

TNP Language Teacher Training and Bilingual Education: [Table of contents](#) [en français](#) Language Medium Teaching

Carmel Mary Coonan

Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, IT

Multilingualism or plurilingualism is a key concept in any discussion today concerning the promotion of an individual's linguistic repertoire. If, however, a multilingual competence is to be nurtured, specific educational modes need to be devised to do this efficiently. The issue is to promote a better learning of more languages. It is against this scenario that the ELC Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages: sub-project Language Teacher Training and Bilingual Education **(1)** is working on the premise that bilingual education, as a form of effective language teaching and learning, can make a valid contribution towards the promotion of individual multilingualism.

Bilingual education

The term bilingual education is used in the literature to refer to two quite distinct educational situations (Baker 1996): those where two languages are used as the media of instruction and promoted in the curriculum; and those where "bilingual children are present but bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum" (p.173). On the basis of this initial distinction Baker proposes to define the former "strong forms" of education for bilingualism and the latter as "weak forms". Immersion programmes are included in the "strong" form category for, although there is an initial emphasis on the L2 (indeed for a certain length of time in full-immersion programmes the L2 is the sole vehicle language), the other vehicle language is, in time, gradually introduced.

The TNP on Language Teacher Training and Bilingual Education has chosen the strong forms as its focus of interest. The educational aims of such "strong" programmes are linguistic pluralism and cultural enrichment. The national reports **(2)**, produced by the TNP working group, concerning the "strong forms" of bilingual education in existence in Europe and the related issue of the training of the teachers called on to carry out such teaching, reveal a situation of considerable variety. Far from importing ready-made models, the countries concerned are taking full account of their particular political, educational, geographical, historical, linguistic and social circumstances, as well as the educational aims and the linguistic outcomes foreseen, in order to elaborate "tailor-made" forms of bilingual education.

Although forms of bilingual education exist in the private sector, of particular interest are those that have been established in the state sector, in the mainstream schools. With reference to these, different models and programmes exist throughout Europe both for the promotion of majority languages as for the promotion of minority, autochthonous, languages. In relation to the latter there is a tendency to involve the whole school structure with all children going through bilingual schooling (e.g. Italy - in the Valle D'Aosta and in the Ladin-speaking areas of the province of Bolzano - , in Luxembourg, in the Catalan and Basque countries, etc) and it is in these situations that immersion models of bilingual education can be found.

Regarding the promotion of the majority languages, the diversity involves a considerable number of factors.

(i) discipline: using the distinction that Nixon & Rondahl make (in Fruhauf et al 1996:140-141), the number of disciplines/subjects taught through the foreign language can be all, broad range (4-5) or narrow range (1-2). However, it must be pointed out that not all schools adopt the criteria of "discipline" as the organising principle of language-medium teaching. A topic can be isolated and taught through the foreign language in the form of a module/project which has a much shorter life span than that usually associated with the teaching of a discipline.

(ii) student age range. the general tendency in the promotion of majority languages in mainstream state schools in Europe is to offer foreign language medium teaching at lower secondary or (more often) upper secondary school levels. In those situations however, where the majority language is (considered) a second language, there is a tendency to use that language as a medium of instruction for all levels of schooling.

(iii) instructional structure: different countries (and regions within those countries) organise language medium teaching in structurally different ways. The whole school system (and therefore all the single schools) can be made bilingual (cf. Valle D'Aosta in Italy) or parallel structures can be created within the normal school in the form of bilingual streams or sections (cf. Germany, Austria, France). Alternatively, "pedagogic" structures like the module can be elaborated and "slotted" in the instructional process as desired.

(iv) length: length can vary from the full educational cycle (e.g., Ladin schools in Italy; schools in Luxembourg) to a school level or part of a school level (e.g. bilingual sections in Germany) or to that of a course or a project (e.g., Austria, Sweden. Cf. Heindler & Abuja in Fruhauf et al., 1996:18-20; Nixon & Rondahl, in Fruhauf et al., 1996: 141-142).

(v) focus: the main pedagogic objectives of a programme where content is taught through a foreign/second language can vary along a continuum with, at one extreme, content objectives (the programme is content-driven) and, at the other extreme, language objectives (the programme is language driven) (for this distinction cf. Met in Cenoz & Genesee, 1998 : 35-53). Between the two extremes more or less attention can be afforded to the purposeful development of the medium language (cf. the question of CLIL below).

(vi) parallel teaching of vehicle language: it would appear that European models of bilingual education/language medium teaching see the actual teaching of the medium language as a subject in its own right as an important element for the overall promotion of competence in that language.

(vii) instructional language/role of the teacher: in some language medium teaching situations (e.g., Ladin schools of Bolzano Province in Italy; schools in Luxembourg) the teacher has only one language relationship with his students. Conversely, in other situations, the principle of language alternation, carried out by the teacher who switches from one vehicle language to the other, represents a characterising methodological feature of the programme (e.g., Valle D'Aosta in Italy).

(viii) mother tongue of teacher: although language medium teaching requires sophisticated language competence in the medium language not all countries require that the teachers be obligatorily native speakers of that language (e.g., Germany, Finland, Austria). In other situations however, it is a legal requirement that the teacher be a native speaker of the vehicle language (e.g., Bolzano in Italy).

