

“I STUDY NATUS IN ENGLISH”: LEXICAL TRANSFER IN CLIL AND REGULAR LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT. *This study analyses lexical transfer in a CLIL cohort (N = 48) at grade 5 and another (N = 22) at grade 7 to describe L1 influence in EFL in the area of lexis (as measured through the use of borrowings and lexical inventions). The results are then compared to those obtained from two cohorts of learners in “regular” classes at the same grades (N = 48 for grade 5 and N = 20 for grade 7) so as to establish possible differences between the two types of foreign language learning programmes in relation to lexical transfer. Results from the written composition used to gather data show a lower percentage of borrowings in the CLIL group than in the regular group both at grades 5 and 7 and a clear decrease in both CLIL and regular groups from grade 5 to 7; on the contrary, lexical inventions present very similar percentages of use in both types of programmes at each grade and a slight increase from grade 5 to grade 7 in both cases.*

KEY WORDS: *EFL, lexical transfer, CLIL.*

RESUMEN. *El presente estudio analiza la transferencia léxica en un grupo (N = 48) de alumnos con enseñanza AICLE en 5º Primaria y otro (N = 22) en 1º ESO para describir la influencia de la L1 en el léxico de inglés como lengua extranjera (medida a través de los “préstamos” y las “invenciones léxicas”). Se comparan luego los resultados con los obtenidos en otros dos grupos de alumnos de los mismos cursos pero con enseñanza “reglada” (N = 48 en 5º Primaria y N = 20 en 1º ESO) a fin de establecer posibles diferencias entre los dos tipos de programas de aprendizaje de lengua extranjera en cuanto a la transferencia léxica. Los resultados de la redacción escrita utilizada para obtener los datos muestran un porcentaje menor de préstamos en los grupos AICLE que en los reglados tanto en 5º Primaria como en 1º ESO y un claro descenso de 5º Primaria a 1º ESO en ambas muestras; por el contrario, las invenciones léxicas presentan unos porcentajes muy similares en ambas muestras (AICLE y reglada) en cada curso y un pequeño ascenso de 5º a 1º en ambos casos.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *ILE, transferencia léxica, AICLE.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The number of recent publications on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) shows the increasing interest towards this methodology, with a special focus on English as the main foreign language in schools in Europe. Marsh and Langé (1999) edited a volume that describes CLIL experiences in seven European countries; Navés and Muñoz (1999) were in charge of presenting CLIL experiences in the Spanish context. Although the evaluation of such contexts is generally speaking quite positive, a systematic analysis of several aspects of language acquisition has not been carried out yet.

The present study is framed in the BAF project (see Muñoz et al. 2002 and Muñoz 2006) and it has a double background. On the one hand, the focus on lexical transfer, which comes from previous research on written production in “regular” groups (with EFL), usually as part of a more comprehensive set of measures (see Celaya, Torras & Pérez-Vidal, 2001; Navés, Torras & Celaya, 2003, and, more specifically, Celaya & Torras, 2001; Sánchez & Celaya, 2003; Navés, Celaya & Torras, 2004; Navés, Miralpeix & Celaya, 2005; Celaya, 2006b). On the other, the focus on CLIL classrooms, inspired by recent educational changes in EFL teaching in our country, still with very little research; within the BAF project, data were gathered at several schools where pilot projects in CLIL have been carried out for years. Celaya (2006a) is the first analysis within the BAF project where the production of syntactic patterns in writing by CLIL learners and by regular groups is described and compared. CLIL learners with more hours of instruction in English and two years of content-based teaching but the same age as regular groups produced more complex patterns and fewer incorrect

patterns and their behaviour was similar to that of a cohort of regular learners who were at a higher grade and therefore older. It was assumed that more hours together with a different pedagogical approach would lead to relevant differences, but the author concludes that the advantage is not as huge as expected, given the large differences in hours and so further analyses need to be carried out in skills such as oral fluency or comprehension. Álvarez & Celaya (in preparation), based on the previous study, includes written data from a group of immersion students.

Generally speaking, studies that focus on transfer conclude that low proficiency learners tend to transfer more elements from their first language than more advanced learners (Möhle, 1989; Poullisse & Bongaerts, 1994; Woodall, 2002), although the opposite finding has also been reported (Sánchez, 2003; Sanz, 2000). A plausible explanation for these controversial findings may be that, as Ringbom (2001) claims, in the activation of words from other languages the learner's proficiency in the L2 may affect the type of L1 influence. In other words, these studies may be measuring different manifestations of transfer that are affected differently by proficiency (see Cenoz, Hufeisen & Jessner, 2001 for a thorough analysis of several aspects of cross-linguistic influence). In a different line of research, borrowings and lexical inventions are considered as communication strategies, more specifically, as compensatory strategies, together with other strategies such as calques, circumlocution, approximation and so on; generally speaking, most studies show a decrease of use as learners become more proficient in the L2 (see, for instance, Grañena & Celaya, 2001 for written data and Rossiter, 2005 for oral data).

