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Plurilingual lecturers in English medium instruction in the Netherlands: the key to plurilingual approaches in higher education?

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ABSTRACT
Recent research calls for a re-structuring of higher education (HE) beyond English medium orientations by acknowledging the plurilingual resources of students and lecturers. In the Netherlands there is a rapid rise in plurilingual lecturers. The central question is to what extent these lecturers make use of their plurilingual resources for teaching within EMI and in what ways they can contribute to making EMI more plurilingual. This mixed-methods study aims at addressing this issue from the perspective of the lecturers. Based on 54 surveys and 20 qualitative interviews, it explores how Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers use their plurilingual resources in EMI. Overall, whereas the plurilingual lecturers engaged more frequently in plurilingual practices in their lectures, Dutch-speaking lecturers were mostly concerned with the status and the level of proficiency in the Dutch language and often followed a strict interpretation of official language policies which limited their engagement with students’ plurilingual resources. The study highlights the ways in which plurilingual lecturers can contribute to a shift within EMI towards acknowledging and using the plurilingual resources of both lecturers and students.

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English medium instruction; plurilingual education; higher education

1. Introduction: globalisation, internationalisation and EMI
Globalization has brought about the dominance of English across many domains (Coleman 2013) among which is academia, currently steered by the increasing competitiveness among higher education institutions (HEIs; Wilkinson 2013). This is often translated in the creation of English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes in countries in which English is not the official language. Higher education has intensified its focus on internationalization as a result of both globalization- and diversity-driven trends (Ampuja 2015; Smit 2010). In Europe, the Bologna Declaration promotes the use of English at university level (Coleman 2006). Since then, many HEIs opt for the implementation of EMI degree programmes to promote internationalization of the institution,
student exchanges, staff mobility and increase graduates’ employability (Coleman 2006; Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013).

This rapid increase of EMI is particularly visible in Dutch higher education. With the exception of Ireland and the United Kingdom, the Netherlands is the country within the European Union in which English is most commonly used as instruction language in HEIs (Coleman 2006; Edwards 2016). The current figures on EMI in the Netherlands show a drastic increase in the last decades (Edwards 2016). An example of this trend is the University of Groningen. With over 60% of all Dutch Higher Education programmes using English as the sole medium of instruction (Bouma 2018), and double as many international students between 2005–6 and 2016–17 (Huberts 2017), Groningen is increasingly adopting EMI. These changes have been accompanied by heated discussions on the role of English and Dutch in HE. Recently, for example, Eelco Runia, a history professor at the Arts Faculty, explained in an article why he left the university. Next to criticizing the general neoliberal trend and implementation of internationalization in HE in the Netherlands, he revealed being asked to teach in EMI to a room full of students who were all without exception capable of understanding Dutch (Runia 2018).

This trend towards more EMI has thus not gone unchallenged. Consequently, based on a request by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Science (KNAW) has issued a report on EMI, in which the main arguments for or against English in HE were related to internationalization and quality of education, the labour market and profession and business-related arguments, but were found not always to be based on factual evidence (KNAW 2017, 46–49). This situation has led to a debate about the role of the Dutch language in HE and several entities have pinpointed the dangers of neglecting Dutch in academia (Raad voor de Nederlandse Taal en Letteren 2015). The incongruities around this debate are summarized in the following statement: ‘The Dutch Language and Literature Council finds that Dutch is losing its position in relation to English in the fields of science and HE, but also sees the importance of internationalization in research and HE (…)’ (Raad voor de Nederlandse Taal en Letteren 2016, 5).

In addition to the general debate on EMI, recent research on plurilingualism and language education proposes a softening of borders between languages and the use of plurilingual repertoires of students and teachers for learning. Plurilingualism refers to ‘the capacity of individuals to use more than one language in social communication whatever their command of those languages’ (Beacco 2005, 19). This recent trend has been termed the ‘multilingual turn’ in language education (Conteh and Meier 2014; Stephen 2014) and has mostly been discussed in the context of primary and secondary education. Recently, however, similar propositions have been put forward for HE. Van der Walt (2013, 2016) suggests focussing on micro policy development for managing language use in HE, as overall policies are impossible in bi-/multilingual education due to the diverse student population. She proposes that lecturers are given the freedom to make their own language arrangements within EMI programmes. Similarly, Yanaprasart and Lüdi (2017) recommend that a balance needs to be found between the use of ‘English as lingua academica’ and the use of the students’ plurilingual practices. In their edited volume, Mazak and Carroll (2017) review research on the use of translanguaging (García 2009) in HE across different settings. Against this backdrop, two questions arise: to what extent are lecturers in general drawing upon the plurilingual repertoires of their students within EMI programmes? And are plurilingual lecturers – they also a
result of globalization and internationalization – more aware of the benefits of using students’ plurilingualism for learning, as they too daily engage in plurilingual practices? The present article addresses these issues.

