

CLIL: the approach for the future?

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The aim of this article is to explore the potential of CLIL as a key approach in the future of English language teaching. Issues related to the different roles of teachers -including teacher training- and to the school specific subjects have been discussed. We have also focused our attention on the relationship between this approach and culture. The role of language in CLIL and the implementation of different modes of assessment are also mentioned. Material selection and adaptation is analysed in the light of CLIL's principles. The analysis of these points leads us to provide a series of requisites which are to be met if we want the CLIL approach to improve our teaching practices and our students learning experiences.

Teaching English in the 21st century poses the challenge of facing and adapting to the new status of the English language as a lingua franca. Accordingly, its teaching methodology and didactics have changed too. We now live in a globalised, postmodern world in which knowledge of English is considered a basic skill and which therefore requires a different model of education (Graddol, 2006). Within this context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) seems to be a new candidate likely to produce a paradigm shift in the world of language teaching (Ball, 2013).

The acronym CLIL was coined in 1994 by David Marsh, who provided the following definition for the approach: “*Content and Language Integrated Learning refers to any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content. It is dual-focused because whereas attention may be predominantly on either subject-specific content or language, both are always accommodated*” (Marsh, 2002). While Coyle (2010) defines CLIL as “*an educational approach in which various language supportive methodologies are used which lead to a dual-focused form of instruction, where attention is given both to the language and to the content*”. Inherent to both definitions is the bringing together of two entities which for the most part had stood separately: subject teaching and language teaching. This is the ‘revolutionary’ response CLIL gives to the changes in today’s teaching and learning contexts. In addition to this, CLIL offers a number of advantages such as: it builds intercultural knowledge and understanding; it develops intercultural communication skills; it improves language competence and oral communication skills; it develops multilingual interest and attitudes; it provides opportunities to study content through different perspectives; it complements other subjects rather than competing with them; it increases learners’ motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught and it provides materials which develop thinking skills from the start.

CLIL can be realised using very different models. Each one is determined by the context of the school and learners. CLIL invites a re-conceptualization of how we consider language use and learning. It enables development of an integrated educational approach which actively involves the learner in using and developing the language of learning; the language for learning; and the language through learning. CLIL has been referred to as education through construction, rather than instruction. The CLIL ‘generic umbrella’ includes many variants. Some of these may be considered as primarily language teaching. Some can be seen as mainly content teaching. The essence of CLIL leads to it having status as an innovative ‘new’ educational approach which transcends traditional approaches to both subject and language teaching.

The adoption of CLIL at an international level started gradually. In the many countries in which this

new trend has grown, its implementation has responded to different reasons and has its own particular traits.

At a local level, CLIL fits in well with the prescriptions of the curriculum designs in our country - Argentina- both for primary and secondary education. Throughout their primary education, children are developing their knowledge and understanding of the world. At the same time, they are developing their ability to use language as a tool to investigate, analyse and describe the world. This interrelationship links different subject areas across the primary curriculum. On the one hand, language is the medium for learning about all other subjects and, on the other hand, all other subjects are the vehicle for developing language. However, CLIL is a term used to cover a range of contexts and models. Some schools teach topics from the curriculum as part of a language course. This is called soft CLIL while other schools teach partial immersion programmes where almost half of the curriculum is taught in the target language. This is called hard CLIL. The model of CLIL implemented in most public schools in Argentina would be defined as soft CLIL for a number of reasons, mainly the amount of time devoted to the teaching of English as a foreign language. Secondary education in our country prioritises the preparation of citizens for the world of work and/or further education. In this sense, teachers of English must accompany learning to help students to appropriate meanings in different contexts and develop communication. For this reason, teachers must plan their tasks in this cycle from a CLIL perspective. Since the contents of the projects are transmitted through different text genres, CLIL methodology and genre-based pedagogy are closely related and this helps teachers to design tasks based on content and texts first in relation to the four macro-skills of language -reading, writing, listening and oral production-, and on the other hand, incorporate what is generally known as the fifth skill, i.e., the concept of literacy or academic literacy.

