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Actualising Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Irish-medium education; why, how and why now?

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This is a time of great change, vulnerability and possibility for the Irish language and for Irish-medium education. Research shows the language in serious decline in the Gaeltacht; areas of Ireland designated as being predominantly Irish speaking. There are also inconsistent approaches at the policy level in addition to an ambiguous attitude to the language amongst the general public. This article examines the research, policies and recent initiatives relating to Irish-medium education and to the language itself. A core imperative underpinning this article is to explicate a strong case for the connection between Irish-medium education and international research on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a field that encompasses the cognate area of immersion education best practice and draws on the theory and practice of language acquisition, teaching and learning. The authors contend that if the language learning outcomes of students in Irish-medium education, particularly at the post-primary level, are to be maximised, now is an opportune time, if not the last chance, to truly actualise CLIL.

KEYWORDS: CLIL; immersion; Irish-medium education; language acquisition; language learning; Irish language

Introduction

Irish (Gaeilge) is an autochthonous language spoken on the island of Ireland. The future of Irish-medium education is intertwined with the vitality of the Irish language and the attitude of the general public towards it. The language is enduring an unprecedented period of profound change and vulnerability with its position as the predominant language of the Gaeltacht in danger. Despite these challenges, a majority of the population claim to be favourably disposed to the language and there is substantial demand for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht.

All this provides a challenging landscape for Irish-medium teachers to traverse and has resulted in a renewed focus on CLIL (content and language integrated learning). This paper draws on the findings of a scoping literature review to provide a rationale for actualising CLIL as a pedagogical foundation in Irish-medium post-primary education. The next section provides a context for the study by briefly discussing the precarious state of the Irish language and the context of Irish-medium

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education. The methodology section outlines the protocol used to review the literature and present the findings. The authors will examine the literature and methodologies of CLIL and explore the links with immersion best practice and language acquisition, teaching and learning. With a particular focus on post-primary education, they will illustrate that drawing judiciously from these fields will offer Irish-medium teachers, in the varying linguistic and educational contexts, a roadmap for maximising the language outcomes of students. The conclusion will suggest areas for further research and offer recommendations on how best to chart a way forward for Irish-medium immersion at the post-primary level.

Background

Irish in society

The results of Census 2016 (Central Statistics Office 2017) revealed a drop of 11% from the previous census on the number of people who claim to speak Irish on a daily basis outside of the education system in the Gaeltacht. On a national level, there was a decline of 4.4%. These trends corroborate claims by researchers that the Gaeltacht has been in crisis for many years (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007; Péterváry et al. 2014; Ó Giollagáin and Charlton 2015).

However, this downward trend is happening at a time when a majority of the population are favourably disposed to the language in the Republic of Ireland (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan 2009; Darmody and Daly 2015). On a policy level, the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* (Government of Ireland 2010) affirmed the Government's commitment to the preservation of the Gaeltacht.

Irish-medium education

Over the years many studies have implicated the Irish education system for not catering to the diverse, and unique, linguistic needs of Gaeltacht students (Mac Donnacha et al. 2005, 15; Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007, 11). Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) conclude that the educational system in the Gaeltacht cultivates the use of English. The recent Gaeltacht education policy (Department of Education and Skills 2016a) acknowledges for the first time that Gaeltacht native speakers have unique linguistic needs and has set in train a process for schools to apply for Gaeltacht school status. The main criterion is a commitment to full immersion in the early years.

Outside of the Gaeltacht, there has been substantial growth in the number of *gaelscoileanna/gaelcholáistí* (Irish-medium primary/post-primary schools) since the 1970s (Ó Duibhir 2018). Darmody and Daly (2015, 82) report that 23% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland would consider (or would have considered) Irish-medium education for their children if a school was located near their home. In November 2019, the Department of Education announced the names of the 19 schools and early years centres that are to participate in a three-year CLIL pilot programme that will see physical education and other subjects taught through Irish (Department of Education and Skills 2019b).

At present, there are 145 primary schools, and 44 secondary schools/streams/units operating through the medium of Irish in the Republic of Ireland; with 35 and 6, respectively, operating in Northern Ireland (Gaeloideachas n.d.). Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht is predominantly aimed at students for whom Irish is a

second (L2) or additional language (Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy 2018, 1). These gael scoileanna/gaelcholáistí operate as stand-alone ‘whole-school immersion centres’ (Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy 2018, 2). In December of 2019 the Department announcement that the number of students in Irish-medium education is to be doubled in the coming years (Department of Education and Skills 2019a). It remains to be seen whether this ambitious target will be met but all of this indicates that there is potential for growth in Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht.

Gaeltacht schools and Gaelcholáistí: The same or different?

