Popularizing the CLIL Classroom

This study focuses on the dissemination of knowledge through processes of popularization in Content and Language Integrated Learning (henceforth CLIL) where English is the subject language. The article argues that non-language subject knowledge can be accommodated and re-contextualized in order to foster learning through the mediating act of popularization, which involves the presentation of areas of knowledge that are unknown to non-experts so as to ensure accessibility and usability. The author aims to establish a parallel between CLIL methodology and popularization processes, which must be brought to the surface and employed in providing more effective ways of integrating language and content without impoverishing the subject matter with oversimplification techniques.

The corpus of this study is based on responses from a questionnaire (Appendix) and transcripts from two different interview sessions conducted among 40 high school teachers who were either already teaching Science and History classes in English or attending a University-based and Ministry-funded CLIL training course. Evidence collected from May 2013 to November 2013 shows that teachers generally support student learning in CLIL classes through the simplification of both language and concepts rather than through the re-elaboration of content by using more semantically effective explanatory strategies. This paper presents some of these discursive strategies within a popularization framework, albeit in its initial stage of creation, with the purpose of providing access to an improved understanding of subject concepts introduced in a foreign language without reducing the cognitive challenge that is an essential ingredient in the learning process.