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‘Me Siento Pequeña’

**A Visual Approach Towards Students’ Experiences with the Transition from
Elementary to Secondary School in Spanish-German bilingual Education**

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Abstract

As the education system is organised around horizontal and vertical transitions and because bilingual education (BE) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in languages other than English (LOTE) are quite rare, it is difficult to guarantee the continuity of CLIL in LOTE (Harbon & Fielding, 2022). Additionally, little is known about the possible causes and effects of such language and content learning disruptions on students’ learning pathways (Chambers, 2020). Through visual narratives and open-ended questionnaires, this paper examines how 37 young learners in two Spanish-German bilingual classrooms either experienced or envisioned their bilingual and CLIL classes and how they perceive the transition from elementary (4th grade) to secondary school (5th grade). The aim of the research is to better understand CLIL and BE transitions in LOTE from an emic perspective, by gaining some insights into students’ past and current experiences and expectations, thereby collecting ideas for successful transitions that incorporate their perceptions. Our results show that pupils’ perspectives through their drawings and answers can be assigned to four main categories: difficulty and workload, self-perception, image of the school and teachers, and social environment at school or in BE. We discuss the implications of our findings for BE and CLIL LOTE, in general, and for dealing with educational transitions more effectively, in particular.

Keywords

bilingual education, Content and Language Integrated Learning-LOTE, school transition, pupils' perspectives, visual narratives

1. Introduction

“Transition”, from Latin “transitionem” (nominative transitio) meaning “a going across or over” and highlighting a process rather than a product, refers to a change and might induce tensions and conflicts, as recent political events around “transition of power” in the US and Brazil have shown. In education, there are several moments of transition in the school path of students, which are also surrounded by tension and uncertainty, as the transition from Kindergarten to Primary School or from Primary to Secondary school, to give but two examples. These transitions might not occur automatically and be dependent on the assessment of the students’ performances (in some cases even being connected to “institutional discrimination”; Gomolla & Radtke, 2009) or on the availability of adequate curricular offers, influencing continuation or disruption in students’ school paths. Transitions in the school curriculum, from one school level to the next, are usually connected to changes in the language curriculum provision and design (Burwitz-Melzer & Legutke, 2004). Moreover, transitions from one school level to another are connected to changes in the language learning trajectories, as many times students start learning a second (in primary school) or even a third language (in low secondary school) or abandon one language (if the curriculum allows them to). This means that school-level transitions can be connected to linguistic transitions, as pointed out by Melo-Pfeifer (2023), who identified that moments of linguistic transition in life were depicted by German student teachers as attached to curricular options and the organisation of the school system, as the language curriculum is usually additive (the offer of a new language adds to the subject list) and sequential (languages are offered one after the other). Students, as we saw, can also disrupt such learning by pulling out from the language learning path.

The learning of foreign languages as a subject is but one way to develop language skills and school systems have thought of alternative models to improve them. Currently, and apart from foreign languages classes, there are various models to promote modern language learning in education, for example through bilingual education (BE) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In both, the process of learning a language takes place implicitly, as one or

more subjects are taught in the target language (Fleckenstein & Möller, 2020, p. 227). On an organisational level, BE and CLIL make an increase in learning opportunities in a second language possible without adding subjects to the curriculum. On a didactic level, through BE or CLIL students have the opportunity to learn the second language in an authentic setting and through the learning context of facts, “without having them as a separate subject or object of study” (Fleckenstein & Möller, 2020, p. 228).

As can be seen in Ohlberger and Wegner (2018), there are many studies focusing on the different research perspectives about and research approaches to BE and CLIL. Many of these studies have focused on English as a foreign language, and only a few consider the perspective of the students, the one that will be our focus (Dafouz & Smit, 2022; Duarte, 2022). Few studies to date have addressed the issue of how the students experience the transition between the different school levels in which BE or CLIL is implemented (Chambers, 2020). In our study, we intend to tackle this gap in the research by focusing on the students’ perspectives on transition in CLIL in Spanish, a context commonly referred to as LOTE (Languages Other than English¹). The study of students’ perspectives is particularly relevant as emotions interplay with cognition, and therefore with school success. Understanding students’ perspectives on transitions can facilitate the transition in BE and CLIL settings, promoting a sense of continuity and belonging instead of disruption and alienation. Following this rationale, we will focus on the transition from primary to secondary school, i.e. from 4th to 5th grade, answering the following research questions:

- RQ1 - How do young students interpret and envision their transition from Primary to Secondary education in a Spanish-German maintenance and enrichment bilingual program?
- RQ2 - Which lessons can be learnt from that emic perspective in order to facilitate the transition in BE/CLIL settings, in languages other than English?

First, we will present the theoretical background of our study on CLIL and BE, focusing on terminological and typological issues. We will then move on to presenting relevant literature on the field of children’s perspectives about their school experiences, namely those related to language learning. In this section, we will engage in discussing methodologies that are adequate to explore children’s perspectives. In a third moment, we will present the empirical study, describing the participants, the context, the data collection instrument and the data analysis

¹ Despite some criticism regarding this designation, which tends to underscore a hierarchy between English and the other languages, we still use it here for descriptive convenience. Our aim is to highlight the uniqueness of an empirical study that does not focus on English.

methodology, which combines written and visual content analysis. Following the analysis and discussion of the findings, we will discuss their consequences in terms of the organisation of transitions in BE and CLIL in languages other than English.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Bilingual education and CLIL in Languages Other than English

