

“DAS BIN ICH...”: CORPOREALITY AND EARLY GERMAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN (SLOVAK) KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract: This paper, based on ethnographically obtained data, discusses German language acquisition at an early age: the discovery of the interconnection between language and corporeality is the key component of the analysis based on videostudies. The body—conceived as an intermediary and content element of education, becomes an essential base for foreign language acquisition. This will be documented by tangible data and subsequent theoretical analysis with respect to relevant terminology of cultural anthropology (Körper and Leib). The principle of corporeality is further used as a means of perceiving German language education in the sense of the so called language propaedeutic concept and as a means of the legitimisation of particular qualification and the role of foreign language teachers in preschool institutions.

Keywords: anthropology of the body, corporeality, foreign language acquisition, kindergarten

Introduction

A continual shift toward the language teaching of younger and younger age categories in multilingual Europe has become a general tendency in recent decades, and this is being obviously and massively supported by the education policy of the European Union. The project Piccolingo, an official campaign aimed at promoting the foreign language teaching of preschoolers, is one of the foremost examples (Piccolingo Campaign...)¹, and a response to a European-wide discourse on the significance of early foreign language learning and the acquisition of so-called linguistic competence for the sake of European integration and the multilingual global community. This context gives rise to discussions of both an academic and political nature about the significance of foreign language education at preschool age; kindergartens integrate early foreign language acquisition into their education programmes on a voluntary basis, as this implementation is rooted in political justifications as well in

¹ An EU campaign announced by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture), following the “Early Language Learning” conference that took place in Brussels, 2009. It supports the idea of acquiring at least two foreign languages from preschool age. The campaign is already being implemented through pilot projects in 15 EU countries.

parents' requirements and, to a certain extent, as a competitive element between preschool facilities.²

Although foreign language learning in kindergartens is generally recommended by the government, it is still optional and left to the free will of these institutions. In terms of language policy in the Slovak Republic, compulsory foreign language education starts in the third grade of elementary school. The evolution of this policy is a remarkable one; at first, no particular language was defined as compulsory (expected choices were English, German, and occasionally French). The present Slovak government has brought about a radical change in this domain. English has become a compulsory foreign language for all third-graders and above. If we leave the political context of such a decision aside, preschools which implemented education projects of a different language than English (most frequently German) now face problems arising from the lack of continuity of language learning from preschool to primary school.

One such project is the Slovak—Austrian cross-border cooperation program (2007-2013) which, apart from the broad objectives of multicultural education and international communication, implements the systematic learning of German at selected West-Slovak preschools in close vicinity to the Austrian border. This project, bearing the name “Intercultural education of children and adults”, has provided added value to participating kindergartens, reflected in parents' increased interest in foreign language learning on the one hand and the involvement of given preschools in intercultural cooperation on the other. Despite recent changes in language education policy, as stated above, the project still continues to be implemented, as well as its evaluation. It is of importance to add that, for the Slovak Republic, as a former part of the Soviet bloc, the implementation of the current language learning policy has been and still is a novel process as the period before 1989 was marked by its orientation toward the former Soviet Union. Then, compulsory foreign language education was confined to the Russian language only, whereas German or English languages were taught only marginally and on a voluntary basis. Of these two languages, German was preferred, largely because of the proximity of German-speaking countries to Czechoslovakia (split in 1993 into two sovereign republics—the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic).

The above mentioned teaching of the German language in the kindergartens taking part in this project is currently in the process of implementation within the context mentioned. The Department of Preschool and Primary Education of Faculty of Education, Trnava University (i.e. the city implementing the project), has been required to evaluate this project. We have outlined an evaluation approach with respect to the wider research objectives of foreign language education at preschool age. The fundamental methodological approach chosen was the neutrality of attitude toward early language learning in order to find the most objective answers to questions that emerge in the context of research and in practice. This neutral position was a result of scholarly discourse on early foreign language learning in

² In the Slovak Republic, preschools are the institutions that provide preschool education. They are for children from three to six years of age but are not compulsory. Nevertheless, attendance of preschools is fairly high (approximately 90% of 5-6 year-old children). The preschools follow the established state educational program and since 2008, have been an integral part of the school system.

which both tendencies are represented; a spectrum of opinion that is positive (Garabédian, Weiss 1991; Cohen 1982), and another one that is more or less sceptical when it comes to the value of foreign language learning at this age (various research studies of such a nature are summarized by Hanušová, Najvar 2007). It is important to analyze the issues as follows: What happens with children of preschool age when they receive organized foreign language education? In what way is the first contact with a foreign language at an early age established? What is the overall purpose of early foreign language education, and what is the nature of its interconnection with diverse activities? Is there a need to approach early foreign language education by means of specific educational strategies, or are these equivalent to the acquisition of a native language? What is meant by the 'qualification' with regard to a foreign language teacher at preschool level?

