



**Małgorzata Bielicka,**  
***Efektywność nauczania języka niemieckiego***  
***na poziomie przedszkolnym i wczesnoszkolnym***  
***w dwujęzycznych placówkach edukacyjnych w Polsce***  
***[The Effectiveness of Teaching German***  
***at the Preschool and Early School Levels in Bilingual***  
***Educational Institutions in Poland].***  
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The monograph by Małgorzata Bielicka describes a research study whose main goal was to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching German to young Polish-speaking learners in an immersion programme. In the study, the Author focused on the development of grammatical competences as well as their use during reception and production by young children acquiring German as their first foreign language (FL) within the so-called Poznań model. In my review, I will first present the contents of the monograph and then point to some of its good and bad sides.

The theoretical part of the monograph comprises the Introduction and three chapters. In the Introduction, the aim of the research and the hypotheses are presented, and the structure of the whole book is sketched. The Author emphasises the importance of the undertaken topic, by pointing to the need of early bilingual education of Polish children and the importance of an early acquisition of an FL other than English. The reader is also informed that the project is in fact work in progress, and its next goal is the assessment of the participants' competences in English at the end of primary school education. Then in the first chapter the Author describes the European 'mother-tongue-

plus-two' policy. The difficulties connected with the plurilingualism strategy and its low effectiveness are pointed out. Among other things, the Author mentions the insufficient number of hours devoted to the teaching of languages other than English, resulting in low attainments in these languages. By doing so, she indirectly underlines the importance of her own research activity. Proceeding to read the second chapter the reader gets acquainted with a historical overview of bilingual education. Next, the most important terminology used in the book is presented, in particular notions such as immersion, Content and Language Integrated Learning, and bilingual education/teaching are explained, and their different interpretations and practical applications described. For this reason, this chapter is an important theoretical foundation of the research presented later in the book. Further in the same chapter, general teaching goals and bilingual teaching goals realised in Polish schools are outlined. Moreover, the relationship between teaching a curricular subject and an FL is explained. Finally, the Author explains her choice of the terms. Chapter three begins with the description of child development, from the cognitive, pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. The Author concentrates in particular on children's grammatical competences (the research focus of the present study). Next, the reader finds a description of the L1 and L2 development, including the stages of grammar development. The Author mainly quotes research studies conducted with Polish- and German-speaking children, which is understandable, since these are the languages of the participants of her own research study. In the next part of this chapter, the positive influence of early bilingualism on the child's cognitive and linguistic development is presented. The Author discusses the competences achieved by learners in institutional settings and then moves on to describe the Polish educational system, with particular attention paid to the effectiveness of language education at the pre-school and early school levels. She also makes a comparison of natural and instructed processes of language learning. In the final section of this chapter, the principles of bilingual teaching and the competences of teachers working with young learners are presented.

The empirical part of the monograph embraces four chapters. Chapter four presents the results of the observation conducted by the Author in two educational institutions in Poznań, Poland: the bilingual kindergarten Ene Due Rabe and the Primary School no. 22, in which a German-speaking day-care room was organised. The reader is provided with information about the research procedures, conditions of the didactic process, as well as applied methods and materials. This part of the chapter ends with some conclusions—recommendations regarding the teaching process, such as the need for moderate language instruction, without explicit grammar explanations. Some comments with regard to parents' desirable attitudes and behaviour are also included, and the importance of parents' and generally the society's influence on the child's multilingualism is stressed. In the next section of chapter four the Author presents the

desirable competences of language teachers and points to the various skills and abilities necessary in the context of immersion. Finally, the formal qualifications of kindergarten and primary school teachers of German are described. In the fifth chapter the reader is acquainted with the results of another research study. Here the Author describes the quantitative analysis of the receptive grammatical competences of the participating children and answers the research questions. Next the reader is informed about the research tool and the procedure of the study (which was cross-sectional—except for the few children who attended both the kindergarten and the school day care). The last subchapter includes the results of a statistical analysis. In chapter six, the Author proceeds to discuss the qualitative analysis of the children's language production, focusing on their grammatical competences. The reader is also provided with some additional comments on the receptive grammatical skills as well as lexical competences of the children. The final part of this chapter presents a rating scale developed by the Author for the assessment of the grammatical competences of young learners acquiring an FL in immersion. Chapter seven provides the summary of the results described in two previous chapters. The children's receptive and productive skills are juxtaposed and the relationship between them is analysed.

Chapter eight, the last one in the book, comprises the summary of the book, the most important conclusions of the research and their practical implications. The Author emphasises the effectiveness of early FL immersion, although she admits that FL learning is also effective when it begins at school. She also points to the salience of an early contact with and a long exposure to an FL, and stresses the need for using the target language in the classroom, contextualisation of the language input, discreet control of the learning processes and individualisation of teaching. Next the Author sums up the desired competences of a language teacher, describes the role of parents in assisting their children's multilingualism and indicates various possibilities of implementing immersion teaching in educational institutions. Finally, the research aims and hypotheses are addressed, and further research fields are suggested.

I would like to point to some important assets of the monograph. Firstly, the relevance of its topic should be stressed, that is, the development of an FL other than English at an early age. In Polish schools, students typically learn English as the first FL and usually they are not motivated to learn any further language. The Author is right in maintaining that an early introduction of a language such as German, which is less popular than English and which may be more difficult for a Polish-speaking person (though this thesis probably ought to be verified), is a solution which may lead to the development of plurilingual competences (so strongly promoted in various documents of the EU). Since learners are usually willing to learn English and this language is omnipresent in their lives, there is a high probability that they will be able to achieve high levels of competence in English as an L3 even much later in life.

