

# METHODS OF BILINGUAL GEOGRAPHY EMPLOYING A FILM, A MIND MAP AND A POSTER <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Of special significance among non-linguistic subjects in bilingual teaching is geography, which develops the skills of perception, evaluation and explanation of processes and phenomena occurring in the geographical environment at a variety of spatial, temporal and cultural scales (Piotrowska, 2007). People interested in bilingual education are usually teachers and parents in frontier cultures, ethnic minorities, or users of several languages themselves. What is important in bilingual instruction is a careful choice of teaching methods, like observation of geographical objects presented on film and the creation of mind maps and posters.

**Key words:** geography, bilingual teaching, methods of bilingual instruction, film, mind map, poster

## Introduction

Today the existence of multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies affects educational systems, which have to accommodate the needs this fact creates. An important place in this development is assigned to geography, both as a scientific discipline and as a subject of instruction at a variety of educational levels. Modern geography is a system of sciences exploring and explaining the causes and effects of natural and socio-economic differences in the geographical space. It focuses on describing and elucidating the relations and interactions holding among the particular elements of animate and inanimate nature as well as between those elements and human activity. Another phenomenon highly relevant to geography is the linguistic diversity occurring in the geographical space.

<sup>1</sup> Piotrowska, I. 2008. Methods of bilingual geography employing a film, a mind map and a poster. [in]: K. Donert, P. Charzyński, Z. Podgórski (red.), Bilingual Geography – aims, methods and challenges. Geography in European higher education. Herodot Network & Association of Polish Adult Educators, Liverpool-Toruń, 5: 42-48.

It has prompted bilingual education, which is a system of instruction in which particular subjects, e.g. geography, are taught using two languages: native and foreign. Pupils thus attain better linguistic skills in many important fields. Bilingual linguistic competence also opens up an opportunity to continue education in other countries. That is why this conception of education should be a priority and should meet the requirements of reality (Piotrowska, in press).

### **Methods of bilingual education of geography**

Bilingualism can be considered in its social, linguistic, psychological and pedagogical aspects. The bilingual mode of teaching relies on the use of two languages as equivalent tools of instruction, the teaching in Polish and in one of the target languages of subjects. The effect of this process is the acquisition of broad communicative and intercultural competence. Formally, bilingual education was introduced in Poland from the school year 1991/1992. The first to appear were bilingual classes with French established in secondary schools with a tradition of teaching this language. Next came English, German and Spanish classes. Bilingual instruction does not apply to lessons of Polish, the history and geography of Poland, and another foreign language. At present there are some 80 schools in Poland with bilingual classes, and their number keeps growing from year to year (Piotrowska, 2007). Of special significance among non-linguistic subjects in bilingual teaching is geography, which develops the skills of perception, evaluation and explanation of processes and phenomena occurring in the geographical environment at a variety of spatial, temporal and cultural scales.

As follows from international studies, pupils in bilingual classes display (Piotrowska, 2007):

- a stronger motivation for learning and a higher level of activity,
- a more extensive vocabulary also in geography,
- more confident and correct use of the vocabulary,
- a skill in using dictionaries.

In a general secondary school, geography is of great cognitive, practical and pedagogical merit. Geographical instruction is to help the pupil answer the question about the meaning and role of objects and phenomena found in the environment, and about possibilities of their rational use. An exceptional value of this discipline is its holistic approach, both to the geographical environment and to human activity.

The main goals of the bilingual teaching of geography are for the pupils to:

- master two languages at the same level,
- master the subject's substance and skills,
- achieve competence in the target language, and
- achieve bi-cultural and intercultural competence (Iluk, 2000).

This kind of teaching should lead to the extension of knowledge about the actualities of contemporary life in the countries speaking the language and about the geographical conditions of human activity in them, their culture and history. People taking interest in bilingualism are teachers and parents in frontier cultures, ethnic minorities, or users of several languages themselves. This new dimension of interest in the subject of the present study is an effect of the globalisation process. An effect of education of geography carried out by creative, competent and reflection-inclined teachers, or generally teachers-constructivists, should also be the pupils' ability to gather and consolidate the knowledge necessary to describe phenomena, and to appreciate the natural and cultural attractions of their region.

To test the above theoretical assumptions concerning the role of geography in acquiring knowledge about the geographical environment and possibilities of practical application of geographical knowledge, an attempt was made to investigate the actual approach to bilingual education by pupils of the Upper Secondary School No 1 in Poznań (Piotrowska, 2007). A survey research was carried out among 80 pupils of selected classes in which geography was taught in two languages: Polish and French. The questionnaire contained a variety of questions about the importance of geography in the teaching process, the bilingual instruction methods employed, the didactic means used, difficulties encountered in learning, skills acquired in geography classes, and an evaluation of the teaching of geography in a foreign language. The pupils were also asked to give their reasons for choosing bilingual classes, as well as weak and strong points of this kind of instruction.

