

INTEGRATING CONTENT-BASED TASKS INTO A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Jolita Butkiene and Lilija Vilkanciene

International School of Management (ISM)

Vilnius, Lithuania

Contact e-mail: lilvil@ism.lt

BRIEF PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

Lilija Vilkanciene is an Instructor of English as a foreign language at the International School of Management (ISM) in Vilnius, Lithuania. Her teaching experience is about 20 years, five last years at the International School of Management. Current area of interest is CLIL (content and language integrated learning) and possibilities of applying the approach in tertiary education. She also does some teacher training on the British Council projects, Human Rights Education being the most recent one.

Jolita Butkiene has been a Vice Dean for the Bachelor Studies and a foreign language Instructor at the International School of Management (ISM) since 2001. Her areas of interest are foreign language education policies in Lithuanian universities and issues of policy on languages at universities in Europe.

CONTEXT

The idea of including content of a subject under study into a language classroom was introduced in the 1970s by Hutchinson and Waters, the founders of the ESP approach. They stated that the content of a subject, for example economics or management, should be used for teaching a foreign language. The focus however remained on the language. The idea of “natural” language acquisition promoted by S.Krashen supported the approach as it was claimed that the best way to learn a language was by using it for “meaningful” purposes. The CLIL (content and language integrated learning) approach builds on and brings the two ideas even further.

The term CLIL was launched in 1996 by UNICOM, University of Jyvaskyla and the European

Platform for Dutch Education. There are several definitions of the term offered by its promoters: “CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language.” (Marsh, 1994). “CLIL is an educational approach in which non-language subjects are taught through a foreign, second or other additional language.” (Marsh, 2001). According to the authors, this is the generic “umbrella” term, which includes a range of educational approaches where non-linguistic content is used to teach a language. They claim that it is a very effective way of learning a language as provides the learners with “comprehensible” (Krashen, 1981) input and authentic situations.

According to Krashen (1982), „...the mistake of language teaching was that we first “teach” the skills and only later use them, while the most effective way should be learning and using at the same time. The Comprehension hypothesis ‘claims that we can enjoy real language use right away: ...The path of pleasure is the only path. The path of pain does not work for language acquisition’.

The purpose of the following paper is to look at the reasons why and advantages of integrating case study into teaching “language”.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE BE COURSE AT ISM

The ESP approach has been successfully applied at ISM (International School of Management) by offering Business English courses for the students of Management and Business Administration and students of Economics. BE, as a compulsory course is taught for the first two semesters (12 ECTS), and as an elective the third semester (6 ECTS). The expected goal at the outcome of the course is to be able to exchange *professional* information with foreign partners, the immediate demand of language learners, though, is to be able to acquire knowledge and awareness in many other *academic* disciplines, as a number of subjects are taught in English in the third and fourth years of studies; to communicate effectively with foreign students and teachers from different countries and diverse cultural backgrounds using English as the lingua franca, participate in conferences and student exchange programmes. This is why the aims of the BE course are to enhance business vocabulary, to develop oral communication skills, presentation and discussion skills among them, and to train writing skills.

Together with these, more “language” related aims, the programme also aims at developing academic skills, such as reading, information search and selection, critical thinking and problem solving. In terms of integrating the BE course into general curriculum, building up managerial competences, such as interpersonal communication, team work, time and stress management, becomes important component of the programme. In this context, the case study approach integrated attaining all the above goals and complemented other methods of foreign language teaching. It is a step further in the CLIL direction.

TASK DESCRIPTION

The students were assigned a case related to the topics covered during the BE course and during

the Principles of Business, Management and Economics course, to ensure the minimum knowledge in the subject matter and that students could make reference to the materials covered during the subject course. The case that is available on the internet was used as the basis for the assignment. The whole work was divided into four stages.

STAGE I

The first stage was information gathering, understanding, vocabulary development, discussing and language work. It was done individually and as a whole group work. The students had to:

1. Find the case on the Internet and read it, checking new vocabulary items.
2. Develop vocabulary notes with key terms.
3. Answer general comprehension questions and discuss them in class.

STAGE II

1. During the second stage the students with diverse language proficiency were divided into teams. The teams had to agree on specific roles, i.e. "business consultants" ; "company representatives" and facilitators of the in – class discussion.
2. The "business consultants" task was to search for any extra information related to the case, the company or the topic of their presentation and as a group prepare a Power Point presentation outlining the situation in the case, stating the problem and offering the solution to the problem.
3. "Company representatives" and facilitators had to submit the answers to the questions prepared by the teacher to help to guide the analysis of the case one week prior to the class discussion.

STAGE III

The third stage involved class performance:

1. "Business consultants" had to take turns to deliver their presentations (10-15 min.).
2. During a 10 minutes break "business consultants" hypothesised questions that might come from the "company representatives" and "company representatives" had to agree on the issues to be raised during the discussion period.
3. "Business consultants" and "company representatives" participated in a general discussion, monitored by the facilitators who had to ensure everybody's participation and take notes. The discussion was based on the "business consultants" presentations and suggestions.
4. All group agreed on the best presentation and suggestions.

STAGE IV

The final stage involved:

1. Evaluation of their own performance in terms of ideas, presentation skills, learning outcomes.

2. The teacher's feedback on the performance and if necessary summary of the main ideas of the assignment.

ASSESSMENT

The students are assessed on the basis of their performance during the whole project, all the three stages. We can refer to "integrated assessment". The first stage is assessed for timely preparation, vocabulary, and content knowledge. The written answers to the questions show the students level of preparation for further work. The second stage is assessed for the presentation skills and the content of the presentations. The discussion stage is assessed for the participation in the discussion and quality of arguments to support their opinions. The students who have to facilitate the whole session, are assessed for their ability to manage the group work, provide introductions, link different stages of the process, summarize and involve all the students in the discussion, these are the meeting management skills. This kind of work lends itself to using different assessment methods, it is important to discuss the assessment criteria with the whole group when assigning the task. It is also possible to provide self-assessment or peer assessment in this kind of work.

