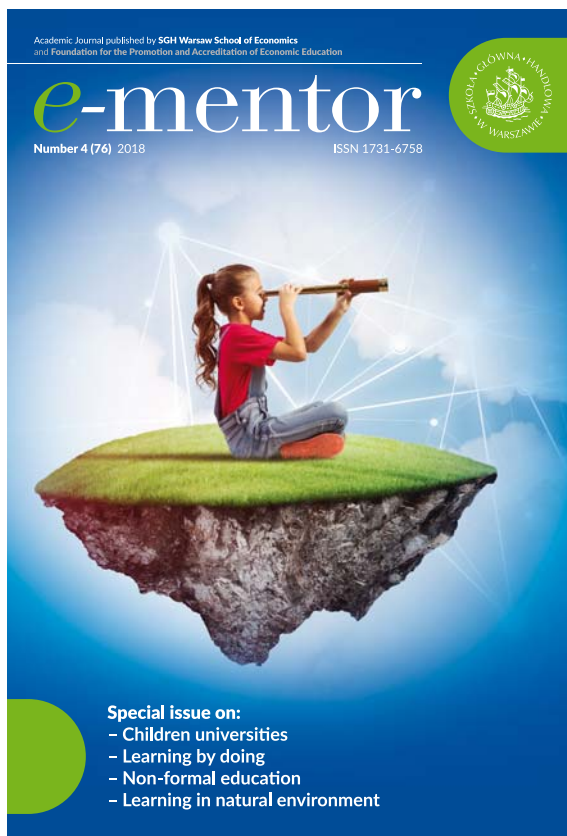


e-mentor

DWUMIESIĘCZNIK SZKOŁY GŁÓWNEJ HANDLOWEJ W WARSZAWIE
WSPÓŁWYDAWCA: FUNDACJA PROMOCJI I AKREDYTACJI KIERUNKÓW EKONOMICZNYCH

2018, nr 4 (76)



Agnieszka Szlachta, *Developing the child's multilingualism: the concept of concurrent foreign language learning at the Mały Poliglota Children's University*, „e-mentor” 2018, nr 4(76), s. 41–49, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15219/em76.1376>

Developing the child's multilingualism: the concept of concurrent foreign language learning at the Mały Poliglota Children's University¹



Agnieszka Szlachta

The aim of this article is to present theoretical and methodological assumptions that serve as the basis for the concept of concurrent foreign language learning at the children's university. The paper presents also a case study of the implementation of these assumptions at the Mały Poliglota Children's University² operating since 2012 at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Szczecin (Poland).

This publication constitutes a summary of six-year-long both conceptual and implementation works conducted by the author. It also includes information on the progress in current actions and plans concerning future editions of the project. The paper provides a well-organized collection of the author's views previously expressed i.a., at the First Congress of Children's Universities held in Warsaw in 2014 and during the public consultation at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. It also includes some new concepts of and perspective for the early development of the child's and young people's multilingualism provided in academic education conditions. However, in the author's intent, the article does not constitute merely a collection of theoretical considerations but also indicates possibilities for practical application of specific concepts. It may prove to be of high interest to language teacher trainers, authors of foreign language teaching tools as well as philology students.

Introduction

The Mały Poliglota Children's University is the first university for the youngest individuals in the history of the University of Szczecin that has been continuously operating at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Szczecin since 2012. The Children's University was founded by Ewa Komorowska and Agnieszka Szlachta. The two scholars propose a model of education, the

innovativeness of which, among others, consists in the parallel learning of two foreign languages belonging to different groups of the Indo-European family. Moreover, the programme includes courses in the culture and history of the countries where those languages are spoken³. In total, there are already about 800 graduates from Szczecin, cities in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and German border boroughs.

The work and experience gained at the Children's University have helped E. Komorowska and A. Szlachta to obtain two grants. In the academic year 2016/2017, the Mały Poliglota Children's University was one of the winning projects in the contest organized by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education called 'Uniwersytet Młodego Odkrywcy' (No 0013/UMO/2017/30, funding: 40 000 PLN)⁴. In the following academic year, the Mały Poliglota Children's University was one of the projects financed as part of the contest organized by the National Centre for Research and Development called 'Uniwersytet Młodego Odkrywcy' (No POWR.03.01.00-IP.08-00-UMO/17, funding: 485 000 PLN). Its aim is, among others, teaching two foreign languages to children, assuming gender equity and equal educational opportunities. The said project will last until 2020.

The concept of the Mały Poliglota Children's University was developed with due account of the latest research in the field of language education. Recently, the phenomenon of multilingualism has become increasingly important in considerations on the reality of the EU community. In particular, we refer here to the assumptions of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a document put together by the Council of Europe.

* University of Szczecin

¹ The project is co-financed by the European Union as part of the European Social Fund, Action 3.1 Competences in higher education, Axis III: Higher education for economy and development POWER 2014–2020; project no. POWR.03.01.00-00-U032/17.

² For more detailed information on the project, please visit the website: www.malypoliglota.usz.edu.pl.

