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Małgorzata Byca

Institute of Socio-Economic Geography
and Spatial Management
Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies
University of Warsaw
mbyca@wp.pl

**BILINGUAL GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION MODELS
THROUGH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
IN POLISH SCHOOLS**

Abstract: The history of bilingual education in Poland has its beginning in 1991, when first the French language, and later German, English and Spanish were introduced at schools at secondary level. Geography is one of the most popular subjects taught in bilingual system. In Polish schools we can observe different approaches towards bilingual education at secondary level. They are usually connected with several criteria, according to which schools in Poland organize bilingual classes. One of the most common criteria of organizing this kind of teaching is the syllabus (Polish or international) and the proportion of native and foreign languages used during lessons (usually given in percentages). Bilingual education nowadays is without doubt one of the attempts to adjust curricula to contemporary educational standards existing in Europe. A justification for encouraging bilingual approach in teaching is connected with the European Union directive, according to which all secondary school graduates should speak two foreign languages fluently. Such an idea of contemporary bilingual education is formulated in CLIL Programme (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*), which promotes full integration of the geography content and language learning. This is based on an assumption that during bilingual geography lessons one of the teaching goals is to practice and develop language skills, which geography teachers seem to forget. This article is an attempt to classify Polish bilingual geography education models and indicate their weaknesses and strengths.

Key words: bilingual education, bilingual educational models, CLIL

INTRODUCTION

Bilingual education has become one of the endeavours to adapt educational systems to contemporary requirements¹. But we cannot forget that the ideas of bilingual education were popularized much earlier. In Europe, Latin was the first language of education. People living on borders were usually bilingual. Teaching minorities, in any case, is also one of the aspects of this kind of education. After World War II there were two main approaches towards bilingual education. On the German-French border, in those days, bilingual education was a way of promoting tolerance and intercultural education. At the same time, in Canada in the 1960s, the concept of immersion was developed, in which language teaching was content related. Both approaches had different organization and educational goals. Those became then the foundation of the first division into “European” and “American” models of bilingual education.

“EUROPEAN” AND “AMERICAN” MODELS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

“European” model of bilingual education, created in Germany, is based on an assumption that educational goals are as important as teaching proper behavioural patterns in the whole educational process. This aspect has become a very important part of intercultural education at German-French border since the early 1950s. In this model, only some selected school courses were conducted bilingually, and both the mother tongue and a foreign language were in use during one lesson. Among the most common school subjects which were taught bilingually we may find history, geography and so called artistic courses, such as music or art. All of those were perceived as the foundation for intercultural education.

On the other hand, “American” model of bilingual education focuses rather on language skills development, as according to its principles at least 50% of all class hours should be conducted in the second (foreign) language. Such an approach results from one of the most important goals in this model which is assimilation of ethnic minorities.

A clear interest in introducing all forms of bilingual education has been noticed in the countries of the European Union since the 1990s. In 1994 the methodological foundation was formulated, which makes it possible to describe the practice of CLIL Programme (Content and Language Integrated Learning).

¹ Edukacja w Europie: różne systemy kształcenia i szkolenia – wspólne cele do roku 2010, (2003) Foundation of the Development of the Education System, Warsaw

A foreign language is used here to teach other school subjects than languages. System CLIL combines some of the achievements of “European” and “American” bilingual education models.

Further investigation is focused on answering the question which model of bilingual education is implemented in Polish schools at secondary level. At the beginning of the investigation we have to emphasise that different goals and organization styles are not the only criteria according to which Polish models of teaching bilingual geography can be classified. Such classification can be also based on the syllabus, according to which the subject is taught and proportion of the mother tongue (L1) and the foreign language (L2) used during a bilingual lesson (fig.1). Further analysis brings additional question whether, and to what extent, during bilingual geography lessons we may experience other methods, forms and techniques of teaching which are at the same time different from those traditionally used.

