

CLIL

Debate questions and answers

Here is a transcript of highlights from the question and answer session that followed the presentations.

[Guardian Weekly](#), Wednesday 20 April 2005

Question 1

Mario Rinvoluceri from Britain

What are the downsides of the clil venture?

David Graddol [DG]: I was implying that there is a potentially large downside to it. In many countries they just don't seem to be equipped to implement Clil. When it works it works extraordinarily well, but it is actually quite a difficult to do well. My feeling is that it may actually take 30 or 40 years for a country to really to pull this one off. Now European countries have been in the business for several decades but that's not true of a country like China.

David Marsh [DM]: Eurydice, which is the statistical arm of the European Commission is doing research on clil in Europe. It has found that every country in Europe is moving on Clil to a greater or lesser extent, except Iceland, Portugal and Greece. If you look at how this Clil movement has been coming, it has been top-down in a few countries. It has been grassroots, bottom-up in the majority of countries. And that makes it quite a formidable force.

Catherine Walter [CW]: Did you [DM] want to comment on any downsides.

DM: No

Gisella Langé [GL]: In our recently approved school reform, Clil is being taken into consideration as a main issue within new trends in education, therefore the future is more and more relying on Clil teachers, who in our country at the moment, cannot possibly be only subject teachers because subject teachers have not got language competencies to teach using a foreign language. Therefore, tandem and team teaching is becoming an important issue. It will take years - at least 10 or 15 years - before a subject teacher will be able to offer his subject and it will take at least 10 or 15 years before initial training at universities, which is being changed now, will offer teachers with a foreign language competence and subject competence.

CW: tandem teaching is a resource heavy solution so of course you need more teachers.

Question 2

Questioner from Finland

I am wondering how we might get rid of the kind of distinction between two camps: The English teachers being suspicious about losing their jobs - perhaps feeling a threat - and the subject matter teachers perhaps jealous about safeguarding as high standards as possible for their academic subject. Surely there should be a convergence of their interests. In other words, aiming at young people who have high standards of both the language and the academic study. What would be the steps by which English teachers could pave the way towards integrating subject matter teaching with language teaching? A problem, as I see it, is that sometimes Clil comes as an unexpected shock to language learners - how are we to soften that shock in any pedagogical ways?

DM: This is a tricky one. I think we have here a steamroller. That is we have an educational approach which is now being researched outside of Canada on a scale we haven't seen before. Which is of particular importance in, for example, a country in Africa which is teaching through English as in Switzerland which has particular problems in promoting multilingualism (against the stereotype). There is an opportunity here, through the forms of dialogue that we have today, and also through many others in Europe, to bring the subject and the language teachers together on this. I think that this is just one part of stopping the "lonely rider" image of teachers in schools and colleges. Of teachers who teach their subject and go home... So I think this is part of the movement. But for some reason in the language teaching profession, the countries I am familiar with have been slow to respond to this as an opportunity. They have been sitting on the side feeling that this is a passing fad and a very silly one. After all, "who are you - the geography teacher - to think that you are good enough in this language to teach through it". So it's a period of opportunity and we will see how it swings.

Question 3

Susan Barduhn [comment]:

I was very pleased in Gisella Langé's talk that she talked about training the trainers first. I find that in my travels around the world is that governments are passing legislation: English must be taught and its very difficult for the teachers. Sometimes the teachers are getting trained sometimes not. But certainly the trainers are not getting trained nearly enough.

Question 4

Questioner from Northern Cyprus:

In my country the educational authorities are trying to change the curriculum from teaching through English to teaching in English. In some high and secondary schools the medium of education is in English now, but as the authorities believe that the students don't have

a good command of English, for the next year they will start to teach English only in English courses. Can you give me your thoughts and suggestion about this situation.

DM: This Clil umbrella is a very large umbrella and under it are many different very interesting educational approaches. To reply, there will be soon a virtual learning environment released called Clil.com and that will be launched towards the end of this year [2005]. It is costing around Euros 500,000 and is being funded by the European Commission and the idea is that it would act as a personal consultant or educator to the teacher who has that kind of question. Clil.com is the kind of tool that can help.

Follow on question from Max de Lotbinière of the Guardian Weekly What happens to the Clil project if the political backing or support for it is withdrawn, which seems to be the experience in Northern Cyprus as outlined by the previous questioner?

