Title: An evaluation of code-switching in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in secondary education in Poland

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K a t a r z y n a   P a p a j a

An evaluation of code-switching in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in secondary education in Poland

Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL) as an educational approach was developed in Europe and is, therefore, very strongly European-oriented. "It is based on the well-known assumption that foreign languages are best learnt by focusing in the classroom not so much on language – its form and structure- but on the content which is transmitted through language" (Wolff 2003: 211). *Code-switching* is a phenomenon which is present in bilingual stream. It is often perceived as "the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction" (Nilep 2006: 1).

The following article aims at presenting different types of code-switching, namely *linguistic switch, topic switch, affective switch, socialising switch* and *clarity switch,* which are present in Content and Language Integrated Learning classroom. The below provided data consisting of various examples is a part of a PhD research observations carried out in one Secondary School in Poland throughout the whole school year. Apart from the different examples of code-switching, I am also going to analyse them and draw some conclusions bearing in mind the changes in occurrence of code-switching throughout the whole school year.

1. Introduction

Changes which occurred in political, technological, social and economic realities since the early 20th century have led to more relationships between people of different nations. The educational changes which result from different policy decisions are situated in diverse settings. The patterns which are given to such settings are various. For the time being, the most widely used ones as Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2007) mention are "Content – based Instruction (CBI), Immersion Education, Bilingual Teaching, and Language X as Medium of Instruction" (Dalton-Puffer and Smit 2007: 7). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been introduced as a common term for a number of similar approaches in Europe to teach content subjects through a foreign language (Wolff 2003: 211). The term CLIL is now the most commonly used and it is based on the assumption that foreign languages are best learnt by focusing in the classroom not so much on language but on the content which is transmitted through language.

One very important aspect of the CLIL approach is code-switching which deserves special attention.

In the following article, I am going to present a definition of CLIL. Then I am going to define code-switching paying special attention to different types of code-switching. Apart from the theory, I am also going to describe the study and present different examples of code-switching which are a part of my PhD research observations carried out in the Secondary School. Finally, I am going to draw some conclusions and add my own comments.

2. A definition of CLIL

According to Wolff (2003) "Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is based on the assumption that foreign languages are best learnt by focusing in the classroom not so much on language but on the content which is transmitted through language" (Wolff 2003: 211). The novelty of this approach is that classroom content is not so much taken from everyday life but rather from content subjects e.g. mathematics, biology, geography etc.

A general definition of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been provided by David Marsh:

"Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is a generic term and refers to any educational situation in which an additional language

and therefore not the most widely used language of the environment is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than language itself" (Marsh and Lange 2000: iii)

3. A definition of code-switching

Nilep (2005) provides a definition of code-switching which is defined as "the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction. This contextualization may relate to local discourse practices, such as turn selection or various forms of bracketing, or it may make relevant information beyond the current exchange, including knowledge of society and diverse identities" (Nilep 2006: 1).

Another phenomenon which is worth mentioning while talking about code-switching is code mixing. According to Fasold (1984) "Code mixing is one of the major kinds of language choice which is subtler than code-switching" (Fasold 1984: 52). In code-mixed sentences, pieces of one language are used while a speaker is basically using another language. These 'pieces' of the other language are often words, but they can also be phrases or larger units.

Comparing code-switching with code-mixing, it can be said that code-switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event while code-mixing is the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from a cooperative activity where the participants, in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand. The data gathered during the research was mostly connected with code-switching and that is why only the data concerning code-switching is taken into consideration and presented below.

Flyman-Mattsson and Burenhult (1998) state that several explanations for code-switching in the second language classroom may be relevant to the CLIL classroom, namely:

a) *Linguistic insecurity*, e.g. the difficulty teachers experience in relating new concepts (Merritt et al. 1992: 107);

b) *Topic switch*, i.e. when teachers switch code according to the topic;

c) *Affective functions*, e.g. spontaneous expressions of emotions and emotional understanding in discourse with students;

d) *Socialising functions*, i.e. when teachers turn to the students' first language to signal friendship and solidarity (Merritt et al. 1992: 107);

e) *Repetitive functions*, i.e. when teachers convey the same message in both languages for clarity;

