

THE MISSING LINK: A CALL FOR TRANSLANGUAGING IN CLIL ITALIAN L2 SECONDARY EDUCATION

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1. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Since the early 1990s, Europe has promoted the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as an innovative pedagogical methodological approach designed to enhance linguistic competence through subject-based instruction. The foundation for this initiative can be traced, as Serragiotto (2023: 186) stressed, back to Article No. 126 of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992², which establishes the European Community's role in supporting education. Specifically, it underlines that the Community is tasked with contributing to the development of quality education by fostering cooperation among Member States and supporting and supplementing their actions, while fully respecting the Member States' responsibility for the content and organization of their education systems, including their cultural and linguistic diversity.

Within this broader European framework, Italy has progressively adopted the CLIL approach through more than one hundred projects since the late 1990s, across all educational levels (Eurydice, 2006: 33). In upper secondary schools, for instance, at least one non-linguistic subject is expected to be taught through a foreign language (FL)³. Most CLIL initiatives in Italy focus on teaching scientific or humanistic subjects through English, German, or French as FLs (Cinganotto, 2016: 390). Conversely, Italian L2 learners with migrant backgrounds seldom benefit from CLIL methodologies specifically designed to support their academic language development.

In multilingual classrooms⁴, where students constantly navigate among multiple linguistic repertoires, CLIL focused solely on one language may not fully address issues of inclusion and equity in learning. For this reason, integrating translanguaging practices can provide a more effective pedagogical response. Translanguaging, as theorized by García (2009), acknowledges and legitimizes learners' full linguistic resources as tools for meaning-making, enabling students to access disciplinary content through flexible language use, in line with the concept of dynamic bilingualism (García, Lin, 2017).

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² http://www.cvce.eu/obj/treaty_on_european_union_maastricht_7_february_1992en-2c2f2b85-14bb-4488-9ded-13f3cd04de05.html.

³ The Italian Education Reform Law No. 53 of 2003, together with its implementing regulations issued in 2010, established the generalized introduction of CLIL through a FL during the final years of all upper secondary schools. In the *Liceo Linguistico* (i.e., linguistic high schools), the teaching of one non-linguistic subject through a FL is required starting from the third year, with an additional subject taught in a second FL beginning in the fourth year.

⁴ While multilingualism can be understood as the regular use of both a dominant and a majority language by minority or immigrant speakers (Charalampoglou, Karras, 2023: 42), in this paper the notion is also employed following the broader perspective of the Council of Europe (2020: 30), which conceptualizes multilingualism as the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual levels.

Nevertheless, despite the Council of Europe's (2020) strong advocacy for the development of pluricultural and plurilingual repertoire, the implementation of CLIL involving Italian as a Second Language (L2) remains limited and uneven (Eurydice, 2006: 43). Furthermore, research exploring the intersection between CLIL and translanguaging in Italian secondary education is still scarce, representing a significant gap in the field. As a result, the potential of a translanguaging-informed CLIL approach remains largely unexplored in the Italian context, despite its promise for enhancing comprehension, identity negotiation, and participation among L2 learners.

This paper aims to be placed in this perspective, whose purpose is to provide a systematic review of the literature to examine existing studies on CLIL and translanguaging conducted in Italy over the past 25 years, to identify how and if these pedagogical practices have been conceptualized, integrated, and evaluated in relation to Italian L2 teaching in secondary schools.

The paper is structured as follows: § 2 presents an overview of the state of the art of CLIL, while § 3 discusses pedagogical and theoretical translanguaging, outlining both the benefits and limitations of translanguaging methodological approaches and practices. § 4 outlines the research methodology, and § 5 discusses the results obtained through the PRISMA framework, concluding with pedagogical proposals for integrating CLIL and translanguaging in Italian L2 secondary school settings (§ 6).

2. CLIL: PRINCIPLES, MODELS, AND CRITICAL ISSUES FOR ITALIAN L2

2.1. *The origins of CLIL*

The origins of CLIL can be traced to earlier pedagogical paradigms such as Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and its more recent evolution, Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), which have been identified as theoretical precursors of CLIL (Gabillon, Ailincal, 2015). Both CBI and CBLT share fundamental principles, including the integration of language and content, the use of authentic materials, the relevance of subject matter to learners' lives, and the support of active learner participation whose skill acquisitions lean on repeated opportunities for practice. These approaches are grounded in Krashen's Monitor Theory and Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, according to which language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to meaningful, contextualized, rich communication, rather than explicit grammar instruction⁵. In that vein, linguistic output is monitored and refined through the student's conscious grammatical knowledge, which serves to regulate and correct language use after production.

Therefore, building on CBI, CBLT further emphasizes the functional and interactional dimensions of L2 learning (Mantovani, 2024), viewing language not merely as a system to be mastered but as a tool for authentic communication and cognitive engagement. Within this skeleton, immigrant teenager language learners are positioned not simply as students but as social agents who build on their pluricultural repertoire (Council of Europe, 2020:

⁵ According to the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, the activation of the Language Acquisition Device postulated by Chomsky requires exposure to input that is both meaningful and comprehensible. This input must be situated at the appropriate level within the natural order of language acquisition, as expressed in Krashen's (Krashen, Terrell, 1998: 33) formula 'i + 1', where 'i' represents the learner's current level of linguistic competence, and '+1' denotes the next stage of potential development. It is within this zone of proximal advancement that educators can most effectively intervene through appropriate instructional methodologies.