(ix) curriculum adaptations: in a number of situations the introduction of language medium teaching has been concomitant with curricular changes (of content and objectives) with the aim of introducing a European and international dimension to learning (e.g., Germany, Italy). In this sense therefore there is the preoccupation on the part of some countries to go beyond the merely instrumental dimension of language medium teaching and to invest it with a more formative function.

All the above variables (just to mention a few) are questions for discussion when implementing forms of bilingual education, or, more generally speaking, language medium teaching.

However, two issues appear to be of central importance. These are

- i) the question of how to ensure language growth through language medium programmes;
- ii) the training of teachers for such programmes.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Bilingual education refers to the presence of two vehicular languages in the curriculum – of which one is the mother tongue. However, if it is the methodological-didactic dimension of bilingual education that is of interest for its potential in promoting language learning, then the limitation enshrined in the term "bilingual" can give way to encompass "multilingual" instructional situations. In other words, the features that characterise bilingual education can become those that also characterise multilingual education (cf. Cenoz & Genesee, 1998). Indeed, the term bilingual education is in fact insufficient to describe situations like those of the trilingual models in Luxembourg and of the Ladin schools in the Province of Bolzano in Italy. These are in effect models of multilingual education. Furthermore, it cannot adequately describe full-immersion models when they are in their monolingual phase. Thus, the key characterising features are that some form of language medium teaching takes place, that content and language are entwined in the teaching-learning process, and that the language used is a foreign/second language (for the students).

The choice to adopt language medium teaching is prompted by the desire to provide learning situations that promote language competence. However, there is the realization that language growth will not come about automatically. Focus on content allows for deeper, more meaningful learning (Wolff, 1997). Language is practised in authentic (more motivating) situations of language use. The promotion of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), as opposed to just basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), is made possible (cf. Baker, 1996: chapter 9 for Cummins' distinction). However, whatever the focus of the programme – content driven or language driven - what is required is that there be an integration of the content and the language – that there be content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

This has several potential implications such as:

(i) in content-driven programmes language outcomes will be specified also; the linguistic specificity of the discipline will be recognised; the cognitive skills required by the discipline will be developed; techniques and teaching strategies peculiar to the language class may be introduced; the content teacher and the language teacher will work in tandem (this will be possible of course only in those cases where the medium language is also taught as a separate subject).

(ii) in language-driven programmes content will be chosen for its potential in contributing towards the language syllabus objectives; furthermore, content can be a criteria for establishing, in part, the objectives of the language teaching syllabus.

Essentially the CLIL acronym wishes to highlight the requirement that the choice to use content cannot relinquish the teacher from his or her responsibility in a purposeful and principled development of the language.

A European Masters in Bilingual Education (EMBE)

The TNP national surveys highlight a situation in which, with few exceptions (e.g., Germany and Finland), no institutional training of teachers involved in bilingual education programmes exists. This situation appears in all its urgency if we consider the rapid evolution that language medium teaching is having at the moment throughout Europe. Language medium teaching is neither language teaching alone nor content teaching alone. Nor is it the sum of the two. Language medium teaching is an approach of its own, presenting teaching and learning difficulties of a different sort (cf. CLIL above). These require novel solutions and teachers trained for them.

It is against this background that the TNP has put forward, and is working on, a proposal for a European Masters in Bilingual Education (EMBE) that will be run by a consortium of leading European universities (**3**). The EMBE will be able to draw on the expertise that has developed in Europe throughout the last decades and make this available. A stepping stone in the direction of the Masters is the decision, made in February 1999 by the TNP committee and the representatives of the consortium of Universities, to devise a Foundation Module in Multilingual Education that provides initial training for CLIL and that could figure as an optional module in initial teacher training or as an in-service initial training programme.

Notes

(1) The TNP sub-project on Language Teacher Training and Bilingual Education began its activities in 1996.

(2) The twelve National Reports were prepared for the TNP Evaluation Conference at Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille III, FR, in July, 1997. The reports are currently being published by the University of Jyväskylä, FI.

(3) The universities currently participating are: Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE; Bergische Universität GHS Wuppertal, DE; University of Jyväskylä, FI; Universitat de Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, ES; Universiteit Gent, BE; Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, IT; University of Nottingham, GB; IVLOS, NL; Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, FR.

Bibliography

- Baker, C. (1996) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Second Edition. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cenoz, J. & Genesee, F. (eds) (1998) *Beyond Bilingualism. Multilingualism and Multilingual Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Fruhauf, G., Coyle, D. & Ingeborg, C. (eds) (1996) *Teaching Content in a Foreign Language*. Alkmaar: European Platform for Dutch Education.
- Van de Craen, P. & Wolff, D. (eds) (1997) Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages: Sub project 6: Language Teacher Training and Bilingual Education (Report prepared for the TNP Evaluation Conference of the European Language Council, Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille III, (in print University of Jyväskylä, Finland).
- Wolff, D. (1997) "Content-based Bilingual Education or Using Foreign Languages as Working Languages in the Classroom", in Marsh, D., Marsland, B. & Nikula, T. (eds) *Aspects of Implementing Plurilingual Education: Seminar and Field Notes*. Research and Field Reports, 29. Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä, Continuing Education Centre.