



# PLURIDENTITIES

## WORKING PAPER 4

### Working package 4



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# Problem statement

## *Conceptual and theoretical framework*

The Pluridentities framework (Pluridentities project, n.d.) emphasises that language and identification are deeply interconnected and dynamically shaped across contexts. Rather than viewing identity as fixed, the framework foregrounds identification: how individuals relate to categories such as “multilingual,” “Belgian,” “Swedish,” or “European,” and how these relationships shift over time (Cummins, 2015; Janssens, 2019). Language functions as both a communicative resource and a symbolic marker of belonging (Li et al, 2022). Within this perspective, plurilingual identities – *pluridentities* – emerge through the interaction of linguistic capital, the learning environment, language policy and technology. Schools, therefore, constitute central sites where learners’ linguistic repertoires and identities can be supported, shaped, or constrained (Cummins, 2000).

Situated at the intersection of the framework’s components (Pluridentities project, n.d.) – linguistic capital and the learning environment – an inclusive classroom begins with recognising and valuing the linguistic diversity that pupils bring. Therefore, this working paper focuses on linguistic identification in the learning environment. Brind et al. (2007, as cited in Nusche, 2009) state that valuing pupils’ native language is “an essential component of intercultural education, ensuring that migrant children feel that their cultural and language background is appreciated as much as that of the majority,” a point also emphasized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2010). To fully understand the complexities of language learning and teaching, it’s crucial to consider the multifaceted nature of identification. As Norton (2013) states, “it is only by acknowledging the complexity of identity that we can gain greater insight into the myriads of challenges and possibilities of language learning and language teaching in the new millennium” (p. 191). Multilingual learners bring valuable linguistic resources to their learning environment, which shapes not only their own identification but also that of their teachers. When valued, learners’ motivation increases, and these resources support both L1 and L2 development (Little & Kirwan, 2018). Language acquisition is not only about skills but also about navigating linguistic hierarchies and social connectedness. Teachers, like

pupils, are affected by the multilingual realities in the classroom. Their professional identity is shaped by the languages they teach, use and encounter (ref framework).

Multilingualism in the learning environment is often interpreted in two ways: on the one hand there is the focus on pupils who speak several languages outside the school (which are seldom the school's instruction language) and on the other hand there are the attempts to stimulate the multilingualism of the pupils via multilingual teaching approaches such as CLIL, within the learning environment, which comprises the physical, social, and digital spaces in which language learning and use occur (Benson, 2013; Richards, 2001). Teachers shape these environments through their pedagogical decisions and their stance toward linguistic diversity (Medgyes & Malderez, 1996; Little & Kirwan, 2018).

Multilingual pedagogies, including translanguaging and CLIL, represent structured ways of linking the learning environment to pupils' linguistic repertoires. CLIL integrates an additional instructional language into subject teaching and has been associated with gains in language proficiency, cultural awareness, and motivation (Coyle, 2008; Graham et al., 2018; San Isidro Agrelo, 2019). Yet, implementation varies substantially across educational systems, highlighting the need to explore and understand learning environments in context.

### *The Belgian (Flemish) context*

Flemish classrooms are increasingly multilingual: around one-fifth of pupils in secondary education have a home language other than Dutch (Department of Education and Training, 2025). Nevertheless, the education system has historically maintained a strong monolingual orientation aimed at safeguarding Dutch, resulting in limited institutional space for multilingual practices (Delarue & De Caluwe, 2015). Such conditions shape the learning environment by contributing to the undervaluation of pupils' linguistic resources, with studies documenting stigmatisation of home languages, lower teacher expectations and constrained opportunities for identity expression (Agirdag, 2010; Van der Wildt et al., 2015).

Although individual teachers sometimes create opportunities for multilingual practices, coherence between classroom approaches, school policy and broader governance is limited

(Jaspers, 2024). CLIL was introduced only in 2014 and remains tightly regulated: it is restricted to secondary schools, limited to 20 percent of instructional time, and requires specific teacher competences (Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2020; Surmont et al., 2023). As a result, CLIL provides structured multilingual exposure, but opportunities remain circumscribed. Despite these developments, little is known about how teachers and pupils in Flemish secondary schools perceive multilingualism within their learning environments, both in CLIL and non-CLIL settings.

