

BOOK REVIEW



**ESP IN EMI SETTINGS:
MAPPING LINGUISTIC AND
ACADEMIC INTEGRATION IN
HIGHER EDUCATION**
**Marta Aguilar-Pérez, Balbina
Moncada-Comas and Dietmar Tatzl
(Eds.). DEVELOPING LANGUAGE
COMPETENCE THROUGH ENGLISH FOR
SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN ENGLISH-
MEDIUM UNIVERSITY SETTINGS (2024),**
Multilingual Matters. 164 pp., ISBN 978-1-
80041-686-4 (HBK); 978-1-800-41688-8
(EPUB); 978-1-800-41687-1 (PDF).

447

As universities increasingly embrace English-medium instruction (EMI), the demand for effective communication skills in English has never been greater. However, this adoption often comes with challenges, particularly in balancing general language proficiency with the specialized linguistic needs of different disciplines. As noted by Dafouz (2025), linguistic ability in English is dangerously confused with the specific academic skills required at university, which has even led to the removal of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses from the curricula of some Spanish universities. This conflation underscores the need to distinguish between language competence and academic literacy, especially within the context of EMI. Therefore, the interplay between ESP and EMI has become a crucial area of scholarly inquiry. In *Developing language competence through English for specific purposes in English-medium university settings*, the authors examine the evolving role of ESP in EMI environments. The book's central objective is to highlight how EMI and ESP can coexist and interact symbiotically, positioning ESP as a key pedagogical intervention in higher education. Rather than viewing EMI as a self-sufficient approach to language development, the authors challenge the misconception that students' linguistic, disciplinary, and intercultural skills will naturally improve without additional educational support. Instead, they argue that ESP plays a crucial role in helping university students become better

communicators in both academic and professional contexts, equipping them with the necessary skills to operate effectively in a globalized landscape.

The volume brings together a diverse range of perspectives, offering a well-rounded and theory-informed exploration of the interplay between ESP and EMI. A key strength of the book lies in its ability to present complex pedagogical challenges in a structured and accessible manner. Divided into two parts, the book follows a logical progression from broader conceptual discussions to more practice-oriented insights. Part 1, *The interplay between ESP and EMI*, sets the stage by defining the relationship between these two domains. Following the introduction by Tatzl, Aguilar-Pérez, and Moncada-Comas, Helen Basturkmen (Chapter 2) provides a crucial theoretical foundation by exploring the intersections of EMI, ESP, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Subsequent chapters delve into specific disciplinary contexts, such as pharmacy education (Acebes de la Arada & Woźniak, Chapter 3) and student motivation, expectations, and language progress in EMI versus non-EMI settings (Čakarun & Drljača Margić, Chapter 4). Part 2, *Pedagogical challenges and innovations in ESP*, shifts the focus to instructional strategies and assessment practices. Here, the book highlights cutting-edge approaches, such as function-based instruction in Business English (Castellano-Risco, Chapter 5) and genre-based pedagogy in engineering communication courses (Zemliansky, Chapter 6). The discussion extends to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on assessment practices, with a comparative analysis of EMI and ESP perspectives across European universities (Arau Ribeiro et al., Chapter 7). Finally, the concluding chapter by Moncada-Comas, Tatzl, and Aguilar-Pérez (Chapter 8) effectively ties together the book's themes, reinforcing the need to reposition ESP as a vital pedagogical component in EMI settings.

448

In the opening chapter, the editors critically examine the growing presence of English in higher education, using the TROJAN HORSE metaphor (Kuteeva et al., 2020) to highlight concerns that Englishization processes may undermine local languages. A key issue is the increasing marginalization of ESP in favor of EMI, often under the vague assumption that EMI alone fosters internationalization. The authors challenge this notion, arguing – rightly, in my view (Velilla-Sánchez, 2021) – that EMI operates within an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) context, where English is primarily a medium rather than the instructional focus (Macaro, 2022). This distinction underscores the need for explicit language support, as content delivery alone does not ensure linguistic and disciplinary competence. Tracing the historical emergence and convergence of ESP and EMI, the authors emphasize that these approaches should not be seen as opposing forces but as complementary strategies for enhancing students' academic and professional communication skills. Collaboration between EMI and ESP instructors is presented as a crucial means of addressing students' linguistic and disciplinary needs. The chapter outlines essential prerequisites and potential challenges of such collaboration, positioning ESP as a fundamental pedagogical tool within EMI.

