

## Editorial

# Teaching and learning in English in parallel-language and ELF settings: debates, concerns and realities in higher education

This special issue of *Ibérica* is dedicated to the use of English in higher education. As a result of the Bologna process and increasing internationalisation at universities across Europe, English is often used in parallel with a local language or as a lingua franca. This trend towards English-medium instruction and research has been strong in the north of Europe and is becoming visible in other EU countries. Internationalisation is now perceived as a desirable outcome by university policy-makers, and there is no doubt that it brings new opportunities in education and research. However, on the practical level, the use of English in academic settings outside the Anglophone world is not problem-free; it naturally brings new challenges for students and teachers alike. Without adequate language support, these challenges can grow into obstacles, so it seems that LSP professionals have a role to play in facilitating the internationalisation process.

This volume contains contributions by LSP researchers and practitioners from two Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Sweden. English has been used as a language of research, scholarly publication, and undergraduate reading in Scandinavian universities since the 1950s, but its increasing use in these areas and in teaching, as well as its status as an academic language, have become subject of heated debates over the past few years. As in other European countries, higher education in Scandinavia has experienced a number of substantial changes resulting from two major factors: the Bologna process and an urge to increase competitiveness in international university rankings. Thus, most universities have undergone major adjustments; an increasing use of English in undergraduate and Master's education is one such adjustment.

Compared to Sweden, only the Netherlands offers more English-medium education today (Wächter & Maiworn 2008). There are several reasons for this high use of English: in some disciplines, academic publications and university textbooks are mostly or exclusively in English; English also promotes international exchange and is perceived as an asset in the job market. In Sweden, this gave rise to an ongoing debate concerning the status of English as an academic language and the issues of domain loss, directly related to the development of subject-specific terminology in the national language (see, for instance, Gunnarsson & Öhman, 1997; and also the interview with Gunnarsson in this volume).

The concept of “parallel language use” is largely rooted in Scandinavian reality and may not be familiar to the readers of *Ibérica*, although similar practices may exist in other European countries. This concept is not brand new: we first find mention of the parallel use of English and Swedish in higher education in the 1998 *Action Programme* prepared for the Swedish Government by the Swedish Language Council, whose aim has been to strengthen the position of Swedish:

encouragement should be given to educational development work aimed at enhancing students’ ability to use *Swedish and English in parallel in their subjects*. It is unfortunate if separate domains develop, with foundation courses predominantly in Swedish and more advanced courses only in English. (Swedish Language Council, 1998: 16 – my emphasis)

In later official documents and reports published by the Swedish Language Council and the Swedish Government, the notion of parallel language use (*parallelspråkighet*) was expanded. An influential report, *Mål i mun* (“the gift of the gab”), was published in 2002 and made a number of recommendations as part of an action plan to support Swedish. This 2002 report also mentioned “parallel language use”, implying a co-existence of Swedish and English. In 2006, ministers for education and culture and other governmental representatives from the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden – published *Deklaration om nordisk språkpolitik / Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy* (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2007), which contained an entire section on the parallel language use of English and one or several Nordic languages in research and education. In Sweden today, two years after the introduction of the Language Act, 2009 (Swedish Government, 2009) which established the official status of Swedish as the country’s main language, “parallel language use” is increasingly regarded as a

guiding principle for the dual use of Swedish and English in higher education. However, it seems that this concept was conceived by policy-makers and concerns primarily the administrative aspect of the education system, rather than students, teachers, and their language and disciplinary competences (Airey, 2009). The full implications of parallel language use remain unclear, and more research needs to be done on how this concept is implemented in practice.

