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László Varga – Arianna Kitzinger – Réka Kissné Zsámboki

Changing Perspectives and Attitudes
on Early Childhood Research and Education

László Varga – Arianna Kitzinger – Réka Kissné Zsámboki

Changing Perspectives and Attitudes on Early Childhood Research and Education

Edited by Gábor Kovács



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THE AGE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING IN MODERN EUROPE

*“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.”³*

Introduction

According to the famous monologue by Shakespeare, there are seven parts of **human life** where men play their parts as 1. infants, 2. school children, 3. lovers, 4. soldiers, 5. judges, 6. pantaloons⁴ and 7. old men (Figure 1). Age may be a crucial point in several fields of life, among others in language learning, too. At least language learners usually attribute great importance to this when they start to learn a foreign language. Although personal age can be divided into several phases, in language pedagogy the distinction between *young age* and *old age* are generally opposed to each other. Here especially early childhood language development will be scrutinised with some hints to language learning in adulthood.



Figure 1. The seven ages on a stained window in the State Library of New South Wales (State, 2021)

From another point of view, **historical periods** are often taken into consideration when the question of age turns up. It means the historical and social era we live in and which can change so considerably during human lifespan. If we use this approach while examining age, we will soon realise how much the society we live in makes an impact on our lives, for instance on education as well. In education we must never forget about the age we are living in; with its developments and challenges.

In this context our textbook in **three major chapters** deals with the timely questions of our age; whether it is scrutinised from personal or historical aspects. We will discuss the topic of language learning from a bird's-eye view where we start our journey in our present age in our linguistically diverse Europe (Chapter 1) from where the next station will lead us to the language education in our modern age (Chapter 2). The last part (Chapter 3) will provide students with the practical part of early childhood language development introducing a running bilingual programme in a kindergarten. A short description of the three chapters will be given at the beginning of the three major parts under the heading 'Learning objectives', while at the end of each major unit we, together with a few comprehensive questions, will intend to ask several food-for-thought questions for further inspiring dialogues in the classroom.

³ Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, Act II Scene VII

⁴ foolish old man (from Italian)

1. An international overview of languages and language learning

Learning objectives

Europe is the home of many nations, many countries and many languages. Most of these languages form a group of language families which means that these languages have similar roots and their structure and vocabulary are closer to each other than to other languages. With the help of two maps these families and their sub-categories will be introduced. Throughout the chapter the difference between the languages of Europe and those of the European Union will be described. The question of monolingualism and multilingualism are often manifested in political landscapes, so it is important to get familiarised with a few examples of language policy of some overseas countries and the basic standpoint of the European Union regarding linguistic diversity. By the end of the chapter, students will have a clear idea about European language families where they will definitely find their own language and the language(s) they are learning, they will be able to see the difference between monolingual and multilingual language policies and will probably form their own idea about linguistic diversity in their country, their continent and in their life.

1.1. The European map of languages

According to the classical division there are **four basic language families in Europe: Indo-European, Finno-Ugric or Uralic, Turkic or Altaic and Basque** (Figure 2).

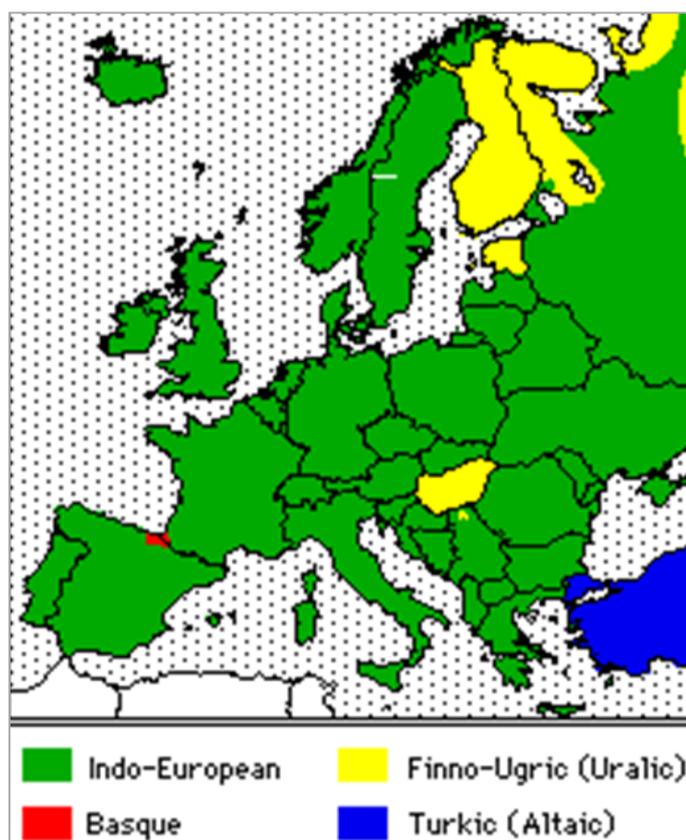


Figure 2. Language families in Europe
(My English, 2021)

Turkic or Altaic languages will not belong to the official languages of the European Union until the accession of Turkey. Turkish, however, does play a role in the EU in an indirect way if we are to reckon in the large number of Turkish immigrants in Germany and Austria, for instance. Neither is Basque an official language in the EU. Yet, its cultural and historical importance is unquestionable as it is considered to be among the most ancient surviving languages on the continent. Also, it is as unrelated to other languages as Hungarian is, even if the latter is categorised as a Finno-Ugric language. From among Finno-Ugric languages, Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian have become official EU-languages. But other Finno-Ugric languages are used as minority languages in the area of the ex-Soviet Union, and one of them, also as a minority language, in Finland, namely Saami or Lapp.

