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Dealing with language issues in English-medium instruction at university: a comprehensive approach

Aintzane Doiz  and David Lasagabaster 

Department of English Studies, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Spain

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At a time when EMI (English-medium instruction) is considered to play a key role in the internationalization process of many higher education institutions, the articles included in this special issue are focused on the role of language(s) in EMI settings at different levels of action, so that the true complexity of EMI teaching can be unearthed and analysed. The contributions portray a reality in which language issues are not constrained to the integration of content and language in EMI courses (Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013; Valcke and Wilkinson 2017; Wilkinson 2013), traditionally the main concern of applied linguists, but include other issues such as EMI programme development and the role assumed by stakeholders in regards to language. In sum, the articles reveal the need to approach the EMI phenomena, and specifically language issues in EMI in a more integrated and comprehensive way (Dafouz and Smit 2020).

The volume thus brings together the current work of well-established researchers in the field of EMI from different perspectives. Specifically, focusing on different EMI contexts at university level, the six papers that make up this special issue will (1) present frameworks focused on the importance of language issues in EMI programmes or courses, (2) foster reflection among EMI practitioners to promote professional growth, including their stand on language, (3) examine the role that different practices and norms play in EMI classes and how translanguaging practices across institutional and disciplinary contexts are perceived, (4) analyse students' perceptions about the EMI lecturer's desired qualities, such as whether they need to be native speakers of English, (5) provide support to the spread of technology in EMI courses to cater for those students who otherwise would have limited access to instruction in a foreign language, and (6) foster the complex interaction between language, academic culture and local perspectives to support the internationalization of higher education institutions. Last but not least, the combination of these objectives will hopefully help to (7) lay the foundations for quality EMI teaching at university.

The different contributions reflect the three levels at which the drivers of the spread of EMI operate: the individual level, the EMI classroom and the institutional/global level as part of the internationalization process, in other words, the driving forces at the micro, meso and macro levels. The first two articles (Macaro's and Farrell's) are encompassed in the individual or micro level of EMI, as both share the same starting point, namely that teacher preparation, reflection and professional development are critical steps in the implementation of EMI (Camarata and Ó Ceallaigh 2018). Both articles are thus focused on the EMI teacher and their need to understand the connection between language and content as a key pedagogical asset when teaching through a foreign language (Morton 2016). The contributions by Kuteeva and Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt belong at the meso level, in which the students' interactions with the teacher and among themselves and reflections about language issues based on their experiences in their EMI classes go beyond the individual level. The two final papers deal with language issues at the macro level, as the role to be played by technology in the case of Helm's paper and that by educational developers in Dafouz,

Haines and Pagèze's paper transcends the limits of the EMI class and provides a wider perspective of the EMI experience. In particular, educational developers work at the institutional level, whereas the implementation of e-learning follows global trends in educational innovations.

At the micro level, since one of the objectives of EMI programmes is aimed at improving students' foreign language competence while learning content delivered in English, EMI teachers should ideally have expertise in content and language instruction, as they should help to develop their students' disciplinary literacy (Airey 2016). This statement is supported by research which reveals that a content-based EMI model is not as effective as an integrated content and language approach when it comes to fostering students' linguistic gains in university EMI settings (Ament and Pérez-Vidal 2015), while the latter offers some focus on form and language guidance that benefits students' linguistic development.

The literature has also revealed that the lack of EMI's effectiveness in the promotion of language learning may stem from the fact that language issues play second fiddle in EMI classes, as content teachers do not consider language within their remit. Content teachers view themselves as experts in their field of specialization (be it maths, physics, history or sculpture) but not as language teachers (Airey 2012; Costa 2012; Lasagabaster 2018). Therefore, language and content integration should be explored in more depth in order to pinpoint the key drivers of successful foreign language-medium instruction at the class level (Cammarata and Ó Ceallaigh 2018).

The need to pay more attention to subject-specific language is also underpinned by the results obtained by Rose et al. (2019). These authors drew two interesting conclusions from their study. Firstly, that lower proficiency students need more targeted language support if they are to succeed on EMI courses, and secondly, that, although language proficiency was a predictor of academic success (25.7% of the variance in content score was explained by a model containing only English proficiency scores), academic language skill or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) scores explained a significantly higher 36.5% of the variance. That is, the prediction of content scores was stronger when only ESP scores were considered, which could be interpreted as strong evidence of the importance of academic language proficiency in EMI settings. Therefore, it is essential that EMI teachers help their students to deal with the vocabulary, syntax and discourse features of their specializations, so that students are able to use words with the particular meaning given in each specialization in the right manner. However, research reveals that while EMI lecturers draw attention to vocabulary, grammatical and discourse features are largely neglected (Basturkmen and Shackelford 2015; Costa 2012). As Basturkmen (2018, 697) puts it, they tend to construe learning of disciplinary register to 'learning specialized vocabulary.'

