ZEE Centre for Renewable Energy

"I think everybody has this thing in mind, this flexibility to accept less than perfect"

An Ethnographic Case Study of the *Renewable Energy Management* Master's Programme at the University of Freiburg

Susanne Gundermann

In 2010, the Centre for Renewable Energy initiated its work on a series of working papers. The primary objective of these papers is to stimulate discussion in the field of sustainable energy in Europe as well as on a global scale. An accurate citation of the findings, interpretations and opinions included in these papers must be ensured. They reflect the work of their authors and do not reflect the opinions of the Centre for Renewable Energy or the University of Freiburg. We welcome feedback from readers and request that they convey their comments and criticisms directly to the authors.

Author(s):

Susanne Gundermann (M.A.)

English Department
University of Freiburg
E-mail: susanne.gundermann@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de
Tel.: +49 (0) 761 – 203-3312

Susanne Gundermann holds an M.A. degree in English (major), Spanish and German Philologies and is currently working on her PhD research project assessing the implementation of English-medium instruction and the resulting linguistic and intercultural challenges in the Renewable Energy Management (REM) Master's programme at the Centre for Renewable Energy (ZEE). In addition to her work as research and teaching assistant at the English Department, she will design and teach an intercultural introductory course for international Master's students at the Language Teaching Centre (SLI) in October 2011, based on her preliminary research findings as presented in this paper.

Abstract

This work-in-progress report provides a description and preliminary results of an ongoing PhD research project[1] on the use of English-medium-instruction (EMI) in the international *Renewable Energy Management* (REM) Master's programme at the University of Freiburg. The focus lies on students' experiences with EMI based on field observations, questionnaire surveys and individual interviews. Preliminary analyses show that the use of English in REM is working out well on the surface since initial accent comprehensibility problems tend to disappear in the long run. However, the cultural context of REM (i.e. the German linguacultural environment) plays an important role and linguistic challenges on the surface are often due to intercultural differences among students and lecturers. The paper concludes with a plea for introductory courses addressing the specific linguistic and intercultural challenges of studying in an EMI programme. A pilot introductory course for international Master's students, based on the preliminary research findings of this PhD project as presented in this report, will be designed and taught by the author in October (for further information, see http://www.sli.uni-freiburg.de/studienvorbereitung/studying_in_germany).

---

[1] Working title "English as a lingua franca: Modelling the role of the native speaker", supervised by Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Christian Mair, English Department, University of Freiburg.

1. Introduction

The role of the English language in Higher Education has gained in importance as English-medium-of-instruction (EMI) programmes have sprung up like mushrooms in Germany recent years. Currently (April 2011), there are 412 English-taught Master's programmes offered in Germany, among which 11 are based at the University of Freiburg (cf. DAAD). Yet, scientific evaluation of the use of EMI in Higher Education is still scarce in German speaking countries. While in Scandinavia there are three well-established research centres assessing the implementation of English-based instruction in Higher Education (cf. CIP (Copenhagen/DK), CALPIU (Roskilde/DK), ELFA project (Helsinki/FIN)), only a small number of individual studies (e.g. Soltau 2007, Intemann 2007) and practice reports (e.g. Clear 2005, Wilkinson 2008) have been carried out at German universities. Large-scale research projects in central Europe are still in their infancy (e.g. MuMiS (Siegen, Kassel, Hamburg/D); EMI at ZHAW (Zurich/CH)).

With my PhD project, I intend to contribute to this new research area by pursuing two main aims: From a theoretical point of view, I will discuss the role of English in Higher Education and the applicability of the 'native speaker' concept and 'native speaker' norms by assessing students' and lecturers' attitudes towards native and non-native English as used in an international Master's programme. From an applied perspective, I will identify the linguistic and intercultural challenges faced by English-taught study programmes with the aim of providing practical recommendations for improvement. For the purpose of this paper, I will leave the theoretical discussion aside and will focus on the following practical questions:

→ What happens when international students from all over the world come together at the University of Freiburg to study a Master's programme entirely taught in English?

→ How do English-medium classroom interaction and communication among students and lecturers work?

→ What are students' and lecturers' experiences with the "international classroom" and to what extent do the German-speaking environment and the German host culture have an impact on the use of English in such a programme?

In brief: What are the linguistic and intercultural challenges of English- medium instruction?

