

New Trends in Foreign Language Teaching

New Trends in Foreign Language Teaching:

*Methods, Evaluation
and Innovation*

Edited by

António Lopes and Raúl Ruiz Cecilia

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INTRODUCTION

ANTÓNIO LOPES AND RAÚL RUIZ CECILIA

Language teaching approaches, methods and procedures are constantly undergoing reassessment. New ideas keep emerging as the growing complexity of the means of communication and the opportunities created by technology put language skills to new uses. In addition, the political, social and economic impact of globalization, the new demands of the labour market that result from it, the pursuit of competitiveness, the challenges of intercultural communication and the diversification of culture are phenomena that have opened new perspectives on the role that foreign languages have come to play in the development of contemporary societies.

This has far-reaching consequences in terms of foreign language learning. Having become more aware of these changing circumstances, learners now seek practical solutions for their needs in real contexts, and this has entailed a radical departure from the school's traditional teacher-directed curriculum. On the other hand, the *Common European Framework for Reference* has helped teachers to rethink their strategies and attitudes, and has opened new research avenues.

Taking into account these contexts, the editors selected from contributions made at an international conference held in Granada in April 2016 those papers that, besides their scientific quality, best represent the approaches and strategies that more effectively address the actual needs of learners. Most proposals revolved around the notion that the teaching of language can no longer be exclusively language-centred, but should rather embrace more comprehensive and integrated approaches where learners are invited to use the language as a means not only of “acquiring information”¹, but also of producing content, in particular when exposed to “comprehensible input”, that is “a comprehensible subject-matter”². More

¹ Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 207.

² Stephen Krashen, *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981), 62.

than just entailing the development of language acquisition, this perspective on language learning helps learners move from reception to production, as Snow points out, in “the search for the right balance of language and content teaching”³.

In sum, this book aims to provide an insight into the latest developments in the field and to discuss the new trends in foreign language teaching that result from the need to adapt to the new social, economic and educational contexts in four major areas, namely methods and approaches (with particular emphasis on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and the Flipped Classroom); teacher training; innovation in the classroom; evaluation and assessment. These topics correspond to those key areas in language teaching permanently subject to detailed scrutiny by researchers in the field, and are all closely intertwined. Innovation cannot be detached from a specific methodological orientation and can only be validated if the evaluation tools are applied in a consistent way. On the other hand, methods and approaches that fail to prompt innovative practices within their didactic framework are unable to keep up with the social, cultural and technological changes directly affecting the learners’ lives. In turn, teacher training plays a pivotal role in fostering a critical awareness of the potential, opportunities and challenges that all these aspects present to the practitioner.

The book comprises fifteen chapters. In *part one*, priority is given to CLIL and TBLT. With the increase in the number of European countries where bilingual education is offered more extensively, CLIL has become a central issue, both in educational and political terms. On the other hand, TBLT has prompted a major change in language learning, shifting it from language-centred approaches to a learner-centred one, where the focus is on communication and the development of practical skills necessary for effective language use. This has redefined the way teachers develop their in-class activities and the roles both learners and teachers play in the learning process. Likewise, the concept of the “flipped classroom” has helped teachers to move away from the traditional model of classroom instruction and has diversified the ways in which content has been delivered. These approaches have been critical in improving the teaching of LSP, as the latter also entails the learning of specialised knowledge

³ Margaret A. Snow, “Content-based and immersion models for second and foreign language teaching.” In *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*, edited by Marianne Celce-Murcia (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2001), 315.

which requires greater attention to be paid to the contexts where language plays an instrumental and constitutive role.

Part two looks into the new challenges facing teacher training and how teachers position themselves in relation to new methodological proposals. Since the approaches discussed in the first part rely heavily on social interacting and social representations, a reflection is required on the ways in which values are negotiated and agreed upon. One should bear in mind that the oral and written production of learners, as well as the very social dynamic of the class, are influenced by the dominant discourses in circulation in society. The discussion of sensitive matters such as gender discrimination in teacher training is a first step towards ensuring a healthy social environment within the learning group. The chapter that discusses this latter aspect is followed by another that examines the teachers' attitudes towards innovation and their training needs through the analysis of the results of a survey conducted both in Europe and the US on how teachers value the latest methods and approaches in language teaching and on the ways in which ICT has been used in the context of TBLT. This part of the book is rounded off by two studies targeting pre-service teacher students and concerning their prospects of professional development. One of them resorts to task-based learning and attempts to identify the concepts impacting teaching practices, while ascertaining how those concepts can be exploited in teacher training. The other one addresses the importance of the reflective approach and experimental learning not only in the development of teaching competencies, but also in the improvement of the quality of initial teacher training.

