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ENGLISH LINGUISTICS IN MOTIVATING CLIL STUDENT TEACHERS

Only a small number of people become professional linguists,
but everyone can acquire a linguistic temperament.
(Crystal 2007: 482)

Abstract

Research on teacher motivation has recently given evidence of being closely related to several variables such as pre-service and in-service teacher training, educational reform, teaching practice, student motivation, work environment, psychological fulfilment and general health conditions. Taking into consideration the most recent studies on EFL teacher motivation across different disciplines and cultures, this paper aims at sharing the author's personal experience with colleagues who have taught in CLIL trainee courses for High School content teachers. The results of the project, carried out in university run-courses from 2013 to 2017, have shown that teaching certain linguistic aspects (such as WE and ELF features, or word-forming processes) makes teachers linguistically aware of the plurality of English in communication and education, stimulates them strategically, increases their intrinsic motivation and influences their teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: EFL teacher motivation; CLIL; linguistics.

1. Introduction

The past years have witnessed an increase in teacher motivation research across various contexts (Pennington 1995; Wild *et al.* 1997; Kunter *et al.* 2008; Kassabgy *et al.* 2001; Dörnyei 2005; Karava 2010; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011; Erkaya 2012; Hein *et al.* 2012; Lopriore and Vettorel 2017), so much so that motivation is considered a crucial component to enhance classroom effectiveness (Carson and Chase 2009) and it has been explored in terms of “teaching style, teacher ap-

proaches to teaching, teaching practice and instruction behaviours in relation to teacher motivation factors” (Han and Yin 2016: 8).

This paper attempts to show how, training CLIL student teachers (STs) in some specific topics on linguistics and terminology helps them foster Language Awareness (LA) and research-actions that, to our mind, are to be the unfailing pillars of CLIL teacher motivation. As a matter of fact, in the light of some current factors that often demotivate content teachers, LA – if achieved during their training – increases teachers’ motivation by enhancing their professional competence and effectiveness as educators and researchers. In other words, not only does language awareness allow them to be more self-confident when using the CLIL foreign language, but also it gives them much expertise when organizing lessons in relation to the classroom wants of content or language. Also, by acquiring greater knowledge of some linguistic phenomena in general and specialized contexts, STs can realize that a suitable C1 level of English proficiency is only the starting point of their CLIL activity, bearing always in mind that they are asked to teach mainly content by integrating learning with language.

In addition, the paper allows the author to share her experience with colleagues who have been involved in CLIL training courses for content teachers of Secondary High School. Part II introduces the Italian context and what, in the author’s experience, Italian high-school teachers need to carry out CLIL activities successfully; Part III deals with the context and participants of some training courses held at the University of Palermo (Unipa) and outlines the research task; Part IV gives results and Part V refers to conclusive remarks.

2. Teacher Motivation, CLIL and the Italian Perspective

Most research on teacher motivation has recently shown that teacher training, whether pre-service or in-service, is one of the several variables to which motivation is closely related in education, alongside educational reform, teaching practice, student motivation, work environment, psychological fulfilment and general health conditions (Han and Yin 2016).

On the other hand, CLIL experience has widely shown how teachers and students are to be motivated in order to get satisfactory results. Motivation is, consequently, one of the main requisites for the achievement of the successful integrated learning of content and language. And, in this respect, it is extremely important to explore what Italian teachers need to make them really involved, being always aware that CLIL methodology should be “flexible and dynamic” because a “one-size fits

all provision” cannot exist (Coyle 2006: 3). As a matter of fact, the European approach – trying to be flexible – is today offering a range of CLIL models and training courses, which respond to the situational and contextual demands of each member state (see TIECLIL).

Although CLIL is today part of the long-established European language policy, which aims to convince European citizens on how necessary multilingualism is, significant cultural barriers and linguistic unawareness still exist among most Italian adult learners of foreign languages and mainly among learners of English.

In the author’s experience, what is mostly missing in many CLIL content teachers is awareness of the nature and purpose of languages. We do not mean what some scholars list among the theoretical competences that teachers must acquire during CLIL trainee courses (Wolff 2012 in Marsh 2012: 64; Balboni and Coonan 2014), but we refer to the “explicit understanding” of how languages work in general and how they are used in a variety of contexts (Marsh 2012). This lack of knowledge often regards not only English (L2), but also Italian (L1).

Most CLIL trainees do not consider that all languages express the identity of the people who speak them; they are not really conscious of the language standardization processes, nor of the variety of forms a language can take from one part of a country to another. On the contrary, they often consider dialects as unpleasant or slovenly, disregarding that all languages, and the specialized ones particularly, develop to express the needs of their users.

