

Good Enough to Teach? A Study of EMI Lecturers' Language Skills and Metadiscourse

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Abstract

In a study conducted at the Copenhagen Business School, 1,794 students completed questionnaires on lectures given by 31 non-native English-speaking lecturers in 12 EMI programmes. They were asked to rate the lecture, the lecturer and the lecturer's language. Statistical analyses revealed a correlation between the students' perceptions of the lecturers' general lecturing competence (defined as knowledge of subject and teaching skills) and their perceptions of their English language proficiency (Jensen et al. 2013). In return for their assistance, each lecturer received a feedback sheet on how to improve their communicative effectiveness. The feedback was given by experienced tutors of English who had extensive experience of teaching and assessing English in an everyday ELF context. This paper sets out to investigate what sort of criticisms and recommendations were provided, concentrating on the 24 lecturers whose L1 was Danish. An examination of the tutors' comments showed that they could be divided into two main categories: formal language skills and pragmatic or metadiscursive features. The observations on language features are presented using a slightly adapted version of Lavelle's (2008) "good-enough-to-teach-model", whilst the comments on metadiscourse could be divided into four categories: sequential structure, hierarchical structure, connectives, and "fillers". Although some ELF research has suggested that effectiveness in ELF settings depends more on pragmatic ability than on language proficiency (Björkman 2010; Jenkins et al. 2011: 301), the analyses of the tutors' comments to the 24 lecturers in the present study show that both aspects should be attributed importance.

Keywords: English-medium instruction; discourse structure; pragmatic strategies; metadiscourse; connectives; formal language skills; pronunciation; English as a lingua franca; university lecturers

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen the introduction of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) at Danish universities. In 2012, the Danish Language Council (Dansk Sprognævn 2012) estimated that more than 25% of the master's degrees in Denmark are English-medium, comprising more than half of the natural science programmes, approximately 25% of those within the social sciences and a little less within the humanities. One significant factor in this development has been the Bologna Declaration, which set out to harmonise the market for higher education in Europe, and thus the proliferation of both isolated courses and entire degree programmes in English is a European and not merely a Danish phenomenon. The Nordic countries and Western Europe in particular have seen EMI gaining ground, and in 2012 Denmark was second only to the Netherlands in offering English-taught master's degrees (Dansk Sprognævn 2012), and today the two countries have even switched places (Maiworm and Wächter 2014: 47). Since Denmark and the

Netherlands are small countries whose languages are spoken by relatively few people, it is often taken to be both natural and necessary that English is introduced as the corporate language of businesses (Millar and Jensen 2009) and as the medium of instruction at universities (Tange 2012). For an overview of the ‘Englishisation’ at Danish universities, see Hultgren et al. (2014).

In many ways, the introduction of EMI has been a top-down process, and many university managements have failed to take into account the implications for pedagogy and the communication of knowledge. In practice, an increasing number of Danish university lecturers are being required to teach through English, which raises concerns about the consequences for lecturers of having to convey content and knowledge in a language different from their L1s.

Issues raised by this concern are whether there are negative consequences for the lecturer’s academic authority vis-à-vis the students when content is conveyed via the medium of English, and whether the “authentification” (Preisler 2008: 106) of the lecturers, and their knowledge, can be achieved using a foreign language. Or put differently, will the lecturer be seen as less competent by students if the medium of instruction is English?

The issue of whether language proficiency in English influences students’ assessment of lecturers and their lecturing competence was the central question asked in a research project at Copenhagen Business School (CBS). In the project *Students’ Perceptions of the English of Academics (SPEAC)* audio recordings were made of 31 lectures, given by 31 different non-native lecturers (24 Danes and seven other nationalities), in 12 EMI programmes (six bachelor’s and six master’s). Students’ reactions were probed via questionnaires. They were asked to assess the lecture, the lecturer and the lecturer’s English. A total of 1,794 students filled in the questionnaire (response rate close to a hundred per cent); approximately 60 per cent of these had Danish as their L1 (Jensen et al. 2011: 27–28). Although it is difficult to determine the direction of causality, our statistical analyses have shown that there is a very high correlation between the students’ perceptions of what we have termed the lecturer’s general lecturing competence (defined as knowledge of subject and teaching skills) and their perceptions of language proficiency (Jensen et al. 2013: 101).

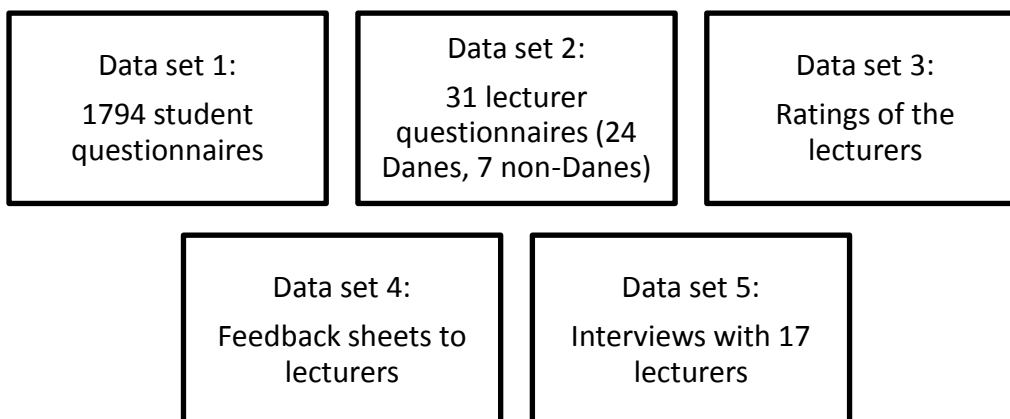
In the present article we shall discuss the EMI lecturers’ ability to convey their message successfully from the perspective of their language skills – both in terms of their formal language skills (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary) and their ability to use metadiscursive strategies – also termed pragmatic strategies – which we take to mean language “which talks about the text rather than the propositional content” (Thompson 2003: 6). The background is that in recent years the assumption within English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research (Jenkins 2000; Jenkins et al. 2011; Seidlhofer 2004) is that ELF users should not be measured against native-speaker standards, and that communicative effectiveness relies less on formal language skills and more on metadiscourse (Björkman 2010). The findings of the present study suggest that neither of the two components of English

proficiency can be neglected if the goal is to get the message across in a predominantly monologic setting such as a university lecture.

2. Data in the *SPEAC* project

For the *SPEAC* study five different sets of data were collected (see Fig. 1): (1) student questionnaires (mentioned above), (2) lecturer questionnaires, (3) ratings of the lecturers on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference global scale (2001: 24) by three examiners, who also assisted in providing (4) feedback sheets to the lecturers, and (5) interviews with approximately half of the lecturers who participated in the study. Statistical analyses were undertaken of the first three data sets in Jensen et al. (2011, 2013)* while a more qualitative approach was adopted in Denver et al. (2009, 2011). The interviews were discussed in Werther et al. (2014).

Figure 1. Overview of the five data sets.



In the present paper, we focus on the fourth data set, namely the feedback to the lecturers. To distinguish the examiners in their role as raters (data set 3) and as providers of feedback to the lecturers (data set 4) we have termed them ‘tutors’ in this latter capacity. The central question we wish to address can be formulated as follows: *Which formal language and metadiscursive features do experienced ELF tutors regard as necessary in order for the lecturers to be good enough to teach through English at university level?*

The people selected for the task had extensive experience of teaching and assessing English in an ELF context, as teachers and testers of diplomats at the School of Languages at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as examiners in the CBS Project in Language Assessment for Teaching in English (Kling and Hjulmand 2008). Each lecturer was given a feedback sheet prepared by one of the tutors, who were asked to pay special attention to the language features which interfered most with communicative effectiveness. Their comments included advice both on aspects of language and on lecture structure. The following areas were covered: an

overall assessment, pronunciation/intonation, vocabulary, grammar, structure of the presentation and delivery (e.g. signposting, fillers, stereotyped language). Furthermore, for our analyses, we have also taken into account valuable observations made by the three examiners/tutors in connection with their ratings as to which of these areas they regarded as most significant for effective communication.

