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## Student-teachers' understanding of language teaching through the CLIL Language Triptych

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) continues to garner attention as its implementation spreads around the globe. As (language) teachers increasingly prepare for CLIL practice, the role of CLIL conceptual frameworks on student-teachers' education has become an important lever teacher educators can pull. **Aim:** This study investigated student-teachers' understanding and use of Coyle et al.'s (2010) Language Triptych to plan and deliver CLIL-oriented lessons as part of their placement.

**Sample:** The participants were 32 student-teachers completing an initial English language teacher education programme in Argentina.

**Method:** Framed as a qualitative study, data were collected through forum discussions, classroom observations, and (stimulated recall) interviews.

**Results:** Thematic analysis demonstrated that the student-teachers understood and employed the Language Triptych as a teaching organising tool not only for CLIL but for language teaching in general. They also utilized it as a programme-based teacher learning catalyst to make sense of other core contents (e.g., systemic functional linguistics), and as a professional knowledge expander since the Triptych allowed them to articulate new understandings (e.g., the multispatiality of language teaching).

**Conclusion:** The Language Triptych is a potentially powerful lens that facilitates professional awareness.

### 1. Introduction

In the arena of bilingual education, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) can be succinctly defined as a dual-focused approach to teaching content and an additional language, where both content and language are given attention (Coyle et al., 2010; Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). CLIL has been implemented through a range of models which can be placed along a continuum (Cenoz, 2015), alternately understood as an educational approach when it is content-driven (e.g., a school subject taught through an additional language), or a language teaching approach when it is language-driven (e.g., the teaching of an additional language through school curriculum content) (see also Sylvé & Tsuchiya, 2023).

In their foundational publication, Coyle et al. (2010) propose the Language Triptych as a pedagogical tool/didactic organiser to design meaningful learning opportunities (Bower, 2021) which enable teachers to pay attention to the different roles that language plays (e.g., *for*, *of*,

and *through* communication) in the construction of knowledge in the CLIL continuum. The Triptych, which we discuss in more detail below, has been examined with experienced teachers and found to aid in teacher reflection and language awareness (e.g., Martín del Pozo, 2016; Turner & Fielding, 2021). However, little is known about how it is understood and implemented by pre-service language teachers when they engage in the critical and contextual application of theory into practice, and how their implementation helps them develop their own professional knowledge of language (teaching). Examining student-teachers' views as well as practices is vital to ensure that (language) teacher education programmes and pedagogical frameworks are data-driven and research-informed.

In this study, we respond to the niche outlined above by examining how a group of student-teachers completing an initial English language teacher education programme in Argentina understood and used Coyle et al.'s (2010) Language Triptych pedagogical tool to organise language learning from a language-driven CLIL perspective. In Argentina,

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curricular guidelines for secondary education (e.g., [Ministerio de Educación del Chubut, 2015](#)) suggest that English language teaching (ELT) can be delivered through different educational approaches. One of such approaches is language-driven CLIL, which refers to English language teachers teaching English through thematic content included in the learners' school curriculum delivered through the medium of Spanish, the dominant language in Argentina.

## 2. Literature review

As CLIL pedagogy developed, some scholars (e.g., [Coffin, 2017](#); [Lin, 2016](#); [Llinares, 2023](#); [Llinares et al., 2012](#)) increasingly embedded pedagogic principles based on systemic functional linguistics (SFL), best explained by [Llinares \(2023\)](#) as a theory that sees language as a system of choices that speakers make depending on the meanings and functions they wish to convey. Therefore, SFL views language as a meaning-making system, i.e., language is inseparable from what is being talked about. Hence, it stands to reason that SFL is applied to CLIL since both explore language and content in an integrated manner. [Coyle and Meyer \(2021\)](#) note that the primary purpose of language is knowledge construction, i.e., learning; therefore, language in CLIL is considered, as in SFL, a social semiotic, meaning-making system that merges disciplinary literacies and learning with development of conceptual knowledge. The authors define this process of merging as *pluriliteracies*, which is the “dynamic and evolving development of subject-specific literacies and several subjects and languages” ([Coyle & Meyer, 2021](#), p. 185). In other words, the term refers to the different academic literacies that learners are expected to develop in formal education.

From an SFL perspective, we understand that language in CLIL not only refers to disciplinary discourse but also patterns of classroom interaction that help learners construct knowledge by displaying (and developing) cognitive discourse functions (CDFs). According to [Dalton-Puffer \(2016\)](#), CDFs refer to verbal/linguistic demands from learners as they engage in the understanding and construction of knowledge. Differently put, they represent the language learners need to classify, define, describe, evaluate, explain, explore, and report subject-matter ([Dalton-Puffer, 2016](#); [Dalton-Puffer & Bauer-Marschallinger, 2019](#)). In addition, CDFs include awareness and use of different registers, languages, and translanguaging, i.e., the use of one's full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning ([Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021](#); [Cenoz & Gorter, 2017](#)). As [Andrews and Lin \(2018\)](#) note, language awareness (i.e., one's ability to understand how language works, or knowledge about language) in CLIL is not only beneficial for learners but also for teachers, regardless of their preparation and background (e.g., language teachers or content teachers), as the latter can find in language awareness a situated source of professional development.

### 2.1. The Language Triptych

With the aim of supporting the language element in CLIL, [Coyle et al. \(2010\)](#) developed the Language Triptych (alternatively “the Triptych”,

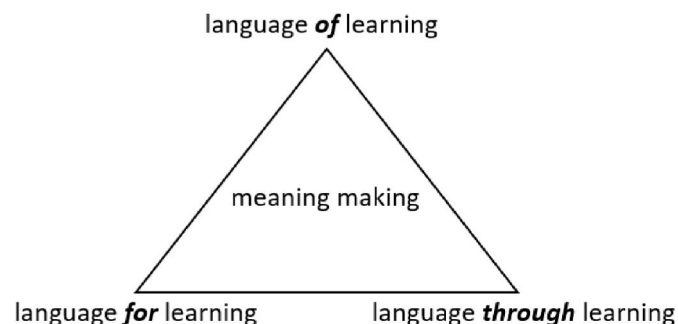


Fig. 1. The Language Triptych (adapted from [Coyle & Meyer, 2021](#), p. 26).

