Effects of focus on form on primary CLIL students' foreign language performance in task-based oral interaction

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In content and language integrated learning (CLIL) programmes, attention to language can be easily overlooked behind the assumption that language learning will take place incidentally. This study aimed at analysing the effects of a balanced integration of content and language on fifth graders' foreign language (FL) oral performance. Two groups of participants had been doing CLIL in the form of an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) subject as of first grade, and yet observations revealed an important lack of focus on form in these lessons. CLIL materials and lessons that provided enough attention to language were designed and implemented for three months only in one of the groups. Students were assessed on their FL fluency and complexity before and after the treatment. Results revealed higher gains in speech rate and number of minimal contributions and a significantly lower L1 reliance in the case of the treatment group.

Els programes AICLE (aprenentatge integrat de continguts i llengua estrangera) sovint desatenen aspectes lingüístics assumint que l'aprenentatge de la llengua tindrà lloc de manera espontània i incidental. Aquest estudi ha analitzat els efectes d'una integració equilibrada entre llengua i contingut en la producció oral en anglès com a llengua estrangera de nens i nenes de cinquè de primària. Els dos grups de participants havien estat cursant AICLE en sessions d'informàtica des de primer de primària i una sèrie d'observacions de les sessions van mostrar una falta notòria d'atenció a aspectes

lingüístics. Es van dissenyar materials AICLE i sessions d'informàtica que promovien l'atenció i l'ús de la llengua i es van implementar durant tres mesos en un dels grups. La fluïdesa i la complexitat de la producció oral dels participants es va avaluar abans i després de la intervenció i els resultats van mostrar guanys considerables en la velocitat de la parla, un nombre menor de respostes curtes i menys ús de la primera llengua en el grup on es va realitzar la intervenció.

1. Introduction

Particularly in contexts where in-class and outside-class exposure to English as a Foreign Language (FL) is rather limited, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) seems to have been embraced as a promising answer to the apparent deficiencies of language education. CLIL is widely defined as a dual-focused "educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language" (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p. 183) and is claimed not only to increase the amount of exposure to the target language but also to improve the learning conditions where it takes place. Inspired by the success of immersion programmes in Canada, this approach aims at providing a more naturalistic setting for language development where meaningful and functional communication is enhanced (De Graaf, Koopman, Anikina, & Westhoff, 2007; Lasagabaster, 2010). CLIL programmes, however, are very heterogeneous. They may vary considerably in length, intensity of exposure, age/proficiency of the learners, content type and target language, which makes drawing a cohesive theory of CLIL a rather problematic task (Coyle, 2008). As CLIL was originally envisioned as a tool to foster multilingualism, research was first biased towards analysing its effects on

language competence. In particular, studies have mainly focused on comparing the linguistic outcomes attained by those learners following regular mainstream foreign language instruction and those enrolled in CLIL programmes (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). The kind of pedagogical principles or methodological guidelines which have been followed in the explored CLIL programmes are, nonetheless, rarely specified in this type of research (Costa & D'Angelo, 2011).

One of the key features of CLIL instruction that could potentially contribute to its quality and success is the type of balance between content (meaning) and language (form) maintained during lessons. Despite being conceived as a more meaning-focused type of instruction where incidental learning is enhanced, research agrees that an appropriate integration of language in the CLIL classroom entails additional language objectives and specific opportunities for language use (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010; De Graaff et al. 2007; Nikula, Dafouz, Moore, & Smit, 2016). Yet attention to language might be easily neglected in content-driven environments. It is often the case that CLIL teachers are content specialists lacking formal qualifications in CLIL or general foreign language pedagogy (Dalton-Puffer, 2008; Llinares, Morton, & Whittaker, 2012). Attention to language is frequently overlooked behind the assumption that language learning will take place incidentally without the need to draw students' attention to it. In her exploration of how CLIL practitioners approach form in their classes, Pérez-Vidal (2007, p. 50) reported how they may indeed show a "significant concern for meaning, but not for form." Even though the importance of a balanced integration of content and language has yet to be more widely explored in CLIL contexts, extensive research on bilingual programmes in Canada (e.g., Lyster, 2007) as well as research conducted in other contexts such as the U.S. (e.g., Tedick & Wesely, 2015) and Ireland (e.g., Ó Duibhir, Ní Dhiorbháin, & Cosgrove, 2016) has progressively shown that a more

systematic focus on form is necessary to optimize language development in content-based instruction.

There is an undeniable need to produce more classroom-based research that allows for a closer look at the effectiveness of teachers' pedagogical repertoires that are actually being used in CLIL settings (Nikula et al., 2016). Exploring the characteristics of CLIL pedagogies that foster the development of language competence is the main purpose of the present small-scale study. In particular, it aims at analysing the introduction of focus on form in two fifth grade primary CLIL classes and exploring to what extent a balanced integration of content and language can contribute to better language performance and, more specifically, to the development of learners' FL oral fluency and complexity. In contexts of minimal exposure such as the one explored in this study, where CLIL lessons take place only once a week, most of the potential linguistic benefits of this educational approach may directly depend on how learners systematically and actively engage with the language during classes. The attested tendency of CLIL teachers to focus on content over form (Coyle, 2011; Gajo & Serra, 2002; Pérez-Vidal, 2007) only adds to the need to further explore this matter and determine whether a lack of focus of form could be preventing CLIL instruction from reaching a more promising potential.

2. The balance between content and language in CLIL

As Coyle (2015) stresses, the definition of CLIL itself emphasises the need to integrate content *and* language learning. Simply put, CLIL students should be able to learn content through language but also language through content (Llinares et al., 2012). An appropriate integration in the CLIL classroom, then, entails additional language objectives and opportunities for meaningful language practice (De Graaff et al., 2007).

In Coyle's (2015, p. 86) words, in order for CLIL to be effective, *"it has to be context-embedded and content-driven yet with specifically-determined target language outcomes."* CLIL instruction is widely regarded as content-driven, which means language objectives would depend on the content to be taught and, consequently, following a delineated linguistic progression (as is usually the case in EFL instruction) is rarely possible (Costa & D'Angelo, 2011).

