COGNITIVE-ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION—WITH AN OUTLOOK ON A UNIVERSITY PROJECT IN ALBANIA

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Abstract – *Based on the concepts of bilingual education of Cummins, this paper explores the contribution of cognitive-academic language proficiency to the acquisition of a second language in instructional contexts. Cummins' threshold hypothesis is interpreted not as referring to an unspecified level of language competence presupposed for positive development in bilingual instructional contexts but as referring to an adequate level of cognitive-academic proficiency that allows sufficient orientation in the proceedings of the classroom. The analysis of a sample text taken from a textbook for fourth grade illustrates this point and leads to a discussion of consequences for the language classroom. In the last part of the paper educational practices in Albania are considered in this context. A review of a joint project undertaken by the University of Graz in Austria and the University of Shkoder in Albania, shows that cognitive academic proficiency is along with situational and motivational factors a key element determining success in educational contexts, where a foreign language—in this case German— is used as a language of instruction.*

Introduction

Many students want to, and many more are forced to undertake part or all of their schooling not in the language they have been brought up with, but in the dominant language of the majority or the well-educated elite: children of international experts and managers, children of migrant workers, exchange students, students who enrol in their own country in schools and universities with a foreign language as language of instruction. In these contexts, it is necessary for students to become bi- or multilingual, and school acts as a major agent in the creation, maintenance (and sometimes in the restriction) of the multilingualism of the individuals and groups it serves.

Quite often this way of learning is a difficult experience. I would like to focus here on a very significant point: Even with regard to moderately difficult tasks, students often do not learn to use the language of instruction at a level and in a manner considered appropriate by native speakers of that language. Empirical

research on the instructional record of children of migrant workers has by now a long history in Western Europe and North America; analogous observations can be made at university level.[1]

> This is a commonplace phenomenon, and it is easily forgotten how surprising it is. Instruction is constituted by and consists mainly of linguistic activities. There is hardly any other enterprise that is so intensely and thoroughly structured and maintained by language. Compared to normal everyday activities in families, school offers a wealth of input and a wide array of language-oriented activities, so one should expect linguistic development to happen rapidly.

In fact, such positive developments do happen. There are students who are able to attain high levels of perfection even if their home language is not the language of school and even if they may not have a great deal of out-of-school contact in that language. Obviously, school can be a good place for language acquisition. The question is: What are the conditions that make students able to use it as such— and under what conditions is this not possible?

This is the question I want to pursue in the following. The answer to be given will be far from complete. I hope to be able to identify at least one of the central factors at play here.

How to account for language acquisition in instructional contexts?

When dealing with questions of language acquisition, what comes to mind first and foremost is the *theory of language acquisition* in the Chomskyan tradition. Groundbreaking as it is—this theory is not of much help with regard to the problem at hand. The focus of research lies on the mechanisms of Universal Grammar and the internal reconstruction of linguistic knowledge systems by learners, not on the contexts and communicative conditions of learning and their impact on learning outcomes.[2] If it is correct that school does not offer the same language learning opportunities for all, however, then precisely such questions regarding context and pragmatic conditions will be of paramount importance.

A better place to look at is *research in learner language* as it is conducted very intensively and successfully in the domain of foreign language learning and teaching. In this paradigm, contextual and communicative factors have been studied quite well, for instance

— the adaptation of teachers' talk to the restricted capabilities of the learners (thus making input more transparent).

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— the function of interaction and negotiation in the learners' attempt to structure input and to find support for their own production.
— the fundamental role of comprehension as a condition for acquisition, as expressed for instance in Krashen's famous statement that comprehensible input is at level 'i+1' (Krashen, 1985).

