

**Theses of Doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

**MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL  
CHALLENGES  
IN A HUNGARIAN KINDERGARTEN**

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Context and research problem

“Barbarians.” This is how ancient Greeks stigmatised people who spoke a different language from their own (Bakker, 2010, p. 282). Today, however, multilingualism or linguistic diversity, both on individual and societal levels, is a widespread occurrence. Multilingualism has been widely examined from the aspect of linguistics, just like early childhood education from the side of pedagogy. There are researchers also in Hungary who deal with bilingualism (e.g. Bartha, 1999; Navracsecs, 2007, 2008, 2010), childhood language acquisition (e.g. Kovács, 2002, 2008, 2009 a, b, c), or multiculturalism (e.g. Cs. Czachesz, 1998; Torgyik, 2005; Varga, 2006), yet the social situation completed with an early childhood educational setting is so novel in Hungary that a gap in the discussion can be noticed.

In the present research a unique language educational situation is discussed. Since September 2008 the children of foreign families working at the air base of Pápa have been going to the local Fáy András Kindergarten, which was appointed to be their host institution by the self government of the town. Families came from NATO members and two Partnership for Peace nations in the frame of the Strategic Airlift Capability programme called SAC/C-17 (Strategic, 2013). Families are usually made up of young parents and their children who go either to school or to the kindergarten. Their delegation lasts approximately for 1.5-4 years. The multilingual–multicultural kindergarten in Pápa hosts 23 foreign families’ children from 6 different countries and from the host country, namely, from Sweden, Bulgaria, Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, the United States, and Hungary, naturally. Apart from Hungarian, mother tongues of the children are Swedish, Bulgarian, Polish, Norwegian, Dutch and, in the case of the American families, English, Filipino and Spanish. The setting is exceptional as NATO bases establish their own international schools elsewhere in the world. The town of Pápa, Hungary is, however, the first place where foreign children are trying to adapt to the local community from linguistic, social, educational and cultural aspects.

## 1.2 Aims and research questions

The complex language educational situation requires a theoretical background based on linguistics, education and sociology so as to reveal how kindergarten teachers, children, parents and educational decision-makers form a common linguistic, cultural and pedagogical basis for communication in their very complex setting. Besides understanding and introducing the given linguistic community, the aim of the research is also to decipher new meanings, discover and reveal linguistic and pedagogical coherence that had been hidden till the establishment of this multilingual–multicultural kindergarten in Hungary. In the light of the aims the research questions (RQ) are as follows:

- RQ 1.       What are the major language educational theories that serve the bases for early bi- or multilingual education?
  
- RQ 2.       How is multilingual–multicultural education manifested in the material conditions of the kindergarten?
  
- RQ 3.       Which languages are used in the kindergarten and how are they developed?
  
- RQ 4.       What language pedagogical methods are applied and what is the role of the kindergarten teacher?
  
- RQ 5.       How do language and nationality take part in children’s social relations and how are different cultures present in the kindergarten?
  
- RQ 6.       What kind of educational philosophy do kindergarten teachers follow in their everyday practice?
  
- RQ 7.       What are the most important advantages and drawbacks of multicultural education?

## 2. Methodology

Due to the multifaceted features of the problem, the underlying theories to the empirical research had to be chosen from different disciplines. Therefore, in the secondary research (i.e. the literature review) Krashen's (1981) language acquisition and language learning distinction, Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis and Cummins's (1976) Thresholds Theory give help to understand early childhood language development from linguistic and educational aspects. From another point of view, i.e. the sociological side, Berry's (2008) acculturation strategy and its interpretations (Feischmidt, 1997; Rédei, 2007; Kitzinger, 2009 a, b) are worth taking into consideration.

