The fundamentals of CLIL methodology in the teaching of specific contents

S I L V A N A   S C H I A V I   F A C H I N *

Abstract. The acronym CLIL, *Content and Language Integrated Learning*, has become a kind of master key which should pave the way for teaching/learning languages better and faster. The Italian translation "Integrated Teaching of Language and Contents", by exchanging terms and putting Language before Contents, has often understood CLIL as a didactic intervention aimed at mainly improving linguistic competence, neglecting or underestimating cognitive aspects. Instead, it is a matter of mediating (teaching/helping to learn) a non-linguistic content (technical, scientific, philosophical, mathematical, etc.) in a foreign language (FL) or a minority language (L2), i.e. in a language other than the language of instruction. The primary objective is therefore to learn a new cognitive content, using a specific language level to support students first and foremost to understand and only then, gradually and progressively, to speak, read and write using the so-called sectorial languages or specific technical languages. In order to implement the CLIL methodology, it is necessary first of all that the materials and activities proposed are in line with the level of cognitive competence of learners, taking into account – for example – the fact that many years are necessary to master the notions of time, space, quality and quantity. The CLIL teacher, therefore, must be able to choose contents that are suitable for the cognitive competence of the students and that are able to arouse their interest and curiosity, thus nourishing their desire to learn. This is the basis for designing activities in two (bilingual education) or more languages (multilingual education), through teamwork (*team teaching*) conducted with the teacher of Italian (language of instruction), foreign language (French, English, German, etc.) and/or minority language (Friulian, Slovenian, Romanian, Albanian, and so on), in a key that we can define as contrastive and that compares the similarities and differences between two or more languages and two or more cultures.

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1. The Multilingual space. The co-existence of human groups with different languages and cultures on the same territory is part of human history, but with the passing of time it has grown enormously in many parts of the world, both because of the greater ease of movement, and because of the need of some populations to leave their countries due to wars or famines. We know that the third millennium pushed this phenomenon to unprecedented levels, throughout Europe, Italy included, with problems in the reception of immigrants by the civil society, the world of work, public institutions, administrative or educational institutions such as schools or universities.

The world of schools, from kindergarten to high school, is slowly and laboriously trying to create the conditions to offer an adequate welcome to newly arrived schoolchildren.

As a matter of fact, the Italian academic world, especially in the area of humanities, has long ignored the issue of professional training, both for Italian and foreign graduates. It was only in the late 1990s that academic institutions began to dialogue with the world of production, which had already been connected for some time to the global economic world. The latter had to face the mobility of people and therefore the problems of cultural linguistic diversity, with the consequent need to create a profession that included new communicative language skills, also through the development of forms of intercultural and multilingual education aimed at improving the teaching of Italian as a second language (L2), enhancing the study of foreign languages (FL) with special attention to English, which was also introduced in primary schools and even in kindergarten. The choice of *plurilingual* education – which, on this side of the Atlantic, characterized the education policy of only a few countries, such as the Swiss Confederation, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Sweden – has gradually spread to countries and peoples of English language and culture, from Great Britain to Australia, the United States, Canada, and in countries of Spanish tradition, from Spain to Latin American countries. However, it was almost always a bilingual teaching for schoolchildren who had as their native language (NL)[1], i.e. the first language learned in the family, a language dif-

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[1] The term "mother tongue" is improper because not always the first language that the child listens and learns (or rather acquires) is that of the mother, but that of the person who cares for him in the first months or years of life. The most commonly used term is native language (NL), which is the first language

ferent from the language of instruction this being their second language (L2), i.e. the language used in the surrounding environment. In California, for example, this form of bilingual education (Spanish-English) was addressed to the *Chicanos*, students from families from Mexico; in Canada, it was addressed in French (NL) and English (L2) to French-speaking students and in English (NL) and French (L2) to English-speaking students. In Europe and Italy, this form of school bilingualism usually included the language of the State having the status of language of instruction and a foreign language (FL), which became a subject of the curriculum. In the 1970s, both in Great Britain and Italy, detailed reports began to be published on the poor results that language teaching produced both in the field of knowledge and skills in the language of the State and in foreign languages.

It was during the last thirty years of the twentieth century, from the 1970s onwards, that multilingual Europe, precisely in order to improve the quality of language teaching and also to preserve the extraordinary wealth of languages and cultures of the European continent, set up a special committee in which linguists and specialists from all over Europe worked. This Committee on Cultural Cooperation of the Council of Europe[2], as stated on its website, acts according to Article 3 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which states that: "The Union shall respect the richness and cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe's cultural heritage and shall ensure that it is protected and developed"[3].

