"What's the English word for Spannungstrennung?" Language-related episodes (LREs) as CLIL instantiations

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- This study reports on the first investigation of CLIL classroom discourse in Austrian HTL, i.e. upper secondary technical colleges.
- The concept of 'Language-related episodes' (LREs), originally developed for foreign language classrooms, is extended to fit the CLIL classroom.
- LREs function as analytical tool for discursive moments of content-and-language integration
- The findings indicate different levels of CLIL teacher language awareness.

1. Rationale

Austrian upper-secondary technical colleges ('HTLs', Höhere technische Lehranstalten) offer a variety of Content and Language Integrated (CLIL) lessons that aim at both teaching subject-specific English and increasing the students' overall English proficiency outside English lessons. These CLIL classrooms and their predominant use of English as the target language (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula & Smit, 2010) allow for manifold investigations of how English and content are incorporated over the course of a lesson. This nexus of language and content (for instance the use of English in the discourse on the mechanics of different devices in the subject *Network Engineering*) becomes clearly evident when vocabulary needs to be clarified, pronunciation issues arise or when interlocutors must be encouraged to use the target language. Such moments in CLIL lessons provide direct access to the ways in which teachers and learners interact and co-construct what "lies at the heart of everything that takes place in classrooms" (Walsh, 2011, p. 182), namely classroom discourse. A careful, turn-by-turn analysis of such interactional moments, then, paves the way for gaining insights into language-aware classroom talk.

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This contribution is part of a special focus on upper secondary CLIL. Please see the introductory article "Introducing four papers on upper secondary CLIL. Crossing the divides between language and content subjects" by Dalton-Puffer & Smit (2018) for further information.

One helpful concept in this context is the language-related episode (LRE), which pays particular attention to language-specific topics contained in the overall classroom talk. Swain and Lapkin (1998) define LREs as "any part[s] of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, questioning their language use, or correct themselves or others" (p. 326). Such a student-centered view is endorsed by Jackson (2001), who describes LREs as a "useful construct […] for exploring the contributions that output makes in learning a second language" (p. 299). Moreover, LREs are seen as triggering metalinguistic reflections and "deepening the students' awareness of forms, rules […] they are trying to express" (Swain, 1998, p. 69). Reflecting their origin in Second Language Learning, these views foreground the relevance of LREs when dealing with the students' spoken contributions, very often exclusively taking into account either grammatical features or meaning-based LREs, i.e. lexis, but disregarding LREs analysing meta-level comments on language. While the LRE-concept has played a valuable role in foreign language teaching for years (cf. the above sources), its advantage for investigating CLIL contexts must not be ignored.

In view of the increasingly encountered educational practices in a language other than the participants' L1, the time has come to (a) re-position LREs as a fine-grained research tool, investigating student *and* teacher exchanges in content-focused lessons (see also Basturkmen & Shackleford, 2015), and to (b) widen the concept of LRE to also include meta-level commenting on language use, in addition to topicalising language itself. Based on these considerations, we define language-related episodes as *interactional sequences in classroom talk in which the participants, i.e. teachers and students or students and students, topicalise* either *language or metal-level commentaries on language*. The former aspect becomes the key part of LREs when vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling or discourse are discussed among the participants (Basturkmen & Shackleford, 2015, p. 91). This is illustrated in the following example, in which the CLIL teacher explicitly relies on his role as language resource:

> Sm4:   what's the äh English word for äh *Spannungstrennung* ?
>
> T: voltage divider
>
> Sm4:   voltage divider ok voltage divider

<div align="center">(Example 1: Case D)</div>

Example 1 sheds light on how CLIL classroom discourse can spontaneously shift to an overt language-related question. Although one might expect that CLIL and its idea of "an innovative fusion of both [content and language]" (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010, p. 1) presupposes such episodes as a quasi 'natural' element, our CLIL classroom observations show that such moments of content-driven discourse becoming language-driven have the potential to cause unease among CLIL teachers, especially amongst those who are not English language teachers. Here, the observation and analysis of dealing with language-related episodes in combination with post-lesson reflective interviews provide significant insights not only into the underlying respective teacher's beliefs about the integration of language and content (e.g. *how much time is dedicated to language?*), but also into the overall nature of CLIL classroom interaction (e.g. *who engages in language-related exchanges or who is seen as the 'language expert'?*).

The second type of language-related episodes is 'commentaries on language'. These sequences in classroom talk encompass meta-level talk on using language or a particular language (cf. Hynninen, 2016). Considering such episodes of classroom discourse with regard to LREs allows for tackling the questions of praise, encouragement and confidence, resulting

in descriptions of the overall classroom atmosphere in the CLIL classroom. Consider the following example:

> Sf8:   my English is very very bad
>
> T: just try it it is all bad in the same way no fault just talk

<div align="center">(Example 2: Case D)</div>

Exchanges like in Example 2 offer us insights into how the interlocutors co-construct their interaction and social relationship in the setting 'classroom' (cf. Lyle, 2015, p. 40). By analysing comments on one's own English or on another participant's English use, the levels of insecurity and confidence as well as phenomena of praise and error correction can be grasped. Moreover, focusing on language commentaries also offers insights with regard to, for instance, episodes in which teachers and students jointly apply dictionary skills in order to clarify vocabulary. In this way, the extent of the students being placed on a par with the teacher (and *vice versa*) can be investigated.

In sum, language-related episodes facilitate the analysis of how much attention is paid to language during content-oriented classroom discourse. By investigating the topicalisation of language as well as meta-level commentaries on language, LREs provide answers with regard to the diverse language foci (e.g. grammar, lexis) when integrating language in CLIL lessons, and they essentially support the process of understanding the nature and atmosphere of CLIL classroom interaction. Based on these considerations, we chose LREs as unit of analysis in our study on CLIL at HTLs.

