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Learning to learn multilingualism

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Learning to Learn Multilingualism

Jörg Roche, Elisabetta Terrasi-Haufe (eds.). 2018. *Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachenerwerb*, (Kompendium DaF/DaZ 4). Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag.

1. Introduction

This very comprehensive textbook was published by Jörg Roche and Elisabetta Terrasi-Haufe in 2018, and is the fourth volume of the nine-part series 'Kompendium DaF/DaZ' (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache/Zweitsprache* – German as a foreign/second language). Jörg Roche, editor of every volume in the series, describes its aim as deepening the education of foreign-language instructors. In order to do so, the series focuses on sharing insights from research on language acquisition, language teaching and multilingualism. According to the publishers, all volumes in the series share the orientation toward insights from the cognitive sciences (p. 16). All of the textbooks can be used in academic teaching as well as in further training, and are part of a correspondence course at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU) and its European partners.

Both editors work at the *Institut für Deutsch als Fremdsprache* at LMU and have collaborated on different book series on methods in the DaF/DaZ field. Only one of the eight chapters in the textbook was written without the involvement of one of the two editors (chapter 4 'Dynamische Modellierung von Sprachenerwerb' by Kees de Bot, University of Groningen). Apart from de Bot and Jala Garibova (Azerbaijan University of Languages), the participating authors are all associated with LMU (Svenja Uth, Claudia Maria Riehl, Eduard Arnhold).

The volume comprises 350 pages, including the introduction, list of references, illustrations and index. Each of the eight chapters is divided into three subsections (learning units) and begins with a one-page introduction as well as a list of key points (in a highlighted field). At the end of every unit are a bullet-point summary and a list of comprehension and discussion questions. Another recurring element is numerous suggestions for experiments that can help readers experience and thereby better understand the chapter content (these are described in a highlighted box containing further questions). This pattern helps the reader to gain orientation to the different theories and models described in the textbook. The same format is followed in all volumes of the series, which is also helpful to academic instructors and students. The choice to use a single bibliography at the end of the volume is convincing, as it avoids duplication and reflects the contributors' shared research.

2. Summary

2.1 Prolog & chapter 1 – introducing multilingualism

The introduction is very clear on the theoretical framework. It carefully dismisses older theories of multilingualism and criticizes generative linguistics for only seeking to explain early or children's language acquisition (p. 15). In contrast to nativist theory, cognitive-oriented theories view late language acquisition as a different process from learning a language as a child.¹ The authors claim that newer research has been inspired by this assumption but has not consistently pursued its methodological and application-oriented consequences. Specifically, they argue, adult language learning should involve interaction with, and systematic use of, the languages a person had already learned until that point in their life. Different fields of cognitive science are considered particularly useful in terms of developing methods that keep in mind the linguistic background of the individual being taught. Nevertheless, the authors stress that insights from the cognitive sciences cannot always be transferred into the classroom on an as-is basis, notwithstanding their value for understanding how languages are processed in the human mind (p. 16).

Turning to the content of the volume, the overarching argument is that multilingualism is more (or sometimes less) than speaking two or more languages on a native speaker's level (cf. p. 33). Instead, multilingualism should be understood as the dynamic interaction of different languages or even varieties (p. 199), serving different needs and functions, depending on the domain in which the code in question is being employed. As globalization progresses, multilingual functionality plays an increasingly important role that should not be mistaken for learning (only) English or another *lingua franca* in addition to one's first language (p. 37). From the very beginning, the authors seek to point out the importance of linguistic diversity and intercultural (language) learning, while also engaging with new approaches such as intercomprehension (p. 64).

