



Selecting CLIL Materials at University Through Investigation of Language Variety Preferences and Their Causes Among Students

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Abstract

Investigating CLIL is a continuing concern within the field of English language teaching. Central to this approach is the concept of integrating both content and language in the learning process. Application of the approach to various learning environments has been studied by many scholars. However, recent developments in new technologies have heightened the need for reconsideration of CLIL materials while taking into account current trends in teaching and learning languages. What is not yet clear is the impact of different factors that (have) shape(d) the language of (university) students. This may indicate the importance of understanding the English variety preferences among students and their causes. Therefore, this paper attempts to show that the investigation of these factors may serve as a guide towards selecting appropriate CLIL materials which could be also used with university students when teaching culture, history, media, etc. The aim of the study is to shine new light on this topic from a different perspective. The study was conducted using a quantitative research method, with data being gathered via a survey on a sample of 2nd year students of the English language and literature (in combination). The study seeks to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the selection process of CLIL materials while taking into consideration students' language variety preferences and causes of those preferences.

Keywords: CLIL, higher education, language variety, students.

1. Introduction

Proper selection of CLIL materials can be considered an important component in the process of the successful implementation of this approach. The issue of CLIL has received considerable attention and is a continuing concern within the field of English language teaching. Recent trends in language teaching have led to a proliferation of various materials that can be used in the learning process. This indicates a need to meet the learners' expectations and requirements.

This paper attempts to show that by analysing the factors which affect the language variety of learners it is possible to select the CLIL materials properly in accordance with learners' needs.

Thus, it seeks to address the question of the relationship between material selection and factors which shape the language of language learners. Moreover, the study offers some important insights into the issue of English varieties, the learners' preferences, sources of those preferences and overall awareness of the language varieties among the learners.

The paper consists of two main parts. The first part deals with the theoretical background to the topic while the latter presents the research methodology, data analysis and findings. Throughout this dissertation, the term CLIL will be used to refer to Content and Language Integrated Learning.

1.1 Theoretical Background

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the topic of CLIL and its role in language learning and teaching. In her study, Çekrezi Biçaku [1] draws our attention to some of the advantages of the CLIL approach, such as motivation enhanced by purposeful content, language learning being at the centre of curriculum through multiple language practice, meaningful/real contexts, time efficiency due to greater exposure to language and a variety of teaching methods through integration of different disciplines. Moreover, as Sepešiová [7] argues, "Learner-centred approach, as CLIL is regarded to be, belongs to the active learning methods because teachers act as facilitators and all the work involvement and thinking is put on learners" (p. 131).

A study by Cimermanová [3] deals with the notion of developing CLIL materials while emphasising the fact that CLIL teachers should be familiar with the concept of the approach, be open to collaboration and cooperation and be prepared to create materials which would consider dual aims of the approach and at the same time reflect learners' needs.

Dack et al. [4] discusses the development of pragmatic competence as a result of CLIL implementation since the approach not only gives many opportunities to produce language, but also



puts special emphasis on purposeful input. Besides the pragmatic competence, Yang, W.-hsien [9] discusses the importance and possible development of the cross-cultural competence as well through the implementation of CLIL at tertiary level. Similarly, Straková [8] highlights the importance to begin with the proper CLIL training at tertiary level, i.e. in a teacher training programme, to enhance its application in practice.

Overall, these studies highlight the need for authentic meaningful materials which would meet learner's expectations and requirements. Therefore, by analysing the factors which may affect students' language variety preferences it may be possible to clarify the issue of selection and/or creation of suitable CLIL materials.

2. Research Methodology and Aims

The methodology applied in this study was a quantitative approach based on a questionnaire with various types of questions. The design of the questionnaires was based on multiple choice (6 questions), Likert scale (7 questions) and open-ended questions (1 question) which were distributed among seventy-one 2nd year students of the teacher training programme – English language and literature (in combination with a second subject).

This semi-structured approach was chosen because it allowed the respondents to express their opinions and attitudes more freely. Therefore, the study used mainly quantitative analysis in order to investigate the relationship between the selection process of CLIL materials and the factors affecting the preference of the respondents' English variety. Furthermore, the study also seeks to suggest possible CLIL materials to be used at university in subjects such as media, history, culture (of English-speaking countries).

