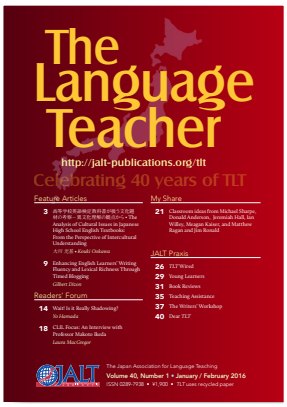
The Language Teacher



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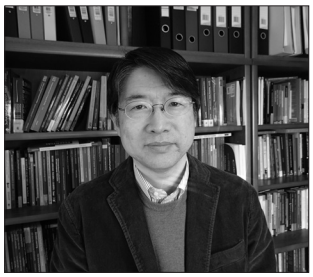
CLIL Focus: An Interview with Professor Makoto Ikeda

Interviewed by Laura MacGregor
Gakushuin University

In an interview in August 2015, Professor Ikeda spoke with Laura MacGregor about his first encounters with content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and how CLIL has shaped his teaching beliefs and teaching practices. He also discussed how teachers could implement CLIL principles in their classes in Japan.



Makoto Ikeda is professor of English philology and English language education at Sophia University. He received his MA from King's College London and his PhD from Sophia University. He has published a number of articles and books on CLIL, and guest-edited a special issue of *The International CLIL Research Journal* focusing on CLIL in Japan.

Laura MacGregor: You are a professor of philology. How did you become interested in CLIL and why did you decide to implement it in Japan?

Makoto Ikeda: My field is philology, nowadays known as historical sociolinguistics, which means it is not just about language. It involves history, culture, and literature, and is therefore an integrated approach to language. From the beginning, as a student, I wanted to see things from different perspectives. This is reflected in my PhD thesis about Lindley Murray, a 19th-century grammarian who combined moral teaching with grammar education. When I started out teaching at a high school, I tried to use authentic materials so students could learn something about life, history, etc. as they studied English. When I started teaching at Sophia, I couldn't just teach vocabulary or grammar or the four skills; they were always integrated with content. Therefore, I have been interested in combining two, three, or even four elements when studying and teaching language for a long time.

A few years into my career at Sophia, my department asked me to become an ELT trainer. To prepare for that, I took a sabbatical to get an MA in ELT and applied linguistics at King's College London in 2007. While I was there, I attended a conference and saw a presentation on CLIL. This was my first encounter with CLIL. I was attracted to the idea of combining language teaching and subject teaching, and when I heard about the 4Cs framework: Content, Cognition, Communication, and Culture (see Figure 1), I realized that my teaching practice was supported by CLIL. So that's how I became interested in CLIL. When I came back to Japan in 2008, I started implementing CLIL principles formally into my lessons, and after doing that, my class evaluations went up a lot.

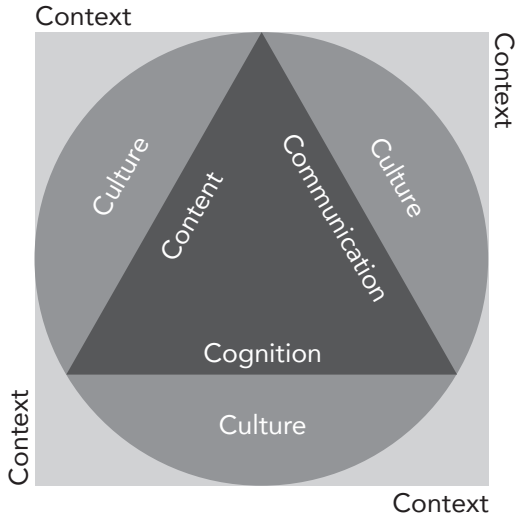


Figure 1. **The 4Cs of CLIL (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 41).**

LM: How did your teaching change, exactly?

MI: Before, I lectured and gave exercises to students. It was a knowledge-based approach. Using CLIL, I moved to a task-based approach with more discussion, critical thinking, and student interaction.

LM: And you decided to promote CLIL in Japan.

MI: Yes. I started giving workshops around the country and have helped bring CLIL specialists to Sophia over the years, including David Marsh, Do Coyle, Peter Mehisto, Rosie Tanner, and Christiane Dalton-Puffer. I would say that in 2009, CLIL was not known at all [in Japan], but now many English teachers have at least heard of CLIL.

