

# How can CLIL play a role in helping bicultural heritage language learners integrate their two languages and cultures?

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**Abstract:** As a methodology the CLIL approach has not been widely examined in terms of its potential in the context of supplementary schools for heritage language education and research in the area is limited. In the UK, although bilingual educational programmes and CLIL have attracted interest, there has been little research involving languages other than English, especially with regards to heritage languages (Charalampidi & Hammond, 2017). Through a review of the literature this paper examines how supplementary schools in the UK that practice the education principles and objectives of the dual focus of CLIL can influence and shape heritage language learner's cultural identity as well as their heritage language ability.

**Keywords:** CLIL, Heritage language, Bilingual bicultural children, Identity

## 1. Introduction

As a methodology the CLIL approach has not been widely applied or examined in terms of its potential in the context of supplementary schools for heritage language education and research in the area is limited. In the UK, although bilingual educational programmes and CLIL have attracted interest, there has been little research involving languages other than English, especially with regards to heritage languages (Charalampidi & Hammond, 2017). This review examines two supplementary schools in the UK run by volunteers. One teaches the Japanese language through level and age divided language lessons with a focus on cultural education to mixed-race children born to English and Japanese parents. The other teaches Arabic language and culture through a CLIL based 'Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project' to children of Arabic backgrounds. The paper will examine how a CLIL approach can help bicultural heritage language learners integrate their two languages and cultures.

## 2. What is CLIL?

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) originally came from Europe and is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. Coyle et al. (2010) state that "CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (p.1). They emphasize the importance of cognitive engagement that facilitates effective learning. Activities such as group work, collaboration, problem solving, and questioning help students learn the process of "constructing knowledge which is built on their interaction with the world" (p.29). The four C's of culture, cognition, content, and communication can be considered the cornerstones of CLIL. These allow for a classroom setting that engages the learner in an environment with clear content and linguistic objectives. CLIL involves learning to use language appropriately whilst using language to learn effectively. There are three kinds of language states that need to be executed for learning to occur within the CLIL classroom. Coyle et al. (2010) talk of a language triptych that materials used within a CLIL class should be based on. They are:

1. Language of learning: This is the learning of key words and phrases to understand the content of the lesson.

2. Language for learning: This concerns the language students will need to execute classroom activities.
3. Language through learning: This allows room for the unpredictable language learning which may occur as the course progresses.

Based on the four C's approach, CLIL may be considered to be too cognitively challenging for younger learners (older children come more equipped with more advanced cognitive skills) and that more scaffolding or language support may be needed for young language learners. Marsh (2000) argues that CLIL can offer young language learners more natural opportunities to learn a language because the children can forget that they are learning a language and solely focus on the content. It can also provide pupils not only with language skills but also with content and knowledge which can prepare them for a globalized world.

It can be argued that educational approaches involving additional languages with younger children are already CLIL like in their focus and that this has gone unnoticed with many educators (Marsh, 2012). Coyle et al. (2010) emphasize that "it is often hard to distinguish CLIL from standard forms of good practice in early language learning" and how for children of a foreign language the "main-focus is on the doing – be it playing, singing, drawing, building models, or other activities" (p. 17). However, regardless of the age of the learner, sufficient teacher training and knowledge of CLIL is important for its successful implementation.

### *3. The Heritage Language Speaker: some definitions*

What we mean when we talk about the heritage language speaker has proved to be a polarizing topic and there are a number of definitions within the literature (Wiley & Valdes, 2000). In a narrow definition the heritage speaker is classified as a person who has grown up learning the heritage language and has some proficiency in it (Fishman, 2006). Kagan & Dillion (2008) describe the heritage speaker as someone who grows up with a particular family language in the home that is different from the dominant language in the country, they reside in. They concede, however, that there is no universally accepted definition. Similarly, Valdes (2001) defines the heritage speaker as someone who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and who speaks, or at least understands, the language and is to some degree bilingual in the home language. A broader view by Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) describes heritage language learners' as "a heterogeneous group ranging from fluent native speakers to non-speakers who may be generations removed, but who may feel culturally connected to the language" (p.221).

The office for national statistics (2018) reported at the time of its publication that 34% of children born in the UK had at least one parent from another country. These children can therefore fit the definition of a heritage language speaker through the non-British born parent. In addition, 20% of children in UK primary schools are categorized as speakers of English as an additional language (Wilson, 2019). As a result of such statistics research on heritage speakers has rapidly developed over the past two decades. There has however, been little research on what is the best methodology and approach when it comes to teaching children from such backgrounds.

#### *3.1 Heritage Language education methodology and the potential of CLIL*

In recent years there has been a considerable amount of investigation and effort into examining effective pedagogical approaches for the teaching of heritage languages. Anderson (2009) suggests that CLIL can play a significant role in contributing to the development of such pedagogies. The needs of heritage and minority language learners' can be described as different and a 'foreign language approach' or a 'mother tongue' approach may not be appropriate. A 'foreign language approach' assumes that the heritage language learner or speaker is the same as that of a monolingual learner of a foreign language and the latter does not take into consideration that the heritage language learner's exposure to the target language may be limited resulting in passive proficiency (Anderson, 2008).

