

Focusing on article forms: A study of language transfer in CLIL contexts in Spain

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on split-triggered transfer errors. The study is longitudinal and the data comprises a set of one-to-one interviews with CLIL learners involved in Madrid's Autonomous Community's bilingual program. The analysis focuses on a specific language feature that usually results in article errors. The findings so far suggest that transfer is 'developmentally moderated' (Hakansson et al. 2002). As split transfer errors seem to be particularly difficult to overcome with the help of CLIL input alone, the present study calls for explicit *focus on form* (Lyster 2007) in CLIL instruction models.

Introduction

A new outlook on transfer research

Nowadays, the phenomenon of transfer is informed by new cognitive models such as that presented by MacWhinney (1992), namely, the Competition Model. Within this framework, phonological transfer involves 'the accretion of new lexical items based on an old set of phonological units' (1992: 375). Thus, new words are constructed by figuring out new matches between old semantic units and old phonological units. This theory predicts massive L1 transfer in the early stages of L2 learning. Moreover, the closer to the L2 the L1 is, the more positive transfer is expected. Syntax is said to be acquired through translation by using a one-to-one lexical mapping strategy. However, if it fails, the learner turns to many-to-one mappings whereby an L1 phrase is translated as a single L2 word.

The latter strategy is otherwise known as *coalescence* and its counterpart (the one-to-many mapping) is called *split* (Ellis 1994). A very simple, grammatical realization of the afore-mentioned phenomenon would be the splitting of Spanish infinitives into two English patterns. In other words, where the Spanish language uses one infinitive strategy regardless of the syntactic collocation, English uses either an infinitive clause or a gerund, as can be seen from the examples below:

Spanish: Voy a **hacer** los deberes
Hacer los deberes es aburrido.
English: I'm going **to do** my homework
Doing my homework is boring.

Interestingly, it is the split phenomenon that seems to pose problems for L2 learners. Apparently, it is cognitively more demanding to map a single L1 conceptual category onto two or more L2 categories than to do it the other way around. In Rod Ellis's words, '... difficulty will be greatest when there is a split and least in the case of coalesced forms. No difficulty arises when there is a complete correspondence of items in the two languages' (1994: 307).

Why CLIL students?

Many regard Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a useful tool 'directed at creating a multilingual population in Europe' (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). However, applied linguistics research still has a long way to go if it is to develop a full-fledged CLIL model of instruction. The bare bones of CLIL instruction can be traced back to the Canadian Model of French immersion. The existence of two official languages within the country prompted Canadian scholars to put forward a mixed model of instruction, combining traditional second language classes with a rather innovative teaching mode in which the second language is the vehicle of instruction for curriculum subjects. This model was a major breakthrough at the time when it was implemented and the European context soon set about creating and adapting a parallel model specific to foreign language teaching environments.

The ¹*CLIL-Compendium* has formulated the goals of CLIL-instruction as follows (Dalton Puffer, 2007):

- Develop intercultural communication skills.
- Prepare for internationalization.
- Provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives.
- Access subject-specific target language terminology.
- Improve overall target language competence.
- Develop oral communication skills.
- Diversify methods & forms of classroom practice.
- Increase learner motivation.

However, this set of educational objectives is still far from specific. The goals to be achieved remain out of focus and many researchers, such as Dalton-Puffer (2007: 15), call for a clearer definition of language learning aims:

[I]n order to avoid stagnation of the CLIL enterprise it will be necessary in the future to state more explicitly which language learning aims are pursued through the practice of CLIL (and by implication, therefore, which are not or cannot be pursued but must be taken care of by EFL lessons or altogether different learning environments).

So far CLIL research has yielded fairly positive results as far as content is concerned. The evidence suggests that CLIL learners know as much about the topic subject as their L1-instructed peers. Language-wise, though, the results are not that homogeneous. While receptive skills, vocabulary, morphology and pragmatic abilities are improved noticeably through CLIL instruction, syntax and informal, non-technical language seem to remain unchanged (Dalton-Puffer 2007). Thus, it seems that grammar skills cannot be improved via CLIL unless there is explicit instruction in traditional EFL classes.

Some researchers claim that a second language cannot be fully acquired on the basis of CLIL input alone. Lyster (2007: 3) argues against this underestimation of the target language in immersion and content-based instruction and calls for 'counterbalanced instruction', i.e., a two-fold model combining implicit input-triggered language learning and language-focused reference. Yet, however obvious the need for language focus, the controversy over this issue is far from settled and further research is most welcome.