Consequently, many CLIL content teachers or, generally, a significant number of adult learners forget the relationship between language prescriptivism and language use, even when the terminology of their professional field is concerned. In other words, most of them acknowledge the difference between grammar prescriptions, defining how language should be used, and the language as it is actually used by native-speakers (McArthur 2005). Lastly, they do not see language change as a normal process, something continuous, inevitable and multidirectional. Accordingly, most of them consider variations in terms of language deterioration and decay, disregarding that languages simply change because society changes (Crystal 2007).

With regard to English, content teachers often underestimate its dynamic variety and plurality. They take for granted its several forms, whether formal or informal, domestic or professional, mainly distinguishing just two realities of English, the British and the American standards and ascribing all the multiplicities of English (e.g. ESL, WE or ELF) to the American idiom.

In a nutshell, most Italian adult learners of foreign languages – in the author's experience – lack “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (ALA). Therefore, they are likely to learn languages without paying particular attention on how languages work and, consequently, they can find it difficult to use CLIL textbooks or to give more attractive and original lessons when using CLIL methodologies.

For this reason, we believe that long-term teacher motivation is likely to disappear, influencing both teaching and classroom effectiveness negatively. In addition, notwithstanding the European multilingual efforts, the linguistic history of our country leads most Italians to think that speaking one language is the most natural rule, and that those who speak more than one language are the exceptions, disregarding that “exactly the reverse is the case” all over the world (Crystal 2007: 409).

3. Course Design and Tasks

Since 2010, Italian content teachers, interested in CLIL, have been requested to attend university run-courses, which include the achievement of an English C1 level as well as theory and practice of CLIL methodologies and foreign language didactics.

On this assumption, from a linguistic standpoint, Balboni and Coonan (2014) have suggested that Italian content teachers must mainly know a) the main features of their specialized language (largely from the lexical standpoint); b) the relationship between general and specialized languages; c) the L2 grammar and d) the textual genres specific to their subject.

From 2013 to 2017, the Department of Humanistic Science at the University of Palermo has activated CLIL education courses for upper secondary school teachers. Each of the last five courses was made up of three modules and run parallel to or after the English language course. The first module (50 hours: 30 in class, 20 e-learning) dealt with CLIL theories and the introduction of some topics from English linguistics (theory on specialized languages, corpus linguistics and textual genres) according to the guidelines given to trainee CLIL teachers by international scholars and Balboni for Italy. The final goal of this module was to equip student teachers with a solid theoretical platform on CLIL and English language, to give them a reference framework for the following lessons on CLIL practices and laboratory activities (40+90 hours).

The author was tutor in the first module of two courses for teachers belonging to two different areas of interest: 1) history, philosophy,

music, art, economics and political economic geography; 2) maths, science, chemistry and physics. Each class was made up of about 35 teachers and was heterogeneous enough with regard to attendants' age, genre (men and women) and school of origin.

Many teachers, teaching humanistic studies, had already attended the language courses and declared a level of knowledge in English between B2 and C1. The teachers of science had not attended the language courses yet and declared a general B1+ level, but they showed good skills in reading and writing, above all when dealing with their field of interest.

The first goal of the present case was to verify what had attracted these teachers (above all the in-service ones) to do CLIL and to what extent they had been further motivated by the CLIL experience already made (if made). The final purpose was to help them to further appreciate this experience and to keep on enjoying it as much as possible in the years after the course.

Questionnaires were, initially, administered to identify participants' background, their individual and professional relations with English, their previous CLIL experience (if any), their motivation in teaching CLIL and their expectations from that training course.

In general, all answers disclosed a low level of real interest towards CLIL activities because most trainees were motivated by extrinsic factors. Most in-service teachers declared to be interested because the recent educational reform had involved them, whereas pre-service ones declared to be motivated by the possibility to get professional qualifications. Only a few of them were intrinsically motivated and looked at the CLIL as a challenge linking their passion for teaching with their interest in learning foreign languages (*viz.* English).

With regard to learning forecasts after the CLIL trainee course, since most participants had already carried out CLIL experience for two years, they expressed their expectations by complaining about what was missing in the CLIL material currently available and requesting what they needed to enhance their teaching.

As far as the humanistic class is concerned, teachers of economics, law, music or political-economic geography, for instance, claimed the lack of material for Italian students in their field and declared that the material they collected from the Web was unsatisfactory because there was little variety of topics and few repetitive exercises. According to the teachers of history and philosophy, there were sufficient texts to start with, but these lack the specific terminology, resulting too easy for the level of English required for students attending the final years of High School.

