

# MOVING TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: DOES CLIL LIVE UP TO THE HYPE?

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This paper presents a descriptive study, within the Spanish BIMAP research project, analysing the success factors of the CLIL approach in the teaching of foreign languages. Indeed, the wide dissemination of this methodology points to the world-wide acclaim it has received, so much so that it is currently considered to be one of the best strategies for the promotion of multilingualism. After a brief historical introduction on the origin of this methodology, on changes in the concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism and some underlying psycholinguistic issues which support it, a series of important issues will be covered: the differences between CLIL and other immersion systems, the success factors in CLIL and the criticisms that have been levelled against it. Finally, this work analyses how language and content are integrated in the light of research carried out in the context of history classes.

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## 1 Introduction

The expansion of bilingual education since the 1960s has been an innovative trend designed to address the failure of traditional language teaching. Fortunately, the teaching of languages has been revolutionised, and interest in a multilingual curriculum has spread in many countries.

The European context includes different models of bilingual education, most notably, the immersion systems which emphasise content and language known as CLIL. This has become a special model with precedents not only in North America, but also in Europe, where other immersion models had previously been in use, such as the one used in European international schools.

In general, two attitudes can be distinguished in bilingual models: (a) bilingual education offers added value: it helps to promote cultural integration, inclusive education and equal opportunities for everybody (additive bilingualism); and (b) linguistic and cultural diversity is a threat: bilingual programmes are a transition towards full assimilation by the dominant group, which is detrimental to the L1 of learners (subtractive bilingualism).

Immersion systems are characterised by the intense learning of a foreign language (FL) thanks to the increase in exposure when using it as a vehicular language in content teaching. In this context additive bilingualism is promoted for a series of psychological (cognitive and emotive) reasons, since it is considered that the reinforcement of the L1 at the same time as learning the L2 (or other L3) represents the best option for the balanced development of learners. The first of this type of programmes was the immersion in French of the Saint Lambert school in Canada in 1965.

It is considered to be a valid alternative to traditional teaching. It is a kind of dual “one-way” programme that is carried out with homogeneous groups of students who speak a majority language (the official language in a country) and who have little or no competence in the language of immersion considered as a FL when entering the programmes. In practice, some non-linguistic subjects (i.e. philosophy, maths or history) are taught through a FL with a double interest in content learning and competences and skills in the FL. This is what distinguishes it from other approaches that use content teaching (content-based instruction or CBI) in L2, but which only point to the learning of a linguistic programme, or use a FL, but where the emphasis is above all on learning non-linguistic content (Georgiou, 2012, p. 495).

The CLIL approach is an immersion system that originated in Europe and began to grow rapidly from the early nineties onwards. In Europe, Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Turkey are the only countries which do not offer any kind of CLIL provision, whereas Belgium, Luxembourg, and Malta are the only European countries in which CLIL exists in all schools throughout the whole

education system (Eurydice, 2012, p. 39).

As regards Italy, it is one of the European countries to systematically making it compulsory in the second grade of secondary education from 2010 onwards. There is significant impetus from the government to support and develop CLIL, so that it starts in primary school and continues throughout the education system (Cinganotto, 2016, p. 389). Specifically, CLIL has been disseminated primarily in English, but is also taught in other languages (mainly French, Spanish and German), which contrasts with the linguistic policy of other countries that have concentrated exclusively on English.

## 2 Promoting changes in FL acquisition

This dissemination of bilingual education is due to a change of perspective in the way bilingualism is viewed, thanks to certain psycholinguistic contributions and to the evolution of linguistic models, language-learning models and language-teaching models.

Firstly, with regard to studies focusing on the cognitive impact of bilingualism, there has been a significant shift in viewpoint since the seventies, from negative to positive, with a recognition of the advantages of bilingualism.

