TEACHING AND LEARNING FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (FFL) AND FRENCH FOR MEDICAL PURPOSE (FMP) IN ASSOCIATION WITH SUBJECT-MATTER CONTENT IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION: THEORIES AND PRACTICE AT HAI PHONG UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND PHARMACY (VIETNAM)

Nguyễn Thị Hiền, Cao Thị Phương Dung,
Trịnh Thị Thu Trang, Trần Thị Hà Giang

Abstract: The paper aims to (1) present some theoretical questions about teaching and learning foreign languages in association with Subject-Matter Context under a Francophone point of view, (2) to illustrate these theories by describing the actual situation of practising CLIL (content and language integrated learning) in Teaching and Learning French as a Foreign Language (FFL) and French for Medical Purpose (FMP) in association with medical disciplines at Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy. The paper finally concludes with some recommendations to be taken.

Keywords: CLIL, French as a foreign language, French for medical purpose.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, learning a language in general, and a specialty language in particular, is becoming more and more necessary for both students and professionals. In Vietnam, in the field of medicine, for historical, cultural and academic reasons, French plays an important role in the transmission of knowledge and scientific cooperation. French was the language of instruction in the faculties of medicine, and continues to be so in medical French courses, and medical courses taught in French, as part of the Francophone teaching program at some medical universities in Vietnam, including Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy. How are these courses conducted using the CLIL (content and language integrated learning) approach? What are the problems to be solved and what are the solutions?

---

1 Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy; tran.thg@gmail.com.
2. THEORETICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING FFL AND FMP IN ASSOCIATION WITH SUBJECT-MATTER CONTEXT

French as a Foreign Language (FFL), French for Specific Purposes (FSP), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are often misleading concepts. What do these acronyms mean and what are their differences? First of all, the acronym FFL (FLE in French: Français Langue Étrangère) means a disciplinary field born of the awareness of the differentiation between “mother tongue” and “foreign language”, in the 1960s. According to the Dictionnaire de didactique du français (Clé Internationale, 2006), “French is thus a foreign language for all those who, not recognizing it as their mother tongue, enter a more or less voluntary process of appropriation, and for all those who recognize it or not as their mother tongue and are taught by non-native speakers.” (Cuq et al., 2002: 150). For FFL, French is a discipline like any other, and not a language through which knowledge is transmitted. In the teaching methods of FLE, it’s “general French” which is taught, intended for non-specialized audiences, adults or children, and whose content is limited to the different themes of everyday life.

The FSP - French on Specific Purposes (in French FOS: Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques), meanwhile, is intended for specialized audiences. The Dictionnaire de didactique du français (Clé Internationale, 2006) defines it as follows:

“French for Specific Purposes (FOS) was born out of a concern to adapt the teaching of French as a foreign language to adult learners wishing to acquire or improve skills in French for a professional activity or higher education. […] (Its objective is) “the access to language skills in duly identified situations of professional or academic communication” (Cuq et al., 2002: 109-110).

Originally, it developed in Latin America in the 1970s as “Français instrumental”, and then became “Français de spécialité” before being known as FOS during the 1980s. It is a name borrowed from English “English for specific purposes”. According to Richer (2008), the characteristics of the FOS which distinguishes it from the FLE concern four elements, including the learners, the language to be acquired, the teacher and the methodology. Concerning learners, according to Mourlon-Dallies (2008), there are several types of public such as professionals, students in the process of specialization, immigrants wishing to integrate into professional life in France. These audiences want to learn specific French and not general French because of their professional goals and limited time for learning. The notion of “langue de spécialité” has been replaced by “discours de spécialité” by researchers in the field following the finding of the specificity of use and not the language (Nguyen Van Toan 2015: 78). Thus, the objective of learning the FOS becomes the specialized discourse. As for the teachers of the FOS, they have 4 features of particularity compared to the teachers of FLE. On the one hand, according to Richer
(2007), they find themself in a particular situation during their professional practice, they must design him pedagogic material. On the other hand, they “have little time relative to the importance of the program to ensure” and “the heterogeneity of their public often requires them to resort to various methodologies and approaches for a better acquisition by their learners”. (Nguyen Van Toan, 2015: 79). Regarding the methodology, the FOS has undergone significant evolutions, ranging from the borrowing of methodological currents from the FLE to “post-communicative approaches such as the (inter)actional approach, corpus-based learning, discursive” (Richer 2008: 22-23).

