The Effectiveness of Integrating CLIL Principles in a Conversation Course at the University of Sulaimani

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Abstract
The Region’s extremely young and rapidly expanding population continues to push for further growth in the overall capacity of the sector and such developments also enabled the education system of Kurdistan Region of Iraq to require more teachers, students, and employees to improve communication abilities in English language conversation. This paper is about the effectiveness of selected contents and language integrated learning (CLIL) principles - ‘the 4Cs framework’ and ‘the language Triptych’ in teaching an English Conversation course at the Language and Culture Center, University of Sulaimani. The study hypothesizes that CLIL principles have positive effects on students’ speaking competence. As a result, this paper shows that learning a language through a content/theme-based is one of the best methods to get control of both knowledge and language together. Integrating the 4Cs’ elements content, cognition, culture, and communication helped the conversation course to sustain effectively by design suitable activities, and detailed lesson plan, which enhance content and language production. Moreover, the facets of the language Triptych: language OF learning and language FOR learning facilitated language THROUGH learning to project, and the participants started speaking spontaneously.

1. Introduction
Iraqi Kurdistan Region is located in the north of Iraq, the official language is Kurdish and the second language is Arabic. There are other communities living in this Region, thus it makes
it a multilingual community. The status of education and its linguistic system are different in most aspects, though in the past decades English language has immersed in the education curriculum quite remarkably. The Region’s education system dealt with various trends of teaching EFL, all the attempts were on individual bases; lately CLIL has been introduced and there are individual attempts to implement it in the teaching process. Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010:1) define CLIL as a “dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language”. This approach has a dual focus aim to teach language and content together and not separately, both are interwoven with each other in teaching and learning.

Usually, the focus of teaching EFL in the Region has been on grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing, while educational and pedagogical reforms require an improvement of communication skills including English conversation. Therefore, various courses for speaking and communication skills have been offered in the Language and Culture Center, inside the University of Sulaimani, with the implementation of the latest trends in teaching EFL. This research aims at presenting the way CLIL principles have been integrated in teaching a conversation course productively with satisfactory results.

The idea of using foreign language along with the content can be traced back to 5000 years ago. The Akkadians, known today as Iraq, after conquering the Sumerians has begun to learn the local language of the Sumerian by using it as the language of instructions (Hanesova, 2015). These historical evidences extended across centuries and have been absorbed by the majorities, worldwide. Learning a language through content is one of the best methods to get control of both knowledge and language together. The globalization of the world, social status and economic forces require the development of CLIL in order to achieve the highest wanting results in a short amount of time.

Along with the establishment of the European Union circa 1992/93, the CLIL acronym was born. It was first raised by David Marsh in 1994, a specialist in the field of bilingual education and multilingualism at the Finnish University (Zydatib, 2017). Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) declared that Europe adopted CLIL approach in 1994 in its education system and in several school environments where teaching and learning began in an additional language. The results were promising and brought an educational success, which was hard to accomplish in a language-learning classes. Few years later, Do Coyle and other educationalists come up with CLIL principles like “4Cs framework” and “language triptych” which have a major role in enabling deep learning to take place (Coyle, 2018).

2. Why CLIL Principles?

English language and technology have influenced and engaged Kurdistan’s Region in many aspects of economic, social, political and educational system. EFL courses has mushroomed in the Region, and English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has emerged in almost all the Universities in the area by authority. All these entitled for an innovative form of education and CLIL is the response. As Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) mention, CLIL is a solution that comes in harmony with broader social perspectives rather than being just a convenient reaction to the challenges brought about by globalization.

