
Nikula, T., Dafouz, E., Moore, P., & Smit, U. (Eds.) (2016).

Conceptualising Integration in CLIL and Multilingual Education

Bristol (UK): Multilingual Matters, 276 pp.

Although Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been a major topic in education for over ten years now, it is clear to those involved – whether as practitioners, as teacher trainers, or as school organisers – that the hardest aspect to grasp is that of integration. After all, “content” and “language” are easy to understand, and “learning” is what, we suppose, education is all about, but the notion of “integration” always poses a challenge. In this timely volume, a team of experienced CLIL researchers from Finland, Spain, Austria and the United Kingdom turn their attention to the issue of integration, and to the various senses that this term seems to have acquired in the CLIL context. The book is divided into three parts: the first is somewhat more theoretical, taking a step back from particular contexts to look at particular strands that run through CLIL programmes from the perspective of curricular design, while the second looks in detail at participant perspectives, focusing on secondary and higher education, and the third provides some insights classroom practices in different contexts.

In part one, Christiane Dalton-Puffer’s chapter provides a welcome overview of the key role played by cognitive discourse functions in drawing together the different strands of CLIL, providing extensive examples from classroom language. Francisco Lorenzo follows this, in collaboration with the same author, by looking more deeply at what literacy might mean in the context of history classes, with consideration of discourse functions in this area, taking in the wider concept of genre and the narrower one of lexico-grammar. This chapter is illustrated by extracts from spoken and written language from the history classroom, with a useful but brief discussion of how learners’ academic literacy skills seem to develop over time. Unusually, the last two chapters in this part centre on the mathematics classroom, looking at the interaction between mathematical content and foreign language in problem-solving activities. Angela Berger’s chapter builds an integrated model of the way that cognitive processes needed for language and mathematics appear to act. Using data from an empirical study conducted with pupils aged 11-12 in Austria, she found that working in English posed a considerable cognitive challenge to these students. Although, on the positive side, using English led to “extended phases of text reception” and tended to extend learners’ engagement with the content matter, in some cases the language difficulty posed an insurmountable obstacle to learning. Using think-aloud protocols, Berger is able to paint a detailed picture

of how individual learners struggle to make sense of mathematics and the foreign language. These learners engage actively with the rubrics provided, and appear to develop systematic phases for ordering and interpreting the information before they perform the task. The fact that they proceed more carefully would appear to be positive, in that they are less likely than L1 students to jump to conclusions too quickly. The mathematical model they develop, too, is likely to be more explicit, which is again to these learners' advantage. The examples provided by Berger nicely illustrate the recursive nature of the problem comprehension process, and point to a significant role for translanguageing in this area. Finally, Richard Barwell's chapter on mathematics classrooms in Canada takes a Bakhtinian perspective on classroom interactions, showing how meaning arises out of teacher-student interaction, and how students gradually seem to acquire more academic language, in parallel to informal or non-standard forms, as they develop new content knowledge. Such examples nicely illustrate the process of socialisation into subject-specific languages and practices, which is important in the L1, but particularly salient when content is taught in an L2.

Part two, on practitioner beliefs in EMI and CLIL settings, starts with a study by Dafouz, Hüttner and Smit, based on interviews with 18 lecturers in 4 European countries. The non-UK based lecturers all expressed concern about the extra investment of time needed to give good classes in English, and the perceived difficulties faced by students. However, their opinions diverged widely regarding the legitimacy of using other languages to communicate with students, or the extent to which the lecturers should modify their approach to teaching or assessment when English was used. UK-based lecturers, on the other hand, seemed to assume that all students (L1 or L2) needed to undergo an acculturation process to adapt to Anglophone academic practices, and that teachers have little agency – or responsibility – in this area. Also looking at teacher beliefs, Skinnari and Bovellan interviewed secondary school CLIL teachers in Finland, Austria and Spain, and found that they all tended to prioritise content, but were very aware of subject-specific language, particularly vocabulary. Their awareness of language beyond lexis was sketchy, since they often described it as “a side effect”, and subscribed to a vague acquisitional model of the way students benefited linguistically from CLIL. On a positive note, some were aware of key discourse functions for their discipline, while others stressed cultural, motivational and cognitive benefits.

The third part of the book provides a window on various classrooms. Morton and Jakonen's chapter is unusual in taking a conversation analysis perspective to analyse video data around one language-related episode in the classroom. Their example brings out the importance of focus on form in CLIL contexts, particularly

when this is student led. They remind us that CLIL classrooms should offer opportunities for students to explore language actively, and suggest how this could be engineered in future CLIL designs.

Then, Llinares and Nikula compare evaluative language in Spanish and Finnish classrooms using an approach based on Appraisal theory. Interestingly, the Finnish teachers appear to “play with voices around opinions” more than the Spanish teachers, while the Finnish students seem to take a more dialogic approach, and use more resources of engagement than their Spanish counterparts. The results obtained with this small sample (5 classes) offer a tantalising starting point for future comparative research. Finally, chapter nine, by Moore and Nikula, takes on the question of translanguaging in CLIL classrooms, again offering a comparison between Finland, Austria and Spain. Their central argument is that bilingual classroom discourse needs to be understood as just that, rather than as “L2 monolingual”, because this will “contribute to the development of functioning bilinguals”. The concluding chapter, rare in such volumes, actually puts forward a new construct intended to make sense of the different orientations to integration in CLIL that emerge in the course of the book. The authors, Leung and Morton, propose a matrix in which different approaches to CLIL can be positioned with respect to the visibility of language pedagogy (high or low) and the extent to which there is a disciplinary orientation to language (high or low). This is an interesting idea, and one that could be followed up in future research.

As Jim Cummins recently commented, even in the context of official publications and declarations by educational authorities, many assertions about bilingual education are “evidence free”. This book represents a further step along the road to creating a solid research basis for CLIL practice. It is to be hoped that the need for swift practical solutions at classroom level does not deter us from striving to gain in-depth knowledge of the multiple processes that contribute to integration in CLIL. At the same time, however, more dialogue is needed between CLIL researchers and practitioners, in order to bring the problems of real students and teachers into focus and devise positive solutions to the multiple issues that arise.

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