The use of the L1 in CLIL classes: The teachers' perspective

El uso de la L1 en clases AICLE: la perspectiva del profesorado

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Abstract

There are currently different perspectives about the role to be played by the L1 in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) contexts, although its use seems to be common practice. Some voices consider that the L1 only has a support function for explanation and its use should be minimized, whereas other voices state that the L1 has a learning function, as it can help to build up students' lexicon and to foster their metalinguistic awareness. In this paper, 35 in-service CLIL teachers were asked about their beliefs regarding the use of the L1 in their classes in Colombia. The results indicated that the participants were positive about L1 use, as they believed it can serve to scaffold language and content learning, although the amount of first language use varied greatly from teacher to teacher. The paper ends up by advocating for a principled L1 use, instead of the current randomized practices.

Key Words: code-switching; translanguaging; CLIL; English-medium instruction; use of L1.

Resumen

En la actualidad existen distintos posicionamientos sobre el papel que la L1 debe desempeñar en contextos AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lengua Extranjera), a pesar de lo cual su uso parece ser una práctica habitual. Hay quien defiende que la L1 solo tiene un papel de apoyo en las explicaciones y que su uso debería limitarse, mientras otros defienden que la L1 tiene una función de aprendizaje, puesto que puede ayudar a formar el léxico de los estudiantes y a desarrollar su conciencia metalingüística. En este estudio se preguntó a 35 profesores de AICLE en activo sobre sus creencias en relación con el uso de la L1 en sus clases en Colombia. Los resultados mostraron que los participantes eran favorables al uso de la L1, puesto que consideran que este puede ayudar en el andamiaje del aprendizaje de lengua y contenido, aunque el uso de la L1 variaba considerablemente de un profesor a otro. El artículo aboga finalmente por un uso estructurado de la L1, en lugar de las prácticas aleatorias actuales.

Palabras Claves: cambio de código; translanguaging; AICLE; instrucción en inglés; uso de la L1.

INTRODUCTION

Gorter and Cenoz (2011) point out that there is little research on multilingual language practices focused on the possibility of using different languages in class, despite the fact that the use of both the L1 and the L2 is considered to provide an important communicative support for both students and teachers. This has led to the current situation in which monolingual assumptions are being challenged and

bilingual discourse has started to be seen as the norm by referring to pedagogical practices that use bilingualism as an asset instead of as a problem or burden. In fact, this paper will centre on the everyday teaching practices in which teachers use their bilingualism as a resource. Whereas code-switching assumes that bilinguals use their two languages as two separate monolingual codes, translanguaging posits that bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire which they select strategically to communicate effectively (García 2009). Hence, code-switching would involve the teacher's use of the L1 once an L2 explanation has failed or the translation of a term from the L2 into the L1 if students face comprehension problems, whereas translanguaging would take place if students read about a topic in the L1 and present their work in class in the L2 (Mehisto, 2012). It is worth pointing out, however, that multilingual scholars are sometimes prone to romanticize code-switching and translanguaging practices of teachers and students (Canagarajah, 2011) and, therefore, researchers' analysis should be undertaken with caution.

L1 and instruction in a foreign/second language

The L1's role in the foreign language classroom has always been fraught with controversy. "For many decades, foreign language teaching has been dominated by the principle that teachers should only use the target language" (Littlewood & Yu, 2011: 64), but this trend has changed in the last two decades. Throughout the history of language teaching methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), some have advocated totally excluding the L1 with a view to imitating the natural process children follow in acquiring their mother tongue. Supporters of the direct method (implemented by Berlitz in his well-known language schools) claimed that only the target language should be used in the classroom and it should be taught through actions, gestures, and mime, as any L1 use would interfere with the students' attempts to master the target language. Grammar rules ought to be learned inductively, instead of being taught. With the audio-lingual method, the emphasis was on speaking and listening, and relied heavily on dialogues and drills. L1 use was, once again, discouraged. Defenders of the Total Physical Response approach (Asher, 1988) believed that meaning could be conveyed through action and demonstrations and used commands to elicit a physical response from the learners. Many of these methods arose as a reaction against the Grammar Translation Method, in which grammar learning and translation

were the main learning tasks and the L1 was therefore principal in the language learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the 1970s, communicative language teaching became the predominant method, as a reaction to the audio-lingual method's popularity in the 1960s and based on the belief that communicative competence develops through students' active participation in meaningful communicative contexts (Littlewood, 1981).

