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## An insight into language fossilisation of the speaking skills of clil and non-clil teachers: similarities and differences

### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to discuss CLIL and non-CLIL teachers' language fossilisation in terms of speaking. Firstly, there is a brief overview of fossilisation, focusing on its definition and scope. Secondly, the spoken discourse of CLIL and non-CLIL teachers in the classroom is described. Thirdly, there is a discussion of current research and the data collected through a questionnaire conducted among CLIL and non-CLIL teachers in Poland. This shows that slight differences in terms of language repertoire have been found between CLIL and non-CLIL teachers, placing the former at the forefront due to the strategies they tend to use frequently and the language areas they do not consider to be difficult or problematic at all.

**Keywords:** fossilisation, CLIL teachers, non-CLIL teachers, speaking skills, spoken discourse.

### 1. Introduction

In linguistic studies, fossilisation is connected with a permanent decomposition of language forms which can be observed as early as at an intermediate competency level in the shape of incomplete and/or incorrect language systems and subsystems. It was introduced into the field of SLA by Selinker in 1972 and was based on his general observation that a large proportion of (second) language learners never achieve native-speaker proficiency. This arrested progress can occur in one or more specific features of their language use. The reason why fossilisation occurs in some students but not in others lies in such critical causal factors as first language (L1)

interference, illiteracy in the L1, a lack of emotional, psychological, or social attachment to the L2 environment or culture, age of arrival in the L2 community or when they began to have formal instruction, the existence and manner of corrective feedback, and insufficient comprehensible input of the new target language and lack of opportunity to use it in both speaking and writing.

When it comes to the speaking skills of CLIL and non-CLIL teachers, it should be underlined that both groups need to analyse the language from the perspective of the actual use they make of it and from the perspective of the language characteristics that it makes use of. However, in CLIL, which is defined as the “dual-educational environment where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language, typically, to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary, or tertiary level” (Dalton-Puffer 2011:183), teachers have a more challenging task to face since, apart from focusing on the language itself, they also need to transmit very specific content knowledge using that language. Therefore, their ability to speak the language very well is important.

The aim of the paper is to discuss CLIL and non-CLIL teachers’ language fossilisation with reference to speaking. Firstly, we set the scene and provide a brief overview of fossilisation, focusing on its definition and scope. Secondly, we describe CLIL and non-CLIL teachers’ spoken discourse in the classroom. Thirdly, we discuss current research and the data collected through a questionnaire conducted among CLIL and non-CLIL teachers in Poland, and finally, we offer practical implications that might be introduced into future teacher training.

### **1.1. Definitions of fossilisation**

Attempts to define fossilisation have been made by many researchers so far, with varying degrees of uniformity, worded as follows:

- stopping short (Selinker 1972),
- ultimate attainment (Selinker 1972),
- stabilised errors (e.g., Schumann 1978),
- backsliding (Schachter 1990),
- erroneous forms (Allwright & Bailey 1991),
- learning plateau (e.g., Flynn & O’Neil 1988),
- typical error (e.g., Kellerman 1989),
- persistent non-target-like performance (e.g., Mukattash 1986),

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- low proficiency (e.g., Thep-Ackrapong 1990),
  - de-acceleration of the learning process (e.g., Washburn 1991),
  - ingrained errors (Valette 1991),
  - errors made by advanced learners (e.g., Selinker & Mascia 1999),
  - variable outcomes (Perdue 1993),
  - cessation of learning (e.g., Odlin 1993),
  - structural persistence (e.g., Schouten 1996),
  - random use of grammatical and ungrammatical structures (Schachter 1996),
  - long-lasting free variation (Ellis 1999),
  - persistent difficulty (Hawkins 2000),
  - deviant features of the second language (Wysocka 2008).

What emerges from this plethora of descriptions is the complexity of the phenomenon characterised by its temporary and regressive character leading to language blockage/stoppage and impediment. Secondly, they all fall into the category of either erroneous or non-erroneous forms in the target language, their common denominator being the lack of interlanguage development.

This dichotomy is likewise observed in longer definitions, such as:

- the inability of a person to attain native-like ability in the target language (Lowther 1983),
- persistence of an incorrect form in the emerging interlanguage (Preston 1989),
- permanent failure of L2 learners to develop complete mastery of target language norms (Bartelt 1993),
- a process whereby repeated practice and exposure to the language does not lead to any further development (Sharwood-Smith 1994).

