

International conference on academic literacies in multilingual contexts: Bridging research evidence and classroom practice

- Classroom practices
- Integration of language and content

Title: *How Young Learners Verbalise their Thoughts: Cognitive Discourse*

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Abstract

The aim of Cognitive Discourse Analysis (CODA) is to gain insights about concepts and complex cognitive processes by a close look at how people verbalise their thoughts (Tenbrink 2015). Although clearly empirical, the linguistic descriptive models are insufficient in our discussion about learning and the cognitive models shift the focus from language to thought. This case study does not seek to describe language; but rather to ‘reassemble’ learning. Using case study this contribution will address two reflective questions for any CLIL instructor.

- What does developmental language look like in CLIL contexts?
- And (ii.) Does language performance have to be perfect to show cognitive learning?

In this case study sample, younger learners are learning Science through English as a second language. Every learner clearly has their own internal cognitive processes and in the case of this proposal these processes are tied to language development. The proposal includes discussions regarding instructional design and cognitive language learning in the primary classroom. Practical implications of teaching content through language will be highlighted and student production will be analysed to underscore second language learning as developmental language. We find these samples as not explicative of our capacity to teach, but rather, as a clear testimony of the students’ ability to learn through a second language.

The sample is small, but extremely illustrative of bilingualism as a process. The discussion includes cognitive learning models associated with learning English as a second language using a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach. The analysis makes key connections between what instructors do and what learners do to make learning effective.

Key words: Cognition, Primary education, CLIL. Science through English, Instructional design.

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- **Topic presentation:** The aim of Cognitive Discourse Analysis (CODA) is to gain insights about concepts and complex cognitive processes by a close look at how people verbalise their thoughts (Tenbrink 2015). Although clearly empirical, the linguistic descriptive models are insufficient in our discussion about learning and the cognitive models shift the focus from language to thought.
- **Objective:** Typically, instructors use discourse strategies by reformulating as they deliver their content. “A great deal of research has now established that (...) texts embody interactions (...), but few have examined the ways small acts of reformulation and exemplification contribute to this” (Hyland 2007: 266). Language description and learning theory can be aptly framed by psychology if we remember that language learning is both cognitive and socially constructed. The research purpose is for reflective teachers to examine how learner language develops through careful instructional design and a reformulation of contents and language. The objective of this proposal is an effective illustration of developmental language in bilingual instruction.
- **Our context:** is a primary school with a bilingual programme. The participants we studied are 57 Spanish primary student monolinguals in a well-established bilingual program divided into two groups. All students can be considered ‘bilinguals-in-training’ and have only been exposed to L2 at school All learning is built step-by- step and CLIL surely is no different.
- **Methodology:** Case studies are designed to suit the research and demonstrate wide diversity in study design (Hyett, Kennyn, and Dickson-Swift 2014). There are many more variables of interest than data points, but a qualitative and contextualized approach can offer key teaching strategies that might be applicable to similar CLIL contexts. We will not uncover all the connections between learning and teaching; however, we hope to shed some light on the unique way second language can be developed through purposeful instructional design. The analysis will use real learner language samples to illustrate how bilingual learning is a sequenced process of creative and emerging language. Learning models have set the stage for our sequences of task-based instruction, but It is often only through student production can we truly examine aspects of learning.
- **Results:** Developmental language is not a defective system, but rather a perfect illustration of language processing in a bilingual mind. The learner sample presented shows that developmental language is full of meaning and creative constructs and despite mistakes communication prevails. We have looked at student samples that show a highly creative use of language production despite the obvious errors. We have seen them as reflective, not imitative models of L2 instruction. They are clear examples of assimilation and synthesis of content learning.
- **Conclusion:** In CLIL contexts learners study curricular content in a second language and require active support in their development of academic language, ideally in conjunction with working content. However, content teachers naturally orient towards the learning goals formulated for their subjects, while language teachers do not routinely consider them. With simple didactic strategies of dual coding, repetition and scaffolding language we have created a zone of convergence in this case study sample between Science and English. In their conceptualization of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in the university, Dafouz and Smit (2020) suggest there is a need for a more holistic framework to allow for interdisciplinary, multi-sited analyses. In this regard, we will continue to examine how language teaching and learning are ongoing for both professors and students in bilingual instruction, specifically in the content classroom context.