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The Pedagogical Value of Literature as a Tool to Teach EFL through a CLIL Approach in Spanish Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This paper offers an alternative approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language in Spanish secondary schools and highlights the benefits of using English literature for language learning within a CLIL methodology. It will do so by exploring the potential application that literature might have by building on each of the four theoretical principles of CLIL: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture. The validity of the view offered in this study relies on conclusions drawn from a variety of scholars worldwide that support the pedagogical usefulness of both CLIL and of literary texts for effectively learning a foreign language. This paper will conclude that the use of English literature through a CLIL approach in the EFL class may have limitless potential in enhancing Spanish secondary students' English linguistic skills while providing them with both content knowledge and intercultural competence which will contribute to develop their cognitive abilities to the highest levels.

Keywords: CLIL, teaching EFL, English literature, 4Cs Framework, Spanish Secondary schools

Resumen

Este trabajo propone un enfoque alternativo a la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en centros Españoles de educación secundaria y destaca los beneficios del uso de la literatura inglesa como herramienta para aprender el idioma a través de un enfoque AICLE. Para ello se analizará la posible aplicación práctica que puede tener la literatura inglesa tomando como base cada uno de los principios teóricos de la metodología AICLE: Contenido, Comunicación, Cognición y Cultura. La validez de la perspectiva que se ofrece en este estudio deriva de las conclusiones de una amplia variedad de académicos a nivel mundial que defienden el valor pedagógico tanto de la metodología AICLE como del uso de textos literarios como medios para aprender un

idioma de forma efectiva. En la conclusión de este trabajo se establece que el uso de la literatura inglesa a través de un enfoque AICLE en la clase de inglés puede tener un potencial ilimitado a la hora de desarrollar las habilidades lingüísticas en inglés de estudiantes españoles de secundaria además de proporcionarles aprendizaje de contenidos y adquisición de competencia intercultural, los cuales contribuirán a desarrollar al máximo sus habilidades cognitivas.

Palabras clave: AICLE, Enseñanza de inglés, Literatura inglesa, modelo de las 4 Cs, centros españoles de Educación Secundaria

Glossary

AICLE: Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras

BOE: Boletín Oficial del Estado (Official State Bulletin)

CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning

CBI: Content-based instruction

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FLT: Foreign Language Teaching

HOTS: High Order Thinking Skills

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an emergent educational approach in which a foreign language is used as a means to learn content matter and multicultural values "from a cognitively challenging perspective" (Ionnaou and Ramírez 1). CLIL promotes a comprehensive dimension of language learning since it is not limited to the acquisition of communicative linguistic skills and content, but it also helps to develop cultural and cognitive skills. The core principles of CLIL are thus Content, Communication, Culture and Cognition, comprised in the so-called 4 Cs Framework.

CLIL has served as a theoretical foundation for bilingual programmes that have spread across Spain. Consequently, content subjects are being redesigned to be taught using English as a means of instruction. Many research projects support the positive outcomes of such programmes so far (Consejo escolar, Álvarez-Cofiño, Llinares and Whittaker). In the meantime the EFL class has remained unchanged even though "a radical rethinking of the subject" (Ortells 97) is required. Such need for improvement derives from the insufficient, inauthentic and functionally restricted input offered in the traditional EFL class (Lasagabaster 13). On the basis of the positive results of CLIL programmes that the aforementioned research studies suggest, it could be claimed that organizing the Secondary EFL class in Spain around CLIL principles could be a way to offer a more authentic and effective approach to language learning.