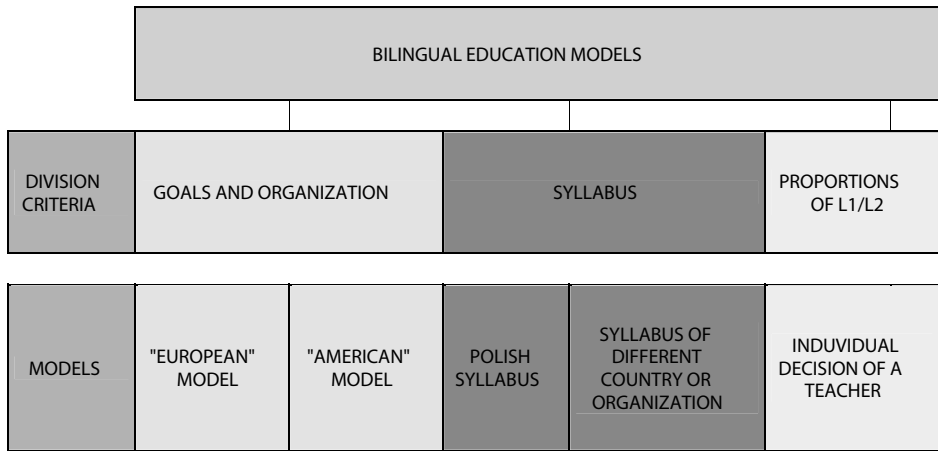


Fig. 1. The criteria for classifying the bilingual education models

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

In order to obtain qualitative and quantitative data surveys and interviews were conducted among a selected (target) group of teachers. Geography teachers who teach bilingually participated in workshops conducted by the Association of Polish Educators in Toruń (Poland) in 2009 and 2010. For the purpose of the investigation 26 questionnaires were collected. The small number of surveys is a result of continued low number of schools offering bilingual education (see Section 5).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCHED GROUP OF TEACHERS

Bilingual geography teachers through the English language usually have a Master's degree in geography (fig. 2). Much lower number has a Bachelor's Degree. In the group of "others" are teachers who are proficient in the foreign language and have additionally, for example, a Ph.D. in geography, or other related degrees, such as tourism and recreation. There are also those who completed appropriate teaching courses, and a few cases of teachers with a postgraduate diploma in geography.

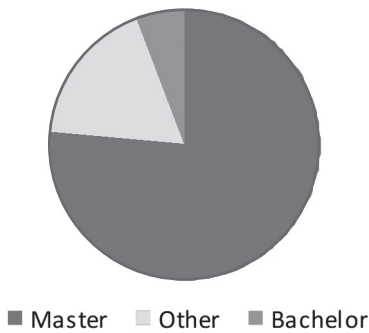


Fig. 2. Bilingual geography teachers' qualifications

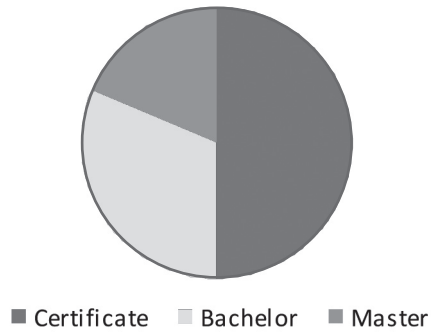


Fig. 3. Language skills of bilingual geography teachers

FCE, CAE, TOEFL are the most common certificates confirming teachers' language proficiency in English. According to Polish Education Law such certificates are the minimum requirement to teach in English. A large proportion of teachers also have a Bachelor's Degree in English, followed by Master's Degree (fig. 3).

The degree of professional experience of the described group of teachers is variegated (fig. 4), with a slight dominance of contract teachers, and further certified teachers². The age structure chart overtly shows the domination of teachers at the age of 25–35 years (fig. 5).

