

# The problem with materials in CLIL: Needs and perspectives of Austrian CLIL history teachers.

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This paper provides

- a short introduction to the current situation of material design<sup>2</sup> for CLIL history education
- insights into strategies and challenges of material design for CLIL history education in Austria
- suggestions for material design and development for CLIL history teachers
- a hidden gems resource list for CLIL history teachers (compiled with the help of interviewees)

## 1. Introduction

Recent global phenomena such as growing multilingual societies and the interconnectedness of countries have led to a major focus on foreign language competence worldwide. Thus, education policy makers in Europe have been keen to promote foreign language competence in the past decade (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) - with its strategy to teach subjects through a foreign language in order to increase contact time with the L2 and consequently enhance students' language skills - has been considered an innovative teaching method that can indeed help students reach higher competence levels in foreign language learning (Dalton-Puffer & Nikula, 2014). Consequently, its implementation in schools all over Europe has been a major focus of education policies. Despite these efforts, however, the provision of quality CLIL materials has not received the necessary attention, resulting in a lack of suitable materials for CLIL teachers (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Morton, 2013). In addition to this shortage of ready-made CLIL materials, limited research on CLIL material development further complicates the situation for teachers, particularly in the Austrian context (Wildhage, 2007). Although history is deemed to be one of the most popular subjects for CLIL in Austria, materials particularly for CLIL history hardly exist (Wildhage, 2007). Thus, further research in this field is needed to fill this gap. In this paper, some major results of an empirical study by Hahn (2018) on CLIL history teaching materials in Austria will be presented.

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term "material design" includes finding, selecting, adapting, and creating materials.

## 2. Research question(s)

The following research questions were central to the study:

RQ1

Where do CLIL history teachers find material and what do they think about it?

RQ2

How do teachers adapt history materials?

RQ3

What are the challenges for CLIL history teachers in terms of material design?

RQ4

Which solutions do teachers propose for problems related to material design?

## 3. Study description

### 3.1 Context and participants

Five qualitative interviews with Austrian CLIL history teachers were conducted to ensure comprehensive information so as to answer the research questions posed above. All interviewees were teachers practising CLIL history in upper secondary schools in Austria. Due to reasons of maintaining anonymity, the names of the interviewees were replaced by a code reflecting the order in which the interviews were conducted. The individuals involved in the study can be found in Table 1 (below).

Table 1: Overview of interviewees

Teachers	Gender	School type	Subjects	Experience
Teacher 1	Male	AHS <sup>3</sup>	English, History	> 15 years
Teacher 2	Female	AHS	English, History	> 15 years
Teacher 3	Female	HAK <sup>4</sup>	Religion, History	> 10 years
Teacher 4	Female	HAK	Geography, History	> 10 years
Teacher 5	Female	HAK	English, History	< 5 years

Participation in the interviews was voluntary and the selection of the interviewees followed the snowball sampling strategy described by Dörnyei (2007), in which the first key interviewees were asked to recruit further participants who were similar in that sense that they also practised

<sup>3</sup> AHS = secondary grammar school

<sup>4</sup> HAK = upper secondary vocational school with a focus on business

CLIL history. Additionally, for reasons of higher variation in the sample, CLIL history teachers whose second subject is English and teachers with a different second subject were included in the study<sup>5</sup>. It was also attempted to interview teachers with a different amount of experience of teaching CLIL history, varying among the chosen interviewees from two to twenty years of experience. Lastly, participants from different school types with slightly differing formats of CLIL were included. To be more precise, two teachers practise CLIL history in an AHS where the majority of the history lessons is held in English and three teachers practise CLIL history in a HAK where an almost equal balance of English and German is attempted.

### 3.2 Instruments

To obtain relevant information, qualitative interviews were conducted. These interviews were held in German for reasons of fluency and ensuring that teachers felt comfortable. Single-session semi-structured interviews were considered the best format to achieve the goals set. The interviews were conducted with a set of prepared guiding questions (structured) while simultaneously following an open-ended format in which the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on issues raised during the interview (unstructured) (Dörnyei, 2007). The five interviews were performed consecutively in November 2017 in the participants' schools and varied in length between 47 and 70 minutes.