As the limitations of bilingual instruction are unravelled, an increasing number of authors have expressed their concerns about the lack of focus on form in bilingual classrooms (e.g., Basterrechea & García Mayo, 2013; Dalton-Puffer, 2008; Llinares et al., 2012; Lyster, 2007; Martínez Adrián & Gutiérrez Mangado, 2015; Ó Duibhir et al., 2016; Ruiz de Zarobe & Lasagabaster, 2010). Drawing on findings in abundant classroom-based research in immersion programmes in Canada, Lyster (2007) observes how focus on form should be necessary to compensate for some of the morphosyntactic, lexical, and pragmatic weaknesses found in students' outcomes. In an attempt to explain these limitations, Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) describe how an uneven focus on content may cause students' and teachers to overlook language problems as long as the content is understood or the communicative purpose fulfilled. Consequently, the learners' use of the language can go "unnoticed, unchecked and, hence, underdeveloped" (p. 22). A counterbalanced approach that encourages a more systematic focus on form with clearly planned language objectives and ample opportunities for language development in classroom activities should be encouraged (Lyster, 2007).

In this vein, focus on form would be defined as "any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners' attention to language forms either implicitly or explicitly" (Spada, 1997, p. 73). As Llinares et al. (2012) indicate, this attention to form should

take place without losing a communicative approach. Although some authors limit focus on form to the incidental and unplanned instances where the students' attention is drawn to the language form (see Ellis, Baturkmen, & Loewen, 2001), in this study a wider definition is adopted that also comprises the pre-planned efforts that seek to engage students with the language during CLIL classes (Doughty & Williams, 1998). As Lyster (2004a; 2004b; 2007) emphasises, both proactive and reactive form-focused practices should be encouraged in a content-based class to enhance language development. Thereby, instances of focus on form could occur, on the one hand, incidentally during the lesson through implicit or explicit corrections such as recasts, repetitions, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback or drawing attention to problematic linguistic forms (i.e., reactive); or, on the other, they could be deliberately planned through, for instance, adapting the language, planning specific language objectives or designing activities which promote form processing, language scaffolding, output production and allow learners to reflect on their language use (i.e., proactive).

Along the same lines, De Graaff et al. (2007) identified the main indicators of effective teaching performance in the CLIL classroom in order to enhance the balance between content and language. They recommend facilitating exposure to comprehensible input by adapting materials and incorporating visual aids and actively using body language. Teachers should also provide activities that elicit meaning-focused processing (i.e., stimulating and checking meaning identification) as well as form-focused processing (i.e., facilitating noticing of relevant language forms and providing feedback on them). CLIL teachers should also encourage meaningful output production by selecting different interactive formats (i.e., pair or group work) and activities that stimulate the use of the foreign language, not only receptively, but in spoken and written forms too. Finally, they also recommend guiding students towards

the use of receptive and productive compensation strategies (i.e., inferring or negotiating meaning and paraphrasing) and active reflection on the learning process.

3. CLIL teachers and the nature of the CLIL subject

As shown thus far, a systematic focus on form is an intrinsic part of most of the principles that are assumed to promote language learning in CLIL instruction. Nevertheless, there seems to be an important lack of awareness of some of the guidelines outlined in the previous section and therefore a carefully balanced integration between content and language may not always be present in all CLIL practices. Teachers' selection or lack of appropriate training and the nature of the CLIL subject taught might explain these current practices.

As shown in the last *Eurydice on Key Data on Teaching Language at School in Europe* (2012), special or additional qualifications in CLIL teachers are rarely required in most European countries and, when regulations do exist, they mostly allude to a minimum level of competence in the foreign language (often set at B2 or C1 levels in terms of the *Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR*[1]) and sometimes basic methodological knowledge. As a result, a good number of CLIL teachers end up being appointed as such depending on their availability and whether they exhibit a *'good enough'* level of English (see Frigols, 2007). They are generally content specialists with no qualifications in CLIL and little or no experience in teaching foreign languages (Dalton-Puffer, 2008; Llinares et al., 2012). As it will be argued, this may often lead them to unwittingly underexploit some of the potential benefits of CLIL. Without the adequate training, they might be unaware that CLIL instruction is different from monolingual instruction. Lessons, consequently, may

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[1] For more information on the CEFR see https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/.

end up being planned as they would be in the learners' mother tongue without carefully setting language objectives (Costa & D'Angelo, 2011). Materials might simply be translated without adapting the language to the learners' proficiency and often containing activities not designed to be done in a foreign language (Cenoz, Geneese, & Gorter, 2014). Teachers may attend only to content learning whereas language is left to be learnt incidentally mainly through their receptive skills. As long as the content is assimilated, stimulating language production or awareness may not be seen as a necessary requirement of this type of instruction. According to Dalton-Puffer (2008), language is primarily attended to when lexical errors arise whereas morphosyntactic and phonological errors are widely ignored. Despite the obvious fact that different teachers would show very diverse attitudes towards attention to language depending on their background or their goals, a lack of awareness of CLIL principles could be preventing these learning environments from being as communicative and language-rich as they are claimed to be. Matters are not helped by the fact that these teachers are rarely provided with the sufficient time to design their materials or collaborate with the language teachers.

