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Report on Sergei Gniativ's PhD thesis "First language attrition among Russians living in Hungary"

The doctoral thesis by Sergei Gniativ focuses on first language attrition of Russian speakers in Hungary. It is structured in 6 chapters. The research questions deal with lexical and grammatical attrition and extralinguistic variables exerting influence on attrition. Thus the dissertation focuses on very much needed knowledge in language language and education. The innovative aspect of the study is described as the first study on the linguistic perspective of the Russian population in Hungary. The goals of the study focus on the exploration of the effect of extralinguistic factors on the extent of language attrition and the level of L1 maintenance by Russians living in Hungary.

Language and Form

The author uses an acceptable level of academic English with some weaknesses which can be seen as minor problems to be dealt with in case of publication of the thesis.

Content and Argument Structure

The thesis is structured in 6 chapters, that is introduction and literature review as the first chapters which are followed by chapters dedicated to the actual study. The literature review gives a very thorough overview of the rather new field of language attrition which has mainly concentrated on L1 attrition (see Jessner et al. 2020).

The literature review which starts with a description of the target population summarizes the main research on L1 attrition carried out in this rather young field of linguistics and empirical studies pertaining to the dissertation.

This review also includes a complexity dynamics system approach to language development. On p. 18 the candidate explains that only few researchers have employed this approach as part of their methodology, that is although they agree on the interconnectedness of all systems involved in the process of attrition they ignore this understanding in the methodology applied

to studies on L1 attrition. As it becomes clear from the analysis of the interviews English plays a role in the participants' language repertoire so that it is not clear why no further attention has been paid to more than two languages in the study.

Although I am fully aware of the approaches taken by the majority of attrition studies a change of perspective might have helped to increase our understanding of the complexity of the research context. The interaction with English should have been given attention also to understand why attrition processes set in.

Otherwise the thesis is clearly and logically structured. This concerns the presentation of research questions, the choice of methodology and the argumentation used in the discussion of the results.

Questions

Based on the outcome of the thesis in the Public Defense I hope we will be able to discuss the following questions:

1. What do you think about the possible usefulness of a follow-up study?
2. Do you think your results could be generalized and/or transferred to another context?
3. What describes the usefulness of your study for education?

Summary

On the basis of the above considerations, I can conclude that this dissertation presents an original piece of research on a timely and important topic in an under-researched context and thus the dissertation meets the requirements of a PhD degree.

I am looking forward to discussing the study with the candidate at the public defense.

Ulrike Jessner-Schmid

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