

# 1 Critical Views of English Medium Instruction

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## Introduction

This book foregrounds the adoption of critical sociocultural views of language education in English Medium Instruction (EMI). Critical perspectives, as one side of this epistemological merge, are now established alternative theoretical orientations in the scholarly sphere of applied linguistics and English language education (Crookes, 2022; Pennycook, 2021). These perspectives problematize the mainstream conception of English as a neutral means of communication and invite us to better understand its essential sociopolitical nature (e.g., Al-Issa & Mirhosseini, 2020; Block, 2018; Canagarajah, 1999; De Costa, 2016; Pennycook, 1998, 1999, 2017; Phillipson, 1992). From a critical view of language education, English carries its own sociocultural loads – that is, history, worldviews, and values – and is particularly associated with neoliberal ideologies (Block, 2014; Block et al., 2012; De Costa, 2019; Norton, 2013; Wierzbicka, 2014). These loads can be overtly or covertly carried over into processes of teaching and learning English (and through English) as an additional language (Hillman et al., 2023; Mirhosseini et al., 2017; Phillipson, 1992; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017).

On the other hand, EMI defined as the use of English as the language of teaching and learning in educational settings where it is not the home language (Macaro et al., 2018) also has a long history. In particular, over the past two decades EMI has expanded exponentially in various contexts (Bolton et al., 2024; Dimova et al., 2015; Lasagabaster, 2022; McKinley & Galloway, 2022; Molino et al., 2022; Pun, 2024; Zhao & Dixon, 2017). Along with increasing discussions of the theoretical underpinnings of EMI and its practical affordances and challenges, EMI research continues to grow as a vast and vibrant area of inquiry around the world (Griffiths, 2023), spanning from the broader Asia-Pacific region (e.g., Fenton-Smith et al., 2017; Sah & Fang, 2023) to many countries in mainland Europe (e.g., Dimova et al., 2015; Earls, 2016), Africa (e.g., Kamwangamalu, 2013), and South America (e.g., Miranda & Molina-Naar, 2022).

As noted by Tollefson and Tsui (2004), EMI is characterized by complex “sociopolitical processes” that are related to medium of instruction policies, which themselves often reflect wider sociopolitical contestations that critical approaches have sought to interrogate. In fact, critical discussions and explorations of EMI portray the significance of such contestations in EMI theory, practice, and research beyond linguistic concerns and instructional challenges (e.g., Block & Khan, 2021; De Costa et al., 2021a; Lin, 2024; Phyak, 2024; Sah, 2022; Sah & Fang, 2023, 2024; Toh, 2016) and the wealth of understandings that can be offered by critical views in this realm. While EMI is still an emerging and developing area of professional practice and scholarly inquiry (Gupta & Lin, 2023; Lasagabaster, 2022; Rahman & Singh, 2022), further deliberate embrace of critical orientations can significantly enrich EMI praxis. In light of this reality, this volume is a collective endeavor to highlight a *Critical EMI* that underscores critical praxis in this area of inquiry in an explicit, inclusive, and coherent manner (also see Mirhosseini & De Costa, 2024). Introducing this endeavor, we first revisit the notion of “critical” in this chapter and then further discuss the significance of Critical EMI as well as some of its implications before providing an overview of the book.

### What Do We Mean by Critical?

Perhaps the first question about the notion of Critical EMI would be what we mean by *critical*. It is not easy to delineate criticality as a clearly demarcated theoretical construct, as there are diverse conceptions and different understandings of what is and what is not critical (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Lockett & Bhatt, 2024; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). However, working on the assumption that the scholarly community of applied linguists and English language educators – though not necessarily including all frontline practitioners – now has a broad idea of criticality, we highlight some focal concerns related to critical views that can be adopted in EMI. In electing not to offer a precise definition, we are in alignment with Pennycook (2021) and Crookes (2021), who posit that it is important to understand criticality not as a solid frame but as a dynamic arena of problematizing sociopolitical underpinnings of people’s engagements (in language and education). In fact, Pennycook (2021) offers a set of key notions of criticality that encompass issues of power and decolonization, as well as a problematization of praxis.

Therefore, criticality in Critical EMI may be understood as foregrounding such foci, which entails necessarily stepping beyond technical instructional considerations and an obsession with the use of English as a mere instrument of content teaching; rather, a critical approach may be viewed as a sociohistorical and sociopolitical site of cultural and material dominance (Dafouz & Smit, 2023; Mirhosseini & Babu, 2020; Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 1992;

Toh, 2016). This idea of criticality as sociopolitical awareness thus invites contextual interpretations and realizations in diverse ways – even diverging positions and *clashing criticalities* – that pursue the common thread of sociopolitical sensitivity (Abednia et al., 2022; Crookes, 2021; Selvi et al., 2022). In the next section we highlight three aspects of such awareness and sensitivity: namely, ideology and policy, identity and justice, and the sociopolitics of English.