The best summary of what non-erroneous fossilisation is comes from Van-Patten and Benati (2015:119), who state that: Fossilisation is a concept that refers to the end-state of SLA, specifically to an end-state that is not native-like. By end-state, we mean that point at which the learner's mental representation of language, developing system, or interlanguage (all are related constructs) ceases to develop.

## **1.2. Erroneous vs. non-erroneous fossilisation**

As regards the deficits in language that are indicative of fossilisation, it is predominantly manifested via:

- stabilised or fossilised errors,
- systematic errors,
- random use of ungrammatical structures,
- long-lasting free variation,
- backsliding, and
- bad language habits (Han 2004:25ff.).

By definition, stabilised or fossilised errors are those deeply ingrained deviant forms that FL learners cannot dispense with. Systematic errors, as the name suggests, cover those incorrect language forms which a learner produces systematically. In opposition to this systematicity, however, stand ungrammatical structures used randomly, which serve as proof of an as yet uninternalised language system. Long-lasting free-variation ordinarily induces errors which take the form of linguistic items “misplaced” or “mismatched”. Backsliding consists in those inappropriate language features which were thought to have disappeared from the learner’s interlanguage a long time ago. Bad language habits in turn are manifested in learners’ habitual errors, i.e., routinised language behaviours deviating from TL norms.

Littlewood (1996:34) adds to this detailed inventory the occurrence of non-systematic errors, whereas Corder (1993:27) quotes Schachter’s resident errors. The former are not as much the result of an underlying system of language as they are caused by immediate communication strategies and performance factors, whereas the latter are commonly understood as exhibiting the properties and characteristics ascribed to both fossilised and non-systematic errors. And, last but not least, aside from repetitions, false starts, fillers, and pauses which are high frequency instances of behavioural evidence of fossilisation, Scarcella (1993:109) draws attention to discourse accent, whereby he means “some of the conversational features (Cfs) of the learner’s L2 in the same way in which they are employed in the learner’s first language (L1)”. These do not preclude either strange-sounding speech markers or language hedges, which tend to persist permanently for many adult L2 learners. In the case of correct language forms, the list of the most apparent evidence of fossilised language competence involves:

- low proficiency,
- low fluency,
- random use of grammatical structures (Han 2004:26),
- overuse of progressive speech markers (De Bot & Hulsen 2002:262),

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- conversions (De Bot & Hulsen 2002:262),
  - regressive speech markers (De Bot & Hulsen 2002:262),
  - overuse of conversational features (Scarcella 1993:109),
  - overuse of hedges and emphatics (Williams 1990:126),
  - lexical simplification (Blum-Kulka & Levenston 1983:121), and
  - language habits.

Generally speaking, low proficiency is reflected in a learner's poor skills in using a language. This, accordingly, may be reflected in reading, writing and speaking as well as comprehension problems. Difficulties with reading are expected to be manifested via a lack of a learner's understanding of a given text or his/her inability to read fluent English. Writing problems are believed to start at the level of sentence construction, not to mention intersentential and intrasentential relationships, such as text coherence and sentence cohesion. Low proficiency in speaking is usually mirrored by the learners' inability to get the meaning across, or, for instance, their avoidance of communication. Difficulties with comprehension, on the other hand, might be the reason for these communication problems, and, apart from that, are likely to cause misunderstandings. Low fluency, following Leeson (1975) and Nowak-Mazurkiewicz (2002), is not only evident in wrong pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns, but also through numerous repetitions and hesitation sounds, like, for instance, false starts and fillers. Random use of grammatical structures is a distinctive feature of correct but chaotic language performance, which many a time is difficult to comprehend and follow. Its difficulty derives from the fact that it is hard to predict when and how often these grammatically correct language forms will appear in a given context, making it impossible to anticipate the shape and structure of communication as such. The aforementioned overuse of progressive speech markers such as, for example, excessive cut-offs, causes interruptions which, more often than not, change the language being produced into a medley of bits and pieces. Such fragmented and disconnected discourse is very likely to bring about misunderstandings on the part of both its sender(s) and receiver(s). Conversions are reflected in syntactic changes in the sentences produced. These cover substitutions of complex sentences with simple ones, and marked structures with unmarked ones, as well as a reliance on a restricted syntax. Regressive speech markers, such as for instance the sounds "uh" or "erm", result in lengthy and slow speech due to moments of hesitation and long pauses. These in turn lead to unfinished and incomplete sentences, and/or complete but "delayed" production. The overuse of conversational fea-

