



**Jornades de Foment de la Investigació**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNING IN  
NORTHERN AND  
SOUTHERN EUROPE:  
SPAIN AND THE  
NETHERLANDS**

**Autor**

Vicente BELTRAN-PALANQUES.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of English and the recognition of minority languages in certain areas have promoted the rise of multilingual communities. This particular phenomenon has modified to some extent the linguistic picture of the European context in which certain communities have accepted the language diversity that might characterised their territories. In addition to this, English has become a lingua franca or language for communication in the vast majority of European contexts and consequently it has appeared a growing interest for the learning of English as a vehicle for communication across culture. With this respect, considering the bilingual nature of certain European contexts, English has become a third language (Cenoz, et al., 2001; Safont, 2005). The use of English as a third language (L3) and the necessity of learning this given language in order to be able to communicate across cultures have also modified the treatment of English in the educational system. Furthermore, certain socio-demographic changes in Europe such as migratory movements have also shaped somehow the linguistic reality of most European contexts. As a result, multilingualism in Europe appears to be influenced by the spread of English as a lingua franca, the changes in the educational system, the recognition of minority languages as well as by speakers' linguistic background. In short, the result of this linguistic change seems to alter the educational systems (Wei & Moyer, 2008) as well as language users' way of looking at the world. With this respect, it seems that schools, in bilingual areas, could go beyond bilingualism in order to offer a trilingual education (Cenoz & Gorter, 2005). The introduction of English as an L3 might affect the conceptualisation of that particular language as well as its application in the educational context. English speakers' competence, however, is rather questioned since traditionally, it is believed that Northern European countries show a higher proficiency level of English than those in Southern contexts. Moreover, in some settings, the introduction of English is regarded as a language course while in other this language is employed as a language of instruction in which a trilingual education may be at work. This particular aspect might also have an influence on English speakers' use and competence.

Bearing in mind the previous assumptions, the purpose of the present paper is that of presenting a state-of-the-art of the role that English play in certain bilingual in which special emphasis is given to language use and learning in the educational realm. In order to reach to that end, two European bilingual communities have been selected, more specifically those of the Valencian Community (Spain) and in the Friesland Province (The Netherlands).

## 2. SOME SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS

### 2.1. Sociolinguistic features

The sociolinguistic context might influence on the process of learning an L3 (Cenoz, et al., 2001). Ytsma (2001: 13) proposes a general typology (Table 1) which reflects some of the major patterns that might be found in trilingual education.

<p><b>Linguistic context</b></p> <p>Trilingual area</p> <p>Bilingual area</p> <p>Monolingual area</p>
<p><b>Linguistic distance</b></p> <p>Three related languages</p> <p>One non-related language</p> <p>Three non-related languages</p>
<p><b>Programme design</b></p> <p>Simultaneous</p> <p>Consecutive</p>

Table 1. Criteria used by Ytsma (2001:13) to describe trilingual schooling.

First, the linguistic context refers to the place the education takes place. According to the previous distinction, it is possible to find places in which three languages (i.e. L1, L2 and L3) are spoken in an area; in other contexts, however, it might be found the use of an L1 and an L2 plus a foreign language (e.g. L3); and finally other contexts might show the use of an L1 plus foreign language. For example, Luxembourg is a trilingual community in which Luxembourgish, German and French are spoken. Other examples are found either in the Friesland Province or in the Valencian Community which are bilingual areas including a third language (i.e. English). Finally, an example of a monolingual could be the central area of Spain in which officially only Spanish is spoken and English is seen as the foreign language. The second aspect pointed out by Ytsma (2001) is that of the linguistic distance is related to the degree of linguistic interrelatedness among the three different languages involved. Linguistic differences between languages which come from the same language family should be smaller than the distance between languages from distinct branches. Finally, the third criterion is the programme design which is associated to the didactic organization of the teaching programme (i.e. simultaneous approach and consecutive model.). With this respect, Ytsma (2001) adds that the majority of trilingual primary schools consider the consecutive model in which languages are introduced in succession.

