



TRANSITION BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: STATE OF THE ART

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Introduction

The problem of transition between primary and secondary education has been a matter of concern for many years in the educational field. Regarding education in general, plenty of research and literature has been devoted to this issue. Nevertheless, concerning foreign language learning and teaching, research and literature on transition is nearly non-existent. This is the reason why a group of universities and teacher training institutions from different European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) have decided to work together to analyse the problem and try to design materials that can contribute to make transition smoother. The project (Pri-Sec-Co- Primary and Secondary Continuation), although it does not make a direct reference to FL in its acronym, has as its main objectives to exchange experiences, collect models of good practice and design bridging tasks in the field of FL which could facilitate transition between the two educational levels.

The present report, one of the first steps taken in the project, is aimed at describing the state of the art of foreign language teaching and learning in the partner countries involved, with a particular focus on the transition issue between primary and secondary FL education, which, as stated above, is a matter of concern, in different ways and for different reasons, in most European countries. Conducted on a small scale and based also on previous studies and perceptions from researchers, the report shows the different stages of development of foreign language teaching in each country, framing the national contexts and offering different perspectives on key issues such as methodological approaches both in primary and in secondary schools, teacher training for the two levels, exposure time to the target language and expected levels of competences, and different ages in which transition takes place.

The national reports are organised according to three main headings: “Key issues”, “Different perspectives”, and “Needs analysis”, even if undertaking a similar reflection on the issues mentioned above, do not follow a rigid internal structure. They have been kept in the original formats so that they can reflect more directly the local realities researchers are involved in.

The first section, “Key issues”, deals with the state of the art of foreign language teaching in each country. This section undertakes, under the common perspective of transition, topics like FL teaching policies, national curricula, the starting age for learning foreign languages and which languages are taught, different FLT methodologies in primary and secondary education, and FL teacher education.

The second section, “Different perspectives”, analyses briefly the main issues from the point of view of the stakeholders, basing the reflection on data collected within the project activities or in an informal context. The points of view of teachers, pupils, parents and also teacher trainers concerning transition have been mirrored and have provided the basis for the content of the last section.

The last section of each national report, “Needs analysis”, presents matters for discussion and is the basis for the Pri-Sec-Co project’s further development. It provides reflective insight allowing a common ground for discussion as well as for an overview on specific local needs. The diverse contexts imply that the further findings of the project will require flexibility regarding adaptation to different contexts.

It is important to point out that though transition may have a common meaning for most of the countries involved in the project, the way in which it takes place differs substantially from one country to another. For instance, whilst German and Austrian pupils move from primary to secondary education at the age of nine or ten, French, Hungarian, Spanish and Swiss pupils change schools at the age of eleven or twelve, which implies that from a psychological point of view, children are at a different stage of maturity. On the other hand, in Sweden the transition phase is not considered an issue of concern as children can attend the same school from seven until sixteen. Understanding the different ways transition takes place in each country can set the basis for a common definition and can lead to mutual learning.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in Austria

Key issues

In Austria primary school takes four years and it is divided into two stages: level 1 (6 – 8 year-olds) and level 2 (9 – 10 year-olds). In 1983/84 one lesson per week of “English foreign language education” became obligatory at primary school for 9 and 10 year-olds. In 1989 the project “English as a Foreign Language” started at level one (age 6). The experiments had names like “Lollipop, Teddy-bear, Butterfly, Bunny ...”. The concept was to teach English in short units integrated (as in CLIL), which involved exposing pupils to English integrated into other lessons – excluding German – for 5 – 10 minutes a day five times a week. This “integrated language teaching” was left to the teachers’ discretion regarding the lessons where it should occur.

In 2002 English became compulsory from year one onwards and the implementation was finished in 2003/04. For Austria this means that since 2003/04 English is taught for 32 hours per year. In year one and two (ages 6 – 8) English is taught entirely integrated. In year three and four (ages 9 – 10) pupils have one lesson of English per week with an occasional additional integrated lesson. As yet writing in English is not done before the children are competent in writing their mother tongue. The majority of the time spent on teaching English should be oral.

In Austria transition from primary to secondary schools is a dramatic rather than an easy time for children: instead of one class teacher they have up to nine different teachers, instead of a holistic way of learning and working they are confronted with ten individual 50 minutes classes of very different content and diverging methodology. It also means a time of selection, as in Austria there are still two types of lower secondary education.

During the course of a school planning session in the fourth year of primary school, parents or guardians are informed and advised about the recommended further educational opportunities for the pupil, based on his or her interests and past achievements. Admission to the first form of an academic secondary school requires successful completion of the fourth year of primary school with "very good" or "good" marks in German, reading and mathematics, or a statement from the primary school conference that in spite of a "satisfactory" mark in these required subjects, the student's overall achievement will probably meet the requirements of academic secondary school; or an entrance examination. Particularly in the big towns and rich communities, academic secondary schools are considered to be socially more prestigious and parents try to place their children in these schools.

The learning and teaching of a foreign language, most commonly English, is done differently, for example the approach is more academic with more grammar, more writing tasks, tests and regular homework. Secondary school teachers still do not consider EFL in primary schools as a serious matter and fail to appreciate the achievements of these children in terms of pronunciation, range of vocabulary, enthusiasm for foreign languages and motivation.

Different perspectives

a) Teacher training

Since 1971 English was offered for primary teachers at Teacher Training Colleges as an optional subject. From 1985 onwards English became a compulsory subject at the Teacher Training Colleges, i.e. students had approximately 115 lessons (45 minutes each) spread over 6 semesters. In 2002 crash courses called “Lollipop, Butterfly ...” were organized. The nine counties of Austria offered varying numbers of in-service training courses. In some counties of Austria in-service training was obligatory, in others it was optional.

