

12 Intercultural citizenship education in the English language classroom in higher education: Does it lead to language learning?

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1. Introduction

This paper reports a bilateral university project in the foreign language classroom designed to promote intercultural competence, language development and active and responsible citizenship through content-language integrated learning (CLIL). The rationale for broadening the scope of language courses and combining them with intercultural citizenship or human rights education rests on the idea that language teaching has instrumental (linguistic-oriented and communicative) purposes as well as educational purposes (development of critical thinking skills, development of the self and of the citizenship dimension) (Byram, 2014). Pedagogic proposals (Porto, 2015) and empirical studies reporting on classroom practice are recently available (Byram, Golubeva, Han & Wagner, 2016; Porto, 2014; Porto & Byram, 2015b). These studies have connected both types of education (language and citizenship/human rights) and have demonstrated growth in self/intercultural awareness, criticality and social justice responsibility, as well as the emergence of a sense of community among students during the projects. However, the concern remains as to whether this combination leads to language learning and this article addresses this issue.

The paper describes one transnational intercultural citizenship project carried out in 2013 during a fourth-month period in the foreign language classroom in Argentina and the

UK, designed as a case study, and the research question is ‘Does an intercultural citizenship project lead to language learning?’ The analysis focuses on data produced by the Argentinian students. The project was located in Higher Education in Argentina, where 76 students were learning English, and in Britain, where 23 students were learning Spanish. It focused on human rights violations during the football World Cup that took place in Argentina in 1978 during a period of military dictatorship. In its four stages (introductory, awareness-raising, dialogue, and citizenship), the project involved students researching about the topic, working collaboratively to design posters to raise awareness of human rights violations and acting on their communities. Conversational and documentary data were analysed qualitatively and comprise recorded Skype conversations, chats in a wiki and Facebook, class discussions, reflection logs and the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, Jackson, & Méndez García, 2009). Findings show that students found the project motivating, developed critical language awareness, widened their vocabularies and developed plurilingual practices within a translingual orientation.

2. The intercultural citizenship project: The football World Cup 1978 and the military dictatorship in Argentina

This project addressed the topic of the football World Cup in Argentina in 1978 in the midst of a military dictatorship (1976-1983). It took place between September and December 2013. In Argentina, there were 76 second-year undergraduates studying English at a national university. In Britain, there were 23 students, first-year undergraduates taking a Spanish Honours language degree. All students had level B2/C1 in the *Common European Framework of Reference* and were 18-22 years old.

The language courses in both countries, traditionally taught with a linguistic orientation, had recently introduced the intercultural citizenship component as a course requirement in telcollaboration projects that began in 2012 (Porto, 2014). The basis is that a citizenship and human rights education framework in language teaching presents students with issues of social justice and democracy anywhere in the world (Osler 2015; Starkey, 2015). The topic was clearly relevant for the Argentinian students, and equally so for the British students, because it became a springboard for analysis and reflection on the universality of human rights violations.

The project had four stages (described in Porto & Byram, 2015b): introductory, awareness-raising, dialogue, and citizenship. In the introductory stage, the students researched about the dictatorship and the World Cup in their foreign language classrooms, using a variety of sources in English and Spanish (documentaries, interviews, videos, magazines, newspapers, websites, songs, films, etc.).

In the awareness-raising stage, they analysed the media representations of the dictatorship and the World Cup at the time, and reflected on their attitudes, prejudice and feelings toward the historical period and the people involved (dictators, football players, the citizenry, etc.). They thought of other sports events in the world which had been used to mask military, political or other issues and chose one for further research.

In the dialogue stage, the online intercultural exchange began using Skype, Facebook, email and a wiki with the aim of designing a collaborative leaflet or poster in English and Spanish intended to raise the awareness of people today about human rights violations during the World Cup in 1978. The students worked in small groups of mixed nationalities and recorded their Skype conversations.

Finally, the citizenship stage involved only the Argentinian students due to institutional constraints at the British university. They designed and carried out a civic action with an impact on their local communities. For instance, one group talked to family and friends and interviewed a neighbour; another one gave a talk at the local School of Medicine; others travelled 100 km to a teacher training college and worked with student teachers on how to teach this historical period to primary school children; and another group travelled to the city of Lincoln (500 km away) to interview a 95-year-old man whose son had disappeared.

3. Language education and intercultural citizenship education in combination

The point initially put forward by Byram (2008) is about the educational purpose of language teaching and how this can be more fully developed, problematising its instrumental focus. He argued that a combination of language teaching and citizenship education has an educationally significant potential (Byram, 2008, 2014; Byram et al., 2016; Porto & Byram, 2015a). The proposal is to integrate intercultural communicative competence (from foreign language education) and civic action in the community (from citizenship education). In this view, language activity when combined with a citizenship

dimension reaches the public sphere by transcending the boundaries of the classroom and the school/university. Furthermore, citizenship becomes the content of foreign language teaching and this introduces into the language classroom the approach to CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) (Cenoz, 2015).

