Exploring English as a 'glocal language' in online EMEMUS

Francesca Helm

COVID-19 led to a transition to 'remote emergency teaching' in higher-education contexts across the globe. The impact of this on English-medium education in multilingual university settings (EMEMUS) contexts is yet to be fully understood, but it is clear that it will be long lasting. This article outlines three online pedagogic activities that were adopted in an English-taught course that transitioned from the classroom to online. Based on a conceptualization of English as a 'glocal language' and motivated by an orientation towards a 'pedagogy of care', the activities were designed to draw on students' rich linguistic repertoires and support community building. The first activity was a language portrait, the second entailed online and offline exploration of the linguistic landscape of the local contexts, and the third activity was the critical analysis, editing, translation, and/or adaptation of Wikipedia pages. All activities can be adapted for the ELT classroom.

Key words: English-medium education, language portrait, glocal language, linguistic landscape, language pedagogy

Introduction

In the last twenty years there has been an 'unfettered growth' in English-medium education pushed by the relentless drive for internationalization of higher education (Galloway and Rose 2021: 33). English-medium education in multilingual university settings or EMEMUS (Dafouz and Smit 2016) is spreading also in south European countries such as Italy where English is not widely used in everyday interactions. International students in such contexts often do not speak the local language(s) and may face linguistic and social barriers that can affect them in many aspects of daily life within and outside the university.

COVID-19 has drastically changed the higher-education scenario and will have long-lasting repercussions. The pandemic has exacerbated inequity, and both educators and students have been experiencing trauma and anxiety in many parts of the world (Bozkurt et al. 2020). At the time of writing, one year after the onset of the pandemic, student mobility in Europe is resuming and educators are transitioning from remote emergency teaching to more reflexive engagement with how technology can be meaningfully used for classes—many of which continue to be online. As physical distancing remains necessary in some contexts,

considerations are needed as to how we can support community building through online and blended activities and address the isolation that many students have reported. This is particularly important for EMEMUS communities such as that outlined above, as students need to access and understand information. This access is often mediated through their peers, particularly when institutions do not provide all information in English as often happens in contexts that have only recently introduced English-medium education.

This article outlines three online pedagogic activities that were adopted in an English-taught course entitled 'English as a Global/Glocal Language', which transitioned from the classroom to online. Motivated by the need to work towards social justice and equity, and a belief in collaborative and open educational practices, the activities were designed to support students in community building and also in developing greater understanding of social, epistemic, and linguistic inequalities. They aimed to draw on students' linguistic repertoires and to raise awareness of the complexities and opportunities of English as a glocal language—both online and offline.

EMEMUS and the ROAD-MAPPING framework

This paper draws on the ROAD-MAPPING framework for EMEMUS developed by Dafouz and Smit (2016) which identifies core dimensions that are at work in higher-education institutions (HEIs) where English is an additional language used as a means of instruction. Developed in a European context, their framework sees multilingual universities as sites where bilingual or multilingual education is represented—whether it is official, comprehensive, pedagogically explicit, or not. The framework is informed by postmodern sociolinguistic conceptualizations of language as fluid, complex, and multifunctional, and by the need to explore the relationships of languages to each other and the contexts in which they are used—that is, an ecolinguistic perspective. This article draws upon three of the six dimensions they have identified. The first is 'practices and processes', which regards 'teaching and learning activities that construct and are constructed by specific EMEMUS realities' (Dafouz and Smit 2016: 407). These activities are informed by the (often implicit) beliefs of the teachers about the learning process and how their teaching can best support students. The second dimension I draw on is the 'internationalization and glocalization' dimension, which regards the complex interplay between the local and the global and relates to measures that address multicultural and multilingual university scenarios, the internationalization of curricula, widening the participation of minoritized communities. The third dimension addressed is the 'roles of English in relation to other languages'. English is used as the shared language of communication, a glocal language which is used to bring together different knowledges.

