Josep Soler*

Linguistic justice in English-medium instruction contexts: a theoretical argument

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Abstract: This article looks at English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts in higher education from a linguistic justice perspective and offers a theoretical argument to discuss the potential for EMI to be defended as a positive and valuable phenomenon, beyond economic and competitive arguments. In the final keynote panel at the 2022 ICLHE conference, Philippe Van Parijs pondered how EMI teachers might be seen: either as killers, traitors, sellers, saviours, upgraders, or liberators. After providing characterisations for each of these labels, Van Parijs suggested that EMI teachers should be better conceived of as civilisers, not in a missionary sense of civilising the barbarian, but in the Aristotelian meaning of civic virtue, of citizens being part of public life, actively involved in discussion of public affairs. This seems to imply a specific view of English, one that almost naturally equates the language to democratic progress and consensus. In the article, I challenge this assumption and suggest that for English to be a democratising agent and EMI truly a gate-opener to higher education, emphasis needs to be placed on listening subject positions and regimes of uptake as key aspects of democratic deliberation and key elements to overcome prejudiced views of accents and voices.

Keywords: English-medium instruction (EMI); higher education; internationalisation; linguistic justice; politics of listening; uptake

Resum: Aquest article analitza els contextos d'anglès com a llengua vehicular (EMI en anglès) a l'educació superior des d'una perspectiva de justícia lingüística i ofereix un argument teòric per debatre si es pot defensar l'EMI com a fenomen positiu i valuós, més enllà d'arguments econòmics i de competitivitat. En una taula rodona al final de la conferència de l'ICLHE de 2022, Philippe Van Parijs va reflexionar sobre com es podrien conceptualitzar els professors d'EMI: ja sigui com a assassins, traïdors, venedors, salvadors, milloradors o alliberadors. Després de proporcionar caracteritzacions per a cadascuna d'aquestes etiquetes, Van Parijs va suggerir que els professors d'EMI haurien de ser concebuts com a civilitzadors, no en un sentit

***Corresponding author: Josep Soler**, Department of English, Stockholm University, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden, E-mail: josep.soler@english.su.se

missioner de civilitzar el bàrbar, sinó en el sentit aristotèlic de la virtut cívica, de ciutadans que formen part de vida pública, implicada activament en la discussió dels afers públics. Aquesta concepció implica una visió específica de l'anglès, que gairebé i de manera natural equipara la llengua amb el progrés i el consens democràtic. A l'article, qüestiono aquesta hipòtesi i suggereixo que perquè l'anglès sigui un agent democratitzador i perquè l'EMI realment ajudi a obrir portes a l'educació superior, cal posar èmfasi en les posicions d'escolta i en els règims de comprensió com a aspectes clau de la deliberació democràtica i per superar visions estereotipades d'accents i veus.

Paraules clau: comprensió; educació superior; ensenyament en anglès com a llengua vehicular (EMI); internacionalització; justícia lingüística; política d'escolta

1 Introduction

In 2023, at the time of writing this article, English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education has become such an established fact of so many university systems around the world that even the acronym itself seems banal and "self-explanatory" (Smit 2023: 1). In Europe, which is the context where I write from, the oft-cited reports mapping the expansion of EMI programmes by Wächter and Maiworm (2008, 2014, see also Wächter 2004) seem to have come to a halt, which might be taken as a sign that it is no longer necessary or relevant to keep monitoring the expansion of English as a language of instruction throughout universities in the continent. Indeed, EMI has been growing fast in the past couple of decades both as an empirical reality and as field of inquiry within applied linguistics, with a cascade of publications within the many branches of this multidisciplinary area from about the mid-2000s until the present moment (e.g., Coleman 2006; Dimova et al. 2015; Lasagabaster 2022). While it is hard to strictly compartmentalise EMI as a sub-field of research on its own (precisely because of the many areas in applied linguistics that cut across it), work on EMI has begun to coalesce in recent years so that the notion of doing research on EMI is now entirely possible; more significantly, since 2022 John Benjamins publishes the *Journal of English-Medium Instruction* (Pecorari and Malmström 2022), Routledge has a book series on EMI (Routledge Series on English-Medium Instruction), already featuring seven titles in it (in October 2023), and a handbook on EMI is now also published (Bolton et al. 2024).

