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## CLIL: Detail matters in the whole picture. More than a reply to J. Hüttner and U. Smit (2014)



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 13 November 2014  
 Received in revised form 2 July 2015  
 Accepted 12 July 2015  
 Available online 30 July 2015

#### Keywords:

CLIL  
 CLT  
 CBI  
 Foreign language planning, curriculum & learning

### ABSTRACT

This is a broad response to J. Hüttner and U. Smit's article on a previous article of mine, which raises some further questions. It is an extended reply, including references and arguments additional to those in the previous article, and covering various CLIL matters critically in order to lay bare some of the central issues. Most importantly, it is argued that CLIL remains a term that is ill-defined, with excuses of there being local contextual variation, and even its positive FL learning outcomes still unproven, not to mention other effects and outcomes. The view defended here is that if there are any possible CLIL successes they are probably attributable to selective measures and contrived supportive conditions, in addition to the on-going benevolent interpretations of some questionable empirical research data. Finally, rather than enlarge part of the picture, it is the whole picture that needs to include the non-CLIL programmes as well.

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I would like to thank the editors for encouraging Hüttner and Smit to respond to my article in *System* (Bruton, 2013) and the authors for accepting. It is, of course, something of a privilege that colleagues dedicate time and attention to scrutinising and commenting on views they may not share. Having said that, Hüttner and Smit (2014) do not acknowledge any of the limitations of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), despite their intention to do so (p.161). So, in the best spirit of fair play, the coverage here will not only reply to them critically on their interpretations of the benefits of CLIL, but introduce some other questions besides. I will not broach questions at the level of language policy, because the assumption is that it is the school-level of potential CLIL efficacy that should be established first.

### 1. Positioning

Despite the clear statement that Bruton (2013) complemented Bruton (2011a), Hüttner and Smit (2014) do not mention the latter article, which severely questions the evidence and positive interpretations offered in a number of published studies on the foreign language (FL) learning outcomes in the CLIL initiatives cited. Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2013) do not mention Bruton (2011b) either and “deliberately excluded” (p.551) outcome studies from their proposed research agenda, apparently because overall CLIL seems to be a “success story” (p.551) – a position seemingly shared by a long line of CLIL advocates, some recent examples being Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010), Ioannou Georgiou (2012), Pérez-Cañado (2012), and Hüttner, Dalton-Puffer, and Smit (2013), who are more cautious. CLIL being a success story, even in terms of FL learning outcomes, in this author's opinion, is very questionable, given the published facts (Bruton, 2011a), some of which will be reconsidered later.

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Added to this is the unfortunate fact that much of this research is seriously defective (Bruton, 2011a; 2011b), which is still ignored by many recent references to the benefits of CLIL, though Pérez-Cañado (2012:330) contradicts herself by referring to evidence of CLIL success, but admitting that much of it is based on methodological flaws. Rather than look at Hüttner and Smit's (2014) so-called "bigger picture", the position taken here is that the scenario does not need enlarging, but rather more attention to detail in the whole picture. Coyle (2007), some time ago, had this to say: "In order for CLIL to earn its rightful place in the pedagogic arena of contemporary and future curricula, it has to demonstrate rigorous theoretical underpinning, substantiated by evidence in terms of learning outcomes and capacity building (Coyle, 2006)" (p.546) – in the Dalton-Puffer, Faistauer and Vetter's (2011) survey of CLIL research in Austria between 2004 and 2009, for example, there was apparently only one CLIL outcome study, by Mewald. With the CLIL FL learning outcome provisos on hold, other CLIL matters will be attended to, beginning with the surprisingly unresolved issue of what CLIL actually is.

