

3 Belgium (French-speaking)



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3.1 Belgian Linguistic Situation and Language Policy: Paradox and Potential

Belgium, proclaiming itself the heart of Europe, is a land rich in both linguistic paradox and linguistic potential. Officially trilingual, this 'does not refer to the linguistic situation, but to the (political and cultural) relations between the indigenous language communities of Belgium'. The French-speaking part of Belgium has most actively adopted a legal framework allowing the development of CLIL provision in mainstream public education and this article will primarily describe the present situation there. However, so doing first requires contextualising the Belgian linguistic situation and language policy as a whole, as well as some developments regarding CLIL-type provision in the rest of the country.

Within its compact 30,528 square kilometres, the 10.3 million Belgian inhabitants are at the cultural and historic crossroads between the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, France, and, across the North Sea, the United Kingdom. The Belgian constitution recognises French, Dutch and German as the country's three official state languages – nevertheless, each language is mainly spoken in its restricted area, based on the Belgian language policy 'principle of territoriality: i.e., the official language of a particular municipality depends on the territory in which it is situated'.

Though language census taking is not permitted in Belgium, the country is schematically divided in half, with the Dutch-speaking Flemish to the north (about 60% of the population), the French-speaking Walloons to the south (about 40% of the population), plus the small German-speaking enclave near the eastern border (less than 1% of the population). The two linguistic exceptions are the politically bilingual French/Dutch Brussels Capital Region (about 1.0 million inhabitants, with a French-speaking majority) and special municipalities called '*communes à facilités*'. These are located either around the suburbs of Brussels or on either side of the French/Dutch and French/German 'linguistic borders' and offer 'language facilities' in some situations (e.g. administrative) to cater partially to inhabitants who are speakers of the 'other' language.

5 Janssens R. (2002): *Sociolinguistic Survey Research in Brussels: Some Methodological Issues*, in: So D. and Jones G. (2002): *Education and Society in Plurilingual Contexts*, Brussels, VUB Press, p. 277.

6 *Idem*, p. 273.

Deeply rooted language/identity conflicts, especially between the French- and Dutch-speaking communities, are continually at the forefront of Belgian political life and its intricate negotiating process.⁷ There are three levels of government (Federal, Regional and Language community) and a complex division of responsibilities. Education, which falls under the political decision-making power of each Language community, is influenced by this polemic climate, resulting in what Baetens Beardsmore described over a decade ago (1995) as an attitude of 'schizoglossia': at the same time, consensus about the need to speak and to teach at least two languages and a desire to develop bi- (or multi-) lingual education, in the presence of legal rigidity and political barriers that inhibit concrete progress.⁸

Historically, French was the dominant language of instruction in all parts of Belgium and was considered the language of the political, economic and cultural elite. After much unrest, the linguistic laws adopted in 1963 put an end to the dominance of French and ruled that education had to be delivered through Dutch in the Dutch-speaking Flemish community, through French in the French-speaking community and – made officially legal under a decree passed only recently by the German-speaking community government in 2004 – through German in the German-speaking community (with the exception of those special municipalities 'à facilités' where instruction may be delivered in another national language).

Language and educational considerations remain inseparable from political sensitivities and debate concerning such issues as the equal status of each of the three languages and preservation of the cultural identities that each language embodies.

Despite such tensions and barriers, a European education reality beckons! Each of the language communities has been exploring and evolving in its own way with regard to CLIL – either timidly, or less so, depending on specific context. Increasing impetus from, for example, the European Commission's 'Action Plan on Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity' and 'Education and training in Europe: Diverse systems, shared goal for 2010', as well as the Bologna process, challenge the three language communities to lift their eyes and to shift their focus towards a more European logic. An optimistic observer could dare hope that eventually CLIL could contribute to transforming the country's linguistic paradox into a model of linguistic potential to be realised.

7 Ibidem.

8 Baetens Beardsmore H., quoted by de Man N. [(1995): 'L'enseignement précoce des langues en Belgique', in: *Revue de didactique du français langue étrangère*, janvier-mars], in: Duverger J. (1996): *L'enseignement bilingue aujourd'hui*, Cher, Albin Michel Education, p. 95.

