

# Migration and Multilingualism: Family Language Practices and Early Childhood Education Programmes

by Henrike Terhart and Christina Winter

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## ABSTRACT

For many families in Germany, migration-related multilingualism is a part of everyday life. Families' language practices are shaped in each case by a combination of factors both in and outside the home, and can also change over time. In light of the current linguistic diversity in Germany's families, (early childhood) educational institutions face a growing demand to accommodate linguistic heterogeneity. There are various ways in which multilingualism can be acknowledged in and integrated into the daily childcare centre routine. And since parents are increasingly being seen as partners in institutionalised educational work, some early childhood education programmes on migration-related multilingualism have been specifically designed to involve parents. This paper will discuss the possibilities and risks of programmes with one specific target group, using concrete examples from the multilingualism-oriented education programme *Rucksack*.<sup>1</sup> In the process, the importance of striking a balance between acknowledging the current needs and avoiding a problem-oriented approach towards multilingual migrant families will become apparent.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rucksack* is the German word for "backpack".

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Different language practices in the case of migration

### 1. Introduction

People are mobile in diverse ways. Despite the wide variety of reasons why people change their main place of residence, the diverse conditions under which they do so and the varying durations of this change, there are a number of issues associated with migration that are experienced by nearly all migrants; multilingualism is one such issue. Just as the phenomenon of family migration is manifold, so too are the language practices of families in which one or more members have migrated from a different region or country where they speak another language. Due to the combination of factors in and outside the home that inform the ways in which migrant families use language and negotiate multilingualism at home, early childhood education institutions are experiencing an increasing demand to take linguistic diversity into account in the daily childcare centre routine. There are a number of different ways in which multilingualism can be better considered and integrated into the childcare centre routine: two examples are bilingual kindergarten concepts or read-aloud activities in several languages led by people outside the kindergarten. There is also the possibility of incorporating the children's languages into the daily kindergarten routine by cooperating with families. In this way, family language practices can be integrated into early childhood education programmes.

In this paper, we will first look at the phenomenon of multilingualism as a result of migration, focussing on the linguistic situation of families in which one or more members are migrants. After an introduction to the various issues surrounding family and migration (section 2), we will address the diversity of migration-related multilingualism in families (section 3). Then, based on concrete examples from the multilingualism-oriented programme *Rucksack*, we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of early childhood educational programmes designed for specific target groups within the context of migration as well as what should be considered when such programmes are implemented (sections 4 and 5).

### 2. Families and migration

Migration is embedded in family networks

For a long time, migration was primarily thought of as the mobility of individuals. Many classical theories that aim to explain why people become mobile in the first place make economic arguments and thus view it as a decision made by individuals as a result of weighing specific pros and cons (cf. Pries 2011, 27). This view of migration, however, will be countered by a perspective that sees migration as the result of collective, often familial decision-making processes that are not purely focussed on economic interests. Migration is embedded in social and familial networks, and consequently linked to related social topics, such as marriage, childbirth and care for the elderly (see overview by Geisen, Studer & Yildiz 2014).

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The following classification of different types of familial migration (which build on one another) provides some basic insights into the various topics surrounding family and migration by way of concrete examples (cf. IOM 20018, 155ff.): first, there is the migration of an individual for familial reasons. One example of this type of familial migration might be, for example, when a family decides that one of its members should migrate in order to improve the potential earnings of the family. A second type of familial migration is family reunification, in which other family members follow the person or people who have already migrated with the goal of being able to live together (again) in the same place. A third type comprises accompanying family members, for example, when a person gets a job in a foreign country and moves there with his or her children. Migration in order to establish a family is a fourth type of familial migration; this type encompasses binational partnerships in which a person moves to the country of his or her partner in order to start a family together. In a fifth type of familial migration, relatives migrate to provide care for family members: this type of migration is above all common in countries of immigration in which migrants who have been living there for a long period of time can sponsor relatives for immigration in order to, for example, help take care of family members (cf. Pries 2011, 29ff.).

### Research topic: Families with a migrant background

Despite the diverse circumstances surrounding families and migration and their interplay, little empirical research with open, exploratory hypotheses on these topics has been performed in Germany, argues Marianne Krüger-Potratz (cf. 2013, 13f). Systematic findings are usually supported by statistical data that, in part, come from reports on the “status of the migrant family” conducted on behalf of foundations or political authorities at the state or federal level. One such example is the report published by Germany’s Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, or BMFSFJ) entitled “Families with a migrant background. Analyses of the lifestyle, labour participation and the compatibility of work and family” (cf. BMFSFJ 2016).

