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Z A S — Schützenstraße 18 — 10117 Berlin

Leibniz-Zentrum
Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

PD Dr. Natalia Gagarina
gagarina@leibniz-zas.de
Tel +49(0)30 · 20192-506

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Assessment of the Ph.D of Karolina Mieszkowska

Title: *Internal State Lexicon of bilingual and monolingual pre- and early school children*

Terminy wyrażające stany wewnętrzne u dwujęzycznych i jednojęzycznych dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym i wczesnoszkolnym.

In her doctoral dissertation, Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska investigates internal state terms (henceforth, IST) in bilingual Polish-English-speaking children at pre- and early school age (4.5-7 years old) matched with Polish-speaking monolingual children living in Poland. The main goal of the doctoral dissertation is to closely examine how bilingualism or monolingualism influences the use of IST and to compare IST in dual languages of bilingual children. Data from a total of 150 children (75 Polish-English bilingual children and 75 Polish monolinguals aged 4.5-7 years old) were analyzed. The large-scale work of Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska uses the data from the two research projects (additionally, her present analyses go far beyond the research goals of the data-donor projects): the *Bi-SLI-Poland project* and the WLRB project. The aim of the *Bi-SLI-Poland project* "Cognitive and language development of Polish bilingual children at the school entrance age - risks and opportunities" was to investigate Polish-English-speaking bilingual children living in the UK, to identify the typical development and to pinpoint bilingual children at risk of Specific Language Impairment (henceforth, SLI) or Developmental Language Disorders (henceforth, DLD). The *WLRB research project* "Phonological and Morpho-syntactic Features of Language and Discourse of Polish Children Raised Bilingually in Migrant Communities in Great Britain" (WLRB) aimed additionally at examining the language development of English-speaking monolingual children as a control group. The children were tested with large batteries of tests,



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eliciting e.g. productive and perceptive lexicon and grammar, but also verbal and non-verbal working memory, theory of mind development, narrative skills, etc.

The dissertation of Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska consists of the *Introduction*, 6 chapters and additional parts: *Study limitations*, *Further directions*, *General conclusions and practical implications* and *References* (an extensive list with the length of 27 pages: 170-197).

In the first three theoretical chapters, Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska presents the state-of-the-art of research on IST on bilingual children from a methodological and developmental perspective and. Chapters four to six are dedicated to the study itself, the results and the discussion.

In the *Introduction*, the terminology is specified, the objectives are presented, the goals are defined, the organization of the dissertation is described and the data-donor projects are outlined. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska specifies several goals of her dissertation: the first goal is to examine "*the use of internal state terms in child-made narratives based on a set of pictures.*" (P.7), the second and the third goals deal with the specific uses of IST in production and comprehension of narratives: "*These two aims investigate whether: (4) the ISL production in a narrative context can be momentarily improved by presenting a child with a model story told by an adult; (5) whether the child's ISL use when telling a story differs from the ISL use when specifically asked about story protagonists internal states.*" (P.7).

The first chapter discusses IST from the methodological perspective, but also describes the classification of the IST. Since this chapter presents not only ways and methods to study IST, but also their subclasses (and/or classification), I would give this chapter the more general title and would not add the specification "*methodological issues*" in the title. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska starts with the presentation of IST and their characterization. She then moves to the discussion of the meanings of IST, which are not straightforward, and finishes with the IST classification and ways to examine them. The focus on the peculiarities of IST, which have an impact on their acquisition and on the ways they can and should be tested in children is important. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska writes about the following features: "*First, internal state terms describe abstract processes. Second, they are often polysemous in nature. Third, they constitute a small share in the child's language input and production.*" (P.14). While reporting on the



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studies on early child development of lexicon she thoroughly reviews the seminal studies of e.g. Clark (1993), but also shows her knowledge of the modern studies, e.g. Roy et al. (2015) dealing with IST. The research on IST classification is also thoroughly reviewed.

The second chapter with five subchapters discusses IST from an acquisitional and cognitive perspective. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska first addresses the importance of IST for the general and cognitive development of children, then she presents the evidence for the role of IST in the development of social skills and connects IST and theory of mind. Given the role of mental language for the development of different domains in children, the task to compose the theoretical background on this topic was complicated. I think that Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska managed to fulfill this task in a clear and excellent manner: she subsequently portrayed IST and mental language from different angles, refers to a bright spectrum of studies and compares the acquisition of IST with "*a construction site*" (P.33).

The short note on one formal issue has to be done: it is not clear to me, why the abbreviation "*IST*" suddenly disappears and the full wording "*internal state terms*" (e.g. P.33, 34) is used (such inconsistent use – abbreviation vs. full wording – can be found also later the text).