While previous research on EMI has focussed both on lecturers’, students’ or staff members’ attitudes, experiences or challenges within EMI, little research has focussed on how lecturers – both speaking the majority language and plurilingual (with neither the majority language nor English as mother tongue) – engage with their own and their students’ plurilingualism. Although most Dutch-speaking lecturers also speak several languages, this article distinguishes between lecturers that report having Dutch as native language – termed here ‘Dutch-speaking lecturers’ – and those known as expatriate or international lecturers. As the term expatriate carries assumptions about class, education and privilege, this article will refer to the lecturers not having Dutch as their native language as ‘plurilingual lecturers’, while acknowledging that every lecturer in Dutch HE is probably fluent in more than one language.

By using a mixed-methods design, we aim at (a) identifying the types of plurilingual resources that Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers use within EMI programmes; (b) to explore differences in the use of those resources between Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers, (c) to explore the ways lecturers are making use of their students’ plurilingualism in class and (d) create a typology of the arguments facilitating or hampering the use of plurilingual approaches in HE.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Challenges within EMI

Lecturers and students alike view English as the lingua franca for classroom communication within EMI among speakers who do not share a first language (Crystal,2003; Dafouz and Smit 2014; Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2011; Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013; Smit 2010; Wagner and Gardner 2004; Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017). However, English language proficiency is by far the most common challenge concerning EMI of both lecturers and students that ‘affects the quality and quantity of classroom communication’ (Tange 2010, 137). Furthermore, cultural differences and student-teacher expectations (Ball and Lindsay 2013; Flowerdew and Miller 1996; Tange 2010) are also found to be typical concerns in EMI. In several studies, it was found that the lecturers’ lack of proficiency in English made them appear less flexible in conveying content, resulting in longer monologues, the loss of control (ability to handle unpredicted occurrences), style (flexibility) and personality (humour) (Clear 2005; Klaassen and De Graaff 2001; Tange 2010). As a consequence, they are more likely to cover less material throughout the lecture (Klaassen and De Graaff 2001). Alternatively, Björkman’s study (2010) suggests that English proficiency does not influence the way lecturers teach and that any lecturer can struggle with effective teaching or communication strategies, regardless of their English proficiency. Other studies propose that lecturers struggle to find a teaching methodology that addresses the needs of non-native speaking students studying in a foreign language (Klaassen and De Graaff 2001; Moore, Nussbaum, and Borràs 2012).

Besides language proficiency, researchers have also observed that teaching methodology is another challenge lecturers face in EMI (Ball and Lindsay 2013; Cots 2013; Klaassen and
De Graaff (2001). Recent studies have found that teaching in another language, especially at advanced conceptual levels, requires a shift in methodology and practice (Ball and Lindsay 2013; Guarda and Helm 2016). Concretely, lecturers must shift away from a top-down teaching methodology, which focusses on conveying knowledge, and move towards one which helps students in constructing knowledge by themselves by providing the necessary resources and tools to study in a foreign language (Cots 2013). Ferris (1998) found in the US that lecturers needed to develop classroom behaviours that address their students’ language difficulties, especially since most of them were studying in a foreign language and need additional support. Similar findings were reported by Klaassen and De Graaff (2001) for the Netherlands. However, researchers have doubted whether lecturers are willing to alter their teaching methodologies (Guarda and Helm 2016; Van der Walt 2016). These studies illustrate that teaching methodology is often perceived by EMI lecturers as a challenge, as it requires them to provide additional help and support to their students so that they are able to understand the lecture.

