

FOCUS ON LEXIS: ICLHE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS' PRACTICES

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Abstract: This paper briefly reviews findings from recent studies which looked at how teachers focus on lexicon in ICL classes. The paper presents a small-scale study that examined how lecturers focus on subject-specific and general vocabulary and contrasted it to students' perceptions of lecturers' practices. The paper highlights CLIL teachers' and students' opinions regarding the use of L1 in CLIL settings.

Introduction

The growing need for internationalization across higher education institutions (Smit and Dafouz, 2012) has created language demands of university students that are being met by increasing students' exposure to foreign/additional languages (often English) through non-language content-based subjects (e.g. chemistry, physics, etc.). This approach to content and language integrated learning in higher education (henceforth, ICLHE) varies from "learning *in* English" to "learning *through* English", depending on the university setting. While the former describes English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in contexts where students' proficiency levels allow for fluid content teaching and learning in English, the latter describes settings where students' proficiency levels require consistent language scaffolding that is characteristic of CLIL. The degree of focus on language as an object of study is one of the main aspects that seem to set CLIL apart from EMI.

Recent findings have shown that despite the movement towards CLIL in higher education, its implementation does not necessarily follow precise guidelines or include the same level of language support across degree programs. For example, Arnó-Macià and Mancho-Baréss (2015) showed that though their internal documents mentioned their contexts were CLIL oriented, *language support* was not present.

The present paper aims to project the nature of content and language integration in the private university of San Jorge, Zaragoza, for which purpose two questions were posed:

- 1- How do lecturers focus on lexicon?
 - 1a. Do lecturers use English, Spanish or a mixture of both when focusing on lexicon?
- 2- Do students' perceptions of lecturers' practices align with lecturers' reports?

Teacher training and planned attention to language

CLIL implementation in San Jorge University (USJ), in Aragon, began from its foundation year in 2005 (cf, Nashaat Sobhy, Berzosa and Crean, 2013). To increase consistency among lecturers and ascertain that they not only have the language means to teach through English but also the pedagogical means, an internal accreditation process was put into practice at the end of 2015. The accreditation is composed of a series of training workshops and classroom observations (see Giner and Nashaat Sobhy, this volume). During this training, lecturers learn to prepare their materials and lessons in a way that should enhance students' comprehension and production of the new content.

Attention to subject-specific language forms is part of these workshops, which the trainers find particularly important for students to eventually contribute to class conversations, aided by teacher practices like modeling, paraphrasing, and repairing student language production. In content classes, these practices are likely to hinge on subject-specific terms (SSTs) -technical and semi-technical terms- that are the meeting point between content and language in ICLHE lectures (Costa, 2012). For this reason, we believe it is important to assess how lecturers focus on lexicon.

Defining the boundaries of Lexical Focus-on-Form (LFonF)

By tradition, FonF refers to focus on morphosyntax. Both Long's (1999) focus-on-form (FonF) in meaning-oriented classroom communication and Lyster's (2007) counter-balanced content and form-based instruction recommend such a focus and show how explicit focus on language in instructional input leads to better improved comprehension and noticing by the students. However, the use of FonF has also been extended to include lexicon whenever the participants pause to focus on language as an object, in contrast to its being a tool for communication (Ellis et al, 2001: 426). FonF can also be lexical whenever there is "intentional vocabulary teaching and learning" in any given learning activity (Laufer and Girsai (2008). These two definitions point to *unplanned* moments when teachers decide to shift their attention to lexicon (Ellis et al, 2001: 426; Long, 1999) and other planned instances in which vocabulary teaching is at the core of learning (Laufer and Girsai, 2008; Lyster, 2007). Whether planned or unplanned, LFonF is a necessary scaffolding practice that facilitates students' content learning.

Unlike *unplanned FonF*, which consists of spontaneous and possibly reactive explanations when students require further clarifications (examples, reformulations and translations), *planned FonF* consists of proactive practices that the lecturer spends time planning for. These could take the form of handouts with language frames or exercises for students to work on. Such materials are prepared to draw students' attention to key SSTs. This, in turn, allows students to participate more actively in classroom discourse.

The next section describes our methodological approach to answer the question.

Methodology

Teacher-led interaction accounts for two-thirds of the talk in CLIL classrooms (Dalton-Puffer 2007), which gives teachers time to provide different types of lexical support and gives students an opportunity to form perceptions of how their course lecturers manage new lexicon. Hence, an online survey, which gathers planned and unplanned LFonF scenarios, were given to seven lecturers -who had received a minimum of 16 hours of CLIL training and one-on-one sessions - and to their students at the end of a 16-week course. Definitions and examples of subject-specific terminology and general non-specific language were inserted in the survey prior to the sections with questions about each category. A total of five questions were asked about whether the lecturer focused on lexicon through: a) self-study activities; b) specific classroom activities; c) glossaries and translations; d) examples (including images), reformulations, definitions and explanations in simpler English; and finally e) corrections and feedback on students' written assignments. Statements a to c denote preemptive planning, whereas d and e are mostly reactive.

