

Linguistic Challenges in a Hungarian Multilingual-Multicultural Kindergarten

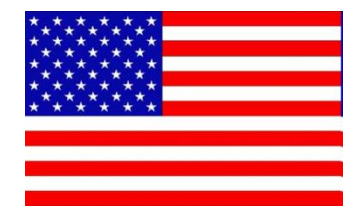
Arianna Kitzinger (kitzingerarianna@hotmail.com)

Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Piliscsaba, Hungary



INTRODUCTION

Since September 2008 the children of foreign families working at the air base of Pápa have been going to a local kindergarten. Families came from NATO members and two partner countries, namely Sweden and Finland. The setting is exceptional as NATO bases establish their own international schools elsewhere in the world. The town of Pápa, Hungary is, however, the first place where foreign children are trying to adapt to the local community. Thus, 23 foreign families' children from 6 different countries go to this unique multicultural kindergarten. Apart from Hungarian, mother tongues of the children are Swedish, Bulgarian, Norwegian, Dutch and, in case of American families, English, Filipino and Spanish.



OBJECTIVES

My research aims to find the answer to the main question, i.e.

How can kindergarten teachers, children, parents and educational specialists form the common linguistic, cultural and pedagogical basis for satisfactory communication in this very complex setting? (Kitzinger 2009, Torgyik 2005)

Background theories:

1. The **gift language - gift culture** theory
2. The **language puzzle** theory
3. The **language self - cultural identification** theory

Key hypotheses:

H1: Children and teachers have to face linguistic and cultural challenges

H2: Children are able to communicate either in Hungarian or English with each other and the kindergarten teachers

H3: The multilingual-multicultural group gives the opportunity for children and kindergarten teachers to

a) create language self and

b) develop cultural identity

Besides understanding and introducing the given linguistic community, the aim of the research is also to decipher new meanings, discover and reveal linguistic and pedagogical coherence that had been hidden till the establishment of this multilingual-multicultural kindergarten in Hungary.



RESEARCH METHODS & TOOLS

In order to achieve outcome from multilateral perspectives and to be able to expand the validity of results, the method of **triangulation** was employed in the research (Nádasi 2004, Seidman 2002) which was made up of the following components:

1. **Interviews:** - 9 parents in 3 groups: Hungarian, native English, non native English
- 3 educational professionals, 5 kindergarten teachers, 6 children
 2. **Observation:** - personal & material conditions in the whole kindergarten
- curricular & extracurricular activities in 3 kindergarten groups (61 children)
 3. **Desk research:** - programmes, project documents, group diaries, an observation diary, websites
1. EXAMPLES of **Interview questions:**
 - a) *"Do you expect the kindergarten teacher to speak English to your child?"* (⇒ parents)
 - b) *"What are the basic principles of your bilingual programme?"* (⇒ ed. professionals)
 - c) *"How do educational tasks differ in a monolingual and in a multilingual group?"* (⇒ kindergarten teachers)
 - d) *"What's that English language?"* (⇒ children)

2. EXTRACT from the **Observation Chart:**

A. PROCEDURES	B. LINGUISTIC FEATURES children kindergarten teacher	C. PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS and METHODS	D. CULTURAL PHENOMENA	E. COMMENTS
- daily schedule - activities (L developing, other; spontaneous - curricular) - play (types, children's participation - how many with the same L1) - parents' role (at the beginning/ end of the day)	- proportion of Ls (according to diff. Ls and time) - active and passive L use - meta-communication, gestures (as L substitutes or reinforcement) - L use: code-switching and code-mixing - children's reactions: 1. migrants in HU 2. HU children in L2 - mistakes (vocabulary, syntactic) - correction	- proportion of Ls (according to diff. Ls and time) - individual differentiation - meta-communication, gestures (as L substitutes or reinforcement) - feedback (+/-) - L use: code-switching and code-mixing - k-g teacher's role (mediator/ leader) - mistakes (vocabulary, syntactic) - correction	- authentic materials (books, cassettes, etc.) - illustrative materials (flash cards, pictures, etc.) - conflicts & solution	- child-to-child interaction (according to nationalities) - cultural differences (e.g. during eating, sleeping)



3. SAMPLE from **Desk research** material (The Hungarian-English bilingual programme)

Main tasks:

- Keeping Hungarian traditions according to regulations, respecting each other's identity
- Arousing interest ⇒ Hungarian and English
- Proportion of languages: according to groups of children
- Foreign languages (Hungarian, English): individual differentiation
- Speech panels - understanding, reproduction over production
- Holidays, customs - cultures of both speech areas

Language educational methods:

- All areas
- Spontaneity, without any force
- While playing
- Positive feedback
- Meta-communication
- Accepting physical response
- Consistent repetition
- Authentic English speech samples

FINDINGS

I found that children and kindergarten teachers had only partially been prepared for the special multilingual-multicultural challenges and previous theories, expectations and present-day practice differed.

Children use different languages in the kindergarten and their language use is absolutely based on their own choice, i.e. kindergarten teachers do not determine which language to use. Non native Hungarian/ English children's case is the most complex and difficult; they have to face the most serious linguistic and cultural challenges.

The conditions of linguistic and cultural identification and openness are naturally given, intentionally developed and constantly exploited due to systematic language educational methods and teachers' positive attitude.



CONCLUSIONS

Although multilingual education is full of challenges, especially at the beginning of children's pre-school history, the efforts of Fáy András Kindergarten in Pápa has been crowned with success from several aspects up to now. It is a case without parallel in international language politics (Baetens Beardsmore 1993) that a self-government of a town receives 230 foreign families and launch a bilingual pedagogical programme for their children. The programme proves to work most effectively in the kindergarten (vs. schools). Here teachers have created the favourable circumstances under which children will gradually become able to use either Hungarian or English receptively and/ or productively.

According to the research every opportunity is caught to strengthen children's and teachers' linguistic awareness, and develop their cultural identity and openness.



REFERENCES

- Baetens Beardsmore, H. (ed.) 1993. *European Models of Bilingual Education*. Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Kitzinger, A. 2009. Children in our Multilingual-Multicultural Europe. In: Tengerdi A., Varga L. (eds.), *A gyermeklét narratívái*. Sopron: Edutech. 17-29.
- Nádasi, M. 2004. A kikérdezés. In: Falus, I. (ed.) *Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe*. Budapest: Műszaki Könyvkiadó. 171-211.
- Seidman, I. 2002. *Az interjú mint kvalitatív kutatási módszer*. Budapest: Műszaki Könyvkiadó.
- Torgyik, J. 2005. *Fejezetek a multikulturális nevelésből*. Budapest: Eötvös József Könyvkiadó.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks are due to

- Dr. Andrea Reményi, supervisor
- Mariann Morvai, head teacher and her helpful staff, especially
- Ákosné Simon, Anikó Csóka, Orsolya Ruzsás (Elder group)
- Anett Osváth, Adrienn Happ, Klára Varga (Lavender group)
- Ferencné Varga, Adél Nagy, Dolores Hermann (Blueberry group)
- children & their parents

Photos are displayed with the kind permission of people in them