CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH CLIL

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Abstract: The CLIL approach is a modern manner of teaching English, which has been adapted in Romanian schools and universities. An interesting aspect of learning a foreign language is the contact with its culture/s and the changes it produces in terms of identity. Therefore, a challenging question to be answered is whether a CLIL approach focusing on culture influences students' cultural identity.
Keywords: CLIL, cultural identity

1. CLIL/Content and Language Integrated Learning

An educational approach that dates back in Antiquity, when Latin was used as language of instruction in European universities, being the language of law, science, theology, philosophy, this is what we nowadays call CLIL/Content and Language Integrated Learning. For a certain extent of time this type of teaching and learning has been out of practice, till recently, 1965, the date at which a language immersion programme in Canada was started. Its aims were to create bilingual citizens, to make learning languages easier and to improve the motivation of the students involved.

Content and language integrated learning is considered "a dual focused approach" (Mehisto, Marsh, Frigols 2008), "a fusion of subject didactics, leading to an innovation which emerged as education for modern times" (Coyle, Hood, Marsh 2010:ix), an umbrella term, used for bilingual education, language immersion, CBI -Content Based Instruction, EAL - English as an additional language, LAC - language across the curriculum, intercultural language teaching and learning in practice etc. The language employed is usually English, as the new lingua franca, therefore Dalton-Puffer (2011) proposed the term CEIL – Content and English Integrated Learning.

1.1. CLIL – Cultural Identity

The word *identity* can be traced back to the 16th century, coming from Latin *identitas*, from the latin *idem*, "same", referring to the "characteristics determining who or what a person or a thing is" (www.oxforddictionaries.com). The concept has proven of great importance in the 20th century, when philosophers (Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault), psychologists and sociologists (Erikson, Barth, Tajfel, Bourdieu, Weedon, Hall) have defined and analysed it from multiple perspectives.

However, identity proves to be a shifting concept, an ambiguous one, impossible to give a sustainable definition. It is a product of the social as regarded by Tajfel and Turner (1979), being taken over by poststructuralists, Bourdieu (1992), Hall (1996), Weedon (1997). Theories coming from the field of sociology and psychology are of great interest to our subject: substantialist theories of identity, which focus on the objective features in defining identity (biological, social, historical) and interractionist theories which are based on the assumption that identity is the result of a process, determined by psychological, social, cultural and historical elements (Gavreliuc 2003).

This last type of theories are mentioned by Hall (1996) as well, discussing the change of identities in the modernity of the 20th century, old identities which are in decline, "giving rise to new identities, and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject" (Hall 1996:596), the

crises of identity so specific for the modern age. Modern identities are de-centered, fragmented, dispersed, as a result of the transformation of the society:

> A distinctive type of change is transforming modern societies in the late twentieth century. This is fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which gave us firm location as social individuals. These transformations are also shifting our personal identities, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects. This loss of a stable "sense of self" is sometimes called dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This set of double displacements – de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves – constitutes a "crises of identity" for the individual. (Hall 1996:596-597)

Identity is also seen as "subjectivity", in relation to the thoughts and emotions of the self, giving a new way of understanding the world, being "precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly reconstituted in process each time we think and speak" (Weedon 1997:32), the perspective of feminist theoretician.

Sociological theories mention the influence of the "significant others", who influenced the self through their culture (values, meanings, symbols), identity being conceived as a result of the interaction between self and society (Mead, Cooley, apud Hall 1996). Therefore, our post-modern identities will not be permanent, unchanging, but constantly changing, a person assuming different identities in different contexts, experiencing contradictory, multiple identities, as "The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy." (Hall, 1996).

Individuals are defined by categories based on social class, religion, education, family, peer groups, but, most of all, "they are shaped and formed by their "culture" (Block 2007: 12). Cultural identity, part of social identity, has been given many definitions, the focus being on the distinctions between the two. However, nowadays this distinction has been rediscussed and the similarities have become more important than the differences (Norton 2006). The five more important characteristics of identity as a sociocultural construct are summed up by Norton: identity is dynamic, constantly changing; it is multifaceted; "identity is constructed and constructs by language"; "identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes", there is a coherent link between identity theory and classroom practice. (Norton 2006:3).

