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# CLIL and Deeper Learning: A Language-Learning Experience with Student Tour Guides

*CLIL y aprendizaje profundo: una experiencia de aprendizaje  
de idiomas con estudiantes guías turísticos*

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**ABSTRACT.** This practice-based article describes a virtual language-learning experience with student tour guides at a state-run national university in Argentina. The students participated in 75-minute synchronous online classes twice a week; their English language proficiency ranged from A1 to A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This CLIL project was developed in response to a request from a local museum and was aimed at producing a bilingual audioguide (Spanish and English). The analysis goes beyond the CLIL 4Cs framework and discusses the students' text development in light of the Pluriliteracies Model for Deeper Learning (PTDL). CLIL is conceived as a facilitator for deeper learning. Throughout the text production process, students were able to build and communicate knowledge across languages and cultures. By promoting deeper learning, this pedagogical proposal encouraged learners to put languages into practice in real situations with a defined and relevant purpose.

**Keywords:** Language learning; teaching practice; project design; project implementation; tourism.

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo basado en la práctica describe una experiencia de aprendizaje de idiomas llevada a cabo en un entorno virtual con estudiantes guías turísticos en una universidad nacional pública de Argentina. Los estudiantes participaron en clases en línea sincrónicas de 75 minutos dos veces por semana, y su dominio del inglés oscilaba entre el nivel A1 y el A2 del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las lenguas (MCER). Este proyecto CLIL fue la respuesta a una solicitud de un museo local y tenía como objetivo producir una audioguía bilingüe (español e inglés). El análisis va más allá del marco CLIL 4Cs y analiza el desarrollo del texto de los estudiantes a la luz del Modelo de Pluriliteracias para el Aprendizaje Profundo (PTDL). CLIL se concibe como un facilitador para un aprendizaje más profundo. A lo largo del proceso de producción de textos, los estudiantes pudieron construir y comunicar conocimientos a través de idiomas y culturas. Al promover un aprendizaje más profundo, esta propuesta pedagógica animó a los alumnos a poner en práctica los idiomas en situaciones reales con un propósito definido y relevante.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje de idiomas; práctica docente; diseño de proyectos; implementación de proyectos; turismo.

## Introduction

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The CLIL initiative described in this article was implemented with future tour guides within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at a state-run national university in Argentina. These courses focus on the development of all four language macro-skills, with a particular emphasis on listening and speaking.

This practice-based article explores how CLIL connected students with the university and the university with the local community during the COVID-19 lockdown. This CLIL project started in 2019 in response to a request from a local museum to the university's English department. The museum asked for an English-language resource to accompany the museum's display. In alignment with course content and students' language proficiency, the English department designed and implemented the production of an audioguide as a pedagogical task.

This project is an example of the university's role in transferring knowledge to the communities it impacts. During the lockdown, it helped students to re-engage with their academic and social environment. This study draws on Barnett's (2011) idea of an ecological university, which responds to the wider community and is part of an interconnected world.

## Context

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Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the university adapted the pedagogical design of its English classes to a fully virtual environment. The thirteen tour guide students involved, whose English language proficiency ranged from A1 to A2 according to the CEFR, participated in 75-minute synchronous online classes twice a week for four months. The sessions were supported by a Moodle platform, which provided audio and reading materials, grammar exercises, recorded lessons, and explanations for autonomous study between live sessions. The project required the systematic planning of a series of actions to reach the intended final product (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Project Description

