

**AN EXPERIENCE OF TEACHER COLLABORATION:
SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO REFLECT ON THEIR USE OF
ENGLISH THROUGH CONTENT-BASED ASSIGNMENTS**

**UNA EXPERIENCIA DE COLABORACIÓN DOCENTE:
APOYO A LOS ESTUDIANTES A REFLEXIONAR SOBRE EL USO
DEL INGLÉS A TRAVÉS DE TAREAS BASADAS EN EL
CONTENIDO**

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1. Point of departure

The University of San Jorge (USJ) in Villanueva – Zaragoza has taken on the integration of English and content (CLIL) as part of its language policy since 2005. For this purpose, students receive English as a subject in the first two years next to other technical subjects partially imparted in English. However, students cease to have English language classes after the first two years and move on to having entire subjects in English that may reach up to 18 credits in their 4th year of undergraduate studies. During the latter period, students then mainly depend on content classes to continue learning and practicing English. While this arrangement seems logical and in line with

CLIL, closer inspection through content classroom observations, which will be explained next, showed the possibility that students might not continue to see English as equally important to other subjects in their specific disciplines, leading them to disregard essentials in English writing they learned in the first two years.

The provider of English language instruction and CLIL support within the University is the Institute of Modern Languages (IML). In 2010/2011, IML started a protocol of peer observations among English language and content professors. During these observations, the presenter realized a number of facts that are considered the point of departure for this paper. It was noticed that:

- a. Students were rarely prompted to produce long utterances in English and those seemed willing and able to do so were the same students on every occasion;
- b. Students who took the initiative to speak English were not given language feedback of any type by the content teacher;
- c. Concepts and important terms were usually explained, but concept checks were never used;
- d. Some students preferred Spanish when asking for clarifications or commenting; a routine the professors seemed to be used to and did not try to modify.

The above observations led the presenter to conclude a number of lacking elements that CLIL scholars continuously point to as important in the CLIL context: the need for conscientious scaffolding (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010); the need to communicate to students and content professors the importance of integrating English in content whenever possible for students to negotiate meaning and monitor their output (Swain, 1993); and the lack of meaningful language feedback (Dalton- Puffer, 2007).

As a result, the presenter decided to run an experiment to see if students can be motivated (pushed) while engaged in content to notice language problems and learn from them. In addition to this, two further questions were posed:

- 1- Using a holistic rubric for evaluating language use in content assignments, would students self-evaluate accurately?

- 2- Do students believe they should linguistically perform as best as they can in assignments directed to their content professors?

2. Context

To answer the questions, a process of collaboration started between the presenter and a colleague lecturer in the school of information technology⁹ at the same university. The content subject was Advanced Computer Architecture for third and fourth year students who were 8 students in total. The students involved were presumed to have a high B1 or a B2 level on the scale of the common European framework of reference for languages as that is the level mandated by the university for students in years 3 and 4. The students had only seen the presenter during observations and between classes at the university campus in *El Parque Tecnológico de Walqa*. The experiment was facilitated by colleague previously mentioned and communication took place via emails and the Moodle platform.

3. Development & materials created

The collaborating professor informed the students that one of the assignments – already submitted – will be corrected and graded by the English lecturer who teaches first and second year students. They consented to the experiment knowing that it would not affect their grades and that the feedback would help them take notice of their mistakes to avoid them in the future. The procedure started by sending the students an informative document illustrating the role of each party, the rationale behind why it is important for them to notice their mistakes, and what to expect from the experiment, all in the form of frequently asked questions in English and Spanish (FAQs – see Fig.1). The assignments were corrected qualitatively first and sent to the students for them to use the comments together with a holistic rubric to reflect on their performance (Fig.2 & 3). After receiving the reflections of the students and their self-evaluations, the grades given by the English lecturer were sent forward to all and the students' grades on content and English were correlated.

