Embedded English: Integrating content and language learning in a Swiss primary school project

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In einer zweijährigen Studie wurde ein Teilimmersionsprojekt des Kantons Zürich (Schulprojekt 21) evaluiert, in dem Englisch als Unterrichtssprache in den ersten drei Jahresstufen der Primarschule verwendet wurde. Das Projekt ist eine zweifache Herausforderung: Erstens wirft es die herkömmliche schulische Sprachpolitik der Schweiz über den Haufen, die vorsieht, dass Schulkinder zuerst die Sprache der Nachbarregion lernen; zweitens wurde ein niederschwelliger methodischer Ansatz gewählt, der Sprache und Sachfach in 20-minütigen täglichen Sequenzen integriert an Stelle einer traditionellen Methodik des Fremdsprachenunterrichts.

Die Studie arbeitet das komplexe Verhältnis zwischen Unterrichtsinteraktion und dem frühen Erwerb von Sprachstrukturen (Lexikon, Morphologie) sowie interaktionaler Kompetenzen (Hörverstehen, dialogische Kompetenzen) heraus.

Der Artikel konzentriert sich auf drei Fragen:

- Wie setzen die Primarlehrkräfte die Unterrichtsmethodik um, in der sie instruiert wurden?
- Welches beobachtbare Verhalten der Schüler und Schülerinnen ist mit Lernerfolgen verbunden?
- Was für Kontakte und Erfahrungen mit der neuen Sprache sind notwendig, damit die gewählte Methode nachhaltig wird und die Kinder die Lernziele erreichen können?

Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchungen unterstützen die Hypothese, dass eine minimalistische Teil-immersionsmethodik den Erwartungen der Behörden, Eltern und Lehrkräfte nicht gerecht wird. Die Gründe dafür liegen im Mangel an Kontinuität und Stärkung von neu zu lernendem Sprachmaterial sowie in der Unterrichtsinteraktion, die stark auf die Lehrperson zentriert ist.

Das Projekt muss in seinem soziolinguistischen Kontext betrachtet werden: bezeichnenderweise fördert es die englische Sprache als internationale Verkehrssprache und nicht etwa als mögliche fünfte Landessprache zur binnenschweizerischen Verständigung, was einem Tabubruch gleichkäme. Der Artikel schliesst mit der Feststellung, dass das Schulprojekt 21 einen sozio-ökonomischen Ablasshandel darstellt und Gefahr läuft, die Priorität des Spracherwerbs aus den Augen zu verlieren.

1.   Introduction: Project 21 and its implications for English as a second language in Switzerland

Innovation in public education is a fairly rare phenomenon given that schools tend to change slowly and often organically. The phenomena discussed in this paper present an experimental venture in the domain of second language education which is interesting on the one hand for the reactions it has provoked in the sociolinguistic landscape of multilingual Switzerland, and, on the other hand, for the experience itself, as more than one thousand pupils and around 100 primary school teachers were for the first time confronted with the task of learning and teaching a new language.

It is useful to address the questions raised in this paper against the backdrop of two contexts:

- the reform-driven public school context of the Canton of Zurich in a decentralised and heterogeneous education system;

- the changing landscape of Swiss foreign and second language instruction across 26 cantons and four linguistically distinct regions.

Notably, the experimental introduction of English into the primary school in the Canton of Zurich is only one part of a large-scale project called School Project 21[1], which itself is one of about 14 reform projects initiated under the aegis of an extremely active minister of education. Project 21 is a collection of three relatively disparate endeavours to help primary school pupils acquire «media competency». Networked thinking, working co-operatively in teams, being able to use the computer and its software as well as using the language of communication society, i.e. English: these were the broad objectives which led the Department of Education to conceive, in 1998, three distinct project parts (1. learning in teams of pupils of various ages and grades; 2. learning with computers, 3. teaching in English) which were experimentally tested in a first phase between 1999 and 2002, involving 60 classes in 13 communities.

The speed at which the teachers concerned were trained and briefed as well as the rough-and-ready realisation of the project were rather unusual in the staid political atmosphere of the country. The project initially met with a good deal of alienation and rejection, but was also welcomed by a number of stakeholders, most prominently by parents and school supervisory boards.