Undoubtedly **the most extensive language family** of the European continent is the **Indo-European** (Figure 3), which can be further broken down into **Germanic, Romance, Slavic, Celtic, Baltic, Greek and Albanian** sub-families. Related languages share similar grammar and vocabulary systems, but they are not automatically intelligible for their speakers.

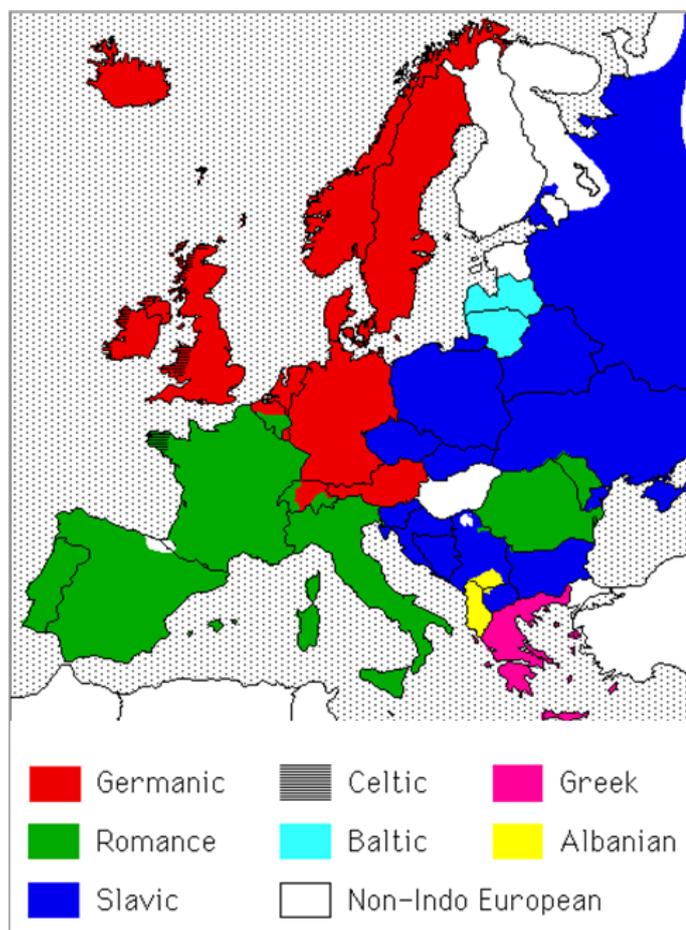


Figure 3. Indo-European sub-families in Europe
(*My English, 2021*)

Five EU official languages (as the descendants of Latin) belong to the Romance family: French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian. The Germanic family in the EU is represented by English, German, Danish, Dutch and Swedish. A number of Slavic languages, such as Polish, Czech, Slovak and Slovene, gained official EU-language status with the enlargement in 2004, and then Bulgarian in 2007. The same happened with the Baltic languages (Latvian and Lithuanian) in 2004. Greek has been an official language since 1981, while Albanian does not have any such a status.

The 24 official EU languages of the 27 member states in alphabetical order are Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish.

1.2 Multilingualism vs. monolingualism

If according to the basic tenet of the European Union every citizen of the Union is entitled to use their own mother tongue as a manifestation of democracy, then multiculturalism through multilingualism is to be welcomed. The European Union is not the only community in the world by far where different languages and different cultures live together. In fact, multilingualism is a more natural phenomenon than monolingualism all over the globe. In terms of language policy, two countries on the other side of the Atlantic will be examined here.

The United States has always promoted monolingualism. In its famous “melting pot” role, the USA has demanded that newcomers speak English. The established powers preferred “to found a New Eden rather than a New Babel” (Baron, n.d., para 4) and thus sought to compel its immigrant to acknowledge the rules and regulations of their new state. A proposed English Language Amendment⁵ was voted down in 1981, and the United States still does not have an official language. English is, however, considered to be the *de facto* national language.

In spite of maintenance programmes, where immigrant children’s mother tongue is aimed to be developed, education is more characterised by transitional bilingualism, where mother tongue is gradually substituted with English (Wolff, 1998).

In the northern neighbour of the United States, **Canada**, the picture is more refined. From a linguistic point of view Canada must be divided into Québec, which is an autonomous region where French is the only official language and the rest of Canada where multilingualism is supported. The latter statement is especially relevant for Ontario, where a great number of language immersion programmes are available for children to acquire the official languages of the state, which are English and French (Wolff, 1998).

The question of linguistic diversity has naturally arisen in the **European Union** as well. The Community has always emphasised the necessity of multilingualism, which was expressed especially openly in the *Communication on Multilingualism* (2005). After defining the term multilingualism⁶ the *Communication* takes into consideration the major areas where multilingualism plays a special role (e.g. academic life and education, economy, mobility and employment). Moreover, the document states: “*The Commission [...] urges member States to take additional measures to promote widespread individual multilingualism and to foster a society that respect all citizens’ linguistic identities.*” (Communication, 2005, p.15)

1.3 Linguistic diversity

By the beginning of the 21st century the debate about mono- vs. multilingualism has been closed in the European Union: all the official EU-documents promote multilingualism. The system is well described by Dieter Wolff (1998), according to whom pre-school education is the field of linguistic immersion and primary school is that of conscious language use. Instead of traditional language teaching in the secondary education, Wolff is very much in favour of

⁵ An amendment to the Constitution which proposed English to become the only official language of the USA.

⁶ “Multilingualism refers to both a person’s ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area.” *Communication* (2005, p. 3)

content-based language learning (CLIL), where students not only learn a foreign language, but study different school subjects (e.g. art or science subjects) in a foreign language.