127) and must navigate real-world contexts through informed decision-making. Yet, the Council of Europe guidelines (Beacco *et al.*, 2016) emphasize that language education should not be treated as a marginal or isolated component of the curriculum; instead, it must be conceived as a fundamental element of each school's mission and culture, embedded across all subject areas. Additionally, research consistently shows that many learners are unable to achieve adequate proficiency in the language of schooling without instructional approaches that integrate language development with content learning (2016: 157). Within this in mind, CLIL can be seen as a flexible pedagogical approach that operationalizes these principles.

CLIL, as conceptualized by Coyle (2007: 549-551), formalizes these principles through the “4Cs” framework, which together define the pedagogical foundations of the approach. Each dimension represents a core component of the integrated learning process:

- i) *Content* refers to the active construction of disciplinary knowledge rather than its passive transmission.
- ii) *Cognition* links content learning to cognitive development and higher-order thinking within a Vygotskian framework of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development.
- iii) *Communication* emphasizes interaction and negotiation of meaning as central to linguistic development.
- iv) *Culture* promotes learners' ability to interpret, compare, and critically engage with diverse cultural frameworks, suggesting that culture is not limited to the transmission of factual knowledge about different societies, but rather involves advancing interdependence between language, thought, and identity.

As observed by Cinganotto (2016), the framework may more accurately be conceptualized as encompassing the “5Cs”, since all learning occurs within a *context*, an overarching dimension that situates the other four components within a meaningful environment of learning and use.

The implementation of CLIL for Italian L2 involves a structured process of material design, including the selection of disciplinary content, multimodal input, and cognitively engaging tasks that foster both language and subject learning.

Two main orientations of CLIL have been identified (Ball, 2009): a strong/hard form, which is content-driven and prioritizes the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge through the target language, and a weak/soft form, which is language-driven and uses content as a vehicle for linguistic development. Both share the assumption that language and cognition evolve interdependently through meaningful engagement with subject matter. For non-native Italian-speaking adolescents with limited or elementary language proficiencies, CLIL-based lessons in Italian L2 can be particularly beneficial, as they foster vocabulary growth and conceptual understanding through meaningful engagement with curricular content (Serragiotto, 2023). Moreover, empirical evidence shows that CLIL more effectively fuels the acquisition of specialized and disciplinary vocabulary, both in receptive and productive settings, than traditional instruction (see, for instance, Xanthou, 2011).

In the CLIL perspective, Italian as an L2 assumes a threefold role (Coyle *et al.*, 2010): it functions as the language *of* learning, the language *for* learning, and the language *through* learning, that is, a tool for reflection and knowledge construction. The latter dimension aligns closely with sociocultural theories of language learning, which posit that knowledge cannot develop independently of linguistic interaction (Coyle, 2007).

Within the Italian secondary *curricula*, these principles are reflected in key competencies to be acquired at the end of the first cycle of education, such as multilingual competence or expertise in cultural awareness and expression⁶.

In Italy, the integration of CLIL and Information and Communication Technology, as highlighted by Cinganotto (2016), has gained relevance, particularly following the 2015 National Digital School Plan, which sought to modernize teaching practices and the broader educational system. Recent years have seen the emergence of systematic experimentation with CLIL applied to Italian L2. Scholars such as Coonan (2000) and Serragiotto (2006) have contributed to spreading CLIL-based projects, emphasizing that certain subjects, especially history, geography, and STEM (i.e., Science, Technologies, Engineering, Math) disciplines, are naturally suited to this approach due to their combination of verbal and visual elements (maps, charts, diagrams, images). As noted by Balboni (2012), Italian is already used as a vehicular language across various subjects, making the exploration of its microlinguistic varieties an authentic application of CLIL principles; in fact, Italian teachers in the humanities have long practiced implicit forms of CLIL through grammar, history, and literary analysis.

Further contributions come from the *Centro Linguistico* of the University of Padova, where CLIL for Italian L2 has been explored within university contexts. As Mascherpa (2016) notes, such initiatives foster the development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency-oriented competence models for international students, reinforcing the relevance of CLIL as a pedagogical pathway for advanced linguistic and cognitive integration.

Nonetheless, CLIL remains predominantly associated with the teaching of English and other FLs (e.g., French, Spanish, German), with limited implementation in Italian L2 secondary education.

2.2. *Limits to CLIL*

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the CLIL model often reflects a monolingual ideology, constraining its full potential in multilingual classrooms. As noted by Tai *et al.* (2025), there is a persistent tendency to conceptualize languages as distinct and separate systems, which paradoxically reinforces the ideal of the monolingual norm even within ostensibly multilingual pedagogies. This perspective limits CLIL's capacity to leverage learners' entire linguistic repertoires and to recognize other pedagogical practices, such as translanguaging, as a legitimate cognitive and communicative resource. Santipolo (2023) further emphasizes that contemporary societies are characterized by complex, dynamic identities, which are not merely the sum of multiple affiliations but rather an integrated synthesis of linguistic, cultural, and experiential dimensions. In a similar vein, May (2014) identifies a persistent multilingual bias in language education policies, wherein monolingual norms and native-speaker competence remain the implicit benchmark, thereby reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and marginalizing learners' authentic multilingual experiences.