In the context of the modern world the students' cultural identity, is viewed as a "sum of characteristics given by place, gender, age, history, nationality, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, orientation, ethnicity "(Meyer, 2008). From the psychological perspective, cultural identity can be seen as an "individual's self-concept deriving from his/her awareness of membership in a particular social group" (Miville, Koonce, Darlington, & Whitlock 2000).

The identity of learners has been a subject of interest for some time, derived from poststructuralism, considered to be influenced by the social and cultural context (Norton 2008, Ortega 2009). The problem has been widely studied, especially with reference to ESL settings, due to the multicultural and multilingual situations: Norton (2000), Miller (2003) focussed on the study of immigrants' identities in English speaking countries and Kanno (2003) brought more evidence to the fact that identities are constructed in relation to language and society.

Furthermore, the issue of identity in EFL classes has been discussed by Giampapa, Lamoureux (2011), who investigate the relationship language-identity-power in multilingual societies, in Canada, Spain, China and the United States. Intercultural learning, highlighting issues of identity, are topics researched by Menard-Warwick, Heredia-Herrera, Soares Palmer (2013), on students from Chile and the United States, observing the local and global perspectives.

However, there are few connections between cultural identity and CLIL, this being an interesting aspect to investigate. Arranz (2013) discusses the relationship between identity and culture in CLIL contexts, focusing on aspects related to culture, identity, ideology. He starts from the statement that "culture is a form of knowledge" and an intrinsic part of our culture, language being an important part of an individual's identity, transmitting cultural elements, which are ideologically laden. Arranz connects SLA to identity issues, stating that there are "reasons to

believe that SLA (especially if understood through the prism of EIL), may have potentially powerful effects on the learner's identity" (2013:154), reaching the conclusion that no consistent empirical data are to be found and that the issue needs to be thoroughly researched.

The social dimension of learning in CLIL contexts has been disregarded until recently – there are just a few accounts of it, most research on CLIL focusing on aspects related to language/cognitive /didactical aspects. Based on Krashen's ideas that the affective filter is of great importance in such contexts and the research that has shown that CLIL students are more motivated than EFL students (Arranz 2013), we consider that there are many aspects related to the socio-psychological elements which contribute to the formation of students' identities and which are an interesting subject to be researched.

2. Case Study

The research topic refers to the connections between CLIL programmes studied in school and the manner they have influenced students' cultural identity. Participants in the study were 24 students in English, 2nd year at the West University of Timișoara, who have experienced such courses. The data collection methods were questionnaires, containing both qualitative and quantitative elements.

Results

The answers to the first question were surprising and relevant for the sample chosen: being students in English, the respondents have studied programmes more complex than students who attended only regular English classes. The proportion of students who studied CLIL subjects was 80%, whereas the ones who did not study such subjects were only 20%.

The content subjects integrated through English which were employed in schools by students were: History 16%, Literature 58%, Culture and civilization 62%, all of them being connected to the English language classes.
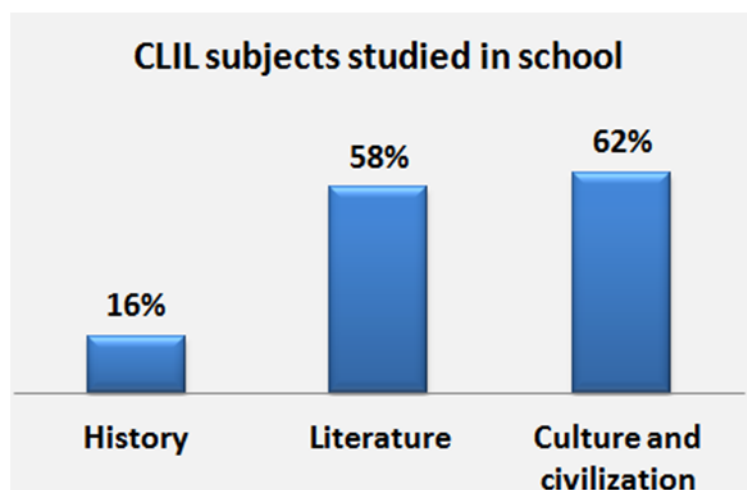

Figure 1: CLIL subjects studied in school

The advantages of CLIL programmes mentioned by students referred mostly to language and to the cultural aspects that proved interesting, attractive and therefore motivating:

- improving language (vocabulary);
- improving speaking skills;
- understanding language better ("something different than grammar");
- interesting topics; variety;
- becoming aware of other cultures;
- improving historical knowledge; literary knowledge;
- motivating way to learn English;
- motivating students to read.

