

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

ENLU Task Force 4

Discussion Brief (01.10.04)

Introduction

This discussion brief highlights key issues in language learning by undergraduates (1st cycle) in European higher education, hereafter HE, with respect to *medium of instruction*. Medium of instruction is examined in relation to the use of a second, or otherwise foreign language, as the medium of education.

Medium of instruction is also considered in relation to a specific educational approach termed *Content and Language Integrated Learning*, hereafter CLIL. CLIL is defined as any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, hereafter L2, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content.

CLIL involves the teaching of non-language subject matter in an L2. It acts as a generic term which encompasses the types of methodology found in a range of learning environments where dual-focused education is conducted. Interest and implementation of CLIL in European primary and secondary levels has expanded rapidly since the early 1990s. Proponents argue that the mainstreaming of CLIL is directly linked to the socio-political steps leading to European integration, and specifically MT+2. A major feature of this mainstreaming can be seen in the shift of CLIL from mainly private sector education, or that serving selected target groups, particularly secondary academic study, into pre-school, primary, vocational and professional sectors.

In the context of this brief, it is useful to reiterate a key issue relating to definitions. Using an L2 as the medium of instruction

only qualifies as CLIL if there are dual-focused objectives involved – namely focus on non-language subject matter, and focus on the language in terms of both communication and cognition. There are, therefore, primary and secondary schools in Europe where an L2 is used as the vehicular language which do not qualify as CLIL schools. International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, teaching through English, reportedly often fit into this category.

Focus

The purpose of this brief is to consider the potential role of CLIL in improving language learning among (1st cycle) undergraduates in relation to current practice, curriculum innovation and potential future trends. It serves to deepen insight into how a trans-European network of HE institutions, and other stakeholder organizations, could implement CLIL successfully into diverse forms of 1st cycle education so as to enhance plurilingualism. Apart from ACA 2002 (English-Language-Taught Degree Programmes in European Higher Education), there is little existing data or discussion on L2 medium of instruction in the creation of a European HE area resulting from the Bologna Process.

The brief draws on research concerning:

- CLIL practice in basic and vocational education vis-à-vis transferability into HE.
- L2 medium education in European HE.
- Descriptions of the situation ‘on the ground’, anticipated future trends, and insights into good practice. This has been drawn from a three-tier consultation process within the ENLU partnership during April-September 2004.



This allows resulting discussion to be based on

- Consideration of transferability of cross-sectoral good practice
- Understanding of the current situation
- Perception of future trends and indicators

Issues

The core findings may be summarized as follows:

- The emergence of EN as a lingua franca and the impact of market forces on HE directly undermines the nurturing of plurilingualism.
- EN is the most dominant L2 medium of instruction across Europe and this is forecast to rise as a result of the Bologna Process, the creation of Europe 25, and increased institutional global positioning.
- Introduction of L2 EN medium education is directly linked to internationalization.
- The shift towards L2 medium education in EN does not correlate with the introduction of CLIL.
- There are structural and performance weaknesses reported in L2 EN HE which link to reportedly impoverished educational contexts.
- Language specialists in HE have generally not been included in decision-making, planning and implementation of L2 EN, or other L2 vehicular language delivery.
- The ongoing shift towards L2 medium education in some sectors has not typically been supported by provision of specialized training programmes.

- Certain questionable assumptions have been influential in top-down decision-making on shifts towards planning L2 medium programmes. For instance, one example is that successful academics are assumed to have sufficient fluency in the L2, and that the fluency of this academic is the predominant success factor for this type of education. Experience of CLIL at secondary academic level shows the significance of adaptation of methods in relation to knowledge of L2 medium language and thinking skills, not merely the linguistic skills of teaching staff. In addition, verification of language abilities by academic staff through testing is currently unreported.
- The ability to speak EN is frequently seen as an assumed competence by HE staff. This can lead to an overestimation of an individual's ability to use this language as the medium of instruction. In turn, this can lead to linguistic and communicative performance fossilization when the individual teaches through EN unless safeguards such as adequate loop-back systems are operational.
- The cognitive complexity involved in much HE education is high, and thus an equally high level of linguistic competence is required by students and teachers alike. Thus it is difficult to foresee CLIL being introduced at this level in any language other than a major lingua franca.

This has direct implications for the potential of CLIL and less widely taught and learnt languages (LWULT). (CLIL in academic secondary education, for example, is particularly successful in modules across subjects and disciplines where the cognitive demands are appropriate. Even at this level the introduction of LWULTs would be more typical at lower than upper

secondary). To teach complex subject matter through an L2 in HE requires a correspondingly high level of language proficiency by all involved.

