"Assessing Dutch and English Immersion Education in French-Speaking Belgium: Linguistic, Cognitive and Educational Perspectives"

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**Abstract**

Our paper aims to present a 5-year multidisciplinary research project on immersion education in French-speaking Belgium. Our project starts from the premise that although recently published surveys have confirmed that immersion learners outperform traditional L2 learners as far as target language test scores are concerned, it nonetheless remains largely unclear to what extent, in what respect and thanks to which (internal and external) processes and factors immersion students show increased language gains compared to traditional learners (see Dalton-Puffer 2011). Drawing on an innovative combination of different research methods and perspectives, our project tackles the interplay between linguistic, cognitive and educational aspects of immersion. This interdisciplinary approach also allows us to examine the possible cognitive (memory, attention…) and socio-affective (motivational, attitudinal…) factors that inform the potential linguistic (typological, cross-linguistic…) differ...

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Assessing Dutch and English immersion education in French-speaking Belgium

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STUDY CONTEXT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- Dual-focused educational approach: content & language
- « Language of, for and through learning » (Coyne, Hood & Marsh 2010)
- Besides main educational aim, also socio-economic and socio-cultural aims

Relevance for the Belgian context
- Bi-/multilingual workers needed on the job market (Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2009)
- Language learning often seen as problematic (Janssens 2008; Gilsin, Meuwese & Weber 2006)
- Polarisation of the two main linguistic communities (Dutch- and French-speakers) for economic, social and political reasons

CLIL in Belgium
- Separate educational systems: different implementation of CLIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Belgium</th>
<th>Official CLIL since</th>
<th># CLIL-programmes: Primary / secondary</th>
<th># CLIL-pupils: Primary / secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French-speaking</td>
<td>Wallonia &amp; Brussels</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>171 / 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 858 / 20 324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch-speaking</td>
<td>Brussels (STIMOB)</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10 / 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>? / ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>/ 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Statistics for school year 2010-2014 (Choppy-Paquet 2015)
(2) Statistics for school year 2013-2014 (provided by Scholingcoop Brussels)
(3) Statistics for school year 2014-2015 (provided by Flemish Ministry of Education)

Goals
- Compare processes and products of language learning between CLIL and non-CLIL learners:
  - what are the differences, if any;
  - for which linguistic aspects;
  - according to which cognitive, socio-affective and instructional factors?

Contrast: one official state language (Dutch) and one high prestige foreign language (English)

Methodology
- Multidisciplinary approach (cognitive, socio-educational, linguistic)
- Longitudinal approach: 5 waves of data collection during 2 school years

WORK PACKAGES

WP1: Linguistics: phonological dimension
- Topic: « Perception and production of vowel and word stress systems by CLIL and non-CLIL learners of Dutch and English »
- Aims:
  - Investigating if CLIL education leads to a better phonological awareness of the foreign language
  - Cross-linguistic differences? (WP 2, 3)
  - Differences between primary school and secondary school learners?

WP2: Linguistics: morpho-syntactic dimension
- Topic: « Acquisition of intensifying constructions in Dutch and English by French-speaking CLIL and non-CLIL learners »
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- Topic: « Acquisition of intensifying constructions in Dutch and English by French-speaking CLIL and non-CLIL learners »
- Topic: « Acquisition of intensifying constructions in Dutch and English by French-speaking CLIL and non-CLIL learners »

WP3: Linguistics: phraseological dimension
- Topic: « Phraseological language: receptive knowledge and productive use of target-like phraseological units in L2 English or Dutch by CLIL and non-CLIL pupils »
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WP4: Cognitive aspects
- Topic: « The cognitive profile of the immersed brain »
- Aims:
  - Identifying the cognitive demands of CLIL
  - Understanding how CLIL itself may influence cognitive functioning
  - Interplay with linguistic and socio-affective variables? (WP 1-4, 5)

WP5: Socio-affective variables
- Topic: « The role of socio-affective variables in CLIL »
- Aims:
  - Integrating pupils’ individual and socio-affective background
  - As dependent variables
  - As predictors for linguistic and cognitive variables (WP 1-4)
  - As dynamic factors influenced by the teaching and learning CLIL processes
  - As sociocultural outcomes due to the specific language contact situation of CLIL in Belgium

Research team
- PhD researchers: Amélie Bulcke, Audrey De Smet, Isé Hendriks, Morgane Simons
- Post-doctoral researcher: Luk Van Mensel
- Academics: Philippe Hiligsmann (spokesman), Benoît Gabart, Laurence Mette, Fanny Meunier, Anouck Samra, Kristel Van Goethem

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INTERPLAY BETWEEN VARIOUS COMPONENTS (WORK PACKAGES)

integrated approach