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Students’ Oral Participation in the CLIL Classroom
A comparative study of oral participation of CLIL students and students taught through their native language Swedish

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Abstract

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Abstract: Studies have shown that participation and interaction in a language classroom are important. Especially so in the CLIL classroom where the target language is both the subject of study and the medium of instruction. However, it can be difficult for a teacher to get students to participate orally. Many researchers claim that students’ oral output in the CLIL classroom is minimal, and that they speak less than students who are taught through their native language.

The aim of this paper was to study Swedish CLIL students’ oral participation and to find out whether the amount of oral classroom interaction was similar in a CLIL classroom and in a classroom where Swedish was the medium of instruction. I also wanted to investigate if male and female students interacted to the same extent, and whether the amount of interaction was evenly distributed within the classroom.

The results show that CLIL students’ oral participation tended to be very high. The CLIL students produced even more total oral output than students in the control groups, which had their native language as their medium of instruction.

Nyckelord: CLIL, SPRINT, bilingual education, oral participation, output, interaction, gender, classroom positioning
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1. Introduction and aims

A classroom is a place where more than two individuals gather for the purpose of learning (Tsui, 1995:1). Since we learn by communicating it is of great importance that students are active in the classroom (Allwright, 1984:157). Participation and interaction in a language classroom are especially important, since the target language is both the subject of study and the medium for learning (Tsui, 1995:12). In a language classroom, students’ oral participation is crucial in order for students’ language proficiency to improve (Tsui, 1995:81f). However, all students do not voluntarily and actively engage in oral interaction during class, and it is difficult for a teacher to get students to participate orally in the classroom (Tsui, 1995:11f).

There are schools in Sweden and all over the world where some or all subjects are taught in part or entirely through a target language, rather than through the native language. This means that the target language is the medium of instruction as well as the subject of instruction. This kind of education is called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The Swedish term for CLIL is Språk- och innehållsintegrerad inlärning och undervisning, which creates the acronym SPRINT (Nixon, 2000:3f). CLIL has a number of different other terms that can be used when subjects are taught through a target language; one is bilingual education. However, that term is misleading because it implies that CLIL education only has to do with two languages, but since there are schools that offer students more than two CLIL languages the term is not correct (Nixon, 2000:7).

There has been research done on the oral participation in the CLIL classroom. The results tend to show that CLIL students’ output is minimal and that they speak less than students who are taught through their native language (Swain, 1988:69f). However, on the specific issue of Swedish CLIL students, not many studies have been done. There is one larger study, commissioned and issued by the Swedish National Agency for Education in 2001, that focuses on CLIL in Sweden. This study is called Sprint – hot eller möjlighet? and Gun Hägerfelth claims in this study, as Swain does above, that CLIL students speak less than students who are instructed in their native language (Skolverket, 2001b:13).
The aim of this paper was to study whether the amount of oral classroom interaction is similar in a CLIL classroom and in a classroom where students are taught through their native language. I also wanted to study if male and female pupils interacted to the same extent or if gender differences could be found? Lastly, I wanted to try to find out where in the classroom most oral participation occurs.

Through classroom observations and discussions with the teachers concerned, I planned to look at students’ oral participation in secondary school. I studied one English CLIL class and two classes where Swedish was the medium of instruction, and compared the amount of students’ oral output. Since it cannot be ruled out that the amount of interaction differs between subjects, I have chosen to focus on natural science subjects, such as physics and biology, where discussions might be more likely to take place, rather than in for example maths and physical education.

2. Background

2.1 The importance of classroom interaction

Allwright (1984:156) claims that for a lesson to actually be defined as a lesson, everyone who is present in the classroom, both teacher and students, have to participate in classroom interaction. If no interaction has taken place during a lesson, the participants might not accept that it is a lesson that has taken place (Allwright, 1984:159). Both teachers and students have to be seen as ‘managers of learning’ (Allwright, 1984:256). However, this participation requirement does not apply to lessons of the lecture kind, since there the teacher is the main discoursor (Allwright, 1984:156f). The main problem, however, is not how to get students to talk, but to get them to actually communicate, since it is the quality of the oral output that counts, not the quantity. Consequently, ‘interaction’ and ‘communication’ cannot be regarded as synonymous (Allwright, 1984:156).

2.1.1 Students’ participation in the language classroom

Interaction is a ‘co-production’ between at least two persons and the responsibility for classroom interaction should not only be the teachers’ but also the students’ (Allwright, 1984:159). In most cases, however, the teacher has a certain vision about how the lesson should be conducted, and what he or she wants the students to learn and what kind of
exercises they should work with (Tsui, 1995:1f). The students on the other hand, no matter how motivated they might be, bring no specific plans (Allwright, 1984:163). The students see the lessons as a must and something they are obligated to attend. In order for the teacher to execute his or her plans, the teacher has to interact with the students. The students might not respond to the teacher and the risk that the intended plan might not agree with what will actually happen during the lesson, is common knowledge to all teachers (Allwright, 1984:163; Tsui, 1995:1).