2.2 Chapter 2 – modelling multilingualism

Despite the initial announcement of the intention to concentrate on newer explanations, the authors never fail to mention traditional theories of multilingualism, for example in chapter 2.2 on "innere und äußere Mehrsprachigkeit" (p. 67, cf. Wandruszka 1979) and "Schwellen- und Interdependenzhypothese" (p. 70, cf. Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa 1977). Next to well-known theses about e.g. territorial and social forms of multilingualism (p. 30, cf. Riehl 2014),

¹ This proposition becomes highly relevant in chapter 7.2 on xenolects (p. 257) where the role of input for foreign language learners is discussed.

the volume also deals with dimensions of multilingualism that have not been investigated in much depth, for example the role of belonging and identity. It is a pity that no further literature is provided here (p. 35), but this is mostly not the rule.² Here (p. 36) and throughout the chapters, the authors stress that for most of human history multilingualism has been the norm rather than the exception (for example on p. 36). In the process of nation-building starting from the late 18th century, language homogenization has been used to shape national identities. As a consequence, political and educational efforts to revive multilingualism are necessary, especially in industrialized countries where minority languages are mostly marginalized by dominant majority languages (p. 36, cf. Crystal (1997) and p. 37, cf. Weinreich (1953)). These preliminary assumptions not only stand on their own, but also serve as a preface to the discussion of bilingual education (see p. 49 for political aspects and p. 67 for didactics).

Although they are mentioned in the section header, chapter 2.1 does not properly address questions of migration and its consequences. Instead, the author Jörg Roche discusses the implications of the *Sinus* study at length (pp. 58-60), before turning to the (important) conclusion that "ethnische Faktoren nicht milieubildend wirken" [...] and therefore cannot serve as a benchmark for revival measures that help maintain ethnic segregation (cf. p. 66). Chapter 2.2 and 2.3 finally contain a great wealth of information, especially with respect to the question of modeling multilingualism adequately.

2.3 Chapter 3 – on (foreign) language acquisition

It is only logical that chapter 3 focuses on (late) language acquisition. This time, the author quickly turns to contemporary theories in chapter 3.1, explaining the process of chunking (among others) as well as introducing the concept of a *basic variety*. The chapter illustrates the principles of a learner's grammar, which the reader should be able to understand quickly provided a minimum of prior linguistic knowledge. The experiment proposed on p. 102 offers the chance to apply these insights immediately. Earlier, the author draws parallels between the concept of a basic variety and, again, an older theory developed by Givón (1979) about the supremacy of the pragmatic mode over the syntactic one when learning a language. Sadly, the connections to *gestalt* psychology are dealt with very briefly (p. 101). Also, the importance of the lexicon over grammatical structures is repeated multiple times but concrete examples and references to literature are missing.

² The textbook does discuss literature on social coherence and belonging in chapter 6.3 but at this point it neglects to provide the relevant references.

In spite of the clear orientation towards cognitive linguistics, the two editors of the present volume openly discuss nativist approaches, namely in chapter 3.2. This is done not only with the aim of pointing out the limits of this theory. Insights from form-based theories do indeed help us understand learners' grammatical development. However, in the authors' opinion they should be considered more as "Diagnoseinstrumente denn als Einladung zu externen Korrekturen [...]" in the process of teaching a foreign language (p. 115). They reach this conclusion after discussing the question of how to interpret deviations from norms in the process of directed second-language learning (cf. Diehl et al. 2000: 372). On the one hand, those in favor of a natural process in the acquisition of an L2 claim that variation occurs *despite* grammar being taught. On the other hand, those critical of a "starke Formfokussierung im Unterricht" suggest that training exercises may have contributed to the results observed by Diehl et al. (2000), (cf. p. 111). Finally, Terassi-Haufe refers to her own work (2004) where findings inconsistent with Pienmann's teachability hypothesis (1998) are explained by maturational factors as well as "unterrichtliche Maßnahmen" (p. 115).

The editors are also responsible for chapter 3.3, which addresses newer issues around foreign language learning as well as older ones (such as *fossilization* and *stabilization*). In addition, the subsection contains some valuable hints for teaching foreign languages with its focus on the "Erhöhung der subjektiven Wahrnehmbarkeit eines sprachlichen Phänomens" (p. 127).

