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## Training Would-be Teachers: Premises and Results of a Content-based ESL Course

### Abstract

This article focuses on the description and discussion of a corpus of 12 lesson plans created by Second Language Acquisition MA students at Sapienza University of Rome in AY 2020-2021. The best practices selected represent valid case studies for a much broader reflection about the implementation of content-based instructional approaches in the Italian education system. Resorting to internationally acknowledged critics as well as zoomed views about content-based English Second/Foreign Language courses in Italy, the current study aims at developing a coherent and cohesive method for an effective application of content-based language teaching. Such a model can be exploited by aspiring and experienced teachers within the scope of developing transdisciplinary key competences for lifelong learning and the internationalisation of education systems in Italy and worldwide.

### 1. Acknowledgments

This article and the teaching practice it describes would not have been possible without the precious contribution of Second Language Acquisition (hereafter SLA) students/trainees belonging to the MA degree courses at Sapienza University of Rome – namely, English and Anglo-American Studies (EAAS) and Scienze Linguistiche, Letterarie e della Traduzione (SLLT; i.e., Linguistic, Literary and Translation Studies). To all and each of them goes my gratitude. More than 50 aspiring teachers attended my SLA course in the first semester of AY 2020-2021 and 29 of them decided to submit a lesson plan/project concerning Content-based Language Teaching (hereafter CBLT)/Content-

based Instruction (hereafter CBI)<sup>1</sup> to be discussed during an oral exam. Of these 29, I have selected 12 best practices whose rationale and findings are investigated in this article. For practical reasons, I requested their written permission to mention their names and quote from their outputs; they all accepted very graciously and enthusiastically. They are, in alphabetical order by surname, Mariangela Amoroso, Marco Bucci, Giada Calce, Giorgia Carta, Noemi Cirone, Giulia D'Elia, Gaia Guglielmino, Aytakin Gurbanzade, Fabrizio Patrolecco, Lidia Maria Pes, Silvia Principali and Ginevra Tedeschi.<sup>2</sup> Ad maiora, guys!

## 2. Introduction: CBLT in the Italian education system

CBLT is an approach to the teaching of a foreign language, mainly English, which has been receiving growing attention for its dual focus on both disciplinary contents such as Maths, Sciences, History, Philosophy, etc., and the development of the students' linguistic competence and metalinguistic awareness. It has sometimes been variously defined as an umbrella term encompassing a cauldron of different (but at the same time similar) approaches and methodologies, such as bilingual and immersion programmes, EAL (English as Additional Language), EMI (English Medium Instruction), LAC (Language Across the Curriculum), LSP (Language for Special/Specific Purposes),<sup>3</sup> etc. (see, i.a., Bula Villalobos 2013; Lightbrown 2014; Cammarata 2016; Lyster 2018). In other cases, CBI overlaps with CLIL (Content and

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1 In this article, I use these two acronyms interchangeably (cf. Stryker and Leaver 1997).

2 I mention their names instead of their surnames in this text to distinguish them from SLA scholars. For the same reason – i.e., to distinguish their projects from published scientific articles, chapters and books – when quoting from the lesson plans, date of publication is not given (both because their projects have not been published and because it is 2020) and page numbers are preceded by the noun “page(s)”.

3 Actually, LSP is neither a methodology nor an approach per se, but a branch of applied linguistics. Nevertheless, since its teaching and implementation is a precise methodological choice in the Italian school system, here I consider LSP teaching a methodology. For this reason, from now on, when LSP is defined as a methodology, it must be considered LSP teaching, not LSP per se. Moreover, since the SLA course under scrutiny here is addressed to aspiring English teachers, the acronyms LSP and ESP (English for Special/Specific Purposes) are used interchangeably.

Language Integrated Learning), the latter being probably the best known and implemented approach/methodology that balances content and language teaching/learning (see, among others, Fernández 2009; Cenoz 2015). In this article, as in my SLA course, I adopt the first perspective, trying to distinguish among different CBLT programmes, since LSP, CLIL, EMI, etc. have separate statuses and regulations in the Italian educational system (see Cinganotto 2016; 2019; Graziano 2018; Langé 2021).

SLA is a brand-new course taught to postgraduate students belonging to the Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies (SEAI) at Sapienza University of Rome. According to the Italian Ministerial Decree n. 616/17 and subsequent amendments and additions,<sup>4</sup> SLA is one of the courses that allow postgraduate students to obtain the 24 university credits necessary for participation in the public competition for high school English teaching positions. Since these prerequisite-like credits are divided into four main areas<sup>5</sup> – i.e., 1) anthropology, 2) psychology, 3) pedagogy, and 4) teaching methods and technologies – SLA at Sapienza has been designed as a 6-credit course related to the field of teaching methods and technologies. The 24 credits can be obtained following both curricular and extracurricular exams, the only difference being that extracurricular exams are not covered by university fees and must be paid separately. For this reason, many postgraduate students belonging to both EAAS and SLLT curricula decide to attend the SLA course at Sapienza, even if they have not yet definitely decided to become teachers.<sup>6</sup>

Given the increasing interest in transversal, transdisciplinary competences for lifelong learning, on the one hand, and a growing tendency towards internationalisation of educational systems worldwide, on the other, I believe

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4 I.e., so far, Note of 25 October 2017 n. 29999 and Note of 17 November 2017 n. 32688.

