Content and Language Integrated Learning: Operational Practices

Kirti Kapur

ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) argues in favour of an across the curriculum approach that breaks down barriers between English and other subjects, and also between English and other Indian languages. Content based learning uses the subject matter as a vehicle for second or foreign language teaching/learning. Learners are exposed to a considerable amount of language through stimulating content, and language is explored via interesting materials and appropriate language-dependent activities. Such integration is especially useful within and across subjects at the early stages of teaching and learning, where English is the second language for doing activities that create learners' awareness of the world. The integration of concepts, themes and ideas from different subjects with language skills helps in language acquisition. In this paper, I will look at CLIL, its advantages, disadvantages, and the tasks that teachers may adapt from content, thereby, using language activities to help bridge both linguistic and learning gaps.

Key words: across the curriculum, content and language integrated learning, language acquisition, linguistic gaps

How does one balance interest in language learning with lack of proficiency in the target language? Can teaching content become a means to enhance the teaching and learning of language? Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a methodology that seeks to develop language learning through content, across the curriculum. It challenges discipline-specific boundaries regarding methods and outcomes of teaching and learning. The concept of CLIL originated when the need was felt to teach subjects in foreign language/s for the benefit of the learners, so that they could participate in the socio-cultural discourse at both national and international levels. The genesis of the term can be traced to a research study

commissioned by the European Commission in 1994, in which CLIL was defined as the operational use of a second language to teach content and language skills in another. At the time, the expansion of the European Union had necessitated making language education more diverse and adopting teaching methodologies that encouraged communicative competence in different languages. Using a lexical approach, initial CLIL programs motivated learners to pay attention to language while reading.

Over the years, with the multi-disciplinary research done by linguists, educators, psychologists, neurologists, etc., the model of dual language combined with content has gradually been supplemented by a third strong research focus and CLIL pillar—emphasis on students' learning strategies and thinking skills. (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010; Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008) CLIL can therefore be regarded as an educational approach that takes into account the whole curriculum and not just second language acquisition. In fact, language acquisition takes place in conjunction with other curricular objectives as part of CLIL. The learning of an additional language, for example, is integrated with the content subjects such as science, history or geography. Learners therefore automatically learn the target language as content is facilitated through it. CLIL can be used for any language, at age or educational level, from pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher learning to vocational and professional learning. In this sense, it promotes integration, understanding and mobility through multilingualism and multiculturalism. This approach has been successfully implemented in Europe, with Finland and the Netherlands showing the highest levels of CLIL in primary and secondary schools (Pokrivčáková et al., 2015:10; European Commission, 2012).

UNDERSTANDING CLIL

CLIL's flexibility is underpinned by a theoretical framework, commonly referred to as the 4C model. The 4C model is a holistic approach, where content, communication, cognition and culture are integrated. These cornerstones can be defined as follows:

- Content - Progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum.

- Communication - Using language to learn whilst learning to use language.

- Cognition - Developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding and language.

- Culture - Exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self.

Intensive exposure to a language in its avatar as a vehicular language improves comprehension and aids expression. In a CLIL classroom, language is learnt in a natural way and in meaningful contexts. Learners may also be motivated to experiment with the link language when they experience the positive impact of linguistic inclusion. In fact, in the last decade, educationists and pedagogues have focused more on the linguistic rather than the non-linguistic elements of CLIL, because at the centre of learning is language. This approach involves the development of social, cultural, cognitive, linguistic, academic and other learning skills, which in turn facilitates achievements in both content and language (Ioannou & Pavlou, 2011: 15).

The growing usage of English in India, in academic as well as social spaces is a clear indication of its integration within the overall Indian linguistic and cultural repertoire. The *Position Paper on Teaching of Indian Languages* (NCERT, 2006) acknowledges that English plays an important role in the domains of education, medicine, business and international relations, judiciary, industry, etc. English clearly does not stand alone, and the aim of ELT today is as much the creation of multilinguals that may enrich our linguistic fabric, as proficiency in the language. A range of English teaching situations exist in India. Despite that there is a demand for English medium schools because people feel that by learning English, they will get better opportunities in life. Parental and societal demand has resulted in the mushrooming of private English medium schools. However, availability of resources such as materials and teacher preparedness remain critical concerns. It is observed that in these emerging English medium schools/ sections, teacher preparedness and learners' exposure to the language is not up to the mark (Kapur, 2017:31). The most pressing issue, therefore, is developing sound pedagogy.

