

Acquiring intensifying constructions:

A case study of learning foreign languages in Belgium

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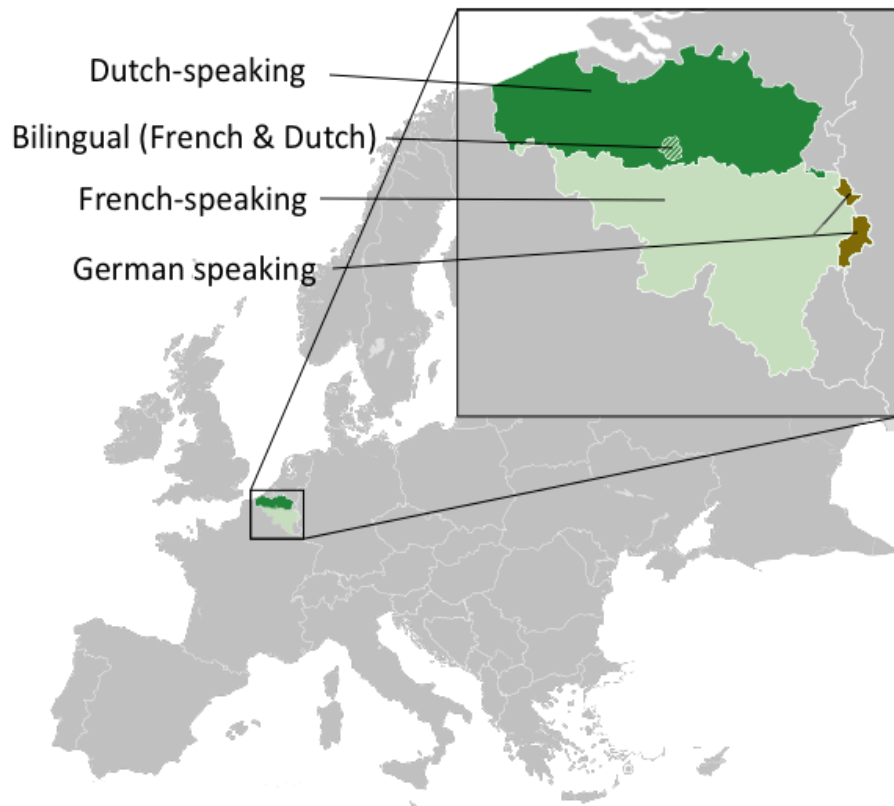
University of Patras, 5 April 2021

PART 1:

Research context

The paradox of Belgium

Belgium



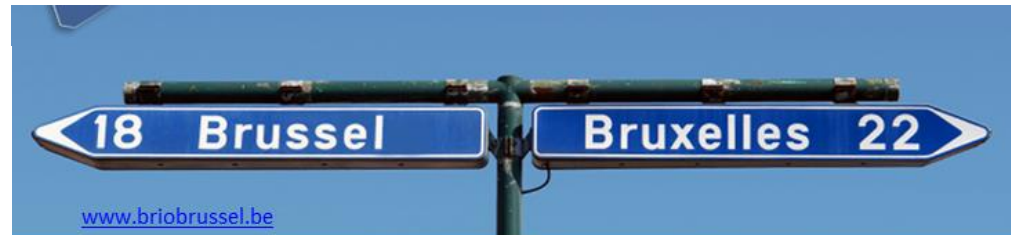
Paradox:

- Small country, at the heart of Europe
- 3 official languages: Dutch, French and German
- Bi-/multilingual speakers needed on the job market



- Language learning is problematic
- Pedagogical methods too traditional
- Polarisation of the two main linguistic communities for economic, social and political reasons; two separate educational systems

The paradox of Belgium



Research context

- Innovative didactic approach promoted by European Commission to **improve multilingualism**:

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

“a second language (a foreign, regional or minority language and/or another official state language) is used to teach certain subjects in the curriculum other than language lessons themselves” (Eurydice, 2006)

= dual approach that focuses on both **content & language**



Research context

ARC-CLIL research project (2014-2019) (Hiligsmann et al. 2017)

= *“Assessing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): linguistic, cognitive and educational perspectives”* (UCLouvain – UNamur)

- Learning Dutch and English in French-speaking Belgium
- Comparison between CLIL and non-CLIL students
- Different linguistic topics (spelling, vocabulary, writing competence, ...)
- Multidisciplinary project (linguistic, cognitive, socio-affective and educational factors)

Cognitive



Socio-educational



Linguistic



Research team



Methodology

Sample

- **Participants:** pupils in primary & secondary in French-speaking Belgium, learning Dutch or English, through CLIL or non-CLIL

<i>T1 (Fall 2015)</i>	CLIL Dutch	CLIL English	non-CLIL Dutch	non-CLIL English	TOTAL
Primary (5th year)	175	103	71	106	455
Secondary (5th year)	141	104	114	114	473
TOTAL	316	207	185	220	928

22 schools in French-speaking Belgium
(Wallonia – not in Brussels)

- Primary: 13
- Secondary: 9



PART 2: Case study

The acquisition of intensifying constructions (cf. Hendrikx 2019)

Intensification

Definition:

- **Intensifier**: a linguistic item (prefix, adverb, ...) that indicates and **increases the degree of emphasis or force** of another item, often a gradable adjective

<u>FRENCH</u>	<u>ENGLISH</u>	<u>DUTCH</u>
 <i>très joli</i>	 <i>very beautiful</i>	 <i>heel mooi</i>
<i>joli</i>	<i>beautiful</i>	<i>mooi</i>

Intensifiers may be difficult to acquire by foreign language learners:

- Wide variety of intensifiers, but language-specific preferences (Rainer 2015; Hendrikx et al. 2017)
- Subject to rapid change (De Clerck & Colleman 2013; Foolen 2015; Lorenz 1999)
- Stylistic specialization (Hoeksema 2012; Foolen, Wottrich & Zwets 2012)
- Not often subject to explicit instruction in foreign language teaching

