Identifying Effective L2 Pedagogy in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)[1]

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1. Introduction

In Europe, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is becoming a popular and widespread practice of immersion education. In the Netherlands, for example, over 90 schools for secondary education offer a CLIL strand. Most CLIL teachers, however, are non-native speakers of the target language, and do not have a professional background in language pedagogy. How, then, can these teachers effectively contribute to the target language development and proficiency of their students?

In this paper, we will discuss the findings of a study carried out in three schools for secondary education offering CLIL. The purpose of the study was to observe and analyze effective CLIL teaching performance facilitating language development and proficiency. The analysis was carried out by means of an observation tool for effective CLIL teaching performance, based on the following principles from second language pedagogy: (1) exposure to input; (2) content-oriented processing; (3) form-oriented processing; (4) (pushed) output; and (5) strategic language use. We will discuss how the observed CLIL pedagogy is related to content-based teaching and task-based language teaching, and provide recommendations for effective language pedagogy in CLIL. We will argue that not only CLIL-teachers can benefit from effective language-pedagogical approaches, but that language teachers can benefit from effective CLIL approaches and experiences as well.

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2. Research questions

Although much attention has been paid to the proficiency level in English of CLIL teachers in the Netherlands and to the selection and adaptation of subject matter textbooks for CLIL, national CLIL evaluations indicate that little attention is paid to the pedagogic repertoire of CLIL teachers and to how it contributes to the pupils' target language proficiency (see Maljers & Wooning 2003). Therefore, in this paper we aim to investigate characteristics of effective CLIL teaching performance and relate these to theoretical principles in second language acquisition. The specific research questions are:

1. What CLIL teaching performance indicators can be derived from theoretical assumptions about effective language teaching and learning?
2. What instances of effective teaching performance in CLIL lessons can be identified by means of an observation tool based on assumptions of effective language teaching performance?
3. What practical recommendations can be provided to both CLIL and FL teachers concerning effective language pedagogy?

The aim of the study reported here, in other words, is not to quantitatively analyze or qualitatively evaluate CLIL practice, but to detect and describe instances of effective CLIL teaching performance based on language teaching performance indicators.

3. CLIL teaching performance indicators

Our conceptualization of effective teaching performance for language acquisition in CLIL includes attention to such features as functional communication, simultaneous attention to form and meaning, and type of corrective feedback, within a broader framework of three essential conditions for language acquisition – *exposure, use, and motivation* (Willis 1996: 11). Those essential conditions have been further elaborated in an observation tool for this study according to five basic assumptions related to effective language teaching performance.

Teacher facilitates exposure to input at a (just) challenging level

In correspondence to this assumption, before a lesson a CLIL teacher is expected to select and tailor input material in order to have it challenging but comprehensible for learners. Two types of scaffolding can be distinguished

during the lesson, namely on content and/or language of the input material, and content and/or language of teacher talk.

In the observation tool, this category consists of the following indicators for effective teaching performance:

1. text selection in advance
2. text adaptation in advance
3. adaptation of teacher talk in advance
4. text adaptation during teaching
5. tuning of teacher talk

Teacher facilitates meaning-focused processing

In correspondence to this assumption, a teacher can be expected to stimulate content-processing of oral or written input by giving special tasks that involve learners in grappling meaning (trying to make sense of whatever they hear or read). The teacher should check whether the meaning of the input has been comprehended sufficiently. If meaning is processed insufficiently or erroneously, the teacher might give some kind of support. Supplementary exercising of the related content features of input can be performed in this category as well.

In the observation tool, this category consists of the following indicators for effective teaching performance:

1. stimulating meaning identification
2. checking meaning identification
3. emphasizing correct and relevant identifications of meaning
4. exercising on correct and relevant identifications of meaning

Teacher facilitates form-focused processing

In correspondence to this assumption, a CLIL teacher can employ activities aimed at awareness-raising of language form, thus making learners conscious of specific language features. The teacher might indicate and direct learners' attention to correct and incorrect uses of form, give examples of such uses, thus facilitating implicit or explicit noticing of language form. In giving corrective feedback the teacher might employ implicit techniques (e.g. clarification requests, recasts) or explicit techniques (e.g. explicit correction, metalinguistic comment, query, advice) for focusing on form, as well as nonverbal reactions.

