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EMI In Algeria: Theorizing As A Vehicle For The Internationalization Of Local Knowledge In The Social And Human Sciences

Abstract

English has recently been adopted as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Algerian higher education. An important question that should be asked about this is whether or not the use of EMI will necessarily lead to a paradigm shift in the way Algerian academics in the social and human sciences (SHSs) conceptualize their research activities. The present paper attempts to answer this question with specific reference to two closely related concepts: 'community of practice' and 'discourse community'. Assuming that language and the disciplinary conception of reality are intrinsically related, this article which defends the argument that embracing this global medium of instruction provides favorable conditions for the emergence of local paradigms that are both more reflective and more responsive to Algerian reality. The article also says that this process can only be enhanced principled-based theorizing is integrated into the SHSs curricula. The paper culminates with a presentation of Value Determinism Theory (VDT) as an early example of local theorizing.

Keywords: *Social and Human Sciences (SHSs), English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), paradigm shift, community of practice, discourse community, local paradigms, theorizing*

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Əlcəzairdə EMI: Sosial və humanitar elmlərdə yerli biliklərin beynəlxalqlaşması üçün nəzəriyyələşdirmə vasitəsi kimi

Xülasə

İngilis dili son vaxtlar Əlcəzair ali təhsilində Təlim vasitəsi (EMI) kimi qəbul edilmişdir. Bu qəbullə bağlı əsas sual odur:

EMI-dən istifadə, sosial və humanitar elmlərdə (SHS) fəaliyyət göstərən Əlcəzair akademiklərinin tədqiqat fəaliyyətlərini konseptuallaşdırma tərzinə mütləq paradigma dəyişikliyinə səbəb olacaqmı, yoxsa olmayacaqmı? Bu məqalə, "təcrübə icması" və "diskurs icması" kimi bir-biri ilə sıx bağlı iki anlayışa xüsusi istinad edərək bu suala cavab axtarır. Dil və reallığın intizam anlayışının əhəmiyyətini nəzərə alaraq, məqalə müdafiə edir ki, bu qlobal təlim vasitəsinə mənimsəmək, həm Əlcəzair reallığını daha düzgün əks etdirən, həm də ona daha çox cavab verən yerli paradigmalardan yaranması üçün əlverişli şərait yaradır. Məqalə həmçinin bildirir ki, bu proses yalnız prinsiplərə əsaslanan nəzəriyyələşdirmənin SHS-in kurikulumlarına inteqrasiyası ilə gücləndirilə bilər. Məqalə, yerli nəzəriyyələşdirmənin ilkin nümunəsi kimi Dəyər Determinizm Nəzəriyyəsinin (VDT) təqdimatı ilə yekunlaşır.

Açar sözlər: *Sosial və Humanitar Elmlər (SHS), Təlim vasitəsi kimi İngilis dili (EMI), paradigma dəyişikliyi, təcrübə icması, diskurs icması, yerli paradigmalar, nəzəriyyələşdirmə*

Introduction

Following a social constructivist view, members of academic communities communicate among themselves using discourses that are reflexive of the cultural norms of their discipline. As Hyland (Hyland, 2004, p. 8) puts it, 'Within each culture, individuals acquire specialized discourse competencies that allow them to participate as group members.' Consequently, academic discourses within the same language manifest a great deal of variability across disciplines. A considerable amount of variability can also be observed in the discursive practices of members who pertain to the same discipline but use different languages and belong to different cultural traditions. For instance, social philosophy dominates French sociology, whereas the orientation of Anglo-American sociology is more empiricist and pragmatic. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Giddens, 1987; Turner, 2007; Lizardo & Sepulvado, 2017; Lamont & Thévenot, 2000; Wacquant, 1993; Connell, 1997) It follows, then, that what is considered as knowledge by members of a specific academic community, especially in the human and social sciences, is not immediately transferable to another language. Thomas Kuhn, an American philosopher of science, says that the differences in how people think and talk about different subjects come from the idea of "paradigm." A "paradigm" is the clear-cut view that people in a subject hold about reality, knowledge, scientific truth, and the methods that can be used to find this truth.