5 Future teachers are required to obtain at least 6 credits in at least three out of these four areas. In other words, they can even ignore one of the four areas and collect, say, 8 credits in each of the other ones, 12+6+6, 10+8+6, etc.

6 At the moment, the university degree course in Primary Education Studies (according to Law 169/2008) is the only one that qualifies graduate students to teach in primary schools in Italy. The Italian Ministry of Education is still working on a draft law concerning the so-called *lauree abilitanti all'insegnamento* (teaching qualifying degrees) to teach in Italian secondary schools. In the meantime, each university is free (and encouraged) to modify their curricula and adapt them to the necessities of aspiring teachers, thus inserting the necessary exams to obtain the necessary prerequisites within their educational syllabi.

that CBLT is a paramount field of studies to be investigated by would-be teachers taking an SLA course. The syllabus of this semester's course was divided into four modules:

- 1) Module A was dedicated to the main theories concerning SLA with emphasis on Error Analysis and the notion of interlanguage.<sup>7</sup> The reference textbook for this module was Rod Ellis's *Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford University Press, 1997).<sup>8</sup>
- 2) Module B focused on the introduction, comparison and contrast of such methodologies/approaches as CBI, ESP, EMI and CLIL. The list of references for this module included David J. Fernández's 2009 article "CLIL at the university level: Relating language teaching with and through content teaching" (*Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning* 2, no. 2: 10-26), Roy Lyster's 2018 booklet *Content-based Language Teaching* (Routledge), and Daniel Madrid and Elena García Sánchez's 2001 article "Content-based second language teaching" (*Present and Future Trends in TEFL*: 101-134).
- 3) Module C focused on the roles of language use and learning in CLIL and its reference book was Christiane Dalton-Puffer, Tarja Nikula and Ute Smit's *Language Use and Language Learning in CLIL Classrooms* (John Benjamins, 2010).
- 4) Lastly, Module D introduced some good practices and case studies of content-based pathways/syllabi to be commented on, taken from Anna Romagnuolo's 2015 article "Teaching English professional writing in an e-learning environment: An Italian case study" (*International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 3, no. 6: 383-393), Alba Graziano's 2019 "Learning second language through restaurant menu dish names" (*Je-LKS* 15, no. 1: 67-82) and Fabio Ciambella's 2020 book chapter "ESP+CLIL: Theoretical insights, experimentation and future prospects at the School for Army Training Sub-Officers of Viterbo, Italy" (in Luminița Chiorean and Cristina

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7 Despite not being the focus of this article, it is worth noticing that the concepts of "error" and "interlanguage" have been challenged over the last few decades, even due to the impact that globalisation is having on the spreading of English as a Global Language (see, i.a., Widowson 2003; 2015; Jenkins 2007; Pennycook 2009; Seidlhofer 2011; 2015; Grazi 2013; 2020).

8 Although Ellis's book is a good manual for future language teachers, it should be observed that its approach might be outdated as regards today's global dimension of English and its teaching as a world's lingua franca.

Nicolae's *Humanities in the Spotlight: The Role of Humanities in Pandemic Times*, 378-394. Lambert Academic Publishing).

Students chose between an oral exam focused on the discussion of a lesson plan or work project<sup>9</sup> they could work on during the course, and a more traditional written exam covering the contents of the SLA syllabus. One week before the exam, the 29 students who had chosen to take the oral exam were asked to upload their lesson plans/work projects to the Moodle page of the course (<https://elearning.uniroma1.it/course/view.php?id=12568>).

Primarily, three different approaches/methodologies – i.e., LSP, EMI and CLIL – were distinguished and explored during the course, and then adopted by the students in their lesson plans. These are the most widespread content-based approaches/methodologies in the Italian educational system and were initially distinguished by adopting and adapting Roy Lyster's counterbalanced approach (2018) as representatives of the Canadian scholar's language-driven, content-driven and well-balanced programmes.

Lyster classifies CBLT programmes according to a continuum or spectrum whose ends are represented by language-driven and content-driven courses. At the language-driven extremity, Lyster positions what he calls theme-based language courses, “foreign-language classes that promote target-language development by incorporating a focus on themes or topics with which learners have some familiarity in their L1 [...] as a means of developing target-language vocabulary” (2). This is exactly what happens in Italy in the final three years of upper secondary school<sup>10</sup> (third, fourth and fifth), when students are taught one or more foreign languages by language expert teachers using themes and

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9 Postgraduate students were free to choose between a CBLT lesson plan that could be shaped like a CLIL, EMI or LSP short module and a work project about Error Analysis of some content-based outputs they made their friends and relatives write or record for them. Out of the 29 students who took the oral exam, 15 (52%) chose the lesson plan option, while the remaining 14 (48%) focused on Error Analysis.