Over the course of this paper, Gaeltacht schools and gael scoileanna/gaelcholáistí will be treated as separate, but strongly related, educational entities. Schools that cater for students for whom Irish is their first language (L1), as well as being the language of the home and community, are in a completely different linguistic context to Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht, where English is predominantly the first language of the students. Consequently, Gaeltacht students have unique educational and linguistic requirements; a fact which has been acknowledged by the Gaeltacht education policy mentioned previously and emphasised by scholars such as Ó Duibhir et al. (2015). Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha (2017, 5) claim that researchers struggle to find a consensus on what term best describes Gaeltacht education; a point that only serves to underline the nuanced nature of minority language education.

However, it has to be argued that Irish-medium education inside and outside the Gaeltacht are analogous as they both teach through the medium of Irish. The language crisis in the Gaeltacht only serves to bring them closer together. Only 68% of post-primary schools in designated Gaeltacht areas teach the entire curriculum through the medium of Irish (Department of Education and Skills 2016a, 15). Even the strongest Gaeltacht regions cannot boast of Irish being the L1 of all students, and there is also the issue of English being the dominant language for those who are strongly bilingual (Mac Donnacha et al. 2005; Péterváry et al. 2014). Ó Duibhir et al. (2015, 9–10) inform us that this situation is not unique in minority language education settings around the world. Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha (2017, 10) state that it is very challenging for teachers to get the linguistic balance right in a classroom that contains learners, native speakers and Irish speaking students who are in a state of incomplete acquisition of the language.

Therefore, the fact that there are immense opportunities for symbiosis and synergies within Irish-medium education is unquestionable. Any advances or innovations in the teaching and learning of content/language in one setting are applicable in some way to their kindred schools in the other setting. The differences can be acknowledged and respected while capitalising on the similarities.

Comprehensive research indicates that the Irish language is in crisis in the Gaeltacht while there is enthusiasm for the language in the general public and demand for Irish-medium education. Ó Duibhir (2018, 173) is of the opinion that ‘a level of proficiency approaching native speaker norms is important for the survival of Irish in order to integrate the entire Irish-speaking community which is perilously small.’ Research on ‘new speakers’ of Irish gives an insight into the positive role Irish-medium education has played as a linguistic *muda*; a moment that gives rise to profound and sustained change in linguistic practice (Walsh, O’Rourke, and Rowland 2015). Therefore, it is incumbent on Irish-medium schools to play a key role in

supporting young people, inside and outside of the Gaeltacht, approach native speaker norms by the end of post-primary education. In the remainder of this article, the authors will delve into the theory and methodologies of CLIL and its strong links with immersion and language acquisition/teaching/learning in an attempt to chart a way forward for Irish-medium education at the post-primary level. Throughout this paper, the term Irish-medium education [IME] will refer to all contexts where Irish is used as the medium of instruction. We will use the term Irish-medium teacher(s) [IMT] to describe those who work in these settings.

Methodology

By any definition CLIL (and by extension immersion education) is a heterogeneous area and as such its tentacles reach out into many jurisdictions and to the scholarly areas that framed the literature search for this study, that is, applied linguistics, content-based instruction, TEFL/TESOL and minority language education, in addition to language teaching, learning and acquisition. In an effort to identify literature relevant to applying CLIL and immersion best practices in the Irish context, and also gaps in the scholarship, a scoping review method was adopted as a framework for this study. Therefore, the objective of this study aligns with two of the four reasons set out by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) for conducting a scoping review.

Many scholars define scoping review as an effort at 'mapping' the relevant field (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Pham et al. 2014). The latter refers to presenting 'an overview of a potentially large and diverse body of literature pertaining to a broad topic' (Pham et al. 2014, 371). A protocol was adopted that was informed by the five stages in the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005). Their framework sets out the following steps: identifying the research question, identifying relevant literature, selecting particular studies, charting the data and summarising the results.

The review was guided by the following question: 'What areas of research in the fields of CLIL, immersion and language acquisition/learning/teaching offer guidance to post-primary immersion teachers in their efforts to balance the teaching of content and language.'

At the outset research (written in Irish and English) on CLIL and immersion education in the Irish context was read/reviewed. This functioned as a springboard into international scholarship in English. In addition, searches were made on online journal databases (Taylor and Francis, Wiley, JSTOR and Sage) using the aforementioned terms. Works in languages other than Irish and English were excluded but research from all linguistic contexts was included.

Initially, no limits on dates were placed on the research but special consideration was given to works published between the years 2000 and 2020. Gray literature

Table 1. Results of scoping review.

	Number of studies identified for consideration	Number of studies chosen for review
CLIL/Immersion	211	50
Language learning/acquisition and teaching	138	19

sources were also explored. The results are presented in tabular form below and narrative form in the following sections (Table 1).

Authors/works were added and removed from these lists as the mapping continued. The evolving lists were divided under two headings: CLIL/Immersion and language acquisition/teaching/learning. It was subdivided by author name, with, unsurprisingly, some authors straddling both areas. Works of particular importance were marked, and notes were made of their significance to the area being explored. Works were read/reviewed and bibliographies/reference lists were constantly reviewed and cross-referenced in what (Pham et al. 2014, 373) refer to as a ‘snowball’ approach. This approach was ‘not linear but iterative’ where the researchers had to ‘engage with each stage in reflexive way’ and to repeat steps if necessary (Arksey and O’Malley 2005, 22). Current research in the area of scoping reviews suggest an approach such as this could be improved by moving to a more systematic scoping review; an example of which is the detailed framework laid out by Tricco et al. (2018).

