

How do Students Think about Soft CLIL in the Basque Secondary Schools?

Chiharu Nakanishi^{1,*} and Hodaka Nakanishi²

¹ Kunitachi College of Music
5-5-1 Kashiwa-cho, Tachikawa-shi, Tokyo190-8520, Japan

² Teikyo University
2-11-1 Kaga, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo173-8605, Japan

*Corresponding author's email: nakanishi.chiharu [AT] kunitachi.ac.jp

ABSTRACT— *The Basque Autonomous Community, which is a bilingual community of Basque and Spanish, has adopted CLIL as a method to teach English as a foreign language with on-line materials as well as written materials. The object of this study is to investigate how the students think about studying subjects in English, in the form of Soft CLIL (Language-driven) in the Basque-medium school. The participants (n = 127) are 1st year secondary students. For them it is the 8th year to study English and 5th month to study subjects in English, in Soft CLIL. The results show that attitudes towards studying subjects in English are positive among overall students, whereas the majority of them want to learn subjects in Basque. The students who want to study subjects in English perceive the effect of Soft CLIL more than the others. The results obtained seem to confirm that Soft CLIL plays a positive role as a pre-stage to advance to Hard CLIL (Content-driven). The present study shows the pedagogical implication of adopting Soft CLIL to Asian countries.*

Keywords— The Basque Autonomous Community, multilingual, Soft CLIL, perception, attitudes

1. INTRODUCTION

In Europe, children are learning subjects such as history, geography and science in their second or third language in primary and secondary school. This has been partly due to a commitment of the European Union (EU) to a multilingual Europe. In 1995 EU proposed that every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue as one of the objectives of the language policy. Following this proposal, EU leaders at the March 2002 Barcelona European Council declared that every child in the EU should be taught at least two foreign languages from an early age. These requirements have given “CLIL” a great importance and have resulted in its establishment in many schools all around Europe. CLIL is an acronym of Content and Language Integrated Learning. Coyle et al. (2010) define “Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, in the teaching and learning process, there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language. Each is interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater on one or the other in a given time (p.1).”

As CLIL is an innovative approach, well-devised materials are to be developed. In order to meet the needs for teachers who want to implement CLIL, several materials are provided on-line such as E-CLIL by European Resource Centre and EKI project in Basque whose materials are used in the schools we observed. EKI materials include music and video on Web which teachers use through internet in their classes as well as written textbooks (Ikaselar argitaletxea, 2013).

In CLIL there are many types of programs and modules depending on the situation, context, and aim. According to Ball (2008) there is a basic division of the CLIL approach into two camps: one in which the teaching and learning is focused primarily on language, and the other in which the teaching and learning is focused primarily on the subject content. The former is referred to as language-driven, and is called “Soft CLIL” or “Light CLIL”. The latter is called content-driven, and is often called “Hard CLIL” or “Heavy CLIL”. Ball explains that the content-driven approach means that the subject content is given primary focus and subject concepts and skills as its learning objective, whereas a language-driven approach has as its basic objective language learning (2008). Students need gradual steps to move from Soft to Hard CLIL according to their progress of the target language.

The Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), which is a bilingual community of Basque and Spanish, has adopted CLIL as a method to teach English. In the already crowded curriculum of Basque, Spanish and other subjects, integrating content and English is the most effective way to promote multilingualism. Under “the Eleanitz-project” which means multilingual in Basque, the BAC intends to educate and prepare students as future citizens of a multilingual and multicultural Europe. “The Eleanitz-English” is part of the Eleanitz-project which integrates language policy with curriculum, materials and training for the teaching and learning of English for students aged 4-16. The Eleanitz-English project at “Ikastolas” (“Ikastolas” means schools in Basque), starts with an early introduction of English at the age of 4 and lasts until the age of 16. During 4-years compulsory secondary school education, the students, who have studied English for 8 years already, experience to study subjects in CLIL. In the first two years, Year 1 and 2, they study subjects such as Music, Natural Science, and Technology in English classes of the standard secondary school curriculum from English teachers in the form of Soft CLIL. It is called “Subject Project”. They have four English classes per week during “Subject Project”. During the last two years, Year 3 and 4, they have two English classes and three Social Science classes in English per week. This project is called “SSLIC – Social Sciences and Language Integrated Curriculum” and they study under subject teachers in the form of Hard CLIL. (See http://www.eleanitz.org/public/Eleanitz_Project, Source: times of class / Elorza & Lindsay, 2013)

The educational system in the BAC has enhanced bilingual education and has taken important steps toward the development of multilingual education. During the Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (in office: 1939 - 1975), the Spanish language was declared Spain’s only official language and the public use of other languages was banned. Since the Status of Autonomy for the Basque Country was promulgated (1979) one of the priorities of the Basque Government has been doing is the revitalization of the Basque language. When the Basic Law on the Standardization of Basque was passed in 1982, three linguistic school models were established to ensure that every student had the possibility to learn in Spanish and/or Basque (Cenoz, 2005; Zarobe & Lasagabaster, 2010).