BE has “[...] traditionally [been] defined as the use of two languages in education, often with the purpose of making students bilingual and biliterate, but other times, especially in educating language minoritized people, simply to enhance comprehension and develop linguistic competence in a dominant language” (García & Lin, 2017, p.2). BE programs can be focused on supporting multilingual students to successfully acquire the dominant language of schooling or society, or on supporting speakers of the dominant language in learning a foreign language (Bialystok, 2016). While transitional bilingual programs are those that “aim at language shift from the child’s first language to the majority language and imply cultural assimilation” (Cenoz, 2012, p. 3) and thus at an emotionally and cognitive detrimental “subtractive bilingualism”, maintenance and enrichment bilingual programs have been considered “strong” forms of BE, as they aim to “foster the minority language in the child, as well as the associated culture and identity,” and in the case of enrichment programs, “to extend the individual and group use of minority languages, leading to cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity” (Baker & Wright, 2017, Introduction). Heinemann (2018) defines BE as “a possible form of the umbrella term Content and Language Integrated Learning, used in international literature”, in which a connection between content and language learning is produced (cf. Heinemann, 2018, p.17). Following Bach and Niemeier (2010, p.7), BE refers to the use of a language that is not the main mother tongue of the study group, and which is used as a working language in one or more subjects. It should, however, be noted that in BE, languages are often kept separated as bilingualism is displayed in the curriculum, but interaction in the classroom is supposed to be kept monolingual, thus most of the time reproducing monoglossic forms of language education (García & Flores, 2012).

CLIL is a term used particularly in Europe for forms of BE where an additional language is used as the language of instruction in non-language school subjects (Nikula, 2017). The term CLIL is used to describe classroom settings in which instead of the (native) language of the students, another language is used in instruction. In addition, CLIL also refers to both a target and process standard for teaching. Depending on the approach, CLIL can be classified

as: language-driven (emphasis on the established goals of the language teaching) or content-driven (focus on the established goals of the subject teaching) (Cenoz, 2015, p. 10). According to Breidbach (2015, p. 205), CLIL differs from BE in that it is a didactic approach that bears in the name what ideally should take place in the BE: content and language-integrated learning.

Ohlberger and Wegner (2018) provide an overview of the state of research on BE in Germany and Europe and show predominantly positive effects on the learning and performance of students in relation to both second language acquisition and subject teaching. The studies by Nold et al. (2008) and Dallinger et al. (2016), who compared students in BE to those attending traditional foreign language classes, also reveal that students who take part in BE (with English as a foreign language) experience a positive impact on their academic performance, and have a higher proficiency level of English. Duarte (2011) came to similar conclusions in her study of a Portuguese/German bilingual model, in which the students attending the bilingual classes outperformed their peers in regular immersion classes in both languages, as well as in English. With regard to the perspective of the students, a positive effect can be registered as they show a larger interest in bilingual teaching (Fleckenstein & Möller, 2020, p. 228). Also, in a study by Coyle (2013) BE and CLIL are considered to be useful, as the participating students get the impression that their language skills have improved.

The target languages used in CLIL are often selected due to their international status. This means that the languages are usually chosen due to their importance in the world and recognition as a lingua franca. Although French, German or Spanish are becoming more common in the CLIL context, English is still the preferred language (Escobar, 2019, p. 14). Dalton-Puffer (2011, p. 183) criticises the definition of CLIL and points out that while the first L in CLIL stands for “language”, it actually had to be an E for “English”, because outside of the English-speaking countries it is overwhelming how English is the language of choice in CLIL programs. The European Centre of Modern Languages (ECML) speaks of a “crisis” faced by non-English languages in CLIL programs and groups them together under the acronym LOTE (Languages Other Than English). It is argued that despite learning LOTE in primary and secondary education, and/or in university studies, students do not tend to use these languages later (cf. European Center for Modern Languages, 2022).

2.2 Children's perspectives on their lived plurilingualism at school through visual approaches

Doing research on young students' perspectives is recognised as facing several challenges related to adequate data collection instruments, in general, and data elicitation techniques, more specifically. Ethical concerns meet issues of cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2013; Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). While most of the time research is still more *on* children rather than *with* children, through observation, interviews, etc, multimodal approaches to doing research with and on children have been gaining momentum, as being a less invasive and more age-adequate technique to collect data (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). This might be because drawing, for example, is perceived as a familiar task by children (Perregaux, 2009), and children's drawings present their perspectives on and conceptualisation of the objects and events being visually represented (Castellotti & Moore, 2009). In a meta-analysis study by Chik and Melo-Pfeifer (2020), visual methods were indeed mainly used with primary school children and focused on the affective dimension attached to language learning and use, namely their self-perception as plurilinguals.

Several studies have indeed used visual methodologies in exploring children's perspectives on their plurilingualism. Dressler (2015), for example, examined the language identity of young plurilingual learners (6-8 years) in a German bilingual program in Canada through the use of a Language Portrait Silhouette. Data support the idea that language identity is seen by children as encompassing expertise, affiliation and heritage. Also, Ibrahim (2016) investigated how children in France, aged 5 to 12 constructed their identity across languages (at least French, English, and a heritage language), literacies, and formal and non-formal educational spaces. She focuses on how children make sense of their place in the multilingual world, using interviews with children (and their parents), children's drawings and writings, and their chosen objects. She concluded with the concomitant presence of national and transnational spaces in children's lives, which they navigate through contact with different people, namely significant adults. Further, Purkathofer (2018) exploited how children's drawings, as parts of school language profiles, describe the multilingual environments of bilingual families and schools. Researching a bilingual Slovene and German school in Austria, she analysed "how heteroglossic spaces are constructed through local/spatial/language practices and how these constructions are represented in the drawings of children" (p. 201). Languages at school are thus perceived not just as the indexicality of bilingualism, but as constructing the spaces children inhabit. In another study, Millonig et al. (2019) developed

classroom research involving young participants' perceptions resorting to drawings. They focus on Austrian children's perceptions of their English classes, in terms of setting in connection to a specific language, and show positive attitudes towards English language learning at school.