10 To be as clear as possible, after nursery school (children's age: 3-6), primary school in Italy lasts for 5 years, when children are 6-11. Secondary/High school is divided into two branches: 3 years of lower secondary or middle school (11-14) and 5 years of upper secondary school (14-19), after which students can decide to attend university and obtain a degree. For further detailed information, see [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/italy\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/italy_en).

topics tailored on their field of expertise and kind of school attended (e.g., professional English for computer programming, agro-industrial business, tourism, etc.). Literary studies have a particular status in the final three years of *licei* (i.e., non-technical and non-vocational high schools aimed at preparing students for tertiary education), since in the majority of cases English teachers abandon language teaching completely to focus on historical backgrounds and the life and works of English writers, as both students and scholars lament (see Stagi Scarpa 2005; Magnani 2009; Della Valle 2014). Two of the lesson plans by the SLA students – namely, Giorgia’s and Silvia’s – focused on how to teach English treating literary language as ESP neither more nor less than any other professional English course (see section 4.2). The language-driven end of Lyster’s continuum, I argue, corresponds to what Mohan (1986) called “language teaching *for* content teaching”, whose focus is on language, and only useful language (i.e., sectoral, professional language) is learnt/acquired.<sup>11</sup>

On the content-driven end, Lyster positions the one-way immersion programmes typical of some areas in Canada and the southern US, where more than 50% of the total hours are taught through the medium of a foreign language. Unlike language-driven courses, metalinguistic awareness is not developed, and the students’ linguistic competence is somehow taken for granted. Content-driven programmes are typical of EMI university courses in Italy,<sup>12</sup> especially in internationalised degrees where some subjects (or all of them, as in the case of EAAS at Sapienza) are taught in English. Content experts are entrusted with teaching by adopting such an approach; for instance, such subjects as Philosophy and Theory of Language, Psychology and Fashion, Russian Studies, German Literature and Critical Thought, and even SLA are taught in English at EAAS, thus adopting an EMI approach which takes linguistic competence for granted, while metalinguistic awareness is developed through the English Language and Translation courses that form part of the

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<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this article, I treat both learning and acquisition as two interchangeable processes, yet acknowledging the importance of distinguishing them according to Krashen, Schmidt, and other SLA scholars.

<sup>12</sup> Lyster considers EMI “an extension of CLIL programs” (2018, 4), perhaps because in the majority of cases EMI in internationalised university courses represents the natural development of what CLIL is in high schools, which Graziano has also noticed, albeit lamenting the considerable confusion with labels in the Italian university (2018, 9).

EAAS curricular activities.<sup>13</sup> In 1986, Mohan classified this kind of CBLT as “language teaching *by* content teaching”, a content-focused approach where L2 is developed incidentally and without any direct focus on it.

Lastly, Lyster considers programmes in the middle of his spectrum (which I would call “(well-)balanced programmes/courses”) where “students study one or two subjects in the target language, usually in tandem with a foreign language or language arts class. This is the model adopted by many CLIL programs in Europe and elsewhere” (2). Lyster collocates CLIL in the middle of the continuum, although he had previously used CLIL as a synonym of CBI. Although the acronym CLIL had not even been coined when Mohan elaborated his taxonomy of CBLT in 1986,<sup>14</sup> his definition of “language teaching *with* content teaching” closely resembles CLIL’s focus on both content and language. Nonetheless, only useful language is taught and learnt to acquire new content knowledge in Mohan’s description of LT *with* CT. Fernández revises Mohan’s LT *with* CT definition and adapts it to CLIL. The Argentinian scholar prefers adopting the label “language teaching *through* content teaching” (2009, 15) – a totally acceptable definition – whose focus is on both language and content, but L2 teaching aims at developing communicative competence in subject-related topics and reinforcing previous general, non-sectoral linguistic competence. According to Italian school law,<sup>15</sup> CLIL is compulsory in the final (fifth) year of *licei* and technical high schools, despite also being strongly recommended in vocational schools.<sup>16</sup>

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13 For a general overview of EMI in Italian (and global) universities, see Bowles and Murphy 2020; Costa and Mariotti 2020.

14 The acronym CLIL was coined by David Marsh and Anne Maljers in 1994 at a conference at the Sorbonne University, Paris.

15 CLIL was first introduced into the Italian education system with the Moratti Reform, Law 52/2003, then made compulsory in the fifth year of *licei* and technical high schools with the presidential decrees DPRs 88/2010 and 89/2010.

16 See Graziano 2019 for a CLIL experimentation in an Italian vocational high school with “hotel management/food and wine curriculum” (68). Actually, according to Graziano (2018, 9), the introduction of CLIL in the Italian secondary school has generated an unexpected interest in it in lower secondary and primary schools as well. Among the lesson plans analysed in this article, it is worth noting that Lidia’s is the only one that considers lower secondary school in Italy. In line with Graziano’s “domino effect” of CLIL in primary and lower secondary school, Lidia’s lesson plan considers a possible collaboration between a Technology teacher and an English teacher to develop a module about the textile industry

Content experts are entrusted with CLIL teaching, provided that they possess a C1 level in the foreign language through which the non-linguistic content is delivered (see the CLIL teacher's profile in Cinganotto 2016, 385-6). From this perspective, CLIL is not so different from content-driven approaches/methodologies such as EMI (Marsh and Cinganotto 2021). Nevertheless, as Fernández's definition above demonstrates, unlike EMI, CLIL stresses the students' metalinguistic awareness, thus also making it close to LSP and language-driven CBI in general. Given its intrinsic dual focus on content and language, a plethora of scholars urge hand-in-hand collaboration between content and foreign language teachers in CLIL in Italy, as part of the so-called CLIL team or Teaching Team CLIL<sup>17</sup> (see, i.a., Menegale 2008; Doiz and Lasagabaster 2017; de Maurissens 2018; Di Sabato, Cinganotto and Cuccurullo 2018). For this reason, according to Mohan's taxonomy (revised by Fernández) and Lyster's counterbalanced approach, CLIL represents the perfect balance and fusion between content- and language-driven CBI, between CBLT courses given by language and content teachers. One of the main peculiarities of CLIL is also its strong connection with new technologies (see Cinganotto and Cuccurullo 2018a; 2018b; Graziano *et al.* 2021), a characteristic which stresses the interdisciplinary nature of this approach/methodology and makes it adhere to the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning as established by the European Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, one of the transversal competences (n. 6) is digital competence or e-skills. Throughout the SLA course, the importance of e-skills in CBLT in general was stressed and students' lesson plans were enriched with CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) tools.

