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Multilingual Development in Germany in the Crossfire of Ideology and Politics: Monolingual and Multilingual Expectations, Polylingual Practices

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The massive changes in its demography resulting from the economic and political transitions in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have changed Germany's linguistic topography, resulting in increasing societal and individual multilingualism or plurilingualism. In the wake of these changes, language and the expression of language ideologies have come to the forefront of political, academic and popular discussions. Increasingly, the formulation of and arguments about social policies have been couched in terms of language. This paper focuses on countervailing ideologies that underlie the discussion of the political and social debates focused on language. As we will see, both German-only and multilingual policies have expanded in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Multilingualism, Plurilingualism, Polylingualism*

In 2008, the Council of Europe introduced a terminological distinction to clarify discussions of multilingualism, proposing *multilingualism* for the presence of more than one 'variety of language' in a society in which individuals may be monolingual, and *plurilingualism* to refer to the repertoire of varieties of language used by individuals. Germany is multilingual, encompassing social groups which use German, but also groups which use regional minority languages or migrant minority languages. It is also plurilingual, in that individuals from all such communities may (and often do) use more than one language. This kind of plurilingualism is increasingly supported in educational institutions, principally in the teaching of foreign languages in their standard varieties, but also in teaching some of the curriculum subject matter in languages other than German.

However, contrary to the standard understanding of *monolingualism* in which each language is used separately, plurilingual individuals are increasingly *polylingual* in their language practices, characterized by Jørgensen (143) as employing “whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best they can, regardless of how well they know the involved languages,” combining processes of code switching, code alternation, language crossing and code amalgamation to create hybrid varieties. Dirim and Auer document crossing into Turkish by speakers who do not have a Turkish background; Hinnenkamp discusses Turkish-German polylingual performances employing collage, bricolage and sampling as a transcultural interface; and Androutsopoulos discusses the ideologizing of ethnolectal<sup>1</sup> varieties of German, the impact of which is seen in Yildiz’ commentary (320-321) on Zaimoglu’s literary representations. While polylinguals themselves and many sociolinguists regard polylingualism positively as a reflection of creative virtuosity, others regard such styles in academia, government and advertising and in the informal (countercultural) discourse of youth as a threat to the substance of the German language. The disparity of these views toward linguistic variation can be understood as an example of what Hüppauf (6-11) discusses in the wider framework of attitudes toward globalization framed either as an aspect of modernity opening local identities to transnational influences through migration or as a threat to national identities based on the essentialist notion of one nation, one language.

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<sup>1</sup> The usage of the term “ethnolect” has evolved from referring to a variety of the majority language which is influenced by contact with the language used by a particular (immigrant) ethnic group to designating urban dialects used across several immigrant (and non-immigrant) groups, particularly youth, as an “act of identity.” The term is critically discussed by Nortier (1) and exemplified by other articles on North American and European varieties in the 2008 issue of the *International Journal of Bilingualism*.

## *The constitutional status of German*

Language policies in Germany, as in other European countries, are still strongly influenced by the notion that nations are, or ideally should be, monolingual (Blommaert and Verschueren). Although national monolingualism has never been the case in Europe, as pointed out by Gal, the ideal and ideology persist and continue to have enormous influence. Germany is no exception here, as seen in the debate that has raged in recent political discussion about whether German should be explicitly recognized as the national language. At the present time, the German Constitution (*Grundgesetz*), established in 1949, does not have an explicit statement of national language.

In 2005, the Association of the German Language (*Verein deutsche Sprache*, VDS), a group dedicated to the protection of the German language in various ways, called for the constitution to be amended to explicitly name German as the national language, and the Bundestagspräsident Norbert Lammert (CDU), also called for this change. In summer 2008, a petition published in the popular tabloid *Bild Zeitung* demanding that the sentence “The language of the German Federal Republic is German” (“*Die Sprache der Bundesrepublik ist Deutsch*”) be added to article 22 of the *Grundgesetz*. On November 9, 2010, a petition signed by 46,000 people was delivered to the Bundestagspräsident, which although representing only a very small proportion of the population, has provoked more public discussion.

