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Methods Of Teaching English Terminology in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Higher education instruction in English in non-English speaking countries has become a reality in several countries and contexts. The policy towards the adoption of English as language of medium of instruction (EMI) has led to a situation in which students are faced with the need of coping with learning new content in a language different from their mother tongue and teaching staff needs to deliver their courses in English, which is not their first language in many cases. The present review article focuses on the studies concerning EMI in higher education, reporting on didactical strategies employed by the teaching staff and students to cope with the learning context.

Keywords:

Higher Education, English, English as medium of instruction.

Higher education instruction in English in non-English speaking countries is a reality in different contexts. Higher education institutions promote the adoption of English as a language of instruction to achieve varying objectives, such as internationalization of students and staff; improvement of the English level of the students, etc. This policy towards the adoption of English as language of medium of instruction (EMI) has led to a situation in which students cope with learning content in a language different from their mother tongue and teaching staff having to deliver their courses and/or lectures in English, which is not their first language in many cases. Coping with this change and the resulting difficulties is found in the literature, as Kalmar & Linder state: "Although the shift to teaching in English has often been welcomed by teachers and students, the research community is only beginning to understand the dynamics of these changes within the learning environment.

A selection of articles started in August 2013, by the use of the academic search service 'Web of Knowledge', in which the terms

"English", "Medium", and "Instruction" (EMI) were employed as inclusion criteria. The time frame 1990-2013 was adopted. This resulted in a data set of 417 articles. Next, these articles were analyzed on the base of the following exclusion criteria:

- Dealing with EMI in higher education; -
- Not having language teaching/learning as a research focus. From the 417 articles, only 17 met the criteria. Further exclusion criteria focused on selecting only those articles, focusing on didactical strategies used by either instructors and/or students. This additional selection phase resulted in a set of 10 articles meeting the above criteria. These articles were the starting point of a new literature selection phase, building on the reference list of these articles. This resulted in 17 additional relevant articles, meeting the exclusion criteria. These additional articles were tracked and collected via the Ghent University's library (4), Google Scholar (6), the Web of Knowledge (6) and direct communication with authors. The final data set included only 27 articles to start our review of the literature. It is important to repeat

that identifying and locating articles meeting the very specific criteria was not a straightforward task. Though one easily finds studies dealing with the use of English in Higher Education, most describe how that process has been taking place in their specific contexts without addressing the didactical strategies used by the teaching staff and the students in order to cope with these new circumstances.

In total, 38 different didactical strategies could be identified to be used by teaching staffs. To facilitate their presentation, we organize them following two categories: Strategies used by teaching staff inside the classroom and strategies adopted by teaching staffs outside the classroom. Strategies used inside the classroom are implemented during lectures, the moment they interact in English to, mostly, non-native speakers. We can cluster these strategies as follows: Language, interaction, checking understanding, and lecture delivery. The largest cluster is language, containing 8 strategies:

1. Paraphrasing
2. Explaining words/key-concepts
3. Less density of new information
4. Code-switching
5. Allowing L1 among the students
6. Adjust writing tasks
7. Activate students' prior knowledge as a context when introducing new key terms
8. Simplified language to adjust to the students' (language) level

Vocabulary seems a major concern, as reflected in the following strategies: paraphrasing, explaining words/key-concepts, activating the students' prior knowledge before introducing key terms and, in a more general way, simplifying the language used in the lectures. The third strategy is connected to how students are less able to intake information in an L2 lecture context. Strategies 4 and 5 are related to the use of the L1 in the classroom, which may not be applicable when students and lecturers do not share the L1. One has to realize that code switching might add extra effort to develop understanding. Lastly, strategy number 6, adjust writing tasks to short papers and short answer questions, is linked to assessment and evaluation and helps to diminish written production. The latter might have negative

consequences in being able to fully test the mastery of complex learning outcomes.

The next cluster of strategies used inside the classroom is related to interaction, or the decrease of it, which is cited as a major issue in the studies being analyzed. The strategies are:

1. More discussions among the students
2. More interaction with the students
3. More interactive activities
4. Lecturers being more pro-active as a discussion leader
5. More group/pair activities

The first two strategies are related and build on materials made available prior to lectures. Strategy number 1 and 2 require students to read sections of the materials made available beforehand to become better prepared. The third strategy implies extensive reading of materials after the lecture to enhance their learning. Strategy number 4, completing assigned work, seems obvious since it also applies to the L1 setting, but it becomes more relevant in an L2 context since it requires revisiting the content, activating new cognitive schema, rehearsing the content, etc. The fifth strategy is practicing to become more confident. Students reported increased confidence after practicing L2 content, by: making notes, giving informal presentations and/or participating in interactive seminars with other students. Strategy 6, "pre and post lecture routines", refers to extra activities adopted in the L2 context, for example, preparing for lectures in advance, recording the lectures (audio) and, afterwards, (re)listening to the recordings on the base of the textbook and/or the notes. The last strategy, "rote learning", should be avoided. Participants reported adopting rote learning since they could not follow the lecture content or did not fully understand the English. In such cases memorizing was seen as the only way to "acquire" the information.

The present study presents an overview of didactical strategies adopted by students and lecturers when studying in an L2 higher education context. The literature review started from a promising large number of studies, published since 1990, but after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a rather small

number of studies remained. This small number is in sharp contrast to the actual problem at hand. Internationally growing numbers of students in higher education experience challenges due to having to study in an L2 context. It is promising that the studies also center on the challenges presented to lecturers. Only a small number of the studies in the literature review actually presented empirical evidence to underpin their impact. As such, the L2 research agenda becomes clear. The list of didactical strategies is therefore a starting point for future research to focus on their efficacy and efficiency. Attention should be paid to consider the “fit” between these L2 strategies and student and teacher characteristics, next to attention to be paid to the nature of the learning content. Next little has been said about mediating and interactions variables, such as variation in L2 language mastery, L2 motivation, professional development of staff, etc. Nevertheless, it is clear from the review of the literature that educational practice is becoming aware of the need to adopt adequate strategies to meet the needs of a growing group of L2 students.

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