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ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD: TRENDS AND DILEMMAS

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Abstract – The recent phenomenon of globalisation has strongly favoured English, which has become the preferred medium for international communication in many contexts. This spread of English as a lingua franca has had relevant implications in the field of English used for specific purposes (ESP), where the need for a common language is particularly felt for the development of specialised communication at a global level. This paper investigates the present globalising trends in a specific field of ESP, i.e. in the academic world, focusing in particular on their main implications for language research and education, highlighting both its recent trends but also the main dilemmas that this great development has aroused. The first part of the paper explores the globalising effects of the use of English as a lingua franca in the world of academia and the complex nature of its linguistic realisations, underscoring both homogenising and localising trends. Indeed, in spite of the homogenising trends deriving from the process of globalisation, academic discourse is not at all uniform but varies according to a host of factors, such as language competence, disciplinary field, community membership, professional expertise and generic conventions, as well as some factors which clearly reflect aspects of the local tradition and culture. The second part of the paper is devoted to the analysis of another phenomenon which is quite topical in the academic context at a global level, i.e. the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education in many non-English-speaking countries. The implementation of these 'international' courses has opened up new opportunities for learning the English discourses relating to the specialised disciplines taught, but has also aroused dilemmas connected with language proficiency and the level of content competence acquired.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca; Academic discourse; Globalisation; English as a medium of instruction; English for research purposes.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great acceleration of the moves towards the globalisation of socio-cultural and communicative practices. The phenomenon of globalisation has strongly favoured English, which has become the preferred medium for international communication in many contexts. This spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has had relevant implications in the field of English used for specific purposes (ESP), where the need for a common language is particularly felt for the development of specialised communication at a global level.

This spread of English has not only been considered a great advantage in terms of better global communication, but has also aroused criticism as it has often been seen as a factor of marginalisation or even obliteration of important existing differences among non-English speaking communities, with the possible risk of a 'colonisation' process preventing the attainment of authentic intercultural discourse (Scollon, Wong Scollon 1995; Canagarajah 1999). As globalising trends commonly rely on covert strategies meant to reduce participants' specificities, they are likely to hybridise local identities in favour of Anglocentric textual models. Globalisation thus offers a topical illustration of the interaction between linguistic and cultural factors in the construction of discourse, both within specialised domains and in wider contexts (Candlin, Gotti 2004, 2007). As language is strictly linked to the setting in which it is used, cultural elements operate as key contextual constraints, influencing both the level of discursive organisation and its range of realisations (Pérez-Llantada 2012).

It is the aim of this paper to investigate the present globalising trends in a specific field of ESP, i.e. in the academic world, focusing in particular on their main implications for language research and education, highlighting both its recent trends but also the main dilemmas that this great development has aroused. The first part of the paper will explore the globalising effects of the use of English as a lingua franca in the world of academia and the complex nature of its linguistic realisations, highlighting both homogenising and localising trends. Indeed, in spite of the homogenising trends deriving from the process of globalisation, academic discourse is not at all uniform but varies according to a host of factors, such as language competence, disciplinary field, community membership, professional expertise and generic conventions, as well as some factors which clearly reflect aspects of the local tradition and culture. The data presented in this part originate from recent research projects on identity and culture in academic discourse. These data show that the (native or non-native) Anglophone textual realisations are clearly influenced by their authors' linguistic, professional, social, or national background.

The second part of the paper is devoted to the analysis of another phenomenon which is rather topical in the academic context at a global level, i.e. the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education in many non-English-speaking countries. The implementation of these 'international' courses has opened up new opportunities for learning the English discourses relating to the specialised disciplines taught, but has also aroused dilemmas connected with language proficiency and the level of content competence acquired. These issues will be investigated with reference to experiences and research projects carried out in various European countries in the last few years.

2. ELF in the research field

The adoption of English as a lingua franca in the process of globalisation of academic practices has certainly provided a solution of great practical value, but has also aroused fears and complaints in many non-English-speaking academics. The strict English-medium policies adopted by many academic publications and book series have heightened non-English-speakers' awareness that the increasing use of this language in publishing and higher education might greatly reduce the role of national languages for academic purposes. Indeed, as there is a tendency of scholars to publish what they consider to be their best work in English so as to reach a wider audience (cf. among others Gunnarsson 2000 for Sweden, Yakhontova 2001 for Ukraine, Salager-Meyer, Alcaraz Ariza, Zambrano 2003 for Latin America, Giannoni 2008 for Italy, Kachru 2009 for Asia and Ferguson *et al.* 2011 for Spain), non-English-medium publications are often relegated to the status of local scholarly products providing only a marginal contribution to the mainstream because they are unable to disseminate knowledge through a global lingua franca.

These hegemonic tendencies of English are known to have relevant ideological and ethical implications in the marginalisation, mitigation or even obliteration of existing differences among 'colonised' communities. As globalising trends commonly rely on covert strategies meant to reduce participants' specificities, they hybridise local identities in favour of Anglo-centric textual models. The complex interaction that opposes and often merges globalising/localising trends contains evidence of hybrid forms of discourse which are as unstable and provisional as the sociocultural identities they encode (Robertson 1992; Wright 2000) and which result in the simplification of discourse strategies, the recontextualisation of actor-space-time relations, the enactment of processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, and the rise of cultural hybridity (Fairclough 2006). Furthermore, anthropological and sociological accounts of cultural interaction in international communities and organisations (Hofstede 1991) suggest the possibility of hybrid communicative schemata in which a new set of cultural values and identities – functional to communication within the wider community – are created in response to the need to communicate internationally. The new, contaminated system generally adopts the norms and features of the language/culture that is dominant in the wider discourse community, but it retains key traits of its users' native languages and cultures. At the same time, as English is the language dominant in international professional exchanges it has a backwash effect that contaminates and hybridises native systems. The gradual globalisation or hybridisation of discursive practices that first appeared in English-speaking environments, now significantly affects also smaller languages (Cortese, Riley 2002; Gotti *et al.* 2002), which are subject to standardising pressures in their semantic, textual, sociopragmatic and even lexicogrammatical construction.

