

# The Dominant Language Constellations of young multilinguals in an international school in Croatia

---

Lakuš, Davor

Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2020

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zagreb, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:131:681025>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2025-04-02**



Sveučilište u Zagrebu  
Filozofski fakultet  
University of Zagreb  
Faculty of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[ODRAZ - open repository of the University of Zagreb  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences](#)



University of Zagreb

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English Studies

TEFL Section

THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE CONSTELLATIONS OF YOUNG MULTILINGUALS IN  
AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN CROATIA

Graduate paper

Student: Davor Lakuš

Mentor: Ass. prof. Stela Letica Krevelj, PhD.

Zagreb, April 2020



Sveučilište u Zagrebu

Filozofski fakultet

Odsjek za anglistiku

Katedra za metodiku

DOMINANTNE JEZIČNE KONSTELACIJE MLADIH VIŠEJEZIČARA U  
INTERNACIONALNOJ ŠKOLI U HRVATSKOJ

Diplomski rad

Student: Davor Lakuš

Mentorica: dr. sc. Stela Letica Krevelj, doc

Zagreb, travanj, 2020.

**Examining Committee:**

Associate prof. Renata Geld, PhD

Jasenka Čengić, Mag.

Assistant prof. Stela Letica Krevelj, PhD

## 0. Abstract

Regardless of their location, international schools serve as paradigmatic multilingual enclaves. They gather and group multiple cultures under one roof. Given the scope and the spectrum of different languages and cultures present, the pupils and the teachers necessarily find a common communicative foothold in a lingua franca, which is most often English. Thus, the pupils attending international schools are most often multilinguals by default, as they use and are fluent in their heritage language at home, use English at school, and are surrounded by the language and culture of the society at large. This paper presents a case study of young multilingual pupils of various cultural background (Russian, Azerbaijani, Chinese and Slovenian) attending the third grade in a Croatian international school. The study is aimed at establishing their linguistic profiles on the model of the Dominant Language Constellation concept of multilingualism (Aronin & Singleton, 2012). The introduction covers an outline of the theory and its context, followed by instances of previous research on the topic of multilingual profiling. The main body of the paper presents the study of the young multilinguals, which is followed by a discussion on the results and possible implications. The DLC concept proved more than appropriate in profiling young multilinguals' core languages. The answers to how, when, where, why, and whom with the pupils used their languages, paired with their own perceptions of their DLCs can be beneficial towards a better understanding of certain DLCs, as well as tailoring the educational solutions aimed at a certain DLC group.

## 1. Introduction

This paper sets out to discuss and elaborate on the usefulness of the Dominant Language Constellation (DLC), conceptualized by Larissa Aronin (Aronin & Singleton, 2012), for a case study on profiles of multilingual children. A DLC consists of the languages vital for individual's or group's life. This concept was proposed as a practical orientation for studying multilingualism as it focuses on the most necessary linguistic faculties of an individual or group. Furthermore, the DLC concept puts a stress on how, when, where, why, and whom with an individual or a group utilize their languages as a unit. This study was primarily set in motion as a topic of a graduate paper. Multilingual profiling can in general furnish a better understanding of an individual's or a group's essential languages, and how they use their languages in everyday situations to relate to, communicate with and understand the world around them. The DLC is here presented as a theoretical springboard for studying young multilingual pupils of a heritage background attending an international school in Zagreb, Croatia.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. The Dominant Language Constellation

The DLC is a fairly new concept and framework within the field of multilingual research. First proposed by Larissa Aronin and Muiris Ó Laoire (2004), the DLC framework lends itself as an approach to studying multilingualism both at the individual and the societal level. The DLC is basically a set of key languages essential to an individual's or a group's existence (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 59). Leaning on both the sociological (globalization, glocalization, etc.) and linguistic theories (multi-competence, language repertoire, etc), the DLC acknowledges the multifarious, multifaceted nature of using more than two languages,

and in fact invites a holistic, albeit still a rather delimited approach to investigating multilingualism in all its various forms. Aronin and Singleton presented it as a part of their ‘New Linguistic Dispensation’ approach to multilingual phenomena, embracing the full spectrum of language use, education, policies, and the way language evolves and changes across societies and time (2012, p. 43).

The crux of the approach lies in its narrowing down and zooming in on only the most vital, expedient languages of a multilingual’s repertoire, the ones they use daily, regularly, and still on the other hand capturing and seizing on the multi-competence nature of multilingualism. The languages of a particular DLC are taken as a composite unit, rather than as separate systems, thus sidestepping the monolingual trap. Language knowledge and competence is rather relativized between the languages of a DLC (as opposed to assessing it against an idealized and arbitrary monolingual norm) and according to the actual communicative needs of the individual. It hence serves to profile the language knowledge of an individual not in terms of an idealized “‘perfect’ or ‘native-like’ command of the languages at his/her disposal”, but rather in terms of how they use the language in actual situations (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 31).

The DLC framework is thus set to cover just the essential and indispensable linguistic faculties. As objects of study, DLCs inevitably call attention to and suggest a certain indexicality, as they are (be it implicit, or explicit) indices of individuals’ or group’s personal background, their socio-economic status, their culture and so on (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 65). That is, the DLCs offer an outline of an individuals’ identity, insofar as it relates to their active and commonplace use of their languages. The constellations thus on the one hand offer a synchronous snapshot of multilinguals’ linguistic life at a point in time, a syntagmatic relationship of their main languages, channelling “our attention to the differences, similarities, configuration of skills and characteristics in each of the languages within a particular



constellation” (Aronin, 2016, p. 203). Furthermore, they offer a glimpse into individuals’ linguistic multi-competence and “an instance of the closest possible language contact, literally in one person” where it is just this synergy of languages “what generates multi-competence” (Aronin, 2016, p. 209). On the other hand, they also offer a diachronous view of individuals’ main linguistic competences, in terms of a dynamic and historical dimension of their DLCs, as people’s life trajectories and choices condition which languages enter, stay or drift out of one’s DLC (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 66).