In the student questionnaires (data set 1) there was a section on English language proficiency which included items on different linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Jensen et al. 2013: 92). Statistical analyses showed that the ratings of the lecturers by the three examiners (data set 3) were a significant predictor of the students’ evaluations of the lecturers’ English proficiency (Jensen et al. 2013: 100). The drawback of questionnaire studies of this type is that they are designed for quantitative purposes, and that students do not get the opportunity to put into words what specific features they base their ratings on. Furthermore, we assume that, even if they were given the opportunity, they would generally be able to do so only in vague terms since they do not have the metalanguage. The correlation between the perceptions of the examiners and the students gives us reason to assume that we can, at least to some extent, rely on the feedback sheets to the lecturers in discovering what features the students responded to in their evaluations of the lecturers’ English. The tutors’ advice to the lecturers on linguistic features will be discussed in section 3.

The student questionnaires also contained a section on structure. Our statistical analyses revealed that students’ perceptions of lecture structuring have predictive value for the ratings of both the lecturers’ English language proficiency and their general lecturing competence. This could suggest that the students’ ratings of lecture structure (with the questions “I found the lecture well-structured/well-presented/well-organised/easy to follow”) reflect the lecturers’ ability to employ metadiscursive markers to achieve communicative effectiveness. The tutors’ comments on the lecturers’ use of metadiscursive marking of lecture structure will be discussed in section 4.

In the lecturer questionnaires (data set 2), the lecturers were asked to rate their general English competence according to a six-point scale. We shall here focus on the 24 Danish lecturers (the only group large enough to generalise from). The distribution of their responses was as follows. Four lecturers rated their English as *excellent*; seven *very good*; eight *good*; three *satisfactory*; two *sufficient*; and none *barely sufficient*. The open question, of course, is whether the English of the lecturers who stated that their English was *good* is indeed good enough. According to the examiner evaluations (data set 3) in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference (2001), eight lecturers’ English received a score of C1 (C1+: 5; C1: 3) whereas the remaining 16 lecturers were rated lower, as B2 (B2+: 7; B2: 3; B2–: 5) and B1 (B1+: 1). Against this background, it appears important to examine which features contribute to successful communication. On the basis of the feedback given by the tutors, we shall discuss the role played by formal language skills and metadiscursive skills in reaching the goal of communicative

effectiveness. Our study will be concluded with some reflections on what can be done to help the EMI lecturers who need an upgrading of their English competences.

3. Formal language skills

Lavelle (2008: 142–146) suggests a model consisting of four steps (ranging from most to least important) which are crucial for successful communication: mutual comprehensibility, credibility, verbal flexibility, and pleasure. He terms this the “good-enough-to-teach-model”, which he describes as “a flexible, four-tier model aimed at helping teachers assess their own classroom experience” (2008: 138). Lavelle developed it on the basis of observations he made when supporting faculty engaged in EMI at Stockholm School of Economics. While Lavelle’s model was not specifically intended as an analytical tool for research purposes, it was found useful in the context of our data. The first two steps, which are the ones on which we shall base our classification system, have a number of subcategories. Lavelle provides only few examples, so one of the aims of this article is to fill this gap. All examples below are taken from the tutors’ feedback sheets/comments to the authors. In addition to Lavelle’s different categories, the tutors also draw attention to a small number of other phenomena. These are also described and exemplified below. Errors made by the lecturers are marked with *. We stress that the word “error” should here not be taken in the most literal sense of the word. Unlike in the English as a foreign language (EFL) paradigm, in the ELF paradigm, deviations from native speaker (NS) English norms are seen as differences or variants rather than mistakes. The distinction has been summarised by Jenkins (2011: 928):

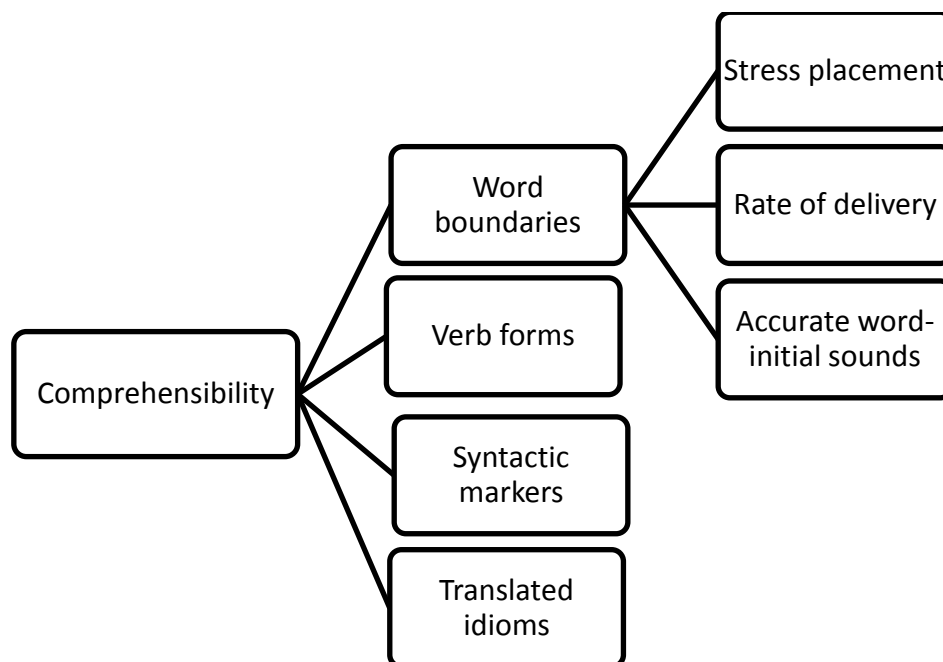
ELF belongs to the global Englishes paradigm in which all Englishes are seen as *sui generis* rather than as attempts to approximate a native speaker version, whereas EFL belongs to the modern foreign languages paradigm, according to which the learning of English is no different from the learning of any other foreign language, with the goal of learning being to approximate the native speaker of the language as closely as possible. ELF therefore takes a difference perspective as contrasted with the deficit perspective of EFL. That is, differences from native English may be seen as legitimate variation according to ELF, but always as errors according to EFL.

3.1. Mutual comprehensibility

Lavelle (2008: 142) points out that the first step towards successful communication is mutual comprehensibility. In our study, where we are dealing with monologic communication (see section 4.1 below), this has to be adapted to one-way comprehensibility (i.e. that students understand the teacher). The heading covers five areas (some of which again comprise sub-items) which Lavelle sees as the absolute minimum a teacher must master in order to achieve comprehension: word boundaries, verb forms, syntactic markers, translated idioms and what he calls an “open stream of speech”. Unlike the four other features, which are all related to language in one way or another, the last of these should perhaps be classified as a pedagogical strategy: “Students’ comprehension of a teacher’s English depends

upon their hearing it, and even though classroom acoustics are beyond an instructor’s control, teachers should make certain to avoid impeding the flow of speech with poor posture, overuse of notes or speaking into a whiteboard or screen” (Lavelle 2008: 142). Fig. 2 provides an overview of Lavelle’s comprehensibility categories as they have been used in this article.

