



Language and Content Courses: A Plea for Synergy in Academic Programmes

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Abstract

Traditionally, language courses and content courses have co-existed within academic programmes without being explicitly related to each other. This compartmentalization views language teaching as “practical and technical” and content teaching as “the real intellectual challenge” (Fandrych, 2010). Nevertheless, globalisation and the importance given to the knowledge economy compel the need to reconsider the orientation of academic programmes as a whole, as well as the guiding principles of each course. This necessity also echoes the shift from a traditional knowledge oriented educational philosophy to the importance for students to acquire skills and competences. This approach raises questions in terms of the profile and orientation of academic courses dedicated to foreign language/culture studies. These issues will be illustrated here with a case study, namely a European studies undergraduate programme in Hong Kong combining two majors, social sciences and intensive language learning. This atypical combination is envisioned as a fertile fusion of academic disciplines to support students’ language learning and their motivation. This pedagogical perspective is supported by the dual educational axis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, namely the action-oriented approach and the vision of language learners as social agents as well as the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach.

Keywords: Foreign Language Teaching, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), Cognitive-Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

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Language and Content Courses: A Plea for Synergy in Academic Programmes

Higher education institutions worldwide have been facing the need to reconsider the orientation of academic programmes as a whole, as a result of the introduction of new ideas and educational principles engendered by a fast-changing environment. Globalisation, knowledge-based economy, and internationalisation, set up an international context within which integration, convergence, and participative learning are envisaged as the three key characteristics influencing teaching and learning strategies for “Knowledge Age” organizations (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, p. 2010). In the pursuit of “excellence of education”, teachers are strongly encouraged to rethink their courses in the light of new educational principles and objectives. By embarking on this new academic journey, they have to try to steer the boat in the same direction, that is, all teachers responsible for courses in an academic programme must design the content and format of their courses according to the programme’s overall objectives. One of the major concerns is to reposition and redefine academic programmes and courses by observing the shift from a traditional knowledge-oriented educational philosophy to one that enables students to acquire skills and competences (Cabau, 2014a). At the same time, a call for transdisciplinarity has been recurrently made at Hong Kong Baptist University in order to enhance the coherence of academic programmes (Cabau, 2013).

This article will demonstrate the application of the above-mentioned educational reorientation in a dual-focused academic programme based in Hong Kong. Its peculiarity lies in the combination of social science as the disciplinary core with intensive linguistic training in a foreign language other than English, namely German or French. One of the underpinning principles of the European Studies Programme at Hong Kong Baptist University is the adoption of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to strengthen the coherence of this

academic programme by interrelating content and language teaching. This educational approach also aims to prepare students for their full year compulsory academic stay in the target language country during their third year of study (Cabau, 2013, 2014b). This paper will focus on the CLIL approach in the French stream of this Hong Kong academic programme.

1. Theoretical framework

The need to better coordinate the learning of language and subject matter has been expressed for several decades (e.g., Mohan, 1986), and the integration of language and content instruction has grown in importance since then, in line with the development of the communicative approach of the 1970s. These needs led to the implementation of Content Based Instruction (CBI), i.e., “an approach to language instruction that integrates the presentation of topics or tasks from subject matter classes (e.g., mathematics, social studies) within the context of teaching a second or foreign language” (Crandall & Tucker, 1990, p. 187). CBI can be content-driven, where emphasis is put on the learning of content, or language-driven, where content is the tool for language learning (Met, 2000). Met defined content in content-based programmes as representing “material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and is material that extends beyond the grammar or culture of the target language” (1999, p. 150). CBI, bilingual education, language across the curriculum, and immersion programmes were precursor approaches to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a concept which emerged in the 1990s in Europe. For example, there is no entry for CLIL in the first edition of the *Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning* published in 2000, while there is one for CBI (Byram, 2000). The three methodological pillars of the European Space for Higher Education are “competences as a core objectivity of university education; an action-oriented learning model, and communicative capacity as a complex combination of different types of general and linguistic knowledge and skills” (Ezeiza Ramos, 2009, p. 154).

