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Signposts for Comprehensive Knowledge of CLIL Contexts

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Abstract

The implementation of a bilingual program at higher education raises multiple questions to those involved. The uncertainty around such novel experience could be lessened if participants understood all the factors converging. This paper provides a list of elements and parameters to aid both present and prospective practitioners to deepen in the characteristics and factors of their contexts. This systematic approach to the knowledge of the context assembles several theoretical models and descriptors of the practice of teaching content through English at higher education. Special attention will be given to linguistic issues. The five-year experience of bilingual teaching at the Escuela de Ingeniería de Informática de Segovia (Universidad de Valladolid) is used to illustrate the models and descriptors.

Keywords: higher education; bilingual education; English Medium Instruction; Content and Language Integrated Learning

1. Introduction: implementation of bilingual degrees

Though CLIL is the most widely used term regardless of the educational level, practice at higher education institutions lacks the dual focus of a truly integrated approach (Dafouz, 2011; Martín del Pozo, 2015) and the term English Medium Instruction (EMI) is preferred for these contexts. However, the term CLIL will be maintained throughout this paper for general reference to the practice of using a second language as a medium of instruction.

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EMI was an optional practice from 2006 to 2011 at Escuela de Ingeniería Informática de Segovia (EIISG) (Universidad de Valladolid, Spain). The subjects taught through English at Escuela de Informática range from Economics, Operating systems, software engineering, Math, Physics, Information Systems, Programming and other related knowledge areas. The number of credits in English increased from 26 to 117 during this five year period. The attitudes and perceptions of students and lecturers for the first two years of the experience were reported in Martín del Pozo (2008a & b) along with some narratives of lecturers' difficulties, strategies and achievements. Some lecturers were videotaped and their discourses were analyzed in order to identify main features and linguistic training needs as part of a doctoral thesis which also included the design of a course (Martín del Pozo, 2014, 2015). The author´s connection with EIISG dates from 2003, when she taught English for computing for one academic year. In 2006, when the School was about to start this program, she was asked for some advice due to her research interest in ESP and EAP. During the first two years of the program, she provided some training to the lecturers involved, mainly conversation and academic English lessons.

EIISG was the first public higher education institution to offer a bilingual degree on Computing at Comunidad de Castilla y León. Apart from reasons and factors explained in section 2, EMI implementation aimed to provide an added value and a different profile to the degree, since Universidad de Valladolid also offers the same degree at Campus Valladolid.

During this period, EMI was implemented on a voluntary basis. Subjects were also delivered in Spanish to provide students with both options. The staff reduction in the academic year 2012-2013 implied that subjects in English could not be offered.

2. Sociological and sociolinguistic factors

Regarding sociological and sociolinguistic aspects in EMI implementation, the models and descriptors used for a systematic approach to describe this context include:
- Forces behind CLIL (Coleman, 2006)
- CLIL dimensions (Marsh, Maljers & Hartiala, 2001)
- Findings from the ENLU report (Marsh & Laitinen, 2005)

The description of EIISG or any higher education EMI program could be complemented by 26 levers (Marsh, Pavón & Frigols, 2013) which provide indicators and recommendations for quality English degrees. Space restrictions of the present paper impede a detailed consideration of these levers.

2.1 Forces behind CLIL

The forces which drive universities into the use of English can be classified in seven categories (Coleman, 2006).
1. CLIL

"Foreign language learning in itself is NOT the reason why institutions adopt English medium teaching´ (Coleman, 2006: 4). This means there are not explicit language objectives neither at institutional nor at individual level. This is the case of EIISG. Nonetheless, it is expected that students' linguistic competence will benefit from the program.
2. Internationalization.

International relations with other universities and institutions have increased for academic and research reasons, mainly with the department for Information Systems at Technological University of Brno (Czech Republic). In addition some other professional from all over the world have contacted or visited the centre. For instance, Dr. Borenstein, Chief Open Standards Strategist and Distinguished Engineer de IBM, one of the creators of MIME protocol visited EIISG and gave an open lecture in 2010.
3. Student exchange.

EIISG shows active participation in international exchange programs and experiences such as the selected International Week, University St. Pölten (Austria) representing our university in an international European forum.
 4. Research and teaching materials.

