

ENCOUNTERING ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY OF THREE SWEDISH STUDENTS IN AN ENGLISH-MEDIUM UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRAMME

ACERCÁNDOSE AL INGLÉS: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE TRES ESTUDIANTES SUECOS EN UN PROGRAMA DE ENSEÑANZA EN INGLÉS EN LA ESCUELA SECUNDARIA

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This paper presents a recent case study that addresses one aspect of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in the Swedish context, namely how much English the students in an English-medium CLIL programme in an upper secondary school encounter throughout the day. It has been indicated in Swedish research that students in CLIL programmes are not exposed to as much English as expected (Lim Falk, 2008) and that students may experience more English outside of the classroom during their extramural activities than they do in school, with this factor affecting their English proficiency more than their time spent in a CLIL school (Sylvén, 2004, 2011). Thus, the main research question for this study is as follows: How do students in a Swedish CLIL class encounter English throughout a school day? Encountering English may include listening to teachers or peers, speaking to teachers or peers, reading subject material in English, or writing notes or assignments in English. One focus is on the activities they conduct in English, asking when and why they produce English in

writing or speaking, as well as who is speaking English to and with the students. Another focus is on how English is afforded in the CLIL classroom.

This study is ethnographical in orientation and strives to allow for a deep immersion in the culture of the Swedish CLIL school. The object of this study is a case study, which in qualitative research allows for a focus on ‘rich, real, and uniquely human material’ (Heigham & Croker, 2009:67). Case study offers an emic perspective, afforded through a close observation and shadowing of a single individual in the culture being studied. While case study is usually limited by certain boundaries and often focuses on only one participant or event, this case study involves three parts, as three individual learners have been observed on three different full school days, making it a collective or multiple case study. Both what is common and what is individually specific in the school day of the three students are of interest. A socio-cultural perspective provides the theoretical framework, as this approach focuses on how actions are situated in a social context. Learning is grounded in social interaction, as both learning and development occur in and through participation in social practices (Säljö, 2000: 236). Although the case study is primarily descriptive, this socio-cultural theoretical approach facilitates the investigation of the use of language not only by each individual informant but also of how their interaction with other participants in their particular class context and culture unfolds.

This study was conducted in early 2012, during a period of three consecutive school days, at a Swedish upper secondary school (ages 15-19). This school, located in a mid-sized Swedish city, has approximately 1900 students, divided into programme classes of approximately 20 students each. The participants of this study all have Swedish as their mother tongue and are all attending a natural sciences programme that prepares them for higher education, with the majority of lessons taught in English. One student from each of three class years (Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3) participated.

The material collected during each day included audio-recorded speech, field notes, and documents (such as written lesson material), and photographs. The methods used for data collection included participant observation, on-going open interviews, and audio recordings using a small hand-held mp3 player. Language usage was noted, indicating which language was being used (i.e. Swedish or English), which activity was being conducted (during the lessons and in between lessons), which modality was being

used (reading, writing, listening, speaking), and who the actors were during the specific activity. The physical environment was also noted. This triangulation affords a deeper understanding of the details recorded throughout each informant's school day.

The data extracted from the material has been analysed for thematic patterns of language usage, allowing for the development of theories about CLIL students' encounters with the English language during a typical school day. These patterns have been considered in light of the context of both this particular school and of CLIL schools in general in Sweden, as indicated by previous research. Several themes across the data of the three participants have been identified, including the following:

- a. The students generally take their language cues from the teachers and do not usually switch languages unless the teacher does.
- b. Swedish is used nearly exclusively for all social interaction in and out of the classroom, except for the cases listed below.
- c. In Swedish conversations, English is used mainly in these instances: Quoting something that is usually familiar to the other speakers (e.g. from a film or video game); using prefabricated expressions or idioms; or playing with words.
- d. All three students mention that code-switching with classmates – but not others outside of the class, such as family members – is acceptable and common.
- e. None of the three students feel that the English-medium instruction is a hinder to their studies. All three students comment on how useful it is to have textbooks in both English and Swedish for most subjects, explaining that it is necessary to be able to know the subject-specific terms in both languages.

In line with previous research, the students do indeed encounter less English than might be expected. However, the use of Swedish is noted to fulfil specific academic or social functions and is not usually random but instead tends to be strategic. The final conclusions from this case study will be presented at the TRICLIL 2012 Conference and will be illustrated with transcriptions from the lessons and student interviews as well as with photographs of the lesson material and learning environment.

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