A heritage language speakers' language ability has its roots in the need to interact and communicate with family members and friends who speak this language either as a mother tongue or a heritage language. However, heritage language learners need age relevant material that can stimulate and be cognitively challenging if they are to bridge the gap from using the language socially to using it more academically as in Cummins (1984) BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) to CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) distinction. Anderson (2009) suggests that "courses in which medium is prioritized over message or where the emphasis is on performing trivial everyday transactions are not appropriate for learners from bilingual backgrounds and risk undermining confidence and demotivating learners" (p.125).

CLIL helps to the student to move away from formulaic functional or situational language usage as in BICS towards "a genuine engagement with culture and provides a basis for enhanced literacy development" (Anderson, 2009: p.130). In terms of Coyle's 4Cs framework (Coyle, 2007: 51), it 'puts culture at the core and intercultural understanding pushes the boundaries towards alternative agendas such as transformative pedagogies, global citizenship, student voice and 'identity investment'. Thus, it has the potential to break down barriers between the teaching of foreign and minority languages, and to contribute to the development of an integrated and genuinely inclusive languages curriculum.

#### 4. CLIL within supplementary schools: Two cases studies

Supplementary schools were setup primarily in response to newly arrived immigrants (and now international families) who were concerned that their children were losing the active use of their heritage language as they began schooling which created concern about a weakening of cultural identity. Below are two examples of supplementary schools that can illustrate how CLIL can play a role in helping bicultural heritage language learners integrate their two languages and cultures.

##### 4.1 *The Little Bears Club*

The author visited 'The Little Bears' Club' which is a volunteer-based UK supplementary school that was established in September 2007. Within the study Kavanagh (2019) aimed to examine how a CLIL approach can work in the context of heritage language education through interviews with the school teachers, the pupils, and their parents. The following section gives brief review of this study.

The school is run entirely by volunteers and the school's main objective is to provide support in learning Japanese culture and language for Japanese parents and their children. The school encourages young children to learn Japanese culture and language through storybooks, nursery rhymes and various seasonal festivals. The children are aged between 4 to early teens. The voluntary teachers at the school are also mothers of bilingual bicultural children and some of them may even attend the school. The classes that the school offers are divided according to a child's level in Japanese in addition to their age. A description of the classes the school offers is given below.

- **Reception level children:** These classes aim for the children to be exposed to and have fun with the heritage language. No textbook is used.
- **Based on the Japanese elementary first year grade.** Use textbooks.
- **Based on the Japanese elementary second year grade.** Use textbooks.
- **\*GCSE classes** Aimed at students who want to take the GCSE exam in the future. Aimed at 2<sup>nd</sup> year elementary students and up. Includes higher-level conversation. The school's website suggests that the students discuss contemporary topics.

\*GCSE stands for General Certificate in Secondary Education and is an academic qualification in specific subjects taken in the UK in year 11 (around 15-16 years of age)

The pre-school / 1st year elementary school age classes observed by Kavanagh (2019) had 3 students per class with children aged between 5-7. The focus of the lesson was on counting, singing the days of the week and doing pronunciation drills such as sa さ、shi し tsu つ、se

せ、so そ. Classes pitched at the Japanese 2<sup>nd</sup> year elementary proficiency were also quite teacher centered although the students could use Japanese and express their likes and dislikes very fluently. The class was very structured and provided the pupils with a lot of scaffolding for them to execute the activities carried out in the class.

Regardless of the class level, the observed 45 minute classes included the theme of *Setsubun* (節分) a ritual to drive away the evil of the former year and drive away evil spirits / demons. Cultural activities at the school were aligned to the events that take place in Japan or otherwise a general demonstration or practice of Japanese cultural activities takes place. At the time of observations conducted by Kavanagh (2019) in early February, the theme of all the 45-minute morning classes was predominantly on *Setsubun* (節分). After lunch the cultural activity was the actual practice of *setsubun*. Therefore, the language learned in the morning was put into practice in the afternoon. In the actual *setsubun* activity the children made oni (鬼) masks and threw beans at the oni (the parents). Throughout this activity the children were only spoken to in Japanese and were encouraged to use Japanese the whole time, although inevitably they lapsed into English when conversing with each other.

When there are no cultural events assigned to a particular date the pupils take part in other cultural activities such as *kamishibai* (紙芝居) or picture story telling whereby pupils re-create famous stories and even draw the pictures themselves. Some even create their own stories. All of this is done of course, in Japanese. On other occasions, students present about their hobbies in Japanese, with some pupils demonstrating and presenting about topics such as karate. The older children or those aiming to take the GCSE examination usually do these activities as they tend to be cognitively challenging.

