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Learning and Teaching a Second Language:

The Relevance of CLIL Combined with the Influence of Multiple Intelligences

Alumna: Irene Pérez Martín
Tutora: Sarah Rose Burkett

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Abstract

This essay analyses the CLIL methodology as a fundamental tool for learning a second language such as English. In order to do this, an explanation of the principles of the psycholinguistic theory of Constructivism will be given and a comparison between Constructivism and CLIL will be made, seeing how the principles of learning such as the reconstruction of previous knowledge through meaningful connections can be applied in teaching. However, this essay will mainly focus on explaining the CLIL methodology, mentioning its role in bilingual schools in Europe and exposing both its advantages and disadvantages. Finally, a teaching methodology based on the combination of Multiple Intelligences and CLIL so as to achieve a complete strategy that surpasses the traditional ones will be proposed.

Key words

CLIL, Constructivism, Multiple Intelligences

Resumen

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado analiza la metodología AICLE como herramienta fundamental para el aprendizaje de un segundo idioma como es el inglés. Para ello, primero se centrará en explicar los principios de la teoría psicolingüística del Constructivismo y se hará una comparativa entre el Constructivismo y el AICLE, viendo cómo se pueden aplicar en la enseñanza principios del aprendizaje como la reconstrucción de conocimientos previos a través de conexiones significativas. Sin embargo, principalmente se centrará en explicar la metodología AICLE, mencionar su papel en las escuelas bilingües de Europa y exponer tanto sus ventajas como sus desventajas. Finalmente, se hará una propuesta de metodología para la enseñanza

basada en la combinación de las Inteligencias Múltiples y el AICLE con el fin de lograr una estrategia completa que supere a las tradicionales.

Palabras clave

AICLE, Constructivismo, Inteligencias Múltiples

Contents

Introduction

Until not so many years ago, traditional methodologies prevailed in European education systems and, as the study of second languages was still underestimated, there was a lack of both research and resources to properly engage students in the language. Traditional methodologies focused on a passive attitude of students and an exclusive classroom approach which expected all students to process information equally. Fortunately, due to the global expansion of society there was a shift in educational systems, and an adequate focus on languages, especially on English, was required. As a reaction, new methodologies such as CLIL or Content Language Integrated Learning which conceived language as a *lingua franca* arose. CLIL intercedes for the active role of the student and the study of other subjects concurrently with the study of English. Furthermore, other practices such as the consideration of Multiple Intelligences in a classroom have gained leverage within the academic field.

In this essay, I argue that CLIL proves to be a key methodology in second language teaching since it creates meaningful connections with previous information favouring a better consolidation of knowledge; CLIL's traits are related to the psycholinguistic principles of Constructivism, the main feature of which is the reconstruction of previous knowledge through meaningful connections which can be achieved by means of engaging tasks. Additionally, along with the practice of Multiple Intelligences, CLIL fosters participation achieving better results than traditional methodologies. In this essay, thus, the principles of Constructivism will be explained before exposing its similarities with CLIL; then the role of CLIL in education will be examined and a proposal of a combination of Multiple Intelligences and CLIL in the classroom will be suggested in an effort to achieve a second language teaching methodology that may overcome previous weaknesses.

Theory of language acquisition: Introduction about Constructivism

Before going straight into CLIL it is important to make an explanation about Constructivism. Although Constructivism is a wide learning theory that has its roots in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, this essay will shed light on Constructivism as a theory of language acquisition. According to this theory, individuals' chief way to acquire knowledge is, as ironic as it may sound, by unlearning. Constructivism asserts that individuals are constantly constructing knowledge by reassessing previous information. Therefore, the individual assimilates knowledge when they examine their mental storage and spots discrepancies within previous knowledge. They reconstruct knowledge as if they were building bricks upon previous information or adding new and revised layers while simultaneously correcting the former ones. Due to this reason, knowledge is supposed to be meaningful: the key which allows Constructivism to work is that the individual is able to establish connections with previous knowledge. In order to accomplish this, the information should be meaningful enough so that the learner is able to remember it and later, reassess it and modify it (Casal 58).

