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Analysis of first and foreign language use in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classrooms

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Abstract

This paper describes our on-going research into first and foreign language use in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classrooms. First, we compiled a corpus for indirect observation of twenty YouTube videos featuring primary and secondary school CLIL lessons taught in five European countries. Second, data were gathered through direct observation of four secondary school groups of CLIL Technology classes taught at the *IES Benicalap* (Valencia, Spain). The results provide insight into when and how first and foreign languages (in this case, English) were used in these CLIL classrooms, especially in regard to instruction, class management and feedback.

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Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); language use; teaching methodology; English language learning; European Union

1. Introduction

In schools throughout the European Union, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classes are now being taught to promote foreign language competence among young people and to strengthen “European cohesion and competitiveness” in the era of globalization (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 2008:10). According to Coyle, Holmes and King (2009:6), CLIL is defined as “a pedagogic approach in which language and subject area content are learnt in combination. The generic term CLIL describes any learning activity where language is used as a tool to develop new learning from a subject area or theme.” Deemed by British linguist David Graddol (2009) as the “ultimate communicative methodology”, CLIL is believed to enhance overall linguistic and cultural competence in the first language (L1) as well (Marsh, 2000). Additionally, Burns (1999) found higher levels of motivation among

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students when the L1 was used to teach subject-specific content in the foreign language (L2), especially among those with lower levels of L2 knowledge. Indeed, research initiated by Coyle (1999), and developed further by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010), has highlighted the intricate interplay between content, cognition, communication and culture (the 4Cs framework). In brief, by combining these four elements, the CLIL approach effectively creates an environment in which learners not only learn a language and use it for communication, but they also actively think while doing activities and become more aware of their own and other cultures.

Given its global expansion as lingua franca, English is becoming the main language of classroom instruction, and the CLIL model is now an essential part of curricula at all levels of education throughout the European Union. Consequently, CLIL has been made the focus of much research (Smit and Dafouz, 2012:1). Several studies have analyzed CLIL learning activities, materials and attitudes (e.g., de Zarobe, 2008; Massler, 2012) while others have examined the effects of CLIL on language acquisition and classroom discourse (e.g., Alonso, Grisaleña and Campo, 2008; Lucietto, 2008; Marzà and Ríos, 2014). However, we still do not fully understand how the L1 and L2 are actually used in CLIL classrooms. Therefore, this study was designed to examine L1 and L2 use in CLIL classrooms and, to this end, three objectives were established: 1) to compile a corpus of YouTube “CLIL lesson” videos featuring primary and secondary school CLIL classes for indirect observation; 2) to collect data through direct observation of CLIL lessons in the *Instituto de Educación Secundaria Benicalap (IES Benicalap, Valencia, Spain)*; and 3) to analyze instances of first and foreign language use in the CLIL lessons observed indirectly and directly.

2. Materials and methodology

In order to study first and foreign, in this case English, language use in CLIL classrooms, data were gathered through both indirect and direct observation and recorded with a specially designed working template, as described in the following. Overall language use in the lessons observed was evaluated as “all L1 use”, “mostly L1 use”, “equal L1/L2 use”, “mostly L2 use”, or “all L2 use” while instances of L1 or L2 use were classified as 1) *instructions*, such as introducing topics, explaining and conducting activities; 2) *management*, in particular disciplinary comments, remarks on student behavior; 3) *feedback* for clarification, error correction, affective comments and evaluation (Lorenzo, Casal and Moore, 2010).

2.1. Template for CLIL classroom observation

To conduct the indirect and direct observation for this research, a template was designed based on models mentioned in the literature (see, for example, Richards and Farrell, 2011), and including other details necessary to fulfill the objectives of this study (technical data, with link, date accessed, number of minutes, country, educational level, subject, etc.). The working template included course name, topic and number of students/teachers participating in the session (if available) as well as teaching methods or strategies. We were also interested in the classroom layout, so a section was available for notes on class distribution, use of observable space, materials or equipment. Finally, ample space was left for the observer to note the role of the teacher(s) and the activities of the students, and, of primary importance for the present study, descriptions of when, why and how participants used the L1 or L2 in the CLIL lesson.

2.2. Corpus of YouTube CLIL lesson videos for indirect observation

The second step in this research involved creating a corpus for indirect observation with CLIL lesson videos available on the social network website YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>). From late October to early November 2013, an initial corpus was compiled with thirty-one (31) videos from eight different countries found using the keyword search term “CLIL lesson”. All these videos contained complete and uninterrupted segments of classes being taught with CLIL methodology using English as the L2. To select the videos that were most suitable for our analysis, we eliminated any videos 1) exceeding 10 minutes in length, 2) filmed outside the European Union, and 3) whose quality was insufficient to ascertain what said in English. The final YouTube CLIL lesson corpus compiled for this research contained twenty videos and totaled 160 minutes (2h 40m). The selected videos were filmed in five

European countries: Lithuania, Slovakia, Spain, Romania and Italy. The subjects taught through the CLIL methodology in this YouTube CLIL lesson corpus included Art, Biology, Geography, Handicrafts, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Science and Technology.

2.3. Direct observation of IES Benicalap CLIL lessons

The third step in this study involved the direct observation of CLIL classes. Taylor-Powell and Steele (1996) identified several advantages to conducting direct observation. They found it appropriate to better understand the issue in question in its progression, especially when other methods seem insufficient for the given research purpose, or when direct information about the issue is required. To this end, the direct observation was done after receiving permission to do so at the *IES Benicalap* (Valencia, Spain). This secondary public school offers Technology classes through CLIL methodology using English as the L2.