The nature of the CLIL subject could also condition the balance between content and language. Certain subjects may indeed require an extra effort on the teacher to integrate content and language in a balanced way. Very hands-on-oriented or physical subjects such as physical education, arts and crafts, or Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are traditionally less linguistically charged learning contexts which may be harder to transform into language-rich communicative environments. Working all the language skills may not always come naturally in all subjects and lessons may unevenly focus on the learners' receptive skills. Moreover, some of these subjects run the risk of being too visually supported to enhance language learning. In this sense and

despite the undeniable scaffolding benefits they present, opportunities for language processing may end up being scarce in these subjects. Pladevall-Ballester (2016) examined the development of the receptive skills of two groups of CLIL learners being taught two different types of content: arts and crafts on the one hand and science on the other. Even though significant differences did not emerge between groups until the second year and only in listening skills, she observed how the arts and crafts group relied excessively on visual support and did not seem to be provided with as much contextualised and challenging input as the science group. The arts and crafts teachers themselves acknowledged how learners' listening skills were targeted mainly through instructions or descriptive language which may not have been as cognitively challenging as the input provided in science lessons. If learners do not need to make an effort in order to process the language and follow the lessons, linguistic outcomes could end up being compromised. If teachers are not clearly aware of CLIL principles, goals and shortcomings, there could be an even higher risk of leaving language unattended in these subjects.

Sheen (2002) points out how the object of focus on form is to compensate for insufficient levels of exposure to the language by focusing the learners' attention on the language form. In Catalonia, Spain, where this study takes place, most CLIL programmes include an average of one to two hours a week of integrated learning (Frigols, 2007). They are contexts of minimal exposure where learners often struggle with the linguistic demands of learning content through a foreign language. Considering how implicit language learning has shown some limitations in minimal exposure contexts (DeKeyser, 2002; 2007), planning language carefully and drawing students' attention to it in a systematic way could be proven to be particularly beneficial, if not

necessary, to maximise some of the linguistic benefits claimed by this type of instruction.

4. Methods

4.1 The Study

The present study aims at analysing the effects of a systematic and balanced integration of content and language on young learners' FL performance when taking part in task-based oral interactional exchanges. Two groups of fifth graders that had been doing CLIL for four years participated in the project. A series of classroom observations were carried out by the researcher previous to the study, which revealed an important lack of focus on form and which made the case an adequate representation of content-driven CLIL practices which leave language unattended. The two groups were thus suitable for a pre-post test design where a focus-on-form treatment could be applied to one of the groups. In doing so, this study intended to examine the linguistic outcomes (measured through oral FL performance) attained through these two distinct ways of implementing CLIL instruction. Results may shed light on the importance of focus on form in CLIL programmes where levels of exposure are rather limited.

In an attempt to measure the effect of focus on form in CLIL instruction on young learners' FL performance, the research questions that guide this study are the following:

(1) Does inclusion of focus on form practices in CLIL lessons have an effect on young learners' development of oral FL fluency (as measured by speech rate in words and L1 word ratio)?

(2) Does inclusion of focus on form practices in CLIL lessons have an effect on young learners' development of oral FL complexity (as measured by mean length of turns, number of minimal contributions, and number of long turns)?

As previous research indicates, the inclusion of focus on form in CLIL lessons is predicted to have an effect on the learners' FL oral fluency and complexity, whereby learners in the treatment group will predictably be able to produce more FL words per minute and will show a lower reliance on their L1 when using the target language in task-based oral interaction. Similarly, they are predicted to display a higher mean turn length with greater number of long turns and fewer minimal contributions (i.e., single-word turns) (Basterrechea & García Mayo 2013; Coyle, 2015; Martínez Adrián & Gutiérrez Mangado, 2015; Lyster, 2007).

4.2 Participants

A total of 32 primary school students participated in the study, 20 in the treatment group (12 male and 8 female) and 12 in the non-treatment group (9 male and 3 female). Aged between 9 and 10 years old, they belonged to two different fifth grade classes in the same school and they had an A1 level of English. Unfortunately, no permission was obtained to run a placement test; thus, the English level of the participants was determined by consulting their EFL grades as well as by seeking guidance from the teachers at the school (considering the descriptors found in the *Council of Europe's CEFR)*.

The study took place in a semi-private school located in Catalonia, Spain, where students generally come from families with a middle socioeconomic background. They had been doing CLIL for four years in the form of an ICT subject. Students had these CLIL lessons one hour a week, and they also underwent regular EFL instruction which occupied three more hours of the children's timetables. They received a total of four hours of weekly exposure to English at school (three EFL hours + one CLIL hour). Being two fifth grade classes in the same institution, the amount of in-class exposure

remained the same for both groups during the study. However, a good part of the participants both in the non-treatment group (8 of 12, 67% of the group) and in the treatment group (13 of 20, 65% of the group) received additional English instruction outside class. Fully controlling this variable was not possible, but a chi square test was run to examine the relationship between attendance to extracurricular sessions and group belonging. Results revealed the two categorical variables were not related (chi square value=0.01 p>0.05), therefore, it was concluded that extracurricular exposure would have a similar impact in both groups.

The teacher in charge of the subject was an ICT content specialist with no qualifications in CLIL or foreign language teaching. He was assigned to teach these classes mainly because of his IT background and his level of English (C1). He had been in charge of the CLIL subject for the previous six years.

These participants were selected because a lack of focus on form in their CLIL lessons had been previously detected and later confirmed by completing three one-hour observation sessions on each group partly based on De Graaff et al.'s (2007) indicators for effective L2 pedagogy in CLIL to examine to what extent attention was paid to language during classes. The observation sessions revealed that only content objectives and not language objectives were planned for the CLIL lessons. Activities were designed exclusively to work on content and, thus, not many opportunities were provided for active language use. Materials were not adapted. Most of them had been translated from Catalan to English so activities were not originally designed to be done in the foreign language. There was an absence of warm-up activities and language scaffolding. When the language was too complex or not understood, the teacher usually resorted to direct translations in the students' L1 rather than trying more diverse scaffolding techniques such as paraphrasing, using synonyms, simplifications,

examples, or body language. Although the use of the L1 is considered a good scaffolding method in FL and CLIL instruction (see Moore & Nikula, 2016), the teacher's reliance on it could have been reduced with adequate language planning as well as suitable materials.

Lessons unevenly focused on the learners' receptive skills and were reduced to students listening to the teacher's instructions and carrying them out. Moreover, the hands-on nature of the subject did not always provide ample opportunities for language processing. More often than not, the classroom dynamics required students following directions which were usually verbalized at the same time as a practical example was performed by the teacher (e.g., *'Now we open the document'* followed by the teacher opening the document on the projector). This means that, frequently, students could follow activities and explanations without paying too much attention to the linguistic input.

