

THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF CLIL: LANGUAGE PLANNING AND LANGUAGE CHANGE IN 21ST CENTURY EUROPE

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ABSTRACT. This paper focuses on the ways and the reasons that make CLIL a unique approach in L2 teaching now. The main tenet of the article is that CLIL is not just a new expression of educational bilingualism. The time when it has appeared, the places where it has been adopted and the learning theory behind it turns CLIL into a successful attempt at language and social change in 21st century Europe. The article attempts to draw attention to the conception of language and language learning that lies under the CLIL movement within the larger scope of 20th. c. theories of Second Language Acquisition and Theoretical Linguistics. Finally, the article looks at CLIL as a sociolinguistic venture: one that plans language change according to a clear ideology of language that has been laid down for social change.

KEY WORDS: Language planning, European language policies, Content-based teaching, Bilingual Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Changes in education as all attempts at social transformation are politically dependent, language policy tells us. Immersion education was an attempt to promote understanding in the charged debate of a linguistically divided Canada in the mid-sixties (Blommaert 1999). Two way bilingual programs in the United States were partly a bid to bring language diversity into schools in a diverse ethnical and cultural context (Brisk 1998; Faltis and Huddelsonn 1998). Both initiatives were fully responsive to the needs perceived by society. Much in the same way, CLIL is something more than an educational need. The European supranational state in the making since the mid twentieth century has been built upon ideals like mobility, economic cohesion, maintenance of cultural diversity and other principles that would be hard to make real without efficient language learning schemes. It is in this regard that CLIL is a “European solution to a European need” (Marsh 2002: 5).

As all approaches to language learning, CLIL has both overt and covert visions of language. For CLIL, as for other contemporary movements such as *Language Across the Curriculum* or *Languages for Specific Purposes*, discourse is the true dimension of language use and sentence-bound linguistic theory is seen as limited in scope. Through CLIL, the focus changes from language as a vehicle of culture to language as a means of communication in academic settings. True communication prevails and with it language programs that pursue cohesion, coherence and text completion as the natural framework of language learning. That means that a functional systemic view of language is fully compatible if not essential for CLIL language teaching programs.

A new vision of language called for a new vision of learning. CLIL is linked to experiential views of second language acquisition and consequently a new methodology of language teaching. In the nineties doubts had been cast on new methods being too elusive tools as prisms to view classrooms and reflect on teaching quality. CLIL has breathed new life into experiential methods like the task based approach and made them more authentic. By combining meaningful activities and meaningful academic content, authenticity has made itself present and students have found a reason to struggle with new languages in the classroom.

What has been said above puts forward a vision of CLIL as an L2 approach that grows out of a certain language epistemology: a vision of what language is and a vision of how languages are learned. This should provide the foundations for a language change of continental dimensions that rests ultimately upon an overall aim: shifting from a monoglot to a multilingual ideology and sowing the seeds for a language change to become real through education in Europe. The scope of the aspects mentioned –the where (Europe), the what (language) and the how (learning)– will be seen in turn in the following section.

2. EUROPE AS THEATRE OF OPERATION

Although relations between CLIL and bilingualism are intricate (see Muñoz, this volume), CLIL is now a European label for bilingual education. It is hardly known outside Europe and was hardly ever used –if at all– before the late nineties. However, multilingual education has usually been present in the continent. Studies in the European Sociology of Language show bilingual education as a permanent feature of educational systems across the centuries (Braunmüller and Ferraresi 2003; Burke 2004). Along the 20th c. Canadian, American and Israeli content-based programs using L2s and L3s as a means of instruction had provided patterns for incorporating minority languages in education (Cenoz and Jessner 2000; Cenoz and Genessee 2003). Another source for multilingualism before CLIL came into existence was the multiple *ad-hoc* solutions for efficient teaching of international languages in formal schooling that found inspiration in bilingual education (see for an early and worthy instance, Scott-Tennent 1995; 1997). For one reason or another, if not the norm, multilingual education has been rather

frequent in Europe. This being the case, there is nothing in CLIL that makes it brand-new nor especially groundbreaking in the larger picture of multilingual education.

However, its scope and spread makes this approach noteworthy. It came as a fully articulated response to the needs of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Language policies in Europe are not old. On 15 April 1958 –some fifty years ago now– the very first regulation of the Council of the European Community established French, German, Italian and Dutch as the official languages. This level of multilingualism was already labelled the *language problem* (Booker and North 2003: 109). Now, with 25 members that incorporate not only their respective state official languages but minority and regional languages that try to find a place of their own and new domains of use in education, the amount of languages has done nothing but escalate. Immigrant languages have also claimed a right to be present at school (Extra and Yagmur 2004; Edwards 1998). Multilingualism is seizing schools and the CLIL scheme has grown stronger as a solution. CLIL as such is a broad concept, where languages of all sorts can be embraced. By using them for the purpose of communication only, languages lose their overtones as culture-bound artefacts, as expressions of some vision of the world or any other label Whorfian folk theories one may want to attach to them. All languages are efficient as teaching tools and all can fit into school schemes as languages of instruction, hence CLIL.