3. Data Analysis and Research Findings

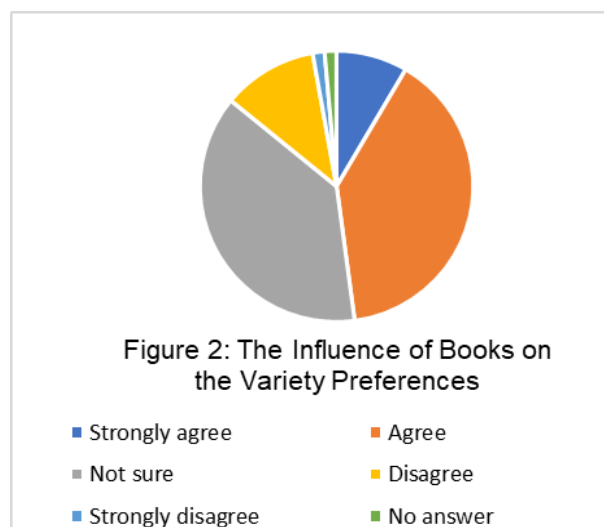
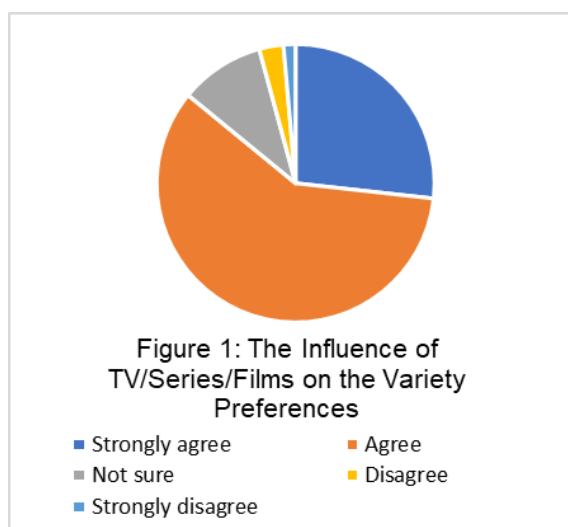
Based on the data, the majority of the respondents had been learning English for more than 10 years, are interested in English varieties and consider the knowledge of them to be important. When asked about the preference, British (56%) and American (44%) varieties were selected among the respondents (sometimes both). Han [5] provides the analysis of the major English varieties, i.e. British and American which, according to our data, also appear to be most dominant among the students.

58% of the responses indicated that the reason for their choice was the accent, i.e. how the variety "sounds" while 29% of the responses consider the country where the variety is mainly spoken to be a decisive factor. Others find the variety more challenging to learn, or provided their own answer, such as: because it is the most common English language variety, because they were exposed to it more often and/or the variety was taught at schools by (native) teachers. Some respondents chose more than one option which is why the percentage reflects the frequency of the responses provided.

In response to another question, the majority of the respondents (72%) reported they often watch TV, series, films in English, whereas 86% either agreed or strongly agreed that it was a factor which had had an influence on their English variety preferences.

When asked about books, 18% of the respondents reported they often read books in English, others chose the following options: sometimes (49%), rarely (24%), never (9%). 48% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the English books they read had influenced their English variety preferences. On the other hand, 38% were not sure and the rest of the respondents disagreed, strongly disagreed or did not provide their answer.

Figures 1 and 2 present the data visually using a pie chart. Based on the data we may conclude that the learners' preferences were influenced by digital media, i.e. TV (series, films) to a greater extent compared to the influence by books. This finding may represent the inclination of the younger generation towards digital media.



When asking about other factor(s) which had influenced the English variety preferences, the respondents mentioned especially communication with native speakers, English speaking friends, family, various apps, social media, podcasts, video games, radio, TV shows/news, magazines, audio books, teachers of English, showbiz, time spent in an English-speaking country (e.g. working abroad) or the country itself (lifestyle, accent), songs/music, blogs, videos, articles, the fact that British English is taught at schools, study material, “simplicity” of the variety in terms of understanding.

In further investigation, 42% of the respondents (strongly) agreed they try not to mix different varieties in written/oral language whereas 58% were either not sure or disagreed with the statement. In addition, 68% are aware of the fact that sometimes they accidentally mix different English varieties.

A very interesting fact emerged from the data when asked about the use of dictionaries for the purpose of finding more information about words in terms of the respondents' language varieties (e.g. form, pronunciation). More than half of the respondents were either not sure or (strongly) disagreed with the statement. However, almost all of the respondents would like to improve their language skills in other English varieties in the future.

4. Conclusion

This study has discussed the English variety preferences among the learners, causes of those preferences and their relationship with the selection of CLIL materials. Based on the data, the findings suggest that the most dominant varieties among the learners are British and American, which was due to various factors, education (the dominant variety taught at schools is British, (native) teachers, English speaking friends/family, the nature of the English-speaking countries and learners' interest in them, etc.

Taking into consideration latest trends and technological advances, the learners also expressed their interest in PC games, videos, TV series, shows, podcasts, etc. Moreover, as the data suggest, these factors play an important role in the formation of language variety preferences. This finding is in accordance with the study by Choomthong and Manowong [2] who also consider popular media as one of the factors affecting the way learners perceive different varieties of English. It may be assumed that podcasts, music can be used as CLIL materials especially because of the fact that the sources mentioned are close to learners' interests and have an impact on their language variety. This notion is also reflected in the study by Oddone [6] who draws the attention to the use of video in a CLIL classroom while emphasising the authenticity of CLIL material compared to traditional ways of teaching languages which use predominantly graded material.

Taken together, these findings highlight an important role of the factors shaping the language in promoting proper selection of CLIL materials. The current investigation was limited by the number of respondents, thus further research is recommended to establish greater accuracy on the matter.



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