

CLASSROOM LANGUAGE: UNIFYING KEY EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH			Linguistics
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Abstract			
<p>The rise of CLIL in many European countries, as in the case of Spain, has manifested certain discoordination between teachers who use the same language (English) as vehicle for communication in different subjects (CLIL and non-CLIL subjects). This paper seeks for highlighting the necessity of unifying key expressions in English -at different educational stages-, in order to provide students the common classroom vocabulary and expressions. Thus, standardizing the expressions used in those subjects taught in the foreign language suggests being a suitable option to that struggle.</p>			

Introduction

Content Language Integrated Learning (henceforth CLIL) is currently a largely widespread methodology all over Europe. Specially in Spain, this teaching-learning method has enjoyed a frenetic boost in every educational stage over the years.

In the practice, CLIL coexists with the subject of English as a Foreign Language (EFL from now onwards). In both cases, the English language is the common code to communicate in the classroom. However, the former is more concerned with the content -as its acronym suggests- than the latter, which emphasises lexical and grammar accuracy by means of a communicative approach. Though the subject of EFL and the CLIL methodology seem similar at first sight, they are not. In fact, EFL is a subject itself; whereas CLIL is a methodology that can be implemented in any curricular subject, with the obvious exception of EFL and the study related to the own mother tongue, Spanish in this case.

As previously stated, in Spain, hundreds of schools and high schools currently undergo this innovative and attractive content-language method.

Many articles and reference books have been written dealing with the obstacles CLIL presents respect to vocabulary learning, teaching methodology and even CLIL materials. Nevertheless, using a foreign language to communicate also implies certain level of conflict with regard to the key expressions used among CLIL subjects, EFL and the different teachers. Consequently, the unification of key expressions in subjects where English is spoken will be the central issue along the following lines.

CLIL vs. English as Foreign Language

Before proceeding to discuss the mirroring aspects of both CLIL and EFL, let us start defining these concepts first.

Dalton-Puffer (2011) defines CLIL as “an educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary or tertiary level” (p. 183). In this brief but accurate definition of CLIL, the author emphasises the vehicular character of language and the central role of content. Nonetheless, Marsh labels CLIL as “an approach...that may concern languages; intercultural knowledge, understanding and skills; preparation for internationalisation and improvement of education itself.” (Bentley, 2017, p.5). Therefore, CLIL is not only conceived as a methodology itself, but as an approach to cope with the pluriliteracy¹ of learners who are able to study a specific curricular content by means of a foreign language; fact that might broaden their educational limits too. The *TKT: CLIL Handbook*, better describes CLIL as “an evolving education approach to teaching and learning where subjects are taught through the medium of non-native language” (Bentley, 2017, p.5). However, as CLIL and EFL teachers we would rather state that CLIL is a methodology with a dual function which allow pupils to develop their language skills in two different languages, in a parallel way, as well as it prepares them for a plurilingual future.

Attending to Bentley (2017), Coyle’s perspective of CLIL is “referred to as having ‘4Cs’ as components: content, communication, cognition and culture” (p.7). On the one hand, **content** refers to the key concepts, vocabulary and expressions related to the topic the teacher is going to deal with. On the other hand, **communication** tackles with the communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and how they enhance the development of the students’ language learning. On its side, **cognition** is involved with the thinking skills students develop (HOTs or LOTs). Whereas **culture** is deeply connected to the contextualized and meaningful learning the students acquire in CLIL classes and how they affect, somehow, to the civic values they explore along the CLIL lessons. Therefore, CLIL basis lie on how content is implemented by means of a communicative approach in the foreign language, aiming for cognitive settlement, preferably contextualized in the students’ cultural milieu.

Respect to the subject of EFL, its nature is originally more related to the linguistic aspect of the language and its accuracy rather than the recent communicative approach demanded in the last decades. That is to say, EFL, when contrasted to CLIL, somehow focuses on grammar perfection and lexical accuracy, aiming to put such precision into contextualized practice. Then, if both concepts embrace English as the medium to communicate and both terms are inherently imbued by a communicative halo, what is their main difference? Basically, EFL is the teaching of the linguistic structures and lexical corpuses any individual needs to communicate in the foreign language; whereas CLIL makes use of that linguistic knowledge the individual has in the target language to learn specific content. Therefore, EFL teachers boost on the theoretical and practical

¹ According to Meyer, Halbach and Coyle (2015), it refers to “acquiring subject literacy in more than one language” (p.3).

acquisition of the foreign language (continent²), whilst CLIL teachers draw the attention to the information (content) they are communicating in the foreign code.

To close this clarification, it is necessary to reiterate that CLIL is not a subject but an approach to teach the specific content of a certain subject.