<p><b>The Project in Action</b></p> <p><b>Name of the project:</b> <i>Recorriendo la historia local a través de una familia de nuestro pueblo / Exploring Our Town's History through the Lens of one Family</i></p> <p><b>Intended final product:</b> Bilingual audioguide to be accessed through QR codes. The codes were placed along the two-room museum.</p> <p><b>Participants:</b> Thirteen tour guide students (Universidad Nacional del Comahue, San Martín de los Andes, Argentina).</p> <p><b>Project setup:</b> The teachers of English held meetings with the museum committee (between 2019 and 2020) to negotiate what the department could offer, considering the museum's needs. Once we agreed on the final product, work was distributed between the museum and the university. Other aspects of the audioguide were discussed with the teachers of one of the core subjects in the course of studies (Professional Practice). They oriented the work with regard to the content and the organization of the tour.</p> <p><b>Project activities:</b> Students' work involved several actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Search for relevant material for the elaboration of the audioguide.</li><li>• Define the thematic axes of the tour</li><li>• Write and rewrite drafts of the script for the audioguide of the museum</li><li>• Write the final version of the script</li><li>• Practice and record the script</li><li>• Submit the recording</li></ul> <p><b>Presentation of the final product:</b> Nine QR codes were generated and displayed around the museum rooms. The museum committee invited teachers and students to the launch of the audioguide. Different members of the community (museum and university authorities, the local press, students, and teachers) participated in the presentation.</p> <p><b>The final product at present:</b> The entrance to this museum is free for both locals and visitors. The QR codes are still available, and the English Department encourages new students to visit and take the tour by listening to the audioguides prepared by previous students.</p>
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## Conceptual Framework

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The project originated in response to a community request. It was guided by the pedagogical objective of transferring classroom-based learning

into real-world contexts. Thus, language learning was conceptualized as a social practice rather than the encoding and decoding of a text (New London Group, 1996). In line with Kramsch (2022), where language learning is a place of recognition and agency, learners were both informants and actors capable of influencing others' perceptions of the world. In the case of these tour guide students, their role as social agents, who "draw upon all sorts of resources in their linguistic and cultural repertoires and further develop these resources in their trajectories" (Council of Europe, 2001), was enacted throughout this project.

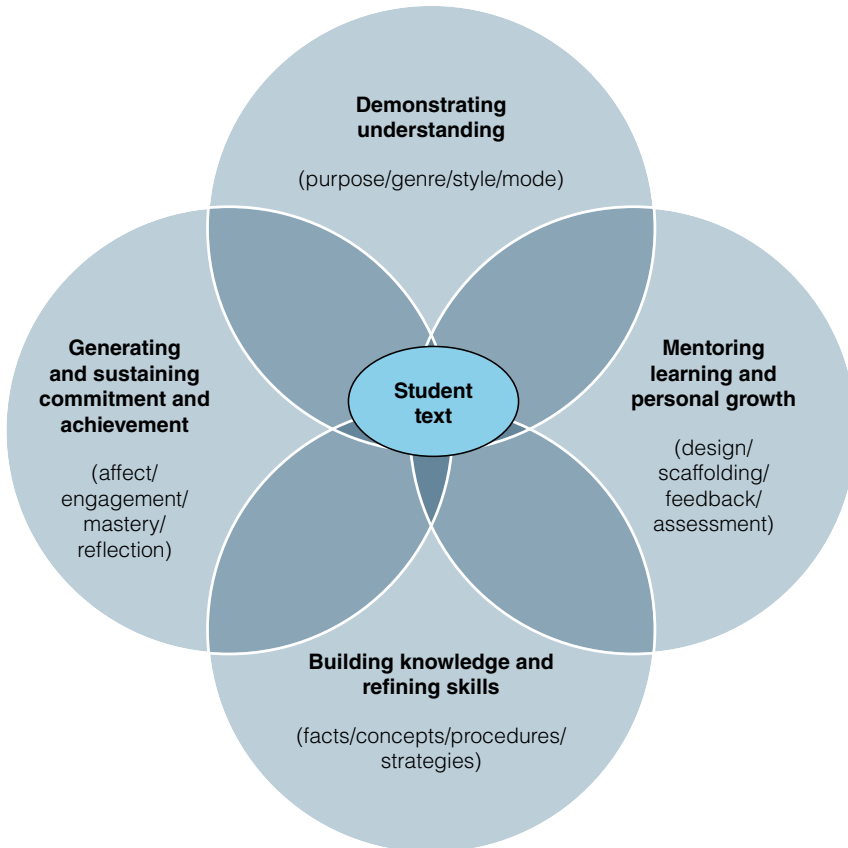
Regarding CLIL and its 4Cs framework (Coyle et al., 2010): Content, communication, cognition, and culture, content development for the audioguide involved interpreting the town's history through its architecture and presenting biographical information about relevant local figures. To support communication, learners were encouraged to develop specific lexis—building materials, parts of buildings, roof and window types, and historical lifestyles—, as well as sentence starters to organize the audioguide script. Thus, the text production process was accompanied by detailed teacher scaffolding (see Appendix A).

