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Bilingual classes for all or for a selected few?

CLIL with less privileged students

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1. Introduction

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) emerges from the literature as an educational concept from which students can draw significant benefits: ZydatiB found highly significant differences between the linguistic competence of students in CLIL and regular classes with CLIL students outperforming their peers on all measures of language proficiency (2009). Moreover, Coyle et al. stress that “CLIL not only promotes linguistic competence”, but also “stimulate[s] cognitive flexibility” and “enrich[es] the understanding of concepts, and broaden[s] conceptual mapping resources” (2010: 10f.).

However, German CLIL programmes tend to be rather selective, with students being admitted based on prior language competences or grades in relevant subjects: “[S]tudents with lower abilities and social backgrounds tend to be excluded. Drop-outs from CLIL classes will even enhance this homogeneity” (Küppers / Trautmann 2013: 292). Homogeneous groups as well as high performance requirements seem to attract parents as well as students striving to belong to an exclusive group (Bruton 2013: 595). However, such an elitist agenda clearly does not match the current educational goal of *inclusion*, which aims to provide equal educational opportunities to all students regardless of their current situation or individual prerequisites by individualising teaching and learning processes (Dietrich 2016).

The alleged success of CLIL programmes in improving students’ language as well as subject competences has led educators to expand them to a broader range of learners (Coyle et al. 2010: 2). However, the endeavour to provide equal opportunities to students of different abilities may cause severe problems: according to the *threshold hypothesis*, insufficient language skills may hinder students’ cognitive development as well as subject learning (Cummins 1979: 229; ZydatiB 2012: 26). In contrast to that, Küppers and Trautmann argue that “CLIL does indeed work for everybody” and suggest that more research should address bilingual programmes in mixed-ability settings (2013: 292, 294).

In accordance with this goal, this paper addresses the question under which conditions German CLIL programmes can be beneficial for students with a limited proficiency in the working language. As the implementation of CLIL programmes as well as the types of schools available to less proficient students differ quite strongly between German federal states, this paper focuses mainly on the situation in Berlin.

While similar conditions may be relevant for other languages, the paper concentrates on CLIL programmes with English as an additional language. This focus was chosen due to the prominence of English as a vehicular language in Berlin, with 71 schools offering German/English CLIL programmes in contrast to ten schools offering German/French, four schools German/Russian and three schools German/Spanish CLIL programmes in addition to *Staatliche Europaschulen* offering immersion programmes in various other languages (SenBJW 2015b).

This paper draws on theoretical literature in order to explain the selectivity of current and especially previous CLIL programmes as well as the goal of expanding CLIL to less privileged secondary schools. Based on the theoretical background of the threshold hypothesis, it presents empirical evidence on CLIL programmes with less privileged students considering both their problems and potentials. The paper aims at establishing possible supportive conditions for implementing CLIL with less proficient students, which could be tested in further research.

2. Democratising CLIL

According to Coyle et al., CLIL can be defined as “a dual-focused educational approach in which an **additional language** is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Coyle et al. 2010: 1, emphasis in the original). In the context of CLIL classes, this *additional language* serves as a *vehicular language* or a *working language* being used for content learning as well as for activities with a more explicit language focus (ibid.; Wolff 2010: 299).

In the German context, CLIL is mostly referred to as *bilingualer Sachfachunterricht*. Apart from *immersion programmes* teaching students of two different first languages (L1) half of the time in one language and half of the time in the other, CLIL is mostly limited to secondary schools. Usually, a *foreign language* (FL) serves as vehicular language (ibid.). Hallet gives an overview of CLIL types commonly practiced at German schools: (1) bilingual strands, in which selected subjects are being learnt through an FL, (2) temporary CLIL, which means that selected subjects are being learnt through an FL for a limited period of time, (3) bilingual modules in the form of specific units being learnt through an FL, (4) projects using an FL, and (5) FL elements in subjects generally learnt through German, e.g. FL materials (2005: 12).