Methodology of research

The research study employs a standard method of qualitative research which favors a global view on classroom events without any *a priori* assumptions about a given educational context and without any assumptions about preferred pedagogical attitudes. Observation of classroom activity requires a specific research strategy by means of which it is possible to capture and repeatedly observe various aspects of the given lesson. This strategy is called *videography* and is currently ranked as one of the most important research techniques of learning and education, as pointed out in several overview studies (see e.g. Janík, Najvar 2008). In this research videography is perceived as an audiovisually based ethnography that is the product of a participant-observational research method that records *interviews* and *observations* of particular people.

It is also worth mentioning that some methods of video analysis for the study of foreign language education, specifically the education of English, were designed by Czech researchers (Najvar et al. 2008). In accordance with the principles of videography, observation was employed making use of the advantages it offers (Janík, Seidel 2009). In the framework of the research carried out, 59 lessons, including a variety of age and language levels of the preschool children sample³, were captured and analyzed by means of videography. The recording of lessons took place from April to June 2010 across all age categories and language proficiency levels, as defined in the project.⁴ Once the lessons were recorded, we analyzed them by watching replays and by looking for pivotal thematic elements and focus-metaphors which would allow for understanding and description of the dominant aspects of the observed lessons. The recording of participating teachers was equally balanced.⁵ In order to ensure the validity of acquired data, after the end of this analysis an in-

³ The data were gathered in four kindergartens in the city of Trnava (a regional capital with approx. 70,000 inhabitants).

⁴ Three language proficiency levels of involved children were defined, i.e. beginners, intermediate and advanced, whereas the difference in proficiency levels was particularly in the length of participation in the project. The age category of those involved (3-6 years) covers the whole age range of children attending preschool in Slovakia.

⁵ Two foreign language teachers working in 4 analyzed preschools came to the preschool at a pre-set time and carried out lessons of German language out of the preschool's standard day routine. With

depth interview with the teachers of the four participating preschools in Trnava was carried out. The interviews in both cases took some 60 minutes; they were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The analysis of these interviews facilitates access to, and throws light on, the covert or indefinite background of any given lessons. The analysis also helps to clarify the methodological background of the lessons and provides for thorough understanding of specific strategies used by individual teachers in the course of the preparation and realization of their lessons.

The chosen theoretical neutrality is rooted in the fundamental principles of the ethnographic approach. The teachers didn't receive any systematic training in work with children of an early age (not even in the framework of the project they were involved in). This was confirmed by one of the teachers during the interview:

...We didn't have any materials or rules how to teach so most things were up to us after all. II: Actually, what did they tell you? That you are going to teach? That's it? R: Yes, literally, they said that we are going to teach German and that it is up to us how. The search for materials has been our business as well and they refunded it afterwards. Nobody has told us what to stick to or what should the children learn.

It follows that the teachers' performance cannot be assessed in terms of correct or incorrect use of standardized methods to teach a foreign language at early age—in the way that we know them in the form of communicative, pragmatically oriented education, the narrative method or the TPR method (Total Physical Response). The video recording makes clear that the teachers' approach embraces elements of spontaneity and methodological openness which refers to the high rate of pedagogical intuition use in conducting educational activities. We thus had the opportunity to study the elements of spontaneous and intuitive foreign language education by professionals lacking any systematic methodological training for the respective age level.

Thus it becomes possible not just to scrutinize these spontaneous educational strategies, but, at the same time, to clear up some basic questions about the nature of early foreign language acquisition. Without any other justification, it can already be said that the key answer to the above stated question of analysis is the figure of corporeality representing non-discursiveness, as opposed to discourse-oriented approaches to early foreign language acquisition. It seems that this figure constitutes the interpretational leitmotif which allows for versatile and in-depth understanding of foreign language learning in a preschool age, whether from the processual or from the organizational viewpoint.

every group, one 20-minute lesson once a week took place. The teachers had degrees in foreign language teaching, but just for secondary education. It should be noted that, in Slovakia, there is no separate qualification of early foreign language teaching, thus the teachers in question possessed the most appropriate linguistic and pedagogical education for the given activity. The absence of any theoretical and practical training for the work with children of preschool age is a professional deficit, however.