That said, the consolidation of EMI as an empirical reality and as an object of study seems to have run side-by-side with an increased political and societal contestation of the presence of English at universities. This is not to suggest that the incorporation of English in higher education systems was smooth in the earlier

stages. In 2006, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research adopted its Language Declaration, establishing the principle of "parallel language use" at universities for the promotion and development of "main Nordic languages" in parallel with English (Nordic Council of Ministers 2006). A reiteration of this policy was published in 2018, with 11 recommendations for its implementation (Gregersen et al. 2018). Further south, in Italy, in 2012 staff members of the Politecnico di Milano took legal action against the decision by administrative officials to turn all teaching at the master's level at the institution into English (Santulli 2015), a decision that later would be declared unconstitutional by the Italian Constitutional Court (Zuaro et al. 2022, Zuaro et al., this volume).

More recently, such political and ideological tensions seem to have become more commonplace in more contexts, including those where a previous seemingly peaceful coexistence between English and the national language is being replaced by policies to explicitly diminish its presence at universities. A case in point is the Netherlands, where a recent ministerial decision aims at reducing English-taught subjects to only one-third of degree programmes, except where there may be good reason to justify a bigger percentage of teaching in English (NL Times 2023). For a university system that has been so successful in attracting foreign students (35 % of the total student body in 2022), such a proposal has already been met by opposition from universities and students since, in fact, their success as an international student hub has made universities largely dependent on the arrival of students from abroad (Llach 2023). Back in the Nordic countries, the growing presence of English in higher education might have been behind the rise of neo-nationalist discourses, reviving older locally situated sociolinguistic tensions (Saarinen 2020).

The above worries about an Englishization trend in European higher education (Wilkinson and Gabriëls 2021) might very well be relevant only at a regional (European) level (for a contrasting overview of EMI trends in Asia, for example, see Fenton-Smith et al. 2017). Having said that, the following question is still worth asking: what arguments may justify the presence of English across higher education systems globally? Given that the growth of EMI seems to be often tied to key performance indicators and institutional profiling (as a globally attractive pole) (Hultgren and Wilkinson 2022), which in turn can be connected to broader economic and political interests (De Wit et al. 2017), are there other (non-economic) ways in which it may be possible to defend EMI as a valuable thing? And if there are, what conditions might enable or prevent a conceptualisation of EMI as a gate-opener and a democratising agent? To address these questions, in this article I develop a theoretical argument based on Philippe Van Parijs' notion of linguistic justice (Van Parijs 2011) and his own application of the concept in the context of EMI in higher education.

In the next section, I briefly delineate Van Parijs' (tentative) conceptualisation of EMI from a linguistic justice perspective, together with a summary of his broader framework of linguistic justice. This is followed by my own critical reading of Van Parijs' framework, and I then develop a subsequent potential alternative avenue for an enhanced linguistic justice approach in EMI. The latter is premised on the importance of shifting the focus from a speaking subject position to a listening subject position (Flores and Rosa 2015), understanding that regimes of listening and the politics of uptake are key aspects in democratic deliberation (Mansbridge and Martin 2013; Scudder 2020a). These are also key elements to overcome prejudiced views of accents and voices, which is of central importance for both democratic theory and democratic representation (Peled and Bonotti 2019). Should EMI truly be a gate-opener to higher education, then I defend that a focus on listening regimes is of paramount importance. To do that, it is necessary to shift the framework of a linguistic justice theory more squarely towards an ethics of responsibility (Levinas 1981) and political hospitality (Derrida 2002), a task that linguistic ethnography seems particularly well suited to undertake (Blackledge and Creese 2023; Holmes 2023).

