

Accommodating to English-medium instruction in teacher education in Finland

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This study analyses teacher educators' and student teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning situations in an international English as a lingua franca (ELF) context in an English-medium instruction (EMI) teacher education programme in Finland. The analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that the participants perceived a partial reversal of traditional teacher and student roles; students assisted voluntarily and teaching became reciprocal. Some teachers reflected on having used typical strategies in ELF context such as code-switching to further communication and engage students. However, teachers' lack of fluency was sometimes considered causing frustration among students and affected negatively their feeling of being professional teacher educators. Nevertheless, by increasing more learner-led activities, ELF can positively affect teacher education pedagogy.

Keywords: accommodation strategies, co-construction of communication, ELF, EMI, teacher education

Introduction

Teaching in English has increased in the academic world in Europe as a consequence of the Bologna Process initiatives to promote mobility within and beyond Europe and to improve and sustain high-quality education (Wächter and Maiworm 2008). For higher education in Europe, rapid structural changes, such as provisions of entire programmes taught in English, involve high demands to the institutions, in particular to the staff responsible for designing and executing the programmes. Often there is either insufficient time to train the teaching staff or it is assumed that no training is necessary. Hence, university teachers, non-native English speakers, are expected to start teaching in English without much preparation (Hellekjær 2010).

English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes are typically set up in countries where English is not the official language (Graddol 2006). Although universities have language policies for instruction in a foreign language (L2), their recommendations or aims are not always realized or even considered in actual practice. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2009) calls for universities in Finland to require teachers to demonstrate their language proficiency in a foreign language to ensure high-quality education. The language policy of the university where this study was conducted instructs all university teachers to promote high-quality language usage by their own example and, in this respect, to act as language teachers. However, since there has been no language proficiency evaluation for university teachers, it is not known to what extent the university's language policy is implemented. The university language centre offers specialised language courses for EMI teachers but there are no other incentives than personal gains for participating in them. In the department of teacher education (context of this study), it is rather taken as self-evident that teachers can teach in English

because English is the language of international research and teachers are expected to produce scholarly articles for international journals.

This study set out to explore the perceptions of the teachers and students involved in an English-medium teacher education programme in which the common language of the participants with different first languages (L1s) was English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Seidlhofer 2005; Jenkins 2007). The present setting differs from a typical academic ELF setting because here it may be the teachers rather than the students who are less proficient speakers of the L2. Students must have proof of a requisite level of language proficiency on entrance to the EMI programme in question while the teachers are expected to teach with no formal language requirements. Therefore, traditional teacher-student power relations are partially reversed (e.g. Cazden 2001): teachers maintain expertise in terms of content but they may risk compromising their authority in terms of language command. The students in turn find themselves in a situation where their language skills may be superior but they are apprentices in the content. The purpose of the study was to find out how the participants perceived the use of ELF and how they experienced the situations where communication problems arose.

Teaching and learning in English-medium instruction

The present study was carried out in EMI subject teacher education, which has features that are especially challenging to the participants, in particular to teacher educators and their language skills. Firstly, teacher educators have a dual role in teaching: while teaching student teachers they also teach them how to teach (Loughran 2006). Their pedagogical thinking (Kansanen et al. 2000) is the guideline that justifies the educational decisions that they make. Acting out these educational decisions in actual teaching is a way of exposing teachers' pedagogical thinking. This in turn makes it possible for students to better examine the teaching they receive from the perspective of a future teacher and assess and develop their own skills (Loughran 2006).

Secondly, the programme is taught by teacher educators with a background in different school subjects. Teaching students with different majors in one group is demanding because the teachers have to involve all the students, in and outside of the teachers' subject speciality (the Finnish education system and teacher education are described in detail in Niemi, Toom and Kallioniemi 2012). It requires careful cooperation between teachers across the subjects to ensure that the objectives, teaching and learning methods and assessment strategies are constructively aligned at the course and programme levels (Biggs and Tang 2011).

Thirdly, in small-group teaching, teachers cannot prepare to deliver predetermined and rehearsed material as is customary in monologue type of information delivery teaching, such as lectures (e.g. Airey and Linder 2006; Björkman 2010). Instead teachers will encounter spontaneous questions from students and they will lead class discussions and organise collaborative activities.