Theorization of the research results: Body as the context, content and performance

Even if it is well known that there are methods directly based on language acquisition by means of physical response to linguistic expressions (the TPR method in particular), the observed teachers did not systematically employ this method. The interviews even revealed that they had no further information about it. The body, which turned out to be an element of reference in language acquisition, was the subject of their methodological impact in an unsystematic sense—based on partial rhymes and rhythms which the teachers found in various available methodological materials not exclusively designed for language teaching to preschoolers.⁶ The body turned out to be a phenomenon influencing the following three levels: the contextual level, the content level and the performance level. In terms of the contextual level, the teachers' concentration on the body was intuitively and continuously supported by the fact that if the dominance of the body began to fade away, so did the effectiveness of the learning situation. It means that once the teacher chose the communication context without framing it by means of some transition ritual in the form of a repeated “warm-up”, which would be accompanied by the teacher's or children's language use, the children were no longer able to identify foreign language teaching. Foreign language education linked with the non-discursive connection with the body created a specific educational context, especially typical for the preschool age. It signifies that the connection of body and foreign language acquisition represents a typical contextual framework for this given age.

Apart from corporeality in contextual view, the body operated at the surface analysis level as the dominant content factor of foreign language education. The topic of the “human body” is a strikingly frequent topic in the teaching of foreign languages.

It should be noted that this topic is capable of referring to world objects as well as to the subject of learning, whereby it connects the content and the anthropological dimension of education. It is a theme that represents the connection between body and language, and therefore it is understandable that it keeps appearing in various textbooks and methodological check materials. Among others, Reilly and Ward (1997) recommend this theme as a key one for the preschool age. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that even if the topic “*Mein Körper*” is not a stand-alone topic of educational activity, one can easily find it in rhymes and songs.

The third aspect revealed by the surface analysis of the video recordings is the performative aspect of corporeality, represented by physical activities of various kinds in the form of active movement, physical exhibits, pointing or other explicit and expressive behavioural reactions linked to foreign language stimuli. Children's foreign language utterances, which, in early education are primarily of a performative nature, are included in the performance aspect as well.⁷

⁶ The methods “*Kikus*” (see Garlin 2008) and “*Ene Mene*” (Jankásková, Ulbert, Dusilová 2003), primarily designed for the elementary school level, have been used very frequently.

⁷ Any foreign language utterance of observed children can be metaphorically expressed in the form of a short drama performance—children are asked to express themselves, just like a specific performance. Whether individually or in the entire group, children perform e.g. the ability to reproduce learned phrases that can have the form of unison group recitation without comprehension or without any

The obvious linkage of all three surface dimensions of corporeality can be seen in the four most frequently used rhymes: “*Wo sind meine Hände?*”⁸ “*Das bin ich*”⁹ “*Punkt, Punkt, Komma, Strich*”¹⁰ and “*Kopf und Schulter, Knie und Zehen*”.¹¹ All those body performances were frequently used to frame the foreign language education. An uninitiated observer would certainly note that such education remains at the level of exteriority, a sort of spiritless corporeality manifested in repeated physical exercises, drills and stereotypes. It is legitimate to raise the question whether such a way of foreign language education can ever lead to the acquisition of language comprehension.¹²

Anthropological background of interpretations

The impression that reproductive physical performativity in foreign language learning is counter-productive may be formed only if we overlook the anthropological basis of corporeality and interpret the body in a purely superficial, instrumental sense (exemplarily Mauss 1989). The contemporary so-called “anthropology of the body” (Lock 1993; Turner 1995; Csordas 1990, 1993, 1999) strictly criticizes the objectivist perception of the body, as worked out by the classic psychology of perception. The anthropology of the body is mainly based on the classic phenomenological analyses of Merleau-Ponty, for whom perception

relationship to pragmatic language use. For instance, the performance of “*Zahlen-Rap*” (the content goes beyond their actual knowledge, even in the mother tongue) is being declaimed by 3-year-old children: “*Eins, zwei, wo ist Kei? Ich bin hier!; Drei, vier, komm zu mir!; Fünf, sechs, wer ist Rex? Rex ist ein Hund.; Sieben, acht, gut gemacht!; Neun, zehn, ich muss gehen. Auf Wiedersehen!*” Another example is a collective ritual performance of learned rhymes which the children presented in front of an audience consisting of preschool teachers, acquainting them with the results of German language education at given kindergartens.

