Hermes 45-2010
ABSTRACTS

THEMATIC SECTION
Lecture Comprehension and Learning in English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education

ARTICLES

Glenn Ole Hellekjær
Lecture Comprehension in English-Medium Higher Education

In European higher education the growing number of English-Medium (EM) courses, i.e. non-language subjects taught through English, has led to discussion about, and research on, whether the use of a foreign language for instruction has a negative impact on teaching and learning. The present quantitative study investigates this issue by comparing student lecture comprehension in English and the first language (L1) at three Norwegian and two German institutions of higher education, with a sample comprising 364 Norwegian and 47 German student respondents. It compares selfassessment scores for lecture comprehension in English and the L1. Analysis shows that while the difference between English and L1 scores was not substantial, a considerable number of students still had difficulties understanding the English-Medium lectures. Among the main problems, which in fact were similar in English and the L1, were difficulties distinguishing the meaning of words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and difficulties taking notes while listening to lectures. The study argues the need to improve the quality of lecturing in English and L1 as well as the lecturers' and students' English proficiency.

John Airey
The Ability of Students to Explain Science Concepts in Two Languages

This paper analyses the ability of twenty-one physics undergraduates at two Swedish universities to orally describe and explain in both Swedish and English the science concepts met in their lectures. This ability is related back to the language used to teach the concepts (English, Swedish or both languages). Transcripts of student descriptions in both languages are rated using three measures:

1. Fluency (in terms of syllables per second and mean length of runs)
2. Code-switching
3. A judgment about the 'disciplinarity' of what is said.

Comparison between languages finds that students speak on average 45% slower and have 33% shorter runs in their English descriptions. However, these differences in speaking rate and run length become much lower (28% and 26% respectively) in those transcripts where students appear to have adequately understood the concepts that were presented in the lectures. These latter values are in line with fi ndings in comparative studies of other types of speech event (See Hincks 2010). Analysis of code-switching identifies some students (n=3) who have great difficulty describing disciplinary concepts in English. These were first year students and were being taught in

English for the first time. It is thus concluded that for some students disciplinary English is indeed a problem. However, from a disciplinary point of view, all other students give similarly good (or bad) descriptions of physics concepts in both Swedish and English, regardless of the language used in the lectures.

Robert Wilkinson
Enhancing Lecture Interaction through Live SMS

A consistent challenge with lectures to large audiences is the extent to which the lecturer can develop interaction with the audience. Obtaining answers to the lecturer's questions or stimulating questions from the audience during the lecture may be hampered by the fact that the lecturer and the audience are not able to hear speakers in the audience clearly. This article reports on an experimental design to test the feasibility of allowing live SMS messaging as a means to stimulate interaction during large lectures. The context concerned lectures on academic writing in bachelor's programmes in business and economics. Each lecture attracted about 500 students. The students were invited to send text messages to a dedicated phone line connected to a computer, which, at chosen intervals, displayed messages for everyone to see. The set-up allowed the lecturer to switch instantly from slides to the message display. Messages could be easily transferred to an Excel file for subsequent processing if necessary. Results showed that students did not use the opportunity as frequently as expected, and most messages were not relevant to the topics of the lectures. In this article, explanations for these outcomes are discussed, and recommendations for further implementation are presented. Using a new technology, even a pervasive one like SMS messaging, in a lecture entails modifi cations to the design, delivery and content of the lecture itself.

Renate G. Klaassen & Madeleine Bos
English Language Screening for Scientific Staff at Delft University of Technology

Delft University of Technology (DUT) screened her (non-native English) scientific staff on their level of English profi ciency in the academic year of 2006/2007. In this paper this large scale operation, involving planning, policy decisions, assessment means, advice and training are discussed. Since 2005 all the master programmes at DUT have been taught in English and since 3 years ago DUT has been an officially bilingual university with around 5,500 master students and 1,100 international students in the year 2008. Therefore, results are framed against the background of becoming an international university.

Beyza Björkman
So You Think You Can ELF: English as Lingua Franca as the Medium of Instruction

This paper reports the findings of a study on spoken English as a lingua franca (ELF) in Swedish higher education. The aim has been to investigate the role pragmatic strategies play in content lectures where English is a lingua franca, i.e. a vehicular language. The findings show that lecturers in ELF settings make less frequent use of pragmatic strategies than students, who deploy these strategies frequently in group-work projects. Earlier stages of the present study showed that despite frequent non-standardness at the morphosyntax level, there is very little overt disturbance in student group-work (Björkman 2008a and b/2009b), most likely owing to a variety of communicative strategies used during interaction and the questions raised (Björkman 2009a). It seems reasonable to assume that, in the absence of appropriate strategies and questions that serve as real-time signals of disturbance, there is an increased risk for covert disturbance in lectures. This view complies with the findings of earlier studies on the importance of such strategies (Mauranen 2006, Airey 2009, Hellekjær 2010). The findings imply that the effectiveness of a speaker of English in academic ELF settings is determined primarily by the speaker's pragmatic

ability and less by his/her proficiency. There are important implications of these findings for lecturers who need to operate in ELF settings. First, increasing interactivity by using pragmatic strategies sufficiently frequently appears critical for those involved in English-medium education. It is also important that awareness is raised on target language usage in lecturing in English. Such awareness-raising can be achieved at the macro level by clearly-written language policies that include training for teachers and students who both need to be equipped with the skills needed to cope with the complexities of such settings, and at the micro level, by in-house training and courses that could be administered to both teachers and students.