Teachers at general secondary schools are trained at University Colleges of Teacher Training. They graduate as Bachelors of Education after 6 semesters. They choose a major subject, German, English or mathematics and a minor subject like geography, history etc. The successful completion of studies allows them not only to teach the subjects they actually studied, but also other subjects. This maybe relevant in smaller schools. Experts have biased views on this situation. For English we can say that in Lower Austria more than 85% of the teachers are qualified language teachers.

b) European Language Portfolio

The ELP for primary school children, which is piloted this year, will definitely help to make secondary school teachers see what has been done in primary, what they can expect and what they can build on. Parents consider EFL a very important subject, bi-lingual and/or CLIL in primary and secondary schools is growing rapidly in Austria. Not all the demands put by parents can be fulfilled by school authorities because more teachers would need to be trained in the CLIL methodology.

Needs analysis / Conclusions

- Teacher training. Austrian primary school teachers definitely need more courses in language competence as well as EFL methodology. We know that they cannot be experts in everything, so maybe language teaching will be taken up by “specialists”. There is no one single approach to this problem.
- Contacts between primary and secondary school teachers. In initial teacher training there are no classes where teachers of both age groups work together and exchange their experiences and learn from each other.
- School books, learning materials that smoothly lead children from one stage to the other.
- Concepts focussing on language learning strategies are needed for primary as well as secondary school teachers.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in France

Key Issues

After many years of controlled experiments with initiation to foreign languages in primary schools taught by free-lance native-speakers or high school language teachers, foreign language was introduced into primary school programmes as a subject in its own right, with, since 2002, official programmes and objectives. In 2008, this concerns the last four years of primary school; in 2009, year 1 will be added and the following year, “*Grande Section*”, the last year of Nursery School. Level A1 of CEFR is the objective to be reached by the end of primary school. When pupils move into secondary school in year 6 at age 11, they are required to continue the foreign language they studied in primary, and they begin a second in year 7 or 8.

To become a primary school teacher requires a three-year degree in any subject, then the attainment of the national competitive examination for primary school teachers. This is followed by a year of teacher training, alternating pedagogical study at an IUFM with practical experience. In primary schools, where class teachers teach all subjects, student teachers are now required to study a foreign or regional language and older teachers can “reactivate” their FL knowledge through in-service training courses, if they wish, to obtain the complementary certification needed to be able to teach a FL. The system of free-lance language teachers is thus being phased out. In some schools an “*échange de service*” takes place, whereby one teacher dispenses all the FL for the school in exchange for some subjects being taught to his/her class by other teachers. High school teachers are subject teachers and must have a three-year degree in their specialisation to sit the national competitive examination specific to each subject, followed by a year of teacher training.

Continuity between primary and high school is the subject of much discussion and reform at the moment, although this mainly concerns French and Mathematics. As far as foreign languages are concerned, oral communication and enjoyment of the language are emphasised at primary level, whereas in high school, the lessons are often far more grammar-bound with a tendency to favour the written word. In 2007, new language programmes for lower secondary school were introduced to take into account the presence of FL in primary and with the declared aim of improving the continuity into secondary school. Currently, however, many Year 6 teachers don't quite know how to take into account the diversity of pupils' acquisitions, so treat the whole class as debutants.

Implementing the current language programme is dependent on the training of sufficient teachers for schools to be able to offer foreign languages. Because of the relatively short time that this teaching has been in force, there is still a shortage of primary teachers able and/or willing to teach a foreign language in addition to the rest of their workload. This makes it difficult for schools to offer the selection of languages pupils (parents!) demand and which individual teachers wish to teach. Consequently, there is not always continuity of the same language from one year to the next in primary school, let alone from primary to secondary.

The main languages taught are English, Spanish, German and Italian, with a great preference for English. Diversity of FL (or the fight against the dominance of English) is defended with, for example, the introduction of “bi-language” classes in the first year of secondary schools where another FL is taught in addition to English. Regional languages, like Occitan in the south-west, Breton in Brittany, Alsatian in the east, etc., also form part of this programme. Some bilingual primary schools exist where subjects are given equal teaching time in French and in the regional language. International and European Sections exist, at secondary level, where pupils can benefit from CLIN and reinforced FL instruction.

Different perspectives

From teacher questionnaires (30 primary and 25 secondary) and discussions during 3 different primary-secondary liaison training courses, some of the problems mentioned are large classes: 25–30 pupils, which makes oral work more difficult; also the great heterogeneity of levels in year 6.

Positive points of FL in primary: secondary teachers who take into account the language acquisition of primary school say that pupils arrive in secondary language classes with some bases in the language

and express themselves orally with more ease than previously; they have better oral comprehension skills and a more authentic pronunciation and they are used to the way language classes function.

Some means being introduced to try and make the transition smoother:

- A “*Carte des Langues*” has been drawn up in most *Académies* to try and list and harmonise the spread of foreign languages across schools in the same area.
- The use of the CEFR is being implemented at all levels for programme development and assessment and use of the ELP is explained in many training courses. Its use is not yet generalised, though; some teachers are reluctant to use it, believing that pupils cannot assess their own levels.
- It is recommended that teachers and/or pupils complete self-assessment grids (in French) of skills taught/acquired during their foreign language classes in primary school to be transmitted to *collège*. This type of bridging document exists in various forms in many academies, but is not always used, criticised as too time-consuming.
- In-service liaison training courses allow teachers from primary and secondary schools to meet up, become familiar with each other’s programmes and approaches in the interests of greater awareness and cooperation. Attempts are made to organise liaison meetings between year 5 and year 6 language teachers at the beginning of each year. These training courses and meetings, when they occur, are usually very valuable, but they tend to be difficult to set up.
- *Evaluation à l’entrée en 6^e*: Diagnostic testing in year 6 in three of the four competencies (oral expression is excluded). This serves as a basis for year 6 teachers to plan their classes. These test results are also sent back to the primary school so that primary teachers, especially those of year 5, can see whether adjustments in their teaching are necessary. However, these tests are not always carried out, or not always at the beginning of the year as a diagnostic tool; their function is not always properly explained to pupils who apprehend them.