Part three is about innovation in the classroom and presents five studies on experimental teaching practices for the development of the language proficiency. The first two studies are focused on CLIL. The first one analyses the way in which teachers resort to code-switching as a teaching strategy and how learners react to it, while discussing at the same time the management of code choice in the CLIL classroom and its implication in the development of bilingualism. This study is followed by another one centred on the development of the mechanical aspects of the learners' writing. In turn, task-based learning is addressed in two chapters dedicated to the use of formulaic language in the development of the learner's proficiency while carrying out tasks of different sorts. One final study shows the potential that ICT has to offer in terms of increasing the learners' motivation and enhancing the teaching and learning process, by means of a data-driven corpus-based methodology for an inductive and learner-centred approach to foreign language teaching.

Evaluation and assessment, which constitute *part four* of the book, are critical components to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning processes. The two final chapters take on two different perspectives. The first one presents the results of an experimental research study to test the reliability of a self-evaluation tool based on the grid of descriptors of the European Language Portfolio and a syllabus structured around each of the six levels applied to the incoming students of a Higher Education institution. The second study seeks to build a methodological model for the certification of foreign language achievement in primary and lower secondary schools based on the “principle of authentic assessment”, which takes into account personal language learning in different communicative situations.

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PART 1 –
METHODS AND APPROACHES

CHAPTER ONE

TEACHING CLIL IN A POST-GRADUATE
PROGRAMME:
SURVEY CONCLUSIONS ON TEACHER'S
TRAINING NEEDS

MARÍA BOBADILLA-PÉREZ
AND PILAR COUTO-CANTERO

1. Introduction

This article discusses the results of a study carried out in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) subject of the Master's Degree in *Specific Didactics* offered by the School of Education at the University of Coruña (UDC). One of the main academic aims of this postgraduate programme is to present future educators with models for the interdisciplinary teaching and plurilingual approach promoted by current legislations. Upon the conclusion of the course, a survey was conducted among the students with a double aim: one was the recollection of information for future improvements of the course. The other aim, and more relevant to the purpose of this study, was to inquire into the students' opinion on the training needs in plurilingual education of the UDC undergraduate students. All of them had recently completed the degrees on Pre-Primary and Primary Education on offer at this institution and at the moment, the study was carried out, they had acquired enough knowledge about CLIL so they could have a formed judgment about the matter discussed.

The data collected in the survey, which was both quantitative and qualitative in nature, aimed to shed some light on the student's perception on three issues: their perception of CLIL as a practical approach to the promotion of plurilingualism; what was their opinion about how it was promoted in Galicia; and what training needs at UDC Pre-Primary and

Primary Education degrees they felt were necessary for the students' future exercise of their profession in plurilingual institutions in our autonomous community. We present here the analysis of such data and the preliminary conclusions arrived to, which triggered questions about the need to revisit undergraduate education programmes at the University of A Coruña contemplating the incorporation of a CLIL specific subject, which would better prepare students for their future profession.

In order to contextualize the study, it is necessary to define the concept of plurilingualism itself and to present the reasons that justify CLIL as the approach for its implementation following the guidelines provided by the Council of Europe. Since the object of study is a particular subject on offer at the UDC's Master's degree, the contents introduced in class are presented as required training needs for the formation of any teacher in a plurilingual system. Finally, with the aim of discussing the possibility of future modifications of UDC's study plan, we describe the current training offered in didactics of the foreign language and CLIL both in undergraduate and graduate programmes.

2. Plurilingualism and CLIL

In order to adopt the plurilingual educational model promoted at the continental level by European Linguistic Policies, in 2010 the Galician local government encouraged the plurilingual designation of 52 schools in our community and since then, the number has steadily been increasing so that by the year 2015 that number had reached the 274 mark. Several laws, some of them not exempt from public discussion, are regulating that implementation. That was the case of the controversy triggered by the highly criticised "Galician Decree on Plurilingualism (79/2010)"¹ for non-university teachings, which would directly affect the existing policy of having half the Primary and Secondary school subjects taught in Galician and the other half in Spanish, since now plurilingual institutions would have to bestow some of that L1 class time to subjects being taught in L2s through CLIL methodology. Following the guidelines provided by that decree, an Act was approved regulating plurilingual schools in the Galician autonomous community by establishing the linguistic requirements that the institutions must meet for the compulsory stages of

¹ Decreto 79/2010, de 20 de mayo, para el plurilingüismo en la enseñanza no universitaria de Galicia.
http://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/2010/20100525/Anuncio17BE6_es.html

Primary and Secondary Education². Although there is no actual regulation in that sense for the non-compulsory stage of pre-school education, those institutions seeking to develop the plurilingual competence among their students should reinforce foreign languages in that stage. The Act also establishes a B2 level proficiency certificate as a requirement to teach CLIL sections.

