PLANNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ENGINEERING BOLOGNA-ADAPTED DEGREES

PLANIFICACIÓ DE L'APRENENTATGE D'UNA SEGONA LLENGUA EN GRAUS D'ENGINYERIA ADAPTATS AL PLA BOLONYA

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CLIL is a recent phenomenon for European universities. The offer of CLIL is justified due to the need to improve local students' foreign language proficiency so as to prepare them for the global labour market (cf. Coleman, 2006; Wätcher & Maiworm, 2008). The University of Lleida (Universitat de Lleida, UdL) is no exception of this trend, as its white books show. In fact, given that UdL's policy-makers consider graduates' foreign language proficiency as one institutional strategic competence, UdL's linguistic policy recommends offering modules in English in the Bologna-adapted degrees. Moreover, regulation has been issued about the mechanisms to accredit the B1 level in a foreign language (2010), such as passing 12 ECTS taught in a third language (CLIL) within the degrees.

In this changing scenario where foreign language learning becomes institutionally strategic, this paper presents research conducted at the UdL on the planning process of foreign language learning in Bologna-adapted degrees. The research questions are (i) whether the degrees offer mechanisms so that graduates can obtain their foreign language accreditation; and (2) how these mechanisms may enhance foreign language learning. Four degrees are examined as institutional samples:

Agronomy and Food Engineering (AFE), Forestry Engineering (FE), Automation and Industrial Electronic Engineering (AIEE), and Mechanical Engineering (ME). The first two belong to the Agronomy School (ETSEA) and the last two to the Polytechnic School (EPS). These degrees have been under development in the last two years, so only the corresponding subjects have been considered—together with elective subjects already public. All the data are taken from the public websites of the degrees and the subject syllabi.

The results show that the four degrees' websites list foreign language proficiency as one of their graduates' competences; in two cases, this competence is shaped as being able to work in multilingual environments. However, none of the degrees plans for foreign language learning. In fact, no ESP subject is mentioned in any of the degrees. But students may enrol in an elective cross-curricular subject, EAP-focused, and offered by the UdL's Linguistic Service[5] Additionally, 15 subjects belonging to the four degrees incorporate the competence of foreign language proficiency in their syllabi. However, this competence is only practiced in 9 of these subjects – amounting to 12% of the 74 subjects examined – by teaching through the medium of English and with bibliographic references in English. The rest of the subjects mention either some basic bibliographic references in English without any tuition in English; or simply they mention the competence but without any foreign language learning provision. So these 6 subjects are disregarded in the subsequent discussion. Table 1 shows the ECTS load per subject and the percentage distribution of the languages employed in class.

School	Degree	Subject	ECTS	% of classes in English	% of classes in Catalan/ Spanish
ETSEA	AFE	*Topografia…*	6	1 small group	--
	FE	*Topografia…*	6	1 small group	--
		Economia…	6	10%	90%
EPS	AIEE	*Enginyeria Tèrmica…*	6	10%	90%
		Tecnologies del Medi…	6	55%	45%

[5]http://www.udl.cat/export/sites/UdL/serveis/upd/Materia_Transversal/Materia_Transversal_CG_2011-2012.pdf

		Automatització Industrial	6	5%	95%
	ME	*Enginyeria Tèrmica…*	6	10%	90%
		Tecnologies del Medi…	6	55%	45%
		Automatització Industrial	6	5%	95%

Fig.1. Distribution of ECTS and percentages of languages used in class

Foreign language learning is planned in several ways in these degrees. On the one hand, curriculum-designers give the option to undergraduates to enrol in the elective cross-curricular subject imparted by the UdL's Linguistic Service, which amounts to 3-ECTS credits and is entitled "Let's communicate: oral presentations and written essays in English". On the other hand, the graduates of both EPS degrees will have studied already 18 ECTS in English by the end of their second year. In turn, ETSEA's degrees offer fewer numbers of courses in English for their undergraduates: there is only one 6-ECTS subject in English (but restricted to one small-sized group) in the AFE degree, while the FE degree has on offer the same subject and another 6-ECTS course. In all, the EPS degrees have already complied with the recommendations to obtain the foreign language accreditation, unlike ETSEA, whose graduates may need to follow any other mechanisms to obtain such accreditation.

The second research question reveals that the EPS degrees rely heavily on only one subject for foreign language learning: *Tecnologies…* with 55% of its time using English as a language of instruction. The same situation is found in the ETSEA degrees with only one subject using English as the medium of instruction, *Topografia*….However, unlike *Tecnologies…*, only one small-sized group benefits from this, as the remaining groups will be taught in Spanish/. No criterion is written about the student distribution in these two linguistically distinct small-sized groups. The other subjects from Table 1 expose their learners 10% or less to foreign language input, so foreign language use may be rather incidental and unsystematic (cf. Greere & Räsänen, 2008).

Furthermore, apart from a general recommendation in the *Topografia…*subject about the need to have a basic competence in reading comprehension in English, the public syllabi of the two English-partially imparted subjects make no explicit mention of linguistic objectives or linguistic outcomes, although the foreign language proficiency competence is listed. Given that the instructors do not belong to the English

and Linguistics Department, the subjects may not be the result of collaboration between content and ESP language specialists. Therefore these two subjects typify as NON-CLIL as language and content is not learnt and practiced in an integrated way (cf. Greere & Räsänen, 2008).

In conclusion, curriculum-makers of the four degrees examined generally show an interest to facilitate foreign language accreditation to their undergraduates by offering content subjects taught through the medium of English. However, a closer look at two syllabi show that foreign language learning relies basically on two subjects and that the integration of language and content in the syllabi is not guaranteed. Hence real foreign language proficiency may not be promoted.

A suggested future direction for these programs is to build bridges between ESP language specialists and content instructors so as to plan effective programs that improve local students' foreign language proficiency.

References

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