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# **Investigating young Finnish CLIL pupils' perceptions of foreign language use through visual narratives**

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## **Abstract**

This article explores how pupils in early CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) education perceive language skills and use. The participants were 25 French-medium and 16 English-medium CLIL pupils in Grade 2 (aged 8 years). They had received CLIL education since the 1st Grade. The data were visual narratives drawn by the pupils and some associated open-ended questions they answered in writing. The data were analyzed using visual and content analysis. The results show that the pupils' perceptions of language were a combination of traditional and modern views of language. The pupils compartmentalized the different languages as separate entities. They mostly saw language being used with native speakers. Technological artefacts were absent even though they are an integral part of children's life in Finland. Also, the pupils considered language being a vehicle for oral communication outside school. The results bear implications for CLIL education and early language teaching in general.

**Keywords:** CLIL, French-medium CLIL, English-medium CLIL, early language learning, visual narratives, Finland

## **Introduction**

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an educational approach in which subject matter is taught through a foreign language with the twofold aim of learning both content and the language of instruction (e.g., Coyle et al., 2010). CLIL has proliferated in Europe in the

past few decades. In general, it is more popular at secondary level (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Eurydice, 2006; Wolff, 2007), even though primary CLIL programs are also expanding their reach (e.g., Eurydice, 2017; Llinares, 2017). In Finland, however, CLIL is more common in early childhood and primary education although it is also implemented at secondary level (Peltoniemi et al., 2018). In Europe, the vast majority of CLIL programs are English-medium (e.g., Eurydice, 2017), which is also the case in Finland. In 2018, English-medium CLIL was offered in 19 Finnish municipalities whereas French-medium CLIL only in 4 municipalities at primary level (Peltoniemi et al., 2018). Globally, the dominance of English as the CLIL language has been so apparent that Dalton-Puffer (2011) has even suggested replacing CLIL with an acronym CEIL (Content and English Integrated Learning) to be more in line with its implementation. Due to the dominance of English, we wanted to focus on another language as well, namely French-medium CLIL. In addition, the context of our study is early CLIL (i.e., Grade 2) which has received less attention in research.

The Finnish National Core Curriculum provides a flexible framework for the implementation of bilingual education (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014). The curriculum distinguishes between immersion education in the national languages Finnish and Swedish and other forms of bilingual education (i.e. CLIL). Bilingual education is further divided into large-scale (at least 25 % of all teaching) and small-scale (less than 25 % of all teaching) bilingual education. The curriculum does not specify the target language objectives for bilingual education, but these are defined by the education providers, that is, the municipalities. The national curriculum states that the general content objectives must be achieved in all subjects regardless of the language of instruction. The curriculum also enables schools to offer bilingual education in the subjects and languages of their choice.

Our study is partly motivated by the current trend to offer early language teaching. In most European countries, studying a first foreign language starts already at the age of 6 or 7

(Eurydice, 2017). Finland recently followed this trend since as of 2020, all pupils begin to learn their first foreign language in the 1st Grade (pupils' age 7). CLIL has been suggested as a potential approach in early language teaching (e.g., Loranc-Paszyk, 2019) which often focuses on functionality and oral communication in meaningful interaction. Recent studies on early CLIL context have mostly focused on language development and motivation (e.g., García Mayo, 2017; Muñoz, 2015). There is a paucity of studies examining CLIL pupils' perceptions of language skills and use, a gap which the present study seeks to address. We are particularly interested in examining whether the CLIL approach is reflected in the pupils' language perceptions. Therefore, the specific research questions of the study are the following:

*1. What are the CLIL pupils' perceptions of situations in which foreign language is used or needed?*

*a. What languages are present in the pupils' drawings?*

*b. What kind of language use situations are present in the drawings?*

*c. What kind of language use is present in the drawings?*

*d. What similarities and differences can be identified between the English and French CLIL classes?*

## **Theoretical background**

### ***How learners conceptualize language and learning***

Our study is part of the research tradition that seeks to understand how 'language' and language-related topics are conceptualized by language learners, teachers and multilingual people. These conceptualizations have been referred to as 'everyday knowledge' (Dufva & Lähteenmäki, 1996), 'cognition' (Borg, 2003), 'beliefs' (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003), 'perceptions' (Kuteeva et al., 2020) or 'views' (Roiha, 2014). There is a fair number of studies

that focus on second language learners' (Kalaja et al., 2018; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2019) and teachers' (Borg, 2003; Pitkänen-Huhta & Mäntylä, 2020) conceptualizations. As Alanen (2003) claims, individual beliefs emerge in a sociocultural environment - and are affected by it. Focusing on young learners' beliefs in particular, Aro (2009, 2012) argues for their multivoicedness, that is, a presence of several different voices that come from parents, peers, or from the society at large. It could be expected that traces of different voices can be found also in the data of this study.