Navés et al. (2005) in the analysis of borrowings and lexical inventions produced by learners from grade 5 to grade 12 show that learners at higher grades use fewer borrowings and lexical inventions, with statistically significant differences only in the case of borrowings. According to the authors, this suggests that school grade has an influence on transfer as far as the use of borrowings is concerned, but that its effect on the use of lexical inventions is less powerful. Navés et al. (2004) and Celaya (2006b) also found out that borrowings decreased over time (from 200 hours of instruction to 726 hours) in different groups of regular learners in each study; contrary to Navés et al. (2005), lexical inventions increased.

In light of these controversial findings, the objective of the present study is the analysis of lexical transfer (borrowings and lexical inventions) in a CLIL programme at two different grades (grades 5 and 7) and the comparison with a regular programme at the same grades. CLIL learners with more hours of instruction and a different type of input are expected to produce fewer borrowings than regular learners and, on the contrary, to present more lexical inventions since these require a better command of the L2.

2. METHOD

2.1. *Participants and contexts*

The total number of participants, who were selected at random from the BAF sample, is 138. The CLIL cohort consists of a total of 70 learners, of whom 48 learners were at Grade 5 (5 Primaria) (from now on, C5, C=CLIL) and 22 learners were at Grade 7 (1 ESO) (from now on C1); they all belonged to a semi-private school where a special type of programme was being piloted at the time of data collection. The "regular" cohort is formed by a total of 68 learners from a state school where English was taught as a foreign language as part of the school curriculum, as established by law. The regular group at Grade 5 (from now on, R5,

R=Regular) consists of 48 learners and the regular learners at Grade 7 (from now on, R1) are 20.

Grade 5 learners were 10.9 years old at the time of data collection; Grade 7 learners were 12.9 years. At Grade 5, CLIL learners had received 532 hours of EFL and about 266 of CLIL instruction whereas regular learners had received 200 hours of instruction. As for Grade 7, CLIL learners had increased the number of EFL hours in about 200 hours and CLIL in about 130 and regular learners had received 416 hours of instruction. None of the participants had received extra school classes at the time of data collection.

Groups	N	Grade
CLIL5 (C5)	48	5 (5 Primaria)
Regular5 (R5)	48	5 (5 Primaria)
CLIL1 (C1)	22	7 (1 ESO)
Regular1 (R1)	20	7 (1 ESO)

Table 1. *Participants*

2.2. *Instruments*

A time and topic-constrained written composition was used for data collection. Students had a maximum of 15 minutes to write on the topic “Introduce yourself”; the task was carried out in their own classrooms with the presence of the researchers in the BAF project and their own teacher in some cases. They were not allowed to ask questions or use dictionaries.

2.3. *Analysis*

The total number of open class words (OCW), the total number of borrowings and the total number of lexical inventions (both in open class words only) were counted in each composition (see Celaya, Pérez-Vidal & Torras, 2001) for the criteria of analysis into words).

Borrowings are L1 words that are not tailored to the target language (see James 1998) whereas lexical inventions are, according to Dewaele (1998), lexemes which are morpho-phonologically adapted to the target language but that do not exist in the target language. According to Ringbom (2001), borrowings and lexical inventions (*coinage* in his study) imply different types of L1 influence, that is, a borrowing results from a type of influence that works independently of the L2 system whereas a lexical invention requires the L1 and the L2 systems to interact closely and hence a higher degree of mastering of the L2 is expected.

The following are examples from the data in the present study (borrowings and lexical inventions in italics):

Borrowings:

1. My grandfather Joaquim “*tiene*”¹ 70 years old and my “otro” “*tiene*” 72 years old.
2. My mother is *ama de casa*
3. I have a *movil*
4. My father is *cocinero*
5. In the *passat*, I went to other school
6. I have a dog. It is a pastor “*alemán*”

Lexical inventions:

1. I don't like is *verdurs*
2. I tengo two *sistermanastres*
3. My mother is *guardia urban*
4. My favorite *assignature* is maths
5. My father is a *psicolog*
6. I have a bird. He is a *muscler* (from Catalan "mascle", English "male")

3. RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results in raw numbers and in percentages against the total number of open class words for both groups of learners.

