological progress. Imagine, just compare the quality of your cell phone today and the quality of the cell phone ten years ago, completely different things. So, more products, but also for the products of better quality, also the creation of new products. So something that simply did not exist before. Cell phone did not existed 30 years ago, 40 years ago, I guess. Computers did not exist 50 years ago. So, the creation of brand-new products. And a further dimension is also a larger variety of products. So, the same product come in many different varieties, in many different types. And this is also an aspect of technological progress.</p>
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In this example from set #3, the overarching topic of the lecture is introduced similarly in both versions; however, the Italian introduction concisely lists the various nuances to the main topic before moving on. In the EMI introduction, on the other hand, the discourse organization is not as linear, with some notions being repeated (e.g. “*We have a broad definition of what is technological progress*”, “*many things can be called technical progress*”) or paraphrased (“*So, with the same input, when there's technological progress, we can get higher output. So, the first dimension of technological progress is that we get more output from power from our inputs.*”). Furthermore, the EMI explanation features examples (cell phones and computers) not included in the other version. As a result of this different organization, the EMI explanation ends up taking noticeably more space.

There are some instances of additional explanations in the Italian version respect to the EMI one in the data; in those cases, further space is generally devoted to technical details or complementary information. This is the case in set #5 with the notion of *lumeggiature* and how they can be obtained.

(5) #5

Però lumeggiature possono essere eseguite anche in materiali molto più nobili del carbonato basico di piombo, no? Che veniva ottenuto tramite diciamo la corrosione da parte di varie soluzioni acide come anche l'aceto del piombo e ottenendo un materiale poi mescolato ad acqua, insomma liquido, per quindi lumeggiare utilizzando il pennello. Sono tecniche più rare in oro e argento prese in prestito dalla tecnica della miniatura, solitamente usate anche per il loro valore economico, questi materiali, per fogli più finiti o fogli di presentazione con un alto, con un alto valore decorativo, come questi due che qui vedete.

In the example above, the Italian explanation elaborates on the chemistry behind the composition and use of basic lead carbonate (“*carbonato basico di piombo*”); this information is omitted in the EMI lecture, where the salt is only mentioned in passing, referred to as “*white lead, biacca*”, before moving to the discussion of precious metals.

#### 4.2 Kinds of explanations

Another perceivable difference in the EMI and Italian lectures occurs in relation to the types of explanations offered by the lecturers, rather than to their length. This is especially clear in the examples selected, which can differ, despite fulfilling a similar function.

(6) #5

Lo abbiamo visto già in età, già nel Trecento, in età tardo gotica, 300 o 400, con Giovannino de Grassi, i suoi studi di animali e di dame cortesi, ma va avanti anche con Durer, no?, come abbiamo visto nei fogli rivisti oggi e esaminati l'altra volta. A volte nei colori stesi a pennello non c'è una vera e propria ragione funzionale, cioè di desiderio di prefigurare e visualizzare l'opera finita ai colori dell'opera finita, c'è una semplice scelta estetica affine al gusto proprio dell'artista che la produce nella scelta dei colori. Come in questo caso o come abbiamo visto per esempio con Giovanni De Vecchi altro artista attivo nel tardo Cinquecento, primo 6, volte vanno utilizzati anche acquerelli violetti verdi gialli su una traccia magari come in questo caso a matita nera poi in qualche caso rinforzati con la biacca anche se solitamente il d'inchiostro più utilizzato il tono di colore più utilizzato è quello marrone. Sia che si tratti di un inchiostro ferro gallico di cui abbiamo già parlato sia che si tratti di un bistro o altri tipi di inchiostro. Qui vedete un disegno di questo Pietro Sordi, che forse non avete mai sentito nominare, ma che è un artista toscano senese attivo nel tardo Cinquecento primo Seicento. E questo è un altro Giovanni De Vecchi originario di Borgo Sansepolcro di cui abbiamo già parlato, che esegue questo studio di composizione utilizzando, acquerellando, no?, con questo acquerello violetto.

Maybe if you could remember some paintings. Of this typology. This is a typical so-called genre-scene, scena di genere. This is a particular genre of painting, of work of art, that we can find out in Italy during the 17th century. But it was very typical of northern artist, also artist active in Italy, and in Rome especially, in the first moment. This is by Flemish painting- painter. And here obviously he would- he wants to... to talk, to tell... about the normal life in these places, restaurants or other places. And colors are very important to give this- to realize that materialistic view of the normal life. And so using watercolors and also tempera colors could... uh, could, could give us very autonomous works, very finished works. And we've got a very subtle limit the painting. And in following centuries, we find a very intricate expressiveness of- in the using of polychrome watercolors, especially by some artists, northern artists English, French, artists such as Turner, Goya, Delacroix and more. But especially in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Example (6) shows the lecturer intent on expanding on the use of watercolours as a painting technique, associating examples of artists who made use of it. While in the Italian lecture this leads to listing mostly Italian artists (De Grassi, De Vecchi, Sordi) from the Renaissance, in the EMI version an international pool of more recent artists (Turner, Goya, Delacroix) is mentioned instead. The



content is, in this case, altered to suit two different audiences; in the outcome, the Italian class is exposed to rarer and potentially unfamiliar examples (“*Pietro Sordi, che forse non avete mai sentito nominare*”), while the same is avoided for the EMI class.

Nonetheless, the differentiation of information is not limited to examples. In some cases, the explanation of the same concept gives rise to different considerations in the two lectures. In set #2, for example, the introduction of a dietary intervention for anti-inflammatory purposes branches out into two different directions:

(7) #2

<p>Dopo 15 giorni, quindi stretta dieta, dieta standard con cioccolato, i parametri dell’infiammazione interleuchina 1RA, interleuchina 1-alpha 1-beta si sono modulati a ribasso, è aumentata la capacità antiossidante totale e contemporaneamente è aumentato il valore delle HDL. [...]</p> <p>Allora per rispondere alla domanda della collega qui abbiamo la risposta: abbiamo sottoposto ad un test psicometrico le donne normopeso obese (sempre con i confronti con le altre), in questo caso abbiamo fatto... al tempo c’era l’[EDI2], c’era un test che ci permetteva di capire se i soggetti avevano un disturbo del comportamento alimentare e quindi si andava a testare la risposta ad una serie di domande che profilavano il soggetto come rispetto alla percezione di se, alla tendenza alla bulimia, alla tendenza alla asocialità, alla tendenza alla anaffettività, e anche alla tendenza di vedersi particolar- alla non accettazione della propria immagine corporea. Quello che abbiamo osservato è che la risposta delle donne normopeso obese, soprattutto per quello che era la non accettazione dell’immagine corporea, era molto prossima sia a quella dei soggetti obesi ma sicuramente non avevano una tendenza all’anoressia o disturbi del comportamento alimentare. Quindi queste donne sono sane dal punto di vista del loro profilo diciamo psicologico, non hanno un disturbo del comportamento alimentare ma si sentono obese, quindi non accettano la propria immagine corporea. E questo viene poi stato messo in relazione con la loro composizione corporea da cui si evince che tutte quelle che dimostravano questa insoddisfazione erano poi realmente obese per percentuale di massa grassa e potevano classificarsi o normopeso obese od obese, le ho risposto?</p>	<p>So we discovered, for example, that a NWO has more level of oxidative stress, so the stress, the respect- metabolically stressed respect to MONW and in the same range of obesity. So we need to give them more antioxidants compound into the diet. Ok? For example, just to finish, the finish for the morning &lt;ride&gt; and then we continue in the afternoon. If we eat more chocolate, more dark chocolate. That chocolate contain a lot of antioxidants compound. Do you know which? [...]</p> <p>If we use Lactose, ok. In milk. What do we have into milk, milk is a solution, is an emulsion and is a suspension, from a chemical physical point of view. Water, fat, proteins and sugar, vitamins, endocannabinoids, there are some casein that are the same effect of opium. So, there are peptides that- so there are some protein. What is the effect of the protein of the milk when we are add into with- and we mix it with coca that contains polyphenols? OK, there are the class of- OK, we take the protein of the milk and we add to antioxidant compound. There is the denaturation. So the effective activity, cioè the activity of polyphenols is less because we have a duration of polyphenols, because they are the inside- blocked by protein. OK? So if you eat milk chocolate, you don’t make...nutraceutical foot, because the activity of antioxidants, is lower respect to dark chocolate, so-</p>
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In the Italian version, after having illustrated the beneficial effects of dark chocolate for the purposes discussed, the lecturer is able to address an earlier question she had deferred until this moment in the lecture. In the EMI version, notions regarding the psychological state of patients are not included, as the explanation goes into the specifics of the chemical processes that make dark chocolate beneficial vis-à-vis other types of chocolate. Both these discussions only occur in their respective versions, making this not a case of information being devoted more space in one version than the other, but rather of a differentiation of information conveyed.

Other examples feature this differentiation as an opportunity for revisions of background knowledge. This is the case in example (8):

(8) #4

<p>Agostino Chigi, banchiere ricchissimo che, figlio di un banchiere, a sua volta, di un banchiere senese, una famiglia molto ricca, potente. E le fortune di Agostino decollano in maniera - cioè, già appunto ben avviate - ottengono un'ulteriore spinta, grazie all'acquisizione del monopolio della commercializzazione dell'allume.</p> <p>Forse già lo dicevamo durante il primo modulo, lo ricordavamo, questo sale minerale usato per fissare i colori nei tessuti. E quindi Agostino Chigi ottiene dal Papa il monopolio e la commercializzazione di questo indispensabile materiale, e questo gli permette appunto di consolidare ancora di più la sua fortuna. E Agostino è un grandissimo promotore artistico, diciamo così, culturale, e il centro di questa sua vita artistica e culturale diventa la villa che progetta per lui Baldassarre Peruzzi, senese, allievo di Francesco di Giorgio, pittore e architetto, che tra 1505/1506 progetta questa villa, questo palazzo, villa suburbana, lungo via della Lungara.</p>	<p>Agostino Chigi, you already know, I repeat it, came from Siena, and he was a Tuscan banker. He was born in Siena in 1466, from, he came from a family of bankers, his father, Mariano Chigi, was also a very important member of the Senese political community, he was also a public official, many times, and he had two sons: Agostino, the eldest, and Sigismondo. And Sigismondo made a very important marriage with the daughter of the... signore de facto... or the... ehm... let's say the most important citizen of Siena in the second half of the 15th century, coming from the Petrucci family, so a leading, a leader of the Senese community, and so this branch, Sigismondo's branch of the family became also very important and influential. Agostino- But Sigismondo spent the most part of his life in Siena himself, while Agostino, quite early, moved to, moved to Rome and in 1487, he started to work with other, another important... senese banker, Spannocchi, from the Spannocchi family, and this was a very good move because in 1492, the new pope, Alexander VI decided to trust the Vatican, the administration of the Vatican finance, not to the Medici as before, but to the Spannocchi, to the bank of the Spannocchi. And so Agostino Chigi was there, was in Rome, working in that very bank and he - as, as an agent - he came in contact with papal court and later on he was involved at the beginning of the 16th century, in 1502 if I recall correctly, he was able to open a banca Chigi, so his own Chigi bank, under his own name and in the name of his father Mariano Chigi, in Rome. And this bank was settled in the area that we have defined as the... Wallstreet of Renaissance Rome, that is the Canale di Ponte now, the road called Banco di Santo Spirito which is just in front of... the Ponte Sant'Angelo, where we met for the first time at the beginning of the course.</p>
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In the EMI version, most of the space is devoted to revising biographical notes of Chigi and his family; in the Italian version, on the other hand, the biographical focus remains more general, making space for information about *allume* and Peruzzi, the architect who designed Chigi's villa. As a result, in example (8) there is indeed a difference of devoted space, but also a difference in the type of content shared itself.

#### 4.3 Ways of providing explanations

In addition to different length and type, the present dataset also features examples of different ways of providing explanations in the two versions of the lectures. In these situations, a difference in the length or type of the explanation provided may still occur; however, what sets this order of explanations apart from the others is the use of a specific device to convey knowledge. Such device can manifest as a simple instance of alternation; a translation, or periphrastic explanation of an untranslatable term; an appeal to other shared knowledge.

As previously shown in Tab. 2, there was a remarkably clear distribution of alternations among the lectures, most often caused by use of names or technical terminology established in the specific

disciplinary tradition. This linguistic behaviour was not monodirectional and often resources from multiple languages were included in the lectures.

(9) #2

Allora nel frattempo che trovo la diapositiva giusta, vi racconto come siamo arrivati ad identificare la normal-weight obesity syndrome.
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In the example above (9), the technical term remained in its English original in the Italian class; this reflects the challenge of finding a suitable equivalent for a concept of recent coinage, which has mostly been discussed in English language literature.