Together, these studies make the case for the use of visual methods when eliciting data from children, to analyse their perspectives on plurilingualism (Chik & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020). The visual material, which is usually multimodal and includes non-verbal and verbal clues, such as captions, can be combined with other data-gathering tools, such as interviews, surveys or written comments. Important is the understanding that children have well-based perspectives on societal and individual multilingualism connected to their lived experiences in different contexts (home, school, after-school programs, etc) and in contact with different people. These studies illustrate how children learn and use their languages in specific spaces, thus perceiving their identities and repertoires as spatialised. Such a conclusion allowed us to design a data collection tool focusing on children's perspective of bilingual spaces (school, classroom, and all the artefacts and actors that construct them), which are concomitantly located in time (different ages, different school years, different developmental stages).

Following this methodological and epistemological tradition, the present study adapts some of the principles attached to the use of visual methodologies with children and addresses the specific issue of transitions in CLIL as lived or envisioned by children in bilingual German-Spanish programs. While there are, to the best of our knowledge, no previous studies combining both themes (transition and CLIL LOTE seen by children), our study nevertheless presents some similarities with the studies by Mäntylä, Roiha and Dufva (2022) and Melo-Pfeifer and Schmidt (2019), the first one about children's perspectives on CLIL and the second on young refugees' envisionment of their transition from language classes to regular classes (from one social space to another). Both studies used visual narratives to tackle participants' perspectives. Mäntylä, Roiha and Dufva (2022) focused on how young learners, participants in French CLIL classes in Finland, visualise language skills through drawing, and how they describe their pictures verbally. Despite naming various languages and displaying positive attitudes towards CLIL (in both French and English), languages are seen in an additive and compartmentalised way, being evidence of monoglossic practices attached to CLIL (as we referred to above): these representations are similar to those collected in non-CLIL programs. In the study by Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt (2019), in order to depict what is understood under integration, the young refugees produced two drawings comparing their current situation in Germany and how they envisioned their future in one year's time. While the participants of this second study were not children

anymore, the analysis of the data obtained through two drawings inspired us in the construction of the data collection instrument: reflecting or envisioning transitions in CLIL could be done through the production of two drawings comparing two different points in time of their lives. Some students produced very similar drawings, and the differences between the two are significant to illustrate the before and after readings. This is due to the fact that transition implies a changeover from a state or condition, from one time and place to another.

In sum, our study aims at capturing multilingual students' perspectives on transitions in CLIL LOTE by applying visual methodologies to young learners attending a Spanish BE and CLIL program in Germany.

3. The empirical study

To find out how students perceive the transition from primary to low secondary school in which CLIL models in LOTE are implemented, a mixed-method study (Creswell, 2013) was carried out with two different approaches: the first focus was on how primary school students from 4th grade (students aged 10 years old) experience BE in the present and what are their expectations in secondary school (regardless of whether they decide to continue with BE or not). The second focus was on how 5th grade students (aged 11 years old) experienced the transition, also focusing on how they perceive their current situation.

Our study in the German context, in a maintenance and enrichment bilingual program, focus on a transition in the school path considered problematic: the one from Primary to Secondary school. This transition, that in Hamburg (the context of the study) occurs from the 4th to the 5th grade², is problematic insofar as students are directed to different types of schools. The assignment of students to grammar schools (typically leading to a path in higher education) or to less prestigious school types depends on school marks and performance, in which linguistic abilities are crucial (Gomolla & Radtke, 2009).

Visual narratives (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019) were used as an instrument to research students' perceptions, and questionnaires with open-ended questions were carried out to complement them. The visual narratives and the written answers to the questionnaires, filled out individually, were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to obtain insights in this regard.

² In other German Federal States, as in Berlin, this particular transition occurs from the 6th to the 7th grade,

3.1 Context and participants

The study was conducted with students from a primary (14 children) and a secondary school (23 children) in Hamburg (Germany), where CLIL is implemented with Spanish as a second language. Most of the students who took part in this study are multilingual with different language repertoires.

In both schools there is a bilingual class in each grade composed by students who have Spanish as their first language, or have been previously in a bilingual class, and students with no prior knowledge of the language but who must demonstrate an affinity with language learning as well as a good academic performance. During the first years, both schools focus on teaching enough Spanish so that the whole group is able to take part in bilingual classes altogether. In primary school, in addition to the Spanish class, subjects like Geography and History are taught in team-teaching by a Spanish and a German teacher in both languages. In secondary school German-speaking students receive intensive Spanish classes, so that from the 7th grade onwards they can take part in bilingual classes together with their Spanish-speaking classmates. In the first years of secondary school (5th grade), subjects such as music, sports, art, or theatre are provided in Spanish. From the 7th grade onwards, other subjects, such as Biology or History are taught in Spanish. Up to the 10th grade, two further subjects are taught in Spanish.

Both schools are located within the same area in Hamburg. This was relevant for the study, as many students from the bilingual class of the primary school, who are already familiar with the bilingual Spanish-German path, choose the secondary school to continue it.

