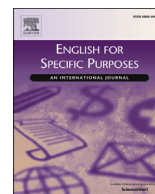




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# The role of content and language in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at university: Challenges and implications for ESP



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## ABSTRACT

In a context characterized by the increasing presence of CLIL programs in universities with a tradition of ESP courses, we analyze the case of a university in Catalonia (Spain) with regard to the position of CLIL and ESP. As CLIL programs are promoted to improve students' language proficiency in English, we explore the importance of language learning in these programs and the implications derived for ESP. Data were obtained from institutional documentation, class observation, and lecturer and student views on CLIL expressed in focus groups and a questionnaire. Findings show imprecise guidelines for CLIL implementation. Although we can observe an institutional shift from ESP to CLIL, the latter courses do not generally include language support. Lecturer and student perspectives provide useful insights for action that can be taken by ESP course designers to adapt courses to make them more relevant to students' discipline-related needs. Faced with these findings, we propose engaging in collaboration with content lecturers to develop graduates' proficiency in English. This collaboration can take place both through the integration of language in content courses and through the integration of content in ESP courses to make them more relevant to disciplines' communicative needs.

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## 1. Research background

There has been growing institutional concern over the past 20–25 years about the importance of the internationalization of universities worldwide, which is connected to the use of English as the language of instruction in non-English speaking countries (Coleman, 2006; Ljosland, 2005). Given this move towards English-taught programs in universities with an ESP tradition, the roles of language and content merit further research, specifically their integration, and the lessons which can be learnt from the ESP perspective to adapt to this new situation.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which has grown in Europe since the 1990s (Dalton-Puffer, 2007), has been defined as “an educational approach where [content] subjects [...] are taught through the medium of a foreign language” to students at all educational levels (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smit, 2010, p. 1). Some approaches stress the dual integrative focus on content and language, taught by subject specialists or team teaching (Greere & Räsänen, 2008). From the

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US tradition of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989), different levels of integration can be distinguished according to (i) whether content is the primary goal of the course under the sole responsibility of the specialist instructor; (ii) whether or not language learning support is included (sheltered model); (iii) if there is specific language instruction to support content courses through the collaboration of subject-matter and language specialists (adjunct model); and (iv) if the language instructor uses discipline content to teach language (theme-based), similar to Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) "carrier content". In turn, these authors identify different types of collaboration that range from cooperation to team-teaching. These are not unproblematic, because content lecturers fear that adapting content to English lower-proficiency learners may result in a "watering down of the content"; or language lecturers may regard supporting other disciplines as "eroding their professional career" (Crandall & Kaufman, 2002, p. 3).

In Europe, Greere and Räsänen (2008) propose a classification of CLIL courses ranging from the absence of the integration of language and content to full collaboration between language and discipline specialists: (i) the non-integration model (which they term 'non-CLIL'), involving independent content and language courses (less than 25% of exposure to English in content courses); (ii) the Language for Specific Purposes (LSP)/Discipline Based Language Teaching mode, similar to the theme-based model above (i.e., subject-matter exposure through LSP subjects); (iii) the pre-CLIL model (language/content), which involves LSP courses preparing for content courses (similar to the CBI adjunct model) or content courses taught through the foreign language; (iv) the adjunct-CLIL model, which tailors language instruction to disciplinary needs, based on the collaboration of language and subject specialists, and (v) the CLIL model which involves the team-teaching of dual programs catering for language and content. This distinction helps in the analysis of CLIL programs in terms of language and content and the roles played by each.

In an analysis of CLIL and ESP within the Bologna process,<sup>2</sup> Räsänen and Fortanet-Gómez (2008) have noted an increase in CLIL programs and a decrease in ESP courses in redesigned curricula, as content subjects in English are being offered instead of ESP subjects. This somewhat dismal picture of ESP further strengthens Swales, Barks, Osterman, and Simpson (2001, p. 455) view of the 'fragility' of ESP at university, as "almost every time there is a change in the senior administration, there will be an increase in ignorance about what it is that we [ESP instructors] do and why it is important". This vulnerability of ESP in CLIL contexts takes us back to Raimés' (1991) notion of the *butler's stance* of language instructors, often being regarded as having a subsidiary role vis-à-vis content instructors.

The integration of content and language is inextricably linked to ESP, and especially EAP, which has expanded in universities worldwide as English has become the dominant language of instruction and research. Some central ESP/EAP issues that have been the objects for debate over the years are relevant to the integration of language and content: (i) subject-specific versus common core EAP materials, which has led to the distinction between English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2002); and (ii) the extent of collaboration between EAP and subject-matter specialists (Hyland, 2012; Melles, Millar, Morton, & Fegan, 2005; Swales et al., 2001).

Sustained interaction between content and language lecturers is not common (Räsänen, 2009), probably due to a traditional lack of interaction between disciplines. However, examples such as Lyster's (2007) *counterbalanced instruction* – originally developed in immersion programs for younger learners – can serve as models for integrating form-focused instruction into content instruction as can – in the ESP context – the course described by Foran-Storer (2007), which was based on cooperative learning and the development of soft skills through authentic discipline-related materials.

An experience worth mentioning in detail is Cots and Clemente's (2011) tandem teaching, in which the language instructor was a PhD student researching CLIL. During the three-year project (2005–2008), the content and language instructors worked collaboratively in program design and implementation, and, in the second year, both participated in class teaching. The content instructor was thus furnished with models for classroom interaction so that he could eventually teach the class alone in the last year.

This study<sup>3</sup> provides an insight into the implementation of CLIL programs at a Catalan university (Spain) from an ESP perspective. Our main objective is to examine both institutional policies and the practices and views of lecturers and students. More specifically, we look into the role of language learning in CLIL settings from which we make proposals for collaboration between content and ESP lecturers. The article first analyzes the institutional context and then, from a qualitative perspective, presents an analysis of the role and status of CLIL versus ESP in three degree programs, observing content courses in terms of linguistic objectives, language focus in classroom discourse, and participants' perspectives on the relationship between CLIL and language. The insights gained through the analysis of policies, practices and views inform our discussion of how ESP can adapt to these new pedagogic scenarios. This is mainly through proposing new roles for ESP specialists, encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration, and reappraising the position of ESP courses.

### 1.1. Institutional context

The University of Lleida (UdL), in Catalonia (Spain), is located in a bilingual community with Catalan and Spanish as official languages. Catalan is the language commonly used by the University administration and courses are taught in either Catalan

<sup>2</sup> For details on the Bologna process see: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en.htm).

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