UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL INSTITUTO DE LETRAS PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS

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THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN BRAZILIAN EMI PRACTICES

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Dissertação de Mestrado em Linguística Aplicada apresentada como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Orientadora: Profa Dra Simone Sarmento

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Resumo

O uso da língua inglesa tem crescido globalmente de forma exponencial ao longo das últimas décadas nos cenários acadêmicos (Dearden, 2014; Macaro, 2016; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Dentro dessa realidade, Inglês como Meio de Instrução (English as a Medium of Instruction, EMI) surge como uma abordagem que foca no ensino dos conteúdos das várias áreas do conhecimento por meio da língua inglesa em países nos quais ela não é a primeira língua (L1) (Dearden, 2014; Gimenez et al., 2018; Hu, 2008; Macaro, 2015; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Nesse sentido, práticas EMI não necessariamente focam no ensino de inglês, e sim no conteúdo, mas podem também promover o aprendizado espontâneo e incidental da língua por meio de práticas autênticas (Hulstijn, 2013; Muñoz, 2012; Pusey, 2020). Dentro deste contexto, os objetivos do estudo são analisar o grau de adesão às práticas EMI nas áreas do conhecimento, como os professores auto avaliam suas proficiências em inglês e como a proficiência na língua se correlaciona à adesão de práticas EMI em sala de aula. Para tanto, busca-se responder três questões de pesquisa: 1) como as diferentes áreas do conhecimento utilizam EMI na suas Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES) brasileiras?; 2) como os professores das IES brasileiras auto avaliam seus níveis de inglês? e 3) como esses níveis de proficiência se relacionam com as práticas EMI nas IES brasileiras. Para as diferenças de proficiência entre as áreas, usou-se planilhas Excel para organizar os dados, criando abas para cada uma das oito áreas do conhecimento, colocando, ao lado de cada respondente, números de 1 (sem conhecimento da língua inglesa) a 4 (conhecimento avançado) de acordo com as respostas deles. Usando o software SPSS (IBM Corp, 2021), análises de correlações estatísticas foram feitas a fim de investigar a relação de proficiência com a implementação de práticas EMI no Ensino Superior brasileiro. Os resultados apontam que os professores se consideram, em média, usuários com níveis de proficiência entre intermediários a avançados na língua inglesa. Em segundo lugar, EMI ainda é incipiente em cenário acadêmico nacional (Gimenez et al., 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2014; Martinez, 2016; Pusey, 2020), apresentando baixa adesão à prática nas diferentes das áreas do conhecimento, mas com *Linguística, letras e artes* apresentando a maior adesão, com 25,3% e *Ciências humanas* a menor, com 6%. Por fim, as proficiências auto avaliadas

proficiência avaliada, mais os professores aderem a práticas de Inglês como Meio de Instrução.

desses professores correlacionadas com suas práticas EMI revelam que quanto mais alta é a

Palavras-chave: EMI – proficiência – língua inglesa – áreas do conhecimento – Ensino Superior brasileiro

Abstract

The use of English has been increasing exponentially all around the globe in the last decades in academic settings (Dearden, 2014; Macaro, 2016; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Within this reality, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) appears as an approach with a focus on the contents of the several fields of knowledge through the use of the English language in countries where it is not the first language (L1) (Dearden, 2014; Gimenez et al., 2018; Hu, 2008; Macaro, 2015; Altbach & Knight, 2007). In this way, EMI practices are not necessarily focused on language teaching but rather on the content through the language; however, it can also promote incidental language learning via authentic practices (Hulstijn, 2013; Muñoz, 2012; Pusey, 2020). Thus, the study's objectives are to analyze the adherence degree to EMI practices throughout the different fields of knowledge, how the professors self-rate their English proficiencies, and how language proficiency correlates to the adhesion of EMI practices in the classroom. For that, three research questions are raised: 1) to what extent do the different fields of knowledge use EMI in Brazilian HE?; 2) what are the general self-rated English proficiency levels of HE professors in Brazil? and 3) how do these self-rated proficiency levels relate to EMI practices at the undergraduate and graduate levels?. For the differences in proficiency levels among the fields of knowledge, Excel spreadsheets were used to organize the data by creating tabs for each of the eight fields, adding, beside each respondent, their respective proficiency level from 1 (no English knowledge) to 4 (advanced English knowledge), according to their answers. Using SPSS (IBM Corp, 2021), correlation analyses were carried out to investigate the association between English proficiency and EMI in professors' classroom practices. The results show that the professors consider themselves users with intermediate to advanced language knowledge. Furthermore, EMI is still an incipient practice in the national academic scenario (Gimenez et al., 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2014;

