Multilingual Education in the German Society*

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Abstract

Multilingualism is not just a matter of individual but of social interest. It changes and grows by itself to some extent, but at the same time it needs to be promoted by language policy and by the common effort of social institutions. A language policy that promotes social/societal multilingualism should pay special attention to languages spoken by the minorities in a society, especially to the languages brought to a country by immigrants. Immigration history has changed the German society in the last 60 to 70 years, and living together in a de facto multilingual society is becoming more and more a challenge today. An important issue that must be addressed in a multilingual society by language policy is especially multilingual education in schools. In our article, we want to support the point of view, that every language of the world, that finds its way to an immigration country has its own value, that we need to strengthen the prestige of heritage/community languages by revalueing them in the context of school education. This could be achieved by appreciating the languages that children of immigrants bring to school, by treating them as a part of the language portfolio that is assessed in possibly the same way as all foreign languages teached in school are treated in. We focus on the trilingual model of language education as suggested by Rehbein (2012) and Belke (2012) and rethink multilingual education in German schools and German society that should not be biased only to European multilingualism.

1 Multilingualism and multilingual communication

When can a person be seen as a multilingual? Does she have to speak several languages on a native or near-native level?

The measure for *individual multilingualism* is whether someone can act in several languages, whether she can communicate and gets along in everyday life with the languages, and not how good, fluent, accent-free, grammatically and stylistically flawless someone has mastered the languages in which she communicates (cf. Rothweiler 2007: 103f; Riehl 2014: 14). Hence the most important criterion for individual multilingualism is, that we can exploit our existing multilingual potential in everyday communication, and not that we have mastered a language perfectly. By acting in several languages, we are able to improve our individual multilingualism. By trying and practicing forms of speech actions and the corresponding linguistic means of expression in everyday language practice, we develop *linguistic qualifications* (cf. Ehlich/Bredel/Reich 2007) such as pronounciation, grammar and vocabulary in a cross-linked manner. It does not matter, whether these are languages, with which we communicate at home in the family, in educational institutions such as day-care center, primary or high-school, college or university, or professionally at the workplace. Every language that a person uses expands the abilities for language use and can contribute to mutual understanding in communication. In this respect, we should not distinguish between the language of the majority of the population and the languages of minorities in a society. The potentials, skills and abilities available in a society and opportunities for speakers/listeners to act in multiple languages

are not only of individual, but also of high social value. Individual multilingualism should therefore be socially esteemed and promoted. In fact, more than half of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual (Grosjean 2012): A majority of the people communicate in more than one language to get along in everyday life. This is nothing out of the ordinary today (Tracy 2014). Multilingual practice can be observed day-to-day in various domains of social practice.

When can a society be seen as multilingual? Is it sufficient, that speakers of different languages live in this society?

The measure for *social multilingualism* is the linguistic action, that takes place in an society – just as much the same as for individual multilingualism. Social multilingualism is given in a society, when speakers of different languages depend on multiple language usage and are theirselves able to use these languages in everyday life to communicate with each other, i.e. when, in everyday life multilingual constellations are given and the purposes which are defined therein by linguistic action, by means of various types of one- or of multilingual discourses ((a)-(f) in Fig. 1) must be processed:

