

English-Medium Higher Education in Denmark (EMHED)

*Kirsten Haastrup, Department of International language Studies and
Computational Linguistics, Copenhagen Business School*

Background

The research described in this short report is being undertaken by a group of (applied) linguists at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS).

As is the case in the other Nordic countries, higher education in Denmark is subject to a continuing process of internationalisation. As a consequence, all Danish universities have progressively shifted to offering more courses and more degrees in English without the lecturing staff concerned being given training to upgrade their competence in English, and without any screening to verify that their language skills are adequate to the task. All institutions are experiencing problems with the quality of English-medium degrees and courses. There are complaints from students about what they perceive as 'bad' English, though the precise characteristics of what is inadequate have yet to be explored systematically. In any case, the proficiency issue has many dimensions, relating to activity and discourse type (lecture, informal seminar, feedback to students in speech and in writing), intercultural and cross-linguistic sensitivity, the influence of a variety of mother tongues, and the diversity, norms, and nature of English when functioning as an international language rather than as a British or American language.

Scope and aim

The aim of our research is to investigate the linguistic challenges experienced in connection with the internationalisation and globalisation of university education with special reference to English-medium degrees and courses. The project focuses on the communicative competence that non-native English teachers need in order to function optimally when offering English-medium content courses in higher education. Specifically, we intend to explore the extent to which teaching staff at CBS have adequate and appropriate English skills by conducting a study of selected aspects of their communicative competence. On the

basis of this research one of our main aims is to make proposals for improved educational practice.

The project will be carried out in two phases: 1) a study at the Copenhagen Business School 2007-2009; 2) a larger study involving other universities in Denmark as well as collaboration with Nordic colleagues, from 2009 onwards.

The project at Copenhagen Business school (2007-2009)

This project focuses on lecturers' English language competence, more specifically faculty staff working within the fields of economics and management. The seven researchers in the team come from the Department of International Language Studies and Computational Linguistics. Together they cover the following areas: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, phonetics, grammar and discourse, vocabulary, second language acquisition and language testing.

We are currently collecting data for a study that investigates the relationship between teachers' language proficiency and students' perception of teachers' academic and linguistic competence. Students' attitudes are examined through a questionnaire investigation, in which the students are asked to evaluate the quality of the academic content of a specific lecture as well as the language skills and teaching methods of the lecturer concerned. The aim of the study is to throw light on the extent to which the students' attitudes relate to an assessment of the teachers' English language proficiency, and how the students' attitudes are affected by their cultural and linguistic background and their own language proficiency.

A planned collaborative project (2009 -2012)

As part of a future collaborative project we wish to investigate the English competence which is required to ensure quality in university English-medium studies. We shall focus on both teachers and students in order to provide a solid foundation for making decisions about:

- the required level of English competence for lecturers
- the required level of English competence for Danish and international students
- establishing a valid screening procedure to secure that these levels are met
- developing a comprehensive English-language support programme for the faculty.
- staff.