According to Allwright (1984:160f), student participation in classroom oral interaction can be divided into three modes of engagement. The most common mode is called ‘compliance’, according to which students’ utterances depend on the teachers’ management of classroom communication. In other words, these are cases where the students reply to their teachers’ questions. The second mode is referred to as ‘navigation’, and it occurs when the students take the initiative to overcome communication breakdowns in order to get clarification of what has been said. ‘Navigation’ helps comprehension and might contribute to language development. The third and last mode is referred to as ‘negotiation’ and it occurs when the teachers’ and students’ roles become less asymmetrical, and people taking part in conversation attempt to reach decisions through agreement (Allwright, 1984:160f).

Many students seem to lack confidence in their English oral proficiency. Students might be shy, afraid of making mistakes and also of being criticized by their peers or teacher (Tsui, 1995:83f). They do not want to be laughed at or corrected if they say something wrong, or something that might be regarded as stupid or funny. So instead of taking part in discussions, the students clam up in order to avoid criticism and laughter (Tsui, 1996:84). This indicates that the classroom atmosphere plays an important part in whether students actively take part in oral interaction (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000:103). But a student with a high degree of self-respect is probably more willing to take risks, since the fear of failure is not a burden (Allwright, 1984:167). Whether a student has a high or low degree of self-respect, will show directly in classroom behavior (Allwright, 1984:167).

2.1.2 Effects of gender on students’ oral participation

In the curriculum goals for the Swedish compulsory school system, Lpo 94, pre-school class and leisure-time centre are established (Skolverket, 2006). It is established that the schools’
mission is, among other things, to make sure that the students’ development is based on their individual capabilities, and at the same time are being stimulated in using and developing their whole capacity (Skolverket. 2006:8f). The student shall, in school, have self-respect, respect for others and also for their work. The school shall also aim for a social comradeship, which creates a safe environment and a will and desire to learn. This is a prerequisite for development and learning. Under the topic Goals and Guidelines in Lpo 94, it is stated that schools are obligated to educate their students about the importance of values, such as human sanctity, the freedom and integrity of the individual and all humans’ equal value. The schools shall actively and consciously foster women and men’s equal rights and opportunities, as in what ways girls and boys are treated and valued. The schools are also obligated to resist traditional gender patterns (Skolverket. 2006:8f).

Previous studies have shown that boys tend to speak more than girls, and that they also get more opportunities to speak (Öhrn, 1993:11f). It is not unusual that boys interrupt more than girls. Boys tend to have a more prominent position in the classroom and tend to be more dominant than girls. Boys also tend to take up more physical room in the classroom and are therefore more visible than girls. Boys get both more attention and criticism for their schoolwork. There are studies that show that boys and girls are given different types of assignments during class. The boys get the more productive assignments such as e.g. giving oral descriptions, whereas the girls get the reproductive assignments e.g. reading a text out loud (Öhrn, 1993:11f). Girls accept that they are interrupted by the boys, and prefer to ask other female students for help instead of asking their teacher. The boys, on the other hand, see the classroom as an arena where they can create a position for themselves and gain status (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984:84f).

Studies have shown that in classroom interaction the teacher tends to take up two thirds of the classroom time, and out of the remaining third, the boys take up two thirds and the girls get the one third that is left (Einarsson et al, 1984:84). However, although boys tend to be talkative, there are some boys who say nothing at all during lessons. There are even classes where girls take the dominant positions. In every class there are usually a couple of students that produce the larger part of the output. The students that produce the larger part of the output are often three to four boys and one or a couple of girls (Einarsson et al, 1984:84).
2.1.3 Effects of classroom positioning on students’ oral participation

In terms of designing the physical environment in the classroom to promote oral participation, the steering documents do not provide much information. The information that is provided is that the classrooms should be suitable for the purpose, and that the equipment should be adjustable for the students’ conditions (Skolverket, 2006:3f). In Lpo 94, it is mentioned that the students should learn to work independently as well as together with others. It also states that the teacher should be informed about each individual student’s personal situation, and have respect for the student’s integrity (Skolverket, 2006:8f).

When it comes to students’ perceptions of positioning in the classroom, the three first rows in the classroom are often defined as up front of the classroom. The fifth and sixth rows are often defined to be in the back of the classroom. The fourth row does not have a given place, as that row alternates between the middle and the back of the classroom. The classroom is therefore divided into two distinct sections: the front and the back of the classroom (Bailey & Nunan, 1996:127f). Students often position themselves in the classroom in relation to where the teacher and the blackboard are. Studies have shown that boys tend to place themselves up front of the classroom, because then they are likely to get the teacher’s attention. Girls, on the other hand, prefer to place themselves in the back, due to shyness and fear of answering questions. However, it is usually the teacher who influences and decides where which students should sit. Since the teacher and the blackboard are usually located up front of the classroom, that is where most of the action takes place (Bailey et al, 1996:126f; Öhrn, 1993:11f).

It is mainly students sitting in the up front section who are selected by the teacher to do different tasks and therefore also participate the most orally (Bailey et al, 1996:128f). As a result, the up front section gets the most attention from the teacher and the students positioned there work harder and participate more, because the teacher can monitor them better (Bailey et al, 1996:135f). The students in the up front section also get a better understanding of the lesson and the teachers often perceive these students to be the cleverest, hard working with strong personalities and actively participating during the lessons. As a result, the front section is perceived by students to be more positive.

