

DISPELLING “LANGUAGE MYTHS” IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION

DESAZENDO “MITOS DA LINGUAGEM” EM ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to dispel some commonly held, but potentially faulty ideas about the nature of English language use in English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts - what I refer to as EMI “myths.” Drawing on a synthesis of transdisciplinary scholarship from the field of applied linguistics, I discuss three dimensions of English language use in EMI contexts that tend to be misunderstood, namely: (1) the multilingual nature of EMI; (2) the relativity of English language proficiency; and (3) the role of multimodality in EMI classroom interaction. In dispelling the myths that surround these dimensions of language use, this paper seeks to legitimize translanguaging practices in EMI. Ultimately, the paper aims to inspire new ways of thinking about how language(s) are conceived of in EMI contexts, which may serve as a point of departure for further research and practical work.

KEYWORDS: English-medium instruction; Internationalization; Multilingualism; Multimodality; Higher education

RESUMO: Este artigo tenta criticar algumas ideias comuns, mas potencialmente errôneas, sobre a natureza do uso da língua inglesa em contextos de inglês como meio de instrução (English-medium instruction [EMI]) - o que chamo de “mitos” de EMI. Com base em uma síntese de estudos transdisciplinares do campo da linguística aplicada, discuto três dimensões do uso da língua inglesa em contextos de EMI que tendem a ser mal compreendidas, inclusive: (1) a caráter multilíngue da EMI; (2) a relatividade de proficiência na língua inglesa; e (3) o papel da multimodalidade em interação discursiva na sala de aula. Ao dissipar os mitos que cercam essas dimensões do uso da língua, este artigo busca legitimar as práticas translínguas. No final das contas, o artigo visa inspirar novas formas de pensar em como a(s) língua(s) são concebidas em contextos de EMI, o que pode servir como ponto de partida para futuras pesquisas e trabalhos práticos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Inglês como meio de instrução; Internacionalização; Multilinguismo; Multimodalidade; Ensino superior

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In recent years, there has been an explosion of scholarly interest in English as a medium of instruction (EMI). As one of the primary strategies for the internationalization of higher education (Gimenez & Marson, 2022), EMI has received much attention due to its complexity, consequentiality, and seemingly enigmatic status as policy, practice, and ongoing site of ideological struggle (Corrigan, 2015; De Costa et al., 2019). The heightened interest in EMI can be seen in the publication of numerous edited volumes, including a recent book series (Routledge, 2022), the introduction of an academic journal dedicated to the topic (i.e., *The Journal of English-Medium Instruction*), hundreds of theoretical and empirical articles, numerous professional development programs, and even entire degree programs dedicated to the topic (see Sah, 2021). Yet many fundamental questions about EMI still remain, as well as many misunderstandings.

One area that continues to be debated concerns the role(s), status, and nature of English language use in EMI settings (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2022). A range language issues have been discussed, from the functions of language(s) in the classroom (e.g. Zhang & Lo, 2021), to the notion of “domain loss” of local languages (Kling, 2019), to the hegemony of English in the academy (Doiz et al., 2011), and more. In regards to language use among EMI faculty, concerns over English language proficiency have been particularly central, with instructors themselves, as well as students and university policymakers expressing a preoccupation with how (well) English is deployed by instructors in the classroom. As a consequence, there has been increasing anxiety over “quality assurance” in EMI programs (Dubow & Gundermann, 2017; Macaro et al., 2020; Park et al., 2022), with concomitant dialog around the notion of faculty “preparedness” for EMI (Lasagabaster, 2022; Macaro et al., 2018). For some, “preparedness” essentially translates to English language proficiency (e.g., Dimova & Kling, 2018; Drljača Margjić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018), while for others, language is but one of many equally important facets of readiness for EMI (e.g., Bradford, 2019)—and one that should not be considered in isolation (cf. Morell et al., 2022). Considering these different perspectives, might it be that the linguistic emphasis is somewhat misguided? Should quality assurance in EMI be primarily a matter of English language proficiency? And what actually happens with language in the EMI classroom? That is, what language(s) are *actually* used, and how?

