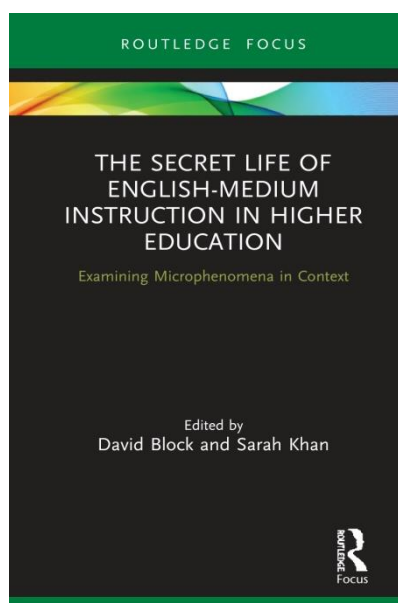


BOOK REVIEW



UNVEILING ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

David Block and Sarah Khan (Eds.).

THE SECRET LIFE OF ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION. EXAMINING MICROPHENOMENA IN CONTEXT (2021), London/New York: Routledge. 148 pp., ISBN: 978-0-3674-3772-5 (HBK); 978-1-0030-0566-7 (EPub).

346

The 21st century has witnessed a major shift in the way English is used in education and its dominance as the global academic lingua franca. As Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, and Pitzl (2006: 3) note, “English impinges on everybody’s life in Europe, in many different ways”; hence the need to prioritise English in higher education.

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is defined by Dearden (2015: 2) as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” and it involves the teaching of specialist content through English. This book, part of the *Routledge Focus on English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education* series, is a timely contribution to the rapidly expanding literature on EMI in higher education. As a whole it makes exceedingly valuable contributions by addressing EMI from a micro-phenomena perspective in a South-European context and offering examples to those involved in EMI implementation.

Composed of six chapters, the book explores EMI in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects at two Catalan universities in a context where English is used in addition to two local languages (Catalan and Spanish). The volume aims to bridge the gap in EMI research by studying it from a micro level, using an ethnographic approach with data collected from multiple sources, including questionnaires, interviews, audio and video recordings of classes, audio logs

produced by both lecturers and students, policy documents, course materials, exam papers, students' written work, lecturers' PowerPoint slides, and evaluation rubrics.

In Chapter 1 David Block and Sarah Khan set the scene and provide essential background information about the research setting, emphasising the defining traits of the Southern European (SE) context, where EMI began later than elsewhere in Europe. In this context, EMI has been under-researched, and concerns have been raised about lecturers and students having sufficient English proficiency for EMI to be a viable alternative (Aguilar, 2017; Dafouz, 2018). This chapter is an excellent exercise for readers to further their understanding of this EMI context. Furthermore, while a lot of research has been conducted on EMI in Northern European Higher Education (HE), there is a research gap that the authors have successfully addressed by highlighting what makes EMI distinctive in the South, thus contributing to shaking off the "Northern" outlook that still prevails in EMI research. Next, Block and Khan focus on the bigger picture to describe the processes of internationalisation and "Englishisation" in HE in the early 1990s as the backdrop against which the adoption of EMI emerged in response to the pressures and demands of neoliberalism in economies around the world. As the authors point out, the marketisation of HE benefits universities as it can enhance academic staff's research capacity and the quality of teaching. Students also benefit from study abroad and exchange programmes where they can expand their horizons and gain quality educational experiences. Other positive effects include the fact that universities earn more money and that gains to academic staff are factored into accountability regimes. Nevertheless, Block and Khan also bring to the fore the negative effects of the marketisation of education; that is, "internationalised HE institutions are, ultimately, highly complicit with the spread and imposition of neoliberal values and practices" (p. 22). They point out that something similar occurs with the "Englishisation" phenomenon, which is complacently accepted to be here to stay, as English is the language university students, faculty members and administration personnel need to succeed in a globalising world. Nevertheless, English poses a threat to local languages and cultures – the danger of "domain loss" – and that should not be hidden.

The authors' attention shifts to the definition of EMI and how it relates to a more recent coinage, English Medium Education (EME). EMI is thought to be a more suitable label for this research context, although it is noted that the term "education" encompasses a wider range of curricular activities, more appropriately in many contexts (Dafouz & Smit, 2020). Background information is provided about the two research sites – the Universitat de Lleida (UdL) and the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), and the chapter finishes with an outline and brief summary of chapters two to five.