### *The Swedish context*

Swedish schools also educate linguistically diverse student populations. In addition to Swedish and the five recognised national minority languages, commonly spoken community languages include Arabic, Somali, Persian and Kurdish. Around a quarter to a third of pupils have an immigrant background or a first language other than Swedish (PISA, 2018; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2023). Instruction, however, remains largely monolingual with Swedish as the main medium.

English holds a particularly strong position in Sweden as it has been a mandatory school subject since 1948 (SOU 1948:27). It is widespread across social and digital domains (Mežek, 2024), and Swedish pupils demonstrate relatively high proficiency in English compared to European peers (Eurostat, 2024). Other foreign languages – German, French, Spanish – are offered, but enrolment and uptake vary, and their contribution to pupils' multilingual identification is less well understood (Bardel, Gyllstad & Tholin, 2023). Home-language instruction exists for pupils with migrant backgrounds, though provision varies locally.

CLIL-inspired programmes have existed in Sweden for several decades but remain limited in number and differ considerably in organisation (Sylvén, 2019; Olsson, 2025; Paulsrud, 2016). Most students, therefore, experience multilingualism in non-CLIL contexts, where it may be reflected in their language studies, in peer interaction, in classroom practices, and in the linguistic repertoires they draw on in daily school life.

Despite Sweden's multilingual society, relatively little quantitative research has examined how teachers and students perceive opportunities for multilingualism in their learning environments, or how instructional contexts relate to the presence and use of pupils' linguistic repertoires.

### *Comparative perspective*

Comparing Belgium (Flanders) and Sweden offers the opportunity to examine how multilingual learning environments are perceived within two systems that educate diverse student populations, yet differ significantly in their policy traditions and approaches to multilingualism. Flanders maintains a historically monolingual regulatory framework, while Sweden operates in a more visibly multilingual societal context. CLIL is tightly regulated and relatively new in Flanders, whereas in Sweden, it has been around for decades, is limited in scale, but varied in form. Analysing survey data from both countries allows us to explore convergences and divergences in how multilingualism is understood, valued and enacted in everyday school life, contributing to broader discussions about plurilingual learning environments in Europe.

### *Research questions*

This study investigates the role of multilingualism and multilingual education, in this case realised through CLIL, in the context of Belgium and Sweden. The focus is on two central dimensions: the linguistic identification of the pupils and the perceptions of multilingualism at school of both pupils and teachers. To explore these aspects, we formulate the following research questions:

**RQ1.** How does pupil's linguistic identification differ across educational contexts within Belgium and Sweden, and how do these patterns compare between the two countries?

**RQ2.** To what extent do pupils' and teachers' perceptions of multilingualism in schools differ between Belgium and Sweden?



# Methodology

## *Dataset*

Two surveys were developed within the project, one targeting teachers and the other pupils. Minor context-specific adaptations were made in Belgium and Sweden, and each survey was piloted prior to data collection.

Principals and teachers were asked to give their informed consent before data collection was formally initiated. In Belgium, the target groups consisted of second and third-grade teachers and pupils aged 14 to 18. For pupils under 16, informed consent was sought from parents in advance, via paper and digital forms. In Sweden, teachers at lower and upper secondary schools, and students aged 15 to 18, were invited. All participants were informed about the purpose and procedure of the study, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation, following the applicable ethical guidelines. The survey was prepared in Qualtrics and administered between 30 April 2025 and 1 November 2025. It was distributed via a digital link and QR code, which teachers shared with their students or projected in the classroom. For the teacher survey, a link was also shared.

In Belgium, 18 schools participated in the study, including 8 CLIL schools. After excluding non-serious responses and incomplete surveys, 127 questionnaires were completed by teachers (12 CLIL, 115 non-CLIL) and 1118 by pupils (162 CLIL, 956 non-CLIL).