In this conceptual paper, I seek to dispel some potential misunderstandings regarding the role, status, and nature of English language use in EMI. These misunderstandings, which I refer to as “myths,” represent commonly held but potentially misguided beliefs, attitudes, and conceptualizations regarding the ontology of English and other languages in EMI settings. The aim of the paper is not to deny the existence of any particular instantiation of EMI, nor to prescribe any set of practices or

beliefs. Rather, my aim is to present a series of arguments, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings in relation to each of the EMI myths I discuss, which, it is hoped, may inspire new ways of thinking about how language(s) are conceived in the context of English-medium instruction. I begin with the myth that EMI classes are equivalent to “English-only” learning environments.

MYTH #1: EMI CLASSES ARE “ENGLISH-ONLY” LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The first myth concerns the semantics of the nomenclature *English-medium instruction* (EMI) and the pedagogical, as well as policy-related entailments the term may suggest. The deceptively straightforward referents of the acronym suggests that a *language*—namely, English (and only English)—is the *medium*⁸⁴, as opposed to alternative modes and media (e.g., books, articles, films, websites), whose discursive/communicative-functional role is *instruction*—a nominalization that erases the connection to policy, and, in an educational context, typically implies verbal/spoken language of a pedagogical/didactic nature (Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Kuteeva, 2020). To be sure, this is more or less an accurate, even if partial, semantic representation of what is implied by E-M-I in many contexts across the globe, particularly within the European context, where English-medium instruction has enjoyed a longer historical presence as an educational policy than most other contexts across the globe. However, this semantic mapping is by no means universal, even within so-called “anglophone university settings” (cf. Baker & Hüttner, 2018; Fenton Smith & Humphreys, 2015; Preece, 2020; Xu et al., 2019), and reflects more of the policy dimension of EMI (which some argue is primary; cf. Coleman et al., 2018), which tends to be informed by a monoglossic language ideology rather than what happens in actual classroom practice (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018).

To begin with, numerous empirical investigations have attested to the multilingual nature of EMI (Dafouz & Smit, 2016), in which English is used alongside other languages, often in fluid ways, for a range of pedagogical (e.g., classroom management), communicative (e.g., clarifying meaning of key terms), and interpersonal functions (e.g., using humor to express affiliation). Recently, much of this work has taken a *translanguaging* perspective (Li, 2018), which emphasizes “the fluid and dynamic practices that transcend the boundaries between named languages, language varieties, and language and other semiotic systems” (p. 9). For instance, Kao et al. (2021) report on the translanguaging practices of university instructors in a Taiwanese tertiary context. They found that instructors used translanguaging strategies to help improve student comprehension (e.g., through translation and L1 paraphrasing), as well as to encourage student participation or maintain interest (e.g., through telling

⁸⁴ The term “medium” (pl. *media*), from the perspective of multimodality, refers to the resources used to materialize meaning (Kress, 2010).

jokes that mixed Chinese and English). Goodman's (2014) ethnographic study of Ukrainian instructors in the process of transitioning from Russian-medium to English-medium instruction also revealed hybrid language practices, such as supplementing EMI classes with Russian-medium reading materials and using Russian (rather than English) for disciplinary measures. Pun and Macaro (2019) found that the use of the L1 in EMI classes in Hong Kong was associated with the use of more cognitively complex questions, which led to greater interaction among students. Adamson and Coulson (2015) report on the strategic use of translanguaging practices in a Japanese university writing class (e.g., use of L1 texts as references for writing), which was reported to promote students' writing skill development. Shartiely (2016) describes a case study of code-switching practices among lecturers in a Tanzanian EMI university context. The author found that lecturers used code-switching strategies for classroom management and to promote engagement with students, as well as to translate concepts and for advisement purposes. Numerous other studies (e.g., Evans, 2008; Malmström et al., 2017) have similarly documented such fluid language practices, providing ample evidence to debunk the myth that "EMI equals English-only instruction."

