

Early Language Learning: What it (can) look(s) like...

Workshop organised in the context of the OWRI MEITS project, University of Cambridge

Location: Lucy Cavendish College

Cambridge, 24-25 October 2019

In the context of the AHRC Open World Initiative and the MEITS project (www.meits.org), we are running a two-day workshop (October 24 and 25) in Cambridge entitled *Early language learning in school: What it (can) look(s) like*.

The aim of the workshop is to discuss what language learning in primary and lower secondary school looks (or can look) like. We hope that this workshop will promote foreign language learning and support the transition from primary to secondary school as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. To this end, it brings together academics from the UK and EU with teachers of modern foreign languages in primary and secondary schools, teacher trainers and policy makers from the UK.

Our main speakers are a mix of experienced practitioners, teacher trainers and academics, who will talk about successes and difficulties with language teaching and learning in their contexts and present practical tips for the classroom. We hope that the workshop will provide a platform for participants to exchange original ideas, share best practice and deepen their understanding of language teaching and learning.

The provisional programme for the workshop is as follows:

Thursday 24 October

9.00-9.45	Registration
9.45-10.45	Welcome followed by Opening Lecture by Prof Florence Myles (University of Essex): <i>Primary Languages Policy in England – Can we make it work?</i>

- 10.45-11.15 Prof Victoria Murphy (University of Oxford):
Multilingual classrooms and foreign language learning
- 11.15-11.45 Coffee break
- 11.45-12.15 Dr Darnelle Constant-Shepherd (University College London):
Primary Languages- from Initial Teacher Education to the classroom
- 12.15-12.45 Ms Nadine Chadier (St. Jérôme Church of England Bilingual School):
Title to be announced
- 12.45-2.00 Sandwich Lunch
- 2.00-3.30 Small group sessions on topics relevant to early language learning in the UK and abroad (e.g., curriculum expectations versus classroom constraints; choice of language in primary school and the primary to secondary transition; role of teacher proficiency and teacher training; multilingual classrooms and an additional foreign language; best age to start foreign language education)
- 3.30-4.00 Coffee / tea break
- 4.00-5.00 Round table discussion: groups to report and general discussion

Friday 25 October

- 10.00-10.30 Prof Simone Pfenninger (University of Salzburg):
Investigating the age factor with multiple measures over time
- 10.30-11.00 Jan-Willem Chevalking (Radboud University, Nijmegen):
Bilingual Primary Education and early-Foreign Language Teaching in the Netherlands: language learning outcomes & implications for policy-makers, primary schools and teacher-training institutes
- 11.00-11.30 Coffee break
- 11.30-12.00 Dr Paula Ambrossi (University College London):
Who's afraid of the grande wolf malo? Moving from apprehension towards liberation from insularity
- 12.00-12.30 Speaker to be confirmed
Title to be announced
- 12.30-2.00 Sandwich Lunch
- 2.00-3.30 Small group sessions on topics concerning early language learning (as brought by participants, or as above) and/or practical session on how to structure a foreign language class and where to find appropriate materials
- 3.30-4.00 Coffee / tea break
- 4.00-5.00 Round table and points to be brought to attention of policy makers

Abstracts currently available:

Florence Myles

Primary Languages Policy in England – Can we make it work?

Primary languages became statutory in 2014 but policy implementation remains a challenge. Research and inspection evidence notes that, whilst some schools offer principled and consistent FL provision, others are struggling to cope with a range of contextual factors which are often beyond their control. Historic issues such as: time allocation, teacher expertise and linguistic proficiency, learning outcomes and limited CPD remain unresolved and are exacerbated by a lack of direct government support and guidance. The result has been inequity of opportunity for primary pupils across the country.

A coherent, research-informed implementation strategy involving all relevant stakeholders is now essential to ensure primary FL sustainability. However, following austerity measures and major structural changes in state education provision, there are limited opportunities for national, local or regional bodies to develop stakeholder partnerships and opportunities for collaboration. In 2016, primary FL researchers, led by the University of Essex, formed a Research in Primary Languages network (RiPL www.ripl.uk) to raise awareness of primary FLs research and pedagogic issues. With support from BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics), RiPL held a Policy Summit which brought together key education stakeholders and academics and culminated in the production of a RiPL White Paper (Holmes and Myles, 2019) which proposes ten realistic recommendations to support the full implementation of the primary languages policy. These include the creation of a National Taskforce for Primary Languages with involvement from all stakeholders: teachers, school leaders, academics, professional associations, cultural partners and non-government organisations. Central government is, of course, an essential partner.

In a bid to influence policy developments, RiPL are now disseminating their recommendations top-down (amongst policymakers and government) and bottom-up (appealing directly to school leadership teams and practitioners). This paper will discuss the White Paper recommendations and how researchers and non-academic partners are working together to co-construct practical, research-informed solutions to complex policy initiatives.

