CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES: A COMPARISON OF CLIL IN SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

EXPERIÈNCIES D'AULA: UNA COMPARACIÓ D'AICLE A L'EDUCACIÓ SECUNDÀRIA I UNIVERSITÀRIA.

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1. Introduction

With the deployment of the new degrees in the European Space for Higher Education, many universities have attempted to increase students' use of academic English by offering – or rather imposing – CLIL courses to students and teachers alike. Due to cultural and organisational particularities, the context of Catalan higher education may not strike some critics as the ideal one for this sort of methodology: class sizes tend to be large, attendance rates are traditionally low, students are often reluctant to use English due to preconceived lack of confidence, whilst some teachers are fearful of maybe dumbing down subject content and of their own lack of linguistic expertise and

abilities. Furthermore, there is little investment in teacher training, which, coupled with the current cuts in funding, may limit the resources available to implement CLIL effectively. However, some critics may also argue that students and teachers within the Catalan system are actually at an advantage as they are learning and communicating within a bilingual society. Moreover, the public sector in Catalonia has a lot of experience working with CLIL in primary and secondary education. This previous experience and exposure in earlier stages of education pave the way for students' learning a subject with CLIL in higher education (HE).

CLIL pedagogies have a strong impact on classroom interactions, enabling students to be more autonomous in their learning by promoting the use of collaborative learning and group work, and the use of high-order cognitive and linguistic skills. By focusing on language from a communicative perspective, based on the levels described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), CLIL practitioners scaffold students' content acquisition in a context of real-life interactions in the target language, providing continuity in HE to the work carried out by secondary school teachers, and catering to students' different learning styles and language expertise. This paper is a comparative study of materials in secondary and HE to promote a pedagogical approach based on CLIL pedagogies, thus building on CLIL's theory of practice at these two levels.

2. Context

As background for the methods we discuss, we compare the context of secondary and higher education in terms of lesson design, learning goals, material design, classroom interactions and assessment methods.

3. CLIL essentials, description of the teaching materials

The theoretical framework that supported the design of these classroom interventions comprehends sociocultural learning theories such as socio-constructivism and the role of discourse in collaborative learning, (based on the works of authors such as Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Leontiev), Coyle's 4C's Framework (1999) and the CLIL matrix (Coyle,

2005; Cummins, 1984). The 4C's Framework studies the interaction between contents, communication, cognition and culture within CLIL pedagogies. Contents refer to subject knowledge and discipline-specific skills. The acquisition of content involves learning and thinking (cognition) in an interactive meaningful context in which L2 is the language of multi-modal communication, connecting contents to context and L1 culture to L2 culture. The CLIL matrix depicts the possible combinations between high and low demands placed on students either linguistically or cognitively. The balance between these determines the role of language in the mediation between cognition and culture, structuring knowledge through conscious articulation and processing. Cognitive skills are classed into Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), as classified in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) and further revised versions of it (Andersen & Krathwhol, 2001). In Bloom's earliest version, evaluating ranked the highest; however, the newest classification places creative skills as the highest order thinking skill. From a communicative perspective, the production of more spontaneous personal speech is perhaps the most challenging prospect for learners. According to Swain's (1988) input and output hypotheses classroom activities should promote spontaneous and complex production of the target language to create opportunities for potential language acquisition.

We present two classroom interventions, one in first-year Baccalaureate and one in first-year Sports Science degree. The first set belongs to the first-year Baccalaureate subject Contemporary History. It consists of a project on the Cold War period in which students were asked to analyse a series of audiovisual sources in order to design an exhibition on this period to teach fourth year ESO students about it. The learning goals of this three-week project covered the ideational contents regarding this historical period, and the necessary discipline-specific competences to study different types of historical sources and connect them to the contents of the course. It also entailed the communicative skills needed to process and deliver this information so that it was comprehensible for ESO students using verbal and non-verbal communicative competencies. The second classroom intervention was used with first-year Sport Science students for History and Sociology of Sport. Authentic texts, listening activities graded to the student's level of English and audiovisual materials were used to present the key concepts in a manner that students, regardless of their language level, could

access and identify them. Subject content was divided into topics with specific objectives for each of the parts. In the first three topics, the students were provided with the key concept questions and had to find the answers using adapted texts, listening activities and audio visual materials. Students were gradually enabled to identify the content objectives on their own, gaining more and more autonomy, removing the scaffolding that was necessary during the first weeks. Sub-groups of 3-4 students worked together to extract information to report back to the rest of the class, using presentations as visual aids. Each sub-group had to create a text summarising the topics' key concepts from all of the group presentations.

4. Analysis and Conclusions

Guided by the theoretical approached we previously described, we discuss the differences and similarities between the two interventions in relation to their context of use, the level of integration of discipline-specific language and knowledge, and the thinking skills activated. Due to the similarities between these materials and the learning goals they try to achieve, we suggest that CLIL is a suitable approach to material design in HE as well, thus contributing to rethink classroom management, course design, interaction patterns and assessment.

5. Further Studies and Proposals

This study compares the materials used by teachers in secondary and higher education and the pedagogical stance underlying their design. Our aim was to share with HE teaching staff some of the advantages of CLIL pedagogies so that they can apply them to adapt materials to both students' and teachers' linguistic abilities, based on the many successful examples of CLIL use in Catalonia's primary and secondary public education (see for example APAC's 2006 CLIL monograph). It would also be interesting to open a debate on the resources available to implement CLIL in universities: With the education budgets being squeezed, would it be viable and possible to provide a self-help manual or to create some kind of community of practice?

6. References

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