Intercultural citizenship can be developed in any language course when : a) learners from different countries, regions or communities work in a collaborative project and develop a sense of bonding; b) students engage their critical thinking skills at levels involving not only thought but also action, more specifically actions that reach the community (Byram et al., 2016; Porto & Byram, 2015a).

Very few intercultural citizenship studies as conceptualized in this way exist (Byram et al., 2016) and they are located in Argentina, China, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Sweden, South Korea, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and the USA. They are examples of how learners of different ages and different levels of linguistic competence in different languages can be taught on the basis of the principles of intercultural citizenship mentioned before.

4. What about language learning?

The cases presented in Byram et al. (2016), including this project, were conceived as curriculum development experiments designed to test the transferability of the theoretical principles and philosophical rationale behind intercultural citizenship education to the language classroom. The projects have been successful in providing opportunities for students to use languages for meaningful content related with citizenship and an intercultural perspective. Although this project was not specifically designed to test language improvement as a result of an intercultural citizenship intervention, there was a strong language focus because it was undertaken in language courses in both countries (English in Argentina and Spanish in Britain). The intercultural citizenship project was introduced in the language courses as a pedagogic innovation in addition to the specific focus on language required by the language departments.

Departing from the belief that “when language is separated from academic content and when students have little contact with L2-speaking peers, their opportunities for learning are limited” (Lightbown, 2014, p.16), this intercultural citizenship project was thought as a

CLIL project aimed at introducing a citizenship element in regular ELT through a challenging theme. As Cenoz (2015, p.17) explains, “the basic idea behind the integration of content and language is that languages are not learned first and then used but that they are learned by being used”. The project involved reading, writing, speaking and listening in English and in Spanish about the dictatorship and the 1978 football World Cup.

Language learning is not viewed here in terms of knowledge of the language as a system but rather as the development of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Rowsell, 2013) that allow individuals to use their available language(s) in multiple contexts of work, study, entertainment, travel, etc. (García, 2009) appropriately to satisfy their communicative, interpersonal and other purposes, in a variety of sign systems and mediums, including print, non-print, visual, digital, multimodal or others (Hagood & Skinner, 2012). A plurilingual perspective pointing to the need to “draw on learners’ full linguistic repertoires” (Taylor & Snoddon, 2013, p.440) and to develop the capacity to shuttle “between different communities and contexts, with the ability to negotiate the different discourses making each context” (Canagarajah, 2005, p.32) is paramount.

5. The research

The project was designed as a case study (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000; Yin, 2009) and the research question was ‘Does an intercultural citizenship project lead to language learning?’

Conversational data comprise recorded Skype conversations and class discussions; chats in the wiki and Facebook, and email conversations. There were 23 mixed nationality groups of Argentinian and British students which produced an average of 10 hours of talk each. Each Skype conversation was usually between one and two hours, sometimes more. Documentary data comprise 23 collaborative leaflets or posters, one per group; and individual reflection logs. The Argentinian students also completed the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE) (Byram et al., 2009). The AIE is a resource produced by the Council of Europe that encourages users to reflect on a particular encounter with ‘another’, in this case the students from the British university. It consists of a sequence of questions based on the theory of intercultural competence and citizenship.

Data were analysed qualitatively following the guidelines and procedures in Corbin and Strauss (2014) and Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011). Confidentiality and ethical issues were addressed and students signed informed consent forms to allow disclosure of their productions, with pseudonyms.

The data analysis phase focused on four aspects, selected on the basis of a brief review of key aspects investigated in CLIL contexts and in need of further research (Cenoz, 2015; Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015; Cenoz & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015; Meyer, Coyle, Halbach, Schuck, & Ting, 2015): motivation, language awareness, vocabulary development, and plurilingual competences within translingual practices.

6. Analysis and findings

6.1. Motivation

Banegas (2012) and Heras and Lasagabaster (2015) point out that CLIL projects are motivating and motivation correlates with language learning (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). “Students seem to feel more motivated to learn foreign languages, as they undergo less stress and anxiety in a learning environment in which the focus is not only on language forms but also on meaning and communication” (Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015, p.72). For instance, in the Autobiographies of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) Amalia valued the opportunity to interact with native speakers positively:

It was pretty exciting talking to a native speaker, [name of British peer] was nice to us, she even told us we had a good English level. It was the first time I did something like that and I must say I would do it again, the experience you gain is amazing, in fact, I think that it is the best way to learn to communicate, we do not have the chance in our everyday life to get in touch with a native speaker so this is a really good opportunity.