The increasing recognition of the multilingual nature of EMI, in which English is used as a multilingual franca (Jenkins, 2015), has inspired some, such as Dafouz and Smit (2016), to propose new terminology, such as "English Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings" (EMEMUS). This modified terminology is considered by some to be more inclusive, as it recognizes not only instruction but also learning, while also centering to a greater degree the multilingual character of EMI (Baker, 2021).

Different contextual variables contribute to the degree to which English is used in EMI settings. These include, among others, the degree to which the students and instructors share an L1 (Sahan et al., 2021; Zhang & Wei, 2021) or have mutual access to one another's languages (e.g., when an instructor has a different L1 than the students but maintains a functional repertoire in their language); the nature of institutional language policies and the degree to which they are enforced/monitored; and the beliefs about the role(s) and value(s) of languages within particular EMI contexts (i.e., local language ideologies). In the first case, it is not uncommon, for example, for students and faculty in many EMI contexts to share an L1. In this situation, it may be possible to choose the language policy at the classroom level (cf. Menken & Garcia, 2010). For instance, Sahan et al. (2021) described four variations in EMI implementation in a Turkish EMI context, ranging from Turkish-dominant to English-dominant language use (varying also according teacher vs. student-centeredness), which was largely associated with access to a shared L1. As one of the Turkish-dominant instructors stated, "I teach in

Turkish because the students asked me to. There are no foreign students, so I said okay” (Teacher 21, as quoted in Sahan et al., 2021, p. 9).

The stated institutional language policy, together with local university culture and norms, as well as the history of particular EMI programs (i.e., how well a given program is established) also impact language practices in EMI contexts. In some cases, EMI programs are very well-established, to the extent that nearly all academic degree programs are taught through the medium of English. This is the case, for instance, at the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) in South Korea (Kao et al., 2021). However, in spite of apparently rigid language policies, there may still be negotiation at the local (i.e., classroom) level. For example, Zhang and Wei (2021) found that lecturers at a university in East China implemented translanguaging practices in strategic ways (e.g., using the L1 to communicate domain-specific knowledge or “complement” the English-medium portion of a lecture; repeating an English utterance in Chinese; using L1 to refer to local knowledge; pp. 108–113). These instructors did so despite their awareness of the “English-only” institutional language policy and their apprehension towards using the L1 because of it.

Finally, local beliefs among students and faculty alike have a powerful influence on language practices and perceptions of language use in EMI classrooms. Sahan et al. (2022) report on a large-scale study involving students and faculty across 17 universities in Thailand and Vietnam. They found that, despite positive perceptions of L1 use for pedagogical purposes in EMI classrooms, the majority of participants preferred English-only instruction. Similarly, Kuteeva’s (2020) study regarding local and international students’ perceptions of “standard English,” English as a lingua franca, and translanguaging practices in a Swedish university context found that students varied in how they conceptualized language use, with all three conceptualizations of “the ‘E’ in EMI” present in the data. Moreover, Kuteeva (2020) found that, contrary to the mostly positively framed studies regarding translanguaging, some students reported incidents of exclusionary practices resulting from their lack of an “elite translanguaging” repertoire (pp. 297–298) (i.e., the ability to use the local language as well as English as a lingua franca).

In sum, the nomenclature “English-medium instruction” can be understood as more of a convenient shorthand—rather than a semantically transparent label—for the complex, multilingual language ecology (Pusey & Butler, in preparation) of higher education institutions currently pursuing this internationalization strategy (Gimenez & Marson, 2022). Ultimately, language policies are enacted by teachers, often in negotiation with their students, rather than handed down unproblematically from above. As Menken and García (2010) remind us, “there is typically space for [language] policy negotiation in classroom practice, as it is ultimately educators—particularly

classroom teachers—who are the final arbiters of language policy implementation (p. 1). Thus, although some EMI contexts may be more or less accurately described as “English-only” learning environments, this is not always the case, and need not be.

A greater recognition of the multilingual nature of EMI will help dispel this myth.