Figure 2. Lavelle’s (2008) comprehensibility categories adapted for the SPEAC study.



3.1.1. Word boundaries

The label “word boundaries”, which seems a slightly odd choice of terminology because it would in fact appear to refer to syllable boundaries, includes various linguistic phenomena that are considered essential: stress placement, rate of delivery and an accurate pronunciation of word-initial sounds (Lavelle 2008: 142). Although Lavelle does not explain what he means by “word-initial sounds” and does not provide any examples, it is likely that he is here referring to initial consonant clusters (e.g. /str/, /θr/ and /sp/ in words like *structure*, *threat* and *speak*, to name a few of the many sequences found in English), which are known to pose problems for non-native speakers. An analysis of the feedback provided by the five tutors indicates that their statements are largely consistent with Lavelle. Incorrect stress placement (shown below in bold-faced type) is probably the most frequently occurring error and that which the tutors felt led to most confusion and irritation. In a large number of words, e.g. *pro'cess (vb), *'report (vb), *com'ment (vb), *this for'mat, my *col'league, *'personnel (which sounded like *personal*), *an in'crease, to *pur'chase, *'hotel, *'analysis, the lecturers stress the wrong syllable, and even if incorrect stress placement does not always lead to misunderstandings,

it distracted the tutors. Rate of delivery is discussed in the section on “Fluency” (3.2.2), where we feel it is more appropriate. There were virtually no examples of inaccurate pronunciation of word-initial sounds so although it may be an important area in the case of lecturers with other L1s, the tutors did not appear to regard it as a major problem in our data.

3.1.2. Verb forms

The category “problems with verb forms” covers a range of different errors, and since much information is contained in verb endings and auxiliary verbs, the ease with which listeners are able to make sense of the message is jeopardised if there are too many non-native features. Examples in this category are lack of subject-verb concord (**if she do not have trust* rather than *if she does not have trust*, **a situation that are marked by* instead of *...is marked by*), overuse of -ing forms (**This concept is very much being used* instead of *This concept is frequently/often used*; **What is this showing/telling us?* instead of *What does this show/tell us?*), problems with modal verbs (*if you should evaluate* rather than *if you had to/were to evaluate*).

3.1.3. Syntactic markers

Lavelle’s third requirement for minimal comprehensibility is accurate use of syntactic markers. The tutors mention, for example, that -ly is often omitted in the case of adverbs (**We can talk free* instead of *We can talk freely*, **no-one was taking them serious* instead of *... seriously*), lack of concord (see 3.1.2 above), confusing *this* and *these* (**all this old values*) and *who* and *which* (**the suppliers of music which*), and incorrect use of *amount* and *number* (**the amount of people*).

3.1.4. Translated idioms

Translated words or idioms are a frequent source of misunderstanding. Examples are **As told, there will be* (meaning *As stated*, a translation of Danish “som sagt”), *the meaning of this type of exercise* (rather than *the purpose of this exercise*, translated from Danish “meningen med”). Our analysis shows that this point applies not only to words and idiomatic expressions, but also to home-made hybrids (e.g. **lakrish*, which is a combination of the Danish and English words for *liquorice*; Danish “lakrids”). Another hybrid, though not translated from the speaker’s L1, is one lecturer’s use of a word that sounded like **aggreivated*. The tutor writes: “My brain went into overdrive trying to interpret the meaning here ... did you mean that the problems were “aggravated” by the matrix structure or that they were “alleviated” by it? As these words have opposite meanings – I was rather confused”.

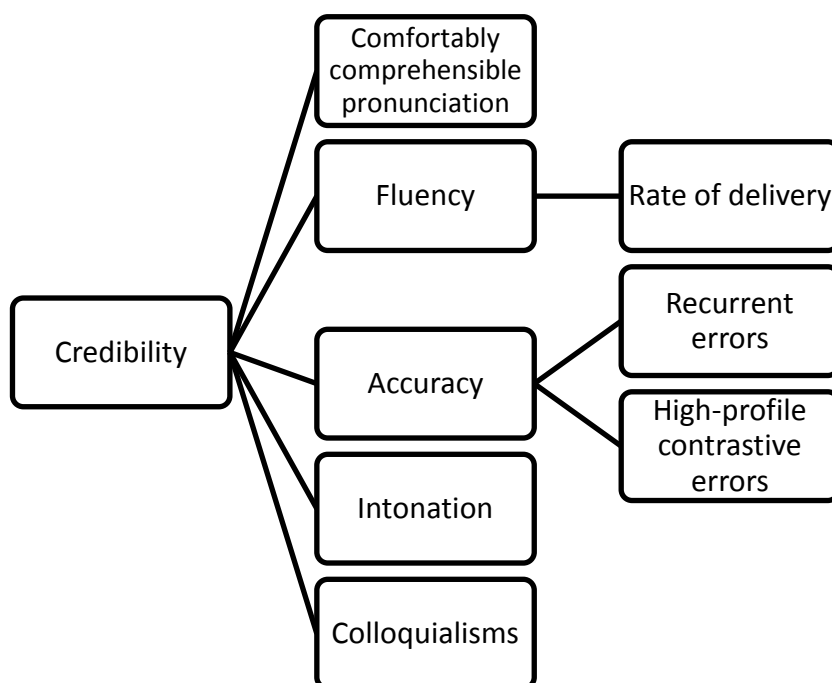
3.2. Credibility

The second tier in the model is credibility, which can be equated with Preisler’s “authentication” (see section 1). Lavelle (2008: 142–143) observes that

negotiating credibility is often, perhaps always, one dimension of classroom politics. Ideally, a teacher’s credibility would rest solely on her or his disciplinary expertise and educational competence. However, age, gender, appearance and nationality can affect student perceptions of teacher credibility, and so too can language proficiency when English is the instructional lingua franca.

The category consists of the following items: comfortably comprehensible pronunciation (which does not necessarily mean that one has to sound like a native speaker; see section 2), fluency (pauses, repetitions, correcting oneself), and accuracy. In addition, the tutors frequently referred to features of intonation and colloquialisms.

Figure 3. Lavelle’s (2008) credibility categories adapted for the *SPEAC* study.



3.2.1. Comfortably comprehensible pronunciation

Lavelle (2008: 143) reminds us that “native-like accents are not prerequisites for credible L2 English”. Nevertheless, the tutors very frequently reported pronunciation errors, and we shall therefore devote more space to this type of error than the other types. Within pronunciation teaching a useful concept is that of “hierarchy of error” (Collins and Mees 2003: 290, Collins and Mees 2013: 214–216) – a ranking of pronunciation errors based on how important they are for comprehensibility (see Van den Doel 2006: 6–10 for an overview of studies attempting to establish the relative importance of pronunciation errors). Collins and Mees (2003: 290) proposed a tentative classification of errors on a scale ranging from most to least significant:

Level 1 (most significant) – Errors causing a breakdown in intelligibility.

Level 2 (significant) – Errors involving a distortion of sound sufficient to cause distraction, irritation or amusement on the part of the native speaker. These do not result in misunderstandings, but draw the listener’s attention away from what is being communicated.

Level 3 (least significant) – Errors which are easily detectable, but which do not distract, irritate, or amuse the native speaker. (This type is totally irrelevant in an ELF setting.)

