The Development of a Coordinated "Foundation" University CLIL Course

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In this paper, we discuss the development and introduction of a coordinated compulsory content and language integrated learning (CLIL) course at a mid-level Japanese university, focussing on the history and culture of English-speaking countries. We describe the context, philosophy, and development of the course and assessment procedures. As well as considering general issues faced in CLIL teaching, we look in some detail at the issue of student poster presentations. We report some initial student resistance to the authenticity of content learning and presentation in a language classroom. We also discuss how the provision of good models and guided noticing for research and presentation tasks has had a limited effect, and that this approach needs to be supplemented by direct instruction on what not to do.

この論文は、日本における中堅大学の英米文化及び史学科で必修科目として行われている内容言語統合型学習(CLIL)の授業に関するものである。CLILの背景、考え方、導入方法から展開の仕方、またその評価方法に至るまで詳しく紹介していく。また、学習指導にあたる際に頻繁に直面する問題、学生によるポスター発表における課題も細かく考察していく。研究内容を理解しそれに関して英語で発表を行うことの真正性について、初期段階から妨げになると思われる点も取り上げていく。更に、研究発表の課題を与える際に、良い参考例を示すことや、学生に気づかせるためのヒントを与えることよりも、すべきでないことや悪例を具体的に見せていくことの方が、より効果的であることについても言及する。

I n this paper, we describe the introduction of a foundation CLIL course in the culture and history of English speaking countries for mid- to low-level university students. We first consider the origins, philosophy, and course design and then the pitfalls and problems encountered, particularly with student poster presentations. We hope it provides a useful case study to inform others designing similar courses.

Institutional Context

The course described in this paper was introduced in 2015 for the 1st-year intake of the newly renamed Department of English Language and Cultures at Aichi Gakuin University. The change reoriented the department towards the sociocultural study of English-speaking countries or *eigoken* (a term undefined in policy documents, but which designers of the course discussed here interpreted to include countries typically considered part of Kachru's [1990] inner and outer circles), and brought an expansion in its English language curriculum. To this end, two full-time native English teachers were hired in 2012 and 2014 and tasked with developing the native teacher-taught elements of that curriculum. This involved coordinated core courses in oral communication and culture through English with further limited-elective language courses, involving the management of a small team of part-time teachers.

Two favourable circumstances allowed for teacher and curriculum coordination. First, both full-time teachers had previously worked together in a coordinated curriculum programme described in Venema (2008) and so were able to straightforwardly agree on an approach to successful coordination, involving part-time teachers in an ongoing process of feedback and decision-making (including the negotiation of objectives), with time set aside for meetings when this could occur. Second, the teachers were given a great deal of freedom institutionally to develop and manage these classes.

Content and Language Integrated Learning

According to Marsh (2002), CLIL originated in language teaching in Europe, where the imperative for education systems to improve additional language competence within the EU led to proposals to teach some subjects in students' additional language; the term CLIL dates from the 1990s. CLIL refers to "any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non- language content" (Marsh, 2002, p. 2). That is, learning materials are used both to learn nonlanguage-related content as well as to improve language skills.

According to Meyer (2010), CLIL material should be meaningful, challenging, and authentic. Authentic here means not tailored for language students: The teacher scaffolds learning, allowing authentic materials to be "a rich source for designing challenging tasks that foster creative thinking and create opportunities for meaningful language output." (p. 14) It should engage Coyle's "four Cs" of content, communication (unrehearsed, yet scaffolded, production), cognition (development of thinking skills) and culture (understanding and tolerance of alternative culture perspectives (Wiesemes, 2009).

There is good evidence that CLIL results in improved language outcomes, particularly in oral production, vocabulary attainment, writing accuracy, and stylistic range (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). It has spread rapidly across Europe and is now increasingly used in Asia, including Japan (Pinner, 2013).

