



# Teaching Language and Content in Multicultural and Multilingual Classrooms

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CLIL and EMI Approaches

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*Edited by*

María Luisa Carrió-Pastor · Begoña Bellés-Fortuño

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# Contents

|                                                                                                                |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Introduction</b>                                                                                            | 1  |
| <i>Begoña Bellés-Fortuño</i>                                                                                   |    |
| <br><b>Part I CLIL and EMI</b>                                                                                 |    |
| <br><b>CLIL vs EMI: Different Approaches or the Same Dog with a Different Collar?</b>                          | 13 |
| <i>María Luisa Carrió-Pastor</i>                                                                               |    |
| <br><b>“How Do I Find the Limit?”: Risk Management in EMI and CLIL at University</b>                           | 31 |
| <i>Monika Woźniak and Fiona Crean</i>                                                                          |    |
| <br><b>Part II English as a Medium of Instruction</b>                                                          |    |
| <br><b>EMI Lecturers’ and Students’ Perceptions: Can EMI Contribute to Enhancing Intercultural Competence?</b> | 65 |
| <i>Marta Aguilar-Pérez</i>                                                                                     |    |

- Focus on Language in CBI: How Teacher Trainees  
Work with Language Objectives and Language-Focused  
Activities in Content-Based Lessons** 97  
*Anna Krulatz*

- Understanding Lecturers' Practices and Processes:  
A Qualitative Investigation of English-Medium Education  
in a Spanish Multilingual University** 123  
*Niall Curry and Pascual Pérez-Paredes*

- The Challenges of EMI Courses in Armenian Higher  
Education Institutions (HEIs)** 157  
*Zhenya Ter-Vardanyan*

- Improving Second Language Writing Across  
the Disciplines: Resources for Content Teachers** 191  
*Renia López-Ozieblo*

### **Part III    Content and Language Integrated Learning**

- CLIL and Literary Education: Teaching Foreign Languages  
and Literature from an Intercultural Perspective—The  
Results of a Case Study** 225  
*Josep Ballester-Roca and Camilla Spaliviero*

- Meta-CLIL: When Methodology and Aim Meet in Initial  
Teacher Training** 253  
*Anna Marzà*

- CLIL Assessment: Accommodating the Curricular Design  
in HE** 293  
*Begoña Bellés-Fortuño*

|                                                                                                                                                                        |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Essential Framework for Planning CLIL Lessons<br/>and Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Methodology</b><br><i>Francisco J. Álvarez-Gil</i>                             | 315 |
| <b>Thinking Skills in Exam Models for CLIL Primary<br/>Subjects: Some Reflections for Teachers</b><br><i>María Ángeles Martín-del Pozo and Débora Rascón-Estébanez</i> | 339 |
| <b>Concluding Remarks on Teaching Language and Content<br/>in Multilingual Classrooms: CLIL and EMI Approaches</b><br><i>María Luisa Carrió-Pastor</i>                 | 369 |
| <b>Index</b>                                                                                                                                                           | 375 |



# CLIL vs EMI: Different Approaches or the Same Dog with a Different Collar?

María Luisa Carrió-Pastor

## 1 Introduction

This chapter takes into consideration the fact that the way English is being taught has undergone a massive change internationally. It can be observed that English language teaching has changed from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), then teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), after that, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and, finally, to using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). In my view, ESP, CLIL and EMI are based on Content-based Instruction (CBI), an umbrella term that describes classrooms where “students are taught academic content in a language they are still learning” (Lightbown 2014: 3). The author of chapter “[Focus on Language in CBI: How Teacher Trainees Work with Language Objectives and Language-Focused](#)

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[Activities in Content-Based Lessons](#)” in this volume adds more information about CBI, as this approach may be considered the precursor of ESP, CLIL and EMI. It should be noted that ESP is always implemented in foreign language classes, meanwhile CLIL and EMI are applied in content classes, but all these approaches include specific content teaching.

