



## **A close examination of CLIL geography teaching: an observation grid for analysing bilingual geography teaching (from the perspective of integrating content subject and language)**

### **1. Introduction**

The [observation grid](#) for analysing bilingual geography teaching represents a link between the more theoretical and general opinions on CLIL and the teaching elements to be analysed while watching the video. In an empirically verifiable way, this grid complements the normally very general observation criteria usually considered in subject-based pedagogy and is orientated towards observing bilingual teaching. The ratio of language to subject matter (Geography), as well as target language (L2) to native language (L1) and their pertinent functions in particular phases of a lesson or unit, including intercultural aspects, determine the content and structure of the observation grid. The participants should be made aware - through precise observation - of the central difficulty of bilingual teaching, i.e. the status and function of target language (L2) and native language (L1) in certain phases of a given lesson. Even if only monolingual teaching is seen on the video, be it because this suits the particular phase of the teaching unit or because CLIL is being understood as monolingual content subject teaching in the L2, the use of the observation grid shows the necessity to focus on the relationship between target and native language (L1) in CLIL teaching.

Bilingual teaching claims to promote intercultural and transcultural learning. But how can this claim be realised in the classroom and verified through observation? This should be facilitated by the questions under Part V Intercultural aspects. In the sense of the Bilingual Triangle (Hallet 1998) developed by Hallet, it is necessary to identify terms, which allow cultural scripts in similar or different historical and/or geographical contexts of meaning to be recognised.

The grid is admittedly designed for bilingual geography teaching, but can be used for any other subject taught bilingually with minor alterations in Part III (Content, geographical aspects).

At this point it should be mentioned that this observation grid does not in any way claim to be complete or didactically correct in respect of questions as to how a subject should be taught bilingually. Of course, we have an idealistic concept of CLIL teaching in our heads, which influenced the design of the observation grid. But within the MOBIDIC Project itself, it has become clear that there exist very varied and diverse expectations of CLIL.

Above all, we should like this grid to be treated as a stimulus and support in training future CLIL teachers. It indicates the multiple facets of bilingual teaching and facilitates the empirical testing of differences between teaching models in various European countries as well as different concepts within a country. It should also be pointed out that we have tried - as far as possible - to filter out our national German perspectives (and to think in supra-national terms). In some places this is easier than in others. For example, the relationship between L1 and L2 is dealt with more neutrally than perhaps a lesson structure comprising different phases fundamental to the sequencing and conceptualisation typically found in German geography methodology. At this stage, we should like to point out that there are comparable concepts in other European countries. Thus the so-called "*trace écrite*" in French methodology corresponds to the German "*Ergebnissicherung*" (checking learning outcomes).



In order to make the observation sheet clearer, it has been divided into different aspects. For, even if the individual facets of bilingual teaching can only be separated from one another with great difficulty (perhaps not at all), the opportunity to contemplate these different aspects separately seems sensible in order to reach a final synthesis and an integrated approach to teaching both content subject and language.

Finally, it should be mentioned that as it is possible for one individual to use the grid to observe one single lesson, it is essential that the sheets can be thumbed through quickly. However, the main aim of the grid is for it to be used by groups with each member exploring particular aspects, e.g. within a group observation or within the framework of micro-teaching, followed by discussion.

## **2. Methodological rationale behind the observation grid**

### **2.1 Section on general information about the class**

The introductory questions on the context of the CLIL class have intentionally been kept short and serve simply to provide brief background information needed for evaluation.

### **2.2 Monitoring linguistic aspects**

The observation of linguistic aspects mainly concerns the L1/L2 ratio and their usage within the CLIL lesson.

It is clear that the question regarding the percentage of L1 and L2 used by teachers and pupils rests to a great extent on the subjective view of the individual observer. The use of stopwatches for measuring both the pupil and teacher talk would be necessary for an exact percentage measurement. Yet in this instance we are definitely not trying to obtain an accurate quantitative measurement, but to sensitise the observer to the use of the two languages and build a conscious awareness and interpretation of bilingualism.