2. Study description and research questions

As part of a first evaluative analysis of statutory CLIL, which was introduced by the Austrian Ministry of Education in 2011, this paper focuses on the language and content interface in profession-oriented theoretical subjects in Austrian upper-secondary technical colleges ('HTLs', Höhere Technische Lehranstalten). Commissioned by the ministry (BMBF-17.600/0010-II/2e/2015), the aim of the study was to particularly describe classroom practices, pedagogical actions and the beliefs of both HTL teachers and students with regard to CLIL. The results, though, seem to be highly relevant for other school types and their CLIL teaching, too.

HTLs offer five years of education and end with full university entrance qualification. Students at such schools experience 36 to 39 contact hours per week and are educated in diverse areas of expertise such as mechanical engineering, construction or IT. CLIL is mandatory for all HTLs in grades 11 to 13 but it is also highly recommended by the Ministry of Education for grades 9 and 10. Moreover, 72 CLIL lessons need to be taught per class per year and the teaching should be characterised by the "inclusion of elements of foreign language teaching" (BMB, 2013, p. 2) outside foreign language classes. In fact, the implementation of CLIL remains highly flexible since decisions regarding subjects, the timing of CLIL lessons over the course of a school year and lesson design have to be made autonomously at each school site.

The study at hand investigated five HTL-CLIL teachers and their classes by taping 4 to 5 consecutive CLIL lessons, transcribing the classroom discourse and analysing those sequences that feature LREs, i.e. topicalise 'language and meta-level commentaries on language'. In this way, the following two research questions were addressed:

a) Are LREs part of HTL classroom talk? How often are they used?

b) What language-related topics are treated in LREs?

3. Overview of main results

The findings in Table 1 show that, on average, there are 12 LREs per lesson analysed, but that there are considerable quantitative differences between the five cases, each one consisting of one teacher and the CLIL lessons he/she taught to one or two student groups. While Case A, for instance, only exhibits 0.3 LREs, Case E features 35.6 LREs on average per lesson. This means that LREs cannot be assumed to be a 'staple ingredient' of CLIL in HTLs. On the contrary, it seems as if the teachers in Cases A & B avoid, intentionally or not, such language-focused exchanges, whereas the teachers in Cases D & E, for example, engage in moments of fusing content and language to a greater extent and quite regularly (see Table 1, columns 5 & 6). This interpretation finds support in the relatively high numbers of *lexis*, one typical language focus of LREs (cf. Section 1), which shows that vocabulary explanations and terminology questions, e.g. required translations, not only occur more frequently, but also seem to be encouraged in Cases D & E.

Table 1: Overview of normalised numbers of LREs

	CASE A	CASE B	CASE C	CASE D	CASE E	overall
normalised per 50 min						
Total LREs	0.3	2.3	8.9	13.1	35.6	12.4
Language focus total	0.0	1.3	5.9	11.1	31.0	11.1
lexis	*0.0*	*1.0*	*5.0*	*8.8*	*27.6*	*8.7*
Commenting total	0.3	1.6	7.5	6.6	15.2	7.1

As Table 1 further illustrates, LREs dealing with language commenting play a more crucial role in Case E (and in Case C as well) than in all other cases. Given the fact that such LREs provide views on the nature of interaction and on classroom atmosphere, Case E serves as a valuable source as it includes a substantial number of comments on other participants' English uses, providing a vivid picture of e.g. how to encourage and ensure L2 use during a CLIL lesson. Additionally, all cases exhibit a preferred use of LREs focusing on lexis and comments on spoken language. LREs dealing with aspects of grammar, pronunciation, discourse or comments on writing could be observed rather infrequently (and are therefore excluded from Table 1). Which implications can now arise from these insights gained?

4. Implications for an informed decision-making process by CLIL teachers

Before offering some implications, it is important to mention that all five teachers included in this study can be considered dedicated and successful CLIL teachers. This we could observe in class and found confirmed by the students who in focus-group interviews described their

teachers as particularly successful in adapting their fluent English to the students' needs and in offering a supportive and relaxed atmosphere in class. It is against this background that the varying LRE results are particularly remarkable. Reflecting their nature, such episodes open up interactional space for language-focused concerns, making teacher and students explicitly negotiate language and language use in their otherwise highly technical and cognitively demanding exchanges on e.g. the processes of subnetting (*Network Engineering*) or the mechanics of oscillators (*Specialist Software Engineering*).

The cline in using LREs, however, indicates that not all teachers dedicate some of their class-time to such exchanges, thereby potentially depriving their learners of explicit moments of fusing content and language learning. And the fact that those who do use LREs resort mainly to lexis, largely disregarding other linguistic concerns, such as pronunciation, grammar or discourse (see Table 1) hints at the danger of failing to exploit the discursive possibilities LREs actually offer.

When taking these insights together with the fact that all teachers expressed their full conviction of the benefits CLIL would have for their students' English language proficiency for their school and later professional careers, it becomes clear that CLIL teachers, especially those who are not foreign language teachers, need support in developing their language awareness, understood here as "explicit knowledge about language, conscious perception [of] and sensitivity [to] language learning, language teaching and language use (Association for Language Awareness, 2018). Besides developing their own understanding of language awareness, this also entails the much more difficult process of turning such language awareness into classroom practices. Although this still awaits empirical testing, these LRE-related findings seem to suggest a micro-level approach to interactionally-focused teacher development. By using interactional examples taken from actual CLIL lessons, CLIL teachers could learn about the potential of LREs for CLIL teaching and learning.

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