English as a glocal language

English has been conceptualized in many ways, for example as a foreign language, a medium of education or of instruction, a lingua franca, a global language. The activities described in this paper adopt the concepts of English as a glocal language (Guilherme 2018) and as a language always in translation (Pennycook 2008).

Glocal languages are complex phenomena which go beyond simple local–global dichotomies. They do not reject, but rather they transform global languages according to their own, local, needs. English as a glocal language coexists with other languages and meanings and is in the middle of a traffic of meanings (Souza 2019).

This view of English as a glocal language has much in common with Pennycook's (2008) conceptualization of English as a 'language always in translation' and its underlying premise that English always needs to be seen in the context of other languages. English offers opportunities to bring people into 'the global traffic of meaning', that is, the coming and going of people and 'a passing to and fro of ideas, concepts, symbols, discourses' (Pennycook 2008: 33). Yet, he argues, English is often taught as a monolingual enterprise, 'a language that operates only in its own presence' (Pennycook 2008: 44). Central to both views is the foregrounding of the inequalities between languages and the struggles over diversity, not only linguistic but also epistemic diversity. Linguistic stratification and subordination is intertwined with social injustices (Piller 2016). Souza adds that there cannot be social justice without "cognitive or epistemic justice" (Souza 2019: 33), highlighting the importance of knowledge, culture, and language for social well-being in a world where there are disparities in terms of the kinds of knowledge that are valued. The spread of English as a medium of education can reinforce the widespread assumption that English is the *only* language of knowledge-making. Introducing English as a glocal language is a strategy for questioning and challenging such 'monocultures of knowledge' (Souza 2019: 19) and introducing 'a pluriversality of knowledges' (Souza 2019: 33). It entails a translingual approach whereby students' languages and knowledges are welcomed and explored in relation to one another and to English, and where multiple semiotic resources can be brought into play, enriching the possibilities for meaning-making.

The activities proposed in this paper are informed by these conceptualizations of English as a glocal language. They also embrace principles of a pedagogy of care and community. The concept of care is not new in education, and it has long been a priority of communities of open educators and those adopting feminist educational approaches. The pandemic has highlighted the need to learn how to use online spaces not just to communicate, but to create social spaces where community can be built with and among learners. Practising a pedagogy of care means being attentive to the well-being of students, being culturally responsive, giving learners choices and different possible pathways (Bali 2020).

The context

The pedagogic activities were developed in a specific situated context, that is, an English course in an EMEMUS context in an HEI in Italy—in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Italian higher-education system the number of English taught programmes has grown rapidly in the last few years, with the Universitaly website[1] reporting 668 degree courses (mostly at master's level, although the number of bachelor's programmes is increasing) taught in English at seventy universities in 2020, while in 2015 there were 245 degree courses in fifty-two universities. The language ideology in many English-medium courses is often English-only, with

informal translingual practices present in classes, but not pedagogically planned (Dalziel and Guarda 2021).

In the specific context of this case study, the shift from an Italian-taught master's-level degree in 'Studi Europei' to an English-taught master's programme in European and Global Studies (EGOS) led to a substantial change in the student population. A somewhat homogeneous class, which shared Italian as their L1 and/or main language of education, studying English as a foreign language, became a class with roughly 50 percent international students from a wide range of countries, all using English for their studies. For me as a lecturer it entailed a shift from teaching 'Advanced English', where the focus was on using English and developing academic English skills, to a course entitled 'English as a Global/Glocal Language', in which English and its relation to other languages became the main theme. The course took on a more critical orientation and addressed issues such as language policy, linguistic diversity, and social and epistemic justice (Piller 2016). This change was a result of a collaborative and transdisciplinary approach to the design of the Global Studies curriculum and an attempt to make stronger links between the different courses. It also reflected a shift in my own understanding of language and its relation to power, and my research interests and engagement with scholars writing from the epistemic Global South (Souza 2019). English, in this course, thus served as a glocal language, to create new knowledge through contact, contributing to the 'pluriversality of knowledges' in the classroom.