CLIL is the practical manifestation of the European idea of “**mother tongue plus two**”, which was introduced in 2006 by Leonard Orban, who at that time worked as the Commissioner for Multilingualism in the European Commission. It was a recommendation that aimed to develop language teaching with introducing two foreign languages besides one’s mother tongue. Although the “mother tongue plus two” model can guarantee multilingualism, it is interesting to examine which languages are learnt in the Union. Nobody is surprised that according to the Eurobarometer-survey (Europeans, 2006) English is learnt as a foreign language by the majority of Europeans (38%). German with its excellent geopolitical location and French as an (ex-)rival of the English language tied for second place (14%-14%). From among the Slavic languages, Polish is mentioned (1%), and, not an official EU-language though, Russian is also learnt by 6% of European citizens (Figure 4).

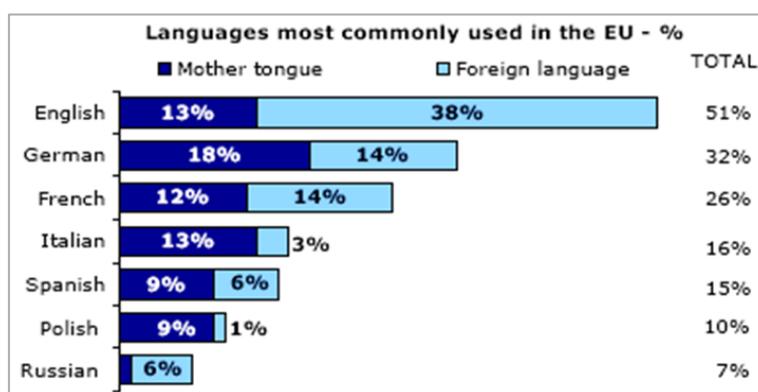


Figure 4. The most commonly used languages in the EU
(Europeans, 2006)

The numbers may speak about the dominance of the English language all over Europe, the rivalry between French and German in certain places of the European Union, and about the political changes in the eastern part of the continent.

Comprehensive questions and study activities:

- Which are the four basic language families in Europe? Which are the Indo-European sub-families in Europe?
- Which languages belong to the Germanic/ Romance/ Slavic/ Celtic/ Baltic/ Greek/ Albanian families?
- Look at the map (Figure 3). Name three European languages that do not belong to the Indo-European language family!
- Which language family does your mother tongue belong to? Which are the closest languages to your L1 (first language)?
- Is your language the official language of the European Union? How do you think a language can become the official language of the EU?
- The United Kingdom left the EU in 2021 (Brexit). Will English remain the official language of the Union? Yes or no? Why?
- Which language policy do you prefer in a country: monolingual or multilingual? Justify your choice!
- What does “mother tongue plus two” mean? Why not “mother tongue plus one”?
- Which is the most popular foreign language in your country? Why?

- Here you can find a graph about “the second most useful foreign languages” (Figure 5). Find your country and share your opinion about the result.

