Three Swedish students' experiences of EMI at three Swedish universities

Semi-structured interviews exploring preparedness, content acquisition and conceptualisations of English

Adam Kridiotis Keay

Department of English

Individual Research Project (EN04GY)
English Linguistics

Autumn 2020

Supervisor: Špela Mežek

Stockholms universitet

Three Swedish students' experiences of EMI at three Swedish universities

Semi-structured interviews exploring preparedness, content acquisition and conceptualisations of English

Adam Kridiotis Keay

Abstract

This paper aims to explore Swedish students' experiences of English-medium instruction (EMI) in Swedish higher education. Previous research shows that students' experiences of EMI in higher education are closely related to attitudes towards the proficiencies of lecturers and peers, which in turn are based on students' conceptualisations of English. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, three interrelated themes are explored: (1) how prepared students felt they were to use English in higher education (2) students' experiences of acquiring content through English and (3) students' underlying conceptualisations of English. Three Swedish students at different institutions and programs were interviewed. Findings show that the students had varied views of what it was to be prepared for EMI as well as how prepared they felt they were according to their own definitions. Students also had differing experiences of acquiring content through English. All three students conceptualised English as a standard, native variety. Their conceptualisations of English as a standard had implications on student-student and teacher-student interactions, which was evidenced especially in regard to international non-native speakers of English. Findings are discussed in relation to relevant previous research on EMI and the Swedish context. Finally, suggestions are made for Upper Secondary school in-class practices, for the benefit of better preparing Swedish students for higher education in Sweden by implementing an English as a lingua franca (ELF-) perspective on English spoken interaction.

Keywords

English-medium instruction (EMI), English as a lingua franca (ELF), students' experiences, preparedness, content acquisition, conceptualisations of English, expanding circle, higher education.

Contents

1. Introduction

English has steadily grown as an international language in the last century and has since the new millennium truly become *the* international language in a variety of fields. In one of these fields, higher education, there is an ever-growing number of courses, programmes and institutions being taught in and operating in English (Wächter and Maiworm, 2014). Different factors have led to this being the case, such as the widespread use of English and the economic status of English-speaking countries since World War II. Additionally, since the Bologna Process began in Europe in 1999 with the vision of creating a shared, globally attractive and competitive "European Higher Education Area", collaboration across Europe has since grown to include 48 member states with the vision increasingly becoming a reality year by year (EU Commission, 2020). Phillipson critically noted that "what emerges unambiguously is that in the Bologna process, internationalization means English-medium higher education" (2009, p. 37). It is clear then, that different processes have led to English gaining a central part in higher education in Europe. Indeed, it seems that English has become a prerequisite to take part in the benefits of internationalisation in European higher education, whatever the disadvantages thereof.

Studies on English-medium instruction have grown considerably since the year 2000 and the field should therefore be understood as a relatively young field of study (Macaro, 2018). As such there seems to be a large degree of unclarity as to what exactly is meant with "English-medium instruction" (EMI). Macaro illustrates this by reviewing 177 academic papers found to use EMI as a keyword or in the title of published academic articles, with at least seven different definitions found in merely a selection of these articles (2018). The definition provided by Macaro, which offers a good starting point and the one I use as a foundation, is as follows:

> The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English (Macaro, 2018, p. 19).

This definition is still rather wide and thus requires additional precision based on the "particular educational setting" of research at hand (2018, p. 19). More details on the

Swedish context and participating students will follow in the Background and Methodology sections respectively.

There are many different aspects of EMI that are possible to be researched, both at a policy level and at a practical level, exploring areas such as teaching quality, students' content acquisition, group work, seminars, lectures, student participation etc. My interest lies in students' experiences of the practical implications of EMI. Students, along with their lecturers, are key stakeholders in the internationalisation process of higher education through the medium of English. Students' experiences of English-medium instruction in higher education are well documented in Southeast Asia, with publications from South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan leading the way (e.g. Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019; Kim, Kim & Kweon, 2018; He & Chiang, 2016). Although the Nordic countries are considered to be at the forefront of EMI since the Bologna Declaration there is still much to be said about students' experiences of EMI in the Nordic countries (Airey, Lauridsen, Räsänen, et al, 2017). Thus, there is need for further investigation of Swedish students' experiences of EMI in higher education in Sweden.

One way to study students' experiences of EMI is through examining students' conceptualisations of English. In the Swedish context, Kuteeva (2020) most recently interviewed five students (of which two were native Swedes) studying an EMI programme in Stockholm in order to "examine students' conceptualisations of English" (2020, p. 289). She argues that conceptualisations of English are of importance as these affect stakeholders' practical situations, such as teacher-student and student-student interactions. For example, if students conceptualise English as a native standard variety, they will judge other students' and teachers' English proficiencies based on that conceptualisation. If a teacher or student has a Swedish or non-native accent, this may result in an obstacle in communication. This was similarly shown in Jensen's quantitative study (2013) on Danish students being the most critical towards lecturers with strong Danish accents.

The connection between secondary education and higher education is often missing in previous research, thus often analysing students' use of English in higher education without consideration for their secondary education *in* English. In Swedish secondary

education, students are supposed to practice the ability to understand "spoken language, also with different social and dialect[al] features" as well as "adapt [oral and written communication] to their purpose and situation" (Skolverket, 2018). Considering this, Swedish students ought to be moderately prepared for an international setting such as EMI in higher education. Investigating students' experiences of this "jump" from secondary education English to higher education through English should therefore also be a focus point of this study. This is important as a review of whether students are accustomed to more Englishes than native ones, as well as exploring whether Swedish students felt prepared for EMI after Upper secondary school.

1.1 Aim and research questions

Considering the spread of English, its use in higher education, and the lack of extensive qualitative research on Swedish students' experiences of EMI in higher education, this paper fills a need to investigate the topic further. The aim of this paper is to explore and elicit Swedish students' experiences of EMI in higher education in Sweden in regard to preparedness, content acquisition and conceptualisations of English. This is done through interviews with students who have recently or are currently studying academic subjects (other than English) through the medium of English. Research questions which the present study aims to answer are:

1. To what extent do Swedish students believe that their secondary education English classes had prepared them for EMI in higher education?
2. What are Swedish students' experiences of studying through English and specifically in acquiring content through English?
3. What are Swedish students' conceptualisations of "good English"? How does this affect their perceptions of their own, their peers', and teachers' proficiencies in English?

2. Background

This section presents key concepts, previous research and a closer look at the Swedish context. For the sake of clarity, two significant concepts of this study will be addressed and defined first, English-medium instruction and English as a lingua franca. Then, a look into the previous research provides the backdrop which this study fits into. Finally, defining the Swedish context considers the variables taken into consideration when examining Swedish students' use of English in higher education.

2.1 EMI and ELF

Firstly, EMI has been defined in the introduction as

> the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English (Macaro, 2018, p. 19)

It is important then to clarify that the interest of this study lies in the function of English being used as a *medium* in content acquisition. This can be compared to a similar but different concept such as *Content and language integrated learning* (CLIL), which combines acquiring content with proficiency in the language being used as a medium (Airey, 2016). The reason for this distinction is that the university courses and programmes of the interviewees in this present study do not assess acquired language skills. Rather, assessment is solely focused on acquired content. Any language proficiency gained by studying through English is seen as a by-product and not a goal in itself from an EMI perspective. That said, the line between general proficiency in English and proficiency in a disciplinary language in English is a question which needs to be addressed and thus will be discussed closer in the Previous research (Section 2.2). Furthermore, whether gained language skills are assessed or not during a university programme does not imply that students themselves have, or do not have, a goal to practice their English language skills whilst taking the programme. Thus, students might take an EMI-style programme with the intention of practising their English language skills.

When studying EMI, it is impossible to overlook the internationalisation of higher education, caused by globalisational forces. Similarly, when observing the internationalisation of higher education, it is impossible to overlook its use of English as a lingua franca in this setting.

The definition of English as a lingua franca (ELF) used in this paper is this:

> any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option (Seidlhofer 2011, p. 7).

There are many languages that function as a contact language intranationally as well as internationally, but there is only one that has reached truly global dimensions, and that is English (Van Parijs, 2011; Björkman, 2013). Although English is spoken by a wide variety of people from diverse linguistic backgrounds, English is not a pidgin but a standardised language. According to Björkman (2013), it thus makes for an interesting case as a lingua franca in that it is the native language in numerous countries. However, from an ELF perspective, a further distinction must be made between the native varieties of English and its use "by those who need it as a vehicular language to communicate with each other" (Björkman, 2013, p. 28). The focus of ELF is thus reiterated as a function of English among speakers of different L1's, both by choice and by necessity.

With ELF-speakers being "(almost) by definition non-native", it would be easy to call these speakers learners (McKenzie, 2013, p. vii). From an ELF perspective, however, Mauranen calls for an end of viewing "second and foreign language users as eternal learners" (Mauranen, 2006, p. 147). Therefore, from an ELF perspective, speakers are not confined to the status of being eternal erring learners but are understood as *users* of English as a communicative tool for whatever range of purposes they use it for.