Research

Algeria has officially adopted EMI in recent years. The shift to using English for teaching subjects across all academic disciplines clearly aims at enhancing the internationalization of Algerian higher education. However, despite its numerous benefits, the new policy has also presented some significant challenges. One of the major challenges is that local disciplinary communities, which have been using predominantly French-based paradigms, risk losing their accumulated knowledge and expertise as they try to cater to a wider, international audience using the world's dominant language. To live up to this plausible challenge, steps should be taken to protect the local. It is important to give the local academic more power by challenging the widespread tacit agreement, especially among new members of academic communities, that traditional ways of thinking should be thrown out in favor of new English-based ones as this would damage the valuable "histories of learning" accumulated so far. Instead, local academic communities are in need of adequate accompaniment that would enable them to successfully and creatively integrate their "learning history" with the new international perspectives made available by the new medium. To reach this goal, this paper argues for the use of theorizing as a tool that could both protect the epistemological heritage of local communities and, more importantly, help spread local knowledge through new local paradigms. In this light, adapting to the dominant views around the world is considered as an opportunity for Algerian academic communities to use their background knowledge to share and reclaim the local in global settings, rather than a barrier.

Based on the above, the present paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent can the adoption of EMI in Algeria lead to the replacement of existing conceptual views in the SHSs?

2. What measures should be taken to create favorable conditions for the emergence of local paradigms that are more reflective of and more responsive to the Algerian reality?

The paper seeks to answer these questions with specific reference to two concepts, namely 'community of practice' and 'discourse community.'. We chose to focus on these two ideas because we believe they are important for understanding how paradigms and disciplinary academic discourse are connected and how the use of EMI might change existing conceptual views, especially in the SHSs local communities of practice.

However, for disciplinary social groups to be recognized as representing autonomous communities, their members should first agree on a set of core issues that form the basis of their scientific work. In other words, they should operate with the same paradigm. So, let us, first of all, examine what is meant by the notion of paradigm.

I. Academic communities and the notion of a paradigm

'Paradigm' as a term was offered by the American philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, in his influential essay *'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'*, where he attributes the causes of scientific revolutions to the occurrence of paradigm shifts. For Kuhn (Kuhn, 1962, IX-X), 'paradigms...are universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.' According to this view, science is a matter of paradigm, and, accordingly, no academic community can exist without possessing a common paradigm, i.e., a shared conceptual framework that would guide the research activities of its members. Adherence to a particular paradigm has serious consequences for all aspects of the life of the disciplinary community. These include, according to Tavakoli (2012:443), "commitments, beliefs, values, methods, outlooks, and so forth shared across a discipline."

As far as the social sciences are concerned, Tavakoli (Tavakoli, 2012, pp. 217-218) proposes a number of questions the answers to which would help to determine the paradigm that a disciplinary community is operating with: what actually comprises different methodological paradigms or disciplinary matrices in social inquiry? What are the beliefs, assumptions, and values about the aim of social inquiry? In what way do similar concerns and commitments cut across or overlap paradigms/disciplinary matrices that are often regarded as distinct? How are these paradigms actually accomplished, enacted, or constituted socially and politically? All these questions showcase the depth with which the notion of a paradigm permeates all aspects of the lives of a disciplinary community as well as the lives of its members. They also point out to the fact that—unlike in the hard sciences—paradigms in the social and human sciences are heavily influenced by the cultural, social, and political factors. One of the powerful and defining elements of the latter is the linguistic situation marking the national context to which a given community belongs. Having said that, it should be born in mind that the exact impact of language on the conceptual views held by academics, especially in multilingual societies, is still a neglected area of research.

It is a truism that the academic communities that have been established in Algeria after independence were ideologically divided along linguistic lines. Defending two fiercely opposed social projects, the Arabophones and Francophones have traditionally held contrasting positions vis-à-vis all the questions raised above. Although both groups have been operating with Western theories, in general, and French ones, in particular, they presented antagonistic readings of the local reality and defended seemingly irreconcilable visions about the aspired-for future for the Algerian society. Although most departments of the social and human sciences have been Arabized, the epistemological and ideological divide persisted in multiple and subtle ways, thus preventing the emergence of a common framework for engaging with local reality, a necessary prerequisite for endowing the social and human sciences with a leading role in the modernization and welfare of the Algerian society.