3.2 Data collection instruments

To explore the students' perspectives on their transition experiences, an analysis of visual narratives and open-ended questionnaires was conducted. In recent years, the use of visual methods has developed in the field of Applied Language Studies becoming a useful tool to research language use and learning processes, attitudes of language learners and multilingualism (e.g. Dufva et al., 2011, p. 60). Furthermore, they serve as a means of communication between researchers and students (Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2019). Studies using drawings to facilitate communication with children have shown that they serve both as survey tools and mechanisms to empower children in conversations with adults, and as tools to conduct analysis (Clark, 2004, p. 172). A questionnaire composed of four open-ended questions was used to complement the information collected with the drawings, and thus facilitate the analysis (Lingard de la Vega, 2022). The purpose of the questions was to gather information on language biographies and repertoires

(“Which languages do you speak at home?”), emotions (“What emotions did you feel while drawing?”), and children’s own description of the drawings (“Write a text about your drawing.”). Additionally, according to the school year, the questionnaires intended to describe envisioning of transitions and transitions as lived (Table 1).

4th grade: envisioning transition	5th grade: transition as lived
How do they imagine the transition from elementary school into a secondary school in terms of Spanish/CLIL will be?	How was the transition from elementary school into the new one in relation to Spanish/CLIL?

Table 1: Specific research questions attached to the written questionnaire

For the research, 4th graders were asked to draw on a sheet of paper the following: on the one side how their bilingual experiences are “today” and on the other side, how they imagine it will be after primary school (see Figures 1 and 2). By contrast, 5th graders were asked to draw on the one half what their bilingual experiences were like in elementary school, and in the other half how it is “today” (see Figures 5 and 6).

3.3 Data analysis

For the quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the full corpora, composed of 37 visual narratives and the related texts were coded into the following four categories (Table 2): difficulty and workload, self-perception, image of school and teachers, and social environment at school or in BE. After analysing the drawings and the open answers collaboratively (by two of the co-authors) and considering the almost inexistence of theoretical or other empirical studies addressing the issue of envisioned and lived transitions as perceived by young students, we decided to create inductive categories to make sense of the data and structure the analysis. This means that the categories emerged from both the drawings and the open answers, without being pre-established.

Category	Description / Visual indicators	Coded segment from data ³
Difficulty and workload	How is the workload perceived in Spanish/ bilingual classes? How difficult is the content and/or material of the classes? Do the students find the level of difficulty appropriate? Does the school schedule matter?	<i>“There will be more homework, more time to practice, and more breaks.”</i> (code 402, 4th grader) <i>“In primary school everything was so easy, I didn't have to study as much as I do now, I always got a 2+. Today I have to study more because I have forgotten many important things.”</i> (code 502, 5th grader)
Self-perception	Did the students draw themselves alone or accompanied? How do the students perceive themselves in the school context? Are they satisfied or unsatisfied with themselves? Do they feel motivated to participate in CLIL classes? What expectations do they have of themselves?	<i>“I think I'll get beat up, bullied, hit because I'm small.”</i> (code 402, 4th grader) <i>“Very good because I can speak Spanish very well.”</i> (code 406, 4th grader) <i>“I didn't have Spanish classes in elementary school, but now even Spanish is FUN! And I learn a lot although I can already speak four languages”.</i> (code 522, 5th grader)
Image of the school and teachers	How do the students perceive their learning environment? What do they think about their teachers' teaching methods? How do they feel about participating in a CLIL program? How do students perceive their relationship with their teachers? Do they feel that their teachers take them and their learning necessities into account? Do teachers play a role in their learning motivation?	<i>“I painted that I feel I'm in good hands.”</i> (code 411, 4th grader) <i>“Interesting because we stopped learning verbs in different tenses (including irregular ones). Here we have started with how to introduce ourselves.”</i> (code 504, 5th grader)
Social environment at school or in BE	How do students perceive themselves within the group and how do they feel about their classmates? Do they feel a sense of belonging within their class or/and school?	<i>“I'm sure they're going to be very nice and friendly, I'm going to make a lot of friends!”</i> (code 413, 4th grader) <i>“I like my new class much better!”</i> (code 506, 5th grader)

Table 2: Categories of analysis.

In terms of analysis, multimodal and semiotic analysis of the visual materials were used (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Rose, 2016) and, when combined with verbal data, content and discourse analysis were also used as methodological approaches, as in Ibrahim (2016), for example. As drawings are complex ensembles, most drawings were assigned to several thematic categories.

³ Our translation. Pupils answered the questionnaire in German and/or Spanish. Drawings also include the both languages. In this table we included elements from the open answers only.

Subsequently, each category was evaluated according to the student's attitude: positive, negative, or neutral. While this might seem a simplification of students' answers, attitudes in the literature are usually analysed according to this scale. After establishing the main thematic categories, the drawings were reviewed and classified accordingly. The quantitative analysis determined how often each category appears in the drawings and texts, and what attitudes the students projected. If a child has painted herself/himself with a happy face in school this was classified into the category "self-perception" and was evaluated as a positive attitude towards school/CLIL classes.

The information collected from the open-ended questionnaires about the students' emotions while drawing was analysed quantitatively according to the type of feelings, e.g. how often joy or sadness appears in the answers. The answers were then classified according to the type of attitude expressed, e.g. whether they are happy (= positive), afraid (= negative), or even in some cases, both. The answers were both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. For the specific questions, the answers were evaluated differently according to the group. In 4th grade (Question: How do you envision the transition from elementary school to a new school in relation to Spanish?) responses were assigned to the above-mentioned categories and then re-classified according to their attitude type. For the 5th grade, the last question (How was the transition from primary school to the new school in terms of Spanish?) was analysed in a different way, since most of the answers did relate to Spanish lessons, as opposed to 4th graders who focused mainly on their self-perception and social context. It was therefore considered more useful to evaluate the answers according to the students' level in Spanish (with or without previous knowledge) and the attitudes they have towards the transition in relation to CLIL: positive, negative, or neutral.