Needs analysis

There is still the basic need to continue training primary school teachers in FL so that all schools are able to offer the 4 (then 5 & 6) years of FL required by the programmes.

The above-mentioned steps to harmonise foreign language teaching need to be continued and consolidated for two reasons: first to develop a more natural, more open communication between teachers of the different levels, second to allow pupils to become accustomed to self-assessment and have a greater hand in their own (language) learning.

Logistical problems, like freeing teachers (especially primary teachers) to attend liaison training courses and/or meetings need to be solved; the importance of these meetings needs to be promoted to the different levels of hierarchy in the system and to schools. Secondary school teachers, who are “specialists” and don’t always feel too concerned by the problem, need to become aware of their role in assuring continuity.

Teachers also suggest organising meetings between pupils of year 5 and 6 at year end, which in the few cases it has occurred seems to aid the younger children with the transition; an experiment in the Académie of Reims, where younger pupils were mentored by older pupils, show that this also helped the older pupils by giving them a sense of responsibility, as well as by allowing them an objective viewpoint on their own learning.

Some teachers express the desire for text books which help foster continuity, and a great need exists for means of dealing with mixed levels.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in Germany

Key issues

In Germany, primary school starts at the age of 6/7 and takes four years. At the age of 10/11 pupils enter secondary education which is divided into two or three academic streams (*Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium*). The transition from primary to secondary school and the effects of the selection processes this brings about are currently the subject of controversial discussions.

The introduction of foreign language teaching in primary schools (ca. 1995-2001, mostly English, also French, Czech, Polish in border regions) has brought about changes for the teaching and learning of languages at the secondary level as well. Whereas in the past, foreign language teaching in Germany only started in secondary school, pupils now enter secondary education with prior knowledge and linguistic skills. Foreign language teaching has become compulsory at least from year 3 and several federal states even start in year 1. Both, teacher education and secondary language teaching, have to face the challenges of the new situation.

Although foreign languages are often taught by the class teacher in primary school, they are not a compulsory part of primary school teacher training in most federal states. Primary school teachers specialize in two or three subjects, one of which can be the foreign language. In secondary school, foreign languages are taught by subject teachers who have to take a state exam.

In this transition from primary to secondary education children frequently suffer from a lack of continuity in terms of teaching methodology, learning environment and academic demands. The rupture which mostly takes place after year 4 is due to

a. Different learning cultures and teaching approaches:

At the primary level language learning is communicative, content-based, multi-sensory and action-oriented - all of this within a monolingual setting. The focus is on oral language, written language has only a supportive role. Primary specific activities are playing, singing songs and story-telling. When the pupils enter secondary education, they have acquired an elementary communicative competence and a basic knowledge of vocabulary as well as language learning strategies. Very often their listening skills and their pronunciation are well developed; they approach language holistically and creatively and show an open-mindedness towards language learning. At the primary level, the foreign language is taught for two lessons a week; it is not a main subject.

In secondary schools rule-oriented learning plays a greater role and the focus is often on grammatical knowledge, formal aspects of language, meta-language and writing. The competences pupils have acquired at primary level are often not recognized. At secondary level the foreign language is taught for 4-5 lessons a week and is one of the main subjects.

b. A lack of communication and cooperation between teachers of the two stages:

Another reason for the problems at the transition between primary and secondary foreign language teaching is the considerable lack of information between teachers of the two stages. Very often teachers have little knowledge about the teaching methodology and the requirements of the other level. One of the main reasons for this situation lies in teacher training. Mostly, primary and secondary teachers are trained separately. Furthermore, secondary teachers are trained for foreign language teaching at university, whereas many primary school teachers had to take over the new subject on the basis of very little in-service training.

Different perspectives

a) Teachers

Many primary teachers who have adopted the new primary specific language teaching methodology expect acknowledgment for their input and work from secondary teachers. They have fewer difficulties in coping with heterogeneity and try to develop their pupils' strengths. However, there seems to be a tendency towards the incorporation of more written language and rule-oriented learning in order to prepare the pupils for secondary school.

Secondary teachers often have difficulties in diagnosing and appreciating the competences their pupils have acquired at the primary level. They rather expect them to have a pre-knowledge of grammatical rules and of the written language. Teachers are frequently disappointed by their pupils' achievements which promotes a negative attitude towards primary foreign language learning in general.

Another problem that secondary teachers complain about is the fact that learners bring very mixed levels of language competence to the secondary classroom. Teachers have to cope with the increasingly heterogeneous linguistic background of primary school children and their varying levels of proficiency.

b) Pupils

Many pupils enter secondary education with a positive attitude towards foreign language learning and considerable self-confidence concerning their linguistic competences. However, the mismatch between secondary teachers' expectations and their competences sometimes leads to frustration and a lack of motivation. Very often they are again treated as beginners and suffer from start-again effects. Since their knowledge and skills are not acknowledged, children lose their self-confidence and the interest in language learning.