In textbooks on pronunciation, errors that can cause a breakdown in communication (Level 1) are traditionally said to be those where a phoneme contrast is lost. For Danish speakers, the most frequently lost consonant distinctions are /p–b/ (*staple–stable*), /t–d/ (*writing–riding*), /k–g/ (*ankle–angle*), /tʃ–dʒ/ (*H–age*), /θ–s/ (*thick–sick*), /θ–t/ (*through–true*), /θ–f/ (*three–free*), /s–z/ (*niece–knees*), /ʃ–ʒ/ (*Confucian–confusion*), /v–w/ (*vest–west*). Vowel contrasts that are often confused are /i:–ɪ/ (*feel–fill*), /u:–ʊ/ (*fool–full*), /ɒ–ʌ/ (*boss–bus*). However, in practice, some of these have a very low functional load, that is, there are very few pairs where the contrast may be lost, e.g. in the case of /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. The tutors’ feedback sheets reveal that the consonant pairs where a loss of contrast most frequently led to confusion in the audio-recorded lectures were /t–d/ and /s–z/. (The incorrect pronunciation of the consonant is often compounded by incorrect vowel length of the preceding sound; it should be shortened before voiceless /t/ and /s/ in words such as *sight/place* as opposed to voiced /d/ and /z/ in words like *side/plays*.) In our data, *code lines* was heard as **coat lines*, *these sides of the issue* as **these sights of the issue*, and *a white space* as **a wide space*. One lecturer said medial <s> in *phases* with /s/ instead of /z/, which resulted in one of the tutors hearing it as **faces*.

It is estimated that there are three times as many non-native speakers (NNSs) of English as NSs (Crystal 2008), and in ELF discourse there can therefore be a tendency to focus on non-native needs. But NNSs also often have to communicate with NSs, so this target group cannot completely be ignored; see Wells (2005: 109) and Scheuer (2005). Moreover, we should bear in mind that there are as many different ELF pronunciations as there are languages (due to the influence of different mother tongues). Danes and other Scandinavians have no problems understanding what is meant when the lecturer says *phases* for *faces* because none of the Scandinavian languages have /z/ in their sound systems, and listeners themselves would probably pronounce the word in the same way, but French, German, Dutch or American listeners, to name some of the nationalities that were represented in the audience, are likely to be confused, or at least need more time to work out what is meant.

Another example of a pronunciation that led to misunderstanding was the word *stage* (the final consonant in this word, /dʒ/, does not occur in Danish), which was pronounced as **states*. Errors in the vowel system also occurred, e.g. when a lecturer pronounced what sounded like **used as a muddle or a theory* rather than *used as a model or a theory*. The vowel contrast between /ʌ–ɒ/ is a classic Danish problem often mentioned in the literature on contrastive Danish-English pronunciation (Davidsen-Nielsen 1983: 83–84; Livbjerg and Mees 1997: 130–132; Mees and Collins 2000: 107–111; Jensen and Mees 2012). There are many exercises in such books on pronunciation recommending learners to produce contrasts between minimal pairs such as *bus–boss*, *luck–lock*, *colour–collar*, *wonder–wander*. In our study, however, this error was rarely commented on by the tutors, probably because the meaning was disambiguated by the context.

Confusing /v/ and /w/ was on a number of occasions mentioned as a source of irritation (Level 2 in the hierarchy of error), e.g. *valid* pronounced as **walid*, *individual* as **indiwidual*, but there are no instances of it leading to misunderstandings. The English <th> was also frequently mispronounced, but hardly ever caused a breakdown in communication (see also Jenkins 2000: 137). It was either pronounced as /s/ (e.g. *method* sounded like **mesod*) or /t/ (for example *three* and *theoretical* sounded like **tree*, **teoretical*); in a few cases, it was replaced by /f/ (for example, *thought* was said as **fought*). This particular example could therefore in principle both be said as *taught*, *fought* and *sought* by a Danish speaker. Both these errors (/v–w/ and the various substitutions for /θ/) belong to the highest level in the hierarchy of error as they are phonemic and can result in misunderstandings, but in practice this was not the case. As stated above, this has to do with the low functional load.

Other examples of Level 2 in the hierarchy (distracting, annoying or comical errors) were the following. A word like *text* sounded like “tsext” or “sext” (with Danish pronunciation of /t/), *business* was said with an /i:/ vowel as in *beat* instead of /ɪ/ as in *bit*, *multiply* was said with [u], the wrong vowel was selected in the first syllable of *capabilities* (pronounced with the vowel in *cap* instead of *cape*). The tutors noted many more examples of this type, but since they did not lead to misunderstandings, we have quoted only a small selection.

3.2.2. Fluency

Lavelle’s second point in the credibility category is fluency. It is clear that fluency is related to rate of delivery, which is an important parameter whether one is dealing with one’s L1 or a foreign language. Rate of delivery will be affected by the number and length of pauses, hesitation markers, and repeated syllables or words. Lavelle (2008: 143) draws on Hedge (1993), who defines the concept in negative terms: “non-fluency is discernible in frequent pausing, repetition and self corrections”.

When considering the non-native lecturers’ rate of delivery, one could be forgiven for assuming that their speech would be characterised by a slow rate of delivery due to pauses as a result of looking for words and thinking about their discourse. And this is indeed partly confirmed by our tutors’ feedback. The lecturers

hesitate frequently (indicated by a dash in the excerpt below), stop in mid-clause and make false starts – all phenomena that disrupt the rhythm and flow in the presentation. This can be illustrated by means of example (1):

(1) that was one of the points – (then someone already mentioned) [*false start*] – (and please nametags again – I – I’m sorry – I’m so bad at names) [*digression*] – but – about the texts for today – I hope you were able to find at least one of them (because I was) [*mid-clause stop*] – able to – (but the other one – the one on Japan – it was) [*false start*] – you couldn’t find it anywhere without paying for it – so I still didn’t get it myself and didn’t read it – but I would have it from the royal library and (it will) [*false start*] – it should appear one of these days and (I will) [*mid-clause stop*] – be happy to copy and scan it and upload it if you have the interest in reading it – yeah.

But the tutors also mention examples of the opposite phenomenon, i.e. a rate of delivery which is too high. In some cases, the lecturer utters the words so quickly that a syllable may be lost, which means that listeners have to make an even greater effort to understand the actual string of words, and thus cannot devote their cognitive energy to understanding the message: *experience* sounds like **sperience*, *recapitulate* like **recaptulate*, *European* (four syllables) like **Europeen* (with three syllables).

3.2.3. Accuracy

Lavelle’s category “accuracy” comprises “recurrent errors” and “high-profile contrastive errors” (Lavelle 2008: 145). It is particularly important to address recurrent errors. For instance, if a lecturer needs to refer to a specific lexical item many times, the use of an incorrect word may in the worst case lead to a breakdown in communication; even if the correct word is used, it can be distracting or annoying if it is systematically mispronounced. In addition to the problem of recurrent errors, the tutors also frequently referred to “density of errors”, which is the occurrence of many different types of errors within a short space of time. Listeners can easily ignore isolated mistakes, but intelligibility and tolerance decrease if a lecturer shortly afterwards makes a new error. Even if the message is clear, it can nevertheless be distracting or comical, and possibly result in the listener waiting for the error to occur again. For example, if a lecturer has to refer to *cooperation* many times, it could be a source of irritation if it is pronounced as *corporation*. A small mental adjustment has to be made every time the listener hears the word. Therefore, it is important to devote extra time to preparing frequently occurring words or sequences that are needed in a lecture. Surprisingly, the lecturers state that they typically do not do this (see section 5 below).

The second component of accuracy – the “high-profile contrastive errors” – occurs when teachers and students share the same first language. Lavelle gives the example of a French-speaking instructor using EMI when communicating with a class consisting mainly of French-speaking students combined with a number of international exchange students. In this scenario, “the French-speaking students will be most critical if the teacher should make a common Francophone mistake”

(Lavelle 2008: 144). Our survey provides clear evidence of this phenomenon: students responded more negatively if they and the lecturers shared the same L1. Since 60% of the students who filled in the questionnaire were Danish, and 77% of the lecturers were Danish, this means that Danish students were more critical of Danish lecturers using EMI than of lecturers with whom they did not share the same language (Jensen et al. 2013).

