



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Language

THE EFFICACY OF THE APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES IN THE TEACHING OF A CONTENT-BASED COURSE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS.

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ABSTRACT

Foreign Language instruction entails much more than simply imparting language skills. Teaching of content-based courses through a range of approaches including CLIL leads to improved language proficiency and deeper understanding of content for achieving near native language level. Advanced language structure and registers can not be taught in isolation, and it is the content that provides the scaffold for learning advanced language skills. scaffolding enables learners to engage with challenging subject content while receiving linguistic support to facilitate comprehension and communication.

INTRODUCTION:

This article talks about the challenges faced by both; the language learner and instructor. The instructor is not only required to be well versed in the foreign language pedagogy but also be an expert in the content through which s/he is trying to teach the language. The task is two times more challenging than the usual tutors. In this particular case I have tried to make a case, using examples and techniques for teaching Spain's History through Spanish language.

The Efficacy of the Approaches and Strategies in the Teaching of a Content-based Course in a Foreign Language Class.

"Knowledge cannot not be transmitted it can only be constructed"

— Lev Vygotsky

This famous phrase by Lev Vygotsky (Soviet psychologist) acquires a special significance in the ambit of pedagogy of foreign languages. This approach highlights the importance of proactive and contextualised learning, and it assumes greater importance in the context of teaching content-based courses. The learning process doesn't involve only acquisition of the linguistic competence but also building up the knowledge of the other cultural aspects through the language.

At the beginning of teaching and learning process of a foreign language, 'Spanish' in this case, it is imperative that the approach and methodology be based on the development of four basic language competencies namely: speaking, writing, reading and listening. Any learner or teacher recognizes that learning a new language goes beyond memorising grammar rules and vocabulary. Even for the basic level language acquisition it is vital to cognise; the culture, the value system, the historical formation, the way of thinking and functioning of native speakers of the new language, and that they are all inseparable cogs in the wheel of learning process. The objective is to develop the proficiency in these skills to a level comparable to the native speaker which is only possible when the language is learnt in its totality and that it can never be reduced to isolated language learning.

Consequently, as the learners progress and reach more advanced levels, it becomes necessary to provide more specialised instruction in specific linguistic structures and language registers. It would entail development of critical thinking and together with that, the interdisciplinary knowledge should also be encouraged. Learning content through language and, language through content as a process requiring constructive and active participation and move beyond the simple memorization of information.

According to the SGCTIE (Subdirectorato-General for Territorial Cooperation and Educational Innovation, under the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports of Spain).

Original quotation:

"En España, para dar respuesta a esta demanda de aprender un segundo idioma se implementó el programa bilingüe y el enfoque AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras) durante el primer lustro del siglo XXI. Dicho enfoque integra el estudio de las lenguas extranjeras y el de los contenidos curriculares al mismo tiempo."

English translation:

"In Spain, in response to the growing demand for second language learning, the bilingual education programmes and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach were implemented during the first five years of the 21st century. The said approach integrates the foreign language studies and the content-based curriculum simultaneously."

The process of foreign-language learning is shaped by a range of external and internal factors. Their influence varies from one learner to another, reflecting individual differences in the ways learners receive, interpret and process the information. Although, a learner's conceptual understanding is often higher than their ability to express it in a second language. Teachers apply Vygotsky's ZPD (Zone of proximal development) by providing appropriate scaffolding, where the content maybe intellectually challenging, but the language demands are made achievable through guided support.

However, with regard to History as a content-based subject in a foreign language class, it isn't difficult to anticipate the reaction of the learners when it is introduced at their level of the curriculum. Whenever I start the History course, I ask the students, although with certain feeling of apprehension, that "How many of them would like to learn History?", as should be expected, the response isn't very encouraging for me as course instructor, with roughly, only about 10% showing interest. Therefore, integrating a history course in the language learning course presents a considerable challenge. Initially, when I took up teaching History in Spanish it was a struggle to engage students.

On analysing, I realise that the challenges I faced was due to lack of motivation on students' behalf for a supposedly uninteresting subject but more importantly, I needed to make it interesting enough to pique their interest.

Over the years I have tried to evolve from a pedagogic approach that was initially centred on the transmission of information to one that could generate interest and result in participative learning for the students. Jane Lave, a social anthropologist, says that learning is a social process, as opposed to cognitive one – This challenges the conventional cognitive theory.

In an attempt to achieve that I utilised some strategies, as listed below:

1. Project based learning (PBL)
2. Collaborative learning techniques

3. Use of videos and documentaries
4. Analysis of original documents and authentic historic texts
5. Finally, to equip, reiterate and reinforce the new vocabulary

The primary challenge was in finding relevant material that would be interesting, captivating, and adapted to the level of language learning of the student (history is introduced at certain level and then progresses with the progression of semesters), also it should serve the purpose of imparting the lesson effectively. The effort was to provide scaffolding in the form of small diversions in the class to deal with the tedium of learning the subject that history is to the uninitiated. In CLIL, scaffolding enables learners to engage with challenging subject content while receiving linguistic support to facilitate comprehension and communication.

I needed to create a mental map for introducing it at the right moment and for the right duration. It should be a sum of relevance, timing, brevity, purpose and integration.