Hence, the focus of ELF is on English as a communicative tool. Therefore, communicative success is more important than conforming to native standardised forms. Indeed, aiming strictly to conform to native-like English is not particularly desirable or effective in academic settings as previous research shows that speakers in academic ELF-

settings are instead focused on using several communicative strategies to aid mutual intelligibility (Sato, Yujobo, Okada, & Ogane, 2019; Seidlhofer, 2011; Björkman, 2014). Communicative effectiveness in an ELF-setting is therefore a shared responsibility on both speaker and listener to gain mutual intelligibility through communicative strategies such as conformation checks, clarifications and repetitions (Mauranen, 2006; Kaur, 2011; Björkman, 2014). Not being acquainted to more varieties of English than native ones or the use of communicative strategies can therefore be an impediment to successful communication in multicultural settings such as EMI in higher education.

2.2 Previous research

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the reasons for introducing English as a medium of instruction has been to attract researchers, lecturers and students of diverse backgrounds from all around the world, what we might call an internationalisation of higher education. The phenomenon is not strictly European. The same tendency can be found in South-east Asia where English can be understood as a language that grants access to greater academic opportunities (Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist, 2019). Thus, many tertiary programmes are given in English with a push for EMI often coming from parents as well as governments (Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist, 2019). In a recent study on attitudes towards English at a university in Bangladesh by Rahman and Singh (2019), using EMI was both popular and perceived as beneficial for students and lecturers because of the possibility to partake in the knowledge communities of their disciplinary fields through English. In Sweden, a quantitative study involving survey results from more than 4500 Swedish students found that attitudes towards EMI were generally positive, despite some instances of recorded issues in regard to the English proficiency of lecturers (Bolton and Kuteeva, 2012).

Proficiency in English is a topic that is widely covered in the previous research. Concerning the perceived English proficiencies of lecturers, He and Chiang (2016) researched international students' experiences of studying at a Chinese university EMI-programme. The international students reported language difficulties primarily in teacher-student exchanges in instructional settings such as lectures. The students believed that problems in communication were caused by their lecturers lacking the English

proficiency needed to teach their respective academic subjects at an acceptable level. Some students reported problems in understanding Chinese teachers' pronunciation and grammar, as well as the Chinese teachers being incapable of understanding international students' pronunciations of English. The research paints a stark picture of an educational setting under a lot of strain, mainly stemming from communicational problems, but also from intercultural differences of educational styles. He and Chiang explain the language problems by pointing to the fact that both teachers and students were non-native speakers of English (NNSE) and come from varied backgrounds. From their own experience and previous research (Chiang, 2009), native speakers of English (NSE) are capable of simplifying their language and hold a greater command of vocabulary and can thus uphold and clarify communication in teacher-student situations in an easier way. From their point of view, command of the English language is key to a successful EMI programme. Exploring attitudes towards what students deem "good English" is therefore a relevant question which requires more attention.

In the Nordic countries, similar results can be seen. According to a quantitative study involving 1700 students in Denmark, students' perceptions of lecturers' proficiency in English to a large degree determined whether or not they believed their lecturers were good teachers or not (Jensen, 2013). Their perceptions were to a large degree coloured by negative connotations towards certain accents of NNSE lecturers. This in turn affected students' attitudes and perceptions towards the institution as a whole in a negative way. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Danish students were most critical of Danish lecturers who, when lecturing in English, spoke with thick Danish accents.

In Sweden, research has been conducted on the use of English at an EMI programme and attitudes towards English proficiencies among Swedish and exchange students. Kuteeva, Hynninen and Haslam (2015) reveal in their survey results involving 58 students (30 Swedish, 28 international) that firstly, English-medium instruction in Sweden in practice actually looks more like *translanguaging*, a mix of Swedish and English in a fluid manner. They found that a lecture might be given in English, but if unclarities arose both lecturer and student could switch over to Swedish in order to circumnavigate communicational obstacles. Secondly, the study also presents some thought-provoking findings concerning students self-perceived proficiencies. First off, more than half of the

students reported that they believed they were better at English than their lecturers. When breaking those numbers down, however, Swedish students believed they were better at English than their teachers to a much larger degree than their international peers. Simultaneously, however, Swedish students did not believe they were better at English than their peers, while the international students believed they were better at English than their Swedish peers. In other words, the attitudes towards proficiency did not follow a consistent logical order of hierarchies. According to the study, these attitudes affected in-class interactions. Following the reported attitudes, international students were more hesitant to receive feedback from Swedish peers than they were receiving feedback from teachers. Swedish students, however, were more hesitant towards receiving feedback from teachers than they were from international students. A closer investigation on Swedish students' attitudes towards peers', lecturers' as well as their self-perceived proficiencies is therefore interesting and relevant to this study.

Students reports of using English and their actual experiences thereof might not always mirror each other according to previous research. Airey (2009) studied the use of EMI in undergraduate Physics at two Swedish universities by observing lectures in both Swedish and English, as well as interviewing students about their experiences of the two different situations. His results showed an astounding gap between what students claimed it was like to study through English and how differently they acted when given a lecture in English. According to the students "there were very few differences between being taught in English or in Swedish" (Airey, 2009, p. 108). However, Airey's own observations of the lectures showed that students "asked and answered fewer questions" as well as "[reported] being less able to follow the lecture and take notes at the same time" (Airey, 2009, p. 108). It is noteworthy that students claim that studying through English is not a problem although it affected them to a large extent. Bearing this in mind is therefore important during the interviews and analysis. Consequently, it is necessary to juxtapose students' attitudes towards EMI with anecdotes of actual use of English in EMI settings.

Previous research shows that students conceptualisations of English to a large degree colour their overall experiences of EMI. Although Swedish universities could very well be classed as "ELF settings" (Björkman, 2013) where English is used as a contact language to cross multilingual borders, students' conceptualisations of the English at use

in higher education might not necessarily mirror this definition of English. Kuteeva's work (2020) on local and exchange students' conceptualisations of English at an EMI programme at a Swedish university showed some interesting results regarding this discrepancy. Through interviews, Kuteeva unmasked the conceptualisations of students in regard to three strands of English: standard English (placing UK/US variants as the standard to which one must conform), English as a lingua franca (English as a communicative tool where mutual intelligibility is the goal), or English as part of a translingual practice with local languages (code-switching in a fluid manner). She found that all these conceptualisations were present among the students and were also used in ways contrary to common beliefs. Translingual practices, often seen as empowering students, were revealed to be used to exclude certain students by forming "exclusive" Swedish groups when tasked with group work. The interviews also showed that many students sought the norms of British English when wanting to use a standard, sophisticated English, especially in written texts. In regard to English as a lingua franca, the students explained that in situations where all the students had different L1s, they would try to solve language difficulties with the help of various communicative strategies. In sum, the interviews revealed that students' conceptualisations of English were dynamic and moved along a standard – non-standard continuum, depending on what situations the students were in. Further research on Swedish students' conceptualisations of English is needed as the sample size of Kuteeva's study merely included two native Swedes. Moreover, the relationship between conceptualisations of English and preparedness and content acquisition is also needed to shed light on this gap.

Lastly, previous research has examined to what extent instruction through English affects content acquisition and language learning. In a study compiling and comparing the current literature on the effects of EMI on language and content acquisition in Europe and South-east Asia (Graham, Choi, Davoodi, Razmeh & Dixon, 2018), there were no clear benefits in English language learning nor content acquisition through EMI in tertiary education compared to groups who took courses in their L1. Furthermore, when comparing EMI with CLIL in tertiary education, EMI students at times outperformed the control group, but often only in one aspect, thus showing mixed results once again (Graham, et al., 2018). According to the researchers, there are so many different factors (teachers, context, students) that can affect the outcome that the results might even seem

arbitrary. Indeed, claims that CLIL and EMI increase general English proficiency per se are therefore unlikely to be true. Rather than focus on general English proficiency, Airey (2009) draws attention to the fact that EMI effectively teaches students disciplinary fluency in English and students consequently have no command of their disciplines in Swedish. Airey finds that "control of spoken disciplinary English and Swedish does not appear to be encouraged" (2009, p. 109). Hence, rather than encouraging bilingual fluency, students in Swedish EMI programmes become monolingual in their disciplinary fluency. Previous research on Swedish students' content acquisition through English also shows that Swedish students are disadvantaged by taking courses through English, as students who study through English show a shallower understanding of the content than students who studied content through Swedish (cf. Björkman, 2013; Karlgren & Hansen, 2003; Söderlundh, 2004; Söderlundh, 2005). Drawing on these studies, exploring students' experiences of content acquisition through English is therefore relevant.

What is unequivocally evidenced in the previous research both internationally and nationally is that experiences of EMI are closely related to attitudes towards English proficiency, which, in turn, are related to students' conceptualisations of English. This leads us to the need for further research on Swedish students' conceptualisations of English in higher education in more detail along with the important questions of perceived preparedness to partake in EMI and content acquisition through English.

