



The LSP-CLIL Interface in the University Context

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Abstract

The present paper purports to explore the relationship between LSP and CLIL in the context of tertiary level education. The distinction between the two seems sufficiently clear in theory, which postulates that LSP be single-focused on language as delineated by an analysis of student linguistic and communicative needs, while CLIL should simultaneously teach language and subject content through partial or total immersion, enhancing various learning mechanisms. However, in a university context this distinction is considerably obscured by the fact that learners, who are relatively proficient in the target language, are also pre-service and lacking in subject knowledge. Also, as the author's survey into the motivation of her legal English students clearly indicates, university learners have a strong and fully understandable expectation for a highly contextualized and cognitively demanding language instruction, which, would contain a considerable subject content component related to English and American legal systems. This poses a number of questions, ranging from the practitioner's dilemma of how best to teach contextualized and professionally relevant language - or how much real life simulation to include without neglecting the academic aspect of the language - to a theoretical issue of a factual distinction between LSP and CLIL in the light of student expectations. It appears that the real difficulty related to the latter lies in finding the correct balance between legal English and the two content elements present in all LSP instruction: the target language culture and professional subject matter. Unlike law practitioners, concerned exclusively with the pragmatics of English as the lingua franca of the international legal community, law students need likewise to gain some actual knowledge of the English and American legal culture, which necessitates the inclusion of a CLIL-like content element in the LSP instruction offered to them.

This paper presents an interpretation of the relationship between LSP and CLIL from the point of view of a university based ESP practitioner, who one day asked herself a question: What is it that I teach to my law students, a course of advanced English for Academic Legal Purposes with a considerable amount of subject or carrier content, or a CLIL course which might be labeled Introduction to Anglo-Saxon law, integrated with advanced English as a world language? After reviewing the scholarship, I have come to a conclusion that, unlike in lower educational contexts, in university settings the much emphasized ontological and epistemological differences between the two approaches have scant practical manifestation. Indeed, on closer scrutiny the difference between a language-embedded CLIL course of say American Legal System offered in English, and an advanced course of American legal English, becomes more a matter of language used to describe the underlying theoretical assumptions about language learning and teaching than actual classroom practices, provided both course are learner-centered, communication-oriented



and cognitively demanding. By saying this I am not implying that in tertiary education the distinction between CLIL and LSP does not hold. Rather, I hope to demonstrate here that there is so much convergence and interplay between the two approaches that they may be practically undistinguishable in their classroom realizations.

To begin with, let us briefly characterize the two approaches, as presented in the views of some of their most pronounced theorists. Based on what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) stated in their now classic books, ESP (and LSP by the same token) is an approach to language teaching which is based on and designed to meet learner work or study related needs, identified through a needs analysis. Though ESP is often designed for a specific discipline or occupation, it does not consist in teaching any specialized variety of English, or register, but instead it is concerned with all uses and rules of English, in which it parallels General English, though pays more attention to contextualization in order to ensure that learner occupational or educational needs be properly met. Being primarily concerned with developing learner communicative competence, ESP seeks to re-create target group's communication settings and situations in the classroom in an attempt to make language learning more focused, useful and meaningful to the learner and so, by tapping into the learner's motivation – also more efficient. To this end, ESP uses functional, situational or thematic syllabuses and a variety of communicative classroom activities, ranging from cognitively undemanding drills to role plays, simulations and other cognitively demanding tasks, which are sufficiently contextualized by the use of realistic interactional situations as well as authentic materials to facilitate acquisition of the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres used by the target professional or occupational group. Though it comes in many field- or occupation-specific varieties such as English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business Purposes (EBP) or English for Legal Purposes (ELP), which may suggest that non-linguistic content should play a role in the teaching and learning process, ESP has always been viewed as single focused on language and not concerned with achieving any non-linguistic objectives.