2. Data and Methods

In order to assess the linguistic and intercultural challenges of EMI, I conduct a longitudinal ethnographic case study of the *Renewable Energy Management* (REM) Master's programme at the University of Freiburg. Ethnography here entails a detailed description of the setting and the people involved, not only focusing on language use, but also on other characteristics of this particular "community of practice" (Wenger 1999). In order to get a holistic view of the implementation of EMI in REM, I employed a mixed-methods approach, including participatory observation[2], questionnaires, individual interviews, audio recordings, a listening experiment and a corpus compilation of written material. This mixed-methods approach provides me with an extensive data base available for analysis: At the current stage, it consists of two log books with fieldnotes from approx. 80 hours spent at the REM programme, 126 student questionnaires, 59 individual interviews with REM students and lecturers of ~ 40 hours duration, many hours of recorded classroom interaction and a large corpus containing more than 250 written documents (students' essays and other study materials) and more than 3000 emails. The

---

[2] I prefer to use the term *participatory observation* instead of *participant observation* since I was taking part in various classroom activities and excursions as well as in private gatherings among students.

ethnographic data have been gathered over a period of 26 months (Nov 2008 – Dec 2010). The participants in my study are the first two generations of REM students (64 students in total) and a range of REM lecturers (including professors, lecturers and doctoral students working as teaching assistants). All data used in this case study is anonymised, i.e. all personal names are replaced by pseudonyms. Since an analysis of all data would go far beyond the scope of this paper, I will restrict myself to a selection of questionnaire and interview data from REM students only[3].

3. Preliminary Results

3.1 What happens when international students from all over the world come together at the University of Freiburg to study a Master's programme entirely taught in English?

When REM was launched in October 2008, 26 students started their studies as the first generation of REM. In the following year, REM attracted more than 150 students of which 38 were accepted. These 64 REM students from the first and second generation come from 27 different countries. The following map provides an overview of the students' countries of origin with each black dot representing one student.

Fig. 01: World map with REM students' countries of origin

---

[3] To enhance readability, interview quotes have been slightly modified if necessary (e.g. omission of hesitation markers such as "uh" or "uhm"). Original data in German has been translated into English by the author.

The linguistic diversity among students is huge as they speak 24 different first languages. Although some students are bi- or trilingual and many of them are also competent in *linguae francae* other than English (German, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Hindi), English is the only language spoken by all of them. Thus, the use of English as *lingua franca* among students and the students' choice of an EMI programme are primarily extrinsically motivated.
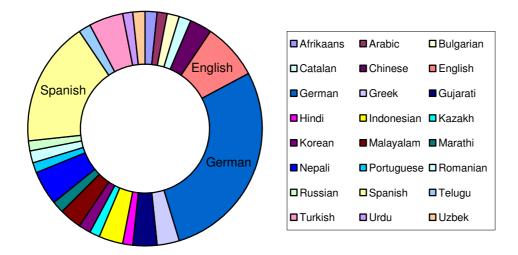

☐ Afrikaans	■ Arabic	☐ Bulgarian
☐ Catalan	■ Chinese	■ English
■ German	☐ Greek	■ Gujarati
■ Hindi	☐ Indonesian	■ Kazakh
■ Korean	■ Malayalam	■ Marathi
■ Nepali	☐ Portuguese	☐ Romanian
☐ Russian	☐ Spanish	☐ Telugu
☐ Turkish	☐ Urdu	☐ Uzbek

Fig. 02: Distribution of REM students' first languages[4]

REM students are required to provide evidence of their language competence in English when applying for the programme, either by a TOEFL score of 100 points (internet-based) or IELTS band 7.0. These scores are equivalent to the language requirements for (similar) post-graduate programmes at world-renowned universities such as Oxford, Cambridge or Stanford[5]. European universities with similar EMI programmes on renewable energies tend to require lower scores (e.g. Jyväskylä: TOEFL 92, IELTS 6.5; Newcastle: TOEFL 90 pts., IELTS 6.5,; Nottingham: TOEFL

---

[4] Fig. 02 only displays first languages as claimed by students. Bilingualism is not taken into account here.
[5] For web links to these universities, see references (section 5).

88, IELTS 6.5; Flensburg: TOEFL 80 pts., IELTS 6.0)[6]. REM students thus have had to master a rather demanding formal language barrier before starting their studies in Freiburg and it is thus not surprising that 71% of REM students judge their English language skills as good or excellent. When asked whether their English had changed over the course of their first REM semester, the majority claim to have noticed improvement, either in terms of fluency and listening comprehension (e.g. Martin: "[…] more fluently and I am getting used to hear many different accents") or in terms of performance (e.g. Kosimo: "[…] it has improved. I gained confidence and [it] is becoming easier with [the] time to express complicated ideas").