In addition to the symbolic issue, concrete language policies have become central in the instrumentalization of practical social policies. The impact of the new policies must be understood in the context of demographic changes and their linguistic consequences. Thus,

before turning to the evolution of language policy as social policy, a brief overview of population and immigration statistics at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is in order.

*Demography: Population, immigration and naturalization in Germany in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Until 2005, population statistics reflected either German or foreign citizenship, but starting with the Microcensus in 2005, the population has also been reported in terms of “persons with migrant background” (*mit Migrationshintergrund*) as well as country of citizenship (from the Central Foreigner Register, or *Ausländerzentralregister*). These two measures provide a more realistic picture, which reflects ethnic German emigrants (*Aussiedler*) who automatically became German citizens, as well as naturalized German citizens and their children. Members of these groups have German citizenship but are not necessarily dominant (or in some cases even very fluent) in German.

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Total Population</b> (microcensus)	<b>82,369</b>	<b>82,257</b>	<b>82,135</b>	<b>81,904</b>
<b>Persons with Migration background</b> (microcensus)	<b>15,143</b> (18.4%)	<b>15,411</b> (18.7%)	<b>15,566</b> (19.0%)	<b>16,048</b> (19.6%)
<b>Foreign population</b> (Foreigner Registrations)	<b>6,751</b>	<b>6,745</b>	<b>6,728</b>	<b>5,594</b>
<b>Naturalizations</b> (naturalization statistics)	<b>125</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1: Population of Germany (in 1,000s), according to nationality and migration status 2006-2009. ([www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de)).**

According to the most recent available statistics for 2009, by far the most people with migration background come from Turkey (3 million), followed closely by 2.9 million from the former Soviet Union, 1.5 million from the former Yugoslavia and nearly 1.5 million from Poland (Press release 248, Destatis).

Recently imposed language requirements for immigration, particularly of spouses of current residents, appear to have contributed to a decline in the rate of immigration. According to the statistics on approved visas for spouses, the numbers have declined and the direction of migration has reversed. In 2008, there was a net emigration of 10,147 persons to Turkey. Despite this reversal, the number of people with Turkish background in Germany has continued to increase through births but also through naturalizations. In 2009, naturalization of formerly Turkish citizens (24,647) far exceeded the next most populous nationality, citizens of former Yugoslavian countries (5,732).

#### *Linguistic and educational consequences of concentration of non-Germans*

The population with migration background is unevenly distributed by age as well as geographically. As a result of both further immigration and the natural increase of populations with and without migrant background, the current and future population of children and adolescents with migrant background is even more sharply skewed toward high proportions of pre-school, school-age and young adults entering the job market. The 2008 press release of the Federal Statistical Office pointed out that almost one third of the children under five in Germany have an immigrant background (Press release 105, Destatis). The situation is even more extreme

in certain neighborhoods, where in some schools the percentage of pupils with migrant background is over 90%.

As Schroeder (7) points out, in the diglossic verbal repertoires of many migrants in Germany, language use frequently varies between formal and informal settings, with use of German dominating in formal and school settings, while varieties of the heritage languages are used in informal domains. Many adults lack standard, or colloquial, or even minimally proficient German, which is argued to be one of the major obstacles to their integration. Children growing up in these environments are exposed to German less frequently, and the varieties of German are often non-standard; thus they often lack proficiency in the expected varieties of German when they enter school. Lack of expected proficiency levels persists for many pupils with non-German background who thus drop out of school or leave with a lower degree of completion than those without migration background.