Fig. 1) “as a planning tool” ([Coyle & Meyer, 2021](#), p. 26) to represent language learning and language using as a complex meaning-making system for knowledge construction in CLIL. Thus, in this paper we understand that the Triptych is a pedagogical tool that may enable teachers to mobilise an SFL perspective to language development.

The Triptych features three interconnected elements. Language of learning (LoL) refers to subject-specific as well as general academic language that is required to understand and construct disciplinary/thematic knowledge. It includes terminology as well as discourse-specific phrases. [Coyle et al. \(2010\)](#) recognise that this element may carry different meanings to language and content teachers in CLIL settings. For language teachers in language-driven CLIL it entails building a syllabus in which linguistic progression is determined by content and functional perspectives. This move marks a shift from a grammar progression syllabus (a syllabus in which grammatical items are taught according to a sequence which goes from simple to complex structures, e.g., simple present before conditional sentences) to a functional syllabus (a syllabus in which language items are taught according to content demands) ([Ellis, 2019](#)).

Language for learning (LfL) includes the language needed to carry out learning activities individually or in interaction ([Bower, 2021](#)). For example, if learners are required to work in pairs to compare two population pyramids, they need specific language items to interact, negotiate meanings, ask each other questions, and articulate comparisons. Last, language through learning (LtL) refers to language needs emerging as a result of deepening meaning making, as for example, students begin to use newly learned language for their own communicative purposes. While LoL and LfL can be planned, LtL is primarily spontaneous as it is the learner who expresses their necessity for language that will allow them to articulate knowledge building. This level of unpredictability demands teachers' ability and awareness to capture these language learning moments to support learners.

According to [Coyle et al. \(2010\)](#), the Triptych “provides the means to analyse language needs across different CLIL contexts and transparently differentiates between types of linguistic demand which impact on CLIL” (p. 36), and can therefore enable teachers to develop their own language awareness. However, reviews (e.g., [van Kampen et al., 2018](#)) and empirical studies (e.g., [Morton, 2020](#)) have noted that content teachers working in a CLIL environment may not pay explicit attention to language, and when they do, they exhibit a tendency to focus on LoL, i.e., disciplinary language, and disregard LtL and LfL because, quite understandably, they may lack formal preparation or confidence in providing language support. The Triptych is a relatively “old” tool, and continues to be referred to (e.g., [Turner & Fielding, 2021](#)) as instrumental for lesson planning and delivery. We wonder what potential the Triptych could offer to language pre-service teachers, who, unlike content teachers, come with comprehensive knowledge of language and language learning.

### 2.2. The Language Triptych in teacher preparation

Teacher preparation for CLIL is crucial for teachers to develop a battery of professional competencies to address and balance content and language ([Kao, 2022](#); [Oattes et al., 2018](#); [Turner, 2021](#)). In their review of CLIL and professional development, [Yuan and Lo \(2023\)](#) note that CLIL has been included as an approach, a module, or content within pedagogy modules in language, content, and bilingual teacher education programmes. This trend has also been found in Latin America (e.g., [Banegas, 2022](#); [Banegas et al., 2020](#); [Ruiz de Zarobe & Banegas](#)). In line with the focus on language-driven CLIL of this study, recent reviews (e.g., [Ellison, 2015](#); [Pérez Cañado, 2021](#); [Yuan & Lo, 2023](#)) on CLIL teacher education, particularly with pre-service teachers, agree that including CLIL in language teacher education programmes enables student-teachers to develop a holistic, contextualised, and functional view of language learning. In addition, it can help them develop greater language awareness about themselves and their students and enhance

their reflective practice (Ellison, 2014).

Concerning the inclusion of the Language Triptych as part of teacher preparation or support, research studies have been conducted in different settings and with varied participants' backgrounds. In relation to content teachers, three studies are worth considering. In a qualitative study about CLIL support for lecturers at a Spanish university, Martín del Pozo (2016) found that the Triptych acted as a tool for self-reflection and language awareness among the content specialists. However, the participants reported a lack of confidence in relation to capturing teaching opportunities for L1L. Similarly, a study conducted in Australia with primary and secondary school teachers (Turner & Fielding, 2021), concluded that the use of the Triptych enabled them to attend to learners' language needs beyond LoL while developing their own language awareness. Most recently, Banegas and Mearns (2023) conducted an action research-based study with content and language in-service teachers delivering secondary school subjects in a CLIL school in Argentina. Findings showed that the Triptych became a helpful lesson organiser as well as an opportunity to develop their awareness of disciplinary literacies and teacher language awareness in relation to teaching content through English. They also remarked that they wished they had been provided with opportunities to explore the Triptych in their teacher preparation.

A limited number of studies have investigated the use of the Language Triptych among pre-service language teachers. For example, in Portugal, Ellison (2014) concluded that an understanding of CLIL, including the Triptych, enabled language student-teachers to engage in reflective practice while developing a deeper understanding of language in education. In Turner's (2021) study on a master's TESOL programme in Australia, student-teachers created mindmaps to articulate first their language aims connected to each element in the Triptych, and the content aims second. Similarly, Kao (2022) conducted a study in Taiwan in which pre-service teachers utilized the Triptych as a planning tool to deliver language-driven CLIL lessons to elementary learners. Findings demonstrated that the student-teachers exhibited an increase in language awareness, the development of language-sensitive competencies resulting from planning, and an appreciation for L1 use and trans-languaging as powerful resources in CLIL.