However, in the 1990s there was a shift in the pendulum and more importance was once again attached to the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom. As Auerbach (1993) put it, "Starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English." This brought about a change of perspective in which reluctance to use the L1 was observed as neglecting a valuable resource (Atkinson, 1987), a transition being deemed indispensable by ardent advocates of L1 use such as Butzkamm (2003). Although reports demonstrate that teachers make ample use of the L1 (Littlewood & Yu, 2011), practices such as code-switching and translanguaging are still controversial. In fact, in contexts as diverse as Canada (McMillan & Turnbull, 2009), South Korea (Kang, 2008), and Hong Kong (Swain *et al.*, 2011), English-only language policies are still implemented based on two main beliefs: firstly that the L1 may interfere in the L2 learning process, and secondly that by increasing exposure to the L2, the learner will become more proficient.

In this vein, Macaro (2009) identifies a continuum of perspectives on L1 and L2 use. At one end are teachers and learners who believe in L2 use exclusively. They see no value in L1 use and argue for the crucial importance of providing classroom learners with the maximum possible number of opportunities to foster L2 learning. Macaro states that this position has been challenged by research findings. Firstly, because it has been observed that the vast majority of teachers use the L1 to varying degrees, even in those contexts where an only-L2 language policy is expected to be implemented; secondly, because the L1 can function as a cognitive tool in L2 learning and teachers can facilitate learning by making reasoned references to the L1; and thirdly, because code-switching is a natural part of bilingual interaction. These findings lead us to the other end of the continuum, the optimal position, which states that code-switching can enhance second language acquisition better than a second-language-only policy in the classroom. The optimal position warns against

teachers missing a chance if they desist from taking advantage of features of students' first language, and if they avoid comparisons between the first and second languages.

Most studies so far have been focused on the use of the first language by learners (Guk & Kellogg, 2007; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) and seem to indicate that the presence of the L1 may be high if students share the same mother tongue. However, studies seem to confirm that L1 use decreases at the same time as L2 proficiency increases (Agustín Llach, 2009; Lázaro & García Mayo, 2012). Storch and Aldosari (2010) concluded that learners are supportive of the use of the L1 in the FL classroom, as the L1 makes learning the new language easier and acknowledges the value of their prior knowledge. The results of this study confirmed that the functions served by L1 in L2 classes are mainly two: (a) Task management: students gain a joint understanding of the task requirements in order to complete them (particularly of novel or complex tasks); (b) Deliberations over vocabulary: they help students to understand word meaning and therefore facilitate learning. Macaro (2009) also examined the relationship between code-switching and vocabulary acquisition, and his data illustrated that making ties to L1 vocabulary may stimulate deeper processing. Other functions detected in the aforementioned studies (Guk & Kellogg, 2007; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) include the following three: (c) Provide each other with assistance when negotiating metalinguistic knowledge and understanding the meaning of a text; (d) Initiate and maintain interrelationships to establish goals and achieve them; and (e) Vocalize their thoughts. All these results indicate that banning using the L1 in the L2 class should be avoided, as it denies students a very useful tool. The previous studies point out that students tend to use the L1 judiciously and it helps them to complete the tasks carried out in class in a more effective way. However, Swain and Lapkin (2000) underscore that teachers have to be careful when encouraging students to use the L1, as it may eventually substitute (rather than support) L2 learning.