⁹ Jesus Carro – Lecturer in Networks and Computer Architecture Systems

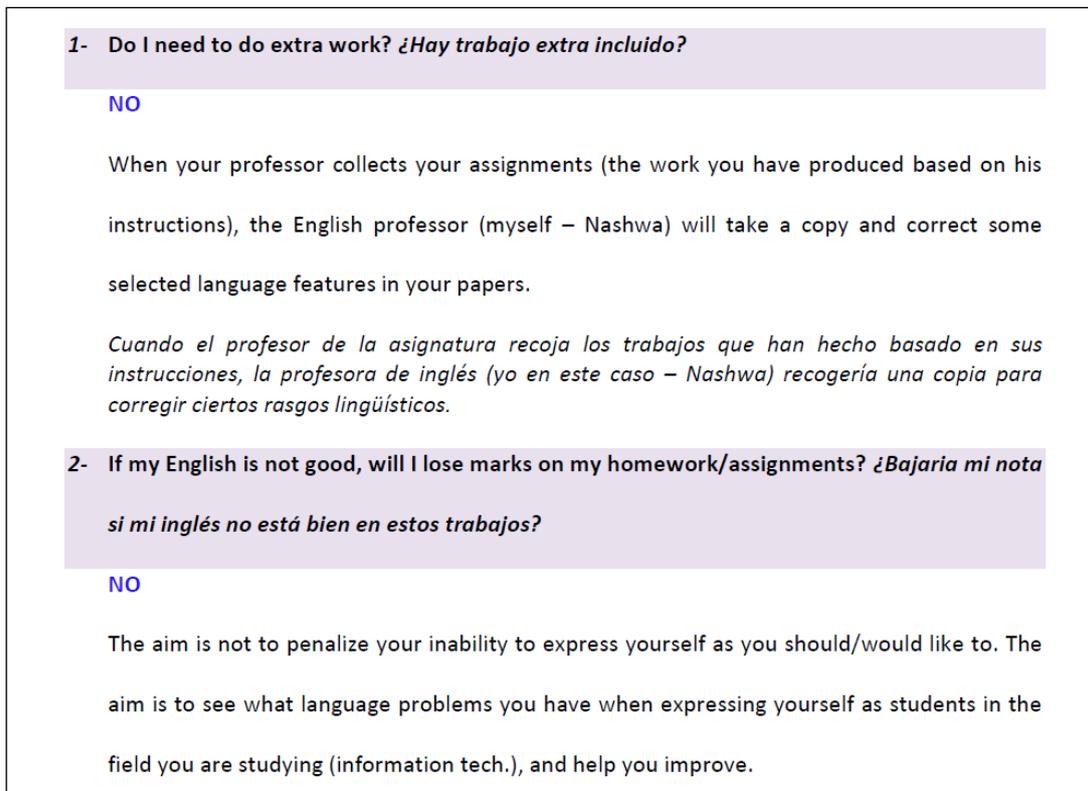


Fig.1. A screenshot of the FAQs document sent to the students.

4. Evaluation and conclusions

The experience and the data from the students led to the following conclusions:

- Students were absolutely accurate in self-evaluating their language performance in the content assignment using the holistic rubric.
- Students stated they would have performed linguistically better had the assignment been designated for the English language classroom.
- The use of self-evaluation and the reflective questions pushed the students to revisit their language performance in the content-based assignment, and without it they would not have revisited their language performance at all.

It could then be concluded that for students to pay attention to language while working on content assignments, a form of evaluation needs to be strongly considered including self-evaluation in regards to language. In addition, the collaboration of

language and content teachers on feedback is essential for students to realize that language is not divorced from content at the moment of evaluation.

Reflection Sheet

This sheet has some questions that will help you evaluate the way you write. By evaluating how you write, you will be engaged in self-assessment.

Reflection 1: GIVE YOURSELF A GRADE

You need to give your self a grade based on the comments in your corrected sample and on the assessment scale in the table below.

	0	1	2	3	4
Description	The paper is impossible to comprehend or follow as the language is too fragmented and lacks any coherence.	The paper is very hard to follow, but there are scattered phrases and keywords that give the reader clues about the nature of the subject. The reader can only get the gist of the paper, but no details.	The paper is not easy to follow because of the odd choice of words and incorrect sentence structures (including punctuation). Translation from Spanish makes it necessary that the reader re-reads several times and may end up not being fully sure of the meaning still. Some verbs or nouns may be missing leaving the reader to guess.	The paper can be easily followed and arguments/explanations...do not require extensive reading despite the presence of some odd word choices or grammatical errors (including punctuation). The latter do not impede the reader from comprehending the message	The paper runs smooth with hardly any errors to comment on. Style and some punctuation may require improvement though.

Figure 2. A screenshot of the rubric used for evaluation (self and teacher evaluation).

Reflection 2:

If you were preparing a paper for an English language class, would you pay more attention to constructing better sentences and paragraphs? YES/ NO and explain a little.

Reflection 3:

Which of the comments in the paper did you LIKE (think is right/ will help you) the most. In other words, which correction clicked for you and you think you will not repeat?

Figure 3. A screenshot of the reflection questions students answered to after self-evaluating.

5. Proposals for the future

For the future, it would be of interest to see the degree to which students' written performance would improve if their content assignments were graded for language as well.

6. References

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