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INTERNATIONALISATION IN THE TIME OF COVID. ONLINE AND ENGLISH AS MEDIA OF INSTRUCTION AT THE UNIVERSITY. A CASE STUDY.

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Abstract

The abrupt shift to remote instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the intersection of two emerging trends in international higher education: English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and online learning. This paper investigates lecturer's talk in the EMI classroom in two different learning formats – face-to-face (F2F) and online synchronous video lecture (SVL) – at the University of Bologna. By making use of a discourse analytical and multimodal framework, this study shows that in SVL lecturer's talk tends to be less monologic and is characterized by a greater variety of speech acts. Furthermore, given that online settings provide lecturers with a wider variety of modes, "[m]ultimodal competence plays a crucial role in effective interactive lecturing, especially when the language of communication is other than one's own" (Morell, 2018, p. 70). The findings of this study have implications for designing customized support training for EMI lecturers.

Keywords: English-Medium Instruction; Online Synchronous Video Learning; Classroom discourse; Discourse Analysis; Speech acts; Multimodality.

1 INTRODUCTION

The health emergency we are facing to has deeply affected the education sector worldwide and the internationalisation agenda as well. For decades, the internationalisation of higher education (HE) has been generally referred to as mere cross-border mobility. The current restrictions on the movement of people are now challenging this view, with most international degree programs transitioning from face-to-face (F2F) to remote teaching, which takes Online Distance Learning (ODL) as its main implementation. What is more, the pandemic has further challenged lecturers involved in the internationalisation process, which has gone hand in hand with English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI).

EMI has been defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2015: 4). University lecturers are key players in the internationalisation of higher education (Helm and Guarda, 2015) and they have to take on new tasks which require a series of different competences. However, research has long revealed several "issues relating to English proficiency, interaction and communication" (Cicillini and Giacosa, 2020). Indeed, studies in Europe in general have found that lecturers often lack good oral communication skills in English (Vinke et al., 1998; Sercu, 2004; Jensen and Thøgersen, 2011; Helm and Guarda, 2015; Dimova and Kling, 2018), while their lack of self-confidence as non-native speakers of English (NNS) lectures prevents them from effectively engaging students in extended verbal exchanges (García Mayo, 2006: 165). Therefore, EMI lectures often result in long monologues, a lack of rapport with students, humour and interaction (Klaassen and De Graaff, 2001, p. 282). This is even more evident in untrained lecturers. However, a bulk of literature is increasingly pointing out that "[i]nteraction, between instructor-student and between students, is at the heart of education, whether F2F, fully online, or blended-hybrid" (Smith and Kurthen, 2007).

This rise in academic interest has run parallel to the increased use of online instructional technologies in international HE (Querol-Julián and Crawford Camiciottoli, 2019). While this project takes e-learning as part of its research framework, its emphasis is on Synchronous Video Lectures (SVLs), which involve: "(a) permanent separation (of place) of learner and instructor where (b) instruction occur[s] in real time such that (c) students [are] able to communicate with other students and the instructor through text-, audio-, and/or video-based communication" (Martin, et al., 2017: 3).

In this respect, the recent development of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in the classroom, has gained growing attention in Discourse Analysis (DA), particularly with regards to "elearning pedagogy, and the features of interaction in the new online learning and teaching environments" (see Xu, 2008).

However, in SVLs lecturers have a limited supply of learners' feedback, particularly in large groups where lecturer-students interaction mostly relies on the text chat (Querol-Julián and Crawford Camiciottoli, 2019: 7). Therefore, increasing learners' interaction in online learning settings might require a stronger commitment on the lecturer's part. This might be even more challenging for Italian lecturers whose teaching style is generally based on traditional, monologic lectures.

With these ideas in mind, we aim to investigate: (1) how the "discourse nature of interactions" (Xu, 2008: 157) changes across the two educational media (SVLs *versus* F2F), by particularly focusing on the analysis of speech acts in classroom talk; (2) what the emerging discourse patterns in SVLs are. Finally, (3) given that talk-in-interaction is widely considered as an indicator of good pedagogical practice (Muijs and Reynolds 2001; Lo and Macaro 2015) and is generally accepted as beneficial to learning, we wonder to what extent the online mode affects the quality of teaching and learning in the EMI context.

2 METHODOLOGY

Following the theories of the discourse hierarchy elaborated by Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Stenström (1994) identifies 5 hierarchical levels in conversations i.e. transaction-exchange-turn-move-act, as shown in Figure 1 below.

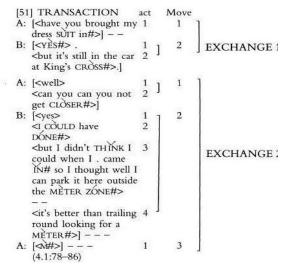


Figure 1 The Discourse hierarchy in Stenström (1994: 30).