Needs / Conclusion

To facilitate the transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching strategies have to be developed both for foreign language classrooms at primary and secondary level and for initial and in-service teacher training:

In order to ensure the continuity and success of the learning process started at primary level pupils' competences should be taken into account and expanded and the teaching should build upon the competences learners have acquired previously. If the benefits of an early start are not to be lost, secondary teachers will need to find ways of starting from where their new pupils are. This would mean using mixed levels in a class as a resource, rather than regarding them as a problem. To build on primary language learning in effective and motivating ways and to avoid start-again effects, several methodological approaches seem to be appropriate: task-based language learning, CLIL, portfolio assessment¹ and differentiated tasks to address the varied learning needs of pupils. It is also important that pupils become explicitly aware of what they have learned in order to foster their self-esteem. Such awareness will ideally extend not only to achievements in the foreign language but also to differences between and within first, second and foreign languages and to strategies for learning languages.

As far as teacher training is concerned, regular meetings between teachers of the two levels are important in order to increase the knowledge about the teaching methodology of the other level. Both initial and in-service teacher training modules have to be developed to raise teachers' awareness of the issue and to provide strategies to facilitate the transition.

¹ Pupils make up a portfolio of their productions and projects and carry it with them, adding to it, from year to year. This portfolio serves as a transition document for teachers as well as allowing pupils to keep track of their language achievements.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in Hungary

Key issues

Children in Hungary start school at the age of six and must attend school at least until the age of sixteen. The main institution for basic education in Hungary is the 8-year general school, which comprises the 4-year lower primary and the 4-year upper primary or lower secondary level. Generally, pupils change after year 8 to a secondary school (4-year grammar school or vocational school). But there are further possibilities in Hungarian education: children can change after the year 4 to an 8-form grammar school or after year 6 to a 6th-form grammar school.

The National Core Curriculum (1995) regulates the educational program for the first ten compulsory years of the twelve years of school education. It divides the content of the education into areas of knowledge, one of which is the subject group called "Modern Foreign Languages". Its curriculum has been basically prepared on the basis of output-driven, functional criteria. Its content is intended to conform to both European expectations and Hungarian language teaching.

The Frame Curricula decree that the teaching of the first foreign language should start no later than year 4 at the age of 9. A second language (including Latin) may be taught from the start to the end of compulsory schooling. The Frame Curricula make a second foreign language compulsory in secondary schools from year 9 (age 14). Depending on the curriculum, 4-6-8-year secondary schools may begin the teaching of a compulsory second foreign language earlier. The Frame Curricula also determine the compulsory and optional number of lessons. At primary level foreign language is taught generally only in year 4, 2 lessons a week. For an earlier start the number of lessons is the same. From the 5th class, the number of lessons increases to 3-5 lessons per week.

Bilingual education may start at the age of 6-7. Bilingual courses may be part of a 4-6-8-year secondary school with a preparatory year. The 5-year version starts at the age of 13 or there is a preparatory year at 14, then teaching lasts until the age of 19.

Both general and bilingual school institutions decide freely on the compulsory languages and timetable they wish to offer. The most frequent languages taught in Hungarian schools are, first of all, English and German, followed by French, Italian and Spanish. Teachers can design the syllabus and select a course book according to the NCC.

Different perspectives

FLT in primary level is multisensory and action-oriented, focused on oral language and age-related activities (play, songs, story-telling). The transition from the fourth into the fifth class is smooth if pupils continue their studies in the same school. In this case it does not imply too much change as the same teacher can continue the teaching in the 5th class and children can undertake the requirements of the new stage more easily. Furthermore, children can use the next level of the same foreign language book series. The teaching methodology will change according to the age of children. FLT in upper-primary classes usually focuses on vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and teachers very often use role plays.

If schoolchildren transfer to an 8-year secondary general school or a 6-year secondary general school after the sixth class of the primary school, transition means a big change: the number of lessons increases, pupils have new teachers, methods and requirements and, in many cases, a new textbook. Furthermore this new type of school requires a very tricky grammar oriented entrance examination. Language learning is the most efficient if they continue their studies already begun. Depending on the group organisation, sometimes children get into groups which are not for their level of FL competence. This can be a problem as the level of these groups can be very heterogeneous.

In Hungary primary school language teachers – trained in the Teacher's Training College for primary level (years 1-4) – are expected to teach also in the fifth and sixth classes and can choose the method they think most suitable. Nevertheless, methodological freedom in language teaching is not always positive. Many teachers use the modern communicative teaching approach in which intercultural knowledge is integrated but many others interpret this freedom as an opportunity to preserve the

traditional grammar-translation method. In some schools, teachers use CLIL applied to the age of the students, but not all teachers are prepared to teach with this methodology. In general, textbooks strongly influence teachers' view of the target language as well as their methodological approach. Fortunately, the choice of language textbooks is increasing. Since at the end of upper secondary school children will take a level B2 exam, FLT in this stage is exam-oriented. This fact influences greatly the choice of content and teaching requirements.

In Kecskemét a meeting for the children of the world is organised every second year. This meeting involves the participation of children from approx. 30 countries in a lot of cultural activities. The programme has a direct effect on the activities carried out in the foreign language classrooms as many children have their first experience with foreign children on this occasion. International partnerships are great motivational tools for language and cultural awareness. Unluckily not all schools have international contacts.