2.4 Chapter 4 – language as a dynamic system

The preceding chapters can be considered a prelude to the findings reviewed in chapter 4, "Dynamische Modellierung von Spracherwerb", which can be seen as the heart of the volume. Starting with the note that it is important to consider the interactional development of various languages an individual has gained, the author speaks of *Entwicklung* rather than *Erwerb* in order to include processes like attrition and language loss in multilingual minds (p. 131, chapter 4.2 on p. 142). For the same reason, one should look not only at (grammatical) rules within a language, but also at attitudes and patterns of language use, which are placed at the center of any dynamic modeling of language acquisition.

The general rules of complex systems, discussed in chapter 4.1, very successfully address the aforementioned critiques of older theories of multilingualism, and the methodological demands arising from newer ones. This is despite the fact that languages are not mentioned even once in this first subsection. Parallels are only introduced in chapter 4.2 ("Sprache als dynamisches System"), which sadly lacks depth (only 8 pages). Apart from the fact that one cannot properly explain complex dynamic systems in a nutshell, many statements in chapter 4.2. and 4.3 again

lack references. For example, no literature at all is cited on p. 143 ("Diese Annahme wird von Forschungserkenntnissen unterstützt, die ..."), on p. 144 ("es hat sich gezeigt, dass die ...", "Wie die Forschung zur Sprachlernentwicklung gezeigt hat, ..."), and on p. 155: ("Hinsichtlich der unterschiedlich ausgeprägten linguistischen Fähigkeiten zeigen die Ergebnisse verschiedener Forschungsprojekte, dass ..."). On p. 147, the author of this chapter (Kees de Bot) introduces "*Emergentismus*, der im Fall von Sprache so zu verstehen ist, dass ...", but cites neither Keller (1994), nor Hopper (1998), nor any other key literature. He also refers to findings mentioned in other volumes of the series without providing a page number, as on p. 143 ("vergleiche den Band »Sprachenlehren«") and p. 152 ("siehe hierzu den Band »Sprachenlernen und Kognition«"). The latter volume does not seem to even refer to the "kognitionslinguistische Systemperspektive".³ Finally, some passages are either inaccurately written or poorly translated. Phrases such as "Es gibt viele Theorien über Sprache, was sie ist, wie sie entstanden ist, und so weiter." (p. 146) or "Ein System entwickelt sich auf eine gewisse Weise, weil sich das System so entwickelt." (p. 147) would certainly require some adjustment. At times, the content even lacks clarity, as can be seen in the following quotation:

Sowohl beim Verlust der L1 als auch der L2 spielt das Alter in zweierlei Hinsicht eine entscheidende Rolle. Es wirkt sich deutlich auf den Spracherhalt aus, ob es um den Zeitraum vor oder nach der Pubertät geht: In der präpubertären Phase findet ein erheblicher Verlust statt, während in der postpubertären Phase weitaus mehr bewahrt wird. Der gegensätzliche Alterseffekt tritt im hohen Alter ein. (p. 155)⁴

First of all, it is entirely unclear what the pronouns *es* in the second sentence refer to. While the author probably means them to refer to the onset of attrition of an acquired L1 or L2, it is still difficult to imagine what the "opposite effect in terms of advanced age" exactly means in this context (*ibid.*, translation EB).

Despite these criticisms, it is important to stress the value of the introduction to complex (dynamic) systems (4.1), the many analogies to and examples of language as a complex system (4.2), and the summary of relatively new research on language loss and attrition (4.3). The author contextualizes new findings very reasonably, and considers the role of both acquisition *and* loss in the development of multilingualism.

³ In other cases, the authors do not neglect to include page numbers. For example, on p. 165 the exact learning unit is given in the reference to another volume of the same series.

⁴ In contrast to other citations I did not translate this passage into English. The aim was to show the original wording.