Course Purpose

Three factors influenced the decision to introduce a foundation CLIL course. First, there was a desire to establish the renamed department as more language-focused, where students could express their ideas about the departmental subject in English. Second, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is pushing for increased English-medium instruction in universities as part of their broad efforts to internationalise the education system and globalise the Japanese labour force (Brown, 2014). One aim is to provide courses to attract students from overseas to study in Japan. Given that our 1st-year students average TOEIC scores of around 380 on entry, in order to have appropriate level courses in later years for such overseas students we needed not simply to raise the Japanese students' English level, but also to focus on English for special purposes in culture and history. Third, there was a concern, based on experience across several universities where the course designers had worked, that in English language discussion classes, Japanese university students of this level were often unable to display even the most basic knowledge about the geography, history, or culture of the main English-speaking countries. As Iyobe and Li (2013) pointed out, higher order thinking, a widely accepted goal of full CLIL instruction, is difficult without a grounding both in these topics and in the English language required to talk about them. The term *foundation* refers to the nature of the materials that we use: They are adapted for language learners in preparation for the use of authentic materials in later years.

The culture through English course thus had three main aims and one limiting condition:

- the English-medium teaching of basic historical and cultural content that students were expected to retain both for assessment and subsequent study,
- language preparation for English-medium study and project work in subsequent years,
- developing students' research and presentation skills in English, and
- ensuring a manageable burden of class preparation and grading for part-time teachers.

Course Content

The 1st-year course was organised into four 3-week units per semester. In the first two lessons of each unit, content was presented; in the third lesson, students gave their researched presentations. Each content lesson centred on an illustrated text; occasionally video material was used in place of a text. The philosophical approach was to choose concrete topics anchored in easily processed facts from which more fundamental topics can be extrapolated. For example, a lesson on American food (hamburgers come from Germany, etc.) is the basis for information about immigration to the US prior to 1920. In another lesson, the history of international baseball supports an account of the US usurping Spain as a dominant power in the Pacific and Caribbean. It was felt that students needed factual grounding to be able to comprehend broader patterns in cultural–historical trends. Content knowledge comes before an ability to think critically and creatively in a domain (Baer, 2016). Written texts were authored by the course coordinators. Although the texts were graded for vocabulary and thus not strictly authentic in the narrower real-world sense suggested by Gilmore (2007), they had an authentic purpose (Pinner, 2013): the transmission of real world content that students were expected to process. Because it contains tailored materials, the course cannot be called a true CLIL course, and so instead we here describe it as foundation CLIL. However, for their presentations, students would of course need to research authentic texts (typically online). Pinner's concern about the limited expertise

of language teachers designing such material was fortunately met in the most part by the course designers having first and higher degrees in politics, social research, postcolonial, and religious studies and the relatively low conceptual difficulty of the material we sought to teach in the initial development of the course.

Three elements were included in language preparation:

1. direct vocabulary study related to the unit topic, supplemented with high frequency items, with students assessed with simple Japanese-to-English and English-to-Japanese tests;

2. extensive reading for homework using teacher-written stories that recycle vocabulary, with simple tests to check homework compliance (rather than comprehension, in keeping with principles set out in Day & Bamford, 2002); and

3. the direct presentation and guided textual discovery of target structures appropriate for presentations on the topic.

Our hope was that, taken together, the content examples and the language focus provided would give adequate scaffolding for students to research and plan their presentations and thus fulfill the departmental aim and CLIL goal of improving students' ability to communicate on cultural topics. This has proved the most challenging aspect, and much of the latter half of this paper is taken up with reflecting on this challenge.

In addition to in-class tests and assessment of presentations, there were end-of-semester speaking tests (for which teachers swapped classes to assess each others' students through interviews about their posters) and an examination week test on the course's content consisting of multiple-choice questions and vocabulary review. Although open-answer tests have advantages pedagogically and in terms of assessment, with approximately 120 students a year, variable levels, and three part-time teachers, we felt that the grading burden for teachers needed to be kept to a minimum.

General Issues

A new course such as this inevitably has teething problems. Before discussing in more detail issues with student presentations, we look at the challenges of student levels, student acceptance of CLIL, and material creation and how we responded.

