# “I think it is internationalized, is it not necessary to have an official language policy” – Roles and conceptualisations of language in English medium multilingual universities

## Abstract

The rapid increase in English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education has resulted in the need for a greater evidence base documenting EMI in practice spanning a range of settings. Studies of EMI focusing on linguistic issues are beginning to emerge but there are few comparative studies looking at multiple sites, levels and stakeholders. In response to this, the study reported here examined the roles of and conceptualisations of English and other languages in three EMI programmes in Thailand, Austria and the UK. A mixed-methods approach was adopted making use of a student questionnaire (N= 121) and interviews (N= 12) with lecturers and students, supported by documentary analysis and observations. Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed diverse roles of English and other languages, various levels of recognition of multilingualism, and a sophisticated range of conceptualisations of language by stakeholders. In particular, English as discipline-specific language use emerged as a key concept, straddling language and content learning and teaching, as well as problematizing simplistic divides between language and content. Furthermore, the complex understanding of the diverse roles of languages by participants offers a counter to perspectives of English in EMI as an unambiguous, monolithic entity.

Key words: English medium instruction, internationalisation, higher education, multilingualism, language beliefs, English as an academic lingua franca

## Introduction

The increasing internationalisation of higher education (HE) has been a much discussed phenomenon and a major driving force of recent educational change. OECD statistics (2014) reveal the increasingly international make-up of HE globally with over twice as many tertiary students enrolled outside their country of citizenship now than a decade ago. How internationalisation is translated into policy and practice within institutions is, of course, highly varied reflecting a diversity of beliefs and practices concerning the economic, political, ideological and cultural role of HE (Maringe & Foskett 2010). Internationalisation as a process has also not necessarily been even or successful in reducing traditional power imbalances, particularly in regard to the prominence of Anglophone HE institutions. For example, the majority of international students (82%) are enrolled in G20 countries, but come from Asia (53%), while Anglophone settings ‘send out’ very few students (OECD 2014). Intertwined with the processes of internationalisation has been a more diversified conceptualisation in research of language use in HE and especially EMI programmes, foregrounding the role of English as an academic lingua franca (ELFA) (Björkman 2013; Jenkins 2014; Mauranen 2012). It is against this diverse and complex backdrop that the study reported here took place, exploring the role of language in EMI programmes in three internationally oriented HE institutes in Asia, Continental Europe and the UK. This paper seeks to underscore the complex and varied conceptions and roles of English and other languages in such multilingual and multicultural settings and the need to eschew simplistic accounts of linguistic practices and beliefs about them in EMI research.

### Internationalisation and English Medium Instruction in Higher Education

English has become the dominant language of HE (Jenkins 2014), even if the evaluations of this dominance vary greatly, and this language choice appears to constitute an inherent part of a general movement towards increased internationalisation of HE (Maringe 2010, 24-26). While an exact definition of internationalisation remains elusive, we follow Knight’s (2008, 21) as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or deliver of HE at the institutional and national levels.” Mobility, both of students and staff, has long been considered one clear indicator of internationalisation and figures show an unbroken upwards trend, especially towards programmes taught in English. Thus, OECD statistics (2014) indicate that 41% of the increase in international student enrolment over the last decade has been in Anglophone settings. At the same time, the rapid growth in EMI programmes in non-Anglophone settings has led to over 25% of postgraduate programmes in OECD countries now being offered in English (OECD 2014), even if only 1.6% of the overall European student population are enrolled in these EMI programmes (Wächter & Maiworm 2014). Although precise statistics are not available for Asia, existing data points towards an increase in international students and an accompanying rise in EMI programmes (Dearden 2014; Hu & McKay 2012; Kirkpatrick 2011; OECD 2014). As with all aspects of internationalisation, the way in which EMI programmes are interpreted and implemented is not uniform, especially as regards the role given to (English) language as an explicit focus of instruction or not[[1]](#endnote-1).

EMI programmes tend to align with diverse strategies of internationalisation (Maringe 2010, 26). One prominent type of EMI programme are those introduced to facilitate student mobility, and so, on the one hand, bringing the economic advantage of the revenue of international students, while at the same time also resulting in the presence of multilingual groups. The other major type encompasses EMI programmes introduced as part of an ‘internationalisation at home’ strategy (Dafouz 2014; Nilsson 2013), i.e. attempts to bring internationalised curricula and teaching/learning styles to largely monolingual groups of local students. The final group consists ofprogrammes in Anglophone HE institutions, which are not typically considered EMI programmes, since the language of instruction and of the local environment has always been English. However, given the increasingly multilingual and multicultural nature of many of these institutions, in which a significant percentage of students and staff are likely to be using English as an L2, there are many parallels with EMI programmes in similarly multilingual, internationally orientated universities.

