



## **THE ADDED VALUE OF CLIL APPROACHES AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PERSPEKTIVE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Many reports and studies suggest that at the moment CLIL is still at a trial stage. As long as the subject-specific didactic experts have not reached any final conclusions in their discussion, theoretical approaches should be explored for their practical suitability. What follows is an attempt to compare some theoretical considerations with practical activities. The exercises of the practical part aim at verifying the approaches to CLIL in the theoretical part. What interests the foreign language teacher here is the potential added value of bilingual learning. Does bilingual teaching simply impart extra knowledge and skills or does it also offer a qualitative increase in intercultural competence?

### **I. What interest does the linguist have in bilingual teaching?**

How can the interest of foreign language teachers in CLIL be explained? Is it about more lessons in the foreign language, is it about intensifying language skills or is it generally about improving the status of MFL? It may well be that this interest is the result of the aporias of foreign language teaching per se.

Traditionally, foreign language teaching encompassed two fundamental areas:

1. teaching linguistic rules;
2. the development of communicative skills.

However, the application of these skills can only be successful if a third dimension is added: the dimension of the socio-cultural context in which the language has its roots. Traditional Background Studies classes are unable to do this, as they merely aim at imparting factual knowledge about the country where the language is spoken. By contrast, what is important at the moment is the development of procedural skills: the perception of what is foreign as an opportunity for learning and developing a growing awareness of one's own pre-suppositions. Bilingual teaching could, as it were, be described as a set of 3-D glasses enabling and fostering such insights.

An example from the time of the Cold War serves to illustrate the idea of socio-cultural interference. When in its early years, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was due to build socialist monuments, its big brother, the Soviet Union, was highly irritated. Despite the efforts of the GDR artists to create images of socialist heroes, the only reaction of their Russian comrades was complete disbelief. As it turned out, the mistake they had made was that they had remained trapped in Western iconographic traditions. So, although all the heroes had been depicted in victorious postures, they also showed signs of struggle and failure. What they represented were secularised "Men of Suffering". Soviet heroes, by contrast, stem from the iconographic tradition of the "pantocrator", i.e. the absolute ruler, who knows neither pain nor suffering. Accordingly, whenever a Russian Socialist spoke of "heroes", he or she meant something quite different to what his or her East German comrade was referring to. These contrasting mental images among socialist artists had neither been linguistically analysed or communicatively reappraised. Nor was either side aware that they were drawing on a common, pre-socialist heritage.

With regard to bilingual art classes, this could mean that traditional forms of representation are investigated and confronted with experiences from one's own culture. In this way, CLIL could help to pre-empt and deal with potential conflict situations. However, if one looks at the



reality of bilingual teaching, one does not necessarily get the impression that subjects are taught with due consideration of the linguistic aspect, or that new dimensions are opened up for the process of language learning. Instead, one encounters monolingual instructions with the foreign language functioning as the working language.

For example, Science is taught in French to sixth form students in some North African countries. In keeping with learning techniques from the Koranic school, the students respond to the teacher in chorus, learn each formula by heart and recite it. For them, language is like the overall they put on for scientific experiments, leaving it behind in the classroom after school.

Louis-Jean Calvet made similar observations with regard to the use of English at the United Nations and in the European Union (*Le Marché aux langues. Les effets linguistiques de la mondialisation, Paris 2002*). In international institutions, the English language has a similar function to the Latin used in church. It is the language of the insiders and officials, allowing them to ignore national and cultural diversity. Obviously, this means that potential conflicts tend to be concealed rather than resolved. The appeal of bilingual teaching for the foreign language teacher certainly does not lie in using language as a vehicle for subject teaching without reflection. Instead, foreign languages should serve as catalysts in class.

## II. What can be expected of CLIL?

Bilingual teaching makes sense whenever it is able to offer more than traditional forms of subject teaching. This “added value” is not achieved by wrapping up the subject-specific information in a foreign language, nor can it be found in the fact that language skills are developed within a subject-specific context. Rather, one can speak of “added value” whenever knowledge about a foreign culture is brought to interact with one’s own cultural experience. For this reason, the foreign language “wrapping” either has to be made transparent or it has to be “unwrapped”. Only then can the bilingual teaching of subjects result in the pupils gaining an additional communicative competence.