MYTH #2: HIGHER ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY MEANS HIGHER QUALITY EMI

By and large, the most frequently discussed issue in the literature on EMI concerns matters of English language proficiency—in particular, the relationship between English language proficiency and teaching and learning quality and outcomes (Macaro et al., 2018). For the present discussion, I mainly focus on English language proficiency as it pertains to EMI instructors, but note that students’ language proficiency is not only a matter that is widely discussed, but is one that is closely tied to the arguments I make below.

While recognizing the variation in norms and practices related to language that exist across disciplines and discourse communities (cf. Dimova & Kling, 2018), in addition to the particularities of individual instructors and classroom environments, few would deny that a certain threshold level of English language proficiency is needed in order to carry out the basic communicative and pedagogical functions required for EMI. In some contexts, particularly in Europe, in-house language assessments have been developed to this end, such as the Test of Oral English Proficiency for Academic Staff (TOEPAS) at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark (Dimova, 2017; Dimova & Kling, 2018) and the Test of Performance for Teaching at University Level Through the Medium of English (TOPTULTE) at the University of the Basque Country in Spain (Ball & Lindsay, 2013). However, in many EMI contexts, this is not the case. Park et al. (2022), for instance, speaking from the South Korean EMI context, report that among the five major higher education institutions examined in their study, a high level of English language proficiency for EMI faculty members was neither required nor evaluated by the universities in question (p. 5). Moreover, Korean universities such as KAIST (a fully English-medium university) have consistently received high rankings on metrics such as the QS World University Ranking report (Cho, 2012), which suggests that advanced language proficiency, by itself, does not necessarily indicate high-quality EMI.

Nevertheless, there has been continued dialog around the development and feasibility of certification for EMI instructors at the national and international level (Dubow & Gundermann, 2017; Macaro et al., 2019; O’Dowd, 2018). It is also common in the literature to encounter some mentioning of “minimum English language proficiency” standards (e.g., Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018; Martinez & Fernandes, 2020), often made in reference to general

proficiency indicators, such the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, at present, there is no consensus as to what level of English language proficiency is required for EMI, nor is there agreement about how exactly such proficiency ought to be defined, operationalized, and/or measured (Costa, 2015; Jiménez-Muñoz, 2020; Martinez & Fernandes, 2020). What does seem to be clear, however, is that advanced English language proficiency *in the abstract*—that is, without regard to the specific, situated contextual factors that characterize actual EMI teaching and learning environments—does not guarantee, nor is (necessarily) a primary consideration for ensuring high-quality EMI (Björkman, 2010, 2011; Bradford, 2019; Lauridsen & Lauridsen, 2018; Park et al., 2022).

Related to this myth is the assumption that transitioning to EMI from instruction in the L1 is merely a matter of “changing the vehicle of communication” (Cots, 2013, p. 117). Under this assumption, all else is considered equal (or not considered at all) and English language expertise is therefore isolated as the sole variable impeding or facilitating ‘business as usual.’ If this were in fact the case, then it might stand to reason that any increase in faculty English language proficiency could index increasingly higher quality EMI. Several studies have reported such views held by faculty (e.g., Costa & Coleman, 2013; Park et al., 2022), and this orientation can be seen as informing the perspective of researchers themselves. Such a view is captured by Dimova and Kling (2018), who state:

In the European EMI courses, the central change for teachers is in the selection of language, a shift in medium. The teachers continue to teach the same content (and at times the same courses that are now taught in English as opposed to the local language) in the same educational context that values the same teaching approaches. English is a transplanted language in the local university settings. (p. 639)

However, the perspective taken by Dimova and Kling (2018) differs from other EMI researchers (e.g., Ball & Lindsay, 2013; Bradford, 2019; Macaro et al., 2019; Cots, 2013; Rose, 2021) who assert that instruction in EMI contexts is likely to require concomitant changes in teaching methodology and communicative practices. Gimenez and Marson (2022) note that “teachers’ abilities to teach through the medium of English needs to go beyond their own proficiency, to consider the reconstruction of their professional knowledge base and to expand their pedagogical content knowledge” (p. 159). It has been argued that of particular importance in EMI contexts is the need for awareness of and ability to accommodate students’ communicative needs as they relate to English language expertise—in other words, the need for pedagogical and linguistic scaffolding (Bradford, 2019; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2021; Lauridsen & Lauridsen, 2018; Martinez et al., 2021). Indeed, if the ultimate concern in matters of “quality assurance” is student learning, then the ability to scaffold student learning linguistically and pedagogically can be seen as potentially more consequential to successful EMI than the instructor’s proficiency level in the abstract (though, clearly, the two are related). This standpoint aligns with