These studies indicate that CLIL in language/content teacher education needs to include a comprehensive understanding of CLIL underpinnings and opportunities for lesson planning and delivery. As Ellison (2015) notes, including CLIL in the ELT teacher education curriculum can contribute to a holistic and purposeful approach for teaching and using a language, which can be supported in the Language Triptych. The Triptych has proven helpful to develop language awareness among not only content teachers but also language teachers, and as such it facilitates systematic attention to language learning across contexts. That it helps teachers identify language targets proactively and spontaneously aligns with the priority in language education more broadly to highlight meaning and context (Larsen-Freeman, 2023). While these studies have considered the use of the Language Triptych, they do not explain how student-teachers' understanding of the Triptych supported or conflicted other aspects of the curriculum. A more comprehensive examination is needed to understand how this tool could become a springboard for student-teachers to foster a coherent personal theory of language teaching practice.

Against this backdrop, this investigation was guided by two research questions.

1. How do ELT student-teachers in a language-driven CLIL context understand the Language Triptych in relation to language teaching?
2. What is the relationship between the Triptych and student-teachers' understanding of language teaching more broadly?

### 3. Methodology

We adopted an interpretivist paradigm to educational research

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to understand how the participating student-teachers constructed their understanding of the Language Triptych in particular and language learning in general in CLIL. For this reason, we reconciled different qualitative methodologies (Coe et al., 2021; Creswell, 2013) for a rich exploration of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

#### 3.1. Context and participants

This study was carried out in an Argentinian online initial English language teacher education programme (not a CLIL programme) in which CLIL was embedded within a mandatory module in 2023. This is a four-year programme (Table 1) that prepares teachers for English language teaching provision for kindergarten, primary and secondary education. To be accepted in the programme, student-teachers need to have completed their secondary education and show evidence of having achieved an intermediate (or B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference) level of English. However, as experienced by one participating teacher in Banegas and Mearns's (2023) study, English language teachers may also find themselves asked to deliver content-driven CLIL (a school subject delivered through the medium of English) in bilingual schools.

In Year 4, the student-teachers must take a two-term module (March–November) called ELT Didactics for Secondary Education, which Author 1 has led since 2011. The module concentrates on enabling student-teachers to analyse pedagogical resources and experiences, develop a rationale to design their own lesson plans and materials, and experience teaching through micro-teaching. In 2023, the core contents of the module were: (1) diversity, inclusion, and social justice in language education, (2) developing learners' cognitive and language skills, (3) language awareness, (4) lesson planning and materials development, and (5) CLIL: principles (e.g., the Language Triptych, pluriliteracies), models, and lesson planning. It should be stressed that CLIL was mainly approached from a language-driven model in response to the curricular guidelines mentioned in the introduction. To reiterate, language-driven CLIL mainly refers to language teachers (in this paper English as a foreign language) using thematic content from other school subjects to contextualise language learning (e.g., instead of using characters' routines to introduce the present simple, teachers may use topics from physical geography to enable learners to use present simple to describe and deepen their understanding of the geographical features of a region).

In addition, the student-teachers in Year 4, together with other modules, complete a module called Professional Practice (taught by another tutor), which also focuses on ELT lesson planning but includes delivery of such lessons through a placement of 24 lessons at a class of secondary school students. In 2023, as the student-teachers were unsure

**Table 1**  
Modules included in the programme.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Pedagogy</li> <li>• Philosophy</li> <li>• English Grammar I</li> <li>• English Phonology I</li> <li>• Academic Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Didactics</li> <li>• ELT Didactics for Pre-Primary Education</li> <li>• Professional Practice</li> <li>• Sociology of Education</li> <li>• English Grammar II</li> <li>• English Phonology II</li> <li>• Introduction to Linguistics</li> <li>• Literature II</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELT Didactics for Primary Education</li> <li>• Professional Practice</li> <li>• History of Argentinian Education</li> <li>• Discourse Analysis</li> <li>• Literature II</li> <li>• ELT and Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELT Didactics for Secondary Education</li> <li>• Professional Practice</li> <li>• Literature III</li> <li>• Academic Writing and Speaking</li> <li>• Educational Policy and Curriculum</li> <li>• English for Specific Purposes</li> </ul>

about how to connect the Triptych to their practice, both tutors agreed that the placement would provide each student-teacher with the opportunity to practise language-driven CLIL lessons for a period of 10 lessons as part of the five-week placement, with two lessons per week. As suggested in the literature (e.g., Pavón Vázquez, 2014; Pavón Vázquez & Ellison, 2013), the content of the lessons was agreed in consultation with the teachers of Literature, Geography, History, and Citizenship as well as English as a Foreign Language, as collaboration between content and language specialists is an important aspect of the CLIL model (Montgomery & De Costa, 2024). The lesson plans received feedback from Author 1 and the Professional Practice tutor. The data reported in this article come from these two modules.

The participants were 32 student-teachers, who shared Spanish as their L1. Twenty-nine participants were female and three were male, ranging between 24 and 35 years of age ( $M = 26.1$  years,  $SD = 2.09$ ). Following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), their level of English language proficiency was B2–C1. Twelve of the participants had between two and five years of experience as EFL teachers in primary and secondary schools. The participants did not have any previous experience with working in a language-driven CLIL environment.

