Clarifying CLIL for the English teacher
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Clarifying CLIL for the English teacher

Rosie Tanner and Liz Dale offer ideas for integrating the language students need for other subjects into their English lessons.

CLIL and the English teacher

You may have come across key ideas related to CLIL, like these: ‘Every subject teacher is a language teacher’, ‘CLIL is all about integration’, ‘The language of science is different from the language of history’. In many secondary schools, subject teachers are being asked and agree – sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes unwillingly – to teach their subject through English. Teaching a subject through English involves subject teachers interweaving the teaching of their subject matter with learning the language related to the subject, not just teaching their subject in English.

But where does all this leave the English teacher? If the subject teacher is teaching both content and language, what kind of language can English teachers focus on? Not all subject teachers feel comfortable about or capable of integrating language into their lessons: ‘What's biology got to do with English?’, ‘If I teach history in English, that's enough, isn’t it?’ The main focus in CLIL language lessons, then, is not on teaching biology, but rather on familiarising learners with the language they need for their biology lessons. The role of the English teacher is, thus, to help learners to focus on and practise with the language of biology.

Integrating subject content into English lessons: two ways

Each subject has its own language features: the most obvious is perhaps subject vocabulary (e.g. treble clef in music, canvas in art, or cell wall in biology). And school subjects also have their own typical language features: for example, scientific texts use many ‘if’ sentences for hypotheses and modals to help to describe processes accurately. Each subject also has its own typical text types, e.g. historical texts are often narrative and descriptive. English teachers can use these as a point of departure. Here, we suggest two ways in which English teachers can support subject teachers:

1. Identify language features to be worked on

2. Design CLIL activities to be carried out in the English lessons

Here are some suggestions for content-based language activities which can support learners in succeeding in subject lessons.

1. Identify the language features to be worked on. For example:
   - specialised vocabulary
   - words which are difficult to pronounce
   - everyday words used in a specialised way, e.g. cell in biology means something different from (prison) cell in everyday language; depression in geography is different from depression in history or psychology
   - typical grammatical structures used in subject-specific contexts
   - linking words used to organise and structure text, such as firstly, secondly, lastly, on the other hand
   - language needed to explain or interpret visuals, e.g. This diagram shows how cilia and goblet cells work together to carry dust out of the lungs.

Figure 1 on page 25 shows a page from a biology textbook. We have identified and annotated the page with some typical language features – one of nine examples of annotated subject pages from Dale & Tanner (2012: 82).

2. Design CLIL activities to be carried out in the English lessons. These
“How can English teachers support subject teachers and their learners to understand and use the language of school subjects”

Biology of Cells, Tissues, Organs, Organ Systems, and Organisms

You are a member of a very large and complex world. Together with other members of your family, you work to do jobs, like clean your home, set the table, make dinner, and many other important chores. […] From one individual to an entire planet filled with human beings, each of us have a role to play. Some of us are airline pilots, teachers, doctors, farmers, builders, and more. Without a variety of people with specialized skills working together, our world would be very different. There would be no advancement of technology, no discovery, and medical and food technologies would not exist as they do today. There is a similar organization within the bodies of living things. If we could go inside a living thing, the first thing we would see are what we call cells. Cells are like people in the example above. Each one is an individual entity working hard on specialized jobs. Instead of firefighters, cells might be assigned the job of helping digest food, or carrying messages from the brain, or fighting diseases that enter the body.

Figure 2: Part of a reading text related to the biology lesson, from http://www.kidsbiology.com/biology_basics/cells_tissues_organs/structure_of_living_things1.php

Figure 1: Annotated page from a biology textbook

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING

take place before and/or after the subject lessons. Think about

- language skills: listening and watching, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction, writing
- language systems: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, language functions and genres

How much time will this take?

Some of these activities involve little preparation, others need more time. Most of them can be reused, so you can gradually build up a bank of activities as a teaching resource.

Who makes content-based language activities?

English teachers can create these activities; ideally, develop them with your subject teacher colleagues. You can also involve learners in making the materials – either for their peers, for parallel classes, for a lower year or next years’ classes.

Who can use the activities?

The CLIL activities can be used in English lessons or subject lessons, depending on which teacher feels most comfortable or willing to carry them out. The more language work the learners do, the better they will become in the subject and in their language use.

The CLIL activities we present demonstrate a range of language activities, based on the page from a biology book. Of course, you are unlikely to do all of these in one lesson! You can choose how many and which to use, depending which areas you would like to focus on and how much time you have available.

Reading

Subject teachers often find that the texts in their coursebook are too difficult for their learners, so it is helpful if the English teacher can support reading about the topic.