Whereas the first project part, mixed-age team tutoring, was favoured by teachers at least on a theoretical level and few people seriously dared to speak out against more computers in primary school classrooms, the responses to English were more mixed: Some observers and stakeholders were worried about the introduction in the first year of primary school of a foreign language as such. This would militate against a diglossic situation where pupils first needed to come to terms with the Swiss standard form of German, having used primarily local dialects in family and playground interaction or, as is the case in about 25% of the Zurich school population, another (migrant) language. Others were concerned that English was

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1   In German: Schulprojekt 21. The figure 21 stands for the 21st Century, to which its objectives are purportedly suited.

preferred over the second national language, French, a move which threatened to undermine Swiss linguistic peace, or rather, a delicate language-political truce which rested on the assumption that every language region had demonstrated goodwill by moving the teaching and learning of the partner's language ahead by two or three years to Year 4 or 5.

Two arguments were provided by the Zurich authorities to defend their controversial choice of English, apart from the seemingly obvious fact that English enjoyed popularity among upwardly mobile parents and ambitious school boards:

- French as a third language would not be endangered, as pupils would start learning French for two years in primary and three more years in secondary schools, reaching the same objectives as they would in English plus some socio-cultural competencies yet to be specified;

- English would not appear as a separate subject in the curriculum (and thus steal time from other subjects), but it would be used as a language of instruction in some subjects for some of the time, providing opportunities for «simulated natural second language acquisition».

The second argument was based on a tacit admission that the teaching of French in primary school in the Canton of Zurich had been something of a failure. Although no thorough study was commissioned to analyse the depth and the grounds for this alleged failure, certain popular myths were allowed to persist, such as that learning in a playful way did not lead to any results that could be acknowledged and built upon in secondary school, that a majority of teachers actively or passively resisted teaching French in the primary, or that no suitable classroom materials were available.

English in Project 21 was intended as a radical departure from the French language teaching as known hitherto, both on a methodological and a socio-linguistic level.

- Methodological: By treating the language to be acquired not as a school subject, but as a tool for communication, the children would put English to immediate use in meaningful contexts.

- Sociolinguistic: By picking a language which is perceived to be popular among children and their parents for economic and cultural reasons, schools would be able to capitalise on positive motivation and to instil a sense of success into the pupils.

However, the departure is less radical than it may seem at first glance. Only 90 minutes are devoted to English as a classroom language without any specific rules as to which subjects are to be taught in English, the training of teachers was (at least initially) less thorough than before the introduction of French, and little thought was given to the coherence of the three project parts, thus forgoing potential synergies.

The specific constellation of Project 21 in Zurich raises a number of questions which should be of interest to innovators in second language education as well as experts and the broader public concerned with the educational sociolinguistics of multilingual countries.

The first set of questions concerns the approach to early language learning chosen by the Zurich project. It was initially referred to as an embedding approach, as English was embedded in the curriculum and subject matter taught and learned through the medium of English. In the course of the first three years, the approach has been slightly revised and now sails under the more well-known flag of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In order to discuss the broader theme of innovation in second language education, the prime question to be addressed concerns what actually happens in the classroom.

- To what extent and how do primary school teachers implement the method they were instructed in? Do they use English as a means of classroom communication and does this represent a departure from traditional teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?

Secondly, we need to focus on the issue that is most difficult to survey, particularly as there is no control group available which would learn English in a different way from CLIL or would learn another language, e.g. French. However tentatively, the paper provides a glimpse at learning outcomes at an early stage of the project:

- What observable behaviour by teachers and pupils is associated with learning outcomes?

Thirdly, Project 21 will only have a describable effect on the shifting landscape of multilingual Switzerland if it lives up to the objectives set by the authorities and the expectations brought to it by parents, teachers and authorities. If, on the other hand, the bold initiative by Zurich to subvert the principle of learning the neighbouring region's language first failed to record a success, Switzerland might be confronted with additional tensions. The breach of

linguistic peace could be more easily construed as symbolic by those groups who have always seen the economic hub of Zurich as hegemonic and arrogant. The question, therefore, is:

- Is the CLIL method sociolinguistically adequate and sustainable? How much and what kind of exposure to the new language is required to reach the set objectives?

The Zurich authorities subjected the whole of Project 21 to a scientific evaluation, which was conducted by a group of independent researchers[2]. The authors of this paper were responsible for the English part of the project, and it is on this study that the following findings and comments are based[3].

2. Findings: Experimenting with CLIL

2.1. Evaluating the Zurich Project 21

The Zurich CLIL project consists of a recommended daily sequence of 20 minutes in English, adding up to 90 to 100 minutes per week or about 8% of the weekly lesson load. The project leaders allowed a considerable degree of freedom for the teachers to choose among the curricular subjects, ranging from mathematics and «science» (locally called «people and their environment») to gymnastics and handicraft. The project was started in August 1999 with 30 classes simultaneously in Grades 1, 2 and 3 (ages 6 to 9/10) in order to experimentally gauge the most suitable age of onset.