### 3.2. Data collection

All the student-teachers participated voluntarily and signed a written consent form which explained their rights, and ensured anonymity, confidentiality, and no academic consequences for withdrawing from the study. In this article, the student-teachers are referred to through pseudonyms. Since Author 1's dual role as tutor and researcher could have led to coercion issues, a student representative from another module became a mediator in case the participants experienced pressure or discomfort. Data were collected via four instruments:

*Whole class English-medium written forum discussion.* The aim was to interrogate the student-teachers' views about the Triptych. The forum was held in the programme's Moodle platform, and contained a separate thread for each session of the module. The forum took place asynchronously after sessions on the topic and analysis of sample lesson plans and before the students designed their own lessons. The students' submitted posts were mainly individual answers to the question "How do you feel about using the Language Triptych in your lesson planning and delivery?", but there was some interaction as well (e.g., a student asking a follow-up question to a post). A total of 82 posts (mean length: 55.3 words) were analysed.

*Classroom observations.* The student-teachers were observed delivering three lessons. Observations were carried out remotely via Zoom as the authors were based in three different countries. In the classroom, the student-teacher placed a laptop through which the observer could gain access to their practice. The observer assumed a non-participant role (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). While the student-teacher audio-recorded the lesson for posterior stimulus, the observer employed a semi-structured note-taking pro-forma to document the student-teachers' (1) (non)verbal reactions to learners' comments linked to language learning (e.g., asking for the meaning of a word), and (2) actions to introduce, monitor, and assess language learning opportunities/activities. Field notes also documented the observer's reflections. In total, 96 classroom observations were carried out. We acknowledge that (1) the distant observation may have affected the quality of the data (e.g., inaudible comments made by those in the classroom, limited visibility to what was happening beyond the laptop camera range), and (2) the observer's online presence may have had an impact on the student-teachers' practice.

*Post-lesson stimulated recall interviews.* Each observed lesson was followed by an English-medium interview conducted the following day. The lesson audio-recording and the observer's notes were used as recall support to prompt responses. As an introspective and dialogic method (Gass & Mackey, 2017), stimulated recall was used to facilitate

discussion of the participants' understanding of the Triptych and language learning. To make the instrument more participant-oriented (Sanchez & Grimshaw, 2020), the student-teacher was asked to think about any moment(s) in the lesson in which they felt confused/challenged/uncertain (i.e., critical episodes). Then, with the observer they selected between two and three critical episodes to discuss. The observer's field notes were also used to probe into the participant's understanding of the Triptych and language learning in a language-driven CLIL model. In total, we carried out 96 stimulated recall interviews, which were audio-recorded and orthographically transcribed for data analysis.

*Group interviews.* A week after the delivery of Lesson 10, the 32 participants were randomly arranged in four groups (eight participants in each group) for an online group interview. Each of the four interviews was conducted in Spanish and lasted approximately 45 min. In the interviews the student-teachers reflected on the experience of putting the Triptych into practice and in what ways their understanding of language learning had developed. Extracts from the whole class forum discussion were used to encourage reflection.

### 3.3. Data analysis

All the data were transcribed and imported into ATLAS.ti version 8 for qualitative data analysis. In particular, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was employed, and it involved these phases: data familiarisation, coding, and thematisation. These phases entailed reading and re-reading the data before linking them to pre-conceived codes (e.g., elements of the Triptych) and emerging codes (e.g., language teaching as a multispatial experience) which were identified through open coding. In this regard, coding combined deductive and inductive processes. Through axial coding, the initial codes were first arranged into categories, which in turn, were organised into themes (Table 2). Additionally, frequency (counting occurrence) was employed to describe participants' responses (including repeated words and phrases) around the themes identified through thematic analysis. In this regard, descriptive statistics were only used for landscaping and therefore such

**Table 2**  
Overview of themes and categories.

Themes	Categories
Limited subject knowledge	Lack of confidence Need for content teachers' support
Thinking outside the grammar progression syllabus	Language functions Issues with traditional grammar Grammar-driven syllabus Form and meaning
Understanding the pedagogical side of systematic functional linguistics	Genres Importance of meaning making
Capitalising on spontaneous language through learning moments	Planned language teaching Unplanned language teaching
Language Triptych as a compass for pedagogical-linguistic knowledge	Organising tool Pedagogical aims Identifying pedagogical opportunities Less is more Knowledge of SFL
Language Triptych as a pluriliteracies endeavour	Disciplinary literacies Texts and genres Use of languages to support learning
Language Triptych as a multispatial experience	Recognition of learning environments Digital spaces and materials Hybrid spaces Physical spaces beyond the classroom

statistics were subsidiary to thematic analysis.

For the purpose of ensuring confirmability, trustworthiness, and transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a colleague not familiarised with the study acted as an inter-rater of 50% of the data. Discrepancies were discussed and the Krippendorff's alpha-reliability coefficient for multi-valued nominal data (Krippendorff & Craggs, 2016) was calculated. The alpha value was .871, which is reasonably close to perfect agreement. Finally, the participants were shown the anonymised findings to engage them in member checking and to legitimise and/or provide feedback on the adequacy of the analysis.

#### 4. Findings

With the aim of offering a thick description (Silverman, 2021) of the issue under examination, this section describes the participants' emerging understanding, application, and reflection of/on the Language Triptych.

##### 4.1. Initial views

According to the thematic analysis of the whole forum discussion before lesson plan design, all the student-teachers coincided in approaching the Triptych as a novel idea, which generated concerns and opportunities for enhancing the pivotal role of language as a meaning-making system in language education. Thematic analysis yielded the following themes: (1) limited subject knowledge, (2) thinking outside the grammar progression syllabus, (3) understanding the pedagogical side of systemic functional linguistics, and (4) capitalising on spontaneous Ltl moments.