Student Levels

Students are streamed by placement test into levels of language proficiency. Student levels in the less proficient classes average around 300 in TOEIC; those in the highest class average around 470. Course content that the higher proficiency class could process in one lesson might take the least proficient class two lessons. Motivation levels, themselves likely a factor in placement test scores, also appear to vary between classes. Thus, providing coordinated content that all classes could manage was a challenge.

Initially, we discussed the feasibility of providing simpler materials with reduced content for lower level students. However, such an approach would prioritise language learning over content learning and thus weaken the motivational strength of CLIL courses (Lasagabaster, 2011). In addition, it would weaken the coordinated continuity of the course. The course over the 3 years is designed so that students build on their knowledge as they progress. However, class streaming according to proficiency reoccurs at the beginning of every academic year. Therefore, if obligatory content is going to be reduced or simplified, it is better done for the whole year, focussing on material that has been too challenging even for the top classes. Instead we have tried to improve scaffolding. For example, we are looking now to develop part-time teacher-friendly materials to allow the integration of short teacher lectures in which students have the opportunity to interact with the "lecturer" and teachers can monitor understanding. We are also considering the extent of L1 scaffolding offered by teachers to support content comprehension and appreciation. So on this matter in general we agree with Lin (2016) that it is better to build bridges using L1 and multimodal approaches rather than "dumb down" the content (p. 99).

Student Comprehension of CLIL

Although we repeatedly emphasised to students throughout the course that content presented in class should be learnt and recalled for the end of semester test and subsequent semesters as in any regular content class, several students in the first semester did not grasp this. That is, students themselves were resistant to the authenticity of a CLIL class. We can speculate why some students fail to grasp that the course is as much a content as a language course. One may be environmental. With only a few exceptions in large multinational companies such as Honda and Uniqlo (Editorial, 2015), English is not used as a day-to-day working language in Japan, and so the supposed English learning imperative of globalisation is simply not a lived experience. In one sense, English is not experienced as a real language. Alternatively, students bring expectations of 6 or more years of primary and secondary English education—in which texts are for comprehending and language assessment—and they take time to adjust to English language texts used purposefully. It is not, after all, unusual for people to use their previous experiences to interpret their current situation.

Creating Content

For each unit, the full-time teachers created two factually accurate core texts on well-chosen topics, a well-chosen vocabulary list and test, and two extensive readings of around 2000 words with reading checks. These tasks presented time and logistical constraints on teachers who themselves had to research, and be in sufficient command of, the content material created.

Even at this preliminary level, political choices needed to be made. Should material on Churchill as a British icon include the darker side of his pre-World War II career (Toye, 2010)? How does one address the low visibility of African American contributions to American cuisine (Pinchlin, 2014) in a lesson purporting to show the relationship between American food and the people who went there post Columbus? How should an upbeat lesson on British ethnic diversity be revised following the Brexit referendum? As course designers, we are aware we have generally fallen on what might be called the progressive, anti-imperialist side of analysis.

Poster Presentations: Challenges for Students

In the final lesson of each unit, students practise poster presentations in small groups on topics they had chosen themselves. Presentation tasks provide opportunity for students to begin to engage higher order thinking skills as they engage in "pushed output" (Meyer, 2013). Posters are required to have six or more pictures as visual aids to their presentation, and the presentation should at least answer a stated set of generic questions. For example, for the presentation on a festival (the unit topics had been Christmas and Easter), students were required to answer the following questions:

- What the festival is about?
- What is the history of the festival?
- What activities do people take part in?
- What do you think about the festival?

Two successful examples of student-designed posters as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Each student is required to give a short presentation of their preresearched and prepared poster, usually lasting about 2-4 minutes. Scripts are allowed, but students are strongly discouraged from purely reading; the ultimate aim is to present with no script. The audience members are required to listen to the presentation and fill out a presentation sheet with a simple evaluation of the presenter's performance in terms of audience engagement through eye contact and clear speech and then each ask the presenter one question. Individual teachers are allowed and expected to work flexibly within this framework.
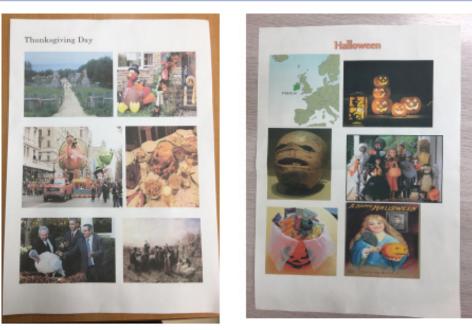

Figure 1. Student poster on Thanksgiving.