2.2. Reconciling EMI and plurilingualism

In recent studies, scholars suggest exploring plurilingual repertoires as an alternative option when there is linguistic diversity (García 2009). Milambiling (2011), for example, found that teachers developing methods for using individual plurilingualism were able to provide students with the guidance and support they needed, by having them reflect on their own linguistic resources. Lecturers can explore this by engaging in translanguaging (Mazak and Carroll 2017), using different languages orally or in slides or by asking students to relate course content to examples from their own cultural background or language(s) (Moore, Nussbaum, and Borràs 2012). Such activities may facilitate students’ comprehension of the content as well as communication by making it ‘more equitable, dynamic, flexible [and] inclusive’ (Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017, 12). Furthermore, it addresses issues related to language proficiency by facilitating language comprehension, production and development (Moore, Nussbaum, and Borràs 2012). In a study conducted by Gajo et al. (2013) in Switzerland, researchers found that plurilingual teaching practices were instrumental in that they facilitated knowledge and content construction. Another study conducted by Moore, Nussbaum, and Borràs (2012) in Catalan HE revealed that engaging in plurilingual practices improved language-related difficulties.

Adopting plurilingual forms of lecturing implies gaining insight into the different perspectives contained in the academic discourse (Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017). It helps creating a collective feeling of belonging, and may have a positive impact on group inclusiveness. Yanaprasart and Lüdi (2017, 12) also state that plurilingual approaches can result ‘in increasingly effective scientific outcomes and interpersonal relationships’. Besides facilitating internationalization and creating a pleasant social environment, it also enhances student participation (Moore, Nussbaum, and Borràs 2012).

Plurilingualism also has an influence on English as a lingua franca (ELF) which is often used in higher EMI education and is defined as the common means of intercultural communication among speakers who do not share a primary lingua-cultural background (Hülbauer and Seidlhofer 2013). Resources and possibilities in ELF are not limited to English but plurilingual elements such as translanguaging (García 2009; Mazak and Carroll 2017) are likely to play a role. ELF therefore provides the possibility of extending
linguistic repertoires for the need of intercultural communication and helps sustain multi-
lingual diversity (Hülmbauer and Seidlhofer 2013).

Translanguaging, for example, is a concept that is often highlighted as a useful strategy
in a multilingual classroom (Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013; Erling, Adinolfi, and Hultgren 2017; Tange 2010; Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017). At the University of Lausanne, plurilingual practices such as translanguaging are encouraged. If students are insecure about their English, they can pose questions in French because plurilingual interaction helps conceptual understanding and offers different perspectives in each language (Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017). Similarly, a case study of Ghana showed that teachers use translanguaging solely when they, based on students’ facial expressions, perceived that support was necessary (Ernig, Adinolfi, and Hultgren 2017). The use of translanguaging in the classroom therefore does not counter EMI but rather supports it. Basque lecturers likewise regard their non-nativeness of English as an asset because they can allow for translanguaging and accordingly raise students’ understanding (Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013). Another study in a Danish university analysing language use while doing group work found that using both Danish and English in an EMI class seems to be a suitable example of how multilingual development could be encouraged to a far greater extent than when English is used as a ‘one-size-fits-all filter’ (Mortensen 2014). The study concludes that exploring the benefits of integrating other linguistic resources into EMI courses is a desirable part of international education.

Concluding that it would help students develop multilingual academic literacy, Knapp (2014) explicitly advises lecturers to use students’ plurilingual competences to clarify meaning, enhance the depth of processing and make available acquired knowledge in diverse linguistic contexts. Airey’s (2011) study on the relationship between teaching language and student learning at a Swedish university showed that students indeed have severe problems describing disciplinary concepts in English. When making descriptions of the content of lectures, the quality of the content was just as good in their L1 or English, but when doing it in English they were in average 45% slower (Airey 2011). In general, engaging in plurilingual practices in EMI can help ensure comprehension of the academic input which is the overall aim of an academic lecture (Belhiah and Elhami 2014, 19).

In sum, lecturers often feel that they lack English proficiency while teaching in EMI. This goes hand in hand with challenges in finding teaching methodologies to overcome language barriers and engage in dynamic classroom discussions. The explicit use of plurilingualism has been put forward as a possible solution for these challenges and several studies looked at how this occurs in HE. However, less research has focussed on lecturers that have yet another native language (or languages) than both English and the majority language of the country they are lecturing in. Research on such lecturers is crucial as the academic staff of the universities becomes increasingly internationalized. In particular, the type of plurilingual resources used and lecturers’ views on the use of plurilingualism in class in relation to native lecturers is of specific interest. As such, the present study aims at answering the following three research questions.

