Intercultural English as a Medium and Outcome of Instruction: The Case of the University of Trento, Italy

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical reflection on the role and meaning of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education, grounded on the findings of a survey on EMI conducted by the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for the Quality and Innovation of Didactics (LIQuID) of the University of Trento (Italy). Trento strongly advocates the need to improve its international profile, switching from a local to a global perspective in teaching practice. This is consistent with an internationalisation drive in higher education in Italy and in universities worldwide, for which the adoption of EMI is considered a necessary step.

LIQuID thus developed a questionnaire with the aim of investigating faculty members' self-evaluation as EMI-users as well as their opinion on institutional and didactic aims, teaching practices, and learning assessment methods, comparing, when possible, their experience in teaching in L1 and L2. Data referring to a total of 150 EMI-modules offered in the academic year 2018-19 were collected. Starting from this dataset regarding Trento's experience, this contribution discusses the adoption of EMI from the local point of view, since internationalisation and one-size-does-not-fit-all policies cannot overlook the specificities of the contexts in which they are implemented. This necessarily leads to a reflection regarding EMI as a global phenomenon. In particular, the survey's results point at complex teaching-learning dynamics which may be associated to a spiral movement consisting of three laps: first, English is initially employed as a tool (medium) to reach general goals at a university level (i.e., innovation and internationalisation); second, English is used as ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to achieve subject-specific aims (i.e., improvement of students' specialised language competences and professional profile); third, English as a Lingua Franca fosters the development of linguistic

but also intercultural competences, thus mediating the shift from the local to the global context for both the University and the students.

This is what I would call EMOI spiral movement, in which inter-cultural English is the Medium and the Outcome of Instruction: English language is the starting point, the medium and the outcome of a multifaceted educational process. Institutional programmes aimed at a truly effective internationalisation of higher education should not disregard the final step of this movement in favour of the others, since a diverse and inclusive university community is grounded upon the nurture of cultural and intercultural competences in addition to linguistic ones.

1. Introduction

A growing global phenomenon which encompasses all stages of education and educational settings as a mechanism for internationalising their programme offer and joining a global community (Dearden, 2015), English as a medium of instruction (EMI) represents a new yet rapidly growing field of academic investigation (Macaro et al., 2018). In particular, an extensive body of research confirmed that EMI found fertile soil in the field of Higher Education (HE) (Smit, 2010; Brenn-White & Faethe, 2013; Wachter & Maiworm, 2014; Fenton Smith, Humphries, & Walkinshaw, 2017), with universities worldwide investing on an offer of EMI-programmes at both an undergraduate and postgraduate level (Lasagabaster et al., 2014; Earls, 2016). In her attempt to map the growth of this phenomenon on a global scale, Dearden (2015) provided a general definition of EMI as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (p. 4). This description of EMI entails a teaching practice *through* English, rather than *of* English, though language improvement is a by-product expected from EMI implementation[1].

The practical definition of EMI is *de facto* not as easy as it may seem. Dearden's study highlighted a twofold attitude towards its adoption, since EMI can offer opportunities but also raise concerns linked to such issues as its

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1   For a full review of the debate on the topic, see Macaro et al., 2018, pp. 57–60.

potentially socially-divisive nature, the access to education for all socio-economic groups, the protection of the first language/national identity, the quality of educational infrastructures, the presence of linguistically-qualified lecturers, English language proficiency expectations, and the top-down introduction by policy-makers, regardless of the consultation with all key stakeholders. In fact, EMI contexts tend to differ from each other and the implications of its adoption vary greatly according to the location, the reasons behind this decision, the different relationships with English each setting has, and the actual users of English in class, i.e., the teachers and the students, each coming from a variety of first language (L1) backgrounds.

Thus, by its very nature, EMI is a diverse phenomenon, which poses several challenges to policy makers and universities as well as to non-native speakers who have to succeed using English and, therefore, with different degrees of pressure upon their shoulders. However, despite the important position of EMI in HE and its intrinsic complexities, few guidelines on teaching and learning through English exist either on a logistic or on a pedagogical level (Smit & Dafouz, 2012; Macaro, 2014; Costa, 2015; Dearden, 2015). Dearden's report (2015) highlighted the considerable differences in aims, scope, infrastructures, and consequences of EMI implementation worldwide. Likewise, several studies stressed the discrepancies on a European level (Cots, et al., 2014; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014; Dimova et al., 2015) with a clear geographical distinction between Northern countries, favourably and successfully embracing the adoption of EMI in HE, and Southern countries, showing a certain degree of reluctance and resistance to its implementation. This tendency is confirmed by looking at the Italian situation. In a survey by the European Commission (2012), Italy resulted second from last among 27 EU nations as for participants' self-assessed competences in a second language (L2), with only 38% of Italians claiming to be able to communicate in at least one L2, against an EU average of 54%. According to Wächter and Maiworm's 2014 survey on English Taught Programmes (ETPs, another term often used for EMI) in non-Anglophone countries in the EU, Italy ranked 21st, with only 0.5% of Italian students enrolled in such programmes. Italian is still the most used language in HE in Italy (Broggini & Costa, 2017) and the introduction of EMI raised criticism and provoked a heated debate (Dearden & Macaro, 2016).

