



The Intercultural Aspects of CLIL

CLIL has been available in Europe for over 20 years, encompassing a range of different forms and models. Bilingual teaching is either continuous or module-based. The so-called modules are time-constrained content subject lessons focusing on the relevant subject matter and appropriate content. The problems facing bilingual teaching are reflected either in intercultural and regional studies or in methodology. A range of topic areas are selected as suitable for integrated cross-curricular teaching or deemed to be of special significance for vocational development.¹

Good, well-qualified teaching staff are the pre-requisite for efficient and successful bilingual teaching. It is absolutely necessary to prepare for a specific form of teaching, regardless of which subject is being taught.

Discussions are ongoing as to whether humanities or science subjects are best suited to bilingual teaching. There is, however, no doubt at all that the methodology for teaching Biology in the mother tongue has to differ from the methodology used in bilingual Biology teaching, as the L2 is used as the tool for acquiring content and technical skills. Furthermore the pupil also acquires linguistic ability in L2.²

The pupil is also able to observe the problems from a different point of view; i.e. from the point of view of the culture base of the other language. The role of teaching staff is to sensitise pupils to intercultural aspects of the subject matter and to point out intercultural differences.

The pupil learns to critically tackle the content of lessons in L1 and L2 and gain access to other perspectives: be it the perspectives of another country, a different social class or different protagonists.

Bilingual teaching makes a contribution to the differentiation of the learning objectives to be acquired. To illustrate this, here is an example from bilingual teaching in German.

German has the ideas of *Heimat* and *Vaterland*. These two ideas have different interpretations. In German culture *Heimat* refers to the turn of the XVIII and XIX centuries and is closely connected with the concepts and theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Johann Gottfried Herder.

Heimat, as a cultural phenomenon, gained political interest in the latter stages of the Romance Period, especially after 1848.

The shift of emphasis to the concept of one's own country led to the idea of German unification. The term *Heimat* became a stable component of an all-German pedagogy and a model for diverse associations that fostered regional and local traditions. A unified picture of a world was created, starting with the individual and his family and whose epitome was, first and foremost, the *Heimat* and then the *Vaterland*.

The *Heimat* is therefore the focal point of interest, i.e. the place and the surroundings into which one was born. The affective connection to the ideologically higher-ranking *Vaterland* is compounded by love for the *Heimat*. The *Heimat* and the people represent the true state of being German: loyalty, willingness to make sacrifices and patriotism.

¹ Christ, I.: Bilingualität und Mehrsprachigkeit, Hannover 2002

² Mäsch, N: Bilingualer Bildungsgang mit Deutsch als Fremdsprache, Amsterdam 1997



In Poland, on the other hand, the idea of *Heimat* was never the central term for the Polish National Idea. As Traba³ says, the causes of this are that Poland disappeared from the map of Europe in the 19th Century and restitution of Poland was fought over in various ways.

The term *Heimat* was never truly understood in Poland, it was sometimes “the place where I was born“ (*ziemia rodzinna*) or sometimes “*kleine Heimat*“ (*mała ojczyzna* or *ziemia ojczysta*), which approximates to the German meaning of *Heimat*.

The dominant categories in Poland were **the Nation and the State**. These two ideas were assigned absolute values.

This thinking remains to this day. Throughout Polish history, the Poles have thought along these lines. The idea of regional development and allegiance to one's roots is slowly gathering momentum

It is evident that the term *Heimat* not only invokes different connotations in Germany and in Poland, but that the term also represents quite different concepts of global awareness.

Another historical date is the Battle of Grunwald. The Polish people equate the year 1410 with the victory against the crusaders. This is part of the Polish History curriculum and a symbol of patriotism.

In Germany it is called the Battle of Tannenberg and is associated with the year 1914 and the victory of the German troops over the Russian army. In truth, this war was not fought in Tannenberg, but a few kilometres away from the medieval fields, in Frynnow. In his memoirs, Hindenberg wrote that the name Battle of Tannenberg should be preserved. This was about emphasising the significance of the victory over the Russians, ie. the Slavs. This therefore compensated for the defeat in the Middle Ages, and was said to have strengthened the resolve of the German people.

Battle of Tannenberg – the same name but very different backgrounds and great differences in meaning and connotation.

The result of this is that bilingual teaching should not only involve imparting content subject knowledge with the aid of a foreign language, but that **the intercultural differences should be identified and one's own identity should be built up in harmony with one's own environment**.

Comparing what is known with what is unknown and practising tolerance towards foreigners is very characteristic of bilingual teaching. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is officially endorsed by the European Commission as it expressly named this form of teaching as one of the few recommendations in the field of languages (*Förderung der Fremdsprachen und der Mehrsprachigkeit – Aktionsplan 2004-2006*).

In Poland, bilingual teaching has been on offer for more than 10 years and is gaining in popularity. It is interesting to note the attitude of the new intake into Secondary schools (Year 7 in the UK) to this type of teaching. Within the framework of the MOBIDIC Project, Polish pupils were also asked why they were attending bilingual classes. It turned out that over 70% of those questioned pointed out that they wanted to learn a foreign language and be able to communicate in that language. Intercultural aspects ranked much lower.

It is in fact true that CLIL is the most efficient form of teaching when learning a foreign language. According to scientific research (e.g Lamsfuss Schenk 2000) it is possible to reach the so-called *plateau*, which in *conventional standard* teaching is very difficult to attain.

³ Traba,R.: in Polacy i Niemcy – Historia – kultura – polityka. A, Lawaty, H.Orłowski, Poznań 2003



The experimental research carried out by the academic named above shows that it is well worthwhile using a foreign language as a teaching tool as well as the medium for acquiring information. This research⁴ was aimed at examining the understanding of the history and culture of another country, on the one hand by pupils who were taught in their mother tongue and, on the other hand, by pupils who were taught in the target language, French.

The result was that, compared with pupils who had only had mother tongue instruction, pupils in bilingual classes, had understood texts better and in more detail, they had accepted diverse or wider perspectives of a range of questions, they had used more technical terms and were able to cite source materials.

This was because bilingually taught pupils had had to develop and employ diverse strategies in order to understand the content thoroughly and in a sustained manner. The texts represented an intellectual challenge, with the result that the analysis carried out was better and more profound and thus the texts could be better understood on the whole. The effort needed to engage with the lesson content led to improved retention of the decoded information. The high degree of elaboration needed for working with foreign language texts also helps develop skills in linking new information with prior knowledge and identifying the main points, which means that pupils are better able to structure the subject matter.

Conclusion

Bilingual teaching is an efficient method of teaching in order to acquire the target language and content subject learning objectives. At the same time intercultural competencies are being developed, which are absolutely essential for life in another culture. This is of special importance nowadays in the light of globalisation. These are the main reasons why CLIL is extremely popular throughout Europe in spite of many problems.

⁴ M.Dakowska, M.Olpińska, Edukacja dwujęzyczna. Przedszkole, szkoła podstawowa i średnia. Terazniejszość i przyszłość. Warszawa, 2002