2 EMI and Van Parijsian linguistic justice

The 7th 2022 ICLHE Conference (Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education)[1] featured a closing panel in which Philippe Van Parijs engaged in dialogue with other panellists from around the world: Bipanchi Bhattacharyya and Nang Wesufa Loungchot (India), Ana Luiza Pires de Freitas (Brazil), and Mila Kalasnikova (Chile). The title of the panel was explicitly provocative: "EMI teachers: killers, traitors, sellers, saviours, upgraders, liberators?" At the start of the panel, Van Parijs proposed arguments to characterise each of these attributes, flagging in this way the different discourses that may normally be found in general media outlets among stakeholders from different sides in debates about English in higher education (for an example of one such debate in the Baltic states, see Soler and Rozenvalde 2024); and while framed as a question about EMI teachers specifically, it would seem safe to suggest that the framework was presented as a characterisation of EMI as a phenomenon more generally. In a nutshell, Van Parijs pondered if EMI teachers could be conceptualised as "killers of our own language", as "traitors of a national community", or "sellers of lucrative services"; he also asked if they could be best seen as "saviours of university departments", as "upgraders of the human capital of students", or "liberators of the mind of students".

1 https://www.iclhe.org/iclhe-2022 (last accessed 24 June 2024).

After having the audience discuss what they would think was the label that best defined EMI teachers, in their opinion, Van Parijs added one extra descriptor: civilisers. Van Parijs argued in favour of conceptualising EMI teachers as civilisers, not in a missionary sense of the word, of civilising the barbarian, but in the sense of Aristotelean politics. Following Aristotle's philosophy, EMI teachers should be seen as agents fostering the development of civically engaged citizens, of people interested in and discussing about common affairs in the public agora. Central here is the notion of voice, 'logos' or 'speech' in Aristotle's thought, which encapsulates the Greek philosopher's key notion that as opposed to all other species of the animal kingdom, humans have speech, they can talk to each other and reflect on what is right or wrong, what is morally acceptable or not, etc. But to do that at a global scale and to enhance the development of a global demos, a shared language globally is needed, a role that English as a lingua franca (ELF) is best suited to fulfil at our current historical period. Following this argument, EMI is a structural feature of education systems, even if at the tertiary level, that is well situated to play a key part in the pursuit of a global demos, not least because of the integral component of international student mobility that it often incorporates.

Such characterisation of EMI is coherent with the more general framework of linguistic justice developed in more detail in Van Parijs (2011), a theory he had already started writing about much longer before that (see, e.g., Van Parijs 2002). Put briefly, in a world characterised by linguistic diversity and fragmentation, humanity's global challenges require the existence of a lingua franca, and (to Van Parijs) the alternatives to English for that role are currently unrealistic. However, the establishment of such a global lingua franca comes with some costs. These costs are the product of two types of injustice: cooperative and distributive, that is, (i) not everyone invests resources (particularly of time and money) to the same extent in developing English as a lingua franca, with English first-language (L1) speakers putting in less effort than the rest of the humanity (Anglophone's free riding); and (ii) the benefits of having English as a lingua franca are not equally distributed amongst all, with L1 English speakers disproportionately advantaged by the more positive stereotypical evaluation of their "native" accents and varieties, as a result of native-speakerist language ideological frameworks (Holliday 2006).

To overcome these injustices, Van Parijs (2011) suggests a range of measures, including: the world-wide expansion of immersion education systems in English, a ban on dubbing of audio-visual products originally in English, and "poaching the web", making all kinds of English language content that exist online freely accessible for anyone with internet connection. Van Parijs himself recognises that these measures do not fully remedy the cooperative and distributive injustices he identifies as a result of the global spread of English, but they do go some way in addressing them to an extent. In addition, these suggestions are designed to enhance the knowledge and

proficiency in the English language by speakers all around the world, but there is one more source of injustice that Van Parijs (2011) identifies and addresses: a parity of esteem injustice. In short, if we accept that the spread of English as humanity's shared lingua franca is something positive and we adopt active policies in support of that, speakers of languages other than English might feel that their own language is not as much worth as English. To protect speakers' sense of identity and self-esteem in their L1, Van Parijs suggests a strong application of the principle of territoriality, so that each nation or community can enforce an official application of a single-language policy regime.