Unlike immersion schools the education principles and objectives this school adopts reflects the dual focus of CLIL whereby the foreign language is employed for the learning and teaching of both content (in this case Japanese culture) and the Japanese language. Kavanagh (2019) found that the teachers' goals were to maintain and improve the children's heritage language level and get them exposed to and be involved in Japanese culture through an emphasis on authentic materials as well as textbooks. Although they had no clear teaching philosophy, they all expressed a desire to learn more about CLIL and adopt the methodology in their own classes. The pupils suggested that their goals were to speak to the Japanese parent and grandparents via skype or facetime. They also wanted to get the GCSE qualification. They enjoy the classes, although they find kanji difficult. They find the school to have a fun atmosphere and enjoy being involved in authentic Japanese cultural activities and being around other bilingual bicultural children. The children said the school helps their sense of identity with their heritage culture and language by participating in cultural events. The children are proud of being different and stated that they feel they belong to a unique club that is different to 'normal monolingual British kids.'

#### 4.2 Peace School

The Peace school is a community based 'complementary' school run by volunteers on Saturdays and situated in the London borough of Brent, North West London. The school teaches Arabic language and culture and Islamic studies in addition to offering a range of cultural and sporting activities. Students attending the school range from 5-16 years of age and come from different ethnic groups such as Asian, African, and European. The mission statement of the school is "To enable young people mainly of Arab background to experience high quality Arabic language and culture teaching which develops confidence and gives them a sense of pride and responsibility as bilingual Arabic British individuals."

In a special J-CLIL Tohoku webinar organized by the author, the Peace School head teacher Fatima Khaled (2020) suggested that Arabic heritage and culture is invisible and not recognized in British mainstream education and curriculum. When Arabic heritage language learners become teenagers, she suggested that they feel their heritage language is not recognized and therefore not important. Many of the students at Peace school come from differing Arabic speaking backgrounds and speak in a wide variety of informal dialects. The school aims to teach its students formal Arabic and link it to Arabic culture.

Like 'The Little Bears club' Japanese supplementary school, the school does provide GCSE

classes and offers a textbook approach to do this. However, as Khaled (2020) points out, students end up leaving the school if they are just studying for GCSE examinations as they do not consider it engaging and find classes boring and/or duty-bound study. Fatima states that such a teaching approach is not linked to the Arabic language, culture or to the students or pupils themselves. The school therefore also takes on a CLIL approach.

Goldsmiths, University of London, created a project entitled ‘Critical Connections: Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project’ (Anderson & Macleroy, 2016) where the emphasis on teaching is a move away from the narrow functional emphasis in foreign and community language learning towards one which is more personal, more culturally connected and more engaging for learners. The Multilingual Digital Storytelling project has been implemented in classes conducted by Fatima Khaled at the Peace school with the help of Goldsmiths university. These classes aim to explore the concept of how a cross-curricular visual arts focus could be introduced to Arabic language-and-culture learning and what effect this might have on student engagement and achievement.

The activities and classroom practice in the ‘Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project’, like CLIL, reflects a dual focus on both content and language, and focuses on secondary language learners. Multilingual digital storytelling is seen as a form of life writing about personal and shared experiences. Pupils learn how to develop skills in using media tools to create a multilingual digital story, learn about pre-production, production, post-production and how to present multilingual digital stories to a range of audiences.

In a study conducted by Abdelhadi et al. (2020), the Peace school was used as part of a small-scale qualitative research study based on teaching of a unit based on the multilingual digital storytelling project. The paper quotes Fatima Khaled as saying that she was “struck by the way students were able to connect with the art-work intellectually, emotionally, empathetically and how they drew inspiration from it to speak out on matters they cared about such as bullying, discrimination and poverty” (p. 284).

Khaled (2020) suggests that the study of visual art through a CLIL and project-based Learning method (PBL) can help students to:

1. Bring context and purpose to language learning
2. Foster learner agency, creative thinking, and voice
3. Develop appreciation of heritage culture
4. Develop pride in bilingual identity
5. Unlock personal, emotional, multisensory, and aesthetic aspects of language learning
6. Develop understanding of multimodal design and intertextuality

Many of these attributes are reflected in the key principles of CLIL, such as the four C’s, the and the language triptych. Abdelhadi et al. (2020) suggest that this “cross-curricular approach, applied on the basis of transformative, learner-centred pedagogical principles, can yield rich rewards in terms of art appreciation, critical and creative thinking and language-and-culture development and how this can benefit foreign and heritage language learners at an intermediate stage in their learning” (p.285).

## **5 Conclusion**

This paper examined how the CLIL approach for young heritage languages at a supplementary / complementary school can give them a voice in a mainstream culture that may not recognize their heritage language or culture within the education curriculum. In learning a language by doing approach the children can develop their language skills while at the same time appreciating a deeper understanding of their heritage language culture. Both supplementary / complementary schools documented in this paper produced students very confident, positive and proud of their double identities and that learning about their cultural heritage has led them to develop a cultural and intercultural awareness by making explicit the differences between their two cultures. Although there needs to be more research conducted these case studies can provide us with a deeper understanding for the potential of CLIL in supplementary schools not just in the UK but also in Japan as an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of heritage languages.

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