This and other similar documents are based on the concept of a “family with a migrant background” as defined by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, namely: a household in which at least one parent has migrated to Germany and there is at least one child under the age of 18. According to this definition, 30 percent of all families in Germany could be called a “family with a migrant background” (cf. *ibid.*, 15). But, given the diverse circumstances of familial migration sketched out above, such statements can only offer a superficial understanding and be of limited use if the point is to understand the impact that mobility has on families and the way they live their lives as well as the consequences it has on their use of languages: “Distinguishing between a family ‘with’ or ‘without’ a migrant background does not allow any conclusions to be drawn with regard to the specific social and linguistic situation in families, the language skills of the family members, or the parents’ attitude to educa-

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### Pluralisation of ways of being a family

tion”<sup>2</sup> (Krüger-Potratz 2016, 35). In the following, additional empirical findings and conceptual considerations about families and their everyday life, which is also shaped by migration, have been compiled.

Given that the diversity of familial coexistence, which has always existed, is now being thought of more conceptually and attracting more political attention, the concept of a “traditional nuclear family” is expanding to include additional types of familial coexistence. With all this plurality, however, we can still ask what function society assigns to families, regardless of their outward appearance. As a “highly charged normative symbol” (Hamburger & Hummrich 2007, 112), the family was and is traditionally seen in Germany as the “nucleus of society”, as a sort of “counter-structure” within and for society that takes on the important role of educating and raising the younger generations and caring for the older ones. According to Franz Hamburger and Merle Hummrich (2007), this view of the family as an institution and pillar of society worthy of protection does not entirely apply to migrant families. Rather, the latter are often portrayed as a “counter-society” and thus as potential competition for existing societal structures: “The foreign or migrant family is not perceived as the embodiment of integration into modern societies but as a symbol of a foreign world” (ibid. 112f.). The main basis for this distorted idea of migrant families is their labelling as a pre-modern institution.

Despite empirical findings demonstrating the diversity of lifestyles in migrant families – as in all families (cf. e.g., Boos-Nünning & Karakşoğlu 2005; Farrokhzad 2007; Farrokhzad et al. 2010) – the notion persists that migrant families inherently have more traditional ideas about generational and gender roles. Western notions of a general difference in the level of modernity (cf. Bukow & Llaryora 1998) between the migrants’ countries of origin and Germany become clear in the enduring assumption that the younger generations in particular are bound to be conflicted between their families’ traditional values and the demands of individualisation and pluralisation in a (post-)modern society. The assumption that adolescents will have divided loyalties to their host society and their family places emphasis on the risk involved and suggests furthermore that adolescents from migrant families will almost certainly experience problems during their development (cf. King & Koller 2006, 18). However, the one-sidedness of such an idea runs the risk of turning migrant families and their “normal” family problems and generational conflicts into a cultural issue. What’s more, developments and problems in migrant families are frequently not due to their cultural background but to the fact of having migrated and of living in a migrant situation (cf. Krüger-Potratz 2004). The family cohesion of migrant families is often explained by their original cultural affiliation with traditional and thus collectivist family-oriented societies.

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2 Translator’s note: Unless otherwise noted, we have freely translated all quotations in this paper from the original German text.

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### Migration can bring about new forms of familial coexistence

One consideration that has not been taken into account is that the personal experience of migration and the fact of being affiliated with other “people with a migrant background” can actually strengthen family cohesion and unlock solidarity potential among family members in coping with the challenges of everyday life (cf. Nauck 2002). Therefore, we cannot assume that there is a linear process of adaptation to the existing family structures of the country of immigration, but rather that new forms of family cohesion can be formed through migration. One such form are transnational family constellations, in which family members live permanently or temporarily in different countries but share their everyday lives with one another virtually via communication software such as Skype (cf. e.g., Miller & Slater 2000; Greschke 2014). When labour migration takes place within the framework of domestic services such as child care or care for the elderly, it not only changes the situation of the migrant workers’ families: migration also (indirectly) influences the constellation of the family in which they are working (for more on this subject, see Lutz 2008; Apitzsch & Schmidbaur 2010).

### Support given by families is often not visible

The findings detailed above show that the topic of the family in migration cannot be considered one-dimensionally. In the worst-case scenario, families can represent a risk for their members; but as a rule families initially provide resources. In the case of adolescents with a migrant background, for example, integration within the family can help them process migration-related experiences as well as providing support to cope with the challenges of everyday life. These might include exclusion and discrimination, both of which many people with a migrant background (retrospectively) report experiencing in their childhood and adolescence (see, among others, Melter 2006, Scharatow 2014). Having taken this background information into consideration, it is now time to talk about the linguistic situation in migrant families. After all, multilingualism as a result of migration is the reality of many families in Germany.