Let me give a positive example from Tunisia: the subject of Freud is on the Year 12 bilingual Philosophy syllabus. The pupils have learned the terminology of psychoanalysis and are able to reproduce terms, definitions and models. Most of the time, they respond simultaneously, even in chorus, if asked mere factual questions. However, as soon as the psychic qualities of the individual are discussed, the set up of the lesson, marked by the educational tradition of the Koranic school, becomes shaky. For the first time, names of pupils are mentioned and personal ideas expressed. Obviously, it has become necessary to exchange and discuss experiences. The transition from teaching Philosophy to a philosophical discussion in class is equalled by the shift in paradigm of the taught subject: psychoanalysis. The use of language makes the differences of culture transparent.

The example of the philosophy lesson perhaps shows just how interesting and challenging bilingual teaching can be. Here, the subject teacher as the mediator plays a dual role. Firstly, he or she has to find a balance between subject-specific and language-specific learning objectives. Secondly, he or she has to connect these goals in the target language or ensure that they are achieved in the mother tongue. What has to be initiated is a *gestion mentale*, which requires careful support. Antoine de la Garanderie (*Pour une pédagogie de l'intelligence, Paris 1990*) differentiates between three phases of this learning process: *perception, evocation, restitution*. More simply: the content to be learned is first perceived and then connected to images, which ultimately have to be combined into new concepts. In the CLIL classroom the phase of *evocation* may cause problems. If the pupils cannot relate the content to their existing knowledge and the teacher is using new symbols to make the connection, then the learning process will slow down. Teachers of bilingual classes often



complain, and not without reason, about the slow learning pace of their pupils. The *évoction* does not necessarily happen in target language images and symbols. Potentially, the brain locates its concepts in social language or in the language commonly used for communication. These concepts have to be re-encoded in the target language, a process that requires time and methodological support.

All of us have experienced guided tours on holidays abroad. As a rule, only certain tours stay in our minds. Usually, the audience is bombarded with one piece of information after another without any reference to their own experience of or ideas about the world. Only when we are able to refer back to our own images or when new images can be integrated without difficulty, can we take in and retain the new information for any length of time.

Well-trained guides will sound out their audience's previous knowledge, preconceptions and expectations before they start giving out new information. They will choose perspectives, which enable people to associate and compare different facts. They will be eager to adjust their register of language to the abilities of their audience.

Many colleagues know how difficult it is to get groups of pupils interested in foreign cultures on study trips abroad. On tours, teachers regularly encounter problems with discipline because the new learning context cannot be made accessible. Only if the "foreign" can be made transparent in relation to their own experience, can pupils be receptive to new impressions.

Similar processes have to be considered with regard to the teaching of subject knowledge in a foreign language. The added value of bilingual teaching depends essentially on the question whether what is foreign can be made familiar and whether what is familiar can be connected with what is foreign.

Foreign language teachers are used to falling back on existing systems of reference when introducing new structures. Possibly, one can make use of these experiences in bilingual teaching.

### III. Recommendations for bilingual teaching

Colleagues teaching in bilingual departments are often envied for their capable students. However, if they are asked about their impressions, they often complain about the fact that their classes hardly manage to cope with the subject matter in the available lesson time. They claim to lose too much time with trying to understand foreign language texts and materials and thereby miss out on the actual learning objectives. Of course, foreign language teaching does not offer miraculous recipes, but it can certainly help to reduce problems:

1. by developing reading comprehension methods that actively involve the pupils
2. by familiarising pupils with particular skills and by developing cognitive learning processes in relation to the subject matter
3. by creating situations that are of intercultural significance

ad 1. In bilingual teaching, the mistakes that have proved to be obstacles in MFL teaching should be avoided:

- The misconception that texts are only understood if all the vocabulary and structures have been grasped.
- The misconception that what has been understood can immediately be reproduced using complicated linguistic formulations.
- The misconception that the learning process is stimulated by the teacher's questions.



The teacher can create “islands of understanding” within a text, enabling the pupils to reconstruct the whole content independently. Also, pupils can be encouraged to develop “networks of comprehension” by connecting individual terms within a given text. Using the principal concepts, the author’s argument can be reconstructed. The didactics of foreign language teaching has developed various methods of reading and interpretation, which actively involve the pupils, accelerate the learning process and, at the same time, make life easier for the teacher.

ad 2. In the areas of elementary and advanced language learning, two phases can be identified: the familiarisation phase and the cognition phase. On the one hand, familiarisation means making pupils reproduce newly learned structures imitatively and on the other, immersing them in the foreign language. Suggestopedia has recently discovered phases of subconscious learning and has integrated them into its programmes. Once listening comprehension and pronunciation have been secured, one can start with the phase of cognition: what has been newly learned is systematically analysed and integrated within the linguistic system of rules. Such phases of cognition are indispensable for the deepening of the learning process.