³ The program, including teaching communicative competence in two languages, is based on the monograph *Pragmatyka dyrektywnych aktów mowy w języku niemieckim, polskim i rosyjskim* co-authored by E. Komorowska (Komorowska, 2008).

⁴ The report concerning the implementation of the project including an extensive photographic documentation was issued as a printed publication: Komorowska, Szlachta, 2017.

Theoretical assumption on multilingualism

In reference to the current state of knowledge on language education, the author assumes that it is most beneficial to start second language learning at the age of about 6–8 years⁵. A child who commences learning his or her second language in early education period uses natural competences that allow him or her to attain functional bilingualism. The sooner a child starts learning a foreign language, the higher and more permanent skills he or she acquires. Magdalena Lisiecka-Czop among the benefits of early foreign language learning indicates, i.a., a better grasp of pronunciation and intonation of a given foreign language and acquisition of phonological patterns (which has a positive effect on learning subsequent languages in the future), positive attitude towards other languages and cultures, and improved general intellectual development of the child (Lisiecka-Czop, 2014, p. 45).

The author's experience proves that when the second language is taught without language immersion conditions, it cannot be called bilingualism as it does not stand for an equal knowledge of both foreign languages, it is rather 'incomplete' bilingualism. Therefore, it seems justified that not only bilingualism but also multilingualism should be supported (cf. Szpotowicz, 2011, pp. 131–134).

It is also worth to stress that the educational offer of the Mały Poliglota Children's University stems from social needs. Such expectations are visible in, among others, the increasingly growing number of inquiries sent by parents to the research unit the author represents (the Faculty of Philology, the University of Szczecin). People ask about the foreign language teaching offer for children aged five years and more. It results partly from the belief that academic⁶ teaching is more 'professional' than the services offered on the market. To some extent also from significant growth of parents' awareness of the usefulness of specific language skills as well as a highly favorable assessment of actions related to bi- and multilingualism and with learning about new cultures⁷. The background for such thinking could be a shift observed currently in global politics (from assimilation to multiculturalism) and perceiving multilingualism as a commonly accepted standard⁸:

Over the last decades, exchange in the field of economy, technology, science, education, art and entertainment (both real and virtual) and mobility of societies (development of tourism, migrations) have intensified, triggering a growing process of international integration. The sine qua non for this integration is the capacity to communicate, which for the vast majority of people implies the necessity of using fluently languages other than their mother tongue. (...) Perhaps, only a few years ago multilingualism was considered a non-standard phenomenon, yet today, it is monolingualism that is perceived as an atypical phenomenon on a worldwide scale. (Chlopek, 2011, p. 23). In a 2012 study, as much as 72% of residents of Europe responded that a citizen of the European Union should know more than one foreign language. Among Poles, this rate was even higher and was estimated to stand at 80% (Tutka, 2014, p. 213).

In accordance with the new Polish core curriculum introduced for 2017/2018, at the initial stages of education (primary school grades 1–6) learning one foreign language is compulsory. In turn, grade 7 students and onward learn two foreign languages, and it has been marked in the document that *one of the two compulsory languages might be taught in a higher number of hours, especially in bilingual schools or classes*⁹. The core curriculum also states that (...) *every student should have the right to continue to learn the same foreign language (s)he has chosen as the main language, at all the stages of education from year one at the primary school to the final year of the secondary school (throughout 12 or 13 years)*¹⁰. A secondary-school student can choose, however, another language than those he or she used to learn and can start learning it from the very beginning.

Thus, at the end of the third stage of education the language skills of an individual should correspond to the following levels described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages:

- the first foreign language – level B1+/B2+ (depending on the type of education: basic level/advanced level) to C1 level for those who attended bilingual classes or bilingual schools;
- the second foreign language – level A2+/B1+;
- the second and the third foreign language – level A1+/A2+.

Referring to the early Polish papers which have been written nearly 30 years ago concerning the bilingual

⁵ Recommendations of the Council of Europe on early foreign language teaching cover, i.a., allowing access to learning of one foreign language to children from the age of 8 years (Sopata, 2008, p. 317).

⁶ Teaching is provided by foreign language instructors who deliver classes for philology students on a daily basis. The classes take place in teaching rooms at a higher education institution.

⁷ Here, it is also worth mentioning the growing expectations of parents with regard to the teaching process and the foreign language teacher, since (...) *the pupil's learning is expected to be easy, pleasant and effective. In other words, the teacher is expected to teach using techniques that ensure the comfort of fast acquisition of the material and long-lasting memorization while allowing this knowledge to be instantly put into practice, and all this with the least effort on the part of the learner* (Marcinkowska-Bachlińska, 2017, p. 26).

⁸ An interesting study on the attitude of Poles towards multilingualism is the following title: Przyklenk, J., 2014, pp. 231–250. One of the examples provided by the author is the initially negative connotations of adjectives *dwujęzyczny* (bilingual), *wielojęzyczny* (multilingual), *różnojęzyczny* (plurilingual), which were connected to what is alien to human nature. Moreover, these terms were ascribed a metaphoric meaning of *obłudny* (deceitful), *falszywy* (false), *nieszczery* (insincere). (Ibidem, p. 234).