### 3.3 Data analysis

After the transcription of the recordings of the interviews, the transcripts were coded with the software MAXQDA and analysed according to the principles of qualitative data analysis. The analysis followed the method of qualitative content analysis developed by Mayring (2015). More precisely, a structuring content analysis was conducted with the goal of systematically grouping information extracted from the interview material into predetermined categories, following the deductive category assignment as defined by Mayring (2014). Subsequently, the coded utterances were analysed within the respective categories before possible interrelations among categories were examined and previous research was taken into account. Some of the major results of this analysis are presented below.

## 4. Findings

*RQ1: Where do CLIL history teachers find material and what do they think about it?*

The analysis of the interviews provided valuable information on the present material situation for CLIL history in Austria. Similar to other studies (Gierlinger, Hainschink, & Spann, 2007; Morton, 2013; Wildhage, 2007), the findings of this study show consistent dissatisfaction with the provision of ready-made CLIL history materials, mostly since these are almost non-existent, and these few booklets<sup>6</sup> that are available are said to provide insufficient language work and too little detailed historical information. As a consequence, teachers have to design materials

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<sup>5</sup> Generally, Austrian teachers are qualified for two subjects.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelsen Verlag published a handful of CLIL booklets on certain history topics, see application box for further information.

themselves by either adapting resources found online or in books, or creating materials themselves:

Ich nehme immer wieder Materialien von Internetforen oder was in den Büchern ist, adaptiere die aber. (T4 111. *I often take materials found online or in [native speaker text] books and adapt them*)

As this interviewee states, native speaker textbooks can be good resources for specific topics. However, because of the major focus on the Anglophone history and the neglect of Austrian history, native speaker textbooks are not comprehensive enough for the use in the Austrian context and thus always need further adaptation.

*RQ2: How do teachers adapt history materials?*

The interviewees stated similar strategies when adapting materials, which display some similarities to the strategies proposed by Moore and Lorenzo (2007):

- *Simplification* through changing difficult sentence structures and vocabulary of a text so as to ease understanding for students.
- *Discursification* through facilitating comprehension of a text with the help of 'easification devices' such as re-structuring the layout and adding visuals or glossaries as well as engaging students in the text through different tasks (e.g. gap-filling, question-answering, vocabulary work).
- *Adaptation of content* in order to make texts cognitively more or less demanding to meet classroom needs.

The findings further show that material design is a highly individualised procedure in which each teacher includes his/her distinct aspects in terms of didactic design. However, the teachers seem to strive for similar characteristics of their materials, including

- a clear and visually appealing layout
- a short but concise informative text
- diverse tasks encouraging critical thinking
- the provision of additional links to deepen the learner's knowledge
- and the importance of an appropriate language level and vocabulary work.

Most of these characteristics are also mentioned in the literature as aspects that increase reader-friendliness (Mehisto, Marsh, & Frigols, 2008; Palatella & Palatella, 2016).

*RQ 3: What are the challenges for CLIL history teachers in terms of material design?*

Additionally, through the analysis of the interviews, major challenges in material design could be identified. The challenges stated most emphatically are

- obtaining suitable materials in terms of language and topic
- establishing an appropriate language level for CLIL students
- finding materials for topics in Austrian history.

In other words, the major concern of teachers in material design is the lack of ready-made CLIL history materials and the ensuing time-consuming procedure of finding and selecting suitable materials. This procedure is often accompanied by a subsequent adaptation of materials gathered which further entails challenges such as finding the appropriate language level for CLIL students.

*RQ 4: Which solutions do teachers propose for problems related to material design?*

Finally, the interviewees expressed wishes for the future, which present possible solutions for the current problematic situation of CLIL history materials in Austria. First, teachers call for CLIL history textbooks tailored to Austrian curricula since such textbooks would significantly reduce the time needed for material preparation and could provide teachers with materials displaying an appropriate language level for CLIL students:

Das wäre es. Also ein Geschichtebuch für unseren Lehrplan bilingualen Unterricht von einem österreichischen Verlag (T1 142. *That would be great. A history textbook that fits our curriculum for bilingual education produced by an Austrian publisher*)

Thus, the provision of a CLIL-specific history textbook should be of major importance. Only one of the interviewees remarked that she had heard of an already existing and promising CLIL-specific textbook named 'History' (Oxford University Press). However, this textbook was not known by any of the other participants. Moreover, the interviewees wished for a specific CLIL history website for teachers that sorts online materials by topics and language level:

Ich würde mir wünschen, also dass es irgendwie so gesammelt ist (T5 167. *I would like to have a collection of materials*)

Consequently, the establishment of a national material bank for CLIL – an idea already proposed by Marsh (2002) about fifteen years ago – should be a priority so as to ease the arduous task of finding suitable materials. Finally, the interviewees wished for more CLIL history teacher training courses with a focus on material development as well as support for finding materials. Hence, CLIL teacher training courses focused on material design need to be offered and promoted in Austria or, alternatively, existing CLIL courses should dedicate more time to this topic.