(10) #4

La cosa interessante è appunto che questa- questa idea appunto, di inserire nella lunetta terminale questa finestra, cioè, di includere la finestra, che ovviamente pre-esisteva, in questa struttura a serliana che poi si prolunga in profondità, di nuovo a dare il senso dello spessore della parete, appunto un'idea, nello spessore della parete; è un'idea che abbiamo già, già visto, che abbiamo già incontrato in Bramante.	He transforms the window into something you should... you should already recognize, it is what we call- in Italian we call it a serliana, but in English it's called the palladian window. It's this kind of window, which is composed of three openings, one in the centre, which is rounded, flanked by two rectangular openings and it was kind of window, very elegant window, that Bramante had introduced in Rome, Bramante, again, in Rome... and you have seen. [...] Perfect window for the lunette, because there is a taller element in the middle and then two lower parts flanking, it's almost perfect for the lunette.
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In example (10), the use of Italian technical terminology (“*lunetta*”, “*serliana*”) is mediated in the EMI class by the lecturer via additional explanation (“*It's this kind of window, which is composed of three openings, one in the centre, which is rounded*”) and reference to an English equivalent (“*in Italian we call it a serliana, but in English it's called the palladian window*”), which is not included in the Italian lecture.

(11) #3

-Quindi diciamo la fertilità del processo di ricerca e sviluppo che a sua volta dipende dalla qualità delle persone che la fanno, dalla qualità delle dotazioni strumentali e così via. Ma dipende anche dalla appropriabilità dei risultati della ricerca. La capacità di appropriarsi, appropriabilità <ride> non si può sentire. La capacità di appropriarsi... dei risultati della ricerca-
---

-Appropriazione forse?

-Appropriazione, sì, meglio.

Example (11) shows a negotiation of terminology between lecturer and students in the Italian class. This linguistic episode is not present in the EMI version, where the term “appropriability” is used smoothly in the communication. In this case, however, the lecturer second-guesses the Italian equivalent (“*appropriabilità*”), possibly interpreting it as a non-standard calque from English. The term appears equally unfamiliar to the students, who suggest an alternative solution in Italian which

is accepted (“*appropriazione*”). In reality, appropriability, which has a Latin etymology, finds a direct translation in *appropriabilità* in Italian; the lecturer’s familiarity with the English tradition of Economics may be interfering, in this episode, with her terminological choices, leading her to assume an untranslatability of the term appropriability.

The present dataset features several other instances of alternation, sometimes translated (e.g. #3ita “*Questo è un esempio, come dire, un po’ tranchant*”; #5emi “*called also body color, a corpo, said by Baldinucci*”; #4emi “*because the liaison, the connection, between the house and the river*”); some instances are also visible in previously mentioned examples (see 2, 3, 6, 7, 8). Nonetheless, there appears to be a clear directionality in most of these episodes, with the majority of alternation occurring in those lectures that use as their medium of instruction a language that is more removed from the disciplinary tradition being taught. Sets #2 and #3, including scientific disciplines that appear to draw more from an English tradition, feature more alternation in the Italian class; the opposite is true for sets #4 and #5, which appear to draw more from an Italian tradition of the arts.

Finally, another device whose use is modulated differently in the two versions of the lectures is references to shared knowledge. This is less common throughout the dataset, but still significant in the way it occurs. An instance of such strategy was already visible in example (8) above, where the lecturer made sure to place on the map the architectures that were being discussed in a way that would be easily understandable for the students (“*that is the Canale di Ponte now, the road called Banco di Santo Spirito which is just in front of... the Ponte Sant’Angelo, where we met for the first time at the beginning of the course.*”).

In the Italian class, however, what could happen is that the pool of information the lecturer drew from was not only knowledge shared among the lecturer and the students specifically, but also inside knowledge, derived from a shared cultural understanding at large.

(12) #5

Il procedimento chimico che invece rende trasparenti le carte grazie all'olio lo vediamo anche noi tutti i giorni - anche se magari non in questa maniera efficace, scientifica - basta che vi si sporchi la carta della pizza o del pane e vedrete come assume- diventa trasparente, no?
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The explanation of a chemical process in the Italian version features an analogy with what happens with a typical paper traditionally used to wrap pizza in Italy. This analogy is not offered to the EMI class, presumably because it would not be able to rely on shared knowledge of this particular experience.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

As shown in the previous section, various adaptations accompany the switch from the L1 to the EMI class. In general, the present study corroborates the findings of previous EMI research from a variety of contexts (Arkin & Osam, 2015; Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Thøgersen & Airey 2011; Airey, 2010; Airey & Linder, 2006), that consistently reports longer lectures, slower speech rates and more repetitions in EMI. Nevertheless, no clear increase or decrease pattern was visible with regards to students’ questions (cf. Airey & Linder, 2006). In terms of content, within matching macro-units both versions of the lectures mostly showed to touch on the same core topics and usually in a similar linear order. However, the microscopic analysis also revealed variations in essentially every aspect of how

information around such topics was selected and conveyed by the lecturers: the omission or addition of specific explanations, the examples selected to accompany them, the efforts to contextualize or revise information, use of the technical terminology, linguistic alternation, and references to shared knowledge were all elements subject to adaptation. Thøgersen and Airey (2011), who had previously conducted a detailed investigation of EMI and L1 lectures based on matching content, had already identified differences in the lecturer's rhetorical style. The present analysis, in turn, contributed to this branch of research by shedding some light on how such differences affect the content delivered. The notion that content adaptations accompany the linguistic shift has relevant implications for EMI implementations in HE, which I outline next.

The conceptual starting point for the present investigation was the Vygotskian perspective of sociocultural cognitivism, which places critical emphasis on the role of context and language towards knowledge construction. In line with this conception, there is evidence in these data that the building and transmission of knowledge is heavily influenced by contextual factors such as the target audience, the learning aims, the medium of instruction. If the discursive choices of the lecturers included in the study are reflective of their cognitive processes (as posited according to the role of language as a mediating device), it is clear that different cognitive operations are being carried out in the two versions of their lectures. This, in turn, means that the two groups of students are exposed to somewhat different knowledge and, thus, completing different processes of cognitive modelling. An extreme example of this is represented by the Applied Statistics set (#1) in this dataset, where knowledge around similar topics was delivered (and, in turn, learnt) in a completely different fashion. Thus, on the one hand, because of the contextual changes it introduces, EMI creates the very need for an adaptation of content and communication; on the other hand, this adaptation can in itself go in a direction of further removing the knowledge conveyed from its L1 counterpart. The present study does not seek to make a qualitative judgement on the adaptation initiatives identified. Their existence is intrinsically relevant, in that it points to the need for specific communicative efforts to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.