Following Stenström (1994):

"transactions consist of one or more exchanges dealing with one single topic [...] exchange is the smallest interactive unit consisting, minimally, of two turns produced by two different speakers [...] turn is everything the current speaker says before the next speaker takes over. It consists of one or more moves [...] Move is what the speaker does in a turn in order to start, carry on and finish an exchange. It consists of one or more acts. Act signals what the speaker [...] wants to communicate [...]" (italics added; Stenström, 1994:30).

Therefore, according to the discourse hierarchical model, speech acts are the smallest unit of meaning in conversation. Accordingly, speech acts refer to actions performed by language. In this study we follow Stenström (1994) classification of speech acts in Primary, Secondary and Complementarity acts, focusing particularly on primary acts. However, due to their high frequency of occurrences in lecturer' discourse, some secondary and complementary acts were also considered in our analysis, as shown in Table 1 below.

	F	Secondary acts	Complementary acts			
<accept></accept>	<apology></apology>	<disagree></disagree>	<offer></offer>	<reply></reply>	<emphasizer></emphasizer>	<appealer></appealer>
<acknowledge></acknowledge>	<call-off></call-off>	<evaluate></evaluate>	<opine></opine>	<request></request>	<expand></expand>	<empathizer></empathizer>
<agree></agree>	<check></check>	<greeting></greeting>	<query></query>	<smoother></smoother>	<justify></justify>	<filler></filler>
<alert></alert>	<closer></closer>	<inform></inform>	<question></question>	<statement></statement>	<metacomment></metacomment>	<frame/>
<answer></answer>	<confirm></confirm>	<object></object>	<react></react>	<suggest></suggest>		<hedge></hedge>
			<reject></reject>	<thanks></thanks>		

Table 1 Classification of acts in Stenström (1994: 38).

According to Sinclair' and Coulthard's model (1975) one of the most important features of all classroom discourse is that it follows a fairly typical and predictable structure, comprising three moves: a teacher *Initiation*, a student *Response*, and a teacher *Feedback*, commonly known as *IRF*, or *IRE*: *Initiation*, *Response*, *Feedback* or *Evaluation*, also known as *recitation script* or *triadic structure*.

1	T:	So, can you read question two, Junya.	I
2	L1:	(Reading from book) Where was Sabina when this happened?	R
3	T:	Right, yes, where was Sabina.	F
4		In Unit 10, where was she?	I
5	L1:	Er, go out	R
6	T:	She went out, yes.	F

Figure 2 Example of IRF discourse pattern in classroom discourse (Walsh, 2001: 17)

But is still IRF the main discourse pattern in EMI? EMI can be considered as a platypus, so an inbetween genre which sits at the intersection of academic lecture, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Given the centrality of interaction to the curriculum and to language learning, as well as that the prime responsibility for establishing and shaping the interaction lies with the teacher, "[b]y considering the relationship between pedagogic actions and the language used [by the lecturer] to achieve those actions, a more realistic perspective of classroom discourse can be attained." (Walsh, 2006: 216).

Furthermore, more recent studies (see Xu, 2008 among others) focusing on the nature and structure of classroom discourse has gained insight into the transformations taking place in classroom discourse due to the development of new teaching and learning theories as well as the introduction of new technologies. More specifically, these studies have found that new educational media have a "democratization effect" (Xu, 2008) such that they tend to promote a shift towards more dynamic roles of the teacher and the students. Therefore, we expect that the online educational environment might promote a shift towards a more dialogic and interactive classroom discourse even in the EMI classroom.

Therefore, this exploratory study reports on a corpus-assisted comparative discourse analysis of speech acts and discourse patterns used by EMI lecturers at university, in two different educational settings: conventional and remote instruction. These outcomes may have several implications for both EMI teacher training courses and research.

3 RESULTS

The case study presented in this paper consists of two video recordings lectures extracted from The EMIBO corpus¹ (Picciuolo and Johnson, 2017-2021) which has been compiled by Mariangela Picciuolo and Jane Helen Johnson from transcripts of EMI lectures at the University of Bologna given between 2017 and 2021.

These two lectures were delivered by the same lecturer teaching at the faculty of Engineering of the University of Bologna, but taking place in 2 different learning settings: F2F and SVL. Although the duration of the online lecture is slightly longer, frequencies of occurrences were normalized per thousand words, as shown in table 3.

Recordings	Setting	English level	Teaching experience	Teaching experience in EMI	Academic Field	Duration	Tokens
Recording 1	F2F					90 mins	12 210
Decerding 2	SVL	C1	>20 anni	> 5 anni	ENG	90 mins	12,210
Recording 2	(online)				146 mins	18,083	

Table 2 Our corpus for this study

¹ The EMIBO corpus has been compiled by Mariangela Picciuolo and Jane Helen Johnson from transcripts of EMI lectures at the University of Bologna given between 2017 and 2021. Corpus development was assisted by funding from research grant no. ID-51465.

