

15th International Conference of the Spanish Association of language and Literature Education,
15th International Conference SEDLL, 19-21 November 2014, Valencia, Spain

A comparative study of the influence of the mother tongue in LSP and CLIL

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Abstract

In this paper we analyse the motivation of students when they are taught a foreign language using different methodologies. We took into account that motivation may be defined as the various purposes that are part of the goals to learn a second language. Motivation is not the same as needs analysis as students could consider that written communication is vital for them but if they are not motivated and feel part of what they are learning; language learning strategies could not be effective. The objectives of this paper are, on the one hand, to compare the two methodologies used to acquire a foreign language and, on the other hand, to analyse the influence of the mother tongue and motivation in second language acquisition in a specific environment. In order to study and answer the objectives set, fifty students were involved in this research. Twenty-five of them were enrolled in a language for specific purposes class and the rest attended a class of content and language integrated learning. The teachers collected several assignments from those students and analysed their output, taking into account mother tongue influence.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Universidad Politècnica de Valencia, Departamento de Lingüística Aplicada.

Keywords: mother tongue; CLIL; LSP.

1. Introduction

In this paper, there are several concepts taken into account: languages for specific purposes (LSP), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), motivation and mother tongue influence. In the first place, motivation could be defined as the various aspects that are part of the targets to learn a second language. Motivation is not the same as

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needs analysis as students may consider that written communication is very important for them but if they are not motivated and feel part of the knowledge they acquire, language learning methodologies could not be successful (Carrió-Pastor and Mestre Mestre, 2013).

It can be considered that motivation is divided into two basic types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is when the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community. Instrumental motivation underlies the goal to gain some social or economic reward through L2 achievement, thus referring to a more functional reason for language learning (Siskin, 2008; Carrió-Pastor and Mestre-Mestre, 2014).

In the second place, we believe that when language courses are offered in Higher Education, the syllabus should be specific as language teachers prepare students to communicate in a specific environment. On the contrary, languages courses are often regarded simply as an extension of secondary school language learning, and, as a consequence, the thematic sessions included are not specific. This is an error as the demand from industry is for graduates with supporting work skills. Additionally, European exchange programmes are also instrumental in encouraging students to participate in Europe-wide mobility opportunities and then giving the opportunity to language learners to practise languages in a professional or academic context.

As a consequence, language learners now have the chance in tertiary education to consolidate and develop their language skills. It is very important to focus on their needs in order to motivate them (Siskin, 2008). Nowadays, several approaches are used in teaching foreign languages, but in this research our interest focuses on teaching languages for specific purposes and content and language integrated learning. The methodology of languages for specific purposes has been one of the most important teaching approaches for the last fifty years (Hutchinson and Waters, 1986). Many handbooks have been written to teach languages for specific purposes as language teachers contextualised language learning and it was basically a language centred approach that included specific vocabulary. Lately, one new approach has been developed (Coyle, 2002; Marsh, 2002), CLIL, that entails a similar approach but in some aspects, it is different to LSP. It focuses on content rather than on language and uses a foreign language as a tool to learn content. Some researchers have been using or researching the impact of this approach on second language learning (Dalton-Puffer, 2006; Carrió-Pastor, 2009; Coyle, Hood y Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula and Smit, 2010; Bruton, 2011).

As Marsh (2001, cited in Butkiene and Vilkaniciene, 2005: 2) describes it “CLIL is an educational approach in which non-language subjects are taught through a foreign, second or other additional language.” As knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning content, the student is highly motivated and language acquisition becomes stimulating.

There are some principles underlying CLIL (Darn, 2006: 2) that should be noted: language is used to learn and communicate (receptive and productive skills); a CLIL lesson should combine content, communication, cognition (develop thinking skills) and culture; language is functional and it is adapted to the subject; language is approached lexically, grammar is not important and finally, learners needs should be taken into account in task types.

A CLIL framework for a lesson should be prearranged considering the reading comprehension of texts and activities related to the organisation of knowledge and processing of texts. The teacher cannot explain the language structures or correct the language errors as it is not his/her task, and fluency is more important than accuracy. The content teacher should combine the CLIL activities with some language classes, as language assessment is essential in order to reinforce the students' language skills. The subject teacher should be able to exploit opportunities for developing language skills and improve the content but also the language knowledge of the students (Carrió Pastor, 2007).

Taking into account all the aspects mentioned the objectives of this research are on the one hand, to study the influence of the mother tongue in CLIL and LSP students and, on the other hand, to analyse if students feel motivated when being enrolled in subjects with different approaches used to acquire a second language in a specific context.

2. Methodology

The number of learners involved in this research was a total of fifty. They were enrolled in technical degrees at Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería del Diseño (ETSID) and Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería de

Edificació (ETSIE), both faculties at Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV). In this study, twenty-five students (from now on group A) were enrolled in a CLIL subject which content was Mathematics and the subject was explained in English at ETSID. The other group of students (from now on group B) was composed of twelve students enrolled in a specific English subject at ETSID and thirteen students who were trained in a specific French subject at ETSIE. Summing up, we compiled a total of fifty assessments from group A (CLIL students) and from group B (LSP students).

The students were selected taking into account their foreign language level, i.e. pre-intermediate and intermediate. Once selected the students, they were asked for a written task. The Mathematics' teacher asked some questions about the specific content of the subject in English and the English and French teachers asked students to write a composition about a specific topic. The length of the assignments was of 250-300 words, compiling a total of approximately 15,000 words.

