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### Content and language integrated learning

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Content and language integrated learning

This special issue of *The Language Learning Journal* is devoted to Content and Language Integrated Learning, frequently referred to by its acronym CLIL in Europe, but also elsewhere of late. CLIL is an educational approach where curricular content of subjects such as biology or history is taught to students through a language that is neither their first language nor the dominant medium of instruction in the respective education system. Science taught through English in Finland, history taught in French in Spain, civics taught in Italian in Australia or health education taught through the medium of German in the UK would be examples of such CLIL settings. The articles included in this and the second special issue, to appear in 2015, are all based on such contexts.

In using a language other than the students' first language for instruction, CLIL obviously shares many features with other types of bilingual education. There have been heated debates in particular about the differences, similarities and definitions of CLIL and immersion (Cenoz, Genesee and Gorter 2013; Lasagabaster and Sierra 2010). Rather than pursuing this conceptual track, we start from the premise that the two overlap in significant respects, especially as regards classroom pedagogical realities (see also Lyster and Ballinger 2011). However, we argue that despite the heterogeneity of CLIL approaches, there are 'prototypical' CLIL implementations: these involve use of a foreign language (most frequently, English) rather than the co-official language of the country; teaching by subject specialists, rather than language teachers; classes being timetabled as content lessons and taking place alongside language teaching rather than instead of it. There are other types of provision also labelled CLIL where the choice of this term instead of others such as immersion or bilingual education may well be motivated as much by connotations and associations rather than profound differences in implementation.

Given that the origins of CLIL as a form of education reside in Europe, it is significant that we should consider CLIL in the overall context of European trends in language education. In their recent analysis of European policy trends, Williams, Strubell and Williams (2013: 33) note that aside from the EU's 'unity in diversity' policies, the restructuring and de-nationalising of labour markets in the wake of globalisation is 're-sorting the relative status of languages' and pressurising education systems into being more flexible and open to change. Amidst a mosaic of national policy decisions regarding the organisation of language teaching and adjustments thereto (see Williams, Strubell and Williams 2013), it seems that the idea of complementing traditional foreign language classes with other curricular subjects taught through the medium of one of the languages studied, i.e. CLIL, has been welcomed by many as a promising perspective, both at management and grassroots levels. While in some countries (e.g. Spain), CLIL has become part of concerted top-down policy efforts to step up foreign language teaching, others have simply left doors open for local agents to adopt CLIL if they want (e.g. Austria, Germany). Many countries

have done so and not only in Europe. In Europe, however, the fact that the European Commission adopted the CLIL label and the idea behind it as part of its larger educational language policy plans (for a comprehensive treatment, see Marsh 2013), meant that for some time there was not only a favourable political climate but also funds available for setting up transnational initiatives and platforms for collaboration and exchange – not necessarily a common phenomenon relating to educational innovation on a continent that may be integrating but whose school-level education systems remain firmly national.

Probably owing to this initial web of international collaboration, as well as the frequent use of English as language of CLIL instruction which has meant that data from different countries is readily accessible to researchers, CLIL research has always shown a high degree of international collaboration. Document research and a first wave of conceptual work was published from the mid-1990s onwards (e.g. Coyle 2002), with empirical research appearing in noticeable quantities around the mid-2000s and growing steadily ever since. Since there was a need for the early phases of CLIL research to explore the functioning of the approach in contexts that had earlier relied on formal language teaching as a route to foreign language skills, it is unsurprising that many of the earliest empirical studies were concerned with learning outcomes, especially with regard to attainment in the language of instruction (e.g. Admiraal et al. 2006; Lorenzo et al. 2010; Zydatis 2007). The other major strand in the first wave of empirical CLIL research looked at the realities of the CLIL classroom as an environment where learners and teachers *use* language.