Another issue concerns the training and accreditation of EMI teachers provided by universities. Although the majority of universities provide training in communicative skills, in a survey of 70 European universities O'Dowd (2018) showed that CLIL methodology is largely overlooked and EMI teachers are not usually trained to linguistically scaffold their lectures so that EMI students can successfully cope with subject-specific vocabulary, technical terms and specialized discourse. These results confirm Dafouz and Smit's (2020) claim that disciplinary language development is usually ranked low in teacher education and account for EMI teachers' dissatisfaction with the quality of support their higher education institutions offer when faced with the many challenges that EMI poses. As a result, as stated by Airey (2016), it is relevant that language demands derived from EMI from a pedagogical perspective are addressed as for 'EMI teachers need help with carving out a different pedagogy, one that will enable the learners to access the subject curriculum more effectively' (Macaro 2018, 259).

With this background in mind, in the opening article Macaro tackles the language-related pedagogical complexities by providing examples taken from CLIL classes in different disciplines. Under the adoption of a broad – and 'deliberately provocative definition' of EMI (author's own words) designed to capture the broad spectrum of educational settings in which EMI is implemented, his article focuses on the role of language, including the students' L1, in EMI and places special emphasis on a key issue, namely the predominant view of applied linguists (rather than that of content teachers)

when analysing the EMI phenomenon. It is a thought-provoking manuscript that paves the way to the topics to be analysed by the other contributors. Macaro raises very relevant issues (e.g. Are EMI content teachers aware of their students' vocabulary knowledge?) and poses important questions (e.g. What do we mean by vocabulary knowledge? What is a keyword and does it vary depending on the teacher concerned? When and how should students' L1 be used in EMI classes?) that often cross the minds of EMI practitioners.

In his contribution Farrell underscores the need to foster reflective practice among EMI teachers as a means to work on professional development and reflect on EMI practice, including many of the issues put forward by Macaro. Professional development through reflective practice has hardly been analysed in EMI literature, since research has mainly tackled language results, and content learning to a lesser degree. Farrell's chapter on 'professional development through reflective practice for English-Medium Instructions (EMI) teachers' capitalizes on the teachers' need for professional development as well as their fear of the detrimental effects that teaching through the medium of the L2 may have on the students (Macaro, this issue) and puts forward a framework for reflecting on teacher practice. The two-step framework lays out the theoretical foundations of the model by describing the stages of reflection designed to encourage EMI teachers to analyse their philosophy, beliefs, theories and practices, and then discusses the tools necessary to accomplish reflection. This is a holistic approach, which encompasses both practice and the EMI teacher who is doing the practice. It is an innovative proposal in which teachers from many different contexts will be able to satisfy their concern about the lack of guidelines to face the EMI challenge.

Kuteeva's and Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa Schmidt's papers belong in the meso level. EMI teachers, students and researchers need to become aware of linguistic decisions that need to be made, such as the choice of the English to be used (British English, American English, or English as a *lingua franca*?), the appropriateness of using students' language repertoire (L1, L2, LX) through translanguaging practices, and the impact that such decisions may have. These are the issues that Kuteeva examines by means of interview data gathered from local and international students. The author provides an analysis of three different conceptualizations of English in EMI (English as standard, as a *lingua franca*, or as part of translanguaging practices) and aims at capturing the interplay between them. The opinions on the role of English voiced by the students uncover the existence of group dynamics, social integration, power relations and learning, and once again underlie the importance of language in EMI.

Using English as the medium of instruction brings about a more onerous teaching and learning process for many, and 'is in turn equated with greater use of English by non-native speakers' (Linn 2016, v), which brings the native *versus* non-native speaker debate to the fore. This is precisely what Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt analyse in the contribution entitled 'EMI lecturers in international universities: Is a native/non-native English-speaking background relevant?' These authors delve into the competencies that EMI lecturers should have according to students' opinion, a question of utmost interest at a time when the number of EMI programmes is mushrooming in universities the world over. The study was undertaken in a multilingual and multicultural setting (Israel) which adds yet another layer of complexity to the data gathered. Interestingly, students' description of the EMI lecturers' desired attributes brings to light a new construct that goes beyond the concept of the native speaker and is particular to the EMI context (see also Doiz and Lasagabaster 2018).

The differences in the results obtained in Kuteeva's and Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt's studies regarding the student views on the use of the L1 (which may surface as translanguaging practices) and English underscore the importance of the context. The former is characterized by the presence of 15 L1s in the classrooms taught in English in a context where the country's L1, Swedish, may not be all the students' L1, whereas in the case of the latter, the students L1 is either Hebrew or Arabic, depending of the group under study. Yet, interestingly enough, the students shared similar expectations regarding the traits that the teacher should have.