Indeed, deliberate or not, the adaptive behaviours displayed by the lecturers presented a specific inner coherence. As noted in section 4.3, the evident directionality in the linguistic alternations in this dataset, although deserving further investigation, is already showcased by the sheer consistency of its instances and the significance of the divide. Similarly, other types of adaptations also showed to occur with a specific ratio: the removal or substitution of obscure, very technical or very culturally connotated information lets a certain additional preoccupation for the ease of the EMI students transpire. Thus, the aforementioned effort to bridge the many different asymmetries among the two audiences seems to move in a direction of lightening the load for the international class, as also directly confirmed by some of the lecturers in the follow-up interviews. Nevertheless, the question as to how and if this type of (commendable) efforts can be carried out without compromising complexity remains. In fact, the question becomes even more pressing when considering that EMI lectures already appear to take consistently more time. It should perhaps be noted that, in this particular HE system, the amount of content delivered in each single lecture is not strictly regulated; this may afford the lecturers the possibility to modulate flexibly on which parts of the course to invest or save up time. Nevertheless, the present study mainly revealed where and how adaptation occurs, not strictly where the necessary resources (e.g. time and effort) to carry out such process are deducted from. Further research is needed to investigate longitudinally the possible effects of adaptation on entire courses.

Ultimately, the comparison between L1 and EMI lectures is not an end unto itself. The question is not how close to identical the two versions can be made; rather, the question is which adaptations can

allow the pursuit of the set learning aims with the same level of sophistication. Much like decreasing the amount of knowledge shared does not seem a viable option, an excessive ‘sanitization’ of the lecture from its contextual and culturally connotated elements appears equally undesirable. EMI is often framed as an internationalization strategy: if its aim is to afford access to knowledge and experiences that would otherwise remain out of reach, the local component that shapes that knowledge and experience cannot be framed as a hindrance. Adaptation processes can work precisely towards integrating the local element into the knowledge conveyed to the international audience. This, however, represents an additional task for lecturers, compared to the L1 class where such adaptation is traditionally not necessary. It follows necessarily that, if an additional process is to be completed in EMI learning, this cannot be expected to happen without additional resources and provisions.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Beyza Björkman Nylén and Josep Soler for the helpful feedback they have provided to the present study.

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<sup>1</sup>All fieldwork for the present study took place before the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, with no infringement of the safety protocols subsequently introduced.

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Degano, C. & Zuaro, B. (2019). Oral Examinations in EMI: a focus on pragmatic competence. *Textus*, 32(1), 141-162.

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# Oral Examinations in EMI: A Focus on Pragmatic Competence

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## *Abstract*

The oral examination is an area of EMI in which students' language difficulties often come to the fore, and studies from different countries have shown that inadequate language competence may negatively impact on exam results. However, very little research has been done on oral examination interaction in EMI contexts. The aim of this paper is to help fill this gap by comparing the performance of students with different language backgrounds and levels of English. Attention was devoted to those linguistic structures spanning different levels of language description that reveal pragmatic competence, and, in particular, register awareness. These include features like premodification in complex nominals – which are typical of English, and even more so of ESP, but not so common in other languages – and information structure, with the attendant range of syntactic choices (active/passive, cleft constructions, extraposition, inversion and existential *there*).

*Keywords:* EMI oral exams, pragmatic competence, information structure.

## **1. Introduction**

English Medium Instruction (EMI) has been spreading ever further in the last few decades among higher education institutions, as they compete with each other to offer curricula in English for their degree courses, to the point where, by 2014, 60% of postgraduate courses in Europe were estimated to be taught through EMI (Macaro, 2014).

EMI has attracted the interest of researchers since its early days, and a number of studies have tackled different aspects of

\* Both authors are responsible for the overall study design. As for the drafting of the single sections, Degano has authored § 3, and Zuaro has authored §1, §2 and §4.

the phenomenon. On the one hand, researchers have tracked the evolution of EMI over time and mapped its general practices (Wächter and Maiworm 2014; Smit and Dafouz 2012; Coleman 2006); on the other, research has focused on comparing it with other phenomena, such as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF; Kirkpatrick 2014, Mortensen 2014, Björkman 2014, 2011) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL; Smit and Dafouz 2012, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009). As EMI has been shown to develop in context-specific ways, several studies have focused on examining regional differences (Costa and Coleman 2013, Cots 2013, Doiz *et al.* 2012, Airey and Linder 2006, Lassegard 2006, Sercu 2004). There have ensued interesting ideological debates aimed at improving understanding and description of the phenomenon and at stimulating discussion around policies and practices (Philipson 2015, Bolton and Kuteeva 2012, Jensen and Thøgersen 2011, Ferguson 2007).

However, there are still relatively unexplored areas of EMI implementation. One such area is that of oral examinations, which is especially relevant from an academic point of view because it is often during oral examinations that students' language difficulties come to the fore (Dearden 2014). Previous studies have shown that such difficulties may negatively impact on their exam results (Al Bakri 2013, Chapple 2015, Sagucio 2016). At the same time, a perception study has shown that a linguistic bias may affect assessment in the opposite way, with the examiner perceived as unduly marking up students with low-quality English (Berdini 2016). The lack of research on oral examinations is partly due to the fact that examinations in traditional EMI subjects (Engineering, Economics, Medicine) are frequently conducted in writing. Nonetheless, oral examinations represent the main form of assessment in the academic traditions of several countries. Italy, for example, has a long tradition of oral examination at all levels of the education system, a tradition that some have traced back to the so-called *Gentile Reform* of 1923 (Pastore and Pentassuglia 2015), which set out to improve the country's education system by making it more rigorous and demanding.

In recent years, major changes have affected higher education institutions all over the world, putting strain on traditional national systems. The re-conceptualisation of knowledge as a commodity has brought to the fore new necessities and criteria for universities to match, resulting in a 'run for internationalization' that has appeared

to be closely linked to a process of ‘Englishization’ (Bull 2012). This process has not been devoid of complexities, especially for countries with a generally lower level of English proficiency; Italy is a well-documented case in the literature (Costa and Coleman 2013; Grandinetti, Langellotti and Ting 2013; Pulcini and Campagna 2015; Brogini and Costa 2017). At the same time, internalisation has brought to the fore the culture-boundedness of teaching and testing practices. What is the norm in one country, for a given discipline, is not necessarily the norm elsewhere: students with different backgrounds entering a national education system at university level may thus experience difficulties in adjusting to the country’s practices.