RQ1: What types of plurilingual resources are Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers using within EMI programmes?

RQ2: To what extent are there significant differences between Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers in the use of plurilingualism within EMI?
RQ3: How are Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers making use of their students’ plurilingualism in class within EMI programmes?

3. Methodology

The present study makes use of a mixed-methods design (Creswell 2013) in order to explore Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers’ use of different teaching methodologies within EMI, in particular when drawing on their students’ plurilingual repertoires. A sequential mixed-methods approach was chosen as it has been considered to be an effective approach for investigating complex problems (Myers and Oetzel 2003). In such designs, the analysis of quantitative or qualitative data collected in a first research phase then informs the nature of quantitative or qualitative data collection in the second phase. For this study, an online survey was first conducted, followed by semi-structured interviews with EMI-lecturers of the University of Groningen.

3.1. Survey on plurilingualism in HE

3.1.1. General procedure

In order to answer research questions 1 and 2, an online survey was sent out to all the lecturers of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen using a central mailing list and the online learning platform (Nestor). The survey was written in English in order to be answered by both types of lecturers and data collection took place between September and October 2017. The fact that no Dutch version was used might have impacted the results of the Dutch-speaking lecturers by sending out an ideological message in itself. However, and following the official policy of the university, the accompanying mail with the link to the survey was bilingual (Dutch-English).

3.1.2. Variables

The survey was divided into three sections and had a total of 28 items. The items measured (a) self-reported proficiency in English, (b) strategies applied to use students’ plurilingual repertoires and (c) socio-demographic background information.

Self-reported English proficiency was assessed by 4 items focussing on pronunciation, fluency, writing and reading skills in the English language, ranked by participants in a 5-point Likert scale from low level to high level proficiency. These 4 items were chosen as they were highlighted as the most relevant within the literature reviewed on lecturers’ language proficiency and their teaching in EMI (Björkman 2010; Hülmbauer and Seidlhofer 2013). Scale reliability was high (α=.86).

The items for capturing the strategies applied by lecturers to use students’ plurilingual resources within EMI consisted of two sections. One concerned the extent to which lecturers were aware of the linguistic background of students, colleagues and staff and was measured in a 5-point Likert-scale from unaware to fully aware. The second scale captured the frequency of 14 activities typical from plurilingual teaching equally measured by a 5-point Likert-scale (from never to always). Items were constructed based on the literature on the use of plurilingualism in education (Aronin and Hufeisen 2009; Bourne 2013; Braunmüller 2013; García and Wei 2014; Oliveira and Ançã 2009) and on literature on multilingual HE (Guarda and Helm 2016; Mazak and Carroll 2017; Van der Walt 2013;
Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017). Scale reliability was moderate ($\alpha = .59$). For further research, weaker items will be removed to raise scale reliability. Nevertheless, to demonstrate the variety of activities within a plurilingual teaching approach in HE, the items will be used.

The last section of the survey contained socio-demographic items such as gender, age, and language background, as well as information on lecturers’ teaching experience in and outside EMI, the languages used in teaching and the amount of support given by the Faculty to improve EMI teaching skills.

3.1.3. Sample
In total 54 lecturers in EMI programmes of the Faculty of Arts completed the survey. 26 were male, 28 female and 33 reported having Dutch as native language, while 21 reported speaking other languages (5 English, 9 German, 1 Italian, 1 Russian and 5 other languages). Most participants were between 50 and 60 years old ($N = 18$) or between 40 and 50 ($N = 12$). Many lecturers reported being experienced in teaching, with 23 of them claiming to have been teaching for more than 20 years. 12 lecturers reported having 10–15 years of experience, whereas only 5 claimed to have less than 5 years of teaching time. However, when it came to EMI, 13 lecturers had less than 5 years of experience, 15 between 5 and 10 years, 11 between 10 and 15 years, 10 between 15 and 20 and 6 more than 20 years of experience. In conclusion, the sample was mostly composed of experienced lecturers in both teaching in general but also in teaching within EMI.

