

# Language Attitudes in CLIL and Traditional EFL Classes

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## Abstract

Schoolchildren are starting to learn a foreign language sooner than ever as education authorities introduce early-start compulsory foreign language (FL) policies. As a result of this global trend, the learning of FLs is playing a major role in many educational systems (Coleman, 2006). This is the context in which CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) programmes have been implemented during the last few years in many different contexts, in the belief that this will help to improve students' language proficiency and to "nurture a *feel good* and *can do* attitude towards language learning in general" (Marsh, 2000: 10).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the effect of CLIL on students' attitudes towards English as a FL and the two official languages (Basque and Spanish) in the curriculum of a bilingual context, namely the Basque Country in Spain. The participants in the study were 287 secondary education students from four different schools and the results obtained seem to confirm that CLIL programmes help to foster positive attitudes towards language learning in general.

**Keywords:** CLIL, language attitudes, trilingualism, gender

## Introduction

The need for multilingual citizens is becoming more and more evident in many different social spheres which encompass not only the job market, but also social integration (ever increasing migratory movements being a very good case in point), education, research and many others. As a result of this global trend, the learning of FLs is playing a major role in many educational systems all over the world (Nunan, 2003; Knell *et al.*, 2007). This is the context in which CLIL programmes are becoming commonplace –believed by many to be an effective way of improving students' FL skills (see Lasagabaster, 2008)– and leading many necessary avenues of research to suggest themselves (Coyle, 2007). In our opinion, the attitudinal factor is one of these avenues. Most early research data were usually focused on linguistic competence, whereas currently other research themes have emerged such as "content subject competence, intercultural competence, content subject methodologies and evaluation" (Coyle, 2007: 557). In some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, CLIL has been developing over a period of years, but to our knowledge the measurement of students' attitudes and comparison with students' attitudes vis-à-vis regular programmes –where English is only taught as a subject– has been largely overlooked. For this reason, the attitudinal factor is the main focus of this paper.

The literature offers a wide range of definitions for the word 'attitude'. One of the most widely quoted is by Sarnoff (1970: 279; quoted by Ó Riagain, 2008), who defines an attitude as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects". As regards language attitudes, the objects which provoke a favourable or an unfavourable reaction are language related.

Marsh (2000) highlights that CLIL programmes can nurture a *feel good attitude* among students, as the higher proficiency level achieved (irrespective of how modest it eventually is) may have a positive effect on their desire to learn and develop their language competence. As far as language attitudes are concerned, Marsh (2000: 10) states the following:

A major outcome of CLIL is to establish not only competence in two languages, but also nurture a 'can do' attitude towards language learning in general. So very often the CLIL language will itself only be a platform by which the youngster may ultimately take an interest in other languages and cultures as well. If the child has a language which is not the language of the wider environment, then CLIL can lead to an even greater appreciation of that home language.

Research studies undertaken in very different contexts (Gardner and Tremblay, 1998; Dewaele, 2005; Lasagabaster, 2005; Lasagabaster and Huguët, 2007) have demonstrated that the attitudes and motivation to learn a FL can vary not only from language to language –even within the same group of learners– but also within-different age groups. An interesting case in point is a study carried out in the Basque Country by Cenoz (2001), who analyzed the attitudes towards English of three different groups of students. The first group consisted of students enrolled in the fourth year of primary education (9-10 year olds); the second one of second-year secondary education students (13-14 year olds) and the third one was made up of first-year high school students (16-17 year olds).

The results showed that the youngest group held significantly more positive attitudes towards the FL, whereas the oldest learners presented the least positive ones. Cenoz resorts to both psychological and educational factors to explain these results. The former would be based on older students' rejection of the school system as a result of the transition from a family identity to a more individual and peer group identity. The latter is connected with the different teaching methodologies used in primary and secondary education. In primary education young learners enjoy the oral-based approach and a methodology based on drama and story telling, whereas in secondary education and high school grammar and vocabulary become prominent and the methodology is habitually much more teacher-centred. The conclusion to be drawn is therefore that there is a decline in attitudes towards the FL due to both psychological and educational issues and this leads us to wonder whether the use of a CLIL type approach may help to avoid or at least diminish the effect of these psychological and educational factors.