A further challenge lies in the distinction between hard and soft CLIL (Paran, 2013). While hard or strong CLIL prioritizes content mastery through the target language, soft or weak CLIL is language-driven, often at the expense of disciplinary content. In practice, classroom implementation increasingly favors the soft approach, providing substantial L2

⁶ <https://www.mim.gov.it/-/indicazioni-nazionali-per-il-curricolo-scuola-dell-infanzia-e-scuole-del-primo-ciclo-di-istruzione>.

input but offering limited engagement with subject matter, which can hinder comprehension and learning outcomes for L2 students. Moreover, the “4Cs” curriculum lacks a coherent theoretical framework that addresses the key pedagogical issues specific to CLIL (Gabillon, Ailincăi, 2015: 315), and the pupils’ L1 frequently occupies a marginal role, thereby reducing opportunities for immigrant learners to draw on their existing linguistic resources to support their understanding. Ergo, teachers are required to engage in careful text adaptation, scaffolding, and reworking of materials to ensure both content accessibility and meaningful linguistic engagement (Gilardoni, 2021a). These limitations underscore the need for a more balanced CLIL implementation, which integrates content and language goals while valorizing learners’ full linguistic repertoire.

3. TRANSLANGUAGING: PRINCIPLES, MODELS, AND CRITICAL ISSUES FOR ITALIAN L2

3.1. *The origins of translanguaging*

As part of the so-called ‘multilingual turn’ (May, 2014: 1), the concept of translanguaging originates in 1994 from the pioneering work of C. Williams within the context of bilingual education in Wales, where it was initially conceptualized as a pedagogical practice enabling learners to use multiple languages dynamically and strategically to support learning (Gallagher, Colohan, 2014). Translanguaging, or *Trawsieithu* in Welsh, was designed to foster biliteracy and metalinguistic awareness⁷ among bilingual learners, acknowledging that both languages can function in an integrated, complementary manner to mediate cognition, comprehension, and communication (Lewis *et al.*, 2012).

Translanguaging as a theoretical approach and pedagogy has since been distinguished from code-switching, which often assumes that bilinguals operate with two separate linguistic systems (Carbonara, Scibetta, 2020; Tai *et al.*, 2025). In contrast, translanguaging views a bi/multilingual speaker’s linguistic repertoire as a single, unified, dynamic system (García, Li Wei, 2014), often entailing the flexible integration of elements from different languages. This theoretical divergence is reflected in the debate between Unitary Translanguaging Theory (UTT) and Crosslinguistic Translanguaging Theory (CTT), which represent two different orientations towards bilingualism. While both reject rigid language separation, UTT conceptualizes the bilingual repertoire as unitary and undifferentiated (cf. García, 2009), whereas CTT views languages as distinct yet interconnected systems, emphasizing crosslinguistic transfer (cf. Cummins, 2022). This distinction parallels García and Lin’s (2017) “strong” and “weak” versions of translanguaging. Despite these differences, both perspectives support translanguaging as a pedagogical approach that enables learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires.

From a heteroglossic standpoint, this is conceptualized not as the use of separate systems, but as the deployment of a unified linguistic repertoire. As Firpo and Sanfelici (2016: 45) assert, translanguaging constitutes a *continuum* of alternations drawn from a speaker’s entire linguistic resources. Corroborating this continuum-based view, Carbonara and Scibetta (2019) further elaborate a fluid distinction between pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging, framing them as interrelated points on this spectrum rather than rigid categories. The former refers to deliberately planned instructional strategies that purposefully integrate two or more languages within educational settings; the latter

⁷ Metalinguistic awareness represents the ability to use language to discuss and analyze various aspects of language itself by reflecting on its nature, form and function (Torregrossa, Carbonara, 2025: 864).

describes naturally occurring bilingual practices in which linguistic boundaries are fluid, dynamic, and continuously negotiated. Either perspective enables apprentices to strategically mobilize their entire linguistic repertoire to meet communicative and cognitive demands, thereby fostering the development of receptive and productive skills across languages.

The relevance of translanguaging has also been acknowledged in broader European language education frameworks. In the Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), the term translanguaging appears only twice in the main text (and twice more in the references), where it is discussed in relation to the broader notion of plurilingualism. Notably, it is encompassed within the conceptualization of plurilingual practices as actions undertaken by plurilingual individuals who flexibly mobilize their entire linguistic repertoire to meet communicative and cognitive needs (Council of Europe, 2020: 31), thus highlighting the value of flexible, integrated language practices that recognize learners' full repertoire, particularly in multilingual classrooms. Pedagogically, translanguaging enables teachers to scaffold learning by leveraging learners' stronger language(s) to support development in the weaker one (Lewis *et al.*, 2012), and to mediate complex concepts such as tense and aspect distinctions. Emphasizing the dynamic interplay of languages, translanguaging strategies facilitate not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking, literacy, and both teacher and learner autonomy (Moraru *et al.*, 2025), making it a powerful approach for multilingual and immigrant learners. Practices proposed by scholars such as García and Li Wei (2014), including the use of cognates, word walls, sentence starters, the comparison of multilingual texts, L1 note-taking, and multilingual vocabulary inquiry, hold significant potential for multilingual classrooms, including those with newly arrived students. In the Italian context, foundational contributions by Carbonara, Scibetta, and Torregrossa within the *L'AltRoparlante* project⁸ have advanced this pedagogical approach in secondary schools, laying the ground for a more systematic integration of translanguaging strategies into mainstream education, an area which, to date, remains underdeveloped and inconsistently applied across secondary schooling.

3.2. *Barriers to translanguaging in the Italian context*

Despite the growing presence of bi/multilingual education initiatives in Italy, instructional models in upper secondary schools remain largely confined to CLIL in English or English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) (Costa, 2025). In contrast, translanguaging as a deliberate pedagogical practice remains relatively unfamiliar and sparsely implemented, with isolated experimental cases in primary and higher education. This gap is particularly consequential at the secondary level, where both recently arrived migrant students and their Italian peers could substantially benefit from translanguaging-oriented approaches that nurture inclusion, participation, and deeper understanding of content. The limited permeation of translanguaging in Italian schools reflects persistent institutional and ideological barriers, including the dominance of monolingual norms in institutional settings and a systemic lack of teacher training in plurilingual pedagogies (Tai *et al.*, 2025). Consequently, translanguaging remains largely excluded from mainstream CLIL implementation, which is still perceived primarily as an English-medium initiative rather than as a flexible, multilingual framework.