tures like topic shifts, interruption, or back channel cues, contributes to frequent misunderstandings and difficulties in continuing with the train of thought. The resultant language production, as was previously the case, tends to be fragmentary, multi-track and, hence, ambiguous. Excessive hedges and emphatics, on the other hand, are likely to result in verbiage or, in other words, empty and meaningless strings of language. If this is the case, the language seems to serve as an instrument to produce sounds but not say a word in fact. Lexical simplification, as Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983:121) put it, is evident in “making do with fewer words”. It ranges from the replacement of long and difficult lexical items with short and simple vocabulary, the use of approximative meanings and L1 incorporation to being economical with TL words. Consequently, however, FL learners are likely to avoid certain topics, and abandon message delivery due to their lack of linguistic means to fill in their semantic gaps. Finally, language habits, which are defined here as correct language forms in the shape of pre-fabricated patterns and routine formulas used over-excessively, are bound to be responsible for the production of empty words and expressions, similar to the aforesaid hedges and emphatics.

Although Selinker and Lakshmanan (1993) clearly state that there is no precise list of fossilisable language structures, fossilisation is likely to occur at phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical levels. While foreign accents and examples of bad pronunciation in general are to a greater or lesser extent observable among FL learners irrespective of their L1 background and language, fossilisable language structures at the level of morphology, syntax, and lexis are more L1 specific, and their frequency of occurrence is likely to differ depending on the native language of a given FL learner.

## **2. CLIL and NON-CLIL teachers’ foreign language requirements and competences**

According to the Journal of Laws (2020), teachers who teach content subjects in a foreign language in Poland, apart from the content subject competences, should have an MA or a BA in philology or applied linguistics in the field of a particular foreign language (§13, section 1, para. 4). It should be stated that teachers who have finished MA studies are allowed to teach both in primary and secondary schools with bilingual education, while those who finished BA studies can only teach in primary schools with bilingual education. It is also stated that teachers who want to teach

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a content subject in a foreign language might have completed studies in a country where a given foreign language is the official language or graduated from a teacher training college specialising in a particular foreign language or might have a language certificate which proves that their command of a foreign language is at B2 or B2+ level according to the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) (§13, section 1, para. 4).

In terms of the requirements for general foreign language teachers in Poland, the qualifications are very similar to those concerning CLIL teachers. As stated in the Journal of Laws (2020), foreign language teachers should have an MA in philology or applied linguistics in the field of a particular foreign language together with teaching qualifications (§12, section 1, para. 4). Those who have a BA in philology or applied linguistics in the field of a particular foreign language together with teaching qualifications are only allowed to teach in kindergartens or primary schools. As in the case of CLIL teachers, it is also stated that foreign language teachers who have finished studies in a country where a given foreign language is the official language are allowed to teach the foreign language provided they have teaching qualifications. Besides, teachers who have MA qualifications in any field and a certificate at advanced or proficiency level in a foreign language or a certificate proving that they have passed the state teacher examination in a foreign language are also allowed to teach this language. Finally, those who graduated from a teacher training college specialising in a particular language have proper qualifications to teach a foreign language, too (§12, section 1, para. 4)

The requirements concerning CLIL and non-CLIL language teachers in Poland are very similar, but CLIL teachers are required to have additional qualifications in a particular content subject (e.g., geography, biology, maths, etc.) What is interesting when analysing the requirements for foreign language teachers provided by the Journal of Laws (2020) is that teaching qualifications are mentioned in each case, yet in the case of foreign language requirements for CLIL teachers these qualifications are not mentioned at all, which does not mean they are not significant. Since CLIL is about content and language teaching, these teaching qualifications should be also required.

When considering teachers' language in the CLIL environment, Coyle (2005) suggests three different kinds of language that should be used in the CLIL classroom, namely, language **of** learning, language **for** learning and language **through** learning.

