Content and language integrated learning, CLIL, has from its onset been promoted by the EU institutions as a tool to support learners’ foreign/second language skills. CLIL has a dual emphasis on content and language learning, yet the latter has dominated the CLIL research scene. In the early phases, language learning research was needed to examine whether CLIL indeed has the potential it is used for. As recent overviews (e.g. Dalton-Puffer 2011) show, the overall results suggest benefits on many areas of language competence, visible especially in CLIL students’ wider lexicon and morphosyntactic resources.

Language learning studies have tended to approach CLIL from the perspective of generic language skills. Recently, however, there has been more emphasis on the need to relate language learning with its content-specific features. This shift in orientation is visible, for example, in recent research that seeks to highlight the roles of language in CLIL (Llinares, Morton & Whittaker 2014) or conceptualise the very notion of integration as something that encapsulates both language and content dimensions (Nikula et al. in press).

This presentation will outline current achievements of CLIL research and discuss its future directions. It will argue that the reconceptualisation of language skills as subject-specific and the ensuing emphasis on knowledge construction aligns CLIL research with other research areas interested in the roles of language in learning, an increasingly important matter in all education, and especially so in contexts where a growing proportion of students are working through the curriculum in their L2.


Keywords: subject-specific language, CLIL, language in learning.