Likewise, the concepts of multilingualism and bilingualism should be addressed, given that the boundaries between them are not always clear. In fact, the literature encompasses a wide range of definitions (Ruiz de Zarobe & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015). Traditionally, the definition of these two concepts has been based on a high level of linguistic competence, as in the first definitions of bilingualism offered by Bloomfield (1933, p. 56), who spoke of «native-like control of two or more languages». Another definition that is based more on the level of competence is that of Comanaru and Dewaele, which refers to «proficiency to various degrees in more than one language» (cited in Ruiz de Zarobe & Ruiz de Zarobe, *op. cit.*, p. 394). In this sense, it is difficult to gauge the level that is necessary in order to be able to speak of bilingualism and multilingualism. In addition, the ascribed competence must take into consideration the «different language areas (lexis, phonetics, syntax, etc.) and the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)» (*Ibidem*).

Therefore, a more modern definition of multilingualism (or plurilingualism<sup>1</sup>) is presented here which states that a multilingual is someone who can maintain conversational interactions in two or more languages (Wei, 2013, p. 33). This implies that the model speaker of reference is no longer a native or mother tongue speaker.

Regarding the linguistic and psychological models, it is significant that, with the passing of time, there was a rejection of the structuralist model and

<sup>1</sup> This second term is more frequently used in French literature, so from now on both terms will be considered synonymous.

the behavioral model respectively. In this sense, it is worth noting the influence that the bilingual programmes of the aforementioned Canadian primary school of St. Lambert, beginning in the early sixties, had on later models. In fact, at that time there was a reaction to formalist teaching based on the principles of linguistic structuralism that proposed a sequential study of linguistic forms called “attention to forms”, because it wrongly predicted that students learn structures in an isolated and sequenced way by the repetition of linguistic models in the classroom (advocated by behaviorism). Therefore, from that moment, bilingual models began to propose a new theory of learning which, in contrast to explicit learning, held that grammar is learned implicitly without express attention to form.

In general, immersion models advocate an incidental rather than intentional L2 learning, because it is believed that students can learn while focusing their attention on parallel actions. It is also implicit because it occurs without full consciousness. Research emphasises that this type of knowledge is more persistent in relation to the type of brain connections that are created (Mondt *et al.*, 2011).

From reflection on the results obtained in those first experiences of immersion, a review of the role of implicit learning has been proposed. Today many authors agree that a balance between implicit and explicit learning is necessary, since learning is configured as an interactive process between both.

In terms of language teaching, CLIL combines the advances in teaching with the development of the communicative approach and the task-based approach. This has led to a radical change of perspective and an emphasis on content and the ability of learners to communicate thanks to more significant linguistic learning.

Finally, it is important to consider that multilingual learning involves greater complexity and its success depends on a series of variables (De Bot *et al.*, 2007) such as: (a) the importance of maintaining the mother tongue (or mother tongues) (additive bilingualism); (b) the existence of a correlation between exposure time to additional languages in multilingual programmes; (c) the lack of an evident correlation between the age<sup>2</sup> of students and the acquisition of multilingual competence; (d) the fact that didactics are fundamental to the promotion of opportunities to use languages interactively through learning situations in which real communication needs are set up; (e) multilingual training in languages belonging to very distant linguistic families from the maternal language of students may be relative in relation to the academic and linguistic goals of the school, but there are usually limits in relation to the objective of the use of these languages for other social purposes (Lorenzo *et al.*, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> An early onset is preferred, but it should not be ruled out later in adolescence or in adulthood.

### 3 Identity of the CLIL approach

The CLIL model has its own characteristics, which is why it was thought convenient to use new terminology to indicate its distance with respect to previous models. In fact, in order to structure the model, Coyle (2007, p. 550) developed a holistic model based on four elements: «The 4Cs Framework focuses on the interrelationship between content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (learning and thinking) and culture (social awareness of self and ‘otherness’)».

With regard to the educational level, it should be noted that CLIL can cover different levels, since it is aimed at students participating in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary, or tertiary level. From a didactic point of view, its flexibility stands out as it is presented as an approach with various degrees of application which take into account the realities and the resources available starting with 30-minute “language showers” in preschool or primary settings. Another possibility consists in the gradual presentation of the content in the FL from 25% until it reaches 100%.

