

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE-INTEGRATED LEARNING

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Introduction

More and more people seem to have realized that mastering a foreign language is a long, laborious and painful process and that no foreign-language teaching method, whether old, i.e. “genuine”, involving the wearisome study of grammar, or modern, i.e. focusing on communication, can work wonders. The initial zeal for the study of a foreign language, which in Poland is most often English, evoked by another very expensive and thus “greatly promising” course-book, bound in a gleaming cover and illustrated with colourful pictures, very soon ebbs away and things are back to normal. A lot of money is invested: many expensive course-books, one more promising than the other, additional materials: apparently wonderful grammar books, dictionaries of synonyms, antonyms, phrasal verbs and collocations, computer inter-actional courses and what not, and yet the final outcome is, in many cases, the same: a recourse to body language and some basic phrases, i.e. the inability or greatly limited possibility to communicate in a language that is not the mother tongue.

For millions of performers of this sort, the recommendation of the European Commission, proficiency in three European languages, may seem totally unattainable and, consequently, greatly frustrating. Similarly, the

statement that all the languages of EU member states should have equal status may sound like mockery. The feeling of frustration is often accompanied by bitter envy towards the citizens of those member states whose native language is one of the main languages of the EU. *Why should I spend my money and my precious time to study **their** language? Why don't **they** study **mine**?* The situation is rather far from the ideal: namely, equal status for all EU languages, and equal opportunities and possibilities for every EU citizen.

Not only poor performers but also those learners who have managed to master a foreign language to a certain degree have an unrelenting feeling of linguistic insecurity: *Do I really say what I mean? Do I sound English? Do I understand subtle shades of meaning correctly?* All in all, this linguistic inadequacy makes many people feel like inferior, non-authentic citizens of the EU, citizens of a second class. These feelings may gradually lead to some kind of (un)conscious resentment towards the EU, in spite of the possibilities it offers, among others, the possibility to study or work in the country of one's choice.

A great number of these problems and worries could be avoided if some neutral and simple language, foreign for all nations of the EU, such as Esperanto, would be adopted as a lingua franca. Since replacing the current lingua franca, English, with some neutral language, if it were ever possible, is a project which could only be realized in the very distant future, I would like to propose a more easily accessible solution, a cost-saving and time-effective way of teaching foreign languages. This is Content and Language-Integrated Learning (CLIL), recommended in the Council Resolution of 31 March 1995. The Resolution and the White Paper on education and training published a year later, encouraging the teaching of foreign languages "beyond the strict confines of the language class", constitute a legislative basis for this form of bilingual education.

What is CLIL?

One of the well-known specialists on content and language integrated learning (henceforth called CLIL), David Marsh, gives the following definition: Content and language integrated learning is a form of bilingual education in which content learning (and teaching) and language learning (and teaching) take place at the same time and are **equally important**. This

means that both are integral parts of the educational process, each being specified in the syllabus as a learning objective. In other words, CLIL seeks to develop proficiency in both the non-language subjects and the target language, the language in which learners are taught, and thus maximize learning. Generally, a language other than the mother tongue has a special role in CLIL (Marsh 1999).

Which languages may be taught through CLIL? On the one hand, the EU majority languages: English, French, German and Spanish, taught as foreign languages in different types of schools. This measure is time-saving and cost-effective: there is hardly any more space for language lessons in school curricula and the resources allocated for language teaching are usually far from sufficient. On the other hand, less widely used and less widely taught languages, often the languages of neighbouring countries, minority languages, particularly in bi- or multi-lingual countries, or even regional dialects may also be taught. The knowledge of these languages or language varieties may facilitate trans-regional contacts and eliminate the need for one single dominant lingua franca. The added value may be increased worker and student mobility, also within neighbouring countries, a development of intercultural knowledge, a higher level of understanding and mutual respect, and therefore the elimination of racial or ethnic animosities, something which may contribute to the propagation of peace and security in the world.

This form of education, responding to practical possibilities and local needs, can be introduced at any level: from kindergarten to tertiary education, and in both general and vocational education. In addition, it is important to notice that CLIL does not require that a foreign language is used all the time. According to Marsh (1999), the target language may be taught on a small scale and on a large scale. When the objective is to uphold the language of a neighbouring country, a minority language or a regional dialect, it may be used for a short period of time, e. g. for a day, a couple of days or a couple of weeks. When the objective is to achieve a high level of proficiency, it may be used over a longer period of time and more systematically, e.g. one or two lessons per week for a whole school year or over many years, and for as much as 90% of each lesson., CLIL does not have to be used for the whole given school subject. It may be used for only some particular themes specified in the syllabus, i.e. in teaching thematic modules. For example, in the case of English, it could be used for a series of events in British or American history as part of a general history course. In the case of less

widely used and less widely taught languages, languages of neighbouring countries, minority languages or even regional dialects, the module may involve some common historical events or some specific cultural, historical and social issues. Cultural issues such as literature or music, songs and art with explanations and comments in the target language, lend themselves particularly well in this respect. Generally, we can speak about CLIL if 25% of a lesson, theme or module takes place in a language which is not the learners' mother tongue.