Although most of the international students attending the course had actually come to Italy, the course referred to in this article was taught online. Students were physically isolated from other students on their course and few had actually met each other. Many of the students were living in a context they did not know and they did not speak Italian. A characteristic of EMEMUS contexts is that they are not in Anglophone countries, the 'local' language is not the same as the language of education, and this can put an additional strain on these international students, particularly if they have no familiarity with the local language. At a time of heightened uncertainty, when local regulations due to COVID-19 were changing from one day to the next, and English translations were not always provided, this was a cause of anxiety and discomfort for many of the students on the course described. One of the key aims of the activities described below was thus to support the students' social and emotional needs as well as the academic curriculum.

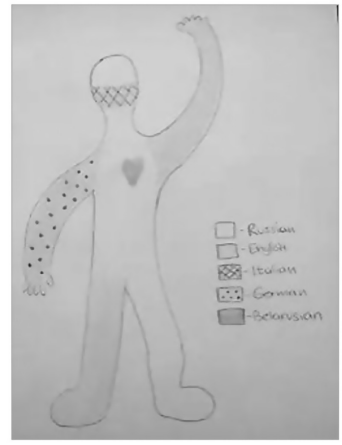
Language portraits

One of the first activities to enable students to get to know one another and to explore the plurilingual repertoires that they were bringing to the class was the language portraits activity—which has been extensively used in language education for migrants and also in research on multilingualism (Busch 2012). This activity makes a person's language repertoire visible, and thus allows them to visualize a representation of the relations and entanglement of English with other languages in their lives. It can provide an engaging way to get to know one another through the discussion of language-learning biographies that the portraits elicit, which are related to life experiences. In this EMEMUS context the activity

was also a way of allowing the students to express the linguistic challenges they may have been facing or their needs. The activity was effectively translated online by having students individually draw their biographies on paper and organizing them into break-out rooms in small groups so that they could share their portraits through their webcams. They were invited to tell and ask each other about their portraits and biographies, disclosing as much information as they felt comfortable with. A class Padlet (an online pinboard) was created where students could display their portraits and write about their biographies and engage asynchronously with the whole class, posting comments and questions, thus including students who were not able to connect for the synchronous meeting. This activity adopted a translingual approach by bringing into play different semiotic resources and modes—the visual, spoken, and written language as well as encouraging students to use and reflect on their changing linguistic repertoires and lived experiences of languages (Figure 1).

Observation and analysis of students' discussions of their portraits suggest that this activity raised students' awareness not only of the multiple languages and knowledges that were present within the class, but also of the values these were assigned in different contexts. Students highlighted the experiences, attitudes, and emotions linked to languages and linguistic hierarchies, and also how language policies have played out in their lives. One issue that emerged in discussion was the contrast between monolingual ideologies in many societies and spaces, including their English-medium classes, and the translingual reality of their daily practices and interactions.

While this activity focused on the languages that students brought with them to the class, the following activity took students out of the class to



As for my language biography, I included 5 languages in the following way. *"I was raised in Belarus. The usually spoken language there is the Russian language; it's also my mother tongue. That's why there is so much white color in my painting. And since I think in Russian, my head is also colored in white for the moment.*

My mouth is covered with an Italian "mascherina" because I'm learning the language and I live in an Italian-language environment. I think what I want to say in Russian, and translate these words through the Italian mask so that they sound Italian.

English raised hand means my current language of work and education. German hand means that I can use this language also for work if it's needed. It's like my left hand when English is not enough.

FIGURE 1
An extract from a student's portfolio about his language portrait. This activity is outlined and illustrated at: https://onehe.org/eu-activity/language-portrait/.

explore English and its relation to other languages in the local contexts in which the students found themselves.

Exploring the linguistic landscape

The linguistic landscape (LL) is the display of multiple forms of 'languages' in public spaces, and has become a growing field of studies. In language education, the study of public texts and textual practices provides opportunities to develop learners' language awareness, translingual competences, civic participation, and also social critique (Malinowski 2016). The aims for an activity on linguistic landscapes in this EMEMUS context were plurifold. For the newly arrived international students it was a way to get to explore an area of the city and also learn some Italian with the support of their Italian peers. In relation to equity and social justice, it provided an opportunity to examine linguistic hierarchies in this local context and consider the (in)visibility and inclusion/exclusion of the city's multiple communities.