Needs analysis / Conclusion

- There are some examples or situations when children have to give up studying the language they started with because of the secondary schools lack of facilities. It is important for children to continue with the learning of the foreign language they started and not give up to replace this foreign language with another one.
- If children change school in the transition from primary to secondary, children and parents need more information about the requirements and methods of FL teaching at the new level and school.
- Primary teachers need more information about the FL language level required in secondary and secondary teachers need more information about the FL knowledge acquired by children in the primary school.
- From the parents' perspectives it would be necessary to organise more "open lessons". This is necessary because the parents learned with completely different methods. They are not aware of new methods. There is a generation gap between parents and children in this field. Furthermore, parents have high expectations from foreign language teaching.
- There is a lack of transition modules, additional language tasks, good teaching practice, methodological guides and recorded lesson samples.
- It is very important to develop a greater choice of in-service training activities to train primary and secondary teachers efficiently, to provide updated teaching strategies more suitable for the age of the students, and to prepare teachers for working with European documents, i.e. ELP.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in Spain

Key issues

Up to 1990 learning English started at primary school at the age of 12 (Primary Education spread until the age of 14). English or French were offered. Since 1990 English has started at the age of 8 and from then French has disappeared gradually from Primary Education. Since 2006 English is compulsory from the age of 6 in the whole country and is also offered from the second year of Pre-school (4 year olds) in most Spanish Communities. In 1998 a bilingual project was launched in the Community of Madrid as well as in other Spanish Communities resulting from an agreement between the British Council and the Ministry of Education. Besides English (5 hours a week), pupils must take one or two subjects in English (Geography and History or Natural Science). In some of these bilingual schools French is also offered in the first year of Secondary Education.

Although English has been compulsory in Spanish primary schools for nearly two decades, results are still unsatisfactory. When students finish their "Bachillerato" (17 and 18 year olds) their command of English is still poor. Most of them are able to read and write in English but their listening and speaking skills fall further behind. Foreign language learning, English in particular, has been a matter of debate for many years.

This is the reason why in 2004 the Community of Madrid started an ambitious bilingual project in Primary Education. Pupils took 5 hours of English plus 3 hours of Science, Physical Education or Arts and Crafts. 26 primary schools started the project in the school year 2004-05, 54 in 2005-06, and 42 in 2006-07. A total of 122 primary schools are involved in the bilingual project at the moment. This project has not reached Secondary Education yet and there are not sufficient elements for its evaluation. In Secondary Education only English is offered. In year 4 (15 years olds) a second foreign language can also be chosen (French or German) together with a number of other optional subjects.

Though teachers in charge of foreign language in primary and secondary schools are specialists, a number of issues can be highlighted:

- insufficient training for bilingual programmes
- training curriculum for initial FL teachers (Primary and Secondary) to be revised
- lack of opportunities for practising the target language outside the language classroom. Films, TV series, computer games, etc. are dubbed or translated into Spanish
- little exposure to authentic language in the classroom
- teachers rely too much on textbooks which makes lessons predictable and a matter of routine.

Transition from primary to secondary schools takes place at the age of 11-12 (after year 6 of primary). The National Curriculum foresees continuity in terms of contents but not in terms of methodology, though it suggests a communicative approach based on CEFR. No special transition materials have been published despite the fact that in the market a great variety of textbooks can be found.

2. Different perspectives/empirical findings

a) Teachers

The gap between Primary and Secondary Education is acknowledged by both primary and secondary FL teachers interviewed, whether involved or not in bilingual programs. When questioned about the need to create a bridge between one stage and the other, most of them answer that something has to be done to solve such an important issue. All of them admit that children experience a number of difficulties when entering secondary language classrooms. Although some secondary teachers point out the need to know their students better, children don't bring transition documents with them as the ELP is being piloted only in a few primary schools. Secondary school teachers don't feel well informed about the teaching of FL in primary schools and how to construct continuity in secondary. Most teachers also agree on the fact that primary learners lack grammatical competence and metalinguistic knowledge. Although this gap should not theoretically be so evident (the Spanish Curriculum establishes clear objectives, general contents, suggests type of methodologies and assessment criteria based on the CEFR which could facilitate the transition from one stage to the other), it represents a real problem whose consequences may directly affect language learners motivation and results.

b) Pupils

Concerning children, only 2 out of the 28 secondary learners interviewed say their favourite subject is English, but most of them affirm that they enjoy the English classes. Only 5 out of 28 have been to a country where the target language is spoken, but most of them say they would like to go. None of them know the language portfolio so far, but the learners coming from a primary bilingual school feel quite satisfied with their level of competence, which they think matches the requirements to undertake the new learning situation in their secondary school. Regarding the tools that could have facilitated transition, learners suggest it would have been better to study more grammar and have more speaking practice in primary, which shows a shift in the methodological approach. A few of them also say that friends and family, contact with secondary students, and visiting the target language country have helped them to face transition. Generally speaking, most students find FL more difficult in secondary than in primary and a few of them complain about the difficulty of examinations. Finally, the students who visited the secondary school in the last year of primary education criticise the fact that none of them had contact with secondary students.

c) Teacher education

The existing differences between teachers' education for either stage should be taken into account when talking about transition problems. While prospective primary FL teachers undergo quite a complete curriculum with regard to educational subjects (specific content subjects and didactics, educational psychology, school organization, history of education, etc. plus a number of subjects related to FL teaching), secondary teachers mainly base their learning on content and only dedicate a few weeks (when they have finished their university studies) to a special course aimed at preparing them for the CAP (certificate of pedagogical suitability) which can be quite easily obtained, but with insufficient practice in secondary schools. They may speak quite good English but when entering the classroom they may lack the pedagogical tools to deal with pupils that are going through a delicate phase of personal development and are used to a certain type of methodology.

Due to the European harmonization, new university studies are being designed at this very moment. These changes also affect teacher training. In relation to Primary Education, only two branches are being considered: primary teachers and pre-school teachers (specialists disappear). Primary teacher training will spread for four years and become a regular degree (so far it was a three-year university diploma). Nothing has been decided yet regarding foreign language teachers, but in years 3 and 4, 60 European credits (out of 240) have been assigned for "itineraries" which can lead to teacher specialization (nowadays there are six specializations: primary, pre-school, music, physical education, special needs, and foreign language). On the other hand, to be a secondary teacher, students will have to take a 4 year university degree plus a Master (60 European credits). This new perspective may improve secondary FL teachers' education as they will have to take a number of subjects directly connected to educational matters and a Practicum which will require their tutoring/mentoring in secondary schools for a number of weeks.