Marsh (2002, p. 15) defined CLIL and its French acronym EMILE,

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Enseignement de matières par l'intégration d'une langue étrangère, as “any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content” . The European Commission’s education network Eurydice (2006, p. 8) considers CLIL as “a generic term to describe all types of provision in which a second language (a foreign, regional, or minority language and/or another official state language) is used to teach certain subjects in the curriculum other than languages lessons themselves” and in which equal importance is given to the development of proficiency in both the non-language subject and the language in which this is taught. It is interesting to note that on the site of the European Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/>), CLIL was previously defined as an umbrella term embracing *both* learning other content or another subject through the medium of a foreign language (FL), *and* learning a FL by studying the content-based subject. Now, it is defined as “teaching a curricular subject through the medium of a language other than that normally used. The subject can be entirely unrelated to language learning” (European Commission, 2012). It seems that the European Commission now sees CLIL as equivalent to CBI.

But even if CBI and CLIL are sometimes considered synonymous (e.g., Ruiz de Zarobe, 2008), the difference lies in the continuum and the dual importance of language and content (Coyle, 2005), (i.e., the joint role of language and content (Marsh, 2002). Coyle et al. (2010) still subscribe to the double facet of CLIL, i.e., the “additional language” in CLIL is used for the learning and teaching of both content *and* language, even if CLIL is content-driven. Because of “the joint pursuance of two sets of goals – the acquisition of knowledge and skills in a given content domain and, in parallel, the acquisition of communicative skills in an L2” (Tudor, 2008, p. 51), CLIL is different from the teaching of courses in a FL/L2. This means that most English-medium programmes in various universities throughout the world cannot be designated as being part of the CLIL strategy, since they focus on content only. Nevertheless, we may observe a recent trend towards the integration of language learning and content study in some European universities offering programmes

in a foreign language (English, German, or French) (Tudor, 2008).

One of the (many) questions arising from the definitions mentioned above is whether CLIL is applicable to both language and content classes, or only to content classes. In fact, the literature describing the experience of applying CLIL (mainly in Europe) seems to indicate that the CLIL approach is envisaged to be utilized in content classes, i.e., not by a language teacher. Nevertheless, while defining CLIL as the use of an L2 in the teaching of non-language subjects, Dalton-Puffer (2007) seems to evoke the possibility of applying a CLIL approach in the context of language classes: “undeniably, CLIL classrooms are *not typical language classrooms* in the sense that language is neither the designated subject nor the content of the interaction, but the medium through which other content is transported” (2007, p. 3, my emphasis). The fact that the CLIL approach may be adopted in very different educational contexts explains these terminological variations and the lack of a “canonical model” for CLIL instruction (Tudor, 2008). The variety of CLIL implementation is explained by several factors, among which the balance between language and content and the students’ proficiency in the target language play major roles (Tudor, 2008).

A final note: the integration of language and content has been the focus at the school level for several years now, but only recently has it been discussed at university level (Rösler, 2010), despite the creation of a platform for researchers in 2008, i.e., the *International CLIL Research Journal* (<http://www.icrj.eu/>). Furthermore, most of the research literature about CLIL refers to the use of English as the medium of instruction. This is due to the fact that English is the medium of instruction most widely used in CLIL instruction mainly in Asia, but also in Europe. As previously mentioned, the experimental study presented here relates to the adoption of an FL other than English in CLIL instruction, more precisely French. Nevertheless, we may say that research about the CLIL approach in Asia in tertiary education with an FL other than English is scarce, even non-existent in Hong Kong, and even more so with social science as the core discipline.

