

# Second Language Acquisition and Bilingual Education

*Prof. Dr. Thorsten Piske, Institute of Language and Literature  
University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany  
E-Mail: thorsten.piske@ph-gmuend.de*

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## 1. Introduction

- **The term "bilingual education"** is used in two fundamentally different ways (e.g. Baker<sup>3</sup>2001):
  - a) teaching approaches involving more than one language
  - b) teaching approaches using two languages as languages of instruction so that learners become highly proficient in these languages
- **Many different terms are used in the literature, e.g.**
  - content and language integrated learning (CLIL)
  - immersion
  - teaching content through a foreign language
  - content-based second language teaching
  - language-enhanced content learning
  - language enriched education
  - mainstream bilingual education

## 2. Reasons for early foreign language learning

### a) Political reasons

- **More efficient approaches to foreign language teaching are necessary in order to**
  - maintain linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe,
  - to help children develop greater tolerance towards foreign languages and
  - to enable EU citizens to search for employment across the entire EU territory
- ⇒ **The "Common European framework of reference for languages" (2000) demands "multilingual education"**

### b) Psycholinguistic reasons (e.g. Flege 1987; Piske 2007b)

- In the long run most children are more successful than adolescents or adults in learning a foreign language.
- There is no strong evidence for the existence of a "critical period for learning languages".
- But:
- Young children are better able to perceive "foreign sounds".
- Children's first language system is less well established than an adult's first language system.
- Fear of making mistakes appears to be a greater problem for adults than for children.
- Children are much more prepared to participate in playful and creative activities (songs, rhymes, games, role plays, etc.).

### **3. Conditions for successful foreign language learning**

#### **• Factors crucial for success in foreign language learning**

(see, e.g. *Flege et al. 1999; Piske et al. 2001; Piske 2007a, 2008a, b*):

1. An early start
2. Continuous and intensive exposure to the foreign language
3. Frequent use of the foreign language in diverse and motivating contexts
4. Authentic and enriched input provided by teachers with at least almost native-like skills in the foreign language

### **4. Continuity in bilingual programs**

#### **• In several bilingual programs in Northern Germany continuity is established by strong links between three phases:**

1. 2- to 6-year-old children are exposed to a foreign language in bilingual kindergartens and pre-schools.
2. In primary school, the foreign language is supported through immersion/CLIL.
3. The major goal for secondary I is to introduce the second foreign language in grade 5 and to also support it through immersion/CLIL.

⇒ The bilingual programs in Northern Germany are based on strong links between kindergarten, primary school and secondary school.

### **5. Instructional methodology in bilingual programs**

#### **• Ten of the most important strategies used by immersion teachers (according to *Snow 1990*):**

1. Extensive use of body language
2. Predictability in instructional routines
3. Drawing on background knowledge to aid comprehension
4. Extensive use of realia, visuals, manipulatives
5. Review of previously covered material
6. Building redundancy into the lessons
7. Explicit teacher modeling
8. Indirect error correction and negotiation of meaning
9. Variety of teaching methods and types of activities
10. Use of clarification/comprehension checks

### **6. Bilingual programs in Germany: Kindergartens and pre-schools**

(e.g. *Wode 2001; Rohde 2005; Piske 2007b; Steinlen 2007*)

- The kindergartens follow the "one person-one language approach" (e.g. *Döpke 1992*).
- One kindergarten teacher only uses German, the other one only English.
- English is not taught to the children.
- The kindergarten teachers create contexts enabling the children to understand the meaning of the linguistic input they are exposed to.
- It takes many children about one or two weeks to "get used" to the new language.
- After about six weeks the children can understand the new language in the context of all daily routines.
- After about three months they integrate English words into their German utterances, e.g. "*Ich habe einen dog.*"
- By the end of the first year most children will use whole sentences, e.g. "*Pass me the milk, please.*"
- In general, language comprehension develops much faster than language production.

## 7. Bilingual programs in Germany: Primary schools

(e.g. Wode 1995; Burmeister & Pasternak 2004; Piske 2006; Piske & Burmeister 2008)

- Immersion/CLIL: A foreign language is used to teach (parts of) the school curriculum.
- All subjects, except for German language arts, are taught in English.
- The students are exposed to English for about 70% of the time and to German for about 30% of the time.
- English is not taught as a subject.
- The students learn English because
  - they are actively involved in classroom activities
  - they are asked to speak English as often as possible
- The students are mostly taught by German-speaking teachers with a very good command of English.
- The bilingual programs are always offered as alternatives to the regular programs.
- The bilingual programs are attended by both children from German families and by children from migrant backgrounds.
- The bilingual programs are attended by both children with and without prior knowledge of English.

### How do the students' skills in the foreign language develop over time?

(see, e.g., Piske 2006, Piske & Burmeister 2008)

#### The first three pictures of the picture story "Frog, where are you?" (Mayer 1969)



#### Transcript 1. Excerpt of a picture story told by student no. 8 at the end of grade 1.

IE Don't show me the pictures.

8 There is a dog and a boy, and the d/ dog *looking* in a glass, and in the glass *sitting* a frog, and the moon *shining*.

IE Hm, mhm!

8 And then the boy are *sleeping*, and the dog *sleeping*. And then the boy *looking* in the glass, and the frog is/ is not there.

IE: English-speaking interviewer.

**Transcript 2.** *Excerpt of a picture story told by student no. 8 at the end of grade 1.*

8 Ehm one night a little boy # ehm has **caught** a little frog and **puts** him in a glass, and # ehm # then he **took** the glass and **bring** it in his bedroom, and then he **looks** at the little frog, and the frog **thinks** when the little boy **sleeps**: "I **go** out in the forest to my family" and ehm # the light is on, and the little # dog ehm **looks** in the glass exactly on the frog.