While there is some research regarding L1 use in foreign language contexts (Storch & Aldosari, 2010), studies are scant in immersion (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012) and almost non-existent in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) programs (on differences between immersion and CLIL, see Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). CLIL can be defined as "an educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language,

typically to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary or tertiary level" (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p. 183) and in which there is a dual focus on language and content. Since CLIL programs are spreading all over the world (Coyle *et al.*, 2011; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010) and at all the rungs on the educational ladder (Coleman, 2009: Doiz *et al.*, 2013) at a surprisingly fast pace, this is an issue which demands further research.

Teachers' use of the L1

In examining the educational research from the 1990s to the present day, Curtis (2012) observed that the focus seems to have shifted from teachers to students. Consequently, we should also pay heed to how, when and why teachers use the L1. Due to the very limited number of CLIL studies in this area, an influential study carried out in the Canadian French immersion context will first be reviewed. The results of this study will then be compared with those obtained in the second study to be reviewed in this section, which was undertaken in a CLIL program in Spain.

McMillan and Turnbull (2009) produced one of the few studies on L1 use in immersion programs, working with two French immersion teachers in Canada. Since there are official recommendations to follow a French-only-language policy in immersion classes (in fact, Ministry of Education documents in several Canadian provinces specify that the L2 should be the only language of communication in immersion classrooms), many Canadian immersion teachers try to stop their students from using their L1. In the Canadian context the rigid separation of the two languages has been regarded as axiomatic for a few decades, as Lambert (1984) pointed out: "In immersion programs, therefore, bilingualism is developed through two separate monolingual instructional routes" (p. 13). Nevertheless, the two teachers participating in this study (McMillan & Turnbull, 2009) used the L1 and seemed to base their practices on their own attitudes and beliefs. McMillan and Turnbull (2009) advocate action research as a means for developing teachers' awareness of their code-switching practices and conclude that teachers should implement personalized approaches to L1 and L2 use that should be pedagogically and theoretically principled. It is worth remembering that Cummins (2007) demonstrates that there is conclusive evidence that supports teaching for transfer across languages. However, and although there is empirical evidence which suggests that teachers in immersion

programs fall back on their L1 in order to not interrupt the teaching of the subject matter (Hoare & Kong, 2008), there is little consensus about how the L1 should be used.

In Spain, the only study to my knowledge focused on L1 use in CLIL classes is that of Méndez and Pavón (2012) who examined the Plurilingual program in Andalusia (a CLIL program). These authors focused on a French-Spanish program and interviewed 15 (language, content and language assistant) teachers in primary and secondary education. Méndez and Pavón observed that the L1 was successfully employed as an instrument of disambiguation to help students understand complex ideas and notions. They concluded that neither teachers nor language assistants had been explicitly trained in the benefits of using the L1 and that their teaching practice was based on their intuition and the previous knowledge they had acquired. Teachers were thus positive about the use of the L1, but this practice was neither systematic nor based on guidelines.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in the two different teaching contexts (immersion and CLIL) the use of the L1 is rather habitual and teachers' actual use hinges on their own beliefs rather than on any critical reflection and interpretation of the lessons learnt from practice.

Many questions remain unanswered, which is why research into code-switching and translanguaging practices has become a compelling need. This is especially the case in CLIL contexts, where few studies have been published despite the fact that this approach is becoming increasingly popular in Asia, Europe and Latin America. With this in mind, the aim of this paper is to analyse the following research question: When and why do CLIL teachers shuttle between the L1 and the L2?

METHOD

Participants

Although the total number of participants was originally 45 in-service teachers, only the 35 that had CLIL experience were included in the final sample. The majority of them (26) were secondary education professionals with a few primary (6) and university (3) teaching staff working at different Colombian education institutions. Their experience ranged from 1 year (just four young teachers) to 26 years, the average being 7 years and 8 months. Therefore, the participants were,

overall, experienced teachers, all of whom taught in English in their CLIL classes. All the participants had Spanish as their L1, except two native speakers of English who were very proficient in Spanish.

