

LSP or CLIL in Tertiary Education: Different Perspectives on the Choice

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Abstract

In the global strive for effectiveness and sustainable results in the Education World, teaching/learning of languages at the tertiary level has been scrutinized not only by the directly involved actors (teachers and students), but also by university administration, curricula designers and policy makers. Since, in most cases, university and college students are supposed to “continue” studying the language(s) they learnt at schools, the content of the courses, offered at universities, is pre-conditioned by the level acquired at school as well as the national or supranational (as in the European Union) language policies. Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) as well as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) have been recognized as the most popular approaches to language teaching/learning at universities all over the world. The article suggests the analysis (based on the experimental activities) of these approaches from the perspectives of universities of two countries - Russia and Lithuania. The authors will debate the advantages and challenges of LSP and CLIL on the basis of their application at Vilnius and Tomsk universities. Such factors as course duration, the balance between content and language learning, and some methodology aspects will be analyzed from teachers' and students' perspectives on the basis of the conducted surveys, interviews, teachers' observations and reflections.

Keywords: *Content and language integrated learning, language for specific purposes, adjunct learning, learner-oriented teaching, language acquisition;*

1. Introduction

There is little left UNSAID about the applications of LSP or CLIL approaches in tertiary education; the theoretical aspects of these approaches have been developed since 1990s, besides, there has been done a lot of field research to supplement the theoretical principles and concepts with the “real classroom” data. Nevertheless, the choice between LSP and CLIL has not been determined and unanimously upheld yet; the effectiveness of this or that approach is subject to ever-changing teaching/learning environment, not only in terms of generation-specific features of teachers and learners, but also considering the peculiarities of pre-tertiary education systems, availability of experts, teachers' commitment and some other factors. The present paper is based on the authors' experience of teaching at the universities of Lithuania and Russia, the countries that about forty years ago shared a common vision of how to teach foreign languages at the tertiary level, but since then have developed their education policies separately. The authors do not claim to overview all the aspects of university language teaching in both countries, they offer the reflections based on their personal teaching experience and relate them to some theoretical issues of LSP and CLIL application.

Teaching LSP: what is the key word in LSP?

Purpose oriented teaching complies with the increased strive for effectiveness in all areas of human activities, that is one of undeniable characteristics of our society.

Although the term *Language for Specific Purposes* suggests the dominance of the word *language*, we believe the word “*purposes*” deserves some special consideration. For learners, the purpose might be more or less evident: the language needed is a specific content area (for example, specialization in family, criminal or commercial laws), but teachers, while creating an appropriate learning setting, should be able to relate the content area to specific language skills (comprehension and advising, presentation, arguing, summarizing, etc.).

Pre-requisites for a successful LSP course

The reflections on the accumulated experience in teaching LSP courses at the tertiary level allow us to distinguish several important elements of a successful language course.

As suggested above, **the awareness of a variety of specific purposes** is essential in designing, delivering or following a course. The content areas are possibly the easiest and less professionally

demanding for a teacher to decide on. For example, the legal English course offered to the 2nd year students of the Law Faculty at Vilnius University closely reflects the range of major subjects, taught in the respective terms (3rd & 4th terms): civil law, criminal law, EU law, international Law.

What might be less evident for the learner are the things you can accomplish through the language course: how to use language effectively to argue your point of view, how to construct a debate to achieve your aim, how to stay consistent and coherent. Actually, these skills are to a large extent transversal, not language-specific; when teaching this or that language, we can highlight the universal value of such skills, and we can also teach the specific functional language – English, German etc. – that serves to better achieve the set goal, whether it is to present your argument or to convince your counterpart, to summarise the results of negotiations, to review an article or to write an academic report.

Learner-oriented teaching is another important condition for a successful LSP course. The university setting suggests a less rigid learning environment as compared to the one at schools or short-term training courses. As our annual interviews and students' feedback show, students view LSP classes as an opportunity to use the target language in classroom debates, discussions, in solving legal problems in teams/pairs, in corresponding with future clients, etc. These activities are easily adapted to the needs or interests of some particular groups of students, they promote individual involvement, let students decide on their immediate priorities and make adjustment to the suggested learning content. The ratio between face-to-face sessions and independent work on the legal English course at Vilnius University is 1:2, i.e. the 270-hour course comprises 96 contact hours and 174 hours of self-studies.