Martinez, 2016; Pusey, 2020), showing low adherence to EMI practices in all of the eight fields of knowledge, but demonstrating that the field of *Linguistics, Literature, and Arts* presents the highest adherence, with 25,3% and *Human Sciences* demonstrating the lowest adherence, with 6%. Ultimately, the self-rated proficiency levels of these professors correlated to their EMI practices reveal that the higher the proficiency level, the more they utilize EMI practices.

Keywords: EMI – proficiency – English language – fields of knowledge – Brazilian Higher Education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

English has increased its role in Higher Education (HE) due to oncoming internationalization processes in the last few years (Dearden, 2014; Macaro, 2016; Altbach & Knight, 2007). In this context, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) emerges as an internationalization tool for the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) once there is a need to equip students and professors for the globalizing scientific, technical, and commercial communities in which English has become increasingly predominant (van der Walt, 2013).

In the present study, EMI is considered a practice connected to other terms in the contentlanguage learning spectrum, e.g., Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which will be presented and discussed in the following sections (Airey, 2016; Macaro et al., 2017; Macaro, 2018). This investigation stems from the research project named The use of the English Language in Brazilian Higher Education, which gathered data from professors holding a Ph.D. and associated with Brazilian HEI through an electronic questionnaire. The data were firstly collected for the dissertation by Laura Knijnik Baumvol in 2018, called Language practices for knowledge production and dissemination: the case of Brazil, under the supervision of Professor Simone Sarmento, the same as in this study. I was, at the time, a junior research assistant and helped in the process of collecting the data and with the data trimming. As the title of the dissertation mentions, Baumvol (2018) focused on knowledge production and which languages are used for these practices in Brazil. Analyzing curriculums on the Lattes Platform and matching these data with an electronic questionnaire with over 5,000 respondents, the researcher delineated how languages, including English, are used for publications. From this moment on, I have not stopped researching and working with EMI since the questionnaire mentioned above ended up producing invaluable data on EMI matters.

Since I first started as a junior researcher in 2017, I have been dealing with quantitative and qualitative data analysis, an experience which culminated in my final undergraduate monography, called EMI no Ensino Superior Brasileiro: um estudo da percepção de docentes. This final paper analyzed how professors from HE in Brazil interpreted EMI practices. A qualiquantitative methodology was applied and analyzed via a coding process (Saldaña, 2013) to sort professors' perceptions (qualitative methodology) into categories whose number of occurrences was later quantified (quantitative methodology). In the first moment, the respondents had to answer the question what are the benefits of teaching in English? The findings showed that the most selected option was the Brazilian students have the opportunity to improve their English language proficiency (64% of the respondents selected this option). The least chosen option was that there are no benefits in teaching in English (only 5,3% of responses). For the open question, what should be done by your HEI in order to implement more EMI classes?, a coding process was conducted after a close reading of all the over 3,000 responses. Seven categories with suggestions for EMI implementation emerged after coding: training for professors, language education for professors, language education for students, more incentives for professors, stimuli in general and English teaching for the academic community, having more foreign students, and diminishing the resistance to English. Also, a category emerged with responses from participants who opposed the implementation of EMI. The most recurring category was training for professors, followed by language education for professors and language education for students (Marengo, 2019).

Right after my graduation, I started my Master's in Applied Linguistics. During my time as a master's student at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), I was invited to be an English Teaching Assistant (ETA) at the Physics Department of the university in an

Astrophysics discipline named *Fundamentos de Astronomia e Astrofísica*, under the supervision of professor Ana Leonor Chies Santiago Santos, together with her Astrophysics intern, in preparing and delivering EMI classes for this course. My role in this course was to give linguistic support concerning the English language, mainly in preparing pedagogical tasks and conducting some of the activities, focusing on essential vocabulary and language structures for the course. The proofreading of English assignments by the students was also a part of my duties. I also participated in the oral exams, helping evaluate students' interactions in English.