The English Language: A Voyage from Preschool to Primary

Generally, in Spain, the first contact students have with the foreign language (English) is located at the Preschool stage; where four assessment criteria are directly connected with the target language as far as the educational curriculum establishes (LOE³). However, it exists a noticeable increment of educational centres at a national level which favours the introduction of the CLIL methodology at this early stage of instruction. Therefore, students indirectly go through a continuous linguistic immersion, making of the English language a constant in their academic and personal lives.

Nevertheless, the transition from Preschool to Primary imply both a qualitative and quantitative jump, in terms of the quality and the quantity of English students learn at this new stage. In spite of this huge academic change, many teachers forget or obviate that this formative leap entails significant changes in a short period of time, affecting every dimension (personal, academic...) involved with the student. Additionally, the start of a new educational level implicitly comes with the introduction of new teachers in the students' life. This aspect is directly related to the students' capability to adapt to the teachers' methodology and characteristics and vice-versa, as Plasencia (2018) states:

Before becoming teachers, we were pupils and learners of foreign languages; that is why we perfectly know, or we should not have forgotten, those reasons or casualties which usually hinders the teaching-learning process of any language different from the mother tongue (p.15).

As well as we have pointed out changes respect teachers and the quantity and quality of the English students learn, it is compulsory to emphasise the methodological approach which is put into practice in the stage of Primary education. Thus, generally speaking, students, after being active agents undergoing a dynamic learning process during the Preschool stage, they become passive and static spectators in Primary education.

The aforementioned changes lead us to underline the most relevant differences between the English students 'acquire' during the Preschool period and the English they do 'learn' along the Primary stage. The use we made of the terms 'acquire' and 'learn' are not randomly but consciously applied throughout these lines. On the one hand, we understand that students acquire knowledge by their own experiences and from their most immediate environment, always in a natural, spontaneous, manipulative and, above all, vivential way, framed in real and meaningful

² Term used to refer to the role of the language as mere vehicle to convey content.

³ Ley Orgánica de Educación (Organic Law of Education).

contexts. This idea is put into practice within the area of Language and Communication, as those students from Preschool who undergo a CLIL-like linguistic immersion experiment the learning of concepts and ideas in a parallel way -always contextualized in both codes-. Therefore, those concepts and ideas are internalised and acquired either in their mother tongue as in the foreign language.

On the other hand, the subjects under the umbrella of CLIL usually have a more expository and descriptive character in Primary, rather than the experiential one offered in Preschool. Likewise, the perspective given to the subject of EFL in Primary especially stresses the learning of grammar, vocabulary and morphosyntactic structures of the target language, somehow unlinking knowledge or content from a meaningful context for the student.

Hence, we conclude this section with the essential idea that the change between educational stages involves, among others, methodological changes regarding the teaching and learning processes by means of a foreign language. Therefore, this appreciation must be transferred to the daily and ordinary expressions used in the classroom, craving for a necessary and coherent unification of the key expressions used in the different educational stages, subjects (EFL and CLIL) and teachers.

The Active Use of English in the Classroom

When referring to the use of a foreign language in the classroom, it is almost inevitable to focus on the level of instrumental English (grammar, vocabulary...) or the fluency our students may have either in the oral comprehension or the oral production processes when dealing with the target language. Nonetheless, the spread of that morphosyntactic apparatus and skills blurs the purpose of any linguistic code: to communicate.

Thus, when talking about vehicular language in different contexts (EFL or CLIL), the subject itself establishes the priority and the emphasis to be set on the foreign code. In fact, the subject of EFL pays more attention to the form (language) as well as to the communicative purpose (content). However, in subjects taught by means of a CLIL methodology, the spotlight mainly focuses on the curricular content to be transmitted in the foreign language.

The latter statement, on the one side, does not aim to suggest that the subject of EFL is more necessary or essential than those subjects taught by the CLIL methodology, due to, as it has been previously pointed out, CLIL is not a subject itself but a means to teach a subject. On the other side, the purpose of these lines is not to lead the reader to the belief that CLIL is not just another way to teach content without considering the use of the language that vehicles contents and knowledge. Therefore, from a hierarchical point of view, the subject of EFL establishes the lexical-syntactic basis of the language, from which the CLIL subject can take advantage to set, firstly, the content and, secondly, the language (continent) as much as possible (figure 1). Likewise, this hierarchy we refer to has recently derived into a parallel position (figure 2) since - from a temporary perspective- both EFL and CLIL have started to be implemented at a very early

age, where one reinforces the other. Going further on this diachronic perspective, it is also possible to foresee that, in the case of Spain and many other countries, in some decades time, the aforesaid hierarchy between EFL and CLIL will be totally ineffectual and, thus, inexistent, as students will be totally immersed into a bilingual system⁴ where both two, language (continent) and knowledge (content) will receive the same attention indiscriminately (figure 3), as the current case of Canada and its bilingual educational programme has shown.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Hence, this progressive fusion between CLIL and EFL directs the attention onto the terminology and expressions commonly used by teachers who teach by using the target language in CLIL or EFL classes. What is more, it is well known that every teacher has a style to convey things in such a personal way; that is why a 'standard' use of English in the classroom is required, in order to avoid the emergence of ambiguity and misunderstandings among students and teachers.