According to the 'Coherence principle' of Richard A Mayer, extraneous material competes for cognitive resources in working memory and can divert attention from the important material, disrupt the process of organizing the material, and prime the learner to integrate the material with an inappropriate theme.

Being very well aware of the Coherence Principle of Richard A Mayer, mindful that it can defeat the purpose: I try to strategically employ the relevant anecdote, additional information to stimulate students' curiosity and make the learning more engaging and interesting, but at the same time maintaining a clear focus on the primary objective of the lesson.

If the objective of the lesson is to teach a specific topic of the History, it is necessary to establish connections with diverse aspects of the concerned epoch like; the political situation, the society, the cultural aspect, the religion, the why of a particular type of literature, the why of a particular type of architecture. This approach has been of help in facilitating holistic comprehension of that period. It also serves in establishing connections between the different events and analysis of its implications and relating it with the past and future development of the taught history.

I also try to draw connections between the past events or details and encourage the students to examine if any effect can be attributed to the historical period. A big example can be the political evolution towards the current political system as a result of the French Revolution. Another example can be with reference to the effect of climate change on the history of XVI century Spain. The student will easily be able to comprehend the enormous impact it may have had in those times, as the student is living in the times that are most impacted by current climate crisis.

Taking the above example, I would like to elaborate on how I utilise them by establishing a link.

In the period between 15th to the 19th century the northern Hemisphere was experiencing a cold period called 'The Little ice Age' (LIA) which had a deep impact on the turn of events for Spain's History.

Let's see how we can make the connect:

1. **Climate:** Decline in the international reputation of Spain: it was said that 'The sun never set on the Spanish Empire'. Speaking of the defeat of the invincible Spanish Armada, the unusually low temperatures (because of the LIA) during the expedition against England is attributed with having played a crucial role in the outcome.
2. **Economy:** The food shortage provoked by the crop failure which was a direct result of extreme climatic conditions. The adverse climate caused hardships, scarcity of food, and fall

in agriculture produce generated devastating effects on the political and economic stability leading to social unrest which in turn resulted in agrarian revolts.

3. **Spread of diseases:** The population was forced into overcrowded living conditions due to cold which resulted in bad ventilation, this together with an already debilitated population, due to hunger and malnutrition facilitated the spread of epidemics like black plague. This left the society in a state of ruin.
4. **Religion:** The problems on this front came up in the form of Protestantism leading to social tensions. The social conditions already worsened by the general poverty, plague and inequality were prompted by and one can easily say, to some extent also caused by the adverse and extreme climatic conditions which led to a radical change in the outlook of people towards life. A theocentric society was turning into an anthropocentric society which comes to be culturally known as Humanism. This also can be credited with creating conditions favourable for Protestant Reform movement which was trying to question and modify the power structure in the society and the established hierarchies.
5. **Architecture:** In response to the climatic conditions, the architecture of that period, specially in the ambit of Gothic and Renaissance adopted architectural elements like big windows to maximize the natural light in the interiors, incorporation of gargoyles in the architecture for draining the excess rainwater. Architecture was also adapting itself and still stands like a testimony to the climatic challenges it braved.
6. **Industry:** Because of the decline of the naval industry of the Low-Lying countries due to low temperatures and frozen seas due to LIA, the Basque ship building industry emerged as one of the main areas for shipbuilding in Europe. It turned out to be advantageous for Basque region due to changed climate conditions.
7. **Literature:** As stated earlier, the droughts, frost and crop failure led to impoverishment and subsequent social tensions and surprisingly these difficult life conditions led to the emergence of new literary genre 'The picaresque'. Particularly, in the picaresque novel, 'Lazarillo de Tormes'. It was a character that came up as a response to a world filled with deprivation and hardship.

I would like to add and clarify that the aforementioned developments are not solely attributable to climate change and other factors should be included too in the lesson, as there were many other contributory factors but I have observed that by establishing connections and presenting them with a unifying theme makes things easier to weave the diverse historical events and aspects together. It facilitates the understanding of the period holistically i.e. in terms of climate, economy, health, religion, architecture, industry and literature.

I hope and believe that my efforts have yielded positive results, as several students have repeatedly acknowledged that they have developed a greater interest in History and feel more engaged with the subject that they previously found uninteresting.

In the teaching-learning process of a foreign language, it is essential that we adopt contextualised approach that helps in fomenting the interest and in turn active participation on the students' behalf.

Under the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), integrating history, culture, literature, politics, economy, society, architecture, art and the related language register along with the teaching techniques like Project Based Learning which is used in the end to sum up the entire history theme. These approaches aren't merely informative; in fact, I have observed that they stimulate the students to process this information and comment in a way that is engaging and be able to analyse the things at an individual level. All this leads to an understanding that is more profound and lasting. Teaching History through a range of approaches including CLIL, leads to improved

language proficiency and a deeper understanding of the historical content. The subsequent increase in the interest of the students, their active participation and, their inclination to opt for History related topics for research, demonstrate the efficacy of this approach.

“CLIL is about instilling a ‘hunger to learn’ in the student. It gives opportunity for him/her to think about and develop how she/he communicates in general even, in the first language”. (Marsh, Marsland & Stenberg, 2001). (SGCTIE)

This further highlights that content-based learning approaches extend beyond classroom, beyond foreign language acquisition, producing far reaching educational benefits.

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