3.2.4. Intonation and colloquialisms

We have seen above that Lavelle’s categories are by and large reflected in the tutors’ comments. But in addition to the areas mentioned above, an analysis of the tutors’ feedback sheets showed that there were a small number of other language problems which are not covered by Lavelle’s model. These will be discussed below.

Something Lavelle does not mention is intonation. By far the most frequently mentioned attitude associated with Danish intonation was the lecturers’ monotonous delivery. This is clearly not due to their lack of interest in the subject or in the students, but because Danish intonation does not have obligatory sentence accents, or “tonic accents”, and is therefore not characterised by large fluctuations. The most noticeable difference between the two languages may therefore be that English uses more high pitches (in tonic accents) than Danish. Danes therefore easily come across as depressed, apathetic or uninterested if they transfer their intonation unmodified into English (Mees and Collins 2000: 141; Livbjerg and Mees 1997: 40; Davidsen-Nielsen 1984: 33–34; Grønnum 2007: 92). Students familiar with the conventions of native English intonation may therefore feel that the lecturer lacks zest, liveliness and commitment. In a few cases, intonation came across as brusque rather than dull. One of the tutors draws attention to a lecturer’s aggressive intonation when he says *Anything else?*. This is obviously not the speaker’s intention, but an example of what would be a normal intonation pattern in Danish, namely a level or slightly falling tune, with no rising pitch accent on *else*, due to the above-mentioned lack of obligatory sentence accents in Danish. When this pattern is transferred to English, the unfortunate consequence is that the lecturer’s attitude can be misunderstood.

Another source of potential irritation is the somewhat artificial attempt to reduce the distance to the students by using slang and colloquial expressions, such as *you guys, and stuff, y’know*. If one wishes to use such terms, it is important to make sure that they are completely up-to-date, otherwise they can come across as silly, absurd or even outrageous. Non-natives are often good at picking up such terms, but one must be aware that they rapidly become obsolete. One of the tutors stated: “There is nothing wrong with this – but note that such expressions change over time and their appropriateness changes over *your* time (i.e. as you get older)! My only advice here is to keep up to date to make sure you don’t become a “colloquialism dinosaur!”.

Another example of a colloquialism which caused frustration among one of the tutors was one of the lecturers’ use of *gonna*. It was not the word itself that was offensive, but the fact that it was used incorrectly: “I became very tired of listening

to *gonna* rather than *going to* – but most because you say *you gonna* and *we gonna* rather than *you’re gonna* and *we’re gonna!*”.

3.2.5 Flexibility and pleasure

Lavelle’s third step is flexibility, which he describes as the ability to rephrase and paraphrase. We have virtually no examples of this constituting problems in our data, so either the lecturers met this criterion or it was not deemed important for intelligibility. Lavelle’s last step is “pleasure”, which refers to the benefits gained when teachers enjoy teaching through L2 English (Lavelle 2008: 145). This is doubtless important, but beyond the scope of this article.

4. Metadiscursive skills

Structure is prototypically signalled by metadiscursive markers which are used to make it easier for the audience to follow the lecturer’s line of thought and in this way reduce the cognitive load on the listeners. In recent years ELF scholars have focussed a great deal on the study of metadiscursive skills in order to achieve the goal of communicative effectiveness. Statements of the following type are found in the literature: “competence in lingua franca communication involves above all the acquisition of the pragmatic skills required to adapt one’s English use to the demands of the current communicative situation” (Jenkins et al. 2011: 301), and “effectiveness in ELF settings seems most strongly associated with one’s pragmatic ability and less with one’s level of proficiency” (Björkman 2010: 88). ELF researchers should be given credit for drawing attention to the importance of metadiscourse, which indisputably is a great help in deciphering lecture content. However, it is important to remember that ELF research has been carried out mainly on the basis of oral data in dialogic settings. As Björkman (2010: 85) is well aware, monologic events are “where misunderstandings and general comprehension problems are most likely to occur”. In our opinion, a clear distinction should be made between monologue and dialogue, the latter being much better suited to testing whether or not the participants’ mutual goal of communicative effectiveness has been reached. This is because meaning can be negotiated and misunderstandings cleared up by means of backchannelling immediately after the utterance has been made, though, as pointed out by House (1999), even backchannelling is not a foolproof way of solving problems with comprehensibility in dialogue.

The *SPEAC* data consisted of lectures, essentially monologic events, in which the co-construction of meaning is *not* an inherent quality. On the whole, lecturers feel monologic lecturing to be more demanding than teaching in smaller more dialogic groups. This has, for instance, been documented by Ball and Lindsay (2013: 53) in a survey carried out at the University of the Basque Country on EMI teachers’ attitudes to lecturing to large groups as compared with teaching in small groups. Our own study of the responses filled in by the 31 EMI lecturers who participated in the *SPEAC* project suggests that lecturing through English poses a challenge to 25% of the lecturers (Werther et al. 2014).

The importance which the tutors in this study attribute to the use of appropriate metalanguage in oral one-way EMI communication is clearly reflected in their comments. At the same time we should bear in mind that the use of metadiscourse is not an inherent competence even in one’s mother tongue. Thompson (2003: 11), who compared to what extent discourse structure was signalled explicitly in six authentic undergraduate lectures and in ten talks extracted from materials on English for academic purposes (EAP), found that the average number of markers per 1000 words was considerably higher in the EAP talks (9.1) than in the authentic lectures (3.0). Her findings suggest that the use of structure markers is the effect of a conscious attempt to create transparency in discourse structure, also in one’s mother tongue. So it is by no means an easy job to create structural transparency in an EMI setting.

Below, metadiscursive phrases whose function is to signal structure are treated in section 4.1 (sequential structure) and in 4.2 (hierarchical structure). In 4.3 the use of connectives, in the strict sense of the term, is taken up. Finally, section 4.4 (“fillers”) contains the tutors’ comments on stereotyped metadiscourse.

4.1. Sequential structure

The tutors all stress the importance of the opening section of the lecture, where the thematic structure of the talk – as well as the lecturer’s aim and approach – should be outlined in order to help the audience make “a mental map” of the content of the lecture. Not unexpectedly, the *SPEAC* lecturers generally gave such an introduction. In some cases, however, the opening discourse was a bit abrupt owing to the limited use of connective devices and linking phrases, as in (2):

(2) Last time we were talking about [...] the first 30 minutes: a presentation – a break – discussion where you can talk free [...] this was the start of my presentation.

By contrast, the next example of an opening was given by a lecturer who showed proficiency in metadiscourse and furthermore – or perhaps for this reason – had the self-confidence to introduce the lecture by means of a reference to the weather:

(3) Thank you for fighting your way through the blizzard here today – several things are going to happen today – we are going to continue on [...] from last time and wrap up [...] then I will give examples of [...] then, having done that [...] the interest – how do we create interest? [...] lastly – just to sum up [...] Ok, that was [...] now we [...].

As stated by one tutor in her praising comment, the lecturer “introduces today’s subject, links to subjects discussed in earlier classes – and later – to another course in the semester”. In other words, this lecturer’s opening contained a retrospective reference to “last time” as well as a prospective reference (Mauranen 2006). The strategy of pointing backwards and forwards in oral or written texts is important in terms of contextualising the content of the lecture. Alternative terms for this phenomenon have been proposed by Björkman (2011a: 86), who uses

“retroactive/proactive strategies”, and Ädel (2010), who prefers the labels “reviewing/previewing”. Examples (4) and (5) contain such references:

(4) Just to repeat a little from the last class [...] that is basically what we covered last time. Now, the topic of today’s lecture is [...].