Hegemonic tendencies have clearly been identified in academic English, especially in the language policies commonly adopted by major international publications employing English as 'the world's academic lingua franca' (Oakes 2005; Bennett 2007). Non-native academics are thus expected to have good English literacy skills so as to be able to present their papers in that language at conferences and publish them in peer-reviewed journals and volumes. This expectation has greatly influenced academics, with the result that the last decades have seen a massive conversion of journals from other languages to English, thus determining "a real loss in professional registers in many national cultures with long scholarly traditions" (Swales 2000, p. 67). The story of the Egyptian marine biologist reported by Swales (1990, p. 204) shows that, in order to have her dissertation accepted, she had to rewrite it several times, modifying the original style typical of the Arabic way of writing and adopting the rhetorical conventions commonly shared by the American scientific community. Moreover, the influence of English has greatly conditioned the evolution of local specialised discourses (see Scarpa 2007 for the spread of the nominal style and the related progressive depersonalisation in Italian scientific prose).

These trends have a number of serious consequences. The first is the concentration of immense power in the hands of a restricted group of academic gatekeepers, located in very few countries in the world. These countries have attained the right to enforce norms and to certify the academic recognition of research carried out all over the world. Their academic power in certain disciplines is so strong that it can decide the careers of scholars who need to publish in leading international journals to validate and disseminate their research findings (Curry, Lillis 2004). There is therefore a risk of linguistic monopoly, scholarly chauvinism and cultural imperialism. The exclusive use of English disfavours non-native writers who have "the triple disadvantage of having to read, do research and write in another language" (Van Dijk 1994, p. 276). It may thus give rise to unintentional – or even intentional – discrimination against non-native speakers on the part of the editors of specialised publications (Canagarajah 2002). The demands associated with writing and publishing in English are usually very strict and can be used by academic publications to filter foreign contributions.

Moreover, since only the British or American varieties are favoured, a failure to comply with the journal's linguistic standards is usually penalised with rejection.

Scholarly chauvinism and cultural imperialism may be detrimental to the growth of specialised knowledge itself. There is a risk that 'periphery' perspectives (Canagarajah 1996) in the various disciplines may have no influence on the trends developed in intellectual centres located in a small number of monopolising academies. The periphery, instead, may play a healthy role by questioning views prevailing in the centre and providing alternative perspectives. In recent years, there has been a heightened awareness in the academic world of the valuable contribution of non-Anglophone scholars working within dominant research paradigms and agendas. However, this increased awareness has rarely "translated into a recognition that the discipline[s are] also 'owned' nowadays (to use the new management-speak) by a very large number of people for whom English is neither a first, nor a second language" (Kayman 2003, p. 52). In some cases, 'periphery' publications have changed their language or even title to suggest a more international collocation. For example, in 2006 the *Italian Heart Journal* (which already published in English) changed its name to the *Journal of Cardiovascular Medicine.* As local journals are regarded as second-class research tools by the Italian medical community and since medical literature is regarded as being more competitive if published in the UK or the US, the scientific board of the *Italian Heart Journal* decided to conceal the peripheral provenance of the journal by assigning it to an American publisher, while maintaining an Italian editor.

The complexity of the choices made by non-native English speakers depends on the fact that they participate in at least two different communities: the English-speaking academic community and the global discourse community of their own discipline. To belong to the former community they have to show that they are able to use English and master its norms of use, including grammar rules, word choice, idiomatic expressions and technical aspects such as punctuation and spelling. Moreover, in order to be accepted by the English-speaking academic community, scholars need to be aware of the practices commonly used in expository academic prose, as reflected in the guidelines provided by books on academic communication and by the notes to contributors published in international academic journals. The examples below (from Noguchi 2006, p. 57) clearly illustrate some of the expectations of the English-speaking academic community pointed out by the reviewers of submitted papers:

(1) Thus, for colorectal adenocarcinoma, it is more useful to investigate the expression of X as well as that of Y for predicting tumor invasion and metastasis than examining Y only.

Revised version: *Thus, to predict tumor invasion and metastasis in colorectal adenocarcinoma, not only expression of Y but also that of X needs to be examined.*
Comment: The aim of the study can be more quickly grasped if the phrase dealing with the purpose comes earlier in the sentence.

(2) However, the number of markers is still insufficient. From this standpoint, the present contig must be reexamined using a larger number of landmarks. Recently, RG was developed as a method to scan a large number of restriction sites distributed on entire genome. RG employs [...]
Revised version: *However, the number of markers is still insufficient. From this standpoint, the present contig must be reexamined using a larger number of landmarks. One solution to this problem is offered by RG, a method developed to scan a large number of restriction sites distributed on an entire genome. RG employs […]*
Comment: Adding the discourse signal 'one solution' [...] tells the reader what to expect.