The first two points are quite undisputed, and the second one in particular has led to a wealth of proposals for a more open, learner- and interaction-centred approach in foreign language teaching. The third is as important as it is disputed. It is important because 'semantic bootstrapping' seems to be one of the most basic principles in language acquisition. 'Semantic bootstrapping' refers to the recovery and identification of linguistic information (semantical, morphological and syntactical) by learners on the basis of their comprehension of the meaning and function of linguistic utterances. It is relevant in all contexts of language learning, especially in the situation we are concerned with here: the second language classroom where the foreign language is the medium of instruction and the main vehicle of information.[3] Here, comprehensibility must be one of our main concerns. The problem is that there is no easy way to define it.

Krashen takes 'i+1', as far as I have understood him, as referring to linguistic structures—the structures that 'come next' on the ideal path of acquisition. He seems to take comprehensibility for granted if an utterance is restricted to structures known by the learners. Above all with regard to content learning prevalent in the second language classroom, there are difficulties with that view. Structures are not merely formal devices. What is to be understood (and learnt) outside and above their formal characteristics are the semantics and pragmatics of their use in the context. Mainly in the written mode, formal devices (the passive, the gerund, connectors...) are intricately intertwined with discourse traditions, communicative strategies, and techniques of structuring content (Bhatia, 1993; for instructional concepts, Hatch, 1994). Texts and utterances may thus be difficult on quite different grounds than that of linguistic complexity or newness of syntactic devices alone. Additionally, one has to ask whether it is enough to look at the input when talking about comprehensibility. What is left out in such an account are the strategies of learners to deal with the material and to make it comprehensible (Cummins 1991, 77ff.). If comprehensibility counts in language acquisition—and I assume it also counts with regard to content learning—we have to take into consideration this subjective side of the matter.[4]

Important contributions that may clarify this issue come from research in *bilingualism* and from *literacy studies*. Studies in bilingual education have brought into discussion the concepts of immersion and submersion (see Hoffmann, 1991, Ehlers, in preparation). Immersion is considered as generally

leading to success in acquisition, whereas submersion is considered an obstacle, making acquisition difficult. Some main factors that make up submersive situations are the necessity for learners to compete directly with students speaking the language of instruction as their first language, a low social and socio-economic status of learners (sometimes combined with marginalisation, victimisation and so on), an insufficient command of the language of instruction, and lacking support for the further development of first language competence.

The first two factors describe crucial conditions of learning contexts and motivation, the last two refer to the linguistic aspects of situation: competencies that can be brought into play when dealing with a challenging and complex language environment. In the following, I will concentrate on the latter. Submersion under this perspective is very much a linguistic affair, and in this respect (and only in this respect) I take 'submersion' and 'immersion' not so much to refer to the general design of programmes of schooling. Rather, I take them to mean the *individual profile of the situation* students find themselves in when they are confronted with the task of making the classroom a fruitful place for comprehension and for learning. In this sense, the question is: What kind of competence that students bring along allows them to convert a linguistic situation into a supportive, immersive one? What is missing when this is not the case?

The literate mind: cognitive-academic language proficiency

To answer this question, I want to turn first to Cummins well-known distinction between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)(Cummins, 1981, 1991). The first is what is needed in dealing with everyday situations, the latter what is needed in order to manage the more complex situations arising when language is used as an instrument for the articulation of knowledge and for learning in propaedeutic and scientific domains. CALP, in this sense, is one of the main concerns of school, one could even say that this proficiency is what school is mainly about.

This distinction has turned out to be very fruitful, in first language pedagogy as well as in second language pedagogy (Cummins, 1991; Verhoeven, 1997; Ehlers, in preparation). CALP in fact seems to be a competence that is partly independent of the capability to use language in everyday communication. Given basic communication skills, it is for many students, even in their first language, not always easy to gain proficiency in this cognitive-academic domain, but given experience in this cognitive-academic domain in one language, it is relatively easy to bring it to bear in another language. According to this (this is Cummins

interdependence hypothesis) cognitive academic language proficiency has to be learnt only once. It can be learnt in the second language, of course, but we all know—and there is massive evidence for this—that to learn it in one's first language has many advantages and is highly preferable.[5]

One important consequence of this is that cognitive-academic language proficiency may play a key role in school not only for content learning, but— in bilingual contexts—also for language learning. Cummins (1991, p.84) hints at this possibility, and what I want to do in the following is to pursue this idea further. Cognitive-academic proficiency, according to this view, is the skill enabling students to make activities at school a stimulating linguistic experience. If this skill is not developed to an adequate degree, these same activities may appear to the students linguistically non-transparent, intractable and barren.[6]

In order to develop this idea more clearly, I would like first to make two general comments on Cummins' distinction and then bring in the bilingual dimension explicitly.