This general decline in positive attitudes towards school subjects as students climb up the educational ladder was also verified in a survey involving 800 elementary school students. Davies and Brember (2001) observed that, after measuring their attitudes by means of a Smiley-face Likert scale in the second and sixth grades, both males and females harboured significantly more negative attitudes in the highest grade. The authors concluded that the more years students spend studying a subject, the more increasingly disenchanted with it they become.

In the present study attention will also be paid to the relationship between the sociocultural variable (parental education level) and language attitudes. Most studies check the socioeconomic status (family income) of the sample with the aim of comparing results between different groups, with sociocultural status generally being ignored. Research suggests (Baker, 1996) that comparison of the socioeconomic class does not consider all the differences in a home environment, as socioeconomic class is just a simple and partial measure of the students' environmental background. For this reason parental occupation is liable to summarize differences very inadequately.

Laurén (1994) and Lasagabaster (1998) also observed that the sociocultural status variable had a greater effect on the learning of an L2/L3 than the socioeconomic status, for which it can be considered a very influential variable when comparing different groups of learners. In fact, the students of a high sociocultural status achieved the best results in the FL tests, those from an average sociocultural background obtained average results, and those of a low status the poorest scores. Consequently, it may be asserted that sociocultural status is an important variable in the process of learning a FL. In the same vein, Furnham and Heaven (1998) point out that social class has an effect on children's attitudes towards learning and academic performance in general and on language attitudes in particular.

Donitsa-Schmidt *et al.* (2004) investigated the teaching of Arabic as L2 in Israeli schools and their findings bore out the important role that parents' attitudes have regarding their children's behaviour and interest in learning Arabic. In this respect, students may be strongly influenced by their parents' beliefs and values, which are closely tied to their sociocultural status. Muñoz (in press) draws attention to the so-called PISA report, which also concludes that in formal contexts of language teaching (such as schools) the socioeconomic background may determine the children's FL experience, but the educational level of parents has a more significant influence on their FL learning success. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that sociocultural status will also exert a strong influence on language attitudes.

The impact of the independent variable gender on language attitudes will also be scrutinized in this article. The number of research studies focused on the relationship between language and gender has grown steadily during the last decades. Researchers from areas such as anthropology, linguistics, sociology or psychology have reached very similar conclusions: The language used by male and female speakers is different in diverse aspects (Ladegaard, 1998). Graddol and Swann (1986) affirm that these differences stem from and are mediated by other factors which interact with the variable gender. Thus, these differences start turning up from a very early stage of the socialization process, so much so that children begin to establish a specific identity for their gender from early childhood. Results from different studies (Sunderland, 2000; Mills *et al.*, 2007; Pavlenko and Piller, 2008) have revealed that some motivational variables vary as a function of gender, in the sense that women are reported to have a significantly stronger interest in and place more value on learning about both the L2 and its culture than men.

As for language attitudes, Wright (1999) found that female students showed significantly more positive attitudes toward French as a L2 than their male counterparts, gender being the strongest predictor of attitudes in the factors "attitudes toward speaking French", "desire to learn about France", and "perceptions of the French character". Baker and MacIntyre (2000) set out to compare the effect of immersion programmes on language attitudes and compared an immersion group with a non-immersion group in the Canadian context. The authors observed no significant differences among male and female students in the immersion group, whereas in the non-immersion group Anglophone females showed significantly more positive attitudes towards French as L2, French speakers and travelling to French speaking countries. Consequently, it could be concluded that immersion programmes affect language attitudes as the differences between males and females tend to vanish, whereas this is not the case in non-immersion programmes.

Still on the subject of gender, a recent research study completed in the United States is especially worth mentioning on two counts: firstly for the length of time the students were monitored, and secondly because of the numbers involved: all the children (several thousand) in two school systems (one suburban and one urban) in North Carolina. Heining-Boynton and Haitema (2007) reported the attitudes of students towards a FL (French or Spanish) over a 10-year period with a view to testing whether boys and girls differed in attitudes towards the FL. Although the results revealed that students' enthusiasm declined among both boys and girls, the girls showed more desire to keep on FL studies and more positive attitudes than the boys, with the differences being statistically significant. The authors point out that, albeit significant, the steady attitudinal declines were small and the majority of participants had positive (or at worst neutral) attitudes. Heining-Boynton and Haitema conclude that attitude formation toward language learning is a critical component of early schooling.