As far as students' output, the use of the foreign language was encouraged mainly with a handful of formulaic expressions used for routines (e.g., when students had to ask for permission to go to the bathroom). Most students seemed to know the formulas required and they were used to employing them with the teacher. However, outside the routines, English was not frequently stimulated. During class activities, students tended to use their L1, and they were not provided with linguistic support, examples, or sentence frames to be able to produce more language with their contributions. Although students worked in pairs (one computer per pair), they always interacted in their mother tongue. Activities planned to encourage peer-to-peer interaction in the FL were not present in the sessions observed.

4.3 Design of the intervention

Lessons and materials that focused on content as well as on form and that encouraged the use of language were designed by the researcher, who trained the teacher to use them. The content to be taught in the subject was decided by the teacher, and it was the same for both the treatment and the non-treatment group, but the teacher used different materials and pedagogical strategies in each group.

A whole unit of 8 sessions was designed which was finally expanded to 10. In this unit students were introduced for the first time to the basics of programming and computational thinking. *Scratch*, a graphical blocks-based programming environment, was used for this purpose. In the first half of the unit, the most fundamental computational concepts were presented (algorithms, coding, loops, conditionals, and events) and practised through simple guided codes. In practicing, students became familiar with the process of coding and also with the most important elements of a *Scratch* project. In the second half of the unit, students were instructed in the uses of the program itself with access to a wider range of blocks. Everything learnt was applied in a final project where they had to create a simple animation of their team names.

The materials were designed by the researcher in alignment with the most important pedagogical recommendations for effective content and language integration described by De Graaff et al. (2007), Coyle et al. (2010), and Meyer (2010), incorporating the necessary attention to language. To do so, the first step was the inclusion of clear language objectives, which were decided after analysing the characteristics of the content and identifying the language that would be content-obligatory (i.e., necessary for its learning), content-compatible, and content-enriching, following Snow et al. (1989) and Coyle et al.'s (2010) *Language Tryptich* and therefore including language of, for, and through learning. All language in the materials was also carefully adapted in order to provide challenging, yet comprehensible input. With this purpose, texts were

adjusted selecting vocabulary, using synonyms if necessary and simpler and shorter sentences, placing notes in the margins, providing examples and visual support, and highlighting the most relevant or problematic forms. Since a gradual linguistic progression is not always possible in CLIL lessons, some content-obligatory language (Snow et al., 1989) had to be thoroughly scaffolded. With this purpose, warm-up activities that prepared students for the vocabulary and structures they would be using to learn the content were also included (i.e., picture matching activities and vocabulary brainstorming and elicitation). In addition to this, the materials tried to modify the uneven focus on listening skills that had been observed in the lessons by including activities which allowed work on the language not only receptively, but also productively, particularly through peer-interaction tasks. Following De Graaff et al.'s (2007) indicators, meaningful activities with a purpose were designed that encouraged meaning-processing as well as form-processing. In this sense, not only meaning identification was stimulated but also the noticing of language forms with activities that aimed at making learners aware of specific language features, such as question formation or zero and first conditionals through picture description tasks or information-gap tasks or games. Learners also received constant feedback on their language production during the treatment period, including peer feedback which was also elicited through peer-to-peer assessment activities. Output in the target language was also promoted by eliciting learners' contributions and opinions as well as using diverse interactive formats, including pair/group activities and presentations. Due to the learners' low proficiency, clear examples and sentence frames were usually provided in productive activities to facilitate their oral production, such as *I'm sorry, I don't understand* or *Could you say that again please?* Finally, as recommended by De Graaff et al. (2007), activities that encouraged reflection on not only the content, but also the

language learnt were included. For this reason, and similarly to Ó Duibhir et al. (2016), students were asked to fill a diary designed for them to reflect on the content and language difficulties found during each lesson and their expectations for the next.

4.4 Information-gap tasks

The learners' oral production skills were selected to be analysed in the study on the grounds that this area of L2 proficiency is among those which have been attested to benefit more noticeably from CLIL instruction (Lasagabaster, 2008; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2008). Eliciting peer-to-peer oral interaction was decided to be an appropriate method to assess how these learners were able to use their oral production skills meaningfully and functionally. In this sense, research has shown how goal-oriented tasks are a useful tool to stimulate interaction as learners need to exchange information to reach a goal (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). These tasks are also considered to be the most suitable for young learners since they are closed, have an unambiguous goal, and are easily adaptable to their proficiency.

To assess students' FL performance in task-based oral interaction, an information gap task was designed for the pre-test and the post-test. In the pre-test students were grouped in mixed dyads and given one set of eight pictures each. In these sets, five pictures were different and three were the same. By interacting in the FL, they had to describe their pictures and decide which were repeated. All images were carefully selected and adapted so the kind of vocabulary necessary to speak about them was suitable for the participants' overall proficiency. In order to encourage interaction, some of the pictures shared common elements so participants needed to describe them rather thoroughly before determining they were the same. The task designed for the post-test was the same but using different images, also carefully selected to maintain the same level of difficulty. Both tasks were previously piloted to ensure the suitability of the task

with respect to the learners' age and proficiency as well as the appropriateness of the pictures used in relation to the established goals.

4.5 Procedure

After the observation sessions, students were placed in mixed proficiency dyads (10 dyads in the treatment group and 6 dyads in the non-treatment group), and their FL performance was pre-tested by means of the information gap task described in the materials section. As stated, this task had been previously piloted with dyads of similar ages to get an idea of its effectiveness for the established goals. Mixed dyads were assigned taking into consideration the learners' proficiencies and affective factors such as their motivation towards the subject and the target language, as determined by the teacher. This was done in order to avoid a situation where both students regarded themselves as unable to do the task. Instructions were given in the learners' L1 to make sure they were clearly and equally understood by all participants. These instructions stated they had to find the three repeated pictures among the eight they had displayed on their respective tables which were separated by a screen that allowed them to see each other but not their pictures. They needed to complete the task by describing elements in them and asking each other questions in English. They were also warned they should describe more than one element in the pictures since some of them were very similar. Once they agreed a picture was the same, they had to turn it over and continue with the next.

