

# Michèle Catroux

---

## Is Content and Language Integrated Learning Congruent with Plurilingualism?

---

Annales Neophilologiarum nr 6, 151-162

---

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

## DYDAKTYKA

MICHÈLE CATROUX\*

Université de Bordeaux

### IS CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING CONGRUENT WITH PLURILINGUALISM?

The Lanqua project<sup>1</sup> states that the European Union (EU) has been working towards the building of the linguistic and intercultural competence of language learners through international mobility and specific language policies and approaches. Indeed, language learning concerns students of non-language disciplines and not only future language specialists. For that reason many educational institutions have introduced approaches where subject studies are offered in a second or foreign language, most often English.

According to a recent ACA report (Academic Cooperation Association) the number of English-medium degree programmes in non-English speaking countries was about 2,400 in 2007. These programmes are at present concentrated in Central and Northern Europe and their number has tripled over the past five years.

The dominance of English as the medium of higher education instruction is understandable and realistic for many reasons – because of its dominance in research reporting and because of its dominance in business, science and tech-

---

\* Michèle Catroux is a researcher in EFL teacher training and applied linguistics. She is specialised in the teaching of foreign languages at a very young age and her research focuses on the link between theory and practice in both pre- and in-service training. She is working towards the training of teachers of Content and Language Integrated Learning. She is a lecturer at Bordeaux 4 University College of Education where she is also in charge of research seminars in multiculturalism.

<sup>1</sup> Lanqua Project. *Subproject on Content and Language Integrated Learning. Redefining 'CLIL' – towards multilingual competence*, 2008. Available April, 2011 at [http://www.lanqua.eu/files/Year1Report\\_CLIL\\_ForUpload\\_WithoutAppendices\\_0.pdf](http://www.lanqua.eu/files/Year1Report_CLIL_ForUpload_WithoutAppendices_0.pdf).

nology, etc. – but also problematic in terms of the policies aiming to maintain Europe as a true multilingual and multicultural area and the EU target of citizens' competence in one-plus-two languages.

Indeed, the Council of Europe recommends to promote widespread plurilingualism by encouraging all Europeans to achieve a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages; by diversifying the languages on offer and setting objectives appropriate to each language; by encouraging the use of foreign languages in the teaching of non-linguistic subjects (for example history, geography, mathematics) and create favourable conditions for such teaching (Recommendation N° R (98) 6).

This article will address the interface and interaction between the pursuit of multilingual competence, the immersion approaches and criteria and the status of global English so as to solve this apparent inconsistency.

### **CLIL/EMILE practices**

The basic original definition for CLIL which stands for Content and language Integrated Learning (or EMILE in French, for Enseignement d'une Matière par l'Intégration d'une Langue Etrangère) is that it is a pedagogical approach with a dual focus, involving the integration of language study with the study of a subject domain as aims of instruction. As emerges from the European Commission Eurydice Report from 2006, between three and thirty per cent of students in primary and secondary education are receiving CLIL tuition.

In most countries that offer CLIL,<sup>2</sup> the languages used are both foreign languages and minority languages for example Breton, Catalan, Occitan in France, Russian in Estonia, Sami in Norway or Ukrainian in Romania. For foreign languages, as would be expected, English is a long way in front in all countries, followed by French and German. Individual countries also list Spanish, Italian and Russian. These include Hungary and the Czech Republic, for instance.

In the countries that are officially multilingual, the other official languages of the country concerned are also used, such as Flemish in the French-speaking

---

<sup>2</sup> D. Wolff, "Bilingualer Sachfachunterricht in Europa: Versuch eines systematischen Überblicks," in *Fremdsprachen Lernen und Lehren* 36, 2007, pp. 13–31.

part of Belgium, Irish in the Republic of Ireland or Swedish in Finland. In this context it should be underlined that some of these languages have purely minority status (e.g. Friesian in the Netherlands), others by contrast are also majority languages, usually in neighbouring countries (e.g. Slovenian in Austria, which is a majority language in Slovenia).

