

Review on the PhD thesis written by  
Lilla-Pilbauer Horváth  
titled

## Teaching across languages: A multilingual awareness-raising project in third language teaching

Reviewer

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The dissertation intends to investigate the potentials of multilingual awareness in the course of language teaching, acquisition and learning within the Hungarian education scene. In the work an ambitious effort is made to offer an alternative to the current language teaching strategies in the Hungarian education context, which is mostly characterized by monolingual assumptions. The writer chooses secondary school contexts to carry out a pilot, and then a research project, during which she focuses on the interaction between shared and similar language cognates of English and German languages, metalinguistic and cross-linguistic awareness and language learning motivation with regard to linguistic development.

### STRUCTURE

Although a separate introduction to the work is not provided, all the above information is revealed under **Part I. Theoretical background** 1. *Introduction and overview*. Moving the introduction pages to the beginning of the work, and separating it from the body may serve as an efficient opening to the dissertation, since the passages in the subchapter mostly clarify the structure and the formal details of the work. At the same time this act would dissolve the confusion over some statements here, such as '... part I begins with Chapter 2.' (p.11.)

Having said that, Part I. 1.2. is the first relevant subchapter, which discusses the concepts of bi- and multilingualism, various aspects of multilingualism and expands on the European geographical scene. To follow, the reader is introduced to some cross-linguistic features languages demonstrate, and furthermore, to theories of individual multilingual development together with theories of language learning motivation. From here, we move on to Part II., which describes the Hungarian language education scene, and the details of the teaching project comprising information on the participants, the methodology of the project, the results and the conclusion.

The work is finished with a chapter concluding the dissertation results and offering an outlook for the future.

### PART I

Part I reviews some of the relevant literature on a variety of related concepts.

2.1. primarily intends to investigate the concepts of bi- and multilingualism, however, the final text seems to be an endless listing of the various standpoints in the literature without the author critically analyzing either the reasons for the diversity, or making a decision on which approach she applies in the research. In addition, new concepts are introduced (e.g. plurilingualism), and then left unattended. Mentioning The Dynamic Model of Multilingualism seems to be too early at this stage, as well. All in all, the subchapter should be more systematic in discussing the definitions and/or concept constructions and should be followed by the final statement of the author. An attempt to do so can be observed in 2.2. through the discussion of the

psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of multilingualism, completed with an investigation of recent language policy changes in the European scene. The chapter, however, leaves instructed multilingualism, that is, the context of institutional language education, which is a key issue in the work, unattended. Besides balancing the discussion of the key concepts, by adding a more critical tone and by building the argument of each (sub) chapter in a more logical manner could also highly improve the discourse.

Chapter 3. is devoted to the linguistic features of language intelligibility (mostly, but not exclusively between German and English) through the studies of lexical elements and structural similarities. A more focused study of the languages involved in the research might improve the coherence of the chapter and the whole work. In the chapter intercomprehension (IC) maintained in the classroom is referred to as a method and an approach at the same time (p.15), thus the clarification of what *IC* really is seems to be necessary.

Chapter 4. provides the description of a select of multiple language acquisition theories. Here it seems that the introduction to the chapter is actually the summary of the author on the topic as well, consequently, going through the selected models one after the other seems to provide redundant information from the very beginning of the chapter through 4.1.-4.3, which distracts the attention from DMM, the author's original choice. As a solution, these subchapters could be briefly summarized in an introductory paragraph to 4.4 on DMM, with special attention to the theories related to the research, or DMM only. 4.4. is a well-formulated subchapter. The Dynamic Model of Multilingualism is revisited here through its relation to Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, how it is understood in the process of multilingual development, and in addition, through the explanation of the interaction of linguistic and individual cognitive factors in the process, finally providing an account of some related research results.

Chapter 5. is an efficient overview of some relevant recent theories of motivation, which is concluded with highlighting the relation of Dynamic Motivation Current theory to the research completed.

## **PART II.**

Chapter 6. promises to describe the situation of foreign language education in Hungary to back up the research work. However, the author keeps moving between details concerning teaching L2 and/or L3 in both the European and the Hungarian education scene and research constantly, which makes the passages confusingly hectic. The text here would require a more coherent organization either timewise or geographically to promote the successful development of ideas. The main goal of the work is revisited on p. 45, however, the wording needs clarification since it is hardly precise in its current form, and, furthermore, higher consistency should be maintained with the similar statements of the main objective of the dissertation before this part (see Q1 in the *Questions* section at the end of the review).