As far as the empirical research is concerned, the method of triangulation appeared to be a suitable tool. Triangulation as a method has become widespread in the social sciences since the 1970s when it was borrowed from navigation. There it means that the position of an object is determined from two other points whose location has already been known (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). Although by now it is often applied to mixed method research where qualitative and quantitative methods are both used, originally, Denzin (1978) used it for the application of multiple qualitative methods. From whatever aspect it is used (either for mixed method research or only for qualitative research), this suggests that "Triangulation is a method [...] to check and establish validity [...] by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives" (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2002, para. 1), and its major goal is "to validate one's conclusion by presenting converging results obtained through different methods" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164). However, the results do not have to be convergent, as Patton warns researchers and argues that divergent results, due to their motivating force, can be just as much illuminating and stimulating (as cited in Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2002).

From among the different types of triangulations researchers have categorised up to now (Denzin, 1978; Janesick, 1994; Freeman, 1998; Brown, 2001), in this research data triangulation, methodological triangulation and interdisciplinary triangulation are applied. In data triangulation I used the information from different sources, i.e. the data gained from the interviewees with different roles and I was trying to understand their special aspects. By methodological triangulation in this research I mean the use of different methods side by side, i.e. observation and interviews with various types of actors. Simultaneously, the method can be called interdisciplinary as well, due to the linguistic and pedagogical methods applied along with some sociological and psychological value.

In the light of the above, to achieve results from multilateral perspectives and to be able to expand the validity of results (Seidman, 2002; Nádasi, 2004), the method of triangulation was employed in the research which was made up of the following components (Figure 1):

<b>Methods</b>	<b>Subject of research</b>	<b>Research tools and methods of analysis</b>
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal &amp; material conditions in the whole kindergarten</li> <li>• curricular &amp; extracurricular activities in 3 kindergarten groups (61 children)</li> </ul>	Content analysis of the observation chart
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 parents in 3 groups: Hungarian, native English, non-native English/ Hungarian</li> <li>• 3 educational decision-makers</li> <li>• 5 kindergarten teachers</li> <li>• 6 children</li> </ul>	Content analysis of the answers to the semi-structured interview questions
Desk research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the intercultural programme of the kindergarten</li> </ul>	Analysis of the document within the frame of Grounded Theory

*Figure 1. Methods of empirical research*

In the research qualitative and quantitative methods are related to each other in the following pattern: QUAL + quan, which means that mostly qualitative methods are applied with the completion of some minor quantitative data (Dörnyei, 2007). Qualitative research was preferred, as I believe, it will show the different experience and opinions (e.g. those of the families and professionals involved), the uniqueness and the complexity of the situation better than quantitative data.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Main findings

The main findings can be presented along the six hypotheses (H) of the dissertation which are either confirmed or rejected here.

H 1. There are theoretical issues that generate debate in early childhood language development.

✓ The hypothesis is confirmed. There are still a few crucial issues the discussion of which is not exempt from emotional overtones either. Chomsky's (1968) Innate Hypothesis, Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis and Cummins's (1976) Thresholds Hypothesis are still widely argued, moreover, the ever-green dispute on early start does not seem to end. This latter takes on outstanding importance in the present research subject as examination was made in a kindergarten. Findings show that the debate branches off into different directions and questions like when to start learning a L2, whether bilingual children have advantages over monolinguals and what the advantages of starting earlier are have still not been responded unanimously. In these questions Krashen's (1981) distinction between language learning and language acquisition and Johnstone's (2002) comparison of early and late language learning give invaluable help as they focus on the different characteristics of the different ages and reveal that both early and late start have their *raison d'être*. Taking the findings of this dissertation into consideration I must add that the focus instead of "what age" should shift towards "how" at any age.

H 2. The pedagogical and material conditions of starting multilingual-multicultural education in the kindergarten were given.

✓ X This statement can be considered to be partially confirmed. The pedagogical conditions became favourable due to the enormous work of the heads and the staff of the kindergarten. They undertook and still undertake the lion's share in the process of forming a multilingual-multicultural kindergarten from a monolingual one. It is questionable, however, that without their dedicated work how long the programme could have been continued. The local self-government also seems to support their educational work, for instance, with study visits and language courses. Yet, they cannot offer any extra benefits for the extra work. The role of the

NATO in the given language educational situation appears to be also vague: it does not turn out whether they really wanted to establish this multicultural institute, and if yes, what their responsibility would be. More support could be expected from them in the field of mother tongue help (e.g. L1 assistants' continuous presence), organisational and administrative work.