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The present study and beyond

Research questions and aims

In the light of the available evidence of transfer research so far, this study aims to delve deeper into the phenomenon of splits/coalescence in learner interlanguage. It is for this purpose that I use the UAM-CLIL Corpus of oral learner English. Several research questions are posed below:

1. Which is the most frequent phenomenon, coalescence or split transfer?
2. Is it more frequent at the syntactic or the lexical level?
3. What are the most frequent types within the most frequent transfer category, be it syntactic or lexical?
4. Is there a need for more *focus-on-form* (Lyster 2007) in the CLIL classroom to speed up the disappearance of specific transfer types that linger longer in the learners' interlanguage?

The English article system

It is widely agreed that the English article system is a most challenging language feature and learners seem to find it extremely difficult to grasp the rules governing such an intricate grammar point. In fact some researchers go as far as considering it as *hard grammar*, that is, very difficult to teach, if at all learnable (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). Goto Butler (2002: 452) captures the difficulty inherent to the acquisition of the English article system as follows:

Part of the complexity can be attributed to the fact that the English article system does not consist of one-to-one form and meaning relationships.

However complex, though, the acquisition of this grammar feature has been on the top of the list in many research agendas for decades now and several studies (Bickerton, 1981; Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982; Goto Butler, 2002; Jarvis, 2002; Liu & Gleason, 2002; Master, 1987a; Parrish, 1987) have given us useful insight into the inner workings of article usage rules. As Liu & Gleason point out, 'if the grasp of the use of the English article system entails a command of the discourse and referential constraints on NPs, the acquisition of the article must in turn involve the learning of these constraints' (2002: 3). Further, many have called for a bigger research effort into the effect of the L1 on the acquisition of articles (see, for example, Goto Butler 2002, Jarvis 2002).

Foremost among those who took the lead in studying English articles is Bickerton (1981), whose work turned out to be one of the most important thorough descriptions of article use in English. His research focuses on the semantic functions that govern the use of English articles, namely, *a*, *an*, *the*, and the zero article. The semantic functions of

NPs, according to Bickerton (cf. Jarvis 2002: 388) are specified by two discourse features, namely, whether a noun is a specific referent (\pm SR) and whether the hearer knows the referent (\pm HK); and, thus, this binary system gives way to four categories.

According to Type 1 (-SR, +HK) indefinite and definite articles pre-modify singular nouns and zero articles pre-modify plural nouns. Type 2 posits a specific referent that the hearer knows (+SR, +HK), and so it demands definite articles. Type 3 proposes a specific referent that the hearer does not know, so singular nouns take indefinite articles while plural ones take the zero article. This category comprises two subgroups. It might be the first time that a NP unknown to the hearer appears in the discourse, in which case an indefinite article must be used (e.g. *My aunt bought a fridge*). Otherwise, the NP unknown to the hearer might follow existential *have* (e.g. *My car has a big trunk*). Last but not least, type 4 demands a non-specific referent that is unknown to the hearer and it can be further divided into four subcategories. Equative NPs using the verb *to be* demand an indefinite article (e.g. *He is a doctor*), as do negative statements (e.g. *She does not have a computer*), interrogative sentences (e.g. *Do you have a cell phone?*) and hypothetical statements (e.g. *If I were rich, I would buy an island*).

Learners apparently tend to overuse definite articles in the early stages of article acquisition regardless of whether or not the hearer knows the referent of the NP (Huebner, 1983; Jarvis, 2002; Master, 1987). Jarvis (2002: 389) concluded that the Finns and the Swedes taking part in his research project used the zero article in a similar way as they did in their L1s. Their first language, he says, determines the stages following that of overgeneralization (2002: 389). This observation is supported by sound evidence by researchers Chaudron and Parker (1990).

As far as Spanish learners of English are concerned, the obligatory use of Spanish definite articles was found to split up into three different English settings. In Spanish the use of definite articles is compulsory before singular, plural, personal property/body parts and uncountable nouns alike, whereas English requires a definite article before singular nouns; not so before plural and personal property/ body part nouns. Plural nouns demand either no article -if the reference is generic- or else a definite article -if it is specific-, while personal property/body part nouns require possessive determiners. Uncountable nouns, on the other hand, do not require any definite articles.