Needs / Conclusion

In Spain, focus on form is not absent from the FL primary classroom. Games, songs and fun are not the only activities carried out in the language classroom. As children move towards Secondary Education new elements are incorporated in the lessons and, theoretically, transition should be smoother than it is. More contact between primary and secondary FL teachers is needed. Secondary teachers need to know children's psychological characteristics and needs. A child does not change in a couple of months. School visits could be organised so that primary FL learners could meet their future teachers, know the new environment and talk to peers that have undergone the situation they will have to go through soon. Furthermore, primary and secondary teachers could exchange their roles for a number of sessions. In this way they would know first hand what happens in the classroom, know pupils better and get fresh information about the learning environments their students come from or will go to. In relation to teacher training, special modules could be designed to make future and in service teachers aware of the meaning of transition. Teaching professionals must not forget that FL primary learners' enthusiasm may be in danger when facing a new learning reality which should be the continuation of a learning process, not the break up.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in Sweden

Key issues –

The Swedish school system comprises *compulsory school* from ages seven until sixteen - years 1-9, and non-compulsory *upper secondary school* between the ages of 16 and 19. There is no formal transition within the compulsory school as pupils can attend the same school from years 1-9: however it is not uncommon for pupils to move to a new school for years 7-9. Transition in the Swedish context is therefore somewhat difficult to define: traditionally it would probably be described as the transition from having a class teacher up to year 6, to having subject teachers in years 7-9. However, increasingly, the transition from class to subject teacher is taking place between years 5 and 6 instead.

English is one of the three obligatory subjects in the compulsory school curriculum (together with Swedish and Mathematics). It is also compulsory for all lines of study at upper secondary school. Since the first compulsory school National Curriculum in 1962, English has been an obligatory subject from year 4 and since 1969 it has been an obligatory compulsory school subject to year 9. There is a national syllabus for compulsory school English with stipulated attainment goals for year 5 and year 9 <http://www3.skolverket.se/ki/eng/comp.pdf>. At the time of transition, defined here as either year 6 or year 7, Swedish pupils are expected to have a knowledge of English corresponding to level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference. By the end of compulsory school, they are expected to have attained a B1 level of competence. There are national diagnostic tests in English in year 5 and 9. Written assessment in the form of marks is given in years 8 and 9. A key feature of the Swedish school system is its decentralization: at both municipality level and at the individual school level, the syllabus can be redefined in local terms. Subjects are allocated a specific number of hours which must be covered during the compulsory school years. This means that in some schools pupils may begin English in year 1 whilst in other schools they may begin in year 3 but the total number of hours for English teaching in compulsory school is the same.

'Modern languages' is the term given to all other foreign languages in the Swedish national curriculum. German and French are the modern languages traditionally studied in Sweden, but increasingly Spanish, Japanese and in the Öresund area (the area in the South-West of Sweden near Denmark) Danish are being studied. Pupils usually start studying a modern language in year 6 or year 7: there is therefore no issue of transition within compulsory school where modern languages are concerned.

In the current teacher education programme in Sweden, introduced in 2001, English is not a compulsory subject for teachers training to teach the early years, i.e. class teachers in years 1 to 5 or 6. This means that many teachers who teach English and administer national diagnostic tests in year 5, may have no formal training in the subject.

Different perspectives

Transition in foreign language learning does not seem to be an issue of concern in Sweden: there appears to be little empirical research on this issue. It can be speculated that this is due to the transition years being covered by the same national syllabus which emphasizes communicative competence and allows the individual school or teacher scope for a fairly free interpretation.

For this project, we conducted a small-scale questionnaire survey amongst the teachers and pupils of our two partner schools in the Pri-Sec-Co project, to investigate their opinions of teaching before and after transition. According to their answers, transition is not seen as a particularly pressing issue for either pupils or teachers: the general consensus is that there is little difference in the content or the methodology before and after transition. The differences highlighted by pupils were described mainly in terms of quantity: they experienced that there was more homework and more vocabulary to be studied when English was taught by the subject teacher. The decentralized nature of the Swedish school system and the openness of the syllabus to interpretation probably mean that it is difficult to highlight general issues related to transition.

In a study conducted by the Swedish Agency for Schools (Skolverket) in 2004² on the attitudes of pupils in years 4-6 to school, 56% of pupils in years 4-6 said that they enjoyed English, compared to

² Yngre elevers attityder till skolan 2003 - hur elever i årskurs 4-6 upplever skolan. Skolverket 2004: rapport 256, page 56.

69% of pupils in years 7-9 (and 64% of upper secondary pupils). However, the report does not give any explanation as to what variables influence these figures. Another report by the Swedish Agency for Schools on the use of textbooks in three subjects in years 5 and 9 showed that English teachers in year 5 are the most likely to only use textbooks in their teaching: they rely on the textbook to cover the syllabus although many textbooks can be deficient in this area. Teachers who have worked more than 10 years in compulsory school are more likely to use the textbook than those who have recently completed teacher education³. Although the authors of the report do not draw this conclusion, the reliance on the textbook may be related to the lack of formal education in teaching English.

Needs analysis / Conclusions

In Sweden, a national syllabus exists which covers the transition years and which contains a clear progression from years 5 to 9 in the same syllabus with an overall emphasis on communicative competence. There are national diagnostic tests for years 5 and 9 and there are diagnostic materials available for teachers in the transition years. Many and varied teaching materials are available. There is also scope for the use of the European Language Portfolio which the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement (Myndigheten för skolutveckling) is actively promoting.

