How to relate quantitative research data on plurilingual development with individuals' changing communicative needs

Maria Stopfner

Eurac Research Bolzano and University of Innsbruck

maria.stopfner@eurac.edu

Situated at the gateway of some of the most important trading routes across the Alps, the Autonomous Province of South Tyrol (Italy) has always been a multicultural and multilingual region. Today, multilingualism in South Tyrol neither only refers to the three officially recognised languages, i.e. German, Italian and Ladin, nor is it limited to formally taught foreign languages such as English and French, but also comprises the languages of origin of those who have (more or less) recently settled in the region. In order to investigate how children acquire, use and maintain their linguistic repertoire in a multilingual setting such as South Tyrol, a longitudinal study within the project "One School, Many Languages" accompanied 170 students from eight middle schools over a period of three years (2015–2018), from their first (year 6) to their final year of middle school (year 8). Within these three years, a broad range of quantitative as well as qualitative data was collected based on a variety of instruments within different communicative settings (written/oral language assessment, in-class observation, questionnaires etc.). Yet, in order to describe the development of purilingual competence, one first needs to be clear as to how and to which extent the child has already acquired the languages of schooling. These linguistic prerequisites are traditionally accounted for in categorizing the child's languages as first, second or third language(s). However, the results of the study indicate that categorizing middle-school children in South Tyrol as mono-, bi- or plurilingual might be an overgeneralization of a much more diverse reality. In my presentation, I will compare different approaches to speaker categorization (Herdina & Jessner 2002, Francescini 2011, Aronin & Singleton 2012) in relation to research data on language development and their ability to transcend theory and practice.

AG 9

References: Aronin, L. & D. Singleton (2012). Multilingualism. Amsterdam: John Benjamis. Francescini (2011). Multilingualism and multicompetence. The Modern Language Journal 95, 344-355. Herdina, P. & U. Jessner (2002). A dynamic model of multilingualism. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Vetter, E. & U. Jessner (2019). International Research on Multilingualism: Breaking with the Monolingual Perspective. Berlin: Springer Nature.