What is more, splits and coalescence can work side by side to produce *doubly-determined* transfer errors (Ellis, 1994: 333). English demands an indefinite article (*a/an*) that precedes a singular countable noun, but this is not always the case in Spanish. Spanish-speaking learners of English may or may not leave out the indefinite article when producing TL's singular indefinite NPs. Therefore, either positive or negative transfer, -if there is any-, would be expected. It is plain to see that the noun in the sentence *No tengo coche* (English: *I don't have a car*) is countable, thereby requiring an indefinite article in English. Somewhat surprisingly, though, **No tengo un coche* would be deemed to be a rather marked construction by native Spanish speakers, who otherwise prefer the alternative *No tengo coche*. Hence, as *I don't have car* is not available in English, Spanish-speaking learners of English are most likely to make split transfer mistakes.

When it comes to plural countable nouns, the match is rather straightforward. Both English and Spanish require indefinite articles or the zero article, the only difference being that L1 negative sentences might use singular rather than plural nouns.

	Spanish	English
Singular noun indef. NP. Affirmative sentence.	Tengo un libro Tengo libro	I have a book (NOT AVAILABLE)
Singular noun indef. NP. Negative sentence.	No tengo un libro No tengo libro	I do not have a book (NOT AVAILABLE)
Plural noun indef. NP. Affirmative sentence.	Tengo libros Tengo unos libros	I have books I have some books
Plural noun indef. NP. Negative sentences.	No tengo libros No tengo ningún libro	I do not have books I do not have any books

Table 1: Indefinite NP split mapping

It is a similar case for the L1 Spanish speakers using uncountable nouns, as for both the L1 and the TL demand the zero article or an indefinite article/pronoun:

	Spanish	English
Uncountable noun indef. NP. Affirmative sentence.	Tengo azúcar Tengo algo de azúcar	I have sugar I have some sugar
Uncountable noun indef. NP. Negative sentence.	No tengo azúcar No tengo nada de azúcar	I do not have sugar I do not have any sugar

Table 2: Indefinite NP split mapping

It has been mentioned elsewhere (MacWhinney, 1992: 375) that L2 learners aim to find one-to-one mappings between the L1 and the L2, since this is a powerful tool that enables them to ease their way through the target language. Therefore, transliteration is as close as they can get to proper translation. The more genetic and typological similarities between the L1 and the L2, the more chances of matching transliteration and translation there are, and so negative transfer is rarely to be seen when the following conditions are met. Thus, if transfer eventually occurs, it is always positive when the following conditions are met:

- a) When perfect syntactic transliteration between the L1 and the L2 is possible.
- b) When cross-language synonymy is perfect.

c) When both factors are at work.

It becomes clear that Spanish learners of English are likely to make such mistakes as the following if this principle is applied to such sentences as *No tiene coche*:

*He doesn't have car.

Method

Subjects

The study I discuss here was conducted in two bilingual schools in the Autonomous Community of Madrid from 2006 to 2007 and it is part of a bigger research effort that aims to analyze the evolution of the learners' interlanguage over a four-year period of secondary education. As a result of the agreement signed by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science and the British Council in 1996, the two schools have been leading the way in the implementation of an official bilingual program in which some of the curricular subjects, such as arts and crafts, natural science and social science, are taught in English.

In this study, there are altogether twelve students involved. They are Spanish 11/12-year-olds immersed in the aforementioned CLIL program. By the time the research project was carried out, all the participants had been doing CLIL for 8-9 years as they had started their content-and-language integrated education at the age of three. Throughout the secondary education period, they had been exposed to English via a CLIL subject (social science) and also through traditional EFL classes. According to the British Council/Ministry of Education program, a wide group of curricular subjects may be used as L2-learning vehicles. However, school authorities usually choose the subject "Geography and History" to teach, simultaneously, both the content and the English language because this particular content subject facilitates the teaching of a wider range of TL structures and lexicon.

Materials and procedures

The data I am using is part of the UAM-CLIL Corpus, which evolved from the UAMLESC (UAM Learner English Spoken Corpus)². This is a learner English database comprising a long list of transcriptions of class sessions and interviews with English learners. The project began in 1998 and the bulk of data has continued to increase ever since. Among the transcriptions researchers may find a wide array of bilingual schools, ranging from total immersion curricula to partial immersion, and so they can choose the model that meets their needs the most. Some of the schools teach the whole syllabus in English while others teach a limited set of curricular subjects in the TL. Furthermore, the Corpus encompasses different socio-economic settings as the

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schools that take part in the project are scattered all around the Autonomous Community of Madrid.