Findings

In this section, the findings of the scoping review are presented in narrative form. The review identified two overarching themes that linked with the research question: (1) language outcomes in immersion education and the factors affecting it, and (2) research linked to the theory and practice of CLIL (including immersion).

Language outcomes in immersion education

The second/additional language outcomes of immersion programmes have been examined and discussed intently over the years. The overwhelming consensus is that the language proficiency of immersion students in the target language is significantly superior to their peers who study the language in conventional stand-alone classes (Cammarata and Tedick 2012; Genesee and Lindholm-Leary 2013). Ó Duibhir (2018) and Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda (2017) come to the same conclusion in their discussions of the acquisition of Irish in Ireland. Krashen (1984) described immersion as probably ‘the most successful program ever recorded in the professional language-teaching literature’ (61).

‘Speaking immersion’

However, many immersion scholars internationally conclude that immersion students do not reach native-like competence but, rather, a ‘functional proficiency’ (Cammarata and Tedick 2012, 253). There is a wealth of scholarship on the language proficiency of immersion students that supports this view (Harley 1984; Harley 1992; Cammarata and Tedick 2012; Genesee and Lindholm-Leary 2013; Lightbown and Spada 2013). Swain and Lapkin (1986) explore the various studies on French immersion programmes in Canada and they conclude that immersion students’ productive skills lag behind their Francophone counterparts. Cammarata and Tedick (2012) refer to teachers teaching in the L1 due to concerns about their students’ ability to engage with complex academic content in their L2. Ó Ceallaigh (2016) states that immersion students in Ireland display a limited vocabulary and simplified grammar, in addition to their lexicon and syntax being heavily influenced by their English.

Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010, 35) assert that learners' linguistic ability (in the target language) is not as advanced as their cognitive ability. Therefore, it is possible that the content is understood by the learner but that they do not possess the productive skills to demonstrate that learning in a meaningful way (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 116). Lightbown and Spada (2013, 32) assert that while students may appear fluent in social situations, they do not have the required language for academic work.

Selinker (1972, 215) introduced the term interlanguage to the field of linguistics to conceptualise the language learner's attempt at reproducing the target language. He also referred to the notion of fossilisation; the manner in which the incorrect use of the target language becomes habitualised and difficult to correct. Many immersion scholars have drawn on Selinker's work in their discussions of deficiencies in immersion students' language proficiency, particularly their productive skills. Lyster (1987), in his examination of immersion in Canada, suggests that an 'immersion language' exists and that this interlanguage becomes fossilised (701). Lyster (1987) also argues that while 'speaking immersion' (701) students 'can communicate coherent meaning, but with little grammatical accuracy' (702).

Ó Duibhir (2018) found an error rate of 30.2% in a corpus-based analysis of the verbal output of final year primary class students in IME. He suggests that the grammatical inaccuracy and influence of English on students' Irish are the reasons that the Irish spoken in IME has been disparagingly referred to as *Gaelscoilis* and *Géarla* (Ó Duibhir 2018, 113). Walsh (2007) reports that sixth-year students in post-primary IME still have difficulties with some of the errors identified in Ó Duibhir (2018), namely the copula and the verbal noun. Interestingly, in stimulated recall sessions conducted by Ó Duibhir (2018) the students were critical of their own standard of Irish. The author also interviewed teachers working in immersion programmes in Ireland and Canada and the picture that emerged was that students have good communicative ability but that their utterances 'lacked grammatical accuracy and did not conform to native speaker norm' (Ó Duibhir 2018, 157).

As Met (1999) has illustrated, immersion programmes are by their very nature content-led, and consequently, language learning is not the main priority. In the immersion classroom, the overriding focus is on meaning, and not form; it is presumed that the student will acquire the language by osmosis (Cammarata and Tedick 2012). This 'two for one' (Lightbown and Spada 2013, 171) view of immersion has an adverse effect on L2 outcomes, as implicit acquisition does not happen. The language will not 'take care of itself' (Lightbown and Spada 2013, 195). Both Ó Duibhir (2018) and Lyster (2007) have identified the same issue in their studies with the latter referring to 'meaning-based classrooms' and 'meaning-focused interaction' (2). One of the conclusions of Ó Duibhir (2018) is that 'the current, strongly experiential, approach does not lead to grammatical accuracy by the end of primary school' (174). Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013, 22) argue that the strong focus on content in immersion programmes draws attention away from language outcomes and Swain (1988, 68) proclaims that 'not all content teaching is necessarily good language teaching.' This overriding focus on meaning, to the detriment of accuracy, results in students communicating in a fossilised interlanguage; they communicate by 'speaking immersion.' If this is the case at the primary level there are consequences for language learning at the post-primary level.