In spite of the above-mentioned controversy caused by the implementation of plurilingual policies in the Galician bilingual community, more and more schools are choosing the linguistic designation promoted by guidelines presented in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*³, from now referred to as CEFRL. In its introductory chapter, a section is devoted to defining the term “plurilingualism” as opposed to the term “multilingualism”:

Plurilingualism differs from multilingualism, which is the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society...Beyond this, the plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact (CEFRL, 4)

That definition given by the CEFRL implies a dramatic change in the way schools should approach the treatment of foreign languages. With a multilingual approach, the use of the L2s at schools was only limited and used within the foreign language lesson. In fact, this multilingual approach to language teaching has been the only one used for decades in the Spanish educational institutions. During the 80s and 90s, foreign languages were taught at Spanish and Galician schools, but students did not have the chance to use the language outside the classroom or even outside the school. English or French were only learned and used within the specific

² Orden de 12 de mayo de 2011 por la que se regulan los centros plurilingües en la Comunidad Autónoma de Galicia y se establece el procedimiento de incorporación de nuevos centros a la Red de Centros Plurilingües de Galicia.

https://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/2011/20110520/AnuncioC3F1-160511-1748_es.html

³ Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

linguistic subjects and students would not be encouraged to use them elsewhere. Furthermore, the methodology used in our language classrooms has been in general quite traditional: teacher-centred classrooms with a focus on learning grammar and vocabulary and hardly any time to put that knowledge into practice. The choice of such methodology might somehow be explained by the fact that during the last decades of the 20th century in Primary and Secondary school classrooms in our country there was an average of 40 students per class, due to the so-called “baby boom” of the sixties and seventies. If we compare this number of students with the situation nowadays (25-30), it is understandable that it would be difficult to give so many students the opportunity to properly use the language in such a limited time period (two or three weekly hours).

Making an allowance for that needed change, the last two educational laws passed during the 21st century have emphasised a plurilingual approach to the teaching and learning processes of foreign languages. Thus, following the guidelines provided by the CEFRL, the last two national educational laws in Spain, the Organic Law on Education-LOE (2006)⁴ and the Organic Law of Improvement of Educational Quality-LOMCE (2013)⁵, specifically establish the implementation of plurilingual policies. One of the final dispositions of the LOE (the seventh) instructs the establishment of plurilingual education to be done in coordination with the autonomous communities, paying particular attention to the linguistic reality of each of the regions. The LOMCE takes a step forward in the promotion of plurilingualism, addressing the insufficient promotion of foreign language acquisition by the Spanish educational system and establishes as one of its main priorities the construction of a European project as defined by the Council of Europe⁶:

La Ley apoya decididamente el plurilingüismo, redoblando los esfuerzos para conseguir que los estudiantes se desenvuelvan con fluidez al menos en una primera lengua extranjera, cuyo nivel de comprensión oral y lectora y

⁴ Ley Orgánica de Educación: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2006/BOE-A-2006-7899-consolidado.pdf>

⁵ Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa (LOMCE): <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2013/BOE-A-2013-12886-consolidado.pdf>

⁶ My translation: The LOMCE decidedly supports plurilingualism, strengthens its efforts towards achieving the students’ fluency in at least a first foreign language, whose level of oral and written comprehension and of oral and written expression results decisive to favour employability and professional ambitions, and for that it makes a decided commitment towards the curricular incorporation of a second language (LOMCE, 2013).

de expresión oral y escrita resulta decisivo para favorecer la empleabilidad y las ambiciones profesionales, y por ello apuesta decididamente por la incorporación curricular de una segunda lengua extranjera (LOMCE, 2013).

In the Autonomous Community of Galicia where this study takes place several steps are being taken in the promotion of plurilingualism: the establishment of bilingual sections and plurilingual designation of schools; for students, grants are offered to take language courses in foreign countries; for teachers in general, the CUALE programme gives them the opportunity to improve their language skills, and the PALE programme is specifically designed for those teaching non-linguistic subjects in a foreign language. However, in spite of these efforts, there is still a lot of room for improvement, particularly in reference to teacher training in specific methodologies for the integration of language and content in the classrooms.