2.3 The Swedish context

Sweden is at the forefront in implementing EMI-programmes in Europe. According to Wächter and Maiworm's study (2014) on the extent of English-taught programmes (ETPs) in European higher education, Sweden sat in third place with 822 ETPs, trailing only Germany with 1030 ETPs and the Netherlands with 1078 ETPs, but comfortably ahead of fourth-placed France with 499 ETPs (p. 16). Considering the population sizes of these countries in comparison, Sweden's position in supplying ETPs is even more striking. Furthermore, when observing how many of the country's institutions provide ETPs Sweden was once again high up in the rankings. Sweden was placed second in the list with 81% of institutions providing ETPs, trailing only Finland with 83.3% of institutions providing ETPs (2014, p. 42). Although the study is already somewhat dated,

it is a relevant indicator to show to what extent English has impacted Swedish higher education.

The English language has impacted Swedish society to a greater extent than merely in higher education. Firstly, Swedes start learning English early in their primary education. Secondly, it is encountered and used in ads, entertainment, schools, workplaces and in education on a daily basis. Thirdly, according to various international surveys, Swedes are often ranked as some of the most proficient L2 speakers of English in Europe (Education First, 2019 Report). Thus, there is an argument as to whether English can be considered a "foreign language" in Sweden at all (Hult, 2012).

A high level of English proficiency in the Swedish population, as well as its daily use in younger generations, has given reason to suggest that English has become an unofficial second language to Swedes. The debate in Swedish newspapers regarding making English an official L2 further enforces the status of English in Sweden (see for example DN 2018, "Gör engelska till officiellt andraspråk i Sverige" [Make English the official second language in Sweden]; GP 2016, "Är engelska vårt andraspråk?" [Is English our second language?]). Although one must bear in mind that the proficiency of Swedes is among the highest in the world when it comes to L2 English, it is nonetheless, officially speaking, still treated as a foreign language. Hult (2012), however, argues that pinpointing English as either a second language or a foreign language is like trying to "hit a moving target" (p. 251–252). Instead, it is argued that English can be considered a "transcultural language" in that English is localised in the Swedish context as a global language.

According to Kachru's Three Circle Model (1984) which attempts to categorise global use of English into contexts of nativeness and its use intra- and internationally, Sweden, and most of Europe, belong to the Expanding circle. The purpose of English in the Expanding circle is to use English as a shared lingua franca with people from outside the country (Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist, 2019). Furthermore, English taught in Sweden does not conform to its own patterns or norms, but rather receives them from the Inner circle, of native Englishes such as US (General American) and UK (Received Pronunciation) varieties. However, developments in the curriculum in the last decade have included a more varied picture of English and its use locally, nationally and

internationally (Hult, 2017). The more varied understanding of English can be seen in the Swedish National Agency for Education's intended learning outcomes for Upper secondary English education which includes the ability to understand "spoken language, also with different social and dialect[al] features" (Skolverket, 2018). The extent to which teachers practice this with students and what varieties are used in class, though, is not yet clear. Nonetheless, regarding the first question of preparedness to partake in EMI, Swedish students should have practiced understanding a range of dialectal varieties in English.

The use of English in higher education in Sweden does not necessarily mean that no other languages are present (or useful!) in EMI in Sweden. There has been some discussion on the potential danger English has on Swedish, by Swedish losing the higher education domain to English (Hyltenstam, 1999). Research on the use of languages in Swedish EMI in relation to this feared "domain loss" showed that English indeed was used as the lingua franca in higher education but aided by Swedish and other languages in order to accomplish their communicative goals (Söderlundh, 2012). Söderlundh (2012) and Risager (2012) both show that EMI in practice in Sweden is indeed a more multilingual setting than a merely monolingual English one. The use of different languages was explained in Söderlundh (2012) as participants choosing the "path of least linguistic resistance" (as quoted in Björkman, 2013). Thus, in one situation the path of least linguistic resistance might be English, in another it might be a mix of Swedish and English and so on. Hence, we must bear in mind that although English is used predominantly in Swedish EMI, previous research shows that it is also a multilingual setting with more languages present than English, not least Swedish.

3. Methodology

3.1 Semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of this thesis, semi-structured interviews were used. Kvale and Brinkmann define qualitative research in a semi-structured format as interviews "with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret

the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 3). The interviews were conducted following a conversational flow as follows:

> (1) *question*, (2) *negotiation of meaning* concerning the question raised and the themes addressed, (3) *concrete description* from the interviewee, (4) the interviewer's *interpretation* of the description, and (5) *coda*. Then the cycle can start over with a new question, or […] further questions about the same description can be posed. (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 283)

Thus, the semi-structured format gives opportunity for the interviewer and interviewee to explore certain topics further as they arise or move on to the next question and topic. This method of interviewing leans towards a constructivist approach, meaning that whatever is shared is understood as situational and takes form in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Moreover, a constructivist approach discards the romantic idea of data produced in the interview as permanent truths, but rather as data that is produced within the context of the interview (Brinkmann, 2014).

The interviews were centred around the following questions: the extent of the use of English in students programmes; what students' perspectives were of the use of English in Swedish higher education; their perceptions of their own proficiency in English as well as their peers' and lecturers'; challenges and advantages of studying through English; whether they felt prepared to partake in EMI; and how they would define "good English" (see Appendix A and Appendix B for the full interview protocols in English and Swedish respectively). The structure of the interview integrated the conversational flow previously mentioned. Thus, follow-up questions were asked, as well as negotiating meaning and asking for detailed descriptions, sharing my interpretations, and giving the interviewee the chance to accept or reject my interpretation of their experience and perspective. Hence, through the interpretation of their answers to the questions, a first level of analysis was incorporated into the interview. More details about the procedure and analysis is accounted for in the following sections.

3.2 Participants

The focus of the study is on Swedish students' experiences of EMI in Swedish higher education. Considering the fact that this study explores the connection between studying

secondary education English and the use of English-medium in higher education, the target group for data collection is consequently strictly students who have grown up in Sweden with experience of EMI in Swedish higher education.

Three interview participants who matched the criteria were found for the study through an online forum for students. I knew one of the participants personally beforehand, while the other two were strangers. All the participants are male, in their early twenties and grew up with Swedish as their L1 at home. On the outset, this might seem a rather homogenous group, which is a disadvantage in regard to representativity. Yet, as this study makes no claims for generalisation or representativity of all Swedish students' experiences, this is not necessarily a problem. More importantly, the qualitative nature of the study combined with its limited scope provides the possibility for a deeper analysis of a few Swedish students' experiences. Additionally, the participants are all in different academic fields and universities which gives this study an edge previous research on Swedish students does not necessarily have. Airey (2009), for example, only interviewed students studying Physics at two universities, similarly Kuteeva (2020) only interviewed Business and economics students at one university. See *Table 1* for a general overview of the sociolinguistic backgrounds of the participants.

Table 1. Overview of participants involved in the study.

Participants overview	**Age**	**L1**	**L2's**	**Field(s) of study**	**Previous EMI experience**
Participant 1	22	Swedish	Italian, English, German	Computer science and engineering	None
Participant 2	23	Swedish	English, French	Business and economics; (theology)	None
Participant 3	21	Swedish, Spanish	English	Journalism; (freestanding courses)	IB-programme, 3 years

The participants will hereafter be referred to as the *Engineering student*, *Business student* and *Journalism student* according to their respective current fields of study. Two of the

students had taken courses prior to their current studies which are shown in brackets. The reason why these are represented is that the Journalism student specifically studied freestanding courses through English recently, while the program he is currently taking at undergraduate level is in Swedish and thus draws many of his experiences of EMI from these university courses. The Business student is taking an EMI program at undergraduate level and the Engineering student is taking an EMI programme at MA level.

An *Information sheet* (see Appendix C) was sent to each participant with information about the thesis as well as a *Consent form* (see Appendix D) whereby the participants gave consent to partake in the research. Taking the Covid-19 pandemic into account, two of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, while a third was conducted in person following relevant safety regulations. As such, participants gave their consent to partake in the interview verbally by reading the consent form aloud and agreeing to its content at the beginning of the interview. The full interviews were recorded. The interviews took on average 40 minutes each. The interview questions were prepared in both English and Swedish (see Appendices A and B), so that the participants themselves could choose to be interviewed in the language they felt most comfortable with. All three students chose to be interviewed in Swedish.

3.3 Transcription, translation and analysis

Almost two hours of material was transcribed with the focus being on data related to the study rather than on form, meaning that fillers such as *uh*, *um* and *eh* as well as off-topic conversation were not included in the transcriptions. The transcriptions totalled 11 000 words. As all three participants chose to be interviewed in Swedish, transcriptions are therefore in Swedish except if the participants said something in English, in which case the English word or sentence was simply transcribed. Quotes presented in the results have been translated from Swedish to English. When including an excerpt of dialogue from the interview, “P:” signifies the *participant* being and “I:” signifies the *interviewer*. Commas in the excerpts (“ , ”) signify a short pause in the speech or a restart. Italicised words in the excerpts are English words used by the interview participant in the interview.