Procedure

This data gathering was based on a workshop entitled "The coexistence of the L1 and the L2 in CLIL classes" which was held at the Universidad del Norte (Barranquilla, Colombia) in October 2012. In it, the 35 CLIL teachers were presented with a text passage on a slide. The aim was to generate reflections on their own use of the L1 at school and get them thinking about the role to be played by the L1 in CLIL contexts. This practical session was designed to give them the opportunity to reflect on their everyday practice, the main goal being to hear their opinions. This was the text passage:

> The implementation of CLIL programs has given rise to a reconsideration of different learning and teaching processes, the presence of the L1 in CLIL classes being a very good case in point. In fact, there are currently different perspectives about the role to be played by the mother tongue in CLIL contexts. Some voices consider that the L1 has a support function of explanation and should not occupy much time. Conversely, other voices state that the L1 has a learning function, as it can help to build up students' lexicon and to foster their metalinguistic awareness. In this awareness raising session different questions will be put forward: Do you as CLIL teachers use the L1 in the classes?[1] If so, when and why? Do you resort to the L1 in a structured way or is the L1 used at random? With these questions in mind, you are invited to share experiences and reflect on your own use of the mother tongue.

The teachers then had to respond to three questions. Firstly they were asked whether they believed that the L1 should be used in CLIL classes. They were requested to write their answers individually on a sheet of paper. Secondly, and once again individually, they had to think of five situations in which they regularly used the L1 in their CLIL classes. Finally, the participants had to form groups and try to agree on a list of the five most effective classroom uses of the L1. From the very beginning, they were told that all their written answers would

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[1] It is noted that Colombian students could have L1s other than Spanish (if they belonged to ethnolinguistic minorities within the country, etc.). Such an issue—in which the students L1 was not also the majority language of the national educational system in which they were being taught—falls outside the scope of this paper and, therefore, is not tackled here.

be gathered at the end of the session, but anonymity would be maintained by using only numbers to identify each of their papers.

RESULTS

As for the first question, all the participants were positive about using the L1 and only four of them showed any reluctance, although they were in favour of using it in particular situations. The teachers were also asked if they had had any training (courses, seminar, etc.) regarding how to use the L1 in the foreign language and/or CLIL class and only six answered affirmatively. Two of them had attended a course delivered by Scott Thornbury a few years before, and another 4 said that it had been referred to on a method course they took as part of their degree: curiously enough, these 4 participants were the youngest teachers, which seems to indicate that some attention is currently being paid to this topic on some university degrees. Nevertheless, the vast majority had never received any training regarding L1 use.

The teachers' responses appear below as they were written, although I have highlighted some words and noun phrases. The comments can be grouped into five main categories (to help students understanding; to make L1 and L2 comparisons; to feel comfortable in the CLIL class; to boost debate; and to deal with disciplinary issues), with the most widely referred to situation being that of helping students' understanding: This referred mainly to instructions and clarifying concepts. The words "understand", "understanding" and "abstract" are recurrent in the teachers' comments and mention is also made to the practicality of L1 use with a view to saving time. Teachers seem to be very much aware of how useful the L1 can be when explaining concepts that are abstract and difficult to cope with in the L2. The following are examples from this first category:

> Yes, in the case they **don't understand** and after having explained something in different ways. It should be the last option. (teacher 4)

> It is important to **clarify things.** (teacher 9)

> Yes, as an extra resource that **saves time** and **illuminates**! (teacher 26)

> Yes, it is a useful tool to **check** if students are **understanding** what is being taught. (teacher 8)

> When I have to explain the **meaning of a saying**, for example, "the early bird catches the worm", it is much easier to give them the direct translation in Spanish (*A quien madruga Dios le ayuda*). (teacher 35)

> Of course, because there are certain **concepts** that are **too difficult** to express in the L2 because they are **too abstract**. There are times in which you need just to say the word in the L1. (teacher 19)

> Yes, because it helps students to acquire some important **concepts** that be hard to explain in the L2 because some of them are **abstract** and it will be **hard to learn** if the students don't have a previous knowledge about them. (student 33)

> Yes, because there are some concepts that are **abstracts** and are **difficult to explain** and learn if the student doesn't have enough knowledge about it. (teacher 20)