The plurilingual approach discussed here implies an extension of the use of the foreign language; in order to develop the plurilingual communicative competence, content and language teaching approaches should be implemented in non-linguistic subjects. *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) is the methodology that practising teachers should be implementing and should be trained in; having a relatively good command of the foreign language does not by itself enable the professional to teach a non-linguistic subject in any language other than the mother tongue.

CLIL is an umbrella term coined by David Marsh and Anne Maljers in 1994 that covers many varieties of educational programmes and projects focused on the teaching and learning of academic content through a language other than the mother tongue. Coyle, Hood and Marsh⁷ in their benchmark study on the subject, define the approach as:

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused educational approach in which a traditional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, in the teaching and learning process, there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language. Each is interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater on one or the other at a given time. (2010, p.1)

⁷ Do Coyle, Philip Hood, and David Marsh, *CLIL. Content and Language Integrated Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

3. CLIL teacher training contents

Understanding the implementation of CLIL implies being familiar with the pedagogical theories that support the approach. It is not enough, as previously discussed, to have a certain proficiency in the foreign language to be able to teach a bilingual section. In the Master's degree, the theories of several key authors in pedagogy and bilingualism are discussed, Benjamin Bloom⁸, Jim Cummins⁹ or Lev Vygotsky¹⁰. Crucial in understanding cognition, thinking processes and their relationship with language is Bloom's suggestion of categorisation of the thinking skills, and its revised version presented by Anderson and Krathwohl¹¹. This division between HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) and LOTS (Lower Order Thinking Skills) enables the CLIL teacher to help their students develop their thinking skills and to link thinking and language. Therefore, he or she can properly prepare and plan for the "most crucial element for successful CLIL" (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010, p. 62), i.e. "Language for Learning" within the CLIL language triptych composed of these three elements:

- Language of Learning: Content obligatory language related to the subject or topic.
- Language for Learning: Language needed to operate in a foreign language environment.
- Language through Learning: New language that cannot be planned.

Cummins's theories (1984), which differentiate between two types of language proficiency, are key in understanding linguistic immersion process in CLIL: BICs (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALPs (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). According to Cummins, within two years of immersion many children can develop native fluency in the foreign language (i.e. BICS), but take longer in achieving CALPs. In addition, Cummins's discussion on the existence of a

⁸ Benjamin S. Bloom ed., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* (New York, Longman, 1956).

⁹ Jim Cummins, *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1984).

¹⁰ Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹¹ Lorin W. Anderson and David Krathwohl (eds.), *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Educational Objectives* (Longman: New York, 2001).

Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) justifies the development of the above-mentioned “communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact (CEFRL, 4)”. This CUP is a set of skills and metalinguistic knowledge acquired while learning one language that serve as the base for developing second languages. Also, Vygotsky’s (1978) concepts of “scaffolding” and “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) are fundamental concepts in CLIL. The concept of ZPD was introduced by the author to “describe the kind of learning which is always challenging yet potentially within the reach of individual learners on condition that appropriate support, scaffolding and guidance are provided” (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010, pp. 29). Therefore, the CLIL teacher must be trained in the specific scaffolding strategies for CLIL (visuals, task design, use of dictionary, use of the L1, etc.).

The CLIL teacher must learn how to plan, prepare and assess a CLIL unit, taking into consideration the so-called 4Cs framework. *Content*: the curricular subject-progression in knowledge, skills and understanding; *Communication*: using language to learn while learning to use language; *Cognition*: developing cognitive and thinking skills; *Culture*: understanding ourselves and other cultures. According to the CEFRL, plurilingualism “has itself to be seen in the context of “pluriculturalism”. Language is not only a major aspect of culture, but also a means of access to cultural manifestations” (CEFRL, 2002, 5). The consideration of culture as one of the main elements of CLIL contributes to the development of the global citizenship promoted by the Council of Europe. In the subject good practices, resources and materials are presented and analysed in class.

4. Foreign Language and CLIL Training at the UDC School of Education: Undergraduate and Post-graduate programmes

The University of Coruña offers degrees in Pre-Primary and Primary education, but does not offer the specialisation in foreign languages, the so-called *Mención en Lenguas Extranjeras*, which would enable them to teach the foreign language class. Graduate students at UDC will, therefore, become Primary school generalists or Pre-school teachers. For several reasons, we acknowledge the fact that the amount of credits devoted to *Didactics of the Foreign Language* subject is very limited; actually, there is only a six ECTS compulsory course on offer for the degrees in Primary Education and Pre-Primary Education. Our students must take that class during their third year from the month of March to the middle of May;

during the month of February they are doing their internships at schools, and so we only have two and a half intensive months to achieve all the learning outcomes planned for our subject, which is, in fact, a challenge. But, in spite of that, during our lectures and seminars we introduce relevant contents in the area: European and national policies which define the foreign language curriculum (CEFRL, LOE and LOMCE Educational Laws, Local Decrees on Plurilingualism, etc.); teaching approaches and methods (Communicative Language Teaching, Total Physical Response, Project Based Learning, etc.); we also devote class time to presenting resources and good practices in the Foreign Language Classroom.