The first international PISA and IGLU<sup>2</sup> tests of 15-year-olds and 4<sup>th</sup> graders showed not only that Germany ranked very low in general, but also that it was among the countries with the largest disparities in results between students of migrant and non-migrant background. The results of the 2009 PISA tests showed some improvement, especially for pupils with migrant background, but their results are still lower than those without migration background. (Klieme et al.). Findings that the use of languages other than German at home is correlated with low reading proficiency scores (see e.g. Entorf and Minoiu) reinforced the ideology that minority languages are detrimental, and supported emphasis on German-only policies in preschool. The achievement discrepancies also inspired calls to reform the secondary school structure, which has been implemented in several federal states, including Berlin in 2010/2011. However, since school

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<sup>2</sup> PISA = Program for International Student Assessment, IGLU ('PIRLS') = *Internationale Grundschul-Lese-Untersuchung* ('Progress in International Reading Literacy Study')

policy is regulated by the individual Federal States, it is noteworthy that these reforms are not uniform across all of Germany, but reflect regional and political differences. Although the Hauptschule, Realschule and Gesamtschule have been combined, the highest and most selective school type, the Gymnasium, continues to exist.

*Integration: The role of language in the debates*

In recent years, language proficiency has come to play an increasingly important gate-keeping role in overt policies for immigration, naturalization and integration directed toward adults, children, and adolescents, as seen most recently in the publication and discussion of the book by the former finance minister of Berlin and head of Deutsche Bank, Thilo Sarrazin. In the section entitled “What to do” (“*Was tun*”) Sarrazin makes explicit recommendations about language policy, including obligatory language courses for all migrants whose German is insufficient for public work, increasing the linguistic requirements for naturalization, and requiring full day kindergarten in German for children three and older (Sarrazin 327-28). Many of these proposals had already been instigated before the publication of his book.

*German proficiency requirements for adult immigration*

In 2007, the Minister of the Interior tabled a proposal for reform of the immigration law (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*), which, among other provisions, required prospective immigrants, particularly spouses of current residents, to prove proficiency in German before being allowed to enter. Crucially, and controversially, this law contained an exclusion clause, so that the



requirement was waived for citizens of many countries. This proposal, passed in December 2007, was intensely debated. Critics of the proposal claimed that it violated the human rights of potential immigrants from countries where it would be difficult or impossible to acquire German proficiency before their arrival, and further that it was unfairly formulated since, in addition to spouses from Schengen countries who have visa-free entry, according to §41, spouses from certain other countries, including Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, the Korean Republic, New Zealand and the USA were exceptions who did not have to prove knowledge of German. Thus, as Stevenson (158) has also pointed out, it appears that the actual target is not language proficiency but other purported (or feared) aspects of the potential immigrants or citizens. According to statistics comparing 2007 and 2008, applications for immigration of spouses have indeed declined, though according to the Migration Report for 2009 (139) there have been relatively very few cases due to applicants failing the language test.

### *Language requirements for naturalization*

Due to political and social historical circumstances discussed by Maas (2008), Germany's shift from a definition of citizenship only in terms of ancestry (*jus sanguinis*) to permit naturalization of migrants without German "blood" came late. Since the revision of criteria for naturalization introduced in 2000, German language proficiency has come to be a significant component of the requirements. In conjunction with efforts to harmonize regulations across the European Union, subsequent revision in August 2007 defined proficiency in the German language as attainment of the level B1 of the European Reference Framework for Languages, specified in terms of communicative proficiencies rather than of grammatical correctness or

literacy. The B1 “threshold” competencies specify that the candidate can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters, can deal with most situations in countries where the language is spoken, can produce a simple coherent text on a familiar topic, can describe experiences, events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions, and can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. Although these B1 competencies are vague, insofar as they aimed at the prospective citizens’ ability to engage in everyday communication, they represent a step forward.