Ragnhild Ljosland
Teaching through English: Monolingual Policy Meets Multilingual Practice

The present paper proposes to explore the boundaries of Teaching Through English by discussing situations where English meets other languages within the teaching and learning situation and in the surrounding environment. In contrast to the view that the English language is taking over whole areas of society in a process of domain loss, the paper shows that even within offi cially English medium study programmes there is a certain scope for multilingual practices. Through looking in more detail at actual language use in a range of communicative situations within the study environment, the paper seeks to build a more detailed understanding of what constitutes a sociolinguistic domain, and where its boundaries are. The paper is based on a case study of an English medium MSc programme at a Norwegian university.

Philip Shaw et al.
Intertextual Episodes in Lectures: A Classification from the Perspective of Incidental Learning from Reading

In a parallel language environment it is important that teaching takes account of both the languages students are expected to work in. Lectures in the mother tongue need to offer access to textbooks in English and encouragement to read. This paper describes a preliminary study for an investigation of the extent to which they actually do so. A corpus of lectures in English for mainly L1 English students (from BASE and MICASE) was examined for the types of reference to reading which occur, classified by their potential usefulness for access and encouragement. Such references were called 'intertextual episodes'. Seven preliminary categories of intertextual episode were identified. In some disciplines the text is the topic of the lecture rather than a medium for information on the topic, and this category was not pursued further. In the remaining six the text was a medium for information about the topic. Three of them involved management, of texts by the lecturer her/himself, of student writing, or of student reading. The remaining three involved reference to the content of the text either introducing it to students, reporting its content, or, really the most interesting category, relativizing it and thus potentially encouraging critical reading. Straightforward reporting that certain content was in the text at a certain point was the most common type, followed by management of student reading. Relativization was relatively infrequent. The exercise has provided us with categories which can be used for an experimental phase where the effect of different types of reference can be tested, and for observation of the references actually used in L1 lectures in a parallel-language environment.

OTHER ARTICLES

Søren Beck Nielsen

Municipal Representatives' Accounts of Decision-Making Practices during Geriatric Case Conferences

This article addresses questions of elucidation in talk-in-interaction. How do social actors give accounts of what they are doing? To what degree do actors sustain a taken-for-granted level of reasoning? The analysis is based upon naturally occurring data consisting of a corpus of audio recorded case conferences at various geriatric wards in Danish hospitals. The article elaborates one of the important insights of Harold Garfinkel regarding the relationship between discourse and social interaction: as a general characteristic, people tend to treat their fellow interlocutors' conversational contributions as adequate for-all-practical-purposes. Specifically, the article investigates how Danish municipal representatives account for their decisions about whether or not senior citizens are to be referred to residential homes. This practice, I demonstrate, is characterized by non-explicitness with regards to rules and regulations. Instead, municipal representatives make use of developmental discourse: a worsened condition is used to justify a referral to a residential home. On the other hand, an improved condition is used to justify that an elderly citizen is not referred to a residential home.

Elisabet Arnó-Macià

A Qualitative Approach to Educational Research: Language Courses in English Studies

This paper reports on a qualitative study focusing on the role of language awareness in university language courses that form part of English Studies (ES). Language constitutes the subject matter of students' discipline and the ES degree is the initial training for future language teachers and other language-related professionals. Therefore, the models and views of language presented at university will influence graduates' future professional practice. This study focuses on how language awareness is approached in language classes and on lecturers' and students' views of language and learning. This article will discuss how a qualitative methodology was used to find out about participants' practices and views on language and learning, through immersion in a university language course over a term. Using a descriptive interpretive paradigm, data were gathered from classroom observations and interviews, and analysed through the combination of ethnography and discourse analysis. This paper presents the methodological underpinnings of this research, decisions on the selection of data, interaction with participants, researcher's stance, and warranting. Through the understanding of participants' practices and views, this study provides a picture of how language awareness is approached in a university language course.

Alexandre Coutant

Une idéologie incarnée. Les marques identitaires et le discourse marketing les sous-tendant

Si l'image de marque préoccupe les praticiens du marketing et de la communication depuis des années, ce n'est que récemment que la marque, coupable de ne pas s'intégrer aux postulats de la théorie du libre-échange, a su acquérir aux yeux des chercheurs en économie ou en gestion comme aux yeux des professionnels une certaine crédibilité. Particulièrement, certaines de ses caractéristiques se voient accorder une valeur immatérielle et des

outis de mesure adaptés à ces dimensions moins quantifi ables se développent. Dans ce contexte, des stratégies communicationnelles fondées en grande partie sur la force de la marque se développent. Elles donnent naissance à ce que nous pouvons nommer des « marques identitaires », construits anthropomorphisés cherchant à s'ériger en modèles enviables aux yeux de leurs clients potentiels. Cet article propose d'étudier les fondements théoriques d'une telle mise en scène de la marque ainsi que les raisons de consommation supposées des consommateurs.

(Ideology Enacted in Branding: Brand Strategy Founded on Identity and the Marketing Theory It Is Relying on)

Marketers as advertising executives have long been concerned by brand equity. Nevertheless, classical economic theory used to undervalue its importance in the marketplace, as brand could hardly fit the positivist epistemology it was relying on. Recent research arguing for a more comprehensive approach of consumption gave a new credibility to brands. Thus, the value of some of their intangible dimensions have been admitted enough to justify new kinds of communication strategies which are relying on brands' identity strength. These socalled "identity brands" are supposed to operate as models for consumers. This paper is dealing with the theoretical justification of this strategy and the assumed reasons why consumers should have a taste for these kinds of brands.