The aim of this paper is to examine issues related to teachers and learners, culture, language and assessment as well as materials in the light of theoretical principles, the opinion of experts and our own experience in order to determine whether CLIL may actually enable us to teach languages better.

For CLIL to promote effective learning there is an important consideration which should not be overlooked. Interconnectedness between the different elements of CLIL strengthens when links between language, cognitive processing and culture are explored. So what is meant by culture and what role does it play in CLIL?

From a holistic perspective, CLIL has an important contribution to make to learners' intercultural understanding by developing "... *an ability to see and manage the relationship between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings, as expressed in a foreign language, and those of their interlocutors, expressed in the same language-or even a combination of languages*" (Byram, 1997). But in order for CLIL to have a cultural impact, learners need to engage in interactive and dialogic learning within the classroom and beyond. CLIL offers a wide range of opportunities for intercultural interaction and has a fundamental role to play. The extent to which CLIL is successful will depend on the intercultural ethos of the classroom.

Implementation of an intercultural perspective within an English class can be made explicit by setting up tasks that focus on culture-related themes. At the same time, an intercultural view inevitably will be implicit in the materials we use for instructional purposes. But beyond these explicit and implicit means of teaching intercultural communicative competence, the vital element which gives CLIL classes a tone of cultural understanding is the teacher's own attitude toward the students' backgrounds as well as the materials the teacher designs and the resources he/she uses.

Closely related to the concept of culture is the argument of English as the Trojan Horse. It holds true that in some countries around the world CLIL can be used for politico-linguistic purposes, disguised as a pedagogical philosophy. David Marsh (2004) argues that "*Caustically referred to as the language of instruction, if not occasionally destruction, adoption of English as the medium of learning is responsible for widespread school wastage in various continents. From Africa to Asia, from Bolivia to Brunei, the use of a foreign language as the medium of instruction is directly linked to educational exclusion.*"

The adoption of English as the medium of instruction needs to go hand in hand with the adoption of language-sensitive curricula and methodologies. The exploration of possible methodological possibilities leads us to the concept of post-method. As Kumaravadivelu (1994) has claimed we are now in a 'post-method' era and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and the use of English as the language of instruction has moved from experimental research to the centre of global education. The fundamentals of this postmethod pedagogy consist of the pedagogic parameters of particularity,

practicality, and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2005). The parameter of particularity facilitates the context-sensitive language teaching with a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. Practicality empowers teachers to construct their own theory of practice. Possibility is the parameter which allows learners, teachers, and teacher educators to be sociopolitically conscious and to search for identity formation and social transformation.

As pressure grows on governments and education planners to raise English language levels, the promise of teaching the language while teaching other subjects has become hard to resist. But CLIL and English-medium raises important issues of ethics, it challenges the role of EL teachers and there is concern that its implementation is outpacing a measured debate about the impact on students and teachers of using an L2 as the medium of instruction.

Another issue which has been at the centre of the debate since the appearance of the approach is that of *Who teaches?* in CLIL. The controversy between the language teachers versus the content teachers constitutes a key issue for CLIL researchers and practitioners. David Graddol (2005) suggests “*English seems so much in demand in the world today that it may be perverse to suggest that English teachers are becoming an endangered species.*” However, giving a straightforward answer to this question would be an easy way out. Nowadays, in the vast majority of schools in our country it is not possible for subject teachers to work as CLIL teachers because they are not equipped with the necessary language competencies required to teach in a foreign language. Therefore, joint work between the subject and the language teacher would provide the ideal scenario at least for the time being in our context. Surely, this will demand an effort on the part of all the participants involved in the process. Though we acknowledge many practicing teachers, either subject or language ones, may perceive this enterprise as a threat to them at first, we certainly believe not only teachers but also students will greatly benefit from it. Viewing this controversy as a stepping stone to rethink our role as language teachers will contribute to enhance the status of our profession.