The approaches towards EMI adopted on a HE level were found to vary between North and South (Pulcini & Campagna, 2015; Costa, 2017) as well as between public and private universities (Costa & Coleman, 2012; Broggini & Costa, 2017). In general, a slight increase in the provision of EMI can be detected: indeed, Universitaly's[2] online data about EMI programmes indicated that 61 universities were offering 440 courses in 2020. This marks an increase of 44% with respect to 2015 data, with 245 courses provided by 55 universities, as reported by Guarda and Helm (2016). Nonetheless, English is still far from replacing Italian as the language of HE (Helm & Guarda, 2015) and, in general, Italy still ranks quite low in the EF English Proficiency Index (2019), which assesses the general proficiency in English as L2 on a European and worldwide level (occupying the 26th and the 36th positions out of 33 and 100 countries, respectively), though with a stable increase.

Given such a broad and extremely varied scenario, this paper aims to develop a critical reflection on the role of EMI in HE starting from the analysis of a single case study, namely the University of Trento (UniTn). This choice responds to the need to approach the "jump" into the global starting from the concreteness of the local perspective, i.e., by determining purposes, teaching practice features, learning assessment methods, and potential concerns related to the adoption of EMI. In so doing, the present research discusses the meaning of EMI and its potential developments with the support of first-hand data provided by a questionnaire created by UniTn's Interdisciplinary Laboratory for the Quality and Innovation of Didactics (LIQuID). After presenting the survey and describing the data gathered, this study discusses EMI and an intrinsically diverse – even controversial – phenomenon which can positively enrich and be enriched by the intercultural environment its implementation should aim to foster, one in which English is the medium but also the outcome of an open and flexible, yet carefully-planned, well-supported and thoroughly-supervised educational process.

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2   Universitaly is the web portal of the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR - Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca), which provides the information on course offerings for all Italian universities.

2. Methodology of Research

This was a small-scale quantitative study designed by LIQuID[3] as part of the 2017–21 University Strategic Plan. The main purpose of the survey was to identify the institutional and didactic aims, teaching practice features, and learning assessment methods used in EMI modules at UniTn and, where possible, to compare faculty members' experience in teaching through their first (L1) and second (L2) languages. The quantitative questionnaire research method was selected as best suited to collect a large amount of data in a structured and systematic way (Dörnyei, 2007) as well as to gather subjective information on the faculty members' objectives, attitudes, and opinions (Broggini & Costa, 2017). The online survey software tool Qualtrics XM Platform™ (https://www.qualtrics.com/) was used to design the questionnaire and collect the data. Questions were specifically developed for the present study and provided in both Italian and English. Respondents were asked to answer a maximum of twenty-six questions, most of which were close-ended to encourage completion. A number of questions included optional sub-questions to fill out with personal opinions, specifications or remarks.

Data refer to the modules offered by UniTn in the academic year 2018/19 for which English was the medium of instruction. The survey was carried out between April and September 2019, when the questionnaire was sent by email to EMI teaching staff. The email included a title, a description of the study, the instruction to fill out the questionnaire and the link to the Qualtrics XM Platform™. The survey was explicitly addressed to teachers who had held or were holding classes through English as a second language (L2) at UniTn in 2018/19. Teachers whose first language (L1) or whose dominant language is English were also invited to respond. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to state whether their mother tongue was Italian, English, or languages other than Italian and English in order to differentiate the questions accordingly. If, in the 2018/19 academic year, teachers held multiple EMI-modules, they were given

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3 The questionnaire was developed by the following members of LIQuID: Andrea Binelli, Maria Micaela Coppola, Antonella Degl'Innocenti, Francesca Di Blasio, Sabrina Francesconi, Carla Gubert, Greta Perletti, Federica Ricci Garotti, Sara Dellantonio, Patrizia Maria Margherita Ghislandi, Carla Locatelli, Chiara Polli, Giuseppe Ritella. English version translated by Maria Micaela Coppola and Anna Masetti. Data elaboration by Flavia Valentini.

the chance to fill out either a single questionnaire or a different one for each module. Data were collected and processed anonymously, with no direct or indirect identification of respondents. The research findings were examined by using descriptive statistics. The following section presents the main results of the questionnaire. For a full list of the survey's question and response options, please see the Appendix section at the end of the article.

3. Results

An invitation to participate was sent out to 356 faculty members. A total of 150 responses by 139 teachers were collected (on 11 occasions, more than one questionnaire was filled out by teachers of multiple EMI modules), covering all UniTn's Science and Humanities Departments. Of these, 112 questionnaires were completed in Italian (74.67%), 38 in English (25.33%). The respondents' first language was Italian in 123 cases (82.00%) and English in 17 cases (11.33%). In 10 cases (6.67%), the respondents' answered "Other" (i.e., French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Hebrew, and Turkish). In accordance with the findings on the Italian situation by Guarda and Helm (2016) and by Broggini and Costa (2017), most of the EMI modules referred to Master's degree courses (77.33%). In the majority of cases, these classes were compulsory or limited elective (47.31% and 25.15%, respectively).