In Sweden, 7 schools participated in the study, including 4 CLIL schools. In total, 423 pupils (242 CLIL, 181 non-CLIL) completed the survey, along with 18 teachers (9 CLIL, 9 non-CLIL).

## *Data analysis*

The data analysis was fully aligned with the two central research questions, which respectively explored (RQ1) differences in pupils' linguistic identification in Belgium and Sweden, and (RQ2) differences in perceptions towards multilingualism at school for both pupils and teachers.

### **Linguistic identification (RQ1)**

To investigate pupils' linguistic identification, data were used containing information on language repertoire, participation in CLIL programs, and self-reported linguistic identification, measured on a five-point scale ranging from "very weak" to "very strong". Only pupils with complete data on these variables were included in the analyses.

A summary table was created, listing the languages most frequently cited by respondents in answer to the question "Name all languages you know," broken down, by country and CLIL status. The percentages of CLIL versus non-CLIL pupils were calculated. In addition, average linguistic identification scores were calculated by language and CLIL status, based on respondents' self-reported ratings of how strongly they identify with each language they cited, measured on a scale ranging from very weak to very strong. Because English was the only sufficiently representative language in both countries, chi-square tests and Wilcoxon rank-sum tests were performed to test whether language identification differed between Belgium and Sweden.

### **Perceptions towards multilingualism at school (RQ2)**

The perceptions of teachers' multilingual classroom use focused on nine items, which asked teachers to indicate how often they used different languages in their lessons on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = very often; "not applicable" was treated as missing). An exploratory factor analysis (principal axis factoring) conducted on the Belgian and Swedish sample of teachers revealed one dominant factor (KMO = 0.88; Bartlett's  $\chi^2(78) = 746.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the nine selected items measure a coherent concept of multilingual classroom use. Three negatively worded items were reverse-coded, so that higher scores indicate a higher level of multilingual use. The final scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

The same approach was used to investigate pupils' perceptions of multilingualism at schools. A composite scale was constructed by averaging eight items ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). These items were also scored on a 5-point scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree), with higher scores indicating a more positive attitude toward multilingualism in education.

# Results

## *Linguistic Identification of pupils (RQ1)*

Below, tables 1 and 2 present the most frequently mentioned languages among pupils in Belgium and Sweden, distinguishing between CLIL and non-CLIL participants. The “mean” values indicate the average level of linguistic identification reported for each language, measured on a Likert-type scale (higher values indicate stronger identification with that language).

**Table 1: Pupils in Belgium**

*Top 15 languages: CLIL vs non-CLIL percentages and linguistic identification*

Language	Participant non-CLIL (%)	Participant CLIL (%)	Total	Mean non-CLIL	Mean CLIL
English	85%	14%	1,018	3.10	3.53
Dutch	85%	14%	915	4.43	4.57
French	84%	15%	909	2.36	2.50
German	83%	17%	241	1.70	1.78
West Flemish	79%	20%	219	3.89	3.28
Flemish	85%	14%	194	4.76	4.71
Spanish	75%	25%	124	2.21	2.12
Arabic	94%	5%	77	3.53	2.50
Antwerp	85%	14%	56	3.62	3.00
Brabantian	75%	25%	48	4.27	4.50
Limburgish	89%	10%	38	2.17	3.75
Italian	64%	35%	37	2.83	1.76
East Flemish	82%	17%	29	3.62	3.60
Latin	47%	52%	23	2.36	2.25
Gents	71%	28%	21	3.06	2.50

Table 2: Pupils in Sweden

*Top 15 languages: CLIL vs non-CLIL percentages and linguistic identification*

Language	Participant non-CLIL (%)	Participant CLIL (%)	Total	Mean non-CLIL	Mean CLIL
English	42%	57%	401	3.176	3.90
Swedish	44%	55%	396	4.74	4.162
Spanish	45%	54%	137	1.74	1.92
French	54%	45%	73	1.58	2.18
German	54%	45%	55	1.87	1.80
Arabic	25%	74%	35	3.78	4.15
Norwegian	63%	36%	22	2.00	2.75
Persian	41%	58%	17	4.43	4.10
Danish	62%	37%	16	2.10	2.50
Italian	26%	73%	15	3.25	2.09
Tamil	8%	91%	12	3.00	4.18
Chinese	27%	72%	11	3.67	3.63
Japanese	28%	71%	7	1.00	2.40
Russian	57%	42%	7	1.50	3.67
Turkish	28%	71%	7	3.00	3.00