This naturally leads us to the question of teacher training. For obvious reasons, the questions arising from teacher training vary according to the context. For instance, in countries such as Finland, Norway, Germany, the implementation of CLIL is likely to render good results as teacher training programs have been introduced that allow trainees to specialise in both a content subject and a foreign language (Marsh, 2002). In our country, however, the situation is not the same. The courses of studies available for future teachers, either at university or tertiary levels, focus either on content or language. Thus, even if each country may have its language policy as regards this issue, trainees should be encouraged to form an open mind and critical perspective during their training years which will prepare them to become real professionals ready for lifelong learning and be able to adapt to future needs and contexts.

Alongside the question of *Who teaches?*, the question of *Which subjects?* arises. Researchers and practitioners have tried to define which subjects should be selected when working within this approach, asking themselves whether some subjects are better CLIL “partners” than others.

The choice of core subjects will depend on different factors. In some places, this is regulated by local authorities, while in others the decision simply lies on the teacher. Another factor determining this choice will be an analysis of the different types of language which students need for scholastic or academic contexts.

A large majority of teachers are strong advocates of the social sciences, since they not only provide rich language and many opportunities for communicative activities but also demand Bloom’s high-level operations. Ball (2013) argues “*These operations will require language - in some cases specific lexis and grammatical structures - that may be either typical or even exclusive to that subject field.*” However, his following point is most interesting “...*what these subjects offer above all is a wide range of contextualised language.*”

It is interesting to note the question of mathematics, teachers and researchers have taken different sides. On the one hand, there are those who see adopting maths as problematic. But on the other hand, some European countries teach part of the target language through this subject. It is important to notice that ‘content’ is the first word in CLIL. If curricular content leads to language learning, we can assume, for instance, that learning about mathematics often involves learners in making a hypothesis and then proving whether this hypothesis is true or not. Therefore maths teachers should be aware of the language the learners need to think through this process, make their hypothesis and then provide their proof. Teachers need to teach this language, or help learners to notice it.

But how can we choose materials and how can we adapt them for CLIL? CLIL materials need to show

curriculum subjects presented in a non-native language very clearly. CLIL materials are usually different from materials found in ELT coursebooks. Language courses have materials which are often selected because of a grammar or functional syllabus and also because of a topic. Topics are usually chosen to present and practice grammar or a set of functions. CLIL materials, however, are selected because of the subject content, for example maths, arts or history. The language needed to support the subject is then considered. But what is the source of these materials? Materials can be translated from the L1 curriculum, taken from native speaker coursebooks, downloaded from the Internet or made by teachers.

Another important aspect to consider is the role of language in CLIL. Snow, Met and Genesee (1989: 205) suggested identifying content-obligatory language (essentially for learning the content) and content-compatible language (which supports the content of a lesson, as well as the linguistic cultural objectives of the curriculum to enable teachers to strategically sequence their language and content objectives).

CLIL teachers and learners need to know the content-obligatory language. This is the vocabulary, grammatical structures and functional language for specific subjects. Learners require this language to be able to understand the subject and communicate ideas. For example, in geography learners need to know map vocabulary and how to interpret evidence shown on a map. Learners also need to know the everyday, less formal language which they may have learned in English lessons. For example, in a map reading lesson learners might use basic verbs such as 'goes' and 'travels' to describe the route of a river. They may also use the conditional form to describe cause and effect. These are examples of content-compatible language.

In CLIL, learners produce, listen to and read a wide range of language. Learning subjects in a non-native language is not the same as learning a foreign language and it is not the same as learning subjects in the first language. CLIL teachers need to analyse the language demands of subject lessons and then plan and prepare relevant language support.

