21

INITIATION-RESPONSE-FEEDBACK
IN CONTENT LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING
INICIACIÓN-RESPUESTA-RETROALIMENTACIÓN EN EL IDIOMA DE CONTENIDO APRENDIZAJE INTEGRADO

MSc. José Miguel Campuzano[1]
E-mail: jose.campuzano@ug.edu.ec
[1] Universidad de Guayaquil. República del Ecuador.

ABSTRACT

Oral proficiency has been considered as every language learner's main objective. After all, speaking is considered to be the evidence that an individual is able to master a language since real and meaningful communication is achieved. Regardless of this, many Ecuadorian language classrooms, especially in high school education, tend to rely on structure and accuracy resulting in grammar-based lessons only. This situation is a main concern in Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) since educators are focusing on the content and disregarding the language component of this approach. As a result, the original purpose of teaching language through content that CLIL offers is not attained. While some people might believe that real communication is not feasible in a classroom, research states that teacher-student interaction is very similar to parent-child interaction. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce CLIL teachers to the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) approach as a technique to ensure meaningful communication takes place in the language classroom. Different types of IRF models are presented and a clear distinction between them is explained. Moreover, the advantages and disadvantages of this approach are discussed in detail so that language teachers can fully exploit it in their own settings.

Keywords: Foreign language education, oral production, language integrated.

RESUMEN

La competencia oral se ha considerado como objetivo principal de todo estudiante de idioma. Después de todo, el habla se considera como la evidencia de que un individuo es capaz de dominar un idioma ya que se logra una comunicación real y significativa. A pesar de esto, muchas clases de inglés en Ecuador, especialmente en educación secundaria, tienden a enfocarse en estructura y precisión dando como resultado lecciones basadas solamente en gramática. Esta situación es una preocupación principal en Conten Language Integrated Learnings (CLIL) ya que los educadores están centrándose en el contenido y sin tener en cuenta el componente de lenguaje de este enfoque. Como resultado, no se alcanza el propósito original de enseñanza de lengua a través de contenido que CLIL ofrece. Mientras que algunas personas podrían creer que una comunicación real no es factible en el aula, investigaciones afirman que la interacción profesor-alumno es muy similar a la interacción entre padres e hijos. De esa forma, este trabajo pretende introducir a profesores de CLIL con el enfoque de Iniciación-Respuesta-Feedback (IRF) como una técnica para garantizar una comunicación significativa en la clase de idiomas. Se presentan diferentes tipos de modelos IRF y se hace una clara distinción entre ellos. Por otra parte, las ventajas y desventajas de este enfoque se analizan con detalle para que profesores de idiomas puedan explotarlo en su totalidad en sus propios contextos.

Palabras clave: Educación de lenguas extranjeras, producción oral, aprendizaje integrado.

UNIVERSIDAD Y SOCIEDAD | Revista Científica de la Universidad de Cienfuegos | ISSN: 2218-3620   Volumen 10 | Número 4 | Julio-Septiembre, 2018

149

INTRODUCTION

Oral proficiency has always been considered, by both teachers and students, as the ultimate goal of every language learner. Based on this, it is typically assumed that if someone is not able to convey their ideas properly and keep a conversation with others, this person cannot be labelled as a speaker of the target language.

Following constructivist theories of language acquisition, Vigotsky and Piaget concluded that language developed primarily from social interaction after observing children interact among them and with adults (Light Bown & Spada, 2013). In addition to this, they also claimed that these interactions helped in the development of their cognitive understanding. Therefore, it can be implied that this is the key for the development of both language and cognition in the classroom.

Within an educational context, besides being defined as the most challenging skill to develop in many classrooms, the main pedagogical purpose of speaking is to "*exchange already known information and check students' knowledge*" (Llinares, et al., 2012, p. 77), which has led to the misconception that classroom communication is not authentic. Nevertheless, this has been proved to be wrong as Geekie and Raban (1994, as cited in Llinares, 2012) found that patterns in classroom interactions were similar to those between mothers and children. After all, the language classroom can actually offer opportunities for genuine interactions, such as when asking for clarification or exchanging opinions. It would be up to the teacher to create these opportunities to use the target language in different ways.