2.5 Chapter 5 – on multilingual use of language

The problems mentioned above persist, but are much less pronounced, in chapter 5.1 and 5.2. The examples lack interlinear glossing and other details (p. 164, "Englisch" missing in final line) and there are some technical errors (p. 169, reference of "Auer 1995: 120" in bullet instead of right-justified) – a general problem in the volume, discussed below. While these may be corrected in a new edition, it is much more important to consider the line of argumentation against the artificial separation of languages in multilingual minds. Firstly, the authors compare code-switching with interlingual variation of styles and registers (p. 163) without referring to Coseriu's (1988) concept of "Dachsprachen", which is discussed in chapter 6 of the same volume. After a brief discussion of whether or not switching costs exist, Kees de Bot and Jörg Roche conclude that not only multilinguals benefit from what is known as "Mehrsprachigkeits-Vorteil" (p. 171). Therefore, one must ask how the so-called advantage of multilingualism comes into being in the first place (cf. p. 173). The authors claim that switching between languages *and* conversational situations both involve similar costs and benefits.⁵ They refer to the inauthentic nature of experiments in which code-switching is elicited, in order to show that switching is not a matter of one's choice of language, but of a certain variety that best fits the situation:

In usual conversations containing code-switching, [speakers] are never forced to switch codes. They do so because it is in line with their purpose... Some words and constructions tend to occur in a certain language. Perhaps even the term "language" is insufficient to describe the process. A word or a phrase is used because it comes to one's mind; which language the word originates from is basically irrelevant. (p. 173, my translation).

In this respect, both multilinguals and monolinguals use "die praktische und kostengünstige Variante und das können Entitäten aus dieser oder jener Sprache sein." (ibid.)

Chapter 5.2 (on transfer) maintains the approach of contrasting older and newer theories ("von der Fehleranalyse auf der Basis von Kontrasten hin zur *Performanzanalyse*", p. 177, emphasis added). The author (Kees de Bot) also provides a good overview of basic literature on the phenomenon of transfer, as well as a short introduction to gestures and transfer (p. 184). Chapter 5.3 (by Claudia Maria Riehl) then broadens the perspective on multilingualism by discussing multiliteracy as another domain where transfer can be observed. It also contains two illustrative examples (p. 189, 197) as well as many cross-references to materials within the volume (e.g. to learning unit 8.2 and the concept developed by Koch und Oesterreicher

⁵ This argument is taken up again in chapter 7.2 on xenolects, which show great variation and can therefore be analyzed in terms of code-switching (p. 251).

(1994) on p. 190), along with external references (cf. most recent study by Rosenberg and Schröder (2016)).

2.6 Chapter 6 – language variation

Among the aims of chapter 6 (by Jarla Garibova, Jörg Roche and Svenja Uth) is to explain variation as part of multilingualism (p. 200). However, in my opinion it fails to do so. After a short introduction to the theory of language as an architectural ensemble of varieties (Coseriu 1988), the authors raise more questions than answers. One of these is whether anything like a standard language actually exists. In the end, the "postmodern" doubt is dismissed quite rapidly by listing arguments (reasonable in themselves) in favor of a standard, such as supraregionality, codification, institutionalization and literacy (p. 204). Subsequently, the social interaction of varieties is discussed in terms of assimilation and division. Special attention is given to regionalization as an example of a process in which convergence of varieties is due to "the desire of assimilation" (Coulmas 2013: 7, cf. p. 205). In contrast, division happens "[w]here social norms put a premium on social distinctness" and differences "tend to be maintained" (Gumperz 1967: 228, cf. *ibid.*). All this is true, including the statement on p. 206 that variation on a social level creates variability on an individual level. The authors' corresponding example of how different factors in a (foreign) language learner's mind dynamically interact with one another is a simple but striking indication of how the process of language learning can be described as a complex adaptive system. However, neither chapter 6.2 on regional varieties (Jala Garibova and Svenja Uth) nor chapter 6.3 on social varieties (Jala Garibova and Svenja Uth, assisted by Eduard Arnhold) clarify the extent to which these insights are relevant to learning a foreign language. There most certainly is a difference between learning and using varieties of a single language on the one hand, and learning different and sometimes clearly unrelated languages on the other. That said, the chapter fulfills all the other aims it sets itself, especially that of raising the awareness (of foreign language teachers) to the operating principles of variation and variability on different levels (regional, social, stylistic, etc.). Chapter 6.2 focuses on the question of what makes a dialect different from a language. In many cases, structural criteria are less significant than the analysis of political decisions (cf. p. 220). While it is truly exciting to read the overviews of different theories, the connection to multilingualism and language acquisition is again missing. The same applies to most of chapter 6.3, except for p. 227 where the authors point to the educational potential of reflecting youth language as a diastratic variety.