This rapid rise in EMI in Europe and Asia has led to concerns about the implications such extensive use of English may have on HE. Wilkinson and Zegers (2007, 12) highlight the lack of understanding of the relationship between linguistic proficiency and the development of content knowledge, stating that “[p]rogrammes [are] being introduced with scant underpinning of research findings into the relationships between language and content”.More recently, Dafouz (2014, 292) has pinpointed this problem as “the truth is that research in this area is still under-developed […and has] been mostly treated in an impressionistic way” and Dearden (2014, 2) in a large scale survey concluded that “[w]e are quite some way from a ‘global’ understanding of the aims and purposes of EMI”. Discussions of linguistic issues in European EMI are emerging (e.g. Aguilar & Muñoz 2013; Aguilar & Rodriguez 2012; Björkman 2013; Cots et al. 2014; Dafouz et al. 2014, Doiz et al. 2013; Mauranen 2012; Smit and Dafouz 2012), and highlight the contextual nature of many findings. However, there has been minimal interest in language issues in Anglophone (Dippold 2015; Jenkins 2014; Tian & Lowe 2009; Ryan & Viete 2009) or Asian contexts (Kirkpatrick 2011). In particular, there are concerns about language ideologies which advantage native speakers of English in supposedly international Anglophone HE institutions (Jenkins 2014) and the promotion of Anglophone varieties of English internationally resulting in domain loss for other languages of academia (Cots et al. 2014; Doiz et al. 2014). Alternative multilingual models of EMI have been proposed in which English is viewed as an academic lingua franca belonging to, and adapted by all who use it (Preisler et al. 2011), functioning in conjunction with other languages instead of displacing them (Barnard & McLellan 2014). In support of this, there is a growing body of research documenting fluid and multilingual uses of ELFA (e.g. Björkman 2013; Jenkins 2014; Mauranen 2012). The empirical question remains, however, as to whether such multilingual and multicultural perspectives on EMI enter into key stakeholder perceptions and become sanctioned EMI practices. Indications from extant research present a varied picture, with sites where any notion of multilingualism is implicitly rejected, for instance Hu & Lei’s (2014: 562) comment that EMI was “adulterated” by Chinese, in contrast to positive views of established institutional multilingualism reported in Cots et al. (2014) and Doiz et al. (2014).

### The ROADMAPPING framework

Given the diversity of current EMI practices, there is a real challenge in capturing this multi-faceted nature of the implementation and practice of EMI, especially with a view towards comparing multiple sites. Recently, Dafouz and Smit (2014) have presented the ROADMAPPING framework as a holistic and dynamic means of analysing the dimensions operating in such English-medium educational settings. The six areas identified as central are the following:

* Roles of English in relation to other languages (RO)
* Academic Disciplines (AD)
* (language) Management (M)
* Agents (A)
* Practices and Processes (PP)
* Internationalisation and Glocalisation (ING)

The first dimension, Roles of English (RO) encapsulates the breadth of functions that English can undertake in EMI settings. Such roles of English range from the more obvious function as a language of teaching and learning, as a means of regulating student intake or managing staff recruitment, to constituting a lingua franca as the only shared language among staff and students. The dimension Academic Disciplines (AD) addresses the characteristics of disciplinary practices. The third dimension, (language) Management (M) encompasses what is largely considered as extended language policy in the sense of “direct efforts to manipulate the language situation” (Spolsky 2004, 8). Fourthly, Agents (A) is an umbrella term for all the social players engaged in English-Medium Education at university level. The status, beliefs and agenda of (groups) of agents within HE typically vary, which can potentially lead to tensions when views and beliefs clash. The fifth dimensions, Practices and Processes (PP) puts the HE classroom centre-stage by considering as ‘ways of doing’ and ‘ways of thinking’ (Leung & Street 2012) the means in which agents use classroom discourse to co-construct (disciplinary) knowledge. The final dimension in this framework, Internationalisation and Glocalisation (ING), addresses the international, global, national and local forces and interests that universities need to respond to in the 21st century HE environment.

