

Current Issues in the Teaching of Russian across the Curriculum  
Bruce T. Holl  
Trinity University, San Antonio, TX

69th Annual South Central MLA Conference  
San Antonio, TX  
Nov. 9, 2012

### **Content and Language Integration: A Working Hypothesis**

I am going to talk about Languages Across the Curriculum and content and language integration in general. This is the subject of an article I am writing, and also a web site, [LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com](http://LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com), that I started in conjunction with our LAC program at Trinity. Much of what I will say in this paper pertains not only to Russian but to all foreign language teaching in the United States. My working hypothesis is that language teaching in the United States will benefit both quantitatively (meaning higher enrollments in more languages) and qualitatively (meaning better student outcomes) from the use of a curricular and pedagogical approach that incorporates foreign-language content teaching to a greater extent than is now the case at most colleges and universities. Moreover (and of equal importance), content teaching in many disciplines will benefit in the same ways from the inclusion of languages others than English as a medium of instruction.

### **The Trinity Program**

My interest in this subject, and my belief in the efficacy of content and language integration, are based on my experience at Trinity University in San Antonio. There is an interdisciplinary program at Trinity called "Languages Across the Curriculum," sometimes referred to as LAC or L-A-C, that offers content courses in foreign languages. Our program dates from 1993 is one of the oldest of its kind in the country. It has received sufficient support from our administration to fund, on average, two new courses and one course revision per year, a biennial workshop, campus events to introduce the program to new faculty members, and occasional attendance by committee members at conferences. The program has now offered some 51

courses. Spanish is our largest section, but we have also offered content courses in Arabic, Biblical Hebrew, Chinese, French, German, Portuguese, and three courses in Russian. Courses with a variety of formats have been offered in Anthropology, Art History, Business Administration, Communication, Economics, Education, History, Modern Languages & Literatures, Music, Political Science, and Sociology.

### **Terminology and Definitions**

I will mention at this point that there are many terms to that describe content and language integration. The three most popular are Languages Across the Curriculum, Content Based Instruction, and Content and Language Integrated Learning. Each of these terms is generally referred to by its abbreviation: LAC, CBI, and CLIL. Often LAC and CLIL are pronounced as acronyms.

The terms refer to three related but not identical curricular models. LAC generally means the use of a language other than English to teach courses outside of language and literature departments. CBI is more inclusive and signifies a curriculum that (according to Stephen Stryker and Betty Lou Leaver) "1) is based on a subject-matter core, 2) uses authentic languages and texts, and 3) is appropriate to the needs of specific groups of students" (Stryker and Leaver 1997, p 5). Finally, CLIL is the term favored over the past fifteen years or so in Europe and, increasingly, Asia and Latin America. According to Christiane Dalton-Puffer it "can be described as an educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the secondary, or tertiary level" (Dalton-Puffer 2011, p. 183). There are a number of other terms as well, but a keyword search of these three will yield most of the literature available on the subject.

### **The 2007 MLA Report**

My proposal for more extensive content and language integration is, in part, a response to the 2007 MLA report "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World."

The report argues that there is a separation between language teaching and literature studies amounting in many universities to a two-tiered system in which literature "monopolizes the upper-division curriculum" and "devalues the early years of language-learning" (3). The MLA calls for "a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole, supported by alliances with other departments and expressed through interdisciplinary courses" (3). The report goes on to mention "foreign languages across the curriculum" as a means of achieving this goal (5).

### **The 2009 Employers' Report**

The MLA report has implications for our students beyond the meaningfulness of their college experience. Another, more recent study by Hart Research Associates, entitled "Raising the Bar: Employers' Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn" (2009), surveyed employers as to which learning outcomes should, in their view, receive more emphasis in American colleges. Of the seventeen outcomes listed, "proficiency in a foreign language" ranked second-to-last, and was named by only 45% of employers. (Discouragingly, "democratic institutions and values" ranked dead last and was named by only 40% of respondents.)