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and cloth production to second-year students aged 12. Resorting to affective humanistic techniques such as Moskowitz's "identity card" (Moskowitz 1987, 50-52; Graziano 2019, 69), crossword puzzles, and other communicative, inductive techniques, pupils are guided through the industry of synthetic and natural materials with the final aim (output) of describing what they wear in front of their classmates and talk about their clothes' environmental impact.

17 Actually, the notion of a CLIL team was introduced by the Italian Ministry of Education itself through the Note of 25 July 2014 n. 4969.

18 This document is a revision of the Council Recommendation of 18 December 2006, where digital competence was already listed as a transversal key competence for lifelong learning.



on the different phases that characterise any lesson plan (input, scaffolding and output) and Lyster's proactive approach to CBLT. In CBI, the input phase is usually vocabulary-driven (Lyster 2018, 6) and, according to Krashen's well-known input hypothesis ( $i+1$ ), comprehensible yet "just ahead of [the learners'] current level of ability" (6). Vocabulary is probably what content teachers are interested and more competent in, so this is also the phase they deal with, where a CLIL team is available, while language teachers prefer focusing (or should focus) on the morphosyntactic and textual scaffolding.<sup>22</sup>

During the input phase, vocabulary is normally elicited through passive skills (reading and listening), although active skills (writing and speaking) are welcome but preferred during the output phase. An effective, well-structured scaffolding phase should lead L2 learners to metalinguistic awareness, focusing especially on morphosyntax and textuality. Lastly, the learners' output is an autonomous task they carry out by themselves (individually or as part of peer groups, thus also reverting to cooperative learning). Generally, outputs are creative – creativity being at the top of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational goals – and tangible, concrete products that demonstrate the learners' acquisition of specific competences (in this case, content and linguistic competences). It goes without saying that the output phase requires primarily the active skills of writing and speaking,<sup>23</sup> so a number of products are possible in CBLT, e.g., essays, articles, brochures, leaflets, ppt presentations, seminar-like oral presentations, debates, didactic songs, etc.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be used throughout the whole lesson plan, as SLA students' outputs demonstrate.

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having supported students with academic writing (through paraphrasing and re-ordering exercises) during the scaffolding stage. This, I believe, supports some Italian scholars' (and CLIL practitioners') unyielding conviction that implementing CLIL at university is possible and desirable in order to reach an effective internationalisation of university courses, which cannot occur by resorting to EMI alone (Bosisio 2015; Costa 2016; Graziano 2018).

22 By investigating various case studies about CLIL classroom interaction, Lorenzo and Moore (2010) concluded that content teachers prioritise lexis (thus demonstrating poor knowledge of language acquisition patterns) because they believe that students need the correct terminology to deal with a specific content. On the other hand, language teachers are still too focused on traditional grammar teaching and thus neglect sentential grammar items.

23 Of the 12 lesson plans selected, 4 (33%) focused on a written task, 5 (42%) on a multimodal oral output, and 3 (25%) considered two different outputs by students (one written and one spoken) connected together.

10 out of the 12 selected best practices uploaded on Moodle (83%) present an effective use of learning platforms and apps such as *Storyboard That* (Giorgia), *Spider Gram Maker* (Silvia), *Wordwall* and *Kahoot* (Giada), blogs (Giorgia and Giulia), vlogs<sup>24</sup> to be uploaded on social media (Marco and Noemi), and audio-visual materials from YouTube (Fabrizio, Giada, Ginevra, Giorgia, Marco and Noemi) and TV series (Gaia and Mariangela). After all, the implementation of e-skills in CBLT is a very much studied field nowadays thanks to approaches/methodologies such as CALL, CALI (computer-aided language instruction), CMC (computer-mediated communication), MALL (mobile-assisted language learning), etc. (see, i.a., Durán and Cruz 2011; Abdelhak 2015; Matsubara and Yoshida 2018).

During Module B of the SLA course, the input-scaffolding-output model is integrated with Lyster’s proactive approach, which identifies four phases (see Fig. 1) instead of the three considered thus far:

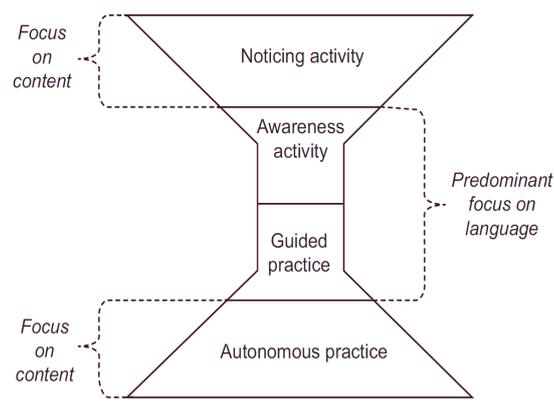


Figure 1. Phases of Lyster’s proactive approach (2018, 16)

