

Language concept

rainbowtrekkers

Kita gGmbH



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The limits of my language  
mean the limits of my world.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)





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## 1. Foreword

In this language concept, we would like to describe how multilingual language acquisition takes place in practice at the rainbowtrekkers, what theoretical foundations it is based on and what suitable diagnostic procedures for (multilingual) language assessment could look like in the future, which are more dedicated to the special translanguing competences of children growing up in multilingual day care centers and which are more appreciative than before.

The idea for this concept was born at the time of the "first Corona Lockdown" in spring 2020. At that time, a project group was formed by our staff members Antje Pillunat (rainbowtrekkers Junkersdorf) and Haley Passmore and Rosa Erhardt (rainbowtrekkers Widdersdorf) with the aim of writing down *best practice examples* and setting common standards for all our daycare centers. Chapters 4.1 ("Living multilingualism" and 4.2 ("Creating language opportunities") of the present concept emerged from this project group.

On our way from a bilingual to a multilingual daycare provider, we have been scientifically accompanied for several years by Professor Julie A. Panagiotopoulou from the University of Cologne. The entire chapter, including all sub-chapters, is an abridged version of her 2016 publication *Multilingualism in Childhood. Perspectives for Early Childhood Education Practice*. The chapter is, so to speak, a (much abridged) scientific introduction to the topics of multilingualism and translanguaging and is therefore placed before the practical comments of our educators.

The transfer services "Initiation of speaking opportunities in a multi- and translanguing context" (chapter 4.3) as well as the suggestions for the development of appropriate language assessment tools (chapter 5) and the introduction (chapter 2) originate from the undersigned.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the colleagues of our organization as well as to Professor Panagiotopoulou. I hope that this concept will give parents, staff, and external parties an impression of the many ways in which language teaching and (multi-)language acquisition work in day care centers today.

Cologne, December 2021

Joel Mertens  
Founder and Managing Director  
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## 2. Introduction

Classically, bilingual day-care centers in Europe in the period after the Second World War until today have largely worked according to the concept of "one person - one language". According to this, children were supposed to be in contact with the respective native speakers in order to learn "proper English" or "good German" from them, for example. This was based on a conventional conception of languages as quasi-autonomous, definable systems that are recorded additively in an unambiguous order (L1, L2, L3, etc.) as monolingual linguistic codes. Language mixing was thereby considered a deviation from the norm since competent multilinguals would supposedly no longer mix their languages.

In fact, however, this practice has (at best) trained children to be "double monolinguals". This is particularly evident in comparison with classical multilingual countries such as Switzerland, Luxembourg, Israel, or India. In these societies, language choice and use are much more flexible and dynamic. Language use in these societies can depend on both the topic of conversation and the addressee.

For example, a well-educated Indian couple working in the IT industry can discuss professional matters directly in English because of the appropriate technical terminology, while in private matters they communicate in the national language Mahrati because of biographical familiarity and in front of business partners in Delhi in the majority language there, Hindi, so as not to exclude anyone.

Another example is a rabbi in an Israeli yeshiva who, because of his American background, may prefer to speak to his students in English in everyday life, switch between Hebrew and Aramaic when studying Talmudic sources, and then tell a joke to the same students in Yiddish because it only sounds funny in that language.

The concept of "one person - one language" has so far blocked such natural multilingualism in our daycare centers. In the past, at rainbowtrekkers (as in most other bilingual daycare centers in Europe), we had selected educators based on their mother tongue (they were hired decidedly as English- or German-speaking professionals). This has regularly led to bizarre situations, such as when a German-speaking educator wanted to hide from the children that she also understands English, or when foreign colleagues used pedagogical terms in German and were "reprimanded" for it by parents or supervisors along the lines of "You should only speak English here."

At rainbowtrekkers we nowadays assume that multilingual people can and should communicate monolingually in monolingual environments, but that in multilingual environments - like in our day care centers - a more flexible and dynamic use of language is natural and accepted.

This approach can be called *translanguaging*. The rainbowtrekkers are an active member of the project group "Translanguaging Pedagogy in Multilingual Kitas in NRW", which is affiliated to the University of Cologne, Department of Education and Social Sciences. The group is led by Prof. Dr. Julie A. Panagiotopoulou, who also provided expert advice for the concept presented here, for which I would like to thank her very much.

Professor Panagiotopoulou writes in the magazine of the Centre for Multilingualism and Integration Cologne (December 2018):

*When multilingual children speak, write, or do arithmetic, they do not use individual languages or language systems, but their entire - i.e., cross-linguistic - linguistic repertoire. In order to*



*communicate with multilingual people, even young children combine linguistic elements into an integrated whole that is adapted to the respective situation and the repertoire of their interlocutors.*

*From an external monolingual perspective, this seems somewhat unusual, but from the perspective of children growing up multilingually, this dynamic use of language is a matter of course.*

For our staff recruitment and development at rainbowtrekkers, this means that - unlike in the past - staff are no longer recruited as "German-speaking" or "English-speaking" educators, but that all those involved commit to demonstrating or promptly acquiring bilingualism in German and English at least at level B2 when they are recruited.