However, CLIL can create an environment in which learners can be highly exposed to the target language. This approach offers large proportion of the curriculum through the target language (Ball, Kelly and Clegg, 2015). Learners, in this case, acquire content and
language simultaneously. CLIL has language benefits: it leads to bilingualism and improves intercultural communication skills, raises greater awareness of both L1 and L2, encourages learners to develop multilingual interests and attitudes. Content benefits are other aspects of CLIL as it helps: learning content through different perspectives, access to subject-specific terminology, preparing for future studies and work life. In addition, CLIL encounters instructional benefits: it addresses a wide range of individuals’ learning strategies, and adds diversity and flexibility to existing methods and forms of classroom practice. Lastly, CLIL has university benefits; it helps with achievement of international certification goals, and preparing students for internationalizations.

One can conclude from these evidences that CLIL is not an approach to language learning, neither to content learning solely rather it is an intermingling method to achieve a proficiency of both schemes. CLIL principles, the ‘4Cs framework’ and the ‘language Triptych’, open windows of opportunities to adjust both language and content in teaching and learning well and efficiently. In other words, as Zafiri and Zouganeli (2017) point out that CLIL raises the notion of foreign language teaching and learning using content subjects.

3. The Method and Participants

The participants of this research are adult learners from different fields, whose ages ranged between 19 and 32, and their 1st language is Kurdish with pre-intermediate level in English conversation. This group received a total of 50 hours exposure of English language by means of CLIL with the integration of ‘4Cs framework’ and ‘language Triptych’. The learners had four days a week of conversation class within 3 hours a day. This study has used North Star Listening and Speaking series level 2 (2015), which is a theme based book; each class tackled a specific subject with the consideration of language and content in a dual-focus. Due to the limitation of this paper, one theme is selected as an example, which is ‘Endangered Languages’ from week 4 of the conversation course, with the researcher’s modification of some activities to fit CLIL principles’ objectives.

The lesson was pre-planned by the integration of selected CLIL principles: the ‘4Cs framework’ and the ‘language Triptych’. This theme was studied for 9 hours, in other words; participants had 9 hours exposure to the theme ‘Endangered Languages’. As a first step, this theme stimulated the students’ interaction first by proposing general questions related to the content and asked for opinions, for instance: What do you know about endangered languages? How many languages are still alive with their native speakers in the world? The students had 10 minutes to participate and share their opinions in English, followed by some of the teacher’s explanations regarding the topic, and later an audio was played about the theme for 2:30 minutes. After that, scrambled expressions, collocations, and phrases were given with definitions and students had to work in-group or pairs to negotiate the meanings and discuss their choices for 15 minutes. In the next steps, after 9 hours exposure to the theme by means of different activities, this study selected a role-play activity from the book North Star Listening and Speaking Level 2, by Frazzier and Mills (2015) as a final project, to make students interact and participate by languaging which means using natural and spontaneous language. Pair of students had to act as a school principal and a parent. Student A, the school principal had to pretend that he is in charge of a school in which education and the official language in the school is English. Student B was the parent who is concerned about her child’s native language being endangered, and asking the school to teach Kurdish language and not just English language. Student A had to defend the school’s regulation
of using English as a dominant language and this cannot be changed, and student B was supposed to convince the principle about the importance of preserving the native language. Students used a voice-recording app on their smartphone to record their conversation and the role-play, and then the recorded voice was sent in for evaluation.

The researcher integrated the ‘4Cs framework’, which is projected by Coyle, within the conversation class, in teaching the theme and the language with a dual focus. Arguably, it’s been certain to interweave each element of the 4Cs in the process of teaching, and designing activities, specifically the communication facet with the application of the ‘language Triptych’ steps. In the role-play activity, content, cognition, culture and communication all worked together with the help of language OF learning, and language FOR learning to make language THROUGH learning project from the learners.

4.CLIL Principles
4.1 The ‘4Cs Framework’
In one of her interviews, Do Coyle (2014) declared that the development of the 4Cs was not by one individual person rather it was by a group of practitioners and teachers. However, she said that implementing 4Cs framework is not compulsory and everyone should follow it. The 4Cs is a conceptual framework to enable teachers to plan their units of work and lessons so as to connect all the various elements of CLIL.

