

Abstract

This PhD. thesis is an extension of my diploma thesis *Current Trends in the Field of Child Bilingualism* (2010). The new topic is the field of trilingualism.

The subject of this thesis is the natural bilingualism and trilingualism in children. In the theoretical section, the work has the objective of providing a comprehensive overview of the current perspective on specific aspects, possibilities and limits of multilingualism, with emphasis on summarizing the latest studies and research. The empirical section of this thesis is drawn up as a mapping study. The original part analyses sample of twenty five pre-school children from Czech-German bilingual families and the new part analyses ten children from trilingual families. The families are studied for their strategies of bilingual/trilingual upbringing and the proportional representation of these languages in their children's everyday life. The data are analyzed with the aid of qualitative research methods. The principal method of collecting data from the parents in this regard was by a questionnaire. Further The Active Vocabulary Test ASWT-R was conducted on children from these families. With trilingualism there was a focus on specific aspects which differ from bilingualism. Qualitative analyses of the data showed the parents' approach to bilingual and trilingual upbringing is very conscientious and also that it is no barrier, if one of the parents does not understand the language of the other. It was also shown that while the overwhelming majority of the children used their mother's language to begin with – she being the one with whom they had the most contact at first – later, the dominant language for most of them became that of their kindergarten and local environment. In accord with the claims of many authors, the well-balanced development of languages was shown to be the exception. In trilingual children one language was shown to be dominant and the two other weaker (very weak was the father's language).

Key words: child bilingualism, trilingualism, cognitive benefits, bilingual speech development, language dominance, multilingual family