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**PROBLEMS OF THE RESEARCH ON THE BILINGUAL
PRESCHOOLERS' LANGUAGE**

In contemporary society, due to processes of globalization and Europeanization the number of bilingual children increases, and the necessity to develop multi-lingual skills raises. In Latvian linguistics purposeful children's language studies are carried out [12] but no thorough research has been conducted about bilingual preschool age children, whose mother tongue or second language is Latvian.

The *aim* of the article is to provide insight into the research of bilingual preschool child language in Latvia, as well as other countries of the world, briefly characterize the child's second language (sequential bilingualism) research problems and data collection techniques, their usability in the research of preschool children Latvian language. In the article child language research issues are examined related to: 1) sociolinguistic situation in Latvia, 2) research situation in Latvia, 3) recent developments in other countries in the research of early bilingualism, 4) the usability of the experience of these countries in the research of the Latvian language.

Sociolinguistic situation

Minorities are a traditional part of Latvian society, which for generations have lived in Latvia. Historically, the Latvian language has been subjected to different languages, affected by both economic and political factors. In different time spans the Latvian language has functioned in one political and economic space with German, Russian and English. In the 1950-s of the previous century 1.5 million Soviet Union inhabitants came to Latvia, from who approximately half remained to live there. After 1992 young immigrants from countries outside the EU (mostly from the former Soviet republics) arrived in Latvia. Over the past decade, with the Latvia accession to the European Union, also the citizens of the European Union have settled down in Latvia. In the result of all these processes, in Latvia a large number of mixed families and bilingual children has formed, as well the proportion of minority children, who can not speak Latvian.

Riga among other Latvian cities is characterized by high level of multilingualism population, determined by both the ethnic and linguistic situation in employment, education and entertainment, and other factors. Riga environment is distinctively a bilingual one, as opposed to that of the Latvian countryside and some rather monolingual Russian-language surroundings in Latgale.

At present Riga has 158 preschool educational establishments, in 75 of them instruction is in Latvia, in 32 preschool educational establishments the language of instruction is Latvian and Russian, while in 51 preschool

educational establishments children are instructed in Russian. The head of Riga City Council of Education, Culture and Sports Committee Eiženija Aldermane claims that some non-Latvians send their children to preschool educational establishments with Latvian language of instruction. In Riga currently there are no such preschool educational establishments, which are attended only by Latvian children. In minority preschool educational establishments 26 percent of all Latvian preschool children are educated [26]. One can agree with Margarita Kaltigina opinion that „the intensity of the exposure of various family children to language pluralism is different. For some, it is routine in a multicultural environment or family, for others: acquisition of foreign language (a few hours a week) in kindergarten...” [7, 1].

Currently the acquisition of the Latvian language in preschool educational establishments is held two or three times a week. One class for 3 year olds lasts for 12-15 minutes, for older children: 20 minutes. Ivars Balamovskis, the Head of Riga City Council Department of Education [26] believes that „the biggest problem in the minority preschool educational establishments is the use of Latvian by preschool pedagogues. Most of them do not have adequate knowledge of Latvian”. If nursery school pedagogue linguistic preparedness and language quality is not adequate – her speech is poor, children acquire language as they hear it, then learning process does not provide the child the opportunity to learn the proper Latvian language.

Realizing the transition to bilingual instruction in preschool educational establishments, the following issues should be addressed: 1) pedagogue education in the terms of knowing the Latvian language, 2) this fact must be taken into account in the development of primary school education programs.

Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012 – 2018) state that the acquisition of the Latvian language and its use should be supported from an early age, hence the state has to ensure the opportunity that in preschool educational establishments all minority children can acquire the Latvian language to such a level that they are able to start learning at schools with the Latvian language of instruction. It should be noted that of the same importance and topicality would be a comprehensive study on minority children’s Latvian language linguistic competence. Its results would provide an opportunity to create a high-quality preschool program for the acquisition of the Latvian language, which is not yet designed, as well as on its basis develop the program for the acquisition of the Latvian language for the pupils of the first grade of the primary school.

