



# PROCEEDINGS OF PRAGMATIC CONSTRUCTIVISM

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## **A pragmatic constructivist approach toward Higher Education management policies – The case of English medium instruction at Aarhus University**

**Klarissa Lueg**

*Assistant Professor of Knowledge Communication*

*Aarhus University; School of Business and Social Sciences; Department of Business Communication  
Jens Christian Skous Vej 4; 8000 Aarhus C; Denmark; [lueg@asb.dk](mailto:lueg@asb.dk)*

**Rainer Lueg**

*Associate Professor of Management Accounting and Control*

*Aarhus University; School of Business and Social Sciences; Department of Economics and Business  
Fuglesangs Allé 4, 8210 Aarhus V, Denmark; [rlueg@asb.dk](mailto:rlueg@asb.dk)*

### **Abstract**

This paper specifically highlights that discussion on instruction language does not account for stratum specific study strategies. It was presented at the 3rd Actor-reality conference, Aarhus University, October 23-25, 2013.

**Keywords:** English medium instruction; higher education; university management.

## A pragmatic constructivist approach toward Higher Education management policies

The case of English medium instruction at Aarhus University



- 1 **Motivation & Background**
- 2 Theoretical Frame
- 3 Hypotheses Development
- 4 Data & Measurement
- 5 Findings & Implications

### Motivation & Background

Language discussion does not account for stratum specific study strategies

#### Elite Discourse

- „Language of higher education“ (Coleman 2004)
- „Near-necessity of English proficiency for graduate employability“ (Costa/Coleman 2012)
- Career opportunity for students (Byun et al. 2011)
- Students need „international competencies“ in order „to compete on the global job market“ (AU 2012)
- Split between „English-oriented elite“ and Danish majority (Harder 2009)

#### Research on Social Background

- Why do students self select against EMI?
- Why do students chose EMI?

## Why do lingua franca students choose English Medium Instruction?

A Bourdieuan Perspective

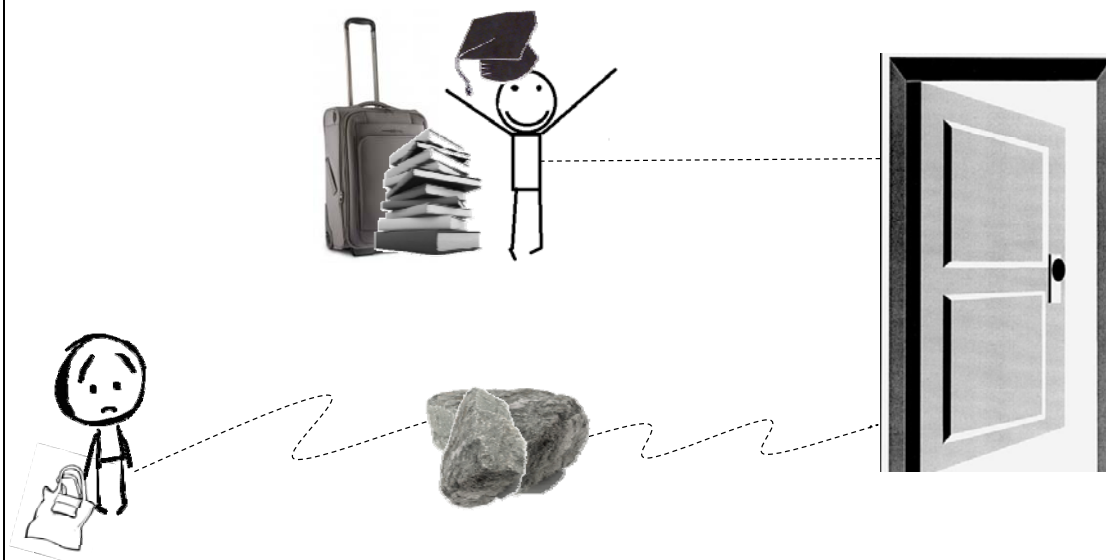


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## Theoretical Frame

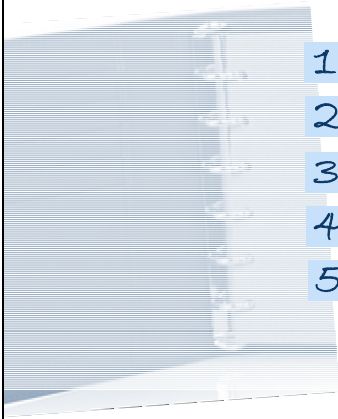
Students are socially unequally distant from Higher Education Institutions



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## Why do lingua franca students choose English Medium Instruction?