Content or language?

Cammarata and Tedick (2012), and many other scholars, also point to the inability, or an unwillingness, on the part of immersion teachers to integrate the teaching of content and language. Scholars, such as Mehisto (2008) and Ó Ceallaigh (2016), maintain that teachers struggle with this integration and Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy (2018, 5) refer to it as a ‘conundrum.’ Cammarata and Tedick (2012) describe teachers’ efforts at focusing on language as a ‘stab in the dark’ (261) and discuss the complexity of balanced instruction while questioning whether scholars have interrogated what it ‘really means for teachers themselves’ (251). Mehisto (2008, 93) refers to this lack of balance between a focus on content and a focus on language as ‘disjuncture’ and stresses the need for what he describes as ‘counterweights.’ He also maintains that immersion teachers have a ‘limited repertoire’ of methodologies (104). Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013, 22) echo this point when they lament the lack of a ‘systematic pedagogy.’

The unwillingness may stem from the fear that a focus on language will detract from content learning as Fortune, Tedick, and Walker (2008, 89) postulate in their study of immersion teachers in the United States. In his discussion of Estonian immersion programmes, Mehisto (2008, 104) refers to teachers’ preoccupation with ‘getting through’ the curriculum and the negative effect of regional/state examinations. Feeding into this is the concern of teachers in relation to their students’ ability to engage with complex academic content in the target language. Cammarata and Tedick (2012) refer to teachers of upper primary and post-primary teaching in the students’ first language. These sentiments echo the pedagogical tensions mentioned by Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda (2017, 4). Cammarata and Tedick (2012, 258) cite other reasons for the lack of focus on language, including lack of planning, lack of accountability for language outcomes and lack of resources. Consequently, teachers ‘seldom see themselves as language teachers’ (Genesee 2008, 34).

Teacher readiness

In Ireland, as in most jurisdictions that practice immersion/CLIL, there is no specific teaching qualification required (Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy 2018). Cammarata and Tedick (2012) have highlighted the inadequacy of generic programmes for immersion teachers. Immersion teachers, in general, need a range of linguistic and pedagogical skills/knowledge over and above what is needed in mainstream programmes (Lyster 2007; Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda 2017). The issue in Ireland is more pressing as the initial teacher education sector is not catering appropriately for the Irish-medium sector (Mac Donnacha et al. 2005; Ó Grádaigh 2015). The immersion teachers themselves feel that their training does not adequately prepare them for IME (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda 2017). Therefore, it is unsurprising that scholars such as Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy (2018, 9) and Cammarata and Tedick (2012, 263) argue that initial teacher education programmes reinforce this content-focused mindset.

The context at post-primary is more nuanced and challenging. Post-primary teachers in Ireland, and elsewhere, are content specialists, with many having a qualification in a subject area like history or science, and no formal language or language teaching qualification (Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile 2019). When teaching in an immersion/CLIL context this can result in a ‘subject-focused mindset’

(Mehisto 2008, 103) and a defensiveness about accepting responsibility for language learning (Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile 2019). High-stakes state examinations at post-primary, such as the Irish Leaving Certificate, can only reinforce this mindset (Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile 2019). Consequently, Mehisto (2008) argues that integration comes more naturally to the primary school teacher as subject specialisms at post-primary embed the content-focused mindset.

There is also the concern about the language proficiency and language knowledge of many IMTs (Ó Ceallaigh 2016; Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile 2019). Research by Ó Grádaigh (2015) revealed that 68% of principals surveyed were concerned with the standard of Irish of some of their teachers. All this is caused and/or compounded by an acute shortage of teachers in the IME sector (Máirtín 2006; Ó Grádaigh 2015) with Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) reporting on Gaeltacht principals having to employ teachers with no Irish in certain subject areas. Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha (2017, 15) also draw attention to IMTs' acknowledgement of their lack of proficiency in the language and the anxiousness that arises from it.

The language environment

Many schools in IME apply incentives and sanctions in relation to the use of Irish inside and outside of the classroom and this is one of the distinguishing features between IME and immersion programmes elsewhere (Ó Duibhir 2018, 166). What is particularly worrying from a post-primary perspective is that in one study 70.2% of the post-primary students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I speak more English than Irish in the school playground.'

There is also the issue of contact with the target language outside of the sheltered school setting. Lyster (1987) maintains that when the target language is not the language of the home or the community then the immersion student is not in a language acquisition environment but rather in an enriched language learning environment. They are not truly immersed in the target language if they have no meaningful contact with the language outside of school. In light of the linguistic context described earlier this artificiality of the immersion setting is especially true of the Irish situation (Ó Duibhir et al. 2015).