(5) I’m going to focus on [...] my first example will be [...] later I will argue that [...] the new rich which we will talk about next week.

Not surprisingly, all lecturers (except for one) gave an introduction presenting the content of the lecture. However, the introductions differed as to the degree to which they used metadiscursive structuring devices to create fluency and also the extent to which they were able to make use of linguistic variation.

Most tutor comments in the feedback sheets on the signalling of sequential structure were related to “topic management”, which refers to topic initiation and topic transitions. According to House (1996: 233–234), “the notion of anticipation is at the core of the concept of discourse strategy” and in her list of strategies to support the speaker’s main move we find the concept of “topic introducer”, where “[t]he speaker prepares the ground for the content of his or her message by initiating a ‘lead-in’ as a prelude to his or her main move”. House’s concept of lead-ins seems to be of vital importance judging by the frequent comments by the tutors in our study, such as: “No real transition from one topic to the next”, “Lists topics as headings”; “Jumps from one subject to the next”, “She introduced a number of themes [...] in keywords (no connectives)”.

In addition, the strategies used to introduce a new topic or to change topics exhibited little variation. The most common topic introducer was: “Let’s move on to [...]”/“moving on to [...]”. One lecturer stood out; he succeeded in introducing a topic by adding a clause which at the same time served the purpose of highlighting the topic: “[...] interest rate, now this is very interesting [...]”. However, altogether, the general advice to the lecturers was to build up a richer repertoire of topic introducers, e.g. “Turning back to the ideas presented by [...] that we discussed last week” (a topic introducer with retrospective reference).

Another set of phrases to round off topics is also essential. In some lectures, topics – or clusters of topics – were successfully closed by means of clauses such as:

(6) We’ve been studying the consumer in a social context – now [...].

(7) So that was just to give you some kind of illustration of how you can measure [...].

(8) [...] So those are some of the models. I personally prefer [...].

At this level, the tutors remarked on the general scarcity of closing and summing-up phrases in the lectures, which in many cases resulted in rather abrupt topic transitions. Furthermore, when summing-up phrases were used, the linguistic variation in this type of metadiscourse was limited.

4.2. Signalling hierarchical structure

The importance of helping the audience grasp the primary message by removing part of the cognitive load needed to decode oral texts by means of connectives and metadiscursive phrases has been pointed out by researchers under different headings like “signalling importance” (Björkman 2010: 81; 2011b: 956), “managing the message” (Ädel 2010), and “staging and signposting” (Ball and Lindsay 2013: 53). We prefer the term “foregrounding” as it has the advantage of presupposing the existence of the opposite, namely “backgrounding”. The last strategy was commented on positively by one of the tutors when a lecturer stated: “[...] I’m going to go through these (slides) very quickly.”

The term used by the tutors is “signposting” and their feedback sheets often contain remarks on the lecturers’ limited use of signposts. For example, one tutor comment reads as follows:

(9) A good example: “[...] here the central point is [...]”. Here you helpfully indicate the relationship between ideas and arguments that you are presenting. [...] this could be strengthened so that students (especially those whose level of English may not be that high) can be guided through the content of your lecture and the information can be “sorted” or “digested” for them, for example in terms of distinguishing between main point/sub points, examples and illustrations.

In our opinion, House’s concept of lead-ins for topic management can be generalised to any type of overt signalling of the information that comes next. It serves as a kind of preparation which makes it easier to process the propositional content that follows. In addition, it gives the audience a break before the message is presented, thus reducing the information density of the whole sequence. Furthermore, if the lead-in explicitly mentions the type of information contained in the following sequence (e.g. an example), it additionally serves the purpose of foregrounding or backgrounding the propositional content. In fact, the tutors agreed on advising the lecturers to use such lead-ins, particularly in connection with examples, quotations and questions.

An appropriate way of preparing the audience for an example could be: “This is another example just to illustrate the point”. Examples serve the purpose of reformulating in a specific form a message which has typically been given in the preceding sequence in a generalised form. In this sense, the example itself stands in the background, but the strategy of adding an example serves to highlight the message.

As regards lead-ins to prepare the audience for a quotation, one comment reads:

(10) On a couple of occasions you read quotes [...]. Quotes can be quite “dense” in terms of new information/terminology, so you could explicitly prepare your audience for the fact that you are going to read (“let’s take a look at what ‘x’ says here”), so that the quote doesn’t get “lost” in the flow of speech.

For example, where the information structure “X describes [...], Y says [...]” is used in quotations or references with no explicit lead-in, the author’s name – functioning as the subject and theme (typically old information) is backgrounded. Here the use of lead-ins like the one quoted in example (10) is appropriate since it isolates the author’s name and the quotation in separate clauses, both containing new information.

As for questions, an appropriate introduction could be: “I’m going to bring up some questions for you”. Furthermore, it was recommended that lead-ins also specify what kind of question is to be asked – direct or rhetorical:

(11) You employ this time-honoured technique for engaging an audience. [...] you could strengthen this if you signal more explicitly whether your questions are direct (i.e. you expect a response) or purely rhetorical. For example, you could say: “Here’s a question for you”. Your intention was not always clear and some questions came out of the blue, or were just part of the flow of speech.

4.3. Signalling cohesion

In this section, the use of the traditional cohesive devices, i.e. connectives, is discussed separately in spite of the fact that they, too, serve as sequential or hierarchical markers. This has been done for two reasons; firstly, connectives constitute an area where overuse – in extreme cases called “mannerisms” or “bad habits” by the tutors – was not uncommon and, secondly, the tutors observed cases of incorrect use which could have the adverse effect of reducing comprehensibility.

Connectives are invariable in their form and are used to mark semantic relations between propositions or clusters of propositions. Prototypically, the relations can be inferred from the context without explicit marking. In this way, connectives are not indispensable in order for a (spoken) text to be well structured and easy to follow, as can be seen from this comment from one of the tutors to the authors: “Actually, few connectives, but the progression comes across as logical and is easy to follow.” However, at the same time, in her feedback sheet the tutor recommended the lecturer to use more connectives: “Many of us use relatively few connectives when speaking and more when we are writing. It is often a good idea to include more of these in our spoken language.” This comment was characteristic of the advice given to the lecturers, who were generally recommended (1) to increase the use of explicit marking of semantic relations between (clusters of) propositions, and (2) to build up a richer repertoire in order to avoid stereotypical use of a limited number of connectives. The semantic categories included in the feedback sheets from the tutors are the following: additive, adversative, causal (including consecutive) and temporal (also in a sequential sense) (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 242–243).

In their study of second language learners’ comprehension of the information conveyed in spoken American, Chaudron and Richards (1986: 124) found that “[a] lecture which uses more macro-markers is likely to be easier to follow”. As we have seen, the lecturers, on the whole, started out with an introduction to their lecture, in some cases characterised by a scarcity of linking phrases. However, the lecture

introductions are not where most tutor comments pointed to a marked scarcity of connective links.

The next level, i.e. the topical level, where chunks of information are structured, was where the tutors found most instances of abrupt transitions. One comment reads:

(12) Hardly any connectives [...] comes across more as a string of statements than as a coherent whole.

(13): You could have given many more signposts – such as [...] *in addition, as a contrast, to conclude* [...]. Your favourites seem to be *and, plus, therefore*. The effect sometimes became a string of statements, where the links/contrasts were a bit blurred.