⁸ *Wo sind meine Hände?; Ich habe keine Hände mehr; Ei, da sind die Hände wieder; Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la; Wo sind meine Augen?; Ich habe keine Augen mehr; Ei, da sind Augen wieder; Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la; Wo sind meine Ohren?; Ich habe keine Ohren mehr; Ei, da sind Ohren wieder; Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la; Wo ist meine Nase?; Ich habe keine Nase mehr; Ei, da ist die Nase wieder; Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la; Wo sind meine Knie?; Ich habe keine Knie mehr; Ei, da sind die Knie wieder; Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la; Wo sind meine Füße?; Ich habe keine Füße mehr; Ei, da sind die Füße wieder; Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la.*

⁹ *Ich hab Haare und zwei Ohren, und zwei Augen hab ich auch, ich hab eine schöne Stirn, gleich dahinter mein Gehirn; Das ist ein Lied über mich!; Das bin ich! Das bin ich! Das bin ich!; Im Gesicht ist meine Nase, und ich hab auch einen Hals, einen schönen roten Mund, meine Zähne sind gesund; Das ist ein Lied über mich!; Das bin ich! Das bin ich! Das bin ich!; Hab zwei Arme und zwei Beine, und, einen kugelrunden Bauch, hab zwei Hände und zwei Füße, und, einen Popo hab ich auch; Das ist ein Lied über mich!; Das bin ich! Das bin ich! Das bin ich!*

¹⁰ *Punkt, Punkt, Komma, Strich, fertig ist das Gesicht. Punkte sind die Augen, Komma ist die Nase, Strich ist der Mund.*

¹¹ *Kopf und Schultern, Knie, Zehen, Knie, Zehen, Knie, Zehen, Kopf und Schultern, Knie, Zehen, Augen, Ohren, Nase, Mund.*

¹² For example, with the rhyme “*Kopf und Schulter, Knie und Zehen*”, the teacher intentionally increase the pace of declamation while accelerating pointing at single body parts, whereby she checks children’s reactivity to signals contained in the speech. The exercise gradually takes on the form of furious repetition of physical acts with a clear affective dimension. The quality of the “exercise” obviously does not correspond with the dimension of comprehension.

itself starts with the body, by means of the body and in the body (Merleau-Ponty 1966). It means that every physical experience is not empty, but individually and socially coded. It is the body that is in fact the primary medium of “being human in the world”. Without any reservation, the body functions as a means of culture and language acquisition, as pointed out by P. Bourdieu in his concept of “habitus”. In his view, the primary means for acquiring any cultural contents is the body. In children’s upbringing, it is not the parents’ discursive and argumentative practices but their expected bodily reactions and stereotypes that are instilled. Moreover, it does not concern just the reproduction of cultural phenomena such as “gender habitus”, e.g. which is directly linked to physical forms of being, but linguistic habitus as well (Grenfell 1998, 74). Bourdieu sees language in its practical forms whereby he quite intensively criticizes the linguistic theories of Chomsky and de Saussure that abstract away from the performative dimension of language and which can be found in the concept of speech acts, e.g. (Bourdieu 1991). In this context, Bourdieu talks about “implicit pedagogy” (1979, 200). The world of physical practice is in his view a “world of already implemented intentions, manuals or directions, and objects, instruments and institutions which are, in Husserl’s opinion, endowed by an everlasting teleological character” (1987, 100). Every physical activity has its intentionality and content. This allows him to claim that “arms and legs are full of numb imperatives” (1987, 128).

According to Grenfell (1998), the reproduction of specific linguistic habitus happens also in a school environment, thus it is legitimate to question if, and in what way, the “internalization of structures” (Bourdieu 1979) takes place, in this case, in foreign language classrooms. Is it possible to see the body as a medium of foreign language acquisition in the way we find it in concepts that thematize long-term language habituation in the family environment? There are certain analogies to be found if we consider that the link between the discursive nature of language and non-discursive aspects of language learning are an important issue for early language acquisition (irrespective of whether it is a native or foreign language).