These six dimensions intersect with one another and interact dynamically. The access point, given the focus on language issues, is that of discourses, seen here as not only representations of these dimensions, but more importantly as means of co-constructing these realities. Although the classroom discourses are vitally important, discourses here also include formal and informal policy documents, notes, interviews, discussions, journal entries, essays, websites, and promotional videos among others. In this project, our main point of access is the discourses of teachers and students in these EMI settings, as sites of co-constructing their beliefs on this pedagogic endeavour and, in this paper, a predominant focus on the RO dimension of the framework.

### Beliefs of teachers and students on language in EMI

Despite the wealth of research into teacher and learner beliefs, they still remain a “messy construct” (Pajares 1992), especially in their application in research (Fives & Buehl 2012). This leads us to adopt Barcelos’ (2003, 8ff.) rather inclusive definition of beliefs as complex clusters of intuitive, subjective knowledge about the nature of language, language use and language learning. In the rich history of studies of both teacher and learner beliefs, a number of research perspectives have been employed. In this project we follow the contextual approach (Barcelos 2003, 19), which focuses on capturing beliefs as linked to specific contexts and as inherently dynamic and complex (Amuzie & Winke 2009) and so allows for an investigation of belief constructs without establishing a priori links to actions. Our focus here lies on the overtly stated “professed beliefs” (Speer 2005, 361) of EMI participants. Clearly, the area of teacher beliefs shares overlap with the large area of teacher cognition (Borg 2003; 2006), where the role of beliefs in pedagogic action of teachers has been highlighted.

Extant research in the area of stakeholder beliefs within EMI highlights the influence of context; thus, northern European studies seem to indicate a view towards EMI as constituting more disadvantages than advantages, resulting in difficulties in content understanding and development of L1 academic literacy (e.g., Airey & Lindner 2006; Airey 2012, Hellekjaer 2010). In contrast, participants in central and southern European EMI were more positive and viewed the programmes as offering additional learning opportunities in English, without an overall loss in content knowledge (e.g., Aguilar & Rodriguez 2012; Doiz et al. 2011). In one of the few studies on Asian EMI, Hu and Lei (2014), reporting on Chinese EMI, overwhelmingly reported difficulties to the extent of a student participant stating that “because of our limited English proficiency, we can only get a smattering of the content covered in class” (Hu & Lei 2014, 560). Reasons for this diversity can only be speculated upon at this point; however, the influence of the precise nature of the EMI programme employed, the voluntary nature (or not) of attending this programme; the role given to other languages all seem to play a role. We would argue that the overall inconsistency of findings merits a closer look by applying one analytical framework to a range of different contexts.

## Methodology

In response to the need for a more in-depth understanding of language in EMI programmes in diverse settings the following two guiding research questions were devised and addressed through a mixed-methods approach (Dörnyei 2007).

1. What are the roles of English and other languages in three EMI programmes in Thailand, Austria and the UK?

2. How are English and other languages conceptualised by stakeholders (lecturers and students) in these programmes?

A mixed-methods approach was considered most suitable as following previous studies into the use of English as a medium of instruction in both HE and secondary level (e.g. Dafouz and Smit 2014; Hüttner et al. 2013) it is clear that a range of perspectives on roles and conceptualisations of English are needed in order to avoid simplistic and superficial characterisations.

As one of the aims of this research is to explore the different ways in which EMI is conceptualised and put into practice, multiple sites were chosen for the study. In terms of differences, sites were selected in an Anglophone setting, continental Europe and Asia and focused on disciplines associated with generally high levels of international orientation, i.e. business, computer science and engineering. However, selection also involved identifying a number of similarities, including that all programmes investigated were postgraduate taught; all were well-established to ensure that differences were not the result of ‘settling in’ periods; all claimed to be internationally orientated; and all were regarded as prestigious programmes. The overall data-base is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Research sites and data collection**

The research team consisted of two principal researchers who were based in the UK and collected data from the UK research site. The second author collected the data at the Austrian site. At the Thai site, data collection involved collaboration between the first author and a research team who administered the questionnaires and conducted the interviews. This team was familiar with the research site through previous teaching and research experiences giving them a degree of insider knowledge.

Contextual information on the sites was systematically gathered through documentary analyses of institutional websites, classroom observations and linguistic landscaping. The questionnaires formed the quantitative dimension to the study. They addressed four different areas: personal information, previous experiences of learning and using English, the use of English and other languages in their current programme, and opinions of studying on the programme[[2]](#endnote-2). The choice of topics was based on previous related research (Dafouz and Smit 2014; Dafouz et al. forthcoming; Hüttner et al. 2013) and an earlier pilot study at the UK research site. There were a total of 99 questions, using a range of different question types including Likert scales, multiple choice and ranking scales. The questionnaire was administered online for the UK and Thai research sites and in paper and online at the Austrian site. Data analysis consisted of a mixture of descriptive and inferential statistics making use of SPSS.