Intensification

A Construction Grammar approach

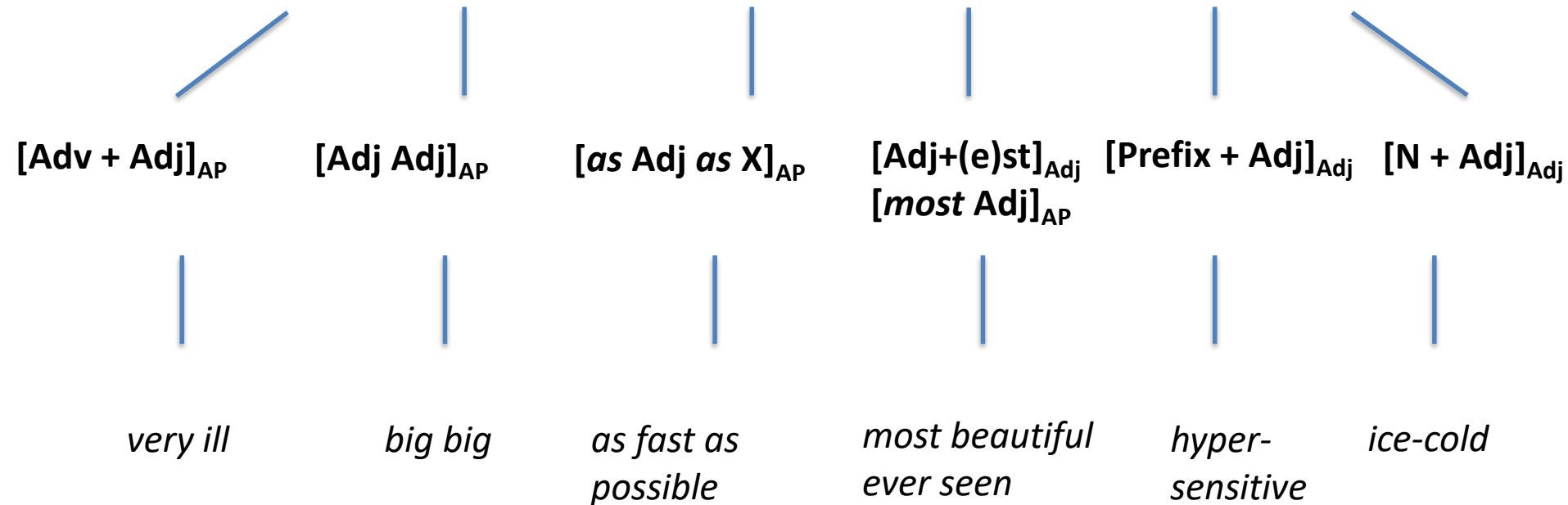
- **Construction:** form-meaning pair at phrase or word-level
(cf. Hoffmann & Trousdale 2013; Booij 2010)
- **Intensifying construction:**

$$[[X]_{\text{INT}} [Y]_{\text{ADJ}}]_{\text{ADJ/AP}} \leftrightarrow \text{'very Y'}$$

- Phrase level (AP): *very tired, extremely motivated*, etc.
- Word level (ADJ): *ice-cold, brand-new, hypersensitive*, etc.

English intensifying constructions

[[X]_{INT} [Y]_{ADJ}]_{ADJ/AP}



Dutch intensifying constructions

[[X]_{INT} [Y]_{ADJ}]_{AP/ADJ}

[ADV+ ADJ]_{AP}

heel ziek
'very ill'

[ADJ ADJ]_{AP}

mooi, mooi
'beautiful
beautiful'

[zo ADJ *als* X]_{AP}

*zo trots als
een aap*
'proud like a
monkey'

**[ADJ+*st*]_{Adj}
[*meest* Adj]_{AP}**

mooiste ooit
'most
beautiful ever'

[Prefix+ ADJ]_{ADJ}

supermodern

[N/A/V+ADJ]_{ADJ}

ijskoud 'ice-
cold'
dolgelukkig
'madly happy'
piepjong 'very
young'

French intensifying constructions

[[X]_{INT} [Y]_{ADJ}]_{ADJ/AP}

[ADV+ADJ]_{AP}	[ADJ ADJ (ADJ)]_{AP}	[ADJ <i>comme</i> X]_{AP}	[<i>plus</i> ADJ]_{AP}	[Prefix+ ADJ]_{ADJ}	[N+ADJ]_{ADJ}
<i>très malade</i> 'very ill'	<i>un monde fou</i> <i>fou fou</i> 'a crazy crazy crazy world'	<i>fort comme un</i> <i>Turc</i> 'strong like a Turkish person'	<i>meilleur de</i> <i>ma vie</i> 'the best of my life'	<i>hyper-</i> <i>sensible</i> 'hyper- sensitive'	

Participants and tasks

Participants from 9 secondary schools (T1 in 5th – T2 in 6th year):

	English	Dutch	Total	Percentage
Non-CLIL	97	112	209	47.72
CLIL	96	133	229	52.28

Control groups:

L1 speakers of Dutch	L1 speakers of English
59	65

Research questions

1. Cross-linguistic differences

- What is the **impact of language-specific differences** for intensifying constructions in French, English and Dutch?
- Do French-speaking learners acquire Dutch/English **intensifying compounds**?

2. Input

- **CLIL input:** Do CLIL learners show a more native-like use of intensifiers due to more native input of English/Dutch?
- **Longitudinal input** (two school years): Which developments can we observe in the learners' use of intensifying constructions?