In this chapter I focus specifically on CLIL and EMI as these are two approaches that have been lately promoted by educational institutions, such as primary education, secondary education and universities. In 2003, some researchers included a third term, which is extensively used in research on European higher education settings, Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE). I here use CLIL and EMI as general terms that embrace integrating content and language in different educational settings, such as higher education, secondary education, primary education, etc. In this chapter, my purpose is to analyse the similarities and differences of CLIL and EMI, as sometimes these approaches have been used in a similar way, and to highlight the positive aspects of both approaches.

In this vein, if we think about their definitions, some aspects are similar while others are different. CLIL was described by Marsh (1994: 2) as “CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language”. One of the most popular definitions of EMI is the one by Dearden (2015: 2), who describes EMI as “The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions in which the majority of the population’s first language is not English”.

It should be noticed that EMI started at tertiary level in universities while CLIL was mainly used in primary and secondary schools. Both approaches wanted to attract students from abroad and prepare their home students to study and work abroad, publish in English, and survive in an increasingly competitive education system.

The implementation of both approaches has been supported by governmental policies. Institutions have received economic aid to train teachers in EMI and CLIL practices as well as to attract the brightest

students, share their knowledge with the widest possible audience and develop their own teaching. Internationalization and globalization are two key terms in EMI and CLIL that are also the initial aims of supporting these approaches. As we live in a globalized world, educational institutions advertise the quality of their teaching methods, describing them as international in the expectation of attracting the best students and graduating the best professionals.

With these facts in mind, the most relevant aspects of Content and Language Integrated Learning and English as a Medium of Instruction are described in this chapter. Additionally, the most outstanding differences and similarities are discussed and, finally, the conclusions summarize the most important differences and similarities of these two approaches.

## 2 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and Language Integrated Learning is an approach that emerged in the 1990s. One of the best-known definitions is the one provided by Coyle et al. (2010: 1): “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language”. It is based on content-based instruction but it involves specifically the integration of language and content instruction. In this approach, English-as-a-second-language students can acquire their academic development while practicing and improving language proficiency (Marsh 1994, 2009; Marsh et al. 2001; Carrió-Pastor 2007, 2008, 2009c, 2011, 2013). As Carrió-Pastor (2019: 77) points out, “CLIL means the integration of teaching based on focus on form and focus on meaning. Students are trained to know the content of words (meaning) and language (form), thus acquiring language rules and knowledge at the same time”.

There are a variety of strategies used in content-based instruction; for example, cooperative learning, task-based learning, case studies, whole language approach, etc. (Crandall 1992). These strategies are also employed in CLIL, as many studies show (Carrió-Pastor 2008, 2009a, b,

2011, 2013; Carrió-Pastor and Perry 2010; Carrió-Pastor and Romero Forteza 2019). For example, Davison (2005) studies secondary school English in Hong Kong and Australia and argues that the terms language and content are problematic but, at the same time, the combination of content and foreign language acquisition allows students to become competent members of their community. Also, Dalton-Puffer (2005) explains the degrees of indirectness as well as variability in the realization of directive speech acts in six content lessons in Austrian upper secondary schools. The author highlights that CLIL is firmly situated within English as a foreign language lessons and it provides communicative opportunities to language learners. CLIL became progressively very popular as a new approach used in secondary and primary schools, as well as in universities, and it was practised following different approaches: a content subject or a language subject, depending on the needs of the educational centre. Studies by Schleppegrell and de Oliveira (2006), Zwiers (2006), Dalton-Puffer (2007), Coyle et al. (2010), and Lasagabaster (2011), for example, explore several methodological issues related to the use of an L2 as the medium of instruction when teaching content subjects and discuss the effectiveness of the theoretical and practical issues involved when learning and teaching content through an additional language, appealing to researchers and teachers to use this innovative approach in their classrooms to improve student motivation.

Some researchers have highlighted the importance of the coordination of language teachers and content teachers (Carrió-Pastor 2008, 2019) to design materials; both teachers can even collaborate in the same classroom. Teachers play a very important role in obtaining positive results, as stated by Carrió-Pastor and Perry (2010: 72).