### *Language as a criterion of integration*

In January 2005, the German government initiated an integration course (*Integrationskurs*) for adults. This course is obligatory for new arrivals and for unemployed residents of 5 years or more who lack adequate knowledge of German or are otherwise deemed in need of integration<sup>3</sup>. The course is predominantly devoted to German language instruction, initially 600 hours, with the goal of attainment of the B1 level of the European Reference Framework for Languages, as now required for naturalization, plus 30 hours of civic ‘orientation’ in historical, legal and cultural aspects of German life.

Both positive and negative sanctions were proposed: for successful completion of the course, participants were rewarded with a residence permit and with reduction of the number of years of residence necessary for naturalization from 8 to 7 years. Those who failed to attend could be refused extension of their residence permits, and recipients of unemployment compensation could be penalized 10% of the amount (Press release of the Ministry of the

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<sup>3</sup> According to the information on the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2009), a person can be judged especially in need of integration if he or she has custody of a minor child and cannot speak simple German.

Interior, January 17, 2007). The imposition of negative sanctions was controversial, considered by some to constitute an infraction of immigrants' human rights, and was widely discussed in the media and debated in parliament. In addition, the effectiveness of the program was questioned.

New regulations passed by the Ministry of the Interior in November 2007 maintain that language is the prerequisite for integration. In fact, the provisions that came into effect on January 1, 2009, make the duration of the course flexible, allowing for 430-1200 hours of instruction, with up to 900 hours of language instruction. A new language test for the "Certificate in German" (*Zertifikat Deutsch*) prepared by the Goethe Institute and TELC GmbH ("The European Language Certificate Ltd.") contains much more specific criteria for oral and written proficiencies appropriate for A2 and B1 levels. One such course given in Cologne is presented in the 2009 documentary film *Zertifikat Deutsch*, directed by Karin Jurschick.

### *German proficiency requirements for migrant children and youth*

Turning now to policies directed at children and youth with migrant background, we find that focus on their development of proficiency in German is equally strong, but grounded more plausibly in educational necessity for children. The current focus is on German at the expense of children's heritage language varieties.

Two positions have been taken: one reflects a traditional focus on vocabulary and grammatical correctness, such as "Deutsch Plus" or "Fit in Deutsch"; the other focuses on functional and pragmatic abilities in everyday interactions, as in the "Sismik Screening." Despite much criticism of such tests in psychometric and theoretical terms (Ehlich et al.), the use of these tests continues. In its evaluation of available tests, the *FörMig* program concludes that multiple

tests and screening procedures to assess proficiency and monitor progress are more appropriate than fixing on a particular test (Lengvel et al.).

### *Education for multilingualism / plurilingualism*

However, German-only education is not the only option. Although the prevalence of explicit mother tongue education programs has declined, there has been an increase in education in languages other than German, with the focus not so much on the integration and well-being of migrant children in their own communities (or with an eye to their possible return to their countries of origin), but looking ahead to their integration into the German economy, to improved social integration in the wider socially diverse community and, finally, to increased economic and educational mobility within and beyond the European Union.

An important innovation reflecting the changed rationale for mother tongue education to the promotion of minority and majority multilingual competence has been the establishment and proliferation of two-way bilingual education programs in a number of languages. Several German cities have private schools which offer bilingual immersion programs. In addition, several have instituted public schools with immersion or partial immersion programs in a number of languages, the so-called “Berlin model.” The State European Schools in Berlin (*Staatliche Europaschulen Berlin*, SESB), are unique in Germany in the number of different language pairs represented, and they continue throughout the secondary level, up to the Abitur. These schools, founded on the assumption that highly proficient multilingualism is highly advantageous, are intended to prepare pupils for international employment and study, and to serve as a bridge between Western and Central Europe. At the same time, with their bicultural approach, in which

pupils of different backgrounds learn with and from each other, they intend to make a significant contribution to combating prejudice and discrimination.