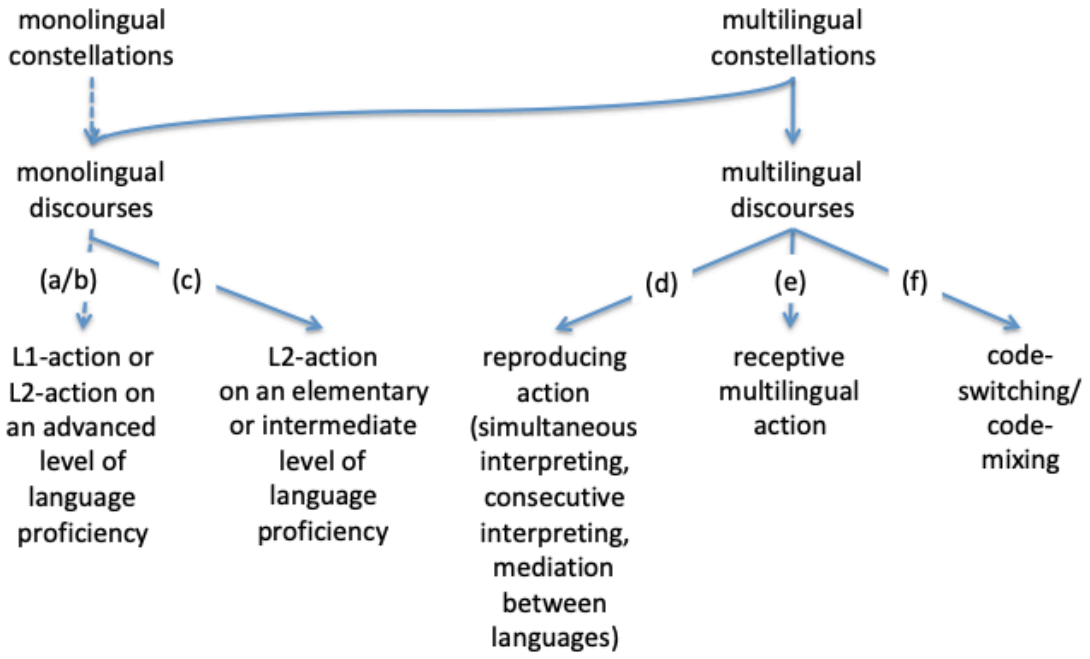

Fig. 1: Types of monolingual and multilingual discourses and forms of multilingual action in multilingual constellations

When monolingual speakers speak to each other in their own language, what we have are *monolingual constellations* of linguistic action. Monolingual constellations lead to (a) *monolingual discourses* (L1-action). On the other side, we have *multilingual constellations,* as soon as multilingual speakers (of the same or different language(s)) are involved in the communication. In a

multilingual constellation there are various possibilities for communication in discourse: If the speakers share a common language for communication, it can be, depending on how well the L2 speakers have mastered the communication language, (b) L2-action on an advanced level of language proficiency in a monolingual discourse, or (c) L2 -action on an elementary or intermediate foreign language level of language proficiency (cf. Ehlich 1980 for "levels in the mastery of a foreign language"). It becomes more complicated, when the speakers do not share a common language of communication. In this case, they could make use of the support of a professionally interpreting or non-professionally speaking third party person in the discourse: Bührig/Rehbein (2000) call this kind of linguistic action (d) *reproducing action* (*simultaneous/consecutive interpreting* and *mediating between languages*). A relatively seldom used, but linguistically interesting possibility, practiced in some European institutions, helpful to communicate with each other, if one understands the language of the other, but does not (yet) speaks so well, is (e) *receptive multilingual action* (Zeevaert/ten Thije 2007). In this case, each speaker speaks her own language and tries to understand the contributions of the other speakers in their languages. If multilingual speakers share several languages with each other, it is possible to use several languages in discourse by creatively (f) *code-switching/code-mixing* (cf. Özdil 2010). All the above-mentioned types of *multilingual communication* in discourse (d)-(f) are only given if multilingual action in multilingual constellations is possible. If only a certain language is permitted in institutional discourses, the possibilities of communication in multilingual constellations are reduced to (c) *L2 action on an elementary/intermediate level* and thus linguistic communication takes place under restricted conditions. This must be borne in mind, when considering the practice of communication in a de facto multilingual society in which multilingual constellations can occur everywhere in everyday life (for examples cf. Kameyama/Meyer 2007; Meyer 2004; Meyer/Apfelbaum 2010).