For the purpose of this particular study, a set of one-to-one interviews with students from two different schools was chosen in order to control the variability of students. As the study was going to be longitudinal (i.e. the study takes place over a long period of time, while the students' linguistic performance is analyzed at different points in time and so we can observe the evolution of their interlanguage), class session recordings would not have allowed the student variable to remain constant as there were over thirty students intervening randomly in each session.

The procedure consisted in recording conversations about different social science topics that had just been studied by the learners at the time. The researchers asked questions and the students had to provide answers that required them to use their knowledge of the subject. Prior to the recording of the conversational exchanges, though, the teacher had carried out a brainstorming class session - usually recorded as well - in which students had to go over and review previously learned concepts through a list of question prompts provided by researchers. This task was followed by a composition to be written on the basis of the same prompt.

Below is a sample of questions based on those used in the class sessions, for the written compositions and interviews.

1. Why and where did cities appear?
2. Why did ancient civilizations become empires?
3. What do you know about pharaohs and kings in ancient civilizations?
4. Why were Egypt and Mesopotamia so important at the time?

The data for the present study were gathered throughout 2006 and 2007. The first round of interviews took place in the spring of 2006 and the topic of conversation was natural disasters; the second was about ancient civilizations and was recorded before the summer of 2006, while the last set of interviews - about feudal Europe - took place before the summer of 2007. There were six students per school, two of which were advanced, while the others were intermediate and beginner level respectively. At the end of the data-gathering period, there was a set of 36 interviews, comprising three interviews on three different topics per student.

Results

Qualitative Analysis

As far as definite NPs are concerned, the most frequent mistake involved plural nouns. The subjects were prone to overusing definite articles with plural nouns in the L2 -no matter the distinction between generic and specific- and most of the errors registered in the study were as follows:

- (1) ST: And then **the** people can, can, eat.

(2) ST: Because, because they, they don't have **the** time to to react?

(3) RES: Right. And what do you do in order to, not to, pollute, the area? Is there anything that you personally do, that you're conscious that, you're doing that?

ST: With **the** cars.

(4) ST: And **the** earthquakes, eh, it can be prevent, more or less.

(5) ST: The power of all the world was centred in those cities, because they, they were kings and the most important people, **the** noblemen, **the** priests, **the** scribes.

(6) ST: Because **the** children didn't go to school and they had to work very hard.

Singular nouns, on the other hand, hardly ever triggered negative transfer errors. As a matter of fact the subjects turned out to have a very good command of singular definite NPs, which may be enhanced by positive transfer more often than not. Notice that the right use of definite articles before singular nouns does not necessarily mean that the child has properly acquired the TL structure. Learners might also be mapping an L1 structure straight onto the L2, there being a powerful potential for L1-L2 positive transfer. Be that as it may, though, negative transfer, albeit infrequent, took the following shape:

(7) ST: So peasants work the land of (**the**) aristocracy.

As the match between the L1 and the L2 in this particular grammar point is absolute, there is hardly any room for negative transfer. Yet, the L1 still manages to work its way into the child's interlanguage in the shape of simplification. As the L1 and the L2 differ in the use of definite articles before plural nouns - the L1 requiring a definite article with generic and specific nouns alike - the child tends to mistrust the similarity regarding singular noun NPs, and ends up avoiding definite articles. It should be noted, though, that this phenomenon might be put down to second language development, as simplification has been traditionally considered a feature of early stage interlanguage. However, if that were the case learners might also have been expected to drop the definite article - which they seldom do - before plural, personal property /body parts and uncountable nouns alike.

As for indefinite NPs it was singular nouns that caused most of the trouble for the learners. As was mentioned elsewhere, L1 singular noun indefinite NPs may or may not demand indefinite articles, whereas the L2 always requires them. The data, though, revealed a very interesting realization of the above-mentioned split. As the Spanish countable noun *trabajo* splits up into two English lexical items, namely, *work* and *job*, L2 learners tend to use the uncountable one because it allows for a one-to-one transliteration between the L1 and the L2. In other words, L2 English learners whose mother tongue is Spanish are predisposed to avoidance of the lexical split *job*:

(8) ST: ... and now is better, eh, eh, look for **work** (meaning a job).