At the same time, membership of the global discourse community of their discipline depends on scholars' compliance with expectations concerning the specific academic genre to which the text they are writing belongs. These include textual and paragraph organisation in terms of information presentation and ordering, as well as the need to consider cross-cultural issues. The 'rules', however, are not always easy to identify or define in clear terms, as is shown by the fact that reviewers and editors often point to problems in the text without being able to indicate exactly what rules are being violated or what criteria have not been met. Here is an example of such comments cited by Noguchi (2006, p. 59):

(3) Comment: There is a problem with the English throughout the text. It is not a very serious one, but it certainly detracts from the message and makes some important statements not immediately intelligible. Among the many examples I could quote, I will select these:
"The clinicopathologic importance of the biologic aggressiveness has been well documented in many reports." (First sentence of Discussion, page 8). What does this sentence mean? I think the authors are trying to say that some clinical and pathologic parameters of thyroid carcinomas have been found to correlate with the tumor aggressiveness, but it sure takes a while to decipher the message.
"The classification by Sakamoto et al defined both papillary and follicular carcinomas as poorly differentiated carcinomas." I assume they are trying to say that Sakamoto's poorly differentiated carcinomas include tumors in both the papillary and the follicular category. [Anonymous reviewer for *The American Journal of Surgical Pathology*, December 1997]

Indeed, stylistic/rhetorical structures may differ from culture to culture; for example, Japanese writers prefer a specific-to-general pattern in contrast to the general-to-specific pattern favoured by American writers (Kobayashi 1984). Another well-known case is the one visually expressed by Kaplan (1966) referring to the difference between linear (English) and circular (Oriental) patterns in the rhetorical structuring of an argumentative paper. Since intercultural differences are bound to influence the comprehension of events by people belonging to different cultures, research in the field of contrastive rhetoric (Connor 1998) has greatly helped the identification of textual aspects which may be attributed to culturally determined schemata reproducing a 'world view' typical of a given culture. It has been shown (Candlin, Gotti 2004, 2007) that the non-native, when communicating in English, is confronted with a psycho-cognitive situation where his/her L1 linguistic and cultural schemata conflict with the schemata dominant in international professional communities, and is thus forced to negotiate and redefine his/her cultural identity in order to successfully communicate in international intercultural settings. The importance of compliance with such conventions (not only linguistic but also cultural ones) for the acceptance of an academic contribution have been aptly pointed out by Mauranen (1993, p. 263):

> The option of not conforming to the norms of the target linguistic culture is not available with respect to grammatical and lexical use, and, as it seems, at least some textual rules must be included in the same category, possibly more than we are accustomed to thinking at present. Breaking grammatical rules has different consequences from breaking textual or rhetorical rules originating in a national culture: by breaking grammatical and lexical rules, a writer conveys the impression of not knowing the language, which may in mild cases be forgiven and in serious cases cause breakdown of comprehension; by breaking rules of a text-linguistic type, a writer may appear incoherent or illogical; finally, by breaking culture-specific rhetorical rules a writer may seem exotic and command low credibility.

Being associated with communities linked to local as well as international conventions, academic discourse has provided fertile ground for the analysis of intercultural variation, both at a textual level and in the communicative strategies embedded in its textualisations. Several research projects have investigated identity-forming features linked to 'local' or disciplinary cultures, as communicated through English in various academic domains by native and non-native speakers. Three recent projects on this issue are the KIAP Project (*Cultural Identity in Academic Prose*)[1] carried out by the

[1] http://www.kiap.uib.no/

University of Bergen, Norway, the SERAC Project (*Spanish/English Research Article Corpus*),[2] conducted at the University of Zaragoza, the *Identity and Culture in Academic Discourse* Project,[3] carried out by CERLIS, the research centre on specialised discourse based at the University of Bergamo. The KIAP Project has carried out a comparative analysis of medical research articles with those of two other disciplines: Economics and Linguistics (Fløttum, Dahl, Kinn 2006). In particular, Fløttum (2006) compared articles written in three different languages: English, French and Norwegian in order to establish whether cultural identities may be identified in academic prose, and, if so, whether these identities are language or discipline-specific in nature. In general, Fløttum's findings show that for cultural identities, discipline has greater influence than language. This means that, for example, there are more similarities between Norwegian and French medical articles than between Norwegian medical and linguistic articles. Statistically both discipline and language have an effect on the frequency of all the six main phenomena studied. However, for most of them, discipline seems to be more important than language.

In the CERLIS Project, special attention has been given to the relationship between socioculturally-oriented identity factors and textual variation in English academic discourse, focusing in particular on the detection of identity traits typical of different branches of learning (Gotti 2012). Within such domains, we have investigated to what extent the cultural allegiance of (native or non-native) Anglophone discourse communities to their linguistic, professional, social, or national reference groups is affected by the use of English as a lingua franca of international communication. To identify textual variants arising from the use of English as a native language or as the lingua franca of science, we have used a corpus formed by English texts for academic communication (CADIS). The corpus also comprises some Italian texts for comparative purposes. Besides including two different languages, CADIS represents four separate disciplinary areas: Law, Economics, Applied Linguistics and Medicine. For each disciplinary area, various textual genres have been considered: abstracts, articles, book reviews, editorials, posters. The structural complexity of CADIS reflects its contrastive orientation: it is designed to be internally comparable, so its texts can be analysed not only by disciplinary area, genre, language and culture, but also historically. This is possible because the corpus covers a time frame of over thirty years, from 1980 to 2011. Including all language groups – native speakers and non-native speakers of English, and native speakers of

[2] www.interlae.com
[3] www.unibg.it/cerlis

Italian –, a total of 2,738 texts (from 635 to 739 per disciplinary area) have been inserted in the corpus. The corpus includes over 12 million words.