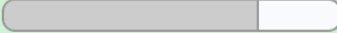
Studies

- **Cloze test** (Hendrikx 2019)
 - L1 & L2 English; L1 & L2 Dutch; L1 French
 - Productive use of intensifiers in controlled contexts
- **Multiple-choice test** (Hendrikx & Van Goethem 2020)
 - L2 English; L2 Dutch
 - Receptive knowledge of intensifying compounds
- **Corpus study written texts** (Hendrikx, Van Goethem & Wulff 2019)
 - L1 & L2 English; L1 & L2 Dutch; L1 French
 - Longitudinal: 5th and 6th year
 - Productive use of intensifiers in semi-spontaneous contexts

STUDY 1

Cloze test:

Productive use of intensifiers in a
controlled context

0%  100%

English



10 sentences

fill in the gaps in the following sentences (in English). Several answers are possible. Insert the word that you is the most appropriate in this context.

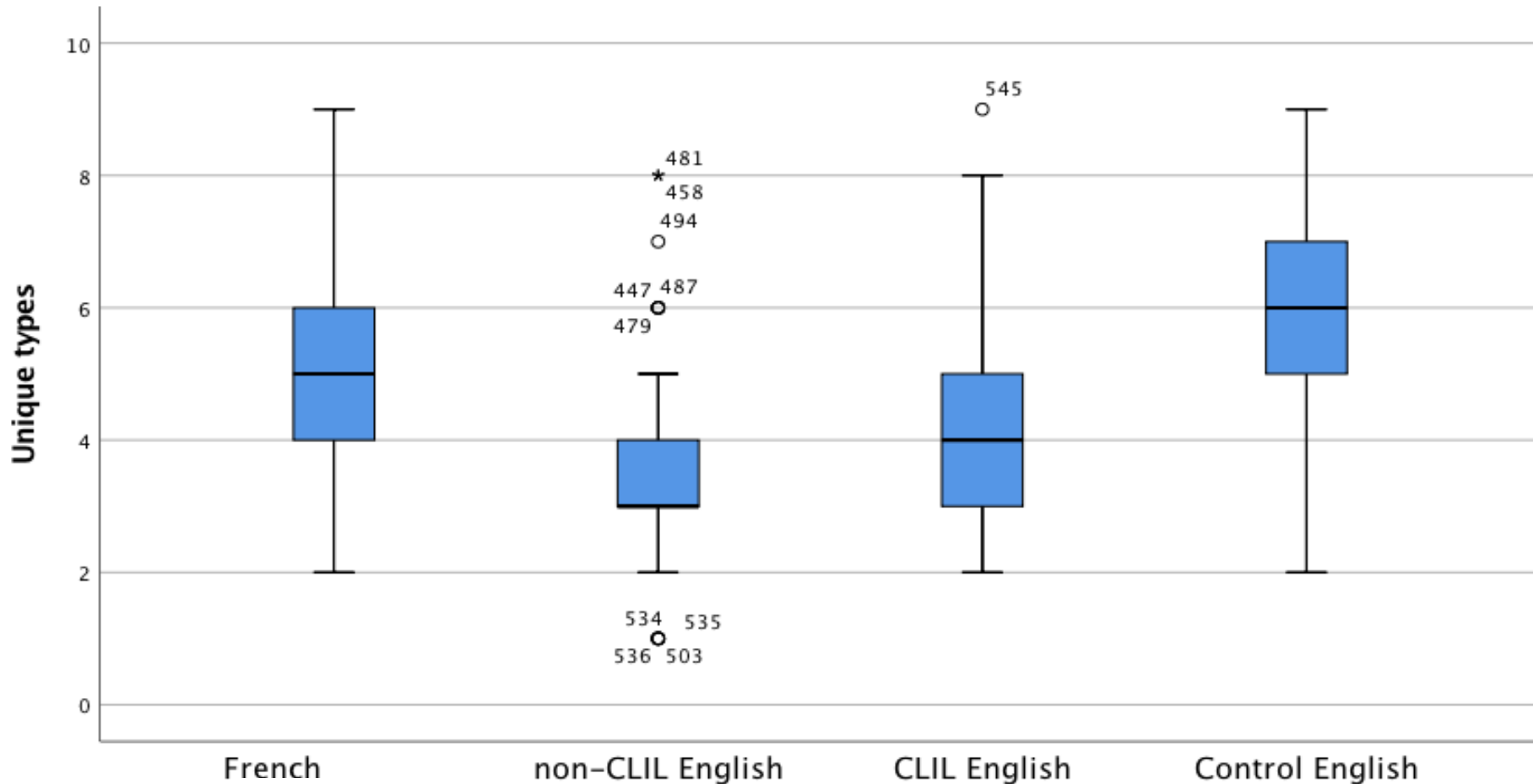
*

I went to a party until two o'clock yesterday evening, and this morning I had to get up at six o'clock to take the bus to school. I'm tired!