Research studies indicate that the more positive the students' attitudes, the higher their L2 achievement. For this reason the importance of analyzing the attitude of students toward CLIL programmes when compared to the regular teaching of English as a FL is beyond any doubt.

## The context of the study

The widespread social interest in FLs is rather recent in Spain, in general, and in the Basque Country, in particular. In fact, Spain is on the bottom rung of the foreign-language-knowledge ladder according to the last Special Eurobarometer on Europeans and their languages, as 56% of Spanish citizens admit being unable to speak any other language other than their own mother tongue, whereas the percentage (17%) of those who can hold a conversation in two other languages is among the lowest in Europe (European Commission, 2006).

Dissatisfaction is the common denominator when the proficiency in English of Spanish students is scrutinised, despite many having spent quite a few years trying to learn the language. One of the measures undertaken to improve these frustrating results was the early introduction of English into the curriculum, implemented after the passing of the Education Reform Act in 1993. This established the teaching of English from the age of 8 onwards (down from the age of 11). However, some Spanish autonomous communities such as Catalonia and the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) have gone even further and implemented experimental programmes in which FL teaching starts at age 4. In the case of the BAC, this policy now extends to practically every single school (Lasagabaster, 2006). But the will to improve English proficiency has gone even further, which is why in the last few years CLIL programmes have also been implemented in the belief that they will definitively help to beef up Basque students' command of the FL.

And this trend has reached most Spanish autonomous communities, where projects integrating the teaching of English as a FL with that of content subjects in English are burgeoning. In 1996, the Spanish Ministry of Education and the British Council signed an agreement (Llinares and Whittaker, 2006) promoting CLIL programmes (in 20 schools in Madrid) wherein apart from English as a FL, the students are taught social sciences in English plus a second subject (depending on the availability of qualified teachers). The Andalusian regional government has also launched the so-called *Plurilingualism Promotion Plan*, which intends to incorporate CLIL programmes in half the schools and high schools of this autonomous community by 2012.

The Basque Country is a bilingual community in which both Basque and Spanish are official languages and, therefore, used as a medium of instruction from the outset of schooling. Depending on the linguistic model selected by parents time allotted to teaching through one or the other language varies. Basque is the minority language fluently spoken by approximately 35% of the Basque population, whereas Spanish is the majority language spoken by almost everybody. Since 1983, all Basque students learn Basque either as a subject or through immersion programmes. Thus, the teaching of English implies that all students have to face these three languages (Basque, Spanish and English) in the curriculum.

It is in this linguistic and educational context where some voices have warned against the ever increasing presence of English and its purportedly negative effects on language competence and attitudes towards Basque as the minority language in the Basque Country (Osa, 2004), whereas others (Etxeberria, 2004, 197) are highly critical of the early teaching of the FL and complain that "none of the studies examined provide the slightest theoretical justification that these kinds of programmes can be carried out with a minimum guarantee of efficacy or success." In his review of CLIL around Europe, Marsh (2002) also points out that there is some controversy in the Basque Country regarding the presence of three languages in the curriculum from a very early age.

The different CLIL models can be placed on a monolingual, bilingual or multilingual continuum – the latter describes the context under scrutiny in this article. The presence of CLIL programmes undertaken in plurilingual European contexts is reasonably widespread: Catalonia (Spain), Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the Basque Country (Spain) or Wales, to name but a few (Marsh, 2002). One of the main reasons for this may lie in the fact that "CLIL enables languages to be taught on a relatively intensive basis without claiming an excessive share of the school timetable" (Eurydice, 2006, 9). The ever-increasing presence of this type of language provision also calls for increased and multi-faceted research.