The analysis of the data is based on a content analysis, defined as a "systematic analysis of texts […] addressing not only manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in texts" (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p. 82). Thus, bearing in mind that the first level of analysis is done during the interview in interpreting and negotiating meaning, the second level of analysis is accomplished by analysing the sound files and transcriptions in terms of themes and core ideas. The themes and core ideas identified in the interviews are informed by interview data, previous research and the research questions in this study. This process is thereby of a certain hermeneutic quality, as the detailing of the research questions is affected by the material, and data selection affected by the research questions, which in turn are grounded in the previous research. The final set of themes identified were (1) *perceived preparedness to partake in EMI* (2) *experiences of acquiring content through English* and (3) *conceptualisations of English*.

When analysing texts, or interviews, there is a level of inference on the data by choosing themes and core ideas to analyse. However, the inference is limited by previous research to an extent and the theoretical framework on EMI. As such, inferences are based on previous research and theoretical frameworks, which make the inferences "more systematic, explicitly informed, and verifiable" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 30-31).

A further level of safeguarding against free interpretation is the constructivist approach to semi-structured interviews as a first level of analysis. The construction taking place is done through negotiating meaning, asking for concrete descriptions from interview participants and sharing my interpretation of what has been said with the possibility for them to approve or disprove of the interpretation.

Bearing in mind the research project by Airey (2009), it is a good reminder that students' self-reporting might not reflect the reality of things as they are seen in practice. Aiming to combine, or juxtapose, both implicit abstract conceptualisations of English with anecdotal experiences of EMI through the interviews is therefore crucial in the analysis.

3.4 Limitations

This thesis was written in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the number of physically present students taking part in EMI in Sweden is likely to be very low if not non-existent. Furthermore, because of the pandemic, the vast majority of education in higher education in Sweden is taking place via digital platforms from the confinement of students' own homes. Thus, much of the valuable interplay between teachers and students and among peers is unfortunately lost. Thankfully, the students partaking in the study had a wealth of experiences to draw from acquired prior to the pandemic breaking out.

Another limitation is that the initial target was to find five students to partake in the research. This, however, turned out to be more difficult than first imagined. Two more people did show interest in participating. One kept on stalling the interview and finally chose not to partake. Another did not fulfil the criterion as he was studying English as part of a teacher programme. Three appropriate interview participants, however, were found - yielding more than two hours of recorded material in total.

As all participants were unaware of the theoretical framework of the study beyond the short description of wanting to interview students on their experiences of using in English as a medium of instruction in higher education (see the Information sheet in Appendix C), the fact that I know one of the participants personally should not be considered a conflict of interest. They were all interviewed in the same professional manner as part of the thesis project.

4. Results and analysis

In this section results are presented in three subsections covering the three main themes. Although the main discussion will follow in Section 5, some discussion will be present when necessary. For example, in Section 4.3 it is difficult to show what conceptualisation a student has of English without some level of argumentation and reference to previous literature.

Each interview is different. Answers by students sometimes cover several topics at once, and at times overlap each other. But the three main themes are used to separate the answers from each other, as well as aid in comparison between the three students' experiences. Firstly, students' experienced preparedness to use English in higher education is addressed in Section 4.1. Secondly, students' experiences of acquiring content through English is examined in Section 4.2. Thirdly, students' conceptualisations of English are investigated, which to an extent draw on their experiences of preparedness and content acquisition, in Section 4.3.

4.1 Perceived preparedness to partake in EMI

This section on students' perceived preparedness to partake in EMI aims to investigate to what extent students felt they were prepared to study through English in Swedish higher education. It reveals their ideas of preparedness as well as touching upon areas which students struggled with and did not feel they were prepared for in their studies.

The Journalism student, who had taken three years of EMI in Upper secondary school was asked to what extent he felt prepared for EMI in higher education. He answered:

> (1) I felt so prepared that , I don't think about the fact that I read in English when I read in English (Journalism student)

He mainly thought of preparedness in terms of reception in reading course literature. In his current higher education program, English is limited to course literature and digital material. In his previous university studies, primarily drawing on his experiences of a distance course in Global studies, however, he had used English when writing essays and forum posts as well and felt it took him "no effort" in these situations. Currently, he finds the mix between English and Swedish problematic, especially when tasked to hand in papers in Swedish while reading course literature in English. The Journalism student explains that

> (2) the disadvantage is that you can think of how to phrase something really well in English and then not know how to write it in Swedish , and end up stuck (Journalism student)

The Journalism student is not currently taking an EMI program or course. Yet, he expressed problems with mixing languages. Our conception of what constitutes EMI is perhaps somewhat challenged. While the course is not taught through English, English seems inevitable for him in his university program. He goes on to say that

> (3) a lot of the course literature is in English and this has been the case in almost every course I have read, whatever the subject has been (Journalism student)

Probed on why this is such a problem he answered

> (4) because it's like , you start mixing and like writing , translating from English in your head […] this kind of thing is annoying and when you study to be a journalist you have to know perfect Swedish , so I have had to work hard on that (Journalism student)

According to Söderlundh's research (2012) on the language practices of EMI programs in Sweden, she found that there was a lot more Swedish present in EMI than previously thought. What we see here in the case of the Journalism student is paradoxically a reverse image. In a non-EMI program, the extent of English materials and course literature is so present that it "annoys" the Journalism student when having to consistently translate thought processes from English to "perfect Swedish", a requirement in his field of study. Thus, combining his self-reported preparedness to use English in higher education as being a non-issue together with a few probing questions reveals the struggle he faces in translating thought processes between English and Swedish. Although English was not a problem in itself for the Journalism student, the mixing of languages in a non-EMI program revealed itself a key issue for him.

The Business student felt prepared to use English in higher education but claims he

> (5) doesn't know if that's solely down to school […] most people would probably say they've learnt English in other ways than merely in school (Business student)

He goes on to list movies, music and other media in English as significant aids in learning English. He does, however, credit school with teaching him grammar rules such as

(6) *I was* , *I am* and so forth , and not *I are* or *you was* […] so , I learned that in school at least , a good foundation (Business student)

For the Business student, being prepared to use English in higher education was partially a knowledge of grammar rules from school and partially the acquired skills in English he has gained through practice in various extramural situations. In his case, he mentions school, church and his one-year studies in theology taught partially through English as important factors. In these arenas, as he called them, he gained vocabulary specific to each setting. Thus, he understood preparedness as having a general English knowledge of correct grammar on which he could build field-specific knowledge in the form of vocabulary, concepts and theories. Based on this definition of preparedness for EMI in higher education, he believes he was prepared for EMI. However, non-native varieties of English present themselves as an issue he was not prepared for in his university program, which will be explored further in Section 4.3.

When asked whether he felt prepared for EMI or not, the Engineering student contemplated the question for a while, and said:

(7) It's difficult to say actually (pause) Okay I felt prepared afterwards maybe because I noticed that [studying through English] wasn't a problem […] I was thinking that perhaps there could be problems with it beforehand , but there weren't (Engineering student)

So, his experience was not necessarily one of feeling absolutely confident in his own capabilities to partake in EMI beforehand, but he realised quite quickly that his English was good enough to cope with lectures, seminars and course literature in English without reporting significant problems. The Engineering student had revealed earlier in the interview that he had been taken aback by the fact that the first lecture and course in his program was given in English, as well as being shocked at the extent to which English was used. Hence, more questions were asked in order to gain more information on his experiences. Questions were asked about the nationalities of the lecturers in order to hear whether or not they were all native speakers of English, prodding at his self-reported claim of having "no problems with English" (Engineering student). He answered that

(8) The first lecturer was from Ireland or something , but he could be understood quite easily , without major problems , then there's been an American , yeah it's quite mixed , it's usually been understandable , there was one , from Japan who was a quite difficult to understand (Engineering student)

After enquiring why that might be the case, the Japanese lecturers' pronunciation came to the fore as the reason why it had been difficult to follow the lecture. Indeed, the Engineering student did not attend any more lectures with the Japanese lecturer partially because of this. Concludingly, the Engineering student realised that he felt prepared for EMI to a large extent because he noticed that he was capable of studying through English whilst doing it, but through the interview revealed that he struggled with non-native English, specifically the Japanese lecturer. The topic of non-nativeness will be expounded upon in Section 4.3.

In conclusion, all three students claimed they felt prepared for EMI in their respective university programs and courses although their perceptions of what preparedness was seems to differ between the three of them. The Journalism student felt it took him "no effort" (Journalism student) to study through English but found mixing Swedish and English difficult. The Business student thought he had a good foundation in English grammar on which he could build field-specific vocabulary but struggled with non-native varieties of English. The Engineering student experienced being generally prepared for EMI but was taken aback by the extent to which English was used, as well as a certain Japanese lecturer's pronunciation providing a stumbling block for him.

4.2 Experiences of acquiring content through English

The purpose of this section is to elicit students' experiences of acquiring content through English. Comparisons are made between studying in Swedish and English, as well as perspectives on the use of English in Swedish higher education.

