



# Scaffolding Language in CLIL Lessons

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# CLIL Boom

- learners deal with content texts and authentic tasks;
- learners acquire or learn a foreign language effectively;
- provides an authentic context for students to work with;
- the language is not an objective in itself, but a means that helps students get information about the new content and achieve subject objectives;
- language is a tool for gathering and sharing knowledge (listening/reading – speaking/writing);
- learners are dealt with as language *users* (not novice learners);

# Challenges in CLIL

- **hard CLIL** is subject-led → mastery of academic language;
- BUT in CLIL, primary-school learners do not have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning study;
- academic language is decontextualized and situation-independent, context-reduced → scaffolding needed

# Scaffolding

- “a process of ‘setting up’ the situation to make the child’s entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it” (Bruner, 1983: 60);
- the learner is assisted by others to be able to achieve more than he or she would be able to achieve alone – this can only occur in the Zone of Proximal Development;
- helps learners move toward new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding (achieve language, content and cognition objectives);
- is a temporary assistance;

# Sources of scaffolding

- being assisted by an expert, when the learner receives guidance, advice and modelling;
- collaborating with other learners, when learning is constructed together;
- assisting a lower-level learner, when both have opportunities to learn;
- working alone, when internalised practices and strategies, inner speech, inner resources and experimentation are used.

Van Lier (1996)

# Ways of providing scaffolding

## PROACTIVE approaches

- planning activities that help learners develop their language

## REACTIVE approaches

- unplanned;
- occur in response to students' language production

# The objective of the study: find out

- what ways teachers choose to scaffold language learners encounter in input materials, and produce in speaking and writing tasks;
- if teachers choose proactive or reactive ways of scaffolding language;
- if the scaffolding provided emphasizes the interactive social nature of learning;
- what kind of support teachers might benefit from to scaffold learners more effectively;

# Rationale for providing scaffolding in CLIL lessons

- the assumption that in CLIL learners learn through the means of a foreign language and do not have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning study (Graddol, 2006, p. 86);
- learners are language users from the beginning; they use the language as a means of gaining and sharing knowledge;
- learners construct their knowledge in social interaction; education is embedded in a sociocultural milieu; thus learning is a matter not only of cognitive development but also of shared social practices;
- learners need temporary assistance thanks to which they learn how to do something, so that they will later be able to complete a similar task alone;



# Methodology

- observations of 15 lessons taught by three teachers (mathematics, biology, history)
- analysis of 25 biology lesson plans and 16 biology worksheets; 11 history lesson plans and 13 history worksheets 23 mathematics lesson plans and 22 mathematics worksheets and created by the observed teachers;
- interviews with teachers

# Activating prior knowledge before using input materials

- **in all lessons:** questions (tasks) about what students studied in previous lesson(s); incl. vocabulary (animals);
- **once:** beginning the learning from learners' prior knowledge (experience) teachers asked questions about students' real-life experience – not tapping into prior knowledge of students, not igniting their prior knowledge
- pre-teaching vocabulary – teacher-led (33% of lessons);

# Ways of scaffolding not used

- any graphic organizers to activate learners' prior knowledge, e.g. concept maps, KWL charts, T/F statements, etc.
- no development of prediction skills

# Scaffolding the work with input materials

## Embedding language in sensory context by:

- using illustrations: pictures, photographs, digital images (incl. powerpoint presentations), drawings, charts, films, youtube, labelled illustrations and/or illustrations with captions;
- using manipulatives;
- using kinaesthetic activities;
- using ICT applications (virtual 'hands-on' format):

# Ways of scaffolding not used

- graphic organizers;
- language scaffolding: text simplification;
- no use of reading strategies;
- no explicit presentations of various learning skills (prediction skills, writing notes) which learners might internalize and use as sources of scaffolding their own learning;

# Observations

- students asked to gain information from a text individually; no space for pair check; answers evaluated by the teacher – the involvement of students very low - a pattern which was repeated most of the time;
- sometimes the activities suggested for a text focused more on the language development than they did on the subject matter;

# Scaffolding output

- demonstration of the final product
- the collective scaffolding context: interaction with peers – present in some lessons (45%);
- using manipulatives;

# Scaffolding language production - patterns

- **Pattern 1** - asking questions: *Does it need air? Does it need food? Does it reproduce?*
- **Pattern 2** - sentence stems: *Minerals are made from ..... and are used for ..... .*
- **Pattern 3** - presentation of vocabulary in structures used repeatedly: [Six] is ***divisible*** by [3].



- **Pattern 4:** No structures provided, but learners are expected to categorize, describe, define, etc.
- **Pattern 5:** Incidental learning

# Observations

- students encounter and use many more structures than they do in traditional English lessons;
- proactive scaffolding (with the exception of vocabulary learning);
- upfront teaching: common; students need to answer questions or react to stimuli without having any space to discuss the answers with their peers;
- in the observed lessons students were not divided into heterogeneous groups according to their abilities; division always based on friendship;

# Conclusions

- CLIL lessons are teacher-centred;
- when providing scaffolding teachers prefer proactive approaches to reactive approaches;
- need some help in being able to use all sources of scaffolding as defined by van Lier:
  - assistance by an expert (teacher) – most common;
  - collaboration with other learners (only about 15% of the learning time)
  - assisting a lower-level learner (incidental)
  - individual internalization and use of strategies (incidental)

# Conclusions

- teachers seem to understand the language system as a whole, learners use structures which are not included in the traditional grammar-oriented syllabus;
- language (grammar) in CLIL is effectively represented by notions (equality, duration, possibility, dependence...) – CLIL is a meaning-oriented approach;
- know quite a lot about how to guide speaking and writing activities in CLIL, but might benefit from having a wider repertoire of learner-centred activities;
- teachers might benefit from learning more about strategies helping activate learners' prior knowledge sufficiently;
- need to find out more about how reading and listening strategies of learners might be developed;