H 3. Integrated language education is applied in the kindergarten (vs. separated education) which is manifested in parallel Hungarian–English language use.

✓ This statement is confirmed. Integration is one of the major aims of the intercultural programme, which seems to be completely fulfilled in the kindergarten's curricular and extra-curricular activities. Within integration each group houses two types of education, i.e. immersion and submersion education, which can be called unique under one roof. To diminish the challenges of submersion, the kindergarten teachers have already asked for foreign parents' help in order to compile a "survival kit" in children's L1. To go further, negotiations could be made with the maintainer to lessen this problem with L1 assistants; in case the kindergarten wants to turn into a multilingual kindergarten from a bilingual one.

H 4. a) All participants of multilingual-multicultural education in the kindergarten have to face linguistic, cultural and pedagogical challenges.  
b) Children whose mother tongue is neither English nor Hungarian have to face the most challenges.

✓ ✓ Although both parts of the hypothesis can be considered to be confirmed, the challenges do not affect every participant to the same extent. While most educational experts had to revisit their language command and intercultural strategies seriously so that they could do their jobs, not all the parents or children had to do the same. English-speaking children and parents can speak their own mother tongue, and it is the same with Hungarian children. Non-English/ Hungarian speaking children have to accommodate themselves to the language educational situation offered by the kindergarten. At the same time, foreign parents do not expect mother tongue education in the kindergarten in all the cases and the programme also assigns mother tongue development to the families. It is also true that L1 in several cases is pushed into the background, and Hungarian and American culture seem to be in the limelight. The new intercultural educational programme with its wide educational implications (e.g. new methods, tools and strategies) highlights the pedagogical challenges which had to be faced by the actors.



H 5. a) Children will not become automatically bilingual under institutional circumstances.

b) Children can become bilingual with the help of a carefully elaborated educational programme.

✓ X The first part (a) of the hypothesis can be considered to be fully and the second part (b) partially confirmed. Becoming bilingual is a very complex and delicate matter: several components may influence its development. An appropriate educational programme, although it may serve as a decisive factor, cannot guarantee absolute success either. In Fáy András Kindergarten an intricate network of relations can be observed, which can all make their impact on language use and communication. Therefore, language use can be partially influenced by the teacher, and the role of peers and the family cannot be neglected either. Also, intrinsic and instrumental motivation may stimulate bilingualism; thus, it cannot be stated that children “gain” languages without their own participation or as a gift.

H 6. The multilingual-multicultural group gives the opportunity for children and kindergarten teachers to

a) create language self, i.e. which language(s) they can identify with and

b) develop cultural identity, i.e. which culture(s) they accept and belong to.

✓ These suppositions can be regarded as confirmed. The special setting favours children and their teachers to create a language self and develop cultural identity; earlier than the school age as they already get to be familiar with different languages and cultures at a very young age. To what extent it remains an opportunity and to what extent the actors catch this opportunity is mostly up to them. The kindergarten, by all means, tries to provide children and adults with varied linguistic and cultural inputs which promote the development of these dimensions. In the case of most children it was observed the positive effects of the educational setting; mostly due to the kindergarten teachers’ positive approach and serious efforts. However, there are still special fears e.g. of identity confusion in Hungarian parents and slight pedagogical criticism, e.g. about food and daily routine among foreign parents.

### **3.2 Particular professional outcome**

On the basis of the research results it may be reasonably concluded that a new model of multilingual and multicultural education in the kindergarten was launched and developed in

Hungary under the auspices of the NATO. As a crucial conclusion, in this dissertation I offer its definition for the first time and call it “Pápa Model” (PM) whose novelty I describe below.