## Hypotheses

Based on the research studies reviewed above, the following three hypotheses are put forward:

1. Students enrolled in the CLIL groups will hold more positive attitudes towards English as a FL than those in EFL groups.
2. Female participants and those from higher sociocultural environments will hold more positive attitudes towards the FL.
3. CLIL students will show more positive attitudes towards the two other compulsory languages in the Basque curriculum (that is to say Basque and Spanish) than their EFL counterparts.

## Methodology

### Participants

The sample was made up of 287 secondary students from four different Basque schools, which were divided into two age groups: third-year secondary education students (SE3 henceforth) who were 14-15 years old and fourth-year secondary education students (SE4) who were 15-16 years old. These are the last two academic years of compulsory education in Spain. Depending on whether they followed a CLIL methodology or not, the participants were also divided into two groups: (i) The CLIL group: this was made up of those students who were enrolled in CLIL programmes. (ii) The EFL group: the second group consisted of students whose exposure to English took place only in the traditional foreign language classroom. As for gender, 40.3% were male and 59.7% female. More details of the sample are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample.

<b>School year</b>	<b>SE3</b>	<b>SE4</b>
<b>Number of subjects</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>(40.4%)</b>	<b>(59.6%)</b>
<b>Group</b>	<b>EFL</b>	<b>CLIL</b>
<b>Number of subjects</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>(40.1%)</b>	<b>(59.9%)</b>

### Instrument

The participants filled out a questionnaire with a view to measuring attitudes towards each of the three languages with which they came into contact in the Basque educational system, namely Basque, Spanish and English. The questionnaire consisted of a seven-point semantic differential questionnaire based on Gardner (1985). During the measurement of attitudes by means of this technique learners are presented with a set of antonyms (for example necessary-unnecessary; appealing-unappealing; important-unimportant; easy-difficult; useful-useless; pleasant-unpleasant) and asked to evaluate a given language, in our case English as a FL, Basque and Spanish.

The first part of the questionnaire was focused on socio-biographical items and this allowed us to gather information about the respondents' gender and social class, which will be considered as independent variables in the forthcoming analyses. The participants' social class was determined through the highest level of education attained by one of the parents (Dewaele, 2007; Lasagabaster, 2008): 39% of the participants were thus classified as *low* category (primary education degree), 33% participants as *medium* category (secondary education degree) and 28% as *high* category (tertiary education or university degree).

## Results

Firstly, the results of the SE3 and the SE4 groups will be analyzed concerning the first hypothesis, that is, students' attitudes towards the FL (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Attitudes towards English among SE3 students.

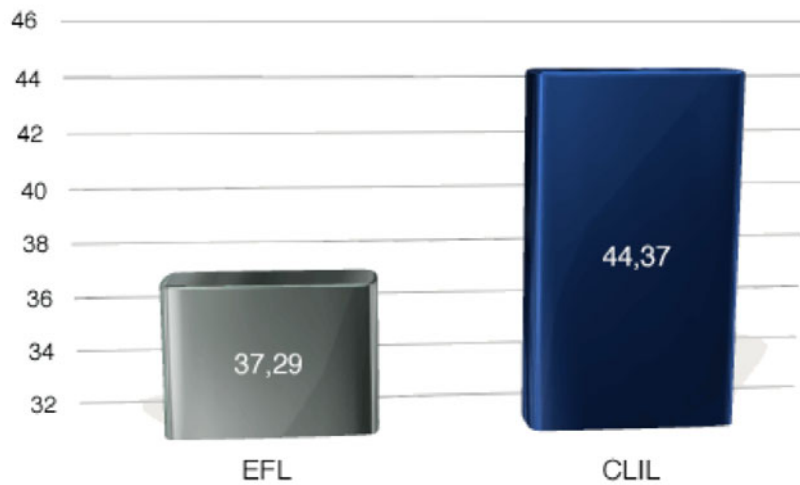
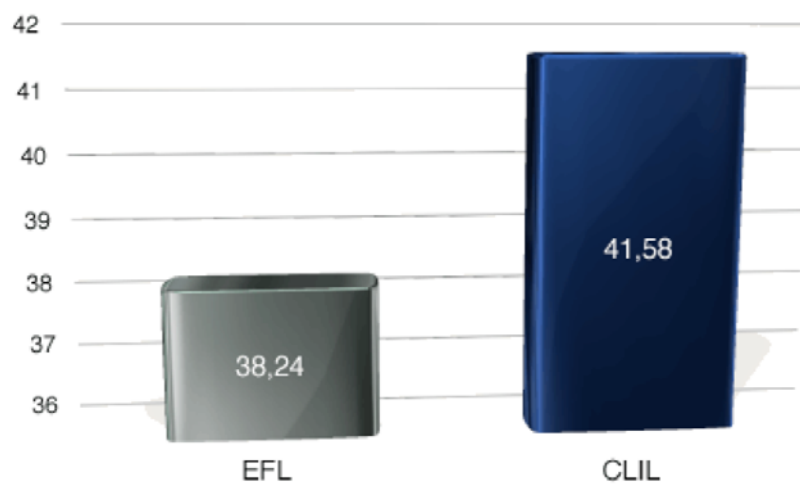