### **Subjects taught and exposure time**

The European countries implementing CLIL have debated about what subjects should be taught in another language. Although a distinction is commonly made between three subject groups, humanities and social science subjects (history, geography, social studies), natural science subjects (mathematics, physics, biology), and creative subjects (art, sports, music), countries do not provide guidelines as to specific subjects. Many countries allow schools the freedom of choice when selecting content subjects at secondary level, for example Spain, France, Italy, Ireland, England and Wales, Poland, Hungary and Austria. In other countries, for instance the Czech Republic and Romania, the choice is restricted to natural and social science subjects. In Sweden and Finland, but also in the Netherlands and Bulgaria, natural and social sciences are of primary importance, but also creative subjects. In primary education every subject or subject area can be taught in another language.

On the other hand the number of teaching hours is not defined at all in a large number of countries and depends on the individual school. Some countries quote approximate figures, such as the French-speaking part of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany, yet others quote very precise figures, for instance some of the autonomous regions of Spain, France, the Netherlands, Poland. This has to be accounted for by the need to preserve minority languages. Malta and Luxemburg estimate half to two-thirds of teaching time for teaching in the other language. In fact, defining the best amount of time devoted to CLIL in class requires paying attention to different aspects of this issue. It has to be considered whether formal foreign language tuition exists apart from the CLIL environment, if learning support in the second language is available to learners in their institution and if learners are exposed to the second language outside the classroom, during extracurricular activities for example. This is an important aspect because it leads us to consider the status of the CLIL

languages and to wonder whether CLIL approaches are really paving the way to European integration through multilingual education.

First, terms should be made explicit. Bilingual education is used to refer to an educational scheme in which the child receives educational instruction in at least two languages with one of these being the mother tongue of some/all of the children in the classroom. The second language is normally a language of wider communication, often the official or national language. Multilingual education is used primarily as a synonym for bilingual education. The primary difference, when it is a difference, is that multilingual education schemes may well involve three or more languages rather than just two. Even so, it is still assumed that the mother tongue will normally be a part of the early educational experience of the child.

### **The status of CLIL languages**

Adopting a CLIL approach presupposes that there are separate goals for content learning and language learning. Language, however, is seen very differently by different people and in different contexts:<sup>3</sup>

- for every user, it is a tool for interaction and strategic communication,
- for a language teacher and learner it is a subject (i.e. content) to be taught and learnt,
- for linguists, then, it is their discipline and object for research,
- for an academic professional, language is a tool and mediator for constructing knowledge and sharing one's expertise.

What is most significant in CLIL, is the articulation between subject and language. Agreeing on what “language” and “language learning outcome” might mean in the CLIL context is particularly important in the case of non-language learners. It is still too often the case that language learning is mainly seen as learning about the language rather than learning to use the language for personal and professional purposes. This is where the CEFR<sup>4</sup> (Common Euro-

---

<sup>3</sup> Lanqua Project, op.cit., p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, Cambridge, p. 9.

pean Framework of Reference for Languages) is relevant as it implies that the language should be used to carry out tasks “not exclusively language-related.” This question depends on the status of the language used in CLIL settings. We will now take a closer look at CLIL and the national language through two examples: a bilingual country and the case of border schools.<sup>5</sup>

## **CLIL and national languages**

### **Example of bilingual countries**

Estonia faces two challenges. Firstly, it has to improve skills in the national language, Estonian, amongst the Russian-speaking community. Secondly, it has to prepare the population as a whole for European integration through providing opportunities for enhanced language learning.

The methodology used here, essentially an example of Canadian immersion, primarily seeks to solve a problem relating to minority language issues. In Grade 1, 100% of teaching is through the target language, Estonian. This gradually declines through to Grade 6 where 44% is in Estonian and 44% in Russian.

