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## Rethinking ESP: Integrating content and language in the university classroom

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### Abstract

This paper highlights the main points of convergence between Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), presents the main features of CLIL pedagogy, and shows how they were implemented in the design of an ESP Journalism course in a Greek university. The 4Cs Framework (communication, content, cognition and culture) was used as a basic theoretical tool for the design of the materials. Attention was paid to both content and language through a multiple focus on language, content learning and cognition, and the promotion of active and co-operative learning. Finally, the use of authentic materials through scaffolding, and the use of interaction as a technique to accompany learning and to make students increasingly autonomous have also been used in the materials design of the course.

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*Keywords:* ESP; CLIL; higher education; materials design; scaffolding

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### 1. Introduction

English for Specific purposes (ESP) has a long tradition, dating from the 1960s, as a movement designed to appeal mostly to adult tertiary students in non-English speaking countries responding to their needs for communication in specific scientific fields and professional settings. Although Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), with its dual focus on both content and language, emerged almost thirty years after the advent of ESP, both movements are driven by common factors, including the omnipresence of English as the international

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language of communication and the demands of world economy. Indeed, some researchers have pointed out the common characteristics shared by both approaches. Johns (1997), although not directly referring to CLIL but to Content-based Instruction (CBI), upon which CLIL draws, highlights the common features between the two approaches. The first point of convergence is that both movements combine language teaching with the contexts and demands of real language use. A difference, however, lies in the fact that CBI is generally addressed to ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts whereas ESP is related to foreign language learning and thus it is more internationally focused, a feature it shares with CLIL. Moreover, ESP mostly addresses language issues, that is, it involves teaching the English language necessary for communication in specific situations. Both ESP and CLIL can be seen, however, as occupying places on a continuum with ESP standing towards one end as a more language-driven approach and CLIL on the other as more content-driven (Räsänen, 2008).

Table 1 presents some of the key features of CBI, CLIL and ESP allowing, thus, for a comparison among the three approaches.

Table 1: Basic features: CBI, CLIL, ESP

CBI (Grabe & Stoller, 1997)	CLIL (CLIL Compendium, 2001; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010)	ESP (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998)
Exposure to incidental language results in the learning of content	A dual-focused approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language	Designed to meet specific learner needs
Language is comprehensible, linked to previous learning and relevant to students' needs	Successful content learning through another language entails careful reflection on the use of language and on teaching methodologies which should include output and interaction	Makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines and professions it serves
Input is contextualized and integrated in relevant discourse contexts	Using language leads to communication and learning	Depends on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genre relevant to these activities
Content instruction integrated with explicit language instruction in a relevant and purposeful context	Language is used in authentic situations; scaffolding occasionally needed	May be related to or specifically designed for specific scientific fields
Learners use prior knowledge and expertise to learn additional language and content material	Develops thinking skills; challenges learners cognitively	May use a different methodology than that of general English
Generation of increased motivation arising from successful learning	Fosters international understanding through learning about other cultures in another language	Designed mostly for adult learners either at a higher institution or professional settings
Support from instructional approaches: co-operative learning, apprenticeship learning, experiential learning, project-based learning, task-based learning (which facilitates strategy-instruction)	Develops oral communication skills	Generally assumes basic knowledge of the target language system
Flexibility and adaptability in curriculum design and activity sequences	Methods and forms of classroom practice are diversified	
Increase in student-centered classroom activities		

## 2. English for journalists

The ESP courses offered by Greek institutions typically run for a semester and are usually included in the core subjects of the Universities' programmes, thereby ensuring that each student will have some kind of exposure to the specific type of language used in his/her field of study together with general academic/study skills.