These obvious analogies are found in native language acquisition, where early language acts are linked with the body, and analogous forms of foreign language use related to physical activities can be found functioning even in early foreign language education, as captured in observed situations. Although here, the non-discursiveness and bodily habituation are not autonomous ways to acquire cultural contents, the foreign language is in fact the content itself, which just like teaching content, interconnects the discursiveness and non-discursiveness of the body.

One finds such linkages in primary language stimulations in the family, when the child is asked to find or identify individual body parts (eye, ear, nose, finger...). This sort of identification is not just a simple reaction to a mother’s talk, but a result of complex mimetic processes that are elicited by a mother’s demonstration and pointing. We can find the usage of analogical identifications in early foreign language education in the way that reference to individual parts of the body is directly incorporated and fixated in specific scenarios of educational activities that are typically contained in rhymes, just like the above mentioned: “*Das bin ich...*”, “*Wo sind meine Hände...*”, “*Punkt, Punkt, Komma...*”, “*Kopf und Schulter, Knie, Zehen...*”. These and others are often used in collective forms and refer through and to the body by means of foreign language stimulation. This means that the teacher’s language

use is simultaneously accompanied by physical action, imitated by the children with more or less accurate accompanying talk. The video records made one tendency apparent: the children's clear responsiveness to bodily stimuli, subsequent takeover and internalization. The structure of the above listed rhymes initiates searching activities that bring about analogical identificational situations from the above-stated examples of primary language habituation. Demonstrative activities of searching are in essence a specific bodily performance, which simultaneously proves an automatized degree of understanding respective discourse units within a stable situational framework. Discursiveness is thus interconnected to non-discourse. That brings us to Merleau-Ponty's description of the body as "potential space". In his phenomenology of perception, the body is perceived as the object and subject of experience at the same time. One can handle one's body in an instrumental way (to possess a body), e.g. by using its parts for pointing, demonstration and likewise, and, at the same time, our body is the point of departure for any kind of experience, it is sensed as being identical with us (to be the body). The mentioned duality of "possessing a body" and "being the body" is analogically expressed in the conceptual duality "*Körper*" and "*Leib*" as viewed by Plessner (2003). The body as object is present in foreign language activities, so that it functions as a learning object. It is a tool for learning foreign languages and for that reason, children are encouraged to point at given parts of the body when pronouncing words. The body as subject is simultaneously incorporated into these activities so it is seen as an object from which it is impossible to abstract away. For that reason, the body has the potential that manifests itself in explicit behaviour, thus it is a "potential space" of learning and behaviour (including verbal behaviour). The perception of corporeality in early language learning in kindergartens puts stress, among others, on the behavioural level of verbal experience, justifying the idea that early verbal behaviour does not necessarily mean the comprehension of a foreign language and its use in the sense of the communicative approach.

Teachers, lecturers, puppets

In the context of implementing foreign language education into pre-primary and primary education in Slovakia, some issues, especially concerning the qualification of language teachers at a given level of education, remain unresolved. Above all, it is still not resolved as to whether a specialized lecturer/teacher of foreign language should do the job, or whether the profile of pre-primary and primary teachers should be extended by another component: the qualification to teach a foreign language in addition to all other curriculum areas.

Although the general tendency leans more toward the latter, the findings ADD in this study call for consideration of the first solution, which differentiates between the lecturer/teacher of a foreign language and pre-primary/primary core teachers. The basic argument is based on the functional differentiation of individuals (entities) who enter the educational process and symbolically as well as objectively differentiate education and contexts.

When the educational process in kindergarten involves other persons in order to teach a foreign language, framing of this activity becomes significant. The separation of contexts by means of a new person is in fact the preparation for activity; it is a challenge and signal of that action. It has been quite clearly proven (Kaščák 2007) that, without the separation of life contexts in preschool, children's adaptation to various kinds of activities becomes

very difficult to ensure. Such separation can have a symbolic form, or it can be related to these new persons associated exclusively with just one kind of activity. In a sense, a new teacher is a symbol of a new activity—activity in a German class. In this case, there is no role confusion—that of a native speaker and that of a foreign language speaker. As we have witnessed, however, such confusion arose very frequently in situations when the teacher relinquished the role of foreign language teacher, especially in situations of reacting very approachably to off-topic discourse stimuli by children. Although such situations, “zigzaggery” in communication contexts, may not necessarily be disruptive in the course of regular education, in the case of German language lessons, they were strikingly disruptive. It means that the teacher’s awareness of being a foreign language teacher can legitimately function throughout the whole lesson so that the content of the lessons is clear from start to finish. Paradoxically, the observed teachers did not succeed as language teachers when they tried to adhere to the contents and methods of work of ordinary kindergartens, even though the thematic inspiration of the school curriculum was not an obstacle when preparing foreign language lessons. We could see that the children were confused because they stopped reacting in a foreign language.