A section of the questionnaire aimed to investigate what are, according to the respondents, the main reasons for UniTn offering modules or programmes through English (Fig. 1). Each faculty member was allowed to select a maximum of three options among the possible answers (nine in total, including "no reason" and "other"). In most cases (86 and 83, respectively) the general objectives identified were to offer students the opportunity to work towards their future careers and to develop a professional international profile (22.57%) and to enable UniTn to enlarge its international learning and research community (i.e., by admitting more incoming Erasmus students or international researchers) (21.48%). Only seven respondents (1.84%) considered the promotion of innovation in teaching practices and learning activities the core reason for implementing EMI-classes.
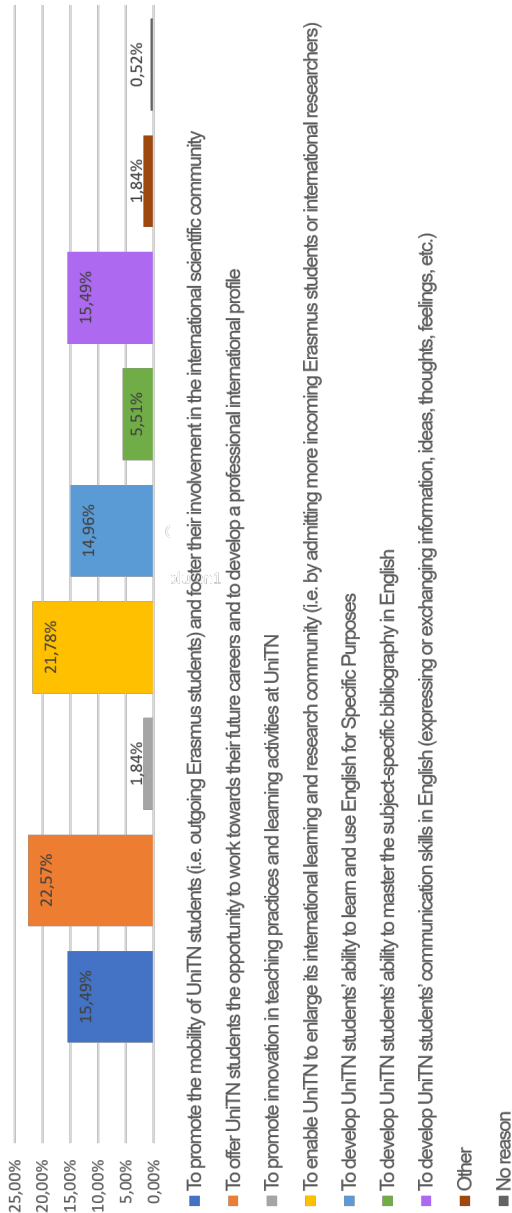
Fig. 1 – General Objectives – The University: In your opinion, what are the main reasons for the University of Trento offering modules or programmes through English?

Faculty members were subsequently asked to state the specific learning objectives of their EMI modules (Fig. 2). Even in this case, a maximum of three out nine responses per teacher was allowed. Most answers (79 and 78, respectively) indicated the possibility of offering students in their module the opportunity to work towards their future careers and to develop a professional international profile (21.29%), and to develop their ability to learn and use subject-specific English (21.02%). Again, the focus on the incorporation of innovative teaching practices and learning activities in the faculty members' module was considered a key-objective only in eight cases (2.16%).
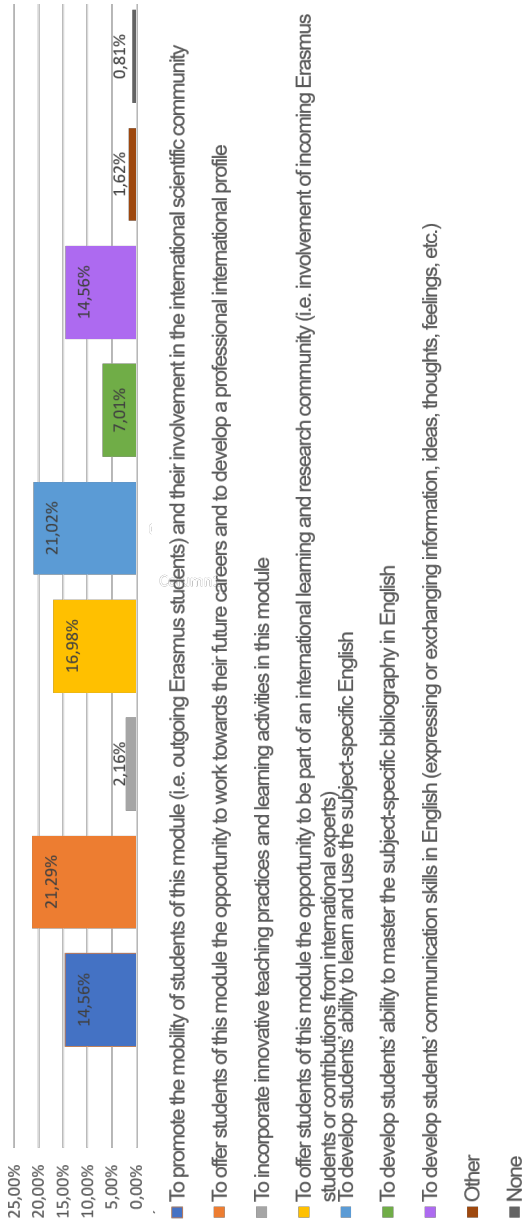
Fig. 2 – Objectives –Teaching practice/Module: What are the key learning objectives of this English-medium module?

Faculty members were asked whether they had taught through Italian (or through their first language, other than English) at UniTn in the last three academic years. In the case of positive answers – 97 cases (65.10%) – they were asked to respond to a subset of questions regarding their teaching experience in L2 and L1. This allowed for a comparison between the responses given on their lecturing style and on their students' competence evaluation and concerns in L1-modules and L2-modules.

