

The State of the ReCLes.pt CLIL Training Project

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an area that has only recently been more thoroughly explored for appropriate use at higher levels of education, has been one of the research areas identified by the Association of Language Centers in Higher Education in Portugal (ReCLes.pt). ReCLes.pt members – administration and research professors are striving to make a difference in the paucity of scientific publications in this area with the creation of their national program for training content teachers in Portuguese higher education. To best learn from each other in a collaborative network and apply well-informed teaching and learning methodology to English-taught classrooms, the underlying concepts range from classroom management and scaffolding to learner autonomy and from Web 2.0 tools to terminology-based learning. As an update of the current state of the art as interpreted in this project, the outreach and reception will be described in full with attention to some detailed examples of the more successful aspects as well as others where we have found room for improvement. Recommendations will be made for other networks and individual schools aiming to effectively prepare their students for the market by using an integrated approach to content and language learning. This paper reports on the current state of the ongoing ReCLes.pt CLIL Training Project, financed in part by the FCT (the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology), with project members from a number of universities and polytechnics across Portugal.

Keywords: ReCLes.pt, CLIL, scaffolding, learner autonomy, Web 2.0

Introduction

The *ReCLes.pt CLIL Project – a parallel and comparative study in higher education*, funded in part by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (*FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*) through a grant for projects that promote innovation in higher education, provided training in higher education for teachers of other specialty subjects aiming to teach that content through English using the CLIL methodology. As members of the Network Association of Language Centers in Higher Education (ReCLes.pt – Associação de Centros de Línguas do Ensino Superior em Portugal), the 33 participating subject teachers and the ten teacher trainers specializing in foreign language teaching and learning methodology met over the course of ten

hours in the first semester of the academic year 2014-2015 to prepare the modules for the CLIL courses that would be piloted that year. This paper provides an update of the path the researchers and participants have traced in growing this project.

Establishing the need for CLIL in higher education

The project design, especially the phases of collaborative writing and implementation of the pilot project, has been thoroughly described in recent publications (Morgado et al. 2015a; Morgado et al. 2015b; Morgado et al. 2016; Arau Ribeiro et al. 2016; Silva & Albuquerque 2016a; Silva & Albuquerque 2016b) and in presentations made throughout Europe, beginning at the initial roundtable presented at the Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo de Estoril (ESHTE) in Portugal. This roundtable initiative capitalized on the ReCLes.pt 2014 International Conference on *Languages and the Market: Competitiveness and Employability*, hosted by ESHTE in October 2014, when the collaborative research was just coming to fruition and publication of the *ReCLes.pt CLIL Training Manual Creating a CLIL Community in Higher Education* (Morgado et al. 2015a) was nearing completion.

At this time, the research team had published preliminary research (Morgado et al. 2013) from the first phase in a poster for the ICLHE Conference at the University of Maastricht, Belgium, which indicated the very important supportive role of the local administration of the various higher education institutes in the study. Through structured interviews with the deans of schools and presidents of universities and at polytechnics, the researchers determined that the internationalization sought after, influenced by the mobility implicit in the Bologna Agreement, was indeed a clear goal for those in charge, who saw English-taught classes as one of the ways to achieve this result. Fellow teachers were also interviewed to better understand the impact of this internationalization on their academic paperwork, publishing and speaking requirements as well as on their teaching needs, especially in reaching out to incoming foreign ERASMUS students (pre-Erasmus+) in English, the language for global communication.

By demonstrating the timeliness and proven need for the introduction of pilot projects based on CLIL methods, the research results justified the aims of the ReCLes.pt CLIL project to expand the array of teaching approaches available to a selected group of teachers. These 33 subject teachers at the six polytechnics that participated in this final phase of the project not only demonstrated a B2 CEFR-level of English but also willingly joined the communities of practice and learning promoted by the researching teachers in the project at the schools in Estoril, Porto, Bragança, Guarda, Castelo Branco, and Portalegre.

Note that the terminological option for “Content and Language Integrated Learning” (CLIL) over the term used for the annual conference in Maastricht, “Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education” (ICLHE), reflects the need to bridge educational levels so that a student or teacher learning or teaching in secondary school via CLIL methodology is not misled into thinking that ICLHE is actually a different methodology. Supporting learning via scaffolding techniques can and should happen at all levels of learning; rather than changing the name, teachers must be made aware of the needs of adult learners in terms of understanding the purpose of their learning for better motivation. It also reflects the greater recognition of the term in 2.2 million hits for *CLIL* in a google search with a mere 4,980 hits for *ICLHE* at the time of publication. This choice has been well-received by colleagues at further presentations made at the University of Mazaryk in Brno, the Czech Republic (Arau Ribeiro et al. 2016c), the University of Bremen, Germany (Arau Ribeiro & Morgado 2015), the University of Roviri e Virgili, Tarragona, Spain (Arau Ribeiro, Silva, & Coelho 2016), the University of Coruña (Arau Ribeiro 2015a), the

University of Maastricht, Belgium (Chumbo & Morgado 2016), the University of Split, Croatia (Gonçalves 2015), and the University of Calabria, Italy (Arau Ribeiro & Silva 2016).

