The Possibilities of a Common Uniform Understanding of CLIL within an Institution

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Abstract

The present paper provides an overview of the CLIL training development at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, particularly the structure and principles of CLIL classes conducted in the specialities of Police Service, Border Guards, Customs and Taxation, Rescue Service and Emergency Dispatchers (both vocational and professional higher education level). The paper could be divided into three major sections, firstly, a brief overview of the demographics in Estonia forming the basis for the need of foreign language instruction in Russian and English. Secondly, the curriculum development in the past ten academic years and, in particular, its implementation in the past three years (the standard period of studies in higher education curricula). It also features the role of professional standards as set by the Estonian Qualifications Authority and the requirements by the state agencies commissioning the respective student places. The third part of the presentation focusses on the preliminary results of the internal questionnaire and focus interviews conducted among the lecturers participating in CLIL classes in Russian and English. The study was conducted in order to explore the possible variations in the understanding of CLIL principles among language and speciality lecturers. The current small-scale study aims at exploring to what extent the selection of practical methods and the role of the language teacher in the class depend on the speciality lecturer's understanding of the CLIL concepts.

Keywords: *CLIL implementation, curriculum development, vocational and higher education, cooperation between language and subject teacher, subject and language competences.*

1. Instruction at EASS

Our topic is related to the CLIL training at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences. Our institution provides instruction for specialities of Police Service, Border Guards, Customs and Taxation, Rescue Service and Emergency Dispatchers both on vocational and professional higher education level. However, at first, it is important to mention that although Estonia has one official language, it is actually a bilingual country with around a third of the entire population using Russian as their first language. There are regional and age-related differences in the Estonian language skills with more such people living in the eastern parts of the country and around the capital and with mostly older generations lacking the respective skills.

Younger generations of Russian-speakers know the Estonian language rather well due to changes in educational policy, integration programmes etc. On the other hand, younger generations of Estonians no longer speak Russian which used to be the first foreign language taught at school during the Soviet period. However, in the internal security services, the knowledge of Russian is as important as Estonian, and in the capital Tallinn, also English plays an important role due to tourism and foreign workforce. As the graduates of EASS are awarded also the respective qualification by the Estonian Qualifications Authority, our curriculum development relies strongly on the cooperation with the respective state institutions (e.g. Police and Border Guard Board, Tax Office etc). For the given reason, our academy has implemented a particular foreign language system in which students first get 60 hours of English/ 108 hours of Russian of general foreign language instruction on levels A1-B1 followed by 54 or 72 hours of work-related foreign language classes on B2 level (LSP), and since 2011, there have also been additional CLIL classes increasing in number as follows:

In academic year 2012/2013 – CLIL classes in 9 speciality courses
In 2013/2014 – CLIL classes in 15 speciality courses
Since 2017/2018 – each year at least 18 academic hours of CLIL in Russian and English.

The colleges and academic departments are free in selecting the appropriate subject courses that will have additional CLIL classes. Lecturers have been provided respective training and, in theory, they should be well equipped for the CLIL instruction. It should be noted that the increase in the number of

CLIL classes is partly also determined by the positive feedback from the EASS students on the effectiveness (in their opinion) of language and subject integrated classes.

2. The aim of the study and sampling

One of the main reasons for conducting the study was to find out how our subject teachers understand the essence of CLIL concepts and practise. In other words, although CLIL has been implemented in our academy for almost ten years already, in our daily practise as language teachers we have encountered various understandings of and approaches to this kind of instruction. For instance, some subject teachers seem to presume that in CLIL classes, the language teacher simply does all the work, in other cases, the subject teacher merely provides a scientific article on a related topic and asks the language teacher to "do something" with it, or the entire process is undertaken just to tick the required box in the curriculum on *ad hoc* basis. There are naturally also lecturers who have grasped the key aims and methods and work together with language teachers to make the most of the given opportunity. The main tool for the current small-scale qualitative research was an anonymous questionnaire compiled by authors including altogether 19 questions with both close and open-ended questions. In the current presentation, we will not consider the responses to two questions (about the basis for selecting the teaching methods) that will be left for the next stage of the study.