With regard to social multilingualism, we are particularly interested in the differences in the evaluation of individual languages with regard to their *political prestige*. Not all languages existing in a society are assessed equally positively. Rather, there is a complex hierarchy among languages. In Germany, standard German occupies the most important position as an overarching language of communication and institutions, followed by English as the first foreign school language and world language, followed by other European foreign languages. In border regions, neighbouring languages (such as Danish or Polish) play a specific role as autochthonous minority languages, and in some special regions, protected minority languages with special status (such as Frisian or Sorbian) play a specific role. Regional languages (such as Low German), dialects and city languages play a specific role in some places as regional varieties. On the other hand, immigrant languages (i.e. languages spoken by migrants, such as Turkish, Arabic, Pashto, Albanian, Vietnamese, Kazakh) that came to

the Federal Republic with the migration of guest workers, refugees and resettlers since 1949 have a lower social prestige outside the families and the respective languages and are less accepted than other allochthonous languages, in particular the classical school foreign languages (such as English, French or Spanish). The consequence of this unequal social evaluation of languages is an educational disadvantage for children with a immigrant language as their first language, as we experience it in educational institutions (for the linguistic diversity in Germany and on the immigrant languages cf. Maas 2008).

The following remarks deal specifically with multilingualism in German educational institutions. The starting point is the multilingualism in Germany and in German educational institutions as it has evolved and as it factually exists as a result of migration (→ Section 2.2). We focus on the children with German as a second language (GSL), who are multilinguals and bring their individual multilingualism to the educational institutions, and hence, we argue that the perspective of GSL should not be limited to the promotion of the second language German alone, but that we should think about how to also promote individual multilingualism of the children with GSL and all other children (→ Section 3). Finally, we present selected models and concepts for multilingual education and its further development (→ Section 4).

2 Multilingualism in Germany

The immigration of migrants from all over the world has lead to the situation that so many languages are spoken in Germany. When the first 'guest workers' came to Germany in the mid-1950s as systematically recruited workers – initially from Italy, later from Spain, Greek, Turky, etc. – they brought their languages into the country. Depending on the country of origin, we can now look back on a migration history of sixty to seventy years in the Federal Republic of Germany (Ekinci/Hoffmann et al. 2013). Statistically speaking, one fifth of the current population has an immigration history. Since the Immigration Act came into force in 2005, Germany has also been an immigration country in official terms. Today, unlike in the early days of German migration, migrants and their languages are an integral part of German society. Germany is an immigration country with numerous immigrant languages. The largest immigrant languages in Germany are Turkish and Russian, followed by Polish, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Arabic, Italian, Kurdish, Greek, Romanian, Albanian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Hungarian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Persian. Besides there are numerous other smaller immigrant languages like Romanes, Pashto (Afghanistan, beside Dari), Tamil (Sri Lanka), Tagalog (Philippines), Korean, Japanese or Akan (Ghana, beside many others like Ewe etc.). About a hundred such immigrant languages can be found in larger German cities (on urban multilingualism cf. Redder et al. 2013, Rehbein 2010, on migration history

in Germany cf. Meinhardt 2005; on criticism of the expression „Migrationshintergrund“ („migration backgrund“) cf. Mannitz/Schneider 2014, Scarvaglieri/Zech 2013).

The migrants are networked with each other in their local language communities, organizing a part of their everyday life in this way, preserving parts of their culture of origin in Germany and speaking their language of origin with each other. Many of them are multilingual. The first generation of migrants tries to integrate themselves linguistically in their new homeland, at the same time preserving their heritage language and passing it on as good as possible to their children born and grown up in the new homeland. For the first generation, German is a second language which they have acquired with varying degrees of success, beginning with the day-care center, at school or in a professional context (second language acquisition). The second generation either grow up bilingually in the family from the beginning, with German as one the mother tongues of their parents (double first language acquisition) or their German acquisition begins with their second socialisation in the day-care center (early second language acquisition). Some of them grow up monolingually only with German. Speakers of GSL have to make up for what they missed in the first few years in the day-care center and at school. However, with good support in the day-care center and school, they can master German at native level later. The possibilities for promoting their non-German family languages vary strongly and depend on many factors: for example, how good the language repertoire of the parents is, in which language the communication takes place in the family, how much time and commitment the parents can devote to the language promotion, how good the network of the family in the local language community of their heritage language is, how the socio-economic conditions of the family looks like etc. At home in the family and in one's own local language community, a different language is often spoken than that which is officially regarded as the national language outside (for an example of the situation of individual immigrant languages in the Ruhr area, cf. Bernhard/Lebsanft 2013). Clyne (1991) refers to the immigrant languages spoken in the respective local language communities as "community languages". In the educational institutions – in schools, pre-schools, day-care centers – these community languages are represented by a large number of children (for schools in Essen and Hamburg cf. Chlosta/Ostermann 2008; Fürstenau/Gogolin/Yağmur 2003).