The following section gives an overview of common selection mechanisms of German CLIL programmes, which are criticised for being exclusionary and distorting investigations into the results of bilingual teaching. Afterwards, measures for expanding CLIL to less privileged secondary schools are being presented.

2.1 Selection mechanisms and elitism

German CLIL programmes tend to be quite popular with students and parents. If there are more applications than places, the applicants and their parents are usually invited to interviews with the school's headmaster or a teacher. The impression the child conveys during the interview as well as prior grades and the recommendation of the child's primary school teachers are taken into account in order to decide whether it should be offered a place in the CLIL programme (Rumlich 2013: 184). The students' proficiency in core subjects, such as Maths or German, is also often considered in the selection process (Küppers / Trautmann 2013: 292). These requirements suggest that only students who are generally successful at school can cope with the demands of learning through an FL.

According to the legal requirements for CLIL in Berlin, students and their parents have to give their written consent to participation in a CLIL programme. The principal decides whether to admit a student, and he or she should consider language competence, capability, commitment, and learning behaviour. Students attending *Integrierte Sekundarschulen* are only permanently admitted to bilingual classes if they have the required FL grade in their first report (SenBJW 2015a: 4).

The selective nature of the entry processes is compounded by the fact that applying for a CLIL programme and not for another strand at the same school or a different school is a conscious decision which is probably only taken by families placing value on good education, as participation in CLIL strands is often described as necessitating increased effort on the student's part (Zydatiř 2009: 161). Moreover, Apsel argues that German CLIL streams are "*doubly selective*" as "students have the statutory right to leave the CLIL stream at the beginning of each school year in order to attend subject matter teaching in German" (2012: 51, emphasis in the original). Therefore, students are not only selected on entry but can later drop out of CLIL. This means that teachers can further increase the homogeneity of the group taught by advising less proficient students to leave the CLIL strand.

Küppers and Trautmann argue that the selection process for CLIL programmes results in a *creaming effect*: “Creaming here means selection of the ‘best’ into more favourable learning environments in the sense that more will be given to those that already have (Matthew principle)” (2013: 291). They assume that CLIL students “get more language instruction, they are subjected to an enriched curriculum and to better motivated and qualified teachers” (Küppers / Trautmann 2013: 291). This assumption is supported by the legal requirements for Berlin, which recommend additional FL teaching as a preparation to CLIL and one additional lesson for each CLIL subject in the first two years as well as demanding a quite high minimum qualification of CLIL teachers (SenBJW 2015a: 2 (1), 9 (1)).

Selectivity does not seem to be a necessary evil resulting from limited capacities but a strategic asset for schools offering CLIL programmes. Küppers and Trautmann argue that the perceived exclusivity of CLIL programmes contributes to its attractiveness for different educational stakeholders: “*Parents* [...] might look out for a special curriculum and a school profile which provides a distinctive education for their offspring. *Students* [...] might feel flattered by being ‘special’ and find the idea of getting extra credentials quite appealing. *Schools* might want to attract their ‘customers’ through exclusive bilingual national-international profiles.” (2013: 287, emphasis in the original)

The selection of highly proficient students for CLIL programmes has probably also distorted the results of studies trying to investigate whether CLIL leads to improved FL competence. Based on a re-evaluation of various studies positing positive effects of CLIL especially on FL learning, Bruton concludes that “[i]t is very convenient to select and then demonstrate that the selected perform better than the non-selected with additional language exposure” (2011: 530).

This accusation is supported by Rumlich’s study on the general English proficiency of CLIL and non-CLIL students from the end of grade 6 to the end of grade 8. The study found that prospective CLIL students performed significantly better already after their additional preparatory English classes in year 5 and 6 (2013: 193, 196). Rumlich argues that these differences are a result of preparatory English classes as well as the selection of a specific kind of students who benefit from teaching more than other students due to their higher intelligence, greater prior knowledge or motivation, more favourable attitudes or domestic learning environments and greater extramural exposure to and use of English (2013: 197f.).

