

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) A European Overview

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Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become a focus of attention in recent years, particularly in the state sector in various countries and on the interface with the private school and university sector. CLIL is the subject of ongoing debate in the UK national press, and was one of the main centres of attention at last year's IATEFL conference.

Along with the processes of joint political, economic and cultural activity and increased mobility across borders has come the realisation that a united Europe contains a huge diversity of languages and that if successful and continued expansion is to take place, communication plays a central role. There are a number of key considerations:

- Even if English remains the lingua franca, individual countries cannot be expected to relegate their own languages to second place in internal matters, and it has always been the case that some nations have strong views regarding the use of other tongues within their own borders.
- Given the above, together with increased linguistic contact, there will be an increase the need for communicative skills in a second or third language.
- Languages, therefore, will play a key role in curricula across Europe, and attention needs to be given to the training of teachers and the development of frameworks and methods which will improve the quality of language education.

European Policy

The logic of these conclusions is backed up by clear policy statements. Proficiency in three Community languages is stated as one of the objectives of education in Europe in the European Commission's White Paper on 'Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society'. The vision of a bilingual and multilingual Europe is clear.

The European Commission, through funded research projects in universities across Europe, has been investigating the state of language teacher training and bilingual education since the early-90s, pulling together the threads of existing approaches such as 'content based instruction', 'language supported subject learning', 'immersion', 'teaching subjects through a foreign language', and 'bilingual/plurilingual education'. All the aforementioned terms suggest a strong relationship between language learning and the learning of other 'content' subjects, with CLIL, the term having originally been defined in 1994 and launched by UNICOM in 1996, emerging as the most promising and beneficial approach.

Definition

The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was originally defined in 1994, and launched in 1996 by UNICOM, University of Jyväskylä and the European Platform for Dutch Education, to describe educational methods where 'subjects are taught through a foreign language with dual-focussed aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language'.

The essence of CLIL is that content subjects are taught and learnt in a language which is not the mother tongue of the learners. Knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning content, language is integrated into the broad curriculum, learning is improved through increased motivation and the study of natural contextualised language, and the principle of language acquisition becomes central. Broadly speaking, CLIL provides a practical and sensible approach to both content and language learning whilst also improving intercultural understanding, and has now been adopted as a generic term covering a number of similar approaches to bilingual education in diverse educational contexts. The evolution of CLIL involves precedents such as immersion programmes (North America), education through a minority or a national language (Spain, Wales, France), and many variations on education through a "foreign" language.

Theory

Earlier notions such as 'language across the curriculum' and 'language supported subject learning' have been assimilated into CLIL, and judging by the variety and number of CLIL-based projects ongoing in Europe and elsewhere, it may no longer be relevant to question which is the dominant partner in the language-content relationship (content in English or English through content). What is fundamental to CLIL is that language and content are taught and learned together in a dual-focused classroom context, and there are a number of related reasons why this might be the way forward if a bilingual or multilingual society is the goal.

Benefits of Interdisciplinary/Cross-Curricular Teaching

The theory behind CLIL has foundations in interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching which provides a meaningful way in which students can use knowledge learned in one context as a knowledge base in other contexts. Many of the important concepts, strategies, and skills taught in the language arts are "portable", i.e. they transfer readily to other content areas. Strategies for monitoring comprehension, for example, can be directed to reading material in any content area while cause-and-effect relationships exist in literature, science, and social studies. Thus, interdisciplinary teaching helps learners to apply, integrate and transfer knowledge, and fosters critical thinking.

Interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching can increase students' motivation for learning. In contrast to learning skills in isolation, when students participate in interdisciplinary experiences they see the value of what they are learning and become more actively engaged. Interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching provides the conditions under which effective learning occurs. Students learn more when they use language skills to explore, write and speak about what they are learning.

Cross-curricular teaching is characterised by thematic units, offering the teacher flexibility over a period of time in terms of adopting a strict content-based or more global timetable of lessons.