> The use of the L1 allows **students with difficulties** in the L2 to use the L1 to make sure they're **understanding** the topic. (teacher 8)

The second category regards how L1 and L2 comparison can be a productive teaching strategy in which teachers take advantage of the students' previous knowledge and their positive affective attitude towards their first language. The L1 is observed as a scaffold that allows students to make comparisons. Similarly, it is perceived as a tool to help lower grade students gradually increase their use of English in a CLIL setting. The following comments illustrate the participants' viewpoints:

> Yes, it can serve as **a structured scaffolding tool.** (teacher 12; provides 2 main ideas)

> **Making comparisons** between English grammar and their L1 grammar. (teacher 13)

> Yes, but only in the **beginner level** in order to **make comparisons** and also to start little by little the **transition to the L2.** (teacher 15)

> Yes, especially when you teach **lower grades**. Because it helps them to express their feelings and ideas when they don't know the FL necessary to express them. (teacher 31)

This scaffolding is even connected to identity issues by some of the teachers, who considered that acknowledging the students' cultural heritage was also part of this comparison process: recognition of the L1 would help to improve students' attitude towards the foreign language. Endorsing the students' identity is seen as a way to foster content learning in English:

> Yes, because students learn when their learning is based on **their L1 knowledge and their culture**, their **affective side** is very important. (teacher 4)

> Yes, because it is your **cultural heritage language.**[1] (teacher 35)

> To make students aware of the **importance of the L1** (identity) (teacher 3)

The third main category focused on the great importance placed on the L1 as a tool to make students feel comfortable in the CLIL classroom and as a way to boost their confidence. This soothing effect of the L1 seems to be essential to create an anxiety-free classroom, as an English-only language policy might trigger student anxiety, hampering the learning process. The participants seemed to be well aware of the inherent risk that a stressful environment might have in a teaching context in which English is the medium of instruction. In fact, their comments underline the need to resort to the L1 to help students overcome this source of tension and build self-confidence as a way to facilitate their transition from the L1 to the L2:

> Yes, because it sometimes helps to **develop confidence** and since we train them to be bilingual, this connection is important (teacher 2)

> Yes, mother tongue might help foster the use of the target language and **develop confidence** as part of the transition between the L1 and the L2 (teacher 3)

> Yes, L1 can make students **more comfortable** during language learning (teacher 12)

The fourth category revolved around using the L1 to boost debate. In CLIL classes, it is sometimes difficult to encourage students to participate in debates because of their linguistic limitations to talk about complex topics. In these situations, some teachers deemed using the L1 as reasonable and effective.

> Yes, to **foster debate** which they cannot do in the L2 (teacher 24)

Finally, the fifth category had to do with disciplinary issues. In this vein, the need to use Spanish to settle disciplinary matters was emphasized, as this kind of class situations can leave no space for ambiguity or misunderstandings. These quotations illustrate the two categories:

> Yes, especially when we have students who misbehave. For **discipline** purposes (teacher 11)

> To **tell them off** seriously! (teacher 26)

> When students are **not paying attention** (teacher 4)

It is worth pointing out that some of the participants were reluctant to use the L1, especially the youngest participants, with only one year of teaching experience, who would accept it only as a last resort.

> I think sometimes the L1 is needed in the classroom but **it is best to use different strategies** to help students to understand before using the L1 (teacher 34)

> Yes, but **not that much**, because in terms of teaching English students need to have as much contact as possible with the language they are learning (teacher 22)

> I think it would be useful, but **it is not a good idea** using it as the main one because the students would get used to speaking and listening just the L1 and maybe the forget the L2 (teacher 34)

A native English speaker in this last group (sufficiently proficient in Spanish to resort to it when necessary) was also less than keen on using the L1:

> **Depends.** My L1 is not the same (Spanish) as students' L1 and sometimes it might cause some misunderstandings. I would say I'm more against it, that's why I wanted to attend this session to maybe change my opinion (teacher 27; native speaker of English)

This teacher seemed to be aware of the controversy surrounding L1 use, but showed an open-minded attitude, and was willing to change opinion.