Within this scope, the adoption of EMI is expected not only to ameliorate the internationalization of the sciences in question but also to unite them in the long run around common visions and social goals. But a caveat is in order: Acculturation to the more powerful and globally recognized paradigms rendered possible through EMI possesses the potential to render local disciplinary communities in the social and human sciences both more homogeneous and more visible at the international

knowledge market, but it is also fraught with dangers. One of the primary risks facing the new policy is the widening of the already significant gap between the western paradigms and the local reality under investigation. Following is an appraisal of this potential threat from the vantage point of two concepts: community of practice and discourse community.

II. Communities of practice

The term "community of practice" was introduced by Lave and Wenger in 1991 to refer to a network of individuals who communicate routinely to improve the quality of a common profession. The driving force behind such a "social learning system" is the building of a "history of learning" about the community's practice. According to Wenger (Wenger, 2010, p. 1), the construction of a common history of learning requires community members to engage in two types of "meaning making": participating in the community's activities in various ways and creating "words, tools, concepts, methods, stories, documents, links to resources, and other forms of reification."

Although Algerian disciplinary communities have over the years produced an impressive amount of all types of the aforementioned artifacts, the resulting 'history of learning' has not led so far to a tangible improvement in the practice of these communities. As a result, these communities have been incapable of assuming leading roles in academic life, let alone contributing considerably to the modernization and the social and economic well-being of the nation. A multitude of internal and external factors have been responsible for this situation.

The linguistic divide and the ideological tensions with which it was associated and which have for a long time prevented the emergence of homogeneous communities sharing a common goal have gradually given way to predominantly Arabized communities that are less imbued with the critical spirit, which is a necessary ingredient for triggering social change. The production of conceptual and physical artifacts has remarkably increased as a direct consequence of the proliferation of social and human sciences caused by the policy of massification of higher education pursued since the beginning of the new century. But this considerable increase in productivity came at the expense of quality. Paradoxically, in the age of globalization, and due to the observed weaknesses in foreign language skills, the new generation of academics has become, on the one hand, incapable of gaining access to an important part of the 'history of learning' written in French, and on the other, disconnected from the current developments in their field. This has obviously deprived the local communities of the different forms of collaboration and sharing of knowledge with the wider international communities that are crucial to their development. That being so, the adoption of EMI has become vital for fixing this alarmingly anomalous situation.

It is important to note, though, that a B2 level (according to the Common European Framework of Reference, or CEFR)—officially set as a requirement for both faculty and students to be able to use EMI education—is a necessary but, by no means, sufficient requirement for starting to teach and publish research in your field. Disciplinary discourses are, matter of factly, specialized languages that have been developed to express sophisticated meanings underpinned by the epistemological and methodological choices of the communities that use them. To improve their practice, disciplinary communities are required to enhance 'meaning making' through improving the quality of their medium of interaction. Communities of practice establish standards for their discourses to guarantee 'a smooth transfer of information among members... Grego (2010, 52). Hence, adopting EMI should primarily entail mastering the nuts and bolts of the specialized discourses of the corresponding field, which leads us to consider another key concept in this discussion, namely academic discourse community.

III. Academic discourse communities

The rise of English as a lingua franca in science and technology in the modern world has led to the development of English for specific purposes (ESP). As a result of the ever-increasing developments in ESP, applied linguists developed the concept of discourse community (Swales, 1990) that fits perfectly with that of community of practice. Through this concept, applied linguists have raised awareness of the fact that disciplinary communities do not only differ from one another in terms of conceptual views or paradigms but also differ in the way they structure their discourses. According to Hyland & Hamp-Lyons (Hyland, 2002, p. 6), the social and cognitive differences among

disciplines do not lie just in their fields of knowledge but also in their ways of talking, their argument structures, aims, social behaviors, power relations, and political interests.

It is worth noting here that disciplinary communities have developed languages for specific purposes (LSPs) for gatekeepers to use as mechanisms for the inclusion of new members and the exclusion of non-specialists. As Grego (Grego, 2010, p. 52) puts it, 'ESP greatly seeks, for its members, clarity, objectiveness, non-hermeticity, non-arbitrariness of language, and precise and agreed canons for communicating in that language...' It is also important to consider that disciplinary discourse communities exercise generic control through their gate keeping function (editorial boards, scientific committees, doctoral juries, etc.). In this regard, Bhatia (Bhatia, 1997, p. 369) cautions us about the potential threat of hegemony in these gate keeping functions. In his words, '...in academia, the power to control and maintain generic standards can be, and often is, interpreted in terms of the dominant community, which undoubtedly happens to be a western community.'