Results and discussion

As shown in the chart (Figure 1), the majority of the lecturers' (57.10%) coincide in reporting their use of specific exercises from time to time at the beginning of the class to focus on SSTs. Fewer lecturers (42.90%) then coincide in their frequent use of examples, definitions and reformulations as well as glossaries and translations. Three in seven lecturers (28.60%) also say they include some kind of LForF for STT through autonomous self-study tasks.

As for general non-STTs, the results show a shift in lecturers' answers; here, the majority (57.10%) coincides in resorting primarily to examples, definitions and reformulations as well as glossaries and translations. Fewer lecturers (42.90%) then coincide in using specific and self-study exercises from time to time.

Interestingly, the majority coincide in not addressing LForF in students' written work, either for STT or for Non-STT.

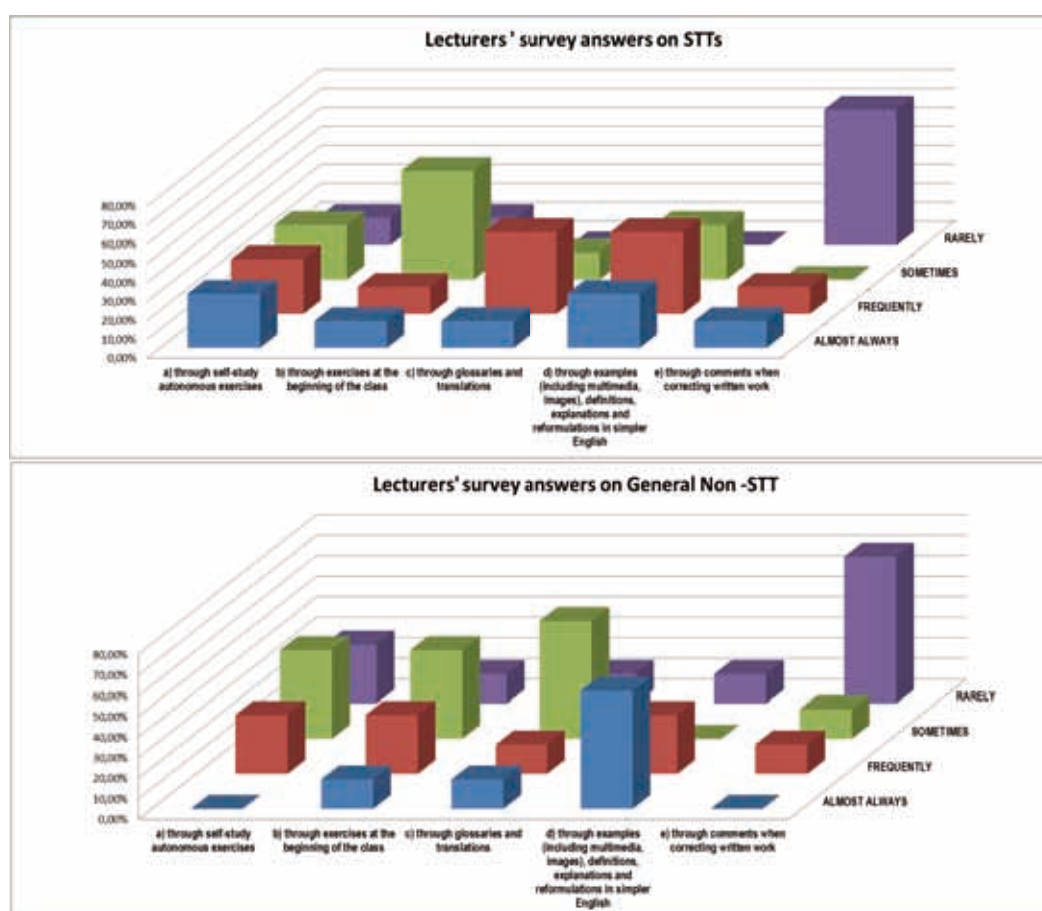


Figure 1. Definitions and examples of subject-specific terminology and general non-specific language

With regard to the use of focusing on SST, 57.1% of the lecturers report using English and Spanish equally, and the remaining 42.9% report mainly using English. When focusing on general Non-STTs, 28.6% of the lecturers mainly use Spanish when students are not familiar with a word or an expression.