All the above measures have already been scrutinised and discussed by previous work (a useful collection of essays on Van Parijs and his critics can be found in De Schutter and Robichaud 2015). For example, a ban on dubbing and poaching the web have been assessed by Réaume as relatively cheap but only modest forms of compensation; more critically, because of the type of language and registers they may give access to, these two measures do not seem to "prepare anyone to write a grant proposal, a brief to parliament for a land use planning body, or even an op-ed piece" (Réaume 2015: 158). In addition, a world-wide immersion education system in English seems not just largely unrealistic because of organisational and economic constraints, but it would also enhance an inter-generational type of injustice whereby younger generations having gone through immersion in English would disproportionately benefit from it than older generations, educated through non-immersion systems (see Soler and Morales-Gálvez 2022 for a fuller account of this issue). Finally, a strong application of the principle of territoriality seems premised on a relatively thin explanation of why English poses a threat to the dignity of speakers of other languages; instead, and as argued by Anna Stilz, official multilingualism might be better placed to address such problem (Stilz 2015).

In sum, as noted above already, Van Parijs seems to judge EMI positively because of what it represents in terms of being a structural feature in education systems that allows more people to have more access to English, which is one key part of his linguistic justice framework. However, as the critiques summarised in the paragraph above indicate, Van Parijs' theory of linguistic justice seems overly egalitarian; indeed, having access to English, in and of itself, is not sufficient to ensure equality of opportunities or equal dignity for everyone (May 2015; Piller 2016). More fundamentally, from a sociolinguistic point of view, what seems problematic is the largely monolithic and standardising view of language that Van Parijs mobilises in his account of linguistic justice, placing it at odds with the complex and heterogeneous linguistic realities that are observable empirically (Wright 2015). In the next section, I elaborate further on the stratification of English, connecting the relevance of this argument with the specific context of higher education.

3 English*es* in higher education

In his critique to Van Parijs' theory of linguistic justice, May (2015) delves deeper into the problematic consequences of seeing English in a monolithic way, detached from social, economic, political, and cultural realities. Indeed, not recognising the inequalities of access to and distribution of resources (both symbolic and material ones) either at a macro (between nations) or micro level (between speakers) and understanding language as a mere artifact may do little to change such conditions of inequality. As evidence for this, May cites the fact that many of the poorest countries in Africa have declared English (and/or French) as an official language, without this having had any tangible effect in these countries' economic development (May 2015: 141). In addition, another problematic consequence of the monolithic view of English is the de-contextualised analysis that emerges out of this view, which runs a serious risk of erasing any inequalities and power relations that run through specific uses of particular kinds of English in concrete social contexts. At this point, May cites Van Parijs when he writes that "[English] enables not only the rich and the powerful, but also the poor and the powerless to communicate, debate, network, cooperate, lobby and demonstrate effectively across borders" (Van Parijs 2011: 31, as cited in May 2015: 142). To May, the questions we need to ask here are: on whose terms and to do what, can the poor and powerless do all these things in English? Following Blommaert (e.g., 2010), May argues in favour of analyses of English in context, where meaning-making processes may be observable and issues of inequality more directly scrutinised (for an example of an analysis of this type, with a linguistic justice framework, see Codó and Riera-Gil 2022).

Higher education is no exception to a multi-faceted context of English, where the language coexists in tension and harmony at the same time both with other languages and with its own internal and complex diversity (of varieties, accents, registers, etc.) (Kuteeva 2023). In such a diversified context, differences have the potential to index hierarchies and inequalities between speakers. Although translingual practices (Canagarajah 2013) are commonplace in higher education as in very many other multilingual settings (Cogo 2012), speakers continue to award more value to what they perceive are the forms of communication that have more currency. This can be the case in a range of contexts and situations, from researchers orienting towards field-specific forms of "standard" written English (Hynninen and Kuteeva 2013) to students in international mobility programmes who value "native" speaker varieties more positively even in the context of diversity that they contribute to and belong to (Fiedler 2022). After all, language is a powerful resource that may work as a double-edged sword, either helping create and reinforce hierarchies, or reducing them. Back to teaching practices in EMI, teachers who deliver content through the

medium of English have been typically thought as non-language teachers (Airey 2012); but in CLIL-*ised* EMI contexts (Moncada-Comas and Block 2019), where students' proficiency in English might be considered below average, EMI teachers may certainly present themselves as language teachers, even if implicitly, to reinforce their position of power in the classroom context (Block and Mancho-Barés 2021).