We do not share the view of some commentators (cf. Bruton 2011) that this first wave of research has been uniformly ‘celebratory’. Yet we do acknowledge that, as with any other research area in the process of developing and consolidating, there are areas of CLIL research that need more intensive attention. Consequently, a number of recent research overviews (Dalton-Puffer 2011; Dalton-Puffer and Smit 2013; Nikula, Dalton-Puffer and Llinares 2013; Pérez Cañado 2012) have identified future paths for CLIL research in order to produce an ever more complete and multifaceted picture of the realities of CLIL. Only in this way will it be possible to eventually consolidate our view of this educational approach, its affordances, its problems as well as the insights it can offer to those areas involved in related enterprises, including immersion, second language learning and content teaching for second language learners in the mainstream. Below, we briefly discuss the key research desiderata identified. We then highlight how the articles included in this special issue address these desiderata.

- (1) Broadening *the variety of research objects or foci*: there have been calls for outcome studies to cover not just language, but also content learning outcomes. In the case of classroom discourse studies, additional dimensions to be considered include corrective feedback, the way participants orient to content and language in classroom tasks and activities, joint meaning construction, dialogic enquiry and academic language functions so as to drive forward the modelling of content-and-language integration. From a different perspective, the beliefs, perceptions, motivations and orientations of both teachers and students – indeed, of all stakeholders – merit investigation as it seems crucial to know more about how those directly involved experience CLIL implementation in order to identify areas for both research and development. In terms of pedagogy, (integrative) assessment that accounts for both content and language concerns (Llinares, Morton and Whitaker 2012) has been identified as an urgent research need as has its companion, integrative lesson planning. Further research on policy goals in relation to CLIL has also been called for.

- (2) Broadening *the variety in methodological choices and theoretical outlook* as well as doing more research that is geared directly towards *the development of pedagogy*: while CLIL research has actually been characterised by theoretical and methodological plurality from its inception (using both quantitative and qualitative designs), it is certainly desirable that future quantitative studies include further moderating variables and that generally longitudinal studies are pursued in order to ascertain whether CLIL has long-term effects. Further, the hitherto dominant theoretical positions in CLIL research such as second language acquisition and foreign language teaching, functional linguistic theories and discourse studies would be well served by additionally drawing on work from bilingualism research. A notable gap given the concurrent focus on content and language learning has been the lack of involvement of subject specialists in CLIL research, which to date has been largely conducted by applied linguists.<sup>1</sup> Some projects in this direction are currently in progress but not mature enough to appear in this special issue. Cooperation by language and content experts would also be important for research geared towards developing CLIL, both as regards teachers' conceptual and pedagogical toolkits to enhance classroom practice.
- (3) Expanding the *types of contexts and number of vehicular languages*: CLIL research has tended to focus on secondary level education, but primary and tertiary contexts need to be covered too, although it is debatable whether tertiary teaching in the academic lingua franca English should be considered prototypical CLIL (cf. Smit and Dafouz 2012). Insights gained from research would definitely benefit from the inclusion of a wider range of contexts (outside Europe) as well as a wider range of languages. However, the focus on CLIL in English is not something produced by researchers; inevitably, English dominates as the CLIL target language in all non-anglophone countries. Careful socio-linguistic descriptions and comparisons between contexts and languages will deepen our insights.

The eight articles comprising this first of two CLIL special issues reflect how CLIL researchers are now starting to work in the three areas identified above. Development-oriented work is presented in two articles. First, Gerrit Jan Koopmann, Jason Skeet and Rick de Graaff report on a study which explores experienced CLIL subject teachers' practical knowledge base regarding activities for supporting language learning in their lessons, thus trying to fathom which theories of practice non-language teachers have developed with regard to language. These aspects of teacher cognition are crucial in order to bring to the level of observable pedagogy the integration of language and content that is said to represent the core of CLIL. At the same time, the article demonstrates how research can be an integral part of teacher development.

The second development-oriented article by Ute Massler, Claudia Queisser and Daniel Stotz is set in a primary education context and reports on a bilateral Swiss–German project dedicated to constructing an assessment instrument which accounts for the goals and objectives of two different subjects, including knowledge, competences, skills, attitudes and discourse practices, for both language and content. This is a timely contribution as research on assessment as a core area in educational practice has frequently been identified as a desideratum for CLIL research, but the complexities of integrated assessment have meant that this area seems to have been neglected. The fact that Massler, Queisser and Stotz use international competence models in both language and science means that their work should be transferable to other contexts.