² Teachers in Poland are promoted according to five-stage-degree classification. At the entry level is the "trainee," who teaches for one or two years. Success at this level accompanied by an interview in front of a committee (consisting of the trainee's mentor, school's director, faculty chair of the subject, and a trade union representative selected by the trainee) elevates the trainee to the level of "contract teacher." A teacher has to work for at least three years to be able to sit an examination which may raise him or her to the status of a "nominated teacher." To become a "certified teacher," the next three successful years must be completed at this level, including an interview at the end of this period in front of a committee consisting of the school's director or assistant director, three experts from the Ministry of Education, and a trade union

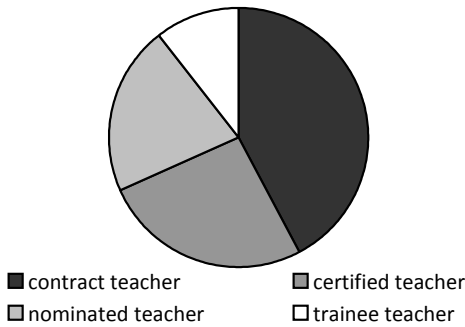


Fig. 4. Qualifications of bilingual geography teachers according to degree

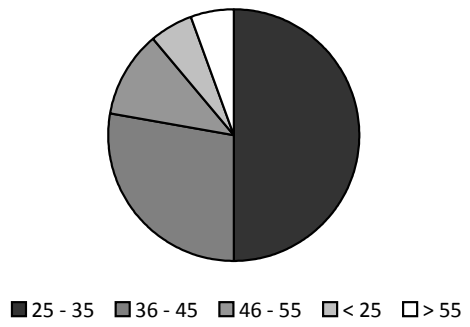


Fig. 5. Age structure of bilingual geography teachers according to age groups

TEACHING BILINGUAL GEOGRAPHY AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE LINGUISTIC PART

There are different approaches to the Polish – English geography bilingual teaching in Polish secondary schools. The Act of 7 September, 1991 on the Education System, Article 3, states that bilingual classes are such in which teaching ought to be conducted in two languages, Polish and a modern foreign language, the latter of which is the second language taught. On the other hand, the same document defines international classes, in which teaching is conducted in accordance with the curriculum established by a foreign educational institution. Thus, we can frequently observe mistakes in nomenclature, since international classes are often not taught bilingually, because the implemented curriculum of another country should be rather taught “monolingually”, in a language other than Polish.

Another important document that defines the organization of bilingual classes, and the exact proportions of the mother tongue and foreign languages to be used, is the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education and Sport of 12 February, 2002 on curriculum framework for public schools. In § 5, pt. 1 we read, “The proportion of the Polish language and a foreign language should be settled by the teacher who teaches a given subject bilingually, and that should be in line with the level of students’ skills in the foreign language.” The regulation will therefore oblige the school to divide the subject hours into those conducted in Polish and those in a foreign language. The

representative. The fourth level, is where most careers end. Some, however, manage to reach the fifth level, which is an honorary, “professor of education.” (<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1217/Poland-TEACHING-PROFESSION.html>)

document does not provide any clear information about the proportion of L1 and L2 languages usage during the same lesson of a given subject. Such approach towards bilingual education is typical of France, where the main principle is “one language – one teacher”. Hence, also in Poland, geography is not always taught bilingually during one lesson. Schools often divide subject hours into those conducted in the Polish language and additional lessons in English. Nevertheless, in some cases secondary schools with bilingual classes also offer bilingual geography teaching in a single lesson, on the basis of the “American” model, in which one of the essential requirements is a bilingual teacher who conducts the particular lesson. Figure 6 illustrates subjective opinions on the proportions of English usage during a bilingual geography lesson. The tested group of geography teachers declared that the foreign language is used for at least half of a lesson time (more than 60% of respondents). On the other hand, a wide range of answers indicates that we cannot identify a single dominant organization model, and about 25% of teachers use a foreign language only occasionally (less than 30% of the lesson time).

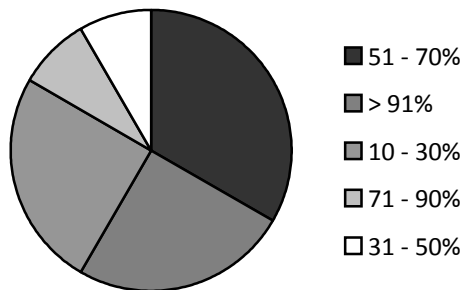


Fig. 6. Proportions of English usage during bilingual geography lessons according to subject teachers

But we should not forget that one of important principles of bilingual education is to teach through a foreign language rather than in that language. Therefore, it should not be surprising that despite the nearly 20-year experience of teaching geography in a bilingual system in Poland, its organization takes many forms. At this point another question appears: can we still call bilingual education a system in which only single lessons are conducted in English, or in which teachers occasionally give their students a vocabulary list in that language? Bilingual education proponents say unequivocally, yes. It is better in fact, they believe, to know even a few phrases in a foreign language than all of them only in the mother tongue (Gozdawa-Gołębiowska, Marsh, Zajac 2008).

