English Medium Instruction
A Research Agenda for a Worldwide Phenomenon

Ernesto Macaro
(University of Oxford, United Kingdom)

Let me start by giving you a bit of an introduction to *EMI Oxford* which is the group of people in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford who are focusing on research in English Medium Instruction (EMI). What we are trying to do at EMI Oxford is to act as an observatory of the global phenomenon of EMI. We take a neutral but where appropriate critical stance on what we observe. We are able to take this stance because the UK is not an EMI country according to the definition which we have adopted which is:

> The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions in which the majority of the population's first language is not English.

Because the UK is not an EMI country when we observe the phenomenon and write about it we are not under any pressure from government agencies or other groups to adopt a particular stance. I should point out that the definition is by no means watertight. Indeed it is there to be challenged by the many different contexts in which content subjects are being taught through the medium of English. Nor is EMI, in my view, to be considered as a fixed object but one which is evolving. The challenge is for that evolution to occur on the basis of involving all the key participants and stakeholders in the process rather than it being a top-down imposed system of delivering education – which appears to be the case at the moment.

Acting as an observatory through research means that we have to carry out research at both a country-specific level and at a global level, where possible using comparative techniques. Looking at the broader global picture and comparing contexts in which EMI is operating is important if we are to move beyond the single institution case study (a predominant feature of current EMI research) towards a broader and more nuanced understanding of how local factors influence its implementation and ultimately its success or failure. To do this kind of research we need 'friends'

around the world to help us. Clearly we do not have the resources to go and spend weeks or months in other countries in order to collect data. I have been heartened by the response of these 'friends' in wishing to help us collect data. An example of this help from our friends is the current research project on the certification of EMI teachers in Higher Education where we are collecting the views of EMI teachers and university managers on whether it is possible to arrive at a certification of competence to teach through the medium of English and at what level that certification might be offered: institutional, national or international level.

As well as carrying out research on EMI our centre tries to act as a resource for other EMI researchers and for teachers around the world. So for example my colleague Jessica Briggs has built up a corpus of EMI lectures in Higher Education which eventually will be available as a resource on our website. We have also carried out a systematic review of EMI in secondary and tertiary phases of education and a 'systematic map' of where that research has taken place, the methods used and the findings obtained will be sketched out in tabular form on our website. We also offer teacher development courses on EMI (currently for secondary and tertiary phases only) either in-country or at Oxford.

For the purposes of this conference I am mainly focusing at the HE level. So what are the aims of EMI in HE? Is the aim simply to internationalise universities by attracting more lucrative international students and rising in the university rankings? Is the aim to facilitate learning of subjects by home students by, as it were, harmonising the research literature written in English with the medium in which the course is delivered? Is EMI in HE a way of ensuring that home students (for example Italian students) can compete in a world market? Or is the aim to build/improve English language capacity of the home country, i.e. Italy? The question which then needs to be asked is: are these aims shared by all the participants in the process – particularly the teachers and students? And with regard to improving the English language capacity of the home country, is there a suggestion here that the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (as a subject in itself) in secondary schools and universities has failed? If it is seen to have failed then why has it failed?

Another set of aims of EMI in HE could be that it is seen as a new multilingual and multicultural tool for developing intercultural communication. If students of many different cultural backgrounds learn academic subjects through the same language will they become more tolerant of each other's cultures and make for a more harmonious and peaceful world? Or is it that EMI offers authentic forms of language learning. Language teachers have been arguing for decades what 'authenticity' means in the foreign language classroom. Is EMI the epitome of authenticity in that without quality and successful communication the learning of content will not take place? Or finally is EMI a way of forcing change in HE pedagogy? In many

parts of the world, Europe included, there is the strong suggestion that teaching in universities is very 'transmissive', knowledge handed down from teacher to student without taking into account where the latter is starting from. Could EMI bring about a change in pedagogy by forcing it to be more interactive and student-centred? Once again, we need to ask: are all these possible aims understood and shared by the participants in the process?