Although the instructions for the task were given in the L1, students were also asked some questions in English eliciting simple personal facts before the actual task took place in order to set the learners' language mode to English (see Grosjean, 2004). During the task, whenever learners got stuck and interaction stopped with considerably

long pauses, the researcher tried to encourage talk by giving the same suggestions to all pairs. They were told to change the picture if needed or think about the colours, the clothes, and the different objects they could describe instead of focusing on just one. At times, learners asked the researcher for a word they did not know how to say in English. On these occasions, help was not provided and they were told they should speak to their partner.

After being pre-tested, the materials described in the previous section were implemented only in the treatment group during a treatment period that lasted three months with a total of 10 sessions.[2] The researcher was present during all sessions to provide on-the-spot guidance to the teacher. On their part, the non-treatment group continued their regular lessons as they had been planned. Three of these lessons were also observed to make sure a lack of focus of form continued to be present in their classes. In order to prevent the teacher from unwittingly applying in the non-treatment group some of the methodological strategies designed to be done only in the treatment group, the content was taught every week first in the non-treatment group before the teacher could see the materials or have an idea of how the lessons were going to be carried out in the treatment group. After the treatment, both groups' FL performance in task-based oral interaction was tested again using the same conditions: the same dyads, the same time/place, and the same task but using different pictures. Their interaction in both the pre-test and post-test was recorded, transcribed, and codified using CHAT transcription conventions[3] (MacWhinney, 2000) in order to be analysed.

4.5 Data analysis

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[2] Materials were designed for eight sessions but they had to be expanded to 10 in order to fit the final project and presentations.

[3] The CHAT transcription conventions are used within the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) project (https://childes.talkbank.org/).

The specific measures selected to analyse the learners' oral performance in the target language were adapted from CAF (complexity, accuracy and fluency) measures of L2 proficiency (Housen, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2012). This study only used fluency and complexity measures as dependent variables since accuracy measures may distort the perception of the performance of low proficiency learners. Two fluency and three complexity measures were used in order to capture the progress of young learners in their FL performance while interacting. More specifically, fluency was measured in speech rate in FL words per minute (SPW) and dysfluencies caused by the L1 (L1-words ratio). Complexity, on the other hand, was measured in length of turns (number of words per turn), number of minimal contributions (single-word turns) and number of long turns produced (those with 10 or more words). Previous research has proven these measures to be a reliable way of quantifying the fluency of young learners' oral performance as well as their interactional complexity (Bret, 2014; Mora, 2006; Onoda, 2014). Once the data were collected from the pre-test and the post-test, they were analysed manually and quantified according to the measures and the criteria described. Normality tests, intragroup, and intergroup statistical comparisons were carried out.

5. Results

In relation to fluency, as Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 show, intergroup (between groups) statistical comparisons of the results from the pre-test showed no significant difference between groups in any of the measures, speech rate ($t_{(16)} = 1.04$, $p > 0.05$) or L1 words ($t_{(16)} = -0.59$, $p > 0.05$), showing how both groups were comparable at the beginning of the study. Another independent two-sample t-test comparing the results from the post-test yielded smaller t-values in speech rate ($t_{(16)} = -0.47$, $p > 0.05$) and L1 words ($t_{(16)} = -0.18$,

p>0.05) tentatively indicating that no differences existed between the groups at post-

test.

Table 1 Results from the pre-test and post-test for fluency measures as well as results from intergroup statistical tests of said results.

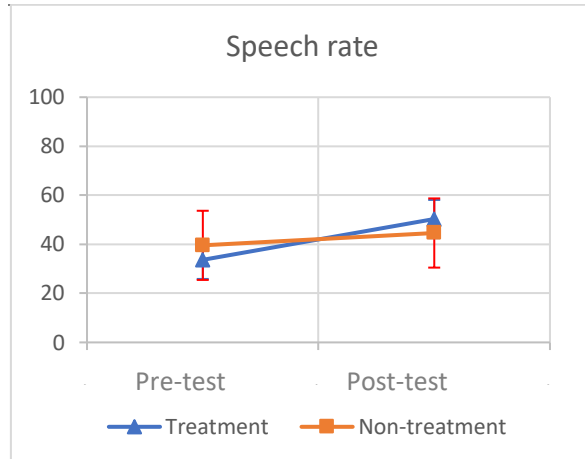| | PRE-TEST | | | | | | POST-TEST | | | | | |
| FLUENCY | Non-treatment Group (*n= 6*) | | Treatment Group (*n= 10*) | | Indep. two sample t-test | | Non-treatment Group (*n= 6*) | | Treatment Group (*n= 10*) | | Indep. two sample t-test | |
Measures	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p
Task time	**4.96**	2.42	**5.68**	2.34			**5.30**	1.96	**5.44**	1.84		
Total words	**210.67**	60.1	**218.2**	102.4			**245.33**	50.8	**284.2**	65.9		
Total FL words	**196.17**	61.25	**191.1**	69.51			**236.33**	45.79	**273.8**	63.74		
Speech rate (FL words/min.)	**41.54**	14.11	**35.03**	7.79	1.04	0.3341	**48.77**	18.24	**52.73**	12.78	-0.47	0.6521
Total L1 words	**14.5**	26.44	**27.1**	44.25			**9**	12.2	**10.4**	7.9		
L1-words/total words	**6.47%**	12.1	**9.87%**	9.6	-0.59	0.5717	**3.33%**	4.1	**3.69%**	3	-0.18	0.8574