2.2 Expanding CLIL to less privileged secondary schools

German CLIL programmes used to be restricted to secondary schools of the *Gymnasium* type with the first bilingual strand being introduced in 1969 (Schwab 2013: 299). However, other types of secondary schools as well as primary schools have started to establish bilingual programmes in the past decades and the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia even aims at offering CLIL to all students (Mentz 2008: 8).

Counting state as well as private schools and *Staatliche Europaschulen* offering immersion programmes, Berlin currently has 71 schools with German-English bilingual programmes, eight of which are primary schools, 35 *Gymnasien*, 27 *Integrierte Sekundarschulen* (ISS) and one is a *Fachoberschule*¹ (SenBJW 2015c). The large number of ISS offering CLIL programmes suggests that CLIL is open to students who are less proficient in the working language. However, especially CLIL programmes at ISS are quite strongly regulated in the relevant legal document, called *Ausführungsvorschriften für bilingualen Unterricht an allgemein bildenden Schulen* (SenBJW 2015a).

Every secondary school in Berlin is allowed to offer bilingual classes if it decides to have a bilingual profile and to embed this profile in its school programme. A bilingual profile should not only include CLIL and support measures for achieving an advanced language competence, but also projects, student exchanges, school partnerships or similar measures (SenBJW 2015a: 3 (2)). While this holds for both *Gymnasium* and ISS, the regulation stipulates that FL classes for students participating in a bilingual strand at ISS have to be taught on the advanced level (SenBJW 2015a: 5 (4)). As ISS are open to students of different abilities, individual students or whole classes can be taught and assessed either on a basic level (Grundniveau) or on an advanced level (Erweiterungsniveau). If FL classes have to

¹ In contrast to other German federal states, Berlin has partly abolished its three-part secondary school system. Students can qualify for the Abitur both at *Gymnasium* and at ISS. However, the ISS is open to students of different abilities, while the *Gymnasium* only admits students with higher abilities. In contrast to that, *Fachoberschulen* or *Oberstufenzentren* are restricted to students from year 11 onwards. They offer different kinds of general educational certificates as well as vocational training. Other German federal states have three different types of secondary school, with the *Gymnasium* being reserved for high achievers, *Realschule* for medium achievers and *Hauptschule* for pragmatic achievers. In parallel with this three-part secondary school system, there is the *Gesamtschule*, which is open to students of all abilities. While *Gymnasium* is often translated as “grammar school” and *Gesamtschule* as “comprehensive school”, the original German terms are used throughout this paper in order not to distort the meaning of the terms or the differences between the school types.

be taught on the advanced level, this means that students only reaching the basic level in the FL are prevented from participating in the CLIL programme. Therefore, the expansion of CLIL to less privileged types of secondary schools does not necessarily mean that it is offered to less privileged students.

3. The threshold hypothesis

Bruton argues that “[s]election in CLIL should not just be recognised, but justified, if only to admit it may be critical to its implementation” (2015: 125). This argument suggests that it may only be possible to realise CLIL successfully in quite homogeneous classrooms due to the high requirements for students’ language proficiency. This argument is based on the *threshold hypothesis* mainly advanced by Cummins. He proposes that “there may be threshold levels of linguistic competence which bilingual children must attain in order to avoid cognitive deficits and to allow the potentially beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to influence their cognitive growth” (1979: 229).

Cummins argues that below the *lower threshold*, “bilingual children’s competence in a language may be sufficiently weak as to impair the quality of their interaction with their educational environment through that language” (1979: 230). He stresses that this threshold can only be determined for specific situations: “The threshold cannot be defined in absolute terms; rather it is likely to vary according to the children’s stage of cognitive development and the academic demands of different stages of schooling” (ibid.). Baker stresses that negative cognitive effects can especially result when “there is low level of competence in both languages”, which has been termed *semilingualism* (2011: 167). While the negative cognitive effects of bilingualism seem to be overcome with the lower threshold, cognitive advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals are only expected when learners exceed the *higher threshold* by having “age-appropriate ability in both [...] languages” (Baker 2011: 167-68).