Interviews were conducted with lecturers and students at each of the research sites and formed the substantive part of the qualitative data. The interviews were semi-structured and aimed to gather more in-depth data on the issues initially brought up in the questionnaires. In the UK, the interviews were conducted in English as the shared, although not necessarily first language (L1), of the researchers and participants. In Austria the interviews were conducted in German for the L1 German participants and in English for the L1 Russian participants. In Thailand the interviews were conducted in a mixture of Thai and English depending on the preference of the interviewees, although in all cases Thai was the L1.

Thus, following recent research into linguistic practices in EMI (e.g. Dafouz and Smit 2014; Smit and Dafouz 2012), we attempt to offer multiple perspectives on the phenomena under investigation by combining the approaches described above in order to provide a richer characterisation of each research site. In this paper the focus will be on interview and questionnaire data supported by other data sources. Although, no claim to generalisability can be made from such a limited data set, we hope to provide data that ‘resonates’ (Richards 2003) with researchers and practitioners in other EMI settings.

## Findings

Data analysis involved content coding through NVivo making use of a mixture of emergent and top-down codes (Miles et al. 2014) based on the ROAD-MAPPING framework with a focus on RO (Dafouz & Smit 2014). Coding was conducted by the two authors in an iterative process, where emergent codes were also collated and at times subordinated to top-down codes. The analysis of the coded items led to an identification of two main themes within the RO code. The first theme concerned observations on the roles of English in the three settings which was sub-divided into ‘standards, monolingualism and multilingualism’ and ‘tool or target’. The second theme concerned more general conceptualisations of language which were sub-divided into ‘disciplinary language’, ‘varieties of language’, and ‘language for group communication’.

### Roles of English: standards, monolingualism and multilingualism

At a policy level the findings from this study corroborate previous research (e.g. Dippold 2015; Jenkins 2014; Saarinen & Nikula 2013) in illustrating an official policy orienting towards standard English and, more generally, a monolingual habitus which only recognises a role for English or which clearly separates the role of English in EMI programmes from other languages present in the institution. Information from the websites of all three sites state that the programmes are taught in English and no mention is made of a role for other languages. Furthermore, in both the UK and Thailand the websites and downloadable information, such as the prospectus and student handbooks, are available only in English. Only the Austrian site offers information bilingually in German and English, reflecting the nature of the University itself as mainly German-speaking. In all three sites, one of the most visible manifestations of the institutional role of English is in the entry requirements measured through a test of English with TOEFL and IELTS at the top of the list in all cases. The orientation of TOEFL and IELTS to a particular standard and native- like English has been well documented (e.g. McNamara 2014). Alternative language qualifications are accepted in Austria and Thailand and include local tests, but in the case of Thailand these are modelled on TOEFL and follow a standard English orientation. However, there is a difference at each site as to the level of accepted ‘proficiency’, as measured by these tests, with Thailand accepting IELTS level 5.5 or equivalent, the UK level 6.5 and Austria level 7. The most detailed language requirements during the course of study are provided by the Thai site with website documentation stating that students are expected to ‘conform to international standards of writing’ and referring students to three text books on writing published in the US; suggesting a conflation of ‘international standards’ with a particular kind of US English*.* Although the UK site does not specify what variety of English is most appropriate, it does suggest that international students may benefit from pre-sessional or in-sessional English language support. Previous research has highlighted the very strong orientation to standard and native English in such programmes (Jenkins 2014).

The official orientation towards a monolingual standard English approach in EMI is supported to an extent by the research participants’ own experiences and perceptions. The questionnaire responses show English used in all areas of the programmes from lectures, to reading, to assignments[[3]](#endnote-3). Specifically, the students’ responses on language use in the classroom indicated that the use of other languages was relatively rare. This was particularly the case for lecturers where use of another language was rated as happening never or rarely; a practice confirmed by the lecturers in the interviews. Among students, on the other hand, using another language than English was reported as more frequent, noticeably so in Thailand. This would suggest that while the lecturers generally adhered to an English only policy, students were making use of other languages in their class study time; something that was also noted in the classroom observations where ‘side-talk’ frequently took place in languages other than English in all settings.