2. Rationale for CLIL

CLIL programmes have been implemented for several reasons: the disappointing results observable in FL teaching (Dalton-Puffer, 2007), the realisation that additional instruction time does not automatically ensure better proficiency among students (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009), and the need for better educational outcomes in language and communication (Coyle et al., 2010). Mohan explains that university students studying abroad fail to reach their potential in academic achievement because of poor coordination between the language teaching/learning and content teaching/learning and because of students' passivity in content classrooms, traditionally characterized by a high proportion of teacher talk and limited opportunities for student response (Mohan, 1986). The implementation of CLIL programmes is seen as the best way to improve students' FL proficiency by increasing exposure to the target language without increasing the number of classes in the school curricula.

Coyle et al. (2010) see in CLIL a fusion or convergence of subject didactics together with an opportunity for students to be exposed to two complementary exercises, i.e., language acquisition (result of natural communication and usage by subconscious process) and language learning (result of direct instruction with the learner's conscious involvement). Language learning becomes hence acquisitional and intentional. In CLIL instruction, language, cognition, and culture are interrelated, and language learning is based upon four pillars: communication (language use), cognition (thinking processes), course content (knowledge), and culture (social mediation and interaction) (Coyle, 2005).

The CLIL approach sees language as a tool and not just a goal. Apart from improving language competences and oral communication skills, CLIL methodology increases opportunities for practice with and exposure to the target language/culture, as well as deeper understanding of the foreign culture of learning, academic culture, and culture of communication. It also helps to build intercultural knowledge and

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understanding, develop intercultural communication skills, and provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives, while increasing learner motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught (European Commission, 2012). Another outcome is preparation for internationalisation of education (Marsh, 2002), and more precisely for an academic stay abroad (Cabau, 2014b; Fandrych, 2010).

The CLIL Compendium supported by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission defined five dimensions and foci to identify the core principles of the CLIL approach (CLIL Compendium, n.d.):

1. the culture dimension (build intercultural knowledge and understanding; develop intercultural communication skills; learn about specific neighbouring countries/regions and/or minority groups; introduce the wider cultural context)
2. the environment dimension (prepare for internationalisation, specifically EU integration; acquire International Certification; enhance school profile)
3. the language dimension (improve overall target language competence; develop oral communication skills; deepen awareness of both mother tongue and target language; develop plurilingual interests and attitudes; introduce a target language)
4. the content dimension (provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives; access subject-specific target language terminology; prepare for future studies and/or working life)
5. the learning dimension (complement individual learning strategies; diversify methods and forms of classroom practice; increase learner motivation)

The curricula of content subjects are considered as providing concepts,

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topics, and meaning, which enable the natural use of the target language by becoming the object of real or authentic communication (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). This greater authenticity or “naturalness” is considered as “one of the major platforms for CLIL’s importance and success in relation to both language and other subject learning” (Marsh, 2000, p. 5, as cited in Coyle et al., 2010). Dalton-Puffer (2008) also highlights the fact that students feel more relaxed when using the target-language, since the stress is put on meaning and not linguistic correctness, just as it does in natural conversations outside the classroom (2008). This helps support students’ language learning and their motivation by leading them “to appreciate the immediate pertinence of the effort to acquire and use a 2nd or 3rd language while studying something else” (Beardsmore, 2002, p. 26). Marsh (2005) corroborates this idea of immediate pertinence: “The mindset orientation of Generation Y (born 1982-2001) is particularly focused on immediacy as in ‘learn as you use, use as you learn - not learn now, use later’. Generation C (2002-2025) will be even more influenced by early experience of integrated media, curricula and practice” (Marsh, 2005).

Based upon classroom-based evidence, Coyle (2002, 2005) identifies four building blocks or 4 Cs for effective CLIL practice: subject matter (content), the language of and for learning (communication), the thinking integral to high quality learning (cognition), and the global citizenship agenda (culture). Tudor (2008) listed the potential benefits of CLIL in higher education as follows: increased student motivation to learn the language; an authentically communicative activity; parallel development of academic/professional competences and domain-relevant communicative skills; and preparation for lifelong learning. CLIL stresses “the cognitively guiding role language plays in all mental activities, such as discourse comprehension and production, as well as when negotiating about concepts, context and meaning” (Martyniuk, 2008, p. 18). As pointed out by Mohan (1986, p. 13), “if teachers can provide more opportunities for exploratory talk and writing, students would have the chance to think through material and make it their own. Student communication about subject matter is an important way of learning because it allows for a process of reflective thinking”.