- Countries which have a LWULT as the L1 tend towards high rates of EN L2 medium education programmes in HE. This impacts on incoming students' need to learn a LWULT as an L2, particularly in Erasmus exchange programmes.
- CLIL is an educational approach which is fundamentally methodological. If, as is reported, HE teachers tend to be untrained in teaching methodologies, it is likely that there will be a shortage of methodologically competent subject specialists in specific institutions. HE education is still reportedly characterized by transactional (largely imparting information) modes of educational delivery in certain sectors, rather than interactional (largely process-oriented). CLIL overwhelmingly requires use of interactional methodologies. However, it is possible that those sectors involved with EN L2 medium education tend towards interactional rather than transactional methodologies.

CLIL in HE would require specific skills in handling cognitive load and mixed ability classes. There is a lack of experience in HE of the types of systematic professional development which would be required for CLIL. The assumption that language will be picked up through exposure is contrary to what is understood about good practice in L2 medium education. There remains a role for language teaching whether this is integrated or parallel.

- The issue of whether language teaching is part of the core of academic life or a secondary auxiliary science remains a key

issue both in terms of language teaching and L2 medium education. The status, remuneration, and career development opportunities of the language specialist in European HE tends to be lower than that of other academic staff. This situation is widespread with some notable exceptions where there is a high degree of equality. Language specialists may be seen as 'auxiliaries', with lower positioning in hierarchies. They may sometimes be classified alongside clerical administrative staff and considered as 'auxiliary support service staff'. Where this situation exists, such subordination reduces the potential of the integrating of competencies across staff within HE departments. This is not an optimal situation if CLIL is to be implemented.

- The formation of Language Centres has a long history in some countries and is relatively new to others. It is possible that the existence of a Language Centre could go against the implementation of CLIL. However, given appropriate strategy and action this would not necessarily be the case. The issues outlined below indicate a threat of marginalization resulting from the L2 medium of education processes. It draws on respondent opinions and experience at HE/polytechnic levels and manifests itself through the following scenarios:
 - The Language Centre draws language specialists from departments into a centralized organization. This may separate language specialists from other academic staff even through physical location of offices outside departments.
 - This reduces easy opportunities for teamwork, and ultimately the types of team-teaching characteristic of quality CLIL in secondary academic education.

- It also reduces opportunities for staff to use the L2 as a daily medium of professional communication.
 - Thus, the language specialist may be come to be viewed as an external service provider and not as a member of the academic department.
 - External service providers are increasingly linked to income-generation. Shifts towards departmental financial autonomy and management can lead administrators to seek ways of challenging and managing ‘costing’.
 - Any shift towards L2 medium education can lead directly onto questioning the necessity for parallel language instruction according to costs. In addition, departments may also opt for recommending ICT-based self-study and thus reduce financial capacity allocated for language learning.
 - Increasing L2 medium education without resourcing and utilizing language specialists into core activities is unlikely to result in good practice.
- Market forces are also linked to L2 medium of education institutionally. This assumption is based on indicators showing the link between attracting students from outside Europe 25 into EN medium courses and the introduction, and increase, of fees. It is not possible to determine if the income generated in this way would be used to develop CLIL. Nor is it possible to see at this stage if incoming students are solely responsible for ensuring their own L2 linguistic proficiency, even if pre-programme language teaching and so forth is available. In a CLIL context, this responsibility would be shared.
- Thus the status of language teaching, the formation of independent language learning provider agencies, and market-oriented administration, can work against the implementation of CLIL. However, it is fully acknowledged that the creation of Language Centres can provide other tangible benefits for achieving plurilingualism. However these may not involve CLIL, unless the teaching of languages for specific purposes (LSP) is included within the definition.
- The Bologna Process and the development of 2nd cycle programmes (1-2 years usually 90 ECTS through the range 60-120 ECTS) is reportedly subject to curricula pressure. These, as noted, appear to be increasingly planned through EN as an L2. It is possible that academic departments, already under stress to reduce time allocated to subject matter, are unlikely to be receptive to any educational input not considered core. This is likely to reduce allocation of time for language teaching. But this could be an opportunity for the language specialists to ensure that L2 medium education in these programmes is implemented as CLIL so as to maximize overall quality.
- Erasmus exchange programmes may be strengthening the position of EN rather than leading to reciprocal multilingualism.
- HE already has experience of CLIL through language departments where much subject matter is taught with a dual focus (e.g. knowledge of L2 literature alongside knowledge of L2 language). There is also experience of CLIL through forms of LSP.
- In addition there is experience of teaching students whose L1 will not be the major medium of education.