### **Department Closings**

In addition to the MLA and Hart reports, there is evidence, often presented on the Slavic and East European e-mail list "SEELANGS," that while some Russian language programs are thriving, others continue to face cuts and in some cases elimination. Most recently, Emory University, at least according to its student newspaper *The Emory Wheel*, has announced the elimination of its Russian Program ("Emory Shuts Down Departments"). I might add that this trend affects other languages as well; Emory is also ending its graduate program in Spanish. In each case chronic low enrollments are cited as the reason.

## **A "Functional" Approach**

The question, then, is how do we make our languages classes more meaningful for the students? The MLA points out that "[a]dvanced language training often seeks to replicate the competence of an educated native speaker, a goal that postadolescent learners rarely reach" (3) and counsels the creation instead of language programs in which, "[i]n the course of acquiring functional language abilities, students are taught critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception" (4). These comments are especially relevant to Russian and other Less Commonly Taught Languages. At many colleges and universities the number of students willing to commit their entire undergraduate careers to reaching "the competence of an educated native speaker" is often not large enough to sustain a program, but the number of students willing and able to acquire "functional language abilities" commensurate with their own needs and interests is larger. As an example, at Trinity our undergraduate courses in Russian are chronically under-enrolled and face cancellation every semester (as does our Russian major). Our courses in English about Russia, on the other hand, are among the most popular in the curriculum and generally have long waiting lists. To bridge this gap we have created a one-semester LAC course called "Russian Basics" that teaches the Cyrillic alphabet, basic grammar, naming conventions and some high-frequency words and phrases, but also databases, keyword searches and specialized vocabulary keyed to each student's professional and personal interests.

## **Observe American but also European and Asian experience**

The next question is, how can a teacher who wants to introduce content and integrated learning find out more about it? There are three general sources of research:

The first is theoretical literature by second language acquisition specialists. This literature is not extensive. Next, since approximately 1990 there has been a small but steady tradition of American

scholarship. Finally, it is very helpful to study the large and growing scholarly literature from Europe, and to some extent Asia, on Content and Language Integrated Learning. Because CLIL has been mandated by the European Union and in turn many national ministries of education, there is a large and varied body of recent research based on classroom experience; some of this research reflects primary school initiatives, but much of it concerns high school students (whose cognitive development is similar to that of college freshmen and sophomores), and some of it focuses upon college teaching; the research is based on extensive assessment of student outcomes; much of it is available online; and since its target audience is English teachers from a variety of countries who have no common language other than English, much of it is in English.

My reading of all of this literature, and especially, in recent years, the European research, leads me to a number of conclusions:

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration between institutions is important. There is an organization called the CLAC Consortium that facilitates this collaboration. (CLAC is a variant of LAC – Culture and Languages Across the Curriculum). Its conferences and published materials facilitate cooperation between institutions.

Collaboration within one's own institution is also important. Many of the course models that I will discuss in a moment entail some level of team teaching or paired courses involving both language teachers and content teachers from other departments

### **Assessment**

Outcomes assessment, however distasteful some of us may find it, is important. Data from assessment projects can be published, which helps to popularize CLIL. (One of the current goals of the CLAC Consortium, in fact, is to encourage more published research.) The data can be used to

demonstrate the efficacy of CLIL to administrators and granting organizations. Most important, assessment provides information to teachers about what is and is not working in the classroom.

The Europeans have taken a variety of approaches to assessment. It need not entail testing. Some European programs are as yet on a small scale not unlike our own language programs, and rely on such instruments as classroom observation and teacher interviews. There is in Europe, however, a call at present for larger and more objective studies. Among the largest studies to date is a comparison of CLIL students in Andalusia with a control group of students who took traditional content courses in their native language and studied foreign languages separately in traditional L2 classrooms. The project involved several hundred primary and secondary school students of English, German and French. It was significant not only for its sheer size but also because it sought to assess L2 gains along with several other outcomes, including the effect of CLIL instruction on the students' overall academic performance. I single out this study because its authors quite convincingly argue that in language learning "CLIL learners were clearly outperforming their mainstream peers" (416), and also that "CLIL is beneficial to the educational process in general" (433).