In the observation tool, this category consists of the following indicators for effective teaching performance:

1. facilitating noticing of problematic and relevant language forms
2. providing examples of correct and relevant language forms
3. correcting use of problematic and relevant language forms
4. explaining problematic and relevant language forms, e.g. by giving rules
5. having pupils giving peer feedback

Teacher facilitates opportunities for output production

In correspondence to this assumption, in promoting output production in the target language a CLIL teacher can encourage learners to react, ask questions aimed at functional output as well as stimulate interaction between learners in the target language. Different interactive formats (e.g. group, pair work) might be implemented to facilitate meaningful communication in English. Through instructions and/or corrections the teacher can guide learners to use English exclusively in the lesson. Corrective feedback by teachers or peer-students might stimulate the use of correct form/meaning connections by learners. The teacher can use a diverse range of activities for further exercising essential aspects of form/meaning use.

In the observation tool, this category consists of the following indicators for effective teaching performance:

1. asking for reactions
2. asking for interaction
3. letting students communicate
4. stimulating the use of the target language
5. providing feedback, focusing on corrected output
6. organizing written practice

Teacher facilitates the use of strategies

In correspondence to this assumption, a CLIL teacher should be able to assist learners to overcome their language and content comprehension and communication problems, by developing a repertoire of receptive and productive compensatory and communication strategies. Scaffolding and reflection on-the-spot is considered of great importance, when the teacher should be able to suggest to the learners an effective path (use of strategies)

for resolving comprehension or language use problems they have encountered.

In the observation tool, this category consists of the following indicators for effective teaching performance:

1. eliciting receptive compensation strategies
2. eliciting productive compensation strategies
3. eliciting reflection on strategy use
4. scaffolding strategy use

According to Westhoff (2004), these five assumptions can be considered as the basic ingredients for effective language learning and teaching activities. Westhoff's "SLA penta-pie" (named after a five section pie chart) is illustrated in Figure 1 and forms the theoretical basis for the observation tool in this study. For a more detailed description and justification of the observation tool, see de Graaff *et al.* (2007).

Figure 1. The "SLA penta pie", adapted from Westhoff (2004)
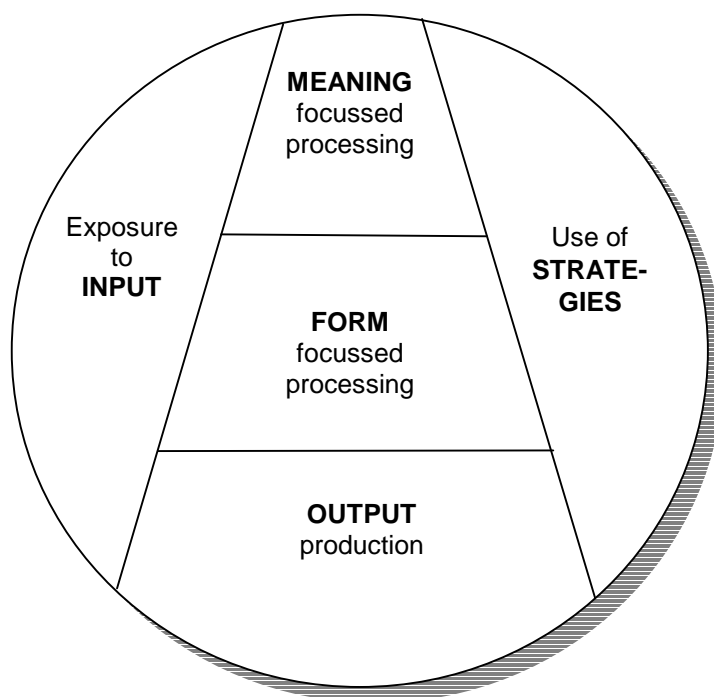
4. Effective teaching performance in CLIL lessons

In order to find practical evidence for teaching performance promoting learner language acquisition within CLIL contexts, a research instrument in the form of an observation tool was constructed according to the basic assumptions of the "SLA penta-pie". The observation tool was piloted on seven CLIL lessons

by CLIL teacher trainees in order to validate its usability and coverage. Subsequently, the observation tool was used to analyze a set of CLIL lessons from a variety of school subjects in three Dutch CLIL schools.