Figure 2. Attitudes towards English among SE4 students.



In these first analyses, the scores obtained regarding each item were summed up so that a general attitudinal picture could be easily captured. The t-test performed showed statistically significant differences in the case of both age groups, as those students enrolled in CLIL groups held more positive attitudes towards English in SE3 ( $t = -4.394$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and in SE4 ( $t = -2.422$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

For a more detailed picture, table 2 apportions the significant differences observed in each of the eight adjectives included in the semantic differential questionnaire among SE3 students.

Table 2. Attitudes towards English among SE3 students (itemized).

SE3	GROUP	MEAN	S.D.	t
Necessary	EFL	5.93	1.69	-2.500*
	CLIL	6.54	0.62	
Nice	EFL	4.32	1.99	-2.469*
	CLIL	5.06	1.05	
Easy	EFL	2.87	1.91	-3.827*
	CLIL	4.11	1.39	
Appealing	EFL	3.92	1.89	-3.352*
	CLIL	4.96	1.23	
Pleasant	EFL	4.23	1.87	-3.001*
	CLIL	5.11	1.04	
Important	EFL	5.62	1.95	-2.615*
	CLIL	6.45	1.23	
Useful	EFL	6.00	1.46	-3.644*
	CLIL	6.79	0.53	
Interesting	EFL	4.47	1.99	-1.944
	CLIL	5.11	1.33	

\*Significance =  $p < 0.05$

In general terms, the CLIL group scored higher in all pairs of adjectives. In particular, the two groups under comparison showed very positive attitudes in the case of three of the adjectives provided: necessary, important and useful. But this was especially so in the case of the CLIL group, whose scores were well above 6 on a seven-point scale (6.54, 6.45 and 6.79 respectively). These results confirm that both groups place great importance on English as a FL and on its instrumental value.

On the other side of the coin, the lowest scores among EFL students relate to the adjectives "easy" (2.87; by far the lowest score in table 2) and "appealing" (3.92), suggesting that learning a FL in the conventional way appears not only complicated, but also not very attractive for EFL students. Only with the adjective "interesting" was the CLIL group's higher score less than significant.

Table 3. Attitudes towards English among SE4 students (itemized).

SE4	GROUP	MEAN	S.D.	t
Necessary	EFL	5.80	1.34	-2.697*
	CLIL	6.37	1.13	
Nice	EFL	4.21	1.72	-1.617
	CLIL	4.62	1.43	
Easy	EFL	3.20	1.68	-2.470*
	CLIL	3.83	1.49	
Appealing	EFL	3.91	1.75	-1.597
	CLIL	4.37	1.72	
Pleasant	EFL	4.09	1.65	-1.997*
	CLIL	4.58	1.39	
Important	EFL	6.18	1.18	-1.795
	CLIL	6.51	0.92	
Useful	EFL	6.42	0.99	-1.419
	CLIL	6.63	0.75	
Interesting	EFL	4.13	1.99	-2.061*
	CLIL	4.71	1.56	

\*Significance =  $p < 0.05$

In the case of the SE4 students, the CLIL groups were also more positive towards English in relation to all the adjectives. In this age group, however, significant differences were found in just four of the pairs: necessary, easy, pleasant and interesting. The trend is therefore maintained, but it seems to diminish as the students go up in the educational ladder.