Our research project has dealt with identity traits across languages and cultures, as the use of a given language affects the writing of a scholar, especially when it is not his native language. This is particularly evident in the case of English, whose recurrent use by non-native speakers requires a degree of adaptation of their thought patterns and expressive habits. This issue has been dealt with by various members of the CERLIS team. Giannoni (2012), for example, has investigated local vs. global identities in medical editorials. His analysis of Anglo-American journals, English-medium Italian journals and standard Italian journals suggests a considerable extent of intra-disciplinary variation, both within and across languages/cultures. The data investigated allow for the observation of the writing behaviour of three different kinds of scholars: native-speaker English (NEng), non-native (i.e. Italian) English (ItEng) and native-speaker Italian (NIt). Since medical editorials (henceforth MEDs) are signed by only one or two authors, native-speaker status is relatively easy to determine, based on the author's name and affiliation. One notable difference between the NEng texts (cf. quotation 4) and the other two groups (cf. quotations 5 and 6) is the absence among the latter of direct appeals to the medical community. When a course of action is advocated, as in (6), its wording is both impersonal and indirect. Viewed contrastively, this difference may reflect the more tentative orientation of NIt MEDs (rhetorical interference) but also – more intriguingly – greater interpersonal distance in the ItEng sample, where local (Italian) academics address a global community of which they are, linguistically speaking, only peripheral members.

(4) We still have hurdles of ethics, immunology and biology to conquer, and until we do, we must remain on guard against donor scotoma. (NEng, MEED494)

(5) Therefore, we believe that right insula activation has a significant role in the perception of chest pain in syndrome X (the insula is known to receive cardio-pulmonary inputs). (ItEng, MEED511)

(6) Tale strategia può contribuire a ridurre in maniera significativa il rischio di reazioni avverse a farmaci idrosolubili e i costi sanitari ad esse correlati [This strategy may help to significantly reduce the risk of adverse reactions to hy-drosoluble drugs and their associated healthcare costs]. (NIt, MEED916)

In her analysis of book reviews (BRs) written in English and Italian by native (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs), D'Angelo (2012) investigated how reviewers of different nationalities, within the disciplines of Applied Linguistics, Economics, Law and Medicine, express positive and negative ap-praisals (respectively PAs and NAs) of their peers' work. The comparison of the English and Italian sections of the corpus has shown that in all the disciplines considered in the study, BRs written in English are generally much longer than BRs written in Italian. If we concentrate on BRs written in English, an interesting finding is that in all four disciplines considered, NNSs seem to produce slightly longer BRs than NSs. Also Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005, p. 45) found that clauses in NNS texts (research articles and paper presentations) are considerably longer than in NS texts, something accountable to the more frequent use of the passive form by NNSs than by NSs, which leads to the production of longer, more articulated sentences. D'Angelo's analysis also reveals that a difference exists between NS and NNS in their use of appraisals. Specifically, NS seem to use PAs slightly more than NAs (49.2 vs 31.3), whereas NNS use twice as many PAs as NAs (40.4 vs 20). More important is the fact that in general, NS seem to make a much more frequent use of appraisals: the number of NAs found in texts written by NS is 31.3, whereas the number of NAs found in NNS texts is only 20; along the same line, the number of PAs found in NS texts is 49.8, while the number of PAs found in NNS texts only amounts to 40.4. These results suggest that although reviewers in general prefer giving positive feedback, NNSs are less likely to judge another colleague's work negatively and express less evaluation than NSs do. If in every discipline we further differentiate between native and non-native reviewers, we notice that the use of NAs and PAs follows a clear pattern: every discipline considered sees NNSs consistently using almost twice as many PAs as NAs. These data further validate the hypothesis that NNSs, in every discipline, tend to use evaluation less frequently and, most of all, they tend to prefer evaluating positively rather than negatively. If we consider how hedged NAs are used in BRs, relevant differences appear among the writers depending on whether the author is an Italian or English speaker. Specifically, a wide difference is detected when considering the use of hedges by NS and NNS of English, the former using five times more hedges (13.1) than the latter (2.6). These results are probably related to the fact that in general, Italian and NNS reviewers use evaluation much less frequently than English L1 speakers.

Maci (2012) has compared the argumentative strategies employed in medical research articles (RAs) written by native speakers of English with those written by Italian non-native speakers of English in order to identify any cross-cultural differences in terms of argumentative devices employed by their authors. Analysing the *Discussion* section of 50 articles from two important journals of cardiology, she has identified several differences between the textual organisation of English medical research articles written by native and non-native speakers, which seem to be linked to their authors' linguistic and cultural identity. The main differences are rhetorically realised through hedges and other argumentative strategies, such as the use of connectives. Indeed, NSs of English tend to exploit more fully modality expressed by modal auxiliaries (such as *may*, *would*), verbs (such as *appear*, *suggest*), and adverbs (such as *likely*). The modal verb *may*, in particular, frequently appears in the NSs corpus, to such an extent that it can be regarded as a keyword with high keyness (*may* occupies position 15). This is not the case in the Italian NNSs subcorpus, where *may* occupies position 95. The minimal use of hedges in the Italian NNSs subcorpus seems to be counterbalanced by other grammatical devices: whenever the outcome conforms to the expected results and is thus validated, Italian authors tend to interpret outcomes with the use of the present tense of such boosters as *confirm*, *find* and *show* rather than using hedging devices. If hedges are used, there is a preference for *might*, which may be perceived by NNSs as carrying a stronger connotation of probability than *may*, or *should*, employed whenever a suggestion about the correct scientific procedures and/or treatment is made. This occurs especially whenever the results do not confirm the initial hypothesis, or whenever there is a gap in the existing literature filled by the present research. In these cases, NNSs of English seem to prefer the use of hedges and modal expressions to indicate probable interpretations or possible implications:

(7) In our opinion, aortic plaques are those *the most likely to be responsible* for recurrent cerebral events. Furthermore, aortic atheromatosis *should be considered* as a clinical entity itself and should be related to different vascular districts than the cerebral one. This was demonstrated in a study by Pandian et al. [46], who affirmed that […]. (MERA242)

(8) Although no complications occurred in any patient implicating the safety of cryoenergy, these results are slightly inferior to what can be expected with RF energy in terms of acute success. In 17 patients (nine AVNRTs, eight APs) out of 126 patients (13%) with acute successful ablation, recurrence of the arrhythmia and/or AP was observed. The percentage of recurrence is therefore higher than that usually reported with RF energy […]. The high rate of recurrences in this series *may be ascribed* to a possible more limited lesion created by cryoenergy, which *can even further* decrease in dimensions in the early post-ablation phase owing to tissue healing. (MERA250)

A further differentiation can be seen in the use of connectives. There is a lower frequency of connectives in RAs written by NNSs of English, which seems to reflect the trend already established by Italian authors as far as the use of hedges is concerned: whenever the claim is confirmed and supported by scientific literature in the field, Italian researchers seem less keen on exploiting argumentative strategies, as, apparently, reference to the literature becomes the objective evidence supporting the author's reasoning. For instance, the concordance list of *also* shows a different distribution of the connective: in the NSs subcorpus it is mainly used to underline the findings resulting from the investigation, which may confirm the researcher's hypothesis; in the NNSs subcorpus, *also* is found in connection with reference literature supporting the researcher's data:

(9) […] the immediate postoperative period also demonstrated that the combination of clopidogrel and aspirin was more effective than aspirin alone in reducing MES. (MERA204)

(10) Moreover, BNP is a strong predictor of mortality not only due to heart failure progression[35-37] but also to sudden death.[38] (MERA228)

The more frequent use of *although*, *furthermore*, *hence*, *in contrast* and *therefore* in the NSs subcorpus is indicative of the presence of a textual organisation in which scientific information is offered in a coherent and convincing way. Here, the problematizing proposition is introduced by *although*, which positions the reader in the correct reasoning path: *although* presupposes the presence of a second part of a sentence which the reader expects to carry the right type of information necessary to decode the semantic value offered by the researcher's investigation:

(11) Although sharing a common familial environment may inflate the estimates of heritability, we found low to moderate heritability for BMI, which in turn represents the maximal possible contribution of additive genes. (MERA209)

In the NNSs subcorpus, the extremely high frequency of such connectives as *on the contrary* and *on the other hand* seems to suggest a preference for a type of argumentation in which the author plays with a twist: first there is the introduction of common shared knowledge (and reference literature); then there is a counterclaim, from the author's research, supported by other cited literature. This is further emphasised by a list of evidential elements (and relevant literature), introduced by *first*, *second*, *third*, etc. which support the results of the researcher's investigation, as in (12):

(12) First, with respect to infero-posterior AMI, where sympathetic activation may follow transient signs of vagal hyperactivity,[20,21] anterior AMI is constantly followed by strong and stable signs of enhanced adrenergic tone;[20] thus, we avoided any potential flaw in the interpretation of the changes in vagal and sympathetic effects. In addition, the effects of cardiac rehabilitation have been extensively studied in patients with anterior myocardial infarction and reduced ejection fraction in whom concern for adverse ventricular remodeling has been expressed.[22,23] (MERA234)

3. ELF in University courses

In the last few decades there has also been a great increase in the globalisation of pedagogic practices in universities all over the world. As part of their internationalisation programmes, more and more academic institutions in non-English speaking countries have promoted courses using English as a medium of instruction (Ammon, McConnell 2002; Hellekjæ, Räsänen 2010; Bowles, Cogo 2015; Wächter, Maiworm 2015; Helm, Ackerley, Guarda 2016). These courses are meant to attract students from as many countries as possible all over the world, and the only feasible solution to the language problem is seen in the use of English as a lingua franca. Sometimes the lecturers remain the local ones, who adopt English as a means of instruction although they are not native speakers of that language. In other cases the teaching of such courses is assigned to foreign lecturers (often non-native speakers of English), who are not chosen specifically for their language competence but rather according to their expertise in the subject they are supposed to be teaching. As they are taught in English, these courses attract many students from other countries. This is part of a large process of "international marketization of HE [higher education]" (Coleman 2006, p. 3), in which universities are fully involved at a global level.

In linguistic terms, the result is a typical English as a lingua franca (ELF) situation in which most lecturers and students – although they are not native speakers of English – use this language as a common means of communication and instruction. Indeed, in the last few years, several studies have taken into consideration the use of ELF in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses organised by universities, some of them investigating formal aspects (Ranta 2006, 2009; Jenkins 2007; Björkman 2008a, 2008b, 2009) while others focusing on pragmatic issues (Leznyák 2002; Mauranen 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Guido 2008; Cogo 2009; Kaur 2009; Smit 2009; Suviniitty 2010; Guido, Seidlhofer 2014). As regards the latter, Mauranen (2003) has pointed out the adoption of 'self-regulation' strategies, by means of which speakers tend to adapt their way of speaking to the interlocutors' assumed linguistic competence.

