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Languaging in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Classrooms: Implications for English Across the Curriculum

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Language is a primary semiotic (meaning-making) resource in construing the world, and the world (or content) is grasped mainly through language (Halliday, 1993). Hence, it has been argued that successful learning or knowledge construction depends on “guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience” (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 58), or through the process of *languaging*, where language is used to mediate formulation of concepts (Swain & Lapkin, 2013). These highlight the importance of ‘dialogue’ or ‘dialogic discourse’. However, what actually constitutes ‘dialogic discourse’ and how this can be achieved by teachers and students in classrooms are still being explored, especially in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classrooms, where such languaging processes and dialogic discourses take place through students’ (and often teachers’) second language (L2).

In this seminar, we explore how teachers and students co-constructed content and language (particularly academic language) in CLIL classrooms. Drawing on Lemke’s (1990) seminal notions of thematic development strategy and social interactional strategy, as well as Lin’s (2012) Rainbow Diagram of bridging resources, we conducted fine-grained analysis of two CLIL science lessons observed in Hong Kong secondary schools. Our analysis demonstrates how the more experienced teacher adopted the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) discourse format to elicit student contributions and deployed various strategies to interact with students during the process of developing the target thematic patterns. He also adopted social involvement strategies to draw on students’ daily life experience. In addition, he skillfully made use of students’ various communicative resources (e.g. L1/L2, everyday/ academic language) to make connections between what students are familiar with and the target L2 academic language. It appeared that the more experienced teacher, by employing the various discursive strategies, could engage students in a process of languaging and constructing scientific concepts in scientific language in L2.

With the findings of this study, we would like to propose a framework or continuum for understanding teacher-student interactions – on the one end, some teachers can simply perform a straight-up lecture without engaging students in co-constructing a prescribed (in the teaching syllabus) set of thematic patterns. On the other end, some teachers are open to negotiating their teaching agenda to accommodate students’ contribution of new thematic patterns. Somewhere in between, some teachers solicit students’ participation in the co-construction process, but then only select “appropriate” responses which fit into the teacher’s prescribed thematic pattern while ignoring others which do not. Such a framework may help CLIL teachers at various levels to analyse their own classroom discourse and raise their awareness of the importance of English Across the Curriculum in scaffolding students’ content and language learning.