

Guidelines for Language Use in Bilingual Preschools

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1. Introduction

Bilingual preschools function according to the one person-one language principle (Ronjat 1913, Baker 2000), according to which preschool teachers use two different languages with the children throughout the day: one teacher exclusively uses the ambient language (L1), the other one, preferably a native speaker, uses only the target foreign language (L2) in all interactions with the children. Foreign language learning in a bilingual preschool context requires specific skills especially from the preschool teachers who speak the L2, because the L2 is not taught formally, such as in a classroom context, but it is used as a medium of communication. In contrast to L2 teachers in school, whose challenge is to integrate language and content (e.g. Massler & Ioannou-Georgiou 2010), the challenge for preschool L2 teachers is to find ways and strategies to foster and stimulate children's development by using the L2 only. Furthermore, in contrast to L2 school teachers, L2 preschool teachers usually do not receive any kind of formal training in using a language which is not the ambient language outside preschool and may therefore wish to obtain further information as to how to convey an L2 in a preschool immersion context. So far, research on this topic has mainly focused on school immersion contexts and many articles and books on "best practice methods" in such a context are now available (e.g. Stevens 1983, Snow 1987, Swain 1988, Snow 1990, Peregoy 1991, Harley 1993, Burmeister 2006, Edelenbos & Kubanek 2009, Massler & Ioannou-Georgiou 2010). However, only little research has so far been carried out in a preschool immersion context and the findings on L2 preschool teachers' strategies are rather unstructured and impressionist in nature (e.g. Kubanek & Edelenbos 2004, Leidner 2005, Nauwerck 2005, Günther & Günther 2006; Steinlen 2008, Wode 2006, 2009, Schilk et al. i.pr.). The ELIAS study on L2 input (Weitz et al., volume I), however, has shown that best practices known from the early school context can indeed be transferred to the preschool context as well. The study showed that good principles of language use, previously known from school research, have a significant beneficial effect on children's grammar and vocabulary comprehension (Steinlen et al.; Rohde, volume I) in bilingual preschools. This is not surprising, as bilingual preschools follow an approach which is comparable in several ways to early immersion teaching in primary grades and follows its principles, sometimes, even more strictly (i.e. L2 as medium of communication, the person-language bond and high input intensity, among others).

This chapter therefore intends to provide guidelines for bilingual preschool teachers by combining research on school settings with principles that have successfully been used

in bilingual immersion preschools, complemented and adapted by principles which have been observed and tested in the two year study in nine bilingual ELIAS preschools (Weitz et al., volume I). In this context it is noteworthy that immersion is mostly considered as a language learning programme or an institutional setup, but not as a teaching method itself. It means that the foreign language is used for at least 50% of all language input as the language of communication from the part of the teachers. This way, children are surrounded by or "immersed in" the language in bilingual preschools to a great extent during the day, and learning happens in the most natural way possible.

2. Guidelines for L2 language use in bilingual preschools

The guidelines for language input which are introduced in the following section are based on the literature and on the experiences reported by the members of ELIAS (preschool teachers, observers, and scientists alike). All in all, six different principles will be presented which refer to L2 input quantity and quality, contextualisation, multi-sensory learning, interaction strategies, scaffolding, and parental involvement. This is, by no means, to be interpreted in such a way that there is no interconnection between these principles. On the contrary, they mutually influence each other and, therefore, enhance children's successful learning of the L2 in a bilingual preschool immersion context (Weitz et al., volume I).

The term "preschool teacher" is used throughout this chapter for the lack of a widely acknowledged term for preschool pedagogues. It is used with no implication whatsoever on the pedagogical approach of the institutions, but as a cover term for all pedagogical personnel who supply language input to preschoolers at the age of approximately 3;0-6;0 in bilingual preschools.