One very clear example of the hierarchical potential of English in higher education comes from the role that accent plays in determining ideal English speaker types, thus creating an imagined order in which these ideal types come at the top, followed by other forms of talk and other accents. Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen (2020) illustrate exactly this with a discussion of Accent Reduction/Accent Modification (AR/AM) courses at universities in the United States. To Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen, the very existence of these courses is paradoxical, if not straightforward problematic, because these courses are advertised with the goal of increasing students' intelligibility, thus connecting the course with matters of proficiency and fluency. However, students already enrolled at university degree programmes will typically have had their level of English formally checked (via TOEFL or IELTS tests, for example). Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen's analysis of 26 AR/AM course programmes reveals the deeper layer language ideological underpinnings of such courses; the authors conclude that what these courses in the end point at is the institutionalising gaze of varieties of English that are typically labelled as "international", "foreign", or "non-native", a gaze that helps reproduce the "white listening subject position" (Flores and Rosa 2015) that privileges some forms of English (associated with white normativity) and downgrades others (associated with racialised varieties).

We will return to the listening subject position in the next and final section below. To round off the argument presented here, it is chiefly important, for an account of linguistic justice in EMI, to not forget the language ideological workings of accentism and native-speakerism that are at the base of very many higher education systems. This is an empirical problem which an egalitarian approach to linguistic justice along the line of Van Parijs seems to find difficult to overcome. There are traces of accentist problems and native-speakerist ideologies both in Anglophone and non-Anglophone contexts (see Ramjattan 2023, for a study of international teaching assistant's accent work in Ontario, Canada; and Rivers and Ross 2013, for an analysis of the nexus between native-speakerism and race in English as a Foreign Language education in Japan). Importantly, accentism and native-speakerism are not simply empirical challenges to a theory of linguistic justice, but they also have real-life consequences for speakers on the ground. Dovchin's (2020) study of the perceptions of international students' forms of English reveals the psychological damages that these students may experience in what Dovchin terms "ethnic accent

bullying" and "linguistic stereotyping", which are concrete instantiations of the overarching phenomenon of "linguistic racism".

It is true that most of the work on linguistic racism in connection to English comes from Kachru's Inner Circle countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (e.g., Baker-Bell 2020; Cushing and Snell 2023). This is perhaps not all that surprising, given that English is the dominant and main societal language in these countries and as such, the dominant linguistic group may exert covert or overt forms of linguistic racism towards subaltern populations such as migrants or racialised minorities, who will normally be bi-/multilingual speakers of non-dominant languages (May 2023). Internationalising academic settings, where English is used as a medium of communication can present significantly different characteristics compared to English L1 contexts, but that does not preclude the possibility that the language may be infused with hierarchising power and difference making. The study by Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen (2020) referred to above illustrates precisely this point, that at least in the context of the US native-speaker varieties seem to carry more intrinsic value and prestige (see also Fiedler 2022 for similar conclusions from the German context). Certainly, there is plenty of other research that would prove that native-speaker norms have little bearing in internationalising academic settings, and that communicative effectiveness is more central in actual situated language practices (e.g., Björkman 2013), but if we agree that the hierarchising power of English remains in principle, the question, to which I turn next, is whether there can be a way to address this power in abstract, generalising terms.