### **Expand our ML&L curriculum**

We must expand our Russian, or Modern Languages, curriculum. The Andalusia study and many others suggest that students in L2 content courses actually make better progress in their language-learning than students on a comparable level who take traditional form-based language classes. LCTL teachers typically have an area studies background and are well prepared to teach not only literature courses (which *are* content courses) but also art, art history, culture, history and political science courses. Student surveys (at least at Trinity where I read them every year), as well as enrollments, show overwhelmingly that students prefer such a variety, so we must be able to offer it in courses that utilize Russian.

## **Encourage L2 content courses in other departments**

It is also essential to promote foreign-language content courses in other departments taught by native speakers or non-native speakers with sufficient skills. Some language teachers view these courses as a threat to their own positions, or believe (*contra* the evidence of much CLIL research) that the courses will not promote, and may even diminish, their students' linguistic abilities. My own view, however, and the underlying philosophy of CLIL, is that any course that promotes interest in the culture we teach, and provides students with an opportunity to use its language will ultimately help us by creating interest in our subject and our own courses.

## **Accept Code-switching**

We should re-address the issue of code-switching in the classroom. I have an MA from the Middlebury Russian School and I am a firm believer in the inflexible immersion model for some students, but for many students it is too extreme. There is a surprising amount of research on the subject of code-switching, and in general the use of L1, in L2 classrooms. The research indicates that in traditional language classrooms (as opposed to Middlebury-style language-pledge programs) L1 use is quite common, even when teachers report that they never revert to L1. Teachers tend to use L1 haphazardly without even realizing that they are doing so. Not everyone is in agreement on this point, but many researchers suggest that planned, judicious use of L1, at designated times and for designated functions during a lesson, helps to achieve the content goals of the class and also the L:2 goals.

## **Find the Correct Level**

We must find the correct level at which to begin teaching content courses. This is especially important for Russian and other LCTLs that have few cognates with English in comparison to languages like French and Spanish. In some European CLIL programs there is an attempt to articulate vocabulary lists between lower-and upper division courses to prepare students for their content courses.

## **Development of Materials**

We must develop materials. CLIL is predicated on the notion that all lecture and reading material, regardless of the department in which a course is taught, should be authentic material whose purpose is not only to improve the student's language skills but also impart actual academic knowledge. This does not mean, however, that teachers can give students any content they find interesting. Teachers need to develop materials of appropriate length and complexity, and provide supporting materials such as glossaries. One current objective of the CLAC Consortium is to create a data-base of such materials for consortium members.

## **Teacher Training**

Many European CLIL programs stress teacher training. Often this means acquainting content teachers with the rudiments of language-teaching, such as beginning class with a warm-up exercise and dividing the lesson into several components using different teaching modalities. These techniques are built in to all modern foreign-language textbooks, and language teachers use them instinctively, but content teachers, in my experience, are often not aware of them, or at least not aware that they are essential when teaching in a foreign language, and so we are in the process of creating a workshop for content teachers at Trinity. I should add that in European programs teacher training also often includes content teachers helping their language-teacher counterparts to become better content teachers.

## **Explore many models**

Finally, it is important to consider a wide variety of course models. I will now provide an overview of the models that I have come across in my research, many of which reflect the principles noted above. Forgive me if there is some overlap, but I have tried to list all of the models that I have come across in my research.

## **I American LAC Models From a Variety of Sources**

**The one credit course in the target language, taught in conjunction with a three credit English-language course.**

- This is the model that at one time was used most frequently at Trinity.
- The same teacher can teach both courses, or a teacher from the foreign language department can teach the adjunct course in collaboration with a colleague from another department.
- It includes one of my own courses: A one-credit course in Russian appended to a three-credit English-language culture course entitled "The Peoples of Russia."
- The English course deals with Russia, Siberia, the Caucasus and the Jews of Russia
- The one credit course includes a reading or readings from each area and a meeting once a week, conducted in Russian, to discuss the readings.
- The one credit course in a department other than Modern Languages and Literatures, taught in conjunction with a three credit content-based course in the foreign language department
- This is a model suggested by Frank Ryan of Brown University that to my knowledge has never been taught (*Next Steps* 24)
- For example, Sarah Burke, Professor of Russian at Trinity, teaches a three-credit History of the Russian Language course that might include a one-credit adjunct linguistics course.