Generally speaking, language learning outcomes and content outcomes are positive in CLIL education (Dalton-Puffer, 2008). According to Coyle (2005), CLIL experiences demonstrate students' increased linguistic competence and confidence; increase students' expectations, i.e., students "feel they are learning at a level that is appropriate to their age and maturity rather than at a level determined by their linguistic level"; a development of a wider range of skills, such as "problem-solving, risk-taking, confidence building, communication skills, extending vocabulary, self-expression and spontaneous talk"; and raise awareness of cultural issues and the global citizenship agenda (Coyle, 2005, pp. 6-8).

3. The European Studies Programme at Hong Kong Baptist University

In 1994, a European Studies undergraduate programme was launched at Hong Kong Baptist University, manifesting in the academic arena the traditional image of Hong Kong as the place where East meets West. The European Studies Programme (hereafter, ESProg) incorporates some original features which proved to be challenging as well as attractive in the public eye. First of all, while Hong Kong's academic institutions had traditionally had strong links with English-language countries (the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada), this programme focused on the French-speaking and German-speaking countries of Europe, with a strong emphasis on acquiring French or German. Secondly, the newly introduced programme adopted a social sciences orientation in a city known as one of the most important financial centres in South-East Asia, where people are supposedly more interested in money than in social and political issues. Thirdly, it was a four-year rather than three-year programme, with a full year spent in Europe (Cabau, 2013, 2014b). The launch of the ESProg was seen as providing added value at three different levels – political, economic, and institutional – within the Hong Kong higher education arena (Hess, 2010).

The specific features of this programme combine a systematic study

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of European political, social, and economic affairs with intensive FL acquisition (French or German). The four-year programme comprises two years of full-time study in Hong Kong; a third year spent in Europe with academic study and, whenever feasible, working experience in companies or institutions; followed by a fourth year of full-time study in Hong Kong. Political science provides the disciplinary core, which is underpinned by history and contemporary area studies. The annual student intake is set at 36 students, equally distributed between the French and German streams. The Year III study component in Europe is constructed to meet individual students' interests and academic performance, predominantly within the range of social sciences and business. The ESProg maintains student exchange programmes with Higher Education institutions in Europe. As for the French stream, students can opt either for political studies at one Institute of Political Studies (*Sciences Po*) or for management/business studies at university level business schools (*Écoles Supérieures de Commerce*).

Although the ESProg is a social sciences programme, the curriculum devotes considerable time to language study (twelve hours per week during the first two years). The students undergo intensive and rigorous training in French up to certified proficiency level prescribed for full-time academic study and/or professional activities in French speaking countries (corresponding to the *Diplôme approfondi de langue française* or DALF level for French learners). All language courses use the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) laid down by the Council of Europe (2001), which provides “a useful tool to align learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment methods” (Chaudhuri, 2011). The fact that the CEFR is action-oriented entails that it is linked to the concept of task, i.e., action is justified through social practices considered as tasks, and not as academic exercises. This approach defies the stereotype of Asian/Chinese students being passive learners, since linguistic/cultural knowledge and skills are presented as tools for communication and action (Cabau, 2012). It also appears as a coherent perspective for the preparation of the year abroad and professional life in an international environment (Cabau, 2013).

The first-year language classes (absolute beginner level) focus on the context of living and studying in France. The second-year language course aims to equip the students for academic study and internships in France during Year III. The fourth-year language course focuses on academic writing in French for the dissertation they have to submit for graduation. All language courses in the new four-year course curriculum of the ESProg have been re-titled ‘Language in Context’ to signify that language learning is multi-purposed and context-oriented. At all levels, devices developed by the latest communication technology are used to increase the dynamic aspect of language learning in the classroom. All French language teachers are native speakers.