We understand bilingualism and multilingualism not only as the mastery of German and English. In line with our self-image, we would also like to integrate the different family languages of our children even more into the day-to-day life of the day care center, be it in the morning circle or in play situations. We also invite all parents to contribute with their language repertoire and family culture, e.g., by reading aloud, telling stories, singing, dancing, researching, building, celebrating, or cooking.



### 3. Multilingualism in early childhood

#### 3.1 How do we define multilingualism?

Within the framework of our language concept, we consider children to be multilingual when they encounter interaction situations in their first years of life in which several languages are used in a communicatively relevant way. This can be in the day-care center - or also at home in families whose members act in several languages or "across languages" in order to cope with their everyday life. These are children who go through a natural language acquisition process within and outside the family.

This chapter is based on the publication by Prof. Julie A. PANAGIOTOPOULOU (2016): *Multilingualism in Childhood. Perspectives for Early Childhood Education Practice. An expertise of the Further Training Initiative for Early Childhood Educators (WiFF)*; Publisher: Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V. - The following text is either taken verbatim from the above-mentioned publication or paraphrases it in a shortened form. We would like to thank Prof. PANAGIOTOPOULOU for allowing us to use her material here.

The term natural language acquisition is used in linguistic multilingualism research to distinguish this everyday process from controlled acquisition, for example by means of language teaching. In our child daycare facilities (Kitas), we are not concerned with the controlled acquisition of languages and also not with the question of whether multilingual children acquire their languages simultaneously (simultaneous) or successively (successive). We therefore refrain from definitions that deviate from the usual listing of the first, second etc. (national) language (L1). (national) language (L1, L2 etc.).

Instead, we assume that children acquire their languages mono- and translingually in everyday use, i.e., that all the child's languages are interwoven from the very beginning.

#### 3.2 What does a (supposedly) monolingual society expect from multilingual children?

Multilingual children are often compared with ideal and therefore also fictitious speakers; as a rule, these have not acquired their "mother tongue" under the conditions of migration, but use it supposedly in a standard way, e.g., "error-free", "accent-free" and preferably not colored by dialect. This fictitious native speaker is an effective norm against which not only adults, but even young children are measured and against which, in turn, children, adolescents and adults often measure their own linguistic performance.

These expectations of normality can arise from upbringing and socialization in societies that define themselves as monolingual and regard multilingual practice as a deviation from the norm or as an exception. In the past, we have repeatedly encountered these expectations or claims of normality in our Kitas, for example when parents were confronted with a Southeast European dialect of English by a teaching assistant or when another person "with a migration background" made mistakes in German grammar.

These expectations of normality can also be internalized by multilingual children. It can be assumed that under the conditions of constant comparison with an unattainable ideal, multilingual children themselves develop unrealistic expectations which they consequently cannot fulfil - on the one hand,



because there are no "perfect" speakers of one or more languages anyway and, on the other hand, because multilingual people cannot be regarded as two monolinguals (in one person).

In the professional discussion, these expectations of normality often led to the fact that multilingual children growing up in immigrant families were almost automatically and without considering their concrete socialization conditions and their specific (multilingual-)language biographies considered to have problems or even to be educationally distant. Here, implicitly or indirectly, it is not the children's linguistic development, but already the assumed conditions of socialization in an (allegedly) non-German-speaking family that are considered a risk factor.

This is obviously connected to the conviction that educational professionals in German "regular day care centers mainly with a "German-German" clientele, specifically: that educators are mainly familiar with the cultural experiences of monolingual German children. However, this very assumption does not apply to the day-care centers run by us, where the majority of the staff themselves have migration experience (to or back to Germany) and have multilingual language biographies and language skills.

The monolingual view of multilingualism also leads to the fact that a different rate of language and learning progress in both languages is often labelled as deficient. The child is then said to be unable to express itself in one or the other language in a way that is appropriate for its age. But precisely for this observation, another interpretation would also be possible, one that does not evaluate the alleged "lack" in the lexicon of multilinguals in comparison to the already existing words of an ideal monolingual, but one that takes into account the specifics of multilingual biographies. Such an interpretation would be, for example, the following: People experience and learn certain things in only one of their two languages. This is because a single person does not live two lives.

The constant comparison between children growing up monolingual and multilingual thus stabilizes the construct of a (linguistically) deviant socialization within the framework of an allegedly monolingual society.

### **3.3 Language acquisition is not additive but complementary**

Parents have repeatedly expressed their concern to us that the acquisition of English would impair their German language competence. Particularly in the case of families with a migration background, we have sometimes sensed a certain uncertainty as to whether their child will be able to acquire sufficient linguistic competence in the German language by the time it starts school in Cologne's regular school system, if at the same time we also communicate in English in our day-care centers.