⁹ <https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/podstawa-programowa-%E2%80%93-jezyk-obcy.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibidem.

approach to foreign language learning (Kaczmarek, 1988), one can find the basic assumption of the new (at that time) approach to foreign language teaching. Such an approach that has been successfully used in many countries points, among others, to the significance of the rules of inter-lingual transfer of grammatical structures and semantic as well as pragmatic translations. In that case, however, the direction of the transmission was from a mother tongue to the foreign language. It should be noted though, that initially, researchers had a negative approach to bilingualism, indicating, its negative impact on an individual's psyche. It was not until the 1960s that a specific breakthrough occurred (Nott-Bower, 2014, p. 59). In turn, modern research indicates numerous advantages that come with early foreign language learning.

The concept of concurrent foreign language learning

In the method adopted at the Mały Poliglota Children's University, the second foreign language that is introduced belongs to a different language group (with a significant typological distance), allowing participants of the project to notice significant semantic, grammatical and pragmatic differences¹¹. The emergence of inter-lingual influences should be considered obvious¹². In this case, much depends on the capacity to notice both similarities and differences between languages, which shall determine proper 'shift' of language codes. Concurrent learning of two foreign languages from diverse language groups will also allow one to eliminate (or at least limit) the interference of the subsequent language, which may have an effect on confusing the linguistic content transferred as part of the language education process. Here, it should

be noted that with every new language one starts to learn, more and more complex correlations and new types of impact emerge. They are presented in the form of a diagram by Zofia Chłopek in her paper on multilingualism (Figure 1.).

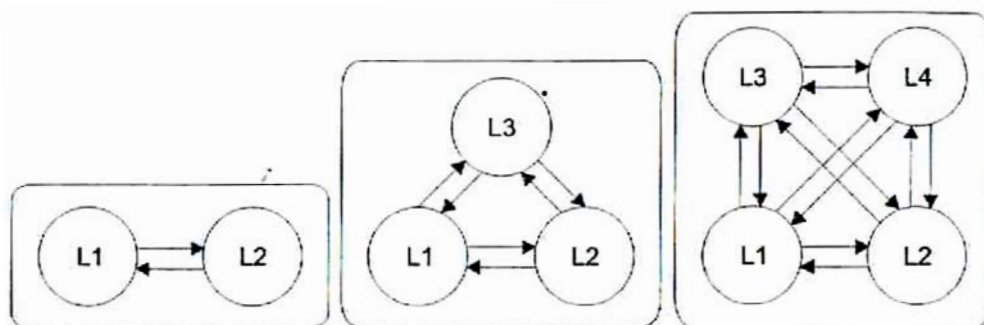
Nonetheless, bearing in mind that each type of communication in a foreign language is largely based also on comparing specific cultural systems (Kukowicz-Żarska, 2011, p. 39), foreign language teaching at the Mały Poliglota Children's University is also conducted with due account of historical and cultural aspects of the selected linguistic areas.

The main idea of the project's creators is to promote and develop bi- and multilingualism of children and young people aged 6 to 16 years in West Pomerania region. The initiative gives the young learners an opportunity to participate in regular, highly effective, professional language classes organized by the university and conducted by qualified foreign language instructors – academic teachers. The curricula for the classes have been prepared in a way that they allow combining the concurrent foreign language teaching with activities oriented on the cultural and general development of the young learners with due account of the specificity of the West Pomeranian region.

The Mały Poliglota Children's University project involves improving foreign language skills, that are crucial for the development of the economy and labor market of West Pomerania as well as aims to shape proper social attitudes based on the values such as tolerance, respect, openness. In particular, the Mały Poliglota Children's University project pursues the following objectives:

1. to spark cognitive curiosity and encourage obtaining knowledge, to stimulate intellectual and social development of the young generation;

Figure 1. Inter-lingual impact in the mind of a bi-/tri-/quadrilingual person. L1, L2, L3, L4 – subsequent languages



Source: Chłopek, 2011, p. 140.

¹¹ The inadequacy of specific structures in selected languages (Polish, Russian and German) was depicted with more depth by, i.a., E. Komorowska (Komorowska, 2008, pp. 40–53).

¹² Their occurrence may be justified by the fact that (...) *language systems of a bi-/multilingual person are stored in the same cerebral structures of procedural memory and declarative memory, and are linked to one system of conceptual representations. When the target language is used, elements or features of the non-target language (non-target languages) are activated, the effects of which can be observed during production and reception in the target language both in verbal and non-verbal actions* (Chłopek, 2011, p. 139). The author lists numerous phenomena that stem from the mutual impact of foreign languages: erroneous loanwords, semantic broadening, errors caused by the use of the so-called false friends, loan translations or transfer on various linguistic planes (Ibidem, pp. 148–150).

2. to teach two foreign languages concurrently using modern methods and to promote cultural and historical knowledge regarding specific countries, to promote openness to new cultures and respect for diversity;
3. to inspire creative thinking, to perfect concentration and memorization skills, to gradually implement individual mode of work;
4. to integrate the local community with the academic institution by creating conditions for conducting organized non-school educational activities;
5. to equalize educational opportunities in various social groups and age groups, and among people with disabilities;
6. to encourage the growth of the university regarding the fulfillment of the third mission by establishing cooperation with the environment, the commitment to the social development process;
7. to promote the idea of lifelong learning, children's participation in the life of academic community as the first step in the world of knowledge and science;
8. to promote awareness about the European Union, specific member states, West Pomerania and the University of Szczecin.