Almost every school subject, with the exception of content subjects involving information about the learners' own country, e.g. the native language or native literature, lends itself to be taught through CLIL. The choice of subjects depends on the students' level of proficiency and, necessarily, on the access to teachers able to teach in the target language. With younger, less linguistically proficient students, subjects focusing on practical and interactional skills, like those in the of Total Physical Approach, such as technical subjects, physical education, music or art, may be particularly suitable. With older, linguistically more proficient students, subjects involving more verbal response, oral and written work, such as general history, geography, social sciences, biology, chemistry, or physics are recommended, (Marsh 1999).

As far as the teaching staff is concerned, the problem may be difficult, but not insurmountable. At a beginner's level, CLIL may be implemented by qualified teachers of foreign languages. Having a good command of the target language, and thus serving as an adequate linguistic model, foreign-language teachers can easily take on the responsibility for teaching at least some amount of content. At higher levels of education, where content is more complex, it is rather content teachers who have a relatively good command of the target language, though not necessarily native-like competence, that can implement CLIL. Successful CLIL teaching involves much more than linguistic competence. Teaching in an interactive way, it is not only the content teachers who are models of the target language usage: the peers also supply a linguistic model, e.g. while a group of students is solving non-linguistic problems or working on a project, etc. Further, what must not be forgotten is that CLIL involves the use of a wide range of multimedia, with native voices presenting and commenting on the content. Thus, CLIL methodological competencies, e.g. the mastery of a wide range of techniques involving simplification of the content, checking comprehension and learning, raising learners' language awareness or the use of video

or computers are often of more importance than native-like competence in the target language.

Another solution is networking, cooperation between language teachers and content subject teachers within a school, each of them having responsibility for a respective part. Networking, strongly recommended by Sajavaara (1997) can also be developed on a local, national or even trans-national level, which may give access to native-speakers and original school-materials. An ideal situation would, of course, be to have access to dual-qualified teachers, teachers knowing both the target language and the target content, as well as the respective teaching methodologies. In some new EU countries, such as Poland, dual-qualified teachers are easily available. Many university graduates in fields such as geography, history, or biology who are not able to find a teaching job in the discipline for which they have been qualified, take additional three-year-study programs in foreign language teacher training colleges. These teachers are a great asset for CLIL.

Similarly, access to teaching materials does not seem to pose any serious problems nowadays. The main source of teaching materials may be some reliable internet sources: news-sheets, encyclopaedias, maps, landscapes, animations, etc. Internet sections on teaching methodology show sample lessons and give a lot of advice as far as teaching methods and techniques are concerned. Making use of this sort of material, with the necessary adjustments to the linguistic abilities and the needs of one's own students, does not seem to be particularly time-consuming, especially when working in a network, locally or internationally. Once prepared, CLIL materials can be exchanged within a network, and thus used by more than one teacher. In the era of globalization, education is no longer culture-bound. The same or similar programmes in different countries or regions may also encourage trans-national networks on the part of the learners, thus creating a genuine need for a meaningful use of the target language.

CLIL and the current FLT methodology

A commonly known theory (Krashen 1989) claims that language is acquired through exposure to comprehensible input, i.e. when learners are exposed to samples of the target language which they are able to understand. Optimal acquisition will occur if the learners are exposed to frequent input, at just above their current level of linguistic proficiency, but with sufficient

clues for the input to be comprehensible. Thus, the primary task of a first or second/foreign language learner, is understanding. This claim may be easily substantiated through CLIL. An interesting input can be made involving authentic educational materials: (mini)-lectures, films, specialized (course) books, articles, internet sources, etc., adjusted to the level just above the learners' current level of linguistic knowledge and with sufficient clues to be comprehensible, may be easily produced. At the same time the amount of target language exposure in school will be considerably increased.

Further research seems to confirm Krashen's (1989) claims. It has produced evidence that some amount of language learning, such as some aspects of syntax, and (Newport 1990), some aspects of grammar (Van de Gein 1991) and some vocabulary (Elley 1993), takes place incidentally, when attention is not directed to the linguistic input, but when another kind of high-interest activity (problem-solving, interpreting data, selecting or rejecting information) is taking place. If these claims are true, purely linguistic classes, especially those with an exaggerated attention to form, seem to be a mere waste of time. Regrettably, many learners lose interest in this type of language classes because the content in which they might be interested is banal and well-worn. Achievement tests and statistics show that linguistic analysis, i.e. focus on grammar and particular vocabulary items or phrases, in many cases produces meagre effects and has little value for improving students' written and oral performance.

