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GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Disrupting the Native Speaker Fallacy through the Use of CLIL

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to disrupt the idealization of Standard English as the only correct variety and make visible the relevance of the non-native teacher. The native speaker fallacy has been challenged showing that non-native speaker teachers of English who are proficient can be perfect figures for their students to follow. Moreover, the fact that they have followed the same learning process when studying English as their students will do, they are conscious of the difficulties that emerge during this process. What is more, students feel identified and motivation is increased. This objective can be achieved through CLIL, which is a learning approach based on teaching content and language at the same time. This dual teaching allows students to be exposed to English language for more hours and encourage its use in a natural environment, reducing the anxiety that the process encompasses. The use of code-switching has been studied as a valuable technique, the first language can be used when necessary, while the presence of both languages in the brain cause a positive effect. CLIL deals with positive learning both at academic and personal level. Students encounter a new learning environment and they feel motivated while their self-confidence is increased. Despite the good welcome that CLIL has experience in Spain, there are still measures that should be taken in order to exploit this approach in full.

Key words: approach, CLIL, code-switching, native speaker fallacy, proficient.

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es desmitificar el inglés estándar como la única variedad correcta y hacer visible la importancia del profesor no nativo. La falacia del profesor nativo se ha desafiado demostrando que los profesores no nativos que presentan una formación pueden servir de ejemplo a los estudiantes. Además, el hecho de que estos profesores hayan pasado el mismo proceso de aprendizaje que sus alumnos, les hace conscientes de las dificultades que surgen a lo largo del proceso. A su vez, la motivación de los estudiantes aumenta. Este objetivo puede llevarse a cabo a través del CLIL, que es un enfoque de aprendizaje basado en la enseñanza de contenido y lenguaje al mismo tiempo. Esta enseñanza dual posibilita la exposición de la lengua inglesa a los estudiantes durante más tiempo y potencia su uso en un ambiente natural, reduciendo la ansiedad que este proceso conlleva. El cambio de código es una técnica útil mediante la cual la primera lengua puede usarse cuando sea necesario, al mismo tiempo que las dos lenguas coexisten en el cerebro causando un efecto positivo. CLIL proporciona un aprendizaje positivo en el ámbito académico y personal. Los estudiantes afrontan un ambiente nuevo y se sienten motivados, pero a su vez, su confianza se incrementa. A pesar del buen recibimiento del CLIL en España, todavía hay medidas que deben tomarse si la intención es aprovechar este enfoque de aprendizaje al máximo.

Palabras clave: enfoque, CLIL, cambio de código, falacia del hablante nativo, competente.

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1. Introduction

Globalization and language imperialism have influenced English expansion around the world, but also many people's desire to learn it. However, there are several reasons that led people to learn English. Even though when teaching English we are dealing with one single language, the approach used to do it may be different depending on factors such as the purpose of learning, learner's profile or future application among others. It is important to consider whether the country where English is going to be taught belongs to the inner, outer or expanding circle, following the classification proposed by Kachru. Because of the perspective on English as the language for communication between speakers of other languages, the interest on learning it has increased. To perform this task, several teaching methods have been applied for years with the purpose of reaching the highest results. In the process of learning the teacher plays a vital role, being partially responsible for the attainments achieved by students. For this reason, people take it seriously when choosing the professional in charge of this process. This person should be a professional, as I have said, one who has been trained for it and with abilities to achieve the learning requirements. However, people are sometimes mistaken thinking that the best candidates are native English speakers, in many cases not worrying about their vocational training, while despising well-prepared local teachers, as it will be explained later on. To support these ideas, it will be explained one teaching approach called CLIL, which has become highly valued in high schools.