4. CLIL in the European Studies Programme (French stream)

Having presented the conceptual framework of the CLIL approach and its rationale as well as the profile of the ESProg, we will now turn to the implementation of the CLIL approach in the French stream of this Hong Kong based programme. If, as we have seen, CLIL is considered in Europe as a promising approach to improve language learning and subject knowledge among students, one might ponder the relevance of such an approach in Asia. The Hong Kong case illustrates the challenge posed when applying an external “model”; i.e., it stresses the importance of context and environment on the implementation of this teaching/learning approach, and the need to take into account the local, regional, national, and transnational exigencies (Cabau, 2009; Coyle et al., 2010).

The Hong Kong Government’s educational language policy aims for Hong Kong students to become trilingual (Cantonese, Mandarin and English) and biliterate (Chinese and English). The CBI/CLIL approach is used in secondary schools with English as the medium of instruction, even if students’ language proficiency and subject knowledge are questionable (e.g., Hoare & Kong, 2008; Marsh et al., 2000). English is also the medium of instruction at all universities, illustrating the idea of “One Country Two Systems” in the educational arena. This means that French or German are a student’s fourth language after Cantonese, English, and Mandarin. The foreignness of German and French is

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further reinforced by the very limited presence of these languages in Hong Kong, as generally in Asia (Cabau, 2013, 2014b). In the Hong Kong context, the CLIL approach is innovative, even more so with the use of French in content classes.

4.1 Format of the CLIL approach

In the French stream of the ESProg, the CLIL/EMILE approach was adopted in order to achieve two main objectives: to develop the linguistic proficiency of students with a general knowledge of French culture and to prepare them for a smooth adaptation to a French academic environment, so that they meet successfully the high demands of French tertiary programmes. In addition, knowledge about the target-language country is as important as linguistic proficiency, because it is crucial for ESProg students' social interaction with foreign nationals during their stay in France. The heavy teaching schedule of twelve hours per week facilitates the integration of these objectives in language classes. The social science orientation of the ESProg provides unlimited resources to contextualize CLIL classes (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). A large collection of films related to French history, society, and politics (most of them with subtitles in English) is available in the Self-Access Learning Unit of the ESProg. French culture is the core discipline of our programme, i.e., social sciences. The non-language topics/themes are not taught *in* French but *with* and *through* French (Eurydice, 2006, p. 8). This means that content courses also use at least some French in class, and some topics refer to topics taught in French in the language class, so that students benefit from their French classes to understand more in the content class. Hence, content is a full component of the language teaching curriculum.

Content and more precisely, cultural aspects are embedded in language classes from Year I on during CLIL sessions (two hours per week in the first semester). Culture is presented and studied in the perspective of self-reflection, i.e., students are expected to ponder their own social environment while examining some social issues of present-day France

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(Cabau, 2013). For example, ecological and environmental issues are presented in the light of the situation observed in Hong Kong. In CLIL sessions in Year II (four to six hours per week), content, i.e., topics in French culture (e.g., the Algerian War, the May 1968 protest, the headscarf controversy) are presented in French by using lecture presentations, press articles, television programmes, and films in order to help the students acquire academic language competence (ALC), i.e., “pragmatic and conversational skills that are typical of academic environments (such as approaching and negotiating academic issues with teachers, co-operation with other students, active involvement in class discussions, etc.” (Fandrych, 2010, p. 22). During lecture presentations, emphasis is not only put on listening comprehension but also on note-taking. Students are also asked to use various materials to present topics in French in order to increase their oral proficiency and presentation skills before their academic stay in France. Regular tests in French are given to students each semester. The tests include questions about present-day international events. Students may use their dictionaries during these tests to avoid any major problems of comprehension. The greater emphasis put on content in Year II is facilitated by an intensive French language programme organized at the end of Year I. In 2012, the topics presented were the Hong Kong legislative elections and the French presidential election.