This theme of the scoping reviews explains why the language of the immersion student does not attain native-like status, particularly in relation to their productive skills. In addition, our expectations for native-like proficiency may have to be recalibrated (Ó Duibhir et al. 2015, 66). Therefore, the task facing immersion teachers is an intricate and challenging one for they must 'find a practical way to add this extra language layer effectively and seamlessly into their instruction' (Cammarata and Tedick 2012, 260). We posit that drawing judiciously from CLIL and immersion best practice can address the 'conundrum' that is language and content integration in IME classrooms, a dilemma that is particularly acute at the post-primary level,

CLIL and immersion: theory and practice

CLIL and immersion: The same or different?

There is a vibrant debate among scholars in relation to the conceptualisation and definition of CLIL and how it differs from other educational approaches, such as content-based instruction (CBI) and immersion education (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2010, 97;

Dalton-Puffer et al. 2014; Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter 2014). Many scholars view immersion as being a form of content-based instruction (Genesee and Lindholm-Leary 2013, 4; Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter 2014, 248) with the latter referring to immersion as ‘an extreme version of CBI.’ Met (1999) presents a continuum of content-based teaching which emphasises the similarities of approaches that are language-driven and those which are content-driven. It also stresses that language learning is incidental at the content-driven end. Unsurprisingly, immersion programmes are at the far end of the content-driven side. However, just to underline the complexity of the terminology/definition debate, Ó Duibhir et al. (2015, 6) state that immersion education is frequently used as an umbrella term for different types of bilingual education. Furthermore, Ó Duibhir and Harris (2011) describe CLIL as an ‘attenuated version of immersion’ (44). Eurydice (2006, 8) defines CLIL as being a generic term that describes contexts where subjects are taught through a second language. This corresponds with the umbrella metaphor used by authors such as Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter (2014, 246). Therefore, these authors agree with Ní Ghuidhir (2016) when she asserts that IME falls under the definition of CLIL.

The definitions and deployment of immersion/CLIL are a function of the local educational and linguistic context. Ultimately this myriad of interpretations and definitions does not take away from the underlying tenets of CLIL and immersion best practice; that is the importance of maintaining a dual focus on content and language in contexts where a second/additional language is used as the medium of instruction. Dalton-Puffer and Nikula (2014, 117) acknowledge that immersion and CLIL overlap significantly ‘especially as regards classroom pedagogical realities;’ a view that Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) and Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter (2014) concur with. In this paper, we adopt the same position and accept the definition of CLIL proposed in the work of Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010, 1); a variation of which could and should be used to describe immersion education.

Content and Language Integrate Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content *and* language.

While the authors refer to an educational approach, they, and many others view CLIL in relation to the classroom strategies and instructional techniques contained within it (Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter 2014).

Due to the ubiquitous nature of CLIL, its theory, research and methodologies emerge across the entirety of Met’s (1999) continuum, including, crucially, the language-driven end. Consequently, it is of significant assistance in the interrogation of the content and language puzzle. While scholars, namely Lyster (2007), have written extensively about the need for balancing content and language instruction in immersion programmes, Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter (2014) note that advocates of CLIL believe that its systematic planning for language outcomes distinguishes it from immersion, even though the authors also note that there is little evidence to support this claim. Nevertheless, Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010, 6) maintain that ‘the planned pedagogic integration of contextualised content, cognition, communication and culture’ in CLIL separates it from CBI/immersion. They maintain that it is a ‘fusion’ of language education and subject education where content and language are ‘interwoven’ (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 2). Coyle et al. also refer

to the target language as a ‘vehicular language’ (2) and a ‘learning tool’ (159). As such, the content teacher should deploy ‘language supportive methodologies’ to support language acquisition and learning (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 3). The aspiration is that ‘the non-language subject is not taught *in* a foreign language but *with* and *through* [italics in original] a foreign language’ (Eurydice 2006, 7).

Second language acquisition, learning and instruction

The theories of second language acquisition, learning and teaching are the bedrock of CLIL and immersion. CLIL/immersion map on well to the principles of instructed language learning set out by Ellis (2005), and discussed by Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012), namely the predominant focus on meaning. Drawing on the work of Lyster (2007) and Lightbown and Spada (2013), Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy (2018, 3) insist that immersion/CLIL teachers need a thorough knowledge of second language acquisition and learning in order to advance student learning in the L2. The effusive praise of Krashen (1984) stems from the fact that the language acquisition aspect of immersion/CLIL is in full harmony with his input hypothesis (Krashen 1982). The immersion context, where all communication inside and outside the classroom takes place in the target language, creates a situation where students are trying to ‘understand language that contains structure that is a “little beyond”’ (Krashen 1982, 21) where they are at that point at the time. Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) reference the input hypothesis of Krashen (1982) and discuss how language needs to be ‘accessible’ but also include ‘new linguistic items’ (91).

Long (1983, 1996) agrees with Krashen on the importance of comprehensible input and discusses how input can be made comprehensible for learners. He advocates modified interaction where students negotiate for meaning through a combination of slower speech rate, contextual clues and/or linguistic simplification. In a related vein, Swain (1985) emphasises the importance of comprehensible output. She posits that language production gives students awareness of the limits of their language proficiency and in their efforts to make themselves understood they develop their proficiency in the target language.