I use Lyster’s own words to describe the instructional sequence he identifies:

The *noticing* phase establishes a meaningful context related to content, usually by means of a written or oral text in which target features have been contrived to appear more salient or more frequent. The *awareness* phase then encourages students to reflect on and manipulate the target forms in a way that helps them to become more

<sup>24</sup> “A personal website or social media account where a person regularly posts short videos” (OED, n.).

aware of patterns that were highlighted at the noticing phase. [...] The subject-matter or thematic content is in the foreground during the noticing phase but fades into the background during the awareness phase as students zoom in on language. [...] The *guided practice* phase provides opportunities for students to use the grammatical features in a meaningful yet controlled context and to receive corrective feedback in order to develop automaticity and accuracy. The sequence comes full circle at the *autonomous practice* phase by returning to the content area that served as the starting point. Autonomous practice requires the use of the target-language features but in a discipline-specific or thematic context. [...] [T]he instructional sequence begins with a primary focus on content during the noticing phase then zooms in on language during the awareness phase and guided practice phase. Finally, during the autonomous practice phase, the primary instructional focus is once again on the content that served as the starting point. (2018, 15-16. Emphases in the original)

Prima facie, although Lyster does not highlight it, the correspondence between the input, scaffolding and output stages and his four-phase model is evident: the input phase with its focus on content (mainly vocabulary) corresponds to Lyster's noticing activity, while linguistic scaffolding is divided into awareness activities and guided practice. Lastly, the students' output mirrors what Lyster calls autonomous practice.

Despite aspiring to become full-time, permanent English teachers, SLA students/trainees have encountered major difficulties in the scaffolding phase – quite paradoxically. As shown in the next section, the scaffolding is the central phase that should guarantee the coherence and cohesion of the whole lesson plan through the contextualised morphosyntactic re-elaboration of the input, thus paving the way to an autonomous, creative output. Thus it is clearly a demanding task for inexperienced trainees.<sup>25</sup> I next explore the difficulties surrounding the scaffolding phase that emerge from the students' lesson plans and even reflect on the weak points of my own teaching while trying to fill some methodological gaps.

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25 Not all of the students are inexperienced: some are private English tutors/teachers, others work in private language schools that adopt a specific global/experiential approach, and still others work as language consultants in public schools and attended my course as an extracurricular subject. Nevertheless, I consider them inexperienced in the field of SLA, since, as they admitted, most of them lack a systematic knowledge of learning/acquisition theories and how to create a successful lesson plan.

#### 4. Discussion of the students' outputs

Before discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the students' lesson plans, we must examine some data regarding the approach/methodology selected (LSP, CLIL or EMI), the educational level of their intended target and the content/ non-linguistic subject chosen. These data are shown in the charts below (Fig. 2):

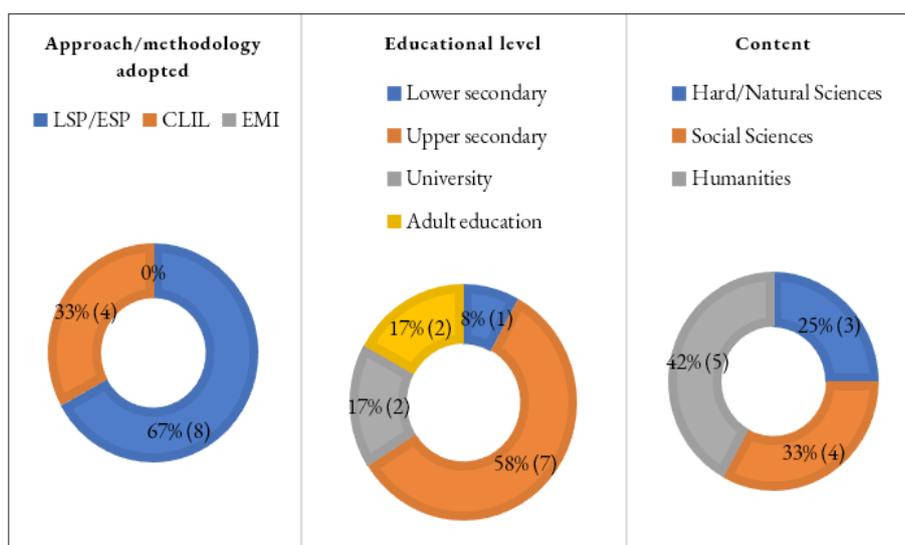


Figure 2. Statistics relating to trainees' methodological and target choices

The above data demonstrate that mainstream projects by SLA students concern ESP teaching as methodology adopted, a target of upper secondary school pupils (aged 14-19) and contents dealing with the Humanities and Social Sciences, ranging from Art History (2) to Law (2) via Literature (2), Linguistics (1), Philosophy (1), and Media Studies (1); the contents MFL MA students are definitely more familiar with if compared with the three students who dealt with Hard/Natural Sciences such as Medicine (1), Food Chemistry (1) and Textile Technology (1).

All the lesson plans selected were organized according to the canonical tripartition input-scaffolding-output, although three students – Giada, Giulia and Noemi – deliberately chose to “tak[e] inspiration from Lyster’s proactive approach, that divides the scaffolding part of a lesson plan in two different moments: awareness activity and guided practice” (Giada, page 3), while the

other two – Aytakin and Marco – provided an incredibly detailed subdivision of the various phases into a number of intermediate, gradual tasks.

