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Moving beyond ‘infancy’: Towards a cross-fertilisation between EMI and EAP scholarship

Abstract

Growth in the provision of English medium instruction (EMI) has led to a significant increase in publications on EMI. Several publications claim that EMI is a young field that is still at the level of ‘infancy’ in areas such as language-related student support and teacher education. This raises the question why EMI appears not to draw on research and practices from English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a discipline with a longer history of enquiry into English-medium education. In this paper, we explore convergences between EMI and EAP in the areas of student support, collaboration between language teachers and subject teachers, and teacher education, and suggest some EAP theories and practices that EMI might usefully draw on. We conclude by stressing the need for cross-fertilisation between EMI and EAP scholarship and for a joined research agenda that aims to produce more systematic empirical evidence of the benefits of discipline-specific academic language and literacy development.

Introduction

There has been a massive growth in the provision of English medium instruction (EMI) in universities around the world, and the number of publications on EMI has increased accordingly over the last decade. One such paper, published in this journal by Galloway and Rose (2021), focuses on the expanding roles of English language practitioners in EMI contexts. It points out that ELT practitioners may be confronted with new demands as a result of the growth of pre-sessional and in-sessional courses designed to address students’ language-related challenges. The new demands discussed by the authors include, for example, teaching specialized EAP classes, developing discipline-specific EAP learning materials, and collaborating with subject lecturers to support students. Regarding student support, Galloway and Rose (2021: 36) argue that ‘EMI is in a relative stage of infancy in terms of understanding how to confront students’ academic and language-related challenges...’. We have noticed that in addition to Galloway and Rose’s (2021) ‘infancy’ claim regarding student support, several other EMI scholars also refer to the domain’s ‘infancy’, for instance in the areas of collaboration between language specialists and content teachers (Lasagabaster 2018: 412), and teacher education (Yuan 2021: 4). These ‘infancy’ statements led us to consider whether EMI can be, and is being, regarded as a relatively new and independent discipline for which wholly new approaches must be developed, or whether it is in fact a close relative of the older discipline of EAP, which already has a decades-long tradition of theory-building, research and development of instructional approaches as well as a wealth of publications that are concerned with the three areas perceived to be in their infancy by EMI researchers.

A distinction between the two domains has been drawn by Macaro’s (2018: 19) definition of EMI as ‘[T]he use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English’. This definition sets EMI apart from EAP, which has traditionally provided English language teaching for L2 students studying in Anglophone countries or post-colonial regions where English has long been the medium of instruction. It is beyond the scope of this paper to debate Macaro’s definition, although we agree with the critique raised by some over the geographical distinction on the grounds that many Anglophone universities have become multilingual spaces, where often very few classroom participants, including teachers, have English as their first language. However, it is concerning that this clear-cut distinction might conceal substantial convergences between EMI and EAP and impede their cross-fertilisation. There are signs that there is not much knowledge exchange between the

two domains, as evidenced in the relative absence of EAP sources in the reference lists of EMI publications, and vice versa. We see this geographical separation of EMI and EAP as unhelpful, as it may prevent EMI scholars from drawing on EAP's research findings, principles and practices in the belief that they are not applicable to EMI and thus may lead them to reinvent the wheel when it comes to supporting non-native speaker of English (NNES) students and teachers in their endeavour to learn and teach in the English medium. At the same time it may prevent EAP scholars from broadening their repertoire which they could do through learning about the specific challenges and practices that are prevalent in EMI contexts (as defined by Macaro).

In this paper, we begin to question whether EMI and EAP should be seen as separate disciplines or close relatives by looking at similarities between the two domains in the areas of student support, collaboration and teacher education. Where we see similarities, we will refer to theories and practices developed in EAP that might be applicable to EMI. Before we begin, it is important to clarify that we understand EAP as an academic discipline, in contrast to the way in which the term is being frequently and incorrectly used, that is for all types of general language and study skills courses offered in Anglophone universities.