As seen in the previous section, the Journalism student did not report any difficulties in regard to studying through English, and this was reflected in his experience of acquiring content through English as well. In fact, he preferred acquiring content in English over Swedish. On the question of how he experienced acquiring content in English he answered:

(9) I have an easier time acquiring concepts and notions in English than I do in Swedish , and I think , for me it just becomes *awkward* and strange in Swedish […] the correct term is in English for me , I hate discussing things in Swedish , Swedish is such a poor language in that there are almost no words for anything in the academic environment , if you want to discuss something , you have to constantly throw in English words because the Swedish language is not sufficient enough (Journalism student)

Interestingly, he believes that English is the "correct" language in academia. To him, Swedish lacks the "academic-ness" which English does have. Learning the English term is thus more correct for the Journalism student. He could be expressing the commonly held belief that there is a domain loss of Swedish in higher education. It could also simply be a personal preference of English over Swedish. Both, however, could be a consequence of using English course literature. His strong feelings towards studying in Swedish as opposed to English could have to do with his limited experience of studying through Swedish (because of taking the IB-program in Upper secondary school) combined with the challenge of needing to showcase "perfect Swedish" in his field (see Example 4). For the Journalism student, acquiring content in English is both easier and understood as more correct than it would be in Swedish.

The idea of English being a more academic language than Swedish is a notion that is shared with the Engineering student, which affected both of their experiences of content acquisition. The Engineering student believed there was great value in learning content through English and held rather positive views of his own experience of acquiring content through English. He names the possibility of looking up information online in English as a benefit of studying through English, as well as it being preparation for his professional work life:

(10) There's a lot of terminology which is unavailable in Swedish , so when everything is in English , you understand all the different parts of the terminology […] and how they work together , and then there are of course more resources on the internet in English in general , so if you have a question [about something in the course literature or exam] you don't have to try to figure out what the Swedish translation is in order to find an answer (Engineering student)

He claims that in one of the fields in his master studies, computer technology and artificial intelligence, there is so much new knowledge being produced in English that it is inefficient to use Swedish translations to look up information online because the information will be very limited compared to what he would find using the English search term. He gave the example of a *Support vector machine* (stödvektormaskin), stating that it had been translated from English but that it was still not as useful as the English term.[1] This kind of comparison (see Footnote 1) is important in order to realise what kind of language climate Swedish students in higher education can find themselves in, such as the case of the Engineering student and his Swedish peers. EMI, to an extent, becomes less optional in certain fields and more of a requirement when content knowledge in the field is produced in English and is mainly available in English. This is what Airey (2009) would call learning monolingual disciplinary fluency, which will be discussed further in the discussion.

The Engineering student also found it useful to acquire content through English because he believes that it prepares him for his future in work, a setting where English seems to play a big part both in applying for jobs and in everyday communication:

> (11) I have noticed that , working life is very much done in English , I also work as a software engineer on the side and there's a lot of English there as well , for example all the sites where you can look for a job , the job advertisements are in English , it feels a bit like English is the professional language […] it is quite important to keep track of English terminology [because you need it in your workplace] (Engineering student)

It seems to be the case for the Engineering student that studying content through English, gaining field specific vocabulary in English and practising English in general is more than merely a by-product of taking an EMI programme. For him, learning English and field-specific terminology in English is to learn "the professional language" (Engineering

[1] Following this up, a quick comparison was made between the English and Swedish Wikipedia sites (a website which the Engineering student stated that he used frequently). The Swedish site on the topic *Stödvektormaskin* contained 312 words counting a total of zero footnotes and sources. On the other hand, the English site on the same topic, *Support vector machine*, contained over 6000 words, 44 footnotes and sources, as well as references to further reading on the subject.

student) of his field. However, considering his struggle to understand the Japanese lecturer (see Example 8), acquiring content has not always been easy for him, although he claims “it works well for the most part” (Engineering student).

The Business student echoed the sentiment of English being the language used in his field and EMI being a good opportunity to practice it. But acquiring content through English in general is not as straightforward for him as it seems to be for the other two students. The Business student explains how he feels if he learns something new in English:

(12) If I learn something in English , it can easily feel external because Swedish is my mother tongue , if I learn a theory in English it can easily become just one of many theories , but if I learn them in Swedish , it can be easier to conceptualise and process and make the model my own (Business student)

In other words, the Business student seems to have trouble internalising content when taught theories and economic models through English. He believes there might be a difference between his capabilities to question and integrate these theories and models depending on what language is used to teach them. He explains:

(13) I believe there might be a risk that you don’t process it [the model or theory] as much in English , because it requires more brainpower to think about models in English , it is easier to just accept it like ‘alright it’s just the way it this’ , in Swedish it feels easier to reflect on and question [the model or theory] (Business student)

The Business student believes there is a potential risk in learning content through English for a variety of reasons. On the one hand content in English can feel external to him, and on the other hand he does not feel that he can question the theories he is presented to the same extent that he would in Swedish. He claims that it takes him a larger amount of energy to acquire content through English than in Swedish. Previous research by Söderlundh (2004; 2005) shows that Swedish students indeed gained a deeper understanding of content when taught through Swedish than through English. Yet, at the same time, the Business student sees good use in learning content through English as a preparation for professional life. Indeed, it was one of the reasons why he chose to take the program in Business and economics in the first place:

(14) I thought it would be good , it wouldn't be the easiest task , but I see it as part of my preparation for the labour market , and the future , that English probably won't be needed any less later on in life , that it is an asset , so why not practice it more (Business student)

Thus, the Business student, much like the Engineering student, saw the use of practicing English through an EMI programme as preparation for his professional life. The Business student concludes that "*business* is very international" and that he "will probably be doing *business* in English" (Business student). Hence, he found it to be a very natural part of his education to practice his English language skills simultaneously as he acquired content through English and emphasised that learning concepts in English was particularly useful.

In conclusion, the Journalism student claimed he had an easier time acquiring content through English than Swedish. He also believed English was a more "correct" and rich academic language than Swedish. The Engineering student claimed that studying through English had a number of perks which Swedish does not have. Particularly, the amount of information readily available online and English being the professional language of his field were key strengths of acquiring content through English. The Business student similarly saw the use in practising the language of his field through his studies, English, but said that content often felt external. Furthermore, he struggled with the feeling of not being able to use his critical thinking and reflective capabilities to their full potential because of the study being done through English, which he claimed would have been easier to do in Swedish.

4.3 Conceptualisations of English

Analysing conceptualisations of English is not as straightforward as investigating students' experienced preparedness for EMI or their experiences of acquiring content through English. Conceptualisations of English are often reflected implicitly in students' attitudes towards other speakers of English, often in combination with their views on their own and others' proficiencies in English (cf. Kuteeva, 2020). Thus, this section of the results includes more analytical work as well as discussion, based around a combination of attitudes, reported proficiencies and descriptions of "good English". The interviewer's interpretations of the students' answers also take more space in the interview excerpts, as

well as giving the students the possibility to affirm or reject interpretations and clarify their own stances.

Students' conceptualisations of English mainly revolve around English as a standard variety, although there is some nuance to this conceptualisation. There are what one might call traces of a conceptualisation of English as a lingua franca, implying that focus is on English as a communicative tool between speakers of different L1's. A third conceptualisation of English in EMI settings is English as part of a translingual practice, meaning that English is mixed with Swedish in order to accomplish whatever communicative needs the students may have (Kuteeva, 2020).

In the first excerpt of this section, the Journalism student explains how he had a hard time with certain English accents, how that was interpreted, followed by a clearer description of what he understood the problem to be in that interaction:

(15) P: I've had peers or teachers from other countries who have had strong accents , but language wise they've been able to speak English just as well as everyone else , I'd definitely say that's the case
I: So their pronunciation is perhaps the thing you're not used to?
P: It's probably on me , that I can't understand very strong dialects , rather than that they don't know English (Journalism student)

The Journalism student recognises that the problem might not be that they do not know English, the problem is probably that he "can't understand strong dialects" (Journalism student). The fact that he places the deficiency on himself, being unaccustomed to a certain dialectal variety or accent, rather than on the speaker who does not sound native-like falls very much under what we might call an English as a lingua franca perspective on interaction. From an English as a lingua franca perspective, there is an understanding that the hearer plays an as important role as the speaker in pursuit of mutual intelligibility (Jenkins, 2011).

Although the Journalism student claims responsibility in the exchange above and later claimed that interactions with peers from different countries worked "without problems" (Journalism student), another anecdote of an exchange with a Pakistani classmate in

Upper secondary school reveals a more varied picture. The Journalism student confessed that he

(16) couldn't at all make out what he was saying (pause) I really could not make out what he was saying (laughing) (Journalism student)

Juxtaposing his claim of EMI being problem-free with the anecdotes above revealed that he did in fact run into some trouble using English in academic settings. Later in the interview the Journalism student claimed that English is "a universal language that I expect everyone to know" (Journalism student). Following on this claim, a reminder was given about the anecdote with the Pakistani student, followed by a question about what he would do to solve communication breakdown if he got into a similar situation again:

(17) I: In such a situation, what ought to be done?
P: By who? By me?
I: It's an open question
P: Well (pause) you just have to ask him to repeat himself (pause) and make yourselves extra clear (Journalism student)

Once again, we find that the Journalism student pulling towards an ELF perspective on communication. The above excerpt could be seen as the use of a communicative strategy in asking for clarifications and repetitions, thus working within an ELF framework (Björkman, 2014). However, there was still some investigation needed for what was meant with "making yourselves extra clear". The Journalism student revealed in the interview that he himself believed he was a highly proficient speaker of English, and when asked how he would describe his own English he answered:

(18) I'd say , that it's very American with a Swedish *touch* […] I don't think I have a very strong accent more than like , a *basic standard* […] yeah I don't believe I have that much of an accent (Journalism student)

This answer shows quite clearly how entrenched the idea of native-like English being the norm is. He claims to speak American English "with a Swedish touch", and later says he does not believe he has "that much of an accent". It seems as if he is saying that either he does not believe he has a Swedish accent, or that the English variety he claims to speak (American) exists outside the limits of accents and dialects, "non-dialectal" as it were. In

essence, he claims that he speaks English without an accent, as it is meant to be, as a standard variety. It is worth mentioning that the Swedish "touch" came through quite strongly when he spoke English during the interview, for example when reading the Consent form. This was in fact true for all three interview participants. Thus, not only does the Journalism students' claim of being a non-dialectal speaker of English reveal a conceptualisation of English being a native standard against which others mispronounce words and have accents, it also shows that he is greatly underestimating his own "Swedish touch" and deviation from that conceptualised American norm. Taking this into consideration, reading interview excerpt (17) again renders a different reading of "making yourselves extra clear" which could imply attempting to sound more native in order to achieve mutual understanding.