CLIL, Translation and Translanguaging

One of the criticisms of standard parallel content and language programmes and some bilingual programmes is that there is little evidence to show that the comprehension of content is not impeded by lack of language competence. CLIL identifies a 'transition' stage at which learners become fully functional in both languages, and is open to a wide range of approaches which enable learners to arrive at this stage. Translation is an acceptable tool, particularly where the concurrent use of two languages enables concepts to be understood and depth of comprehension to be achieved. Many learners respond well to exploring and comparing versions of a text in different languages.

In truly bilingual situations (Wales, Canada), 'translanguaging' is a teaching strategy designed to promote the understanding of a subject in order to use the information successfully. In translanguaging, the input (reading or listening) tends to be in one language, and the output (speaking or writing) in the other. Input and output languages are systematically varied.

Global Advantages of CLIL

Because CLIL is seen not only as an approach to subject and language learning but also in broader educational and even political contexts as a means of understanding, proponents and exponents of CLIL see its advantages in terms of both achieving bilingualism and improving intercultural understanding.

In the cultural context, CLIL is seen to build intercultural knowledge & understanding by developing intercultural communication skills whilst learning about other countries/regions and/or minority groups.

Institutions using a CLIL approach are likely to enhance their profile by accessing international certification and preparing students for internationalisation, specifically EU integration.

Linguistically, CLIL not only improves overall target language competence, but also raises awareness of both mother tongue and target language while encouraging learners to develop plurilingual interests and attitudes.

Content-wise, CLIL provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives, access subject-specific target language terminology and hence prepare for future studies and/or working life.

Educationally, CLIL adds to and complements individual learners' range of learning strategies while adding diversity and flexibility to existing methods and forms of classroom practice.

CLIL and ELT

A CLIL lesson is not a language lesson neither is it a subject lesson transmitted in a foreign language, nevertheless, CLIL includes many aspects of language teaching methodology, and, of course, relies on the communicative language teaching tenet that language should be presented, taught and practised in a meaningful context. CLIL methodology is based on, resembles and incorporates many aspects of ELT:

- **CLIL and Situational Learning.** Language is presented in real-life contexts in which language acquisition can take place even in a monolingual/non-immersion environment.
- **CLIL and Language Acquisition.** CLIL encourages acquisition over conscious learning. Since language acquisition is a cyclical rather than linear process, the thematic nature of CLIL facilitates the creation of a functional-notional syllabus, adding new language whilst recycling pr-existing knowledge.
- **CLIL and the Natural Approach.** Exploring language in a meaningful context is an element of both natural and communicative language learning. Learners develop fluency by using the language to communicate for a variety of purposes. Fluency precedes grammatical accuracy and errors are a natural part of language learning, thus the concept of ‘interlanguage’ is encompassed.
- **CLIL and Motivation.** Natural use of language can boost a learner’s motivation towards learning languages. In CLIL, language is a means not an end, and when learners are interested in a topic they will be motivated to acquire language to communicate. Language is learnt more successfully when the learner has the opportunity to gain subject knowledge at the same time.
- **CLIL and Current ELT Practice.** CLIL adheres closely to current trends in language teaching. Grammar is secondary to lexis, fluency is the focus rather than accuracy, and language is seen in chunks, as in the lexical approach. Learners are required to communicate content to each other, and skills are integrated with each other and with language input. Learner needs are of primary concern, and learning styles catered for in the variety of task types available.

In many ways, then, the CLIL approach is similar to a modern ELT concept of integrated skills lessons, except that it includes exploration of language, is delivered by a teacher versed in CLIL methodology and is based on material directly related to a content-based subject. Both content and language are explored in a CLIL lesson. A CLIL ‘approach’ is not far removed from humanistic, communicative and lexical approaches in ELT, and aims to guide language processing and supports language production in the same way that an EFL/ESL course would by teaching techniques for exploiting reading or listening texts and structures for supporting spoken or written language.

CLIL Classroom Practice

Given the relative lack of teacher training programmes and obvious sources of materials, there is an understandable concern over what actually happens in a CLIL classroom.