Language instruction/learning research also places a strong emphasis on corrective feedback. Lightbown and Spada (2013) advocate maintaining a focus on form in communicative content-based classes as ‘the shared language and learning backgrounds [of students] allow them to communicate successfully in spite of their error’ (195). Ó Duibhir (2018, 65) maintains that intervention is required ‘for features that are semantically lightweight, non-salient and do not lead to a breakdown in communication.’

Knowledge of language acquisition and learning is vital for the IMT. Considering what has been discussed thus far it is questionable whether the IMT, particularly at post-primary, possesses this knowledge and has the skill to deploy it. CLIL and immersion best practice enables a judicious deployment of this knowledge in a way that does not distract from content learning.

CLIL and immersion best practice is good pedagogy

In the CLIL context, the *4Cs Framework* (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 41) maintains that students access and learn content through communication and cognition;

all of which is embedded in the culture. In a CLIL setting, especially at post-primary, students are endeavouring to access cognitively challenging content in their second or additional language. Deep and meaningful learning will not take place if the teacher is in ‘transmission mode’ (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 88)

The active participation of students in their own learning, through group work, questioning, discussing etc., is crucial to the CLIL (and immersion) strategy of using the language in a meaningful way to learn content. Herein lies the challenge: the learner has to engage in communication in ‘a language which they are probably unable to express themselves as well as in their first language’ (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 35). To combat this Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) developed *The Language Triptych* (37) which assists the teacher in their examination of the language of the subject and the language of the classroom. This construct examines not only the ‘language of learning’ (the language of the subject) but also the ‘language for learning’ (language needed for communication in the classroom) and ‘language through learning’ (new language and gaps in language that emerge during class).

The emphasis on the language needed to operate within specific content areas echoes the work of other scholars who also pondered the importance of teachers being ‘language aware’ (Hoare 2001) and ‘language sensitive’ (Marsh, Maljers, and Hartiala 2001, 3). Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy (2018, 9) emphasise the importance of a ‘language attentive teacher’ and Snow, Met, and Genesee (1989, 205) propose that teachers uncover within their own subjects and classes language that is ‘content-compatible’ and language that is ‘content-obligatory’.¹ This echoes the work of Cummins (2000), who developed the concept of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to the language used in social interaction and CALP describes the language required to complete educational tasks and activities.

Whatever the terminology one uses ‘quality learning will not take place’ if language is not being attended to in the content class (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 37). Students have to be enabled to internalise the language demands of the subject/classroom. The issue of competent language production is more pronounced towards the end of post-primary education as written language is the primary tool for displaying academic achievement in high-stakes examinations.

The work of Lyster (2007) and Ó Duibhir (2018), who have studied immersion best practice at the primary level, resonates with what we find in the CLIL and language acquisition/learning literature. They suggest various pedagogical practices that place a more explicit focus on language in meaning-orientated immersion classrooms. The aforementioned ‘counterbalanced approach’ of Lyster (2007) is an attempt to integrate a focus on content with a focus on form. The author proposes instructional practices that place a proactive and reactive focus on form and include noticing/awareness activities, the controlled practice of the target language and feedback (Lyster 2007, 134). Cammarata and Tedick (2012) reference pre-planned ‘language-focused’ (264) activities and activities such as corrective feedback that can be spontaneous. Ó Duibhir (2018) also makes a case for a more analytical approach to language in the immersion classroom and places great emphasis on feedback and focus on form activities. Based on his research he advocates encouraging students to reflect on and monitor their language use in what Swain (2005) refers to as ‘pushed output.’ In addition, Ó Duibhir suggests recalibrating the school/

classroom norms; moving from an emphasis to speaking Irish to an emphasis on speaking Irish accurately.

As mentioned previously, language acquisition and learning are the bedrock of CLIL/immersion. Consequently, many scholars, such as Lyster (2007), draw heavily on the theory and practice of language learning, acquisition and teaching. Furthermore, Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha emphasise the importance of the IMT understanding how to transfer their knowledge of the target language into effective pedagogical tasks (15).

Moreover, CLIL practices such as clearly defined learning outcomes, feedback, critical thinking, formative assessment, emphasising metacognition, scaffolding student learning and cooperative/active learning are effective strategies for advancing student learning irrespective of the language context (Dean et al. 2012; Hattie 2012). Accordingly, Mehisto (2008, 197) states that CLIL is often associated with the ‘principles of good pedagogy.’ Additionally, Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) remind their readers that ‘CLIL is about effective classroom practice’ (67). In an effort to elucidate best practice in an immersion classroom, Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha (2017, 58) provide a checklist of student/teacher activities that draws heavily on general pedagogical knowledge.