Moving on to the Business student, his conceptualisation of English as a standard variety was elicited when asked to reflect on the proficiencies of his teachers from Italy and Spain in comparison to his own. He contemplated whether or not he thought he was better at English than they were:

> (19) I think I have a much clearer , you understand my spoken English much better , that's what I can judge , it feels as if they only have the academic , is what it feels like […] yet they've lived with their English in another country you know , they live in Sweden and speak a lot of English so you shouldn't underestimate them , but it feels like there is still a bit for them to learn (chuckle) (Business student)

Remembering Mauranen's words of not confining the non-native speaker to that of an eternal learner of English comes to mind (2006). On the one hand side, the Business student recognises that his teachers have used English as a communicative tool in Sweden. But on the other hand side, he believes they still have a lot to learn. The contrast between being a *user* of English from an ELF perspective and being a non-native speaker from a standard English perspective is evident. This is an interesting case considering the fact that both the Swedish Business student and his Italian and Spanish teachers are from the Expanding circle. Yet there seems to be a hierarchy of Englishes even among Expanding circle speakers according to the Swedish Business student. The Business student in general, more than the other two, elicited this notion of a hierarchy within non-native Englishes. To him, what he called "Swenglish" (Business student), was a more

native-like variety than other varieties based on the fact that both Swedish and English share Germanic roots.

(20) I think I experience that Swedish , that it is Germanic , that it is closer to English than Italian , even if you speak Swenglish (chuckle) with strong Swedish intonation , it is still quite clear , at least in my opinion (Business student)

Hence, it is apparent that the Business student has quite a clear conceptualisation of English as a standard, as well as a notion of hierarchies of non-native varieties in relation to how close they are to the native norm. It is interesting that even in an international EMI setting with teachers who use English in their daily professional lives, he still believes they are "learners of English" (Mauranen, 2006). When asked what his Italian and Spanish teachers needed to do to improve their English, he answered:

(21) Polish their accents a little bit so that they become a bit more international and not as specific to their own country […] each country has its own English , but maybe get it a little closer to British or American pronunciation (Business student)

Interestingly, he seems to conceptualise standard native varieties as more internationally useful Englishes. Comparing the description of how the two Expanding circle teachers needing to polish their accents above with his description of another teacher from Expanding circle captures his conceptualisation of English as a standard variety quite vividly:

(22) I think he was German , but he was incredibly good at English, he sounded like an American" (Business student)

At this point it is evident that the Business student conceptualised English as a standard variety. Interestingly, standard English seems to be conceptualised as the internationally most useful variety of English. He believed that polishing away certain "national features" in one's accent might aid in international communication. Speaking, or at least sounding, like a native is understood as being "good at English".

The Engineering student, like the Business student, also conceptualised English as a standard. When asked what his opinion on what good English was, he answered:

(23) P: There are different levels [to good English] , of course you have pronunciation which is very important , it's binary , either you understand it or you don't , so it has to be clear […] and you have to adapt the language to the audience […]
I: And what is the yardstick for good pronunciation?
P: It has to be clear , not a strange accent which can't be understood [...] I'd say I prefer American English (Engineering student)

Good English for the Business student had to be both adapted to the recipient as well as being pronounced in a "clear" way, which was elicited as conforming to a native variety, preferably as American English. Bearing that conceptualisation of good English in mind, this might be the reason why the Engineering student did not understand or return to the Japanese lecturer's lectures (see Example 8). When quizzed on whether he had other experiences of communicational problems in his EMI programme, such as he had with the Japanese lecturer, he mentioned an interaction with an Indian student which further revealed his conceptualisation of English as a standard:

(24) It was quite hard to understand him sometimes , but for the most part it worked well anyways I would say , and I also think that if you're an exchange student you've learned to (chuckle) fix the dialect so that it can be understood by most people (Engineering student)

The Engineering student believes that exchange students tweak their accents to conform to standard pronunciation norms in order to be understood in an EMI-setting abroad. Like the Business student, they both believed this was necessary in order to be understood by more people than you would be by using a national or regional accent. Notably, neither of them commented on the need for themselves to conform to native norms, believing that they were highly proficient speakers of English as a standard variety.

Remarkably, English was not conceptualised as part of a translingual practice by any of the students. They all revealed that mixing Swedish and English could be problematic during seminars and lectures, showing what might be called an anti-conceptualisation of English as part of a translingual practice. Perhaps more correctly, the students showed discontentment with mixing in Swedish while partaking in EMI, with Swedish being the stumbling block rather than English when mixing the two. Voluntary mixing of Swedish

and English among the three students could not be considered to be part of a translingual practice, as they were limited to lexical borrowings, especially when using field-specific vocabulary in English. The Business student explains that

(25) Of course, it may happen that you say a few words in English […] it could be that you have a theory as in finance , so you might say *CAPM theory* instead [of a Swedish translation] (Business student)

The Journalism student agrees with the Business student on the extent of mixing languages in his program. He states that he would not use English more than in a few lexical borrowings:

(26) When we talk with each other we don't do it in English , we might use English terms sometimes […] in photojournalism a lot of the vocabulary is in English , such as *shift* , *turn off* , *slide* , then we'd use the English terms , but not more than that (Journalism student)

The Engineering student, too, was asked about mixing languages, if they used "Swenglish" in his programme at which he claims that mixing English with Swedish does not occur. But if they use English while speaking Swedish, it is "just a bunch of abbreviations [in English]" (Engineering student).

In conclusion, all three students had an idea of good English being as native-like as possible, although the Journalism student conceptualised English as a lingua franca when reflecting on other speakers' proficiencies. The Business and Engineering student both seemed to claim that students and teachers had to imitate native varieties of English in order to be understood better. The Journalism student, however, saw other ways of solving communicational problems than by simply asking the other speaker to change their pronunciation to sound more native. He believed that problems could be solved through repetitions and clarifications. Their conceptualisations of good English affected interactions with other students and teachers. It affected the way they thought about their lecturers (Jensen, 2013) and it affected the way they perceived their own and their peers' proficiencies in English (Kuteeva, 2020). None of the students showed conceptualisations of English as part of a translingual practice. English was limited to lexical borrowings while speaking Swedish.

5. Discussion

In this section, the main findings are discussed in relation to previous research. The discussion also argues for how the three themes (preparedness, content acquisition and conceptualisations of English) affect each other. Furthermore, suggestions are made for further research on students' experiences of EMI.

The students' conceptualisations of English affected the ways they perceived their own and others' proficiencies, which in turn affected their experiences of studying through English as well as their perceived preparedness to partake in EMI. All three students revealed that they believed they were highly proficient speakers of English, mainly claiming to speak a standard American variety although all three had strong Swedish accents while speaking English. As found in other studies, these conceptualisations affected teacher-student interactions (Jensen, 2013) and student-student interactions (Kuteeva, 2020). According to previous research, Swedes, along with their Nordic neighbours, could be described as having an "overconfidence in [their] English proficienc[ies]" stemming from extensive extramural exposure to conversational English, "which has consequences for academia" (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2020, p. 246). Previous research on students' attitudes on English proficiency revealed similar results of Swedish students believing they are highly proficient speakers of English while simultaneously holding condescending views towards speakers of other varieties than native ones (Kuteeva, Hynninen & Haslam, 2015; Kuteeva, 2020). In a multilingual setting such as EMI in higher education, where English is a communicative tool among speakers of different L1's, such views are a hindrance for successful communication (Sato, Yujobo, Okada, & Ogane, 2019; Seidlhofer, 2011; Björkman, 2014). This was seen clearly in the Engineering student who did not return to the lectures given by the Japanese lecturer who he struggled to understand because of his pronunciation not conforming to native standards (see Example 8). Similarly, it could be seen in Business student who held condescending views towards his Expanding circle teachers (see Examples 20 and 21). The Journalism student, however, placed part of the "deficiency" on himself as he

recognised that he was unaccustomed to certain varietal dialects (see Example 15) and thus stood out from the other two students when comparing his own proficiency with others. The reason the Journalism stands out in his attitudes towards other speakers is first because of a partial conceptualisation of English as a lingua franca, rather than merely as a standard. This conceptualisation of English as ELF could have to do with the fact that he took an EMI program in Upper secondary school as well as university courses through English prior to his current program and thus has more varied experiences of using English in academic settings.