Here, CLIL can bring about a change in the focus within the classroom so that learners are able to use language to express their views, feelings, ideas, and later to express their opinions with appropriate arguments based on readings and research. Contextualization creates the scope for learners to develop language (English) across the curriculum. Vocabulary and grammar too flourish when developed in a context and not in isolation. Through input-rich environments, students learn to use appropriate language for speeches, debates, discussions, essays, reports, articles and manuals. They also learn the narrative language of stories, the figurative language of poetry, and the technical language of instructions. They develop an awareness of how language is used in various formal and informal situations and appreciate the different registers of language for different domains. Above all, learners learn to use language creatively for a range of topics.

Learning a subject means learning its terminology, understanding the concepts, and being able to discuss and write about them critically. For some topics (see boxes for some examples, learners can be encouraged to consult books or talk to people in different languages such as moving from home language to the language of the region and then to national / international languages, or gather material in English from the Internet, or gather materials in English from the internet as higher order linguistic skills need to be developed across languages and subjects. Let us take the example of reading. If learners comprehend a text in L1, it helps them to understand the text in L2. Improving it in one language improves it in another, while reading failure in one's own language adversely affects second language reading. This holds true for writing also, as both reading and writing are transferrable skills. Therefore, we can say that CLIL has advantages across languages and content. A language class also offers some unique opportunities. Stories, poems, songs and drama link learners to their cultural heritage, give them the opportunity to understand their own experiences and develop sensitivity towards people from other cultures. Similarly, learners are more likely to understand vocabulary and grammar in context from such activities that are culturally familiar and run across the curriculum.

CLIL BASED LEARNING AND TEACHING

Language is the basis for thinking, communicating, and learning and it should be developed through contextual meaning-making activities rather than mere drill. This will help learners prepare for the world and the workplace. However, the content of the language curriculum should be broad enough to encompass learners' needs and interests. Also, the activities need to be linked to their lives to create socio-cultural contexts that will encourage them to participate actively in understanding and creating appropriate communicative practices. CLIL is not purely a language class, but because it is subject/discipline centric, the focus is both on language learning and knowledge acquisition. While learners learn about the subject matter, they also learn a new language. Since the medium of instruction is not the mother tongue, initially learners may not be able to contribute and may even start rote memorizing the content. However, when the content is contextualized, learners' participation increases manifold. Here, teaching-learning materials such as visual aids, audio-video materials help in ensuring meaningful participation on the part of the learners. What also works in favour of CLIL is that:

It can provide effective opportunities for pupils to use their new language skills now, rather than learn them now for use later. It opens doors on languages for

a broader range of learners, nurturing self-confidence in young learners and those who have not responded well to formal language instruction in general education. It provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum, which can be of particular interest in vocational settings. (Emile Education, 2017: 572)

I will now share a few examples from CLIL based teaching and learning:

1. Learning the use of past tense from history lessons.

In the late eighteenth century, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras **rose** in importance as Presidency cities. They **became** the centres of British power in the different regions of India. At the same time, a host of smaller cities **declined**. Many towns manufacturing specialized goods declined due to a drop in the demand for what they **produced**. Old trading centres and ports could not survive when the flow of trade moved to new centres. Similarly, earlier centres of regional power **collapsed** when local rulers were **defeated** by the British and new centres of administration **emerged**. This process is often described as de-urbanization. Cities such as Machlipatnam, Surat and Seringapatam were de-urbanized during the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, only 11 per cent of Indians were living in cities. The historic imperial city of Delhi **became** a dusty provincial town in the nineteenth century before it was **rebuilt** as the capital of British India after 1912.

Excerpt from: NCERT. (2018). *Our Past*- III. Class VIII, p. 66

2. Writing a weather report in a language class.

India: Climate, Vegetation and Wildlife

You read in newspapers daily and watch on T.V. or hear others talking about weather. You must know that weather is about day to day changes in the atmosphere. It includes changes in temperature, rainfall and sunshine, etc. For example, as such it maybe hot or cold; sunny or cloudy; windy or calm. You must have noticed that when it is hot continuously for several days you don't need any warm clothing. You also like to eat or drink cold things. In contrast there are days together [sic], you feel cold without woollen clothes when it is very windy and chilly, you would like to have something hot to eat. Broadly, the major seasons recognised [sic] in India are:

• Cold Weather Season (Winter) December to February

• Hot weather Season (Summer) March to May

• Southwest Monsoon Season (Rainy)June to September

•   Season of Retreating Monsoon (Autumn) October and November

Excerpt from: NCERT. (2018). Social Science –Class VI, *The Earth: our Habitat*, p. 56

3. Vocabulary learned in the geography class will help learners to appreciate the chapter in Class VIII, English. They can be asked to write a diary entry/journal record as a reflective activity.