##### 4.1.1. Limited subject knowledge

While they understood that the Triptych starts with the language needed by content (Coyle et al., 2010), the content component triggered concerns. Paula wrote:

From what we learnt about the Language Triptych and language [for] communication in CLIL, language is viewed as an aspect of content and as being learned through use in relation to content. But I don't know the content, so that negatively influences my ability to choose the language of learning and content-obligatory language. (Paula, Extract 1)

Like Paula, all the students recognised that limited subject knowledge (i.e., this came from their own secondary education background or from brief meetings with the subject teachers) would undermine their ability to organise LoL. The phrase "I don't know the content" was used 38 times in the forum, i.e., some students used it more than once to reinforce their worries. We must recognise that this finding is unsurprising since the participants were training to become language teachers, not content teachers. Nevertheless, Extract 1 shows that even in language-driven CLIL, awareness of disciplinary content exerts a powerful influence on pedagogical decisions.

##### 4.1.2. Thinking outside the grammar progression syllabus

Despite student-teachers' understandable reservation with disciplinary knowledge and its impact on the Triptych as an organising tool, 27 of the students welcomed the Triptych as it provided them with the opportunity to, in line with Coyle et al. (2010), plan lessons thinking outside the grammar progression syllabus. Phrases such as "grammar rules", "tenses", "too much discrete grammar" were used 25, 22, and 9 times respectively in relation to this category. One post can illustrate this view:

Rather than planning the way ELT coursebooks always do, following a grammar sequence (e.g. first present simple, and then simple past), here I need to plan language teaching around content and what structures and phrases I need to teach them. The language of and for

learning is great to help me think about what grammar the kids will need to show their new knowledge. This is really meaning-making in practice! (Sabrina, Extract 2)

At a surface level, Extract 2 seems to indicate that the Triptych enabled student-teachers to consider a functional syllabus (Wilkins, 1981) to respond to the lesson topics. The practice of lesson planning combined with the Triptych allowed them to make this personal connection. At a deeper level, it exposes that the language teacher education programme may be perpetuating questionable notions such as the overreliance on global ELT coursebooks or the grammar progression syllabus. In this regard, the Triptych seemed to have become an opportunity to destabilise dominant approaches in coursebooks and how these persist in the face of language teacher education regimes.

##### 4.1.3. Understanding the pedagogical side of SFL

Of the 32 participants, 25 also expressed that through the Triptych they were able to translate declarative knowledge of some core SFL concepts learnt in the Grammar II module (see Table 1) into pedagogical practice. In this regard, Juan expressed:

Thanks to the Triptych, I think I've finally cracked the notions of genre, speech function, and textual function. I think language for learning can help me look at what functions students need in order to complete the tasks I design. These are all SFL concepts we learnt in Grammar [a compulsory module in Year 2 of the programme]. I think they'll be really helpful to guide my CLIL lesson planning (Juan, Extract 3).

Across the data, connections between SFL and the Triptych were consistent, which may support the argument (e.g., Lin, 2016) that SFL can be a relevant theoretical model for CLIL teachers. Readers may note that Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 stress the participants' pedagogical understanding of key language teaching concepts (e.g., functions, genres), which sometimes are taken for granted in language teacher education programmes in the context of the study. We speculate that these concepts may have been either absent in previous modules of the programme or included mainly at a theoretical level without opportunities for the student-teachers to apply them to language teaching situations. In any case, the Triptych acted as a bridge to make some concepts pedagogically relevant.

##### 4.1.4. Capitalising on spontaneous Ltl moments

The students' understanding of Ltl enabled them to capitalise on spontaneous language educational moments. Of the 32 students, 20 referred to Ltl by signalling that while it was a good opportunity to engage in planned as well as unprompted language learning, they also acknowledged that being able to identify such moments in class would be a challenge as it required higher levels of awareness and attention to classroom discourse. One participant mentioned:

The language through learning part looks tricky to me. I think I don't quite see it because I may need to have sophisticated awareness of what happens either in interaction, or through input if the kids are reading or watching something. (Karina, Extract 4)

At a surface level, Extract 4 confirms Martín del Pozo's (2016) conclusion that teachers lack confidence with this element of the Triptych. At a deeper level, it also points to student-teachers taking a critical, self-reflective view of (1) their own strengths and weaknesses (which may be a valuable prerequisite for effective professional development), and (2) an important shift toward students as sources motivating curricular choices.

These initial views show that the Triptych helped the student-teachers espouse (1) their knowledge of SFL, (2) their reservations about the grammar progression syllabus and recognition of the functional syllabus, and (3) their concerns about the roles of planned and unplanned language teaching, and by extension disciplinary literacy, in

relation to disciplinary knowledge. While previous studies (e.g., Ellison, 2014; Martín del Pozo, 2016) show that the Triptych prompted pre-service/in-service teachers to engage in reflective practice, our findings on the participants' views may indicate that they developed a reflective and critical attitude towards their own language teaching preparation as they started to make sense or question some contents and practices.

#### 4.2. Into delivery

In this section, we present the findings gathered through classroom observations, stimulated recall interviews, and group interviews. Data analysis yielded three overarching themes: (1) the Language Triptych as a compass for pedagogical-linguistic knowledge, (2) language teaching as a pluriliteracies endeavour, and (3) language teaching as a multi-spatial experience. These themes show how the Triptych enabled the participants to consider the tool as a springboard for notions which exceed its original remit.

##### 4.2.1. The Language Triptych as a compass for pedagogical-linguistic knowledge

All students recognised that the Triptych allowed them to organise and (re)direct their language-driven CLIL implementation experience. They agreed that as the practicum progressed, their selection of aims, materials, and activities was oriented by specific elements of the Triptych. For example, Olivia delivered a lesson that combined content about writers and literary movements in Argentina, narrative tenses, and temporal markers. In the post-observation interview, Olivia said:

I organised my lesson around the language *for* learning as I wanted the learners to make group presentations about famous Argentinian writers. With that function in mind, I paid special attention to the language they needed, especially past tenses and time markers to show the evolution of their works. That is why I first gave them written descriptions and asked them to identify helpful phrases. (Olivia, Extract 5)

Extract 5 shows that Olivia's lesson was directed by LfL as she developed a clear direction of pedagogical aims in terms of enabling the learners to practise the function of describing. The LfL allowed her to conflate her linguistic knowledge of functions, narrative tenses and time markers with pedagogical decisions on how to support learners with making a presentation via language noticing activities.