The students in the back section, however, are generally perceived by their teachers to have a
lower motivation. They are often described as having weaker personalities and being less motivated and less interested in their school work (Bailey et al, 1996:128f). Also, students in the back section often complain that they cannot hear what the teacher says and the section is often described as being distracting and noisy. As a result, the back section is not advantageous for students, and creates limited opportunities for learning and participation (Bailey et al, 1996:131f). An extra effort is therefore required from the students in the back section, e.g. when they need to see the blackboard, and also when getting the teacher’s attention. This can result in a lack of interest. The back of the classroom can also be a place for students to hide, e.g. students who have not completed their home work and do not want to participate (Bailey et al, 1996:131f).

Students in the front section do not necessarily have a higher level of ability, they are just given more opportunities to participate in the classroom (Bailey et al, 1996:131f). There is a possibility that if the students in the back would move closer to the teacher and the blackboard, their studies would improve. Therefore, it can be questioned whether students in the back are less motivated or interested as some teachers claim, or if their behavior is a result of being involuntarily positioned there by their teacher? (Bailey et al, 1996:131f).

2.2 The origin of the CLIL method

Before the 1970s, subjects taught through a foreign language were mainly available in bilingual regions, e.g. close to national borders or in big cities (European Commission, 2005:7). For example, bilingual education was introduced in St. Lambert, Canada, back in 1965 when English-speaking parents thought that their children did not improve enough in their French language proficiency. The parents knew that their children’s future career prospects would be brighter if they were English/French bilinguals. This indicates that bilingual education has social implications (Sylvén, 2004:1). In the case of St. Lambert, French was the target language and was to be used as the medium of instruction. But this way of learning a new language was not new or revolutionary; it was only a modern version of a millennia-old way of learning other languages. This is for example how Latin was learned, and also how English spread all over the colonies in the British Empire. People used the new language as a tool of communication, and while they used it, people learned the new language (Sylvén, 2004:1).
In recent years, the CLIL method has grown popular all over Europe. Each country has a unique method based on its curricula, teacher education programs, school systems and/or population (Sylvén, 2004:15f). In Europe, most students have voluntarily chosen the CLIL program in order to receive their subject instructions in a foreign language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006:156). In some countries, however, the medium of instruction other than one’s native language is not always a free choice. The medium of instruction could be the language of a previous colonial power, or there might not even be any educational material available in their native language. Therefore, a language is chosen for them since no other choice is available (Lightbown et al, 2006:156).

2.3 The use of the CLIL method in the European Union

The popularity of CLIL in Europe is in part a result of the politics of the European Union (EU). The EU wants to promote language proficiency, and therefore financially supports the development of an educational CLIL model that is believed to foster higher proficiency (Nixon, 2000:7; EU, 2005:8). One goal that the EU has established, is that all European Union members should be able to comprehend and use two languages other than their native language, and schools are also encouraged to enable that goal (Nixon, 2000:7). In 2003, the European Commission even developed an Action Plan for language learning and linguistic diversity in order to achieve a greater degree of plurilingualism within Europe. The plan provided educational solutions so higher levels of language learning could be achieved along with practical approaches to improve the quality of language teaching (de Graaff, 2007:603f).

2.4 CLIL in Sweden

In Sweden, the CLIL method had its starting point in the mid eighties, but it was not until the mid nineties that an increase in the number of compulsory schools that offered CLIL could be found (Nixon, 2000:3). Today, many schools in Sweden see the CLIL method as an opportunity to attract new students, and also an opportunity to renew the teaching style of the school (Skolverket, 2001a:5). Other common motives as to why schools want to offer CLIL to their students are that they want to strengthen internationalization and create new international contacts (Skolverket, 2001a:8). Another reason to use CLIL, is the fact, in both secondary and upper secondary school, that since the beginning of the 21st century, fewer students have chosen to study foreign languages. In that light, CLIL can be seen as an opportunity for students to learn an additional language while studying other subjects (Skolverket, 2001a:3).
According to teachers that Nixon has interviewed in his study, the CLIL method has increased students’ motivation and classroom attendance. Shy and quiet students gain self-confidence when they get the opportunity to use English in order to establish contacts from other countries. (Skolverket, 2001a:8).

According to figures from Nixon’s report on CLIL for the Swedish agency of education, CLIL occurred in at least 4% of Sweden’s compulsory schools in 1999 (Nixon, 2000:3). In Swedish CLIL education, English is the most commonly used target language (75.5%) followed by German (8%) and Spanish (4%) (Nixon, 2000:3). Most of the CLIL students have Swedish as their native language, whereas a small group of students are bilingual (Nixon, 2000:3). The amount of CLIL in compulsory school must not exceed 50% of the total amount of teaching (Sveriges Riksdag, 2003). That criterion also meets the guidelines for a program to be regarded as CLIL, since at least 50% of the lessons must be instructed through the target language. When only one subject is taught through the target language, it is identified as enriched second learning (Genesee, 1987:1). Within CLIL, there are different forms of CLIL education. For instance, it is possible to use English as the medium of instruction certain days each year, or whole terms (Nixon, 2000:4).