(e.g. foreign students coming to learn through the institutional L1). It is difficult to determine if systematic approaches have been applied by which to learn from and cater for specific incoming foreign students. Such knowledge would be directly applicable for developing HE teacher expertise in CLIL methodologies.

- Vocationally-oriented HE, including medicine and business studies, has a long experience of partial teaching through an L2. The rationale for continuing this, alongside explicating CLIL dual-focused goals, could be re-asserted, particularly in internationally-oriented curricula. This leads directly to the significance of employability within the Bologna Process.
- There are some examples of bilingual HE institutions which are considered significant in the discussion on L2 and CLIL. However, these tend to have differing languages used through separate educational circuits. Such bilingual institutions may be little different to those which are monolingual in nurturing plurilingualism.
- The development of converging technologies and media applications could offer considerable potential in merging subject and language learning as a form of CLIL.

Summing Up

- As EN is the major L2 medium of education, any attempt to promote plurilingualism needs to follow the lines of ‘EN is not enough’ for equipping undergraduates for working life. The argument that linguistic competence in EN is rapidly becoming ‘banal’ is a strong one now surfacing. In other words, the future employer may assume that a person has some competence in EN, and require evidence of competence in another L2. It is a strong argument on employability which links to students’ motivation to enrich their respective resumé.
- Modules in another language, or the use of ICT, could enable limited exposure to CLIL in other languages. If these are then recordable through an institution-specific ELP, or similar accreditation reference frame, then it could be possible to use this approach to enhance the uptake of learning other languages.
- This has direct bearing on the development of language policies. The examples reviewed in the course of this desk research are generally top-down. Although some regulations and recommendations may be necessary to support plurilingualism, grassroots (bottom up) initiatives are crucial. Focus on the value of partial competencies and recognition through the resume/ELP is one way to enable CLIL to be introduced particularly in conjunction with ICT. This is where the Language Centre could take control of and implement forms of CLIL. It will already be occurring in some institutions leading to a form of pragmatic multilingualism. Any policy needs to act as an enabler which makes the student the de facto decision-maker on learning additional languages.

- Whereas an increase of L2 medium education is expected for 2nd cycle, 1st cycle instructional languages are not forecast to change substantially. However preparation for 2nd cycle and exchange programmes could be started in the 1st cycle in small-scale modular L2 medium activities. The projection of having 3m Erasmus students by 2010 has direct bearing. It could also be linked to provision of joint 2nd cycle degrees which are taught in separate locations in the L1 of the respective institutions, using CLIL methodologies. At 1st cycle, preparation could be focused on development of L2 academic study skills.
- The position of CLIL in tertiary education is clearly at an exploratory stage. Although there appear to be situational and structural variables which work against its introduction, there is no educational reason why it should not be introduced. However, if it is introduced, the advance of EN suggests that few other languages would be adopted as an L2 medium of education. The increasing need for HE institutions to strengthen international profiles in order to achieve competitive advantage appears to leave little choice.
- A weakness in the current L2 education medium situation relates to quality. HE reports the importance of improving academic quality as the 1st priority of the Bologna Process following preparation of students for the European labour market, and enhancing the attractiveness of European HE worldwide. This weakness could be targeted in an effort to impact on L2 medium education and language policies overall.

Correspondingly, joint programmes have been identified as a major platform upon which to gain

competitive edge. Here again L2 medium education could play a key role.

In addition, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) also carries implications in terms of the globalization of education. Viewed as a possible threat to the types of institutional cooperation envisioned in the Bologna Process, GATS negotiations are focused on a qualitative review of HE teaching and learning practice.

- The risks involved with inappropriate application, not least through forms of academic homogenization, and ensuing poor practice, are considerable. In developing specific HE institutional language policies, focus needs to be given on medium of instruction. Existing CLIL expertise can provide relevant input into handling these issues even if CLIL methodologies themselves are not fully or widely realizable in achieving greater linguistic pluralism.

The recommendations for action within and across the ENLU partnership, resulting from this initial work, will be further developed and circulated during the next discussion phase for which this brief has been prepared.

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EMILE: *Enseignement d'une Matière par l'Intégration d'une Langue Etrangère*