However, many students feel that native speakers of English have advantages in studying REM, on the competence as well as on the performance level (Siegfried: "[T]hey can feel more safe in presentations and have advantages in reading literature (faster."). Only a small number of students believe that all students have equal chances in REM (Donald: "[A]ll students here can speak English really well. So this doesn't give the native speakers any edge over other students. And all the students are treated the same"). For some, the fact that REM lecturers are non-native speakers of English presents a further argument for equality among native and non-native speaker students:

> [T]hey [= native speakers; SG] might have a slight advantage at understanding the concepts presented on lecture or "big" words, but [it] is still not that easy for them because the lecturers are non-native speakers of English. (Andrés)

Even though native speakers of English may have advantages in reading, writing and presenting in English, non-native speaker students do not perceive themselves as strongly disadvantaged since their English skills are more than sufficient for studying an EMI programme. The demanding language requirements for

---

[6] For web links to these universities, see references (section 5)

application to the REM programme theoretically ensure a high degree of language competence (though not fulfilled by all participants, as some students complained) and we could thus assume that interaction in English in the REM programme is not characterized by any linguistic difficulties.

3.2 How do English-medium classroom interaction and communication among students and lecturers work?

Seemingly, interaction among students is working out well as 77% judge the communication in English among students as good or excellent. Student-student interaction works best when the participants are familiar with each other's accent (either because they share the same first language accent or because they are used to hearing that particular accent) and when both speak clearly, slowly and loud enough (results of questionnaire survey, question about easiness of comprehension). Miscommunication may thus arise when the participants in a conversation are not familiar with each other's accent and/or when a participant speaks with an unclear articulation, too fast and not loud enough. At the beginning of the first REM semester, when the students do not know each other very well yet, the abundance of different accents may cause problems in mutually understanding each other (Bernd: "[…] it is also tiring to concentrate and you probably don't grasp as much as you would otherwise."). A questionnaire survey among all students has shown that there is a correlation between the students provenance and accent comprehensibility: the farther a speaker's country of origin, the higher the probability of perceived accent incomprehensibility – a rather obvious conclusion since accent comprehensibility is closely linked to accent familiarity. In the individual interviews, many students claim to have had difficulties in understanding their classmates at the beginning of their REM studies. Yet, time seems to have been a great healer in

this respect and "[a]fter some time, you actually get used to the different accents and then it works out well" (Kerstin). After all, as some students point out, language use is not the central focus of REM, but just a "side-effect" (Miriam), since REM is not a philological programme:

> And you are not studying language here, you are studying renewable energies, I mean. The idea is not how every person speaks here, like how English is delivered here. The idea is like to get the degree Master of Science. (Bulat)

Nonetheless, to obtain their Master's degree, students have to follow English-medium lectures that are almost exclusively taught by native speakers of German, for whom English is a foreign language. With very few exceptions, REM lecturers are almost exclusively native speakers of German. When REM students' were asked to judge their lecturers' English, 81% think that the majority of their lecturers have good or even excellent English skills. However, some stated their disappointment as they "would have expected […] a little bit more language proficiency" (Manel). One of the questionnaire surveys revealed that lecturers are easy to understand if they do not have a strong German accent and speak clearly, slowly, loud enough and with an adequate intonation (i.e. by using different intonation patterns for statements and questions). One REM lecturer's English was mentioned by the vast majority of students as best practice example since apparently all of the above mentioned features inhere in his way of speaking English. Some students also mentioned that the way of explaining and interactive teaching methods make his English easy to follow. I also asked the students to explain which lecturers they found hard to understand and give reasons for their choice. The prevailing assumption is that a lecturer is particularly hard to understand if he or she has a noticeable German accent, uses inadequate intonation patterns (i.e. by using a high-rise intonation pattern for both questions and statements) and tends to repeat words and phrases due to a lack of vocabulary resources in

English.

