

BILINGUAL CONTENT TEACHING IN GERMANY IN 2017

AN ATTEMPT TO ASCERTAIN THE STATUS QUO

When Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer signed the Élysée Treaty in 1963, a treaty of friendship that included a recommendation to establish schools in both countries that would particularly promote the language of the other country, they and their fellow politicians could hardly have imagined what long-term consequences this would have, at least in Germany. Admittedly, many European countries already had what were known as bilingual schools, where pupils were taught not only in the country's local language but also in a foreign language, yet these were few and far between and were aimed primarily at the elite upper classes who could afford to pay the required school fees.

In Germany, the first school to emerge as a result of the friendship treaty was established in Singen in 1969. This grammar school already put into practice the basic principle of bilingual teaching – that is to say teaching a subject in a language other than the usual school language. Further schools followed; they were grammar schools that were the result of existing schools being extended by what were known as bilingual streams; initially, however, their number increased only gradually. More than one subject would often be taught in French in the bilingual streams; the subjects in question tended to be geography, history or social studies, with STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) playing only a marginal role. The number of bilingual streams increased sharply in the early nineties when English was introduced as a teaching language alongside French. Ever since, it has been rising continuously, above all after the education ministries of Germany's federal states gave the green light and provided administrative support for the establishment and standardization of bilingual streams (cf. the 17.10.2013 decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany, KMK).

The organizational structures that still characterize schools offering bilingual teaching today began to emerge last century. The majority of these schools are at the secondary level: it is normally in year seven that certain subjects begin to be taught in the foreign language, while the two previous years (five and six) are devoted to more intense foreign language teaching in many of Germany's federal states. Generally this means that two or three additional hours of foreign language classes are provided. From year seven, it is for the most part the social sciences that are taught bilingually, while the natural sciences remain the exception. Only since the middle of the last decade have these subjects moved more into the foreground. Interestingly, apart from biology it tends to be mathematics in particular that is chosen as a bilingual subject. The bilingual subject changes after one or two years, and in a number of schools two subjects are taught in the foreign language at the same time from year ten. At German grammar schools, bilingual teaching comes to an end when pupils sit their Abitur exams (the university entrance qualification), which can be taken in the chosen subjects either in the school's normal language or in the foreign language. This basic organizational structure is also described as „bilingualer Sachfachunterricht“ („bilingual content subject learning“).

Another organizational structure that can also be found at German secondary schools, albeit far less frequently, is what is known as modular bilingual teaching. This involves certain subject topics being taught in English or French for a period of one or more years, while others continue to be taught in German. The selected topics, which can also be taught on a project basis, should preferably be taken from English or French history or, if the subject in question is geography or social studies, should at least have some relevance to the country in which the target language is spoken. Modular bilingual teaching can be found in schools that want to make some bilingual teaching available but are unable to offer a fully-fledged bilingual education. Modular bilingual

teaching is provided at some of Germany's intermediate and even lower secondary schools, though a full bilingual education is rarely on offer there.

Some bilingual teaching has also been available at Germany's state primary schools for roughly a decade. As a rule, this involves one particular field within a subject being taught in English for one to two hours per week. This is done on the basis of content and language integrated learning, especially if the field in question is only taught from year one or two. Though the number of primary schools offering bilingual teaching is still small, it is growing steadily. In this context we will ignore private primary schools (and indeed nursery schools) that have far more variable organizational structures. As yet no joint decisions have been taken by the KMK as far as bilingual teaching at primary level is concerned, with the result that different concepts are applied in the individual federal states.