## 2.2. Previous Research

The Dominant Language Constellations model relates to a number of approaches to studying multilingualism, particularly by the common theme of approaching multilingualism holistically (Jessner 2008, Cook & Wei 2009, Llorca 2009, May 2014). Rather than considering languages individually, they put the stress on “the whole individual and his or her social repertoire and highlighting the connections between the language” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011, 359). The multilingual approach (for example Cenoz & Gorter 2011), as opposed to the monolingually biased tradition of SLA research (Chomsky 1965), centres around the actual speakers, their identities, and the multilingual contexts as complex systems of linguistic interaction, rather than isolated, idealised languages. The DLC, in addition, pushes to spotlight only the most vital of a multilingual’s languages. The DLC also in a way relates to the Dynamic Systems Theory approach to SLA (Larsen-Freeman 1997, De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor 2007). They both stress the complexity of the multilingual phenomena, the multiple variables involved – internal (cognitive capabilities, motivation, time, aptitude, etc.) external (support from environment, formal and informal education, etc.), and their interconnectedness – and how they are subject to change over time.

### 2.2.1 Multilingual Profiling

Multilingual profiling and biographies are topics that have drawn some attention over the last few decades. Various research studies have been done focusing on multilingual case-studies, mainly concerning either migrant populations or ethnically diverse regions, such as the Basque country (Cenoz 2009), South African Republic (Busch 2010), or Israel (Olshtain & Nissim-Amitai 2003), where three or more ethnic groups coexist in a multicultural social setting. These groups are often required to juggle three or more languages for various functions in their day-to-day lives. For example, as Olshtain and Nissim-Amitai (2003, p. 36) reported, a Circassian living in Israel spoke Circassian with family and their inner community, used Arabic for religious purposes, Hebrew in the context of the society at large, and English for the needs of higher education, media literacy, etc. Many of these case-studies share features with the DLC model: the emphasis on a functional analysis of multilingual's linguistic palette, the interrelationship of individual's main languages, and the indexicality of a given multilingual profile. Following are a few examples of such case studies.

Lamare and Dagenais (2003; 53) inquired into the linguistic profiles of Canadian youth in Vancouver and Montreal by means of a semi-structured interview. Their case study featured a sample of multilingual students from various cultural backgrounds, mostly immigrant, and “explored students' daily language practices in and out of school, their representations of multilingualism and the languages in their repertoire.” They examined the students' perceptions of the benefits and social role of multilingualism, as well as how multiple languages tie in with their identity construction. The students regarded their use of multiple languages as a definite social and economic asset, which made them quite mobile in navigating multiple social and business spheres. Although ascribing a strong practical value to dominant languages in the social context – English, French – they nevertheless “express stronger affiliation with their family language, regardless of its status and economic value.” In

keeping with their immigrant background, they identified themselves as transcending both Canadian and/or heritage identity, describing themselves as transnational, viewing themselves as transnational youth, with a fluid identity. Lamare and Degenais in turn concluded that the students of this colourful a background and multilingual profile represented a group that required a specific approach, one in-tuned to their rich linguistic repertoire and practice. The theoretical perspective in this study runs in parallel with the main ideas of the DLC theory. The authors looked into how a multilingual dominant language constellation of English – French – heritage language fared among immigrant youth in Canada. They inquired into how had the students acquired a particular language, how and when did they use their dominant languages, and questioned what symbolic, emotional and practical value the students ascribed to each particular language.

In a similar vein, Schwarzl, Vetter and Janik (2019) constructed linguistic profiles and repertoires of students in international schools in Brno and Vienna. They went about this by examining the school language policies, talking to the principals, and finally interviewing 20 students from five schools in both cities. The interviews were conducted hand in hand with having the students fill out language self-portraits, where they were required to colour a blank body silhouette using the colours that represent the languages of their repertoire. The follow-up interviews were conducted to inquire about the choices of languages and their relative positions on the body silhouette. The discussions were mainly steered towards looking into what functions particular languages had in the students' lives. They were concerned with where, when and with whom they used the languages, in turn constructing students' linguistic profiles. In this way, the researchers, in tandem with their interviewees, categorized students' languages as home, school and desired languages, all the while stressing and acknowledging the fluidity and hybridity between the categories. One of the main aims, akin to a DLC-like

analysis of individual's multilingualism, was to denote and uncover functional patterns of the main languages of the students' linguistic palettes.

Wei (2009), conducted a qualitative study featuring three Chinese university students in London. He interviewed them on a range of topics concerning their multilingualism, from their handling of everyday social situations, their views on using two and more languages, to their sense of identity and their 'transcultural' status. The students were fluent and active users of English, as well as a few Chinese dialects. He analysed their practices in terms of translanguaging which Wei defined as "the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users". He noted that engaging in multilingual practices the individuals create social spaces which have a formative and transformative power, as they thereby actively construct authentic multilingual identities. It is through creating these metaphorical translinguistic space that the actors employ and manifest their cognitive faculties, personal histories, experiences, attitudes, values and ideologies. In this way, translanguaging correlates to DLC-like indices of multilingual's own personal, but also socio-cultural background and context.

In a 2016 paper, Ibrahim also tackled the problem of constructing and drawing up children's multilingual identities. She inquired into the multilingual profiles of migrant children living in France. They showcased high levels of literacy and proficiency in both their heritage language and the language of the society at large they lived in. The participants were also inevitably proficient in English as well, which, among other things, functioned as a mediating language between the two. In her study she also strove to go beyond mere knowledge of the languages, but rather also encompass the emotional, personal, social and cultural attitudes towards the languages (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 71). The children, by expressing themselves in writing, verbally, by drawings, and by choosing objects of emotional

significance, voiced and formulated distinct, fluid and, for that matter, dynamic images and identities of their multilingual selves (Ibrahim. 2016, p. 72).

Furthermore, regarding visual representation of multilingualism, particularly in youth, Melo-Pfeifer set out to analyse the patterns in which children represent their linguistic repertoires via visual narratives (2017, p. 41). She was concerned with how exactly children with a heritage background conceptualized and reflected on their multilingualism in a foreign context. The results varied, from monolingual to multilingual representations of their plurilingual resources (2017, p. 42). Similarly, DLCs as a group of languages easily offer themselves as a type of a visual metaphor in that the constellations of languages can readily be imagined in a visual relationship. Aronin and Singleton indeed suggested and offered examples of a visual imagining of the DLC's of particular multilinguals (2012, p. 61). Visualizations can serve well to highlight DLC's "particularity and specificity for each individual and each society", in turn better delineating the pragmatics of the main language(s) of an individual or group (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 64).