There were 15 respondents in the preliminary questionnaire including 12 subject lecturers whose mother tongue is Estonian, two with Russian as their first language, and one bilingual lecturer. In terms of level of instruction, seven of them taught at both vocational and higher education level, while four respondents respectively taught either only vocational or higher education level. Four lecturers had experience in CLIL classes in English, five in Russian and six in both given foreign languages. The majority of respondents had taught CLIL classes in the Police and Border Guard College, one in the Financial College (i.e. in the field of customs control), one in the College of Justice (i.e. in the field of prison service) and one respondent did not define the speciality. With the exception of one teacher, all respondents had experience in working with more than one language teacher.

3. Conceptual framework

It can be assumed that the certain discrepancy in the understanding of CLIL by all participants in the educational process arises from the CLIL scholars' noted flexibility of the approach as an "innovative fusion" of both subject and language education and it can be adapted to different contexts [1]. However, Coyle et al claim that for the CLIL approach "to be justifiable and sustainable, its theoretical basis must be rigorous and transparent in practise" [2]. Thus, Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter critically analysed the existing meanings of CLIL, which do not distinguish it from the other forms of content-based L2 education clearly enough [3]. Along with the lack of conceptual clarity in the various definitions of CLIL, they note, referring to the leading CLIL scholars [4], in particular the differences regarding the distribution of the volume of content and language as 50% and 50% or 90% and 10%, or the impossibility of achieving proper balance between content and language at all [5].

As an initial theoretical and methodological setting, we relied on the following differences between the concepts of CLIL and EMI (English, or other L2 as well, as a medium of instruction) (see Table 1) [6].

Table 1. Differences between the concepts of CLIL and EMI

Comparable aspects	CLIL	EMI
The essence of the method	Integrated content and language learning	English as a medium of instruction
Learning methods and environment: language and subject (content)	CLIL lecturer provides the environment, context of where and how the vocabulary is used	EMI lecturer teaches subjects through the target language. EMI lesson is a regular lesson with emphasis on the subject, not the language.
The role and responsibility of content and language lecturers	Content lecturer can do CLIL tasks. Language lecturer provides language. Teaching is carried out in cooperation with the language and subject lecturers.	All activities are carried out only by the content lecturer. Language lecturer is not involved. Language lecturer may help the content lecturer prepare for the course.
Teaching techniques	Language teaching support (from language lecturer to content lecturer)	No language teaching techniques Clear instructions in English (classroom English)
Feedback	Feedback can be given in both the language taught in and the trainees' mother tongue	Little or no feedback on language (feedback on concepts and vocabulary, not grammar)
Learning materials	Authentic learning material (environment); 95% of content and 5% of language assessment	Authentic material (little or no emphasis on language)

4. Findings

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to choose the statements that best correspond to their understanding of CLIL instruction. The statements were as follows:

1. An educational approach in which the subject is taught through the medium of a foreign language.
2. CLIL is the simultaneous learning of a subject and a foreign language.
3. CLIL is the synthesis of the aims of foreign language and subject instruction.
4. CLIL is primarily the instruction of professional terminology and key topics in a foreign language.
5. CLIL is primarily the instruction of a subject enriched by the foreign language component (added value).

The first statement is traditionally taken as the definition of instruction conducted in a foreign language (e.g. EMI). The fourth statement primarily corresponds to LSP, i.e. language for specific purposes (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the preferences in the specified statements

Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Statement 4	Statement 5
1	11	7	11	9

As can be seen from the answers, lecturers mainly understand CLIL as the simultaneous instruction of a subject and a foreign language (11 respondents) or as a subject instruction further enhanced by the foreign language dimension (9). However, it is worth noting that the same number of responses (11) also agreed to the statement that actually corresponds to LSP – as the given aims (i.e. study of terminology and key concepts in a foreign language) are actually covered by our professional foreign language courses, it partly explains our practical CLIL experience where subject teachers did not always consider their own input as relevant in proportion.