The approach adopted in the French stream does not fit into any of the categories defined by the literature about CLIL. This does not come as a surprise, given the specificity of CLIL settings, such as the multiplicity of teaching/learning formats, of orientations of academic programmes, and staff and budget issues. It seems that content-driven sessions *within* a FL teaching schedule are not widely applied in the academic context. Nevertheless, the CLIL sessions of the French language classes are content-driven, since the content is taught in French; the content is primary, and language learning is secondary; the content objectives are determined by the ESProg’s goals and curriculum; the teacher selects language objectives; and students are evaluated on content mastery (Met, 1999). The French language teacher does not teach a subject, but introduces themes/topics of content (here French civilization)

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during language classes, which correspond with Crandall & Tucker's definition of CBI previously mentioned. The main difference with CBI, though, is that students are expected to be active learners who engage in various communicative activities orally and in writing, and by doing so "developing their potential for acquiring knowledge and skills (education) through a process of inquiry (research) and by using complex cognitive processes and means for problem solving" (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 6).

4.2 Outcomes

First of all, it is important to stress that ESProg students face the challenge of acquiring almost simultaneously two different academic cultures, the local one and that of the destination country, as well as a second academic language after English. During their French sojourn, students experience different expectations from the teachers, a different methodology, autonomy-driven learning activities, etc. Syllabi, course readers, reading assignments, and published course notes often are not available, but students are expected to select books from extensive bibliographies and to write substantial course notes. Participation in class and oral presentations are given significant weight in assessment (Cabau, 2013). This is the reason why emphasis is put in Year II on the acquisition of ALC, since it is a "crucial linguistic and intercultural survival skill for periods abroad" (Fandrych, 2010, p. 25). Without ALC (strategies in reading comprehension, in listening and viewing comprehension, in writing essays, in presentations and discussions, etc.), students are unlikely to profit fully from their study abroad period in Year III (Cabau, 2013). The fact that students spend a successful year in top ranking French higher education institutions is a strong indicator of the various competences and skills gained during CLIL sessions.

Another positive consequence has been observed, namely the continuous exchange between language and content classes through 'curricular interfaces' (Rösler, 2010). That is, the knowledge acquired during CLIL sessions in language classes re-emerges in content subjects, such as

“Contemporary European Societies: The French-Speaking Countries”. For example, the headscarf controversy studied in language classes is an already known social event when they attend the seminar about French Speaking European Societies in the second semester of Year II. Moreover, the same content subject may support students’ language learning: the lecturer who is a French native speaker delivers her lectures in English, but may refer to some sources in accessible French, as in the lecture dedicated to the French social model when some documents are not available in English, but written or spoken in simple French, and with the use of films/videos/television programmes with subtitles in English.

Finally, we will turn to the teachers’ perspective. Although the teaching staff in most CLIL programmes are not native speakers (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009), the problem of the teachers in the target language is minimized when the CLIL approach is included in the language classes. Another advantage of integrating the CLIL approach in language classes is that coordination between language and content is facilitated, because it is performed by a single teacher. Obviously, the language teacher, if not adequately trained, has to demonstrate at least a keen interest in the content. In the present case, the French language teacher had some previous experience in teaching French culture at another university. Another advantage in our case is that language teachers do not need any specific training to teach culture (as would be the case if they had to teach mathematics in French, for example), but possess some training in pedagogy (not very usual among academics teaching content), which enables them to develop their own material (Met, 1999). In fact, our language teachers have repositioned their teaching philosophy according to the ESProg and the core discipline and have become “conductors of the orchestra within the new language learning framework” (Marsh, 2005). At the same time, teamwork with the content teacher is crucial, and preparation is more time-consuming for the language teacher who also has to collaborate with the content teacher to discuss themes and topics.

