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## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ESP AND CLIL IN THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Further to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), many European countries have joined the *Bologna Process*<sup>2</sup> in order to standardise their higher education systems to create an open market for both European and non-European citizens (Wächter). As a result, universities felt the need of internationalising their curricula to foster academic cooperation, thus encouraging staff and student mobility. Internationalisation of tertiary institutions implies the use of English as a *lingua franca* to both attract students and staff from other countries as well as allowing one's own peoples to move out of their countries. University teachers of English, then, can choose whether to implement CLIL or teach ESP courses in order to meet these needs of standardisation and internationalisation. The present paper attempts to explore the relationship between ESP and CLIL in the context of tertiary level education. These teaching approaches have been at the core of heated controversies as to whether they are different methodologies or two different terms used for the same approach. From a theoretical point of view, ESP and CLIL share several key features, such as 1) the use of context from different non-linguistic subjects, 2) the use of communicative language teaching methodology and 3) the development of academic and communication skills, among others (Greere and Räsänen; Soetaert and Bonamie; Dalton-Puffer and Smit). Nevertheless, there are also some significant differences between ESP and CLIL such as 1) different approach to L2, 2) different objectives and learning outcomes, and 3) different teachers' roles, among the most important features. In broad terms, ESP is viewed as being single-focused on language, whereas CLIL is meant to teach both language and subject content simultaneously. This work supports the belief that there are more areas of convergence than divergence between ESP and CLIL and, therefore, English language learning in university contexts could benefit from a gradual and mutual collaboration between these two approaches.

### 1. Introduction

Back in 1999, the Ministers of Education from 29 European countries met in Bologna (Italy) and decided to create the *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) through a resolution known as *Bologna Declaration*. The aim of such a project was that of promoting and facilitating academic mobility and allowing the comparability of studies across all the educational systems of these countries. This EHEA was subject to the fulfilment of three key components:

- 1) The creation of a specific evaluation system to allow the comparison of study programmes and courses through the establishment of the so-called European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS);
- 2) The creation of comparable higher education structures through the establishment of a system based on cycles;
- 3) The application of the *Lisbon Convention* to allow the mutual recognition of studies within the participant countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Launched in 1999 by the Ministers of Education and university leaders of 29 countries, the Bologna Process was aimed at creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to allow the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained. The European Higher Education Area improves transparency between higher education systems and provides tools to facilitate recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges between institutions.



The *Bologna Declaration* was originally signed by 29 countries and, since then, more than 40 countries have joined the EHEA (Wächter). Further to the establishment of the EHEA, universities began feeling the need of internationalising their curricula to foster academic cooperation and, at the same time, to promote and facilitate mobility for both staff and students across Europe. Due to this need of internationalisation along with the increasing globalization and the role of English played worldwide, it is not surprising that most courses at tertiary level choose English as the main instruction language. Although other languages are taught, such as French, German and Spanish, English seems to be the first choice and many degree courses make it compulsory in most study programmes. In this respect, Coleman (11) acknowledged how English would inevitably “become the language of education”, whereas Phillipson (37) asserted that “in the Bologna Process, internationalization means English-medium higher education.”

The need to adopt a lingua franca in different fields, such as technology, science, education and business among others, has led to an increasing demand of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) all over the world. ESP provides learners with a great opportunity to acquire English naturally and CLIL was developed along the same line in order to provide learners with the opportunity to learn a subject and a foreign language at the same time. Whereas ESP is single-focused on language, CLIL allows to teach language and subject content simultaneously. Before looking at the convergence and divergence points between ESP and CLIL, it is useful to provide a brief explanation of the emergence and subsequent development of these two approaches.

## 2. Understanding ESP

The term ESP was developed in the 1960s when several scholars and language practitioners began to realise that general English could not meet learners and employers’ needs. The development of ESP was connected with the pioneering research of Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens. Widdowson (10) asserted that “ESP is simply a matter of describing a particular area of language and then using this description as a course specification to impart to learners the necessary restricted competence with this particular area.” According to Hutchinson and Waters (5) there are three main reasons to explain the emergence of all varieties of ESP, namely 1) the demands of a Brave New World, 2) a revolution in linguistics and 3) a focus shift from the teacher to the learner. Hutchinson and Waters (19), then, provided a definition of ESP claiming that it “is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning.” This is why, as ESP teachers, we should start planning an ESP course starting from our learners’ needs first.