To manage teaching in an EMI programme with the above characteristics requires from teachers a substantial command of subject matter and a good command of the language of instruction. In the current context, the teacher educators participated voluntarily and they were not tested for language competence, whereas the students were required to show proof of academic level English skills to enter the programme. Differences in language proficiencies between different ELF speakers (non-native or native) can be vast and they often create power imbalances in communication (cf.

Mauranen 2006). This uneven distribution of language skills may have an effect on the teachers' feeling of being a professional teacher educator.

Traditionally, the goal of L2 teaching and learning has been to reach a native-like language competence, which for the vast majority of language learners is both an unrealistic and unnecessary goal. Nevertheless, the native-speaker model is persistent (Council of Europe 2001) and may cause more frustration than inspiration for language use when learners compare their language skills to the native-speaker model. University lecturers are no exception. Pilkinton-Pihko (2010) has studied university lecturers' perceptions of their own English skills and noticed that although teachers teaching in an ELF context understand that it is not necessary to attain a native-level proficiency of English, they nevertheless tend to compare their own language skills to those of a native speaker. In today's lingua franca communication, such comparisons and goals of attainment are of secondary importance.

It is more appropriate to judge ELF speakers by the skill with which they adapt and adjust to a particular communicative situation and how flexible and receptive they are in accommodating and understanding different accents, rather than by the deviations they make from a native variety (Jenkins 2011). This is in accordance with what university students appreciate in lecturing: more important than having a high level of English skills was the lecturer's ability to use language interactively with students and to confirm their understanding (Suviniitty 2010). High enough level of English is important for both teachers' and students' successful communication, but the teacher's skill to lecture effectively and structure lecture material in a sensible way affects students' understanding as well (Hellekjær 2010), irrespective of the language of instruction. As a matter of fact, any prevailing communication problems from L1 lectures are accentuated in lectures carried out in L2 (Airey and Linder 2006; Airey 2009).

Ways of co-constructing and negotiating meaning in ELF

Typically participants of a communicative event are cooperative and attempt to adapt their communication to that of their interlocutors. The process of adaptation and alteration of one's speech and communicative behaviour to better match the one of the interlocutor in order to enhance mutual understanding is referred to as "the phenomenon of accommodation" (Cogo 2009: 254).

Intelligibility is ascertained by the use of various strategies that help to resolve problems that may occur during interactions but also to proactively prevent comprehension problems from happening (Mauranen 2006; Dewey 2009; Jenkins 2011). Repetition (both self and other repetition) is commonly used as a strategy to either emphasise pieces of important information or to confirm understanding (Björkman 2010; Kaur 2012). Reformulations of one's own speech or using comprehension checks are found to be routine practices in ELF communication (Mauranen 2006).

Mediation is a pragmatic strategy where the speaker rephrases someone else's speech and thus helps further common understanding. More specifically, it is the intervention of a third party in order to clarify apparent communicative misunderstanding by two (or more) co-speakers (Hynninen 2011). In a university seminar course, mediation was found to be a frequently used strategy by the lecturers when students did not at first understand each other. The teachers functioned as intermediaries to keep the interaction going and engaged the participants in negotiating meaning when a struggle was detected. Mediation helped make the communication

more explicit (Hynninen 2011). Code-switching, a strategy where the speaker switches or mixes other language(s) with English, is another accommodation strategy often used in ELF talk (Klimpfinger 2007; 2009; Cogo 2009). In ELF, code-switching is used for several purposes (Klimpfinger 2009): to specify an addressee, appeal for assistance, to introduce another idea and to signal culture and cultural identity. The latter has been found to be a more frequent use than filling gaps in knowledge (Jenkins 2011). Although the different pragmatic and accommodation strategies are essential for successful and fluid ELF discourse, they may slow down communication (Hynninen 2011). Repetition of material and engaging students in co-construction of meaning is not necessarily negative, however, as it can deepen students' understanding (Biggs and Tang 2011). If less material can be covered, teachers need to take more care of what to include in a session, as the teaching hours are limited.

Using an L2 can thus bring in changes in teaching and learning because understanding and delivering information in L2 is not necessarily as straight-forward as in L1 instruction. Introducing and dealing with complex content and ensuring students' comprehension can be challenging even in L1. Teachers must structure sessions and make continual decisions during teaching based on their professional abilities and pedagogical thinking (Kansanen et al. 2000). The purpose of this study was to find out the participants' perceptions of the ELF context; how teacher educators and student teachers perceived their experiences and approaches in sometimes problematic situations and how they considered using ELF affected the teaching and learning situations.