We believe that CLIL should be taught as a single subject being based on close cooperation between content teachers and language teachers. Some researchers into this approach consider that the role of the language teacher is merely that of 'assistant' to the content teacher. In our view, both content and language are of equal importance and both the content and language teachers collaborate to produce specific materials which allow different aspects to be focused on.

There were other aspects that are important for the use of CLIL to improve language acquisition and gain positive results, but also some negative aspects that questioned the quality of the education received by students in CLIL subjects and non-CLIL subjects, focusing on the impact of adding the burden of a foreign language to, in some cases, deficient pedagogy (Bruton 2011, 2013, 2015). Specifically, this author observes that CLIL can be adopted by teachers with very limited training in this approach, or that CLIL can cause a division between students—those that are successful in a CLIL classroom and those that cannot benefit from this approach as they do not have the same foreign language support or they are immigrants and their mother tongue is very different. Also, some researchers point out that some teachers consider a CLIL subject should emphasize conversation and so they focus on simple topics; additionally, some students are not proficient in English and thus teachers tend to design easy activities (Sasajima 2013).

Nevertheless, despite some criticisms, this approach has been defended by many researchers (Hüttner and Smit 2014), and proof of this is the many studies on this topic (Carrió-Pastor 2013, 2019; Cenoz et al. 2014; Rea Rizzo and Carbajosa Palmero 2014; Pérez-Vidal and Roquet 2015; Cenoz 2015; Arnó-Macià and Mancho-Barés 2015; Carrió-Pastor and Tamarit Vallés 2015; Yang 2016; Piesche et al. 2016; Dallinger et al. 2016; Lasagabaster 2019; Carrió-Pastor and Romero Forteza 2019). These researchers highlight the support of national governments to CLIL and the benefits of its use; for example, the improvement of foreign language learning as well as content acquisition, the development of motivation in the classrooms, in the case of English, CLIL is also seen relevant for gaining higher professional status, etc. In this volume, the chapters by Marzà, Bellés-Fortuño, Álvarez-Gil, and Martín-del Pozo and Rascón-Estébanez reflect on methodology, assessment and training, and the way CLIL is applied in Spanish educational institutions.

CLIL is also considered an umbrella term, covering (Cenoz, Genesee and Gorter 2014: 246)

the following educational approaches: “language showers”, CLIL camps, student exchanges, local projects, international projects, family stays, modules, work-study abroad, one or more subjects, partial immersion,



total immersion, two-way immersion, and double immersion. CLIL can even go beyond school contexts to include everyday activities, provided they take place in an L2/foreign language.

This fact, the versatility of CLIL, entails that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish CLIL from non-CLIL learning, and this implies that there are some practices that are difficult to differentiate from content-based instruction or languages for specific purposes. In this sense, Cenoz et al. (2014: 247) explain that, “We would argue that this lack of precision makes it difficult for CLIL to evolve in Europe in a pedagogically coherent fashion and for research to play a critical role in its evolution”. Additionally, the role of teachers in developing and applying this approach is crucial but it seems that institutions do not pay much attention to organizing CLIL classes and prefer to involve content teachers even when the class should be taught by content and language teachers. In this vein, Carrió-Pastor (2019: 84) compared the role of language teachers and content teachers in a CLIL classroom.

The problems encountered by both content teachers and language teachers when designing a CLIL curriculum that entails collaboration are, on the one hand, the different teaching and research methodologies used by both content and language teachers and, on the other hand, the institutional constraints, the perceived threats behind the sharing of methodologies and information and the hierarchies among disciplines. It has to be added that educational entities contract one teacher with two roles (content teacher and language teacher), and this is important, as politicians may believe that they are improving educational policies when they are actually implementing working restraints. Content teachers seem to teach language and content, but the real problem is that students frequently claim they do not acquire language skills or the content of the subject properly. Currently, this is a problem that Spanish curriculum designers and politicians should think through and provide solutions for.