Joining the European Union opened new opportunities also for the Latvian people. Many Latvian people have gone to work abroad. Necessary and topical for the preservation of the Latvian language and culture is the research into such preschool age children’s Latvian, whose parents have settled in their host countries both for a short time and planning to stay there for long. An increasing number of Latvian youth is obtaining education in European and the world’s schools and universities, a lot of ethnically mixed

families are formed. Topical problem is the question, what happens to the Latvian language of those family children? What characteristics and qualities does it possess?

Situation in Scientific Research in Latvia

The first studies of the Latvian child language in Latvian linguistics are connected with the name of an outstanding scholar, Professor Velta Ruke-Dravina (1917 – 2003), who had conducted her research in Sweden since the 1950s, studying the language development of Latvian children living in exile. In Latvia people are much more familiar with her monographs: „*From Five Months to Five Years*” („*No pieciem mēnešiem līdz pieciem gadiem*”) [16] and „*A Latvian Girl Learns her First Language*” („*Latviešu meitene apgūst savu pirmo valodu*”) [17] as well as the work, which is available in the libraries of higher schools „*A Fairy Tale about Little Red Riding Hood as Told by Parents and Children*” („*Pasaka par Sarkangalvīti vecāku un bērna stāstījumā*”) [18]. In her works the scholar studies and analyses the formation of the Latvian child language as well as she focuses a bit on the manifestation of the child second language (Swedish) in speech.

In modern linguistics, a well-known linguist, a leading researcher of Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy Child's Language Research Centre (RTTEMA CLRC), Dace Markus has made a major contribution into the child language research, whose research was devoted to the feel for a native language, the similarities and differences in children's language, the children's creative linguistic activity, imaginative thinking and emotional aesthetic perception of the world. The scholar has summarized and analyzed the samples of the child language in her monographs: „*A Child's Language: From the First Cry to the Fairytale*” („*Bērna valoda: no pirmā kļiedziņa līdz pasakai*”) [9] and „*A Child Speaks in the World of Culture*” („*Bērns runā kultūras pasaulē*”) [10].

The other researchers of RTTEMA CLRC have carried out the targeted research in various directions of preschool children's language studies since 2005: Anna Vulane has studied the diminutives in the child's emotional experience and the Latvian children word-formation patterns; Inese Freiberga's studies touch upon the mother tongue devaluation, the preschool age and preliminary reading as the beginning of reading skills acquisition, the features of the literary work understanding at the older preschool age, the formation of a personal sense in acquisition of creative aspects of literature, the reflection of the world's picture in children's creative literary work, the belles-lettres impact on the older preschool children's personality development; Agrita Taurina has studied the speech formation and development conditions at the younger preschool age, 5 – 6 years old children's speech development and concepts of their social roles, the fairytale dramatization for the creativity development of the preschool children's personality; Agita Abele has dealt with the problem how to promote the preschoolers' dialogical speech development during sports play activities; Liga Aboltina and Ruta Inara Kanepēja have studied the children's literature

during the child's adaptation period in preschool; Daina Dzintere's research field is the language as a means of communication between preschoolers during the games; Tija Zirina writes about the finger games in Latvian folk songs as the sensory skills activator at the nursery age; Skaidrite Tubele studies the reading disorders and dyslexia, the interest for reading as an important factor of reading skills formation; Jekabs Raipulis deals with the creativity manifestation in childhood; Viktorija Kuzina studies the child language and its perfection possibilities in preschool, the games and their language linguistic statistical research as well as the use of foreign words in children's language [11].

RTTEMA CLRC works on the child's language database development, writing down, storing and classifying the specific vocabulary used by children. Such database would reflect the state of the Latvian language in the 21st century and its acquisition at the age group of children. In the future, the database will be very useful for scholars in their further research projects. For all that, in this database, there are a few facts of Latvian language used by the minority children, for this reason, it is necessary to supplement the joint children's language database with the speech facts of Latvian language of the minority children.

In the field of the preschoolers' language research very little research has been carried out in bilingualism studies direction. Basically, the speech facts of Latvian monolingual children are analyzed. Only a very few linguists have turned to the subject of bilingualism: Dace Markus has provided interesting speech samples of the vocabulary used by the minority children, she compared the diphthongs [ie] and [uo] phonology in the speech of Latvian and Lithuanian children; Baiba Trinite [21] has studied the lexical grammatical component development peculiarities in the group of 5 – 8 years old bilingual children. It should be mentioned that at the end of the previous century Indra Sinka, who lives in Great Britain, began to study the Latvian – English child's simultaneous bilingualism. At present Thomas Lewandowski studies the German – Latvian child's simultaneous bilingualism.