<div align="center">A Short Monsoon Diary by Ruskin Bond</div>

June 24

The first day of monsoon mist. And it's strange how all the birds fall silent as the mist comes climbing up the hill. Perhaps that's what makes the mist so melancholy; not only does it conceal the hills, it blankets them in silence too. Only an hour ago the trees were ringing with birdsong. And now the forest is deathly still as though it were midnight

Excerpt from: NCERT. (2018). *Honeydew*. Class VIII, p.113

4. Reading comprehension while understanding the phases of the moon and also connecting learning to art.

<div align="center">STARS AND THE SOLAR SYSTEM</div>

Let us try to understand why phases of the moon occur. We see the moon because the sunlight falling on it gets reflected towards us. We therefore see only that part of the moon, from which the light of the Sun is reflected towards us. The moon appears different at different positions in its orbit. Let us try to understand why phases of the moon occur by doing the following activity.

Take a big ball or a pitcher. Paint half of it white and half black. Go out into the playground with two of your friends. Draw a circle of radius of about 2 m on the ground. Divide the circle into eight equal parts. Stand at [*sic*] the centre of the circle. Ask a friend to hold the ball at different points of [*sic*] the circle. Ask her to keep the white portion of the ball always towards the Sun. If you are performing this activity in the morning, then the white portion of the ball should be kept towards the east. If the activity is being performed in the afternoon, then the white portion of the ball should be kept towards the west. In each case the line dividing the white and black portions is kept vertical. Standing at [*sic*] the centre of the circle, observe the visible white portion of the ball while your friend stands at the points on the circle marked earlier. Draw the shape of the white portion as you see it.

Compare your drawings with the different phases of the moon.

Excerpt from: NCERT. (2018). *Science*. Class VIII, p. 217

Sample questions based on the excerpt are:

- How many round objects are required to do this activity?
- What is the next step in the activity?
- Which side of the ball should face the sun?
- In which position should you keep the line dividing the black and the white portion?

Keeping in view the CLIL approach, while planning lessons, teachers need to explore both language and content with a focus on communication, vocabulary and grammar development. The best texts are those that are accompanied by illustrations, so that learners can visualize what they are reading. Illustrations include visuals, maps, diagrams, classifications, groups, hierarchies, flow diagrams and timelines for sequenced thinking such as instructions and historical information, and lastly, tabular diagrams describing people and places in various combinations. Not only do these facilitate reading, but they also and give cues to the learners to help them understand the content. Furthermore, they help learners develop their language and cover both linguistic and learning gaps. Depending on the text, CLIL may also help make learners aware of their culture, language competence and global trends. Lastly, CLIL helps learners in their preparation for lessons, reflection and in increasing their motivation to learn the language.

In a CLIL classroom, the teacher must design tasks that are subject-orientated, so that both content and language are covered. The tasks can ask learners to describe, classify, contrast, compare, exemplify, create, etc. A few activities appropriate to this discussion include:

- Questions and answers, terms and definitions, HOTS questions
- Complete the sentences
- Fill in the gaps
- Things - 'things you know' and 'things you want to know'
- Word quizzes, guessing games, crosswords, riddles
- Questionnaires for survey
- Descriptions of a visual input

All these activities are already a regular feature of an English classroom and can

become part of any classroom across the curriculum. However, when the focus is on the content, more language support than in a usual ELT lesson may be required. A teacher adopting CLIL is therefore expected to be able to integrate content and language learning effectively. The teacher can highlight useful language in the text and scaffold the learners so that they are able to use it as per the needs of the task. Learners can further be taught about discourse markers, adverb phrases, prepositional phrases, collocations, idioms, semi-fixed expressions. Phrases may also be given attention along with subject-specific and academic vocabulary. Awareness of these language forms supports the generation of knowledge. As Halliday (1993: 93) notes, "The ontogenesis of language is at the same time the ontogenesis of learning."

CLIL AND THE WAY FORWARD

The principles behind Content and Language Integrated Learning also include global statements such as *all teachers are teachers of language*. According to NCF (2005), language education is not confined to the language classroom. A science, social science or mathematics class is ipso facto a language class. This is possible only if there is cooperation between content and language teachers. However, this may not be possible always, and teachers may have to be trained to perform both roles—language and subject teachers. For teachers from an ELT background, having CLIL lessons means:

• Integrating both receptive and productive skills;

• Building lessons based on reading or listening texts/passages;

• Reorienting language focus in a lesson so that the focus is not only on grammar;

• Regarding language as functional and contextual;

• Taking learner styles into account in task types.