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### Hypotheses development

 Hypothesis confirmed

We derive hypotheses relating to social background, cultural capital and habitus

**H1a: The higher the social background, the more likely the choice of EMI**

**H1b:** The higher the social background, the higher the expectation of English as working language

**H1c:** The higher the social background, the higher the expected job advantage from EMI

**H1d: The higher the social background, the higher the perceived English proficiency**

**H2a:** The expectation of English as working language positively impacts the choice of EMI

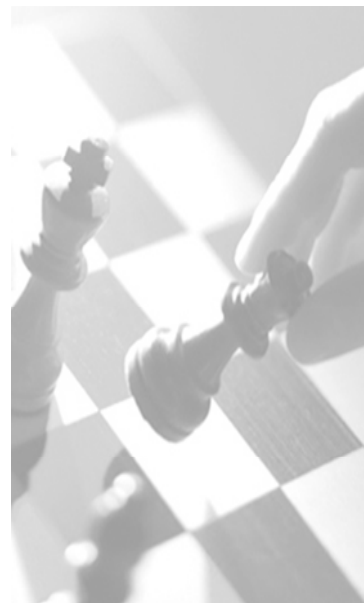
**H2b:** The expectation of English as working language positively impacts the expected job advantages

**H3: The higher the expected job advantages, the more likely the choice of EMI**

**H4a: The higher the English proficiency, the more likely the choice of EMI**

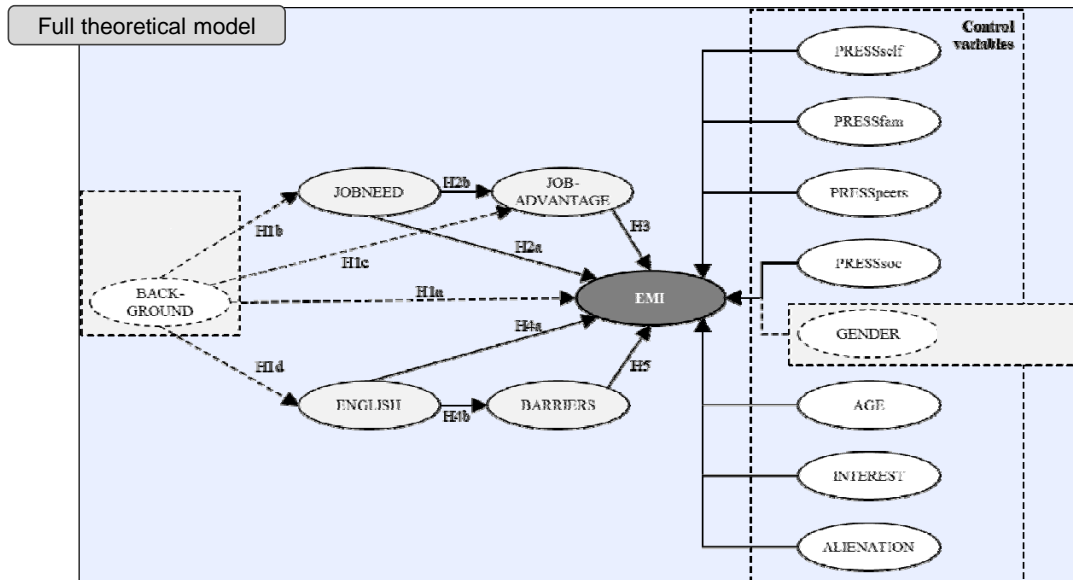
**H4b:** The higher the English proficiency, the lower the barriers to choose EMI

**H5: The higher the expectation of barriers (inferior use of time, lower grade), the less likely is the choice of EMI.**



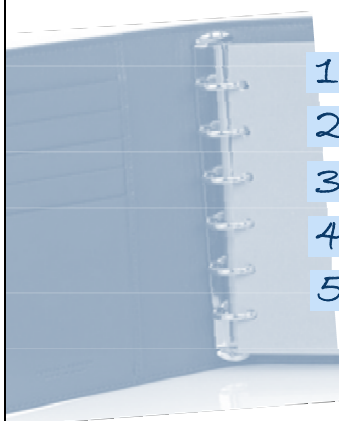
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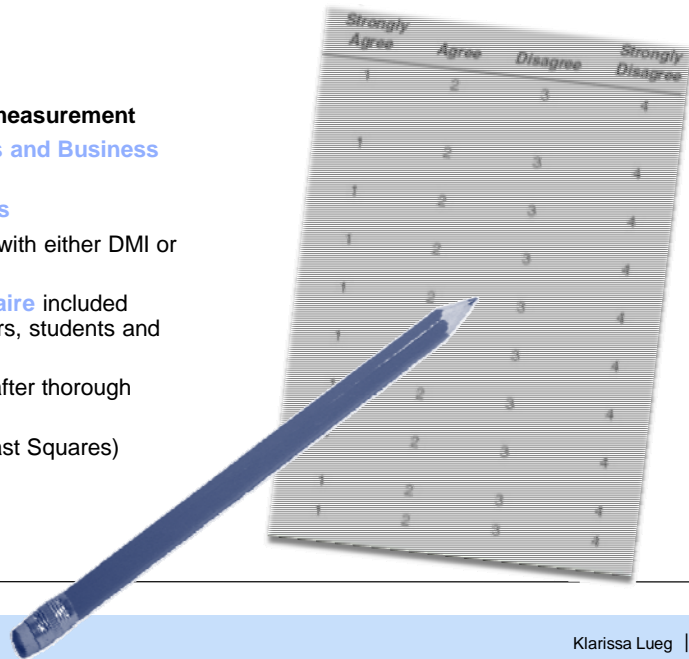
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## Data & Measurement