How to do CLIL in higher education

An immediate and shared concern amongst the participating subject teachers in the ReCLES.pt CLIL project and English-teaching colleagues attending the above mentioned presentations around Europe is finding a way to deal with their own mistakes in English and simultaneously dealing with students who have more competence in English. The recommendation of the ReCLES.pt CLIL research team focuses on the early establishment of a community of practice (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), which is necessarily an ongoing community of practice and learning that incorporates individuals who are all language *users* (Arau Ribeiro 2015a). In this sense, by leveling the ground so that learning is occurring *through* the use of language (Morgado & Coelho 2014), attention is instead focused on communication and learning about a given subject while simultaneously promoting the learning of a language, which results in greater competence in both the subject and the language (cf. Arau Ribeiro 2015a, 2015b).

Scaffolding is the basis of CLIL teaching, whether to support and reinforce the use of prior knowledge or to introduce and promote new concepts and build growing awareness of concepts and language (Morgado & Coelho 2015). At the University of Mazaryk, Arau Ribeiro et al. (2016) presented the use of a terminological approach to scaffolding, promoted in the ReCLES.pt Training Manual: Creating a CLIL learning community in Higher Education (Morgado et al. 2015), based on a fundamental understanding of terminology itself as the key to “non-ambiguous and efficient communication about specialised knowledge” (Silva & Albuquerque 2016b). Using a Language Activity Plan (LAP) (and following the new Bloom’s taxonomy), the course of learning can be prepared and traced so that each step of learning the specialty terminology is supported by appropriate learning activities (cf. Arau Ribeiro 2015b). The CLIL Spring Institute at the University of Roviri i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain, and the XIV CercleS International Conference on *Enhancing Learners’ Creative and Critical Thinking: The Role of University Language Centres* at the University of Calabria, Cosenza, Italy, provided enriching opportunities to share further concrete examples of how to support terminology-based learning in the CLIL subject classroom in higher education (cf. Arau Ribeiro & Silva 2016; Arau Ribeiro, Silva, & Coelho 2016a, 2016b; Arau Ribeiro et al. 2016), ranging from the creation of word clouds and word frequency lists via Web 2.0 tools for knowing and analyzing the language for further application, synthesis, and evaluation in the exercise of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

This terminology-based approach to CLIL, the “theoretical and practical basis for the creation of a CLIL Learning Community of foreign language teachers and subject teachers” (Morgado et al. 2015a) has been tested in training courses offered to domain-specific teachers, in all the institutions involved in the project. Although no assessment tool has been applied yet, feedback from those teachers is enthusiastic and motivating.

While TerminoCLIL, the ReCLES.pt denomination of this approach, structures the discourse and knowledge related to the subject/content, other scaffolding activities further involve the community of learners in practicing and learning issues related to culture, cognition, and communication in general, in keeping with Coyle’s 4 Cs (1999, 2008; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010). Scaffolding is a concrete recognition that knowledge is constructed differently across individuals, languages, and cultures (Wilkinson & Walsh 2015; Boroditsky 2011). CLIL classes respond to this often invisible aspect of teaching by providing needed support in the initial

phases of the introduction and development of the new content and then gradually remove this support as the community of practice and learning gains experience to autonomously carry out designated activities competently (cf. Arau Ribeiro 2015b).

Simultaneously, the results indicate, as Morgado et al. (2015) express, that scaffolding techniques and strategies are “at the heart of all CLIL teaching”. Nevertheless, as described by Silva and Albuquerque (2016b) the symbiosis arises from the dialogical relation between terminological work and the support students receive to solve the challenges he encounters in each activity. This dialogical character prevails in the way scaffolding responds to the growing complexity of the cognitive demands that appear at later stages of the approach.

Where we are today

Additional research, training and experiments are being carried out in CLIL contexts in Portuguese HEIs to obtain data and feedback to further develop the project presented here and to obtain an in-depth analysis of further approaches to support and enhance results and teacher’s performance in CLIL environments.

Communities of practice and learning continue to flourish in Portugal, notably at the Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo de Estoril (ESHTE), where the Board has designated five ReCLES.pt CLIL courses for academic year 2016-2017 to be supervised by the English teacher who created their original community of practice and learning. These teachers meet regularly to delve into the issues that arise in the various areas of CLIL teaching and learning.

At the Instituto Politécnico da Guarda, both the local students and the growing international community of students can choose to attend CLIL classes for the Accounting and Management degrees in the 1st and 2nd study cycle (Bachelor’s and Master’s), also with the participation and observation of the English teacher who created the original community of practice and learning.

Other examples of students who have the ongoing opportunity to simultaneously learn content through a foreign language and practice their communicative and intercultural competences are taking place at ISCAP, where English and content teachers decided to collaborate and share contents in order to improve their pre-existing materials. Thus, to further implement the project and the pilot modules, they aligned the summer B2 and C1 English syllabuses with those of content classes in e-Commerce and Financial Mathematics, involving a minimum of 12 hours of the overall courses.

The presentation at the XIV CercleS International Conference (Arau Ribeiro & Silva 2016) at the University of Calabria, Cosenza, merited first place in a friendly competition in the strand *Applying Research to Pedagogical Practice*. Also at the conference, a CercleS Focus Group was launched that will initially include researchers/teachers from the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, and Portugal.

This recognition in the international research community has reinforced the commitment of the team of teachers/researchers to investigate what works and why in CLIL in HE to be better able to pass this understanding on to our colleagues – not only those who teach the content but also those who are language teachers who can, in turn, provide support for their own colleagues. We look forward to continuing this exploration of the myriad teaching and learning contexts in which CLIL is applied to expand the possibilities for implementing this methodology.

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