Constructivism also proves to be useful in a second language acquisition. Within a constructivist approach, teachers should persuade students of the usefulness of their study of the language in order to keep them motivated. Students need to think that what they are studying has a real foundation, hence, providing them with real sources and context will contribute to engage them in the subject. Moreover, since Constructivism considers each person as a different individual, teachers should attempt to be concerned with the motivations and necessities of their students. As each student would feel stimulated and included, this would contribute to the creation of meaningful connections with past knowledge which will be modified later. With the purpose of enhancing these meaningful connections, an active participation on the students' side should be required. The only way of reconstructing

meaning is by actively participating in an action. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to serve as a guide who provides students with basic knowledge such as grammar rules and vocabulary and eases the classroom ambience so that students feel comfortable and free to participate. Finally, as John Philpo affirms summarizing the statements of Reinfried "constructivist language learning is to be holistic with a content-oriented perspective and authentic in a complex learning environment" (Philpo 7). Therefore, it is possible to infer that Constructivism is highly related to a second language teaching methodology called CLIL.

Constructivism and CLIL

CLIL is a recent second language teaching methodology that has become considerably popular especially in Europe during recent years (Xantou 2). As has been mentioned previously, its initials stand for Content Language Integrated Learning. In fact, this methodology takes a stand in favour of learning a language through the instruction of other subjects. For instance, students may learn History or Physics in English; this way, English becomes a vehicle which conveys meaning.

Taking this into account, it is possible to trace a line which unifies Constructivism and CLIL. First, by virtue of CLIL, students' goal will go even further than learning English; they would have an additional motive to learn the language which is learning the contents of the other subject. By assuring a goal, they would doubtlessly feel motivated both in learning the second language and the other subject.

Second, through the implementation of more hours dedicated to the practice of the second language, students would be provided with a considerable amount of input. Input will be related to the language but also with the knowledge of other contents, increasing the value of said input. According to the principles of the processing of input of Van Patten "learners process input for meaning before they process it for form" and "for learners to process form

that is non-meaningful (such as verb endings), learners have to process the informational content or meaning at no or little cost to attentional resources" (Muñoz 19); consequently, students may easily focus on meaning and on the content words as they are learning the language through the study of a different subject. Furthermore, learning both the language and the other subject sets the stage for an encouragement of the creation of meaningful connections with past knowledge. This is sustained by the fact that students achieve a greater learning of vocabulary when they see words in context. Seeing words in a context instead of isolated, allows students to find a real application for their learning strengthening those meaningful connections (Xantou 5).

Thirdly, CLIL as well as Constructivism fosters an active participation of students. Contrary to traditional methodologies which are grounded on the passive role of students focused on processing massive amounts of input, CLIL and Constructivism ask for the students' production of output. As specified by CLIL, students' main way to learn is through speaking and acknowledging their own mistakes. The teacher, who acts as a guide as it is supported by the constructivist theory, may correct the student's sentences by repeating the same sentences in their correct form; this feedback is not likely to damage students' self-esteem and might spur them to participate even more.

As a final remark, CLIL also enables the establishment of meaningful connections with past knowledge due to the negotiation of meaning. As Sonia Casal explains, it has been proven that CLIL tasks allow for the recreation of social and real circumstances in a classroom for the students to talk to one another and participate in an exchange of meaning. Students ought to be intelligible to their interlocutor, thus, through this negotiation of meaning a significant effort is placed upon form. Moreover, even if at first, they fail to convey the proper meaning, they will be forced to utter it in another way until they can make

themselves understood. Through this meaningful act, they will be able to reconstruct previous knowledge and remember the new content (61).

The role of CLIL in European education

The term of CLIL was coined by David Marsh in 1994 to designate the integrated learning of any second language; however, the one that is gaining recognition in bilingual schools of Europe is English. CLIL is considered to be a flexible methodology which does not rely purely on memorizing information but rather on combining all the skills (listening, writing, reading and speaking) and putting them into practice. Because of this, this methodology has been considerably successful even in countries such as Spain where just "15.6% of the population considered themselves proficient in English, and a 14.2% of the population considered themselves good, in comparison with the worrying 46.6% of the population who have no knowledge of the language" (García 11). The percentage of fluent speakers of English in Spain is expected to improve if a drastic change in education towards a widespread practice of CLIL takes place. Additionally, in Germany "CLIL students were found to score higher than their non-CLIL counterparts" (Nikula 5), proof that underscores the efficacy of the methodology despite its recent implementation. Students can not only escape from the boundaries of grammar but, being CLIL a context-based methodology, they are also able to learn about a different culture, increasing their motivation. Indeed, according to some undertaken studies, CLIL students have a better disposition towards learning new languages compared to the non-CLIL ones (Sylvén and S. Thompson 31-32). The use of the language as a *lingua franca* to learn other subjects is thought to heighten this motivation and cultivate the interest in other languages. Furthermore, in another research study carried out in Swedish schools, it was found that non-CLIL students presented higher levels of anxiety when speaking a second language than those who were part of the CLIL's model (Sylvén and S. Thompson 35); this is likely to happen due to the calm atmosphere created in CLIL classes

to stimulate participation. As a result of CLIL's reliability on the use of authentic texts for its tasks, the active students manage to accomplish a great fluency and stock up new knowledge in their long-term memory. Notwithstanding the escape from traditional methodologies in which the main focus relies on the study of grammar rules, according to Tarja Nikula, "CLIL learners have also been found to display greater sensitivity complexity and text structuring" (5). Therefore, CLIL assures through its inclusive approach a focus on both form and content outscoring non-CLIL students and traditional methodologies.