LM: So it just grew organically?

MI: That's the word, organically.

LM: As some readers may be unfamiliar with CLIL, can you tell us your definition of CLIL, and briefly explain what it involves for practitioners and learners?

MI: I have two definitions of CLIL. One is just good education, education itself. When good education is in place, there is active learning, characterized by learner-centredness, dialogue between teacher and students, critical thinking, collaborative learning, etc. The second definition is a lot more at the micro level. CLIL is a good system or framework for teaching students, both in terms of content and language. Everything that is considered to be good teaching practice is in CLIL. It's like a smartphone: it includes everything in one package. So on the one hand, I have a very big picture of CLIL, that is good education. On the other, I regard CLIL as a teaching methodology. Some people don't want to see CLIL that way. They think CLIL is an approach or even a sort of mindset. But for me, it is a framework.

The acronym CLIL means content and language integrated learning. It's not teaching, it's learning. It's a learner-centred approach. The 4Cs framework is very powerful: Content is subject-specific concepts and terms. Communication is basically language skills. Cognition, thinking, is the most important element of CLIL. I think everybody involved in CLIL agrees that the most important component of the 4Cs is cognition. Cultural interaction [the fourth C] is also very important.

LM: Why is cognition the most important?

MI: For example, if you are given a new grammar rule, and you do some grammar exercises on paper, and you are assessed using similar questions, probably learning can be transferred, meaning students can give correct answers if they learned that grammar rule properly. That doesn't mean they can use that new grammar rule when they write or speak. It can't be transferred so easily. But in CLIL, if students learn new things and think about the content in English, that knowledge can be transferred when they use that language in their workplaces, for example, when they collect new information related to their job and they think about/process that information with other people, and then they write a proposal or give a presentation. Basically, it is how they apply language to a new context.

On the contrary, many Japanese people get stuck when they are asked questions in English, even very simple questions. When you are asked a question, you want to say something good—that's content. At the same time, you need to think about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and accuracy. So the capacity of the brain for content is very limited, because people are not used to thinking about something in English. But in CLIL, because students think a lot in English they can give opinions more fluently in English. That's why I strongly believe students need to think a lot in CLIL lessons.

LM: Does CLIL encompass PPP—Presentation, Practice, Production?

MI: Well, I propose a new PPP in CLIL. In the presentation stage, students learn new content from authentic materials. But the second stage, practice, is totally different. Instead of practice, students process information, new concepts and terms. At this stage, students think a lot. This is CLIL. Then, at the production stage, they discuss what they thought about or write something. The middle stage is my new PPP model. And to make it happen, teachers need to be really careful when they design tasks. You need to give very good tasks where students think a lot, deeply.

LM: What is an example of a good task that makes students think?

MI: Tasks where students use their higher order thinking skills (HOTS; see Bloom in Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 30; Ikeda, 2012), where they need to analyze, evaluate, or create. That's the criterion for me. There shouldn't be a right answer, actually.

LM: What about the level of the students?

MI: At the macro level, CLIL can be used by any teacher, with any students. If students' cognitive levels are low, teachers need to give more support, or scaffolding if you like. Of course, tasks shouldn't be too demanding, but maybe you can give some tasks where they think more enjoyably as opposed to learning by memorization.

But at the micro level, students need to be at least upper secondary level in terms of age, because they need to have some sort of general knowledge to make the most of CLIL. Ideally, they should be at least 17 or 18 and their English proficiency level

should be at least CEFR B1. Otherwise, they can't actually learn new things. So, B1 is the entry level for good CLIL. You need to compromise for lower level students in terms of language and give age appropriate lessons.

LM: What are the fundamental things teachers need to know in order to start to teach using CLIL?

MI: They need to use authentic materials, multimodal input—not just texts, but visuals and statistics. Basically, a task-based approach is very important: students need to talk about what they have learned with others, not about the language, but about the content. That's the best way to learn something.

If teachers start to teach using CLIL, they have to deny what they've been doing in the past. To be good CLIL teachers, they have to be very flexible. They should be eager to learn a new way to teach and be able to take risks.

