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## **From EFL to CLIL and EMI in Poland: Language Education in Transition**

### **Introduction**

Learning content through the medium of a second language is a form of education which is growing rapidly in both secondary and tertiary educational phases. In both secondary and tertiary education, Poland and other countries are seeing a major transformation in the way that the teaching of English as a foreign or second language is being conceived and offered to adolescents and adults. Instead of relying essentially on classrooms in which the primary aim is to teach the target language, the vehicle through which English is delivered is an academic subject other than English. That being said, a content subject is taught in a language which is not the first language of the majority of the students in class, nor of the majority population outside that class. It is this latter criterion that distinguishes English Medium Instruction (EMI) from what is called Content-based learning (Briggs, Dearden & Macaro 2018). Another label given to the practice of teaching content through a foreign or second language in countries where the majority of the population does not have that language as their L1 is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which is normally to be found in European contexts, especially in secondary education (Ruiz de Zarobe & Jiménez-Catalán 2009).

The overarching objective of the present paper is to provide a timeline of language education in Poland from the late 1980s till the present times with a particular focus on English as a Foreign Language. The role of EFL in formal schooling, initiated in Poland in the 1960s, has augmented over the past few decades to an unprecedented scale by introducing bilingual programmes through CLIL in secondary education in the 1990s and EMI in higher education institutions at the beginning of the second millennium. These rapidly growing phenomena provide evidence for the stance that teaching academic subjects through the medium of English as a Foreign Language is of benefit to developing English proficiency without a detrimental effect on content learning.

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## **Foreign languages in the Polish system of education**

The past two decades witnessed two education reforms in Poland. The Education Reform of 1999 implemented changes to improve the overall level of Polish education. A comprehensive primary school cycle of six years was introduced, to be followed by a lower-secondary school of three years and three- or four-year secondary schools (general upper-secondary or technical schools). The New Reform enacted by the Government in 2017 redrew the existing school system adjusted to other EU member states by implementing radical changes and re-establishing the two-tier education system that had existed prior to 1999. Within both the new structure (after 2017) and the old one (1999–2017) English has always played the role of the one of the most popular foreign languages taught in Poland (Romanowski 2019). This comes as a surprise, because due to historical ties and influences the languages that were traditionally popular in Poland until 1989, had been Russian and German. However, when Poland became a democratic country, and especially after 2004, when it joined the European Union, the Polish education system started to favour English as the main foreign language (Górowska-Fells 2012).

With the compulsory education beginning for a Polish child at the age of six, also learning a foreign language is instantly obligatory. State schools introduce the second foreign language when children turn 13 (7th grade of primary school). Language education continues until learners graduate from vocational or secondary schools at the age of 18 or 19 respectively. Foreign languages are also taught throughout tertiary education. As mentioned, English is currently the most widely taught foreign language, followed by German and Spanish. Its popularity grew exponentially over the past years, and eventually it ousted other foreign languages usually perceived by learners as second choices (Romanowski 2019).

Due to the political changes occurring in Poland after 1989 and the integration with the European Union in 2004, the country geared its language teaching to the uniform policy prevailing all over the EU states (Przygoński 2012). The transformations that occurred after 1989 triggered not only socio-economic changes, but also laid the foundations for changes in education in Poland. Language education has always been considered a crucial element of the Polish education system. Poland's accession to the EU led to a significant extension of the educational offering in terms of foreign language instruction (Wróblewska-Pawlak & Strachanowska 2000). English, an elitist language available to only a few in the past, evolved to an unprecedented level (see Table 1).