4.1 Procedure

Nine lessons from three Dutch CLIL schools for secondary education were observed, videotaped and analyzed by means of the observation instrument for effective pedagogy. The three schools belong to the same consortium of schools and are medium sized Dutch schools of about 1,200 students each. Each school has a CLIL-stream of about 300 students per school. The schools implemented a CLIL program about six years ago. The sample for this study consisted of nine lessons from the following subjects: History (three male teachers), Geography (one male teacher), Biology (one female teacher), Maths (one female teacher), Arts & Crafts (one female teacher) and English (two female teachers). We observed one lesson per teacher.

All videotaped lessons were observed and analyzed by at least two researchers. Any doubts concerning the qualification of specific excerpts were discussed and agreed upon in the research team, consisting of four researchers.

4.2 Results

In general it was found that, over all observed lessons, teachers used almost the whole range of effective teaching performance indicators. Although not every teacher used all performance subcategories in all the observed lessons, consistent and useful examples were found for almost every subcategory. As the aim of this research was to detect examples of effective CLIL pedagogy and to validate the instrument, the observations were not used to provide a quantitative analysis of the school, a department or individual teachers, neither to evaluate the quality of those. For a more detailed description and discussion of the results, see de Graaff *et al.* (2007).

5. Conclusions and practical recommendations for CLIL teaching

This research has aimed at finding practical evidence for theoretical assumptions on effective teaching performance directed at language acquisition in CLIL contexts. For this purpose, teaching performance indicators have been formulated, derived from assumptions about effective

language teaching. Those performance indicators have been integrated in an observation tool for effective CLIL teaching practice.

In the CLIL lessons analyzed in this study, sufficient evidence was found for most subcategories of the five main indicators for effective language teaching performance, as in:

1. *Teachers facilitate exposure to input at a (just) challenging level* by selecting attractive authentic materials, adapting texts up to the level of the learners and scaffolding on the content and language level by active use of body language and visual aids.

2. *Teachers facilitate meaning-focused processing* by stimulating the learners to request new vocabulary items, check their meaning, use explicit and implicit types of corrective feedback on incorrect meaning identification, and practice through relevant speaking and writing assignments.

3. *Teachers facilitate form-focused processing* by giving examples, using recasts and confirmation checks, making clarification requests and giving feedback (sometimes including peer feedback). No evidence was found of CLIL teachers providing explicit form-focused instruction, e.g. by explaining rules.

4. *Teachers facilitate output production* by encouraging learners' reactions, working in different interactive formats and practicing creative forms of oral (presentations, round tables, debates) and written (letters, surveys, articles, manuals) output production, suggesting communicatively feasible tasks, which give the learners enough time for task completion, encouraging learners to speak only in English, providing feedback on students' incorrect language use and stimulating peer feedback.

5. *Teachers facilitate the use of compensation strategies* by stimulating students to overcome problems in language comprehension and language production, reflecting on the use of compensation strategies, and scaffolding on-the-spot strategy use.

We can conclude, then, that the CLIL lessons observed in this study show instances of effective language teaching performance. That is, the subject teachers in the study perform at least incidentally as effective language teachers.

6. Further developments and implementation of the observation tool

The results of the study and teachers' reactions in the interviews related to this study indicate that teachers appreciate the tool as useful for expanding their teaching repertoire in a CLIL context. The tool might be further developed and implemented as a practical instrument in CLIL teacher training (e.g. pre-service/in-service, peer-coaching) and self-reflection of individual CLIL teachers (e.g. in professional development plans and performance reviews). For that purpose, a CD-ROM has been edited and produced containing video-clips that show examples of effective CLIL teaching performance in all subcategories found. The examples are accompanied by explicit 'do-statements' for all subcategories and suggestions for classroom activities. The CD-ROM and the observation instrument have been distributed among all CLIL schools in the Netherlands, and are used in pre-service training, in-service training and peer coaching sessions in our Institute for Teacher Training.

Although the observation tool was developed for effective language teaching performance in CLIL, a wider usage can be conceived. The tool, the observations made, and its application in CLIL teacher training and professional development might be of importance to *foreign* language teachers as well. It may serve as an example of how content and language integrating principles can facilitate language learning, and of how teachers can stimulate content-based language learning activities in foreign language curricula. Both content and language teachers can learn a lot from each other, and trainers and researchers, in turn, can learn a lot from both.

References

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