Initially talking to a native speaker generated anxiety

I was worried about two things, first of all if [name of British peer] was going to be able to get our English, which was a great surprise because of what she told us later; and, secondly, if I had the proficiency required to communicate and make my contributions as clear as possible (Amalia, AIE).

But Amalia overcame her nervousness and uncertainties and saw the project as motivational and inspirational:

*I really appreciate the fact that the teachers work with stuff like this, giving us the opportunity to get in touch with native speakers, to compare cultures, to give our opinions, etc. This is, I think, the only project of this kind throughout the course of studies and *experience of this kind is really necessary for our training*. Being a professional is not just reading books and photocopies to pass our exams.*

Similarly, in their AIEs Faustina and Emilia expressed comparable uneasiness regarding the encounter with native speakers, and mentioned feelings of nervousness and anxiety which were neutralised by the opportunity to put the foreign language in use in a real situation:

I was really nervous because I thought I would have trouble understanding her [the British peer]. Fortunately, she didn't have a strong British accent so I could easily follow her. I especially enjoyed listening to her speak; her pronunciation was just perfect and pleasant-sounding. She was friendly and to my surprise she spoke Spanish very well so we had no problem communicating (...) it was a great opportunity to put in practice my English language skills (Faustina).

I met a British girl because of a project we were asked to do. The first time I talked to her I was a bit nervous because I didn't know if I was supposed to speak English or Spanish, and I didn't know if she could understand me or if I would be able to understand her accent. In the end, everything worked out fine and we were able to speak fluently and without any problem (Emilia).

Overall, for these students the project represented a chance to communicate successfully with native speakers using the target language in a genuine context.

6.2. Language awareness

Language awareness, implicit and explicit, is part of language learning and involves several domains, namely affective (positive attitudes, sense of achievement), social (language varieties), power (ideologies behind languages), cognitive (awareness of patterns, rules, etc.) and performance (awareness underpinning mastery) (James & Garrett, 1991). For instance, in this project communicating with native speakers was perceived as unusual and led to self-consciousness of the need to adjust speech in specific ways (affective and cognitive domains):

It was probably an unusual experience because talking to foreign students is not something that happens every day, at least it isn't for us. (...) I tried to express myself as clear as possible. And I asked questions whenever I felt the need (...) I tried to make myself understood by talking slowly and clearly. Sometimes we had to repeat words or explain them in other words or use synonyms in the same language or switch languages to make ourselves understood (Faustina, AIE).

I think that *this encounter was an unusual experience* not only for [name of British peer] but for us as well. I don't think she has the opportunity to talk to foreign students every day. *In fact, we don't have that opportunity either, that's why I think it was very helpful not only to know other cultures but to improve our English skills (...) I always tried to sound polite and I tried to make myself clear. When we spoke in English I tried to maintain a particular accent and if I didn't know a word, I asked my partners for help. Also, when I spoke in Spanish, I tried to talk slower so [name of British peer] could understand what I was saying. I tried to use a neutral accent without using any Argentinian idioms (Emilia, AIE).*

Communication with the British peers led to explicit awareness of the linguistic benefits of the project (“it really helped with my fluency and my communication ability” – Amalia, AIE-; “I think it was very helpful not only to know other cultures but to improve our English skills” –Emilia, AIE) (affective, cognitive and performance domains), awareness of linguistic varieties (“she had a strange accent, and difficult to get sometimes”, Amalia, AIE) (social domain) and awareness of speech accommodation (“we even had to

type for her some words that she didn't know, and we also had to slow our speed", Amalia, AIE) (social and cognitive domains). Some students also gained awareness of their own weaknesses – a springboard for further learning (James & Garrett, 1991):

I think that interacting with a native speaker of the language you are learning is the best way to actually put it in practice what you have learned about that language. It has also helped me realize what I have to improve. I found it difficult to work in a team (Faustina, AIE).

In sum, language awareness in its several facets (affective, social, power, cognitive and performance) was an important part of language learning in this setting.

6.3. Translanguaging and vocabulary development

As the students in each mixed nationality group negotiated the content, format and language of their awareness-raising leaflet, they engaged in translanguaging understood as the ability to shuttle between different languages and contexts (Canagarajah, 2005). The following group conversation extract shows that students found media sources in French and Italian and decided to translate them into English (evidence in italics) ('Eso es lo que dice la imagen en francés. Ahí está en español, y nosotras lo tendríamos que poner en inglés'). This occurred as they were doing several things simultaneously: they were speaking Spanish and English, reading 'text' in other languages (French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, English) ('Esta está en portugués'; 'Es en italiano'), translating text from one language into another ('Voy a traducirlo'), writing ('Can you write it, please?'), and using digital resources and tools (shown in underlining) ('Voy a traducirlo en la red... ¿Eso lo compartiste con nosotras?'). The extract shows the conception of language learning as multiliteracies development that supports this project (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; García, 2009; Rowsell, 2013) ('al lado de la imagen tiene la explicación que es lo que dicen los textos de la imagen').