DG: I think that there have been, at a political level, some very unrealistic expectations about how rapidly these transitions can be made and with how few resources. I think that means we are living through a transitional period which is quite troubling because when not quite fully resourced, when too hastily implemented, this has the potential for really destroying the education chances of a generation of children right across the world. I think people need to see more clearly, identify what their final goal is, then actually manage the transition towards that with much care and with more realistic views of how much its going to cost and how long it will take.

GL: Not only in Lombardy but in Italy, the political decision as for the curriculum has seen recently a reduction in the time for the teaching of foreign languages. Schools are reducing their weekly offer. There have been financial cuts. We used to have 36 hours in some secondary schools. Now we are having 32-33 hours weekly of school offer. Therefore in order to have an offer of a foreign language with the correct time, they are thinking of having Clil introduced in all secondary schools, at least in one subject. That is a political choice that comes not from a positive development for language but it is a political choice for a better focusing of the curricula. This is one of the reasons why politicians are shifting on Clil.

DM: It is the cost effectiveness of Clil which is attracting political will - or whim - at the moment. From Tanzania through to European countries there is now discussion about how Clil can help bring about a positive, cost effective response. The threat to Clil, where Clil is being jumped on quite heavily is found in countries like Sweden, Slovenia, Iceland, which are frightened of the power of English in terms of their first language. So I would say that the tendency in the countries that I am most familiar with is for the political power to keep with Clil

because there is now the economic evidence of the economic returns - money doesn't talk it swears.

Question 5

From Germany

How far does the panel see the "I" in Clil as relating only to English? Gisella made the European dimension of the Lombardy project particularly clear. But I think we do have a duty to see that the stamped of English doesn't drive out other language, perhaps particularly here in Wales.

Question 6

Dave Allen from NILE, England

I noticed that the word assessment appeared only twice in the three presentations and the word evaluation not at all. If I remember, DG said this [the Clil project] would require new instruments and procedures and it may be possible to do the assessment of language ability through the content. I have worked with hundreds of people - teachers and trainers - who have been involved with Clil over the last 10 years and I know nobody who doesn't think that there is an inherent problem involved in the fact that, while there are advantages in bringing content and language together for the teaching and the learning, there are real problems for assessment. If we don't have the right assessment instruments how do we know that we are doing it well, whether we are improving or whether we are doing damage? I'd like to know whether you think there are problems and do you have any solutions?

DM: There's no blueprint for export of Clil. One of the early mistakes with some Clil with young children in Europe was to import a Canadian model and to assume that what works in Montreal will work in Oslo. There were problems with that. The assessment is being handled case by case, situation by situation. Euridice 2005 are reporting on assessment in Europe. There are tendencies and solutions on board but they are country specific. I give you one example: if you go to a country like the Netherlands there are some 80 schools teaching 50% of all upper secondary through English. That's a lot. Fifty percent is a lot of Clil over three years. They are assessing in Dutch. They are keeping their examinations in Dutch and separately assessing the English. So the youngsters are not having English language exams and that's the same thing we opted for in Finland. There we said there is an added value to Clil through English but that we also need to keep the assessment procedure standard. But it is country by country, it is complicated and people are working on it.

GL: We have been trying to focus on assessment - you are correct that it is really the issue. Also, because previous experiences in international schools were not so positive. That is at the end of the experience the general feeling was that students had been practicing more language but

they had not really learned how to master to content. So there is some thinking that you learn more language but you don't learn enough content. This has not yet been proved. Detailed research has not been made to a point where we could say it is not true or it is true. This is a general perception that needs to be analysed. Yet with team teaching those misunderstandings that were typical of a simply content-led teaching have come to change. People are exchanging more and they are understanding that you cannot possibly have a good content language class unless you also develop a very good language awareness and language evaluation. What's happening with a [limited] Clil experience - 20 hours module for example - is that you have an evaluation that is given by the content teacher for his or her subject and the language teacher for his or her subject separately. This is why we are not having a Clil assessment - we are having still a separate assessment.

DM: I was thinking about chocolate. Clil is a bit like chocolate - a small amount of it is very good, when your hiking up a mountain and you're feeling tired. But too much of it can lead to skin problems and weight problems. If you look at the majority of Clil operation, for example in Europe, then you will see very small scale exposure to learning through English. You'll see a lot of modularity. You will not see 50% of the secondary curriculum in English. You see small modules and you see a direct link to the use of ICT. We've got teachers in Nottingham teaching kids in Romania. We've got teacher trainers sitting in Nottingham University working with students in Romania. So most of this Clil activity is ICT based and it supports and complements language teaching. Because if you look at the reasons why - why we would ever want to start teaching subjects through another language, they are quite diverse. They can be found in something called the Clil Compendium [clilcompendium.com] and they are really quite diverse.