Unlike FLE and FOS, CLIL (in English: Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a teaching approach that focuses mainly on the discipline itself:

“Content and language integrated learning (CLIL is a generic term and refers to any educational situation in which an additional language and therefore not the most widely used language of the environment is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself.” (Marsh & Langé 2000: iii)

According to this definition, the CLIL approach aims at transmitting knowledge via a foreign language, and not necessarily through the one most practiced in the world (for example the case of English). Indeed, between the language and the content of specialty is tied an indelible link, one could not exist without the other in this integrated approach. In fact, language teaching is not the only goal of CLIL, it is integrated harmoniously with the content. The mastery of the language of specialty makes it possible to better apprehend the content and the mastery of the content promotes the learning of the language. According to Wolff (2010), the CLIL approach is rarely used in higher education, except in the studies where the content is related to the language itself, such as English or French studies. He also adds that language is often learned separately and not in integration with the content because the lack of teachers with sufficient language skills to teach a subject in a foreign language. However, this researcher says that some studies have shown the effectiveness of the CLIL approach at the university level (Wolff 2010: 5). By citing the work of Marsh, Marsland & Stenberg (2001: 17) on the five main reasons why it is advantageous to introduce the CLIL approach in an academic context, he adds a sixth one:

“According to them these reasons involve the development of 1. Pragmatic knowledge and skills 2. Interpersonal skills 3. Intercultural communication 4. Quality of learning and teaching in the content field 5. Employability. 6. (I would like to add a sixth one: multi-perspectivity, i.e. to be able to look at one’s own academic subject from different perspectives).” (Wolff 2003:5)

---

1 The pagination of this citation was the one of the online version of Wolff’s article, for more details, please consult the bibliography, pp.136-137.
In short, the names of the currents of teaching specialized French are certainly varied, but the border between these appellations is not very clear. There is always a legacy of inheritance that can be passed from one name to another, despite the transformations, changes or adaptations that have been put in place to improve the quality of teaching/learning at every step of the history. As for the CLIL approach, it plays an increasingly important role in university education in the age of globalization, since it provides students with a solid intellectual and linguistic background in order to better integrate into the world of international work. Co-operation between subject and language teachers is essential in order to carry out this teaching, from the creation of the teaching program to its implementation.

3. PRACTISING CLIL AT HAIPHONG UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL AND PHARMACY (VIETNAM): ACTUAL SITUATION AND DIDACTICAL PROPOSITIONS.

3.1. Learning and Teaching context

Unlike the French departments where this language is taught as a major specialty, in non-specialist language universities, it is a compulsory subject but does not occupy a priority place in university education. At the Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy, French is taught through two different courses: the 2 years course for students in the standard curriculum and the 6 years course for students enrolled in the Francophone university program (in French FUF: *Filière Universitaire Francophone*). General French is taught during the first three semesters and medical French in the fourth semester, which makes a total of two academic years out of six for students in the standard curriculum. As for the curriculum of the FUF program, in addition to the similar courses taught by their fellow students in the 2 years program, they also have supplementary French courses and medical courses in French, *i.e.* CLIL courses until their sixth and final year of university.

At the end of the fourth year of studies, that is to say the eighth semester, the students will have to reach the level B1 (CEFRL\(^1\)) and they are encouraged to attend the level B2 at the end of the fifth year, that is to say the tenth semester.