Malinowski (2016: 105–106) puts forward three different spaces that can be juxtaposed as we open the spaces of learning through exploration of the linguistic landscape. These are 'perceived spaces', which are the visible, audible spaces that can be detected by the senses; 'lived spaces', which are the very subjective experiences we have in places; and 'conceived spaces', which are abstract representations of spaces that are planned and enforced. His suggestion is that in designing sequences of learning, educators should deliberately juxtapose these three spaces in order to support a more nuanced and critical understanding of how meaning, culture, and power work in the linguistic landscape.

The learning experience was designed so that the 'perceived spaces' were explored through a field trip, which replaced one of the online lessons. Students were organized into small groups and each group was assigned an area of the city (Padova) to explore, and asked to digitally document the material LL in response to the question: what languages are visible in the neighbourhood and why? They were to look for bi- or multilingual signs and take photographs of these and subsequently share these with the rest of the class. The field trip is also where they explored the 'lived space' as each group was deliberately composed of both domestic and international students, and they were encouraged to discuss their interpretations of the signs and what they represented, but also how they experienced them, as 'newcomers' and/or 'locals'. Students who were not physically in Padova explored the online LL of Padova by analysing the municipality's website or the LL wherever they were located.

The students' work was brought together and presented on Padlets or PowerPoint presentations and discussed in the online class. The discussion focused on whether Padova was perceived as a multilingual city, and also whether it was a welcoming and inclusive city, and for whom—international students, migrant communities, tourists.

Students identified the symbolic value of English and the abundant use of anglicisms, often for no specific purpose. They also observed how rarely English was used for functional and informative purposes, above all on a top-down level by city authorities. Public health information related to COVID-19, for example, was not readily available in English or any of

FIGURE 2
Photograph of sign in Italian about mask-wearing requirements.

the community languages (Figure 2), although images were frequently used. The COVID-19 crisis brought the impact of linguistic inequalities to the fore, as timely access to reliable information was often hindered by language barriers.

The 'conceived space' was addressed in several ways. First of all, through demographic research on the city and the university, looking at the numbers of non-Italian residents, tourists, and international students and discussing the extent to which this was reflected in the linguistic landscape. Students made observations on the visibility of languages in different spaces and the impermeability of spaces, as the following comment shows:

> One observation that seemed to me interesting is how inside the Station, the languages and the multiethnic atmosphere that it's outside, is just wiped out. For example, near the Station there are a lot of shops and bars from countries like Romania, China, or Arabic countries and India, but inside the station these languages don't exist. Inside the dominant languages are English and other European ones. ... At some

point it made me feel sad, because this idea shows how some social groups, in both directions, are waterproof.

Many of the international students felt that whilst the city was open and welcoming for tourists (as witnessed by multilingual ticket machines, signs at the station, signage around tourist sights), it was not 'ready' to welcome international students or migrants. The LL around basic services such as emergency health information, public transport, postal or banking services, supermarkets, and even the university was predominantly monolingual, and they reported finding this challenging and unwelcoming.

In line with the principles of a 'pedagogy of care', the activity allowed international students to express the difficulties they were experiencing and provided an opportunity for the domestic students to support them.

Analysing and editing Wikipedia

The final activity presented was designed to explore the 'roles of English in relation to other languages' in a more global online context. Celebrating twenty years of existence at the time of writing, Wikipedia has become one of the most widely used online resources. It is a resource that students are likely to access and read, but few will have actively contributed to, or fully understood—let alone considered in terms of a linguistic or knowledge ecology.

