

Chapter 1

CLIL, Bilingual Education, and Pluriliteracies: Bridging the Language Gap in the Knowledge Society

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ABSTRACT

The so-called language gap is not a modern invention, since language is power and a form of taking dominion over the world in humans' intellectual confrontation with reality. Historically, there has been inequality in language learning and mastery as a way to access knowledge and to achieve self-fulfillment in both the public and private spheres. This chapter explores the concept of language gap from a diachronic perspective and the way in which the Andalusian education system has taken actions emanating from European language policies, aimed at bridging the language gap among young people through initiatives of great impact on content and language education, such as the consolidation of bilingual education programmes through the CLIL approach and pedagogical tools like the Integrated Language Curriculum, the European Language Portfolio, and the School Language Project.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'language gap' is as old as humanity for a simple reason: the human being is *homo loquens*, a creature that speaks, and social differences have imposed their tyranny ever since the very cradle of humanity. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals remind governments precisely that they have yet to eradicate world hunger and make primary education a universal right. It is no coincidence that injustice and social inequality have had many faces and one of them is the way in which the mastery of languages (the mother tongue and foreign languages) has allowed certain groups or individuals to attain greater levels of personal, academic and professional success (and power) in the public and private spheres. The school, as an institution in charge of perpetuating the vast cultural legacy of

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human beings, has not remained on the margins of this unavoidable reality. Thus, in recent decades, we have witnessed the unprecedented democratization of language learning in the European context. While language learning used to be an elitist prerogative, now public schools ensure that citizens have access to languages as powerful tools for meaning making and knowledge construction. In this context, the CLIL approach represents a unique pedagogical opportunity to fight the language gap: by transforming languages (the mother tongue and the foreign language) into genuine vehicles of communication and tools for accessing the knowledge of the different disciplines that make up the school curriculum, this approach makes it possible for learners to acquire more solid curricular knowledge, to improve students' linguistic competence in several languages, to access other worldviews and cultural meanings, as well as to develop pluriliteracies that ensure the learner's active participation in the so-called Knowledge Society.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the European Union, from its very origins, should have been committed to giving a decisive impetus to all those policies aimed at reinforcing the plurilingual and pluricultural dimension that must necessarily permeate the provision of high-quality education. In the case of Andalusia, in 2005 the regional administration put in place the *Plan for the Promotion of Plurilingualism. A Language Policy for the Andalusian Society*, an essential document from which various actions emerged that improved the competence in linguistic communication in foreign languages of the teaching staff and students alike. In 2017, the *PEDLA, the Strategic Plan for the Development of Languages in Andalusia. Horizon 2020*, was made public. It seeks to perpetuate the spirit of its predecessor, whilst not forgetting the need to cultivate different skills in the mother tongue to make citizens truly competent. In an increasingly globalised world, the pragmatic and functional mastery of languages opens doors, bringing people closer to the wealth inherent in the human species in its various manifestations. Needless to say, the school is called upon to be at the forefront of this titanic enterprise.

This chapter explores, on the one hand, the concept of *language gap* from a diachronic perspective and, on the other, the way in which Andalusian language policies emanating from European recommendations and resolutions have tried to bridge the language gap amongst young people through initiatives of great impact on content and language education, such as the consolidation of bilingual education programmes through the CLIL approach and pedagogical tools like the Integrated Language Curriculum, the European Language Portfolio and the School Language Project.

FROM PROTO-CLIL TO THE DEMOCRATISATION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

In a seminal book titled *CLIL* (2010), Coyle et al. define the concept of CLIL in crystal clear terms:

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, in the teaching and learning process, there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language. Each is interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater on one or the other at a given time. CLIL is not a new form of language education. It is not a new form of subject education. It is an innovative fusion of both. (2010, p. 1)

CLIL is, therefore, an educational approach that integrates the learning of content from different disciplines or curricular subjects and the learning of an additional language. In other words, the additional language is used as a tool of communication and as a tool of access to the disciplinary knowledge of

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