2.7 Chapter 7 – communication in multilingual contexts

In no way does the critique above apply to chapter 7, written by the editor Jörg Roche (7.1 on ethnolects, 7.2 on xenolects and 7.3 on pidgins and creoles together with Svenja Uth). This is already evident in the reference to Wandruzska (1979) in the introduction as well as in section 7.1.1 (this one unfortunately referenced incorrectly to "Lerneinheit 2.1" on pp. 233 and 234). By appreciating that mixed languages can bridge the "innere Mehrsprachigkeit" with which young children easily experiment and the "äußere Mehrsprachigkeit" with which adult foreign language learners sometimes struggle, the reader will better comprehend the application-oriented advice given repeatedly through the chapter. The author not only provides the reader with the most common model of ethnolects (Auer 2003, cf. p. 235), but also gives a long list of examples from research, especially from Wiese's work on *Kiezdeutsch* (2006, 2012; p. 236). The illustration of its (grammatical) innovations makes it easier to understand that ethnolects are not (only) about simplification and reduction, but also about how speakers creatively exploit, develop, and rearrange various linguistic structures. *Kiezdeutsch* therefore does more than to express the speaker's belonging to a certain group (p. 237). Moreover, they are fully capable of switching between different registers, including standard (cf. p. 241), which ultimately proves that *Kiezdeutsch* is not the code of some parallel society.

Throughout the chapter, the reader is constantly reminded why new insights into language variation are valuable knowledge when teaching a language (p. 234). Sometimes the structural descriptions of an ethnolect like *Kiezdeutsch* are somehow incorrect or at least superficial: "Veränderung der deutschen Satzstellung in SVO" on p. 236 or "Verb steht an anderer Stelle" on p. 237, when the context is in fact V3-constructions. This is somewhat compensated for with the use of "Funktionsverbgefüge" *ich mach dich Messer* (p. 237-238) as an example for grammatical innovation. Therefore, credit must be given to the author for showing that a primary ethnolect or a dialect like *Kiezdeutsch* is far more complex than its usurped forms, taken up by youth via mass media (secondary ethnolects) or even produced in direct mockery (tertiary ethnolects, cf. pp. 239-240). In the end, the bridging function of ethnolects is best explained by pointing to how they enrich the majority language and thereby demonstrate "die natürlichen Kräfte der Mehrsprachigkeit" (p. 241). Roche then identifies another bridging function of ethnolects with methodological potential for language learning. By looking at intern and extern multilingualism as terms that exist on a continuum, one could lower the entry level for learning a second language and thereby expand the critical period for lasting language acquisition (pp. 242-243). In chapter 7.2, the author points out commonalities between ways of speaking to children (*motherese*) and to adult language learners (*xenolects*). Parallels to the concepts mentioned in chapter 3 (basic variety, pragmatic mode) are not only brought up, but

also turned into questions for the reader (p. 259). Likewise, the highly interesting but far too short section on pidgins and creoles contains some inspiring questions (cf. question 4 on p. 269: "Welche Konsequenzen ergeben sich für den Spracherwerb und den Sprachunterricht aus den Erkenntnissen über Pidginisierung und Kreolisierung? Wie lassen sich Kreolisierungserscheinungen im Spracherwerb vermeiden?"). However, the discussion of methodological implications is far from exhaustive, and is limited to the final paragraph of each of the first two subsections. As for the question of how to make use of the high variability of xenolects when teaching a foreign language, advice is given only in the very last sentence:

It makes sense to properly consider addressees' input model when teaching a language to young people and children, and when teaching technical terminology. This also applies to the selection of communicative tasks and readings or grammatical exercises. (pp. 258-259, my translation)

This shortcoming is compensated for in two ways. Firstly, in the sample solutions on the publishers' website one can find detailed responses to the questions mentioned above.⁶ Secondly, the final chapter 8 is explicitly dedicated to methodological questions. It will be discussed in the following section, before drawing an overall conclusion in chapter 3 of the present review.