The CLIL method was introduced in Sweden by enthusiastic teachers or school administrators who had come across the CLIL method elsewhere (Sylvén, 2004:19f). It is the individual school that decides how the CLIL method should be implemented. This means that the government does not interfere in decisions concerning the CLIL method (Sylvén, 2004:19).

2.4.1 Are all subjects suitable for CLIL?

Depending on the purpose, different subjects appear to be better suited for CLIL education (Nixon, 2000:23). If the purpose is to encourage the students to use the target language as much as possible, then subjects such as biology and history tend to be more suitable, as there tends to be more interaction during such classes, since the lessons offer more discussion and oral presentation opportunities. Also, more teaching material is provided. But if the purpose is to get the students to learn the target language as quickly as possible, without realizing that the foreign language is being used, then subjects such as physical education and art tend to be more suitable and these subjects are more limited when it comes to teaching material in the target language (Nixon, 2000:23).
2.5 Previous studies

In the early 1980s, CLIL was first experimented in Swedish schools (Sylvén, 2004:21). The first attempt was made in 1977 by Tom Åseskog as referred to in Sylvén (2004:21). Åseskog wanted to experiment with a group of electrical engineering students by teaching certain subjects in English, and he wanted to look at how the CLIL method affected the vocational students. Would their proficiency and interest in foreign languages increase in comparison to the students in the control group, who were taught in their native language. Åseskog’s study showed that after a year, the result was that the experimental students were positive and saw themselves as more proficient in English than their peers that were taught in Swedish. Test results also showed that the CLIL group’s English proficiency was slightly better than that of the control group (Sylvén, 2004:21). The results, however, were not statistically significant (Sylvén, 2004:21). Another experiment took place in 1984, when a group of building-construction students was taught through English in all their subjects. The results were positive. The experiment group scored better on all English tests than the control group. However, in this experiment no initial comparison between the groups had been made, so no definitive conclusion could really be drawn. It is possible that the English proficiency of the building-construction students was better than that of the control group to begin with (Sylvén, 2004:21f).

Another study that shows that the CLIL method is successful is a study done by Järvinen in Finland in 2001 as referred to in Sylvén (2004:19). Järvinen compared English proficiency in CLIL students with that of peers who studied English as a foreign language. The study shows that the CLIL group could produce full sentences in grade 3, while the other group could not even do that at the end of grade 5. The CLIL group was introduced to the CLIL method in first grade (Sylvén, 2004:19). This study confirms that CLIL can have a positive effect on language learning (Sylvén, 2004:19).

2.6 The effects of CLIL

There is, though, a skeptical view on whether or not the CLIL method is effective. Maria Falk who Sylvén refers to, questioned the usefulness and effectiveness of the CLIL method after having studied three CLIL students (Sylvén, 2004:22f). Falk found that English was used to a much lesser degree than expected (Sylvén, 2004:23). Nixon verified Falk’s results by
claiming that there was a lack of student oral output in the target language in CLIL classrooms. He claimed that this was due to the fact that students and teachers did not use the language they normally mastered best (Skolverket, 2001a:6). Therefore, not many spontaneous questions and discussions occurred, and students’ oral output was limited to answering the teacher’s questions. Students mainly listened, read and wrote in English, and only spoke English when they answered questions or had oral presentations. In interaction student-to-student, Swedish tended to be used (Skolverket, 2001a:6f). In conclusion, the students do have good opportunities to elaborate certain aspects of their English proficiency as when writing, but not when it comes to speaking (Skolverket, 2001a:7).

In Sweden, CLIL is rarely documented or planned long term, and the schools rarely have any quality criteria or quality follow-ups (Skolverket, 2001a:5). Consequently, the CLIL method is dependent on the people involved in it and it is therefore vulnerable (Skolverket, 2001a:5). Since the schools in Sweden seldom have any documentation, it is hard for parents and politicians to have insight into the CLIL method (Skolverket, 2001a:9).

2.6.1 CLIL teachers

Not only the CLIL method, but also the competence of the CLIL teachers has been questioned (Skolverket, 2001b:15). About 75% of CLIL teachers are authorized to teach the target language (Nixon, 2000:3f) and, consequently, most of the CLIL teachers’ English language proficiency is satisfactory and sufficient. However, there are also teachers that describe their proficiency as limited (Skolverket, 2001a:6). A possible reason for this is that there is no formal education to become an authorized CLIL teacher, and consequently, the target language standard of Swedish CLIL teachers has been questioned (Nixon, 2000:3f). Most CLIL teachers have undergone further education, which generally only lasts about 2-3 weeks. Such extremely short education may well create problems (Nixon, 2000:31). Anyone who wants to become an English language teacher, with the purpose of being authorized to teach in secondary school or upper secondary school, has to undergo at least three English (90 ECTS credits) courses at the university (Karlstad University home page, 2009). In comparison, it becomes clear how the almost non-existing requirements to become an authorized CLIL teacher can create problems. Another problem is that students’ pronunciation and proficiency in today’s spoken English is influenced from TV and music and the teachers
are generally not updated with slang words. Some students might even be better at speaking than their teachers, and they do not appreciate their teachers’ Swedish accent (Nixon, 2000:29f).