The SESB began in 1992 with 160 first grade pupils in programs with the three language pairs: German/English, German/French and German/Russian, the languages of the former occupying forces. It now encompasses nine language pairs, including those spoken by immigrant populations in Berlin: Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Greek, Turkish and Polish. In the school year 2009/2010, there were 4 dual language primary schools for French; 2 primary schools each for English, Russian, Spanish, Italian; and one school each for Turkish, Portuguese, and Polish. Although the SESB model was conceived to include equal numbers of German L1 and partner language L1 students, in practice the proportions of Germans and non-German home language students may differ greatly from this ideal (Pfaff 347). The disparities reflect both the popularity and the prestige of the Western European international languages English and French, and of Spanish and Italian, which have high proportions of German L1 students, as opposed to the Turkish and Greek programs, which have much higher proportions of students who use the non-German language of instruction at home.

In addition to the Turkish/German SESB, the biliteracy programs (*zweisprachige Alphabetisierung*) for Turkish/German developed in Berlin in the 1980s (Nehr and Karajoli) still continue in four public primary schools. Although these schools were recognized by the Council of Europe (*Europarat*) as a model for bilingual education of language minorities in Europe, participation has declined, and as of 2010 only four schools are still participating.

Several public schools now offer non-traditional languages as foreign languages for credit as a second foreign language after English or French. In Berlin, 13 foreign languages are currently offered in the public schools as a first, second or third foreign language: English,

French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Polish, Modern Greek, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, as well as classical Greek and Latin. Eight secondary schools currently offer Turkish as a second foreign language. In addition, there are five private secondary schools in Germany, part of the international Gülen network, which follow the local curriculum, teaching in German with Turkish as a foreign language. During a 2010 visit to Turkey, Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced support for Turkish schools in Germany, parallel to German schools in Turkey, but insisted that proficiency in German is essential for integration and that their goal should be bilingualism, not total assimilation to German culture (MiGazin 2010).

*Final remarks: Multiple messages on the path to a multilingual and plurilingual Germany*

Language policy issues continue to be a significant part of the discussion about much wider social issues concerning immigration, naturalization and integration of recent migrants into the majority population in Germany. However, there is no single ideology or line of policy planning. Policies focused on German proficiency, as well as those focused on multilingualism, are debated in terms of both desired practical outcomes and the important symbolic role of language and personal identification, whether with the nation or with the ethnic group. Both turn on arguments that language is essential, albeit in two different senses.

The essentialism seen in the symbolic value of the German language as a symbol of the nation is reflected in the continuing debate on revising the German constitution. That the German language is essential in the sense of being necessary in practice is acknowledged by all; what remains controversial is the extent to which the level of proficiency in German should be decisive in permitting or preventing access to residence permits and social support or to certain

educational and occupational options. As we have seen, the application of the laws is not uniform for all immigrants, suggesting that language proficiency is not the underlying issue, but rather a convenient, apparently objective instrument of social and political policies to control options for immigrants and their families. Although the integration course still consists primarily of language instruction, and the proportion may even be increased, the imbalance of language to cultural learning may be mitigated by the reorganization of the language courses to focus on areas of life where adult migrants frequently have contact with Germans, dealing with educational issues of their children, contacts with employers, government officials or health services. However, it is not yet clear whether attainment of these levels of proficiency in German will actually give a significant boost to social integration for the participants. Meanwhile, informal practices of both majority and minority groups are increasingly polylingual.

As far as language at schools is concerned, German-only rules in kindergartens and schools may lead minority pupils to internalize (and on some occasions to articulate) that their heritage languages are less valuable.

At the same time, there are positive views of multilingualism and plurilingualism, stemming from European policies that support linguistic diversity in education as a way to facilitate labor and educational mobility, empowering both majority and minority groups. Fears that support for minority languages in education will decrease integration are voiced, but at present they are outweighed by the advantages of added competencies.

The suggestion (Maalouf et al. 21) that political recognition and support for these languages could actually function to defuse perceived religious and cultural divisions also refers to essentialist views of language and culture, this time from the point of view of the ethnic minorities rather than the national majority.

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