	1986/1987	1997/1998	2005/2006	2012/2013	2020/2021
English	6.6%	39.6%	58.5%	61.4%	65.4%
German	8.2%	20.2%	31.6%	30.2%	26.1%
French	2.8%	7.5%	3.3%	2.9%	2.1%
Spanish	n/d	n/d	0.3%	1%	3.4%
Italian	n/d	n/d	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Russian	82.4%	32.7%	6.1%	4.4%	2.9%

Table 1. The popularity of foreign languages taught in Polish schools between 1986 and 2021 (Source: Statistics Poland)

Alongside other foreign languages, i.e. German, French, Italian and Spanish, English is also regarded to be the prevalent means of instruction in bilingual programmes that have started their existence all over the country in the first decade of the 21st century. Further on, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme or the European Baccalaureate started to be offered on the Polish educational market. In such contexts English Medium Instruction (EMI), at both secondary and tertiary levels, remains the predominant methodology. Bilingual classrooms in state schools have also been available for a very long time for less privileged students, who cannot afford high tuition fees (Papaja 2014; Romanowski 2020). Clearly, English has witnessed the dominance and ubiquity at all educational levels to become the most favoured foreign language. Its presence has strengthened thanks to numerous innovative EU approaches that have been implemented in most European states, such as the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

### Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a common term used for a number of related approaches intended for the teaching of content subjects through the medium of a foreign language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010; Romanowski 2018). Wolff (2003) assumes that foreign languages are best learnt by focusing not so much on the language itself but on the transmitted content taken from school subjects, e.g. Mathematics, Geography, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Arts and so on (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols 2014; Pérez Cañado 2016). The underlying principle of CLIL refers to the belief that young people should be more effectively prepared for the multilingual and cultural requirements of diversified culturally, ethnically and linguistically Europe where mobility is expanding. It is an approach premised on so-called naturalistic language learning rather than formal language learning. Through CLIL learners

receive increased exposure to the target language, as it is the medium of instruction in other content areas besides the language itself, as compared solely in foreign language classes (Toth 2018). Languages are thus perceived as being learned naturally through language use (Cenoz 2015).

Considering the fact that English has become both the language of science and academic research, and an obligatory subject in all schools, the most logical decision would be to combine the two achievements so that a learner could take advantage of them simultaneously. This is the core of CLIL also labeled as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of content and language with the objective of promoting both content and language mastery to pre-defined levels (Marsh *et al.* 2010). It is essential to highlight that the additional language is not supposed to be the only medium of instruction and thus, it should be used interchangeably with the mother tongue. Its frequency of use will largely depend on its level of advancement among teachers and students as well as the complexity of discussed issues. That is why integrating language and non-language content has been referred to as the hallmark of all forms of bilingual education (Lo & Macaro 2015).

CLIL has been implemented in more than 20 European countries (Maljers, Marsh & Wolff 2007; Marsh & Wolff 2007; Dalton-Puffer 2011; Pérez Cañado 2014). Over the past two decades an increasing body of research has demonstrated that CLIL can enhance multilingualism and provide opportunities for deepening learners' knowledge and skills. CLIL has been found to be additive (one language supporting the other) and not subtractive (one language working against the other). It involves a process which is generally curriculum-driven with the language curriculum arising from the content curriculum (Merino & Lasagabaster 2018). At the level of schooling, successful education in one or more languages requires that learners be equipped with the language for thinking about the content. When learning in a CLIL programme, where an additional language is used, language-supportive resources, procedures and activities are actively and coherently used to enable learners the use of language purposefully. This support acts as a form of scaffolding helping learners to effectively process information, negotiate understanding, and co-construct knowledge (Dalton-Puffer 2017; Ruiz de Zarobe 2017).

### **CLIL in Poland**

The first CLIL-related pedagogies were introduced in Poland as far back as the 1960s, when selected content subjects were taught through the medium of a foreign language for the whole duration of a lesson in a secondary school in Gdynia (Zielonka 2007; Papaja 2014). The language initially used was English. At the time this form of instruction was regarded as elitist, and in some environments it still is. Nowadays, a vast number of schools offer CLIL instruction using English, German, French, Spanish and Italian as the languages of instruction.