The teachers' next task was to list five situations individually in which they usually resorted to the L1. It is worth pointing out that there were no representatives of the exclusive-L2-use end of the continuum proposed by Macaro (2009), as all the participants recalled some situations in which they used the L1. Once they had answered this question, the participants were asked to split into groups and to work together with those who were teaching at the same educational level. They were asked to endeavour to reach an agreement about the main five class situations in which they actually used the L1 and to put them in order of preference or importance. Six groups were formed whose consensus viewpoints are apportioned in Table 1.

Table 1. Consensus viewpoints about when to use the L1.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. When you are trying to explain the meaning of an abstract word. 2. When teaching a subject (e.g. maths) and students don't have previous knowledge of the subject vocabulary. 3. After giving/clarifying/ modelling instructions and a student doesn't understand. 4. To express their emotions / feelings.	1. Clarify instructions. 2. Clarify rules the first day of class. 3. To deal with misbehaviour and to scold students. 4. To give feedback about mistakes, to talk about needs and to clarify doubts.	1. When a kid struggles to understand a word or a concept and we have tried out many strategies and none of them have worked. 2. When we need to call a disruptive student's attention because it's being repetitive. 3. When we need to send messages or important information to the students and to their parents.
Group 4	**Group 5**	**Group 6**
1. To teach vocabulary; to save time. 2. To give instructions; ensuring students understand what they have to do. 3. For administrative purposes; to deal with the syllabus. 4. To give cultural information (idioms and expressions). 5. To connect with low-level students and get them comfortable. 6. To do translation activities; highlight language differences, functions and syntax.	1. Vocabulary translation / false friends. 2. Comparing language structures English-Spanish. 3. Solving conflicts. 4. Some grammar concepts.	1. Clarify words/concepts (proverbs). 2. Break the ice. 3. Set rules (classroom instructions). 4. Student-student interactions (pair group or small group). 5. Teach grammar rules.

When comparing the main situations provided by the 6 groups, 5 main categories arose (see table 1). Their classification indicates that the most habitual situation is related to using the L1 to explain vocabulary and concepts, especially those that are more abstract and therefore more cognitively demanding. In fact, 5 out of the

6 groups ranked this situation as the most important function of the first language. The teachers posited two main reasons for using the L1 in these situations: either to save time, or as a last option once other strategies had not worked out.

The second main situation was for clarifying instructions related both to the activities to be carried out in class and for setting rules regarding the functioning of the class. This situation was mentioned among the predominant functions of the L1 by 4 of the groups. The L1 was also recurrent when dealing with discipline issues in the class. This was pointed out by 3 of the groups and had to do with the use of the first language to tackle conflicts that may erupt in class and in which there should be no space for ambiguities or doubts. The last situation that was widely supported by the participants referred to the fostering of students' metalinguistic awareness by comparing their two languages (even using translations to foster interlanguage comparisons) and the use of Spanish to explain grammar rules.

There was general agreement among the 6 groups about the aforementioned 4 situations. The last situation in which the L1 is regularly used was connected to its effectiveness in low proficiency classes in order to connect with those students whose command of English is not good enough to deal with diverse situations in the L2. It was pointed out that using the L1 helped the teachers to make students feel more at ease. This particular context was widely quoted when the teachers were invited to highlight situations individually but, curiously enough, it was upstaged by other situations when they worked in groups to decide on the most important ones.

DISCUSSION

Macaro (1997) states that the exclusive or near-exclusive use of the L2 is not habitual, a possible exception being those contexts in which learners have mixed L1s. The other exception that comes to mind would be the case of those native speaker teachers who do not speak the L1 of the students. Nevertheless, in most primary and secondary schools throughout the world students and teachers share at least the official language (or one of the official languages), and therefore the aforementioned contexts are not the norm but rather the exception.