Although, as we mentioned before, these students will not become specialists in foreign language, they should be as familiar with principles of foreign language teaching as they are with any specific didactic areas (Physical Education, Music, Arts, Science...). We also consider that one of the aims of our subject is to promote among our students the sense of self-responsibility towards the development of their language proficiency. Therefore, with that in mind, as part of the individual working time observed within the European Credit System, we present the students with the resources to practice the presumed B1 level they should have on completing Upper Secondary School.

For the reasons discussed above, the future teaching practice of many of our UDC students will be defined by the plurilingual designation of the growing number of Galician Schools. That is why in our *Didactics of the Foreign Language* subject we are introducing some basic concepts of CLIL, but it is definitely insufficient. In order to complete that limited training that UDC undergraduate educational programmes have in CLIL methodologies, the university offers a Master's Degree in Specific Didactics, which trains postgraduate students in interdisciplinary approaches with CLIL being one of its major methodological vehicles. This subject has a practical approach, so at the end of the course students are required to make and present in class a CLIL project of their choice, either for Primary or for Pre-Primary. Teachers of areas of Didactics of Language and Literature have also presented the Dean's office the programme for a specific subject in CLIL to be offered as an optional 4.5 ECTS subject that students seeking a degree in Primary Education could take. At this moment, the inclusion of this subject in the study plan of that particular degree requires its modification, a difficult process due to the administrative steps that would need to be taken. Nevertheless, the School of Education is working on the proposal of a bilingual degree in Primary Education as a part of the internationalisation strategy of the University of A Coruña. If the implementation of this degree were successful, then the

CLIL subject discussed here would be included in its study plan. However, in spite of all the efforts taken it should be noted that any study plan in a Degree in Pre-primary and Primary Education in a plurilingual Europe should include, in our opinion, teacher training in the integration of content and language in the classroom.

5. Study, instruments and data collection

Within this context, it should be argued that the undergraduate teaching programmes at UDC should be revisited at some point in order to meet the demands of today's society. The students' point of view on that matter has to be taken into consideration. That is why, as a starting point in this ongoing discussion, we conducted a survey among the students registered on the Master's Degree in Specific Didactics once they had completed the course on content and language integrated learning. The intention was to inquire into their opinion on the training needs in the plurilingual education of UDC students.

This CLIL subject is one of the three compulsory subjects of the Module in Innovative Didactics of the Master's Degree. Most of the students had some very basic knowledge of the matter, as they came from the undergraduate programmes on offer at UDC. Nevertheless, the methodology here is further considered, both theoretical and practical components are presented, so that the contents in the teaching guide include a discussion on these CLIL essentials.

A total of 19 students participated in the study. They all came from the following undergraduate degrees on offer at the University of A Coruña: Primary Education (six students); Primary Education with Physical Education (PE) Specialisation (nine students); Pre-school Education (four students).

The data was elicited at the end of the term, once the students had completed all the tasks and assignments for the subject. They were asked to answer a survey with 45 questions, which were designed following the requirements of a Likert scale. They were also asked to give their personal opinion on the different areas of inquiry. Quantitative and qualitative information was analysed. Data collection took place during a 45 minutes session where all students answered in writing. All of the students entirely completed the survey and provided opinions on the matter showing that the focus of the study was of great concern for them.

6. Discussion

The survey presented questions organised into three areas of inquiry:

- a) Student's perception of CLIL as a feasible methodology.
- b) Student's perception of the promotion of plurilingualism in Galicia.
- c) Teacher training in foreign languages in their undergraduate degree.

In the first part of the survey, students were asked about their perceptions of CLIL once they had completed this particular course. This part of the survey should serve as course assessment by providing the teacher with relevant information regarding the contents considered so it could be improved in subsequent editions of the Master's. Students were asked whether they saw CLIL as a feasible methodology to be implemented in Galician schools. 78% of the participants found that too much theoretical training in CLIL can confuse the teachers, but 81% thought it would be better to explore more good practices in CLIL. Therefore, the emphasis on teacher training programmes should fall less on reviewing the theoretical framework and more on observing and assessing effective CLIL practices. Also, 72% of the participants thought that, in spite of the benefits of CLIL, its application carries along with it some hitches: curricular adaptations, complications for the students and for the parents, or not enough reliable resources available.