4.3 Challenges

Some of the potential drawbacks of CLIL are whether the content integration could increase differences of proficiency among students, whether students regard CLIL sessions as too demanding (Tudor, 2008) in terms of acquisition of general knowledge, and whether motivated students can communicate their interests to their peers. Additionally, although, as previously mentioned, the language learning outcomes of CLIL instruction are globally positive (as regard listening comprehension, morphology, fluency, etc.), nevertheless this is less evident in students' writing and syntax; mainly as a result of placing emphasis on oral activities (Dalton-Puffer, 2008).

In fact, experience tells us that the CLIL approach may have a negative impact on students' linguistic progress only if students do not show any sustained interest in what is going on around the world, i.e., if they lack intellectual curiosity. By contrast, CLIL may have a positive impact on students with only average proficiency in French, but a strong motivation to understand worldwide issues. Their interest motivates them to communicate, hence increasing their chances to improve their linguistic proficiency. As mentioned previously, CLIL/ESProg students feel more relaxed when using the target language, because the stress is put on meaning and not on linguistic correctness.

To incorporate content in language classes necessitated some reflection on the content and the format among teaching staff of the ESProg. In the French stream, language teachers at first considered it risky to reduce the time allocated to language training. Content is often seen as difficult because of the traditional way of teaching languages at Hong Kong secondary schools, where proficiency is generally measured "in terms of formal language learning (e.g., grammatical accuracy)" (Jackson, 2010, p. 117). For this reason, content was originally introduced in Year II, but the increased expectations of host institutions in France heavily influenced the subsequent decision to introduce CLIL sessions from Year I. Another observation led to widening the scope of the content: students needed to contextualize their knowledge of French culture in a

more global, international perspective. It appeared irrational for Hong Kong students to learn about one specific European civilization without possessing a minimal knowledge of contemporary international affairs (e.g., the 2012 U.S. presidential election, the winner of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, etc.). One might think that students enrolled in an academic programme follow the news regularly, but Hong Kong students and new graduates are considered “*too inward looking, [...] know too little about the outside world (and indeed show insufficient curiosity about it) to be ready to contribute in the kind of globalising economy in which Hong Kong must find its place*” (University Grants Committee, 2010, p. 57).

The other big challenge for the faculty members of the ESProg was to develop synergy between the language and the content subject teachers. This synergy entails a de-compartmentalization between language teaching, considered as “practical and technical”, and content teaching, regarded as “the real intellectual challenge” (Fandrych, 2010, p. 22). In fact, the relationship between language and content is often characterized by tension and conflict (Krueger & Ryan, 1993): one of the recurrent concerns of content teachers is that the use of an FL may reduce the breadth and depth of the student learning. Students would learn less and in a more superficial way (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). Questions are also raised about the possible loss in a lecturer’s teaching abilities when teaching in an L2 and not in his/her mother tongue because of more restricted language competence (Tudor, 2008). Tudor (2008) also refers to the perceived lower status of language teaching faculty compared to mainstream lecturers. This might be due to several factors: lower academic qualifications among language teachers compared to content lecturers; the fact that language competences have been long seen as only instrumental and optional, and that higher education institutions have been long reluctant to the idea to make students acquire competences (and not only knowledge), a concept generally linked to professional and not academic qualifications (Springer, 2010). In fact, “issues of roles and status come up repeatedly and heatedly in content-based instruction” (Snow, 1998, p. 257). However, because of the format of the CLIL approach in the ESProg and the existence of a strong team spirit, such issues are non-existent.

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4.4 Content and language in Year 4 seminars

The presentation of the CLIL approach in the ESProg (French stream) would not be complete without considering the importance given to content and language during the fourth and final year. French is the medium of instruction in two fourth-year seminars.

In the first seminar, “Contemporary European Societies II: *questions d’actualité*”, students are expected to recognize multidimensional factors and stakes which have affected the societies of Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Switzerland in recent years; to define present-day issues of political and social debates in the European French-speaking countries; and to identify various challenges for these countries in the social and economic field from the perspective of the European Union’s policy in the era of globalization. In terms of skills, by the end of this course, students will be able to compare the social and economic policies adopted in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Switzerland in response to these challenges; to explain the present-day role and position of existing political parties in the above-mentioned countries; and to present in French, orally or in writing, an organised synthesis on topics related to the evolution and present-day situation of the French-speaking societies of Europe. Hence, this seminar is clearly content-oriented, but reinforcing academic language proficiency is also an objective.