This study reports on a content structural analysis, including F2F and SVL discourse hierarchy, where speech acts in the two lectures were first identified and categorized, and then their frequencies compared.

3.1 Discourse hierarchy

3.1.1 F2F

As shown in table 3 below, in the 90 minutes F2F EMI lecture, there are 7 transactions, 5 dialogic exchanges, made of a total of 47 turns, 25 were performed by the lecturer while 22 performed by the students. Finally, a total number of 795 acts have been identified and classified. The lecturer performs a total of 776 acts while the students only produced 19 acts. In contrast, in the more than 2 hours SVL lecture we notice that out of 29 transactions there are only 5 dialogic exchanges, made of a total of 14 turns, 9 were performed by the teacher (4 more than the students). Finally, a total number of 1,272 acts have been identified and classified. The lecturer performs a total of 1,265 acts, while the students only 7.

		2 F 210 tokens)	SVL (146 min; 18,083 tokens)		
	(90 min; 12,210 tokens) Lecturer Students		Lecturer	Students	
SPEECH ACTS	776	19	1265	7	
MOVES	3 [Initiate]	2 [Initiate]	3 [Initiate]	2 [Initiate]	
TURNS	25	22	9	5	
EXCHANGES	5		5		
TRANSACTIONS	7		29		

Table 3 Analysis of the structure of classroom discourse in our corpus.

The conventional *F2F* lecture there are a number of moves to <initiate>, <repair>, <re-open> and to <follow-up> in the lecture, as in the excerpt reported below:

[INITIATE] LE_speech and the engine has manoeuvred the gate by rotating a (.) by rotating this erm this I don't get this I- I- It's a like a (.) you know?

[RESPONSE] ST5_speech [stuff?]

[RE-OPEN] LE_speech yeah! a a staff, yeah, but it's it's erm (.) it's what in Italian is called a vite senza fine, and let me see (.) let me check

[RESPONSE] ST5_speech a screw?

[FOLLOW-UP] LE_speech yeah, yeah, yeah a screw a screw yeah (.) and erm erm I thought that I I was not, I though that screw was meant, was the word for the screw diver, no, it's screw!

As we notice, in this exchange – as in all the exchanges in our corpus – the follow up move is generally spoken by the lecturer, which is typical of classroom discourse.

3.1.2 SVL

In the *online SVL* lecture we found that students never ask question by talking on the microphone, rather they only interact by writing on the text chat.

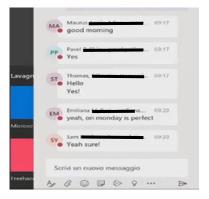


Figure 3 Screen capture from the SVL. Students reply on the text chat.

Furthermore, out of 5 exchanges, only 2 are student-initiated. In the following two excerpts taken from the SVL lecture, we can notice that when the teacher opens the exchange, and the sequence follows the IRF model, as in the first excerpt. However, when students open the exchange (through a post on the text chat), the sequence is just made of Initiation – made of a confirmation question or a polarity question – followed by the lecturer's answer.

Excerpt 1:

[INITIATE] LE_speech I think two of you that book the presentation for Monday I think Emiliana and maybe Sam I just wanted to make sure that you are ready on Monday morning to deliver the presentation just write on the chat if you are ready [...]

[FOLLOW UP] LE_speech so I see Emiliana Monday (.) yeah okay (.) so as your colleagues did I will (.) okay and Sam (.) perfect

Excerpt 2:

LE_speech Now let's move forward with our lecture so today I'm not making (.)

No there is a question (.) Thomas [INITIATE] the University will not be reopened to to students in June so it will be a remote exam (.) it's an oral examination [RESPONSE] as I as I mentioned at the beginning of this course it will be done either through Teams or Zoom (.)

3.2 Speech acts

3.2.1 Lecturer's discourse

In the 90 minutes F2F lecture, performs a total of 776 acts while in the much longer (2 hrs) online lecture he performs a total of 1265 acts. The distribution of the different types of the teacher's acts in the sequence of frequency is shown here below in Table 4. In order to compare the two lectures, frequencies were normalized per thousand words.

First, in both lectures the lecturer mostly make statements. However, online, we can notice a higher variety of speech acts: <frame> might suggest that lecturer speech online tends to call the students' attention more often than in F2F lectures, as also suggested by the high occurrence of <metacomments>. Although also in the conventional F2F class the <metacomments> and the <opine> speech acts are ranked 2nd and 3rd, their relative frequency is lower than in the online setting.