While the monolingual English only policy seems to be largely adhered to in teaching, it is less clear that a standard or native speaker English policy was followed. Findings from the questionnaire suggest that the majority of students did not know or were unsure of their institutions’ language policies. Additionally, an item asking students what policy they thought would be most appropriate (Figure 1) showed that although responses clustered around standard English, there were also a large number of responses highlighting the use of international English or English as a lingua franca as possible targets and to any kind of English being used as a suitable policy, particularly at the Austrian site.

**Figure 1. Students’ opinions on the most appropriate language policy**

The responses from the lecturers similarly question whether the standard language orientation implied in the official policies is translated into classroom practices or beliefs. Extract 1 from a Thai lecturer makes it clear that he is neither aware of the policy nor thinks such a policy would be relevant. Indeed he explicitly links the international orientation of his programme with eschewing such a policy.

Extract 1

R[[4]](#endnote-4):does your university or department have an official language policy like what type of English should be used

TL1: [what type] of English

R: [what type] for example British English or American English

TL1: there is no such policy

R: do you think there should be one

TL1: should there be one (.) I think it is internationalized (.) is it necessary to have one I don’t think so

In extract 2 an Austrian lecturer explains that she is familiar with her university’s standard/native English policy, but that this policy is ‘outward’ facing, e.g. for webpages, and that for teaching practice such policies are not followed or necessary. Instead, she suggests intelligibility is a more appropriate criterion for appropriate English.

Extract 2

ATL1: {the [institution] decided that American English is our English language (.) which means that the webpage and everything is oriented towards one standard that the texts are written towards one standard which I think makes sense (.) but that is simply done like this and that’s that it (.) it is up to every teacher how he or she herself does it so from the university there are no regulations no at least (.) I can’t remember any situation where anyone said the one is better or the other is better… as long as it is easily intelligible I think that is the main thing}

Lastly, the UK lecturer in extract 3 also explains how as a native speaker of English he had to learn to adjust his communication through English in a manner that was effective for an international student audience, suggesting that for him native English is not considered appropriate for teaching.

Extract 3

UKL: I think something I struggled with to begin with was that I would say something in my natural style without thinking about how easy it is for a non-native English speaker to-to comprehend so with time I was able to by spending a lot of time with my tutees and my project students I was able to notice when they weren’t understanding the thing I was saying the first time and then I could- I-I sort of learnt which phrases are easier to understand and how to a: emphasize certain aspects of the things I’m saying so that they make more sense

In sum, and in keeping with previous research (e.g. Doiz et al. 2013; Jenkins 2014), all three sites adopted a similar role for English in official documentation as the sole language of instruction and assessment. Furthermore, although not always explicitly stated, there seems to be a preference for standard English often equated with native English particularly in the entry requirements. In teaching practice the monolingual role of English appears generally to have been adhered to although students made some use of other languages in the class. However, in practice there was less concern with, or even rejection of, standard or native like English[[5]](#endnote-5) and more of a focus on intelligibility. Nonetheless, there seemed to be little recognition of the multilingual resources that many of the students and lecturers possessed, and made use of, leading to multilingualism being made ‘invisible’ (Hynninen and Nikula 2013).One point that becomes apparent here is the overlapping and dynamic nature of the dimensions identified in the ROADMAPPING framework; thus, our focus on roles of English (RO) has shown how these link in with management (M), agents (A) and practices and processes (PP).

**Roles of English: tool or target**

The roles of English (RO) in policy and language choice in instruction supports previous research findings in highlighting a monolingual language orientation, and marginalisation of multilingualism; although multilingualism was present in each environment. However, outside policy documents there was a more ambiguous response to a standard language orientation. Furthermore, the role of English in learning and development revealed a diverse range of responses which suggests a greater complexity to understanding English in EMI. The extent to which English was approached as a ‘tool’ in the learning of content knowledge or whether learning English was viewed as a ‘target’ in itself, alongside learning content knowledge, demonstrated substantial variation between the three sites.

None of the official documentation (websites and downloads) stated the learning of English as a goal, although in the Thai site students are expected to have passed a number of English modules before graduating. Furthermore, questionnaire responses demonstrated that although students expressed an interest in English as a very important reason for choosing the programme it ranked behind three other factors (interest in the programme, career goals and international connections) and this was the same across all three sites[[6]](#endnote-6). However, the interview responses revealed greater complexity in this issue. Data from the Austrian site followed the expected role of English in EMI, i.e. that it was not the subject of study, and that if students wanted to learn English they were, as the student in extract 4 reports, on the ‘wrong master’ programme.