The two groups were analysed separately and the number of occurrences per category in each group was transformed into percentages, to allow for a quantitative comparison, despite the different number of participants.

4. Presentation of the results

In this section, we will first present some of the drawings, exemplifying how the multimodal reading of the drawings was carried out. In a second step, we will present the results of the quantitative content analysis, combining the data from the content analysis of the drawings and the answers obtained through the open questions.

4.1 Primary school 4th graders: envisioning transition

Students in primary school consistently represent and describe positive experiences attached to their Spanish BE. They depict positive experiences attached to learning and socialisation, and the school itself is also associated with a playful environment. In Figure 1, the child represents the schools from two different angles: the image from outside the current school and the image from the classroom.

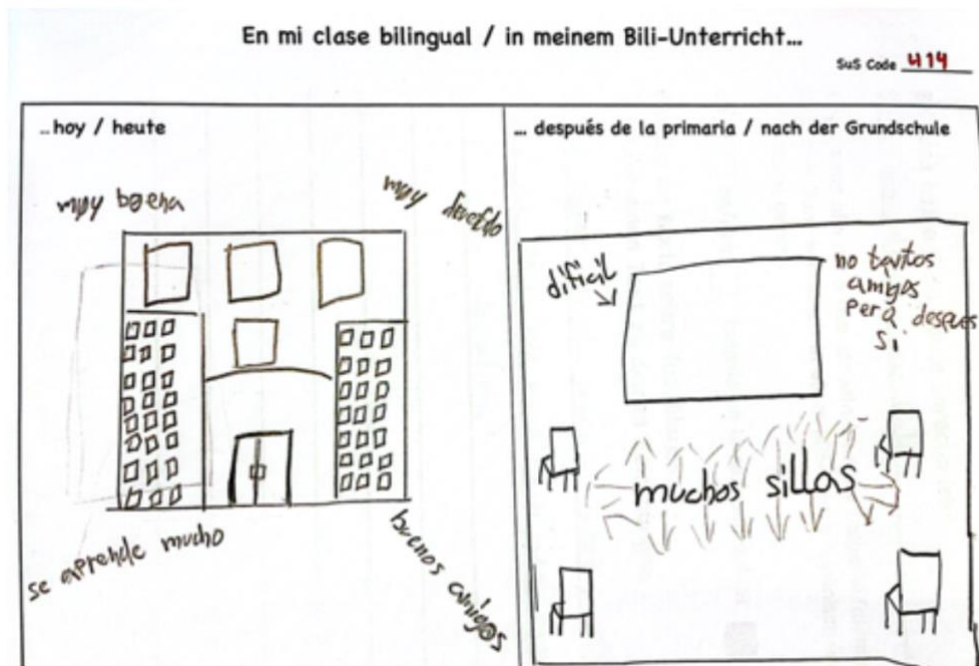


Figure 1: Envisioned difficulties (content and socialisation)

In the drawing on the left-hand side, the child displays a more holistic perception of the school life (*very good, we learn a lot, good friends*). On the right-hand side, the atomistic depiction of a class and its content refers to classroom organisation (with the “a lot of chairs” being possibly a metonymy to the increase in the number of students in class), to the increased difficulty of the content, and to the challenges attached to a resocialisation process (*not that many friends, but then yes*).

In Figure 2, the child draws a self-portrait on both sides of the sheet. In both the child is placed in the middle, with a speech bubble. Interestingly, the child at the primary school is depicted as bigger than the child in the secondary school. Conversely, the words in the speech bubble are smaller in the first drawing and more prominent in the second one.



Figure 2: School change and negative self-perception

The child reflects on the consequences that the change of school establishment can have on his/her self-perception. While in primary school she identifies herself by her first name (*Hi, my name is X!*) and mentions liking the school (*I love this school*), in the second drawing she points out feeling small (*I feel small*) and not knowing the school (*and I don't know that school*). The fact that she underlined the Spanish word “no” (in: *I don't know this school*), illustrates an intentional act of the child that underlines the perception of the difficulties to come. The feeling of insecurity related to the transition to an unknown environment is also visible in the change of the demonstrative article used by the child: from “this school” in the first drawing to “that school” in the second one.

The data from the qualitative analysis, which we have exemplified above, are further reflected in the quantitative data, which aggregate the frequency of the 4 categories in the drawings and the questionnaire responses (Figures 3 and 5). The 35% of students referring to school and teachers do it in positive terms. The second most represented category is that of self-perception, which is also mostly positive. The category that more significantly refers to a rather negative perception is the one referring to the difficulty of the content. Also, the social environment at school is consistently reported as positive.