CLIL in turn, is a much broader approach to education which seeks to effectively integrate learning of a foreign (or second) language with learning of non-linguistic content. It takes a holistic view of content and language learning as occurring through integration of four contextualized building blocks: content, communication, cognition and culture, within the so-called 4Cs Framework (Coyle et al., 2010: 41). To put it differently, effective CLIL learning can only occur through a symbiosis of four, interrelated elements: subject matter, language learning and using, learning and thinking, and intercultural awareness, respectively. In the attempt to fuse language learning and content learning CLIL draws heavily on earlier similarly motivated approaches, especially the Canadian bilingual or immersion programs of the 1950's and 1960's. What makes it interesting is that it goes beyond the somewhat attractive idea of simply learning a subject in a foreign language and is doing - acquiring proficiency in the language of instruction in a quasi-natural way. The innovativeness of CLIL consists precisely in its dual focus, making it 'neither language learning nor subject learning but an amalgam of both' (Coyle et al, 2010:4). The idea that such integration should promote overall learning is based on a theory of learning which, owing both to the general learning theory and social constructivism, proposes that any effective learning requires not only careful scaffolding but also authentic social interaction and cognitive engagement, where knowledge of both the content and the language is acquired and/or constructed by the learner through active problem solving, negotiation of meaning and higher



thinking. While being invariably double focused, CLIL is generally content-driven although at a given point of CLIL education a course may be either language-led or content-led, depending on which set of learner needs is more important at the moment. Consequently, the amount of the so-called CLIL language or vehicular language through and with which the subject content is learned ranges from total immersion (where the vehicular language is used almost exclusively) to partial immersion, involving extensive code-switching between the CLIL language and the first language. As an approach to education concerned with satisfying learner need for better linguistic and communicative competence, CLIL is a communicative methodology in which a foreign language is used for authentic interaction and inquiry (research). In that, it achieves a high level of authenticity of purpose where learners become active participants in developing both their subject knowledge and language skills through problem solving and interaction. Underlying is a view of language as a matter of both form and meaning, created by discourse, in which the CLIL language is simultaneously 'the language of learning' (or target language), the 'language for learning' of content (vehicular language), and the 'language through learning', gained through negotiation of meaning occurring during social interaction and thinking (Doyle, 2010:36-37). It is therefore imperative that classroom communication settings be interactive, authentic and cognitively demanding to encourage learner engagement, without which this dialogic learning cannot occur.

Although the above brief characteristic of ESP (LSP) and CLIL has been written with view to bringing out their distinctive features, it nevertheless clearly points out to several areas of convergence. Firstly, both approaches are learner-centered in their attempt to base curriculum on properly identified learner needs and empowering the learners to make decisions about their own learning. Though the actual methods of learner needs analysis are more elaborate in LSP (where they often involve also target group needs analysis) than in CLIL, which typically uses simple placement tests, knowing where the learners stand in their input command of the target language (their lacks), where they need to arrive (desired learning outcomes) and what range of language will be needed for effective class participation, is viewed in both approaches as a necessary condition for effective scaffolding and structuring of the target language needed for optimization of classroom work. The implications of empowering learners to make decisions about their own learning are even more important, as both approaches subscribe to the backbone principle of communicative teaching that the learner's active involvement is a prerequisite to any effective learning. As a corollary of this principle, both LSP and CLIL propose that learning outcomes are best achieved by interaction and participation in meaningful, authentic, properly contextualized, and at least moderately cognitively demanding classroom activities, where by being actively engaged in the learning process learners assume at least partial responsibility for its outcomes.

The importance attached to interaction as a way in which and through which the learning outcomes are achieved is clearly indicative of a concern with communicative rather than linguistic competence, which is common to both approaches. That communicative performance should be stressed is hardly surprising given the basic objective of LSP and CLIL, which is to prepare learners for the challenge of globalization and multilingualism. Obviously, this emphasis has a bearing on the choice of teaching methods and classroom activities, with both approaches tending to favor communicative or eclectic methods and making extensive use of interactive classroom activities. It should be noted that both CLIL and contemporary LSP stress the need to base language teaching on tasks or problems, which 'require a learner to act primarily as a



language user and give focal attention to message conveyance' (Ellis, 2003:4-5). To put it differently, a task differs from other language classroom activities in that it is focused on meaning rather than form, has a clearly defined purpose or objective for learners to attain and is sufficiently cognitively demanding to ensure their active involvement. While CLIL has been problem-based from the beginning, the idea that learning is most effective when done by participation in authentic communicative acts is relatively new in foreign language teaching. However, thanks to the work of people like Nunan (1989) and Ellis (2003), it has quickly gained grounds among LSP teachers, who now routinely practice if not task-based than at least task-assisted teaching.