Basic interpersonal communication skill is not a unitary phenomenon

It is true that under normal circumstances all children learn to communicate in their first language, and all acquire the basic communication skills necessary to do this. And of course all acquire the basic syntax and vocabulary of the language. But not all families display the same culture of communication, and not all children acquire the same communication skills, or, in Bourdieu's term, the same communicative *habitus*.

Sociolinguistic research has shown that there is a general distinction to be made that coincides quite well with socioeconomic status. Middle and upper class families display a communicative style that is in many ways different from that of lower class families—and one of the main distinctions is that the linguistic *habitus* of middle class families is much more and more thoroughly influenced by characteristics of formal, educated linguistic behaviours that are modelled on standard language and textual strategies. And these are characteristics of CALP.

This means that some students bring along experience with linguistic habits and attitudes connected with CALP as part and parcel of their basic communication skills, whereas others do not or to a far lesser degree.[7] The passage from BICS to CALP in school, then, will be much easier, maybe even imperceptible for some students, and it will be an important and possibly difficult transition for others, affecting their opportunities to take part in and profit from the proceedings in the classroom.

'Cognitive-academic language proficiency' is not primarily linguistic competence

During their school careers, students have to learn a lot of linguistic material: the standard language many of them do not speak at home, a wide range of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, terms and syntactic structures pertaining to the languages of geography, mathematics etc., the specifics of the written language. And, of course, this is a huge task.

But this is only one part of cognitive-academic competence. The fact that—according to Cummins—this competence is transferable makes it quite clear that its most important aspects are not directly language-bound, but concern mainly *metalinguistic, textual, strategic,* and *metacognitive* skills.[8] The following example can illustrate some of these quite well. It is a text written for fourth grade. The source is a textbook written in German; I have translated the text as faithfully as possible.

> 'In our forests, we often encounter the red forest ants. With great skill, they construct huge hills that may reach a height of up to 2 meters and a width of up to 10 meters. The hills are built with pine needles and pieces of wood. Here, up to 500 000 ants live and work together.'

> 'If the weather is warm and sunny, they open the entrances to the nest in the morning and plug them again in the evening. If it is cold and rainy, the entrances remain closed.'

> 'The red forest ants construct an intricate net of chambers and passages. In these chambers, the eggs, larvae and pupae are stored. Worker ants transport them to upper or lower chambers depending on the temperature, and thus ensure uniform warmth.'

> 'The red forest ants search all over the forest for living and dead insects. They consume a lot of pests and are very useful for the forest. They are under natural protection.'

This text seems easy, even simple. It is a text-type common in school, and I take it to be paradigmatic of the kinds of texts students are confronted with. Nevertheless, it depends on a complex set of conventions regarding its structure, the information it encodes and the adequate manner of processing them. Some of its main characteristics are the following (I omit all references to vocabulary, syntactic structure and the fact that the text is written, i.e. that is has to be decoded on the basis of visual marks).

Textual characteristics

At the beginning and at the end of the text, one finds allusions to the human world and to perspectives pertaining to it; the body of the text is quite different. Not much of what it says can be linked to everyday experience. The information concerns aspects of ant life one could hardly detect when encountering an anthill in a forest. And nothing in the text even comes close to what people would say on such an occasion. Further, there is no story line running through the text, not much that could be equated with an agent or another stable point of reference on which the propositions of the text converge. This piece of information is organised completely differently than a narrative (and narratives are the texts young students are certainly most accustomed to if they have been exposed to texts at all). It is an expository text, relying on neutral, distanced description, given as a series of more or less related facts. The text, finally, has no pragmatic point, no intersubjective force, not much context. It presupposes a curiosity for things as they are, an attitude giving attention to facts as facts.