Wolff (1997), approvingly quoting Craik and Lockhard (1972), offers an explanation for why content-based language teaching may be more effective than linguistically-focused language teaching. Successful acquisition of knowledge depends, to a large extent, on the depth of processing. The probability that a learning item will stay permanently in memory is higher if it has been processed more deeply. The deeper stages of processing involve cognitive and semantic analysis. Content-based language learning offers more opportunities for deep processing than purely linguistic classes in which content is of no importance.

A very strong and convincing argument for a large-scale implementation of CLIL may be found in a comparison of the recommendations of the current main-stream methodology, Communicative Language Teaching (Harmer 2001) and CLIL. Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth called CLT) constitutes an underlying principle of modern course-books and is used worldwide in language classrooms. It may be easily noticed that, in many cases, CLT does not do what it claims and that CLIL offers an effec-

Table 1. The realization of the methodological recommendations of CLT in CLIL

CLT recommendation	CLT practice	CLIL practice
1. Language should be a medium of communication, i.e. authentic, meaningful interaction among speakers	Classroom simulations, “spontaneous” discussions of topics imposed by teacher, no real desire to communicate on the part of learners	Target language is a medium of communication by definition: authentic interactions while performing meaningful (e.g. problem-solving) tasks, searching for information, commenting the usefulness of internet sources, etc.
2. Authenticity of materials	Course-book texts (often repetitive, well-worn topics) chosen for the sake of linguistic analysis: grammatical structures and vocabulary (new lexical items connected with the topic, synonyms antonyms, collocations, etc.). No requirement to assimilate the content	Authentic (even if initially adjusted or abbreviated) informative material: content subject course-books, scientific articles, encyclopedias, educative films, internet sources, etc. The requirement to master the content and be able to discuss it in the target language.
3. Involvement of reading and writing skills	Oral performance and comprehension of spoken language of utmost importance, reading, and particularly writing skill somewhat neglected	Reading (skimming and scanning in seeking factual information) and writing (summaries, reports, term papers, etc.) are given their due place
4. Mastery of language functions (seeking information, apologizing, expressing regrets, offering, suggesting, (dis)agreeing, etc.)	Language functions practiced in simulated situations or while solving fictional problems	Language functions practiced in authentic learning situations: i.e. language accompanying planning, arranging, and performing content-based tasks, reporting on tasks, etc.)
5. Idiomatic everyday language used in communication between people	Idiomatic everyday language is used in pseudo-communicative learning environment (simulated tasks, discussion of imposed topic recommended by the syllabus)	Idiomatic everyday language is often used in a natural way during communication in authentic learning situations

tive remedy for some of the weaknesses of CLT. The most important weaknesses of CLT and some remedies for them offered by CLIL are presented in table 1.

These considerations, based on my classroom observations seem to be shared by language learners. A number of CLIL sample lessons, including

those involving a local minority language, Kashubian, and the following survey carried out by 10 teachers trainees with 200 informants, produced the following results: 55 % of gymnasium students and 70 % of high school students find the material in the course-books moderately interesting and the accompanying tasks rather artificial and repetitive. The most frequent comments were: “We are focused on form, making parrot-like reconstructions of ready-made utterances, and not saying what we really want to express and mean.” and “I feel awkward when simulating somebody else and say what he/she would say.” 64% of gymnasium learners and 82% high schools learners would rather have CLIL lessons than purely linguistic lessons. 70% of the informants were very enthusiastic about the lessons on Kashubian culture run in Kashubian, the most frequent comments being: “I have understood a lot and liked it” or “I want to go to the places where I can hear Kashubian used as an official language and see how it works” and “Yes, I am interested in Kashubian culture and would like to have more lessons like those”.

Conclusions

CLIL is a cost- and time-effective method of instruction. However, its main value involves more than just the safe-guarding of time and money. It also offers an improvement for the educational environment, making use of naturalistic and incidental language learning while studying content and thus sustaining the interest of a much wider range of students, including those students who are not linguistically-oriented. The use of a target language while performing meaningful content-based tasks in communication among speakers of the same mother-tongue seems to be less artificial than in linguistically-oriented classes, in which not only the use of the target language, but also most of the tasks, mere classroom simulations of real-life situations, may feel artificial.

The general expected outcome of teaching through CLIL is a much higher level of linguistic competence and a better ability to communicate in one or more additional EU languages and, what is more, not only in everyday situations but also in professional contexts: academic or vocational. The knowledge of foreign languages will make it possible for a greater number of EU citizens to fully take up their rights to work and study in a country of their choice. The promotion of regional dialects and less widely used and

less widely taught languages, in many cases the languages of neighbouring countries, instead of English or any other EU majority language used as a lingua franca, will promote a closer integration of a greater number of different ethnic groups, as well as and recognition and appreciation of cultural identity and linguistic diversity. As a result, Europe and the world may become a more secure and more friendly place to live in.

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