An analysis of the questionnaires showed that:

1. The choice of bilingual classes by the pupils was justified by the following reasons:
  - expanding their use of French and acquiring a vocabulary from a variety of disciplines,
  - learning about the French culture,
  - preparing for the international graduation exam, and
  - ability to enrol in a study in other countries.
2. Among the most common difficulties encountered in learning geography in a foreign

language were:

- having to master a great number of geographical notions,
- a difficult geographical vocabulary,
- remembering and using geographical notions, and
- explaining and formulating descriptions of phenomena and processes in a foreign language.

3. The skills formed during geography classes included:

- using the French geographical vocabulary in practice,
- combining phenomena with geographical notions,
- using notions in two languages,
- ability to perform an analysis of geographical phenomena,
- understanding of the surrounding world,
- ability to construct explanations and definitions of phenomena in a foreign language,
- orientation in space and on a map,
- searching for geographical information, e.g. in the Internet, and
- ability to understand TV broadcasts.

With reference to the skills being developed, geography is indeed a very important subject which can help a young person to understand the environment and the world.

Extremely helpful in the understanding of the surrounding world and geographical space are teaching methods adjusted to the subject matter and skills to be developed in the pupils. Among the methods employed in geography classes the respondents mentioned: a lecture, a discussion, a talk, work with a geographical text in French, and work with a map. But very important methods include observation (of phenomena or processes in a film or on didactic charts), creation of mind maps and preparation of posters.

The necessary information is supplied by perception, or observation of geographical objects, phenomena and processes taking place in a selected space. Observation consists in planned, conscious perception of geographical objects, phenomena and processes. The research procedure consists in seeking and uncovering facts, and the research itself includes description, registration, analysis, and interpretation. In geography, observation is the basis of acquiring knowledge about the environment. Observation is a search and a discovery, depending on the aim or task adopted. Observation must be target-oriented, planned, accurate, objective and perceptive. Its main goals are to develop observation skills and the ability to perceive and learn about phenomena, and to help pupils to form geographical ideas and notions on the basis of cognitive processes (Piskorz,

1997). It is also an important intellect-developing factor through independent thinking and inference as well as through attempts at explaining the operation of geoecosystems (Piotrowska, 2007), because when observing we try to understand the observed.

### **Film and observation**

An audio-visual work of any length composed of a series of sequential pictures giving the impression of movement, conveying a message, and fixed on any medium allowing its frequent replaying. Film acts on our sight and hearing. The following basic film genres can be distinguished: a feature film - a fictional live-actor film, an animated film - created with classical stop-motion techniques employing drawn or spatial objects, or the latest computer techniques of 3D animation, a documentary - a non-fiction film documenting reality, and an educational film - for didactic-instruction purposes. Thanks to a film pupils can observe dynamically developing phenomena as well as those occurring over a long period of time or inaccessible to the observer, perform concrete predetermined tasks, and learn to concentrate.

### **Mind map**

A mind map is a map of thoughts, map of notions, map of associations, map of imaginings, map of memory, map of knowledge, logical map, network of concepts, or graphic ordering. It is a method of a structural recording and management of information.

Mind mapping consists in the making of mind maps, that is, visual and graphic presentations of a problem, notion, phenomenon, situation or event, using words, drawings and symbols (Buzan and Buzan, 1977). A mind map reflects multidimensional thought processes. The record of thinking is not linear; it rests on a chain reaction of associations. Fisher (1999) calls each process involving the illustration of thinking in a graphic form the drawing of cognitive maps, or a visual and graphic presentation of relations among notions and an ordered structure of dependences. During the class pupils prepare mind maps of their own, first in the native language, then in a foreign one. The teacher can also introduce notions in the foreign language from the very start. Prepared in this way, a mind map is an enormous help in the visualisation of issues discussed, and organises specified elements of the geographical environment and human activity which control, in this case, the land-use pattern and its changes occurring in a concrete area.



Figure 1. Mind map of elements of land use - prepared by the pupils in polish

At present mind maps are used in the following domains: administration, planning, project management, economic management, and knowledge management.

### Poster

A poster is any large piece of printed paper designed to be attached to a wall or other vertical surface. Typically, posters include both *textual* and *graphic* elements, although a poster may be either wholly graphical or wholly textual. Posters are designed to be both eye-catching and information-rich. Posters may be used for many purposes: it is a frequent tool of advertisers (particularly of events, musicians and films), propagandists, protesters and other groups trying to communicate a message. Posters are also used for reproductions of artwork, particularly famous works. Another type of poster is an educational one, which may be about a particular subject for educational purposes.

According to Dina F. Mandoli (2007), "a great poster is:"

- readable: where readability is a measure of how easily the ideas flow from one item to the next. A text that has lots of grammatical problems, complex or passive sentence structures, and misspellings is "hard to read".
- legible: if a text is legible, it can be deciphered. A common error in poster presentations is

the use of fonts that are too small to be read from 6-10 feet [2-3 metres] away, a typical distance for reading a poster.