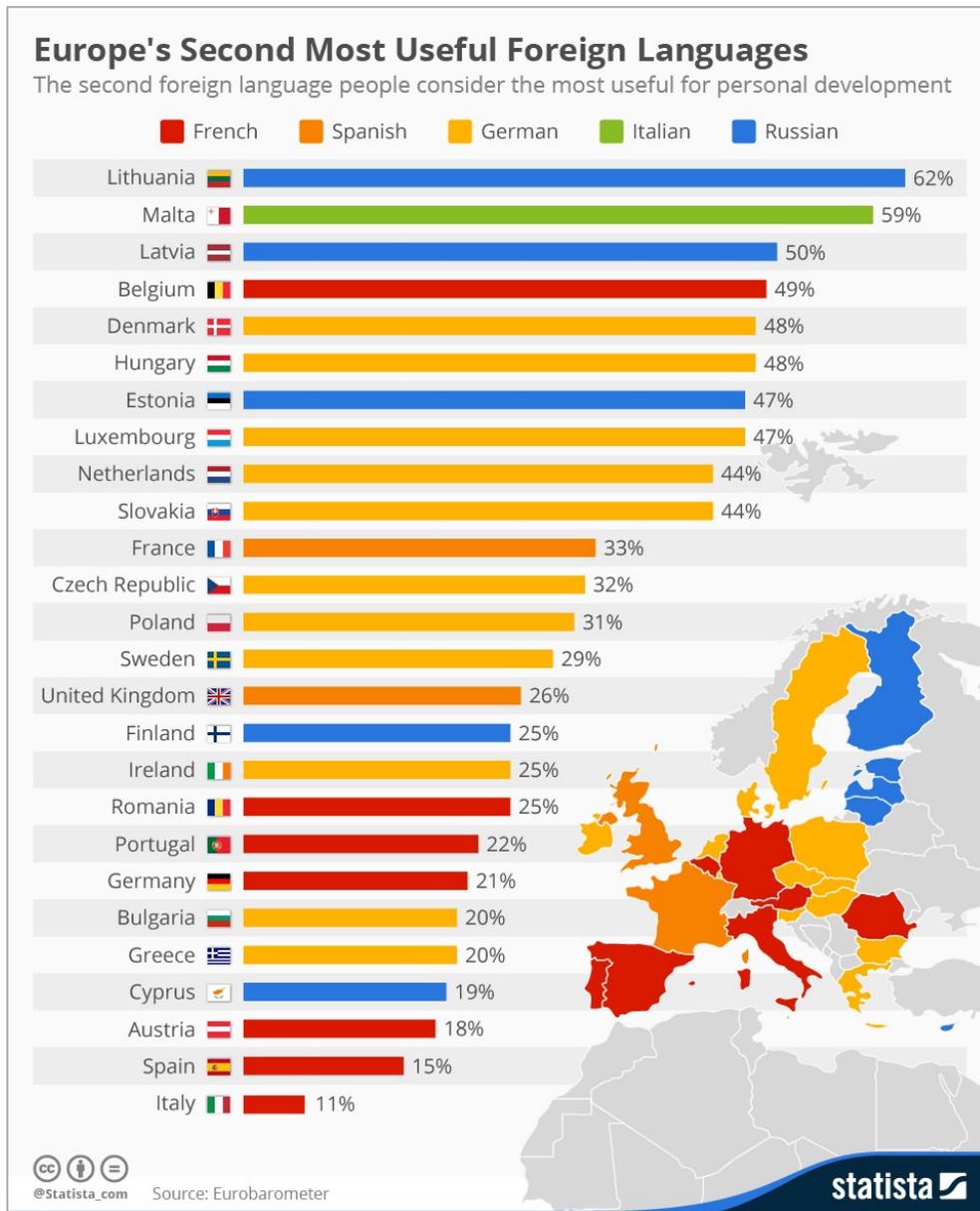


Figure 5. Europe's second most useful foreign languages
(McCarthy, 2015)

2. Bilingualism in education

Learning objectives

Having gained a brief insight into the languages of Europe and the language policy of the EU, regarding linguistic diversity, in this chapter we go on discussing language learning at school putting a special stress on the European priorities in this field. From among the priorities we discuss early childhood start in details as it is important to know the different views on this topic which can be called a hot issue in European language learning today. On the basis of modern research, we will discuss the benefits of language learning in childhood and adulthood.

Moreover, we will make a clear distinction between language learning and language acquisition, which will be called the “alpha and omega” of early childhood language development. In the end, students will be provided with a description of L1 process from the age of 0 to the age of six. The ending questions will focus on students’ own opinion and experience on the topic.

2.1. Language learning at school

Language learning and teaching is a very complex area. Knowing this, the European Commission in its *Action Plan 2004-06* (Promoting, 2004) clearly determines the educational scenes where language learning can be more effective and language teaching could be most desirable. These **priorities** are as follows:

1. Linguistic diversity
2. Early start
3. Language learning in secondary and higher education
4. Lifelong learning
5. Language teacher training

As the document suggests, **early childhood language education** is a key element of fostering multilingualism in the EU. The question is how the European Union can promote language learning at an institutional level: in pre-, primary and secondary schools, and also in higher education.

As far as language learning is concerned, **primary schools** may be regarded as “transitional” institutes where children do not only acquire but also learn a language, especially towards the age of adolescence. Children’s special characteristics of this life period should be taken into consideration even in language learning. We must not forget that children are at the beginning of a long process, the result of which cannot be immediately recognised.

Adults also tend to overlook two issues. First, the language command of children leaves much to be desired even in the case of their mother tongue. Secondly, even if a child starts acquiring a foreign language early, his or her competence in other fields of life cannot be compared with that of the older students or adults. It is for this reason that children might fail language examinations that demand “adult competences” or life experience (e.g. how to book a room at a hotel or how to apply for a job).

According to a survey on **language education** (Key, 2005), in the majority of the EU countries, more than half of the pupils in primary education learn a foreign language. What is even more interesting and important is the trend regarding the numbers of foreign languages taught in Europe. There are fewer and fewer countries where no foreign languages are taught in primary education. In some countries even two foreign languages are taught at this level. More than 10% of children in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden belong to this group, while Luxembourg with its 80% can be considered exceptional (in Luxembourg there are three official languages).

In **secondary education** the number of students who learn foreign languages practically doubles, which means that by now all European students learn at least one foreign language in general secondary education. The question of a second foreign language is different in the EU-countries. In the Czech Republic, Germany, Malta, Austria and Poland, it is obligatory to choose a second foreign language at the upper secondary level, while in Ireland schools are allowed to decide if they want to introduce it or not.

Although we have dealt with the problem of **linguistic diversity** earlier, it is worth mentioning here in the section of language learning that English is the most commonly learned

foreign language. Those who are for linguistic diversity gladly accept the introduction of a second foreign language in education as it promotes multilingualism. Yet it must be seen that English is the language that is learnt by the 90% of secondary school students even if it is not compulsory. The influence of English is so vast in every area of life that it is impossible to resist. If we cannot – or do not want – to stop it, we should be happy at least to see that a language can be popular even if students are not forced to learn it.

2.2. Early start of language learning: pros and cons

Although the trend of starting to learn foreign languages earlier is obvious, there are still some fear and reservations about it among educational professionals and laymen as well. What are **the pros and cons** of early language learning? According to Kovács's (2009, 2017) pedagogical research the most popular cons are as follows:

1. *Pre-school children are immature for heavy mental strains.*
2. *First the mother tongue should be learnt perfectly.*
3. *Early childhood language acquisition does not have measurable benefits.*
4. *Foreign language learning takes away time from playing.*
5. *There are not enough professionals in this field.” (Kovács, 2017, para 3)*

On the basis of some other researchers (Bartha, 1999; Baker, 2000, 2007, 2011; Diamond, 2010) and existing good practices (Jó, 2009; Kitzinger, 2009, 2018, 2020) we may give the answers to the above mentioned fears:

1. Learning a foreign language is a different activity for a child (acquisition) and for an adult (learning). Therefore, brain is not more burdened than in the case of acquiring L1.
2. Our brain possesses an unlimited place for storing languages. Languages do not exclude but complete each other.
3. The lack of measurable benefits may be true for every other activity in early childhood (cf. mathematical competence). However, using different codes support diversity in thinking.
4. Language acquisition is never separated but integrated into activities (e.g. physical exercises or singing) and connected with senses. Therefore, language acquisition, with the suitable methods, is an organic part of playing.
5. Today there are more and more teacher training faculties which train pre-school teachers with foreign language specialisation on BA level.