BILINGUAL GEOGRAPHY TEACHING AND NUMBER OF LESSONS

According to the Association of Polish Educators (SOP), in 2009 we had 37 middle secondary schools and 59 high schools where geography was conducted bilingually through English (fig. 7). In 33 high schools lessons were conducted according to the Polish curriculum (bilingual classes), and in 27 – according to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Curriculum (international classes) (fig. 8).

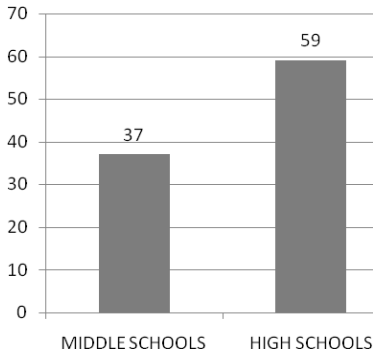


Fig. 7. Secondary schools teaching geography bilingually through English

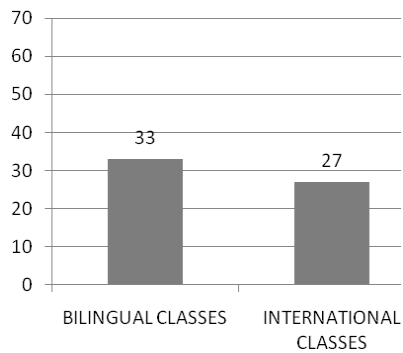


Fig. 8. Bilingual and international classes in Polish high schools

Source of data: Association of Polish Educators (SOP), Toruń, Poland, 2009

Both in middle schools and high schools with bilingual classes we can observe a wide variety of organizational models (Table 1). For example, in 1 High School in Wałbrzych geography is taught 1 hour per week, and according to the teacher, 90% of the teaching is in English. In addition, graduating students attend two extra-curricular lessons conducted in the Polish language, which is probably connected with the final exam conducted in Polish.

Table 1. Numbers of geography lessons taught bilingually in selected secondary schools in Poland, at standard level

School name	1 st class	2 nd class	3 rd class
X High School in Toruń	2b	1b	_____
I High School in Wałbrzych	1b	1b	1b + 2p
III High School in Gdańsk	3b	2b	1b + 1p

Number of hours taught:
 b – bilingually, p – in Polish only

The organization of bilingual teaching of geography through English is often based on so called principal's hours (additional teaching hours which can be timetabled if the school Principal decides so). A teacher from one of Wodzisław Śląski secondary schools describes the organization of his work: "I follow my own modified teaching plan as I have additional lessons as principal's hours during which I can teach bilingually. Together with my bilingual classes I implement the geography curriculum in Polish, and English classes are organised from the principal's hours on an extra-curricular basis". An appropriate organization of bilingual teaching of geography can thus be crucial in overcoming various problems. Lack of geography teachers who use advanced English may be a reason for teaching geography in English as a separate lesson, by an English teacher (which is obviously not the best idea), or by another geography teacher with high language competence.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES IN BILINGUAL GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

Evaluation problem, which often appears in open discussions among bilingual teachers, is sometimes dealt with making a clear division between assessing students' knowledge of geography and their linguistic competence. A geography teacher in Lublin says: "...we have to separate the assessment of geographic knowledge and English fluency and provide a separate evaluation. Besides, my kids at school would not be able to write tests prepared in English. I mainly introduce the vocabulary in the form of single words (e.g. names of rocks) or some short phrases drawn from the text read in the classroom".