The set of learning objectives published in March 2000 (School Project 21, 2000) are based on the Zurich primary school curriculum and refer to three years' CLIL exposure. They state that curricular goals must be reached notwithstanding the fact that some of the lessons are conducted in English. In a special language syllabus, emphasis is placed on listening and understanding, but progress in literacy skills (reading, writing) ought also to contribute to «the development of a positive attitude to foreign language learning generally and towards other cultures» (School Project 21 2000, 12)[4].

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2   The researchers responsible were: Georg Stöckli (group leader), Xaver Büeler and Rita Stebler from the Institute of Pedagogy of the University of Zurich; Daniel Stotz and Tessa Meuter from the Department of Applied Linguistics of Zurich University of Applied Sciences Winterthur.

3   The complete German text of the study can be downloaded from: http://www.schulprojekt21.ch

4   In detail, the language syllabus draws heavily on the Cambridge Young Learners Syllabus 1 (created and published by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate UCLES).

The curriculum document recognises the importance of coherence with the next higher level of schooling (in this case, Years 4 to 6 in primary school and secondary school). It also maps out the route to language acquisition and charts some of the theoretical and methodological foundations that underlie the project. It follows the paradigm of simulated natural acquisition and suggests that the «foreign language should be presented in the form of rich comprehensible input at frequent and regular intervals» (School Project 21 2000, 4)[5].

Teachers engaged in Project 21 underwent language as well as methodological training prior and in parallel to the project start. They had to pass a certificate exam set between Council of Europe Levels B2 and C1. The 43-hour methods course consisted of some theory and discussion, materials selection and creation as well as reflection on practice experience. Some of the teachers were involved in teaching assistantships in the USA and the UK.

The two-year evaluation study that accompanied the project focussed on classroom interaction, learning opportunities and studied the transition from receptive to productive linguistic abilities among the learners. It consisted of two periods of systematic classroom observation and two tests (listening comprehension, speaking in interaction)[6]. The sample studied comprised 9 classes with a total of 178 pupils in 3 communities ranging over school years 1 to 3 at the beginning, and 2 to 4 in the second year. The proportion of children who spoke another language than German at home or were bilingual was a high 47%, reflecting the fact that two of the schools were suburban and urban, respectively.

2.2. The method question: do teachers play ball?

Ever since the Pennsylvania Project (discussed in Allwright 1988, 3-10) it has been essential, when innovating in the language classroom, to verify and monitor carefully whether teachers indeed follow the intended methodological prescriptions and suggestions. In Project 21, the focus of the systematic observational component was twofold:

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5   For a critical appraisal of the conceptual foundations of the project see Stotz (2002).

6   1st observation period: October 1999 to January 2000; 2nd period: September/October 2000; testing: May to July 2001.

- first, to observe whether the teachers' choices and ways of fostering language acquisition were in compliance with the implicit, immersive approach called Embedding;

- second, to observe what learning opportunities arose in the complex classroom context characterised by input and interaction.

For the first observation phase, the COLT System (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching, published in Harley et al., 1990) was used and slightly adapted. It had been conceived for a comparison of traditional intensive foreign language classes with immersion classes in Canada and proved adequate for a first approach to Project 21. The quantitative observation study of 1200 minutes of recorded classroom action was complemented by a qualitative analysis, which used data from interviews with 22 teachers and questionnaire answers.

The main dichotomy of the analysis is that between the implicit, communicative use of the target language (following the principles of an embedding approach, e.g. giving instructions for a school activity involving the creation of a cardboard clock) and the explicit or formal use, where reference is made to the language as a system (in line with more traditional cognitive methods of foreign language teaching, e.g. explaining the vocabulary needed to talk about clock time).

From among the 289 recorded language activities[7], 56% were used solely for implicit purposes. In 28% of the activities, it was a formal feature of language that stood at the centre of the interaction. The remaining 16% of the activities contained uses of English for both implicit and explicit purposes.

This finding allowed a conclusion to the effect that, at the beginning of the project, teachers by and large followed the principle of implicit, embedded use of English in the CLIL sequences while at the same time, there was some confusion and inconsistency. Significantly, teachers with advanced knowledge of English used the language more readily and consistently as a vehicle of communication (77% implicit language use) than their counterparts with (lower) intermediate competence, who seemed to feel a need for explicit vocabulary and linguistic explanation (38% of activities).

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7   A language activity is defined, for the purpose of the observation study, as a classroom interaction unit bounded by introductory instructions for action and/or a shift in the participant configuration.

