Teachers transitioning to teaching in English

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Benefits of a second language

– Language of academic publication
– Many textbooks are in English
– Develops local teachers’ competence
– Can use visiting lecturers in teaching
– Prepares local students for study abroad
– Overseas students can participate
– Job market

(Airey 2004)
But what happens when lecturers change their teaching language?
Research Background

Vinke (1995)

Lecturers noticed very little difference

Reduced redundancy, speech rate, expressiveness,
Less clarity and accuracy of expression

(Vinke, Snippe, & Jochems, 1998:393)

Lecturers report an increase in preparation time needed for English-medium teaching

Select group
Highly experienced
Teach in English on a daily basis

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Klaassen (2001)

Student-centred lecturing much more important than the lecturer’s language competence.

Suggests a threshold level of TOEFL 580 (approximately equal to level C1 on the Common European Framework)

Below this level language training may be necessary.

Klaassen (2001:176)
Lehtonen and Lönnfors (2001)

Findings

Similar to Vinke (1995).

Problems of pronunciation.

Uncomfortable correcting students’ English.
Research Background

Thøgersen & Airey (2011)

- Built on earlier work with students that suggested people speak more slowly in a second language
  (Hincks 2010; Airey 2010)
Research Background

Articulation rate [normalised]

Adapted from Thøgersen & Airey (2011)
Research background

Questions:

– Is this true for all lecturers?
– Is this true for all languages?
– Is this true for all subject areas?
Lecturer profiles

• 18 lecturers at two Swedish universities
• Course teaching in English
• Eight disciplines:
  – 6 Business administration
  – 5 Media studies/journalism
  – 2 Physics
  – Environmental science
  – Maritime studies
  – Industrial engineering
  – Nursing
  – Law
Data collection

- Video
  1. Ten-minute mini-lecture in Swedish on a subject they usually teach
  2. Ten-minute mini-lecture in English on the same subject
- Text
  Online comments and discussion tasks (circa 60000 words)
- Interview
  Individual interviews with participants (n=12)
Two types of results

- Differences between English and Swedish lectures
- Lecturer reflections
Differences between lectures

Lecturers spoke more slowly had more pauses and shorter runs in English
Articulation rate in syllables per second [normalised]

- English
- Swedish

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Three types of lecturer

1. Structured no change in English
   
   Two options:
   
   - lecture is longer
   - the end of the lecture is cut off

2. Structured works differently in English
   
   Three options:
   
   - Choose to miss out some content
   - Cover all content but have less redundancy
   - Cover all content but in less depth

3. Free structure
   
   - presents different information (but probably would in L1)
   - shorter
Tentative conclusions

1. Lecturers probably need more time to do the same job in English

2. Some lecturers might be able to rationalize and ‘work more effectively’ (Pedagogical effects?)

3. Lecturers who tend to be less structured (more student centred?) may have problems changing to English. (cf Klaassen 2001)
   - Places greater demands on language ability.
   - May be pragmatic to change style to a more structured approach.

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Lecturer reflections

Themes

Short notice
No training
More preparation
Less detail
Less flexibility
Less fluent
No correction
Few differences
Confidence boost
Lecturer reflections

• It is even more important to be well prepared when teaching in English.
• Less is more. Decide what are the key ideas in your presentation and emphasize them.
• Try not to translate a lecture you already have—think and prepare in English.
• Use powerpoint to structure your lecture, but remember it’s even more important to keep the amount of text on a slide to a minimum.
Lecturer reflections

- Make a list of key terms/vocabulary.
- Put all new terms on powerpoint or in handouts.
- Pronunciation, check if possible—this can be a problem if your pronunciation is different than that of your (international) students.
- Prepare by writing a full manuscript but don’t read this out in class! (low level) or by reading a novel or disciplinary literature in English (higher level). Take every chance available to speak English.
- Practise your lecture!
Summary

1. Swedish lecturers speak more slowly in English
2. Nine themes about the process of transition to teaching in English.
3. Lecturers gave some advice.
Questions?