The study

This study was conducted in an EMI teacher education programme at a Finnish university. The programme was launched as part of the university's internationalisation efforts to offer English-medium teacher education to non-Finnish speakers and international students who hold a Master's degree or are Master's degree students at the university. The one-year programme consists of 60 ECTS credits of teachers' pedagogical studies for subject teachers and provides them with general competency for subject teaching. Each year a cohort of Finnish and international students is selected with different teaching subjects. The successful applicants pass an entrance exam that consists of an interview where the applicants' suitability for becoming a teacher is assessed.

The participants of this study were students (student teachers) and teachers (teacher educators) in the first year of the EMI teacher education programme. They were invited to participate in the study through an email request and their participation was voluntary. Out of the total of 14 students, 11 agreed to be interviewed. The students were of various L1s, with a small minority of English native speakers. In addition, 11 teachers teaching in the programme were interviewed. They were university lecturers, part-time teachers and post-doc researchers. Most of the teachers were Finnish and Finnish L1 speakers.

Semi-structured interviews (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007) were conducted with the participants to explore their perceptions of the ELF context and how each respondent had approached sometimes problematic situations. The interviews allowed finding out how the teachers and students talked about the accommodation strategies that they had employed and how they talked about the effects of the used strategies on teaching and learning situations, their expertise and feeling of being a professional

teacher educator. The main benefit of the interviews was that they offered possibilities to interpret what aspects of the ELF context the participants considered important.

The participants were interviewed halfway through the academic year. The student interviews lasted 30 minutes and teacher interviews one hour. All the interviews were recorded. Three teachers preferred to be interviewed in Finnish. The interviewer was the first author of this article and the participants knew her role as a teacher and researcher in the programme. The familiarity allowed for a comfortable setting during the interviews. The interviews covered several main areas, including the requirements of language of instruction, teaching methods, experiences of the English-medium environment and eventual language-related communication problems and their solutions. Some of the interview questions to the teachers included: 'Did you take the language or your language skills into account in teaching?' and 'Did you change/adjust your teaching methods? Why?' Questions to the students included: 'How did you experience the English-medium environment?' and 'Did you encounter communication problems because of language? If so, how did you cope with them?'

Following a transcription of the interviews, the data were analysed by the interviewer using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The analysis was an iterative process where the researcher searched for recurring themes in the participants' perceptions of employed strategies and their effects in incidents where communication breakdown was either detected or endeavoured to be avoided. The themes were modified and refined in successive readings jointly by all the authors and the data were gradually reduced until the final thematic foci were identified. The themes were not restricted to the interview questions but they were selected from the participants' shared experiences and perceptions of what it was like to teach and study in the ELF context. In the next section, the themes which emerged from the analysis will be presented. The major themes were related to the participants' experiences of using ELF in the academic context and to their ways of collaboration in the co-construction of communication.

Findings

The discussion begins with the teachers' and students' perceptions of the ELF context in general and their use of ELF in particular. The discussion moves on to describe the participants' perceptions of managing the different communicative situations encountered in the sessions and how they considered using ELF affected the teaching and learning situations.

Experiencing English as a lingua franca

The participants came from different linguistic backgrounds and their expectations of the level of English used in the programme varied. Thus their adjustment to the ELF context varied as well. Many had previous experience, some extensively, from contexts where English is used as a lingua franca.

Communication in ELF

Many students commented on English being a common tool for communication and that the essential point is to understand and be understood. However, some students were bothered when a teacher's lack of fluency affected the progress of a session negatively or even by the use of non-standard English. One of the students, Louise, denied being disturbed by such situations, but nonetheless conceded that she naturally appreciated it if a teacher had fluent and vibrant communication skills. However, it was more the content, "exciting ideas" and interaction that mattered:

(1)

Louise_s¹: [Pekka_t] is one of the teachers whose English is at the top. For some people it did make a difference, I noticed that. And of course I enjoyed it too.

F²: So you're saying that it makes a difference if someone speaks fluent English?

Louise_s: Yes of course it does. But you know there's fluent and there is, I don't know, his language is not just fluent, it's exciting and he was talking about exciting ideas.