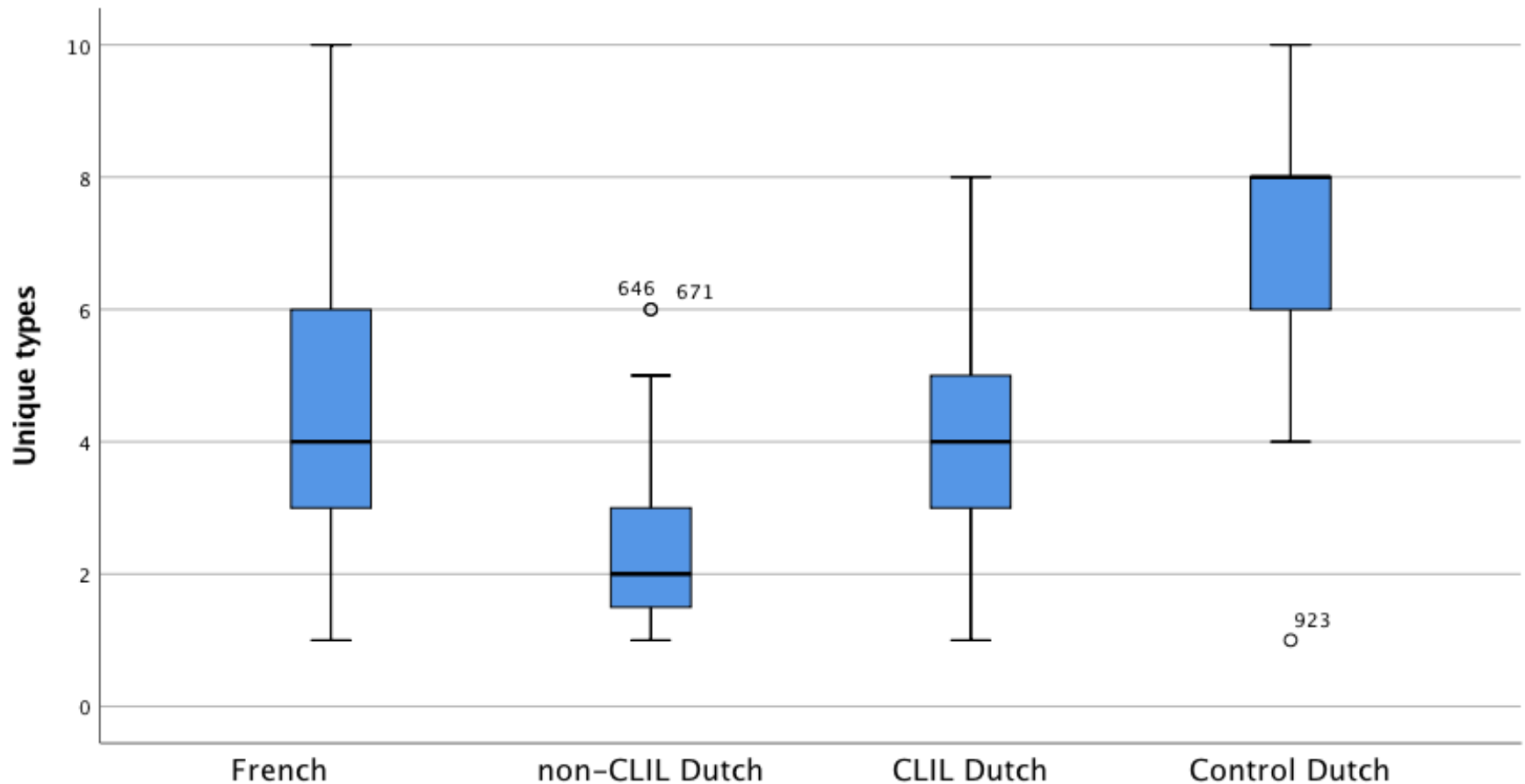
*

You decide that it is time to look for a new hobby. Climbing seems to be great fun. During the first class you get half way up the wall. You are thinking to yourself: what did I get myself into? This is not easy at all, it is even difficult!

English CLIL: greater variety of intensifying constructions



Dutch CLIL: greater variety of intensifying constructions



Summary study 1

- CLIL students use a **greater variety** of intensifiers:
 - Less overuse of all-round adverbs (e.g. *very*, *heel*)
 - More morphological intensifiers, but still very limited use of intensifying compounds (e.g. *schatrijk* (lit. treasure-rich), *paper-thin*)

STUDY 2

Multiple-choice test:
Receptive knowledge of intensifying
compounds

English



Multiple choice 2

Choose one of the three words to fill the gap in the sentence.

The message is ... clear.

- ☐ crystal
- ☐ mirror
- ☐ dead

My clothes are ... new.