Similar methods could also be usefully applied in bilingual teaching. Firstly, subject-specific terminology and vocabulary have to become ingrained before they can be questioned and critically analysed. However, one must not stop short at the phase of familiarisation, as subject-specific information can also be rooted in the mother tongue/reference language consciousness. CLIL can only be implemented plausibly if other language skills are activated in the cognition phase. As early as in the 1970s, the didactics of foreign language teaching already coined the phrase “enlightened mono-lingualism”, that today’s syllabi have replaced with the term “functional mono-lingualism”. This expression describes exactly what bilingual teaching is aiming at: to make meaningful connections between pieces of information in a foreign language.

The length of the familiarisation and cognition phases will depend on the complexity of the subject to be learned as well as the tools available in the foreign language. Since many technical terms can be universally applied or are cognates in different languages, the detection of their meaning often does not prove difficult. Cognition in the field of bilingual teaching should not be restricted to the process of language learning, but also serves to make cultural differences transparent. You might find yourself wondering, for example, whether *citoyen* can be translated with *citizen*, or which terms are used in German textbooks for *débarquement*, or whether *climat continental* refers to similar things in German as it does in French.

ad 3. In foreign language teaching, phases of cognition are often related to specific situations. What is necessary is a special moment, an actual reason for communication, in order, for example, to make people aware of differences in the system of tenses or the perception of other aspects of grammar. Continuous reflection on systematic parameters is not welcome in foreign language teaching and CLIL alike. However, bilingual teaching should provide a forum for discussing intercultural questions when the opportunity arises. It has already been suggested elsewhere that “intercultural windows” in subject teaching should be offered to hint at perspectives which are seldom considered in traditional foreign language teaching.

In Social Studies, for example, an “intercultural window” could be opened up with regard to the topic “Migration”. In History, while teaching the French Revolution, one could undertake an intercultural comparison of the term “revolution” itself. In Geography, the topic “Forests” could give reason to conduct a differentiated multi-perspective investigation. In Biology, questions of environmental protection could be discussed. It therefore seems desirable to



discover cross-curricular intercultural aspects within the national curricula, so that problems of general concern are not dealt with in class by mere coincidence. In dealing with such questions, foreign languages should not simply be used as means of communication. As the product of social and cultural processes and traditions, they can help significantly in clarifying specific subject matter, not only with subjects with a particular “cultural outlook”, but for all subjects alike.

#### IV. Practical Suggestions

Some basic recommendations can be illustrated by way of practical tasks. In the case of working with texts, we can take the example of using two political speeches. Both speeches were held at about the same time – and for the same reason – but were written in different contexts. Differences in the way they are formulated, in the target audience and in argumentation make it possible to make an intercultural comparison in a number of steps.

##### 1. Terminological Jigsaw

As a first step, the students put the terms used in the text into the correct order using in a jigsaw activity. As we know, learning principally means the reconstruction of an experienced reality. Although the terms used by the politicians mean different things according to their social and cultural context, they seem familiar and thereby activate an already existing knowledge of the world. This previous knowledge can be used to make the other, foreign perspective plausible. The participants are asked to reflect on what the terms allude to in the foreign language and how they can be combined in the language of “the other” to create a meaningful whole. By arranging the terms into an outline text, they have to assume the perspective of the authors and follow their line of argument. By comparing their reconstructed jigsaw with the original text they are able to explore their own preconceptions and to become aware of social and cultural differences.

Aim of the activity: understanding the perspective of “the other”.

Task: groups of participants receive sixteen phrases or words from both speeches ([AB1a](#) and [AB1b](#)).

- They try to find out on which occasion the speeches were made and to identify the events to which they refer.
- Using the terms given, they try to develop the outline of a text.
- They investigate whether there are significant differences in argumentation.

Possible results: the participants recognise that both speeches were delivered after an act of terrorism had taken place in a friendly nation. They realise that the events could have been perceived as a threat to their own country. This results in a similar line of argument: the expression of grief and sympathy, the condemnation of the deed, the reference to the community of nations, the determination for joint action, the reassurance of the people, etc. Differences might be discerned less in the way the argumentation of the speeches was structured than in the way the events were received emotionally, how the politicians evaluated them and diplomatically hinted at possible consequences. In the group, the resulting questions can be followed up and offer various opportunities for interaction.