Victoria A. Murphy

Multilingual classrooms and foreign language learning

Over twenty percent of UK primary school pupils are from multilingual families. Many EAL pupils struggle relative to non-EAL peers in relation to literacy skills in English, leading to underachievement by many on academic subjects. One area where students with an EAL background typically have manifest strengths, however, is in learning Modern Foreign Language (MFL) (Hutchinson, 2018). EAL children typically have matched, or superior performance of non-EAL pupils on MFL. Nonetheless, official guidance issued to teachers concerning MFL typically omits the fact that large proportions of the school-aged population are EAL. Additionally, methodological debates in UK MFL teaching often

seem to assume a context of monolingual, English-speaking students, which no longer matches the reality of many schools. Whereas MFL is now statutory for primary school pupils aged 7-11, there is anecdotal evidence of schools withdrawing EAL pupils from MFL lessons in order for them to receive additional support in English literacy. However, EAL students are prima facie likely to have certain advantages in terms of MFL learning: for example, they have more experience of learning a second language, potentially leading to more effective use of language learning strategies and greater metalinguistic awareness. These putative advantages are borne out by the academic achievement evidence at GCSE level on MFL for EAL pupils. Nonetheless, there is little systematic analysis of EAL students' attainment in MFL. Consequently, there is a real and urgent need to consider the specific issues and challenges of EAL pupils in relation to MFL learning and teaching at primary level and beyond. In this presentation I will discuss these issues in detail and summarise key areas of importance to pursue for researchers and practitioners in relation to the foreign language learning of EAL pupils.

References:

Hutchinson, J. (2018). *Educational outcomes of children with English as an additional language*. London: Educational Policy Institute. Retrieved from: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/educational-outcomes-children-english-additional-language/>

Darnelle Constant-Shepherd

Primary Languages- from ITE to the classroom

This presentation is to provide information with examples of how one particular university is preparing Primary PGCE students to implement the Primary MFL/FL curriculum.

The presentation will go through the journey and timeline within which the selected group will achieve their master's level credits and how the research into teaching and learning of languages in the primary classroom is a way to engage stakeholders and motivate colleagues to make room for foreign language learning.

This presentation will also explore how the university has addressed students' proficiency of the target language and how it works with students who may have little language skills, but who are nevertheless upskilling in order to promote language learning in primary schools.

Simone E. Pfenninger

Investigating the age factor with multiple measures over time

All of the most relevant questions about SLA, including the age issue and the role of input, are implicitly or explicitly about change over time (see e.g. Lowie & Verspoor 2015). From a theoretical and research perspective, this argument places a premium on empirical studies which go beyond the mere establishment of statistical covariations between variables and into an elaboration of the *dynamics* that could possibly be producing those statistical covariations (Furnham 2016).

This longitudinal study explores the multicausality of age of onset of EFL instruction in (pre)primary instruction in Switzerland, with a special emphasis on macrocultural and microcultural phenomena

that can have a bearing on interpersonal relations that influence, shape, increase, or decrease variables such as FL language learning motivation, literacy, and schooling – variables that are known to co-vary with the age factor (see e.g. Montrul 2008; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017). I studied children who received 50/50 bilingual instruction in German and English (so-called ‘partial CLIL’ programs) as well as children in ‘minimal CLIL’ programs with almost uniquely monolingual German instruction (90% German, 10% English). In the cross-sectional part of the study at the end of primary education (age 12), we assessed the German and English writing skills of 251 students who vary in their age of first CLIL instruction (5, 7, 8, 9 or 11), 231 of whom were from German-speaking homes (new to English), while 20 were from English-speaking homes (new to German). For 91 of them data collection occurred four times annually over eight school years (ages 5–12), via oral production tasks, narrative and argumentative essays, language awareness questionnaires, as well as parental and teacher questionnaires. In the quantitative analysis of the production data, generalized additive mixed-effects regression models (GAMM) were used, which can model temporal trajectories that reveal nonlinearities as well as include within-group variance-covariance structures to account for the corresponding within-group autocorrelation.

By systematically integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses this approach focuses not only on the learning process itself and on quantification of change but also on the underlying environmental and psychological reasons of change. Results showed that (1) bilingual programs do not show comparable age of onset (AO) effect structure as children in regular FL programs or during naturalistic L2 acquisition; (2) AO is highly susceptible to task effects; and (3) shifts in L2 development do not necessarily have to be caused by AO (or maturation) itself, but are due to a number of factors confounded with AO. Specifically, the mixed-methods approach revealed how many internal states (e.g. motivation, attitude, emotions, etc.) and external states or events (the general context in which a language is learned, family circumstances, use of domestic digital technologies) at any given moment may have an effect on the developmental path. All these interrelated factors may cause any part of the learner’s L2 system to fluctuate from one moment to the next.

The findings provide educators, policy makers and parents with information concerning choices about when to begin different types of FL instruction via bilingual education without compromising outcomes or wasting resources.