In both Belgium and Sweden, English is the most frequently mentioned language among pupils, reflecting its central role in international education. The majority (57%) of pupils in Sweden follow CLIL, while in Belgium, only 14% of CLIL pupils indicate English. The average linguistic identification of CLIL pupils in Sweden is 3.90, compared to 3.54 in Belgium, while non-CLIL pupils in both countries score around 3.1. The Wilcoxon rank-sum tests indicate a significant difference in linguistic identification between Belgium and Sweden for CLIL pupils ( $p = 0.0004$ ), whereas no significant difference is observed for non-

CLIL pupils ( $p = 0.52$ ). This suggests that the CLIL programme may be associated with variations in linguistic identification across countries, while non-CLIL pupils show more consistency.

We see a different pattern for the national language. In Belgium (Flanders), Dutch is the dominant language, with 85% non-CLIL participants and only 14% CLIL; the average identification is high (4.43 for non-CLIL and 4.58 for CLIL). In Sweden, a similar pattern applies for Swedish, with 44% of non-CLIL pupils and 55% CLIL, and average identification scores of 4.74 and 4.16, respectively. It is striking that CLIL pupils in Sweden report slightly lower identifications than non-CLIL pupils, while in Belgium, CLIL shows a slight strengthening of identification with the national languages.

Dialects in Belgium (Flanders) add an extra dimension. Languages such as West Flemish, East Flemish, Limburgish and Brabantian are mainly indicated by non-CLIL pupils, with relatively high average identifications (e.g. West Flemish: 3.89). This suggests that regional variation remains strongly linked to local identity and is relatively independent of CLIL programmes. In Flanders, CLIL focuses mainly on international languages such as English, French and German, while dialects retain a cultural and linguistic identification outside formal education.

#### *Perceptions towards multilingualism at school (RQ2)*

Table 3. Teachers' perceptions of multilingualism at school

<b>Report</b>		
Multilingual classroom language use (mean of 9 items: Use_languages3,8,9,13,15,16,1_R,10_R,12_R)		
Country	Mean	Std. Deviation
Belgium	3.3387	.73952
Sweden	1.7949	.58063
Total	3.1671	.87058

In the combined sample, the average level of multilingual classroom use was around 3.2 ( $SD \approx 0.9$ ), which corresponds to a frequency between "sometimes" and "often." When comparing across countries, Belgian teachers showed a significantly higher level of

multilingual use than their Swedish colleagues in this sample. Belgian teachers reported an average score of 3.34 (SD = 0.74, n = 104), while the average in Sweden was 1.79 (SD = 0.58, n = 13). The difference of approximately 1.5 scale points was found to be statistically significant,  $t(115) = 7.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [1.12, 1.97].

Table 4: Pupil's perceptions of multilingualism at school

<b>Report</b>		
<b>Attitudes towards multilingualism at school (mean of attitude2-9)</b>		
<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Belgium	3.0092	.81696
Sweden	3.4765	.82419
Total	3.1233	.84272

Compared to the teachers, the Swedish pupils in the sample reported a more positive attitude on average than their Belgian peers. The mean for Swedish pupils was 3.48 (SD = 0.82, n = 346), while Belgian pupils had a mean score of 3.01 (SD = 0.82, n = 1071). These differences were examined with an independent t-test, which indicated that the difference was statistically significant,  $t(1415) = 9.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , with a mean difference of 0.47 scale points.

# Conclusions

The current study focuses on the linguistic identification of pupils, as well as teachers' and pupils' perceptions of multilingualism at school, within various educational contexts in Belgium and Sweden. The analyses show that country-level contextual factors and participation in CLIL programs play a role in the variation in language identification and attitudes, although patterns differ between pupils and teachers.