While oral exams in Italian universities do not seem to have received extensive scholarly attention (c.f. Ciliberti 2007, an exception being Anderson 1999), whether in native or in EMI contexts, other genres of academic discourse have. A case in point is the genre of conference presentations in the science domain, which has been investigated from the perspective of native language influence on discursive choices (Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas 2005). This research on conference presentations highlights that NNS generally show a lower extent of diamesic variation, i.e. they fail to adapt their discourse to the oral mode of communication, sticking to forms that are characteristic of written scientific English. Of course, differences exist between oral examinations and conference presentations. However, there are similarities as well, first of all in terms of topic – hard sciences – and mode of discourse – orality. In addition, oral exams tend to start with sequences in which the examiner shows that s/he expects the student to produce a narrative (Bowles 2017a), creating favourable conditions for extended turns of speech on the part of the student. These long stretches of speech have been described as actual monologues (Anderson 1999) and are thus in a way comparable to the sustained monologue of conference presentations. Previous research has concluded that appropriateness in their oral expositions allows for students being assessed to be construed as knowledgeable and competent members of their academic community (Anderson 1999) and, indeed, their ability to discursively organise the content of their answers has been shown to have an influence on the outcome of examinations (Bowles 2017a).

In light of developments in higher education and the need for reflection on the conditions which might hamper (or facilitate) success in international degree courses, this paper aims to fill the gap left by research around the analysis of oral examinations in EMI programmes. The focus of the present study is on comparing the performance of students with different language backgrounds and levels of English, devoting attention in particular to their pragmatic competence. Data are analysed in an attempt to better understand whether students with different native languages express content differently, selecting different structures or using them with a different frequency, and what kind of impact this can have on the communicative event.

Our research questions are as follows:

- 1) Is there any difference in the way native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English manipulate information structure?
- 2) Can a failure to handle information structure adequately (i.e. a lack of rhetorical appropriacy) impair effective communication?

## **2. Method**

The data analysed in this paper were collected in collaboration with a small group of graduate students from the University of Tor Vergata, under the guidance of Professor Hugo Bowles, whose collaboration we gratefully acknowledge. Data collection took place at the University of Sapienza in Rome, Italy, over several oral examination sessions for the course of Immunology, third year of Medical School. The recorded exams involved 2 examiners and 19 students for a total of 6 different nationalities, including 2 English native speaker students from the UK. The corpus includes transcriptions of 30 oral exams spanning a range from a minimum of 4 minutes to a maximum of 20.50 minutes. Students were examined twice, first by one of the examiners, then by the other, on different topics from the course programme.

The transcriptions were carried out in compliance with the conventions of Conversation Analysis (for a relatively recent and comprehensive account see Ten Have 2007), representing both contents and interactional features. The latter included pauses, continuity between two turns, overlaps, non-verbal sounds, lengthened and shortened syllables, audible inspiration/expiration,



acceleration or slowing down, volume variation, stress, tone, and laughter. The performances of the two native speakers, a minority in our dataset, were compared to the performances of the larger group of non-native speakers. Due to this imbalance, the results can only be regarded as an initial attempt at tackling the problem.

Corpus statistics for the two sub-groups are provided in Table 1:

TABLE 1  
Corpus statistics

	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Tokens used for wordlists*</i>	<i>Types</i>	<i>TTR</i>	<i>STTR</i>
Native	4.441	3.501	711	20,31	26,20
Non-native	36.462	28.835	2.495	8,65	23,54

\* While “tokens” refers to the running words in the texts (where by “word” is meant any string of letters/numbers separated by spaces), “tokens used for wordlists” excludes numbers. In our corpus numbers feature in line indications and pause length annotation, following Conversation Analysis transcription conventions.

A qualitative corpus analysis was conducted on this dataset, limited to structures that are retrievable through corpus interrogation routines, since there was no specific mark-up. Suitable grammatical indicators were identified for each of the investigated structures and the concordance lists thus obtained were then manually cleaned, retaining only the occurrences of the targeted structure. Attention was devoted in particular to those structures that reveal pragmatic competence and particularly register awareness, allowing speakers to manipulate the information structure by playing with the focus of their utterances and the related notions of given-new information, theme-rheme position, and emphasis. More specifically, the analysis focused on information structure as conveyed by four syntactic choices: active/passive voice, cleft constructions, extraposition, and existential ‘*there*’ (Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas 2005). The frequencies of each structure in NS and NNS turns were then compared, based on data extracted through Wordsmith Tools 6.0 (Scott 2012). While raw frequency data are provided for completeness, we focus specifically on the per-thousand-word normalised frequencies calculated automatically by Wordsmith Tools 6.0, which allow for the comparison of differently sized data sets.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Passive voice and existential 'there'

Scientific communication is primarily about conveying facts, data, and results, with much of the semantic load shifted onto the noun phrase (Halliday and Martin 1993 – see especially p. 84*ff.* for the notions of lexical density and grammatical metaphor). This has several effects on the syntax: verbs tend to lose their prominence in the clause, or are nominalised; the subject slot is often occupied by noun phrases referring to the object of an action performed by scientists, who are not represented at all in the transitivity process, and the verb is in the passive. In this way the receiver's attention is drawn directly to the thematised concept (i.e. the item placed in theme position), with the effect of impersonality, a much-valued rhetorical trait in a field that pursues objectivity. In terms of information structure, the thematised concept is presented as given information (either because it was mentioned in a previous statement, or because it is considered as easily recoverable by the receiver), while the rest of the clause conveys new or newsworthy information.

In a similar fashion, existential *there* allows the speaker to focus attention on the information contained in the rheme, conventionally reserved for new/newsworthy information, while filling the theme slot with a semantically empty placeholder.

Frequency data for the two structures are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
Frequency of passive verbs and existential *there*\*

	NS		NNS	
	raw fq.	ptw fq.	raw fq.	ptw fq.
Passive verbs	29	6,59	208	7,48
Existential <i>there</i>	15	4,99	84	2,73

\* Occurrences of passive verbs were retrieved using all the possible inflected forms of the main auxiliaries used to form them (*are/is/were/was/been/be/get/gets/got/s/re*); and then cleaned manually. Occurrences of existential *there* were searched for starting from *there* as a node word.

As shown in Table 2, there is only slight variation in the frequency of passive structures between NS and NNS, suggesting that the use of passive structures may not be a problem for the latter during EMI oral exams. In some cases, they get the passive grammatical structure wrong (e.g. “which can be activate”), but the context makes their intention clear.

Existential *there*, on the other hand, shows greater differentiation, with NNS using it less than NS, possibly because it is not perceived as formal enough for the context of an oral exam. This interpretation seems to receive backing from the analysis of the co-text in which the node word occurs. In NS turns, existential *there* is often associated with informal syntax, especially with a lack of verb/subject agreement (e.g. “there’s so many”, “there’s strong second signals”, “there’s fetal proteins”), and is always followed by the contracted form of the verb (“there’s” “there’ll be”, “there’s gonna be”). NNS, on the other hand, use it mostly followed by the strong form of the verb (“there is”, “there are”) and with subject-verb agreement (“there are also other important cells”, “There is a direct recognition”).