On the grounds of the analysis of the theoretical sources, one can draw a conclusion that in Latvian linguistics little attention is paid to the research of the Latvian language of bilingual children, only a few aspects of linguistics are studied. There are no such orders for studies in the country, however, this is a problem of multi-direction and multi-layer. While studying the Latvian language of preschoolers, the scholars have to be guided by and make use of the experience gained by other countries as well as their methods and techniques.

Contemporary trends in the research of early bilingualism in Europe and other countries around the world

In the world child language researchers pay more and more attention to the research of early bilingualism. The development of early bilingualism is characterized by two basic principles:

1. *Simultaneous* bilingualism: a child acquires two languages at once. This situation occurs when parents talk to children in their own languages.

2. *Sequential* bilingualism: a child first acquires one language and afterwards the other. The sequential bilingualism is associated with second language acquisition. It develops when after the acquisition of the first language the second language is acquired.

Linguists and psychologists working on bilingualism address these questions in different aspects with a variety of methods and types of data. For instance, current psycholinguistic models of the bilingual lexicon (Concept Mediation Model and the Word Association model [15], and Revised Hierachial Model [8]) take into consideration proficiency level, age and context of acquisition and have much great explanatory power. Psycholinguists also have used the latest functional neuroimaging technologies to investigate the cognitive organisation of languages in the bilingual brain [1]. The key research question is the relationship between the neurobiological substrate for multiple language and environmental influences such as age of acquisition, exposure and proficiency. In terms of acquisition of bilingual knowledge the question has emerged whether bilingual acquisition is the same as monolingual acquisition [13].

Child language researchers use cross-group (monolingual first language children, bilingual first language children, second language children and second language adults) comparisons to determine whether there are age, transfer and input effects. Regarding second language children, cross-group comparisons investigating maturational effects in L2 acquisition have focused on the route learners take in their acquisition process, the rate at which they progress, and the end state which they reach. Child L2 data is considered to provide a testing ground for theories on the effects of transfer. By comparing groups for whom the amount of input systematically varies (e.g., in different acquisitional context – instructed vs. naturalistic), researchers test the differing predictions made by nativist vs. usage-based theories of language acquisition about the role of the input [25] as well as pinpoint to what extent and for what target properties input effects exist [23]. At the same time smaller attention has been devoted to areas of individual differences – including personality, motivation, preferred language learning strategies, anxiety, gender. Paradis points out that „factors accounting for individual differences in acquisition have been studied extensively for monolingual child first language learners (.), but they have been studied much less in child second language (L2) learners” [14, p. 213].

Topical issues of how children acquire the second language are:

- when simultaneous bilingualism (bilingual first language acquisition (2L1) ends, and sequential bilingualism (second language acquisition (cL2)) starts;
- whether there is a critical age in preschool years, which limits the ability to learn the second language as the first language (L1);

- in what ways child simultaneous bilingual language (2L1) and child second language (cL2) acquisition differ;
- whether child L2 language acquisition develops in a manner more resembling monolingual L1 or adult L2 acquisition;
- which language categories more resemble child L1 acquisition, and which: adult L2 acquisition [5; 22].

The theoretical analysis of the sources allows drawing the conclusions that there are few studies comparing child L2 development with child simultaneous bilingual language (2L1) development. Understanding of the development of preschool children second language, and its acquisition is complex and often inaccurate:

- several researchers in their studies do not distinguish between simultaneous and sequential bilingualism, including all in the same category: „bilingual”. As a result, preschool second language learners’ data are collected and analyzed together with simultaneous bilingualism children data;

- age groups are not strictly separate: some children are older than preschoolers age groups (over 7 years), when they are for the first time being exposed to second language exposure, and / or in the moment of data collection.