3. Methods

I carried out my empirical study at a secondary school in a medium-sized Swedish university town. I based my study on classroom observations and also on discussions with teachers after the lessons. The purpose of the observations was to study whether the students in a CLIL classroom participated to the same extent as students who were taught through their native language. The discussions with the teachers were carried out in order to get further information about students’ oral participation.

During the CLIL lessons, I counted the number of utterances made by students in English or Swedish, and made a note on the students’ position in the classroom and their gender. During the lessons where Swedish was the medium of instruction, I made the same observations as during the CLIL lessons, with the exception that the interaction was exclusively in Swedish.

3.1 Participants

There were in total 74 students that were observed in this study, divided into three different classes; all of them in grade 7. Two of the classes had 25 students and the third had 24 students. One class was a CLIL class with English as their medium of instruction and consisted of 12 boys and 13 girls. The other two classes were instructed through Swedish and one class had 14 boys and 11 girls, and the other Swedish class had 14 boys and 10 girls. As a result, the Swedish classes had a total of 28 boys and 21 girls.

The CLIL class had 50% of their teaching through English, spread out through the whole term. Since I did not want to influence the interaction, I did not inform the participants, neither pupils nor teachers, about the exact focus of my observations. In that way I hoped that interaction would not be consciously promoted, but remain as everyday as possible. The reason why I only observed students in grade 7 was that this was the first age group that had the opportunity to choose CLIL. Therefore, at this particular school, the CLIL method was not offered in grades 8 and 9.
In addition to the classroom observations, I discussed the oral participation of the students with their teacher after class. I wanted to know whether the teachers thought that there were any differences between the oral participation of the CLIL students and the students who were instructed through their native language. Furthermore, I wanted to find out whether they thought that there were differences in students’ oral participation in relation to the students’ gender and classroom positioning.

3.2 Material

I observed and made notes every time a student spoke English or Swedish during the CLIL lessons, and whether the participant was male or female and also where the student sat in the classroom. The same observations and notes were made in the classes that were instructed in their native language, but since English was not the medium of instruction, there was no use of English in those groups.

The three classes were observed during four lessons, all natural science. The CLIL class was observed during two lessons with the same teacher. The other two classes were observed during one lesson each with two different teachers.

During the two CLIL lessons the students used the same places in the classroom, and the same classroom was used. This was also the case for both lessons and classes when Swedish was the medium of instruction.

3.3 Discussion with teachers after the end of less

After the lessons, I discussed with the three teachers concerned. We discussed the students’ oral participation in the classroom, both that of the CLIL class and the classes taught through Swedish. We discussed whether the CLIL students tended to speak more or less than the Swedish classes, and whether they felt that the CLIL method had a positive or negative influence on students’ oral participation. I also wanted their opinions on whether gender had any influence on students’ oral participation, and where in the classroom they found that the students spoke more and less. The discussions were a complement to the observations, to get more information in order to explain my results.
4. Results and analysis

In this section, I will present the findings of the classroom observations and the results of the teacher discussions. In order to illustrate the results, they will be presented in graphs. When the three classes are divided into four subgroups in the result sections, they will be referred to by the following abbreviations: CL1 (CLIL lesson 1), CL2 (CLIL lesson 2), SW1 (Swedish class 1) and SW2 (Swedish class 2).

4.1 Classroom observations

4.1.1 Total amount of oral output in the CLIL class and the Swedish classes

The results, from observing the three classes during four lessons, show that the students during both of the CLIL lessons produced more total oral output than the other two classes, which had Swedish as the medium of instruction (see Figure 1). This result does not coincide with Swain’s results, which were that CLIL students’ output is minimal and that they speak less than students who are taught through their native language (Swain, 1988:69f).

Figure 1 shows that the students’ total English output in each of both CL1 and CL2 were higher than the Swedish classes’ total output together. The total English output of the CLIL lessons was more than twice as much as the Swedish classes’ total output. These results do not coincide with Hägerfelth claims that CLIL students speak less than students who are instructed in their native language (Skolverket, 2001b; see 1. Introduction). Moreover, the results do not coincide with Falk’s results, since she found that English was used to a much lesser degree than expected among the CLIL students (Sylvén, 2004; see 2.6).

When it comes to the total amount of oral output, CL1 and SW1 are somewhat alike. However, the total output of CL2 is considerably higher than that of SW2, which resulted in the total output of the CLIL class being higher than that of the Swedish classes. The total output of CL2 was 53 compared to SW2’s 14 (see Figure 1). This result demonstrates an extremely big difference, since in CL2 the students spoke 279% more than the students in SW2. Just like the results above, these results do not agree with Falk, Hägerfelth or Swain’s results.
Another result, that is somewhat remarkable, is that the students in CL1 spoke even more Swedish than the students in SW2 (see Figure 1). This result disagrees with what Nixon claims. He found that CLIL students’ oral output in the target language was restricted. This was due to the fact that the target language was not their native language (Skolverket, 2001a; see 2.6).