Guideline 1: The teacher uses the L2 in a way that the children receive rich and varied L2 input

Intensive input

The way the L2 is used in a preschool context critically affects the L2 learning progress of the children. As Weitz et al. (volume I) show, the quality and the quantity of the L2 input determine how well the children will master the L2 during their preschool period. The children need, for example, a great amount of L2 input to develop their L2 competencies and, therefore, the L2 teachers need to talk constantly to accompany each of their actions with language. Vice versa, even without action, they provide constant L2 input. That way, children receive manifold opportunities to combine the meaning of the new language with the actions they observe. Consequently, the L2 teacher needs to be an extrovert person (Edelenbos et al. 2006).

In fact, the preschool setting is advantageous for the L2 learning process because the children attend preschool for many hours a day, and are therefore exposed long enough to the L2 to receive a sort of "language shower," or "language bath," which is the well-known metaphor for "language immersion." English courses, which are often offered in (non-immersion) preschools on a weekly basis, do not reach such a level of intensity or linguistic richness. Once the L2 teacher starts to use the children's ambient language for reasons of simplicity, the amount of L1 input usually grows considerably in a very short time, at the cost of intensive L2 input (see e.g. Inbar-Lourie 2010 for a review on the use of the L1 and the L2 in a classroom school context).

Rich and varied lexical input

In terms of quality, the L2 teacher ideally uses lexically and structurally rich input (e.g. Snow 1990, Wode 2001, Nauwerck 2008, Steinlen 2008). Lexically rich input refers to the use of vocabulary, which not only comprises object words of the so-called basic level (e.g. 'dog,' 'cat,' 'chair,' 'table,' i.e. words which can be visualised as individual exemplars), but which stretches to more abstract, or superordinate, words such as 'pet' or 'furniture' as well (e.g. Rohde 2000, 2005). When children newly arrive at a bilingual preschool, they lack both the basic and the specialised L2 vocabulary. Therefore, the L2 teachers must emphasise vocabulary building so that the children are quickly able to follow the daily routines. To provide such lexically rich input, L2 teachers will not only use repetitions of recurring words and phrases, but also restatements, paraphrases and extensions of words and sentences (e.g. Snow 1990). A word can for example be explained by using synonyms ('hide – conceal'), antonyms ('good – bad,' 'hit – miss') or superordinates ('hammer – tool'). Category words such as 'fish' can be subdivided into 'trout' and 'salmon.' If the input is presented in such an intensive, natural and authentic way, it provides many possibilities to enrich the children's lexical (i.e. vocabulary) learning.

Rich and varied structural input

Apart from extended L2 vocabulary, children also need structurally varied input, which refers to the use of the different sentence structures. L2 teachers will, therefore, not only limit their input to main clauses (or short SVO sentences) but will also use subordinate clauses (e.g. relative clauses) or passive sentences where appropriate. The children can only learn the whole range of linguistic structures of a language (e.g. establishing its word order, distinguishing subjects from objects, learning about grammatical agreement) when these structures are presented in the input. Not presenting such a variety of structures would deprive the children of selecting and filtering the linguistic features from the L2 input. This is needed, however, in order to appropriately formulate hypotheses and rules about the use of these structures.

However, using varied input does not mean that the L2 input is not tailored for the needs of the children: A good L2 teacher uses repetition, paraphrase, restatement and synonyms to give the children many chances to understand the language, i.e. she in-

corporates redundancy into her speech (e.g. Snow 1989). Furthermore, in order to emphasise an utterance, she speaks more slowly at times. Although the L2 teacher does not translate the L2 into the L1, she translates the child's L1 utterance into the L2 and models, expands, paraphrases the children's L2 utterances (Tardif 1994). In other words, she takes up the child's utterance and provides a correct and extended model. Finally, the L2 teacher encourages the children to sing along, to use the L2, never forces them to use the L2 or to participate in activities carried out in the new language.