### 3.2. Cleft/pseudo-cleft, and extraposition

These structures contribute to the manipulation of information structure by modulating emphasis, and hence signalling newsworthiness. The cleft sentence gives both thematic and focal prominence to a particular element of the clause, thus making the division between given and new information explicit. Most cleft sentences start with *It* followed by the verb BE, and then by the element on which the focus falls (Quirk *et al.* 1992: 951). Starting from the declarative sentence “John wore his best suit to the dance last night”, an example of cleft structure would be “it was John who/that wore his best suit to the dance last night”. Unlike clefts proper, pseudo clefts, sometimes called *wh*-clefts, follow the rules of main and subordinate clauses. They in fact follow the SVC order, with a nominal *wh*- relative clause as subject (“what you need most is a good rest”) or complement (“A good rest is what you need most”, Quirk *et al.* 1992: 954). With extraposition, *it* is used as a pro-form “substituting for a clause that is positioned finally” (p. 633), as in “It is obvious that you have been misled”. As a result, the predication

(naturally occurring in rheme position) is fronted, while a complex subject, often in the form of a non-finite clause (e.g. “It would be unwise *to interfere*”), is disclosed at the end of the utterance, a phenomenon known as ‘end-weight’ (Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas 2005: 43).

The three structures, generally not very frequent in the corpus, occur almost exclusively in NN exams, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
Frequency of cleft/pseudo-cleft and *It* extraposition structures\*

	NS		NNS	
	raw fq.	ptw fq.	raw fq.	ptw fq.
Cleft sentences	-	-	2	0,07
Pseudo-cleft When/ what where/who why/all	-	-	17	0,55
This/that's	1	0,23		
<i>It</i> - Extraposition	-	-	22	0,72

\* For clefts and *it* extraposition concordances were extracted using *it* as a node word; pseudo-clefts were retrieved using all the *wh*-words shown in the table. For pseudo-clefts introduced by *this/that's* (Collins 1991: 198) the two strings *this* and *that's* were used as search strings. To these the string *that is* was added, even though it was not included in Collins' list. The outputs were then cleaned manually. The only example of such type of pseudo-cleft used in our corpus is “This is how acute happens” (NS).

Some examples of these structures are discussed below. Example 1 features a cleft sentence, in which only the first part is uttered (“it's not the tumour cell that”), leaving the sentence unfinished, as is frequently the case in the corpus. This is possibly due to the high extent of shared knowledge between the examiner and the student, associated with the relatively limited time allocated to each exam.

```
(1) 254 E1: So is it any (.) relevance that the tumor antigen
    255      ()
    256 S15: No
    257 E1: Why is not relevant
    258 S15: Em because it's not the tumor cell that-
    259 E1: Yeah (.) so, who cares, if ()
    260 S15: ()
```

Whatever the content of the relative clause, what is relevant here is that the student wants to emphasise the negation, so as to rectify what s/he had previously said. In example (2), the cleft sentence occurs again in the proximity of a wrong answer.

- (2) 27 E1: [My question is eh eh  
 28 regarding the eh germinal center I mean follicular  
 29 dendritic cells [()  
 30 S8: [Ok ok  
 31 E1: Ok is ok  
 32 S8: So anyway T cell eh::: produce the::: antibodies ()  
 33 response  
 34 E1: Mh  
 35 S8: So it's (starting) the T follicular cells  
 36 E1: Start=  
 37 S8: -start from (.) start from () presentation of antigen to  
 38 B cells in the lymph nodes [()  
 39 E1: [Who's presenting antigen to B 40 cells? ()  
 41 S8: No no no no [()  
 42 E1: [Ok, **it's you that you want to say** no ok now  
 43 say i(h)t correctly because I wanted just [() dendritic  
 44 cells

A problem emerges clearly at line 36, where the examiner repeats the verb used by the student (“start”), to signal her perplexity. The student replies by expanding on the verb (“start from presentation of antigen to B cells...”), but the use of the nominalised form ‘presentation’ begs the examiner’s question as to the agent of such a process (“Who’s presenting antigen to B 40 cells?”). The question does not seem bona fide, but is rather a strategy to show the student that by embarking on that line of reasoning s/he is heading in the wrong direction, a clue which is correctly grasped by the student (line 41). With her reply (“no, no, no”) the student clarifies that the issue has not been framed correctly, prompting, in turn, the examiner’s comment “it’s you that you want to say...”. Even though the form is not correct (as the second ‘you’ should not be there<sup>1</sup>) the examiner’s intention is clear. The cleft sentence places emphasis on ‘you’ (syntactic emphasis

<sup>1</sup> Some speakers may object also that the verb should be in the 3rd person (“it is you that wants to say...”), even though the norm in a cleft sentence is that “a relative pronoun subject is usually followed by a verb in agreement with its antecedent: *It is I who am to blame*” (Quirk *et al.* 1992: 367). However, as Quirk *et al.* point out, in informal English third person concord may prevail (*ibid.*).

that would be lost with the linear SVO structure ‘you want to say’) as opposed to ‘me’, referring to the examiner herself. As has been noted, in a cleft sentence “the highlighted element has the full implication of contrastive focus: the rest of the clause is taken as given, and a contrast is inferred with other items which might have filled the focal or ‘hinge’ position in the sentence” (Quirk *et al.* 1992: 951). Cleft sentences are particularly suitable to express emphasis in writing where, in the absence of the intonation clue, they allow one to mark the information focus syntactically. Therefore the examiner’s choice of using a cleft here, instead of simply resorting to contrastive intonation, is *per se* meaningful. It suggests a willingness to unambiguously make clear that the wrong framing of the issue is being blamed on the student, and not the examiner, who was simply pretending to accept the answer in order to build on it. In this way she re-establishes her professional identity as an expert in the field, distancing herself from the propositional content of the utterance at line 39.

Pseudo-clefts are definitely more frequent than clefts in the present sample, confirming their mode-dependent distribution as observed in several studies (cf. Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas 2005: 56). However, contrary to Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas’ findings (i.e. lack of pseudo-cleft in NNS presentations), in the present data pseudo-clefts are predominantly used by NNS. This could be a result of the overrepresentation of NNS in the corpus, but another explanation may also be related to pragmatic and typological reasons (see below).