The approaches mentioned above all correlate to the DLC to a certain degree. The DLC emphasizes a functional analysis of a multilingual's linguistic repertoire, putting an emphasis on only the most expedient languages in a multilingual's linguistic repertoire, as do all of the above-mentioned studies. Qualitative studies on multilingualism necessarily rely on analysing multilinguals' languages with respect to communicative contextual domains in which they use the languages. They are also bound to tackle on the one hand issues of linguistic identity and personal linguistic histories, and on the other emotional and practical value assigned to the main languages of a multilingual's repertoire.

### 3 The study

#### 3.1 The aim

The aim of this research study is to apply, test and evaluate the applicability and pertinency of the DLC framework in research to multilingual pupil's linguistic profiles and portraits.

#### 3.2 Participants

The pupil sample was comprised of 7 pupils from the same 3<sup>rd</sup> grade primary school class in an international school in Croatia. Official language of instruction in school was English. The interviews were accordingly carried out in English. English was also most frequently their L2, as they had languages other than Croatian and English as their home/mother language(s), and they had most commonly started their formal education in English in their 1st grade. Croatian was taught as a school subject and was not nearly as ubiquitous as English in the school setting, but was the official and ever-present language of the society at large, and outside school. The pupils were thus a part of an officially bilingual community, of a truly multicultural makeup. Their DLCs were quantitatively in keeping with Aronin's and Singleton's remark that the number of languages typically revolve around three, while the repertoire may be much wider (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 63). The pupils were chosen on the criteria of having similar DLCs, or rather the third, heritage language in question, namely: three pupils had Russian as their L1, three had Chinese, and an unmatched had Slovenian. The languages of the pupil sample are presented in Table 1.

		Languages				
		English	Croatian	Russian	Chinese	Slovenian
Status		Pupil's L2, official language of instruction, language used in the school community	Foreign language for most of the pupils	L1 of the Russian pupils	L1 of the Chinese pupils	L1 of the Slovenian pupil
Domains of use		Covers all domains (private and social domain)	Education and official domains (social domain for most)	Family, media, popular culture (private domain )	Family, media, popular culture (private domain )	Family, media, popular culture (private domain )
Global status		Global language	Croatian national language	Russian national language	Chinese national language	Slovenian national language

Table 1: Languages of the DLCs

The constellations of the group basically fall into a pattern of a heritage language (Russian, Chinese, Slovenian)/English/Croatian.

### 3.3 The methodology

The pupils were interviewed on a range of topics ranging from their basic linguistic, cultural and personal background, their (perceived) linguistic knowledge, the use they make of it. They were finally given a drawing task in order to elicit from them how they perceived their multilingualism visually: for example, as an integrated whole, as multiple selves speaking separated languages, or something entirely different.

The study was conducted in the form of interviews, carried out individually with each pupil. Interviews were all held during a single, regular school day in the school lobby and in a classroom. They were all audio recorded to ease the data analysis. The names of the pupils are coded to guard their privacy. Interview questions were designed so as to construct a DLC profile of the pupils roughly in keeping with Aronin and Singleton's layout of the DLC framework. The form was a semi-structured one, where most of the conversations were led in

a similar fashion and order, whilst still allowing for certain digressions. The questions were kept as simple as possible, given that the pupils were rather young (9, 10 years), and as such were not expected to provide an all-too-thorough account of their linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge.

Introductory questions were intended to cover multilinguals' general life background, their origin, the countries, cultures, societies they have lived in, and for how long, along with, in turn, their future plans (theirs, their family's), if any. Following these ice-breakers, pupils were asked to list their languages. In turn, they were asked to note the order of acquisition, the onset, how they had acquired them (active-passive acquisition, instructed or acquired), how long had they been learning them, some earliest memory regarding the language in question, and the perceived difficulty, both of the acquisition process and of the language in general. They were then asked to express, in any words, their own reflections on their language use, how they perceive their proficiency in and usefulness of their dominant languages relative to each other, and how they perceived the distance/closeness and interchangeability (in various communicative contexts) of their dominant languages.

The whole idea was to encapsulate, bring out, and foreground the ways they as multilingual individuals, although young, manifested a purported high level of linguistic and expressive symbolic skillset. It was interesting to see the ways in which their languages behave and aid them in their everyday environment(s), how much, where and why they used certain languages, and how their linguistic savvies accommodated each other. As they expounded on and hinted at their relative proficiencies, mostly by comparison and through relationships with their strongest language(s), they were also asked to provide some kind of affective assessment and/or impression regarding their favourite language(s). They were also asked if they had any prospects as regards any potential future language acquisition, and moreover, future plans in general.



Next set of questions was imagined to delve into the languages spoken in their family, their immediate social surroundings, their school, both formally and informally, and with their friends. Those social interactions furthermore also begged the question of them mixing their languages in communication, and all the nuances, strategies, code-switching, and translanguaging that was bound to crop up when juggling three (or more) languages, both in their heads, and in the actual social situations. The relationships set was thus to cover all of the pupils' social interactions, by medium of what languages they acted out and how people around them perceived their language use.

Pupils were asked about their hobbies, extracurricular activities, pastimes, dreams, and everything they did on a regular basis which entailed use of their linguistic faculties. This also included all manner of literacies they were apt with, from written literacy, to media literacy, watching films, playing video games, etc. Thus, tied together with their activities, the media set covered their media use and literacy (reading, writing, listening, internet use, gaming, etc.). To wrap up, they were all asked to produce a drawing, give a brief visual representation of how they viewed their own dominant languages, in the form of a language 'body map'. Provided with crayons and minimal instruction ('Draw yourself and the languages you speak regularly'), they were to draw a visual representation of how they imagined and conceptualized their multilinguality.