Language **of** learning “is an analysis of language needed for learners to access basic concepts and skills relating to the subject theme or topic” (Coyle et al. 2010:37). In other words, CLIL teachers need to focus on subject specific vocabulary and subject-typical grammar. Furthermore, it also covers the knowledge and use of subject-specific register or genre. For CLIL teachers it means “shifting linguistic progression from a dependency on grammatical levels of difficulty towards functional and notional levels of difficulty demanded by the content” (ibidem).

Language **for** learning “focuses on the kind of language needed to operate in a foreign language environment” (ibidem). It means that CLIL teachers need to use the language that allows them to manage the learning environment. Moreover, CLIL teachers need to provide learners with language that enables them to learn and develop their higher-thinking skills.

Language **through** learning is based on “the principle that effective learning cannot take place without active involvement of language and thinking” (Coyle et al. 2010:37). CLIL teachers’ role is to support learners with language that allows them to express new meanings, articulate their understanding of particular concepts, and take part in various classroom interactions which require capturing not only new knowledge but also the language. At this stage, CLIL teachers need to support learners both linguistically and cognitively.

When referring to non-CLIL teachers’ foreign language, Richards (2015) mentions teachers’ target language proficiency or the following competences: “providing good language models, maintaining use of English [a foreign language] in the classroom, giving explanations and instructions in English [a foreign language], providing examples of words and grammatical structures, giving accurate explanations of meanings of English [a foreign language] words and grammatical items, using and adapting authentic English-language [a foreign language] resources in teaching, monitoring one’s own speech and writing for accuracy, giving correct feedback on learner language use, providing input at an appropriate level of difficulty and engaging in improvisational teaching” (Richards 2015:113).

Having looked at the required foreign language competences of CLIL and non-CLIL teachers, it can be inferred that in both cases teachers should be able to use the language in particular ways and to know about the language so as to be able to focus on form, recognise genres, make input comprehensible and provide feedback on language use.



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### **3. The study**

#### **3.1. Current research aims**

Bearing in mind the pedagogical and linguistic challenges CLIL teachers and non-CLIL teachers need to face in the classroom, we decided to investigate the quality of CLIL and non-CLIL linguistic competence specifying their level of oral language fossilisation. Since language teaching qualifications for CLIL teachers are not formally required and these teachers usually do not have dual education, which means they mostly specialize in a content subject and have an additional language certificate showing their level of a foreign language (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski & Opacki 2020; Marsh et al. 2008; Papaja 2014; Romanowski 2018), we assumed there would be a difference between the scope of oral language fossilization of CLIL and non-CLIL teachers. Therefore, the research questions were the following:

1. Do CLIL and non-CLIL teachers differ as regards speaking skills? If so, in what way?
2. What are the most often self-reflected areas of language incompetency when it comes to speaking in the case of CLIL and non-CLIL teachers?
3. What are the reasons for CLIL and non-CLIL teachers' current quality of speech?
4. How to remedy the situation? What to focus on in a FL classroom?

#### **3.2. Participants and procedure**

Even though more than 40 teachers were contacted, eventually, the group under study involved 14 participants since only 18% of the respondents declared that they had experience in CLIL. As a result, we decided to investigate the responses of 8 non-CLIL teachers and 6 CLIL teachers, among whom 11 were females (82.5%) and 3 males (17.5%). The teachers had varied teaching experience ranging from 5 to more than 21 years and they were selected from both primary and secondary schools. They were contacted by e-mail and asked whether they wanted to participate in the research. Those who agreed were sent a link to an online questionnaire that they were asked to fill in. The research was conducted between June 2022 and December 2022

#### **3.3. Data collecting instrument**

The data collection instrument is divided into two parts. The first concerns basic information such as sex, age, general work experience and

work experience in CLIL. The second part, designed by Wysocka (2009), is organised around a checklist based on symptoms of fossilised language competence observed among advanced language users of English as a FL. It is divided into two sections: one focuses on speaking and the second on writing. The first one encompasses grammar, lexis, morphology, phonology and fluency-related issues and the second one is organized in a similar way, operating in the same areas in the case of the first three, replacing phonology with punctuation and spelling, and fluency with text-coherence. As each section is sub-divided into several parts, each corresponding to the language areas affected by fossilisation, completion of the table provides a possibility to raise not only teachers' language awareness, but also their awareness of fossilisation.