Consequently, the lecturers were recommended to explicitly structure their lecture at the topical level, and also, as can be seen in (13), to enrich their repertoire. Among the categories of connectives that were rarely used by the lecturers, and which they were advised to employ in order to explicitly organise clusters of propositions, we find *first... secondly...* (temporal-sequential connectives), *finally, in conclusion, to conclude* (temporal-conclusive connectives) and *to sum up* (a temporal-summarising connective). In her study on native speakers’ use of metadiscourse structuring devices (see section 4), Thompson (2003: 11) found that lecturers relied less on metadiscourse structuring to indicate the highest levels of organisation (51% on global and major topics) in authentic undergraduate lectures than in the talks appearing in EAP listening skills materials (73%). This perhaps suggests that the topical level is where the creation of explicit textual transparency, especially in oral texts, requires a more conscious effort on behalf of the speaker, native or non-native.

While the characteristic feature of the lectures at the topical level was the limited use of explicit cohesive marking, the sub-topical level was characterised by the opposite, i.e. a very high level of explicit marking. At this level, the tutors found many instances of stereotypical use – or overuse – of a small number of connectives. Among the most commonly used markers were the additive *and*, the adversative *but*, the temporal-sequential markers *then* and *now*, the consecutive markers *so* and *therefore*. The frequent use of these connectives led to the advice to the lecturers to enrich their repertoire. In fact, in quite a few cases, the tutors found that lecturers overused a connective to such an extent that they referred to it as a “mannerism” or “bad habit”. In an extreme case, a lecturer used the connective *so* 31 times in the lecture. According to Chaudron and Richards (1986: 124), such overuse may have the unintended effect of reducing textual comprehensibility instead of increasing it: “an over-use of micro-markers possibly detracts from the overall coherence”. In some cases, when the use of a particular connective turned into a mannerism and was inserted automatically, this also led to erroneous use, as in this case:

(14) Last Friday I participated or attended not less than two – presentations on [...] culture – and business – and *so* I think you should really – do yourself a – the favour of keeping an eye on the homepage and see what is coming up.

However, the greater part of comments on deviant or incorrect use concerns fillers, which are discussed in 4.4.

4.4. Fillers

The phrases found in this section are formally different (adverbial phrases, modifiers, etc.): *etc.*, *and so on and so forth*; *I mean*, *you know*; *kind of*, *sort of*; *more or less*, *somehow*; *something/things like that*; *so to speak*. The reason that fillers are dealt with here is that (1) in some cases, the same filler was used again and again; and (2) there were instances where the tutors found that the overuse of a filler actually reduced the communicative effectiveness. An appropriate alternative to using a filler may be simply to leave out the filler and say nothing, as pointed out in a feedback sheet to a lecturer:

(15) Bad habits – most of us have some annoying verbal habits even in our own language – for example overuse of certain phrases/expressions. Here are a few that you tend to overuse: [...] “you know/you might say”. It’s hard to break this kind of habit – many people tend to do it while they are “processing”, i.e. subconsciously (or consciously) formulating what to say next. Allow/discipline yourself to pause without saying anything. If you have the confidence of your audience (and that does seem to be the case), you don’t need to use these “fillers” – in fact, they might be glad of the pauses themselves to process the content of your message. Barack Obama does it all the time.

If the filler appeared to serve no other purpose than perhaps gaining time when looking for a word or working out what to say next, the advice was to insert a pause. Fillers are of course also used by NSs, but here the lecturers are often able to vary their use somewhat more, so that the strategy does not become quite so conspicuous. On the other hand, if the purpose of the filler is to qualify a statement, the solution could be to enrich the repertoire:

(16) [...] try not to overuse certain expressions – or use them as “fillers”. One example from your lecture is *so to speak*. If your intention is to buy time [...], try not to say anything at all. Alternatively, if your intention is to qualify or hedge what you are saying, perhaps you could have a few alternatives up your sleeve: “one might say”/“you could say”/“perhaps” [...].

If the use of fillers turns into “a bad habit”, and they are used automatically without any conscious thought as to their meaning, it may blur the primary message, adding to the listener’s cognitive load in terms of mentally processing the propositional content, as can be seen in comment (17):

(17) [...] We all have our “favourite” expressions or “fill-in phrases” that we use when we cannot think of anything else to say [...]. Be aware that you overuse “somehow” as in “I somehow have to start up here...” or in your explanation of different kinds of information “...that is somehow parallel to data...”, “...that is somehow the notion of economic power...”. Or in your discussion question for the students “How can we somehow combine”.

In example (18) a tutor commented on a lecturer’s frequent use of “more or less” in this way:

(18) Be careful not to add “fill-in phrases” that add little or nothing to your message. Your favourite phrase seems to be “more or less”: one writer was described as “more or less a traitor”, Europe’s colonial activities results in “the complete division of the world more or less”.

In her descriptive corpus study of innovative uses of “more or less” in ELF settings, Metsä-Ketelä (2006) found that “more or less” was among the most frequent markers of vagueness in academic ELF and that in ELF monologues the expression was primarily employed with a hedging function, that is, to reduce the speaker’s commitment to the propositional content by adding an element of uncertainty or tentativeness to the utterance. This is the way in which “somehow” and “more or less” have been used in (17) and (18). However, one could argue that this kind of hedging does not exactly help the listener to grasp the meaning, and in (18) the last instance of “more or less” (“the complete division of the world more or less”) results in a contradiction in terms.

In summary, the tutors recommended an increased use of explicit marking of the lecture structure, especially at the topical level where chunks of information are organised. This level was characterised by the scarcity of explicit links – lead-ins and connectives – which could assist the audience in following the lecturers’ line of thought. On the other hand, there was copious use of explicit marking at the sub-topical level where propositions are linked together and it is at this level that the tutors remarked on overuse and misuse of a limited number of “favourite” connectives and fillers and the advice was simply to insert a pause and to build up a richer repertoire of alternatives to avoid stereotyped language.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The earlier *SPEAC* studies showed that – even after other explanatory factors, such as the lecturer’s teaching experience, age, gender and the students’ perceptions of lecture content and structure were taken into account – students still seemed to be influenced by their perceptions of the lecturers’ language proficiency as regards the use of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Jensen et al. 2013). Consequently, we assume that the lecturer’s English proficiency is not a factor that can be ignored, and even if Björkman’s statement of the priority of metadiscursive strategies over linguistic correctness may be true for dialogic settings, it is not necessarily valid when dealing with monologues. The previous *SPEAC* studies also revealed that the students’ evaluations of the lecture structure were related to their evaluations of the lecturers’ general lecturing competence and, furthermore, were a predictor of the ratings of the lecturers’ English proficiency, so that lecturers who received higher scores for the structure component were also evaluated more positively in terms of their language competence. Rost (2002: 234) emphasises the difficulty of determining which of many different variables (speed of delivery, accent, text-structuring metadiscourse, etc.) has the greatest influence on lecture

comprehension. While our study cannot document the relative importance of formal language skills vs. metadiscursive skills, our results do seem to indicate that both are significant and that the mastery of formal language skills has perhaps been pushed too much into the background by some ELF researchers.

As regards English proficiency, Seidlhofer (2004: 220) has listed a set of characteristic lexico-grammatical ELF-features which “appear to be generally unproblematic and no obstacle to communicative success”. They include omitting the third person present tense -s, confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which*, omitting definite and indefinite articles or inserting them where they do not occur in NS English, simplifying the system of tag questions to *isn't it?* or *no?*, inserting “redundant” prepositions, as in *We have to study about*, “overusing” certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do*, *have*, *make*, *put*, *take*, replacing infinitive constructions with that-clauses, as in *I want that*, and overdoing explicitness (e.g. *black color* rather than just *black*). With respect to pronunciation, Jenkins (2000) has suggested that the features needed for intelligibility in ELF interactions are a mastery of the consonants (with the exception of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/), initial consonant clusters, vowel length distinctions and word stress. Being a Germanic language, Danish has similar initial consonant clusters to English, so this did not surface as a problem, but the other features were all mentioned by the tutors. In addition, the tutors frequently noted errors in stress placement – a feature not included in Jenkins’s list.