Considering my path as a junior researcher during undergraduate studies, the production of my final monography already dealing with EMI, and my hands-on experience with EMI as an ETA for the Astrophysics discipline, I am interested in this topic come naturally, culminating in the present master's thesis. In this way, during my time as a master's student in the program, I knew that EMI matters would still be the main topic of my research.

Thus, using the data gathered for *The use of the English Language in Brazilian Higher Education umbrella research, the present thesis* aims to shed light on EMI practices in Brazil, considering how professors' English language proficiency levels relate to their perceived use of English in class. More specifically, how self-rated proficiency correlates to the choice of bibliographical references, the language used by the professors and their students, and the language used in students' assignments and tests. English language proficiency is believed to be one of the main issues related to EMI practices at Brazilian HE (Gimenez et al., 2018; Graddol, 2006; Martinez & Morgan, 2019; Muñoz, 2012). Another objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which professors from different disciplinary fields have already had any experience teaching EMI courses. Disciplinary differences are also believed to influence the use of English in HE practices (Becher, 1998; Bernstein, 1999; Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Kuteeva & Airey,

2014). Thus, investigating the role of proficiency and disciplinary differences in EMI practices on a large scale is of utmost importance, and, to our account, it is an unprecedented study in Brazil.

This thesis is composed of five chapters, including this Introduction. Firstly, a literature review will be presented, showing the different uses of English and additional languages in the classroom, the spread of EMI around the globe, EMI in Brazil, the opportunities and challenges faced by EMI, and the disciplinary differences when it comes to the use of English. After that, the methodology will be delineated, presenting the questions from the study and how the quantitative and correlational analyses were carried out. Then, in chapter four, the data is presented. The chapter compares how different fields of knowledge use the English language in their classes at Brazilian HE. This is followed by the descriptive data regarding professors' selfrated English language proficiency levels and to what extent the English language is used in classrooms by the professors themselves, their students, in the courses' bibliographical references, and in tests and assignments. Next, correlation analyses among the professors' selfrated proficiencies and the four different aspects of the use of English in Brazilian HE classrooms will be considered. After that, analyses of how the four aspects correlate to each other will be conducted. Finally, the research questions will be commented on, and final considerations will be provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will present the theoretical background for the current study. At first, the concept of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) will be provided, displaying its different approaches and situating EMI within similar areas such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Then, EMI implementation policies

will be discussed, followed by the origins of EMI and the use of English at higher education institutions (HEIs) all around the globe. Subsequently, EMI's affairs in Brazil will be explored, showing how it has been performed in this country and providing examples of practices. The advantages and disadvantages of implementing EMI in several different nations will also be brought to light. Finally, an overview of how different fields of knowledge handle English medium practices when it comes to classroom and publication practices will be provided.

2.1 Differentiating the uses of English in the classroom

A range of terms has been used to describe the teaching of so-called content courses in English at the Higher Education (HE) level: "English-medium instruction (EMI), teaching in English (TIE), English-medium education in multilingual university settings (EMEMUS), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), integrating content and language in higher education (ICLHE), etc." (Airey, 2016, p.72). However, some of these terms seem to have never gotten off the ground, such as TIE, EMEMUS, or ICLHE. Thus, this section will mainly explain the contexts in which CLIL and EMI are used.

According to Macaro (2017), EMI refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English, which is the case in Brazil. CLIL, on the other hand, would not necessarily be about the use of English. However, even though CLIL might theoretically refer to any language, the first 'L' is almost always English (Airey, 2016; Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2013). In addition, whereas CLIL is concerned with advancing content and language, "EMI does not (necessarily) have that objective" (p.4) since the focus should be chiefly on the content while using English as the medium to teach it.