“Pápa Model” is a Hungarian educational pattern introduced in the kindergarten pedagogy in 2008 which operates within the frame of the SAC/17 (Strategic Airlift Capability) NATO programme and makes integrated multilingual and multicultural education possible for Hungarian and migrant children in Fáy András Kindergarten, Pápa. The main elements of the programme are as follows (Figure 2):

<b>“Pápa Model”</b>	
1.	The programme of the PM is based on Hungarian–English bilingualism while children, due to the international composition of the kindergarten groups, can also get familiar with several other languages.
2.	Kindergarten teachers and pedagogical assistants use the Hungarian and/ or the English language(s). At the same time, children’s language choice and language use are optional.
3.	The language pedagogical aim of the PM is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a to give the appropriate motivation and impulse for kindergarteners to acquire their mother tongue and foreign language(s) and</li> <li>b to facilitate language development under spontaneous and natural circumstances, embedded in playful setting whose result should be the oral production of languages according to the age characteristics.</li> </ul>
4.	The programme puts a special emphasis on the acquaintance with Hungarian and other nations’ culture present in the kindergarten and on their widespread introduction. Therefore, the multicultural aim of the programme is to arouse interest in exploring other cultures among children, parents and educators so that children could get accustomed to cultures and behavioural norms different from their own. At the same time, they should be familiar with their own culture’s features and values as well.
5.	The major features of the PM are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a uniqueness, i.e. it is unexampled at worldwide language education policy level</li> <li>b innovation, i.e. the continuous renewal and development (e.g. by projects, material and personal conditions)</li> <li>c expansibility and expandability both in its linguistic and cultural contents</li> </ul>
6.	The prospect of the PM lies in its “good practice” or “pattern” status which can be implemented through further dissemination and cooperation emphasising both the advantages and drawbacks of the programme.

**Figure 2.** *The main elements of “Pápa Model”*

#### **4. Relevance of the research**

Although the major outcome of the research is undoubtedly the identification and introduction of “Pápa Model”, the research bears other relevance to early childhood multilingual–multicultural education as well, which are as follows:

1. It reveals literature from widely interdisciplinary aspects; introduces and compares theories and debates and by drawing conclusions it forms a solid theoretical framework on which empirical research can be based on. Additionally, by recognising gaps in literature, the dissertation aims to fill the gaps with the help of valid meanings of the actual empirical research and offers new meanings to early childhood language educational phenomena.
2. It applies methods (e.g. interviews with different categories of parents, interviews with the youngest ones, Grounded Theory) which can be considered less widespread in early childhood language pedagogy research while it aims to collect them under one roof under the auspices of triangulation.
3. Beyond observing and introducing the PM, the research aims to reveal a network of influences, i.e. cohesion and coherence between the different actors; linguistic, social and cultural phenomena; and the theory and practice of early childhood language development.
4. The research also observes, recognises and identifies the needs and responsibilities of the actors in early childhood multicultural education. Besides, it draws attention to the existing setting and the achievements, while it shows the gap between the present situation and the future potentials.
5. As up to now there is no recorded documentation of the PM, the dissertation can serve as a source of information about the programme and about the advantages and drawbacks of multilingual–multicultural education at early age. Therefore, the dissertation can be recommended to researchers, active participants, language educational decision-makers, kindergarten teachers and trainees, parents and laymen who are interested in the theoretical and practical sides of the topic.

## 5. Directions for future research

An interdisciplinary dissertation like this may open different directions for future research into the academic field. The recommended areas would be mostly linguistic and pedagogical. It would be interesting to carry out a follow-up research, i.e. a longitudinal investigation examining the linguistic and/ or cultural outcome of this special (trans)migratory period of the actors with research questions like: *How has the period spent in Hungary made an impact on children's later personal and educational career? How can they benefit from the linguistic and cultural experience gained in Hungary? How has their linguistic competence developed? What has remained from the Hungarian language? How has it influenced language learning, language learning motivation and the attitude to foreign languages and cultures later? etc.*