The third chapter is dedicated to bilingual acquisition. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska first treats theory of mind in bilinguals, then described the studies on vocabulary and narratives skills and terminates the chapter with mental states lexicon. While the single parts of this chapter are thoroughly done, I slightly miss the coherence and the red-thread of "*theory of mind*" (this is the part of the title of the subchapter "*3.1. The bilingual speaker: theory of mind and the bilingual language acquisition*") between the subsections *3.1.2. Vocabulary skills in bilingual children* and *3.1.3. Narrative skills in bilingual children* of the subchapter 3.1. This third chapter would have been more consistent, if Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska would have tried to tie, for example, IST to child lexical development. The other way to make this part more coherent would be not to include "*theory of mind*" into the title of the subchapter 3.1., but to single the section *3.1.1. Theory of Mind development in bilingual children* into a hierarchally higher section. In this way, *3.1.2. Vocabulary skills in bilingual children* and *3.1.3. Narrative skills in bilingual children* would not have necessarily be subparts of the "*theory of mind*" title.



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The most impressive chapters of the dissertation are the chapters four to six (*Chapter 4: The current study – analysis of ISL in bilingual and monolingual, Chapter 5: The results and Chapter 6: The discussion*).

Chapter four presents the aims, the research questions and hypotheses, the design and the methodology. The study has several goals (I replicate them again, as they are specified in this part of the dissertation as well): first, it examines the production of IST in monolingual and matched bilingual children, and, in bilinguals, in their dual languages. Second, it correlates the use of IST with the other factors. Third, it treats the narratives from the perspective of “*IST enhancement*” (P.77). The further additional goals target the narrative interaction of an adult and a child and scrutinize the effects of a model story on children’s story production.

Generally, the research questions correlate to the hypotheses, which are well-grounded in the previous research. For the Hypotheses three (“**H3**: *There is a positive relationship between the use of internal state terms in a narrative and the children’s age, vocabulary size and receptive grammar knowledge in each language, theory of mind development, the number of total words produced in a story, and the general ability to tell a coherent story.*” P.80), however, I see some discrepancy with the research question three (“**RQ3**: *What are the best predictors of the use of IST in the narratives told in Polish and English?*” (P.78)): the research question seeks predictors (i.e. it deals with the causality), whereas the respective hypothesis makes the predictions about the relationship or correlations. Causality (in the RQ3) usually triggers an effect or a change, whereas correlation (H3) doesn’t cause or show any effects/changes. Although Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska writes on P.80 that “*This hypothesis presupposes a general positive relationship between the use of internal state terms and each of the mentioned variables, but does not determine beforehand the actual best model predicting the number of IST in a Polish or English narrative*”, the dissonance – to my opinion – between the RQ3 and the H3 still stays (and it is repeated on P.147).

The detailed description of the participants is followed by the thorough presentation of the instruments for data collection, which terminates Chapter four.

The results are presented in Chapter five: they are separated into the general or introductory results, the results related to the five research questions and the summary of the results. While the dissertation provides a number of interesting results,



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corresponding to the main research questions, I find the general results very remarkable as well. For example, Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska found that IST constitute 3% of all tokens in the stories; this percentage is not only similar for monolingual and bilingual children, but also holds across the languages (Polish vs. English) of bilinguals.

Without repeating here all results of the dissertation, I would like to point to the results, which have impact on teacher's education and which are relevant for the bilingual praxis and that's why they are among the most significant ones. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska writes on P.148 *"The results showed that both bilinguals and monolinguals produced more IST-saturated narratives when retelling the story after the experimenter than when spontaneously telling the story."* This result has an important implication for the early (bilingual) education – the role of adults in a dyad child-adult and, especially, the role of verbal communication between an adult and a child which shouldn't be underestimated. In this respect the part containing the practical implications for teachers and parents is an additional important accomplishment of the dissertation. Also, the methodological implications on p.168 and the issues dealing with the problematic of the IST categorization are of the high value for the future research as well.

An overall estimation of the scientific work of Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska: The dissertation represents an original research: it provides a clearly designed and well described study of the use of IST in bilingual and monolingual language acquisition. Mrs. Karolina Mieszkowska has shown a thorough and investigative scientific curiosity and an ability to work with a big amount of data. The results are a novum and not only close some gaps in the IST research, but can be useful for children's (narrative) education in monolingual and bilingual settings. The text is at large coherent and the parts logically correspond to each other. The small comments and critical points don't decrease the high value of this work, which I rate with **magna cum laude**.

Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren Berlin e.V.

PD Dr. Natalia Gagarina

Leibniz-Zentrum
Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

TEL + 49 (0) 30 · 20 192-401
Schützenstraße 18 · 10117 Berlin
www.leibniz-zas.de