3.2 Teaching Content Through a 'Foreign' Language in the Dutch- and German-speaking Communities

The Flemish Dutch-speaking school system, implemented since the 1960s, upholds the place of the Dutch language. However, three Dutch-speaking primary schools in Brussels are currently participating in a CLIL pilot project called *Stimulerend Meertalig Onderwijs in Brussel* (Stimulating Multilingual Education in Brussels). The project, begun in 2001 in pre-primary and primary education, integrates about 20% of the curriculum taught through French. A university task force of CLIL specialists supports and monitors the project. There is (cautious) interest in extending the approach to other schools in Brussels as well as throughout the Dutch-speaking Flemish community. Recent legislation passed in May 2004 could allow for moving in that direction, though much clarification would still be required.⁹

In the German-speaking community,¹⁰ teaching bilingually through French and German has long existed, i.e. since the region became part of Belgium after the First World War (except during the period of the Second World War when the Nazis had annexed the region to Germany and had imposed German as the sole language of instruction). Political issues have underlain a pragmatic approach, for example owing to the need for French communication skills in the employment market and the fact that students typically pursued their education in one of the Belgian French-speaking universities. Questions concerning the place of German as the language of instruction, and that of how to cater to the needs of the French-speaking minority have also been issues dividing public opinion. Until April 2004, no specifically clear legislation framed the various forms that the bilingual provision took; each school's governing body proposed its own programme, for example depending on its students (German- and French-speaking), as well as its available teaching staff.

The 2004 law now specifies that, while German is indeed the official language of instruction, activities and subjects may be provided through the medium of French under certain conditions:

- In pre-primary (2½–5 years old) education, a minimum of 50 minutes and a maximum of 200 minutes a week of play activities;
- In primary (6–11 years old) education, artistic, creative and physical education activities;
- In secondary (12–18 years old) education, a maximum of 50% of any of the non-linguistic subjects; a special measure allows up to 65% during the first two years of secondary school (12–13 years old), intended particularly for French-speaking learners residing in the region whose primary education had been taught through French and whose German proficiency would be considered as insufficient for progress if more of their curriculum were taught through German.

9 Cf. Eurydice (2004/05): *Content and Language Integrated Learning at School in Europe, National Description: Belgium – Flemish community*, Available: www.eurydice.org/Documents/CLIL/en/frameset_CLILND.html.

10 Cf. Eurydice (2004/05): *Content and Language Integrated Learning at School in Europe, National Description: Belgium – German-speaking community*, Available: www.eurydice.org/Documents/CLIL/en/frameset_CLILND.html.

3.3 Introduction to CLIL in the French-speaking Community: A Pilot Project in 1989

In the French-speaking community, the introduction of CLIL into public education goes back to 1988 when a non-profit-making organisation was founded to promote 'immersive' language learning methods. This grassroots group, comprised of parents and other interested individuals, including one Liège school head teacher collaborating closely with the University of Liège, prompted the city of Liège to organise a pilot early English immersion project in one of its pre-primary/primary schools the following school year. The organisers obtained exceptional ministerial authorisation for special dispensation regarding the linguistic laws, which needed to be renewed each year, so allowing teaching to be delivered through a language other than French.

The first cohort began at age 5 in Year 3 pre-primary education with 22 hours per week of 'partial immersion' exposure to English and at least 6 hours per week taught through French. The English/French ratio then gradually reversed, similar to the Canadian early immersion model, as the learners progressed through their years in primary education. The project's success generated much interest from prospective parents and the school added a new entrance class each year.

Amidst a certain administrative precariousness, the pilot project's persistence and that of other grassroots lobbying groups pioneered the way for CLIL in the French-speaking community and served as a catalyst for the development of a legal framework.

3.4 CLIL in the French-speaking Community: From 1998

A law passed in July 1998 gave official recognition to what it calls the 'immersive' method, which it defines as 'the pedagogic procedure aiming to favour modern foreign language learning by delivering a part of the (content) courses in the scholastic timetable through that language'. The term CLIL-EMILE was coined and used in later government circulars.

The 1998 law specifies the conditions and procedures that must be met for teaching through a language other than French at pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. A feature of this law is that it indirectly allows for different types of CLIL projects: early learning CLIL starting at pre-primary level (like the pilot project), as well as CLIL projects starting at primary level and projects starting at secondary level. This diversification has increased the amount of participating learners.