To investigate the respondents' lecturing style, the questionnaire included a section on the tools used for personal reference while teaching (maximum three responses out of twelve options) and what such tools were used for (maximum two responses out of eight options). For both English and non-English classes, the main tools selected were notes and outlines on the lecture topics (29.33% and 37.33%, respectively), notes and comments added to the slides (18.73% and 16.00%, respectively), quotations and references from papers (16.61% and 14.00%, respectively). The findings on EMI modules indicated extremely low percentages regarding the use of language tools: in 6.36% of cases, teachers used specialised terms and vocabulary in English; only 3.89% of the participants used English pronunciation notes; 2.12% used English expressions and phrases you use to provide examples, be persuasive, or place emphasis; 1.77% used dictionaries; 1.06% used signposting language notes in English (i.e., expressions and phrases to signal progression through the lecture: e.g., beginning, moving forward, conclusion). By looking at the use respondents made of these tools, the results were similar in both EMI and non-English taught modules as consistent with the answer to the previous question. Tools were used as memos or outlines of the soon-to-be-covered topics (37.85% and 43.80%, respectively), for improving the intelligibility of the lecture (28.08% and 25.62%, respectively), and as a source for quotations and references (17.29% and 21.49%, respectively). Even in this case, the specific function of these materials was not linked to language support: only 5.14% used these tools as guidance with pronunciation, 2.34% with specialised terms and vocabulary, 1.40% with syntax and grammar.

These results seem to be consistent with the answers given to other questions regarding the faculty members' self-evaluation on whether they considered their English language proficiency adequate for teaching in that

language. As for their receptive skills, the majority of teachers answered "yes" and "probably yes" for listening (76.00% and 22.00%, respectively) and reading (90.67% and 8.67%, respectively); likewise, for productive skills, the majority of answers was "yes" and "probably yes" for both speaking (66.67% and 28.67%, respectively) and writing (78.00% and 19.33%, respectively). Overall, their self-perceived communication skills (i.e., the ability to integrate both receptive and productive skills) were considered adequate in 58.67% cases, with 36.67% "probably yes". Negative answers ("no" and "probably no") were extremely low: 0.67% answered "no" for listening, reading, and speaking skills and 1.33% for writing and communication skills; none answered "probably no" for reading skills, while the percentage was 1.33% for listening and writing and slightly higher for speaking and communication skills (4.00% and 3.33%, respectively).

Teachers were then asked what language skills they considered fundamental for a lecturer to teach successfully through English in intercultural settings (Fig. 3). They were allowed to select a maximum of two responses out of seven options. In most cases, their answer was clarity (36.59%) and intelligibility (26.48%). In accordance with the above-mentioned results on language tools, native-like pronunciation was not considered a fundamental requirement (2.79%).

■ language accuracy (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc.)
■ clarity
■ intelligbility
■ fluency
■ native-like pronunciation
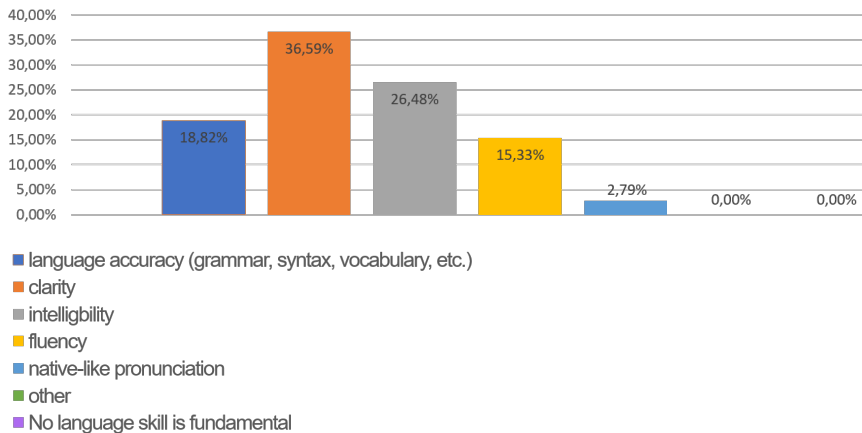■ other
■ No language skill is fundamental

Fig. 3 – English language proficiency – Lecturer: In general, what language skills do you consider fundamental for a lecturer to teach successfully through English in intercultural settings?

After indicating their self-evaluation and the key-language skills required to teach EMI classes, the participants stated a maximum of three out of eight aspects of linguistic, communication and interpersonal competences that they evaluated in their students. As for both EMI modules and non-English medium modules, the aspects most frequently considered by respondents were the ability to learn and use the subject-specific language in 23.42% and 31.18% of the cases, respectively, and communication skills (expressing or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc.) in 21.56% and 24.12% of the cases, respectively. A noteworthy number of EMI module respondents (15.61%) stated that they did not assess linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competences. In non-English medium classes, this percentage (14.71%) was slightly lower, while the focus on the ability to master the subject-specific bibliography increased (18.24% against 14.50% in EMI-modules).

When asked what concerns teachers had regarding the students' English language use in the classroom when they teach through EMI (maximum three options selected out of nine), the respondents' main answers were that their students were reluctant to use English (due to shyness, fear of making mistakes, insecurity, etc.) (24.73%), and that they had difficulty articulating complex arguments (20.49%) and expressing their opinion or holding a discussion in English (14.84%). Teachers were also asked whether students were able to speak English more fluently than they themselves, though only in 3.18% cases was this regarded as a concern. In 13.07% of cases, teachers found no concern. In the great majority of responses (62.50%), faculty members stated that their students' English language use in the classroom improved as their classes progressed.

As for non-English medium classes (maximum three options selected out of eight), the main concern regarding the students' communication skills in the classroom was confirmed to be their reluctance to speak (33.57%), followed by the difficulty using subject-specific language (15.71% against a mere 7.42% in EMI-modules), together with the difficulty articulating complex arguments and expressing their opinion or holding a discussion (both 12.14%). A higher percentage of faculty members did not find any concern (18.57%). Even in this case, 64.29% of responses positively assessed an improvement in the students' communication skills as the module progressed.