Regarding the lack of resources, particularly interesting were the personal comments of those students who had designed a final project for the Pre-Primary classroom. Compared to those designing a CLIL project for Primary education, they did not find as many specific books, textbooks, previous projects or websites. In fact, most of the resources available for Pre-Primary are ESL materials. Current legislations, in theory, encourage the promotion of plurilingualism at all educational stages, but it seems that the efforts are mostly put on the compulsory stages. In that sense, the Organic Law of Education-LOE (2006), which still regulates the curricula for Pre-Primary¹², encourages the promotion of plurilingualism from the stage of Pre-Primary education: "El Gobierno establecerá las bases de la educación plurilingüe desde segundo ciclo de Educación Infantil hasta Bachillerato, previa consulta a las Comunidades

¹² Pre-Primary is the only educational stage that has not been modified by the LOMCE (2013).

Autónomas”¹³. But, in spite of this, we argue here that Pre-Primary is the most overlooked stage in the promotion of plurilingualism, and we must not forget that early childhood is a critical age¹⁴ in the acquisition of foreign languages. The concretion of the LOE curriculum for the autonomous community of Galicia for Pre-Primary Education, with respect to the treatment of second languages, only suggests three weekly periods of twenty minutes each and only in the second cycle, thus overlooking ages 0-3 and not giving enough presence to foreign languages during the ages 3-5. In addition, the norm that regulates bilingual sections and plurilingual schools for the local administration of Galicia only focuses on the compulsory educational stages, i.e. Primary and Secondary Education. All of this results in difficulties for pre-primary teachers to coordinate efforts and share resources for the promotion of plurilingualism during that stage. Furthermore, publishing companies do not show interest in developing specific CLIL materials for that stage.

The students were also asked about their perception on how plurilingualism was promoted in Galicia, and they were in fact very sceptical towards it. 80% were critical towards the Galician Decree on Plurilingualism. 87% of the students had the chance to observe plurilingual/bilingual practices during their internship and 89% of them were critical towards those practices: too much L1 spoken, traditional methodologies or the teachers' language level proficiency were some of the arguments discussed. On the other hand, 86% of them acknowledged to some degree the fact that the designation on plurilingual institutions in Galicia is relatively new and that the process needs adaptation. A high 96% of them also confirmed that at the specific institutions where they had done their internships, the second language was almost absent in the Pre-Primary classrooms. Students observed, on their written remarks, that more resources should be given to active teachers to improve their proficiency, such as language refresher courses or grants to take courses in the foreign country. These resources are in fact available and funded by the educational administration of Galicia. Besides the above-mentioned

¹³ My translation: “The National government will define the grounds for plurilingual education from the Second cycle of Pre-Primary to Upper Secondary Education, following consultations with the Autonomous Communities.”

¹⁴ Lennenberg (1967) in *Critical Period Hypothesis* defends the argument that, due to the plasticity of the child's brain during growth, the period from early childhood to pre-puberty is key when it comes to L2 acquisition, particularly in the phonological sense. This is reason why for a very young learner it is easier to internalise and reproduce the sounds of the second language better than an adult learner.

programmes, the Council of Europe has the “Erasmus Plus Key Action 1 for School Staff Mobility” by which active teachers receive financial assistance from the European Union. Therefore, the resources are there. What is important here is that such programmes become even more visible so that more and more teachers participate in them. Sometimes it is not the lack of interest of the teachers in improving their foreign language, but that they are unaware of these programmes.

Regarding the last areas of inquiry about the students’ perception of teacher training in foreign languages at UDC, the results were not surprising. 76% of them considered insufficient just one subject of *Didactics of the Foreign Language* in their undergraduate program. But, interestingly, the 91% of them who considered it adequate were PE specialists, which makes us question whether they perceive CLIL as an additional specialisation as opposed to a vehicular methodology for the one they already have. Remarkable was the fact that only 42% of them considered it important to have had a subject which just focused on EFL. This opinion differs very much from the initial position of many of the undergraduate students, who at the beginning of the course in *Didactics of the Foreign Language* thought there should be a subject just devoted to developing their proficiency in English. Unavoidably, this puts on the table the question about the main role of the professors in teacher training programs: Are they language teachers or methodology teachers? That question does not have a clear-cut answer, but the conclusion we can draw is that UDC students, once they complete their degree, start to acknowledge their need to develop foreign language proficiency. Eleven of the students that participated in the study are in possession of an official certificate of a B2 level of the foreign language (all of them in English). Four of them were preparing to take the B2 exam at the end of the year and two already have a C1 in English. B2 is currently in Galicia the level required to teach a non-linguistic subject in English, and the fact that a great majority of them had recently completed that level shows their awareness of the importance of acquiring a proper language competence for their future profession. 90% of them, on the other hand, considered it very important to have had a subject, which just focused on CLIL.