Although Pekka_t was complimented on his English skills by the students, he was quite critical of his skills himself. Because Pekka compared his English to L1 English, he did not give himself much credit for it. He considered that his "pronunciation from the sort of native perspective is very strange." However, in the excerpt below, he described his perception of the ELF environment as something "very positive."

(2)

Pekka_t: I think at least for me it would've been much harder to teach with all the students speaking some sort of Oxford dialect and me trying to manage. But now the idea that we all try to manage here was something that I felt very positive.

Being a non-native speaker of English among other non-native speakers put Pekka in a similar situation with the students and eliminated a linguistic dominance related to L1 language use and a possible power difference caused by it. Non-native teachers often feel inferior in their language skills when they compare them to those of the natives and this may affect their feeling of being professional negatively (Pilkinton-Pihko 2010; Hynninen 2013).

Community of ELF speakers

One of the reasons why the students chose this particular programme was that English was the language of instruction. The students adopted English as their preferred language in private conversations even among exclusively Finnish L1 speakers:

(3)

Robert_s: I think it was very good we used it [English] all the time, also in our private discussions. Most of the time, with some exceptions. [...] But also with the Finns in personal discussion when applicable. [...] Because it was the common language of the community. I get to know these people in English, so we continue to use English when we speak.

As Robert_s describes, using English among the students was part of their "community" and thus natural for them. Speaking English was part of their identity as student teachers and a factor that helped unite the group of students. The international students, including the native English speakers (as specified by themselves, not necessarily from the 'inner circle' countries, see Kachru 1982; native English in itself is a problematic concept), tended to be more lenient and more accepting of different variations of English and deviations from a native norm than Finnish students (see also Hynninen 2013). It seems that the student teachers in the teacher education programme formed a community of practice (Wenger 1998; Seidlhofer 2011) characterized by a flexible, contextual and jointly negotiated variety of ELF with shared ways of speaking to achieve mutual understanding. This is in accordance with Carey's (2010) hypothesis that native speakers permanently outside of their native environments have an incentive to be accommodating, whereas it contradicts the claim (Jenkins 2011) that native speakers are less adaptable than non-native speakers in ELF contexts.

Lack of words

Many of the teachers had prepared their sessions with more care and time than normally. When preparing the content, they needed to take into account the student body consisting of students with different educational and disciplinary backgrounds. Some teachers explained that they needed to compensate their lack of fluency and vocabulary with well-prepared slides. Nevertheless, students found some teachers struggling with explaining interdisciplinary concepts in understandable language. Sometimes the teacher failed to produce relevant vocabulary altogether. Because the students had different majors and the teachers represented different school subjects, the students were not always knowledgeable in the specialised vocabulary of the teacher's area of expertise. Some found it difficult to follow if the teacher was not able to explain and define concepts in more regular terms. Louise explained that because not all were experts in the same subject, a more common level of language worked well so that the students of different majors could easier understand each other and the teacher.

(4)

Louise_s: You just have to put it in plain English so that's why I'm saying that ELF is okay for this kind of course because actually you want to discuss this maybe on a lower level, especially when there are not too many experts from that field around.

Some teachers elaborated on this topic as well and agreed that by avoiding the unnecessary use of subject-specific terminology, attention and time can be focused on learning actual content. Nevertheless, ELF does not equal merely "plain English," to which Louise alludes above. In university teaching more advanced level vocabulary cannot be completely avoided. Some findings suggest, however, that academic ELF does show evidence of lexical simplification in comparison to L1 academic English (Mauranen 2012). The challenge of understanding diverse terminology is important for students to reflect on from a future teacher's perspective. Many of the students will likely end up teaching in school environments where students are fluent speakers of English but have English as their L2. Comprehension and the extent of vocabulary in ELF contexts may be lower than in native-speaker settings. Thus teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, i.e. capacity to transform subject knowledge in understandable terms to students, may be tested more in ELF than in L1 situations.

Although some students shared initial complaints of having difficulty understanding certain teachers, eventually it was not the pronunciation but lack of vocabulary and fluency that caused actual problems:

(5)

Eeva_s: But usually some of the teachers are quite competent and even if they have a pronunciation problem, if they're just competent enough to try speaking and then you can figure out what words they were trying to use. Even if they pronounce them wrong. But if it really affects their teaching so they leave stuff out or start not getting where they were going to go because they can't find the words to actually go there, then it's a problem, I think. Sometimes that happened.