These objectives remain closely related to the implementation of the language policy of the European Union, which aims to promote bi- and multilingualism. Specific objectives of the learning process that entail both knowledge and skills take into account the specificity of a given group and are evaluated and verified in the course of the teaching process based on feedback received.

It should be also noted that competences acquired by the project participants will undoubtedly be only partial competences and the organizers do not face the pupils with a model of measurable achievements they should have upon completing the curriculum. The aim of the education system adopted by Mały Poliglota is primarily to acquire communication skills. Here, one can refer to the statement that, *the specific fragmentation (...) of the linguistic competence stems from the functional aspect present at the level of learning goals* (Zajac, 2011, p. 28). Narrowing down curricula and adjusting them to the level and needs of the project participants may be referred to as specialization. Shaping cultural competences is also significant, as they will allow foreign language users to communicate

not only correctly but also in a manner specific for a given community.

In the author's opinion, fulfilment of this objective is to a great extent influenced by integration workshops held during the trips to Germany. The possibility to organize international exchange is ensured under cooperation agreements concluded between the Faculty of Philology of the University of Szczecin and border institutions and schools¹³. The trips allow both cooperating units to fulfil common objectives. In principle, it is assumed that an intercultural competence is largely independent of the taught language, yet it still requires to be structured to some extent in specific curricula.

Choosing foreign languages to be taught

One of the author's key tasks is to determine the rank of and the demand for specific languages taught in a specific country and region¹⁴. Szczecin is a city in Poland located on the linguistic and cultural border, only several kilometers away from Germany, which also maintains ongoing contact with Scandinavia and considers international cooperation to be one of its strategic objectives. Apart from social needs specified as described above, one should also mention individual needs (e.g., contacts maintained by family members with representatives of other nations, international marriages, migration). Assuming that the Polish curriculum of foreign language teaching meets social needs to some extent, we cannot expect it to fulfill individual needs in this regard as well.

At present, the educational offer of the Mały Poliglota Children's University involves six foreign languages, three of which are taught as the leading languages in the language group (English, German and Norwegian) whereas the other three are introduced as additional languages in the language group (Russian, Spanish, Italian). In each group, two foreign languages are taught concurrently. Importantly, the number of hours of the leading language classes is twice as high as the number of hours of the additional language classes. The following groups based on the pairs of languages have been created:

- a group with English and Russian,
- a group with German and Spanish,
- a group with Norwegian and Italian.

Educational profiles remain compliant with the current European language policy guidelines regarding foreign languages since the author fully agrees with

¹³ The author undertook international cooperation with Oder-Welse Office, Gutshof 1, 16278 Pinnow (Germany). The cooperation involved a children's trip to Pinnow and participation in intercultural classes as well as participation of the personnel of the Mały Poliglota Children's University in public consultations on the development of Polish-German course books for children.

¹⁴ To this end, one can refer to the concept of the communicative value of language (*wartość komunikacyjna języka*) introduced by Waldemar Pfeiffer. The communicative value of a given language is said to be affected by relations between specific countries, the type and frequency of contact. Moreover, one can indicate the significance of historical, political and economic relations (cf. Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 207). This can be explained by the assumption that *The progressive integration and the related disappearance of borders and extensive daily cooperation increase the communicative value of one's neighbor* (Ibidem, p. 208).

Developing the child's multilingualism...

the statement (which applies to date) that *the integrating multilingual Europe needs solutions that ensure effective communication* (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 204). For the author, the most significant are, however, studies dedicated to the specificity of foreign language teaching in West Pomerania with a particular focus on teaching children and young people. E. Komorowska, a researcher from Szczecin, notes that (...) *the youngest generation that enters the world has much more improved linguistic skills than the former generation, which is the effect of Poland's openness to Europe and related linguistic education possibilities* (Komorowska, 2006, pp. 343–344). When analyzing the grounds for introducing specific languages to the educational offer of preschools and schools in Szczecin, Komorowska claims that English – due to its international rank – should be considered obligatory¹⁵. In turn, due to the geographic location of Szczecin, she points to the necessity of an increased focus on German and rightly postulates that the educational offer should also be extended to include Scandinavian languages – Norwegian and Swedish.

To a large extent, the author also bases the choice of languages included in the offer of the Mały Poliglota Children's University on current reports regarding linguistic competences both with regard to the demand in a given investigated region and the current supply. For instance, when developing the educational offer for the academic year 2018/2019, she took a due consideration of the data from the report of Szczecin City Hall titled *Kompetencje językowe Szczecina* (Linguistic Competences of Szczecin) (Szczecin 2017) she co-authored¹⁶. Considering the above-mentioned findings, at present, the leading languages at the Mały Poliglota Children's University are English, German and Norwegian. The choice of the first one seems obvious given that English serves as the modern *lingua franca*. The other two foreign languages have been selected on the account of the geographical and social specificity of the West Pomeranian region and regional studies.