Thematically, about half of the language activities in this first observation phase referred to school contexts such as maths problems or the completion and colouring of science worksheets. In roughly a fifth of the activities, the class was busy singing or reciting nursery rhymes, whereas a sixth was devoted to classroom organisation and orientation. Only a small proportion (about 5%) dealt with so-called world topics, which range outside school life. Six curricular subjects were represented, with music/singing and maths being most frequently conducted in English.

After the first observation phase it was clear that we were dealing with a genuine attempt at teaching English embedded across the curriculum, which was partly counteracted by a small number of teachers who felt a need for language support and more formal instruction. It was evident from the interviews conducted that some teachers tended to simplify the notion of embedding, defining the approach as «doing a subject in English», «saying in English what you would say in German», «switching to English for part of the lesson». Such views, though perhaps characteristic of an early project stage, tend to cloud the complexities of what goes on in classroom interaction.

2.3. Windows of (learning) opportunity

In the second observation phase, our aim was to work out some of these complexities and frame them with respect to learning opportunities for the pupils. Learning opportunities, as occasions for tacit acquisition processes to kick in, are absolutely essential in the concept underlying the embedding approach:

> Adults and children acquire language by understanding a bit beyond their current level of competence. When learning is stimulating and challenging they are motivated to try to understand new or unknown language. When children learn something new they make guesses and try to understand with the help of the context in which the new information is presented. (School Project 2000, 4)

This view harks back to the ideas of Krashen (see for instance 1985). According to Swain, however, learning opportunities must offer more than teacher-presented or negotiated input. There should be opportunities for the productive use of language by learners so that there is a «push for them to analyze further the grammar of the target language» (1985, 249) and to develop a phonological, morphological and lexical system slowly.

A more fine-grained analytical approach was used to document a week's worth of classroom interaction in the same 9 classes (about 900 minutes were audio-recorded and videotaped). Following Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl's Vienna

study (1998), a speech act analysis of the data aimed to reveal some of the functionality of teacher and learner language and to characterise the turn-by-turn structure of the interaction. For the purpose of this paper, we would like to focus on a central aspect of classroom interaction, that of the relationship between teacher and learner talk, and, more specifically, question-answer-feedback cycles as well as instructional and representational speech acts.

It emerges in the analysis that nearly a third of all speech acts were parts of the well-known pattern (teacher) display question – (learner) response – (teacher) feedback. Display questions serve the purpose of eliciting information that the teacher assumes is known by at least some of the pupils. Chaudron comments negatively on such questions:

> Aside from the possibility that display questions tend to elicit short answers, learners supply the answers for didactic purposes only, so it is plausible that they would have less communicative involvement in producing a display response, and thus less motivational drive for using the target language. (Chaudron 1988, 173)

The pupils in Project 21 did use English to a considerable extent (57% of all learner speech acts), but usually their utterances consisted of one word (such as «yes» or «no» or a figure) or were read out from some materials; a quarter were repetitions, either spontaneous or elicited ones. Learners delivered most of their spontaneous interactions (usually classified as comments) in the local dialect of German. This suggests that there were few productive learning opportunities arising from classroom discourse in which the learners could have tested out their hypotheses.

Of teacher speech acts, 22% functioned to control the class or organise tasks, and, surprisingly, only 10% of 5300 utterances were categorised as representational (telling a story, describing or explaining something, giving information). The second study confirmed the finding that language-related speech acts such as translations, vocabulary explanations or corrections made up a small minority (10%) of teacher talk.

In conclusion, interaction patterns in the embedding classroom resemble forms of exchanges that are typical of most frontal classrooms. The three-part cycle constrains learner utterances as if in a tight scaffolding, and there is little evidence of a push towards the negotiation of meaning, risk-taking and more creative output. Interestingly, a qualitative analysis revealed that the end of the English lesson sequence was often marked by a new participant structure: individual, pair or group work was then conducted silently or in German or dialect.

A year into the project, learners can clearly not be expected to come up with long chunks of language; however, some of the utterances made in the speaking test do suggest that a greater variety of speech functions and emergent syntactic or lexical patterns would be possible[8].

2.4. Classroom interaction and learning outcomes

Expectations of Project 21 were high on all sides concerned. The department of education, in its invitation for tender, had asked for a study of the influence of the embedding approach on the learning success of the children. The timeline for this evaluation was tight, and the tests came at an early stage for a language acquisition study (tests were administered after about 100 hours of tuition). It is with this proviso that the following results should be read.