CLIL provision in Polish schooling is labelled as bilingual education (Dzięgielewska 2008). Special classrooms are established in primary and secondary schools where learners undergo instruction in a selected foreign language as well as their mother tongue. The instruction is usually limited to two, three or four subjects, most commonly Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, and History of Art (Olpińska 2010; Romanowski 2016). While bilingual education in Poland is not a new phenomenon, it should be noted that no uniform methodology has been implemented yet. The reasons are twofold. First of all, as observed by Baetens-Beardsmore (1993), educational traditions in a particular country determine whether certain subjects are to be taught by the medium of a foreign language. Secondly, these are the prevailing linguistic needs that dictate the most desirable provision. As rightly posited by Wolff and Otwinowska-Kasztelanica (2010), approaches to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) vary in specific EU states as a result of administrative decisions taken by governments. Depending on the educational context, while implementing CLIL, such factors as the choice of content subjects, the proportion of CLIL and non-CLIL classes, the recruitment process, or the type of school in which CLIL is introduced, are considered (Czura & Papaja 2013).

Marsh *et al.* (2008) enumerate four main types of instruction or curricular models to be distinguished in Polish schools. The distinctive feature lies in the proportion between L1 and L2 used during the lessons. For example, in Model A, referred to as Extensive Language Medium Instruction, lessons are mainly conducted in a foreign language, as far as both the lesson and syllabus realisation are concerned. The mother tongue is restricted to situations where translation of terminology is required or short recapitulation of the main points is needed. This model is used to achieve the syllabus aims as well as to develop learners' language competence at a very high level. The main purpose is to achieve the expected content learning outcomes while developing and using a very high degree of competence in English. In Model B, often labeled as Partial Language Medium Instruction, lessons are conducted in both Polish and a foreign language and the two languages are used interchangeably and whenever necessary. About 50% of lesson time is devoted to each language. The predominant aim is to achieve course objectives, less attention is paid to linguistic competence. The logic behind this model is to achieve expected content learning outcomes while developing and using a very high degree of competence in the target language. Model C, called Limited Language Medium Instruction, offers lessons with limited use of a foreign language. Hence, using both Polish and a foreign language interchangeably is common. Between 10% and 50% of lesson time is devoted to a foreign language. Teaching the aspects of course content is the primary objective whereas the linguistic knowledge is expanded chiefly through the study of new lexis. The reasoning is to achieve expected content learning outcomes alongside the limited use of the target language. This generally involves the activation of existing knowledge, supplementing it with new words, terms and concepts, and providing opportunities for cross-linguistic development. Last but not least, when a foreign language is used sporadically while teaching we mean Model D, often defined as Specific Language Medium Instruction.

Very little time is devoted to the selected foreign language, which is mainly used to achieve particular aims (i.e. a lesson is conducted in Polish, but it is based on texts in the target language or project work where the results are presented in the target language, however most of the content studied earlier is available in Polish). This model is complementary as it focuses on the course objectives and the secondary aim involves the use and development of foreign language competence. The main objective is to complement courses taught in Polish and fulfil the expected content learning outcomes by providing opportunities for specific forms of the foreign language usage and development (Romanowski 2016; 2018).

### **English Medium Instruction**

On the other hand, English Medium Instruction (EMI), defined as a model providing instruction in English in contexts where English is not the language commonly spoken, has been considered a more advanced paradigm than CLIL (Dearden & Macaro 2016; Macaro 2018). Not surprisingly, it is a rapidly growing global phenomenon, the demand for which seems to have spread throughout the world only in the past twenty years. Brumfit (2004) asserts that English is already the language of education and the most dominant L2 medium of instruction in Europe forecasting its position to strengthen further. The first to implement EMI were Sweden and the Netherlands in the 1950s. Finland, Norway and Hungary followed in the 1980s. The trend, however, took off in the 1990s expanding not only to Western but also to Eastern and Central Europe (Coleman 2006). At the moment, over 55 countries all over the world and 21 European states, e.g. Italy, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Portugal, Spain have been increasingly using EMI in secondary and tertiary education (Dearden 2015). Policies designating English as the medium of instruction have been in place in a number of Asian higher education institutions, including Brunei, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Korea, the Philippines and Singapore (Lin 2015). Further, in some European countries EMI is promoted as a passport to a global world. Policy makers, teachers, administrators and parents consider EMI as a mechanism for internationalising their education offer, e.g. in Croatia, Estonia, Portugal or the Netherlands (Król & Romanowski 2018). There are practical reasons for this, for most academic research is published in English (over 90% in international, high-impact publications).