Additional foreign languages introduced to the offer of the Mały Poliglota Children's University are the result of the author's previous six-year-long experience and reflect the demand for non-school foreign language classes in Szczecin. Every year the enrolments for the Mały Poliglota Children's University show that Russian, Spanish and Italian are the most wanted foreign languages among the candidates¹⁷.

Responding to such needs allows classifying the approach taken by the organizers of Mały Poliglota as actions aiming to shape multilingualism¹⁸ in line with the stance promoted in the European Union's directives. Here, mainly due to the limited timeframe of non-school education in the curriculum of the children's university, instead of attempting to perfect the knowledge of one language, the pursued objective of the classes is to help the learners to obtain the communicative skills in two or more foreign languages.

The educational offer prepared in the project fills a significant gap in multilingual teaching of children residing in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The author also puts a great emphasis on showing the positive diversity of specific countries, regions, and most of all, people of different nationalities. The fundamental objective is hence not only to teach a foreign language but also to raise among the region inhabitants the awareness regarding the culture of one's own country and foreign culture from an early age.

Organizing language classes and teaching methods

Owing to the financial aid obtained from the European fund, classes provided as part of the project are free of charge. Enrolment is conducted in line with the principles of equality and equal opportunity policy. The project will be carried out with the same number of male and female participants and the equal number of individuals living in urban and rural areas. Out of the total number of places 2% are reserved for the disabled, and children from disadvantaged families are accepted out of turn. The project does not include any additional enrolment requirements (such as knowledge of specific foreign languages). The enrolment limit for the academic year 2018/2019 was 180 participants. The students of the Mały Poliglota Children's University are children and young people aged 6 to 16 years. Classes take place in small groups created concerning both the age and the level of knowledge of specified foreign languages. The groups have up to 15 students each to ensure efficient work during the classes and monitoring of each pupil's learning outcomes.

Individualization of the teaching process is one of the vital issues for the organizers. Here, the fact that participants belong to groups created both regarding

¹⁵ However, Komorowska notes that the general level of knowledge of foreign languages in the Polish society cannot be considered satisfactory, which is a significant obstacle for adult Poles who are experts in specific fields, e.g. when participating in international business operations, during the business trips or when taking supervisory posts abroad (cf. Komorowska, 2006, p. 343).

¹⁶ The report is available online: www.invest.szczecin.eu/download/file/fid/322.

¹⁷ At the time of enrolment, we also suggested the following languages: French, Chinese, Japanese, Czech. The inhabitants of the region proved to be less interested in these languages, still, pilot groups were launched. We plan to extend our educational offer to include other languages.

¹⁸ Here, one can refer to the concept of the so-called model of receptive multilingualism proposed by the Modern Language Society in Germany in the 1990s, according to which communication takes place largely based on the mother tongue, with the assumption that several other languages may be comprehended. Though it may be plausible, such an approach seems insufficient to the Author (cf. Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 205).

the age and their familiarity with foreign languages is essential. Determining age brackets is crucial. The said ranges usually take the following form:

- group 1: participants aged 6 to 7 years¹⁹;
- group 2: participants aged 8 to 10 years;
- group 3: participants aged 11 to 13 years;
- group 4: participants aged 14 to 16 years.

As part of the project, three tests will take place; language skills test for assessing the level of already possessed knowledge (before the commencement of the project), the knowledge test in the course of the classes (two tests per one academic year) and the final assessment of knowledge (after project completion). The authors of the tests are academic teachers, employees of the Faculty of Philology of the University of Szczecin, who also carry them out and check the results. The teaching efficiency evaluation system will include statistical analysis and reports prepared after each stage of the project implementation (results of a study of competences). All these data will be available to the public after completion of the project.

Classes conducted as part of the project implemented by the Mały Poliglota Children's University have a form of foreign language courses, history and culture classes and educational language workshops. During language classes, the so-called communicative approach is adopted supplemented by intercultural objectives²⁰. The objective is hence to develop language competences that one needs to establish social contact adequate for a given communicative situation. The applied *teaching methods and measures should allow the communication between the sender and the receiver, which despite taking place in staged conditions should resemble natural conversation referring to authentic situations and stemming from current communicative needs* (Kukowicz-Żarska, 2011, p. 38). The author inclines to adopt the so-called natural approach to foreign language teaching according to which *a grammar competence is developed while using the language for communication; it cannot be attained solely by learning grammatical rules* (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 88).

In practice, the author understands these assumptions as the necessity of creating by foreign language instructors the conditions similar to those of natural communicative situations. That implies the high importance of using visual aids and props, which gives the project participants the possibility to engage in creative actions and react spontaneously. Such an ap-

proach leads to forming an actual difference in information levels between the interlocutors (Komorowska, 2004, p. 27), and not solely to the construction of grammatically correct utterances.