Consequently, the most important area for Sweden to focus on in this project is probably the area of teacher education, particularly in the primary years, both in pre- and in-service training.

Läromedlens roll i undervisningen. Skolverket 2006: rapport 284, pages 91-94.

Transition from primary to secondary foreign language teaching in Switzerland

Key issues

Swiss students normally enter secondary school at age 12 after having completed 6 years of primary education. Secondary schools are structured along three or four academic streams, with the academically most able students attending *Gymnasium* from Year 7. In the second stream, students have an option after 3 years of entering *Gymnasium* or pursuing an apprenticeship with or without prospects of a tertiary degree course later on. Students in the lowest academic streams normally go on to apprenticeships in various trades.

The foreign language component in the state school curricula is currently undergoing changes. The strategy being implemented is to study two foreign languages, the first starting in Year 3 and the second in Year 5. While the sequence of the languages, English and the second national language (French or German), differs from one Canton to another, the aim is for students to acquire comparable competences in both, at A2 and B1 levels of the Common European Framework (CEFR).

As the Canton of Zurich (together with some central Swiss cantons) has progressed furthest in implementing this model, key issues are discussed in relation to its system. From the experiences with French (taught from Year 5 since 1990) and the pilot project with English (1999 – 2004), the following key concerns arise at the transitional stage:

- Curricular objectives traditionally have relatively minor significance for primary school teachers as they are broadly phrased along the lines of the CEFR; thus, the onus is on specially designed materials to ensure that a sufficient breadth of language activities is offered to support learners in reaching these objectives.
- Past experience shows that if foreign languages have a special status as school subjects without formal assessment and marks in students' reports, they are not taken as seriously as core subjects. Currently, such assessment procedures are being introduced. There is a risk that traditional form-oriented testing (e.g. vocabulary tests) will be used despite communicatively oriented objectives.
- There is a long tradition of state publishers creating tailor-made materials that offer a mixed methodological approach and a wide range of supplementary materials such as films, CD-ROMs, and vocabulary cards. In the best case, an integrated course spanning the primary-secondary divide can support the transition (cf. e.g. the French course *envol*). The prerequisite is that teachers are familiarised with the approaches, especially innovative ones such as CLIL, and that they are aware of the age-related differences in the way students learn languages. This is not always the case.
- The earlier primary teaching of languages starts, the higher the probability of heterogeneous learner profiles becomes. Teachers are finding it challenging to deal with the wide range of ability levels in large classes.
- Foreign language achievement does play some role in streaming students in secondary school, but the decisive factors for selection are German and maths, so especially multilingual students often find themselves in lower streams where less is expected of them also in French and English. In some cases, their potential may be underestimated, but the system doesn't allow transfers very easily.
- There is a lack of transparency and communication about achievement levels, methodology and content between primary and secondary schools. Teachers tend to revert to subjective theories about how languages are learnt in the other type of school. The situation has improved with the cohesive French course *envol*, and may yet get better after basic standards will have been introduced by 2012 (although the low level of these may lead to a downgrading of expectations).

Foreign language learning plays an important role in the educational system of multilingual Switzerland and the past decade has been characterised by increasing investments into language learning for all. In future, more differentiated trajectories of learning may need to be devised. It is vital that transparent and realistic interfaces and transitions between the various levels and tracks of schools are created.

Different perspectives

Research conducted within the project "Multilingualism, Identity and Language Learning in Swiss Schools and Communities" yields a number of findings and insights with respect to the transition, summarised in the following:

- Primary teaching of French follows a mixed approach placing emphasis on text comprehension and lexical development, with a subsidiary focus on form. The content aims are geared towards the everyday life of youngsters and cultural knowledge about life in French-speaking Switzerland.
- Classes observed all work actively towards language aims, while relatively little concern is given to topic development. In primary school, playful and fantasy-oriented activities sometimes loosen up the atmosphere. However, towards Year 6 there seems to be less scope for such activities.
- When educational topics are introduced (such as healthy food, in English), treatment is limited partly due to linguistic ability, but also due to a superficial approach to the subject matter in the teaching materials (Cambridge English for Schools).
- Many secondary teachers and their classes follow a traditional form-focused approach to language learning (working e.g. with a 20-year-old English course). There is little evidence of task-based learning in either type of classroom.
- There is considerably more variety in the social organisation of primary classes than secondary, where there is hardly any evidence of structured pair or groupwork. Concerns regarding discipline seem to compel teachers to keep a tight control over class management and preferably use whole-class and individual formats.

Interviews with 17 teachers provide evidence that most teachers are committed to the dual-language learning programme, more so with respect to English than French, and that they see themselves primarily in the role of motivators. Their prime aim is to get learners to speak the language and achieve mutual understanding. They consider grammar and vocabulary to be important and necessary, even if dry. It is somewhat surprising that even though most of them speak more than one additional language, they place little emphasis on language awareness and interlingual comparison and transfer of knowledge and skills in their lessons.

Secondary teachers in Appenzell, who have already received primary school students with English, are generally satisfied with their entry level competence, whereas teachers of French stress the heterogeneity of the students' accomplishments. Some teachers lack ways and means of perceiving and describing competencies in an adequate way. Some experienced secondary teachers tend to blame primary school methodology when formal accuracy is not a key strength of primary students. Primary teachers fear that their students' competence is not adequately assessed and appreciated by the upper level, and they begin to teach toward implied expectations, placing more emphasis on formal knowledge.

Needs analysis

There is no lack of materials attempting to provide stepping stones between primary and secondary school. The French course materials have gone some ways towards increasing cohesion (there is a special transitional module), and new assessment tools and standards will lend further support. In English, the CLIL approach adopted by the *Explorers* materials and carried over, in an age-adequate version, to secondary schools is expected to lead teachers to a fresh appreciation of task-based learning and an enhanced focus on content.