I am sure we are all aware of what are the national and supranational drivers for EMI. In Europe the Bologna Process has aimed and succeeded to a great extent in facilitating student mobility across countries. Ironically though that process appears to have run counter to the European Union's aim of plurilingualism by creating a situations where student mobility necessitates a lingua franca for the purposes of teaching academic subjects to mixed groups of students and, of course, the main candidate for that lingua franca is English. We will have to wait and see if there is an impact of Brexit on EMI in Europe!

Europe is of course not the only geographical area of the world trying to encourage student mobility; the Association of South-East Asian Nations has very similar ambitions and links these very strongly with that area's economic development. The language of the ASEAN has been established, without opposition, as English.

We know that in Italy as in the rest of Europe EMI in HE is on the increase. This mirrors our findings of a 54 country survey across the world facilitated by the British Council which shows that the vast majority of countries surveyed were aiming to increase their EMI offer and internationalise their universities. However we also found that rarely did these countries or institutions have clear language policies in general and EMI policies in particular. So for example we found little evidence that there were guidelines as to how to introduce, implement or monitor EMI programmes. There was little evidence that there was a policy on whether it should be English-only in the EMI classroom or whether codeswitching was to be permitted or even encouraged.

We also found from this study that EMI was putting a downward pressure on the secondary sector to also adopt English as a medium or the medium of instruction. A typical and important example is Hong Kong where eight of its ten universities are offering programmes totally through the medium of English and the other two are offering some programmes or part programmes through the medium of English – one of these even being The Chinese University of Hong Kong!

In the same study we also asked about public opinion or media opinion about EMI in those countries. We could sum this up by saying that generally opinion is favourable to it or ambivalent but rarely completely against it. Opinion in favour is generally couched in terms of 'globalisation' and therefore the need for 'internationalisation', these being the inevitable

consequences of the status of English as an international language. Some sections of certain societies even see it as a way of maintaining or creating a social elite – parents see EMI as a way of distinguishing their sons and daughters from those learning subjects through the medium of the home language. Where public opinion is ambivalent or controversial is usually couched in terms of the recognition that there is simply not the level of English proficiency able to make EMI a success, neither among teachers not students. Another reason why EMI is controversial is because of the colonial past affecting certain countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines although of course in some countries the 'colonial' medium of instruction is occasionally adopted as a 'unifying force' among many ethnic and linguistic groups – see for example Sri Lanka, Nigeria or Cameroon. Other concerns about EMI is the lack of pre-service training or in-service professional development for teachers being asked to teach through EMI.

There are basically three types of EMI programme implementation. There is what is called the Preparatory Year Model (PYP) in countries such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia where students leaving secondary school are given in universities an intensive year of English language learning prior to starting an EMI programme. The second type could be called the university support model where no PYP is available but access to EMI is for all potential students although it is expected that they then get concurrent support from English language specialists. The third model is where there is some kind of selection system for accessing EMI courses. Those that have reached a level of English considered to be sufficient are admitted, those that have not are channelled into home language medium of instruction. This last model, I would argue, is the least egalitarian model and is the one that is most likely to be socially divisive in that better off parents are able to ensure that their sons and daughters reach the requisite level of English by providing them with private language tuition.

I would like to finish off this talk by giving you an insight into the systematic review of EMI research that we have carried out at Oxford. In case you are not familiar with the concept of systematic reviewing, the basic idea is that it is carried out by a team of researchers, rather than one individual, and a review protocol is established whose prime aim is to avoid bias in reviewing the research evidence available. Thus, in our case, we carried out extensive electronic searching using a number of key terms including CLIL and 'Content based'. We established inclusion criteria whereby we included doctoral theses which are often omitted from other 'narrative' reviews. We produced the systematic map I have already mentioned. Most importantly for the 83 EMI studies in HE two reviewers independently carried out in-depth reading of each research paper and then came together to decide on its method, its findings and the quality of the research.

