

## Preliminary remark

In lieu of contributions from the practice of native language education per se, the practice part of this chapter comprises a report of a concrete HLT research project in German-speaking Switzerland.

## Heritage language education in the spotlight. Results of the research project “Development of the first and second languages in an intercultural context”

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Heritage language teaching, or instruction in the child's native language and culture (HSK) as it is called in Switzerland, is frequently at the center of educational policy discussions. On the one hand, the instructional offerings of HSK are emphatically recommended by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Education Directors (EDK) and financial assistance is made possible based on article 16 of the Swiss language law for “the promotion of the first language for speakers of other languages”. On the other hand, the institutional promotion of native languages is subject to continuous public legitimacy pressures (Krompàk, 2014; see also Reich chapter 15 A). The main legitimacy pressure is based on the assumption that the promotion of the first language favors the development of the second language. Supporting this assumption is Cummin's interdependence hypothesis of 1981, which serves time and again as the basis of empirical impact studies about the first and second language.

## Theoretical foundations of the research project

The research project “development of the first and second language in the intercultural context” (Caprez-Krompàk, 2010) set itself the target of investigating the little researched HSK courses (subsequently called HLT) in German-speaking Switzerland, as well as gaining insights into the language development of children with a migration background. Central to the study were the following questions: how does

attending HLT classes affect the development of language competences in the first and second language? Which conditions characterize Swiss HSK courses? The insights into the failure in school by children and adolescents with a migration background formed the theoretical background underpinnings of the study, as well as Cummins' interdependence hypothesis (1981). This theory essentially argues that there is a positive relationship between the development in the first and second language. The original quotation formulates two important conditions of interdependence, such as equal promotion of both languages and adequate motivation, which renders an empirical examination of the hypothesis more difficult. In conjunction with this hypothesis it is alleged that an ambitious level in the second language can only be reached if the first language is correspondingly well developed. This assumption is derived from Cummins' threshold level hypothesis of 1984\*. The threshold level hypothesis which was later critically questioned by the author himself (Cummins, 2000), no longer corresponds to the insights of more recent language research. Contrary to the threshold level hypothesis, language development is no longer seen as a stage model, but a dynamically evolving model (Herdina & Jessner, 2000). Moreover, the concept of translanguaging (García, 2009) further highlights the dynamic development of languages and suggests that there are no clear boundaries between the individual languages.

\*) The threshold stage hypothesis, developed by Cummins (1984) assumes that language development in the first and second language proceeds along three threshold levels. Below the first threshold is semilingualism, which suggests low language competences and leads to negative cognitive effects. Dominant bilingualism with a good command of one of the two languages shows neither negative nor positive effects. Additive bilingualism on the other hand suggests good language competences in the first as well as the second language. This highest threshold level has positive effects on cognitive development (Caprez-Krompàk, 2010).

## Central findings of the study

In order to arrive at a differentiated image of HSK instruction (HLT), a research design was selected for the study that recognized various areas, such as the level of the individual, level of the home, and level of the school.

In the area of the individual level, Albanian and Turkish-speaking students in the fourth and fifth grade were administered the C-test in their first and second languages at two different times. The group with HLT comprised 126 students and the group without HLT had 55 students at the time of the first test. At the second survey period, 80 children with HLT and 46 without HLT participated. Included in the analysis as control variables were motivation for language learning, parents' socio-economic status, their linguistic and cultural attitude as well as their support for learning languages. The central insight of the longitudinal study has been that participation in HLT under consideration of the control variables has a positive influence on the development of the first language (Albanian). The analysis of the Turkish C-tests was suspended, however, owing to the lower participation in the control group of the Turkish-speaking children without HLT.

The attendance of HLT, as well as parental support positively influenced the surveyed persons' development of the Albanian language. The development in the second language (German) showed a parallel trend in both groups, whereby the children with HLT achieved significantly better results than those without it in both test periods. However, this difference could not be explained with the positive effects of HLT. The control variables like socio-economic status of the parents and motivation had no significant influence on the development of language competence in German. Language performance in German at the second test occasion was exclusively explained by the language performance in the first test.

In summary, it can be concluded that institutionalized furthering of the first language has a positive influence on the first language, although instruction occurs just once a week, and it does not impair the promotion of the second language. The findings even tend to show a positive effect on general language competence, which also benefits the second language (German).

Based on the results of a quantitative analysis of 111 parent questionnaires at the level of parental home, it became clear that parental support plays an important, but not the only decisive role in language development. A different pattern became apparent in the promotion of the first language: whereas the mothers communicated with their children significantly more often in the first language, the use of language between father and children distinguished itself by changing of the language (code-switching). (see also Schader 2006). The analysis of the qualita-

tive data underscored the importance of the parental attitude towards language promotion. Those parents whose children attended HLT emphasized the importance of first language promotion, bilingualism and the mediation of knowledge about the country of parental origin as well as the integration into Swiss society.

The central results of the quantitative survey of 338 HLT instructors in German-speaking Switzerland on the level of the school evidenced the lacking integration of HLT into regular classroom instruction and the related, hardly existing collaboration with Swiss teachers, as well as the uncertainty in terms of financing of HLT courses. On the one hand, financing of the courses occurs through the parents, on the other hand through the embassies and consulates, and in some cases also through the cantons and the city, respectively (see chapter 1 A.3 in this volume). Consequently, there are substantial wage disparities and uncertain employment conditions.

Another result suggested deficits in training and continuing education of HLT instructors (see chapter 14). Although the majority of those consulted had acquired a tertiary education in their home country, only just 50% have the qualifications as language teachers. The participation in faculty development and continuing education opportunities is made more difficult due to financing (in many cases HLT instructors themselves have to assume the cost) and the irregular work hours. In terms of the promotion of bilingualism, a one-sided picture emerged: the main goal of the queried HLT instructors consisted exclusively of the promotion of native language and mediation of knowledge about their respective country of origin.

## Summary and outlook

In summary, it can be inferred that the interdependence hypothesis has made an important contribution to the differentiated perception of the language competences of bilingual children. However, it is not suitable for the legitimation of HLT. The empirical verification of the hypothesis is made more difficult by the formulated conditions on the one hand; on the other hand, the argumentation for the promotion of first languages should take another direction, one that recognizes individual and societal multilingualism as a normality and furthers and values it accordingly (even independently of a predictable influence on the second language).

It would be desirable if the institutional promotion of first languages through HLT in terms of integration as well as education and faculty development of HLT instructors would be expanded and optimized. Moreover, the topic of bilingualism and multilingualism as well as translanguaging (Garcia, 2009) should play an important role in terms of the heterogeneity in teacher education. Furthermore, there is a need for research concerning the varied practices of multilingual children and adolescents within the family as well as within educational institutions. In consideration of the above referenced measures, the linguistic variety of the 21st century could and should also become increasingly visible and perceptible as an important resource for all participants in the educational system.

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