## 2. What matters?

### 2.1. Definition matters in CLIL

Hüttner and Smit (2014) believe that Bruton (2013) misrepresents CLIL as meaning two-in-one, which has consequently been interpreted as two-for-one: content subject coverage accompanied by FL development. Apart from Bruton's (2013) citations, this reading of CLIL has been suggested recently by Cenoz (2013:393), is acknowledged by Bonnet (2012:66) and even recognised by Hüttner et al. (2013:280). However, let us leave this version of CLIL aside, which Bruton (2013:590) clearly recognises is idealised, like some Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and atypical in practice, and accept the current compromise, which is CLIL classes being offered concurrently with FL classes. This option is one of the possibilities reflected in Bruton's (2013) Table 1, which Hüttner and Smit (2014) criticise, but interpret effectively, with one limitation, the possibility of there being some form of combined L1 and L2 use in the CLIL content classroom. To resume, the content subject classes can be given in the L1 (national language, if you like), in the FL, or in combinations of the two, with or without additional FL classes, giving six overall combinations, only four of which might be considered to be under the CLIL umbrella: some or all of the CLIL subject content given in the FL, with or without parallel FL classes. Rather than adopt the some-all duality in the CLIL + FL option, the FL in the CLIL part could be construed in terms of a moving scale as in Table 1 mentioned above, or proportions (see Czura & Papaja, 2013), all the content in the FL to almost no content in the FL – 90% to 10% is mentioned by Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter (2014:245) and 10%–100% by Hüttner et al. (2013).

Before, looking more closely at some of the consequences of the CLIL + FL, or FL + CLIL, consider what Hüttner and Smit (2014) have to say on the matter. They propose that CLIL practices display a "bundle of possible characteristics", none of which are "necessary and sufficient" (p.164). This seems to add to the terminological confusion. Even so, we must assume from their modified definition of Dalton-Puffer (2011) in the following paragraph, and given their rejection of the CLIL with no FL classes option, that basically some curricular content is instructed in a FL, which is also taught as a timetabled subject. It would seem, therefore, that these two conditions are at least necessary, and have been recognised by Dalton-Puffer (2011), Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, and Smit (2010a), and Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2013). All the latter authors acknowledge the additional feature that the FL is usually English, leading to the acronym CEIL instead of CLIL (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smit, 2010b:286), a variable admitted without due consideration of its politico-educational consequences in the EU arena, perhaps. These latter authors also add that it is the content that drives the FL in the CLIL classes and that the teachers are usually NNS – but see Cenoz (2015) on this. On content driving the FL, it must be pointed out that the purpose behind the adoption of CLIL is usually FL-driven, typically to achieve more FL exposure, even though the actual selection and sequencing of the subject matter in the CLIL class is content-driven – see Cenoz et al. (2014) on this distinction, and on Marsh's (2002) confusions and contradictions.

From an extensive reading of the CLIL literature, one might come to a similar conclusion as Cenoz et al. (2014) that versions of CLIL are not very different from versions of immersion, for example, and other content-based L2 initiatives – see Cenoz (2015), as well. This debate will not be pursued here, but Dalton-Puffer, Llinares, Lorenzo and Nikula's (2014) rather condescending reply does nothing to resolve the issue – see the exchange between Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010) and Somers and Surmont (2012), too. Cenoz et al. (2014) omit that there seem to be strong vested interests in CLIL being different, in political, academic, educational, and funding terms, in Europe at least. Leaving the comparisons aside, the position here is that, if there is anything that makes CLIL different, it is these necessary characteristics:

*CLIL means that (part of) a limited number of common-core content subjects in compulsory state education are instructed in a language foreign (FL) to the official language(s) of the curriculum to develop content subject matter and FL proficiencies integratively, as an alternative, or in addition, to the timetabled FL.*

The common-core compulsory education factor, of course, side-lines university-level English for Special and Academic Purposes (ESP and EAP), which have a long outstanding history of their own. The other defining feature is the additional language being foreign to the context in question, while the definition leaves the door open to there being timetabled FL classes as well, which may complement the CLIL classes or be more general. Obviously, there needs to be a minimum of core subject content given in the FL.

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