Extract 4

ATS1: and I remember the kick off the wo- the first two days of the programme they told us: if YOU decided to take not the German but the ENGlish speaking masters so that you

would excel your English language knowledge that’s the wrong master

The responses for the UK participants were more ambiguous. The lecturer appeared to downplay the importance of English and the need to learn English as part of the degree programme. In extract 5, he suggests that proficiency in English makes little difference to learning.

Extract 5

UKL: so I think probably of-of all the Master’s programs this year offered by the

university I would (.) I would guess that engineering ones would be among the (.) the ones where English as not being a first language would be less of a disadvantage

However, students did not necessarily share this view. Extract 6 illustrates how this Chinese student at the UK site believes what is sometimes learnt in class is entirely related to language rather than content. He claims that at times he already knows the concepts in Chinese and he is learning about them in English.

Extract 6

UKS1: previously you know my education is (.) all from China so a lot of concepts are in Chinese now I get more familiar to the to the ENglish concepts yeah …some are new but most of them are same same concept but in in English

In the Thai site there seems to be agreement from both students and lecturers that learning English is an integral part of the programme and this forms part of the teaching from the very beginning as highlighted by the lecturer in extract 7. Furthermore, many students spoke very positively about this and felt it was an added feature of the programme.

Extract 7

TL1: {because the students (.) have to start studying the courses in the program and improve their English at the same time so at the beginning their English might not be good enough but their English keeps improving while they are studying here we don’t choose only those who are good at English to study here but with the method we use to teach when they graduate they will be good at English}

In conclusion, there were differences in the role of English (RO) as a ‘tool’ or ‘target’ in the three different sites. In Austria, English was approached as a tool and this may have been related to the already high level of proficiency as reflected by the entry requirements and reported by the students themselves, which meant there was little overtly felt need to improve English. In the UK, the findings were more ambiguous. Although the lecturer believed that it was not necessary to learn English to learn subject knowledge, some of the students reported a different experience with gains in both linguistic proficiency and content knowledge and a complex relationship between the two. Finally, in Thailand there was explicit recognition from lecturers and students that English was both a target in itself as well as a tool to content knowledge. Again the level of proficiency may have been an influential factor here with students’ relatively low starting position meaning they needed to improve their English to cope with the demands of the course; something that seemed to be recognised by the lecturer in extract 7.

This dual focus on content and language, either explicitly in the Thai site or implicitly in the UK site, suggests a blurring of the borders between language and content instruction. This also draws attention to the difficulty of clearly distinguishing content knowledge from the linguistic practices that accompany it and problematizes traditional conceptions of EMI which excludes language instruction. Such a finding is similar to recent research in school-based CLIL which also reveals a variety of perspectives on the integration of language and content and the danger of artificially separating them (Dalton-Puffer 2011; Skinnari and Bovellan In press; Smit and Dafouz 2012).

#### Conceptualisations of Language(s)

Turning to the second set of themes under RO, overall, findings support the view that there are three inter-related conceptualisations of language that participants refer to. Firstly, language is identified as the language of the relevant academic discipline; secondly, language is viewed as representing a particular variety, often in terms of standard or non-standard; thirdly, language is conceptualised as a means of group communication, either within groups sharing a first language or as a lingua franca among speakers of diverse L1s. This differentiated view of language indicates that it is not naively assumed to be a monolithic entity by students or lecturers.

##### **Disciplinary language**

Linking the RO code to the AD code in the ROADMAPPING framework, disciplinary language is seen as a key feature of what is to be learnt at university, regardless of whether the language in question is the L1 or L2 of the students involved. While this learning is largely assumed to happen in an incidental manner, several participants reported on the use of specific guidelines for writing in their disciplines. The positioning of these more generic features of disciplinary language, including academic writing conventions, is, however, a little unclear. For most of the teacher participants it does appear to fall within the realm of ‘content’ rather than ‘language’, given their insistence that the ‘language’ of students is not assessed. This was shared by lecturers at all three sites.

Extract 8

UKL: that [language]’s not the criteria that we necessarily mark on

Extract 9

ATL: {we don‘t evaluate English (.) these are no English essays}

Extract 10

TL2: when marking teachers won’t focus on grammar they don’t mind grammar mistakes as long as they understand what students mean

This perception of EMI teachers of not assessing (or teaching) language is in line with many other studies, e.g. Airey (2012), Aguilar (2015). It would seem, however, that students have a somewhat more inclusive view of disciplinary language as being part of the cluster of ‘language’ rather than ‘content’. Overall, questionnaire responses showed 45.7% of student felt their English was being assessed in examinations, in contrast to 25% who felt they were not.