A second law in July 2003 brought modifications aimed at making the recruitment procedures for 'immersion' CLIL-EMILE more flexible. Several other governmental texts have added directives to this framework, for example with respect to language proficiency requirements in the target language, for non-native (i.e. French-speaking) CLIL teachers and in French for native-speaking (i.e. Dutch-, German- or English-speaking) CLIL teachers.

The present Minister of Education is currently preparing legislation whose objective is to further clarify, regulate and improve certain organisational and pedagogic aspects.

Within the legal framework, in order to obtain authorisation from the Government of the French-speaking community, a school's governing body must first, on an institutional level:

- a Receive the backing of its *Conseil de participation* (the board of representatives of all the groups of players from its educational community) for organising CLIL at its school.
- b Include 'immersion teaching' in its school's *Projet d'établissement* (the school's official description of its aims and objectives, as well as the means put into place to attain them). Ministerial authorisation is thus required to organise CLIL at a school. However, no special funding is provided.

Secondly, the framework stipulates certain pedagogic conditions regarding:

- a The languages for CLIL
For most of the French-speaking community (i.e. except in Brussels or in the 'special status' zones where the CLIL language must be Dutch), the school may choose between Dutch, German or English. In principle, a school can only organise CLIL through one target language (though there have already been exceptions to this stipulation).
- b CLIL exposure according to the level of education and learners' ages

School years and learner ages	Proportion of the teaching timetable (non-linguistic content) allowed for CLIL
From Year 3 Pre-primary to Year 2 Primary (ages 5-7)	Between minimum half and maximum three quarters
From Year 3 to Year 6 Primary (ages 8-11)	Between minimum one quarter and maximum two thirds
From Year 1 to Year 6 Secondary (ages 12-18)	Maximum one quarter

(There is no special entrance examination or other requirement for pupils to be recruited into a CLIL project. Public demand has often been high and pupils are usually accepted in chronological order of enrolment.)

- c The subjects for CLIL
Schools may choose any content course for teaching through a foreign language, except religious/philosophical studies. Also, the target modern foreign language (MFL) course can be integrated into the 'immersion' programme. For example, at secondary school, this means that the four 50-minute lesson periods of MFL are in addition to the one quarter of non-linguistic content (7 or 8 lesson periods per week, depending on the type of school), bringing the total amount of CLIL exposure at secondary level to 11 or 12 lesson

periods per week – in other words, about 35%.

The content does not change for CLIL; the same curricula must be followed and respected. CLIL teachers must use a competence-based approach, as in the traditional teaching of the content subjects through the medium of French, in order to develop progressively the same discipline-area (and transversal) competence objectives set by the curricula. There are neither CLIL-specific examinations, nor any official recognition of the CLIL 'value-added' dimension in the primary or secondary diplomas. Continuing formative and summative assessment can take place through the target language. However, assessment for certification at the end of primary school takes place in French. To date, there are no standardised exams (e.g. *Baccalauréat*, *Abitur*) at the end of secondary education.

The language curriculum is also officially the same for CLIL as for traditional MFL, though it is logical to expect the learners to acquire skill levels that extend beyond those set by the curricular objectives. There is currently a period of reflexion and development of guidelines as to how MFL teachers can adapt and collaborate with their subject specialist CLIL colleagues, in order to best integrate and linguistically support the content learning. One way forward for CLIL recognition/certification could be for the French-speaking community to anchor its CLIL in a wider European frame of reference, as more and more countries are doing. The 'European Language Portfolio' devised by the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Division (piloted in 15 Council of Europe member states between 1998 and 2000, including the French-speaking community of Belgium, and launched Europe-wide in 2001), as well as the Council of Europe's 'Common Framework of Reference' for languages provide relevant and validated tools for exploring how this could be done.

d The recruitment of CLIL teachers

Teachers are officially hired and paid as employees of the Government of the French-speaking community. They must be qualified and specialised for the level of education they are teaching, as well as for the specific content. In theory, qualified native-speaking content teachers who have 'functional' French language skills (working knowledge) can be hired. In practice, this is unfortunately still far from being a smooth process. They can also be French-speaking qualified teachers with a high proficiency in the target language as attested by an 'Advanced level certificate' (*Certificat de connaissances approfondies*).