### ***Early language learning and learners' perceptions***

Early language learning has gained a fair amount of attention in research due to language education policies Europe-wide. Studies have mostly concentrated on pupils' language skills and whether or not the early start of formal language teaching also results in better language proficiency. The results of these studies are contradictory (Enever & Lindgren, 2017; Rokita-Jaškov & Ellis, 2019), emphasising the fact that language learning is affected by multiple factors, age being only one of them. Some studies have also focused on attitudes towards (studying) a foreign language. It seems that an early start creates a positive attitude towards foreign language and culture (Jaekel et al., 2017) and this seems to apply also to early CLIL (Loranc-Paszylk, 2019; Pižorn, 2017). However, it may be that the positive attitude only extends to the language studied and not necessarily to other languages (Roiha & Mäntylä, 2019). Also, the few existing studies on early CLIL concentrate on English. Although not an official language, English is very much present in everyday life in Finland and studying English is not really a conscious choice pupils make but regarded as a necessity both for further studies and in working life (Leppänen et al., 2011; Mäntylä et al., 2021). Particularly for the young, the role of English is further strengthened, as social media and the Internet play a significant role in their freetime.

Some studies have looked at teachers' perceptions of language awareness in early language learning (Hansell & Bergroth, 2020), but as to children themselves, there is very little research (Atagi & Sandhofer, 2020) and even less in institutional language learning settings. Other evidence from children growing up in diverse language environments such as a multilingual community or a multilingual home suggests that these experiences may affect the development of language awareness (Atagi & Sandhofer, 2020). In their study on 3-5-year-old children (n=81) in the US, Atagi and Sandhofer (2020) found that both community linguistic diversity and home bilingual exposure correlate with children's explicit language labeling and understanding of labeling conventions, but not with other areas of language awareness.

In a Finnish setting, Mård-Miettinen et al. (2014) explored the language perceptions of pre-school children (n=34) with interviews and drawings. Some of the children took part in either a Sami or Swedish-medium nest or program. On average, the children depicted themselves as multilingual and the majority of the children mentioned being able to use several languages. Altogether, the children mentioned 15 different languages, and English was the most often mentioned language. The children in the study seemed to have a functional, action-based view of language which emphasized language use and social interaction. Since the participants were in pre-school, we assume their exposure to foreign languages had mostly been through language use and authentic input instead of formal exercises. Traveling was the most important incentive to learn a new language but many children also brought forth the need to communicate with foreign language speakers in Finland. Despite the real-life language use, many of the children mentioned school or pre-school as a venue where one learns the language. The authors speculate that the children may have formed this perception through their older siblings.

Early CLIL pupils' views on language awareness or multilingualism have not been extensively studied. Previous CLIL research on primary pupils' perceptions has focused on

uncovering their overall views towards this educational approach. On average, pupils have experienced CLIL very positively (e.g., Calderón Jurado & Morilla García, 2018; Massler, 2012; Pladevall-Ballester, 2015). Furthermore, when considering both research on CLIL as well as on early language learning, the dominance of English as the language of instruction may distort the results, given the role of English as a lingua franca.

In past twenty years, several studies have focused on Finnish non-CLIL learners' views on language and learning. These studies have looked at children at school (aged 7-16), or young adults, and they show that the learners' conceptions are biased towards literacy and also grammatical correctness (e.g., Alanen et al., 2006; Kalaja et al., 2008; Kalaja et al., 2013). In the present study, we wanted to investigate the language perceptions of CLIL pupils during their early years at school: how their young age and their attendance to CLIL instruction might be seen in the data and how the findings of the present study relate to previous studies. Hence, the focus is on today's young learners' views on multilingualism in language use.

## **Methods**

While earlier empirical studies on language learning and multilingualism mainly used interviews or written narratives to tap into individuals' views (e.g. Benson & Nunan, 2004), there has been a surge in adopting a variety of visual means, such as drawings, photographs or multimodal data (e.g., Busch, 2006; Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2008; Menezes, 2008; Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018; Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). As Dufva et al. (2011) argue, different - verbal vs. visual - means draw not only on different means of expression but also on different traditions of representation: images may tell a partly different story from words. Visual data such as photos or videos can be recorded by the researcher, or by the participants themselves, creating a different angle to the data (Boeije, 2010). Drawings, naturally, are participants'

individual creations but researchers' role is seen in the research design and task instructions that also have their effect on the end result.

Here we focus on how young learners, participants of CLIL classes, visualize *language skills* by drawing, and how they describe their pictures verbally. Along the *multilingual turn* in applied linguistics (e.g., May, 2014), and the observations on the significance of multilingualism for learners in and out of educational contexts (e.g., Wei & Ho, 2018), a wealth of studies have emerged that deal with visual representations of multilingualism (e.g., Chik & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020; Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). These include studies on how children visually represent their life stories as language biographies (Busch, 2006), how they give languages embodied significations in their language portraits (Busch, 2018), how they relate their heritage language to their second and third languages (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015, 2017) and how their drawings may be reflections of their identity (Pietikäinen et al., 2008). Further, studies from teachers' perspective show how pre-service teachers envision multilingualism in the classroom (Kalaja & Mäntylä, 2018; Mäntylä & Kalaja 2019).