The lecturers' non-native accents in English may in some cases just be perceived as disturbing for aesthetic reasons, but in a number of cases students had real difficulties in following their lecturers' English at the beginning of their REM studies. Similar to what the students said about their peers, it also takes them time to get used to unfamiliar lecturers' accents. Those who are not used to the typical features of German-accented English such as the persistent pronunciation of [θ] or [ð] (commonly known as "th-sound(s)") as [s] or [z] (Gisa: "They 'sink' about many 'sings'.") may have difficulties in grasping the lecturer's message as can be seen in the following interview extract where a student describes accent comprehension difficulties during a lecture:

> He [= the lecturer; SG] was saying one particular, like, the word 'another' and he pronounced it completely different. He was saying 'anozer', 'anozer', like... So, the first two times I heard... I associated it with NASA, like, N A S A. But then I found it not relating and then immediately was looking forward to hear the same word again from him and then I understood the sound, I understood that it's 'another' and not... This is one example I remember very clearly. Yeah, this was... but otherwise, if you listen carefully I think, even if it's very bad I think you can still understand it. (Pramod)

From a linguistic point of view, it could be very helpful for students to train their accent comprehension skills prior to the beginning of the first semester. Ideally, this training is embedded in a general preparatory course for international students in EMI programmes and enables them to systematically recognize distinctive non-native accent features.

Some students feel that some of their lecturers' limited lexical competence in English leads to oversimplification and reduction of information in the lectures:

> [T]hey cannot express especially complex thoughts. It is impossible for some of them. And this reduces the density of information and the lecture loses substance. This is a pity because this somehow makes me nervous, when I feel that I am

not learning anything from them. (Finn)

On the other hand, advanced skills in English are not necessarily linked to good teaching skills, as one student explained:

> A lecturer is not necessarily a good lecturer, if he speaks English very well. We had lecturers whose English skills were rather deficient, or maybe not deficient, but rather pathetic, but eventually you thought: Yeah, he really made me grasp the idea, maybe it took him more time to get there, but you got it. He uses a simple and clear sentence structure and that helps getting the idea across. And there are other lecturers whose English is actually better, but they don't get their idea across, where you eventually think you haven't learnt anything from them. (Silvan)

Thus, if a competent speaker does not accommodate towards his or her audience, he may as well be considered incomprehensible. The easiest strategy to avoid this problem is to "[…] keep in mind that it is not the point to build complex sentence structures" (Silvan) and to rather use a simple, straightforward syntax in the classroom.

Although there is room for improvement with regard to the lecturers' English skills and even though a number of students fear that listening to their lecturers' English might downgrade their own English skills, there are also students who appreciate their lecturers' imperfect English. Lecturers who "don't feel like they are perfect in English" seemingly make students feel more confident about their own English (Daniela), especially if the students perceive their own English as imperfect too, in comparison with their classmates. Given that REM is not embedded in an English-speaking environment, it seems only natural that the REM lecturers' English language competence is variable, as one student explains, and most REM students are principally well aware and tolerant of this variation:

> There's so many different lecturers. They all have different levels of English. Some are good, some are not that good ((laughs)) And of course we have to keep in mind this is not an English-speaking country, so you would have, you know, different levels mostly. So I think everybody has this thing in mind, this flexibility to accept less than perfect. (Dhiraj)

So far, we have seen that interaction in English in REM – or more precisely: understanding each other's English - is generally working out well, although immediate comprehension problems, mainly in the areas of phonology and syntax, are common at the beginning of the programme. Yet, does it make sense to look at language use in isolation, i.e. disregarding the linguacultural environment in which a language is being used? The following subchapter will focus on the role and impact of German language and culture on REM.

3.3 What are students' and lecturers' experiences with the "international classroom" and to what extent do the German-speaking environment and the German host culture have an impact on the use of English in such a programme?

As already mentioned at the beginning of section 3, REM is by definition an international Master's programme and attracts post-graduate students from virtually all over the world. Regarding REM students' experience with the internationality of the student body, their evaluations are positive without exception. The international orientation of the programme is considered a valuable preparation "for work and life outside of the bubble of university" (Joy) and even seen as an end in itself:

> I'm not completely satisfied with the programme […] [b]ut I would most likely go this way again because the group of people that came together here is teaching me different things due to the fact that it's so international and open. (Miriam)

The internationality of REM is thus seen in a very positive light and does not seem to cause difficulties other than minor misunderstandings among students on a personal level. However, despite REM being an international Master's programme, it is situated at a German university and there seems to be a covert,

but strong bias towards German cultural and language norms, which will be examined in the following.