From the experience of the past 15 years, we can say that a child who is admitted to our day care center at the age of one has passive language comprehension in both languages by the age of three at the latest and can actively articulate in both German and English in an age-appropriate manner by the time it starts school. The feedback from the primary schools in Cologne to our teams is very positive and the primary school teachers generally *attest to a very high level of literacy* for our children.

The reason for this is that multilingual children (can) acquire the target language (German) just as competently and successfully as monolingual children. This is because children do not acquire their languages additively (according to the pattern: L1, L2, L3 etc.), but dynamically and complementarily. If a multilingual child acquires a certain concept or linguistic pattern in one language, this can also have an effect on the concepts and patterns in his or her other languages. According to the communicative demands of the environment and their own needs, these children develop cross-linguistic competences and practices, as the phenomenon of language blending also shows.



### 3.4 Language mixture from the beginning

Recent psycho- and sociolinguistic research has shown that language mixing is neither an early childhood developmental stage nor a compensatory strategy of multilinguals, but a legitimate linguistic practice, among others. It is the rule rather than the exception for multilingual children. Mixed language statements are not an expression of "language confusion" but an extremely creative linguistic characteristic. They are an expression of communicative competence.

It is quite natural that bilingual children do not develop their languages at the same rate. The unrealistic idea of "balanced multilingualism" only suggests a quasi-mathematical equation ( $L1 + L2 = 1$  balanced multilingual person) and a supposed symmetry in children's language development. However, this is an oversimplification that cannot do justice to the complex, dynamic and translingual practices of multilingual children.

### 3.5 Dynamic language environment in family and day care center

With the terms *cross-language* or *translanguaging*, the dynamic use of language(s) is considered: The focus is then no longer on language systems, but on language practices, on the *cross-linguistic languaging* of speakers. Accordingly, languages are not used and acquired as entities, autonomously and separately from each other. Rather, children growing up multilingually develop "cross-linguistic curiosity" from the very beginning, acting and learning across languages.

Young children in particular, if they are given the opportunity to do so in the day care center, develop "cross-linguistic competence". This means they play with their languages by mixing or alternating them and communicating "across them". Multilingual children thus already develop an overall repertoire of linguistic practices that transcends the boundaries of language systems during their dynamic language acquisition.

Instead of asking about correspondences with or deviations from the respective system of the language(s) used in the process, the complex and flexible cross-linguistic practice of the children is captured. *Translanguaging* is also the normal mode of communication in the context of multilingual families. The children use and develop their individual and dynamic repertoire at the same time, which they access accordingly depending on the situation in order to communicate pragmatically adequately in their multilingually organized everyday life.

However, multilingual children produce not only translingual but also monolingual utterances both in the day-care context and in their everyday family life, as they adapt their linguistic practice to the respective communication situation and reference person. In doing so, their *translanguaging* is closely linked to their translocal relationships and experiences. From the very beginning, children experience their parents in everyday family life who, depending on the situation, communicate both monolingually and translingually by, for example, reporting to each other on their everyday professional life, by contacting relatives or friends who live in other countries by Skype or telephone, or by reading newspapers from different countries on the Internet or reading out "foreign language" news and exchanging translingual information about them.

In everyday life at the day care center, children interact with caregivers both mono- and translingually, for example when they read aloud from monolingual children's books and comment on the text together with the children in several languages and across languages. Such everyday situations are not exceptionally complex constellations for young children, but merely concern cross-linguistic, translingual and translocal conditions of their family (experience) life and thus the specific acquisition conditions of their own dynamic multilingual practice and identity.



## 4. Translanguaging in educational practice

### 4.1 Living multilingualism

Thanks to our multilingual staff and our many binational or international families from all over the world, multilingualism is a matter of course in our day care center.

We constantly switch between languages, depending on the situation and the interlocutor, and we use the vocabulary that is necessary in the given situation to communicate with each other. In short, we use any language that is part of our vocabulary to communicate our thoughts, feelings and needs. And we encourage our children to communicate with us using whatever vocabulary is available to them at the moment.

Our children are surrounded by a variety of different languages wherever they go and learn several different languages at the same time. Our job as educators is to accompany each child on this journey and help them navigate these new experiences.

We take the main languages of the day care center (German and English) just as seriously as the children's family languages. We also do not accept any language hierarchies such as English as the "world language", German as the "cultural language" or other languages as the "third language" or "secret language between the parents". Every language has linguistic potential, which the children may and should use to express themselves.

The choice of language in which they want to express themselves is up to the children themselves. As a rule, they will initially choose the language in which they can best express themselves in the respective situation. With increasing communication experience, however, the language horizon broadens and, in addition to questions of self-competence and self-perception, the linguistic competence of the respective interlocutor can then increasingly be considered from the child's point of view.