### *Ideology and Policy*

Ideologies as fundamental social belief systems can significantly characterize a critical approach (van Dijk, 2006). Critical views are clearly embedded in discussions of language ideologies and educational ideologies (Schiro, 2013; Woolard, 2020), English language education ideologies in particular (Doecke et al., 2019; Mirhosseini, 2018). Closely related to ideologies are (language-in-education) policies that by some accounts necessarily entail certain ideologies, values, and worldviews (Ball, 2015; Johnson, 2013). Therefore, addressing policies – admittedly beyond administrative planning and institutional management – can also reflect critical orientations. Within EMI, there are streams of studies that have focused on issues of ideology (e.g., Rahman & Singh, 2022; Sah, 2022; Sung, 2021), policy-related problems at different levels (e.g., De Costa et al., 2021a; Hamid et al., 2013; Phyak & Sah, 2024; Sah & Li, 2022; Zhang, 2018), and the intersections of these two considerations (e.g., Phyak, 2013, 2024; Shirahata & Lahti, 2023). Such studies do demonstrate the considerable scope of research problems related to ideologies and policies in EMI and highlight the significance of ideological awareness in EMI practices, particularly in encountering their (neo)colonial underpinnings (Sah & Fang, 2024). Addressing such research problems and adopting such practices can be both emphasized through Critical EMI and at the same time help to partially define it.

### *Identity and Justice*

Identity, as understandings of how people and their relationships are defined and represented (Joseph, 2004; Norton, 2013), is closely integrated with issues of power, representation, and domination as focal aspects of critical views. Distinct from individual and psychological conceptions of identity, such critical views have already been addressed in the field (e.g., De Costa & Norton, 2016; Preece, 2016; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). Identities as sociocultural constructs are also often understood in connection with social justice, which can constitute another significant aspect of criticality (Macedo, 2000; Tavares, 2023). In the specific area of EMI, and different from mainstream trends in practice and research, issues of identity and (epistemic) (in)justice have been addressed by scholars in different social and educational contexts, sometimes

in conjunction with problems of ideology and policy (e.g., Dafouz, 2018; De Costa et al., 2021b; Fang & Hu, 2022; Jahan & Hamid, 2019; Kuchah, 2016; Milligan, 2022; Phyak et al., 2022; R'boul, 2022; Zheng & Qiu, 2024). This body of research illustrates some aspects of the host of related questions that could and should be addressed. Importantly, this wealth of insights that can be gained from critical approaches can also help with understanding further aspects of Critical EMI as a distinct area of praxis.

### *The Sociopolitics of English*

In English language education, the criticality of examining history, economy, power, dominance, ideology, policy, identity, and justice is crucially realized in problematizing the global spread of English and how it came to be the dominant language today (Hall & Eggington, 2000; O'Regan, 2021; Pennycook, 1994). Hence, awareness of the sociopolitics of English is arguably the most prominent aspect of critical English language education (Crookes, 2022; Mirhosseini, 2018). On this basis, the English language has been viewed as a significant element and driver of neoliberalist globalization policies (De Costa et al., 2016; Mirhosseini & Babu, 2020; Phillipson, 1992; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017). Therefore, EMI is an essentially sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical undertaking rather than a mere instructional activity with simple instrumental aims (Block, 2021; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Sah & Fang, 2024; Sahan & Rose, 2021; Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 2017; Wright, 2016). Other studies that have investigated EMI policies and practices in terms of the underlying status of English (e.g., Choi, 2021; Kuteeva, 2020; Muslim et al., 2022; Phyak & Sah, 2024) do indicate that this is a potentially rich line of inquiry that can be expanded and strengthened within focused and coherent Critical EMI scholarship. Such endeavors can not only further contribute to sociopolitical awareness in EMI practice, but also offer possibilities for resistance to and dismantling of structural mechanisms of power associated with the neocolonial spread and dominance of English.