In ELF contexts it is a presumption that interlocutors have different accents. People are usually quite competent in adjusting their hearing to the accent of their interlocutor (Jenkins 2011) and this seems to have happened in this ELF context as well. Some of the problematic situations arose, as Eeva_s describes above, when a teacher lacked words to an extent that s/he was not able to complete a part of the teaching. In such cases the course content changes and the curriculum is at risk of not being fully implemented.

Time constraints

The teachers also elaborated on timing. Some felt their English skills had slowed down the sessions. Lauri_t explained that it made him adhere more closely to the session topic in order to try stay on time.

(6)

Lauri_t: I think there is certainly some difference in tempo. In the Finnish side it is also easier to more spontaneously digress and then return to the theme. And maybe I wanted to keep it more on the topic. Teaching becomes slower so you think of the clock too. (F)³

Earlier studies have shown that it is common to cover less ground when teaching in an L2. However, many studies blame the students' language skills, rather than those of the teachers (e.g. Hellekjær 2010). Thøgersen and Airey (2011) found that a lecturer's speaking rate was slower in an L2 than L1. This does not directly correspond to fewer topics being covered in class but less elaboration on each topic. If, due to lack of vocabulary, non-fluency or slow speaking, the teacher is not able to enrich teaching with practical stories related to the topic, this may leave the students without some valuable examples that they could connect with as future teachers.

Changing roles of teachers and students

Student-initiated mediation

Some of the above-described situations, which were uncomfortable and even detrimental for student learning, were remedied by a student stepping in and helping the teacher out. One of the teachers, Saara, shared her experience when she did not possess the necessary vocabulary to explain all concepts in more colloquial terms. She recalled a situation when she introduced a concept that was subject-specific to her own field and she had not prepared herself to explain the concept in more common terms in English to students who had different majors.

(7)

Saara_t: At some point we had for example a situation that came as a surprise because I had not thought of how some concept can be explained in English. Then one of the students jumped in to help. So in some ways in the interaction it was difficult to explain concepts. (F)

Although a student had assisted and the concept was explained in understandable terms, Saara had felt slightly uncomfortable. Since she had not been able to express herself fully, she felt it affected her feeling of being professional negatively. She felt she had "never taught as poorly before." Because she was not used to teaching in English, she had at first been nervous of speaking English and had worried of how she could make the interaction work naturally. She was surprised that not all students were familiar with the specialised terminology that she used. However, she appreciated the activeness of the group and found it as a resource to herself as a teacher. Liisa_s described the above-mentioned situation from the students' perspective:

(8)

Liisa_s: We had [a student of a related major] in the room [...] so he would kind of try to dumb it down and he would sort of filter what she said [*laughter*] and re-explain it in some things.

Mediation works as an unsolicited interactional strategy where a speaker rephrases someone else's speech after a break-down in communication and thus helps further

common understanding. In Hynninen's (2011) study the teacher functioned as an intermediary to help the students understand each other. In this data, however, it was the students who voluntarily jumped in to help the teacher when s/he was not able to explain content matter and concepts in more understandable layman's terms to the other students. In the above excerpt, one of the students "filtered" and tried to "dumb down" the teacher's expression of a concept. Usually, the teaching sessions employ a power hierarchy where the teacher is the one to facilitate interaction. It can create new power imbalances if the scales are tipped and the teacher loses control of the class. However, being a less fluent communicator does not indicate a loss of control when the actors are comfortable with the situation. If the students felt that the teacher was lacking in and nervous about his/her English skills, it affected negatively many students' attitudes about the situation. Some students worried in those sessions whether the quality of education was as good as it would be if the teachers taught in their L1. Liisa was one of the students who were bothered by the hesitations and interruptions in the flow of the sessions. She wondered whether it was the teachers' pride that refrained them from asking the students for help:

(9)

Liisa: And what happened with me was that I started to worry that am I getting the right education. Like is this level as good as you know on the Finnish side where the teacher is naturally able to speak in their own language. You know like if you're explaining an answer and you can't find the words and rather than asking us what are the right words, because there are Finnish speakers in the room, if your pride or something is in the way, and you just kind of avoid it, then we don't get the answer.