Dearden (2015) also makes it clear that the term EMI itself is so new that no proper definition exists. Hence, the notion is sometimes misunderstood in various educational contexts. As a result, EMI is wrongly associated with teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through English implying that the interaction and texts used for instruction in EFL should avoid any recourse to the students' first language. It is also mistakenly perceived as part of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) programmes where courses are specifically designed to aid the students with undertaking particular professions. In addition, EMI often misleads researchers and practitioners

into believing that it is similar to EAP (English for Academic Purposes) designed to provide students with academic lexis and discourse enabling them to function at a university where academic subjects are delivered in English.

Although it seems that EMI has not yet received as much attention in Europe as CLIL, its advantages seem to be self-evident. The central idea of the programme is that it does not concentrate on the acquisition of grammatical structures or studying other language-connected aspects representing the formal language learning (English as a school subject) but focuses on the development of communication skills, intercultural relationships, as well as on natural interactions with both native and non-native speakers of English. EMI contributes to the international mobility of the students involved promoting intercultural awareness (Tsou & Kao 2017). The programme aids students in broadening their knowledge about the today's highly interconnected world that is driven by English as an international language. Universities and other higher-education institutions located in non-Anglophone speaking countries require their prospective students to demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English. Therefore, it is believed that participation in EMI programmes would facilitate the entrance process. EMI students do not only develop the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), but also gain specialist knowledge in each discipline (Biology, Geography, Psychology, Mathematics, etc.) in a language other than their mother tongue. Given that the EMI programme ends with an internationally recognized matriculation exam (e.g. International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme), students usually do not have to sit any additional written or oral tests verifying their linguistic competence or subject-content knowledge (Król & Romanowski 2018).

Apart from the academic aspect, EMI can bring considerable advantages to the future career of the students involved, both at the domestic and international level. In addition, it is viewed as beneficial not only for the students, but also for the schools that implement the programme, as it boosts the prestige of such institutions. Having employed international staff, participating in foreign exchange programmes and co-operating with other bilingual schools worldwide may attract not only parents, but also local and national governments which, in consequence, may lead to obtaining additional funding needed for further development and scientific research (Tamtam *et al.* 2012). EMI gives schools an opportunity for promotion and participation in international projects and research, gives access to a wide range of diversified teaching and learning materials, as well as helps to build up international respect and visibility on the European stage.

The approach provides greater exposure to the target language and more opportunities to use it. As opposed to regular English classes where an emphasis is placed on the grammatical forms and structures, the English-medium instruction methodology allows for a daily contact with the target language through a variety of academic subjects (Romanowski 2020). The difference between the regular classes and EMI classes lies in the manner of language acquisition. Students no longer learn about

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English as a separate school subject but learn through English as a medium to study non-language content (Dearden 2015). This mode of language learning allows them to develop both receptive and productive skills. They gather information from listening and reading and convey knowledge through speaking and writing, acquiring at the same time new terms and concepts from a non-language discipline. The main purpose of EMI therefore, is to focus on the meaning of the subject content and not on the language learning and its form. This implies that the target language is acquired unintentionally, and its development can be referred to as a by-product of the process (Król & Romanowski 2018).

### **EMI in Poland**

Throughout Poland many universities are increasing the number of courses they are offering students through the medium of English. The primary reason for this is the need to attract lucrative international students by internationalising the institution and thereby gaining it prestige through global university rankings. The secondary reason is to be able to offer home students an EMI curriculum which will prepare them better for the globalised world (Bolton & Kuteeva 2012).

Currently, in Poland there exist 54 universities, which educate in humanities, social sciences, medical sciences, technical sciences and natural sciences and all of them offer programmes in English. As regards faculties providing English degree programmes, 37% are from Economics, 21% from Engineering, 14% from Science and 7% from Law. This includes full degree programmes at Bachelor, Master as well as Doctoral level. As might be expected, English-medium teaching is more prevalent in public universities, which have developed international links throughout the past years. On the other hand, several well-established private universities offer selected programmes in English, which is due to the fact that they are typically wealthy institutions and charge higher fees (Romanowski, forthcoming).