However, from Grade 3 onwards 12% of the curriculum is taught in a foreign language. The dual-focus involved in this implementation is of particular significance because there are other countries which face similar language problems linked to past historical circumstances. It is assumed that by successfully introducing forms of CLIL to solve one problem, it will tackle the problem of increasing the number of foreign language speakers within the society.

### **Example of border schools**

Border schools have been a traditional environment for schools to teach in each of the neighbouring languages. Some of them have introduced CLIL as a pragmatic solution to the needs and expectations of the surrounding environ-

---

<sup>5</sup> CLIL/EMILE. *The European Dimension. Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential*, 2002. Available April, 2011 at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc491\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc491_en.pdf), pp. 130–144.

ment in an area where the borders have been open for some years. The situations below exemplify two ways of implementing CLIL.

In a Finnish / Swedish border region, the philosophy of the school is changing from mixing two separate cultural-linguistic groups, as in sometimes teaching separately and sometimes together, towards greater integration. For this to happen, staff consider themselves not to be either language teachers or other subject teachers, but rather ‘language developers.’ In other words, the staff, all of whom are proficient in both languages, all have responsibility for language development. Finnish staff rarely teach through Swedish, and Swedish staff rarely through Finnish.

In a border region between Lapland, Finland and Sweden, Pello school started to experiment with CLIL through English in 1992. In 2001, the school adopted a new policy of moving one class of children across to the neighbouring Swedish school and teaching through CLIL for one day per week. This is planned as follows: teachers employed by either Swedish or Finnish authorities teach linguistically-mixed classes in one location. The groups are separated for some subjects such as teaching of the mother tongue as a language, teaching of the target language as a second/foreign language, mathematics and some ‘more-demanding’ themes.

### **CLIL and the language competence**

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. This term was first coined by Williams (1994) to describe a pedagogical practice in bilin-

gual schools where 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.

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.

### **CLIL and the development of Global English**

Non-CLIL practices are frequent and attract a number of concerns. Content specialists, mainly non-natives, will deliver content-based courses in an L2 which they can only use to some extent. In this case, there is no explicit concern for language enhancement and no awareness that a number of communication problems could be avoided if language were properly considered. On the other hand, in LSP classes (Language for Specific Purposes), language teachers use the learners' specialist documents to develop the language competence without being able to teach the content. In these situations both students and staff are uneasy. Students, because they receive no language support or because the language tuition they receive is not coordinated with the content course; this may affect negatively their overall performance in class. Staff, because they are frequently asked to deliver the same content both in their native language and in the L2 or to switch from their native language to the L2 for the purpose of speeding up the internationalization of their institution or to respond to public pressure.

Also, staff are rarely offered language support. Content teachers lack understanding of the cognitive, socio-cultural and psychological elements of foreign language learning. At this level, if LSP is delivered, the language specialist rarely interacts with the subject specialist and this lack of coordination is seen to reveal inefficient outcomes, hence wasted efforts. This means also that the language classroom is not threatened yet and that it is still necessary to teach the language as a subject, and not only as a tool.

One of the strongest criticisms against CLIL is that it serves solely as a platform for strengthening the English language within the European educa-



tional systems. As a matter of fact, content specialists tend to teach through English as a foreign language. It has been argued for instance that this would be to the detriment of national languages. And besides, that interest in the learning of other foreign languages diminishes. This and the former considerations lead us to consider the status of the language used, i.e. English.

The reasons for introducing CLIL methodology are most of the time to teach some non-language content with language as an added value. But it can also be meant to teach and develop both. What is known about European CLIL shows that most teaching practices are focused on education and not just language. Yet much research, from Europe or abroad, mainly Canada, focuses solely on the language dimension.