2.8 Chapter 8 – paving the way for research on multilingualism and applied linguistics

The first section of chapter 8 opens with an interesting notion. Rather than treating mistakes, the aim of studying learners' varieties should be to understand how varieties impact the ways in which individuals learn. Nevertheless, the authors and editors give examples of longitudinal data in order to illustrate the progress of a foreign language learner's syntactical skills. They then quickly turn to the interactional use of the same learner's variety (p. 274). In this way they show which strategies learners employ and how they cope with cultural challenges alongside the challenges of the new language as such (p. 277). Furthermore, the pragmatic dimension of language learning is addressed. With the concept of scaffolding (p. 279), the authors also introduce practical guidelines for helping to develop language skills.

Chapter 8.2 focuses on differences between oral and written language (absence of interlocutor; planning and production, phenomena according to Koch and Oesterreicher

⁶ Available under http://meta.narr.de/9783823381822/M4_Musterloesung_Wissenskontrollaufgaben.pdf. See for example the answer on question 4 in chapter 3.2 asking for the didactical consequences of the basic variety and its implications for learning and teaching a language. It includes a methodological discussion of the theses presented by Klein and Dimroth (2003) on non-directed second-language acquisition.

(2011)) which are crucial for comprehending the different skills one needs to develop when writing texts in a foreign language. The author (Claudia Maria Riehl) then introduces different models for recording language competence. Combined with Koch and Oesterreicher's well-known model mentioned above, one can understand the need for foreign language teachers to distinguish between texts' different modes of discourse, which they often disregard (p. 295).

Finally, chapter 8.3 (Jara Garibova) gives a nice brief overview of almost any question a researcher might be concerned with: from basic principles of empirical studies (such as the observer's paradox and methods of eliciting data) via the generation of a corpus (including transcription, annotation and triangulation) and through to ethical aspects of field research. It would have probably made more sense to begin the chapter with these explanations, but this way the reader is left with the urge to embark on research right after they finish the textbook.

3. Evaluation and final remarks

Before I conclude with my overall impression of the textbook, I would like to list some technical mistakes that could have been avoided with more careful proofreading.

In general, the authors take great care to use both masculine and feminine pronouns, but do not manage to do so consistently throughout the whole book. One can read masculine forms like "Sprecher" (p. 235) followed "a few pages later by both forms, as in "durch den Sprecher oder die Sprecherin" (p. 241). There is some faulty formatting, for example inconsistent bold printing of keywords (p. 65), italics that are missing in citation (p. 236, "jetzt bin ich 18") or misused (p. 249, "*statt*"), and missing opening brackets (p. 252, before "T1801") or paragraph breaks (p. 255 in dialogue excerpt "12P: Aber wann nicht nerven (...)"). The list of orthographical errors is much longer, and ranges from missing conjunctions (no "zu" before "akzeptieren" on p. 41), letters ("berücksichtig" on p. 71), blank spaces ("dasaktuelle", p. 82), prepositions ("auf" on p. 266 in table 7.4) and commas (p. 24, 63, 148, 176, 183). In contrast, some commas are superfluous (p. 113, 179, 183, 194). These errors may be corrected in a second edition, which would certainly be well-anticipated.

In summary, while this textbook has several different authors, one can easily see the common thread running through almost every chapter. This is reflected not only in the frequent cross-referencing but also in the common bibliography. In addition to using it as a textbook in a seminar, one can read the book backwards as in introduction to research on language acquisition and multilingualism. Indeed, the book's greatest merits are its up-to-the-minute research insights into language acquisition and multilingualism, and its potential to raise

awareness to the challenges still facing second language learning. However, teachers and those responsible for foreign language training will ultimately benefit most from this book, even if they find it occasionally demanding in terms of prerequisite linguistic knowledge and somewhat lacking in references to further literature.

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