Actual recruitment is handled through the local school system, which must then forward a completed dossier of diplomas, certificates, etc. for each teacher to the Ministry for Administrative Affairs to be evaluated and approved as being equivalent to French-speaking Belgian qualifications. In order to individualise this process better for the needs of CLIL recruitment, recognition of a teacher's foreign qualifications should theoretically be possible via recommendation of a special committee set up to examine the individual's particular case. So far, however, the many bureaucratic layers and obstacles make

implementation discouragingly slow and impractical. Until political decisions can be taken to streamline the administrative process further, teacher provision will remain a key hindrance to further development of CLIL projects.

e The type of education in which CLIL may be organised

The existing framework limits CLIL at secondary level to a 'general' type of education, in other words, in preparation for higher education. (The legislation currently being prepared by the Minister of Education is projected to modify this limit and extend CLIL to vocational and technical education as well. This will present interesting organisational and pedagogic challenges as to how it should be set up effectively; it should also be a positive step towards a more inclusive image of CLIL.)

3.5 Snapshot of the Current Situation of CLIL in the French-speaking Community

Various CLIL projects have been developing over the past seven years in mainstream education, since the legal framework was set in place. No statistics are available concerning the number of learners involved. However, the current number of schools authorised to organise CLIL and the target languages are as follows:

Number of schools authorised to organise CLIL projects in 2005–2006

	Dutch	English	German
68 Pre-primary/Primary schools (up from 51 in 2004–05)	54	13	1
38 Secondary schools, of which 2 have special authorisation to organise CLIL projects in 2 target languages (up from 12 in 2004–05)	26	10	4

The projects vary in size and scope. Some projects begin in pre-primary education and continue building up each year by adding the next year level. Some begin during primary education, still others in secondary education. The projects may have only one or possibly several group-classes per year level. One secondary school that began its CLIL project in 1999 now has over 500 pupils participating in CLIL, with 21 classes covering all of the six year levels (12–18 years old).

This flexibility, allowing schools to offer different project types, can be criticized as lacking standards. Indeed, the French-speaking community must be careful to avoid schools indirectly using CLIL as a marketing tactic. A Quality Assurance approach with clear criteria and indicators needs to be developed. On the other hand, this flexibility can be considered a positive characteristic of CLIL in the French-speaking community because the panoply of

learners potentially taking part is much larger. For example, at secondary level the learners' personal motivation to participate is a constructive factor in choosing CLIL (i.e. as opposed to being more the parents' choice to enrol a child in a CLIL project at an earlier age). If priority is put upon principled planning and methodology, then the linguistic, cognitive, communicative and cultural gains are potentially very high for a large public of learners; in other words helping learners of any age and with various learning styles to learn differently – as regards both content and language.

3.6 Some Challenges... for Quality CLIL

Beyond the legal framework, support had been lacking in the French-speaking community for planning and curriculum development based on theoretical principles underpinning effective CLIL. Some recent piloting efforts have sought to provide guidance, for example through compiling a *CLIL/EMILE Digest* of information, a schedule of conditions for new projects as well as through organising conferences for school heads interested in beginning a CLIL project. Awareness-raising at all levels of educational management needs to be furthered. Developing quality, credibility and sustainability for CLIL is a continuing research and development process and an effective Quality Assurance system, as mentioned above, should be a major focus.

Another important challenge has been the lack of both initial (pre-) and in-service teacher training. Even though the teachers who have been accepted to teach in the CLIL projects are qualified and experienced professionals, they have not been prepared or trained for teaching in a CLIL context. Some in-service training, for example in CLIL fundamentals, has begun to help, but the teachers themselves request further training in developing teaching and learning strategies and adapting methodology in order to best support their CLIL learners.

At the practitioners' level, the teachers involved in CLIL find themselves caught up in the *feu de l'action* and must locate, adapt or develop their own materials almost entirely during out-of-school time. Some co-constructive work groups composed of pedagogic advisors and CLIL teachers for exemplary materials development (with a view to create a context-specific materials bank) have begun to address this issue. Nevertheless, much needs to be done. The means need to be provided, among other things for development of appropriate pedagogic materials and for teacher training and development, both of which are indispensable for the French-speaking community's long-term success in CLIL.