In fact, the underlying principles of cross-curricular teaching can be found in the 4Cs curriculum (Coyle 1999) which stated that a successful CLIL lesson should combine elements of the following four principles:

- **Content.** Progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum.
- **Communication.** Using language to learn whilst learning to use language.
- **Cognition.** Developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding and language.
- **Culture.** Exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings which deepen awareness of otherness and self.

A CLIL lesson looks at content and language in equal measure, and often follows a four-stage framework.

- **Processing the Text.**

The best texts are those accompanied by illustrations so that learners can visualise what they are reading. When working in a foreign language, learners need structural markers in texts to help them find their way through the content. These markers may be linguistic (headings, sub-headings) and/or diagrammatical. Once 'core knowledge' has been identified, the organisation of the text can be analysed.

- **Identification and Organisation of Knowledge.**

Texts are often represented diagrammatically. These structures are known as 'ideational frameworks' or 'diagrams of thinking', and are used to help learners categorise the ideas and information in a text. Diagram types include tree diagrams for classification, groups, hierarchies, flow diagrams and timelines for sequenced thinking such as instructions and historical information, tabular diagrams describing people and places, and combinations of these. The structure of the text is used to facilitate learning and the creation of activities which focus on both language development and core content knowledge.

- **Language Identification.**

Learners are expected to be able to reproduce the core of the text in their own words. Since learners will need to use both simple and more complex language, there is no grading of language involved, but it is a good idea for the teacher to highlight useful language in the text and to categorise it according to function. Learners may need the language of comparison and contrast, location or describing a process, but may also need certain discourse markers, adverb phrases or prepositional phrases. Collocations, semi-fixed expressions and set phrases may also be given attention as well as subject specific and academic vocabulary.

- **Tasks for Students.**

There is little difference in task-type between a CLIL lesson and a skills-based EFL lesson. A variety of tasks should be provided, taking into account the learning purpose and learner styles and preferences. Receptive skill activities are of the 'read/listen and do' genre.

CLIL Organisations

As little as two years ago, project results concluded that CLIL or similar systems were being applied in some countries, but were not part of teacher training programmes. Subsequently, there has been an increase in the number of schools offering 'alternative' bilingual curricula, and a response in terms of research into training and methodology at three distinct levels – individual Institutions of Higher Education, Ministries of Education, and international organisations. On the transnational level the following are key organisations:

- UNICOM, based within the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and incorporating the European Platform for Dutch Education, remains a key centre of expertise in research, teacher development, consultancy and materials production. UNICOM also coordinates the CLIL Consortium, a growing collection of experts in the field of bilingual and content-based education. UNICOM have extended CLIL-related activity beyond Europe, with projects in Namibia, Mozambique and Ethiopia where CLIL has also been used to reduce inequality in societies where some teachers and learners may be excluded on the grounds of linguistic inadequacy in the predominant language of instruction.
- EuroCLIC (The European Network for Content and Language Integrated Classrooms) focuses on programmes which entail the use of a modern foreign language as the language

of instruction or content and language integrated learning for non-language subjects and, like the CLIL Consortium, includes practitioners, researchers, teacher trainers and policymakers.

- The TIE-CLIL project (Translanguage in Europe, funded through Socrates) promotes plurilingualism through the introduction of CLIL in five different EU languages (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish). The aim of TIE-CLIL is to provide pre- and in-service development programmes in CLIL for language teachers and subject teachers and to develop both theory and practice.
- Probably the most comprehensive source of information is the CLIL Compendium, which identifies the foundations, benefits, dimensions, progress and potential of CLIL across Europe and is the result of a multinational research project. Like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, support for CLIL research and development is offered by EUROPA (the European Union), the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Within the UK, the major incentive has come from the Content and Language Integration Project (CLIP) hosted by CILT, (the National Centre for Languages) which is the UK government's recognised centre of expertise on languages and whose mission, in line with European policy, is to promote a greater capability in languages amongst all sectors of the UK population. CILT monitors a number of projects connecting the National Literacy Strategy with language learning in schools across England. These projects cover the 7-16 age range and involve a variety of approaches ranging from innovative techniques in language teaching to the integration of French into the primary curriculum. Key players in the field of CLIL in the UK are based at the University of Nottingham, while teacher training and development courses in CLIL are available at Nottingham and NILE (the Norwich Institute for Language Education).