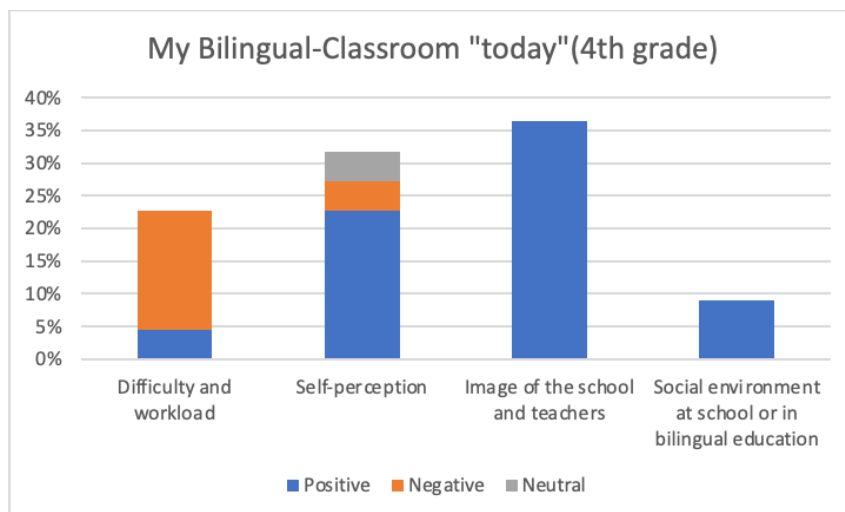


Figure 3: BE in Primary School as lived by 4th graders

The frequency of representation of the four categories changes in the representation of transition as envisioned by the 4th graders. The same students now mostly depict and/or describe elements related to their self-perception and now mostly in negative terms. The second most visible category is related to the social environment at school, which is now also mostly perceived in negative terms. Compared to Figure 3, the children now seem less concerned with the difficulty of the content: the category “difficulty and workload” is the least represented in Figure 4.

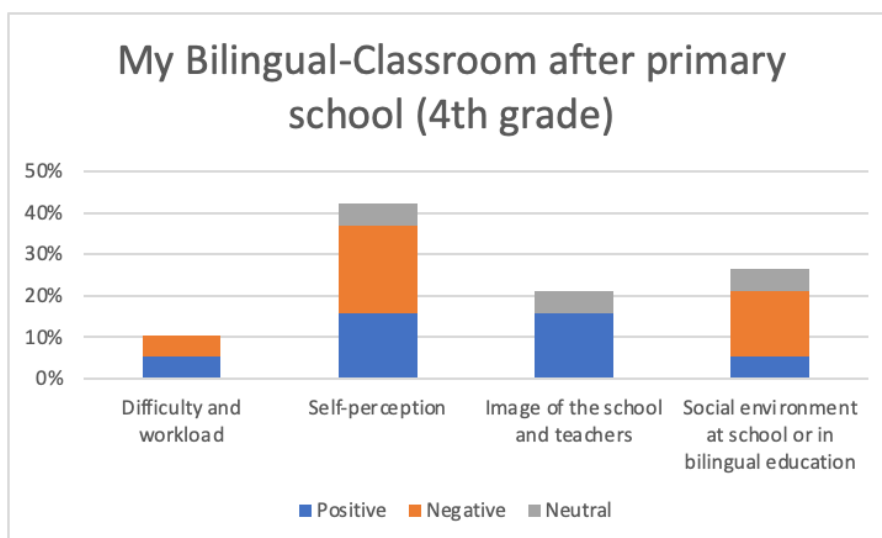


Figure 4: BE in the Secondary School as envisioned by 4th graders

Summarising the quantitative analysis, a change in the childrens’ perspective is noticeable: whereas the 4th grade appears very much associated with a positive self-perception and a positive image of the school and the teachers, the 5th grade, after the transition, is mostly associated with a worse self-perception, a worse image of the school and the teachers and a worse school environment. In fact, the percentage of negative associations to the new school context in the

5th is much higher than in the 4th grade. Interestingly, the students seem to detach themselves from the school content, as if BE content became secondary in students' lives, due to the prominence of other concerns.

4.2 Secondary school 5th graders: transition as lived

Children who have already gone through the transition experience are oriented towards issues of classroom organisation and self-perception. Compared to their experience from 4th grade, the children associate the 5th grade classroom with a higher degree of difficulty (Figure 5). In terms of self-perception, the students show a positive and confident self-perception (Figure 6).

In Figure 5, the pupil depicts different organisations of the classroom work: while the 4th grade is associated with group work and socialisation work formats, 5th grade is depicted with the student isolated in the middle of the classroom, feeling cold (*I'm cold*), with the back to the blackboard. In the 4th grade, a word welcoming the students has been written (*hello*); in the 5th grade, the blackboard is full with grammar. At the bottom of the drawing, the child refers to the break between lessons as a longed-for rescue (*let's go quickly*).

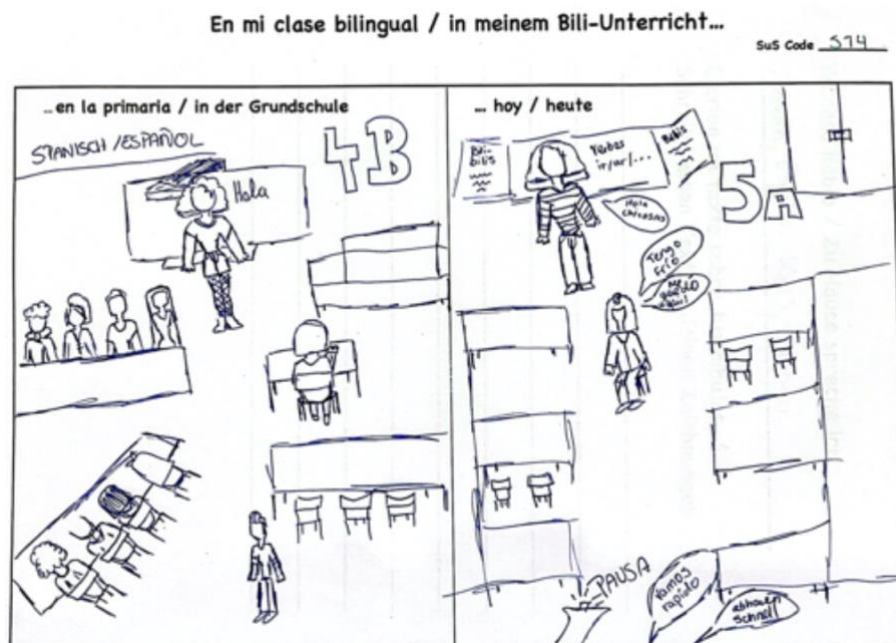


Figure 5: Lived difficulties (difficulties and different work atmosphere)

The different working methods shown in the drawing of the primary school correspond to a situation of isolation, with desks and chairs aligned in the same direction the following year. This drawing reveals an experience of transition associated with loneliness and discomfort, in which the school content also acquires a great predominance.