A large difference between the CLIL lessons and the Swedish classes, which could be seen during the classroom observations, was that when the CLIL students spoke Swedish, they appeared to do this because they did not know the English word or phrase and they asked their peers or teacher for help. Therefore, the CLIL students’ behavior can be linked to one of Allwright's three modes of students’ oral engagement: ‘navigation’ (Allwright, 1984; see 2.1.1). The CLIL students took the initiative when asking for help, even though they did not speak English at all times, to overcome communication breakdowns by letting themselves be navigated by their peers or teacher, to the right choice of English word or phrase. When students in both of the Swedish classes spoke with their peers, the reasons were mainly to chat with each other, and the interaction rarely had anything to do with the lesson or subject matter. However, it must be emphasized that the results showed that when the CLIL students
spoke among themselves, they mostly used English. In conclusion, the results regarding the CLIL students’ use of Swedish agree to some extent with what Nixon claims (Skolverket, 2001a; see 2.6). He found that in interaction student-to-student in CLIL classrooms, Swedish was used, and in this study students used Swedish occasionally.

4.1.2 Oral output of Swedish and English in the CLIL class

As mentioned above in section 4.1.1, the total amount of CLIL students’ English oral output was higher than the total oral output in the Swedish classes. As Figure 1 shows, the total English output was 33% higher in CL2 with 44 times, compared to the 33 times in CL1. Also shown in Figure 1, the CLIL students sometimes used Swedish as their medium of interaction, but were primarily consistent in speaking English. The total Swedish output was twice as high in CL1 (18) compared to CL2 (9). Approximately 35% of CL1’s total output was Swedish as compared to 17% in CL2. These results show a big dissimilarity in the students’ Swedish output, since it was the same students that attended both of the CLIL lessons. Furthermore, the structure of both the CLIL lessons was similar, with the same kind of exercises. The amount of teacher output remained roughly the same in CL1 and CL2.

In conclusion, the results show that there was more English output and less Swedish output in CL2 than in CL1, and the total oral participation was higher in CL2 than in CL1 (see Figure 1).

4.1.3 Comparison of oral participation of CLIL students by gender

In CL1, 31 of the 33 instances of spoken English were produced by girls (see Figure 2). This result points to an extremely big gender difference in the amount of English output. Also, when considering that the CLIL class had 12 boys and 13 girls, the results show that the girls were more talkative than the boys. In CL2, 26 of the 44 instances of spoken English were uttered by girls and 18 by boys. The latter comparison shows that in CL2, the difference between the boys and girls regarding their English output is not as big as in CL1 (see Figure 2).
The previously mentioned results go against what Einarsson et al (1984) and Öhrn (1993) claim, which is that boys tend to speak more than girls and take up two thirds of the students’ talking time, and the girls get the one third that is left (see 2.1.2).

Concerning the use of Swedish, it was used in 15 utterances by girls in CL1 and in 3 utterances by boys in CL1. In CL2, girls interacted 7 times in Swedish and boys twice (see Figure 2). 32% of the girls’ total output in CL1 was Swedish and that those girls also had the highest amount of Swedish output of the CLIL class, e.g. the girls spoke Swedish 114% more during CL1 than they did during CL2. An even bigger difference is found when comparing CL1 girls’ Swedish output with that of the boys in CL1 and CL2. It turned out that CL1 girls’ Swedish output was 400% higher than that of the boys in CL1, and 650% higher than that of the boys in CL2. These results contradict Einarsson et al’s (1984) findings on the amount of speech of boys and girls in the classroom, since in the CLIL class, in my study, it was the girls who had most of the speaking time (see 2.1.2). The observations showed that when the girls used Swedish during both CLIL lessons, it was in order to find the right word or phrase. This differed from the boys, who tried to primarily explain in English which word or phrase they were looking for, instead of saying the word in Swedish. As a result, the CLIL boys used
Swedish to a lesser extent than the girls.

4.1.4 Comparison of all orally participating students by positioning

In both CL1 and CL2, the students that spoke the most tended to sit up front in the classroom. This indicates that the student positioning in both of the CLIL lessons was very similar (see Figure 3). This result coincides with previous studies claiming that students in the up front section get the most attention from the teacher, work harder, and participate more since the teacher can monitor them better (Bailey et al, 1996; see 2.1.3). However, it was difficult to determine whether the CLIL students who spoke the most sat up front or in the middle of the classroom (see Figure 3). The problem arises since the classroom is divided into only two distinct sections: the front and the back (Bailey et al, 1996; see 2.1.3). The middle of the classroom is not a distinct section of its own, and it is therefore difficult to categorize the students sitting there (Bailey et al, 1996; see 2.1.3). Still, the up front students in the CLIL lessons had a slightly higher amount of total output than the other sections. It is also evident that the CLIL students that spoke the least sat in the back of the classroom, in both CL1 and CL2 (see Figure 3). The latter results confirm previous studies claiming that students in the back tend to speak the least in the classroom (Bailey et al, 1996; see 2.1.3).

Regarding the Swedish classes, Figure 3 shows that students that spoke the most tended to sit up front in both classes. But there was a big difference in SW1 and SW2 students’ total output in the category up front, since SW1 spoke 180% more than SW2. In both SW1 and SW2, the section in the back had similar amounts of oral output as the sections up front. Moreover, there was a big difference between SW1 and SW2 students’ total output in the back section, since in SW1, the back section students interacted more than twice as much as those in SW2. In all, these results do not agree with previous studies that have shown that most student oral participation takes place up front.

