

The role of Language Teachers in the CLIL curriculum

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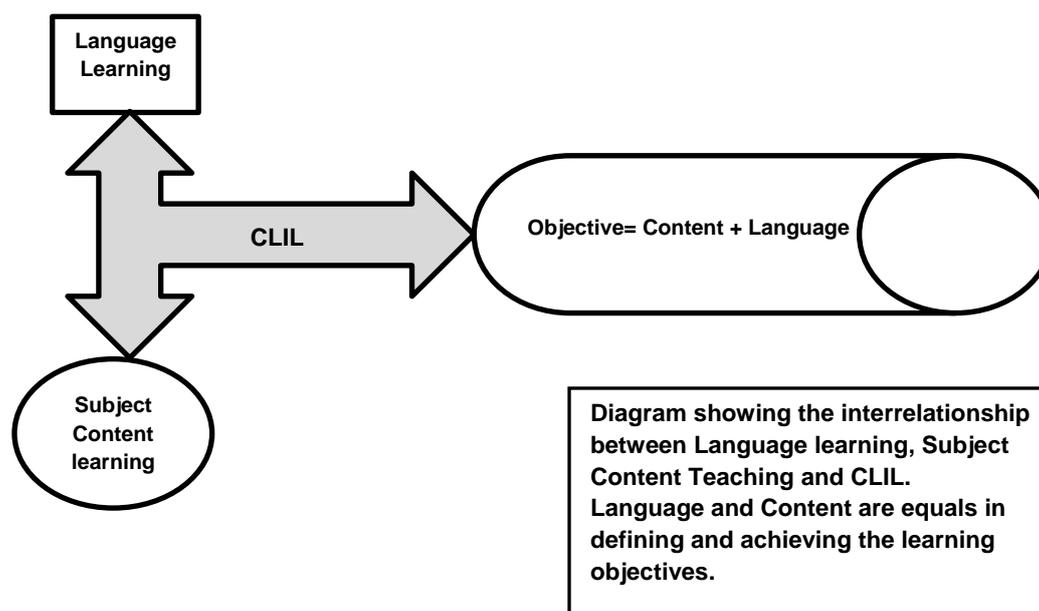
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Abstract: The European Union has, through the Bologna Process (1999) and the Europe 2020 Strategy (2000), set objectives in becoming by 2020 a leading and innovative society. The core objectives were recognised as being education, science and economics. Since the benefits of the EU objectives were to be enjoyed by every citizen, bilingualism -- or multilingualism -- was seen as the most suitable in achieving higher levels of language proficiency, cultural awareness and educational and economic growth. In the 1990's, CLIL emerged as an educational approach that assigned language a special role in the learning of subject content and in promoting cultural awareness. The question that now arose was – since the content teacher was expected to teach the content in the target language and had to be competent in the target language, what is the role of the language teacher in the CLIL curriculum and how does this affect language teachers? This article looks at the role of language teachers in a CLIL environment.

Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning, language teachers, role of language teachers.

Introduction

Through the provisions of the Bologna Process (1999) and Europe 2020 strategy, Europe is making efforts to become a leading and innovative society. The core objectives were recognised as being education, science and economics. The integration of the differing European nations into a Union has meant that learning a language simply to communicate was not enough – multicultural and multilingual diversity had to be accommodated as well as content in order to fulfil the objectives set down by the EU in the strategies, as well as taking into account national identity. Since the benefits of the EU objectives are to be enjoyed by every citizen, bilingualism was seen as the most suitable in achieving higher levels of language proficiency, as well as fostering cultural awareness and educational and economic growth. In the 1990s, CLIL emerged as a term that described an approach to bilingual and multilingual education that assigned language a central role in the learning of subject content through a foreign language.



Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is a general term adopted in the 1990s to describe the diverse approaches that are part of dual-focused learner-centred education where subject content and language of instruction are given special attention. CLIL is an approach fundamentally based on language immersion and content-based instruction, where content is learnt through an additional language (foreign language (FL) or second language (L2)), thus teaching at the same time both the subject content and the foreign language [1].

CLIL has been identified as very important by the European Commission because: *"It can provide effective opportunities for pupils to use their new language skills now, rather than learn them now for use later. It opens doors on languages for a broader range of learners, nurturing self-confidence in young learners and those who have not responded well to formal language instruction in general education. It provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum, which can be of particular interest in vocational settings."* [2]. Adopting CLIL the European Commission saw it as a way of *"...enhancing the language competences in general, in order to promote the teaching of non-linguistic subjects in foreign languages"* [3]. CLIL can be very effective in enhancing the learning of languages and other subjects, while at the same time developing positive attitudes towards learning languages. This comes as fewer and fewer students feel that it is ineffective to learn a language without content application.