During the early 1970s, the Council of Europe began to publish a series of so-called "Threshold Levels"[4] in many languages, which were very useful to boost and renew the teaching of native, second and foreign languages. It is a kind of standard reference inventory of basic components of a communicative use of a language, of any language, divided into the following main aspects:

1. The *right settings* for using the language and *topics* (*general or specific topics*) or that environment and those situations.

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a person learns in the family. The second language (L2) is the language used in the surrounding environment, while the foreign language (FL) is the language used in another country. In the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, both Slovenian and German are native languages in their local variations, but they can become second languages when they become part of the curriculum of a school, or living languages of communication for the many Slovenes and German speakers who spend their holidays there or for the citizens of the region, who go to Austria and Slovenia, the two neighbouring countries.

[2] For more information on the Council of Europe's activities and documents in support of language teaching, see http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/index_it.html.

[3] *Le rôle de la Commission repose sur l'article 3, paragraphe 3 du traité de Lisbonne, qui dispose: "L'Union respecte la richesse de sa diversité culturelle et linguistique, et veille à la sauvegarde et au développement du patrimoine culturel européen".*

[4] The first Threshold Level was the English one published by the Council of Europe in 1974. The Friulian *Nivel Soiâr* was translated and made available to research and school by the chair of Didactics of Modern Languages at the University of Udine in 1987.

2. The *right way* to express oneself in those situations and to deal with those topics, also in relation to the psychological state of the speaker (neutral, sympathetic, unsympathetic, polemical and so on

3. The *communicative functions* that we want to express through language, ending with an inventory of the basic vocabulary and a basic grammatical inventory.

On the basic elements of these inventories and of the experimental research work carried out during the last thirty years of the last century, the Council of Europe in 2001 published the CEFR *Common European Framework of Reference*, another fundamental document for the teaching of languages that was published in Friuli in 2004 under the title *Cuadri Comun European di Riferiment pes lenghis: aprendiment, insegnament valutazion (CCER).* The document states that "It was developed to provide a common basis to the explicit description of objectives, content and methods in second and foreign language education". The text included a detailed description of what students should know and teachers should teach, although it must be said that it did not yet take into account the problem of teaching native languages, especially minority languages: an aspect that would be taken into account only in the nineties. The core of the common framework refers to language not so much as a system of formal combinations but as a series of actions that language speakers (users) or students carry out in a specific communicative situation (private or public; formal or informal; daily or specialised and so on) to obtain a specific result.

Taking up the fundamental components of the threshold levels, the common framework of reference offers a very detailed analysis of the necessary linguistic competence, of the receptive or productive activities to be implemented, of the textual typologies (spoken or written), of the environments (public or personal/private), of the strategies to be used and of the tasks to be implemented to obtain the solution of a problem or to achieve a certain result.

In comparison with a tradition centred above all on the teaching of linguistic skills, that is, on the phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical knowledge of a language, this new perspective aims to put into action other types of particular communicative environments, such as sociolinguistics and pragmatics. The first refers to the ability to harmonize the language with the social condition and conventions of the environment in which it is used (formal or informal, public or private, domestic or foreign, between friends or strangers, between equal or different, and so on). Pragmatic competence refers to the functional use of a language, i.e. the use one makes of it to obtain or reject something; to relate to others, to imagine, describe or verify something, and so on, according to a model elaborated by the linguist Halliday (1973, 1975). The most detailed section of the document concerns a global scale of receptive (the language a person understands) and produc-

tive (the language he uses) skills sorted into a global scale of six increasing (or rather, decreasing) levels, and outlines the characteristics of a very skilled speaker, a rather fluid one and a beginner who has just began using the language. The six so-called descriptors can be examined in two directions: from C2, the highest, which refers to high quality skills, which are usually those of a native speaker with a high level of education and which are reduced in progression from C1, to B2, to B1, to A2, to get to A1, which marks the lowest level, i.e. describes the initial level of mastery of language skills of a beginner who has only recently started to use a certain language. It is clear that descriptors can also be read from the bottom up (from A1 to C2), and used to analyse the different qualitative aspects of the use of a language by students or any speaker, but they are also a valuable support for each of us to assess our level of competence in a language. They can therefore also become a useful self-evaluation, self-education tool for teachers.

In 2004, the OLF (*Osservatori regjonâl de Lenghe e de culture Furlanis*), a regional body established by the regional law 15/96, published a bilingual booklet (Italian-Friulan) to – as stated in the introduction: «[…]

formulate an organic proposal of an educational and didactic programme that can become a common reference for the whole school, accompanying it with general introductory considerations and suggestions of an organizational and methodological nature"[5] (OLF 2004, p. 7).