We collected data via a questionnaire amongst AU first semesters

### Aspects of data collection and measurement

- Students of **BSc Economics and Business Administration** in 2011
- Survey in a **mandatory class**
- **616 (937) Danish students** with either DMI or EMI
- **Development of questionnaire** included **pretesting** with administrators, students and lecturers in several steps
- ...**construct development** after thorough literature review
- Analysis via PLS (Partial Least Squares)



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## Data & Measurement

We drafted ten constructs that represent possible reasons for choosing EMI

JOBNEED	Does the student expect English to be a daily working routine?
JOBADVANTAGE	Does the student expect English skills to be an advantage at work?
ENGLISH	How do the students assess their own English proficiencies?
BARRIERS	What are the student's fears related to choosing EMI?
INTEREST	How high is the student's interest in cultures and languages?
ALIENATION	What is the student's attitude towards the diffusion of English in DK?
PRESSself	How high is the professional ambition of the students?
PRESSfam	How are the family's ambitions?
PRESSpeers	What is the student's peers influence on the language choice?
PRESSsoc	What is the student's view on English as symbolic capital?

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## Data & Measurement

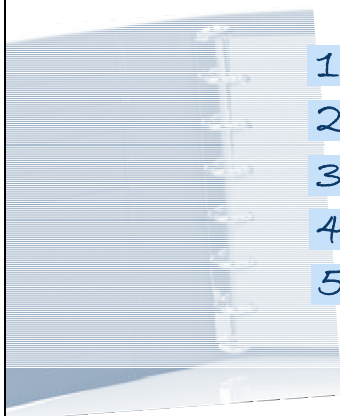
Factor analyses show that constructs are well-defined

	<b>FamStatus</b>	
	"HIS"-scale from Germany (1-4) for low, middle, upper middle and upper class.	
	<b>EMI (English as medium of instruction choice)</b>	
	Binary variable (0 = Danes choosing Danish; 1 = Danes choosing English)	<b>ALPHA</b>
<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>CapabilityENG</b>	<b>0,886</b>
	V009 I read international (online) newspapers.	
	V015 I speak English fluently.	
	V016 I write English fluently.	
	V017 I understand English without any problems.	
	V018 I speak English better than the average Dane.	
	V019 I speak English better than the average student at AU.	
	V020 I speak English better than the average non-English-native student around the world (Europe, Asia...).	
<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Xenophobia / Alienation</b>	<b>0,835</b>
	V033 "English harms the Danish language."	
	V034 "English harms the Danish culture."	
	V037 "English harms the Danish identity."	
	V038 "There is too much English spoken in Denmark."	
	V041 "Danish universities are too 'Anglo-Americanized'."	
<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>JobAdvantage</b>	<b>0,856</b>
	V049 I think that having studied in English is an advantage for job applications.	
	V050 I think that having studied in English makes one more qualified than studying in Danish.	
	V051 I think that having studied in English increases job security.	
	V052 I think that having studied in English increases the chances for a higher salary.	
	V054 I chose to English program to improve my English skills.	
<b>Factor 4</b>	<b>JobNeed</b>	<b>0,888</b>
	V045 In my future career, I expect to communicate in English with customers and suppliers	
	V046 In my future career, I expect to communicate in English with direct colleagues (incl. superiors)	
	V047 In my future career, I expect to communicate in English with headquarter of the company	
	V048 In my future career, I expect to communicate in English with other strategic business units of the company	
<b>Factor 5</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>0,943</b>
	V012 It would be easier (harder) for me to engage in classroom discussions if the instruction language was Danish (English).	
	V013 It would be easier (harder) for me to understand the course content if the instruction language was Danish (English).	
	V014 It would be easier (harder) for me to get a good grade if the instruction language was Danish (English).	