Teachers were asked whether they also used Italian (or their first language, other than English) in their EMI classes and, optionally, to state to what extent and why they did so. In 116 cases (77.33%), the answer was negative. Among the 150 questionnaires, 30 respondents answered the optional question by claiming that Italian is used for clarifications, individual explanations, jokes, greetings and casual talks, details about the exam and other technical issues, to be consistent with the language of exam, to stimulate quicker responses and when no international student was present. Likewise, the answer to the question about the possibility for students to also use Italian during EMI classes was negative in 93 cases (62.42%). The optional responses (45 in total) regarding the occasions in which students were encouraged to use Italian were during one-to-one conversations between native Italian speakers, during teamwork discussion among students, to ask questions and demand clarifications (usually translated in English by the teacher to make them comprehensible for international students), to foster the participation of students that were shy or less familiar with English, or in casual conversations at the end of the lesson.

Finally, EMI teachers were asked whether their students were allowed to choose to take the exam (or part of it) in Italian (or in a language other than English) and, if yes, in which cases and to what extent. Even during the learning assessment phase, the response was negative in 104 cases (69.80%). Faculty members opted to answer the optional question in 29 cases. The great majority of them (27) claimed that their students were allowed to choose the language of the exam to avoid any penalisation caused by the linguistic barriers, especially since their English proficiency was not under assessment.

4. Discussion of Findings

This small-scale study was aimed at investigating faculty members' attitudes towards EMI in an HE institution, namely UniTn, in order to evaluate the implications of adopting EMI programmes. According to UniTn teachers, the main catalyst for the implementation of EMI programmes on a macro-level is internationalisation, intended both as the creation of an outward looking profile for students in view of their future careers and as an opening up of the

whole academic community by attracting students and researchers from abroad.

The results of the present research also seem to be consistent with the findings of a 2015 survey on Italian universities by Broggini and Costa (2017) in which the university managers interviewed declared that the main reasons for establishing EMI courses were the improvement of their own international profile, the expansion of the foreign student population, and students' preparation for future entrance on the global market. Dearden and Macaro (2016) also highlighted how their Italian respondents were less idealistic about the objectives of their university administrations, which in their view introduced EMI exclusively for financial reasons and to compete with other HE institutions. In this view, EMI is conceived as an instrumental tool, which serves the purpose of internationalisation. EMI was found to be a university managerial decision to boost the international prospects of the institution (Naidoo, 2006), with the key stakeholders in the process of teaching and learning rarely being consulted by policy makers and university managers at both a national and institutional level (Dearden, 2015; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). In this view, it was essential to determine the specific motivations of UniTn faculty members in comparison to the institutional ones.

In accordance with the principle of constructive alignment for teaching and learning practices (Biggs & Tang, 2011), the specific learning objectives of the respondents' EMI modules are consistent with the general aims they attributed to UniTn. Indeed, most teachers conceived EMI as the means to offer their students the chance to work towards their future careers and to develop a professional international profile, also developing their subject-specific English (i.e., English for Specific Purposes) proficiency.

Internationalisation was found to be the major drive behind the adoption of EMI in several previous studies on teachers' attitudes towards EMI in HE contexts (e.g., Dearden & Macaro, 2016 in Italy, Austria and Poland; Başıbek et al., 2014 in Turkey; Choi, 2013 in Korea). In particular, Dearden and Macaro (2016) interviewed EMI teachers from Italy about their actual beliefs concerning the use of English in classes where it was neither the lecturer's nor the students' fist language. Their answers clearly pointed to an increase in the

students' professional opportunities abroad and the creation of an international outlook for them as key motivators. Moreover, they considered English the language of academia and, therefore, felt their students needed to master ESP to understand and possibly carry out research with international impact. In this respect and given the results of LIQuID's questionnaire, the conception of EMI as an instrumental tool which was pointed out at a macro-level (i.e. regarding UniTn's general objectives) goes hand in hand with the idea of English as ESP on a micro-level. Indeed, teachers used English with the aim of fostering their students' knowledge of a subject-specific language, as well their skills to actually employ it in their future career.

This necessarily underlies the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) of communication in both job-related and research contexts, i.e., a language spoken by people who do not share a L1 (Jenkins et al., 2011). Students are expected to access an increasingly internationalised and interconnected professional world and, therefore, HE is expected to equip them with the linguistic competences and skills required to make the leap from the local to the global.

However, a University truly striving for an international turn cannot lean only on a merely instrumental integration of EMI modules in its programmes and the faculty members' use and dissemination of ESP. By using the metaphoric image of a spiral, the conception of English as a vehicular language and its use for subject-specific purposes are only the first two spires. Something is still lacking. The kernel of this process lies on the subsequent spire, which can be achieved only by means of the others and, in turn, illuminates and gives them meaning.

Conceiving of English only as a tool and teaching students to use it only as a vehicular language entails several risks. In his pioneering state-of-the-art paper about EMI in HE, Coleman (2006) predicted that "the world will become diglossic, with one language for local communication, culture and expression of identity, and another – English – for wider and more formal communication, especially in writing" (p. 11). However, he also highlighted how the "inexorable increase in the use of English" (p. 1) in HE entailed potential implementation problems which cannot be underestimated. Likewise, several studies tackled the various jeopardies this inexorable process may bring about

(Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2015) and Williams (2015) even maintained that the "current EMI implementation produces more challenges than opportunities" (p. 1) for both HE teachers and students.