#### **Bilingualism and multilingualism**

*The term “multilingualism” is a generic term often used to describe very different phenomena of linguistic diversity. As an umbrella term it can, however, also generate uncertainty about what, exactly, is meant by it. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981), all definitions of bilingualism can, in principle, be applied to the definition of multilingualism. However, there is no common consensus on the definition of bilingualism, either.*

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*In extreme cases, definitions of bilingualism and multilingualism are either so narrow that they hardly apply to anyone since they presuppose that speakers have very good language skills in both languages (for more on the problematic concept of balanced bilingualism, see Bloomfield 1935), or the definitions are so broad that they include people who might only be able to say a handful of words in another language (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 1981, 81).*

*A somewhat broader understanding of multilingualism is being advocated in many places today: according to this definition, an individual is bilingual or multilingual when he or she is able to use more than one language in his or her everyday life (albeit with varying levels of fluency).*

**Possible trajectories  
of language use over  
generations**

### **3. Migration-related multilingualism in families: a diverse phenomenon**

Just as the phenomenon of family migration is manifold, so too are the language practices of families in which one or more members have migrated from a different region or country where they speak another language. This is a form of multilingualism that can be seen as a sort of by-product of human mobility: we refer to it as “multilingualism as a result of migration” or “migration-related multilingualism”. Depending on the constellation, a family might speak new languages or even (temporarily) not speak certain ones (cf. the phenomenon of the language shift, Riehl 2004, 167ff.). Empirical research has shown that the members of a family negotiate the way they use the languages they know among themselves, thus making this use subject to change (cf. e.g., Tuominen 1999; Piller 2001; Purkardhofer 2011; Bailey & Osipova 2016). This negotiation is an ongoing, never-ending process that takes place over generations and results in diverse language practices in families. To illustrate this point, we will portray examples of possible trajectories of language use over generations:

- ▶ People who relocate their main place of residence can study the language of the destination country beforehand (foreign language acquisition). However, the new language can also be learned after arrival in a new country (second language acquisition). In this way, the change of language in the place of residence (i.e., the ambient language), which is associated with migration, usually causes these people to become bilingual or even multilingual. However, migration does not necessarily go hand in hand with learning the ambient language. Sometimes several members of a family will learn the ambient language while other members only acquire rudimentary or no skills in the language. Whether family

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members speak to one another in the new ambient language – either exclusively, partially or not at all – also differs depending on the family.

- ▶ Now, if a person who is bilingual or multilingual as a result of migration has a child, that child might learn the parent's first language first, might speak the ambient language, or might grow up bilingual or multilingual from the start. The latter case illustrates simultaneous bilingualism or early second language acquisition (Reich & Roth 2002, 11). When the other parent or other family members speak another first language that is different from the ambient language, a further language can be brought into the mix.
- ▶ When bilingual or multilingual children who grow up with these language situations in their families have a child themselves, it opens up even more language constellations based on the existing language skills (including those of the other parent and his or her family).

This thought experiment quickly makes clear that languages and language skills can differ in multilingual families with a migrant background and among individual family members. The individual configuration of linguistic practices in families is also influenced by a number of factors outside the home, such as the attitudes towards and handling of migration-related multilingualism in public institutions (including educational institutions); the status or prestige of languages in relation to one another in a country; the size of the group of speakers in a country and their interconnectedness; and the presence of linguistic (media) services (for more about family language practices, see Brizić 2007, 166ff; summary, Terhart & von Dewitz 2016).

### **Language prestige**

*When examining migration-related multilingualism, it is worth considering the issue of ascribing a certain "value" to any single language in a specific context. The prestige of a language is important in the respective environment because of the "social mobility" associated with it (Weinreich 1953, 79, cited in Fishman 1975, 136).*

*English is one such example. Although it is not an official language in Germany, English is held in indisputably high regard due to its status as a global language. In general, English is the first foreign language learned at school in Germany and is increasingly being taught in early childhood education institutions (cf. [www.fmks-online.de](http://www.fmks-online.de)). By contrast, other languages in Germany are not regarded as highly and when children speak those languages it is usually seen as a risk for language development.*

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The prestige of a language depends on its context; it can vary based on different conditions such as time, place or speech community (cf. Fishman 1975). Studies on attitudes towards languages and language varieties, such as dialects, illustrate that they are closely linked to preconceived notions of the socio-cultural orientation of those who belong to the group of speakers. Finally, language attitudes typify the attitudes towards widespread social norms and values of a society (for more on the basics, see Lambert 1967; for more on language attitudes in Germany, see Settinieri 2011; Eichinger et al. 2009; Plewnia & Rothe 2011).

However, it is not only the families that play a key role in raising and educating children in a multilingual environment: the educational institutions they attend also play a role. Existing organisational structures as well as the attitude and knowledge of educators are important for the development of children's language skills and for recognising the value of the languages spoken by the students and of multilingualism itself. On the whole, research on this subject shows that, for a long time, the phenomenon of migration-related multilingualism was either not considered at all or it was considered from a problem-oriented perspective. The assumption has persisted – and still persists – that language skills should be evaluated on the basis of languages that can be clearly demarcated from one another. Learning several languages was therefore often considered risky because, according to this assumption, improving language skills in one language would cause a decline in skills in another or other languages.