Turning to the more precise case of two of the Chemistry and Theory of Education lecturers, and focusing on SSTs only, we see that students' perceptions are *not* well aligned with their

lecturers' answers; however, they seem to be more aligned with the Education-course lecturer than with the Chemistry lecturer (Figure 2 & 3).

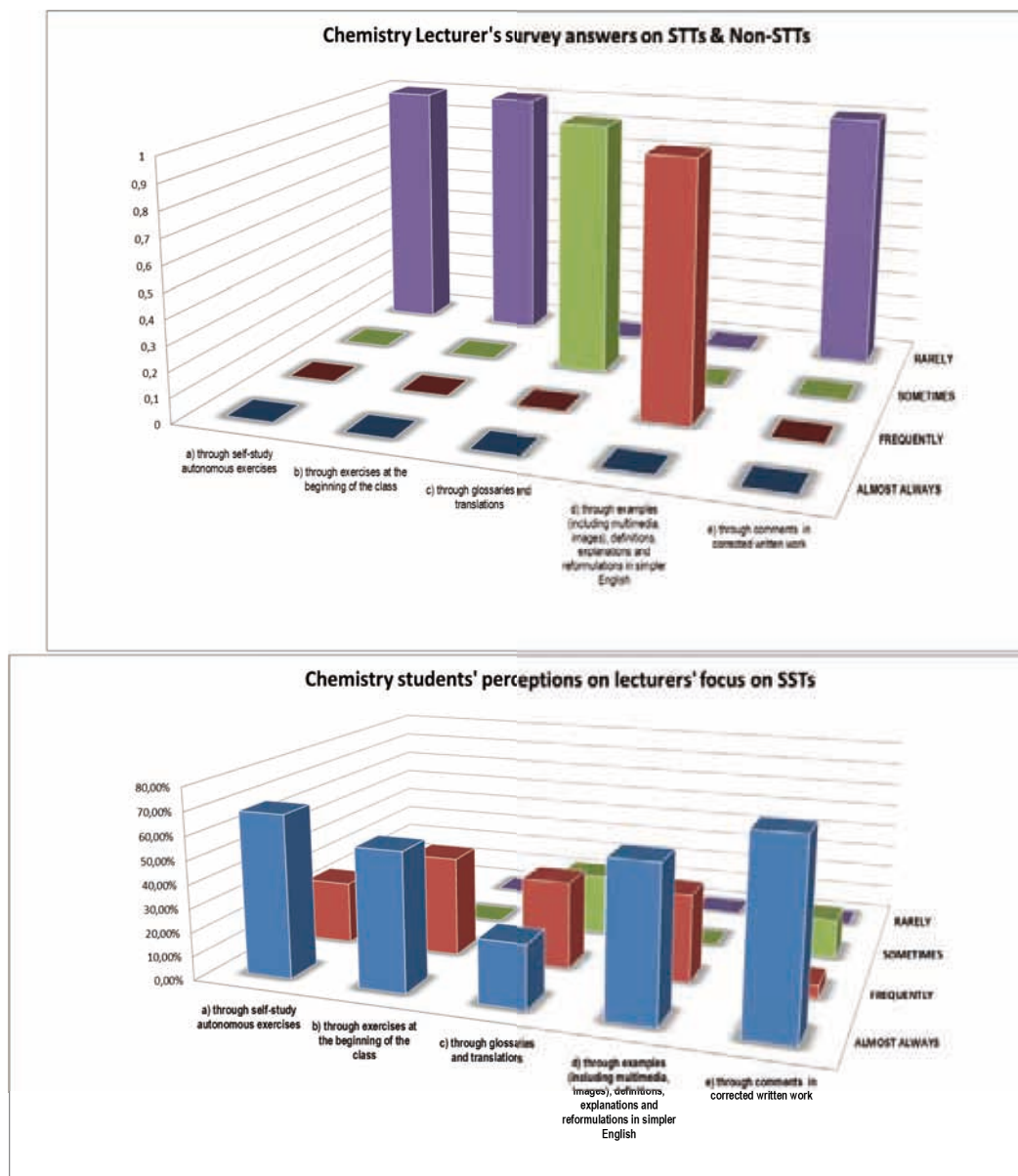


Figure 2. A comparison of Chemistry students' perceptions to their lecturer's answers on the survey regarding focus on SST

The Chemistry lecturer reported having resorted to two strategies: 1) to the frequent use of examples, definitions, and 2) reformulations as well as glossaries and translations from time to time. The Chemistry students, however, perceived that the lecturer had focused on SST almost always through the full range of all the proposed activities in the survey (Choices a to e). The lecturer's answers and the students' perceptions are completely unrelated.