I will now summarise briefly the review findings of the 83 studies of EMI in Higher Education. First of all there is absolutely no consensus as

to what label we should be using: English Medium Instruction; English as a Medium of Instruction; English Medium Education; English Taught Programmes; Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT); Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE). All these are labels which have been used in the literature sometimes with no attempt to explain why a particular label is being used. Moreover it is unclear which might be the 'umbrella term', the superordinate term which encompasses the others. Some authors claim that CBLT is the umbrella term, some claim that CLIL is, others that EMI should be considered the superordinate term.

Second, there is a lack of specification about what the construct is; what the label actually represents beneath the surface, as it were. Are we talking about all instruction being in English or only some? And if it is 'some' then are two languages (the home language and English) being kept separate or mixed in the same lesson or lecture? A related issue is which subjects are being taught through EMI? Are they what we might call 'hard EMI subjects' such as Biology, Engineering, Geography, Politics, and Economics. Or are they what we might call 'soft EMI subjects' such as International Business Studies, Applied Linguistics, or TESOL. This hard and soft distinction is my own based on the notion that the 'hard EMI subjects' can be perfectly well taught in the home language, but a choice is made by the institution to offer them in English. On the other hand it would be difficult not to use in some way the English language in those subjects which I have labelled 'soft EMI subjects'.

Third, in terms of bringing all the evidence together from the systematic review it is beyond doubt that our own findings were correct: EMI is increasing on a world-wide basis in practically every country covered by the research we reviewed. The rate of increase of course is highly variable. So for example whilst South Korea is rapidly expanding its EMI provision, Japan is moving more cautiously despite the launch of the Global 30 project (the ambition of which has now been curtailed) which aimed to attract some 300,000 international students to Japanese universities.

Fourth, in line with the growth of EMI provision, the field of EMI research has grown, particularly post-2005. However this research is dominated by investigations into teacher beliefs and student beliefs or reactions to EMI. Whilst I would definitely agree that these investigations are important, research also needs to ask different research questions, not least, if sticking to teacher and learner beliefs, do those beliefs change over time? There is very little research on the impact of EMI on English language learning. This is surprising given the claimed benefits of 'immersion' in the language brought about by EMI. We have some evidence that it improves listening skills but it is not convincing evidence because of often the lack of an adequate comparison group not taking an EMI course but relying on EFL provision only. There is even less evidence that there is no

detrimental impact on content learning as would be judged by objective tests. We have the views of teachers and learners and these tend to suggest some, at least short term, detrimental impact on content learning but we do not have hard evidence from assessments.

Fifth, the EMI research field tends to divide itself in secondary education (often labelled CLIL) and tertiary. However very rarely are there studies looking at transition between the two phases. Yet I would argue that the transition from learning a subject through English at secondary schools (as in the current situation in Italy with the *scuole superiori*) to EMI at university is a crucial one to ask and investigate.

Sixth, a number of variable are not explored. One of these is gender. Now people might ask why gender should be an issue in EMI? Well the answer is that subjects are gendered in many countries. Females tend to opt for language-based studies; males for subjects such as engineering. Can EMI bring about a change in the gendered nature of an academic subject? Might we see more female engineers and more male language teachers? The other variable which needs further exploration is the private versus state sector. There are some indications in the research reviewed that the private universities are quickly increasing their EMI offer and that state universities are having to compete with them for student numbers. It therefore would be useful to have private versus state as a variable when examining outcome variables such as improved language learning, impact on content learning, *actual* career opportunities offered by EMI (as opposed to merely anecdotal/aspirational ones), impact on equality issues in a particular country or jurisdiction.

So, to sum up, we have a rapidly developing phenomenon in HE which is having an impact on secondary education and on all sorts of other aspects of teacher and student life. As yet however we have only scratched the surface in terms of research into what exactly is happening. There is still plenty more quality research to be done!