Whether **bilingual children** have advantages over monolinguals is still a question. On the basis of worldwide research Baker (2007) declares that bilingual children are in a favourable position as far as **flexibility, creativity and divergent thinking** are concerned. They seem to be more sensitive to communication and they are much more able to concentrate on the meaning than the sound of a word: for them a similar word to ‘cap’ is ‘hat’, and not ‘cat’, which sounds more similar to ‘cap’. Also, they tend to be much more inventive if they are asked about the use of a certain object. Baker (2007) is confirmed that the reason why bilingual children’s intelligence was underestimated until the 1960s was due to the wrong assessment systems: the wrong language choice of IQ tests (they had to be filled in in the children’s weaker language) or other “mitigating factors, of a sociolinguistic nature related to the learners’ immigrant status” (Cenoz & Genesee 1998, p. 21). At the same time Baker does not tell us

whether the advantage might be considered temporary or it will accompany children throughout their lives.

Another researcher, Diamond (2010) examines bilingualism from the part of **infants and old people** and finds that bilingualism has advantages at both ages. Infants can have cognitive benefits which may affect their life later as bilingualism, based on “executive function” (2010, p. 332), advances to cope with different inputs: what children already know from possessing two languages (e.g. lexical flexibility) can be beneficial in other areas of life, especially in situations where one has to adapt to unpredictable situations or distracting stimuli have to be coped with. This latter function of the brain is called “executive function” (2010, p. 332) whose forming goes on in the prefrontal cortex which can be developed in the first 5 years of our lives. As far as old people are concerned, bilinguals’ Alzheimer’s symptoms appear 5 years later. Diamond makes a parallel between physical exercise’s beneficial effects on body and mental exercise’s positive effects on brain and mental diseases. The bilingual brain’s best exercise is practising two languages as a bilingual continuously keeps himself/ herself asking: “*Shall I think, speak, or interpret sounds spoken to me according to the arbitrary rules of language A, or language B?*” (2010, p. 333).

2.3. The process of language acquisition

How age appears in language learning it is the best if a few examples from our field, i.e. early childhood, are taken into consideration. Lundberg (2007) concludes that very young children in pre-school can profit from language acquisition just as much as older students do at school. Two surprising facts are mentioned in his study: firstly, **very young children** can pick up language at an astonishing speed through songs and rhymes, and secondly, children cannot benefit linguistically as much from computer-related games as they had been expected to. What all teachers agree is the stimulating and very effective role of songs and the use of illustrative materials through total physical response (TPR) activities. These activities encourage children to use the target language bravely, which will result in a relaxed and natural atmosphere that promotes communication.

If we want to base our pedagogical practice on the differences of children’s and adults’ learning characteristics, we must draw distinction of **language learning** and **language acquisition** as this is the alpha and omega of early childhood language development. If we want to reckon on young children’s age-appropriate features, the first we have to notice is that very young children do not learn but acquire L2. It entails a holistic pedagogical attitude where the pre-school programme is absolutely adjusted to children’s age characteristics and the methods of L2 development does not differ much from those of L1 development.

The term **language learning and acquisition** comes from Krashen (1981), who in his Natural Approach made a distinction of the types of language learning. His theory has been closely examined from the aspect of language pedagogy as well. Acquisition is often connected with the mother tongue and learning is with foreign languages. However, it is only partially true, as a second language can also be acquired, e.g. during travels in a foreign country and the mother tongue can also be learnt, e.g. if one has to learn the terminology of a profession. Therefore, L2 teaching methods should be very similar to those of mother tongue development.

To understand this, we should examine **the process of how a human acquires his/ her mother tongue**. The actual speech production is not without antecedents. Already on the first day the infant is able to make a distinction between her mother’s voice and other voices and by the second week he/ she can distinguish between human and other voices.

Then the following pattern can be traced (slight overlaps can be noticed) in the ‘foundation year’ (Crystal, 1995, p. 430):

- the first 2 months: primitive vocal sounds production during hunger, pain and physical discomfort
- between 6 and 8 weeks: cooing, which means typical short vowel-like sounds preceded by consonants which will develop into a varied string of sounds
- between 3 and 4 months: cooing is replaced by vocal play which is a combination of practice and experimentation
- from the 6th month: babbling has different periods, first it involves repetitive consonant and vowel-like sounds (e.g. ‘bababa’), then at around the 9th month the repetition is replaced by more creativity by forming new syllables which will lead to adult-like words like ‘mummy’ or ‘daddy’. Babbling for a while stays parallel with real talking.
- at around the 12th month: proto-words appear with clear sounds but unclear meaning.

Between the age of 1 and 2 years both receptive and productive skills develop rapidly (Gósy, 1997). Children are able to understand speech globally, with less and less help from mimics and gestures. (However, we must not forget that meta-communicative elements play an important role. By the age of 2 “key-word” strategy is followed (1997, p. 29) which means that children are able to “find out” the missing elements of communication on the basis of some already known words. It is also the period of “double stringing” (1997, p. 29) that involves saving two varieties of pronunciation: the adult’s and the child’s own variety for the same word. On a more developed level the adult’s variety will exclude the child’s own version(s). By the age of 3 a child is able to elaborate the different linguistic characteristics of speech (e.g. acoustic, phonetic, grammatical, semantic features) which serve as the bases of interpretation.