### **The parallel (or interlocking) course model**

- According to Gail Riley of the American University and Frank Ryan of Brown, this model "consists of two independent courses, one in a language and the other in another discipline ... Students enroll in both courses, and faculty collaborate to ensure some overlap in texts, activities and expected outcomes" (Riley & Ryan, *Next Steps* 22).

### **The three credit stand-alone course in the target language**

- This is course for advanced students taught entirely in the target language
- Dr. Dante Suarez of Trinity's Business Administration Department teaches such a course entitled "Haciendo negocios en Latinoamérica"

### **The three credit stand-alone bilingual course.**

- Dr. David Spener of Trinity's Sociology Department has developed such a course.
- The course is entitled Relaciones Fronteras EE.UU.-México/Mexico-U.S. Border Relations.
- The course requires the same level of Spanish as our upper-division Spanish courses.
- Readings and discussions are in both languages.
- The rationale for the course is to provide, as he says, a "transborder perspective," which requires both languages.

### **The one credit stand-alone course in the target language**

- A number of these course have been taught at Trinity in the Modern Languages and Literatures Department, utilizing the diverse backgrounds of our faculty.
- Dr. Carlos Ardavin (Spanish), Dr. Rita Urquijo-Ruiz (Spanish), and Dr. Nanette LeCoat, (French), among others, have developed versions of this model.
- Dr. Bladi Ruiz (Spanish) Dr. Kelly Lyons (Biology) have received grants to develop new courses this summer

- Dr. Ardavin's course is an interdisciplinary survey of the history and culture of the Dominican Republic.
- Dr. Martinez's course is a survey of Latin American history through music.
- Dr. LeCoat's course is an examination of French history through historical films.

### **The one credit introductory language course for students in other disciplines**

- This includes the course that I mentioned earlier, "Russian Basics."
- Topics include the Cyrillic alphabet; the basics of Russian grammar and pronunciation; identifying the title, author and subject of a scholarly article; keyword recognition in texts; basic conversation skills; word processing in Russian; Russian web resources including databases and library catalogues; citing Russian sources in English-language papers; the geography and placenames of Russia; and Russian name conventions and forms of address.
- The purpose of the course is twofold: to help students who need some rudimentary Russian for their research; and to provide an introduction to the language for students who are considering taking a traditional four-skills course.
- Dr. Stephen Field (Chinese) has taught a course in Classical Chinese using this model

### **The English-language course with optional readings and discussions in one or more target languages**

- This is popular model at LAC pioneer SUNY-Binghamton (see *Translation Perspectives X*).
- It includes several variants:
- LAC students substitute some target-language readings for required readings in English.
- LAC students read texts in the original while other students read translations of the same texts.
- LAC students do a group project in the target language.

### **The English-language course in which everyone reads works in English that incorporate some elements of one or more target languages**

- An example of this model is a Mythology class that uses "texts which incorporate the original languages, words untranslatable into English" (*Translation Perspectives X* 140).

### **The English Literature course that employs foreign-language translations.**

- There is a published description of a Shakespeare course that uses this model in extra meetings for students who know French (*Language and Content* 87).
- The students compare the translations of sonnets with each other and with the original.
- According to the description, "facilitators report that these students, when comparing translations, proceed more thoughtfully than they do when reading English alone, and they seem to take note of figurative language with a heightened consciousness."

### **Independent study**

- LAC credit can be attached to any university course by means of independent study for individual students.

### **The Foreign Language Immersion Program** (*Translation Perspectives VII* 103, 110-111).

- Students take all courses in the target language during a given semester
- This program, as a LAC model, originated at the University of Minnesota.
- It is the basic format of summer language institutes, although it can be used during the academic

year as well.