In our analysis of a corpus of EMI courses,[4] we found several turns that show great difficulty in communication in which however the lecturer tries to keep the interaction going with his students. In the following extract, for example, the student does not catch the metaphorical usage of the expression *feel at home* as he thinks that reference is made to his own home, which

[4] The corpus consists of transcriptions of EMI courses on specialized disciplines offered by the University of Bergamo, taught by experts coming from both native and non-native English speaking countries and attended by students from different lingua-cultural backgrounds.

creates great misunderstanding and confusion in the last part of the exchange clearly indicated by the question ‘What does that mean?’ uttered by the lecturer:

(13) L: air bangladesh exist?
S: yes, it exists
L: what is the exact name?
S: bangladesh biman
L: bangladesh what?
S: bangladesh biman B-I-M-A-N
L: BIN what does that mean?
S: biman means ah like a flying bird
L: flying bird?
S: flying bird ah
L: flying bird <LAUGHS> ah in bangladesh flying bird
S: yeah <SS LAUGH>
L: that’s nice <SS LAUGH> but you feel at home when you fly with bangladesh biman?
S: in my home?
L: yeah you feel at home if you fly this company?
S: oh is no more modern
L: it’s not modern?
S: yes
L: what does that mean? <LAUGHS>
S: okay it’s because it’s not a familiar real airline sector[5]

The lecturer uses a formulaic expression in a native-like way, but its figurative meaning is unknown to the student, who instead interprets the utterance only in a literal sense, a clear case of ‘unilateral idiomaticity’ (Seidlhofer 2004, p. 220). This discrepancy in processing leads to misunderstanding between the speakers. Another lecturer in our corpus seems to be aware of the fact that idioms are culture-bound, as he often checks that the students understand them properly and in some cases he asks them to give their own local rendering of the same concept, as can be seen in the following case:

(14) L: what is the elephant in the bedroom?
S: it means something very very big
L: so it’s a sort of contradiction ... how do you say this in italian?
S: *un elefante in una cinquecento*

[5] Transcription conventions: <TEXT> = descriptions and comments; _ = false start; (.) = short pause (1-2 seconds); … = longer pause (3-4 seconds); (xx) = unintelligible speech; {TEXT} = translated text; L = lecturer; S = student.

Another strategy commonly employed in ELF contexts is the recourse to ‘self-repairs’, which takes place when words or expressions previously formulated are proposed in a different way to facilitate the hearers’ comprehension. The following extract shows an example in which reformulation strategies are adopted in order to solve a communicative problem, arising from the fact that S1 does not know the meaning of the word *cosy*. As is confirmed by S1 himself, the problem was somehow solved by directly asking another student (“D”) to provide some linguistic help, which she did by mentioning a synonym (“she explained that is comfortable very comfortable”). S1 then continues contributing to the group discussion by using the new word and showing – by means of an explicit reformulation move – that he has understood its meaning and that he is able to use it in context (“he will be a comfortable (.) so cosy chat”). S2 is aware of his better linguistic competence and therefore reinforces the explanation of the adjective *cosy* not only by agreeing with the synonym *comfortable* but also adding a couple of reformulations (“between friends”, “relaxed”), as well as some linguistic comments (“it sounds less formal than a comfortable interview (.) sound more formal”).

(15) S1: when i read the ehm text (.) i don’t know what the word <u>cosy</u> mean and i asked to D (.) and she explained that is comfortable very comfortable
S2: yeah
S1: and so ehm (xx) then he gave his direct number (.) her ehm another personal ehm element (.) and said that ehm he will be a comfortable (.) so cosy chat ... so ehm
S2: cosy chat means ehm comfortable (.) cosy ehm between friends ehm relaxed mm? relaxed (.) so it sounds less formal than a comfortable interview (.) sound more formal so again choosing always the alternative (.) rather than comfortable interview (.) a cosy chat eh?

In the following example, instead, the interaction between two students seems to be very problematic as S2 shows her difficulty in understanding S1 with very direct remarks (“wait (.) what?”, “which one?”). This attitude does not help S1’s task as shown by the many hesitation marks (“ehm i don’t know”) and reformulation efforts (“i mean”). Another student (S3) realizes that both S1’s difficulties of expression and S2’s uncooperativeness are making the situation quite tense and so he tries to facilitate communication by repeating a few words of S1’s utterance (“the beginning”) so as to show his understanding (both linguistic and emotional) and underline his spirit of agreement, listenership and engagement. This move proves to be successful as it prompts S1 to continue her explanation (“yeah … <u>i i</u> think it’s not only <u>ehm</u> catching attention”).

(16) S1: i would say that it … ehm i don't know (xx) … like that also the establishing contact (.) cos it's <u>kinda</u> going personal with the reader
S2: wait (.) what?
S1: i mean (.) is taking it personal with the reader … i mean the
S2: which one?
S1: ehm … oh just at the beginning
S3: the beginning
S1: yeah … <u>i i</u> think it's not only <u>ehm</u> catching attention (.) cos catching attention might be just like the first part

This mediating function has also been noticed in other cases. In the following extract, S2 shows his difficulty in understanding S1's explanations of how to go to Milan from Bergamo (well (.) no i'm confused … ah to take the train to get to milan?). S3 intervenes to facilitate understanding specifying explicitly what S1 means ("yes (.) she means that you have to take the train from here to milan"). This intervention proves to be very successful in facilitating communication ("oh (.) i see i see i see ") and is also greatly appreciated by S1, who completes her information by adding further details ("yeah (.) there's a train (.) a train (,) almost at every hour").

(17) S1: mm … no no no no (,) this is milan *porta garibaldi* … but you have to take the train to get there
S2: well (.) no i'm confused … ah to take the train to get to milan?
S3: yes (.) she means that you have to take the train from here to milan
S2: oh (.) i see i see i see
S1: yeah (.) there's a train (.) a train (,) almost at every hour

A further way to promote understanding is by means of 'self-repetitions', which occurs when the speaker repeats something said before to make his concepts clearer (Mauranen 2006b). In other cases, instead, the speaker solves any misunderstanding problem by providing appropriate explanations. In the following extract, for instance, a native speaker (S1) uses the term *Ms* which is unknown to an Italian student (S2). Noticing the latter's puzzlement, S1 explains the spelling of the word and its differentiation from another similar title (*Mrs*). This specification leads S2 to the explanation of the title used in Italy to refer to both married and unmarried women (*signora*).