Few researchers deal with the characteristic features of **pre-school children’s speech products**. Yet, it is a crucial point that kindergarten teachers should be aware of the major levels of mother tongue acquisition. Gósy (1997) explains it and gives a review referred to children with Hungarian L1 (Figure 6):

Age	Linguistic levels of L1	Linguistic development of L1
3 rd year	phonetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • articulation is getting more stable and consequent • all vowels appear in speech; vowel harmony gets relevant • - consonants appear (except for the alveolar trill [r]), but their appearance is lexis-dependant; consonant rules are uncertain
	morphological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in children’s mental lexicon adults’ variations are activated (vs. their own individual variations) • parts of speech: first nouns are dominant, then gradually more and more verbs appear
	syntactic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • telegraphic speech is replaced by multi-word sentence patterns → pseudo-sentences • compound sentences appear (with or without conjunctions)
	other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tense relations cause problems • grammar becomes more important than accurate pronunciation

4 th year	phonetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all speech sounds appear in speech including [r]
	morphological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> verbs are dominant vocabulary is extended rapidly more complicated parts of speech appear (e.g. postpositions) verbs are used in all persons and numbers
	syntactic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the appearance of subordinate clauses the most complicated structures appear (e.g. conditionals)
	other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communication strategies develop sharply
5 th year	phonetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> paradox: pronunciation of sounds is good, yet in certain words earlier physiological errors can be observed
	morphological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suffix system is strongly developed vocabulary (especially passive) develops
	syntactic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentences get longer and often connected with conjunctions
	other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fluent communication, details are elaborated
6 th year	phonetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sound production becomes independent on context, i.e. they can be pronounced well in any context
	morphological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vocabulary (also active) develops both on quantitative and qualitative bases
	syntactic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> syntactic relations are enriched: children are able to express more complex and complicated contents in compound sentences
	other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mother tongue perception base has been developed

Figure 6.

Pre-school children's speech production on the basis of Gósy (1997)

Age affects language learning (Navracscics, 2007). As the **mental lexicon** can be developed in different ways at the different age levels, this should be a starting point in foreign language teaching, too.

Comprehensive questions and study activities:

- Which are the priorities of language learning and teaching in the EU? Which of these priorities do you find the most important in the case of your country's language education policy? Why?
- When do you start learning a foreign language in your country? How many foreign languages are taught in different schools?
- To what extent does your country promote linguistic diversity? Give examples!
- Are you for or against early childhood language acquisition? From what age do you think foreign language development should be started?
- Do you agree with the researchers (Chapter 2.2) on the benefits of language learning in young and old age? What is your experience?
- After reading about the difference between language learning and language acquisition, fill in the next table (Figure 7). (You can check yourself with the key under the exercises):

Aspects	Language acquisition	Language learning
Mental control	(1)	Conscious
Aim	To convey message	To convey (2) about the language
Focus on	Language (3)	Language form
The most important value	Risk taking	(4)
Teacher's role	(5)	Prescribing, leading, checking
Learner's role	Sensing rules	(6) rules
Error correction	Not suggested because it causes (7)	Obligatory part of the process
Communication	Process-like	(8)-like
Efficiency	(9)	Relatively fast

Figure 7. Krashen's (1981) language acquisition and language learning distinction
adapted from Kovács & Trentinné Benkő (2014)

- 7. In Figure 6 you can find the stages of L1 acquisition referring to the Hungarian language. Look at the table and try to find similarities and differences with your own mother tongue acquisition process. Point out the crucial points, e.g. special sounds or vocabulary.

Key to Ex. 6: (1) Subconscious, (2) knowledge, (3) function, (4) Accuracy, (5) Partnership, guidance, (6) Following, (7) inhibitions, (8) Product, (9) Relatively slow

3. From theory to practice: how to implement a bilingual programme in the kindergarten?

Learning objectives

The chapter shows, on the basis of an existing programme, a possible way to implement a bilingual programme in the kindergarten: what kind of method(s) are worth considering, what the basic principles and aims of the programme are and what kinds of activities are worth taking into consideration while dealing with the young ones in a foreign language. Besides presenting the complex features of the implementation of a foreign language programme the chapter also provides readers with a sample of an English session made by a teacher trainee. The reflection of the trainee and the comprehensive questions make the students think about whether, with the help of this model, they can think of something similar in their own setting, i.e. whether this model can be adoptable; and if yes, how?

3.1. The kindergarten method

Implementing a foreign language programme in an affiliated kindergarten of a university has a double aim: while the programme is used among the kindergarteners, a solid theoretical and practical background has to be given to kindergarten teacher trainees at the university as well. At the same time teachers at the university and teachers in the kindergarten have to collaborate on a daily basis as the two fields, i.e. language development in the kindergarten and training at the university are inseparable as they continuously inspire and complete each other. Here we focus on the kindergarten: the method, the programme and the activities.

First of all, a kindergarten programme has to be set with the basic aims and principles, then appropriate activities have to be attached to it. Even before setting down to compile the programme, the first question should be *What kind of method(s) to apply in the kindergarten?*

In early childhood education there are **two basic methods**:

1. *one person – one language* method and
2. *playful bilingual* method.

According to the first method there are two teachers present in the kindergarten where one teacher is a native speaker of the given foreign language and the other is a non-native speaker (Busch, 2011). This model tries to imitate the natural state present in mixed marriages where spouses' L1-s are different. The advantage of the method is that the child acquires an authentic language, which has special relevance, for instance, regarding pronunciation. Children can usually make difference between the speakers and they can select the languages (which L to use with which person) in everyday communication easily. If the method is used regularly and consequently, the language process can be at a natural speed and the results can be impressive. The disadvantage of the method is that it cannot be implemented easily under institutional circumstances, mostly due to the lack of well-trained native language teachers. Although progress seems to be slower in the case of the second method, it also proves to be more practical and more easily established. In this method the kindergarten teachers themselves become *bilingual models* for children who may acquire a foreign language in a playful and motivating way.