The interview questions were thus organised in such a way as to infer into the nature of pupils' multilinguality, and in particular their DLCs, by means of co-construction. Some room for manoeuvre, as this was a semi-structured interview, was envisaged for digression and expounding of certain topics of special interest. The aim was to lead the pupils to first arrive at their own version of what they believed are the dominant languages out of their linguistic repertoire, which they later through the interview got a chance to affirm by explicating all the various ways their dominant languages tied into their relationships, their

hobbies, their media use, their everyday and finally who they were as a person. Their DLCs may just well prove to be emblematic of Aronin's and Singleton's suggestion that "the DLCs may be seen as microcosms of the multilingual world order manifest at the level of the individual and the particular community." (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, 70)

The pupils were all more or less eager to talk to. Some were a bit timid, seeing that this was an unusual and (probably) unprecedented situation for them, but all the interviews were carried out in an orderly fashion. As they were still a rather very young group of pupils (most of them aged 9, some 10), questions were kept as simple as possible, were of a more straightforward format to forbear unnecessary seesawing and digressing, and additional questions were asked where further elaboration was required.

## 4. The results

### 4.1.1 DLCs of the Russian pupils

codename	Peter			Nada			Sergei		
Age	9			9			8		
Country of origin	Russia			Russia			Azerbaijan		
Length of residence	6-7 years			5 years			2 years		
Other countries				Macedonia (1 year)					
Age of arrival to Croatia	6-7			7			2		
Length of residence in Croatia	2-3 years			2 years			6 years		
Languages	Russia	ENG	CRO	Russia	ENG	CRO	RUS	ENG	CRO
Order of acquisition	L1	L2	L3	L1	L2	L3	L2	L1	L3
Mode of acquisition	Acquired	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed	Acquired	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed	Acquired	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed
Proficiency, competence (best L, descriptive comparison to other Ls in a DLC)	Best	"Ground and sky" (meaning: 'worlds apart')	"Ground and space"	Best	Rather difficult	Difficult to speak	3/10 (opposed to 5/10 before)	6.5/10	3.5/10
Frequency of use	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday

Table 2: DLCs of the Russian pupils

Pupils who noted their third language in their DLCs, apart from English and Croatian, to be Russian were all born and spent some early years of their life abroad. Two of them (Peter and Nada) were from Russia and came to Croatia just before starting their first grades, at the age of 6-7, whilst the third, Sergei, was from Azerbaijan, and moved to Croatia relatively early, aged 2. Sergei stood out from the group in a sense, as while Nada and Peter listed Russian as their main language, Sergei rather opted for English. He also mentioned knowing a bit of Azerbaijani (self-assessed at 2/10), which was spoken in his family, and which he used to speak better. His knowledge and use of the language had however attrited through the years, and had thus drifted away from his DLC. Peter and Nada reported talking exclusively in Russian with their parents, and their proficiency in Russian could additionally be attributed to the fact that they had spent a few years longer in a Russian-speaking

environment. Sergei on the other hand came to Croatia at a very young age, and while he noted to have first started learning Russian which used to be his principal language, which was spoken alongside Azerbaijani in his family. English had since his preschool and school years taken over as his dominant language, used in almost all non-family communication, while his Russian proficiency had since diminished as well. Nada and Peter on the other hand found Russian to be their unrivalled best, as they are still brushing off and polishing their Russian by attending a Russian school extra-curricularly. Nada and Peter expressed that their parents were probably planning on moving again in the near future (a few years), back to Russia, which was again telling of why Russian carried such weight in their DLCs.

Peter described his competence in English relative to Russian, as “ground and sky” (a literal translation of a Russian idiom “nebo i zemlya”, meaning “worlds apart”). Nada had never, in turn, had contact with English until she came to Croatia in the first grade, and had since, in the two-and-a-half-year span acquired it at an exponential rate, where she was among the most fluent of the pupils in the interviews. Regarding English, she still reflected that it was a rather difficult language to her and that she had found some difficulty in handling subject-specific terminology from time to time. Sergei on the other hand volunteered a numerical interpretation of the relative competences of the languages in his DLC. His English was 1<sup>st</sup>, “at 6.5 out of 10”, his Croatian currently 2<sup>nd</sup>, “at 3.5 out of 10”, and Russian close behind “at 3 out of 10”, where “it used to be at 5 out of 10”.

In school context, they reported speaking little to no Russian, even when talking among each other. In fact, Croatian was also not viewed as an appealing language for in-school communication, and most of the social interactions, both with teachers and with other pupils was in English. Nada noted having a very close friend who spoke Russian, and the two would exclusively talk in Russian, but who had since moved to Iran. Outside of school, especially with the out-of-school friends and neighbours all three reported speaking almost

exclusively Croatian. All three reported being highly involved with various hobbies and extracurricular activities: with Peter it was carting, swimming and tennis, with Nada it was tennis, and with Sergei it was swimming. In all of these sports activities the communication was done almost exclusively in Croatian, with little English as a backup language.

All of them noted that they found themselves code-switching quite often. Be it that they could not remember something they wanted to say in one language, and thus expressing that in another (in contexts where the collocutor(s) (potentially) spoke both) as in Peter's example, or that there was accidental code-switching from e.g. a sentence in Russian to a sentence in English as in Paula's example. Sergei also noted quite a lot of code-switching occurring all the time in his family, where they spoke predominantly Russian, but would then again frequently fill in with Azerbaijani, English or even Croatian. "My family is like that" (Sergei).

Regarding their media literacy, they all reported reading for pleasure. They read books in both English and Russian: in English in part for their school assignments, partly for entertainment, but Russian almost exclusively for pleasure. Reading in Croatian was almost completely avoided, and/or simply found boring and uninteresting. What was interesting was that Peter had been engaged in writing a comic book in English, in cooperation with Leon, and they had been at it for a year and still had to finish it. Peter and Nada also expressed playing some games in the free time, Peter in Russian, and Nada in English, and listening to music both in Russian and in English.