The expectations that students have of teachers is based on their idea of the roles that students and teachers should have. If the student's image of teacher is of one who delivers knowledge and student is more of a passive recipient, it is all the more frustrating if the teacher does not meet the preconceptions. However, if the student has assumed a contemporary research-based view of teaching and studying (which is the goal of the teacher education programme), it is easier for him/her to accept teacher's role as a facilitator and actively engage him/herself in learning situations. The situation is also affected by the teacher's conception of student and teacher roles (Biggs and Tang 2011).

Student engagement

Some teachers were perhaps better able to create a more effective and engaging learning environment that welcomed help and input from others. When students help to explain concepts to each other, they also improve their own learning (Biggs and Tang 2011). Ville_t explained how he managed to create a climate where eliciting co-construction in meaning making from students was encouraged and appreciated.

(10)

Ville: I'm trying to practice my English and also in that group it is so nice, they are helping me to use this kind of concepts which are really correct in that situation. That's why I suppose that this kind of teaching is also surprising in that sense that you can practice your language knowledge. [...] All the time if somebody doesn't really understand the correct concepts the [students] are also helping and that's why it's very good. [...] If you can interact with the students in that way that they also understand that if there are some that have some problems with the language, why we can't help? And if it happens, then the learning atmosphere in the group

is much more effective than something like that everybody is ‘oh now our teacher is not as talented in the field of language as we are.’

Ville was not afraid to admit his occasional lack of linguistic knowledge in the way of “correct concepts” and he felt comfortable and natural to invite and accept assistance from the students. Teachers have an important role in establishing a supportive learning climate that encourages students’ contributions and activeness. Students’ learning is greatly enhanced when they take responsibility of their own learning and are actively constructing knowledge (Biggs and Tang 2007). In co-constructing meaning making the question is not only about linguistics and finding the right terms but about explaining and understanding complex content matter and phenomena.

Code-switching

Another teacher, Minna, explained that she was comfortable in asking for help with isolated words if she did not know or remember them in English. Although she thought that it would give a more “convincing” picture as a professional if the teacher did not need linguistic help, she realized it saved time. Code-switching is often used in multilingual situations (Cogo 2009) and in this data teachers mentioned that they used it to appeal for assistance (cf. Klimpfing 2009), and in particular to fill gaps in their linguistic knowledge. This is a contradiction to Jenkins’s (2011) claim that ELF speakers rarely use code-switching for filling gaps in knowledge but rather to signal cultural identity.

(11)

- I: How was it when you prepared the lessons or when you were in the sessions? Did you somehow take into account your or the group’s level of English? Was it something that you consciously thought about?
- Minna: No it was very easy for me. I mean it was not easy but in that way that I could say anything I can in English and be sure that everyone else understands. But I even needed help in expressing myself in some points because my level of English was clearly lower than the level of my students [...].
- I: [...] What kind of help did you ask for?
- Minna: Oh for some unknown words mostly because many of them were Finnish speakers [...] so they were very quick to help if I asked them. [...] Sometimes you wonder [*laughter*] in your mind and you still cannot get it so it’s even quicker to just say ‘could someone help.’ [...] I don’t know how they felt about it. Of course it would be more convincing if a teacher was more or less perfect in the language that he or she teaches in. But perhaps I wasn’t the only one who was not perfect in English so I just thought that when you are as old as me so you have learned that [...] you can ask for help if you need.

Although Minna was comfortable in appealing for assistance, she yet viewed her English skills from a deficit angle and considered them inferior to those of the students. ELF proponents (e.g. Jenkins 2011; Seidlhofer 2001) urge non-native speakers to stop viewing themselves as imperfect English speakers and concentrate rather on adopting accommodation strategies to enhance ELF communication, regardless of the level of language proficiency. Not everyone was comfortable with soliciting help or code-switching, however. Lauri_i elaborated on his experiences and explained how he had found it cumbersome having to ask for help. When teaching in English, it is natural to also try to think in English. Having to switch back to Finnish slowed down Lauri’s thinking and distracted his teaching:

(12)

Lauri: I was bothered by having to use roundabout ways. Sometimes I would ask someone who had Finnish as mother tongue for a translation. And it somehow slows down and hampers thinking because it is always the language of your thinking that you are speaking. And when you are thinking in English and you cannot find the words so then you think in Finnish. And then you try to find a clumsy roundabout way of expression. (F)

Lauri felt “bothered” when his flow of thought was interrupted and he felt “clumsy” in his expressions. He felt that using an L2 affected his feeling of being professional negatively. This is an example when code-switching was not a successful strategy. Perhaps this is a question of experience and getting used to code-switching in an ELF environment. Nevertheless, this substantiates the findings by Hellekjær (2010) that a high enough level of English proficiency is important for teachers so that they can lecture and teach effectively.