### ***The participants and the context of the study***

The participants of the study were 41 pupils from two different classes. One of the classes was a French-medium (n=25) and the other an English-medium CLIL (n=16) class. All the pupils were 2<sup>nd</sup> Graders (aged 8 years) and they had received CLIL education since the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade. All relevant ethical measures were taken into account. Consent to take part in the study was obtained from the pupils' custodians and a privacy notice was provided to them. In addition, all data were anonymous.

The French-medium CLIL school was a primary school (i.e., Grades 1-6) in which CLIL was implemented in all other subjects except other languages (i.e., Finnish, English and Swedish) and optional subjects. The amount of CLIL teaching varied depending on the subject

being studied and the grade level. In the target class, the amount of CLIL was approximately 25 percent of the overall teaching. The pupils applying for the CLIL track were subjected to a pre-test. In Grades 1-2, the language objectives were related to listening and speaking. Also, the learning focused on vocabulary and pronunciation. The content objectives in CLIL were the same as in mainstream education and as set out in the national core curriculum. In the early years, the emphasis was on daily classroom routines, songs and rhymes. A native French speaker gave 1-2 CLIL lessons a week for each class. From the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade onwards, the target class had received also formal French teaching one lesson per week alongside CLIL.

The English-medium CLIL school was also a primary school (i.e., Grades 1-6) and the pupils were chosen based on an aptitude test. Additionally, a good command of Finnish was a prerequisite for studying in the CLIL class. After the primary CLIL program, the pupils were able to apply to a secondary school CLIL program through an entrance exam. CLIL in Grades 1-2 was carried out in all other subjects except languages. The general objectives of the CLIL program were to grow into internationality as well as to have the courage to communicate and the ability to study in the target language.

### ***The data collection and analysis methods***

The data of the study were visual narratives drawn by the participants. The data collection method was piloted with three pupils in the spring of 2020. Based on the pilot study, minor adjustments were made to the final method design. The pupils were given an instruction to draw a situation where a (foreign) language is used/needed. The time limit for drawing the picture was approximately 15 minutes and, within that time limit, the pupils could decide themselves when they were finished. They were allowed to use a pencil, crayons or, for example, a ruler in drawing.

When the pupils were done with the drawing, they were asked to answer a few questions on the backside of the paper to elaborate on their drawings. The questions were the following: *what language/languages are used in the drawing, who/what is in the drawing and what is happening in the drawing*. The questions were asked and answered in Finnish, the mother tongue of the participants. Since the teachers were gathering the data, written rather than oral descriptions were more practical. If some pupils were unable to write properly, the teachers were allowed to act as scribes for them.

The data collection took place in December 2020. Due to COVID-19, the researchers were not able to visit the schools themselves and thus the class teachers were in charge of the data collection. The researchers had, however, thoroughly instructed the teachers on how the situation should be organized and the teachers had an opportunity to ask clarifying questions from the researchers. It was for instance emphasized that the pupils should make their drawings and answer the corresponding questions independently and not discuss them with their classmates.

The data were analyzed in several phases (see e.g., Boeije 2010). First, a raw categorisation and coding were done both for French and English speaking CLIL classes by three researchers separately. The drawings were analyzed and described as to the following factors: how many and which languages appeared in the picture; what was done in the picture, by whom and where; what functions did language(s) have; what artefacts related to language use could be found; what was the mood in the picture, whether the language used was oral or written, productive or receptive. Next, based on the codes and categories, the researchers formed the main themes collaboratively. The data analysis was predominantly inductive, however, the process was informed by prior literature and theoretical insights. After establishing the initial main themes, the researchers separately reviewed them in relation to the codes and categories, after which they jointly refined the themes and decided on the final themes.

## Results

In this section, we present the findings of the study. We have divided the section into three subsections that correspond to the main themes identified in the data, that is, 1) *languages and multilingualism*, 2) *language use situations* and 3) *the type of language*. With each part, we reflect on the findings and compare them to previous studies when applicable.

### *Languages and multilingualism*

Several interesting observations and interpretations could be made from the pupils' drawings and accompanying texts with regard to different languages. Firstly, on average, the respective CLIL languages of the classes were strongly represented with approximately two thirds of the pupils in both groups including it in their drawings (see Table 1). This would imply that, as expected, most pupils reflected on their foreign language use predominantly through their CLIL language, which they encounter on a daily basis. Interestingly, English was present in one fifth of the French-medium CLIL pupils' drawings whereas, conversely, none of the English-medium CLIL pupils' drawings contained French. This may be due to the dominance of English as a lingua franca. The pupils in the French CLIL class most likely encounter English in their everyday lives as it has a very prominent status in Finland (Leppänen et al., 2011). As opposed to that, the pupils in the English CLIL had not necessarily been exposed to French which is much less visible in the Finnish linguistic landscape (Pyykkö, 2017).