4.1.2 DLCs of the Chinese pupils

codename	Karl			Yin			Paula		
Age	9			9			9		
Country of origin	Croatia (born in Italy)			Croatia (born in Austria)			China		
Length of residence	9			9			3		
Other countries	goes to China sometimes (every 2 years or so)						3		
Age of arrival to Croatia							6 yrs		
Length of residence in Croatia									
Languages	CHI	ENG	CRO	CHI	ENG	CRO	CHI	CRO	ENG
Order of acquisition	L1	L2	L3	L1	L2	L3	L1	L2	L3
Mode of acquisition	Acquired	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed	Acquired	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed
Proficiency, competence (best L, descriptive comparison to other Ls in a DLC)	Best	Best	a little, good listening comprehension, could not produce very well	Best	Best	Croatian a bit less fluent	Best	Best	Best
Frequency of use	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday

Table 3: DLCs of the Chinese pupils

Karl and Yin from the Chinese group of pupils had both been living in Croatia since birth. Paula on the other hand was born in China, and moved to Croatia at the age of 3. Karl reported going to China every year or two to visit some of his many relatives. All of them reported Chinese as their first language, as Karl and Yin noted speaking mostly Chinese at home, while Paula was brought up in China. Yin indeed, mentioned talking to both of his parents exclusively in Chinese, as with his sister also, excepting some English from time to time. Karl noted speaking with his parents mostly in Chinese. He reported having gone to Chinese lessons for a part of his life, although sometimes using Croatian with them as well, as they were both good speakers of Croatian. Paula on the other hand quite embraced Croatian since her family's moving to Croatia. She noted that Croatian was indeed her favourite language. Although brought up in a Chinese environment, her mother, a native Croatian, also started teaching her some Croatian, which indeed gracefully flourished in her preschool years in Croatia. She was the only pupil to report being fluent equally in all three languages of her DLC. Furthermore, both Yin and Karl reported equal mastery in both English and Chinese.

Yin noted that his Croatian proficiency was just a little off from his English and Chinese proficiencies, where Karl on the other hand expressed that he could produce only a little Croatian, or rather, that he fared well with understanding other people talking, but found difficulty in producing the language himself. All three of the Chinese pupils reported that they would probably be staying in Croatia for the foreseeable future, which would certainly entail a more significant uptake of Croatian in Karl and Yin's DLCs.

As for the cross-linguistic influence and code-switching, Yin, for one, reported no mixing between the languages in his DLC. Karl on the other hand remembered often filling up something he could not express in Chinese in English. And Paula reported code-switching quite often, especially when talking to her brother. They would even sometimes say one sentence in Croatian, then code-switch to Chinese, and then again to English. The pupils, contrary to the Russian group, often conversed in Chinese in the classroom. Another peculiarity is that they, at least Karl and Yin used to teach Chinese to other interested parties in the class, including some of the Russian collocutors. Karl noted taking a notebook with a lot of Chinese letters and symbols for an entire school-year with him every day to school, and having taught some of the pupils, as they found Chinese quite interesting and appealing. Yin would assist him.

Outside of school, The Chinese pupils also reported being involved in various activities. Karl, for one, went to music school where he played the piano, took drums lessons on the side, and went to swimming practice quite often. He reported almost exclusively using English in all of these. Yin and Paula, on the other hand went to football practice where they would on the contrary use Croatian exclusively. Regarding literacy and media, all three reported being able to write the Chinese symbols, but to an extent, as they probably had no domain to apply them to use. Paula, for example, reported having her smartphone in both Chinese and English, and doing her web browsing in both languages. All three also noted

being avid readers, and reading in Chinese often. Although they noted there is little to no availability of reading materials in Chinese in Croatia in general, they were able to get a hold of the books and comics in Chinese via social connections, for example from a father's colleague (Karl), or via a grandfather from China (Paula). Karl also added that he liked watching the *Pokemon* series, as well as some movies in Chinese, without subtitles. When it came to reading in Croatian, they all noted eschewing it as much as possible.

#### 4.1.3 The DLC of the Slovenian

codename	Leon		
Age	9		
Country of origin	Slovenia		
Length of residence	2-3 yrs		
Other countries			
Age of arrival to Croatia	2-3		
Length of residence in Croatia	6-7 yrs		
Languages	SLO	ENG	CRO
Order of acquisition	L1	L2	L3
Mode of acquisition	Acquired	Acquired, instructed	Acquired, instructed
Proficiency, competence (best L, descriptive comparison to other Ls in a DLC)	Best	Best	did not know 'hard words'
Frequency of use	Everyday	Everyday	Almost everyday

Table 4: The DLC of the Slovenian

Leon, originally from Slovenia, was chosen as an additional, unmatched multilingual, just for the sake of comparison of an individual with the two groups, as well as the to see how would two genealogically very similar languages, Croatian and Slovenian, be perceived in the mind of a multilingual. Leon was born in Slovenia and spent the first 2 to 3 years there, moving thence to Croatia. He termed Slovenian to be his principal language, English his



second best, which he had acquired half passively, half through instruction. He deemed being equally proficient and fluent in both of these, whereas his Croatian was a little bit behind, as he did not “know 'hard words'”. He noted his English acting as a mediatory, go-between language, where he would fill in the expressive and semantic gaps when speaking Slovenian and Croatian in English. He detailed that his parents both and almost exclusively spoke Slovenian with him, as was the case with his brother, excepting a bit of recurring English here and there. With his friends and neighbours on the other hand he spoke mostly Croatian, coupled with some English where possible or context-required.

He reported going to basketball practice, where he mostly spoke Croatian. He also mentioned that he loved to read, but mainly in English. He noted having tried reading a Harry Potter in English first, liking it much, but when coming back to it in Croatian, having found it very boring. He also noted listening to music mainly in English, with no Slovenian and Croatian songs of interest.

#### 4.2 The Drawings

Each of the pupils were given a drawing task in the end for them to visually express how they perceived their languages and their DLCs, and were provided with instruction: “Draw yourself and the languages you use regularly”. The idea was taken from Melo-Pfeifer (2015, p. 47) where the instruction chosen was “Draw yourself speaking the languages you know”. The reason behind opting for a slightly different phrasing and expressions, namely ‘use’ rather than ‘speaking’ was that the intent was to cover as broad a field of language use, not just the speaking sphere, and the additional stress was to be on the ‘regularly’, so as to nudge the pupils in the direction of thinking about their dominant languages, rather than everything in their language repertoire dispenser.

The pupils were only briefly given the instruction, and their drawings were not additionally analysed after they finished drawing, similarly to the Melo-Pfeifer's study, where children were not in the position of "co-ethnographers or informants on their productions" and the analysis was thus "the sole responsibility of the researcher (an ethic perspective, in contrast to an emic angle)" (2015, p. 47).