The presence of a new person for the sake of initiating new activity in a preschool daily routine—a German language lesson—is methodologically encouraged in a way that a new educational context is carried into the classroom by means of puppets, as mediating elements within the context of a foreign language lesson. If these are used in the classroom, they acquire special referential meaning if the foreign language teacher is the core teacher. In this way, the puppet fulfils the analogical symbolic function, as if the educational context was initiated by a newcoming foreign language teacher. There are several methods of foreign language education that ascribe an important role to a puppet in foreign language lessons. An example might be the already mentioned method “*Ene Mene*”, which proposes the use of puppets named “*Jens*” and “*Lisa*” which appear in the observed lessons.

The fact that the teachers, as well as the puppets, fulfil the same initiatory function in relation to the educational context can mean that if the teachers and the puppets appear in the same situation, it will be redundant in the induction of the context and it will necessarily lead to suppression of one initiatory factor, i.e. the puppets. If Jens and Lisa were used by the observed teachers, the redundant mediation of the foreign language context was highly evident. The puppets frequently got lost in their meaning. They disturbed children’s attention, children handled them like any other toys, laying them aside, throwing them at each other etc. These figures did not fulfil the function as described in some methods; i.e. to actively communicate with children in the target language during the whole lesson, introduce new vocabulary, phrases etc. The redundancy was reduced when the puppets referred not just to the foreign language context but to the foreign language environment as such. It is true that Slovak teachers can refer to a different language (as language speakers), but they cannot refer to the countries where the language is used just by themselves. That is why the teachers used *Jens* and *Lisa* in the latter case.¹³

¹³ At the beginning of the lesson, teachers repeatedly used to introduce the puppets *Jens* and *Lisa* while pointing out that they come from Austria. The teacher answers the interview question “But tell us how you made use of them [the puppets]” as follows: “Specifically, that these puppets are from Austria

Discussion: Propaedeutic enjambment of the lessons

Although in the story *Jens* and *Lisa* were mainly shown by the teachers as representatives of the foreign environment, we were confronted with an interesting problem and that was how to understand that Jens and Lisa were systematically presented as inhabitants of Austria.¹⁴ This particularity (resting on the fact that the German language primarily implies Germany and less so Austria) can evoke the following question: Is the implementation of this foreign language context in relation to German language education confusing? At first glance, it may seem so; German and Austrian variants have their own specifics after all. What is even more important in our case is that the affiliation of Germany and Austria to the same language family was not presented to the children at all. These, maybe theoretically important, differences hardly played any role in the observed context. Children did not pay any attention to the nationality of the puppets and perceived the context as absolutely self-evident.

The question takes a different form if it asks what it means when children claim that their lessons are lessons in Hungarian, when instead of German words, they use English ones, when they talk about Czech instead of German etc. All this was noted by the children in the initial phases of creating a foreign language context, which was an expression of understanding the new educational context and the relation of that context to a different, foreign language code. Subsequently, they continued the German language lesson without any problems. It means that their association with “Hungarian”, “English”, or “Czech” is not a failure of German lessons. It means in fact, that by referring to languages other than German, children describe foreign language as such, and they take it as evident that the given lecture places them into the context of foreign language education.

The general foreign language context is moreover supported by other recorded activities, e.g. the activity “*Tschuff-Eisenbahn*”, which is a rhyme about travelling from one foreign country to another (Italy, Turkey, Greece, Spain, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Africa, Australia) ending “on a German language course”.¹⁵ Here we can find a reference to foreign language diversity, symbolically connected with German as a symbol of a certain cultural integration by means of language.

and we are going to play with them.” This performance was a part of the introductory rhyme “*Guten Morgen! Guten Tag!, das ist Lisa, die ich mag; Guten Abend! Gute Nacht!, das ist Jens, der gerne lacht: Ha-ha-ha!*”

¹⁴ The German language lessons, delivered within the project’s framework, were related to Austria because the project itself followed, in particular, intercultural aims in relation to neighboring Austria. Thus, the German language was presented as the language used in Austria.