On the practical level, parallel language use is only possible when both students and teachers have adequate language competences in English and in the local language. This is certainly not the case when the vast majority of students or lecturers are international, i.e. not from the country where the education is taking place, and English is therefore used as an academic *lingua franca*. English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) has become dominant at Swedish universities and colleges offering degrees in the natural sciences, medicine and engineering, particularly at the postgraduate level. These programmes have been attracting many international students. For example, in 2009 nearly two thirds (65%) of all Master's programmes in Sweden were taught in English, with about 50% of foreign students; nearly half of these programmes were in Engineering or related subjects. At the PhD level, 94% of theses in Natural Sciences published in Sweden were in English, compared to 65% in Social Sciences and 37% in the Humanities (Salö, 2010). These proportions may look alarming to advocates of Swedish, since, in absolute terms, the disciplines that publish more in English are also the ones that produce more research. For example, Gunnarsson (2001) warns against the danger of diglossia, with English playing the role of an official "high" language of science and Swedish that of a "low" language of popularisation.

The issues discussed in the articles published in this volume address a range of topics related to the use of both written and spoken academic English in parallel-language and ELF settings, including the challenges faced by content lecturers who are required to teach their subjects in English, the role played by content teachers in the students' acquisition of academic English, the issues of standard/non-standard English use when English is used as an academic *lingua franca*, and the importance of academic literacy in an increasingly international university.

In the opening article, Christian Jensen & Jacob Thøgersen, researchers at the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use, set the scene by describing various positions in the national debate about English in

Denmark and then reporting the results of a survey of university lecturers' attitudes towards English as the medium of instruction conducted at the University of Copenhagen. Their results indicate that the lecturers' age and degree of English use play an important role: younger lecturers and lecturers with a higher teaching load in English show positive attitudes towards the increase in English-medium instruction. In the following article, John Airey approaches a similar topic in a case study examining Swedish university lecturers' experiences of changing their teaching language to English. Unlike the previous article which draws primarily on quantitative data survey, Airey presents a qualitative analysis of the teachers' reflections and experiences. He groups these under nine major themes and then offers nine practical recommendations. Airey indicates that his study participants were relatively inexperienced in English-medium instruction and therefore aware of different limitations when teaching in English.

Diane Pecorari, Philip Shaw, Aileen Irvine and Hans Malmström present the results of another large-scale survey involving approximately 20% of all university lecturers in Sweden. In this article, the authors analyse university teachers' objectives and practices related to the use of English-language textbooks in the subject courses taught in the local language. Their study identifies predominant attitudes and syllabus infrastructures underlying this practice. Thus, Swedish university lecturers considered the use of English-language textbooks as providing a useful opportunity for incidental language learning, but only a small minority of courses was reported to have any specified learning outcome related to the English language. Additional comments by university lecturers who took part in this survey showed awareness of the benefits and risks of parallel-language practices, but no interest in making language-learning aims explicit.

In disciplinary domains such as sciences and engineering, language is seen as a tool for communication, and knowledge is also transmitted through other means such as formulas, diagrams, and graphs. It is in these domains that academic English is most often used as a *lingua franca* in education and research. In her article, Beyza Björkman proposes a new ELF paradigm for EAP, which stresses the importance of communicative competence for both students and staff. In the context of increasing internationalisation, Björkman argues, EAP needs to be modified accordingly. If the aim of EAP instruction and testing is to prepare speakers for academic settings where English is the *lingua franca*, the findings of ELF research need to be taken into consideration and then integrated into EAP curriculum design and

testing, rethinking norms and target use and validating the pluralism of English.

Drawing on his experience of running the Division for Language and Communication at Chalmers University of Technology, Magnus Gustafsson offers a framework for teaching LSP in an integrated fashion. This framework draws on previous research on academic literacies and generic skills, as well as other theoretical underpinnings such as peer learning and activity theory. Gustafsson suggests that a genuine literacies approach in higher education is by necessity disciplinary, and that LSP practitioners need to take into consideration the students' understanding of the communities they are active in. He also offers three examples of courses to illustrate the application of the models described in a flexible and versatile manner which ultimately fosters academic literacy.

In the following article, Mona Bläsjö discusses the importance of visuals and numerals in learners' acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, regardless of whether the instruction is in English or in the local language. Drawing on the theoretical framework of social semiotics and the neo-Vygotskian perspective, her article shows how novice students of economics in Sweden encounter a multimodal academic literacy and argues for a raised awareness among teachers in order to scaffold students into academic visual literacies.