## 2. Comparison of Texts

The second task involves an actual comparison of the speeches. Bilingual teaching is more than simply imparting background information. It is not primarily focused on providing ready lists of facts, but on the development of autonomous forms of learning. The texts should not be rashly categorised within existing schemes of thought too readily. Instead, they should be explored with regard to their contexts and to the audiences they were written for. This background will then enable students to analyse the formal qualities of the speeches. After this, a further step could involve reflection on the discernible differences of language register, terminology and argumentation.

Aim of the exercise: recognition of different social and cultural premises

Task: the participants receive both texts ([AB2a](#) and [AB2b](#)) with worksheet ([AB3a](#) and [AB3b](#)).

- They compare the general contexts and conditions in which the speeches were delivered.
- They speculate about each politician's message.
- They try to identify intercultural differences by investigating analogous language.

Possible results: the participants realise that the French President spoke to his nation on the evening of the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> in a TV speech, whereas the German Chancellor delivered a government statement the next morning. The TV broadcast is recorded in the Élysée-Palace, the government statement is given in the *Bundestag*. The President addresses his "*chers compatriotes*", while the Chancellor speaks to the deputies. The President's speech is relatively short and affirmative; the Chancellor expresses his feelings, explains his reaction to the situation and requests support for his actions. Both of them declare their solidarity with the United States and try to reassure the citizens. The President's phrases appear more neutral than the Chancellor's (*tragédie, épreuve dramatique/criminal challenge, declaration of war*). The President argues less in political terms than the Chancellor (*lutte efficace, action déterminée, décisions coordonnées/civilised world, fundamental values, peace and liberty*). One can make comparisons between language such as "*tous les Français*" and "*the whole German nation*", between "*sentiment d'inquiétude*" and "*shock*". The participants might come up with assumptions about the different spheres of influence of a president and of a chancellor, but they might also ask questions about the history of the two countries, starting with the terms "*citoyen*" or "*Volk*".

## 3. Association Exercise

The third exercise is of an open, associative nature. Bilingual teaching is not just about cognitive learning processes. Whenever students enter a new system of semantic assignments, it is not only their previous knowledge that will be stimulated. Their pictorial, subconscious ideas will also be activated. In this process, the brain is not only interested in the semantic dimension of concepts and words, but also in their emotional significance. Language, too, is first and foremost perceived in a sensory way before any meaning is extracted. Therefore, it is interesting to find out what kind of associations emerge from specific terms. It is also interesting to see how these associations can be re-combined to form new units of meaning. The intention of this exercise is to record such semantic and "sensory" associations and to have them interact with each other. This procedure helps to clarify the effect that certain terms have on teenagers and what connections they make.



Aim of the exercise: activation of conscious and subconscious ideas.

Task: The participants write down a word (noun, verb, adjective), which they think of spontaneously when hearing the term *liberty/liberté/ Freiheit*. From all these words the tutor picks the two most contrary ones and writes them on the board.

- For each of these terms, the participants are asked to write down three associated words based on sound (one word respectively).
- For each of these terms they are asked to make three associations based on meaning (one word respectively).
- By now, there should be fourteen words ([AB4a](#) and [AB4b](#)) altogether, which the participants are asked use to write a short text, that includes all of the terms.

Possible results: As the end products might be quite different, concrete results cannot really be anticipated. Even with spontaneous reactions, the term “liberty” will certainly give rise to all kinds of associations. Depending on the social backgrounds and the philosophy of individuals, the term will signify a variety of things: liberty as the basis of democracy or as the epitome of self-realisation? If we take the terms “democracy” and “self-realisation” as a basis for more associations (meaning and sound), then we will end up with a sheer endless number of different combinations. In bilingual lessons, it would be of particular interest to see what these terms mean in the target languages. Does the German concept of “*Freiheit*” have the same associations as *liberty* or *liberté*? The texts resulting from these deliberations will not only serve as stimuli for the pupils’ creativity, but will also allow for an analysis of the participants’ social and cultural background and of their learning needs.

The three activities above are not to be understood as exercise typologies. Instead they illustrate methods, which can help to initiate intercultural learning processes in bilingual teaching. As we have seen with the last exercise, there are no limits to the teacher’s imagination. The general added value in bilingual teaching starts with these exercises: the synergy of language and subject teaching should create opportunities for autonomous learning that involves multiple perspectives.