It is clear from the interviews that in today's internationalised higher education, there is a lot more to the 'E' in EMI than 'standard English'. Both teachers and students spoke a wide variety of Englishes according to the interviews. Although these are merely three student's experiences which cannot be generalised to the entire population of Swedish students, these examples inform us of what the situation can look like for Swedish students. Thus, the need for secondary educators to prepare students for EMI also lies in expanding the idea of 'English' as 'standard English' or 'native English' to a more inclusive notion of English. Indeed, Graddol argued already twenty years ago that the centre of gravity must actually be moved towards the non-native speaker of English as non-native speakers far outnumber native speakers of English (1997). Modiano, similarly, finds issues with persisting to use Kachru's Three circle model as the basis of our understanding of English in English language teaching, as it places the inner circle and their native varieties at the centre of gravity (2001). In using such a model, non-native varieties become peripheral. But disregarding the non-native speaker in an EMI setting is not only harmful in preparing Swedish students for real world EMI, but also dishonest in its representation of how English is evolving in these increasingly globalised contexts. Shifting focus from the native speaker to the non-native speaker, essentially adopting an ELF perspective on English, would perhaps better prepare Swedish students for EMI both in Sweden and internationally.

Different experiences of acquiring content through English were also present among the students in the study. On the one hand, the Journalism student found learning content through English easier and indeed more academically correct (see Example 9). The opposite experience can be found in the Business student who found that learning content

through English made content feel external. Furthermore he had a hard time engaging with the content critically (see Example 12). Previous research shows that students in Swedish EMI are not encouraged to acquire "bilingual scientific literacy" in their programmes (Airey, 2009). What this entails is in essence that students only become fluent in their field in one language, in this case in English as an L2. Indeed, the link between language and content is often overlooked as if language were merely a carrier of content rather than a product in itself which the students acquire (Airey, 2009; Airey, 2012). This can be seen in both the Engineering and Business students' experiences of using the English terms extensively and exclusively. Not only were English terms deemed more useful (see Example 10), they were also used as lexical borrowings when speaking Swedish with peers (see Example 25). Even the Journalism student who did not currently attend an EMI programme found that English terms were widely used in his Swedish programme (see Example 26). Previous research has rather conflictingly shown that Swedish EMI settings are a lot more multilingual than being purely monolingual English settings (Söderlundh, 2012; Risager, 2012). This could also be seen in the interviews to a certain extent in that Swedish peers use Swedish with each other, sprinkled with English lexical borrowings. However, what the interview with the Journalism student revealed was notable in relation to this previous research. In his non-EMI programme, English was used to such an extent that it was deemed "annoying" to have to switch between reading English course literature and writing Swedish assignments (see Example 4). Although it has been done to an extent (Mežek, 2013), this finding presents an interesting opportunity for further research in regard to the question of the extent English is used in non-EMI programmes and what students' experiences are thereof. Conceivably, this ought to be combined with research questions on monolingual and bilingual (or perhaps even translingual) scientific literacy, a question which requires more attention at both policy level as well as at a practical level.

Regarding preparedness, all three students thought of preparedness in different ways (see conclusion in Section 4.1). However, one thing they all had in common when analysing their own preparedness was that they did not take the non-native speaker into consideration. In other words, they judged whether or not they were prepared for EMI by analysing the use of English as a standard in their programmes and if English use did not conform to that conceptualisation of English, they deemed it strange, foreign or non-

native. Based on their own experiences of various Englishes, a more fitting perception of preparedness would be to consider whether or not they are ready to communicate through English with speakers of a wide variety of Englishes. According to the Swedish National Agency of Education, Swedish students are supposed practice reception of various national and dialectal features (Skolverket, 2018).

Finally, it is perhaps not so strange that Swedish students conceptualise English as a (US/UK) standard when English in the expanding circle is exonormative in nature and looks outward for norms of the English language (Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist, 2019). However, with the direction of English being more and more as a lingua franca and with expanding circle speakers far outnumbering inner circle varieties, teachers in Swedish secondary education, too, must be aware of this trend and prepare students to interact with speakers of more varieties of English than merely native ones. Indeed, the centre of gravity too must change from the Inner circle to the more pluralistic notion of ELF where communicative strategies play a large part between users of English (Björkman, 2014; Jenkins, 2011).

6. Conclusion and implications

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, three Swedish students were interviewed on their experiences of EMI in Swedish higher education. The research questions of preparedness, content acquisition and conceptualisations of English were thus explored. The main findings showed that the three themes of the thesis (preparedness, content acquisition and conceptualisations of English), concisely put, affected each other.

It was revealed that students' conceptualisations of English as a standard affected student-student as well as teacher-student interactions. Students all believed they mastered English as a standard variety, which was reflected in their attitudes towards their peers' and teachers' proficiencies. Only the Journalism student showed a partial conceptualisation of English as a lingua franca. He took partial responsibility on himself in communicative breakdown by claiming that he was unaccustomed to certain varieties

of English. The other two students, however, placed the deficiency entirely on their non-native peers and teachers by claiming that they ought to tweak their accents to sound more native-like in order to be understood.

All three students claimed they felt prepared for EMI in their respective university programs and courses although their perceptions of what preparedness was differed from one another. The interviews, however, showed that the students' conceptualisations of English became a problem for them when encountering non-native varieties of English. This attitude towards non-native speakers of English in turn showed that students had not been fully prepared for EMI in Swedish higher education.

The students had mixed experiences of acquiring content through English. The Business student claimed that content felt external and difficult to engage with critically. The Journalism student preferred acquiring content through English over Swedish, although mixing the two was a problem. The Engineering student felt that studying through English was better than through Swedish as there was a lot more information readily available online in his subjects. The interviews also elicited the fact that the student currently in a non-EMI programme used more English than previously expected.

As such, suggestions were also made for future research on the topic, especially in relation to monolingual and bilingual (or translingual) disciplinary literacy. Such research would also be important to inform secondary teachers of English what kind of language climate Swedish students find themselves in in Swedish higher education.

This leads on to the final remark of this thesis, namely what implications the findings of this research can suggest for Upper secondary teachers of English. Based on the findings that students held condescending views towards speakers of non-native varieties, there is reason to believe that the centre of gravity of English language teaching in Sweden needs to be shifted towards the direction of the non-native speaker. Conceivably, this could be accomplished by practising communicative strategies according to an ELF framework as well as including more varieties than native ones in teaching materials.

References

Airey, J. (2016). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In Hyland, K. & Shaw, P. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of English for Academic Purposes.* (pp. 71–83) London: Routledge.

Airey, J., Lauridsen, K.M., Räsänen, A. et al. (2017). The expansion of English-medium instruction in the Nordic countries: Can top-down university language policies encourage bottom-up disciplinary literacy goals?. *Higher Education* 73, 561–576. https://doi.org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1007/s10734-015-9950-2.

Airey, J. (2009). Science, Language, and Literacy: Case Studies of Learning in Swedish University Physics. ACTA UNIVERSITATIS UPSALIENSIS. Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Science and Technology, 81.

Airey, J. 2012. "I don't teach language: The linguistic attitudes of physics lecturers in Sweden". *AILA Review*, 25(1), p. 64–79.

Arnbjörnsdottir, B. (2020) "English at the University of Iceland: Students' Perceptions and Practices". In Kuteeva, M., Kaufhold, K. & Hynninen, N. *Language Perceptions and Practices in Multilingual Universities* (pp. 245–265).

Björkman, B. (2013). *English as an Academic lingua franca: an investigation of form and communicative effectiveness*. Walter de Gruyter, Inc. Boston/Berlin.

Björkman, B. 2014. "An analysis of polyadic English as a lingua franca (ELF) speech: A communicative strategies framework", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 66, 122–138.

Brinkmann, S. (2014). Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing. Chapter in Leavy, P. (Ed.). (2014). *The oxford handbook of qualitative research*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Chiang, S.-Y. 2009. 'Dealing with communication problems in the instructional interactions between international teaching assistants and American college students.' *Language and Education* 23,(5), 461–478.

DN, 2018, [Make English the official second language in Sweden] (Accessed 21-9-2020). https://www.dn.se/asikt/gor-engelska-till-officiellt-andrasprak-sverige/.

Drisko, J., Maschi, T. 2015. *Content Analysis.* Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Education First (EF), English Proficiency Index. 2019. https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/regions/europe/sweden/ (accessed 21/09/2020, 14:14).

EU Commission, Bologna Process, https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en (Accessed 26/9/2020).

GP, 2016, "Är engelska vårt andraspråk? [Is English our second language?] (Accessed 21-9-2020). https://www.gp.se/debatt/%C3%A4r-engelskav%C3%A5rt-andraspr%C3%A5k-1.3195572.

Graddol, D. (1997). *The Future of English?* British Council, London.