## 2.2. Bilingual areas

### 2.2.1. Valencian Community

Yet in this particular study our focus is on the Valencian Community (Figure 1), it is relevant to state the three areas in which Catalan is spoken in Spain, namely, Balearic Islands, Catalonia and the Valencian Community. The Valencian Community is placed at the Eastern part of the country and the main provinces are those of Alacant, Castelló and Valencia. According to the Institut Valencià d'Estadística (2009), the population of the Valencian Community is the 5.029.601. In this particular context, two different languages coexists namely those of Spanish which has the status of majority language and Catalan which has the status of a minority language. The official recognition of Catalan happens, as well as other languages in the Spanish context such as Basque and Galician, with the Spanish Constitution in 1978. With this respect, the Valencian Community achieves autonomy from the central government in 1982 (Estatut d'Autonomia, 1982), currently, the Estatut d'Autonomia de la Comunitat Valenciana 2006, and by the Llei d'ús i ensenyament del Valencià (1983), Catalan language was part of the educational curriculum.



Figure 1 Catalan spoken area.

1 Taken from: <http://www.eurominority.eu/version/eng/maps-other.asp>

In the Valencian Community both languages, Catalan and Spanish, share the same official status in terms of professional, administrative, legal and educational aspects. However, despite the fact that it seems that many people use both languages for different purposes, Spanish seems to be dominant in the vast majority of contexts (Martínez, 2002).

### 2.2.2. Friesland Province

The Friesland Province (Figure 2) is one of the 12 provinces in The Netherlands which is located in the North-western part of the country. The capital of the region is Leeuwarden (Ljouwert) which has total of 91,000 inhabitants. In this context, two languages coexist namely Dutch as a majority language and Frisian as a minority. There are three different varieties of Frisian language: West Frisian (Friesland Province), Saterland Frisian and North Frisian (both in Germany). Basically, Frisian is spoken in the province of Friesland Province and in a few border villages like the province of Groningen. The recognition of this particular minority language in the area of the Friesland Province occurs in 1970. However, the use of this minority language is different depending on the social domain. Hence, in the domains of family, work and village community the Frisian language presents a good position, whilst, Dutch prevails over in terms of education, media, public administration and law (Cenoz, & Gorter, 2006). In short, Frisian can be use at any level, that is, in circumstances such as traditions, attitudes or rules of politeness, however, in specific domains Dutch is mainly used (Gorter, 2005).



Figure 2 Friesland Province.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Taken from: <http://www.eurominority.eu/version/eng/maps-other.asp>

English, however, seems to grasp an important position in some of the domains of Dutch and Frisian society. The foreign language brings about an active role in domains such as media and business. People are exposed to English everyday not only because of media, business, etc but also because of the presence of English on billboards, names of bars, restaurants etc, which in fact affect on the linguistic landscape (Gorter, 2005).

## **2.3. Educational system**

### **2.3.1. The Valencian Context**

Bilingual education is a common practice in the Valencian Community since the regulation of the *Estatut d'Autonomia* (1982). We might find students with different linguistic backgrounds; more specifically bilinguals with Spanish as L1 and Catalan as L2, bilinguals with Catalan as L1 and Spanish as L2, or monolinguals. There are specific educational programmes which aim to integrate the two official languages as well as English as an L3. With this respect, the different programmes that might be found in the Valencian Community are those of (1) PIP (*Programa d'Incorporació Progressiva* or Progressive Incorporation Programme); (2) PEV (*Programa d'Ensenyament en Valencià* or Valencian Training Programme); and (3) PIL (*Programa d'Immersion Lingüística* or Linguistic Immersion Programme). The first programme focuses on Catalan and Spanish as languages of instruction, the second is concerned with students with Catalan as mother tongue, and the third is concentrated on students as Spanish as mother tongue. PIB and PIL might be understood as Spanish-oriented whereas PEV Catalan-oriented.