Model A: Spanish medium schools

Model B: Spanish - Basque bilingual schools

Model D: Basque medium schools

Among the three linguistic school models, Model D (Basque medium schools) is the most dominant in all level of schools from kindergarten to university (Elorza & Lindsay; 2013). Some studies show that Model D can educate more balanced bilinguals of Basque and Spanish (Gabiña et.al, 1986; Sierra & Olaziregi, 1989). Lasagabster (2013) shows that the students enrolled in Model D scored higher points in Basque and English than those in other Models. Regardless of medium of the instructive languages, all Models include English in their curriculum. It is based on the strong support from Government of Basque which promotes multilingual education. Cenoz states that parents are also strong supporters of multilingual education (2005). They are very interested in improving their children’s level of proficiency in English (Cenoz, 2005). Cenoz says that the development of multilingual programs in the BAC is related to the need to acquire English as a language of international communication and the idea that the positive experience of bilingual education can be extended to trilingual education (2005).

While the BAC has been taking a step forward from a bilingual to multilingual community, CLIL has been implemented there. It is important to know the perception of students on CLIL. In the context of Basque and Spanish bilingual society, are the students willing to study subjects by the medium of an additional language, English? Lasagabaster (2003) examines the university students’ attitudes toward English in the BAC. He finds that though they do not prefer to be taught in English, they think that English is worth learning and learning English enriches their cultural knowledge. Lasagabster (2009) also examines secondary school students’ attitudes in CLIL towards trilingualism. He reveals that the CLIL can boost positive attitudes towards trilingualism at school, which leads to the multilingual educational system in Europe. In the study of Lasagabster and Sierra (2009), the CLIL students hold more positive attitudes towards English than those of EFL. In both studies of Lasagabster (2009) and Lasagabster & Sierra (2009), the participants were 3rd and 4th year students of secondary school. The students in Lasagabster’s study (2009) studied subjects such as Geography, Arts or Social Science in English, that is, Hard CLIL. In Europe, there are several studies focusing on perception and attitudes towards CLIL such as Dalton-Puffer et al. (2009) and Yang & Gosling (2013). These studies tell the attitude towards CLIL is very important for the effective implementation of CLIL. However, the attitudes of Soft CLIL students in the BAC have not yet been investigated. It is necessary to find out how the Soft CLIL students think about their Soft CLIL in order to proceed to the step of Hard CLIL in a few years later.

The object of the present study is to investigate the perception of the secondary school students in the Basque-medium schools in Soft CLIL. The participants ($n = 127$) are 1st year students of five different schools in the BAC. They have studied English under the Eleanitz project at Ikastolas for 8 years. After entering secondary school, they started to study subjects in English, in Soft CLIL. The Soft CLIL classes are considered to be a pre-stage for taking Hard CLIL in Year 3 and 4. The results show that attitudes towards studying subjects in English are positive among overall students, whereas the majority of them want to learn subjects in Basque. The students who want to study subjects in English perceive the effect of Soft CLIL more than the others. The results obtained seem to confirm that Soft CLIL plays a

positive role as a pre-stage to advance to Hard CLIL (Content-driven).

2. THE PRESENT STUDY

2-1. Research Question

How do the 1st year students at secondary school think about studying subjects in English, Soft CLIL?

2-2. Method

Participants

A total of 127 students at 1st year of secondary school, 12-13 years-old, participated in this study. They were at five different Ikastolas. The names of the Ikastolas and the number of students of the observed classes are as follows: Aranzadi (n = 22), Zurriola (n = 30), Axular Lizeoa (n = 26), Santo Tomas Lizeoa (n = 27), and San Benito (n = 22). All of these Ikastolas took Model D. The students started English at the age of 4 and it was the 8th year for their learning English under the Eleanitz-English project. They were in the period of “Subject Project” (Year 1 and 2). They studied the subjects in English class through the varying contents of different subjects such as Music, Natural Science, and Technology in Soft CLIL. Soft CLIL materials of English in the Eleanitz project are prepared by the EKI project. The materials were content-led and employed the same type of conceptual sequencing and a part of the materials were e-materials and extra resources were supplied on the Web page.