Wikipedia is a multilingual resource in that there are Wikipedias in nearly 300 different languages and 89 percent of Wikipedia articles are in languages other than English. It thus represents a multilingual ecology—although it is important to point out that it still includes only around 5 percent of all the world's languages. Languages are strictly separated into separate Wikipedias and, unsurprisingly, the English-language Wikipedia is the largest, with some 5.8 million articles and 31,000 editors. The nine top language Wikipedias have more than half of all articles, whilst together the bottom 50 percent of all Wikipedias have less than 10 percent of all articles (Vrandečić 2020). Wikipedia's contributors are predominantly white, Western males and the conceptualizations of neutrality, notability, and reliable sources, which are criteria for inclusion of articles, reflect this inherent epistemic bias. Whilst some progress has been made in terms of the gender bias, knowledge from marginalized communities, oral knowledge, biographies of women and transgender, black, brown, indigenous, queer, and people from the Global South are barely represented (Vrana, Sengupta, and Bouterse 2020).

Despite the inherent limitations of Wikipedia, it is of interest as a resource for multilingual and equitable pedagogy because it is freely available in more languages than most other educational resources. Furthermore, it is not driven by financial or commercial interests but rather by a huge community of volunteers (over 280,000 volunteers edit Wikipedia every month: https://wikimediafoundation.org/wikipedia20/) which students can become part of. The community's inherent biases can only be challenged by expanding the user base and by contributing to the content and discussions on Wikipedia.

Editing Wikipedia is an activity that has been used in English language teaching, above all to support academic writing skills because contributors

are expected to write in a neutral style and to cite sources for what they write. It also creates opportunities for them to 'successfully integrate a sense of authorship into their English writer identities by positioning themselves as communicators within a Web 2.0 interactive world' (King 2015). In this activity, students were required to explore the roles of English in relation to other languages, to critically analyse the 'ecologies' of language and of knowledge in Wikipedia, and to make contributions. In the EMEMUS context described above, students worked online in small, multilingual groups to analyse and/or contribute articles to Wikipedia.

Students explored the presence and use of different languages in Wikipedia on certain topics of their choice, and the type of information and perspectives that were available in the languages they were familiar with. One group of students, for example, chose to compare how the 2020 US presidential elections were written about, edited, and discussed in the Wikipedia articles and talk pages in the Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, and English versions of Wikipedia. Other students created or edited articles with the support of a Wikimedian, on issues related to language policy, linguistic landscapes, and/or social justice issues that they were interested in. They were encouraged to engage with the concept of 'neutrality', one of the pillars of Wikipedia, and to explore the extent to which multiple perspectives were present on the issues written about. For example, one group who explored an article on English-medium education felt that critical perspectives were missing and thus sought to address that gap by contributing to the page. Another group translated an Italian Wikipedia page on a social issue they felt was important and relevant to a more global audience, and thus created a new article in English.

> My Wikipedia group focused on translating the page '…' into English. This page already exists in Italian and in German but not in English. My group translated the Italian page and we added some information to it. The topic is relatively current regarding the refugee crisis. So, it is important that not only people who speak Italian or German can find out more about it. By translating it into English people who speak English have access to this information now.

As the above activities show, Wikipedia can create opportunities for students to bring their linguistic repertoires into the classroom by comparing, discussing, editing, translating, and/or creating articles in different languages. These kinds of activities could also be adopted for other academic subjects taught in EMEMUS contexts[2].

Conclusions

Much of the literature on the changing role of ELT professionals in EMI contexts has focused on EAP and ESP (Galloway and Rose 2021). Here, other roles and responsibilities have been highlighted, which include community building for the social and academic integration of students and entering the traffic of meanings that English as a glocal language brings. This article was based on a class in Italy, but in many non-Anglophone EMEMUS contexts, international students are particularly vulnerable if they do not speak the language of the country in which they find themselves.

Exploring English as a glocal language through the activities described allowed students to reflect on the relation of English to other languages

in their own and their peers' linguistic repertoires and biographies, as well as the values assigned to different languages. It also brought to light the role of English and its relation to other languages in the physical spaces in which they found themselves and the online world of Wikipedia.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has enforced physical distancing and the use of online tools, this does not mean that social proximity is impossible or that classes cannot actively engage students. By developing online activities that also promote community-building and a pedagogy of care, the socio-emotional needs as well as academic and linguistic development and exchange among students can be supported. The COVID-19 pandemic and the pivot to remote emergency teaching has highlighted the need for such support and community-building, to make our universities and societies more equitable and welcoming translingual and transcultural spaces for all. However, this need will remain as the world seeks to recover and renew itself in the aftermath.