Another indicative aspect of this need to adapt to students may be the introduction of explanatory comments or translations in the students’ L1 and even the acceptance of “code switching”, that is, passage from the L1 to the L2 or vice versa. In this sense, we refer today to “translanguaging”, which is a kind of institutionalized “code switching” whereby, in many monolingual classes, the use of the L1 is accepted, for example, in group activities, or even in support materials within a class held in the L2.

In practice, FL teachers aim at the accuracy and fluency of learners’ productions, while subject-specialist teachers aim to achieve the development of mathematical, or biological thinking in the FL. Therefore, CLIL experiences provide a large amount of linguistic input that is also real and relevant for learners, because it is related to content. The processing of the meaning is motivated by the learners’ need for content in order to understand the explanations of a subject or to carry out activities in class.

In addition, it is an opportunity to integrate the focus on meaning with the focus on form. If content teachers are aware of the importance of the formal aspects, they will use appropriate strategies and that need may even come from students after a communicative task. This way of working contributes to the processing of the form and the correction of errors. In this sense, we can talk about the “noticing hypothesis” that maintains that, for input to be transformed into intake<sup>3</sup> (which can be collected and incorporated into the interlanguage by the learner) it is necessary for him/her to pay a certain amount of attention to the input, for example, when he/she perceives the difference between his/her

<sup>3</sup> The intake is the part of the input comprehensible and understood that is focalized by the learner.

performance and other language models.

The CLIL approach attempts to encompass a type of global learning (Pavesi *et al.*, 2001, p. 123), since contextualised concrete learning is fostered, in which motivation is generated by necessity, and the objective is related to immediate oral communication with a focus on content and few cognitive demands. This trend is in contrast to a traditional type of education in which, up to now, learning was decontextualised, with little regard for non-verbal communication, a predominance of written over oral language, a high cognitive requirement driven by abstraction and an emphasis on the formal aspects of language that formed a barrier between students and the learning process. In this regard, Cummins (1979) had established the distinction between basic communication skills or BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and academic textual competence or CALP<sup>4</sup> (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency).

In contrast, CLIL classes provide an authentic learning context in which significant communication is established and the learner maintains an active role following principles of task-based teaching which can lead learners, for example, to create a map of the school (geography) or perform an experiment (science). In this way, with an emphasis on the content of the task, incidental learning is promoted and opportunities are offered to practice language. That is to say: the sociocultural and constructivist theories about learning are taken into account and the development of learners is promoted through a dialogic relationship with their peers, the teacher and the materials.

From a methodological point of view, this approach emphasises learning strategies and techniques. In particular, in research carried out in the Netherlands, De Graaff *et al.* (2007, p. 620) found evidence of good teaching practices during CLIL classes that contribute to L2 learning. These can be summarised in the following five main categories: (a) stimulating input; (b) the facilitation of meaning processing with questions about new vocabulary, or with explicit and implicit correction; (c) the facilitation of the processing of form by providing examples, with recasts or confirmations, requests for clarification and feedback that can also be carried out among peers; (d) the development of written production by means of proposals with different formats and oral (presentations, round tables, debates) and written creative practices (letters, surveys, articles, manuals); (e) the proposal of compensatory strategies, reflection on these strategies and scaffolding in case of difficulties in learning.

In conclusion, the success of CLIL is due to the fusion between the best principles of language teaching and the best principles of general education.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Cummins (1979), for the development of BICS, learners need between one and three years, and for CALP, between five and seven years if they have previously acquired literacy in their L1, or between seven and ten years, if they have not acquired it yet.