Following Madrid and García Sánchez's summary of the dichotomic positions relating to L2 learning/teaching (2001),<sup>26</sup> all the trainees whose lesson plan was selected agreed that Hans H. Stern's combined model (1992) to surpass this dichotomy is the most convenient and feasible solution to adopt in the Italian education environment. In other words, although a cross-lingual, global/experiential, and implicit approach – proper to communicative and affective humanist methods – is preferable because it should lead students to natural, unconscious acquisition, intra-lingual, analytic and explicit techniques are sometimes necessary to allow and improve students' learning, as also stated by the European Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 “on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of language” (2019/C 189/03).

Therefore, if the organization and methodological choices of the lesson plans selected represent the strong points in this SWOT analysis,<sup>27</sup> weak points must also be dealt with, aiming to improve the quality of the course – in case of future re-elaboration of the same syllabus – and of the lesson plans themselves. Undoubtedly, the main weakness of the students' lesson plans is the lack of coherence and cohesion between scaffolding and output. This probably stems from the fact that I have not stressed the importance of the scaffolding phase to help students realise what Lyster defines as a pushed output (2018, 6), that is, an output supported by a solid scaffolding, given that Krashen's notion of comprehensible input is insufficient to guide students to acquisition. As Aytakin's, Giada's, Giulia's, Marco's and Noemi's lesson plans demonstrate, Lyster's subdivision of the linguistic scaffolding into awareness activity and guided practice may help aspiring teachers to better understand the importance of a detailed and gradual scaffolding which allows students to create a successful output. In other words, the more the linguistic scaffolding phase is divided into intermediate subphases, the better the students' performance.

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26 Madrid and García Sánchez (2001) distinguish between SLA vs FLL (Foreign Language Learning), cross-lingual vs intra-lingual approaches, global vs analytic approaches, and explicit vs implicit teaching.

27 SWOT analysis or matrix is a technique developed within business studies, aimed at improving the quality of a project by analysing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. I believe that this kind of analysis is perfectly suited to the kind of research I describe in this article.

I believe that what has been stated above can be refined and integrated by resorting to Bloom's taxonomy and his distinction between LOTS and HOTS,<sup>28</sup> and to Jim Cummins's difference between BICS and CALP.<sup>29</sup> Both Bloom's original taxonomy, elaborated in the 1950s (see Bloom *et al.* 1956), and his revised version, elaborated by his former student Lorin W. Anderson in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Anderson and Krathwohl 2001), represent a continuum of six cognitive processes which follow the learning process. The first three stages – i.e., remembering, understanding, applying, according to Anderson's revised taxonomy adopted here – correspond to LOTS (Lower-Order Thinking Skills), while domains 4 to 6 – i.e., analysing, evaluating, creating – correspond to HOTS (Higher-Order Thinking Skills). Adapting this taxonomy to Lyster's proactive approach, I would argue that both can be interpreted as a continuum and that correspondences are possible:

- Lyster's noticing activity, when content is elicited, can be understood in terms of remembering and understanding vocabulary in CBLT (so LOTS, where the passive skills of listening and reading are stressed).
- Awareness activity in Lyster's approach is reached through understanding and application, this first part of the scaffolding still corresponding to LOTS.
- Lyster's guided practice marks the turning point from LOTS to HOTS, thanks to the analysis and evaluation of the useful linguistic structures to be employed in the output.
- Lastly, resorting to the evaluation process, students arrive at creation (at the top of the continuum of Bloom's HOTS end) in what Lyster calls autonomous practice.

According to this combination of Bloom's revised taxonomy and Lyster's proactive approach, the scaffolding phase is the turning point at the core of any lesson plan where simple activities become complex practices (Lyster) and LOTS become HOTS (Bloom). Moreover, to stress the coherence of a CBLT lesson plan, I believe that the input and scaffolding phases share the process of understanding, while scaffolding and output share the evaluation domain. First defined by Cummins in 1979, Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills

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<sup>28</sup> LOTS stands for Lower Order Thinking Skills, while HOTS for Higher Order Thinking Skills.

<sup>29</sup> BICS is the acronym for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and CALP for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

(BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are at the very core of Cummins’s cognitivist theory of learning/acquisition, a theory that significantly influenced CBI and its development. According to Cummins, “BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to students’ ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school” (2008, 71). He also affirms that differences between BICS and CALP are due to the context (BICS tend to be more context-embedded, while CALP more context-reduced, decontextualised) and the cognitive demand they encompass (BICS are generally cognitively undemanding, while CALP is cognitively demanding). Imagining the context continuum as a horizontal axis and the cognitive demand as a vertical one, Cummins elaborated his well-known four-quadrant model (Fig. 3) for the acquisition of an L2. The BICS/CALP dichotomy and quadrant framework were thought to concern language learning exclusively, and little space is devoted to the integration of content and language (Barbero 2006, III). Nevertheless, academic language, which Cummins considers context-reduced, is also fertile ground for the development of CBI:<sup>30</sup> the more the context is reduced, the more specific/specialised it grows. An adaptation of Cummins’s quadrant to be implemented in content-based classroom activities was attempted in Italy by Teresina Barbero (2006, Fig. 3).

