Language and Content in Higher Education

Lenguaje y contenido en educación superior

Língua e conteúdo no ensino superior

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Introduction

Language is a crucial element in not only the exchange of ideas but in collaboration and the construction of new knowledge. In the context of foreign or additional language learning, English has come to occupy an almost unique position as a leading global language; *global English* in a sociolinguistic context referring almost literally to the use of English as a global language (see papers in Cancino, Dam, & Jæger, 2011; Graddol, 2006; Hashim & Leitner, 2014). The effects of globalization are making the need to understand and use English increasingly more of a need than a mere desire—and no least in higher educational institutions (HEIs) worldwide. Indeed, "globalization and the Information Age have placed higher education at a crossroads …. Universities worldwide are clearly in a state of rapid change, the language landscapes are changing, and the stakes are high" (Marsh, Pavón Vázquez, & Frigols Martín, 2013, pp. 9–10), with the demands for innovation in an international educational marketplace creating unprecedented competition. The many degree programs in non-majority English-speaking countries that are now delivered either completely or partially in English are clear evidence for this (Björkman, 2011; Carloni, 2013b; Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015).

Thus, the successful use of English in academic settings has become one of the greatest challenges for learners in higher education. As a result, it is no surprise that in many universities around the world are teaching English to students as a second, third, or foreign language. Yet the non-linguistic challenges of university learning—such as the use of higher order thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and professional communication skills, alongside the content-knowledge demands of degree programs—remain. It is critical that students, if they are to become bilingual professionals in their respective fields, be prepared to manage both language and content knowledge effectively. Moreover, an exclusive focus on language, even "academic language", too often ignores the need to apply this language through the use of twenty-first century skills (JaleniauskienI:, 2016).

The language courses offered by HEIs, supposedly to provide learners with the tools needed to meet these challenges, too often

come up short. In many cases, English is taught separately, divorced from the communicative needs of students' content-oriented degree programs—or content courses are simply taught in English, with the expectation that students will somehow "magically" acquire the necessary professional communicative competences in the language. This is where problems arise: with the belief that the teaching of content and language are being integrated when, in fact, they are not. This challenge has led researchers and practitioners to explore innovative alternatives that truly integrate language and content in the formation of future professionals.

Content and language learning in higher education

Numerous pedagogical approaches and methodologies have sought to address both language and content in higher educational settings, including Content-Based Instruction (CBI) (Costa & Coleman, 2010; McDougald, 2007a), English-Mediated Instruction (EMI) (Corrales, Paba Rey, Lourdes, & Escamilla, 2016; Toh, 2016), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Evans & Morrison, 2011; Tatzl, 2011), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Carloni, 2013a; Chostelidou & Griva, 2014; Costa & Coleman, 2010; Fortanet-Gómez, 2013). Such approaches have been used individually or through blends of two or more, such as initiatives to combine aspects of CLIL with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Ruiz-Garrido & Gómez, 2009; Taillefer, 2013).

While there is debate over the nature and relationship of approaches that explicitly seek to integrate content and language learning, such as CLIL or CBI, in general these types of approaches are centered on the notion that students improve by not merely "learning" but "using" the target or vehicular language to meet immediate communication and learning needs—much as with a first language. However, if such approaches are to deliver on this promise in university settings, teaching faculty must not only themselves be prepared linguistically, and must not only have the knowledge and skills to teach their subject in the vehicular language, but also the knowledge and skills to support the development of learners' professional communicative competences in that language.

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Conclusion

Yet though debates on how to best to achieve the effective integration of content and language teaching have been going on for decades, it must be admitted that few firm conclusions and little consensus have been reached. Nevertheless, it has become a fact that English has increasingly become part of the lives of university students, faculty, and administrators worldwide—or needs to become so, at the risk of their being disadvantaged in an increasingly globalized economy and society. Regardless of the approach taken to addressing this issue, there are five key areas in which content and language educators must be conversant (McDougald, 2007b). These areas would provide all practitioners with a starting point to reflect on when considering how to approach language and content in the classroom.

1. Content area: educators must be well-versed in the particular content subject area that they teach.
2. Pedagogy: educators must be prepared to implement strategies that provide students with opportunities to access content in pedagogically valuable ways and employ a range of evaluation options to evaluate both content learning and language learning.
3. Second Language Acquisition (SLA): educators need to understand how learner language acquisition develops and evolves over time so as to facilitate the process.
4. Language Teaching: teachers need to know how to support the use and development of the the "four skills" (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) of language in their classes.
5. Materials selection and adaptation: educators must be able to select and, as necessary, adapt a variety of methods, approaches, instructional materials to meet the language/linguistic needs of their students.

Although there are others that are also relevant and necessary to consider, these five clearly cover the areas/aspects that are often excluded or not seriously considered when managing content and language. If considered and employed in an environment that caters to

CLIL or CBI they serve as a basis for towards a successful integration of content and language in HEIs.

In this issue

The articles in this issue of the *Latin American Journal of Content and Language Integrated Learning* (LACLIL, Vol 10, No. 1, 2017) are all focused on the integration of content and language in HEIs. Perez & Ferrer (2017) explore the use of English with health sciences (medicine and dentistry) undergraduate programs in Colombia, choosing a self-reflection model encouraging learners to self-assess their learning progress. Keogh (2017) examined the use of a smartphone-based instant messaging service (WhatsApp) on interactions within the group of learners, as well as how and student reflections support effective scaffolding, increased participation, and the creation of a learning community.

On different note, Kewara, (2017) considers the need to prepare teachers (in Thailand) to both content and language successfully, looking at ways to increase content teachers' confidence with using English as a medium of instruction and transform monolingual classrooms into integrated bilingual learning spaces. Similarly, Montoya and Salamanca (2017) look at the internationalization of a Colombian HEI's curriculum, with a focus on training content teachers in communicative competences in English and the use of a CLIL approach to design content activities through collective team work.

Finally, Bernal- Castañeda, (2017) analyzes the obstacles faced by adult learners in vocational training programs, as well as the growing motivational, personal, and affective difficulties encountered in the English-language classroom in Spain.

Overall, this issue of LACLIL presents five innovative contributions to the debate on how to most successfully integrate content and language in higher education—and if there is perhaps one thing that can be agreed in this debate, it is that there is no "secret recipe" for making this integration a reality, nor only one approach or method that can achieve it. We trust this issue's contributions provide fresh ideas and

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inspirations that will help the many CLIL-oriented initiative ongoing worldwide move closer to meeting their goals.

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