The value of the monograph also lies in the promotion of teaching FLs in immersion (Content and Language Integrated Learning), which results in the simultaneous acquisition of subject knowledge and language skills. This way of teaching leads to the development of language in authentic communication, which revolves around important and interesting topics. Even though immersion programmes have been usually found very effective, they are rarely implemented in schools (Kersten & Rohde, 2015).

The research study does not belong to easy ones. In research conducted with young learners it is relatively difficult both to recruit an adequate number of respondents and to obtain reliable results. Nevertheless, the Author has coped with the task very well (even though the inter-group comparisons do not allow true generalisations, due to the rather small number of participating children, that is, 44).

The work offers some interesting conclusions. For example, it turns out that the language learning process at the school level proceeds faster than at the pre-school level, and that there is a positive effect of an early contact with an FL on the development of the competences in this language. Nevertheless, most of the conclusions should yet be verified, as the number of the participating children was rather low and some significant additional variables<sup>1</sup> may have influenced the results.

Probably the most important achievement of the research is the development of the rating scale of children's grammatical competences in an FL acquired in immersion. Even though the scale includes only the lowest levels of grammatical ability, the Author signals a new research study whose aim is to complement the scale with higher levels. Thus the reviewed work may be treated as the first step towards the development of language achievement scales serving the measurement of young learners' communicative competence.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary character of the monograph must be emphasised—even though the research is strongly grounded in the field of FL didactics, the Author makes use of the achievements in (cognitive) psychology, pedagogy, psycholinguistics, and (cognitive) linguistics. Partly for this reason, the book has important didactic implications. It is full of practical information which may be useful for head teachers and teachers in kindergartens and primary schools, and the 'Poznań model' may be implemented in other educational institutions.

Unfortunately, I must also point out some downsides of the reviewed monograph. A serious drawback of the book is that some important information is either missing from it or has been presented in an insufficient manner. For instance, in the second chapter, the historical overview of bilingual education

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<sup>1</sup> For example, five girls had some additional contact with the German language (see pp. 330–331).

seems to be rather sketchy and incomplete. A better solution would have been to focus on the European countries only, especially considering the topic of the preceding chapter (the European language policy). Also in chapter two, more information regarding the critical period hypothesis should have been presented, especially as the Author is interested in the language development of young children. Psycho- and neurolinguistic studies conducted on the critical period for both the native language and second languages have questioned the original theories proposed by Penfield and Roberts (1959) and Lenneberg (1967). Thus, it is a pity that the Author has not elaborated on the subject. Moreover, it seems that when presenting the teaching goals in the second chapter the Author should have concentrated on the teaching goals regarding the bilingual education of the age group which was relevant to the present study, that is, preschool- and school-children.

In chapter three, a more thorough analysis of the current theories of child development might be useful for the reader. It seems that quoting Chomsky and Hymes—even though the contributions of these researchers are undeniable—is a little bit outdated in the face of the present-day abundance of psychological, psycholinguistic, and neurolinguistic research studies. A similar problem can be noted later in the same chapter, where the Author sets out to make a comparison of the natural and instructed language acquisition processes, but fails to present any neuro- and psycholinguistic research outcomes pertaining to this issue, for example, those which indicate different, age-, method-, and context-related engagement of the procedural and declarative memory systems in the learning process.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter four, the reader does not feel adequately informed about the research procedures and outcomes. For instance, it is not clear which role the Author played in planning, conducting, and evaluating the language classes in the bilingual kindergarten and in the primary-school day care and, in general, what her contribution was to the development of the 'Poznań model' of teaching young children in immersion. Moreover, it is not explicitly stated in which of the institutions the quoted dialogues with children took place.

Furthermore, it is a pity that the layout of the lesson plans (mentioned on p. 169) which was implemented in both institutions participating in the research project has not been included in the Appendix. The layout might be of use to other researchers working with young learners in immersion programmes. Also, I think more information would be in place as to the test used in the study (pp. 175–176).

Even though throughout the book the Author explains and defines the terms she uses, it seems that a few additional explanations might be useful for the reader. I mean such terms as, for example, assimilation and accommodation

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<sup>2</sup> Compare, for example, publications by M. Paradis, F. Fabbro, N. Ellis, F. Pulvermüller.

(p. 155), ‘fine-tuning’ (p. 157), or first language (L1), second language (L2), third language (L3), and foreign language (in many places). I am also dissatisfied with the definition of submersion, which suggests that its consequence is inevitably the supersession of the mother tongue by a new language (p. 53).

Moreover, I cannot agree with the statement claiming that English is structurally easier than German (p. 123). Such a statement should be supported by appropriate research results. It should be also taken into consideration that language difficulty is relative and depends to a large extent on the languages one already knows.

As for the formal side of the monograph, its structure is correct. The content is presented in a logical manner, from the EU language policy and immersion models through the child’s language development. The text is coherent, with its different parts logically interwoven. Unfortunately, the reader frequently stumbles over language mistakes, stylistic problems, and other formal errors. These occur especially in the case of German or English words, and names of quoted researchers.

To conclude, the reviewed book is a valuable contribution to the present state of knowledge about teaching FLs to young learners. It may become an important source of information for researchers active in the field of early FL acquisition, as well as educators working with children in kindergartens and primary schools. Nevertheless, the readers of the monograph must also take into consideration its drawbacks which I have pointed out in the present review.

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