Taking into account that, unlike the natural and exact sciences, SHSs are rather interpretive in nature and are, thus, more sensitive to the local socio-cultural contexts, generic control based on the standards of dominant communities is consequently dangerous in that it reduces the role of local communities to that of mere testers of the 'grand theories' developed in the west. The current hiatus between theory and local reality will be seriously aggravated by the crave for internationalization. Consequently, defining aspects of local realities face the risk of occlusion, which will diminish the potential of local communities to act upon their immediate context to improve it as well as preclude them from bringing relevant and significant contributions to the advancement of their wider, global communities. What is the solution, then, to the potential threat of hegemony over the newly adopted medium of instruction and expression in the Algerian academic context? The solution might lie in empowering local communities by encouraging them to make sense of their history of learning through engaging in theorizing.

IV. The need for teaching theorizing in SHSS curricula

Algeria has a highly culturally and linguistically diverse society, grappling with different sorts of problems and challenges, not the least of which are modernization and engagement with global markets. As such, it stands as a fertile field for different realms of inquiry in the social and human sciences. It is, indeed, sensitivity to these special characteristics of the Algerian context that have allowed Bourdieu to emerge as a key figure in modern sociology. Yet, the idiosyncrasies of a particular context, no matter how important they are, are certainly not sufficient for the generation of influential contributions to the edifice of knowledge in the social and human sciences. The development of robust and original explanations in the form of new theories, which dare to depart from the received wisdom in the literature, is crucial for advancing knowledge in any field (Lave, & Wenger, 1991).

Academics see reality through the lens of theory because it is theory that enables them to put order in the chaos of the data emanating from their respective fields of study. Theory, in other words, is what gives life to an academic community; theory building and theory testing, therefore, are the two dimensions along which the community's research activities are organized. However, the asymmetrical relationship between the more powerful academic communities in the west and their counterparts in developing countries has reduced the role of the latter to mere testers of paradigms that are discrepant with their local realities, and Algeria is no exception. To reclaim the local in international settings, the adoption of EMI is not enough. Quite on the contrary, reliance on the new medium alone is more likely to worsen the situation through sanctioning only the desirable facets of reality from the prevalent western perspectives. Hence, the introduction of theorizing across Algerian curricula constitutes a promising and sustainable solution to this problem (Kechroud, & Bouamama, 2021).

In this regard and invoking a tradition in sociology that goes back to Charles Pierce and the founding fathers of the Chicago school in sociology, Richard Swedberg, in his article titled 'Before Theory Comes Theorizing', argues in favor of the institutionalization of the teaching of theorizing in SHSs curricula. Theorizing is defined by Swedberg (Swedberg, 2016, p. 6) as '...the actual process that precedes the final formulation of a theory.' Swedberg—a prolific author on the issue—criticized the existing SHS curricula for being confined to the teaching of 'finished theories' and 'neglecting the process that goes into the production and design of a theory'; According to him, appreciating the

fundamental need to nurture students' innate theorizing abilities requires making a basic epistemological distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification. In this way, Swedberg argues that the focus on the context of justification and the neglect of the context of discovery are the major causes for the observed weakness in theorizing among students. This diagnosis, in our view, is also valid for tackling the weaknesses in theorizing prevalent in our context. To reform this anomalous situation, he proposes the provision of hands-on practice on theorizing in the form of exercises. In his view, only a principled training in theory building starting from the early stages of the academic curriculum is susceptible to enabling would-be members to approximate more to the scientific truth in social and human phenomena taking into consideration of the specificities of the context. It also serves as a stepping stone towards emboldening them to engage gradually in inferring pertinent causal relationships within the Algerian context without being straightjacketed by the views that are alien to their society and its culture.

Although addressing primarily a native speaker's audience specialized in sociology, Swedberg's proposal also holds true for the problematic of EMI and the ensuing duality between theory and practice in our context. This solution has the potential of enhancing the emergence of robust local paradigms capable of advancing knowledge on specific aspects of local realities and promoting these specificities at the international academic level. Following is a presentation of an early experience in theorizing that had shed light on the specificity of Algerian reality.

V. An early model for theorizing the local: AZI's theory

Azi's theory provides a vivid early illustration of theory construction in the domain of media studies, incorporating defining elements of Algerian reality that have been excluded from Western theories.