The amount of time allocated for independent work allows to individualise such 'traditional' for university tasks as presentations on a chosen topic (certain freedom in the choice of topics, in using various presentation styles and various media), it also gives students a chance to revise some particular language topics (general English grammar, limited vocabulary, etc.)

A considerable amount of students' independent work is given to reading academic articles that are chosen according to the thematic area of students' course papers. For the legal English course, students have to write an extended summary of the articles they have read; then they present 'their findings' to their group mates during 'round-table' discussions, which proves to be useful in clarifying certain issues in the course papers.

Recommendations based on the LSP courses at Vilnius University

Since most school leavers in Lithuania have CEF Level B1 or Level B2, there is no need to spare university study time on the basic language issues; instead, Language for Specific Purposes courses are offered.

Designing a LSP course, the teacher should be well aware of the range of topics, relevant for the students, as well as the schedule of covering these topics/subjects. The information received in LSP classes is complimentary to that received in major subjects; it brings up different aspects of the issues under consideration (e.g. practice of law in other countries).

While delivering a LSP course, the teacher should exploit 'additional values' of a language course: awareness of language importance in various forms of communication, transversal skills, functional language. The suggested activities and tasks should resemble real-life situations and professional needs.

The LSP course should be learner-oriented. Such tasks as preparing individual presentation, choosing and reading academic articles, debating, round-table discussions promote students' engagement and raise the effectiveness of the course.

Let us consider the other focus point of the article as CLIL, often viewed as an alternative to LSP at the tertiary level.

Teaching CLIL: what is the main purpose in CLIL?

As we can see from the recent surveys (María Pérez-Cañado, 2011) CLIL is clearly on its way to becoming obligation, not an option, for higher education. Against the background of internationalization and globalization perspectives, educational institutions face the need to create borderless education that entails the challenge of programme competitiveness and language acquisition. CLIL is considered as a driver for both.



Pre-requisites for successful CLIL

CLIL is an approach to learning oriented towards achievement of a dual objective, where a foreign language is used as a means of teaching content and at the same time as the object of study. Specific nature of CLIL courses is the right balance between the difficulty of content and language. This balance can be achieved by careful planning and selection of content that has a linguistic potential, as well as a simultaneous selection of language that is most typical for a professional field (Ting, 2011). In other words, **cLil** = simple content + complex language or **CLil** = complex content + simple language. That is, the increase in linguistic complexity should be compensated by a decrease in professional content complexity and vice versa. Therefore, CLIL implies changes to the traditional repertoires of language and non-language teachers, requiring the development of a special approach where educators work collaboratively to formulate new didactics for “a real integration and function in language teaching” (Marsh, 2008).

CLIL Practice at Russian University

The transmission to CLIL-based teaching in Russian universities was not so easy. The main reason for it was that the approach has not been well-termed yet and had the lack of practice base. In spite of quite “long existence” in the world pedagogy, CLIL application is compounded with some differences in cultural backgrounds and social-educational patterns, established in the world countries. All said above can be underpinned with the following quotations: “there is no single blueprint of content and language integration that could be applied in the same way in different countries – no model is for export” (Marsh, 2012); “CLIL resembles acupuncture: it works but nobody seems to know why” (Van de Craen, 2007) that required own field research; “the political support for CLIL teaching is generally strong, concrete guidance and support for teachers implementing it are largely absent” (Wiesemes, 2009).

Thereby, on the one hand, CLIL format promises much but on the other hand, it remains some questions open, and here are only some of them: which language level should teachers possess to be able to deliver a CLIL course? Can a CLIL course be of a general academic nature, e.g. academic writing, scientific communication? What should be the nature of cooperation between language and content departments? Can this course repeat some content previously learned in a native language? Is language or content a primary objective of a CLIL course?