The second seminar “European Economic and Business Life: *travailler en contexte international*” is project-based. The project or scenario devised by the students sets the objective to be achieved (e.g., the opening of a French company in Hong Kong) and defines the different steps (micro-tasks) of the mission (macro-task) to be accomplished. The assessment takes place for each micro-task focused on reception, interaction, and production of written and oral communication (Cabau, 2013). This seminar mainly revolves around three principles: transferability, i.e., learning objectives should be linked to students’ future professional careers; capacitation, i.e., the capacities needed to perform various tasks in a professional context; and integration, i.e., the successful combination of “conceptual, procedural and attitudinal

learning at different (cognitive, functional, social, etc.) levels” (Ezeiza Ramos, 2009, p. 154). These principles are mentioned as the three (out of nine) most important expectations among Hong Kong employers, namely analytical and problem-solving abilities, work attitude, and inter-personal skills. But according to a 2006 survey, whereas graduates obtained a satisfactory performance score for work attitude and inter-personal skills, their performance in analytical and problem-solving abilities was the second lowest (Education Bureau, 2010). From this perspective, group work, student questioning, and problem solving are considered crucial elements for interactive classrooms. The project approach adopted in the Year 4 seminar seems among the most appropriate formats to answer Hong Kong employers’ expectations in terms of graduates’ abilities, more particularly for inter-personal and management skills, which can be applied in a French-speaking professional environment.

5. Concluding remarks

In Europe, the development of the CLIL approach has been mainly envisaged with the impact of the internationalisation of higher education and its consequences, i.e., the growing demand of English-medium academic programmes (even if some universities include other languages, such as French and German). This paper illustrates that a content-oriented approach is also applicable in an Asian academic context with languages other than English; but it also highlights the importance of context and environment, such as the profile and structure of academic programmes, teaching and learning strategies, staff resources, and educational objectives. In fact, in Asia, as in other parts of the world, several factors may challenge the future of CLIL provision: the first one is undeniably the overwhelming status of English as international academic language, the consequence being that in Asia CLIL is virtually equivalent to English language education. Then, the problem of programme structure is apparent, namely the limited time allotted to content subjects against the time dedicated to language tuition. This issue is related to the academic profile of the programme

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(business, literature, etc.) including language education.

The duality of focus on both language and content is demanding for students, who have to reconsider their foreign language learning strategies. At the same time, the integration of content in language classes increases the range of teaching/learning activities where students actively participate in the learning process. But smooth and productive integration of content will be more easily achieved at universities by being implemented at an earlier stage, i.e., at secondary schools, which may increase learners' motivation in FL education. The CLIL approach is also ambitious and challenging for all teachers, and the Hong Kong case study investigated why and how the language teacher has to go far beyond the linguistic teaching/learning activities and the presentation of cultural issues found in traditional foreign language textbooks. In the ESProg, this is a question of choice driven not only by the profile of the academic programme, but also by the support of the faculty members. Any attempt to force or induce language teachers to incorporate content (politics, economy, etc.) in their classes is likely to fail, mainly because these teachers normally lack background knowledge to teach content.

Finally, it is important to stress that if potential employers are keen to hire fresh graduates who have mastered a foreign language, they expect these candidates to possess excellent communication skills, i.e., to master the linguistic and non-linguistic tools to interact efficiently in a foreign professional environment. Communication skills are not synonymous with linguistic correctness, but they play an increasing role in the enhancement of graduates' employability. It is from this perspective that CLIL experiences in various Asian academic contexts with a language other than English should be developed.

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[received 16 May 2016;
accepted 9 September 2016]