Incidentally CLIL also strives to be useful in some other way. The attested inefficiency of language learning in many European contexts has been calling for an overall solution. The demolinguistics of Europe have shown time and again that all resources and school time invested in language learning have not delivered the goods in many contexts. Eurobarometers (European Commission 2000; 2006) showed facts like that less than half of students taking languages ended school with some competence and –a less echoed conclusion– that if languages are not learnt at school, they are rarely learnt later in life. That being the case, as an offshoot of bilingual teaching CLIL brought better language education to the European arena.

It is against this backdrop that one can appreciate CLIL serving the purpose of the new Europe in the making and for this reason it has had official support since its inception as a new method. Council resolutions and official journal communications have swamped European legislation since the early nineties (see for a selection of official statements, Eurydice 2006). In them, CLIL is very often referred to as a response to multilingualism at the same time that multilingualism is mentioned as being at the core of the European project. To put it in the words of the recently appointed Commissioner Responsible for Multilingualism, Orban (2007): “Multilingualism touches the very substance of European identity, its values and challenges ahead: Integration, competitiveness, inclusiveness, cohesion, mobility, transparency and democracy are intimately linked to multilingualism”.

What lies behind this proclamation is a number of key features that shape the European ideology of languages. Insofar as CLIL stems from or at least is compatible with such principles, CLIL is officially supported as the adequate approach to language teaching. Via CLIL, it seems feasible to strengthen the three main pillars of European language ideology:

- A European identity should surpass ethnical and national identities, traditionally linked to national language use and national language competence. Accepted as they are, these identities are thought insufficient for full participation in the European scene. Multiple transnational identities are to be developed and this should start with the accomplishment of the *1+2 principle*, one stating that every individual should add at least two new languages to their mother tongue. These points have been clearly made both institutionally (Declaration of European Identity of December 1973 in Copenhagen) and theoretically (Byram and Tost 1999; Lorenzo 2005). Multilingualism must be an early experience in life providing a third socialization process that students go through at school whereby they encounter different tongues in operation to the exclusion of no languages and no participants.
- The ideal of a mutual search for understanding and a willingness to communicate should preside over all European relations. Learners will try to make the most of their partial language competences. Languages, even if not totally mastered, are conduits for intercultural communication, a trait Europeans will have to develop for full participation in Europe. The European craze for mobility demands that the cooperative principle rules in all intercultural communication. If language learners themselves, citizens will be more willing to surrender the privileges that using one's mother tongue brings in intercultural communication. Native speakers should reject their roles as dominant speakers in communication and no authenticity should be claimed nor language mystified on account of nativeness. All these behaviours mean that attitudes to language learning and language use should change and all archaising, reformist or xenophobic interpretations of languages - the components of language purism - should go (see Lippi Green 1997; Ager 2001). European leaders have always set their hopes on bilingual programs building this mindset. The effects of bilingual schemes were thought to provide not only the learning of other languages, but the inculcation of attitudes of mutual understanding between the European nations historically at war. In fact, some of the initial formulations of bilingual programs were conceived as a way to overcome the breach between France and Germany following World War II.
- Although extreme language diversity can be costly to the point of being economically impractical, zero language diversity policies are from an economically standpoint similarly ill-advised. Studies in the Economy of Language show that investment in language teaching involves a high rate of return. Bilingual education, which usually amount to little more than an increase of 5% of total education spending, is a wise move for economic reasons too. European multilingualism is not just a way to ensure language diversity for cultural reasons, it is a strategy that will produce important revenues, even more if the Union envisages itself as a *Knowledge Society* (Grin 2002).

3. CLIL AND LINGUISTIC THEORY

Although institutional support has always been clear, one of the main strengths of CLIL is that it has been a grassroots initiative. Innovation in education is normally successful if top-down and bottom-up initiatives share the same goals in such a way that teachers and decision makers coordinate their actions in the same direction (Markee 1997). If teachers cannot come to terms with decisions coming from above or find them impractical, innovation is bound to fail. This does not seem to be the case with CLIL. However, since many of the CLIL developments came from schools and actual practitioners, doubts have arisen as to whether the CLIL approach was too pragmatic in nature, a risk that could render the approach hollow from lack of theory.