Although it was a booklet designed to accompany the introduction of teaching of Friulian and in Friulian in schools, starting from kindergarten to secondary school, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, it is a clear and practical example of how CCER can be used to structure any language course.

However, it must be said that the Council of Europe Language Policy department, since 2005 has continued its activity by producing materials and research studies to move from the teaching of second and foreign languages to the more complicated subject of the languages in education and the right to have a plurilingual and intercultural approach[6]. A theme that, in fact, involves an extension of the linguistic policy that values every language a community has as its native or encounters at school or the one he/she uses with the people of his/her environment. This basic approach of reasoning no longer takes into account one language at a time: the language of the house, the

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[5] […] *rivâ ae formulazion di une propueste organiche di un program educatîf e didatic par che al deventi riferiment comun di dutis lis scuelis, compagnantlu cun considerazions di jentrade di fate gjenerâl e cun sugjeriments di caratar organizatîf e metodologjic.*
For further information, see: OLF - Regjon Friûl-Vignesie Julie (2004) Indicazions pe programazion didatiche curiculâr daûr de leç 482/99, bilingual edition (Friulian-Italian).
[6] For more information on the different forms of plurilingual education, see http://www.observatoire-plurilinguisme.eu/index.php?lang=en

common language of instruction, the international language of the time (once in Europe it was French, now it is English), a minority language, a classical language, the language as a subject or as a means of learning other subjects. This new perspective, in fact, speaks of "languages" in the plural and calls them languages of education; there is not, as in the Common European Framework of Reference, only the objective of achieving standardization, but, through the mastery of a plurality of languages, the close link that these have with the concepts of social cohesion, inclusion and democratic life, is highlighted i.e. with the principles that we find in Article three of the Constitution of the Italian Republic.

It should be mentioned that, regarding the discussion to develop new models that can manage the linguistic diversity of Europe effectively, the documents of the Council of Europe mention the Italian example of language education stemming from the *Ten Theses for a Democratic Language Education* by GISCEL (1975). These theses (for the most part) entered the programmes of Italian primary and secondary schools, which in different classes – especially in primary schools – through the contact of several languages and different cultures, have produced, especially for the weakest pupils, surprising results that showed effects of inclusion and social cohesion, thus putting into practice one of the basic principles of the *Ten Theses*. This function that the school can have is clearly indicated in thesis number IV:

Among these objectives there is the school which is therefore called upon by the Constitution to identify and pursue the task of an effective democratic language education. It must be emphasised that the main goal of this task is the respect and protection of all the linguistic varieties (whether they are different languages or different uses of the same language) provided that citizens of the Republic shall never experience such differences as ghettos and cages of discrimination, as obstacles to equality[7].

In a 1996 publication, Tullio De Mauro reinforced this concept and remarked:

At all levels it is noted that a wrong teaching approach can crystallize diversity into inequalities and distances into unbridgeable ditches and disadvantages. But it is also documented that conscious teaching can transform diversity and distance into factors that enrich common language skills[8] (De Mauro 1996, 24).

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[7] Tesi IV: *Rientra tra questi la scuola, che dalla Costituzione è chiamata dunque a individuare e perseguire i compiti di una educazione linguistica efficacemente democratica. Tali compiti, ripetiamolo, hanno come traguardo il rispetto e la tutela di tutte le varietà linguistiche (siano esse idiomi diversi o usi diversi dello stesso idioma) a patto che ai cittadini della Repubblica sia consentito non subire tali differenze come ghetti e gabbie di discriminazione, come ostacoli alla parità.*

[8] *A tutti i livelli si constata che una didattica sbagliata può cristallizzare le diversità in diseguaglianze e le distanze in fossati incolmabili e svantaggi. Ma è anche documentato che una didattica consapevole può trasfor-*

2. From language teaching to plurilingual democratic education. Taking these premises into consideration and returning to the definitions of multilingualism and plurilingualism found in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, it can be said that the basic lines of an educational policy project emerge clearly. Starting from a very rigorous analysis of situational contexts, i.e. from the complex of relations that exist between the linguistic element and the social situation, it is possible to draw the outline of an educational project that changes the initial situation in a dynamic way, creating the conditions to transform them progressively into multiple individual competences. To give a practical example, it is enough to take into consideration the basic multilingualism of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, where three languages coexist, protected by state and regional laws, plus the language of the State to which they belong, under three great linguistic families, the Romance languages (Friulian and Italian), the Germanic language of the German-speaking communities, and the Slavic language. There has never been, however, a suitable linguistic and educational policy to transform this territorial wealth into an individual wealth, that is to say, to ensure that it becomes a plurilingual competence in the four languages of the region[9]. As the greatest experts in plurilingual education state, this is the ideal condition to start studying also other languages such as English, Spanish, French or (modern) Greek, Chinese and so on.