### Traditional problem-oriented perspective of migration-related multilingualism

This understanding of bilingualism and multilingualism has received a lot of criticism (e.g., Dirim 2005; Fürstenau & Niedrig 2010). Using monolingualism as a benchmark for evaluating bilingualism or multilingualism is neither necessary nor useful because it cannot provide any insights into the linguistic skills of bilingual or multilingual people (cf. Baetens Beardsmore 1982). One crucial finding is that people who grow up bilingual or multilingual use their languages based on the context and have varying experiences with and in their languages during the acquisition process. It is against this backdrop that Ingrid Gogolin (1988) coined the term "everyday bilingualism"<sup>3</sup>, which emphasises that the linguistic abilities of bilingual and multilingual people do not have to be balanced. Due to the different circumstances under which languages are acquired as well as the specific use situations and purposes for which they are used, languages develop distinct functions: based on this understanding, people are considered bilingual or multilingual if they are capable of using both or all of their languages in everyday life.

3 Translator's note: The term used in German is *lebensweltliche Zweisprachigkeit*, which references the philosophical concept of *Lebenswelt*. Although translated officially as "lifeworld" in English, given the context of this paper, we have decided to translate this term as "everyday bilingualism".

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**Not all linguistic tasks must be mastered at the same level in all languages**

Multilingual people not only use their languages in different situations but also for different purposes. Although for a long time there were disagreements about the level of mastery in various languages needed to be considered multilingual, today there is a general consensus that it is “usually not necessary and thus not useful to be able to perform all linguistic tasks required by one’s social life in both [or all] languages” (Auer 2009, 94). “Because even if a child hears both [or all] languages in his or her environment from the start, it is no guarantee that the child will use and develop these languages throughout his or her entire life. It also depends on the opportunities children have to use a language actively and for an extended period of time. When living circumstances change [...], the opportunities and frequency of use often change” (Tracy 2008, 50f.).

In summary, migration-related multilingualism should be seen as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a combination of factors both in and outside the home that can also change over time. There is a broad spectrum of language constellations and ways of organising these in the home. Educational work that wishes to take advantage of the language resources of families that are multilingual as a result of migration should pay attention to the ways in which individual families use language and, if necessary, provide support.

### 4. Early childhood education programmes for multilingual migrant families: the case study of *Rucksack*

**Difference-sensitive perspective on language is necessary**

The diversity of familial coexistence is also enhanced by linguistic heterogeneity in the home. In the following, early childhood education programmes for integrating families’ linguistic diversity will be examined more closely. As the first educational institutions outside the home, childcare centres have a particularly strong impact on the way that young children are raised and educated. The demand to see childhood education as the entry level of the education system has resulted in early childhood education being ascribed a higher status within said system, at least theoretically. As the recognition of the importance of early childhood education work grows (and continues to demand more recognition), so too does the educational responsibility of early childhood institutions. This responsibility includes adequately taking into consideration linguistic diversity in families. Such a difference-sensitive perspective of languages can be understood as a component of intercultural education and thus of a fundamental attitude towards a society that is diverse because of migration. It should always be combined with an attitude that is sensitive to inequality (cf. Mecheril & Plöber 2009) since linguistic heterogeneity is dependent on the languages spoken and the context (see “Language prestige”). The sensitivity of education professionals, regardless of whether they themselves are multilingual as a result of migration, should not be seen as a

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special skill that ticks off another box in an otherwise largely difference-free working environment (cf. Kuhn 2013, 107ff.). Rather, this sort of sensitivity – an ability to recognise opportunities for providing individual support to families and to respond to these opportunities appropriately – represents a basic attitude and skill in the diverse professional skill set of early childhood education professionals.

There are a number of ways to approach the question as to how migration-related multilingualism can be acknowledged and taken advantage of in the classroom. In light of the increasing demand for parents to be seen and listened to as partners in institutional educational work (cf. Stange et al. 2013; Roth 2013), early childhood education programmes that involve parents with a migrant background have been developed (cf. BMBF 2008; Friedrich, Siegert & Schuller 2009). The *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack Kita* programmes (cf. Homepage of the Central Coordination Office of Local Integration Centres of North-Rhine Westphalia [Landesweite Koordinierungsstelle der Kommunalen Integrationszentren NRW]) as well as the *frühstart* project, which was created in Hessen (cf. Homepage of Projekt frühstart), are explicitly multilingual. On the one hand, they are intended to promote multilingual education in families and, on the other, to raise awareness of migration in childcare centres. The programmes have a low-threshold social design in which the parents are seen as educational partners. In all three programmes, the goal is to support and educate parents in order to encourage linguistic interactions with their children. Based on the principle of peer education, the programmes involve multilingual people as peer educators who communicate programme contents and offer advice to parents (cf. Terhart 2015).

In the following, we present examples from the *Rucksack Kita* education programme in order to illustrate what needs to be considered when implementing programmes that are designed specifically for and involve multilingual migrant families.