The ESP programme at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications has been well established since 1993 and its basic aim is to prepare future journalists for an international/multilingual environment. *English for Journalists* is a core course taught during the second semester and it presupposes a good knowledge of general

English. Thus, the course caters for a B1-B2 level of English for a duration of 39 hours. The number of students who are enrolled in the class is 140 per semester but only 50 regularly attend the classes on a weekly basis. It is worth mentioning here that the course also caters for the needs of exchange students who visit the School through various international agreements; every year at least 10-15 Erasmus students from different countries also attend this course. This steady influx of international students together with the School's interest in promoting internationalisation and in "modernizing" its institutional profile has prompted the researcher to pool resources from the CLIL movement as this approach has shown wide applicability and success across national contexts and through all educational levels (Smit & Dafouz, 2012). The following unit presents some of the basic principles of CLIL and illustrates the way they were implemented in the design of the materials used in the ESP course, for which we provide a brief outline in Table 2. The new materials for this course were first introduced in the 2014-15 academic year.

Table 2: Course description (the course outline was developed and the course taught by Asst. Prof. Mary Valioli, ESP teacher at the School of Journalism from 1998-2013).

Course	English for Journalists	
Topics	Content	Objectives
The Print Media	<p>Introduction to journalistic guidelines and techniques in relation to story structure(s), writing style(s), news values for the print media</p> <p>Introduction to language varieties, newspaper language, the Associated Press stylebook</p> <p>Analysis of news and feature story writing</p>	<p>Realising the close relationship between the various principles, criteria and values underlying news selection and presentation, and their linguistic expression</p> <p>Developing the skill of writing in a journalistic conversational style (normal and friendly varieties of English)</p> <p>Understanding the differences between writing for quality newspapers and tabloids</p> <p>Developing the skill of writing (hard and soft) news stories and feature stories for the School's college newspaper</p>
The Broadcast Media	<p>News values/criteria; characteristics of broadcast news and feature story writing</p> <p>Story structure(s)</p> <p>Journalistic guidelines, conventions and techniques related to copy writing style</p> <p>Elements of phonology useful to anchoring</p>	<p>Copy writing of readers/liners and lead-ins</p> <p>Converting print to broadcast style</p> <p>Anchoring</p> <p>Developing the skills necessary to present a news-in-brief television programme</p>

### 2.1. Course methodology

According to the 4Cs Framework (Coyle, 1999) language learning (communication and cultures) is integrated with learning (content and cognition). Effective CLIL is achieved through successful understanding of the content, activation of cognitive processing, interaction in a communicative setting, developing language knowledge and skills and increasing intercultural awareness.

In the first module covering the print media the students had to write news stories for the college newspaper which would appear on the School's website. Basic concepts were first introduced such as news values, the genre of the news story, newspaper language, story structure (e.g. the inverted pyramid-style) and also the function of

headlines and lead paragraphs. The students were also introduced to lexico-grammatical features of textual analysis, such as nominal groups, connectors, referents and also the use of active/passive voice and modals in specialised discourse.

Input was provided through authentic data taken from British and American newspapers, both quality and tabloid. The analysis provided the students with conceptual knowledge regarding news stories. This introduction was followed by a task where the students, in groups of four, had to write a news story by applying the journalistic guidelines they had been introduced to and thus they were able to develop their skills and the competences necessary for the production of a piece of writing belonging to this genre.

This task-based activity draws on CLIL principles in that it pays attention to authentic materials, it focuses on output and, through group work, allows for interaction which would otherwise be limited in a class of 40 students. Students were also exposed to the differences in the Greek and Anglo-Saxon writing style, thus allowing for the development of intercultural awareness.

CLIL draws upon social-constructivist theories of learning which focus on interactive, mediated and student-led learning (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). This type of pedagogy involves social interaction among students and teachers and requires scaffolding. Hammond and Gibbons (2005, p. 9) define scaffolding as “support designed to provide the assistance necessary to enable learners to accomplish tasks and develop understandings that they would not be able to manage on their own”. An important characteristic of scaffolding is that it is temporary. It aims at building independent learning, thus teacher support should be gradually reduced as the students become increasingly autonomous in tackling a task. Scaffolding applies to both language and subject content and involves the cognitive skills required to carry out tasks. The theoretical basis of scaffolding lies in Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development, which is best described as the kind of learning which is always challenging yet within the grasp of the students, provided they are furnished with adequate guidance and scaffolding. The teacher’s role is to facilitate cognitive challenge within a student’s zone of proximal development and to gradually withdraw support as learning progresses.