It should be stressed that the style of working in each group is determined by the age and level of linguistic and communicative competences of the project participants²¹. Due to significant differences (such as writing and reading skills), the groups are to a considerable extent run by language instructors in an individual manner. The children who have hardly acquired writing and reading skills learn mostly by listening (e.g., to songs, rhymes) and by using their natural mimicking skills also attain objectives related to speaking skills. Enrichment of vocabulary and learning new simple sentence structures constitutes the fundamental aim in the youngest groups of the project participants. Here, multiple repetitions are necessary to facilitate consolidation of the language material. The choice of the forms and meanings taught, must correspond to the children's knowledge resulting from concrete thinking specific for that age (introduction of names of objects, people, indicating elements of the surroundings, creating situations natural for the child, etc.). Also, due to the need for physical activity that manifests primarily while playing, various forms of expression need to be introduced. The possibilities of diversifying the teaching methods increase while working with teenagers – here, the fundamental task is still to ensure effective communication in typical situations, yet with due account of reading and writing texts. There is a greater focus on the grammatical form of a given utterance, while the content may involve abstract thinking capacity of learners at this age. However, the language instructor faces new challenges: students are reluctant to fulfill school duties, peer pressure starts making an impact on them, and they manifest the need of being noticed (more on this issue: Komorowska, 2004, pp. 32–35). Here, the approach adopted by the foreign language instructor becomes crucial, as he or she should take actions to ensure proper ambiance that will make the learning process free from fear.

The Mały Poliglota Children's University has its own highly-qualified teaching staff who conduct classes in line with original curricula using cutting-edge foreign language teaching methods. The staff comprises experts in foreign language teaching – academic teachers, employees of the Faculty of

¹⁹ The main criterion for determining the first group with the smallest age bracket is the assumption that the children admitted to this group are acquiring only living language skills and have not developed reading or writing skills yet (cf. Komorowska, 2004, p. 32).

²⁰ In the studies, the following terms can be found: *postkomunikacyjna faza dydaktyki języków obcych* (the post-communicative stage of foreign language teaching) (cf. Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 77), *post-metodyczna dydaktyka języków obcych* (the post-methodological foreign language teaching) (Jodłowiec, Niżegorodcew, 2008, p. 15). The approach we represent may be also classified into the group of the so-called indirect methods.

²¹ These competences involve in particular: *perfecting speech perception, acquiring grammatical rules, perfecting language production, comprehending utterances and pragmatics, i.e. using language for various purposes in social situations* (Trempała, 2011, p. 215).

Developing the child's multilingualism...

Philology of the University in Szczecin. The criteria for choosing foreign language instructors to run classes as part of the project involve in particular: education in Philology in a given foreign language and experience in working with children and adolescents (2 years as a minimum). It is required that individuals who conduct foreign language courses are also familiar with the second foreign language taught concurrently in a given group. The subject of classes and the level of difficulty are adjusted to the learner's age, while the language used by the teacher ensures that the young students understand the information provided.

Each course cycle starts with an official inauguration with the presence of the authorities of the University of Szczecin and its Faculty of Philology. During the meeting, young students receive specially prepared student's logbooks and starter kits (t-shirts, notebooks, and ball pens, bags or backpacks, identity cards).

For the academic year 2018/2019, as many as 22 four-hour meetings are foreseen. Each young student will hence participate in 88 teaching hours. The classes take place only on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in line with an established timetable.

Each meeting has a fixed structure: two teaching hours of the leading language (English, German, Norwegian), one teaching hour of the additional language (Russian, Spanish, Italian), one hour of history and culture classes or language workshops. The historical and cultural parts of the classes pertain to history, geography, social studies, and the culture of the area where the language being taught is spoken. The educational language workshops involve classes that will allow linguistic and cultural competences to be put to practical use. These will be integrated and multi-disciplinary. The last of the indicated forms of education entails the introduction of knowledge on specific linguistic areas, while formerly acquired language skills are practiced (by role play, making visual artworks, etc.). Hence, it is assumed that the project participant, as a result, will acquire linguistic competences, and not only learn the specific foreign languages²².

In previous years, each semester ended with a trip to a cultural institution (a theatre, a museum or a cinema) or an editorial office (be it the press, radio or TV) in Szczecin, or an interesting natural site in West Pomerania. In subsequent years our little students had the opportunity to visit the philharmonic hall in Szczecin, to meet the editorial staff of Radio Szczecin, to take a look behind the curtains of Pleciuga Puppetry or to see the National Museum exhibition. Among the other attractions offered to them was the visit to Eureka center of interactive experiments, the display at Zajezdnia Sztuki of the Museum of

Technology and Communication or participation in an expedition being part of the project called 'Droga do lasu – zachodniopomorskie' (A Path into the Forest: West Pomerania).

Starting from the academic year 2017/2018, trips to Germany are organized to allow participation in intercultural integration meetings. The destination venues are schools in Germany in border areas, which concluded cooperation agreements with the Faculty of Philology at the University of Szczecin. Another trip will take place at the end of the current edition of the project. As part of the meeting, Polish and German children will take part together in integration teaching classes that will broaden their linguistic and cultural knowledge.

According to the author, the international cooperation with border schools and institutions allows practical usage of linguistic and cultural skills acquired by the project participants for communicating with their peers. It may also be conducive to overcoming the anxiety of talking in a foreign language.