⁸ <https://www.ecml.at/en/ECML-Programme/Programme-2020-2023/RECOLANG/Example-4-LAltRoparlante-Italie>.

In response to these limitations, scholars have proposed integrative frameworks such as “Translanguaging CLIL” (Bartlett, 2022; Charalampoglou, Karras, 2023) and “Translanguaging in CLIL” (Portolés, Basgall, 2024; Tai *et al.*, 2025), which adapt translanguaging pedagogy to CLIL classrooms to reposition students’ L1s as legitimate pedagogical resources. These models seek to reconceptualize CLIL through a translanguaging lens, advocating for the systematic inclusion of learners’ full linguistic repertoires as cognitive, communicative, and metalinguistic assets. In line with this perspective, recent proposals for pedagogical translanguaging in CLIL contexts emphasize the strategic alternation between the target language and students’ home languages as a means of scaffolding disciplinary learning, fostering metalinguistic awareness (Torregrossa, Carbonara, 2025), and enhancing both linguistic and academic outcomes.

However, research on these emerging practices remains scarce in the Italian context, and even internationally, studies are largely confined to implementations in primary education or to EMI at the tertiary level (see, for instance, Serra, Feijoo, 2022; Dalzier, Guarda, 2021).

4. CLIL AND TRANSLANGUAGING IN ITALIAN L2 SECONDARY EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

This section reports a systematic review of the literature on CLIL and translanguaging in L2 Italian secondary school settings. The review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (hereafter referred to as PRISMA) guidelines (cf. Moher *et al.*, 2009), enabling an interpretative thematic synthesis of the findings. Although PRISMA was originally designed for quantitative systematic reviews and meta-analyses, its principles have been increasingly adopted in qualitative and mixed-method reviews within educational research. In emerging fields such as CLIL and translanguaging in Italian L2 contexts, where empirical studies are still limited, PRISMA could provide a rigorous yet flexible framework for ensuring methodological transparency.

The adoption of the tool aligns with recent systematic reviews on related topics in CLIL research, such as Poveda-Garcia-Noblejas and Antropova (2024), who examined CLIL-related studies in school settings, and Moraru *et al.* (2025), who conducted translanguaging research in secondary schools. These studies demonstrate the growing relevance of structured, transparent methodologies for mapping trends and identifying research gaps in CLIL and translanguaging pedagogy.

Therefore, rather than serving as a tool for statistical synthesis, PRISMA operates, in this study, as a reporting structure that documents how sources were identified, screened, and included, supporting a comprehensive understanding of how current literature frames the interplay between translanguaging and CLIL in Italian L2 educational settings.

4.1. Identification, screening, eligibility, and analysis

A systematic review search was conducted between August 2025 and April 2026 across the databases Academia Search, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. The search included publications from 2000 to 2025, spanning over two decades of research developments in CLIL and translanguaging in Italy.

The literature search was conducted using the Boolean queries: “CLIL” OR “Content and Language Integrated Learning” AND “translanguaging” AND (“Italian L2” OR “Italian as a second language”) AND (“secondary school” OR “secondary education” OR “high school” OR “middle school”) AND “Italy”. Besides, a manual search of the reference lists of key publications was undertaken to identify additional relevant studies.

Table 1 illustrates the ten predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic review.

Table 1. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

No.	INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
1.	Empirical and/or theoretical studies published between 2000 and 2025 reflect developments in the past two decades	Both empirical and non-empirical studies, whether theoretical or not, published outside the selected time frame
2.	Empirical or theoretical studies on CLIL and/or translanguaging conducted in Italy or abroad in Italian secondary school settings	Studies addressing CLIL and/or translanguaging without explicit reference to bi/multilingual or L2 contexts; other notions (e.g., code-switching alone, EMI, etc.)
3.	Focus on secondary education (lower/middle and/or upper/high schools/levels)	Studies focusing exclusively on pre-primary, primary, or tertiary (university) education
4.	Relevance to Italian as an L2/FL or bi/multilingual teen learners	Absence of reference to Italian L2 or multilingual learners (e.g., monolingual Italian settings solely)
5.	Published in English or Italian in peer-reviewed journals, books, or conference proceedings	Non-peer-reviewed sources (e.g., theses, institutional reports)

Following the PRISMA guidelines, the study selection process was conducted systematically. The database search initially identified over 1,000 records. The subsequent stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion were as follows (cf. Poveda-García-Noblejas, Antropova, 2024: 149):

- Identification: records identified through database searching (Academia Search n=477 + Google Scholar n=396 + ResearchGate n=582, total n=1455).
- Screening: duplicates removed (n=1231).
- Records screened (n=224).
- Records excluded based on titles and abstracts (n=175).
- Eligibility: full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n=49).
- Full-text articles excluded due to unavailability or incomplete access (n=12).
- Included: studies included in the final qualitative synthesis (n=37).

During the data extraction and analysis phase, a coding scheme was developed to systematize the information across three key analytical dimensions:

- i) Educational context, including school level, geographical area, sociolinguistic profile, and target population. A substantial number of studies were excluded because they solely focus on primary education or higher education settings.