Of the 32 student-teachers, 21 exhibited the implementation of language noticing strategies. In one lesson observed, Leandro asked the students to read a six-paragraph text about the process of fracking and answer a set of comprehension questions. He had planned to ask the students to write a similar text explaining the process of drilling, but the learners began to ask him questions about the organisation of the text. In response, he went over the text with the students asking them questions about connectors, topic sentences, and other elements that would make a text coherent and cohesive. In the stimulated-recall interview, he said:

The learners didn't know much about the writing of this short expository text, so I thought I could use the opportunity to ask them questions that would help them notice coherence and cohesion. I realise that I've finally understood the notion of textual metafunction we studied in the Grammar modules because I paid more attention to the language *through* learning as I was teaching. (Leandro, Extract 6)

On the one hand, Extract 6 illustrates that the Triptych and his knowledge of SFL allowed Leandro to identify a LtL opportunity which he pedagogically exploited by drawing his learners' attention to textual features. On the other hand, it might be acknowledged that the LtL mitigated Leandro's lack of more careful planning since he assumed that the learners had the skills to write an expository text. In this regard, the Triptych acted as a compass because it could help teachers re-orient their lessons through the identification and addressing of learners'

needs.

The passage from planning to delivery revealed another change. As the student-teachers started to draw the learners' attention to language and cognitive aspects, the lesson plans from 21 student-teachers began to feature fewer activities, which were then fully exploited when implemented. On this change, a student-teacher noted:

Implementing the lessons is definitely helping me realise that I need to do more with less, like I can exploit each activity more so that there's more time, more opportunities for the learners to benefit from the Triptych. So now my lessons will have more noticing, more spontaneous focus on language *through* learning. (Yolanda, Extract 7)

This shift may indicate that the Triptych became a compass for pedagogical-linguistic knowledge as it enabled student-teachers to reflect on their practice, as in Ellison (2014), and allow more time for learners to share their language needs. As in Extract 6, it may also show that it helped correct any problems in lesson planning connected to achievable aims and time management since it seems that previously Yolanda's lessons may have been overambitious.

The transition from planning to delivery also influenced nine student-teachers' linguistic knowledge. For example, in Lesson 10, Silvina was teaching relative clauses for adding information or specifying. As she was giving examples, a learner asked "How else can we do the same, I mean, what other things can I use to give more information?". Silvina paused and provided examples such as *specifically*, *furthermore*, and *in more detail*. In the stimulated-recall interview, she noted:

I realised that it was a teaching moment to make use of my understanding about how lexicogrammatical choices are linked to meanings and functions. I thought that it was a moment of the language *through* learning because the learner didn't want to only use relative clauses for the function of describing something. That was something that I could have never planned [...] I'll make sure I do more of this. (Silvina, Extract 8)

Extracts 5–8 demonstrate that the Triptych allowed the student-teachers to attend to LfL (Extract 5) and LtL (Extracts 6–8) as in Turner (2021), and unlike previous studies (e.g., Martín del Pozo, 2016). The Triptych was a pedagogical compass that enabled the student-teachers to make informed decisions by mobilising different facets of professional knowledge such as their linguistic knowledge. The compass metaphor not only exercised a directionality function in terms of pedagogical decisions at the intersection of planning and delivery as in Kao (2022); it also allowed them to operationalise their linguistic knowledge, which in turn contributed to the development of reflection (see also Ellison, 2014) and pedagogical strategies.

##### 4.2.2. Language teaching as a pluriliteracies endeavour

This theme conflates categories that signal the student-teachers' recognition of notions associated with disciplinary literacies, language use across contexts and cultures, and the potential of pedagogical translanguaging (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Lin & Lo, 2017) to support learners' literacies development in CLIL and EFL (Kao, 2018). Notions connected to terms such as *pluriliteracies* or *translanguaging* particularly emerged in the last post-lesson stimulated recall interview and the group interviews.

In the group interviews, 21 of the student-teachers acknowledged impromptu that using the Triptych to plan and implement their lessons permitted them to understand the different literacies at play in language teaching and learning. For example, a student-teacher in a social studies classroom said:

As I was preparing the lessons and teaching them, I realised that I was teaching the learners the language needed to operate in social studies, which is different from other subjects. So, I began to appreciate that we need to prepare the learners for the different languages, so to speak, that each subject needs. (Saulo, Extract 9)

Another student-teacher commented:

[...] you begin to notice that the kids need to learn how to write formally, a report for example, but that language is not exactly the same they need for a group presentation. The Language Triptych guided me in that respect because it would orient me to say [to myself], “Right, I didn’t plan this, but I need to teach them how to start a presentation or how to deal with a question.” It’s like English is giving them the opportunities to use the language with different genres and for different disciplines. (Adriana, Extract 10)

It should be noted that while in Extract 9, literacies refer to disciplinary discourses, in Extract 10, literacy is connected to linguistic variations according to mode, i.e., written or spoken language. Thus, these extracts show that the Triptych enabled the student-teachers to think of pluriliteracies in connection to both CLIL (Extract 9) and ELT (Extract 10).

In addition, all the lessons observed featured the use of Spanish to support learning. For example, when Noelia noticed that one learner was struggling to articulate a comparison between two writers she suggested “*Podés decirlo en español así te ayudas* [You can say it in Spanish to help yourself]” and the learner could verbalise a comparison which combined English and Spanish. Noelia then reflected:

Today I realised that learners can use their own language to build understanding. Using [their first language] as a teaching tool can help the students develop knowledge and confidence. They can feel strong enough to write a report. And I see it as part of the Triptych because there’s a genuine need to express disciplinary knowledge. (Noelia, Extract 11).