Multilingual adolescents switch or mix their languages creatively and virtuously, thus expressing their personality through a "bilingual language mode" (Grosjean 1982). In this independent language mode, in the bilingual discourse, the speakers access their language repertoire in two languages when planning their utterances in accordance with the purpose of their actions; this unhindered access to the entire repertoire makes codeswitching truly attractive (for an analysis of the codeswitching of e.g. young people in Turkish-German discourses, cf. Özdil 2010). Unusual and

interesting characteristics of the way bilingual adolescents speak attract other adolescents and generally become accepted in the youth language. In this way, young people with German as their first language incorporate elements from ethnolects of bilingual youths into their own way of speaking (Dirim/Auer 2004; on contact-induced language change in general cf. Thomason 2001, Chap. 6ff.; on contact-induced language change in German-Turkish cf. Rehbein/Herkenrath/Karakoç 2009). In this way, immigrant languages have long since become part of local language practice. – It is about time that we begin to reflect on our attitudes towards immigrant languages and how we treat them.

Members of the public and agents of social institutions are gradually becoming aware of the need to promote multilingualism in society and of the numerous immigrant languages that need to be taken into account. Since at least the nineteen-nineties, there has been an increased interest in the topic of social multilingualism and immigrant languages in research. For reasons of necessity, civil services have, over the years, provided multilingual forms and leaflets in various immigrant languages, even if this does not solve all the problems in the communication with public authorities (cf. Hoffmann/Quasthoff 2013, cf. also the trilingual booklet "Vor und hinter dem Schreibtisch der Behörde" of the project "Literacy between Languages and Cultures" (LiLaC); cf. also Porila/ten Thije 2008). In the service sector, such as local public transport, services such as menu navigation at ticket vending machines are offered not only in foreign languages for tourists, but now also in various immigrant languages. Some hospitals have introduced interpretation services for their patients, etc. So there are quite a number of ways for an institution to respond to existing multilingual communication needs. The fact that immigrant languages are perceived and respected in this way is noteworthy.

However, in educational institutions it is considerably more difficult to promote multilingualism. Certainly, a reason for that is, that the handling of multilingualism in educational communication is much more complex and time-consuming and therefore needs special attention. In German day-care centers, preschools and schools educators and teachers are confronted with the mulilingualism of a percentage of children that they can not ignore anymore. The younger the age cohort, the greater is the percentage of migrant children in the group. Nationwide, the average share amounts to almost 30%. However, in individual cases this depends on the type of school and the milieu (cf. Jeuk 2010: 17ff.). Depending on the district, there are educational institutions in some cities in which migrant children make up significantly more than half of the group. However, such a situation does not automatically lead to the attempt to strengthen the multilingualism of the children, but in many cases rather to the problem that immigrant languages are further ignored in favour of the promotion of German. Finally, whether institutions are able to promote immigrant languages or not, depends on

the availability of multilingual staff. The training of multilingual and language-sensitive staff is therefore an urgent desideratum.

Just as there are few reliable statistical surveys on languages in other areas, there are hardly any statistical surveys on the languages spoken by children for educational institutions. In most cases, the data only refer to the nationality and origin of the family (cf. Chlosta 2010). However, data on immigrant languages in schools and day-care centers would be important for considerations on measures that could lead to a change in general framework related to multilingualism. Collecting data on immigrant languages is an important task that universities and municipal institutions could tackle jointly in cooperation with schools. Such cooperation would be of interest to educational institutions in order to gain an overview of the situation on the spot with regard to multilingualism and language use.