Figure 1. Development of both groups from pre-test to post-test in speech rate.
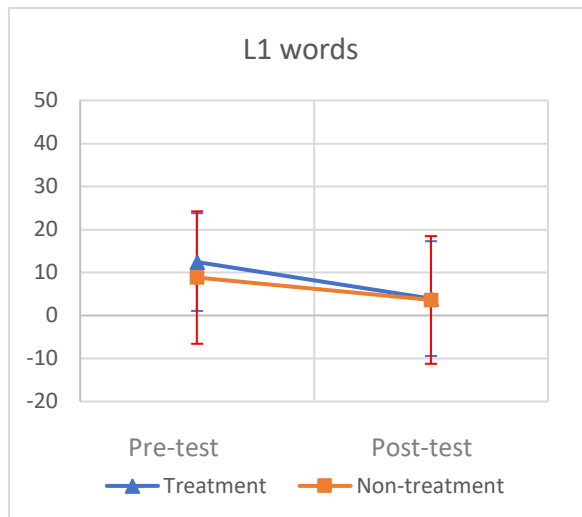
Figure 2. Development of both groups from pre-test to post-test in fluency breakdowns caused by the L1.

As regards complexity, Table 2 and Figures 3, 4, and 5 show that independent two-sample t-tests comparing the results from pre-test complexity measures revealed no significant difference between groups on any measure: turn length, (t (16) =0.98, p>0.05), single-word turns (t (16) =-1.65, p>0.05), or long turns (t (16) =0.74, p>0.05). Hence, both groups were comparable at the beginning of the study. Another independent two-sample t-test comparing the results from the post-test yielded smaller t-values in turn length (t (16) =0.55, p>0.05), single-word turns (t (16) =0.78, p>0.05), and L1 words (t (16) =-0.11, p>0.05), also indicating no differences at post-test.

Table 2   Results from the pre-test and post-test for complexity measures as well as results from intergroup statistical tests of said results

	PRE-TEST						POST-TEST					
COMPLEXITY	Non-treatment Group (*n= 6*)		Treatment Group (*n= 10*)		Indep. two sample t-test		Non-treatment Group (*n= 6*)		Treatment Group (*n= 10*)		Indep. two sample t-test	
Measures	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p
Total words	**210.67**	60.1	**218.2**	102.4			**245.33**	50.8	**284.2**	65.9		
Number of turns	**33**	11.1	**44**	20.8			**35**	9.8	**41**	13.3		

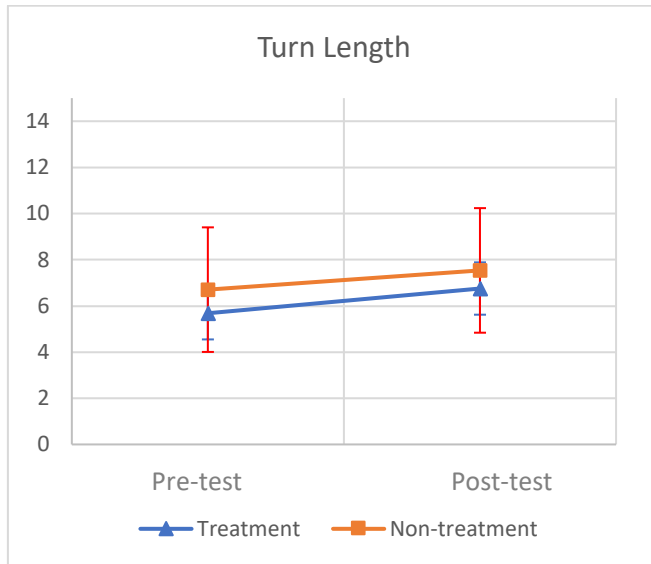| Turn length (words/turn)	6.70	2.7	5.68	1.1	0.98	0.4111	7.54	3.2	6.75	1.8	0.55	0.6014
Single-word turns/total turns	31.37%	7.7	39.07%	11	-1.65	0.1228	30.64%	8.0	27.35%	8.4	0.78	0.4492
Long turns (10+ words)/per total turns	28.12%	19.9	21.85%	6.3	0.74	0.4854	26.65%	16.5	27.47%	9.5	-0.11	0.9169

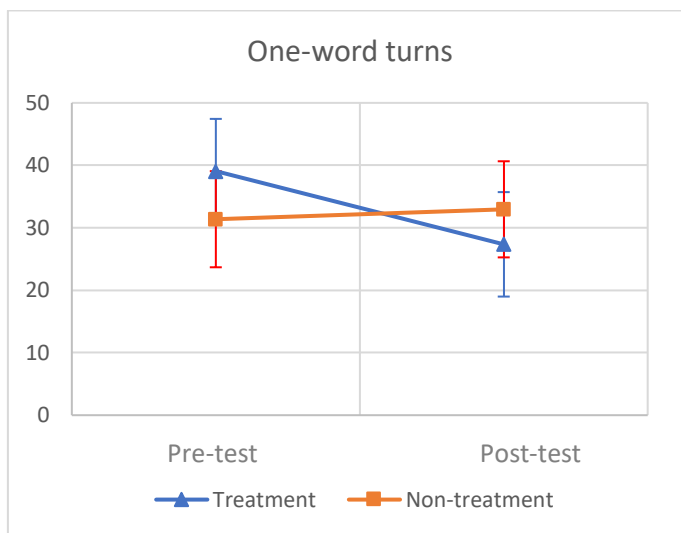Figure 3. Development of both groups from pre-test to post-test in turn length.

Figure 4. Development of both groups from pre-test to post-test in one-word turns.
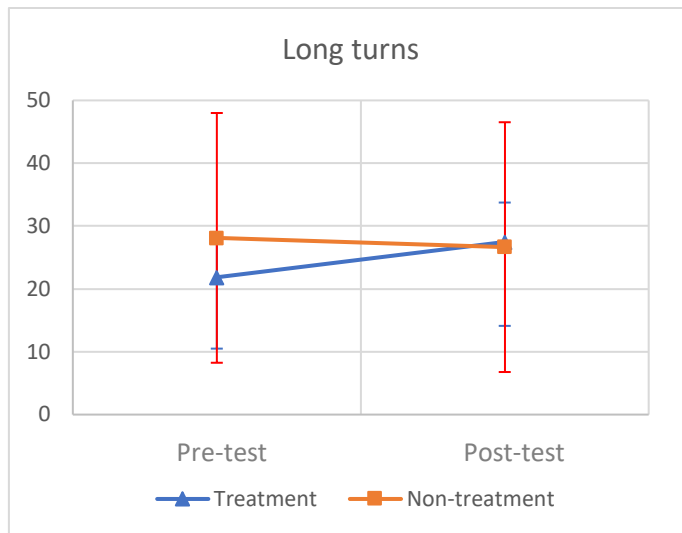
Figure 5. Development of both groups from pre-test to post-test in long turns equal or longer than 10 words.