In addition to communicative methodology, developing learner communicative proficiency requires that considerable attention be paid to the target language culture, an imperative shared by both LSP and CLIL. The two approaches have also adopted a similar view of target culture as a feature of language understood as social practice rather than some information about native speakers conveyed by the target language. Consequently, rather than teach cultural facts, both ESP and CLIL seek to develop cultural awareness that would enhance learners' performance in the foreign language by allowing them to grasp native social and cultural meanings and thus enable learners to 'communicate appropriately with native speakers of the language, get to understand others and get to understand themselves in the process' (Kramsch, 1993:183). The two approaches also share the conviction that the best way to develop cultural awareness is by providing maximal exposure to authentic texts, created by native speakers for real communicative purposes and not to teach their language to foreigners. As stated above, these authentic texts should be used in activities that are related to the real world, focused on meaning rather than form and involve some pragmatic objective. Admittedly, this view of culture as a feature of language to be acquired through participation in authentic communicative acts is more pronounced in CLIL, where it is anchored in the holistic view of learning as made up of the 4Cs, which involves cultural awareness as one of its building blocks. However, it is also present in LSP, which, being interested in effective use of language in work- or school-related settings and situations, simply cannot ignore the socio-cultural dimension of linguistic communication. Interestingly, unlike CLIL which refrains from the practice of teaching culture as facts, the idea that some social and cultural meanings may have to be explicitly taught rather than naturally acquired by exposure appears to be present in some varieties of LSP, such as ELP, where relevant cultural facts that have shaped the Anglo-Saxon legal systems often need to be directly presented to learners who - coming from completely different legal cultures - would be otherwise unable to authenticate them.

The final area of convergence between CLIL and LSP has to do with the relationship between language and non-linguistic or subject content. While in CLIL the place of subject content is clearly defined as one of the two integrated elements, in LSP the issue of subject content is largely ignored, in keeping with the fundamental assumption that LSP should be single-focused on the target language and entirely language driven. However, in practice it is extremely hard to imagine a university course of legal English that would not involve some information on the Anglo-Saxon law, if for no other reason than to properly contextualize and authenticate classroom tasks. Moreover, the presence of some subject content is expected by tertiary-level learners, who tend to be cognitively rather than pragmatically oriented. In fact, a study into the expectations and motivation of law students enrolled in legal English courses at the University of Warsaw, which I conducted last spring, revealed that a decisive, 62% majority of students have chosen a legal



English class over a general English class precisely because they wished to gain some subject knowledge in addition to developing the language skills required for their future profession. This means, that while learning some non-linguistic content may not be a declared teaching objective of most LSP courses, it is likely to be a desired learning outcome. Considering that many university LSP courses not only use thematic syllabuses but are in fact content-based, it is perhaps time that LSP theorists stopped dismissing the issue and accept subject content as a secondary teaching focus. Obviously, this would put LSP even closer to CLIL, or to put it differently, move CLIL closer to its origin as language teaching and learning undertaken for a special – and specific – purpose, namely, to promote a target language by making it a medium of school instruction.

In light of the above, it is no wonder tertiary level language teachers, including myself find it extremely difficult to distinguish between some varieties of CLIL and LSP. Given that both approaches are concerned with developing learner language proficiency through communicative, task- or problem-based methodologies and with regard to meeting learner linguistic needs, the only difference between field-specific, language embedded CLIL courses of either language-based or adjunct types (Doyle, 2003:21-25) on the one hand, and language driven but content- and task-based LSP courses on the other, is in the degree of integration of language and content and the relative primacy of one over the other. Clearly, such courses belong in an overlap area between the two approaches, which is a lot larger than their theorists are willing to admit.

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