CLIL and its problematic

Due to CLIL's recent entrance in the educational system, many teachers and professionals cast doubts on its efficacy. Among the complaints against this methodology, the most significant ones put forward are weaknesses in both form and content learning and some problems that may arise because of the nature of its tasks.

In the earlier years of CLIL, there was a high preference for the learning of content over form. Since its focus was placed on learning the content of other subjects and CLIL *per se* has never been a methodology which prioritized the traditional learning of grammar rules, morpho syntactical aspects might have been disregarded. In this aspect, CLIL students may not exceed considerably over their non-CLIL counterparts; there is a high likelihood of them presenting the same grammatical problems as the non-CLIL students present and of them being at the same level. However, throughout the last years, being aware of this problematic, there have been made efforts to counteract it.

Nowadays the scales seem to be tipping towards learning English grammar; nonetheless, this implies another disadvantage. As grammar and fluency in English must not be forgotten, the more time dedicated for these aspects, the less that is employed for teaching the contents. In fact, a study carried out by Lim Falk in Swedish schools "suggested that CLIL

students used less relevant subject based language in both speech and writing than their peers taught in L1 Swedish" (Nikula 6). Thus, some teachers brood over which stance to take. If CLIL prejudices the acquisition of the needed knowledge to pass secondary education successfully, though they might have achieved a higher proficiency in English, it would be unfair and cause them a greater damage in the long term. Nevertheless, solutions can be found to mend this problem, as will be proposed later.

A final disadvantage that has been found relies on the class dynamics and problems that may emerge because of some tasks which require cooperation between students. CLIL classes are distinctive for their abundant but reasonable supply of input. Students are considerably immersed in the second language and are expected to be able to produce a large amount of output and, hence, to freely participate. Nonetheless, because of the need to properly focus on form and content and the introverted nature of some students, it might be difficult to reach an active and talkative class. As Tarja Nikula asserts "mere switching of the instructional language will not turn CLIL classrooms into communicatively enriched environments for language use and learning unless proper attention is also paid to pedagogical solutions that support learner participation" (6), if participation is not totally assured, CLIL would probably lose mostly of its benefits. In addition to this, obstacles may interfere in the execution of tasks. CLIL tasks, which tend to be applied to a real context and collaborative, seem to set a perfect scenario that ensures an exchange of ideas where students are able to learn from one another. However, in real situations these tasks may turn out to be slightly complicated: controversies and arguments between students may cut the profits of these tasks short. As Sonia Casal claims "the problem arises when situations of disagreement are more frequent than those of agreement and when a group of disagreeing students goes against a single student; when the context is competitive or when the student feels negatively challenged. These conditions make conceptual conflict stronger and may cause a lack of

confidence in students" (60). Consequently, if these tasks lower the self-esteem or confidence of the students, they may not be willing to participate and the whole CLIL methodology would be dismantled.

Multiple intelligences

The practice of Multiple Intelligences could be implemented alongside CLIL in an attempt to mend the problematic of content and participation tackled previously. That being the case, first it is necessary to provide a short explanation of the theory of Multiple Intelligences or MIT.

Multiple Intelligences is a theory coined by Howard Gardner (1983) in which he contended that each individual has different intelligences and some of them might be more predominant than others. Gardner identified nine types of intelligences, these being mathematical logical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic and existential intelligences. According to Jane Arnold and Carmen Fonseca "these different intelligences reflect a pluralistic panorama of learners' individual differences; they are understood as *personal tools* each individual possess to make sense out of new information and to store it in such a way that it can be easily retrieved when needed for use" (120); therefore, multiple intelligences is a theory which focuses on the individuality of each student and the inclusion of their uniqueness. Were multiples intelligences implemented more often in a classroom, there would be a shift from traditional methodologies which discarded students whose predominant intelligence was not the one demanded from them, into an embracement of all intelligence and, thus, all students. This would also help students not to feel inadequate and increase their motivation for learning.