While intergroup comparisons of standalone results at post-test yielded no differences, intragroup statistical comparisons specifically analysing the pre-to-post test progress in each of the groups did, particularly in the treatment group. As shown in Table 3, paired t-tests comparing the results of the non-treatment group from the pre-test and post-test revealed no significant differences in speech rate ($t_{(5)}$ =-2.39, p>0.05), L1 words ($t_{(5)}$ =0.94, p>0.05), length of turns ($t_{(5)}$ =-1.56, p>0.05), single-word turns ($t_{(5)}$ =0.2, p>0.05), or long turns ($t_{(5)}$ =0.22, p>0.05). Conversely, intragroup comparisons of the results of the treatment group from the pre-test and post-test yielded a highly significant difference in speech rate ($t_{(9)}$ =-5.14, p<0.001), a significant difference in L1 words ($t_{(9)}$ =2.73, p<0.05), and another very significant difference in single-word turns produced ($t_{(9)}$ =3.43, p<0.01). Even though no significant difference was identified in turn length ($t_{(9)}$ =-2.02, p>0.05) and long turns ($t_{(9)}$ =-1.95, p>0.05), a trend towards significance can be observed in both measures (p<0.1).

Intergroup comparisons of the gains presented in each of the groups showed significant differences in speech rate ($t_{(16)}$ =-2.29, p<0.05) and single-word turns produced ($t_{(16)}$ =2.2, p<0.05) but no significant differences in L1 words ($t_{(16)}$ =0.75,

p>0.05), turn length (t $_{(16)}$ =-0.32, p>0.05) or long turns (t $_{(16)}$ =0.98, p>0.05), as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 Gains from both groups from pre-test to post-test as well as intragroup and intergroup comparisons of those gains.

GAINS	Non-treatment Group *n= 6*		Paired t-test		Treatment Group *n= 10*		Paired t-test		Independent two sample t-test	
Measures	Mean	SD	t	p	Mean	SD	t	p	t	p
Speech rate (FL words/min.)	**7.23**	7.4	-2.39	0.06201	**17.70**	10.89	-5.14	0.0006***	-2.29	0.0386*
L1-words/total words	**-3.14**	8.1	0.94	0.3877	**-6.18**	7.2	2.73	0.02325*	0.75	0. 4679
Turn length (words/turn)	**0.84**	1.3	-1.56	0.1796	**1.07**	1.7	-2.02	0.07401	-0.32	0.7531
Single-word turns/tot. turns	**-0.73**	8.9	0.2	0.8486	**-11.72**	10.8	3.43	0.007452**	2.2	0.048*
Long turns (10+ words)/per tot. turns	**-1.47**	16.3	0.22	0.8343	**5.62**	9.1	-1.95	0.08294	0.98	0.3618

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* Significant at the p<0.05 level ** Significant at the p<0.01 level *** Significant at the p<0.001 level

6. Discussion

The first research question guiding this study sought to examine whether inclusion of focus on form in CLIL lessons would have any effects on the learners' oral FL fluency. Intergroup and intragroup analyses of the groups' progress revealed important differences in the development of their oral fluency after the treatment period. Whereas the treatment group displayed very significant improvements in speech rate and a significantly lower reliance on the L1, the non-treatment group did not reach significance in any of the fluency measures. Statistical between-group comparisons of the gains attained in each of the groups showed how the treatment group's development in speech rate was significantly larger than that present in the non-treatment group.

The results from the treatment group as regards fluency could well be attributed to the presence of focus on form in the activities and materials in the CLIL lessons during the treatment period. All throughout the intervention, language was systematically

planned and ample opportunities for language development were offered at the same time that the content was learnt. Following also De Graaff et al.'s (2007) indicators and Meyer's (2010) principles for effective content and language integration, activities that encourage not only meaning processing but also form processing were provided. Likewise, output was encouraged with activities that allowed learners to actively engage with the language and reflect on its use (Swain & Lapkin 1995; 2003). Pushed output may have caused learners to notice important gaps in their language systems and progressively adjust them through productive practice. The inclusion of different formats of interaction during the treatment period made students feel more confident when using the foreign language in meaningful conversational exchanges allowing them not to pause and hesitate as much. This would be in line with Dalton-Puffer's (2008) observations about how CLIL learners, being afforded with enough interactive space, could show greater fluency, risk-taking attitudes, and creativity when using the FL. Linguistic support, such as examples and sentence frames, was offered during the treatment activities so learners were prompted to notice and become aware of language forms and reuse them to interact more fluently in the task as well. This language support provided them with tools to reduce communication breakdowns and avoid turning to their L1 in case they occurred. This goes in accordance with research indicating the important role of noticing in order to turn input into intake (Basterrechea & García Mayo 2013; Schmidt; 1990; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; 2003).

The second research question inquired about the effects of focus on form on the learners' FL complexity. Regarding mean turn length, intragroup analyses of the results revealed no significant improvements in either of the groups. No significant differences were revealed either in intergroup comparisons of the gains obtained by both groups. In this sense, both displayed similar improvements of around one word in mean turn length

from pre-test to post-test. This more moderate development in the treatment group could be due to the fact that the nature of the task tended to elicit a rather homogeneous length of turns. Generally, students described one element or idea reflected in a picture and waited for confirmation from their classmate (e.g. *'In my picture there is a boy eating'* or *'I can see two boys playing basketball'*). In some cases, two or three elements were coordinated and the most proficient participants could even exhibit some subordination. Nevertheless, overall, the length of turns was given mostly by simple units that tended to lie between five and nine words. To show greater developments in complexity maybe a different type of task and longer treatment periods could be needed where learners are given time to increase the complexity of their contributions fitting more abundant instances of coordination and subordination.