Compared to most everyday interactions, this text shows a decisive shift away from illocutions and practical goals, and a tendency towards foregrounding propositions and maximising information. Texts like this one are concerned with knowledge. They realise a specific technique of representing the world in words that ultimately belongs to the sphere of science. It is not to be expected that every student will find it easy to attribute meaning and significance to such texts and to understand the importance they assume in the perspective of the curriculum.

Strategies of text processing

To understand this text demands more than just to know what its words mean. Students are expected to build up a mental model (a cognitive representation) of what the information in the text is about.[9]

This mental model lies at the basis of any further activities centred around the text. The most simple and at the same time most fundamental type of work done with texts in school is to give an account of their contents, and I will dwell here only on this point. The difficulty involved when recounting what the text is about is the following: When talking about a text, its exact wording will in all probability not be repeated. Rather, students as well as teachers will use paraphrastic formulations. These new ways of putting textual content into words do not follow from the text—they follow from an understanding of the text and depend on insights into the exact semantic load of the sentences, into the inferences they allow and into the factual and logical connections they entertain with each other. Taking the third paragraph of the text above,

'The red forest ants construct an intricate net of chambers and passages. In these chambers, the eggs, larvae and pupae are stored. Worker ants transport them to upper or lower chambers depending on the temperature, and thus ensure uniform warmth.'

students are expected to understand the connection between these sentences and formulations like the following as one of elucidation and paraphrase:

— Eggs, larvae and pupae of the red forest ant are sensitive to changes of temperature.
— Temperature is not the same in all areas of the hill.
— Ants are able to recognise differences in temperature.
— Ants recognise where in the hill temperature is most appropriate for the eggs, larvae and pupae.
— Worker ants ensure uniform warmth' does not mean that they create uniform temperature by themselves.

In time, they should be able to render the information of the text in similar ways in their own words.[10]

It is of course not easy to delimit proper from more or less improper inferences. So, in fourth grade we would expect, but not encourage inferences and reformulations like the following:

— Ants are clever.
— Ants love their young.
— Ants have to work a lot.

On the other hand, we would probably not expect, but highly welcome inferences like the following that show precise reasoning or even imaginative recombination of information from quite different fields:

— The eggs, larvae and pupae of the red forest ant are probably quite robust.
— Ants seem to have a problem with cold temperatures and humidity.
— Ants are active at daytime. Do they rely on eyesight?—If so, how do they find their way in the hill?
— Are bee eggs and larvae also sensitive to temperature changes?—But they are solidly embedded in the honeycomb!

Paraphrases and elucidations of this kind presuppose the ability to extract meaning from words and sentences through conscious processing of the exact wording of the text, and on the ability to keep track of the changes of meaning

entailed by changes in the phrasing of information. This, of course, is quite different from what is asked for in everyday communication. The basic mechanisms of making sense have to be adapted to quite specific contextual demands.

What is new when reading expository or argumentative texts as used in teaching and learning is the dependency on propositional information alone, on the linguistic precision of understanding and restating required, and on the general and systematic application of the techniques of elucidation and rewording—every information and every sentence of a text is a potential object of this procedure. Everyday communicative skills thus have to be transformed into a far more specialized ability to gauge meaning potentials and meaning differences. Students with some intuitive grasp for the goals and strategies involved in this kind of processing language will probably be well equipped to follow text-based instruction. To others, explanations or discussions concerning the contents of texts may seem opaque and impenetrable. As a consequence, they will be hard tested to restate in their own words what they understand, thus making outside checks and focused help difficult or impossible.

Strategic skill, then, has to do with the ability to take textual information as a starting point for the building up of a mental model. Strategic skill does not prevent difficulties or uncertainties from arising, but it allows to see them within a framework of text-related tasks and activities. Without this orientation, the whole process of understanding and processing textual information is in danger of losing its goal-directed unity. One telling sign of this is an exaggerated importance given to the correct understanding of single words or phrases taken out of their context.