3.1.4. Data analysis
The quantitative data was analysed using R. In order to answer RQ 1, a sum of resources used per type of lecturer was calculated. For RQ 2 a linear regression was used to find ways of explaining the differences between Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers.

3.2. Semi-Structured interviews on plurilingualism in EMI
3.2.1. General procedure
After analysis of the survey, an interview guide was developed to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews (Delamont 2012) with 20 lecturers teaching in EMI programmes throughout the University of Groningen. In order to enhance the scope of our research, lecturers teaching in several faculties were contacted. Interviews were chosen due to their suitability for allowing researchers ‘(…) to explore interviewees’ attitudes, opinions and feelings’ (Lambert 2012, 109). Lecturers were approached by mail and asked to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted one-to-one within the university setting and recorded between March and June 2018.

3.2.2. Interview guide
The guide was constructed on the basis of the above-mentioned themes in the academic literature on EMI and plurilingualism in HE and following the results of the survey. Questions focussed on three main areas: general opinion towards EMI in relation to self-perception of English proficiency and of students’ proficiency, experience with EMI and general teaching methodology and use of plurilingualism in the teaching methodology.
3.2.3. Sample and corpus

In total 20 lecturers from different faculties were interviewed (see Table 1 below). 9 ‘Dutch-speaking lecturers’ reported being native speakers of Dutch while also mastering both English and other foreign languages (6 women), and 11 ‘Plurilingual lecturers’ meaning lecturers with a different L1 and mastering two to four other languages (7 women). Based on this and the general years of teaching experience, and the faculty they were teaching at they were assigned codes for the purpose of data anonymisation.

The interviews lasted from 12 to 45 min (27 on average) and were conducted either in English or Dutch, depending on the preference of the interviewee. The recordings were transcribed verbatim following Powick and Tilley’s conventions (2002). The full corpus of transcribed interviews consisted of 49,115 words.

3.2.4. Data analysis

For the analysis of the interview data a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014) was conducted. The analysis of the corpus involved the inductive coding of the lecturers’ statements and the subsequent attribution to a coding system using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti. The coding system was first set up deductively on the basis of the literature review and the interview guide. It was then expanded through inductive analysis of the interview material. A hierarchy of codes and sub-codes was created after iterative reviewing of the data by two different raters. In order to answer the third research question of the present paper, two specific codes were selected: EMI (sub-topics: ‘Attitudes towards EMI’ and ‘Characteristics of EMI’) and Use of Pluri-/Multilingualism in EMI (sub-topics: ‘Encouraging plurilingualism in general’; ‘Encouraging plurilingualism in research/assignments’; ‘Encouraging plurilingualism in the classroom’ and ‘Rejection of Multilingualism’).

In order to extract from the corpus statements concerning the above-mentioned codes, all material was reviewed by two raters and relevant passages were selected. Thereafter, units of analysis (Mayring 2014) were defined. The length of these units ranged from 5 words up to 245 words (average of 117). Both the selection of the units of analysis and of the coding were done by two raters. In total, 179 units of analysis were coded.

4. Results

4.1. Types of plurilingual resources used in EMI

The first research question was addressed by analysing the answers of lecturers given to the question on the extent to which they apply resources to actively make use of their students’
plurilingualism within EMI instruction (Table 2). Answers ranged from Never (1) to Quite often (5).

Table 2 shows that while lecturers seldom encourage interaction in other languages or multiple language comparison, they often explicitly include non-native speakers of English in classroom discussion. This is true for both Dutch and plurilingual lecturers and is reported to happen often or quite often. Using translations and stimulating the use of sources in other languages are used occasionally by both groups of lecturers.

### 4.2 Differences between Dutch and plurilingual lecturers

To answer the second research question, a linear regression was carried out to determine differences in plurilingual teaching resources between Dutch and plurilingual lecturers. Except for the variable ‘valuing multilingualism’ no significant differences were found between Dutch and plurilingual lecturers in multilingual resources. Plurilingual lecturers valued multilingualism significantly more often than their Dutch colleagues ($F(2, 52) = 12.12, p < .01$). The model explained 19% of the variance in the data (multiple R-squared). The regression coefficients are shown in Table 3.