An attempt was made in both tests to reflect the conditions and contexts in which the pupils had been learning as well as their ages. The listening comprehension test was based on a story that was read by the class teacher and accompanied by colour pictures. The first text was a non-fiction text on wood and trees, modified slightly for the 4th graders. The second part was a story about a witch, and teachers were encouraged to tell the story in a lively way, which inevitably produced slightly different performances.[9]

Table 1 shows that 3rd-year students did best in the listening comprehension test, and overall, pupils scored better in the story than in the non-fiction task.

Table 1: Results of listening test

	Part 1 score *	Trees&Wood in percent	Part 2 score**	Story in percent	Combined points	in percent
4th year	9.70	81.9%	9.2	86.7%	20.73	58.6%
3rd year	11.20	60.9%	10.68	83.9%	21.88	72.4%
2nd year	7.90	43.2%	9.22	71.5%	17.12	57.4%
		51.6%		80.6%		66.1%

N = 173

* Maximum achievable score in 4th-year version: 19 points; in 3rd-year version: 17 points
** Maximum achievable score: 19 points

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8   In the Vienna study (Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl, 1998) 15.5% of learner utterances were qualified as «creative chunks»; this comparatively high proportion may be due to the participation of bilingual pupils and teachers in the experiment and/or the higher exposure to English.

9   The questions were posed in standard German and required the ticking of pictures and boxes, some labelling and short answers in German.

The tree and wood text may have overtaxed the learners to some extent, and it should be noted that in the classroom, new information is rarely presented in such large chunks. On the other hand, if English is to be embedded in curricular teaching of «people and their environment», it must be able to carry rather complex content structures.

The test results could also help decide at which stage of schooling to introduce English. In the language region of the project, the standard form of German is introduced gradually in the first grade, which presents a considerable challenge to most pupils. The fact that in this small sample third-year pupils (who were first exposed to English in second grade) did best supports the decision to introduce English in the second school year.

An attempt was made to study the association between classroom interaction and the outcome of the listening test. It emerged that groups with the highest share of formal, language-oriented classroom work were associated with the weakest test results. Classes with the largest amount of implicit, «immersive» teaching did well although they were topped by two groups whose classrooms were characterised by a mix of implicit and explicit features.
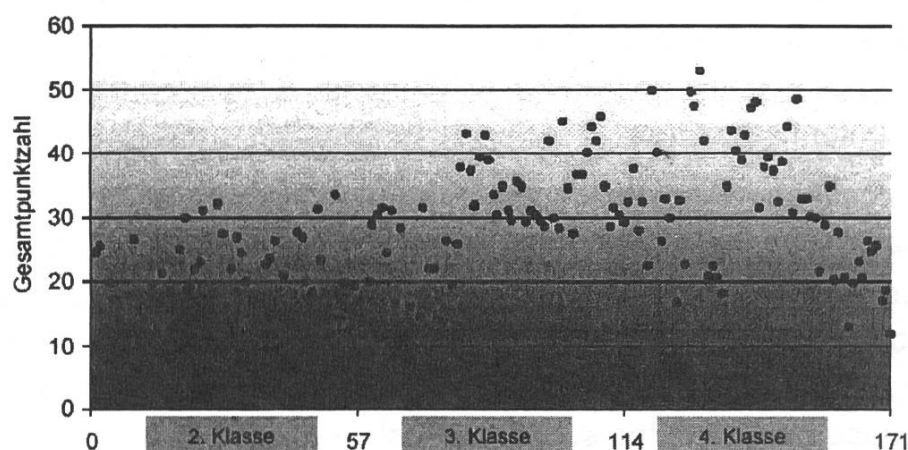
The second test, which examined performance in language production and interaction, was characterised by a great deal of heterogeneity. In the test, pairs of children went through a number of interactive activities together with an experimenter[10]. The interaction was videotaped and analysed with a dense set of 25 features within the areas of pronunciation, lexis, morphology, utterance length and experimenter-pupil and pupil-pupil interaction. The test shared some characteristics with a typical embedding lesson.

The results of the speaking test were rendered in an overall score with an estimated maximum of 48 points. Some few pupils did better than that as they provided more and longer responses to prompts in the last phase of the test.

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10   Details can be found in the Final Project Report (Stöckli et al., 2001). The test, which lasted about 20 minutes, was divided into three parts: A) *Feely Bag* (Each child groped for hidden objects, named them and, once on the table, compared them.) B) *The farm* (Children named toy farm animals, counted them, did some simple arithmetic and were encouraged to engage in a negotiation, role-playing a farmer and a truck driver who had come to pick some animals.) C) *Pets and friends* (The experimenter engaged each child in a simple conversation about their real-life preferences).