### **The Joint Degree program**

- Students at the University of Rhode Island graduate in five years with a joint degree in German and Engineering (Spinelli, "Languages Across the Curriculum: A Postsecondary Initiative" 7)

### **The Internship**

- Students complete an internship using the target language either abroad or at home where opportunities exist (*Language and Content* 106).

### **Service Learning**

- Service Learning in general is currently a popular addition to the college curriculum
- At Trinity the LAC program at the 2003 workshop heard a presentation from two representatives of local volunteer organizations, who suggested how our students might combine their study of Spanish with service to the community.
- Some Trinity students have subsequently done this.

### **The English-language course in which the teacher introduces some target-language vocabulary (*Next Steps* 22).**

- In all of my literature in translation classes and my English language culture class I teach the roots and original meanings of words like "perestroika" and "pogrom."
- There is a published description of a course on Kant, with no German-Language prerequisite, that includes the analysis of key words in terms of "roots, semantic range, and Kantian usage" (*Language and Content* 86).

## **II CBI models for language classrooms (from Stryker and Leaver, *Content-Based Instruction and Kecht and von Hammerstein, Languages Across the Curriculum*)**

- Textbooks are supplemented with authentic materials and ultimately replaced either by a content-oriented textbook or authentic materials (Stryker and Leaver 33)
- Languages classes are organized around themes (Stryker and Leaver 55)
- Institutions offer two tracks for language-learners: skills-based and content-based (Stryker and Leaver 59)
- Content-specific proficiency tests are developed (Kecht and von Hammerstein, 106).
- The "preview-review" model, where language teachers attend lectures in an English-language course, then give "follow-up" lessons in the target language. (Stryker and Leaver 107).
- Content specialists give guest lectures in the target language in a language course (Kecht and von Hammerstein xxii).
- Language class include "instruction units" to enhance museum and library visits (Kecht and von Hammerstein 24)

## **III LAC and Language Program Articulation (From Barrette and Paesini, *Language Program Articulation and Kecht and von Hammerstein, Languages Across the Curriculum*)**

- Intermediate and Advanced languages classes are articulated along disciplinary lines (Barrette and Paesini 65).

- Students keep language-learning portfolios throughout their language study that include material from LAC courses and "reflections" on the applicability of their language study for other disciplines (Barrette and Paesini 143).
- The same text is introduced at various points in a curricular sequence (Kecht and von Hammerstein 27).

#### **IV European Models & Approaches (From Grenfell, *Modern Languages Across the Curriculum*)**

##### **Immersion Programs**

- "Specialist Language Colleges," for which CLIL has been proposed (4)
- "Parity Structure": Half of the sessions are in one language, half in the other (56)
- General Education/common curriculum courses in the target languages (118)
- Trilingual Baccalaureate (118)

##### **Teacher-Intensive Models**

- Language pedagogy training for subject teachers (58, 96, 111, 123)
- Subject training for language teachers (103, 120)
- Content teachers teach vocabulary and grammar as part of the content course (43, 65, 84)
- Content and Language teachers teach classes together (81)
- A CLIL component in Interdisciplinary courses with two or more subject specialists (105)
- "Role reversal": Qualified students receive training and help lead the course (123)
- Students are assessed for both content knowledge and language skills (127)

##### **Multilingual Classrooms**

- Teachers teach in the target language and repeat in the native language (43)
- Classes allow "translanguaging," i. e., code-switching (62, 94-6, 105-6).
- Language teachers visit once a week with 15-30 minute language activity (94)
- There are outside lectures, films and seminars in the target language (103)
- L2 modules are distributed throughout the length of the course (100)
- Varying degrees of target language use within a given lesson (105)

#### **VI Some News Developments**

##### **New LAC Model at Trinity University**

- A content course, "Brazilian Popular Culture," has been developed by Rosana Blanco-Cano, that is taught in a second language (Spanish) but includes instruction in a third language (Portuguese).

##### **Goucher College IICA program**

- Goucher College has instituted a new program predicated on the hypothesis, which research has substantiated, that study-abroad and content-based instruction improve language learning.
- They have developed an "Integrated Intensive Course Abroad," or IICA, which incorporates several of the models mentioned above.