Using the L1 seems to be commonplace in CLIL contexts, and analysis of the individual answers provided by the in-service CLIL teachers participating in

this study bears this out. However, this analysis also indicates that there seems to be quite a bit of variation concerning L1 use, as the answers and comments throughout the seminar illustrate that the amount of first language use varies from one teacher to another. In any case, some commonalities are brought to light. The first has to do with dimensions of pedagogical communication which teachers deem necessary to provide the scaffolding students need to learn. These results tally with those obtained by Littlewood and Yu (2011) when they asked undergraduates about their former secondary education teachers' use of the L1 in the foreign language classroom. Ensuring understanding (especially for explaining difficult grammar and the meaning of unknown words) and maintaining discipline are key functions attributed by both the teachers participating in this study and Littlewood and Yu's students. These L1-use purposes were also detected by Macaro (1997), who observed the importance of the L1 for improving understanding and discipline.

The data gathered in this study also seem to coincide with Littlewood and Yu (2011, p. 71) when they state that the use of translation to clarify the meaning of words, structures or utterances can be very effective while allowing students "to progress more quickly to the more important stage of active use and internalization." The Colombian teachers' comments also coincide with Macaro's (2009, p. 49) statement that "banning the first language from the communicative second language classroom may in fact be reducing the cognitive and metacognitive opportunities to learners." Based on evidence, this author affirms that items of vocabulary might be better learnt by providing first-language equivalents rather than by providing second-language definitions or paraphrases.

The use of the L1 to tackle disciplinary issues is also worth mentioning. It is important to remember that the vast majority of participants in the seminar were secondary education teachers, where this kind of problem may be more habitual. It is more than likely that this would not be so preeminent if the participants were university level teaching staff, as discipline is not usually an issue at tertiary level. As Smit and Dafouz (2012) put it: "In contrast to compulsory education, students at university have reached advanced levels of cognitive development and decided to further their education of their own accord. Furthermore, they have proven themselves successful learners and have accumulated a considerable amount of learning experience and expertise." (p. 3)

However, there are some differences between this study and those by Macaro (1997) and Littlewood and Yu (2011). In the latter studies, establishing constructive relationships (e.g. talking to a student about a personal matter) was one of the main functions of the L1, whereas this was not mentioned by the CLIL teachers participating in this study. This difference between CLIL and non-CLIL (EFL) classes clearly needs further research.

Another difference between this study and previous ones can be found when we compare it to Kim and Elder's (2005). These two authors concluded that native-speaker teachers have also often been found to use a high proportion of L1, as their non-native colleagues do. However, this is not the case in the present study. There is a need therefore to analyse if there is also a difference between CLIL and EFL contexts in this respect, although it should be mentioned that there were just two native English speakers in the present study. It would be interesting to examine whether these differences are maintained with a larger sample of native speakers involved in CLIL programs.

Certain other aspects are not covered by this study. The most outstanding one is that it is based on self-perceptions or beliefs about the use of the L1, which is why it should be complemented by classroom observation, as this would allow us to check whether these beliefs do actually match the teachers' everyday practices in CLIL classes. It has also to be considered that a 50-minute seminar is not enough to delve into the many issues that surround the use of the L1 in CLIL contexts. More time needs to be devoted to this issue, as its importance (attested by the habitual use of the L1 among the participants in this study) demands further consideration. It would also be interesting to analyse whether CLIL teachers suffer from a sense of guilt at "not using the target language enough", as Littlewood and Yu (2011, p. 64) put it, or whether they accept its use as a natural teaching practice that needs to be carried out in some particular classroom situations. In any case, my results seem to indicate that the participants agree that the L1 is a valuable teaching resource that bears constructive implications for L2 teaching and learning.