Although some attempts have been made to link CLIL with linguistic theory, this approach does not boast a theory of language of its own (see Van de Craen 2002). One, however, could be clearly envisaged if considered side by side with another outcome of the European Language initiatives emerging at the same time: the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). If both initiatives have had the backing of institutions –the former as the recommended approach in compulsory language education and the latter as the road-map of language learning, teaching and assessment– the reason is that both of them share the same approach to what language and language learning is.

This is less visible for CLIL, as it is normally the case that methods hardly ever state their epistemology. However, when the CEFR had to take a stand on the general view of language behind it, it put forward the following principles: language use is action oriented and language users –including learners– social agents. More broadly language was defined as follows (Council of Europe 2003:9):

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises actions performed by persons who, as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw upon the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out their tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences.

Key aspects of language theory are to be found here: learners are agents and therefore full members of the language community. They form a community of practice in its own right. Communicative competences represent a layer that stands out from the other linguistic levels. Furthermore, students' lack of competence is not seen as an absolute but as depending on constraints and contexts, i.e. students can do things through their L2 however limited their L2 knowledge is, hence the can-do abilities lists. Disinclined as the CEFR claims to be to choose among different methodological options,

language learning activities when mentioned are referred to as tasks, which might be hinting if not clearly embracing a task-based approach. Last but no less crucial here is that students interact with language as a means for text production and reception.

In short, the approach to language follows, in the most orthodox possible way, a systemic functional approach to language, one that holds that language is a resource for meaning rather than a system of rules (Halliday 1994). A whole tradition of linguistic formalism collapses when confronted with this perspective on language, one which has been going on for years but that had failed to be fully accepted in Europe. Much in the same vein, the CLIL response to formalism is prompt and sharp: if explicit knowledge of language rules is unnecessary for language acquisition, so are language experts. These can be replaced by efficient language users who will stand in authority in the classroom context for their expertise in subject area content.

The connection between SFL and CLIL (or content based teaching) is being identified in a growing number of studies (Mohan and Beckett 2003; Mohan and Slater 2005; Dalton-Puffer and Nikula 2006a; Dalton-Puffer and Nikula 2006b). Among their many contributions, they have revised classroom language to identify the following main features:

- Classroom interaction in CLIL contexts is less concerned with well formedness than with reconstructing meaning to the mutual satisfaction of speakers. Language and content work in an intertwined manner, subject matters provide food for thought and thoughts are instrumentalized through language –through an L2. The role CLIL leaves for language– in the strictest Vygotskian tradition –is to reflect on experience and to achieve understanding (see Jappinen 2005). The traditional debate in Applied Linguistics as to whether communication is the cause or effect of L2 learning, has a clear answer in bilingual settings: it is communicate to learn and not learn to communicate.
- Language items are not easily foreseeable in the CLIL classroom. Although there are certain structures which are likely to come up for certain topics, these are not sentence-bound elements but rather micro and macrofunctions consisting of syntactic categories, stretches of discourse and rhetorical aspects. Studies looking into the grammar of content-based approaches find that the language items focused in content-based language courses pay only passing attention to the morphology of the L2 or to the particular systems of the different parts of speech (the auxiliary and negation system, the determiner system, the object system, etc.) (Master 2000). It is on the syntactic and wider rhetorical levels that structures are considered (fronting and adverbial phrases, embedded questions, existential constructions, and so on). See however Muñoz (this volume) and Pérez-Vidal (this volume).
- A language syllabus for CLIL classrooms will have to take as a reference, the knowledge structures of academic contexts (hypothesizing, recasting, expressing causes and effect, etc) and their discourse-semantic and lexicogrammatical

components. This means that conversational L2, which forms the basis for mainstream functional courses, even in academic contexts, is thought to be secondary. The academic language is the language to be learnt. Language learning is bound to environments and classrooms as academic environments determine that the language most likely to be learnt is of an academic nature. The old debate between BICS and CALP rages here again. (see for a recent proposal of academic language functions around which CLIL language syllabi could be formed, Dalton-Puffer and Tikula 2006b)

4. CLIL AND LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORY

The theory that explicit language teaching is redundant and immaterial for language learning calls for a theory of language acquisition that will presumably differ from traditional *focus on forms* trends.

Language processing in bilingual settings has established that a distinguishing feature unique to L2 acquisition in immersion education –CLIL included– is language inhibition (Bialystok 2005; Gassner and Maillar 2006). By this, what is meant is a total forgetting of language as a code and engagement in language use for the sake of having things done with language, that is, for its instrumental use. Oblivious to the fact that the language in use is constrained by their limited language resources, students struggle to get their messages across. Their engagement in the communicative act is total, participation high and communication more likely to be achieved. Such behaviours, which are not unknown to cognitive psychology, have been used in language acquisition studies to describe learners' commitment in language use: attention is always on task, more effort is deployed, there is an increase of persistence if difficulties arise and as a result there is in-depth language processing. All these behaviours are known as *flow* - a psycholinguistic umbrella category that encompasses cognitive features like high activity levels with conative elements like positive attitudes to the language and strong motivation (see Csikszentmihalyi 1996, for the original formulation and Schumann 1998, for an application to L2 learning).

