EMI Language Tip – “Do I need to address language in my English-taught courses?”

When some teachers ask that question, they usually associate language with rules of grammar or pronunciation. However, in the context of a university-level course, the question ultimately ties into the language of your discipline. When you teach, regardless of the content or the language of instruction, you teach vocabulary to a certain degree. In the English-taught class context, there are some basic principles you can use to support students in learning the language of your field.

1. **Provide materials (slides/articles) in advance** so that students can familiarize themselves with the target language before attending your lesson/lecture. If students are hearing terms for the first time in class, this can slow down and even impede comprehension. Some teachers provide a shortlist of key content-related terms for each lesson, thus better preparing students for the language they will hear and use in class.

2. **Visualize** key terms during class, whether it is on slides, handouts, or the board. This strategy does not necessarily mean you need to create more materials. Instead, it means you may have to be more explicit in your materials compared to teaching in your first language.

3. **Paraphrase and repeat** key terms during a lesson. This example from a technical science class does both:
   - “So what does *decoupled planning* mean? Decoupled means that instead of planning for the entire team, step by step, we plan for each agent in isolation.”
   
   Increased repetition or paraphrasing likely means that you will cover less content during the lesson. Yet, this trade-off will likely help students learning content in a foreign language to better comprehend.

4. **Give students opportunity** to use the language. Carefully formulated questions by the teacher coupled with brief collaborative tasks whereby students must use the language (whether speaking, writing or applying cognitively) helps students deepen understanding in combination with the discipline target language.

**International classroom tip**

Having just emphasized the importance of language use, we now turn to a counter-intuitive, yet interesting question recently posed in one of our workshops: “Is it okay to let students speak different languages during in-class activities?”. The answer to this thoughtful question is up to the teacher. Let’s briefly weigh the pros and cons:

- **Pro:** Students may find it easier to get talking about the topic, which can lead to more follow-up contributions.
- **Con:** Students will be ‘less prepared’ to share their questions/input in English with the whole class.
- **Pro:** Students’ language diversity is appreciated when a teacher allows this freedom in class.
- **Con:** Teacher can’t listen in on discussions unless he/she understands the language being spoken.
- **Pro:** Students may be more motivated/less apprehensive to engage in the activity.
- **Con:** Some students may feel disadvantaged if they cannot share with anyone in a language other than English.

In the end, a teacher may have good reasons to opt for the multi-lingual approach, e.g. increase student involvement/activation. If you opt for multiple languages in collaborative tasks, we recommend that you exercise explicit transparency. Communicate to students why you do it and that the language switches back to English when the whole group discusses the activity or question posed.

**Food for thought**

Many universities are placing more emphasis on internationalizing curricula. Sounds great but how does one do that? [Glasgow Caledonian University](http://www.gcu.ac.uk) provides some first practical steps and tools to assist this endeavor.
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