Extracts 9–11 indicate that the student-teachers’ understood language teaching needs to accommodate a pluriliteracies perspective as it will allow learners to operate across different disciplinary literacies, languages, and contexts of situation. Also, Extract 11 shows that translanguaging has pedagogical valency not only in CLIL but also, as Noelia reasons, in ELT, a view that supports *Kao’s (2018)* findings. Finally, it is worth noting that although the Triptych was taught within the notion of language-driven CLIL, the student-teachers associated it to teaching as a whole.

#### 4.2.3. Language teaching as a multispatial experience

This theme emerged from the classroom observations and student-teachers’ reflections. Student-teachers understood that language teaching involves different spaces, including both physical spaces such as the classroom or the wider environment beyond the classroom as well as digital spaces and objects such as social networks or online dictionaries.

We identified 601 learner requests (i.e., learners asking for linguistic items they needed to mean something) ( $M = 6.26$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ) in the 96 classroom observations. *Table 3* shows student-teachers’ responses to them, which involved asking learners to explore digital (e.g., a website) as well as physical (e.g., aspects of their city) spaces. In some cases, the

student-teachers did not respond to the requests. To reduce potential discomfort of the student-teachers who may have heard them but did not know how to respond, we avoided asking about these instances.

When we shared *Table 3* with the student-teachers for member-checking, they acknowledged that as learners found answers to content and language queries (LtL), they navigated different physical and digital spaces. In this regard, Paulina reasoned:

If my students are online [physically in the classroom or other spaces but navigating the web] or are at home working on a group mini-project and each of them is on their phone looking for info in different places, they’re in different spaces. And if they have a genuine question that I don’t know the answer for, all these places can offer answers and we all learn. (Paulina, Extract 12)

Similarly, Roxana said:

We are doing all these activities online, [where the students are] surveying people in the streets and then reporting here. English learning can take place at home, online, and then back here, and the learners move through these places learning English. Their language *through* learning, and even language *for* learning, drives that [awareness of space] because they need to find the answers, wherever they may be. (Roxana, Extract 13)

Extracts 12–13 indicate that designing and delivering language-driven CLIL lessons, particularly anchored in the Triptych, enabled the student-teachers to recognise that language teaching and learning can include a spectrum of spaces. As discussed in *Benson (2021)*, the extracts hint that language teaching may need to become more authentic and recognise learning opportunities within and outside the physicality of a classroom.

The findings describe that the student-teachers employed the Triptych as an organising tool for lesson planning and delivery. Additionally, it became a catalyst to make sense of complex key concepts (e.g., SFL) and develop new knowledge (e.g., pluriliteracies and multispatiality of language education) as part of student-teachers’ professional biography (*Larsen-Freeman, 2023*).

## 5. Discussion

Drawing on the findings that described the student-teachers’ relationship with the Triptych as they learnt about and implemented it for lesson design and delivery, the framework exceeded its functionality as merely an organising tool. To conceptualise these dynamic processes, we suggest that the Triptych could be experienced as a lens that facilitates focus on three levels (*Fig. 2*): Level 1, which refers to lesson planning and delivery; Level 2, which refers to how language-driven CLIL curriculum relates to theories in the field of language education/linguistics; and Level 3, which refers to how the student-teachers’ personal theories of practice relate to the concepts in the field but were not included in their preparation. We conceptualise these levels as nested circles,

**Table 3**  
Student-teachers’ responses to learner requests on content and language.

Request	Frequency	%	Student-teacher response	Frequency	%	Example
On content	195	32.45	Re-orientation	118	60.51	Ask learner to use their mobile phone to find the information online. Direct the learner to a list of useful websites. Ask learners to pay attention to features of their city and take notes.
			Direct instruction	49	25.13	Provide an example. Reformulate information in English or Spanish.
			No response	28	14.36	–
On LtL	406	67.55	Direct instruction	228	56.16	Provide the language needed.
			Re-orientation (i.e., suggest to find the answer elsewhere)	147	36.21	Ask learner to use their mobile phone to find it on an online Spanish-English dictionary. Ask learners to note any signs in the city.
			No response	31	7.64	–



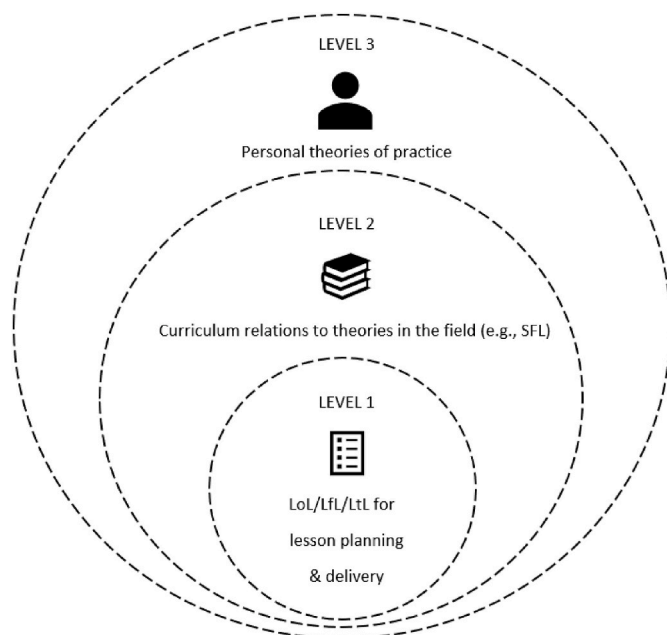


Fig. 2. Student-teachers' understanding of the Language Triptych.

whereby the Triptych is understood to facilitate student-teachers' ability to execute the technical aspects of their job (Level 1), as well as their expanding awareness of language education theories and practices (Level 2), ultimately including their own place within disciplinary discourses (Level 3).