In comparison, the scientific class declared their preference for teaching their subject in English taking information from original texts, rather than use the few and apposite CLIL handbooks created for Italian students. This standpoint was later strengthened during the comparison between Italian and English handbooks with regard to the organization of discourse and the priority of topics dealt with. They affirmed that, for clarity and conciseness, it was easier to refer only to the English terminology rather than make a comparison between L1 and L2 specialized lexicon.

In conclusion, the questionnaire revealed that, during the course, most participants hoped to receive teaching material that could help them to carry out acceptable CLIL lessons on specific topics. On the other hand, it was soon clear that their search for miraculous CLIL and foreign language teaching methodologies was actually due to a lack of language awareness in L2.

The lack of LA and the difficulties claimed by teachers experiencing CLIL was confirmed during the first lesson when participants were questioned to investigate their familiarity with English in general, its varieties, ELF, or WE and specialised terminology. Most of them found it difficult to arrange comparison between English and Italian and gave the impression of being unfamiliar with the processes deriving from the influences between languages. Others, perhaps underestimating the development of their specialized languages, did not know the existence of English popular terms beside the English specialised ones (e.g. *intestine* and its popular term *gut* in biology; *centrifugal force* and *centre-fleeing* in physics) and were often unable to distinguish Global English terms from Standard English. As a result, the first consideration, after reading the questionnaire and after the first lesson, was that teachers' interest and motivation for CLIL were to lessen if not properly encouraged and inspired with specific clarifications of the above-mentioned linguistic phenomena.

4. *Fostering Language Awareness: responses to tasks*

Besides the topics predicted by the Unipa project, the new goal in this first module was to enhance language awareness in STs as stimulus to acquire self-confidence and competence when using the L2 and, consequently, to make a greater effort in teaching CLIL with original and successful results, limiting, as much as possible, the tendency to look for available books to teach their subject.

The English language component – alongside the above-mentioned scholars' recommendations – included:

- a general comparison between Italian and English (phonetics, grammar, syntax etc.);
- The historical and sociocultural factors responsible for the spread of English;
- Kachru's circles, focusing on new varieties such as Euro-English;
- WE or ELF features and contexts of use: mainly ELF in specialized contexts;
- The impact of English on European languages;
- The differences between words and terms, the definitions and goals of three linguistic branches: lexicology, lexicography and terminology;
- Word formation and creative word-forming processes in English and across languages.

The following part will trace only the activities regarding word formation and lexical creativity (from a terminology standpoint too) because these topics have been mainly examined and appreciated by participants. The author's aim was to increase interest in words and terms with regard to the teachers' specific field of knowledge and to encourage them to create their own lessons (if necessary). *Lexical creativity* was mainly explained as the "way in which speakers invent, modify, mix, and remix single morphemes, entire words, or whole expressions by applying or by violating productive and creative word-forming processes" (Munat 2007).

This approach motivated teachers to compare a small corpus of texts, becoming *word detectives* in their field. They showed interest in word history, in the meaning of names, in the development of dictionaries, in the usage and features of dialect or jargon expressions. Not only did they start paying attention to the coining of lexical items in English (e.g. *galvanization* after Luigi Galvani), but also to the manipulation of existing Italian and English words and expressions or to the influence of English in the creative coining of Italian hybrid words (e.g. *net-azienda*, *cyberspazio* or *cybernauta*).

Furthermore, since the author's teaching module was to be mostly theoretical, the former part of each lesson was a standard Italian 'lezione frontale' about literature and fundamentals. The latter part was, on the contrary, devoted to group activities during which exemplification was achieved for each field of participant interest.

This approach aimed at making teachers aware of the actual status of English and, in general of the changing nature of each language, encouraging them to organize their work by themselves and to create

new didactic tools which would fit better to their teaching aptitudes and to their students.

The minor goal was to make teachers use the CLIL books in an innovative way and, if necessary, to become able users or scrutinizers of the CLIL material already at their disposal. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of Unipa classes did not make these tasks always feasible.

As matter of fact, providing human science teachers with appropriate exemplification – given the author's background in law, economics, history and philosophy – was pretty easy. Not only were they attentive enough, but they also contributed brilliantly to exemplification, above all those whose subject, such as music, was far from the class wide-ranging competences. Their interest and active participation was the first feedback to the initiative of adding other linguistic and terminological topics for fostering LA among STs.

The best results were, definitely, achieved with the scientific area, whose participants gave the main proof of the successful outcomes possible in CLIL teacher education when disclosing linguistic and terminological issues. As a matter of fact, since the author was not competent enough in maths, science and physics, it was not easy to give teachers appropriate examples on the additional topics. The possibility to give them examples from the above-mentioned different fields (i.e. economics, law, art etc.) was also excluded because considered tedious and inevitably unsuccessful for acquiring a real language competence to work independently and to achieve good results.