This language processing mode is more typical in CLIL and other (semi)immersion contexts than otherwise. Although descriptive studies abound, an instance could help illustrate such language behaviour. A student in third grade aged eight in a CLIL environment in the Spanish Educational System with less than a quarter of his school time in English produced the following written utterances in school tasks

- In response to a question on how to keep eyesight and skin healthy in a Science lesson on Healthy Living, the student wrote: “We should a daily bath and use sunscreen. We shouldn’t spend to much time watching TV”.
- Months later, on the occasion of Father’s Day, the student wrote the following dedication on the reverse of a cardboard bookmark that the English Arts and

Craft teacher had tasked students to produce and present their parents with: “This for you because you have been a child and feeled the same that me now”.

The examples are no doubt faulty if judgement rests on accuracy only. In fact, such is the level of accuracy inconsistency that the child appears to have intentionally broken all the rules as they appear in language syllabi. In just one single line the student has produced faulty *copula + adverb structures*, *irregular verb forms* and *comparative linkers*. This happens in sheer contrast to the feeling of communicative completeness that readers gain from the utterance produced.

The example above meant to exemplify that a CLIL theory of language learning has to make sense of apparent imbalances in language competence: students can be communicatively competent and grammatically inaccurate at one and the same time. The answer is that a theory of L2 acquisition in CLIL contexts cannot be cognitive alone but has to be social in nature. As seen above, language behaviour oozes sociolinguistic normalcy: there is full attention to meaning and the disregard for form that characterizes language use in non instructional settings (Preston 1989). Other typical features of discourse interaction in authentic settings - fighting for talking time, overlappings - are also featured in CLIL and other similar acquisition-rich environments (Dornyei 2001; Leung 2005). It is this achievement behaviour that over time makes grammar grow. Longitudinal immersion studies report that content-based teaching develops L2 grammar accuracy in all skills (production and reception) as measured by different test types (cloze, composition and oral production tests) (Zuengler and Brinton 1997; Rodgers 2006). That being the case, a sociolinguistic theory of L2 acquisition in CLIL contexts would rest on the following principles:

- Language forms can only be learnt within a powerful functional mapping. Content and language learning are so closely intertwined that no line can be drawn between content learning and language development. Subject area content provides the cognitive schemata through which language makes sense. No content learning, no language growth. (Zuengler and Brinton 1997).
- CLIL also takes a strong stand on the focus on form /focus on meaning debate in SLA. Unsurprisingly, CLIL is almost exclusively focus on meaning oriented. It is not that meaning goes first with respect to form learning, it is that without meaning orientation a linguistic scaffolding interaction is impossible. For this reason, form orientated language practice should be present in the slightest possible form. Learning is basically incidental and although language awareness is essential for the proper integration of language and content, typical language awareness activities have little bearing with accuracy. No language practice is to appear and no assessment is based on error only (Stoller 2004; Lorenzo 2007).
- A sociolinguistic theory of second language acquisition holds that it is message delivery that triggers language use in natural settings. Attention to form is normally related to power relations always present in language (see Kramsch 2002). CLIL empowers students to use L2, face L2 difficulties and overcome them through

meaning negotiation. Finetuning L2 input will be necessary for success in language use but this does not demand attention to forms - much in the same way as it does not exist in motherese or any other natural language use environment (Lorenzo forthcoming). A new insight that CLIL brings to the *grammar as power* debate is that in second language classrooms focus on forms may have not as its *raison d'être* being a better instrumental element for L2 learning.

5. CONCLUSION

Bilingual education is not a disinterested attempt at educational renovation. Apart from the technicalities it no doubt implies like curricular change, new teaching procedures, different task types, it is ultimately ingrained in the values and aspirations that society sets for itself. CLIL is bilingual education at a time when teaching through one single language is seen as second rate education. CLIL has provided the methodological turn required, bringing new expectations to language policies that asked for responses. In a way, CLIL at the turn of the century may be compared to the communicative revolution in language teaching in the 1970's. If the European initiative that resulted in Wilkin's *Notional Syllabuses* brought life to language education, the CLIL move may bring authenticity by using languages for the instrumental uses they are most appreciated for in an academic context: learning subject area content. This is in exact alignment with a new European language ideology: one that highlights the instrumental values of tongues as a means to succeed in intercultural communication even with partial language competences, and to develop multiple identities.

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