A danger that raises serious concern is that the process of "Englishization" (Hultgren, 2014, p. 390) of HE may lead to undermining the status of home languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Pennycook, 2014; Galloway & Rose, 2015) and their domain loss with respect to scientific terminology and textbooks written exclusively in English (Hultgren, 2012), and that this process may have linguistic as well as social consequences. On a broader level, Phillipson talked of linguistic imperialism (1992; 2006) and potential pandemic (2009) in this respect, while Kirkpatrick (2011) explicitly lamented the risk of "a global society based on Anglo-Saxon values" (p. 11).

To draw a prestigious comparison, this evokes the recurring accusation Pierpaolo Pasolini (1987) made against the spread of "*l'italiano orrendo della televisione*" (the horrendous Italian language of television) which suppresses dialects ("*volgar'eloquio*" – the vulgar way of speaking, p. 39). According to Pasolini, the use of a standardised Italian entailed a process of linguistic homologation to the detriment of minor linguistic specificities which shape and prompt free thinking and ideas. Ideas stem from linguistic pluralism, whereas monolingualism engenders uniformity of thought. This is the second risk of conceiving ELF from a merely instrumental viewpoint: the homogenisation of conceptual frameworks owing to the tendency to think in conformity with the linguistic – and therefore cultural – code adopted. Indeed, given the unbreakable link between language and culture, a universalistic imposition of English also endangers cultural pluralism. This is clearly detrimental for scientific thought as well as for society as a whole.

HE cannot ignore such negative impacts since research development is grounded upon the exchange of ideas and the circulation of a diversified thought, whether we consider the so-called "hard-sciences" or humanities. In this respect, an academic policy aimed at internationalisation of HE cannot be biased towards the misconception that one size fits all, thus disregarding the specificities of the contexts in which it is implemented. For these reasons, it is of utmost importance to investigate the potential negative impact of the spread of English on home languages, focusing on an analysis of EMI from a

sociolinguistic perspective that take into account teachers' and students' feelings about their L1 being devalued or threatened, but also monitoring the availability of non-English resources preventing the negative impacts of EMI also in this process.

In this respect, UniTn's efforts in creating an international campus should stem from the idea of creating an academic environment with a European – or possibly worldwide – scope but preserving its connection to context-bound specificities, i.e., looking at a global perspective without neglecting the local cultural background in which it is set. Thus, going back to the metaphor of the spiral, the third leap may represent the key-factor to overcome this bias, i.e., the conception of English not only as an instrumental tool (EMI *strictu sensu*) and ESP, but also as a *Lingua and Cultura Franca*, whose introduction can foster the development of linguistic but also intercultural competences, thus mediating the shift from the local to the global context for both the university and students. Going back to its essential purpose, ELF is born to communicate effectively in intercultural settings, which involves establishing social relationships, negotiating meanings, and playing what Wittgenstein (1953) would have defined language games (i.e., creating social meanings and language itself through its integration with practice).

In this view, English language and culture are the starting point, the medium and the outcome of a multifaceted educational process according to what may be called an EMOI spiral movement (Fig. 4), an umbrella concept which emphasises how intercultural English is the Medium and the Outcome of Instruction.
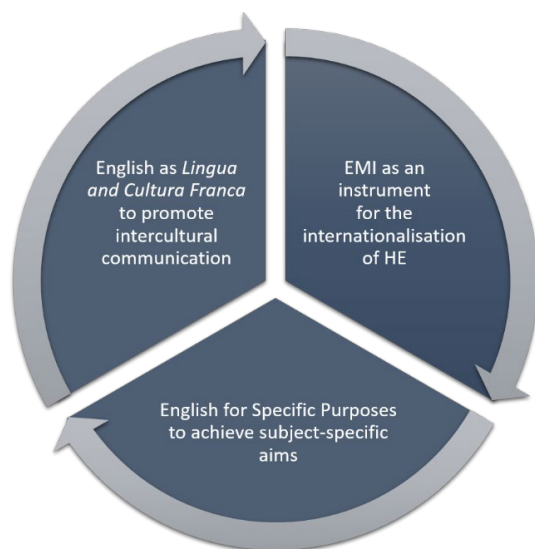
Fig. 4 – EMOI spiral: English as a Medium and Outcome of Instruction

Institutional programmes aimed at a truly effective internationalisation of HE should not disregard the final step of this movement in favour of the others since a diverse and inclusive university community is grounded upon the nurture of cultural and intercultural competences, in addition to linguistic ones. Rather than a label, an EMOI-based approach should be concretely applied on a practical level. In this respect, data acquired through LIQuID's questionnaire point at different areas of interest regarding teachers' English competences, in-class experiences, and evaluation processes, which academic policies should take into close account for a truly effective and diverse internationalisation.

As for faculty members' competences, the findings of LIQuID's survey suggest that UniTn teaching staff, which is mainly composed of Italian native speakers, consider their English proficiency adequate for their EMI teaching position. According to Macaro et al. (2018), most studies reporting on teaching staff's self-assessment about their English proficiency indicated that lecturers expressed linguistic concerns.

Studies on Italian university lecturers highlighted that most teachers perceived their English as inadequate and expressed the concern that students may not understand them, thus leading to an incorrect language learning process (Pulcini & Campagna 2015; Campagna, 2016). Likewise, Guarda and Helm (2016) found that language skills were considered a major difficulty in teaching on EMI programmes in ten out of 53 cases. Francomacaro (2011) reported that Italian Engineering lecturers felt quite confident about their English proficiency, the level of interaction with students, and the evaluation of their progress. However, in her view, "the discussion revealed how the discipline lecturers are unaware of the linguistic implications of their teaching and of their students" (p. 67).