Therefore, after some examples on general English, a number of specific activities were introduced to stimulate the interest of the student teachers in vocabulary knowledge and to develop satisfactory observational skills. At the end of each lesson, the teachers of science were asked to investigate their specialized language through individual or group exploration.

This method made it possible to highlight some dynamics and differences between the two groups of teachers. Science and maths teachers showed a reasonable level of competence in describing some features of their specialized language (e.g. conciseness, use of acronyms and initialisms). They were able to explain some mechanisms that affect the universe of words and terms. They knew, for example, that *terms* are made up of single words, collocations or phrases and refer to a concept in a particular kind of language or branch of study by giving each professional group their own linguistic identity. Nevertheless, most of them disregarded that words usually move from everyday language to the specialized domains becoming *terms* through a process of semantic redetermination such as happened for words like *window*, *google*,

surfing, *mouse* in computer science (Taylor 1998; Cabré 1999). So, if questioned on the nature of their specialised language lexicon, some of them were often unable to give explanations: e.g. they knew and used collocations in Italian, but they frequently tended to translate literally from Italian into English, not providing the right L2 equivalent. Although they are daily used to adopting popularization strategies for their students, they were not able to identify them, or if they used didactic metaphors, they disregarded the cultural implications of metaphorical processes. To give further examples, they did not know the common existence of popular terms besides technical terms in English (e.g. *varicella* and *chickenpox*) or they had not paid particular attention to the occurring etymological difference between ESP nouns and their related adjectives (e.g. *eye* and *oculist*).

Nevertheless, when the teachers of science were invited to explore the language of maths, they succeeded brilliantly in analysing, for example, the discourse organization of the topic *Functions* in two English and Italian handbooks addressed to students of the same age and grade. Teachers also accepted to draft lexicon activities for learning vocabulary in their classroom and were able to provide useful game proposals on *Functions* such as matching collocations, domino loop cards, fill in the gaps, crosswords.

In detail, their comparison focused on grammar, lexicon and the popularization processes of each handbook. This activity led them to personally realize that American handbooks have an inductive teaching method, which allows students to draw conclusions and learn content by featuring examples of real life. Consequently, American handbooks are student-centred with a significant communication between the text and readers. With regard to exercises, they propose many applications and few theoretical problems. Alternatively, Italian handbooks contain a deductive method, which gives students abstract examples focusing on theory and speculation. There is little communication between the text and the readers and the number of theoretical problems – given as exercises – is higher than applications.

As regards specialized languages, the American manuals make a great use of frequency words, phrases and metaphors. Their pages are full of colours and drawings as well as visual organizers i.e. arrow diagrams, machine diagrams, graphs and tables of values. On the contrary, the Italian discourse is more specialised. It features visual organizers, but also many tricky technical terms and very few didactic metaphors or drawings for explaining concepts.

After learning more about their ESP, participants also investigated the relationship between general and maths language. They looked at

the etymology of key words and focused on some terms having both a general and specialized meaning, e.g. the term *function* itself that in GE means “one’s proper work or purpose the power of acting in a specific proper way”, while in ESP it means the “relation between two sets in which one element of the second set is assigned to each element of the first set”. The *domain* that is a “particular area of activity” in GE and also the “set of x values for which the function is defined” in ESP, or *range* that is a “number of different things of the same genre” in GE and the “set of values coming out of a function” when talking about maths.

In conclusion, the achievements of the scientific class – perhaps taken for granted by expert EFL teachers – proved that teaching linguistic topics in CLIL training classes increases the intrinsic motivation of participants allowing STs not only to learn content but also to process data, developing observational skills and becoming critical users of mother and foreign languages.

5. *Conclusive Remarks*

Scholars argue that CLIL is a poor environment if teachers are not actively supported to develop language awareness (Marsh 2012: 63). As a matter of fact, only after acquiring LA can teachers and thereafter students appreciate diversity and variety of languages, the mechanisms for speech, the nature of writing systems and the historical development of language (McArthur 2005). This is even clearer when referring to English, because only learners, who are linguistically aware, can face the international and intercultural communicative contexts in which the Global Language is used.

The author’s research design, carried out in the above-mentioned CLIL trainee courses, has proved that fostering language awareness among content teachers provides a learning environment that promotes greater self-confidence in the use of L2, autonomy (if necessary) and self-organization. By learning certain linguistic issues, they are encouraged to explore the unknown aspects of their specialized language becoming expert or even innovative in using the material already at their disposal by planning and implementing CLIL syllabi and lessons. In a nutshell, in the author’s experience, at the beginning of the course the CLIL student teachers of both classes were listeners, at the end they became investigators of languages and active contributors to the training course itself.

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