In Chapter 2, Elisabet Arnó-Macià and Marta Aguilar-Pérez's in-depth study focuses on stakeholders' beliefs about an engineering course at the UPC entitled "Advanced Electronics", which is offered, simultaneously, in both Catalan and English. Given that both lecturers and students can choose the language of instruction, Arnó-Macià and Aguilar methodically examine participants' interests and reasons for their

choice. The authors draw on questionnaire and interview data to examine how participants experience the course. They also delve into how language mediates disciplinary knowledge and how EMI is implemented to emphasise that the lack of collaboration between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and EMI teachers throughout the course means that difficulty levels could be deterring students from signing up in this EMI course. Arnó-Macià and Aguilar offer far-reaching conclusions in their study. On the one hand, the need for planning and systematicity exists. On the other, more attention needs to be paid to language in the EMI classroom in a context where its main driver in the Catalan context is precisely helping students to (i) learn the disciplinary language (referred to as “CLIL-ised EMI” by Moncada-Comas & Block, 2019), and (ii) overcome EMI challenges by providing scaffolding for content and disciplinary language learning.

In Chapter 3, Balbina Moncada-Comas draws on American sociologist Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theory of backstage and frontstage interaction to analyse a brief videotaped interaction between two students and a lecturer in an EMI engineering class at UdL. Moncada-Comas’s multimodal analysis documents two students’ backstage interactions with each other that display disengagement and use of L1. In sharp contrast, in frontstage they show engagement in interactions with their lecturer and conduct them in English. The study concludes that students adopt different subject positions depending on whether they are “being a student” or “doing education”. In backstage interaction, students convey their ambivalence towards EMI, their general lack of enthusiasm and an ironic distance from “doing education” through gestures, eye contact, gaze and facial expressions. Participants’ peer-to-peer multimodal interaction helps them scaffold content learning in L1 and thus pedagogical implications include the need to promote pair and group work activities in EMI as well as the role the use of L1 could play in harnessing content learning. The chapter ends by drawing attention to the theatrical nature of EMI in a context where education could have been more naturally and effectively conducted in the students’ and lecturer’s L1.

In Chapter 4, Maria Sabaté-Dalmau also adopts the Goffmanian backstage-frontstage construct within a critical sociolinguistics perspective that defines the conceptualisation of English as an academic asset and an employability requirement (Bocanegra-Valle, 2020) influenced by neoliberal language-in-education policies. Sabaté-Dalmau shows how a lecturer and her students display compliance with disciplinary content transmission via English-only in frontstage and adopt English-user academic identities in a biotechnology course at the UdL. This contrasts with backstage resistance and breaching English-only policy, in what she calls “whispers of resistance”, with agents interacting in Spanish and Catalan. Her study unravels how agents adhere to neoliberal beliefs and calls for the need for alternative multilingual practices based on more balanced, realistic language-in-education pedagogies.

In Chapter 5, David Block and Guzman Mancho-Barés are interested in the extent to which two STEM lecturers at the UdL, an agronomy engineer and an infrastructure engineer, contradict the pervasive “I am not an English teacher” self-

positioning, which is common across a range of EMI contexts (Airey, 2012; Block & Moncada-Comas, 2019). The authors focus on the specific case of rubrics used to evaluate students' oral presentations given on the last day of courses taught by the two lecturers, as they examine and analyse the rubrics the lecturers employed, and their explanations of the origin and the content of the rubrics. Finally, researchers observe lecturers providing feedback to their students after their in-class presentations and they highlight that, on occasions, EMI lecturers act as English language teachers despite their continued claims to the contrary. Inconsistencies between the rubrics and the feedback lecturers prepared for students are thus identified. This is an in-depth study of evaluation rubrics for students' spoken production in EMI. It shows EMI lecturers' lack of awareness of their students' need for further guidance on how to conduct oral presentations, and their refusal to acknowledge their role in assisting their students. This refusal to engage in English-language teaching practices are inconsistent with the expectation that students should produce effective oral presentations that align with the items in the evaluation rubrics. EMI lecturers prefer to restrict their role to teaching their respective disciplinary fields and their refusal to "teach English" deprives students of the possibility of using the language of the disciplines. These findings suggest that ESP professionals could be of great assistance to support students' needs and shake off lecturers' perceptions of EMI contexts, where time should be devoted to developing student proficiency in both oral and written communication within their disciplines.