Table 1. The different languages mentioned by the pupils in the data (drawings + their verbal accounts)

<b>Language mentioned</b>	<b>French-medium CLIL (n=25)</b>	<b>English-medium CLIL (n=16)</b>	<b>total (n=41)</b>
<b>French</b>	16	-	16

<b>English</b>	5	10	15
<b>Finnish</b>	-	4	4
<b>Swedish</b>	3	1	4
<b>Spanish</b>	2	-	2
<b>German</b>	1	1	2
<b>Chinese</b>	-	2	2
<b>Japanese</b>	1	-	1
<b>Estonian</b>	1	-	1
<b>Bulgarian</b>	1	-	1
<b>Italian</b>	-	1	1
<b>Korean</b>	-	1	1
<b>Greek</b>	-	1	1
<b>'Canadian'</b>	-	1	1
<b>'snoring'</b>	-	1	1

Regardless of the language, the atmosphere and facial expressions in the drawings were positive and smiley. Some scholars have suggested that CLIL has a positive effect on attitudes towards languages and language learning in general (e.g., Coyle et al., 2010; Marsh, 2000). Although this has not been extensively examined, a few studies have corroborated this (e.g., Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009; Mearns et al., 2020, Pižorn, 2017, Loranc-Paszyk, 2019). However, in Roiha and Sommier's (2018) study, former students felt that CLIL had a positive impact only on the target language, but not so much on other foreign languages. Even though our study did not explicitly address language attitudes, based on the inclusion of several languages, it can be interpreted that, on average, the pupils' attitudes towards languages in general were rather positive. This also coincides with results from studies on early language learning that have shown that an early start with the language creates a positive attitude towards

languages (e.g., Jaekel et al., 2017). Interestingly, one pupil had drawn a sleeping person and explained that they were speaking the language of ‘snoring’. This accurately exemplifies the developmental stage of the participants and how there can be creative imagination and certain type of childishness in their answers. Similar observations on imaginary languages have been made by Pitkänen-Huhta and Pietikäinen (2012) in their study of Sami children’s visualizations and Mård-Miettinen et al. (2014) in their study with 5-6-year-olds who mention the languages of ‘leopards’ and ‘dogs’.

Thirdly, although there was a somewhat broad range of languages present in the drawings, on the whole they did not contain a lot of genuine aspects of *translanguaging* which can be conceptualized as a unitary linguistic repertoire upon which individuals draw in meaning-making or as a language pedagogy approach in which pupils’ diverse and dynamic language practices are capitalized and reinforced (see e.g., Vogel & García, 2017 for a more detailed discussion). In general, most drawings contained just one language and approximately only one sixth of the pupils incorporated more languages in them (see Table 2). This may of course be a result of the task itself: even though the pupils have likely encountered various languages, actual situations where they are used may be rarer in their experiences.

Table 2. The number of pupils whose drawings contained only one or several languages

	<b>French-medium CLIL (n=25)</b>	<b>English-medium CLIL (n=16)</b>	<b>total (N=41)</b>
<b>Only one language mentioned</b>	22	12	34
<b>Two or more languages mentioned</b>	3	4	7

When there were several languages present in the pupils' drawings, they mostly depicted communicative situations in which the different languages were used separately and not intertwined in meaning negotiation. For instance, in Image 1, a Finnish person enters a Chinese restaurant and places their order in Finnish to which the staff member replies in a language which the pupil has labeled Chinese. The conversation continues with both of them sticking to their own languages and the Finnish person ends up leaving the restaurant empty handed as the interlocutors do not understand each other. Altogether only four pupils drew or mentioned Finnish (i.e., L1) and these were all from the English-medium CLIL class.



Image 1. <sup>1</sup> Pupil's drawing of a situation in a Chinese restaurant (English CLIL)

The absence of Finnish in the rest of the visual narratives could be due to the task instruction to draw a situation where a (foreign) language is used/needed. In each case, Finnish appeared together with other languages and three out of the four drawings depicted a communicative

<sup>1</sup> Mennäänpäs ravintolaan (fi)= Let's go to a restaurant

Kiinalainen ravintola (fi) = a Chinese restaurant

Ottaisin sbagettia (fi) = I'd like some sbagetti, please

Anteeksi mitä kieltä hän puhuu? (fi)= Excuse me, what language are they speaking?

Hussica mus! (fi) = nonsense language

situation in which two people were having a conversation by using different languages, one person in the drawings was speaking Finnish and their interlocutors either Chinese (see Image 1), Swedish or English. These types of drawings, in which both interlocutors were using different languages, suggest that some pupils viewed the need to use a foreign language through the shortcomings of their own language skills.

In one of the drawings, there were two people singing and the pupil had drawn only musical notes (see Image 2). According to the pupil's explanation, the characters are singing in English, Korean and Finnish. This drawing was the one that reflected translanguaging the most since the characters presumably mix the abovementioned languages while singing. In another picture, a character, presumably themselves, is at the airport and tries three different languages (French, Swedish and English) to ask about the location of the airport cafe. This drawing also contained traces of translanguaging since the character makes use of their broad linguistic repertoire in meaning making (Vogel & García, 2017). However, similarly to the majority of drawings with multiple languages, in this drawing, the languages were used separately instead of mixing them.