Most of the research results in technical fields are published in English. Also, teaching materials (books, articles, videos, blogs, webs, data bases, etc) in English. Consequently, access to original sources could be easier and more efficient than recurring to translations (if any).
 5. Staff mobility.

Visits of foreign lecturers to Segovia have turned from sporadic to periodical. Since 2007 EIISG has received the visit of a Czech professor who delivers lecturers in English for a week. Other professors from his research group have lectured on their area of expertise. Equally, lecturers from Segovia have lectured in English in other European countries such as the Czech Republic.
 6. Graduate employability.

Having studied abroad or certifying a good level of a foreign language is always and added value in professional preparation.
 7. Market of international students.

EIISG received students from the Czech Republic, which would not had been viable if teaching had been through Spanish only.

2.2 CLIL dimensions:

The 5 CLIL dimensions (language, context, environment, learning and culture) are the reasons for implementation (Marsh, Maljers & Hartiala, 2001). Higher education centers mainly on Lantix, Contix and Entix. These three dimensions are analyzed in our context.

LANTIX
a. Improve overall target language competence

This is one of the strongest reasons to implement CLIL. this is not the initial aim, in our context. However, it is expected that students´ linguistic proficiency will develop as a collateral effect of the teaching in English, that is to say, without explicit linguistic objectives (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). Though we have not tested if our students improve, we have evidence that students perceive there was an improvement (Martín del Pozo, 2008b). This is not surprising given the high exposure to English (three hours per subject every week in a term of fifteen weeks).
b. Develop oral communication skills

This is a common aim of CLIL at all educational levels. Again, this improvement has not been tested but the polled students consider an enhancement in their oral comprehension skills (Martín del Pozo 2008b). On the other hand, lecturers value oral fluency as one of the main professional achievements of this experience.
c. Deepen awareness of both mother tongue and target language

There is debate about when a second language should be introduced without interfering with the learning of the first one. At higher education, the situation is different. However, awareness of both languages should be dealt with from another perspective. Language awareness seems to be one of the (hidden) aims of CLIL promoters (Dalton-Puffer, 2007) and a benefit for the lecturers themselves (Escobar Urmeneta, 2009).

CONTIX

This is perhaps the dimension which better identifies the reasons for CLIL implementation at higher education (Coleman, 2006).
a. Provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives

As Marsh *et al*. (2001) estimate, EMI is an approach for some topics and subject matters. In a scientific and technical degree, the convenience of English is evident. One of the lecturers commented in the open questionnaires that "English is a language that allows better synthesis of the contents and which has optimized the subject".
b. Access subject-specific target language terminology

Specialized terminology of Computer Science and other related very specific field is rarely translated into Spanish. EMI allows exposure to terms inexistent in Spanish and, simultaneously, exposure to new contents.
c.   Prepare for future studies and/or working life

Students need to develop linguistic skills for future professional life. In the field of Computer Science, competence in English is compulsory. EMI prepares students for future professional mobility in transnational and plurilingual contexts.

ENTIX

In a different manner, our context also presents reasons integrated in the environment dimension
a. Prepare for internationalization, specifically EU integration
b. Access International Certification
c. Enhance school profile

2.3 The ENLU report

The ENLU report (Marsh & Laitinen, 2005) gathers some features shared by European higher education contexts. Regarding linguistic issues, the most frequent tendency is that:
1. The reasons to introduce English as language of instruction are correlated with internationalization.
2. Teaching in English is not correlated with CLIL (Coleman, 2006; Coyle, 2010), because it lacks the dual focus and there are no language objectives
3. Implementation has hardly been accompanied with specific training
4. Countries whose first language is a LWULT language (less widely used and less taught languages) (Marsh & Laitinen, 2005: 3) tend to participate in EMI programs. In our case, the language is Czech with approximately 12 million speakers.
5. Erasmus exchanges at EIISG are strengthening the position of English instead of promoting plurilingualism (Coleman, 2006).

Therefore, EIISG presents the same features as most European universities where EMI has been implemented.

3. Linguistic aspects

As regards to linguistic aspects, a context could be approached with three theoretical models which aim to explain the different type of languages converging in the CLIL event.