Although any type of authentic material or content matter may help develop the four principles in the 4C's framework for CLIL, the use of literary texts could be a particularly enriching material for implementing this model within the EFL class. Literary texts in English have the potential to provide English students with an authentic

way of presenting language in context and cultural values (Bobkina and Domínguez 250). It does so in a cognitively challenging way due to the interactive process of meaning construction that literature requires (Erkaya 5). Therefore, it could be claimed that there is a point of convergence between the objectives of CLIL and literature and that literary texts may perfectly fit into the above mentioned 4 Cs framework. The learning outcomes of the use of literature in the EFL class are particularly interesting at secondary level due to the comprehension skills that secondary students should have gained by then. This paper aims to describe the benefits of teaching English literature within a CLIL approach since it may serve as a valuable learning tool in the teaching of EFL in Spanish secondary schools.

2. Definition of CLIL

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an emergent perspective on Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) that safeguards the teaching of a content subject whilst promoting the use of a foreign language as a medium for learning (Coyle 27). It has arisen from the need to improve the quality standards of traditional language education as well as to confront the modern challenges of a globalised world and a multilingual Europe (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 5). Even though CLIL builds on previous approaches to FLT such as Content-Based Instruction, it is certainly an innovative methodology as it offers the most integrative view of FLT known so far. This integrative perspective is reflected in the four fundamental pillars of CLIL, comprised in the so-called 4Cs Framework: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture.

CLIL practice entails that students face the mental challenge of decoding meaning after having formally processed a message conveyed through a foreign language (Muñoz 19). According to Coyle, Hood and Marsh, the synchronized

activation of such multi-leveled thinking processes fosters students' engagement in higher order thinking skills (54). A process of scaffolding compensates such an intense cognitive effort: Scaffolding implies that students progress from simpler to more demanding learning challenges as they gain higher comprehension skills. Therefore, previous knowledge is used as a "firm foundation and as an anchor for new learning" (Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols 141). Scaffolding is a key principle within the CLIL approach and, as a consequence, CLIL programmes provide students with a sense of purpose and progression and are thus motivated to keep climbing up the learning ladder.

A second motivating factor within CLIL practice is the students' interest in the subject matter. The content must be carefully selected as it is meant to be authentic, relevant for the students (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols) and it also must "allow students to explore and to ponder on cultural topics self-reflexively" (González and Borham, 110). Another objective of CLIL is students' development of communicative competence in a foreign language. The communication process within a CLIL approach is promoted by offering a "real-life situation" (Goris 29) to the students. The compulsory use of the foreign language as the medium of instruction makes using the language a genuine necessity.

3. CLIL: Theoretical background

There are some precedents to CLIL as in many countries bilingual education was implemented prior to its emergence. In Canada, French immersion programmes promote full linguistic competence in both English and French (Genesee and Lindholm 3). In North-America, Content Based programmes aim to help "immigrant speakers who have yet to learn the official language of instruction in the system" (Dalton-Puffer 2). Sharing similar objectives with these programmes, CLIL has risen as a "European construct" (Pérez-Vidal 5).

However, CLIL implementation has not only been supported by educational institutions across Europe but it is also justified on pedagogical grounds by scholars worldwide (Dalton-Puffer, Harrop, Coyle, Hood and Marsh). The widespread enthusiasm that CLIL has generated lies in the fact that it has emerged as an updated pedagogical practice which encompasses the benefits of previous approaches while overcoming their flaws.

Since CLIL integrates both the learning of content and of language, this methodology emerges as an improvement on grammar-focused approaches and other form-oriented methods. CLIL promotes the use of genuine material in the foreign language and, therefore, it offers a more authentic framework that replaces the unnatural study of "decontextualised phrases and structures" (López and Álvarez 9) that the form-oriented methods offer. Nevertheless, CLIL does not fully reject all the tenets of form-oriented approaches: Due to its dual focused objective, it places emphasis on both content and language, including the formal study of the latter.

CLIL may also be seen as a development of purely communicative approaches. (Graddol 86). However, its aim is more ambitious since CLIL tries to foster communicative and intercultural competence while students learn meaningful content through a foreign language. That is to say, the foreign language is a means of acquiring language and content within a cultural context.