It is important to clarify the two cases of French teaching in the Haiphong University of Medicine and Pharmacy. Firstly, it’s the teaching of medical French (a branch of FOS) ensured by French teachers from the department of foreign languages, and secondly, the CLIL courses ensured by medical teachers from several departments of the same university. However, all these two cases are hybrid teachings. Indeed, in the courses of FOS - French medical, certain contents are new for the students, they do not study only the linguistic contents on the medicine such as the medical terminology, the studies of texts on

\(^1\) CEFRL : Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
medical themes but through all these contents, they acquire the specialist knowledge. For example, by working on a reading comprehension activity with a text on the respiratory system as a teaching aid, the students discover at the same time the functioning of the latter and the medical terminology which concerns it, etc. As for CLIL courses where the teaching of medical subjects should theoretically be conducted in French, because of the level of language of students as of the teachers themselves, and because of the lack of pedagogical training of medical teachers, courses are also held in Vietnamese. Thus, all these two types of teaching do not correspond exactly to the official definition of FOS and CLIL, but they still have many of their characteristics. If the FOS course is supposed to focus on the linguistic knowledge of the specialty area, the CLIL course aims to pass on knowledge through the language. In all of these two cases in question, the specialty content and the language play more or less an important role. However, the content-language distribution varies according to each respective case: the “language” part is more important in the FOS courses and on the contrary, the “content” part is more important in the CLIL courses.

Regarding the pedagogic documents, the manual “Le français médical” is used for FOS courses, and the manuals of medical subjects in French (for example the manual entitled “Cours de médecine interne pour les étudiants francophones en 4e année” written by Dr. NGUYEN Thi Dung - a teacher of the Department of Internal Medicine) are used for CLIL courses, both written by the university’s teachers themselves. If there are enough French-speaking medical teachers at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Haiphong, not all of them will be able to dispense medical courses in French, because of the language level, or lack of availability, or lack of interest for this particular teaching. Students therefore have different courses each year depending on the availability of Francophone specialty teachers: some promotions have courses in immunology, others in internal medicine or gynecology and obstetrics, etc.

It is also necessary to underline the great effort that must be made by students to continue these CLIL courses, taught as part of the lessons of the FUF program previously piloted by the AUF. In addition to a busy schedule of theoretical and clinical classes throughout the day, with night guards at the hospital, students enrolled in FUF must take evening classes and pay additional tuition fees. Few are those who “survive” until the end of the sixth year - at which point they will have to acquire the B2 level in language and support the final dissertation of medical studies in French.

In this academic context where medicine is the main field of study, the whole operation of the establishment revolves around this specific core. Indeed, clinical disciplines such as internal medicine, surgery, gynaecology-obstetrics, paediatrics, etc. are privileged compared to other disciplines classified by the institution in the category of “basic sciences” such as mathematics, informatics, foreign languages, physical education, etc.
Students, meanwhile, give more time and attention to clinical disciplines to the detriment of the latters. This teaching context is far from being a facilitator for French teachers such as teachers of medical subjects in French. Interviews with them have shown that they face difficulties in practicing their profession. Indeed, on the one hand, medical French teachers work not only with a non-language specialist public, but must at the same time adapt to it in order to teach them specialty French in their own field of medicine, which is a double challenge. If the profession of French teacher in general is more and more devalued because of the omnipresence of English, and of Chinese and Japanese - two languages now in vogue in Vietnam, to be a French teacher in a non-specialist institution demands from the teacher a great passion and a constant effort to continue his job. On the other hand, for teachers of medical subjects in French, their difficulties consist of insufficient mastery of the foreign language of the students and of themselves. It is difficult to teach and learn a science subject totally in French when teachers and students have difficulty in understanding and speaking in this language. Most of the time, they use mother tongues to deal with this gap.

3.2. Difficulties in practise CLIL at HPUMP

Whether it is to teach medical French or to teach medical subjects in French, teachers encounter difficulties in the practice of their profession, largely related to the academic environment to which they belong professionally.