Figure 2. Student poster on Halloween.

There were several reasons for choosing poster presentations in small groups, although they are much less common than more ubiquitous standard speech-style presentations (Prichard & Ferreira, 2014). They are less intimidating than whole class presentation; they encourage the development of good presentation habits such as eye contact with listeners; they allow for practice and repetition; posters are technologically less fallible; the picture prompts carry less pressure to memorise a text than a whole class speech; there is much greater potential for interaction between audience and listener through fielding and answering questions; and poster presentations promote creative and research abilities (Prichard & Ferreira, 2014; Tanner & Chapman, 2012). In particular, the chance for students to practice presentations in pairs before a more formal group presentation, as well as for students presenting on the same subject to share information and assist each other in research, were found to be a clear benefit of this kind of presentation task. Working in pairs also provided opportunities for peer coaching in presentation style, with students asked to watch for basic skills such as eye contact and not reading directly from a script.

There were three common challenges that arose: The selection of material for the poster presentations was sometimes unsuitable for the assigned tasks; there was sometimes incomprehensible language included in the presentations, both for the audience and even for the presenter themselves; and there was a tendency to overly rely on reading their presentation scripts despite the more favourable presentation conditions mentioned above. Here we analyse the causes and the attempted solutions to these problems that came out of coordination meetings and discussions.

The first problem concerned the selection of visual images for the poster presentations. In their presentations, students are supposed to provide an in-depth historical and cultural view of the topic. For example, if their chosen topic is Coca-Cola in the 1st-year unit on drinks, they should talk about the history of Coca-Cola and how it became one of the most popular beverages in the world, such as where it originated; what it was made from; how, where, and how fast it became popular; and so on. Accordingly, the posters should contain images that supported the telling of this story, for example, a picture of the inventor John Pemberton, a picture of some cola nuts, or a graph of sales figures. Although some students immediately grasped this, many others would choose 5-8 images (as they were instructed to) that depicted the topic in various ways but that did not support their presentation. For example, a poster about Coca-Cola would be of six different styles of Coke bottle. Similarly, in the unit on music in which they were required to make a poster about a musician, they would have six different pictures of a pop star singing or dancing. This inevitably resulted in very brief presentations lacking in appropriate coverage of the chosen topic.

This problem of image selection for the poster was first tackled by turning the content section of one of the lessons in later units into an example poster and presentation script. The intention here was to give the students clear examples of what they should be aiming for in their presentations. This met only limited success, even when there were exercises for students to notice how the poster design helped to answer the set presentation questions. More students did adopt a style that we were looking for, but a sizeable portion were still having task comprehension issues. Finally, a more direct approach was taken: Some teachers gave direct instruction in what a bad poster is and also required students to draft posters a week early so that a teacher could intervene if students were still producing posters that did not support the narrative of a good presentation. This has had more success, and it is clear that students need much firmer guidance on poster creation starting earlier in the course. In other words, it has been surprising how much direct instruction students need in order to fulfil this part of the task. Presenting examples and using guided noticing has not been enough.

The recurring issue of incomprehensible content is perhaps a failure in students' approach to research and suggests a need for greater teacher guidance in how to do it. The challenge of research has been made easier by the Internet. Any famous person, world leader, festival, national dish, and so on can be researched along with accompanying images. However, in this case, this convenience turned into a double-edged sword, particularly given the lower level of English ability in lower level classes. Some students would either look up their chosen topic on the English Wikipedia and copy what was written there, or access the Japanese version and use translation software to change it to English (effectively resulting in plagiarism, the recognition of which is a problem among university students in Japan as well as in western countries [Dee & Jacob, 2012; Wheeler, 2009]). In doing so, students effectively ignored any instruction in useful language, whether direct or through noticing in the model presentation texts. As a result, content was often incomprehensible to the listeners and occasionally the presenter themselves, with vocabulary, grammar, and also pronunciation of unfamiliar (often inappropriate or very low frequency) vocabulary hindering a successful exercise in communication. This resulted in the need for students to confer in their L1 immediately after the presentation to gain comprehension. Furthermore, no language learning or content processing was taking place.