Another relevant point could be the examination of the transition from a multilingual-multicultural kindergarten to school examining the questions, e.g. *How has kindergarten promoted the linguistic development and the acculturation strategies of the children? To what extent was it beneficial to go to this kindergarten from the aspects of school? What were the difficulties and benefits of the transition? Was transition more or less difficult than for those who came from a monolingual kindergarten? etc.*

It could also be instructive to compare the operation of Fáy András Kindergarten with other kindergartens with a similar profile, e.g. bilingual, multilingual, ethnic minority kindergartens in Hungary and abroad alike. With the application and extension of the present results such studies would shed further light on this underrepresented area of language pedagogy and could enhance innovation both in the theoretical and practical sides of early childhood multilingual-multicultural education.

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- (2013). A használható nyelvtudásért. *Soproni Téma*, Issue 2/39. p. 4.
- (2013). Kik azok az Erasmus-hallgatók? *Soproni Téma*, Issue 2/33. p. 4.
- (2011). Horvát Dorottya Csenge, az OTDK háromszoros nyertese. *Vivat Academia*, Issue IX/3. pp. 14-15.
- (2010). Észak és Dél: két európai tanulmányút tanulságai. *Vivat Academia*, Issue VIII/4. p. 11.
- (2006). Nem csak nyelvtanároknak!: Beszámoló egy svéd tanulmányútról. *Vivat Academia*, Issue IV/2. p. 21.
- (2006). Report on a European workshop titled ”Multiculture, Plurilingualism and Democracy”. <http://domi.paris.free.fr/Malmo/Report%20Arianna.pdf>
- (1999). Az égő hegedű. In Raicsné Horváth, A. (Ed.), *ÓTE Tükörcsép*, (pp. 86-95). Baja: Óvó- és Tanítóképzők Egyesülete.

## Presentations on the topic of the dissertation

- 30 March 2015. *Multilingvális és multikulturális kihívások egy magyar óvodában*. Paper presented at the 25th Conference of Hungarian Applied Linguistics, Budapest: PPKE.
- 29 August 2014. *A korai többnyelvűség és multikulturalitás relációi egy interdiszciplináris kutatás tükrében*. Plenary at the conference on Inclusion and Diversity in the Kindergarten, Pápa: Pápai Városi Óvodák.
- 12 June 2014. *Multilingual-multicultural challenges in the kindergarten*. Paper presented at the international conference on Early Language Learning: Theory and Practice in 2014, Umeå: Umea University.
- 8 April 2014. *Linguistic Challenges in a Hungarian Multilingual–Multicultural Kindergarten*. Paper presented at the International Study Visit on Innovation and Cooperation in Early Childhood Pedagogy, Sopron: NymE BPK.
- 23 April – 2 May 2013. *Multilingualism and Identity in the 21st Century Europe*. Five presentations at the Erasmus Study Visit, Klagenfurt: Alpen-Adria Universität.
- 24 May 2013. *Multilingvális és multikulturális kihívások egy magyar óvodában*. Paper presented at the international conference on The Theory and Practice of Early Childhood Language Development, Budapest: ELTE TÓK – Goethe Institut – British Council.
- 12 April 2012. *Cultures and Languages in Action in a Hungarian Kindergarten*. Paper presented at the international conference on Training and Practice: The Encounters of Generations, Sopron: Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem.
- 1 March 2012. *Multilingualism and Social Cohesion in a Hungarian Kindergarten*. Paper presented at the Pestalozzi Council of Europe workshop for education professionals on Multilingualism and Social Cohesion, London: British Council.
- 4 February 2011. *Nyelvpedagógiai vizsgálatok egy multilingvális, multikulturális magyar óvodában*. Paper presented at the 5th Conference of PhD Students in Applied Linguistics, Budapest: Nyelvtudományi Intézet.
- 29 June 2011. *A korai nyelvi nevelés kutatása interkulturális környezetben Pápán*. Paper presented at the international conference on Bilingualism, Pápa: Pápai Városi Óvodák.
- 30 August 2011. *Linguistic Challenges in a Hungarian Multilingual-Multicultural Kindergarten*. Poster presentation at the Central European Conference in Linguistics for Graduate Students (CECIL'S), Piliscsaba: PPKE, BTK.
- 9 November 2010. *Nyelvi kihívások egy többnyelvű magyar óvodában*. Paper presented at the conference on The Day of Science, Sopron: NymE, BPK.
- 1 October 2010. *Our Multilingual Europe*. Paper presented at The European workshop on Supporting Teaching in a Multicultural School, Tampere: OPEKO.