#### From our everyday life

In the morning at drop-off, we talk to a bilingual family with a German-Spanish background. The child grows up bilingual at home. At the day care centre, the child is immersed in a predominantly German-English language environment. We start the conversation with the parents in German. If we notice that the Spanish-speaking parent cannot follow the conversation in depth, we switch to English. In between, we comfort another child who is new to the facility and has difficulty saying goodbye to his parents in Turkish with the words: *Anne geliyor* ("Mummy will be back soon").

Later, when we ask the child at breakfast if they want *bread with jam*, or when the child says *more pasta, please* at lunch, we use the language that is available to us at that moment and that best conveys what we want to express.



## 4.2 Creating language opportunities and teaching *literacy skills*

The educational support needed for the complementary acquisition of several languages in early childhood is basically no different from the support needed for monolingual language acquisition. The be-all and end-all in both cases is to create speaking opportunities and to strengthen the children's *literacy skills*. This applies to the bilingual day-care centers in our organization as well as to any monolingual "regular day care center and is also anchored in the educational principles of the federal states.

Creating opportunities to speak is an integral part of everyday activities in our daycare centers, be it at the morning greeting, at breakfast together to start the day, during free play, in group activities or in the outdoor area. At lunch, at *nap time* and in the small group. During afternoon play, tidying up and saying goodbye - we are constantly surrounded by language(s).

In doing so, we use a number of different strategies to actively initiate conversations with the children or between the children. These include, for example:

- **Speech that accompanies action:** Throughout the day, we verbally describe what we see when the children are playing or interacting alone or with other children. Similarly, we verbalize our own actions as we interact with the children.
- **Open questions:** We ask a variety of different questions that cannot be answered simply with yes or no. We keep the conversation going by formulating open questions instead: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?
- **Songs and rhymes:** During the morning circle and throughout the day, we sing songs and use rhymes, both familiar ones and new ones we make up ourselves. The aim is to encourage the children to explore language(s) through play. We talk about the similarities of words that rhyme. We start a sentence and let the children complete the sentence with their own rhyming words. We consider: Are these real words or fantasy words? What is the difference between fantasy and reality?
- **Picture book discussions:** We read picture books together every day and we also offer our children retreats to engage with books individually. We use picture books in our groups in vastly different ways. Beyond simply reading the text of the story aloud, we also look closely at the pictures and talk together about what we see in them or what they remind us of or how the story might go on. We also have *story bags* utensils that go with the story to appeal to all the children's senses. We also practice retelling stories independently with the children or making up new stories ourselves.
- **Telling our own stories:** Throughout the day we talk to each other. We tell each other stories and listen to each other. We talk about the adventures in our nursery and about what we experience outside the nursery. We encourage all children to talk to other children. In our *role play areas*, the stories can not only be verbalized, but also "acted out" in mime and drama.
- **Listening attentively:** We listen attentively to our children, at eye level. While a child is talking, we signal through our facial expressions that we are attentive. We maintain eye contact and face the child with our body.



- **Corrective repetition and extension:** When talking to our children, we focus on *what* they say, not *how* they say it. When talking to the children, we do not judge their language ability and do not react negatively to language "mistakes". Instead, we use the strategy of corrective repetition. In doing so, we reproduce what was said in our own words in a linguistically correct way, but without emphasizing the previous mistake. This strategy is called *corrective feedback* in the literature.

#### Example 1

Child: *Mama gehte einkaufen bei Rewe.*

Teacher: *Mama ging bei Rewe einkaufen? Was hat sie denn gekauft? Ganz viele Äpfel? Bist du auch schon mal bei Rewe einkaufen gegangen?*

#### Example 2

Child: *I goed to the playground.*

Teacher: *You went to the playground? Which playground did you go to? Did you have fun?*

- Criticizing expressiveness can weaken the child's self-confidence and sends the message to the child: "When I speak, I make mistakes that have to be corrected by adults", which can lead to an overall decrease in motivation to speak. This problem is *described* in the literature as *silencing*.
- **Facilitate group discussions between children:** In group situations, it is important to create a framework for discussion that gives all children enough time to think about their ideas and thoughts without being interrupted. For social reasons, it can be helpful if older - more linguistically competent - children speak up for younger children. For linguistic reasons, on the other hand, it may be more useful to support each individual child in expressing themselves in a group situation. In this case, it depends on the specific situation and the intuition of the teacher. The teacher should make sure that she supports the conversation but does not dominate it, so that there is enough space for the children to communicate themselves.
- **Participation in children's play:** Through their participation in children's play, educational professionals have the opportunity to model language use in relation to the situation. Collective play is also a good opportunity to expand vocabulary.