Question 6

From UK, working in Thessaloniki, northern Greece

David Graddol mentioned that most instruction would take place in universities in English. How would that effect people in my context who are Greek who are brilliant academics, but who, for what ever reason, haven't been able to master English to the required level [6.5 Ielts]. I am a bit worried about the "have-nots" in that situation: somebody may have a brilliant academic career ahead of them but for whatever reason that person hasn't made it... I have a colleague who wasn't able to graduate as a social worker to work with Greek people in Greece because she couldn't pass English. Is that the way forward?

DG: It is clearly not the way forward. That is what is happening in quite a number of countries. In some countries it is actually people beginning to realise the very negative effects of that and starting to backtrack and revise the regulations on that. I think they have just revised the regulations in China so that you don't fail to get your

Masters because you haven't reached the necessary band in the English test. But this is happening at not just university level. There are subtle effects working right the way down, even to primary schools, in some countries because girls are better at languages than boys. It seems almost universally - I don't know whether that's because of the universalisation of the methodologies we use - but that seems to be a fact. As you teach some of the core subjects like maths and science through English, the finding is that girls are doing better in some countries in those subjects; getting more places at universities; getting the better jobs at exit from university and getting promotion faster. So there is a kind of a gender issues arising in some countries. The filter, gatekeeping work is being done through the language ability. So I think there are some very big ethical issues that do need to be looked at because they can only be addressed locally. One of the problems about this is that whatever my feelings might be, I have to recognise that these things have to be worked out in country and among the stakeholders.

Question 7

From Germany, Hamburg University.

We have just introduced a course an added qualification for Clil.

Learning English or Learning in English: will we have a choice - who are the "we"? In Germany there is a very lively debate on Clil... the point is it is all on a voluntary level - no one is forced to do it. Student and parents have a choice but parents and students must be totally behind Clil.

DM: [I think] the "we" [in the title of the debate] are the stakeholders be they the parents worrying about the kids or be they the educators. On universities - not German universities only - we were asked recently to do research on "does Clil have a potential in university education". We did it under something called ENLU [www.fu-berlin.de/enlu/] and it is being reported at the end of 2005. And the answer is that it is very difficult because so many university teachers are not methodologically - what's the term... I'm a university teacher [laughter]. But there is another problem that we've found, which was the status of the English language teachers in quite a lot of European universities is remarkably low. I never realised this having lived in the paradise of Finland for some years, but actually the voice, the status and the salary of the language specialist is quite low in universities. This is a real opportunity for the language specialists to reassert themselves, and this is partly what the ENLU is arguing. Because there is an impoverishment - There is clearly a problem with the quality of teaching and learning when "Jack" starts teaching through a language that he does not have full capability to do so at university level.

Question 8

Amy Tsui from the University of Hong Kong

This is a follow up to the question to that from northern Greece about the psychological effect. And it is not only the psychological effect it is

the cognitive - the effect on the cognitive development of the students. I don't know how far we can generalise from the Asian context to the European context, but I would like to share with you three pieces of data.

It seems to me that Hong Kong is going against the rest of the world or the world trend. That is we have moved back from English-medium education to Chinese language education. Now only 25% of our schools use English as the medium of instruction. We have been conducting research on that and one piece of research tracked the students in the two streams for the first three years [now published in the Educational Research Journal]. It actually shows that the students who learned content through English were two years behind the student using Chinese to learn content.

The second piece of data is something I have done, and that is tracking the psychological effect of that on our students. What I have done is look at 11 schools - half Chinese-medium and half English medium - and they started at exactly the same academic level and I looked at things like their self perception, self esteem, motivation and learning strategies. What I found is that they started more or less the same when they were in grade 7; it slowly widened when they got to the second year, but it widened significantly in the third year. That is the self perception, self esteem of English-medium students were significantly lower than Chinese-medium students - and motivation as well. So I am wondering what are the sorts of psychological effects it has on students.

The third piece of data is a very controversial issue in Hong Kong, because the government in Hong Kong is about to announce whether they are going to retain it or change it. The third piece of data is that the first cohort of students who started from 1998 (from the hand over of Hong Kong). The first cohort graduated two years ago (2003) and what we've found is that those Chinese-medium school students - the grades that they got in the school-leaving public examination were much much higher than before because they were taking the exam in Chinese. The school principals, who I have spoken to, have said: "I am never ever going back to English-medium because what I really want is to give our kids a chance - give them a chance to get into university and when they get into university they will do whatever they can to get through university."