The 4Cs framework consists of four essential facets: “content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using), cognition (learning and thinking processes) and culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship).” (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:137-138). By incorporating this framework into the conversation course at the Language and Culture Center, this study took in account the dual focus aim in teaching process which is learning the language all together with the content.

4.2 Integrating the ‘4Cs Framework’ into a Conversation Course
In line with my teaching experience this study further suggests that a CLIL class is not just about teaching language and content rather it can occur effectively by applying the 4Cs basic building blocks (figure 1). Evidently, this framework was integrated in the speaking course at the Language and Culture Center-University of Sulaimani. The four major Cs and the way they are integrated with the speaking course are presented below:

![Figure 1: 4Cs framework Coyle, Hood & Marsh, (2010:106)](image)

4.2.1Content
In the process of teaching and learning a language, one of the important things is content or theme selection. The students learn about the topic or the theme that is proposed by the instructor, and this has a positive influence on the learner that enhances the language development. Here it is certain to choose topics that perfectly suit the student’s level of language, like Cinderella’s shoes. According to Do Coyle (2014), any content should lead the
way, difficult and unfamiliar topics to the learners, as Bruton (2013) declares, could delay the language processing, especially in a case when instruction is not given clearly. Arguably, it is insisted on making the learners create their own knowledge and understanding, as well as the use of critical thinking and the development of thinking skills. The selected theme in this research is ‘Endangered Languages’ from week 4 of the speaking course at the Language and Culture Center in the University of Sulaimani.

4.2.2 Cognition

Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010) asserts that learning and thinking (cognition) is related to content. In order to have an effective learning of the content, learners should be cognitively engaged. This study applied these two interwoven points to teach ‘Endangered Languages’ theme in the conversation course. Having used scaffolding at the beginning of the lesson to familiarize the students with the new title and new vocabulary. As well having the students engaged cognitively with the topic, as it is proposed by Krathwohl (2002), which involved the development of thinking skills both high order and low order thinking skills. For instance, the learners understood and remembered the title, further activities were proposed to make them analyze, and evaluate the theme. This reveals the fact that cognitive involvement needs content integration with these thinking skills. In one of Coyle’s interviews, conducted by Vives and Gales (2015:90), she stated that the 4Cs is a “wake-up call” and a facilitator to the process of learning both language and content. The C, which stands for cognition, represents meaning making, notions of understanding, and how children negotiate meanings. The outcome found this behavior among the learners; in one of the activities the learners had to find out meaning and definition of selected vocabulary. They started negotiate meaning among each other, understanding and analyzing with a bit of the teacher’s guidance.

4.2.3 Culture

Another element in the 4Cs is culture, which is tightly associated with language, content and cognition in a CLIL lesson and context. According to Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010), in a micro level in a CLIL lesson; culture understanding requires interaction among the learners, with the teacher, and the resources in the classroom through the target language (English language in the case of this paper). Having applied this technique in the speaking course let the students practice the culture practically with the materials by means of participating and applying what they learn, as well as creating discussions among the peers. For example, one of the activities was about endangered languages in New Zealand, the learners had to search for the endangered languages and how the government worked to preserve the native languages from being extinct. At a macro level, the learner was asked to go beyond the class instruction and environment and extend their social interaction with others in English language to have an understanding about the relationship among themselves and their own cultural beliefs (Kurdish culture). In other words, to ask questions whether Kurdish language is endangered or not, or whether the case of Kurdish language is different or similar to the one in New Zealand.

4.2.4 Communication

Another C in 4Cs framework is communication. Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010) declare that the term communication is used in the 4Cs framework rather than the term language because this is a strategy for encouraging genuine communication in the target language through the process of learning. As various speaking courses in Kurdistan have been based
on classroom learning and follow formal language teaching and learning. Others are misled by the idea that grammar oriented class is unsuccessful, as a result they focus on communication and neglecting grammar which leads to lack of proficiency in communication and fluency. Therefore this study changed such general norm and organized a natural teaching and learning environment for the learners. Furthermore, the course was not all about language learning but rather there was a balance between language using and language learning. The deed was actively presented in the class, encouraging conversation among peers; asking questions and answering as well. As Freire (1972) claims that communication, among students and teachers in the class environment, promotes students to articulate what they learn. Moreover, this collaboration between teacher and students encourages meaningful interaction and communication.