In terms of CLIL settings, there is a big concern that some teachers focus on the Content aspect of this approach only, totally disregarding the Language component, and the main objective of learning the language in meaningful contexts is not achieved as a consequence. One interaction pattern that would comply with this necessity of promoting language development is the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) exchange, the most frequent in traditional EFL contexts. Therefore, it becomes essential to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of IRF in a CLIL classroom as a tool to develop learners' potential for communication and cognitive engagement in a secondary school.

Initiation-Response-Feedback (or sometimes Follow-up) is "a pattern of interaction which has been identified as common in classroom talk" all around the world (Swann, et al., 2004, p. 146). This exchange structure was first introduced by Sinclair and Courthard in 1975 and has had "a huge impact on our understandings of the ways in which teachers and learners communicate" (Walsh, 2011, p. 17). An example of IRF is as follows:

1	Teacher:	What is the capital of Ecuador?	**I**
2	Student:	Quito.	**R**
3	Teacher:	Well done.	**F**

This extract shows how IRF works. The teacher opens the exchange with a question (I) in line 1 which prompts student's response (R) in line 2. In line 3, the teacher offers feedback (F) to the learner's answer. Walsh (2011), explains that Sinclair and Courthard found that this interaction pattern was usually represented through three basic kinds of exchange: Question-and answer sequences (as described in the example above), Pupils responding to teachers' directions, and Pupils listening to the teacher giving information, described in the two examples below respectively:

1.	Teacher:	So, now let's open our books.	**I**
2.	Student:	On page 21?	**R**
3.	Teacher:	That's right.	**F**
1.	Teacher:	In the past, people used to misbelieve that the Earth was flat.	**I**
2.	Student:	Flat?	**R**
3.	Teacher:	Exactly!	**F**

Llinares, et al. (2012), make a distinction between the types of questions that can elicit learners' response: *display* and *referential* questions. Display questions are those "*whose answer is known by the questioner*" while referential questions "*seek information unknown to the teacher*" (p. 84). Even though the first are the most common, referential questions tend to trigger "more complex and long answers from the students" (p. 84), which results in more genuine communication. Look at the examples below:

1.	Teacher:	When was America discovered?	**I**
2.	Student:	In 1942.	**R**
3.	Teacher:	Correct!	**F**
1.	Teacher:	Why do you prefer drinking water to juice?	**I**
2.	Student:	Well, compared to some processed juices, water does not have sugar and other artificial flavors. Also, it has fiber which helps my digestion. And actually, when I drink water I do not feel thirsty anymore. This does not happen when I drink juice.	**R**
3.	Teacher:	I see.	**F**

Finally, the authors also illustrate how this pattern can easily turn into two modified versions which are expected to retrieve even better outcomes. These variants, which will

be discussed later as advantages of IRF, include student-initiated interactions and teacher's expansion of feedback

The fact that IRF is the most common interaction pattern does not make it completely effective. Whilst some researchers agree on the advantages it brings to the development of learners' potential for communication and cognitive engagement, others argue that it also feature some disadvantages.

Once again, it must be clear that, although IRF can be found in any classroom, this paper will discuss both sides of it within a CLIL program in a secondary school as a potential solution to the overemphasis teachers place on the Content component.

DEVELOPMENT

First, the IFR sequence provides an understanding of the special nature of classroom interaction; *"an awareness of IRF enables us to consider how we might vary interaction more and introduce alternative types of sequence"* (Walsh, 2011, p. 20). Moreover, IRF allows the teacher to have better classroom management. When teachers are in charge of initiation, *"they control who may speak and when, for how long, and on what topic"* (Walsh, 2011, p. 20), they know when to elicit a response or not. Teachers even confirm their power when they provide an evaluation of students' response.