Student support provision in EMI and Anglophone universities

Several EMI studies recently conducted in universities in China and Japan (e.g. Galloway and Ruegg 2020) have found a predominance of pre-sessional and in-sessional courses, which are typically designed and delivered by staff in language departments that are detached from the disciplines. Because of this detachment, the language support offered to students remains at a generic level that fails to address their discipline-specific needs. As the relevance of this provision was questioned by both staff and students in their study, Galloway and Ruegg, alongside a number of other EMI scholars, recommend discipline-specific instruction as most beneficial for EMI students. Here there is a strong convergence with EAP. First, both domains share as a fundamental problem the widespread provision of generic language support, as in many Anglophone universities, too, English language support is largely offered from outside the disciplines whilst subject lecturers take little responsibility for helping students with what they perceive as language problems. This provision neglects the need of students to acquire 'disciplinary' (Dafouz & Gray 2022: 6) or 'academic' (Wingate 2015) literacies, that is the ability to participate in the communicative practices of their chosen disciplines. The challenges of acquiring academic literacy are, we would argue, identical for *all* students new to a discipline, be it students in EMI contexts, non-native speaker of English (L2) or native-speaker of English (L1) students in Anglophone contexts.

Second, because of students' academic literacy needs, the importance of discipline-specific instruction has also been highlighted in many EAP publications, on the basis that there are considerable disciplinary differences in the use of academic English and that students need to be explicitly taught the features of the language specific to their discipline to be able to communicate effectively in this context (e.g. Hyland 2002). In fact, discipline-specificity is at the heart of EAP theory and pedagogy, having been the core principle of EAP's parent discipline English for *Specific Purposes* (ESP) since its beginnings in the 1960s. Strevens (1988), one of the founding ESP scholars, summarized the essential characteristics of ESP as meeting the specified needs of the learner, relating content to particular disciplines, and analysing the language used in the disciplines' activities. Consequently, it has become EAP's central business to identify the discourse practices and conventions of specific disciplines with the aim to teach the related language features and

communicative skills to novice students. Discipline-specific EAP work was conducted at Birmingham University as early as the 1980s, and there have since been numerous reports on EAP units in Anglophone universities in Hong Kong, Australia, South Africa and the UK moving towards discipline-specific provision (for an overview see Wingate 2015). EAP's practice of discourse analysis as well as the examples of discipline-specific provision could potentially offer useful information for EMI policy makers and course designers; however, they may currently pay little attention to EAP practices or see them as irrelevant as a result of the clear distinction drawn between the two domains. Thus, whilst the benefits of discipline-specific instruction are recognised by both EMI and EAP scholars, there is little mutual awareness of what has already been achieved. A common challenge for both domains, as we will discuss later, is to expand this approach from small-scale interventions, carried out by individual practitioners or researchers in individual programmes or departments, to a systematic and institution-wide provision.

Collaboration between language specialists and subject lecturers

Collaboration between English language specialists and subject lecturers (called content lecturers in the EMI literature) has been recommended by several EMI scholars (e.g. Lasagabaster 2018; Galloway & Ruegg 2020; Yuan 2021). As Lasagabaster (2018: 401) explains, collaboration, for instance in the form of team-teaching, would help to overcome subject lecturers' tendency to avoid language-related issues and 'lead them to ponder the fact that they have a specific role to play when it comes to teaching the discipline-specific language'. Again, however, it is stated that 'studies on collaborative work are still in their infancy' (Lasagabaster 2018: 412), which suggests that the long-standing discussion of this topic by EAP scholars and the implementation of collaborative activities in EAP contexts have not been taken on board.

It is obvious that discipline-specific language and literacy instruction relies on the information that language specialists receive from discipline insiders and on consequent collaborative activities which turn this information into teaching and learning resources. Therefore, the need for collaboration as well as ways of achieving it have long been discussed in the EAP literature, beginning with Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) model of three levels of engagement between EAP and subject specialists. Concrete proposals have been put forward for the implementation of collaborative activities (e.g. Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998; Wingate 2015), and reports of successful implementation have been presented, for instance the CEM (contextualization, embedding, mapping) model at the Newcastle Business School (Sloan and Porter 2010) or the model of collaborative, curriculum-integrated language and literacy instruction which is followed widely in Australian universities (e.g. Murray and Nallaya 2016). This model is explained in more detail below. Whilst there is an evident consensus in the EMI and EAP literature over the need for collaboration, again, there is no mutual recognition. This is regrettable because, as is the case for student support, the two domains share the challenge of implementing collaboration more widely within and across institutions. So far, collaborative work tends to be restricted to individual initiatives by EAP and subject specialists. These bottom-up initiatives are difficult to transfer to other contexts (e.g. Sloan and Porter 2010) and often unsustainable because of workload issues and staff turnover. Another compounding factor, as mentioned by Lasagabaster (2018), is a lack of willingness and expertise among subject specialists to engage in activities related to academic literacy. This factor has been recognised by both EMI and EAP scholars, alongside the understanding that only if collaborative and discipline-specific approaches are incentivised and resourced by university managements, can they provide effective and continuous student support.

