

Teaching “Greek and Roman Mythology” in a CLIL Classroom: Towards a New Approach

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Abstract. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach that puts dual focus on both language and content. It adopts the 4Cs framework, namely content, communication, cognition and culture to form a unity of content and language learning. The author applies this concept to the course of "Greek and Roman Mythology" in English teaching. The paper discusses the selection of teaching materials, the design of teaching mode and the unity of 4C framework, aiming at establishing a systematic teaching mode.

1. Introduction

The teaching of English majors in their first year has long been focusing on language skills. However, with the improvement of students' English level and cognitive ability, they demand for systematic knowledge beyond language skills. Therefore, English major need to change the status quo by adding the subject-based curriculum, and combine language skills with subject knowledge.

“The Greek and Roman Mythology” is such a course for first-year English majors. In order to improve students' language and cognitive level, the concept of “Content and Language Integrated Learning” (CLIL) is introduced into teaching, aiming at the innovation of classroom mode and the emphasis on both knowledge and language. Therefore, students will gain the overall cognition of subject, and acquire the target language as well.

2. Theoretical basis

CLIL is growing in primary and secondary education, and has gained more relevance in higher education settings. Coyle et al. offer one of the best known definitions of CLIL: It is “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” [1]. In this process, language and content, with equal weight, should work together. The key issue of this educational approach is how to effectively integrate the two to achieve the teaching goal. Morton also states that CLIL impacts not only the field of language teaching, but also the curriculum, as non-language subjects are involved. [2]

Coyle brings forward 4Cs framework which focus on the connections of four aspects: content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (learning and thinking), culture (social awareness of self and “otherness”). All of these aspects are interwoven and must be conducted in a whole in practice. The framework suggests that CLIL will be effective with the knowledge processed, content understood, interaction conducted in a communicative context, language skills developed, and intellectual awareness experienced. [3]

Coyle points out that teaching language can be adapted to the cognitive demands. The following matrix is the combination of cognitive and linguistic demands. [4] Quadrant 1 may support learner progression in terms of language as content or as a language focus needed for subsequent content learning. When high cognitive demands appear, we can move to quadrant 3 where cognitive progression is maintained by accessing content through a lower linguistic level, such as mother tongue. Then, with the aim of developing language skills, we can gradually work towards higher linguistic demands in quadrant 4.

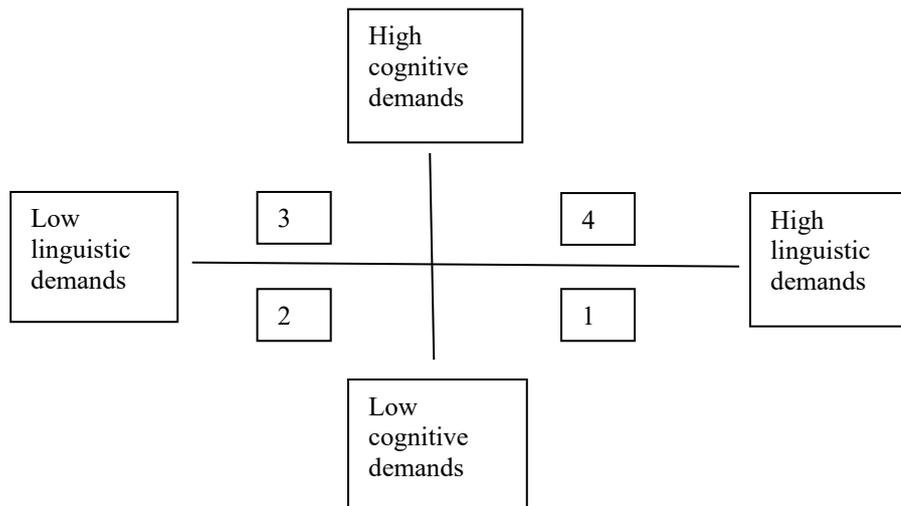


Fig. 1. The CLIL Matrix (Coyle, 2007)

Coyle also maps three stages in the learning with 3As tool (analysis, add and apply). In the first stage, teacher will analyze content and find the specialized terminology. Thus it helps learners to establish cognition. In the second stage, Teacher will add the language, scaffolding students in mastering content and language during discussion, dialogue and communication. In the third stage, language and knowledge will be applied to cultivate deeper cognitive and thinking ability. [5]

Domestic scholars' research on CLIL focuses mostly on theoretical research. Sheng Yunlan compares the difference of CLIL in Europe and Community College Education in U.S. [6]. Li Lingli et al. conducts a comprehensive study on the curriculum development of CLIL Learning [7]. Liu Huiying et al. introduce background and rising up of CLIL pedagogies [8]. The application of CLIL theory to practice is not fully studied yet at home. Xia Beibei discussed how a factor in 4Cs framework is reflected in the curriculum from a communication perspective [9] Ma Li explored the teaching mode of the “Anglo-American Literature Appreciation” course with the same theory [10]. This paper will apply the CLIL to the practice of teaching “Greek and Roman Mythology”, with the aim to explore the implementation of the theory.