- The lack of motivation among some students choosing to learn French and in French

The lack of motivation among students could be a major obstacle. At the Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy, while some students show a strong taste for French, others do not really have any interest in this language. This observation is similar to that of Pascaleine Faure:

“Finally, if medical students have rarely experienced failure in their previous course, they show at best a very limited interest in foreign languages and at worst a certain disgust. Many, even some of the best in their discipline, are at odds with English and have not kept very pleasant memories of courses taught in high school. It should be added that the teaching programs of medical subjects are extremely important. [...] It goes without saying that, for undergraduate and graduate students, languages are minority subjects and, even if they are aware that they will need them, they prefer medical subjects and therefore have very little time to devote to them.” (Faure 2012: 150)

This lack of motivation among non-language students, particularly those at the Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy, is linked to several factors. First, they have a very busy schedule compared to students from other fields, plus a few night guards per week at hospital. Their duration of study is longer and the entrance examination for
medical studies requires a tedious preparation work. They therefore have very little time for learning a foreign language. Secondly, most of them came from rural areas where the conditions for teaching / learning languages in secondary education were not ideal. Finally, the motivation to learn French and medical courses in French depends on each student’s vision of his or her respective needs: some people think they do not need to use French in the future, or they do not know yet what is the use of French on their studies or professional life, or to learn French if it is only an obligation to complete their studies, etc. Elisabeth Crosnier explains more:

“It would be interesting to know to what extent the existence or absence of career plans, career prospects, relatively targeted (LANSAD\(^1\)) or more open (LEA\(^2\)), influence the behavior of learners. A survey of 600 fourth year students (PCEM\(^3\) 2 at DCEM\(^4\) 3) at Toulouse’s two medical universities brings unexpected results: the motivation for learning medical English comes mainly from students’ perceptions their professional needs (extrinsic motivation of reason and long term).” (Crosnier 2011)\(^5\)

Would it be necessary to help students, from their first academic year, to acquire the skills and savoir-vivre of this new period of their life at the same time as academic knowledge? (through a guide, an internship, a meeting, etc. for example) These skills could help them overcome difficulties and succeed in their studies.

- **Lack of training and communication with other institutions providing CLIL courses**

While there are many training courses for language teachers, there is no training for those who wish to improve their skills or become specialized language teachers, as pointed out by Brudermann and Poteaux (2015), citing researchers Causa and Derivry (2013):

[…] at the same time, it should be pointed out that there is currently no specific training for Lansad teachers in France, which seems paradoxical, especially considering that in France about 90% of university students, when they study languages, are not language specialists” (Brudermann & Poteaux 2015\(^6\))

Indeed, specific training for French teachers and those who teach medical courses in French does not exist not only in France, but also in Vietnam. In the case of French

---

1. LANSAD: LANgue pour Spécialiste d’Autres Disciplines (Language for Specialist of others disciples)
2. LEA: Langue Étrangère Appliquée (Applied Foreign Language)
3. PCEM: Premier Cycle d’Études Médicales (First Cycle of Medical Studies)
4. DCEM: Deuxième Cycle d’Études Médicales (Second Cycle of Medical Studies)
6. This citation was taken on paragraph 14 of the free online version of Brudermann & Poteaux 2015’s article, available at https://journals.openedition.org/dms/1003
teachers at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Haiphong, this is an educational and professional isolation. They have only some ongoing training that is offered and accessible. On the one hand, unlike colleagues from language specialist universities, they do not have a permanent connection to the various professional networks of the world of language sciences, especially of FOS and CLIL. On the other hand, their work environment does not require a professional dynamic. In fact, if the colleagues teaching clinical disciplines must carry out at least one scientific study per year as the main author, the teachers of foreign languages and other disciplines called “basic sciences” do not have this obligation. Moreover, they are no longer obliged to pursue doctoral studies – which are required by their doctor colleagues. This particular context diminishes their self-confidence and their motivation to communicate, to train, to aim “higher” scientifically. As the years go by, their creativity and scientific productivity may be lost progressively. Concerning French subject teachers, who are often practitioners at the same time, the lack of training in medical pedagogy and language improvement courses are two main factors that constitute their difficulties. The quality of teaching and learning would be better if they could benefit from specific and ongoing training, and if they could participate in more research colloquia in the areas in question.