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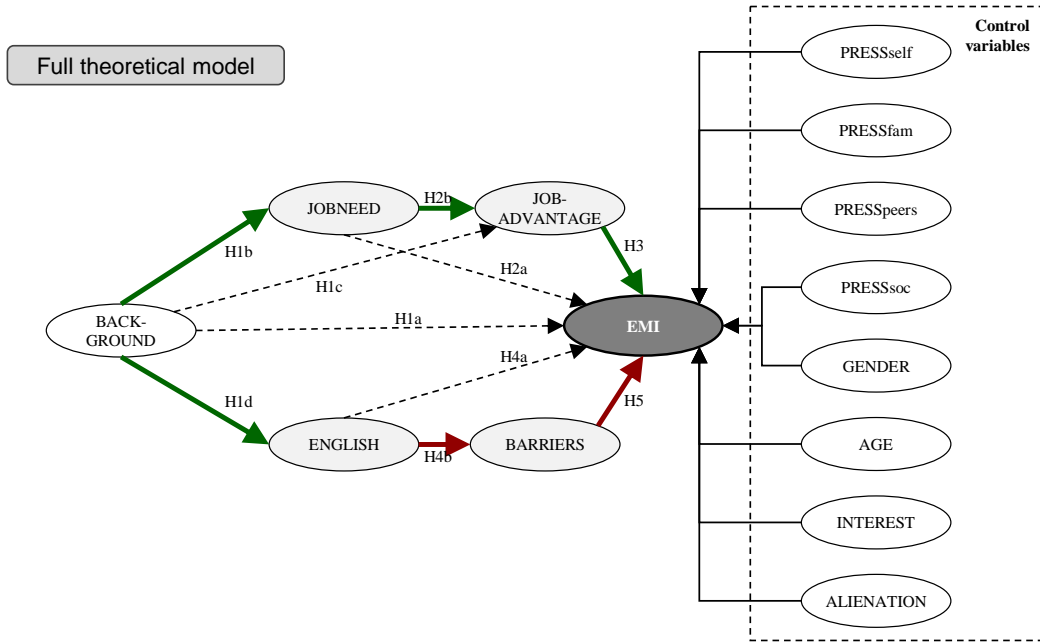


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### Hypotheses development

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### Theory transition

Connecting Bourdieu's constructivist structuralism and pragmatic constructivism



“Constructivist structuralism” \*  
 --Pierre Bourdieu

- Seemingly endless **interdependency** between agency and structure (perceived as deterministic)
- **Doxical** reproduction via manifestation and recognition of symbolic capital  
 → Group a: self-selection against  
 → Group B: opting for EMI
- Implication: **Deconstruct** the symbolic capital, in this case the value and prestige of EMI
- Nearly **impossible** within a management perspective
- **No clear framework/constructs** for deconstruction of symbolic power



- Framework needed within the school of **constructivism**...
- ...yet must recognizes certain management and organizational **facts** (organizational frame)
- Step-by-step-framework (**construct causality**) understand agency
- Given: a set organizational frame)


→ **Pragmatic Constructivism**

\* Source: Bourdieu, P. 1989. Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1): 14-25, on p. 14.



## Implications for policy makers

What are the implications for policy makers, from the PPC perspective?

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ English IS the European <b>lingua franca</b>, English IS dominant in management education</li> <li>▪ Chances to choose EMI are <b>50% higher</b> if a student is from a higher stratum (given same average grades)</li> <li>▪ EMI serves as <b>distinction</b></li> <li>▪ The effect is "<b>hidden</b>" (indirect) through habitus and cultural capital</li> <li>▪ Low-stratum <b>females</b> also seize the opportunity</li> <li>▪ <b>Pressure</b> from peers is more important for students from lower social backgrounds, families matter for high-stratum males</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Devaluating/<b>deconstructing</b> EMI is not an option<br/>→ possibility is to deconstruct some misunderstandings that come with it</li> <li>▪ Higher absolute English proficiency will not help, the <b>barriers</b> must be torn down</li> <li>▪ Translate continental business <b>tradition</b></li> <li>▪ Avoid "undergraduate <b>MBA</b>"-industry</li> <li>▪ Explore <b>construct causality</b> of actors:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gendered strategies</li> <li>▪ Self-efficacy, reflexive practice</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>FACTS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                   | <b>POSSIBILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equal opportunities</li> <li>▪ High quality of content</li> <li>▪ Pedagogics in education</li> <li>▪ Local roots, international orientation</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clarify that use of English <b>literature</b> necessary (most sophisticated)</li> <li>▪ Explain <b>individual benefits</b> to lower strata students</li> <li>▪ De-emphasize "<b>Oxford English</b>" in course descriptions, oral exams etc.</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate equal opportunities for the "man on the street" to lower <b>political resistance</b></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>VALUES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                   | <b>COMMUNICATION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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