Graham, K. M., Choi, Y., Davoodi, A., Razmeh, S. & Dixon, L. Q. (2018). Language and content outcomes of CLIL and EMI: A systematic review. *LACLIL*, 11(1), 19–37.

He, J.-J. & Chiang, S.-Y. 2016. "Challenges to English-medium instruction (EMI) for international students in China: A learners' perspective", *English Today*, 32 (4), 63–67.

Hult, F. M. (2012). "English as a Transcultural language in Swedish Policy and Practice", *TESOL Quarterly*, 46(2), 230–257.

Hult, F. M. (2017). "More than a lingua franca: Functions of English in a globalised educational language policy", *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 30(3), 265–282.

Jenkins, J., & Mauranen, A. (Eds.). 2019. *Linguistic diversity on the EMI campus: Insider Accounts of the Use of English and Other Languages in Universities within Asia, Australasia, and Europe*. Routledge, London.

Jensen, Christian et al. 2013. "Students' attitudes to lecturers' English in English-medium higher education in Denmark." *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 13(1): 87–112.

Kachru, B. B. (1984). World Englishes and the teaching of English to non-native speakers: contexts, attitudes, and concerns. *TESOL Newsletter*, 18 (5), 25–26.

Karlgren, J. and Hansen, P. 2003. "Cross-language relevance assessment and task context." Paper presented at the Advances in Cross-Language Information Retrieval. Third Workshop of the Cross-Language Evaluation Forum, CLEF, Rome, Italy.

Kaur, J. 2011, “Raising explicitness through self-repair in English as a lingua franca”, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43 (11), 2704–2715.

Kim, J., Kim, E.G. & Kweon, S.-O. (2018). “Challenges in implementing English-medium instruction: Perspectives of Humanities and Social Sciences professors teaching engineering students.” *English for Specific Purposes,* 51, 111–123.

Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. SAGE Thousand Oaks, California.

Kuteeva, M., Hynninen, N., and Haslam, M. (2015) . “It’s so natural to mix languages”: Attitudes towards English-medium instruction in Sweden. In A. Linn, N. Bermel, G. Ferguson & C. Hadjidemetriou (Eds.), *Attitudes towards English in Europe*, 193–212. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter Mouton.

Kuteeva, M. (2020). Revisiting the ‘E’ in EMI: Students’ perceptions of standard English, lingua franca and translingual practices. *International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education.* 23(3), 287–300.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). SAGE. Thousand Oaks, California.

Macaro, E., 2018, *English Medium Instruction*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Mauranen, A. 2006. “Signalling and preventing misunderstanding in English as lingua Franca communication.” *International Journal of Sociolinguistics and Language*, 177 pp. 123–150.

McKenzie, I. (2013). *English as a lingua franca: theorizing and teaching English*. Routledge.

Melchers, G., Shaw, P. & Sundkvist, P. 2019. World Englishes: Third edition. Routledge. London & New York.

Mežek, Š. (2013). *Advanced second-language reading and vocabulary learning in the parallel-language university* (Doctoral dissertation). Stockholm, Sweden: Department of English, Stockholm University.

Phillipson, R. (2009) English in higher education: Panacea or pandemic? *Angles on the English-Speaking World* 9, 29–57.

Risager, K. (2012). Language hierarchies at the international university. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 216, 111–130.

Sato, T., Yujobo, Y., Okada, T., & Ogane, E. (2019). Communication strategies employed by low-proficiency users: Possibilities for ELF-informed pedagogy, Journal of English as a Lingua Franca, 8(1), 9–35. doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2019-2003.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Skolverket, 2018. English syllabus for upper secondary in English.

Söderlundh, H. 2004. Lika bra på engelska? En undersökning av hur studenter i Sverige förstår kurslitteratur på svenska respektive engelska [As good in English? An investigation of students' comprehension of coursebook literature in Swedish vs English]. *Språk & Stil* 14: 137–165.

Söderlundh, H. 2005. Svenska är lättare att fatta [Swedish is easier to understand]. *Språkvård* 2: 29–33.

Söderlundh, H. (2012). "Global policies and local norms: Sociolinguistic awareness and language choice at an international university". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 216, 87–109.

Van Parijs, P. (2011). *Linguistic justice for Europe and for the World.* Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Appendix A

Semi-structured interview, English

Socio-linguistic and academic background:

- Age?
- Mother tongue/L1?
- Knowledge of other languages?
- How many years of studying at university level?
- What have they studied? Program, courses? Why are they studying what they're studying now?
- What program/course are they studying in English?
- Was the option of studying through English a conscious choice, i.e., did they choose to take this course (partially) because it was given in English? Also, was there an option to do it in Swedish, and why then did you choose to do it in English?
- Previous EMI experience? (Studying in English in Secondary ed., exchange program, studying abroad, etc.,)
- Are they working in labs, seminars, group work, lectures?

Main questions:

- What languages do they use in their education and for what purposes?
- To what extent is English used in the program/course? What is their experience of the extent to which English is used?
- How do they perceive their own English proficiency, and also in relation to teachers/peers?
- How do they view "good" English? What is "good English"?
- Do they feel they were prepared for EMI in higher education from their secondary education? (Why yes/no? In what way? What was missing? What should they have learnt?)
- Have they come across difficulties in studying in English? Do they experience any advantages?
- Examples of successful and challenging communicative situations in their EMI programme/course?

Hand on the doorknob:

- Finally, now that we're reaching the end of the interview, is there anything else that comes to mind which you would like to share when it comes to studying in/through English?
- Could you give a summary of what you think about the use of English at your university?

Appendix B

Semistrukturerad intervju, svenska

Sociolingvistisk och akademisk bakgrund:

- Ålder?
- Modersmål / förstaspråk?
- Kunskaper i andra språk?
- Hur många års studier har du läst på universitetsnivå?
- Vad har du studerat? Program, kurser? Vad läser du just nu?
- Vilket program / eller vilken kurs läser du på engelska?
- Valde du att gå den här kursen eftersom den gavs på engelska? Fanns det också ett alternativ att göra det på svenska, och varför valde du då engelska?
- Tidigare erfarenhet av att studera på engelska (högstadiet/gymnasiet, utbytesprogram, studerat utomlands etc.)
- Arbetar ni med laborationer, seminarier, grupparbete, föreläsningar?

Huvudfrågor:

- Vilka språk använder du i din utbildning och till vilka syften?
- I vilken utsträckning används engelska i programmet / kursen? Vad är din erfarenhet av den utsträckning engelska används?
- Hur uppfattar du dina egna kunskaper i engelska? Och i förhållande till lärare och andra studenter du läser med?
- Hur ser du på ”bra” engelska? Vad är “bra engelska”?
- Kände du dig förbered för att använda engelska på universitetet från din gymnasieutbildning? (Varför ja/nej? På vilket sätt? Vad saknades? Vad borde du ha lärt dig?)
- Har du stött på svårigheter med att studera på engelska? Upplever du några fördelar?
- Har du några exempel på framgångsrika och utmanande kommunikativa situationer på engelska i ditt program / kurs?
- Hur upplever du att du tar åt dig ämneskunskaper genom engelska?

Handen på dörrhandtaget:

- Slutligen då, finns det något annat som du kommer att tänka på som du vill dela med dig när det gäller att studera på / genom engelska? (hand på dörrhandtagssyndromet)
- Skulle du kunna ge en sammanfattande bild av vad du tycker om användandet av engelska på dit universitet?

Appendix C

Swedish university students' perspectives on English medium instruction

Adam Keay
Position: English IV student
Department of English, Stockholm University
Email: keayadam@gmail.com
Supervisor: Spela Mezek
Research conducted as part of the English IV course, Magister thesis

Information sheet

The purpose of this research is to investigate Swedish students' experiences of studying academic subjects (other than English) in higher education through the medium of English. The participant will be asked several questions about their attitudes, perspectives and experiences in relation to studying through English.

By participating, the participant gives their consent that their answers will be used in the research project. However, participation is completely voluntary, and the participant has the right to withdraw from the survey whenever they want.

The participant's answers are completely anonymous, and the answers cannot be traced back to the participant. The participant will be given a pseudonym when presented in the research. The answers are used for research purposes only.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, interviews will be conducted via Zoom or in person while keeping a safe distance at the participant's convenience. The interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcribing and analysing the interview during the writing of the thesis. Because of the reasons previously mentioned, the Consent Form will be agreed to verbally at the beginning of the interview, rather than written and signed.

Thank you for participating!

Appendix D

Swedish university students' perspectives on English medium instruction

Adam Keay
Position: English IV student
Department of English, Stockholm University
Email: keayadam@gmail.com
Supervisor: Spela Mezek
Research conducted as part of the English IV course, Magister thesis

Consent Form

I have read the Information sheet, and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the research, on the understanding that I can withdraw from the research at any time and without consequence.

I have been given a (digital) copy of this form.

Name of participant:_____

Place and Date: _____

Verbal agreement: _____

Name of researcher: Adam Keay

Place and Date: _____

Verbal agreement: _____

Stockholms universitet
106 91 Stockholm
Telefon: 08–16 20 00
www.su.se

Stockholms universitet