Dearden and Macaro's study (2016) showed that the lecturers from Italy (but also from Austria and Poland) that they interviewed had no clear idea of what English level might be adequate to teach EMI modules, often pointing at PhDs from Anglophone countries and teaching experience abroad as the main criterion of selection. Several studies maintained that no benchmark of English proficiency in HE for teachers exist, and no data on the (either mandatory or optional) implementation and results of EMI-teaching preparation programmes are currently available (Lasagabaster et al., 2014; Macaro et al., 2018). Broggini and Costa (2017) indicated that, in Italian universities, in 45% of cases no minimum level of English is requested and in 33% it is self-assessed by lecturers.

Likewise, in Trento, no international certification is required to teach in EMI courses. In this respect, the evaluation of uncertainties and critical points is of utmost importance in order to plan formative activities to bridge potential gaps, meet teachers' specific needs and prevent the feeling of EMI as a constraint. In this case, the high percentage of positive self-evaluations seem to point at an encouraging scenario, in which English does not represent an obstacle for most faculty members. The results of reading and writing skills were expected, since the academic community is familiar with the reception and production of papers and volumes in English. Still, these are the competences less elicited in EMI classes. Speaking, listening and communicative skills are at stake when dealing with an international teaching environment

and, according to the questionnaire's results, staff's self-appointed competences are slightly inferior, though the percentage of "probably no" (4%, 1.33%, 3.33%, respectively) and "no" (0.67%, 0.67%, 1.33%, respectively) are extremely low or almost null.

A positive way to integrate EMOI formulation in this respect may be to nurture communicative skills as a combination of receptive and productive abilities and to work towards a conception of such skills in a dialogical, intercultural and pluralist viewpoint. This means to focus on teaching staff's knowledge of English not just as a sum of lexicon, grammar and pronunciation but also as a cohesive and coherent ability to share ideas, opinions and thoughts.

Findings regarding the language skills that faculty members considered fundamental for a lecturer to teach successfully through English in intercultural settings seem to be consistent with this view as, in most cases, their answer was clarity and intelligibility, while, for instance, the achievement of a native-like pronunciation was not considered a crucial requirement. This evokes the idea of "World Englishes" which inspired Jennifer Jenkins's homonymous volume (2009), and the idea that Standard English does not – and cannot – exist in a global setting. Therefore, different pronunciations co-exist under the umbrella term 'English', whose boundaries necessarily stretch to embrace its speakers' linguistic varieties. An inter-cultural context once again advocates multilingualism even within the same LF. Research showed that ELF goes beyond a culturally-specific, rule-based conception of English (Smit, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011; Jenkins, 2015; Mauranen, 2015). ELF is flexible and fluid, with speakers even accommodating their way of speaking according to their interlocutors. Teachers should focus on clarity and flexibility, but also on empathy and accommodation, rather than on providing a perfect – yet static – language model (native speakers' English) by mimicking an ideal speaker (the native speaker of English), with the subsequent increase of pressure on themselves and on their students.

In this respect, LIQuID's findings indicate that this stance is maintained as for the aspects of linguistic, communication and interpersonal competences that teachers evaluated in their students. In their EMI modules as

well as in non-English medium modules, the respondents privileged communication skills intended as expressing or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, in addition to the ability to learn and use the subject-specific language. This may indicate that ESP, i.e. the second spire of the EMOI spiral, is prone to merge with an intercultural and dialogical perspective. Clearly, communicative skills do not solely regard the evaluation phase, but encompass the whole teaching and learning experience. It is fundamental then that the employment of English does not hinder communication in the classroom.

For this reason, the questionnaire investigated the concerns teachers had regarding their students' English language use in the classroom and compared the results with those referring to non-EMI modules. Indeed, findings indicate that students seem to be reluctant to use English (due to shyness, fear of making mistakes, insecurity, etc.), show difficulty articulating complex arguments and expressing their opinion or holding a discussion in English. This result is seemingly worrying, though the same concerns were highlighted in non-English medium classes and therefore may be a symptom of students' general reluctance and difficulty in communication in classroom. Since in both cases data suggest an improvement in students' communication skills, UniTn's findings may lead to a reflection concerning how to enhance student-teacher and student-student interactions and create an inclusive environment, in which all participants are encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions with no fear of making mistakes and no penalisation caused by linguistic barriers, both in case of Italian native speakers using English and of international students who do not know Italian and have to struggle with an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural milieu.

The latter consideration also accounts for the question regarding potential concerns linked with faculty members having to face students who are able to speak English more fluently than them. This apparent provocation underlies the very concrete possibility for an Italian native speaker to teach students whose mother tongue is English or who are accustomed to use it at a highly proficient level. An international and intercultural research community should not fear but rather embrace such a chance, though faculty members should be well-equipped and trained to face this challenge. The organisation

of seminars, study days and forums to help, train, and assist teachers is a necessary step to ascertain that the leap from local to global does not turn out to be a bungee jumping experience. Though in LIQuID's survey such concern was pointed out only in 3.18% cases, this percentage may increase as UniTn opens to a broader international community. Therefore, policy makers should be aware and ready to face this issue. Moreover, teachers should bear in mind that they are the subject specialists, whereas their students, regardless of their English proficiency, are in class to increase their knowledge of a discipline in which they are not experts yet.

In that respect, it is of utmost importance for teachers to receive an adequate training on their lecturing style, not just to achieve language proficiency. The survey included a section on the materials used for personal reference while teaching, with results indicating that, for both English and non-English classes, the main tools selected were notes and outlines on the lecture topics, notes and comments added to the slides, quotations and references from papers. Surprisingly, the use of language tools (list of specialised terms and vocabulary, pronunciation notes, English expressions and phrases to provide examples, be persuasive, or place emphasis, dictionaries, and signposting language notes in English) during EMI classes proved to be extremely limited. EMI experts encourage the use of such linguistic tools as signposting language, notes to signal progression through the lecture and ease the learning experience for students, as well as of ready-to-use English expressions and phrases, so as to help non-English native teachers to provide examples, anecdotes, and jokes in a language which may not be familiar to those who are speaking or listening to the lecture.