Child second language research mostly is longitudinal. From the research methods the most widely used are research observation (audio and video recordings) and the methods of the analysis of acoustic instrumental speech. Both child second language comprehension and production skills are researched. For the assessment of general language skills, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic competences specific tests have been developed and adapted. Data are collected using child spontaneous speech, picture description, sentence building according to the pattern, parent surveys, researcher-designed tests and other methods [6; 24]. The most planned and already used research methods in Latvia are research observation, questionnaires, theoretic analysis of interviews, writing down and classification of vocabulary in form of dictionaries, as well as instrumental speech analysis methods [11].

Other Countries’ Experience in the Studies of the Preschoolers’

Latvian Language

When conducting the research in Latvian, the theoretical basis must be formed from the point of view of other countries, applying and adapting their developed methods. Since Latvian as the second language (L2) may both include and exclude the child’s previous knowledge of Latvian, it is necessary to develop a parent survey, in order to determine the child’s previous experience of learning the Latvian language, as well as an integrated interview for children, in order to clarify the level of Latvian language skills. So that the data are accurate, the simultaneous and L2 learners must be set apart. It is necessary to adapt or develop the data collection methods and the assessment tests of lexical, grammatical and pragmatics competences of the Latvian language meant for preschoolers, with respect to the preschool educational programs, peculiarities of the children’s development and linguistic factors of

the Latvian language. It is essential to inquire about the development of the Latvian language of the preschool minority children living in Latvia in informal surroundings (naturalistic acquisitional context) – in the Latvian children's group of preschool educational establishments, and in formal surroundings (instructed acquisitional context) - in the minority children's group of preschool educational establishments, who are learning Latvian 2-3 times per week at Latvian lessons. It is advisable to compare these children's language with the Latvian language of the simultaneous bilingual children.

Conclusions

- Historically, as a result of globalization and Europeanisation processes in Latvia, especially in Riga, a high level of inhabitants' multilingualism has developed, there is a great number of mixed families and bilingual children as well as a large proportion of the minority children, who do not speak Latvian. The Latvian diasporas are being formed in other countries of the world.

- The lack of linguistic training and language quality of the minority nursery schools teachers do not provide an opportunity for a child to master the proper Latvian language. When passing on to bilingual training in preschool establishments 1) it is necessary to resolve the issue of the teachers' education in the Latvian language mastering; 2) this fact must be taken into account in the development of primary school education programs.

- In Latvian linguistics, at the heart of preschoolers' child language research, the monolingual Latvian children's speech facts are being analyzed, only a few linguistic aspects are being studied, there is some deficiency in the studies of bilingual research direction. Nowadays, this is a multi-direction, multi-layer and topical problem.

- When carrying out the preschoolers' research in Latvian, the theoretical basis must be created from the standpoint offered by other countries, using and adapting their developed methods.

- The preschool environment is favourable for such studies for the reason that there the targeted training takes place and it is an observation environment of equal ranking.

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Томме-Юкевица І. Проблематика дослідження мови двомовних дітей дошкільного віку

Вивчення дошкільного навчання мові дітей була предметом обширних досліджень за кордоном впродовж багатьох років. Воно зростає і розвивається в Латвії порівняно недавно. В результаті діяльності Центру дослідження дитячої мови Ризької Академії педагогіки і управління освітою вивчення дитячої мови в Латвії розвинулося в цілеспрямовану і стабільну область досліджень. Слід, проте, відзначити, що не існує яких-небудь значних досліджень по двомовних дітях дошкільного віку, для яких латиська мова є першою і / або другою мовою. Метою статті є розгляд питання про недавні дослідження про розвиток першої і другої мови у двомовних дітей дошкільного віку в Латвії і інших країнах світу, аби отримати уявлення про нинішню ситуацію, проблеми і тенденції в цій області. У статті дається короткий огляд найбільш вживаних методів дослідження і збору даних і пропозиції про розробку відповідних інструментів для оцінки знань латиської мови у двомовних дітей дошкільного віку.

Ключові слова: двомовні діти дошкільного віку, дослідження дитячої мови, засвоєння другої мови дітям.

Томме-Юкевица И. Проблематика исследования языка двуязычных детей дошкольного возраста

Изучение дошкольного обучения языку детей была предметом обширных исследований за рубежом на протяжении многих лет. Оно растет и развивается в Латвии сравнительно недавно. В результате деятельности Центра исследования детской речи Рижской Академии педагогической и управления образованием изучение детской речи в Латвии развилось в целенаправленную и стабильную область исследований.