Multilingualism, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, *is a social phenomenon* which means "the co-existence of a number of languages in a given society. It may be attained by simply diversifying the languages on offer in a particular school or educational system, or by encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language, or reducing the dominant position of English in international communication" (CEFR, 4).

Plurilingualism, on the other hand, *is an individual phenomenon*. In the Common European Framework it is stated that

the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language(s) of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience). He or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence

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mare diversità e distanze in fattori di arricchimento delle comuni capacità linguistiche. In Colombo A., Romani W. (a cura di) (1996). *È la lingua che ci fa eguali. Lo svantaggio linguistico: problemi di definizione e di intervento.* Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

[9] This territorial multilingualism has never been transformed into an individual plurilingualism, that is to say that all or most of the citizens of the region have not been given the right educational means in order that they can become capable of using, at least partially, the four languages of the regional territory.

to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact (CEFR, 4).

The heart of this division is the contrast between two models of competence in two or more languages: a separate competence and a unified one[10]. According to the first (SUP), the pupil places separate skills next to each other, one for each language (e.g. one for Italian, one for Friulian, one for English, and so on). This model requires that the contents and skills one has in the NL (native language) have little influence on the construction of another language and therefore the competence in the L2 is built independently.

It is clear that this way of considering things, which is the most widespread among people, believes that the energy and time spent in learning L1, especially when it happens to be a small language and has a small circulation as Friulian, Welsh or Catalan, is a waste of time and may even prevent learning correctly and quickly the language of instruction (Italian L2) and/or a foreign language (FL). Unfortunately, this idea is still prevalent in our schools and, unfortunately, it has also passed on to families and society.

Empirical evidence, however, shows that an important part of the conceptual cores and skills – in their deepest and most general aspects – are transferred from one language to another, even if the surface manifestations are different. Jim Cummins defines this passage as *Linguistic Interdependence Principle* and in a work of the 1990s, describes it as follows: "As education in an X language (XL) really and profitably grows a competence in XL it will happen that this competence will pass into YL, but only if the exposure time to YL is adequate (at school or in the surrounding environment) and if the student is motivated enough to learn it" (Cummins 1996)[11].

Among the 27 countries that are part of the European Union, the Italian Republic – as Tullio De Mauro writes in a book published in 1992 under the title *L'Italia delle Italie* – is the country that has the most marked linguistic and cultural diversity and where the linguistic and cultural heritage of the country has been most extended and enriched thanks to the new migrations. In the chapter dedicated to "Linguistic minorities: theoretical and historical issues", de Mauro writes on page 101:

As it should be known, that the population that now lives within the borders of the Italian Republic experience more than

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[10] Jim Cummins, in his 1996 study *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*, defines both the first model and the second model, respectively: *The Separate Underlying Proficiency Model of Bilingual Proficiency* (SUP), and *The Common Underlying Model of Bilingual Proficiency* (CUP).
[11] For more in-depth information, see Cummins J. (1996). *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. Ontario: California Association for Bilingual Education and Schiavi Fachin S. (2006). *Linguistic minorities in the perspective of multilingual education. Annals of Education*, 5-6, Bimonthly of the Ministry of Education.

in other European countries, and perhaps more than in any other country in the world of equal geographical extent and demographic weight, a native condition of internal and external multilingualism, which is well rooted in history and still present in the social reality of our country[12].

Unlike the visions of Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (1932)*,* George Orwell in *1984 Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), or Pier Paolo Pasolini in the last ten years of his life, who thought that a process of standardization was erasing all signs of diversity, Tullio De Mauro, already about thirty years ago, said that

The "planetarization" of each economy and information circuits is not only not erasing, but is exalting the awareness and sense of the peculiarity of each linguistic-cultural and national area in the face of the other different ones; in addition, the economic and information technology "planetarization" is giving linguistic, cultural and national realities the power to come to the fore, to be present and to count. This condition, in the most technologically and economically unconnected world of the past, did not exist and was not even imaginable[13].

It must be said that De Mauro has devoted his entire life, as a scholar, writer, professor, man of institutions[14] to the rebirth of the conscience of citizens of all social classes, from academics (professors and researchers) to school teachers (of all levels), to educators of all kinds, from parents to grandparents, to nannies (babysitters), to all those involved in the education of children and young people and to journalists and those responsible for radio and television programmes (from the legislator to the editor, the presenter and so on) of the great value that this heritage of languages and cultural traditions of our country, a heritage which should be known, respected, studied and disseminated.