CLIL follows the guiding principle of Krashen's Natural Approach about the benefits of providing a considerable amount of input to develop students' second language acquisition. According to Krashen, teachers should expose students to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of linguistic competence, but which they can still understand (21). That is a core principle of CLIL practice.

CLIL experts highlight the importance of selecting materials that may be relevant to the students (Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols 179), as other scholars did before (Cunningsworth, Scrivener), as a means to motivate them to engage with the topics presented while learning the language. However, taking this a step further, the main objective of CLIL is the production of language in meaningful contexts. This rationale is supported by Swain's Output Hypothesis which states that "complete grammatical processing" (Swain 99) may be achieved only through language production. According to CLIL experts, teachers must create situations in which students are obliged to become "active participants" (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 5). In this sense, the practical principles from the project-based or task-based learning approaches are perfectly applicable within a CLIL framework as techniques to promote language production in the CLIL classroom (Tardieu and Dolitsky).

4. The benefits of using literature in the EFL classroom through a CLIL approach

A number of scholars have defended the pedagogical value of literature as a valuable tool in the EFL classroom (González and Borham, Gómez, Ionnaou and Ramírez, Bobkina and Domínguez, Ortells). English literature can function as "a source of genuine authentic texts that provides the learner with real examples of a wide range of styles, text types and registers" (Bobkina and Domínguez 250). Literary texts offer an authentic context for the formal study of new vocabulary and linguistic constructions in the target language while paying attention to the underlying meaning of the story. Moreover, the construction of meaning out of literary texts implies an active and subjective process of interpretation on the part of the reader and such process may function as a trigger to develop other skills such as writing or speaking (Erkaya 5): Students may develop their own views about a wide variety of topics through

discussions in class or language compositions at home, thus fostering the oral and written communicative competences.

Literary texts also enhance the acquisition of sociolinguistic knowledge. Some scholars claim that foreign literary texts offer an authentic framework to develop intercultural communicative competence, indispensable to interact effectively in multicultural contexts (González and Borham, Gómez). Moreover, it has been acknowledged that quality literary texts are a crucial resource to develop critical thinking (Van 2) and to foster emotional intelligence as literary texts are a valuable asset to "gain insight into human behavior" (Ghosn 3).

On the basis of the aforementioned positive learning outcomes that literature has the potential to offer, it could be stated that literary texts provide a uniquely appropriate educational framework to fulfill the four theoretical objectives of the CLIL approach: content, communication, cognition and culture. The combination of the integrative principles from CLIL methodology and the pedagogical value of literature to learn a language could be particularly interesting when it comes to effectively improve the dynamics of the EFL class in the Spanish compulsory secondary education and baccalaureate.

According to the curriculum described in the BOE (Official State Bulletin), students in the first year of secondary school must understand the essential features in young adult literature titles (Gobierno 426), and the demands increase as they progress towards the end of their secondary education (Gobierno 432). However, in practice "teachers generally follow a textbook and the presence of literary texts is relegated to graded reader assignments" (Ortells 92). The use of literature as a learning tool implemented through a CLIL approach could be an effective way to provide Spanish

secondary students with a more authentic and motivational learning environment in the ESL class. Hereafter the potential benefits of this practice will be outlined by building upon each of the principles in the 4Cs framework that CLIL promotes.

4.1. Content

Within a CLIL approach, the target language is not an end in itself but a means to learn content matter. As this methodology is thus content-oriented, literature may be a perfectly appropriate tool to suit CLIL's objectives due to the historical, cultural and social perspectives in which literary texts can be approached.

The possible array of approaches that the study of literary texts offers implies that "literature in the context of the EFL classroom is not only a tool to teach communicative skills but also a cross-curricular element in learner's education" (Ortells 94). Within this context, the process of selecting the texts is fundamental as these must be relevant to the students and appropriate for their level (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols 22). If the texts selected meet these two requirements, content becomes engaging and motivating as well as a powerful "scaffolding tool for the learning process" (Ioannou and Ramírez 3). Consequently, redefining the role of literature in the EFL class and introducing it through a CLIL approach could be a first step for Spanish secondary students to profit from the aforementioned learning benefits.