In this article, only the data concerning oral symptoms of fossilised language competence will be discussed.

### 3.4. Analysis and results

Non-CLIL teachers and their language competence:

Teacher 14	Teacher 15	Teacher 16	Teacher 23	Teacher 26	Teacher 34	Teacher 39	Teacher 41
wrong tense	lack of subject-verb agreement	omission of articles	wrong structures	wrong verb forms	wrong word order	wrong structures	wrong word order
wrong words	wrong phrases/expressions	non-existent words/phrases	wrong phrasal verbs	wrong phrases/expressions	non-existent words/phrases	wrong words	non-existent words/phrases
wrong suffixes	wrong prefixes	wrong prefixes	wrong prefixes	wrong prefixes	wrong suffixes	wrong suffixes	wrong prefixes
stress difficulties	stress difficulties	stress difficulties	problems with pronunciation	stress difficulties	stress difficulties	stress difficulties	problems with pronunciation
double repetitions of language sequences	silent pauses	double repetitions of language sequences	reformulations aimed at self-correction	vocal pauses	meaningless sentences	meaningless sentences	unfinished sentences

Table 1: Non-CLIL teachers' data

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Judging by these results, derived from a self-rating list, all non-CLIL teachers of English have fossilised language competence to varying degrees in each of the language subsystems listed. This is evident in the reappearance of errors in those structures commonly presumed to have already been internalised, and, hence, used correctly, yet that continue to appear regularly. Secondly, they all seem to fit the characteristics of a fossilised language teacher representing a suspended language competence (Wysocka-Narewska 2021) which is described as consisting of numerous deficiencies in a language (e.g., grammar, lexis), the reinforcement of mistakes made and tendencies to use the incorrect language in the classroom, which has a detrimental effect on L2 input and output.

As far as grammar is concerned, two of the respondents (Teacher 34 and 41) declared that they use wrong word order and two others (Teacher 23 and 39) marked wrong structures as indicative of their syntactic problems. The remaining problematic areas were reported by individual teachers and covered using wrong tenses (Teacher 14), lack of subject-verb agreement (Teacher 15), omission of articles (Teacher 16) and wrong verb usage (Teacher 26). In terms of lexis, the entry most often self-checked by the teachers was the use of non-existent words/phrases (Teachers 16, 34, 41). The category of wrong phrases/expressions was ticked by two study participants (Teacher 15 and 26) and the choice of wrong words was expressed by other two people (Teacher 14 and 39). The least problematic section here seemed to be phrasal verbs, which only one person mentioned (Teacher 23). When it comes to morphology, the difficulties indicated by the respondents were twofold and concerned the use of wrong prefixes and wrong suffixes exclusively, the former being confirmed by five people (Teacher 15, 16, 23, 26 and 41) while the latter by three (Teacher 14, 34 and 39). Almost the same two-track distribution of problematic issues appeared at the level of phonetics, where the teachers could be divided into those struggling with stress difficulties (Teacher 14, 15, 16, 26, 34 and 39) and those experiencing problems with pronunciation (Teacher 23 and 41). Last but not least, the group under investigation self-reported problems within the scope of fluency in the form of producing double repetitions (Teacher 14 and 16), meaningless sentences (Teacher 34 and 39), vocal pauses (Teacher 26), silent pauses (Teacher 15), unfinished utterances (Teacher 41) and reformulations (Teacher 23).

## CLIL teachers and their language competence:

Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 8	Teacher 12	Teacher 22	Teacher 27
lack of subject/object-pronoun agreement	wrong tense	problems with direct/indirect questions	wrong prepositions	wrong structures	misuse of articles
wrong phrasal verbs	none	wrong phrases/expressions	wrong words	wrong phrasal verbs	wrong words
wrong suffixes	wrong suffixes	None	wrong prefixes	wrong prefixes	wrong prefixes
stress difficulties	none	stress difficulties	stress difficulties	problems with pronunciation	None
double repetitions of language sequences	quadruple repetitions of language sequences	None	reformulation aimed at self-correction	reformulation aimed at self-correction	double repetitions of language sequences

Table 2: CLIL teachers' data

When looking at the data provided by CLIL teachers, it can be inferred that most of the participants exhibit a highly fossilised language competence that could be referred to as locally suspended language, consisting in using wrong structures, prepositions, articles, prefixes, suffixes and wrong words or phrasal verbs. Furthermore, they also indicate stress difficulties as far as pronunciation is concerned.