Dana Gablasova's study also addresses assessment, and specifically from the point of view of the content subject, thus contributing to strengthening this weak link in the area of CLIL and content-based instruction in general. The study uses an oral assessment format that is in regular use in L1 teaching and compares how Slovak CLIL learners performed in three different conditions: reading content material in English and then performing a task in either English or their L1, Slovak, or covering content and performing the task in the L1. The findings indicate that having to perform in the L2 may indeed constrain learners' opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired.

The classroom itself is the focus of two articles. Cristina Escobar and Natalia Evnitskaya present an interpretive case study of a Spanish CLIL science classroom. Framed in sociocultural learning theory and Conversation Analysis, this study shows how teacher-led discussions provide a rich web of cyclical and multimodal sources for learners to construct meaning in order to appropriate content/language. The abundance of resources from which to draw meaning contrasts with the scarcity of opportunities for learners to formulate extended content-oriented contributions.

The second classroom study, by Ana Llinares and Roy Lyster, focuses on (primary level) classroom talk and uses a more strongly quantitatively oriented methodology to answer a comparative research question: how do CLIL in Spain, Japanese immersion in the US and French immersion in Canada compare with regard to corrective feedback? The authors examine the frequency and distribution of different feedback types as well as learner uptake across the three contexts, uncovering a shared preference for didactic recasts in CLIL and Japanese immersion, whereas conversational recasts were more frequent in French immersion. This difference is discussed in terms of detailed contextual features as well as teachers' professional trajectories.

A non-European context is again represented in Simone Smala's contribution. Through interviews with teacher-directors of Australian CLIL programmes offered in French, German, Japanese, Italian, Indonesian, Spanish and Chinese, Smala brings into view the concerns and attitudes of stakeholders and in particular, the conflicts they experience between language policies that put the CLIL programmes categorically into the *foreign* language learning basket, explicitly banning language maintenance interests which are, however, present in the community. Smala's study thus highlights the importance of considering CLIL in relation to its social, cultural and educational contexts.

A very different side of stakeholder views is examined in the study by Aintzane Doiz, David Lasagabaster and Juan Manuel Sierra, namely student motivation. This study provides valuable empirical evidence to support anecdotally reported differences in learner motivation when comparing traditional English as a foreign language instruction and CLIL. It concerns secondary-level students and apart from CLIL and non-CLIL division, also considers students' age, sex and parents' socio-economic background as variables. With the help of an independently validated learner motivation questionnaire, the authors find overall a more positive motivational mindset for the CLIL students. They cautiously discuss the extent to which this can be accounted for by the CLIL teaching approach itself. Conclusive answers, however, need to be postponed to a later stage of this longitudinal study.

Finally, Lena Heine offers a predominantly conceptual article which seeks to advance the theorising of content-and-language integration. She argues that models of the bilingual lexicon are a promising starting point for grasping the content-language interface in a principled way, since psycholinguistic lexical models are concerned not only with bilingual lexical storage but also with conceptual restructuring and thus impact directly on notions of concept-learning in the subjects. She also argues that a differentiated understanding of

the cognitive structures underlying student performances is necessary to design appropriate pedagogical interventions.

In conclusion, we note how the notorious complexity of empirical research in education is intensified in CLIL by the fact that the vantage points of two disciplines converge in it: that of the 'CLIL-subject' (history, science, etc.) and that of language, which both come with their particular theoretical mindsets and research traditions. We nevertheless believe that there is great potential in researching CLIL precisely to showcase the integration of epistemologies that are traditionally separate in policy and research but inevitably converge in the minds of the learners as they experience formal education. This special issue reflects this and illustrates the richness and complexity of this research area.

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### Note

1. Research on bilingual education in Germany is an exception to this but it is published almost exclusively in German.

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