What must be emphasised here is that CLIL does not break with the Communicative Language approach but rather it enhances it – communication is still facilitated through language, but the objective has now shifted. Content dictates what language elements need to be learned, their order and the level of language proficiency. Teachers are no longer left groping for suitable language materials; the subject content shows them a clear path as to what needs to be learnt. Language thus plays a central role in breaking down cultural communication barriers and facilitating EU integration, and so the role of language learning becomes even more important and central in the fulfilment of the EU objectives. Schools in the EU countries have adopted CLIL as a way of attracting students, but the EU as a whole has not implemented or financed coherent CLIL policies which should include teacher education and training in the CLIL environment [4]. Most teachers have not yet acquired the teaching competencies and abilities that are peculiar to CLIL. They have been unable to do so because very few higher education

institutions provide suitable Teacher Education (TEd) in CLIL - neither is it offered in a systematic fashion to student-teachers or in-service teachers [5].

In Bulgaria, the current nationwide curriculum is described in two documents – for foreign language teaching at primary schools *‘Вжодно-изходно равнище на учебният предмет Чужд език в българското основно училище (1993) Чуждоезиково обучение кн.4’* [6] (**Foreign Language Input-Output level for subject ‘Foreign Language’ for the Bulgarian Primary School, 1993, Foreign Language Learning, bk 4**) and for the secondary school - *‘Вжодно-изходно равнище на учебният предмет Чужд език за гимназиалната степен на българското училище (1995), Учебен курикулум МОИТ’* [7] (**Input-Output Threshold for the subject ‘Foreign Languages’ at Upper Secondary Level in Bulgarian Schools: curriculum of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 1995**). Neither document makes any mention as to the methodology that will be or is used to teach foreign languages in schools. Rather broad outlines are given, and it is inferred that the school principals and language teachers will choose the most suitable method. What is mentioned however is that the mother language should have a minimal presence in the teaching of the foreign language and may only be used to clarify grammatical and other points. It would appear that the language teacher is an executor of a government policy while the method of fulfilling the objectives of the curriculum is left up to the language department in each school. Bulgaria introduced CLIL in schools as ‘best practice’ after the transition period of 1989 in order to attract students and to be more up to date with the tendencies present in Europe. Despite this, the shortage of suitably qualified teachers, books or a material base has caused problems which remain by and large unsolved. What is more alarming is that there is no contact between content teachers and the language teachers at schools. Where subjects are taught in a foreign language, the emphasis remains on content – content teachers lack language training and proficiency and the curriculum does not provide for any recommendations for focusing on the foreign language let alone the focusing of the language through the content. Recently this has been addressed with Universities such as Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridsky’ through its department of Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching providing content teachers with solid language training in their relevant subjects.

3. The role of the Language Teacher in the CLIL curriculum

Language is traditionally seen as a resource for meaning being used to teach new information and to communicate [8]. One of the main obstacles facing the EU is the understanding and managing of cultural and intercultural diversity, under the prism of migration and immigration within the EU and from countries outside the Union. CLIL has at its core the promotion of social cohesion through its 4C’s which lead to the understanding of the diversity of cultures now present within the EU. The table below summarises the core values of the 4C’s and we can see how they are interrelated.

Content	Integrating content from across the curriculum through high quality language interaction.
Cognition	Engaging learners through higher order thinking and processing.
Communication	Using language to learn and mediate ideas, thoughts and values.
Culture	Interpreting and understanding the significance of content and language and their contribution to identity and citizenship.

▲ The relationship of the core values of CLIL giving rise to the 4C framework.

The table shows that knowledge is learnt through subject content and cognition giving rise to communication through language facilitating understanding of culture and community – giving rise to the 4C’s = Content, Cognition, Communication, Culture/Community [9]. These stages are nothing new to students – they implement the 4Cs when learning in their native language (L1). The challenge for content teachers and language teachers is the application of the 4Cs in the Target Language (TL) on part of the students.

CLIL has been favoured in the EU due to its multifaceted and integrated approach to foreign language teaching. At the centre of CLIL is the subject teacher, who teaches the subject and its content in the target and/or foreign language. Pupils thus learn a subject by using the Target Language and/or foreign Language and are thus able to develop higher order thinking processes. This will help them to develop valuable individual identity and ability in understanding the multitude of cultures present within the EU.

But what is the role of the Language Teacher in CLIL? The role of the language teacher in CLIL is not so clear-cut – it is left up to the individual member states and their educational systems to define what the role of the language teacher is in the CLIL curriculum. Tardieu and Dolitsky comment on the role of the language teacher with reference to the French educational system thus, “*The official texts offer almost no indication as to the role of the language teacher in CLIL. They address the content teacher who is expected to co-operate with the language teacher. In this respect, the language teacher remains in the shadow in the CLIL scheme. Language teachers are not recognized for their work in the CLIL programme.*” [10].