### **Why Critical EMI?**

As stated, critical research and discussions of EMI have examined the socio-cultural (e.g., Huang & Fang, 2023; Milligan, 2022; Song, 2020) and political/economic (e.g., De Costa et al., 2022; Kedzierski, 2016) aspects of EMI. This strand of research has explored EMI in universities and K-12 education in postcolonial settings as well as other non-Anglophone contexts (e.g., Bhattacharya, 2013; R'boul, 2022; Shirahata & Lahti, 2023; Sung, 2021; Toh, 2016). However, an invitation to a more deliberately supported Critical EMI is still worthwhile within the broader landscape of “critical applied linguistics”

(Pennycook, 2021). When the notion of critical applied linguistics was proposed in the 1990s (Pennycook, 1990a, 2001), critical approaches to language, education, and English language teaching already existed (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Freire, 1970; Graman, 1988; Kress & Hodge, 1979; Pennycook, 1994, 1999). Still, the invitation to engage in critical applied linguistics became a turning point for a more serious (explicit, inclusive, and coherent) adoption of critical approaches and in turn spurred calls for new intellectual initiatives such as “critical language testing” (Shohamy, 1998), “critical English for academic purposes” (Benesch, 2001), and “critical language teacher education” (Hawkins & Norton, 2009).

These subareas of applied linguistics and language education had existed for decades before these critical overtures, but we posit that EMI is still *emerging*. Apart from postcolonial spaces that have hosted EMI for a long time, its vigorous expansion worldwide only started around two decades ago (Bradford, 2019; Chang, 2021; Coleman, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2022). In many contexts it “is still in its infancy” (Gupta & Lin, 2023, p. 63); “still a growing phenomenon that is being defined and redefined” (Rahman & Singh, 2022, p. 2435). Therefore, evolving critical considerations of EMI can expand more strongly in terms of theory and practice as well as offer alternative routes of action to open up spaces for resistance and change (see the Afterword by Graham Crookes). Central to this vision of a Critical EMI is shaping an educational and scholarly praxis with three major features: an *explicit* advocacy of critical understandings of EMI anywhere in the world; an *inclusive* critical view of all aspects of EMI theory, policy, practice, and research involving students, teachers, policy makers, and the society at large; and a *coherent* endeavor at creating an area of educational, scholarly, and social engagement that synergically aims to improve social life (also see Mirhosseini & De Costa, 2024).

### Critical EMI Awareness (beyond Universities)

In addition to academic research and theory development, Critical EMI needs to be adopted in policy and practice as part of broader critical awareness raising in language teaching and learning (De Costa & Van Gorp, 2023). At the instructional level, critical attitudes about the historical and sociocultural situatedness of the English language should become embedded in the pedagogical practices of EMI teachers and students. Both teachers and students need to be able to own the English language within their multilingual world and independently of its colonial and neoliberal associations (Canagarajah, 2024; Doecke & Mirhosseini, 2023; García & Li, 2014). At the institutional level, Critical EMI awareness needs to be part of decisions about the very adoption of English as the medium of instruction and the possible pitfalls of EMI within the broader trends of Englishization and marketization of higher education (De

Costa et al., 2022; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Pan & Block, 2011). Critical EMI awareness can also be seen as part of the broader critical awareness of the history, status, and dominance of English and its sociocultural associations, as argued by proponents of critical language education (e.g., Crookes, 2021; Pennycook, 1990b, 1999; Sah & Fang, 2024).

This broad critical awareness of English and its teaching, learning, and use interconnects EMI in higher education with K–12 education in significant ways. A crucial aspect of this interconnection – what we would call the *ebb tide* effect of higher education EMI – is reflected in how (prospects of) university EMI can accelerate the further spread and dominance of English language education (and possibly EMI endeavors) at the school level. Apart from the allure of the possible pursuit of higher education in English-speaking countries, the prospect of EMI university education in their home countries can encourage parents and students in non-Anglophone contexts to invest in EMI school education. This investment can itself become an impetus to foster school-level EMI in such educational contexts. In other words, an increasingly larger number of students are going through school (i.e., K–12) EMI programs, hoping to prepare for university EMI education, and this educational vision in turn fuels the continued neocolonial expansion of English in the domain of education. The scope of this ebb tide can extend even further if school and university EMI students choose to immerse themselves in more English language learning activities beyond formal education (Mirhosseini & De Costa, 2024).

## Book Structure

As stated, in lieu of a clearcut definition of criticality, we conceptualize critical perspectives of EMI as those addressing cluster issues of ideology and policy, identity and justice, as well as the sociopolitics of English within the historical, cultural, political, and economic atmosphere of education and society. Therefore, the contributions to this book are organized in three parts around those three clusters of EMI concerns.