It was also thanks to his many interventions throughout Italy that, in application of Article 6 of the Constitutional Charter of the Italian Republic – *The Republic protects linguistic minorities with special rules* – after more than fifty years, in 1999, the Italian State promulgated law, no. 482, with which a process was started, albeit still partial and fragmentary, to protect the rights of citizens to recognize themselves in a native linguistic

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[12] *Come dovrebbe essere noto, le popolazioni che si raccolgono entro i confini attuali della Repubblica Italiana vivono più che in altri paesi europei, e forse più che in ogni altro paese del mondo di pari estensione geografica e peso demografico, una condizione nativa di plurilinguismo interno ed esterno, ben radicato nella storia e nella realtà sociale presente.*

[13] *La "planetarizzazione" di ciascuna economia e dei circuiti informativi non solo non sta cancellando, ma sta esaltando la coscienza e il senso della peculiarità di ciascuna area linguistico-culturale e nazionale di fronte alle altre diverse; di più, proprio la "planetarizzazione" economica e delle tecnologie dell'informazione sta conferendo a realtà linguistico-culturali e nazionali un potere di venire alla ribalta, di farsi presenti e di contare che, nel mondo di ieri tecnologicamente ed economicamente più slegato, non esisteva e nemmeno era immaginabile.*

[14] De Mauro was Minister of Education under the Amato Government between 2000 and 2001.

and cultural heritage and to build the premises to start a democratic linguistic education "based upon the respect of the linguistic identity of the students and on the offer of the linguistic and cultural heritage elaborated by the peoples of the world above all in the area of the international languages of greater diffusion, as it is the most highly mobile and widely effective instrument to reaffirm the primary human right to the word", as De Mauro wrote in 1974[15].

Already in the 1970s, he blamed the traditional linguistic pedagogy of the school for ignoring and stifling the dialectal, cultural and social diversity that characterized a large number of students, eventually turning it into a disadvantage in school and in life.

In the first version, the Ten Theses for a Democratic Language Education were elaborated by Tullio De Mauro, then they were discussed by linguists and teachers who had gathered in a research group within the Società di Linguistica Italiana under the name of GISCEL (intervention and study group in the field of language education), and in April 1975 the text was published in its final version[16].

In the Ten Theses we read these words (Thesis VIII):

The solicitation of linguistic abilities must start from the identification of the linguistic and cultural background of each pupil, of the family and of the environment, not to fix and nail him or her to this background, but, on the contrary, to enrich the linguistic heritage of the pupil through additions and expansions that, to be effective, must be purposely graduated[17].

A fundamental starting point to begin learning other languages as early as possible.

This fundamental document led to a profound reconsideration of the teaching of Italian as well as of foreign languages, especially by groups and associations of teachers[18] who began to produce documents and publications, develop research studies, organize conferences and professional refresher courses giving rise to inservice training activities. Due to the spirit of initiative of some academics

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[15] […] *orientata sul rispetto dell'identità linguistica degli allievi e sull'offerta del patrimonio linguistico-culturale elaborato dai popoli del mondo nell'alveo soprattutto delle lingue internazionali di maggior diffusione, è lo strumento più mobilmente e largamente efficace di riaffermazione del primario diritto umano alla parola* (De Mauro 1992, 86-109).

[16] See https://giscel.it.

[17] *La sollecitazione delle capacità linguistiche deve partire dall'individuazione del retroterra linguistico-culturale personale, familiare, ambientale dell'allievo, non per fissarlo e inchiodarlo a questo retroterra, ma, al contrario, per arricchire il patrimonio linguistico dell'allievo attraverso aggiunte e ampliamenti che, per essere efficaci, devono essere studiatamente graduali.*

[18] The CIDI (Centre for the Democratic Initiative of Teachers), the GISCEL (study intervention group in the field of language education) for education, the MCE (Movement for Educational Cooperation), the ANILS (National Association of Foreign Language Teachers) and the LEND (Language and New Didactics) for foreign languages.

and especially of many teachers who were familiar with the studies and experiences made in other countries of the world, this new climate also helped to encourage a small academic reform, namely the introduction (in the academic year 1971/1972) of the Didactics of Modern Languages in the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures.

In the meantime, large international organizations such as Unesco and the Council of Europe – in order to respond to the increasingly urgent demand for knowledge of foreign languages and especially English – intervened to improve teaching by means of documents of applied linguistics, experiments with systematic courses of professional training and production of inventories of the heritage of contexts, notions and basic forms of communication of a language.

The chair of Didactics of Modern Languages of the University of Udine also actively contributed to this field of research[19].