3.2. The kindergarten programme

English in the kindergarten specialisation at Benedek Elek Faculty of Pedagogy was introduced in 2006 and was implemented in the affiliated kindergarten of the University of Sopron, Hungary from February 2007. Before this time only programmes of different national languages (e.g. German, Croatian, Slovakian, Serbian, Slovenian, Romanian and Romani) had been developed in the kindergarten. As the faculty had been running German as an ethnic language programme since 1959, it was obvious that some of the basics, with some special modifications, were integrated into the new English language programme as well. First, the programme was built in an already running Hungarian programme, but four years later it was revisited and reshaped.

The new programme was titled *Playful English language acquisition with a detailed methodological guide* (Soósné, 2010). In its foreword the programme mentions the new European trends of foreign language learning and the new era where early childhood language development has a special place. It describes the psycho- and sociolinguistic background of language acquisition, then it enumerates the different educational areas in the kindergarten from the aspect of language development. It specifies the learning form and methods where foreign language may appear and delineates the structural frames and the available material conditions. The programme is supplemented with sample English session descriptions and methodological guidance. The richly illustrated programme sets motivating small children to acquire a foreign language as its basic goal and it plans to reach this via conscious code-switching of L1 and L2. Playfulness is considered to be the key to motivation and positive attitude. It also gives a pedagogical standpoint about the commitments of the teacher.

According to the programme the kindergarten teacher has to

- “give children the chance of natural language acquisition through play
- provide children with language input through listening
- motivate children through activity-oriented situations
- create an emotionally stable relationship with children
- provide children with a wide range of experience through the senses (hearing, seeing, moving)
- provide a rich methodological repertoire regarding activities and equipment.”

(Soósné, 2010, p. 3)

3.3. Activities in the kindergarten

When we speak about foreign language development in the kindergarten, we may notice that **foreign language activities are not separated from other activities**. What really happens is that we use a different language, i.e. we change the code (*code-switching*). It is important to know that the vocabulary of a foreign language does not necessarily transmit new knowledge. For instance, if we learn the name of numbers, colours or the parts of body in a foreign language, our knowledge about the world is not extended. It is worth bearing it in mind as it explains why the same activities and aids can be applied both in L1 and L2 development.

As the programme suggests, the base of every activity in the kindergarten is *play*. Foreign language can be adopted easily in role play or guided play to acquire basic vocabulary. Moreover, instructions can also be given in the foreign language; with some body language where necessary. This is the reason why memory games, card and board games can be popular in foreign language development. *Literary and music education* are also very often connected to each other (Figure 8). Rhythm, movements, melody have an important role in getting familiar with English songs and rhymes as they all help the phases of learning and later it is much easier to remember words and phrases accompanied by music or movement. According to the rules of acquisition, vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation will be learnt imperceptibly. In the case of tales, it is worth telling (or dramatising) a tale in L2 which is already known in L1.



Figure 8. Singing and music with Adrienn Lovász⁷

⁷ All the pictures and educational materials are presented here with the kind permission of the actors.

Songs, rhymes and speech panels can also be embedded in *visual education* and short dialogues can be initiated relating to the visual product. In *environmental education* children can get acquainted with words and notions already known in L1; it refers to the natural phenomena of acquisition as well. At the changing of the seasons, for instance, children can welcome Froggy (Figure 9), the ‘weather forecaster’, who can tell the weather report in English.



Figure 9. Environmental education with Petra Bontó, Froggy and Pussy cat

While making trips, it is also possible to use the foreign language as “there is infinite potential in the woods, in the fields, on the river banks, and on educational trails; we just have to move out from the closed classrooms to the ‘open ones’” (Molnár, 2019, p. 94). Basic *mathematics* (numbers) can also be introduced in L2, just like the *characteristic features* of objects, plants and animals (colours and size). *Work-like activities* (cooking, baking and gardening) can also offer the chance to switch the code. Music and *moving* (physical exercises, dancing) have an invaluable importance in foreign language development. In the case of physical education a special vocabulary (e.g. prepositions and adverbs of directions) can be developed. All these activities demand conscientious preparation from the teacher in order to get children acquainted with a foreign language.

3.4. Early English in action

By this point we have discussed the basics of the possible and most appropriate early childhood methods in language development. We also introduced a language educational programme that was carefully tailor-made to the needs of the given kindergarten. Now it is time to **focus on practice** with the help of a kindergarten teacher trainee, Petra Rádóczy, who did her kindergarten practice as a student of Benedek Elek Faculty of Pedagogy, Sopron, Hungary.

3.4.1. A sample English session for the very young

First we get to know a part of her **kindergarten journal** where she planned her English session. It is every student’s task to plan and describe their future activity in the kindergarten. The form is set: it is made up of some general data which is followed by a table of activities. Here you are (Figures 10 and 11):

English session

Name of kindergarten trainee: Petra Rádóczy

Group: Mixed age

Kindergarten programme: Playful English development

Previous activities: Discussing autumn weather

Form of activities: Dramatising songs with movements

Aims:

Educational aims: aesthetic education, singing clearly, socialising in games

Language educational aims: developing foreign language through play and movements, developing vocabulary, expressing English lyrics with gestures and movements

Cultural aim: Getting acquainted with English nursery rhymes and songs

Competences to develop: Communication, cognitive skills, observation

Methods: conversation, presentation, action, practice, checking, feedback (positive)

Aids: plush teddy bear, weather chart, plush shark (finger puppet)