Considering communication, the aim was to share relevant information about the town to local, national, and international visitors. Accordingly, the audioguide was delivered bilingually, in the students' dominant language (Spanish) and in English. Cognitive engagement was evidenced through tasks requiring information gathering, analysis, selection, and text creation. These tasks were cognitively challenging for students as they involved the development of problem-solving and decision-making skills (Fernández-Costales, 2023). Following Corrales and Pooles' (2023): "CLIL can serve as a window to bringing culture into the classroom" (p. 553), the project allowed students to express *culture* through their understanding of the town's history through their L1 and an L2.

Beyond the 4Cs model, the project adopted a pluriliteracies approach aimed at empowering the students to build and communicate knowledge successfully in a specific content area across languages and cultures (Meyer, 2016). CLIL was thus conceptualized as a facilitator for deeper learning, defined as "the successful internalization of conceptual content knowledge and the automatization of the subject-specific procedures, skills and strategies" (Meyer & Coyle, 2017, p. 1).

Deeper learning was analyzed using the Pluriliteracies Model for Deeper Learning (PTDL) developed by Coyle & Meyer (2021). The model comprises four interconnected dimensions: *demonstrating understanding* (purpose, genre, mode, and style), *building knowledge and refining skills* (facts, concepts, procedures, and strategies), *mentoring learning and personal growth* (design, scaffolding, feedback, and assessment), and *generating and sustaining commitment and achievement* (affect, engagement, mastery, and reflection). The students' texts are discussed through an adapted version of the PTDL quadrant (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Adaptation of the PTDL Quadrant



Source: Coyle and Meyer (2021).

## Analysis and Discussion

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The project follows Coyle and Meyers (2021) understanding of text as a collective noun:

When text is the currency for critical understanding and cultural consciousness; when text communicates ideas and concepts which are relevant, challenging and thought-provoking; when text provides the space for mediated learning and meaning making; when text evidences linguistic progression through learners' increasingly nuanced construction and use of language forms and their interpretation—then, the language classroom affords potential for deeper learning (p. 151).

For the analysis, different extracts from the QR codes displayed in the museum, where some of the characteristics of text as a collective noun are presented.

Look at these pictures, they show what the lifestyle at the beginning of the 20.C. was like. You can see the photo of the opening of the first National Bank in town. It was located in front of the present Sarmiento Park. Today, in this building, there is a shop that preserves its facade. The opening of Banco de la Nación Argentina was a cornerstone for the connection of San Martín de los Andes with our country. Previously, Chilean currency was used for everyday transactions. This promoted a closer relationship between the local people and the bank. Commonly, transactions were carried out in general stores, and then money was taken to the national bank (Extract 1, QR3).

This paragraph (Extract 1) illustrates the historical and contemporary identity of the town. The text reveals the student's interpretation of the local history through the selection and framing of information presented to visitors. Locals and tourists construct meaning through the integration of the audioguide with the pictures on the wall and the view from the windows. The language presented in the classroom (see Appendix A) was appropriated by learners and used to express their own meanings.

Let's have a look at the picture of Bar de Muglia. Located on the corner of San Martín Avenue and Elordi Street, this is an old building from 1920, a bar where men met to have a few drinks while women had tea at the Lacar Hotel across the street (Extract 2, QR9).

Extract 2 is an example of the appropriation of the language forms presented in class (see Appendix A: Relevant People) that lead to student's critical understanding of socio-cultural aspects. Through the text, students stressed the difference between men's and women's roles, and the meaning of objects, pictures, and the museum.