- well organized: spatial organization makes the difference between reaching 95% rather than just 5% of your audience: time spent hunting for the next idea or piece of data is time taken away from thinking about the science.

- succinct: studies show that you have only 11 seconds to grab and retain your audience's attention, so make the punchline prominent and brief. Most of your audience is going to absorb only the punchline. Those who are directly involved in related research will seek you out anyway and chat with you at length, so you can afford to leave out all the details and tell those who are really interested the "nitty gritty" later."

Pupils can also work using a poster as an instruction method, preferably during a class, because then we have an opportunity to watch their ingenuity, involvement, and activity. After they have studied the geographical issue set as their task, the final stage should be the presentation of the poster by its authors and possibly a discussion. Practice shows this method to be highly instructive.

Examples of posters concerning river and wind activity are shown on Figures 2 and 3, prepared by pupils of a Polish-French form during a Geography class.

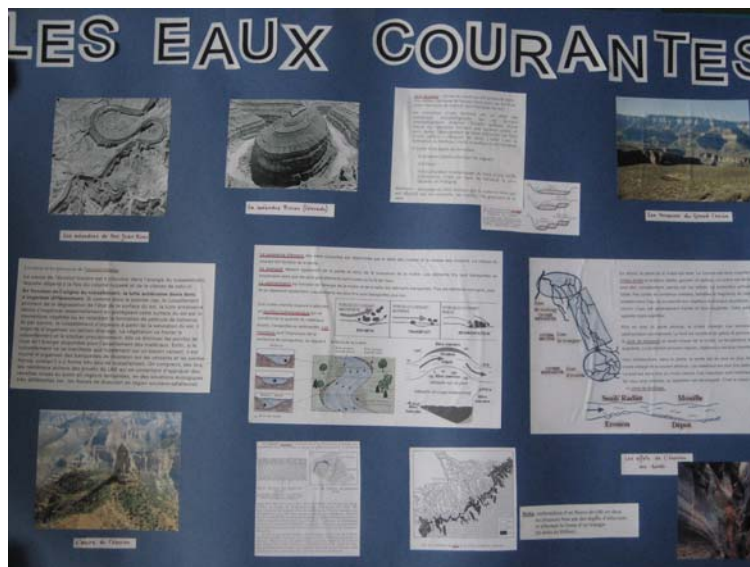


Figure 2. Poster – River erosion

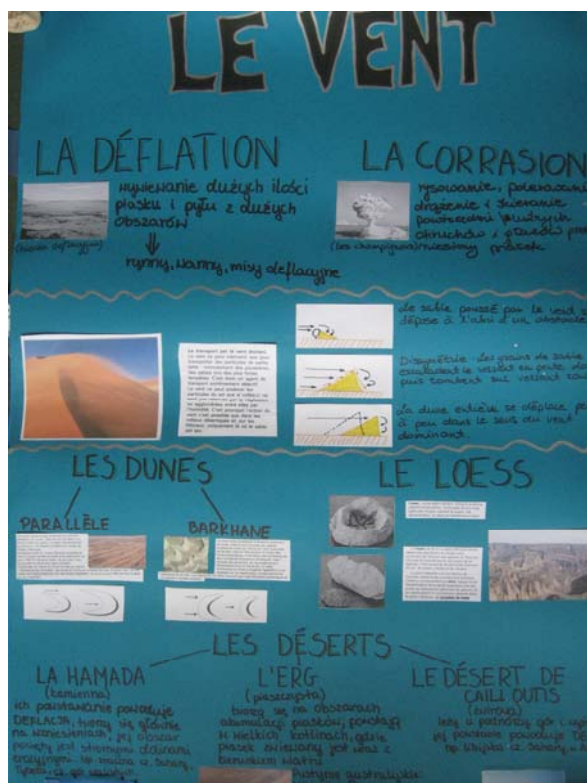


Figure 2. Poster – Wind erosion

With reference to the skills being developed, geography is indeed a very important subject which can help a young person to understand the environment and the world. Geographical bilingual education is also intercultural; with the application of various teaching methods it allows a deeper insight into geographical phenomena and processes, both at a local and a global scale.

## Conclusions

Current discussions and considerations of the role, significance and value of geography in the cognitive and educational systems employing bilingual instruction confirm the important place that this discipline occupies in them. Geographers, both researchers and teachers, who adjust geographical knowledge to the school level, make a great effort to ensure that its fields of study and ever-more-perfect instruments offer an increasingly deeper insight into the operation of the geographical environment. Among very important methods of geographical instruction are observation of geographical objects presented on film and the creation of mind maps and posters. They all develop pupils' creativity and activity. Bilingual teaching helps them to learn notions and employ them to explain natural and economic aspects of a geographical region.



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