Ideally, the methodology applied in CLIL should be designed by content teachers and language teachers but the main problem faced until now is that in most cases, CLIL is only taught by content teachers who apply

content methodology and do not pay the attention needed to language matters.

It should be noted that, lately, EMI has attracted the interest of researchers that seem to find this new approach more interesting and reliable, although it is mainly applied in universities and in bilingual schools. As a consequence, CLIL is still mainly used in primary and secondary education, but it seems this approach is not so interesting for researchers and practitioners. Furthermore, there is growing interest in a new approach: translanguaging. Caldas (2019: 4) describes it as

García (2009) calls all these practices translanguaging as part of a process of self and co-construction within a cultural and linguistic community beyond traditional codes or languages (García and Wei, 2014). Given that identity, values, and practices are not formed in a vacuum, Wei (2011) maintains translanguaging is a shared social practice within a space that allows both language enactment and co-creation.

There are many studies nowadays that focus on translanguaging, i.e. using a multilingual context to improve several languages, but as this is not the main focus of this book, I will not include any more about this approach and proceed with paying attention to the differences and similarities of CLIL and EMI.

### 3 English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)

EMI is an approach adopted by educational institutions to include subjects taught in English in the degrees at universities or in secondary and primary education. It has been seen as a product of globalization, a need to speak an international language and as a necessary passport to success for students. Belhiah and Elhami (2015: 7) state that, “The adoption of English instead of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction can thus provide students with ample opportunity to use the language on an everyday basis and in a wide array of communicative situations and capacities”.

For educational institutions, this is a way to attract more international students and to increase international mobility and academic cooperation (Kyeyune 2003; Doiz et al. 2012). Although EMI usually refers to teaching at the university level, there are also secondary, primary, and even pre-primary schools that teach using the English language. It should also be noted that most private bilingual schools offer EMI classes as it is extremely marketable; many parents consider EMI subjects are better than mother tongue-traditional teaching, feeling it will give their children a head start in life.

The adoption of this approach has been supported by many researchers that study its implementation and benefits in several countries. For example, Belhiah and Elhami (2015: 7) explain its implementation in the Gulf, arguing that it could have been beneficial to use English and Arabic; Li and Ruan (2015) report a longitudinal study of changes in the beliefs in Chinese students after studying EAP in an EMI setting at university; Dearden (2015) reflects on the use of EMI in non-Anglophone countries, analysing 55 countries and pointing out some key aspects. One aspect that stands out in this study is the fact that English teachers could be trained in content and then they would be ideal EMI teachers, following the example applied in CLIL, i.e. content teachers are trained in language skills. Also, Margic and Vodopija-Krstanovic (2017, 2018) explain teachers' perceptions in Croatian universities; Dordevic and Blagojevic pay attention to the attitudes of teachers in Serbia higher education when implementing EMI; Kim et al. (2018) analysed the challenges when implementing EMI in Korea; Bradford and Brown (2017) in Japan; Li and Wu (2018) focused on EMI assessment in Taiwan, Kuchah (2018) in Cameroon, and Du and Jackson (2018) in Hong Kong, and Lin (2020) focuses on EMI master thesis defences in Taiwan universities. It should be noted that in Spain there are several studies that focus on the use of EMI in universities; for example, Dafouz and Camacho-Miñano (2016) centred their study on student academic achievement; Breeze and Dafouz (2017) applied the cognitive discourse function to the analysis of exam answers in an EMI context; Lasagabaster et al. (2018) studied the role of language and team teaching at universities; Doiz et al. (2019) compared students' view on EMI in Italy and Spain; Macaro et al. (2019) investigated the competencies of

EMI teachers; and Carrió-Pastor (2020a, b) shows different perspectives of training EMI in Spain, specifically the training of pragmatic competence. Moreover, in this volume, Aguilar and Curry and Pérez-Paredes reflect on the role of EMI in Spain in higher education.