In this particular example, the split is thus two-fold - both lexical and syntactic - and so is transfer. In the present data hardly any learners use the lexical split *job* when it is due, but there is further trouble when they attempt to use it as part of an indefinite NP although they are aware of the mentioned lexical split. The syntactic split usually makes them dodge the count noun by getting them as close to perfect transliteration as possible. However, if at all used, the lexical split *job* is seldom pre-modified by an indefinite article in the students' L2 interlanguage. As the presence of the article is more marked than the absence in the L1, learners lean towards the latter alternative, thereby dropping the otherwise compulsory indefinite article in the L2 for the sake of word-for-word transliteration.

(9) ST: They don't have **(a)** job.

Quantitative analysis

As the English article is a rather frequent - hence, salient - grammatical feature the recordings yielded relatively high numbers of potential errors, thereby making the samples more reliable. It is worth remembering that the students were recorded at three different moments, namely, the spring and the summer of 2006 and the summer of 2007. So, the study comprised a one-year period and three cross-time sets of samples. Also, two of the subjects were left out after their L2 production was found to be too poor as to yield enough transfer error settings. Had their samples been taken into account, the study's significance would have been compromised.

In order to carry out a quantitative analysis of the data, the ANOVA significance test was applied. ANOVA is an analysis of variance allowing us to compare several group means at the same time. In this particular case we were to compare three group means of the same subjects across time. There is a dependent variable, which corresponds to the number of split-transfer article errors, and also an independent variable, namely, the effect of CLIL instruction over time. The null hypothesis was equalled to a lack of significant differences among the group means, in which case the three samples would belong in the same population

The following table includes potential error figures per subject and interview. Potential errors, or else error settings, refer to the number of occurrences of the English article, be it definite, indefinite or null. As the English article is quite a salient feature the numbers were high enough as to allow for accurate statistical calculations of significance.

Article Error Settings				
School	Student	Spring 2006	Summer 2006	Spring 2007
A	1A	36	59	57
	2A	26	21	40
	3A	43	49	31
	4A	45	75	64
	5A	29	46	43
	6A	22	29	—
B	1B	33	35	27
	2B	59	87	90
	3B	39	29	30
	4B	19	31	33
	5B	17	23	31
	6B	59	57	57

Table 3: Potential error settings figures per student and interview

The second column on the right is that of the students, who were taken from different schools, A and B. The topmost row, on the other hand, makes reference to the number of split-transfer error settings per interview. It is worth mentioning that student 6A dropped out in the last interview and 5B was eliminated from the study due to the fact that some of the samples were too small in size.

The next table shows the amount of mistakes made by the subjects per 100 error settings and the figures in it shall be interpreted as follows hereafter. If student 1A had 36 chances to produce English articles in the spring 2006 interview, and 10 out of 36 were realized as article errors, it follows that student 1A makes an average of 27.8 article transfer mistakes every 100 article settings.

Article Errors 100%				
School	Student	Spring 2006	Summer 2006	Spring 2007
A	1A	27. 8	23.7	15.8
	2A	19. 2	9.5	17.5
	3A	14	10.2	9.7
	4A	2.2	13.3	14.1
	5A	17. 2	13	18.6
	6A	22. 7	10	—
B	1B	12. 1	8.6	18.5
	2B	17	18.4	20
	3B	10. 3	34.5	16.7
	4B	21. 1	29	18.2
	5B	23. 5	4.3	29
	6B	11. 9	28.1	5.3

Table 4: Error percentage numbers

As article error rates could increase, drop, or else remain the same over a one-year period of CLIL instruction, the ANOVA test was applied to the data above to find out if significant changes had taken place from one recording to the next. Having tested out the figures for statistical reliability, it was demonstrated that there were no significant differences among the group means. In the spring of 2006 the group mean was 15.28, but then it soared up to 18.83 over a three-month period. Notice, however, that it failed to be significance, and went down again one year on (15.44).

It seems that the learners went through a period of heavy article transfer before being able to apply English article-governing rules properly, or else that they reached a ceiling effect before transfer gave way to L2 structures. However, such a lack of consistency in the transfer load - which seems to be very deeply into a state of flux and interlanguage uncertainty - might be due to different reasons. On the one hand, it is possible that the learners may have studied English articles in language-focused classes between the summer of 2006 and the spring of 2007, or else such an improvement in their command of English articles might be put down to the natural development of the second language. In regard with the statistic significance, I am aware of the fact

that the improvement was not significant. However, a non-significant result can also provide some useful evidence or insight regarding the evolution of the learners' interlanguage.