Several language scholars and practitioners, such as Carver and Hutchinson and Waters for instance, have proposed different taxonomies of ESP. The former identified three types of ESP, namely 1) English as a restricted language, 2) English for academic and occupational purposes and 3) English with specific topics. The latter, however, provided a much more detailed and, to a certain degree, complex division of ESP varieties through the well-known ‘tree of ELT’ as shown below:

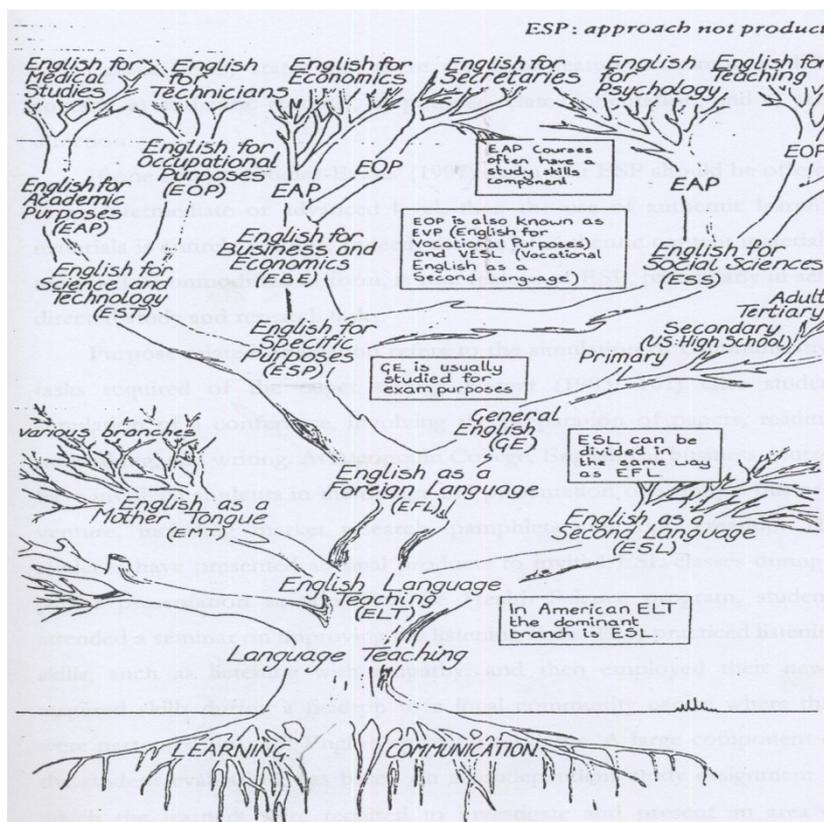


Figure 1: The tree of ELT (Hutchinson and Waters 1987:17).

As shown in this ‘tree’, ESP can be subdivided into three main branches, 1) English for Science and Technology (EST), 2) English for Business and Economics (EBE) and 3) English for Social Sciences (ESS). Each of these branches is, in turn, further divided into two specific fields, namely English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). It is interesting to mention, in this respect, that Hutchinson and Waters (16) claimed that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP since “people can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job.” In Carver’s previous classification, indeed, both EAP and EOP are categorized under the same type of ESP. It is worth mentioning, in this respect, that EAP and EOP seem to have common goals and the main difference lies in the way these goals are achieved.

As far as the main features of ESP courses are concerned, many scholars and researchers agree with Carver’s proposal, thus identifying three main characteristics: 1) authentic material (real-world communication and context), 2) purpose-related orientation (simulation of communicative tasks) and 3) self-direction (turning learners into users). Furthermore, as far as the ESP teacher is concerned, in Micic’s (5) opinion, he or she “should not become a teacher of the subject matter, but rather an interested student of the subject matter.”

As English is becoming more and more important in several fields, the demand for ESP is growing rapidly. ESP is undoubtedly one of the most commonly employed approaches in language learning in tertiary education, although CLIL is also gaining more and more importance in this context.

### 3. Understanding CLIL

CLIL is a recent phenomenon, which appeared in the early 1990s as promoted by the European Commission and the Council of Europe (Dalton-Puffer, 1; Coyle; Marsh and Frigols). CLIL, *ipso facto*, is strongly supported by the European Commission, which considers it as a great opportunity for improving language



teaching in all the Member States as well as a good opportunity for “exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum” (Commission of the European Communities 2003, 8). The increasing globalization as well as internationalization exercised a great deal of influence and pressure over educational systems all over the world to teach in a second or foreign language so as to allow students, ranging from primary to tertiary levels, to compete in an international context.