For Graddol (2016), the two approaches also differ as far as language proficiency is concerned since EMI implies a certain language proficiency level from professors and students, whereas CLIL does not:

CLIL is an approach to bilingual education in which both curriculum content — such as science or geography — and English are taught together. It differs from simple English-medium education in that the learner is not necessarily expected to have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning study. (Graddol, 2006, p.86)

It is also important to note that CLIL is often mentioned in primary and secondary education contexts, while EMI is frequently more associated with HE (Dearden, 2014; Mahan, 2022; Urmeneta, 2019). According to Urmeneta (2019), "indeed, schools are institutions where teaching languages, developing educated ways of using them, and focusing on the use and uses of language are primary interdependent goals" (p.9). When interdependent goals are mentioned, authors such as Halliday (1993) mention a multi-faceted view of learning in general, and language learning in particular, as a series of three interconnected processes. These processes are mentioned as learning language, learning through language, and learning about language.

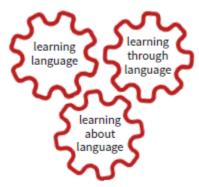


Figure 1. Halliday's model of learning. Source: Urmeneta (2019)

CLIL, which encompasses all the three processes in Halliday's (1993) model, is deemed more approachable in primary and secondary schools since this method can be used in different

disciplines (e.g., science or geography), while it is possible to teach the content, and also teach about the language. Hence, "in CLIL, the content to be covered is the starting point for planning, and teachers and students work together, making the most of all the verbal and nonverbal resources at hand, to understand one another and be understood in relation to the target content" (p.10).

Moreover, CLIL is sometimes viewed as an "umbrella term," encompassing EMI and other educational approaches such as immersion programs, bilingual education, and multilingual education. However, this does not seem to be a consensus. Therefore, in this thesis, CLIL will be taken as an approach at a different point of the spectrum in the language/content continuum compared to EMI (Airey, 2016). This scale includes, in addition to EMI and CLIL, English for Academic Purposes (EAP):

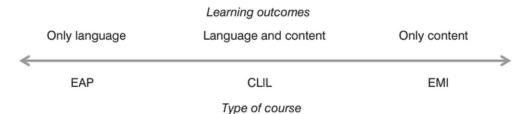


Figure 2. The language/content continuum. Source: Airey (2016)

According to the continuum, EAP courses, with mainly language learning targets, are shown on the left side of the picture. In contrast, EMI courses, with essentially content learning pursuits, are shown on the right. CLIL courses, which combine language and content learning, fall somewhere between these two extremes (Airey, 2016). Subsequently, language is not directly regarded on one end of the spectrum (EMI). The syllabi of such courses include content-related learning outcomes but no straightforward English language-related learning outcomes. For Airey (2016), "language is simply viewed as a tool for teaching that may be substituted by another tool as required — the choice of teaching language is pragmatic and not expected to

affect the content taught to any great degree" (p.73). In other words, in EMI contexts, English is exclusively viewed as the language of course instruction. However, the author points out that this is an artificial division since it would be a fallacy to imagine that content and language could ever be disconnected from each other - they are inevitably intertwined.

Macaro et al. (2017) point out that EMI is a relatively recent subject of study. The fact that researchers and professors label the phenomenon with a variety of terms reveals this fact.

Macaro (2018) illustrates the different terms used to refer to EMI:

English medium instruction	Kim & Sohn, 2009; Kang & Park, 2005; Islam, 2013; Huang, 2015; Byun et al., 2011; Dearden, 2015; Macaro, Akincioglu, & Dearden, 2016; Dearden & Macaro, 2016
English-medium instruction	Kim & Shin, 2014; Kim, Tatar, & Choi, 2014; Ghorbani & Alavi, 2014; Cho, 2012; J. Y. H. Chan, 2014; Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Rogier, 2012; Studer, 2015; Tatzl, 2011; Yoxsimer Paulsrud, 2014
English medium of instruction	Khan, 2013; Chu, 2005
English as the medium of instruction	Lai, 2013; Ellili-Cherif & Alkhateeb, 2015; British Council/TEPAV, 2015; McMullen, 2014; Yip & Tsang, 2006
English as a medium of instruction	Belhiah & Elhami, 2014; Al-Masheikhi, Al-Mahrooqi, & Denman, 2014; Lueg & Lueg, 2015; Sultana, 2014; Tung, Lam, & Tsang, 1997; Wu, 2006; Vu & Burns, 2014; Tarnopolsky & Goodman, 2014; Ryhan, 2014
English language as medium of instruction	Ismail et al., 2011
English-medium education (English-medium higher education)	Kirkgöz, 2005, 2009; Earls, 2016
English-medium teaching	J. Y. H. Chan, 2014; Byun et al., 2011
English-medium higher education	Hellekjaer, 2010
English-medium courses	Yeh, 2014
English-medium programs	Hengsadeekul, Koul, & Kaewkuekool, 2014; Dafouz, Camacho, & Urquia, 2014
English as the lingua franca medium of instruction	Chapple, 2015; Bjorkman, 2010
English medium content classes	lyobe, Brown, & Coulson, 2011