multilingual perspectives on EMI and higher education more generally (Jenkins, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2018), which emphasize the negotiated, emergent nature of communicative norms *in situ* (Jenks, 2018) which arise when interactants use English as a (multi)lingua franca.

At this point, a brief illustration may be useful. While helping to design an EMI professional development course for faculty at two universities in the south of Brazil, I carried out several class observations as one of several needs analysis activities used to inform the curriculum design (see Pusey, under review). During my observations, I noted how each instructor I observed utilized language and other semiotic resources (e.g., the white board, PowerPoint slides, gestures) to communicate with students in order to achieve the pedagogical goals of each class. Each instructor varied in terms of academic discipline, personal communicative style, and general pedagogical approach; it was also apparent that the English language repertoires of each faculty member varied. What was most noteworthy, however, was that the instructor who appeared most effective (judging by the observable level of student engagement, the general flow of the class, my own ability to follow subject matter which I was largely unacquainted with, etc.) was also the one that might be described as having the least developed English language repertoire—a fact which the instructor herself pointed out to the class (in a casual, matter-of-fact way) and used as a rationale for the interactive, student-centered approach she took in the classroom. Conversely, the instructor who might be described as having the most advanced level of English language proficiency did not seem as successful at promoting student engagement and comprehension of the material (judging by, e.g., the [albeit subjective] criteria mentioned above). While this latter instructor's speaking was linguistically sophisticated, he spoke very quickly, often using low-frequency vocabulary that seemed somewhat inappropriate or ineffective for the audience; in a way, his language use was more characteristic of a written rather than spoken academic register (Biber et al., 2009). Moreover, this instructor's PowerPoint slides were (over)filled with text, which seemed to create a conflict of attention for the audience between his lecturing and the slide contents. (This was the case for me!). Furthermore, his bodily orientation was often facing opposite the students (as he was reading his slides) and he actually seemed to be blocking half the class's view of the projector screen! While this example is anecdotal and perhaps represents an extreme case, it points to the fact that additional factors, such as audience awareness and pedagogical style and practices, may be essential to high-quality EMI. It furthermore reinforces the point that linguistic proficiency alone is insufficient for effective EMI (Björkman, 2010; Hellekjær, 2010).

Summing up, advanced English language proficiency alone does not guarantee high-quality EMI. Indeed, highly advanced English language use in EMI contexts without the accompaniment of audience awareness (at a minimum) may be detrimental to comprehension and learning (Hellekjær,

2010). However, before moving on, I want to emphasize that I by no means wish to downplay the felt experience of EMI lecturers who may face additional challenges in relation to language. As has been pointed out in previous research (e.g., Airey, 2011; Tange, 2010), EMI instructors may experience not only affective and behavioral challenges (e.g., lack of confidence when teaching; spending additional time planning lessons), but also issues directly related to language (e.g., expressing humor; accessing general and discipline-specific vocabulary; speaking fluently and naturally). For this reason, it is quite understandable that some instructors perceive a direct link between language proficiency and their own quality of teaching. Indeed, several studies have noted that this preoccupation with English language proficiency may remain even at “advanced” levels of proficiency (Bradford, 2019; Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018; Lauridsen & Lauridsen, 2018). Nevertheless, there is an important distinction between one’s self-perceptions and self-efficacy beliefs on the one hand, and the imposition of top-down language policies on the other (e.g., minimum language proficiency requirements based on abstract scales normed to native speaker language varieties). My argument is mainly aimed at deconstructing the latter, while fully recognizing and in no way diminishing the former.