- ii) Instructional design encompassing CLIL subjects, linguistic scaffolding techniques, and translanguaging strategies specifically applied in secondary education. Several papers were excluded because they addressed English, French, or German as the sole L2.
- iii) Learning outcomes documenting theoretical, linguistic, cognitive, or socio-affective results.

A qualitative thematic synthesis was subsequently conducted on the included studies to identify emerging trends, recurring challenges, and theoretical intersections between CLIL and translanguaging within Italian secondary education.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 37 publications were included in this review (Table 2) and are presented in chronological sequence, ranging from the earliest to the most recent contributions.

Table 2. *Systematic Synthesis Review: The Evolution of CLIL and Translanguaging Research in Italian L2 Secondary Education (2000-2025)*

Author/s (Year)	Focus	Education Level	Context	Research Methods	Participants
COONAN (2000)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms as a new learning and teaching environment	Upper Secondary/ Upper Italian Secondary School Abroad	Italy; Italian secondary schools abroad; FLs	Theoretical; FLs (English, French, German, Spanish) as a learning vehicle	Theoretical reference to upper secondary school (<i>Licei</i>) students and teachers
LUISE (2006; 2009)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms with immigrant learners	Mixed Levels including Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Theoretical; Study school disciplines using a non-mother tongue in a situation of CLIL	Theoretical reference to secondary alloglot students and teachers
SERRAGIOTTO (2009; 2023)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms	Mixed Levels including Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Theoretical; Italian as an FL and L2 in CLIL; Metacognitive reflection	Theoretical reference to secondary students and teachers
COONAN (2010)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms; promotion of CALP and of the study of FL culture	Mixed Levels including Secondary	Italy; FLs	Theoretical with references to the vehicular FL project (L.I.VE); Concepts of ‘authenticity’	Students (n=189); Theoretical reference to secondary students and teachers
MAZZOTTA (2010)	CLIL implementation	Mixed Levels	Italy; Italian L2	Theoretical; The problem of	Theoretical reference to

	in the classroom for cross-cultural comparison and facilitated negotiation	including Secondary		overly complex inputs; Degree of self-esteem and motivation of the subject	secondary students and teachers
AMBROSI (2012)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms	Lower Secondary (n=1)	Trentino; Italian L2 for Specific Purposes	Action-research; Questionnaire; Survey aimed at improving the training offer	First grade students (n=81); Teachers; Teacher training
BALBONI (2012)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms	Upper Secondary	Italy; Italian L1, Italian L2, FLs	Theoretical; Collaboration proposals between Italian teachers and teachers who use microlanguages	Theoretical reference to secondary students and teachers
GALLAGHER, COLOHAN (2014)	Translanguaging and code-switching in CLIL lessons to develop an enriched bilingual vocabulary	Upper Secondary	Northern Italy; Italian L1, English L2	In class-study (<i>Liceo Linguistico</i>)	Treatment group (n=30); Control group (n=29)
AGOLLI (2015)	Translanguaging in CLIL classrooms for skills and competences development	Upper Secondary	Rome; Italian L1, Italian L2	Questionnaires; Classroom observation; Semi-structured interview with teachers	Second-generation learners of first and second grade (n=146); 3 teachers
BEACCO ET AL. (2016)	CLIL and the importance of language, not only as a specific subject of study, but also in all disciplines of the curriculum	Mixed Levels including Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Theoretical; Supporting literacy development; The training of <i>all</i> teachers at the national level	Theoretical reference to secondary students, students' families, and teachers
ATZ (2016)	Promote multilingual and plurilingual teaching models with newly arrived students	Lower Secondary	Bassa Atesina (South Tyrol); Italian L2	Logbook (for 6 weeks); Interview; <i>Piano dell'Offerta Formativa</i> ; PDCA cycle	Teachers (n=2); Teacher training
CINGANOTTO (2016)	CLIL and translanguaging implementation in multilingual classrooms	Upper Secondary	Italy; Italian L1, Italian L2	Theoretical; Illustration of pilot projects; Interplay between L1 and L2	Theoretical reference to secondary students and teachers

ENGEL, HOFFMANN (2016)	Multilingualism and linguistic diversity in the classroom; Language awareness	Lower Secondary (n=9)	South Tyrol; Italian L1, Italian L2	Exploravite; Mixed-methods; Interviews; Focus groups	Secondary students (n=170); Teachers (n=38); Parents (n=78)
FIRPO, SANFELICI (2016)	Translanguaging practices and transcultural identity in multilingual classes	Lower Secondary (n=1)	Genoa; Italian L2 for Specific Purposes	Linguistic test for examining linguistic competence	Italian students (n=42); Spanish speakers (n=29)
CAVAGNOLI (2018)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms to support multilingual education at the <i>Liceo delle Scienze Umane</i>	Upper Secondary (n=12)	Bolzano/ Bozen; Italian L2	Language Biography; Incoming and outgoing questionnaires	Upper secondary school students (n=142 incoming; n=145 outgoing); Educators (n=12); Family (n=91)
COPPOLA, MORETTI (2018)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms	Mixed Level, including Lower Secondary	Florence; Italian L1, Italian L2	Quantitative and qualitative; Language Biography; 4 plurilingual test	Students (n= 300; 133 included in an experimental module)
CARBONARA, SCIBETTA (2019)	Translanguaging in Italian L2 classes; Schoolscape (the classroom as a plurilingual linguistic space); Heteroglossia as practice and pedagogy	Upper Secondary	Tuscany; Liguria; Piedmont Italian L1, Italian L2	Language biographies; Questionnaires; Interviews; Observation; Focus groups	Educators (n=16); Students' biographies (n=350); Students interviewed (n=146); Parents (n=179);
BONOMI (2020)	Translanguaging in multilingual classrooms for the inclusion of home language	Upper Secondary	Milan; Italian L1, Italian L2	Action research; Reflections; Observations	Teachers (n=2)
CARBONARA, SCIBETTA (2020)	Translanguaging in Italian L2 classes	Lower and Upper Secondary	Italy; Italian L1, Italian L2	Theoretical-practical approaches linked to the multilingual dimension	Theoretical reference to secondary students and teachers
CARBONARA ET AL. (2020)	Translanguaging practices in Italian L2 classes;	Mixed Level, including	Italy; Italian L1, Italian L2	Transformative action research: questionnaires,	Teachers (n=95); Students (n=800)