Scholars have built on the pedagogical content knowledge’ construct of Shulman (1986) in efforts to present a knowledge base for immersion teachers (Trojan, Cammarata, and Martel 2017; Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy 2018). They advance the concept of integration pedagogical content knowledge (I-PCK) which is ‘an amalgam of all knowledge domains and may be defined as the situated synthesis of immersion teacher knowledge’ (Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy 2018, 4).

Literacy, biliteracy and disciplinary literacy

The links that CLIL/immersion practices have with literacy/biliteracy, and more particularly with the concept of disciplinary literacy, cannot be avoided, especially in light of certain developments in Ireland over the last number of years. Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy (2018, 2) mention language and literacy together in their discussions of immersion classrooms and Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha (2017) constantly reference the importance of developing biliteracy. Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) take it as given that literacy development is inherent within the CLIL classroom as the teacher has to have ‘explicit awareness of the linguistic demands of the subject or content to take account of literacy and oracy in the vehicular language’ (37). This is very interesting in the Irish context as there has been a new focus on literacy and numeracy since the launch of a national strategy which enjoins that: ‘[a]ll teachers should be teachers of literacy’ and that content should not be taught in ‘isolation from the core communication skills’ (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 47). There is also an effort to broaden the definition of literacy to include speaking and listening (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 8).

Whether by accident, or by design, this has profound implications for the IME sector as the strategy dictates that the literacy focus should be on the language of the school, which is Irish for most of the IME sector; the L2 of the vast majority of students. Therefore, at a classroom level in IME, what begins as a renewed focus on literacy development becomes, in essence, an espousing of effective CLIL practices. Regrettably, work by Mac Mahon, Ó Grádaigh, and Ní Ghuidhir (2016) has

revealed that the IME sector's engagement with the literacy strategy has not been a very positive one. They report on scepticism in relation to a policy that principals/teachers believe was designed for English-medium schools and pupils.

In recent years the review and subsequent reconceptualisation of the junior cycle (Department of Education and Skills 2015) is bringing about extensive changes in lower secondary education. These changes are incorporating a strong focus on this broader interpretation of literacy. 'Being Literate' and 'Communicating' (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 23) are two of the eight key skills that are to be developed over the course of the three years, and communication/language in L1/L2 (Irish and English, respectively, for IME) are included in 5 of the 24 statements of learning (Department of Education and Skills 2015, 12). All new subject *specifications* (syllabi) have placed great emphasis on consolidating literacy in LI (Department of Education and Skills 2015, 13). Again, it bears repeating that the L1 in the context of the literacy strategy and the new junior cycle refers to the language of instruction, which is Irish in IME, the L2 of most students.

When one moves into the area of content area literacy/disciplinary literacy for students immersed in L2, as Mac Mahon, Ó Grádaigh, and Ní Ghuidhir (2016) do, one really is in the realm of CLIL. They cite the work of Zygouris-Coe (2012, 38) who contends that each subject area is a 'community with its own language, texts, and ways of knowing, doing, and communicating.'

Conclusion

This article explicates a strong case for actualising CLIL in Irish-medium post-primary education. In an effort to offer guidance to IMTs at post-primary a scoping review was conducted to explore the fields CLIL/immersion and second language acquisition/learning/teaching. This scoping review, in conjunction with the exploration of the linguistic context of Irish-medium education, answers the why, how and why now set out in the title of this study.

Why?

Students of immersion programmes achieve high levels of functional proficiency in the target language while maintaining a level of academic achievement that is comparable to their non-immersion peers (Camarata and Tedick 2012; Ó Duibhir 2018). However, as outlined in this article the research also illustrates that the language of the immersion student is grammatically inaccurate and contains many non-target-like forms. This has led to scholars referring to students speaking in code or in an immersion language. The literature also sets forth the reasons for the inability and/or unwillingness of immersion teachers to incorporate a focus on language into their lessons. As CLIL and immersion best-practice methodologies draw on the theory and practice of second language acquisition/teaching/learning they will, if deployed appropriately, result in better language outcomes for students. However, the challenge is to persuade and enable teachers to deploy CLIL and immersion best practice strategies while maintaining academic achievement. At the post-primary level, subject specialisms and the absence of formal language/language teaching qualifications makes this endeavour more challenging. This situation is compounded by the high stakes nature of the Irish examination system and the

fragmented nature of the school day with teachers encountering various class groupings for limited periods of time. In the absence of a specific qualification required to teach in IME, the authors make the following recommendations that relate to pedagogical development, resource development, monitoring and review of classroom and school-wide practices.

How?

Research has shown that there is a demand amongst immersion teachers for professional development that is focused on IME (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda 2017; Ó Duibhir 2018).

Therefore, a comprehensive and continuous professional development programme devoted to CLIL and immersion best practice is required for IME at post-primary. The ‘limited repertoire’ of methodologies (Mehisto 2008, 93) could be added to and the IME sector moved to a more ‘systematic pedagogy’ (Genesee and Lindholm-Leary 2013, 22). Interestingly, a study by Cammarata and Tedick (2012) shows that post-primary teachers are more prone to an ‘awakening’ (260) to the importance of language. This programme of professional development would not only facilitate this awakening but allow it to be studied. This would be an important feature as Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile (2019) identify a shortage of research on the professional development, opinions and experiences of immersion teachers.