IE Mhm.

8 And when the frog # ehm **go** out of the glass in the night, the little dog and the little boy are **sleeping**, and ehm # the # moon is **shining** in the window, and # ehm all is **standing** around and is dark. And when the day **comes** and the ehm # sun **shines** on the glass and the little boy ehm **wakes up** and the dog a/ as well ehm # the # glass was empty because the frog ehm in the night **go** ehm to his family again # in the forest.

IE: English-speaking interviewer.

## **8. Bilingual programs in Northern Germany: Secondary schools** (e.g. Burmeister & Daniel 2002)

- Late partial immersion programs (*Bilinguale Zweige*) can now be found at secondary schools throughout Germany.
- In most cases, two subjects are taught in a foreign language, mostly in English or in French.
- **Immersion Projects in Northern Germany**
- In 1991, late partial immersion programs were first implemented at five academic secondary schools (*Gymnasien*).
- In August 2003, bilingual programs were offered by over 20 *Gymnasien* and 12 *Realschulen*.
- **Program features**
- In grades 5 and 6 English is taught in language-as-subject periods.
- In these "lead-up grades", English instruction is boosted by one or two communication-based periods per week.
- From grade 7 onwards, two subjects (geography, history, or biology) are taught in English so that the contact time to the L2 amounts to almost 30% - an increase of about 15%.
- **Research on immersion students' foreign language skills**
- Many studies focusing on L2 vocabulary and aspects of discourse have been carried out to determine if and to what extent IM students and non-IM students differ in proficiency in the foreign language.
- **Example: "A difficult decision"**
- A communicative test, called "A difficult decision", was used to examine the secondary school students' performance in English.
- The students taking the test had to complete four tasks:
  - a) They had to answer reading-comprehension questions.
  - b) They had to describe a map.
  - c) They had to consider different ways out of a desperate situation.
  - d) They had to write a letter to describe what had happened to them.
- **Subjects**
- Three groups of students were tested:
  - a) Immersion students
  - b) non-immersion students from parallel classes
  - c) non-immersion students from schools without an immersion program
- Students were tested at the end of grade 7 or the end of grade 10.

## • Results

- By the end of grade 7, i.e., seven months after the onset of immersion, the students had already benefited from the program.
- The immersion students were more talkative than the non-IM students.
- The immersion students were more eager to talk.
- The immersion students needed less guidance and encouragement on the part of the interviewer.
- The immersion students' L2 vocabulary was larger and more varied than that of the non-immersion students.
- The immersion students scored higher with regard to the number of clauses that were used, the frequency of cohesive devices and the degree of cohesiveness.
- The positive effects of bilingual programs on German-speaking students' foreign language skills have recently been confirmed in a national survey (*Schröder et al. 2006*).
- Among other things, this "DESI study" found that 9th graders enrolled in bilingual programs were two years ahead of 9th graders taught English in language-as-subject-periods.

## 9. Answers to frequently asked questions

- **Do students in bilingual programs show deficits in the development of their first language?**
  - In studies examining students' reading and writing skills in German, immersion students obtained better results than students who received their instruction in German. (*e.g. Bachem 2004; Zaunbauer & Möller 2006, 2007*)
  - These results correspond to the results of international studies. (*e.g. Genesee 1987; Turnbull et al. 2001*)
- **Do students in bilingual programs show deficits in the development of subject knowledge?**
  - In studies examining subject knowledge (e.g. in maths) immersion students obtained results that corresponded to or were slightly better than the results obtained by students who received their instruction in German. (*e.g. Zaunbauer et al. 2005; Zaunbauer & Möller 2006, 2007*)
  - These results correspond to the results of international studies. (*e.g. Genesee 1987; Bournot-Trites & Reeder 2001*)
- **Are students in bilingual programs able to express their subject knowledge in their first language?**
  - In studies on subject knowledge carried out in German, immersion students obtained results that corresponded to the results obtained by students who received their instruction in German. (*e.g. Zaunbauer et al. 2005; Zaunbauer & Möller 2006*)
  - These results correspond to the results of international studies. (*e.g. de Courcy & Burston 2000; Bournot-Trites & Reeder 2001*)
- **Does participation in a bilingual program hinder general intellectual or cognitive growth?**
  - Bilingual programs have been found to exert positive effects on cognitive abilities such as concentration, divergent thinking and creativity. (*e.g. Bialystok 2005*)
  - In the bilingual programs that have been implemented in Germany so far hardly any student "opts out" of these programs.
- **Do all students benefit from bilingual programs?**
  - When children start school, at least one their languages should reflect a stage of development typical of their age. (*e.g. Cummins 1982; Wode 1995; Elsner 2007*)
    - ⇒ Parents have to make sure that their children's first language can develop in an age-appropriate way.

⇒ In general the results obtained in Germany support Wesche's (2002, p. 362) conclusion that early immersion is "the most effective means of school second language instruction yet developed for majority language children."

### **10. Some practical issues**

- **Can a foreign language be used as the medium of instruction in all subjects of the curriculum?**
- Yes. This has, for example, been shown in "total immersion programs" implemented in Canada since the 1960s.
- **Do parents have to speak the foreign language when they interact with their children?**
- No. They should rather support their children's native language.
- **Which problems do teachers in bilingual programs have to cope with?**
- There is a lack of teaching materials developed for bilingual programs.
- **What do schools need if they want to start a bilingual program?**
- Parents strongly interested in enrolling their children in such a program.
- Children whose first language receives enough support at home.
- Teachers who
  - can conduct lessons in subjects like geography, biology, or mathematics in a foreign language.
  - are willing to spend much more time preparing their lessons.
- School administrators or politicians who are willing to give a school the permission to start such a program.

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**A lot of useful information is provided on the following website:**

<http://www.fmks-online.de>