Examining CLIL through a Critical Lens

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Published online: 15 July 2020

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Sharing epistemological territory with immersion, content-based instruction (CBI) and English-medium instruction (EMI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is an educational approach with a dual focus on language and content [1–3]. Originating in Europe, it has expanded to Asia, Latin America and contexts where English is an additional language, and has been constantly re/interpreted, adapted and extended vis-à-vis theories in bilingual education, genre and register analysis, sociolinguistics, systemic functional linguistics and sociocultural theories of language and literacy development. This special issue contributes to this multi-stranded conversation by examining CLIL as a historically and culturally constructed educational model, circumscribed by power relations and shaped by colluding and conflicting ideologies of language and learning. By offering critical perspectives of CLIL as a social practice, it draws attention to how the debates about its parameters, labels and methods are as much about cultural and political issues as its actual features.

In the past decade, there have been CLIL overviews that have called for the pursuit of various research issues ranging from the *theoretical*, e.g. viewing language and content as one process and bridging learning theories with ideas of discursiveness and performativity [3]; *methodological*, e.g. engaging with action-research to transfer scholarly insights to professional contexts of education [4] and the *pedagogical*, e.g. examining assessment methods and teacher preparedness [5]. In a special issue of *The Language Learning Journal*, Dalton-Puffer and Nikula [6] bring together various studies that examine content learning outcomes and assessment methods, corrective feedback and learner motivation. Responding to what has been regarded as a pendulum

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shift in CLIL research from enthusiasm (e.g. [7]) to intense critique [8, 9], Cañado's [10] special issue of *Theory into Practice* offers guidelines and recommendations regarding characterization, implementation, research and teacher training to address certain gaps.

While these earlier CLIL studies examine a range of theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical issues, they have mostly been conducted through descriptive, correlational or interventional frames. What this special issue advances is a *critical* frame that recognizes how CLIL is continually interpreted and discursively constructed by policymakers and practitioners and remains a perpetual site of struggle. As an integration model, CLIL has always been characterized by a certain in-betweenness: between being a type of programme and a pedagogical model, between a focus on form and a focus on meaning, explicit and implicit language teaching, and systematic and spontaneous development. The word *integrated* in CLIL is indexical of the fluidity in which this object is theorized and practiced and where the parts that make it whole (*integrare*) are never in complete equilibrium. These different poles tug CLIL in different directions, allowing it to resist being sedimented into a fixed or established set of expectations. This constant movement, this in-betweenness, is both CLIL's greatest strength and challenge: it enables CLIL to be reinterpreted and reconfigured to address specific local needs, and it can involve different points of rupture. As policymakers, stakeholders and practitioners assert their own interpretations and configurations of CLIL, power permeates these relationships, and the contrasting conceptual stands and practical decisions of these human actors constitute this site of struggle.

While the six studies in this special issue span different geopolitical domains—Taiwan, Korea, Canada, Hong Kong and the USA—and involve both K-12 and higher education contexts, they collectively illumine the rhizomatic relations through which content is learned and mediated by English as an additional language. Whether it is at the national scale where language policies are implemented, or the local scale where instructors perform various roles and engage in diverse teaching practices, these CLIL domains are arenas where ideological stances and interpretations of CLIL are continually negotiated and contested.

The Construction of Language Policies

National language-in-education policy and practice is a frequent site of struggle where we often witness how local actors exercise their agency to contest top-down policies that are saturated with global dominant ideologies [11–13]. In Tsou et al.'s paper (this issue), the researchers describe how the dominant ideologies of 'English-only' pedagogies and 'native-English-speakerism' have shaped the national policy in Taiwan with dire implications for classroom language policy, teacher hiring policy and teacher professional development. As Taiwan's political leaders grow in their aspiration to expand Taiwan's influence and participation in the global stage, their determination to implement an English-dominant 'bilingual education' policy and to seek quick results is understandable. However, politicians and the general public alike have been under the global ideological myths of English-only pedagogies and native-English-speakerism (see critique of these myths by [14, 15]). Tsou and her colleagues successfully draw on the theoretical and pedagogical resources of English as a lingua franca (ELF) [16] and translanguaging (TL) [17, 18] to develop culturally sensitive and locally

appropriate recommendations regarding classroom language policy, teacher hiring policy and teachers' professional development needs in their CLIL pilot programme in Tainan, a historical city in Taiwan. The agency of these Tainan educators and researchers shines through the ways they leverage both recent trends in educational theories (e.g. ELF, CLIL, TL) and local, place-based knowledge and insights to design sensible policy and practice recommendations in CLIL to address the specific needs of their national, societal and school contexts. Their work is instructive to CLIL scholars and researchers demonstrating how CLIL can offer a site for negotiation of national policies as well as how critical, context-sensitive approaches to CLIL are crucial if CLIL is not to turn into another form of cultural and epistemological imperialism from the West.