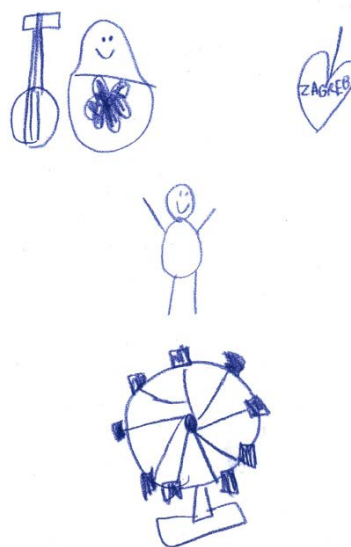
In her study, Melo-Pfeifer suggested three analytic categories for analysis of the multilingual self-portraits: dynamic multilingual portraits, interdependent repertoire portraits and juxtaposed repertoire portraits. The first category of dynamic multilingualism would have the languages represented in a merged, orderless fashion; this would represent a truly translingual discourse. The interdependent repertoires would have subcategories where one self would be portrayed as expressing either the same content in different languages, or else different content for different languages. The third category of juxtaposed repertoires would have three subcategories: one of multiple but ordered languages, one where different selves would express themselves in different languages, and a third where one self would use clearly separated languages. (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015, p.48)

In the pupils' visual productions, traces of each of the categories might be found. As such Peter for example produced a drawing of himself surrounded by the cultural symbols of the languages in his DLC, organized unhierarchically, which would probably best fit somewhere around the dynamic multilingualism interpretation. Sergei gave a juxtaposed type of a language self-portrait that extends beyond his DLC into his language repertoire, but also the languages he yet wishes to learn. Yin produced a mix of a dynamic multilingual, and juxtaposed repertoire drawing, where his self is surrounded by different, unrelated content expressed in the three different languages of his DLC, but Chinese somehow stands out as the most prominent. Leon drew himself, and simply listed the languages of his language repertoire, rather than his DLC. Paula and Karl gave a juxtaposed repertoire self-portrait,

where they translated greetings from one to another language of their DLC. Karl, interestingly, expressed he did not want Croatian in his portrait, as he clearly cannot identify with the language-culture. And Nada gave a juxtaposed portrait of expressing her fluency in her main languages, but expressing it in English. In summary, the portraits ranged from expressing only two languages (Picture 1), encompassing all three languages in a pupil's DLC (Pictures 2, 3, 4, 5), the whole language repertoire of a pupil (Picture 6), and the language repertoires including desired languages (Picture 7).



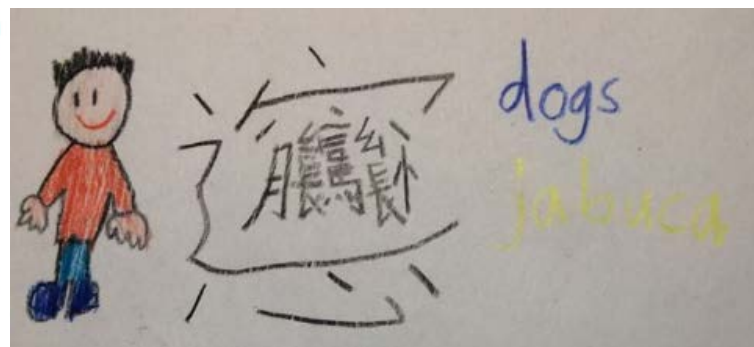
Picture 1: Karl's drawing



Picture 2: Peter's drawing



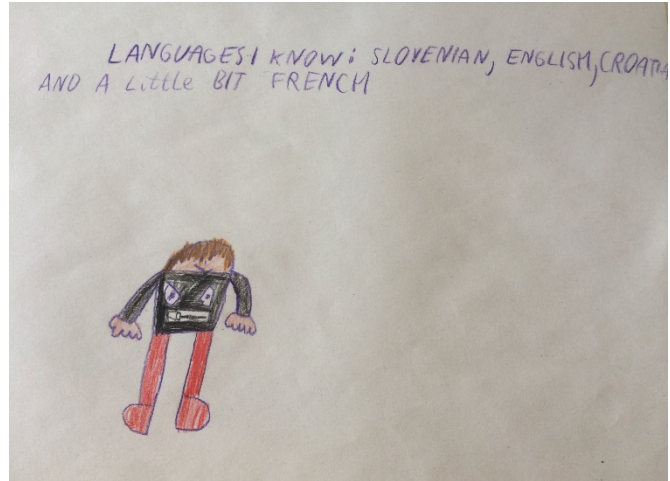
Picture 3: Nada's drawing



Picture 4: Yin's drawing



Picture 5: Paula's drawing



Picture 6: Leon's drawing



Picture 7: Sergei's drawing

### 5. Interpretation and analysis

Essentially, most of the pupils' DLCs were based around the core language(s) they took over and 'inherited' from their family, namely, their parents. They had since starting pre-schooling and schooling acquired and been instructed in English, which in turn became their strong L2 by means of which they navigated most out-of-family social situations. The common DLC core was thereby: L1 – heritage language (excepting Sergei, whose English stood in as L1), L2 – English, and L3 – Croatian. Croatian was mostly seen as a last-resort language, only where pressing and unavoidable, in social contexts forbearing the use of their main languages. Karl and Sergei for example labelled Croatian as a non-dominant and non-expedient language. Even in pupils who expressed a comparatively high (Yin, Leon) or even equal (Paula) competence in Croatian, as opposed to their other two languages, there was still a notable reservation towards Croatian. This may again be attributed to the fact that they were aware of having a rather unique identity status in relation to the society at large around them.

The interviewed pupils were an atypical sample in the Croatian context, being both expatriates and pupils of an international and, for that matter, a private school. Having a multicultural background, put them at an advantageous, albeit all that more demanding a position. They were faced with the demanding task of coordinating their heritage culture, their multicultural school milieu, and the Croatian society at large in all the daily interactions with their neighbours, friends, colleagues and coaches at their sports practices, etc. They were yet again still rather isolated from the Croatian culture at large. In part this was due to their age as they were able to meet most of their social needs and had most of their social interactions in their family sphere on the one hand, and in the school setting on the other. Thus, they only got to use Croatian (except Paula) where there was no alternative: for example, Croatian classes, with neighbours and Croatian friends and at various non-English extracurricular activities. This in turn stood as the main shared characteristic across the board, in all the DLCs.

