
Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Through Sign Language (SL)

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Abstract

A technique using signing and newspaper content to help adult learners better understand newspaper articles and remember new technical vocabulary will be introduced. Learners are first taught how to sign the alphabet of American Sign Language/ASL. The teacher then reads aloud a newspaper article related to their interest field (e.g., medicine, technology, education). After reading a key word, he stops. A seated learner must spell/sign the word while another standing at the board writes it. For the next class learners must choose one of the topics and give a report entitled What I Learned From, and My Impressions of, (Title of the Article). After which the presenter fields questions from other learners and the teacher.

Key words: Sign Language, ASL/American Sign Language, JSL/Japanese Sign Language, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)

Introduction

In this short Research Note a teaching technique which I have been using for over 10 years will be introduced. I will touch on the following:

- How the seeds for the use of this technique were planted;
- How the technique is actually carried out in the classroom;
- The reasons for the choice of the materials;
- The institutions in which this technique is employed and for whom it has been found to be pedagogically appropriate;
- Problems I have encountered;
- Future plans for the use of this technique.

I was first introduced to Sign Language while working at the Tsukuba University of Technology / 筑波技術大学 (TUT). As one of the campuses is for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, a course (職員手話研修)

which introduces basic Japanese Sign Language (JSL) was offered to employees. Signing was a new experience for me. I quite liked it. And I found that when I was introduced to a new Japanese word, or met a new person, that if I could sign the word or name that my retention of the new input was enhanced.

A formal for-credit American Sign Language course was offered for students on the Amakubo/Division for the Hearing Impaired campus. The instructor of the course (Ms Mariko TAKAMURA) also offered an informal ASL Benkyo Kai. Several interested faculty members joined this group. I introduced in classes some of what I learned, at first in a non-academic fun manner. Surprisingly, the blind and low-vision students (in the Division for the Visually Impaired, TUT) especially seemed to enjoy signing.

1. In the Classroom

The foundation of this method is learning how to sign the alphabet of American Sign Language/ASL. But as many Japanese students already have some experience with Japanese Sign Language/JSL, and there are similarities, JSL is briefly introduced first. A self-introduction and basic greetings are covered. The next step is to actually teach the spelling of ASL. This is done by having the students, first in pairs, then in front of the class, introduce themselves by spelling their names.

In the next class I actually jump right into using the technique. I bring a newspaper article related to the major of the students (Using the Medical, Nursing, Medical Science class as an example, I bring an article about Ebola, Japanese medical people abroad, child care, etc.). After reading a sentence or two I stop. I choose a key word. A seated learner (who is holding an object which I have given him (e.g., a ball) must spell/sign the word. Another learner standing at the board writes it. The seated learner passes the object to a classmate. The standing learner passes the marker to another classmate. This continues until the article is finished. For pronunciation confirmation I read the vocabulary words and the class repeats chorally. The board is erased and another article is introduced.

At the end of the class all articles are distributed. Learners must choose one of the topics and for the next class give a one-minute presentation entitled What I Learned From, and My Impressions of, (Title of the Article). They must also field one or two questions from the other students and one from me.

2. Reasons for Using CLIL Through SL

Many texts for university-level students have excellent and interesting topics, but are often dated or not related to the interests of the students. As I am interested in everyday events (e.g., politics, education, health-related topics) introducing current news is a form of mental stimulation for me, and I hope, for the learners. As I have reached my 60s, a personal concern is the prevention of dementia. The use of tactile manipulation in this process adds a further helpful challenge to the equation.

3. Institutions/Students

I began using (and continue to do so) the technique over 10 years ago with medical-related 2nd-year students at the University of Tsukuba. In recent years I have also had favorable results with learners in other faculties, e.g., Engineering, International Studies, Library and Information and in an evening adult class at the Community College of Tsukuba Gakuin University. At other institutions I have modified its use. At Tsukuba International University I did not introduce newspaper articles but used a textbook and used Sign Language to introduce several activities. Likewise, at Tsukuba University of Technology, where I first learned SL, I also used SL there and used it to augment classroom activities, often with variations, as the students were visually impaired.

4. Problems/Difficulties

When I introduced only one or two long detailed articles I found that the presentations were similar and we were asking the same questions. It became boring and tedious.

The solution was to introduce many short articles. Some newspapers have a News In Brief or Headlines section, containing a topic with a headline and one paragraph. This requires the learner to search in other areas (e.g., internet, Japanese TV news) in order to gather enough information to give a one-minute presentation. So the focus of the presentation has changed to not only what is actually contained in the article but the broader topic.

Newspapers contain controversial topics. A concern was the potential of anxiety of learners being forced to deal with topics they were uncomfortable with. This was solved by presenting a large mix of soft topics (e.g., cuisine, sports) along with controversial (historical issues, crime) ones. Students were free to choose. I was pleased that some chose to deal, in a serious adult manner, with such issues as the suicide of a bullied Philippine boy in Gunma, the self-immolation of citizens protesting government policies in Shinjuku and Hibiya, or Japan's relations with other countries.

5. CLIL Introduction

My use of this methodology evolved from my workplace experience. I actually didn't realize what I was doing, nor how to label this way of teaching. In August, 2014, at the 25th Annual Workshop in Kusatsu the Featured Lecturer was Dr. Roy Lyster. He was from McGill University in Montreal and spoke on Content and Language Integrated Learning or CLIL. This was my first introduction to the term.

6. Conclusion

How will I use this in the future? Plans? Changes? My assumption is that a solid grounding in the target foreign language (i.e., English) in secondary school should have prepared learners for content-based instruction on the university level. Fortunately, in most cases my experience has borne this out.

I do not enjoy teaching basic foreign-language skills which should have been learned before entering tertiary education. As this method causes some tension among learners, the challenge seems to be effective in holding the class's attention and maintaining focus on the content. And the fact that I am traversing around the classroom, while learners are speaking and signing, and others are running to the whiteboard, negates the possibility of dozing learners, (and the teacher also I may add) even in an early-morning class.

The basic strategy has not changed but the details/specifics have been continuously tweaked. I would like to introduce this technique to other teachers but I realize that others have different methods (e.g., CALL, music, drama, reading) and this method may not suit their personality or teaching style. As there are always up-to-date news items in the morning paper and I enjoy using Sign Language, I will continue in a similar manner.

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The British Council. britishcouncil.jp

What is CLIL? | CLIL Japan Primary
primary.cliljapan.org/what-is-clil/

Other useful materials

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内容言語統合型学習 (CLIL) に手話

マーティン・ポーリー

〈要約〉

成人の学習者が新聞の記事をよく理解し、新しい技術的な語彙を覚えておくために、手話と新聞のコンテンツを使用するテクニックが紹介されます。学習者は、最初にアメリカ手話 (American Sign Language / ASL) でアルファベットを表示する方法を教えられます。教師は、多くの学習者たちが関心を持つような分野 (例えば、医学、技術、教育) に関する新聞記事を朗読したあと、キーワードを一つ選びます。座っている学習者は、キーワードを手話で表現しなければなりません。次の段階では、学習者は1つの話題を選択し、「学んだこと」、「自分の印象」、(記事のタイトル) というレポートを提出する必要があります。その後、発表者は他の学習者と教師からの質問に答えなければなりません。

キーワード：手話、ASL / アメリカ手話、JSL / 日本手話、CLIL (内容言語統合型学習)