Image 2. Pupil's drawing of two characters singing in English, Korean and Finnish (English CLIL)

Overall, the pupils' drawings reflected the traditional perception of languages that considers them as separate entities instead of a more modern view where the different languages partly intersect and the boundaries between them diminish (e.g., Cenoz, 2015). Nowadays it seems to be somewhat mainstream to use both the target language and L1 in CLIL lessons (e.g. Lasagabaster, 2013; Méndez-García & Pavón, 2012; Nikula & Moore, 2019), which, as such,, is in line with the current views on progressive language pedagogy and for instance the notion of translanguaging. However, most translanguaging discussion and praxis in CLIL have focused on the relationship between the target language and L1 (e.g., Nikula & Moore, 2019) and not so much on bringing all the pupils' linguistic resources to the forefront. For instance, in Skinnari and Nikula's (2017) study, CLIL teachers viewed multilingualism mostly through the two languages of instruction used in the CLIL program (i.e., English and Finnish). One explanation of this type of practice could be that CLIL is traditionally perceived as more content-oriented compared to formal language teaching where the focus is more on the language. Therefore, comparing and contrasting different languages is more naturally done in formal language teaching than in CLIL setting. However, following a modern approach, contemporary CLIL pedagogy would also move away from the traditional compartmentalized view towards making use of various languages in meaning making and drawing parallels between the different languages. The data of the present study provide a somewhat mixed picture of this topic. On the one hand, approximately two thirds of the pupils in both classes had included their corresponding CLIL language in the picture and only approximately one sixth of the pupils had drawn several languages. This hints that the target language and the pupils' L1 are the languages predominantly present in pupils' lives, and very likely most used in the CLIL classes. The descriptions of the CLIL programs also mention only the target language as the centre of focus which further substantiates the above assumption. On the other hand, the fact that almost half of the pupils' drawings included other languages than the CLIL

target language, suggests that many pupils were able to expand their view on foreign languages beyond their CLIL target language.

Another interesting aspect in the data is that only four pupils included Swedish in their drawings. This is quite interesting since Swedish is the other national language in Finland and the target schools were located in regions where Swedish-speaking minority was quite visible and Swedish was commonly used. The pupils very likely encountered Swedish in their lives on a regular basis and were well aware of it.

### ***Places and situations where foreign languages are used***

As to the places where languages were used in the pictures, in French CLIL, only 2 out of 25 pupils mentioned school and in the English group, none. This is a very interesting finding since earlier studies on language learning carried out in non-CLIL teaching groups show the significance of classroom as language context (e.g., Kalaja et al., 2011). However, it is good to bear in mind that the task was ‘where language is used/needed’ which may have led the participants to think about *real-life* language use settings rather than school. Still, considering that these were CLIL pupils, one could expect them to see the foreign language also as a medium of action at school. Another reason for the pupils drawing real-life settings is probably the way language is being taught to very young learners: spoken language through *functional* or *action-based* methods. Furthermore, the settings of the drawings very likely reflected the real-life experiences of the participants: street view abroad, aeroplane, hotel, and restaurant were the most often mentioned places. This is also in line with Mård-Miettinen et al.’s (2014) study with preschool learners.

Secondly, many pupils seemed to match the language to a particular *nation state*. This does not seem very surprising for such young learners, as Piller (2017) argues that there is, in general, an a priori assumption that languages equate nations. This view has however been

vastly problematized by many critical intercultural communication scholars (see e.g., Blommaert, 2013). In the present study, many French CLIL pupils' drawings were located in France and many English CLIL pupils' in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, there were no references to the United States in the drawings even though it is very prominent in the popular culture in Finland. The teaching of English in Finland, however, has prioritized the UK English instead of the US English (e.g., Sjöholm, 2004). Finnish early language learning materials also seem to focus heavily on the UK and France and not on other Anglophone or Francophone countries. The above points could at least in part explain the exclusive focus on the UK and French contexts in the pupils' drawings.

Image 3 is a good example of the above since it portrays a trip to France, with the Eiffel tower recognizable in the drawing. The pupil's written description reveals that he or she is trying to communicate with a French person but they do not understand each other. Regardless of the lack of understanding, the picture depicts a positive atmosphere, conveyed by the sun shining and the smiling faces of both characters.

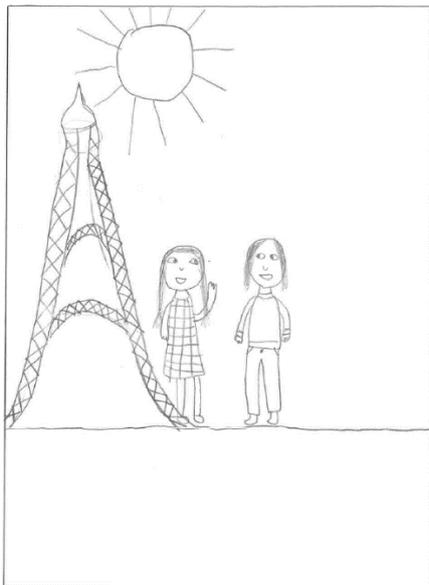


Image 3. Pupil's drawing of themselves and a French person trying to discuss (French CLIL)

Another example of the tight relationship between a language and nation is the presence of national symbols such as flags in the drawings. Altogether five pupils included flags in their drawings: two flags of France, one flag of England, one flag of the United Kingdom and one flag of Sweden. Finally, one pupil's visual narrative included herself and her godfather who lives in Canada. The pupil had explained that they were speaking 'Canadian'. Similarly, in Mård-Miettinen et al.'s (2014) study some children also automatically associated the language with the place. For instance, according to them, a language of 'Venice' was spoken in Venice and the language of 'Caribbean' in the Caribbean.