In the CLIL curriculum the content teacher is expected to be a foreign language teacher as well and is expected to deal with matters such as syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation and reading – areas of expertise that fall within the domain of the foreign language teacher. Language teachers have been sidelined and content teachers have the extra burden of having to be educated and trained as subject teachers and language teachers – hardly an ideal situation since it is the product of state politics implemented without the advice or consent of teachers.

Language teachers and formal language instruction should be an integral part of CLIL, and language should be taught at the same time as subject through L2/FL [11]. In Spain, a country with linguistic diversity, the state has undertaken various CLIL initiatives and together with Estonia are the only countries where coherent policies in CLIL have been implemented and financed [12]. Research in Spain shows that the areas traditionally associated with language learning – pronunciation, vocabulary and productive vocabulary – are not favourably affected by CLIL [13]. The role of the language teacher, it would seem, is still vital even in the CLIL curriculum.

Ideally, the subject and language teacher should form a team (ideally outside of the subject classroom), in which they complement each other – the subject teacher should teach the content by using the foreign language and the language teacher should focus on the problems associated

with language learning such that the student is able to learn the subject content through the foreign language. Below is a table that shows this relationship of the FL teacher in the CLIL curriculum relative to the subject content teacher.

Foreign/Second Language Teacher	Subject/Content teacher
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proficient in FL 2. Uses CLIL methodology 3. Identifies and incorporates L2 language needs and forms present within the subject curriculum into the schools FL curriculum. 4. Suggests teaching strategies and approaches in L2 comprehension (reading/listening) and production (vocabulary/writing/speaking) through the use of subject texts in L2. 5. Identifies with the help of the subject teacher, possible L2 language difficulties that arise or may arise during class and suggests teaching strategies and approaches in L2 comprehension (reading/listening) and production (vocabulary/writing/speaking) through the use of subject texts in L2. Integrates content learning in language classes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has subject specialism. 2. Proficient in FL. 3. Uses CLIL methodology 4. Responsible for the teaching of the subject content through the 4Cs. 5. Responsible for the functional competence in the use of L2 through his subject teaching by appropriate language texts. 6. Responsible for his/her competence in L2 when using it as a medium of subject teaching. 7. Identifies with the help of the language teacher, possible L2 language difficulties that arise or may arise during class and suggests teaching strategies and approaches in subject comprehension (reading/listening) and production (vocabulary/writing/speaking) through the use of subject texts in L2. Integrates language learning in content classes.

The integration of foreign language and subject content in a syllabus calls for a new concept of the roles of the language teacher and the subject teacher. They need to collaborate in order to establish a list of subject obligatory and compatible language elements [14]. The subject teacher assesses which language is essential for talking about the subject matter, whereas the language teacher knows how to teach the relevant language skills. Subject-language objectives also derive from the ongoing assessment of students' needs and progress through the FL-subject curriculum. In this way the students will simultaneously have improvement in language proficiency and improved learning outcomes in content subjects. The language teacher and the subject teacher keep their original priorities, but their areas of responsibility are now expanded [15].

In order to be able to collaborate, language and subject teachers first have to understand one another – this is one area where Teacher Education (TEd) in the 'peculiarities' of CLIL is deficient for both student-teachers or in-service teachers [16]. Content and Language teachers should have an informed appreciation of each other's discipline; the foreign language and the subject, though they need *'not expertise in the full range of concepts, theories and methods'* [17]. Sadly, few teachers have this knowledge of the other's area of expertise. Language Teachers lack a general understanding of the subjects in the curriculum and lack a solid teaching base [18]. In the area of foreign languages, the teaching/communicative competencies in the target foreign language (TFL) of subject teachers is usually not enough to deliver CLIL instruction [19]. This causes subject and language teachers to experience difficulties on agreeing what to teach in CLIL classes and how to do so when engaged in language-subject curricular collaboration [20].

4. Conclusions

Learning a language for the sake of the language is not enough as few see any practical application at the time of learning a foreign language. CLIL gives meaning to the language learning process by teaching the foreign language through subject content. But that alone is not enough. Language proficiency is complex, and teaching through subject content alone is inadequate. While CLIL is seen as a solution to the multilingual education scene and has been eagerly adopted by EU nations, it has been applied in an ineffective manner and thus deficient in addressing critical dimensions of language learning. Subject teachers teach the subject through the foreign language, but they are not language teachers. Language teaching requires a different set of skills and educators and educational policy makers need to take this into account and not to sideline and marginalize the role of the language teacher.

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