MYTH #3: THE EMI-AS-LECTURING-IN-ENGLISH MYTH

The final EMI myth I wish to discuss concerns the intersection of communication, language, and teaching in EMI, and the nature of how these are combined and achieved in actual practice. I will argue that not only is EMI not (necessarily) an “English-only” enterprise, it is also not merely a matter of oral-instruction (i.e., lecturing)-through-English. Rather, EMI classrooms typically comprise richly multimodal settings in which instructors and other human actors (i.e., students), along with the material environment, provide an array of resources for action, meaning-making, and learning (van Lier, 2004). Harnessing the full range of linguistic, embodied, and material resources at one’s disposal is commonplace in contemporary communication (Kress, 2010), yet is less well recognized in EMI classrooms (Morell, 2020). However, *intentionally* drawing on the multimodal affordances in one’s environment may provide an additional set of strategies for teaching and learning that go beyond language (Piquer-Piriz & Castellano-Risco, 2021), which may be beneficial to instructors and students alike. In this section, I therefore attempt to dispel the myth that *teaching* in EMI is primarily (or necessarily) a matter which relies heavily teacher-fronted oral communication (i.e., lecturing).

As alluded to previously, an assumption implied by the label “English-medium instruction” is that teaching, or instruction, occurs primarily or solely through the medium of aural communication (i.e., listening and speaking). Hence, the instructor must be heavily reliant upon and therefore highly competent in the use of extended oral communication in English in order to be effective—that is, to

effect learning. This understanding of EMI places the communicative burden primarily on the instructor, as opposed to the listener or audience (cf. Kang et al., 2014; Lindemann, 2010). It furthermore implies that the instructor is understood as a *transmitter* of knowledge or information which students *receive* and assimilate unproblematically—as long as the message *signal* is clearly articulated (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). It should perhaps be clear by now, however, that this description of teaching, learning, interaction, and listening comprehension does not quite capture reality—particularly in the context of the lingua franca interactions that typify EMI (Canagarajah, 2013). Rather than solely, or even primarily an “aural” phenomenon, teaching, like other forms of interaction, is a multimodal activity (Kress, 2010) that involves the designed orchestration of various resources for making meaning (Goodwin, 2000)—even in cases that might be described as monologic “one-way” listening (Lynch, 2011).

For some time now, researchers of social interaction have recognized that interaction is accomplished emergently through the coordination of language and embodied actions, rather than “entirely within the stream of speech” (Goodwin, 2000, p. 1499). More recently, applied linguists, particularly those working within a conversation analytic paradigm, have drawn on multimodal interactional data to highlight the *embodied work of teaching* (Hall & Looney, 2019)—that is, how the body (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, gaze, posture) functions as a resource for action in the classroom. Extending this perspective to the material environment, researchers such as Matsumoto (2019) and others (Guerrettaz, 2021) have further demonstrated how materials contribute to (i.e., shape, mediate, and “act upon”) classroom interaction and learning. For example, Evnitskaya and Jakonen (2017) discussed the ways that embodied actions within content and integrated learning (CLIL) classes are drawn on to index one’s epistemic status. Through detailed analysis, they demonstrate how students draw on embodied (e.g., gesture, gaze) and material resources (e.g., a microscope) to communicate comprehension during a science lesson. Similarly, Käätä (2014) describes how students in a CLIL setting orchestrate gaze shifts with the material environment (e.g., content on a projector screen) to do “embodied noticings,” which refer to “interactional events that involve the embodiment of cognitive events” (Heritage, 2005, p. 188, as cited in Käätä, 2014, p. 88).