### 4.1 The *Rucksack* programme concept

#### Promoting children's multilingual development

The *Rucksack* programme sees itself as a multilingual education programme designed for and actively involving educational institutions, families and children. The goal of the *Rucksack* programme is to promote the multilingual development of the participating children (for more about the development of the *Rucksack* programme in Germany, see Schwaiger & Neumann 2010). This goal can be achieved by strengthening the parents' (linguistic) educational competence, by improving the partnership between parents and institutions and by ensuring that multilingualism is being dealt with competently in educational institutions. Adapted from the *Rugzak* programme in the Netherlands (to read about the history of the programme, see Springer-Geldmacher 2006;

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### Support for language and literacy in the home

Roth & Terhart 2015), *Rucksack* is provided and coordinated by the Central Coordination Office of Local Integration Centres of North-Rhine Westphalia (formerly known as the Regional Office for Children and Adolescents from Immigrant Families [or RAA]).

The peer-education principle is at the heart of the *Rucksack* programme. Childcare centres and primary schools can apply to participate in the programme at their local coordination office and “pledge to recognise multilingualism as an educational resource” (Roth et al. 2015, 30). Then, as part of the programme, a weekly *Rucksack* group for interested multilingual parents – usually mothers – is offered.<sup>4</sup> The groups are usually led by multilingual women – often referred to as parent coaches – who receive training by the coordinating sponsor and coaching while working for the programme. During the weekly meetings, parent coaches provide support to parents whose children attend a childcare centre (or primary school) and are being raised and educated with two or more languages. Parent coaches provide learning materials and exercises to the group, which are available in German and a number of other languages.<sup>5</sup> The material is prepared during the meetings so the parents can use it at home with their children for language education purposes. At the following meeting, the participants talk about the material and their experience implementing it. By fostering parent participation in the meetings and other activities (reading picture books, visiting the library, etc), *Rucksack* supports family literacy and language skills (for more, see Gantefort 2015). Depending on the situation, some groups hold bilingual meetings. In other groups of parents whose languages are different from one another, the meetings are often held in German.

### Aligning *Rucksack* content with material covered at the childcare centre

Parallel to the families’ work with the *Rucksack* material at home, the programme is structured so that the content of the worksheets aligns thematically with the current educational focus at the childcare centre.<sup>6</sup> In the best-case scenario, the children end up working on the same topic both in the childcare centre (usually in German) and at home (often in the family language). In that sense, the *Rucksack* programme is explicitly not just an add-on for parents with a migrant background that bears little connection to the daily routine at the educational institution. Rather, the demand to align the material of the *Rucksack* group with the material of the childcare centre highlights an opportunity to systematically open the work of childcare centres to take account of existing multilingualism. The multilingual orientation of the programme drives home the idea – more so implicitly than explicitly – that the development of the first language benefits the development of the second language. By fos-

4 *Rucksack* group meetings are two hours long and take place weekly for nine months at the child’s respective institution. At the end, the participants receive a certificate.

5 The material is currently available in the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, German, English, French, Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbian/Croatian, Turkish (cf. *Rucksack Kita* flyer 2016).

6 Since the focus of this paper is on childcare centres, we have omitted the parenthetical information about *Rucksack*’s implementation at primary schools in our translation.

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tering both the family language(s) and the ambient language (German), the *Rucksack* programme aims to promote active multilingualism. This concept is a popular and controversial interpretation of Cummins' interdependence hypothesis (cf. Cummins 2000; Cummins & Swain 1992), which states that the first and second language are interrelated and the advancement of the first language positively affects the development of the second language (cf. Winter 2015, 252).

### 4.2 Between target group specificity and meeting needs: *Rucksack* in practice

#### Rucksack – a learning programme

In the following, the *Rucksack* programme, with its strengths and limitations, will be used as an example of language education services offered in cooperation between educational institutions and multilingual families. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that *Rucksack* is an evolving programme: “*Rucksack* has changed over the years, but not by leaps and bounds. It has grown; it has had, and has reflected upon, many experiences; it has learned from simultaneous pedagogical discussions. The core of the programme has not been lost over time: it sees the fostering of both (or all) a child's languages as the best way to promote his or her language development and the guided activities for parents as the most ambitious way of taking shared responsibility for achieving this goal” (Reich 2015, 277). In that sense, the following remarks may not necessarily apply to all the ways the programme is implemented in practice. The analysis, however, leads to the question: What possibilities are there for implementing an educational programme for families to whom migration-related multilingualism is an important issue that they want to have more information and dialogue about?

The studies on and evaluations of the *Rucksack* programme show that in practice the concept is perceived positively by parent coaches and participating parents (cf. Roth et al. 2015; Romppel & Lütters 2009; Naves & Rummel 2009). A study on *Rucksack Kita* and the follow-up primary school programme *Rucksack Grundschule*, carried out from 2012 to 2013 at the University of Cologne, asked group leaders, parents and children about their everyday experiences with the *Rucksack* programme.<sup>7</sup> It became clear that the multilingual orientation of the programme was grounded in the everyday reality of the families and that the program made the adults feel appreciated for their linguistic resources (cf. Roth et al. 2015, 65f.).

<sup>7</sup> In the following quotations taken from the interviews, the participants are abbreviated as follows: PC = parent coaches (group leaders), M = Mothers, C = Children. These quotations are transcriptions of oral statements and have been slightly modified grammatically.