In Chapter 2, Helen Basturkmen explores the interconnections between EMI, ESP, and EAP, providing a clear and structured discussion that makes this chapter particularly useful for readers new to the field. She distinguishes among the different branches of ESP and clarifies how ESP, EMI, English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) differ in terms of teaching objectives, the role of English, instructional approaches, and learning opportunities. A key theme running across these disciplines is the assumption that natural exposure to disciplinary linguistic registers within EMI settings facilitates language acquisition. However, the author critically examines this idea, arguing that without explicit language support, many students struggle with the specialized discourse of their fields. To address this, the author draws on research investigating language-related episodes (LREs) – namely, spontaneous moments of linguistic focus within EMI classroom interactions (Basturkmen & Shackelford, 2015) – to illustrate how lecturers can play an active role in guiding students toward accurate and appropriate linguistic choices. Basturkmen further discusses teacher feedback on dissertation drafts, highlighting how educators emphasize linguistic precision and accuracy to help students refine their academic writing.

In Chapter 3, Desirée Acebes de la Arada and Monika Woźniak examine the interplay between Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), EMI, and ESP in pharmacy education. Using the metaphor of DRUG INTERACTIONS, they illustrate how these approaches can either complement or compete with one another in shaping students' linguistic and disciplinary competence. A key distinction in their analysis is between over-the-counter English – that is, the general academic English encountered in EMI settings – and prescription English – that is, the highly specialized pharmaceutical discourse essential for professional communication. The authors argue that while EMI provides exposure to disciplinary content in English, it often lacks an explicit focus on the specialized terminology, genre conventions, and communicative practices required for success in pharmacy. To bridge this gap, they highlight how CLIL and ESP converge at the university level in their emphasis on communicative tasks and the use of authentic materials adapted to students' needs. The chapter reports on a collaborative project in which discourse-learning activities were developed with content teachers to introduce students to authentic disciplinary communication, context-specific registers, and their corresponding genres. Through this case study, the authors demonstrate that integrating ESP with EMI is essential to ensure that students develop both content knowledge and the precise linguistic skills needed for their profession.

In Chapter 4, Kornelija Čakarun and Branka Drljača Margić explore the impact of EMI on students' academic experiences, comparing it with non-EMI settings. The chapter investigates key factors such as motivation, expectations, and linguistic development, shedding light on students' perceptions of learning in an EMI environment. The authors examine whether EMI enhances students' English proficiency or if, instead, it creates challenges due to the lack of explicit language

support. They also consider how motivation varies between EMI and non-EMI students, analyzing whether exposure to disciplinary content in English increases engagement or leads to frustration when linguistic demands are not adequately addressed. Drawing on empirical research, the authors provide insights into students' progress in both general and discipline-specific English, questioning the assumption that EMI alone guarantees language development. Even though the findings may not be particularly groundbreaking, its methodological approach offers an innovative perspective, providing valuable insights into how students navigate EMI contexts. The authors argue that while EMI may create immersive learning opportunities, it does not automatically lead to improved academic language proficiency unless paired with targeted linguistic support.

In Chapter 5, Irene Castellano-Risco explores an innovative pedagogical approach to ESP by incorporating a function-based perspective into Business English instruction. The chapter argues that ESP students may benefit from a stronger focus on linguistic functions that directly apply English to the specific genres and communicative tasks they will encounter in their professional careers. This approach emphasizes real-world language use rather than focusing on grammar and vocabulary in isolation. Under this framework, learners engage in tasks that mirror authentic business interactions, such as negotiating, making requests, and presenting arguments, fostering a more dynamic and contextually relevant learning experience. The study presented in this chapter examines two key factors: students' second language development and their satisfaction with the course materials. By analyzing these aspects, the author evaluates the effectiveness of a function-based approach in improving both linguistic competence and student engagement. While the study is exploratory in nature, it offers valuable insights into how ESP instruction can be adapted to better serve students' communicative and professional needs.

In Chapter 6, Pavel Zemliansky examines how genre-based instruction (GBI) can enhance ESP teaching in an engineering communication course. He argues that introducing students to the textual and rhetorical conventions of their discipline better prepares them for professional communication than a generalized focus on English proficiency. Unlike traditional EAP programs, which emphasize future linguistic needs – a tendency described by Caplan and Johns (2022) as *preparation culture* – GBI prioritizes students' immediate coursework demands by focusing on relevant genres like technical reports and research articles. Zemliansky highlights the benefits of this approach, including increased engagement and improved writing proficiency, while also acknowledging challenges such as the need for instructors to be well-versed in both linguistic and disciplinary discourse. To address these, he offers practical recommendations, including integrating discipline-specific writing tasks, fostering collaboration with subject specialists, and developing materials that reflect real-world communication demands in engineering.