Thirdly, another prominent feature in the drawings was the interlocutor being a *native speaker*, a fact revealed by the pupils' verbal descriptions. In the French CLIL group, approximately one third (9/25) of the drawings had this setting, and in the English group more than two thirds (11/16). The native speaker model and ideology therefore still seem to remain strong in the pupils' minds even though they are generally problematized (e.g., Holliday, 2009). Interestingly, in some pictures the language was also used with family members, for instance in Image 2, the character was singing with their big sister.

In general, it seems that a foreign language is seen as a tool to converse with other people, very often in the target language setting. A typical situation for foreign language use was a customer service situation at a hotel or a restaurant, or in a taxi. As discussed above, these reflections of participants' travel experiences were common. Another typical situation was some kind of a play or game with a native speaker or with a friend with a Finnish name. Image 4 below shows the participant and two other children joining in a game of football.

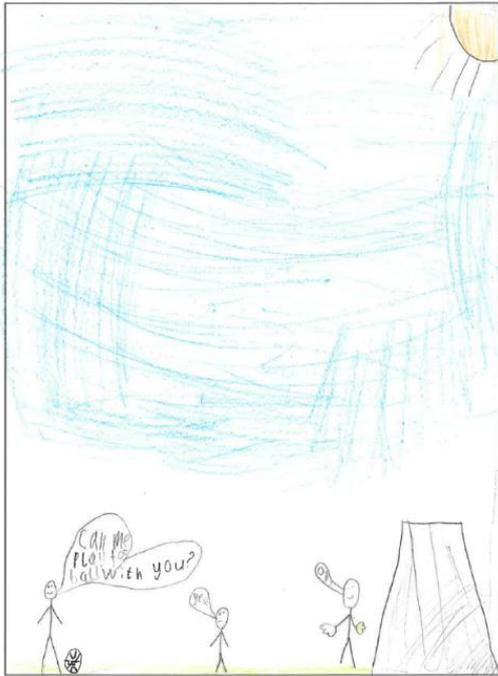


Image 4. <sup>2</sup>Pupil's drawing of children playing football in English (English CLIL)

These playful events and everyday situations mirror the types of activities children encounter in a foreign language at school when it comes to early language learning and CLIL: different games and play are a natural way of introducing children to a new language and its vocabulary and structures, regardless of the language. Moreover, in the target classes CLIL was used in all subjects except other languages, including physical education where the pupils had presumably used the CLIL language in various sports.

### ***The types of language used and the idea of what language is***

When looking at the ideas of why a foreign language is used, firstly, the drawings seem to speak of a *communicative* conception of language. When the children depicted the situations in which language is used or needed - as indicated by the task - they without an exception

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<sup>2</sup> Can me play football with you?  
-yes! ok!

seemed to refer to communication between people. As shown in the images above, the children drew people interacting in different types of situations: in encounters with family (e.g., mother, father, godfather, granny, cousin), friends (possible real friends but also anonymous and imaginary ones) and with people in different types of service encounters (receptionists, server, airport personnel).

The communicative situations in the pictures seem to forefront a *functional* view of language skills. In the drawings, language was used for greetings, conversations/chatting or helping or asking for help or transactions, such as being a customer in a restaurant. Whether this is due to how language is introduced at school or spoken of at home, we do not know, but it seems to be in opposition to the traditional formalist bias of language education with its emphasis on grammatical correctness (Dufva et al., 2003). Once again, here we seem to see a clear indication of the influences of CLIL instruction and its premises on how languages are learned.

Second, a vast majority of the drawings visualized communication in spoken language interactions. In other words, individual language skills seemed to be understood as productive skills and as an ability to speak a foreign language in particular, that is, *oral competence* (see also Aro, 2013). The emphasis on (oral) communication is at least partly explained by the fact that the 1-2 language objectives in Grades 1-2 in both CLIL schools centred around listening and speaking as opposed to writing, as explained in the Methods section. At the same time, although a rigorous comparison with the data on EFL pupils of different ages is not possible, this makes an interesting contrast to the findings of former studies in which Finnish language learners have shown to have a strong tendency to conceptualize and visualize language learning as a literacy-based and written language-oriented process (e.g. Dufva & Alanen 2005; Kalaja et al., 2008; Aro, 2009). Hence, in this study, both the learners' age and their attendance to

CLIL instruction with their action-based, spoken language focused teaching methods were likely reflected in the participants' views of language use.