The adjectives more widely supported are once again “necessary”, “important” and “useful”, results which comply with those in table 2. As happened among SE3 students, English was also seen as a complicated and not very appealing language. The CLIL group however, found the FL significantly easier. Therefore, it can be concluded that in both age groups there is an instrumental orientation and that those following a traditional foreign-language-teaching approach have more problems and find the learning of English more complicated than their CLIL counterparts.

As far as the second hypothesis is concerned, language attitudes were submitted to a series of one-way ANOVAs with gender and social class as independent variables (see Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA: Between-subjects effects for social class and gender on language grades.

Group	Variable	F	p
EFL	Gender	13.577	0.000
	Social class	2.057	ns
	Gender*social class	0.365	ns
CLIL	Gender	4.330	0.039
	Social class	2.761	ns
	Gender*social class	0.629	ns

\*ns = non significant differences

The results revealed consistent results in both the EFL and the CLIL groups. The gender variable had a significant effect on both groups, with female students (M=39.52) holding significantly more positive attitudes towards the FL than their male counterparts (M = 32.69). Social class, though, had no significant effect on the attitudes of either group, despite the differences observed in the means of the low (M = 36.36), the medium (M = 38.05) and the high (M = 34.78) social-class groups. Similarly, when the interaction between gender and social class was analyzed, no significant effect emerged.



The third hypothesis focused on the effect of CLIL programmes on attitudes towards the two official languages in the BAC. The resulting findings can be seen in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Attitudes towards Basque and Spanish among SE3 students

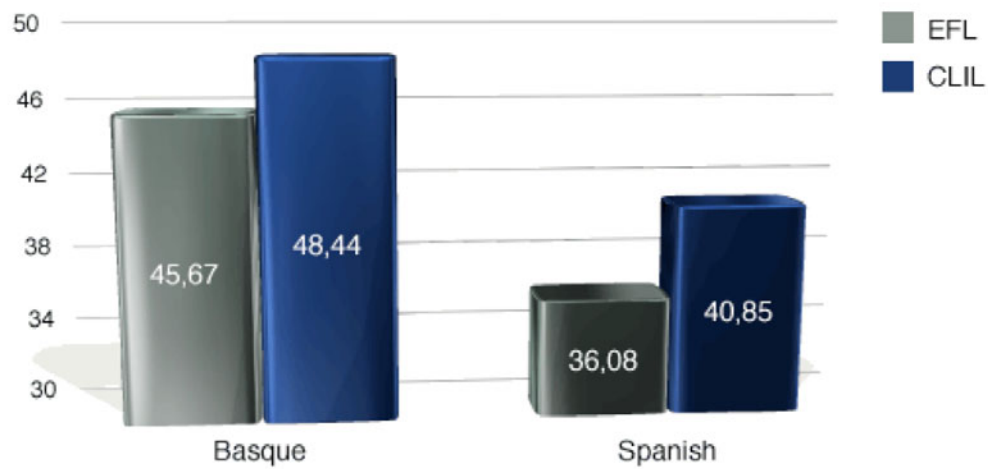
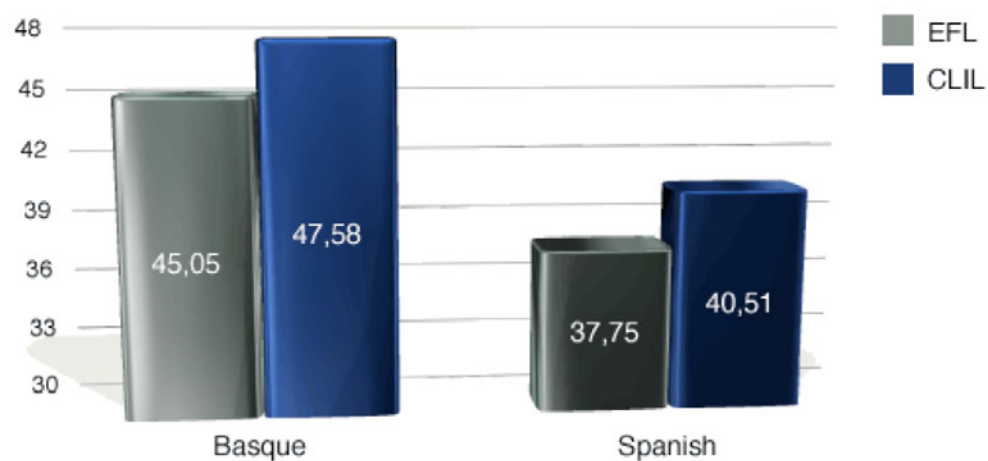