The personal opinions expressed by the students in this area of inquiry also shed some light on future paths UDC teacher training degrees could take in order to better prepare them to exercise their profession. Seven of them expressed the need to have a certain percentage of the 240 ECTS credits that they have to complete in order to get the degree in a foreign language. The percentages discussed differed from 33.3% up to 50%. As discussed before, currently the vice-dean of international relations at

UDC's School of Education is working on a proposal of different subjects taught in English at the School of Education. University regulations require 40% of the subjects taught in a foreign language. The idea discussed by the students in our study does not, however, have that purpose. What they suggest here is quite interesting: in order for a teacher to exercise their practice on a plurilingual educational system, it would be a great idea to be trained with the same methodology they are going to be asked to use. Therefore, they would be learning non-linguistic subjects of their degrees in the foreign language in the same way many primary school students nowadays are learning, for example, Science in English. Nevertheless, it is actually quite difficult to put that into practice due to different factors: the nature of the different subjects, the foreign language proficiency level of the faculty or their lack of training in content and language integrated learning. Then again, we must also acknowledge the effort the University of A Coruña is putting towards training its faculty to teach in English, offering for them every semester free courses on English Medium Instruction which are actually in very high demand.

7. Conclusions

This study presents the results of a first approach in the analysis of the teacher training needs in CLIL at the University of A Coruña. This being the first edition of the Master's program, the number of participants in the study might not have been significant enough. However, their answers actually shed some light on the initial steps that should be taken in order to develop or improve the plurilingual competence of Galician students. The first one should be a revision of current Primary and Pre-Primary Education programmes offered at UDC, so they can prepare students for their future teaching practice in plurilingual institutions. However, that is not an easy task, since these Bologna plans are only five years old and have recently been reviewed. In addition, devoting some credits to CLIL training in these programmes would unavoidably require reconsidering some areas with more presence in the current system, so deciding which one should be difficult.

Another step that should be taken in order to improve programmes that foster foreign languages in Galicia is to raise awareness among future and serving teachers about the importance of continuous learning in innovative methodologies. Also relevant is the acquisition of a real communicative competence in the foreign language, which should not be limited to proving to have official certification on paper but not in practice. Besides showing real proof of a certain proficiency in the L2 – B2 in Galicia or C1

in other Spanish communities – teachers should be required to attend courses on Content and Language Integrated Learning, so they understand that teaching CLIL does not only mean teaching in English.

Finally, more real efforts and resources should be put towards the promotion of plurilingualism in the stage of Pre-Primary Education. Even though it is not a compulsory stage, the early childhood is a key age period in developing foreign language proficiency.

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CHAPTER TWO

TASK-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO OLDER ADULTS: A NEUROBIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

MAGDALENA KALITA

1. Introduction

Numerous parallel social, economic and political changes that we have been observing over the last years have given rise to diverse challenges to foreign language education and pedagogy. First, demographic changes such as an increase in longevity and a downturn in birth rates have led to an increase in the percentage of the population aged 65 and above. In the meantime, the idea of life-long learning has been gaining popularity, all these factors altogether resulting in a growing interest in education, including foreign language education, at an older age. What is more, the recent years are linked to considerable advances in brain research. Consequently, our knowledge of what happens in the learning brain has never been greater than it is now. Today, brain research findings are used to draw conclusions for education, including foreign language teaching and learning. Last but not least, we have been observing the evolution of the communicative methods into the task-based approach to foreign language teaching and learning. Bearing all these changes in mind, we can come to a conclusion that foreign language education is facing numerous new challenges which may lead to a change in how the existing theories of foreign language teaching and learning are viewed.

This paper aims primarily to offer a closer look at the nature of learning and its neurobiological conditions, as well as to briefly present older adults as foreign language learners. The discussion should revolve around the task-based approach and what it can possibly offer to older learners of foreign languages. This will be followed by the presentation of a research project focusing on older learners and the emotional dimension in a language class.