The research design for the pilot project is detailed in Chapter 7. The chapter provides clear information about the participants, the project environment and the basic principles, and describes the two groups of intervention and control. References to *pilot project*, *teaching project*, *pilot period* and *research project* are found all across the chapter, which is quite confusing. A timeline designed to describe the full project procedure may contribute to a clearer picture of the whole research work development. Chapter 8 provides details of the methodology applied, starting with the hypotheses and research questions. The instruments developed and used for data collection are presented with consideration. The process of implementation and the method of data analysis are dealt with due care in the chapter. However, some of the information related to the wording of H1, and its relation to the Multilingual Proficiency Test developed for the research requires further clarification (see Q4 in the *Questions* section of the review).

Chapter 9. provides details of the results of the pilot year first, and then of the intervention period. 9.1 data analysis suggests a successful selection of the research group and control group participants, the careful validation process of the instruments, and the reliability of the data analysis procedures. At the end of the pilot period a new objective, the increase of the sample size was concluded. To follow, 9.2. presents the details of the research year. The data are gathered through validated instruments, the results are analyzed with due consideration, the conclusions are drawn based on the information gained from the research results and the hypotheses.

Finally, one of the conclusions (in my understanding) is that the maintenance of high motivational and self-efficacy level may contribute to positive attitudes and to maintaining facilitative language behavioral patterns, for which activating multilingual awareness through cross-linguistic sensitization seems to be an efficient tool.

## **SUMMARY:**

The work addresses a highly relevant issue of the Hungarian language teaching scenario with the strong intention to challenge and improve the traditions of third language teaching approach in the increasingly multilingual environment. In general, the work meets the requirements of scientific work, however, some modifications are recommended and further clarifications are required.

The external and internal cohesion of the work requires some structural modification at the level of some chapters mentioned above.

The aim of the dissertation needs to be spelt out more clearly and repeated with more consideration all throughout the work.

In contrast to the detailed descriptive sections, the critical analysis of some key concepts appears to be inadequate from the perspective of the work (e.g. cognates, attitudes), or a clear final statement of the author's viewpoint is missing from the overview parts.

The research aims are fairly clear, the research process employs a set of carefully designed instruments. The related details are described in Part II. with due consideration, however, the whole procedure might be more successfully presented and clarified through a visual image (e.g. line graph) summarizing the time of all the steps taken, objectives considered, and instruments employed for the data collection stage. The research results are analyzed carefully, demonstrated through clear visual images accompanied by elaborate verbal interpretation, and the conclusions are explained based on the results clearly.

Since the results show the cross-linguistic sensitization process maintains a high level of motivation and positive attitudes to L3 (German) learning in the research group, there is no clear evidence of the direct correlation between multilingual awareness and competence development and L3 language competence development. Based on the results, L3 language competencies might also be facilitated by the elevated motivation and attitudes (to some extent).

**On the whole, the work demonstrates the author's good skills of completing research work. Writing up the research requires reconsideration: The structure of the literature review, the internal cohesion of the ideas, and the language of the whole dissertation should be reviewed carefully.**

## **QUESTIONS:**

1. The aim of the dissertation is addressed at various parts of the work, however, in slightly different ways:

*... whether multilingual training addressing cognates and similar structures between English and German affects the linguistic development and motivation ... (Abstract)*

*... motivational and attitudinal changes during the initial phase of language acquisition (p.1)*

*... is concerned with lexical similarities ... (p.17)*

*... proposing a method that highlights the importance of multilingual awareness raising, specifically through the identification of cognates and other similar structures between L2 English and L3 German by providing evidence on the effects of multilingual awareness raising on the writing performance of Hungarian L3 learners (p.45)*

2. Please, define what exactly you mean by 'cognate'.
3. What hypotheses is your work based on? Please, clarify the hypotheses provided on p.51. with special attention to the following wording here: *multilingual proficiency in writing* (H1) or *development in L3 writing* (H1:a-c subquestions). In your argumentation, please refer to the relevant parts of the Multilingual Proficiency Test developed for the data collection.
4. Explain the reason for your decision of designing a project focusing on teaching German as L3 subsequent to learning English as L2 in contrast with the recommendation of the *White paper* (EMMI, 2012) mentioned on p. 46.
5. *Attitude* and *motivation* often seem to be used as synonyms. Please, explain further.
6. The results of both the pilot and the research year show a more intensive development, a sharper increase in the multilingual awareness of the control group (Table 4 and Figure 7) without any intentional intervention. How do you explain that?

I suggest the dissertation be presented at the oral defence. If the oral defence is successful, I recommend the award of a Phd-degree to the candidate.

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