Furthermore, due to the collaborative nature CLIL features through the implementation of tasks in its lessons, IRF can be modified so that teacher will not be the only one in charge of initiating exchange. This is what Llinares, et al., (2012) refer to as student-initiated interaction. Language communication is exploited since learners keep L2 throughout all the discussion. Furthermore, IRF enhances cognitive development as "*they are trying to solve a conceptual problem in a group-work environment"* (p. 80). According to Piaget's constructivist theory of cognitive development, *"a child forms new conceptual structures as a result of interactions with his or her environment*" (O' Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013, p. 6). He claims that the individual normally seeks balance in the cognitive system. However, this balance can be disrupted when a structure is modified in some way due to the experiencing of new objects or events. Once the individual becomes aware of this conflict, he or she will make an effort to restore cognitive equilibrium on the basis of new information. Piaget's theory can be easily transferred to a student-initiated IRF exchange where fellow students *"may provide opportunities for others to experience cognitive disequilibrium or conflict"* (p. 6). Through discussions within the group, learners may resume cognitive balance by *"arriving at new understandings as they work together"* (p.6). Look at the example below:

1. Student 1: We now should make a resume of the text. **I**

2. Student 2: Resume? Don't you mean a *summary?* **R / I**

3. Student 1: Resume or summary, it is the same. **R / I**

4. Student 2: Let me explain it to you. Resume sounds similar to summary in Spanish, but a resume is what contains your information when you look for a job. A summary is the short version of a book or a movie. That is what we have to do. **R**

5. Student 1: Oh, I see. Thanks. Let's do the summary **F**

Finally, the F component has a quite important role in this interaction pattern. Cullen (2002), highlights that if feedback were omitted, "*learners would not be able to see the point of the teacher's question"* (p. 118). He also claims that feedback has two main functions in classroom interactions: an evaluative and discoursal role. The first one provides information about learners' performance so they can realise whether or not their inter language needs any modification. This type of feedback usually takes place after teacher's initiation with a display question. This can confirm that, as explained above, this type of questions does not usually lead to genuine communication. On the other hand, discoursal feedback (or Follow-up) aims to "pick up students' contributions and incorporate them into the flow of classroom discourse in order to sustain and develop a dialogue between the teacher and the class" (Mercer, as cited in Cullen, 2002, p.120). Given this, it can be concluded that discoursal feedback might encourage "learners' participation and extended production" (Llinares, et al., 2012, p. 81) since it focuses on content rather than form. In her study, Llinares (2005), concluded that five-year-old children also need interactional feedback (feedback provided by the teacher with no corrective purpose) in their language lessons if they are expected to "use L2 to convey functions such as the personal one" (p. 17). This definitely matches CLIL's paradigms since, in this way, learners make new *personal* meanings in another language; *"relating activities in the classroom to real life helps learners to transfer the personal meaning they have from one language to another"* (Dale & Tanner, 2012, p. 12). Look at the example below:

1. Teacher: What do you think it is the most important natural resource? **I**

2. Student: In my opinion, water. **R**

3. Teacher: I agree. Why? **F / I**

4. Student: Well, without water, you can't cook, take a shower, wash your clothes. We drink water every day. **R**

5. Teacher: Those are some valid reasons. **F**

Llinares, et al. (2012), suggest that for this follow-up move to happen, teachers should ask metacognitive questions, as seen in line 3, *"which engage learners in extended dialogues".* (p. 86)

Disadvantages of IRF

It has been demonstrated how effective IRF is in a CLIL classroom. However, this interaction pattern also features some drawbacks or challenges.

It is evident how IRF allows teachers to have good management of the class. Nevertheless, it is this control that sometimes prevents teachers from deviating from this pattern and exploring other types of interactions (Nikula, 2007). Different examples of IRF shows that teacher's talk is maximized compared to students' talk since "for every utterance made by a learner (R), teachers usually make two (I, F)" (Walsh, 2011, p. 18). If every teacher's main objective is to conduct student-centered lessons, this issue totally impedes it.