Quoting Met,<sup>6</sup> Genesee<sup>7</sup> points out that

[...] there currently exist a variety of L2 instructional approaches that integrate language and content instruction and these can be characterized as falling along a continuum from language-driven to content-driven. In language-driven approaches, content is used simply as a vehicle for teaching target language structures and skills. The primary goal of these programs is language learning ... At the other end of the continuum are approaches where the content and language are equally important so that mastery of academic objectives is considered as important as the development of proficiency in the target language.

Bilingual and immersion education are examples of content-driven approaches. These approaches rely on a form of implicit and incidental learning. This type of learning considers the language as a tool used by learners in authentic and significant communicative situations. It is widely cited as a success factor in forms of CLIL.

Indeed, CLIL rarely considers the language as a subject to learn – it provides a platform for learning by doing, which means that the language is used as a tool, which is in keeping with the CEFR action-oriented approach. However,

---

<sup>6</sup> M. Met, “Curriculum decision-making in content-based language teaching,” in J. Cenoz & F. Genesee (eds). *Beyond Bilingualism: Multilingualism and Multilingual Education*, Clevedon 1998, pp. 35–63.

<sup>7</sup> F. Genesee, “What do we know about bilingual education for majority language students?,” in T.K. Bhatia & W. Ritchie (eds.), *Handbook of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism*, London 2004, pp. 2–3.

if language is used as a tool, or as a means of mediation, it often becomes like a *virtual language*.<sup>8</sup>

The term virtual language has been used to describe a form of inter-language – basically it is what is produced by a person who attempts to communicate but who does so with limited resources, or according to the influence of some special localized conditions. When a virtual language is actualized it is *characterized by adaptation and nonconformity*. This is contrasted to an actual language that implies adoption and conformity.

Thus, English may well be the dominant language used in CLIL but its conformity to norms is reduced, if not totally rejected depending on who teaches content. Besides, language specialists often cringe at the idea that the language should become only a mere instrument of expression. They argue that the language should not be separated from its cultural background.

CLIL's basis on natural language acquisition 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 and necessary.

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. Globish, 'English as a lingua franca' (ELF) is developing throughout Europe and at the international level. This is related to the notion of 'inter-language' described by Selinker<sup>9</sup> as

the observable output resulting from a speaker's attempt to produce a foreign norm, i.e., both his errors and non-errors. It is assumed that such a behavior is highly structured ... and it must be dealt with as a system, not as an isolated collection of errors.

Finally, CLIL involves a constant effort from both teacher and learner to master both content and language. This raises the issue of assessment. It is ques-

---

<sup>8</sup> D. Marsh, *CLIL/EMILE – The European Dimension: Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential*, Bruxelles 2002, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> L. Selinker, Language transfer. *General Linguistics* 9, 1969, p. 71.

tionable whether students are assessed on language or content and thus unclear what the attitude is to errors. It is also important to consider whether inadequate knowledge of content may be caused by linguistic inadequacy.<sup>10</sup>

All forms of assessment are practiced throughout Europe in CLIL approaches. Depending on the CLIL variety, assessment will range from individual/uncoordinated language and content assessments performed by distinct assessors in distinct exam settings to joint/team assessment where there are clear language and content criteria assessed by the assessors in one exam setting. Either the student will receive two grades, or the assessment will result in one grade (both with the respective ECTS credits).

## Conclusion

Maalouf & al.<sup>11</sup> justify learning more than one foreign language as “the inclusion in one’s *curriculum vitae* of a language which might already have been mentioned by all the other candidates does not give the applicant any additional asset in the quest for a job, or in pursuing an activity.”

Apart from this essential point, there are two attitudes towards an English-only Europe. Some researchers like Dabène<sup>12</sup> would like to restrict the teaching of global English to selected parts of communicative competence, or an English-based system of “minimal communication.”

Others like Vez<sup>13</sup> think that English language proficiency should be an indispensable aim of foreign language education since any form of ‘broken or fragmented Euro-English’ would give rise to language conflict. Although this would give rise to negative attitudes towards English, it might also reinforce its linguistic imperialism. She emphasizes that it is not the English language that will cause conflicts but the attitudinal use of it, particularly when applied without negotiation within a discourse.