Figure 3. Use of different terminologies containing the words 'English' + 'medium.' Source: Macaro (2018)

Macaro (2018) points out that some authors utilize two or three representations of the term EMI even within a single study. He also argues that only a few authors have not used the word 'medium,' showing the examples of Wächter & Maiworm (2014) and Kim & Shin (2014), who respectively used the terms 'English Taught Programmes' and 'English Communication

Education' concerning HE. Consequently, one may question if there are any significant explanations for the terminology differences. Rather than attempting to speculate on possible causes, Macaro (2018) provides definitions of the EMI phenomena by different authors. These definitions, he believes, are even more varied and thus problematic than the various terminologies used to label this method, as seen in Figure 3. In order to exemplify the variation in definitions, an excerpt of the examples brought by Macaro (2018) can be seen in Figure 4 below:

... the teaching and learning of content through another language (English).

(Dafouz, Camacho, & Urquia, 2014, p. 224)

English used as the language of instruction, in particular, where English is not the native language of the students.

(Kim & Shin, 2014, p. 42)

... [when] English is the medium of instruction rather than studied as a foreign language.

(Tarnopolsky & Goodman, 2012, p. 58)

EMI is closely related to content-based instruction.

(Kang & Park, 2005, p. 157)

Figure 4. Examples of EMI definitions by distinct authors. Source: Macaro (2018)

Macaro (2018) debates that in the EMI literature, there are seldom attempts to define what is actually being discussed with sufficient detail. For him, by reading these articles, it appears that authors roughly know what is being discussed about. Besides, 'English Medium Instruction,' along with other terminologies in Figure 3, are occasionally used interchangeably with terms like 'Foreign language education' in the same article. Some of the possible causes for the different terms and definitions are 1) the positioning of a research paper in a particular journal, and 2) writers might be trying to reach out to readers in a different context to provide their papers with greater external validity.

The process of using English for internationalization goes beyond the strict use of EMI (Baumvol & Sarmento, 2016). Given its importance, English is present in HE in various ways,

pervading multiple social behaviors, especially in light of the significant growth in academic mobility. Factors such as professors' and students' different home languages, whether or not the students share the same native language, the language of the bibliographic references, and the language of instruction are all taken into account (Baumvol & Sarmento, 2016).

Because instruction or learning does not occur vertically from instructors to students but is somewhat influenced by various factors, it is necessary to define 'language of instruction.' For this, Baumvol & Sarmento (2016) point out three different questions regarding the choice of language of instruction: 1) the language(s) used by the professor; 2) the language(s) of the bibliographic references; 3) the language(s) used by the students (see Baumvol & Sarmento, 2016 for more details). The authors illustrate that, for instance, it is relatively usual to see English as the primary language of all course references in specific areas of knowledge. The most relevant Brazilian academic journals and events are entirely in English in some areas. Nevertheless, the professor mainly speaks in Portuguese to discuss these references in the classroom. Still, even if the professor communicates with the students mainly in Portuguese, tests and final papers may be written in English. Regarding these contrasts, there appears to be a continuum of the presence of the English language in the teaching and learning process. From Baumvol & Sarmento's (2016) point of view, EMI is not merely a binary matter in the sense that "EMI is used" or "EMI is not used," but instead a myriad of scenarios in which more (or fewer) people can use English in more (or fewer) contexts within the same classroom and academic practices.

For the purpose of this study, the term English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) will be used to refer to courses and academic activities in which English is used as the medium of instruction regardless of the content being the only objective or not. As Airey (2016) pointed out,

"content and language are inextricably entwined" (p.73). In this way, even though the official course/activity objectives may refer only to content, it is very likely that language-related issues do come up during classes and will have to be dealt with by the instructor.

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