In this house, throughout the tour, you have seen different photos taken by Bruno Salamon, who was the first photographer in town. This was his camera. After settling down in San Martín de los Andes, he usually toured restaurants, boarding houses and hotels to promote his boat trips to Villa Quila Quina. Nowadays, the peer in Quila Quina is called Don Bruno in honour of his role in the promotion of this tourist spot. Not only did he take pictures of beautiful Northern Patagonia, but he also sent thousands of pictures to his native Europe showing these lands (Extract 3 which corresponds to QR9).

Students demonstrated tenacity (Coyle & Meyer, 2021) through multiple cycles of drafting, revising, and re-recording their audios until they reached a final product. This process required the adoption of a deeper learning mindset, which supported their future learning processes.

Deeper learning was also evident in the collaborative process of writing and recording. During the lockdown, students met virtually to write, practice and record their text, which required responsibility and sustained commitment to the task. Many of these instances occurred without the teachers' presence; consequently, students had to self-monitor to meet the agreed-upon goals. The final text thus emerged from a joint negotiation among participants.

With regard to the first two PTDL dimensions, the genre selected was a narrative mode, in a colloquial style, to demonstrate understanding. Facts, concepts, procedures, and strategies were co-constructed between learners and teachers to build knowledge and refine the learners' skills.

Let's have a look at the objects around. We invite you to travel in time by using your imagination. If you look at this glassware cabinet, you will see the crystalware given to the Chidiaks as a present when they got married. You can also see some notebooks, which reflect the family's daily trading activity. The Chidiaks were good traders who started their own business in town by opening a general store. The pictures on your left are proof of the Chidiaks' daily life: pictures of the two general stores and of this house. Salvador Chidiak died at an early age, and his sons continued with the business which was

called “The Chidiak’s brothers”. San Martín de Los Andes was quite a dangerous place full of ruffians at that time; so, the brothers decided to spend their nights under the shop counter using a rifle as protection. The record player compels us to hear the music that was played when the ladies of the family prepared themselves to go to special parties or when Mrs. Rosa Chidiak offered a meal for those around the table. Now, if you walk towards the other corner, you will see pictures that contrast with San Martín de Los Andes nowadays (Extract 4, QR4).

Extract 4 conveys the students’ intention (purpose as shown in Diagram 1) to share the history of an immigrant family through storytelling (genre as shown in Diagram 1). Through the choice of language, students invited visitors to travel in time and imagine what life was like at the beginning of the twentieth century. The style of the text is an invitation to interpret the town’s history. Through the narrative mode, students created an intimate atmosphere for the audience. Students decided to use the family objects displayed around to explore facts and concepts (Diagram 1) about the settlers’ lifestyles. The procedures and strategies developed were subject and content-specific.

The process of *mentoring learning and personal growth* is evident in the pedagogical design of the audioguide task, which was systematically scaffolded through teacher feedback and assessment (see Appendix A and Appendix B). From the start, attention was directed to audience awareness in the writing process. Students were encouraged to use accessible language, short sentences, and an engaging style (see Appendix B).

Regarding *generating and sustaining commitment and achievement, affect, and engagement* acquired relevance in the lockdown context. This is illustrated by one student’s comment: “The project gave sense to our academic year at university” (informal classroom interaction; authors’ translation). Similarly, learners’ reflection upon their own language development became relevant, as the text was intended for real-world use and long-term public display.

In the adaptation of the PTDL Model, the student-produced text was placed at the center of the diagram as students’ voices intersected all four dimensions of the model. The audioguide revealed their voices, expressions, and interpretations of the town’s history.

## Lessons Learnt

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This experience exceeded initial expectations, as learners demonstrated sustained commitment to the demands of the project and invested more time and effort than anticipated. Although we had a clearly defined outcome, the lockdown context initially posed significant constraints. In practice, however, it functioned as a catalyst for innovation and engagement.

Despite the absence of face-to-face meetings with students to organize the project stages, the experience can be understood as an instance of social practice (New London Group, 1996). Students aimed to express their perspectives and to be heard (Kramsch, 2022). Through informal feedback, students often expressed a sense of achievement in contributing to knowledge that endures over time and potentially benefits the wider community (Barnett, 2011).