2 October 2009. *An Encounter of European and Hungarian Values in Early Childhood Language Development*. Paper presented at the conference on the 50th anniversary of kindergarten teacher training in the higher education, Sopron: NymE, BPK.

24 April 2007. *A korai nyelvfelkészítés európai háttere*. Paper presented at the conference of the World Languages Day, Sopron: NymE, BPK.

### **Other presentations**

7 April 2014. *Early Childhood Language Development at the University of West-Hungary*.

Paper presented at the International Study Visit on Innovation and Cooperation in Early Childhood Pedagogy, Sopron: NymE BPK.

29 September 2014. *Language Specialisations at the University of West-Hungary*. Paper presented at the Mini International Week. Olomouc: Palacky University.

21 March 2013. *Training Pre-School Teachers of English at the University of West-Hungary*. Paper presented at the International Day, Msida: University of Malta.

21 March 2013. *Early Childhood Bilingualism at the University of West-Hungary*. Paper presented at the International Day, Msida: University of Malta.

10 June 2013. *Foreign Languages in Early Childhood at the University of West-Hungary*.

Paper presented at the International Study Visit on Language teaching Skills as a Key to Promote Professional Skills and Improve Cultural Integration, Reggio Calabria: Università per Stranieri "Dante Alighieri".

16 June 2010. *The national and ethnic minorities in Hungary*. Paper presented at the Comenius course Active Citizens for Europe, Saariselkä: University of Helsinki.

10 May 2010. *Bilingual Education at the University of West-Hungary*. Paper presented at the LLP study visit on The CLIL Approach in a Bilingual Environment, Palma de Mallorca: Conselleria d'Educació i Cultura.

12 November 2008. *Bevándorlás, többnyelvűség és identitás a XXI. századi Finnországban*.

Paper presented at the conference on Bilingual Education: Teacher Training, Research and Teaching, Budapest: ELTE TÓK.

21 June 2007. *Nyelvi képességek fejlesztése Európában és Magyarországon*. Paper presented at the conference of the National Kindergarten and Primary School Teaching Conference, Kecskemét: Tanítóképző Főiskola.

25 April 2006. *Multikulturalizmus, többnyelvűség, demokrácia Svédországban*. Paper presented at the conference of the World Languages Day, Sopron: NymE BPK.

11 December 2005. *Swedish-Hungarian Cultural Relations*. Poster presentation at the European workshop "Multiculture, Plurilingualism and Democracy", Malmö: Uppsala Universitet.

- 12 December 2005. *Cultural Heritage in Hungary*. Poster presentation at the European workshop “Multiculture, Plurilingualism and Democracy”, Malmö: Uppsala Universitet.
- 22 June 2003. Food and the Senses in British Studies. Paper presented at the Hornby Seminar on “Intercultural studies in the Web”, Kraków: British Council.
- 5 February 2002. *Looking into Britain through Hungarian Eyes*. Paper presentation at the book launch of “Zoom In – on Britain and Hungary”, Budapest: British Embassy.
- 20 January 2001. *Culture in the Text Book*. Paper presented at the MATSDA Conference: Cultural aspects of language learning, Leeds: Metropolitan University.
- 16 March 1998. *Postcolonial Literature in the English Language Classroom*. Paper presentation at The 13th British Council Conference on the teaching of English literature, Oxford: Corpus Christi College.
- 17 October 1997. *Colonial and Immigration Britain in the 20th Century*. Paper presentation at 7th International Conference of IATEFL. Budapest: IATEFL.