References

- Furnham, A. (2016). Rerum cognoscere causas: Dependent and independent variables in psychology. In R. Harré & F.M. Moghaddam (Eds.), *Questioning causality. Scientific explorations of cause and consequence across social contexts* (pp. 67-80). Santa Barbara and Denver: Praeger.
- Lowie, W., & Verspoor, M. (2015). Variability and variation in second language acquisition orders: A dynamic re-evaluation. *Language Learning*, 65, 63-88.
- Montrul, S. (2008) *Incomplete Acquisition in Bilingualism: Re-examining the Age Factor*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Muñoz, C. (2015). Time and timing in CLIL: A comparative approach to language gains. In M. Juan-Garau & J. Salazar-Noguera (eds.), *Content-based Language Learning in Multilingual Educational Environments* (pp. 87-104). Cham et al.: Springer.
- Pfenninger, S. E. and D. Singleton. (2017). *Beyond Age Effects in Instructional L2 Learning: Revisiting the Age Factor*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Jan Willem Chevalking, Roeland van Hout, Sharon Unsworth

Bilingual Primary Education and early-Foreign Language Teaching in the Netherlands: language learning outcomes from a longitudinal study & implications for policy-makers, primary schools and teacher-training institutes

Background: Research has shown that Bilingual Primary Education (BPE) is beneficial for foreign language learning when compared to less intensive foreign language learning programmes (Lindholm-leary & Genesee, 2014). Even though more class-time is spent learning a foreign language in BPE programmes, various studies have shown there are no long-term disadvantages to first language development (e.g. Baker, 2001). Primary school pupils also show higher scores on metalinguistic tasks (Bialystok & Barac, 2012), but these outcomes appear to differ depending on the language pair under study and the metalinguistic domains that were tested. To fully understand the developmental trajectories of individual children in their development of (potential) linguistic advantages, longitudinal data are crucial. Furthermore, to fully understand the scope of any such advantages, it is necessary to distinguish between distinct metalinguistic domains, namely: phonological, morphological and syntactic awareness (Hofer & Jessner, 2016; Reder, Daigle, & Demont, 2013), something which only a few studies investigating metalinguistic awareness have done.

We conducted a longitudinal study, the aim of which was to examine which factors positively or negatively affect the developmental trajectories of BPE learners in a Dutch-English school for Dutch and English vocabulary, phonological, morphological and syntactic awareness. We included a control group, consisting of pupils from schools where early English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction is given from age 4 onwards and is restricted to ± 1 hr. per week.

Method: 103 BPE pupils (± 9 hrs. English/week) from 4 schools and 70 early-EFL pupils from 3 matched schools were all tested three times at ± 17 -month intervals, starting from age 4;11 yrs. Standardised Dutch and English vocabulary tests (PPVT-III-NL, PPVT-4, EVT-2), phonological awareness tasks (CELF-4-NL), morphological awareness tasks (CELF-4-NL, CELF-4-EN) and a syntactic awareness task (Taaltests voor Kinderen, 1983). Intelligence (WISC-MR) and working memory (AWMA-Odd-one-out) were used in this study.

Results: Our results show that BPE pupils scored significantly higher on English vocabulary than their early EFL-peers for all three test rounds, and that there were no significant differences between the two groups on Dutch vocabulary. No significant differences were found for phonological, morphological and syntactic awareness at any time. This finding contrasts with previous findings (Reder et al., 2013), where differences at the group level were found. While pupils did improve over time in our study, within-group variation appears to be greater than between-group variation. We will use multilevel analyses to explore the role of child-internal and -external factors known to account for these differences at the level of the individual child and of the school. In doing so, a detailed account of sources of variation and the factors that explain children's emerging skills in vocabulary and metalinguistic awareness, and their development over time will be provided. These findings will be discussed in a broader context of foreign language learning policy and foreign language teacher training in the Netherlands.

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Paula Ambrossi

Who's afraid of the grande wolf malo?

Moving from apprehension towards liberation from insularity

There is no greater 'liberation from insularity' than childhood itself. It is from this state of complete openness and spontaneous curiosity that childhood stares us in the face. The overall Purpose of Study for MFL in the NC could not be more apt, and it is from this stance that all else should follow. But what does, and could, 'liberation from insularity' mean for a Primary teacher? Allowing teachers to see the bigger picture of language learning is key. After all, why do we learn to communicate at all? Whether we speak of first or second language learning, motivation is -should be- key; motivation that is not mere entertainment. Children have the right not only to access the curriculum, but also to access new ways of seeing and thinking about the world that the intercultural understanding strand of language learning can offer, if approached creatively. A teacher who demonstrates interest and curiosity about other cultures and is not afraid of making mistakes while learning *with* the children, passes on an invaluable lesson. In terms of foreign languages, a child with such motivation and model of learning is set for life. That is the child I want in my Year 7 class.