Written language seemed to have two purposes in the drawings. First, it was used to represent talk by the use of speech bubbles (11/16 in the English-medium CLIL and 11/25 in the French-medium CLIL). In the speech bubbles, exchanges of greetings, such as 'Hello! - Hi!' or 'Bonné jour' (=bonne journée) or simple questions such as 'Do you need help?' were visualized. The language was not necessarily correct in a standard sense, and in a couple of cases it was represented as 'Chinese' characters, nonsense Chinese ('Hussica mussica pus', see Image 1) or musical notes that described singing in three different languages (see Image 2). Second, written language was also used either to identify human characters in the drawings (e.g., 'äiti' =mom, 'englantilainen' =an Englishman, 'Pekka' =a first name) or places and situations where language skills are needed. These included naming of geographical places ('Creikka' =misspelled Kreikka=Greece, 'Englanti' =England) or contexts of service encounters discussed above ('hotelli' =hotel, 'ravintola' =restaurant). In sum, it seems that language skills were not visualized in drawings as an ability to read and write, but as an ability to speak.

Third, while observing the spoken language bias (Aro, 2013) in the data, we may speculate further on other possible biases. As shown above, children only rarely mentioned language use at school or with (their) teacher, even if the language - either English or French - was regularly used in the classrooms. This may reflect a view that they see the school as a scene for instructed learning, and informal everyday environments as contexts for using what has been learned. Aro (2013) observed a similar conceptual distinction between *learning* and *use* in young learners' interviews.

Finally, while the drawings mostly lacked mentions of literacy as a language skill, they also lacked references to different artefacts, such as laptops, tablets or smartphones that allow

language use. In few drawings (n=3) only, the person in the picture held something that may have been a note or a leaflet. Notably, in one drawing only, the pupil drew their hand holding a smartphone. There were also several language items written on the screen and the pupil explained that they wanted to check a web dictionary (see Image 5).

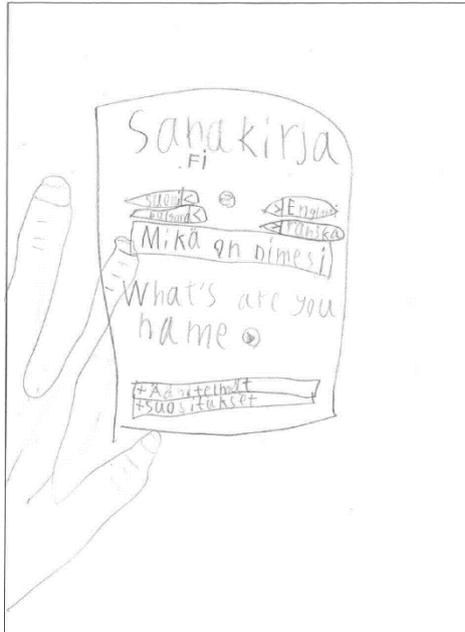


Image 5.<sup>3</sup> Pupil's drawing of a smartphone used for looking up a word (French CLIL)

The lack of artefacts in the drawings seems to be in stark contrast with the information on the digitalization of everyday life of young Finnish people, including the age group of the children we studied (Kumpulainen et al., 2019). Digitalization is an important part of schooling in Finland already in the early years. The Finnish national core curriculum for basic education lists ICT as one of the transversal competences emphasized in Grades 1-2. The curriculum stipulates that the pupils practice ICT skills, use them in their studies, and are expected to use ICT in interactive situations (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> Sanakirja (fi) = dictionary  
 Äänitelmät (fi) = recordings  
 Suositukset (fi) = recommendations

Furthermore, the children of the age of the participants have regular access to different digital tools and their applications. Around a half (45%) of the Finnish 7-year-olds have a (smart)phone and by the age of 8, already 88 percent (DNA, 2020; Merikivi et al., 2019). The digital tools are used actively by children at home, both for gaming and fun, but also for communication with family and friends (Kumpulainen et al., 2019). Also, the numbers of Internet use compared to other European countries are high (e.g., Mascheroni & Staksrud, 2018). Using digital media, children are at the same time exposed to several languages, particularly to English. Especially in multilingual families, where also some of the pupils in this study come from, different applications for phone calls, messaging and video conferencing are in frequent use (Palviainen & Kedra, 2020). Thus, while this was not seen in the drawings, it is safe to assume that children use digital media on a daily basis, and they also have exposure to different languages by this.

### **Discussion & conclusion**

As to the research question of what languages are present, we could detect a multiplicity of languages although much compartmentalized and also including languages such as ‘snoring’. Parallel and fluid use of different languages was absent from the data. However, when analyzing the pictures more in depth, the data reveal that the CLIL pupils’ language perceptions as present in the drawings seemed to include elements of both *traditional* and *contemporary* views on how and for what purposes foreign languages are used.

A traditional view of languages as separate codes seemed to be involved in most pictures. As the languages were named, for instance as English or French, an essentialist view of an inherent connection between language and nation (e.g., Piller, 2017) was strongly present. The imagined language use often occurred in a particular foreign country, for instance France, and such national symbols as flags were depicted in the drawings. The traditional view was

further seen in the fact that the language was often used with a native speaker (e.g., '*englantilainen*' = an Englishman).