Prospective REM students find the information on the REM web page that they do not need German language skills for studying REM, but "a little German" would facilitate their integration in Freiburg:

***Frequently Asked Questions*:**

[…]

2. Do I need German language skills for the M.Sc. REM? *No, the course is held completely in English. For your life in Germany it is advisable to speak a little German.*

[…]

Fig. 03: Extract from Frequently Asked Questions on REM website

According to a survey on REM students' sociolinguistic backgrounds, roughly half of the first and second generation REM students consider their German language skills as fairly good or fluent or even speak German as their first language. The other half consists of 22 % with average or basic German skills and 30 % with only passive or no knowledge of German, including those students who were attending a beginner's course at the time when the survey was conducted.
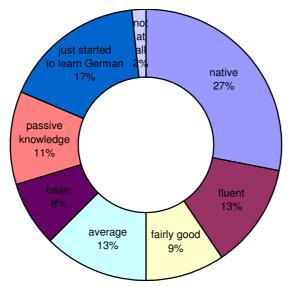
Fig. 04: Distribution of REM students' German language competence

Relying on the information from the official REM website, we could assume that all students have equal chances in studying REM since German language competence is not an official requirement. However, nearly all students commented on the significance of the German language in REM and the perceived advantages for speakers of German (native or advanced non-native speakers): "If you know Deutsch, it will increase your ability to learn, I think, here in Germany" (Ismail). The list of perceived advantages includes access to a wider range of resources (Cai: "Some of the resources (i.e. information on jobs, interesting websites on the topics) are only in German.") and access to official information from the University of Freiburg (Dhiraj: "Official university communication (not from ZEE) is German, as are some of the university web pages. This is sometimes inconvenient."). Students who do not have advanced German skills feel especially disadvantaged when looking for an internship placement or wanting to take part in extracurricular activities:

> [German speakers] can take advantage of more opportunities and resources that the University offers that are only in German, like seminars, open lectures, local companies and organizations and events going on at the university. (Andrés)

> Many of the internship and after class educational opportunities presented to us are limited to German speakers. I feel this is a great disadvantage. (Colin)

Yet, the above mentioned areas of German language predominance do not hinder REM students' study achievement in the narrow sense since study materials are normally presented in English and extracurricular events are not part of the REM syllabus. There are, however, situations in the REM classroom where students with little or no German language competence feel excluded and disadvantaged due to the language barrier between them and their lecturers. When students have very specific questions, they often ask their lecturer after class in German as they feel that lecturers usually provide more precise answers

when talking in German (Andrés: "[…] if you are competent in German, you can communicate more effectively with the lecturers […]."). Moreover, many students complained that lecturers sometimes show German slides in power point presentations:

> [S]ometimes they allow themselves speaking in German in their lectures or having slides in German or speaking with other German students in German . This is a problem for the others I think. That's not a problem for me anymore, I mean, but for the others […]. It's a language barrier for them, it's like a little... not that pleasant story, yeah. (Gavrail)

A further area where German language skills seem to be of vital importance is the indirect use of German by REM lecturers. Some lecturers frequently translate words and expressions literally from German into English, due to insecurity or limited lexical resources. Particular problems in this regard are lexical "false friends" or a tendency to "relexify" German clause patterns and thereby falling short of producing comprehensible idiomatic English:

> I remember there were a few lecturers who were not actually very well in English, I mean, they could speak English, but to teach in an international environment you need a bit of more English knowledge that's... They were getting nervous and 'Uh, I don't know how to say this in, uh, in English' and they were sometimes making the whole sentence directly translated from German which sometimes does not make sense. (Demet)

Several students reported on problems in following these lectures due to inappropriately literal translations:

> [S]ometimes the text is like a German-direct[ly]-translated-to-English type of thing, so it's not really easy to understand. So I thought 'Oh, maybe am I the only person who doesn't really understand?' So I asked the [English] native speakers […]. They also said like 'We don't get that'. (Eun Hee)

The following quote stresses a practical problem resulting from inappropriate translations: if the students want to go deeper into the matter and find more information on a topic, they need to know the proper key words in English, otherwise an online search-

engine will not yield any useful results:

> They were using some terms in English, it was in English, but if you search in the Internet, you cannot find anything about that. So I think it's like German, [a] German word, but they have translated to English using any tools, like any Google translator or anything, […]. So we had difficulties in finding these terms because they have translated from German to English. (Ismail)

REM lecturers should thus keep in mind that not all of their students know German and could limit students' potential difficulties in following their lectures by commenting to the students that they are not sure about the appropriateness of certain terms in English or by explicitly labelling ad-hoc translations from German into English as such (given the lecturer's self-awareness of their translation strategy).

In the title of this subchapter I also asked to what extent the German host culture has an impact on REM. Many REM students believe that native speakers of German who are familiar with the German culture are privileged in studying REM as they are assumed to understand the cultural context of lectures and lecturers better and also know how the German university system works. Those who were studying in Germany for the first time reported several difficulties during their first semester. For example, when the first written exam was due, the lecturers' expectations (e.g. answers should be given in bullet points instead of providing lengthy explanations) and the time constraints were not entirely clear for everyone and led to disappointment (Shashank: "[T]hey should have this, yeah, on the first day that the exam is like this and you have to write within a short period of time. So, this would definitely help the students.").