In most subjects, learners need many different text types or genres in CLIL. Many CLIL texts are non-chronological and are used in most curriculum subjects. Every genre has specific features which make it different from other genres. We can help learners to become familiar with the language features associated with different genres. First, we need to identify the type of texts learners meet in their subjects and then we need to help them identify language features in those texts. Language features are sometimes described at sentence level and word level. A traditional view of language is concerned with the form and structure of language. It operates at the level of the sentence and below and does not recognise context as significant. It sees language as a set of rules which allow us to make judgments of correctness, and it sees language learning as the acquisition of correct forms. A focus-on-form perspective would look at a content classroom and ask whether the students are engaged in tasks and topics that highlight certain features of the grammar which may be considered problematic for students and offer opportunities to practice these difficult constructions. Pica (2002) proposed that content-based language teaching should include more opportunities to focus on intervention strategies which would assist in the noticing and correction of grammatical errors. Derewianka (2001) noted that, In contrast to the traditional view of language, a functional view is based on the functions that language serves within our lives. It emphasises the text or discourse as a whole in relation to its context, and recognises that lexis and grammar vary with text and context. It sees language as a resource for making meaning. Content is the meaning of a discourse and language is the wording of a discourse.

One of the main questions addressed when discussing any teaching approach is that of assessment. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the topic of assessment in CLIL. While some colleagues stress that CLIL means that both the content and the language are taught and that is why both should be evaluated at the same time, other colleagues suggest that an alternative way of doing assessment is a mark for content and a separate mark for language.

Ball (2013) highlights two main issues: fairness and objectives. *"In 'strong' or 'hard' CLIL, the teacher is not assessing both content and language. This is a myth propagated by the acronym CLIL itself as if the two need to be treated equally."* And he goes on to add ...*"then the teacher is assessing language, but indirectly, as the vehicle. In 'soft' CLIL, where teachers use conceptual content as part of their linguistic objectives, these remain language oriented."*

Scriven (1967) distinguishes two types of assessment: formative and summative. The type of assessment chosen on CLIL courses will determine how learners perform and how they work towards the language and content objectives. Hence, teachers should make conscious decisions as regards the type of assessment taking into account their objectives, each institution's requirements, among several other

factors. Both types of assessment can be useful within this approach. Formative assessment can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of learning at a specific moment during the course, so as to improve future learning in the remainder of the course. In order to assess the students' specific competencies at the end of an academic year or pre-determined period of time, a summative assessment based on discrete point testing and on statistical measures will prove useful.

Self assessment and peer assessment should also be implemented. Considering the students' role in assessing their work and letting them become active participants in this process helps them be more independent, better equipped for learning outside the classroom and it can also increase their self-esteem. Besides, knowing their goals puts any learner in a better position to achieve them, and much more if they have participated in setting the outcomes.

Once again we could say that assessment should be "context-specific". *"Different regions, different schools and different teachers assess in a variety of ways. What is important is that there is formative as well as summative assessment in CLIL subjects and that there is consistency in how learners are assessed across subjects in each school. Learners, parents and other colleagues need to know what learners are being assessed on and how they are being assessed."* (University of Cambridge, ESOL Examinations).

After having considered some of the questions linked to CLIL implementation, it is difficult for us to assure that CLIL is the approach of the future, at least, of a "near" future. Strong CLIL practices in our country will demand time and money; besides, some cultural changes may be necessary so that both teachers and learners can adapt to this approach successfully. Moreover, collaboration with professional learning communities which can be mutually supported and fed with ideas is also essential. Transformations of classroom events are undoubtedly required but an adequate planning and reflection on how the integration of content and language learning can be properly adjusted to our local learning environments is also fundamental. In our national academic context, confidence in this innovative model must grow and we, professional educators, have the responsibility of promoting CLIL methodologies to demonstrate its so many advantageous contributions to the teaching of foreign languages.

CLIL also brings with it complex challenges which focus on the growth of effective pedagogies and professional development of teachers who understand how to question their teaching, experiment with new approaches and put these into practice in their classrooms -after all, CLIL per se will not lead to sustainable changes and improvements in learner experiences and outcomes.

To develop as CLIL professionals, it is desirable that teachers belong to or build a professional learning community where everyone considers themselves as learners as well as teachers. This involves teachers sharing their own understanding of what is to be taught and learned, transforming ideas into 'teachable' and 'learnable' activities, connecting this with decisions about the optimal organization of the learning environment, followed by evaluation, reflection and new understandings for classroom teaching and learning.

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