2. Native and non-native English teachers

2.1 Advantages of choosing a non-native English teacher

In this case we are going to deal with teaching English as a second language or a foreign one, thus, referring to the one taught in countries of the outer or expanding circles. For many years, the native English teacher has been considered the best one, it has been idealised as being the best figure to follow when learning English. However, research has been carried out in order to support the figure of the non-native English speaker as teacher. As mentioned by Lee, “It is encouraging, however, that more and more educators today are challenging the native speaker fallacy and pointing out the many strengths of competent teachers of English who share a first language with their students and have gone through the process of learning English as an additional language.” (Lee 9) Lately, the fight against the native speaker fallacy is becoming stronger. Thinking that just because of being a native speaker this person would be a good teacher is wrong. Many times, natives are chosen without having been prepared to be teachers, while non-natives are rejected despite their extensive and profitable academic background. What is more, when applying to be English teacher, the benefits that might result from having learnt the language the same way as your students will do, were not valued. As stated by Kirkpatrick:

“With the choice of the local model, the multilingual competence of the teacher is both recognised and can be exploited in the classroom. (...) In particular, as teachers know the language of their students and have had the experience of learning English as a second language, they can use their shared linguistic resources in the classroom while, at the

same time, understanding the language learning problems that their students might face.” (Kirkpatrick 190)

Non-native speakers of a language become aware because of their own process of learning, of the difficulties that it might entail for students, being able to empathise with them and students’ anxieties are diminished.

2.2 Code-switching when learning English

The fact that students and teacher share the same first language has being generally seen as a drawback. However, as explained by Hall and Cook, “It is also clear that code-switching fulfils a number of clear pedagogic functions, and is employed in similar ways and for similar reasons across a range of differing classroom contexts.” (Hall and Cook 287) The idea lies in taking advantage of it rather than seeing it as a disadvantage. The possibility to use the first language in class does not imply that the other becomes invalid. The pressure to use the target language might be removed. In contrast, the first language may be used in specific situations, in order to facilitate the flow of the class and avoid students’ anxiety when difficulties approach. This idea is also supported by Paquet-Gauthier and Beaulieu, “Research in bilingual education has convincingly demonstrated that allowing learners to code-mesh as a cognitive tool enhances their overall language learning, such as code-meshing to reflect on language practices, to make sense of the requested task, to compare and analyse differences and similarities between languages.” (Paquet-Gauthier and Beaulieu 178) Learning a language, apart from your first one, implies that two languages might be mixed in your brain, while you are able to separate them and when becoming proficient, being able to use both. However, concerning the presence of both languages in your brain, it can be used

positively comparing them, and using your first language to know how to learn the other.

2.3 Disrupting the idealization of English Standard as the only correct variety

The preference for a native speaker when choosing an English teacher is based on the idea that native speakers are perceived as the best reference of Standard English. Being English their first language they are supposed to be a good example for students to follow. However, the fact of being a native speaker does not guarantee that you are the best choice as teacher. In order to teach a language, it is necessary to pass a previous training period, where you acquire the abilities and knowledge to do it in a successful and appropriate way. It is worthy to put aside the thinking that Standard English is the best option. “Language teaching rests on the idea that standard is equated with correctness and respect of the rules of written language, and non-standard with orality and incorrectness.” (Paquet-Gauthier and Beaulieu 170) Standard English is associated with correctness; however, it is not the variety used by all English speakers in their daily life in English speaking countries, neither in other places where English is a predominant language. The purpose of learning English as a secondary language is not to imitate native speakers, but to be able to communicate in English, which usually encompasses understanding English culture and pragmatics. Furthermore, it is necessary to remove the idea that only natives speak English correctly. Non-native speakers are trained in order achieve proficiency in English, obtain a wide understanding of language culture and its expansion around the world and gain knowledge and abilities to teach the language in a successful way. The preference for non-native speaker teachers is encouraged by Kirkpatrick:

“The policy of employing untrained, monolingual native speakers as English language teachers should be systematically opposed by the profession. Well-trained, multilingual and culturally sensitive and sophisticated teachers can best teach today’s learners of English, the overwhelming majority of whom are bilingual and who are learning in culturally diverse contexts for an extraordinarily complex range of needs, stretching from local to international.” (Kirkpatrick 196)

To add to this idea, it might be said that with the presence of a native speaker teacher students feel that their English has to become as the one used by a native, leading to a frustration in the process of learning, that can be removed if choosing a non-native one, who makes a proficient use of English, but one that seems achievable by students. In that way, students get motivated rather than discouraged. Moreover, knowing that the teacher has followed the same steps as them in the process of learning, they gain confidence and believe that if the teacher has done it, they can do it too. Putting together the advantages of code-switching and the motivation that shapes students’ learning process influenced by a non-native English teacher led us to think that a proficient non-native speaker as English teacher is the best choice.

3. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)

To support the idea that non-native teachers can perform their task as well as a native one, or better, it is worthy to consider CLIL. Consisting in an integrated language learning, it would be necessary to know the students’ first language, as well as the second language. Thus, teachers may know the difficulties that they have when learning English, in this case, but also, they could explain the main aspects in their first language if necessary. The fact of being an integrated learning involves

the use of the first language as a benefit point. In that sense, even though English would be used as much as possible for students' participation and exposure of contents, Spanish may be used too, in some cases, for clarifications or difficult explanations. The possibility to use the first language by the teacher reduces the students' feeling of pressure and anxiety that is created by the idea that students would need an extra effort in order to be able to understand the contents in a language which differs from their mother tongue.

3.1 Basis and learning environment

CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. Its purpose is to achieve a learning increase and improve both in content and language. "CLIL is an approach which is neither language learning nor subject learning, but an amalgam of both and is linked to the processes of convergence. Convergence involves the fusion of elements which may have been previously fragmented, such as subjects in the curriculum. This is where CLIL breaks new ground." (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 4)

This is a new approach when learning a language, where the language is used in a natural environment, which allows students to forget about the process of learning and convert it into an acquisition one. There are no grammar rules explained in this type of lessons, but English is used as the medium of learning. In that way, there is no importance given to mistakes, the main aim is to develop students' understanding and use of the language, even if at first, they do not do it perfectly. Furthermore, this is a pedagogic approach which removes the figure of the teacher as the centre and head of the lesson and implies students' participation and involvement in the activities carried out in class. As stated by Hood and Marsh, "When the teacher pulls back from being the donor of knowledge and becomes the facilitator, as is often found in CLIL practice, forces are unleashed which empower learners to

acquire knowledge whilst actively engaging their own and peer-group powers of perception, communication and reasoning.” (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 6) All these factors empower students in the sense that they constitute an active role in the development of the class, while reducing pressure because the figure of the teacher is no more seen as one judging them. Students are taught specific subjects through the use of English, thus reducing the importance of foreign language learning making the process more fluent.

3.2 Positive learning at academic and personal level

There are several reasons to opt for CLIL as the chosen approach to improve language learning in high school students. Apart from the benefits that it supposes in terms of improvement of the language and learning of new contents, it deals with positive issues regarding thinking competence, but also profit at personal level. Increasing the number of hours of English exposure for students encompasses the coexistence of more than one language in their brain, thus developing more than one way to say or understand something. This also supplies them with a wider interpretation perspective, as explained by Marsh, “Being able to see the same phenomenon from different angles, as though looking through different language ‘spectacles’, can have a very interesting impact on our ability to think and understand.” (Marsh 8) Another positive factor regarding CLIL is that through the presence of a non-native English speaker being in charge of this teaching task, students feel empathy and develop self-confidence. Moreover, their language learning is not evaluated considering what they do right or wrong, in contrast, they are evaluated by their progress and achievements, thus, motivating students rather than discouraging them. It is also important to bear in mind that “CLIL provides plenty of opportunities for incidental language learning; the kind of learning which