Attempts to tackle incomprehensibility in the presentations have also had some success. Spot checking of scripts and notes by teachers has been effective in showing students where and how they should simplify their scripts. Another approach taken has been early submission of scripts to allow more detailed teacher intervention. Bans on the use of translation software, apps for large chunks of text, and copy–pasting of text have helped guide the students towards exploiting their own English language abilities. Focussing on explaining their pictures has helped to move them away from blocks of texts to isolate key information and phrases. This issue is ongoing, and including more direct instruction into research methods in the course material is under consideration.

The aim here is to raise students' awareness that a fundamental element of producing a good presentation is considering the audience. It may sound obvious to point out that reading a text that neither you nor the audience can understand is not a satisfactory presentation. However, as mentioned above with the difficulty some students had with processing that they were supposed to be content learning in English, students who prepare incomprehensible presentations may also be cognitively resistant to the authenticity of the CLIL experience.

Excessive script reading was a part of the larger problem of very stilted presentations. The problems with script reading should be familiar to all teachers who have students do

presentations. Students have their eyes fixed to their paper, not at the audience, with a flat delivery of language and insufficient use of the visual images in their presentations, eschewing use of nonverbal tools such as body language. Such presentations are difficult to follow, lack audience engagement, and are often delivered at too fast a pace without appropriate pauses. Teachers had from the beginning made plain that presentations should ultimately be done without reading from scripts, with only notes to support, but reported that this had only limited initial success.

The introduction of example presentations into course materials mentioned above was also intended to tackle the issue of overreliance on scripts. By providing samples of presentation language coupled with activities aimed at having the students pick out useful language ("She has starred in over 40 films"; "In this film, she played a police officer") as well as general presentation language ("On the top right you can see a picture of her as a young girl") to encourage them to use signposting language and use their poster images more in their presentations, it was hoped students would, through exposure and practice, assimilate these constructions without the need to read scripts word for word. However, this met with only limited success. Generally, the students have been slow to adopt this key presentation language. Teachers have found that as with poster design, modelling not only *good* but also *bad* presentation styles has been more successful in allowing the students to see how eye contact, greater use of the poster, and less staring at the script makes for a better presentation. That is, prepared awareness of how students may do the task badly (enabling appropriate teacher demonstration of a badly performed task) seems to be as important as offering examples of how the task is done well.

The question arises about the appropriateness of such a task to students of lower language ability levels. Clearly, there are challenges as topics move from the concrete, here and now, such as discussing food, to the more abstract, such as discussing independence movements. However, two approaches appear to work well. One is the assessment method: Only a third of the grade for presentations is for language use; the other two thirds are for poster quality (picture selection, visual impact) and content knowledge. We found that insistence on good-looking posters improved student investment and effort in general. The other is scaffolding, and this is a topic-dependent process in which teachers and materials designers must learn what kind of scaffolding is needed for each topic.

Conclusion

Through the coordination process of feedback and discussion, the teachers of this foundation CLIL course have identified a series of issues that may face other language educators introducing CLIL into their core curricula in a similar Japanese university setting. In particular, they may encounter inertial resistance by students to the authenticity of attempts to teach course content in nominally language-learning settings and of their own content output, as students may initially treat content in the disposable manner in which texts and output in regular language input classes are often treated. Furthermore, with guided research and presentation projects, students may need a surprisingly detailed amount of direct instruction specifically on what *not* to do, in addition to good examples and models. Course developers need to monitor how the tasks they set are done badly.

Coordination has benefitted the programme greatly; many solutions and supporting materials have been provided by part-time teachers, as well as the writing of general task materials. Coordination also helps teaching staff involved to focus on the course as an ongoing process. We have progressed a long way since the course's inception but we are always aware of the future potential for growth and improvement.

Bio Data

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