When asked about the differences between a regular class and a CLIL lesson, they mostly highlighted the merit of practical use of the foreign language in a work-related situation (6) which is ideally made as realistic as possible, e.g.:

> In the given class, students solved situations in a foreign language, whenever possible we included so-to-speak outsiders to act the parts. Thus it was a practical class with as realistic activities as possible.
> The speciality and language instruction together support the student's development, give them an understanding how to use the knowledge of both in their future work.
> In regular language instruction, the topic could be a lexical or grammatical issue. In an integrated class, the topic could be a particular situation.

However, five respondents stressed the importance of reinforcing professional terminology. One respondent highlighted the supremacy of communication over the subject instruction.

Similar understandings were revealed also in the responses to the question about the aims of CLIL implemented at EASS. In seven responses, lecturers prioritised the importance of preparing the students for real work situations that can be unpredictable and therefore require that the foreign language be internalised (i.e. practised in various "fieldwork" situations) rather than merely learned as a list of terminology. Three respondents highlight the synthesis of the aims of both foreign language and subject instruction enhancing the student's development in both. For instance, they considered CLIL to be the synthesis of the aims of the speciality content and foreign language instruction. For two lecturers, it was still primarily professional foreign language and terminology acquisition rather than the internalisation and practical use of functional language.

Respondents were also asked about their CLIL experience so far and the features contributing to the success or failure of a CLIL class. Six respondents listed the learning environment among the features they liked most about their CLIL experience – it differed from the regular classroom setting and attempted to simulate real work situations. On two occasions, the learning environment was also attributed to taking pressure off from using a foreign language. Seven lecturers stressed the inclusion/involvement of students in classroom activities, and with the presence of two teachers in the instruction, it was not easy for students to hide themselves at the back of the room. Also the support of the academic staff was underlined encouraging students to simplify their language use rather than cling to the stiff and complicated legal jargon acquired during LSP classes. Four respondents could not mention any negative experiences. On four occasions the negative features contributing to the failure of a CLIL class were related to the modesty, low motivation, passiveness or even the hostility of students. One respondent mentioned the importance of explaining the essence of and need for such classes to students, thus hopefully improving their involvement in the case studies even if they are bystanders or observers (see Table 3).

Table 3. The positive and negative features noted by the respondents

The positive features	The negative features
Taking the tension off from the students when they need to use the foreign language in a work situation. Learning environment and the inclusion of students. In general, it was interesting, because in the classes that I attended there was more emphasis on the subject and the language instruction merely supported it. All students were involved in the simulations as CLIL was conducted in groups and all students had to participate. The language classes are still regular classroom lessons, but in CLIL you cannot sit quietly in the corner – you must resolve the case studies. The learning environment and the involvement of students were a change, also the cooperation with the other lecturer was fun for me as well as for the students.	The timidity of students The students' occasional passiveness The general problem with CLIL is that it is chronologically either before or after the language instruction. CLIL should be better planned, that is, they should have earlier knowledge in language and in their speciality and only then we start the integrating. Sometimes, the motivation of some students to learn languages is very low, if not non-existent, or they even have a hostile attitude to it. The low involvement of students, when 2-3 are involved in resolving a case study, most of the others think that it's not for them.