## 4 Principles of the CLIL approach

First of all, it is important to consider that in the development of bilingual education the literature refers to CBI (Content-Based Instruction) and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The first is usually associated with the first French immersion programmes in Canada in the early sixties while CLIL is linked to the teaching of English as a vehicular language during the nineties in Europe. Although research refers to a series of differences which we cannot examine in any detail in this paper, in practice the differences between these terms are not always well defined and their use may not be so unequivocal, giving rise to situations in which intersections or overlays are found. For these reasons, Cenoz (2015) considers that there are no essential differences between CBI and CLIL but rather, a continuum based on the emphasis that, in practice, is placed on teaching content and language.

Therefore, in the current research on CLIL methodology we find that the idea of CLIL is being presented as an “umbrella term” to indicate a wide range of immersion situations (Dalton-Puffer *et al.*, 2014). This agrees with a broad definition in which «CLIL is any learning context in which content and language are integrated to respond to specific educational objectives» (Marsh, 2002, p. 1) and which can be undertaken in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary, or tertiary level.

Likewise, CLIL is characterized by flexibility and is applicable in a variety of contexts. In fact, Coyle (2007) distinguishes 216 different types of CLIL programmes based on variables such as: the compulsory status, the intensity, the age at which it is started, the linguistic level required or the duration. On the other hand, this is understandable because the situation of CLIL in a particular European country cannot be extrapolated to another, given the differences in language-teaching systems.

Considering this vast array, Georgiou (2012) identifies three basic principles:

- (a) It is content-based, which differentiates it from other language-based approaches that can use content teaching, but mainly to obtain linguistic results. In fact, a balance is sought between the teaching of content and language.
- (b) It is a unique methodology that is a fusion between a methodology for the teaching of an FL and a methodology for the teaching of a specific subject, for example, through simulations, role-playing games, or writing reports in the field of science.
- (c) General didactic objectives that have been labeled as the “4 Cs framework” (Coyle, *op. cit.*, p. 550), which goes beyond language (and

communication) to also encompass content, cognition and culture.

Another characteristic is the teaching of a lingua franca that is considered as international to a greater or lesser extent –which in Europe can be languages such as English, French, Spanish or German – although there are a number of ideological circumstances that sustain the hegemony of English (Dalton-Puffer, 2013, p.183).

Based on Georgiou's analysis (*op. cit.*) of research on CLIL, we have identified a large number of its success factors and expanded them. In order to be more immediate, we present them here schematically:

1. additive bilingualism, biculturalism and interculturality;
2. the role of the L1 in the learning of the L2: code switching and translanguaging;
3. the possibility of coordinating the development of L1 and L2, for example, in regard to the teaching of textual typologies;
4. CLIL teacher support and empathy;
5. the training benefits of the CLIL methodology;
6. the use of scaffolding that considers graduality by means of cognitive support and specific materials to meet students' needs;
7. the continuity of the programme throughout the academic year so that students become familiar with the academic language in each subject;
8. the use of a specific parallel space dedicated to the FL to cater to the two types of competences: CALP and BICS;
9. greater L2 motivation in both learners and teachers;
10. improvement of the linguistic competence of a greater number of students who are average learners;
11. more durable learning due to the development of specific brain connections;
12. periodic quality controls;
13. the involvement and support of parents, colleagues and administrators.

Undoubtedly, we refer here to an ideal model, since, in practice, the successful implementation of CLIL classes could be a long way off, as indeed might be the successful implementation of any kind of teaching, depending on a series of variables.

## 5 Criticisms of the CLIL methodology

Most criticism focuses on the method's effectiveness in achieving good results in language and content in the same way that they are achieved through an L1. Some critics consider that CLIL is an elitist approach that attracts better

students because there is self-selection conditioned by the cultural and social background of families. In this regard, it should be noted that unlike other types of bilingual education, CLIL is an initiative open to all types of students, which emphasises its democratic character. In fact, in some countries it is spreading to less academic areas of education such as vocational training, for example, in Italy or the Netherlands.