(18) S1: indeed there used to ehm be (.) ehm mr mrs and miss (.) ehm and then ms
S2: then ms?
S1: yeah writing M-S instead of M-R-S
S2: oh yeah (.) yeah
S1: it's made to avoid this kind of awkward kind of situation ehm
S2: and in italy (.) in order to (.) not to make a discrimination between married and unmarried women they use *signora* {Mrs} for everyone … so even if you are nineteen (.) yeah they call you *signora*

Another strategy used in the corpus to implement language correction is by means of embedded repairs. In this case the interlocutor replies with the right word so that the speaker realizes the mistake he/she has made and subsequently uses the correct word him/herself. An example can be found in the following extract in which an Italian student (S1) uses a wrong word. The Belarusian student (S2) uses the right word in his utterance so that in the following turn S1 modifies his language by using the right term.

(19) S1: so like in germany or italy … and in bielorussia?
S2: in belarus we use last name and the name of father … my father is *Piotr* so my surname is *Petrovich*.
S1: so in belarus you would say professor *Petrovich*?
S2: no professor (.) without professor (.) just ehm *Petrovich*

A further example of *embedded repair* is visible in the next extract, which shows that the NSE adopts the right pronunciation of the verb *promising* in her reply to a previous utterance. When hearing the different version, she realizes she has made a mistake; she first repeats the right pronunciation and then apologizes for the error.

(20) S1: good … and then what happens next?
S2: i think that ehm the the delivery part is also requesting purchase (.) cos i mean they are promising /prɒ.ˈmaɪs.ɪŋ/ you that you'll have fast delivery and that you won't lose anything
S1: that is true (.) yes (.) because they are doing something interesting they are doing something nice ehm they're they are ehm inviting you to buy but they are also
S2: promising /prɒ.ˈmaɪs.ɪŋ/
S1: they are promising /ˈprɒ.mɪs.ɪŋ/
S2: promising /ˈprɒ.mɪs.ɪŋ/ sorry
S1: exactly they are making a promise … if you buy (.) we promise you'll get ehm a gift

In the following case the interlocutor is not actually correcting the speaker, but merely trying to provide an explanation for a particular linguistic habit. The group is discussing the use of titles and appellations in various countries. When S2 remarks that in Belarus professors are addressed only with their surname without prefixing it with the title *Professor*, the Italian student (S1) shows surprise but also finds this habit quite interesting and tries to find an explanation for it by suggesting perhaps the influence of the Russian culture and in particular of the Communist regime in the 20th century, whose aim was "to make everyone equal". The fact that the Italian student tries to recognise the origin of the Belarusian linguistic usage shows that he is willing to build up some common ground with the other student.

(21) S1: ah? with no title or professor just only *Petrovich* … ah that's interesting … is this part of the former russian style (.) because it was somehow imposed (.) or it has always been like that?
S2: it's russian frames
S1: because there was the communist regime (.) so everyone was equal (.) and so perhaps *Petrovich* and not professor was to make everyone equal … very good (.) very nice (.) that's interesting

The clarification of meaning also implies the adoption of cooperative strategies and 'interactive repairs' by both the speaker and the interlocutors whenever difficulties or non-understanding occur (Gotti 2014a, 2014b). Hearers, in particular, recur to 'minimal incomprehension signals' (Mauranen 2006b) or direct questions when they encounter comprehension problems. By means of 'utterance completions' (Seidlhofer 2011) and 'overlaps' (Cogo 2009) they manifest their willingness to cooperate in the fulfilment of the communicative act. Sometimes, instead, minor points of non-comprehension are not raised by the interlocutor, who prefers to adopt a 'let it pass' strategy (Firth 1996) in order not to create unnecessary breaks in the interactive flow, on the assumption that the unclear word or expression will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses. One example is the quotation below, in which the discrepancy of the university systems from which the students come does not allow a clear specification of the year the students are in; noticing the difficulty of finding out this information, the lecturer in the end accepts their vague assertion that they are Erasmus students:

(22) L: also you first year?
S1: ehm
S2: we are third_i'm third year
L: ah
S1: but there are four years
L: but here? you don't know exactly which level?
S2: erasmus we are erasmus
L: you are erasmus okay good hm

3.1. Dilemmas concerning ELF in University courses

Studies on EMI courses have sometimes been criticised for overstating the claim of collaboration/mutual support in ELF interactions. As Seidlhofer (2004) aptly remarks, work on ELF pragmatics is still very much in its initial phase, and the findings available to date may be a function of the type and purpose of the interactions investigated. It is true, however, that the data found in our analyses have shown that the students' awareness of not being native speakers seems to create a higher motivation in their adoption of supportive moves than is commonly noticed in settings only involving native speakers. Indeed, proactive (Mauranen 2006b; Kaur 2009), interactive (Björkman 2010, Suviniitty 2012) and explicitation (Mauranen 2007) strategies have been found to enhance both communication and learning in ELF. As a result, the adoption of these strategies enables the interlocutors to accomplish their communicative purposes and to achieve the objectives of their EMI courses.