CLIL and the Future of the Language Classroom

Politically and socially, there is an obvious need for a rethink of language education policy in Europe. CLIL represents the best framework in terms of a content-based bilingual approach. At the extreme, it could be argued that CLIL materials are the subject matter of other disciplines, that CLIL teachers are well versed in both language instruction and a content subject, that learning a language and learning through a language are concurrent processes, and that the traditional concepts of the language classroom and the language teacher are without a future since they do not fit the CLIL model. While CLIL undoubtedly has potential, there are factors which hinder its development, and caution regarding the implementation of content-based bilingual programmes may be advisable on some or all of the following grounds:

- Experimentation and ad-hoc implementation of CLIL is currently outpacing research-driven studies and empirical evidence of success. Many private sector schools and tertiary institutions see variations on bilingual education and particularly English-medium content study as marketable.
- CLIL is based on belief in natural language acquisition, and may well be appropriate in an immersion situation. However, when cognitive effort is involved, when exposure to the language is restricted to specific times, and when exposure to the language rarely happens outside the classroom, conscious learning of the target language is involved. When English is learned in Turkey or Israel, this is usually what happens, even though it is an unnatural way to learn a language.

- CLIL involves a constant effort from both teacher and learner to master both content and language. In this situation, it is questionable whether students are assessed on language or content, and unclear what the attitude is to errors and possible restrictions on content caused by linguistic inadequacy.
- The lack of CLIL teacher-training programmes suggest that the majority of teachers working on bilingual programmes may be ill-equipped to do the job adequately.
- While learners' breadth of knowledge, confidence and cultural understanding may benefit from CLIL, there is little evidence to suggest that, for the majority, understanding of content is not impeded by lack of language competence. Current opinion seems to be that language ability can only be enhanced once sufficient content has been absorbed to make the general context understandable, and that there is a 'transition' stage, after which the learner is able to function effectively in both languages.
- Various aspects of CLIL appear entirely unnatural; such as the appreciation of the literature and culture of the learner's own country through a second language. For a Turkish student to learn about the tenets of Atatürk through English, for example, would seemingly be inappropriate.

Until issues such as teacher training and the development of content materials which lend themselves to language development are addressed, the immediate future of parallel language learning to support and complement the understanding of content is fairly secure. In the long term, however, there are political, economic and cultural considerations cloaked in the context of Europeanisation, which are likely to make CLIL a common feature of many European education systems.

CLIL Information

Centre for Information on Language, Teaching and Research(CILT) www.cilt.org.uk

CLIL Compendium www.clilcompendium.com

Comenius Project TL2L - <http://www.tl2l.nl/>

Content and Language Integrated Project (CLIP) - www.cilt.org.uk/clip/

EuroCLIC – www.euroclic.org

European Centre for Modern Languages www.ecml.at

European Commission – Languages www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/

Forum for Across the Curriculum Teaching www.factworld.info

National Centre for Languages (CILT) - www.cilt.org.uk

Norwich Institute for Language Education - www.nile-elt.com

Quality Action in English - <http://go.to/action-english>

Science Across the Curriculum – www.scienceacross.org

Foreign Language Teaching to Children - www.Hocus-Lotus.edu

Tips and Materials - www.onestopenglish.com/business/bank/clil/index.htm

Translanguage in Europe www.tieclil.org

University of Jyväskylä www.jyu.fi

University of Nottingham www.nottingham.ac.uk

There is also an ongoing debate in the UK press:

www.guardian.co.uk/guardianweekly/clildebate/

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