Unfortunately, the multilingualism given by the immigrant languages is seldom positively evaluated at German educational institutions. Immigrant languages are usually disapproved and are – sometimes even by migrants themselves – rather regarded as an obstacle to learning German and mastering them as unnecessary and not worthwhile. It would be desirable, both for the benefit of the children themselves and from a social perspective, that we all look after the existing multilingualism with greater commitment. Children with GSL should be further promoted in their heritage/family languages. This would require a fundamental rethinking of how to deal with immigrant languages and a substancial change in practice. To this end, immigrant languages should be given a different status at educational institutions (→ section 4). In many schools, the "monolingual habitus" (Gogolin 1994) still prevent educators and teachers from devoting more commitment to the multilingualism that occurs in everyday institutional processes, from discussing measures to promote multilingualism and concepts of multilingual education at schools and from implementing a multilingual approaches in education in a fair and sustainable manner. We urgently need changed conditions, new attitudes and a meaningful practice for the promotion of multilingualism. This would also be a relevant contribution to educational equality. Current news on multilingualism, migration and education as well as a glossary on migration and multilingualism can be found on Ludger Hoffmann’s website [http://www.germanistik.tu-dortmund.de/~hoffmann/, 22.03.2019].

3 GSL children are multilingual

In the subject of German as a second language, we sometimes exclusively focus on the language support of the GSL children in their second language German. However, in such an approach German as a second language is thought of in a monolingual perspective. Our focus is then reduced to the linguistic abilities of GSL children in their second language German, which are not developed

according to their age: This is nothing else than a deficit perspective. From the perspective of the GSL children, their second language is only one part of their overall linguistic potential. The other part is simply left out in such a monolingual approach. An important part of the child's personality and potential for development would not be taken into account. With their socialisation in day-care center and school, GSL children have not only begun to acquire German as a second language. They have already previously acquired the basics of another language – their (non-German) family language(s) – in family communication and thus have built up the fundament for a multilingual potential. If this multilingual potential were promoted, the children would be able to develop both/several languages, i.e. German and their family language(s), further in the direction of an academic language proficiency. Such a strengthened individual multilingualism would be a great social enrichment, because in a multilingual society, in a world that is growing closer together, we need to strengthen individual multilingualism to be able to cope with multilingual constellations that occur more and more frequently everywhere, even in the educational institutions themselves (cf. House/Rehbein 2004: 2f.). For this we need interactants who are well-trained and flexible in dealing with such language constellations. Multilingual societies like the Federal Republic of Germany need multilingual individuals who can make an active contribution. Instead of focusing exclusively on the deficits in the second language German and on language support for GSL children in German, we should think of GSL in a multilingual perspective and take into account the multilingual potential that GSL children bring along. The fact that German is a second language means that there is another language which is the first language of the children. We should no longer ignore this other language. The aim should be to support the multilingual language development of the GSL children in their first and second language, so each of them can further develop their particular language profile. The promotion of their individual multilingualism is therefore an important contribution to the development of social multilingualism in general.

Such a promotion of both/several languages requires that German is not set as the only language to be considered absolutely in day-care centers, schools and other educational institutions, but that we begin to consciously perceive, welcome and value the immigrant languages that are already present locally. The opening of educational institutions to languages other than German does not mean that German is abandoned as an institutional language. Rather, this means that we adopt an attitude towards other languages that is more open-minded, more attentive and more considered. It is about starting to think about how we can think about and promote these languages in the everyday life of day-care centers and schools. GSL children are multilingual: We should help them – as best we can – to fully develop their linguistic potential with our support. We should not only look after the GSL children, we should also involve all other children and try to take care of the multilingualism of all

children (for arguments in favour of multilingualism, for a multilingual education, cf. Rehbein 2012, 2013).

4 Developing multilingualism in educational institutions

How can it be achieved, that school as an institution becomes a place where the multilingualism of the GSL children and of all other children has a value due to it? What are the prerequisites for this? It is obvious, that ignoring or banning multilingualism is not the right way for German schools, which are in fact already multilingual. Such an attitude towards multilingualism puts multilingual GSL children at a disadvantage, makes their success at school more difficult and leads to integration problems. The recognition of the multilingual potential of GSL pupils is therefore crucial: an important prerequisite for positive personality and language development. We must therefore fundamentally rethink our attitude towards immigrant languages on this point. Such a reflection on one's own attitude towards minority languages and in particular immigrant languages must be an essential component of training for educators and teachers. In addition, there are currently not enough day-care centers, preschools and schools in which both German and the immigrant languages are professionally promoted on a regular basis. Immigrant languages have become an integral part of German society. We should also take them into account in the education system.