Guideline 2: The teacher needs to *contextualise* the L2

When children encounter the L2 as a commentary of every activity in the classroom, they do not understand every single word of this continual input due to their limited L2 proficiency. This experience is natural for children in the acquisition of their L1; thus, they are usually much more capable and willing to cope with it than adults. But the children have to be able to make sense of this stream of L2 utterances in order to build up linguistic competence from the limited L2 input (Kersten & Rohde *forthc.*). In principle, the young learners do not have to understand exactly what the L2 teachers say – they have to understand what they mean. Understanding the situation, knowing what is going on in the group, is especially important for young children as it guarantees their feeling of safety within the bilingual preschool context. Strategies for teachers to support children in this process include the use of visual and aural cues such as pictures, picture stories, CDs, videos, as well as the use of objects and other hands-on materials. The teacher can also support understanding via verbal means such as "reference language": so-called deictic terms (e.g. *here, there, come, go, I, you, etc.*), or "ear catchers" such as "Oh, look at this!"

Furthermore, teachers use body language such as pointing, gestures, facial expressions, and pantomime to underline the meaning of what they say (Snow 1990). Such strategies help identify the object or activity that is focused on, and help the children establish the connection between the content and its meaning. Language input, which would otherwise remain meaningless for the children, receives a context and meaning through such non-verbal strategies. They are especially helpful at the beginning of the children's learning process. Ideally, the contextualisation strategies mentioned above enable the child to understand a situation without having to rely on language at all. The child makes sense of the situation by relying entirely on the non-verbal contextualisation of the situation, much like watching an old-fashioned silent movie ("silent movie technique," see Burmeister 2010). Let us take a very simple example: The child may infer the meaning of the word 'shoe' (due to inherent lexical strategies, see Rohde 2005) because the teacher points to the object and utters the word 'shoe' at the same time.

With increasing language competence of the children, the use of contextualisation strategies usually decreases. At the beginning of L2 contact, e.g. when a child newly

arrives at a preschool or when a bilingual preschool is newly established, L2 teachers will employ many different kinds of contextualisation features. At the end of the children's preschool period, fewer gestures and other non-verbal means are necessary to help the children understand the daily routines and topics in preschool life. This may change in primary school, when new unknown content matter is introduced in the various subjects. However, it is, of course, important to tailor the contextual aids to the children's immediate needs and therefore vary the input strategies from child to child.

Guideline 3: The teacher adapts *speech patterns* for the benefit of the child's understanding

Another strategy is helpful to better understand words and phrases, and to single them out from the continuous flow of input: especially when talking to beginning learners, teachers will adapt their speed and intonation of speech to a slower rate and a clearer pronunciation as in adult speech. They will use a stronger stress on single words, they will alter their intonation and sometimes use a higher pitch. When they adapt language in such a way, the children have a better chance of understanding word and phrase boundaries, and they can map single words onto their respective meanings more easily (Kersten & Rohde forthc.).

Similar features of adapted speech can be observed in the mother tongue, in the speech that mothers or caretakers use to address little children to foster their L1 acquisition. This phenomenon has become known as *motherese* (Ingram 1989). The use of motherese seems well suitable for very young children in preschools. However, not all features of motherese work well with older learners. Adults may often use a somewhat exaggeratedly high pitch with babies or toddlers, but this may seem out of place when addressing older children. When children become more proficient in the L2, teachers usually reduce the amount of motherese or adapted speech with the children.

Guideline 4: The teacher creates an environment which promotes multi-sensory learning

In order to meet the different needs of the several learning types and support substantial learning, various channels need to be engaged in the learning process. This is called "multi-sensory learning" and is defined as "using visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modalities, sometimes at the same time" (International Dyslexia Association 2009). Recent research has shown that the various senses do not only work in isolation but also in connection with each other. Driver & Noesselt (2008) show the impact of multi-sensory brain regions that receive input from more than one sense, yet also influence specific sensory areas. But even though the effects of multi-sensory learning and stimuli on the brain need to be investigated in future research, the findings still indicate the importance of learning with different senses.