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**Raising bilingual and multilingual children – Parent guides**

In addition to academic publications and studies, many parent guides have been published on the topic of raising bilingual and multilingual children. The guides describe how children acquire two or more languages, what some of the prejudices surrounding early multilingualism might be, and how parents can structure their child's bilingual and multilingual upbringing. In contrast to academic literature, parent guides tend to impart educational/practical general knowledge, even though the authors generally respond to the questions and concerns of parents raising bilingual or multilingual children on the basis of scientific knowledge. Depending on the individual presentation, the content of such guides should be taken with a grain of salt, since references to the corresponding studies cannot always be found.

The following parent guides provide a worthwhile overview of the topic:

Gregory, E. (2017). *One child, many worlds: early learning in multicultural communities*. London and New York: Routledge.

Leist-Villis, Anja (2016): *Elternratgeber Zweisprachigkeit: Informationen & Tipps zur zweisprachigen Entwicklung und Erziehung von Kindern*. 7th ed., Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Lotherington, H., Holland, M., Sotoudeh, S., Zentena, M. (2008). *Project-based community language learning: three narratives of multilingual story-telling in early childhood education*. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 65(1), 125–145

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### Different ways to deal with multilingualism in the home

Within the deliberately multilingual framework of the programme, the participants and parent coaches provided insights into the everyday linguistic life of the families by way of structured interviews.<sup>8</sup> The practices described show different strategies – including ones that change over time – which demonstrate that the family language practices are discussed and actively structured by the parents. In the statements, several speakers mention family situations in which one parent always speaks one of the languages with the child as per the “one speaker, one language” principle:

*“whenever we do something, I usually only do it in Turkish – and when he does something with his dad, then his dad only speaks German to him – so he knows – with dad I can speak German and with mum only Turkish – that he knows these boundaries” (M 18, 31) (Roth et al. 2015, 87f.).*

However, in the dialogue among group participants and on the basis of previous experiences, it also becomes clear that the methods chosen are adapted to the real-life situation and not always implemented consistently. Thus, the implementation alternates between the methods the parents aspire to use and whatever methods turn out to work best in real life:

*“they always say you should split the languages in half – right [?] Like Dad speaks one language and Mum another – but to be honest it is really/very hard – although we teach that here, everybody always reports the same thing back to me – I just can’t express certain feelings in German – I need to say that in my mother tongue – and then you really know what you’re saying – that’s the attitude towards language that I’ve developed – speak the language you feel comfortable in – in your heart and in your gut – in your head – that’s what I teach my mothers here (PC 10, 165) (ibid. 74).*

### Language retention as a goal

The goal of the participating families is the development and/or upkeep of their children’s active multilingualism, which includes learning German and usually at least one other language spoken at home. The other language can be the child’s first language; but sometimes parents want a child to have German as a first language in addition to learning the parents’ or grandparents’ first language as a second language. In this scenario, we are talking about the goal of language retention (cf. Reich & Roth 2002, 7ff.):

*“I think now the most important thing is German – so she can get ahead in this country – but her own mother tongue is, too, because we are also still connected to Turkey – my parents – can’t speak such good German, which is why it’s so important that she [her daughter] can speak it well” (M 1, 129) (Roth et al. 2015, 89).*

<sup>8</sup> The evaluation of the interviews with 16 parent coaches and 18 mothers was performed with a structured qualitative content analysis via inductive category creation (cf. Mayring 2015, 5.5.4; Schreier 2014, 5f.)

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*“Then we realised, ‘Okay, she’s only speaking German now’ – then we split it up that way – we said, ‘Okay, from now on we have to be careful – we don’t want her to forget her mother tongue’” (M 5, 23) (ibid. 90).*

Rucksack participants also expressed insecurities about how their family negotiated who speaks what language with whom as well as the desire for more information – issues that resonated with others at the group meetings. In addition, several of the interviewees reported that their interest in the linguistic development of their children had only grown since they started attending Rucksack meetings and had made them more aware of language-related issues:

*“...that we also take out more Turkish books or those dual-language books – we used to only have German books at home – that when it’s time to read we also read more Turkish texts” (M 1, 123) (ibid., 91).*

### Parents demonstrate their interest in their children’s education

Several women also reported that in conversations at the meetings they had received helpful input and suggestions regarding other child-rearing issues such as media use, nutrition and health (cf. Roth et al. 2015, 100). As has been mentioned repeatedly above, one of the core aspects of the programme that is praised most highly by its participants is that it gives them a platform for sharing experiences, ideas and advice with one another. What is striking here is the extent to which most of the women interviewed identify with the programme themselves. The programme enables these women, who want to provide their children with the best support possible, to gain access to information and a platform for peer-to-peer dialogue and sharing advice. Furthermore, by participating, the women have a chance to show the educational institution that they are actively involved in promoting their children’s educational success associated with the programme – which aligns with the strategy of bringing the family into the education system:

*“our childcare centre is/ our director is really enthusiastic about the project and gives us a lot of support – and the condition must be met, I think, because they give us the room – so it’s considered important – it isn’t just some activity that takes place here once a week – it’s considered a very important group and always has priority [...] so our collaboration is very good” (PC 13, 166, 174) (ibid. 67).*

*“of course – the fact that we make arrangements – and that at the kindergarten they – the individual topics – are brought up with the children again [...] that’s why/ of course these arrangements with the kindergarten are very, very important” (PC 5, 136) (ibid. 69).*

Despite the generally positive evaluations of participation in the programme, there are occasionally critical voices that call into question the specificity of the target group. In an interview with one of the mothers who likes coming to

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### Criticism of specificity of programme's target group

the group meetings, she criticises the fact that, in order to participate in the programme, one has to have "a migrant background":

*"I grew up here – why should I join such a group [?] – then I got a bit upset – and yeah, okay, I ended up here – I don't regret it, either – but then it occurred to me – 'it's not just Turkish mothers who need this – there are plenty of German mothers who could use it, too' – [...] – because there are really a lot of mothers – or parents – who do nothing with their children and I don't understand it to this day – and, well, then I felt a bit offended – I didn't want to – but I did [...] because I just don't want to be pigeonholed – I also grew up here and my son even says 'I'm a German' – that's just how it is" (M 11, 40; 44) (ibid. 94).*

### Exclusive target group does not aid normalisation of linguistic diversity

This quote shall direct our focus to the fact that the *Rucksack* programme rests on the participation of families that are multilingual as a result of migration and is thus designed for this specific target group. In light of what has been reported above, it becomes evident that the participating families are very interested in dealing with the issues surrounding multilingualism and, in practice, educational programmes designed to meet the potential demands of a multilingual education tend to target specific groups. That is to say, programmes are expressly aimed at children who are growing up bilingual or multilingual as well as their parents in the sense that – as with *Rucksack* – the didactic material used is available in different languages and the group meetings are often held in two or more languages. By designing the programme specifically for families that are multilingual as a result of migration, there is a risk of giving the impression that it is for an exceptional group of families that, because its members speak several languages, automatically need special support. In that sense, measures targeted at specific groups do not aid the normalisation of linguistic heterogeneity, but can actually even instigate processes that "other" multilingual families (Reuter 2002, 20). It is not uncommon for such programmes to be initiated and implemented based on preconceived notions of cultural differences in family structures and the assumption that migrant families have problematic ideas of education (see section 1). From such a perspective, programmes targeted at specific groups appear to be supporting an educational practice designed to address deficits – a "repair education" (Krüger-Potratz 2005, 33) – and must be examined critically.

### Positive balance between considering commonalities and individuality

What becomes evident here is the delicate balance between, on the one hand, acknowledging the needs of multilingual families and, on the other, the danger of "othering" them based on the distinguishing feature of "a migrant background" and the ideas of cultural difference that often come along with it. This points to a fundamental tension that Doris Edelmann refers to in her concept of a "dialectic of difference" (Edelmann 2007, 233ff.): formulated as a positive tension between considering what people share in common and what makes them different, it must maintain a continuous balance between what families have in common on the one hand and the specific needs of

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families that are multilingual as a result of migration on the other. The over-emphasis of commonalities as well as differences can lead to a “devaluing exaggeration” (ibid.), out of which exclusionary and, consequently, discriminatory practices can arise in different ways.

Programmes designed along the lines of migration-related multilingualism always run the risk of reinforcing one-sided, generalised attributions. At the same time, they give educational institutions and the people involved there the opportunity to systematically integrate linguistic resources into their educational work and into the families' everyday life by means of an existing concept and appropriate materials in several languages. What's more, the peer-education approach of the *Rucksack* programme – in which the group leaders themselves are people who are multilingual as a result of migration – at least partially breaks down the separation between a majority society's programme for “othered immigrants”.

### 5. Conclusion

Migration-related multilingualism in families is a fact that manifests itself in different ways. Looking at the relationship between linguistic education in the home and children's language development, it is possible that the child either learns the first language of one or both of the parents first, speaks the ambient language, or grows up bilingual/multilingual from the start. The multilingualism-oriented *Rucksack* programme can support active multilingualism by working together with families and educational institutions. The involvement of the parents and the linguistic situation at home is viewed positively when, through such programmes, they engender a feeling of appreciation towards migration-related multilingualism and provide a forum for discussing specific issues that might arise among the families. If, however, such a collaboration takes place within the framework of a parent programme designed specifically for families that are multilingual as a result of migration, it risks failing to meet existing needs because it is targeted specifically at a group defined as having “a migrant background”. Therefore, such programmes must be implemented very carefully so as to not “manufacture” a special group of families who automatically require specific help just because one or more of its members have migrated and are, as a result, multilingual. And, due to the sheer variety of language constellations and the ways in which families organise them, it is imperative to focus on the individual situation. Educational work that wishes to take advantage of the linguistic resources of families that are multilingual as a result of migration should devote attention to the individual families' language use and offer them support if necessary. Such a perspective could also bring multilingual families that do not have a migrant background into the focus of linguistic education.