Detailed record keeping of the languages used in the individual phases should, on the one hand, sharpen observation skills with regard to the use of L1 and L2 by both teacher and pupils. For example, observations may be made as to whether teacher and pupils use the target language (L2) to the same extent or whether in certain phases pupils prefer to use their native language (L1), perhaps in pair and group work.

At the same time, this language record prepares the way for the subsequent topic-based aspects of code-switching dealt with under Part IV (Language and Content).

### **2.3 A view of the content and geographical aspects**

These observation tasks on content and geographical aspects attempt to monitor procedures and principles of Geography from a bilingual point of view.

Bearing this in mind should ensure that even in teacher training the geographical point of view is never out of sight, which can happen, as the linguistic preparation often becomes the



priority. In extreme cases, geography teaching could become cultural studies in the foreign language, as there is a danger that the lesson concentrates too much on the foreign language aspect.

It is therefore important in initial and in-service teacher training that Geography acts as a cornerstone to the CLIL discourse. I.e. lesson planning should be approached from a geographical perspective, rather than including geographical principles and procedures as an addendum to a CLIL lesson planned from a language learning perspective.

For this reason the focus initially is on activities relevant to the content subject, which, depending on the phase, should not only deliver a different set of results, (a photo in the introductory phase provides motivation and raises any problems, a photo during procedures provides answers to the questions), but should also involve different languages. For example, the description of the photo in the introductory phase could possibly take place in the target language (L2), but a detailed evaluation of a photo would most likely be in the native language (L1) and only the preparation of the presentation would be in the target language (L2).

Activities introduced to younger CLIL classes possibly involve greater reliance on the native language (L1) - including paraphrasing/literal translation. Advanced CLIL geography teaching is certainly carried out almost entirely in the target language (L2).

On the question of the methodological principles of geography teaching, the focus rests on general geography teaching methods, which relate to most countries. This, on closer inspection, once again reminds us not to lose sight of the requirements of the subject being taught.

Finally, the learning outcomes of the content subject are not to be overlooked. From the qualitative side, this provides an opportunity to produce and discuss national concepts and traditions - such as those in France where it is still customary to dictate key sentences without written input on the board.

It is also important to question in which language this phase should take place. Must or should this be the target language (L2)? Under what circumstances is it more reasonable to use the native language (L1)? (Obviously not in a repetitive way, but possibly as a means of deepening the subject matter.)

## **2.4 An attempt to combine both points of view: language and content**

If we use the term “bilingual teaching” rather than “CLIL”, the focus is immediately placed on the use of two languages. Nevertheless, teaching a subject predominately in the target language (L2) is also generally accepted as “bilingual teaching”. However, in the everyday CLIL classroom there are constantly phases in which, consciously or sub-consciously, languages are switched either by the teacher or the pupils. Discovering and “tracking down” the causes of this “code-switching” is a central skill that should be developed and makes a differentiated observation worthwhile.

This question, which has been deliberately left open in the observation sheet, may not only give rise to all kinds of discussion and critical analysis of observed practice - both positive and negative -, but can also help the (future) CLIL teacher develop his/her own views on teaching their own subject in a foreign language. It is important that he/she develops a feeling for when it might be more sensible and necessary to provide content-related, methodological



or intercultural clarification in the native language (L1) (i.e. to make it easier for the pupils). However, reverting to the native language for simplicity's sake is to be avoided.

One of the principal content and language concerns *par excellence* is the question of clarifying subject specific terminology, as pupils need to know these both in the target language (L2) as well as in their native language (L1). Apart from the semantics of this, it is also interesting to consider the (further) use of subject-specific terminology, with regard to whether this occurs in both languages equally or possibly with some limited use of the L1, whereby, at the very least, a translation would be required. Also of concern is the way in which vocabulary is worked on. We should examine whether technical vocabulary should be taught formally, in ways reminiscent of MFL teaching practices (e.g. crossword puzzles) or freely contextualised, whereby it appears sufficient to embed the technical word simply by using it several times, as Lenz considers sufficient. (Lenz 2004, 39).