## 5. Implications for CLIL in Austria

Although the present study (Hahn, 2018) has provided valuable insights into the little researched field of material design in CLIL history in Austria, it also displays limitations due to the rather small sample of interviewees. In order to increase generalisability and reliability, future studies could contribute to the findings outlined above by conducting more interviews with a larger and even more varied sample.

Nevertheless, three major implications can be drawn from the present study:

Firstly, since CLIL history teachers in Austria are confronted with a lack of suitable on-hand materials, developing a CLIL-specific textbook tailored to the Austrian curriculum should be a priority in the future. Such a textbook could ease the challenge of finding materials with an appropriate language level and save teachers valuable time when preparing CLIL lessons. However, publishers are slow to produce such textbooks since they are not yet profitable from a financial viewpoint. Thus, ample support from researchers and practitioners is needed to encourage the production of a CLIL history specific textbook for Austrian schools.

In addition, the creation of an Austrian CLIL website which features materials sorted by topics and grade or language level would facilitate material design since it would provide teachers with adequate and useful materials displaying appropriate content and language levels for Austrian CLIL pupils. Once established, such an online material bank would need to be promoted and CLIL history teachers would have to be notified about its existence and

encouraged to share their own materials in exchange for a multitude of materials from other Austrian teachers.

Finally, Austrian education policy makers ought to concentrate more on providing and promoting CLIL training programmes, for example a course on CLIL history education and its materials in secondary schools. These programmes could provide teachers with information on where to find suitable materials for CLIL history lessons and how to adequately adapt existing materials. Participating in such courses could also help connect Austrian CLIL history teachers, which in turn could stimulate fruitful exchanges of ideas and materials.

## Application Box

### CLIL history resources – 7 hidden gems

The following list of CLIL history resources is an extract from a comprehensive resource list assembled in the course of a study by Hahn (2018) that should provide CLIL history teachers with useful online resources, native-speaker textbooks, and CLIL-specific booklets.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

##### 1. YouTube channels

Crash course on history (<https://www.youtube.com/user/crashcourse>)

→ offers entertaining short videos about different historical topics

History teachers (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAiABuhVSMZJMgyv4Ur5XqA>)

→ presents popular music videos with lyrics that describe historical events

##### 2. BBC websites

BBC History for kids (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/forkids/>)

→ presents simple English suitable for young learners in an age-appropriate set-up

BBC GCSE (<https://www.bbc.com/education/subjects/zi26n39>)

- offers succinct summaries of mainly British history topics but also 20th century world topics
- includes glossaries with important vocabulary
- provides tasks to self-check knowledge

##### 3. History on the net (<https://www.historyonthenet.com/>)

- provides good summaries and podcasts
- links to other websites with primary sources

##### 4. Maps of War (<http://www.mapsofwar.com/>)

→ offers impressive maps depicting important historical events

## NATIVE-SPEAKER TEXTBOOKS

### 5. GCSE Modern World History, Combined Edition

(Grey, Little, & McAleavy, 2001)

→ displays an appropriate language level for upper secondary CLIL learners

## CLIL-SPECIFIC BOOKLETS

### 6. Invitation to History Vol.1

(Weeke, 2006)

- comes in the form of a booklet with specific topics
- covers American Revolution to First World War
- mainly targets lower secondary
- tip: Volume 2 also available (ISBN 978-3-06-032225-1)

### 7. Module booklets by Cornelsen

(e.g. Weeke, 2007; Tauke & Weeke, 2011)

- come in short booklets on one specific topic (e.g.: The Interwar Years, The First World War, National Socialism, etc.)
- provide good overviews but only little historical detail
- therefore, only suitable for lower secondary

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### CLIL Teaching resource books

- Grey, P., Little, R., & McAleavy, T. (2001). *Modern World History. Combined edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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