There is thus an overall effect of the type of lecturer; plurilingual lecturers value multilingualism significantly more often as compared to their Dutch colleagues. As the model only explains 19% of the variance in the data, we included in a second step the background variables collected (proficiency, gender, age, teaching experience, teaching experience EMI, number of languages spoken) as fixed factors in the model. However, none of these variables showed significance in raising the explained variance in the data.

### 4.3 Using plurilingualism in class

To answer the last research question, the interview data was analysed in order to gain a deeper understanding into how Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers actively use their students’ plurilingualism in class. The main aim of the analysis was to explore differences between the practices and arguments of both Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers towards plurilingual approaches within EMI.

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### Table 2. Types of plurilingual resources used by lecturers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multilingual Resources</th>
<th>Dutch-speaking lecturers</th>
<th>Plurilingual lecturers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging interaction in other languages</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging multiple language comparison</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using translations</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging the use of other languages in research/assignments</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally valuing multilingualism</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulating the use of sources in other languages</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including non-native speakers of English in discussions</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Table 3. Regression coefficients for the linear model of ‘valuing multilingualism’ as a function of lecturer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Dutch lecturers)</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>13.26</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plurilingual lecturers</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the aspects that were often mentioned when it came to supporting the use of plurilingualism in EMI were the official language policies in the sense that individual policies were not always aligned with official faculty policies. Several of the Dutch speaking lecturers (N = 6) indicated not feeling comfortable in explicitly encouraging the use of other languages, as this was not officially allowed. One lecturer explained that the language policies of the faculty did not automatically align with her personal view stating ‘I would have liked to [use sources in languages], but since that is not an option I do not use other sources in other languages’ (D.3.R). When it came to the use of other languages than English in their own research, all lecturers claimed to make use of their own plurilingualism but, as a Dutch lecturer stated, they never give one of these texts to their students: ‘There is no limitation in reading these languages. But, of course, I cannot speak them all and I cannot give texts in these languages to the students’ (D. 12.L).

Most plurilingual lecturers (N = 9) mention not feeling responsible for a strict implementation of the EMI policies, as they do not think that their mission is ‘to police which language students are using’ (P.24.A.) and ‘have the feeling that if students use different languages amongst themselves they do it anyway’ (P.18.A). Two plurilingual lecturers claim to actively support bilingual language practices, as they are in accordance with the courses they are lecturing, so they report ‘these are literally bilingual classes we use both languages’ (P.18.A). As such, the plurilingual lecturers in the sample seem to implement official language policies in a less strict manner as compared to Dutch-speaking lecturers.

Next to language policy, the issue of student in-/exclusion was the second most coded aspect. In general, both Dutch and plurilingual lecturers fear that if students are to use languages other than English that there is the threat that ‘certain people/students will be excluded (D.15.A) which would be ‘kind of discriminatory’ (P.2.A) and has an ‘ethical side’ (D.15.A) to it. The exclusion argument was mostly related to situations in which there were larger groups of students sharing a common language (mostly in relation to Dutch or German). One lecturer even claims taking this into account when forming groups for classroom work and states, ‘I never put German students with German students, Dutch with Dutch, but I try to mix them so they cannot talk to each other in their own language. It is not allowed, like, in a class discussion’ (P.2.A).

Most lecturers (N = 18) identify several benefits of using plurilingual resources in their teaching, although they not always implement such an approach themselves. The benefits lecturers hoped to reap by encouraging/accepting plurilingual practices can be divided into four categories.

The first one relates the broadening of academic opportunities at different levels. One lecturer claimed: ‘you would have access to Spanish sources, you have access to Dutch sources, then your colleagues might have access to other sources that you don’t. That’s where you create […] added value to the academic community. (D.15.A.). In addition, two plurilingual lecturers explicitly perceive students’ languages as the ‘ideal resources’ (P.24.A) and claim that it is central that students ‘make full use of the languages that they master’ (P.18.A). However, while acknowledging the benefits of plurilingual approaches, both Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers often mention that official language policies pose obstacles in the ways lecturers are expected to control the students’ sources:
for example, a Dutch student cannot use Dutch sources, a German student is not allowed to use German sources. It is only allowed to use English sources because that is a source we can check whether it is plagiarism or not. The program can then also check whether there is copy–paste or not. And in any case, I also need to check whether a source is valid or not, I need to also understand the source. There is a restriction, you have to cite English sources only. (P.2.A)

This is not a view all lecturers share as the following excerpt shows,

I think, and that is important, that research is a matter of trust, and building trust, so if people are cheating they will be really bad scientists. People need to learn to trust and I think it is not the responsibility of teachers to educate students, they should already have principles [...]. (P.1.C)

Second, general social benefits such as being more approachable are also mentioned by four plurilingual lecturers as an argument for fostering plurilingual approaches. One lecturer mentioned that ‘Italian students find me more approachable because of the language [we share]’ (P.1.C) and another used ‘the switching between different languages as a way to connect with students and to keep a relationship with them’ (P.24.A).