	Translingual practices; schoolscape	Lower Secondary		interviews, focus groups	
MAYR (2020)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms	Upper Secondary	Bolzano/Bozen; Italian L2	Qualitative; Survey; 2 comprehension and vocabulary tests	Students (n=22)
BALLARINI, TORELLI (2021)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms	Upper Secondary	Australia; Italian FL	Longitudinal in-depth study	Students (n=130); Parents (n=28)
BELLINZONA, CARBONARA (2021)	Translanguaging and CLIL strategies in Italian classes	Lower and Upper Secondary (n=12)	12 Italian regions; Italian L1, Italian L2	Field notes; Semi-structured interviews; Questionnaires	Lower and upper school students (n=642)
GILARDONI (2021A)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms; Terminology-oriented teaching activities	Upper and Lower Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Corpus analysis of Italian L2 materials and textbooks (n=9)	Considerations on L2 treatment terminology
GILARDONI (2021B)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms; Microteaching	Upper Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Action research; Microteaching (lecture recording); Questionnaires	Upper secondary school (<i>Liceo Linguistico</i>) teachers (n=23)
HUSZTHY (2021)	CLIL and task-based implementation in multilingual classrooms	Mixed Level including Upper Secondary (n=2)	Budapest; Italian FL	Observations; Interviews; Audio recording	Bilingual high school students (<i>Licei</i>)
STOPFNER, ZANASI (2021)	Promote multilingual teaching models	Lower Secondary	South Tyrol; Italian L1, Italian L2	Longitudinal (2015-2018); Observations; Interviews; Questionnaires; Focus group	Students (n=170); Workshops for teachers
CARBONARA (2022)	Translanguaging in Italian L2 classes, <i>éveil aux langues</i>	Lower Secondary	Piedmon; Italian L1, Italian L2	Language aptitude test (LLAMA)	Lower secondary school students (n=67); Teacher training
GUARDA ET AL. (2022)	Translanguaging and CLIL practises in Italian classes	Lower and Upper Secondary	South Tyrol; Italian L2	Exploratory survey: 55-item questionnaires	Lower secondary teachers (n=118); Upper secondary teachers (n=310)
BENUCCI (2023)	CLIL and task-based implementation	Lower and Upper Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Theoretical with an example of a	Theoretical reference to

	in multilingual classrooms			cross-curricular curriculum	secondary students and teachers
CARBONARA (2023)	Translanguaging in Italian L2 classes and attitudes towards language diversity; Multilingual pedagogies	Mixed level, including Lower Secondary	North-western region of Italy; Italian L2	Longitudinal research (2017-2019) with language portraits	Students (n=71); Workshops for teachers
GILARDONI (2023)	CLIL implementation in multilingual classrooms in the instruction of scientific disciplines	Upper Secondary (n=1)	Bolzano/Bozen; Lombardy; Italian L2, English FL	Corpus analysis: audio and video recordings of CLIL classroom interactions (n=17 h); Microteaching	Human and Social Sciences High School students; Upper secondary teachers
UBERTI-BONA (2024)	Translanguaging and language awareness in Italian L2 classes; Superdiversity	Mixed levels, including Lower Secondary (n=2)	Milan; Italian L1, Italian L2	Action research; Guided tour; Interviews; Observations; Questionnaires	Lower secondary school students
CARBONARA (2025)	Translanguaging and pluralistic approach in Italian classes; Strategies and schoolscape	Mixed Level, including Lower Secondary	Italy; Italian L2	Classroom-based research: daily self-observation, focus groups	Teachers (n=26) and their classrooms
TORREGROSSA, CARBONARA (2025)	Translanguaging-based pedagogies in Italian classes; Metalinguistic awareness	Lower Secondary	Italy; Italian L1, Italian L2	Between-group design; Generalised linear mixed-effects model; Mediation analysis; Sociolinguistic questionnaire	Lower secondary school students (n=69; Target group n=33; Control group=36)

Table 2 illustrates a discernible thematic and methodological evolution in CLIL research within the Italian context. The scholarly focus has shifted from foundational, theoretical works on CLIL implementation in Italy (e.g., Coonan, 2000; Luise, 2006) and beyond (Huszthy, 2021; Ballarini, Torelli, 2021) to recent empirical investigations into translanguaging and translangual practices (e.g., Uberti-Bona, 2024; Carbonara, 2025).

Geographically, the research does not capture a wide range of regional contexts; instead, it covers northern regions such as Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, and South Tyrol. The “Participants” column reveals significant diversity in research scope, ranging from small-scale case studies of classes and teachers (Bonomi, 2020; Mayr, 2020) to in-depth surveys involving hundreds of students, teachers, and family members (Guarda *et al.*, 2022; Carbonara *et al.*, 2020).