Institutional policies and resources should be aimed at supporting the use of English by preventing potential damage to the quality of learning that may accompany EMI implementation. Therefore, EMI programmes have to be carefully conceived, planned and resourced (Lasagabaster et al., 2014) by further investing in teachers' preparation and professional development to face the challenges of EMI classes with appropriate tools to communicate effectively high-quality contents.

A further consideration in this respect regards the possibility of using Italian (or the first language, other than English) for both teachers and students in class and during exams. In LIQuID's survey, for most respondents, the answer was negative in both cases, though a number of faculty members claimed that Italian is useful in several specific contexts, such as teacher-student clarifications, one-to-one conversation and teamwork debate among Italian native speakers, jokes, greetings and casual talks, details about the exam and other technical issues (usually translated in English by the teacher to make them comprehensible for international students), to foster the participation of students that are shy or less familiar with English, to be consistent with the language of exam, to stimulate quicker responses, and when no international student was present. Interestingly, in a number of cases, students were allowed to choose the language of the exam to avoid any penalisation caused by the linguistic barriers, especially since their English proficiency was not under assessment.

By looking at other within-country data, in her 16-hour corpus of lectures, Costa (2012) found evidence of codeswitching from English to L1 (Italian), even in situations in which non-native speakers of Italian (about 25% in the Architecture classes) were in the audience. Broggini and Costa (2017) confirmed that in 58% of cases, English was the language of assessment in the Italian universities used for their case-study. However, they also pointed out that no standard regulation for the language of exam existed as this percentage varied according to the geographical position of the universities: English was used in 50% of the universities in the North, 67% in Central Italy, 64% in the South. Moreover, they maintained that a high percentage of the administrative staff interviewed did not know (or did not want to say) what language was used in the assessment of EMI modules (17%).

5. Conclusion

A crucial element to bear in mind at all levels of planning and teaching in an EMI setting is that languages other than English are always present and, paraphrasing van Lier (2004), students are not empty vessels as they take part in

learning activities. They always carry their cultural, linguistic, and identity background with them. In EMI environments in which students share a different first language, such as Italian in the case of UniTn, English-only policies are frequently established to prevent the switch to the first language and keep the communicative focus on English. However, an outright ban of other languages may result in their delegitimization as languages of knowledge and learning.

ELF should foster communication in multilingual contexts and not lapse into monolingualism. Palfreyman and van der Walt (2017) highlighted that ELF may positively promote multilingualism in campuses since "increasing numbers of students from different language backgrounds use the lingua franca to access and develop knowledge and competencies in a variety of languages" (pp. 2–3). Many campuses are currently working on developing intercultural competence and awareness among both domestic and international students and faculty members (Friedrich, 2008; Leask, 2008) to engage in intercultural communication successfully. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is grounded upon self-awareness about one's cultural and linguistic background, awareness of others, and the adequate ways of thinking and communicating to negotiate meanings in a diverse and plural context (Baker, 2009; 2015).

A university shifting from local to global cannot overlook that internationalisation should aim to bring people together and prompt a diverse and multilingual scientific community. As Brumfit (2001) claimed, languages "are used to create solidarity, but also to threaten solidarity, to conceal, but also to reveal, to claim identity both within and outside particular cultural groupings" (p. 138). In this respect, establishing a linguistic and cultural hegemony of English while disregarding the specificities of each HE environment is detrimental. First, a Lingua Franca (LF) should foster dialogue, which means creating rather than preventing an opening to other languages and cultures, since the development of a plural thinking is at the core of academic research itself. Second, treating a LF as a receptacle, in which all other languages are forced results in an impoverishment of both sides. Monolingualism and uniformity of thought may degenerate in staleness, which opposes the very notions of development and circulation of ideas and knowledge. An LF and its cultural

background can be enriched by multilingualism, thus overcoming the mere label of "receptacle" with a simple grammar and a basic vocabulary. A language used as LF can thus evolve and incorporate wide influences.

On the other hand, students learning to express themselves in English, without denying the usefulness of other languages, promotes diversity and bridges the communicative gaps between students in an international HE community. For instance, Italian native speakers may be ready for the encounter with a diverse, worldwide academic community while studying in Trento. However, the balance between a systematic use of LF and multilingualism is clearly delicate and difficult to maintain.

For these reasons, one size does not fit all: no general guidelines about language policies are effective across all contexts. They may change according to the nation, the university, or even the discipline. This accounts for the importance of continuing to investigate EMI and EMOI and their potentialities for HE. So far, LIQuID's research focused on the educators' viewpoint. Future inquiries should look at EMI from the students' perspective in order to gather valuable data about their motivations to study in an EMI setting and the challenges it poses.[4] A forward-looking strategic plan cannot overlook the constant need of corrective actions and improvements (e.g., in the light of the forced modifications of teaching practice on account of the Covid-19 worldwide emergency). For all these reasons, this paper proposes the EMOI-spiral model, in which English – in its intercultural sense – is the medium but also the outcome of a diverse, open and inclusive instruction system.

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4   Students' perspectives on EMI have recently become the focus of a growing body of research. See Ackerley (2017); Clark (2017); Costa and Mariotti (2018); Guarda (2018); Doiz et al. (2019).

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