In terms of teaching a language, however, one may think that those who have a predominant verbal-linguistic intelligence have the advantage over those whose most

developed intelligence is a different one. Nevertheless, if teachers are aware of the intelligences of their pupils, each student could be able to develop their linguistic competences using their predominant intelligence. For instance, a student with an existential intelligence could learn English while reflecting upon philosophical issues or a mathematical-logical student could learn it if a teacher helped them to conceive the language by means of logical operations and laid out the basis of the language as if it was a mathematical problem.

Multiple intelligences and CLIL

The use of multiple intelligences and CLIL in the classroom may produce more effective results than using CLIL alone. Firstly, the content taught in a CLIL class could be reinforced by multiple intelligences. As long as teachers are aware of the multiple intelligences of students, there could be more room for doing different activities in accordance with the different multiple intelligences. Thanks to these activities, students would be able to expand their knowledge farther. Furthermore, learning the content in a second language would no longer be a problem since students could retrieve information with less difficulty using their prevailing intelligence. As Sonia Ogalla avows "the use of a foreign language as a vehicle of instruction in CLIL significantly contributes to the growth of the linguistic intelligence and also involves other activities such as hands-on tasks or writing in a journal, which is directly related to other intelligences" (14), CLIL and MIT can be perfectly combined in such a way that favours the learning of a second language while simultaneously reinforcing some CLIL characteristics and encouraging the use of other intelligences. Indeed, according to Robert García "By combining CLIL and the MIT theory students will: (1) enhance their foreign language acquisition by benefitting from the principles CLIL incorporates in its methodology and (2) acquire content more efficiently by attending each learner's preferred intelligence and improving content comprehension" (1).

A case in point would be learning biology in English while searching for the animals or plants and if possible, doing experiments with them to favour those students with a naturalist intelligence (Gey-Suarez, 25). Patricia Gey-Suarez also proposes singing, creating, or listening to a song about the contents to embrace students with a musical-rhythmic intelligence, performing contents as if students were actors to enhance the bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, or asking students to reflect upon the connection between the content and their feelings to motivate those with an intrapersonal intelligence (25-26). Therefore, there are many ways in which MIT and CLIL could be combined through tasks in such a way that MIT benefits CLIL as regards to content.

However, the prime benefit of the use of Multiple Intelligences relies in the fact that it would doubtlessly increase the participation rate of the students. Since Multiple Intelligences would enable students to feel included, motivated and hence, at ease because all their previous feelings of incapability would be lessened, participation would be assured, conceivably reducing the probabilities of the failure of CLIL. Therefore, "integrating the multiple intelligences theory and aspects of CLIL methodology to promote lifelong learning and help students develop cognitive skills to become competent both personally and professionally in the short term and when they become adults" (Ogalla 16) is a teaching model which would definitively grant more advantages and would erase various weaknesses of traditional methodologies.

Conclusion

This essay explores the CLIL methodology, stating its psycholinguistic basis (this being the constructivist theory of language acquisition), explaining its role in Europe, claiming its advantages and disadvantages and, finally, proposing a class methodology consisting in a combination of both CLIL and MIT.

Despite the recent use of the CLIL methodology in Europe, it has been proved to surpass traditional methodologies. Leaning on the constructivist principles of the teacher's role as a guide, and the encouragement of students' participation and the creation of meaningful ties between new and previous knowledge, CLIL is able to create a system which allows students to learn other subjects' contents while learning English and increase their motivation. In addition, CLIL allows students to learn words in context securing a proper assimilation of vocabulary and grammar structures. Some possible and minor problems of CLIL such as the need to focus more both in content and form or the uncertain students' participation could be fixed through the practice of Multiple Intelligences which embraces inclusivity, focuses on content, and fosters participation. CLIL and MIT implemented simultaneously in a class would produce positive outcomes and would stimulate students to learn more languages, a relevant consideration reckoning the current globalised era.

Nevertheless, the combination of MIT and CLIL may have some limitations. On the one hand, the short time that CLIL but especially MIT have been used in a classroom hinders the proper identification of problems. Due to this, more research must be carried out. On the other hand, the combination of both practices may be pivotal when aiming for a long-term knowledge consolidation in terms of content and form and for increasing students' participation and motivation; nonetheless, this might be rather an idyllic statement. The need of MIT of embracing everyone's type of intelligence and covering all their needs may cause a superficial approach of both the tasks and the contents. Had each student a different intelligence, there would be a lack of time to properly address every topic. It is likely that these methodologies are more efficient in small groups since in larger groups the learning process would be slower. Thus, the practice of multiple intelligences should be reassessed pondering on the real efficacy of its results and reflecting on a way which delves into the issues mentioned above within a sufficient amount of time.

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