A thematic synthesis of the literature identifies two primary areas of convergence:

i) The theoretical and empirical pedagogical integration of CLIL in bi/multilingual classrooms.

Seminal contributions that have shaped the Italian approach to CLIL for Italian L2 over the past decades starting from the early work of Coonan (2000, 2010) on the vehicular FL project in Italy (LI.VE), and subsequently developing into more specific proposals for Italian L2 with Luise (2006, 2009), Serragiotto (2009, 2023), Balboni (2012), Gilardoni (2021a, 2021b, 2023), and Benucci (2023). These scholars underlined the methodological challenges of integrating CLIL into subject teaching, traditionally characterized by monolingual practices that favor receptive skills. Their work also highlights the relevance of CLIL practices within Provincial Centers for Adult Education in Italy, where learners aged 15-16, often of migrant background, pursue lower or upper secondary certification through Italian as both a subject and the medium of instruction (cf. Gilardoni, 2021a; Mantovani, 2024). The methodologies and techniques associated with CLIL integration include comprehensible input, interactive input, redundancy, scaffolding, previewing, noticing processes activated through real-world tasks, and the use of collaborative and interactive contexts (Coonan, 2000: 7-10; Luise, 2006: 76; Serragiotto, 2009; Gilardoni, 2021a: 95).

The reviewed studies consistently report benefits of CLIL instruction, including accelerated language acquisition, enhanced student motivation, and the reinforcement of pre-existing cognitive and linguistic skills (Atz, 2016; Agolli, 2015; Gilardoni, 2023). Among students who have already been educated in their home country and are in the adolescent-to-adult age range, L1 attrition does not always align with equivalent L2 Italian competence. The latter is often used instrumentally, thus shifting the focus to the cognitive profile of L2 Italian (Mazzotta, 2010: 220). However, studies in this area remain sporadic, in line with Poveda-Garcia-Noblejas and Antropova's (2024: 155) review, which identifies cognition as the least explored dimension in CLIL. Although teachers generally express positive attitudes toward multilingual inclusion (Benucci, 2023), concerns persist regarding students' ability to fully grasp subject content when instruction is not adequately supported in the target language (Cavagnoli, 2018).

Additionally, educators recognize the relevance of bi/multilingualism and language-conscious teaching but can only implement them sporadically in their daily work (Engel, Hoffmann, 2016). A critical barrier underlying this shortfall is an evident deficit in specialized teacher training. Particularly, this crucial issue of pedagogical preparation remains underexplored in the literature, with only a few studies explicitly focusing on training initiatives (Ambrosi, 2012; Beacco *et al.*, 2016; Stopfner, Zanasi, 2021; Guarda *et al.*, 2022; Carbonara, 2022, 2023), while microteaching, enhanced through video-based self-observation, supports reflective practice and the experimentation of instructional strategies (Gilardoni, 2021b, 2023). Consistent with the concept of the pluriliterate learner (Coyle, Meyer, 2021), strengthening training for all teachers (both language and *non-language* educators) is indispensable to support the development of learners' understanding of how language shapes thinking and learning, as well as their engagement in meaning-making, problem-solving, and creative processes across *multiple* languages, thereby equipping teachers to guide learners towards becoming pluriliterate (Coyle, Meyer, 2021: 122).

ii) The theoretical and empirical application of translanguaging practices in bi/multilingual and CLIL classrooms.

A growing body of research points to the pedagogical benefits of integrating translanguaging within CLIL lessons, as such practices can scaffold comprehension and

facilitate content learning for multilingual students. Theoretical and empirical contributions by Scibetta and Carbonara (2019; 2020), Carbonara *et al.* (2020), Bellinzona and Carbonara (2021), Guarda *et al.* (2022), Uberti-Bona (2024), and Torregrossa and Carbonara (2025) have advanced translanguaging-oriented projects in Italian secondary schools, remarkably through the *L'AltRoparlante* initiative, which have been promoting the pedagogical valorization of multilingual practices in a network of 6 schools. Translanguaging pedagogy is characterized by the use of learners' full semiotic repertoires to support meaning-making and cognitive processes. On this point, Torregrossa and Carbonara (2025: 875) show that Grade 3 students who have been exposed to translanguaging pedagogies for over four years exhibit significantly better metalinguistic awareness. Besides, the incorporation of pluri/multilingual practices, such as schoolscape and translanguaging, into the semiotic space reduces *stigma* toward multilingual teachers, students, and families, thereby fostering processes of socialization (Carbonara, Scibetta, 2019: 499; Carbonara, 2025: 117).

Similarly, both Gallagher and Colohan (2014) and Agolli (2015) suggest that learners' L1 use through code-switching and/or translanguaging practices can be strategically used in various educational settings beyond CLIL, promoting a positive self-image among language students. Meanwhile, Cavagnoli (2018) shows how both teachers and teen learners often draw on their full linguistic repertoires to create meaning together, even when these practices aren't explicitly seen as translanguaging. Among the most extensive Italian studies, Coppola and Moretti (2018), involving 300 learners between primary and lower secondary school, demonstrated the feasibility of employing students' entire linguistic repertoires (L1, L2, and FLs) in both teaching and assessment phases, including through plurilingual testing formats. This implicit use of multiple languages reflects a pragmatic rather than formalized approach to translanguaging pedagogy. Similar initiatives with Italian as an FL have emerged internationally, in the United States and Germany (Zanet, Cixi, 2024) and Australia (Ballarini, Torelli, 2021), illustrating the global relevance of these approaches.