¹⁵ *Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit nach Italien fahrn?, Alleine fahren mag ich nicht, Da nehm ich mir die Angela mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will in die Türkei mitfahrn?, Alleine fahren wolln wir nicht, Da nehmen wir die Hatice mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit na ch Griechenland Fahren?, Alleine fahren wollen wir nicht, Da nehmen wir den Costas mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit nach Spanien fahrn?, Alleine fahren wolln wir nicht, Da nehmen wir die Carmen mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit nach Afganistan fahrn?, Alleine fahren wolln wir nicht, Da nehmen wir den Mirwais mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit nach Afghanistan fahrn? Alleine fahren wollen wir nicht, Da nehmen wir den Mirwais mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit nach Afrika fahrn?, Alleine fahren wolln wir nicht, Da nehmen wir den Yusuf mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff*

The question of the interchangeability of foreign languages in education becomes the focal point of the so-called *language propaedeutics approach* in implementing early foreign language education (Fenclová 2004). This conception does not focus on any specific foreign language, but it aims at foreign language ability as a general phenomenon. Of course, this is realized by means of appropriate language phenomena like a sound comparison of the same animals expressed in different languages (a German dog with its “*wau – wau*” versus Slovak dog and its “*hav – hav*”). It is rather the global difference of language contexts that is of key importance, not the beginning of a specific foreign language acquisition.¹⁶ In the concept of language propaedeutics, the term language awakening in this global sense is used. It is about the continual process of sensitivisation toward various foreign language contexts without favouring any specific linguistic code. It is not surprising though, that the goals of language propaedeutics highlight multilingualism. In this sense and through the optics of language propaedeutics, the overall meaning of the foreign language may be, to a certain extent, perceived in our video studies, even if this particular project is connected to a specific language—German. This relation proved to be frequently very loose and it certainly cannot be said that the teachers implemented the course of language propaedeutics in its own sense. Considering that the project of German language education in kindergartens was implemented at a time when the national education policy presupposed a choice of foreign language, the propaedeutic approach of delivered lessons was even more significant.

Conclusion

This study offers several analyses related to the acquisition of foreign language by children of preschool age. It should be mentioned that the data collected related to children who do not live in a bilingual environment and acquire the foreign language (German) almost exclusively in situations of organized German language education at preschools and to a quite limited extent. On the other hand, this situation allows for a detailed exploration of some aspects regarding foreign language education since the learning progress is slowed down on one hand, but connected with certain didactic interventions and projections on the other. The study does not intend to react to more general disputes on whether foreign languages should be taught at the preschool age. However, it provides certain conceptual support for understanding early foreign language education in kindergartens, as well as certain foundations for a professional mastery of foreign language education and for the clarification of what is involved in certain political circumstances. The study’s conceptual added value is the reference to the phenomenon of corporeality, as an analytical filter for the perception of foreign language education in kindergartens, by means of which several, seemingly trivial, educational activities become important. Repetitive physical activities become legitimized,

die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit nach Australien fahrn?, Alleine fahren wolln wir nicht, Da nehmen wir die Helen mit; Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn, Wer will mit in den Deutschkurs fahrn?, Alleine fahren wolln wir nicht, Da nehmen wir die Kinder mit.

¹⁶ The propaedeutic potential that can be identified in the rhythm “*Tschuff- tschuff-tschuff die Eisenbahn*”, implies an interlingual comparison, since every trip abroad is connected with specific local variants of given names (*Angela, Hatice, Costas, Carmen, Mirwais, Lindita, Yusuf, Helen*).

performativity that is, at first sight, devoid of semantic contents specifically linked to these activities, gets more and more important. Especially in relation to the discursive nature of language, the interconnection with non-discursive forms of learning is emphasized here. These non-discursive forms like physical activities give a special meaning to discourse. The study tackles the contextuality of foreign language lessons mediated by media themselves which are represented by teachers or puppets, which, in order to create necessary distinct contexts, are its symbolic carriers. Based on this view, we incline toward the structuring of an organizational routine in kindergarten where foreign language education has its distinct and defined place. If we look at the entire project from a political perspective and realize that it is being implemented in multilingual Europe, so the implementation of the project follows the aims declared in the concept of so-called language propaedeutics, which strives to open up the space of multilingualism devoid of any preference for a specific language within the framework of language education policy. With the current policy, which, with its neoliberal goals in mind favours English as a means to prepare a flexible and mobile workforce, the results of contributing to the initiation of multilingualism are, of course, disputable.¹⁷

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