The Importance of Unifying Key Expressions. Coherence Between Subjects and Levels

The following lines are going to deal with the last idea proposed in the previous section. In fact, a coherent unification of key expressions during the EFL and CLIL lessons is a necessity, undoubtedly. This unification which must be coherent -taking into account aspects such as the educational stage, the teaching staff, the methodologies or the changes that our students can develop- is not deliberated as, our teaching experience has shown us a lack of coordination regarding the use of key terms in the classrooms. This situation leads us to realize, in first place, about an evident lack of coordination between CLIL teachers and EFL teachers and, in second place, about the scarce or non-existent monitoring given to the vocabulary or expressions used by teachers and students in the foreign language along the different educational stages and their transition. As we have previously mentioned, at the Preschool stage, there are education centers where students get totally immersed into the acquisition of the target language at a very early age. This fact benefits both two, the students and the teachers, because, since they are very young, these students are in touch with the target language by listening to common and basic expressions -always in real contexts-, fact that eases the development of a simple classroom conversations.

Hence, the CLIL or EFL teaching staff has the responsibility to put into practice ordinary and routine expressions of daily use for the students' comprehension and application during this stage. These expressions we refer to could be implemented from the Preschool stage up to the end

⁴ Though Spain, as the rest of European countries must aspire to multilingualism, the experience and the facts indicate that that objective lies far beyond from close future.

of the first cycle of Primary education (second grade), where students have exercised in this field and got familiar with the aforesaid type of expressions, as well as with a lexical-syntactic grounding for the understanding and ordinary communication in the classroom. In the second cycle of Primary education (third and fourth grade), we find convenient a gradual change in relation to the terms used within the classroom, with the only objective that students enrich their lexical repertoire in functional and real contexts. The unification of key expressions proposed above are considered to be less relevant at the Secondary stage. At the end of the last cycle of Primary (sixth grade), a more elaborated and mature use of the vocabulary and expressions is applied in the classroom by both teachers and students. Therefore, big changes concerned with key expressions are not expected along this period. For the unification of such criteria, it is convenient a proper coordination among the teaching staff, preferably at the beginning of the school course. There must be a consensus where teachers attend their students' development as well as the care for the vocabulary and the key expressions used in the subjects where English is the vehicle language. For example, in order to get students quiet in the classroom, teachers could make use of the expression "1, 2, 3. Silence, please!" for Preschool; "be quiet" for intermediate cycles in Primary and "listen up, listen good" for the last cycles of Primary and Compulsory Secondary Education.

To conclude this section, we underline Coyle's words, taken by Lorenzo N. & I. Piquer (2015): *The language teacher has a responsibility, just like all other teachers, to step outside of the 'comfort zone' and ask 'what exactly I am trying to teach in terms of languages; what is it that my learners need/want to do with language' and look more at the general learning agenda. Subject teachers also have a responsibility to be more language aware and analyse carefully the language their learners need to learn effectively and deeply. By working together at school, we can find more creative ways to improve the system a genuine 'bottom up' approach which will transform classroom practices (p.6).*

Conclusions

Along the previous lines the quantitative and qualitative leap between the Preschool and Primary stages has been evidenced, where the use of the foreign language (English) acquires a different nuance regarding how CLIL and EFL subjects cope with the issue of key expressions in the classroom. It mainly owes to the lack of coordination between teachers; that is why a consensus between the teaching staff, in relation to the use of key expressions and vocabulary in the classroom, is required. Conversely, it has been clear the complementary character among CLIL subjects and the EFL subject along the different educational stages. At this respect, it is understood that the meeting point between EFL and CLIL subjects is uniquely and exclusively the vehicle language (English), where EFL complements CLIL in the communicative aspect. Thus, it has been observed the necessity of CLIL and EFL to work coordinately regarding the vocabulary used within the classroom as well as the unification of the expressions used by teachers and students. Eventually, it is worth pointing out the lack of consciousness from teachers who teach foreign language subjects respect to class key expressions, in view of the fact that it exists an

accented lack of awareness regarding the expressions and vocabulary used between different subjects and the target language, what somehow obstacles the understanding of the student in many occasions.

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