There were disadvantages of the programmes, as well:

- subjects were difficult;
- uninteresting lessons;
- not enough speaking activities;
- topics not clearly explained.

The next question referred to the identity of the participants in the study, regarding elements belonging to their family background, and the answers showed that all were Romanian, some coming from a family with a different background, as well: Hungarian 8%, Serbian 8%, Ukrainian 1%.
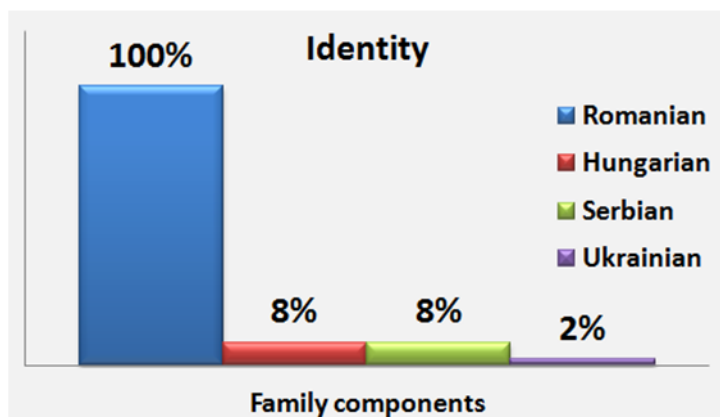

Figure 2: Students' identity – family components

The languages students speak, as part of their formation and influencing their identities, are: Romanian100% and English 100% for all respondents, Spanish 37%, German 33%, French 25%, Hungarian 12%, Serbian 8%, Italian 4%, Serbian 4%, Russian 4%. All students speak Romanian and English, the next lot of languages spoken being modern ones, learnt in schools (Spanish, German, French), the last group of languages being the ones which were learnt in family contexts: Hungarian, Serbian, Russian.
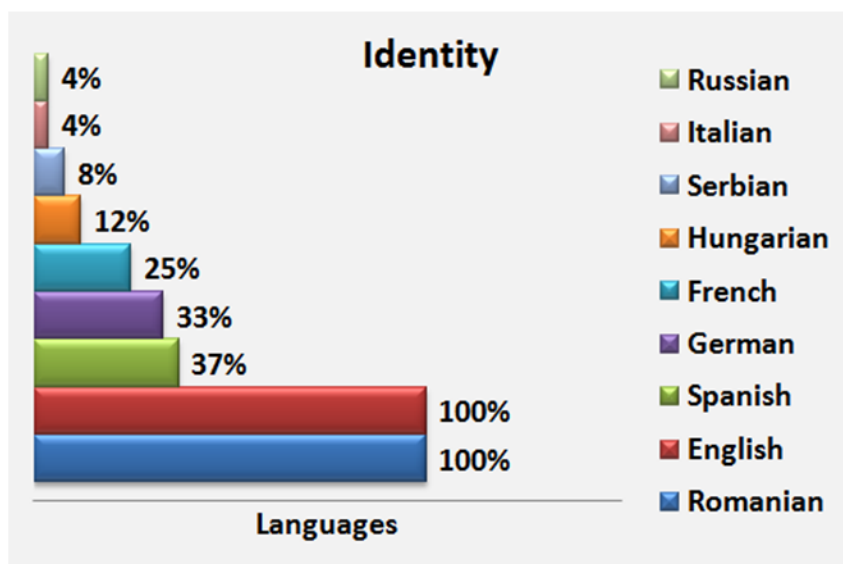

Figure 3: Students' identity: languages spoken

Besides the elements of culture and the languages spoken, participants were asked to define their cultural identity. As a result, 21% of the students mentioned an element of cultural identity when asked to describe it – Romanian. Just one student mentioned another cultural element: Serbian culture: "I consider myself Romanian because my mother is Romanian but I was born and live in Serbia. And it is a strange thing that in Romania I am Serbian, but in Serbia I am Romanian", response which reveals a split identity.