Elena Ortells conducted a study with Spanish secondary students and found that 85 per cent of them showed their willingness to deal with English literature and most of them mentioned titles such as *Dracula, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (93) as potential and interesting learning tools in the EFL class. Classical literary works can offer more authentic input, thus avoiding the "superficial, simplified, impersonal, or artificial ways of presenting cultural content in textbooks"

(González and Borham 109). Moreover, many literary texts deal with universal concerns and appeal to the individual's most intimate drives and, as a consequence, they have the potential to become a powerful motivating tool in the EFL context due to the personal relevance they might inspire in the students.

4.2. Communication

CLIL as most approaches to FLT establishes as one of its main objectives the development of students' communicative competence. CLIL methodology implies the use of an additional language as a medium of instruction which results in natural, "authentic, not contrived communication for discussing content" (Pérez-Vidal 11). A genuine need to use the target language is thus created, making it necessary for students and teachers to "co-construct and negotiate meaning" (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols 31).

Some scholars agree on the potential benefits that working with literary texts in the language classroom may have on the development of students' communicative competence (McKay, Thom, Agustín, Bobkina and Domínguez). As it is not directly intended for learning purposes but for native speakers, literary texts offer students a natural way to become familiarized with real language, communicative functions (Bobkina and Domínguez 250) and sociolinguistic competence (McKay).

This process of language enrichment that literature offers may serve as a foundation to develop communicative competence. Literary texts normally provoke an emotional response in the readers that encourages them to become interested in the plot, empathize with some characters and ultimately share their impressions about the text (Thom 121). Within this context, the teacher is provided with a perfect framework to organize class discussions, dramatic performances or role-play activities in order to develop students' language fluency. Other activities to promote language production

include writing short compositions in which students express their views about the story or a certain character.

According to the BOE, Spanish students from the beginning of their secondary education must be able to express their points of view according to proper sociolinguistic patterns (Gobierno 425). This may not be fully achieved through the artificial ways in which textbooks present content (Berardo 62) since they do not really engage students in meaningful communication. Therefore, it seems highly recommendable to use literary texts through a CLIL approach as a complementary tool to help secondary English students develop their communicative competence and language fluency. In addition to building communicative skills, literary texts develop empathy and improve students' confidence and self-esteem. All these factors could be crucial for helping students in secondary education overcome shyness and anxiety in order to engage them in social interaction.

4.3. Cognition

There is abundant research to support the benefits of using a CLIL approach to develop students' cognitive skills since this method may help them restructure their ideas and use their schemata to acquire both language and content. The integrative approach of CLIL promotes students' "engagement in higher-order thinking and understanding" (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 54). Within a CLIL approach such engagement implies an individual process of cognitive development. That means that CLIL promotes a learner-centred approach in which the teacher is a facilitator and the individuals become independent language users responsible for their own learning (Lucietto 87). The teacher usually teaches cognitive strategies that help students better understand and produce discourse and content. This could be done by performing tasks or projects which engage students in higher-order thinking while they become

competent in the target language and acquire knowledge about a great variety of themes. CLIL is therefore compatible with the task-based and project-based approaches as they enhance the autonomous cognitive development and thus encourage the use of multiple intelligences and individual learning styles (Tardieu and Dolitsky 11).

It could be claimed that the use of literature in the EFL classroom may be a powerful tool perfectly suited to accomplish the high cognitive demands that CLIL advocates. Firstly, "exploring how the message is conveyed through overall structure" (Savvidou 1) in a literary text implies engaging in higher order thinking skills due to the understanding and analytical processes required. Moreover, the individual cognitive process of meaning construction in a literary text implies that the reader is placed at the centre of the process of understanding and processing the input thus meeting the requirements of student-centred approaches. Designing tasks and projects around literary texts implies that students are placed at the center of an autonomous learning process that the teacher has previously facilitated. Furthermore, the individual and group engagement in tasks or projects around literary texts and issues encourages the use of multiple intelligences and learning styles according to students' abilities, "identity, sense of values, personality and knowledge" (Oprescu and Oprescu 118). Ultimately, literature "provides meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language" (Lazar 17), making it easier to be processed and memorized in the long-term.