Unfortunately, even after almost fifty years, it must be said that this attempt to bring professional training into the academies is still very occasional and fragmentary in nature. On the one hand, this is due to the lack of political will on the part of the Ministry of Education (MIUR), but to a large extent it also depends on the professors and university departments, both humanistic and scientific, who have never considered

this problem as a priority, and so it happens that fields of theoretical research are neglected, which have always opened up new avenues and led to the formulation of new basic principles – the fundamentals precisely – to experiment, for example, in teaching paths, materials, activities of an innovative nature and disseminate the new experience after verifying the results.

3. The fundamentals of CLIL methodology (Content and Language Integrated Learning). CLIL was founded in Europe in the 1990s to find a solution to the limitations that French Immersion Programmes (French Immersion Programmes), born in Canada in the 1970s, had demonstrated. The researchers found that an "immersion in the language" at school was not enough to learn a second language and that it was also necessary to use it as means of communication for new non-linguistic contents.

Another fundamental prerequisite for the correct implementation of the CLIL methodology is the distinction between native language (NL) – usually, but improperly, called mother tongue –, second language (L2) and foreign language (FL). In sociolinguistics, and in language teaching methodology, a second language is a language used in the environment in which one lives and the definition opposes a foreign language (FL), i.e. a language used as a means of commu-

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[19] For an in-depth look at the contribution made by the University of Udine and the research group directed by Nereo Perini, see Perini 1985.

nication in a foreign country, which is taught at school but which is rarely used as a means of communication in the environment outside the school and therefore generally becomes only one of the subjects of the school curriculum[20].

The order of the words in the acronym (CLIL), first content (C) then language (L), clearly marks the close relationship between the two terms, where the methodology is applied to learn non-linguistic contents, but at the same time helps learning the language in an integrated way.

That language and thought are firmly correlated and interdependent, both in the process of the first acquisition and in the development and maturity of a language, was already anticipated in the last century by Vygotskij (1896-1934), a Russian avant-garde psychologist. Vygotskij made us understand that language has a dual function: on the one hand, it is a tool for communication and social interaction, on the other hand, it is a tool for nourishing and developing thought. Introducing the CLIL methodology does not only mean introducing a vehicular use of a second or foreign language with the aim to increase the exposure time to the language, but using it in linguistic acts of a cognitive nature because, according to language philosophers such as Searle and Austin, it is through cognitive acts that the system of a language is built and it is through the system that meanings are built.

It is not only a matter of learning a specific or sectorial terminology (technical or scientific), but it is also necessary to take into consideration questions of a cognitive and expressive nature that students need to understand, speak, say, read, write about non-linguistic contents (history, geography, mathematics, chemistry, physics, electronics and so on). Unfortunately, the Ministry did not take into account this fundamental difference when introducing CLIL at all school levels, without any reference to the development of cognitive skills (notions of time, space, quality, quantity) and mastery of the communicative functions that must be used to express them. It is not only a matter of a specific terminology but of a capacity of abstraction, a procedure that goes from the particular to the universal, from the concrete, sensitive experience, to the abstract and universal concept.

In early childhood and primary school it is necessary that students are guided through small experiments (for example, to read a graph or weather maps, to prepare ingredients to make a recipe, and so on) to be able to gradually mature the concepts (of quantity: from spoon to grams; of space: here, there, above, below, North, South; of

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[20] In the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, both Slovenian and German are native languages in their local variations, they can become second languages when they are included in the curriculum of a school or a living language of communication for the many Slovenian German-speakers who spend their holidays in Friuli Venezia Giulia or for the citizens of this region who go to other neighbouring countries.

time: now, today, once, before, after, in the meantime, etc.).

This function of the language that Halliday (1925-2018) has continued to explore over time, enriching a fundamental work of his entitled *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* published in 1985 and subsequently republished in new editions in 1994, 2004 and again in 2014, is based on two principles: that language is a *meaning potential*, i.e. a potential state of meaning, a resource for making sense, and that linguistics studies *how people exchange meanings by 'languaging'*. It is precisely on the basis of these theoretical aspects and the studies he conducted in the 1970s on the development of children's language, published in 1975 under the title *Learning How to Mean*, that Halliday formulated his theory on the development of linguistic functions and proposed new educational paths to teach them both in the family and at school, through interventions and activities that created the favourable conditions for the realisation of that very important process which foresees that, by realising new experiences and widening the field of our knowledge – through meaningful exchanges between the speaker and the listener, or between the writer and the reader – even the language used grows and evolves. It is precisely with the expression LAC (*Language across the curriculum*) that Halliday, already in 1977, highlighted the importance of the role that every teacher plays in the growth and development of the language of his students, no matter if he teaches mathematics, history, Italian, a foreign language and so on , as long as he is aware of it. It would be necessary for those working in the field of education, in all age groups, to be fully aware of the importance of knowing how to use a language in private and in public, a skill that enables all citizens to participate actively in the social and cultural life of the community in which they live and which is the most valid and effective way to implement those principles of democracy, contained in Article 3 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic[21].