Figure 4. Attitudes towards Basque and Spanish among SE4 students



In the case of the SE3 groups, the effect on Basque was not significant, whereas it was significant with regard to Spanish ( $t = -2.374$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). When the analysis was focused on the SE4 groups, the impact of the CLIL programmes turned out to be significant on both Basque ( $-2.183$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and Spanish ( $-2.112$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the CLIL groups not only show a more positive attitude towards the FL, but also towards the two other languages present in the curriculum.

## Conclusions

The first of the three hypotheses put forward in this study was borne out, since the students enrolled in the CLIL classes held significantly more positive attitudes towards English as a FL than those in EFL classes. These results suggest that the use of the FL to teach content has a substantial impact on students' attitudes and this is so in both the SE3 and the SE4 groups. The explanation could lie in the fact that a CLIL approach provides more intense exposure and more meaningful opportunities to use the target language. Language is best learned in authentic situations and, if traditional FL learning is compared with good CLIL practice, the latter is clearly far ahead in this respect.

One of the main challenges teachers have to face has to do with their efforts to avoid students' attitudinal decline as the latter get older. The FL class is too often an artificial environment where the focus is on language itself. This can negatively influence students' attitudes towards the FL and research studies (Cenoz, 2001; Heining-Boynton and Haitema, 2007) show that this is especially so over time because relevance and authenticity have little space in traditional FL teaching. As a self-evident example, teachers regularly observe how unattractive many textbook role-plays are for certain types of learners, who find them unrealistic, boring, anxiety-provoking and non-significant. In the CLIL approach, however, the focus of the classroom shifts from language to achieving something concrete with the language, and language learning becomes almost an incidental activity. CLIL caters for all types of learners/different learning styles and provides much richer communicative situations and "can do" opportunities which engage students and foster the development of language awareness. This is "difficult to achieve in a language lesson where "the main focus is on *doing things with words* and *not using words to achieve things*" (Marsh, 2008, 238). The individualized analysis of the eight adjectives presented in the questionnaire suggests likewise, as the students in the CLIL groups find learning English significantly easier than their EFL counterparts. The CLIL approach may thus contribute to improving students' FL skills by triggering more favourable attitudes towards English.

Our results seem to indicate that CLIL may be a very useful approach to keep students interested in the learning of FLs. The attitudinal decline observed in the aforementioned studies (Cenoz, 2001; Davies and Brember, 2001; Heining-Boynton and Haitema, 2007) seems to wane once CLIL is implemented, but longitudinal studies are needed to bear out or discard this hypothesis. These results concerning attitudes towards English are supported by a study undertaken by Lasagabaster (2008) in the same context –the Basque Country–, and in which the language competence of CLIL and EFL groups was assessed, the conclusion being that the former significantly outperformed the latter.

The second hypothesis was aimed at checking the effect of the gender and social class variables and it was only partially confirmed, as just the former variable revealed significant differences. When the influence of gender as an independent variable was examined, the results showed significant effects in favour of female students in both the CLIL and the EFL groups. Baker and MacIntyre (2000) verified that immersion programmes helped to level out the language-attitude differences between male and female students, differences that were however maintained in the non-immersion programmes. Therefore a more limited form of CLIL, unlike immersion, does not help to even out these differences, as gender continues to play a significant role as far as language attitudes are concerned. Lasagabaster (2008) also observed that female students outstripped their male counterparts in English competence. The gender issue therefore deserves further investigation, so that the necessary measures to help both genders to achieve equally high levels of competence can be implemented.