In terms of grammar, the CLIL teachers claimed to have problems with subject/object pronoun agreement (Teacher 3), tenses (Teacher 4), direct and indirect questions (Teachers 8), English structures (Teacher 22) and the wrong use of prepositions and articles (Teachers 12 and 27 respectively). The CLIL teachers also declared that they have problems with lexis and morphology, namely, with the wrong use of vocabulary (Teacher 8, 22 and 27) or the wrong use of phrasal verbs (Teacher 3 and 22). Only one participant (Teacher 4) stated that they have no problems with lexis at all. Additionally, all CLIL teachers but one (Teacher 8) reported having problems with using wrong suffixes or prefixes. With regard to pronunciation, two participants (Teacher 3 and 27) claimed to have no problems, while the other 3 participants stated that they had problems with stress (Teacher 3, 8 and 12). Finally, the participants pointed out that they have problems with double repetitions of language sequences (Teacher 3 and 27), refor-

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mulation aimed at self-correction (Teacher 12 and 22) and quadruple repetitions of language sequences (Teacher 4). Teacher 8 claimed not to have problems at all as far as fluency is concerned.

### 3.5. Discussion

In trying to answer the first research question on whether CLIL and non-CLIL teachers differ as regards speaking skills, what seems most striking when comparing the data is the fact that non-CLIL teachers' language fossilises more globally than that of CLIL instructors, which means that every language area undergoes unwanted change and/or modification in the case of the former. To be more specific, touching upon the second part of the first research question concerning the exact differences between the two groups, the non-CLIL respondents rely on non-existent words/phrases, which is highly unprofessional and may sound funny. Going even further, the pauses, both silent and vocal, which the participants of the study tend to overuse may be perceived by students as evidence of a teacher's insufficient speaking skills and competences. Following this path, the language of CLIL teachers seems typical of localised fossilisation comprising both ongoing errors that show little or no change and some linguistic areas that are still successfully realized (in this case lexical, morphological, phonological subsystems, and fluency). What is more, when at a loss, this group of teachers makes use of self-correction techniques rather than playing for time and eventually giving up on the utterances.

Apart from these differences, it is important to emphasise the many common features that are representative of the language both groups of teachers possess. At the same time, they serve as an answer to the second research question regarding the most frequently self-reflected areas of spoken language incompetence for both CLIL and non-CLIL teachers. These involve: wrong tenses, wrong structures, wrong words, wrong phrases/expressions, wrong phrasal verbs, wrong suffixes, wrong prefixes, stress difficulties, problems with pronunciation, reformulations, and double repetitions of the language sequence.

Based on particular examples drawn from the study, it is fair to say that most of the common shortcomings listed are in the areas of basic English and rules introduced to FL users at the elementary and intermediate levels. Following the third research question on the reasons for CLIL and non-CLIL teachers' current quality of speech, it seems that the answer might be encapsulated under the label of bad teaching, which is explained in detail below.

## Reasons for teachers' fossilised competence:

- Firstly, it might be the case that teachers themselves have not attained full mastery of the L2, and inevitably guide their learners into incorrect language usage. In such a situation learners do not receive correct input in the classroom and are therefore not able to produce correct patterns on their own. The case of weaker teachers and their students' exposure to inaccurate patterns is especially exacerbated if the issue of language awareness is not raised and/or approached by the educators.
- Secondly, following Valette (1991), some teachers prefer not to correct their students' mistakes, even if the situation requires it. Moreover, as a result, the classroom provides large quantities of comprehensible but flawed input in the form of highly motivating but highly inaccurate peer speech.
- Last but not least, another source of teachers' suspect level of English may be over-teaching and unnecessary teaching coming from linear syllabi that have been used in Polish schools for decades. The example below concerns a part of the syllabus for secondary school students at the intermediate level.