Level 1 confirms CLIL conceptual (e.g., Coyle et al., 2010; Coyle & Meyer, 2021) and empirical (e.g., Turner, 2021) literature in relation to how the Triptych can be used as a facilitating tool for materials selection, lesson planning, and delivery. This level is widely documented in the data. For example, when the students chose the topics for their lessons, the Triptych helped them highlight the content language needed to develop their teaching practice. Similarly, Karina (Extract 4) highlighted a need to develop a "sophisticated awareness" of how to capitalise on spontaneous classroom interactions to foster LtL (see also Extract 7).

Such observations in Level 1 support a view of the Triptych as a lens which contributes to immediate needs such as the selection of aims for teaching, or language skills integration in the classroom. In this regard, its technical and practical valency is successful: the Triptych facilitates a conducive language-driven CLIL learning experience which seeks to enable learners to develop disciplinary as well as academic and interactional language (Ellison, 2015; Turner, 2021). Notwithstanding, the Triptych exposed the participants' limited subject knowledge (Extract 1). In this regard, and in line with the literature (e.g., Moate, 2023; Pavón Vázquez, 2014; Pavón Vázquez & Ellison, 2013) collaboration/consultation between content and language teachers is paramount so that the former can support the latter regarding the content selected and necessary subject-specific genres for their language-driven CLIL lessons. At Level 1, recognising these opportunities and shortcomings in CLIL teacher preparation is critical because it relates to the professional competences needed for CLIL (Kao, 2022).

Level 2 shows the participants' expanding awareness and connections between practices (Level 1) and what can be termed as external/received theories which inform CLIL and language teaching more generally. In this regard, the Triptych becomes a catalyst that reconciles formal preparation, understood as the formal/academic knowledge offered in the teacher education curriculum, and teaching practice. For example, the student-teachers in Extracts 3 and 6 made pedagogical connections to topics included in their preparation such as SFL concepts including genre, function, and textual metafunctions (Coffin, 2017), language as a meaning-making system (e.g., Lin, 2016), and the role of

discourse and interaction of language learning and language use (e.g., Morton, 2020). In addition, they developed a practice-oriented understanding and use of the functional syllabus (Ellis, 2019; Wilkins, 1981) and language awareness (Andrews & Lin, 2018) as Extracts 2 and 5 illustrate respectively. As student-teachers plan and reflect using the Triptych, these theoretical and conceptual frameworks become enacted in practice rather than remaining abstract academic topics.

Thus, the Triptych has the potential to serve as a catalyst to help student-teachers establish associations between practice theories supporting CLIL. This conceptualisation supports the work of Andrews and Lin (2018), who argue that language awareness is a productive aim for teacher professional development. As the student-teachers reflected on their practicum, the Triptych enabled the teachers to build schemata not only of linguistic knowledge and its value, but of other modules in their programme of study.

Finally, Level 3 captures student-teachers' personal creation of theories of practice. Hence, the Triptych may also be seen as a lens for pedagogical-linguistic knowledge development. At this level, the student-teachers may expand their understanding of language education. For example, our findings show that the participants advanced notions akin to the concepts of pluriliteracies (Extracts 9 and 10), translanguaging (Extract 11), and multispatiality (Extracts 12 and 13), each anchored within their own practice. It should be stressed that while these concepts are part of the theoretical constellation that informs the language education field, they were not discussed in the participants' modules. These data lend support to the literature regarding links between content learning and the literacies needed to encode and develop that learning (e.g., Coyle & Meyer, 2021). In particular, autonomous, student-led activities revealed student needs, mainly prompted by LtL, which in turn brought about awareness of space and language learning environments (see Benson, 2021).

Thus, in Level 3 student-teachers engage in reflective practice, and in so doing they may agentively construct a theory of practice (van Lier, 1996) which problematises their own vision of language teaching. Using and reflecting on the Triptych has the potential of enabling student-teachers to adopt an enquiry, practice-oriented, and critical perspective in which beliefs, evidence from the field, and reflection coalesce for the personal creation of professional knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the potential contained in supporting language student-teachers' understanding and use of Coyle et al.'s (2010) Language Triptych in one specific context. We acknowledge that the findings reported provide a positive view, with the student-teachers not articulating any negative views of the Triptych. We speculate this was the case given its novel inclusion in the programme. These findings need to be taken with caution since the experience occurred in a single programme where the student-teachers were supported in different ways throughout their teacher learning. Similarly, we focused on the development individual student-teachers' understanding of the Triptych, without emphasising the rich collaborative potential of language teachers working with content teachers across disciplinary lines. Future studies may need to investigate the use of the Language Triptych in programmes which prepare teachers for language teaching in which a focus on integrating content and language is not included, as well as in collaborative settings that involve pairs or groups of teachers with different backgrounds.

Drawing on this study, language teacher education programmes may wish to include the Triptych in their pedagogy and practice-oriented modules since it can serve as a springboard to discuss CLIL in general and fundamental aspects of it such as CDFs (Dalton-Puffer, 2016) and SFL, as well as wider concepts such as theory of practice (van Lier, 1996). At a micro-level, the Triptych can support student-teachers' conceptualisation, design, and use of language (education), aims, resources, activities, assessment tasks, and support strategies. At a macro level, incorporating the Triptych in language teacher education can promote a professional disposition that helps future teachers reconcile

potent constructs around the design and development of a meaningful and empowering language curriculum. We note that these implications not only apply to language education but also to other teacher education programmes since, as discussed in Coyle and Meyer (2021), any subject/content teacher can benefit from understanding the critical role that disciplinary literacies play in pupils' learning.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Darío Luis Banegas:** Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **D. Philip Montgomery:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Nina Raud:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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