Other researchers question the correlation between the reality of CLIL contexts and the image portrayed by its defenders (Georgiou, *op. cit.*). In this sense, it is noteworthy that the rapid dissemination of CLIL has led to many misunderstandings, so teachers, administrators and politicians have tried to adjust it to particular contexts, and understand and interpret it according to their previous training or without appropriate training or adequate resources.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that CLIL students present problems related to some basic formal linguistic aspects<sup>5</sup> that could be improved if more attention was paid to both the content and the form when communicative tasks are carried out, for example, if feedback is used for correction.

Another issue is the professional training that teachers of non-linguistic subjects may have had and their collaboration with L2 teachers. In this sense, the didactic interventions of the former have been criticised, because sometimes they continue to use a traditional methodology (Georgiou, *op. cit.*).

In addition, it should be stressed that the training of teachers (didactic, linguistic, and psychological) entails a certain complexity. In this respect, it is noteworthy that several possibilities are foreseen (Pavesi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.129): a subject-specialist teacher who teaches the subject content in an L2; an L2 teacher who may teach a content subject; or a collaboration between an L2 teacher and a subject-specialist teacher. The important thing is that teachers should be aware of the need for careful programming, a gradual approach and careful timing of the objectives as well as some knowledge of how to manage group dynamics in order to promote cooperative learning and learner responsibility.

The most sensitive issue involves the training of CLIL teachers since, apparently, they do not always have a sufficiently good level in the language. For example, in Italy a C1 level was initially required, but this has been lowered to a B2 level and even teachers who have merely started their training to obtain that second level are accepted.

However, it should be noticed that all the literature analysed refers to a greater motivation among CLIL teachers, which can have positive consequences on promoting learning and linguistic models that are more accessible to learners, but which are not necessarily always those of a native speaker.

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<sup>5</sup> Martínez and Gutiérrez (2015) indicate aspects such as: use of determinants, position of adverbs, datives and word order.

## 6 The integration of language and content in history

The teaching of history through CLIL is a useful strategy for several reasons. From a linguistic point of view, it contributes to the development of the academic register and the distinction between genres and registers with their lexicogramatical features in the different languages involved. It also contributes to the development of a series of cognitive functions that are the basis of the interdependence between language and cognition.

Likewise, the use of history in writing can attenuate the working memory load given that the content has previously been memorized during classes, which allows the retrieval of a rich and varied lexicon, and in this, in turn, improves lexical availability. In short, the path to complexity in written production is made smoother by attenuating the cognitive load. Besides, incidental learning is promoted in parallel activities while learners are involved in the production of meaning.

From a content point of view, it is worth noting the “linguistic turn” that the study of history has undergone; this recognises that the use of language is not innocent and encapsulates a stance (Lorenzo & Dalton-Puffer, 2016). In this sense, promoting the study of history through CLIL can contribute to critical thinking and to the fight against prejudice, ideological predilections and the assumptions that a certain vision of the past implies by means of the mediation of an L2.

Likewise, historical biliteracy is a strategy for developing otherness, since venturing beyond the borders of one’s own language can help one to experience other versions of history, which can contribute to the development of a multiple identity (*Ibidem*, p. 72).

## Conclusion

The success of bilingual and multilingual teaching depends on a very diverse set of interrelated factors, both curricular and extra-curricular. In Europe there is a drive from above (institutions) and also from below (general social interest) for linguistic and multilingual learning, which can contribute to the consolidation of multilingualism and the individual and social identity of the European citizen for whom linguistic diversity is a common feature, since, in the majority of European countries, different languages are spoken.

Therefore, opting for CLIL can contribute to individual and collective prosperity and to the improvement of social cohesion in a historical moment characterised by massive shifts of people that have given rise to complex societies characterised by multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Finally, there is no doubt that the development of CLIL and all the research

it is generating, including criticisms of it, can contribute to greater reflection, which is beneficial for its survival and improvement and, in the long term, could affect the quality of teaching in general. From this point of view, CLIL has fully satisfied the expectations of disseminating better, more inclusive, multilingual teaching.

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