Groups C=CLIL R=Regular	Total OCW	Borrowings	Lexical inventions
C5 (N=48)	1189	(41) 3.4%	(9) 0.7%
R5 (N=48)	253	(17) 6.7%	(2) 0.7%
C1 (N=22)	1095	(22) 2%	(24) 2.1%
R1 (N=20)	314	(12) 3.8%	(7) 2.2%

Table 2. Raw numbers (in brackets) and percentages of borrowings and lexical inventions

CLIL learners at grade 5 produce more borrowings (3.4%) than those at grade 7 (2%); the difference is very narrow (a statistical analysis, which is beyond the descriptive objective of this paper, would show whether there exist significant differences between the two grades). As for lexical inventions, CLIL learners at grade 5 produce fewer lexical inventions (0.7%) than learners at grade 7 (2.1%).

When CLIL and regular groups are compared, we see that the percentage of borrowings in the regular group, both at grades 5 (6.7%) and 7 (3.8%), is higher than in the CLIL groups, with a greater difference in the case of grade 5. Interestingly, such differences almost disappear in the case of lexical inventions; the same percentage appears for both CLIL and regular groups at grade 5 (0.7%) and a very similar one (2.1% and 2.2%) shows at grade 7.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that both the CLIL and regular groups present the same pattern of decrease in the percentage of borrowings and increase in lexical inventions from grade 5 to grade 7, that is, as grade increases and, consequently, so does proficiency in the L2.

4. DISCUSSION

The results reported above for CLIL learners follow those for regular learners in Navés et al. (2004) and Celaya (2006b); that is, on the one hand, CLIL learners use more borrowings than lexical inventions at both grades and, on the other, borrowings decrease and lexical inventions increase with grade, as expected. Regular learners in the present study also present the same pattern so this study also confirms previous findings for regular learners in the BAF project and in other studies on transfer and proficiency that state that low advanced learners transfer more elements from their first language than advanced learners (Möhle

1989; Poulisse & Bongaerts 1994; Woodall 2002) (see review of the literature above). As claimed by Ringbom (2001), more proficiency in the L2 (grade 7) makes learners rely less on the L1 (borrowings) and allows them to apply L2 rules, even if wrongly (lexical inventions). These results, however, contradict Navés et al. (2005), although we must remember that differences in the production of lexical inventions at higher grades did not yield any statistically significant results in that study.

As results show, CLIL learners produce a lower percentage of borrowings than regular learners both at grades 5 and 7; this is interpreted as evidence of a beneficial effect of CLIL (more instruction and more input in the L2 will prevent learners from relying on their L1); the practical implications for educational policies are clear: at the same age as regular learners CLIL learners (both at grades 5 and 7) have more vocabulary at their disposal and, consequently, are able to use more words in the target language (see also Celaya, 2006a). However, the very similar percentages of use of lexical inventions in both types of programmes at both grades come as a surprise, since they contradict the idea that CLIL learners might be expected to create words based on L2 rules due to their higher amount of input and higher proficiency in general. Further analyses with oral data, for instance, are needed to explore the issue in depth.

A final remark is in order about the rather low percentages in the production of both types of lexical transfer in all the learners. It can be argued that this is the result of the type of task (written), which may not be as appropriate to measure lexical transfer as an oral task requiring more spontaneous speech. The results, however, are in line with the low percentages reported in Celaya & Torras (2001), Navés et al. (2005) and Celaya (2006b) where the same task was used to analyse different groups of learners. In both CLIL and regular groups the production of borrowings is higher than that of lexical inventions (except in C1), presumably because borrowings are easier to produce in the case of low proficiency learners; little effort is required when an L1 word is inserted in the L2 text (borrowing) as compared to the possibility of adapting it to the rules of the L2 (lexical invention).

5. CONCLUSION

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the findings presented above. First, that a CLIL programme, which in the present study is necessarily associated with a higher number of hours of instruction than a regular programme, allows learners at the same ages as regular learners to use more vocabulary in the L2 and prevents them from having to resort to L1 vocabulary when there is a gap in written production. Secondly, that lexical inventions, at least at such initial stages as those of the learners in our study, may not be a useful indicator to compare CLIL and regular programmes or else, that a CLIL programme does not provide learners with more tools to “create” L2 vocabulary.

This descriptive study has tried to contribute to the analysis of foreign language acquisition processes in a (recent) type of context (CLIL classrooms), where, the author of the paper believes, the analysis of linguistic aspects (lexical transfer among others) is necessary and urgent to further understand foreign language acquisition.

NOTES

1. The student him/herself used the inverted commas to mark the difference with the rest of the sentence in English.

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