Below, we will come back to collaboration and look in more detail what it can achieve in subject lecturer education.

Teacher education in EMI and EAP contexts

In the EMI literature, teacher education comprises two different types of teachers, the language teacher and the 'EMI teacher', a term used for subject lecturers, for whom teaching through the medium of English often represents a new challenge. At first sight, it could be assumed that the second type, education of subject lecturers, is not an issue with which EAP should be concerned, as in Anglophone contexts teaching in English is rarely a new challenge for lecturers. We will address this assumption later, but turn first to the first type, the education of language specialists, which Galloway and Rose (2021) refer to in their discussion of the expanding role of ELT (English Language Teaching) practitioners. As the authors explain, more and more ELT teachers who were trained for general English language teaching will take up work in the fast-expanding EMI sector but may 'find that the traditional training they receive in language acquisition and pedagogy does not prepare them to teach on, and often design, specialized EAP classes' (Galloway and Rose 2021: 36). ELT practitioners beginning to work in Anglophone universities face exactly the same challenges, as specializing from general English language teaching to teaching EAP requires additional knowledge and expertise. Even more knowledge needs to be acquired if the ELT practitioner moves into discipline-specific EAP, as this requires a higher level of specialization.

For this higher level of specialization, the discipline of EAP has a relevant approach to offer, namely genre analysis and genre-based pedagogy. Genre analysis provides the ELT practitioner, as well as the more experienced teacher of EAP, with the methods to examine the discourse conventions of unknown disciplines and to identify their specific structural and linguistic features. Genre-based pedagogy provides the methods with which these features can be taught to students. The genre approach originates in the seminal work by Swales (1990), who introduced the concept of genre as the foundation for EAP curriculum design and classroom practice and proposed a framework for developing academic English courses. The framework consists of four strands. The first, Ethnography, comprises the study of the course participants' discourse community to identify the genres they use and the ways in which the genres' rationale and communicative purpose impact on language choices. The second strand, Evaluations and Validations, requires course designers to evaluate existing instructional materials for their suitability to teach the target genre. As existing commercial materials, such as textbooks, are usually generic rather than focused on specific genres, the third and fourth strand, Discourse Analysis and Methodology, are required in most cases. In the third strand, a detailed analysis is carried out of the target genre and the textual features that are expected by the discourse community. In the fourth strand, the course designer transforms the insights gained from discourse analysis into language learning tasks that help students to recognize and internalize the expected discourse features. The first and the third strand, Ethnography and Discourse analysis, are the ones that enable the ELT/EAP teacher to understand the structure and lexico-grammatical features of the target genre as shaped by the purpose the genre fulfills within the disciplinary discourse community. A number of publications have explained in some detail how genre analysis and the subsequent development of learning tasks work, how they are perceived by students and impact on their acquisition of academic literacy (e.g. Tribble and Wingate 2013). Genre-based models can provide ELT/EAP teachers direct access to a teaching methodology that has been shown to be successful by empirical research. Whilst genre approaches to both teacher education and student support have been widely recommended by EAP scholars and are being used

in EAP settings around the world, they have, as far as we can see, not been considered in much of the EMI literature.

The education of the 'EMI teacher' has received more attention in the EMI literature than that of the language teacher. In a survey of the training provision for EMI teachers in European universities, O'Dowd (2018: 559) found that 'a significant number of courses (77%) contain a focus on the development of teachers' language skills', while only 29 percent 'focus on the development of academic language'. Whilst the focus on lecturers' language skills in teacher education clearly sets EMI apart from EAP, the challenge of enabling subject lecturers to support students' development of academic language and literacy is shared by the two domains. There is a common understanding that subject lecturers play an important role in academic literacy instruction as well as a common concern that they are reluctant to take up this role (e.g. Lasagabaster 2018; Wingate 2015). Both EMI and EAP scholars see the language specialist as best placed to provide the necessary training to subject lecturers, which, in addition to student support, presents an important function of their collaboration with subject lecturers. Yuan (2021: 1), for instance, argues 'that language specialists can take on a new role as EMI teacher educators and contribute to EMI teaching and teacher development'. With their linguistic knowledge, Yuan goes on to suggest, language teachers can help EMI teachers to identify their students' language problems and, in addition, they can share 'their teaching experience and expertise informed by the rich literature on pertinent topics such as classroom discourse, task-based teaching, collaborative learning, material design and adaptation' (2021: 1). Most recently, Dafouz and Gray (2022) have described three areas of knowledge that make language specialist useful collaborators and educators of content lectures, i.e. knowledge about language, knowledge about pedagogy, and knowledge about pedagogic materials. While knowledge about language and knowledge about pedagogic materials can facilitate the collaborative development of 'language-sensitive syllabuses' (p.6) and teaching/learning materials, it is language specialists' knowledge of pedagogy which can make fundamental changes to the EMI classroom, by transforming subject lecturers' teaching methodology from an emphasis on lecturing and knowledge transmission to more student-centered interactive modes.