There has been relatively little research focused on the effects of social factors on language attitudes, although there is widespread agreement that the socio-cultural milieu in which students grow up determines their attitudes. Our hypothesis regarding the effect of the social status of the students' families was not borne out. The reason for this variable's lack of effect may be due to the fact that during the last decade English has gathered so much social support that all families in Spain, irrespective of their social background, hold very positive attitudes towards this language. Language planning is likely to succeed when it is embraced by the whole of society and this is what our results seem to confirm with regard to English. The importance of English appears to positively affect all social classes' attitudes by providing students with future possibilities of access to the job market and to promotion.

Another explanation could be based on the fact that, in school contexts where special heed is paid to the formal features of the language (as is the case in secondary education), middle-class students achieve a better command of the L2 and hold more positive attitudes than working class students. Nevertheless, the effect of the students' social class lessens in those programmes in which the emphasis is placed on communicative language skills (Ellis, 1994), as is the case in CLIL programmes, which could be the reason why no significant differences are found in the present study.

The third and final hypothesis was aimed at analysing the effect of CLIL on language attitudes towards Basque and Spanish. One of the dimensions considered when CLIL was introduced was closely related to the development of plurilingual attitudes and interests, as this approach was believed to generate positive attitudes. Our results tally with the purported benefits for students of the CLIL approach.

Marsh (2002) states that in those contexts in which students speak a minority language, their participation in CLIL programmes can help them appreciate this language. Our results seem to support this statement, for the elder students enrolled in CLIL programmes held significantly more positive attitudes towards Basque –the minority language– than those who attended regular EFL classes. In this way, not only does CLIL have a positive effect on English as a FL, but it also positively affects the minority language and Spanish –the majority language– with regards to both age groups. Longitudinal studies are needed, however, in order to shed more light on this issue and analyze whether the older students' more positive attitudes towards the minority language have to do with their longer time enrolled in the CLIL groups. In any case, it appears to be proven that the ever increasing presence of English as a FL does not negatively affect attitudes towards the two other languages present in the curriculum, despite the fears and concern shown by some authors regarding the minority language above all (Osa, 2004).

The explanation for the positive results of CLIL on language attitudes observed in this study is provided by Muñoz (2002, 36), who affirms that recent research studies have demonstrated that there are different factors which strengthen the potential of CLIL for increasing the number of successful FL learners, the following in particularly being pertinent to our results:

- Learners benefit from higher quality teaching and from input that is meaningful and understandable.
- CLIL may strengthen learners' ability to process input, which prepares them for higher-level thinking skills, and enhances cognitive development.
- In CLIL the learners' affective filter may be lower than in other situations, for learning takes place in a relatively anxiety-free environment.
- Learners' motivation to learn content through the FL may foster and sustain motivation towards learning the FL itself.

## Final considerations

Despite the fact that in the present study there was no intention to determine how student attitudes affect linguistic achievement, we are well aware that analysis of this relationship would enable us to discover whether it influences attainment by the two groups under study (CLIL versus EFL classes). Therefore, there is an unmistakable need to analyze the effect of CLIL programmes on the development of the three languages in question. And this is especially so in bilingual contexts such as the Basque Country, as the inclusion of a FL entails the presence of three languages in the curriculum and this curricular pressure inevitably reduces the amount of time available for each of the languages.

Our results reveal that language environment and methodology as represented by CLIL programmes are important factors in determining attitudes towards the FL. There is no doubt that students' attitudes towards the FL have important implications for L2 teaching, which is the reason why the scope of this paper is limited to language attitudes in the belief that this attitudinal lens will help to interpret CLIL programmes. Yet, it is necessary to track changes in language attitudes among CLIL students over time in a more systematic way.

Examining different facets of CLIL will allow researchers and educational authorities in different contexts to base future language policies on a coherent and consolidated theoretical framework. There is a pressing need for this task to be undertaken in the immediate future, as the CLIL approach has become an important tool in supporting the achievement of the European Commission's objective of improving the FL proficiency of its citizens.

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