### 4.3 Initiation of speaking opportunities in multi- and translingual contexts

The natural multilingualism in our institutions, as described in chapter 3.2, forms the framework within which our pedagogical staff use the strategies described in chapter 3.1 to initiate speaking opportunities. These work in the same way in a monolingual context as in a multilingual or translingual setting. The following (fictional) examples are intended to illustrate this:

- **Speech that accompanies action:** Colleague Heidi Müller narrates what is happening in the construction corner in German and uses words like "Bagger", "Kran" or "Planiererraupen". After free play, Ms. Müller leads the *Morning Circle*. She switches to the English language, because today's topic is English *Christmas Carols* and Christmas customs in other countries. She tells the children about a Christmas she experienced many years ago as an exchange student in America and asks if the children have ever spent Christmas abroad.
- **Songs and rhymes:** During the rhyming and singing games, Kevin (5) discovers that the English word "rhyme" and the German word "Schleim" rhyme. He turns to Dogan (4), smiles and says "rhyme Schleim, rhyme Schleim, rhyme Schleim".
- **Looking at picture books:** Colleague Altan Dagtekan sits with Sylvia (3), Jehuda (2) and Liv (4) in the reading corner. Together they are looking at a *Wimmelbilderbuch* (hidden picture book) with drawings from Cologne. Because it depicts a familiar local environment, they unconsciously choose to read in German. "Was sieht man da?" Altan asks the children. Liv answers: "Den Dom!!". Jehuda points his finger at a KVB tram and says in Hebrew: "Rakewet kala!" Sylvia corrects him: "Straßenbahn!"
- **Telling your own stories:** Liam tells how he flew with his parents from Düsseldorf airport to his grandfather in America during the summer holidays. "There was a *bus* and it took us all the way to the *plane*. When Leo hears this, he makes the sound of a plane flying by. Together, the two children are later seen in the hallway. There they have sat down one behind the other on the steps and play that they are on a bus.
- **Corrective repetition and extension:** Henry reports: "Meine Mama geht einkaufen bei Rewe". Colleague Henderson replies in English: "Really, what did she buy? Apples? Did you ever go shopping with her?" - Even if Henry has not expressed himself grammatically correctly in German, he still has the valuable experience of being understood. In addition, he learns from the colleague's answer how a correct linguistic expression of the facts he described sounds in English. He also learns that he can definitely communicate with Henderson in English in the future if he wants to (reflection on the linguistic abilities of the addressee of the communication). He learns that in German it means *bin gegangen* and not *geht* in a game with Leah in the afternoon. She tells him: "Gestern ist meine Mama mit mir ins Schwimmbad gegangen."



## 5. Language assessment

Among socio-political issues, a state interest in the language competence of pre-school children has – rightly so - emerged in recent decades. In the process, social issues and objectives are brought into the daycare sector from the outside. The political interest in the language competence of future primary school pupils grows primarily out of the justified desire for support and equal opportunities. Children from families with a migration background should be strengthened in their language skills in good time before they start school. Ultimately, this is about questions of integration and inclusion in a migration society.

For this purpose, language diagnostic procedures have been developed in all federal states in the past decades, which are to be used in the day care sector. However, these procedures are integrated to varying degrees into the day-to-day work of day-care centers, depending on the provider, the concept of the center and the staff, since they are primarily diagnostic instruments, which can regularly collide with the personal and professional self-image of the staff working in day-care centers. Many educational professionals see themselves primarily as learning and life companions of the children. A diagnostic-clinical view of children is alien to them. This objection - whether justified or not - cannot be completely dismissed, since proper language diagnostics always requires a linguistic examination of the causes of the current language status and predictions of future development or recommendations for action. Neither of these is anchored in the training curricula of the vocational colleges for educators and is also not part of the pedagogical tasks, responsibilities and sphere of action of specialists in the narrower sense. There are good reasons for day care centers to observe children's language development, both for pedagogical and socio-political reasons, as we will show in the following. However, the questions of differentiation between pedagogy and diagnostics should always be considered.

In addition, in our case, the integration policy objectives are generally based on a monolingual expectation of normality, which does not apply to children growing up multilingual and cross-lingual. The existing language diagnostic procedures all assume a normative level of competence in the target language German of whatever kind, to which the children are to be brought - if necessary, through individual support - for honorable reasons. But the opposite of good is well-intentioned. Such a deficit-oriented approach does not recognize the complexity of the learning progress of multilingual language acquisition in early childhood. Not every multilingual child has a so-called migration background and not every family with (their own) migration history is educationally distant. The basic assumption of educational policy that children speak one family language at home and German at daycare sometimes, but by no means always, corresponds to reality, quite independently of the educational proximity or remoteness of the respective family setting. Families who speak more than one language at home live not only in socially-deprived areas, but also the affluent neighborhoods of our cities.



## 5.1 Existing instruments simply inadequate

Unfortunately, all survey procedures for language assessment commonly used in North Rhine-Westphalian day-care centers more or less follow the clichéd notions that multilingual language acquisition during early childhood is separated in space and time. Complementary, non-additive language acquisition is not envisaged in surveys (such as **BaSik** or **Seldak**) that are unilaterally fixated on a German-language "output". Attempts to rethink or adapt an established monolingualistic procedure such as **BaSik** as "language diagnostics in the context of multilingualism in the day-care center", as was recently done by Christina Winter of the Mercator Institute for Language Development and German as a Second Language before the working group Bilingual Day-Care Centres Cologne, have also failed to convince our educators from the field. Even in such a constellation, BaSik remains at best a diagnostic tool for certifying dual monolingualism.