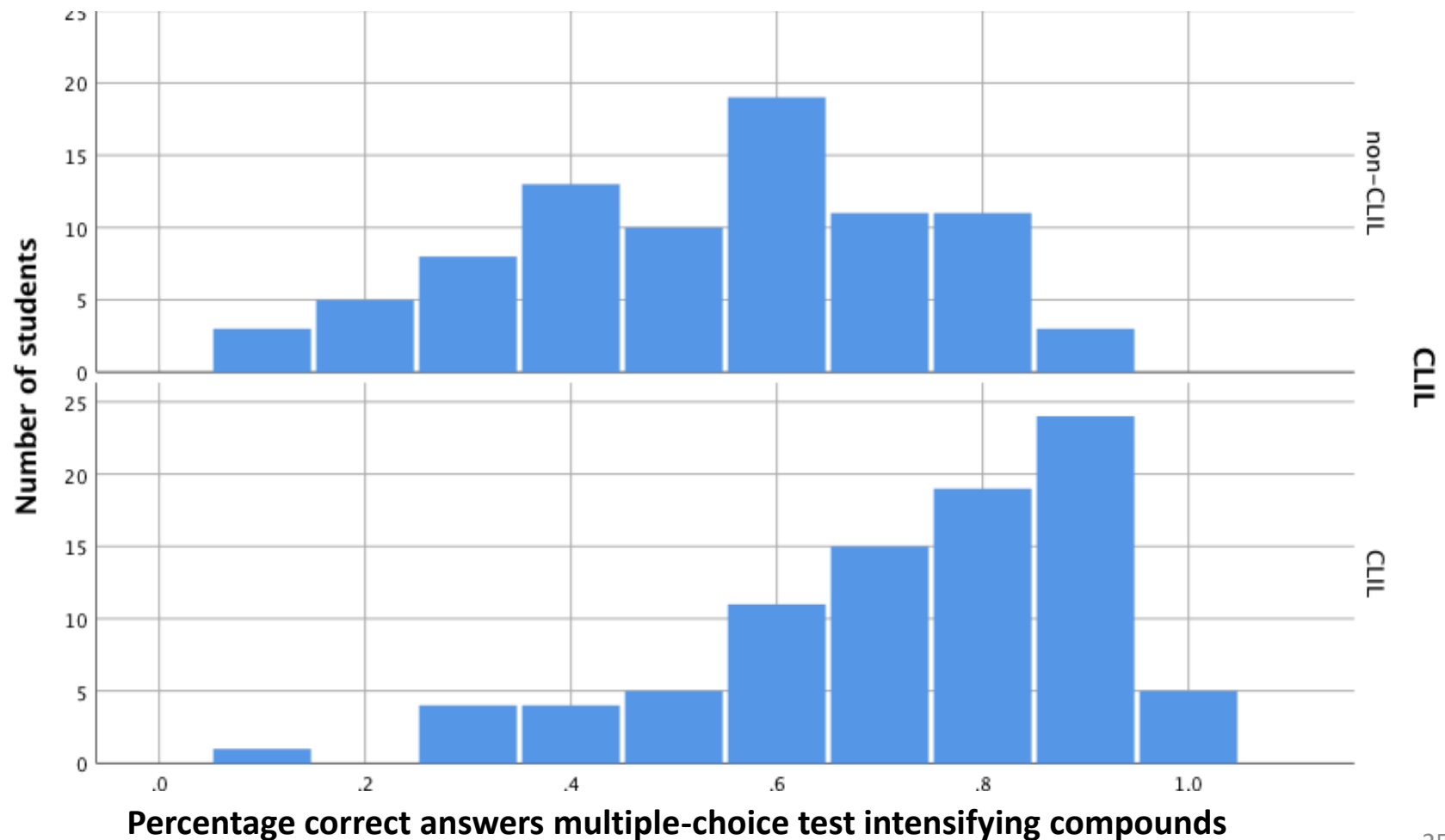
- ☐ pitch
- ☐ stock
- ☐ brand

Be careful with that knife- it's ... sharp.

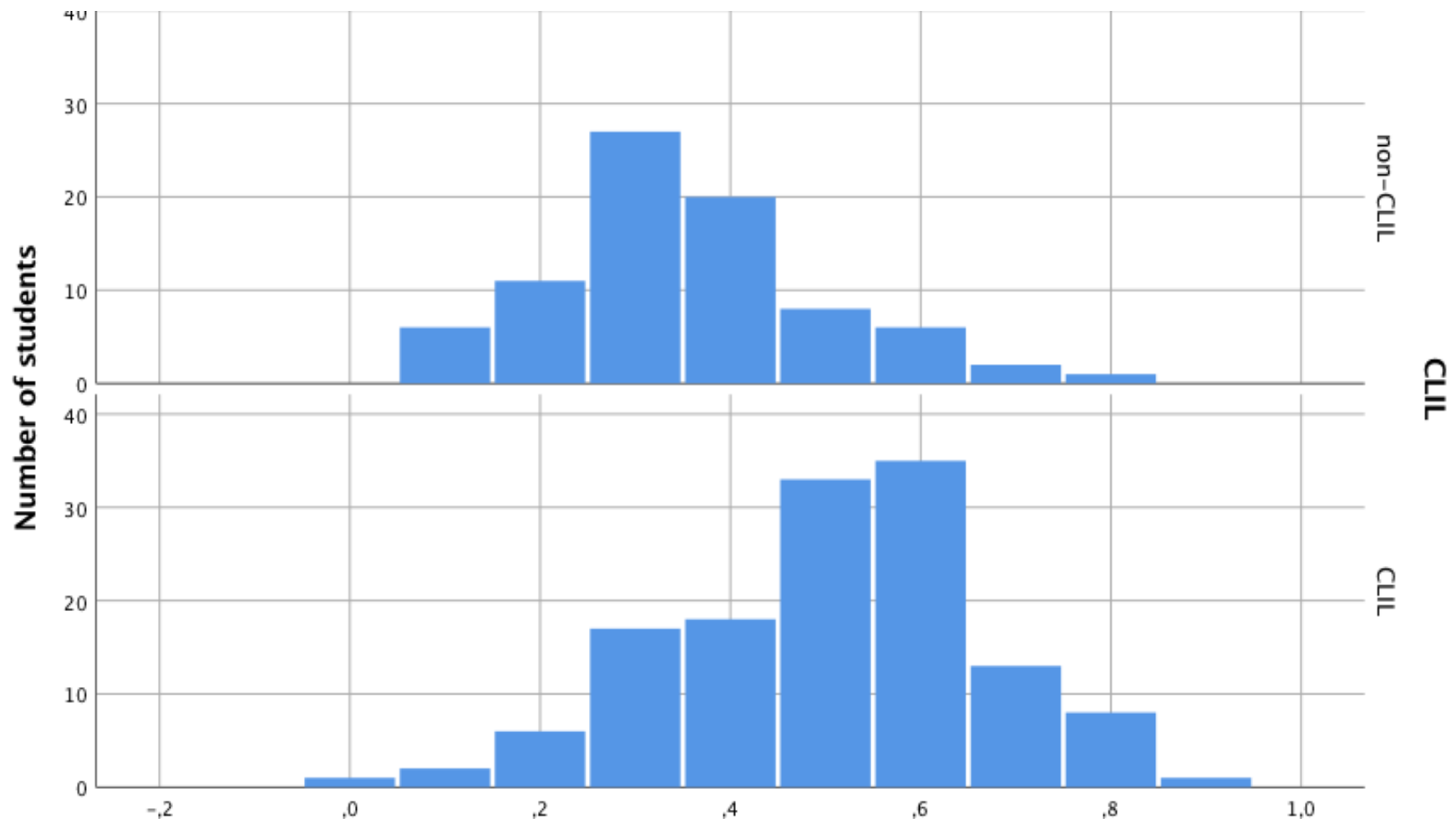
- ☐ pitch
- ☐ razor
- ☐ blade

I was ... awake by six.

English CLIL: on average more correct answers to the multiple-choice test



Dutch CLIL: on average more correct answers to the multiple-choice test



Percentage correct answers multiple-choice test intensifying compounds

Summary study 2

- CLIL students have a better receptive knowledge of intensifying compounds than the non-CLIL students
- The results for English are better than for Dutch

STUDY 3

E-mail writing task:

Productive use of intensifying constructions in a semi-spontaneous context

0%  100%

English 1

Write an e-mail about a party you attended

* Write an e-mail in English (15 to 25 lines) to a friend to tell him/her about the party you attended last night.