Once compiled and classified the assignments taking into account if they were written by CLIL students or by LSP students, we analysed them manually looking for expressions or words that were an influence of their mother tongue, i.e. Spanish. Once identified the interferences, they were classified depending on their nature. The examples were analysed and the results extracted. Finally, a test of satisfaction was designed to measure the integrative motivation of students in CLIL and LSP classes. We decided to analyse the integrative motivation of students, as we were interested in measuring the way students perceived the target language and we adapted the questions suggested by Carrió-Pastor and Mestre Mestre (2014: 242) to the purposes of this study. The questions included in the test can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1. Questions in the integrative motivation test.

Integrative questions about motivation
What is the role of the teacher in the classroom?
Do you consider your language level adequate to pass the subject?
Do you consider important the learning strategies in your class?
Do you feel confident in your class?
Have you improved your language knowledge?
Are you going to enroll in a similar language course next year?

To finish with the research and answer the objectives set, all the results were gathered and finally, conclusions were drawn.

3. Results

After the manual analysis of the twenty-five assignments compiled in group A, it was observed that, although teachers taught their classes in English in the CLIL sessions, students preferred to answer the tasks in their mother tongue. After the quantitative analysis of the texts, we observed that almost 80% of the students answered the questions in Spanish, ignoring that the questions were in English.

On the other hand, after the analysis of the results extracted from the manual study of the assignments compiled in group B, we observed that all the students always used English or French in the twenty-five assignments compiled in LSP classes. Nevertheless, the influence of the mother tongue on these students was also detected. Some examples of the influence of the mother tongue are shown here extracted from the qualitative analysis of the texts:

English samples of the influence of the mother tongue in LSP sessions:

- a. "It's an 'horno' that doesn't need electrical energy to work".
- b. "It works with solar energia".
- c. "Their principal caracterist is the facility with that it explains everything".
- d. "to inform to the receiver of our point of view and which we want obtain with the letter".

It can be seen in examples [a, b] that students used Spanish vocabulary instead of looking for the correct word in English, but the sentences are written in English. They are conscious of their error as they use inverted commas to express the words that are used in a wrong way. On the contrary, in examples [3, 4], students translate from Spanish what they want to express in English and the influence of the mother tongue can be observed in the use of relative pronouns and prepositions.

It was also observed that students attending the LSP classes taught in French also used French in their interactions but the influence of the mother tongue was also observed. Some examples extracted from the qualitative analysis of can be seen below:

French samples of the influence of the mother tongue in LSP sessions:

- e. “*J’ai que trouver* la clé instead of *il faut que je trouve* la clé”.
- f. False friends: “*Apprendre à lire* (learn to read instead of teach to read)”.
- g. “*Ils discutent* souvent (with the meaning of argue instead of speak) ”.
- h. Confusion of *meilleur* (adjective) and *mieux* (adverb) : “*Il parle bien l’anglais, mais je le parle meilleur* (instead of *mieux*) ”.
- i. “*Je me suis divorcé* (instead of *J’ai divorcé*)”: use of verbs that do not need complements but Spanish students use a complement.

The results of the questionnaire to measure the integrative motivation (the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community) of students can be seen in Table 2 (P means positive answer or agree and N means negative answer or disagree):

Table 2. Results of the integrative motivation questionnaire.

Questions of the integrative motivation questionnaire	Percentage of positive or negative answers	Percentage of positive or negative answers
Integrative questions about motivation	Group A (CLIL classes)	Group B (LSP classes)
What is the role of the teacher in the classroom?	P: 60%/ N: 40%	P: 80%/ N: 20%
Do you consider your language level adequate to pass the subject?	P: 35%/ N: 65%	P: 90%/ N: 10%
Do you consider important the learning strategies in your class?	P: 30%/ N: 70%	P: 95%/ N: 5%
Do you feel confident in your class?	P: 40%/ N: 60%	P: 80%/ N: 20%
Have you improved your language knowledge?	P: 20%/ N: 80%	P: 100%/ N: 0%
Are you going to enroll in a similar language course next year?	P: 25%/ N: 75%	P: 95%/ N: 5%
Average:	P: 35%/ N: 65%	P: 90%/ N: 10%

As can be seen in Table 2, the students enrolled in CLIL classes were less satisfied and also less motivated to enroll in similar classes. Group A expressed that they are not conscious of improving their language proficiency in CLIL sessions, and this fact can also be observed in the quantitative results as most of them used Spanish to answer the test. On the contrary, it can be observed that the students enrolled in LSP classes expressed satisfaction with the classes they were attending and were conscious of their improvement in French and Spanish. As a consequence, they were motivated to enroll in similar classes and feel confident.

4. Conclusions

The objectives set in this study were to study the influence of the mother tongue in CLIL and LSP classes output and to analyse if students feel motivated when being enrolled in these classes. The results shown above indicate that students enrolled in CLIL sessions are more influenced by their mother tongue and we believe one reason may be that they are not penalized when they use Spanish. On the contrary, students enrolled in LSP classes are conscious that language is the subject matter being evaluated in the subject and use English and French in their assignments. In this sense, if we take into account second language acquisition, it may be stated, after our analysis, that students do

not improve language acquisition in CLIL classes. Students are in contact with language but as they are not corrected or forced to use English, the influence of their mother tongue is higher than in LSP classes.

Furthermore, the results seen in the motivation questionnaire should also be taken into account to reflect on the purpose and effect of CLIL classes. We believe that although some authors consider that CLIL classes improve language acquisition (Coyle, Hood y Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula and Smit, 2010), the language proficiency of the students enrolled in CLIL classes should also be taken into account. If students do not feel confident when using a second language, this may cause a negative effect on language acquisition.

We are conscious that the number of assignments analysed was not high enough to base all our results in quantitative analysis, and our intention is to include other CLIL and LSP classes to analyse the frequency of the results presented in this paper.

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