Presentation of the achievements in linguistic and cultural education of children from specific groups (verbal-musical performances in foreign languages, an exhibition of visual artworks) constitutes the summary of the project. The theatre actors and visual artists invited to cooperate within the project will provide the necessary support for young students while working on the presentations and performances.

Outcomes of classes and additional actions

A permanent outcome of the project is enhanced linguistic competences in two selected foreign languages as well as improved social and cultural competences of children and teenagers. The participation in the project supports also identifying individual skills and talents, which in turn may help the young people to choose the educational profile in subsequent stages of education. The young students also have the one-of-a-kind opportunity to meet an academic environment.

The project participants who have completed education in one language group can enroll in the next academic year to another language group. Thus, by completing the full three-year curriculum at the Mały Poliglota Children's University, children and adolescents have the opportunity to learn or develop the command of three foreign languages at an intermediate level (English, German, Norwegian) and additionally, they can learn the other three foreign languages at a basic level (Russian, Spanish, Italian). This offer makes the Mały Poliglota Children's University stand out not only in the children's language class market in Szczecin but also in Poland.

²² The familiarity with a foreign language is identified with acquisition of its vocabulary and grammar. Linguistic competences are considered in a much broader context and cover particularly lexical, semantic, grammatical, orthoepic, phonological and orthographical skills. The difference between the acquisition of linguistic competences and the familiarity with foreign languages is discussed in more depth in, among others (Zajac, 2011, pp. 22–24).

Starting from the academic year 2014/2015 – concurrently with the classes for the participants of the project implemented by the Mały Poliglota Children's University – there are language courses organized for parents/guardians of the little students. Each year, we accept about 100 adult participants. The classes take place at the same time and in the same location as the classes for children. The university's offering includes the following foreign languages: English, German, Spanish, Italian, French, Russian at different proficiency levels. These actions are compliant with the idea of lifelong learning. Additionally, starting from the academic year 2018/2019, free classes in the form of workshops for parents are organized to promote the development of parenting and social skills that cover knowledge in the field of pedagogy, psychology, and teaching methods.

Conclusions

Referring once again to the findings of contemporary researchers, *it can be foreseen with a sufficient degree of probability that teaching third and subsequent languages and multilingualism will become a global phenomenon in the near future, and a polyglot will become a global norm, and not only monolingual individuals but also bilingual ones will be a minority* (Chłopek, 2011, p. 26). For that very reason, there are at present works conducted with the aim to broaden the offer of foreign languages taught concurrently at the Mały Poliglota Children's University. In the previous years, pilot language groups including Chinese and Japanese were formed. The methods applied in our project have proven successful also in the case of teaching those languages. Additionally, we have offered single French and Czech classes. After evaluating the past achievements of the project participants, the authors of the project intend to expand the offer to include new groups with Chinese and Czech (with Chinese being the leading language) as well as with French and Japanese (French as a leading language). The language groups mentioned above are currently tested, and the learning achievements will be presented in subsequent studies.