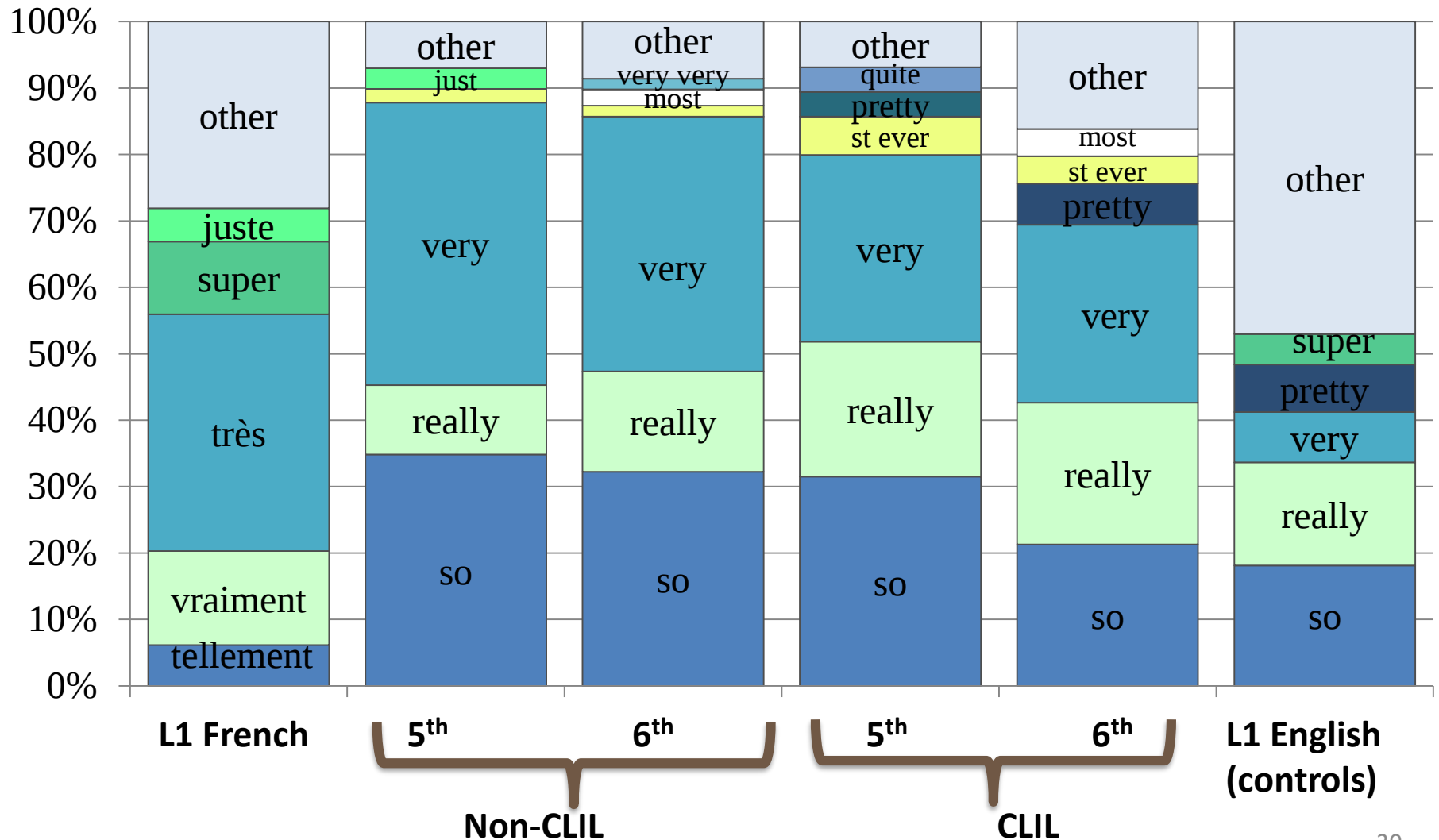
Describe what you liked most, and speak about some funny and crazy things that happened last night. Also, tell him/her about things that happened and that you did not like at all.

You may want to talk about the music, the atmosphere, the guests, the food, the presents, the performances, etc... You may also refer to the pictures below for inspiration.