Metacognition

Metacognitive skills, finally, allow students to keep track of and to manage their own cognitive processes. The ability to ask relevant questions, to consciously compare new information with existing knowledge, to exactly pinpoint the source of difficulties or misunderstandings are instrumental for an autonomous, self-reliant confrontation with texts and their meanings (see Portmann 1991, 406ff. for further discussion).

Seen in this perspective, cognitive-academic proficiency is basically the competence of a literate mind as it has been researched and described in writing research and literacy studies. This competence is mainly developed in school. As my example shows, however, a certain skill in dealing with texts is required already at the beginning of formal, subject-oriented instruction.

Explaining success of bilingual language acquisition in instructional contexts

I am in a position now to give an answer to the question asked at the beginning.

In reading, understanding and processing textual information in formal teaching situations, the contexts for understanding are mainly textual. Nonlinguistic cues and pragmatic supports so important in everyday communication are only marginally relevant or no longer operational; even in the best case, they provide insufficient guidance for understanding and for correlating linguistic elements with meanings and functions. Semantical and logical constraints dominate the processes of decoding and comprehension, thus making understanding heavily dependent on 'formal' linguistic and cognitive operations. Cognitive-academic proficiency is a linguo-cognitive competence tuned to the special demands of text processing. It allows to experience reading (and in consequence also writing) texts as structured, goal-oriented activity, as means of 'doing things' with language, as meaningful and situated social practice.[11]

This view on the school situation and the challenges it poses is of immediate relevance for the understanding of the problems and opportunities students are confronted with when they follow a school program in a foreign language. I assume the following to hold: If students possess *good enough literacy competence* for the teaching-learning situation they are in, they are in a good position to master not only the task of content-learning, but also the task of language learning in the school environment. Of course a basic linguistic competence in the language of instruction is of great help, for most students a prerequisite. Nevertheless, even if the language of instruction is unknown, some students are able to catch up in surprisingly short time—their literacy competence provides the orientation necessary to efficiently work out correspondences between linguistic elements and their meanings and functions. This, then, would allow them to convert their situation into a immersive one.

If on the other hand students do not possess good enough literacy competence, it may be difficult for them to really make good sense of the proceedings of the school.[12] This may be the case even if they know the language of instruction quite well in everyday communication. If command of the language of instruction is impaired even at that level, school can be a very difficult place for both content-learning and language learning. Above all if learners have to compete directly with much better equipped students, the situation is almost bound to become a submersive one for them.[13]

The basic mechanism I believe at work in the situations under discussion, then, is quite simple. Under this perspective, it is not the linguistic difficulty of texts in

terms of vocabulary or syntax that is decisive (although, of course, vocabulary and syntax are important). Comprehensibility is not only a characteristic of texts. Texts or parts of them are *made comprehensible* by their readers, through their competence of using them productively as sources of information both with regard to content and with regard to language.[14] If this competence is not developed to an adequate degree, content learning is hampered. At the same time, and as important, the massive linguistic input school provides can only insufficiently be used for language learning.

The overall picture of what is going on in language learning, of course, is far more complex than this. There are many factors to be taken into account when one tries to figure out the dynamics of the linguistic development of learners and groups of learners in different situations. But what I have pointed at here is a centrepiece in a wide range of acquisition contexts, above all in modern educational systems ultimately based on academic models of literacy.