There is not really any point in attempting to provide a statistical overview of schools offering some bilingual teaching, as the numbers change too much – often in the space of just a few months. Furthermore, there is no data that relates to all federal states, and in any case the statistics that are available are unreliable partly because the various organizational structures are often combined. Nonetheless, here are a few statistics from 2013:

School type	Bilingual school or school with bilingual stream	Schools with modular bilingual teaching
Primary school	287, including 113 private schools	
Secondary school	1500	140+
Vocational school	120+	60+

Although no doubt considerably higher by now, these figures are still fairly low given that there are over 36,000 state schools at secondary level alone in Germany. To better understand the situation in which bilingual schools and streams find themselves today, it is necessary to consider how such schools come about in Germany. Even from a purely administrative perspective, the bilingual approach in Germany differs significantly from that followed in other countries. In Germany, the initiative to introduce bilingual teaching comes from the individual school itself, not from the educational authorities. Once a school's headteacher has reached agreement with his or her teaching staff, he or she applies to establish a bilingual stream. Once the school has a sufficient number of teachers to be able to offer bilingual lessons to several years, the ministry responsible will generally approve the application; teaching can then go ahead in line with the applicable rules and regulations. In other countries, such as in Italy, precisely the opposite approach is followed: the initiative comes from the ministry; schools have to comply with the ministry's directives and have no say in whether bilingual teaching is introduced. Experience shows that Germany's bottom-up approach is more productive than Italy's top-down system, which often leads to a lack of motivation among teaching staff.

In this article we have consistently used the term bilingual content teaching to describe the educational concept that is the article's subject. In the European context, however, other terms are also used – most frequently the acronym CLIL (which stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning), and to a somewhat lesser extent the term immersion. Nowadays the term CLIL is increasingly used, even by the educational authorities themselves, despite there being considerable differences between CLIL and bilingual teaching, at least as far as the underlying theoretical concepts are concerned. CLIL emphasizes the way in which the learning process integrates both the subject content and the foreign language, whereas bilingual content teaching has the goal of teaching a particular subject in two languages: a foreign language and the normal language of the learners. Immersion is certainly not an appropriate term to describe the situation

at German state schools, as it refers to the process of acquiring a language without consciously learning the grammatical system of rules that apply to the language. Immersion often happens when young children acquire a language simply as a result of being exposed to it in a natural setting.

Although bilingual content teaching and CLIL are frequently used as synonyms in common parlance, it does appear necessary to make the aforementioned difference more clear; it is also stressed repeatedly in discussions among German education experts. The kind of bilingual content teaching that takes place or should take place in Germany involves lessons that focus on both the foreign language and the school's normal teaching language, as well as on the subject content itself. Bilingual content teaching is intended to promote cognitive academic proficiency (CALP) in not only the foreign but also in the school language. Language-sensitive teaching, the method proposed to achieve this, is also supposed to serve as the model for content teaching in the school language. This approach to bilingual learning has played only a minor role in CLIL to date. Although language-sensitive teaching is also becoming an increasingly important method in CLIL, it is for the most part applied only in the context of content teaching in the foreign language. The bilingual approach sets the German bilingual teaching concept apart, and there is growing recognition of its potential.

There is a whole host of other issues that should really be discussed here, such as the development of teaching materials or teaching training and continuing education, yet for reasons of space this is not possible. Instead the reader is referred to the volume of articles by Rüschoff, Sudhoff and Wolff (2015), which contains a critical analysis of all the relevant issues.

LITERATURE

Kultusministerkonferenz (2013): Konzepte für den bilingualen Unterricht – Erfahrungsbericht und Vorschläge zur Weiterentwicklung – Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 17.10.2013.

Rüschoff, B./Sudhoff, J./Wolff, D. (eds.)(2015): CLIL Revisited – Eine kritische Analyse zum gegenwärtigen Stand des bilingualen Sachfachunterrichts. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dieter Wolff is an emeritus professor of applied psycholinguistics at the University of Wuppertal. His research focuses on language processing in a second language, foreign language teaching at schools, and bilingual upbringing. He served for six years as vice president of the AILA (Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée), and over the course of many years co-edited three journals on applied linguistics and foreign language teaching (Die Neueren Sprachen, Neusprachliche Mitteilungen aus Unterricht und Praxis, International CLIL Research Journal). He currently advises various European governments on issues relating to bilingual content teaching.

His list of publications encompasses twelve books and more than 220 articles in academic journals, handbooks and edited volumes. His book Fremdsprachenlernen als Konstruktion: Grundlagen einer konstruktivistischen Fremdsprachendidaktik was published by Peter Lang in 2002 and came out in a second edition in 2009. He has published more than 30 essays on bilingual content teaching in renowned international journals and edited volumes.