occurs when the learners' attention is focussed on something different from what is being taught." (Pavesi, Bertocchini, Hofmannová and Kazianka 80) Learning is achieved progressively and in a natural way, reducing the anxiety that appears when focussing on learning a specific thing. One of the best features of this approach is that students' knowledge of the language increases without them being conscious of it. The use of CLIL at high schools does not imply the disappearance of English lessons alone. In contrast, the use of English in this teaching approach involves a supplement in students learning and exposure to the language. Despite the increase of time of English exposure in students' lessons, in a natural learning environment, English lessons focused on the language itself are still necessary in order to reach a high level reinforced by CLIL. In that way, students would acquire language knowledge and at the same time they would have the chance to use the language; both affecting them personally, "Through the interactive and co-operative nature of work CLIL helps boost self-confidence, raise self-esteem, build learner independence and teach learners organisational skills." (Pavesi, Bertocchini, Hofmannová and Kazianka 85)

3.3 CLIL experience in Spain

CLIL has had a good welcome in some Spanish high schools, where it is carried out. It has been viewed as a good approach to improve students' learning of a second or foreign language, English in this case, while motivating them. The involvement of non-native English speaker teachers is highly valued. When students are firstly exposed to CLIL, some of them might find difficulties because they are not used to be taught content through a language different to their first one. This is one of the factors that make non-native English speaker teachers the best choice; although the language used for teaching is English, if students find difficulties, the

teacher can switch to their first language in order to help them. Moreover, Spanish teachers are aware of the culture and educational procedures that are used in this country. Despite the many positive results obtained by CLIL in students' academic progress, there are several measures that should be taken to maximize its benefits. One important thing to consider is the need for teachers of content who are also trained to use English to teach. In order to obtain good results in CLIL the teacher needs to be prepared for this task and educational authorities should deal with it. The main drawback that schools face when deciding to implement CLIL is the lack of teachers prepared to carry on this task. However, there are diverse ways to solve this problem; content and language teachers should work as a group and help each other in order to reach the objectives proposed. Apart from demanding a specific English level to teachers in order to opt for this learning approach it should be compulsory that the governments provide money for training courses where teachers may be instructed in the way in which this approach functions and guide them when elaborating the list of objectives for the course. If language learning is to be improved, money should be invested in order to train teachers for their new task as a commitment to reach the objectives expected. As concluded in a study carried out in a Spanish high school evaluating the experience of CLIL, "Lack of support from educational authorities is the main reason why the enthusiasm and motivation which characterized the teachers' stance during the first interview have diminished somehow over the three years of the study." (Gómez 62)

4. Conclusion

There are several reasons for people's desire to learn English, but one of the most obvious is because of its relevance and use around the world. Due to the association of Standard English as the correct variety, the native English speaker has

been considered the best figure as teacher of English as a second or foreign language. Non-native English learners consider that they might imitate natives in order to achieve proficiency. As it has been explained, there are non-native English speakers who are capable to perform the role of English teacher and succeed in their work. Being non-native has been accompanied by prejudices, however, they have been disrupted or at least, they are in the process of being disrupted in full. There are numerous benefits on sharing students' first language, such as the possibility of code-switching, leading to a more comfortable environment, where pressure is reduced and students' anxiety diminishes. Considering these factors, CLIL appeared as a learning approach, where content and language learning coexist bringing students' benefits both, at academic and personal level. Because of the increased time of English exposure in a natural way, students get used to understanding the language, but also, they are given the chance to use it and are encouraged to do it. Moreover, the fact that the learning is shared by language and content makes the process less conscious, thus acquiring knowledge without noticing. What is more, students feel motivated by the requirements of this approach, but also, they feel identified when the teacher is a local one, considering themselves capable of achieving English proficiency too. In Spain, CLIL is already functioning in some high schools, but it is not well-established yet. Some measures need to be taken if the approach is to be fully exploited. In order to make the most of the approach, teachers involved should be given training courses to know how to deal with their task, but cooperative work between teachers of content and language is also important, both learning from each other. Considering that the improvement on language teaching and thus learning is beneficial for the community as a whole, the government should spend money on reforming and improving education, investing

in training teachers, in this case local English teachers and value them, rather than discredit their effort and academic background in favour of native teachers.

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