Student-initiated questions

Students’ questioning seemed to have two functions: to help the struggling teacher in class and to fill in blanks or ask for clarification after class by asking the teacher in Finnish. Many students confessed that if a teacher seemed not to be lecturing efficiently in his/her English and if the flow of the session was seriously hampered, the motivation level in the class fell and many switched to a survival mode and merely wanted to reach the end of the session. In such a situation when the teacher was struggling to “own the lesson,” one of the students, James, offered unsolicited help by asking questions to keep the session progressing.

(13)

James: The way I feel in that position, standing in front of the class and having a demotivated class to deal with, I feel like I want to help in some way if I can but I don’t want to take over. [...] Well, what I was trying to do in that situation was that I was trying to ask questions so that [the teacher] had a chance to make explanations and also so that he could see that he wasn’t losing the attention of the class. I think that was important.

By asking questions, James wanted to ease the session along and convey to the teacher that some students were still paying attention and were interested in learning. This student-led questioning demonstrates the student’s self-directedness and ownership of not only one’s own learning but the whole learning situation. James elicited empathy by not wanting to dominate the situation or embarrass the teacher but used discretion while supporting the interaction (“I feel like I want to help in some way if I can but I don’t want to take over”). Another student described a different event, when an issue remained unclear and the students took initiative after the session to consult the teacher:

(14)

Eeva: Usually if you really needed to specify something you could ask the lecturer after the lecture in Finnish and they could answer your question and explain what was going on, if there was a problem with something. Then we could explain it to the other ones [who could not understand Finnish].

Eeva explained that if some issues related to content had been left unanswered, a student “could ask the lecturer after the lecture in Finnish” and then translate and share the information in English to the non-Finnish speakers. Both the student-initiated

questioning in class and questioning for clarification after class show the students' resourcefulness and flexibility and their eagerness and interest to learn.

Discussion and conclusion

This article reported on a case study of teacher educators' and student teachers' experiences in an English-medium instruction setting using English as a lingua franca as the common language. The purpose was to find out the participants' perceptions of the ELF context regarding collaboration in co-constructing communication and the effects of using ELF on teaching and learning situations.

In many earlier ELF studies, speakers have willingly adopted accommodation strategies and voluntarily cooperated in offering unsolicited help for furthering communication (Mauranen 2006; Dewey 2009). This study was no exception. According to the participants, if a teacher faced a challenge, the students offered help in various ways, with translating terms or words for teachers, asking questions for clarification in L1 after the session and translating the information to others. Students also reported using student-initiated mediation (cf. Hynninen 2011) and student-initiated questioning in class to help negotiate for meaning and maintain lesson progress. Code-switching, a common language-related accommodation strategy (Klimpfinger 2007; 2009; Cogo 2009), was one of the strategies used by teachers in this data. Contrary to some previous findings (Jenkins 2011), some teachers reported using code-switching specifically when they were lacking a word. Interestingly, not all participants found it a useful strategy. Sometimes it seemed not as easy for teachers to appeal for assistance as it was for students to offer it. One teacher experienced that when he was lost for words in English, he felt that needing to resort to Finnish slowed down his teaching; not because the switch of the code would have taken more time but because his flow of thinking was interrupted. Lacking vocabulary or fluency was considered by some teachers as affecting negatively their feeling of being professional teacher educators.

The data suggested that teachers' perceived ability to create a comfortable learning climate helped alleviate power imbalances caused by differences in language proficiency or teacher/student dichotomy. There were definite benefits to the teacher not taking the role of the only expert in the classroom as it activated the students in explaining and discussing concepts and issues at hand and thus deepened and enhanced their own learning (Biggs and Tang 2011). It also helped make teaching and learning reciprocal; teachers are not the only ones with knowledge. The students showed considerable interest and eagerness in confirming their understanding and perhaps the threshold for asking for clarification on content was made lower when linguistic issues played a role in comprehension. However, the active roles of the students were not necessarily openly discussed in the sessions. Usually the students considered that they were, in essence, merely helping the teacher out when they engaged in contributing to the sessions, instead of taking an active student role that should be the goal in every classroom. The opportunities for teaching about teaching were thus not always utilised (Loughran 2006).