When asked to give five key words that describe their cultural identity, 21% of the students mentioned that they are European, 13% Romanian, one Hungarian and one referred to a regional identity, mentioning Timișoara and Banat. Therefore, besides the traditional elements, regarding their families, they have not perceived other influences that shaped their identity.

The elements that influenced students in defining themselves as European were education 75%, travelling 62% and the direct contact with other cultures 66%.
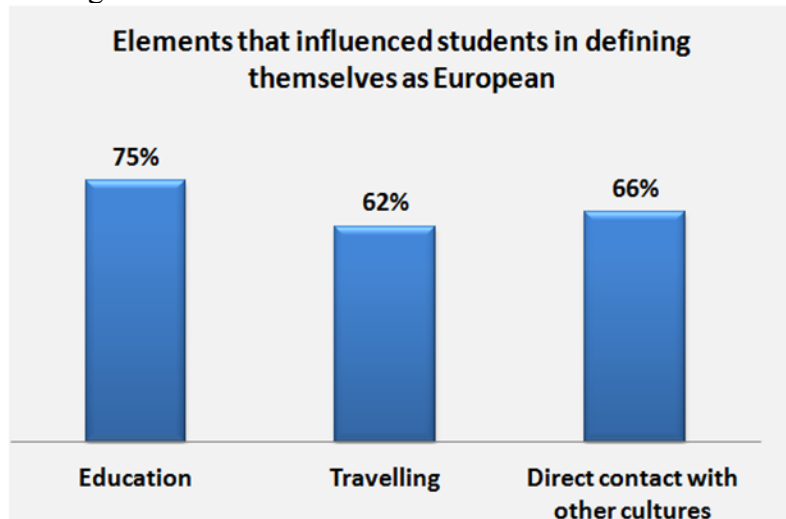

Figure 4: Elements that influenced students' Europeanness

The belonging to the European space was more evident, 50% of the students considering themselves European. The student with a Serbian origin considers herself European but says she is not a European citizen due to the fact that Serbia is not part of EU. Two students state they are European as Romania is part of Europe and of EU, but they do not feel European, without stating their reasons clearly.

3. Conclusions

When describing their cultural identity, students did not mention English elements. However, there were multicultural and multilingual features: the learning of the English language and culture has led to developing cultural/intercultural awareness, expanding their horizon, teaching them about the differences between cultures. Moreover, education is the factor that influenced them the most in attaining Europeanness.

Students' description of identities recalls Hall's theory (1996) of the dispersed, multiple, split identities, as many of them have not mentioned anything related to the subject and some of the respondents have mentioned the fact that they have more than one identity. In relation to Norton's theory, the study also proves there is a close link between language (which could be widened to family background and culture) and identity, as participants in the study relate to their mother tongue and family background when asked about identities.

As Arranz (2013) specifies, language is the means of transmitting, both being closely connected to identities. This is obvious in the case of the participants, as their mother tongue and their original culture are defining for their identities. There are no clear answers that could point to an influence of the foreign language, English in this case and the CLIL programmes students have studied, on the participants' identities. However, the elements that refer to education, Europeanness, intercultural awareness, are clearly influenced by education and by these types of programmes, as well.

In conclusion, the importance of elements such as cultural identity, intercultural communication, intercultural awareness is great in the field of research in the CLIL area, but just at the beginning, the perspectives varying according to the area covered and the interest of the

researcher. One innovative aspect of the CLIL approach consists in the development of the cultural component, as mentioned by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) who, when discussing different aspects of the approach, introduce the 4C's Framework: content, communication, cognition and culture. The link between culture and identity is emphasized with the accent on global education: "As the twenty-first century begins, cultural boundaries and identities are becoming increasingly blurred and intermingled. A transcending of cultural categories, rather than rigidly-defined unique and distinct traits, seems to be the global norm." (Guest 2002:155)

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