LM: I have heard people say that being CLIL teachers requires a lot of lesson preparation time.

MI: Yes, it's huge, but if it's enjoyable, I think teachers can devote a lot of time. But if they are not so good at designing their own materials, it will be difficult for them. That's why more good course books and textbooks should be available.

LM: What should teachers keep in mind when they are teaching CLIL?

MI: If I focus on one element, it is: have your students think a lot. Think, think, and think. As I said before, Japanese students in general cannot express their opinions even about very simple things. One of the causes, I assume, is that when they try to say something, their brain runs out of RAM (random access memory), with one part of their brain searching for appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and phonology while another part is busy collecting relevant information to form their opinion, and yet another with worrying about the quality of their English and their opinion. To avoid this, students need to think a lot about various topics/issues in their English lessons and express their thoughts. CLIL is based on the "transfer-appropriate processing" hypothesis, defined as follows:

> Remembering what we learn is easier when we are in a situation that is similar to the one in which we learned it in the first place or when using the kinds of cognitive processes that we used during learning. (Lightbown, 2014, p. 57)

That's why I strongly believe students need to think a lot in a CLIL lesson.

LM: How would you like to see CLIL develop in Japan?

MI: First and foremost, it should be known more. CLIL is just associated with English education in Japan. But CLIL is content and language teaching or learning, rather than just a language learning methodology. CLIL should be used in mainstream education. That's my final goal.

Nowadays, in Japan, one of the most well-known buzzwords is "active learning." But actually, that's just a normal way to teach in Europe and North America. The problem here is teachers don't know how to give active learning lessons because they have been educated in a traditional way, where they've just been given information to memorize. CLIL can help these teachers. If you do CLIL, you're giving an active learning lesson.

Another buzzword is "developing global human resources." How can you develop students to work and live in a global society? Many people think students need to develop their language skills in order to be global human resources, particularly their speaking abilities, but that's just one of the necessities. Students need to be able to collect new information in English, think about it in English, and then talk about it in English, and write about it in English. This is what CLIL can accomplish, and that's why I think CLIL should be the standard.

In order to do this, we need to produce very good materials and give good teacher training. These two aspects are discussed all over the world; everywhere, good materials and good teacher training are lacking for CLIL.

So, this is what I would like to see happen in the future in Japan.

LM: Thank you very much for sharing your insights and your hopes for the future direction of education in Japan.

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Laura MacGregor is Professor of English at Gakushuin University and belongs to the Preparatory Office of the Faculty of International Sciences, which will open its doors in April 2016. She is currently researching into how CLIL is approached and taught in Japan and would like to get in touch with more CLIL practioners and researchers. Laura is also looking into university student note-taking practices as well as teacher note-taking instruction and implementation in class. Contact her at <laura.macgregor@gakushuin.ac.jp>.

[RESOURCES] MY SHARE

Philip Head and Gerry McLellan

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 600 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

Email: my-share@jalt-publications.org • Web: http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Hi, and welcome to another edition of My Share, the first of 2016. Phil and I hope everyone had a great holiday and that the New Year brings peace, health, and happiness. This issue contains more invigorating ideas from ingenious teachers willing to spread the word and help us as professionals to ensure learning is fun and student centered. This is my first time to co-edit the My Share column, and it is a tremendous privilege to be able to play a part, small though it may be, in helping authors bring their ideas to life.

This month we have four articles in print and another two online. Michael Sharpe gets things up and running with some advice on learner-scripted small group productions. Donald Anderson then shares an idea on pre-literate dictation, helpful for complete beginner classes. Jeremiah Hall has an interesting way of helping students remember new vocabulary, and Ian Willey introduces a fun activity using Senryu.

Last, but by no means least, in our online edition Meagan Kaiser shows us how to promote creativity by having students shoot their own videos, while Matthew Ragan and Jim Ronald share an idea on how to build student confidence by having them correct the teacher.

Learner-Scripted Small-Group Productions

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Collaborative learning, performance, creative writing*
- Learner English level: *High beginner to intermediate*
- Learner maturity: *High school and above*
- Preparation time: *Approximately 30 minutes*
- Activity time: *Three 60-minute sessions (two sessions for preparation and one for the performances)*