While the concept of two thresholds may not be fully applicable to most participants in CLIL programmes who already have adequate competence in their L1 when entering the programme, the theory still suggests that positive cognitive effects of CLIL can only be expected as soon as a certain language level is achieved. Moreover, the theory suggests that students who have a very low proficiency in the working language or grave deficits in their L1 and L2 may be affected adversely by CLIL.

Baker criticises especially the imprecise and static nature of the concept: “What language skills need to be developed to what point so as to reach a higher threshold level? Indeed, the danger may be in constructing artificial ‘critical stages’ or levels, when transition is gradual and smooth.” (Baker 2011: 169) The demand for clear quantified language levels seems to misapprehend Cummins’ original purpose of constructing a model which is sensitive to both the developmental stage of the learner and the demands of the institutions. The second criticism, however, seems to be highly relevant to the CLIL context. If there really was a language level below which students could not benefit from instruction through a foreign language, selecting only students for CLIL programmes who have reached this language level would not only be justified but highly recommendable.

However, such a language level would have to be empirically grounded and clearly quantified if its accomplishment was to be tested in prospective CLIL students. Moreover, the positing of a required entry level is opposed to the fundamental educational premise that everybody is able to learn, and that it is the main responsibility of educational institutions to help students to fulfil their learning potentials. If one assumes that there really are two language thresholds, one can also draw the consequence that a certain degree of failure may be inevitable at the beginning of a CLIL programme and that students need to be adequately supported within the programme to overcome the two thresholds and to finally profit from their bilingual experience.

4. Empirical evidence on CLIL with less privileged students

The following sections present and critically analyse empirical evidence from studies on less privileged students participating in CLIL programmes at different types of schools. While the preceding chapters focused mainly on the situation in Berlin and on CLIL programmes with English as a working language, this chapter includes evidence from different federal states and even from other German-speaking countries as well as studies on CLIL programmes with other working languages. This broader focus is attributable to the fact that the selectivity of CLIL features prominently in the theoretical as well as empirical literature, while the number of studies actually investigating underprivileged students is still limited.

4.1 Problems

Most of the studies identifying mainly problems of CLIL with less proficient students focus on students failing or encountering severe problems in *Gymnasium* CLIL strands. Apsel concludes from the results of his pilot study on the reasons for students to drop out of *Gymnasium* CLIL streams that there is indeed a threshold-level below which students have problems coping with the demands of CLIL: “The initial results indicate that a combination of factors including language, learning skills, content knowledge and commitment seem to function as a complex threshold-level for CLIL reaching beyond discourse competence alone” (2012: 54). However, Apsel also stresses that the emergence of this threshold-level can at least partly be attributed to the inability of teachers to cope with heterogeneous CLIL classes:

Especially learners with comparatively low language proficiency and cognitive academic abilities may not be catered for sufficiently in conventional CLIL streams at grammar schools in Germany. Looking at political aspirations such as “CLIL for all”, it seems advisable for all CLIL teachers to acquire diagnostic, pedagogical and didactic competences to identify and support students across the entire range of ability. (ibid.)