Finally, Sarah Khan's lucid concluding chapter brings together the content of the four preceding chapters, highlighting emerging themes and challenges that can be relevant to EMI in HE around the world, offering excellent curricular and methodological recommendations that may have been overlooked while reading these chapters. She begins by identifying that the implementation of EMI has been associated with the perpetuation of social inequalities on a global scale and with the idea that not all stakeholders access EMI with the same academic and linguistic backgrounds – for instance, students who come with a slight advantage based on their social background tend to choose EMI because they have a higher perceived English proficiency. EMI lecturer self-selection of volunteering for EMI may also be affected in the same way. Thus, social inequalities may determine the kind of lecturers that enroll in EMI and foster elitism and harmful competition. Measures that Khan believes could bridge this widening gap in EMI include further incentives that consider students' class background, fostering students' positive self-efficacy beliefs and creating fairer institutional policies and more equal staff training opportunities and development. The pressure of neoliberal economics on EMI has fuelled an English-only norm to language as unveiled by Sabaté-Dalmau in Chapter 4. Yet this state of affairs, adds Khan, could be counterbalanced by fostering plurilingualism in the EMI classroom. Another emerging theme, already raised by Moncada-Comas in Chapter 3, is that multimodal communication with its array of non-verbal forms requires further research to inform how social dynamics could be harnessed to improve the EMI learning environment.

This book is a valuable resource for scholars interested in EMI in HE in general, for reflective practitioners in EMI in HE, for ESP/EAP professionals and for MA and PhD students in applied linguistics programmes. Overall, the volume provides exceptional insight into how EMI is implemented in “less than ideal circumstances in Spain and in Catalonia” (p. 20), helping us gain a deeper understanding of EMI at the grassroots level. The research-driven recommendations are of great relevance for policy makers and educational and curriculum developers, as they are for all stakeholders in EMI to achieve a more organised and rigorous implementation as well as to ensure quality learning and teaching practices. This unique research field is a key contribution to the advancement of further collaboration between ESP/EAP professionals and EMI stakeholders. It calls for the need to provide ESP courses to support students’ professional communication skills and Continuing Professional Development training to support EMI practitioners in the development of their language awareness and pedagogical practices.

[Review submitted 5 May 2021]

[Revised version received 10 May 2021]

[Accepted for publication 12 May 2021]

Reviewed by **ANA ISABEL FERNÁNDEZ CÓRDOBA**

Department of Subject-Specific Education

Faculty of Education and Psychology

University of Girona

Girona, Spain

ana.fernandez@udg.edu

350

References

- Aguilar, M. (2017). Engineering lecturers’ views on CLIL and EMI. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 20(6), 722-735.
- Airey, J. (2012). “I don’t teach language”: The linguistic attitudes of physics lecturers in Sweden. *AILA Review*, 25, 64-79.
- Bocanegra-Valle, A. (Ed.) (2020). *Applied linguistics and knowledge transfer: Employability, internationalisation and social challenges*. Peter Lang.
- Block, D., & Moncada-Comas, B. (2019). English-medium instruction in higher education and the ELT gaze: STEM lecturers’ self-positioning as NOT English language teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1689917>
- Dafouz, E. (2018). English-medium instruction in multilingual university settings: An opportunity for developing language awareness. In P. Garret, & J. M. Cots (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language awareness* (pp. 170-185). Routledge.
- Dafouz, E., & Smit, U. (2020). *ROAD-MAPPING English medium education in the internationalised university*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dearden, J. (2015). *English as a medium of instruction: A growing global phenomenon*. British Council.

- Moncada-Comas, B., & Block, D. (2019). CLIL-ised EMI in practice: Issues arising. *The Language Learning Journal*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1660704>
- Seidlhofer, B., Breiteneder, A., & Pitzl, M. L. (2006). English as lingua franca in Europe: Challenges for applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 26, 3-34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719050600002X>