The Cultural aspects for Vocabulary Building in a CLIL classroom

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Page No. 1

Abstract

The aim of this article is both to explore the integrated nature of culture in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classes and to provide a more in-depth understanding of including cultural into the learners understanding of content and language- related vocabulary. Cultural awareness is the key in the CLIL approach, which forms the basis of intercultural understanding and in the enhancing of deep learning. For learners to understand the content and language provided, profound analysis of the new information is needed along with drawing connections with the already known information that shall be further boosted with cultural sensitivity. This article shall tap on the importance of culture, moving into a brief description of the position of CLIL in the Indian context and finally diving into the aspect of culture observed in the vocabulary building of the vocational and skill development classes, wherein the approach of CLIL was tested. The article shall conclude with sharing the steps taken to include cultural sensitivity in the classes for vocabulary building. This study is a part of the research study worked upon to test the scope of CLIL in Vocational and Skill Education in the State of Assam (India).

Keywords: Culture, CLIL, Intercultural understanding, Cultural sensitivity, Vocabulary Building, Observation, Inclusion

I.   Introduction

This article presents an exploration about the cultural element for vocational development in the CLIL classrooms used for an intervention study. The vocational and skill area covered in the research is 'Aviation'. The work is part of a larger research study into the reactions of learners towards the CLIL approach in the vocational and skill sector. It was carried out in a vocational institution[1] in Assam (India), with students from the aviation sector.

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

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[1] Vocational and Skill development institutions are technical centers that educate and skill learners in technical areas that help them in their specific jobs. The institution that was a part of the study is Jettwings Institution for the Aviation sector who run courses under Government of India programs that promote Vocational and Skill development.

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Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 2

languages." (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1). Fernandez wrote that "CLIL instruction accommodates the 4C's curriculum by Coyle et al. who presented the four important areas of focus in CLIL and gave a clear picture of what a CLIL classroom shall bring forward" (Fernandez, 2014, p. 27-49). The 4C's curriculum includes Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture, each contributing towards the learner's development.

II.   Culture in CLIL

"Sociocultural theories[2] of learning suggest that language, thinking, and culture are learned through social interaction and that all three are intertwined and interdependent. These ideas also show how learning a subject involves learning the language of a subject and how each subject has its own language and 'culture'… So, CLIL teachers are not only teaching information about a subject but also teaching learners to think, write and speak like subject specialists" (Tanner & Dale, 2012, p. 13). The element of culture helps the learners to question the content and the language, to test the reliability of the information, and thus helping to form their understanding. The element of Culture in the 4C's framework helps to process the growth of Cognition, Content, and Communication by enveloping them and making them more acceptable to the learners and their understanding.

Mehitso (2012) had put the focus on culture while discussing the criteria for the development of 'quality CLIL materials'[3]. It was stated that the use of authentic material with cultural connections would help learners build their knowledge and also to research deeper into various areas. Coyle et al. (2010) had also argued for culture by stating that culture is a central tenant of teaching and learning in CLIL. The awareness of culture shall foster Cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding among the learners, which will in turn help to understand the content and build on the language ability of the learners. This notion is similar

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[2] Sociocultural theory works on society and culture together as one. This emerging theory looks at the important contribution that society makes to individual development. Vygotsky (1978) had said that in the sociocultural theory, the mind of the learner is mediated. It was said that human learning is a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society and culture.

[3] Quality CLIL materials according to Mehisto (2012) made the learning intentions and process visible to the students; systematically fosters academic language proficiency; fosters learning skills development and learner autonomy; includes self, peer, and other types of formative assessment; helps create a safe learning environment; fosters cooperative learning; seeks ways of incorporating authentic language and authentic language use; fosters critical thinking; fosters cognitive fluency through scaffolding of content, language, and learning skills development helping students to reach well beyond what they could do on their own; helps to make learning meaningful.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

An International Multidisciplinary Multilingual E-Conference on "INTERROGATING THE IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT: A 360 DEGREE INVESTIGATION"

Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 3

to the notion of the development of language skills[4] wherein each skill helps in the development of the other and none can grow in isolation. For learners to appreciate the content at their disposal, culture and its understanding becomes the key in the CLIL approach.

III. Intervention

The intervention was conducted with 30 students tries to test the Hypothesis that 'Culture plays an important role in the vocabulary building of learners in the vocational and skill development classes, where CLIL is used as the teaching approach'.

The aviation sector:

This sector prepares the learners for the roles of a flight attendant or ground staff personnel. The jargons[5] used during the classes are technical, with limited reference to the learners L1 culture. *Table 1* gives a few aviation words used in the classes and the meanings the learners had drawn based on their cultural understanding.

Table 1		
Serial No.	**Technical word**	**Meaning derived**
1	Alpha	Man
2	Fuselage	Related to blub
3	Lavatory	Something used to pull
4	Baggage	Bags
5	Staff	People
6	Conveyor Belt	A belt
7	Spotlight	Some form of light

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[4] Language skills are common for all languages and needed for the development of a learner's language ability. The four language skills are Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Listening and Reading are the two Receptive skills, giving input to the learners. Speaking and Writing are the two Productive skills that help the learners to produce outputs.

