

The dark side of EMI? A telling case for questioning assumptions about EMI in HE

Prof David Block, *ICREA, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain*

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Venue: 104 Elvin Hall, UCL IOE

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The neoliberalisation of higher education (HE), which began in earnest about three decades ago, and the global spread of English, which began earlier, together have motivated an exponential increase in the number of universities worldwide offering English-medium instruction (EMI) as a key part of their internationalisation policies. EMI in HE is by now a much discussed and examined phenomenon; however, all too often research does not challenge certain assumptions about its existence. One assumption is that the



introduction of EMI is an on-the-whole innocuous change in how HE courses are delivered, and that any negative side effects for the primary stakeholders, lecturers or students, are minimal. This paper takes a contrarian and critical view of EMI, highlighting its more problematic side. This is done to some extent through a short and selective discussion of relevant literature in the next section. However, the critique comes through most clearly in subsequent sections of the paper, in which interview data collected from an EMI lecturer at a university in Catalonia are examined. As will become clear, the perspective of this single informant, presented as a ‘telling case’ (Mitchell, 1984) is illuminating, as it highlights aspects of EMI that do not often appear in policy documents and research publications focussing on the topic.

Prof David Block is ICREA Research Professor in Sociolinguistics in the Departament d'Humanitats, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, where he is a member of the Grup de Recerca en Espais Interculturals, Llengües i Identitats (GREILI). He is also in the Grup de Recerca en Aprenentatge i Ensenyament de Llengües (GR@EL; Facultat de Traducció). He is Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences (UK); Visiting Professor at UCL IOE; and editor of the Routledge book series *Language, Society and Political Economy*. He joined ICREA in September 2012 after 16 years at UCL IOE, where he was Professor of Languages in Education. Prior to that, he worked in Barcelona for 18 years, teaching English in centres such as ESADE, and teaching Applied Linguistics at the Universitat de Barcelona and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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