### *Part I: Ideologies and Educational Policies*

The five chapters in this first part of the volume investigate EMI ideologies and policies, with the first three chapters foregrounding ideologies as the focus of their critical orientation and the next two exploring policies. Francesca Helm (Chapter 2) problematizes ideological views of English at the national level as well as the institutional and instructional levels in an EMI context in Italy, arguing that in this context English is conceptualized based on a mix of ideas of internationalization and instrumental applicability. Chit Cheung Matthew Sung (Chapter 3) examines ideological orientations of international

EMI students in a university in Hong Kong and demonstrates that these students tend to hold a predominantly monolingual ideology of English that can reproduce the hegemony of English in the absence of critical awareness. Glenn Toh and Mark Zion (Chapter 4) also focus on similar EMI-related ideologies but in a more complex institutional setting in Japan. In the first of the two policy-related chapters, Aigerim Kazhigaliyeva, Syed Abdul Manan, and Anas Hajar (Chapter 5) discuss EMI policies in Kazakhstan in relation to the contemporary trends of internationalization and Englishization in higher education. They identify neoliberalism as the underlying policy force steering such trends and the related epistemological challenges of EMI in that context and beyond. In the second policy-related chapter of this part, Dogan Yuksel, Peter Wingrove, Marion Nao, Beatrice Zuaro, and Anna Kristina Hultgren (Chapter 6) discuss how the concept of “critical” in EMI is linked with questions of dominance and linguistic imperialism and present a transdisciplinary analysis of the case of EMI policy making in Turkish higher education.

### *Part II: Identity and Educational Justice*

The second part of the book includes two chapters that highlight EMI teacher identity and another that addresses the question of inequality. In the context of two universities in Colombia, Mario Molina-Naar and Isabel Tejada-Sánchez (Chapter 7) explore teachers’ own discourses and investigate the identity challenges encountered by teachers as they grapple with multiple dynamics in a complex institutional and sociolinguistic context. The authors argue that while their EMI lecturer participants are conscious of the pitfalls of the dominance of an English-only orientation, their decision-making limitations and institutional constraints are significant forces in this regard. D. Philip Montgomery’s chapter (Chapter 8) is also about EMI teachers’ identity construction processes and challenges, but in the geographically and socioculturally different context of Kazakhstan. His case study examines the ideological nature of identity construction in connection with power relations and internationalization policies. Chapter 9 addresses the issue of inequality through a comparative view of three diverse higher education contexts in Ethiopia, Poland, and Japan. Jim McKinley, Tolera Simie, and Agata Mikołajewska review the status of EMI in each of the three countries and discuss issues of access to EMI, and its various affordances and challenges in light of the broader sociocultural and socioeconomic dynamics within these societies.

### *Part III: The Politics of English in Education*

In the final part of the book, four chapters discuss different dimensions of the politics of English language education and use in several countries.

Although these chapters refer to ideology, policy, identity, and justice to varying degrees, their pivotal arguments are related to the status of English. Chapter 10 by Azirah Hashim and Kyria Finardi “problematizes English” in two distant contexts: Malaysia and Brazil. The authors provide a broad overview of EMI in the two countries, focusing on the historical trends of the use of English in education and the emergent challenges for local languages and multilingualism. In Chapter 11, Shaila Sultana addresses the status of English in the vast region of South Asia, bringing together theoretical perspectives of decolonization, language policies, and social justice. More specifically, she examines EMI with a focus on neoliberal associations of the English language and the possible prospects of decolonization in these countries. Questions surrounding the dominance of English and (neo)colonial trends are also addressed by Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu in the context of South Africa (Chapter 12). Notably, he investigates how this dominance can be reproduced through EMI in different ways. Finally, Kathleen Heugh (Chapter 13) also examines the South African context along with Australia. She challenges “the monolingual imaginary of contemporary Australia,” considers it as an EMI context, and addresses further issues of coloniality and the (neo)colonial dominance of English.

As a whole, the contributions to this volume not only call for more critical research on EMI but also demonstrate that a critical approach can be an essential aspect of any EMI policy and practice even where practicalities are addressed. As the chapters illustrate, critical views can inform the theoretical and empirical attitudes and standpoints of all EMI researchers; that is, all EMI research needs to be sensitive to issues of ideology, policy, identity, justice, and the sociopolitics of English. Moreover, as these chapters (and the Foreword and Afterword) illuminate, Critical EMI is not merely about making EMI work *better* but about problematizing the very (neo)colonial “entanglements” of EMI (Sah & Fang, 2024). Critical views need to be communicated to institutional managers, frontline practitioners, and current/future EMI students in order for them to join the endeavors aimed at challenging the instrumental and commodified conceptions of English. Critical EMI can contribute to broader attempts at remaking English language education and repurposing its use in various domains while confronting the dominance of English around the world.

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