The Negotiation of Power Among Instructors

Another area of struggle lies in the roles and power dynamics between different groups of teachers or instructors. Although the label suggests an integration between content and language, a true integration in practice is rarely found, and sometimes the implementation of CLIL rests on the collaboration between content and language specialists [19, 20]. Nevertheless, during the implementation of CLIL and the process of teacher collaboration, the roles or responsibilities of content and language teachers are often unclear. This ambiguity necessitates a process of negotiation, which involves some power dynamics [21]. Kim and Lee (this issue) investigated the experience of two English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers in a university in Korea, who were 'asked' to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses after their university decided to adopt English as medium of instruction (EMI) in response to the global trend of internationalisation. Although both content and language specialists should bear some responsibilities in implementing CLIL, in that particular university, language specialists were given the responsibilities for teaching discipline specific English courses, so as to prepare students for EMI or bilingual courses in their discipline. Through comparing and contrasting the beliefs and experience of two experienced language specialists, Kim and Lee critically analysed the move towards EMI with a top-down approach and how language specialists could be involved and supported in the process so that they would be in a better position to adapt to their new roles and responsibilities. Different from previous studies on EMI or CLIL in higher education which paid more attention to content specialists, this paper discusses the issues from the perspective of language specialists, highlighting their dilemma and identity reconstruction process.

While Kim and Lee examine the perceptions and experience of language specialists in the process of promoting CLIL (with limited collaboration with content specialists), Wallace, Spiliotopolous and Ilieva (this issue) reveal the possibilities and difficulties involved in interdisciplinary collaboration between content faculty and applied linguists/language specialists. Working together in a university in Canada, content faculty and applied linguists were encouraged to collaborate through an adjunct model with a view to promoting CLIL. Analysing data collected from the professional meetings between content faculty and applied linguists, as well as semi-structured interviews with applied linguists, Wallace and others applied a critical lens to examine

how power circumscribes the collaboration process. Corroborating the findings of some previous studies on interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g. [22, 23]), the authors revealed the instructors' different conceptualisations of CLIL and language, the influence of institutional policies and resources on such collaboration, as well as the power dynamics shaped by the ranking of the content faculty and applied linguists. However, Wallace et al. also argued that each collaborative dyad was unique, and how interdisciplinary collaboration was carried out or to what extent it was effective depended on the negotiation between the dyad involved.

Whether these are issues regarding the design of an ESP course or the collaboration between content and language specialists, these two papers underscore how the integrative nature of CLIL involves interpretation and negotiation processes that are always circumscribed by power and involves not only teachers but the institutions that define their roles and ranks.

The Enactment of Language Ideologies and Teaching Beliefs

CLIL is also a site for the enactment and struggle of different language ideologies and teaching beliefs. Lindahl's study (this issue) illustrates how most dual-language immersion teachers in the USA subscribe to the ideology of language standardization and the ideology of academic language and disparagingly view students' spontaneous classroom utterances from a deficit lens, failing to recognize the value of students' fluid, dynamic meaning making practices. Lindahl thus calls for the need to raise the Critical Multilingual Awareness (CMLA) of teachers in teacher education programmes for CLIL or similar bilingual education programmes. In Liu's study (this issue), we can see that similar ideologies are being contested as both students and teacher engage in meaningful interactions that involve different content topics. Liu's study draws on Lemke's [24] notion of 'feeling-meaning', García and Li's [25] notion of translanguaging and Lin's [18] notion of trans-semiotizing to further illustrate how the teacher's careful attention to students' feeling-meaning entails the fluid, dynamic use of both the students' and teacher's full repertoire of semiotic resources without regard to the sanctions of official English-only policies in the English medium instruction (EMI) CLIL classes. Both Lindahl's and Liu's studies position teachers as potential agents in reproducing larger societal ideologies or in effecting change bottom-up, and thus both point to the need to incorporate critical perspectives and CMLA in CLIL teacher education.

The Integration of the Critical in CLIL

While the articles mentioned above provide a critical examination of CLIL practices involving policymakers, teachers and students, Ho's article (this issue) demonstrates the integration of the critical into CLIL, that is, the adoption of this programme model as a means to advance a critical pedagogy. By developing and implementing a critical sexual literacy curriculum, Ho creates a space to challenge heteronormative ideologies and enable a more pluralistic understanding of gender and sexuality. To achieve this purpose, he draws on the 4Cs of CLIL—content, cognition, communication and culture [2]—to define and explain concepts such as biological sex, intersex and transgender

with a particular focus on the language people use to engage with these topics. The ensuing classroom discussions enable the articulation of conflicting ideological views and create ‘moments of discomfort’, but it is in this space, Ho asserts, that the participants also develop a critical awareness of how language constructs and positions different identities. By ‘queering’ CLIL, Ho demonstrates how critical perspectives can be integrated into both content and language in order to contribute to a liberating pedagogy [26, 27].

Conclusion

By examining CLIL as a social practice, shaped by institutions and human actors, the articles in this special issue demonstrate how this epistemological object is historically, culturally and politically constructed. Whether it involves the design of top-down language policies and curricula, the negotiation of roles and functions among content and language instructors or the mediation of pedagogical choices, all these processes are indexical of different ideologies of language and learning. The interpretations and decisions of people involving CLIL are not just cognitively produced nor are they autonomous. They are subject to the negotiation of power, the positioning of key players and the hegemonic control of institutions. It is these ideological mechanisms and their pedagogical implications that this special issue highlights. By examining CLIL through a critical lens, it offers new perspectives to understand the issues of integrating content and language and the systematic and spontaneous ways in which this model is applied. The plurality, fluidity and in-betweenness of CLIL is what enables not only the production of creative learning solutions but also the collaboration of individuals from different fields and the convergence of diverse forms of knowledge. By offering a critical frame and demonstrating the use of relevant theoretical constructs, this special issue hopes to contribute to CLIL research not only to critique but also to demonstrate how it is within this plurality and fluidity, this site of struggle, that the generative and transformative power of CLIL emerges.

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