Zydatiß compared CLIL and non-CLIL *Gymnasium* students testing their English language competence, or more specifically *Use of English*, and subject-matter competence, or *Academic Discourse Competencies*, with different instruments (Zydatiß 2012: 18). Dividing the students’ results for both *Use of English* and *Academic Discourse Competencies* according to tertiles, he found strong and statistically significant correlations between the students’ language and subject-matter competence. Based on this finding, he concludes:

I would maintain that adequate levels of academic discourse proficiency in German CLIL classrooms (of the extensive type realised by a ‘bilingual stream’) are dependent on rather high levels of linguistic competence [...] and/or general proficiency in the working language [...]. If, however, the condition of being above a ‘lower’ language threshold is not met (which in fact has to be quite high), CLIL learners run the risk of insufficient success with subject-matter instruction through a foreign language. (Zydatiß 2012: 26)

These results prompt Zydatiß to caution educators against the opening of bilingual strands for all students, regardless of their ability (Zydatiß 2012: 27). However, he also seems to recognise the teachers’ responsibility to take the students’ abilities into account, as he stresses that CLIL in general has to be organised carefully “by way of bifocal lesson planning [...], adequate input materials and tasks of varying complexity [...], visual, verbal and social scaffolding, changing levels of abstraction

and [...] systematic but sensible content and language integrated modes of assessment” (ZydatiB 2012: 27).

Due to the design of ZydatiB’ study, it is impossible to determine the students’ initial English competence, the extent of the progress they have made in the course of the CLIL programme, whether their subject-matter competence would have increased more significantly if they had been in a regular strand and whether the teachers used differentiation methods to cater for the needs of less proficient students. This means that one cannot be sure that less privileged students do not profit from CLIL and that this is a consequence of their limited language proficiency and not of teachers who address heterogeneity inadequately.

Similar results were achieved in an Austrian study comparing the oral English competence of CLIL and non-CLIL students of three different ability groups in an extensive oral English test. Mewald stresses that while “pupils from CLIL classes were more fluent than mainstream pupils”, CLIL students from the lowest ability group proved to be less fluent than their peers from the non-CLIL lowest ability group (2007: 153). On the basis of these results, he assumes that “the communicative competence of average and high achievers was supported by CLIL, while the low achievers could not benefit in the same way from the programmes as their peers” (Mewald 2007: 155).

CLIL students from the lowest ability group were also found to lag behind their non-CLIL peers in terms of divergent and creative thinking and the ability to produce continuous speech (Mewald 2007: 160, 165). In general, Mewald suggests that these students may be overtaxed by the demands of CLIL: “Feedback from questionnaires and interviews suggested that the low achievers were frequently asked too much in CLIL lessons, and they did not participate equally actively as the average and the high achievers” (2007: 157). Once again, it is not clear from the design of the study whether the students from the lowest ability group receive adequate support in their CLIL classes.

A focus on problems is also evident in a study investigating the attitudes of Austrian CLIL teachers towards CLIL with less proficient students based on interviews (Gierlinger 2007: 83). Students are grouped according to their abilities at most Austrian comprehensive schools, and teachers seem to be reluctant to try CLIL with less proficient students: the researchers “could hardly find a teacher who would venture to try out CLIL with their third sets” (Gierlinger 2007: 82). This unwillingness

was justified with a perceived unsuitability of the students for CLIL: “Lower ability students, especially in comprehensive schools, were seen as unwilling to and/or incapable of dealing with the higher linguistic and cognitive demands or CLIL” (Gierlinger 2007: 93). However, the participating teachers do not seem very eager to support less proficient students, as “none of the interviewees mentioned the use of text support or easification measures” (Gierlinger 2007: 100). Also the use of the mother tongue by students seems to be discouraged especially by comprehensive school teachers even though some of them seem to use it themselves to clarify understanding (Gierlinger 2007: 105-8).

4.2 Potentials

According to the theoretical literature, CLIL modules may offer a less intimidating route to learning in an FL especially for students who are less proficient in the working language. Christ argues that CLIL modules offer students the possibility to gain experience in working through the FL and to increase their FL competence without having to take the weighty decision to participate in a CLIL strand (1999: 7). In line with this theoretical assumption, most studies stressing the potentials of CLIL with less proficient students are based on module concepts.