So the question I would like to put to the panel is: Are we depriving our students of a choice for better education, while on the other hand we're talking about the economic benefit of Clil? [applause]

CW: From a non-specialist point of view, the question points to the difference that have to be taken into account in terms of identity, where the country is in its national identity, questions of culture and so on.

DM: I worked in Hong Kong last year and I am familiar with the research you refer to. What we have is an example of teaching in English and doing it badly and not actually having teachers equipped to

teach through English using language sensitive methodologies and that is creating a major problem. It is the same as when you go to a country like Namibia or Ethiopia where huge development projects have been set up to improve the teaching in English and if you look at what those development projects have done, from a personal point of view, they've said: "We'll teach the teachers more words, we'll improve their grammar". That is very different to "We will give them the methodologies to make the language barrier lower for the teachers and students in the classroom".

The Dutch research which is similar to this [Hong Kong example], which is very solid research, shows that children who learn through English are showing better Dutch, better content and better English. It may be to do with a honeymoon factor, but there is clearly an important issue with regards to simply teaching in English and teaching through English as a methodological approach.

Question 9

Adrian Tennant from Britain

I want to change the focus slightly away from Clil and back to EFL because I think that Clil has a big effect on us [the audience], because most of us are EFL teachers and not subject-specialist teachers. Clil seems to have a seep-in effect into EFL in that now the materials we get in books and other sources are content rich. We have more about geography, science and history coming through. This has an effect on the assessments - if we are going to have 14 and 15-year-olds supposedly reaching scores of 6.5 Ielts, the content of our mainstream EFL exams is going to have to change drastically, wouldn't you say?

GL: The age of students is the relevant factor. David Graddol pointed out that if you start learning English at the age of six, by the age of 16 you really need to have something different being taught in English. That is the main reason I think for shifting into language content development.

Question 10

Jennifer Basset from Britain

Is there another subtle danger here that has not been mentioned. Every language carries cultural bias. Teaching another subject through a language that has its own cultural baggage, might there not be subtle shifts in attitudes - is there any research being done into this?

DM: It is a very crucial issue that hasn't come up today [during the debate] and I'd like to reply to that with a question: are non-native speakers second best for teaching through English. That relates to this [your question].

DG: I think you are right and more research needs to be done in this area. We are just too ignorant about some of issues here. In some of

the broad models of teaching English [referred to earlier by DG in his presentation] some of them have the native speaker as the gold standard and at the centre, some of them say actually say that it is the non-native speaker who is going to be better at delivering that approach. When it comes to Clil I would have thought that there is very little doubt about it, that in the vast majority of cases, we are looking at non-native speakers delivering the curriculum and rightly so. I also raised the issue of identity change and I think that this is an important thing that comes up again and again. Sometimes it is an explicit part of the programme of teaching English and sometimes it's implicit. We have been talking in Clil about English as though it was this single unitary phenomenon. We then talk about little extensions - ESP style extensions for subject specialisms - as if it's just about specialist vocabulary and things like that. It's not. This thing goes much more widely. It's not just about national styles and orientations and attitudes to learning and to the teacher and to the text book, but also within subject disciplines there are pedagogic discourses which we are familiar with in English but do not translate very easily across the world. Are we actually exporting those? Are teachers in different countries being given the space and opportunities to develop their own new local pedagogic discourses in English?

I was very struck - I was in Hong Kong and China a couple of weeks ago - and I got into fascinating discussions with teachers who were unhappy about teaching through English. One of the issues that arose is that there is a disjunction, it seems, between the way that students are brought to Chinese literacy, with its emphasis on things like memory, partly because of the number of characters that have to be learnt etc, and then the way they are being invited to come to English in which memorising parts of the text book are pretty much forbidden and certainly not highly valued. This struck me as quite an interesting disjunction in learning styles, which was appearing right at primary level. I don't think we are doing enough to explore the implications of some of those things.

CW: I think we have to be a little bit careful about thinking that acquiring a different way of thinking is going to erase the old way of thinking. I don't think it is a question of changing identities but of having a larger repertoire of ways of acting.

Thanks to David Marsh, Gisella Langé and David Graddol ...

[applause]

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