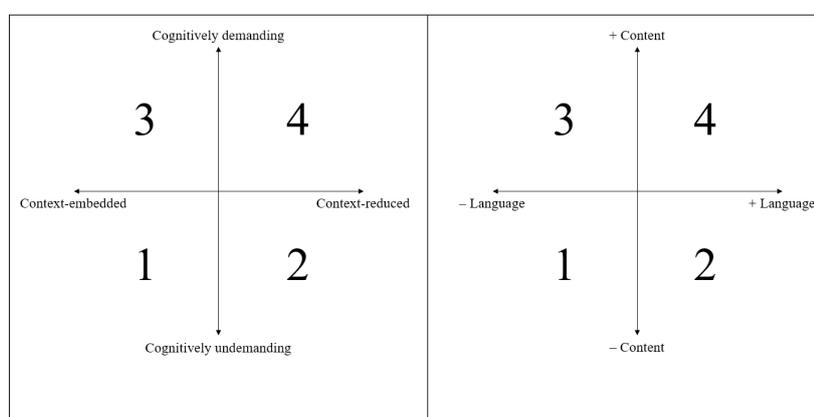


Figure 3. Barbero’s revised model of Cummins’s quadrant applied to CBI

<sup>30</sup> In this context, it is significant to notice that one of the titles of my SLA students’ lesson plans, i.e., Fabrizio’s, is “Academic English for Evolutionary Linguistics”, which clearly connects CALP and CBI.

Instead of context and cognitive demand, Barbero develops a model whose x-axis is content and y-axis is language, thus identifying four major kinds of content-based activities (2006, 113) that I believe can be combined with Lyster’s proactive approach:

- Low-demanding cognitive activities with limited language use. They correspond to Lyster’s noticing activity, where the context is concrete, rich (Barbero 2006, 113) and meaningful (Lyster 2018, 15), and only “more salient and more frequent” (Ibid.) linguistic structures are elicited.
- Low-demanding cognitive activities focused on language. These activities, which Barbero, in line with Cummins’s BICS, positions in an early scaffolding phase with mechanical drills, perfectly matches Lyster’s awareness activity, where students “become more aware of the [language] patterns” (Ibid.) they need in a CBLT module.
- Highly demanding cognitive activities with limited language use. Since any scaffolding must be temporary to make students autonomous, Barbero states that in this third phase the linguistic demand must be “lightened” (2006, 114). Lyster’s guided practice is perfectly suited here, because learners use the morphosyntactic structures they have practised during the awareness activities “in a meaningful yet controlled context” (2018, 16).
- Highly demanding cognitive activities focused on language. Barbero defines these activities as the real CALP tasks that ought to be carried out without any trainer’s/teacher’s support (2006, 114). This is exactly what Lyster calls autonomous practice; the focus is also on language because “[t]here are fewer constraints, allowing students to use the features in more open-ended ways to develop fluency, motivation, and confidence” (2018, 16).

The author’s proposed integrated model is summarised in the table below (Table 2):

Lesson plan structure	Bloom 1956 (revised Anderson2001)		Cummins 1976 (revised Barbero 2006)		Lyster 2018	
(Comprehensible) input	LOTS	Remember	BICS	– Content; – Language	Noticing	activity
		Understand				
Scaffolding	HOTS	Apply	CALP	– Content; + Language	Awareness	practice
		Analyse				
(Pushed) output		Evaluate				
		Create		+ Content; + Language	Autonomous	

Table 2. The integration of Bloom’s, Cummins’s and Lyster’s models of learning/acquisition

As stated earlier, the lesson plans selected sometimes fail to connect all these stages correctly so that any component can be considered a step in an education continuum that successfully integrates language and content. The next section analyses one lesson plan that I consider the best case study for this kind of investigation.

#### 4.1 LOTS/HOTS, BICS/CALP integration in a lesson plan: Marco's case study

I consider Marco's lesson plan the best case study for an analysis of the implementation of Bloom's revised taxonomy, Cummins's/Barbero's quadrant and Lyster's proactive approach to CBLT.<sup>31</sup> His lesson plan presents a CLIL experiment on the topic of "digital detox", to be carried out by a CLIL team comprising a Human Sciences teacher (content expert) and an English teacher (language expert) in an Italian *liceo delle scienze umane* (human sciences high school, first year; students' age: 14-15; linguistic level: A2+, towards B1). The input phase focuses on vocabulary dealing with social media influencers and is made even more comprehensible by what Marco calls a "preparation task" (page 2), a matching exercise where students are asked to find the right definition for 8 content-related keywords they will encounter in the reading comprehension to be completed in tasks 1 (a multiple-choice quiz) and 2 (true/false exercise). LOTS – i.e., remember and understand – and low-demanding cognitive tasks with limited language use are required in this noticing activity, since students focus on receptive skills (reading), the content is meaningful, but only salient linguistic structures are elicited.

The awareness activity introduces the focus on language, as highlighted by Barbero in her second quadrant of low-demanding cognitive activities focused on language. Useful contextualised morphosyntactic structures are introduced here (the present tense in particular with its use and most recurring time expressions) with the aid of a YouTube video, visuals and drills. The communicative, implicit approach is deliberately adopted in this case. Drills, as also stated by Cummins (2000, 68), are typical of the first part

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<sup>31</sup> As an experienced private tutor and English teacher in private language schools, this trainee had the advantage of experimenting his lesson plan with his students and affirmed they were absolutely satisfied with the organization and results obtained, as was he.

of a scaffolding phase, where understanding and mere application are the LOTS employed.