Final version received November 2021

Notes

1 https://www.universitaly.it/index.php/cercacorsi/universita?lingua_corso=en

2 See, for example, the collection of case studies published: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/39/Wikimedia_in_Education_-_Wikimedia_UK_in_partnership_with_the_University_of_Edinburgh.pdf

References

Bali, M. 2020. 'Literacies Teachers Need During Covid-19.' *Al-Fanar Media*, https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2020/05/literacies-teachers-need-during-covid-19/.

Bozkurt *et al.* 2020. 'A Global Outlook to the Interruption of Education Due to COVID-19 Pandemic: Navigating in a Time of Uncertainty and Crisis.' *Asian Journal of Distance Education* 15(1):1–126.

Busch, B. 2012. 'The Linguistic Repertoire Revisited.' *Applied Linguistics* 2012:1–22.

Dafouz, E. and **U. Smit**. 2016. 'Towards a Dynamic Conceptual Framework for English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings.' *Applied Linguistics* 37(3):397–415.

Dalziel, F. and **M. Guarda**. 2021. 'Student Translanguaging Practices in the EMI Classroom: A Study of Italian Higher Education'. In *English-Medium Instruction and Translanguaging*, edited by B. Paulsrud, Z. Tian, and J. Toth. Bristol, 124–40. Multilingual Matters.

Galloway, N. and **K. Rose**. 2021. 'English Medium Instruction and the English Language Practitioner.' *ELT Journal* 75(1):33–41.

Guilherme, M. 2018. '"Glocal Languages": The "Globalness" and the "Localness" of World Languages.' In *New Directions for Research in Foreign Language Education*, edited by S. Coffey and U. Wingate, 79–96. London: Routledge.

King, B. W. 2015. 'Wikipedia Writing as Praxis: Computer-Mediated Socialization of Second-Language Writers.' *Language Learning & Technology* 19(3):106–23. http://dx.doi.org/10125/44436.

Malinowski, D. 2016. 'Localizing the Transdisciplinary in Practice: A Teaching Account of a Prototype Undergraduate Seminar on Linguistic Landscape.' *L2 Journal* 8(4):100–17.

Pennycook, A. 2008. 'English as a Language Always in Translation.' *European Journal of English Studies* 12(1):33–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570801900521.

Piller, I. 2016. *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Souza, L. M. T. M. 2019. 'Glocal Languages, Coloniality and Globalization from Below.' In *Glocal Languages and Critical Intercultural Awareness: The South Answers Back*, edited by M. Guilherme and L. M. T. M. de Souza, 42–64**.** New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351184656.

Vrana, A. G., **A. Sengupta**, and **S. Bouterse**. 2020. 'Toward a Wikipedia For and From Us All.' In

Wikipedia @ 20: Stories of an Incomplete Revolution, edited by J. Reagle and J. Koerner, 239–58. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; 2020, accessed August 10, 2021, https://wikipedia20.pubpub.org/pub/myb725ma/release/2.

Vrandečić, D. 2020. 'Collaborating on the Sum of All Knowledge Across Languages.' In *Wikipedia @ 20: Stories of an Incomplete Revolution*, edited by J. Reagle and J. Koerner, 175–88. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; 2020, accessed August 10, 2021, https://wikipedia20.pubpub.org/pub/svu3uy1z/release/2.

The author

Francesca Helm is assistant professor of English at the Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies at the University of Padova, Italy. Her research interests include online intercultural dialogue, language and education policy, coloniality, and globalization. Her publications have appeared in international journals such as *Language Learning and Technology*, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, and the *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Biligualism*.
Email: francesca.helm@unipd.it