Most of the reviewed studies show that EMI is positive for students and for the institutions; the former are highly motivated and the latter perceive that EMI degrees are beneficial for universities, incorporating international value and the dissemination of academic and professional knowledge. The high interest of researchers in EMI supports the way it has been implemented in many educational institutions with the aim of internationalizing degrees and attracting foreign students. It also shows that educational approaches have shifted from CLIL to EMI; thus, students are considered proficient in English and with the new approach they practice it without learning or acquiring language skills. Universities offer EMI degrees for international students or for those students who finished secondary education in a bilingual school; that is, that do not need language support in their content subjects. It should be noted that one aspect that is noticed by most researchers is that a key issue in EMI is the language proficiency of teachers (Belhiah and Elhami 2015; Margic and Vodopija-Krstanovic 2018; Dordevic and Blagojevic 2019). In the following section, I will discuss the differences and similarities between CLIL and EMI with the aim of showing the evolution of these approaches.

## **4 Discussion: Differences and Similarities of CLIL and EMI**

One outstanding characteristic of CLIL and EMI is that they have become so popular that many certifying institutions offer certificates in these skills. The courses or certificates offered are designed for lecturers or other professionals working in a CLIL or EMI context with the aim of helping teachers in bilingual education use specific vocabulary, improve familiarity with some skills associated with language and content, and, finally, to communicate more effectively in English with students from different cultures and nationalities. The main differences are that CLIL

includes any foreign language learning but EMI only refers to English learning and that CLIL is mainly used in primary and secondary schools and EMI in universities.

Taking this into account, the main objectives of this chapter are to study through a literature review whether there are important differences in the implementation of CLIL and EMI, and whether EMI is the second step of CLIL or if they are two approaches that can be applied in different educational stages.

Some researchers have discussed the differences between CLIL and EMI; for example, Dearden (2015: 4) explains

Whereas CLIL is contextually situated (with its origins in the European ideal of plurilingual competence for EU citizens), EMI has no specific contextual origin. Whereas CLIL does not mention which second, additional or foreign language (L2) academic subjects are to be studied in, EMI makes it quite clear that the language of education is English, with all the geopolitical and sociocultural implications that this may entail. Whereas CLIL has a clear objective of furthering both content and language as declared in its title, EMI does not (necessarily) have that objective.

It is a fact that CLIL was an approach that included language and content acquisition and in the case of EMI language acquisition is not a priority but a consequence of using English as the language of instruction. Also, the use of CLIL in primary and secondary education and EMI in universities seems the most natural evolution if we take into account the needs of students. Theoretically, university students are more proficient in a foreign language as they have been taught English in primary and secondary education, and so EMI could be more adequately implemented in university contexts. On the contrary, CLIL students that are in primary and secondary schools need to be trained in foreign languages as well as in content as they are not proficient in either.

Graham et al. (2018: 30) reviewed research carried out on EMI and CLIL from 2008 to 2018 to study the language and content outcomes of the experiments and point out that “the gains are simply a result of more instruction. Additionally, the research instruments used, particularly in the receptive skill studies, were designed to measure general

everyday language proficiency, or basic interpersonal communicative skills”, explaining that all the research analysis highlighted that CLIL and EMI subjects do as well or better than non-CLIL-EMI subjects.

CLIL and EMI approaches are similar in the sense that they are both forms of bilingual education but CLIL means teaching content through any foreign language while EMI means teaching content to students who are proficient in English (at least C1 proficiency level). Another difference is the perception of teachers’ role in both approaches. In both approaches, teachers know they are using a foreign language and thus they practice English while they teach content, but they differ in the aims of the class they deliver. On the one hand, in CLIL, teachers have a dual objective, that is, teaching both language and the subject content. On the other hand, in EMI, the content teachers do not think of themselves as language teachers; they only teach content speaking a foreign language.