During the virtual encounters, students frequently expressed the meaning of the project for their academic lives in the challenging context of lockdown. However, to assess the impact of this experience more rigorously, systematic data collection would have been required throughout the process. Although the museum staff often shares the positive impact of the audioguide on visitors, the absence of a systematic collection of visitors' opinions and/or the number of people who accessed the QRs limits the evaluation of the long-term impact of the project. These elements would have enabled triangulation and provided more objective evidence of impact.

## Conclusion

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The bilingual audioguide required learners' critical understanding of local history through the selection, interpretation and linguistic framing of content. By drawing on their full linguistic repertoires, students constructed meaning not only through what was communicated but also through how it was communicated.

The virtual language classroom functioned as a space for deeper learning: students conducted research in a language of their choice, selected relevant content for the purpose of the text, and produced their own text according to their interpretation of the town's history. Through this process, they developed content-specific literacy across languages and cultures

While the context of this project was necessarily specific —university student tour guides in the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic—the pedagogical proposal underlying the initiative has broader relevance. Similar proposals may be adapted into other education settings where learners use language for authentic, socially situated purposes, thereby fostering linguistic development and meaningful engagement.

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# Appendix A

## Guidelines given to students to build their texts

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- This house belongs/ belonged to...
- He /She was famous for / popular for...
- Nowadays it belongs to the same family / to somebody else.
- It is located ... (in the downtown area / on the main street / in the commercial area / on the outskirts, in a residential area, etc.)
- It was built in 1930.
- As you can see, nowadays it is used as a restaurant/hotel/coffee shop, etc.
- It is a two-storey building
- The entrance door leads to...
- The windows overlook a lovely garden / the lake / the main street.
- Inside there is.../ there are...
- Outside there is.../ there are...
- It is well kept/neglected (abandoned)
- Today in this building, there is ...
- This building shows ...

### ARCHITECTURAL PERIODS (*settlers, national parks or picturesque, modern*)

- This building belongs to the .... architectural period.
- When skiing became popular, ...
- Immigrants brought ...
- This house is a classic example of this period.
- This building is typical of the period influenced by ...
- During this period, wall paneling was typically horizontal/ vertical
- It was designed by ...

### ARCHITECTURE

- The materials used are wood/bricks/ concrete/ blast stone for the walls
- It has a pitched roof (roof that slopes downwards): lean-to roof or sloping roof/ mansard roof/ hip roof/ canopy
- It has a gable.
- The roof is covered with cypress/ larch shingles/ zinc plates/ tiles/
- It has one-casement windows/ two-casement windows/ French windows / a bow window/dormer windows/ strip windows.
- The windows have paneled glass/ big panels of glass

### RELEVANT PEOPLE

- ... was born in ... and grew up in...
- ... married ... in ...
- ... moved to ... / ... settled in ... / ... opened ... /... inherited .../ ... was the first ...
- After this, he/she went to ...
- After +-ing, ...
- During this period, he/she ...
- While he/she was ...

## Appendix B

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### Write an audio guide commentary to “*Casa Histórica*”, *San Martín de los Andes*.

#### Some tips

- Consider target audience (if possible)
- Use simple language
- Write short sentences
- Be lively and enthusiastic
- Easy to read aloud

Before recording your audio, **practise reading the speech aloud**. Consider:

- ✓ Pauses
- ✓ Intonation
- ✓ Clarity of speech

You can google [izi.travel](http://izi.travel) for some further ideas.

#### **Starting to write ...**

1. Decide the stops you are going to make in the museum
  - San Martín de los Andes, a little village
  - San Martín de los Andes and its pioneers
  - San Martín de los Andes and its architecture
2. Take pictures of each stop
3. Write the entry to that particular stop, considering the above-stated tips (*not too long*)

Some useful phrases to organize the speech of your audio guide

- ❖ Now we are going to enter the historic house
- ❖ In the main room, on the right, you will find a magnificent work of art painted by ...
- ❖ We are going to enter another room dedicated entirely to ...
- ❖ Here we are in front of a great work of art
- ❖ If you move this way, you will look at ...