In addition, during my field observations I noticed that several students felt uncomfortable when giving a presentation in the first semester. In personal interviews, they informed me that it was

actually their first presentation ever in front of a lecturer and their class. The resulting uneasiness is presumably not caused by a perceived imperfectness of their performance in English, but rather by a mere lack of practice and experience. Students who are familiar with the German university system (i.e. those who previously studied in Germany as full or exchange students) usually have little or no difficulties in giving oral presentations, while other students, particularly students from Asia, might feel very challenged. As features of a 'good' presentation are highly culture-specific (e.g. eye-contact with the audience), lecturers would do best to explain these in detail at the beginning of at least the first two modules. One student suggested replacing one of the existing modules by a module on communication skills, which should include practicing oral presentations. Additionally, he suggested encouraging lecturers to provide detailed feedback on language and performance in order to identify areas for improvement, but also mentioned a drawback in his suggestion: "But, at the same time they [= the lecturers; SG] are also in the same situation: Most of the teachers have the same medium presentation level as we have." (Manel). Academic writing and the unacceptability of plagiarism provide a further challenge for some international students, as the following quote shows:

> I remember in the beginning, I had to do a group project, and we didn't know each other very well yet, and at the end we had just put together everything and I was really irritated because I noticed that we expect an entirely different standard here in Germany. And this is… this was so difficult to point that out them [=other students involved in the group project; SG], to tell them, we didn't have much time either, and it was, it is, you just notice that in [country], in [country], in [country], you follow different writing styles and text structures are different, scientific writing is entirely different, you feel. (Maya)

In the REM programme, an entire module is devoted to research skills and includes an extensive introduction to academic writing and how to avoid plagiarism. Although most students did not find

this module very relevant or interesting while attending it, this module is by all accounts very helpful for those unfamiliar with the academic expectations of their lecturers (especially with regard to their Master's theses) and is an indispensable preparation for those wanting to engage in an academic career after completing REM.

Yet, international students may not only have difficulties with specific tasks required by their lecturers, but also in communicating with the lecturers themselves. Many students have already studied in English or used English as a job language and thus have experience in communicating with professors or superiors in English. Since REM is entirely carried out in English, including REM administration, these students would expect to be able to rely on their experiences and communicate with REM lecturers in their habitual way. Nevertheless, their experience is not always helpful as REM is run in a German-speaking environment where German cultural norms are expected. Although English is used as the means of communication, students not acquainted with the German university etiquette may experience difficulties in the beginning. For example, addressing superiors (here: lecturers) requires a higher degree of formality in comparison with English-speaking countries. German professors expect students to address them with their last name and students are generally requested to approach a lecturer's office only during office hours:

> [M]aybe that's a cultural difference because when I was in college, it was more like the American system in which you called the professors by his or her name, and it's rather informal the way you approach them, but with respect of course. And so you have... you feel free to go talk to them. When I really have time, you just come and say: "Ey!" I knock on the doors and say: "Hey, do you have time or you're busy now? Or when can I stop by?" And here in Germany they have these office hours and Öffnungszeiten and also telephone assistants and so, you should come on that time and that… Okay, that's understandable probably because they have to work and other stuff, but I think there's a barrier here between professors and students. (Mario)

Although to my knowledge this "barrier" has not led to interpersonal problems in REM, intercultural differences should be accounted for, if only to reduce students' insecurity in communicating with their lecturers. REM management are doing their best in catering for international students' needs (including special religious requirements such as a praying room or specific diets on excursions) and REM lecturers allegedly always offer an "open ear" (Ferdinand) and are open to feedback from students:

> [I]t's great that the professors interact so many times, even in a month, in a week so, and it's never a thing that you are not heard upon, you always have a chance to tell them, to interact with them, to tell how you feel, so which means there are ample opportunities for you to cope up with the system, maybe understand how it works, so you are never really lost, but, just that, okay, you might lose your rhythm in the first few weeks, but it's not so hard to cope up with it and get back onto the tracks. (Dan)

International REM students are thus likely to "lose [their] rhythm in the first few weeks" but eventually get acquainted with the German university system and its etiquette during the course of their studies and in individual consultations with their lecturers. Once they feel confident to "roam" freely in the German learning culture despite all complications, some eventually even appreciate this experience as character-forming:

> [I]t's a good opportunity for you to learn a new university system, how it functions, and as far as I understand this form of system only makes you more independent and gives you a chance to maintain your individuality. So that adds up to your personality and character, I mean if you can't look at it in a positive way, then I don't know ((laughs)). (Dan)

Although I am not aware of any severe problems, raising intercultural awareness would be a good starting point for improving the integration of international students into a German university. The German-speaking environment and the German culture undoubtedly play an important (albeit covert) role in REM. Lecturers should thus keep in mind that their language use and especially their teaching style are based on cultural norms not all

students are acquainted with and resulting misunderstandings could be reduced by making German linguacultural norms transparent..