Another important issue is whether bilingual teaching of geography will use different methods, forms or techniques of teaching other than those used during traditional geography lessons. Teachers admit that only some teaching techniques may slightly differ, some of those are often derived from the methodology of teaching foreign languages. The list of the most frequently mentioned in the survey includes: working with a text in English and handouts. Teachers often admit that some forms of teaching may have a different relevance during a bilingual lesson, for example work with a written text.

The question whether teaching geography through English truly prepares students for external examinations gave 100% teachers' positive responses. The author, guided by the will to verify this result, asked the same question to students of the International Meridian Middle School No. 51 in Warsaw (36 pupils were asked) (fig. 9). The analysis of students' answers is not that optimistic because it seems that the students are more critical towards this form of teaching.

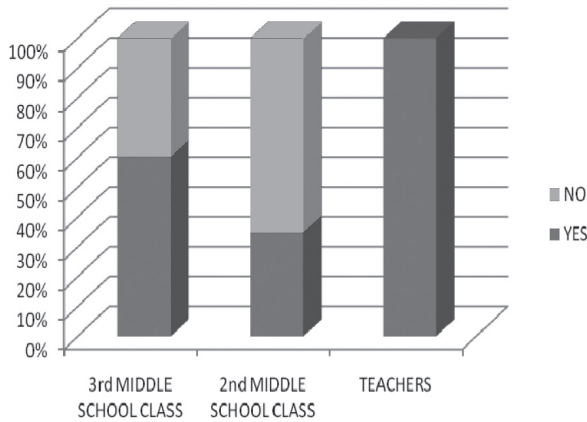


Fig. 9. Students' and teachers' answers to the question: "Does bilingual education in geography truly prepare students for external examinations"

Although the survey on the effectiveness of bilingual education among students was only fragmentary, we can notice a significant contrast between how teachers and students perceive it. Students usually justify their negative assessment of bilingual system by their poor English fluency. In their opinion, bilingual education is focused mostly on teaching the language rather than content knowledge, "... we learn mostly English, and in the final year we write our exams in Polish, so we may have some difficulties". On the other hand, the number of negative opinions about this form of teaching decreases when the third-grade students come into question. That is probably connected with the basic assumption in bilingual education which states that the longer the period of bilingual education, the more positive rating in the eyes of students. Numerous publications discussing the subject matter indicate that the basis for success in bilingual education should be the determination for its continuation through all stages of education. For example, in France, once formed, a bilingual class will be conducted in that system until the end of school education. In other countries (e.g. Germany), not only classes but whole schools are established to teach in a bilingual system. Positive or negative assessment of the various organizational models of bilingual teaching of geography in Poland should be supported by further investigation and the attempt to assess its effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

"Polish" model of teaching geography bilingually through English fits perfectly in the CLIL system, whose main objective is to achieve language profi-

ciency through content teaching. Geography lessons are usually conducted bilingually (it means that both languages are used during one lesson, the only difference being the proportions of the languages in different schools). In some specific cases geography in English may be organised within so called principal's hours. It is then conducted by another teacher who is proficient in English. Interviews with teachers confirmed the author's conjecture that clear linguistic objectives are rarely set in the teaching plans for bilingual geography, thus content knowledge is the priority. Besides, teachers occasionally mention the important role of intercultural education, although bilingual teaching implements, to some extent its assumptions, promoting multilingualism of future European citizens. We can see clearly that the "Polish" model of bilingual teaching of geography through the English language is still in the phase of formulating organizational solutions. The number of schools offering geography courses taught bilingually is dynamically changing. There are also cases that schools abandon this form of teaching (e.g. 40 High School in Warsaw).

Organizational freedom in delivering bilingual education in Germany between 1963 and 1986, had the advantage that it created an opportunity to try different approaches and concepts (Iluk 2000). Similarly, in Poland, the experience should be the basis for the development of future organizational structures and detailed teaching plans (so-called frameworks for bilingual geography teaching plans). This could allow us to standardize bilingual education.

Bilingual classes are undoubtedly a form of promoting and enhancing the attractiveness of educational offer for schools which offer them. One of the strengths of this solution is the development of students' language skills. Most students choose bilingual classes in middle schools as they consider continuing their education in bilingual or international classes in high school, and in the long run, studying abroad.

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