VERB	NOUN	ARTICLE	CONJUNCTION
Present continuous	Countable vs. uncountable nouns	Definite vs. indefinite article	<i>and, or, but, if, unless, that, till, until, when, where, while, after, before, because, (al)though, so, in</i>
Present perfect	Singular and plural forms	O article	
Present perfect continuous	Saxon genitive		
Past simple	double genitive		
Past continuous	Gender nouns		<i>spite, on condition</i>
Past perfect	Compound nouns		<i>that, despite, supposing, providing/</i>
Past perfect continuous	Nouns used adjectively		<i>provided that, so as, even though, whereas, as if, as though</i>
Future simple	Word formation		
Future continuous			
Future perfect			
Future perfect continuous			
Future simple			
Future perfect			

Table 3: An excerpt from the teaching programme for the English language (The Ordinance of the Ministry of Education (2018))

The verb-related content, as shown in the example above, focuses on the present continuous, past continuous and future continuous as well as

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teaching differences between the tenses, with no attention paid to the present tense aspects, resulting in a cognitive overload leading to the fossilisation of basic forms such as wrong tenses and wrong structures found among the sample investigated in the study. On the contrary, noun-based components, articles and conjunctions exemplified in the table, too often neglected and under-taught in schools, are likely to have a detrimental effect on language users' competence, including their language skills. The immediate consequence of such a situation might be blocked communication manifested in unfinished and/or meaningless expressions as was the case for the sample in question. All in all, any linguistic item that is less than appropriate in the case of non-CLIL and CLIL teachers is believed to stem from too much or too little attention given to one linguistic unit in an area to the detriment of another, and vice versa.

Finally, to answer the last questions: How to remedy the situation? What to focus on in a FL classroom?, we suggest that teachers should revise the syllabi and, if possible, pay attention to the most important issues without repetition, reformulation and juxtaposition in conjunction with one another as still happens in the classroom. Following James (2013:241), a de-fossilising means of introducing the teaching material would be that of newly taught items being repeated a lot though spaced away from other TL items that are similar.

Another step that we propose to introduce, which is more learner-directed, would be carrying out voice recordings during English-speaking classes. It is enough to record learners' two-minute speeches. By recording their own voices, transcribing the content and taking part in retrospective self-correction, learners are expected to become more autonomous and, eventually, more language-focused. If learners get used to self-correction in the class, it is a good idea to extend these exercises and go beyond the classroom environment, asking them to reflect on language material independently at home. There is every likelihood that the habit of language retrospection will become a spoken language defossilisation technique with time, in the context of both learners and future teachers.

Last but not least, the content of the more recent coursebooks designed for teaching English as a foreign language is promising. For instance, "English File 4th edition. Upper-Intermediate. Student's Book with Online Practice" has been modified to offer a balance of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and the development of language skills. In addition to that, the book is compatible with the Say it application, which helps learners develop correct pronunciation, intonation and accent.

### **3.6. Limitations of the research**

Although the aim of the research has been fulfilled, there are certain limitations to the study. First and foremost, the main limitation is the form of the study, that is a self-report, which is not always valid. Here, we can signal the problem in a limited form, i.e. only the scope of fossilisation-related issues that teachers are aware of. Secondly, the number of CLIL teachers who have experience in CLIL is not representative since CLIL teachers are very sensitive about their language skills due to having had limited language teaching education. Next, the research was conducted in the Polish context only, therefore, it would be advisable to conduct similar research among non-CLIL and CLIL teachers in other countries. Finally, the lack of current research on the issues investigated makes it quite difficult to compare the data. However, we hope that the above research will encourage others to further investigate these issues, expanding the study to include teachers' opinions regarding the causes of recurrent language problems, to name but one example.

### **4. Conclusion**

Taking into account all the data gathered, it is legitimate to say that the subjects' spoken competence is a reflection and result of their past learning experiences, such as bad teaching and/or over-learning defined as having too much exposure to a given linguistic item, which is, at the same time, a typical cause of fossilisation. Slight differences in terms of the language repertoire have been found between CLIL and non-CLIL teachers, placing the former at the forefront due to the strategies they tend to use frequently (i.e., reformulation), and the language areas they do not consider difficult or problematic at all. Although both groups of instructors declare that they have insufficient knowledge of English and skills in practice, CLIL teachers seem to be more language sensitive and resourceful, which gives them the advantage in their attempts to combat fossilisation on a daily basis.

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