The students that spoke the least in the Swedish classes tended to sit in the middle of the classroom in both SW1 and SW2 (see Figure 3). Also, the students’ total output in the middle section was very similar in SW1 and SW2. This result is somewhat difficult to analyze, since, as mentioned before, the middle section is not a distinct section of its own (Bailey et al, 1996; see 2.1.3).
Figure 3. The positioning of the orally participating CLIL students and Swedish taught students in absolute numbers. CL1: n=25, CL2: n=25, SW1: n=25, SW2: n=24.

When comparing the positioning of the students who spoke the most in the CLIL lessons versus the Swedish classes, the similarity was that, in both groups, the students that spoke the most sat up front. And the most apparent difference between the CLIL students and the Swedish taught students, was that the students that spoke the least of these two categories of students, sat in two different sections.

4.1.5 Comparisons of all orally participating students by gender and positioning

The CLIL girls in the middle section produced the highest amount of total output of all the participating students in this study. The CLIL girls in the middle produced 900% more total output than the CLIL boys in the back. The CLIL boys’ total output in all three sections was lower than that of the CLIL girls throughout (Figure 4). These results do not coincide with studies claiming that boys are the most talkative in the classroom, since in this study the girls had the higher amount of oral output (Einarsson et al, 1984; see 2.1.2). That the girls produced most total output is not due to the number of girls and boys in the class, since the CLIL class was divided into 12 boys and 13 girls.
Figure 4. The positioning and gender of the orally participating students' total output in the CLIL class and the Swedish classes shown in absolute numbers. CL1: n=25, CL2: n=25, SW1: n=25, SW2: n=24.

The CLIL girls also produced the highest amount of Swedish output of all participating CLIL students, and the output was mainly produced in the middle section (Figure 5). The CLIL boys in the back of the classroom were the students who produced the least amount of Swedish (Figure 5).

Figure 4 shows that the boys in the Swedish classes positioned up front had the highest amount of total output of all participating Swedish taught students. This result was similar to the results of the CLIL boys, since the boys positioned up front also spoke the most in the CLIL class of all participating CLIL boys (Figure 4). Of all students in the Swedish classes, the girls sitting in the section up front produced the least amount of output (Figure 4). The boys in the Swedish classes confirm previous studies that claim that boys are talkative and tend to position themselves up front of the classroom (Einarsson et al, 1984; see 2.1.2; Öhrn, 1993:11f; 2.1.3).

When comparing the results from the CLIL lessons and the Swedish classes concerning gender and classroom positioning, the only resemblance that could be found was that the CLIL boys and the boys from the Swedish classes that spoke the most sat up front of all participating male students (Figure 4).
4.2 Information provided by teachers from discussions

The teachers concerned had many thoughts on students’ oral participation. They had their own personal beliefs and perceptions as to how students act in the classroom and different reasons why some things are a certain way. They never referred to any previous studies, they just shared their opinions and beliefs from their own point of view. The CLIL teacher had the perception that CLIL students were more motivated in their schoolwork and during lessons, e.g. when it comes to arriving to class in time, remembering to bring their books, being active and participating during class. The CLIL teacher’s perception confirms the results Nixon found when he interviewed teachers. They also thought that the CLIL method results in increased student motivation and classroom attendance (Skolverket, 2001; see 2.6). The same teacher believed that a possible reason for this could be that the CLIL students have made an active choice, and voluntarily chosen the CLIL method as their medium of instruction. The CLIL students have, according to the same teacher, parents that actively take part in decisions concerning their children’s school attendance, and who care about their children doing well in school. The CLIL teacher pointed out that this was also the case for most of the students in the Swedish classes. But students that were not a part of the CLIL method or any other profile that this school offered might feel a bit left out, not really belonging anywhere. So, in these
classes, the students were, according to the teacher, a bit noisy and care less about their school attendance and schoolwork than the students in the CLIL class. Therefore, these students are also more difficult to motivate. I asked whether the CLIL teacher felt that the CLIL method had a positive or negative influence on the students. The CLIL teacher said that it was rather the students who have a positive influence on the CLIL method, since this kind of teaching method would never work if the CLIL students would not participate and engage in the lessons. The basic idea behind CLIL education is dependent on students’ willingness to speak and learn more English.

The CLIL teacher claimed that the CLIL students had a rather high English language proficiency, which was not comparable with that of the students outside the CLIL classroom. Consequently, the CLIL teacher had a perception of CLIL students similar to Åseskog, who found, after observing a group of CLIL students during one year, that the students were positive and more proficient in English (Sylvén, 2004; see 2.5). The CLIL students’ high English language proficiency is a result of the CLIL students’ genuine interest, and willingness to use and learn more of the English language. All of the three teachers, even though only one was a CLIL teacher, agreed that the CLIL students’ output was qualitative. These opinions can be linked to Allwright’s claim that a common problem is not how to get students to talk, but to actually communicate, since it is the quality of oral output that counts, not quantity. (Allwright, 1984; see 2.1.1).