The following tasks were planned as a sequence of scaffolding that would facilitate both content and language learning in the second module focusing on the broadcast media. Students were given the opportunity to watch a news-in-brief programme videotaped from a British channel. After the presentation they were asked to fill in a table with similarities and differences between news writing for the print media (e.g. the press) and news writing for the broadcast media (e.g. TV). It should be noted here that the students were already familiar with story structure and writing style for the print media and they had produced news stories for the college newspaper during the previous weeks. The teacher facilitated the process by eliciting previous knowledge from the students and guided them through the task by pointing out specific characteristics of broadcast writing and the structure of the broadcast news story (e.g. climax-cause-effect or lead-body-concluding part).

The next step involved the actual writing of a news story for television. The students were given a story that appeared on a British newspaper and were asked to convert it into a broadcast news story by taking into consideration the table they had filled in with relevant information. At this point the video was played once more. By this time students were sufficiently exposed both to the language and journalistic conventions which are appropriate for copy writing and were ready to move on to the final stage, the presentation of a news-in-brief TV programme which was recorded at the School’s electronic media laboratory. During this stage the students had the opportunity to internalize their new knowledge, to synthesize their previous work and to accomplish independently a real-life task. It is worth pointing out that, based on classroom observation, the students seemed to be highly motivated, especially in anticipation of the recording at the studio.

CLIL is by nature dynamic and student-centred, requiring students to take on a more active role and become responsible for their own learning (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). In this way CLIL classes build on both the students’ previous knowledge and the internalization of newly-acquired knowledge through tasks that focus on active negotiation of meaning.

In an attempt to explore active learning in the ESP class we used collaborative group work and project work, thus helping students engage in meaningful exchanges that would facilitate acquisition of the target language and internalization of content knowledge. The students were divided in groups of four; we made sure that every group included at least one Erasmus student, so that the students would converse only in English. At the same time a cultural element was incorporated, in a natural way, in the groups since the involvement of the exchange students

brought in intercultural understanding and awareness in the classroom. Each group was assigned one of the following topics: On-line vs Print Newspapers, Social Media and Internet Addiction, Trash TV in Europe, and Censorship in the Media. The students researched their topic by conducting WebQuests on a template prepared by the teacher at the School's computer laboratory. The WebQuest incorporated an oral presentation where the students delivered a five-minute talk on their topic to the rest of the class following a set of questions and guidelines posted on their WebQuest. Marsh (2004) highlights the importance of WebQuests as both scaffolded learning structures and authentic tasks which are used to motivate students' investigation of a topic, to develop individual expertise and to promote student participation in a group process that allows new information to develop into more sophisticated knowledge. The project work received very positive comments from the students, who mentioned that they had enjoyed the process and had gained considerable knowledge not only on the topic they were researching but also on how to conduct research on the Internet, to use and evaluate sources and prepare an oral presentation, skills they had been introduced to at the beginning of the course.

## 2.2. Evaluation of the course

The success of the course was reflected in the student evaluation, in which students gave a positive rating to acquiring new knowledge in their fields of study (score 3.9 on a 5-point scale, SD=.7, n=53), to engaging in real-life tasks (score 4.2, SD=.8) and to interacting with each other in English (score 3.9, SD=.7).

## 3. Conclusion

The design of the ESP course outlined here presents an attempt to incorporate elements of the CLIL approach to an otherwise language-centred programme. As a general reflection on the experience it could be noted that the implementation of CLIL-based activities seems to contribute to the course objectives and to enhance student motivation. Furthermore, it seems that learning becomes more effective as students are more engaged in real-life tasks and work collaboratively to produce pieces of work that the professional community expects. On the whole, it appears that ESP courses would benefit from the implementation of the core principles of CLIL.

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