One of the techniques that have been focused on continuously was proposed by Crandall (1994), which is to assist the students to learn both content and oral language and discourse conventions with a dual focus, since the course was a speaking one. Students were practicing with the instructor’s guidance to construct and communicate their understandings of the content area.

One can observe that the elements of the 4Cs are interlaced with each other and do not work as isolated facets. This study integrated the 4Cs to the speaking course planning and took in consideration each element in the activities. For instance, the combination of content and cognitive, cognition with communication skills determined the type of activities planned to make the students have an access to the content and classroom language to perform the tasks, as well as an access to the public language outside class environment.

5. The Language Triptych

For students to participate in the class activities and engage with the discussions, they need to be equipped with sufficient correct language to negotiate ideas and create their own expressions. According to Cortacans’s results (2013) there are some speaking communicative skills that are not well balanced achieved, for this reason teachers need to scaffold the learners to develop these skills. Coyle supports this by proposing language Triptych (figure 2) to conceptualize language learning. Language Triptych is a conceptual framework that connects content aims with language aim, “it provides the means to analyze language needs across different CLIL contexts and transparently differentiates between types of linguistics demand which impact on CLIL.” (Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010).

![Figure 2, Coyle, Hood & Marsh, (2010:106)](image)

5.1 Integrating the language Triptych into a Conversation Course

It is worth mentioning that the researcher used the language Triptych in the conversation course to improve speaking skills, and did not neglect grammar whenever was required, rather she used the 4Cs framework and the language triptych to promote language production by the learners. Banegas (2012) suggests that through the
integration of language Triptych a teacher can focus on form and meaning and enhance a lesson rather than emphasizing only on grammatical patterns. In other words, the teacher should use those grammatical patterns and tense identifying to make students learn about the content.

As it is shown in Figure 2, language OF learning represents the language that is required to know about the content or the theme. It is the type of language that is necessary to understand and access the theme or the content. In the case of this study, the selected theme is ‘Endangered languages’, the researcher made sure to equip the students with enough related vocabulary, expressions, and definitions as endangered, extinct, disappear, dominant, replace, native language, bilingual, linguists, and the likes, as well as the use of the needed tense like future with ‘will’ and ‘be going to’. Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010) indicate that the language teacher should not depend and spend time on grammatical paradigms and formulas rather she/he has to concentrate on the notional and functional demands of the theme. In this research, the learners in the speaking course, needed to understand and learn the concept of future tense and how to use it to construct and express their knowledge about Endangered Languages. Banegas (2012) confirms that teachers can teach grammatical patterns and tenses occasionally through the lessons whenever required depending on the content’s dimension. In addition, it is not enough to be familiarized with key concepts and phrases without knowing how to use them so as to learn.

Lifelong Learning Programme established Playing CLIL (2015) which refers to another facet of the language Triptych and that is language FOR learning. This facet refers to the target language that is used in the class. Students need to use the foreign language to perform class activities, but teachers should be aware of the students’ level of the foreign language and always take it into account. For instance, in the case of this research, the lesson ‘Endangered Languages’ required the knowledge of using future tense, but there were some situations that demanded the use of present simple, or past simple, here it was not expecting the learners to use future tense extensively in the language of learning. To perform class activities and use English language effectively, it was planned in advance to scaffold the learners, to use English language and to carry out the tasks like group working, class discussion, turn-taking in applying exercises and sharing it with the class.