4.1 The trilingual model – a 'concrete utopia'?

How can it be achieved that children with GSL are not linguistically disadvantaged in the education system?

Rehbein (2012) and Belke (2012) propose a *trilingual model* that could enhance the value of immigrant languages and thus the multilingual potential of children with German as a second language in the educational system.

The idea behind this trilingual model is first and foremost to enable early bilingualism among all children through appropriate support in day-care centers. All children are to receive support in a language in addition to German at an early age, in which there is a possibility of natural acquisition through immersion on the spot (in the place of residence/city district and thus in the day-care center) – in other words in a community language. It is conceivable that, depending on the possibilities and wishes of the host families, day-care centers will decide on a specific language(s) in addition to German and engage staff who are appropriately trained and qualified in the chosen language(s).

To ensure that as many children as possible have the opportunity to further develop the languages promoted in this way at school age as well, in the transition from pre-school to school the acquisition of writing (in the case of languages with alphabet scripts, the alphabetization) should be

coordinated in the two languages acquired up to then (Keskin 1988; Nehr/Birnkott-Rixius/Kubat 1988; on the role of phonological awareness in the acquisition of writing cf. Şahiner 2011, 2017; on the acquisition of writing and written language in the context of GSL cf. also the contributions in Mehlem/Sahel 2010). GSL children would have the chance through such a multilingual literacy to further develop their other language in addition to German. It is important in this context, that the families of the children are actively involved from the outset through intensive parental work and that cooperation is sought with institutions that already exist locally for the various community languages, such as migrants' schools or supplementary schools in which supplementary instruction in a immigrant language is given, counselling centers etc. For multilingual parental work, schools could cooperate with institutions of the local language community and/or with universities, as these are often the only institutions with multilingual speakers who can support the schools in their parental work in the immigrant languages (for multilingual parental work according to the "Rucksack"-Modell („backpack"-model), cf. Ekinci-Kocks 2011). At larger locations where it is possible, further schools with bilingual/multilingual profiles could be established so that, with regard to as many languages as possible in both acquired languages, language development can continue in the direction of an academic language proficiency – as multidisciplinary as possible (for bilingual schools in Berlin cf. Pfaff et al. 2014; Ebertowski 2011; Rösch 2001).

In such schools with bilingual profiles, pupils that immigrated recently could also be better accommodated immediately after their arrival in Germany than in mixed-language preparatory classes, which were provisionary set up at school. For pupils with languages for which there are no such schools with bilingual profiles, preparatory classes should be organised where possible, in which bilingual teaching can take place in German and in the language of origin. The mixed-language preparation classes, in which the languages of origin of the pupils cannot be specifically taken into account, should be an exception.

The world lingua franca English should be introduced as the first foreign language at a later point, if possible simultaneously for all pupils. Children who have already grown up with English as their first or second language should at this point have the alternative of opting for a school foreign language other than English as their first foreign language, so that they are not underchallenged in such a context.

When the children graduate from school, they then have the opportunity to prove their language qualifications in three languages – no matter which (!) – preferably in certified language tests, aiming at certificates for a professional perspective. This would additionally enhance the qualification acquired during school time in the three languages. This proof of linguistic qualifications in three languages would be compulsory for all pupils.

Equality in the social evaluation of the languages involved would not yet have been achieved by such measures, but at least all languages would have been equally recognised in the pre-school support programme and the school curriculum. This could be a starting point for a reassessment of immigrant languages in Germany as a country of immigration.

The success of such a trilingual model depends in each individual case essentially on how well the cooperation between parents, day-care centers, schools and municipal institutions functions. Only in this way can it be ensured that language support can be provided throughout in the three selected languages.

At present, the realisation of such a trilingual model may still seem rather utopian, and alternative considerations should certainly also be taken into account, but such a model is worth further discussion. We believe we need such a "concrete utopia", a vision of how we want our education system to be, in order to change and innovate the conditions for multilingualism in German schools. In order to be able to bring about such far-reaching changes in the framework at all, we need many committed pioneers, a good network and many opportunities for exchanging experience-based knowledge among those involved.