Both German and Thai were mentioned at the respective sites as relevant languages in the educational mix, amounting to an acknowledgement of ‘English + another language’ as the medium of learning and teaching. Only German, however, was explicitly referred to in relation to its status as a disciplinary language and was conceptualised by some native-German-speaking staff and students as more difficult to manage and/or access than English as a disciplinary language, and so implicitly also as a distinct aspect of German. Reasons for this are related partly to having spent less time on learning German as a disciplinary language and partly to English having become dominant due to its more frequent use in the professional lives of the participants.

Extract 11

ATS1: {as far as anything related to my studies is concerned (.) I can explain that better in English than in German […] I don‘t know (.) on the other hand (.) I do know that my German is still better than my English}

Both German and Thai were seen as playing a small role as additional languages to English in the teaching of the academic subjects. This has to be seen, as discussed earlier, in the context of a clear predominance of using English as the only medium of instruction. The use of Thai was seen diversely by participants, ranging from supportive of student understanding, for instance writing translations of key terms on the board (Thai respondent TL1), to unhelpful (as in Extract 12).

Extract 12

TL1: {and most of the words are technical terms if we used Thai students might get confused}

In Austria, the reactions to the very limited use of German in teaching were also varied. Most German-speaking participants were unaware of it, but non-German-speaking participants found this practice exclusive and so were highly critical of it, as shown in Extract 13.

Extract 13

ATS2: sometimes yeah the biggest problem is that sometimes there are some tasks who: which really require: (.) i- the German (.) KNOWledge

##### **Varieties of language**

All participants showed some awareness of varieties of language, usually labelled “accent” and mostly discussed in relation to English. In terms of standard[[7]](#endnote-7) varieties, British and American English were identified as separate and in the case of the Austrian site American English was chosen as the institutional standard for all external, written communication (see extract 2).

In terms of non-standard varieties, both native and non-native varieties were identified and classified by participants, who used two layers of categorisation. Firstly, varieties were evaluated according to perceived difficulty of understanding, typically with those varieties that participants are less familiar with or that are further removed linguistically from their L1 being rated as more difficult. Thus, for instance, Vietnamese English was seen as difficult in Austria and Slovenian English as easy, whereas French English was seen as difficult in Thailand and Chinese English as easy. The second type of labelling involved a categorisation according to emotional responses, from the very positive, e.g. viewing. Austrian English as “charming” (Russian respondent ATS2) to rather unusual, e.g. Turkish English seen as “extreme” (Austrian respondent ATS1).

With regards to the role of standard/native varieties of English for students to use or aim to achieve, there was a mixed response from participants. On the one hand, in the context of an international university a focus on nativeness was seen as irrelevant for students, as highlighted in both the interview and questionnaire data. In particular, the findings from a factor analysis (Table 2) of the questionnaire items revealed a cluster of related beliefs around standard and native English, showing general disagreement with items suggesting students or lecturers should use native/standard English. There was also a corresponding set of related beliefs suggesting the importance of intelligibility over nativeness, as well as a preference for locally influenced language use, including English.

**Table 2. Language beliefs factor analysis and mean scores**

Lecturers also felt that native-like English was not a necessary target for students

Extract 14

TL2: {I don’t think they need to use native speaker-like English if they can use English to communicate to contact other people or use it in their work that should be enough}

Nevertheless, this more tolerant view of language is not universal among students and there are areas of tension revealed in the interviews. Some students expressed an emotional attachment to becoming native-like or learning the standard language. One student underscored the tension between these two standpoints in her own beliefs.

Extract 15

ATS3: {In truth I’d like not to be not spotted as a German speaker (.) and so speak relatively beautiful English (.) but in daily life that is pretty irrelevant}

To summarise then, like earlier studies (e.g. Jenkins 2014) there is a clear awareness of and response to native and non-native varieties of language and some ambiguity in beliefs. Nonetheless, overall, nativeness is not seen as a desirable target or relevant reflection of use in EMI settings unlike, for example, the participants in Kuteeva’s (2014) study of EMI in Sweden. This also links back to the earlier discussion regarding the use of English as a tool or target and it can be argued that in this study native like/standard English was seldom overtly viewed as a target of these programmes by participants (although, with the caveat that policy documents appeared more prescriptive). It has to be remembered, however, that at the UK site, this study explicitly excluded home students, who might well have a more normative endorsement of native standards, or a negative view of international students’ English (see e.g. Dunne 2009, Peacock and Harrison 2009).