In conclusion, I want to highlight some consequences of immediate practical relevance:

1. Additional language courses for students who are not very strong in the language of instruction are not always effective. We can expect good results if the basic problem is really one of linguistic competence. Then, improvement of this competence enables students to take better advantage of instruction. If insufficient language competence is combined with a comparatively low cognitive-academic competence, language instruction alone will not improve the situation decisively. Improved linguistic competence alone will make the task of learning only minimally more feasible. Effective support in this case has to bring into play also adequate means to improve cognitive-academic competence.[15]

2. Students will generally be much better off if they can do the first steps into the domain of texts and written discourse in their first language.[16] In a very well-designed study, it has been shown that sixth-graders with two years of instruction in a German school outperformed their peers with four and six years of instruction in German schools in a complex literacy task (Knapp, 1997). The reduced contact time with German was more than outweighed by the better preparation of these students in terms of literacy skills they had been acquiring in the schools of their home country before moving to Germany. These results support Cummins' interdependence hypothesis, as well as the claim of this paper regarding the efficacy of literacy competence as a tool not only for content learning, but also for language learning in instructional contexts.[17]

Outlook: studying in German at an Albanian university

As an illustration of the matters discussed in this paper, I will briefly present some observations relating to a joint project undertaken by the University of Graz in Austria and the University of Shkoder in Albania. One of the focal points of this project is the establishment of an Institute of German in Shkoder. At the end of the first four years of cooperation, we now are in a position to evaluate some of the results of the work done so far.

Regarding the linguistic competencies reached by our first students after almost four years of study (all of which was conducted in German), we can state the situation roughly as follows:[18] There is a unexpectedly huge gap between a (relatively small) group of excellent students and a (somewhat larger) group of students at the low end of achievement. In the latter group, development of linguistic competence is slow, almost imperceptible compared to the rapid growth displayed by the other group.[19] Explanations can be found when considering aspects of textual competence in their interplay with language learning.

Teaching and learning in Albanian high schools seems to be centred very much on factual information presented by the teacher to be memorised by the learners. This tradition of learning, combined with a lack of textbooks and other materials, produces well-informed students with little or no experience in self-directed reading, autonomous problem-solving and writing texts (with the accompanying tasks setting goals, organising work processes, checking outcomes against standards or important criteria etc.). One could say that the literate competencies developed in this context show a very specific profile, in many respects not comparable with the ones aimed at schools in industrialised countries and presupposed at university level in a programme run mainly by staff from a university rooted deeply in the tradition of Western European learning. Cummins' interdependence hypothesis allows for transfer, but we can predict that the skills these students are able to take from their first language into their study work run in German will not be up to expectations.[20] This leaves them with the necessity to acquire some very important and hitherto unknown skills at the same time as they enter a completely new field of knowledge, while still working on the fundamentals of their language competence (German is not taught in most high schools in Shkoder, so most of our students were not as advanced in German as it was hoped for). This is a monumental task,[21] and, again predictably, will not only lead to a slow-down of the whole process of learning when compared to the standards set in other contexts, but will for many pose serious obstacles which, unless overcome, will end up blocking further development.

Students with a good level of German (wherever they had acquired it) found the task of studying probably easier at the beginning than the others. However, the ranking of the entrance examination, based on language competence alone, proved to be of little significance in the long run.

Observations at the end of the first four-year cycle include:

— Already in the first year, the main 'layout' of the group became visible. The relative achievement level of the students remained almost constant from then on.
— There seems to be a good correlation between everyday language competence and academic achievement. Some students find it difficult to speak fluently (or have difficulties to follow conversations by others) while doing quite well in written tasks. But these seem to be exceptions.
— There seems to be a good correlation between precision in orthography, syntax and morphology (the core linguistic aspects) and academic achievement
— In the fourth year, even quite good students find it difficult to write texts. They succeed well as long as they can follow a model (paraphrasing, summarizing...). Personal comments are difficult, more so coherent comparisons of different views on a topic. Complex reasoning undertaken on the basis of information from different sources is mostly avoided.