In the children's drawings, the ability to use a foreign language seemed to be associated with parallel monolingualism (see e.g., Heller, 1999). Thus, a foreign language would mean having an extra resource that can be used when visiting a certain country or meeting its native speakers. The fact that language communities extend beyond national borders (e.g., Francophone communities outside France, or English as a lingua franca) did not seem to be present at all. Hence, while in some drawings we could see traces of a more multilingual repertoire (see e.g., Image 2), ideas of multilingual language use or translanguaging (e.g. Vogel & García, 2017), were not strongly or often present. Based on this, CLIL pedagogy should pay more attention to pupils' different languages and entire linguistic repertoire and use them as a resource. In the future, this should also be more strongly reflected in (in-service) CLIL teacher training. Another aspect where translanguaging should be more emphasized is CLIL teaching materials, which have been seen as a challenge in the Finnish context (e.g. Bovellan, 2014).

However, when we examine how, in particular, they visualized language use, the pupils' drawings seemed to reflect much more contemporary views (of language pedagogy). As shown in the Results section, almost without an exception language use was depicted as meaningful and functional communication between people with a particular emphasis on spoken interaction. Further, while we do not necessarily know whether they aimed at representing their current agency or their imagined futures selves, the pupils drew themselves as rather confident L2 users - and active agents in interaction (cf. e.g., Rubio, 2007).

Considering where children's conceptualizations emerge from, it is obvious that they are multivoiced (Dufva et al., 2003; Aro, 2009), coming from different sources. They involve children's own experiences, both from classrooms and from everyday life, and in that they also involve, importantly, influences from what their parents, teachers and peers say. However,

there is also historicity in the ways we talk - and a variety of embedded cultural discourses and ideologies that may go back to centuries. The way we talk about languages as nationally bounded entities may be one of these.

Still, we would argue that the mixture of traditional and contemporary views in the children's drawings could be associated both with their own experiences in their CLIL classrooms, but also the past history of language teaching and the current goals that are expressed in the curricula in general, and in early language teaching and CLIL in particular (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014; García Mayo, 2017). When considered in the light of the extensive research of learners' conceptualizations carried out in the Finnish context, our results seem to speak of a slow cultural and pedagogical change that concerns the conceptualizations of language learning, teaching and language skills (Kalaja & Barcelos 2003). When it comes to potential differences between the French and English-medium CLIL groups, the only clear difference was the presence of English in French-medium CLIL pupils' drawings which is very likely a reflection of the strong presence of English in Finland (e.g. Pyykkö, 2017). This could imply that the CLIL approach provides pupils with a functional and action-based view of language irrespective of the CLIL target language. This is a positive finding in itself and may encourage local authorities to provide more CLIL in languages other than English.

Finally, the fact that English is likely to be encountered via (social) media and television by the pupils (e.g. Palviainen & Kedra, 2020), the absence of the media was also something worth mentioning. In the data, language use equalled people actively engaging in communication with others in real-life situations. The lack of digital media in the pupils' visualizations provides an interesting avenue for future research.

The study has its limitations, some of them due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 restrictions. While we would need, rather obviously, to dig deeper into the children's life-world

and their teachers' and parents' views, a more in-depth analysis for instance by interviews or classroom observation is in place. Further, more research is needed to understand and analyze the chains of influences that underlie children's perceptions. As we are particularly interested in the influences of the learners' age and the teaching methods they are exposed to, we will, in addition to the CLIL data, need to investigate pupils attending early language teaching and pupils studying in traditional EFL and FFL classes. We also need more data to draw conclusions on the effect of the language used in CLIL teaching on children's perceptions. Despite its limitations, the present study has attempted to make its contribution to the existing body of CLIL research by expanding our understanding of young learners' perceptions of language use.

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### **Abstrakti suomeksi**

Tarkastelemme tässä artikkelissa varhaisessa CLIL-opetuksessa (Content and Language Integrated Learning) olevien oppilaiden käsityksiä kielitaidosta ja kielenkäytöstä. Tutkimukseen osallistui 25 ranskankielisessä ja 16 englanninkielisessä CLIL-opetuksessa olevaa alakoulun 2. luokan oppilasta. CLIL-opetus oli alkanut heti ensimmäiseltä luokalta. Aineistona oli lasten piirroksia sekä lasten vastauksia piirrosten tapahtumia tarkentaviin kysymyksiin. Aineisto analysoitiin visuaalisen analyysin ja sisällönanalyysin keinoin. Tulokset osoittavat, että koululaisten käsitykset kielestä olivat yhdistelmä perinteistä ja modernimpaa kielikäsitystä. Osallistujat lokeroivat eri kielet omiksi yksiköikseen, ja vierasta kieltä käytettiin aineistossa pääasiassa natiivipuhujien kanssa. Tekniikkaa kuvissa ei juuri esiintynyt, vaikka digitaaliset laitteet lienevät koululaisten arkipäivää. Lasten kuvauksissa vierasta

kieltä käytettiin puhumiseen koulun ulkopuolella. Tuloksilla on vaikutusta CLIL-opetuksen suunnitteluun ja varhaiseen kielenopetukseen.

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