Finally, the CLIL teacher is always confronted by the question of how to handle error, both in the written form as well as orally. The enclosed observation sheet takes the latter into account. In this instance too it is essential to find personal solutions, which can be justified methodologically. Incorrect grammatical phenomena will certainly not be "hounded" so strictly as in MFL teaching, because, after all, bilingual teaching has completely different objectives. The focus here should be on functional communication, with the language carefully corrected - at least in the early stages of bilingual teaching - because the essence is to understand the content. As long as this is in no way impaired, the correction of mistakes will be handled more sensitively than in MFL teaching. On the other hand, dealing with error in this way does not exclude the need to heed the correct usage of subject specific terminology, if this is part of the content of a particular CLIL lesson. In brief: the observation task on error correction aims ideally to ascertain a difference between correction of error in technical language and that in general language.

## 2.5 Intercultural aspects

Another often-quoted reason for preferring CLIL geography teaching to "normal" L1 geography teaching is the obvious potential for intercultural learning contained therein. This postulate, which can be rather unclear and methodologically more difficult to interpret in everyday teaching, may be approached more easily through the use of authentic teaching materials in the L2.

This observation sheet should, on the one hand, record whether [cultural script\(s\)](#) can be interpreted via language(s) and if so, which ones.

On the other hand, the aspect of multiple perspectives and change of perspective is a central theme. After all, by allowing a comparison of subject matter from two national perspectives, bilingual teaching makes it possible to gain dimensions that are simply unattainable in native language (L1) classes.

Even if in the "everyday CLIL classroom", not every phenomenon can be taught with respect to cultural scripts or multiple perspectives (e.g. because of the availability of resources, the linguistic competence of the learners, time factors or quite simply the topic or room), teacher trainees should be made aware of and sensitised towards these issues.



## 2.6 What is the purpose of analysing the observation sheet?

At the end of the overall rather empirically designed observation sheet with open observation tasks and questions, it should be possible in exchange ideas and concepts with other observers to formulate one's own bilingual methodological hypotheses and speculations.

## 3. Concluding Remarks

Apart from in the MOBIDIC Project, the observation sheet for bilingual geography teaching presented here has also been used within the DAAD *Programme d'études en Allemagne* training programme by French *professeurs-stagiaires* (trainees) in Year 9 (*Jahrgangsstufe 9*) German-French geography classes at a grammar school in Frankfurt. If at all possible, this sheet should be used open-mindedly in conjunction with other analyses of trial CLIL classes in order to build up a full picture. Those who would like to make the observation sheet more open should use only the key words found in the observation tasks<sup>2</sup>.

## 4. Literature

Albrecht, V./ Böing, M. (2004): Kulturelle Skripte im bilingualen Erdkundeunterricht. In: MOBIDIC.

Hallet, W. (1998): The Bilingual Triangle – Überlegungen zu einer Didaktik des bilingualen Sachfachunterrichts. In: *Praxis des neusprachlichen Unterrichts* 45, H.2, S. 115-125.

Lenz, T. (2004): Gemeinsamkeiten, Unterschiede und Überschneidungsbereiche des Geographie- und des Fremdsprachenunterrichts – Teil 2. Vorschlag für ein fächerübergreifendes Konzept von „Content and Language Integrated Learning“. In *Geographie und Schule* 148, 2004, S. 38 – 41.

De Nuchèze, V. (199X): Observer une classe étrangère. *Le français dans le monde* 242, S. XX.

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<sup>2</sup> For Part III this could take the following form: use of content teaching methods and language, adapting principles of geography teaching, checking learning outcomes. For Part IV "Language and Content": Code-switching and reasons behind it, introducing subject specific vocabulary work, vocabulary work in L1 and L2, correction of error.