- **Limited teaching/learning conditions:**

  The teaching materials used in the medical French courses as well as the CLIL courses are mainly boards, chalks and manuals. Teachers rarely use e-learning, PowerPoint or other software to teach, because of the lack of classrooms equipped with projectors or internet connection. In addition, the number of students in a class (about 35 or 40) and the limited weekly schedule reserved for the courses (1 to 2 courses; 1.5 h per course) figure among the difficulties for teaching and learning in Hai Phong University of Medicine and Pharmacy. Concerning evaluation, there are two exams each semester which are midterm and final exams. Yet, these exams focus mainly on the French medical terminology, reading and translation competences; they do not include oral exams. Therefore, they do not allow us to evaluate communication competences of learners.

- **The gradual decline of students choosing to learn French and medical courses in French**

  If the number of students opting to learn English at university remains stable over the years, this is not the case for French. English has become the lingua franca of communication, commerce and science in this age of globalization. Medicine is no exception. New inventions and medical techniques are becoming more common in English-speaking countries thanks to their economic powers and the large budget earmarked for research. Scholarships, fellowships and internships are increasingly coming from English-speaking countries. As a result, medical students prefer to choose to learn English for their professional future, which leads to a drop in the number of French students in the
institution in question. There are three categories of students who learn French: either they have already learned French in high school and wish to continue it at university, or they like French language and culture and want to discover it, or they are classified in the French section because they did not acquire a sufficient level of English in the entrance test at the beginning of the first year. It is a linguistic policy of the university that aimed at ensuring the number of hours of work required for French teachers, maintaining French classes as a result of its long Francophile tradition and thus contributing to the diversity of languages. This situation puts French teachers in a precarious job because their career is not really sustainable and valued.

3.3. Didactical propositions

Faced with many challenges that are constantly increasing, especially in today’s globalized world, what new skills do the French and CLIL teachers need to acquire in order to improve their work, grow professionally? From the research works of authors such as Pascaline FAURE (2014), and personal reflections, we think it is beneficial for these teachers to build the following skills:

- Academic competence: it is a matter of self-training, to engage in research and in the design of training programs and pedagogic materials adapted to the public of learners.

- Relational competence: to build a professional network of specialized teachers, to increase exchanges with professionals in the field of specialty, and to optimize pedagogical support with students.

- Psychological competence: to value one’s job, to manage professional stress.

In order to improve their teaching, the French teachers could make an observation in a hospital service, establish contacts with professionals, and consult authentic documents in French to master the situations of medical communications. The CLIL teachers could enrol pedagogic and French courses to perfect their pedagogic and linguistic levels.

Otherwise, it is necessary that the University direction:

- increases the weekly schedules for medical French and CLIL courses. Thus, students have more time to learn theoretical content and to practice their communication skills in different medical situations.

- organizes small classes with the appropriate number of students.

- motivates students by giving them opportunities to work with native teachers and to participate in university francophone events.

According to Pierre Frath, teachers and university direction must also pay attention to the personal interest of the students by giving them “the possibility of obtaining a good grade at the end of the semester, the hope of having their efforts rewarded, and the possibility of enrolling the levels. in the language reached in the Diploma Supplement “ (Frath 2012)
CONCLUSION

Teaching with the CLIL approach at a medical university requires teachers to have a dual skill in didactics and medicine. Certainly, the French teachers could not master the medical knowledge at the same level as a doctor, but having fundamental knowledge is necessary to ensure the quality of their teaching in the language of specialty. As for teachers of medical subjects in French, being original practitioners, it is essential for them to improve their knowledge, pedagogy and language of specialty. Faced with many challenges of the profession in the era of globalization and the omnipresence of English, these teachers must go to self-valuation, self-training with the help of readings, observations, exchanges professionals. Finally, it goes without saying that in the academic world, teaching must pace with research. It is the latter that will allow the teachers to master their discipline, improve their teaching and develop fully in their profession.

Note: The translation of the citations from French into English has been made by the authors of this article.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