Notably, studies conducted in South Tyrol (e.g., Engel, Hoffmann, 2016; Guarda *et al.*, 2022) document teachers' flexible use of multiple languages in classroom activities, as revealed by questionnaire-based data and focus groups. What is more, positive effects on linguistic and intercultural awareness are reported even in research not explicitly framed within translanguaging theory but focused on multilingual repertoires (Mayr, 2020; Stopfner, Zanasi, 2021), with a significant majority (61%) of students expressing appreciation for the increased use of multiple languages in the classroom (Coonan, 2010: 138; Uberti-Bona, 2024: 668).

While the reviewed studies demonstrate a methodological evolution from theoretical foundations towards empirical (case studies, language biographies, etc.) and heteroglossic-informed approaches (Firpo, Sanfelici, 2016), their reliance on qualitative data and theoretical reflection remains pronounced. Systematic empirical evidence on measurable learning outcomes remains limited, underscoring again the need for longitudinal and quantitative studies to capture the linguistic, cognitive, and intercultural impact of integrating translanguaging in CLIL Italian L2 education. To fully appreciate the impact of translanguaging in CLIL, researchers must also pay greater attention to constructing a more diversified and nuanced understanding of plurilingualism itself (Stopfner, Zanasi, 2021: 31), including factors such as critical language awareness, emergent multilingual identities, and the development of strategic competence across linguistic repertoires. In this respect, the cognitive dimension, often conceptualized in CLIL through the revised

version⁹ of Bloom's taxonomy (Torregrossa, Carbonara, 2025: 869), plays a significant role, remarkably in secondary education, raising a key pedagogical question: what should secondary school students be expected to do by drawing on their heritage languages within content subjects?

The answer can be traced back to cognitive processes identified in Bloom's taxonomy and in the new mediation descriptors of the Council of Europe (2020: 90-121), such as streamlining texts, identifying key content, and producing critical commentary, thereby enabling educators to articulate and assess learning outcomes with greater precision.

It is precisely where "the missing link" between CLIL and translanguaging emerges. While both approaches emphasize meaning-making and the integration of language and content, the cognitive processes underlying translanguaging practices remain insufficiently theorized within CLIL frameworks. This connection becomes evident in activities such as those in which students interview their parents on a topic previously identified in class, formulate questions in their L1, and mediate between Italian L2 and their home language (cf. Torregrossa, Carbonara, 2025, Appendix A). Heritage languages can thus function as cognitive resources, allowing learners to access, process, and critically re-elaborate disciplinary knowledge, while fostering deeper conceptual understanding and supporting the development of higher-order thinking skills across languages (Poveda-Garcia-Noblejas, Antropova, 2024). Such activities entail complex cognitive operations that call for a more consistent, deliberate integration of the cognitive dimension in translanguaging-oriented CLIL practices.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Intending to fill a gap in the systematic review, this paper outlined the current situation in Italy regarding the adoption of CLIL and translanguaging methodologies and practices in secondary schools where Italian is taught as an L2, promoting plurilingual and multilingual learning environments.

A clear lack of longitudinal research exists regarding the implementation of CLIL approaches in Italian L2 contexts, as does the systematic integration of translanguaging, particularly within studies involving consistent and representative sample sizes in secondary education. From a methodological perspective, the main challenge for CLIL (and translanguaging) lies in introducing changes to subject-specific teaching practices, which in Italian secondary schools are often traditional, characterized by frontal teaching and focused on the development of receptive skills (Coonan, 2010: 138). Moreover, the absence of institutional support and professional development for educators continues to limit consistent implementation.

In keeping with May's (2014: 5) perspective, the present study calls for the legitimation of translanguaging pedagogical strategies in CLIL classrooms as an effective scaffold for learning Italian as an L2 while acquiring a pluriliterate repertoire (Coyle, Meyer, 2021: 37). Further research should therefore be conducted with subsets, such as learners' linguistic backgrounds, proficiency levels, and exposure to multilingual environments in secondary schools and provincial centers for adult education (cf. Mantovani, 2024). Such studies should extend beyond CLIL in bilingual contexts such as South Tyrol, where most experimental projects have been concentrated, towards a pluriliteracies lens and more

⁹ The cognitive domain was originally divided in six levels, ordered from simple/concrete to complex/abstract: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Revised in 2001, this taxonomy redefines the cognitive processes as Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create (cf. Anderson, Krathwohl, 2001).

oriented learning spaces for deep learning across languages (Coyle, Meyer, 2021), while drawing on the successful practices implemented there to inform and adapt interventions in other Italian secondary schools.

A limitation of this systematic PRISMA-based review is the relatively small number of studies meeting the inclusion criteria, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the chosen works offer valuable insights into how CLIL and translanguaging can effectively converge in Italian L2 education.

Integrating CLIL with translanguaging practices can enhance not only vocabulary knowledge and language aptitude (cf. Torregrossa, Carbonara, 2025), but also the valorization of heritage languages, functioning as an effective didactic strategy to prevent early school leaving. Indeed, although the early school leaving rate in Italy fell from 34.9% in 2014 to 26.9% in 2023¹⁰, dropout rates among alloglot students in secondary schools still significantly exceed those of their non-immigrant peers. Against the pitfalls, such integration contributes to the creation of a genuinely multilingual and multicultural environment, conceived as a mosaic of coexisting and mutually enriching cultures (Coppola, Moretti, 2018: 399), grounded in the principle of tolerance. This approach may, in turn, foster the development of intercultural awareness (Charalampoglou, Karras, 2023: 41), a key dimension of Italy's broader social and cultural landscape that extends well beyond the classroom.

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