This could involve a lesson study initiative, a form of professional development that is ‘site-based, practice-orientated, focused on student learning, collaboration-based and research-orientated’ (Murata 2011, 2). The iterative, collaborative, observational and practice-based nature of this approach makes it ideal for persuading and enabling teachers to integrate language teaching/learning into content area classes. In the Irish context, Ní Shúilleabháin (2015) found that lesson study had a positive effect on the professional development of mathematics teachers at post-primary and a study of pre-service teachers by Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy (2018) found that the approach offers valuable insights into the immersion classroom. Murata (2011) states that action research has many of the same characteristics as lesson study. This approach was adopted as part of a larger initiative and study by Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile (2019) and they reported a positive effect on the professional learning of participating post-primary teachers. Teachers could also be encouraged and incentivised to build on learning from this professional development programme by enrolling in courses offered by third-level institutions such as the master’s programme on all-Irish/Gaeltacht education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

The issue of the language proficiency of immersion teachers could be addressed within this programme of professional development. Teachers could also be facilitated and incentivised to enrol in one of the many Irish language courses offered by third-level institutions and Irish language colleges. One way of achieving this would be the extension of the Extra Personal Vacation Days scheme to post-primary schools. Currently, the Department of Education scheme offers extra vacation days to primary teachers who attend approved summer courses. In addition, some of the additional working hours for teachers agreed under the Croke Park Agreement (Department of Public Expenditure 2010) could be set aside for

improving the language proficiency of teachers. In-school support could also play a role as research by Ó Ceallaigh, Ó Laoire, and Uí Chonghaile (2019) identified the merits of a language arts teacher being available to support content area teachers in their efforts to improve their own language proficiency.

Supporting materials that are rooted in CLIL and immersion best practice need to be developed by practitioners and educational experts to aid teachers with their ‘stab in the dark’ (Cammarata and Tedick 2012, 261). These materials would build on the indicators of good practice identified by Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda (2017) and assist teachers in their planning, resource preparation, reflection and professional conversations. Classroom observational schedules, planning exemplars/templates, resource exemplars and video recordings of classroom best practice are just some examples of what could be created. These materials could both support the professional development programme and emanate from it.

The reforms that are occurring at the junior cycle have ushered in a new era of formalised subject department planning at the post-primary level. As of 2017, all teachers involved with the delivery of junior cycle have a derogation of forty minutes per week from their timetable for planning purposes. This ‘professional time’ (Department of Education and Skills 2017) is being provided to give subject departments an opportunity to work collaboratively and create comprehensive subject plans. These plans are expected to integrate literacy into all content areas. In IME this planning could, and should, be extended to incorporate CLIL/immersion best practice. In addition, this new era of collaboration and comprehensive subject planning offers a new and sound basis for collaboration between language arts and content areas such as science, geography etc. Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010, 159) suggest that the cross-disciplinary approach be ‘more clearly defined’ so as to offer CLIL students a more ‘holistic’ experience. The language arts plan would inform the content area teachers of what is being covered in language arts and offer opportunities to incorporate some of this into the content class (the past tense in history being a very simple example). These teachers could also feed key, and problematic, language items back into the language arts department for treatment and inclusion into subject plans. In addition, by utilising the various subject plans the language arts department could incorporate content area material (emigration in economics for example) into the language arts class.

Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghda (2017) have identified indicators of good practice in IME which have been incorporated into supporting documentation for schools attempting to gain Gaeltacht school status (Department of Education and Skills 2018). These indicators should be used as part of the Department of Education’s school self-evaluation process (Department of Education and Skills 2016b) to investigate the nuances and challenges of teaching students through a second/additional language. By utilising these tools in conjunction with the subject area plans IME could move to whole-school planning and development in the area of CLIL/immersion best practice. When all these supports are in place CLIL and immersion best practice could take a more formal and central role in Department of Education inspections and feedback/guidance.

Why now?

The recommendations in this article are being made at a very vulnerable time for the Irish language, inside and outside of the Gaeltacht. The education system is seen as

pivotal in preserving the Gaeltacht and promoting the Irish language. There is also growing demand for Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht. Ó Duibhir (2018) acknowledges that language proficiency alone will not guarantee language use in the speech community. It is, however, a necessary condition. The author is also of the opinion that ‘a level of proficiency approaching native speaker norms’ is required for the survival of Irish (173). It would be towards the end of the post-primary education that one would expect students to approach these norms. Thus, it is incumbent on the IME sector to grasp all opportunities to maximise the language learning outcomes of its students.

Note

1. ‘Content-obligatory’ language refers to language students need to access and learn the content. ‘Content-compatible’ language refers to language that could be taught during the lesson but is not essential to the lesson.

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