What do these results mean for the preschool context? It is of special importance in a bilingual preschool to create an environment which promotes multi-sensory learning (e.g. Stevens 1983, Snow 1990). To reach this goal, the children's learning experience takes place in a genuine context (Cameron 2001, Dunn 1983, Lorenz & Met 1989) with authentic materials (Edelenbos et al. 2006). Such a context is given when the focus of the activity is placed on the meaning rather than on the form of the language used in the interaction, as in *task-based activities* (Ellis 2003, Nunan 2004). Such activities consist of meaningful tasks, which are themselves based on meaningful content, and the language is not in the focus of the attention but is used as a means of communication instead.

For example, children like to "research" on their own, especially in the field of science, where different kinds of *hands-on activities* can be used. *Learning Centres* (i.e. educational facilities designed for children's learning that is at least partially, if not fully self-directed) with interesting experiments have been proven to be very useful and fun. Here, the children can demonstrate – verbally and also non-verbally – that they have understood the concepts. Such activities help the children to relate action and language in a more intensive way.

Children will further gain a deeper understanding of the topic (and the L2 input) if it recurs in other activities, like songs, role plays, experiments or other authentic situations. The key for the children to quickly understand the contents of a situation is to "recycle" the foreign language in many different ways. When children engage in multi-sensory learning, positive feedback by the teacher (both verbally and non-verbally) at all times helps the children to feel safe in the foreign language environment.

Guideline 5: The teacher provides the children with ample opportunity to interact verbally and to express themselves (verbally and non-verbally)

Even with all the helpful strategies quoted above, input by the L2 teacher alone does not suffice to foster the children's language production. This has been shown repeatedly in research studies (e.g. Cameron 2001). It is a well-known phenomenon that children understand language to a wider extent than they are able to produce it (e.g. Edelenbos et al. 2006). For children's successful foreign language learning three components – input, interaction and output – are important. Long (1996, 2007) showed that verbal interaction between child and adult facilitates the learning process. This strategy is called *negotiation of meaning*. In negotiating the meaning of certain L2 utterances, the children encounter many different elements of the L2, on which they focus, and which they either learn to accept or to reject through the intensive exchange with the teacher. This kind of interaction of negotiation can also foster vocabulary learning, and it helps the children develop different communicative strategies (Gass 2003, Mitchell & Myles 2004).

If the preschool teacher creates manifold opportunities for interaction in the L2 – even if the child answers in the L1 – she provides many chances for the children to produce language themselves, and for further opportunities to negotiate meaning. The teacher therefore has to create situations in which this kind of interaction can take place. Very soon, the children will learn strategies to make themselves understood and to get their message across. The good news for preschools is that, in contrast to the school context, input, interaction and output in a bilingual preschool context do not have to be arranged artificially; they are naturally given through the routines of the preschool (Kersten & Rohde forthc.).

Opportunities for interaction have been measured in the ELIAS preschools in terms of "encouragement and maintenance of L2 output," that is, to what amount the teachers encourage the children to speak the L2, and to what amount they try to maintain the L2 the children already use. Explicit encouragement would include, for example, a situation in which children tell about their weekends, and the L2 teacher says: "You guys have to speak English to me. I know you can." An instance of implicit encouragement was observed in a morning circle in which the teacher discussed washing hands with the children: She started a sentence with a well-known phrase ("washing your hands") in the L2 and went on saying, "But first of all we" At this point, she stopped talking and instead mimed the action of pulling up her sleeves – in this way, she encouraged the children to fill in the gap and complete the phrase in the L2.¹

Guideline 6: The teacher provides scaffolds to support the children's learning

Scaffolding techniques, which help the children recognise certain patterns in their daily routines and in the language input, have long been regarded a very helpful strategy for children's L2 learning (Snow 1990, Peregoy 1991). Massler & Ioannou-Georgiou (2010) divide scaffolding techniques into verbal and content scaffolding. With verbal scaffolding they mean that the teachers should provide input which is at an appropriate level, which is redundant (by the use of repetitions and paraphrasing for instance) and which is correct. Regarding output, they need to ensure that the children have enough time to respond, that they are allowed to code-switch and are offered supportive error correction. Content scaffolding, according to Massler & Ioannou-Georgiou (2010), includes reference to previous knowledge by, e.g., using visualisation techniques, giving feedback and key content concepts, and by allowing students to discuss concepts in their mother tongue (p. 62-63). These are all techniques that can perfectly well be used in a preschool context.