At the time of the observation, it was the 5th month for the students after they started studying in Soft CLIL. The classes were taught by Basque native English teachers who had CLIL teacher training. Most of the time, the classes were managed in English. The teachers emphasized the students to interact with self, content-material, other students and teachers. The Web materials were used to show the concept of natural science and music. They were well devised and successful to attract the interest of students.

The participants would study Social Sciences and Language Integrated Curriculum, SSLIC, in their Year 3 and 4 under the subject teachers. It means that Year 1 and 2 in Soft CLIL, are in the pre-stage of Hard CLIL.

2-3. Instruments

The students were asked to fill out a questionnaire during class time of English in about 10 minutes. At the beginning of the questionnaire, they were asked their language circumstances i.e. languages at home, among friends, and language in which they wanted to study subjects. The questionnaire consisted of a question of general preference of English and four questions of effect of Soft CLIL with a 5-point Likert scale (Table 1).

Table 1: Questionnaire

Items		Questions
General preference		I like studying subjects in English very much.
Effect of Soft-CLIL	English proficiency	Studying subjects in English improves my English proficiency very much.
	Understanding content	Studying subjects in English improves my understanding of the content very much.
	Thinking skills	Studying subjects in English improves my thinking skills very much.
	World	Studying subjects in English opens my door to the world.

3. RESULTS

All answers to the questions were analyzed from the viewpoint of their language circumstances, general preference of English, and effect of Soft CLIL.

3-1. Language circumstances

Language circumstances of the students are shown in Table 2. Among 127 students, the highest ratio of language at home is Basque only (48.0%) following both Basque and Spanish (28.3%), and Spanish only (22.8%). Among friends, the tendency is the same. Basque is the most spoken (44.1%), followed by both Basque and Spanish (39.4%), and Spanish (15.7%).

3-2. Preferred language to study subjects

Author names are to be centered beneath the title and typed in Times New Roman 11-point, non-italic, non-boldface type. Multiple authors may be shown in a two or three-column format, with their affiliations below their respective names. Affiliations are centered below, typed in Times New Roman 10-point non-italic, non-boldface. Include e-mail addresses if possible typed in Times New Roman 10-point italic, non-boldface. Follow the author information by two blank lines before main text.

3-3. Effect of CLIL

The students' perceptions towards effect of CLIL are shown in Table 4. Although the differences of average points among the items except "World" are not significant, the average points of "World" are significantly high comparing to the other points of items ($p < .05$). As the average points of items are higher than 3 (i.e. middle), the majority of the students enrolled in Soft CLIL show positive attitudes towards studying subjects in English.

3-4. Differences between the students who prefer to study subjects in English and either in Basque or Spanish

The average points of each item by the students who want to study subjects in English and either in Basque or Spanish, are shown in Table 5. For the calculation of p-values, we use one-sided tests because the students who want to study in English are supposed to make higher evaluation on the effect of Soft CLIL. Based on the F-test, all questions but "World" are tested supposing the same distribution and "World" is tested supposing different distribution.

The t-test shows statistically significant differences between the students who want to study subjects in English and those who want to study in Basque or Spanish in the item of general preference towards studying subjects in English, and in the 3 items on the effect of Soft CLIL. Those students who want to study subjects in English think that Soft CLIL improves their English proficiency, their understanding of content, and it opens their door to the world. However there is no significant difference in the item of thinking skills. The students who want to study subjects in English show more positive attitudes towards Soft CLIL than those in Basque or Spanish. However the average points obtained from two groups are higher than 4 except the item of general preference by those who want in Basque or Spanish. The majority of the students enrolled in Soft CLIL shows positive attitudes towards studying subjects in English.

3-5. Differences among the native languages towards Soft CLIL

The points obtained of each item by the native languages are shown in Table 6. The perceptions of Soft CLIL are significantly indifferent depending on either monolingual of Basque or Spanish, or bilingual.