4.2 The Helix Model –Development of Multilingual Communication as a Social Process

It needs the support of other social institutions that work together to promote multilingualism in society, for the school to gradually develop into a place of multilingualism. Rehbein (2012) presents this process, in which multilingual communication in the various institutions is closely interlinked, as a "helix model".

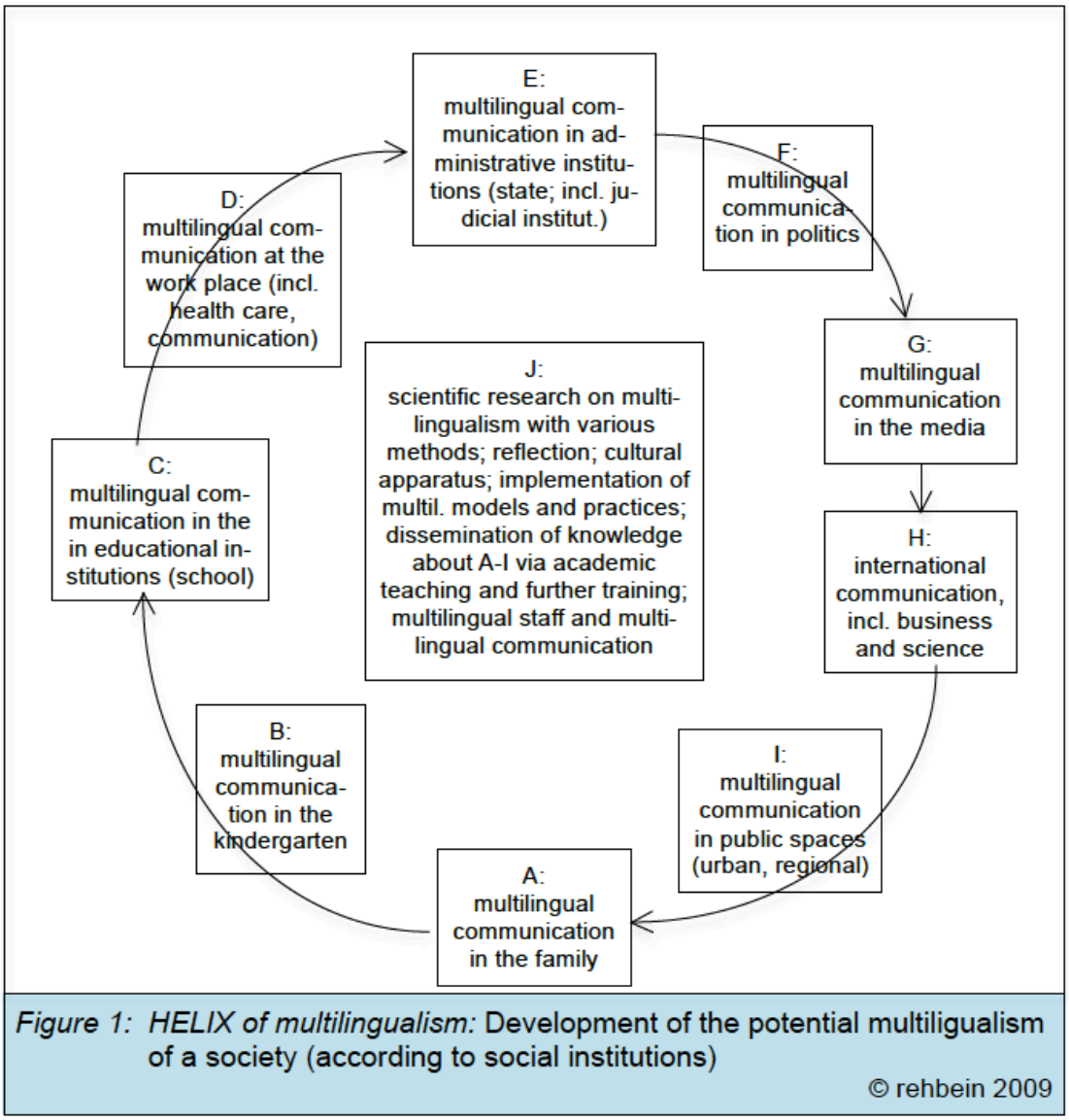

Figure 1: HELIX of multilingualism: Development of the potential multiligualism of a society (according to social institutions)

