Clove room
1.35-2.00pm

Guiding teacher talk in the CLIL classroom using Semantics from Legitimation Code Theory

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Content and Language Integrated learning (CLIL) is increasingly common in higher education globally (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, 2008, 2011; Morton, 2018). This research explores an essential element of this pedagogical approach. It focuses on what Loewenberg, Ball, Hoover Thames, and Phelps (2008) refer to as 'specialised language knowledge for content teaching' (SLK-CT). This is the language required to unpack subject-specific concepts. In other words, it is the result of combining Content Obligatory Language ('what-oriented') and Content Complementary Language (CCL, the 'how-oriented') (based on definitions from Fortune and Tedick, 2008).

Despite a sound research-based theoretical underpinning about what language to teach, a focus on a theory of knowledge as the object of study, and how that facilitates student learning, could be more evident in the current research. The COL/CCC distinction is one way to present knowledge but what is needed is a better strategy for the conceptualisation and sequencing of that knowledge. In her paper 'Exploring the nature of disciplinary teaching and learning using Legitimation Code Theory Semantics', Clarence (2016) explains how legitimation code theory (LCT), and particularly semantics, can provide this. It enables researchers and educators to develop understanding about how knowledge in their fields builds over time and how to facilitate their students' learning of these processes explicitly. Semantics (Maton, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014) explores the structure of knowledge. It provides a code that helps to explore relations within knowledge and this can be impactful for teaching and learning. Semantics is divided into semantic gravity (SG+/-) and semantic density (SD+/-). Semantic gravity (SG+/-) explains how knowledge is related to its context and semantic density (SD+/-), how concepts comprise differing complexities of meanings.

Clarence (2016) analyses teacher dialogue in a Political Science course undergraduate seminar and finds certain patterns. Teachers tend to refer to COL in abstract terms without unpacking it (high flatline as in A in figure 1) or they discuss an abstract concept such as the 'state' with language that tends to be too colloquial, producing low flatlines (as in B in figure 1).
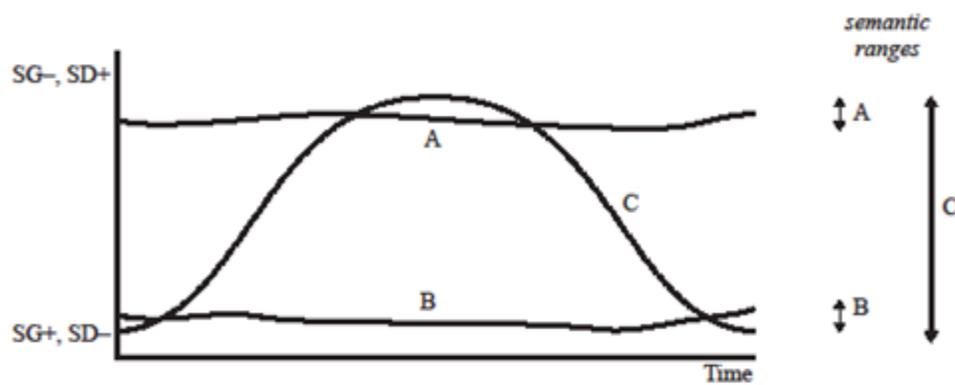
Figure 1. Diagram of semantic gravity profiles and ranges (downloaded from http://www.legitimationcodetheory.com/concept-glossary.html where publication-ready LCT figures can be found).

Or, if teachers do present the abstract term and then unpack it by defining and exemplifying, they tend to move on to another abstract concept and repeat the same process without making connections between these concepts. This produces in LCT terms, what is termed a 'down escalator'. Clarence (2017) and Maton (2009, 2011, 2013, 2014) argue that these practices are ineffective for teaching or learning. In contrast, an LCT-informed practice striving to think in semantic waves (as in C in Figure 1) by sequencing subject matter effectively shifting from abstract to more colloquial speech and back again to connect that to another concept and even to present this in visual form in the classroom is effective (Brooke, 2017).

This paper seeks to demonstrate how Content Obligatory Language (COL) can be conceptualised, sequenced and transmitted in teacher talk in the classroom applying Semantics from Legitimation Code Theory. Doing this, essential questions can be asked such as: *which concepts and contexts do I teach in this discipline? How do I teach these? How do I build knowledge cumulatively?* An action research collective case study was conducted for a CLIL programme at a leading Asian University over 3 years. It produced data in the form of transcripts of teacher discourse during lectures, reflections from a teaching journal as well as comments from interviews with student participants about the ongoing research. Findings indicate that Semantics as well its visual presentation can facilitate effective teaching and learning.

Keywords

Teacher talk; content and language integrated learning (CLIL); content obligatory language; content complementary language; semantics; legitimation code theory

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