



Prolegomena to the epistemology  
of languages for non-specialists :  
the example of CLIL

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# Definitions

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)  
is a hybrid form:

- Abstract cognitive theory + practical pedagogical tool
- Language + subject matter
- Artificial classroom activity + Immersion into real life situations
- One concept + numerous forms of CLIL (context & applications).

# Issue at stake

- Clarification is needed in the form of concept-building
- Epistemological analysis of that domain is essential to assess the impact of the subject matter
  - on language teaching
  - on learning
  - on teaching

# Overview of the presentation

- To show that CLIL can be defined as a teaching and learning « tool » according to Heidegger (1925);
- That CLIL is a « language game » (Wittgenstein 1922 & 1958) consisting of rules within the classroom;
- That language games are shaped by the subject matter that they integrate; each CLIL forms a specific « territory » (Deleuze & Guattari 1980) conditioned by specific intertwined cultures
  - Of the subject matter
  - Of the language
  - Of the institution that shaped & taught it.

# 1- The limits of CLIL as an epistemological « tool »

- Simple recension teaches little in terms of epistemology of the term;
- Integration is a key to define CLIL as a tool connecting language and subject matter;
- Integration also helps define the connection in CLIL between artificial classroom activities and real life imitation;
- But CLIL as a tool says little of the balance to be kept between these two constitutive elements and its social and institutional contexts;
- One possible solution is brought by resorting to the concept of « language game ».

## 2- CLIL as a « language game »

- Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations* 1958):
- Yet CLIL remains autonomous from its institutional and social foundation:
  - Language acquisition is not guaranteed
  - Level of integration is hard to assess
  - Not one single set of rules to govern the « game ».
- It says nothing about which of its aspects should predominate in epistemological analysis:
  - Language or subject matter ?
- More than a « language game », CLIL has a lot in common with a Deleuzian « territory ».

# 3- CLIL as the expression of Deleuzian territoriality

- Why variation matters:
  - Culture of the subject matter forms a territory and conditions variations within CLIL.
- An approach to variation:
  - Law and science as paradigms: Law is territorial, science is deterritorialised (=quest for universal language.)
- Epistemological issues:
  - Importance of the community of learners and teachers (context and culture).
- Complexity: integration also involves borrowing from other epistemological sources (social sciences, humanities).

# Conclusion

- An internal epistemological critique is necessary (Piaget, 1970).
- It is not sufficient (definition and analysis also come from an outsider's perspective).
- Teaching/Learning foreign languages should benefit from that input:
  - It bridges the gap between theory and practice;
  - It contributes to forming conceptual tools;
  - It strengthens didactic analysis and contributes to its emergence as a field of research.