The Chinese pupils tended to communicate in their heritage language among themselves in school, as opposed to the Russian pupils, which might indicate that they simply got along better, and/or that there was a cultural difference at play. Aside from that, judging by the DLCs alone, excepting the actual heritage language and cultural background, there was no single characteristic that would set apart the DLC of the Chinese pupils from that of the Russian pupils, and again from the Slovenian. In other words, the presented DLCs had no clear-cut categorical differences between their respective heritage languages or cultures per se. For example, on the one hand, in the Russian DLC group, Peter and Nada, both born abroad, were in Croatia for a finite time period, where they had arrived in Croatia following their parents' business, and expressed probabilities of moving again in the near future. Although being quite fluent and adept in English, they both expressed Russian to be their primary language, telling of their commitment to their parents' mother-culture, and future. Their Croatian served as a temporary means to an end, as a rule-of-thumb language in the broader social context they navigated in this period of their lives. Sergei on the other hand tied in closer with both the Chinese group and Leon, the Slovenian, as they all across the board expressed the likelihood of staying in Croatia for good. They in turn tended to equate their relative proficiency in both their heritage language and English.

Most of the pupils expressed that their parents' proficiency in English was low to moderate, and categorically did not use English to communicate with their children, rather opting to use their heritage languages. The parents most often seemed to shape their children's linguistic preferences, excepting for Sergei who was the only one who expressed (solely) English to be his favourite and primary language. Regarding proficiencies in Croatian, along with Peter and Nada, Sergei and Karl expressed being only moderately fluent in the language, as they simply had no pressing necessity to use it in most social situations. Yin, Paula and Leon on the other hand expressed being more than quite fluent in Croatian. All

the DLCs thus roughly shared a similar language use pattern, where pupils used their heritage languages mostly at home and in the private sphere, English mostly in school and sometimes in extracurricular activities, and Croatian only when necessary.

The pupils' portraits made effectively dotted the 'i's of their DLC profiles, as the drawings loosely followed the verbal accounts of their language use. Karl for example only drew himself using Chinese and English, which composed his effective DLC. Yin, Peter, Petra and Paula drew themselves together with their three dominant languages, with Paula even noting her relative proficiency in the three. Sergei and Leon on the other hand opted to represent all the languages they had come in touch with.

#### 6 Considerations for and discussion on the DLC theory in general

The international school is a globalization microcosm par excellence. It is just the place and institution which assembles and draws together multiple cultures, and, necessarily, multiple languages. Indeed, as Aronin and Singleton (2012, p. 33) fairly pointed out, globalization is one of the main driving factors behind the booming of multilingualism in this day and age, as it "is widely agreed to be a major determinant of the shape of multilingualism as we experience it in the modern world." The international school as an institution, furthermore, is one of the paradigmatic examples of the phenomenon of glocalization, of the global, cosmopolitan cultural diversity embedded in a local context. The DLC in turn can serve to steer us in the direction of uncovering "the concrete actualities behind the general theoretical understanding of the modern processes of globalization and localization" (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 74). The glocalization phenomena readily showcases how the phenomenon of globalization "referring to very large-scale phenomena", the macrosociological, as opposed to microsociological, (Featherstone, 1995, p. 25), is actually most often embedded in local space and time. The international school as an institution here

serves as a perfect example of the phenomenon. In Croatia it is an example of a multilingual enclave in a rather monolingual and monocultural Croatian setting. And moreover, due to its rallying and bringing together a widely diverse constituency of pupils, it is also a clear instance of a community “characterized by a large number of constellations and a wide variety of languages composing such constellations” (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 69). It is actual and operating evidence that “in modern times it is frequently a constellation of languages rather than a single language that meets the fundamental needs of language-driven cognition, communication and identification for individuals and communities” (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 74). It stands also, on the other hand, as telling of “the role and place of English and other international languages, and the fate of lesser used languages” (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 39).

The studied sample of pupils fit right along the lines of a glocalized population, as they saw themselves as belonging neither to the local, Croatian, context, nor having a typical Russian/Azerbaijani/Chinese/Slovenian identity. Indeed, they might have best been described as cosmopolitans, living an international life, but nevertheless unavoidably embedded in a local context. Indeed their identities transcended the sum of all of the indices that constituted them, just in a similar manner that a DLC “is not just the sum of the several languages constituting it; rather, it is an entity that has characteristics and an identity beyond the sum of its parts.” (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 65) Their special identity status might well explain their DLCs, and their particular multilingual profiles. Their identity overstepped and eluded a typical Croatian pupil’s childhood and schooling experience. What set them apart was precisely the internationality of their life experience.

It did not come as great a surprise that most of the pupils refrained from using and identifying with Croatian language. Although it was an unavoidable part of living in Croatia, they would rather have done without using Croatian wherever possible. Adding to the fact,



Croatian is certainly not as prominent in the ‘global hierarchy of language importance’, and as DLCs are unavoidably subject to the aforementioned hierarchies which are determined, among other factors, socially, culturally and historically (Aronin & Singleton 2012, p.65). The children positioned their sense of self and identity in a manner quite unrelated to, and in a way outside of, the locality of their residence.

The gist of the DLC framework is, as Aronin and Singleton (2012, p. 69) aptly pointed out, that people tend to economize and optimize everything, with communicative, linguistic, and, by analogy, multilingual domain of their life being no exception to this rule or simply put, “people do not need to use everything they know”. And this streamlining not only pertains to the object of multilingualism studies but to the process and methodology itself, as with narrowing down and zooming in on the most vital of a person’s (multi)linguistic faculties, we of course get closer to the heart of the matter. Another essential feature, pertaining to the object of the study, is that the DLC theory promotes approaching instances of multilingualism in a wholesome manner. This means that the languages analysed are taken together as a group, as a constellation, and are regarded holistically as inseparable from a particular individual, groups, or communities. The focus is shifted towards the interconnectedness and the ‘space between the languages’, the internal structure of each constellation, looking at both the wood and the trees.