The key issue for development in Switzerland is teacher development and school-based guidance. Only recently has a system with headteachers / principals been introduced, and a scheme to establish teachers with specialist functions (e.g. language coordinators) is under discussion. While young teachers getting their training now have good prerequisites to help students master the transition, in-service teachers are often struggling to accommodate the numerous reforms and the increased overall emphasis on language learning.

The most suitable and sought-after outcome of the Pri-Sec-Co project is thus likely to be a set of locally adapted transitional materials with the concomitant training and information, delivered to teachers at primary and, especially, secondary level in a convincing way, as well as support for local headteachers and school-based language coordinators.

Conclusions

Transition issues are shown to be a matter of concern in most partner countries. Apart from Sweden, where there is no formal transition and the concept is not easy to define due the school system organisation and the openness of the FL syllabus, the rest of the partners' countries share a similar view. Transition needs identified in the reports can be grouped according to the following headings: teacher training, contacts between primary and secondary school teachers and learning materials. The role of the European Language Portfolio will also be taken into consideration.

Teacher training

The problem related to teacher training is the existing difference between primary and secondary teachers' foreign language education. The Austrian report suggests that FL primary teaching should be taken up by "specialists", which could improve the situation if "specialist" means high command of the foreign language and high methodological education and could also be applied to FL secondary teachers. Nevertheless, according to the Spanish experience, this specialization would not prevent the problem of transition if FL teacher education remains as two different educational itineraries. In fact, in Spain, FL primary teachers are specialists that receive education in pedagogy, whilst FL secondary teachers whose linguistic competence can be satisfactory, lack sufficient methodological and pedagogical training. As outlined as well in the German report, transition implies a rupture in the learning process due to the different learning cultures and teaching approaches between primary and secondary schools. Learners move from more communicative, multi-sensory and action oriented approach to a rule oriented learning often focussing on grammatical knowledge. It would be necessary, then, to have specific initial training modules on both levels to raise teachers' awareness on the transition issue.

Apart from specific modules for initial training, it would also be necessary, as suggested in the Hungarian and German reports, to develop in-service teacher training modules to raise teachers' awareness on the topic and to provide teaching and learning strategies suitable for the learners' ages. Secondary teachers also need to know children's psychological characteristics and needs.

Contacts between primary and secondary school teachers

Some of the problems teachers and learners are confronted with at the transition from primary to secondary school are due to a lack of communication between teachers of the different stages. There is a general agreement that regular meetings between teachers of the two levels are important to increase the knowledge of the teaching methodology of the other level though, as the French report proposes, "logistical problems, like freeing teachers (especially primary teachers) to attend *liaison* training courses and/or meetings need to be solved". Another proposal taken from the French report could be organising meetings between pupils of the two schools levels, "which in the few cases it has occurred seems to aid the younger children with the transition". It has also been suggested that parents should have more information about the requirements and methods of FL learning in the new level and school so that they could support their children in the transition phase.

It is important to point out the need to avoid the start-again effects which implies the necessity of the secondary teacher to build upon the competencies primary children bring with them, and can reduce many learners' motivation. To get this objective the European Language Portfolio seems to be an adequate tool.

Learning materials

Although the reports haven't analysed specifically the role of textbooks and learning materials, the Swiss report acknowledges the existence of materials that offer "a mixed methodological approach and a wide range of supplementary materials spanning the primary-secondary divide" that can support the transition, but it seems clear that these materials themselves do not guarantee a smooth transition as the "prerequisite is that teachers are familiarised with the approaches, specially innovative ones such as CLIL, and that they are aware of the age-related differences in the way students learn language". On the other hand, in some countries like Austria, some teachers "would like to have text books which improve the continuity".

The European Language Portfolio

As pointed out before, the ELP, which in most of the partners' countries is being piloted at the moment, seems to be an adequate tool to ensure the continuity of the learning process started at primary level. One of the main functions of the ELP is to inform readers about the communicative abilities and language experiences of their owners. As the German report states "if the benefits of an early start are not to be lost, secondary teachers will need to find ways to start from where their new pupils are" and this information can be easily found in each of the three sections of the ELP. Therefore two steps must be taken in order to take advantage of the document:

1. training teachers to work with European documents,
2. familiarising learners with self-assessment so that they can be more aware of their language learning progression.

The future changes that the European harmonization is about to bring will offer the teaching community an excellent opportunity to reflect upon transition and incorporate this important issue in both primary and secondary initial FL teachers' education. Secondary FL teachers usually complain about the competence levels of pupils who start Secondary Education and forget that teaching is not only a matter of levels. Children, in general, enjoy learning languages and when learning a new language there is room for different approaches which can be combined in order to evaluate what pupils already know and in turn be used as a basis for constructing new knowledge.

The most suitable and sought-after outcome of the Pri-Sec-Co project is, as the Swiss report suggests "to be a set of locally adapted transitional materials with the concomitant training and information, delivered to teachers at primary and, especially, secondary level in a convincing way". These materials should be aimed at filling the gap between the two school levels and should take into account learners' ages and psychological development. They should also be flexible so that they can easily be adapted to each national and local context.

All members of the project believe that if the benefits of an early start are not to be lost, primary teachers will need to prepare their pupils for the new stage they have ahead. Also secondary teachers, will need to find ways to continue from where their pupils are and to build their new knowledge on their existing competences. It is the aim of the project to support primary and secondary teachers with transition by creating an international, interactive website, video materials and manuals for teachers and teacher trainers as well as sample lessons and assessment tools. Finally, an international Comenius teacher training course is projected to disseminate the project results among European teachers.