© rehbein 2009

Fig. 2: Helix model of multilingualism (Rehbein 2013)

The development presented in the helix model is to be imagined as a continuous one, in which the individual stages are run through several times one after the other in such a way that with each run the multilingualism develops qualitatively as with an upward spiral (hence "helix").
Rehbein's model shows that the development of multilingualism at educational institutions (B, C) represents a building block in the sense of a sub-process of the development of social multilingualism as a whole. The development of multilingualism in educational institutions starts with the multilingual communication that children bring with them from their families (A). This is the fundament for the further development of multilingual communication in other areas of society (D, E, etc.). In Rehbein's model, scientific research of multilingualism including multilingual teacher training programmes, plays a key role. One of the most important task of scientific community is to

reflect in particular on multilingual communication in educational institutions; science should provide essential impulses for its innovation. In our view, it would be important for universities to play such a role more strongly at the municipal level in future in order to promote multilingual practice in cooperation with municipal educational institutions and other relevant institutions.
As examples of a scientific debate on multilingual practice at the municipal level confer the "Multilingual Manchester" project at the Universtiy of Manchester (Gopal et al. in 2013, Robertson et al. in 2013) and the state excellence initiative "Linguistic Diversity Management in Urban Areas" (LiMA) at the University of Hamburg (Siemund et al. in 2013, Duarte/Gogolin 2013, Grommes/Hu 2014).

4.3 Multilingualism in pre-school and school education

Apart from the above-mentioned efforts to work on the framework for multilinsualism and on networking and cooperation at the municipal level, what can be done on the spot in the educational institutions to promote multilingualism? – The research and practical literature addresses numerous possibilities in this respect (e.g. Schader 2012), from which we would like to highlight two interesting ways of promoting multilingualism in pre-school and school education:

- Multilingual vocabulary work in preschools: Ekinci-Kocks and Hoffmann (2012) have explored the possibilities of multilingual vocabulary work at a preschool, so that not only in German but also in the familiy language of the GSL children (in this case Turkish) the repertoire of means of expression and their combinatorics can be expanded in both languages. They have (successfully) built up the vocabulary, which the children should have at their disposal at the beginning of primary school, in both languages for 12 children in natural situations as playing, singing, dancing, experimenting, telling and explaining. Vocabulary work is particularly important in this phase, as it prepares children for the acquisition of writing at school and also helps them to acquire school/academic vocabulary based on everyday vocabulary. At school, children go through the difficult path from everyday language to academic language.
- First languages of GSL pupils as natural working language: Rehbein (2011) has investigated how GSL pupils (with the same first language) speak, when they have the opportunity in group work phases to communicate with each other in a working language/language of communication of their choice. The possibilities for such a setting are of course limited by the fact that there are not always enough pupils of the same first language in one class. The experiment shows, however, that the possibility of using a natural working language promotes the willingness to communicate, spontaneity in communication and thus the engagement with the subject matter. Rehbein argues that

the use of a natural working language opens up a space for rehearsal that enables and promotes an understanding of the subject matter and the development of a thinking language/language of thought; on the basis of a thinking language/language of thought developed in this way, an academic language can be built up in a meaningful context.

There are certainly many other ways to promote multilingualism in educational institutions within the framework of the current possibilities, in order to creatively use and expand the multilingual potential of GSL children in the classroom. Thinking about multilingualism is worthwhile in any case.

In this context, we would like to point out once again the special role and responsibility of teachers. Teachers should help children to develop their multilingual potential, encourage them to do so and accompany them patiently. Basic structural knowledge of immigrant languages and German is a minimum requirement. Multilingual teachers have a special role to play: They have the opportunity to be role models and advisors, to show the children how multilingualism makes it possible to open doors and build bridges.

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