Figure 1: Distribution of results in the speaking test

The scatter plot in Figure 1 may serve as an illustration of the wide distribution of results in the test. In a sense, they reflect the methodological model of simulated natural language acquisition that lets every learner acquire structures at his or her own pace. Add to this the potential impact of the various classroom and learning environments, and it will be difficult to make any claims about the degree of success of the embedding model at this early stage of Project 21.

A more detailed look at the various test features may shed some light on the nature of the learning process. If we take as a departure point the goals that were set for lexis and the naming of objects[11], the achievements in the area of receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge are below par for classroom objects and farm animals, but adequate for colours and numbers. In a word formation and a hyponymy task,[12] pupils could do about 50% of the question on average. The simple conversation at the end of the test occasioned an overwhelming majority of one- or two-morpheme utterances (76%), though some pupils showed remarkable creativity with limited means[13].

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11   Goals for the first three years: They can name and use simple everyday classroom equipment and household equipment (...). They know the names of common forms and shapes (square, circle/ round, rectangular) and can describe in English common surfaces found both inside and in nature. They can compare and contrast objects and living creatures (age, appearance, shapes, and size). (School Project 21 Guidelines 2000, 7-8).

12   Word formation: «This man has a truck. He's a trucker, or a truck driver. This woman has a farm. She's a ....?». Hyponymy: «Take out all the school things. Is there any fruit in your feely bag?».

13   There is space for two examples: «I have a cat, but the cat have not name and this I have in Kosovo, four cat and this cat is big.» (4th Year). «We have a little dog, we have, mir händ no zwei Pferde gha, we have cats, and chickens, chicken nuggets.» (3rd Year).

A remarkable result was that children with an immigrant background (who did not have German as a native language) did equally well both in the listening comprehension test and in the speaking test as the Swiss German speakers.

Perhaps most significantly, the two classes which achieved the best overall test results (listening and speaking combined) were those whose classroom interaction and input patterns showed a mix of immersion and supporting language activities. It seems that these teachers felt a need for a balance between content and language orientation and turned out to be comparatively successful in integrating the two aspects. They thus epitomise the move away from a simplistic embedding to a more sophisticated CLIL design, with an intelligent choice of activities and materials.

3. Discussion: A language shower

3.1. What lessons can be learnt from Project 21?

The evaluation study ended with the conclusion that, while the second language part of Project 21 was well motivated and firmly entrenched in the project schools, there remained a certain discrepancy between ambition and practice. The seductive metaphor of simulated natural language acquisition, influenced as it was by notions from immersion programmes, is unlikely to find a one-to-one reflection in actual practices for several reasons:

- exposure time is too low and learning opportunities too heterogeneous and unsystematic for sustainable natural acquisition to kick in with many learners;

- a lack of materials and recourse to teacher-directed classroom discourse further constrains the set of learning opportunities arising for uninstructed language learning;

- the simplifying notion, partly caused by insecurity, that «embedding» just means «teaching content in English» fails to acknowledge a complex reality where language support is desperately needed for the pupils to attain common goals.

However, these criticisms may lay the groundwork for a more promising generalisation of the project, provided the sights are set a little lower, i.e. expectations on all sides become more realistic. Rather than an immersive language bath, primary school pupils in a CLIL project can expect to receive a shower, a partially regulated flow of learning opportunities, both with content and language aims.

The project leaders and teachers need to agree on the subjects and themes which are adequate for CLIL and narrow the selection down; they need to specify the kinds of activities and discourse types that are suited, and hence provide tasks and materials. Above all, the emphasis should shift from simple embedding to a thoughtful integration of content and language. In addition, it would be fruitful if the basic motivation behind the project were more transparent and socio-culturally grounded so that all stakeholders could subscribe to it without illusions of easy natural acquisition (see Section 4). While a certain share of freedom may be valid in an experimental phase, constraints and options must be well-defined for the generalisation of Project 21. A sense of arbitrariness would undoubtedly lead to negative repercussions within and outside the Canton of Zurich; it would be grist to the mills of those who favour traditional forms of language teaching over CLIL as well as those who oppose the introduction of English over or before the second national language.

Even during the course of the evaluation study, some corrections were made to the direction of the project. The initially used term Embedding was replaced by the concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Together with a rash of specially made materials folders for environmental studies, this move signalled a consolidation of the approach with a better grounding for language work.