Three groups of 1^o ESO (two in Valencian and another in Spanish) and one group of 3^o ESO (in Valencian) were observed over a ten-week period in the fall of 2013 (13 working days; 29 sessions, each 50 minutes). Teacher I was responsible for two groups of first year ESO students, one was a Spanish group and the other Valencian. Teacher II also had two groups, one with first year ESO students and the other with third year students, both of these being Valencian-speaking groups. In all, forty-seven students participated in the research.

The template designed for indirect observation of the YouTube CLIL lesson corpus was adapted for direct observation of Technology classes in *IES Benicalap*. The description of the physical environment was eliminated since each instructor had his own IT workshop and gave lessons to his groups in the same IT room throughout the observation period. The direct observation template also included the aims of the session and the contents as provided in the two course books, both published by Oxford, *CLIL ESO I Technologies: Core Concepts Technologies* and *CLIL ESO II Technologies: Core Concepts Technologies*, respectively.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Indirect observation

The results from the indirect observation showed that L1 differed from L2 use in the primary school YouTube CLIL lessons. First, L1 was mostly used for feedback and also for managerial purposes, but only two instances of L1 use for instructions were observed. By contrast, L2 use was more frequent for instructions in the primary school lessons and L2 was used only once for management. Interestingly, L1 and L2 were used with similar frequency for feedback in these lessons. It seems that in these lessons information was best delivered through L2, and more extra-linguistic elements, pictures, music, and other visual aids were used with L2. The researchers Krashen and Terrell (1983:55) claimed that visual aids help young learners to comprehend the input and “supply extra-linguistic context” helpful for acquiring the language. It is also of interest to note that greater L2 use also corresponded to classes in which the teachers were native speakers of English (L2).

The results from the indirect observation of L1 and L2 use in the secondary school YouTube CLIL lessons differed especially in terms of L1 use, which was less frequent than in the primary school classes. There was only one instance of L1 use for feedback and two instances for instructional purposes. L1 was not used for management in the observed lessons. By contrast, L2 was used for instructions and management during most of these CLIL lessons. Feedback was provided mainly in L2, but in two cases feedback was translated from the L1 into L2. The greater use of L2 may be attributed to the students’ higher level of English. Further, as these videos were selected as being exemplary CLIL classes to be uploaded to the YouTube site, it seems logical that L2 use predominated.

3.2. Direct observation

The results from the direct observation of L1 and L2 use in the CLIL classrooms at the *IES Benicalap* also showed quite interesting differences. Most of all, the L1 (Spanish or Valencian) was used for feedback much more in comparison with L2 in all four groups of ESO participating in the study. Besides, frequent L1 use was observed

for management and instructions. During the lessons, subject specific terms were translated into L1. By contrast, English was used primarily for instructional purposes, and more often for management than for feedback purposes. In brief, results from the direct observation showed that L1 use was dominant for all purposes and in all groups, this seeming to reflect the reality of authentic CLIL classes.

Furthermore, there was no student-student interaction observed in L2; however, there were many examples of teacher-student interaction in English. There were also cases of the teacher speaking in L2 and the student responding in L1. It is certainly worth noting the differences in L1 and L2 use among the groups involved in the study. With the first teacher, there was careful combination of L1 and L2 use during the classes. All necessary information was generally delivered in both languages, and in accordance with the students' L2 level, and thus was fairly similar in terms of instructions, feedback and management. By contrast, the second teacher, perhaps thanks to his greater fluency in English, tended to use L2 for all purposes in his two classes, but when commenting on student behavior, his feedback was given more frequently in L1.

4. Conclusions

This research aimed to enhance our understanding of first and foreign language use in CLIL classrooms. First, a corpus was created with twenty YouTube videos featuring thirteen primary and seven secondary school CLIL lessons taught in five European countries. Second, direct observation was conducted over a ten-week period with four secondary school groups of Technology CLIL classes taught by two IT teachers at the *IES Benicalap* (Valencia, Spain). The data collected were then examined for instances of first and foreign language (in this case, English) use in these CLIL classrooms, especially in regard to instruction, class management and feedback.

Regarding the use of L1 or L2, there were several differences between the findings from the indirect and direct observation. In indirect observation, both primary and secondary classes used English more for each of three purposes: instructions, management and feedback. In the YouTube videos, there were teacher-student and student-student interactions in L2, whereas in the direct observation, the teachers at the *IES Benicalap* were generally the only speakers of English. Clearly, it must be stressed that these recorded classes were selected as exemplary CLIL lessons before being uploaded to the YouTube website. Further, indirect observation of the YouTube videos allowed for a more detailed analysis of the 160 minutes of lessons whereas analyzing the data from the 29 sessions of direct observation meant relying only on the notes made on each template and the memory of the observer given that filming of the CLIL classes was not permitted. Richards and Farrell (2011) rightly pointed out that the variety of activities occurring in the classroom simultaneously often makes direct observation difficult.

In addition to the greater number of direct observation class hours analyzed, another explanation for the predominance of L1 use may be related to the fact that the YouTube classes observed were given by the L1 subject teacher together with, in most cases, a native English speaker (L2 teacher), this being a clear advantage that is not afforded to the CLIL Technology teachers here in Valencia. Moreover, one should not disregard the fact that the presence of the observer in the *IES Benicalap* sessions may have had a certain influence on classroom language use and dynamics. This being said, the findings from the direct observation lead us to believe that with the CLIL approach it is the teachers who set the trend for L1 or L2 use during the lessons; it seems to be up to the teachers to decide when to communicate in L1 or L2, and, as discussed by Marzà and Ríos (2014), future research should focus on the role of languages in more CLIL classrooms and examine the type of activities that engage students to actively use the L2.

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