The introduction of the CLIL methodology cannot, therefore, be understood only as a change of language, but involves the introduction of an exploratory discourse which – through a continuous negotiation of meanings at the level of oral discourse and through interactions in the written form – has made it quite clear that the relationship between the teacher and the student is never limited to a mere transmission of content, but must also be useful in seeking and practicing the most suitable forms of expression to use them in one or more

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[21] "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the task of the Republic to remove economic and social obstacles which, by effectively restricting the freedom and equality of citizens, impede the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization of the country" (Article 3 of the Italian Constitution).
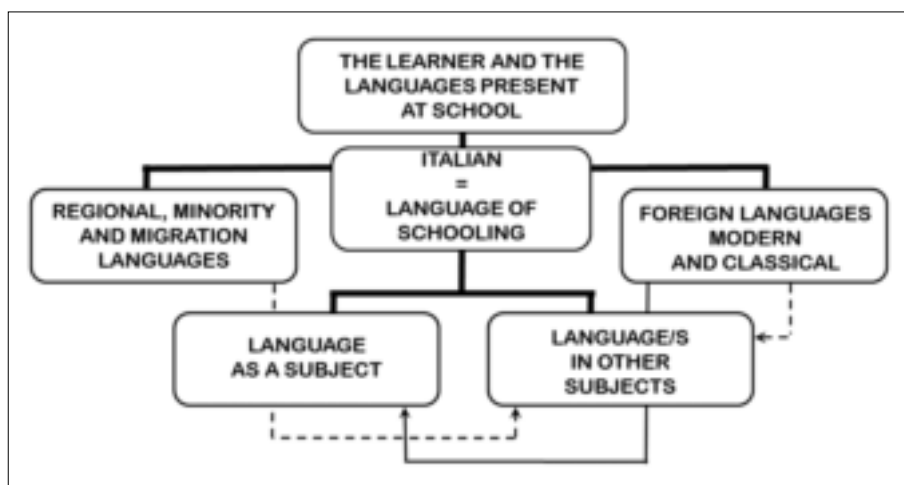
Figure 1. Taken and adapted from Fogar (2011).

languages and that this function of language must be taken care of by all teachers, and not only by those who teach languages (Fig. 1).

The analyses published by Istat on the difficulty that Italians, young and old, have in reading and understanding a newspaper article, a chart, a table, a map, percentages, or the large number of people who do not read even one book a year, or the difficulties that university students also encounter in writing a report or a short thesis, show that the problem of intervening to improve language skills is a general problem that should be addressed at all levels with urgency and seriousness.

The CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology, i.e. an integrated learning of a content and a language, is based on the thesis that exposure to a language, even if the focus is not on the language, always serves to improve it, encouraging a spontaneous acquisition that, with time and practice, will gradually become even more formal. It recalls Krashen's *rule of forgetting*, who in the 1970s proposed that when learning languages one must take into account a rule: that of forgetting that one is learning in a formal situation, i.e. it is necessary to create that "spontaneous" condition that favours the acquisition of language in a natural situation. It was the impact, rather late in Italy, of the "linguistic turning point" that was going through different fields of the human sciences and an important issue touched also the aspects of the acquisition of language as a tool both for the elaboration of thought and a means of social communication, thus highlighting strongly and in a new way, the centrality of the development and of the behaviour of the human person.

The American linguist Stephen Krashen, in the seventies and eighties, had developed the SLAT (Second Language Acquisition Theory), a theory that refers to the acquisition of a second language (L2). Among the fundamentals of this theory, there is the distinction between acquisition and learning as two processes that come into play in the CLIL methodology, but that have a different weight when it comes to teaching (or helping to learn) specific contents such as physics, electronics, chemistry, history, geography, and so on.

By *acquisition* we mean an unconscious process that exploits the global strategies of the right cerebral hemisphere together with the analytical strategies of the left hemisphere: what is acquired enters in a stable way into the competence in the long-term memory.

Learning, on the other hand, is a rational process, supported by the left hemisphere, which produces temporary competence.