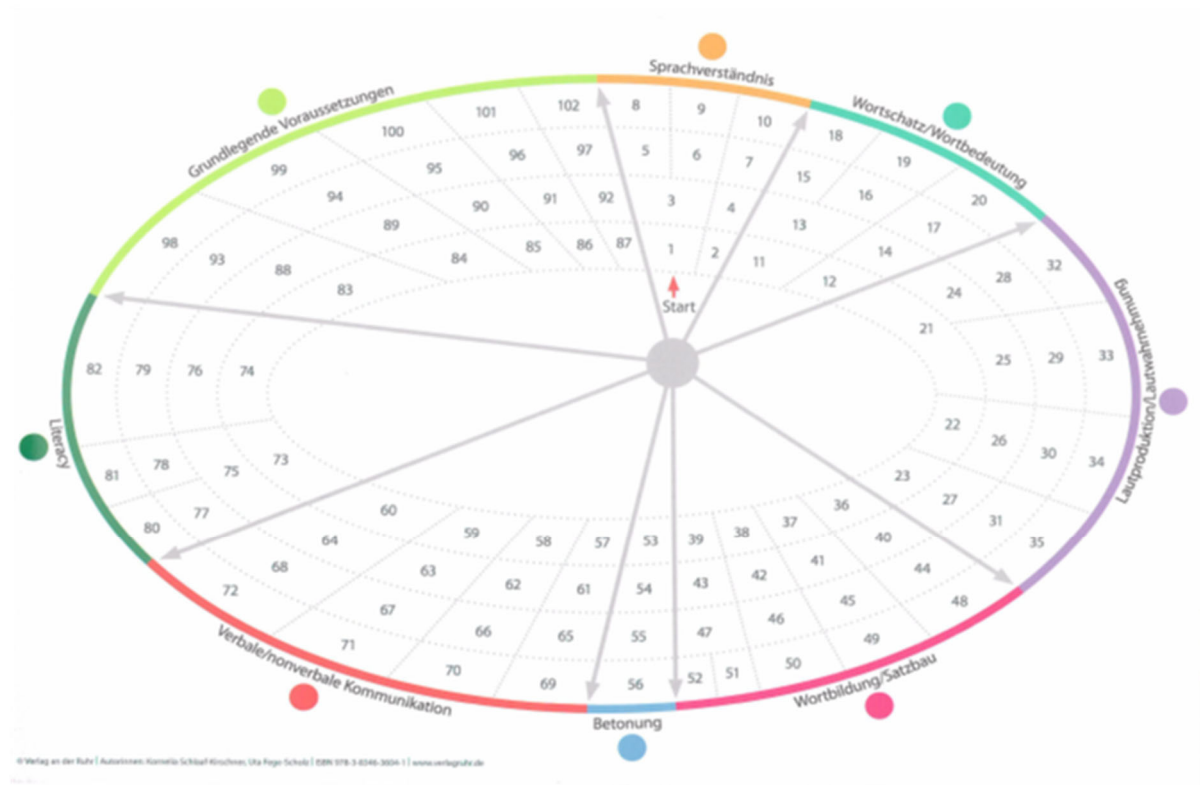
Within the canon of existing diagnostic instruments, the observation forms **sismik**, which were published by the Bavarian State Institute for Early Childhood Education and are also used in daycare centers in North Rhine-Westphalia, are the most suitable method for describing the language reality of multilingual and cross-lingual children. On the positive side, it is noticeable that in **sismik** there is a great deal of awareness of other languages and that parents are involved in the evaluation of children's language abilities and skills in the family languages. The focus on teaching "language love" and *literacy skills* is also positive. However, **sismik** also remains stuck in the deficit-oriented basic assumption that multilingualism is acquired additively and not complementarily.

From our point of view, the main problem is that all the language diagnostic methods commonly used in North Rhine-Westphalia relate *multilingual* children to a cohort of *monolingual* children of the same age who are supposedly developing "according to the norm". However, this completely ignores the specific linguistic competences of multilingual children that accompany multilingualism. In order to be able to properly identify language acquisition delays or developmental needs in *multilingual children*, these children would actually have to be related to a cohort of age-matched *multilingual* children. However, such a diagnostic tool does not (yet) exist.

## 5.2 Procedures currently implemented with us

Because research has not yet provided daycare centers in North Rhine-Westphalia with a set of language diagnostic instruments that assess the competencies of multilingual and cross-lingual children based on resources and not on deficits, language assessment in the daycare centers of our organization has not yet reached its full potential. This means that at the moment we are still looking at German and English language development separately. Cross-connections cannot yet be shown. Third language skills are also only included in the diagnostics to a limited extent.