The last two contributions take the macro perspective as a basis. Helm tackles the impact of digital technology on higher education institutions' internalization process in general and its application for

teaching and professional development in EMI contexts in particular, an issue hitherto largely ignored in EMI. In fact, despite the ever-increasing use of technology in teaching in the last decades, it is striking that we did not find any article or chapter on the impact of technology in a selection of recent edited books and journal special issues on EMI at university level (Dimova, Hultgren, and Jensen 2015; Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013; Henriksen, Holmen, and Kling 2019; Lanvers and Hultgren 2018; Moore, Rubio-Alcalá, and Pavón 2018; Pecorari and Malmström 2018; Ruiz de Zarobe and Lyster 2018; Valcke and Wilkinson 2017). Therefore, Helm's article can be regarded as groundbreaking. The author shows how the general trend to find the one-size fits all solution to the complexities that the use of digital technology in EMI entails needs to be critically approached, since a simplistic narrative of the problem is far from helpful. Other issues that are dealt with are the dangers of the spread of English as a global language which is inextricably linked to innovations in technology and the capitalization of the use of digital technologies by Anglophone countries.

As regards the article by Dafouz, Haines and Pagèze, we would like to quote Schmidt-Unterberger (2018, 535), who points out that 'a language-conscious approach to English-medium education obviously requires an increased awareness among programme designers and teaching staff for the pedagogical and linguistic implications of EMI.' When different authors refer to the importance of language in EMI, the onus is usually placed on teachers, but as the quotation above indicates, other stakeholders should be considered, as they also have a role to play. The article by Dafouz, Haines and Pagèze focuses on one such type of stakeholder, namely the educational developers, a pawn in the EMI board that is often not considered, and whose role goes beyond that of supporters of language issues as they are in charge of helping teachers with the delivery of international programmes and the design and implementation of innovative teaching practices. Drawing from a baseline survey, in this article the authors use the ROAD-MAPPING framework (Dafouz and Smit 2020) to analyse educational developers' views and roles within the complex process of internationalization, while highlighting that the consideration of other EMI stakeholders would undoubtedly redound to a more systematic and efficient design of EMI programmes. In addition, the paper underlines the importance of the setting in the internationalization process of higher education institutions and notes the existence of differences in the discourses at a national and global level.

In the epilogue, Airey provides an insightful critical evaluation of each of the chapters and puts forward the notion of disciplinary literacy as a means to direct future research on EMI. In addition, he underlines the need to drive research on EMI by disciplinary rather than linguistic interests, as the latter have dominated the field so far.

The publication of this special issue is particularly motivated by the need to provide a comprehensive approach to the EMI phenomenon that brings together teacher reflection, an in-depth analysis of the role of languages in EMI, students' perceptions and viewpoints, the potential entailed by the use of technology, and the necessary involvement of different stakeholders apart from teachers and students. Not only will all the previous help to improve the quality of EMI courses, but hopefully it will open new venues for research and will also contribute to underpinning universities' internationalization process, as the latter seems to be ineluctably linked to the increased use of English. However, as Dimova, Hultgren, and Jensen (2015) rightly point out:

One of the most remarkable facts about EMI is that, though striving towards internationalization, it is almost entirely a purely national endeavour, not only in terms of discussions and implementation, policies and attitudes (e.g. to the risk of domain loss), but certainly in terms of the research that has tried to cast light on these issues. (319)

This is not the case of the contributions put together in this volume, as their approach was far from being limited to the national sphere and the authors aimed at catering to the needs of EMI contexts in any part of the world. We believe that this special issue responds to a widely recognized need for an updated knowledge base and innovative tools in the implementation of EMI worldwide, which is why we are very grateful to all the contributors.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Aintzane Doiz is Associate Professor at the Department of English and German Studies and Translation and Interpretation, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Spain. Her research includes EMI (English-Medium Instruction), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), and motivation. She has published widely in international journals, books and edited books. Among others, she has co-edited *English-medium Instruction at Universities: Global Challenges* (Multilingual Matters, 2013) and *Motivation and Foreign Language Learning: From Theory to Practice* (John Benjamins, 2014). Her research interests also include cognitive semantics. She lectures on semantic analysis and the didactics of language at the MA programme Language Acquisition in Multilingual Settings (UPV/EHU).

David Lasagabaster is Professor at the Department of English and German Studies and Translation and Interpretation, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Spain. His research revolves around EMI (English-Medium Instruction), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), attitudes and motivation, and multilingualism. He has published widely in international journals (*Applied Linguistics*, *Language Teaching*, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *The Modern Language Journal*, *Studies in Higher Education*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Language and Education*, *TESOL Quarterly*, etc.), books and edited books. Among others, he has co-edited *English-medium Instruction at Universities: Global Challenges* (Multilingual Matters, 2013) and *Motivation and Foreign Language Learning: From Theory to Practice* (John Benjamins, 2014).

ORCID

Aintzane Doiz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4818-6495>

David Lasagabaster  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7750-2314>

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