CLIL is “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 9). Dalton-Puffer and Smit (1) acknowledge that CLIL is a term used to refer “to educational settings where a language other than the students’ mother tongue is used as medium of instruction.”

CLIL is undoubtedly an innovative teaching approach thanks to its dual focus which, according to Coyle et al. (4), makes it “neither language learning nor subject learning but an amalgam of both.” Although there exists a prolific and growing literature on the benefits and implementation of CLIL in primary and secondary education (Muñoz; Dalton-Puffer and Smit; Lasagabaster and Sierra; Liubinienė; Vártuki), there are not so many studies on CLIL at the tertiary level (Wilkinson; Wilkinson and Zegers 2007, 2008; Fernández; Leonardi; Costa and Coleman). Furthermore, it is interesting to note how CLIL can be seen as an umbrella term which is used, at times, to refer to other similar approaches where bilingual teaching is integrated into content classrooms, such as Content-Based Instruction (CBI), Bilingual Teaching, Dual Language Programmes, English Across the Curriculum among others (Dalton-Puffer).

CLIL allows us to kill two birds with one stone as both a foreign language and a content subject can be taught at the same time. The rationale behind CLIL was that foreign languages are traditionally taught out of context and it was thought that through CLIL the use of language could become more authentic and more useful to allow learners to express themselves correctly in a specific field. The content subject, indeed, can provide learners with a more natural environment to learn and use a foreign language more appropriately, thus allowing real communication to take place successfully (Dalton-Puffer; Dalton-Puffer and Smit). As also acknowledged by Dalton-Puffer (3) CLIL “encourages naturalistic language learning and enhances the development of communicative competence.”

CLIL has its origins in the Communicative Approach where language is given a meaningful purpose when taught along with a content subject (Dalton-Puffer and Smit) and it is based upon the so-called *4Cs framework* (Coyle et al.) where four main variables should be taken into account when planning a CLIL course:

- Content (subject matter)
- Communication (language learning and using)
- Cognition (learning and thinking processes)
- Culture (intercultural knowledge and understanding development)

On the basis of the tenets of the *4Cs framework*, Meyer designed the CLIL-Pyramid (figure 2), which is successful only if all the four competences (four Cs) are taken into account in lesson planning and material selection, thus claiming that:

One of the biggest advantages of using the CLIL-Pyramid as a planning tool is that it makes it possible for teachers/material writers to create an interdisciplinary progression of study skills which can be spread across different units, different age groups or even different content subjects (...).