##### **Language as means of group communication**

In the conceptualisations of language, the need to decide on a code for in-group communication in these international, multilingual, educational settings was highlighted. The choice made relied heavily on the participants involved and on patterns of in/exclusion made relevant by the participants. The default and overtly described practice at all sites involved using a shared L1 for interactions with speakers of that lingua-cultural group (e.g. Russian for Russian L1 speakers, Thai for Thai L1 speakers) and of English for all other interactions including in multilingual groups.

However, non-majority language speakers have a more critical view of this, and reported frequent instances of interactions in such multilingual groups actually taking place in German in Austria, for example, to which they reacted negatively.

Extract 16

ATS3: sometimes when there is one Austrian and three Russians we (can) start speaking Russian just you know (.) to show them how it feels to us [when] […] they speak German

Furthermore, in the UK, the practice of using an L1 in a homogeneous lingua-cultural group was implicitly linked to a perceived lack of improvement in English.

Extract 17

UKS2: most of my friends are Chinese and we speak Chinese for long time and still I don’t think I have improved my English a lot

Thus, while in keeping with previous research (e.g. Kaloscia 2014) there is a strong position of English as a lingua franca in group cohesion, this should not be overstated and the local languages are given some room as secondary lingua franca or language learning targets and other L1s have a role. This arguably especially so for German given its tradition and prestige as a language of higher education.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a study of diverse EMI sites, making use of ROADMAPPING (Dafouz and Smit 2014) as an overarching analytic framework. Applying the framework supports an analysis of linguistic features of EMI, exemplified by the focus on Roles of English (RO) in that model, while an awareness of issues of language management (M), practices and processes (PP), academic disciplines (AD) and the agents (A) themselves has helped embed this discussion in a wider context. Overall, the findings of this research suggest that participants in EMI contexts share a complex understanding of the diverse roles of English and other languages involved in these multilingual sites. Both quantitative and qualitative data show that while in all three sites there is a superficial orientation to the English in EMI as an unambiguous, monolithic entity, more detailed investigation does not sustain this as the sole or even predominant perspective. Instead, English is given varied, sometimes contradictory and at other times complementary, roles in this educational setting. Thus, it can be tool or target of education, with this as a key difference between the sites. In the Thai setting English was seen as an additional target of learning alongside content knowledge, in the UK there were more ambiguous attitudes and in Austrian there was broad agreement that disciplinary knowledge was the sole goal. Nonetheless, in all sites English as discipline-specific language use emerges as a key concept straddling language and content learning and teaching. The multi-sited nature of this research also highlights the influence of contextual patterns on such diverse aspects as perceived ideal language policy and the positioning of other languages as relevant to teaching and learning the discipline. Thus, while English is given a dominant role as a lingua franca in classrooms, for outside-class communication at all sites, secondary, locally dependent, lingua franca emerge and multilingualism is prevalent, if not always recognised.

We would suggest that further research into EMI practices needs to recognise this multiplicity of roles and conceptualisations of English and other languages and avoid simplistic single perspective accounts of any particular language or artificially separating languages in linguistic practices. We would also suggest that further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the trajectories and development of EMI students with regard to their language learning, use and awareness that recognises this complexity.

**Word count: 6992**

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**Appendix**

**KEY TO TRANSCRIPTION**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **(.)** | : pause |
| – | : abrupt cut-off or false start |
| **[ ]** | : overlapping speech. When it is not possible to determine the end of the overlapping speech, the final square bracket is omitted |
| **(word)** | : parentheses indicate unsure transcription |
| **(xxx)** | : unable to transcribe |
| **CAPS** | : emphasis. All the letters in the emphasised syllable are capitalised  : initial letter in proper names is capitalised |
| **:** | : sound stretching |
| **=** | : latched utterances |
| **@@** | : laughter |
| **{ }** | : for translation gloss |
|  |  |
| **…** | : all repetition of words and phrases are transcribed  : Omitted section of the transcription |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

1. Typically, the labels EMI and ICLHE/CLIL are used to distinguish diverse levels of language focus. In this paper, we shall employ the term EMI, as overtly the programmes addressed did not include a specific language focus, while acknowledging that in practice the boundaries are fuzzy and hence the terminology less than exact. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Further information on the questionnaire is available on request from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/390811> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See note ii [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. All speakers are referred to by an ID e.g. R = Researcher, TL1 = Thai lecturer 1, ATS2 = Austrian student 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. We recognise that standard English and native English are not synonymous but while the research initially distinguished between the two, it quickly became clear that for the participants the two were conflated and so they are presented as such here. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See note ii [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See note v [↑](#endnote-ref-7)