Table 2: Language at home and among friends ($n = 127$)

	Basque only	Spanish only	Basque & Spanish	Others
Language at home	48.0% ($n = 61$)	22.8% ($n = 29$)	28.3% ($n = 36$)	0.8% ($n = 1$)
Language among friends	44.1% ($n = 56$)	15.7% ($n = 20$)	39.4% ($n = 50$)	0.8% ($n = 1$)

Table 3: Preferred language to study subjects (Multiple choice allowed) ($n = 127$)

	Basque	Spanish	English
Language in which they want to study subjects	77.2% ($n = 98$)	15.7% ($n = 20$)	14.2% ($n = 18$)

Table 4: Students' perception towards effect of CLIL ($n = 127$)

Items		Average Points (SD)
General preference of English		3.92 (.86)
Effect of Soft CLIL	English proficiency	4.19 (.70)
	Understanding content	4.15 (.83)
	Thinking skills	4.09 (.73)
	World	4.52 (.87)

Table 5: Differences between the students who want to study subjects in English and those who want to study subjects either in Basque or Spanish ($n = 127$)

Questions	Want to study in English ($n = 18$)	Want to study in Basque or Spanish ($n = 109$)	t - value
General preference	4.33	3.85	<.05
Effect of Soft CLIL	English proficiency	4.39	4.15
	Understanding content	4.44	4.11
	Thinking skills	4.22	4.07
	World	4.78	4.48
			<.05

Table 6: Differences among the native languages towards Soft CLIL ($n = 127$)

	Monolingual		Total of Monolingual	Bilingual	Total
	Basque	Spanish			
General preference	3.89	3.80	3.88	3.95	3.92
Effect of Soft CLIL	English proficiency	4.28	3.80	4.18	4.19
	Understanding content	4.14	3.78	4.07	4.15
	Thinking skills	4.22	3.90	4.16	4.05
	World	4.47	4.30	4.44	4.56
					4.52

4. CONCLUSION

The present study showed that the 1st year students at secondary schools in the BAC did not prefer to study subjects in English but preferred to study in Basque, their mother tongue. It should be easy for them to study subjects in their native language. Although only 14.2% of the students preferred to study subjects in English, the majority of the students perceived the effect of Soft CLIL positively. They perceived Soft CLIL was effective to improve their English proficiency, understanding the content, and it opened the door to the world.

The gap between perception of Soft CLIL and preference of language might be because a sense of insecurity for CLIL still remains in students as Soft CLIL has been introduced for only five months. One of the reasons of positive attitudes on the effect of Soft CLIL is that “the Eleanitz-project and the Eleanitz-English” in which the students participate are said to be successful. Elorza and Lindsay (2013) describe one of the common perspective in the Ikastolas is “Language is learnt as we use it as a tool for life in natural contexts of communication”. Since this perspective was observed in their English classes, the students may feel that they can use English naturally and authentic way.

Among four questions of effect of Soft CLIL, the perception towards item of “World” was the highest. The students may value that studying English links to the outside of the classroom and world. The value of “the Eleanitz-project” and parents who support English and promote multilingualism (Cenoz, 2005), might mirror the students’ positive attitudes towards learning English in CLIL. The results obtained seem to confirm that Soft CLIL plays a role as a pre-stage to advance to Hard CLIL in later stage of language curriculum.

There are some limits of the present study. The 5 questions are not enough to do factor-analysis. As a teacher, we know that the maximum time limit for students to answer a questionnaire in a class is about 10 minutes. The questionnaire which needs longer than 10 minutes, does bother students and is not welcomed most of the time.

For our future study, we’d like to investigate how the 1st Year students’ perception towards Soft CLIL will change when they finish “Subject Project”, at Year 2, and how they think about Hard CLIL at Year 3 and 4. We’d like to see the transition or difference between Soft and Hard CLIL in their perception in a long-term research. Moreover we are also interested in the correlation between the achievements and perception towards CLIL.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS TO CLIL IN ASIA

In Asia, such as Thailand, Indonesia, China, Korea and Japan have tried Soft CLIL in secondary and higher education. In these countries the Governments of Education and English teachers have been struggling to find a way to improve the nation’s proficiency level of English. To see the success and advantages of CLIL in Europe, some of Asian Governments of Education and English teachers seem to adopt Soft CLIL. At that time they seem to focus only the advantages of CLIL or focus on the higher ability students. However they seem to overlook the disadvantage of CLIL and the perception of students toward CLIL. The Government of Education and teachers in Asia should see the results of the present study that the students in BAC are not willing to learn subjects in the foreign language, English though they perceive the effects of CLIL positively. Before and while they design curriculums of English, they should see and understand the perception of students.

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