First, the results for pupils' linguistic identification show that English is the most common language in both countries, reflecting the centrality of English in international education. This finding is not unexpected, as previous research has highlighted the status of English as a widespread and dominant global language (Soler & Morales-Gálvez, 2022). Wilcoxon rank-sum tests indicate that this difference in language identification with English between Belgium and Sweden is significant for CLIL students ( $p = 0.0004$ ), with Swedish CLIL pupils reporting significantly stronger identification with English than their Belgian peers. In contrast, no significant difference is observed among non-CLIL pupils ( $p = 0.52$ ), whose levels of linguistic identification with English are similar across the two countries. This suggests that the CLIL program may be interconnected with linguistic identification, while pupils who do not participate in CLIL exhibit relatively consistent identification patterns across the national languages.

A different pattern emerged for the national languages. In Belgium (Flanders), Dutch is the dominant language, with high percentages among both CLIL and non-CLIL pupils. The average identification scores are high, namely 4.43 for non-CLIL pupils and 4.58 for CLIL pupils, indicating strong national language identification, regardless of CLIL participation. In Sweden, the pattern is similar for Swedish, with non-CLIL pupils reporting higher identification ( $M = 4.74$ ) than CLIL pupils ( $M = 4.16$ ). The results show that CLIL pupils in Sweden report a similar average identification with the national language as their Belgian counterparts. This suggests that participation in CLIL, despite the focus on an additional language, is not accompanied by a clear shift in identification with English or the national language within these samples.

A special dimension is added by regional dialects in Belgium. Languages such as West Flemish, East Flemish, Limburgish, and Brabantian are mainly mentioned by pupils who do not participate in CLIL, with relatively high identification scores (for example, West Flemish: 3.89). This demonstrates that regional language identification remains strong and is relatively independent of formal CLIL education. CLIL programs primarily focus on international languages such as English, French, and German, thus maintaining identification with dialects outside of functional education and adding a cultural dimension to pupils' linguistic identification.

The results regarding teachers' perception show a significant difference in the use of multilingualism in the classroom between Belgium and Sweden. Belgian teachers report a statistically significant higher average level of positive perceptions towards multilingualism at school than Swedish teachers in the sample. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to the limited number of Swedish teachers in the sample ( $n = 18$ ). These results suggest that multilingual classroom use differs significantly between Belgium and Sweden, with Belgian teachers more likely to integrate multiple languages into their teaching practice. This pattern may reflect the presence of multiple official languages in Belgian society, whereas in Sweden, languages other than Swedish generally have minority status. At the same time, the scale indicates that, across both countries, teachers use multilingual strategies "sometimes" to "often," indicating that multilingualism is an integral part of classroom practice, although the frequencies differ by context.

Pupils' perceptions of multilingualism reflect a different pattern. On average, the Swedish pupils of the sample report a statistically significant more positive attitude than the Belgian pupils. This indicates that students in Sweden are generally more favorable to using multiple languages at school and have a more positive perception of multilingualism at school. In Belgium, attitudes average between "somewhat positive" and "positive," indicating that pupils, although predominantly positive, are less inclined to value the use of their linguistic repertoire at school compared to their Swedish peers. These differences may



be related to the national curriculum, the degree of exposure to multiple languages, or the cultural appreciation of multilingualism in society.

In summary, the results illustrate that linguistic identification and perceptions of multilingualism vary significantly across countries and educational contexts. CLIL programs appear to be linked with the process of identification with English, particularly in Sweden, while national language identification and regional dialects in Belgium remain largely independent of CLIL participation. The combination of pupils and teacher data provides initial insights into the dynamics of language identification and multilingualism in two different European educational contexts, providing a preliminary understanding of these phenomena across different school settings.

The preliminary findings we have reported contribute to our understanding of how language identification relates to different educational contexts in two European countries. As the Pluridentities project continues, future research will help deepen and extend these initial insights, providing a stronger foundation for examining the interplay between policy, classroom practices, and students' linguistic identities across European contexts. Longitudinal data could shed light on how participation in CLIL and other educational practices influences the development of pupils' national, regional, and international language identification over time.

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