The CLIL teacher believed that the CLIL students interact more than the students in the Swedish classes and her belief agrees with the result of this study. She thought that when the CLIL students spoke, it was comprehensive, and had to do with the subject matter. This agrees with the result in this study, which shows that the CLIL students’ output was of a qualitative kind and had to do with the subject in matter. However, the CLIL teacher’s beliefs are not in accordance with Hägerfelth’s claim that CLIL students speak less than students who are instructed in their native language (Skolverket, 2001b; see Introduction). The teachers in the Swedish classes thought that it was hard to know how to decide whether or not their students’ oral output was qualitative, i.e. that counts as communication. The teachers found that the students do interact, but could not classify them as communicative students. According to one of the teachers in the Swedish classes, the CLIL students do not speak more than the other students at school, but the CLIL students might have a more qualitative output
production. These views were not based on first hand experience other than visits in the CLIL classroom, which was described as silent and calm.

All three teachers concerned believed that boys tend to speak more than girls, regardless if it is a CLIL classroom or a Swedish classroom. The CLIL teacher believed that the girls produce the highest amount of Swedish output, whereas the boys prefer to remain silent if they do not know the English word or what to say. The CLIL teacher thought that the girls have a better way of expressing themselves, and use English more correctly than boys. The teachers’ beliefs, that boys tend to speak more than girls, do not coincide with the results in this study. Since this study shows the opposite results, that the girls actually spoke more than the boys. The CLIL girls spoke, however, also more Swedish than the CLIL boys and this result coincide with the CLIL teacher’s belief.

5. Conclusion

Research made on students’ oral participation when subjects are taught in a foreign language, i.e. in CLIL has tended to show that CLIL students’ output is minimal and that they speak less than students who are taught through their native language. This paper has studied: whether the amount of oral classroom interaction was similar in a CLIL classroom and in a classroom where students were taught through their native language, and whether or not male and female students interacted to the same extent or if gender differences could be found, and where in the classroom most oral participation occurred. Three teachers participated in the study, whence one was a CLIL teacher.

This empirical study has resulted in a number of conclusions. The first is that in my study, CLIL students’ oral participation tended to be very high. The results even showed that the CLIL students participated more orally than students in the control groups, which had their native language Swedish as their medium of instruction. One remarkable result is that the CLIL students’ total oral output would still have been higher than that of their control groups if they had spoken only English, disregarding what they would have said in Swedish. The CLIL students spoke fairly little Swedish. Both the classroom observations and the teachers concerned confirm that the CLIL students’ output was of a qualitative kind. As compared to the Swedish classes, where the students mainly spoke about subjects that did not concern the lesson.
The second conclusion is that gender differences were found in oral participation. The results of this study showed that girls tended to speak more than boys, which was the case in both of the CLIL lessons. These results do not coincide with previous studies that have shown that boys tend to produce the highest amount of output, and are most active during class. The opposite result was found in the Swedish classes, where it was the boys that had the highest amount of oral output.

The third conclusion deals with where in the classroom most of the oral participation occurred. This study showed that students up front in the classroom tended to speak more than students in the back. In all four lessons, the students up front in the classroom produced the highest amount of oral output whereas those in the back spoke the least. These results confirm what has been found in previous studies. Much of the CLIL students’ output was produced in the middle of the classroom, but it is difficult to categorize the students sitting there since the middle of the classroom is not a distinct section of its own. The same problem occurs in the Swedish classes, since the students that spoke the most sat in the middle section. And therefore it is hard to determine to which of the two distinct sections up front and in the back of the classroom the result should be included in.

The fourth and last conclusion is that the use of Swedish in the CLIL classroom was fairly high. Swedish was mostly used by girls, whereas the boys instead tried to explain missing vocabulary in English. Nevertheless, the CLIL students’ Swedish output was however only produced when they were in great need. However, both male and female CLIL students mostly used English as their medium of interaction. They spoke English even when they spoke among themselves, and not just for the purpose of pleasing the teacher. This result indicates that the CLIL students had a high level of student motivation and cared about their school attendance. The CLIL students took responsibility for their own learning and English language proficiency development.

The thoughts and opinions of the teachers concerned both do and do not coincide the results from my observations and study. The teachers all claimed that the CLIL students were more motivated than the students in the Swedish classes, an opinion that was corroborated in my observations. The teachers in the Swedish classes were not of the opinion that the CLIL students spoke more during class than the Swedish classes. Consequently, their opinions did
not coincide with the results of this study. All three teachers believed that boys tend to speak more than girls, regardless if it is a CLIL classroom or a classroom where Swedish is the medium of instruction. Their beliefs only agreed with my observations in the Swedish classes, since in the CLIL class it was the girls who spoke the most.

In conclusion, the results of my study, to some extent, contradict previous studies in the field. Contradicting findings were found in the oral participation of CLIL students, and boys and girls in the CLIL class. Oral participation in the Swedish classes and classroom positioning, on the other hand, confirmed with previous studies.

I think the area of students’ oral participation in CLIL classrooms deserves to be studied further, since there are not many studies done in the area of Swedish CLIL students and the effects of the CLIL method. In order to obtain more accurate results, it would be a good idea to make more extensive empirical studies on several classes, and also on different schools. An area that I became interested in, but which my study did not deal with, was the teachers’ motivation and attitude towards being consistent in encouraging the students to only speak the target language. Consequently, it would be meaningful to study how the CLIL teachers manage to make their students use the target language and not to code-switch.
References