Language THROUGH learning is the spontaneous language in which it is produced naturally without planning in advance. Language through learning, as Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010) declares, in the learning process happens naturally without any prediction. One of the activities created here is ‘run the class by yourself’, which aimed at make language through learning arise in the learner’s behavior. Since the learners were adults, the teachers did not face class management problem with this activity, instead the teacher was stepping back and letting the learners run the activity and the class by themselves, in English. Perhaps, one of the unexpected exercises for the learners was a sudden question, which required a group work and exchanging opinions, the question of the activity was “is Kurdish language going to disappear or is it going to be preserved for future generation?” Students had to create a circle among one another, without the teacher’s interference to give instruction, and they started questioning, answering, and sharing ideas, which were not planned in advance for them. Furthermore, they shared extra questions and suggestions regarding the topic - Endangered languages’ outside the class with other people in English.
6. The Effectiveness of CLIL Principles on Speaking Competence

Researches from European Commission-Education and Training program, which are conducted by Scott and Beadle (2014), prove that CLIL principles have positive effects on students’ speaking competence. A review of evidence declares that one of the language competence’s areas that are affected by CLIL is fluency and the quantity of spoken language. Besides, the review demonstrated that the biggest advantage of CLIL is that learners gain a larger amount of vocabularies (if worked on explicitly as the case of the conversation course in this research) because of the extensive exposure to the theme/content.

The nature of CLIL principles leads to a more student led class both talks and practical activities. The type of the CLIL activities that are designed in this study created more student involvement and interaction in the class. For instance, one of the activities was about ‘role-playing situation’: students had to work with a partner, choose a situation, which was being a parent visiting a school’s principal and talk about his/her concern regarding their native language (Kurdish language) for being endangered. One student had to act as a parent and other as a principal then switch roles and record this dialogue by an app on their cellphones. This activity leads to language THROUGH learning to happen in the speaking competence of the students. Language THROUGH learning occurred because, as Bygate (1987:6-7) affirms, the learners have been transferred from “language-learning situation to a language-using situation”.

Likewise, the interaction skill has further developed from the CLIL activities applied by the instructor’s input which also involves the application of the principles. In the role-playing activity, the students had to control their own language production, and made their own choice. Bygate (1987:6-7) states that interaction skill requires the use of “knowledge and basic motor-perception skills to achieve communication”. The researcher noticed that the learners, in the role-playing activity, made decisions about communication for instance: what to say, how to express it, and develop it intentionally with maintaining the relation with the listener. It is found that all the 4Cs elements worked together to carry out this scenario with the help of ‘language triptych’ in designing the lesson plan for the theme.

This type of activity is meaningful, authentic, and challenging, it requires a link to prior knowledge. As said by Devos (2016) and Puffer (2007) these types of activities affect the spoken production in CLIL. The role-play scenario activity provides more chances to produce longer turns because the nature of this activity requires asking nonfactor questions, which is different from factual questions that tend to create short responses. The participants, in the role-play activity, are asking and answering in a spontaneous way without pre-written scripts or any preparation in advance. This CLIL activity revealed the participants’ lexical gap and pushed them to create language that is a bit above their current level of speaking competence which was pre-intermediate.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed and argued that CLIL is one of the latest trends in the field of bilingual immersion programs, as different teachers, educators, curriculum designer and pedagogical specialists have been applying CLIL in the progression of education and teaching content through a vehicular language (mainly English) in different territories around the world, and Kurdistan Region is no exception.

This research integrated selected CLIL principles as opposed to traditional EFL methodologies that have been used in delivering...
English conversation courses in Kurdistan. The integrated principles in the English conversation course were the ‘4Cs framework’, which stands for content, cognition, culture and communication, as well as the second conceptual framework in the ‘language Triptych’ represented by three facets language OF learning, language FOR learning and language THROUGH learning.

With regards to the findings of this study into consideration, it can be argued that: the 4Cs framework, and language Triptych in specific, help students to learn a language and use it in a natural way for learning. The integration of the CLIL principles into the authentic activities affected positively the linguistic and content production of the learners, as a result their pre-intermediate level changed to intermediate in speaking.

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