After the completion of the project students were asked to reflect upon their individual achievement along *K(nowledge) A(wareness) S(kill) A(ttitude)* lines. Each of the concepts was discussed and examples given as follows: *Knowledge* stands for factual information; *awareness* general feel about their language proficiency and problem areas; *skill* ability to carry out task new or old: e.g. to quickly deal with the text, write an abstract to the essay, translate a text in the area of studies etc.; *attitude* their appreciation of themselves and of English language, *ability* to work in a new class, work in groups etc. The statements in the feedback: *I have learnt about (marketing, cultural differences, consumer attitudes etc)* prevailed. In most cases students emphasized the facts they have learned about other disciplines during English language lessons. Despite that factual information goes under 'Knowledge' heading, it appears to us that most students revealed their attitude towards studying English at the University and their *awareness* of ESP and how it differs from General English: "At school I thought I know English and at the University I realized that I don't know anything". *Attitude* was very positive towards group work, though feedback showed their strife to be singled out from the group. *Skills* is the area that was particularly emphasized in the students' feedback. Group work, presentation, public speaking, negotiation skills were seen as valuable skill and although much of instruction is arranged through group work and peer work – few mentioned to be able to organize or lead a task performance in a group or listen to group mates in working on a task. Yet, all of them mentioned to have enjoyed group work because it was "interesting".

ISM teachers were clearly overwhelmed by the students engagement and energy they put into preparing for the case. The students appeared to be very ready to meet with this novelty: integrating content and language learning.

RATIONALE FOR INCLUDING CASE STUDIES IN THE COURSE SYLLABUS

The most evident benefit of including the case study assignment into the course syllabus is integration which occurs on different levels. We can speak about integrating content and

language, general language skills and business skills, interpersonal and social skills, building up managerial, interpersonal, inter-cultural competences, study and IT skills among them.

The following reasons might be mentioned for including case study projects into a language course:

1. The case study assignment motivates the learners as it is “authentic”, the content of the case is taken from the real world, is related to well known international companies. It enhances the learners’ subject knowledge, provides meaningful content for their assignment. It is ‘authentic’ in terms of communication.
2. It integrates and develops language skills as the learners have to read, write, speak and listen during all the stages of the project. They have to “use” language for meaningful purposes, to demonstrate vocabulary and grammar knowledge when delivering presentations or in written assignment. It is close to the “natural” way of learning the language.
4. It develops study and research skills, such as information search and selection, critical thinking, presentation and discussion skills, argumentation. It encourages creativity in the learners, develops IT skills.
5. It is an active, learner-centered assignment, as the learners do most of the work independently, take responsibility for their own learning while teachers act as facilitators, provide advice and consultancy. It promotes cooperative learning and collaboration.
6. It is suitable for different learning styles as includes a wide range of different kinds of tasks that the learners need to perform.
7. It develops team work skills as a lot of work is done in small groups where the learners have to take on different roles and have a chance to demonstrate their individual strengths, to take responsibly for the performance of the whole team. Learners with diverse language proficiency learn with and from one another.
8. It enhances general managerial competences such as inter-personal communication, people, time and stress management skills.
9. It is challenging as includes problem solving tasks. It focuses on the process of learning as well as on the outcome, includes both accuracy and fluency activities. It might be competitive.
10. It builds up cross-cultural competences, as the cases are based on international companies, their cultures, both national and corporate.
11. It is enjoyable for both learners and teachers. The successful performance adds to the learners’ sense of achievement.

CONCLUSION

“Through content-based instruction, learners develop language skills while simultaneously becoming more knowledgeable citizens of the world” (Stroller, 1997).

“Project – based learning should be viewed as a versatile vehicle for fully integrated language and content learning, making it a viable option for language educators working in a variety of

instructional settings including general English, English for academic purposes (EAP), English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for professional purposes... Project work is viewed by most of its advocates "not as a replacement for other teaching methods" but rather as "an approach to learning which complements mainstream methods and which can be used with almost all levels, ages and abilities of students" (F.L. Stroller).

Content - based instruction bridges the gap between language training and practical performance needs in real life situations by offering authentic reading materials and exposing students to authentic situations. It also helps to meet common needs identified across different programme disciplines.

REFERENCES

Cottrell S. (2003). *The Study Skills Handbook*. Palgrave. Macmillan.

Hutchinson T., Waters A. (1987) *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge University Press.

Krashen S. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. First Internet Edition. 2002.

Marsh D., Maljers A., Hartiala A. (2001). *Profiling European CLIL Classrooms*. Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Marsh D., Marshland B., Stenberg K. (2001). *Integrating Competences for Working Life*. Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Snow M. (1991). *Teaching Language Through Content. Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Heine &Heiner Publishers, p.315-328.

Stroller L.F. (1997). *Project Work. A Means to Promote Language Content*. Forum, Vol. 35 No 4, October-December 1997.

Information About the Authors:

Lilija Vilkanciene

I currently work as an English language teacher at ISM, International School of Management. My teaching experience is about 20years, five last years at my present job. The areas of interest include teaching ESP in general and Business English in particular. Current area of interest is CLIL (content and language integrated learning) and possibilities of applying the approach in tertiary education. I also do some teacher training on the British Council projects, Human Rights Education being the most recent one.

Jolita Butkiene

I am a Vice Dean for the Bachelor Studies at the International School of Management (ISM). has been researching and teaching ESP

Google™

jñ Web jñ esp-world.info