A cooperative learning activity and a pre-output written task constitute the guided practice. Students are asked to discuss the pros and cons of social media, resorting to the vocabulary and morphosyntax introduced in the preceding stages, and to write a short bio-sketch for their Instagram profile “following the tips contained in the previous reading ‘Social Media Influencers’” (Marco, page 9). CALP and HOTS – i.e., analyse and evaluate – come into play here. Highly demanding cognitive skills are required, although focus on language is limited when compared with earlier activities.

Lastly, once students have become autonomous through temporary scaffolding, they are required to stop using their social media for a week and make two vlogs about becoming a digital-detox influencer to be uploaded onto their Instagram profile by the end of the week. Their output must be as creative as possible, thus considering HOTS – i.e., evaluate and create – and highly-demanding cognitive activities with a specific focus on language to describe both daily routines, feelings and thoughts, and the (dis)advantages of digital detox.

#### 4.2 English Literature as ESP: An unusual but desirable binomial in the Italian high school

In the Italian *licei* and in the education scenario in general, understanding literary language as ESP has always been difficult (cf. Stagi Scarpa 2005; Magnani 2009; Della Valle 2014), which is why it is worth reporting the results of Giorgia’s and Silvia’s lesson plans as useful tools for both aspiring and experienced teachers. Giorgia’s project is addressed to the third year of an Italian *liceo coreutico* (dance high school) and is aimed at teaching Renaissance dances to be performed during the school final dancing event via Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. Having been provided with the Shakespearean text (act 1, scene 3), a YouTube video and a simplified academic article about dances in *Twelfth Night* as input, students are asked to compile a terpsichorean glossary of early modern English choreographies. As the final output is the creation of a booklet containing a detailed description of the dances performed at the end-of-school-year ball, pupils are introduced to descriptive/expository texts, their main components

and features, during the scaffolding phase. Exercises involving paraphrasing, reordering as well as bad examples to be corrected guarantee the students' understanding of the kind of textuality dealt with during the class. Lastly, just prior to the final task, students are divided into groups (cooperative learning is applied, which also elicits listening and speaking skills), each one responsible for planning the descriptive/expository text describing one dance in particular mentioned by Shakespeare in his play. As indicated above, the various texts are collected into a booklet that will be presented during the school's final dancing event about English Renaissance dances.

Dealing with a completely different period of English literature (i.e., the rise of the novel), Silvia addresses her lesson plan to fourth-year students in a *liceo linguistico* (linguistic high school). Warm-up brainstorming activities and visuals introduce the input phase regarding the literary jargon of novels (e.g., novel vs romance, genre and subgenre, Gothic, coming-of-age, etc.), while linguistic scaffolding concerns verbal forms to express the past in English (i.e., past tense, past continuous, past perfect, etc.) through drills and reordering exercises aiming to guide students through the acquisition of a proper syntactic structure of past narration in English. The autonomous practice is divided into two tasks (one written and one oral) where pupils are asked to introduce both verbally and in writing (as a kind of book review) a British novel they will have read during the school year.

Although completely different from one another, Giorgia's and Silvia's lesson plans show how the linguistic potentials offered by literary texts can be exploited in a CBLT class, given that the "relationship between language and literature is symbiotic" (Ihejirika 2014, 85) and literary texts represent an excellent selection of realia and authentic material that is more than welcome in the communicative approach on which CBI is based (Daskalovska and Dimova 2012).

## 5. Conclusion

The educational practice described and discussed here has highlighted the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the SLA course taught at Sapienza University of Rome in AY 2020-2021. On the one hand, CBLT has proved to be an effective approach that can be implemented at all education

levels in Italy, as it is tailored to the learners' needs. On the other hand, each phase of a content-based instructional model must be carefully pre-planned and well-balanced, to avoid the risk of compromising the teaching effectiveness. For this reason, the integrated models presented in the second and fourth sections aim at providing aspiring (but also in-service) FL teachers with valuable tools to improve the coherence and cohesion of CBLT lesson plans. These can be intended as operative education continua that guide students to develop their disciplinary and linguistic competence. Although good progress has been made in terms of student-centred methodologies, broader quantitative analyses are needed to confirm the results provided in this article.

Moreover, given the course hours at my disposal (42), I deliberately chose not to focus on the assessment and evaluation of students' output, given that not all trainees had the opportunity to use their lesson plans for actual teaching practice. With more time at my disposal, I could have dealt with holistic and analytic evaluation rubrics and grids, showing how to build them and how to implement them in the teaching practice. The only occasion I had to hint at assessment and evaluation was offered by Romagnuolo's article about professional writing in e-learning environments (2015). Her case study lists pivotal parameters to be considered when evaluating written academic tasks: "Grades have been assigned by [...] assessing *task achievement*, *textual coherence and cohesion*, *lexical richness* and *grammatical accuracy*. Importance has also been given [...] to students' choice of the right *textual format*, *appropriate register*, and mastery of other text-linguistic standards such as *informativity*, *intentionality* and *acceptability*" (390. Emphasis mine). Following Romagnuolo's criteria, some SLA students tried to establish useful assessment standards: while Giulia and Giada take into account (rather timidly) both content and linguistic objectives, and basic skills to be assessed, Lidia and Ginevra elaborate more complex rubrics that consider "coherence and cohesion, grammatical structures, lexical richness and pronunciation" (Lidia, page 4).

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