In the area of German language, we use the "Observation Sheet Language Development from 1-6 Years" by Kornelia Schlaaf-Kirschner and Uta Fege-Scholz. These worksheets are part of the IPS method developed by Schlaaf-Kirschner (<http://schlaaf-kirschner.de/>). The assessment sheets are divided into different competence areas: Language comprehension, vocabulary and meaning, sound production and perception, word formation and sentence structure, speech melody and intonation, verbal and non-verbal communication, literacy (dealing with books, texts, narration) and basic prerequisites. The following picture is an example of such a sheet:



For German language use, we consider the IPS method not only to be a scientifically validated instrument, but also a diagnostic tool which, from the point of view of our pedagogical experts, is convincing due to its high degree of practical relevance. However, the IPS method is only used to evaluate German language skills. With regard to the children's English language acquisition, our professionals prepare a short English summary based on the standards of the educator training systems in the countries of origin of our staff.

The consequence of this unequal standard is that the quality of the observations in the different languages still varies greatly and cross-linguistic competences as well as third languages are not taken into account. Since the instruments available in Germany so far do not take into account the complexity of the special situation of multilingual and cross-lingual children in our care, an overall acceptance problem can be observed in the use of diagnostic tools in the day care centers. This is also reflected in the discussion cited at the beginning of this article on whether and to what extent language diagnostics should be the task of educators at all.

### 5.3 Desideratum and research assignment

Language diagnostics are not only associated with general socio-political purposes, but of course also with pedagogical purposes. These include, for example, the planning and individualization of support programs, optimization of educational processes as well as monitoring and documentation of language acquisition processes in individual children. Therefore, a certain degree of language assessment is definitely justified in day care centers, independent of educational policy discussions and expectations.

Not only in the absence of diagnostic alternatives, but also in order to make the "invisible visible", more thought should be given at this point to free forms of observation, such as those practiced occasionally and anonymously by Prof. Panagiotopoulou and her students in our institutions. In free



observation, the focus is on language action, which is observed in everyday, but also initiated and pre-structured action situations (Lengyl 2012). Observations for the purpose of pedagogical language diagnostics are scientific, methodologically controlled observations and must therefore comply with the rules that apply to them, i.e., they must be intersubjectively comprehensible and reliable. These are therefore not everyday observations that are unsystematic, imprecise, possibly incidental and unreflecting, but systematic, criterion-oriented observations directed at an object (ibid.).

However, free observation procedures are also associated with a higher degree of subjectivity than tests and screenings, as they are based on the perception of the individual and on the individual's interpretation of what is perceived; this applies in particular to the qualitative aspects that are to be assessed: When is a behavior frequent, rare or never? When is a behavior appropriate or inappropriate? In the course of this, high demands are placed on the pedagogical professional; above all, the reflection of what is observed in the team requires not only time, but also the readiness for multi-perspective observation (ibid.).

Just as in the general pedagogical observation setting structured checklists (such as: (GABIP) Grenzsteine der Entwicklung, Ganzheitliches Bildungsdokumentationsprogramm [Developmental landmarks, holistic educational documentation program], Leuvenner Engagiertheitsskala [Leuvenner commitment scale]) are always in danger of representing only a snapshot, so are diagnostic tools such as BaSik and sismik not designed to represent processual developments. Free observation procedures - both in general pedagogical documentation and in language diagnostics - stand out pleasantly from this narrow view. On the other hand, the free forms of observation are also a double-edged sword, especially for the newcomers in our teams. This is because they often lack the theoretical-pedagogical-linguistic background and the professional practical experience that can be assumed of trained educators.

The unsuitability of a completely free, non-structured observation also results from the internationality of our teams. If the staff members come from completely different teacher training institutions all over the world, free observations are, in our view, only suitable to a limited extent for writing binding and meaningful documentation based on uniform standards for the whole team.

In the view of the rainbowtrekkers, a joint scientific initiative is needed on the part of the ministry and the universities to develop a new kind of language development tool that abandons the previous deficit-oriented methods and instead better describes the multilingual and cross-lingual competencies of children in bilingual or multilingual daycare centers. Such a method would have to fulfil the requirement that it can also be accepted by educators who are not (linguistically) scientifically trained and that it can be used meaningfully and integrated into everyday life.

Whether the wheel has to be reinvented for this or whether it can alternatively be a further development of the sismik observation questionnaires should be left to the scientists. For us as day care practitioners, however, it seems important that such a tool should include a number of basic linguistic qualifications and expand them under the special aspects of multilingual and cross-lingual competences of children in bilingual or multilingual day care centers.