English language is introduced in the primary education as a language to be learnt progressively taking into account aspects regarding students maturing process. The school setting appears to be the major context in which students might be exposed to foreign language input since the out-school-exposition is still rather limited. The aim at that particular level is to foster basic communicative competence which let students understand simple utterances. English language is seen as a foreign language that is part of the educational curriculum rather than a language that is employed as a language for instruction. According to the classification made by Ytsma (2001), the Valencian Community is a bilingual area in which the two official languages are Romanic (Catalan & Spanish) and, English is taught consecutively, that is, once the L1 and the L2 have been acquired.

### **2.3.2. The Frisian Context**

The purpose of this section is to provide a review of a particular educational project that is implemented in some areas of the Friesland Province, more specifically that of *Trilingual Primary Education*. The experiment is developed during the 1997-1998 school year by the Fryske Akademy together

with the Frisian department of the provincial centre for education advice. According to the typology of trilingual education, this is a bilingual region where the three languages involved belong to Germanic languages: Frisian, Dutch and English (Ytsma, 2001). Moreover, the author indicates that the Trilingual Schools Project supports also the minority language as it is used as a school subject and as a medium of instruction. The project included seven (out of 500) primary schools of Friesland Province, including the following small and rural villages: Brantgum, Holwert, Boksum De Hommerts, It Heidenskip, Earnewâld and Nes, in which about 400 students participated.

The point of departure for the trilingual education is to take the official core objectives set for the three languages. The core objectives in the minority and national languages are language competence, whereas in the foreign language the aim is that of attaining competence in terms of understanding, speaking and reading. The purpose is to make students become familiar with the English language from an early age. Ytsma (2000) describes that student should be able to understand and interact in daily conversations. The three languages are taken as languages of instruction. In grade 6 as school subject (age 9) and as language of instruction at grade 7 (age 10).

The above mentioned experiment starts in 1997, and it last until the course 2005 and 2006. According to the Mercator, in the years 2005 and 2006 there are eight schools which have established trilingualism. In addition, it is predicted that in 2012 it could be about 50 schools recognising that particular educational system. Some of the drawbacks that might be found are related to the lack of teaching materials as well as the teachers' English proficiency (Ytsma, 2002).

### 3. FINAL REMARKS

In the section it is attempt to provide a brief summary of the main differences between the two communities (Table 2). Although the two areas aim at fostering English language, the educational programme that is implemented in the Friesland Province might be understood as more specific since English is not only introduced as a language course but also as a language of instruction. In the Valencian Community English is introduced as part of the curriculum not as a language of instruction in which the onset of learning is that of age 6. In the Friesland Province, however, the onset of learning English as a language course would be at the age of 9 and later (age 10) English is introduced as a language of instruction. The main objectives of both areas seem to be similar since communicative competence is intended to be achieved. In addition to this, it is remarkable to state that the status is not the same in the north than in the south since language use in those different contexts might differ. The exposure of English in both areas is dissimilar since in the Friesland Province the foreign language seems to be shown more overtly because of the linguistic landscape (Gorter, 2005). In the Valencia Community that particular expose would be limited to the school setting, whereas in the Friesland Province does exist other sources of input such as media or advertisements which are

part of the linguistic landscape (Gorter, 2005). Taking into account teacher's skills, Martínez (2002) may consider that the English proficiency in the Valencian Community should be improved in order to use English as the language of instruction. In the Friesland Province, however, teachers that take part in the *Trilingual Primary Education* should also improve certain abilities in order to better use English as a language for instruction (Ytsma, 2002).

<b>Valencia Community</b>	<b>Friesland Province</b>
Bilingual Education	Trilingual Education
English as a Foreign language	English as a language of instruction
Teachers' skills should be improved	Teachers' skills should be improved
Onset of learning: Age 6 language course	Onset of learning Age 9 language course Age 10 language of instruction
Communicative competence	Competence in reading, speaking and listening
Exposure: mainly school setting.	Exposure: school setting, media, business, advertisements, etc.

Table 2 Comparison between the Valencian Community and the Friesland Province considering the educational programmes.

For further research, bearing the aspects commented in mind, it would be interesting to examine the linguistic reality in both contexts (e.g. linguistic landscape), language use in media (e.g. newspapers, TV), speakers' language usage and competence as well as the type of exposition to which learners can be exposed to in and out school contexts.



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