2. The neurobiology of learning

The recent advances in neurobiological research have led to an exponential growth in the understanding of the most sophisticated and still mysterious structure of the human body: the brain. Technological progress has supplied researchers with tools such as imaging techniques, which allow for creating visual representations of the brain structure and its functions during information processing. The possibility of *spying* on our most valuable organ, which used to be virtually out of researchers' reach, provides us today with an even clearer picture of what occurs in the learning brain.

Thus, it shall come as no surprise that research in the neurosciences evokes the interest of educators, who seek to draw implications for the teaching-learning process and generate standards of brain-compatible and thus effective teaching. Some might argue that what results from neurobiological research findings is no different from our *common sense* and was already under debate since the 18th century.¹ Attempts to create educational theories labelled with relatively newly coined phrases such as *brain-based* or *brain-compatible* could, therefore, be seen as reinventing the wheel. As a matter of fact, the role of emotional arousal of the learner or the importance of practice and active implementation of new knowledge, just to name a few examples, have long pertained to the main tenets of pedagogical theories. What clearly signals the progress, however, is that neurobiological research findings enable educationalists and learners to understand what the learning process consists in and what its prerequisite is. Or, to put it in a different way: *why is effective what a good teacher does and why is ineffective what a bad teacher does.*² The increased awareness of the neurobiological foundations of learning may empower both sides of the teaching-learning process to mould the learning context actively and optimise the process of teaching and learning.

Because a complete presentation of the overall up-to-date neurobiological research is beyond the scope of this chapter, the aim is to focus on the most relevant aspects of the learning process, i.e. those which enable us to understand what the prerequisite of learning is and which are of particular importance for this research.

¹ Ulrich Herrmann, "Neurodidaktik – neue Wege des Lehrens und Lerner." In *Neurodidaktik. Grundlagen für gehirngerechtes Lehren und Lernen*, edited by Ulrich Herrmann (Weinham & Basel: Beltz Verlag, 2009), 10.

² Gerhard Roth, "Warum sind Lehren und Lernen so schwierig?" In *Neurodidaktik. Grundlagen für gehirngerechtes Lehren und Lernen*, edited by Ulrich Herrmann (Weinham & Basel: Beltz Verlag, 2009), 58.

From the neurobiological perspective, learning can be seen as an individual and highly dynamic process that leaves its mark on the neural network in the cortex, the outer, highly developed brain layer composed of 19-23 billion neurons.³ On the neural level, learning translates into restructuring the unique neural network of an individual and creating new connections between groups of neurons, which serve as the mental representation of the uniquely organised knowledge of an individual. Born into the world, an average human being is already equipped with as much as 100 billion neurons. This is approximately 80 million more than an average adult has at their disposal. What matters, however, is not the number of neurons, but the quality and complexity of neural connections, which allow for the transmission of sensory (external) information between neurons.⁴ According to Friedrich, the human brain can be compared to a construction site where work never ceases: pieces of information are constantly transported and processed in order to be used as building blocks for establishing new connections, which translates into constructing new knowledge. Let us go further and compare an average child's neural structure to a mere germ of the buildings of structured knowledge to come. The more often a connection is used, the greater its strength and capacity, as well as the more likely it is to develop into more complex structures. Accordingly, unused neural connections gradually disappear just like unused muscles or paths that grow wild. The innate, genetically programmed ability of the brain to create new and dispose of unnecessary neural connections is known as *neuroplasticity*.

Brain researchers emphasise that neuroplasticity as the brain's response to the individual experience of the external world enables all learners, irrespective of their background and age, to learn throughout their whole lives. Just like the heart, the stomach and other organs, the brain fulfils its own main natural function. As aptly summarised by Renate N. Caine and Geoffrey Caine, "the brain learns because it is its job" and it is equipped with innate and infinite ability to do so.⁵ Consequently, each human brain is programmed to function as a powerful data processor and

³ Marion Grein, *Neurodidaktik. Grundlagen für Sprachlehrende* (München: Hueber Verlag, 2013), 8.

⁴ Gerhard Friedrich, "Neurodidaktik – eine neue Didaktik? Zwei Praxisbereiche aus methodisch-didaktischem Neuland." In *Neurodidaktik. Grundlagen für gehirngerechtes Lehren und Lernen*, edited by Ulrich Herrmann (Weinham & Basel: Beltz Verlag, 2009), 272-285.

⁵ Renate N. Caine and Geoffrey Caine, *Making Connections. Teaching and the Human Brain* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994), 3.