Activities		
Time	Process	Methods, aids, comments
3 min	1. Organisational tasks: I put the chairs in a semicircle on the carpet and prepared the necessary aids.	Set organisational structure.
3 min	2. The session: I start the session with the song Good morning (already known by children)	
2 min	We have already practised introduction. I ask every child their name. Then we count the girls and the boys with the help of Teddy bear. We also say what the weather is like today (weather chart).	First I introduce myself in order to motivate children to do the same. The song and the plush bear will draw children's attention to the activity. Developing communication and language skills.
3 min	We repeat the song Walking, walking. We sing it several times while changing the volume of the song.	I try to apply simple and well-known songs.
4 min	We have already acquainted with our parts of body with the song Head and shoulders. Children will pay attention to the changing of the rhythm.	We are playing in a circle. Changing the rhythm makes the song more entertaining.
3 min	Teddy bear, teddy bear is also a popular song among children. With a plush bear we follow the movements indicated in the song.	Practising a well-known rhyme with the help of a plush bear.
4 min	With the song Hokey Pokey we also aim to remember and practise parts of body.	We repeat the song several times using the different names of our parts of body.
4 min	If you're happy... is a song known in Hungarian	Playful activities; according to the age

	<i>by the children. They imitate my movements.</i>	<i>characteristics of the children.</i>
<i>4 min</i>	<i>Baby shark is the next well-known song. We play it together. While playing, the finger puppet shark will be passed on to the next child.</i> <i>Vocabulary for the topic: weather, sunny, cloudy, teddy bear, body parts (head, shoulders, knees, toes etc.), movements (running, walking, jumping, turning around), animals: shark, bear; numbers</i>	
<i>2 min</i>	3. Ending the session: <i>Children will tell me their favourite rhymes and we will recite and act them out.</i>	<i>Acting out children's favourite songs/ rhymes will make children more interested in the activity.</i>
<i>1 min</i>	4. Feedback, assessment: <i>Continuous praise as positive feedback during and after the activities.</i>	<i>With positive feedback children's self-esteem will increase and will be brave enough to take part in English activities later.</i>

Figure 10. An outline of an English session of Petra Rádóczy



Figure 11. Children of the English session with Petra Rádóczy

3.4.2. Reflection by the kindergarten trainee

In the following part we can read the **student's reflection** on her English session. As a part of their journals students put down what they have done in the kindergarten with a short assessment. This serves as a part of the pedagogical process and also as a psychopedagogical approach that can be beneficial for students' future profession. Naturally, students' writings and practical work are discussed with their mentor and at the end of the session with their fellow students and teacher trainer as well.

Reflection

While planning the session I intentionally concentrated on a gradual approach, and took children's age and individual characteristic features into consideration. I tried to choose simple, easy-to-learn songs as some of the children have just started English. I also paid attention to motivation and tried to keep children interested throughout the session. I wanted to involve each child in the activities.

At the beginning of the session I greeted the children and introduced myself so that they could get an example of introduction, too. My special intention was to create a loving, tolerant and relaxed atmosphere and tried to integrate early language development into a playful form. I also find important to provide children with activities where movements are in the limelight, thus, I have chosen songs and rhymes that could be accompanied with movements. With the chosen methods I also intended to develop children's experience and fantasy.

To most songs I also created and brought in special aids, because I think these make sessions even more interesting and serve as a magnet to their attention; especially at the beginning of the year. The plush teddy bear was going around during the song Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around (Appendix 1), so that each child could have them while they were imitating the necessary movements.

Song popular among children served to increase children's attention and interest. Therefore, I closed the session with a song well-known to them: Baby shark (Appendix 1). To this I also sewed a finger puppet to develop children's aesthetic sense and taste as well (Figure 12 and 13).

What I especially found relevant here is to emphasise and build upon children's emotions. With positive emotions learning will be more effective as these feelings will remain and some positive attitudes are attached to them. The various methods were carefully adjusted to children's age and development in order to make the session playful. Besides playfulness, children's desire to communicate and their needs for exercise had to be fulfilled, too.

I think I managed to achieved what I had planned. Every child took part in the playful English session and what I noticed was joy and happiness on their faces.



Figure 12. The baby shark sewn by the student



Figure 13. Baby shark: acting out

Comprehensive questions and study activities:

- Which method would you use with young children: one person – one language method or playful bilingual method? Justify your choice!
- Which are the educational fields where foreign language development can easily be integrated into a kindergarten programme (Chapter 3.3)? Why?
- Choose a topic from the following list and collect 3-5 songs and rhymes that go with the theme. How would you use them (e.g. methods, aids, order of activities)?
 - *Greetings and family*
 - *Colours and numbers*
 - *Wild and domestic animals*
 - *Travelling in the water and in the air*
 - *Weather and clothing*
- Write 5 questions that you would ask from Petra on the basis of her journal and reflection (Chapter 3.4).

4. Conclusion and acknowledgement

Both learning and teaching foreign languages are fun. There is no area of life where a foreign language could not teach us something new, something exciting and something which may become a part of our identity. In this short journey in the world of languages one of the aims, along with supplying some food for thought, was to extend our knowledge on our present age (both individual and historical) and find our place in it as a teacher. To achieve these aims we started to get familiar with the language families in Europe, then got to know some social and education models that follow mono- or multilingualism. We examined how language learning works and what kinds of methods to use to be successful especially with young children. After the theoretical parts we jumped into some present-day situations where early childhood foreign language education is handled with special care. Although material conditions are important in

a kindergarten, I do believe that without dedicated educators it will not function. Therefore, I want to catch the opportunity to say special thanks to my colleague, Györgyi Soósné Orbán, who taught me how to introduce English into the kindergarten and my (ex-)students, Adrienn Lovász, Petra Bontó and Petra Rádóczy, who continuously teach me how to survive and revive in teaching and research. For the readers who have reached this point I wish good luck and persistence in their present studies and their future career.

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