Although the EAP literature on collaboration has been growing steadily since Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) publication, the emphasis tends to be more on the benefits for student support rather than teacher education. Wingate (2015) has put forward some concrete proposals as to how language specialists could help subject lecturers integrate a focus on academic literacy development into their regular teaching and assessment practices. But most can be learned from the collaborative and curriculum-embedded approach to the development of academic language and literacy that has been followed at Australian universities since the 1990s. This approach has seen practitioners from Academic Language and Learning (ALL) units, which exist in most Australian universities, form collaborations with academics in the disciplines with the aim to embed language and literacy support into the curriculum. Murray and Nallaya (2016), reporting on the implementation of this approach in eight programmes across a South Australian university, show that ALL practitioners play a strong teacher-educational role in the collaboration. For instance, there was a need to help subject lecturers understand what academic literacies are and to 'articulate the literacies pertinent to their particular disciplines and to exemplify how these could be mapped to learning aims and outcomes' (p. 6). Further training provided by the ALL specialists included the alignment of learning outcomes and assessment tasks. Many projects involving collaboration, teacher education, and academic language and literacy development have been reported in the *Journal of Academic Language and*

Learning. Therefore, claims such as Yuan's (2021: 4), that 'EMI teacher education is still in its infancy' or Lasagabaster's (2018: 402) that 'collaboration between language and content instructors is practically nonexistent at tertiary level' suggest that there is insufficient awareness of research and educational practices from beyond the boundaries of the EMI domain.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, EMI and EAP researchers seem to share a mutual lack of awareness of each other's work. If this is to some extent the result of the geographical line drawn between the two domains, this distinction may need to be reconsidered. As we have shown in this paper, the two domains share identical challenges and concerns, such as providing the best possible student support and teacher education. With its older history, EAP has research findings and pedagogical approaches on offer that could move EMI swiftly out of infancy. If, because of their many convergences, EMI and EAP were to be seen as close relatives rather than two distant domains, the infancy claim could not be sustained. Rather, this new perspective would open the door to cross-fertilisation in research and pedagogy. We want to conclude by suggesting one area in which joined research could lead to substantial pedagogical improvements.

A common concern for EMI and EAP is the absence of an efficient and inclusive student support system. Given that scholars in both domains agree on the benefits of discipline-specific academic language and literacy support, it would be useful to join forces in providing more systematic and comprehensive evidence of these benefits. The current problem in both EMI and EAP contexts is that in many universities discipline-specific provision is not carried by institutional policy but occurs rather sporadically on the basis of individual interventions. Consequently, the generic approach, delivered by language units that are separate from the disciplines, is still widespread. This provision, which focuses mainly on linguistic improvement and is in Anglophone contexts often offered exclusively to non-native speakers of English, is entrenched in institutional policies and unquestioningly continued by generations of university managers regardless of the fact that student populations have changed considerably over the last three decades. It is based on a range of naive assumptions, for instance that the main reason for students' struggle with academic literacy is their lack of language proficiency. Budget concerns are most likely another reason for maintaining the generic provision, as it is much cheaper to teach 'general academic English' (an ungenue construct in our view) to students from various disciplines than enabling EAP staff to specialize in teaching students from specific disciplines. Fostering collaboration between EAP practitioners and subject lecturers, on which effective discipline-specific instruction depends, would add to the costs, because this can only be realized by providing incentives, such as workload reductions, to subject lecturers. Discipline specificity based on collaboration is only achievable if university managements are willing to shoulder these costs.

To change university managers' mindsets and convince them to invest in discipline-specific student support, strong evidence of the benefits of this approach must be gathered. Systematic accounts of enhanced student performance and positive perceptions by students and lecturers have not sufficiently been delivered by EAP. A key challenge for EAP and EMI scholars is to provide further evidence on the basis of discipline-specific teaching initiatives and comprehensive research. This requires mutual awareness and cross-fertilisation of research and practices between EMI and EAP.

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