While discussing English-medium instruction in Poland, it is imperative that we consider if and, to what extent, the teaching of discipline-specific language and academic communicative skills occurs. As Basturkmen (2010) indicates, it is precisely this focus on discipline-specific language that needs to be regarded as the so-called central premise of English for Specific Purposes, which endeavours to teach the language the students require to be able to communicate efficiently in their work or study. Thus, as postulated by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), EMI programmes should equip the learners with the linguistic skills they need to communicate the expertise developed in the programme. However, discipline-specific terminology is not sufficient and the curricula of English-taught degree programmes should include English for Academic Purposes, whose courses ideally introduce students to a wide array of academic communication and study skills, such as note-taking, presenting, discussing, reading and writing academic papers – which are of prime importance in most disciplines and tertiary education contexts (Hyland 2006). This, however,

in many contexts situated in Polish universities leaves a lot to be desired, because cooperation between language specialists and the respective subject departments to design course curricula is scanty. As a result, explicit language teaching in EMI programmes is frequently deemed unnecessary and ESP/EAP teaching has much lower status than content courses.

Based on the above considerations, a framework consisting of various instructional types implemented in EMI in Polish higher education needs to be discussed. Its aim is to signal potential opportunities and implications for language learning in the said programmes. English-medium teaching in higher education in Poland can be classified into five distinct categories, namely: pre-sessional ESP/EAP courses, embedded ESP/EAP courses, adjunct ESP/EAP courses, EMI and ICLHE (Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education). As Unterberger (2012) points out, EMI programme designers frequently face the fact that students' prior knowledge and their language level differ considerably. To counterbalance the disparity in the students' language proficiency, curriculum designers implement pre-sessional ESP/EAP courses, which are tailored for a specific programme to match its linguistic demands. This particular category, however, is hardly ever employed in Poland as it consists in co-operation between a language specialist and an expert in the professional content. In contrast to pre-sessional courses, ESP/EAP consists of classes which are part of a regular curriculum. A typical example of embedded EAP teaching would cover courses on academic writing, which are meant to guide students during thesis writing (Schmidt-Unterberger 2018). This type of programme has become popular in Poland only recently with a massive increase of immigrant and foreign students pursuing Master's and PhD programmes. However controversial they may seem, the remaining two types, i.e. EMI and ICLHE, have been popular in Poland for a while. Clearly, they lack explicit language learning objectives, therefore in case of the former, one may conclude that the great majority of English-medium teaching in higher education can be labelled as EMI, while in the case of the latter, it purely remains just a theoretical conceptualisation (Wilkinson 2011). When English-taught degree programmes are introduced at Polish universities, content experts use English as the medium of instruction, without explicitly teaching discipline-specific language. Due to the continuous exposure of students to English in EMI settings, they are expected to incidentally improve it (Järvinen 2008). As far as ICLHE is concerned, a course needs to pursue two aims: the students' mastery of content as well as the development of language skills. Indeed, it is fundamental that language specialists in both curriculum design and programme delivery be involved (Gustafsson & Jacobs 2013). This type of provision is obviously less widely used in Poland due to the fact that content experts are expected to work closely together with language teachers when planning and teaching each of their courses. That being said, we may conclude that ICLHE still requires time-consuming joint lesson planning, team teaching and collaborative assessment. Hence, language teaching would then be intertwined with the content and would ideally take place in the same lesson, which in the Polish higher education context is sometimes impossible due to severe financial constraints.

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### CLIL vs. EMI

In light of the present discussion, it is crucial to make a clearer distinction between EMI and CLIL as these two concepts are often confused. CLIL is deeply rooted in the European ideal of plurilingual competence for EU citizens. On the contrary, EMI has no contextual origin. Whereas CLIL may refer to any second, additional or foreign language (L2), e.g. English, German, Spanish, Italian, etc., EMI clearly underlines the significant role of English as the medium of instruction at any educational levels. In addition, CLIL as an objective sets out furthering both content and language, while in EMI there is concentration on the acquisition of grammatical structures. The main objective of EMI programmes is the development of communication skills and intercultural relations with native and non-native speakers of English (Dearden 2015). It should also be highlighted that although CLIL has often been used to describe programmes within primary and secondary education, EMI can be implemented at any stage of the educational cycle (Simpson 2017; Toth 2018).