[5] Jargons are technical words or expressions that are used by a given profession or a group of professionals that have their meanings which may differ from the common day meanings of the word or expression.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

An International Multidisciplinary Multilingual E-Conference on "INTERROGATING THE IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT: A 360 DEGREE INVESTIGATION"

Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 4

8	Gauge	Bandage
9	Cabin	Room
10	Cruise	Ship

As observed, the Cultural understanding and influence of the learners' L1 are strong in the understanding of new vocabulary and in using the given words in a content and language platform. Steps that were designed and used in the intervention stage to help learners with the new vocabulary in the CLIL classroom included:

- Draw an image of the word using bilingualism.

In this step, the learners are asked to draw a mental image of the word and express that image using their L1 or the target language. The use of a mental image allows the learners to use their imagination and think beyond the apparent. The choice of bilingualism makes the learners comfortable and helps them to focus more on the meaning of the word.

- Connect the dots of meaning.

After, the mental image is drawn the word in question needs to be seen in terms of its content and the dots of its meaning needs to be connected.

- Use of culture to form the complete picture.

Once, the dots of meaning are connected, the culture of the learner which played a very important role comes into focus again. This time around the culture of the learner will help illustrate the meaning of the word in a complete picture by allowing the word, its meaning and the cultural understanding to work together.

IV. Analysis and Discussion:

The meanings derived by the learners for the new vocabulary in the intervention were all influenced by their cultural understanding of L1 and their prior knowledge. The learners let

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

An International Multidisciplinary Multilingual E-Conference on "INTERROGATING THE IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT: A 360 DEGREE INVESTIGATION"

Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 5

their cultural environment direct their understanding of a new word without even giving it much thought. The word 'Alpha' was thought to be 'Man' because in the cultural setting of the learners, Alpha in its pronunciation sounds strong and masculine. Hence, culturally the word will in some way be related to a man. 'Fuselage' was thought to be related to a blub because of the use of the word fuse at the prefix. Fuse in the cultural context of the learners was related to bulbs and hence the word Fuselage was deemed as something related to the use or mechanics of a bulb. 'Lavatory' was culturally related to a lever by the learners and hence the meaning drawn was 'something used to pull'. 'Baggage' was an easy one as the word bag is culturally the same everywhere and so the meaning of a bag was synonymously passed on to baggage. 'Staff' is again a very mundane word used in every culture to mean people and the learners found no trouble in easily relating the two words together. The other word 'Conveyor Belt' has two parts to it and the learners depend on the known part of the word to draw the meaning of the full word based on the cultural use of the known word. Therefore, 'belt' a known word means a strap used to tighten things automatically makes the meaning conveyer belt to a tool used to tighten things for the learners. 'Spotlight' again has two parts to it, the light part works for the learners as the cultural reference is the same and this adds to the meaning of the word. 'Gauge' culturally for the students refers to a bandage used for severe wounds and that's the reason why the meaning is kept the same even in the aviation content. 'Cabin' refers to a space or a room for the learners which is not wrong in the broader understanding of the word. 'Cruise' in layman terms refers to a ship and that is the same cultural reference that the learners draw and use to understand the technical aviation term.

The influence of the learners' culture is dominant in the Table 1. According to observations, the learners use their own cultural identity, understanding, and sensitivity to connect to a new word which may not even have occurred once in their L1 interactions. The use of linking the new word to the closest possible cultural understanding may be based on the tone of the word, the feel the word gives, the image the word draws and narrowest similarity it may have with the words that are part of the learners' L1 vocabulary. "CLIL offers …all youngsters, regardless of

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

An International Multidisciplinary Multilingual E-Conference on "INTERROGATING THE IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT: A 360 DEGREE INVESTIGATION"

Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 6

social and economic positioning, the opportunity to acquire and learn additional languages in a meaningful way" (Moghadam & Fatemipour, 2014, p. 2006).

After the observation was complete and results drawn, an informal discussion was held to understand the results better. The discussion confirmed the hypothesis about Culture playing an important role in the vocabulary building of learners in the vocational and skill development classes, where CLIL is used as the teaching approach.

V.   **Conclusion:**

The inclusion of culture in the CLIL classes is not an option that one can choose but it is a necessity that would support the learners to grasp the new content and language, they would face each day. The start of any new content and introducing of language begins with vocabulary and so the use of culture in vocabulary building gives the learners a better platform to start their learning through the CLIL approach. The study for this article has its limitations as it focuses on just one vocational and skill development sector and learners from a certain geographical area and cultural background. The jargons of the other sectors shall differ, the vocabulary understanding of these learners will be completely different from other learners, and the exposure and cultural understanding of the learners shall heavily affect their vocabulary building in the CLIL classes and in the role of culture to develop the learners content and language ability. Hence, more research is encouraged in order to promote cultural understanding and sensitivity in the classrooms using CLIL as the approach.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

An International Multidisciplinary Multilingual E-Conference on "INTERROGATING THE IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT: A 360 DEGREE INVESTIGATION"

Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 7

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An International Multidisciplinary Multilingual E-Conference on
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Special Issue - Volume.6 Issue 6, June – 2021

Page No. 8