The second drawing selected for this section depicts what we can infer as being a self-portrait of the children and refers to two distinct categories associated with transition: self-perception and degree of difficulty (Figure 6). The student seems to depict the same school in the background, but two differences are salient: one related to the size of the protagonist and another related to the grades obtained.



Figure 6: School change, positive self-perception and lower scores

The two drawings show an analogy between the elements represented: the setting is school (although in primary school the weather is more favourable, with the sun shining), in the centre of both drawings the child is the protagonist, and in his left hand s/he holds a report card with an evaluation. Given the homology of the elements represented, the conscious representation of differences acquires relevance. The child has grown up, showing physical development and the grades have worsened, from maximum evaluation in the German system (grade 1), to the grade immediately afterwards (grade 2). Although the two products in Figure 5 and Figure 6 are very different, both corroborate the sense of increased degree of difficulty, of which the assessments are a proxy.

In quantitative terms, the distribution of the categories is similar with regard to the representations of primary school by 4th graders: the categories “image of school and teachers”, “self-perception”, and “difficulty and workload” are very prominent, while the category “school environment” is the least present. What changes in this case is that there are more negative

associations, particularly associated with self-perception and image of the school and the teachers (Figure 7). Difficulty and workload are very present but, comparatively to children in the 4th grade, they are more positively perceived (Figure 8).

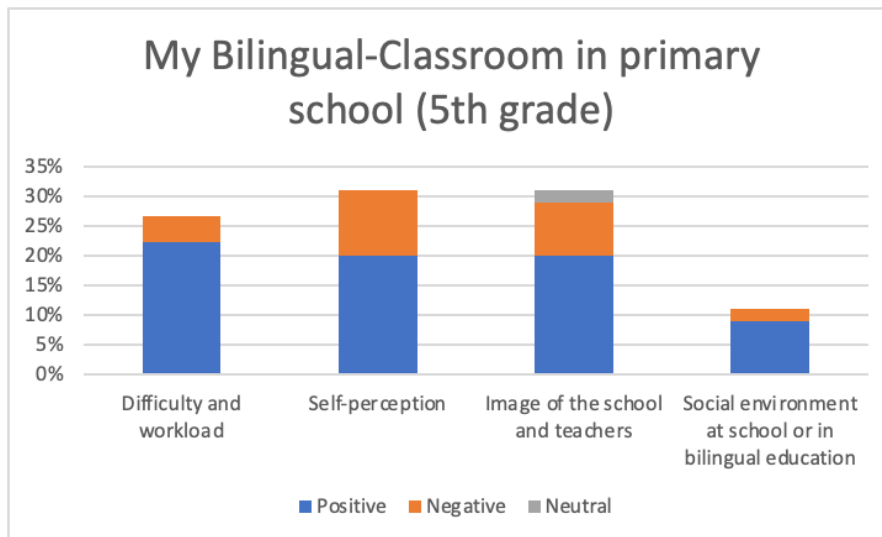


Figure 7: BE in Primary School as lived by 5th graders

Children in 5th grade perceive a substantial increase in the degree of difficulty from the 4th to the 5th class, this category being the one that suffers the greatest variation with the transition after experiencing it (Figures 7 and 8).

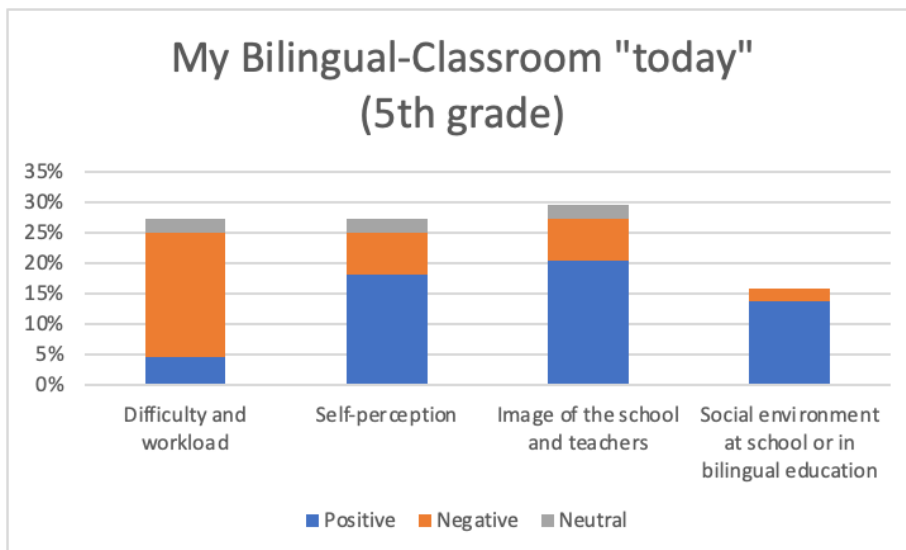


Figure 8: BE in Secondary School as lived by 5th graders

We can conclude that 5th graders are concerned about their self-perception, as also noticed in 4th graders. While 4th graders showed a reduced concern with difficulty and workload after the transition, as they are concerned about changes associated with their self-perception, 5th