4 The promise of English and the politics of listening

Conceived in abstract terms, EMI and the spread of English that it entails can potentially be considered as a democratising agent, allowing more people more access to the key resource that English represents. However, given the accentism and native-speakerist challenges, together with its typical framing against a background of socio-economic competition (Piller and Cho 2013), it may be possible to argue that there are some structural conditions that prevent EMI from fully realising this ideal goal of becoming a catalyst for more English to empower more people. To counter the challenges of accentism and native-speakerism, I would argue that one first necessary step is to shift the focus from speaking to listening and to see how listening subject positions (Flores and Rosa 2015) and regimes of uptake (Scudder 2020b) are enacted to help construct both privileged and marginalised ways of speaking and

communicating (in English). Inspired by recent sociolinguistic work on ethics and hospitality (e.g., Deumert and Mabandla 2017; Karrebæk and Ghandchi 2017; Vigouroux 2019), particularly on Holmes' (2022) doctoral work in the context of internationalising Swedish academia, I want to suggest that an ethics of responsibility (Levinas 1981) and political hospitality (Derrida 2002) can yield important insights in the discussion of linguistic justice in English as a lingua franca, including those that are typical of EMI settings.

To Levinas, "ethics comes first" (Holmes 2023: 45), which means that our ontological sense of being in the world is first and foremost derived from an ethical responsibility in the encounter with "the other". It is in the interaction with the other and the responsibility towards their otherness that the I comes to be. In encountering the otherness in the other, the I is challenged by the experience of the other, and that challenge then leads to the question of how to welcome and coexist with the other without corrupting their otherness. Put differently, there is an irreducible need to negotiate and find limits to accommodate the other's diversity, including their accents and forms of talk. In linguistic terms more generally, however, unconditional hospitality is a near utopia (Holmes 2023: 45), as it would entail always speaking the language of the other, in their own terms, and in all contexts. But fully conditional hospitality is also chimeric. As Derrida writes: "must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 135, as cited in Holmes 2023: 45).

Whether fully conditional or radically unconditional, an ethics of hospitality prompts us to ask about the contextual determinants that shape the interaction between the I and the other. In questioning this, we are moving from an ethics of responsibility towards an ethico-political hospitality, and by focusing on the conditions that impinge on the relational interaction, we are turning our gaze on the political, that is to say: on the discursive, ideological, and material resources available to each party at the interaction. As Holmes writes: "Such a passage from ethics to politics would necessarily entail moving from responsibility towards the other to a questioning of the given context and its conditions" (Holmes 2023: 45). In establishing contextual conditions, the listening subject position plays a key role to determine which resources (both symbolic and material) are valuable and appropriate in the interactional exchange (Flores and Rosa 2015). Understood this way, listening is clearly a social and political act (Bassel 2017), and in this ethical-political shift, the irreducibly contextual boundedness of every interaction begs for a questioning of the roles of "host" and "guest", between the I and the other. Who is more at home and who is more outside their comfort zone is less predetermined and fixed than we might be able to anticipate. Indeed, Holmes (2023) finds that the position of administrative staff in internationalising academic environments may not be as

permanently stable hosts and, likewise, the position of international academic staff may not be immutable as guests. "Host" and "guest" are positions that interactants such as these may exchange as they accommodate to the other or compel them to given interactional expectations; in other words, who gets to accommodate and who is accommodated by whom, in the interactional moment, is not permanently fixed and pre-established.

In EMI situations and English as a lingua franca contexts more generally, interactants (whether local and international students and teachers/researchers, or administrative staff) are in principle and by definition meeting one another on neutral grounds. But is this always so? As noted above, there are always matters of accent bias, of ideological and attitudinal nature, that may be present in any interactional context, including lingua franca ones. In addition, every interaction entails tension between cooperation and competition. English as a lingua franca research has traditionally focused more on the cooperation-oriented side of the continuum such as academic settings, where interactants tend to share a common communicative goal and where, as noted above, effectiveness, rather than nativeness, seems to be a more important factor in the speech event. ELF researchers have been aware of this bias (Seidlhofer 2017) and have indicated the scarcer availability of ELF studies where participants may be less inclined to cooperate to reach a common communicative goal.