When asked about their understanding of a successful CLIL class, four lecturers highlighted the students' unassisted performance in resolving the case studies in simulations. Three respondents prioritised the successful cooperation between language and subject teacher, while three lecturers stress the importance of students realising the value of such skills and opportunities resulting from

active participation. The components of a failed CLIL class mainly included the students' low motivation (3), stress (1) or lack of understanding of the aim of the CLIL class. One respondent highlighted the problem of unmotivated students but did not consider the class as a failure for the given reason. On two occasions, respondents mentioned the students' insufficient subject knowledge or language skills in resolving the case studies. One respondent mentioned the lack of cooperation with the other teacher, while another lecturer brought out the lack of support from the subject teacher. General lack of communication was mentioned once (see Table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' comments on the success and failure of CLIL classes

Success	Failure
When the students can actually use what they have learned. *Students can calmly resolve their speciality case studies in a foreign language using professional terminology.* *When the cooperation with the other teacher went smoothly, all planned activities were accomplished.* *The students have actively participated in the class and understood the need for the foreign language skills.* *Active communication* *Students acquire knowledge in the speciality and also terms in the foreign language. The learning motivation is high.*	*Students in stress* *Low learning motivation* *Lack of communication* *The student doesn't understand the situation and cannot express themselves.* *There is no smooth cooperation with the other teacher.* *Students do not understand the need for such a class.* *The lecturers work hard and learn, students are passive and have no interest.* *When the CLIL class is conducted only by the language teacher with no support from the speciality lecturer.*

5. Discussion

As it was mentioned above, the current small-scale study aims at exploring the extent to which the selection of practical methods and the role of the language teachers in the class depend on the speciality lecturer's understanding of the CLIL concepts. There was a question about the principles that the respondents follow when choosing teaching methods for CLIL classes with most of them basing their selection on the inclusion of the students into a more active learning process. They also highlight the importance of efficiency so that each student could make the most of the little time allocated for practical classes. There was similarly a tendency to choose teaching methods on the basis of the learning outcomes and the practical use of work-related skills. On the other hand, also the importance of cooperation with language teachers in selecting methods was stressed in order ensure the balanced synthesis between language and content. Thus, as shown by the current research, there are no uniform criteria in the choice of teaching methods and techniques among our respondents, i.e. the teachers of CLIL, the main task of which is focusing on the content and language goals. The diversity of teaching methods applied by various scholars and educators has been described in various handbooks of CLIL [7]. However, lecturers tend to rely on particular individual or group needs and level of language skills rather than the methodological tools suggested by practising educators and CLIL researchers. Thus, the lack of common criteria in the CLIL methodology could be problematic in crafting a system accessible to every educator in our establishment.

We also wanted to know about the lecturer's understanding of the distribution of the volume of content and language during preparation and conduct of CLIL classes. Here we detected a little discrepancy, as although theories of CLIL mainly state the division should be 90:10 with the emphasis still on the subject instruction, our respondents had a different understanding. Namely, seven of the respondents said that the workload of the speciality and language teachers in preparing for the CLIL class should be equal, while only three of the respondents said that the language teacher merely provides the terminology and/or language support. One of the respondents stressed the importance of cooperation so that neither of the teachers would be left only as a passive bystander. There were similar tendencies in the responses to the questions about the workload distribution in conducting the CLIL classes with seven respondents preferring 50:50 division, one respondent stating 60:40 with the weight on the subject lecturer. One of the respondents believed that it all depends on the aim of the particular class. So the responses correspond to the frequent problem that has been voiced also by other practising colleagues in other language teaching conferences – it seems that as the lecturers are paid equally for CLIL classes, also the contribution is automatically expected to be of such proportions.

This, in addition to the misconception of CLIL as LSP revealed in the definitions above, once again highlights the need for recurrent (preferably annual) revision and discussion to ensure clarity in understanding the principles and features of CLIL in our institution.

Citations

[1]   See Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010
[2]   Ibid, p.1
[3]   See Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter 2014
[4]   Authors refer to Marsh 2002, Mehisto 2008, Ting 2010 and other scholars
[5]   See Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter 2014: 244-245
[6]   Here we draw on our earlier article, where we compare the specifics of CLIL and EMI, see Soidla et al 2016: 44-45
[7]   E.g. Dale & Tanner 2012.

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