ENG: *¿Voy a escribir sobre esta imagen o no? ¿Porque es en francés no?*

ARG1: *Claro, por eso mismo, pero fijate que al lado de la imagen tiene la explicación, que es lo que dicen los textos de la imagen.*

ENG: *Sí.*

ARG1: *Está en castellano, la idea sería ponerlo en inglés para que esta parte del folleto sea en inglés.*

ENG: Sí.

ARG2: *Entonces habría que traducir... ahí te mando. Te lo mando por skype. Eso es lo que dice la imagen en francés. Ahí está en español, y nosotras lo tendríamos que poner en inglés.*

(...)

ARG1: Así ponemos una [imagen] de cada país y vamos variando.

ARG2: *Esta está en portugués pero no sé de donde será. Dice París. Ah no, o francés.*

ENG: *No es en francés.*

ARG2: *¿Francés?*

ENG: *No, no es en francés.*

ARG1: *En portugués entonces.*

ENG: *Sí creo. ¿Podemos traducirlo?*

(...)

ENG: *Un momento. Voy a traducirlo en la red. Un momento. Es en italiano.*

ARG1: *Ah ahí está. ¿Eso lo compartiste con nosotras?*

ENG: *Sí.*

ARG2: *¿En dónde? Porque no sé dónde está. ¿Dónde está? No sé... Ah ahí está, ahí está. Transformar a la copa del mundo en un foro internacional contra el fascismo - liga por los derechos y la liberación del pueblo, ¿eso es?*

ENG: Sí.

ARG2: *Ah bueno. Y esto...¿ lo pondríamos en inglés?*

ARG1: Para que se entienda mejor.

ENG: *Transform the world cup into an international forum against fascism, and then it says: league for the rights and liberation of the people.*

ARG1: OK. *Can you write it, please? Ahí está.* ¡Ok. Re bien gracias!

ARG2: Tendríamos que hacer eso más o menos con las descripciones de las demás imágenes.

ENG: *Puedo hablar francés así que puedo traducir las otras si quieres.*

(...)

ARG2: Eso es lo que decíamos. *Esa descripción ponerla en inglés.*

(Skype conversation, Group 2)

As students negotiated complex meanings about a sensitive topic, they engaged in vocabulary negotiation. The following exchange is devoted to finding expressions in English for ‘exilio’ and ‘intervenido’. Evidence of vocabulary negotiation appears in italics and evidence of translanguaging is underlined:

ENG: Editor.

ARG1: *The editor was fired. And he had to... se tuvo que exiliar. Exilio... how do you call it?*

ENG: *What was in Spanish?*

ARG: *Exilio.*

(...)

ENG: *Oh exile. Yeah it's exile.*

ARG1: How?

ENG: *It's exile.*

(...)

ARG1: *So, well... there was a sports newspaper that was called... is called El Gráfico... (...) so El Gráfico was also intervenido? Cómo se dice intervenido?*

ENG: *Taken over?*

ARG1: *Yes, taken over by the Junta.*

(Skype conversation, Group 4)

Clearly the group was learning language by addressing new content related with human rights violations during dictatorship and this language learning was more significant than simply acquiring two new vocabulary items (exile, taken over). The extract can be seen as an important clarification loop involving code switching and plurilingual practices in which the students were putting their languages and available resources in use to address specific linguistic barriers through negotiation skills.

In sum, the data analysed in this article problematise the conceptualisation of

language learning in terms of linguistic competence based on the normative and static understanding of a linguistic system. We see here students who can be defined as ‘translingual cosmopolitan learners’ (Canagarajah, 2013), i.e. learners who negotiated on equal terms departing from their own positionalities, showing willingness to contribute and negotiate meanings by engaging their plurilingual repertoires and practices such as code switching and translation.

7. Conclusion

In this study, multimodal digital literacies were combined with an online intercultural communication exchange between Argentinian and British college students to develop intercultural citizenship in the English and Spanish foreign language classrooms. While previous studies demonstrated growth in self/intercultural awareness, criticality, social justice responsibility, and a sense of community of ‘international peers’, this study addressed the question of whether intercultural citizenship education leads to language learning. Findings indicate that students found the project motivational and inspirational, developed language awareness, widened their vocabularies and engaged in plurilingual practices within a translingual orientation.

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