3.2. Putting Project 21 in a European context

Besides being influenced by the teachers and the evaluation team's preliminary reports, the move reflects experiences from other CLIL projects that have been going on in Europe over the last decade and which are extensively described in a recent report published by the European Union (Marsh 2002).

The Zurich Project 21 is a valuable contribution to this stream of experiments and could easily figure among the case studies in the report. It could equally well benefit from insights gained in other countries. If we compare it with some of these European projects, we should focus on three key characteristics:

Degree of exposure: with about 8% of total class hours given over to the new language, the exposure to the new language of Project 21 would be ranked as low. However, at the moment, it does not seem to be feasible politically to increase this proportion as it would undoubtedly be seen as a further

infringement on the second national language in Switzerland (see Section 4 below).

Subject fields and content-language ratio: the freedom of choice and the lack of materials have led to a high degree of experimentation, where in some subjects such as maths and gymnastics the limits of productivity became apparent. Most teachers observed shied away from using English in language arts lessons (such as for story-telling, riddles, rhymes etc.). It remains a moot question whether CLIL should or should not be used in the domain of language and communication education. Some may argue that no terrain should be taken away from the native/local language subject, German. On the other hand, just as Standard German constitutes a competence to be acquired across the curriculum, the same case could be made for the CLIL target language. The European CLIL report cited argues

> ... that subjects, or themes within subjects, should link into *the true contexts of the world* in terms of language and non-language topics. There is considerable interest in offering CLIL/EMILE through theme-designed, modular approaches, rather than just through subjects. The reason for this appears linked to the role that CLIL/EMILE has in initiating change to traditional ways of teaching and learning. (Marsh 2002, 77)

A hint of change was visible in Project 21: preferred activities for the use of English were such things as the day's opening, singing and music, i.e. activities which are not constrained to regular scheduled lessons. This suggests that the new language could be more frequently used in broader interdisciplinary projects necessitating a richer range of language than maths or gymnastics.

Teachers and discourse types: the somewhat hasty introduction of the project meant that not all of the teachers were prepared well enough on the level of language competence, and some indeed expressed feelings of insecurity[14]. As trained and experienced primary school teachers, they found it easier than specialised language teachers might have to focus on content and task rather than on language as a system (possibly involving correction and explanation). On the other hand, an emphasis on the control of the discourse through tight scaffolding of learner utterances constrained the possibilities of learners to take risks and construct novel utterances. A greater emphasis on task-based learning would help to flexibilise and open up the discourse structures available for CLIL.

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14   In future, a qualification at Level C1 of the Common European Framework will be required.

4.   Conclusions: The sociolinguistic trade-off

One of the chapters of the EU's CLIL/EMILE report is entitled «CLIL/EMILE in Europe: Added Value», and it is useful to look at some of the conclusions and open questions in Project 21 under the socio-economic aspect. CLIL often arises out of a sense of frustration with foreign language learning at schools, which either does not seem to be able to persuade tax payers, employers or parents of its effectiveness or fails to convince external stakeholders of the complexity and slow speed of language learning processes. CLIL is then portrayed as offering a boost to acquiring additional languages at little extra cost:

> Some would argue that contemporary languages education has often failed to provide platforms for learning which suit a broad range of people, young and older. To learn a language and subject simultaneously, as found in forms of CLIL/EMILE, provides an extra means of educational delivery which offers a range of benefits relating to both learning of the language, and also learning of the non-language subject matter. (Marsh 2002, 173)

This line of argument appears attractive especially to «grassroots stakeholders» such as parent organisations and non-professional school boards. A strong case for the egalitarian perspective of CLIL English is made by the Zurich minister of education who has repeatedly pointed out that private English courses were popular among children from (upper) middle-class families. Public mainstream education was forced to deliver the goods demanded by parents for the benefit of all children.

It is obvious that earlier and more widespread language learning can eventually contribute to enhanced individual possibilities and economic benefits, an expectation that is echoed in the global project aims (see Section 1 above) and that can only be understood if we know that the language at stake is English. English is tied to economic advantage on a level that transcends cantonal and national boundaries (Grin, 1999).

