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OPEN PEER COMMENTARY

School-Relevant Language As a Meaning-Making Activity – A CLIL Perspective: A Commentary on “Midadolescents’ Language Learning at School: Toward More Just and Scientifically Rigorous Practices in Research and Education”

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Paola Uccelli’s target article for *Language Learning*’s 75th Jubilee encompasses both an extensive research review of the role of language in education and a call for more just and rigorous practices in research and education. In this commentary, I will focus on points of convergence between the Core Analytical Language Skills framework (CALS) presented in the target article and the research perspective on content and language integrated learning (CLIL), an approach where second/foreign language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. I will also point at ways in which CLIL goes beyond CALS by offering a comprehensive view of school-relevant language as a meaning-making activity. As such, the CLIL perspective inevitably requires shifting the focus from language to its role in learning and teaching (see Llinares et al., 2012).

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Content and language interconnection has featured strongly in CLIL research. Nikula et al. (2016) argued that conceptualizing integration requires three intertwined perspectives: curriculum and pedagogy (i.e., planning integration), participant perspectives (how those involved in CLIL perceive integration), and classroom practices (how integration is realized in classrooms). CLIL can only succeed with attention to all these perspectives. The same, I believe, applies to CALS as each of these perspectives is implicated in Uccelli's description of the framework and its pedagogical application potential.

Uccelli highlights the high-utility nature of CALS, namely, that its language tools and resources are shared across content areas and support learning across the curriculum. A key role is accorded to recognizing that "scientific learning and reasoning have linguistic correlates" and to identifying those correlates. In comparison, CLIL-based frameworks attune to both general and subject-specific aspects when theorizing content and language as intertwined. One such framework is that of cognitive discourse functions (Dalton-Puffer, 2013). Cognitive discourse functions help map cognitive learning goals and their linguistic realizations. The seven broad core functions identified are classify, define, describe, evaluate, explain, explore, and report. The cognitive discourse functions, like CALS, are high-utility in depicting communicative functions that feature across subjects. However, cognitive discourse functions also capture the subject-specific nature of knowledge building as they appear in different constellations in different subjects. Attention to these constellations can help teachers move beyond associating subject-specificity with terms and vocabulary and towards seeing it as subject-relevant knowledge building. The construct of cognitive discourse functions is thus deeply functional, foregrounding communicative intentions and language as meaning making.

Alongside cognitive discourse functions, also the construct of pluriliteracies teaching for deeper learning (Coyle & Meyer, 2021) addresses the interdependency of language and content. This model emphasizes the importance of constantly fostering links between conceptual and communicative development, both gradually growing in complexity, in order to help learners master key areas of knowledge formation (i.e., doing, organising, explaining, and arguing science). In sum, while the frameworks of CALS, cognitive discourse functions, and pluriliteracies teaching for deeper learning all address language demands of scientific learning, the first focuses more on school-relevant language and the latter two on the connections between language and a content.

Texts seem to hold a key position in CALS. Even when understanding text broadly, most of the seven resources identified (i.e., organizing text,

connecting ideas, tracking participants, interpreting writers' viewpoint, understanding metalinguistic vocabulary, unpacking dense information, and identifying academic discourse) seem particularly relevant for working with written texts, as also indicated by frequent references to texts, text comprehension, and reading-to-learn. Reading and producing texts are, obviously, at the heart of education and merit attention. This shows also in CLIL research as attention to written texts, especially from the viewpoint of students' ability to convey subject-specific meanings (Whittaker & McCabe, 2020). In addition, however, classroom interaction is important in knowledge building. This is acknowledged by Uccelli when she notes that learning core analytical language skills requires scaffolding and active participation in classroom practices. CLIL classroom research has often approached this from the viewpoint of teachers and their way of orienting to language, probably because CLIL teachers are usually content teachers who may be reluctant to identify as language teachers. Despite these sentiments, classroom interaction analyses have shown that engagement in subject-specific language use is very common in CLIL teaching; it also seems to be an aspect of classroom reality that only rarely receives explicit attention (e.g., Kääntä, 2021; Nikula, 2017). This resonates with Uccelli's point that communicative aspects of school learning often remain hidden. Therefore, constructs such as CALS, cognitive discourse functions, and pluriliteracies teaching for deeper learning, with their attention to the role of language in knowledge building, can help turn hidden language resources into more tangible ones. They can be used to guide teachers and raise their awareness of language practices with which they are routinely but not explicitly engaged.

CLIL classroom interaction research has also helped reveal the multi-semiotic nature of subject-specific knowledge building (e.g., Kääntä, 2021). That is, knowledge building does not only happen through language but also through complex sets of other semiotic resources such as gestures, images, embodiment, and space. Classroom interaction research has also explored teachers and students jointly engaging in knowledge building and has shown the important role of everyday language in this process, scaffolding learners towards subject-specific ways of building and displaying knowledge. For example, Nikula's (2017) study on the physics concept of moment showcases a gradual emergence of subject-specific knowledge as inextricably linked to the appropriation of subject-relevant language.

Uccelli's target article makes an ambitious call for what she terms "pedagogies of voices" to transform educational practices, CALS playing a role in this. It is true that frameworks such as CALS, cognitive discourse functions, and pluriliteracies teaching for deeper learning can serve as resources for

transformation, yet educational change also requires that language-in-education researchers engage in forms of collaboration that do not rely on knowledge transfer from research to practice but see them as mutually informative. While theoretical models to address language demands of scientific learning exist, we also need teachers' professional insights to learn how such models resonate with their work and how teachers' expertise can contribute to theory. Such call for bidirectionality is also voiced by Dalton-Puffer et al. (2022) when they outline future demands for CLIL research. They also emphasize collaboration between content specialists, applied linguists, content and language teachers, and teacher educators to enhance CLIL pedagogy and research. Ideally, such collaboration would extend across research areas usually operating apart. Commenting on Uccelli's article has provided a valuable opportunity to enter such dialogue, to reflect on points of convergence between CALS and CLIL research, and to explore the opportunities and challenges involved when researchers and educators move toward a comprehensive view of school-relevant language as a meaning-making activity.

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