In the CLIL classroom, teachers appear to try and use the L2 as often as possible. However, teaching a course as CLIL does not mean that a teacher should use the target language only. The L2 should not become a linguistic burden for the learner. If the situation demands that a switch from the L2 to the L1 is required, then it should be done. According to Marsh (1999), if learners are forced to use the L2 only, especially in cases in which they need to use their mother tongue, problems may occur. In fact, CLIL offers choice, two languages may be used and as a result the CLIL classroom may be natural and positive. The extent to which L2 and L1 are used depends on the aims and CLIL approach adopted. Marsh (1999) notices that "It is useful to consider the L1/L2 ration of 75%/25% as a minimum starting point for CLIL. This is very low in terms of L2 usage, but it allows for teachers to see CLIL as means of enriching rather than constraining the learning context" (Marsh 1999: 51).

4. The aim of the research

One of the main objectives of the study reported in the following pages is to present different examples of code-switching which occurred in the Content and Language Integrated classroom in Secondary Education. It should be pointed out that the following data is a part of a PhD qualitative study on Content and Language Integrated Learning and since the concept of code-switching is a highly complex phenomenon it is not possible to deal with all aspects at once. The purpose of the research carried out on code-switching was to focus on the changes which take place in the CLIL classroom as far as this aspect of CLIL is concerned throughout the whole school year. Additionally, the research aimed at distinguishing certain differences in code-switching between the CLIL subjects.

5. The participants of the study

The participants in the study were Polish learners who studied in a bilingual classroom as well as their Polish teachers from a Secondary School. The research was carried out in the Secondary School throughout the period of one school year. At the very beginning, I wanted to record the lessons and observe all the bilingual classes but no permission on the part of the teachers as well as the headmaster was given. As a result, I decided to concentrate on one bilingual class only which turned out to be the 1st grade. A total number of 33 learners participated in the lessons observed. All the participants were at the advanced level and most of them started learning English when they were at the age of 5–7 years old. One learner was born in the English speaking country (the USA) and another one was born in France (the learner has got a French speaking parent). It is worth mentioning that the learners graduated from different Lower High Schools and in order to get into bilingual class, they had to pass a written and spoken test in English. The class was divided into two groups and each group had 6 hours (45 min.) of English per week. As far as the subjects taught through English are concerned, the class was divided into two groups only in the case of biology. The class had 2 hours of biology per week (one hour in groups and one hour as a whole class), 3 hours of mathematics and 3 hours of geography. All participants of the research learned English as the second language.

Three Polish teachers of the bilingual subjects in the previously mentioned Secondary School participated in the study by allowing the researcher to observe their lessons. They were teachers of geography, biology and mathematics. Their teaching experience differed as well as their educational background. All of them were fully qualified teachers with university degrees in a particular subject and teaching experience at the secondary school level varying from 3 years to 10 years. Only one teacher was a fully qualified teacher with additional university degree in English. The other two teachers completed some courses in English and passed additional exams allowing them to teach a subject through English. Three CLIL lessons were observed: geography, biology and mathematics.

6. Code-switching in practice

On the basis of the observations, it can be said that various instances of code-switching were present during the lessons. In the case of the CLIL geography lessons, about 20% of the lesson was in Polish. In the case of biology, it was about 30% of the lesson and in the case of mathematics it was about 70%. As it can be seen, the percentage varies due to the difficulty of the subject taught and also the topic of the lesson. The following examples illustrate various instances of code-switching present.

— *Linguistic switch:*

"*Geographical coordinates* to są *współrzędne geograficzne*" (teacher-learner code-switching, geography); "How do we say *rocznik statystyczny* in English?" [translation: *rocznik statystyczny – statistical yearbook*] (learner-teacher code-switching, geography); "*Starch* to jak będzie po polsku?" [translation: "How is *starch* in Polish?] (learner-learner code-switching, biology); "*Intervals* to *przedziały* po polsku" [translation: "*Intervals* are *intervals* in Polish] (teacher-learner code-switching, mathematics); Generally, the linguistic switch was used both by the learners and the teachers in order to explain the key vocabulary and facilitate understanding.