I see these observations as indicating quite important regularities. The first year seems to have been the decisive phase of orientation. Those students able to adapt to the learning situation could take advantage of instruction. I am not in possession of information or personal data that could be adduced for an explanation why some were better able to do this than others.[22] From then on, positions were taken, some students certainly 'left behind' because of lack of adequate support which later, when given, certainly was less efficient than it could have been earlier.[23]

What is important in our context is the correlation of general, everyday language competence and academic achievement—something that can be observed quite often when instruction takes place completely or almost completely in school. The traditional classroom is a place not very well suited for the development of interpersonal communication skills. The order of 'natural' development in other contexts—first one learns to communicate, then this competence is put to use in instruction—is reversed above all with adolescent and adult learners: Language contact takes place in a formal, text-centred setting,[24] often (as in the case of Shkoder) content-learning in the foreign language is important from the beginning. Obviously, this situation can

be of some influence on the communicative use of language. This, however, takes a long time (and is greatly supported by shorter or longer stays in a country where the target language is spoken), above all it seems to presuppose successful development at the academic level.[25] This could have some connection with the third observation: Precision in the details of orthography, morphology and syntax can be achieved only when these details are perceived in the input. The information-rich, conceptually loaded input these students get must be understood well in order to allow insight into the nature and function of such 'minor' linguistic elements. This again favours high-achieving students. Attention to such details also makes the experience of everyday communication a far more profitable one when it comes to expanding and stabilising language proficiency at a high level.[26]

Writing, finally, is the most demanding expression of cognitive-academic proficiency. Even some of the better students in our project can write expository texts with some confidence only when they work along the lines given by another text. We interpret this as indication of a fundamental flaw in our instructional procedure, for it is a sign that most our of our students do not reach the goal set in our agreement: a level of competence comparable to that of university students in Graz.[27] Formulations and the flow of information in a text for them seem to function rather as ready-made patterns to be adapted rather than as documentation of a process of thought that can be questioned with regard to its accuracy and its validity, that can and must be compared to other texts and tested against one's own knowledge and insights. Taking apart what is intended to be coherent, inspecting and testing the elements, enriching them with new and other information in order to construct a transformed picture—these basic dynamics of academic reading, discussing and re-writing are not yet in the reach of most of our students.[28] Consequently, the knowledge acquired by most of them so far is in many aspects not freely available, but bound to specific contexts and constellations. If the arguments put forward in this paper have some value, then we can find in this result one important aspect for an explanation of the fact that instruction has not had the effect on language learning hoped for at the beginning.

Notes

1. For an overview see Hoffmann (1991). Verhoeven (1997) and Ehlers (in preparation). For observations in a co-operation project with an Albanian university see the last section of this paper.
2. Felix (1987).
3. Development of language competence follows here similar lines as in a first-language-school: it happens mainly as a by-product of work in the different subject-areas of the curriculum.

4. What a text has to offer is dependent on goals readers pursue. The different modes of reading distinguished in foreign language teaching ('scanning', 'skimming', 'intensive reading') bear witness to this. What readers do with texts and their ability to extract information is what helps to make input 'comprehensible', not only characteristics inherent in the text. Most reading in instructional contexts is done under the supervision of the teacher (and the goals set by him or the textbook). What the text has to offer is defined with regard to this setting—and at the same time limited by it.

5. Verhoeven (1991). Cummins' BICS/CALP-distinction and his interdependence hypothesis form the core of his theorising about bilingualism. A third hypothesis—the threshold hypothesis—states that there is a level of linguistic competence to be reached if bilingual education is to be of beneficial effect. The definition of this level is disputed (Cummins 1991, 83ff.)

6. In terms of Cummins' theory I am concerned here with the threshold hypothesis and the clarification of its contents.

7. Verhoeven (1991) and Leseman (1994) stress the lasting influence of primary socialisation for the development of literacy skills

8. See Cummins (1976, 1991). With regard to the acquisition of CALP in school, we have to distinguish at least two different tasks: The task of learning to read and write (the visual rendering of language), and the task of using written language and the written, formal mode in dealing with information, first in reading, then also in writing and - orally - in topic-centred discussions. Above all in writing research, these tasks have been amply researched and discussed. See Olson (1997) and Scheerer (1993) for a reconstruction of the oral/written distinction and the impact of learning to write in terms of cognitive psychology; Olson (1994) for an assessment of the consequences of (Western type) literacy; Augst (1992) for a very concise account of the cognitive demands to be met in argumentative and expository writing. In the following, I will not touch on the linguistic and metalinguistic competencies required in encoding/ decoding written words. For details see Verhoeven (1997), and Olson (1997).