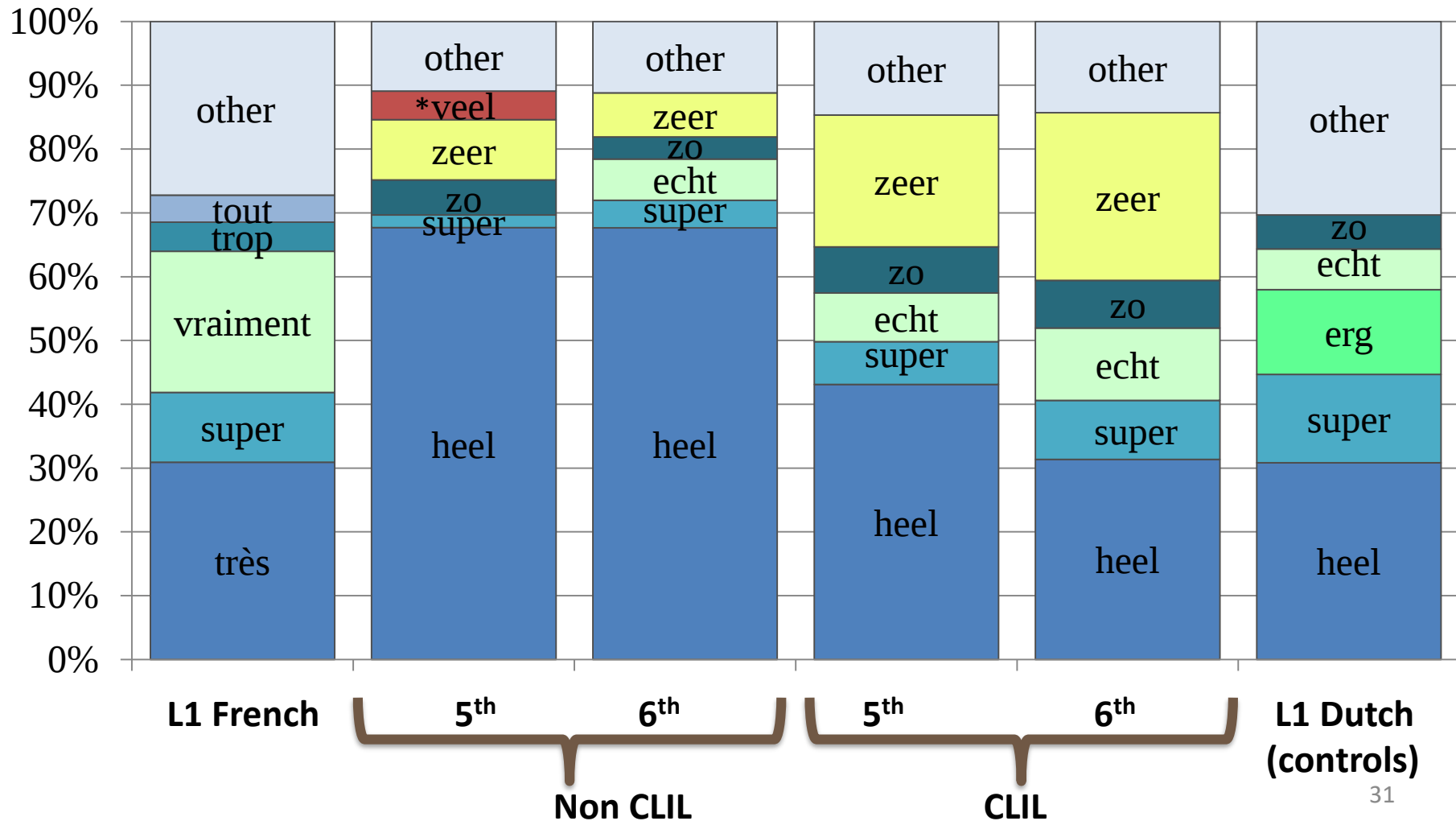
From: anexample@email.com
To: anotherexample@email.com
Object: Party
Message:



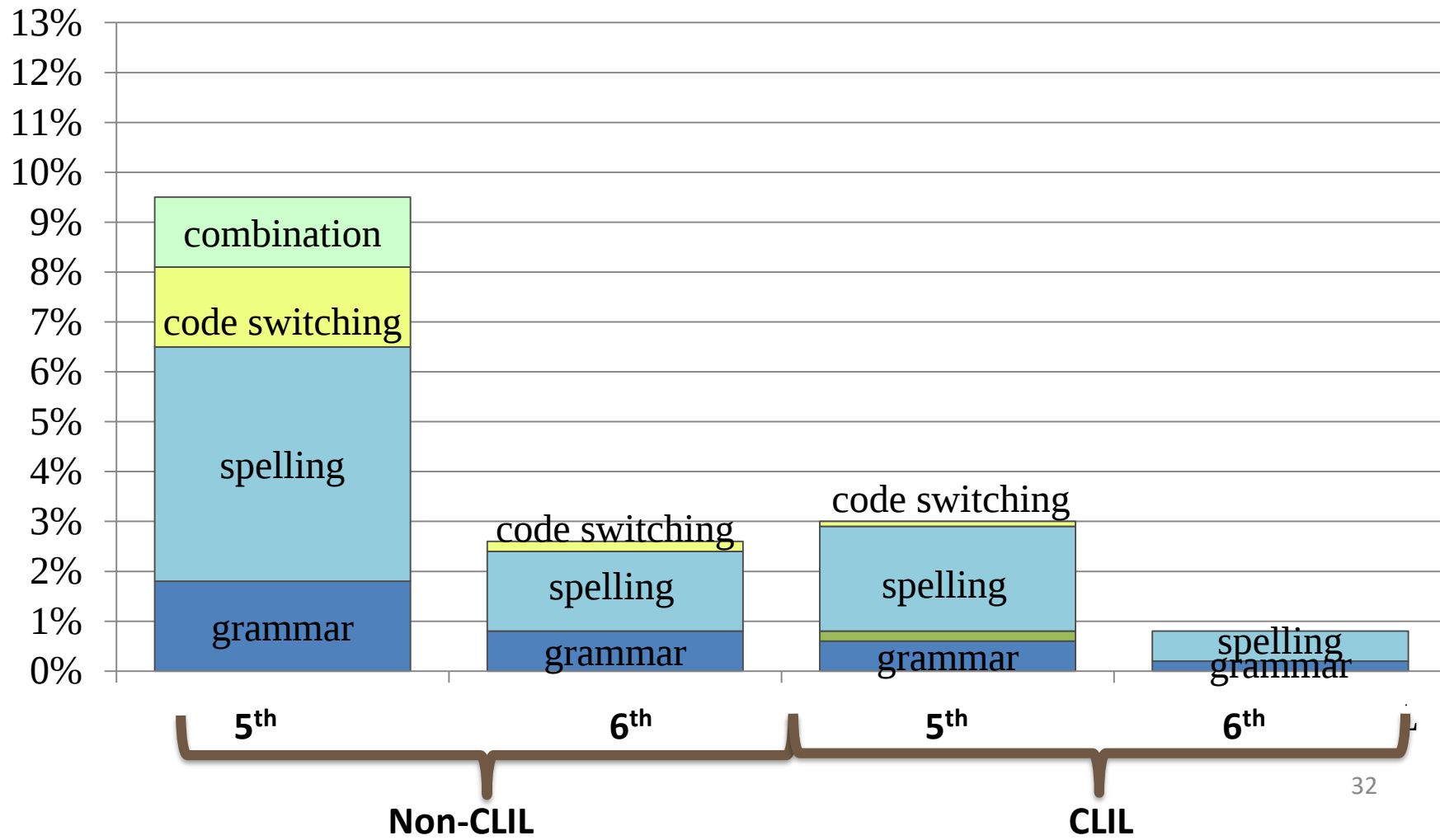
Variation English intensifiers



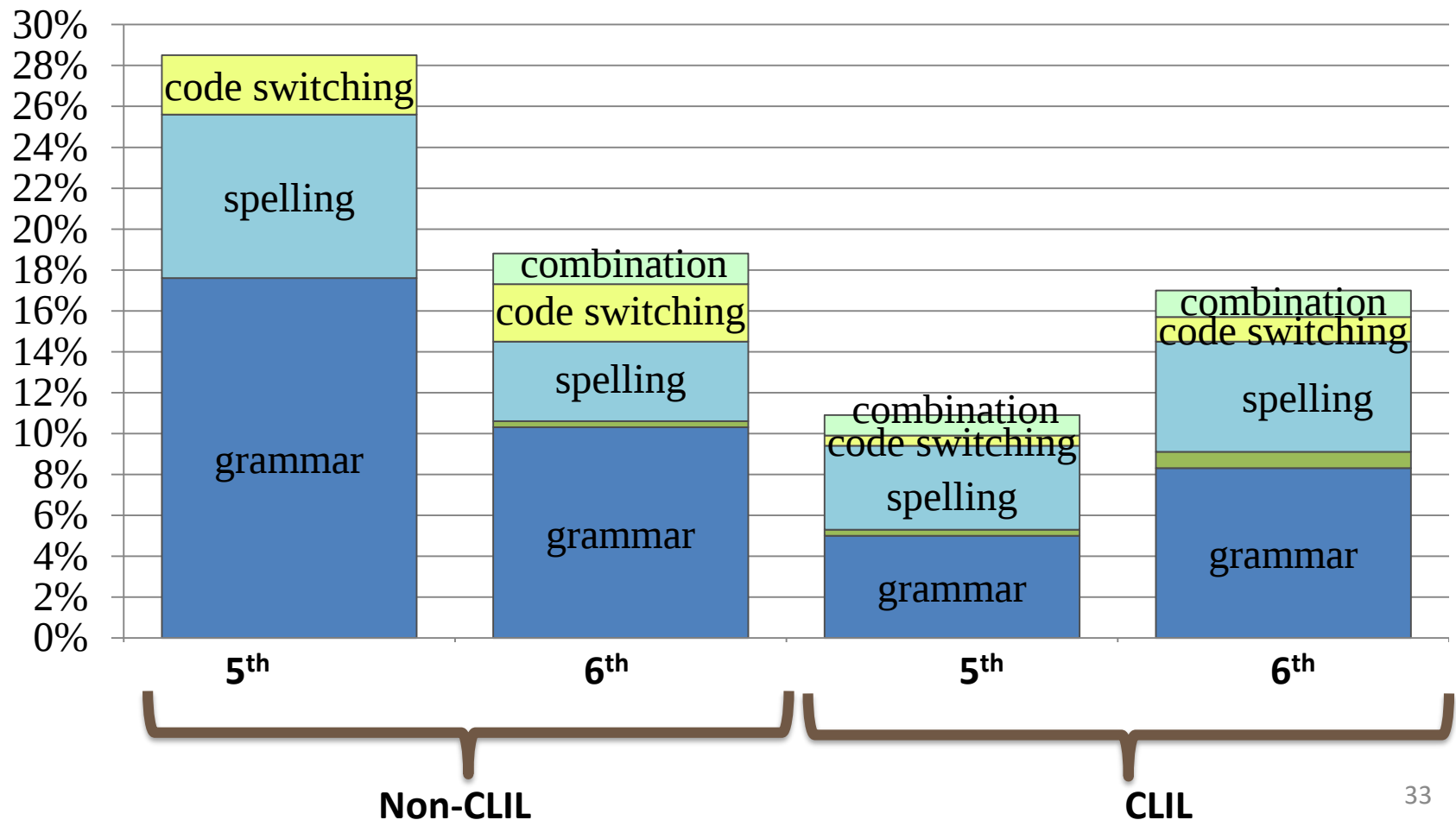
Variation Dutch intensifiers



Misuse L2 English intensification



Misuse L2 Dutch intensification



Some examples of mistakes

Grammar mistakes

- *The moment **the most cute I never** see.* (CLIL T1)

Spelling mistakes

- *I buy a **verry good** dessert.* (non-CLIL T2)

Code switching to L1 or other L2

- *The member of personel are **very sympathique** and food is delicious!*
(non-CLIL T1)
- *The temperature it is **heel warm**.* (non-CLIL T2)

Summary study 3

- The CLIL learners show a more native-like use of intensification:
 - More native-like tendencies in the proportions of use of the intensifiers
 - Less overrepresentation all-round intensifiers (*heel, very*)
 - Greater variety intensifiers
 - Fewer mistakes
- The learners make more mistakes in Dutch (especially inflection) than in English
- We notice longitudinal improvement from the 5th to the 6th year of secondary school (except in Dutch CLIL-group)

Conclusions

Conclusions

1. Cross-linguistic effects

- Overall better results for English than for Dutch
- Fewer (grammatical) mistakes in English than in Dutch

2. CLIL effects

- Greater variety of intensifiers
- More morphological intensifiers
- Better (receptive) knowledge of intensifying compounds
- More native-like proportions of intensifier use

3. Longitudinal effects

- Improvements from 5th to 6th year
- More apparent in L2 English than in L2 Dutch

Multidisciplinary CLIL project

Background variables

Socio-affective aspects

Cognitive aspects

Linguistic aspects



New projects on
the acquisition of

- N+N compounding
- diminutives

Follow us

On ResearchGate:

- ***“Assessing Content and Language Integrated Learning: Linguistic, cognitive and educational perspectives”***

Our website:

- <https://uclouvain.be/fr/instituts-recherche/ilc/assessing-content-and-language-integrated-learning-clil.html>

Selected references

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YOU** Tack Dank
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