The cognitive benefits that the study of literary texts through a CLIL approach offers are even more interesting at secondary level due to the cognitive growth and development experienced during adolescence. This development allows secondary students to deal with more elaborate and complex pieces of literature that sharpen their cognitive skills by exploring universal human concerns. The critical thinking skills and

better understanding of human condition that they may gain while working with literary texts are fundamental skills for both their cognitive and personal growth.

4.4. Culture

Recent approaches to foreign language teaching focus on the development of intercultural competence due to the emergent need for promoting cross-cultural communication skills in an increasingly globalized and multicultural world (González and Borham, Gómez, Sudhoff). In the same line as the aforementioned approaches, the enhancement of multicultural understanding lies at the core of CLIL practice. Moreover, as this methodology advocates for the use of authentic materials, it offers a perfectly appropriate framework to enhance "students' insights into authentic foreign perspectives" (González and Borham 110), thus promoting the students' development of intercultural competence.

Apparently, any kind of reading material such as news articles expressed in the target language may be seen as an artifact of cultural expression (Gómez 51-52) and thus can serve as a learning tool to promote intercultural understanding in the EFL class. However, authentic literature may serve as a more comprehensible tool for this purpose as it permits students to explore and interpret the wider social, political, literary and historical background of a specific text.

Since secondary students need to develop true intercultural competence in the EFL classroom, it would be positive for teachers to cease being dependent on textbooks for lesson planning purposes (Ortells) as those offer an artificial way of presenting language structures (Berardo 62). As an alternative, redefining and highlighting the importance of studying authentic foreign literature through a CLIL approach could be an effective pedagogical tool to foster secondary students' multicultural understanding.

Moreover, according to the BOE, Secondary students are meant to have gained linguistic skills to work with literary texts beyond simple stories. Consequently, it could be claimed that this stage is perfectly appropriate to introduce literature as a tool to promote intercultural competence. Literary texts not only develop students' linguistic competence to deal with extracts from authentic foreign texts but may also contribute to fostering understanding towards cultural diversity.

5. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to contribute to the debate of the study of English literature in the EFL class and has provided a clear picture of how English literary texts may offer a perfectly suitable learning framework to fulfill each of the four core principles of CLIL: content, communication, cognition and culture.

Intended for native speakers, literary texts offer a uniquely authentic way of presenting language in context. Such contextualized language encourages students to focus on the content as they are compelled to process and understand the underlying meaning of the story which in turn functions as an indispensable motivating factor. The cognitive challenge of becoming familiarized with new vocabulary and grammatical structures while processing, understanding, making inferences and re-organizing the meaning of the story enhances students' higher order thinking skills. Moreover, literary texts have the potential to function as a trigger to develop the oral and written communicative competences by offering an authentic and meaningful framework where students may participate in activities such as class discussions, dramatic performances, role-plays, creative writing, oral presentations, summaries or compositions. Ultimately, foreign literary works offer students genuine insights into other cultures' values and viewpoints thus fostering the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence, fundamental to effectively interact in cross-cultural situations.

The four principles of CLIL methodology are thus covered through the study of literary texts. The combination of both learning tools could serve as an effective alternative to improve the dynamics of the EFL classroom in many Spanish secondary schools in which dependence on textbooks and a rather traditional approach is still the norm. Both CLIL and literature place students at the center of their learning process, and thus have the potential to encourage Spanish secondary pupils to become more active participants as well as more critical thinkers and autonomous learners.

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