Thirdly, plurilingual practices as a means of overcoming language barriers were also mentioned by both Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers. This refers to situations such as using terms in a different language ‘to tell them what exactly I mean if I cannot translate it into English that happens’ (P.18.A), or to use other languages to ‘show common translation problems’ (D.11.A) and in language proficiency classes so students ‘can relate to their own grammar’ (P.7.A.) and ‘for orientation’ (D.20.A). Not surprisingly, most Dutch-speaking lecturers (N = 7) admit that they sometimes use the Dutch language within EMI to solve communication problems when answering the question if they use languages other than English in their classes: ‘On an individual basis, I use Frisian and German, but usually the second language used in class is Dutch’ (D.20.A); ‘Or sometimes, to be fair, just when I am looking for a word in Dutch and I hope that one of the students can translate it for me’ (D.13.P); and ‘Sometimes, you get those situations, where you teach English to a class with maybe only one English student. I switched to Dutch once when there were only Dutch students because that was just too strange’ (D.21.S).

The only lecturer that claims systematically using languages other than English in the classroom is a Plurilingual lecturer: ‘To the extent that I think the students would follow. Maybe not all the students will follow all the same time, but different students will follow at different moments. So, I use all of the languages I know, yes’ (P.12.A).

An issue that arose in several interviews with Dutch lecturers was related to the awareness of the importance of fostering the Dutch language at an academic level as one of the missions of Dutch HE. On the one hand, this stands in relation to plurilingual resources as a bridge/vehicle for knowledge construction in that for the majority of students in the Netherlands Dutch is their main language of communication. One lecturer mentions that students are allowed to choose seminars in which they can ‘do the course in their own culture as it is very important for Art Sociology’ (D.11.A); another respondent mentions using Dutch words so Dutch-speaking students can think of the English translation (D.3.R). One lecturer mentions the argument that most jobs his courses prepare for are ‘writing jobs’ and as most students will enter the Dutch job market it is important that they learn to write and publish for these situations (D.11.A).
Finally, several plurilingual lecturers ($N = 5$) attempted at identifying overarching benefits of the ‘international classroom’ (KNAW 2017). They see the plurilingual setting as ‘something extra’ (P.12.A), and highlight the ‘richness that they [students] have’ (P.24.A) and value the general ‘bigger diversity’ (P.1.C.).

In sum, while all lecturers are generally positive about EMI and enumerate various benefits associated with an international teaching environment, nearly all claim to engage in plurilingual practices in the classroom, occasionally as an enrichment to the input they provide to the students, at other moments to solve communication barriers caused by teaching in a foreign language. Based on the interview data, a tentative typology of arguments (see Table 4) in relation to the use of plurilingualism was carried out. Arguments were divided into either perceived as hampering the use of plurilingualism within EMI, or facilitating it, or as conflicting arguments that can both facilitate or hamper depending on which perspective they are looked at. The arguments described above were then attributed to either Dutch-speaking, plurilingual or both lecturers.

Overall, more facilitating arguments towards plurilingual approaches in HE could be identified than hampering arguments. Plurilingual lecturers in our sample seemed to both engage more frequently in plurilingual practices in their lectures and to identify more facilitating arguments towards plurilingual approaches in HE. In turn, Dutch-speaking lecturers were particularly concerned with the status and students’ level of proficiency in the Dutch language and often followed a strict interpretation of official language policies which somewhat limited their engagement with their own and students’ plurilingual resources.

5. Discussion

The present study on plurilingualism in Dutch HE aimed at identifying the types of plurilingual resources that Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers use within EMI programmes and pinpointing differences in their use of plurilingual resources. Furthermore, it wished to explore the ways lecturers are making use of their students’ plurilingualism in class and create a typology of the arguments facilitating or hampering the use of plurilingual approaches in HE.