When single-word turns were analysed separately, nonetheless, significant improvements were detected in the progress of the treatment group. The non-treatment group, on the other hand, remained quite stable on their production of minimal contributions. When pre-to-post test gains between groups were compared, a significant difference was observed in favour of the treatment group. The general abundant production of this sort of turn is believed to be given by not only the interactional speech mode which could have favoured the use of shorter and elliptical contributions (Foster, Tonkin & Wigglesworth, 2000), but also to the low proficiency of some of the participants in the study. In this vein, those learners who did not feel as confident or able to produce the FL showed a tendency to participate in the interaction with a heavy reliance on minimal contributions offered in response to their partner's questions or descriptions. A decrease in this type of response could be a reflection of those middle-to-low proficiency learners feeling confident enough to take more risks and participate more actively in the task (Dalton-Puffer, 2008). That confidence, once again, could have

come from an appropriate integration of language and content in their CLIL classes which may have provided them with some tools when using the language communicatively.

Long turns with a set threshold of ten words or more were also examined. The treatment group started producing fewer long contributions but ended up surpassing their non-treatment peers in mean quantity of long turns produced. However, only a trend was detected in their progress and no significant differences in gains resulted from the statistical tests. In alignment with the assertions that CLIL benefits are usually less noticeable in high-achievers (Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Pladevall-Ballester, 2016), the results in long turns could be explained by the fact that participants with higher proficiencies may have exhibited less noticeable improvements. In other words, those participants who were able to produce longer turns in the pre-test, remained being able to exhibit similar results in the post-test without much variance. In contrast, changes were easier to detect in mid-to-low proficiency participants who, as already shown, were able to rely less in their minimal contributions and produced slightly longer turns. Once again, the fact that the nature of the task did not favour the production of very long turns most probably made changes in this regard even more difficult to detect. Thereby, as in turn length, significant improvements in longer turns would probably need more continued treatment periods and maybe more spontaneous tasks.

The outcomes in this study may sound obvious since the treatment group was provided with more opportunities to meaningfully and functionally use the language and, hence, exhibited significantly larger within-group improvements in this regard. They participated in activities with different interactional modes, they were provided with language support such as examples or formulaic expressions that could aid functional communication, they received constant feedback and were prompted to

reflect on the ways they could use the FL in different interactive formats. It could be considered unsurprising that they were able to show a larger linguistic development in interactional exchanges in the post-test. If attention is drawn towards the non-treatment group, their moderate results indicate that CLIL teaching requires much more than simply changing the language of instruction (Coyle et al., 2010; Coyle, 2015; De Graaff et al., 2007; Marsch, Ennser, & Sygmund, 1999). Implementing a subject in a foreign language does not automatically guarantee that it will provide ample opportunities to use the foreign language in a meaningful way. CLIL lessons, and in particular in contexts of minimal exposure, may not be as successful if language learning is left unattended and assumed to take place implicitly. The fact that the non-treatment group was receiving CLIL lessons in a very visual, less linguistically charged subject as ICT may have undermined their progress even more. In a subject of this kind and with a clear lack of focus on form, the participants in the non-treatment group were probably not exposed to the necessary amount of cognitively challenging input which would have favoured implicit learning (Pladevall-Ballester, 2016; DeKeyser, 2002, 2007). The results obtained in this study are in line with some of the expressed concerns about the need to include focus on form in CLIL instruction (Dalton-Puffer, 2008; Martínez Adrián & Gutiérrez Mangado, 2015; Llinares et al., 2012; Lyster, 2007). They confirm the predictions that a balanced integration with carefully planned language objectives and ample opportunities for language development could be of special relevance in order to foster some of the benefits claimed by this type of instruction.

A number of limitations should be acknowledged. A longer and more intensive treatment period could have revealed even more differences in gains between groups and added solidity to some of the claims. The number of participants was also limited, as some of the families did not authorize their children's participation and same year

classes include a maximum of twenty-five students. Larger samples would have provided more validity to the results. Yet limiting the number of participants to two groups of fifth-graders allowed us to use same-age participants from the same school and the same teacher in the two teaching scenarios. The design of the task might have also constituted a limitation, as it may not have elicited the kind of language that was expected and was not directly related to the content of the sessions.

7. Conclusions

The data reported here could serve as evidence that, despite the growing popularity of CLIL and the many benefits attributed to it, this educational approach should not be overestimated. Simply using a different language to teach the content of a subject may not automatically result in a language-rich, meaningful, and communicative environment. In content-driven environments, linguistic outcomes would directly depend on how learners engage with the language during lessons. If a balanced focus on form approach as the one proposed in this paper is not systematically used, enough exposure to comprehensible input and enough opportunities for language use may not be provided. This might result in learners not fully benefitting from the linguistic assets CLIL instruction allegedly offers.

The noticeable intergroup and intragroup differences in terms of pre-to-post test gains detected in this study are believed to be a consequence of the absence of language planning and language using in the non-treatment group. Since focus on form was still absent in their lessons, they were not provided with as many opportunities to meaningfully use the FL, which would explain their less noticeable improvements when compared to the treatment group. If the rationale behind the implementation of CLIL programmes is that students learn content at the same time as language, then cognitive

and linguistic demands should be properly balanced. This is of special relevance in young learners since, on their own, they may not be able to cope with the linguistic demands of learning content in a foreign language. In this sense, language should be made accessible for low proficiency learners with a systematic use of diverse scaffolding strategies, providing linguistic support when necessary, and having them frequently reflect on the ways they could successfully convey meaning and overcome the very frequent communication problems they may encounter.

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