Other studies, instead, have criticised the political and pedagogic value of these courses. As more and more universities in non-English speaking countries are opening up degree programmes entirely taught in English, several people concerned with educational policies wonder whether it is really useful and appropriate to adopt English monolingualism in university courses in non-English speaking countries. This policy seems particularly odd when curricular courses held in English address monolingual/quasi-monolingual audiences, as seen in certain universities, where the offer of entire degree courses taught exclusively in English mainly serves to boost academic prestige and merely to recruit more students – not necessarily foreign, but often coming from other areas of the same country, who are attracted by this 'internationalisation' policy.

Moreover, the Anglicisation process carried out in many European universities implementing EMI courses has been perceived by some as a 'European paradox' (Phillipson 2006, p. 72), as it contrasts with the official EU policy of preserving linguistic and cultural diversity through the adoption of multilingual policies. At some universities, when a course is offered in English, there is usually an alternative group of the same course which is taught in the local language, but this is not the case in all universities and countries, where courses are almost always offered in only one language, i.e. English. In this case students are confronted with a process of 'forced monolingualism' rather than 'optional multilingualism' (Lasagabaster, Cots, Mancho-Barés 2013). Moreover, in many universities, the impetus to English-taught courses has often determined a replacement of ESP courses (Räisänen, Fortanet-Gómez 2008). Indeed, all over Europe many degrees with a tradition of ESP courses have replaced ESP programmes with content courses taught in English. This revision of curricula reflects both the stakeholders' pressure and the students' desire to concentrate more on the learning of specialized content rather than the foreign language.

While internationalisation is perceived as a desirable outcome, on the practical level, the use of English in academic settings outside the Anglophone world also brings new challenges for students and lecturers. There is even the risk of diminished education quality when a lecturer does not teach in his/her native language. Therefore, English should be used in academic settings after careful consideration of the consequences of such practices. Indeed, in many cases, both lecturers and students tend to overestimate their proficiency in English (Campagna, Pulcini 2014). Where students have an adequate language competence, the learning outcomes of EMI courses are comparable to those reached in courses taught in the local language with little breakdown in communication, and similar understanding of content provided adequate time is given. However, also some limitations have been found: students tend to speak more slowly and pause more often in English, some experience difficulty in simultaneously following a lecture and taking notes, and there is a smaller number of questions asked and answered during lectures in English (Airey 2012). Some scholars have pointed out a more limited participation in discussions when these are carried out in English:

> Most seminars at my department in Sweden are held in English. Although I think most of my colleagues speak good English, it is clear that it lowers the intellectual level compared to scientific discussions in Swedish. When it comes to teaching at the undergraduate level, that is even more clear. The students (and teachers) spend more time trying to understand or find the words. That implies that less effort can be put into actually discussing scientific problems in depth. (Researcher, Faculty of Science, quoted in Kuteeva 2014, p. 339)

While many European countries are rushing to increase the use of English in their higher education systems, in some countries (especially in the North of Europe) the general attitude towards this trend has become more critical. In these countries there is great concern toward the high proportion of English language use and the need to guarantee the adoption of the local language for specialised purposes. In his presentation of the current debate over this issue in Sweden, Salö (2010) reports that many Swedish universities have implemented new language policies aiming at regulating the use of academic English while guaranteeing the survival of academic Swedish. As both languages are considered important, the solution proposed is parallel language use (Josephson 2005). This new policy is meant to guarantee the students' right to receive education in their native language and to protect the national language from the 'threat' of English (Bolton, Kuteeva 2012). However, even this policy has often proved to be ineffective. As Kuteeva (2014, p. 333) asserts,

> the full implications of parallel language use and its practical applications remain unclear, and to this day it largely remains an unoperationalised political slogan […]. Ideally, both languages should be used by students and teachers alike for various academic purposes, but this rarely happens in practice.

Also in Norway the increasing use of English in higher education is seen as a threat. Brock-Utne (2001), for example, mentions five elements that contribute to this threat: the increasing use of English words in Norwegian academic, bureaucratic or technological discourse; the increase in the sale of academic literature in English vs the stagnation in the sale of academic literature in Norwegian; the recruitment of teaching staff who do not speak Norwegian; the growth in Master's degree courses taught in English; and finally the financial rewards for publishing in English.

Moreover, where English is largely used at master's levels, scholars have complained a reduction in the availability of local terminology at higher levels with a greater recourse to code mixing (Airey 2011). This is also due to the fact that less and less specialised literature originally written in English is translated into other native languages. Referring to the Norwegian situation, Brock-Utne (2001, p. 228) asserts that this is "a development which shows that the market for required texts written in Norwegian and to be used in Norwegian higher education is clearly shrinking. Academic literature written in English replaces academic literature written in Norwegian at a high pace".

4. Conclusion

As shown by the analysis presented here, the use of English as a lingua franca of research and teaching has determined important consequences on the status of academic discourse. The findings reported here reflect the considerable challenges and opportunities that confront scholars and students seeking to achieve a delicate balance between their willingness to adhere to the mother-tongue norms and conventions and their own individual competences and identity traits. Such factors have been found to interact, producing complex realities giving rise to textual realisations characterised by hybridising forms deriving from interlinguistic and intercultural clashes.

The analysis of the globalising trends in higher education shows that although the use of English in academic settings outside the Anglophone world offers greater opportunities in terms of a wider international preparation, it also brings new challenges for both students and lecturers. The studies reported here reflect the considerable issues that confront not only academics but also education policy-makers seeking to achieve a delicate balance between their willingness to integrate more fully in a globalised context and the need to protect their national language for specialised and academic purposes. Such opposing trends have provoked animated discussions concerning not merely linguistic or pedagogic issues, but also more general problems of political and educational relevance at a wide national level.

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