### **Models Discussed at the CLAC Conference, March 2012**

- Dr. Tanya Kinsella, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, described the model of linking a one-hour LAC discussion section to two or more English-language courses;
- Dr. Lily Anne Gertz and Dr. William Holliday of Longwood University discussed their model of combining summer study abroad, CLAC, and two or more general education courses.
- Dr. Gwen Barnes-Karol of St. Olaf College discussed the St. Olaf model of introducing scaffolded authentic academic readings beginning in third-semester Spanish, with the ultimate goal of replacing textbooks with authentic texts and supporting materials by fifth-semester Spanish.
- Andrea Lanoux of Connecticut College described a teleconference cultural studies course on the "Net Generation" that included her own Russian-language students and advanced English-language students at the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, Russia. For administrative reasons the course was listed as an English course at the Russian university and as a Russian course at the American university. Dr. Lanoux reported that the class was conducted in both languages with no restrictions on code-switching, which led to lively conversations and, in her view, enhanced language learning for all of the students .
- Dr. Frances-Matos-Schultz, Dr. Charlotte Melin, and Dr. Patricia Mougel discussed collaboration at the University of Minnesota between between French, German and Spanish teachers and teachers from various disciplines in the Sustainability Studies program.

## Works Cited

- Barrette, Catherine M. and Kate Paesani. eds. *Language Program Articulation: Developing a Theoretical Foundation*. Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2004.
- CLAC: Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- Dalton-Puffer, Christiane (2011). "Content-and-Language Integrated Learning: From Practice to Principles?" *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 31 (2011), 182-204. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- "Emory Shuts Down Departments." *Emory Wheel*, Sept. 28, 2012. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- "Exploring Approaches to Cultures & Languages Across the Curriculum. Archived Content from Conference Held in March 2012." CARLA – Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- Fichera, Virginia M. and H. Stephen Straight, eds. *Translation Perspectives X. Using Languages Across the Curriculum: Diverse Disciplinary Perspectives*. Binghamton: Center for Research in Translation, SUNY-Binghamton, 1997.
- Grenfell, Michael, ed. *Modern Languages Across the Curriculum*. London: Routledge Falmer, 2002.
- Hart Research Associates. "Raising the Bar: Employers' Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn." AACU. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- Holl, Bruce . *LanguagesAcrossTheCurriculum.com*. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- Kecht, Maria-Regina and Katharina von Hammerstein. *Languages Across the Curriculum: Interdisciplinary Structures and Internationalized Education*. Columbus: National East Asian Resource Center, 2000.
- Krueger, Merle and Frank Ryan, eds. *Language and Content: Discipline- and Content-Based Approaches to Language Study*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath & Co., 1993.
- Lorenzo, Francisco, Sonia Casal and Pat Moore. "The Effects of Content and Language Integrated Learning in European Education: Key Findings from the Andalusian Bilingual Sections Evaluation Project." *Applied Linguistics* 31 (2009), 418-442. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.
- MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures

for a Changing World.” May 2007. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.

Shoenberg, Robert E. and Barbara Turlington, eds. *Next Steps for Languages Across the Curriculum: Prospects, Problems and Promise*. Washington: American Council on Education, 1998.

Spinelli, Emily. "Languages Across the Curriculum: A Postsecondary Initiative." *ACTFL Newsletter* (Fall 1995), 5-8.

Straight, H. Stephen, ed. *Translation Perspectives VII. Languages Across the Curriculum: Invited Essays on the Use of Foreign Languages Throughout the Postsecondary Curriculum*. Binghamton: Center for Research in Translation, SUNY-Binghamton, 1994.

Stryker, Stephen B. and Betty Lou Leaver, eds. *Content-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education*. Washington: Georgetown UP, 1997.

Stryker, Stephen B. and Leaver, Betty Lou (1997). Content-Based Instruction: From Theory to Practice. In Stephen B. Stryker and Betty Lou Leaver (Eds.), *Content-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education* (pp. 2-28). Washington: Georgetown University Press.

*Trinity University LAC Program*. Trinity University. Web. Nov. 8, 2012.