The table below gives the succinct specification of the CLIL practice at Tomsk Polytechnic University and presents the types of learning activities and the important “quality parameters” as Lesson pace and Student engagement.

CLIL practice at Tomsk Polytechnic University

Practice 1	Practice 2
<p>Course: Computer Aided Analysis (Bachelor 3 year)</p> <p>Integration into programme: extension to a previously taught course</p> <p>Proficiency in English (professor/students): B1/-A2-B1-B2</p> <p>Use of Russian: 100 %</p> <p>Teaching objective: to teach how to operate information in English</p> <p>Organization: translation of an article into Russian</p> <p>Lesson pace: low</p> <p>Student engagement: low</p>	<p>Course: Powerful Gas Lasers (Master 1 year)</p> <p>Integration into programme: new course</p> <p>Proficiency in English (professor/students): B2/A1-B1</p> <p>Use of Russian: no</p> <p>Teaching objective: to teach professional concepts in English</p> <p>Organization: game, discussion, peer teaching</p> <p>Lesson pace: low</p> <p>Student engagement: high</p>
Practice 3	Practice 4
<p>Course: Algorithms and Data Structures (Bachelor 3 year)</p> <p>Integration into programme: extension to a</p>	<p>Course: Introduction to Databases (Bachelor 3 year)</p> <p>Integration into programme: extension to a</p>



<p>Russian-mediated co-requisite Proficiency in English (professor/students): B2/B1 Use of Russian: bilingual textbook Teaching objective: to teach professional concepts in English Organization: advising students in preparing a lab report Lesson pace: low Student engagement: moderate</p>	<p>previously taught course Proficiency in English (professor/students): B2/B1 Use of Russian: to explain difficult concepts Teaching objective: to teach professional concepts in English Organization: active learning techniques Lesson pace: low Student engagement: high</p>
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Let us give the clarification to each case presented in the table.

Practice 1. The objective of the course was to develop general academic skills and was not focused on professional content directly. The students were taught to translate technical texts, specifics of English phrases and terminology. Although the place of the discipline is defined in the programme, its content seems inconsistent and disagrees with programme objectives. It is not clear how the skills of analysing, searching and processing data are integrated into the whole course. Observation showed that insufficient linguistic preparedness of a teacher additionally increased complexity of the course. The language level of students was also different and sometimes exceeded that of the teacher. As a result, the native language was constantly used and the foreign language failed as a communication tool; cognitive processes ran in Russian as well. This negatively influenced students' motivation and engagement.

Practice 2. The purpose of the lesson was to get acquainted with the basic concepts of the subject area, which fully corresponds to the CLIL format. At the same time, it should be noted that the volume of knowledge has been significantly reduced and the pace of training dropped as compared with a similar discipline implemented in Russian. The level of proficiency in the teacher's knowledge is much higher than the language level of the students. Active methods are used; this ensures high involvement of students in the process, interaction with one another, high concentration and interest. This practice can be considered as successful.

Practice 3. The educational objective is not clearly stated. In part, it touches upon the terminology. The course is not clearly placed in the programme. Ambiguous objectives lead to the lack of motivation among students because it is difficult to learn something without firm understanding for what you are doing it. Pedagogical methods are obscure. Communication observed during the lesson did not lead to any learning outcomes.

Practice 4. The lesson objective corresponds to the CLIL model, the level of the language proficiency of a teacher and students is adequate. The students are actively involved, although linguistic materials have not been normalized. The teacher conducts the lesson in English. Russian is sometimes used to explain terms. Active methods are used. Students' engagement is high.

Conclusion

It is evident that different pedagogical approaches appear in response to emerging professional and social needs and challenges. The application of LSP and CLIL at Vilnius and Tomsk universities do not allow deciding which one is better. The choice is determined by goals and available resources (human and material). The main principle in choosing is feasibility and applicability at a place. There is no need to start CLIL if you do not have the resource or special need for it, the chase for being innovative can lead to the results with the "minus sign". Meanwhile, if LSP is a well-established practice and complies with the university policy and curricula, there is no need to replace it with new "more innovative" approaches.

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