The Value Determinism Theory (VDT), conceived by Algerian scholar Abdul Rahman Azi in the mid-1980s, was proposed as an alternative to Western media theories in that the theory foregrounds cultural and religious values as pivotal factors influencing communication practices. Grounded in Islamic ethics and a structuralist approach, VDT challenges the "egocentrism" inherent in Western frameworks that tend generally to neglect non-secular contexts and the spiritual aspects of media effects (Ghouti, 2017). In a clear departure from technological determinism, which emphasizes the structural impact of media, VDT presents media as a tool imbued with values, wherein the "transmitter" and "receiver" collaboratively construct messages enriched with ethical principles such as justice ('adl), dignity (karamah), and social cohesion, all situated within cultural and religious frameworks (Hamidu, 2022). Azi posits that media systems should emphasize positive values, drawing from the ethical framework of the Islamic Renaissance, rather than focusing solely on technological or economic factors. The theory separates contextual variables to show how values work as "collective variables" in communication circuits by combining structuralism and monographic analysis (Hamidu, 2022). For instance, his detailed examination of media content elucidates the foundational role of Islamic values in shaping ethical communication practices, emphasizing the importance of communal harmony rather than sensationalism (Brahimi, 2019). This view resonates with Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, yet it diverges by positioning religion as the primary source of ideological authority (Khiabany, 2003).

In Algeria, Azi's theory has been adopted as a rationale for inquiry across disciplines, offering tools to interpret societal transformations and media practices. Scholars like Saliha Ben Saâd (2023) highlight its utility in diagnosing ethical gaps in media practices, such as the overreliance on television and internet platforms that prioritize sensationalism over community-building (Ben Sebaa, 2023). Yacine Sadouki's 2022 study uses value determinism to assess the impact of distance education on cognitive values, revealing tensions between technological accessibility and the erosion of collaborative learning ethics, underscoring the need for pedagogies aligned with Algerian cultural values (Sadouki, 2022).

The monographic method central to Azi's approach has inspired qualitative studies on localized phenomena, such as Algiers' urban youth culture or Kabylie's oral traditions, prioritizing thick descriptions over generalization. Abdul Rahman Azi's theory of value determinism has had a significant impact on local research promoting values as important tools for analysis and guiding

principles for ethics. It connects different fields and adapts to local needs, showing a way of thinking that supports decolonization. This approach provides a model for local theorizing that strikes a balance between powerful global theories and the specificities of local cultures. Therefore, an investigation of the context of inquiry of this theory is necessary to infer sound principles for the articulation of theorizing in the SHSs curricula.

VI. Concluding remarks

Academic discourses involve more than language. They are 'ways of being in the academic world'; they are 'forms of life' reflecting epistemic views or paradigms (Hyland, 2009). Discipline-specific academic cultural norms can only be acquired through a lengthy apprenticeship process of socialization and acculturation to these norms. This socialization and acculturation can only be effective when carried out within the framework of disciplinary communities of practice.

Communities of practice represent social learning systems engaged in the joint construction of a history of learning geared towards improving their practice. The conceptual views held by the members of the communities of practice are deeply connected to their disciplinary discourses. If the medium of instruction changes, these communities may also change how they conceptualize their practices. In this light, the adoption of English as EMI in Algeria is, therefore, not a simple replacement of a medium of instruction by another but should rather be perceived as a profound change affecting all the elements of the conceptual matrix in all disciplines in the SHSs.

Nevertheless, it is neither necessary nor desirable for local communities of practice adopting EMI to conform to the epistemic views underpinning the more influential discourses emanating from the corresponding communities in the English-speaking countries. Nevertheless, the establishment of autonomous communities is contingent upon the ability of the latter to engage in a systematic elaboration of theories grounded in their practice. Through engaging in theorizing about its practice, a disciplinary community becomes able to capitalize on the acquired expertise (in other mediums of instruction) and make sense of its history of learning. To enhance and sustain this process, hands-on training in theorizing should be introduced and articulated across the HSSs curricula.

Conclusion

All in all, it can be said that in addition to the internationalization of higher education, EMI allows a smooth transfer of communication among the members of local communities, thus enhancing, in the long run, their homogeneity and productivity. To enhance their ability to reflect on, respond to, and promote the specificities of the local realities, there is a need to enhance their capacities to engage in theorizing. To achieve this goal, hands-on practice on theorizing should be introduced across the SHSs curricula.

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