In Colombia, as is the case in many other parts of the world, there has been a great interest in the development of bilingual programs in the last few years due to the increasing role of English as lingua franca. Truscott de Mejía *et al.* (2006) researched bilingual programs undertaken in 36 institutions and concluded that there is tension when it comes to using the L1 in the FL classroom. The

general trend was that there was a clear division between languages so that each teacher and subject was identified with either Spanish or English. This was aimed at creating a monolingual environment of interaction, but it prevents students from taking advantage of their L1 capabilities to support the learning of English, despite a general trend in these schools to integrate curricular aspects in the two languages and to foster collaboration between the different teachers (Truscott de Mejía *et al.*, 2006, p. 95). As we saw above (Kang, 2008; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Swain *et al.*, 2011), top-down decisions regarding the exclusive use of the L2 seem not be followed by teachers in many different contexts and the presence of the L1 is in fact quite widespread. However, the lack of attention to the L1 in teacher training seems to be quite universal, too (Méndez & Pavón, 2012).

Dörnyei (2009) makes it clear that "untutored learning through simple exposure to natural language input does not seem to lead to sufficient progress in L2 attainment for most school learners" (p. 35), which is why the main tenets of methods such as the direct, the audio-lingual, and the total physical response or the communicative methods do not lead to the expected results. Since research has shown that teachers cannot rely on purely implicit (unconscious and automatic learning of the foreign language) approaches, the role to be played by the L1 in explicit (conscious) teaching and how to embed it within a communicative approach must be addressed. Teachers need to be informed about how to deal with the explicit-implicit interface in both foreign language learning and CLIL contexts, but so far little is available on how to boost this interface through L1 use in a principled manner. We need to make headway towards the formulation of some guiding principles for L1 use, which would for example include the teaching of formulaic language (such as idioms, collocations, conventionalised expressions, etc.) as a featured component. Teachers in this study were well aware of the pervasiveness of formulaic language in their classes, which leads to the conclusion that a selection of phrases should be practiced in each CLIL subject. Moreover, as Storch and Aldosari (2010) affirm:

> The findings also show that the use of the L1 by the learners seems to serve important cognitive, social and pedagogical functions. This is of course not to say learners should be encouraged to use L1 extensively. Rather, the findings suggest that to restrict or prohibit the use of L1 in L2 classes is to deny learners the opportunity of using an important tool. (p. 372)

While working on cognitively demanding tasks in CLIL, students will ineluctably fall back on their L1 and the prohibition of this practice may have an unwanted side effect in the form of a forbidden-fruit effect: banning its use may make it even more alluring precisely because it is not allowed. CLIL students make connections between their L1 and L2, and teachers should take advantage of this and apply pedagogical strategies that help students enhance their learning.

Conclusions

"Against a backdrop of almost universal agreement that teachers should make maximal use of the target language" (Littlewood & Yu, 2011, p. 73), the use of the first language, if judicious, can serve to scaffold language and content learning in CLIL contexts, as long as learning is maintained primarily through the L2. In fact, the results obtained in this study indicate that teachers actually make use of such strategies based on their intuitions, but they are implemented with little systematic reflection on their everyday practices. More research is needed on how the L1 can be used/is being used in CLIL contexts to maximize L2 language and content learning, particularly empirically based projects that should lead teachers to become aware of their code-switching and translanguaging practices and to reflect on the reasons for their choices. Research-based guidelines are needed, because the unguided use of the teachers' and students' first language may lead to undesired outcomes. I am here advocating for a principled use of the L1 (on principled uses of the L1 and target language in immersion programs, see Swain & Lapkin, 2013), rather than a randomized practice based on experience and beliefs, as currently seems to be the case. Despite this study being focused on a particular context (Colombia), similar results could be expected in many other countries. The real challenge is then to try to specify the nature of optimal cooperation between the L1 and the L2 by pinpointing how systematically and directly teachers need to code-switch, so that its optimal use (Macaro, 2009) helps to enhance foreign language and content learning.

As for further research, it would be interesting to compare EFL and CLIL teachers' use of the L1 to analyse whether the type of approach used has an impact on L1 usage in class or whether this is similar irrespective of the approach. When compared to Littlewood and Yu's (2011) results, ours seem to point to a commonality with some minor differences, which would imply that similar guidelines would be valid for both approaches (EFL and CLIL).

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