3.1 The continuum from foreign language teaching to CLIL

CLIL can be interpreted as a continuum consisting of six pedagogical approaches which aim to facilitate learning (Greere & Räisänen, 2008 p. 5). Our case is step 5.
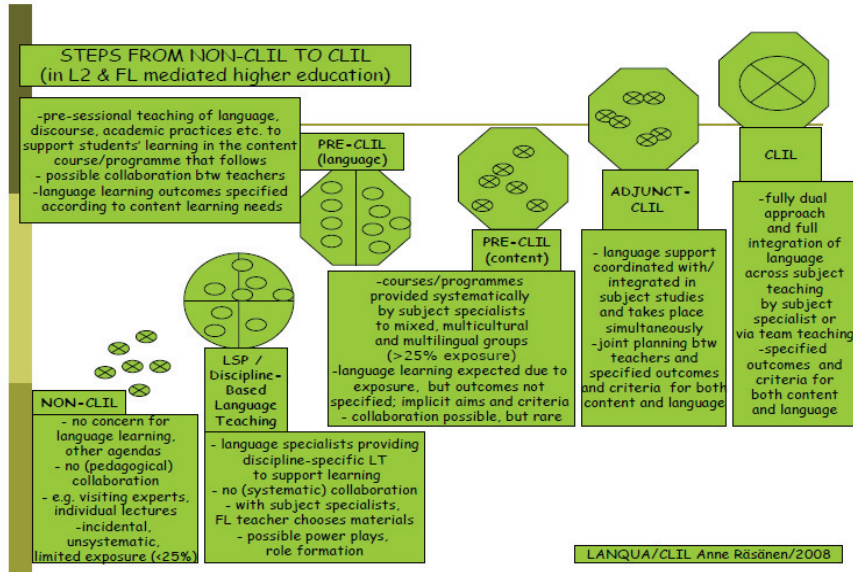
Figure 1: CLIL continuum Greere & Räisänen (2008: 6)

3.2 The Language Triptych (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010)

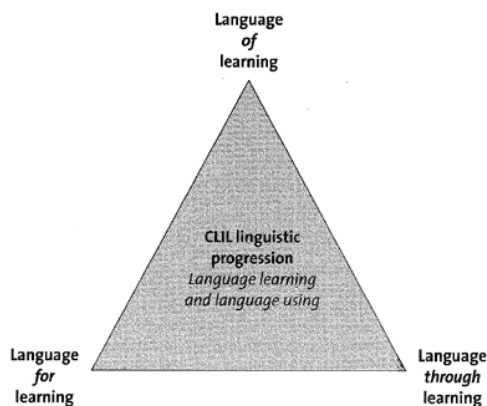This model identifies three different types of language in CLIL, as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: The Language Triptych (Coyle *at al.* 2010: 37

1. Language *of* learning: language needed to access the basic concepts and skills of a topic. It includes the vocabulary of the specialized domain, the linguistic academic functions (describe, explain, contrast, define etc.) and the genres.

2. Language *for* learning: language required to operate in an academic context and that will enable students to learn in a second language. According to Coyle et al. (2010), this type of language is the most crucial.

3. Language *through* learning: there cannot be effective learning if there is not an active relation between language and thought. It is the use of language to refer to new acquired meanings.

3.3 The Languages for CLIL model (Gierlinger, 2013)

Competences indicated by Common European Framework of Reference are not useful to categorize the types of language that CLIL teachers should master. The Ls4CLIL model aims to aid teachers to identify their linguistic training needs.

Figure 3: The Languages for CLIL model (Gierlinger)

Given that lecturers at EIISG are not language teachers, they cannot (and should not) teach language explicitly. However, they should be linguistic models for students and in consequence teach language implicitly. Awareness of these types of language would assist any EMI lecturer in lesson preparation and delivery.

4. Conclusion

The connection between the context of our experience and these theoretical considerations intended to:

1. Exemplify how practice and theory in bilingual higher education can assist each other. Theoretical models facilitate a consideration of the diverse variables and rationale behind our context.

2. Serve as an illustration to other institutions which may be attempting to understand some of the variables that converge in EMI implementation.

As already said in the introduction, the main intention of this paper was to illustrate how a comprehensive knowledge of the context could lessen the uncertainties of novel participants in CLIL /EMI education.

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