Although the students seemed to value interesting content and flexible communication (Jenkins 2011) and making teaching comprehensible (Suviniitty 2010), a fair amount of frustration was reported as having been experienced if a teacher lacked fluency or proficiency in English and if the session was not progressing because of it. It was considered problematic if teachers lacked vocabulary to the extent of leaving out important information. Simplifying academic language is more common in ELF than

in L1 teaching (Mauranen 2012), and as far as it facilitates understanding and learning, it is a pedagogically useful strategy. However, if it impoverishes content and thus leads to imperfect learning, it is a hazardous strategy. Having a high proficiency in English is of course not the only aspect that matters in teaching but teachers need to be effective in their teaching strategies and invite students to participate, and especially in ELF contexts, adopt flexible accommodation strategies. Teacher educators should expose their pedagogical thinking and the choices they make in teaching and take advantage of their weaker English skills by empowering and activating the student teachers, which is also a goal for the students with their future pupils (Kansanen et al. 2000).

Even though an ELF context was not new to most of the participants, many still seemed to hold onto the ideal of native-speaker English (Pilkinton-Pihko 2010; Hynninen 2013). Studying in a teacher education programme and becoming a future teacher might have some significance in the matter. Although L2 teaching has developed towards more communicative language teaching, the myth of a “perfect” native speaker still persists. Perhaps what makes us perfect L1 speakers is that we accept mistakes (slips of the tongue, drawing a blank, etc.) as natural occurrences in our speech. That is what we should learn to transfer to L2 speech as well.

Most of the teachers were content with the opportunity of teaching a multicultural and interdisciplinary group in English. It offered variety to regular teaching. The teachers in this programme participated in EMI teaching voluntarily. If language requirements were in place, it would be very difficult if not impossible to attract enough teachers since the positions do not originally require set English proficiency levels. Most of the teachers managed their sessions in English very well, both according to their own accounts and those of the students. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that all teachers are able to teach in English although the majority may well be. Language is one of the main tools that a teacher has to use.

There are limitations to our research approach. Interviews were conducted only at one point in time whereas several interviews at different phases of the programme would have provided more and different data. Moreover, not all interviews dealt with exactly the same questions as the discussions were partly steered by the viewpoints that each respondent considered important. Nevertheless, we strove to understand perceptions of a certain phenomenon rather than record particular linguistic events. The participants shared their personal experiences and provided us with an understanding of the variations in their approaches and the effects of co-constructing communication at the collective level (cf. Åkerlind 2005). Having perspectives from both teachers and students can thus be considered a strength of this study. The findings have some consequences for the development of EMI teacher education. Continuous development is an important aspect of teachers’ feeling of being professional and a mainstay for high-quality education. Thus it would be beneficial to arrange opportunities for teachers to collectively share and discuss their experiences of teaching in English. Many teachers in this study seemed to have mixed feelings of how they had succeeded and what is expected of one’s language skills in an ELF context. Sharing experiences can help participants be more lenient and appreciative of their own English skills. One of the key issues in EMI programmes language-wise is that all teachers and students are introduced to the principles of ELF communication so that they can adjust their expectations and behaviour accordingly. The teachers could take charge of their own language education and later on this could lead to a negotiation and agreement of a framework for a language certificate in a particular context. Another important consideration in order to accommodate to using ELF is its effect on teacher education pedagogy. Especially if a teacher’s language skills are limited, a change from a teacher-

led discussion to incorporating more student-led discussion or group work with the help of carefully chosen material may be necessary and beneficial. Engaging and activating student teachers to share learning and construct knowledge with peers will help them as future teachers to facilitate learner-centred activities.

Notes

(1) The names of all participants are pseudonyms. The extracts are taken from the interview transcriptions. _s denotes student; _t denotes teacher; [...] denotes cut-out speech; [word] denotes a replacement of the original word for the sake of anonymity or clarity.

(2) (I) refers to the interviewer.

(3) (F) refers to the quote having been translated from Finnish.

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