References

- Brzeziński, J. (1987). *Nauczanie języków obcych dzieci*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.
- Chłopek, Z. (2011). *Nabywanie języków trzecich i kolejnych oraz wielojęzyczność. Aspekty psycholingwistyczne (i inne)*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Erenc-Grygoruk, G. (2013). *Nauczanie języków obcych w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*. Kraków: Impuls.
- Jodłowiec, M., Niżegorodcew, A. (2008). W stronę post-metodycznej dydaktyki języków obcych. In M. Jodłowiec, A. Niżegorodcew (Eds.), *W stronę nowoczesnego nauczania języków obcych* (pp. –21). Kraków: Tertium.
- Kaczmarowski, S.P. (1988). *Wstęp do bilingwalnego ujęcia nauki języka obcego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.
- Komorowska, E. (2006). Nauczanie języków obcych na Pomorzu Zachodnim w perspektywie Nowej Europy. In S. Flejterski, J. Jasnowska, P. Lewandowski, W. Olejniczak (Eds.), *Energia Pomorza Zachodniego* (pp. 343–348). Szczecin: Hogben s.c.
- Komorowska, E. (2008). *Pragmatyka dyrektywnych aktów mowy w języku polskim*. Szczecin–Rostock: Print Group Sp. z o.o.
- Komorowska, E., Szlachta, A. (2017). *Uniwersytet Dzieciocy „Mały poliglota”*. Szczecin: Volumina.pl Daniel Krzanowski.
- Komorowska, H. (2004). *Metodyka nauczania języków obcych*. Warszawa: Fraszka Edukacyjna.
- Kotarba-Kańczugowska, M. (2015). *Edukacja otwarta na języki: różnojęzyczność w teorii i praktyce*. Kraków: Impuls.
- Kukowicz-Żarska, K. (2011). Kompetencja interkulturowa w procesie nauczania języka obcego prowadzonego metodą komunikacyjną oraz metodami pokrewnymi. In A. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, A. Szczepaniak-Kozak, H. Lanckiewicz (Eds.), *Interkulturowość, kreatywność, refleksyjność w dydaktyce języków obcych* (pp. 35–44). Piła: Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Pile.
- Marcinkowska-Bachlińska, M. (2017). Nowa wiedza, nowe wyzwania, stare problemy. Czy neuronauki są szansą dla edukacji? In M. Marcinkowska-Bachlińska, E. Curkan-Dróżka (Eds.), *Multi-lingua-didactica: nowy wymiar dydaktyki języków obcych w edukacji szkolnej i akademickiej*, Vol. 2, (pp. 25–38). Łódź: Primum Verbum.
- Lisiecka-Czop, M. (2014). Wczesne nauczanie języków obcych w polskim systemie oświatowym na tle innych krajów Unii Europejskiej. In B. Mikołajczyk, R. Nadobnik (Eds.), *Różnorodność językowa w perspektywie glottodydaktycznej* (pp. 45–56). Gorzów Wielkopolski: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Jakuba z Paradyża.
- Nott-Bower, A. (2014). Dwujęzyczność a rozwój poznawczy w świetle teorii Jima Cumminsa. In K. Kuros-Kowalska, I. Loewe (Eds.), *Dwujęzyczność, wielojęzyczność i wielokulturowość: szanse i zagrożenia na drodze do porozumienia* (pp. 49–64). Gliwice: Fonem.eu.
- Pfeiffer, W. (2001). *Nauka języków obcych. Od praktyki do praktyki*. Poznań: Wagros.
- Przyklenk, J. (2014). Więcej niż jeden – to dobrze czy źle? O stosunku Polaków do wielojęzyczności w historii polszczyzny. In K. Kuros-Kowalska, I. Loewe (Eds.), *Dwujęzyczność, wielojęzyczność i wielokulturowość: szanse i zagrożenia na drodze do porozumienia* (pp. 231–250). Gliwice: Fonem.eu.
- Szpotowicz, M. (2011). Proces uczenia się dzieci w przedszkolu i szkole podstawowej. In H. Komorowska (Ed.), *Nauka języka obcego w perspektywie ucznia* (pp. 123–139). Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Łośgraf.
- Trempała, J. (2011). *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Tutka, D. (2014). Wielojęzyczność edukacyjna. Kompetencje językowe studentów filologii angielskiej. In K. Kuros-Kowalska, I. Loewe (Eds.), *Dwujęzyczność, wielojęzyczność i wielokulturowość: szanse i zagrożenia na drodze do porozumienia* (pp. 211–227). Gliwice: Fonem.eu.
- Zając, J. (2011). Cele nauki języka obcego – kompetencja językowa. In H. Komorowska (Ed.), *Nauka języka obcego w perspektywie ucznia* (pp. 22–24). Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Łośgraf.

Abstract

The author of this paper provides a detailed discussion on the idea of teaching foreign languages to children and youth in the aspect of developing bi- and multilingualism. The main aim of this article is to present the concept of concurrent foreign language learning that has been pursued by the Mały Poliglota Children's University at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Szczecin (Poland) since 2012.

The article involves a description of the concept of the Mały Poliglota Children's University with due account of the latest research in the field of language education and guidelines of modern language policy (in the European Union and in Poland). The paper presents methodological solutions which have been applied and the obtained implementation results. Moreover, the author refers to the specificity of teaching in a unique region of Poland, namely, West Pomerania, a border area, and discusses local conditions that affect the suggested foreign language teaching offer.

The main idea of the creators of the Mały Poliglota Children's University is to promote and develop the child's and young people's multilingualism by allowing them to participate in regular professional language classes organized at a higher education institution, conducted by well-qualified language instructors – academic teachers, and implemented based on the original curricula. The project concept covers concurrent teaching of two foreign languages supported by cultural and general development activities. Educational offer of Mały Poliglota currently involves the following language groups: English and Russian, German and Spanish, and Norwegian and Italian. This offer not only makes the Mały Poliglota Children's University stand out in the market of language classes for the youngest in Szczecin but is also unique in Poland. The described principles are currently implemented as part of the Mały Poliglota Children's University project, co-financed by the European Union with the funds of the European Social Fund (project no. POWR.03.01.00-00-U032/17).

Key words: language education; foreign languages; linguistic competences; multilingualism; bilingualism; concurrent foreign language learning; children's university

Agnieszka Szlachta, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the Department of Media and Communication, the Faculty of Philology at the University of Szczecin. She graduated in Polish Studies with a specialty in linguistics and language teaching, followed by a Ph.D. in Linguistics. In 2011–2012, she cooperated with Radio Szczecin. She is the pioneer and coordinator of the Mały Poliglota Children's University (since 2012). She is also an instructor of Polish as a foreign language (since 2014) and an author of a monograph titled *Leksykalno-pragmatyczne aspekty komunikowania się w mediach (na przykładzie wybranych audycji Radia Szczecin)* (Szczecin, 2016). She co-edited five joint publications on linguistic studies and authored over twenty scientific articles published in Poland and abroad. Her scientific areas of interest focus around modern linguistics, the language in the media, foreign language teaching and teaching Polish as a foreign language.

LEARN MORE

Children's universities around the world



Università per Bambini,
Bologna, Italy
<http://www.unijunior.it>

Universidade das Crianças,
Belo Horizonte, Brazil
<http://www.universidadedascrianças.org>