Be that as it may, though, the learners did not receive explicit instruction on the use of English articles in CLIL classes. Further, it seems that transfer does not necessarily decrease along with the improvement of proficiency levels.

Discussion and further research

Khon (1986) pointed out that the first level of transfer analysis is that of *transfer potential* and the evidence found in this research study suggests that there is a strong potential for language transfer between Spanish and English, as they are related both typologically and genetically. Cross-language splits have been proved to be a powerful transfer trigger insofar as they entail further complications in second language acquisition and a fairly large proportion of interlanguage errors seem to arise from this phenomenon.

As suggested by earlier work on transfer errors, the coalescence phenomenon -or else, the opposite of splits - does not seem to cause as much interference, and so further transfer research should not only focus on coalescence-led, but also on split-led transfer errors. However, it is important that the structures under investigation evince the same frequency of occurrence. Otherwise it might not be possible to determine which structure is triggering the largest amount of transfer errors, let alone draw significant conclusions.

Dulay and Burt called attention to so-called *ambiguous goofs* (1974), or else errors that could be ascribed to either L1 transfer or L2 development. Yet, the present study suggests that transfer and L2 development do not necessarily exclude each other as potential causes of learner errors. When it comes to interlanguage errors, Selinker's Multiple Effects Principle (1992) seems to be at work in that no single factor can be pointed at as the one and only cause behind learner errors.

In keeping with Hakansson's claims (2002), this study suggests that transfer is 'developmentally moderated'. As article use is seldom to be seen as the explicit focus of EFL grammar lessons, it is more than likely that the constant variation in the transfer load evinced by the learners were the upshot of natural language development. As discussed in the previous section, the learners seemed to have reached a ceiling effect before getting to apply L2 article use rules properly. Yet, it was plain to see that article transfer was decreasing as language proficiency increased. Hence, there is evidence supporting Hakansson's stance in that this particular transfer type seems to vary as the interlanguage improves.

The time frame covered by the study comprised the first two years of secondary education. However, the bilingual instruction was to go on for two more years of Content and Language Integrated Learning and so the students were half way through the 4-year CLIL education period when the sessions were recorded. Therefore, as the data from the final years is yet to be analysed, the results cannot but be preliminary

and it remains to be seen whether or not transfer figures went back on the rise once the first research period had concluded, all the more so because the period covered by this study lasted hardly over a year and a half.

Just as Kean (1986) claims that the 'domains of allowable transfer' change along with the interlanguage grammar, so this study suggests that transfer casuistry and load goes parallel to the evolution of the interlanguage. In other words, transfer does not necessarily diminish as the proficiency level increases. It follows, therefore, that different IL stage samples should yield different transfer types and load. However, the current CLIL model does not seem to meet the students' L2 learning needs insofar as transfer errors usually go unnoticed. Lyster (2007) as well as other scholars have pointed out that the model is over-focussed on content, and language skills seldom come to the fore unless they hinder communication.

Article transfer errors do not impede communication, but they are none the less important. In fact, it is more than likely that they would fade away more quickly if they led to communicative breakdowns. Furthermore, I would like to argue that gaining command of a most complicated grammar structure like the English article system might improve academic rewards in the long run. If students are to master academic language it is necessary to put emphasis on formal aspects which cannot be acquired through content-oriented input alone, as studies in the Canadian context have shown (Swain 1984). Hence, not only should they get a grip on Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills, but they should also achieve Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (Cummins 2003), and the latter can only be acquired via exposure to grammar-rich input focussed on function and content words alike. While they do not seem to pose a big problem for communication in a foreign language, article errors deserve more research attention. The mastering of accuracy-demanding grammar features such as the English article system might help develop metalinguistic awareness, not only in the second language, but also in the students' mother tongue.

CLIL research still has a long way to go, but the current findings might open up new investigation tracks for the study of language transfer, as they have provided useful insight into transfer stage development. It would be of the utmost interest to compare CLIL students with learners who are acquiring a second language through EFL classes only in order to see if there are any differences between them transfer-wise. Moreover, as the most reliable piece of evidence in favour of transfer processes is usually to be found in cross-L1 learner comparisons, future research should also compare CLIL learners having different mother tongues.

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