The DLC theory spotlights the interrelationship of one’s vital languages, the way these languages are actually realized and utilized, and what their use reveals about the multilinguals themselves. Its operationalization in this study shared similar features with a number of studies on profiling multilinguals (Ibrahim,2016; Lamare & Dagenais, 2003; Schwartzl et al., 2019; Wei, 2009). Drawing up multilingual profiles necessarily entails some, if not all of the following: inquiring into linguistic repertoires of the individuals (and moreover focusing on the most expedient of the multilingual’s languages), probing how the languages of a

multilingual (in)form their sense of identity, their own personal attitudes towards each of the languages, and basically which languages they use, where and how.

## 7. Conclusion

The study presented here was a qualitative one, featuring a limited sample of pupils, and more of an experimental nature, intended to probe an operationalization of the DLC model in profiling young multilinguals. As such, it emerged as a primarily descriptive type of research study, with no clear-cut or readily inferable practical implications. The study can hopefully serve as an exemplary endeavour at a scheme of a qualitative multilingual profiling. Although the interview was assembled and designed with the best intentions of getting at the elusive nature of the fluidity and dynamics of multilingual multi-competence, there was still the inevitable and paradoxical problem of using the terms ‘language’, ‘language mixing’, etc. Nevertheless, it indeed is an inevitable issue when inquiring into something as complex as multilingualism, understood as a fluid and dynamic system. Furthermore, the manifestation of this conceptual phenomenon in pupils’ linguistic lives itself is more elusive, as they did not quite possess the metalinguistic capacities of moulding a fully-fledged opinion on the topic yet.

Even though the pupils were initially grouped according to their heritage language (Chinese, Russian, Slovenian), their DLCs shared a rather similar pattern of language use, and a similar structure of a heritage language/English/Croatian. What stood out in all the presented DLCs was the ubiquitous distance all the pupils felt towards the Croatian language and culture in general. All of them rather tended to more closely identify with their heritage background. The DLC profiles in this study were additionally supplemented with drawn self-portraits in order to compare pupils’ testimonies with their visual self-expression on the topic.

The visual self-representations of multilingualism, particularly with young individuals serve as a helpful complement when profiling multilingual's main languages. The study pushes to stand as a (modest) example of an attempt at portraying a sample of DLCs in an international school. As was suggested, the DLC model is a useful instrument of delving into the nature of multilingualism, one that can readily be operationalized to examine and describe the relationships, development and condition of multilingualism on every level, ranging from individual to societal multilingualism (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 70).

Considered from the perspective of this study, the DLC did not necessarily contribute anything brand-new to the table of multilingual research, but it certainly encapsulates and epitomizes the new tendency in multilingual research towards a functional analysis of multilingualism(s). It offers itself as a practical research tool, furnishing affordances for implementing educational solutions for complex multilingual educational communities, such as an international school. The more we research into specific constellations, the easier it is to find the appropriate educational solutions for the target multilingual group on the whole (Aronin & Singleton, p. 70). In the light of this study, further research could be steered towards examining a dominant language constellation such as the one featured here: heritage language – English – Croatian. It might for example focus on discerning the ways of incentivizing pupils' use of Croatian by further interviewing a different group, looking into the curriculum, gathering teachers' perspective on the subject matter, etc.

References

- Aronin, Larissa. (January 2016). Multi-competence and Dominant Language Constellations - Draft. *ResearchGate*, DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781107425965.007. Accessed February 12, 2019.
- Aronin, L. and Ó Laoire, M. (2004). Exploring multilingualism in cultural contexts: towards a notion of multilinguality. In *Trilingualism in Family, School and Community*, C. Hoffmann and J. Ytsma (eds), 11–29. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Featherstone, Mike et al. (1995) *Global modernities*. SAGE publications. London.
- Aronin, Larissa, and Singleton, David. (2012). “Dominant Language Constellations”. *Multilingualism*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam, New York.
- de Bot, Kees; Lowie, Wander; Verspoor, Marjolijn (2007). "A Dynamic Systems Theory approach to second language acquisition". *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*. 10 (1): 7–21.
- Busch, Brigitta. (2010). “School language profiles: valorizing linguistic resources in heteroglossic situations in South Africa”. *Language and Education*: 283-294.
- Cenoz, Jasone. (2009). *Towards Multilingual Education Basque Educational Research from an International Perspective*. Multilingual Matters. Bristol.
- Cenoz, Jasone. and Gorter, Durk. (Fall 2011). “Toward a Multilingual, Approach in the Study of Multilingualism in School Contexts”. *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 95, No. 3. Wiley.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Cook, Vivian. Wei, Li. (2009). "Introduction: Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching in the Twenty-first Century". *Contemporary Applied Linguistics Volume 1 Language Teaching and Learning*. Continuum International. New York.
- Featherstone, Mike et al. (1995). *Global modernities*. SAGE publications. London.
- Ibrahim, Nayr. (2016). "Enacting identities: children's narratives on person, place and experience in fixed and hybrid spaces" *Education Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 2016, pp. 69-91.
- Jessner, Ulrike. (2008). "A DST Model of Multilingualism and the Role of Metalinguistic Awareness". *The Modern Language Journal*. Vol. 92, No. 2, pp. 270-283. Wiley.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). "Chaos/complexity science and second language acquisition". *Applied Linguistics*. 18 (2): 141–165.
- Llurda, Eric. (2009). "The Decline and Fall of the Native Speaker". *Contemporary Applied Linguistics Volume 1 Language Teaching and Learning* (ed. Li Wei and Vivian Cook). Continuum International. New York.
- May, S. (Ed.). (2014). *The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL, and Bilingual Education*. UK: Routledge.
- Melo-Pfeifer, Silvia. (2017). Drawing the plurilingual self: how children portray their plurilingual resources. *De Gruyter Mouton*, 55(1), 41-60.
- Olshtain, E. and Nissim-Amitai, F. (2003). "Being Trilingual or Multilingual: Is There a Price to Pay?". *Trilingualism in Family, School and Community*. Multilingual Matters. 30-50.

- Schwarzl, L., Vetter, E., Janik, M. (2019). "Schools as Linguistic Space: Multilingual Realities at Schools in Vienna and Brno". *Challenging Boundaries in Language Education*. Springer. 211-228.
- Wei, Li. (2009). "Moment Analysis and translanguaging space: Discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth in Britain". *Journal of Pragmatics*.