Example (3) follows the ordinary cleft pattern, even though it deviates from the norm, as the verb ‘to be’ is missing.

```
(3) 026 S13: no what I mean that the auto-antibody might be
      027         either trying to do its normal function which is
      028         [eliminating
```

Again, the cleft sentence co-occurs with expressions signalling a failure in the communication flow, in this case the negative adverb “no”, followed by the metadiscursive expression “I mean”, introducing a reformulation of a previous statement which had not been felicitous. As shown by the concordance output in Figure 1, pseudo-clefts often co-occur with indicators of a crisis in the communicative exchange.

FIGURE 1  
Cleft sentences

N Concordance  
 1 7: Yes. 123 E1: Ok, this is what a CTL cell recognise. This  
 2 M.? 359 E1: Yes this is what I'm saying saying(.) for me  
 3 fferent from kar 125 that's what I'm asking (.) Some partner  
 4 which microhms 026 S13: no what I mean that the auto-antibo  
 5 or [tha 253 S13: [yes oh (.) what I remember that it is very  
 6 .) but in this case, is not what (.) (I saw 133 you think) 1  
 7 gn antigen (.) this is 126 (what i- sorry) 127 E1: It's not=  
 8 o not do it. 199 Anyway (.) what I was just saying that it's  
 9 s 194 in the medulla and so what really happens is that 195  
 10 n with low avidity actually what the TCR 244 combine to is n  
 11 osition 334 E1: Yes this is what we are trying to do but we  
 12 1: (.) 407 E2: the effect is what we want, the effect 408 S1:  
 13 in 411 order to be mild old what we want to do is either 412  
 14 ic(.) type of tumor, is not what you (.) actually 106 w- we'  
 15 9 E2: Ok (.) Ok (.) this is what you should be said (.) 259  
 16 le the antigens) is that 109 who have three main antigen pat  
 17 tive function and that's 0/5 why we have multiple diseases c

Such indicators include different expressions and structures, some of which are explicitly adversative, while others take their oppositional value from the context: metadiscursive expressions with verbs of saying (“What I’m saying”, “What I’m asking”, “What I mean”, lines 2-4), negation (“Is not what” lines 6 and 14), concessive structures (“Yes...but” line 11), adverbs with an adversative function (“Really”, line 9; “Actually”, lines 10 and 14) and deontic modals (“What you should”, line 15).

Cleft sentences normally start with *wh*-words but other structures can also be used. A case in point is the use of “expressions with ‘thing’” (Swan 1980: 107), as illustrated in example (4).

(4) 224 E1: How you arrive to this position of the basomembre  
 225 S10: Ok in it's first of all we have eh eh the imbition  
 226 of eh antibodies  
 227 E1: Sorry(.) we have the immune complex that is  
 228positing on the surface and **the first thing it**  
 229 **adapts is imbition** I-I-I'm not(.) I don't understand

Here the pseudo cleft places emphasis on “the first thing” and once more the use of such marked structure is functional to correcting

wrong information. At line 225 the student starts to describe a process by saying that the first thing is the “imbition of the antibodies”, a formulation that is not satisfactory for the examiner who corrects it (“Sorry ...” 227-229). By using a pseudo-cleft sentence, the examiner highlights “it adapts”, preceded not by a *wh*-word, as would commonly be the case with pseudo-clefts, but by an expression which mimics that used by the student (‘the first thing’), thus enhancing the relevance of his own remark in relation to the student’s statement. These strategies, together with the full contrastive implication carried by cleft sentences, reinforce the relation of opposition between the student’s wrong formulation and its correct version produced by the examiner.

In some cases, the cleft structure can depart even more from the prototypical *wh*-form. In (5) the *wh*-word is replaced by a lexical word (“a reaction”), which does not have the formulaicity of “expression with *thing*”, as discussed in the previous example, but follows the same pattern.

(5)18 S1: Ok, the rejection of the transplant it's a  
19 reaction that we don't want () uhm:

The structure in this case is that of the reversed pseudo-cleft (X is WH-p’), as is made clear if ‘a reaction’ is replaced with ‘what’/‘something’: A rejection of the transplant is WHAT/SOMETHING we don’t want.

Finally, coming to the last feature considered, extraposition is quite frequent in the corpus, with two recurring patterns: *what does it mean that*\_CLAUSE; *is/was it possible*\_CLAUSE, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

FIGURE 2  
Extraposition, selected lines (what\_does\_it\_mean)

N	Concordance
6	membrane= 172 E1: =What does it mean lyse the membrane? I me
7	8 S7: =Ya. 177 E1: what does it mean lyse the membrane? So i
8	1 by the 208 E1: [ what does it mean not functional? 209 S13
9	cells (2.0) 96 E1: What does it mean the () tumor cells 97 S
10	here's any= 25 E1: What does it mean they activate informati
11	t doesn't 90 exist what does it mean this epsilon put here?
12	o 318 other I mean what does it means to have good and many



FIGURE 3  
Extrapolation, selected lines (possible)

N Concordance  
 13 this is my ahhhh 358 S10: Is it possible I do it with profes  
 14 1: So my opinion was how was it possible that in the 341 stu  
 15 16 to be responsible< how is it possible that the 317 mechan  
 16 lways the same so 329 how is it possible(.) that you didn't  
 17 If you want I-I think(.) is it possible to try 350 to answe  
 18 c 185 E1: [Kh and that's why it's 186 interesting to know ho  
 19 is another place where it's it's 77 possible for the B cell

In all these cases extrapolation occurs in interrogative propositions, and almost exclusively in examiner turns. The first pattern confirms what has been observed so far, i.e. that the need for information manipulation arises particularly when there is a problem, and most often when the examiner does not fully accept the students' contribution. Hence the examiner requests a clarification of meaning, with *it* functioning as a place-holder for the students' expression that needs clarifying or correcting altogether, as shown in more detail in excerpt (6).

(6) 165 S7: It penetrates (3.0) so that, wait. The perforins are  
 166 first released in the synapse between the target cell and  
 168 the CD8 T cell and then the (4.0) perforins (6.0).  
 169 E1: [I mean  
 170 S7: [Can cause cell, (2.0) not cell lysing, but it can lyse  
 171 the membrane=  
 172 E1: =What does it mean lyse the membrane? I mean the membrane  
 173 is made by lipids=

The second extrapolation pattern, the one with 'possible', is also related to answers, with some failure on the part of the student to convey the expected information, indicating a certain degree of irritation on the part of the examiner, as illustrated by excerpt (7):

(7) 305 E1: Who is producing CCL1 in this situation?  
 306 S10: Eh:: B eh:: (4)  
 307 E1: DO you know that each chemokine is produced by a cell?  
 308 S10: Yes

309 E1: Ok(.) shouldn't you justify the use of chemokine  
 310 in this situation if you want to propose it as  
 311 someone that's playing the role of mechanism?  
 312 (15) I don't think the mechanism of hypersensitivity  
 313 is clear to you if I must say because chemokine  
 314 is not involved at all in this situation not they  
 315 are not good chemo-factor but they are >not [there  
 316 to be responsible< **how is it possible that the**  
 317 **mechanism one of the 4 hypersensitivity is not**  
 318 **clear to you how is it possible?** I mean if

In other cases, the extraposition used by NNS seems to be due to 'interference' from Italian, the native language of most of the speakers in this corpus, where possibility is often expressed periphrastically, rather than with modal verbs, as is most typically the case in English. Examples 8-10 illustrate this point, with the modal version inserted in square brackets under the speaker's use of extraposition.