— *Topic switch:*

"*Carbohydrates* consist of sugars, starch and cellulose czyli, *węglowodany* to cukry, skrobia i celuloza, tak przy okazji, to ile jecie słodyczy" [translation: "………, by the way how much sweets do you eat?] (teacher-learner code-switching, biology); "Jakiekolwiek zbiory A i B, które nie mają wspólnych elementów etc…" [translation: "Any pair of sets A, B which do not have any constituents in common etc…"] (teacher-learner code-switching, mathematics); "Panie profesorze, czy musi jutro być ta kartkówka?" [translation: "Do we have to write this short test tomorrow?"] (learner-teacher code-switching, mathematics); "Zapadlisko, to pewnego rodzaju zapadnięty teren, np. Kraków jest położony w zapadlisku, dlatego tak też widać zanieczyszczenie" [translation: A depression or subsidence basin is a kind of area which is a bit lowered e.g. Kraków is situated in a depression and that is why we can see so much pollution in the air"] (teacher-learner code-switching, geography); In all cases the topic switch occurred when the learners or the teachers wanted to talk about something which was not connected with the topic of the lesson or while giving examples from every day life.

— *Affective switch:*

"Great, kartkówka jest za tydzień!" [translation: "Great, the test is next week"] (learner-learner code-switching, biology); "Dzisiaj oglądamy video, super!" [translation: "We are watching a video film today, superb!"] (learner-learner code-switching, geography); "Dlaczego dostałam tylko trójkę za zadanie domowe?" [translation: "Why did I get only a satisfactory mark for my homework?"] (learner-teacher code-switching, mathematics); The affective switch occurred due to some additional information given during the lessons which were unexpected for the CLIL learners. It should be pointed out that in most cases the affective switch occurred between the CLIL learners only.

— *Socialising switch:*

"Moje Drogie dzieciątka" [translation: "My Dear children"] (teacher-learner code-switching, mathematics); "Może pójdzie Pani z Nami do kina?" [translation: "Would you like to go to the cinema with us?"] (learner-teacher code-switching, biology); "Co robimy po zajęciach? Może pójdziemy do Galerii Kazimierz?" [translation: "What are we doing after the class? Maybe we could go to the Kazimierz Gallery?" (learner-learner code-switching, geography); The socialising switch occurred in order to signalise friendship both on the part of the CLIL learners and the CLIL teachers.

— *Clarity switch:*

"*Symbolic pictures*, powtarzam raz jeszcze, to są mapy, plany, atlasy itd, proszę sobie zapisać" [translation: *Symbolic pictures,* I am repeating it once again: these are maps, plans and atlases, please write it down"] (teacher-learner code-switching, geography);
L1: "Wiesz, to jest czysta chemia" [translation: "You know, it's just chemistry"];
L2: "Jak to, nie rozumiem" [translation: "How come? I don't understand it"];
L1: "To jest tak jak w chemii, w naszym organizmie są kwasy i zasady" [translation: "It's like in chemistry, there are acids and alkali in our body"]; (learner-learner code-switching, biology); "Panie profesorze, dlaczego ta domena musi różnić się od zera. Czy może Pan powtórzyć definicję" [translation: 'Why is this domain different from zero? Can you repeat the definition, please?'] (learner-teacher code-switching, mathematics);

The clarity switch occurred in order to repeat the message and facilitate learning.

7. Conclusions

As it can be seen from the examples given above, code-switching was present during all CLIL lessons. Questions on the part of the CLIL learners were often prompted in Polish, especially in case of lack of understanding which usually took place when a new topic was introduced. Additionally, the CLIL learners switched into Polish when they needed some specific information about their test results or homework – they were probably afraid that they could misunderstand some important information. What is more, they switched into Polish while talking to each other. As for the CLIL teachers, in most situations, they switched into Polish in order to explain some vocabulary or difficult concepts. Their use of the Polish language also depended on the difficulty of the subject e.g. mathematics is generally considered to be more difficult than geography and this is why there was more code-switching present during these lessons. All in all, having observed the lessons throughout the whole school year I can conclude that the percentage of code-switching was gradually decreasing which was due to gaining more knowledge, experience and confidence on the part of the CLIL learners. In my opinion, it is not possible to completely avoid code-switching. As long as it facilitates learning in a CLIL classroom, it should be perceived as a positive phenomenon.

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