Moreover, this teachers' tendency to control and initiate exchanges leads to a mechanical and even monotonous response from students and the authenticity CLIL takes advantage of is totally disregarded. About this issue, Walsh (2011), explains that learners rarely initiate a response because of the cues teachers constantly submit. Nikula (2007), adds that these "*tightly-structured IRF patterns leave little space for learners to develop their ideas or engage in extended forms of talk"* (p. 181). Dalton-Puffer (2007), remarks that even student-initiated moves are not impossible, these tend to concern "mostly procedural rather than content matter" (p. 36). Once again, these issues interfere with CLIL's foundations. Learners are neither encouraged nor challenged to participate, and students do not co-construct and negotiate meaning (Dale & Tanner, 2012; Mehisto, et al., 2008). Undoubtedly, all of these disadvantages might be counteracted if IRF is properly approached by teachers. In her study, Nikula (2007), found out that despite the fact that IRF mostly took place in EFL settings, these were more fruitful in CLIL classrooms. This happened because CLIL lessons often deal with everyday matters that students feel encouraged to participate in due to the prior knowledge they have about these matters.

CONCLUSIONS

As it has been discussed in this paper, IRF interaction patterns are very common in classroom interaction, and CLIL cannot be the exception. IRF allows CLIL teachers to understand the nature of interaction so they can go beyond that pattern and introduce other types of interaction in order to comply with one of the C components: communication. Even though it provides the teacher with some "power" to control the class and ensure everyone has an equal participation, for CLIL it is a matter of quality rather than quantity. This power can obtain mechanical answers from the students and the authenticity CLIL takes advantage of is neglected. On the contrary, CLIL teachers should be able to transfer this power to the students so they can also initiate interactions. As explained above, this helps to cognitive development as they arrive at new understandings when working together. With this, another C will have been achieved: cognition. Finally, Feedback is always included in lessons, but CLIL teachers should implement, besides evaluative, discoursal feedback or follow up. This will definitely engage students in a dialogue and lead to genuine communication. Besides, this will also comply with one of CLIL's feature since learners will be able to make personal meanings in the target language. All of this can be achieved in CLIL settings better than in standard language contexts where most of the class is based on the materials rather than the participants.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Cullen, R. (2002). Supportive Teacher Talk: The importance of the F-move. *ELT Journal.* 56 (2). 117-127. Retrieved from https://academic.oup.com/eltj/article/56/2/117/514482 -

Dale, L., & Tanner, R. (2012). *CLIL Activities: A resource for subject and language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dalton-Puffer, C. (2007). *Discourse in Content and Language Integrated Learning Classrooms.* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Lightbown, P., & Spada N. (2013). *How Languages are Learned.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Llinares, A. (2005). The Effect of Teacher Feedback on EFL learners' functional production in classroom discourse. *Anglogermanica Online: Revista Electronica Periodica de Filologia e Inglesa.* 3. Retrieved from https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=1970629

Linares, A., Morton, T., & Whittaker, R. (2012). *The Role of Languages in CLIL.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mehisto, P., Marsh, D., & Frigols, M. J. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education.* Oxford: Macmillan Education.

Nikula, T. (2007). The IRF Pattern and Space for Interaction: Comparing CLIL and EFL Classrooms. In C. Dalton-Puffer & U. Smit, (Eds.). *Empirical Perspectives on CLIL Classroom discourse.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang AG.

O' Donnell, A., & Hmelo-Silver, C. (2013). What is Collaborative Learning? An Overview. In C. Hmelo-Silver, C. Chinn, C. Chan & A. O'Donnell (Eds), *The International Handbook of Collaborative Learning.* New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Swann, J., Deumert, A., Lillis, T., & Mesthrie, R. (2004). *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Walsh, S. (2011). *Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action.* London: Routledge.