9. They have to build this mental model mainly on the basis of verbally given information. Sometimes the verbal information is the only one available, sometimes pictures, photos etc. help to organise the facts better. The concept of 'mental models' has been prominently brought into discussion by Johnson-Laird (1983).

10. How difficult this seemingly easy task is can be seen whenever students are required to deliver (without much preparation) coherent information about even short texts. See Portmann-Tselikas (1998, pp.74ff.). Oral work based on texts is very much tuned to the same attitudes and style of thinking as those exhibited in the texts themselves (Cummins, 1991, pp.80f. with reference to empirical studies).

11. The concept of 'situated social practice' has been widely discussed in recent literacy research grounded on empirical research into everyday practices of individuals and groups (e.g. Baynham, 1995). On the basis of this research, critical questions have been asked with regard to the validity and legitimation of the 'academic model of literacy' as a general model underlying literacy instruction (Street, 1995, section 3; Levine, 1994, 1998).

12. This is true even if instruction is in the first language. In this case, however, most students are able to develop the necessary literacy skills at least to a certain degree.

13. Cognitive-academic proficiency can be attained only on the basis of a well-developed competence at least in one language. In this sense, there are thresholds of language competence involved when we try to judge chances of bilingual programmes of instruction. If the considerations presented here are correct, then cognitive academic proficiency plays the key role in the whole process.

14. This is true as well for L1-learners: They have no small learning task themselves, also in matters of language.

15. This, of course, is not the first consideration when dealing with children entering school for the first time, it will be of growing importance in later years. The problem is that development of this competence is a long process and in most instructional contexts, we are not prepared to consciously work on it (see also Hatch, 1994, and O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).
16. It seems that successful transfer of literacy competence from a second to the first language is dependent on specific conditions (Cummins, 1991, p.82; Ehlers in preparation).
17. According to Verhoeven, different minorities may have different background and different difficulties. Here, we have to expect also some limits to the thesis that literacy competence has to be learnt only once. Where the basic model of literacy is constructed differently than the one based on academic literacy, we certainly have to expect additional difficulties.
18. This account is based on my own informal observations over the last four years. I refrain from using test results or official rankings; the relation of these information to the matters discussed here is not transparent enough.
19. My impression is that growth of linguistic competence remains constant in one group, whereas in the other its rate is decreasing from year to year.
20. We can predict this now. It took us some time to learn enough about the situation in order to produce a study plan better adapted to the local conditions (which does not mean that there is a study plan in force now that would make the transition easy. Discrepancies like the ones commented on here are permanent sources of concern).
21. I omit here questions regarding motivation or the problem of values attached to certain activities/kinds of knowledge supported by one, but not the other culture etc.
22. A study on aspects of the language development of these students is in preparation. Data are not yet available.
23. Political turmoil added to the difficulties of the situation and took its toll on duration, intensity and evaluation of instruction.
24. Even if the aim is everyday language competence, the mode of instruction remains 'academic' in most places. Fortunately, communicative language methodology has changed (and still is changing) a lot in this respect.
25. A one-semester stay of twenty of our Albanian students at the university in Graz has had the most positive effect on the language competence of those competent in the academic domain.
26. See also M_hle (1984) on some aspects of learning a morphology-rich language like German and on the effects of everyday communication on students with a largely 'academic' background of language learning.
27. The criterion of comparison is the amount of academic instruction (not counting language courses, practical language work and some other items on the study plan), which means that our fourth-year students in Shkoder should be at least on the level of the students in Graz after two years of study.
28. This way of doing things is, of course, not mastered easily by the students in Graz, either. But most of them have at least some inkling of what is expected of them, and many have made some headway towards this end after two years of study.

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