Another fundamental principle is the contrast between two models of the bi-plurilingual competence mentioned earlier in this paper – the separate one and the common or unified one – which the linguist Jim Cummins defined in a work, published in 1996, with the title *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society.* In his seminal work, Cummins refutes one of the most widespread prejudice about the loss of time and mental confusion that would result from learning a local language, a minority language, both on the language of instruction and on the foreign languages learned at school. According to the first model, the SUP (*The Separate Underlying Model of Bilingual Proficiency*), the learner puts together, side by side, different skills in the languages he is learning. The separate model provides that the contents and skills that the speaker has in the first language (L1) have little or no influence on the maturation of skills in another language, and, therefore, that L2 is developed independently. It is clear that this vision, which is the most widespread, can only estimate the time and energy that a person devotes to learning a native language (L1) – especially if it is a language of small circulation – a waste of time and sometimes even an obstacle to the correct learning of the language of instruction (L2) or the foreign language (FL). Time lost, then, to more important things. This vision still prevails in our schools and, as a result, unfortunately also in families and society. Empirical evidence shows, instead, that an important part of the conceptual core and skills – in their deepest and most general aspects – are transferred from one language to another. Even if the external manifestations seem different.

At least these, among the fundamental concepts that theory and linguistic research provide, should be taken into account even when the university decides to deliver a whole course or a selection of courses in a foreign language, usually English, as it now happens in many Italian universities.

4. Conclusions. The crucial point that we must take into consideration when we choose to deal (teach/learn) with a non-linguistic content (technical, scientific, philosophical, mathematical, historical, and so on) in a foreign language (FL) or minority language (L2), i.e. different from the language of instruction, concerns the *teacher,* and the most debated topic is whether it is better to resort to a) one teacher for both non-linguistic content and language b) two teachers who work together, or c) each on their own subject.

In this regard, Professor Carmel Mary Coonan of Ca' Foscari University in Venice, a specialist in the CLIL methodology, clearly highlights the differences between CLIL and the vehicular use of a language:

The mistake that is easy to make is that of using matter purely for linguistic purposes, thus transforming experience into a teaching of micro-language. The subject becomes the vehicle for teaching L2/FL. A real situation of a non-native vehicular language, on the other hand, is the opposite: the didactic objectives of the non-linguistic subject are pursued, which are primarily conceptual, cognitive and operational (knowledge and skills), non-linguistic. For this reason, it is preferable that the course is done by the teacher of the specific content rather than by the language teacher (Coonan 2002).

My opinion, which corresponds to that of language teachers who have been using this methodology for a long time, is that it is possible to work on CLIL in collaboration with the teacher of the subject. When this is not possible, it must be borne in mind that there are cognitive and expressive issues that students face when understanding, speaking, reading, and writing about non-linguistic content (history, geography, mathematics, chemistry, electronics, and so on). Therefore, it is not just a matter of learning a specific lexicon, a micro-language, but of an integrated learning of content and language, based on the thesis that exposure to a language, even if the focus is not *on* the language, always helps to improve it, encouraging a spontaneous acquisition that, with time and practice, will gradually become even more formal. Remember Krashen's *rule of forgetting*: in learning languages one should forget that he/she is learning in a formal situation. It is necessary to create that "spontaneous" condition that promotes the acquisition of language in a natural situation. This process requires a teacher with a high competence in the languages involved and a well-structured detailed knowledge of the impact, though delayed in Italy, of the linguistic change in the fields of human sciences. In this regard, an important issue touches on the aspects of the acquisition of language, which is an instrument for the elaboration of thought as well as a means of social communication, which also highlights the centrality of the development and the behaviour of the human being.

As mentioned earlier, Krashen in the Seventies and Eighties elaborated the SLAT on the acquisition of a

second language (L2). Among the fundamentals of this theory is the distinction between *acquisition* and *learning*, two processes that come into play in the CLIL methodology, but have a different weight when it comes to teaching (or facilitating the acquisition of) content of specific subjects[22].

It is clear that the primary objective must be to encourage above all the development of the cognitive competence of space, time, quality and quantity and the communicative functions necessary to express them. It is not, therefore, only a matter of specific terminology, but of supporting the development of the capacity for abstraction, of a process that moves from the particular to the universal and that, starting from concrete experiences lived through the senses, moves towards more abstract and universal concepts.

Finally, this kind of teaching and learning strategies, which often take the form of research-action paths, benefit greatly from the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and find in the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) a precious and richly stimulating support for teachers and students.

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[22] As we have seen, by *acquisition* we mean an unconscious process that exploits the global strategies of the right brain hemisphere together with the analytical strategies of the left brain hemisphere: what is acquired enters in a stable way into the competence in long-term memory. *Learning*, on the other hand, is a rational process, supported by the left hemisphere, which produces temporary competences.

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