---

<sup>10</sup> S. Darn, *CLIL: A European Overview*, 2006. Available April, 2011 at [http://www.stevedarn.com/?Writings::CLIL%3A\\_A\\_European\\_Overview](http://www.stevedarn.com/?Writings::CLIL%3A_A_European_Overview).

<sup>11</sup> A. Maalouf & al., “A Rewarding Challenge. How the multiplicity of languages could strengthen Europe.” Proposals from the Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue, Brussels 2008, p. 14. Available April, 2011 at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/doc/maalouf/report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/doc/maalouf/report_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> L. Dabène, *Repères sociolinguistiques pour l’enseignement des langues*, Paris 1994.

<sup>13</sup> J.-M. Vez, “Multilingual Education in Europe: Policy Developments,” *Porta Linguarum* 12, junio 2009, pp. 7–24.

---

We will use House's distinction between 'languages for communication' and 'languages for identification' as a conclusion. She says:<sup>14</sup>

Paradoxical as this may seem, the very spread of ELF may stimulate members of minority languages to insist on their own local language for emotional binding to their own culture, history and tradition, and there is, indeed, a strong countercurrent to the spread of ELF in that local varieties and cultural practices are often strengthened. [...] Using ELF as a medium of border-crossing to set up as many expert communities as necessary in science, economics, education, etc. cannot be seen as encroaching on established 'roots'.

Keywords: CLIL, language and content, plurilingual competence, global English

## **IS CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING CONGRUENT WITH PLURILINGUALISM?**

### **Summary**

CLIL, or Content and Language Integrated Learning refers to educational situations where a language other than the learners' mother tongue is used to teach content subjects. Despite the fact that recent research has shown a positive impact of CLIL methodology on the content subject and language competence of the learners, the strongest criticism of this teaching approach is directed to the fact that it strengthens the global hegemony of English. While, in theory, any second or foreign language can be chosen as the CLIL teaching language, in actual learning environments, English strongly dominates the scene. This paper looks into the apparent conflict existing between the development of plurilingualism and the implementation of CLIL. It considers whether CLIL approaches are congruent with linguistic pluralism and can hinder the goal of preserving an effective multilingual practice alongside the dominant lingua franca.

---

<sup>14</sup> J. House, "English as a lingua franca: A threat to multilingualism?," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2003, 7/4, p. 561.

**W JAKIM STOPNIU ZINTEGROWANE KSZTAŁCENIE  
PRZEDMIOTOWO-JĘZYKOWE SPEŁNIA CELE NAUCZANIA  
WIELOJĘZYCZNEGO?**

**Streszczenie**

CLIL, czyli Zintegrowane Nauczanie Tematyczne i Językowe (z ang. Content and Language Integrated Learning) odnosi się do sytuacji, w których język inny niż język ojczysty uczniów wykorzystywany jest do nauczania treści przedmiotów takich, jak np. geografia, fizyka, itd. Chociaż ostatnie badania wykazały pozytywny wpływ CLIL na nauczanie treści przedmiotowych oraz kompetencje językowe uczniów, najostrzejsza krytyka tego podejścia do nauczania spowodowana jest faktem, że wzmacnia on globalną hegemonię języka angielskiego. Teoretycznie, dowolny język obcy może być użyty w CLIL, jednakże w rzeczywistości pozycja języka angielskiego staje się dominująca. Poniższy artykuł opisuje widoczny konflikt pomiędzy rozwijaniem pluralingualizmu i stosowaniem CLIL. Artykuł próbuje rozstrzygnąć czy CLIL jest zbieżny z zasadą plurilingualizmu i czy nie przeszkadza we wprowadzaniu efektywnego nauczania wielojęzycznego w kontekście dominacji języka angielskiego.

*Przełożył Sylwester Jaworski*