graders are, after the transition, very concerned with this dimension, which increases in terms of negative associations, while the others remain stable.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we investigated how students attending Spanish-German BE envision and/or experience the transition from primary to secondary school in order to identify factors preventing successful transitions. Two groups were selected: 4th graders from a bilingual primary school and 5th graders attending lower secondary education. We performed a multimodal analysis of visual narratives, complemented by an open written questionnaire. Our study adds to the relatively scarce literature on students' perspectives on CLIL and BE (Dafouz & Smit, 2022; Duarte, 2022; Mäntylä et al 2022).

The transition to secondary school is an important moment and has many emotional and psychological implications for students. It can affect their self-esteem, academic performance, perception of school and of themselves. It is imperative to support students during this process. Van Ophuysen and Harazd (2011) speak of the need for a “gentle” transition, relating to a preparation for the transition based on the creation of human resources in the primary school. These resources should strengthen the students' self-esteem and their social skills. It is also important for them to practise their self-assessment skills and their knowledge about the future in the school context and the requirements that they expect in secondary school. Strengthening their individual resources and adapting the requirements could ease the transition. Thus, coordination between primary and secondary school regarding the continuity of content and of didactic methods in the classroom is essential. Such a preparation for the transition would facilitate children's transitions by smoothening detected contrasts and discontinuities.

In relation to the first research question - on how students interpret and envision their transition through visual narratives - the results show that students experience transition from primary to secondary school in different ways but always as a substantial change to their educational pathways. The perspectives of the 4th graders were focused primarily on their self-perception and their social environment, while the focus of the 5th graders was clearly more school-related, reflecting on an increased degree of difficulty of the learning content, the workload and the teaching concept of the school and/or the teachers in their drawings and voiced answers. While our results confirm studies identifying transitions in the school curriculum as usually connected to changes both in the language curriculum provision and design (Burwitz-Melzer

& Legutke, 2004), they also point towards the need to focus on aspects beyond language classes but that critically influence students' engagement and performance in language subjects, such as BE and CLIL, during transition moments.

Regarding the second question - on the lessons learnt in order to facilitate the transition in BE/CLIL LOTE - since the 4th grade students primarily focused on how they perceived the transition in personal and social contexts, only a few elements specifically related to BE or CLIL LOTE could be identified. Nevertheless, they expect the content to increase in difficulty. However, from the results of the 5th graders it could be concluded that the perceived difference of the didactic methods between the school levels was very marked. According to students' multimodal voices, lessons ended earlier at the elementary school, workload was lighter, seating arrangements were more cooperative, classes more open and playful, and as a result, learning Spanish became a more authentic context-related and implied task. Students in the secondary school indicate that classroom arrangement was mostly in tables for two, in the classroom frontal teaching predominates and Spanish classes focus on learning the language based on teaching grammar and vocabulary. Likewise, the school day is perceived as longer and the workload higher. The transition was experienced as very drastic for the majority of students and could have had a negative impact on their learning and performance within the BE/CLIL LOTE setting. Some students indeed expressed this deterioration in performance by comparing grades in primary school and secondary school.

From the results, relevant information related to the transition in the Spanish BE/CLIL could be gained. First, the need to assure a transition in content and in the methodologies in the classroom, to minimise the outcomes of perceived disruptions: feeling of some redundancy of the linguistic content, lack of motivation because of content repetition, dealing with less cooperative learning formats. Additionally, it is clear that transition is not made of content concerns only: the experience of transition is intersectional, crisscrossing elements related to language content, classroom activities, didactic methodologies, organisation of the school curriculum, disruption in socialisation processes and opportunities of resocialisation, and self-perception. We saw that envisioning transition is mostly referred to in personal developmental terms and living transition is mostly experienced as being more demanding, reflected in the marks obtained in the tests. These seem to be, in fact, two important areas of cooperation between primary and secondary schools to prepare for less difficult transitions: on the one hand, affective and emotional work supporting children and, on the other hand, work in terms of bringing working and assessment formats closer together.

This rather exploratory empirical study followed the tradition of using visual narratives to uncover children's perspectives and emotions related to their schooling lives (section 2.2), in general, and language learning in CLIL LOTE/BE, in particular. The production of what could be called a double visual narrative (with a before-after design) was appropriate to uncover children's perspectives of transition, either envisioned or experienced. Combined with the written answers to the questionnaires, we could mainly detect redundancies or complementarities between the visual and the written modi, thus somehow proving the value of visual narratives in research about children's perspectives and emotions. Despite the advantages of such a methodological combination, we should nevertheless point out that the need to express themselves through the written language might have limited children's potential of expression: some children might still feel insecure about their literacy skills (in an additional languages). For further research, researchers might want to experiment with the combination of visual narratives and interviews to counter this possible limitation.

Additionally, we should note that, despite uncovering children's perspectives on transition in Spanish-German bilingual programs, we can say nothing about the validity of our results in other bilingual programs in LOTE, because of the specificities of each language (curricular status, school population, presence of that language in the society, prestige and power of the language on the language market, among others). We can also not be sure the same results will apply to other transitional moments at school. We therefore claim that further studies should be developed on the perception and experience of transitions in other language pairs, in the same German context and in other European and global contexts, and in other transitional contexts (for example, from lower to upper secondary education, or from secondary to higher education).

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