Within the context of EMI specifically, researchers are likewise beginning to recognize the role of multimodality (i.e., the situated meaning making potential of modes and media, including language, in communication) (Kress, 2010). For instance, Morell (2020), drawing on the work of Royce (2002), has proposed the notion of “multimodal competence” to describe “the ability to understand the combined potential of various modes for making meaning so as to make sense of and construct texts” (Royce, 2002, p. 192, as cited in Morell, 2018, p. 58). This definition builds on the work of Walsh

(2006, 2011), who proposed the idea of *classroom interactional competence* (CIC) to refer to “teachers’ and learners’ ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning” (Walsh, 2011, p. 158). In both cases, the interactional nature of learning is highlighted, which reflects not only the empirical reality of what actually happens in classrooms (Hall & Looney, 2019), but also aligns more axiologically with current views regarding the skills needed for teaching and learning in the 21st century (Griffin et al., 2012). For students, such skills include “ways of thinking and working,” including critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and collaboration (teamwork), among other skills and skill groupings (Binkley et al., 2012, pp. 18-19). The development of such skills is likely facilitated through instructors’ CIC and multimodal competence—both of which would seem to center student participation and active construction of meaning while de-centering the lecturer and their “transmission” of knowledge. To promote student engagement and active learning, Morell et al. (2022) suggest the following strategies which draw on the notion of multimodal competence:

Orchestrate speech, writing, NVMs [non-verbal materials], space and posture throughout the EEs [engagement episodes, e.g., pair work and group work] to facilitate lecturers’ representation of meaning and students’ comprehension, as well as to initiate and maintain interaction (Multimodality);

Share professional experiences and ask audience-oriented questions (e.g., referential and display questions) that engage students (Speech);

Use written words and NVMs (e.g., images and realia) to reinforce spoken discourse and to represent concepts (Writing and NVMs);

Combine authoritative and interactive spaces to promote a more learner-centered approach (Space); and

Adopt a dynamic posture to foreground specific semiotic resources and to maintain students’ attention (Posture). (Morell et al., 2022, p. 17)

While the above discussion may come across as something of a prescription for how to teach in EMI contexts, this is not the intent. Even though student-centered pedagogies have been widely acknowledged and supported in much of the EMI literature (and beyond), with the claim made that such approaches may “alleviate” the perceived or real language difficulties faced by EMI lecturers by reducing the amount of teacher talk (cf. Martinez & Fernandes, 2020; Pagèze & Lasagabaster, 2017), to give advice absent of context about so-called “best practices” in EMI would fail to acknowledge the local meanings, values, norms, and expectations held by particular discourse communities (Dimova & Kling, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is worth restating the main point here, which is simply that English-medium instruction does not (necessarily) equate to a heavy reliance on aural modes of communication in a

primarily one-way, teacher-fronted style—what is traditionally connoted by the term “lecture.” Indeed, Ball and Lindsay (2013) note that “the noun ‘lecture’ can no longer be limited to the idea that one person speaks . . . and that a large audience listens” (p. 52). They go on to point out that, in an EMI context, “The teacher can no longer assume (for purely linguistic reasons) that students understand the content of a course” (p. 53). Instead, EMI can be conceived of as a potentially richly multimodal interactional space, in which teachers and students draw on diverse multimodal semiotic resources (including languages) to make meaning. By dispelling the EMI-as-lecturing-in-English myth, it is possible to reimagine the pedagogical, linguistic, and interactional dimensions of EMI classrooms as emergent, negotiated sites of meaning making.

CONCLUSION

As one of the key strategies for the internationalization of higher education, EMI at once holds great potential and also poses many challenges and risks. While EMI can open up possibilities for academic mobility, intercultural exchange, and a more knowledgeable society, it can also threaten one’s professional identity and sense of self-worth. In many cases, these threats revolve around issues related to language ability and language use. This paper has thus attempted to dispel some commonly held, but potentially faulty beliefs, assumptions, and ideas about the nature of language in EMI contexts—what I have referred to here as EMI “myths.” I have focused on three interrelated dimensions of language use in EMI contexts: (1) the multilingual nature of EMI; (2) the relativity of English language proficiency; and (3) the multimodal nature of classroom interaction. By focusing on these aspects of EMI, I have attempted to contribute to the wider discussion regarding the role of languages in internationalization, which this thematic issue embraces. While the ideas I have discussed here are neither completely new nor without controversy, my hope is that, by bringing them together in novel syntheses which cut across sub-disciplinary lines, new lines of inquiry and practice may emerge.

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