Use another text

Find a reading text which contains similar information to the subject page, and create reading activities around it. Good sources for texts are Wikipedia, simple Wikipedia or subject sites. On the
Create 5–10 learners sit in groups around a table. Learners Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd & Media Ltd Cell wanted poster. Play 20 questions with subject on a video.

Create a class quiz

Ask pairs of learners to write two questions each on the text. Alternatively, divide the text up and ask different pairs to write questions about their part of the text. Use these questions to create a class quiz.

Scramble the text

Choose a paragraph from a text and cut it up into sentences or logical chunks. Your learners reorder the cut-ups into a paragraph. This helps learners to notice linking words and how text is organized.

Listening

Search for a video on YouTube on the subject topic and create watching activities for your learners. For example:

- Create 5–10 pre-watching questions. Learners read and predict the answers, then listen to check if their answers are correct.
- Give learners a list of words from the subject page. Their task is to see how many of the words in their list are mentioned in the video.
- Dictogloss. Read a short text out loud while your learners listen. Read the text again and the learners take notes. They then reconstruct the text as well as they can.

Spoken production

Ask learners to create and record their own spoken commentary on a video clip on the subject topic.

Spoken interaction

Create information gap exercises around the topic. For example:

![An organ system Which part of a cell controls its activities?](https://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Cells-loop-game-3009962)

**An organ system Which part of a cell controls its activities?**

Learners can look at their own cards, but not show them to each other. One learner starts the game by reading out the definition (‘Which part of a cell controls its activities?’) on one of their cards and placing it on the table. The person with the card whose word is defined says the word (‘the nucleus’), and reads aloud the question on his or her card, placing the word beside the definition. He or she then reads out the definition next to ‘nucleus’ on his or her card. The game continues until all the cards are on the table and make a ‘loop’. The definition on the last card should be the answer to the word on the first card.

Reference: this is a shortened version of https://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Cells-loop-game-3009962

**Pronunciation**

Create bingo cards and play bingo using subject vocabulary which is hard to pronounce.

**Bingo variations:**

1. **Definition Bingo**

Make some bingo cards with definitions of specialist subject words.
They should all be different. Learners take it in turns to pick and say aloud a biology word. Learners cross off the words on their cards which match the definitions and call out ‘Bingo’ when their card is full.

Example of a bingo card
Key: from left to right, row 1: cell, cilia, haemoglobin; row 2: nerve cell, secrete, mucus

2. Word stress bingo
Make some bingo cards showing word stress patterns like this:

Example of a bingo card
Key: from left to right, row 1: cell, cilia, haemoglobin; row 2: nerve cell, secrete, mucus

Learners read biology words out (e.g., for the left-hand top corner the word is haemoglobin, with the pattern ooOo). They cross off the stress patterns on their cards which match the words and call 'Bingo' when their card is full.

3. Phoneme bingo
If your learners are familiar with the symbols for phonemes, make some bingo cards like this:

3. Phoneme bingo
If your learners are familiar with the symbols for phonemes, make some bingo cards like this:

Learners take it in turns to pick and read biology words out or the teacher shows them in written form – which is more difficult! Learners cross off the phonemes on their cards which match the words and call out ‘Bingo’ when their card is full.

Grammar
1. Create a crossword online using sample subject sentences to practise the present simple.

Cells and the present simple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Across</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cilia cells do this.</td>
<td>5. Cells __________ different jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ciliated epithelial cells __________ mucus out of the lungs.</td>
<td>9. These kinds of cells are very long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Blood cells __________ oxygen to every other cell in our body.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Down</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How many different kinds of cell are there in animals and humans?</td>
<td>3. Goblet cells __________ sticky mucus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. There __________ a million types of animals.</td>
<td>6. Your brain and spinal cord __________ and receive messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The sticky mucus in goblet cells __________ dust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY:
Across: 3. beat 5. do 7. carry 9. nerve
Down: 2. two hundred 3. make 4. are 6. send 8. trap

2. Create a present tense competition.
Students work in teams. Each group has a set of 10–12 cards with verbs in the present tense. Show sentences, one by one, on the smart board: each sentence contains a gap where a present tense should go. Each group discusses their answer, then holds up the correct card. The team gets a point if they get it right.

Grammar
1. Create a crossword online using sample subject sentences to practise the present simple.

Functions
Defining, along with explaining, describing and comparing is a commonly occurring language function in school subjects. Play a definitions game with subject words. Pre-teach key structures and styles for writing definitions. Divide learners into two teams. Each team writes definitions for 10 words, and then give the definitions to the other team. The team reads the definitions and writes down the words on the board. The first team to guess all 10 words wins.

We hope we have provided you with some ways of designing CLIL activities that you, as an English teacher, can use to support your learners and subject colleagues.

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Reference

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