To continue with the theoretical argumentation, the more cooperation-oriented interaction, the more ethically responsible and hospitable the outcome can be (where accent and ideological biases can be more at bay); and vice-versa, the more competitive based the interaction, the more challenging it will be for an ethically responsible and hospitable result to come out of it (where accent and ideological biases can more easily emerge). Bounded within academia, EMI interactions may be more prone to be cooperative than competitive, but the theoretical premise I wish to advance here is that it is important to keep in mind constantly the potential hierarchising power of English in all kinds of situations and scenarios, also in prototypically lingua-franca ones. So, at a very basic level, an ethico-political hospitality asks us to permanently question our role and our position as interacting parties, to see the I in the other and the other in the I, and to understand how we may exchange roles between host and guest, sometimes even within unchanged situational contexts. This is the value of a Levinasian approach to linguistic encounters in higher education and its potential translation to linguistic justice in EMI (see also Holmes 2023).

This constant questioning is, of course, easier said than done. If we concede that listening is political (Bassel 2017), then who gets to listen to whom (and with what communicative expectations), or who is more often put in a listening position than in a speaking one, is also not a straightforward question, and there is plenty of power

games involved in it; because, as Mary Scudder puts it, "not listening is itself an exercise of power. Perhaps, then, our aim should be to encourage dominant segments of society to listen, while empowering others to tune out certain voices" (Scudder 2020b: 517). The latter seems a particularly important, but also challenging point, as illustrated by Khan and Gallego-Balsà's (2021) study of a group of racialised Catalans at a university in Catalonia. Indeed, it took plenty of concerted effort and determination, together with strategic collaboration efforts between the researchers and the participants, to raise awareness among the group both of their own voice and of getting them heard by others around, including others of similar racialised trajectories. So, listening to and including peripheral voices in EMI contexts seems to be a crucial point for EMI to be a truly democratising and liberating educational force, but one that might be particularly hard to come to terms with; after all, EMI programmes and the communicative contexts that revolve around them may not restructure educational systems and their existing patterns of inequality, but they may in fact add to (and perhaps help reinforce) those very inequalities.

Relatedly, another question that is worth examining is whether all voices are equally deserving of being heard and awarded uptake, including those with messages that may be harmful for democratic deliberation (Scudder 2020b); in linguistic terms, this question may be applicable to voices that are typically construed as more authoritative just because they sound more like what is stereotypically expected for a given communicative context. This is an important argument which, due to space limitations, I cannot develop in as much length as I would need to, but in line with Scudder, I would argue that it is important to allow all voices to be heard, but to do that critically in order to see how privilege emerges, even if this may take a toll on the unprivileged and marginalised who may be in fact the addressees of hate speech and other derogatory forms of address. That is why, in linguistic terms and in connection to English as a lingua franca more particularly, it seems more important to work towards fighting for intra-linguistic justice (De Schutter 2018) that is based on speakers' claims to their rightful use of English in whichever variant, accent, or form they speak it, rather than focusing on the inter-linguistic parity of esteem that Van Parijs (2011) proposes via a strong application of the principle of territoriality, based on nation-state single language official regimes. Indeed, if marginalised voices need to be heard as authoritatively as dominant ones in educational contexts such as EMI, and if it is their accented nature that may raise biased readings against them, then it is important to address how these readings are constructed by listening subject positions. This can be done by emphasising the equal worth of all forms of accents of English, and by highlighting the fact that it is the listening subject position that constructs them as unequal.

In all, it seems important to not lose sight of the contextual parameters that determine in great part the interactional positions that the different participants in a