Perhaps the most interesting additional finding that emerges from our analyses is constituted by the two phenomena which the tutors referred to as “frequency of error” and “density of error”. On the whole, the tutors found deviations from NS English of little or no consequence to the comprehension of the message if they occurred as isolated instances. Although they could cause some confusion, especially in lectures of high complexity, and thus add to the cognitive effort needed to decipher the message, they did not on the whole affect comprehension. But when the same NNS English feature occurred repeatedly during a lecture, it tended to cause irritation, which had the adverse effect of distracting the listeners’ attention away from deciphering the discourse. The most frequent systematic errors mentioned by the tutors were pronunciation errors, and as Lavelle (2008: 143) emphasises, [a]ny error that recurs systematically during a lesson can damage speaker credibility, and here pronunciation typically features more prominently than grammar or vocabulary”.

In addition to the recurrence of identical errors, the tutors also found instances of “density of errors”, which was a term they used to refer to a range of *different* NNS English features occurring within a short space of time. In these cases, the tutors found that the accumulation of errors had a detrimental effect on communicative effectiveness. If listeners have to undertake too much accommodative work too many times within a short time frame, their capacity to absorb information may simply be overloaded. Accommodation obviously has to be undertaken both ways in ELF-interaction – both the speaker and the listener have to make adjustments – but our feedback sheets show that despite willingness to do so, there is a limit to

how much accommodation can take place within a short space of time. The findings of our study suggest that one of the difficulties of establishing which features are essential for communicative effectiveness is that they turn out to be highly context-dependent. While a particular NNS feature may lead to misunderstandings in some contexts (e.g. contexts where there is a high density of different errors or high frequency of the same error or where the content is very complex), the same NNS feature may be of little or no consequence in other contexts (e.g. where there are no other interfering features which the listener has to accommodate to).

A study by Wang and Van Heuven (2014: 192) on mutual intelligibility of American, Dutch and Mandarin speakers of English has shown that information is communicated more successfully when the speaker and listener share the same language background. There is therefore the danger that when speakers are accustomed to settings with listeners with the same L1 this may result in their having an “overoptimistic view of their own intelligibility in English, both because they understand their own type of foreign-accented English relatively well, and because they are insufficiently aware of the difficulties they create [...] for non-native listeners with a different language background”. However, this advantage in terms of intelligibility seems to be counteracted somewhat by the finding – at least in our study of Danish lecturers – that the listeners who shared Danish as L1 with a speaker were more critical of the English produced by this speaker than of the English of speakers with different L1 backgrounds (see section 3.2.3).

Let’s now turn to metadiscursive strategies. Discourse structure is typically made more transparent and thereby easier to follow if marked explicitly by using a range of metadiscursive strategies. The tutors pointed to the importance of making a map of the lecture and of using lead-ins to (1) introduce or change the topics, (2) mark salient points, and (3) as a prelude to quotations, examples and questions. In general, they advised the lecturers to use more – and more varied – connectives to make the structure transparent in order to make it easier for non-native listeners to follow the lecturer’s line of thought. Recommendations to the same effect are found in Björkman (2010: 80), Hellekjær (2010: 25), and Lynch (1994: 281). In their study of presentations by international and American Teaching Assistants (TAs), Vinke et al. (1998: 385) discovered that the presentations by international TAs tended to be structured to a lesser extent and less explicitly than those by the American TAs. In our study, the deficiency in metadiscourse in terms of lead-ins and connectives was particularly evident at the topical level, which is the level where chunks of information are organised. By contrast, at the sub-topical level, where propositions are linked together, our lecturers manifested stereotyped use – and even misuse – of connectives and fillers (see also Chaudron and Richards 1986).

The question is what can be done to qualify the lecturers in the use of metadiscourse structuring since the correct use of different kinds of metadiscursive strategies presupposes a relatively high level of general language proficiency. That the use of metadiscourse is by no means a simple matter is further corroborated by House (1996), who conducted an experimental study with German university

students who had received instruction in English for 12 years. They took part in a 14-week course on the use of metalinguistic strategies. At the end of the course House found improvement in some respects (and more so if the students were also given a theoretical foundation); in other respects she found no improvement. Of special relevance to the question of the different possibilities of upgrading lecturers’ metadiscursive competences was her finding that the differences in pragmatic fluency noted at the beginning of the course between the students who had spent some time in an English-speaking country and those who had not remained unaltered at the end of the course.

Now we turn to the question of what measures should be taken to upgrade the lecturers’ English. One seemingly obvious solution would be to offer courses in English language and metadiscourse. However, it became evident from the interviews conducted with the lecturers (data set 5) that they generally felt no motivation to follow such courses. In fact, the lecturer questionnaires (data set 2) revealed that they spent remarkably little time preparing the formal language aspects of their content lectures. When asked questions about their preparation with respect to the use of dictionaries, the Internet and consulting colleagues about vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, only four lecturers (see section 2) indicated that they had resorted to this kind of help. Unlike the others, these four had checked the pronunciation of words, while one of them had also consulted a grammar book when preparing the lecture. This lack of attention to form was also brought out in several lecturers’ spontaneous remarks on their lack of interest in taking English courses. Partly their attitude is the result of their (mistaken) view of form being unrelated to content, and as something which is separate from their professional identity. But it can to some extent also be attributed to a sin of omission committed by the university management, who fail to give them the opportunity to attend such courses and at the same time to relieve them of some of their duties as lecturers and researchers (see also Vinke et al. 1998: 393).

Against this background the idea of full-scale English courses does not seem to be a realistic solution, nor would such courses be relevant to all EMI teachers. The *SPEAC* statistical analyses of the lecturer questionnaires revealed that job category is a predictor of the lecturers’ general lecturing competence (see also Klaassen and Bos 2010: 70). On the whole, full professors and associate professors found giving lectures in English unproblematic (see also Vinke et al. 1998: 387–388). They stated that they performed just as well in English professionally and pedagogically as they did in Danish. Nevertheless, many of these lecturers observed that the individual support they received from the tutors in terms of the feedback sheets was very helpful. They appreciated – in some cases contrary to their own expectations – that advice specifically related to their own usage helped them discover which issues they should concentrate on in order to upgrade their English competences with the greatest effect (Denver et al. 2009: 18). Thus one solution could be for universities to introduce tailor-made EMI support where lecturers are supervised by experts in English during a number of lectures with subsequent feedback.

However, this kind of expert support would not be sufficient for all EMI lecturers. Some groups clearly need more than that. According to the *SPEAC* analyses, it was in the categories of PhD students and assistant professors that we found most individuals who felt they were walking on slippery ground when giving lectures in English. Not surprisingly, they were also typically the youngest members of staff with limited teaching experience and those who had been least exposed to English in an English-speaking country. Among the third of lecturers at the lower end of the examiners’ ranking list, we found a noticeably higher number of lecturers who had not had the benefit of a stay in an English-speaking country (Denver et al. 2009: 18). In the subsequent interviews, this group stated that the best support that they could be offered by the management was a stay at a university in an English-speaking country (Werther et al. 2014). And in line with both House (1996) and the wish expressed by these younger staff members, we suggest that such a stay abroad should be part of the package offered by the university management to inexperienced EMI teachers.

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