DOCENTE							
F2F			SVL				
	tokens 12, 072	*1000 parole		tokens 18,048	*1000 parole		
STATEMENT	456	37,7734	STATEMENT	489	27,0944		
METACOMMENT	44	3,6448	FRAME	105	5,8178		
OPINE	31	2,5679	METACOMMENT	104	5,7624		
EMPATHIZER	29	2,4023	OPINE	69	3,8231		
RHETORICAL QUESTION	23	1,9052	*ANAPHORIC REFERENCE	67	3,7123		
INFORM	21	1,7396	REQUEST	66	3,6569		
JUSTIFY	20	1,6567	EMPHASIZER	62	3,4353		
FRAME	19	1,5739	FILLER	62	3,4353		
[]			[]				
TOTAL	776		TOTAL	1265			

Table 4 Distribution of speech acts in *lecturer's* discourse.

3.2.2 Students' discourse

Students dialogic space within the classroom is definitely negligible. However, in the conventional F2F classroom students performs a wider variety of speech acts (see Table 5 below).

STUDENTI							
F2F		SVL					
	tokens 138	*1000 words		tokens 35	*1000 words		
ANSWER	3	21,7391	AGREE	2	57,1429		
CONFIRMATION QUESTION	3	21,7391	GREETING	2	57,1429		
AGREE	2	14,4928	ACKNOWLEDGE	1	28,5714		
IDENTIFICATION QUESTION	2	14,4928	CONFIRMATION QUESTION	1	28,5714		
REQUEST	2	14,4928	IDENTIFICATION QUESTION	1	28,5714		
SUGGEST	2	14,4928					
FILLER	1	7,2464					
*ANAPHORIC REFERENCE	1	7,2464					
[]			[]				
TOTAL	19		TOTAL	7			

Table 5 Distribution of speech acts in *students*' discourse.

Furthermore, students do not only reply to lecturer's questions, but also ask questions, and put forward an idea – as indicated by the speech act <suggest>. The two excerpts below offer some good examples of how speech acts are realized by the lecturer in the two educational media.

(Online) LE_speech this is a moving average <empathizer> and if you look at <hedge> I think <metacomment> let me see the caption the blue line a figure 5 right here in my side <apology> sorry I increase it <statement> is a short term average which was constructed by applying a weighted moving average of a period of 3 million years <statement> so we don't see any fluctuation because of the moving average <statement> the moving average is over a 3 million <frame> so now I move to the next figure

As we may notice from these two examples, regardless of the educational media, lecturer's discourse has a wider range of speech acts when interacting with the course content material. Given that while teaching online, the lecturer is forced to continuously handle graphs, webpages, pictures, our findings seem to suggest that the online environment would make his discourse more dynamic.

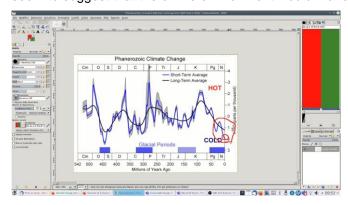


Figure 4 Screen capture from the SVL. The multimodal interplay of different semiotic resources in lecturer's discourse.

As shown in Figure 4, in SVL visuals scaffold students' understanding by providing them with immediate and direct visual support to the lecturer's speech. Given that online students have direct and continuous access to visuals, this might promote comprehension in EMI classroom in general.

4 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the research data analysis shows that although the lecturer still performs a dominant role in the classroom, as suggested by the <statement> speech act which overwhelmingly ranked first in both lectures, online lecture is characterized by a greater variety of speech acts, such as <frame>, <metacomments> and <opine>, which suggest that the lecturer is more aware of students and is more inclined to call their attention and engage them during the class.

However, students' participation is very low, even lower in online classes. However, we don't have access to the text chat and given that students often rely on the chat to interact during the class, this might have slightly affected our results.

And though, given that online learning settings are characterized by a higher combination of modes – speech, writing, gesture, image and space, but also *clickers*, *emoji*, *gif*, *chat*, *hyperlink*, *instant poll* – which need to be orchestrated by the teacher in order "to make and elicit meaning" (Morell, 2018: 70) "[m]ultimodal competence plays a crucial role in effective interactive lecturing, especially when the language of communication is other than one's own" (ibidem).

Of course, this study can be further improved as far as the measure, the scale and the scope of the analysis are concerned. Also, categorization should be verified by a second judge, since there is a high risk of subjectivity in the classification process. Finally, it would be worthwhile to analyse speech acts across different modes, other than oral and written language.

What emerges is the urgency of providing adequate training to teachers which might benefit from the experience EMI lecturers have had with technology-based teaching. It might be useful to experiment

some mini-lessons in blended formula, in which the potentiality of the online learning in disambiguating the message might be alternated to F2F classes devoted to more interactive activities. And this leads us to the final point. Academics need support not only in English but also in developing their pedagogical competence which is inevitably linked to their multimodal competence, i.e. "the ability to make use of and combine verbal and non-verbal modes of communication to construct and communicate meaning" (Morell, et al. 2020: 309).

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