The *Bremer Modulkonzept* is specifically targeted at underachieving and little motivated students who are to be given the chance to experience language not only as a subject to be learned but more as a means of communication and negotiation (Abendroth-Timmer 2009: 178). Depending on the students’ language competence, previous experiences with the language and on whether all students in a class learn the same or different FLs, there are distinct modules, in which the FL is used for various functions and to varying extents.

Based on the evaluation of a Sports module in Spanish with parts of the group learning Spanish and the others French as an FL, Abendroth-Timmer concludes that learning in CLIL modules is possible even on a very low competence level in the language and with linguistically heterogeneous groups (2009: 187). She concludes from interviews with participating students that students’ motivation during CLIL modules may be increased by (1) avoiding typical methods of FL classes and focusing on goals related to the content subject, (2) enabling the students to feel competent while using the FL, e.g. by grading subject and not language achievements, (3) enabling the students to increase their language competence in

areas such as grammar and vocabulary, and (4) facilitating authentic communication in the FL, e.g. through the participation of guest students (2009: 190-91).

Rittersbacher describes a Science module for year 9 which was conducted at a *Realschule* in Baden-Wuerttemberg. None of the two participating classes had any prior experience with CLIL, and the module was conducted in English in one class and in German in the other (2006: 31). Rittersbacher maintains that while the students working in English needed more time for the experimental stage, both groups achieved similar results with regard to the subject content. In the course of the unit, they communicated more naturally in the working language, they seemed to be more motivated than their peers and interacted in a more cooperative fashion, possibly due to the increased demands of experimenting and preparing a presentation in an FL (2006: 35).

Another study focuses on a *Hauptschule* in Baden-Wuerttemberg which offers bilingual modules from year 5 onwards in four integrated subjects covering seven of the traditional subjects (Schwab 2013: 300). Schwab describes rather favourable teaching conditions with a small class, a high proficiency in German of most students with migrant background and team teaching at least for some of the bilingual modules (2013: 301). In a two-year longitudinal study employing lesson observations, language tests and group as well as individual interviews, Schwab found that the students were able to communicate successfully in English and that the English competence of most learners increased from year 5 to 6 (2013: 302, 306).

Interestingly, some of the students interviewed for the study claimed that they understand more in bilingual modules than in regular classes taught in German (Schwab 2013: 308). Schwab argues that especially at *Hauptschulen*, teachers frequently employ difficult, academically-oriented language which does not consider the students' needs (ibid.). In contrast to that, the students were adequately supported by their CLIL teacher in the case of linguistic difficulties and the content of the modules was reduced to the essential aspects (2013: 309). Schwab concludes that bilingual modules can be successfully taught at *Hauptschulen* if they (1) are intuitively accessible, (2) progress in small steps, (3) are action-oriented, (4) include regular revision, and (5) allow students to interact and participate (2013: 311).

Further empirical evidence on CLIL with less proficient students stems from a preliminary report prepared as part of the scientific monitoring of the pilot project "Bilinguales Lehren und Lernen in der Realschule" ("Bilingual Teaching and

Learning at Realschule”) in Baden-Wuerttemberg (Hollm et al. 2010). The study was conducted at five different *Realschulen* with bilingual strands in which the working language is either English or French, and the methods used were participant observation, interviews with the different groups participating in the pilot project, surveys, analysis of reports and teaching materials (Hollm et al. 2010: 161).

Hollm et al. describe a very positive general assessment of CLIL by students, teachers and principals (2010: 183). The existence of a bilingual strand seems to motivate both students and parents to opt for this *Realschule* and not for a *Gymnasium* in the same area. However, the fact that some students described the bilingual strand as a nice supplement for more proficient students suggests that participation in a bilingual strand can serve as a means of social distinction not only at *Gymnasium* but also at *Realschule* (Hollm et al. 2010: 171). This means that expanding CLIL to less privileged school types does not necessarily reduce its elitist flavour.