These differences are important as the methodology used in both approaches should vary and accommodate for students’ specific needs and, at the same time, they present challenges for both teachers and students. Students are supposed to benefit from EMI subjects, and this is true if students are proficient in English as they will improve their English to at least a C1 proficiency level, following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2011), and learn to communicate in a specific context in a foreign language. The problem arises when students are not proficient or the English level of the group of students is not homogeneous... then, students are faced with two problems: language proficiency and understanding content. Consequently, those EMI students who are not proficient in English may think they are not proficient in content, demotivating them and discouraging them from acquiring English as well as content.

EMI and CLIL are nowadays implemented in the educational system and sometimes teachers and students are not conscious of their differences. This is why I think these approaches should be used depending on the foreign language proficiency of students. If students are not proficient in the foreign language to be used, then CLIL should be implemented to reinforce the acquisition of communication strategies in that language

and avoid demotivation. If there is a strict control of the language proficiency of students, then educational institutions can offer EMI subjects if they have teachers trained in this approach.

The differences and similarities between CLIL and EMI and the proposals stated in this chapter are summarized in Table 1.

Furthermore, I think it is not only a matter of dividing CLIL and EMI by educational levels; it also depends on the students enrolled in the subjects or degrees and on the skills of the teachers involved in teaching CLIL and EMI. If these aspects are not seriously considered, then both approaches will produce students who are not proficient in English or in content, discouraging them from using a foreign language.

**Table 1** Differences and similarities between CLIL and EMI

| CLIL                                                                                         | EMI                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| It considers content and language learning                                                   | It considers only content learning; the language proficiency of students is taken for granted  |
| Students enrolled in CLIL subjects do not need to be highly proficient in a foreign language | Students enrolled in EMI subjects should be highly proficient in English                       |
| Taught in primary school (reinforce language acquisition and proficiency)                    | –                                                                                              |
| Taught in secondary school (reinforce language acquisition and proficiency)                  | Taught in bilingual secondary schools (for students with high language proficiency)            |
| –                                                                                            | Taught in universities (for students with high language proficiency or international students) |
| Content teachers trained in foreign language methodology teach the subjects                  | Content teachers or language teachers trained in content teach the subjects                    |
| Content teachers and language teachers should work together                                  | –                                                                                              |
| Materials should be designed by content and language teachers                                | Materials are designed by content teachers                                                     |
| Methodology should be designed by content teachers and language teachers                     | Methodology designed by content teachers as language is not considered a priority              |
| Methodology follows communicative approach and content-based approach                        | Methodology follows communicative approach and content-based approach                          |
| Assessment of content and language acquisition                                               | Assessment of only content acquisition                                                         |

## 5 Conclusions and Future Directions

After reviewing the literature devoted to CLIL and EMI and discussing their differences and similarities, it seems clear that they are different approaches and should be used in different academic institutions. CLIL should be used in preschools, primary schools and secondary schools, and EMI should be used in universities or bilingual schools with students with high English proficiency. Thus, CLIL could be the first step of bilingual education, combining language and content knowledge, and then EMI could be offered at the university level. Both approaches follow similar methodologies and their objectives are to motivate and improve communication and understanding in English (although CLIL can include any foreign language) so they should be used in a coherent way.

From a methodological point of view, both approaches motivate students and are a challenge for teachers, who should be trained specifically in CLIL or EMI and have a very good language proficiency. So, there are no important differences in their methodology and the expected results but I think they should be used in different academic institutions or educational stages, taking into account the expected language proficiency of students (B2 proficiency level in CLIL and C1 proficiency level in EMI).

The implementation of CLIL and EMI might take several future directions. These may be related to the use of the CLIL approach in primary and secondary education and EMI in universities and bilingual schools. Additionally, the language proficiency of students enrolled in CLIL and EMI should be supervised to be sure they acquire content knowledge. Also, language and content teachers should collaborate in teaching CLIL subjects, including language and content methodologies and teaching strategies. This latter aspect could be very beneficial for the students enrolled in the subjects and could improve the quality of the design of specific material.

As a conclusion, many efforts have been made by educational institutions, content teachers and language teachers to implement CLIL and EMI and internationalized education, but their implementation should be supervised, controlled, and planned to obtain the best benefits from these two approaches.



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