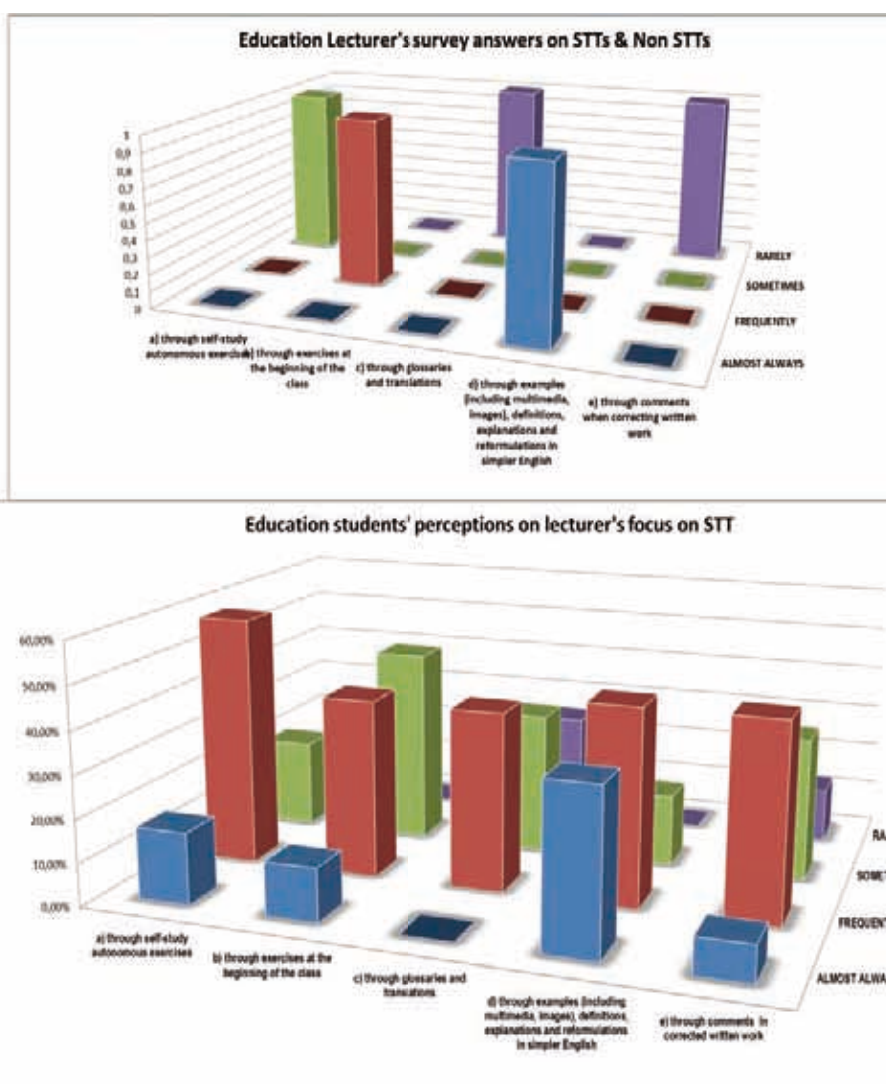


Figure 3. A comparison of Chemistry students' perceptions to their lecturer's answers on the survey regarding focus on SST

The Education lecturer, on the other hand, reported resorting to 3 strategies: 1) almost always to the use of examples, definitions and reformulations, followed by 2) a frequent use of specific L FonF activities at the beginning of some lessons then by 3) including STT exercises in self-study autonomous tasks. The lecturers' reported practices coincide with the perceptions of the majority of the students; nonetheless, there are major discrepancies in students' perceptions of *the frequency* with which the lecturer used the L FonF strategies.

Concerning students' perceptions of lecturers' rates of English and Spanish use, these were completely aligned. Both lecturers reported having used English only throughout the course, which is reflected in the students' perceptions.

Conclusion

To sum up, this small-scale study has shown that lecturers vary in the strategies they apply, yet all report making room for planned L FonF during self-study tasks and activities at the beginning of content lectures, through examples, definitions, explanations and reformulations in a less academic register.

The study has also shown that students' perceptions did not align with the lecturers' answers. The students' perceived that their lecturers had either used more strategies or had used

them at higher frequencies. In other words, students' perceptions give the impression that the lecturers did more than what the lecturers reported, not less.

Spanish emerged as a tool for LFonF through the use of glossaries and translations, and some lecturers' reports regarding resorting to Spanish more than English when dealing with general Non-STT. Students and lecturers also shared opinions regarding the use of L1 in the CLIL classroom, which cannot be elaborated on here given the limited space.

All this leads us to conclude that the sustained interaction between content and language lecturers during the accreditation training and in the one-on-one sessions is leading lecturers to share common practices. These practices point to substantial attention to language, which makes us believe that the integrated content and language model at USJ is drawing closer to CLIL than to EMI.

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