In Chapter 7, María del Carmen Arau Ribeiro, Tanja Vesala-Varttala, Rita Koris, and Ágnes Pál examine how assessment practices in EMI and LSP courses evolved during the pandemic. According to the authors they shifted toward more flexible, student-centered evaluation methods, emphasizing authentic assessment, which mirrors real-world communication demands. The chapter highlights innovative assessment formats such as project-based evaluations and open-book exams while addressing tensions between institutional constraints and meaningful learning. Additionally, the authors present findings from the CORALL project, initiated in 2014 to foster student autonomy through a coaching-oriented teaching approach. The study demonstrates that integrating reflection tools and prioritizing communicative proficiency can help address EMI challenges. The chapter offers valuable recommendations for sustaining effective assessment practices beyond the pandemic, advocating for formative assessments, collaboration between language and content instructors, and digital tools to enhance evaluation.

In Chapter 8, the editors conclude the book by synthesizing the key ideas and offering a forward-looking perspective on the relationship between EMI and ESP in higher education. The chapter emphasizes that EMI and ESP should not be seen as competing forces, but rather as complementary elements in equipping students with both academic content knowledge and the linguistic skills necessary for globalized professional and academic environments. The editors advocate for a reappraisal of ESP as a central pedagogical tool, especially in universities where EMI is prevalent, to ensure that students develop the specific language skills needed in their disciplines. Finally, the chapter highlights the importance of ongoing collaboration between EMI and ESP teachers, as well as the need for continuous adaptation of teaching approaches to address the evolving demands of higher education in a globalized world.

The book is a valuable resource for educators and researchers navigating the intersection of EMI and ESP. One of its greatest strengths is its comprehensive approach, offering insights from multiple disciplines and presenting both theoretical discussions and practical applications. Additionally, its accessible structure makes it suitable for both newcomers to the field and experienced scholars. By advocating for collaboration between language and content instructors, all the chapters reinforce the book's broader argument: ESP must not be sidelined by EMI but rather recognized as a crucial component in preparing students for the linguistic demands of both academia and the workplace. While the book successfully problematizes the challenges of ESP within EMI, some chapters could have further explored practical strategies for integrating ESP into existing curricula. The focus on European universities, though insightful, may not fully capture the experiences of institutions in other regions with different linguistic and policy contexts. Moreover, given the rapid evolution of digital learning tools, a deeper discussion on how technology can support ESP-EMI integration would have been a welcome addition.

That said, the book makes an important and timely contribution to the field, encouraging a necessary reappraisal of ESP in higher education. It offers valuable perspectives and practical recommendations that will benefit educators, policymakers, and researchers alike, while also paving the way for further exploration of this crucial topic.

[Review submitted 4 Feb 2025]
[Revised version received 25 Apr 2025]
[Accepted for publication 28 Apr 2025]

Reviewed by **MARÍA-ÁNGELES VELILLA-SÁNCHEZ**
Faculty of Human and Educational Sciences
University of Zaragoza
Spain
mavelilla@unizar.es

References

- Basturkmen, H., & Shackleford, N. (2015). How content lecturers help students with language: An observational study of language-related episodes in interaction in first year accounting classrooms. *English for Specific Purposes*, 37, 87–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2014.08.001>
- Caplan, N. A., & Johns, A. M. (2022). *Changing practices for L2 writing: Moving beyond the five-paragraph essay*. University of Michigan Press.
- Dafouz, E. (Ed.). (2025). *Internacionalizar la universidad española: Estrategias, prácticas docentes y lenguas* [Internationalizing the Spanish university: Strategies, teaching practices and languages]. Ediciones Complutense.
<https://doi.org/10.5209/ling.003>
- Kuteeva, M., Kaufhold, K., & Hynninen, N. (Eds.). (2020). *Language perceptions and practices in multilingual universities*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38755-6>
- Macaro, E. (2022). *English medium instruction: Language and content in policy and practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Velilla-Sánchez, M. A. (2021). *English as an academic lingua franca in Spanish tertiary education: An analysis of the use of pragmatic strategies in English-medium lectures* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Zaragoza.
<https://zaguan.unizar.es/record/106287/files/TESIS-2021-206.pdf>