An overview of these basic linguistic skills has been summarized by EHRlich (2008) (although still based on a very outdated understanding of multilingual language acquisition). The overview by ROCHE (2018) shows that sismik here covers the broadest "scope" of the basic skills mentioned by EHRlich (2008):



	Verfah- rensart	Phon. BQ		Prag. BQ I		Semant. BQ		Morph.- synt. BQ		Diskursiv BQ		Pragm. BQ II		Lit. BQ I+II	
		Pro	Rez	Pro	Rez	Pro	Rez	Pro	Rez	Pro	Rez	Pro	Rez	Pro	Rez
CITO	T		x				x		x		x				
Delfin 4	T	x	x			x	x	x		x					
DOBINE															
Fit in Dt.	T, I			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				
HASE	T	x	x				x	x	x						
HAVAS-5	T, B	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
H-S-E-T	T	x	x	x	x			x	x						
KISTE	T				x	x	x	x	x						
LiSe-DaZ	T						x	x							
SISMIK	B, I	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
VER-ES	T	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x				

Legende: B = Beobachtung, T = Testung, I = Interview, Pro= produktiv, Rez=Rezeptiv.

Based on EHRlich (2008), we have developed the following proposals for the further development of basic linguistic competences in the multi- or translingual field as a suggestion for linguistic or pedagogical research institutions:

Basic qualifications according to EHRlich 2008	Proposals for further development RAINBOWTREKKERS 2022
<b>Basic phonics skills:</b> Perception, differentiation and production of sounds, syllables and words as well as speech melody	<i>Sounds can sound similar in different languages and yet be different, e.g., "school" but "Schule".</i>
<b>Pragmatic Basic Qualifications I:</b> Use and perception of language as a tool for achieving goals of action; development of the "theory of mind" as a prerequisite for distinguishing one's own perspective from that of the counterpart; perception and production of simple patterns of action (such as asking, requesting, contradicting).	<i>Assessing the linguistic competences of the communication addressee: Which language(s) do I use with whom and when? My applicable language horizon (mono-/bi-/multilingual) as well as my concrete choice of language depend on the counterpart. Can my own limits be communicated if my counterpart's linguistic competence exceeds my comprehension competence?</i>



Basic qualifications according to EHRLICH 2008	Proposals for further development RAINBOWTREKKERS 2022
<b>Pragmatic Basic Qualifications II:</b> Acquisition of complex linguistic patterns of action such as narrating, justifying, describing, explaining and the associated more complex linguistic means.	<i>Is language chosen, for example, on the basis of the complexity of an issue? Are different languages used for the verbalization of cognitive processes than for the verbalization of emotional processes?</i>
<b>Basic semantic skills:</b> Acquisition of words and word meanings; differentiation of vocabulary; concept formation.	<i>Are so-called "false friends" recognized, for example? A mobile phone in German (Handy), for example, is not always a "handy" matter in English.</i>
<b>Morphological-syntactic basic skills:</b> Grammar (syntax and morphology); acquisition is language specific.	<i>For example, is German spoken with English grammar ("Ich will gehen in die Kita" instead of "Ich will in die Kita gehen")? Are declensions and conjugations language-immanent or cross-linguistic?</i>
<b>Basic discursive skills:</b> Acquisition of basic structures of linguistic cooperation (e.g. change of speaker, right to speak) as a basic condition of successful communication; communicative construction of play worlds and trial actions in child-child communication; speaking directed at oneself (egocentric speaking); development of narrative skills.	<i>What language(s) does the child use when talking to him/herself in free play? What does the choice of language depend on? Which language(s) does the child use when he/she is excited? Which languages does the child use when he/she is calm? Which languages, facial expressions, gestures does the child use in communication with third parties with whom there is no common linguistic basis?</i>
<b>Basic literacy skills:</b> Literary precursor skills and entry into writing, e.g., recognition and production of characters; first experiences with texts, e.g., reading aloud in dialogue.	<i>Can different alphabets be distinguished from each other? Can one's own name be written or read in different alphabets/(written) languages?</i>

We consider the development of such a language diagnostic tool to be a desideratum of linguistic and pedagogical research in the country and would welcome it if the political decision-makers would recognize the necessity of awarding a corresponding research contract.



## 6. Epilogue

### 100 languages

#### NO WAY. THE HUNDRED IS THERE

The child  
is made of one hundred.  
The child has  
a hundred languages  
a hundred hands  
a hundred thoughts  
a hundred ways of thinking  
of playing, of speaking.  
A hundred always a hundred  
ways of listening  
of marveling of loving  
a hundred joys  
for singing and understanding  
a hundred worlds  
to discover  
a hundred worlds  
to invent  
a hundred worlds  
to dream.  
The child has  
a hundred languages  
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)  
but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture  
separate the head from the body.

They tell the child:  
to think without hands  
to do without head  
to listen and not to speak  
to understand without joy  
to love and to marvel  
only at Easter and Christmas.  
They tell the child:  
to discover the world already there  
and of the hundred  
they steal ninety-nine.  
They tell the child:  
that work and play  
reality and fantasy  
science and imagination  
sky and earth  
reason and dream  
are things  
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child  
that the hundred is not there.  
The child says:  
No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) was an Italian educator. He was one of the founders of Reggio pedagogy and

made it world famous. He worked as the director of a kindergarten in Reggio Emilia.



## 7. Literature

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