4. Outlook

Even though the first generation of REM students has successfully completed the programme and the second generation is close to obtaining the Master's degree, too, many students had to face a number of linguistic and intercultural challenges on the way. Linguistic challenges in REM include the familiarization with the large range of different international accents of English and especially the familiarization with lecturers' non-native accents. Syntactic complexity in speech and phonological peculiarities of their classmates and their lecturers present a further challenge for students in this EMI programme.

While the internationality of the programme is considered an end in itself, there are still several obstacles for international students in REM. These intercultural challenges include above all misleading information about the relevance of German in REM since German language skills do not only allow students to benefit more from their extracurricular activities and study-related resources in German, but also enable them to better understand their lecturers, linguistically (e.g. understanding direct translations from German) as well as culturally (e.g. understanding references to culture-specific common knowledge). Further intercultural challenges include the familiarization with the German university system and learning culture. Examination formats and study techniques may differ significantly from those the students are used to (e.g. time constraints or providing answers in one's own words instead of memorizing) or may even be completely

unfamiliar (e.g. oral presentations, avoiding plagiarism, etc.). Lastly, German linguacultural norms play an important role in the use of English in interaction between lecturers and students. The students' familiarization with the "academic etiquette" at German universities and its transfer into English may provide a further, usually not anticipated difficulty (e.g. how to address a lecturer in conversation or in an e-mail).

In conclusion, we have seen that an assessment of language use among students and lecturers in isolation, i.e. by focussing primarily on (perceived) language competence, would not cover the peculiarity of EMI in REM in its entirety. The English language in REM is not used in a culture-free bell jar, but embedded in a setting influenced by German language und culture, thus the linguistic and intercultural challenges for participants in this EMI programme are intertwined. In consequence, measures to reduce or alleviate the effects of these challenges should focus on both perspectives. Working on the individual linguistic performance in English in the narrow sense, e.g. by improving one's pronunciation or other phonological features of speech or by trying to extend the vocabulary range, merely serves as a starting point on an individual level. Taking into account the impact of (inter)cultural matters on language use, systematic improvement entails above all transparency and raising awareness which should not only be aimed for by individuals (lecturers or students), but also on a general level. For example, the realization of one student's suggestion to encourage lecturers' feedback on students' oral presentations (as mentioned in section 3.3) would be a good idea, but should ideally be combined with (preparatory) training opportunities for students with little experience in giving oral presentations. Similarly, apart from individual efforts in enhancing language skills, linguistic support should be available for those interested in working also on their comprehension skills, e.g. by means of an accent comprehension training.   The list of

suggestions could be continued here at length, but I will limit myself to these examples here and rather make a plea for an introductory course for students enrolled in EMI programmes that addresses all identified linguistic and cultural challenges for international students. Getting to know the German learning culture with its focus on critical thinking is a valuable experience for international students and a proper introduction to the "rules of the game" would help students to benefit most from it:

> This [= introductory course; SG] would be really good because I really like the idea of a international course. This is very rare, this is something so special. And also Germany's education I think it's really good. A lot of people complain about the course but I still think it's way better than my country's education and I have no regret that I came here 'cause I learned so much more. And really teaching you have to think and you have to criticize something. You have to make it better. Not just one way of observing what teachers are saying. So I really think it's [a] good system but some little change will make a big difference. (Eun Hee)

> [M]aybe they should organize […] an interaction seminar, some weeks... Why not two weeks before the class... the semester starts. To explain differences or how's life in Germany in general. And also how's the academic life in the German universities. They should do that. (Mario)

What these two students are asking for is now about to be put into practice: the preliminary results of my research project as presented in this paper will be the basis for the syllabus of a pilot introductory course for international Master's students[7], arranged by the Sprachlehrinstitut (SLI; Language Teaching Centre of the University of Freiburg) and designed and taught by myself. The course will take place from 10 to 14 October 2011, i.e. two weeks before the winter terms starts, and is aimed at international Master's students enrolled in EMI programmes at the University of Freiburg. I am looking forward to teaching this course and seeing whether some of the linguistic and intercultural challenges of EMI

---

[7] For more information on this course, see http://www.sli.uni-freiburg.de/studienvorbereitung/studying in germany (last accessed 18 April 2011)

programmes can be reduced by means of an introductory week. A detailed evaluation will follow. If international students find it helpful in the long run, this course will be offered on a regular basis, thus supporting the University's efforts to not just offer a range of EMI programmes but also to provide customized EMI-specific support.