communicative exchange may take. In connection to EMI in particular, a focus on the context leads us to question the very ethical and political limits of every institutional interaction. As Luke Holmes' study of Swedish academia shows (Holmes 2023), how far should or can university administrators go, in terms of language adaptation (e.g., using English with internationally mobile scholars) when an institution is politically committed to the use and promotion of the national language of the country where it is based? At the same time, how many resources are there available both for administrators to accommodate to their interlocutors (in English), and for internationally mobile scholars to learn the local national language in their effort to integrate into the institutional framework? These questions are particularly thorny in a context of lack of resources (of time and personnel), and where discourses of the conflictive coexistence of English and the national language are aired every so often in the public political agenda. Admittedly, these questions are perhaps more relevant in contexts such as the Nordic European countries, where the politicization of language matters in higher education has been in place for several years now (Bolton and Kuteeva 2012). However, the political-economic nature of language conflicts in higher education is certainly not exclusive to the Nordic countries and may in fact be spilling over to other countries (see references above about Italy and the Netherlands). So, the borderline between linguistic justice and linguistic domination is definitely a very grey and fuzzy area (Soler and Rozenvalde 2024), especially in lingua franca contexts with a significant degree of international mobility that are characteristic of EMI settings. True, the potential for difference-making power in and through language might be less palpable than in higher-stakes communicative settings, but that power does not just magically disappear.

In summary, for English to be a true agent of linguistic justice in EMI contexts, I would argue that we need to start from the premise that we have an ethical responsibility towards the other, and that accommodation needs to take place against the background of active reflection on the interactional context and its politically situated nature, with a critical eye on the resources and the uneven interactional positions that are at play and available for each party in the communicative event. The focus, therefore, needs to be more squarely put on how we listen to one another, perhaps more than on how we speak (if we are to use this or that variety, or stick to these or those norms), and less energy needs to go into what actions institutions can take in order to compensate for the primal position of English as a lingua franca.

In light of all the above, linguistic ethnography seems particularly well situated to open up research avenues for further investigating the role and values of English as a lingua franca in linguistic justice debates (Codó and Riera-Gil 2022). In fact, in their very recent book, Blackledge and Creese (2023) adopt an ethical approach to the analysis of everyday language acts as a way of expanding the remit of linguistic ethnographic research. Indeed, their writing represents a radically different way of

approaching linguistic ethnographic academic writing, adopting a more explicitly artistic and creative writing angle in order to transform research participants from others one writes about to others one feels compelled by, and in this way turn otherness into innovation, sense of unity and togetherness. More work of this kind is needed, both of an empirical and normative nature, as it can be tremendously helpful to push the borders and expand the boundaries of linguistic justice debates in general, and as they apply to the use of English as a lingua franca today, including EMI contexts.

5 Conclusions

In this article, I have analysed English-medium instruction from a linguistic justice perspective, and I have offered a theoretical argument to address the overarching question of whether EMI may be defended as a positive and valuable phenomenon, beyond purely economic and competitive reasons. Inspired by Van Parijs' (2022) conceptualisation of EMI as a civilising structural element that can allow more access to English to more people for broader global engagement on crucial societal challenges, it is undeniable that potential exists, and therefore, EMI can be a potent motor behind the enhancement of a global demos. At the same time, I have also noted some of the crucial limitations of understanding EMI in such abstract terms, including limitations that pertain to the very theoretical framework of linguistic justice developed earlier by Van Parijs (2011). Indeed, an excessive egalitarian view of language seems challenged by the empirically observable realities, characterised by social and economic stratification, a stratification in which language practices and ideologies play a crucial role. Thus, matters of accent bias and of linguistic attitudinal nature should be addressed by any linguistic justice framework, whether normative, empirical, or a mix of both. To tackle these matters, I have proposed a shift of focus from speaking subject positions to listening subject positions (Flores and Rosa 2015) as a way to continue reminding ourselves that it is in the ear of the listener and of those who have the power to (not) listen where prejudiced views of certain voices become alive. Interactional sociolinguistics of an ethnographic kind (*à la* Gumperz) has for a long time been aware of the indexicality of language, of how social variables are indexed and brought to life and recreated in interactional encounters, so looking at EMI through this kind of lenses seems crucial to check how injustices may be co-created and sedimented in what is in principle (but not necessarily) a neutral, cooperative-oriented meeting grounds. If EMI is to fulfil its democratising potential, then a focus on the politics of listening and on the construction of different accents and forms of talk in English is imperative. There clearly is plenty of work awaiting to be done in that respect, empirically, theoretically, and from an activist perspective.

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