

Book Review

English-medium instruction and pronunciation: Exposure and skills development

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Publisher:

Multilingual Matters, 2019

ISBN:

9781788922456

Pages:

202

English-medium instruction (EMI) has evidently become extremely popular in the last several decades. While its impact has been the most pronounced in primary and secondary schools, mainly within the framework of content and language integrated learning (CLI) (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2007), its influence is also becoming more and more visible in institutions of higher education, which is related to the growing emphasis on internationalization. Therefore, there is an urgent need for empirical investigations into the nature and effectiveness of EMI at this level. This is because the findings of available studies are far from conclusive, these studies do not focus sufficiently on actual instructional practices used in the classroom or how these practices translate into learning outcomes, and such research is fraught with methodological weaknesses (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018). Karin Richter's book *English-medium Instruction and Pronunciation: Exposure and Skills Development* makes an important contribution to this line of inquiry by exploring the development of pronunciation skills of

students enrolled in a bilingual program in a university of applied sciences in Austria, where up to 50% of content courses are taught in English, mainly by native speakers of the target language (TL).

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, which serves as an introduction, presents the research background, spells out the aims and objectives of the study undertaken by the author, and offers an outline of the volume. Chapter 2 focuses on the phenomenon of EMI in tertiary education in Europe, with an emphasis on disentangling terminological issues, shedding light on the reasons for the rapid spread of EMI programs and depicting the situation in the institution in which the study was conducted (University of Applied Sciences Vienna or UAS Vienna). Chapter 3 provides an overview of the theoretical positions which are viewed as providing support for EMI (i.e., input hypothesis, output hypothesis, interaction hypothesis and sociocultural theory), key issues involved in learning TL phonology, in particular with respect to the development of foreign accent, and research that has examined the outcomes of EMI programs, in terms of both linguistic and phonological gains. The chapter also includes the discussion of the methodology as well as the results of the research project related to the gains in pronunciation by the focus group, which benefited from EMI, and the control group, which received instruction in German. The data were collected in the first and sixth semester of a 3-year BA program. On both occasions, the students were requested to read a text and then tell a story based on a picture cartoon, with the resulting audio recordings being rated by seven phonetically trained judges with the help of a visual analogue scale. Chapter 4 shifts emphasis to individual factors that affect the development of pronunciation, that is, attitude and identity, motivation, anxiety, formal pronunciation instruction, gender, musicality, and exposure to the TL. It also reports the part of the study which investigated the impact of these variables on gains in pronunciation learning, both at the group level and with respect to two individuals who achieved the greatest and lowest progress over the course of six semesters. The first part of Chapter 5 is concerned with a comparison of aspects of German and English phonology as well as a synthesis of research that has focused on the occurrence of Austrian accent in learning English. The second part of the chapter focuses on the part of the research project which investigated the development of the segmental and suprasegmental features in the recordings of the text by ten students judged by the raters as those whose pronunciation had improved the most. Finally, Chapter 6, which is a conclusion, provides a brief synopsis of the main findings of the study, as well as discussing its limitations, considering the directions for future research and offering pedagogical implications.

Apart from providing yet another important piece of the puzzle concerning the role of EMI in higher education, the book offers valuable insights into the

development of TL pronunciation in this context. Such a focus can hardly be overestimated given the fact that this subsystem is more and more often relegated to the sidelines of instruction at all educational levels, perhaps with the exception of degree programs focusing on specific foreign languages (Henderson et al., 2015; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2015). In this connection, the findings of the study show quite convincingly that an improvement in pronunciation is possible in the case of adults, even when instruction is mainly focused on content rather than form, let alone specific phonological features. While I initially had doubts about the structure of the book because of a lack of a clear separation between the theoretical and empirical parts, the decision to include the results in relevant chapters seems to work pretty well in this case. I would also like to highlight several strengths of the study for which the author certainly deserves credit. First, the research project involved a longitudinal design spanning six semesters, a phenomenon that is definitely not the norm in the field of second language acquisition. Second, both controlled and spontaneous production was taken into consideration, a true control group was included, and care was taken to ensure that the ratings of foreign accent were valid and reliable. Third, the investigation of individual factors that mediate pronunciation learning was not confined to group patterns but also involved detailed investigation of the progress and individual profiles of the most and least successful participants. Fourth, the analysis of the acquisition of specific pronunciation features allowed identification of those that may be the most resistant to change for native speakers of Austrian German despite lengthy exposure, a finding that brings with it important pedagogical implications.

These merits of the book are undeniable, but there are also some shortcomings that I will mention here only because the comments may benefit similar investigations conducted in the future. While the longitudinal nature of the study is its obvious strength, it may also be a liability since factors other than EMI could have affected the development of pronunciation over the duration of the three years. For example, the participants' beliefs could have been altered, their motivation could have fluctuated, or they may have become more adept in the use of language learning strategies. Obviously, these issues cannot be verified in the face of an absence of pertinent data. Incidentally, the discussion of individual factors affecting TL pronunciation learning in Chapter 2 would have been considerably enhanced if such variables as aptitude, working memory, learning strategies or beliefs had been given much more careful consideration even if they were not the focus of the study. I also find it difficult to concur with Richter that "the difference in the degree of development of the two groups is highly significant as the EMI students decidedly outperformed their peers . . ." (p. 81). After all, the participants in the focus group were better from the outset and the differences in

gains on the two tasks were not significant. In fact, it might as well be argued that the EMI group was composed of more proficient and motivated students and therefore their superior performance could have been anticipated.

Problems of this kind, however, do not in the least diminish the value of the book and its contribution to research on the effectiveness of EMI or the development of pronunciation in an additional language. In fact, I am deeply convinced that the study will pave the way for similar empirical investigations in the future and will set standards for how similar research should be executed. After all, it is longitudinal studies that take into account the individual profiles of learners which are likely to reveal the most about the efficacy of specific instructional approaches and procedures, the variables mediating this efficacy, and the ways in which these can be related to learning outcomes. This applies in particular to EMI whose effectiveness on different levels should be verified so that its widespread implementation is not taken on faith but rather grounded in convincing empirical evidence.

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