**Migration-related  
multilingualism as a  
valuable resource**

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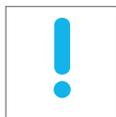
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**Multilingualism is not a “disturbance” to day childcare centre routine**

It is therefore very important that early childhood education programmes on migration-related multilingualism are not seen as add-ons by means of which the various issues surrounding migration, multilingualism and family are kept out of the routine in childcare centres because they represent a “disturbance”. As part of the conceptual framework of the *Rucksack Kita* programme, which served as our example here, the content of the group meetings and the activities the parents performed at home with their children are complementary to the material being covered in the educational institution. The fundamental goal is to recognise and take advantage of the linguistic resources of families by integrating them into the educational work of the childcare centre. Multilingualism as a result of migration can thus be acknowledged and used as a way of opening up early childhood education institutions in a society characterised by migration to all parties involved.

## 6. Questions and further information

### 6.1 Questions and tasks for reviewing the text



#### Task 1:

Think about the situations in your everyday life in which multilingualism plays a role. How is the existing or aspiring multilingualism judged in the respective contexts? Name concrete examples from your surroundings.



#### Task 2:

Explain why the *Rucksack* programme is a parent education programme and, at the same time, a programme to open up childcare centres to incorporating intercultural approaches.



#### Task 3:

Research other family-oriented (language) education programmes. Are these designed for specific target groups and, if so, in what way? Select one concept/programme and illustrate how multilingualism is or could be integrated into it.

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### 6.3 Glossary

**Language practices** More than just the action of one person which “implies intention, these practices contain from the very beginning a complex of knowledge and dispositions in which cultural codes express themselves” (Reckwitz 2006, 38). Consequently, language practices are not the linguistic actions of individuals but rather, are negotiated in interactions and thus potentially changeable forms of using language(s). The way families negotiate this process (cf. e.g., Tuominen 1999; Piller 2001) is shaped by factors both in the home (e.g., what languages are spoken by whom) and outside the home (e.g. what value is attributed to the languages in question).

**Bilingualism and multilingualism** The term “multilingualism” is a generic term often used to describe very different phenomena of linguistic diversity. What’s more, as an umbrella term, it can also generate uncertainty about what, exactly, is meant by it. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981), all definitions of bilingualism can, in principle, be applied to the definition of multilingualism. In extreme cases, definitions of bilingualism and multilingualism are either so narrow that they hardly apply to anyone since they presuppose that speakers have very good language skills in both languages (for more on the problematic concept of balanced bilingualism, see Bloomfield 1935), or the definitions are so broad that they include people who might only be able to say a handful of words in another language (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 1981, 81).

**Everyday multilingualism** “Everyday multilingualism” refers to a phenomenon in which a person grows up and lives with more than one language in his or her everyday life. Ingrid Gogolin (1988) emphasises that the linguistic abilities of bilingual and multilingual people are not necessarily the same in all their languages. Due to the different circumstances under which languages are acquired as well as the specific use situations and purposes for which they are used, languages develop distinct functions. Based on this understanding, people are considered bilingual or multilingual if they are capable of using both or all of their languages in everyday life.

**Second language and foreign language acquisition** In addition to being multilingual as a result of migration (i.e., from living in a multilingual home), a person can also be multilingual as a result of learning foreign languages, e.g., in school or a language course at an adult education centre, or because he or she has grown up in a multilingual region (e.g., Belgium, Switzerland). Depending on the language acquisition context, distinctions can be made between second language and foreign language acquisition: “Second language and second language acquisition are terms used to describe the acquisition that takes place within the target culture; foreign language and foreign language acquisition are used when the acquisition takes place in the context of the

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source culture” (Henrici & Vollmer 2001, 8 quoted from Kniffka & Siebert-Ott 2012, 15). Sometimes both labels are used synonymously in practice.

**Language prestige** When examining migration-related multilingualism, it is worth considering the issue of ascribing a certain “value” to any single language in a specific context. The prestige of a language is important in the respective environment because of the “social mobility” associated with it (Weinreich 1953, 79 quoted from Fishman 1975, 136). The prestige of a language depends on its context; it can vary based on different conditions such as time, place or speech community (cf. Fishman 1975). Studies on attitudes towards languages and language varieties, such as dialects, illustrate that they are closely linked to preconceived notions of the socio-cultural orientation of those who belong to the group of speakers.

**Sensitivity to differences** The ability to exhibit sensitivity to differences is increasingly demanded in educational work. This sensitivity should be seen not as a special skill, but as a core skill of education professionals. According to Melanie Plöber and Paul Mecheril, however, the “general discourse surrounding difference in the social and educational sciences” (2009) tends to neglect the power structures and inequalities within society when analysing categories of difference, above all the categories of race, class and gender. This tendency highlights the problem that taking diversity into account does not automatically negate the influence of social categories of difference with their related privileges and disadvantages. A difference-sensitive educational perspective should thus always go hand in hand with a perspective that is critical of inequality.

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