An additional type of scaffolds that might be particularly important in preschool are organisational scaffolds. A daily schedule which remains the same every day, recurring social patterns and activities, and reliable routines serve as scaffolds and, at the same time, as "safety nets" for the children, who understand the structure of the daily

1 We are grateful to Martina Weitz for these examples from her observation data base.

routines with the help of these signs. They do not only, however, serve as organisational scaffolds but, when expressed verbally, also as language scaffolds, and therefore enable the children to become attuned to the foreign language (Snow 1990, Peregoy 1991). Organisational scaffolds include daily routines, e.g. determining today's weather, tidy-up-time, and morning circle; bells, pictures and symbols that also serve as additional signals.

The teacher will accompany recurring daily routine situations (e.g. morning circle, or the beginning or the end of meals) with the same utterances. The children will quickly understand these formulaic expressions or routine phrases (even if they do not necessarily understand the full literal meaning at the beginning) because they occur frequently in the input, and because they are contextualised in such a way that the children can infer the meaning from the situation (Weber & Tardif 1991). Additionally, songs and rhymes are often used as language scaffolds because most children love to sing along, to imitate and to play with language.

Guideline 7: "Golden Rules" for parents, which allow children a successful early immersion experience

The attitude shown by parents has an important effect on their children's learning progress. For the school context, for example, many studies have demonstrated an intimate relationship between parental expectations and the actual academic achievements of their children (e.g. Eccles et al. 1983, McGrath & Repetti 2000). For the preschool context, it is likewise known that children unconsciously conform to their parents' attitudes and that a positive parental attitude positively affects the (language) learning progress (see e.g. Mushi 2000, López 2005). For foreign language learning, the results from Canadian research clearly show that children are successful in early immersion programmes when their parents are enthusiastic about immersion and believe in the programme, when they work together with the preschool teachers, when they take an interest in what the child tells them about the programme, and when they take part in preschool activities (e.g. Fortune & Tedick 2003). At home, parents are advised to (verbally) interact with their children in the mother tongue, and to read to their children in the mother tongue on a regular basis because numerous studies have shown that reading activities at home are an important predictor for later academic success in school (e.g. Fan & Chen 2002, Flouri & Buchanan 2004). Since the preschool provides a lot of input in the L2, the role of the parents as role models for the L1, which needs to be fostered at home, is all the more important. Practical experience in bilingual preschools has shown that it is not necessary for parents to drill the L2 at home. Parents may encourage their children to use the L2, but should not make them produce the L2 for friends or family members if the child does not want to (e.g. Schilk et al. i. pr.).

3. How do the children respond to the L2 input?

The children are able to understand what is going on provided the L2 input is comprehensible ("contextualised"), and after a short while, they are able to identify single words or phrases in the respective context. As their L1 acquisition process is not finished yet, they are already used to the fact that they may not understand every single word. In contrast to many adults, this does not worry them. Very often, the children answer in their L1 for quite a while, not only because they could not do so in the L2, but also because they know that their L1 is usually being understood by the L2 teacher. Also, in the case where the children all share the same first language, there is no vital reason at all to take the trouble of resorting to an unknown language (see Wode 2001). In terms of L2 production, the children need some time before they creatively produce language. In the beginning, the children produce L2 words in L1 sentences, i.e. they 'code-switch' (e.g. "Gib' mir mal die *milk*." ["Pass me the milk."]), or they use well-known formulas and routines ("Veryl hat gesagt, dass jetzt *tidy up time* ist. / Wir gehen jetzt *outside*. / *We go* raus." ["Veryl said that it's tidy up time now. / We go outside now. / We go outside"]). *Code-switching*, however, is something that continues to be a natural element in bilingual speakers' language use (Myers-Scotton 2006). In sum, the preschool children learn an L2 similar to how they learn their L1, namely by observing and listening and while *doing* things in or with the L2. Most children love to sing along, to play with language, to imitate, and they are less afraid than adults to make mistakes in the L2. Just like in the L1 acquisition process, the L2 grammar simply "emerges" (see Steinlen et al. volume I) and therefore does not need to be taught explicitly. In other words, children are not able to consciously organise the learning process, but they learn the L2 implicitly, as a "by-product."

