

Karin Richter: English-Medium Instruction and Pronunciation. Exposure and Skills Development

(Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2019. 174 pages)

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is a very timely read, especially with the increase in CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) classes on an annual basis. Much has been researched and written about both CLIL and EMI, and the focus on pronunciation is a welcome addition, especially as it is one of the more undertaught skills in the foreign language (FL) classroom. CLIL encompasses all forms of teaching from academic to vocational subjects through the teaching of a foreign language (Pokrivcaková, et.al., 2015:5).

Richter's book takes us through the stages of her research into the development of FL accent through EMI. The experiment was carried out on business students, studying at an Austrian university of Applied Sciences (UAS) and focusses predominantly on the methodology of teaching and the development of the learners' pronunciation. The primary motivation behind the research was the author's interest in the spread of EMI and L2 (English) pronunciation in adult learners, who attended, what is known in the Austrian HE system as the 'Fachhochschule', which specialises in professional fields, such as business in the case of this research.

The research background covers the onset and promotion of multilingualism within the European Union and how it impacts education policy within a globalised world, particularly in the field of business and the changing requirements of the labour market, not to mention the most dominant language of higher education and research (Ament & Perez-Vidal, 2015). This has given rise to the raising of international awareness and teaching intercultural competence as well as communication skills.

The majority of the teachers, in this study at the UAS, are native speakers (NSs) of English. Richter notices the effect this began having on the learners' pronunciation skills and this lay the motivational foundations for this longitudinal study, the main aims which were to monitor the developmental levels of the EMI learners' pronunciation over a three- year period, which tied in with the length of their studies (Bachelor's degree).

There were two main cohorts of participants: a bilingual English/ German group, who acted as the focus group and a control group of students on a monolingual German programme. There was no implicit language tuition during the EMI courses and the research was carried out on the assumption that classroom discourse was of a high standard, which would then lead to the incidental development of the L2 pronunciation.

Foreign accent (FA) is a salient trace of FL acquisition and NS fluency has, since the emergence of the Audio-Lingual Method, been the primary goal of language teachers and learners alike with pronunciation skills being high on the

agenda. Sadly, it is also often omitted or avoided in terms of explicit teaching and is supposed to develop ‘naturally’ in learners by many non- native speaker FL teachers. The participants of the study have one pronunciation module within their programme of study called ‘Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills1’, which is designed to strengthen the learners’ theoretical and practical knowledge of phonetics. The learners have autonomy on their choice of British or American English and their summative assessment is a three- part oral examination comprising a reading text, a monologue/presentation and an informal discussion with a co candidate and the interlocutor.

Through an ensuing discussion on the employment of NSs and the non- native (NNS) versus native speaker (NS) dichotomy, Richter suggests that the NS accent norms are non – attainable for many language learners and a NS accent as a predominant goal is also non -realistic, as English is increasingly used in NNS environments. Currently around 85% of the global English -speaking population are NNSs with only around 4% of all conversations taking part between NSs (<https://lemongrad.com/english-language-statistics/2020>). However, it is an important factor of this study that the EMI tuition was presented by NS lecturers.

The study comprised a mixed- method case study, designed to investigate the EMI environment and is descriptive in nature and placed the focus on the participants rather than the teachers, in order to remove any bias for NS teachers on the part of the researcher. Native speaker FA is also not the expected attainment of the participants, rather, the study focusses on the development of the FA through EMI.

Richter presents a very thorough insight into English-Medium Instruction in European HE, defining the common acronyms within the field such as, CLIL, ICLHE (integrating Content Language in Higher Education), ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). She goes on to describe the increase in EMI within tertiary education and the differences between tertiary and secondary education, with the predominant difference being the use of English, within the HE sector, which has a more ‘vehicular function’ (Jarvinen, 2008:78) and where the main focus of the education is on the acquisition of subject knowledge rather than linguistic. Straková (2015) points out that in Slovakian secondary education there is more than one teacher teaching a CLIL subject; one for the subject material and one for the language elements, resulting in the need for strong cooperation as the learners tend to ‘work at the level of acquisition rather than learning’ (2015:60). In HE generally, it is assumed that English skills will be developed incidentally through the EMI.

When discussing the internationalisation of HE in Europe, Richter pinpoints the onset of student mobility programmes and the increase in EMI to serve this advancement and criticises the growth in the ‘commercialisation of formal education’ (:18) and the competition to attract high quality learners and lecturers,

that has ensued as a result of this. Graddol has labelled this an ‘internationalization agenda’ (2006:74).

A concrete account of Language Learning in the English-Medium Classroom follows, with a presentation of EMI and LL theories where Richter explains that within the EMI classroom the TL is used much more frequently and learners are more apt at internalising, which is in line with second language acquisition (SLA) theory and Krashen’s input hypothesis (1981). However, she also makes reference to the increasing amount of research around the importance of output and interaction within the L2 learning process including notions of the critical period hypothesis, the contrastive analysis hypothesis and markedness in order to discuss the concept of FA. She then goes on to discuss language learning outcomes in the EM classroom, focussing on the linguistic gains, which include facilitating the notion of integration and multilingualism and the phonological gains, where CLIL students demonstrate a clear superiority in spontaneous oral production (:62).

When measuring the challenges around the development of the degree of FA, Richter states that she was confronted with the difficulties of the choice of activities, the development of a useful rating tool and the selection of qualified listeners. An explanation of the materials used in various similar studies acts as a clear rationale for Richter’s choice of measuring tools, two tasks were chosen in order to ensure more reliable conclusions: The reading of ‘The North Wind and the Sun’ short text was chosen and in order to elicit a more natural type of speech, the participants of this study narrated a Gary Larson cartoon as it was deemed to best reflect overall pronunciation abilities and could be more easily controlled. Lexical items with a range of phonological features, such as *farmer, door, bell, house and grass*, were more easily elicited through this channel. The results of the research were rated through the analysis of sound files.

Richter then proceeds with a presentation on the factors influencing L2 pronunciation mastery and presents the following as the predominant individual difference (ID) factors, ‘which account for phonological variance in the learning of a FL: attitude and identity, motivation, anxiety, formal pronunciation instruction, gender, musicality and exposure to the TL (target language)’ (:82). Additional variables of working memory and L1 aptitude were also taken into account throughout the research.

The conclusion recounts the exploration of how the participants FA developed over time and in what way the changes took place. All the participants were recorded twice and the sound files were rated by expert listeners and some of the files were subjected to repeated analysis. Results indicate that learners from both groups enhanced their FA, however in the EMI group the levels of development proved to be more significant.

Limitations of the study included: on a contextual level, the environment was brought into question. On a conceptual level, the primary limitation was the

reflection of the degree of FA and methodological limitations included the sample sizes of both participants and raters, as there were only 7 raters, with the necessary qualifications for 300 sound files.

In conclusion, this study paves the way for more research into the positive effects of EMI, not only on the development of pronunciation skills but also gives rise to modes of instruction in tertiary education and may answer questions around the native and non- native speaker instructor dichotomy.

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