However, different sociolinguistic issues are bound to have an impact on Project 21. Throughout the project, intercultural goals have been conspicuously downplayed[15], and mention of the use of English as a lingua franca for intranational communication is notably absent from the department of education's documents, suggesting that this is virtually a taboo topic. The Zurich authorities obviously try to avoid promoting English as a language of

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15   «We do not in fact believe that it is necessary to teach overt cultural content and therefore that it is necessary for the teachers to receive specialist training in this area. We believe that knowledge of and information about English-speaking cultures should be taught in a wider multicultural context.» (School Project 21 2000 Guidelines Mittelstufe, p. 17).

communication in Switzerland. Advocating English as a lingua franca would undermine the status both of standard German and the other national languages, particularly French. Moreover, it would render useless the national language policy concept that was worked out by a government-sponsored group of experts[16]. A minority view in the CLIL-EMILE report expresses a similar concern:

> A critical factor [...] relates to whether people believe that European working life communication will be increasingly dominated by one single language. There is opinion that a dominant 'lingua franca' type language such as English can be used, for example, to start CLIL/EMILE, but because the *youngsters will pick English up anyway*, other languages should be learnt using this approach. *(It) builds the ability to learn other languages and this capacity is more developed in the students who have studied in two languages* (Hans-Ludwig Krechel). (Marsh 2002, 68)

In effect, despite the pervasiveness of English, other languages are often more closely woven into the Swiss primary school context, for instance with the presence of a great proportion of bilingual pupils speaking Italian, Spanish, Serb/Croat or Albanian as their first language and with the geography of Switzerland (including the French and Italian-speaking regions) being part of the curriculum (cf. Stotz, 2002).

In Project 21, a qualitative ethnographic analysis has revealed that English is used less as a vehicle of intercultural communication than a tool for content learning. This evidence would lend support to the hypothesis that using the CLIL approach is designed to mitigate the detrimental effect that the choice of English as a first additional language may have on language politics in Switzerland. If English is not installed as a separate subject in the curriculum and if it does not serve as a lingua franca in the school context, but adds to some future socio-economic advantage, it can be defended more easily to critics both from the language policy and the educational fields as something quite harmless.

In sum, we are witnessing a trade-off such that proponents of Project 21 offer added value in the form of an additional language at little curricular cost, while at the same time they maintain that neither are educational aims hampered, nor is the status of the second national language affected as students are expected to leave school with similar competence in English and French at the end of obligatory schooling. The costs to pay for this trade-off are the low exposure to English, and hence slow progress, and a certain arbitrariness in the choice of subjects and the content-language ratio, which has led to some

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16   Cf. http://www.romsem.unibas.ch/sprachenkonzept/konzept.html

rather heterogeneous results and may well turn out to be a future liability. The argument that Swiss students would «pick up English anyway» and that the early language slot should be opened for «other languages» (Marsh 2002, 68) is simply ignored.

The experimental introduction of English into the Zurich primary curriculum does not simply mean a replacement of French as most favoured language and an earlier onset of language learning as a result of psycholinguistic insights. More than that, it is testimony of a shift towards a more serious role for language learning, as Takala states in the report on CLIL/EMILE in Europe:

> It is not, however, only the scope of language teaching and learning that has changed dramatically. There has also been an obvious change in the role of foreign language proficiency: from being largely a part of general education, it has [come to be seen as] a major part of many people's professional competence. (Marsh 2002, 40)

The prospective introduction of second languages into most vocational education curricula is further evidence of this trend. Given this shift, heightened care should be taken to reflect the sociolinguistic issues underlying choice of languages and methodology. A fruitful research-based debate could ensue in Switzerland, which would quickly reveal any hidden agendas and which would also need to respond to those voices who claim that we are exaggerating the need for and feasibility of multilingualism for everyone[17].

The opportunity for a multi-variable analysis of the impact of primary-school language programmes in Switzerland is unique, and it would be a mistake to write off the Zurich experiment as a half-failure with negligible consequences. On the contrary, Swiss federalism with its heterogeneous education systems triggers a great deal of competition, and while efforts towards harmonisation should be made, best practice examples should be carefully compared with each other before any choices are made. The matrix below shows what combinations of methodology and language choice will soon become available for study.

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17   For a contribution to this debate see Perrenoud 2001.

Variables for research approaches in Swiss public schools

Age of onset	Language	Methodology	Region
■ 2nd year ■ 3rd year ■ 5th year ■ 7th year	■ Second national language as 1st additional language ■ English as 1st additional language ■ Second national language as 2nd additional language ■ English as 2nd additional language	■ CLIL ■ Communicative foreign language teaching ■ Blended methods	■ Close to intra-Swiss language border ■ Distant from language border ■ Bi- or trilingual canton

In addition, it would be useful to study the impact of early English on the later acquisition of French, and possibly other languages in Zurich and elsewhere. Such research endeavours should insert themselves into the wave of European CLIL studies and make use of available insights. In brief, the Zurich project should not remain the only one to be studied critically and in depth and could thus help pave the way towards a greater understanding of education in the plurilingual society of the 21st century.

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