3. Innovation of Teaching mode

3.1 Selection of Teaching Materials

Content is the core of the CLIL teaching. It is important to choose the appropriate teaching materials to achieve the integration of knowledge and language. The selection of main textbook is based on the following considerations. First, the knowledge provided in the textbook should be systematic and rich in content. Second, the language level should be in consistent with or higher than the student's language level. Therefore, *Appreciating Greco-Roman Mythology* published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press is selected. The textbook, in a systematic way, covers the stories of God in mythology, stories of God and man, and stories of hero. The stories are adapted from myth written by Bulfinch, and footnotes have been made to help understand and build cognition. The textbook also provides a selection of the original texts with high linguistic demands. The English version of the classical originals such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is excerpted. It is the best materials to meet high linguistic demands.

Besides textbook, the teacher also selects supplementary materials, filtering them by the same criteria, to enrich students' reading and deepen their cultural understanding. The first category of materials involves content of low cognitive, high linguistic level, such as documentary with history channel, *Clash of the Gods*. It helps students be acquainted with mythological knowledge and allows students to accumulate language with its precise mythological vocabulary. The second category of material includes content with high cognitive and low linguistic level. After reading stories, it is necessary for students to conduct academic analysis and interpretation of the

mythological stories, which involves high-cognitive content. In this aspect, native language materials or bilingual materials can be adopted. For example, Chinese academic papers related to mythological topics and bilingual academic books can help students build in-depth cognition beyond stories and meet students' cognitive challenges. The third category is the content with high cognitive and high linguistic level. The materials will be English academic papers, which is the biggest challenge for students both in content or language.

3.2 CLIL Mode Design

With content as the foundation, it is another big challenge for teacher to present the content through various classroom interactive activities to help learners master the language and content. In the process of designing the classroom mode, the three basic stages are mainly followed.

In the first stage, a lexical corpus will be prepared for learners. It will cover the names of the mythical characters and special words related to myth. Phonetic symbols are added to the vocabulary, and learners are required to pronounce them correctly. For example, the stress of words Aphrodite, Apollo, Hephaestus, etc. are easily to be mistaken. Based on the lexical preparation, the students will preview the text and watch video clips from *Clash of Gods*. Through this, the learners are expected to basically grasp the general meaning of the story, establish the content cognition, and accumulate the vocabulary enough for the class communication. The idea behind it is to design the task with low cognitive requirements for the smooth understanding of the language and cognition.

The second stage is the classroom teaching stage. It is necessary to test the initial cognition that the learner establishes through their own learning. The most prominent aspect in this stage is communication in the 4C framework. Half of the class time will be spent on continuous dialogue and communication between teacher and learners. Teacher will repeatedly ask questions, and students will answer them and give feedbacks. In this process, a variety of media will be adopted to immerse students in the target language culture. For example, paintings, sculptures and other works of art, literary works, film clips, etc., will enable students to be exposed to a wider variety of texts, to have a perceptual knowledge of what they have learned, and to cultivate the sensitivity to the culture of target language. This stage means to help learners to master the corresponding language in the real scene and establish the dual focus of language and cognition.

In the third stage, after the basic construction of cognition and language, the teacher can lead the students to further deepen the cognition. Half of the class time will be spent on this part. On the basis of reading the Chinese and English papers, the students will be led to analyze the connotation of the mythical stories and interpret the stories from the perspective of literature or philosophy. For example, teacher will offer topics for the students, such as Prometheus's image in Western literature, relationship between Oedipus and Freud's Oedipus complex, reappearance of the motif "destiny" in Western literature etc. Discussion activities will be carried out among students in the classroom around such topics in order to further consolidate students' high level of cognitive and linguistic level.

At this stage, learners use the language and knowledge they have mastered to challenge the higher level of cognitive and linguistic abilities. They are going to practice the abilities of analyzing comparing, evaluating, and drawing conclusions. This phase is to design learning tasks with high cognitive requirements to train knowledge application abilities of learners. In addition to class discussion, learners need to reflect their critical thinking in writing English essays which can cover the analysis of character in the myth, comparison of Chinese and Western mythology.

3.3 Unity of 4Cs framework

As a unified system, 4Cs are interconnected with deep integration. In the process of teaching, these four factors will be combined to achieve the dual focus of content and language. In the aforementioned classroom mode, it can be seen that the subject content is closely related to the language study and the thinking ability. With content as the key starting point, using sufficient teaching materials to meet their cognitive and linguistic levels, through teacher-student exchanges, student-student communication, students are placed in a real cultural context, establishing their own knowledge system (cognition). Through the high-cognitive and high-language teaching content and

curriculum tasks, the ultimate goal of improving student cognition and language (language and content integrated learning) is achieved.

4. Conclusion

English majors, no longer satisfied with a shallow understanding of language, pursue to use language for in-depth knowledge construction for academic reading and academic writing. This is also the challenge and goal of college English education in the new era. Such education objective demands for innovative teaching mode. The mode of integrated learning of content and language in curriculum is a beneficial exploration. This paper introduces CLIL into the teaching of course “Greek and Roman mythology”, and discusses the establishment of teaching mode, including the selection of teaching content, the implementation of classroom activities, and unity of 4Cs framework, with the aim to improve cognitive and linguistic level of the students.

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