CLIL has its share of challenges. Subject teachers may not be trained in ELT, whereas an ELT teacher is more likely to be familiar with the activities used for developing language skills. This makes teacher training a concern as well as a challenge. Teachers need to be trained to embed these types of activities in their teaching learning process. The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in order to address this need gap can lead to a rewarding synchronicity between subject teachers and ELT teachers; especially when they start planning lessons. Administrative and policy level changes that facilitate such collaborations hence become important variables in the practice of CLIL.

In their study of a Science class in a Government run Higher Secondary School in India that used ICT based inputs for CLIL, Vency & Ramganesh (2013:40), surmise that "… teaching language through science is effective." However, they conclude their study on a cautionary note: "… gradual increase in the content language proportion in the CLIL approach should be taken into consideration, for all of a sudden teaching the whole content in second language may result in ambiguity among the learners. It may also demotivate the learners … [leading to] hazardous results." (Vency & Ramganesh, 2013) It is also noteworthy that the goals of second language learning may be too high for students who do not have access to such linguistic capital outside the classroom. They may also be further deterred by the complexity or novelty of the subject matter, resulting in altogether reduced language acquisition. Furthermore, if the content is conceptually demanding it could in turn complicate linguistic development (Seikkula-Leino, 2007: 330). The impact on the student should therefore be a focal point in the assessment of the effectiveness of CLIL.

CONCLUSION

Language learning is a key area in the school curriculum. Goals for a second language curriculum are twofold—attainment of basic proficiency such as is acquired in natural language learning, and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy. This argues in favour of an across-the-curriculum approach such as CLIL, that breaks down the barriers between English and other subjects, and English and other Indian languages at the initial stages. According to the NCF 2005, English may be one of the languages that create in the child's mind an awareness of the world. In higher classes, all learning happens through the language of the medium of instruction. Incorporation of CLIL in pre-service and in-service courses for teachers, and introduction of courses such as "Language Across the Curriculum and Writing Across the Curriculum", in pre-service course curricula in India is an acknowledgment of the same. Investments in empirical studies on the impact of CLIL on learners' confidence in using language effectively in different contexts can be a valuable input for future innovations in ELT classrooms. To eschew a critical approach to CLIL—appealing as its methods may be—would be a disservice to the linguistic heritage and potential of our learners.

REFERENCES

Content Language Integrated Learning. (n.d). In *Emile Education*. Retrieved from https://www.emile-education.com/concepts/clil/

Coyle, D., Hood, P., and Marsh, D. (2010). *CLIL*. Cambridge: CUP

First European Survey on Language Competences. (2012). In *Languages*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf

Kapur, K. (2017). *Voices of Teachers and Teacher Educators*. Volume IV, Issue 1 NCERT: New Delhi

Halliday, M. A. K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, *5*(2), 93-116.

Ioannou and Pavlou. (2011). 'Guidelines for CLIL Implementation in Primary and Pre-primary Education'. Retrieved from http://arbeitsplattform.bildung.hessen.de/fach/bilingual/Magazin/mat_aufsaetze/clilimplementation.pdf

Mehisto, P, Marsh, D. & Frigols, M. J. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL. Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. Oxford: Macmillan Education

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). (2005). *National curriculum framework 2005*. New Delhi: NCERT.

NCERT. (2006). *Position paper on teaching of Indian languages.* New Delhi: NCERT.

NCERT. (2018). *Our Past*- III. New Delhi: NCERT.

NCERT. (2018). *Honeydew*. New Delhi: NCERT.

NCERT. (2018). *Science*. New Delhi: NCERT.

NCERT. (2018). *Social Science: Class VI*. New Delhi: NCERT.

Pokrivčáková, S. et al. (2015). *CLIL in foreign language education: E-textbook for foreign language teachers*. Nitra: Constantine the Philosopher University.

Seikkula-Leino, J., (2007). CLIL learning: Achievement levels and affective factors. *Language and Education*, *21*(4), 328-341.

Vency, J. H. & Ramganesh, E. (2013). Is language learning possible through CLIL in the Indian context? An attempt. *ELT Voices – India*, 3(5), 31-47.

Kirti Kapur is Professor at NCERT, New Delhi. She is an ELT expert and teacher trainer. She holds certifications in Critical Thinking, Assessment and Special Education Needs from University of Maryland and University of Oregon, USA.

kkapur07@gmail.com; kkapur07@yahoo.com