The quantitative analysis showed that both Dutch-speaking and plurilingual lecturers seldom encourage interaction in other languages or multiple language comparison. However, they do often explicitly include non-native speakers of English in classroom
discussions. Encouraging multiple language comparisons, using translations, encouraging the use of other languages in research/assignments and stimulating the use of sources in other languages are occasionally used by both groups of lecturers. The only statistical difference between the two groups of lecturers was found for ‘valuing multilingualism’ where plurilingual lecturers valued multilingualism significantly higher than Dutch-speaking lecturers. Yet, it must be noted that only 19% of the variance in the data was explained by the variable type of lecturer and that none of the background variables that were added to the model showed significance. A possible reason for the low percentage of variance explained could be that the dataset was rather small and that lecturers were not equally distributed across the two groups; there are more Dutch-speaking lecturers in our sample than plurilingual. These results suggest that recent research on both the advantages and the practical implementation possibilities for plurilingual approaches in HE (Björkman 2010; Erling, Adinolfi, and Hultgren 2017; Huberts 2017; Hülmbauer and Seidlhofer 2013; Mazak and Carroll 2017; Moore, Nussbaum, and Borràs 2012; Mortensen 2014; Van der Walt 2013; Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017) has not yet found wide implementation and that EMI largely remains monolingually oriented.

The qualitative analysis confirms general challenges related to language proficiency, fluency, and preparation, as is reflected in the literature (Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2011; Guarda and Helm 2016; Tange 2010; Wilkinson 2013). Guarda and Helm (2016), Tange (2010) and Wilkinson (2013) relate these challenges to limited vocabularies and proficiency that can lead to slower classroom discussions, and difficulties when trying to connect with students. However, in line with Veronesi et al. (2013, 261), all lecturers claimed to use their plurilingual repertoires to overcome linguistic barriers. Furthermore, the recognition that the full exploration of students’ plurilingualism is not yet achieved in EMI was mentioned in all interviews. Generally, more facilitating arguments towards plurilingual approaches within EMI were identified than hampering arguments. While plurilingual lecturers engaged more frequently in plurilingual practices in their lectures, Dutch-speaking lecturers were anxious about the level of proficiency in the Dutch language and followed language policies more often leading to less engagement with students’ plurilingual resources. The interview data thus provide a deeper insight not only into the shared concerns of all lecturers in relation to plurilingualism and HE but also into the views that distinguish Dutch-speaking from plurilingual lecturers.

6. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the English language was the main medium of instruction in all situations the lecturers described wherein English is used as the lingua franca of academia (Crystal 2003; Dafouz and Smit 2014; Doiz, Lasagabaster, and Sierra 2013; Smit 2010; Wagner and Gardner 2004; Yanaprasart and Lüdi 2017). However, this predominantly monolingual way of lecturing was often perceived as a clash with the plurilingual reality in international classrooms. While EMI was generally seen as an asset in HE, plurilingualism was also identified as a resource to tackle language and social challenges, suggesting that plurilingual approaches are in fact compatible with EMI. Nonetheless, much needs to be done in order to empower both lecturers and students to systematically use their plurilingual resources to bridge languages and cultures in their classroom settings without having
the feeling that they are suffering from fluency issues. This perspective offers new possibilities for the field of plurilingual HE.

The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of EMI in HE from the perspective of plurilingual teaching approaches. Especially with the sensitivity of the topic in the recent months in the Netherlands (KNAW 2017; Runia 2018), research into the grassroots opinions of lecturers on these largely top-down and impactful decisions is crucial (Van der Walt 2016). To increase the scope of the study in relation to the implementation and effects of such plurilingual approaches it would be necessary to include participant observations to see the plurilingual practices in situ, and interviews with both lecturers and students alike over a longer period of time to observe possible change and development. Furthermore, a control group of Dutch-speaking lecturers teaching in Dutch would also be recommended to compare with the sample teaching in English.

Hence, the question still remains whether plurilingual lecturers in EMI are the key to plurilingual approaches in HE. In accordance to our results, they are not the sole key, but they are more aware of the need to valorise plurilingualism in general and present more positive arguments towards the concrete implementation of plurilingual approaches.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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