

Content and Language Integrated Learning – Potential and Practice

Steve Darn

Izmir University of Economics

steve.darn@ieu.edu.tr

Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an umbrella term covering dual-focus contexts in which an additional language is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content. There are elements of a host of contexts, primarily variations of the themes of Language Across the Curriculum, Bilingual Education and Content-Based Instruction which fall under this umbrella. However, the essence of CLIL is that it is about teaching and learning content, and that language is the key to a fuller understanding of the subject matter.

CLIL is based on the common-sense belief that better learning takes place when learners are stimulated by the subject matter, hopefully out of interest but sometimes of necessity. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is catered for. There is also obvious pedagogic and even economic sense behind the notion that content and language are best taught and learned together.

CLIL lessons

A CLIL lesson is not a language lesson or simply a subject lesson delivered in a foreign language. Neither is a CLIL lesson necessarily delivered by a language teacher or a subject specialist. To this extent, CLIL diverges from standard content-based instruction and ESL formats. CLIL lessons are subject lessons taught by teachers who are trained not only in the subject area, but also in how to exploit content-based materials for language. That language may be subject-specific, subject-related or necessary for the learner not only to comprehend, but also to produce written or spoken discourse having a similar content base.

CLIL lessons exhibit other important characteristics, either derived from underlying principles or dictated by the practicalities of the dual-focus teaching context:

1. In principle, CLIL adheres to the '4Cs' curriculum. CLIL lessons therefore contain elements of content, communication, culture and cognition. While based on content, the CLIL curriculum recognises broader educational needs such as the development of thinking skills

and self-awareness, and exposure to alternative cultural perspectives. CLIL is committed to breadth of education, long-term learning and internationalisation.

2. In using language to learn while learning to use language, it is the subject matter which determines the language to be learnt. There is no language syllabus, and language within a text is not graded. Naturally, more content is learned as language competence increases. Language is seen as a means to the end of learning content, and language is integrated into the broad curriculum.
3. CLIL lessons incorporate all four language skills, but are often based on reading texts as the major source of input. Language learning in the CLIL context bears similarities to current ELT practice in that lessons tend to be of the integrated skills type, language is approached lexically rather than grammatically and language is noticed and explored rather than taught. Errors are seen as part of a natural progression, and functional language is of a high priority. Learner styles are taken into account in task types. Language learning in CLIL, therefore, is not far removed from the humanistic, communicative and lexical approaches commonly seen in ELT.

Lesson framework

While there is no such thing as a 'CLIL lesson', the following four-stage format is often followed in order to provide a balance of content and language:

1. Processing the text. 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 diagrammatic. Once a 'core knowledge' has been identified, the organisation of the text can be analysed.
2. 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, the creation of activities which focus on both language development and core content knowledge, and to provide a basis for further analysis of the text and note taking.

3. Language identification. Although there is no grading of language, 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.
4. Tasks for learners. 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. A menu of listening tasks might include:
 - Listen and label a diagram/picture/map/graph/chart
 - Listen and fill in a table
 - Listen and make notes on specific information (dates, figures, times)
 - Listen and reorder information
 - Listen and identify location/speakers/places
 - Listen and label the stages of a process/instructions/sequences of a text
 - Listen and fill in the gaps in a text

CLIL teachers

Currently, CLIL teachers are likely to be language teachers able to teach one or more subjects, or subject teachers who can also raise awareness of language. Competence in the target language is a necessity, while the ability to identify the core language of a subject, the ability to work with texts and words, and the ability to design tasks and projects are key skills. Ideally, CLIL teachers are properly trained and involved in INSET. Training providers are beginning to respond to

demand, with short courses being available in the UK at institutions such as Pilgrims and the Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE).

CLIL offers opportunities for team teaching and cooperation between language and subject teachers. Where skills for life are the aim, the ideal situation is the involvement of subject and language teachers together with a vocational trainer. In a cooperative environment, motivation for teaching increases, each discipline benefits, teachers expand their repertoire of teaching techniques, and mutual respect develops between teachers of various disciplines.

CLIL progress

Over the past five years, CLIL has spread from its roots in Western Europe, particularly Scandinavia, to many countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and the Far East . In some countries such as the USA there has been a tradition of content-based teaching, immersion programs and language learning in mainstream classrooms, while in Europe, many projects are driven by the EU's long term vision of a plurilingual society. In South America, particularly Brazil, CLIL is seen as an economical alternative to providing language instruction for very large numbers of students. In Africa, there are CLIL projects which have a socio-political objective in reducing racial and social inequalities. In the UK, where language has become a priority in the national curriculum, there are local and regional projects ranging from the teaching of science in French in elementary schools to providing language support for immigrants and refugees in the secondary and vocational sectors.

Obstacles

In many ways, CLIL remains embryonic. There is inevitable opposition to language teaching by subject teachers, while language teachers may foresee the end of the language classroom as we know it. There are also those who believe that the spread of CLIL is being driven by political and economic forces which may be temporary. Meanwhile, the majority of CLIL projects are experimental and there is a lack of empirical data by which success can be measured. CLIL training courses are few, and materials and resources scarce. 'Teaching English Through Other

Subjects' (Sheelagh Deller and Christine Price, OUP 2007) is the first CLIL resource book from a major ELT publisher. Assessment is also a problematic area, given that content and language need to be given equal weighting. There are ongoing debates regarding the language acquisition aspect of CLIL learning, and over how far subject comprehension may be impeded by inadequate language competence. Critics, however, are faced with the potential of CLIL as long term learning starting in elementary school, and the inevitable demands of internationalisation for efficient and economical ways of achieving bilingualism or multilingualism.

CLIL in Turkey

CLIL may be a way forward for language learning in Turkey, where English has been the pivotal subject in the curriculum for some time. There is already a history of content based teaching and learning of mathematics and science in private high schools, while English medium universities currently proliferate. CLIL offers the opportunity to address the lack of vocationally oriented teaching in higher education, and the possibility of shifting more content learning into university foundation courses, which are currently almost exclusively language based. Learner motivation is a constant problem in a system in which students arrive at university having already studied English for several years and are faced with the prospect of yet more general English and EAP courses lacking a specific subject focus. While Turkey remains committed to membership of the EU, it may be well to remember that the demand for a mobile labour force may be largely confined to language competent skilled labour rather than the academically adept.

Essential Websites

There is a growing volume of literature concerning the nature and spread of CLIL. The following four Websites are good places to start:

- <http://www.clilcompendium.com/>
- <http://www.clil-axis.net/>
- <http://www.clilcom.stadia.fi/1500>
- <http://www.factworld.info/>