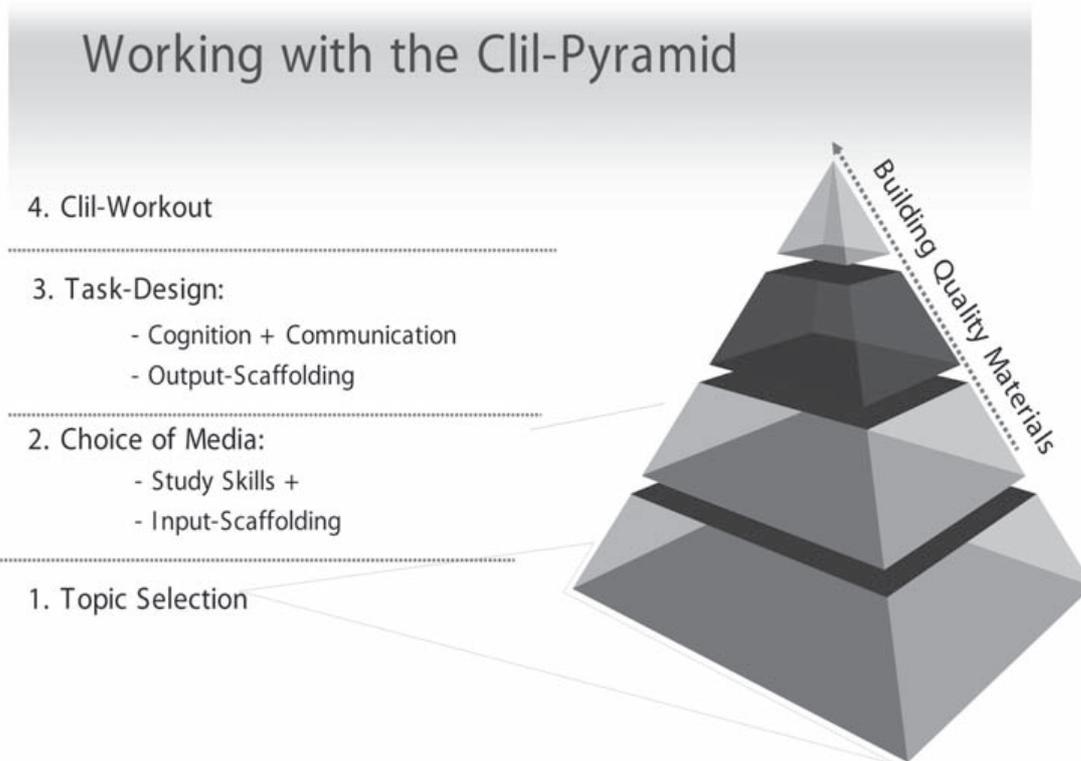


Figure 2: The CLIL-Pyramid (Meyer, 24).

As far as traditional language teaching is concerned, Maley (6) believes that the traditional four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) play a different role in content-driven classes (i.e. CLIL), thus claiming that:

In the language class the four skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) are part of the end product and are also a tool for introducing new language and practising and checking linguistic knowledge. In the content classroom the four skills are a means of learning new information and displaying an understanding of the subject being taught. So the language is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and the structure and style of the language is often less colloquial and more complex.

Maley's statement, in other words, shows how CLIL is more meaningful than other traditional teaching methodologies where a foreign language is usually taught out of context and for its own sake only.

According to Van de Craen et al., CLIL, besides improving language learning, provides learners with several cognitive advantages as they use more cognitive functions in CLIL classes, thus resulting in an increased number of neural connections. These cognitive advantages, however, "seem related to early (foreign) language learning independent of the methodology. Hence, there is no doubt that young children exposed to CLIL cognitively benefit from this" (ibid.: 74).

Although there seems to be a great deal of evidence to prove that CLIL may enhance language teaching and learning, two main problems remain and make its implementation harder and harder. First of all, the scarcity of material and, secondly, the scarcity of teacher training programmes to prepare both language and subject teachers.

#### 4. CLIL and ESP: Bridging the Gap

Having outlined the main features of CLIL and ESP, it is worth noting how four main differences can be found between these two approaches. First of all, ESP and CLIL have a different approach to L2. In ESP, indeed, language (L2) is both the content as well as the means of learning and it is usually adapted to the



proficiency level(s) of learners. In CLIL, however, language is only seen as a means rather than a goal in itself and content is made easy to students through scaffolding strategies (Hammond and Gibbons). Educational (or instructional) scaffolding is a teaching method that enables students to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal through a gradual shedding of outside assistance. Scaffolding strategies are geared to support learning when students are first introduced to a new subject. Scaffolding gives students a context, motivation, or foundation from which to understand the new information that will be introduced during the coming lesson. In order for learning to progress, scaffolds should be gradually removed as instruction continues, so that students will eventually be able to demonstrate comprehension independently. Scaffolding strategies include, although they are not limited to, the following activities:

- a) Activating prior knowledge;
- b) Breaking complex tasks into easier steps;
- c) Using verbal cues to prompt student answers;
- d) Teaching mnemonic devices to ease memorization;
- e) Providing contextualized information;
- f) Using visual aids;
- g) Teaching key vocabulary terms before reading.

Furthermore, CLIL allows more tolerance to language usage and L1 use as compared to ESP, which is more language-led. Secondly, ESP and CLIL objectives and learning outcomes are different as the former favours language-learning objectives whereas the latter claims that content-learning objectives are either equal or more important than language-learning objectives. Thirdly, there is a great difference between the ESP and the CLIL teacher. The former is a language teacher and he or she takes no responsibility for teaching content and, as such, they may co-operate with subject experts. The latter, however, is a subject expert with a good language proficiency level. Furthermore, CLIL also allows for a tandem teaching modality where both a language specialist and a subject expert work together. This modality is not employed in any ESP course. Finally, ESP is more single-focused on language whereas CLIL allows to teach subject content and language simultaneously. This study, however, argues that these differences do not apply at university level as there seem to be more convergence points rather than divergence features between CLIL and ESP when applied at the tertiary educational level. For example, claiming that ESP is more focused on language and CLIL simultaneously deals and combines language and subject content does not hold true at university where learners are more proficient in a foreign language than young learners and lack, at the same time, considerable knowledge of the subject content chosen. Furthermore, university learners are different from the type of learners in school contexts as they undoubtedly have different expectations of language teaching and subject content knowledge. If one takes a closer look at these two approaches, one can see how many points they share in common, as also shown in the table below:

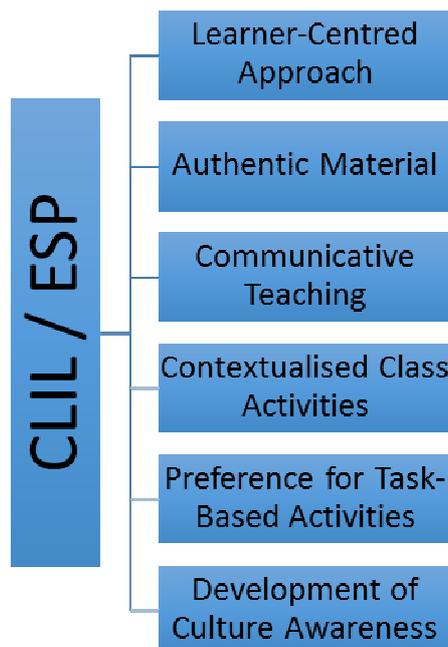


Figure 3: CLIL /ESP: Convergence points

As shown above, both approaches are learner centred being developed out of learners' needs. In both approaches needs analysis plays a fundamental role in planning and developing teaching activities tailored on learners' needs. Using authentic material in both cases means that both approaches seek to provide learners with language use in the real world or, in other words, they make use of authentic texts to focus on meaning rather than form. This is why, in both cases, priority is given to task-based activities to increase learners' motivation and learning success. Task-based activities are cognitively involving and motivating as long as they provide a reasonable challenge (Ellis, 2009). One of the merits of tasks has been that of shifting the focus of learning from form to meaning although, at the same time, attention is also paid to the systematic treatment of linguistic forms. Furthermore, tasks are chosen on the basis of the learners' needs analysis. Tasks, besides, provide the opportunity to create communicative activities, which are more motivating and engaging for learners (Nunan). Tasks also require the use of authentic materials, which provide a great variety of opportunities to practise language in real-life contexts. In terms of communicative teaching, in both approaches a great deal of importance is given to interaction in a way of promoting naturalness, collaboration, negotiation, thus increasing learners' motivation, as concern is placed upon communicative rather than linguistic competence. Finally, both approaches share a particular interest in the culture component viewed as an essential feature of language learning. Both approaches do not focus on teaching cultural facts, but rather they aim at developing and raising cultural awareness in order to allow learners to "communicate appropriately with native speakers of the language, get to understand others and get to understand themselves in the process" (Kramsch, 1983). Furthermore, both approaches argue that the best way of developing and raising cultural awareness is through exposure to authentic texts.

### 5. Concluding remarks

Further to the analysis of the main differences and similarities between ESP and CLIL, one could find it hard to distinguish between these two approaches as both of them are concerned with providing learners with a suitable level of language proficiency through communicative, task-based activities by using authentic material tailored upon their needs. The aim of this work, indeed, was that of showing how there are more areas of convergence than divergence between ESP and CLIL and, therefore, English language learning in university contexts could benefit from a gradual and mutual collaboration between these two approaches. This means, for instance, that certain features of CLIL could be implemented in ESP courses at university. Teachers could combine language and content through authentic exposure to both real-world context situation and language communication. At this stage, for instance, it could be useful to have a cooperation



between language instructors and content instructors especially in the selection of material and topics that could be relevant in their courses. This cooperation should follow a preliminary, yet compulsory, needs analysis stage, which, as also explained above, plays a very important role in course planning and development. Finally, if language teachers choose to combine both approaches, then it is fundamental to plan specific task-based activities to facilitate and balance both meaning-focused and form-focused processing. In other words, it is argued that ESP courses could use some of the CLIL tools and strategies to adapt content and language activities in an attempt to maximise, encourage and promote active language learning at university.

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