Studies have also shown that balance between content and language is seldom realised in actual practice (Cenoz 2015). Because CLIL teachers are generally non-native speakers, they are rather regarded to be content experts than language ones (Dalton-Puffer 2011; Nikula 2015). They often lack sufficient proficiency in the target language to solve issues of linguistic character. Meanwhile, for teachers trained as language experts but who lack competence in the CLIL subject, issues of insufficient content expertise arise (Pladevall-Ballester 2015). That being said, CLIL teachers have one or the other competence rather than both, and have difficulty integrating content and language instruction.

In a similar vein, concerns have been raised regarding EMI programmes. Shohamy (2013) has highlighted a number of issues associated with learning content through language that is not fully familiar to students. Other problems including equity in learning conditions for different groups, bias in assessment through a second language, and outcomes of content learning vs. development of language proficiency. On the other hand, one assumption associated with EMI is the belief that the more students are exposed to English in lessons, the more fluent they will become (Paulsrud, Tian & Toth 2021). However, EMI presupposes and is enabled by the ability of all participants (teachers and students) to use English as a lingua franca. Therefore, the paradox is that the expectation that more exposure leads to greater proficiency also relies on the students having enough proficiency to manage the EMI lesson. This illogicality may be assuaged through pedagogical translanguaging practices that do not limit students to English as a language for learning, recognising that simply because students and/or teachers choose EMI does not mean that they have the ability to manage the EMI lesson.

## Conclusions

Both Content and Language Integrated Learning and English Medium Instruction have been hot topics in applied linguistics for quite some time, in terms of their relevance for students, teachers and educational institutions in Poland and abroad. While CLIL has revolutionised bilingual education at the secondary level, EMI has grown exponentially with the increasing internationalisation of higher education (Dafouz & Smit 2020). Therefore, it may be assumed that the use of English at various levels of education in Poland is likely to continue into the indefinite future. Moreover, the transition from EFL, where English was just one of the many school subjects or university courses, to CLIL and EMI, where it is applied as a tool of instruction, has led to an unprecedented development of the role of English.

All the language policy changes over the past few decades have moved Polish educational thinking from a view of declared internationalisation to the increasingly globalised, Europeanised or Anglicised style of education. As a result, an increased number of CLIL schools in Poland has been seen and, likewise, more courses and programmes have been offered to students through the medium of English at Polish universities. The primary reason, as reported by various stakeholders, was to attract more students by internationalising institutions and, thereby gaining it more prestige through regional rankings in the case of secondary education institutions as well as global rankings for higher education establishments. The secondary reason was to offer home students a new curriculum that would employ currently the most prestigious and powerful language and eventually prepare them for the globalised world.

It needs to be reiterated that both CLIL and EMI lead to the successful L2 acquisition. Despite the perceived threat to L1, it is believed that educational institutions not offering subjects and courses in English to their students risk exclusion from the academic world. EFL teaching has decreased as it was ousted by various forms of bilingual instruction. This means that English principally has gained a vehicular function. It is considered to be the major language of instruction and a tool to communicate subject matter, rather than as a subject or a course itself (Järvinen 2008; Schmidt-Unterberger 2018).

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### **From EFL to CLIL and EMI in Poland: Language Education in Transition**

**Abstract:** The past decades have seen a substantial rise in the use of English as a language of instruction in Polish, European and global secondary and tertiary education. That being said, a shift from the English as a Foreign Language approach to Content and Language Integrated Learning as well as English Medium Instruction paradigms has been observed. While

the former is an instructional approach employing English or any other foreign language in secondary education, the latter has been implemented to serve as an instructional framework applying exclusively English in higher education contexts. This article reconceptualizes the prior role of English as a Foreign Language in the Polish system of education and discusses the rapidly expanding frameworks of Content and Language Integrated Learning and English Medium Instruction labelled as increasingly ubiquitous and significant trends in internationalising both secondary and tertiary education.

**Keywords:** English, EFL, CLIL, EMI, Poland

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