Although in Sweden oral English is used more frequently at the postgraduate level (Salö, 2010), a vast proportion of course literature in undergraduate programmes is in English. Thus, many Swedish undergraduate students are expected to read their course literature in English while being taught in Swedish. In their article, Philip Shaw and Alan McMillion explore the differences between academic reading proficiency of Swedish biology students compared to their British counterparts using different types of reading tests. Their study shows that the reading performance of many Swedish students is within or above the British average on the study-reading test, but the overall average score of the Swedish readers was lower compared to the British sample. This difference is partly explained by a relative lack of academic vocabulary knowledge among the Swedish undergraduates who took part in the reported study. Finally, in her research note, Angela Falk outlines the current sociolinguistic situation among Swedish undergraduates willing to study English and describes the challenges they face when thinking and writing in English.

Over the past few years, *Ibérica* has gained a reputation for publishing sound research concerning the lexicographical, terminological, and genre-analytical aspects of LSP. The research reported in the articles published in this volume takes somewhat different angles, drawing on different theoretical approaches to LSP and resorting to a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect, to analyse and to interpret the data. Thus, the authors make use of survey techniques (Jensen & Thøgersen, Pecorari et al.), statistical analysis for SLA (Shaw & McMillion), and qualitative methods (Airey, Blåsjö). Björkman and Gustafsson provide state-of-the-art reviews and pedagogical proposals drawing on ELF and academic literacies research respectively. The articles provide a snapshot of the current use of academic English in two Scandinavian countries, and the insights offered by the authors open up new venues for LSP research in the post-Bologna Europe.

Although academic English is the main theme of this special issue, it must be acknowledged that *Ibérica* is not exclusively ESP-oriented. Unlike most of the international journals in the field, it accepts articles in six European languages and supports research into different kinds of LSP. In fact, *Ibérica's* editorial policy can be seen as a good example of parallel language use for research dissemination purposes, as its guidelines state that “the title, (...) the abstract and the key words must be written in the original language of the article and in Spanish (or in English, if the article is written in Spanish or in another language)”. One of the recommendations of the Swedish Language Council (Salö, 2010) is that all doctoral theses written in English and submitted at Swedish universities should be accompanied by a summary in Swedish, which has not always been the case to this day. This recommendation results from current concerns expressed by scholars of Swedish with issues of domain loss, eventual diglossia, and other detrimental effects of English-medium education in Sweden.

A great deal of Swedish LSP research takes place in university departments of Scandinavian languages. Uppsala and Stockholm Universities provide illustrative examples, with many researchers working on various aspects of LSP in professional and academic contexts, including parallel language use and multilingualism. Our special issue includes an interview with Professor Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, a key figure in Swedish LSP, whose research in professional communication, LSP, academic discourse, and multilingualism has been fundamental in the development of local LSP studies and, to a certain degree, language policies implemented in Sweden over the last few

years. Mona Blåsjö visited Professor Gunnarsson at Uppsala to conduct the interview and shares her notes with *Ibérica* readers in this volume.

Gunnarsson's *Professional Discourse* (Continuum, 2009) is among the books reviewed in this special issue. Other books reviewed here focus on different issues related to the use of English in academic contexts, namely academic writing (Carter, Lillis & Parkin; Lillis & Curry), teaching and learning issues (Gagliardi & Maley), and academic values in the disciplines (Giannoni).

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Fully supported by the European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes (AELFE) based in Spain, *Ibérica* has a local name and increasingly international submissions and audience. The journal has been recently awarded a certificate and seal of excellence by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, and its quality is being acknowledged by inclusion in major international citation indexes such as Arts and Humanities Citation Index, Social Sciences Citation Index, Journal Citation Reports (all of them at ISI Web of Knowledge), SCOPUS or the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH). But, above all, *Ibérica's* editorial policy is aimed to support European LSP research, and the publication of this special issue is

a move northwards. Hopefully, this volume will contribute to exchange of ideas and experiences between LSP practitioners and researchers across Europe.

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