How can children's progress in the L2 be documented in a manner that is feasible in daily life? One possibility is to use an observation sheet which the L2 teacher fills in regularly, as the one which was developed in collaboration with the City of Kiel (Germany) and the bilingual preschool "Beseler Allee" in Kiel (Eufinger et al. 2008). This is meant as a quick and easy way to document children's progress in the L2, both with respect to productive and receptive L2 skills (see Appendix). In this preschool, an observation sheet is filled out twice a year for each child (each time with a different colour). Such documentation has proven to be a helpful tool, for example in conversations with parents.

4. Conclusion

In all, seven different guidelines have been presented, which include L2 input quantity and quality, contextualisation, multisensory learning, speech intonation, interaction strategies, scaffolding, and parental involvement. These guidelines are far from complete but focus on the idea that children learn languages if only they are exposed to "good" input. We have tried to show what this kind of input involves from the part of

the L2 preschool teacher. As always, it is important to critically reflect on the quantity and the quality of the L2 input that the children receive. We hope that this chapter could give some insights with these guidelines which, in many contexts, have proven to be useful tools in successfully promoting children's L2 skills in bilingual preschool contexts. The results of the detailed ELIAS study on teacher input in volume I (Weitz et al.) show for the first time how important good input actually is for the implicit language learning of bilingual preschool children.

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Appendix

Quick and easy observations in a bilingual preschool: Children's Passive and Active Foreign Language Skills²

Name:	
Birth date:	Preschool entry:
Child's L1 (and level of knowledge):	
Knowledge of preschool's L1:	
Main contact person:	

Tables 1a+b refer to receptive and productive L2 skills in the bilingual preschool. The last column leaves space for additional comments, examples, situations, simply things which are worth to remember. Abbreviations: n.s. = native speaker (i.e. L2 preschool teacher), L2 = foreign language, L1 = children's first language

1a) Receptive L2 skills in the bilingual preschool

	never	seldom	sometimes	often	example
Child avoids contact to n.s.					
Child knows greetings and politeness formulae					
Child asks n.s. for support (e.g. child like consolation from n.s.)					
Child likes to have books read in the L2.					
Daily tasks (e.g. <i>brush your teeth, tidy up</i>)					
Arrangements (e.g. use of rooms, rules)					
Child "communicates" with the n.s. (e.g. tells stories, reacts appropriately in the L1 or L2 or non-verbally)					

1b) Active L2 knowledge in the bilingual preschool

	never	seldom	sometimes	often	example
Child sings L2 songs/rhymes/finger games, etc.					
Child imitates single L2 words/phrases/sentences					
Child communicates with other children in the L2 (single words or L2 "gibberish")					
Child acts as a translator					
Spontaneous L2 utterances					

2 This observation sheet (2008) was developed by Esther Eufinger, Cornelia Otto-Neugebauer, Friederike Schulz-Schneider (preschool "Beseler Allee," Kiel, Germany) and Anja Steinlen, in collaboration with the City of Kiel, Germany. The German version may be found at www.fmks.eu.

2) At home (information from parents)

	never	seldom	sometimes	often	example
Child receives offers in the L2 (e.g. DVDs, holidays, L2 books)					
Child tells parents about the L2 in preschool					
Child uses L2 words/phrases/sentences					