5. References

Clear, John (2005) "The Problems a German Higher Education Institution Faces when Offering Courses Conducted in English". In: M. Motz (ed.) *Englisch oder Deutsch in Internationalen Studiengängen?* Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 193-202.

Intemann, Frauke (2007) "Nicht-Muttersprachler als Dozenten in der Sprachlehre und in fremdsprachigen Studiengängen". In: M. Oesterreicher and R. Zahn (eds.) *Lingua Franca – Lingua Academica. Mehrsprachigkeit im europäischen Hochschulraum.* Bochum: AKS Verlag, 241-253.

Soltau, Anja (2007) "Englisch als Lingua franca in der wissenschaftlichen Lehre: Sprachliche Charakteristika englischsprachiger Masterprogramme in Deutschland". In: M. Oesterreicher and R. Zahn (eds.) *Lingua Franca – Lingua Academica. Mehrsprachigkeit im europäischen Hochschulraum.* Bochum: AKS Verlag, 320-335.

Wenger, Etienne (1999) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity.* Cambridge: CUP.

Wilkinson, Robert (2008) „English-taught study courses: principles and practice". In: C. Gnutzmann (ed.) *English in Academia. Catalyst or Barrier?* Tübingen: Narr, 169-182.

Web links to research centres and universities as referred to in sections 2 and 3.1:

CALPIU – Research Center for Cultural and Linguistic Practices in the International University. University of Roskilde, Denmark. URL: http://calpiu.dk/ (last accessed 07 April 2011)

CIP – Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use. University of Copenhagen, Denmark. URL: http://cip.ku.dk/english/ (last accessed 07 April 2011)

DAAD – Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst. International Programmes in Germany 2011. URL: http://www.daad.de/deutschland/studienangebote/international-programmes/07535.de.html (last accessed 07 April 2011)

ELFA Project – The English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings Project. University of Helsinki, Finland. URL: http://www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/index.html (last accessed 07 April 2011)

EMI at ZHAW - English-medium instruction at ZHAW: Guidelines (2011). Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland. URL: http://www.zhaw.ch/fileadmin/php_includes/popup/projekt-detail.php?projektnr=1255 (last accessed 07 April 2011)

MuMiS – Mehrsprachigkeit und Multikulturalität im Studium. Universities of Hamburg, Siegen and Kassel, Germany. URL: http://www.mumis-projekt.de/ (last accessed 07 April 2011)

Newcastle University, Renewable Energy Enterprise and Management (REEM). URL: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/subjects/energy/courses/514 (last accessed 07 April 2011)

Oxford University, English language requirements for international students. URL: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/postgraduate_courses/apply/internat_students.html (last accessed 07 April 2011)

Stanford University, Exam Requirements for International Applicants. URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/gradadmissions/applying/exams-international (last accessed 07 April 2011)

University of Cambridge, Mphil in Engineering for Sustainable Development, Frequently Asked Questions. URL: http://www-g.eng.cam.ac.uk/sustdev/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=90 (last accessed 07 April 2011)

University of Flensburg, Master of Engineering in Energy and Environmental Management, Admission Requirements. URL: http://www.iim.uni-flensburg.de/sesam/front_content.php?idcat=1402 (last accessed 07 April 2011)

University of Jyväskylä, Renewable Energy Education and Research Programme, Language Tests. URL:

https://www.jyu.fi/kemia/tutkimus/uusiutuva-energia/en/how-to-apply/language-tests (last accessed 07 April 2011)

University of Nottingham, Renewable Energy and Architecture Masters. URL: http://pgstudy.nottingham.ac.uk/postgraduate-courses/renewable-energy-and-architecture-masters-msc_39.aspx (last accessed 07 April 2011)

ZEE – Zentrum für Erneuerbare Energien, M.Sc. Renewable Energy Management, Applications, Frequently Asked Questions. URL: http://www.zee-uni-freiburg.de/index.php?id=54 (last accessed 07 April 2011)