(8) 358 S10: **Is it possible** I do [L with professor M.?  
 [May I do it with professor M.]

(9) 349 E1: If you want I-I think(.) **is it possible** to try  
 [you can try]  
 350 to answer the question in this situation and say  
 351 what comes out

(10) 75 S8: [No  
 76 E1: Outside eh where? Where is another place where it's it's  
 77 **possible** for the B cell to initiate activation?  
 [the B cell can initiate activation]  
 78 S8: No ()  
 79 E1: And in the

A last point to be made about extraposition is the sub-standard use of this structure by NNS, alongside the standard use. While the standard extraposition has it that the pro-form replaces a clause (e.g. in "It surprises me that you don't write", *it* replaces the clause subject "That you don't write"), in the sub-standard use, the pro-

form replaces a noun phrase, producing a clause with a double subject. Table 4 shows all the occurrences of extraposition in NNS turns (with identical ones listed just once), divided into standard and non-standard uses.

TABLE 4  
Standard vs non-standard uses of extraposition

Clause extraposition	Phrase extraposition
is it clear that B cells do not need ...	is it clear my question?
it doesn't matter it's a tissue related antigen	it is also possible an immune deficiency what does it mean not functional?
What does it mean lyse the membrane?	What does it mean the () tumour cells?
What does it mean they activate information?	what does it mean this epsilon put here?
what does it means to have good and many tumour antigens?	
Is it possible I do it with professor M.?	
how was it possible that ...?	
is it possible to try to answer the question?	
Where is another place where it's it's possible for the B cell to initiate activation?	

The substandard use can be partly explained as another example of interference from Italian, where it is perfectly acceptable to postpone the subject, and indeed failing to do so would in some cases produce very unnatural utterances. "Is it clear my question", for example, is an obvious transposition of "è chiara la mia domanda", just like "it's possible an immune deficiency" comes from "è possibile un'immuno-deficienza", and "what does it mean not functional?" from "cosa vuol dire 'non funzionale'?". The Italian construction, with the subject in final position, places emphasis on *it*, thus satisfying the speaker's rhetorical need to draw attention to the important part of the message (newsworthy information). In the case of subjects expressed by clauses, the difference between Italian and English is concealed, so to speak, while with phrases used as subjects the difference becomes evident.

On the other hand, interference from Italian might indulge a need that is also felt by native speakers, as the non-standard extraposition is equally used in informal spoken English: “A special type of equivalence involves placing a pro-form earlier in the sentence while the noun phrase to which it refers is placed finally. This construction is restricted to informal spoken English, and is considered by some as substandard, though it is in fact very common” (Quirk *et al.* 1992:632).

#### 4. Conclusion

The main finding of this study is that there are indeed differences in the ways NS and NNS deal with the manipulation of information structure. The analysis of four main linguistic structures (active/passive, cleft constructions, extraposition, and existential ‘*there*’) revealed that manipulation occurs almost exclusively in non-native talk, with the exception of the passive, which NS and NNS use with similar frequency. The use of existential ‘*there*’ was on the other hand not distributed evenly between the two groups: NNS used it less frequently than NS, possibly because of a difference in the perception of the formality of the occasion. Italian students (as well as students from different countries that share similar academic traditions) would have been socialised throughout their educational careers to recognise oral examinations as a formal occasion, one in which they want to show they have good command of the register. Hence, they might judge existential ‘*there*’ as too simple a structure, appropriate for colloquial speech, but not for oral exams, where more formal forms would appear more appropriate. This is all the more likely if one considers that the register of Italian scientific discourse is typically higher than its English counterpart (Laviosa 2008: 120). NS students are likely to be less familiar with oral assessment in higher education (Bowles, 2017a) and as such may not feel the urgency to use a very formal register. Furthermore, their higher language competence allows for a greater variety in the choices of vocabulary (as confirmed by their higher standardised type-token ratio); NNS may stick more closely to the language used in the textbooks they studied. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that in NS turns use of existential ‘*there*’ is often associated with other informal linguistic features, such as a lack of verb/subject agreement.

For the remaining linguistic structures, namely clefts, pseudo-clefts and extraposition, results show that when they do occur it is almost without exception in NNS turns. As previously noted, these structures mostly serve the purpose of modulating emphasis. Their use by NNS is largely limited to a renegotiation of contents, made necessary by a failure in communication or a necessity to reinstate responsibility for a certain statement. Indeed, their distribution in the corpus shows that the need for such renegotiation is much more common in NNS turns, pointing to the fact that NNS produce communication failures and misunderstandings more often than NS in this exam setting. The examples of extraposition also occur particularly often in the case of a critical moment, especially in those cases where the examiner rejects a student's statement. However, it should also be noted that the use of extraposition by Italian students can be considered as a case of 'interference' from their L1.

Summing up, the difference in the way NS and NNS in our corpus manipulate the information structure mostly lies in the use of strategies to modulate emphasis as a means to repair failures in communication, which normally arise at the level of content. This suggests that the use of such structures with communication failures (i.e. partly or completely incorrect answers) is genre-specific for EMI oral exams, where the correct answer (or an acceptable version of it) is often co-constructed by the examiner and the examinee, through an extended negotiation of meaning. On the other hand, successful answers do not require much manipulation of information structure. This is probably due to two factors: first, the fact that the students' knowledge is checked either by eliciting very specific answers, with much remaining unsaid thanks to the extent of common ground knowledge shared by the participants. Second, in more open-ended questions, both coherence and salience are catered for by adherence to linear textual patterns based on cause and effect or chronological relations (Bowles 2017b).

These results show a need for more research in the area of oral examinations that, on the one hand, tackles how students from different cultural backgrounds may conceptualise and understand the setting of oral examinations differently (with different outcomes in terms of linguistic behaviours); and on the other hand, investigates what kind of toll (if any) the need for frequent repairing and renegotiation of content can take on NNS students' performances.

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