While some students mentioned problems in understanding complicated issues in the FL especially in mathematics classes, most students agreed that technical terms are thoroughly explained in CLIL classes while the students’ familiarity with these terms is taken for granted in regular classes (Hollm et al. 2010: 172, 176). The study suggests that not only CLIL modules but also bilingual strands can be implemented successfully at less privileged types of secondary schools. However, it is very likely that the bilingual option is chosen disproportionately by students who could also attend *Gymnasium* and who are likely to have a high proficiency in the working language.

5. Conclusion: supportive conditions

Focusing on the German context and based on the original definition by Coyle et al., this paper has described CLIL as a dual-focused educational approach in which a *foreign language* is used for the teaching of both language and content. It has been argued that most German CLIL programmes are highly selective as (1) the supposedly higher requirements are likely to discourage less academically oriented families, (2) there is a selection process on entry especially into bilingual strands which is mainly based on previous grades and the student’s assumed qualities, and (3) CLIL students failing to meet academic demands are free to leave the CLIL programme at any time and are probably encouraged to do so.

While the exclusive nature of CLIL programmes has been shown to be in the interest of schools using it as a comparative advantage, it has been argued that positive effects of content learning in an FL are difficult to prove if one considers the additional favourable learning conditions which are being created for the students. However, CLIL programmes have been expanded to less privileged secondary schools due to their perceived advantages. At least in the Berlin context, it is doubtful whether this has actually led to a democratisation of CLIL, as less proficient students are still excluded from participation on a legal basis.

Based on the threshold hypothesis, it has been argued that students whose English proficiency is below a certain level may not profit from CLIL programmes with English as a working language. The hypothesis was found to be applicable to groups of CLIL students in studies by ZydatiB (2012) and Mewald (2007). This can be interpreted to imply either that careful selection for CLIL programmes is justified in the best interest of students with a limited proficiency in the working language or that these students can benefit from CLIL only if they are given adequate support.

The successful realisation of CLIL with less proficient students has been shown in studies by Abendroth-Timmer (2009), Rittersbacher (2006), Schwab (2013) and Hollm et al. (2010). It can be concluded from the results of these four studies that CLIL modules may be a promising alternative to CLIL strands, as they give students as well as teachers the chance to get used to the CLIL setting and to gradually increase the demands. Similar to inclusion, CLIL with less privileged or underachieving students seems to be a question of teachers' attitudes and not so much of objective language thresholds. Topics, materials and language level can be adapted to the students' needs and language as well as subject proficiency.

Based on the assumption that a mismatch between the students' cognitive and linguistic competences exists in most CLIL classrooms, ZydatiB argues that it is vital to support learners through input and output scaffolding, the explicit introduction of verbal operators and discourse functions, and the teaching of context-related grammar structures as well strategies for understanding texts and decoding unknown vocabulary (2010). In addition to these scaffolding measures, which can be used to support students at different proficiency levels, Heimes proposes specific methods for internal differentiation in CLIL classrooms: (1) *mother tongue*: less proficient students can be given hints in their L1 or short L1 summaries before or after dealing with the topic in the L2; (2) *interest*: the students can be allowed to

work on a topic they are interested in or they can present results in a more or less pre-structured way; (3) *methods*: students can work together and help each other according to specific methods; (4) *input*: students can be given materials with different annotations, visualisations or language support (2012: 10f.).

If scaffolding techniques and methods of internal differentiation are used and if – on a more general level – the students' needs are taken into account for all pedagogic and didactic decision, avoiding the negative consequences of CLIL posited by the threshold hypothesis has been shown to be possible. Studies on CLIL with less proficient students suggest that the CLIL experience has increased the students' motivation and language competence and that the understanding of complex concepts may be facilitated. However, further empirical research is needed to establish whether CLIL modules are more beneficial to underachieving students than modules in their L1 with regard to language and subject-matter competences if the teaching conditions are similar in both contexts and similar methods are being used.

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